

Nityabazar Firing Case: Mastermind Arrested After Nine Months

Bongaigaon, Dec 19: Mainal Haque, the mastermind of the fire incident at Nityabazar in Bongaigaon district, has been apprehended by police after over nine months. Mainal Haque was hidden out of state and had been running away. Shortly after coming back to Bongaigaon from another state, he was captured by the police.

The firing incident happened in Nityabazar on February 16, 2025, at approximately 9:30 p.m. While Abdus Salam, the owner of M/S Abdul Store, was closing his store for the evening, two unidentified guys on a motorcycle opened fire on him.

The gunshot missed Salam and hit items like soap cases and a bottle of mineral water behind the store, but Salam was unharmed.

The shopkeeper filed a report at the Boitamari police outpost after the incident, and locals were alarmed by the abrupt fire. Police found a pistol, two live rounds, and used empty cartridges at Mainal Haque's home in the Hordemara neighborhood of Chapar PS in the Dhubri district during a search operation. Mainal Haque was also charged in a number of other crimes, according to police sources. OC, Abhayapuri PS, Pulak Barman, and SI Utpal Kalita handled the entire operation. Senior Superintendent of Police Mohan Lal Meena of the Bongaigaon district oversaw the entire inquiry.

Mizoram government moves state university project to Lunglei, away from Aizawl

The Mizoram government has relocated the proposed state university from Aizawl to Lunglei to enhance access to higher education in the southern part of the state.

Aizawl, Dec 20: The Mizoram government has decided to change the location of the proposed state university from Aizawl to Lunglei. This marks a major shift in the state's higher education plan. The decision aims to improve access to higher education in the southern part of the state, where students often travel long distances for advanced studies. The decision was taken at a high-level meeting in Aizawl. Chief Minister Lalduhoma chaired the meeting. Several ministers, legislators and senior officials attended it. According to officials, the government will bring a Bill in the next Assembly session to make the change official. The Bill will amend the Mizoram State University Act, 2025 so that the university can be set up in Lunglei instead of Aizawl. Higher and Technical Education Minister Vanlalhlana attended the



meeting. Lunglei High Powered Committee vice-chairman and MLA V. Malsawmtluanga was also present, along with two other MLAs from the district. Officials said they discussed academic programmes, infrastructure needs and timelines for the project. The Mizoram State University Bill, 2025 was passed in the Assembly in March. The Bill was introduced to

comply with the National Education Policy, 2020. The policy requires every state to set up a teaching-intensive university to manage college affiliations within 15 years of NEP's implementation. For this reason, Mizoram started the process earlier this year. While introducing the Bill in March, Minister Vanlalhlana had said that the university would follow a

cluster model. This means several colleges and institutions will be brought under one academic system. When the Bill was passed, Aizawl was selected as the initial location. Now, with the latest decision, Lunglei will become the centre of the state's new higher education plans. For students and families in southern Mizoram, the shift is expected

to bring more opportunities. Many people in the region feel that the move will reduce the long travel burden and help local colleges grow. Officials say the state government is now working on drafts for the amendment Bill. Once the Assembly passes it, university project work in Lunglei is expected to begin. The government has not yet released dates for construction, courses or student intake, but officials said planning has already started. The move is being seen as part of the government's effort to balance development between regions. For many years, Aizawl has had most of the major educational institutions. By shifting the university to Lunglei, the government hopes to bring more growth to the southern districts as well. Local leaders and student groups in Lunglei have welcomed the decision. Some say the new university may also bring better infrastructure, faculty positions, hostels, and employment opportunities. Residents hope the move will attract students from other districts and states in the Northeast.

In Brief

Nityabazar Firing Case

Bongaigaon: Mainal Haque, the perpetrator of the February 16, 2025, firing incident in Nityabazar, Bongaigaon, has been arrested after more than nine months of evasion. He was apprehended upon returning from another state. The incident occurred when two assailants on a motorcycle fired at Abdus Salam, the owner of M/S Abdul Store, as he was closing for the night; fortunately, Salam escaped unharmed. Following the incident, he reported it to the Boitamari police, triggering an investigation. Police later discovered a pistol, live rounds, and empty cartridges at Haque's residence during a search. Haque faces multiple charges according to police sources, and the operation was conducted under the guidance of Senior Superintendent of Police Mohan Lal Meena.

Assam AICTE Bootcamp Concludes GCU

Guwahati: The three-day Innovation Design & Entrepreneurship (IDE) Bootcamp for Principals and Teachers of PM SHRI Schools concluded on December 19 at Girijananda Chowdhury University, involving over 190 educators. This intensive program focused on implementing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 by fostering curiosity and creative problem-solving instead of rote learning. The event was collaboratively organized by several educational bodies and the Wadhvani Foundation, reaching over 9,000 participants nationwide. Noteworthy sessions included training on financial literacy and practical application of innovative ideas using the Business Model Canvas, culminating in a "Spotlight On: Two-Minute Pitch" session. The bootcamp aims to transform educational practices in 25 States and 4 Union Territories, nurturing problem-solving skills for future generations in India.

Arunachal hosted the State Youth Festival themed

Itanagar: Under the theme "Viksit Bharat – Young Leader Dialogue," the state youth festival was held in Arunachal Pradesh, showcasing the creativity and cultural diversity of youth from various districts. Organized by the Youth Affairs Department and MY Bharat, the event featured competitions in cultural categories like folk song and dance, as well as innovation activities such as declamation, painting, poetry, and a scientific mela. State officials, including Ramesh Lingga and Kame Yangfo, highlighted the importance of youth in national development, echoing Prime Minister Modi's vision for a developed India by 2047. The champions will represent the state at the National Youth Festival and the Viksit Bharat Young Leader Dialogue in 2026.

PM to arrive in Guwahati tomorrow on 2-day Assam visit

Guwahati, Dec 19: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will arrive in Guwahati on December 20 on a two-day Assam visit.

After reaching Guwahati at around 3 pm on December 20, the e Prime Minister will undertake a walkthrough and inaugurate the New Terminal Building of Lokapriya Gopinath Bardoloi International Airport. He will also address the gathering on the occasion. At around 9:45 am on December 21, the Prime Minister will pay tribute to martyrs at Swahid Smarak Kshetra at Boragaon, Guwahati. After that, he will travel to Namrup in Dibrugarh, Assam, where he will perform Bhoomii Pujan for the Ammonia-Urea Project of Assam Valley Fertilizer and Chemical Company Ltd. He will also address the gathering on the occasion. The inauguration of the new terminal building of Lokapriya Gopinath Bardoloi International Airport in Guwahati will mark a transformative milestone in Assam's connectivity, economic expansion and global engagement. The newly completed Integrated New Terminal Building, spread over nearly 1.4 lakh square metres, is designed to handle up to 1.3 crore passengers annually, supported by major upgrades to the runway, airfield systems,



aprons and taxiways.

India's first nature-themed airport terminal, the airport's design draws inspiration from Assam's biodiversity and cultural heritage under the theme "Bamboo Orchids". The terminal makes pioneering use of about 140 metric tonnes of locally sourced Northeast bamboo, complemented by Kaziranga-inspired green landscapes, japi motifs, the iconic rhino symbol and 57 orchid-inspired columns reflecting the Kopou flower. A unique "Sky Forest", featuring nearly one lakh plants of indigenous species, offers arriving passengers an immersive, forest-like experience. The terminal sets

new benchmarks in passenger convenience and digital innovation. Features such as full-body scanners for fast, non-intrusive security screening, DigiYatra-enabled contactless travel, automated baggage handling, fast-track immigration and AI-driven airport operations ensure seamless, secure and efficient journeys. On 21st December morning before heading to Namrup, Prime Minister will also visit the Swahid Smarak Kshetra to pay homage to the martyrs of the historic Assam Movement, a six-year-long people's movement that embodied the collective resolve for a foreigner-free Assam and the protection of the State's identity.

Later in the day, Prime Minister will perform Bhoomipujan of the new brownfield Ammonia-Urea Fertilizer Project at Namrup, in Dibrugarh, Assam, within the existing premises of Brahmaputra Valley Fertilizer Corporation Limited (BVFCL). Furthering Prime Minister's vision of Farmers' Welfare, the project, with an estimated investment of over Rs. 10,600 crore, will meet fertilizer requirements of Assam and neighbouring states, reduce import dependence, generate substantial employment and catalyse regional economic development. It stands as a cornerstone of industrial revival and farmer welfare.

CM Inaugurates Mizoram's 24th MHIP Assembly in Aizawl



Aizawl, Oct 09: The 24th General Assembly of the Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP) was inaugurated by Mizoram Chief Minister Pu Lalduhoma at Vanapa Hall in Aizawl. In his speech, he praised MHIP for its commitment to public service and community development, highlighting its engagement in government welfare initiatives such as the Swadhar Greh and One Stop Centre schemes. He noted the contribution of MHIP's Sub-Headquarters in Serchhip District under the Swadhar Greh scheme and its involvement in the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao programme.

Additionally, he acknowledged MHIP's receipt of the Nari Shakti Puruskar in 2016 for its significant efforts in women's welfare and men-

tioned the passing of The Mizo Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance of Property Act in 2014, facilitated by MHIP's earlier proposals. The Chief Minister emphasized the importance of family in fostering a strong society and encouraged the community to raise children who will be beneficial to society. MHIP President Pi Ngurmawii Sailo expressed gratitude to the Chief Minister and attendees. The General Secretary reported that MHIP includes 10 Sub-Headquarters, 30 Block Units, 9 Joint Units, and 765 Branches, with a membership nearing 289,300. The assembly was chaired by MHIP Vice President Pi B. Sangkhumi, recognized for her leadership in empowering Mizo women.

Assam AICTE Bootcamp Concludes GCU

Guwahati, Dec 19: The three-day Innovation Design & Entrepreneurship (IDE) Bootcamp for Principals and Teachers of PM SHRI Schools successfully concluded on December 19 at Girijananda Chowdhury University, marking a transformative milestone for school education in Assam. Over 190 dedicated teachers and principals from across the state participated in the intensive program, which was designed to translate the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 into action at the grassroots level by shifting the academic focus from rote learning to a culture of curiosity and creative problem-solving. The event was a significant collaborative effort, jointly organized by the Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL), AICTE, the Ministry of Education's Innovation Cell (MIC), and NCERT, in strategic partnership with the Wadhvani Foundation. This partnership exemplifies a powerful synergy between government, academia, and industry, aimed at driving lasting educational transformation nationwide, reaching more than 9,000 participants. In Guwahati, the regional chapter was spearheaded by Nandajit Rabha, the Nodal Centre Head from the MoE Innovation Cell, and Dr. S. Robert Ravi, Dean of the School of Engineering and Technology at GCU, who served as the university's single point of contact. Building on the success of previous IDE Bootcamps that



benefited 1,874 PM SHRI Schools, this new phase aims for a complete mindset transformation. To date, specialized programs such as SIATP, SIC, DITI, KAPILA, and NPPIS have connected with over 91,000 teachers and 1.18 lakh students nationwide. The current bootcamp expands this reach, involving more than 9,000 participants and 210 expert speakers across India. The event's State Inauguration, held on Wednesday, featured prominent academic leaders, including Naranarayan Nath, Secretary of the Assam State School Education Board, and Jashoda Ranjan Das, President of the Shrimanta Shankar Academy. The final day of the bootcamp, themed "Launch Sprint: Build, Test, Fund & Grow Your Idea," focused on the practical execution of innovative concepts. Participants engaged in a hands-on group activity using the Business Model Canvas and received specialized training on the basics of financial literacy. A critical session provided an overview of grants and fund-

ing opportunities available for student start-ups, followed by the "Spotlight On: Two-Minute Pitch," where educators demonstrated their newly acquired skills by presenting innovative solutions derived from real-world problems. The sessions were led by expert speakers Sree Vatsan and Dr. Bhawana Bardia from the Wadhvani Foundation. The closing ceremony ended with feedback and key takeaways, leaving participants confident and prepared to nurture future-ready problem-solvers for India. This bootcamp is part of a massive national initiative spanning across 25 States and 4 Union Territories. Jointly organized by the Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL), AICTE, Ministry of Education's Innovation Cell (MIC), and NCERT, the program is conducted in collaboration with the Wadhvani Foundation, a global non-profit dedicated towards driving large-scale job creation and entrepreneurship. The Guwahati chapter is led by Shri Nandajit Rabha, the Nodal Centre Head from the MoE Innovation Robert Ravi, Dean of the School of Engineering and Technology. The event's State Inauguration, held on Wednesday, featured prominent academic leaders, including Naranarayan Nath, Secretary of the Assam State School Education Board, kar Academy. Model Canvas and received specialized training on the basics of financial literacy.

PM Modi to lay foundation of Rs 10,000-crore fertilizer project in Dibrugarh on December 21



Guwahati, Dec 19: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit Namrup in Assam's Dibrugarh district on December 21 to lay the foundation stone of a major fertilizer project. Officials said the project involves an investment of about Rs 10,000 crore and will come up within the Namrup Fertilizer Plant complex. The program at Namrup will include the foundation-laying ceremony for a new brownfield ammonia-urea manufacturing unit. According to official information, the proposed unit is expected to increase domestic production of fertilizer and help reduce India's dependence on imports. The project has been described by state officials as a key step toward strengthening the fertilizer sector and ensuring stable supply for farmers. Along with the foundation ceremony, the Prime Minister will address a public gathering at the venue. Local administration and state departments have begun preparing for the event, and security arrangements are being reviewed in coordination with central agencies. To oversee preparations ahead of the visit, Assam Cabinet Minister Bimal Bora inspected the site on Thursday. He held discussions with senior officials at the location and asked authorities to ensure proper arrangements and smooth conduct of the programme. Officials said the minister reviewed the progress of construction-related preparations and checked the layout for seating, access roads, and public amenities.

Omar Abdullah criticizes the BJP's backing of Nitish Kumar in the “niqab” controversy

Patna, Dec 19: Omar Abdullah, Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, commented on the controversy surrounding a video depicting Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar pulling off a niqab from a Muslim woman's face.

Responding to Union Minister Giriraj Singh's support for Kumar's actions, Abdullah expressed his expectation that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would not react differently if the roles were reversed, questioning their double standards regarding religious symbols. He posed a hypothetical scenario where he would be criticized had he removed a 'ghunghat' from a Hindu woman, noting the disparity in reactions based on the religious identity of the individuals involved.

The incident occurred during an appointment letter distribution ceremony for AYUSH doctors, lead-



Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah addressed the media concerning a video in which Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is seen pulling down the veil of a woman doctor.

ing to widespread backlash. Abdullah condemned Giriraj Singh's defense, stating that such an action was a clear violation of respect for Muslim women and that humiliating her publicly was unacceptable. He criticized Nitish Kumar, claiming the incident revealed his true nature, which contradicts his previously perceived secular and intelligent persona.

The outrage generated by the incident has prompted

calls for Kumar's resignation from various leaders in Jammu and Kashmir, including former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, CPM's M.Y. Tarigami, and Awami Ittehad Party spokesperson Inam Un Nabi, reflecting significant public sentiment against Kumar's actions. This incident highlights ongoing tensions surrounding religious practices and the treatment of women in India.

A bill against hate speech is passed by the Karnataka House

Bengaluru, Dec 19: The Karnataka Legislative Assembly has approved the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes Prevention Bill amid protests from the Opposition.

Home Minister G Parameshwara introduced the bill to address hate speech and crimes, referencing a Supreme Court ruling urging stronger measures against communal hatred. The bill categorizes hate speech and hate crimes as cognizable and non-bailable offenses, imposing penalties ranging from one to seven years in prison and fines up to ₹1 lakh for repeat offenders.

It defines hate speech broadly, encompassing various forms of public communication aimed at inciting enmity based on characteristics such as religion, race, and gender, while providing exemptions for bona fide academic and cultural expressions. The legislation also



Karnataka Assembly has enacted a controversial bill aimed at countering hate speech and related crimes, designating these offenses as cognizable and non-bailable, despite facing protests from opposition parties.

extends liability to organizational leaders for offenses committed under their charge and equips law enforcement with preventive powers, including mechanisms to regulate online hate content.

Opposition leaders criticized the bill as a means to suppress free speech and target dissent, complicating the legislative process with further confrontations during the debate.

Reevaluate the 211% pay increase

Odisha BJP MLAs to CM in the face of opposition

Bhubaneswar, Dec 19: On Thursday, BJP MLAs in Odisha urged Chief Minister Mohan Majhi to reconsider a controversial 211% increase in salaries and allowances for MLAs, which would make them the highest-paid lawmakers in the country.

During a BJP Legislature Party meeting attended by various party leaders, including Deputy CM Pravatī Parida, the issue was discussed, emphasizing the need to respect public sentiment. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mukesh Mahaling confirmed that a formal petition had been submitted to review four bills passed in the Odisha assembly on December 9, which raised salaries significantly—MLAs' monthly payments rose from ₹1.11 lakh to ₹3.45 lakh, while CMs, ministers, and other legislative leaders also saw substantial increases.



es. Notably, no MLA opposed these increases during the assembly debate, though former CM Naveen Patnaik later expressed a desire to forgo the salary hike for the welfare of the poor, a move criticized by some as insincere.

The increase positioned Odisha ahead of states like Telangana and Maharashtra, where MLAs earn lower salaries. Public dissatisfaction was vocal, especially given the limited functionality of the assembly, which meets only a month each year. Despite the

backlash, senior government officials indicated no immediate plans to reduce the salary hike, attributing unity among MLAs across party lines in favor of the increase.

Options remain open, including the possibility of the Governor returning the bills for reconsideration in the next legislative session. In contrast, Cooperation Minister Pradeep Bal Samanta defended the hike, stating that financial resources are necessary for effective leadership and community engagement.

In a letter to the PM, Stalin said that 50% of the US levies a humanitarian catastrophe

Chennai, Dec 19: The letter from Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister M K Stalin to Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the severe humanitarian and economic repercussions of the 50% tariff imposed by the U.S. on Indian exports. Stalin emphasizes the critical situation faced by Tamil Nadu's export sectors, particularly in regions like Tiruppur, known as the Knitwear Capital of India, where exporters have suffered a loss of ₹15,000 crores in confirmed orders and enforced production cuts of up to 30%. Daily revenue losses are estimated at ₹60 crores, endangering many small and medium enterprises and leading to a crisis in employment, particularly affecting around 75 lakh workers in the textile sector and over 10 lakh in the leather and footwear industries.



The Chief Minister warns that exporters are forced to provide discounts to American clients in order to maintain their business relationships, which adversely affects profit margins and competitiveness. He notes that many jobs are at risk, with prevalent layoffs and wage deferrals threatening community stability. Increasingly, international buyers are shifting their orders to competing countries like

Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Cambodia, which currently benefit from lower tariff rates compared to India. Stalin cautions that losing these markets could be detrimental, as existing supply chains are not easily re-established, and this loss could have dire long-term effects on local employment prospects, particularly for women.

In light of this escalating crisis, Stalin expresses the urgent need for a bilateral resolution to the tariff issue, urging the Prime Minister to act swiftly. He believes that resolving this issue promptly would not only help revive the fortunes of exporters but also strengthen India's standing as a dependable global manufacturing hub, reaffirming the government's commitment to equitable trade and the protection of domestic industries and jobs.

The Supreme Court rejects the “luxury” argument about packaged water

New Delhi, Dec 19: On Thursday, the Supreme Court rejected a public interest litigation (PIL) petition that sought stricter standards for polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles, criticizing it as an “urban-centric approach” that ignores significant issues faced by the underprivileged. The bench, led by Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joy-malya Bagchi, highlighted that while luxury litigation reaches the court, the concerns of impoverished populations remain neglected, emphasizing the lack of access to safe drinking water in many areas.

The PIL, filed by architect Sarang Yadwadkar, represented by advocate Anitha Shenoy, expressed concerns about potential health risks from antimony and DEHP leaching into food and water from PET packaging. Shenoy cited the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, to argue that the Indian regulations for bottled water are insufficient and do not consider international standards or scientific evidence adequately. However, the court deemed

the petition reflective of an elitist perspective and questioned the relevance of such standards for bottled water that is largely consumed by urban populations, while rural areas still lack basic water access. It noted the inappropriateness of applying foreign standards without accounting for local challenges in India. The bench observed that the PIL represented “luxury litigations” and advised the petitioner to gain an understanding of the struggles faced by those lacking essential amenities. Ultimately, the court al-

■ The Supreme Court declined to consider a request for new and more stringent standards for PET bottles utilized for bottled water and other food products.

lowed Shenoy to withdraw the petition, permitting her to present her concerns to relevant statutory authorities instead. The initial prayers of the PIL included requests for quashing FSSAI notifications relating to permissible levels of antimony and DEHP, as well as the adoption of WHO standards for food safety assessments.

Rahul Gandhi claims that the G Ram G Bill was “bulldozed” through Parliament and is “anti-village”

New Delhi, Dec 19: Leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, criticized the recently passed Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill, labeling it as “anti-village.”

He asserted that the legislation was rushed through parliament without sufficient examination and that it effectively replaces the MGNREGA, converting it from a rights-based, demand-driven program into a rationed scheme managed from Delhi.

He argued that the bill was passed without proper parliamentary scrutiny and claimed it replaces MGNREGA with a constrained scheme controlled from Delhi.

Gandhi contended that the original MGNREGA provided rural workers with bargaining power, reducing exploitation and distress migration, a leverage he claims the government seeks to dismantle.

He noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, MGN-

REGA prevented many from starving. Gandhi expressed concern that the new bill, which he argues alters the rural social contract for millions, should not have been hastily passed without proper oversight. He criticized the Modi government's agenda to undermine labor protections and framed the bill's passage as an erosion of support for rural communities. The VB-G RAM G Bill was enacted amid opposition protests and a boycott by opposition members.

Congress’s “acute acronym-itis” jab at Prime Minister Modi during the G RAM G Bill dispute

New Delhi, Dec 19: A day after Parliament approved the VB-G RAM G Bill, intended to replace the 20-year-old MGNREGA, Congress criticized Prime Minister Narendra Modi, attributing his actions to “acute acronym-itis.”

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh mocked a cartoon on social media showing the government's tendency to create catchy acronyms, specifically highlighting the newly passed VB-G RAM G Bill and the SHANTI Bill, which stands for Sus-



tainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India.



The VB-G RAM G Bill received approval through a voice vote in the Rajya Sabha shortly after it was passed

in the Lok Sabha, despite significant opposition protests regarding the removal of Mahatma Gandhi's name from the rural employment scheme.

The opposition accused the government of imposing financial burdens on state governments, leading to walkouts and vociferous protests, including members tearing pages from the Bill. Opposition MPs later staged an overnight dharna outside the Samvidhan Sadan, expressing their disapproval of the legislation and demanding its retraction.

PIL challenging “unopposed” elections is urged to be restrained by the Supreme Court

New Delhi, Dec 19: The Union government has requested the Supreme Court to restrain itself from hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) regarding a law that permits the automatic entry of “unopposed” candidates into Parliament and state assemblies. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta argued that even well-founded policy ideas should first be assessed by the government before judicial intervention is sought. He expressed concern that directly approaching the court could set an unproductive precedent. The

Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Surya Kant, indicated its willingness to consider the case, acknowledging the interesting points raised in the petition submitted by Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy.

The PIL challenges Section 53(2) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, questioning whether voters are deprived of expressing dissent, especially through options like “none of the above” (NOTA). Discrepancies between the Centre and the Supreme Court have previously surfaced regarding the neces-



sity of judicial review; the Centre maintains that the matter is largely academic, citing the rarity of un-

opposed elections. The petitioner countered, noting that 26 candidates had been elected unopposed since

1952, and asserted that forthcoming measures could address this concern to ensure voter choice is preserved.

The Election Commission reported that there had been no elections resolved by NOTA since its introduction following a 2013 ruling, while the court has debated implementing a vote threshold for declaring candidates elected in uncontested elections. The court aims to prevent affluent candidates from engineering uncontested elections, which would hinder voter opposition.

In the midst of leadership talk, Karnataka minister organizes a supper for more than thirty MLAs

Bengaluru, Dec 19: A dinner gathering of Congress legislators in Belagavi hosted by senior minister Satish Jarkiholi on Wednesday night precipitated political discussions amid ongoing speculation concerning leadership dynamics within Karnataka's ruling party. Over 30 legislators attended the meeting, which Jarkiholi characterized as a routine assembly of “like-minded people” amidst the winter session of the legislature. The presence of key figures, including Yathindra Siddaramaiah and K N Rajanna, was noted, although Chief Minister Siddaramaiah him-

self was absent due to health reasons. Rajanna, contrary to Jarkiholi's claims, asserted the dinner had political undertones, emphasizing that discussions naturally evolve in such gatherings. He remarked on the necessity of dialogue when legislators convene, suggesting that the meeting's purpose extended beyond mere socializing. This dinner followed a notable gathering the previous week with Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, suggesting increasing internal coordination and strategy within the Congress party. In the midst of these developments, Rajanna dis-

missed remarks from Bijapur BJP president B Y Vijayendra, reiterating that Siddaramaiah was still very much in charge and would continue his role. The frequency of such gatherings was defended by Yathindra Siddaramaiah as typical during legislative sessions, where ministers often extend invitations. The political climate is particularly charged as the Congress government has reached the midpoint of its five-year term, igniting debates over possible leadership changes. Unconfirmed reports regarding a power-sharing arrangement between Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar resur-

faced, although their recent meetings have been interpreted as attempts to mitigate internal tensions.

Additionally, Rajanna mentioned concerns regarding cabinet representation for the Valmiki Scheduled Tribe community, hinting at potential changes should a cabinet reshuffle occur. Regarding his own prospects for a ministerial position, he expressed indifference, affirming his readiness to engage with party leadership if invited. Rajanna also addressed speculation regarding the state Congress president role held by Shivakumar, referencing a com-

• A dinner meeting involving Congress legislators in Karnataka has sparked speculation concerning leadership and power sharing within the party. A faction of legislators allied with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah gathered for dinner in Belagavi on Wednesday night, intensifying the political discourse surrounding the ruling party's dynamics amid ongoing discussions.

mitment from the All India Congress Committee for his continuation in that position until the forthcoming 2024 parliamentary elections.

2026: A contrast between pure TVK and nasty DMK

Chennai, Dec 19: Vijay, at his first rally in Tamil Nadu since the Karur stampede, criticized the ruling DMK and positioned his new party, Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), as a “pure force” against the “evil force” of the DMK.

He invoked the legacy of AIADMK leaders MGR and Jayalalithaa to emphasize his opposition and called for the 2026 elections to be a contest between the DMK and TVK. Vijay accused the DMK of failing to fulfill promises, stating that his political enemies include both the DMK and the BJP.

AP will pass legislation unifying universities under a single body

Amaravati, Dec 19: The Andhra Pradesh government is set to enact comprehensive legislation to unify the governance, administration, academic standards, and financial structures of all 32 state-funded universities, which include 11 conventional and 21 specialized universities. A committee from the Andhra Pradesh state council of higher education has drafted amendments to the existing Andhra Pradesh Universities Act of 1991, and the bill is expected to be introduced in the upcoming winter assembly session. The new law aims to consolidate the diverse legal frameworks governing universities, which currently fall under separate acts, creating a consistent governance framework for institutions like Rajiv Gandhi University of Knowledge Technologies, Sri Padmavati Women's University, and others. Key reforms of the proposed law include the replacement of the Executive Council with a Board of Governors, which will serve as the highest decision-making body on administrative, academic, and

financial matters, with a chairperson appointed from experienced professionals. An academic council will meet biannually, supported by a Standing Committee that can make urgent academic decisions. Furthermore, representation in councils will include only nominees from NAAC-accredited colleges, and each university will establish an Internal Quality Assurance Cell. The legislation also introduces an upper age limit of 65 years for vice-chancellors, who will have a tenure of three years or until they reach this age, and will replace the post of Rector with that of Pro Vice-Chancellor. To ensure transparency, a Universities Recruitment Board will oversee staff appointments across universities, with promotions for non-teaching staff based on merit. The appointment committee for Vice-Chancellors will include representatives from the Board of Governors, the University Grants Commission, and the state government, while the law permits the suspension of a Vice-Chancellor during inquiries into irregularities or legal violations.

Mizoram government moves state university project to Lunglei, away from Aizawl

Aizawl, Dec 19: The Mizoram government has decided to change the location of the proposed state university from Aizawl to Lunglei. This marks a major shift in the state’s higher education plan. The decision aims to improve access to higher education in the southern part of the state, where students often travel long distances for advanced studies. The decision was taken at a high-level meeting in Aizawl. Chief Minister Lalduhoma chaired the meeting. Several ministers, legislators and senior officials attended it. According to officials, the government will bring a Bill in the next Assembly session to make the change official. The Bill will amend the Mizoram State University Act, 2025 so that the university can be set up in Lunglei instead of Aizawl. Higher and Technical Education Minister Vanlalhlana attended the meeting. Lunglei High Powered Committee vice-chairman and MLA V. Malsawmtluanga was also present, along with two other MLAs from the district. Officials said they discussed academic programmes, infrastructure needs and timelines for the project. The Mizoram State University Bill, 2025 was passed in the Assembly in March. The Bill was introduced to comply with the National Education Policy, 2020. The policy requires every state to set up a teaching-intensive university to manage college affiliations within 15 years of NEP’s implementation. For this reason, Mizoram started the process earlier this year. While introducing the Bill in March, Minister Vanlalhlana had said that the university would follow a cluster model. This means several colleges and institutions will be brought under one academic system. When the Bill was passed,



Aizawl was selected as the initial location. Now, with the latest decision, Lunglei will become the centre of the state’s new higher education plans. For students and families in southern Mizoram, the shift is expected to bring more opportunities. Many people in the region feel that the move will reduce the long travel burden and help local colleges grow. Officials say the state government is now working on drafts for the amendment Bill. Once the Assembly passes it, university project work in Lunglei is expected to begin. The government has not yet released dates for construction, courses or student intake, but officials said planning has already started.

The move is being seen as part of the government’s effort to balance development between regions. For many years, Aizawl has had most of the major educational institutions. By shifting the university to Lunglei, the government hopes to bring more growth to the southern districts as well. Local leaders and student groups in Lunglei have welcomed the decision. Some say the new university may also bring better infrastructure, faculty positions, hostels, and employment opportunities. Residents hope the move will attract students from other districts and states in the Northeast.

Gauhati High Court Orders Strict Action to Curb Illegal Fishing in Kaziranga During Magh Bihu

Guwahati, Dec 19: Taking serious note of large-scale community fishing inside Kaziranga National Park during the Magh Bihu celebrations in mid-January, the Gauhati High Court has directed the Assam government, concerned departments and Kaziranga authorities to strictly enforce prohibitory orders to prevent illegal fishing within the protected area. A division bench comprising Chief Justice Ashutosh Kumar and Justice Arun Dev Choudhury, while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL No. 63/2025) filed by environmental activist Rohit Choudhury, observed that failure to protect Kaziranga would amount to violations of the Wildlife Protection

Act, 1972, the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, constitutional obligations under Article 48A, and India’s international commitments.“In any view of the matter, the protection of such a site is necessary,” the court observed, adding that enforcement of prohibitory orders is essential to prevent further ecological damage. The bench stressed that the issue requires immediate attention from the authorities.The court directed the respondents to place on record the measures taken to control illegal fishing activities inside Kaziranga National Park and to outline effective mechanisms to prevent such incidents. It also sought an affidavit by the next date, detailing steps taken to stop

illegal fishing during the first and second weeks of January. The PIL sought urgent judicial intervention to curb large-scale fishing in water bodies within Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve. Counsel for the petitioner informed the court that every year during the Magh Bihu festival, celebrated on January 13 and 14, large numbers of people enter the park to engage in traditional fishing practices in protected water bodies, in blatant violation of wildlife protection laws. The petitioner argued that such activities severely disrupt the park’s fragile ecosystem and pose serious threats to its biodiversity, including endangered species such as the one-horned

rhinoceros, migratory birds, and nearly 42 species of fish. Unchecked, these practices could compromise the ecological integrity and conservation status of the park. Kaziranga National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and also designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA). Representing the Forest Department, standing counsel D. Gogoi submitted that the authorities are aware of the issue and that prohibitory orders are issued regularly to curb illegal fishing. However, he noted that enforcement becomes challenging due to the large number of people gathering in the area during the festival, often driven by religious and traditional fervour.

14 declared Bangladeshi foreigners sent back from Matia detention centre in Goalpara

Guwahati, Dec 19: A group of 14 Bangladeshi nationals, who had been officially declared foreigners by the Nagaon Foreigners’ Tribunal, were taken out of the Matia Transit Camp in Assam’s Goalpara district for pushback across the international border on Friday. Officials said that the step was taken after completion of legal procedures and instructions issued by the district authorities. According to sources in the administration, the detainees were escorted by Border Security Force personnel at around 10.30 in the morning. They were transported in a traveller vehicle arranged by the district administration. Officials said that legal paperwork and verification of identities had been completed before moving the group out of the detention centre for the pushback process. Earlier, the Nagaon Foreigners’ Tribunal had declared a total of 15 individuals as illegal foreigners. After the tribunal’s order, the Nagaon Deputy Commissioner Devashish Sharma issued directions for deportation within 24 hours. The administration then coordinated with the

■ A group of 14 Bangladeshi nationals, declared as foreigners by the Nagaon Foreigners’ Tribunal, were removed from the Matia Transit Camp in Assam for pushback across the border.
■ This action followed legal procedures and instructions from district authorities.

Matia Transit Camp authorities, security personnel, and border agencies to carry out the order. Officials said that 14 persons out of the 15 declared foreigners were picked up from the Matia camp, but the authorities were unable to immediately locate the remaining individual. Searches and verification are being conducted to trace the person whose whereabouts are presently not known. The detainees who were transported for pushback include eight men and six women, as per information shared by officials involved in the operation. Their identities had earlier been verified and declared foreign under the tribunal process. The Matia Transit Camp in Goalpara is one of the main detention facilities where declared illegal foreigners are kept before deportation.

Silchar’s Bikash Yadav secures All India Rank 25 in UPSC Engineering Services 2025

Guwahati, Dec 19: A young engineer from Silchar has brought pride to Assam by securing a top position in the UPSC Engineering Services Examination (ESE) 2025. The Union Public Service Commission declared the results recently, and Silchar’s Bikash Yadav has secured All India Rank 25. Bikash Yadav is a resident of Bariknagar in Silchar. His family, teachers and well-wishers expressed joy after the results were announced. The UPSC Engineering Services Examination is considered one of the most prestigious competitive examinations in the country. It recruits engineers for key technical positions under various ministries and departments of the Government of India. This is not the first time that Bikash achieved success in this exam. Earlier, in the year 2020, he secured All India Rank 39 in the same examination. At present, he is serving as an Assistant Director in the Central Water Com-



mission under the Ministry of Jal Shakti. Even after getting a respected post, Bikash decided to appear for the exam again after almost five years. According to family sources, Bikash aimed to join the Indian Railway Engineering Services. For this reason, he made the decision to write the exam again. His dedication and patience paid off with a better result this year. Bikash completed his school and Higher Secondary education from Kendriya Vidyalaya, Silchar. Later, he pursued Bachelor’s degree in Civil Engineering from Assam Engineering College, Guwahati.

APCB, iForest Unveil New ‘Guwahati Clean Air Plan’ to Tackle Rising Pollution

- In response to unimplemented earlier plans, the Assam Pollution Control Board (APCB) has collaborated with iForest to introduce the ‘Guwahati Clean Air Plan’, unveiled at the Advantage Assam 2.0 summit with input from the Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation.
- The plan identifies road dust and vehicle emissions as primary pollution sources, with significant contributions from construction activities (37% of PM10 emissions) and road transport (52% of PM2.5 emissions).

Guwahati, Dec 19: With the earlier action plan remaining largely unimplemented, the Assam Pollution Control Board (APCB) has partnered with iForest (International Forum for Environment, Sustainability & Technology) to roll out a fresh strategy aimed at improving air quality in Guwahati. The new ‘Guwahati Clean Air Plan’ was released on Wednesday and is part of a memorandum of understanding signed during the Advantage Assam 2.0 summit. The plan has been prepared in collaboration with the Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation. According to the report, road dust and vehicular emissions are the biggest contributors to air pollution in the city. Of the estimated 1,071 tonnes per year of PM10 emissions, dust from construction activities and roads accounts for 37 per cent, followed

by industries at 25 per cent and road transport at 21 per cent. Emissions from domestic and commercial cooking and heating contribute around 12 per cent. For PM2.5 emissions, estimated at 435.3 tonnes per year, road transport emerges as the largest source, contributing 52 per cent. This is followed by road dust (16 per cent), domestic and commercial cooking (16 per cent), industries (6 per cent), and construction dust (4 per cent). The report highlights widespread non-compliance with Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) guidelines on dust management. Lapses include the absence of green net coverings at construction sites, lack of barricading around flyover projects, uncovered construction materials, poor coordination among agencies digging roads, open excavated sites, and dumping of waste along roadsides. It also notes that although a similar action plan was introduced in 2018 to curb road and construction dust, most measures were never effectively implemented. To address this, the iForest plan recommends a strict enforcement mechanism—issuance of a show-cause notice for the first violation, halting construction for the second, and imposing a ban for repeated violations.Traffic-related issues were identified as another major concern. The report points to the absence of a structured parking system, excessive on-street parking, operation of large buses on

narrow roads, roadside encroachments, and poorly designed intersections, all of which contribute to congestion and higher vehicular emissions. A comprehensive traffic congestion management plan has been proposed to tackle these challenges. On the industrial front, iron and steel units were flagged as dominant polluters, with coal-fired furnaces being the primary source of emissions, despite the presence of pollution control devices. The report also raised alarms over Guwahati’s weak solid waste management system. Of the 884 tonnes of waste generated daily, only about 650 tonnes are collected, and roughly half of that is processed. Nearly seven per cent of the total waste is burnt, resulting in an estimated 61 tonnes of emissions per day, including significant PM10 and PM2.5 loads. Additionally, natural dust re-suspension from the Brahmaputra riverbed on the northern side of the city was identified as a contributing factor. The report recommends improved soil stabilisation, enhanced green cover along riverbanks, and increased plantation across open and barren patches in the city to curb dust generation.The release event was attended by APCB chairman Arup Kumar Mishra, MLA Mrinal Hazarika, musician Joy Baruah, Aaranyak secretary general Bibhab Talukdar, iForest CEO Dr Chandra Bhushan, Cotton University Vice-Chancellor R.C. Deka, and other stakeholders.

Orange Festival Brings Fresh Hope to Tamenglong Farmers

Imphal, Dec 19: After a gap of two years, the state-level orange festival has returned to Tamenglong district in Manipur, bringing visible relief and renewed optimism to orange growers whose earnings had been badly affected during the ongoing conflict in the state. The festival, now in its 18th edition, began on December 17 at the district mini stadium and is scheduled to conclude today. The event has been organised by the Manipur government with the stated objective of boosting the livelihood of local orange farmers and highlighting Tamenglong as a tourism destination built around its well-known GI-tagged fruit. For many growers, the return of the festival is not just a cultural celebration. It is seen as a chance to restore earnings that were disrupted in the last two years. Farmers running stalls at the

venue said that the festival provides a much-needed market space at a time when transport challenges and safety concerns have made it difficult to sell oranges in other parts of the state. Several growers expressed that being able to sell directly to buyers is one of the most important aspects of the festival. They said that direct sales allow them to avoid middlemen, which means they can earn a better price for their harvest. Many farmers shared that in the absence of the festival over the last two years, large quantities of oranges were left unsold or had to be sold to traders at low prices. Despite the encouraging atmosphere, participation appears lower compared to previous editions of the festival. Growers pointed to continuing law-and-order concerns as a primary reason. Many said people

from Imphal and nearby areas are reluctant to travel due to safety issues. Some farmers stated that the festival would have felt more meaningful if people from across Manipur were able to attend freely without fear. They said a larger turnout from visitors could have improved sales further and boosted confidence among growers. Additional District Magistrate Chunglenmang Kipgen told reporters that attendance has been encouraging, considering the current situation. He said that visitors from several districts have arrived for the event. Kipgen also acknowledged that in earlier editions, there had been criticism that cultural programmes had overshadowed farmers’ concerns. He remarked that this year officials tried to shift the focus back toward growers. The administration expanded farmer-

centred activities, consultations, and seminars with the intention of addressing longstanding issues faced by orange growers in the district. Along with stalls selling oranges and local produce, the festival features seminars and technical sessions on improving cultivation practices. Officials said the seminars focus on soil health, pest control methods, post-harvest handling, and sustainable farming techniques to improve both yield and quality. Cultural and recreational activities have also been organised. These include performances by eight music bands from within and outside the state, art fairs, literary discussions, indigenous wrestling competitions, land and water sports, and trekking and camping expeditions, including tours to the well-known Tharon Cave.

Special Guwahati–Aizawl Trains Introduced to Ease Christmas Rush: K. Vanlalvena

Aizawl, Dec 19: Mizoram’s lone Rajya Sabha member, K. Vanlalvena has informed that the Ministry of Railways has arranged special train services between Guwahati and Aizawl to address the acute travel difficulties faced by passengers during the Christmas season. Speaking to the media, Vanlalvena said the additional services were introduced in view of the heavy rush of travellers heading to Mizoram and neighbouring states for the festive period. As per the schedule, one special train will depart from Guwahati on Monday and return from Aizawl via Sairang railway station on Tuesday. Another special service will leave Guwahati on Wednesday and return from Aizawl on Thursday. Each of the special trains will have 14 coaches.

The MP said the special services would provide significant relief to passengers travelling from Guwahati, Delhi and other parts of the country who have been unable to secure confirmed tickets due to a severe shortage of seats on existing trains. Passengers who failed to get reservations on regular services can avail themselves of the additional Guwahati–Aizawl trains, he added.Vanlalvena also said he had attempted to raise the issue in the Rajya Sabha, highlighting that people from Mizoram and neighbouring Manipur have been facing serious hardship due to the limited availability of seats on trains connecting Aizawl with major cities such as Guwahati, Delhi and Kolkata. He noted that the problem becomes particularly severe during the Christmas season.



BUSINESS

Can an AI-first pivot help TCS shares, which are now in a bear market Goal prices

New Delhi: At its analyst meet, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) outlined its strategic shift from a digital-first services provider to a full-stack, AI-led technology services leader. While TCS has historically lagged global peers such as Accenture in AI investments and positioning, effective execution of this strategy could help narrow the gap, said brokerages, as they retained their neutral-to-positive calls on the stock. In a bear grip, the IT stock lost Rs 3,18,247 crore or 21 per cent of its market value in the challenging 2025 that saw the BSE IT index falling 15 per cent during the same period. The TCS stock currently trades at a forward PE of 22 times, which is at 10 per cent discount to the Nifty IT index against a peak premium of 30 per cent in April 2020.Nomura India retained its ‘Neutral’ rating on the stock with an unchanged target of Rs 3,300. It called Infosys as its preferred large-cap pick in the Indian IT space.”While macroeconomic conditions remain uncertain, deal booking is improving. Data center bet should improve the medium to long term growth outlook; however, its significant capex requirement should keep the stock volatile in the near term,” Antique Stock Broking said as it maintained ‘Buy’ rating with an unchanged target price of Rs



3,575. TCS said its focus is on a shift from digital services to AI-centric enterprise transformation. It came out with a five-pillar strategy for AI execution framework. It maintained margin aspiration of 26–28 per cent and retained shareholder return commitment of 80–100 per cent free cash flow (FCF). It sees \$1.5 billion in annualised AI revenue. “Given

enterprise tech debt is still high and cloud adoption is yet to reach saturation levels, the opportunity for AI-driven modernisation remains significant. We remain positive on TCS and expect it to be one of the biggest beneficiaries of the recovery in tech spends. Maintain ‘Buy’ with an unchanged target of Rs 3,650,” Nuvama said.MOFSL said it was en-

couraged by TCS’s changed stance on M&A, following its recent acquisitions (Listengage, Coastal), but slightly disappointed when it reaffirmed its (slightly lofty) 26-28 per cent EBIT margin ambition, which it said could leave money on the table at this stage of the cycle. This brokerage suggested a target of Rs 4,000 on the stock.

Stock markets trade lower in early deals

New Delhi: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty edged lower in early trade on Thursday tracking a weak trend in global markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 214.87 points to 84,344.78 in early trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty dipped 56.1 points to 25,762.45. From the Sensex firms, Sun Pharma, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles, Mahindra & Mahindra, NTPC, Bharat Electronics and Maruti were among the biggest laggards. However, HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra and ITC were among the gainers. In Asian markets, South Korea’s Kospi, Japan’s Nikkei 225 index and Hong Kong’s Hang Seng index quoted lower, while

Shanghai’s SSE Composite index traded in positive territory. “Global markets enter today’s session on a cautious footing following a sharp overnight sell-off in the US. The S&P 500, Street after several sessions of sustained selling, he added.Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Wednesday as they bought equities worth Rs 1,171.71 crore, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors sellers for the previous 14 sessions, purchasing equities worth Rs 1,171 crore, while DIIs also remained supportive with net buying of Rs 768 crore,” Amruta Shinde, Technical & Derivative Analyst at Choice Equity Broking Private Limited, said.

In 2025, Laurus Labs soars 73% and reaches a record high

New Delhi: In intraday trading on Friday, the share price of Laurus Labs reached a new high of ₹1,043, up 3% on the BSE due to anticipation of robust results. The pharmaceutical company’s stock price exceeded its previous peak of ₹1,040 on December 1, 2025.Laurus Labs has surpassed the market by 73% thus far in 2025. Among BSE midcap non-financial companies, the stock was

the biggest gainer. The BSE Sensex, on the other hand, increased by 8% over that time. For the September 2025 quarter (Q2FY26), Laurus Labs reported impressive earnings, with revenue of ₹1,653 crore, a 35% increase, and EBITDA of ₹429 crore, a 136% increase. Thanks to ongoing operating leverage, the earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA)

margins are still very strong at 26.0%. Strong operational performance and a favorable product mix contributed to the ₹193.8 crore profit after tax (PAT).The company’s gross margin increased by 50 basis points per quarter (QoQ) due to an improved product mix and increased deliveries of commercial molecules. The company announced a second straight quarter of a robust 30 percent plus growth.

Sensex climbs 201.23 points in early trade, Nifty up 64.8 points



New Delhi: Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded in early trade on Wednesday driven by value buying at lower levels and a positive trend in Asian markets.Steady buying activity by domestic institutional investors also brought comfort to the markets, according to experts. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 201.23 points to 84,881.09 in early trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 64.8 points to 25,924.90.From the Sensex firms, Eternal, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank, Tata Consultancy Services and Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles were among the major gainers. However, ICICI Bank, Trent, HDFC Bank and Sun Pharma were among the laggards

In Asian markets, South Korea’s Kospi, Japan’s Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai’s SSE Composite index, and Hong Kong’s Hang

Seng index quoted in positive territory.US markets ended mostly lower on Tuesday

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) off-loaded equities worth Rs 2,381.92 crore on Tuesday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 1,077.48 crore, according to exchange data.Steady domestic inflows through SIPs and insurance channels continue to provide a strong structural buffer, helping to limit downside risks,

Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 1.19 per cent to USD 59.62 per barrel.

On Tuesday, the Sensex tanked 533.50 points or 0.63 per cent to settle at 84,679.86. The Nifty dropped 167.20 points or 0.64 per cent to 25,860.10.

Intel appoints former Trump advisor Robin Colwell to head government affairs

Intel announces three new senior leadership hires to strengthen its relations with customers, policymakers, and global stakeholders.

New Delhi: Intel has announced three senior leadership hires in government affairs, marketing & communications, and advanced technology strategy. Among the three new leaders, Intel announces former Trump advisor Robin Colwell as the new head of the company’s government affairs.As per Intel’s newsroom post, Colwell was deputy assistant to President Donald Trump and deputy director of the National Economic Council. There, she was responsible for developing Administration policies across all sectors of the U.S. Now at Intel, Colwell will look after the company’s global engagement with policymakers, regulators, and industry leaders. Robin Colwell will be based in Washington, D.C. For Colwell, it’s a very crucial role since she will be dealing with trade rules and regulations in the U.S. and abroad, all while managing



Intel’s relationship with the President and the federal government. Lip-Bu Tan, CEO of Intel, said, “Robin’s broad experience and deep understanding of complex legal and policy environments will be invaluable to Intel.” officer (CMCO), and

Pushkar Ranade as interim chief technology These are announcing major sensor leadership changes that will reshape Intel’s strategic direction and strengthen its executive team. Robin Colwell has joined Intel as senior vice president of government affairs, where she

will lead the company’s positioning the company at the intersection of public policy, technology, and manufacturing. Her leadership will be critical as Intel navigates policy, trade, national security, and opportunities with governments around the world.

As the RBI approves the offline payment aggregator license, Paytm shares are under scrutiny

New Delhi: Shares of One 97 Communications Ltd (Paytm) are in focus on Thursday morning after a wholly-owned subsidiary, Paytm Payments Services Limited (PPSL) received RBI nod to operate as a payment aggregator for physical (offline) payments and cross-border transactions i.e. both inward and

outward. This is in addition to the online payment aggregator authorization already granted by RBI on November 26, 2025, under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.”With receipt of this authorization, PPSL now holds Payment Aggregator licences across all key segments, enabling it to offer end-

to-end payment aggregation services across online, offline and cross-border use cases, delivering seamless payment experiences for merchants, and supporting the Company’s long-term growth in domestic and international payment acceptance,” Paytm informed stock exchanges. Geojit in a note earlier this month said Paytm

delivered strong performance in Q2. However, regulatory uncertainties and the current premium valuation remain near-term concern. Hence, we reiterate our HOLD rating on the stock, with a revised target price of Rs 1,481, based on 9x FY27E price-to-sales ratio,” Geojit said on December 5.

Is the price of SBI shares at Rs 1,100 Why MOFSL continues to favor this PSU bank for banking State Bank of India (SBI)

New Delhi: Motilal Oswal Financial Services said on Thursday after meeting the bank’s top management. India’s most-valued PSU at Rs 9.67 lakh crore is the brokerage’s preferred ‘Buy’ in the banking sector. It suggested a target price of Rs 1,100 on the SBI stock. The scrip settled at Rs 975.90 on Wednesday. MOFSL said SBI’s management, led by chairman CS Setty, along with Anindya Paul, deputy managing director (finance), and Ravi Shankar Akella, chief general manager (finance), indicated that the bank is poised to sustain 13-14 per cent year-on-year loan growth, even in the absence of a broad-based corporate capex cycle. SBI had already reported 13.1 per cent advance growth in the second quarter of FY26, keeping it on track to meet full-year guidance, compared with system credit growth of about 11.5 per cent.The brokerage said growth continued to be driven by the retail, agriculture and MSME (RAM) segments, alongside a pickup in personal loans and selective utilisation of working capital limits. Large-ticket project lending remained muted,

reflecting the subdued corporate capex environment. Corporate loan growth stood at a modest 7 per cent year-on-year in the second quarter, while MOFSL estimated SBI’s loan book to grow at a CAGR of 12.4 per cent over FY26-28.MOFSL said the RAM portfolio has emerged as SBI’s primary growth engine, crossing Rs 25 lakh crore and accounting for nearly 56.6 per cent of domestic advances. Retail loans grew 14.1 per cent year-on-year, with management flagging a visible revival in personal loans. SBI continued to be the largest unsecured personal loan lender, with a book of nearly remained limited, consumption-led sectors, particularly automobiles, had shown traction over the past two quarters, aiding working capital demand.On margins, MOFSL said SBI’s domestic net interest margin improved sequentially to about 3.09 per cent in the second quarter, aided by deposit repricing and the impact of CRR cuts, while overall NIM stood at around 2.97 per cent. Management reiterated its FY26 exit NIM guidance of over 3 per cent, despite a 25 basis point



repo rate cut in December 2025, noting that the margin impact would be limited and cushioned by CRR benefits.MOFSL said SBI’s large low-cost CASA base of around Rs 21 lakh crore, pricing discipline and diversified loan mix provided comfort that margins would remain resilient in a softer rate environment. The brokerage estimated NIM at 2.8 per cent in FY26 versus 2.9 per cent in FY25, with a calibrated improvement to 2.9-3.0 per cent over FY27-28, supporting a net interest income CAGR of about 14 per cent over FY26-28.

Sundrex Oil Company IPO ope nissue size, GMP & more

Mumbai: The initial public offering (IPO) of Sundrex Oil Company shall open for bidding on Monday, December 22. The company shall be offering its shares in the range of Rs 81-85 apiece. Investors can make bids for a minimum of 1,600 equity shares and its multiples thereafter. The issue will close for bidding on Wednesday, December 24.Sundrex Oil Company is eyeing to raise a total of Rs 32.25 crore via IPO, which is entirely a fresh share sale of 37,50,400 equity shares. The net proceeds from the issue shall be utilized to meet working capital expenses, to meet capital expenditure, offer-related issues and general corporate purposes.Established in 2010, Sundrex Oil Company is a manufacturer and wholesaler of high-performance industrial and automotive lubricants, greases, and specialty products serving industries in India and neighboring countries. Its product portfolio includes industrial lubricants, automotive lubricants, and specialty products. Shares of the company shall be listed on the NSE Emerge with Tuesday, December 30, 2025 as the tentative date of. Affinity Global Capital Market is the book



running lead manager and Cameo Corporate Services is the registrar of the issue. It has reserved 1,88,800 equity shares for the market maker of the issue.Of the net offer, retail investors have around 59 per cent of the allocation, while non-institutional investors have over 38 per cent of reservation Our focus will remain on strengthening our operational capabilities, improving balance sheet efficiency, and pursuing sustainable growth in line with regulatory and governance standards,” said Mahesh Sonthalia, Chairman & Managing Director at Sundrex Oil Company.

Nawazuddin Siddiqui: Independent Films Are Key to Avoiding Boredom

Mumbai: Nawazuddin Siddiqui, who is gearing up for the release of Raat Akeli Hai – The Bansal Murders on Netflix on December 19, 2025, recently shared his thoughts on supporting independent filmmakers and the significance of diverse cinema. Known for his

versatile film choices, the Sacred Games star talked about the need for creative variety both for actors and audiences.

In an interview with Zoom TV, Nawazuddin highlighted the struggle of independent filmmakers in securing space in theatres.

He stressed the importance of giving audiences access to different types of films. “Variety of cinema should be there so that the audience would get a chance to explore different kinds of cinema. I have always been supporting this. There should be creative and artis-

tic cinema. We need to support all kinds of cinema,” he said. Nawazuddin also reflected on his own approach to acting, noting that exploring challenging roles brings personal and creative satisfaction. “As far as my process is concerned, I always try to do difficult

things. Once you start doing it, by that time you will start feeling ease while doing it. If you stay in that process, you will start doing it differently,” he explained. The actor further highlighted the global impact of independent cinema. “Independent cinema has given the coun-

try global recognition. I like to do all kinds of films. The actor also gets satisfaction from it. If you keep doing the same kinds of films, you will get bored, as it is like a job. Nobody likes to do a job,” Nawazuddin added. Chitrangda Singh, who co-stars in the upcoming film,

Gyanendra Tripathi, Ila Arun, Swanand Kirkire, Nitesh Kumar Tiwari and Aditya Srivastava. The film followed a small-town cop who is summoned to investigate the death of an elderly family member. The film was released on Netflix on July 31, 2020.

Daisy Shah open to Naagin 7 role

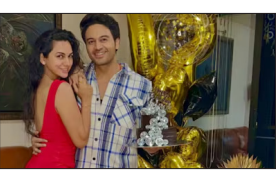


Mumbai: Naagin 7 is set to premiere on December 27, 2025, and anticipation around the popular supernatural franchise is steadily building. With promos generating strong chatter online, fans are eagerly waiting to see how the new season unfolds and who ultimately commands the spotlight as the iconic shape-shifting serpent.

Amid the rising buzz, social media speculation suggested that Daisy Shah might have replaced Priyanka Chahar Choudhary as the female lead. When asked about the possibility, Daisy responded candidly, saying, “Agar hoga (offer) toh mana nahi karungi, because I like the show,” indicating that she would be open to joining the franchise if approached. Despite the speculation, Daisy was quick to clarify that she believes Priyanka Chahar Choudhary is currently the right choice for the role. Speaking to Filmygyan, the Hate Story 3 actress said, “As of now, I see Priyanka as the Naagin because it’s obviously Ekta Kapoor’s show and her decision,” putting an end to replacement rumours.

Naagin 7 will air every Saturday and Sunday at 8 pm IST on Colors TV starting December 27. For digital viewers, the show will also be available for streaming on Jio Hotstar, making it accessible to a wider audience across platforms. Along with Priyanka Chahar Choudhary in the lead, Naagin 7 features Eisha Singh, Namik Paul, and Karan Kundarra in key roles. The latest promos tease a mythological narrative rooted in destiny and power, with Priyanka’s character arriving at a temple and gradually discovering her supernatural abilities. Another teaser introduces the Anantkul ki Naagrani, Ananta, setting the stage for an intense storyline. The opening episode is expected to focus on Priyanka’s human life before her transformation, charting her journey as she comes to terms with her extraordinary identity.

Akanksha Dances, Gaurav Cheers: Couple Lights Party



Mumbai: Gaurav Khanna and his wife, Akanksha Chamola, are truly one sizzling couple. Their undeniable chemistry was on full display when Akanksha entered the Bigg Boss 19 house during the family week. Ever since that moment, fans were eagerly waiting to see the duo together again once the show wrapped up.

Post the show, the couple has been spotted at several events, and there’s no denying just how adorable they look together every single time. In a recent video, Gaurav and Akanksha are seen entering a party, effortlessly radiating the vibe of a bubbly, confident wife and a doting, visibly smitten husband, proving yet again that their love speaks louder than words. In the video that is now doing the rounds on the internet, the couple can be seen entering an event when Akanksha suddenly breaks into a full-fledged dance as soon as she hears the song. She matches steps with her friends, clearly enjoying the moment. Gaurav, on the other hand, cheers for his wife, looking visibly happy. After a while, he cheekily tells her, “Entry toh kar lo,” which makes everyone burst into laughter. Akanksha and Gaurav then greet someone, and even then, she continues grooving with the same infectious energy. Akanksha truly is such a happy soul.

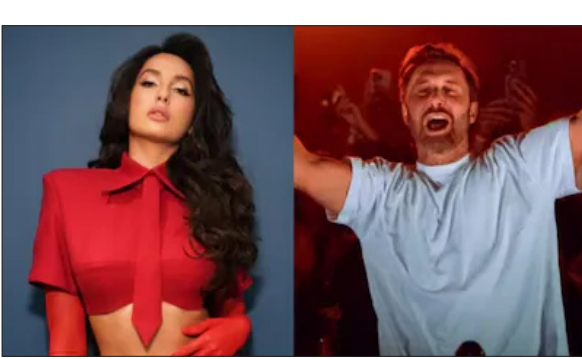
‘Dhurandhar’ success drives Sanjay Dutt to prep ‘Aakhri Sawal,’ his next big film



Mumbai: Historical films have always had a loyal audience, and in recent times, stories based on real events have become even more popular. Films and shows like Chhaava and Freedom At Midnight have shown how much viewers enjoy watching history unfold on screen. Now, another film set in the pre-Independence era is ready to join the list. Titled Aakhri Sawal, the film aims to bring an important chapter of the past to life. The makers have released the muhurat visuals of the film, giving audiences their first look at the project. Aakhri Sawal is being helmed by Abhijeet Mohan Warang, who is a national award winner. The film also has a stellar ensemble cast, featuring Sanjay Dutt, Amit Sadh, Sameera Reddy, Tri-dha Choudhury and Neetu Chandra, among others. It is being bankrolled by Nirvikar Films and Nikhil Nanda Motion Pictures. Nikhil

Nanda took to Instagram to share muhurat pictures of Aakhri Sawal. The photos show Sanjay Dutt being presented with a Hanuman murti, along with glimpses of the film’s creative team. Actress Kainaat Arora commented on the post, “Best of luck, Nikhil. Another one in kitty!” A user wrote, “Congratulations! Eagerly waiting for the release.” Another one added, “Jai Hanuman Ji, more power to

Guetta & Fatehi to Debut New Global Single Live at Sunburn



Mumbai: Nora Fatehi is ready to turn up the global heat once again, this time on one of India’s biggest music festival stages. The actor-performer will join Grammy-winning DJ David Guetta on stage at the Sunburn Music Festival this weekend, where she is set to tease her upcoming international single, adding to her fast-expanding global music journey.

David Guetta is bringing his much-talked-about Monolith Show to India on December 20, making his return to the country after eight long years. His last visit was during a four-city tour in 2017 and expectations are already sky-high. Adding to the excitement is Nora Fatehi’s special appearance

at the concert. According to an insider, the collaboration is part of a larger plan tied directly to Nora’s next international release. The source told Hindustan Times, “Nora is going to make an appearance at David Guetta’s show at Sunburn, and it isn’t just another appearance but for a bigger purpose. The artist is currently rising in the international music scene and is on a professional roll. At the concert, she is going to tease her next global single, which sees David Guetta and American singer Ciara collaborating. Nora has given her vocals to the song.”

The upcoming track marks a major three-way collaboration between Nora Fatehi, David Guetta and Ciara, helping the actress mark her

Karan Johar Welcomes Kartik Aaryan: Calls Collaboration the Start of a New ‘Dostana’

Mumbai: Filmmaker Karan Johar on Thursday said he is pleased to have teamed up with Kartik Aaryan on “Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri”, which turned out to be a great collaborative process.

Aaryan and Johar were supposed to work together on “Dostana 2” but then stories of differences between them started to emerge. Johar later said his production banner would recast for the movie. Now the two seem to have buried the hatchet with “Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri”. The film also stars Ananya Panday and it is directed by Sameer Vidwans of “Satyaprem Ki Katha” fame. “It’s been such a joy working with both of them. It’s wonderful to have a feature film with the man (Aaryan) himself. It’s the beginning of a new ‘Dostana’,” Johar said at the trailer launch of the film as he referenced the now shelved ‘Dostana 2’.

“We are so happy that the film got finished and it also is releasing. Now, there’s no looking back. Also, his coming together with Ananya, no pun intended, has actually been a glorious beginning.



They have had success before this on a tongue twister film, “Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri,” Johar said. Aaryan said he is also “happy” to have collaborated with Johar on a film that they both could complete this time around. “My thoughts are the same that we actually completed the film or finally released... We could have kept the name ‘Dostana 2’ if this title was long,” he said. In another tongue-in-cheek remark, Johar said, “It’s a great coming together of insider (him), insider (Pandey) and outsider (Aaryan). It’s a lovely union of nepo papa, nepo baby and outsider. Please, let’s celebrate this melange on stage. We truly are eclectic in that way.” The

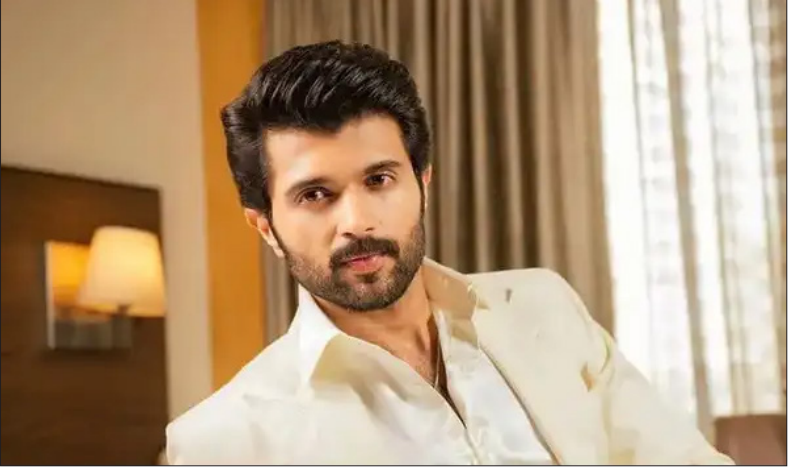
filmmaker said Panday has grown as an actor over the years and he was amazed by the “love and commitment” Aaryan has shown for cinema.

“Ananya and I’ve done a series of work together, so I worked with her very closely. I’ve also seen her literally grow up in front of me; I feel a lot of pride with her achievement.” But what blew my mind was the level of commitment that Karthik brings to the table. He’s very humble in the way he spoke about his contribution. He becomes a lead actor, a supportive producer, a collaborative assistant director, everything to the team, even to the marketing team and to every single department,” the film-

maker said.

On a lighter note, Johar said, “I don’t know when Karthik Aryan sleeps. He doesn’t. He’s a vampire. I’ve missed calls from him ranging from 1 am to 6 am. I actually like to sleep. So after a point I shut up and tune off. I also work very hard. He is awake (all the time).” Johar said he feels “deeply depressed” to see less number of romantic films being made today, which he said were the “foundation” of his career as a director. “Many love stories have been made. There was a time when only love stories were made in Hindi cinema. When I started off in Hindi cinema, Yash Chopra ji, Raj Kapoor sahab, Sooraj Bhargatya ji were my inspirations. Now-a-days when I hear there is a dearth of love stories and they don’t work (at the box office), I get deeply depressed. “My foundation is associated with love stories. Be it my first film (‘Kuch Kuch Hota Hai’) or Aditya Chopra’s first film (‘Divaale Dulhania Le Jayenge’), all of our careers began with love stories.” “Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri” is set to release on December 25.

Vijay Deverakonda Takes on Gritty Role as ‘Real and Flawed’ Rowdy Janardhan



Hyderabad: Vijay Deverakonda’s next, directed by filmmaker Ravi Kiran Kola, is being produced by Dil Raju via Sri Venkateswara Creations. While the movie’s rumoured title (Rowdy Janardhan) will be made official a few days from now, the director’s confessional “note” has piqued interest in the character being essayed by the Geetha Govindam

and Kingdom star.

I have been waiting for a long time to tell this story about a man. I found him in my memory. He is very personal, and I have watched him and grown up seeing him. He is not perfect, but he is real. Flawed, angry, wounded - and more than I hated him, I loved him. This story had to be told. You will meet him,” the direc-

tor shared. “Flawed, angry, wounded” is what Vijay’s character is going to be in the year 2026 release. Since Vijay has not played such a character in years (his character was wounded in Kingdom but it was not flawed), the characterization is expected to be layered. Strained relationships involving a complicated yet self-assured adult might be portrayed in the film. Themes of forgiveness, trauma, growth, and the complexity of love in imperfect domestic settings make for delectable stories. Rowdy Janardhan could well be one. Keerthy Suresh is the film’s heroine. The film’s director, Kola, has previously made Raja Vaaru Rani Gaaru and that was six years ago. Vijay Deverakonda is also acting in a movie directed by Taxiwalla and Shyam Singha Roy fame Rahul Sankrityan. Since the story is set in Rayalaseema region, this one is a first for the actor. Rashmika Mandanna is its female lead. This is the first time in his career that Vijay is filming for two movies at a time; they have been “extremely demanding” and have “taken up my life.”

Lawyer: Shilpa Shetty Home Visit Routine Verification

Mumbai: Shilpa Shetty and Raj Kundra have recently been on the news for another troublesome controversy. As per recent reports, the duo’s home was searched by income tax officials after a case was filed against Shilpa’s restaurant Bastian Garden City for operating past the legal closing hours.

Taking to social media, Shilpa had shared, “We categorically deny the baseless and motivated allegations being circulated. The issues sought to be raised are being given a criminal colour without any lawful basis. A quashing petition has already been filed before the high court and is pending adjudication. Having fully cooperated with the investigation, we are sanguine that justice will prevail and have complete faith in the

law enforcement authorities and the judicial system of our country. We respectfully urge the media to exercise restraint as the matter is subjudice,” she said. As the news about income tax raids spread on social media, her advocate Prashant Patil noted, “On behalf of my client Mrs Shilpa Shetty Kundra I can confirm that there is no Income Tax ‘Raid’ of whatsoever nature against my client. There is a routine verification by the income tax officials pertaining to follow up with my client Mrs Shilpa Shetty Kundra. Whomsoever has mischievously claimed in public domain that these developments have anything to do with the alleged Economic Offence Wing case shall face legal consequences before the appropriate court of law.

India and China: Travelers Celebrate End of Visa Freeze Amid Thawing Tensions

They are the two most populous countries in the world and neighbors clamoring for more tourists, but for much of the last five years it has been difficult for Indian and Chinese nationals to vacation in each other's nations. Now that looks set to finally change as previous fractious relations between the two Asian giants finally begin to thaw.India will issue tourist visas for Chinese citizens for the first time in five years, allowing nationals from its neighboring country to freely visit each other, marking a significant reset in relations after a deadly border clash sent ties into a deep freeze. From Thursday, July 24, Chinese citizens can apply for tourist visas to India, the Indian embassy in Beijing said Wednesday.

This "positive news" is in the "common interests of all parties," China's foreign spokesperson Guo Jiakun said. "China is willing to maintain communication and consultation with India to continuously improve the level of facilitation of personnel exchanges between the two countries."There has been a gradual normalization of ties between India and China in recent months after relations were deeply strained in June 2020, when a brutal hand-to-hand battle in the Galwan Valley left at least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers dead. Both nations maintain a heavy military presence along their 2,100-mile (3,379-kilometer) de facto border, known as the Line of Actual Control (LAC) – a boundary that remains undefined and has been a persistent source of friction since their bloody 1962 war. The 2020 clash in the disputed region between Indian Ladakh and Chinese-controlled Aksai Chin marked the first deadly confrontation along India and China's disputed border in more than 40 years.

Tensions escalated in the aftermath. India banned multiple Chinese apps, heightened scrutiny of Chinese investments and direct air routes between the two neighbors were canceled.Both countries had shut their borders to foreign tourists due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but visa restrictions continued even as global travel began to resume.China lifted tourist visa restrictions for Indian nationals in March after

Beijing and New Delhi announced they would work to resume direct air travel, according to Reuters. "Inbound tourism is going through tough period post Covid, so it is good for us that another market has opened," according to Sarvjeet Sankrit, founder of the Delhi-based travel agency Ghum India Ghum (Roam India Roam), who said he saw "lots of Chinese tourists" visit the capital before the visa ban. India lifting restrictions is "a good thing for vehicle owners, guides, and hotel owners," he said. "Everyone will get more business."

Chinese national Kate Hu, whose boyfriend is from India, said she is excited at the prospect of finally being able to visit his family.The Hong Kong-based comedian had already booked tickets to visit India for his sister's wedding in April when she found out she couldn't get the visa."I lost a bit of money there," Hu said. "We had talked about getting married just to have the visa, so now I'm happy to hear I won't have to get married just for a visa," she joked.Her boyfriend is currently in India to take care of his sick mother. "If this (news) had come out sooner, then I could have gone with him," she said. Pradeep K, a consultant in Delhi called India's latest move is "a good thing," adding "people of India and China will get to interact more."He said he is excited at the prospect of traveling to China to see pandas."Will a diplomatic move on paper change mindsets and bring people closer? Your



guess is as good as mine."

Flights and pilgrimages resume

India's decision to remove visa restrictions is the latest in a string of steps taken by New Delhi and Beijing to reset ties after Chinese leader Xi Jinping met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Russia last October. In January, India and China agreed to resume direct commercial

flights and Beijing recently agreed to reopen Mount Kailash and Lash Manasarovar in western Tibet to Indian pilgrims for the first time in five years.Earlier this month, India's foreign minister S. Jaishankar met with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing, where the two "took note of the recent progress made by the two sides to stabilize and rebuild ties, with priority on people-centric engagements," accord-

ing to a statement from the Indian foreign ministry.There has been a "gradual normalization of the India-China relationship," said Harsh V. Pant, foreign policy head at the New Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation think tank."There is a certain recalibration happening from both ends. But this is also a reflection that India faces a unique challenge in managing China," he added.

US slips again in passport power rankings



In the latest quarterly update of the Henley Passport Index, created by the London-based global citizenship and residence advisory firm Henley & Partners, the US — which held the No. 1 position back in 2014 — has slipped down to the 10th place in the rankings. It's the lowest position ever for the US in the 20-year history of the index, which tracks the global freedom of movement for holders of 199 passports to 227 countries and territories around the world, using exclusive data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA). And because Henley counts multiple countries with the same score as a single spot in its standings, there are actually 33 countries that outrank the US on the list. As we enter the second half of the year, Singapore has held onto its No.1 position as the world's most powerful passport for 2025. Holders of this most desirable of travel documents enjoy visa-free access to 193 out of 227 destinations worldwide, more than citizens of any other place on the planet. Naturally, Singapore isn't handing out passports to foreign nationals like candy. Applying for Singaporean citizenship requires at least two years of permanent residency, a review of "economic contributions" and other qualifications, and compulsory national service for male applicants.South Korea has climbed to join Japan at No.2 in the ranking, with an open door to 190 destinations, ensuring that Asian nations have a solid lead in the global mobility race.The EU member states of Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Spain are all at No.3 behind them, in the third tier, along with Finland, with access to 189 destinations with no prior visa needed. Europe holds sway over the fourth position in the rankings, too, which belongs to seven countries: Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Sweden. All enjoy visa-free access to 188 destinations.Squeaking into fifth place are Greece, Switzerland and New Zealand, all of which have visa-free access to 187 destinations.

The mobility gap

At the opposite end of the list, at No. 99, Afghanistan remains locked in bottom place, with visa-free access to just 25 destinations, one fewer than at the start of this year. Syria is at No. 98 (with 27 destinations) and Iraq is at No. 97 (with 30 destinations).That's a yawning mobility gap of 168 destinations between the top- and bottom-ranked passports.The UK has dropped one spot to No. 6 in the rankings, with visa-free access to 186 destinations. Australia, the Czech Republic,

Hungary, Malta and Poland are tied at No. 7, while Canada, Estonia and the United Arab Emirates are at No. 8.The UAE is one of the biggest success stories on the index, having risen 34 places in the past decade, from No. 42 to eighth place. China has also jumped from No. 94 to No. 60 since 2015, a rise that's been achieved even without visa-free access to the 29 countries in Europe's Schengen Area.

Active and strategic diplomacy

Ninth place is shared by Croatia, Latvia, Slovakia and Slovenia, while No.10 is held by Iceland, Lithuania and the United States. The US now has visa-free access to 182 destinations worldwide.In a provision in the Trump administration's recently enacted domestic policy bill, the United States will soon require international visitors to pay a new "visa integrity fee" of at least \$250, added to existing visa application

costs. The fee will apply to all visitors who are required to obtain nonimmigrant visas to enter the United States.Critics including the U.S. Travel Association, a national nonprofit organization aimed at increasing travel to the United States, have panned the new visa fee as discouraging to visitors. Christian H. Kaelin, chair of Henley and Partners, said in a release that the latest Henley Passport Index reveals an increasingly competitive landscape in global mobility."The consolidation we're seeing at the top underscores that access is earned — and must be maintained — through active and strategic diplomacy," he said. "Nations that proactively negotiate visa waivers and nurture reciprocal agreements continue to rise, while the opposite applies to those that are less engaged in such efforts." Henley & Partners' list is one of several indexes created by financial firms to rank global passports according to the access they provide to their citizens.Arton Capital's Passport Index takes into consideration the passports of 193 United Nations member countries and six territories — Taiwan, Macao, Hong Kong, Kosovo, the Palestinian territories and the Vatican. Territories annexed to other countries are excluded.It's also updated in real-time throughout the year and its data is gathered by close monitoring of individual governments' portals.Arton's Global Passport Power Rank 2025 puts the United Arab Emirates in the top spot, with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 179. Second place is held by Spain, with a score of 176.



Since 2006, Henley & Partners has monitored which of the world's passports deliver the most and least global mobility, based on exclusive data provided by the International Air Transport Association (IATA). Global mobility is a key measure of soft power for a nation's citizens when they go abroad. Citizens of Singapore—the No. 1 passport in the ranking—enjoy access to 193 travel destinations out of 227 around the world visa-free. The second most powerful passports in the world are Japan and South Korea, which each provides access to 190 destinations without a visa. A U.S. passport gives holders access to 182 destinations visa-free—putting the blue book on equal standing with Iceland and Lithuania. "Your passport is no longer just a travel document—it's a reflection of your country's diplomatic influence and international relationships," Dr. Juerg Steffen, CEO of Henley & Partners said in a statement. The United States is held back by its lack of reciprocity, according to how Henley & Partners calculates its ranking. While American passport holders can access 182 out of 227 destinations visa-free, the U.S. itself allows only 46 other nationalities to pass through its borders visa-free, putting it way down the Henley Openness Index in 80th place (compared to 10th place on the Henley Passport Index), barely outpacing Iraq.

Two Asian countries are the ranking's biggest movers and shakers since January. India jumped eight spots in six months, from No. 85 to No. 77, after adding two destinations and bringing its visa-free tally to 59. Over the same period, Saudi Arabia's citizens gained visa-free access to four countries, bringing its total to 91 countries, which lifts the kingdom four places to No. 54. Taking a longer view, two other Asian countries stand out as winners in the ranking since 2015. The United Arab Emirates shot up 34 places over the last 10 years from No. 42 to No. 8. Another notable climber is China, also rising 34 places from No. 94 to No. 60 since 2015, which Henley & Partners characterizes as "particularly impressive considering that, unlike other top risers, China has not yet gained visa-free access to Europe's Schengen Area." The report attributes China's rise to its significant move towards greater openness, with the country granting visa-free access to over a dozen new passports since January. In 2025, passport holders from 75 nations have visa-free entry to China, a remarkable shift from fewer than 20 countries just five years ago. "Americans are now leading the demand worldwide for alternative residence and citizenship options"... as the U.S. adopts "increasingly inward-looking policies," Steffen noted in a statement.



New satellite will see through clouds to ‘weigh’ Earth’s forests



radars that we have in space today take wonderful images of icebergs, but when they look at forests they see the tops of the forest, the little twigs, the little leaves, they don’t penetrate down into the forests,” explained Dr Ralph Cordey, head of geosciences at Airbus. “But what we found was that by using a much longer radar wavelength, we could see down into the depths of trees and forests,” he said. The 1.2-tonne satellite will use an approach not dissimilar to that used in a CT scan, and analyse slices through the trees on repeat passes to build up a picture of how much woody material is present. It is this material that can be used as a proxy for the amount of planet-warming carbon dioxide stored. Currently scientists

big 12-metre, deployable antenna. It’s a bit like deploying an umbrella in space, only a very big one, so we will be looking for that to happen smoothly,” said Dr Cordey. Airbus brought in engineers from the American company L3Harris Technologies to their site in Stevenage to oversee the construction of the antenna-reflector. L3Harris are specialists in these large, unfurlable systems - expertise which is not currently possessed in Europe. The team is hoping to produce the first maps within six months, and will then continue to gather data for the next five years. These annual maps will not only show how much carbon is stored but how much is being lost through deforestation. “The kind of observations that we’ve had for 50 years from [other] satellites like Landsat are affected very heavily by clouds. And in tropical regions, we have clouds a lot of the time, so you may not see a chunk of tropical forest,” said Prof Disney. Another advantage of the longer wavelength of the Biomass satellite is that it can penetrate clouds giving a consistent, comparable view of a forest from one year to the next. It is this outcome which has motivated the scientists who have worked on the project for more than 20 years. “It’s exciting, because it’s going to tell us about how something that we perhaps take for granted,” said Dr Cordey. “Our forests, our trees, how they are contributing to the processes which govern our planet, and in particular, the processes behind climate change which are so important to us today and for the future.”

The European nation where bears roam free

Romania is home to the largest population of wild brown bears in Europe outside of Russia, with as many as 13,000 bears living in and around the largely untouched forests of the Carpathian Mountains. But while bear-spotting has long been a tourist attraction in Romania, it historically didn’t involve venturing into the forest. “It wasn’t that long ago that it was commonplace to see a bear kept in a cage outside of businesses here to attract customers,” host Reece Parkinson explained in a recent episode of BBC’s The Travel Show. When Romania joined the European Union in 2007, the country began to adhere to the EU Zoos Directive, which issues guidelines for how captive animals are to be treated. In the past 18 years, the country has turned to more humane and sustainable ways to show off one of Europe’s last truly wild corners and the brown bears who thrive here. Brown bears have roamed the



woods and mountains of Europe for millions of years. However, their numbers dwindled significantly as human civilisation expanded. Today, it’s estimated that roughly 36,000 bears live in the European part of Russia, but new research conducted by Romania’s Forestry Research Institute reveals that the nation’s brown bear population is much higher than previously estimated – a fact that has brought both opportunity and challenges to surrounding communities. On one hand, sustainable bear tourism in Romania is growing. Numerous tour operators like Outdoor Holidays and Much Better Adventures now offer visitors guided “bear-sighting” hiking trips into the forests where brown bears live. This, in turn, also brings economic opportunities to the country’s more rural communities and encourages continued conservation of the animals’ habitat. There’s even a dedicated safe haven: Liberty Bear Sanctuary, nestled in the south-

ern Carpathian Mountains in the town of Zarnesti, is the world’s largest brown bear sanctuary. It not only rescues and provides medical care to formerly captive bears who can’t be released into the wild, but also offers public tours, allowing visitors them to see the bears in a 69-hectare expanse of oak forests and grasslands. “In the last 20 years, Cristina Lapis and

her team [at Liberty Bear Sanctuary] have given a home to over 130 bears here in Transylvania,” said Parkinson. Unfortunately, not everyone is enthusiastic about their furry neighbours. As the bear population flourishes, so do dangerous encounters with humans. Some local farmers, many of whom have lost livestock to the bears, have lobbied for culling Romania’s brown bear population. Visitors have also had conflicts with the animals, often because of unexpected encounters while hiking the mountains – several of which have turned deadly. Still Lapis, who runs the sanctuary, insists that such encounters are not the norm. “I know hundreds of thousands of cases where people who are used to the forest saw a bear and nothing happened. So [there] must be something special that an accident happened,” said Lapis. “When you go in the forest... it’s important to make noise. If you make noise the animal knows you’re coming and goes away.” Efforts are underway to try to find a happy medium that protects the bears and keeps visitors and livestock as safe as possible. The animals are protected under Romanian law, and reforestation and educational efforts are underway to prevent the bears from entering into human territory to feed and to teach humans what to do when they encounter a bear in the woods. Most life-threatening encounters with bears are due to human error, usually when a human startles a bear or interacts inappropriately with cubs, making mother bears defensive. Therefore, when hiking in bear country – whether in Romania or elsewhere – it’s important to talk loudly or clap your hands to give the animals time to avoid you. If you come upon a bear accidentally, make yourself as large as possible and back away.

Wales facing unrecognisable future warns commissioner

Wales faces an “unrecognisable future” without urgent action to protect the environment, tackle poverty and ill health, the country’s future generations commissioner has said. The unique job was created ten years ago with a law which now forces public bodies to consider the long-term impacts of all decisions. But Derek Walker, who was appointed to the role in 2022, told the BBC he had been “frustrated at progress” as the Wales Audit Office also warned of a failure to achieve “system-wide change”. The Welsh government said it would review the recommendations carefully before responding formally. As part of the role, Wales’ future generations commissioner writes a progress report every five years, to be published a year before a Senedd election. It provides advice on the actions required to protect the Welsh citizens of today as well as “those yet to be born”, Mr Walker explained. While pointing to successes such as Wales’ world-leading recycling rate and investment in sustainable transport, he warned of “significant” challenges. These include climate change and the collapse of nature, with 1 in 6 species currently facing extinction from Wales. There are also 273,000 homes at risk of flooding, a figure projected to double within 100 years, as a result of changing weather patterns and rising sea levels. While there is a Welsh government target for public sector organisations to reach net zero by 2030 - meaning they no longer contribute to global warming - the report found many concerned about whether they could actually achieve it and needing “significant additional resources”. On the other hand, the fact that there was no legally-binding nature recovery target in Wales meant that part of the problem “was not given sufficient priority” by the public sector, the report said. Tougher enforcement of those polluting the environment was also called for, with new legislation needed to give Natural Resources Wales powers to issue civil sanctions, such as stop orders and fines. Other challenges include poverty levels that remained

“unacceptably high”. Nearly one third (29%) of children in Wales live in poverty, while more than 1 in 5 of the population as a whole lived in relative income poverty between 2021-23. The report called on every public body to commit to a plan within two years that sets out how it would offer the voluntary Real Living Wage - so far only 13 out of 56 have done so. The commissioner also said Wales “cannot afford to keep treating preventable diseases without addressing their underlying causes”. NHS Wales spends £1 out of every £10 they have on diabetes, for instance, yet “most Type 2 diabetes cases are preventable”, with healthy eating and exercise. Wales currently has the highest percentage of people living with diabetes in the UK, while around one in four adults are obese. Life satisfaction and anxiety levels among adults are worsening, and in 2025 many can expect to spend the last 20 years of their lives in ill health. As the NHS grapples with the population’s acute care needs, funding for preventative measures has been cut. The report described this as “an act of collective self-sabotage”, warning the health service was “increasingly overwhelmed with preventable diseases and accidents”. The commissioner also warned that “culture is in crisis” in Wales, insisting the arts were “not a nice-to-have” but rather vital to people’s well-being. The capacity of the Welsh public sector was described as being “at breaking point” due to rising demand and years of austerity. Wales became the first country in the world to legislate for the rights of citizens not-yet-born, when the Well-being of Future Generations Act was passed in 2015. Ten years on, today’s progress report finds “strong support” across the public sector. From Welsh government ministers down to those running schools and hospitals, they are now all meant to be evaluating the long-term impacts of their decisions and working collaboratively to tackle future threats such as climate change and growing health inequalities.

Fingerprints of city-sized icebergs found off UK coast

Icebergs as large as cities, potentially tens of kilometres wide, once roved the coasts of the UK, according to scientists. Researchers found distinctive scratch marks left by the drifting icebergs as they gouged deep tracks into the North Sea floor more than 18,000 years ago. It’s the first hard evidence that the ice sheet formerly covering Britain and Ireland produced such large bergs. The findings could provide vital clues in understanding how climate change is affecting Antarctica today. The scientists searched for fingerprints of giant icebergs using very detailed 3D seismic data, collected by oil and gas companies or wind turbine projects doing ocean surveys. This is a bit like doing an MRI scan of the sediment layers beneath the present-day seafloor, going back millions of years. The researchers found deep, comb-like grooves, interpreted to have been created by the keels of large icebergs that broke off the British-Irish ice sheet more than 18,000 years ago. Some of these scratch marks are as close as 90 miles (145km) to Scotland’s present-day east coast. “We found [evidence of] these gigantic tabular ice-

bergs, which basically means the shape of a table, with incredibly wide and flat tops,” said James Kirkham, marine geophysicist at the British Antarctic Survey and lead author of the new study, published in the journal Nature Communications. “These have not been seen before and it shows definitively that the UK had ice shelves, because that’s the only way to produce these gigantic tabular icebergs.” Ice shelves are floating platforms of ice where glaciers extend out into the ocean. By analysing the size of the grooves, the scientists estimate that these icebergs could be five to tens of kilometres wide and 50-180m thick, although it’s difficult to be exact. That means they would have covered an area roughly as big as medium-sized UK cities like Norwich or Cambridge. The icebergs are comparable in size to some of the smaller icebergs found off present-day Antarctica, such as blocks that calved from the Larsen B ice

shelf in 2002. Dr Kirkham described seeing such an iceberg when working in Antarctica two years ago. “Those of us working on this paper were standing together, gazing out onto this iceberg and thinking, ‘Wow, that’s probably a similar size iceberg to what was found off the shore of Scotland 18,000 years ago, right in front of us in Antarctica today.’” Hundreds of ice shelves surround about three-quarters of today’s Antarctic ice sheet, helping to hold back its vast glaciers. But if ice shelves are lost, the glaciers behind can speed up, depositing more and more ice into the ocean and raising sea levels worldwide. Exactly how this plays out, though, is “one of the largest sources of uncertainty in our models of sea level rise”, Dr Kirkham told BBC News. That’s partly because scientists have only been able to use satellites for a few decades to observe about 10 cases of ice shelves collapsing - hence the desire to look for examples further back in time. No ice shelf setting is the same, but the researchers say their findings from the former British-Irish ice sheet could help understand how Antarctica might respond to today’s rapidly warming climate.



SPORTS

India look to seal series against plucky Proteas as concerns mount around

New Delhi: India would hope that the challenging home assignment against South Africa, which has exposed a few chinks in the armour and thrown up difficult questions on selection, ends on a positive note when the two sides clash in the fifth and final T20 International here on Friday. After being blanked 0-2 in the Tests, India bounced back to win the ODI series and now have an unassailable lead 2-1 in the T20Is after the fourth game was abandoned due to poor weather conditions in Lucknow on Wednesday. That India cannot lose the series should be comforting to embattled head coach Gautam Gambhir given that the other two leaders in the camp — skipper Suryakumar Yadav and his deputy Shubman Gill — are battling challenges of their own with less than two months to go for the T20 World Cup. For someone who was ranked world No.1 not so long ago, Suryakumar’s form has sharply nosedived in the only format he is assured a place in the XI for India. Having gone through 18 innings in 20 matches this year without

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a single half-century while averaging a poor 14.20 for his 213 runs, every failure for Suryakumar is adding to the concerns of the Indian camp. Gill’s return as vice-captain in the T20I format might have been perceived as one which put Suryakumar on notice a few months ago, but the former’s ordinary run with the bat since his comeback and the latest injury setback only hampers the team’s cause. A toe injury suffered before the fourth T20I is set to keep Gill out of the final T20I here as India would want to take a cautious route, more so when there is a ready replacement for the top order slot in Sanju Samson. Earlier, Gill had missed most of the two-Test affair following an injury to his neck which he suffered in the series-opener in Kolkata, something that also highlighted his busy schedule and growing list of



responsibilities in Indian cricket across formats. Samson was never the right fit in the lower order as the lowest he has batted apart from the top slot is at No.5, where the right-handed batter has scored a mere 138 runs in eight matches at an average of 23.23. But each of his three T20I centuries and one half-century have come at the top slot in 14 innings, and in case of Gill’s unavailability for the final game, the Kerala wicketkeeper-batter would be keen to make it count. Aside from this, India have a settled unit with both the all-rounders, Hardik Pandya and Shivam Dube, featuring in all three games so far.

IPL Auction 2026: Why Cameron Green will get Rs 18 crore despite Indian Premier League auction

Mumbai: Australian all-rounder Cameron Green being sold to Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) for Rs 25.2 crores, becoming the third-most expensive player in the league’s history and the most expensive overseas player in the competition’s history on Tuesday. Initially, Rajasthan Royals and KKR entered an intense bidding war, with the Royals opting out at around Rs 13 crore, and Chennai Super Kings (CSK), which entered the bidding, pushing the price well above Rs 20 crore. CSK bid Rs 25 crore, and KKR followed it with a 25.2 crore bid and won the war. Green has scored 521 runs in 21 T20I matches at an average of 32.56, SR of 160.3, with six fifties and has 12 wickets averaging 23.35. He has scored 1,334 runs in 63 T20S at an average of



33.35, with a SR of 151.07, including a century and seven fifties, and has taken 28 wickets at an average above 34. The young Aussie all-rounder featured in the 2023 and 2024 IPL seasons with the Mumbai Indians (MI) and Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), scoring 707 runs in 29 matches at an average of 41.58, with an SR of 153-plus, a century and two fifties and took 16 wickets at an average of above 41.5. But he did not

participate in last season’s auction due to injury. According to ESPNcricinfo, the IPL introduced a new “maximum fee” rule last year to address franchisees’ collective concern that some overseas players were registering exclusively at mini-auctions to exploit the supply-demand imbalance. Consequently, the IPL introduced a maximum-fee rule under which overseas players cannot be paid more than INR 18 crore, the highest slab for

franchises retaining players ahead of the 2025 mega auction. If the bid exceeded the INR 18-crore mark, the IPL said the additional money would be utilised by the BCCI for player welfare. “Any overseas player’s auction fee at small auction will be lower than the highest retention price [of INR 18 crore] and the highest auction price at the big auction. In case the highest auction price at the big auction is INR 20 crore, Meanwhile, Maharashtra batter Prithvi Shaw and Mumbai’s Sarfaraz Khan went unsold despite their domestic heroics. Shaw also went unsold last season but has had a decent run in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT) this year, scoring 183 runs in seven matches for Maharashtra at an average of 26.14, SR of 160-plus with two fifties.

Satwik-Chirag wins to the World Tour Finals



New Delhi: Star Indian shuttlers Satwik-sairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty showed nerves of steel to stun Olympic silver medallists Liang Wei Keng and Wang Chang in their opening Group B match at the BWF World Tour Finals here on Wednesday. World No. 3 Satwik and Chirag, the only Indian representatives at the season-ending showpiece, recovered from an opening-game setback and saved a match point to eventually outwit the world No. 5 Chinese pair 12-21, 22-20, 21-14 in a gripping men’s doubles contest. The Asian Games champions, who reached the finals at the Hong Kong Open and China Masters earlier this year, will face another stern test when they take on Indonesia’s Fajar Alfian and Muhammad Shohibul Fikri on Thursday. Former world No. 1 pair Satwik and Chirag came into the match trailing Liang and Wang 3-7 in head-to-head record, and Wednesday’s clash lived up to its billing as a high-quality duel between two attacking pairs. As expected, Satwik and Chirag attempted to use angles and impose a sharp, fast-paced game, but the Chinese were equally prepared, with early errors from both sides keeping the opening game level at 7-7. Short rallies marked the first game, built

around attacking drives and quick smashes, with lifts used sparingly. China then strung together four straight points to take control at the interval. Wang’s sharp interceptions at the net began to trouble the Indians, who also committed a few errors as the Chinese stretched the lead to 14-9. The ability to bring the shuttle down at awkward angles paid dividends for the Chinese as they surged to a 19-11 lead, Liang finishing one rally with a fierce smash. The local favourites grabbed eight game points and wrapped up the opener in 13 minutes, Wang sealing it with a cross-court smash. After the change of ends, the Indians slipped to 2-4, with Chirag slightly off colour in the forecourt. At 3-6, the two pairs engaged in a 31-shot rally, with the Indians opting for flatter lifts and better pace variation. A few soft errors from the Chinese allowed Satwik and Chirag to draw level before a flat drive from Satwik helped them edge ahead. An attacking return from Satwik, followed by a superb serve that forced Liang to the net, handed the Indians a four-point cushion at the interval. They continued to build momentum, moving to 14-10, and then showcased their patience in a 45-shot rally to grind out another point.

The Knicks defeat the Spurs in the fourth quarter to win the NBA Cup

New Delhi: OG Anunoby made five 3-pointers and scored 28 points and the New York Knicks rallied in the fourth quarter to beat the San Antonio Spurs 124-113 and win the NBA Cup in Las Vegas on Tuesday. NBA Cup MVP Jalen Brunson recorded 25 points and eight assists as the Knicks won their sixth straight game and 10th in their past 11 — though the tournament final doesn’t count toward the regular-season standings and stats. The Knicks overcame an 11-point third-quarter deficit. “We found a way to win, that’s it,” Brunson said. “That should be our motto the rest of the way — we’re going to find a way.” New York’s Karl-Anthony Towns had 16 points and 11 rebounds despite missing 12-plus minutes due to a left calf issue. Jordan Clarkson scored 15 points and fellow reserve Mitchell Robinson grabbed 15 rebounds (10 on the offensive glass) for the Knicks. “Anytime you can participate in any event where you’re the last one standing and you’re able to hang a banner, you take that seriously,” New York coach Mike Brown said. “And all of our guys took that seriously.” San Antonio’s Victor Wembanyama scored 18 points off the bench while being limited to 25 minutes in his second contest after missing 12 straight games due to a calf injury. Dylan Harper scored a team-high 21 points off the bench for

the Spurs, who unofficially lost for just the fourth time in the past 14 games. San Antonio made just 5 of 19 shots (26.3%) in the fourth quarter while being outscored 35-19. De’Aaron Fox had 16 points and nine assists, Stephen Castle registered 15 points and 12 assists and Luke Kornet added 14 points for the Spurs. Noting that his team had its entire squad available for just the second time all season, San Antonio coach Mitch Johnson said, “When we played with appropriate pace, with the right spacing and right tempo, we got some really good looks and then we missed some. It was probably more of a team thing. I thought Victor was individually struggling.” New York shot 46.7% from the field, including 15 of 40 (37.5%) from 3-point range. The Spurs made 41.4% of their field-goal attempts and hit 14 of 39 (35.9%) from behind the arc. The Knicks scored the first eight points and 11 of 12 to start the fourth quarter to turn a five-point deficit into a 100-95 lead. Clarkson hit two 3-pointers and Anunoby sank one during the spurt. Towns returned to the floor with 4:49 left — the same time Wembanyama subbed back in — with New York again leading by five. Nearly two minutes later, Josh Hart drained a 3-pointer to give the Knicks a 115-107 advantage. After Harper nailed a 3-pointer with



2:42 left, Anunoby swished a trey from the corner to put New York back ahead by eight with 1:56 to play. Tyler Kolek later scored four straight points as the Knicks pushed the lead to 12 while closing it out. Fox hit a jumper with 7.1 seconds left in the first half to give the Spurs a 61-59 lead at the break. Devin Vassell scored 12 first-half points to lead San Antonio. Anunoby scored 20 points and Brunson had 15 in the half for the Knicks. Wembanyama poured in 12 points in the third quarter to help the Spurs lead by as many as 11 points in the period. The Spurs led 94-89 entering the final stanza.

The dates of IPL 2026 are March 26 and May 31

New Delhi: The 19th Indian Premier League will be held from March 26 to May 31 but it remains to be seen if defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru’s home base gets a game after a deadly stampede halted all big-ticket cricket at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium. As per established norms, the Chinnaswamy should host the tournament opener given the home side, RCB, won the IPL 2025 title but that is unlikely to be clear till the time BCCI comes out with the full-scale schedule. The venue was witness to chaos and a stampede, which left 11 dead, after RCB’s trophy celebrations drew lakhs on the streets, which was well over the state machinery’s capacity to handle at a short notice in June this year. While the venue has received conditional clearance from the Karnataka government, it also needs to meet the necessary safety and security standards following the deaths. The franchise had drawn intense criticism for encouraging people to come out for the street celebrations without requisite clearances from government agencies. “But there was some uncertainty due to the stampede during RCB’s IPL championship celebrations on June 4. So, I’ve held discussions with the BCCI about hosting the opening match in Bengaluru, and they are also discussing on the issue,” he added.



After the stampede, Bengaluru lost the Women’s World Cup matches held earlier this year due to security and administrative issues. The mini-auction for IPL 2026 will be held in Abu Dhabi today with three-time winners Kolkata Knight Riders coming in with the biggest purse.

Unsold at IPL auction, Devon Conway smashes 226 vs WI in Mount

New Delhi: Devon Conway delivered a powerful response to his IPL auction disappointment by scoring a career-best 227 that put New Zealand firmly in control of the third Test against the West Indies in Mount Maunganui. Conway, who went unsold at the IPL 2026 auction earlier in the week, batted for more than seven hours and turned scrutiny into a statement performance before finally falling lbw to Justin Greaves. New Zealand started day two at 334 for 1, with Conway unbeaten on 178 after batting through the entire first day. His opening stand



of 323 with Tom Latham carried the hosts into a dominant position. Latham contributed 137

and provided the stability that allowed Conway to settle and flourish.

Real and Atletico claim narrow wins in Copa

New Delhi: Real Madrid edged into the fourth round of the Copa del Rey after a nervous 3-2 win away to third-tier Talavera. Kylian Mbappe put Madrid ahead in the 41st minute from the penalty spot and then created the visitors’ second, pulling the ball back from the byline for Manuel Ferrando to turn into his own net. Talavera pulled a goal back through Nahuel Arroyo in the 79th minute before Mbappe restored Madrid’s two-goal cushion three minutes from time. However, Gonzalo Di Renzo made it 3-2 in the 90th minute, and Madrid needed a flying late save from Andriy Lunin to deny Isiah and prevent extra time, reports Xinhua. Atletico Madrid also reached the last 16 despite coach Diego Simeone rotating his squad in a 3-2 win away to third-tier Atletico Baleares. Deportivo Alaves beat Sevilla 1-0, a result that could increase the pressure on Sevilla coach Matias Almeyda. Second-division leader Racing Santander produced the night’s biggest shock with a 2-1 home win over La Liga third-placed Villarreal. Juan Carlos Arana struck twice in the opening 28 minutes before Ayoze Perez pulled



one back in the 86th, but Villarreal could not find an equaliser despite 10 minutes of added time. Levante also exited as the La Liga strugglers lost 1-0 away to second-tier Cultural Leonesa after Rafa Tresaco’s 12th-minute goal. Celta Vigo were knocked out on penalties by second-division Albacete after a 2-2 draw and extra time. Jesus Vallejo’s 93rd-minute equaliser forced extra time, but Oscar Mingueza, Hugo Alvarez and Iago Aspas all missed in the shootout as Albacete advanced.

NZ vs WI: New Zealand seize control as Latham and Conway produce record opening stand

New Delhi: On the opening day of the third Test match against the West Indies at Bay Oval, New Zealand took charge and scored a dominant 334-1 at stumps. In 2025, openers Tom Latham and Devon Conway put on an incredible 323-run partnership, the best for any wicket in international cricket and the second-highest opening partnership in New Zealand Test history. Their efforts put a lot of pressure on the West Indies, who need to immediately regroup in order to remain in the running for both the game and the series, which New Zealand now leads 1-0 after two games. Latham scored a patient 137 from 245 balls, finally dismissed just three overs before the close, while Conway remained unbeaten on 178 having faced 279 deliveries. Nightwatchman Jacob Duffy survived to the end of play on 9 not out. Conway, playing with calm precision, is now approaching his Test best of 200, achieved on debut against England in 2021. Latham’s knock brought up his 15th Test century and his second of the series, underlining its importance at the top of the order. Conway was the standout, reaching three figures from 147 balls with 17 boundaries. It marked his sixth Test hundred and his second in the last six innings. Latham showed great patience, with his century coming from 183 deliveries, including nine fours and a six. For New Zealand, this was the first time since 2019 that both openers have scored centuries in the same innings. The day featured key moments. Latham was given a reprieve on 104 when wicketkeeper Tevin Imlach dropped a catch off Anderson Phillips. West Indies bowlers Kemar Roach and Jayden Seales began well, conceding just 22 runs across their opening 11 overs, but could not convert pressure into wickets. After surpassing the 277-run mark, Latham and Conway’s partnership overtook historical records, including the previous New Zealand first-wicket best against England in 1930 and setting a new benchmark for the calendar year. Latham’s decision to bat first bucked convention, especially on a green Bay Oval pitch. “I guess we left the decision about what we were going to do a bit longer than we usually do,” Latham said. “We were going back and forth and we obviously ended up going with a spinner and decided to bat first.” The call paid off as the pitch, while appearing lively, proved much drier underneath.