

## In Brief

### Garo's Hills indigenous Simsamg Festival begins in Williamnagar

**Williamnagar:** The Simsamg Festival 2025 began on 18 December 2025 at the WDSA Playground in Williamnagar, celebrating culture and local enterprise. The event featured a cultural program with performances including the Wangala dance and folk songs by students from local schools. MLA Marcuise N. Marak, the Chief Guest, commended the district administration for organizing the festival and emphasized the role of cultural events in preserving traditions and boosting the local economy. He discussed the Meghalaya Government's aim for a 10-billion-dollar economy, focusing on inclusive growth, tourism, and entrepreneurship, particularly in the Garo Hills region.

### Work on Kaziranga elevated corridor to start in January

**Kaziranga:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma today informed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Assam again in January, 2026 to inaugurate construction of the 32-kilometre elevated corridor at Kaziranga. He said that during his January visit the PM will also launch work on the new railway line connecting Gelephu and Kokrajhar. The Prime Minister would also be invited in February to inaugurate the Guwahati-North Guwahati bridge over the Brahmaputra and to lay the foundation stone of the new airport at Doloo in the Barak Valley, Sarma said. Reiterating the State's gratitude to PM Modi, Sarma said Assam has witnessed an unprecedented pace of development, driven by the Prime Minister's visionary leadership and deep affection for the State.

### 66 Acres Handed Over for Taj Umiam Resort in Umiam

**Shillong:** The Department of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya, has partnered with the Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) Group to develop a world class Taj Resort & Spa in Umiam. The land handover ceremony, held at Umiam, marked the formal transfer of documents from the Department of Tourism to the Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC), and from MTDC to Umiam Hotels Pvt. Ltd. In 2020, Meghalaya did not have even one five star hotel. Today, the State proudly hosts two operational premium properties—Courttyard by Marriott and Vivanta by Taj. Three more are currently under development, including Aurika by Lemon Tree Ltd, Holiday Inn Resort at Sohra and Holiday Inn Tura with the Intercontinental Group (IHG). With the addition of the Taj Umiam Resort and Spa, a sixth five star project is now joining this growing portfolio, underscoring Meghalaya's rapid rise as a premium tourism destination. The ₹300 crore+ Taj Umiam Resort and Spa will be one of the largest hospitality project in the North-Eastern region. In his keynote address, Hon'ble Chief Minister, Shri Conrad K. Sangma stated, "The opening of the Taj Spa and Resort in Umiam will be a game changer for the region. It will not only stand as one of the most iconic resorts in the country but also create new employment opportunities for the youth of Meghalaya."

### PM Modi accuses Congress of historic betrayal, says policies harmed Assam

**Guwahati, Dec 20:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi today launched a strong criticism of the Congress party during a public address in Guwahati. Speaking at a public gathering in Borjhar, PM Modi said that Congress acted against Assam's interests both before independence and in the decades after the country became independent. Modi said the "roots of Congress's sins" could be traced back to the time when the British government and the Muslim League were planning the partition of India. According to the Prime Minister, there was a plan to merge Assam with undivided Bengal, which later became East Pakistan. He said that Congress was moving towards accepting that arrangement. Modi said that Assam's first Chief Minister, Gopinath Bordoloi, resisted those plans and stood against his own party's leadership to prevent Assam from being merged. He credited Bordoloi with protecting Assam's identity and ensuring that the state remained within India. Modi also noted that the Bharat Ratna was awarded posthumously to Bordoloi during the tenure of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, saying the BJP took steps to honour national figures beyond political boundaries. The Prime Minister further added that after independence, Congress continued policies that damaged national interests.

He accused the party of allowing Bangladeshi migrants to vote freely for electoral gains, leading to demographic imbalance in Assam. Modi said illegal migrants encroached upon forest and government land, creating long-term social and political challenges for the region. Modi said that Assam was witnessing uninterrupted development under the BJP's "double-engine government." Comparing it with the state's lifeline, he said, "Just as the Brahmaputra River flows continuously in Assam, similarly, the stream of development is flowing uninterruptedly here." He added that his deep emotional connection with Assam and the Northeast continued to inspire him. "My attachment to the soil of Assam, the love and affection of the people here, and especially the love of the mothers and sisters of Assam and the Northeast, constantly inspire me and strengthen our resolve for the development of the region," the Prime Minister said.

## Mizoram CM chairs state-level police conference

**Aizawl, Dec 20:** The Mizoram State Level Police Conference on the debriefing of the DGs/IGPs Conference was held on Friday at the DGP Conference Hall, Police Headquarters, Khatla, under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister, Lalduhoma. The Home Minister, K Sapdanga, was also present.

The conference was convened to review and deliberate upon the outcomes of the 60th National Level DGP/IGP Conference, which was held in November this year at Raipur, Chhattisgarh, under the leadership of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing the conference, the Chief Minister stated that the National Level DGP/IGP Conference had formulated 107 recommendations aimed at strengthening and modernising policing in India. He expressed satisfaction that several of these recommendations are already being implemented in Mizoram. He added that efforts would be made to implement other recommendations to the extent feasible, for which support from the Central Government would also be required. The Chief Minister lauded the achievements of the Mizoram Police over the past two years and acknowledged that,

due to their dedicated efforts, drug abuse has significantly declined. While complete eradication remains challenging, he noted that the supply chain of drugs has been substantially curtailed. He further appreciated the police and their associates for their effective action against arecanut trafficking, which has led to the highest-ever local market rate of Mizoram arecanut produce. He informed that an amount of Rs. 3.18 crore has been received under the Police Modernisation Scheme, and an additional fund of Rs. 21.276 crore has also been approved. With this funding, several essential police requirements will be procured, including three bullet-proof vehicles. The Chief Minister specifically acknowledged the efforts of the Director General of Police, Sharad Agarwal, in securing these funds and expressed his appreciation. The Chief Minister also highlighted the State Government's broader vision for police modernisation. Among the key initiatives is the issuance of the notification for the establishment of the Directorate of Prosecution, as mandated under the newly enacted BNSS Act, 2023. He remarked that while some of



the National Police Conference recommendations can be implemented promptly, others would need to be prioritised based on the State's financial capacity.

The Home Minister, K. Sapdanga, in his address, emphasized that policing is not limited to punishing offenders alone, but is fundamentally aimed at ensuring public safety and social harmony. He stated that while continuing to monitor traditional forms of crime, the police must also be prepared to tackle emerging and contemporary challenges. He ex-

pressed his appreciation for the commendable work being carried out by the Mizoram Police.

During the conference, the Director General of Police, Sharad Agarwal, gave a detailed presentation on the recommendations of the National Conference. He highlighted that the National Police Conference had laid out a roadmap aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, focusing on internal security, effective use of modern technologies in policing, improved preparedness for disaster management, enhanced

use of technology for women's safety, and readiness to address evolving geopolitical challenges. He also outlined the various requirements of the Mizoram Police for effective implementation of these recommendations.

The meeting was attended by Vanlalmawia, Home Secretary, senior officials from Central and State security agencies operating in Mizoram, and other concerned officers. Superintendents of Police from all districts participated in the conference through online mode.

## Garos Hills indigenous Simsamg Festival begins in Williamnagar

**Williamnagar, Dec 20:** The two-day Simsamg Festival 2025 commenced on 18 December 2025 at the WDSA Playground, Williamnagar, marking a vibrant celebration of culture, tradition, and local enterprise.

The inaugural function was graced by the local MLA and Cabinet Minister, Marcuise N. Marak, as the Chief Guest, in the presence of Nihim D. Shira, Chairman of the State Planning Board. The Deputy Commissioner of East Garo Hills district, R. P. Marak, delivered the welcome address.

The cultural programme began with a lively Wangala dance performed by students of Williamnagar Government College, followed by a musical presentation titled "Sound of Simsanggre" by the youth of Williamnagar.

Students of Rongrenggre Higher Secondary School, Williamnagar, captivated the audience with their folk song "Akai Simsanggre." A graceful dance performance by Dambsa M. Sangma and group and a melodious song by Avril S. Marak further added colour and vibrancy to the inaugural programme.

Addressing the gathering as the Chief Guest, Marcuise N. Marak expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the district administration for successfully organising the



festival. He highlighted the importance of cultural festivals in preserving indigenous traditions while also creating economic opportunities for local communities.

He spoke in detail about the Meghalaya Government's vision of achieving a 10-billion-dollar economy under the leadership of Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, emphasizing that inclusive growth, infrastructure development, tourism promotion, and support for local entrepreneurs would be key drivers of this goal. He further stated that special focus is being given to the upliftment of Garo Hills, ensuring that development reaches the grassroots level across Meghalaya.

The Minister also encouraged local artisans, farmers, and entrepreneurs to make the best use of such platforms to showcase their products, promote self-reliance, and strengthen the local economy.

## Protests in Agartala Against Lynching of Hindu Youth in Bangladesh

**Agartala, Dec 20:** Activists of the Sanatani Hindu Sena staged a protest outside the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Agartala on Saturday, condemning the alleged lynching of a Hindu man in Bangladesh and accusing authorities there of failing to protect religious minorities.

The protest was held in response to the death of 27-year-old Dipu Chandra Das, who was allegedly lynched over accusations of blasphemy in Mymensingh city on December 18. Reports say his body was set on fire after the attack. Demonstrators described the incident as part of a systematic campaign of violence against minorities in Bangladesh and raised slogans against the current regime. As the protesters attempted to move towards the High Commission office, they were stopped by a large deployment of po-

lice personnel led by senior officials. Sanatani Hindu Sena district president Gautam Laskar claimed that Hindus in Bangladesh are repeatedly targeted, and similar incidents are also occurring in parts of India. Referring to the Mymensingh incident, he called the killing a "brutal act" against a member of a minority community.

Laskar emphasized that despite anger over such incidents, the protesters remained peaceful. He warned that attacks on minority Hindus in Bangladesh must stop immediately, or stronger reactions could follow in the future. The protest concluded peacefully under tight security. Meanwhile, media reports quoting Bangladesh's interim government Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus said the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) had arrested seven individuals in connection with the

incident. Bangladesh has seen rising violence against religious minorities, including Hindus, under the Yunus-led interim government. Tensions escalated after the death of Sharif Osman Hadi, spokesperson of the radical group Inqilab Mancha, who was shot by masked gunmen in Dhaka last week. Hadi was flown to Singapore for treatment but succumbed to his injuries on December 18.

Earlier, on December 17, India's Ministry of External Affairs summoned Bangladesh's High Commissioner to convey New Delhi's strong concern over the deteriorating security situation in the country.

Human rights organizations have expressed alarm at the escalating violence and worsening law-and-order situation in Bangladesh under the interim government, raising concerns about the safety and rights of minority communities.

## WTI Facilitates Workshop On Compensatory Measures in Wildlife Crime Cases in Cuttack, Odisha

**Cuttack, Dec 20:** A one-day workshop on compensatory measures in wildlife crime cases was organised on 20th December 2025, by the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) in collaboration with the Odisha Judicial Academy, Cuttack, with the support of Lancaster University, and IWT Challenge Fund. 32 magistrates took part in the workshop, from across the state, which was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Shri Bidyut Kumar Mishra, Director of the Odisha Judicial Academy, Cuttack. Technical sessions on the subject were led by Mr Praveen Srivastava, Advocate, Bar Council of Maharashtra and Goa, Mr. Darak Ullah, District and Sessions Judge (Retd.), Assam Judicial Service, Dr. Jacob Phelps, Senior Lecturer, Lancaster University, UK, Mr. Lovish Sharma, Advocate, High Court of Delhi, Mr. Jose Louies, CEO, Wildlife Trust of India and Mr. Jacob Phelps, Senior Lecturer, Lancaster University, UK. The workshop also covered the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, along with its recent amendments, analysis of the existing laws relating to victim compensation in wildlife crime cases etc. The one-day session witnessed technical discussions and case studies on the overview of wildlife crimes, Indian wildlife laws, compensatory measures in environmental crimes, the legal approach of foreign jurisdictions in wildlife crime cases and critical analysis of the Indian laws pertaining to compensation awards for the loss/injury to wild animals and its habitat on account of wildlife and forest crimes. Wildlife offences pose significant and cascading threats to biodiversity, ecosystems, and human well-being, yet they

often go unnoticed or are underestimated. There's a growing need for stronger actions to hold offenders accountable, beyond penal actions.

As wildlife crimes continue to harm wildlife and its habitat, legal experts and conservationists are urging for a more pragmatic judicial approach to protect and conserve wildlife for future generations. To address this, experts are calling for a shift in how we approach wildlife offences. Instead of just focusing on punishment, there is a need for legal measures that require offenders to monetarily compensate for the harm/injury caused to wildlife and its habitats by their criminal acts. This will ensure that offenders are held accountable not only through penalties but also by monetarily contributing to the restoration of the wildlife and protected forest covers. Existing criminal laws already have compensation provisions to attach liabilities to offenders, compelling them to monetarily pay for the ecological and environmental damage caused by their criminal actions. By adopting this approach, the judicial system can better balance punitive measures with restorative justice, ensuring a fairer outcome for both wildlife and society as a whole. The sessions further explained the finer nuances of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, including key definitions and their legal interpretation, and illustrated these aspects through real-life wildlife crime cases, thereby providing practical insights into the application of law in conservation-related prosecutions. Honble Shri Bidyut Kumar Mishra from Odisha Judicial Academy highlighted the crucial role of judiciary in



wildlife conservation and ensuring protection for our country's natural heritage. Shri Praveen Kumar Srivastava, IFS (Retd.), emphasised that compensation in wildlife related cases can never restore a lost life; it can only attempt to create balance while we collectively work towards the larger goal of saving wildlife and human lives together. Mr. Lovish Sharma, Advocate, High Court of Delhi, highlighted the provisions under criminal procedural law that empower judicial officers to award monetary compensation to victims in criminal cases culminating in conviction. He elaborated on the evolving judicial approach to compensation by referring to significant judgments of various High Courts and trial courts across India, with particular emphasis on the grant of monetary compensation to the Forest

Department in wildlife crime cases. He also added that "The Wildlife (Protection) Act treats wildlife not as property to be used, but as a legally protected trust of the State—where even momentary possession, movement, or negligence can constitute an offence". Mr. Jose Louies, CEO, WTI thanked the Judicial Academy for hosting the event and the judges for their proactive involvement in the workshop while highlighting that "Wildlife crime in India is organised, transboundary, and deeply embedded in criminal syndicates—whether a tiger is celebrated on the pages of National Geographic (referring to the melanistic tiger from Simlipal National Park) or lost to poaching ultimately depends on our collective responsibility to act decisively against these networks".

### 36 former judges criticize Justice Swaminathan is being impeached by the opposition

New Delhi, Dec 20: Thirty-six former judges issued a statement condemning the recent move by opposition leaders to impeach Justice G R Swaminathan of the Madras High Court, characterizing it as a significant threat to democracy and judicial independence.

This controversy arose after Justice Swaminathan ruled that the Arulmighu Subramania Swamy Temple was obligated to light a lamp during a religious ceremony, a decision that was contested by some members of the opposition. In response, several MPs, particularly from the DMK party, sought to initiate impeachment proceedings against the judge.

The former judges criticized this impeachment attempt as a blatant effort to intimidate judges who do not align with certain ideological and political expectations. They called for widespread denunciation of this attempt from all sectors, including Parliament members, the legal community, and the public, to prevent it from gaining traction. The statement reinforced that judges are accountable to their constitutional duty, and not to political pressures or intimidation.

Highlighting a concerning pattern, the judges pointed out that such actions against the judiciary are not isolated but part of a broader trend where the political elite have attempted to undermine the judiciary whenever decisions do not favor their interests.

They referenced previous impeachment efforts and ongoing campaigns against Supreme Court justices, stressing that these actions are not just criticism but an alarming attempt to use impeachment and public vilification to exert pressure on judicial independence and the constitutional framework. This atmosphere of intimidation undermines the rule of law and the foundational principles of democracy, they asserted.

### Before the Telengana DGP, 41 Maoists, including four members of the state committee, surrender

Hyderabad, Dec 20: As many as 41 members of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist), including six senior functionaries and four members of the Telangana state committee, surrendered to the Telangana Director General of Police, B Shivadhar Reddy. Notable individuals among the surrendered Maoists included Erragolla Ravi, alias Santhosh, a 40-year-old state committee member who had been underground for 24 years, and Kanikarapu Prabhajan, a 33-year-old platoon committee member.

Additionally, several Maoist party functionaries from Chhattisgarh also surrendered, bringing with them arms and munitions, following a call from the Telangana state government led by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy.

As part of the surrender, the Maoists relinquished 24 firearms and 733 live rounds of ammunition, including three AK-47 rifles, an INSAS light machine gun, five SLRs, seven INSAS rifles, a BGL gun, and four .303 rifles. The DGP noted that the Maoist party is currently in a state of disarray due to arbitrary deployments of cadres to unfamiliar locations without their consent, leading to operational difficulties and a lack of necessary resources. This situation has contributed to growing frustration among the cadres, prompting many to disengage from the CPI (Maoist) organization and reintegrate into society.



### Domestic help arrested for 40 lakh theft from Delhi house

New Delhi, Dec 20: A domestic help was arrested for allegedly stealing ₹40 lakh from a house in West Delhi's Punjabi Bagh area, where he was employed for only about 15 days. A theft complaint was registered on November 29, leading to an FIR filed the next day. Initial CCTV footage showed the suspect, identified as Dhruv, leaving the house empty-handed. However, further analysis revealed Dhruv later seen with associates Jatin and Shivam, one of whom was carrying a black bag. Following the theft, the suspects switched off their mobile phones, prompting police raids but to no avail. Advanced technical surveillance and call details indicated the trio had left Delhi, leading to their location in Jammu and Kashmir. Eventually, Dhruv and Jatin surrendered to authorities. Interrogation revealed their frequent use of a travel agency, leading to the discovery that Shivam had booked transportation to Himachal Pradesh. Subsequently, police traced Shivam to a hotel, where they recovered all seized items were confiscated, and Shivam was presented in court and remanded to judicial custody. Investigations continue to recover the full stolen amount and assess potential additional involvement of others in the incident.

## Police detention of a phone tapping suspect was prolonged

Hyderabad, Dec 20: The Supreme Court has extended the police custody of T Prabhakar Rao, former chief of Telangana's special intelligence bureau (SIB) and the primary accused in an illegal phone tapping case, by one week.

This decision coincides with the state's establishment of a new nine-member special investigation team (SIT) led by Hyderabad police commissioner V C Sajjanar, which includes other high-ranking police officials. The SIT is tasked with expediting the investigation and filing a charge sheet soon.

Rao surrendered to the investigating officer on December 12, a day following a Supreme Court directive for custodial interrogation. Upon the expiration of his initial police custody, the authorities requested an extension, citing Rao's lack of cooperation and his refusal to provide crucial information. A division bench comprising Justices B V Nagarathna and R Mahadevan granted the extension until December 26 and provided Rao protection from coercive measures until a further hearing in January 2026, conditional on his cooperation with investigators.

The phone tapping scandal was initially reported on March 10, 2024, when D Ramesh, an additional superintendent at the SIB, filed a complaint alleging illegal surveillance by deputy superintendent D Praneeth Rao.

Following this, Praneeth Rao was arrested on March 13, 2024, which led to revelations of extensive surveillance of various targets, including politicians, businessmen, journalists, and judges. The investigation has identified six key accused, along with Rao, including Praneeth Rao, additional superintendents Mekala Thirupathanna and N Bhujanga Rao, former DCP T Radha Kishan Rao, and television channel owner N Sravan Kumar.

The accused face serious charges, including criminal breach of trust, mischief, and criminal conspiracy, under various Sections of the IPC and the IT Act.



■ The Supreme Court has granted a one-week extension of police custody for T Prabhakar Rao, the former chief of the SIB, in relation to a phone tapping case. This decision comes as a new Special Investigation Team (SIT) takes charge of the investigation into the matter.

## Shashi Tharoor on the lynching of a Hindu man in Bangladesh: “Mob rule should not prevail”

New Delhi, Dec 20: Shashi Tharoor, a Congress MP, expressed his outrage over the recent lynching of a Hindu man, Dipu Chandra Das, in Bangladesh, describing it as “unbearably tragic” and emphasizing the need for peace and democratic governance in the country. Tharoor voiced his concerns about the situation in Bangladesh, particularly with upcoming elections in February, urging the restoration of democracy and highlighting the detrimental effects of “mob rule” on both Bangladesh and India. He further questioned the interim Bangladeshi government, led by Muhammad Yunus, about the actions being taken to prevent such violent incidents and ensure accountability for the offenders.



The lynching occurred amid rising unrest in Bangladesh, especially following the assassination of youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi, which has sparked significant agitation across the country, including protests near Indian diplomatic missions. The Yunus administration condemned the violence and promised that those responsible would face justice, stating, “there is no place for such violence in the new Bangladesh.” Despite this, Tharoor raised concerns about the troubling remarks from certain political figures within Bangladesh, which he perceived as inflammatory and indicative of broader unrest.

Overall, Tharoor's statements reflect a deep worry over the escalating violence and political instability in Bangladesh, calling for a unified front to reinforce democratic values and maintain peace between the two nations.

### When Shivakumar visited Delhi to meet with the party high command, he declared, “Both of us will go”

New Delhi, Dec 20: Amid the ongoing power struggle in Karnataka between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Shivakumar has announced that the Congress high command has communicated when they will be summoned to Delhi for discussions. Responding to questions, he stated that both leaders would travel to the national capital to meet with the high command when called, confirming that they are waiting for the appropriate time for this engagement. This assertion follows Siddaramaiah's statement in the Assembly affirming his commitment to remaining in



office, asserting he had never indicated that his term would be limited to half. During a discussion focused on the development of North Karnataka, Siddaramaiah expressed confidence in completing a full five-year term, rejecting any assertions regarding a half-term limit previously rumored in 2023.

He stated, “I feel that the high command is on my side, but I will abide by the high command's decision.” Shivakumar corroborated that he and Siddaramaiah have reached an agreement concerning their roles, as influenced by the Congress high command. The internal disputes have heightened as speculation grows regarding a potential change in the state's leadership, especially since the Congress government passed the halfway mark of its five-year term on November 20. This speculation is largely attributed to the supposed “power-sharing” arrangement established between Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar.

### “The world order that was established eight decades ago is obviously collapsing”: Jaishankar

New Delhi, Dec 20: The global economic and political landscape is undergoing significant transformation, a sentiment expressed by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar during a convocation at Symbiosis International in Pune. He noted that the global order established 80 years ago is unraveling, and neo-asserting a definitive world picture is challenging due to extensive transition. Jaishankar emphasized that global powers are increasingly incapable of being universal entities, attributing the shifts in global order to the politics and policies of large nations, which are also reacting to trends they have influenced.



Three core concepts underpinning this transition are globalization, re-balancing, and multipolarity, all of which are hastened by technological progress. Jaishankar remarked that no single powerful country can dominate global issues, highlighting the emergence of multiple centers of power and influence. This situation fosters natural competition among nations, dictating a dynamic balance within international relations.

Moreover, he argued that globalization has fundamentally changed perspectives and work practices. To remain relevant in this evolving landscape, Jaishankar advocated for the need for substantial and contemporary manufacturing capabilities in large economies, such as India, to keep pace with technological advancements.

### Akhilesh's lyrical response to Adityanath's couplet jab: “Codeine syrup row”

Lucknow, Dec 20: Akhilesh Yadav, president of the Samajwadi Party, intensified the ongoing verbal conflict with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath concerning allegations related to the illegal trade of codeine cough syrup. During a recent press conference held at the SP headquarters, Yadav accused Adityanath's administration of diverting public attention through the circulation of photographs and political insinuations instead of penalizing the actual wrongdoers. He suggested

‘bulldozer action’ against all perpetrators, highlighting the urgency of the issue that transcends Uttar Pradesh, impacting even Varanasi, the Prime Minister's parliamentary constituency. Yadav made a pointed reference to Adityanath's poetic critique from the previous day, asserting his own non-poetic identity while affirming the literary prowess of Uday Pratap, a senior party member present at the conference. In a retaliatory poetic response, Yadav recited lines that directly

addressed Adityanath's previous remarks, emphasizing the failure to confront one's own reflection and the futility of breaking a mirror to avoid self-scrutiny. Adityanath's remarks indicated continued scrutiny of Yadav, implying associations with dubious figures and suggesting that forthcoming investigations would reveal the truth. In his extended poetic rebuff, Yadav accused the government of protecting its affiliates while casting blame on others, asserting that it has consistent-

ly sheltered its own while waging campaigns against perceived adversaries. He cited lines from his poem that depicted this duplicity, along with a warning regarding the dangers of misinformation on social media, specifically the misattribution of verses to esteemed poets like Mirza Ghalib that have surfaced online. Yadav's comments underscore a broader critique of political integrity and responsibility in the context of governance and public trust.

### Odisha Youth Congress workers try to surround Chief Minister's house

Bhubaneswar, Dec 20: Odisha Youth Congress activists clashed with police while attempting to surround Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi's residence on Saturday. The protest was sparked by the alleged gang rape of a 17-year-old college student near Dhauli hills on December 10. Led by state president Ranjit Patra, the Youth Congress members marched towards the chief minister's official residence, carrying posters and banners. As police intervened to halt their advance, some activists threw eggs at the officers and several were subsequently detained.

The protesters demanded the CM's resignation, alleging negligence in ensuring the safety of women in the state. Youth Congress leader Syed Yashir Nawaz criticized what he described as a deteriorating law and order situation in Odisha under the BJP administration, citing previous incidents, including a similar gang rape at Gopalpur beach. He condemned the government and police for failing to protect women.

In response to the protest, BJP spokesperson Anil Biswal asserted that the state government is committed to upholding the law and has taken steps by arresting those accused in the Dhauli case and categorizing it as a “Red Flag” incident to expedite justice for the victim.

## Mayawati calls attention to the Bihar “naqab” controversy and demands that Nitish apologize and put an end to it

Patna, Dec 20: On Saturday, BSP leader Mayawati addressed the rising controversy surrounding Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who controversially removed the veil of a woman doctor during an event at his secretariat in Patna.

Mayawati condemned the incident as “sad and unfortunate,” emphasizing its implications for women's safety and dignity, and urged Kumar to apologize and work to resolve the situation. Her statements followed widespread criticism of Kumar, with opposition parties calling for an unconditional apology.



In addition to the ‘naqab’ controversy, Mayawati spotlighted a separate incident during a police parade in Bah-

raich, Uttar Pradesh, where the police faced backlash for saluting a religious preacher, which she described as a breach of protocol. She insisted

ed this matter needed immediate attention from the state government to prevent similar occurrences in the future. Furthermore, Mayawati crit-

icized the recent brief Winter Session of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly, alleging it failed to address crucial public issues, focusing instead on conflicts between the ruling party and the opposition. She highlighted the ongoing fertilizer shortages affecting farmers as an example of a critical concern that required serious government engagement.

Moreover, she expressed disappointment regarding the Winter Session of Parliament, which concluded without substantial discussions on pressing national issues, including severe air pollution in Delhi.

## Counting starts for Arunachal local body elections across 27 districts

**Itanagar, Dec 20:** Vote counting for the panchayat and civic body elections in Arunachal Pradesh started on Saturday morning under strict security arrangements. The process began soon after 8 am at different locations across the state. Officials of the State Election Commission said that counting is taking place in a peaceful and organised manner. State Election Commission Secretary Taru Talo informed that 45 counting centres have been set up in 27 districts for the process. Security forces and administrative officers have been deployed at these centres to avoid any disruptions. Talo said that the commis-

sion is making efforts to ensure that the counting is transparent and smooth. For the urban local body elections, Electronic Voting Machines are being used. This includes counting for the Itanagar Municipal Corporation and the Pasighat Municipal Council. For the panchayat elections, ballot papers are being counted, as rural polling was conducted using ballot boxes. In the panchayat vote count, results are being tabulated for 186 Zilla Parishad Member seats. A total of 245 ZPM seats were declared for the polls, but 59 candidates had already been elected unopposed earlier. In the Gram Panchayat category, 6,227 candidates were

elected without contest, while polling was held for the remaining 1,947 seats. Polling for the 16 wards under the Itanagar Municipal Corporation and eight wards under the Pasighat Municipal Council was conducted on December 15. Officials said that in the Itanagar civic polls, four BJP candidates were declared winners unopposed before the polling day. Taru Talo also said that polling across the state was conducted peacefully. He credited this to coordination between the district election officials and security agencies. No serious incident was reported from any polling station throughout the state, he added.

## Work on Kaziranga elevated corridor to start in January

**Kaziranga, Dec 20:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma today informed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Assam again in January, 2026 to inaugurate construction of the 32-kilometre elevated corridor at Kaziranga.

He said that during his January visit the PM will also launch work on the new railway line connecting Gelephu and Kokrajhar. The Prime Minister would also be invited in February to inaugurate the Guwahati-North Guwahati bridge over the Brahmaputra and to lay the foundation

stone of the new airport at Doloo in the Barak Valley, Sarma said.

Reiterating the State's gratitude to PM Modi, Sarma said Assam has witnessed an unprecedented pace of development, driven by the Prime Minister's visionary leadership and deep affection for the State.

He observed that apart from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, no other Prime Minister had accorded due honour to Bharat Ratna Lokapriya Gopinath Bardoloi.

## Chief Minister inaugurates 10 MW Thenzawl Solar Power Plant

**Thenzawl, Dec 20:** The Chief Minister of Mizoram, Shri Lalduhoma, today inaugurated the 10 MW Thenzawl Solar Power Plant. Shri F. Rodinglana, Minister for Power & Electricity (P&E), attended the programme as the Guest of Honour.

The project has been constructed at a cost of Rs. 74.82 crore with funding support from NABARD.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister described the occasion as a significant and joyful milestone for Mizoram. He expressed his appreciation to NABARD, the P&E Minister and all officers, engineers, and workers involved in the successful completion of the project.

Key points highlighted by the Chief Minister included, the work on a 5 MWp Solar Park at Sumsuih has already commenced and is expected to be completed shortly. The State has further proposals for solar parks at Keifang (10 MWp), Tumtuitlang, Serchhip (10 MWp), Bawk-mual-Hmunhmeltha (10 MWp), Denlung Ram, Hnahthial (10 MWp), Tlabung Tlang, Lallen (6 MWp) and Dawhzau Zau, Lamzawl (20 MWp). The foundation stone for the 24 MW Tuirini Hydel Project, estimated at Rs. 676 crore, will be laid in the near future. Planning for the 132 MW Tuivai Hydel Electric Project is progressing steadily. Once completed, Mizoram will achieve substantial energy self-sufficiency. Seven older hydel power plants are proposed to be outsourced due to high maintenance costs, and several firms have expressed interest in this initiative. Recognising that energy must remain affordable, the Government has decided not to increase



electricity tariffs for five years. This commitment has been honoured so far, benefiting economically weaker sections and small entrepreneurs. From 1 August 2025, online electricity bill payment has been enabled across Mizoram. The State has been regularly clearing outstanding power dues, thereby qualifying for rebates. Between December 2023 and December 2025, rebates amounting to Rs. 6,57,93,152 have been availed and Mizoram's financial position is steadily improving. While visible outcomes may take time, fiscal health has strengthened. Recently, the Reserve Bank of India acknowledged Mizoram as one of the smaller states with a comparatively strong financial position. Other development initiatives undertaken over the past two years were also highlighted.

Speaking on the occasion, Shri F. Rodinglana, Minister for Power & Electricity, stated that Mizoram's

annual power demand is increasing at around 7.6 per cent, with peak demand having reached 160 MW. He said the Government is pursuing multiple strategies to meet this growing demand, including pump storage power linked with the Vankal Solar Plant. The expected laying of the foundation stone for the 24 MW Tuirini Hydel Electric Project next year, and expediting the 132 MW Tuivai project. He emphasised that outsourcing seven hydel power plants would yield greater benefits for the State and urged the public to understand the advantages of the initiative.

The inaugural programme was presided over by Pi K. Lalrinzuali, Secretary, P&E, who expressed gratitude to the Chief Minister for gracing the event and outlined the Government's broader vision for achieving energy self-reliance.

Er. J.H. Malsawma, Engineer-in-Chief, presented the techni-

cal report and stated that the Thenzawl Solar Power Plant is divided into two zones—eastern and western—with a 132 kV sub-station at the centre. Construction began in October 2023 and was originally planned for completion by March 2025. However, a wildfire earlier this year delayed full commissioning. The eastern section became operational in March, while the western section was commissioned on 18 August 2025.

Since commissioning, the plant has generated power valued at Rs. 3.42 crore, calculated at an equivalent external purchase rate of Rs. 5.34 per unit. The generated power is connected to the 132 kV Lunglei and Serchhip-Bukpui transmission lines, with plans to further link it to the 33 kV Thenzawl Sub-Station.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Er. Lalthananga, Chief Engineer, formally bringing the event to a close.

## Congress Alleges Massive Corruption in Karbi Anglong Council

**Karbi Anglong, Dec 20:** The Congress party on Friday levelled serious allegations of financial mismanagement and large-scale corruption in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and demanded an independent, high-level investigation into its functioning.

Addressing a joint press conference at the Rajiv Bhawan here, District Media Chairperson Charisma Rongpipi and APCC Media Spokesperson Mohan Rongpi claimed that approximately ₹10,000 crore allocated to the KAAC for development between the financial years

2016-17 and 2025-26 has failed to yield visible development on the ground for the people of Karbi Anglong.

The leaders alleged that corruption within the Council has reached “alarming levels.” They stated that while contractors' dues pile up annually, payments are being selectively cleared for a few favoured firms. Specifically named were Kache Enterprise and M/s Inglong Enterprise, which were cited as repeatedly receiving payments, raising questions about transparency in tendering and billing.

It was further alleged that several infrastructure works, including road projects, have been issued overlapping work orders under different schemes—a tactic purportedly used to siphon off public funds. They also accused the KAAC of awarding new projects to contractors from outside Karbi Anglong, sidelining local contractors and depriving local youth of employment. The works, they said, are grossly over-estimated, causing massive financial losses to the Council.

In a sharp criticism of the Council's administration, the Congress leaders

said the KAAC is being run like a private company, “M/s KAAC,” rather than a constitutional autonomous body. They claimed to possess proof of online payments made to petrol stations in the name of “M/s KAAC,” calling it blatant misuse of public funds. Expressing grave concern, Mohan Rongpi warned, “KAAC is being completely sold out, with the land and natural resources of Karbi Anglong being handed over to corporates, threatening the rights and future of indigenous communities.”

The speakers directly challenged As-

sam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to order an independent probe into the role of the Chief Executive Member (CEM) and the overall functioning of the KAAC. They warned that failure to do so would lead them to hold the Chief Minister equally accountable as a partner in the alleged corruption. The press briefing ended with a resolve that the people of Karbi Anglong “will not remain silent” against corruption and exploitation, and that transparent governance, accountability, and protection of land and resources are their non-negotiable demands.

## 66 Acres Handed Over for Taj Umiam Resort in Umiam

**Shillong, Dec 20:** The Department of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya, has partnered with the Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) Group to develop a world class Taj Resort & Spa in Umiam. The land handover ceremony, held at Umiam, marked the formal transfer of documents from the Department of Tourism to the Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC), and from MTDC to Umiam Hotels Pvt. Ltd. In 2020, Meghalaya did not have even one five star hotel. Today, the State proudly hosts two operational premium properties—Courttyard by Marriott and Vivanta by Taj.

Three more are currently under development, including Aurika by Lemon Tree Ltd, Holiday Inn Resort at Sohra and Holiday Inn Tura with the Intercontinental Group (IHG). With the addition of the Taj Umiam Resort and Spa, a sixth five star project is now joining this growing portfolio, underscoring Meghalaya's rapid rise as a premium tourism destination. The ₹300 crore+ Taj Umiam Resort and Spa will be one of the largest hospitality project in the North-Eastern region. In his keynote address, Hon'ble Chief Minister, Shri Conrad K. Sagma stated, “The opening of the Taj Spa and Resort in Umiam will be a game changer for the region. It will not only stand as one of the most iconic resorts in the country but also create new employment opportunities for the youth of Meghalaya.

In accordance with the Meghalaya Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy, 90 to 100% of the non managerial positions will be reserved for locals. Our young people will be equipped to take up these roles. This project is about livelihoods, empowerment, and pride for our citizens, and it places our youth at the heart of Meghalaya's tourism transformation.” This project has been made possible through Meghalaya's robust public-private partnership framework, which has attracted significant investments in tourism. Complementing private investment, the State Government has committed ₹100 crore towards the redevelopment of the erstwhile Lum Nehru Park, which will feature a craft village, botanical garden, light and sound show, sailing club, music centre and academy, as well as glamping facilities. Under the Chief Minister's Meghalaya Homestay Mission, additional proposals will be sanctioned around Umiam to ensure direct community benefits.

## Modi's report card in NE extremely poor: Gaurav Gogoi

**Guwahati, Dec 20:** Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi today said that Narendra Modi's report card as Prime Minister is extremely poor in almost every sector in Assam and the North-East, including industrial development, resolution of unemployment and generation of employment. “Over the last ten years, public sector undertakings in Assam have been shut down one after another. Although the BJP beat drums over the semiconductor project at Jagiroad, it has been set up only after shutting down a paper mill. True industrial development would have taken place had the paper mill been kept running and the new project established at another location,” he said. Gogoi further said the second unit of the Namrup fertiliser plant was shut down in 2020. The fourth unit should have been commissioned long ago. As early as 2014, the Central government had shown dreams to the people of Assam regarding the fourth unit, but only now has work begun. “Tea gardens of the Assam Tea Corporation have been sold off one after another. Nearly 8,000 government schools have been closed,” the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) said while interacting with journalists today regarding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Assam. He further stated that at present, only a handful of people close to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma are enjoying benefits in Assam. “From Dispur to Delhi, the BJP government's policy has been to shut down indigenous and public sector industries and hand over all work to a particu-

lar corporate house, thereby creating monopolies. As a result, our state and the country have been deprived of the kind of economic progress that should have taken place on the ground,” Gogoi said.

Stating that he understands very well the nature of Himanta Biswa Sarma's politics, the APCC President added, “In the absence of Zubeen da today, the people of Assam are recalling his vision of a greater Assam, his stand against the CAA, and his statements about the BJP. To prevent such statements from being discussed, Himanta Biswa Sarma has adopted a strategy of maligning Zubeen da's character so that all other issues are pushed into the background.” Alleging that the Chief Minister can go to any extent to defame Zubeen Garg, Gogoi said that Himanta Biswa Sarma does not hesitate to arrest Zubeen da's supporters and exert political pressure on his family members as well. Ajay Phukan and Victor Das were sent to jail merely for seeking justice for Zubeen da. Journalists have been jailed for asking questions, and reporters have even been threatened on camera with losing their jobs. He also questioned why certain close associates of Himanta Biswa Sarma linked with the Assam Association in Singapore have not been brought under investigation. When questioned about government funds allocated to an organization led by Shyamkano Mahanta for overseas programs, relevant departments, including the Culture Department and the Ministry of External Affairs, did not respond. The Deputy Leader of

the Opposition in the Lok Sabha condemned the recent brutal killing of a Hindu youth in Bangladesh and criticized the Modi government's foreign policy, claiming it has allowed anti-India forces to regain influence in nations that were once friendly towards India, such as Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. Gogoi stressed that India's foreign policy should have demonstrated a commitment to democracy and human rights, but it has failed, resulting in a loss of influence. Regarding upcoming Assembly elections, Gogoi expressed confidence that voters would respond to those who belittle them. He noted the Congress party's outreach initiative, ‘Rajior Padulit Rajior Congress,’ to connect with citizens' issues. He committed to an ideal Assam with better education, a healthier environment for women, and improved facilities for sports. On erosion issues in Majuli, Gogoi urged the Prime Minister to address it, contrasting past governmental support for projects like the Bogibeel Bridge with the current administration's financial delays for flood and erosion control funds. He called for a white paper detailing the Central government's financial allocations for Assam in these areas. Additionally, the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee has held statewide protests against corruption in the Jal Jeevan Mission, with significant demonstrations occurring in Majuli and Jagiroad, featuring the slogan “Nal Ache, Jal Nai” (Pipes are present, but no water).

## Biren Singh lauds Garhwal Rifles for building confidence in Torbung after attack

**Imphal, Dec 20:** Former Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh on Friday praised the 19th Battalion of the Garhwal Rifles for taking up confidence-building steps in Torbung village of Bishnupur district. The village recently came under attack, allegedly carried out by suspected Kuki militants. Biren Singh made the remarks after returning to Imphal on December 19. He had travelled to New Delhi earlier to attend a high-level BJP meeting chaired by central party leaders on December 14. After arriving back in the state capital, he spoke to reporters and responded to questions about the latest violence reported in Torbung and nearby Phougakchao Ikhai. He said that miscreants can be found in every community and added that the Government of India will take all necessary preventive measures to avoid any fresh violence. Singh said the Centre will act firmly to ensure such attacks do not happen again and disturb the fragile peace situation in the state. He stressed that people want peace, and security forces and the government must work together to restore calm. The former Chief Minister appreciated the 19th Battalion, Garhwal Rifles for reaching out to local residents soon after the attack in Torbung. He said the battalion interacted with villagers, listened to their concerns, and tried to reassure them that security forces were present on the ground. According to Singh, such steps help build trust between civilians and the forces. He added that outreach helps communities regain a sense of safety and slowly return to normal daily life. During his media briefing, Biren Singh also shared details about the BJP meeting held in New Delhi. He described the meeting as significant and purposeful. He said that although BJP MLAs and civil society groups meet from time to time, this meeting was attended only by BJP MLAs from Manipur.

## Secretary reviews security and infrastructure along India-Myanmar Border

**Tengnoupal, Dec 20:** Dr. Rajendra Kumar, IAS, Secretary (Border Management), Ministry of Home Affairs, conducted a comprehensive official visit to Moreh in Tengnoupal District on December 20, 2025. The visit was dedicated to reviewing the current security architecture and infrastructure projects along the strategically vital Indo-Myanmar border. During his tour, the Secretary carried out an on-ground inspection of front-line border posts and surveillance installations, engaging with personnel to address operational challenges and gather feedback on enhancing field effectiveness. In a high-level review meeting involving the



Assam Rifles, local administration and various security agencies, Dr. Kumar emphasised the necessity of optimizing patrolling and strengthening real-time intelligence sharing. He advocated for the rapid integration of modern monitoring techniques, spe-

cifically the deployment of drones and advanced sensor systems, to ensure a robust and “smart” border management framework. The Secretary commended the security forces for their dedication in a sensitive environment, reiterating the government's

resolve to safeguard national integrity while facilitating legitimate cross-border trade. He concluded the visit by urging all agencies to maintain peak operational readiness and proactive coordination to curb illegal activities and ensure regional stability.

# Allahabad HC bars banks from cutting fixed deposit rates issuance, even post merger

**Mumbai:** The Allahabad High Court has ruled that banks cannot unilaterally reduce interest rates on fixed deposit receipts (FDRs) after they have been issued, even in cases involving bank mergers or subsequent policy changes. The ruling stems from a dispute in which Punjab National Bank (PNB) reduced interest rates on FDRs originally opened with Oriental Bank of Commerce (OBC) following the merger of the two banks. In this case, PNB lowered the contracted interest rates on certain FDRs from 10.75% to 9.25% and from 10.25% to 8.25%. The affected depositors, including the family of a retired bank employee, challenged the move, arguing that such retrospective reductions were not supported by law or regulatory guidelines. The Allahabad High Court, in its judgment delivered on November 17, 2025, directed banks to honour the interest rates originally agreed upon for the entire tenure of the fixed deposit,

reinforcing the contractual rights of depositors. Deepika Kumari, Partner, King Stubb & Kasiva, Advocates and Attorneys, said the ruling reinforces a fundamental principle governing the bank-customer relationship. “The sanctity of a contracted fixed deposit rate cannot be diluted by unilateral action. By holding Punjab National Bank’s retrospective reduction of the Jain family’s FD interest rates as illegal, the The judgment strengthens depositor confidence, underscores the inviolability of contractual commitments, and ensures banks maintain transparency and fairness in their dealings.”

The court closely examined the bank’s reliance on Reserve Bank of India (RBI) master directions and internal circulars. It held that these provisions do not authorise banks to retrospectively alter interest rates already specified on FDRs. The court observed: “The provisions relied upon



by the respondents govern only the grant of discretionary additional interest and eligibility conditions; they do not permit reduction of a previously agreed rate of interest mentioned on the FDR.” The judgment clarified that exceptions could arise only if there was an explicit contractual clause or a statutory scheme overriding the agreement, neither of which applied in this case. The court further noted that internal bank circulars relating to

additional interest for staff are merely enabling in nature and cannot be used to change agreed FDR terms. It stated that there was no allegation of fraud by the depositors and that administrative errors by bank officials could not justify unilateral rate reductions. Emphasising depositor protection, the High Court held that fixed deposit holders cannot be made to bear losses arising from internal mistakes or policy shifts by banks.

# Google advises employees on US visas to avoid international travel amid embassy delays

**Mumbai:** Alphabet’s Google has advised some employees on US visas to avoid international travel due to delays at embassies, Business Insider reported on Friday, citing an internal email. The email, sent by the company’s outside counsel BAL Immigration Law on Thursday, warned staff who need a visa stamp to re-enter the United States not to leave the country because visa processing times have lengthened, the report said. Some The H-1B visa program, widely used by the US technology sector to hire skilled workers from India and China, has been under the spotlight after the Trump administration imposed a \$100,000 fee for new applications this year. In September, Google’s parent company Alpha-



bet had strongly advised its employees to avoid international travel and urged H-1B visa holders to remain in the US, according to an email seen by Reuters.

# Are Indians overspending on treatment, ignoring prevention

**Mumbai:** In many Indian households, healthcare decisions are still driven by symptoms rather than prevention. A doctor’s visit is often postponed until illness becomes unavoidable, while routine screenings and preventive check-ups are pushed aside. This reactive mindset, experts warn, is proving increasingly expensive—both medically and financially. Data from the ACKO India Health Report 2024 underscores the cost gap. The average insurance claim for hospitalisation stood at Rs 70,558, reflecting the steep expenses families face once treatment becomes necessary. In contrast, a basic preventive health check-up or early screening can cost as little as ₹700. Despite this stark difference, a large section of the population continues to delay medical attention until conditions worsen, leading to higher costs and more disruptive treatment. “This reactive approach has serious consequences,” said Aditya Kandoi, CEO & Founder, Redcliffe Labs. “Modern lifestyles, rising pollution exposure, genetic predispositions, ageing and dietary changes contribute to slow, often unnoticed deterioration in health. What remains unseen progresses silently and eventually turns into serious illness. With healthcare costs rising by nearly 14% annually, delaying diagnosis only makes treatment more complex, expensive and disruptive to family financ-



es.” Skipping preventive check-ups may appear cost-saving in the short term, but it often results in higher long-term expenses. Conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease, when detected late, require lifelong management rather than prevention. This typically involves frequent doctor visits, medication, diagnostic tests and, in some cases, hospitalisation—quickly straining household budgets. The financial impact is amplified by India’s health financing structure. Around 62% of healthcare expenditure is paid out-of-pocket, making medical emergencies a direct hit to savings. In addition, nearly 23% of hospitalisation costs are funded through borrowings, pushing families into debt at a time of emotional and physical stress. The burden often stretches over years, affecting future savings, education planning and retirement goals.

# Ola Stock Slide 3% CEO Bhavish Aggarwal Sells Another Chunk

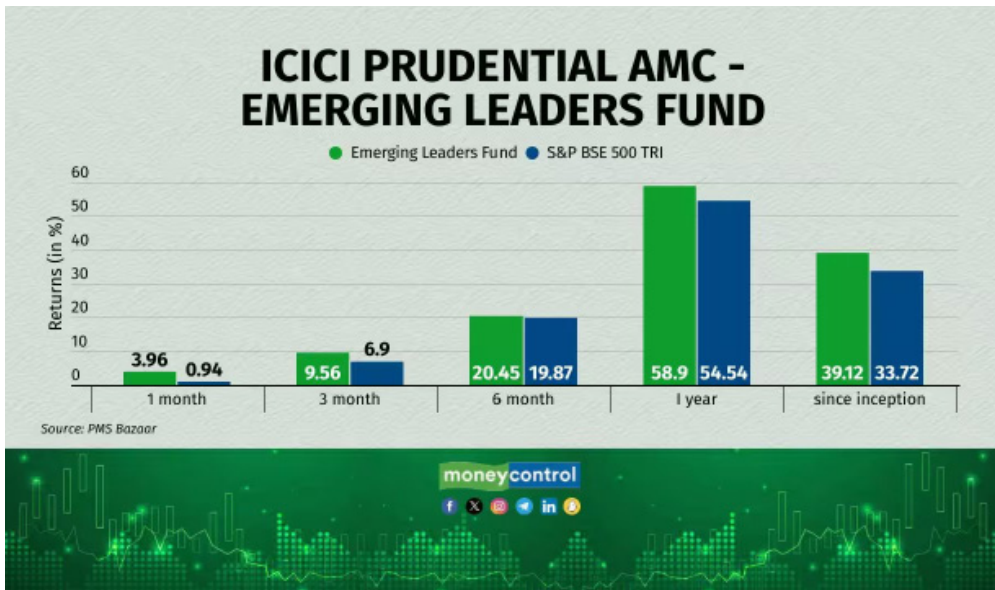
**New Delhi:** Shares of Ola Electric Mobility Limited slipped further on Thursday after founder and promoter Bhavish Aggarwal sold another chunk of his personal shareholding through open market transactions. The stock fell nearly 3 per cent to trade around Rs 32.22 apiece during early trade and touched an intra-day low of Rs 31.56, keeping it close to its 52-week low levels. The decline came even as the broader market showed some stability, with the NSE Nifty index rising around 0.29 per cent. According to bulk deal data available on the National Stock Exchange, Aggarwal sold about 4.19 crore equity shares at an average price of Rs 33.96 per share on Wednesday. The total value of the transaction stood at nearly Rs 142 crore. The buyers of these shares could not be identified from the exchange data. Ola Electric clarified that the share sale was part of a one-time and limited monetisation of a small portion of the founder’s personal stake. The main objective of the transaction was to fully repay a promoter-level loan amounting to Rs 260 crore. The company said the pledge release involved a mix of share monetisation and other personal income sources of the found-



er. As a result of this exercise, all promoter-level share pledges totalling about 3.93 per cent have now been completely released, making the founder-promoter debt-free. This development comes days after Ola Electric shares had already come under pressure following an earlier bulk deal by Aggarwal, as reported by IANS. The stock has been witnessing sustained selling over the past few weeks and has corrected sharply over the last three months, keeping it near its yearly low. Despite the recent sales, the company has maintained that there is no dilution of promoter control and no impact on its business operations or long-term strategy. Ola Electric has also reiterated that the transaction was carried out entirely at the promoter’s personal level and does not affect the company’s financial position.

# ICICI Prudential Life rolls out Sector Leaders Index Fund for ULIP investors

**New Delhi:** ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company Limited has launched a new equity-oriented fund, the ICICI Pru Sector Leaders Index Fund, expanding the investment choices available under its Unit Linked Insurance Plans (ULIPs). The fund is designed to give customers exposure to India’s leading companies across more than 20 key sectors, offering a ready-made and diversified equity portfolio in a single product. The new fund targets investors who prefer a simple, rule-based and passive approach to equity investing. By tracking market leaders across sectors, it eliminates the need for individual stock selection while enabling participation in companies that dominate their respective industries. The offering is positioned as a core equity allocation for long-term investors seeking broad sector diversification with a bias towards established businesses that have demonstrated leadership and scale. The ICICI Pru Sector Leaders Index Fund is a passive, index-based strategy that seeks to mirror the performance of the BSE India Sector Leaders Index. As with all index funds, regulatory constraints may at times prevent the fund from holding all index constituents in the same proportion, which could result in a tracking error. Any dividends received will be reinvested, helping compound returns and enhance fund value over the long term. The launch coincides with ICICI Prudential Life’s silver jubilee year and the fund is currently open for investment. In terms



of asset allocation, the fund will invest between 95% and 100% of its corpus in equities that form part of the underlying index. Up to 5% may be allocated to debt and money market instruments, including units of debt mutual funds, primarily to meet liquidity requirements as prescribed by regulations. The minimum investment amount has been set at ₹1,000, with additional investments permitted, subject to applicable stamp duty. Commenting on the launch, Manish Kumar,

Chief Investment Officer, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company Limited, said the fund offers a straightforward way for investors to tap into India’s long-term growth story. “By bringing together proven market leaders from over 20 sectors in a single, rule-based portfolio, the fund removes the complexity of stock selection while providing diversified exposure to some of the most influential companies in the economy,” he said.

# Piramal Finance to exit insurance venture Sanlam acquires stake for Rs 600 crore

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## Ishaan Khatter Reveals the Hidden ‘Hazard’ of Fame and Overexposure

**Mumbai:** Ishaan Khatter may not be as prolific as many of his contemporaries, but the actor has steadily built a reputation for choosing substance over numbers. With Homebound emerging as India’s official entry to the Oscars 2026 in the International Feature Film category, Ishaan once again finds himself at the centre of critical acclaim. Headlining the film alongside Vishal Jethwa, Ishaan’s performance has been widely praised, reinforcing his belief that quality will always outweigh quantity.

During Zoom’s Best Performances Male 2025 roundtable, Ishaan candidly addressed whether he fears being overexposed in today’s media-saturated world. Acknowledging the pressures that come with constant visibility, the actor said that while overexposure is a reality, it is equally important for actors to set personal limits. Talking to Zoom, Ishaan said, “In a



media-heavy world, Dilip Sahab has been talking about this since the 70s that overexpose karke you run a hazard as an actor. We’re living in a very overexposed world. There has to be a line you need to make for yourself. Agar sabki sunte jayenge, you look back 10 years down the line to see maine voh kiya hi nahi joh mujhe karna tha (When you look back 10 years down the line, you will notice how people’s opinions drove your career and that’s not where you wanted to be). Vahi karta reh gaya joh sab mujhe keh rahe the. (I would end up doing what

others said.)”

The actor further stressed that social media exposure should not be dictated by trends or external expectations. Reflecting on how rapidly the world has changed post-pandemic, Ishaan pointed out that artists must consciously decide what they want to prioritise. He added, “Everyone has some value to give and it is a changing world, and we are coming to terms with it. Two to three years of COVID felt like the world had flipped a decade. It is a personal choice how much you wish to expose and what your priority is.

## Best Debut Winners Ahaan Panday and Aneet Padda Share Emotional Moment

**Mumbai:** Ahaan Panday and Aneet Padda continue to bask in the success of their blockbuster debut film, Saiyaara. Months after the film’s release, the buzz around the duo shows no signs of slowing down. On Friday, the actors were honoured with the Best Debutant Actor of the Year awards at the NDTV Indian of the Year event held in New Delhi.

While Ahaan was present to receive the award, Aneet could not attend the ceremony due to her exams. However, her absence did not stop her from making an impact. Ahaan read out a heartfelt and witty note penned by his co-star, drawing warm applause from the audience. Before reading the message, Ahaan shared, “Aneet is not here with us today. She is getting the same award in the female category and she actually had something to say. She sent me a note to read.” Reading Aneet’s words, he said, “Good evening everyone.

Unfortunately, I couldn’t be here tonight, but fortunately Ahaan lost the bet and he is lending me his voice. I am hoping the sticker is doing enough to convince you that I am somewhere nearby. He did win one bet unfortunately, so you won’t hear his high pitched Aneet voice tonight. He did it alarmingly good.”

In her deeply emotional note, Aneet reflected on her journey into cinema, thanking director Mohit Suri, producer Akshay Vidhani, and Aditya Chopra for believing in Saiyaara and in two “imperfect, unconventional kids.” “I grew up far away from sets and spotlights, no map for how a life like this is built. Just a feeling that wouldn’t leave me alone that there was something I wanted to say even before I knew how to say it. Cinema gave that feeling a language, love gave it a reason and this year those two met through Mohit Suri’s magic, through Akshay Vidhani taking your



chance on a film and on two imperfect, unconventional kids. Through Adi sir’s faith and legacy he continues to built with such integrity and love.

“Thank you NDTV for this honour for seeing me. To my mom, dad, sister, to my dadi and my home. My dadoo who taught me the language of love, thank you for giving me piece of you. I carry them and return to them when I feel lost. Thank you Nitya Mehra and Karan Kapadia for making space for me and showing me how to take space and thank you babaji for this beautiful mys-

terious life. I promise to keep feeling honestly, pass it on in the smallest way how I know. Through a look, a line, a moment on the movie screen. And I promise to never forget that somewhere, someone is sitting alone with a dream wondering if it’s enough and I promise that it is,” she concluded.

“I will begin shooting very soon, in a couple of months. It is an action film and it’s being led by three people who are under the age of 30. It’s something that has not been done for a very long time. Audience will have to wait for it,” Ahaan said.

## Ahaan Panday Confirms His Next Film with Ali Abbas Zafar is an Action Thriller



**Mumbai:** Ahaan Panday, the breakout star who debuted with the blockbuster romantic film Saiyaara, has officially confirmed the details of his much-anticipated second project. The actor revealed that he is set to lead a high-octane action film directed by blockbuster filmmaker Ali Abbas Zafar, with shooting scheduled to commence very soon.

Speaking at a recent public event, Panday put an end to months of industry speculation regarding his follow-up role. Shifting gears dramatically from his romantic debut, he confirmed that his next film will be an intense action drama, signaling his versatility and ambition to conquer different genres early in his career. “It is an Ali Abbas Zafar film,” Ahaan stated. “I don’t know if I should say too much, but all I can say

is I will begin shooting very soon, in a couple of months. It is an action film and it’s being led by three people who are under the age of 30. It’s something that has not been done for a very long time. Audience will have to wait for it.”

The quick turnaround time for filming highlights the meticulous planning by director Zafar and the production house, Yash Raj Films (YRF). Zafar, known for delivering colossal action hits like Sultan and Tiger Zinda Hai, is reportedly keen on presenting Panday in a raw, realistic action avatar. To achieve this, Ahaan Panday has already begun an intensive training regimen. Sources indicate the actor is undergoing a strict two-month preparation schedule, focusing on diverse action disciplines, including hand-to-hand combat and weapon training. Reports suggest

this demanding prep is designed to give Ahaan the agility and physical presence necessary for Zafar’s high-impact vision. The untitled film is generating buzz not just for its genre, but for its young core cast. While Ahaan Panday leads the trio under 30, it has been reported that actress Sharvari will be joining him as the co-lead, marking a fresh on-screen pairing. The project is backed by YRF, marking Ali Abbas Zafar’s fifth collaboration with the banner and producer Aditya Chopra, a partnership that has historically resulted in massive commercial successes. In addition to the youthful energy, the film is set to have a significant international canvas. Filming is expected to kick off in March 2026, with the United Kingdom serving as a primary shooting location. The team is reportedly planning to cover multiple cities, including London, Manchester, and Leeds, leveraging diverse backdrops for the film’s stylish action sequences.

Following the phenomenal box-office success of Saiyaara, which earned Ahaan high praise for his emotional performance, his move into the action genre demonstrates a strategic effort to showcase a completely different facet of his talent. With a powerhouse action director like Ali Abbas Zafar at the helm, this forthcoming action thriller is quickly becoming one of the most anticipated releases for the next year.

## Aryan Khan Dedicates First Project Award to Mother Gauri Khan

**Mumbai:** Aryan Khan, Shah Rukh Khan’s son, created a lot of buzz with his directorial debut The Ba\*\*\*ds of Bollywood on Netflix. It was well received by the viewers and has now earned him his first award. Aryan won the Best Debutant Director of the Year award at the NDTV Indian of the Year event in New Delhi. What also caught everyone’s attention was Aryan’s acceptance speech in Hindi where he dedicated his award to his mother Gauri Khan.

After receiving the prestigious award, Aryan Khan said, “First, I would like to thank the cast, crew, and Netflix for believing in a first-time director. Congratulations to all the winners tonight-this is my first award. I hope to win more. Mere dad ke tarah, mujhe bhi awards bohot pasand hai, but yeh award unke liye nahi.” He added, “This award is for my mom kyunki meri mom mujhe hamesha kehti hain jaldi sona, logun ka mazak nahi udana aur gaali galoch bilkul nahi... aur aaj inhi sab cheezun ke liye mujhe yeh award mila hai.. Thank you for making my mom the happiest woman in the world and I know aaj ghar jaake mujhe thodhi kum dant padegi.” Earlier this month, IMDb awarded Aryan’s directorial debut series, The Ba\*\*\*ds of Bollywood, their Most Popular Indian Series of 2025. In response to the success, Aryan Khan expressed gratitude and promised to



work hard for the audience. He stated that The Ba\*\*\*ds of Bollywood has become a part of the ‘culture’ and that this is what he has always sought to do with his directorial work. He said, “Wanted this show to be a celebration of the madness, the magic, the mischief, and the raw ambition that fuels this industry. No soft edges, no pretending, we told the story the way it deserved to be told, and audiences across the world showed up for it in a massive way.”

In September, Aryan made his directorial debut with Netflix’s series The Ba\*\*\*ds of Bollywood. The audience praised the satirical comedy, which starred Lakshya, Raghav Juyal, Sahher Bamba and Bobby Deol in lead parts. The show, a satire on the Hindi film industry, delves into power battles within Bollywood as well as the problems that outsiders confront in trying to remain relevant. It also stars Anya Singh, Mona Singh and Manoj Pahwa in crucial roles.

## Teaser Release Date Confirmed for Jason Sanjay’s Wrapped Film, Sigma

Sigma teaser drops December 23

**Chennai:** Lyca Productions has officially announced the completion of filming for Sigma, the upcoming action adventure headlined by Sundeeep Kishan and directed by debutant Jason Sanjay. The update was shared on Friday, along with the confirmation that the film’s teaser will be released on December 23 at 5 pm, giving audiences their first proper glimpse into the world of Sigma.

The announcement marks a key milestone for the project, which has steadily generated curiosity for its genre blend and scale. With principal photography now wrapped, the focus shifts firmly to postproduction, where the makers are expected to fine tune the film’s action set pieces, visual effects, and musical transitions. While a release date is yet to be locked, the teaser launch sig-



nals that Sigma is entering its final lap toward the big screen. Sigma is positioned as a high energy entertainer that follows the journey of a fiercely independent man who challenges conventions while pursuing audacious goals. The narrative fuses the thrill of a treasure hunt with the pressure-cooker-intensity of a heist, promising a ride that balances action,

adventure, and humour. By centering its story on a protagonist who operates on his own terms, the film aims to tap into a sense of individuality and rebellion that resonates with contemporary audiences. The film brings together a diverse ensemble cast that adds texture and intrigue to its storyline. Alongside Sundeeep Kishan, Sigma features Faria Abdul-

lah, Raju Sundaram, Anbu Thasan, Yog Japee, Sampath Raj, Kiran Konda, and Magalakshmi Sudharsanan. The makers have also hinted at several cameo appearances, designed to surprise viewers and enhance the film’s entertainment quotient. Adding to media reports it is being suggesting that Catherine Tresa may have been brought on board for a special dance number. While this has not yet been officially confirmed by the production house, the speculation has only heightened interest around the film’s musical segments. Sigma was shot across multiple locations, lending it a visually expansive feel. From Chennai and Salem to the scenic backdrops of Thalakona and international stretches in Thailand, the film’s locations reflect its adventurous spirit.

## Groundbreaking Star Bowen Yang Departs SNL to Focus on Film Career

**Agency:** Saturday Night Live (SNL) is set for a major change as one of its most popular faces is preparing to say goodbye. Bowen Yang, one of the strongest and fan favourite performers, will leave the long-running show after his final appearance in the latest episode, hosted by his Wicked co-star Ariana Grande. His exit comes at a time when the show has already seen several cast members depart ahead of season 51.

He first joined the show in 2018 as a writer and stepped in front of the camera a year later. The news did not come as a total surprise, as Yang had earlier shared that he was thinking about the right time to step aside. According to him, the show must keep changing as new talents are coming in and at some point, older cast members need to step aside. Bowen Yang, who has received five Emmy nominations, made history in 2019 as SNL’s first Chinese American cast member and one of the show’s openly gay performers. Before his departure, several others had also left the series, including Ego Nwodim, Heidi Gardner, John Higgins, Michael Longfellow, Devon Walker and Emil Wakim. Hinting about his exit, Bowen Yang had told People, “SNL, it’s just this moving, living, breathing thing. Especially after the 50th, I’m seeing what life after the show is like and how beautiful it is, and how so many people, no matter how long they were at the show, are just with their families and loving



their lives and not letting the years take away any of that experience for them. And then with SNL, as I said, it’s this growing, living thing where new people come in and you do have to sort of make way for them and to grow and to keep elevating themselves. And that inevitably requires me to sort of hang it up at some point, but I don’t know what the vision is yet.” “The new season of SNL, I’m just like, ‘Oh, right. My time isn’t my own.’ And I tell my friends, ‘I’m not going to really see you guys until June.’ And people that I’ve gone on a couple solid dates with, I’m like, ‘Hey, it’s not for lack of interest. My time is really slipping away from me and I’m so sorry and it’s not a you thing, it’s a me thing.’” Yang added.

chai hai aur woh sachai hum entertainment, filmon, literature ke zariye hum humesha dikhte rahenge. World map par hum kisi bhi zariye se ye dikha sake and we can put a foot in the door and say we are proud of the diversity of our country, our legacy and the truth of the country.”

Moreover, after receiving the award at the prestigious event, Vicky Kaushal said, “Thank you for this honour. This is truly, truly special. It’s a humbling honour. This award is for my family and my little one, who has come in as a blessing. Thank you so much. First time I’m out

of town after becoming a father. I’m sure when he grows up, and watches this, he’ll be proud of his dad. “

On the work front, Vicky delivered one of India’s highest-grossing films of 2025, Chhaava. Helmed by Laxman Utekar, the epic historical drama collected over Rs

800 crore worldwide at the box office. Vicky will next be seen in Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s film Love & War. The film also stars Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt. Vicky Kaushal played minor roles in Bombay Velvet and Luv Shuv Tey Chicken Khurana (2012).

## BBT 9 Double Exit: Sanjjanaa and Demon Pavan

**Hyderabad:** Bigg Boss Telugu 9 is drawing to a close this Sunday, December 21, 2025. Several Tollywood celebrities are expected to attend the grand finale, which will air on Star Maa at 7 PM. The contestants still in the race for the trophy are

Thanuja, Emmanuel, Kalyan Padala, Pavan, and Sanjjanaa. According to current trends, the top three finalists are likely to be Kalyan, Thanuja, and Emmanuel. Speculation is rife that Sanjjanaa and Demon Pavan will be evicted in tonight’s episode.

## Ankita Lokhande, Vicky Jain celebrate birthday

**Mumbai:** Ankita Lokhande celebrated her birthday on Friday with her family and closest friends by her side. A clip from her party last night is going viral, where the actress is cutting a cake with the paparazzi and her husband, Vicky Jain, by her side. The actress candidly interacted with them and was later joined by her mother as well.

In the clip, Ankita was seen cutting the cake and offering it to the photographers. She was later seen jokingly throwing flowers at them. As her mother joined the frame, the photographers asked her to bless her daughter. The duo shared a warm hug as well. Ankita was seen in a green gown, while Vicky was seen in a black blazer. Earlier, Vicky Jain took to Instagram and shared a sweet photo of himself holding Ankita. The two were photographed twinning in white and striking a passionate pose. Vicky Jain expressed his affection for Ankita in the description of his post, referring to her as the “protector” of her people. He appreciated the actress’ loving character and stated that he would not be with her on her birthday owing to a work engagement, but that he would see her shortly.

“Happy birthday to the most caring and nurturing soul. I may not have always understood the strength you carry in the form of deep love and belonging, but that is exactly what binds us. Once you realise it, you know how important it is to keep everything together. You are a protector of your people and you never hesitate to take a stand when it truly matters.



# In Switzerland’s Kingdom Of Snow

A train journey from Geneva to Interlaken (Ost) is not just a visual treat but also a delightful study in the myriad hues of nature, as if painted on a romanticist’s canvas. The route unfolds with the vineyards of the Geneva region, post-card-perfect Swiss villages, and large piles of marshmallows for cow fodder announcing the arrival of winter. As the train chugs ahead, breathtaking mountains rise in the distance, their summits shrouded in mist, while frosty grass gradually surrenders to a white snow sheet. By the time you reach Lauterbrunnen on a bus from Interlaken (Ost), the snow sheet has turned into a thick blanket. For you’ve entered a magical kingdom of snow, dotted with the solitude of dreamy Swiss villages and a magical monochrome. Finally, as a cable car lifts you to Birg, you can’t help but gasp: “How much snow is too much?” Gateway to some of Switzerland’s most famous mountains, the pristine village of Lauterbrunnen is known for its magnificent landscapes featuring towering cliffs, wondrous waterfalls cascading down from them, and lush meadows straight out of the pages of a fairytale. From here, a cable car, or gondola, takes you higher into the Bernese Alps—to the car-free village of Murren; then on to Birg, another mid-station famous for an exhilarating Thrill Walk and panoramic skyline views; and, finally, to Schilthorn, an iconic peak at 2,970 meters (9,744 feet). At the summit stands Piz Gloria, the revolving restaurant made famous by the 1969 James Bond film, On Her Majesty’s Secret Service. Here, guests can enjoy a unique dining experience, complete with a 360-degree view of the Swiss Alps, including the majestic



peaks of Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau. Perched on the edge of Birg mountain, the Thrill Walk offers an exhilarating blend of adventure and awe-inspiring nature-watching. On sunny days, the snow draped across the peaks, valleys, and glaciers glows with a brilliance so divine that no camera lens can truly capture it. During precipitation, the scenery transforms dramatically as snowflakes descend gently, enveloping the surroundings in a misty haze that exudes its own enchanting charm. At an altitude of 2,677 meters (8,780 feet), the Walk is a narrow, open-air steel walkway designed to thrill and challenge. Highlights include a glass floor that gives visitors a vertigo-inducing view straight down to the snow world below, a rope bridge with a safety net, and a crawl tunnel for those seeking some extra adrenaline rush. Each section is meticulously maintained, with sturdy guardrails ensuring the safety of visitors while they take part in this breathtaking alpine experience. Just one station down by cable car, the picturesque village of Murren awaits

visitors with its dreamy charm. The descent itself is mesmerising, offering a bird’s-eye view of matchbox-sized houses, crisscrossing roads, alpine trees, and clouds suspended like veils over the snow-covered landscape. Adorned with wooden chalets, coniferous trees and serene cottages, it sits on a plateau at 1,638 meters (5,374 feet) above sea level. This tranquil village, which exudes a special Swiss countryside charm, boasts a spectacular landscape; it is also a base for visitors who arrive for mountain sports such as hiking and skiing. On a snowy December day, Murren is a white wonderland, exhibiting an unparalleled beauty in an otherwise muted monochrome. Go around the village on foot—and you will pass by Murren’s quaint chalets, a Catholic chapel, picturesque houses, small eateries, fine-dining restaurants, and cheerful Christmas decorations. As you trudge along, you will feel the soft snow cover below your feet and the cool snowflakes falling gently on your face. Layer up well, for the temperature could plummet to -10 degrees

Celsius and beyond. As a magical evening sets in, the charming monochrome fades into a glittery landscape. Festive lights shine bright against a dark backdrop, casting a warm glow that makes the falling snowflakes shimmer. It’s an experience so captivating that words alone cannot do it justice. Jungfraujoeh is called “Top of Europe” not because it is the highest location in the continent but because it is Europe’s highest railway station at 3,454 meters (11,332 feet), which can be accessed from the charming villages of Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen. In the final stretch, the train travels through a tunnel carved into the heart of the Swiss Alps—a true engineering gem. Along the way, visitors can enjoy the awe-inspiring beauty of the Eiger and Mönch mountains, with the train’s observation points offering stunning vistas. At the very top, there is an open-air steel walkway serving as an observation point; it boasts a towering Christmas tree. Make your way to the gateway to the snow world and marvel at the magnificence of the mighty Aletsch Glacier, the longest glacier in the Alps stretching over 22 kilometers (14 miles). Immerse yourself in pristine nature, where the sky is so intensely blue that it almost feels unreal. Wear warm clothes and don a pair of sunglasses, for the cold air bites and the sun gleams fiercely. Look beyond the crowd jostling for selfies and take a pause. Here, in this majestic realm, snow stretches endlessly across mountains and glaciers. The scene is vast and breathtaking, a beauty so profound that you could lose yourself in its stillness for hours—far removed from the rush of everyday life, enveloped in a peaceful silence that exhibits nature’s purest form.

# Plan Your Tranquil Honeymoon in Australia



Australia offers couples the perfect blend of romance, adventure, and relaxation, with pristine beaches, vibrant cultural experiences, and thrilling activities. Whether you’re strolling hand-in-hand on sun-kissed shores, enjoying candlelit dinners under the stars, or exploring breathtaking landscapes, Australia promises cherished memories. Here’s a guide to planning your dream honeymoon. Autumn (Feb to May) is the ideal time to visit, offering mild weather, picturesque vineyards, and stunning coastal regions perfect for exploration. Australia is well-connected to major international cities, with flights landing in Sydney, Melbourne, or Brisbane. Once in Australia, domestic flights, trains, and road trips make exploring easy. Consider purchasing a local travel pass for savings on intercity travel. Australia’s diverse food scene offers couples a variety of gastronomic experiences: Sydney: Enjoy fresh seafood at waterfront restaurants in Circular Quay with views of the Opera House and Harbour Bridge. Visit the Sydney Fish Market for a true culinary adventure. Melbourne: Indulge in the city’s renowned coffee culture and explore hidden cafés and fine-dining rooftop venues with skyline views. Tasmania: Experience farm-to-table dining with fresh seafood, local produce, and award-winning wines. Explore Hobart’s Salamanca Market or the Tamar Valley wine region. Adelaide: Visit the Barossa Valley for exquisite Shiraz and gourmet dishes at vineyard restaurants. Known as Australia’s cultural capital, Melbourne offers: National Gallery of Victoria for international and Australian artHosier Lane for vibrant street artMelbourne International Comedy Festival (March-April) Sydney: A panoramic view of the harbourTasmania: Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National ParkGold Coast: Surfing, jet-skiing, and theme parks Barossa Valley (South Australia): Sip world-class wines amidst picturesque countryside views.

# Planning A Trip To Malaysia? 5 Captivating Destinations That Take You Beyond The Familiar

Beyond the towering skyscrapers of Kuala Lumpur and the vibrant streets of Penang, Malaysia holds a wealth of lesser-known destinations that promise unforgettable adventures. These hidden gems reveal the country’s remarkable diversity, offering something for every traveller – from pristine islands and historic landmarks to cultural treasures and natural wonders! If you’re planning your next getaway to the heart of South-East Asia, fly with Scoot, the low-cost subsidiary of Singapore Airlines, and explore these incredible destinations at unbeatable prices: Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah, serves as a gateway to some of Malaysia’s most stunning islands, located in the Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park. Just a short boat ride away, these islands offer diverse experiences. Gaya Island, the largest in the marine park, is a peaceful retreat for nature enthusiasts, with rugged hills, jungle trails, and secluded beaches. Manukan Island is renowned for its golden sands and vibrant coral reefs, making it a hotspot for

snorkeling and diving. Sapi Island, on the other hand, caters to thrill-seekers with activities like jet skiing, parasailing, and kayaking. What makes island hopping in Kota Kinabalu unique is the convenience: the islands are close to each other, allowing visitors to explore multiple destinations in a single day. Whether you’re seeking adventure or tranquility, the turquoise waters and lush landscapes of these islands won’t disappoint. Known as the birthplace of Malaysia’s petroleum industry, Miri is a city that seamlessly blends its industrial roots with stunning natural attractions. The iconic ‘Grand Old Lady’ oil well, perched atop Canada Hill, stands as a testament to the city’s heritage and offers panoramic views of the coastline and cityscape. Nature lovers can venture into Niah National Park, famous for its prehistoric caves adorned with ancient rock art. A short journey away lies the UNESCO-listed Gunung Mulu National Park, home to striking limestone formations and vast cave systems, including the world-renowned Deer Cave and the Sarawak Chamber. For a relaxed evening, Coco Cabana

is the place to be. Overlooking the South China Sea, this scenic retreat is perfect for enjoying sunsets, local performances, or simply unwinding by the waterfront. Miri is a city that offers a harmonious blend of history, culture, and natural beauty. Penang Island is celebrated as a cultural and culinary hub, offering an array of experiences for visitors. George Town, its capital and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a vibrant blend of the old and new. Colonial-era architecture coexists with modern street art, while cultural landmarks like the Khoo Kongsi Clan House and the Blue Mansion tell stories of Penang’s rich past. Food is central to Penang’s identity. The island’s street food scene is legendary, drawing influences from Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Peranakan cuisines. Must-try dishes include Char Kway Teow, Assam Laksa, and Nasi Kandar. Nature enthusiasts can explore Penang National Park, where lush rainforests, mangroves, and pristine beaches await. For those seeking panoramic views, Penang Hill provides a breathtaking vantage point over the island. Penang’s

unique blend of culture, cuisine, and natural beauty ensures a memorable experience. Nestled in Sarawak, Sibuan is often overlooked but brims with cultural and culinary treasures. Visitors can explore the iconic Iban longhouses, communal wooden structures that offer insights into the traditions and lifestyle of the Iban people. Many of these longhouses host indigenous ceremonies, providing a rare opportunity to witness Sarawak’s vibrant heritage firsthand. The Sibuan Waterfront, situated along the Batang Rejang River, is a bustling area ideal for leisurely walks, visits to local markets, or embarking on boat cruises to nearby villages. Sibuan’s night markets are a foodie’s paradise, serving local favorites like Kampua Noodles and Sarawak Laksa. As a gateway to exploring Borneo’s interior, Sibuan combines culture, cuisine, and nature, making it a perfect starting point for deeper adventures in Sarawak. Malacca, one of Malaysia’s most historic cities, offers a rich tapestry of cultural and colonial heritage. Recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Malacca’s

charm lies in its well-preserved landmarks, such as the 16th-century A Famosa fortress and the Dutch-era Stadthuys, a striking red building that now houses a history museum. The city’s cuisine reflects its multicultural history, blending Malay, Chinese, and Portuguese influences. Peranakan, or Nyonya, cuisine is a standout, featuring dishes like Ayam Pongteh—a savory chicken stew—and Laksa Lemak, a creamy, spicy noodle soup. A stroll through Jonker Street offers a mix of antique shops, street food vendors, and a lively atmosphere that captures the essence of Malacca. From the serene islands of Kota Kinabalu to the historic streets of Malacca, Malaysia’s uncovered gems are a testament to the country’s incredible diversity and beauty. Whether you’re seeking adventure, culture, or simply a relaxing getaway, these destinations promise enriching experiences. With Scoot’s affordable fares and convenient flights to Malaysia’s best kept secrets, your Malaysian holiday is just a click away, making your next adventure even more pocket friendly.



# Five Indian Burger Companies Are Revolutionizing the Bite

In the past, if you wanted a burger, you had to go with the closest international chain. Well-known brands, well-known menus, and typical cuisine. However, India’s palate has changed. These days, there are a ton of strong, creative, and unapologetically Desi native burger companies available to us. They are reinventing what a “good burger” means for Indian palates, not just matching players from other countries. Here are five Indian burger companies that have stoked our appetites and explain why they might replace the industry titans as your new favorite. Bubble tea and Korean street food might be what Boba Bhai is known for, but its burgers have quietly become cult favourites. This brand knows how to make comfort food interesting, layered with flavour, texture, and a little drama. Their Korean BBQ Fried Chicken Burger is a masterpiece of contrasts: crispy chicken glazed in smoky-sweet BBQ sauce, topped with fresh slaw and a kick of gochujang mayo. For vegetarians, the Korean Honey Sriracha Paneer Burger is a revelation, crispy paneer tossed in honey-sriracha, with crunchy lettuce and pickled veggies. It’s indulgent, yes, but also fresh and balanced in a way that keeps you coming back. What makes Boba Bhai stand out is its fearless mashup of global inspiration and local sensibilities. It’s not

trying to replicate an American burger; it’s making something entirely its own and winning over a generation that values flavour over familiarity. One of the first brands to successfully “Indianize” the burger, Burger Singh has carved out a loyal fan base with quirky names and punchy flavours. Top picks? The United States of Punjab (a spiced-up chicken patty with fiery mayo) and the Amritsari Murgh Makhani, Udhta Punjab 2.0, Bihari Gosht, Nikku Singh and many more. This is the brand you turn to when you want your burger to taste like

a Friday-night snack, not a Tuesday office lunch. Mumbai’s beloved vada pav reimagined as a burger? That’s Jumboking’s sweet spot. What started as a vada pav brand has expanded into a full burger lineup that’s affordable, filling, and truly Indian at heart. Fan favourites include the Aloo Tikki Burger (spiced potato patty with tangy chutney) and the Paneer Schezwan Burger (paneer with a fiery Indo-Chinese twist). If you want comfort food on a budget, this is the place. Louis Burger takes a chef-driven



approach to the humble burger. The quality of ingredients and attention to detail are what set it apart. Try the Truffle Shuffle (juicy chicken with truffle aioli) or the Cottage Cheese Smash (a grilled paneer patty with house-made sauces). It’s indulgent but never overdone, perfect for those who want something premium without it feeling overhyped. Wat-a-Burger is for the adventurous eater, the one who wants bold sauces, unexpected toppings, and variety. The Maharaja Chicken Burger (spiced chicken with creamy dressing) and the Cheese Overload Veggie Burger (as gooey and satisfying as it sounds) are big sellers. It’s fast, it’s fun, and it doesn’t take itself too seriously, which is exactly what we love about it. National Burger Day isn’t just an excuse to grab a meal; it’s a reminder of how far Indian food culture has come. We no longer rely on imports to tell us what’s “good.” Brands like Boba Bhai, Burger Singh, Jumboking, Louis Burger, and Wat-a-Burger are proving that Indian creativity, when applied to something as simple as a burger, can create flavours that are every bit as crave-worthy, if not more so than their international counterparts.

## Kids can eat healthy tiffin options like idli and chapati

Parents always struggle to pack the proper school lunch. It must be easy to consume in between classes, nutritious, and satisfying. Idlis and chapatis are two popular options in Indian homes. While both are vital, which is the superior school tiffin? Let’s make a comparison. A fermented batter of rice and urad dal is used to make idli. It is easy to digest, light, and fluffy. Probiotics that are good for the gut are produced through fermentation, which also improves nutrient absorption. Idli is a good option for kids who require a mild yet stimulating supper because a typical serving is low in calories and fat. Chapati, on the other hand, is made from whole wheat flour and is rich in complex carbohydrates and fibre. It provides slow-releasing energy, keeping children full longer and preventing

mid-morning hunger pangs. Chapatis are also a good source of iron and B vitamins. For school lunches, practicality matters. Idlis are bite-sized, non-messy, and easy for children to eat quickly without the need for extra accompaniments. Chapati usually requires a curry or sabzi, which may spill or turn soggy in the lunchbox, though dry curries or a roll-style chapati can work well. While chapati is more filling, it may feel heavy for some children, especially if eaten in a rush. Idlis, being steamed and soft, are lighter on the stomach and easy to digest even when eaten cold. For very active kids who need sustained energy, chapati might be more suitable, but for younger ones, idli is often the easier choice. Both idli and chapati have their place in a healthy school lunch. If you want a light, gut-friendly, quick-to-eat

meal, idli is the winner. But if your child needs a filling, energy-packed option to stay full till afternoon, chapati works best. A smart way is to alternate between the two. Pack idlis with chutney or podi for one day and chapati rolls with vegetables the next. This not only balances nutrition but also keeps your child’s tiffin exciting.



## Recipes for Breakfast That Help You Get Up and Shine



Start your day right with delicious options like waffles, omelets, granola and more. Perhaps it’s just us, but the idea of pancakes dripping with syrup makes getting out of bed and going about the day much simpler. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that we have a ton of fantastic breakfast food ideas. From nutritious

breakfasts that will keep you energized and full to ones you can quickly prepare and eat on the run, this assortment has something for everyone. You shouldn’t ever have to skip breakfast again thanks to these simple recipes for muffins, French toast, breakfast casseroles, and more. Are you unsure of where to begin? Give a chaffle a try. The world has gone crazy over chaffles, which are low-carb waffles made of cheese and eggs. Its crispy edges and fluffy texture make it simple to understand why. A chaffle is a low-carb, cheese-and-egg-based waffle that’s taken the keto world by storm, thanks to its fluffy texture and crispy edges. We opted to use Cheddar for the cheese and added scallions and parsley for a sweet and

savory twist on the popular dish. For the fluffiest chaffle, use only finely shredded cheese—it will blend better with the egg than large shreds. Preheat a waffle iron to medium-high. Whisk the eggs in a large bowl until well beaten and smooth. Whisk in the Cheddar, scallions, parsley, 1/4 teaspoon salt and a few grinds of pepper. Coat the waffle iron with nonstick cooking spray, then ladle a heaping 1/4 cup of batter into each section. Close the lid and cook until well browned and fluffy, 4 to 5 minutes. Use a small offset spatula or tongs to transfer the chaffles to a serving plate. Repeat with the remaining batter. Top each chaffle with a pat of butter and drizzle with maple syrup. To make blueberry coffee cake muffins Preheat

# Five Supplements Women Need to Take After Turning Forty

As women begin to age, they face a variety of physical and hormonal difficulties. Making healthy lifestyle changes is crucial after the age of 40 in order to maintain your heart health, bone density, long-lasting energy, and mental stability. Women frequently neglect their own diet and health because of their hectic schedules and obligations. Supplements can fill up these nutritional gaps and help people maintain their preferred health conditions while lowering their risk of disease. These five vitamins are recommended for women over 40. A healthy dose of calcium is important for women to retain their bone density even when they start ageing. Reduction of estrogen during perimenopause and menopause leads to bone density decline, which paves the path for osteoporosis and bone weakness. For women above 40, it is recommended to take



calcium supplements that help fulfil a daily calcium intake of at least 1,000 mg. To maintain bone strength and health of the immune system, women also require sufficient intake of Vitamin D in their bodies. As they approach ageing, women’s skin shows decreased ability to produce vitamin D from sunlight exposure. A Vitamin D supplement could help produce the essential nutrient. According to medical standards, women in the age bracket of 40 and 60 must take between

600 and 800 IU of vitamin D daily. For ageing women, magnesium is another essential nutrient that helps convert food into enhanced energy for sustained multitasking. After 40, a magnesium supplement would also help women control blood pressure, experience muscle relaxation and preserve the stability of their heart rhythm. Magnesium deficiency amongst women is observed to cause spasms, migraines and excessive fatigue. Omega-3 Fatty Acids protect heart health, brain

functioning and joint wellness among women aged 40 and above. As females in this age bracket are more prone to heart diseases, omega-3 fatty acids work against inflammation and stand firm to prevent the harmful effects of high cholesterol levels. These acids exist in fish oil and also support brain operation by enhancing memory and concentration powers during hormonal shifts. Vitamin B12 is a nutrient that supports the generation of red blood cells while also protecting the nervous system in the body. The tiredness, muscle strain and memory issues you develop after reaching a certain age could be a sign of deficiency and poor body absorption of Vitamin B12. Supplements that contain Vitamin B12 help boost energy levels and also play an instrumental role in protecting cognitive function and preserving nerve health in women.

## Painkillers paracetamol, ibuprofen causing antibiotic resistance? Study reveals how

Globally used over-the-counter painkillers such as ibuprofen and paracetamol could be quietly fueling one of the world’s biggest health threats - antibiotic resistance, according to new research from the University of South Australia. In what is described as the first study of its kind, researchers found that these two commonly used non-antibiotic medications, when taken either individually or together, could increase bacterial mutations. This, in turn, makes Escherichia coli (E. coli), a bacteria often responsible for gut and urinary tract infections, more resistant to ciprofloxacin, a broad-spectrum antibiotic (that kills many types of bacteria effectively).

The study, led by associate professor Rietie Venter, revealed that the presence of ibuprofen and paracetamol not only reduced the effectiveness of ciprofloxacin but also led to increased resistance across multiple antibiotic classes. “Antibiotics have long been vital in treating infectious diseases, but their widespread overuse and misuse have driven a global rise in antibiotic-resistant bacteria. This is especially concerning in residential aged care facilities, where older adults are often prescribed multiple medications — not just antibiotics, but also drugs for pain, sleep, or blood pressure. Such polypharmacy creates an ideal breeding ground for gut bacteria to adapt and become resistant,” Dr. Venter said, whose research paper was published in the journal Antimicrobials and Resistance.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified antimicrobial resistance as a global public health threat, directly responsible for 1.27 million deaths worldwide in 2019. While earlier research has focused pri-

marily on antibiotic misuse, the new study suggests that the challenge is more complex, with common non-antibiotic medications also playing a role.

### MEDICATIONS THAT WERE A PART OF THE STUDY

The researchers tested nine drugs frequently used in aged care homes, including ibuprofen (an anti-inflammatory pain relief), diclofenac (an anti-inflammatory to treat arthritis), acetaminophen (paracetamol for pain and fever), tramadol (a stronger pain medication post-surgery), atorvastatin (to help lower cholesterol and fats in the blood), metformin (for high sugar

plained. The findings hold major importance for aged care facilities, where polypharmacy is the norm. Older residents are more likely to be prescribed long-term medications for chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, and sleep disorders, alongside antibiotics for infections.

### NOT TO CALL TO STOP PAIN-KILLERS

Such combinations, the study suggests, could accelerate the rise of resistant bacteria within vulnerable populations. Dr. Venter stressed that the results should not be interpreted as a call to stop using everyday painkillers. Instead, the study highlights the need



levels linked to diabetes), furosemide (for high blood pressure), temazepam (used to treat sleeping problems), pseudoephedrine (a decongestant). They found that both ibuprofen and paracetamol activated bacterial defence mechanisms, enabling E. coli to expel antibiotics and rendering them less effective. “When bacteria were exposed to ciprofloxacin alongside these painkillers, they developed more genetic mutations than when treated with the antibiotic alone. Not only did they resist ciprofloxacin, but they also showed increased resistance to several unrelated antibiotics,” Dr. Venter ex-

plained. The findings hold major importance for aged care facilities, where polypharmacy is the norm. Older residents are more likely to be prescribed long-term medications for chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, and sleep disorders, alongside antibiotics for infections.

“This doesn’t mean we should stop using these medications, but we do need to be more mindful about how they interact with antibiotics – and that includes looking beyond just two-drug combinations,” added Dr. Venter. The researchers have called for further investigations into drug interactions in long-term treatment regimes. They highlighted that the fight against antibiotic resistance can no longer be restricted to monitoring antibiotic misuse alone.

## McDonald’s Bets on Regional BBQ Flavors with New Gold Sauce Rollout

McDonald’s is closing out summer with the launch of a new menu innovation that highlights regional barbecue influences. The company will roll out the Special Edition Gold Sauce, a limited-time condiment developed as a fusion of North Carolina-style vinegar barbecue, honey, smoke, and mustard. The sauce has been designed to pair with



McDonald’s is closing out summer with the launch of a new menu innovation that highlights regional barbecue influences. The company will roll out the Special Edition Gold Sauce, a limited-time condiment developed as a fusion of North Carolina-style vinegar barbecue, honey, smoke, and mustard. The sauce has been designed to pair with

Gold Sauce, thick-cut applewood smoked bacon, and crinkle-cut pickles, served on a toasted potato roll.

Bacon Special Edition Gold Deluxe McCrispy Sandwich – Building on the classic sandwich, the deluxe option adds Gold Sauce, bacon, shredded lettuce, and roma tomatoes, also served on a toasted potato roll.

McCrispy Strips – Customers can opt to pair the Gold Sauce as a side with the chicken strips, which feature a golden-brown breading with black pepper seasoning. The new addition

reflects McDonald’s ongoing strategy to refresh its chicken lineup with regional and limited-time flavors. The Special Edition Gold Sauce will be available nationwide from September 3 at participating restaurants,

## New WHO-endorsed spatial mosquito repellent sheets reduces malaria risk by 50%, finds study

**New Delhi:** Malaria, dengue and other mosquito borne diseases led to several thousand deaths every year. There was no cure for the disease other than certain vaccines. However, scientists have now developed a new line of defence, spatial repellent sheets that emit mosquito-detering vapours. This new mosquito repellent is endorsed by the World Health Organisation (WHO). A recent study published in eBioMedicine, a part of The Lancet group, said that these mosquito repellents can reduce mosquito bites by more than 50 per cent. For the study, the researchers analysed 1.7 million mosquitoes for more than 25 years. This is the first significant innovation in controlling mosquito-borne diseases in more than four decades. The study was titled “Volatile Pyrethroid Spatial Repellents for Preventing Mosquito Bites”.

How Spatial Repellents Work to Protect Against Malaria, Dengue, and Zika?

Spatial repellents are lightweight paper-like devices that release pyrethroid-based chemicals into the air that keeps away mosquitoes. These are not like the usual topical lotions or coils and hence,

don’t need direct skin application, heat or electricity. These repellents are roughly the size of a paper and they give you protection for up to a year against mosquitoes that carry malaria, dengue, Zika, yellow fever, and West Nile virus. Study Finds Mosquito Bites Reduced by Over 50%



With Repellent Sheets The scientists found that spatial repellents reduced mosquito bites by 50 per cent. Certain trials have also recorded up to 75 per cent effectiveness against

Anopheles arabiensis which is one of the most dangerous malaria-carrying species. However, the studies found that the repellents worked both indoors and outdoors, thereby, offering more versatility than bed nets or insecticide sprays.

Safe, Affordable, and Effective: The Future of Mosquito-Borne Disease Prevention Compared to the existing mosquito repellents, spatial repellents are more accessible and available round the clock. Researchers say that these spatial repellents are safe to be used at home and in public spaces.

The vapours released by these repellents are similar to those used in WHO-approved bed nets, which have a well-documented safety profile. The study authors said, “These are lightweight, affordable, and easy to use—ideal for both rural and urban settings.”

Adoption of spatial repellents is expected to accelerate in high-burden regions across Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia, where vector-borne diseases remain a leading cause of death because WHO endorsement is now confirmed.

SPORTS

# Shrivalli Bhamidipaty and Sumit Nagal help the AOS Eagles win handily

**Bengaluru:** Home favourites Sumit Nagal, Shrivalli Bhamidipaty and Maaya Rajeswaran Revathi stole the show on the third day of the World Tennis League at the SM Krishna Stadium, Bengaluru. The AOS Eagles defeated VB Realty Hawks 22-12 in the first match of the day to extend their lead at the top. They finished the league stage of WTL with 65 points from three matches and have one foot into Saturday's final.

It was tennis' power couple, Gael Monfils and Elina Svitolina, who opened the show on Friday. However, this time, Monfils and Svitolina stood at the opposite



sides of the court in the mixed doubles contest. In an entertaining contest, Svitolina and Yuki Bhambri, playing for the Hawks, edged Monfils-Shrivalli 6-4. But India's leading singles player, Nagal, grounded the Hawks with a dominant performance in the

men's singles. The 28-year-old came out swinging against former Wimbledon finalist Denis Shapovalov, winning 6-1 to hand his team the momentum.

While Shrivalli cheered her team on from the dug-out on the first two days, she stepped into the spotlight effortlessly. After a competent performance in the mixed doubles, the 24-year-old locked horns against teen sensation Maaya, who trains at the Rafael Nadal Academy. Shrivalli quickly found her range, and wowed the Bengaluru crowd with her clean hitting as she beat the 16-year-old 6-2.

# World champion D Gukesh beats Alireza but Triveni Continental Kings stay on top

**New Delhi:** World Champion D Gukesh avenged his loss against Alireza Firouzja in the reverse fixture but defending champions Triveni Continental Kings did enough to beat PBG Alaskan Knights 10-9 to stay on top of the leader board after match day 6 while up-Grad Mumba Masters keep up the pressure on the leaders with a 11-6 win over Ganges Grandmasters in the Global Chess League (GCL), a joint initiative of Tech Mahindra and FIDE, on Friday. With the third edition of the GCL entering the second leg of the group stage, Triveni Continental Kings had an opportunity to extend their lead over Mumba Masters as they were to play two matches in a day.

But the champions first suffered a reversal against Alpine SG Pipers after their icon player Alireza Firouzja went down against Fabiano Caruana and the team needed a win



against Alaskan Knights to keep their nose ahead of Mumba Masters, who had taken the

top spot for a brief period after their win over Ganges Grandmasters.

The Continental Kings opened up a six-point advantage with Alexandra Kosteniuk beating Sara Khadem and Wei Yi getting the better of Arjun Erigaisi. However, Kateryna Lagno scored four points for the Knights with a win over Zhu Jiner to bring the team back in the match.

Gukesh, who had lost to Alireza in the first half of the tournament, played a solid game with black and made the most of his time advantage to inflict a second loss on the 22-year-old in a day in a rook-pawn endgame. But Gukesh's victory wasn't enough for Knights to seal their third successive win as Vidit Gujarathi finally found that winning momentum as he defeated Leinier Dominguez in 39 moves to ensure that his team stayed on top with 15 match points.

# What did Jitesh Sharma do incorrectly being left out of the T20 World Cup

**New Delhi:** While Shubman Gill's removal stole the news following India's T20 World Cup roster announcement, Jitesh Sharma's withdrawal left many supporters perplexed and irritated. A sizable portion of fans questioned on social media why a player who seemed to have established a distinct position in India's T20 setup was excluded at the very end. The selection panel attempted to provide clarity early. Speaking at the press conference in Mumbai, chief selector Ajit Agarkar stressed that Jitesh's omission was not a judgement on his ability, but a consequence of the team combination India wanted for the World Cup. "At the moment, when you look at combinations, if your wicketkeeper is going to bat at the top, the thought process was to have another wicketkeeper as backup, just in case there is any problem. Right now, Jitesh was there earlier and hasn't really done much wrong," Agarkar said. Despite that explanation, the disappointment around Jitesh's snub has lingered, largely because of the context in which he re-entered India's T20 plans.

His return to the national setup was driven by his impact for Royal Challengers Bengaluru, where he played a key role in their title-winning IPL campaign. Jitesh's ability to finish the innings under pressure and his sharp work behind the stumps made him a standout, and many felt that IPL run had pushed him firmly back into contention for India. At the same time, Sanju Samson's role in the side became increasingly uncertain. Despite a standout 2024 in which he scored three T20I centuries, including two in South Africa as an opener, he was pushed out of the top order after Shubman Gill returned during the Asia Cup. Samson was then moved around the middle order, which limited both his impact and continuity. The pattern continued on India's tour of Australia, where Samson was given only one opportunity at No. 3 before being left out of the XI altogether. Jitesh Sharma was preferred as the wicketkeeper instead, a call that seemed to highlight Jitesh's rising value in the setup, particularly as a specialist finisher aligned with India's evolving T20 approach.

# On a tough opening day at La Reserve, Sharma is late, Jarvis and Jamieson

*Shubhankar Sharma's performance at the AfrAsia Bank Mauritius Open was marked by a late stumble on a demanding opening day at La Reserve Links. Despite his efforts to cope with the challenging conditions, Sharma dropped three shots over two holes towards the finish, resulting in a two-over-par score.*



**New Delhi:** Shubhankar Sharma endured a late stumble on a difficult scoring day at the AfrAsia Bank Mauritius Open, dropping three shots over two holes towards the finish to shoot two-over-

par in the opening round at the challenging La Reserve Links. Fresh from regaining his DP World Tour card with a runner-up finish at the Quali-

fying School, Sharma showed resilience in tricky, rainy and windy conditions for much of the day. He was one under through 13 holes before a bogey followed by a double bogey -- the latter coming at the par-4 16th, where he needed two attempts to escape the rough -- derailed his momentum. Sharma signed for a 74 to sit tied 71st. "I knew the conditions were going to be tough, but that's what you expect here. It's an amazing course -- scenic and challenging. This is my first time at La Reserve, but I have good memories of Mauritius," Sharma said.

# Shubman Gill axed from T20 World Cup squad Selector Ajit Agarkar explains

**New Delhi:** India's T20 World Cup 2026 squad announcement delivered its biggest talking point with the omission of Shubman Gill from the 15-member group. Given Gill's stature, recent promotion to vice-captain and his importance in India's batting plans over the past two years, the decision immediately sparked debate around form, balance and long-term planning. The surprise was softened, however, by the clarity offered soon after. Both the selectors and the team leadership were quick to underline that Gill's exclusion was not a judgement on his ability, but a tactical call shaped by the team combination India want to take into the tournament, particularly at the top of the order. Chief selector Ajit Agarkar clarified at the press conference that team balance, especially at the top, outweighed individual considerations "Once again, this is more about team balance—specifically the idea of having two wicketkeepers at the top—than about individual ability," Agarkar added.



India captain Suryakumar Yadav echoed that view, reiterating that the decision was driven purely by squad flexibility rather than form. "It's not about his form. It's just about the combination. We wanted to have



a keeper at the top. It's not about his form. There's no chatter about his quality. He is a terrific player," Suryakumar said. We needed Rinku Singh. We have Washington Sundar also. So, we needed to be flexible

to have multiple combinations. That's why we have picked this squad. No question about Gill's class." As part of the reshuffle, Axar Patel has been named India's vice-captain for the T20 World Cup, stepping into the leadership role left vacant by Gill's omission. The squad also features the return of Ishan Kishan, whose selection follows a standout domestic campaign. The wicketkeeper-batter played a key role in guiding Jharkhand to the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy title this year, strengthening his case as a top-order option who also adds flexibility behind the stumps. Gill's unimpressive T20I return

While the explanation has focused firmly on structure, Gill's recent T20I numbers have not strengthened his case either. The right-hander returned to the T20I setup after missing the ODI series against South Africa due to a neck issue, with the five-match T20I series seen as a chance to reset following an underwhelming Asia Cup. That reset never truly arrived.

# Bengal's pace attack in the Vijay Hazare Trophy will be led by Mohammed Shami

**Mumbai:** Mohammed Shami, an out-of-favor fast bowler from India, has been included in Bengal's team for the next Vijay Hazare Trophy. Shami's nomination follows an outstanding comeback to domestic cricket, where this season he has taken 36 wickets in all forms. His efforts have been crucial for Bengal, especially after he returned from a protracted injury layoff that kept him away from state and national responsibilities. Despite missing selection for the recent series against South Africa and facing questions over his fitness, Shami has consistently delivered for Bengal in both red- and white-ball formats. His ability to lead the bowling attack has helped Bengal maintain an unbeaten record in the Ranji Trophy after five matches, with three outright victories placing them at the top of Group C. Transitioning into limited-overs cricket, Shami continued his outstanding form in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, where he finished as Bengal's leading wicket-taker. He took 16 wickets from seven matches at an impressive average of 14.93. For the Vijay Hazare Trophy, Shami will spearhead a three-pronged pace attack for Bengal, by top-order batter Abhimanyu Easwaran.



# Head century crushes England's hopes as Australia eye Ashes win

**New Delhi:** Travis Head proved England's nemesis once again as he scored his second century of the Ashes to carry Australia toward a seemingly inevitable series triumph on day three at Adelaide Oval on Friday. Head's unbeaten 142 in front of an adoring home crowd of 53,696 helped Australia to 271 for four at stumps and a 356-run lead after the hosts bowled England out for 286 in the morning. Australia lead the five-match series 2-0 after comfortable victories in Perth and Brisbane, and need only a draw in Adelaide to retain the urn as holders.

Head's fellow South Australian Alex Carey also cashed in, adding an unbeaten 52, as the local heroes combined in an unbroken 122-run partnership to bang another nail into England's coffin.

Head's century was unwelcome deja vu for the tourists following his sensational 123 off 83 balls in the fourth innings in Perth.

The second ton nearly eluded him, though when he slashed Jofra Archer low to the gully when on 99, only for Harry Brook to spill a second, costly catch of the test. The following over, Head smashed Will Jacks over his head for four to bring up the hundred



in 146 balls. The boundary sparked one of the warmest ovations of his sporting career, the 31-year-old getting down on his knees to kiss the pitch where he made his career for state side South Australia. Stokes not among the bowlers

With England captain Ben Stokes looking tired and opting not to bowl, the tourists had no answer to Head despite plugging away for some reward against the other batters. "From what I understand he's pretty fit to bowl," England bowling coach Jee-tan Patel told reporters of Stokes. "I

know he's pretty knackered." Opener Jake Weatherald (1), number three Marnus Labuschagne (13) and Cameron Green (seven) fell cheaply but stand-in number four Usman Khawaja joined Head in an important 86-run stand after Australia were 53 for two. Khawaja was caught behind for 40, slicing at the part-time spin of Jacks, a bonus wicket for England given it was a poor delivery. Green then nicked Josh Tongue to the slips where Brook took an excellent catch just above the grass, leaving Australia wavering at 155 for four.

# India team for the 2026 T20 World Cup is "Shubman-less," according to the BCCI

**New Delhi:** BCCI on Sunday officially announced India's 15-member squad for 2026 T20 World Cup. Led by Suryakumar Yadav, the team features core players like Jasprit Bumrah and Hardik Pandya. The same team will play the T20 series against New Zealand in January 2026. Shubman Gill has been snubbed from the squad. "Shubman has been dropped due to combination. Someone has to be dropped when you picked 15. Unfortunately it's Gill this time again," said Agarkar in press conference. Suryakumar Yadav (c), Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Tilak Varma, Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Axar Patel (VC), Rinku Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Harshit Rana, Arshdeep Singh, Varun Chakravathy, Kuldeep Yadav, Washington Sundar, Ishan Kishan. India's T20 World Cup 2026 Group A fixtures have been confirmed, with the tournament starting on February 7.

India will open its campaign against the USA at Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai. The team will then face Namibia in Delhi on February 12, followed by a high-voltage clash against Pakistan in Colombo on February 15. India will conclude its group stage with a match against the Netherlands on February 18.



Indian Test captain Shubman Gill and Jitesh Sharma have been dropped from the squad. BCCI also announced that Ishan Kishan and Rinku Singh have been included into the squad in their place. Agarkar added "We know what a quality player Shubman is even though he's not found runs recently. It's the combination more than anything else. It's more about

combinations, someone has to miss out." Suryakumar Yadav (Captain), Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Tilak Varma, Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Axar Patel (vice-captain), Rinku Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Harshit Rana, Arshdeep Singh, Kuldeep Yadav, Varun Chakravarty, Washington Sundar, Ishan Kishan (wk).