

Aqua Doctor Solutions organized the maiden edition of the Aqua North East Summit 2025

- Aqua Doctor Solutions, in partnership with Fishery.News, is hosting the Aqua North East Summit 2025 on December 12 at Hotel Taj Vivanta, Guwahati.
- The summit aims to transform the Northeastern aquaculture landscape by uniting science, technology, policy, and business.



Guwahati, Dec 11: Aqua Doctor Solutions, in co-organisation with Fishery.News, has organised the maiden edition of the Aqua North East Summit 2025, a one-day high-impact conference aimed at transforming the aquaculture landscape of the North-eastern region. The event will be held on December 12 at Hotel Taj Vivanta, Guwahati, in collaboration with the Department of Fisheries, Government of India, and supported by the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB).

The Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCC&I) is associated as a Chamber partner. Addressing a press conference on December 11, Induvardhan Reddy Putana, Founder & CEO of Fishery.News said: “North-east India has the potential to emerge as a leading aquaculture hub for the country. Through the Aqua North East Summit, we aim to bring science, technology, policy, and business together on a single platform. This summit will set the foundation for long-term growth and pave the way for the Aqua North East Expo 2026.” As the co-organiser, Fishery.News will lead the digital awareness, commu-

nication and coverage of the summit. The press conference was also addressed by Suryateja Vemavarapu, Co-founder & COO of Fishery.News; Dr Debtanu Barman, Founder & CEO, Aqua Doctor Solutions and Ashim Kumar Borah, Senior Executive (Technical) cum Officer in Charge, NFDB-NERC, Guwahati. The Aqua North East Summit 2025 is bringing together pol-

icymakers, researchers, industry leaders, technology companies, startups, cooperatives, FPOs and progressive farmers from all Northeastern states. It will address the region’s core challenges productivity gaps, lack of scientific adoption, limited market linkages, value-chain inefficiencies, and climate-related vulnerabilities. Key topics include species diversification; cold-chain de-

velopment; AI, IOT and digital farming technologies; sustainability; and financial inclusion through government schemes such as the PMMSY. The Northeast holds one of India’s richest aquaculture resource bases—abundant water bodies, high fish consumption, and a rapidly growing regional market. However, challenges such as low productivity, limited extension support, and fragmented supply chains continue to restrict growth. It will also lay the groundwork for the Aqua North East Expo 2026, billed as the region’s largest aquaculture exhibition. Various government bodies, institutions, startups, cooperatives, and progressive farmers are participating in the day-long event, which seeks to shape the future of aquaculture in the Northeast.

Mizoram Minister assures uninterrupted LPG supply during festive season

Aizawl, Dec 11: Amid concerns about possible shortage of LPG cylinders during the holiday period, Mizoram Supply Minister B. Lalthanzova assured that necessary measures to ensure uninterrupted gas supply have been taken up, with the Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) confirming normal supply operations to the state. “There would be no shortage of LPG cylinders during the upcoming festive season, including Christmas and New Year,” the minister informed the media. Meanwhile, IOCL officials informed that the primary supply route remained fully functional, ruling out fears of any immediate shortage of LPG cylinders. However, in anticipation of heightened demand during festive celebrations, Lalthanzova urged all churches across the state to use commercial LPG cylinders for community events.

This advisory aligns with IOCL’s request to reserve domestic cylinders for household use during the peak season. Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs (FCS&CA) director Saizikpuui reiterated the appeal, noting that while hotels, restaurants, and picnic spots regularly use commercial LPG, churches often rely on domestic cylinders during large events — a practice authorities hope to regulate during the holidays. She clarified that commercial gas required a different connector, and churches have been encouraged to obtain dedicated commercial connections. “Many institutions have already complied,” the official said. “Official guidelines and request letters are being finalised and will soon be circulated to the churches to streamline the transition to commercial LPG usage for the festive season,” she added.

Tripura CPIM files defamation case against former CM Biplab Kumar Deb over ‘false and malicious’ remarks

Agartala, Dec 11: The Communist Party of India (Marxist), which is the principal opposition party of Tripura, has filed a defamation case against former Chief Minister and Lok Sabha MP Biplab Kumar Deb, accusing him of making fabricated and derogatory statements intended to malign the party’s image. Speaking to reporters on December 11, CPIM Polit Bureau member and Leader of the Opposition Jitendra Chaudhury said the legal action became necessary after Deb failed to respond to repeated calls for clarification and a lawyer’s notice sent by the party. Chaudhury claimed that during a religious event in Gandhigram earlier



this year, Deb alleged that during the Left Front government’s tenure, money was stolen from the donation box of the Tripura Sundari Temple (Matabari) and replaced with fake items. The CPIM leader condemned the remarks as “false, baseless, and deeply

hurtful to religious sentiments.” He added that the party had initially issued a public statement demanding that Deb either prove his claims or issue an unconditional apology. “After no response was received, a legal notice was served, but Deb still did not

reply, prompting the party to proceed with a defamation suit. MP Deb had intentionally attempted to tarnish the image of the CPIM and mislead the public by making unfounded accusations involving a revered religious site,” the LoP said. He said the party could not accept such “malicious propaganda” and therefore sought legal recourse. The development comes at a time when both parties are preparing for upcoming political campaigns, making the defamation case a significant flashpoint in the state’s political landscape. The CPIM has reiterated that it will continue to challenge what it describes as “false propaganda” and defend its legacy in Tripura.

High-Level Meet Held Ahead of NCW Chief’s Visit in Nagaon

Nagaon, Dec 11: Assam State Commission for Women Chairperson Angoorlata Deka presided over a high-level coordination meeting on December 9 at the District Commissioner’s conference hall as a crucial prelude to the National Commission for Women (NCW) Chairperson’s planned visit to Nagaon on December 12. Senior representatives from key departments convened with the purpose of reviewing plans and refining tactics for the impending visit. Deka emphasized the critical necessity to revitalize women’s cells at the district, sub-divisional, and block levels, pointing out that these venues are essential for providing women with prompt and organized justice. In order to improve these grassroots mechanisms, she called on all agencies to collaborate closely. Angoorlata Deka also instructed the One Stop Center (OSC) authorities to uphold order, effectiveness, and preparedness because the OSC is essential in giving vulnerable women prompt assistance. District Commissioner Devasish Sharma, IAS; CEO of Zilla Parishad Manoj Kumar Chikaria; Senior Superintendent of Police Swapnaneel Deka; SDO (Raha) Dr. Ankita Bora; ADC Debahuti Bora; Superintendents of Police of Raha and Kaliabor; Women’s Commission member Mamoni Bora; the District Social Welfare Officer; Block Development Officers; OC-level police officials and representatives of the OSC and related departments attended the meeting. In advance of the NCW Chairperson’s visit, the meeting represented a proactive effort toward bolstering institutional processes.



Accident

Bokakhat, Dec 12: Around midnight, a terrible traffic collision happened on National Highway 37 close to the Latabari Fire Service Station, which is part of the Bokakhat police station. The car’s handyman and driver both instantly passed away. Reports state that a truck carrying cement, registered AS03BC3451, lost control and plunged into a roadside ditch while traveling from Nagaon to Jorhat. The bodies of the driver, Raidan Ali (32 years old) of Thana Bikria, Hojai district, who was discovered trapped in the driver’s seat beneath the steering wheel, and the handyman, Hedayat Ullah (22 years old) of Samaguri, Nagaon, who was discovered crushed beneath the cement bags, were recovered by Bokakhat police shortly after the incident. The bodies were found by Bokakhat police, who then sent them to Golaghat for a post-mortem. Bokakhat police eventually gave the bodies to family members. In relation to the event, a case has been filed at the Bokakhat police station.

Elephant dies after collapsing on Kaziranga highway

Kaziranga, Dec 11: A privately owned safari elephant collapsed on NH-715 near Kaziranga on Thursday, causing a unique and alarming occurrence. The elephant later died. Swarnamoyi, the female elephant, lost control and passed out on the road while being transported back to the camp after completing two safari excursions in the morning. Just before the fall, the mahut, who was riding her at the time, was able to get down and barely avoided being hurt. When veterinarians came, they started treating the patient right away. The visiting veterinarian stated that Swarnamoyi lost consciousness after her body temperature dropped significantly, probably as a result of the cold weather. He further mentioned that earlier in the day, the elephant had completed standard health examinations and was deemed fit. Nevertheless, the 50-year-old elephant could not be saved even with ongoing care. According to the mahout, the elephant was in good health and had been going on frequent safari excursions without any problems. Elephants hired for private safaris, according to some locals, are not provided proper care or enough rest, which has led to new accusations of carelessness. Concerns have arisen regarding visitor safety during elephant safaris in Kaziranga, especially following the collapse and death of Swarnamoyi.

Eviction drive carried out at Silchar’s Tarapur after repeated notices

Silchar, Dec 11: The district administration on Thursday carried out an eviction drive at Tarapur in Silchar to remove what officials described as illegal encroachments and unauthorised settlements. According to officials, the settlers had been issued notices nearly three months ago, but many of them did not vacate the area within the given time. As a result, the administration proceeded with the eviction as part of its ongoing effort to clear government land. During the operation, bulldozers were brought in to demolish structures that were marked as illegal. Officials on the ground said the action was taken only after repeated reminders were ignored. Security personnel were also present to maintain order and ensure that the process remained peaceful. The administration stated that the drive was necessary to prevent further encroachment and to protect public land from being misused. The drive at Tarapur comes at a time when similar actions are being taken in several parts of Assam. Earlier this month, on December 5, a major eviction drive was conducted at Bhakatgaon in Nagaon



district. In that operation, around 38 bighas of land were cleared, and nearly 100 families were displaced. Most residents in that area reportedly left after receiving prior notice, while the remaining structures were removed during the process. Officials there also mentioned that more phases of eviction are planned in nearby locations. The state has also witnessed public debate and online reactions linked to these eviction efforts. A video recently went viral in which an unidentified individual made a remark suggesting that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma would “face consequences even

after death.” The comment drew sharp criticism from citizens on social media, with many calling it inappropriate and unnecessary at a time when tensions are already high in several eviction-prone areas. Meanwhile, preparations are underway for another large-scale eviction drive in the Dhing and Samaguri areas of Assam. According to administrative sources, the operation is being planned to clear illegal encroachment from government and forest lands. Heavy deployment of police and district officials is expected during the drive to ensure that law and order is maintained throughout the process.

Governor and First Lady attend grand finale of Mizoram Creators’ Fest 2025



Aizawl, Dec 11: The Mizoram Creators’ Fest 2025 concluded on Wednesday with a vibrant closing ceremony held at Aijal Club Park, where Mizoram Governor General (Dr) Vijay Kumar Singh, PVSM, AVSM, YSM (Retd), and First Lady Smt. Bharti Singh graced the event as chief guests. Their presence added significance to the festival, which has become one of the state’s most important platforms for emerging digital creators. Addressing the gathering, Governor Singh praised the organisers for their commitment to nurturing talent in the digital space. He described the festival as a meaningful platform where Mizo youth can showcase their creativity, sharpen

their skills, and gain a broader understanding of the fast-changing digital landscape. He noted that the enthusiasm and participation seen throughout the event reflect the growing interest of young people in digital storytelling, content creation, and new media technologies. The Governor expressed confidence that initiatives like the Creators’ Fest will continue to inspire innovation and strengthen digital awareness among the youth of Mizoram. He added that such platforms not only highlight local talent but also encourage young creators to think beyond conventional boundaries and explore new possibilities in the digital world.

NATIONAL & LIFESTYLE

UP govt identifies key suspects in codeine syrup racket

More than 120 FIRs were filed

Lucknow, Dec 11: Uttar Pradesh Police and the Food Safety and Drug Administration (FSDA) have identified over ten key suspects involved in the illegal trade of codeine-based cough syrups.

This comes as part of a major crackdown on the issue, which has been under investigation by a special team formed by the state government. According to officials, the probe indicates a well-organized network of manufacturers, distributors, and local operators involved in the trafficking of these syrups across various districts and states. To date, FIRs have been filed against more than 128 establishments linked to this trafficking, marking a significant governmental response to illegal pharmaceutical activities.

Ongoing raids are aimed at apprehending suspects



and analyzing financial transactions and inter-state connections related to the illegal market for these syrups. The initiative was spurred by increasing reports of misuse in other states, prompting a stronger enforcement effort in Uttar Pradesh.

The special investigation team, led by Inspector General L R Kumar, is focused on uncovering the full extent and ramifications of this organized racket. The state's chief minister has emphasized a strict stance against any individuals involved, regardless of their influence, as further arrests and revelations are anticipated as the investigation proceeds.

Current procedures will remain in place until new labor tribunals are established: Government

New Delhi, Dec 11: The Delhi High Court was informed by the Union government that existing labour courts, industrial tribunals, and national industrial tribunals will continue to handle all ongoing and future cases under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, until new tribunals are established.

The Industrial Relations Code, which came into effect on November 21, 2020, consolidates four labour codes designed to replace 29 old labour laws, specifically supplanting the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947 and the Trade Unions Act of 1926. Section 51 of the Code mandates that all industrial disputes pending before any authority will transfer to the new tribunal once established, and the Code outlines the qualifications necessary for appointing tribunal members.

During the court proceed-



ings, Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma and standing counsel Ashish Dixit referred to a notification dated December 8 aimed at resolving procedural challenges, ensuring continuity in adjudicatory processes, and preventing any legal void.

This came in response to a petition by lawyers, including NA Sebastian, who challenged the government's notification regarding the Industrial Relations Code, claiming it lacked the necessary implementation

rules and the establishment of new tribunals.

They argued that the Code creates a new adjudicatory framework with distinct structures, powers, and responsibilities, and raised concerns over the government's failure to set the regulations governing the formation and appointment of tribunal members, which they considered detrimental to the judicial process. The High Court criticized the decision to implement the Industrial Relations Code without the requisite rules

• *The Industrial Relations Code, 2020, consolidates and replaces the Industrial Disputes Act and the Trade Unions Act to regulate industrial relations.*

and tribunal formations needed for dispute resolution, urging the government to take corrective actions. The advocates also pointed out that the government had not formally repealed the previous Acts.

The court has tasked the government with facilitating an efficient transition from the old to the new labour law structures, scheduling the next hearing for January 12. The bench, comprising Chief Justice DK Upadhyay and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela, expressed confidence in the government's commitment to achieving a seamless transition and stated that the matter would be revisited in the upcoming hearing.

Tiger dies after being hit by train while chasing prey

Raisen, Dec 11: A tiger in the Ratapani Tiger Reserve, located in Madhya Pradesh's Raisen district, died after being struck by a train on Tuesday night while pursuing its prey. The incident took place between Budhni and Midghat, approximately 95 kilometers from the district headquarters. This event marks the second tiger death in the vicinity within a week, representing the fifth such incident in the Ratapani reserve over the past year, according to a forest department official. The Budhni-Midghat railway track has been identified as a persistent threat to local wildlife. Following the collision, the tiger became entangled in the train's engine and was dragged for about 25 feet. Hemant Raikwar, the Divisional Forest Officer, reported that preliminary investigations suggested the tiger was hit while chasing its prey. Madhya Pradesh is known for its numerous tiger reserves, including Ratapani, Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Satpura, Pench, and Panna. According to the 'Status of Tigers: Co-predators & Prey in India-2022' report, Madhya Pradesh is home to the largest population of tigers in India, numbering 785, surpassing other states like Karnataka and Uttarakhand.



In three months, up to 766 farmers in Maharashtra killed themselves: MP Fauzia Khan of the NCP-SCP

Mumbai, Dec 11: NCP-SCP MP Fauzia Khan addressed the Rajya Sabha, revealing that 766 farmers have committed suicide in Maharashtra over the past three months, prompting her to question the government's concern for farmers' welfare. She highlighted that Maharashtra has the highest rate of farmer suicides in India and noted that, of these deaths, 676 families received government assistance while 200 did not. Despite a ₹31,628-crore relief package announced due to heavy rains and flooding, Khan asserted that the reality on the ground was starkly different.

She pointed out that Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan claimed that Maharashtra had not submitted any requests for addition-



al aid. Under the State Disaster Response Fund, ₹4,176 crore was allocated for farmers, with ₹3,180 crore coming from the Centre, yet only ₹82

crore had actually been deposited into the accounts of 1,13,455 farmers, which she stated left many farmers bewildered.

Khan also addressed inconsistencies in reports about flood impacts, contrasting the state Agriculture Minister's declaration that floods affected 14.36 lakh hectares with the Centre's report, which indicated only 1,10,309 hectares. She criticized these discrepancies, labeling the situation as an unfair mockery of farmers, and emphasized that the current crop insurance system was inadequate for what she termed a significant agricultural disaster. She concluded by reiterating her concern for farmers' welfare and questioning when they would become valued by the government.

The Ministry of External Affairs denounces the widely circulated phony letter on the Rafale deal information leak

New Delhi, Dec 11: On Thursday, the Ministry of External Affairs denounced a letter circulating on social media as a forgery. This letter falsely claimed that External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had communicated with the Embassy of France about potential leaks concerning the Rafale jet delivery timelines. The ministry's official fact-checking handle on the social media platform X verified that the letter was indeed fake and cautioned the public to remain vigilant against disinformation.

The letter originated from an X account named 'Dis-

course Lab,' which alleged that the Indian government was struggling to manage the repercussions of leaked communications related to the Rafale deal. The correspondence, which appeared to be written by Minister Jaishankar, suggested that details regarding the timeline of the Rafale naval aircraft have mistakenly surfaced, leading to unexpected challenges. It further stated, "We are confident that professionalism and discretion that have characterised our interactions will continue to guide our future communications."

This forged document, dated November 26, 2025, was purportedly addressed to Thierry Mathou, the French ambassador to India. The Rafale deal, inked in 2016 by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance government, involved the purchase of 36 Rafale jets from Dassault Aviation for ₹59,000 crore. The deal has faced numerous allegations, including accusations of inflated pricing and corruption. Controversy heightened when a French publication reported that Dassault Aviation had allegedly paid €1 million to



Sushen Gupta as a middleman in this arrangement. However, the Indian government has defended the contract, emphasizing the expedited delivery of the fighter jets, while Dassault Aviation asserted that the deal underwent extensive scrutiny, revealing no violations.

RSS leader Mohan Bhagwat and Amit Shah are scheduled to go to the Andamans for the Savarkar ceremony

Sri Vijaya Puram, Dec 11: Union Home Minister Amit Shah and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat are scheduled to visit the Andaman and Nicobar Islands starting Thursday, where they will commemorate the legacy of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.

Security measures have been heightened due to the high-profile nature of the visit, with potential traffic restrictions in place.

Bhagwat is anticipated to engage briefly with local RSS workers at Dollygunj during this visit, marking his first as a 'sarsanghchalak,' although he had previously visited the islands nearly twenty years ago as a 'sarkaryavah.'

This trip will be Shah's second to the archipelago; he previously visited in January 2023 for Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's 126th birth



anniversary. On December 12, both leaders are set to unveil a statue of Savarkar at Beodnabad in South Andaman around 9:30 AM, followed by the release of a

song dedicated to Savarkar at Dr. B R Ambedkar Institute of Technology in the evening. On December 13, Bhagwat may hold a public gathering at ITF Ground in Sri Vijaya Puram in the evening before departing the islands on December 14, either late on the 12th or the morning of the 13th.

The events are being organized by a Maharashtra-based business group

to celebrate the 116th anniversary of Savarkar's notable poem, 'Sagara Pran Talamala,' which he wrote in 1909.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Savarkar was imprisoned in the notorious Cellular Jail in Port Blair by British authorities in 1911, marking a significant chapter in the history of the Indian independence movement.

Gaurav Luthra and Saurabh are being held in Thailand



New Delhi, Dec 11: Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra, implicated in the Goa nightclub fire that claimed 25 lives, have been detained in Thailand.

Images of their custody emerged, showing them with hands tied alongside Thai police. The brothers, owners of the Romeo Lane restaurant chain, fled to Phuket shortly after the fire at their nightclub in North Goa. They face charges of culpable homicide and negligence.

The fire, which broke out during a musical event, was exacerbated by flammable decor, lack of fire safety equipment, and difficult access for emergency services. Following public outrage, authorities are working to deport the Luthras to India for trial. They have sought anticipatory bail, claiming they were on a business trip and not present during the incident. Meanwhile, their business partner has been arrested in Delhi.

Aniruddhacharya, a spiritual speaker, is being sued for making offensive comments about women

• *Aniruddhacharya was born in Revjha village, Siroha tehsil, Madhya Pradesh, to Ram Naresh Tiwari and Chhaya Bai, as stated on his website.*

Lucknow, Dec 11: A complaint has been filed against spiritual leader Aniruddhacharya by Meera Rathore, the district president of the All India Hindu Mahasabha in Agra, for making derogatory remarks about women.

The Mathura Chief Judicial Mag-

istrate has accepted the complaint, with the next hearing scheduled for January 1, 2026, when statements from the complainant will be recorded. Aniruddhacharya is a well-known figure on social media, recognized for his transformative work in the community, claiming to connect people to the values of Sanatan Dharma through his speeches.

He was born in Madhya Pradesh and runs multiple humanitarian services, including an old age home and Annapurna Rasoi, which provides

meals to thousands daily. Legal issues surrounding Aniruddhacharya are common, and Rathore had previously filed a complaint with no resolution, leading her to approach the court. Aniruddhacharya's legal team submitted an investigation report citing various articles for defense, but also admitted to mistakes and issued an apology during proceedings.

Rathore's advocate emphasized the seriousness of the case, indicating a strong desire for accountability against Aniruddhacharya.



Chhattisgarh train crash

Railways are faulted by the CRS inquiry for using drivers who are unfit and have failed aptitude tests

New Delhi, Dec 11: The investigation report by the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS) regarding the November 4, 2025, Chhattisgarh train collision holds the rail administration accountable for deploying a loco pilot (LP) deemed unfit for service. The LP had failed the mandatory aptitude test and sought guidance via phone during train operation, highlighting significant gaps in knowledge and decision-making. The collision involved a passenger train and a goods train in the Bilaspur division, resulting in 12 fatalities, including the LP, and 19 injuries.

CRS Brijesh Kumar Mishra outlined that the LP's performance was inadequate for handling the MEMU train due to a lack of understanding of essential rules and procedures. The report cited specific

instances from call records where the LP contacted his senior for assistance on routine operational issues, pointing to insufficient training and a lack of confidence. Mishra criticized the certification process of the LP's competency, highlighting procedural failures that raised questions about the legality of him being qualified to operate the MEMU train.

The report reiterated the Railway Board's policy, which requires aptitude testing for single-man operations. Despite the LP's failure in the test, officials argued he could still operate with an assistant loco pilot (ALP), a position deemed unacceptable by the CRS since company norms strictly prohibit deployment without passing the aptitude test. Consequently, the CRS recommended



the compulsory inclusion of an ALP for MEMUs over 200 km and proposed the installation of an Advanced Auxiliary Warning System to improve safety, akin to those in use on EMUs in Mumbai.

The current shortage of skilled personnel—only 102 LPs qualified compared to the required 142 for effective MEMU operations—was also noted. The CRS emphasized that LPs should only operate after passing the aptitude test and urged the Railway Board to address the manpower gap for safe train operation in the South Eastern Circle Railway (SECR).

SC requests that the Draft Arbitration Bill's "termination" gap be fixed by Parliament

New Delhi, Dec 11: The Supreme Court has called on Parliament to clarify the powers of arbitral tribunals regarding termination under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, emphasizing the need for a clear statutory remedy. Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan expressed dismay that ambiguities, rooted in the UNCITRAL Model Law, persist even in the proposed Arbitration and Conciliation Bill, 2024. The court highlighted the importance of defining the nature and effects of termination orders and suggested consolidating termination provisions into a simplified clause. They underscored the necessity for a



statutory appeal against such orders and clarity on revival of claims. Advocate Abhishek Gupta praised the court's judgment, indicating that it provides essential clarity and could lead to legislative improvements. The bench noted the lack of remedies under the 1996 Act, which has resulted in inconsistent judicial rulings. They proposed a three-

The court identified the lack of remedies as a significant gap, emphasizing that the new Bill should clearly define the nature and effect of termination orders.

step remedial approach for aggrieved parties concerning termination orders and cautioned against possible abuses of the arbitration process.

11 maoists chargesheeted by NIA in Odisha explosives loot case

New Delhi, Dec 11: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has chargesheeted 11 accused in a case relating to loot of around 4,000 kg of explosives by armed cadres of the CPI (Maoist) terror organisation during transportation to a stone quarry in Odisha’s Rourkela district.

All 11 have been charged under various sections of UA(P) Act, BNSS, Arms Act and Explosive Substances Act. During investigation, NIA had found these accused to have been actively involved in the criminal conspiracy, planning and execution of the loot of around 200 explosive packets, each containing 20 kg of explosives.

The explosives were being transported to Maoist strongholds in Saranda Forest in Jharkhand when the local police had intercepted the vehicle carrying consignment from Itma Explosive Station to the Banko stone quarry on 27th May 2025. The vehicle, along with its driver, had been forcibly seized by 10-15 armed Maoists and was being taken to a stronghold of the terrorist organisation in the nearby jungle.

NIA, which took over the case from the local police in June, found during investigation that the huge quantity of explosives had been looted for use against the Government machinery, including police and security forces, through the commission of terror acts. The loot was part of a conspiracy of CPI (Maoist) to disturb the nation’s security and stability.

CM takes stock of preparations for PM’s Namrup visit

Dibrugarh, Dec 11: To take stock of the preparations for Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s scheduled visit to Namrup on December 21, Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday held a meeting at the Chief Minister’s Secretariat in Dibrugarh with several ministers, MLAs, and senior officials of the State government.

It may be noted that during his proposed visit to Assam on December 20 and 21, Prime Minister Modi will formally inaugurate the new terminal building of the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Borjhar, Guwahati and also unveil a statue of the Bharat Ratna Gopinath Bordoloi. Moreover, during his visit to Upper Assam, the Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone for an ammonia-urea project in Namrup, built at a cost of around Rs. 12,000 crore with a production capacity of 12 lakh metric tonnes. He will also address a public rally.

In the meeting, Chief Minister Dr. Sarma issued a series of directives to ensure flawless arrangements for all events the Prime Minister will attend, including security measures. He asked the administration to ensure adequate light refreshments, drinking water, and hygienic facilities for the public attending the event, along with proper traffic control and parking arrangements, and availability of primary medical care.

The meeting was attended by Education Minister Dr. Ranoj Pegu, Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika, Power Minister Prasanta Phukan, Industries and Commerce and Public Enterprises Minister Bimal Borah, Cooperation Minister Jogen Mohan, Labour Welfare Minister Rupesh Gowala, several MLAs, and senior officials including Chief Secretary Dr. Ravi Kota.

Earlier today, Chief Minister Dr. Sarma also visited Namrup to inspect the venue of the proposed public meeting to be attended by the Prime Minister. He held a meeting with the officials engaged in the preparations, reviewed all arrangements in detail, and issued necessary instructions to ensure the smooth conduct of the event. During the visit, Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika, Power Minister Prasanta Phukan, MLAs Taranga Gogoi and Terosh Gowala, Chief Secretary Dr. Ravi Kota, senior officials of various departments were present.



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16th edition of Under The Sal Tree theatre festival on December 15

Goalpara, Dec 11: Badungdutta Kalakendra, the renowned theatre institution that celebrated its Silver Jubilee last year, has announced a special one-day edition of its iconic ‘Under the Sal Tree’ theatre festival on December 15. Known for its uninterrupted and innovative theatre practice over more than two and a half decades, Badungdutta Kalakendra continues to uphold the artistic legacy of its founder, the late Sukracharya Rabha. Founded in Rampur, Goalpara, Badungdutta Kalakendra has earned national and international acclaim for its unique physical theatre style – characterised by minimal dialogue and expressive body language. Over the years, its experimental work, including projects such as Retelling Legends Through Theatre, Performing Identity, Live Theatre, and Ritual Theatre, has attracted scholars, researchers, and theatre lovers from across the world to this rural pocket of Assam. The group has also carried its distinctive theatre language to various festivals and platforms in India and abroad. One of Badungdutta Kalakendra’s biggest contributions to the state’s cultural landscape is its annual Under the Sal Tree theatre festival, where performances are staged in the midst of nature without artificial lighting, microphones, or stages. The festival, now entering its 16th edition, usually draws thousands of visitors from across



the country and overseas. This year, the organisers have decided to hold the festival as a single-day event. Announcing the decision, managing director Madan Rabha said: “Before we begin a new phase with fresh concepts and experiments, we are taking a brief pause. This year’s edition will be modest, but from next year onwards we are committed to returning with greater energy.” The one-day festival on December 15 will feature three productions: 1. Ranjumuk A Badungdutta Kalakendra production written by Madan Rabha and directed by Dhananjay Rabha (Duration: 1 hour). The Rabha language play will be performed after the inauguration of the festival by prominent writer and senior journalist.

Assam in touch with Arunachal govt over accident involving people from State

Guwahati, Dec 11: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday expressed his condolences over the deaths in the truck accident in Arunachal Pradesh, and said both states were working closely to locate the people who have been missing.

At least 18 people from Assam’s Tinsukia district have been killed, and three others are missing as the truck fell into a gorge in Arunachal Pradesh.

“Deeply pained by the passing away of our people from Assam in a terrible accident in Arunachal Pradesh,” CM Sarma said. “Our district administration is in touch with relevant authorities in Arunachal Pradesh and all necessary assistance is being provided. Relief and rescue teams are prioritising locating missing or unaccounted people at the earliest. We are also ensuring that medical help is provided to those in need,” he said. “My thoughts and prayers are with the grieving families in this tough time,” Sarma added.

DG BSF reviews security scenario along India-Bangladesh border

Guwahati, Dec 11: Director General, Border Security Force Praveen Kumar today reviewed the current security scenario along the India-Bangladesh International Border during his visit to the Border Security Force, Guwahati Frontier.

Frontier was briefed on the current security scenario and operational preparedness along the India-Bangladesh International Boundary. The emerging security challenges and measures being taken to curb cross-border crimes were also deliberated upon.

The DG BSF interacted with officers and bordermen. He praised the BSF personnel deployed along the international border for effective domination and commendable duties. Giving insight into the changing security scenario in the region, he emphasized the need for heightened alertness and vigilance on the border to ensure a prompt and effective response to any adverse situation.

He stressed upon seamless integration of technology into border management to further enhance surveillance, improve efficiency, and generate real-time situational awareness along with the need to develop skills needed to operate and maintain the advanced systems effectively.



Over 3 Lakh Class 9 Students to Get Bicycles Under New Assam Initiative

Dibrugarh, Dec 11: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma officially inaugurated the much anticipated bicycle distribution program under the Chief Minister’s Special Scheme in Dibrugarh on a day filled with happiness and enthusiasm. Several Cabinet Ministers and MLAs attended the state-level inauguration at Phulbagan, where they gave bicycles to Class 9 pupils alongside the Chief Minister.

A total of 3,10,031 children will receive bicycles as part of this ambitious program to make their daily commute to school easier. This includes 1,34,423 boys and 1,75,608 girls enrolled in Adarsha Vidyalayas, Tea Garden Model institutions, and government and provincial institutions throughout Assam. The occasion was attended by the Chief Minister, Education Minister Ranoj Pegu, Cabinet Minister of Public Works Jogen Mohan, MLA Prasanta Phukan, MLA Taranga Gogoi, and a number of other distinguished visitors.

Speaking at the ceremony, the CM pledged the state’s commitment to lowering school dropout rates and expanding access to education. The government then sent its best wishes to each and every beneficiary, encouraging them to pursue their studies with fresh zeal and resolve. With this widespread distribution, Assam reaffirms its dedication to educational equity and student welfare, marking yet another significant development in the state’s ongoing endeavor to fortify the learning ecosystem.



Anti-CAA protests staged in Nagaland

Kohima, Dec 11: The Naga Students’ Federation (NSF) on Thursday observed ‘North East Black Day’ in Kohima, protesting the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

Member organisations of the North East Students’ Organisation (NESO) held demonstrations across all states in the region to mark the day the Act was passed in Parliament in 2019.

NSF general secretary Kenilo Kent said the observance of the ‘black day’ across the region symbolised a collective stand of resistance.

“Today, we stand together in collective defiance along with the rest of the people of the Northeast,” he said.

Kent alleged that the law is discriminatory in nature and a direct threat to the indigenous people of the Northeast.

“Our homeland is not just a physical space, it is the cradle of our identity, culture and history,” he said, adding that the CAA posed an existential threat to indigenous rights.

NESO secretary general Mutsikhoyo Yhobu said the students’ bodies had opposed the law since its inception.

He reiterated that NESO had consistently demanded that the Act not be implemented in the Northeast, pointing out that although ILP-covered states were exempted, the region as a whole remained vulnerable.

Yhobu said NESO, along with its member bodies, was compelled to observe the ‘black day’ to send a message to the Centre that “we don’t want this Citizenship Amendment Act”.

Sonbeel Utsav 2.0 Announced through Assam University–RTU Hojai Collaboration



Silchar, Dec 11: With a greater emphasis on the ecological, cultural, and scientific significance of Sonbeel, Asia’s largest freshwater wetland, Assam University in Silchar is preparing to conduct Sonbeel Utsav 2.0 on February 7, 2026.

This year’s Utsav will be held in association with Rabindranath Tagore University (RTU), Hojai, signifying a significant scholarly relationship with the goal of increasing community involvement and regional participation.

Assam University Vice Chancellor Prof. Rajive Mohan Pant emphasized during a preparatory meeting in the Vice Chancellor’s Secretariat at Hemanga Biswas Sabhakakshya that the Utsav strongly coincides with Bemisal Barak’s larger goal. He said he was convinced the people of the Barak Valley will help make the festival a success. Dr. Pradosh Kiran Nath (Registrar and Convener, Sonbeel Utsav 2), Dr. Subhdeep Dhar (Finance Officer), Prof. Piyush Pandey (Director, IQAC), Dr. Angshuman Sen (Director, Computer Center), and other dignitaries attended the meeting.

RTU Vice Chancellor Prof. Manabendra Dutta Choudhury, who joined remotely, emphasized that Sonbeel Utsav 2.0 would play a major role in regional development and ecological overall, as well as contribute to the betterment of the Sonbeel region.

Prof. Arun Jyoti Nath, co-ordinator of Sonbeel Utsav 2.0, discussed the university’s continuous social outreach, including helping to put up homestay facilities in the Sonbeel area, during the ongoing preparatory session. This time, a one-day Utsav with cultural performances, awareness campaigns, and talks on sustainable wetland management will be more targeted and significant. According to Assam University administrators, it is a joint regional effort for the preservation, celebration, and promotion of one of the most important ecosystems in the Barak Valley rather than just an academic event.

Sonbeel Utsav 2.0 Announced through Assam University–RTU Hojai Collaboration



Nagaon, Dec 11: From January 13 to 17, 2026, the ancient Sadau Nagaon Bhogali Bihu Utsav at Nehrubali, which is wonderfully situated along the Kolong River, will commemorate its historic 113th edition. This year’s Bihu festival, one of Assam’s most beloved and popular, seeks to combine rich cultural expression with ingrained customs. Ranjit Kumar Tamuli Phukan, who was re-elected as President of the Utsav Committee, presided over a significant preliminary General Meeting at the ancient Swahid Bhawan. To expedite preparations, an 18-branch organizing committee was established, and MLA Rupak Sharma was selected as Working President.

The General Secretaries will be Ranjit Bora (Dadu) and Jayanta Kumar Borah. The coveted Assom Kuwori (Miss Assam) pageant, a statewide one-act play competition, traditional folk sports, displays depicting rural Assamese life, and a major cultural procession exhibiting Assam’s ethnic variety are all part of the impending five-day event. A commemorative souvenir book capturing the festival’s legacy, changing traditions, and local stories will also be released.

In honor of cherished cultural icons singer Zubeen Garg and flautist Dipak Sharma, as well as a number of other contributors to Nagaon’s cultural community, the conference started with a moving minute of silence.

While MLA Rupak Sharma urged the residents of Nagaon and nearby districts to offer their complete cooperation for the success of the 113th edition, General Secretary Jayanta Kumar Borah gave a thorough analysis of the previous year’s celebration. The festival’s strong ties to the community were demonstrated by the presence of Zila Parishad Chairperson Gitanjali Hazarika, Municipal Vice-Chairman Simanta Bora, senior citizens, cultural icons, and leaders from the press and literary organizations.

Intel CEO Lip-Bu Tan pushed deals tied

New Delhi: When the chairman of AI chip startup Rivos wanted Intel to bid for the company, he had no need to phone the chip giant. That’s because the chairman of Rivos was also Intel’s CEO: Lip-Bu Tan.

Tan had pitched Intel’s board on buying Rivos in the summer of 2025, but he had no luck. The board told Tan he had a conflict in representing both Rivos’ interests and Intel’s, and he lacked a strategy on artificial intelligence to justify a deal, three people familiar with the events told Reuters. Tan asked one of his lieutenants at Intel to pitch a new AI plan, leading to partnership talks with Rivos, the people said. But now there was a problem: social media giant Meta had been stalking Rivos and made an offer for the company. Meta’s interest spurred Intel to make its own offer. Meta countered with a sweetened bid. The competition for the startup drove the deal and incentives above the \$2 billion valuation that Rivos had sought in fundraising earlier this year. Some of the sources pinned this package at around \$4 billion. Meta announced plans to buy Rivos in September. By then the bidding process had boosted the startup’s returns at Meta’s expense. Reuters was unable to determine how much the Intel CEO profited personally as a Rivos shareholder because the financials are not public. But in a blog post on its website, Tan’s venture-capital firm, Walden Catalyst, touted how he had delivered a “successful outcome” for its investors and congratulated the Rivos team for their “remarkable achievement.” The events show one of at least three instances where Intel has pursued deals that benefit Tan financially either by exploring bids for startups or investing in them directly through Intel’s investment arm, Intel Capital, said two of the sources. Intel hired Tan in March in part for his experience as a venture capitalist and unparalleled industry connections as a longtime investor in tech companies. Those connections have helped Intel clinch a \$5 billion investment from Nvidia and a \$2 billion investment from SoftBank. Such recusals are commonplace in industry. But they had not been an issue to the same degree at Intel because its leadership prior to Tan had fewer potentially conflicting investments, three of the sources said.

Microsoft announces USD 17.5 billion in India to boost AI infra, new data centres

New Delhi: Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella on Thursday said the company is deepening its commitment to India’s artificial intelligence ecosystem with massive infrastructure investments. The Microsoft Chairman underlined the rapid expansion of the company’s cloud footprint across the country. Microsoft is also strengthening its cloud footprint and focusing on skilling millions of Indians for an AI-driven future, he said. Speaking at a Microsoft event here, Nadella said, “We are very excited about investing in India to make sure that we’re able to bring the best in class infrastructure here, the USD 17.5 billion investment,” calling it Microsoft’s largest investment in Asia. We’re building on Azure as the world’s computer and we have 70 plus data centre regions all over the world. In India, the footprint continues to grow. We now have central India, West India, South India, and we have a partnership with Jio as well,” he said. He further said that a new data centre region would become operational in 2026. “We are very excited that in 2026, we will have a new DC in south central and then the most exciting part for me is that it’s 100 per cent sustainable,” he said. Nadella also emphasised the importance of dig-



ital sovereignty and cybersecurity in an era of expanding AI deployment. “We are taking sovereignty and making sure that there’s a portfolio of options for sovereignty. So you have the public cloud, you have sovereign controls in public cloud...” he noted. He warned that sovereignty cannot be viewed in isolation from security. “Cyber security is a signals game--you can be sovereign and not have global intelligence--you’ll be vulnerable in fact,” he said, noting that Microsoft processes “trillions of daily signals” to secure platforms from Azure to Windows. Nadella said he

recently met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was very encouraging of this investment (USD 17.5 billion), in particular, to drive society, the economy and growth. This commitment, he noted, comes on top of the USD three billion investment he had announced during his last visit. On India’s talent landscape, Nadella said the company will double down on its skilling programmes. “We are now going to skill 20 million people across India in AI skills,” he said, adding that initiatives such as the government’s E-Shram programme

demonstrate how AI can uplift unorganised workers. He also highlighted India’s growing influence in the global developer ecosystem. “praising the “engagement and the type of projects that are coming out of this place, the contributions from India.”

GitHub is a web-based platform for version control and collaboration that is primarily used by developers to store, manage, and share software code. It is built on top of Git, an open-source version control system, and provides a user-friendly graphical interface and a large suite of collaboration tools.

Sensex Nifty slip into red positive start amid weak

New Delhi: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty began trading on a positive note on Thursday but soon pared all early gains to trade in the negative territory amid weak trends in Asian markets and persistent foreign fund outflows. The 30-share BSE Sensex opened higher and climbed 149.3 points, or 0.17 per cent to 84,540.57. The 50-share NSE Nifty also advanced 45.05 points to 25,803.05. However, both key indices reversed their gains as selling pressure intensified, with the Sensex declining 222.39 points, or 0.26 per cent, to 84,168.88 and the Nifty slipping 50.90 points to 25,707.10. Among the Sensex constituents, Titan, PowerGrid, HCL Technologies, Bharti Airtel, Asian Paints, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, ICICI Bank, Trent, Tech Mahindra, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finserv and ITC were the laggards. On the other hand, Eternal, Tata Steel, Maruti Suzuki India, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Adani Ports.

Akasa, Air India, SpiceJet to submit expansion plans to DGCA this week

New Delhi: India’s major carriers will outline their fleet and network expansion plans to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) by tomorrow, amid shifting capacity dynamics triggered by the aviation ministry’s directive asking IndiGo to cut 10 per cent of its schedule, sources tell Business Today TV. Akasa Air and Air India Express, both expecting steady Boeing 737 Max deliveries over the next few months are likely to stick to their existing induction pipelines rather than leasing additional aircraft. Together, the two airlines are set to receive about 10–11 aircraft by March, all part of long-planned orders. Akasa, which took delivery of its 31st Max this week, will use the upcoming aircraft to begin operations from Navi Mumbai and Jewar airports. Air India Express, currently flying around 110 aircraft, will add a few more planes over the next quarter. While the airline has indicated a broader plan to

induct 20–24 Max aircraft, sector watchers say it may phase out additions depending on how long IndiGo’s curtailed schedule remains in place. Air India, the full-service carrier of the Tata Group, is expected to brief the regulator on its own expansion roadmap. The airline is navigating a multi-year fleet overhaul, with new narrowbody and widebody aircraft entering service alongside cabin upgrades for older jets. Air India’s first line-fit B787-9 is scheduled to arrive by the end of 2025. By end-2026, the airline expects delivery of six new wide bodies: A350-1000s and B787-9s, and at least 20 new narrow bodies. SpiceJet, meanwhile, is charting a more aggressive course. The airline has already activated 17 aircraft recently through damp leases and re-inductions and plans to introduce 100 additional winter flights while adding more aircraft where possible. If IndiGo scales back operations on high-frequency routes



for a longer period, rival airlines may gain temporary access to its slots. However, the industry’s limited spare capacity could constrain how much of this opportunity can be utilised, potentially pushing fares higher in the near term, unless the fare caps exist. As per the latest communication, IndiGo is expected to operate 1,950+ flights today, carrying over three lakh customers. Early this week, the Civil Aviation Ministry had ordered a 10 per cent reduction in IndiGo’s schedule for its inability to manage operations.

Realme 16 Pro series India launch confirmed: Brand teases camera

Mumbai: Realme 16 Pro series is launching soon in India, and the company has already started to tease its features. Since Realme’s number series are camera-focused, the company has revealed its biggest easter egg, revealing that it will be equipped with LumaColor IMAGE, its proprietary imaging technology. In terms of pricing, the Realme 16 Pro series will likely be launched around Rs 35,000 and Rs 40,000 in India. However, we will have to wait until the official launch to confirm what exactly the mid-ranger has in store. The smartphone will offer AI-powered camera features such as AI Edit Genie 2.0, AI Style Me, AI Light Me, and others. The lineup will likely consist of two models, the Realme 16 Pro+ and Realme 16 Pro. The Smartphones are expected to debut early in 2026, with a speculated launch date of January 6. The Pro model will likely feature a 6.78-inch AMOLED display, as the China variant. We can also expect a massive 7,000mAh battery, which is rumoured to offer



up to 9.3 hours of gaming, up to 21 hours of video playback on YouTube, up to 20.8 hours on Instagram, and about 125 hours on Spotify. The smartphone is confirmed to run on RealmeUI 7 based on Android 16, supporting 3 years of major OS upgrades and 4 years of security upgrades.

Tata Steel unveils slew of projects, eyes West India expansion Lloyds



New Delhi: Tata Steel has reached an understanding with Lloyds Metals & Energy Ltd to evaluate projects across mining to steelmaking in Maharashtra, signalling a pivot in the strategy for the century-old company going forward. The board of Tata Steel also approved a slew of projects in the East, including expansion of Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd’s (NINL) capacity by 4.8 million tonnes at Kalinganagar, Odisha, and adding a demonstrative low carbon steelmaking unit of 1 mt in Jamshedpur, Jharkhand. The company also approved at least two downstream units for value-added products targeted at the construction and automotive industries in Odisha and Maharashtra, respectively. The board also accorded approval to acquire a 50.01 per cent stake in Thriveni Pellets Private Limited (TPPL), which owns a 4 mt pellet plant in Odisha and a 212-kilometre slurry pipeline for ₹636 crore. Tata Steel said the decision affirms the long-term growth strategy for India business in line with the stated objective of pursuing ‘pru-

dent capital allocation and profitable growth’. The company said it would prioritise investments in the volume growth, value-added downstream portfolio, mining assets and infrastructure to serve the needs of the India business and low carbon low capital intensity process technologies for sustainable steel making of the future. However, the announcement of a broad spectrum of projects was not dovetailed with details of capital expenditure plan and timeline, indicating that they could be flexible depending on market conditions. As part of a non-binding memorandum of understanding with Lloyds, Tata Steel will pursue setting up a 6 mt steel plant in Gadchiroli in two phases and also participate in the upcoming a 3 mt plant Lloyds is building in the region. If it materialises, this would be the first primary steelmaking facility in western India by Tata Steel, which has so far based its operations in Jharkhand and Odisha, which are endowed with raw materials such as iron ore and coal.

Intel CEO Lip-Bu Tan pushed deals tied to his own investments, sources say

Mumbai: When the chairman of AI chip startup Rivos wanted Intel to bid for the company, he had no need to phone the chip giant. That’s because the chairman of Rivos was also Intel’s CEO: Lip-Bu Tan. Tan had pitched Intel’s board on buying Rivos in the summer of 2025, but he had no luck. The board told Tan he had a conflict in representing both Rivos’ interests and Intel’s, and he lacked a strategy on artificial intelligence to justify a deal, three people familiar with the events told Reuters. Tan asked one of his lieutenants at Intel to pitch a new AI plan, leading to partnership talks with Rivos, the people said. But now there was a problem: social media giant Meta had been stalking Rivos and made an offer for the company. Meta’s interest spurred Intel to make its own offer. Meta countered with a sweetened bid. The competition for the startup drove the deal and incentives above the \$2 billion valuation that Rivos had sought in fundraising earlier this year. Some of the sources pinned this package at around \$4 billion. Meta announced plans to buy Rivos in September. By then the bidding process had boosted the startup’s returns at Meta’s expense. Reuters was unable to determine how much the Intel CEO profited personally as a Rivos shareholder because the financials are not public. But in a blog post on its website, Tan’s venture-capital firm, Walden Catalyst, touted how he had delivered a “successful outcome” for its investors and congratulated the Rivos team for their “remarkable achievement.” The events show one of at least three instances where Intel has pursued deals that benefit Tan financially either by exploring bids for startups or investing in them directly through Intel’s investment arm, Intel Capital, said two of the sources. Intel declined to make Tan available for an

The drop in ranking points in Chennai essentially indicates that the overall strength of the field will be comparatively weaker when compared to the last three years.

interview for this story. Meta did not respond to requests for comment, and Rivos declined to comment. Intel hired Tan in March in part for his experience as a venture capitalist and unparalleled industry connections as a longtime investor in tech companies. Those connections have helped Intel clinch a \$5 billion investment from Nvidia and a \$2 billion investment from SoftBank. Since Tan’s arrival, Intel has implemented policies requiring Tan to recuse himself from participating in investment decisions where he might benefit, two sources said. Specifically, Tan cannot attend or vote in decision meetings of Intel’s board or Intel Capital’s investment committee if he has a conflict in a venture or company-wide transaction, the sources said. Such recusals are commonplace in industry. But they had not been an issue to the same degree at Intel because its leadership prior to Tan had fewer potentially conflicting investments, three of the sources said. In the event of a Tan recusal for Intel Capital, the first two sources said, decision-making authority for the venture unit’s investment committee goes to Chief Financial Officer David Zinsner, who reports to Tan. Intel’s board knew when it appointed Tan that his web of investments in chip and technology companies could create conflicts, but the board accepted this, hoping that Tan can revive the iconic U.S. chipmaker, which lost \$19 billion last year, one of the people said. Intel’s 11 independent board directors did not individually comment on Tan, but in response to

Reuters queries, an Intel spokesperson said: “The Board of Directors believes it’s important that Intel fully leverage his vast network and position Intel to capture the next wave of industry innovation and opportunity.” Tan’s deal-making comes as the administration of President Donald Trump agreed to make an \$8.9 billion investment for what would be the largest ownership stake in the chipmaker, designating it as strategic to the U.S. and effectively making its citizens shareholders. Some chip-industry analysts have said in research notes that they welcomed Tan’s industry relationships. “He has a wide view across the ecosystem,” said Bernstein analyst Stacy Rasgon in an interview with Reuters. “And that’s helpful for Intel.” Tan does not perceive his dealmaking at Intel to be conflicted, said two of the sources, who are familiar with his thinking.

Tan believes that his roles at these startups and at Intel make him uniquely able to negotiate transactions that benefit all parties, the people said. In a statement, an Intel spokesperson disputed that Tan’s dealmaking posed any problem. “The company has an unwavering commitment to the highest standards of corporate governance, integrity, and accountability,” the spokesperson said. Tan’s “extensive relationships across the global semiconductor ecosystem are invaluable as Intel positions itself to capitalize on a rapidly evolving industry landscape.” a year after its last disclosure, which took place the week after his start date. U.S. regulations require such disclosures when transactions personally benefiting corporate officers exceed \$120,000, though experts have said smaller dollar amounts can be material to investors if the information would inform a decision to sell or purchase stock.

Dhar, Gautam seek success blessings

Mumbai: Aditya Dhar's recently released film, Dhurandhar, starring Ranveer Singh and Akshaye Khanna in the lead roles, has been smashing records at the box office. The movie has been receiving rave reviews from celebrities, moviegoers, and critics alike. Now, to celebrate the success of the film, Dhar and his wife, actress Yami Gautam, have reached Himachal Pradesh to seek blessings at Shak-tipeeth Shri Naina Devi Temple in Bilaspur.

India Today has shared a video on Instagram in which Aditya, after visiting the temple with his wife Yami and the Gautam family, spoke about the experience and said, "Bahot sundar anubhav tha. Bahot khush hue. Mata ke darshan jab bhi hote hain, hamesha dil bhar aata hai. Toh bahot dhanyawaad, aur bahot achche darshan karwaye hamare (It was a wonderful experience. We were very happy. Whenever we get to do the darshan of the Mata, our hearts are always filled with joy. So, thank you very much for arranging such a wonderful darshan for us) (sic)."



'Anupamaa' Success: Rajan Shahi Aligned Stars

Mumbai: Gaurav Khanna may now be known as the winner of Bigg Boss 19, but years before the reality-show victory, he created a huge impact with his role as Anuj Kapadia in Anupamaa. His entry completely changed the direction of the show, and fans instantly connected with his character. At the time, Gaurav had openly admitted that he felt both excited and anxious about joining such a popular series



and working opposite Rupali Ganguly.

Before the show, he was already a familiar face on television, but this role came with a new set of expectations. It was a major shift for him, and he had shared how seriously he took the responsibility, especially because the part had been offered by someone he had always wanted to collaborate with. Gaurav had long hoped to work with producer Rajan Shahi. In an old interview with the Times of India, he said they often met at award events and spoke about teaming up someday. But things never worked out earlier due to timing issues. Talking about finally getting the chance, he had shared, "This time, I think my stars got aligned, and I got a call from his production house for the role of Anuj. Rajan sir really wanted me to do this role." When he joined Anupamaa, Gaurav played the role of Rupali Ganguly's school friend. Since he naturally looked younger than her, he had to adjust his appearance. He explained that he didn't have much time to prepare, so he changed his workout routine. Gaurav said his character needed to look fit but not extremely toned, so he reduced his training and even tried to add some weight to his face. This helped him look closer to the age his character was meant to portray.

Diljit Dosanjh Teases Next Imtiaz Ali Film with Punjab Video



Mumbai: Punjabi superstar Diljit Dosanjh, who has joined forces again with filmmaker Imtiaz Ali, is documenting what his normal day looks like on location in Punjab. On Thursday, the actor-singer took to his Instagram and shared a video of himself from a haveli in Punjab. The actor is currently stationed in Punjab for a project. In the video, the actor said that he started his day early at 4:30 am, and did some workout. He then sat down for breakfast and was seen eating fruits with some protein.

The actor then left for the shoot along with his team. He shot a few sequences in

front of a green screen, and also captured Imtiaz Ali as the two interacted on sets. The actor then packed up for the day and headed to the haveli. The untitled film marks the 2nd collaboration between Diljit and Imtiaz after 'Amar Singh Chamkila', which was based on the legendary and controversial Punjabi singer-songwriter of the 1980s. The film also starred Parineeti Chopra in the role of Chamkila's wife.

Chamkila was often dubbed the "Elvis of Punjab" for his raw energy, electrifying performances, and bold, socially charged lyrics. His life, music, and tragic death, he and his wife Am-

arjot were assassinated in 1988, have become a significant part of Punjabi cultural history. The film earned two nominations at the International Emmy Awards: one for Best Performance by an Actor for Diljit's portrayal, and another in the Best TV Movie or Mini-Series category. Although the film and Diljit did not win at the 53rd International Emmy Awards, the nominations themselves marked an important moment for Indian and Punjabi storytelling on the global stage. The recognition highlighted Chamkila's enduring legacy and the growing international appreciation of culturally rich content from India. The film boasts a strong ensemble cast alongside Diljit Dosanjh, including Sharvati, Vedang Raina, and the veteran actor Naseeruddin Shah. Furthermore, the project reunites the iconic musical trio of Imtiaz Ali, A.R. Rahman, and lyricist Irshad Kamil, guaranteeing a soul-stirring soundtrack that is expected to define the film's emotional depth.

Janhvi Kapoor Thrilled as SRK Endorses India's Official Oscar Entry 'Homebound'

Mumbai: Janhvi Kapoor is super excited after receiving praise from none other than Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan for her latest project, Homebound. The actress was touched by his appreciation. The Homebound makers also thanked the actor for his praise. The film was released last month.

The actress shared Shah Rukh Khan's tweet with a heart emoji. The makers also reshared the tweet and wrote, "King size love from the king himself, thank you #Homebound". Many celebrities including Alia Bhatt have praised the film. SRK took to his social media account and shared, "#Homebound is gentle, honest and soulful. Lots of love and big hugs to the phenomenal team for creating something so human and engaging. You have won hearts world over by making something truly special!"

Made under the direction of Neeraj Ghaywan, Homebound is headlined by Ishaan Khatter, Vishal Jethwa and Janhvi Kapoor. The emotional drama, set in



a North Indian village, revolves around two childhood friends—Shoaib (played by Ishaan Khatter) and Chandan (played by Vishal Jethwa). Facing deep-rooted discrimination, the duo sets out to become police officers to reclaim dignity and opportunity. But as time passes and the police exam results intensify uncertainty, their friendship is tested, revealing the emotional and societal struggles that shape their journey.

The film is backed by Dharma Productions, with

Apoorva Mehta, Adar Poonawalla, Karan Johar and Somen Mishra serving as producers. Melita Toscan du Plantier, Marijke deSouza and acclaimed filmmaker Martin Scorsese are on board as executive producers. Homebound made its international debut at Cannes 2025. This film marked Neeraj Ghaywan's return to Cannes nearly 10 years after the premiere of his breakthrough film Masaan. While Homebound became India's official entry to the Oscars, it was also screened at the To-

ronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne (IFFM). The actress current work front includes recent release Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari and upcoming projects like Peddi with Ram Charan, and a tentatively titled film, Lag Jaa Gale, with Tiger Shroff and Lakshya.

Despite receiving critical acclaim, the film had a modest run during its limited theatrical release in September before finding a wider audience on the OTT platform, Netflix, in November.

BTS V reveals confident moments



Agency: BTS member Kim Taehyung, aka V, recently spoke about confidence and beauty in an interview, reflecting on the moments when he has felt most self-assured. The band, consisting of Kim Taehyung, Kim Namjoon, Kim Seokjin, Park Jimin, Jung Hoseok, Jeon Jungkook and Min Yoongi, are currently working on their comeback music and 2026 world tour. Besides music, the members also represent a lot of international brands, and V was named the global brand ambassador of a beauty brand.

During an interaction with the brand, the K-pop idol was asked to talk about a moment where he felt most confident or unique. V responded, "I've always felt most confident, natural, and appealing when I can show my true self. Whether it's making the music I love, performing on stage, interacting with my fans or appearing in photoshoots like this." He continued, "In preparing for this shoot, I got to share different ideas and communicate extensively with director Yoo Kwang Goeng and photographer Kim Hee Jun. From the overall concept to the makeup, styling, and hair, we put a lot of emphasis on capturing my natural self."

Nushrratt Bharuccha's Take: Why Male Films Are Box Office Gold



Mumbai: Nushrratt Bharuccha, known for her powerful roles, has often spoken about the harsh realities behind the glamour of the film industry. She explained why male-oriented films tend to perform better at the box office. While acknowledging that change is gradual, she emphasised that female-led films that truly connect with audiences can still find success.

Nushrratt Bharuccha reflected on why male-dominated films tend to perform better. She noted, "They are made less. Males constitute the majority of the population in our country. Change doesn't happen instantly; it will take time. But it will definitely happen. Films about women that resonate with audiences tend to perform well. Mimi, Chhori,

Dream Girl, Akeli, and Pink all did well. Heroism isn't gender-based. Females can also act as heroes, though it's rarely portrayed in our country." Speaking about the hurdles women face in Bollywood, Nushrratt Bharuccha revealed that it's especially challenging for female actors. As an outsider who entered the industry through auditions, her journey has been particularly meaningful to her.

ly made waves with her OTT film Chhori 2, earning praise for her nuanced performance and expanding perceptions of her acting range. Directed by Vishal Furia, the film sees Nushrratt reprise her role as Sakshi, a mother fiercely protecting her daughter Ishaani from malevolent supernatural forces. She is joined by Soha Ali Khan, who marks her acting comeback, alongside Gashmeer Mahajan and Hardika Sharma in this gripping thriller. In addition to Chhori 2, Nushrratt has been part of successful commercial films like Dream Girl and Mimi, showcasing her ability to balance mainstream appeal with content-driven cinema. Next up, she has a project with acclaimed filmmaker Neeraj Pandey. The film is slated for release next year.

She shared that she began her Bollywood career with comedy, which led to certain stereotypes. "When I did Pyaar Ka PUNCHnama, my performance was seen as a joke. People thought I was only suited for commercial films. But when Chhori came along, I grabbed the opportunity and changed those perceptions," the actress said at the Agenda Aaj Tak 2025 event.

Nushrratt Bharuccha recent-

Ticket Hike Triumphs: Balakrishna's 'Akhandha 2' Set to Break Records on Day 1

Hyderabad: Balakrishna's film Akhandha 2 was originally supposed to hit the screens on December 5. Back then, as the film neared its release, the advance bookings and ticket sales were average at the box office. But after the film was postponed by a week, Akhandha 2 is witnessing a massive turnaround for advance booking.

A couple of weeks ago, the buyers of Akhandha 2 were under the impression that Balakrishna was overdue to deliver something big. They

felt that Akhandha 2 wasn't generating the desired buzz to trigger ticket sales, especially after the first installment was a blockbuster. But things have changed dramatically within a week. The postponement of Akhandha 2 by Madras High Court due to an unpaid earlier arbitration by the producers became the hottest topic. Filmmakers' subsequent negotiations with concerned stakeholders, followed the court clearance have all added to film's the buzz. The advance bookings that have



opened in Telangana (Nizam), Andhra Pradesh and overseas is a clear indication of the development. Earlier, before the December 5 release, the numbers weren't

this staggering. But the buzz is palpable as the film is set to open in record numbers.

Earlier, the G.O. was not issued by Telangana even hours before the scheduled

premieres. But now it has issued a fresh G.O. in relation to the ticket rate hike for Balakrishna's Akhandha 2. The bookings for the premiere shows are scheduled from 9 PM and will be priced around Rs. 600. The hikes are allowed only till the first three days. For regular shows, the ticket prices have increased by Rs. 50/- (including GST) in single screens and Rs. 100/- (including GST) in multiplexes. So the new fares are set at Rs. 395/- in multiplexes and Rs. 227/- in single screens.

The revised G.O. also makes it clear that Akhandha 2 team should give 20 percent of the incremental revenue to the 'Telugu Film Industry Employees Federation' (as suggested by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy). In Andhra Pradesh too, the government gave permission for premiere (December 11) tickets to be priced at Rs 600 (including GST). From December 12, for the next 10 days, an approval of Rs 100 and Rs 75 for multiplexes and single screens respectively, were approved.

The Clock Stops: 'Vaa Vaathiyaar' Release Banned by Court on Eve of Debut

Chennai: The road to release for Vaa Vaathiyaar has taken yet another unexpected turn. The Madras High Court has now ordered that the film cannot be screened in any capacity until producer KE Gnanavel Raja settles a significant financial obligation linked to an older dispute. This ruling arrives at a crucial moment, as the makers were preparing for a December 12 release and building momentum with new promotional material.

The legal action was initiated by petitioner Arjunlal Sundardas, whose claim was presented through the Official Assignee of the High Court. The petition requests repayment of an amount that totals more than twenty-one crore rupees. The court has made it clear that the re-



lease of Vaa Vaathiyaar will remain frozen until the full sum is repaid. This latest development follows earlier indications of financial strain around the project, and it adds to the series of delays that have kept the film from reaching audiences. With fan excitement rising after the trailer launch and cast promotions, the stay order

has generated fresh waves of uncertainty in the trade.

Directed by Nalan Kumarasamy, Vaa Vaathiyaar has been positioned as a return to form for the filmmaker, whose first two features Soodhu Kavvum and Kadhalum Kadandhu Pogum earned both critical acclaim and strong audience affection.

Ranveer Singh's 'Dhurandhar' Roars Past ₹170 Cr Mark; Collects ₹26.50 Cr on Day 6

Mumbai: Ranveer Singh and Akshaye Khanna starrer Dhurandhar continues its spectacular box office run, collecting Rs 26.50 Cr across India on Wednesday, Day 6 of its release, according to Sacnilk. The mid-week performance underscores the film's sustained appeal as it marches toward a massive first-week total.

The spy-thriller opened with Rs 28 Cr on Friday and jumped to Rs 32 Cr on Saturday before soaring to Rs 43 Cr on Sunday. After a slight mid-week dip to Rs 23.25 Cr on Monday, it rebounded with Rs 27 Cr on Tuesday and earned Rs 26.50 Cr on Wednesday. The cumulative six-day total now stands at an impressive Rs 180 Cr. The



occupancy across key cities revealed interesting trends. Pune led with 41.33% occupancy, followed by Jaipur at 37% and the National Capital Region at 35.67%. Mumbai recorded 35.33%, Lucknow 34%, while Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Kolkata stayed in the mid-20% range. Ahmedabad and Bhopal posted occupancy around

20%, and Surat had the lowest at 11.33%. Evening shows dominated, whereas morning and afternoon screenings had moderate turnout, and night shows saw almost no audience.

The film's success has been recognised within Bollywood. Akshay Kumar praised director Aditya Dhar and lauded his storytelling. Sid-

dharth Anand called the movie "nasha" that "stays with you for long," while Madhur Bhandarkar described it as "explosive," singling out Akshaye Khanna's performance as a masterclass and Ranveer Singh's portrayal of the lead as gripping and powerful. Dhurandhar is a sprawling spy-action thriller inspired by real-life covert operations, including Pakistan's Lyari underworld and India's intelligence missions. Ranveer Singh stars as an Indian spy who infiltrates a dangerous gang network, navigating crime, espionage, betrayals, and political intrigue. The ensemble cast also features Akshaye Khanna, Sanjay Dutt, R. Madhavan, Arjun Rampal, Sara Arjun, and Rakesh Bedi.

Indians are chasing luxury travel like never before

Luxury, business class, and extravagant retreats are becoming increasingly popular among Indian travellers. Once known for their resourcefulness and practical approach to travel, Indians today prioritise travel like never before, and they're doing it in style – with a taste for luxury. “I am ready to shell out a few



extra bucks, but when I travel, it has to be comfortable. Brownie points if I can find luxury with that extra money,” says Muskan Agarwal, a 25-year-old student from Delhi NCR, while sharing why she prefers to travel in luxury. Such is the mindset not only of Muskan but also of many Indians who are shifting from being budget travellers to embracing the idea of luxury travel. Luxury travel among Indian tourists is no longer a rare occurrence. In fact, recent statistics reveal a clear shift in how Indians are approaching their travel plans. India Today analysed several year-end reports by various travel agencies, and all indicate the same. According to data from Skyscanner, an online travel agency, 37 per cent of Indian travellers plan to upgrade their flights to business or first class in 2024. Additionally, 44 per cent intend to purchase access to airport lounges to ensure their trips begin on a luxurious note. Another MakeMyTrip (an online travel agency) data shows the same. In fact, it shows a 50 per cent year-on-year increase in business class bookings, with international flights witnessing a whopping 80 per cent jump, while domestic flights saw a 27 per cent rise. It also shows that India’s contribution of domestic hotel bookings priced above INR 10,000 has increased to 22 per cent as compared to 20 per cent in the same period last year. This number is almost double for international hotel bookings (a jump of 57 per cent from 51 per cent). These figures paint a compelling picture. For a demographic once known for cost-cutting and resourcefulness, this surge in premium travel choices marks a significant change. It’s not just about getting from point A to point B anymore; it’s about doing so in style, comfort, and with a dash of indulgence. Louis D’Souza, director

at Tamarind Global, says, “Luxury travel among Indian travellers has seen an extraordinary rise and this trend shows no signs of slowing down in 2025.” D’Souza explains that today’s Indian traveller craves unique, bespoke experiences that go beyond traditional sightseeing. “From unwinding in a private villa on an exclusive island to a gastronomic adventure at Michelin-star restaurants in Tokyo, or indulging in bespoke art and fashion tours in Paris, the essence of luxury is shifting toward experiential and meaningful travel,” he adds. Prabhakar Kamat, business head at Red Dot Representations, echoes this sentiment, “The contemporary Indian traveller is seeking experiences that feel personal and enlightening,” he adds. Both experts identify several key factors behind the shift, which include growing economic prosperity, increased exposure to global lifestyles, and the influence of social media. Let’s break down these reasons one by one.

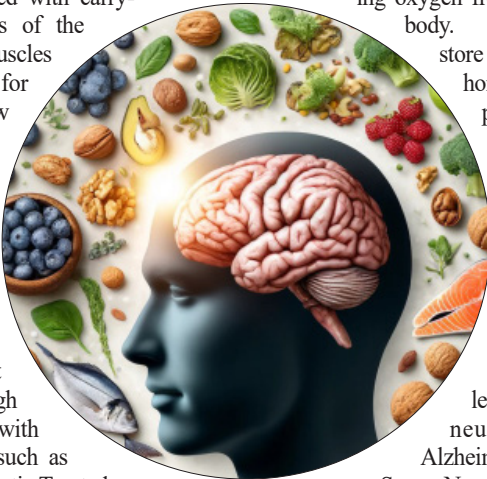
Why Indians prefer luxury Several factors have converged to drive the rise in luxury travel among Indians, transforming it from a niche market to a mainstream aspiration. Here’s a closer look at what’s behind this change: **Rising disposable incomes:** Experts suggest that economic growth in India has created a more affluent middle and upper class, enabling a larger section of the population to afford premium travel experiences. **Change in priorities:** Experts like D’Souza suggest that the younger generation has prioritised travel as an essential part of their lives being the key contrib-

utors (Not 70 hours work week). Rajesh Magow, the co-founder and group CEO of MMT, says, “The trend toward premiumisation is becoming increasingly pronounced, as travellers are willing to spend more for a memorable holiday.” **Exposure to global lifestyles:** Thanks to the rise of social media and digital platforms, Indian travellers have a front-row seat to the luxury experiences enjoyed by people around the world. This exposure has cultivated a taste for indulgence and exclusivity. **Celebration tourism:** Destination weddings, milestone anniversaries, and large family reunions are on the rise. Grand occasions now call for equally grand destinations, and luxury travel provides the perfect setting for such celebrations. **Post-pandemic priorities:** Privacy, safety, and bespoke experiences have become crucial considerations for travellers. Exclusive itineraries and private accommodations naturally align with these needs, making luxury travel a more appealing option. Moreover, ever since the pandemic, there has been a change in the mindset of many people, with them prioritising experiences over anything else. This has led to the rise of a very specific type of travel known as ‘revenge travel’. **Desire for unique experiences:** As D’Souza points out, modern travellers are seeking experiences that go beyond sightseeing. Private villas, Michelin-starred dining, and immersive art and fashion tours have become the new definition of luxury. Looking ahead, the future of luxury travel for Indians seems brighter than ever. As Kamat says, “The growing appetite for such experiences is a clear indication that luxury travel will only continue to flourish in the coming years, with Indians playing a key role in shaping its future.” Gone are the days when Indians were stereotyped as “budget travellers”. Today, they are shaping the global luxury travel landscape with their evolving tastes and growing influence. Vacation from the hustle and fast-paced lifestyle is coming to Indians in the form of luxury. And from the looks of it, this shift is only just getting started.



Antioxidant-rich diet may reduce risk of iron buildup, cognitive issues with age

Iron is one of the many minerals the body needs to function properly. The body mainly uses iron to create a protein found in red blood cells called hemoglobin, which is tasked with carrying oxygen from the lungs to other areas of the body. Additionally, iron helps muscles store oxygen, is important for hormone and bone marrow production, and keeps the immune system working correctly. Iron also plays an important role in brain health. As we age, iron can accumulate in the brain with too much sometimes late in the brain with neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. Trusted SourceNow, researchers from the University of Kentucky have found that including certain nutrients in a person’s usual diet may help lower the amount of iron buildup in the brain, potentially lowering a person’s risk for cognitive issues.



Brain iron accumulation worsens memory, executive function This current study builds on findings from a previous study conducted by Zachariou and his team that was published in October 2021. In that study, researchers found that a higher intake of antioxidants, vitamins, iron-chelating nutrients, and polyunsaturated fatty acids Trusted Source was linked to lower brain iron levels, as well as better working memory performance. In this new research, scientists followed up about three years later with the same 72 older adults from their original study. Participants had their brain iron levels measured through an MRI technique called quantitative susceptibility mapping Trusted Source. Researchers also examined study participants’ diets and their current cognitive performance, including memory. “This finding is significant because it demonstrates two key points: (1) the MRI modality we used to non-invasively measure non-heme iron in the brain is sensitive enough to detect increases in brain iron over a relatively short three-year period, and (2) these increases are cognitively significant,” Zachariou said. “Specifically, the brain regions where we observed iron accumulation subserve and are associated with episodic memory and executive function, and iron accumulation in these regions was linked to declines in these particular cognitive functions,” he continued. Certain nutrients help lessen iron accumulation in the brain However, researchers also found that study participants who had higher baseline consumption of antioxidants, vitamins, iron-chelating nutrients, and polyunsaturated fatty acids presented significantly less brain iron accumulation during the three-year period. “The immediate next step is to identify and refine the list of specific nutrients that may mitigate the effects of age-related brain iron accumulation on cognition. **How can I reduce brain iron accumulation due to aging?** MNT also spoke with Monique Richard, MS, RDN, LDN, FAND, IFNCP, RYT, a registered dietitian nutritionist and owner of Nutrition-In-Sight for tips on how readers can incorporate more of the antioxidants, vitamins, iron-chelating nutrients, and polyunsaturated fatty acids the study spoke about into their own diets. Richard said if access and ability are not barriers, it is essential to incorporate fresh produce as often as possible on a daily basis. “For the average adult, three servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit a day from a variety of sources (a reminder that 1/2 cup cooked = a serving and 1 cup raw = a serving) will be beneficial to provide the nutrients and antioxidants that would be helpful,” she detailed. “Further dietary pattern considerations would be to monitor heme (primarily found in animal products) and non-heme (primarily from plants) sources of iron intake per individual to make sure that the animal sources are not in excess and appropriate as well as a wide variety of non-heme sources are provided.” “Adequate and optimal nutrition is essential to neuroplasticity and cognitive health but it is also important to remember that brain-stimulating activities brain teasers, crossword puzzles, learning a new language body movement, adequate restful sleep, fresh air, proper hydration, calm, peaceful environments, and social interaction also help everything fire on all cylinders,” she added.

Do the new weight-loss drugs improve your health?

The GLP-1 receptor agonist drugs you’re referring to lower blood sugar in people with type 2 diabetes and powerfully reduce weight in people with obesity. The FDA-approved formulations for weight loss are semaglutide (Wegovy), liraglutide (Saxenda), and tirzepatide (Zepbound). They are given by injections. The drugs lower blood sugar and weight in multiple ways: they release insulin from your pancreas, which lowers sugar levels; they block the action of a hormone that raises your blood sugar; they slow the digestion of sugars from the food you eat; and they act on the brain to reduce your appetite. Not only that, the GLP-1 drugs also quiet inflammation, stimulate the production of antioxidants, help repair damaged DNA, and slow the aging of the body’s cells. But do these drugs actually protect you against disease? Among people who use the drugs for diabetes and obesity, evidence suggests the drugs reduce the risks of kidney disease progression, heart attack, death from heart disease, death from COVID-19, and death from all causes by 15% to 35%! They also may slow the brain inflammation that has been found in Alzheimer’s disease (see “Are some cases of Alzheimer’s disease caused by infection?”), reduce the number of flare-ups of chronic obstructive lung disease, and even reduce addictive behavior. As with any medicine, some people experience side effects. The most common are nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Currently, the drugs are very expensive and are not yet covered for weight loss by some insurance companies. Finally, we don’t yet know the benefits or risks of using these over the term. We often see in these for the of sup-basic bio-research—search to under-how the works than to a specific goal. The 1 drugs exam-why. Sev-decades a Har-Medical scientist, Habener, newly available basic research tools, searched for the gene that makes a hormone called glucagon. He found the gene, and also was surprised to find another similar gene that no one knew about: a gene that makes a hormone he called glucagon-like peptide 1, or GLP-1. To underline my point, Dr. Habener wasn’t trying to cure any disease. He simply was curious.

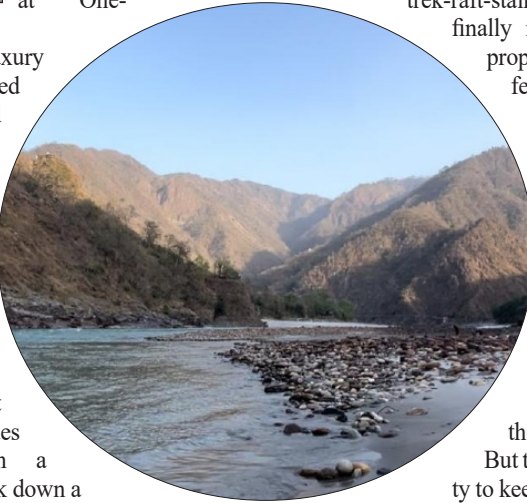


2 days of secluded bliss in otherwise crowded Rishikesh



As North India grapples with scorching heat every summer, many plan to escape to the hills to evade the cruel sun. With a plethora of hill stations around, weekends are often reserved for quick getaways. However, as these plans turn into reality, one is confronted by yet another worry – how to evade the droves of tourists. Whether it’s Mussoorie, Manali, Rishikesh, Nainital, Kasol, or even so-called underrated destinations like Bir and Billing, Khajjiar and Naukuchiatl, they all become crammed with tourists during this time of the year. But guess what? We managed to find secluded bliss on a weekend in Rishikesh, a quint-essential tourist hotspot. A six-hour drive from Delhi, Rishikesh welcomes tourists from all over the country, but majorly drawing a North Indian crowd that doesn’t mind visiting the holy city over and over again. River rafting is a key attraction here during summer. This adventurous water sport in the Ganga makes for a fantastic summer activity suitable even for non-swimmers. However, this same activity also leads to packed roads, over-booked hotels, and a traffic jam in Rishikesh every summer. Videos of peak tourist influx often circulate on social media platforms, warning those on their way to reconsider their decision. Amid this buzz, how did we manage to spend two blissful days away from all the humdrum in Rishi-

kesh? Well, it required some effort. After a 6-hour journey, you would hike down a mountain, get on a raft to cross the river, and then climb up 100 stairs to reach a luxury hideaway? We did just that (not as difficult as it sounds – just took 20 minutes overall). And every breath we fell short of felt worth it as we spent two days at One-ness—a luxury resort cocooned in a secluded forest area in the lower Shivalik mountain range. The property’s staff meets you at the pick-up point and guides you through a 300-metre trek down a mountain. The trek is rather easy-medium in terms of difficulty. The way ahead is a blend of some concrete stairs, a flat pathway, and nature in its raw form. Do expect to cross some boulders and climb down some steep steps. Your luggage, by the way, is carried by the property’s staff up to the resort. That’s a reason why the property has a luggage policy and suggests their guests pack light. A big suitcase (25 kg), a smaller one (7 kg) and a handbag are allowed per person. After you climb down the mountain in 10-15 minutes (depending on your speed and fitness level), you see a serene Ganga flowing in front of you. Get on the private raft that’ll take you to the other side of the river. The staff offers a lifejacket for



the 2-minute river shuttle. It is a scenic delight to be crossing the river with mountains all around. As we alight at the private arrival beach, the next round is to climb up 100 stairs. Think of it as 5 floors. Barely takes 3-5 minutes. There is no rush. Take a break, drink water, and catch a few breaths while soaking in the splendid view – that’s what we did. Wearing a cap and carrying a bottle of water really helped. The sun, burning in its peak, did not spare us in the noon. Wearing comfortable shoes is essential too (imagine doing a trek in heels or even wedges... disaster). After the trek-raft-stairs drill, we finally reached the property – when felt like entering another world. Even Google Maps fails here. Forget your Zomato or Swiggy either. But there is plenty to keep you occupied. Imagine spending hours at private beaches, practicing yoga against the scenic backdrop of mountains, indulging in adventurous activities like rock climbing and tree jumping, and going on nature walks. The property welcomed us with a refreshing juice, much needed after that drill. As you reach the resort, the lush greenery – a bevy of trees, sprawling gardens – combined with the view of the Ganga flowing below gigantic mountains, greets you. The rustling of leaves in the strong winds feels like music to the ears. Nature’s magic worked instantly for us, taking away all the exhaustion. The faces that had turned red in

the scorching sun were now beaming. “This happens with most visitors. They get tired after climbing up the stairs but instantly feel better once they arrive at the property,” a staff member told us. At the entrance of the property is a stunning bamboo structure – the reception (on the ground floor) crowned by a special cottage, entirely built with bamboo. As you look around, another beautiful bamboo structure catches your gaze – an open hall area with a bamboo ceiling in the shape of a wave. We went further to realise it is the dining area – adorned with rustic wooden accents and wooden chairs. No matter what table you occupy, splendid views will tag along as sure-shot accompaniments. We felt so as we relished our arrival lunch here – a buffet comprising a mix of North Indian, Continental, and Chinese delicacies with some really healthy options like wraps, jowar/bajra porridge, and baked vegetables on the menu. Only vegetarian food is served at Oeness. There are only 12 cottages at this resort to keep the secluded vibe intact. All of them are spread around the property on different levels. Ours was the topmost one, requiring us to climb a set of stairs and elevated pathways to reach it. Expect to come across a variety of flora and fauna while at this property – they have worked hard to keep it intact and request their guests not to harm it in any way.



The world's most liveable and happiest cities lists are usually dominated by European countries – but it may be time to look down under. This year, three Australian cities made the top 10 in the Economist Intelligence Unit's Most Liveable Cities index, with Adelaide joining Melbourne and Sydney there for the first time. It's no surprise to Australians, who have long relished a high quality of life. They point to big city benefits – galleries, concerts, sports, diverse cuisine – combined with Australia's iconic natural beauty as the winning formula. "Australia has a deep respect for the outdoors. Lunch breaks can be swims, weeknights mean open-air cinemas and weekends are for farmers' markets packed with produce so good it barely needs cooking," said Andrea Seifert, a senior comms director for Eight Communications who grew up in Europe and Asia and recently moved to Sydney. "That kind of access to nature and culture is rare!" This also translates into a culture where residents work to live instead of live to work. "The lifestyle is just easier. Not necessarily cheaper, but there's a different mindset here," said Cheryl Monkhouse, who lived most of her life in the US and now lives in Adelaide where she works for Sealink Marine & Tourism. "Holidays are taken, and time off is not just expected but respected. Four weeks annual leave is the norm, not the exception." She also says the national healthcare system is a lifeline, compared to the US where losing a job can mean losing health benefits and paying out of pocket for care. "In Australia, there's a sense of security knowing you and your family are covered no matter your employment status," she said. To find out more about what makes these Australian cities so liveable, we spoke to residents about the things that most impact their daily quality of life. Ranked highest out of the Australian cities and fourth globally, Melbourne scored perfect marks in both education and healthcare, and inched out Sydney and Adelaide with its high culture & environment score. Residents point to its cultural diversity as a major draw. "The people, the food, the lifestyle – Melbourne is so multicultural," said Dani Feludu, who was born in Melbourne to European parents. "My husband is Nigerian. My closest friend is Indian. I live in the suburbs, not the city, and can walk 10 min-

utes from my house to get dinner from restaurants that serve cuisines like Mexican, Thai, Filipino, Korean and Turkish. The list goes on!" Feludu recommends experiencing Melbourne's vibrant cultural life in iconic areas like Carlisle Street in Balaclava, Sydney Road in Brunswick and the city laneways. Residents also rave about the city's cafe culture, a product of the Italian immigrants who moved here from the 1950s to 1970s, says resident Katherine Tuominen, founder of Catalyst Brand Strategy. "Beyond the quality and variety of coffee beans, cafes are a great place to connect with strangers and strike up a conversation – once you've enjoyed the beverage that is," she said. And for sport lovers? Melbourne is paradise. "International events like the Australian Open and the Formula 1 Grand Prix take place right in the city cen-

city ranked sixth overall in the index, with perfect scores in education and healthcare, and strong rankings in infrastructure and culture & environment. Residents consistently mention that Sydney combines the buzz of a major global city with a lifestyle built around the outdoors. "What I love most is the balance. You get all the perks of a big city, great food, art, culture and jobs, but with easy access to nature," said Sydney resident Liam Duffy. "I can be in a buzzing cafe one minute, and then at the beach or hiking in a national park within the hour. The lifestyle here feels very grounded and healthy." Sydney's Bondi neighbourhood in particular is known for its



The secret to life in the world's best cities



in the Adelaide Hills and I can be in the city centre in just 25 minutes. It's easy to live here with the hills, the beach and the wine regions!" In the Hills, she finds herself surrounded by nature, with kangaroos and koalas often visiting her property, while the beach is just 30 minutes away and world-class wineries even closer. "My ideal Sunday involves a countryside drive, either south to McLaren Vale or north to the Barossa [wine regions], to discover a new cellar door, sipping a crisp white wine in the sunshine while the kids hang out on the lawn," she said, noting she always takes first-time visitors to the Chalk Hill Winery, with vineyards dating to 1839 and the best views in the region. Autumn (March-May) is a favourite time of year here, especially in the Hills town of Stirling when the leaves start to change. Elsewhere, Carey recommends the beachside suburbs of Aldinga and Moana for their laid-back vibes. "In just a few days, you can experience three incredibly diverse sides of Adelaide: the English village feel and leafy beauty of the Hills, the rolling vineyards of McLaren Vale and the rugged, ochre-coloured cliffs of the southern beaches," she said.

tre," said Melbourne-born Michael Rozenblit, founder of travel site The World Was Here First. "We also have great local sports like Aussie Rules Football (AFL) that draw huge crowds and are incredibly fun to attend." Rozenblit recommends visitors go to an AFL game at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). "The atmosphere is intoxicating, the game is unique and it's fundamental to Melbourne culture," he said. "Some games can draw crowds of more than 80,000 people." **Sydney: City perks, beach lifestyle** Australia's most populous

strong wellness culture, contributing to Sydney's enviable quality of life. "I'm often down at the beach at 05:00 running or training with friends, followed by a quick dip in the ocean, sauna and ice bath session and a coffee, all before 07:00," said Alice Moore, director at Elysée Collective communications agency. Visitors can get a taste of this by doing the popular Bondi to Bronte walk, a 2.5km coastal path that passes through the city's best beaches and has plenty of hip cafes and bars along the way. Beyond the 1,500km of walking and biking paths available in

the city, Sydney's well-planned and easy-to-access infrastructure also makes the city feel more liveable. "Public transport is solid, healthcare is reliable and the city feels generally safe and clean," said Duffy. Similar to Melbourne, Sydney has a diverse food scene that includes both high-end and affordable fare, including Japanese BBQ, Korean, Lebanese, Greek and Turkish. The new Sydney Fish Market is set to open this year, showcasing Australia's best seafood and set to attract nearly six million visitors annually (more than twice the current visitation). "Fresh prawns, oysters,

bugs will be enjoyed right where the fishing trawlers come in every day," said Amanda Bolger, a general manager at Luxury Escapes. To best appreciate the city, she recommends jumping on a ferry from Circular Quay to Manly. "You'll get a different perspective of Sydney from the water and essentially have an inexpensive Sydney Harbour cruise," she said, recommending a walk around Manly before hopping back aboard the ferry. "Don't forget to get a seat on the outside deck so you can get that Insta-worthy image with the Harbour Bridge/Sydney Opera

House in the background." **Adelaide: The quiet achiever** Jumping up two spots in the rankings from 2024 to break into the top 10 for the first time, Adelaide saw its boost come directly from strong growth in its culture & environment score. The capital and most populous city of South Australia, Adelaide scores high marks from its residents for being a "big 'country' city", with a solid mix of access to nature and comprehensive infrastructure that makes life easier and more enjoyable. Locals describe it as a place where simplicity, affordability and nature come together. "Living in

Adelaide, life is simpler," said Monkhouse. "It's connected and convenient without being overwhelming. Public transport is reliable, and my kids use it daily to get to school, the beach or meet friends." She contrasts it to her life in the US where public transport is often unavailable or unreliable outside of major metro areas, and rarely something kids would use independently. Even though the population nears 1.5 million, residents say Adelaide remains easy to navigate. "You can still get just about anywhere in 30 to 45 minutes," said Erin Carey, director of PR agency Roam Generation. "I live



Mediterranean for centuries. Recently, Uzbekistan has been leaning into its Silk Road roots with an ambitious new tourism drive, seeing its historical trading hubs of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva developing at breakneck speeds. However, critics point out that its flashy recreations of traditional Uzbek culture run the risk of turning it into a veritable Silk Road theme park. Margilan is the birthplace of Uzbek ikat, one of Central Asia's most complex textile traditions. This silk-weaving tradition stretches back 1,000



The fertile Silk Road valley few travellers know

In Tashkent, the Fergana Valley, a fertile region in Central Asia, is home to a family of three who grow a variety of fruits, including strawberries, mulberries, apricots, apples, oranges, and strawberries. The valley is also

the birthplace of Uzbekistan's celebrated silk, ceramic, and fruit production, which forms the backbone of Uzbek culture. Like much of modern-day Uzbekistan, the Fergana Valley was a conduit for trade, ideas, and artistry between China, Persia, and the

years and was plied along the Silk Road as early as the 11th Century. Unlike other places in Uzbekistan today, the labour-intensive weaving in Margilan is still done by hand. At Yodgorlik, one of the city's oldest silk factories, silkworms munch through piles of tender mulberry leaves, growing fat until they spin deli-

cate cocoons of raw silk. The silk is then washed, stretched, and tightly bundled into skeins and resist-dyed in successive stages with natural pigments. Artisans bend and sweat over massive steaming cauldrons all day, coaxing colour into thread to build intricate patterns that emerge only after the fabric is woven. Rishtan, a city in Uzbekistan, is

known for its vibrant ceramics, including bowls, tiles, jugs, and glazed pomegranates. The pomegranate is sacred in Uzbekistan, used for fertility, good luck, and to remember life's sweet and sharp aspects. Rustam Usmanov's workshop, part studio and part school of a respected potter, teaches students how to shape and dry local clay, which is then

coated with white clay and fired at 920C. Intricate plant-based motifs are hand-painted before a second firing at 960-1000C locks in the alkaline glaze, revealing the intense blue tint that makes Uzbek pottery so distinct. Every Rishtan ceramic tells a story, with birds representing freedom, fruits for abundance, and jugs representing life itself. Fergana, the

city's namesake city, boasts some of the nation's best fruit, with grapevines, cherries, and apricot trees everywhere. At the farmer's market, the offerings are dazzling, with rows of sun-blushed peaches, crisp apples, purple grapes, and fragrant strawberries. Fergana's rich alluvial soils and long sunlit days make it a popular destination for tourists.

IOA, Italian National Olympic Committee



Mumbai: The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Wednesday to strengthen bilateral cooperation in sports. The MoU outlines structured plans for joint training camps, coaching exchanges, collaborative sports science programmes, and development pathways for emerging athletes, signalling a new era of cooperation between the two OMinister Mansukh Mandaviya, demonstrating the strong strategic commitment of both governments to enhance cooperation through sport. agreement reinforces our shared commitment to cooperation, innovation, and excellence". sport, and this MoU represents an important step in strengthening that bond. By opening our high-performance facilities and expertise to each other, we are building a bridge of excellence that will benefit both nations' athletes for years to come. CONI is delighted to join hands with IOA in this forward-looking initiative".

Indian sports wrap, Manush-Diya pair loses group opener at WTT Finals WTT Finals debut in Hong Kong

Mumbai: India's mixed doubles pair of Manush Shah and Diya Chitale suffered a straight-games defeat against Chinese wildcards Wang Chuqin and Sun Yingsha in the group-stage opener of the WTT Finals in Hong Kong on Wednesday. World No. 3 Wang and Sun took down World No. 9 and WTT Finals debutants Manush and Diya 3-0 (11-7, 11-6, 11-8) in 22 minutes. Manush and Diya, the first-ever Indians to qualify for the season-ending tournament, will be up against the local duo of Wong Chun Ting and Doo Hoi Kem in their match, which will be played on Thursday. The 9th Elite Men & Women National Boxing Championship, earlier scheduled from 31st December 2025 to 6th January 2026 at Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, has been rescheduled. In light of the pollution control



measures mandated by the Government and effective until December 31, the Championship will now be held from January 4 to January 10 2026, at the same venue. All other arrangements remain unchanged. India's Maaya Rajeshwaran Revathi gained four spots to make her Top 50 debut in the latest ITF Junior

Rankings released on Monday. The 16-year-old Maaya, country's top-ranked junior, played at an J300 event in Bradenton, USA, last week where she reached the quarterfinals. To extend her winning run with a hard-fought 16-9 victory against Bara and Rithvik Bollipalli in the mixed doubles.

Barcelona, Liverpool, Atletico Madrid claim Champions League wins

Mumbai: Two headers from Jules Kounde lifted Barcelona to a 2-1 win over Eintracht Frankfurt, securing a vital Champions League victory at home. The win leaves Barcelona 13th in the 36-team league phase, still with work to do to ensure a top-eight finish, but with two winnable games to play in the new year. Ansgar Knauff put Eintracht ahead in the 21st minute against the run of play when he finished off a counter-attack in a half where Barcelona had most of the ball, with Pedri looking to control the play, reports Xinhua. Kounde headed Barcelona level in the 50th minute after a fine cross from Marcus Rashford after the England forward had come on as a halftime substitute. Kounde scored another header three minutes later, nodding in Lamine Yamal's high cross. In Bergamo, Reece James set up Joao Pedro to open

the scoring for Chelsea at Atalanta, but Gianluca Scamacca was allowed a free header to equalize 10 minutes into the second half, and the Chelsea defense stood off when Charles De Ketelaere fired in Atalanta's winner with seven minutes left. Atletico Madrid came back from a goal down to win 3-2 against PSV, who opened the scoring thanks to Guus Til's 10th-minute goal. Alexander Sorloth teed up Julian Alvarez for the equalizer in the 37th minute, before David Hancko pounced on a rebound after Matej Kovar pushed out Nahuel Molina's long-range effort in the 52nd, with Sorloth then adding a third four minutes later. Ricardo Pepi pulled a goal back at the far post in the 85th minute and Armando Obispo missed a golden chance from close range in the final minutes as Atletico claimed a vital 3-2 win.

Ben Stokes, Bazball, Ashes catas trophe are all torn apart by England's

New Delhi: They arrived in Australia with swagger, optimism — and a philosophy. The men in England's Test whites, guided by Ben Stokes and inspired by the fearless ethos of Bazball, promised to rewrite the rules of Test cricket. Instead, in the first two Tests of the 2025-26 The Ashes, their bold blueprint was dismantled, piece by piece, by a ruthless and disciplined side, which was without their captain Pat Cummins. For starters, Bazball itself was born out of humiliation. After England, under Joe Root, were thrashed 0-4 Down Under in 2021-22, the Test side underwent a cultural reset. Brendon McCullum and Ben Stokes built their firebrand brand of cricket with one eye fixed firmly on Australia — an identity robust enough to conquer the one frontier no English side had breached for nearly 15 years. In Perth and Brisbane, England's failures were not just the result of a supe-

rior Australian attack — they were self-inflicted. In the series opener, which ended in two days, England were in the driver's seat, but a session of madness with the bat undid them. In the pink-ball Test, England's lack of preparation showed as they were hammered by eight wickets, falling short of what would have been a deserved innings defeat. Time and again, England batters lunged for glory: driving on the up, going for flamboyant shots, and gifting themselves to the seamers. Their aggressive intent, once the hallmark of their "Bazball" swagger, turned into a pathway of collapse. Meanwhile the bowling and fielding offered no redemption. What was meant to be a ruthless, attacking arsenal, built by their tearaway pacers, came across as erratic, short of discipline, and utterly lacking the timing to break Australia's resistance. The carnage was swift; the collapse spectacular.

West Indies disappoint days heroic display series opener NZ vs WI 2nd Test:

Mumbai: New Zealand fast bowler Blair Tickner was helped from the field with a shoulder injury after taking 4-32 on the first day of the second Test against the West Indies on Wednesday in the latest cruel blow in a career flecked with tragedy. Tickner fell heavily while fielding a ball at fine leg in his first Test in more than two years and only the fourth of his career. He lay motionless while being assisted by medical staff before being carefully lifted from the field on a stretcher. Tickner bowled well in tandem with Michael Rae who took 3-65 on debut as New Zealand bowled



out the West Indies for 205 in 75 overs. Devon Conway and Tom Latham were tested in the last 40 minutes but saw New Zealand to stumps at 24 without loss. "I guess on the first day of a test match if you've

rolled the other team for 200 and you're 20 or so without loss, you're happy," Tickner said. "It's been a really surreal couple of days for me since I knew I was going to play. Pinch me.

Fifty on his debut to put New Zealand ahead of the West Indies in their second Test match

New Delhi: Mitch Hay scored an aggressive half-century on his Test debut to help New Zealand to a 41-run lead over the West Indies at the close of play on Day Two of the second Test in Wellington on Thursday. The Black Caps were 278 all out with about an hour to play in the final session, after the West Indies scored 205 at the Basin Reserve. At Stumps, the visiting side was 32 for two in its second innings, with Brandon King (15) and Kavem Hodge (3) at the crease. Michael Rae and Jacob Duffy took a wicket each as New Zealand got through 10 overs in fading light. Hay scored 61 from 93 deliveries, playing with poise in his first taste of Test cricket. He hit nine fours and a six. Anderson Phillip was the pick of the visiting bowlers, taking three for 70 in 13

overs. Kumar Roach had figures of two for 43. The 25-year-old Hay came to the crease at 117 for four after Rachin Ravindra, for five, and Devon Conway, who made 60, fell in back-to-back overs immediately after Lunch. He quickly found his feet at the Test level, at ease with the pace and movement of the Basin Reserve wicket. Hay and Daryl Mitchell combined for a 73-run partnership for the fifth wicket, with Hay the aggressor, leaving Mitchell in the unusual position of playing anchor. Mitchell fell just before Tea for 25. Hay eventually hooked a ball to Roach in the deep, ending his fine knock. Zak Foulkes added 23 unbeaten runs but ran out of partners. Earlier, Conway batted well for his 60 from 108 balls before feathering down the leg side to wicketkeeper Tevin Imlach soon after lunch.



IND vs SA, T20I: South Africa hopes for a quick turnaround against

Mumbai: The objects in the mirror are closer than they appear: India and South Africa come into Thursday's second T20I with barely any scope to reflect on Tuesday's exploits. A byproduct of the rapid-fire scheduling is that both teams, having only arrived in India's first planned city, will have little time to prepare at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh Stadium.

While the Men in Blue will do well not to sit on their laurels after the 101-run triumph in Cuttack, the Proteas will be relieved to get back into the thick of things without having to dwell on the silly mistakes made at the Barabati Stadium.

South Africa's biggest worry will be the manner in which its batting capitulated in the 176-run chase. From Quinton de Kock being caught by Abhishek Sharma at second slip off the second ball to Lutho Sipamla's edge signalling the premature end of the South African innings (bundled out for 74 in 12.3 overs), nothing went right for the Protean willow-wielders.

In the FIH Men's Junior World Cup, India won bronze

Mumbai: India produced a brave-heart performance, nullifying a two-goal deficit to beat Argentina 4-2 and clinch the bronze medal in the FIH Men's Junior World Cup here on Wednesday. India, who won the title in 2016 in Lucknow, failed to finish on the podium on the last two occasions, ending fourth in 2021 in Bhubaneswar, and two years later in Kuala Lumpur. India produced a valiant fightback with Ankit Pal (49th minute), Manmeet Singh (52nd) and Anmol Ekka (58th) converting penalty corners, while Sharda Nand Tiwari finding the net from the spot in the 57th minute. Argentina were the better side on display at least in the first two quarters, scoring through Nicolas Rodriguez (3rd minute) and Santiago Fernandez (44th). The Argentines controlled the possession of the match in the first quarter as India struggled to get a foothold. Argentina secured their first chance in the third minute in the form of a penalty stroke following a foul by Anmol Ekka and Rodriguez made no mistake to hand his side the lead.

The Indians were guilty of giving away the ball too easily, which put paid to their chances in the first 15 minutes. India had their best shot at the goal in the 20th minute but Dilraj Singh's shot from top of the circle was finely saved by Argentina goalkeeper Joaquin Ruiz. The Indians



started brightly after the change of ends and secured four back-to-back penalty corners in the 31st minute but failed to execute a single one with Anmol Ekka flicking the final one over the post. Argentina kept up the pressure on the Indian defence and secured their first penalty corner in the 37th minute but Indian goalkeeper Princeedeeep Singh made a brilliant double save to keep the hosts in the hunt. Argentina secured two more short corners in the 40th minute but failed to get past the Indian defence. The visitors secured their fourth penalty corner in the 41st minute but Rodriguez flick was off target. The Indians didn't lose heart

and maintained the pressure in the final quarter and drew level, converting two penalty corners through deflections in the span of four minutes. Ankit Pal reduced the margin in the 49th minute by deflecting in Anmol Ekka's flick from India's fifth penalty corner. Manmeet Singh drew parity for India four minutes later, deflecting in another Ekka's flick from India's sixth penalty corner. With momentum on their side, India pressed hard on the Argentine defence thereafter and Tiwari scored from a penalty stroke three minutes from the final hooter. Ekka drove the final nail on Argentina's coffin, converting a finely executed penalty corner a minute later.

ATP Challenger events in Chennai, Pune see drop in prize money and ranking

New Delhi: India is set to host four ATP Challenger Tour events for the third season in a row, albeit with significant changes to the schedule, prize money and ranking points on offer. In 2025, the series began on February 3 in Chennai where the total prize money was USD 160,000 and Frenchman Kyrian Jacquet, the champion, bagged 100 points. The tournament in Chennai was followed by the ones in Delhi (Total prize money - USD 100,000; 75 ranking points for the champion), Pune (Total prize money - USD 160,000; 100 ranking points for the winner) and Bengaluru (Total prize money - USD 200,000; 125 ranking points for the winner) in consecutive weeks. Across the four Challenger events, Indian players managed to win just one out of 13 singles matches in the main draw. As per the revised ATP calendar released on December 4, the 2026 season for the second tier of men's tennis will open in Bengaluru on January 5. The event, while still offering the winner 125 ranking points, has an increased to-



The drop in ranking points in Chennai essentially indicates that the overall strength of the field will be comparatively weaker when compared to the last three years.

tal of USD 225,000 in prize money. However, Chennai Challenger, set to begin on February 9, will have a reduced prize pool of USD 63,000 and the champion will gain only 50 points. "We just hosted a big WTA 250 event (in October) but we also wanted to continue the men's event (Challenger). So, for next year, we will have it as an ATP 50 tournament. We will build it up again," said Hiten Joshi, CEO of Tamil Nadu Tennis Association, when asked about the drop in total prize money and ranking

points. The drop in ranking points in Chennai essentially indicates that the overall strength of the field will be comparatively weaker when compared to the last three years. "Another way to look at it is that more Indians will have the opportunity to compete in the main draw," said Joshi. Delhi Open, starting on February 16, will have a slightly increased prize pool of USD 107,000 with 75 ranking points for the champion. The series will conclude in Pune. Like Chennai, the tournament in Pune, begin-

ning on February 23, will have a drop in total prize money (USD 107,000) and ranking points for the champion (75). Sunder Iyer, Honorary Secretary of the Maharashtra State Lawn Tennis Association, explained the reason behind the reduced prize money for Chennai and Pune. "In 2025, all four tournaments in India received significant monetary help from ATP. For next season, they have selected a different country to do the same. They will still support us but the monetary assistance has been reduced," said Iyer. Iyer also added that while the country will continue to host a WTA 125 event in Mumbai (February 2-8), there are plans to increase the number of ITF events. According to a tentative calendar, as many as 11 ITF tournaments will be held from January to March.