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Bangladesh sees fresh violence after activist's death

Sharif Osman Hadi's death sparks violent protests across Bangladesh, targeting media, political residences, and prompting heightened security nationwide

DHAKA

Fresh violence broke out across Bangladesh early Friday after Sharif Osman Hadi, a prominent activist from last year's pro-democracy uprising, died in a Singapore hospital following an assassination attempt. News of the 32-year-old's death triggered widespread protests in Dhaka, with thousands demanding the arrest of those responsible.

Angry demonstrators torched several buildings, including offices housing the country's leading newspapers, the English-language Daily Star and the Bengali daily Prothom Alo. Journalists and staff were briefly trapped inside as fires spread, though firefighters later brought the blazes under control and evacuated those inside. Reporters described scenes of panic, smoke-filled corridors, and protesters chanting slogans outside the buildings.

Protests also targeted the residence of India's assistant high commissioner in Chattogram, where stones were hurled but no damage was reported. Police dispersed the crowd using tear gas and detained several protesters. Elsewhere, the home of a former Awami League minister was vandalised and set on fire, and party offices were attacked in other cities.

Authorities reported arson incidents, road blockades, and



Authorities respond to rising tensions

- Ready to deal with any situation: Tripura CM
- Security tightened at Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi
- Fundamentalists behind Bangladesh situation: Bengal BJP chief
- UN rights chief urges probe into Hadi's killing

clashes in multiple locations, underscoring rising tensions following the activist's death.

The body of Sharif Osman Hadi, who died in Singapore while undergoing treatment, arrived in Dhaka on December 19, 2025. The Bangladesh Airlines flight (BG-585) carrying Hadi's body from Singapore landed at Shahjalal International Airport.

Yunus announces mourning after activist Hadi's death
Bangladesh's interim chief Muhammad Yunus announced a half-day of mourning after activist Sharif Osman Hadi died in Singapore despite medical efforts. Calling his death an irreparable national loss,

Yunus said democracy would not be derailed by violence. The government ordered special mosque prayers, while authorities prepared to repatriate Hadi's body to Dhaka.

Ex-Minister accuses Yunus government of violence

Former Bangladesh minister Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury accused the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government of deliberately stoking violence to delay elections and provoke India. He alleged attacks on India's Deputy High Commissioner's residence were pre-planned.

Who was Sharif Osman Hadi?

Sharif Osman Hadi, a prominent leader of Bangladesh's July 2024 uprising, hailed from Nalchity in Jhalakathi district. Born to a madrasa teacher, he studied at Nesarabad Kamil Madrasa before earning a political science degree from Dhaka University. He later worked as a lecturer at the private University of Scholars. Hadi founded the socio-cultural platform Inquilab Mancha, which gained influence after the uprising and called for the disbandment of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League. A vocal critic of the Hasina government, India, the Bangladesh Army, and the Yunus-led interim administration, he often accused authorities of failing to bring meaningful change. After the International Crimes Tribunal sentenced Hasina to death for crimes against humanity, Hadi praised the verdict as historic.

Parliament adjourns sine die as winter session concludes

NEW DELHI

The Winter Session of Parliament was adjourned sine die on Friday, concluding amid intense Opposition protests over the passage of the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Rajya Sabha Chairman C.P. Radhakrishnan formally adjourned their respective Houses, describing the session as productive despite disruptions.

The Lok Sabha proceedings ended after the national anthem, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, returning from a three-nation visit, present in the House. In the Rajya Sabha, Vice-President Radhakrishnan adjourned the Upper House after laying statements and reports on the table, while expressing disapproval over members' unruly conduct during a ministerial reply, including protesting and tearing papers. He hoped for more constructive discussions in future sessions.

The Opposition continued protesting the VB-G RAM G Bill, staging demonstrations outside Parliament and at entry points, with Trinamool Congress members actively participating. Lok Sabha Leader of



Winter Session adjourned amid VB-G RAM G protests; Speaker reviews BJP privilege notice against Opposition MPs over alleged disruptions during parliamentary proceedings

Opposition Rahul Gandhi, currently in Germany, condemned the Bill, calling it "anti-state" and "anti-village," arguing that it undermines the rights-based framework of MGNREGA by turning it into a centrally controlled rationed scheme.

LS Speaker reviews BJP notice against Opposition MPs

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla is reviewing BJP MP Nishikant Dubey's notice against eight Opposition members for breach of privilege and contempt.

Opposition remarks on Winter Session

A day after Parliament passed VB-G RAM G Bill Congress took a swipe at PM Modi saying he is suffering from a "case of acute acronym-itis". Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh posted on X a cartoon representation which read: "All new A.C.R.O.N.Y.M MANTRALAYA - Administrative Commission for Renaming Old Schemes -- New Yet Meaningless".



Jairam Ramesh said Vande Mataram debate was aimed at "defaming Nehru" and "twisting history", adding that session ended with an "insult of Gandhi" after passage of G RAM G Bill replacing MGNREGA.

I never said I would serve only 2.5 yrs: CM Siddaramaiah

BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday firmly dismissed rumours about any power-sharing arrangement within the ruling Congress government, asserting that he was elected to serve a full five-year term. Speaking during a debate in the Legislative Assembly on issues concerning North Karnataka, Siddaramaiah clarified that he had never indicated he would serve only two-and-a-half years. "I have completed a five-year term once. I am the Chief Minister now. I believe the high command is in my favour. I will continue till the high command orders," he said in response to questions from Opposition BJP members regarding the government's commitments to North Karnataka.

When asked whether the Congress Legislature Party had chosen him as leader for five years or just half the term, Siddaramaiah reiterated, "There was no decision on two-and-a-half years. I have been cho-

sen for five years. I will continue till the high command orders." He emphasised that the mandate given by the people, coupled with the support of MLAs and the high command, validated his position as Chief Minister.

CM and I have come to understanding: DKS

Not willing to make any direct statement on whether there will be a chief minister change in the state, Karnataka Deputy CM D K Shivakumar on Friday said that he and CM Siddaramaiah have come to an agreement with the involvement of the Congress high command, and both of them will abide by it. Stating that Siddaramaiah is CM as per the high command's decision, he clarified that he has never made any comments on the former's tenure. Siddaramaiah, earlier in the day, had affirmed that he would remain in office for his full five-year term, expressing confidence in the Congress high command's support.



EU leaders will loan 90 billion euros to Ukraine

BRUSSELS

European Union leaders have agreed to borrow funds to provide a €90 billion loan to Ukraine to support its defence against Russia over the next two years, avoiding the immediate use of frozen Russian sovereign assets. The decision followed prolonged discussions in Brussels, where divisions emerged over the legal and political risks of tapping Russian funds.

While the European Commission was authorised to continue exploring a "reparations loan" model based on immobilised Russian assets, the proposal was deemed too complex for now. Belgium, which holds the bulk of the €210 billion in frozen Russian assets, sought firm guarantees against potential legal challenges and financial retaliation from Moscow.

National Herald case: Will appear before police next week, says DKS

BELAGAVI

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Friday said he will appear before the Delhi police next week to provide them the required information, as part of its probe into the National Herald case. The Delhi Police had issued a notice to Shivakumar, who is also the state Congress chief, seeking financial and transactional details as part of its probe into the National Herald case.

"I had told them, I will come next week after the legislature session. I will go," Shivakumar told reporters in response to a question.

The notice issued by the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) states that Shivakumar



is "supposed to have vital information" pertaining to the National Herald case registered on October 3 this year, against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi. In the notice dated November 29, the EOW asked Shivakumar to appear before it or provide the requested information by December 19 latest. Shivakumar, a couple of days ago, had sought the FIR copy from the Delhi police. In response to a query on state BJP President Vijayendra calling him "Pitamaha of corruption", the Deputy CM said that time will come to respond to the former. "Will reply to Vijayendra... He called us (state Congress government) ATM of the Congress party. He has to prove it," he said.

ED attaches ₹8.07 crore assets in Valmiki scam

BENGALURU

In connection with the alleged misuse of funds from the Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached immovable properties worth ₹8.07 crore belonging to former minister B. Nagendra.

Acting under provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the ED attached four immovable assets, including residential and commercial properties. The agency has classified these assets as "proceeds of crime" generated through alleged financial irregularities in the Valmiki Board.

The ED stated that the remaining proceeds of crime could not be traced so far, suspecting that Nagendra may have diverted or concealed the funds through other means.

According to investigators, crores of rupees were allegedly transferred illegally from Valmiki Development Corporation accounts to fake bank accounts and later routed through shell companies to different destinations. The case came to light after the corporation's superintendent, Chandrashekar, died by suicide at his Shivamogga residence. In his death note, he reportedly named three individuals and referred to a multi-crore scam.

Subsequently, the corporation's general manager Rajasekhara lodged a complaint alleging that ₹94 crore was fraudulently transferred without any alerts or messages, accusing bank staff of creating forged documents. Based on the complaint, an FIR was registered against six bank officials at Bengaluru's High Grounds police station.

SIR SHOWDOWN

SIR: EC deletes over 97 lakh names in draft roll in TN

CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu Chief Electoral Officer, Archana Patnaik, announced on Friday that the draft electoral roll, following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), now lists 5,43,76,755 voters, including 2.66 crore women and 2.77 crore men. Prior to the SIR, the state had approximately 6.41 crore registered voters, meaning the exercise led to the deletion of 97,37,832 names.

The SIR in DMK-ruled Tamil Nadu has triggered strong opposition, including from Chief Minister MK Stalin. Criticising the Election Commission,



he described the roll revision as "anti-democratic" and accused it of targeting legitimate voters ahead of the state elections. Stalin highlighted similar allegations in Bihar, where

lakhs of voters were reportedly removed from the rolls. He also criticised AIADMK leader Edappadi K Palaniswami for "playing a double game" and claimed that the

Gujarat draft electoral roll: 73.73 lakh voters deleted

The Election Commission of India released Gujarat's draft electoral roll after the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), validating 4.34 crore voters. About 73.73 lakh names were deleted from the earlier 5.08 crore registered voters. The SIR, which began on November 4, involved booth-level officers distributing enumeration forms locally.

Prime Minister was engaging in political manoeuvres in Bihar for electoral gains. The CM further noted that opposition to the SIR had gained traction nationally, with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi raising objections over the process, while the Election Commission failed to provide a satisfactory legal explanation for the deletions.

Total names deleted: 97,37,832
Breakup of Deletions:

- Deceased Voters: 26.94 lakh
- Migrated / Permanently Shifted: 66.44 lakh
- Duplicate Entries: 3,39,278

High Court cancels Bhairati Basavaraj's bail in murder case

BENGALURU

The Karnataka High Court has revoked anticipatory bail previously granted to former minister Bhairati Basavaraju in the Biklu Shivakumar murder case, leaving him vulnerable to arrest. Simultaneously, the court quashed the application of the Karnataka Prevention of Organised Crime Act (COCA) against him. A bench led by Justice Sunil Dutta Yadav observed that proper legal procedures were not followed in invoking the COCA Act, leading to its dismissal. However, the court emphasized that the murder case remains serious and under investigation.

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N. India faces zero visibility, IMD issues red alert

NEW DELHI

A dense blanket of fog covered large parts of north India on Friday morning, severely reducing visibility and disrupting road, rail, and air traffic. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a red alert for Delhi, warning of potential delays at airports and highways. Satellite images showed fog across Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, northeast Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar, with visibility dropping to zero at several locations including Agra, Amritsar, Safdarjung, and Gwalior. An orange alert was issued for multiple districts in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Uttarakhand.

QUICK READ



City residents brace for scheduled power outage

Bengaluru

Bescom has announced a scheduled power cut in several Bengaluru areas on Saturday, December 20, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The outage is due to maintenance and emergency management work. Major localities affected include Nimhans, Jayadeva, RR Nagar, Banashankari, and surrounding neighborhoods, along with Jayanagar, BTM, Bannerghatta Road, and Wilson Garden. Residents in areas such as Thiagaraja Nagar, Basavanagudi, and Chunchughatta should also prepare for temporary outages. Authorities advised citizens to charge essential devices in advance and cooperate during the blackout.

Russell Market set for ₹140 crore upgrade

Bengaluru

Bengaluru's historic Russell Market in Shivajinagar is set for a Rs 140 crore redevelopment ahead of its 100th anniversary in 2027. The Greater Bangalore Authority (GBA) plans to modernize the market while preserving its Indo-Saracenic heritage. Improvements include proper drainage, waste management, fire safety, upgraded toilets, pedestrian-friendly flooring, and a refurbished clock tower. Temporary arrangements will allow traders to continue business during construction. GBA Chief Commissioner Maheshwara Rao has instructed officials to invite tenders and improve surrounding areas.

Donors unite to launch 55-bed care facility

Bengaluru

Bengaluru's Nelmangala outskirts will soon host the Nemmadi Palliative Care Center, a 55-bed facility providing free care with support from donors. Despite 6–8 million Indians needing palliative care yearly, only 2% receive it due to awareness and facility gaps. The center, backed by Sukriti Charitable Trust, Rotary Bangalore Midtown, and generous donors including former MLA Krishnappa, Prestige Foundation, and Brigade Foundation, will operate without billing counters. Inauguration on December 21 will be attended by dignitaries including Health Minister Dinesh Gundurao and Dr. C. N. Manjunath. The center aims to offer humane, accessible care to those in need.

Local teams proposed to solve neighborhood issues

The Commissioner urged local collaboration, suggesting ward representatives coordinate with officers for faster problem-solving and improved communication

BENGALURU

The Bangalore South City Corporation has proposed forming local level teams to address civic issues more effectively, following a meeting held in the Jayanagar zone on Friday. The meeting was chaired by Commissioner K. N. Ramesh and attended by office bearers of apartment associations and local residents' associations.

During the discussion, residents highlighted several long pending problems affecting daily life. These included footpath encroachments, poor street lighting, irregular solid waste collection, bad road conditions, illegal building construction, commercial activities in residential areas, maintenance of public toilets, e-khata issues and other civic concerns.

After listening to the grievances, the Commissioner said many issues can be solved at the local level if citizens and officials work together. He suggested identifying ward level representatives who understand ground realities and can coordinate directly with corporation officers. Such coordination, he said, would



help in faster problem solving and better communication.

On solid waste management, the Commissioner noted that several non government organisations have already studied the issue and provided useful suggestions. He said effective implementation requires cooperation between citizens and the corporation. He also encouraged the expansion of garbage kiosks through private partnerships to manage waste disposal black spots across the city.

Speaking about urban planning, Mr. Ramesh said private organisations and educational institutions can play a role by studying the city's current conditions and offering practical solutions. He added that

college students can also contribute by giving ideas on city design and planning.

The Commissioner informed residents that daily updates about civic works are being shared on the corporation's social media platforms and urged citizens to follow them for information.

He also announced that he would conduct a spot inspection of local issues next week and assured residents that concerned officials have been directed to take necessary action.

Representatives from several apartment and residents' associations, including Shriram Symphony, Kanakapura Road, Anjanapura and Balaji Layout, attended the meeting.

Police propose strict safety guidelines for IPL

BENGALURU

Bengaluru Police are preparing to issue detailed safety guidelines to the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) ahead of the hosting of Indian Premier League matches at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium. The move comes as the KSCA has begun preparations to stage IPL games in the city.

Police sources said the KSCA governing body will be instructed to strictly follow key recommendations made by an expert committee headed by retired Justice John Michael D'Cunha. These recommendations were framed after a stampede incident near the stadium in the past. Officials said the stadium will be inspected soon, and guidelines will apply not only to the IPL but also to all major matches held in the future.

The police plan to insist on proper parking and pick-up and drop-off arrangements around the stadium, which has a seating capacity of around 32,000 spectators. Since stadium entry points are close to footpaths, separate queuing areas inside the stadium premises will be



Police will enforce proper parking, pick-up/drop-off, separate queuing areas, and clearly separated entry and exit routes with six-foot gates and proper stairways for the 32,000-capacity stadium.

made mandatory. Entry and exit routes must be clearly separated, with narrow gates of at least six feet width and proper stairways. Special arrangements will be required for women and children during international matches. Emergency medical care will be strengthened with ambulances, dedicated routes and permanent medical teams. Fire and electrical safety audits will also be compulsory.

Security measures will include trained staff for ID

checks, bomb disposal squads, metal detectors, CCTV cameras and baggage scanners. Separate entry and exit paths will be reserved for players, and safe holding areas will be created for emergencies. All stadium staff, guards and stall owners must have police verification.

Guidelines will also cover food safety checks, public transport access, crowd management, real-time crowd monitoring systems, ticket counters and waiting areas. The police are also expected to demand immediate payment of ₹2.40 crore towards IPL 2025 security costs. Meanwhile, KSCA President Venkatesh Prasad said discussions are ongoing with the BCCI to host the IPL opening match in Bengaluru, with positive responses received so far.

Bengaluru railway exams previously excluded Kannada, unlike Hubballi and Mysuru, seen as unfair to local candidates

Kannadigas win: Railway exams now allowed in Kannada

BENGALURU

Railway recruitment exams in Bengaluru will now allow candidates to write in Kannada, marking a major win for Kannadigas after a long-standing demand. The decision comes after a meeting held on December 19 between Karnataka Defense Forum President T.A. Narayana Gowda, the Karave delegation, and senior officials of the South Western Railway Division.

Previously, railway promotion exams in the Bengaluru division were restricted to Hindi and English, while Hubballi and Mysuru divisions allowed Kannada as an option. This exclusion was seen as unfair to local candidates, ignoring the state language in the capital city.

Officials from the Railway Department, including DRM and PCPO, responded promptly and approved Kannada as an exam medium. "This is a big win for the employees of Bengaluru



Division," Gowda said, thanking the authorities and the media for their support.

Union Minister of State for Railways V. Somanna also intervened, instructing the South Western Railway to cancel the previous notification and issue a revised one including Kannada. The exams cover positions such as Freight Train Manager, with 317 posts in Bengaluru, 101 in Hubballi, and 56 in Mysuru.

Gowda emphasized that the Karnataka Defense Forum will continue to safeguard the rights of Kannadigas. "There is no compromise in protecting the interests of Kannada-speaking people," he said, celebrating the success of the long campaign.

Aindrita Ray raises alarm over garbage burning

BENGALURU

Actress Aindrita Ray has raised concerns over garbage burning near her home in RR Nagar, Bengaluru, causing serious breathing problems. She expressed outrage on social media by tagging Rajarajeshwari Nagar MLA Munirathna.

According to Aindrita, Greater Bangalore Authority (GBA) staff cleaned the garbage around the Ideal Home Layout and set it on fire. Smoke from the burning waste entered her apartment, making it difficult for her to breathe. She said the problem has persisted for three days.

The actress tried contacting the GBA control room and helpline, but received no response. Frustrated, she posted a video online, highlighting the health risks and appealing to local authorities, including MLA Munirathna, for urgent action. Residents of the area have expressed concern over the practice, noting that burning garbage in residential neighborhoods can cause serious respiratory issues and pollution. The incident has sparked calls for stricter waste management measures and better coordination by the civic authorities to prevent such hazards in densely populated areas. Authorities have yet to respond publicly to Aindrita's complaint.

CHRIST University inaugurates CQTCS

BENGALURU

CHRIST University marked a major step in advanced science with the inauguration of its Centre for Quantum Technologies and Complex Systems (CQTCS) on Friday. The launch gathered top academicians and researchers, reflecting the university's focus on cutting-edge, interdisciplinary scientific research.

The centre aims to advance studies in quantum technologies, complex systems, and their applications. Bringing together experts from physics, mathematics, computer science, and engineering, CQTCS will focus on areas like quantum computing, many-body systems, and quantum materials. It is designed

to foster student-led research, advanced training, and international collaboration.

The inauguration ceremony was presided over by Vice Chancellor Rev. Dr. Fr. Jose C. C., and formally inaugurated by Dr. Subir Sachdev, Herschel Smith Professor of Physics at Harvard University, USA. Dr. Sachdev highlighted the role of strong academic institutions in promoting fundamental research and turning scientific ideas into practical technological solutions. Lamp-lighting was performed by university leaders, centre coordinators, and distinguished scientists from institutions including IIT Madras, University of Luxembourg, DRDO-DIAT Pune, Raman Research Institute,

and IISc Bengaluru.

The university emphasized that CQTCS will prepare students for doctoral studies, academic careers, and emerging quantum technology sectors. The inauguration was followed by a one-day workshop, "From Quantum Science to Emerging Technologies," featuring expert talks from national and international researchers.

Aligned with India's National Quantum Mission, the centre will support research in quantum computing, communication, sensing, and materials. It aims to strengthen India's quantum workforce, encourage indigenous technology development, and contribute to high-impact scientific innovations.

Lohia award presented to Shivanand Tagadur



BENGALURU

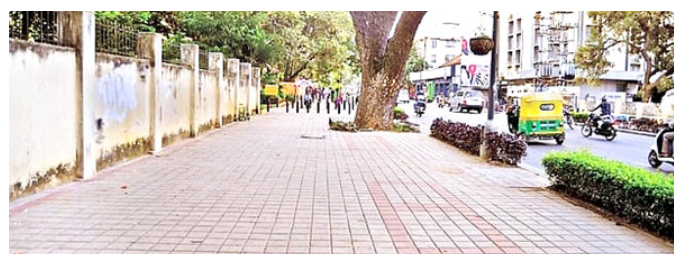
The Bengaluru Nagarikara Vedike and the Buddha Basava Gandhi Cultural Trust jointly organized a civic felicitation and Lohia Award presentation ceremony for Shivanand Tagadur, who was unanimously elected for a third term as State President of the Karnataka

Working Journalists' Association. On the occasion, Tagadur was warmly congratulated and presented with the award.

Speaking at the event, Gandhibhavan President and educationist Nadoja Dr. Vooday P. Krishna said that mainstream media has continued to preserve its dignity through its inherent strength, which is

a hopeful development for everyone.

Ram Manohar Lohia brought a dynamic movement to Indian politics, he said, adding that talents nurtured by Lohia's ideology are spread across the country. Awarding a prize in Lohia's name to Shivanand Tagadur is commendable and a matter of pride for all.



Footpath walk aims to improve pedestrian safety

BENGALURU

The Bengaluru Uttar Nagar Corporation has announced the seventh Footpath Walk under its "Vakalur" project to promote safer and more walkable streets in the city. The 7 km community footpath walk will be held on Saturday, December 20, starting at 7:00 am, with a focus on pedestrian safety, smoother traffic movement and better road design.

The main objective of this initiative is to assess the walkability of key areas such as JC Nagar and RT Nagar. Officials and participants will spot problems related to footpaths, crossings and pedestrian movement, and identify locations that need immediate improvement. The walk is part of the corporation's

ongoing efforts to encourage people friendly urban planning.

The footpath walk will begin from the JC Nagar Main Gate on Jayamahal Main Road and pass through Maykrivrtta, Bellary Main Road, Ganganagar 5th Main Road, 108 Vritta and RT Nagar Main Road. The walk will conclude near the RT Nagar Police Station. Along the route, participants will interact with officials and share their observations and suggestions. Officials said the program is designed to involve citizens directly in city development. By walking together and discussing ground level issues, residents can help authorities understand real challenges faced by pedestrians, including elderly people, children and persons with disabilities.

Bengaluru launches Pulse Polio awareness campaign

BENGALURU

The Bengaluru Central City Corporation launched a four-day Pulse Polio Lasika Abhiyan from December 21 to 24 to raise awareness about protecting children from polio. The campaign began with a Jatha on Friday at 8 a.m., starting from Gandhi Park on MG Road and ending at Mayohall Building.

Daljit Kumar, Development Commissioner of the Bengaluru Central City Corporation, urged parents and guardians



to administer the life-saving two-drop polio vaccine to all children under five years, in-

cluding newborns. "It is important to act now to protect our children's health," Kumar

said while addressing the participants. The event saw participation from Joint Commissioner Ranganath, Hemant Sharan, Health Officer Shivakumar, Dr. Sunita, Dr. Dhanyakumar, as well as school and college students from Kendra Nagar, health department staff, representatives of voluntary organizations, and nursing college students.

The campaign aims to educate the public about the importance of the pulse polio vaccine, encourage community participation, and ensure

every child receives protection against polio. Health officials emphasized that community cooperation is critical in maintaining India's polio-free status.

The four-day drive will include awareness rallies, vaccination camps, and engagement with local communities across Bengaluru Central, ensuring every eligible child receives the vital two-drop vaccine. The Corporation called upon citizens to actively participate and support this public health initiative.

QUICK READ

Massive urea seizure uncovers illegal trade

Bengaluru
Bengaluru authorities confirmed that 1,90,000 kg of seized urea came from Karnataka, not Kerala. The stock, sourced from Raichur and Shimoga, was found in an Adakamaranahalli godown during a DRI raid. A Kerala man reportedly used middlemen to illegally transport and sell the fertilizer. Stored in Shivanpur, the urea, meant for farmers under subsidy schemes, was repackaged into 50 kg bags and sent to Tamil Nadu at Rs 2,500 each. Officials are investigating possible involvement of agriculture department staff. Citizens are urged to buy from registered dealers.

Traffic rules tightened at Majestic bus stand

Bengaluru
Bengaluru traffic police have set new rules to reduce jams at Majestic, especially during festivals and weekends. Private buses must now stop only 30 seconds to pick passengers during busy days, and one to two minutes on regular days. The change comes as illegal parking around the bus stand causes major congestion, especially with increased travel around Christmas and New Year. KSRTC buses will continue normal drop-offs. Bus owners argue the time is too short due to heavy luggage and passenger numbers. Authorities stress following rules to keep traffic flowing smoothly and ensure safety.

Government issues tenders for second international airport

Karnataka government invited KIIDC tenders for a five-month feasibility study covering traffic, tourism, industry, infrastructure, environment, and geography

BENGALURU

Infrastructure Development Minister MB Patil confirmed that Karnataka has initiated preliminary steps for a second international airport near Bengaluru, keeping long-term planning in mind. Patil highlighted that the existing Kempegowda International Airport at Devanahalli is operational, and permission from Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL) is required to construct another airport in the

vicinity. Such approvals were previously restricted until 2033, but conditions have been relaxed in other regions like New Delhi and Navi Mumbai, allowing multiple airports in one area. The government has now invited tenders through the Karnataka Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation for site feasibility, technical, and economic assessment. The process will take about five

months to complete. Key factors in the report will include passenger traffic, tourism potential, industrial development, infrastructure, geography, rainfall, drainage, noise pollution, and waste management. Patil said a top team from the Airports Authority of India has already inspected potential sites at Chudahalli, Somanahalli on Kanakapura Road, and Nelamangala-Kunigal Road. The reports

from these inspections are being used to guide further planning. The minister emphasized that the government recognizes Bengaluru's growing demand for air connectivity and is taking proactive steps to ensure a second international airport becomes a reality in the future. This move reflects the state's foresight in addressing long-term aviation needs amid rising passenger traffic and urban expansion around the Silicon City.



High Court rejects Ranya Rao's bail challenge

BENGALURU

Sandalwood actress Ranya Rao faced another setback as the High Court dismissed her petition challenging the Kafiposa order in the ongoing gold smuggling case. Rao was arrested by DRI officials in connection with the smuggling of gold and was later sent to Agrahara Jail. To prevent her release, the authorities invoked the Kafiposa Act, forcing her to remain in custody for a year. In response, she approached the High Court seeking relief, but her petition was rejected on December 19. The same order applies to four other accused in the case, who will also continue their jail term for another year. The Directorate of Revenue



Intelligence (DRI) has so far recovered assets worth ₹102 crore linked to the case. In addition to cash, valuable property owned by Rao and the other accused has been confiscated. The dismissal marks a significant legal hurdle for Ranya Rao as the investigation continues. The court's order reinforces the strict measures under the Kafiposa Act, emphasizing that bail cannot be granted in cases involving serious financial and smuggling offenses. Authorities continue to monitor the case closely, and the investigation is expected to progress further in the coming months. The DRI has assured that all seized properties and recovered amounts will be accounted for as the legal proceedings continue.

DIGITAL SCAM ALERT
Cyber fraud drains crores daily in Bengaluru

BENGALURU

Cyber fraud is quietly draining huge sums of money from residents of Bengaluru every day, according to police data. The city loses an average of ₹4.83 crore daily, making it one of the worst affected urban centres in the state. By the end of November 2025, cyber criminals had cheated people in the city of ₹1,543.41 crore. This amount forms nearly 76 percent of the total cyber fraud losses reported across Karnataka. Despite the huge losses, detection remains very low. A total of 9,326 cases have been registered in Bengaluru so far, but only 716 cases have been detected. This means the suc-



cess rate is just 7.68 percent. Police say most cases involve fake investment offers. Fraudsters lure victims with promises of high returns through stock markets, cryptocurrency and online trading schemes. Another growing method is so-called digital arrest. Criminals pose as officials, threaten victims on video calls and demand money to close fake cases. In some incidents, people are asked to transfer money for "verification", which is never returned. Fake apps, loan offers and emotional pressure are also used. Police admit investigations are challenging due to rising case numbers and complex methods. Limited technical resources also slow down action.

HC cancels Bhairati Basavaraj's bail in Biklu murder case

Continued from page 1



The Karnataka High Court has cancelled the anticipatory bail granted earlier to former minister Bhairati Basavaraju in the Biklu Shivakumar murder case, exposing him to possible arrest. At the same time, the court quashed the application of the Karnataka Prevention of Organised Crime Act, commonly known as the COCA Act, against him. The order was passed by a bench headed by Justice Sunil Dutta Yadav, which heard petitions filed by Basavaraju seeking anticipatory bail and the quashing of the FIR and the COCA Act. While the court struck down the COCA Act, it refused to interfere with the ongoing investigation and dismissed the plea for anticipatory bail. The bench observed that proper legal procedure was not followed while invoking the COCA Act and therefore set it aside. However, the court made it clear that the murder case itself was serious in nature and still under investigation. For this reason,

the FIR could not be quashed at this stage. With the dismissal of the bail plea, the interim protection from arrest granted earlier also stood cancelled. Basavaraju's counsel argued that since the COCA Act was quashed, the interim bail should continue until he approached the trial court. The bench, however, declined the request, stating that all aspects were clearly covered in the order. During earlier hearings, the prosecution had claimed that Basavaraju gave misleading information during the investigation and that strong evidence. The case relates to the murder of rowdy sheeter Biklu Shiva, also known as Shivaprakash, who was killed near Halasuru Lake in Bengaluru. His mother alleged the murder was linked to a land dispute and named Basavaraju among the accused.

Odisha doctor sexually harassed in Bengaluru street

BENGALURU

A 28-year-old doctor from Odisha was sexually harassed by an unidentified man while returning home in north Bengaluru, police confirmed on Friday. The incident took place on December 17 between 12:40 a.m. and 1 a.m. near AGB Layout, Chikka-banavara. According to the FIR, the doctor was heading to her PG accommodation after finishing her hospital shift when a man on a white scooter approached her. The suspect stopped his vehicle, got down, asked for directions to the bus station, and then inappropriately touched her.



Shri Siddaramaiah
Hon'ble Chief Minister



Shri D.K. Shivakumar
Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister

District Administration, Zilla Panchayat, Belagavi, and Department of Agriculture in collaboration with Sugar Factories

Launch of New Scheme on Integrated Soil Health and Water Management in Sugarcane In Belagavi, Bagalkote, Vijayapura, Kalaburgi and Mandya districts



Promotion of Drip Irrigation and Intercropping in Sugarcane



Support for farmers through Harvester Hub



Hon'ble Chief Minister and Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister along with Hon'ble Agriculture Minister Shri N. Chaluvaryaswamy inaugurating a program to distribute benefits of Agriculture department to the farmers



Mechanization in Trash Management



Collection of trash using Baler to enhance Soil Organic Carbon

Venue:
Near Belgaum Sugars
Hudali, Tq: Belagavi

Date:
20th Dec 2025
10.00 am

Inauguration

Shri Siddaramaiah
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Govt. of Karnataka

Guests of Honour

Shri N. Chaluvaryaswamy
Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture,
Govt. of Karnataka

Smt Lakshmi Hebbalkar
Hon'ble Minister for Women & Child Development
Disabled & Senior Citizens Empowerment
Govt. of Karnataka

Presided By

Shri Satish L. Jarkiholi
Hon'ble Minister for Public Works Department
and District Incharge Minister Belagavi
Govt. of Karnataka

August Presence

Shri D. K. Shivakumar
Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister,
Govt. of Karnataka

QUICK READ

'Children's Market' organised by SRS School

Challakere

An engaging and educational event titled "Children's Market" was organised by SRS School in Challakere city on Thursday, attracting widespread attention from residents and passers-by. The initiative, held on the school premises from 11 am onwards, was aimed at promoting practical learning and overall intellectual development among students. The children's market was organised by the school management as part of an experiential learning programme, allowing students to step beyond textbooks and gain hands-on exposure to real-life concepts such as communication, trade, teamwork, and money management. Students enthusiastically took on the roles of vendors.

Urad dal procurement delays put farmers under strain

Uppinabetageri

Farmers in Uppinabetageri are facing severe difficulties in selling their urad dal at the procurement centre operating under the government's support price scheme at the Primary Agricultural Cooperative Society. Despite the scheme being introduced to safeguard farmers' interests, delays in procurement and limited processing capacity have forced cultivators to make repeated visits, often under harsh weather conditions. Registered farmers are bringing bags of urad dal to the procurement centre in scheduled shifts, as informed in advance by the authorities. However, many farmers allege that the process has been slow and exhausting. Even amid extreme cold conditions, farmers are required to wait long hours to ensure their produce is accepted, adding to their physical and financial stress.

State-level Kabaddi tournament to be held at Doddarasinakere



MADDUR

A state-level floodlight Kabaddi tournament has been organised at Doddarasinakere village in Maddur taluk on December 20 and 21, promising two days of intense sporting action and vibrant rural enthusiasm. The tournament is expected to attract kabaddi teams from across Karnataka, along with a large number of sports enthusiasts and local residents.

The event is being organised with the objective of promoting traditional sports, especially kabaddi, which has deep cultural roots in rural Karnataka. Organisers said the floodlight format will add excitement to the matches, allowing games to be played during evening and night hours and enabling more spectators to attend after daily work commitments.

Preparations are underway at the Doddarasinakere ground to ensure smooth conduct of the tournament. Special arrangements are being made for lighting, seating, player facilities, and crowd management. Local youth and volunteers are actively involved in organising the event, reflecting strong community participation and enthusiasm.

According to the organ-

New district admin building is planned: Minister Sudhakar

The Karnataka government plans a new district administrative complex in Chitradurga to improve public convenience and efficiency

CHITRADURGA

Karnataka's Planning and Statistics Minister and Chitradurga District In-charge Minister D. Sudhakar said that a new district administrative building will be constructed in Chitradurga keeping public interest and convenience as the top priority. He stated that the proposal to hand over the newly constructed Deputy Commissioner's (DC) office building near the Kunchigantal valley to the Chitradurga Medical College is currently at the government approval stage.

Addressing a meeting held at the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha in Belagavi, Minister Sudhakar said that in view of



public convenience, the government has planned to construct a new district administration complex at the existing DC's residence premises and surrounding areas. The meeting was convened to discuss the proposal to allocate land belonging to the Horticulture Department, adjacent to the DC's residence, for the construction of the new Dep-

uty Commissioner's office building.

The minister explained that the new DC office project envisages utilisation of the DC's residence land along with the adjoining Horticulture Department land. He said that if the Horticulture Department agrees to provide its six-acre land for the project, the government will allot alternative land to the

department at another location. In addition, the required basic infrastructure facilities will be provided to the Horticulture Department, and adequate space will be earmarked for its office within the new district administrative complex.

Responding to the proposal, Horticulture Department Director Dr Girish said that the matter would be discussed with the departmental secretary. He pointed out that the authority to allot government land rests with a committee headed by the Chief Secretary. He assured that if a proper proposal is submitted by the Deputy Commissioner, necessary steps would be taken keeping public interest in mind.

Bengaluru Rural police seized the murder weapon and arrested accused in auto driver Pawan murder case using CCTV evidence

Murder weapon seized in auto driver case, accused arrested

BENGALURU RURAL

Superintendent of Police C.K. Baba has confirmed that the long mace used in the brutal murder of auto driver Pawan has been successfully seized by the police. The development marks a significant breakthrough in the investigation into the murder that had shocked residents of Doddaballapura and surrounding areas.

According to police sources, after committing the crime in Doddaballapura, the accused fled the scene in a car and later parked the vehicle in the KR Puram area of Bengaluru. In an attempt to evade arrest, they reportedly went into hiding at Medi Mallasandra village in Hoskote taluk. However, their efforts to escape were thwarted due to swift and coordinated police action.

Acting on crucial CCTV footage collected from multiple locations, police teams traced the movement of the accused from Doddaballapura to KR Puram and subsequently towards Hoskote. The visu-



al evidence played a key role in reconstructing the sequence of events and narrowing down the suspects' hideout.

The operation to track and apprehend the accused was led by City Police Station Inspector Amaresh Gowda and Women's Police Station Inspector Dr. M.B. Naveen Kumar. Under their leadership, police teams conducted a focused search and successfully arrested the accused from Medi Mallasandra village. During the arrest, the murder weapon — a long mace allegedly used to assault Pawan — was recovered and seized as material evidence.

SP C.K. Baba stated that the seizure of the weapon

strengthens the case against the accused and will be crucial during further legal proceedings. He praised the investigating officers for their prompt response, effective use of technology, and coordinated teamwork, which ensured the suspects were apprehended without delay.

The murder of auto driver Pawan had triggered public outrage, with residents demanding swift justice. Police officials reiterated that the investigation is ongoing and that further inquiries are being conducted to establish the motive behind the crime and determine whether any additional individuals were involved.

Amavasya pooja performed at Chittanamma temple

HOLALU

A special religious ceremony was organised at the Sri Chittanamma Devi, also known as Sri Pattaladamma Devi, Temple in Holalu village of Mandya taluk on the occasion of Amavasya on Friday. The sacred rituals were conducted with traditional fervour and devotion, marking the significance of the lunar day that holds spiritual importance among devotees across the region.

On the auspicious occasion, the idol of the goddess was worshipped with a series of special abhishekas, including kumkuma abhisheka, turmeric abhisheka, and sandalwood abhisheka. Following these rituals, the deity was adorned with a silver face mask and decorated with turmeric, enhancing the divine splendour of the idol and creating a spiritually uplifting atmosphere within the temple premises.

The special pooja and associated rituals were performed under the guidance and participation of the temple president and former MLA H.B. Ramu, along with members of Smt. Honnamma's family. Their involvement reflected continued community leadership and dedication towards preserving local religious traditions and supporting temple activities.

As it was Amavasya, a large number of women, children, and devotees from Holalu and neighbouring villages gathered at the temple to participate in the pooja. Many devotees offered prayers seeking the blessings of the goddess for health, prosperity, and family well-being. The



Special Amavasya rituals at Chittanamma Devi temple in Holalu drew devotees, community leaders, and neighbouring villagers in Mandya

temple premises witnessed a steady flow of worshippers throughout the day, highlighting the faith and devotion associated with the goddess.

Several office-bearers and members of the temple trust were present during the event. Those in attendance included Trust Honorary President H.L. Shivanna, Secretary Shivalingayya, Treasurer Patel Ramu, and members Sadananda, Jattikumar, Ningegowda Ningaraju, Chandan, C.K. Nagaraju, and Ravikumar. Temple Manager Shivaramu, Assistant Suresh, Muddegowda, and chief priest Narasimhamurthy also played key roles in ensuring the smooth conduct of the rituals.

BJP never won majority in Karnataka: Minister

HUBBALLI

Karnataka Minister Zameer Ahmed Khan on Thursday launched a sharp attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), stating that the people of the state have never given the party a clear majority. Speaking to reporters in Hubballi, the minister alleged that the BJP came to power in the past by engineering defections under what he described as "Operation Kamala," rather than

through a direct electoral mandate. "The people of the state have never given a majority to the BJP. They came to power by conducting Operation Kamala," Khan said, reiterating the Congress party's long-standing allegation that the BJP used inducements to topple an elected government. His remarks come amid renewed political debates and speculation surrounding leadership and governance in the state.

Idol of Malatesh Devara vandalised near Gundenahalli

HAVERI

An incident of vandalism involving the idol of Malatesh Devara was reported near Gundenahalli village in Byadagi taluk of Haveri district, triggering outrage among local residents. The incident came to light on Thursday when devotees noticed damage to the idol, which holds deep religious and cultural significance for the community.

According to preliminary information, unidentified miscreants allegedly smashed the idol with a stone, severely damaging its face and eye

area. The idol, located in an open space near the village, is regularly worshipped by people from Gundenahalli and nearby villages.

Following the incident, villagers gathered at the site and expressed anger, terming it an attack on religious sentiments. Tension prevailed briefly but remained under control. The Byadagi police visited the spot, conducted an inspection, and registered a case against unknown persons based on a complaint from locals. Police are examining CCTV footage, questioning residents, and have stepped up patrols.

Clash erupts over Waqf Board property in Masti

KOLAR

Tension prevailed in Masti village of Malur taluk in the district following a violent confrontation between two groups over a disputed Waqf Board property. The incident occurred within the jurisdiction of the Masti police station and involved a long-standing dispute over nearly 11 acres of land belonging to the Waqf Board.

According to local sources, the land in question was originally donated to the Waqf Board by the descendants of Syed Rasool Darvesh. The property includes an Eidgah as well as a building that has

been leased out, both of which are officially recorded as Waqf Board assets. The land has reportedly been under the management of mosque authorities for religious and community purposes.

However, the dispute escalated when certain members of Syed Rasool Darvesh's family raised objections, claiming ownership of the land. They allegedly argued that the property belonged to their family and not to the Waqf Board. This disagreement soon turned violent, with the family members reportedly attacking mosque leaders using stones and sticks.

Eyewitnesses said the clash

created panic in the village, as both groups engaged in heated arguments that quickly escalated into physical violence. Residents rushed to the scene after hearing the commotion, while some attempted to defuse the situation. The incident disrupted normal life in the area for a brief period.

Masti police were alerted soon after the clash and reached the spot to bring the situation under control. Police officials dispersed the groups and restored order, preventing further escalation. Preliminary inquiries have been initiated to ascertain the sequence of events and identify those involved in the violence.

POLIO TRAINING IN CHITRADURGA

Training program held for polio vaccination team members

CHITRADURGA

A special training programme for members of polio vaccination teams was organised at the Unity Institute of Nursing Science College in Chitradurga on Thursday, ahead of the upcoming Pulse Polio immunisation drive. The programme aimed to strengthen preparedness and ensure that no child below the age of five is left unvaccinated during the campaign scheduled for December 21.

Addressing the gathering, Chitradurga Taluk Health Education Officer B. Moogappa emphasised the importance of



the polio drive with the slogan, "Let us administer polio drops and prevent disability." He said that preventing polio is a collective responsibility of all government departments as well as the general public. He stressed that every child under the age of five must be reached and vaccinat-

ed without exception.

Moogappa explained in detail the procedures to be followed on booth day, instructing team members to report on time and warmly welcome parents who bring their children to vaccination booths. He highlighted that only one vaccine vial should be taken

out from the vaccine carrier at a time and should not be placed back until it is completely used, ensuring vaccine quality and safety. He further instructed that two drops of the polio vaccine must be administered to each child and a mark should be placed on the child's left little finger as confirmation.

He also informed that from December 22 to 24, house-to-house visits would be conducted for three days to identify children who missed vaccination on booth day. During these visits, health workers will administer polio drops with the cooperation of the

community, ensuring complete coverage.

Unity Institute of Nursing Science Principal Mrutyunjaya Mathad said the institution would extend full cooperation for the success of national health programmes. Health Inspector Rudramuni Aru provided guidance on filling out reports and records, while urging the public to cooperate with health workers during home visits.

Health Inspectors Supritha and Nithin, along with BSc Nursing and GNM students, actively participated in the training programme, contributing to its success.

Calendar of events: (1) Tender documents may be downloaded from the e-procurement portal of the Government of Karnataka from **20.12.2025**. (2) Date of Pre bid meeting at the office of the Executive Engineer (Yelahanka Division) on **23.12.2025 at 4:00 p.m.** (3) Tenders must be submitted online through e-procurement portal on or before **4:00 p.m. on 29.12.2025** and the opening of tenders will be as per the e-procurement portal guidelines. (4) Technical bids will be opened on the website <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in> in the office of the Executive Engineer (Yelahanka Division) on **30.12.2025 at 4:00 p.m.** Further details may be obtained from the above office during office hours or website <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in>.

Sd/- Executive Engineer, Yelahanka Division, BNCC

QUICK READ

**Elephant kills third person in Korba district****Korba**

A 35-year-old man, Mahendra Singh, was killed by a rogue elephant on Friday morning in Gaurbora village, Korba. This marks the third attack by the same tusker in three days. The incident occurred around 6 am when Singh was sitting on his veranda warming himself by a fire. Korba Divisional Forest Officer Premrata Yadav confirmed the attack, urging villagers to stay cautious as authorities work to track the elephant and prevent further incidents.

Delhi pharma owner arrested for drug trafficking**Jammu**

Jatish Babbar, owner of a Delhi-based pharmaceutical company, was arrested by Jammu and Kashmir Police's Anti-Narcotics Task Force on Friday for drug trafficking. Officials said Babbar is involved in multiple cases of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. He is a known trafficker and linked to three separate NDPS cases registered at ANTF police station in Jammu. Police called the arrest a major breakthrough in curbing drug networks in the Union Territory.

Rajasthan govt to hold local polls by April**New Delhi**

The Rajasthan government assured the Supreme Court on Friday that panchayat and municipal corporation elections will be conducted by April 2026. The bench, headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant, refused to interfere with the Rajasthan High Court's order setting the poll deadline. The court disposed of a plea by Congress leader Sanjay Lodha, who had sought immediate elections, citing delays. Authorities confirmed preparations are underway to ensure local body polls are held on schedule across the state.

SC overturns murder conviction over last seen evidence**NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court on Friday overturned the life sentence of an accused in a 21-year-old murder case, ruling that a conviction cannot be based solely on the "last seen together" theory without a complete chain of circumstantial evidence. A bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and Prashant Kumar Mishra set aside the Chhattisgarh High Court and trial court judgments, which had convicted the appellant under Sections 302 and 201 of the IPC, awarding life imprisonment for murder and five years for destroying evidence.

The prosecution claimed the appellant and others lured a tractor driver under the pretext of collecting cable wire. The driver was later found dead with burn injuries. While five co-accused were acquitted, the appellant was convicted mainly based on witness testimony regarding last-seen circumstances.

The Supreme Court emphasised that circumstantial evidence must form a complete and coherent chain, pointing

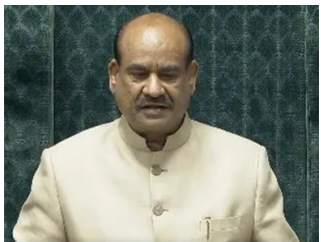
Lok Sabha achieves 111 percent productivity this session

Sixth session of 18th Lok Sabha ended Friday with record productivity, debates, multiple bills passed, and legislative activity

NEW DELHI

The Sixth session of the 18th Lok Sabha, which began on December 1, concluded on Friday, with Speaker Om Birla highlighting the House's 111 per cent productivity. A total of 15 sittings were held, covering 92 hours and 25 minutes, including an 11-hour-and-32-minute discussion on the national song "Vande Mataram."

During the session, 10 government Bills were introduced and eight passed, including



the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Bill, the Manipur GST (Second Amendment) Bill, the Central Excise (Amendment) Bill, and the Sustainable Harnessing and Ad-

vancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India Bill, among others.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the discussion on the 150th anniversary of "Vande Mataram," while electoral reforms were debated for nearly 13 hours, with participation from 63 members. The House admitted 300 starred questions, answered 72 orally, and admitted 3,449 unstarred questions. Members raised 408 matters of urgent public importance during Zero Hour, and 372 matters

under Rule 377.

In addition, 35 statements were made under Direction 73A, and 38 statements under Rule 372, with 2,116 papers laid on the Table. Forty-one Parliamentary Standing Committee reports were presented. Private Members introduced 137 bills, and a resolution by Congress MP Shafi Parambil was withdrawn after discussion. The session also saw the official visit of Shalva Papuashvili, Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, welcomed by the Indian Parliament.

Video of Manjhi sparks Bihar 'vote chori' controversy**PATNA**

A controversy has erupted in Bihar after a video of Union Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi surfaced, appearing to show him claiming he "helped" a candidate trailing in an assembly election. The video, reportedly from Manjhi's Gaya Lok Sabha constituency, was shared by the opposition RJD-Congress combine, which lost the recent elections, as "proof of vote chori" by the BJP-led NDA.

In the video, the former Bihar Chief Minister, who heads the Hindustani Awam Morcha, is heard referring to the Tikari assembly segment. He allegedly said that in the 2020 polls, his party candidate Anil Kumar was trailing by 2,700 votes, and after Manjhi contacted the officials, the candidate was declared the winner. In the recent elections, the same candidate lost by 1,600 votes. Manjhi said nothing could be done this time as the candidate chose to concede, they could not independently verify the video.

The RJD, which regained Tikari but saw its tally drop from 75 to 25 seats, shared the video on social media, accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Election Commission of trying to manipulate votes. Bihar Congress also condemned the incident, calling it "vote dacoity."

Manjhi responded angrily, claiming the video was tampered with and posted to defame him. He said he will not be intimidated and emphasized his identity as a leader from the Musahar community.



solely to the accused's guilt. "Circumstantial evidence can support conviction only when wholly inconsistent with innocence and consistent only with guilt," the bench said, rejecting the sole reliance on last-seen testimony.

The court also criticised the High Court's use of Section 106 of the Evidence Act, noting that failure to explain separation from the deceased does not relieve the prosecution of proving guilt beyond reasonable doubt. The absence of motive or corroborative evidence further strengthened the benefit-of-doubt ruling.

"In this case, the evidence may raise suspicion, but it is not conclusive enough to convict solely on last seen together," the bench observed. The Supreme Court acquitted the appellant of all charges and discharged his bail bonds, as he was already out on bail.

Jaishankar says India enters decisive phase in EU free trade talks, seeking Netherlands support amid deepening bilateral ties

India seeks Netherlands support in EU trade talks**NEW DELHI**

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar highlighted that India is entering a "decisive phase" in negotiations with the European Union on a free trade agreement. Speaking with Netherlands Foreign Minister David van Weel, he emphasised the importance of support from key EU members, including the Netherlands.

Jaishankar noted the strong bilateral ties with the Netherlands, describing it as a key EU partner. He pointed out that recent agreements have expanded cooperation, particularly in trade, security, defence, and emerging technologies, while stressing there is potential to further raise the ambition of the relationship. He also expressed in-



terest in the Netherlands' views on global and regional developments.

Van Weel underlined the need for democracies to collaborate amid changing geopolitics. He praised progress in bilateral engagement and welcomed the signing of a Letter of Intent to enhance cooperation in security, defence, and technology. He noted that despite differences in size, the two countries share similar perspectives and are keen to strengthen ties.

Earlier, Jaishankar met members of India's multi-party parliamentary delegations who represented the country at the United Nations General Assembly. He appreciated their efforts in presenting India's views on global issues and engaging effectively with international counterparts. The meeting allowed the minister to hear directly from the parliamentarians about their experiences and feedback from the UNGA sessions.

Jaishankar thanked the delegates for articulating India's positions on international platforms, reinforcing the country's commitment to multilateral diplomacy while seeking strategic support from the Netherlands in the ongoing EU free trade negotiations.

Congress demands CM Vijayan to apologise over police brutality**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

Kerala Opposition leader V.D. Satheesan on Friday demanded that Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan apologise for failing to act on a 2024 complaint about the alleged brutal assault of a pregnant woman and her family by police personnel. Satheesan said the Chief Minister, who also holds the Home portfolio, was aware of the incident but chose not to intervene, allowing it to be suppressed.

According to the Opposition, the woman's husband was taken into custody over a minor issue, detained, and subjected to severe assault. When the woman reached the station with her children to protest, she too was allegedly assaulted. Satheesan described the incident as unprecedented, saying assaulting a pregnant woman in a police station was unheard of. He added that the case only came to light after reaching the courts.



Satheesan demanded a thorough investigation and action against all responsible personnel. He also sought a probe into whether senior police officers or officials from the Chief Minister's Office had shielded the errant staff. Criticising police excesses and corruption under the current government, he alleged that even senior officers facilitated parole for criminals in exchange for bribes.

Referring to previous instances of police misconduct, including a case involving a Youth Congress leader in

Thrissur, Satheesan accused the CPI(M) and the Chief Minister's Office of shielding guilty officers and failing to honour Assembly assurances.

Meanwhile, the police officer Prathapachandran, accused of assaulting the pregnant woman, has been suspended. The victim has stated that her family will pursue legal action, claiming other police officials also humiliated her. The case surfaced after a video of the assault went viral, drawing widespread public attention.

PUC CHECKS**Awareness grows as 'No PUC, No Fuel' rule takes effect****NEW DELHI**

A day after Delhi enforced the 'No PUC, No Fuel' rule, commuter awareness has increased, with many voluntarily showing pollution-under-control certificates before refuelling.

Nischal Singhania, president of the Delhi Petrol Dealers' Association, said compliance levels are improving, though queues at PUC centres remain long. Fuel sales have dipped at some border areas, including Badarpur, as commuters adjust to the mandatory checks.

Some pump owners reported reduced sales, while customers increasingly carry PUC documents themselves.

However, enforcement remains uneven across the city. At certain petrol pumps, commuters reported buying fuel without verification, with no police presence. Piyush, a commuter on Rohtak Road, said checks were not conducted at his pump, while Bhushan Singh observed normal operations at Gulabi Bagh.

Traffic police and transport department teams were deployed at city entry points, toll



plazas, and petrol pumps to ensure compliance. Officers used smart number plate recognition devices to verify documents and issue challans. At Bijwasan toll plaza on Dwarka

Integrity crucial in civil service recruitment: Prez**HYDERABAD**

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday called on Public Service Commissions across India to ensure honesty and integrity remain non-negotiable in civil service recruitment. Speaking at the national conference of Chairpersons of State Public Service Commissions in Hyderabad, she said skill gaps can be addressed through training, but lack of integrity creates irreversible challenges.

She emphasised that aspiring civil servants must commit to serving marginalised communities and be sensitive to women's needs. Civil servants, as the "permanent executive," provide continuity, impartiality, and stability, making their competence and ethics vital for implementing policies effectively.

The President also highlighted the need for Public Service Commissions to prepare for emerging challenges in technology, transparency, and governance credibility. She urged building globally competitive, future-ready teams to support India's rapid economic growth and the vision of becoming the world's third-largest



President Murmu urges public service commissions to prioritise honesty and gender sensitivity while recruiting civil servants for effective, people-centric governance

economy by 2047.

Murmu reminded that the Constitution recognises the critical role of Public Service Commissions in ensuring social, economic, and political justice, equality of status and opportunity, and promoting both equality and equity. She expressed confidence that these commissions will continue to shape a capable and ethical civil service.

Telangana Governor Jishnu Dev Varna, University Grants Commission Chairman Vineer Joshi, and other dignitaries attended the conference, supporting the President's call for strong, ethical, and people-focused civil services.

SIR exercise sparks fear among Bengal's Matua voters**KOLKATA**

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal has unsettled the BJP's Matua vote base ahead of the 2026 assembly elections. The draft rolls and the second phase of hearings have created anxiety among the Matua community, a Dalit Hindu refugee group from Bangladesh, in around 40-50 key seats the party has relied on since 2019.

Statewide, 58.2 lakh names were excluded from draft rolls, reducing the electorate from 7.66 crore to 7.08 crore. Around 1.36 crore entries have logical discrepancies, and nearly 30 lakh voters are unmapped, many of whom belong to the Matua community. Voters flagged in the SIR process must produce prescribed documents, but many families, displaced over decades, lack formal records. Citizenship Amendment Act certificates or applications are reportedly not being accepted in verification, leaving thousands uncertain.

In Thakurnagar, the spiritual and political centre of the Matua movement, residents expressed fear over possible exclusion. Many have Aadhaar and voter cards but worry these may be insufficient. EC officials stated hearings will continue until January 15, with final rolls published on February 14.

The BJP's rise in West Bengal since 2019 relied heavily on Matua support, particularly in Bongaon and Ranaghat, where the party performed strongly in Lok Sabha and assembly elections. Analysts warn that if large numbers of Matua voters fail verification, it could hurt the BJP's prospects in nearly 50 assembly seats, including 30 reserved constituencies in Nadia and North and South 24 Parganas.

Political leaders from both sides have expressed concern. While TMC claims Matuas risk losing voting rights, BJP leaders argue Aadhaar with supporting documents will suffice. Observers suggest the SIR exercise may challenge the BJP's hold over its core voter base.

QUICK READ

Australia Declares
Reflection Day After
Sydney Attack

Canberra

Australia has declared December 21 as a Day of Reflection to honour victims of the Sydney terror attack at Bondi Beach and to stand with the Jewish community. Fifteen people were killed and 41 injured. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said a national day of mourning will be held next year. Flags will fly at half-mast. Australians were urged to light candles and observe silence. A candle lighting and minute of silence will mark one week since the attack.



Mob Killing Raises
Minority Safety Fears
Bangladesh

Dhaka

Mob violence in Bangladesh has raised fresh fears about minority safety after a Hindu factory worker was killed in Mymensingh district. The incident happened on Thursday night at a garment factory in Bhaluka upazila. The victim, 30-year-old Dipu Chandra Das, was accused of insulting Islam during a workplace event. The claim spread quickly, triggering anger among workers and locals. A mob attacked him, killing him on the spot. Traffic on the Dhaka–Mymensingh highway was briefly halted.



Over 5,700 Afghan
Refugees Return
In One Day

Kabul

More than 5,700 Afghan refugees were forcibly sent back from Iran and Pakistan in a single day, a Taliban official said on Friday. Deputy spokesperson Mullah Hamdullah Fitrat said 1,084 families, totaling 5,780 people, returned through key border crossings. He added that many families were helped to reach home areas and some received aid. Telecom companies also issued SIM cards. The UN earlier reported a rise in Afghan migrant arrests in Pakistan.

Indian Envoy Praises Urakawa
Support Strengthens Japan Ties

Indian envoy highlights local support while advancing broader India Japan partnership

TOKYO

India's Ambassador-designate to Japan, Nagma M Mallick, met Urakawa Mayor Hiraku Ikeda on Friday and thanked him for the strong support extended to the Indian community living in the country.

The Indian Embassy in Japan said the meeting reflected Urakawa's welcoming approach and the mayor's efforts to ensure harmony, safety, and cooperation among residents, including foreign workers and families.

During the week, Mallick also held several high-level meetings in Tokyo to strengthen the Special Strategic and Global Partnership between India and Japan.

On Thursday, she met Minister of State for Economic



and Fiscal Policy Kiuchi Minoru and discussed economic cooperation, fiscal coordination, and shared development priorities.

She also met Yasutoshi Nishimura, a member of Japan's House of Representatives and chair of the Japan India Parliamentary Friend-

ship Group.

The talks focused on issues of mutual interest and practical steps to deepen political trust, people-to-people ties, and long-term cooperation.

Earlier this week, Mallick met Speaker of the House of Representatives Fukushima Nukaga to review the steady

progress in bilateral relations.

India Japan ties have also gained momentum at the highest political level in recent months. Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Johannesburg on November twenty three.

Modi described the meeting as productive and said cooperation in innovation, defence, talent mobility, and trade is vital for a better planet. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar earlier met his Japanese counterpart Motegi Toshimitsu at the ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur.

Both sides agreed to work closely to expand ties and implement a shared vision for the next decade. This engagement underlines growing confidence.

Rights group warns of growing sexual harassment
targeting Chinese activists abroad

HRW Flags Rising Sexual Harassment
Against Exiled Chinese Activists

NEW YORK

A new Human Rights Watch report has raised alarm over a rise in sexual harassment targeting Chinese activists living in exile, calling it a worrying form of cross border repression.

The report says Chinese authorities have long tried to silence critics overseas, but recent cases show a disturbing use of sexually explicit material to intimidate and shame dissidents and their families.

Hong Kong activists Carmen Lau and Ted Hui, now living abroad, face arrest warrants under the National Security Law. Last week, they revealed that unknown persons circulated sexually explicit deepfake images of them and their relatives in the United Kingdom and Australia.

Police in both countries have not identified those responsible. However, a Chinese government spokesperson defended the pursuit of "wanted fugitives" as reasonable, the report noted.



Human Rights Watch pointed to earlier evidence from 2024 showing direct Chinese government involvement in similar harassment. Online accounts spread sexual threats against the teenage daughter of US based critic Deng Yuwen, later traced to Chinese security agencies.

The report said such tactics have increased in recent years. A 2022 study by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute also warned of growing gender based online attacks against critics of Beijing.

While not all harassment

can be directly linked to the Chinese state, HRW said arrest warrants, bounties, and hostile official rhetoric signal that exiled activists are enemies, making them targets.

HRW urged governments to act against transnational repression. It called for public condemnation, proper investigations, and reporting systems for diaspora communities.

The group also asked governments to offer digital security and mental health support to victims, ensuring exiled activists feel safe and protected in their new countries.

Baloch Rights
Group Condemns
Hajra Baloch
Disappearance

BALUCHISTAN

Baloch Voice for Justice has condemned the enforced disappearance of Hajra Baloch, wife of Sanaullah Baloch, alleging she was unlawfully detained by Pakistani security forces, including the Counter Terrorism Department, from the Daru Hotel area of Hub Chowki. The rights group called her disappearance a serious violation of fundamental rights and international human rights law, highlighting a growing trend of repression in Balochistan. They cited similar cases over the past year, including Mahjabeen Baloch from Quetta, Nasreena Baloch from Hub Chowki, Raheema Baloch from Dalbandin, and Farzana Baloch from Khuzdar. According to the organisation, these incidents suggest a policy of targeting family members, particularly women, as part of broader crackdowns. The group urged the United Nations, international human rights bodies, and independent media to urgently address these violations and demanded the immediate recovery of all forcibly disappeared Baloch women.

EU Approves Aid,
Zelenskyy Urges
Russian Freeze

KYIV

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday welcomed the European Union decision to provide ninety billion euros in financial support for 2026 and 2027, calling it vital for national resilience during war with Russia.

He thanked EU leaders for approving the package and stressed that frozen Russian assets must remain blocked until Moscow pays compensation. Zelenskyy said the guarantees give Ukraine stability for coming years and protect Europe's shared future.

European Council President Antonio Costa announced the agreement after long talks in Brussels, saying the bloc committed and delivered. The money will be given as an interest free loan raised through EU borrowing on capital markets.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said leaders met with a clear aim to meet Ukraine urgent funding needs and succeeded through focused discussions.

Former German chancellor Olaf Scholz said the decision sent a strong message to Moscow and added that Russian assets would stay frozen until

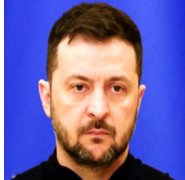
EU backs Ukraine with major funding as Zelenskyy welcomes support and stresses frozen Russian assets must remain blocked until compensation is paid.

damages are paid.

The move followed Zelenskyy meetings with European leaders where he urged use of frozen Russian funds to support Ukraine economy and defence. He called such action morally justified.

The European Union has asked the Commission to examine the possibility of a reparations loan using frozen Russian assets, though legal challenges persist.

Belgium, which holds most of the funds, has expressed concerns, leading to discussions with Prime Minister Bart De Wever. EU leaders confirmed that €210 billion in Russian assets will remain frozen until reparations are paid, after which Ukraine could use the money to repay EU loans. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said talks also covered coordination with the US, energy support, reconstruction, and EU membership, while settlement talks remain unresolved.



Kremlin Warns Seizure Of
Russian Assets Unacceptable

MOSCOW

The Kremlin on Friday warned that the seizure of Russian assets will not go unpunished, saying those responsible will face legal consequences. Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov stated that individuals involved in such actions, whether collectively or individually, will be held accountable.

The warning comes as European Union leaders failed to reach a deal on a reparations loan for Ukraine, instead agreeing to raise 90 billion euros in joint debt to fund the country over the next two years. Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia opted

out of the scheme. EU leaders had initially sought to use immobilised Russian assets in Belgium to provide a reparations loan, but Belgian demands for unlimited guarantees blocked the plan. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz led

the efforts but was unable to secure the loan, prompting the move to joint debt financing. Following the Brussels summit, European Commission President Ursula von

der Leyen and Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen confirmed that EU support for Ukraine's funding needs has been secured. Frederiksen told reporters, "The bottom line, after today, is that our support for Ukraine is guaranteed."



Study Reveals Widespread Labour
Violations In Karachi Factories

KARACHI

A recent study has highlighted widespread labour rights violations in Karachi and Faisalabad textile factories producing healthcare exports for Europe. The report, titled "Public Money, Private Harm", was conducted with Swedwatch, AwazCDS-Pakistan, and NowCommunities, based on worker testimonies from both cities.

The findings pointed to serious abuses, including long working hours, unsafe conditions, lack of social protections, limited maternity benefits, and gender pay gaps. Many workers do not have formal employment contracts,



and women often earn far less than men despite performing the same tasks. Supervisory roles are mostly reserved for men, and workers are largely excluded from decision-making processes.

The report criticised reliance on social audits and certifications, stating they frequently fail to detect or resolve labour violations. It emphasised that inadequate enforcement of Pa-

kistani labour laws and EU procurement rules worsens these conditions. Farhat Parveen, Executive Director of NowCommunities, said workers in both formal and informal sectors face serious challenges, while Zia-ur-Rehman of AwazCDS-Pakistan noted that European countries, including Sweden, heavily depend on Pakistani textile exports, highlighting the global supply chain's role in perpetuating abuses. The study also cited the ITUC Global Rights Index 2024, which ranks Pakistan among the worst countries for workers, noting insufficient legal protections for union activities and limited real access to rights.

SU DO KU

Brain-Bender: Can You Solve It?

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

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

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

Solutions to Yesterday's puzzle

US Commander Warns DMZ Should Remain Protected

SEOUL: The commander of US Forces Korea, General Xavier Brunson, on Friday urged that the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea should not be politicized, responding to a South Korean bill that seeks government control over non-military access to the buffer zone. Brunson, who also serves as commander of the UN Command, emphasized that the 1950-53 Korean War armistice must guide all actions regarding the DMZ. He said the UNC currently has authority to approve access and that altering these arrangements would violate the legal agreement.

CHINA SLOWDOWN DEEPENS

China Slowdown Deepens As Investment Sales Fall

BEIJING

China economy showed deeper weakness in November as investment fell further and retail sales hit their weakest growth since COVID rules were lifted. Official data and reports pointed to slowing demand, weak property activity, and limited consumer confidence.

Industrial output rose 4.8 percent year on year in November, easing from 4.9 percent in October and missing forecasts of 5 percent. This was the slowest factory



growth since August. Retail sales, a key sign of spending, grew just 1.3 percent, sharply



lower than the 2.9 percent rise seen in October and the weakest since December 2022.

Economist Huang Zichun of Capital Economics said the numbers showed broad domestic weakness, mainly due to lower government spending. He said policy support may bring a partial recovery, but overall growth is likely to stay weak through 2026.

Fixed asset investment outside rural households fell 2.6 percent in the first eleven months, worse than the 1.7 percent fall seen earlier this year. Statistics bureau official Fu Linghui said the drop was driven largely by falling real estate investment.

Property investment declined 15.9 percent during the same period, deepening from earlier losses. Once a quarter of the economy, the property sector has struggled since mid 2021, hurting household wealth and spending.

The crisis worsened in November as home prices fell across seventy major cities. New home sales by value dropped 11.2 percent in the first eleven months, adding pressure to an already slowing economy. Analysts expect challenges to persist next year.

QUICK READ

Nifty to touch 29,094 in 12 months supported by durable earnings

New Delhi

India's benchmark index Nifty is expected to touch 29,094 in one year based on long-term valuation averages and earnings durability, a report said on Friday. Wealth management firm PL Wealth said in the report that India enters the end of 2025 from a position of relative macro strength with record-low inflation, a dovish monetary stance, resilient domestic demand and improved corporate earnings visibility. In the near term, large-cap stocks remain preferred due to their earnings stability and strong balance sheets, while selective exposure to high-quality mid-cap names is being added as visibility improves.

India's direct tax collection clocks 8 pc growth at ₹ 17.05L cr

New Delhi

India's net direct tax collections recorded an 8 per cent growth to Rs 17.05 lakh crore so far in the current financial year (2025-26), on the back of a steady growth in corporate tax receipts, according to figures released by the Income Tax Department on Friday. Net direct tax collections between April 1 and December 17, 2025 touched Rs 17,04,725 crore, compared with Rs 15,78,433 crore in the same period of the previous year. Gross direct tax collections grew 4.16 per cent year-on-year to Rs 20,01,794 crore.

Adani's airport unit plans \$11 bn investment, seeks partner ahead of IPO

AHMEDABAD

Billionaire Gautam Adani's group plans to invest more than \$11 billion in its airports business by 2030, as it seeks to bid for nearly a dozen new terminals, upgrade infrastructure and expand into aircraft maintenance, a top executive said. The unit will spend ₹1 trillion (\$11.1 billion) on terminals, runways and aircraft-handling facilities and passenger amenities, Jeet Adani, director at Adani Airport Holdings Ltd., said in an interview at the group's new airport outside Mumbai. He did not specify how the investments will be funded, but confirmed that the company is preparing for an initial public offering by the year ending March 2028, likely by spinning off the airports unit that's currently under the flagship Adani Enterprises Ltd. I personally believe a demerger is the better route as it unlocks greater value for Adani Enterprises shareholders, he said, adding that the group is open to bringing in a strategic investor before the listing although no formal

PUNE REAL ESTATE MARKET RECORDS STRONG GROWTH

Pune's housing market showed steady momentum in November 2025, with higher registrations and strong stamp duty revenues nationwide

PUNE

Pune's real estate market continued to demonstrate resilience and stability in November 2025, registering solid growth in both transaction volumes and revenue collections, according to a report released by real estate consultancy Knight Frank on Friday. The city recorded 14,234 property registrations during the month, reflecting a year-on-year increase of 6 per cent. Stamp duty collections stood at Rs 565 crore, underscoring the sustained demand for residential properties despite moderation following the festive season peak. The report highlighted a sharper rise in revenue collections compared to registra-



tions, with stamp duty revenues increasing by 19 per cent year-on-year in November. On a month-on-month basis, property registrations rose by 12 per cent, while stamp duty collections grew by 7 per cent, indicating continued buyer activity and stable pricing dynamics. This perfor-

mance further reinforced Pune's position as one of India's more balanced and resilient residential markets. On a year-to-date basis from January to November 2025, Pune achieved its highest property registrations and stamp duty collections in the past four years. During this eleven-month period, the city recorded a total of 1,73,578 registrations, generating revenue of Rs 6,675 crore. Compared to the same period last year, registrations and stamp duty collections were up by 0.5 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively, reflecting steady long-term growth. The distribution of ticket sizes remained largely unchanged, pointing to consistent buyer preferences. Homes priced up to Rs 1 crore continued to dominate the market, accounting for 85 per cent of all transactions, while properties priced above Rs 1 crore contributed the remaining 15 per cent. In November alone, properties priced under Rs 25 lakh made up 27 per cent of transactions.

IBM has unveiled an ambitious skill development programme in India aimed at training millions in future technologies

IBM TO TRAIN 5 MILLION IN ADVANCED TECH BY 2030

NEW DELHI

IBM on Friday announced a significant expansion of its skill development efforts in India, committing to train 5 million learners in advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), cybersecurity and quantum computing by 2030. The initiative is aimed at strengthening India's digital talent pipeline and making advanced technology education more inclusive, accessible and aligned with future workforce needs. The company said the programme will focus on expanding AI and emerging technology education across schools, universities and vocational training ecosystems. By targeting learners at different stages of their academic

and professional journeys, IBM aims to build a strong foundation of future-ready skills that can support India's ambitions in the global technology landscape. As part of the initiative, IBM will collaborate closely with key academic and regulatory institutions, including the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). These partnerships will promote hands-on learning and practical exposure through AI-focused courses, faculty development programmes, curriculum integration, hackathons and internship opportunities. The emphasis on experiential learning is intended to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application.

IBM Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer Arvind Krishna said India has the talent and ambition required to emerge as a global leader in AI and quantum technologies. He noted that fluency in frontier technologies will play a critical role in determining future economic competitiveness, scientific advancement and broader societal transformation. India possesses the talent and ambition to lead the world in AI & Quantum. Fluency in frontier technologies will define economic competitiveness, scientific progress and societal transformation, Krishna said. He added that by democratising access to advanced skills, IBM aims to empower youth and students to innovate, build solutions and contribute to India's long-term growth.

S. Korea to funnel public growth fund into AI, semiconductors

SEOUL

The newly launched mega-sized Public Growth Fund will first be used to support the artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductor and battery sectors, the chief of the state financial regulator said on Friday. Lee Eog-weon, chairman of the Financial Services Commission (FSC), said the FSC has selected seven projects to be first funded by the 150 trillion-won (US\$101.5 billion) fund during a policy briefing to President Lee Jae Myung. The projects include the development of advanced AI chip production facilities, large-scale graphic processing unit (GPU) clusters using the recently purchased GPUs from Nvidia, a national AI

computing center and materials for secondary batteries. Last week, the mega-sized fund, one of the Lee administration's key economic pledges, set sail with a focus on accelerating AI adoption across sectors and channeling resources into key industries, including secondary batteries and biotechnology, over the next five years. Lee said 40 per cent of the fund will be used for investment projects that can help induce regional growth. According to the FSC, over 30 trillion won will be invested next year, with the initial investments including 6 trillion won for the AI sector, 4.2 trillion won for the semiconductor segment and 3.1 trillion won in future mobility.

SFIO interacts with IndusInd Bank officials over accounting discrepancies

MUMBAI

Private sector lender IndusInd Bank on Friday said the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) has interacted with bank officials this week and will send a written communication seeking specific details related to the accounting discrepancies identified at the bank. In a regulatory filing, the bank said that under the Reserve Bank of India's Master Directions on Fraud Risk Management in Commercial Banks (including Regional Rural Banks) and All India Financial Institutions dated July 15, 2024, any fraud involving Rs 1 crore or more reported to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) must also be reported to the SFIO, Ministry of Corporate Affairs

Domestic Investors Drive Equity Markets as Household Savings

MUMBAI

Domestic investors have emerged as the backbone of India's equity markets, pumping nearly Rs 4.5 lakh crore into equities during the year through mutual funds and other indirect investment routes, according to a report released by the National Stock Exchange (NSE). This surge in investments highlights a clear and sustained shift in household savings away from traditional instruments such as fixed deposits, gold and small savings schemes, towards market-linked assets. The trend underlines the growing influence of retail investors in shaping market depth, liquidity and long-term stability. The NSE report noted that India's retail investor base has expanded rapidly in the post-pandemic period. The number of individual investors has grown more than fourfold, rising from nearly three crore in 2019 to over 12 crore by 2025. This sharp rise reflects increasing financial awareness, wider penetration of digital trading platforms, and easier access to investment products. It also points to a growing acceptance of equities and mutual funds as preferred tools for long-term wealth creation among Indian households.



Rising domestic investments have strengthened India's equity markets, signalling a long-term shift in household savings patterns nationwide

Importantly, the expansion has not been limited to direct equity investments. A significant portion of new participation has come through mutual funds and other market-linked products, which have helped investors diversify risk while staying invested in equities. Since 2020, total household investments in market-linked instruments have reached approximately Rs 17 lakh crore, underscoring a structural transformation in India's savings and investment behaviour. The report emphasised that the rise in investor numbers has gone hand in hand with strong and consistent inflows into equities. Households alone contributed close to Rs 4.5 lakh crore during the current year, providing steady support to the markets even during periods of volatility. This domestic participation has added resilience and reduced the markets' dependence on foreign capital.

Indian Railways run Niryat Cargo Express from Gurugram to Mundra Port

NEW DELHI

Indian Railways has launched the Niryat Cargo Express, a milestone in export-focused logistics. This double-stack container train provides a time-bound, weekly service from Gurugram's Ichhapuri Terminal to Mundra Port, Gujarat. Operated as a "crack train" with minimal halts, it ensures faster, predictable transit, significantly reducing logistics costs for high-value cargo. Simultaneously, the government approved the Export Promotion Mission (₹25,000 crore) for FY 2025-31. This initiative consolidates export support via two sub-schemes: Niryat Protsahan, which improves trade finance for MSMEs through interest subvention and digital tools, and Niryat Disha. By merging fiscal incentives and regulatory flexibility, the mission aims to strengthen India's global competitiveness and support labor-intensive sectors.

₹94CR RURAL UTTARAKHAND

Centre releases over ₹ 94 cr to strengthen rural local bodies

DEHRADUN

The Centre has released Rs 94.236 crore to strengthen rural local bodies in Uttarakhand during the financial year 2025-26, according to a statement issued by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on Friday. The release includes the second instalment of Untied Grants for the Financial Year 2024-25 amounting Rs 94.10 crore for all eligible 13 district panchayats, 95 block panchayats and 7,784 gram panchayats in the hill state. In addition, Rs 13.60 lakhs towards the withheld portion of the first instalment of Untied



Grants for FY 2024-25 has been released to 15 additionally eligible gram panchayats. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Ministry of Jal Shakti (Department of Drink-

ing Water and Sanitation) recommend the release of XV FC Grants for RLBs/PRIs, which is subsequently released by the Ministry of Finance in two installments during a financial year. Untied Grants are meant to be utilised by Rural Local Bodies/PRIs for location-specific felt needs under the 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution, except for salaries and other establishment expenditures. Tied Grants, on the other hand, are earmarked for basic services relating to sanitation and maintenance of ODF status including management and treatment of household waste, human excreta and fecal sludge, and supply of drinking water, rainwater harvesting, and water recycling. The government, through

Ministry of Panchayati Raj and Ministry of Jal Shakti (Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation), recommends release of 15th Finance Commission grants to states for Panchayati Raj Institutions, which are then released by the Ministry of Finance. The allocated Grants are recommended and released in two instalments in a financial year. Untied Grants may be utilised by panchayati raj institutions and rural local bodies to meet location-specific needs under the 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule, excluding salaries and establishment costs.



In the bustling lanes of Delhi's Chandni Chowk, a small textile manufacturer employs fifteen workers, producing exquisite fabrics that find their way to international markets. In Kerala's Thrissur district, a family-run spice processing unit packages organic products for health-conscious consumers across Europe. Meanwhile, in Pune's industrial belt, a precision engineering startup fabricates components for aerospace applications. These diverse enterprises, scattered across India's vast geography, share a common identity: they are Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), and together, they form the very backbone of India's economic architecture.



Innovation and Adaptability: The MSME Advantage

Contrary to the perception that MSMEs are merely traditional or low-tech operations, many enterprises in this sector demonstrate remarkable innovation and technological sophistication. Small and medium enterprises in sectors like pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, information technology, and precision engineering operate at the cutting edge of their respective fields, often serving as innovation laboratories where new ideas are tested and refined. The agility of MSMEs is one of their greatest strengths. Unencumbered by bureaucratic hierarchies and rigid organizational structures, these enterprises can pivot quickly in response to market changes, adopt new technologies rapidly, and experiment with novel business models. This adaptability proved invaluable during the COVID-19 pandemic, when numerous MSMEs swiftly reconfigured their operations to produce personal protective equipment, sanitizers, and other pandemic-related products, demonstrating both their resilience and their responsiveness to national needs. Moreover, MSMEs often serve as the bridge between traditional knowledge systems and modern market requirements. An organic food processing unit that uses traditional recipes but employs modern packaging and marketing, or a textile manufacturer that combines handloom techniques with contemporary designs, exemplifies how MSMEs synthesize heritage with innovation.

Government Support: Building an Enabling Ecosystem

Recognizing the critical importance of MSMEs, successive governments have implemented numerous schemes and initiatives to support the sector. The Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises provides collateral-free credit, addressing one of the sector's most acute challenges. The MUDRA (Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency) scheme has extended millions of small loans to micro enterprises, enabling entrepreneurs to start or expand their businesses. Digital initiatives like the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) have opened up government procurement to MSMEs, providing them access to a vast and reliable customer base. The Technology and Quality Upgradation Support scheme assists MSMEs in adopting cleaner and energy-efficient technologies. Meanwhile, the ZED (Zero Defect Zero Effect) certification scheme encourages quality consciousness and environmental responsibility. The Atmanirbhar Bharat package announced during the pandemic included substantial measures for MSMEs, including emergency credit lines, subordinate debt provisions, and equity infusion mechanisms. These interventions acknowledged the sector's vulnerability during the crisis and provided crucial support for survival and recovery.



MSMEs in India: The Backbone Shaping a Nation's Future



The MSME Universe: Understanding the Classification

The MSME sector in India operates under a framework established by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, with classification based on investment in plant and machinery or equipment, and annual turnover. As per the revised definitions effective from July 2020, a micro enterprise has an investment of up to ₹1 crore and turnover up to ₹5 crore. Small enterprises are defined by investments up to ₹10 crore and turnover up to ₹50 crore, while medium enterprises can have investments up to ₹50 crore and turnover up to ₹250 crore. This sector encompasses an extraordinarily diverse range of activities, from traditional handicrafts and handlooms to modern technology-driven startups, from food processing units to sophisticated manufacturing facilities. The sheer variety within the MSME ecosystem reflects India's economic diversity and the entrepreneurial spirit embedded in its social fabric.

Economic Powerhouse: Numbers That Tell a Story

The statistical significance of MSMEs in India's economy is staggering. These enterprises contribute approximately 30% to the nation's GDP, a figure that underscores their critical role in wealth creation. More impressively, MSMEs account for nearly 45% of India's total manufacturing output and around 48% of the country's exports, making them indispensable to India's global trade competitiveness. Perhaps most significantly from a developmental perspective, the MSME sector is the second-largest employment generator after agriculture, providing livelihoods to over 110 million people across the country. This employment generation capacity makes MSMEs crucial instruments of inclusive growth, offering opportunities across urban and rural areas, across skill levels, and across social strata. The sector comprises over 63 million enterprises spread across the country, with micro enterprises forming the overwhelming majority. This vast network creates an intricate economic web that touches virtually every aspect of Indian economic life, from the production of consumer goods to the provision of services, from traditional crafts to cutting-edge technology solutions.



The Digital Transformation Journey

Digitalization presents both opportunities and challenges for MSMEs. On one hand, digital technologies can dramatically enhance efficiency, expand market reach, and improve customer engagement. Cloud computing, for instance, provides access to sophisticated software without massive upfront investments. Social media and digital marketing enable even tiny enterprises to build brand awareness and connect with customers globally. The formalization drive, accelerated by GST implementation and digital payment systems, has brought many enterprises into the formal economy, improving their access to credit and government benefits. Digital lending platforms are beginning to address the credit gap by using alternative data and artificial intelligence to assess creditworthiness, potentially expanding formal credit access to previously underserved MSMEs. However, the digital divide remains real. Many MSMEs, particularly in smaller towns and rural areas, lack the digital literacy, infrastructure, or resources to fully leverage digital opportunities. Bridging this divide through capacity building, affordable connectivity, and user-friendly platforms remains a policy priority.



Catalysts of Inclusive Development

One of the most profound contributions of MSMEs lies in their role as engines of inclusive growth. Unlike large corporations that tend to concentrate in metropolitan areas, MSMEs have a remarkable geographic dispersal, operating in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, small towns, and even rural areas. This distribution pattern ensures that economic opportunities and wealth creation are not confined to major urban centers but percolate to the hinterlands. The sector has been particularly effective in empowering traditionally marginalized communities. Women entrepreneurs, who constitute a growing segment of MSME owners, find in this sector an opportunity to achieve economic independence and social recognition. Similarly, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward classes have found pathways to entrepreneurship through MSMEs, often supported by government schemes designed to promote inclusive entrepreneurship. MSMEs also play a crucial role in preserving and promoting India's rich heritage of traditional crafts and skills. From Banarasi silk weavers to Moradabad's metal craftsmen, from Kashmir's papier-mâché artisans to Thanjavur's bronze sculptors, countless traditional skills survive and thrive within the MSME framework, ensuring that India's cultural heritage remains economically viable in the modern era.



Conclusion: The Continuing Saga of Nation Building

The story of India's MSMEs is, in many ways, the story of India itself—diverse, resilient, innovative, and aspiring. These enterprises embody the entrepreneurial dreams of millions, provide livelihoods to countless families, and collectively shape the economic trajectory of the nation. From the artisan in a remote village preserving traditional crafts to the tech entrepreneur in a tier-2 city building software solutions, from the food processor creating employment in rural areas to the precision engineer supplying to global aerospace giants, MSMEs reflect the extraordinary breadth of India's economic landscape. As India navigates the complexities of the 21st-century economy, the continued growth and strengthening of the MSME sector will remain central to achieving inclusive, sustainable, and robust development. With appropriate policy support, improved access to resources, and an enabling business environment, MSMEs will continue their role as the backbone of India's economy and the architects of the nation's prosperous future.

Challenges in the Growth Journey

Despite their immense contributions, MSMEs in India face a complex array of challenges that constrain their growth potential. Access to formal credit remains one of the most persistent obstacles. While banks and financial institutions have lending targets for the MSME sector, many small enterprises struggle to navigate the documentation requirements and collateral demands of formal lending. The credit gap in the MSME sector runs into trillions of rupees, forcing many entrepreneurs to rely on informal sources of financing at exorbitant interest rates. Technological upgradation presents another significant hurdle. While large corporations can invest heavily in research and development and adopt the latest technologies, many MSMEs operate with outdated machinery and processes, limiting their productivity and competitiveness. The cost of technology acquisition, combined with limited awareness about available options and insufficient technical expertise, creates a technology deficit that hampers growth. Market access, particularly for micro and small enterprises, remains challenging. Many MSMEs produce quality products but lack the marketing capabilities, brand recognition, and distribution networks to reach wider markets. The rise of e-commerce has opened new avenues, but many traditional MSMEs struggle to establish an effective digital presence or navigate the complexities of online marketplaces. Regulatory compliance, while necessary, often poses disproportionate burdens on smaller enterprises. Navigating multiple registrations, licenses, tax filings, and labor regulations requires time, expertise, and resources that many MSMEs find difficult to spare. Though reforms like the Goods and Services Tax have simplified some aspects of compliance, the overall regulatory landscape remains complex.



Looking Ahead: The Future of MSMEs in Nation Building

As India aspires to become a developed nation by 2047, MSMEs will undoubtedly play a central role in realizing this ambition. Their contribution to employment generation will be crucial in harnessing India's demographic dividend. Their innovation capacity will be essential in building globally competitive industries. Their geographic spread will ensure that development reaches every corner of the country. The integration of MSMEs into global value chains presents immense opportunities. As multinational corporations diversify their supply chains and adopt China Plus One strategies, Indian MSMEs can position themselves as reliable suppliers of quality components and products. However, this requires continued focus on quality improvement, technological upgradation, and meeting international standards. Sustainability will increasingly become a defining theme for MSMEs. Consumer preferences are shifting toward environmentally responsible and socially conscious products. MSMEs that embrace sustainable practices, whether in energy use, waste management, or social policies, will find themselves better positioned for long-term success. The emergence of MSME clusters and industrial parks facilitates economies of scale, knowledge sharing, and collaborative growth. Supporting such cluster development, along with improved infrastructure connectivity, will enhance competitiveness. Similarly, fostering linkages between MSMEs and large corporations through supply chain integration can create win-win scenarios.



RATCHANOK stays alive as top seeds progress

HANGZHOU

Former World Champion Ratchanok Intanon kept her semifinal hopes alive at the BWF World Tour Finals with a confident win in Hangzhou. The Thai star defeated China's third seed Han Yue in straight games during the women's singles Group B match on Friday. Playing at the Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre Gymnasium, Ratchanok won 21-17, 21-10 in 38 minutes to stay in contention for the knockout stage.

In Group A, Korea's top seed An Se Young and Japan's Akane Yamaguchi sealed their places in the semifinals after finishing as the top two in the group standings. Se Young remained unbeaten, winning all three of her league matches to finish first. Yamaguchi claimed second place with two wins from three games.

Se Young showed fighting spirit in her final group match against Yamaguchi. After losing the first game, the Korean shuttler bounced back strongly to win 13-21, 21-5, 21-14 in a match that lasted 47 minutes. In another Group A clash, Indonesia's Putri Kusuma Wardani defeated Japan's Tomoka Miyazaki 21-17, 21-9 to finish third in the group. Meanwhile, Indian fans will watch as Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag

Shetty prepare for their final Group B match. The Indian men's doubles pair will face Malaysia's second seeds Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik, hoping to end the group stage on a high.

Earlier, Satwik and Chirag boosted their chances of reaching the semifinals with a three game win over Indonesia's Fajar An and Muhammad Shohibul Fikri.

Se Young recovered after losing the first game, defeating Yamaguchi 13-21, 21-5, 21-14 in 47 minutes

world number three pair won 21-11, 16-21, 21-11, showing calm and control in key moments and strengthening India's presence at the season ending event.



Ukraine and Russia sliders set for close start

LAKE PLACID

Ukrainian and Russian athletes are set to start back to back in the men's World Cup luge race at Lake Placid, creating a moment that is drawing global attention. The start order shows Ukraine's Andriy Mandziy will begin second, followed immediately by Matvei Perestoronin, a Russian competing as an independent neutral athlete. Because of the consecutive start positions, both athletes are expected to be near each other at the top of the Mount Van Hoevenberg track and again near the finish area after their first runs on Saturday. This also increases the chance of brief interaction between coaches from the two countries.

The order was decided based on results from the Nations Cup race held earlier this week, which served as a qualifier. Italy's Lukas Peccei will start first, followed by



Russia aimed to send six athletes, but three lost eligibility due to neutrality rules; only three, including Perestoronin, remain, competing to preserve Milan Cortina Olympic qualification hopes.

Mandziy and Perestoronin. American slider Jonny Gustafson, who won the Nations Cup, will start fifth.

Russia had hoped to send six athletes to this World Cup event, but three lost eligibility after failing to meet neutrality requirements linked to the ongoing war that began in

2022. Only three Russian athletes remain eligible, including Perestoronin on the men's side. They are competing to keep their Olympic qualification hopes alive for the Milan Cortina Games.

Training sessions in Lake Placid have kept Russian and Ukrainian athletes in separate groups. Ukrainian supporters are expected in large numbers, as the town has strong ties with Ukraine and has shown public support throughout the conflict.

The men's race on Saturday will be the first World Cup luge event involving Russian athletes since before the war.



Johnston stars as Dallas down Sharks again

SAN JOSE

Wyatt Johnston scored two goals as the Dallas Stars defeated the San Jose Sharks 5-3, continuing their strong run in the NHL. Roope Hintz also played a key role, finishing with a goal and an assist in a well balanced team performance.

Dallas took control early in the game. Hintz opened the scoring late in the first period with his 10th goal of the season. Johnston then doubled the lead before the break, giving the Stars a comfortable 2-0 advantage after the opening period. The Sharks responded early in the second period when Shakir Mukhamadullin scored his second goal of the season. However, Johnston struck again midway through the period to restore Dallas' two goal cushion. The young forward's second goal of the night was his 19th of the season, putting him close to the team scoring lead.

San Jose continued to fight back, with Colin Graf scoring to make it 3-2. But Dallas answered quickly once more. Justin Hryckowian scored late in the second period, ensuring the Stars carried a 4-2 lead into the final period.

Graf scored his second goal of the game early in the third period to keep the Sharks in contention. Despite the pressure, Dallas stayed calm and defended well. Veteran Jamie Benn sealed the win with an empty net goal in the final minutes. Jake Oettinger made 30 saves for Dallas, while Alex Nedeljkovic stopped 25 shots for San Jose. Esa Lindell and Mikko Rantanen contributed with two assists each for the Stars. The loss ended San Jose's three game winning streak. Dallas, meanwhile, will take confidence from this road win as they continue their push up the standings.

Avdija's free throws seal narrow overtime win

PORTLAND

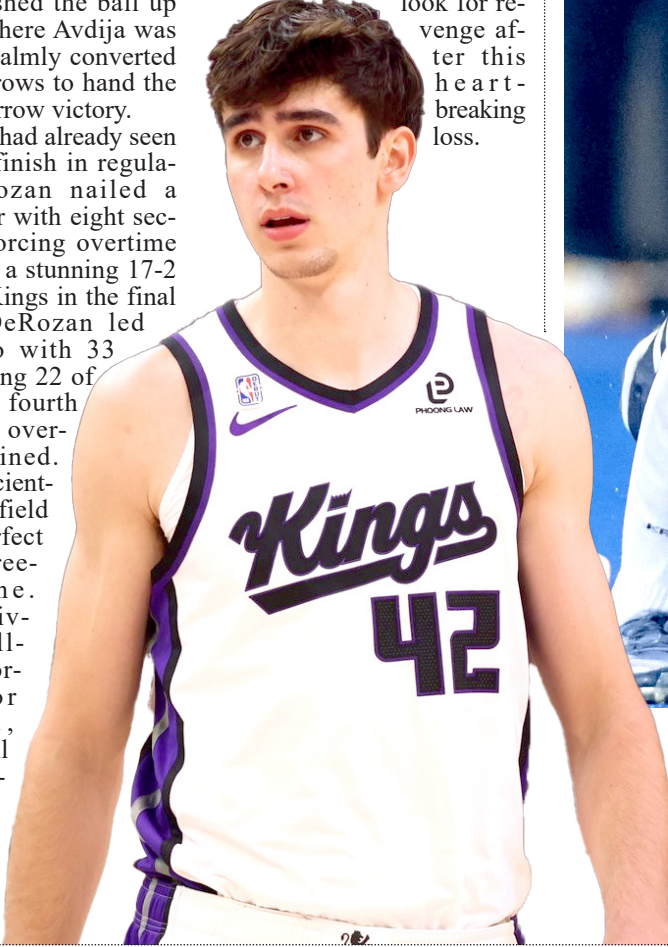
Deni Avdija held his nerve in the final moments as the Portland Trail Blazers edged past the Sacramento Kings 134-133 in a thrilling overtime clash. Avdija scored the decisive two free throws with just 1.5 seconds left in overtime, finishing the game with an impressive 35 points.

The contest was filled with late drama. Sacramento's DeMar DeRozan had earlier given the Kings a 133-132 lead by sinking a jumper with four seconds remaining in overtime. With no timeouts left, Portland rushed the ball up the court, where Avdija was fouled. He calmly converted both free throws to hand the Blazers a narrow victory.

The game had already seen a dramatic finish in regulation. DeRozan nailed a three-pointer with eight seconds left, forcing overtime and capping a stunning 17-2 run by the Kings in the final minutes. DeRozan led Sacramento with 33 points, scoring 22 of them in the fourth quarter and overtime combined. He shot efficiently from the field and was perfect from the free-throw line. Avdija delivered an all-round performance for Portland, shooting well and contributing assists despite some turnovers. Shaedon

Sharpe supported him with 26 points, including four three-pointers. Jerami Grant added 20 points, while rookie Donovan Clingan chipped in with 19. Toumani Camara also made a strong impact with 17 points.

For Sacramento, Maxime Raynaud recorded a career-high 29 points, giving the team strong support. Russell Westbrook had an efficient outing as well, scoring 20 points and handing out 10 assists. The two teams will meet again on Saturday night in Sacramento, where the Kings will look for revenge after this heartbreaking loss.



RANCHI ROYALS stars excited for Hockey League

NEW DELHI

Indian women hockey players Beauty Dung and Sangita Kumari are feeling excited ahead of the second season of the Women's Hockey India League, which will begin on December 28. The two Ranchi Royals players are especially happy about the chance to play alongside famous Argentine stars Agustina Albertario and Agostina Alonso in the upcoming season.

Argentina is one of the strongest teams in women's hockey and has won silver at the Tokyo Olympics and bronze at the Paris Olympics. Beauty and Sangita believe sharing the field and dressing room with such experienced players will help them improve their game. They said the Argentine players bring valuable experience and learning opportunities, which young Indian players can benefit from during the league. Both players are also looking forward to playing matches in Ranchi, their home city. They said hockey fans in Ranchi are very passionate and always turn up in large numbers to support the teams. Playing in front of family and local supporters makes the experience even more special for them. Sangita and Beauty made their India debut in 2021 and have since played in several major tournaments. Sangita has scored 30 goals for India, while Beauty has added six. They now hope to use the league as good preparation for future international events, including the Olympic Qualifiers in Hyderabad.

Georgia's scoring power rolls past Western Carolina

ATHENS

No. 25 Georgia continued to impress with its high scoring style as the Bulldogs defeated Western Carolina 112-82. Playing their first game after entering the AP Top 25, Georgia showed why it leads the nation in points per game.

Jeremiah Wilkinson was the star of the night, tying his career high with 26 points. His performance helped Georgia cross the 100 point mark for the fifth time in just 11 games this season. The Bulldogs improved their record to 10-1 and looked comfortable throughout the contest.

Somto Cyril delivered a strong all round display for Georgia. He finished with 14 points, 10 re-



bounds, four steals and a block. His powerful dunk late in the second half pushed Georgia past 100 points, drawing loud cheers from the home crowd. Marcus "Smurf" Millender added 17 points, while Blue Cain contrib-

uted 11 points after scoring a career best 22 in the previous game against Cincinnati.

Under head coach Mike White, Georgia has now won 34 straight home nonconference games over four seasons, showing their

strength at home. The Bulldogs never looked in danger and controlled the game from start to finish.

Western Carolina struggled to keep pace with Georgia's fast offense. The Catamounts never took the lead and faced further trouble when two of their key players fouled out early in the second half. CJ Hyland scored 14 points before leaving the game late due to cramps. Justin Johnson and Marcus Kell added 13 points each despite foul trouble.

Georgia's only loss this season came in overtime against Clemson, where Wilkinson also scored 26 points. With scoring depth and confidence growing, the Bulldogs look ready for tougher challenges ahead.

Edwards shines as South Carolina crushes USF

TAMPA



Joyce Edwards delivered a stunning performance as No. 3 South Carolina dominated South Florida 103-44 in a women's college basketball game. Edwards scored a career high 34 points while missing only one shot, making 13 of her 14 attempts from the field. Her earlier best was 29 points, achieved last weekend against Penn State, but this effort showed her growing confidence and control on the court. South Carolina played with pace and precision, shooting 62 percent overall and overwhelming the Bulls in every quarter. Tessa Johnson supported Edwards with 16 points, while Ta'Niya Latson added 15. Madina Okot recorded a strong double double with 12 points and 10 rebounds, helping the Gamecocks improve their record to 11 wins and one loss.

South Florida struggled to keep up with the pressure. Jelena Bulajic led the Bulls with 10 points, while L'or Mputu added six points and seven rebounds.

South Carolina built an early lead, finishing the first quarter ahead 28-15. The advantage grew to 52-25 by halftime. A dominant fourth quarter, where the Gamecocks outscored USF 27-6, sealed another big victory.

Head shines as Australia tighten Ashes grip



Travis Head's brilliant century put Australia firmly in control against England on Day Three of the third Ashes Test.

ADELAIDE

Travis Head produced a brilliant batting display to put Australia in a commanding position against England on Day Three of the third Ashes Test at the Adelaide Oval. At stumps, Australia reached 271 for four in their second innings, taking a massive lead of 356 runs and pushing England closer to defeat in the series.

Head remained unbeaten on 142, playing with confidence and control throughout the day. He was well supported by wicketkeeper Alex Carey, who also stayed not out on 52. Together, the pair added an unbeaten 122 runs for the fifth wicket, frustrating the England bowlers and strengthening Australia's grip on the match. This was Head's second century of the series and another reminder of his importance in big games.

Earlier in the day, England showed some fight with the bat. Captain Ben Stokes led from the front, scoring 83,

while Jofra Archer added a useful 51. Their ninth-wicket partnership of 106 runs helped England reach 286 after starting the day at 213 for eight. Despite their effort, England still trailed by a large margin.

Australia's second innings began with a minor setback when opener Jake Weatherall was dismissed early. England found brief hope after lunch when Marnus Labuschagne was also removed cheaply. However, Usman Khawaja and Head steadied the innings with a solid partnership, batting patiently and wearing down the bowlers.

After tea, England struck twice in quick succession, dismissing Khawaja and Cameron Green. But by then, Australia's lead was already close to 300 runs. Carey then joined Head and ensured there were no further wickets before stumps.

With one full day left, Australia are firmly in control and England face an uphill battle to save the Test.



Cricket Australia eyes BBL as T20 Grand Slam

MELBOURNE

Cricket Australia (CA) CEO Todd Greenberg has outlined plans to elevate the Big Bash League (BBL) into a "Grand Slam" event on the global T20 franchise cricket circuit, Greenberg compared the vision for BBL with the Indian Premier League (IPL) and England's The Hundred, suggesting Australia aims to host one of the premier T20 competitions worldwide.

Currently in its 14th season, the BBL is exploring privatisation following a Boston Consulting Group report recommending the move. If approved, the sale of stakes could raise up to AUD 800 million, providing CA with funds to strengthen budgets and invest across all levels of Australian cricket.

Greenberg emphasized the need for investment, top players, and proper scheduling to compete with leading T20 leagues. "To be part of the Grand Slam series, you need capital, you need investment, you need the best players, and you need the right window," he said.

PRESSURE PLAN FUELS Chakaravarthy World Cup push



AHMEDABAD

Indian spinner Varun Chakaravarthy said he is deliberately putting pressure on himself as part of his preparation for the upcoming T20 World Cup. The mystery bowler has been India's standout performer in the ongoing T20I series against South Africa, picking up six wickets in three innings so far.

India lead the five match series 2-1, with the fourth game abandoned due to fog. The final match will be played at the Narendra Modi Stadium, where India will aim to seal the series with a 3-1 result. South Africa will look to level the series and finish strongly

against one of the top teams from the last T20 World Cup.

Speaking ahead of the final match, Chakaravarthy said confidence and mindset have played a big role in his recent success. He explained that his main focus is on bowling the right lengths and trusting his basic skills rather than trying too many variations.

The spinner also reflected on his early struggles at the international level. He said those experiences helped him understand his game better and pushed him to work harder in practice. Playing regularly at the highest level, he added, helps players know where they stand.

Chakaravarthy believes creating mental pressure is necessary, even in matches that feel comfortable. He said challenging himself will help him stay sharp and prepared for big tournaments. Understanding opponents and backing strengths are lessons he wants to carry into the World Cup.

With the final T20I approaching, Chakaravarthy hopes to continue his good form and help India end the series strongly and confidently together.



3 arrested over Messi event vandalism in Kolkata

KOLKATA

Kolkata Police arrested three more people on Friday in connection with the vandalism at Salt Lake Stadium during an event featuring Argentine soccer star Lionel Messi last week. This brings the total arrests in the case to eight.

The principal organiser, Shatadru Dutta, had been taken into custody on December 13, the day of the incident. The three newly arrested individuals are set to appear in a lower court later today, where police will seek their custody.

In a related development, the police's special investigation team visited Dutta's residence in Rishra, Hooghly district. Officials spoke with domestic staff and conducted a thorough search of the premises, though no items were reportedly seized. Investigators declined to comment, citing the ongoing nature of the probe. Sources indicate that financial irregularities, particularly linked to the high ticket prices for the Messi event, are under scrutiny. If confirmed, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) may take over the investigation, as it has the authority to probe potential money laundering under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. Earlier, the state's Principal Secretary for Sports, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, along with DGP Rajeev Kumar and Bidhannagar Police Commissioner Mukesh Kumar, submitted responses to the state government regarding show-cause notices issued over the stadium mismanagement and vandalism. The investigation is ongoing as authorities work to clarify accountability for the chaotic event.

Kuldeep Yadav receives signed jersey from Messi



NEW DELHI

Indian spinner Kuldeep Yadav was gifted a signed Argentina football jersey by Lionel Messi during the football legend's visit to Delhi as part of his "GOAT India Tour 2025." The moment was shared on the official Adidas India social media handle, highlighting Kuldeep alongside other Indian athletes including Paralympic champions Sumit Antil and Nishad Singh.

Messi, accompanied by football stars Rodrigo De Paul and Luis Suarez, visited Delhi after stops in Kol-

kata, Hyderabad, and Mumbai. During the Delhi leg, ICC Chairman Jay Shah presented jerseys of the Indian cricket team to Messi, Suarez, and De Paul. Messi received the number 10 jersey, Suarez number 9, and De Paul number 7, all customised with their names. Shah also extended an invitation for Messi to attend the upcoming T20 World Cup.

The event allowed athletes and sports icons to interact personally with Messi. Kuldeep, a known FC Barcelona fan, was thrilled to receive the

signed jersey, while Renuka Singh Thakur had a cricket ball signed, and Nishad Singh received an Argentina jersey. Sumit Antil posed for photos with Messi while holding a javelin, and boxing star Nikhat Zareen also met the football superstar. Messi concluded his India tour in Jamnagar, Gujarat, visiting the Vantara wildlife conservation centre before departing. Highlights of his visit included meeting Sachin Tendulkar, Sunil Chhetri, Telangana CM Revanth Reddy, and Opposition Leader Rahul Gandhi.

India set to announce World Cup squads

NEW DELHI

India will announce its squads for the 2026 T20 World Cup and the upcoming home series against New Zealand on Saturday. The Ajit Agarkar led selection committee will meet at the BCCI headquarters in Mumbai to finalise the teams.

Along with the World Cup squad, selectors will also name players for the New Zealand white ball series, which includes three One Day Internationals and five T20 Internationals next month. India are currently playing a five match T20I series against South Africa at home. The final match of the series will be played in Ahmedabad on Friday, just a day before the selection meeting. The BCCI confirmed that a press conference will follow the meeting, with captain Suryakumar Yadav and chief selector Ajit Agarkar addressing the media. The ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 will begin on February 7 and will be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka. Twenty teams will compete across eight venues in both countries. Defending champions India are placed in Group A with Pakistan, the USA, Namibia, and the Netherlands. India will open their campaign against the USA in Mumbai, aiming to become the first team to successfully defend the T20 World Cup title.



Old Dominion hosts Coastal Carolina Matchup

NORFOLK

Old Dominion will host Coastal Carolina on Saturday (today) at 2 p.m. EST, following a strong 77-68 win over James Madison. Ketron Shaw led the Monarchs with 22 points, helping maintain their unbeaten home record at 4-0 this season.

Old Dominion, now 4-8 overall and 1-0 in Sun Belt play, averages 74.3 points per game but allows 77.3 points, leaving them slightly outscored on average. Jordan Battle has been a key contributor, averaging 13.4 points with a 41.6% shooting rate, while Robert Davis Jr. has added consistent three-point shooting, averaging 2.2 made threes over his last 10 games.

Coastal Carolina, 6-6 overall and 0-1 in conference play, enters the matchup allowing 71.2 points per game while holding opponents to 37.4% shooting. The Chanticleers have struggled offensively at times, shooting 40.2% from the field this season. Reggie Hill averages seven points and 6.1 rebounds, and Joshua Beadle contributes 14 points on average over the last 10 games.

This will be the first Sun Belt meeting between the Monarchs and Chanticleers this season. Old Dominion hopes to use its home-court advantage and recent momentum from Shaw's performance to secure another key conference win, while Coastal Carolina looks to bounce back and improve its standing in the league.

