

## Forced religious conversion is a crime, says Tripura CM Manik Saha on Veer Bal Diwas

**Agartala, Dec 27:** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha has said that forced religious conversion is a serious crime and there should be a strong social movement against it. He made this statement on December 25 while speaking to reporters at a Gurdwara in Chandmari, on the outskirts of Agartala, during the observance of Veer Bal Diwas. The chief minister said that religion is a matter of personal faith and choice. According to him, no one should be forced, pressured, or tempted to change their religion. He added that society needs to stay alert against such practices and people must raise their voices whenever such incidents take place. Veer Bal Diwas is observed every year to remember the martyrdom of the two younger sons of Sikh Guru Gobind Singh — Baba Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh. They were only nine and six years old when they were killed more than three centuries ago for refusing to give up their faith. In 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that December 26 would be marked across the country as Veer Bal Diwas to honour their bravery and sacrifice. Speaking about the Sahibzade, Chief Minister Saha said their story continues to inspire people even today. He said the young sons

of Guru Gobind Singh stood firm in their faith despite facing extreme pressure and threat to their lives. He described their killing during the rule of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb as an example of extreme cruelty and injustice. According to him, the courage shown by the Sahibzade teaches people to stand up against oppression and wrongdoing. Saha also said that the observance of Veer Bal Diwas reminds people of the need to protect religious freedom. He stressed that every person has the right to follow the religion of their choice. Any attempt to force someone to convert, he said, is not only wrong but also a crime. He also mentioned the past suffering of Kashmiri Pandits while speaking about religious persecution. The chief minister went on to express concern about the decline of the Hindu population in Pakistan over the decades. He said that after Independence, the situation in what was then East Pakistan and West Pakistan was different, but over time the Hindu population there has seen a sharp fall. He said this was a matter of worry and should not be ignored. Calling for joint efforts, Saha said people should not remain silent when forced religious conversions take place. He said voice-



es must be raised not only inside India but also at global platforms. According to him, the issue of religious freedom and protection of faith is important for all communities and must be discussed openly across the world.

Saha also underlined that Veer Bal Diwas is not just a day of remembrance but also a day to learn from history. He said the bravery and sacrifice of the Sahibzade give people strength and remind them that standing for

truth and faith may be difficult but is always important. He added that younger generations should be made aware of these historical events so that they understand the value of courage, tolerance, and freedom of faith. People present at the Gurdwara also took part in the observance and paid tribute to the two young martyrs. The day was marked with prayers, remembrance, and messages on unity and peace. Many people said the story of the Sahibzade shows how even children can show great strength when it comes to protecting their beliefs. Throughout his address, Chief Minister Saha repeatedly stressed that religion should never become a tool for pressure or fear. He said India is a country where many religions and communities live together, and this diversity must always be respected. He added that peaceful coexistence is the foundation of society and forced religious conversion goes against that spirit. He also said that governments, social organisations, and common citizens must work together to prevent such practices. According to him, legal measures alone are not enough. There should also be awareness in society so that people know their rights and feel confident to speak up.

### In Brief

#### ABHILASHA 2025

**Hojai:** The Design Innovation Center at IIT Guwahati is hosting ABHILASHA 2025, a career awareness initiative for students in Classes 7–12 in Hojai, on December 27-28. The program aims to introduce participants to various career pathways in Design, Fashion, Management, Law, and Higher Education through national entrance exams.

#### Tripura student stabbed to death in Dehradun

**Agartala:** On December 9, a 24-year-old MBA student, Anjel Chakma, was stabbed during a fight with five men in Uttarakhand and died in Dehradun 18 days later. Anjel was attacked alongside his brother, Michael, who was also injured.

#### IIT Guwahati conducts career guidance session in Hojai

**Hojai:** The Design Innovation Center at IIT Guwahati is organizing ABHILASHA 2025, a career awareness initiative for students in Classes 7–12 in Hojai, focusing on diverse careers in Design, Fashion, Management, Law, and Higher Education. Scheduled for December 27-28 at Bhavishya Vidya Mandir, the event aims to guide students towards non-traditional career paths.

### CM Neiphiu Rio and A.R. Rahman join hands to set up Naga International Studio in Nagaland

**Kohima, Dec 27:** Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio has announced a new and important creative project for the state. On December 26, he said that the government is partnering with world-famous music composer A.R. Rahman to set up the “Naga International Studio.” Rio said this project will help young people in Nagaland develop their talent and also take Naga culture to the global stage. The Chief Minister made the announcement through a post on social media. He said the studio will become a centre for storytelling, music creation and other creative work.

According to him, the idea is to give artists and creators a place where they can learn, work and share their culture with the world. Rio also thanked A.R. Rahman for seeing the potential of Nagaland and for choosing to collaborate with the state. The studio is expected to support musicians, filmmakers, writers, singers



and many other artistes from Nagaland and the Northeast. Many young people currently leave the region to look for opportunities. With this project, they may be able to work closer to home while still getting exposure at the global level. Rio said the Naga International Studio will try to blend traditional Naga stories, songs and art forms with modern technology and production methods. This will help preserve the identity of the Naga people while also making the content easy for international audiences to understand and enjoy. Officials said the involvement of A.R. Rahman gives the project a strong global connection. Rahman is respected around

the world for his music and creativity. Because of this, the studio may help make Nagaland an important cultural and creative destination in the future. The project is also expected to support the local economy. It may create jobs, encourage entrepreneurship among young people and help build a stronger creative industry in the state. More details such as the exact location, investment and timeline are yet to be announced. However, many cultural groups, artistes and youth organisations have already welcomed the move. They believe this project could become a turning point for the creative sector in Nagaland and open new doors for local talent.

### Tripura student stabbed to death in Dehradun; five held

**Agartala, Dec 27:** 18 days after he was allegedly stabbed during a fight involving five men in Uttarakhand, a 24-year-old student from Tripura passed away in Dehradun on Friday, according to police sources.

Anjel Chakma, the deceased, was an MBA student at a Dehradun private institution. Since the attack on December 9, he has been

receiving treatment for his injuries. Michael Chakma, his brother, who was present at the time, was also hurt. The event happened in the Selaqui neighborhood when the two brothers went out in the evening to buy household goods, according to the police.

A group of drunk guys allegedly got into a fight with the brothers and attacked them with metal bracelets

and sharp-edged tools after using racial and caste-based epithets. When Anjel tried to step in, he was stabbed in the head and abdomen, while Michael had a head injury.

After being admitted to a private hospital in severe condition, Anjel passed away there.

The case was initially filed as attempted murder, but after his death, author-

ities added murder charges under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. According to senior sub-inspector Jitender Kumar, Michael Chakma filed a formal complaint on December 10, which resulted to the arrest of the accused.

The accused allegedly acknowledged during questioning that the attack happened after a fight outside a Selaqui liquor store.

## Manipur Government Highlights Extensive Year Long Environmental Conservation Initiatives

**Imphal, Dec 27:** Reaffirming its commitment to environmental conservation, the Manipur government has intensified its focus on protecting natural resources while pursuing economic growth, with the Environment Department continuing to observe key global environmental days throughout the year. Principal Secretary (Forest, Environment & Climate Change) Arun Kumar Sinha, IAS, attended the programme as the Chief Guest, while Dr T. Brajakumar Singh, Director of Environment & Climate Change, presided over the function. Speaking on the



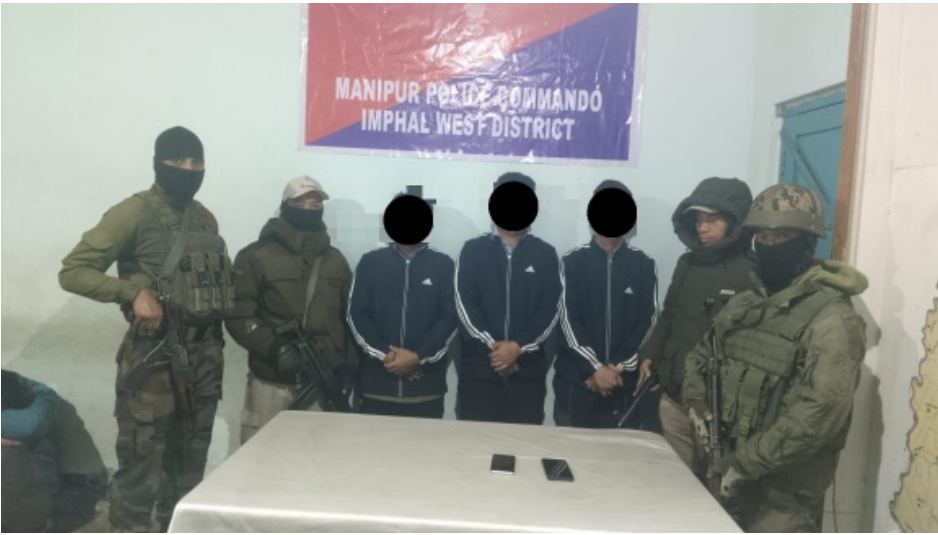
occasion, Arun Kumar Sinha said the department observes several major environmental days annually, beginning with World Wetlands Day in February, followed by World

Water Day (March), World Earth Day (April), International Day for Biological Diversity (May), World Environment Day (June), World Nature Conservation Day

(July), International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples (August), World Ozone Day (September) and International Mountain Day (December). He added that the newly released calendar reflects the state's ecological richness and highlights these key observances. The calendar features Dzuko Valley in January, a hill water body in Tamenglong in February, the Barak River in March, the spring landscape in April, and migratory birds across Manipur's wetlands in May. urged all stakeholders to work collectively for programme.

## Eight KCP cadres arrested in coordinated security operations across Imphal

**Imphal, Dec 27:** Security forces carried out a series of coordinated operations across Imphal East and Imphal West districts on Friday, December 26, leading to the arrest of eight active cadres of the proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP). Officials said the arrests were made during separate but planned actions in different locations, and several items including arms, ammunition and communication devices were recovered during the operations. In the first incident, security personnel apprehended an active member of the KCP (Ibungo Ngangom) group. He has been identified as Kshetrimayum Binoy Singh, also known as Kebi, aged 41. He is a resident of Singjamei Wangma Torban Kshetri Leikai in Imphal East district. According to



officials, he was arrested from a farmhouse at Langol Game Village Zone-III, which falls under Lamphel Police Station in Imphal West. A mobile phone and an Aadhaar card were recovered from his possession. On the same day, security

forces conducted another operation and arrested three more cadres belonging to the KCP (Taibanganba) faction. They were reportedly staying at the Langol Game Village Relief Camp in Zone-II under Lamphel Police Station. The arrested persons have been

identified as Amom Somen-dro Singh alias Kangleibung (32) of Wangoo Ahallup Makha Leikai in Bishnupur district, RK Bishworjit Singh alias Boinao (38) of Nambol Thiyam Makha Leikai in Bishnupur district, and Ningthoujam Santosh

Singh (30) of Saikot Zaion Veng in Churachandpur district. Two mobile handsets were seized from them. In another major development, security personnel arrested four active cadres of the KCP (PWG) faction from the Andro Leitanpekpham area under Andro Police Station in Imphal East district. They have been identified as Ningthoujam Birjit Meitei alias Tocha (36), Pangabam Meiraba Meitei alias Nongpokngakpa (32), Mutum Norin Meitei (33) and Ningombam Robi Meitei alias Akhup (32), all residents of Imphal East. Officials said that during this operation, one .32 pistol, a magazine, three live rounds of ammunition, four mobile phones, an Aadhaar card, a sky-blue Santro car (MN01W 9427) and two Baofeng radio sets were recovered.

## Arunachal students head to Gujarat on Assam Rifles tour



**Itanagar, Dec 27:** The Assam Rifles (AR) Khonsa battalion has arranged a national integration tour for students from Wangcha Rajkumar government college in Deomali, Tirap district, Arunachal Pradesh, to attend the 26th Rashtra Katha Shivir in Gujarat as part of its civic action program.

The effort seeks to advance nationalism, national cohesion, and awareness of India's progress and cultural legacy. The tour, which will take place from December 27 to January 4 of next year, will involve 11 students from the battalion's area of responsibility. State minister of geology, mining,

and minerals Wanki Lowang launched the tour from Deomali on Thursday. The students will go to the Vedic Mission Trust-organized shivir in Pransla hamlet in Gujarat's Rajkot region.

Throughout the program, participants will engage with individuals from around the nation, broadening their perspectives and gaining knowledge about cultural variety, social harmony, and unity. By promoting constructive involvement and awareness, the national integration tour also aims to positively channel the energy of local youth while assisting in the prevention of societal issues like drug misuse and insurgency.

NATIONAL

Siddaramaiah to attend CWC meeting in Delhi

New Delhi, Dec 27: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah traveled to New Delhi to participate in a Congress Working Committee meeting on December 27, alongside leaders from Telangana and Himachal Pradesh. The agenda covers recent electoral reviews, allegations of vote theft, the National Herald case, and a stance against central government changes to MGNREGA. Siddaramaiah's attendance follows uncertainty regarding his invitation, while the State Backward Classes Awareness Forum plans an Ahinda convention for January 25, 2026, to reinforce his political significance amid leadership speculation. Although he will not attend the convention, it aims to showcase his essential role for the Ahinda bloc, comprising minorities and backward classes. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar addressed speculation over leadership changes, emphasizing his commitment as a party worker over any position. Congress insiders suggest that Rahul Gandhi has received assessments on leadership alterations, leading to a delay in decisions. While Shivakumar awaits a meeting with Gandhi, Siddaramaiah's allies have already engaged with him in Delhi.

S. Ramadoss cautions his son not to use the party name

GK Mani is expelled by Anbumani

Chennai, Dec 27: S Ramadoss, founder of the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), issued a legal notice to his son Anbumani Ramadoss, prohibiting him from using the PMK's name, flag, and symbol, citing Anbumani's lack of legal authority to represent the party. With the 2026 Tamil Nadu assembly elections approaching, S Ramadoss urged other political parties to avoid alliances with Anbumani, warning that any such claim would be considered illegal and misleading to the public. Concurrently, Anbumani expelled GK Mani, a long-serving MLA and sup-



porter of S Ramadoss, from the party over alleged anti-party activities. Despite this, the Election Commission of India confirmed Anbumani as the current PMK president until August 1, 2026, rejecting S Ramadoss's claim to the position. The PMK has historically shifted alliances between the ruling DMK and opposition AIADMK. Following the AIADMK's departure from the BJP alliance in 2023, PMK chose to remain with the BJP. In an internal dispute, S Ramadoss previously expressed a desire to align with AIADMK, while Anbumani insisted on continuing with the BJP. The family feud initially gained public attention in December 2024, when S Ramadoss appointed his grandson as the youth wing president, leading to Anbumani's public objections. Tensions escalated through 2024 and 2025, resulting in Anbumani's removal from the presidency and accusations of underhanded tactics. S Ramadoss has declared his authority final, suggesting Anbumani could start his own party if he wished. Anbumani has not publicly responded to his father's allegations.

BJP leader Sarathkumar said, "Vijay cannot be judged politically until he faces elections"

● R Sarathkumar, a BJP leader, stated that actor Vijay's political journey will be evaluated only after he participates in elections and clarifies his ideological stance.

Chennai, Dec 27: Actor and BJP leader R Sarathkumar asserted that true leadership requires attentiveness to public grievances and evaluated actor Vijay's political future, suggesting it can only be determined post-elections and based on his ideological clarity. Speaking at Thoothukudi Airport, Sarathkumar expressed disappointment over Vijay's potential last film, "Jana Nayagan," and discussed the BJP's seat-sharing strategies in Tamil Nadu, emphasizing that decisions would follow discussions with state leaders after elections are announced. He critiqued the DMK government's portrayal of truths, stating that even honest statements are misrepresented under their governance, particularly referencing claims about a multi-speciality hospital.

Sarathkumar raised alarm over escalating crime rates and questioned the police's capacity to manage the situation, noting an increase in violent and sexual offences linked to drug abuse. He commented on the new VB-G-RAM Bill, highlighting issues with funding and implementation, alleging the government misuses social schemes. Further criticizing the DMK, he remarked that they neither support good initiatives nor accept public feedback. Regarding Vijay's political journey, he emphasized the importance of electoral participation and ideological advocacy, cautioning against hasty judgments of his political stature without electoral experience. He also recounted an incident involving a protest by TVK executive Ajitha, advocating for leaders to engage directly with constituents to defuse tensions.



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India provides an update on the chaos surrounding appointments as H-1B visa delays persist

Agency: Amid ongoing delays in the scheduling of interviews and appointments for the much-sought after H-1B visas, the Indian government has said that it has conveyed its concerns with the authorities in the US. The government noted that visa matters fall within the jurisdiction of the respective country, but also acknowledged that many Indian applicants are facing delays and difficulties in securing visa appointments. "There are several people who have been stranded for extended periods of time because of scheduling or rescheduling of consular appointments, and these have also caused a lot of

hardships to their families," Randhir Jaiswal, the minister of external affairs (MEA) spokesperson, said on Friday. The H-1B visa system has undergone significant changes over the past few months. Any modification to the visa allocation criteria stands to impact Indians the most, as they constitute the largest share of its recipients. Earlier this month, the Donald Trump-led US administration announced an expanded screening process as part of which the H-1B visa applicants and their dependents would undergo an online presence review. "To facilitate this vetting, all applicants for H-1B and their de-

pendents (H-4), F, M, and J non-immigrant visas are instructed to adjust the privacy settings on all of their social media profiles to public," a US release read. The modification took effect on December 15. After this, several applicants whose appointments were scheduled last week, received e-mails from US immigration authorities informing that their interviews are being pushed back as late as May next year. Addressing these concerns during the Friday presser, the MEA said that Indian authorities had actively engaged with the US on the issue. "While we do understand that visa-related issues pertain to the



sovereign domain of any country, we have flagged these issues

and concerns of our nationals to the US side, both in New Delhi and in Washington DC. We hope that these delays and the disruptions will be addressed," Jaiswal said. Reacting to the new online screening rule for the H-1B visa applicants, Jaiswal said: "This particular change that they have introduced is applicable globally to all countries. India remains actively engaged with the US side to address and minimise the disruptions caused to our nationals." The fresh changes to the H-1B visa allocation are part of the Trump admin's efforts to further tighten regulations related to the hiring of skilled

■ India recognized that numerous citizens are experiencing delays and challenges in obtaining H-1B visa appointments, and expressed that these issues have been communicated to the United States.

professionals from abroad. Apart from the expanded screening process introduced this month, the US also slapped a steep fee of \$100,000 for first-time H-1B visa applicants a few months back, and replaced the random lottery for selecting recipients with giving greater weight to people with higher skills.

A man murders his brother over a land dispute

Pilibhit, Dec 27: A man has been accused of murdering his younger brother, Hansraj, over a land dispute in Pilibhit. The incident arose from a conflict regarding 10 bighas of agricultural land inherited from their mother, who had passed away. Following her death, the accused, Nakshtira Pal, allegedly took over the land entirely, causing frequent arguments with Hansraj, who demanded a share. On the day of the murder, a violent altercation occurred about 500 meters from their home, leading to Hansraj's death, after which his body was buried in a pit at their resi-



dence to conceal the evidence. The eldest brother, Prithviraj, reporting Hansraj's absence, prompted police intervention. Upon arrival, Nakshtira attempted to flee but was apprehended. A forensic investigation has been initiated, and Hansraj's body has been recovered and sent for a post-mortem examination.

Seven people have died in a collision at Chitradurga: Police

Bengaluru, Dec 27: The death toll from a collision between a sleeper bus and a container truck in Chitradurga district has risen to seven following the death of the bus driver, Mohammed Rafeek, who succumbed to his injuries on Friday. The crash occurred when the container truck struck the bus, causing a fire that consumed the vehicle. Initial reports confirmed the deaths of five bus passengers and the truck driver at the scene. Investigations revealed no violations by the bus operator, Seabird Tourist, which has been in operation for 25 years and had passed recent safety inspections.



The wreckage of vehicles involved in a crash in Chitradurga district.

Transport officials are drafting revised safety protocols for nighttime operations to enhance driver rest facilities. Survivors of the fire recounted their narrow escape, with one, Gaganashree, describing how she and a friend managed to jump to safety while

others became trapped in the flames. Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy emphasized the importance of bus safety and the ongoing inspections that will continue into the new year to prevent such tragedies.

In MP, a BJP youth leader crashes a car into people who are seated close to a bonfire

11-year-old and senior citizen killed

Bhopal, Dec 27: A tragic incident occurred in Madhya Pradesh's Morena district, where a leader from the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), Dipendra Bhadoria, was reportedly driving recklessly when his vehicle ploughed into a group of individuals gathered around a bonfire. The collision, which took place on a cold night in the Porsa area, resulted in the death of an 11-year-old boy named Arnab alias Annu Lashkar and a 65-year-old man, Ramdatt Rathore. Eyewitness accounts indicate that Bhadoria was speeding and possibly under the influence of alcohol at the time of the accident. Following the collision, the injured victims were immediately taken to Gwalior for advanced medical treatment, but unfortunately, both Arnab and Ramdatt succumbed to their injuries shortly after arrival at the hospital. Other individuals affected by the accident, including Kamlesh Rathore, Girraj Rathore, and Abhishek Tomar, are currently receiving medical care for their injuries. After the inci-



dent, local residents expressed their outrage, particularly when Bhadoria managed to escape police custody, which led to chaotic scenes in the aftermath. The community's anger culminated in a highway blockade as frustrations mounted against the police handling of the situation. Authorities confirmed that post-mortem examinations will be conducted on both deceased individuals, and arrangements are in place for their final rites in Porsa. Despite being initially apprehended, the accused's escape highlighted concerns about the effectiveness of the police response in such critical incidents.

Delhi High Court overturns forced retirement and restores the "honour" of an ex-CISF officer

New Delhi, Dec 27: The Delhi High Court has reinstated the dignity of a 72-year-old former officer of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), who was forcibly retired two decades earlier due to allegations of sexual harassment against a female colleague. The court, in its judgment, determined that the complaints raised against the petitioner seemed to be motivated by ulterior motives and noted that the charges were not substantiated. The justices, Dinesh Mehta and Vimal Kumar Yadav, highlighted that imposing a severe punishment such as compulsory retirement,



The Delhi High Court

especially after a lapse of about 25 years and considering the petitioner's advanced age, was unwarranted. The court suggested that the allegations of harassment likely stemmed from a vindictive motive, particularly because the petitioner

had previously warned the complainant about her conduct. The justices criticized the ineffective investigation that failed to acknowledge plausible defenses regarding the credibility of the allegations, which they characterized as deriving from a sense of vengeance rather

than genuine grievance. The ruling came in response to a plea from the former officer, who contested an October 2005 decision by the Deputy Inspector General that mandated his compulsory retirement, a decision he challenged in 2006. The High Court not only quashed the 2005 order but also invalidated the associated enquiry report from 2004, ruling that the additional investigations conducted were superfluous and that the conclusions drawn by the enquiry officer did not align with the evidence. The court concluded that, following the cancellation

of the compulsory retirement order, the petitioner should be considered to have continuously served until reaching retirement age, with the period following the compulsory retirement notionally counted towards his service record. While the ruling entitles him to a revised pension effective March 1, 2026, it noted that no monetary arrears would be awarded. The bench noted that two out of three preliminary investigations had cleared the petitioner of wrongdoing, indicating that the authorities acted improperly by initiating a third inquiry without sufficient justification.

Next year, a bill to tighten AI regulations is anticipated

Nishikant Dubey, a BJP MP

New Delhi, Dec 27: A forthcoming bill, inspired by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology, aims to establish guidelines for AI safety, particularly in news and social media, with a planned introduction in Parliament next year. Headed by BJP lawmaker Nishikant Dubey, the bill prioritizes the protection of vulnerable groups such as children, women, and low-income individuals who may be unaware of AI-related risks. Dubey emphasized that the consequences of AI-generated

content could lead to severe mental distress or even suicide, necessitating stronger regulations for AI usage across media platforms. The proposed legislation seeks to expand the jurisdiction of the Press Council of India (PCI) to digital news, which is currently limited to print media, and may suggest the creation of new regulatory bodies to prevent the spread of misinformation, particularly regarding AI misuse. Addressing concerns over Over-the-Top streaming promoting inappropriate

content, Dubey highlighted the bill's intent to balance freedom of expression with the prevention of harm caused by exploitation of that freedom. Dubey responded to concerns about rogue AI undermining Indian values by asserting the resilience of those values and the nation's ability to combat such threats. He recognized that while legal frameworks are essential, they are not the sole solution; education and awareness initiatives are critical in empowering society against potential media and AI threats.

## Tallest national flag in Mizoram unfurled at Zokhawsang in Aizawl

**Aizawl, Dec 27:** In a special and solemn ceremony held on December 24 in Aizawl, Mizoram Governor General (Dr) Vijay Kumar Singh (Retd), PVSM, AVSM, YSM, unfurled the tallest National Flag in the state at the 34 Assam Rifles campus in Zokhawsang. The flag stands at a height of 108 feet and has now become a major national symbol in Mizoram. The ceremony was also attended by Mizoram Home Minister Pu K. Sapdanga, senior officials, defence personnel, and local residents. The Governor described the occasion as a historic moment for Mizoram. He said that unfurling the Tricolour on Christmas Eve made the event even more meaningful, as it underlined themes of unity, peace, hope, and harmony among the people. He praised the Assam Rifles and the Flag Foundation of India for choosing Zokhawsang as the site for the monumental flag. He added that the flag, clearly visible from Aizawl, would stand as

a constant reminder of national pride for the people of the state. During his address, the Governor highlighted that the National Flag is a powerful symbol of unity among citizens across India. He said it reflects the core values of the Constitution, including unity, integrity, equality, duty, and respect for the nation's diversity. He emphasised that India's strength lies in the peaceful coexistence of people from different backgrounds and cultures. He also expressed hope that the towering Tricolour would inspire the youth of Mizoram to contribute towards the national goal of building a developed India by 2047. Home Minister Pu K. Sapdanga also spoke at the event. He said the National Flag represents patriotism, sacrifice, and the dream of a better future. He noted that the Tricolour reminds every citizen of the sacrifices made during the freedom struggle and continues to strengthen feelings of love and loyalty towards the nation. He added that the instal-



lation of such a monumental flag in Mizoram would further deepen patriotic sentiment among the people. Major General Ashim Kohli, SM, Chief Executive Officer of the Flag Foundation of India, addressed the gathering as well.

The Chairman of the Foundation, Shri Naveen Jindal, shared a brief message through video conference, welcoming the installation of the state's tallest flag. To conclude the programme, Brigadier Pushpendar Sorayan, DIG of

Headquarters 23 Sector Assam Rifles, proposed the vote of thanks. The ceremony was attended by senior military officers, including Major General Suresh Bhambhu, YSM, SM, Inspector General of Assam Rifles (East), as well as senior civil officials such as Pu Vamlawia, Secretary of the Home Department. Ex-servicemen, local residents, school children, and members of the media were also present, making the event a significant public gathering.

## A Jorhat doctor files a police case after losing Rs 49 lakh to “digital arrest” cybercrime

**Jorhat, Dec 27:** A sophisticated cyber fraud involving a fictitious “digital arrest” has cost a 63-year-old senior doctor from Jorhat Rs 49 lakh. Dr. Sadagar Deuri of Jorhat Medical College and Hospital, the victim, has filed an urgent complaint with the Jorhat Superintendent of Police, requesting the filing of a formal report and prompt inquiry. The complaint claims that cybercriminals posing as law enforcement officers continuously monitored Dr. Deuri via video calls and put him under tremendous mental strain. On November 19, 2025, he got a WhatsApp video call from an unidentified number, which started the event. The caller pretended to be a Bengalaru Police officer and claimed that he was the subject of several criminal cases involving pornographic content. The scammers increased the threat when Dr. Deuri refused to go to Bengaluru, stating that the CBI had already filed a complaint. They allegedly accused him of selling his ATM card on commission during a financial crisis and showed his

Aadhaar numbers on the screen. The callers also claimed that 150 ATM withdrawals totaling Rs 3 crore had been made from his Canara Bank account. Dr Deuri was targeted in a cyber fraud where the accused impersonated authorities, invoked the National Security Act, and kept him under constant video surveillance, claiming it was part of an investigation.

He was forced to share personal and property details, location updates, and was intimidated with forged FIRs and fake Supreme Court notices. Under fear of arrest and psychological pressure, he transferred ₹49 lakh in five transactions as a so-called refundable “security deposit.” He later discovered it was a coordinated cyber scam using fake identities and spoofed numbers. In his complaint, he has sought registration of an FIR under relevant laws, freezing of bank accounts, recovery of funds, and strict action against the perpetrators, stating the incident caused severe financial loss and mental distress.

## Meghalaya BJP seeks action over Christmas celebration vandalism

**Shillong, Dec 27:** Amidst reports of attempts to disrupt Christmas celebrations in parts of the country, the Meghalaya unit of the BJP on Friday demanded the strictest punishment for those involved, asserting that every citizen has the constitutional right to celebrate festivals freely and without fear.

State BJP chief spokesperson Mariahom Kharkrang said Christmas symbolises love, harmony and unity, and is celebrated across communities in India with equal zeal and reverence.

“It is painful to see a handful of people indulging in acts of hate with the sole objective of disrupting and disrespecting the spirit of Christmas and its message of universal love. Such acts go against the very nature of Indian civilisation and attack the values we hold dear,” Kharkrang said in a statement. Rejecting attempts to politicise criminal incidents, the BJP leader said certain parties were trying to project isolated cases involving “petty criminals” as organised or orchestrated acts for narrow political gains. He added that such narratives were misleading

■ Amid reports of attempts to disrupt Christmas celebrations in India, the Meghalaya BJP demanded strict punishment for the offenders, asserting the constitutional right to celebrate festivals freely.

and risked further polarising society.

Highlighting the party's commitment to inclusivity, Kharkrang said the Prime Minister, along with senior BJP leaders, has been participating in Christmas services year after year, including in 2025, setting an example of mutual respect and harmony within the party.

He said the BJP stands with citizens across the country in demanding that those responsible for attempts to disrupt Christmas celebrations be arrested, prosecuted and punished under the strictest provisions of law.

Kharkrang added that BJP leaders and office-bearers in Meghalaya are in constant touch with their counterparts in states where such incidents have been reported, including Assam, to ensure that no individual involved escapes accountability.

## Ramakrishna Mission set to establish maiden foreign language centre

**Agartala, Dec 27:** The Ramakrishna Mission has decided to open the State's first-ever Foreign Language Training Center in Agartala, which is a major step toward improving the young of Tripura's employability and skill development on a world-wide scale. The decision was made public by Chief Minister Manik Saha at a function at Ramakrishna Mission in Viveknagar, Agartala.

According to the Chief Minister, the State Government's persistent efforts have led to the initiative. He had earlier written to Swami Suvirananda, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Kolkata, requesting the Mission's assistance in setting up a foreign-language training center in Tripura to provide local youth with skills that are applicable around the world. Speaking to the crowd, Manik Saha stated that the Ramakrishna Mission has decided to build the center in a manner similar to other prosperous establishments in Hyderabad and Kolkata.

This will be Tripura's first specialized foreign language training facility, which will be a major turning point in the state's educational and skill-development environment.

The Chief Minister added that in-depth conversations with the Mission's leadership, including his direct communication with Swami Suvirananda, preceded the decision. The foreign language classes will probably start from the Viveknagar campus next year, he continued, and Swami Suvirananda is anticipated to visit Tripura soon. According to



preliminary plans, the center will include instruction in Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, and other international languages, giving students access to job prospects abroad in nations that are experiencing a scarcity of trained labor. Students from Tripura and the larger North Eastern area are anticipated to benefit greatly from the program in terms of employability, skill base, and global competitiveness. The Chief Minister emphasized that the program is in line with the increasing demand for language-related skills around the world, especially in industries like technology, healthcare, hospitality, and

services. Students from Tripura have up till now had to go to other states in order to receive instruction in other languages.

This center's creation will make such education accessible within the state, which will lessen the necessity for migration as well as the financial burden. Manik Saha expressed optimism that the new center would follow Swami Vivekananda's values, encouraging self-reliance, service, and international understanding, and praised the Ramakrishna Mission for its longstanding contribution to value-based education and nation-building.

## Hailakandi police arrest peddler, seize Rs 5 lakh heroin

**Hilakandi, Dec 27:** The Hailakandi police conducted a targeted raid at the Station Road area as part of their ongoing efforts to lessen the issue of illegal drug trafficking. The raid resulted in the arrest of a drug dealer and the confiscation of a sizable shipment of heroin.

About 25.4 grams of heroin that were allegedly intended for illicit distribution were found by the police during the operation. Abul Hossain Laskar, a resident of Boyalipar Part-I in the Hailakandi district, has been identified as the person who was arrested. Under the direction of DSP (Border) B. K. Saikia, the raid was carried out in response to particular intelligence information about drug-related activity in the area.

According to police sources, the estimated market value of heroin recovered is around Rs 5 lakh, demonstrating the scope of the illegal drug trade operations that law enforcement is currently targeting.

According to police reports, the accused person is arrested as soon as the seizure occurs, and the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act-compliant legal actions are being started. To ascertain the source of this illegal chemical and any potential links to drug networks in and around the district, more research is being done. The top police officers reaffirmed their commitment to stepping up their anti-drug campaign in Hailakandi. They em-



phasized that ongoing raids, monitoring, and intelligence-based operations are carried out with the goal of dismantling drug networks and making sure that citizens' safety and wellbeing—especially that of young people—are not jeopardized. The police have also urged the public to cooperate with them by giving any information on drug abuse and trafficking, as well as to stay watchful. Officials claim that this cooperation between the public and the police is essential to creating a society free of drugs.

The successful operation once again demonstrates the Hailakandi Police's resolve to uphold law and order in the district and to take severe punishment against those who have engaged in or are complicit in illegal drug sales.

## Karbi leader flags deep crisis in Karbi Anglong; Govt to scrap post-1951 trade licences

**Karbi Anglong, Dec 27:** Karbi leader Litsong Rongphor on Friday said that the situation in Karbi Anglong has become very serious after the recent violence and growing tension over land issues. He said the unrest shows the anger and pain of the local people, who feel that their long-pending problems have not been solved for many years. Rongphor was speaking after a tripartite meeting held in Guwahati between Karbi groups, the Assam government and the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council. He said the state government has agreed to cancel all trade licences issued after 1951, which has been a key demand of Karbi organisations to protect tribal land and community rights. He also said the government had agreed in principle to evict outsiders from departmental and reserve lands, including Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) and Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) areas. However, he added that the situation on the ground remains tense and sensitive. According to him, Karbi

society will first discuss the decisions together and then decide whether they are satisfied. He stressed that the movement belongs to the Karbi people as a whole and not to any single party or organisation. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma also addressed the media after the meeting. He said the matter had been delayed mainly because the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council did not file its affidavit before the Gauhati High Court for the past two years. This, he said, slowed down the legal process related to PGR-VGR land disputes. The council has now been directed to submit the affidavit before January 5, so that the court can take up the case without confusion. The recent violence in West Karbi Anglong led to loss of lives, injuries and damage to property. The protests began after demands from Karbi groups to evict alleged encroachers from reserve lands in the Sixth Schedule area. Security forces continue to remain on alert to stop any further violence.

## Dense fog likely across NE over next 5 days

**Aizawl, Dec 27:** The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted dense fog, light rain and falling temperatures in different parts of the Northeast over the next five days. “Very Dense fog very likely to occur at isolated pockets over Assam and Meghalaya, and Dense fog very likely to occur at isolated pockets over Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura on Saturday,” the latest IMD forecast stated. It further said that light rain is very likely to occur at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, while dry weather is likely to prevail over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. No large change in minimum temperature with falling tendency very likely over the region, it added.

## IIT Guwahati conducts career guidance session in Hojai

**Hojai, Dec 27:** The Design Innovation Center at IIT Guwahati is supporting ABHILASHA 2025: The First Step to Design Futures, a district-level career awareness initiative for Classes 7–12 students in Hojai.

Students, instructors, and parents will be introduced to national career pathways in Design, Fashion, Management, Law, and Higher Education through UCEED, NID-DAT, NIFT-NIFTEE, IPMAT, CLAT, and CUET during the two-day session, which will take place at Bhavishya Vidya Mandir in Hojai on December 27 and 28. The program encourages students to choose careers outside of the traditional technical and medical fields. Over 5,300 students, educators, and parents from various districts have already participated in ABHILASHA 2025, including Jorhat (August



29–31) with over 2000 participants; Tura, West Garo Hills (August 8–9) with over 1500 participants; Nongpoh, Ri Bhoi (September 11–12) with over 1000 participants; and Dhemaji (December 15–16). This is IIT Guwahati's first district-level outreach in Assam and Meghalaya, and it was organized in partnership with the corresponding Deputy/District Commissioners. Notably, ABHILASHA 2025 marks the first time in IIT Guwahati's history that an organized academic career awareness program has been extended beyond the campus to the district

level. Soon after taking over as HoD, Prof. Pratul Kalita, Head of IIT Guwahati's Department of Design, started this historic expansion with the goal of immediately bringing IIT Guwahati's academic competence to remote and rural populations in the Northeast. The chief guest and honored guest of the Hojai program will be Basistha Buzarbarua, Khetra Pracharak, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and Bidyut Bikash Bhagawati, ACS, District Commissioner, Hojai district. Numerous other notable attendees will adorn the special occasion.

## Assam CM holds tripartite talks, outlines steps to restore peace in Karbi Anglong

**Guwahati, Dec 27:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma met with leaders of several Karbi Anglong organizations and the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) in a vital tripartite meeting at the Janata Bhawan in Guwahati.

Days of turmoil in the hills district precede the talks. According to reports, the discussions centered on welfare initiatives, maintaining peace in Karbi Anglong, and other community-related issues.

According to the Assam Chief Minister, KAAC would file Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) and Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) gazette notifications by January 5th, and stakeholders will jointly approach the Gauhati High Court for a prompt conclusion. “The outcome of the talks that we



held today was that we have decided to move jointly before the Gauhati High Court so that the VGR and PGR issue can be resolved,” Chief Minister Sarma told reporters following the talks. To eliminate any doubt, I have instructed the council to submit an affidavit by January 5. Additionally, we have chosen to relocate every office from the VGR-PGR area. Additionally, any unoccupied land will be fenced right away, and after that, an afforestation

campaign will be started on the unoccupied area. Additionally, we have made the decision to revoke the trading licenses that were previously granted fraudulently. In addition, the Assam government promised the family of the murdered protester a government job and Rs 10 lakh ex gratia.

The next round of negotiations has been set for January 16 or 17, the Chief Minister continued.

“I thought today's talks were

really productive. I'm optimistic that we can find a peaceful solution to all of the district's problems. I am with the people of Karbi Anglong, but it will take some time. The next round of negotiations will take place on January 16 or 17, he continued. However, Litsong Rongphor, a social activist from Karbi Anglong, declared that the Assam government had firmly decided to revoke all trade licenses granted to immigrants after 1951, specifically targeting outsiders on tribal land. He emphasized that evictions will be carried out quickly, either by KAAC or the state administration.

of the midst of the upheaval, these pronouncements made after the tripartite discussions are intended to protect the indigenous rights of the people of Karbi Anglong.

# BUSINESS

## Price projections for TCS, Infosys, HCL Tech, Wipro, and Q3 earnings

**New Delhi:** The top four Indian IT companies—Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, HCL Technologies, and Wipro—have modest quarter-over-quarter constant currency (CC) revenue growth, ranging from 0.3% to 2.2%, according to ICICI Securities’ Q3FY26 outlook. Although regular year-end furloughs are anticipated to put downward pressure on growth rates, this time is marked by the sustained resilience of banking, financial services, and insurance (BFSI) and the ramp-up of previously acquired significant agreements. HCL Technologies is projected to lead its peers, with anticipated revenue growth of 2.2% QoQ in CC terms and EBIT margin expansion of approximately 50 basis points (bps). This performance is driven by favourable seasonality in its software product business and ongoing traction in BFSI and hi-tech verticals, partially balanced by subdued auto manufacturing. Margin gains are supported by INR depreciation, AI-led productivity, and positive product seasonality, though wage hikes and restructuring will offset some benefits.

TCS is expected to post 0.8% CC and 0.4% USD QoQ revenue growth, led by BFSI and communication verticals as deal wins from the previous quarter ramp up. ICICI Securities notes the demand environment remains status quo, with companies embedding AI-led productivity in their solutions, leading to a deflationary impact on revenue growth. NIFTY IT is trading at a 20% premium vs. NIFTY 50, despite a lower earnings CAGR. TCS



has announced several key deals, with total contract value (TCV) expected at USD 7–9 billion. The company is set to benefit from INR depreciation, workforce restructuring, and pyramid optimisation, which are anticipated to drive a 20bps QoQ improvement in EBIT margin. However, headwinds remain from a two-month wage hike impact and weaker seasonality. Revenue contribution from ListEngage is projected at USD 6 million for the quarter. Infosys is forecast to achieve subdued revenue growth of 0.3% CC QoQ, as seasonal weakness from fewer working days and furloughs offsets healthy momentum in BFSI and engineering/R&D services. The recently announced NHS mega deal (EUR 1.2bn, 15-year term) has started ramping up, though it may take a few quarters for full impact. The demand pipeline remains robust, primarily driven by client focus on cost takeout deals, while EBIT margin is poised to expand by around 20bps from INR depreciation and AI-led productivity, countered by seasonal headwinds. Wage hikes are planned for Q4FY26 and Q1FY27. For HCL Technologies, revenue growth of 2.2% CC QoQ is expected, led by traction in BFSI

and hi-tech and stability in telecom. Weakness in auto manufacturing persists. Q3 is traditionally strong for HCLT’s products business, but growth is likely to be softer this year due to a shift toward subscription-based revenue. Demand remains unchanged, with a focus on cost takeout and vendor consolidation deals. TCV is expected at ~USD2bn. Marginal EBIT margin expansion of ~50bps is expected, supported by positive seasonality, AI-led productivity, and INR depreciation, partly offset by wage hikes, furloughs, and restructuring. Wage increments are spread over Q3 and Q4FY26. Wipro is expected to deliver 1.5% QoQ CC revenue growth, including 0.7% organic and 0.8% from a one-month consolidation of the Harman acquisition. The quarter will benefit from the Phoenix deal ramp-up and vendor consolidation with two major US banks. Healthcare performance is expected to moderate, while demand in consumer, retail, and emerging markets remains soft. EBIT margin is likely to drop by 10bps QoQ due to margin-dilutive consolidations, D&A charges, and furloughs, partly offset by AI productivity gains and operational efficiencies.

## Nifty dips below 26,100

### Markets open lower as FPIs continue selling; Sensex down 183 points

**Mumbai:** Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty declined in early trade on Friday amid foreign fund outflows as sentiment remained fragile amid low trading volumes and lack of any major domestic cues. The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 183.42 points to 85,225.28 in early trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty dipped 46.45 points to 26,095.65. From the 30-Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, Sun Pharma, Eternal, Tata Steel, Tata Consultancy Services, and Bharti Airtel were among the biggest laggards. Bharat Electronics, Titan, Infosys, and UltraTech Cement were among the gainers. In Asian markets, South Korea’s Kospi and Japan’s Nikkei 225 index traded in positive territory while Shanghai’s SSE Composite index quoted lower.

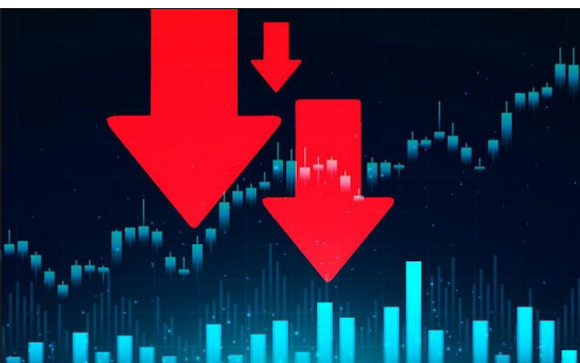
US markets were closed on Thursday for Christmas. The domestic stock markets were closed on Thursday on account of Christmas. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,721.26 crore on Wednesday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 2,381.34 crore, according to exchange data. “In the absence of fresh triggers like a US-India trade deal, the market



is likely to consolidate around the present levels,” V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Ltd, said. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, climbed 0.11 per cent up to USD 62.31 per barrel. “Sentiment remains fragile amid low holiday volumes, FII selling of Rs 1,721 crore and lack of strong domestic cues, keeping markets range-bound and volatile,” Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. On Wednesday, the Sensex dropped by 116.14 points or 0.14 per cent to settle at 85,408.70. The Nifty edged lower by 35.05 points, or 0.13 per cent, to 26,142.10.

## Revenue CAGR of 45%, Zen Technologies’ stock has dropped 47% from its peak

**New Delhi:** Shares of Zen Technologies have fallen 47% from their record high reached on December 24, 2024. The defence sector stock reached a record high of Rs 2,627 on December 24, 2024. However, the firm has clocked revenue CAGR of 45% in the last five years. The multibagger stock has lost 45.43% in a year and fallen 44% in 2025. The defence stock has gained 688% in three years and zoomed 1464% in five years. In the current session, the stock was trading on a flat note at Rs 1393.80 on BSE. The relative strength index (RSI) of Zen Technologies stands at 53, signaling it has neither



oversold nor overbought on charts. Market cap of the firm climbed to Rs 12,607 crore on BSE. The stock fell to a 52 week low of Rs 945.65 on February 19, 2025. Antique Stock Broking has a buy call on the defence stock with a price target of Rs 1,744.

“After a projected decline in FY26E, we expect profits to grow 97.6 per cent and 29.8 per cent in FY27E and FY28E, respectively. We retain our earnings forecast and maintain Buy rating with an unchanged target price of Rs 1,744,” said the brokerage.

## Markets open lower as FPIs continue selling; Sensex down 183 points, Nifty dips below 26,100

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## PNB shares in focus on Monday bank reports Rs 2,434 crore loan fraud

*On Friday, PNB shares witnessed some pressure, closing 0.50 per cent lower at Rs 120.35 on the BSE against the previous close of Rs 120.95.*

**New Delhi:** Punjab National Bank (PNB) shares are expected to be in the spotlight when the stock market opens on Monday, following a significant disclosure made by the state-run lender late Friday. In a regulatory filing on December 26, post-market hours, the bank reported a borrowing fraud amounting to over Rs 2,400 crore involving the erstwhile promoters of two SREI Group entities. The bank informed the exchanges that it has flagged a fraud of Rs 1,240.94 crore in the account of SREI Equipment Finance Ltd (SEFL) and Rs 1,193.06 crore in SREI Infrastructure Finance Ltd (SIFL). However, PNB clarified that it has already made a 100 per cent provision for the entire outstanding amount in both accounts. The filing further noted that these companies have been successfully resolved under the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).

On Friday, PNB shares witnessed some pressure, closing 0.50 per cent lower at Rs 120.35 on the BSE against the previous close of Rs 120.95.



The counter has remained robust over the longer term, gaining nearly 13 per cent in the last six months and more than 17 per cent year-to-date in 2025. Technical indicators suggest the stock is currently trading in a neutral zone. According to data from Trendlyne, the relative strength index (RSI) stands at 50.8, while the money flow index is at 55.4. Both indicators signal that the stock is in the mid-range—neither overbought nor oversold.

The fraud reporting involves the SREI Group. According to the group’s website, SREI Infra-

structure Finance Limited (SIFL) started financing construction equipment in 1989 before expanding into broader infrastructure lending. Once classified as an infrastructure finance company, it was later designated as an NBFC-Investment and Credit Company (NBFC-ICC) and was notified as a public financial institution by the year-on-year rise in net profit to Rs 4,904 crore. The lender’s provisions for the September quarter stood at Rs 643 crore, marking an increase on both a yearly and quarterly basis.

## Rs 100 crore MoD contract win boosts multibagger stock by 3%; see details Apollo Micro Systems:

**New Delhi:** Shares of Apollo Micro Systems climbed as much as 2.7 per cent to touch day’s high of Rs 270 on the BSE in Friday’s trade. The uptick comes on the back of a significant work order announcement, cheering investors who have already seen multibagger returns from the defence-linked stock in 2025. The defence player informed the exchanges that it has secured orders worth Rs 100.24 crore. The order, received from a private company, involves the supply of unmanned aerial systems which are deliverable to the Ministry of Defence. According to the regulatory filing, the company is mandated to execute these orders within a tight timeline of four months.

On the market front, the stock opened higher against its previous close of Rs 262.80. Apollo Micro Systems has emerged as a wealth creator for Dalal Street investors this year, delivering multibagger returns with gains exceeding 120 per cent year-to-date in 2025.

Technically, the counter portrays a mix of consolidation and long-term strength. Data from Trendlyne indicates that the Apollo Micro Systems stock is currently trading above its long-term



trend line, with the price comfortably perched above the 200-day Simple Moving Average (SMA) of Rs 212. However, it faces some resistance in the short term, trading below its 50-day SMA of Rs 268.1. Momentum indicators suggest

the stock is neither in the overbought nor oversold territory, leaving room for price action on either side. The relative strength index (RSI) stands at 54.8, while the money flow index (MFI) is at 56.6, placing both metrics firmly in the mid-range.

## IndiGo allowed to operate 5 Turkish-leased B737 planes only till March 2026: DGCA

**Mumbai:** IndiGo has been permitted to operate five narrow-body aircraft leased from Turkey only until March 2026, with no further extensions to be granted, aviation regulator DGCA clarified on Monday amid speculation that the airline had been allowed additional time. The watchdog said IndiGo has been allowed to operate aircraft on wet lease from Turkey with a final extension valid till March 2026, after which the arrangement will end. IndiGo has been permitted to operate aircraft on wet lease from Turkey with a last extension valid till March 2026 with a sunset clause that no further extension will be given. “This is based on the undertaking submitted by IndiGo airlines in the instant case wherein they have sought last time extension, since their

long range aircraft (A321-XLR) are to be delivered by February 2026,” a senior DGCA official said. According to the regulator, the lease of five Boeing 737 aircraft taken from Turkey’s Corendon Airlines will expire on March 31, 2026. At present, IndiGo operates 15 foreign aircraft on a wet or damp lease basis, including seven from Turkey. In August this year, the DGCA had granted a six-month extension till February 2026 for IndiGo to operate two leased Boeing 777 aircraft from Turkish Airlines, subject to certain conditions. That decision came less than three months after the regulator, in May, provided a one-time final extension of three months till August 31 for operating the Turkish Airlines aircraft and had also directed the carrier not to seek



any further extension. The move was taken against the backdrop of Turkey backing Pakistan and condemning India’s strikes on terror camps in the

neighbouring country in May. SpiceJet currently has 17 foreign aircraft in operation that have been taken on wet or damp lease.

## Salman Khan Celebrates 60th Birthday with Intimate Family Party

**Mumbai:** Bollywood superstar Salman Khan celebrated his 60th birthday surrounded by his close friends and family at his farmhouse in Panvel. Actors Sanjay Dutt, Aditya Roy Kapur and cricketer MS Dhoni were among the attendees.

Salman arrived with his family, father Salim Khan, mother Salma Khan, brothers Sohail Khan and Arbaaz Khan with his wife Sshura Khan, sisters Arpita Khan Sharma and Alvira Khan Agnihotri, nephews and niece Arhaan Khan, Nirvaan Khan, Ahil, and Ayat, last evening at Arpita Farms, which is

close to one-and-half hour drive from Mumbai. Riteish Deshmukh with Genelia D'Souza and their two sons Riaan and Rahyl, Mahesh Manjrekar, Sangeeta Bijlani, Ramesh Taurani, Nikhil Dwivedi, Huma Qureshi, were also in attendance. Salman stepped out for a brief moment to cut a cake with paparazzi, amidst heavy security around him. Also Read - Salman Khan At 60: A Look At His Bollywood Journey. Every year on December 27, which also happens to be his niece Ayat's birthday, the actor celebrates his birthday at his farm house.

## The Cure Guitarist and Keyboardist Perry Bamonte Dies at 65



**Agency:** Perry Bamonte, longtime guitarist and keyboardist for British rock band The Cure, has died at the age of 65 following a short illness. He passed away at home during the Christmas period, the band confirmed on Friday.

The Cure announced Bamonte's death through a statement published on its official website, paying tribute to his extensive contribution across two separate tenures with the band — first from 1990 to 2005, and later from 2022 until his death. "Quiet, intense, intuitive, constant and hugely creative, 'Teddy' was a warm hearted and vital part of the Cure story," the

statement reads. "'Looking after the band' from 1984 through 1989, he became a full time member of the Cure in 1990, playing guitar, six string bass and keyboard on 'The Wish,' 'Wild Mood Swings,' 'Bloodflowers,' acoustic hits and the Cure albums, as well as performing more than 400 shows over 14 years. He rejoined the Cure in 2022, playing another 90 shows, some of the best in the band's history, culminating with 'The Show of a Lost World' concert in London 1st November 2024. Our thoughts and condolences are with all his family. He will be very greatly missed." Born in London in 1960, Bamonte

first became associated with The Cure in 1984 through his brother Daryl, who was the band's tour manager. Initially part of the road crew, Bamonte later served as lead singer Robert Smith's personal assistant and guitar technician before joining the band as a full-time member in 1990, following the exit of keyboardist Roger O'Donnell.

Bamonte went on to perform on multiple Cure albums, beginning with Wish in 1992 and continuing through Bloodflowers in 2000. His work featured prominently on Wish, the band's most commercially successful album, where he played six-string bass and keyboards on tracks including "Friday, I'm in Love," "A Letter to Elise" and "High." In 2005, Bamonte left the group after Smith restructured the band into a trio. He later joined the band Love Amongst Ruin in 2012 and reunited with The Cure during their induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2019.

## Sandeep Singh Safe After Fire, Confirms Vicky Jain

**Mumbai:** On Thursday night, a fire broke out in producer Sandeep Singh's building complex in Mumbai. But reports mentioned that the producer was unharmed after his friends, Ankita Lokhande and husband Vicky Jain, rushed to his aid. Reportedly, he was on a separate floor when the fire broke out; therefore, he was unharmed. But to add to the confusion, pictures of Sandeep in the hospital had surfaced, hinting that he might have been hurt. Days after the incident, Vicky Jain discussed the same and cleared all confusion.

In an interview with Hindustan Times, "There were two things that happened simultaneously. Sandeep had his hernia surgery on December

22, and he was discharged the day before and went to his house. He lives on the 14th floor, with our office also on the same floor, and the fire incident took place yesterday on the 12th floor due to a short circuit." Vicky described how a spiritual intervention occurred for them even before the catastrophe. A member of our production team lives on the ninth level of the same building. When we got Sandeep discharged and transported him home, we transferred him there because the procedure had left him unable to walk or bend down throughout his rehabilitation. He added that if Sandeep had been on the 14th floor, the scenario would have been quite different and dangerous.

## Kapil Sharma's KKPK 2 Re-Releasing in Theatres Next Month



**Mumbai:** Kapil Sharma's new film Kis Kisko Pyaar Karoon 2 is all set to re-release in January, a month after it first released on December 12 in theatres. The film's performance at the box office was severely impacted by the wave that was Dhurandhar, which had been released a week earlier on December 5. Dhurandhar, starring Ranveer Singh, continues its dream run at the box office, but it has impacted Kapil's film, which had initially released on December 12.

On Friday, the makers of Kis Kisko Pyaar Karoon 2 announced that they will re-release the film next month, in January 2026. The makers of Kisko Pyaar Ka-

roon 2 released a statement in which they stated that the theatrical run was impacted by limited screen availability due to ongoing multiplex takeovers by other releases. The film managed to earn Rs 1.85 crore on day one of its release, and has so far earned Rs 12.31 crore in India, as per Sacnilk. "Even with limited screens, Kapil Sharma's

Kis Kisko Pyaar Karoon 2 managed to make audiences laugh, entertain and relive the franchise's charm with its light-hearted comedy and situational humour. Keeping the ongoing excitement of the fans in mind, Producer Mr Ratan Jain has decided to re-release the film once again in January 2026," the statement read.

## Kartik Aaryan's Tu Meri Main Tera Collects \$14.49 Crore; Strong Weekend Jump Expected



**Mumbai:** Kartik Aaryan and Ananya Panday's romantic comedy Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri has posted a steady start at the domestic box office, closing its first two days with a net collection of ₹14.49 crore. The film hit theatres on Christmas Day and managed to find its audience despite facing tough competition and a limited screen count.

The film opened with ₹8.46 crore on Day 1 in India. Theatre occupancy stood at around 34.5 percent, with stronger footfalls reported during evening and night shows. On its second day, the collection saw a moderate drop, adding ₹6.03 crore to its

total. Trade analysts believe the hold suggests positive word of mouth, which could help the film grow over the

weekend as families and holiday crowds step out. Directed by Sameer Vidwans, the Hindi-language rom-com is writ-

ten by Karan Shrikant Sharma and backed by Dharma Productions and Namah Pictures. The film is produced by

Karan Johar, Adar Poonawalla, Apoorva Mehta, Bhumi Kedia, Shareen Mantri Kedia and Kishor Arora. Along with Kartik Aaryan and Ananya Panday in lead roles, the cast includes Neena Gupta, Jackie Shroff and Tiku Talsania.

Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri released theatrically on December 25, 2025. Critical response to the film has been mixed so far, with appreciation for its cinematography and production values, while the story, screenplay, direction and performances have drawn criticism. Even so, its early box office performance indicates that the film may benefit from the extended festive weekend.

## Vijay Arrives in Malaysia for Emotional Jana Nayagan Audio Launch Event

**Kuala Lumpur:** The excitement around Jana Nayagan just hit a new high as actor Vijay landed in Malaysia to attend the film's grand audio launch. The star was spotted at the airport waving to fans before heading out, accompanied by his mother Shoba Chandrasekhar. With only days left for the event, the arrival of the leading man has triggered massive buzz among overseas fans who are expected to travel in large numbers to witness the spectacle. Joining Vijay in Malaysia are composer and singer Anirudh Ravichander, director Nelson Dilipkumar, actor and choreographer Prabhu Deva, along with several top singers who will perform at the event. Director Atlee was also seen leaving the country for the launch, underscoring how the film fraternity is rallying behind what is being pro-



moted as a once in a lifetime musical celebration. Speaking briefly to the media at the airport, Anirudh shared his enthusiasm for the audio launch, stressing that the scale of the programme is unlike anything attempted before. According to him, the organisers are preparing for nearly 80,000 people to attend the show, turning Bukit Jalil Stadium into a sea of lights, music and fandom. Apart from Anirudh himself, the audio launch

will see performances by some of the most recognizable voices in the industry. SPB Charan, Tippi, Anuradha Sriram, Andrea Jeremiah, Saindhavi, Yogi B and several others are expected to take the stage across the night. The makers have reportedly planned a ten hour long music festival that will celebrate not just the album of Jana Nayagan but also the larger cultural footprint of Vijay and Anirudh's collaborations over the years.

## JLo Filmed Cameo Weeks Before Debut

**Agency:** Twenty-eight years after the original movie hit the cinemas, Jennifer Lopez made a surprise cameo in the new Anaconda movie, and how her cameo came along is even more surprising. Director Tom Gormican revealed that he shot for Jennier's cameo a month before the theatrical release.

The Paul Rudd and Jack Black-starrer is the latest entry in the Anaconda franchise and takes a more comedic turn. The original cult classic of the same name starred Ice Cube, Jon Voight, Eric Stoltz, and Owen Wilson. Director Tom Gormican told Hollywood Reporter, "We tried to get



it as part of principal photography, but we couldn't make schedules coordinate. We had always wanted a version of her to come in, and we talked about it and talked about it and talked about it. I was finally able to shoot her cameo a month ago on November 17. It was the very last thing we did. I was finishing up my final mix when I went to shoot it, and I dropped it into this [mid-credit] sequence that I was having built to accommodate it." He added, "I never thought it was going to ultimately materialize, but it did, and we put it together. So it happened very, very late in the game, but we did have the idea a long time ago." Along with Jennifer, Ice Cube also makes a cameo in the movie. Gormican also told THR, that there was a discussion and debate about how Ice Cube's cameo would take place in the movie. He said, "I just said, 'We've got an abandoned boatyard, so let's have him collect flare guns.

## Alia Bhatt's Alpha Postponed to Avoid Competition with Salman Khan's Film

**Mumbai:** In a strategic move to maximize box office potential, producers of Alia Bhatt's highly anticipated action thriller Alpha have decided to shift its release date, steering clear of a direct clash with Salman Khan's upcoming war drama Battle of Galwan. The decision, spearheaded by Yash Raj Films chief Aditya Chopra, comes after a thorough review of the industry's crowded release calendar. Trade sources confirm that this adjustment prioritizes clear windows for both star-studded projects, ensuring fans and audiences can enjoy them without competition.

Alpha, directed by Shiv Rawail and produced under YRF's banner, was initially slated for an April 17, 2026 release. This date positioned it head-to-head with Battle of Galwan, Salman Khan's ambitious portrayal of the 2020



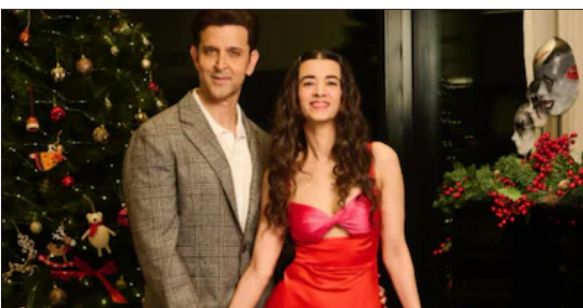
India-China border skirmish along the Line of Actual Control. Salman's film, also backed by significant production muscle, promises high-octane patriotism and action sequences, making it a potential box office juggernaut. Recognizing the risk of splitting audiences and resources, YRF opted to reschedule Alpha to a later, yet-to-be-announced slot. An official announcement from the studio is expected in the coming weeks, once distributors finalize the new position-

ing. This isn't the first delay for Alpha. The project, which marks Alia Bhatt's full-fledged entry into high-stakes action cinema, had earlier postponements from a potential Christmas 2025 window. Those shifts were attributed to extensive post-production work, particularly on visual effects (VFX) to deliver a polished, immersive experience. Insiders reveal that the film features groundbreaking sequences, including an epic confrontation between Alia and Bobby Deol, which de-

manded meticulous CGI refinement. The recent change, however, stems purely from scheduling savvy rather than creative hurdles, underscoring the industry's growing emphasis on clash-free releases.

Alia Bhatt, riding high on successes like Jigra and her Hollywood venture Heart of Stone, brings her A-game to Alpha. She plays a fierce special forces operative in a narrative blending espionage, betrayal, and redemption. The ensemble cast includes Sharvari Wagh, Bobby Deol in a menacing antagonist role, and possibly cameos from other YRF stalwarts. Early buzz from leaked set photos and teasers has generated massive excitement, with Alia's physical transformation—intense training in martial arts and weaponry—drawing comparisons to her Gangubai intensity.

## Hrithik Roshan, Saba Azad's Christmas with Sussanne's Family



**Mumbai:** Hrithik Roshan and Saba Azad are among Bollywood's most gorgeous couples. Their chemistry is visible everywhere: in paparazzi videos, at events, and on social media. In a recent Instagram post, the two struck a delightful pose in front of a Christmas tree. They flaunted their happy smiles on the special occasion as they celebrated with friends and family. Hrithik was seen in a checkered black jacket and white shirt look, while Saba went for a red dress to match the festive

vibe. The two were seen together at the actor's ex-wife Sussanne Khan's annual Christmas dinner. Pictures from the celebration have surfaced on social media, and it appears that everyone had a great time. Hrithik was seen posing alongside Sussanne's brother Zayed Khan and cousin Fardeen Khan. Meanwhile, Saba posed cheerfully with Sussanne's sister, Farah Khan Ali. Sussanne Khan's sister, Farah Khan Ali, uploaded images from the annual Christmas dinner gathering. Hrithik

Roshan and Sussanne's sons, Hrehaan and Hridaan, were also present. Sussanne is photographed with her sisters, Farah and Simone, in front of a Christmas tree, while Hrithik is photographed with Zayed Khan and Fardeen Khan.

In another photo, he is shown posing with Farah and Simone. Hrithik looks handsome in a white shirt layered over a black-and-white checkered blazer and grey slacks. Meanwhile, another snapshot shows Hrithik's ladylove Saba Azad posing alongside Farah. Sharing the photos, Farah Khan Ali wrote in the caption, "When Christmas is about family and close friends.

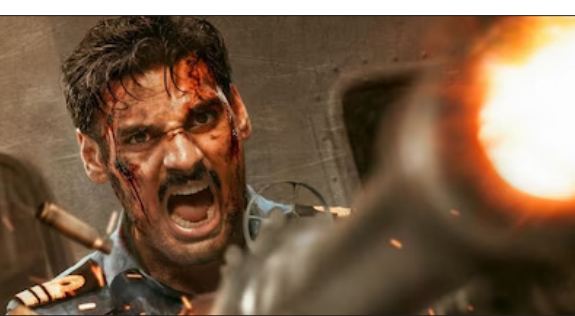
Last night was magical with all our children, parents and friends. Suss, you are an amazing hostess and the evening was magical just the way it was supposed to be."

## Ahan Shetty Dedicates 'Border 2' to the Nation's Real Heroes in Uniform

### New Cast Joins Sunny Deol in Border 2

**Mumbai:** Even 28 years after its release, the Sunny Deol, Jackie Shroff and Suniel Shetty-starrer Border continues to resonate with audiences. Now that the film's sequel is about to be out, expectations are high. Border 2 will see Ahan Shetty, Varun Dhawan and Diljit Dosanjh join Sunny Deol. Ahan Shetty recently told IANS that Border 2 is a tribute to our people in uniform and not just any action film.

Ahan Shetty said, "Anurag Singh (director) understands that authenticity cannot be manufactured; it has to be earned, and he made it clear Border 2 would be forged with military precision, not typical action conventions. He constantly pushed me to inhabit a



mindset rather than just execute sequences." He added, "I had to understand what my character was carrying into every moment, the weight of his training, the responsibility to his team, and the knowledge that every decision has life-or-death consequences. We weren't just making an action film, we were creating a tribute to service, where every frame honoured the real heroes who wear the

uniform." Previously, Ahan had opened up about his father, Suniel Shetty's, advice on the sequel. While revealing the preparations he underwent for his role, Ahan Shetty mentioned, "Obviously, physicality wise I had to change a bit. But again, as Papa had said, just be honest. Just be yourself. Not that I am playing myself, but just go out there, enjoy yourself. Don't think too much about what people

have to say. And don't compare it to Border 1. That was the most important."

The star kid added, "I would like to say that the first one or two days I was petrified on set. I mean, my hands were shaking like this. Just being part of such a big film, my film Tadap came out 4 years ago, in 2021. So, I had a long gap. So, to be able to just come on set with Varun, Sunny sir, to just be able to learn everything, to be able to have the support of my producers and to have a director like Anurag sir, I was a blessing in disguise, and I wouldn't have had it any other way." Produced by Bhushan Kumar, JP Dutta and Nidhi Dutta, the film is slated to hit theatres on 23 January 2026.

When Lauren Winslow-Llewellyn saw a photo of Attabad Lake in Pakistan’s Hunza Valley pop up on her social media feed, she immediately went into planning mode. “[It] was taken from up high, not from a drone but a hiking trail... someone was precariously sitting on the edge of a cliff above vibrant blue water,” she said. Based in south-east England, Winslow-Llewellyn and partner Craig Hubbard, known online as the Non Stop Travelling couple, work seasonal hospitality jobs between their trips to save up for their next adventure. After studying foreign travel advisory sites, mapping safe paths and scouring Google Earth, all that was left was to reach Hunza’s capital, Karimabad, as their base camp and hitch a ride to the trailhead. Perched atop an open truck piled high with rugs and appliances, the couple and a local family barrelled through tunnels, wind whipping their faces and laughter spilling into the air – until, suddenly, Attabad Lake burst into view, majestically blue and breathtaking, ringed by arid peaks jutting straight out of glacial water. “It’s probably my favourite memory of our time in Pakistan,” said Winslow-Llewellyn. “It felt like we were on a crazy rollercoaster ride.” Pakistan was their 88th country, but even for seasoned travellers, the drama of the Gilgit-Baltistan region stood out. “We’ve become a little spoilt to say the least,” Winslow-Llewellyn smiled. But, “the views in Gilgit-Baltistan were dramatic, even before the hikes began”. “The Karakoram ranges are [one of] the highest, steepest mountains on Earth – greater even than the Himalaya,” said Professor Mike Searle, Professor of Earth Sciences at the University of Oxford. From riverbed to mountaintop, Hunza Valley doesn’t rise; it lunges from 1,850m to 7,788m. The 6km vertical gain is a stretch of earth and stone so steep it turns roads into legends. Chief among them is the Karakoram Highway, the highest paved road on Earth, often called the world’s eighth wonder. But such epic terrain comes with danger stitched into every slope. Along the Karakoram Highway,



## Attabad Lake: The stunning legacy of a natural disaster

hand-built barricades and hours-long delays due to landslides are routine. Winslow-Llewellyn recalls a harrowing encounter with a fresh mudslide – a crushed car hundreds of metres below and locals casually making their way across shifting ground. “It was eye-opening... to see how fragile life is and how vulnerable people are in this setting,” she says. Amid this restless landscape, Attabad Lake is a striking case of beauty born from disaster, and a vivid reminder of nature’s force and fallout. On 4 January 2010, a massive landslide dammed the Hunza River for five months. By late January, water levels were rising by 1.1m per day, according to Nasa data. Users on Earth and Space Science blogs spoke about the cataclysmic event with a kind of reverent thrill – how a formation that usually takes geologic ages was unfolding within a single human lifespan, shaped by rupture and growing in real time. By June, the newly formed lake stretched 21km long and more than 100m deep, swallowing Shishkat village

and partially flooding the town of Gulmit. Twenty people died, 6,000 were displaced and a 25km stretch of the Karakoram Highway was destroyed, along with six bridges. In 2012, blasting lowered the lake’s level by 10m, and a \$275m (£202m) project rerouted the highway, adding five tunnels to restore the road to Xinjiang, China, and making the region more accessible. Today, Attabad Lake has become “a must-visit destination”, known for its piercing, cobalt-blue waters and stark mountain backdrop, says Misa Talpur, one of Pakistan’s pioneering solo female travellers. But the past still lingers below the surface, with remnants of submerged orchards and rooftops frozen in time. Despite its tragic origins, the lake has become a rare source of economic opportunity. “Attabad Lake is fully served by local Shisket families directly impacted by the landslide,” said Talpur, who is now a licensed tour manager. Dozens of food kiosks, handicraft shops and boating facility providers have sprung up around the lake,

bringing income to the affected families, while larger hotels lease land from local families, generating further revenue. Sania Malik, a training officer at AKAH (Aga Khan Agency for Habitat) notes there is a robust system of female entrepreneurs selling handicrafts and food items, and the community is rebuilding stronger than ever. In the village of Shisket, which has a population of just 3,000, Malik recently trained 75 locals in emergency response. “We predominantly try to empower women to become first responders,” she said, “They’re the ones managing on a homestead level.” Talpur leads at least five to six tours to Attabad Lake in peak tourist season from June to September, and says that local tourists love to boat, jetski and zipline over the lake. They can also walk along the lakeside promenade and enjoy local cuisine at the lake-edge tea stalls. However, she recommends hiking up to Baskochi Meadows for the best vantage point. “It gives you an incredible bird’s eye view,” Talpur says – es-

pecially at sunset for breathtaking photography opportunities as the mountains shimmer golden. The lake also hosts frequent bonfire nights and musical events in the summer. Many travellers also visit the legendary Hussaini Suspension Bridge and the cathedral-esque, often-photographed craggy spires of the Passu Cones – both just around a 30-minute drive from the lake. The lake’s central location also means travellers can explore the Hopper Glacier, roughly a two-and-a-half-hour drive away. With its black ice and surrounding peaks, it is another dramatic example of the shapeshifting landscape of Gilgit-Baltistan. Alternatively, many plan day trips to the ancient Altit and Baltit Forts – more than 900- and 700-year-old vestiges of ancient royal architecture – to get a glimpse of the region’s royal past. Yet there’s no guarantee this popular travel destination will last. “Everything depends on how well-cemented the landslide debris [is],” said Searle. A sudden breach – triggered by something like a major earthquake – could drain the entire lake and “cause disastrous flood damage all the way down to Gilgit and beyond”, he adds. Studies of silt deposits indicate that the lake is shrinking over time. Ephemeral as it may be, Attabad Lake leaves a lasting impression. In the meadows above the lake, Winslow-Llewellyn and Hubbard met a family and asked to purchase fresh apricots, and were, of course, invited in. Over tea and bread, a young nephew revealed two of his siblings died in the landslide. “The kindness and smiles were contagious,” Winslow-Llewellyn said, “Somehow it feels more real when you meet people directly affected by the disaster.” And it’s those people, not just the landscapes, that stay with you. “Pakistan didn’t just wow us with its huge snow-capped mountains and jaw dropping lakes,” she said, “the people [were] the most genuinely friendly and hospitable people we’ve ever come across.” For a lake that was never meant to exist, now, it’s difficult to imagine a trip to Hunza, Pakistan, without it. To Talpur, Attabad Lake is testament that tragedy can be beautiful.

## Why Oslo might be Europe’s most liveable city break

If you’re after a city break that combines culture, comfort and quiet innovation, Oslo might surprise you. Barely a two-hour flight from Heathrow, the Norwegian capital offers something unexpected: a relaxed, walkable escape where everyday life is designed for ease, from all-electric transport to sustainable neighbourhoods. In short, the perfect city for me to explore on my daylong layover. I started my 24-hour Oslo immersion in the pocket-sized Vulkan neighbourhood, a once-derelict industrial site that has become one of Europe’s most forward-thinking micro-communities. Set on the banks of the Akerselva river, Vulkan is packed with art, culture and delicious food – something of a microcosm of Oslo itself. As soon as I arrived, the main square buzzed with friends catching up over coffee, people enjoying a mid-afternoon stroll and vendors hustling provisions through the streets in preparation for the dinner rush. Ringed by a food hall, a concert venue, a climbing gym and a dance theatre, Vulkan felt like a city within a city. Vulkan wasn’t always this welcoming. Just 20 years ago, this riverside plot in central Oslo was a derelict tangle of concrete and broken windows. Today, it’s a compact urban village powered by geothermal energy, cooled with rooftop solar panels and home to community-driven cultural spaces. Designed with a focus on density, design and sustainability, Vulkan is a model for how cities can rethink old spaces to create new futures. And, as I’d learn over 24 hours, it’s also a gateway to understanding the quiet innovation at the heart of Norway’s capital – a place where liveability is taken seriously. While the hip, vibrant life is a recent development, the neighbourhood dates to the Middle Ages, when it was a longstanding trading hub. During the industrial revolution of the mid-19th Century, the area evolved into a manufacturing centre, where several of the city’s foundries could be found. Then, in 2004, after much of the neighbourhood’s industry had vanished and the once-thriving Vulkan Factory – so named for Vulcan, the Greek god of fire and handiwork – closed, morphing into simpler warehouse space, city officials asked themselves: why not build a city within a city, one that can re-envision what a cities of the future can and should look? The project started in 2004 when a pair of property developers – Aspelin Ramm and Anthon B Nilsen – purchased the land that would become Vulkan; land that was, at the time, severely blighted. “Kids were not allowed to play here,” said Sverre Landmark, a former commercial director for Aspelin Ramm. “Glass windows were damaged, there was a lot of graffiti, drug addicts were hanging around. It was really nasty.”



## The Archdruid of Stonehenge’s guide to Pagan Glastonbury

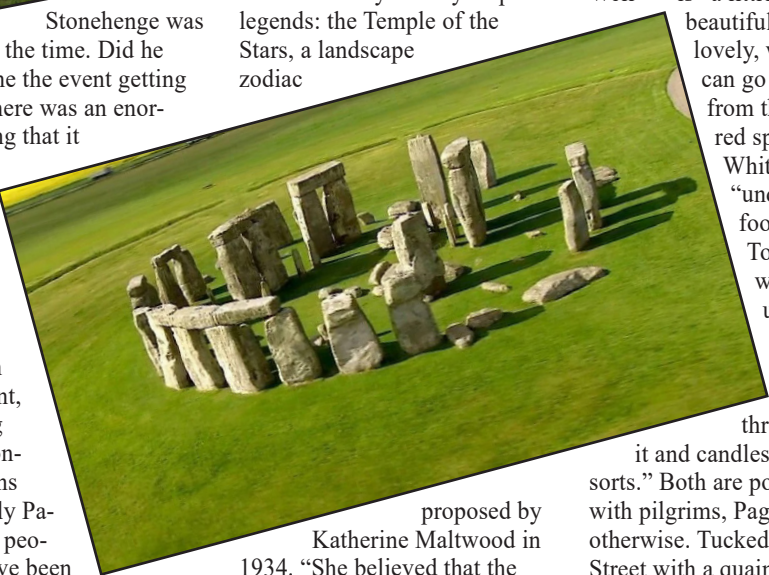
Glastonbury, a small town in Somerset, England, is most famous for hosting the Glastonbury Festival, a five-day bonanza of music and performing arts. The event attracts more than 200,000 people annually, with iconic performers from Paul McCartney to Beyoncé taking the stage over its 55-year history. But Glastonbury’s contribution to local culture is far more ancient. Set amid the hilly wetlands of the Somerset Levels, Glastonbury has been a spiritual magnet for centuries. In the Middle Ages, many believed that Joseph of Arimathea visited with the Holy Grail, and the sacred cup is central to the Arthurian legends that infuse the town and its landscapes. Glastonbury is also considered the hub of English “Neo-Paganism”, a collection of pre-Christian beliefs and spiritual practices undergoing a modern renaissance, including witchcraft, Wicca, the Goddess movement and Druidry. To find the heart of Glastonbury’s spiritual side, we spoke to Rollo Maughfling, the Archdruid of Stonehenge and Britain. For decades, Maughfling has helped spearhead a modern, inclusive form of Druidry. For Maughfling, Glastonbury’s interwoven Christian and Pagan lore is what makes it special. Originally from Cornwall – a land of “quoits and dolmens and strange Druid outcrops and witchy stories, too” – Maughfling moved to Glastonbury in 1971, drawn by its spiritual appeal, where he has lived on and off ever since. Glastonbury is dotted with shrines and

sacred landmarks, from the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey (founded on a 7th-Century church) to Glastonbury Tor looming above. Its streets stir with witches, Druids, hippies and New Age believers of every stripe – especially during Pagan events, and when festivalgoers spill into town each June, turning it into a kaleidoscope of colour and spirituality. Maughfling was involved with Glastonbury Festival for 30 years. Along with other Druids, he consecrated the site’s famous stone circle, created in 1993 because public access to



revoked at the time. Did he ever imagine the event getting so big? “There was an enormous feeling that it would,” he recalls. But despite its astonishing growth and the town’s own development, Maughfling says Glastonbury remains authentically Pagan. “Most people who have been in Glastonbury for any length of time are immersed in the culture,” he says. Here are Maughfling’s favourite ways to experience modern – and ancient – Pagan Glastonbury.

Glastonbury Tor (“tor” means hill, in some parts of England) rises 158m above sea level on the town’s eastern edge. For Maughfling, it’s the preeminent example of how Glastonbury’s blend of Neolithic, Pagan and Christian history give some landmarks “a certain energy or presence or power about them, which is sacred”. The discovery of flint tools suggests human activity since the Neolithic period. The Christian ruin of St Michael’s Tower sits on top, but the Tor is deeply significant to Neo-Paganism. “It’s towards the centre of a great ley line known as St Michael’s Line,” says Maughfling. “[It] goes across the landscape from St Michael’s Mount in Cornwall, up through Glastonbury up to the ancient site [of] Avebury], and on the mound at Eye in Suffolk.” The Tor offers views over town and across the picturesque Somerset Levels, including one of Glastonbury’s many disputed legends: the Temple of the Stars, a landscape zodiac



proposed by Katherine Maltwood in 1934. “She believed that the stories of the knights and the ladies and their quests – as described in the High History of the Holy Grail, a 12th century manuscript discovered at the Abbey – all seemed to centre



around names that were still local,” Maughfling says. “She gradually deduced that there was a pattern... a zodiac pattern.” No Glastonbury Tor visit is complete without visiting its two sacred springs, both said to have healing powers: Chalice Well is “a little garden, beautifully kept and lovely, where you can go and drink from the iron-laden red spring”, and White Spring is “underneath the footing of the Tor – a cave with calcium-rich water pouring through it and candles and all sorts.” Both are popular with pilgrims, Pagan and otherwise. Tucked off High Street with a quaint courtyard in the back, Courtyard Books is Maughfling’s favourite place for Pagan literature and learning. “It specialises in esoteric books, old and new, and they have some fantastic titles,” he

says. The mysterious little shop stocks everything from magic to alchemy to witchcraft – including many rare finds and lots of second-hand tomes. The shop helps keep Glastonbury’s second-hand book culture going, says Maughfling. “It’s become a collector’s art again, in a second-hand bookshop, to find things that are rare and unusual.” It’s also an excellent place to get chatting, either in search of recommendations or insights into local culture. “The owner is very interested in all of this, mythologies and such,” says Maughfling, “and he is also



perfectly happy to talk to people, if he’s not too busy, about Glastonbury’s Pagan

culture.” This Pagan-infused apothecary and herbalist on High Street, is a veritable treasure trove. It’s “a very special shop indeed for the Pagans and esotericists and occultists and witches and travellers and festival-going people... a whole mix of people!” says Maughfling. Star Child is a sensory delight, its shelves brimming with herbs, oils, ointments, ceramics and candles – all hand-crafted, and many dedicated to zodiac signs and Pagan deities. “The guy who runs it actually goes out in the early morning dew throughout the year, collecting herbs and plants from the local area and compounding the incense,” says Maughfling. There’s probably something for everyone, even if you don’t know what you’re looking for. “Just look around to see the things that seem to resonate with you,” Maughfling recom-

mends. The George & Pilgrims Inn has been in operation since the 15th Century, making it the oldest pub in Glastonbury. “It’s got a lovely terrace out the back and they do good food there,” says Maughfling. It was originally the hospitium of Glastonbury Abbey, hosting pilgrims and guests. The Grade I-listed building on High Street features an ornate stone frontage in the 15th-Century style, battlement parapets on top and crooked wooden beams inside. The George & Pilgrim has long been a gathering place for Pagans and the wider community. It’s “the sort of meeting place where everyone who was anybody in Glastonbury has stayed,” Maughfling says. “John Michell, the famous mystic and antiquarian vision philosopher, stayed there and used to hold court out the back on summer evenings... it gives you an idea of the charm of the courtyard.” Glastonbury revels in Pagan festivals as well as musical. For Maughfling, one looms large: Beltane, a week-long Pagan celebration of summer’s arrival, in early May. “[It’s] really special in the year,” says Maughfling, “connected with celebrating the season and merriment... but it’s also linked with what we consider to be important world healing time.” poetry and other revelry. The Glastonbury Order of Druids, including Maughfling, also host sunrise ceremonies atop the Tor. “Prayers are said to the God of the Sun, and the Goddess of the Earth, and a Blessing is sent out to those in need in various troubled parts of the world,” says Maughfling. “The coming months of summer is celebrated in song and dance: a very ancient global tradition, with its own unique Glastonbury flavour.” Joining a ritual is the best way to engage with Druidry, says Maughfling, because “you’re seeing it in practice and you’re learning how to do it.”

# Is it safe to eat a handful of dried fruits and nuts with green tea as a snack?



Whether you are trying to lose weight or simply want to switch to a healthy diet? Adding green tea to the diet can simply help in managing metabolic health and help boost immunity, and its high antioxidant levels ensure cell repair and reverse the damage caused by free radicals and may also help in effective weight loss. But wait, do you also drink your favorite green tea with a handful of nuts and dried fruits, especially as a healthy mid-meal snack? Then you must read on and pause as we will share some facts about this popular combination. With growing awareness about health and fitness, people are gradually moving towards making healthier choices, and one such addition to the healthy diet is green tea. Loved for its subtle taste, flavour and numerous health benefits, the antioxidant-rich tea is great for metabolism and immunity. But do you know what happens when you drink green tea with a handful of dried fruits and nuts? Let’s find out if this combination is actually healthy and effective. Nutritional benefits of green tea

Green tea is rich in polyphenols, particularly catechins, which are powerful antioxidants that help fight oxidative stress in the body. It is also known to support weight loss, boost brain function, and improve heart health. The caffeine in green tea provides a mild energy boost, making it an ideal beverage for a morning or afternoon pick-me-up.

**Benefits of pairing nuts and dried fruits**

Nuts like almonds, walnuts, cashews, and pistachios, as well as dried fruits such as raisins, dates, and apricots, are nutrient-dense foods that are packed with healthy fats, fiber, and vitamins. These foods support heart health, improve digestion, provide long-lasting energy, and are excellent sources of

antioxidants and essential minerals like magnesium, iron, and potassium. Here’s what happens when you eat nuts and dried fruits with a warm green tea.

**Antioxidants**

Both green tea and nuts/dry fruits are rich in antioxidants. Green tea contains catechins, while nuts and dry fruits provide vitamins and minerals such as vitamin E and vitamin C, which are known for their antioxidant properties. By combining these two, you get a powerful combination that helps combat oxidative stress, reduce inflammation, and protect against chronic diseases like heart disease and cancer.

**Improves digestion**

Green tea has mild digestive properties and can aid in soothing the digestive system. It can promote healthy digestion and help alleviate bloating or indigestion. On the other hand, nuts and dried fruits are rich in fiber, which helps in regulating bowel movements and improving gut health. Together, green tea and fiber-rich snacks support a well-functioning digestive system.

**Energy**

While green tea provides a gentle caffeine boost, nuts and dry fruits offer a steady source of energy. The healthy fats in nuts and the natural sugars in dried fruits give a slow-release energy that keeps you feeling full and satisfied for longer. This combination can be particularly useful for midday snacking, offering sustained energy without the sugar crash that comes from more processed snacks.

**Balanced blood sugar levels**

Green tea has been shown to help regulate blood sugar levels and improve insulin sensitivity. Adding nuts and dried fruits to the mix can further help stabilize blood sugar. Nuts are a great source of healthy



fats and proteins, which can slow the absorption of sugar into the bloodstream. Dry fruits like dates and raisins have natural sugars but are also packed with fiber, which helps regulate the release of sugar into the bloodstream.

**Boosts heart health**

Both green tea and nuts/dry fruits promote cardiovascular health. The catechins in green tea can help lower LDL cholesterol (the “bad” cholesterol) while boosting HDL cholesterol (the “good” cholesterol). Nuts, particularly almonds and walnuts, are known for their heart-healthy fats, such as omega-3 fatty acids, which support heart function. Together, they make for a heart-friendly combination. Green tea is often associated with weight management due to its metabolism-boosting properties. It can help burn fat, especially when combined with a healthy diet. Nuts, while calorie-dense, can actually help in weight management by keeping you full for longer, preventing overeating. The healthy fats in nuts increase satiety, making you less likely to snack unnecessarily. The fiber in dry fruits also aids digestion and helps you feel satisfied.

# Is tea really healthy? This is what US FDA says

In India, tea is not just a beverage, but a lifestyle ritual. From black tea to the famous adrak wali chai, Indians enjoy tea in all forms and colours. So, if you are a tea lover, then there is good news for you. As per recent news update, U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) has recognized the tea from Camellia sinensis as a healthy beverage. Scroll down to read the details. The North Eastern Tea Association (NETA) and the Indian Tea Association (ITA) have welcomed the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) recognition of tea from Camellia sinensis as a healthy beverage. This landmark decision affirms the global tea industry’s claims regarding the beverage’s numerous health benefits. It is reported that recently, the FDA announced a final rule updating the “healthy” nutrient content claim to help consumers identify foods that align with dietary recommendations. As part of this update, tea made from Camellia sinensis is now eligible for the “healthy” designation. What is Camellia sinensis? It is a tea plant, from which all varieties of true tea are made, including green tea, black tea, white tea, oolong tea, and yellow tea. The differences in these types of tea are primarily due to how the leaves are processed after they are harvested. What does US FDA say? In a statement shared by NETA, the FDA acknowledged prior findings linking Camellia sinensis to potential health benefits, such as its relationship with certain cancers. However, the agency clarified that the “healthy” claim does not extend to herbal teas made from other plants, including chamomile, peppermint, ginger, lavender, hibiscus, butterfly pea flower, or masala tea. The Indian Tea Association (ITA), the country’s oldest organization of tea producers, welcomed the FDA’s decision as a landmark for the industry. “The Indian Tea Association is pleased that the FDA has officially recognized tea as a ‘healthy’ beverage under its updated criteria. This allows manufacturers to voluntarily label products with the specified ITA status of Camellia sinensis bioactive compounds such as catechins (like theanine, which is believed to contribute to health benefits associated with tea consumption, such as antioxidants and possible improvements in heart health. These leaves are rich in antioxidants that help neutralize free radicals in the body, which can damage cells and contribute to aging and diseases. Drinking tea, especially green and black tea, has been linked to improved heart health. Studies suggest that the antioxidants in tea can help lower blood pressure, reduce cholesterol levels, and improve blood vessel function. The catechins in green tea, for example, may reduce bad cholesterol (LDL) while increasing good cholesterol (HDL), thus promoting overall heart health. Green tea, in particular, is often associated with fat burning and weight loss. The combination of these compounds can enhance calorie burning, especially when combined with regular physical activity. As per reports, the association has also highlighted the FDA’s Executive Summary, which noted that beverages like water, tea, and coffee with fewer than five calories per Reference Amount Customarily Consumed (RACC) and per labelled serving automatically qualify for the “healthy” designation.



# The Royal code of Biryani

Biryani isn’t just food. It’s an emotion, a love language, and in many households, a sacred weekend ritual. But not all biryanis are created equal. Some make your soul dance with every spoonful. Others just...exist. So what’s the secret sauce that transforms an average biryani into one worthy of a royal feast? It’s not just the rice or the meat (though they matter). It’s the little things—those sneaky, fragrant, often overlooked ingredients that give biryani its signature oomph. The stuff that whispers “nawabi” with every bite. So pull up a chair, loosen your waistband, and let’s uncover the hidden treasures that make biryani truly royal.

**Kewra water**

If biryani had a perfume, it would be kewra water. Made from the distilled essence of pandanus flowers (a tropical plant with sweet, floral notes), kewra water adds an almost mystical aroma that lingers long after your last bite. It’s not loud like rose water. It’s more of a flirt—subtle, romantic, and deeply royal. Most Mughlai and Awadhi-style biryanis swear by kewra. Just a few drops drizzled before the final “dum” (steaming) stage, and your kitchen will smell like a palace courtyard.

**Saffron**

No list of royal ingredients is complete without saffron. These delicate crimson threads are more expensive than gold (literally), and just a pinch can change the entire personality of your biryani. When steeped in warm milk and poured over the top layer of rice, saffron does two magical things: it adds a dreamy golden hue, and it infuses your biryani with a luxurious, earthy aroma. It’s the culinary equivalent of velvet.

**Ghee**

Oil may be practical, but ghee is poetry. The moment a spoonful of desi ghee hits the hot pot, you know something divine is about to happen. Ghee is what gives biryani its rich, rounded flavor and melt-in-your-mouth texture. It acts as a natural flavor enhancer, binding the spices together and coating every grain of rice with buttery goodness. Some chefs also fry the biryani masala in ghee to bring out its depth. Others add ghee just before sealing the pot, letting the steam carry its nutty fragrance through every layer.

**Mace and nutmeg**

Let’s talk about spice royalty. Mace (the lacy outer covering of nutmeg) and nutmeg themselves are two of the most regal spices in your masala box—and they’re often the secret reason why biryani tastes “restaurant-level.” Mace has a delicate, slightly

peppery scent that complements the heavier spices like cloves and cardamom. Nutmeg brings a warm, woody depth. Together, they round out the spice mix with a whisper of luxury.

**Fried onions**

They’re golden. They’re caramelized. They’re crispy beyond belief. And they can make or break a biryani. Fried onions—also known as birista—add a sweet-savory crunch that’s absolutely non-negotiable in most traditional recipes. You can mix them into the masala, layer them between the rice, or sprinkle them generously on top just before serving. What do they bring? Texture, depth, and a touch of drama. Imagine biting into a forkful of fragrant rice, soft meat, and then—bam—a crisp, sweet shard of onion that elevates the whole experience.

**Rose water**

If kewra is the mysterious whisper, rose water is the love poem. It’s delicate, sweet, and adds a gentle floral lift to the otherwise spicy, savory biryani profile. You’ll find rose water more often in Lucknowi and Kolkata-style biryanis than in South Indian ones. It’s usually added in the same way as kewra—just a few drops sprinkled on the rice before sealing the pot.

**Bay leaf and star anise**

Bay leaf is like that background character in a movie who doesn’t get much credit but holds the whole plot together. It adds an earthy, slightly bitter depth that rounds out the spices. Star anise, on the other hand, is your flavor wildcard. It has a sweet, licorice-like note that pairs beautifully with meat and long-cooked rice. Just one star-shaped pod can make your biryani taste ten times more “restauranty.” Drop these into the oil at the very beginning so they can infuse the whole dish. Think of them as the first brushstrokes on your biryani canvas.

**Atta dough**

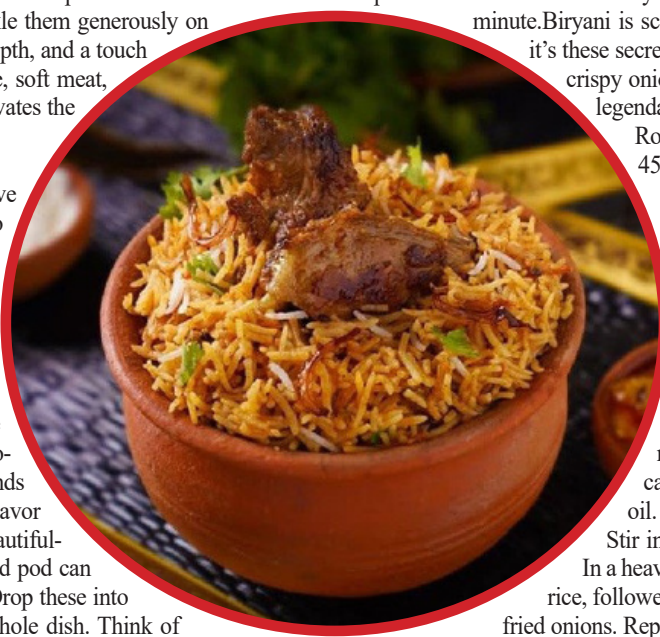
Technically not an ingredient in the biryani, but essential to the magic of dum cooking. Sealing the pot with dough locks in the steam, allowing all the royal ingredients—

saffron, kewra, spices, meat juices—to infuse into the rice. It creates a pressure-cooked flavor bomb that can’t be achieved with modern shortcuts.

Sounds cheesy? Maybe. But ask any grandma who makes biryani for 20 people on Eid or any chef who slow-cooks a dum biryani for hours—biryani is not a dish you rush. Every royal biryani has two invisible ingredients that make all the difference: love and time. You can’t cheat your way to that depth of flavor with pressure cookers and instant pots. You have to build it—layer by layer, aroma by aroma, minute by fragrant minute. Biryani is science, art, and heritage served on a plate. And it’s these secret royal ingredients—from saffron and kewra to crispy onions and dum dough—that take it from good to legendary.

**Royal Dum Biryani Recipe**  
Serves 4 | Prep Time: 45 mins | Cook Time: 1.5 hrs

Start by marinating 500g chicken or mutton (bone-in) in a mix of 1 cup thick curd, ginger-garlic paste, red chilli powder, turmeric, garam masala, lemon juice, and salt. Let it rest for at least an hour, ideally overnight. Meanwhile, soak 2 cups of aged Basmati rice. Boil it with whole spices—bay leaf, cardamom, cinnamon, and star anise—until 70% cooked. Drain and keep aside. To prepare the masala, sauté whole spices like mace, nutmeg, cardamom, cloves, and peppercorns in ghee and oil. Add thinly sliced onions and cook until golden. Stir in the marinated meat and cook until half done. In a heavy-bottomed pot, begin layering: first meat, then rice, followed by saffron milk, rose water, kewra water, and fried onions. Repeat the layers and top with ghee and more fried onions. Seal the pot with atta dough and cook on low flame for 30-40 minutes. Rest for 10 minutes, then break the seal and fluff gently to serve. This Royal Dum Biryani is rich, layered, and fit for a feast. Serve hot with raita or salad and let the regal flavors shine.



# Easy picnic snacks made with boiled eggs

Planning a picnic with friends and family, but don’t know what to pack for the picnic box, then we have some simple recipes that can be made with boiled eggs and are super easy! There’s no denying that boiled eggs are not only nutritious, but are also versatile and delicious, which makes them an excellent option for picnic snacks. Packed with protein and healthy fats, they are easy to prepare, travel-friendly and can be transformed into various tasty dishes. Here are some simple picnic-friendly snacks made with boiled eggs that are sure to be crowd-pleasers. Deviled eggs are a classic snack that’s simple to make and always a hit at picnics. To make them, peel the boiled eggs and slice them in half. Scoop out the yolks and mix them with mayonnaise, mustard, vinegar, salt, and pepper. Spoon or pipe the mixture back into the egg whites and garnish with paprika

or fresh herbs like chives. An egg salad sandwich is a comforting, hearty option for a picnic. Mash boiled eggs and mix them with mayonnaise, mustard, chopped celery, onions, and seasoning to taste. Spread the egg salad on whole wheat or white bread, and top with lettuce for added crunch. Egg salad sandwiches are filling and travel well. They are a simple, make-ahead option that doesn’t require much prep time. You can pack them in individual portions, making them ideal for a picnic setting. Boiled Egg and Avocado Toast For a healthy and satisfying snack, spread mashed avocado on a slice of toasted bread, then top with slices of boiled egg. Sprinkle it with salt, pepper, and a dash of chili flakes for a bit of spice. You can even add some tomatoes or herbs for extra flavor. For a savory, bite-sized snack, try making egg and spinach muffins. Whisk together eggs, sautéed spinach, onions,

and cheese. Pour the mixture into muffin tins and bake until golden brown. You can even add bacon or herbs for additional flavor. These egg muffins are portable, easy to eat with one hand, and can be made in advance. They are also highly customizable, allowing you to incorporate different veggies, meats, or cheeses to suit your preferences. For a lighter, refreshing option, wrap boiled eggs with fresh vegetables in a tortilla. Choose your favorite veggies like lettuce, cucumber, tomatoes, and bell peppers. Slice the boiled eggs and add them to the wrap, then drizzle with a light dressing or hummus for extra flavor. To make this easy snack just scramble boiled eggs and mix them with shredded cheese. Place the mixture between two tortillas and cook on a skillet until the cheese melts and the tortillas are golden and crispy. Cut them into small wedges for easy sharing.

# Is this celebrity-approved trend worth the hype?

Victoria Beckham and Anushka Sharma follow a monotrophic diet, and we asked experts for their take on this celebrity-approved trend Victoria Beckham recently shared in an interview with the UK Telegraph that she has eaten the same meal—grilled fish and steamed vegetables—for 25 years. Similarly, Bollywood star Anushka Sharma revealed in an interview with Slurp that she occasionally follows this kind of diet. These celebrity stories have made this diet a hot topic. To learn more, we asked experts about the celeb-approved monotrophic diet. “The monotrophic diet, or ‘mono diet,’ is a simple way of eating where you consume just one type of food or a small selection of similar foods for a certain period to lose weight,” says Dr. Komal Malik, Head Dietician at Asian Hospital, Faridabad. Celebrities like Beckham and Sharma often choose this diet because it’s easy to follow and reduces the effort of meal planning. The diet is popular among those trying to lose weight because it focuses on one meal or food group. “One of the main benefits of a mono diet is that it is calorie-restricted, which can help with short-term weight loss,” adds Dr. Malik. It can also help people discover which foods suit their bodies best by limiting variety. The monotrophic diet is easy to follow and helps cut down calorie intake quickly. Dr. Malik explains,



“It simplifies meal planning, reduces stress about food, and gives your gut a break by processing fewer types of meals. It can also help identify food sensitivities or allergies that might be missed with a varied diet.” It also removes the need to decide what to eat, which can reduce decision fatigue. Eating the same food for a while may help some people figure out what works best for their digestion or energy levels,” she continues. However, this approach has its downsides too.

SPORTS

Magnus Carlsen “In My Book, Definitely D Gukesh Youngster”

**New Delhi:** Chess superstar Magnus Carlsen didn’t hide behind the veneer of niceties and asserted that he was here to win the FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Championship, and that fatherhood or the emergence of youngsters hadn’t diminished his hunger for success. Carlsen has continued to remain the undisputed king of chess for another year and will be firm favourite in the season-ending global showpiece, having won five Rapid and eight Blitz titles -- the last one coming in 2024 in New York where he raised quite a storm by coming to the venue wearing jeans, a violation of FIDE’s dress code which resulted in him being banned for

Rapid competition. Sharing the stage with India’s world champion in classical format D. Gukesh on the eve of the Worlds, Carlsen said on Thursday: “I love being a husband, and a father. It’s been a fantastic experience this year. Neither my son or my wife are too much of a help, unfortunately in terms of chess advice yet. So, it (fatherhood) really hasn’t changed much and I’m here to win as always, doesn’t change.” With Gukesh emerging as a potential future rival for the Norwegian -- he beat the latter in Norway Chess this year creating quite a flutter -- Carlsen, when asked if he still considers the India a youngster, replied in the affirmative.

Patrick Dorgu Delivers Winner For Depleted Manchester Against

**Mumbai:** Patrick Dorgu’s first Manchester United goal earned the depleted Red Devils a 1-0 win over Newcastle to propel Ruben Amorim’s men up to fifth in the Premier League. Shorn of captain Bruno Fernandes due to injury plus the absent Bryan Mbeumo and Amad Diallo due to the Africa Cup of Nations, Amorim’s change of role for Dorgu paid dividends. The Danish international connected sweetly with a looping ball on his left foot for the only goal to compound Newcastle’s miserable away form despite the visitors dominating the second half. A first home win in two months takes United level on points with fourth-placed Chelsea, while Newcastle remain down in 11th.After a series of promising performances went without reward in recent weeks, this time United got over the line despite having to mount a rearguard action to secure just a second clean sheet of



the season.Amorim responded to the loss of Fernandes by finally switching from his preferred 3-4-3 system to a back four with Dorgu thrust into a more attacking role on the right side of a three behind Benjamin Sesko up front. Dorgu duly delivered his first goal for United since joining from Lecce nearly a year ago. Diogo Dalot’s cross was cleared high into the air before the 21-year-old volleyed past Aaron Ramsdale on 24 minutes.Newcastle boss Eddie Howe himself made an early

formation change to adapt to a fast start from United.But Howe has struggled all season for answers to the Magpies’ woeful form on the road. Newcastle have won just twice in 12 games away from Tyne-side in all competitions.Jack Fletcher, son of former United midfielder Darren Fletcher, was introduced for his first appearance at Old Trafford. Amorim tinkered his system once more to try and turn the tide, but his substitution of Casemiro left the Brazilian befuddled.

Tongue encourages England bowlers to replicate impressive opening display

**New Delhi:** History-making sea mer Josh Tongue hailed England’s bowling unit for the “amazing job” it did on Friday and said more of the same was planned to get a result in the fourth Ashes Test. Tongue led the attack in front of a record 94,199 crowd at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, bagging 5-45 as the host was dismissed for 152.In doing so, he became the first England bowler this century to collect a five-wicket haul in a Test at the cavernous stadium.

The last Englishmen to achieve the feat were Darren Gough and Dean Headley in 1998. But with England skittled out for 110 in 29.5 overs in less than a session, the pace bowling battery has another big job ahead on Saturday to keep its side in



the game.“It’s been an amazing day of Test match cricket,” said the Nottinghamshire quick after his best bowling returns in his

eighth Test.“Obviously coming to the ground here this morning, winning the toss, putting the Aussies into bat and bowling

them out for 150-odd, I thought we did an amazing job as a bowling unit.“Obviously they bowled well, as well. It’s a pitch which is doing quite a bit, and, yeah, we’ve got to come back tomorrow and do the same again that we did first innings.“I feel like if you put the ball in the right areas, which I felt like we did today, you’re going to get your rewards,” he added.“So you just stay patient and hang in there.”With pace spearhead Jofra Archer out of the series with a side strain, Tongue and Gus Atkinson rose to the challenge, length to pose a threat, as did skipper Ben Stokes when he came on after lunch.“I feel like anyone could have taken a ‘five-fer’ today. It could have been Brydon, it could have been Gus,” said Tongue.

3rd T20I: Shafali’s blitz after Renuka, Deepti show powers India to series win over Sri Lanka

**New Delhi:** Renuka Singh Thakur and Deepti Sharma dazzled with the ball before Shafali Verma’s pyrotechnics powered India to a commanding eight-wicket victory over Sri Lanka, clinching the five-match series in the third women’s T20I here on Friday. With the win, India have taken an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match series, underlining their complete dominance over the visitors. The contest followed a familiar script, with India first restricting Sri Lanka to a modest total before overhauling the target with consummate ease.

Renuka (4/21) marked her return to the side in scintillating fashion, while Deepti became the joint-highest wicket-taker in women’s T20Is as India limited Sri Lanka to a paltry 112 for seven. Shafali, who blazed away to an unbeaten 79 off 42 balls, was at her impe-

rious best as she single-handedly dismantled the chase, powering India home with 40 balls to spare.Playing her first T20I since December last year, Renuka did what she does best with the new ball, rattling the Sri Lankan top order and swinging the momentum decisively in India’s favour The ever-reliable Deepti (3/18) provided excellent support with timely breakthroughs and also joined Australia’s Megan Schutt as the highest wicket-taker in women’s T20Is, claiming her 151st scalp in the format.Chasing the modest target, the big-hitting Shafali picked up from where she had left off in the previous match, going all guns blazing to register her second consecutive half-century.After facing three dot balls, the explosive opener danced down the track to clobber a towering 83-metre six over long-off, following it up with back-to-back bound-

aries through midwicket and mid-off.

Timing the ball to perfection, she punished the Sri Lankan bowlers with an entertaining knock, smashing 11 boundaries and three sixes.Spinner Kavisha Dilhari (2/18) briefly stalled India’s momentum by removing vice-captain Smriti Mandhana’s (1), whose lean patch continued, and Jemimah Rodrigues, but the outcome was never in doubt with Shafali finishing it off in style with a boundary.Earlier trying to stay alive in the series, Hasini Perera (25) gave Sri Lanka a brisk start, striking two boundaries to plunder 12 runs of the opening over bowled by Renuka.Perera mixed But India clawed their way back. The ever-reliable Deepti provided the breakthrough as Athapaththu charged down the pitch, only to top-edge the ball to skipper Harmanpreet Kaur.

England Beat Australia By 6 Wickets To Claim Historic Win



**New Delhi:** AUS vs ENG 4th Ashes Test Day 2 Highlights: A fighting England won their first Test on Australian soil in 15 years on Saturday, restoring their battered pride with a gutsy four-wicket victory to clinch a chaotic fourth Ashes clash that was all over inside two days. The pumped-up tourists dismissed Australia for 132 soon after lunch in front of a bumper 92,045 crowd at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. It left them chasing 175 to win, with Harry Brook (18) and Jamie Smith (three) seeing them home for the loss of six wickets. However, the hosts have already clinched the five-match Ashes Test series with 3-1 lead. (SCOREACRD) AUS vs ENG 4th Ashes Test Day 2 Highlights: A fighting England won their first Test on Australian soil in 15 years on Saturday, restoring their battered pride with a gutsy four-wicket victory. Needing 175 second-innings runs to win and 98 after the tea break, England reached its target at 178-6 to clinch the match and send thousands of its long-suffering but faithful “Barmy Army” fans into frenzied celebration.

Virat Kohli, Rohit Vijay Hazare Trophy Salaries Revealed

**New Delhi:** Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma’s return to the Vijay Hazare Trophy has added a fresh layer of spice to the domestic white-ball competition. Though the Vijay Hazare Trophy doesn’t match the glitz and glamour of the Indian Premier League (IPL), the tournament is considered the cornerstone of India’s domestic white-ball calendar every year.

The presence of the veteran duo, however, has seen fans’ interest peak in the structure of the tournament and the way it functions. While both Kohli and Rohit remain BCCI-contracted players, their earnings in the Vijay Hazare Trophy don’t come close to the crores they earn in the IPL. As of the 2025-26 season, player earnings in this tournament are strictly regulated through a tiered system based on professional experience.

Unlike the IPL, where a player’s value is determined by an auction, Vijay Hazare salaries are fixed. The primary metric is the number of List A matches (domestic one-day games) a player has featured in. This is where the likes of Kohli and Rohit - two of the veterans of the game - beat most of the players they are playing with. In the current season, icons like Kohli (representing Delhi) and Rohit (representing Mumbai) earn exactly the same as any other domestic veteran. Because both have surpassed the 40-match threshold, they receive Rs 60,000 per game. In comparison, the BCCI gives the duo a salary of Rs 6 lakh per ODI. But, this isn’t all. Earnings in the Vijay Hazare Trophy aren’t limited to the appearance fee alone. Players can supplement their income through.

Funding delays and administrative lapses USA Cricket’s World Cup preparations

**New Delhi:** USA Cricket’s preparations for a packed international calendar have been repeatedly disrupted over the past few months, with delays in funding disbursal and administrative bottlenecks severely affecting both senior and junior teams ahead of key ICC events. The most recent setback involves the Under-19 men’s team, which was scheduled to depart for South Africa on December 27 for a 10-day preparatory camp ahead of the U-19 World Cup in Zimbabwe in January. That trip has now been delayed after several players failed to obtain visas in time.Sources stated that responsibility for visa applications and travel arrangements rested with ICC-appointed staff, given USA Cricket’s ongoing suspension. However, visa applications were submitted only on December 20, leaving insufficient time for processing and ultimately forcing the postponement of the tour. The letter also noted that on November 10, the ICC declined USA Cricket’s request that it should not interfere with the termination of the ACE contract or require its reinstatement under previously terminated terms. USA Cricket had ended its agreement with ACE in August, citing multiple material breaches of the term sheet signed in May 2019.Following the expiration of the ICC’s DIP proposal, ACE filed a motion in the Bankruptcy Court, a move supported by the ICC. Pisike further highlighted an unpaid reim-

bursement of USD 63,000 owed to USA Cricket for hosting the U-19 Americas Qualifier in August, adding that repeated follow-ups had gone unanswered.The delay is the latest in a series of disruptions that have undermined preparation across age groups. Earlier this year, USA Cricket had planned to send its U-19 side to the West Indies for a preparatory series against the host nation and England’s U-19 team. That tour was unilaterally cancelled by Cricket West Indies, which cited funding concerns. Similarly, a senior men’s training camp scheduled in Sri Lanka in October, ahead of the ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup League 2 series in Dubai, was called off after USA Cricket’s suspension by the ICC came into effect.Logistical challenges extended into the competition itself. Sources said the ICC did not arrange team travel for the senior men’s side to Dubai, forcing the suspended board to make private arrangements at short notice. The squad arrived just in time for the tournament, which ran from October 26 to November 5. Despite the disruption, the USA won all four of its matches and currently sits atop the ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup League 2 (2023–27) points table.The senior men’s team is next scheduled to travel to Sri Lanka on January 26 for a preparatory camp ahead of the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup, which Sri Lanka and India will co-host from February 7. The U-19s will compete



in Zimbabwe in January, while the longer-term roadmap includes qualification and preparation for the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 2028.

The backdrop to these disruptions is USA Cricket’s suspension by the ICC in September for what it described as serious breaches of membership criteria. Shortly after, USA Cricket filed for bankruptcy, having earlier terminated its long-term commercial partnership with American Cricket Enterprises (ACE), the owner of Major League Cricket.

Ashes 2025-26: ‘Short Tests are bad for business,’ says Cricket Australia boss

**Mumbai:** Cricket Australia chief Todd Greenberg said on Saturday that short Tests were bad for business as some of the biggest names in the game attacked the state of the Melbourne Cricket Ground pitch. Twenty wickets tumbled on day one of the fourth Test between Australia and England on Friday, with the former dismissed for 152 and the latter just 110.Six more wickets fell on the second day’s morning session, with Australia 98 for six at lunch, meaning 26 wickets had fallen in 98 overs and four sessions.

It was the most wickets to fall on the first day of an Ashes Test since 1909, and came on the back of 19 wickets being taken on day one of the series-opener in Perth. The Perth Test ended in two days, costing Cricket Australia millions of dollars in lost revenue, with Melbourne also shaping as a major dent to the governing

body’s finances.“I didn’t sleep well last night, put it that way,” Greenberg said on SEN radio after more than 94,000 packed into the MCG for Friday’s first day.“It was an amazing day of Test cricket, so for that record number of people who were here, boy, they’ve had an experience.“But our challenge is to make sure we can continue those experiences day after day. That’s the challenge for all of us.”The Melbourne pitch was prepared with 10 millimetres of grass on the wicket, making it heavily favourable for the bowlers with plenty of movement and bounce under overcast skies.

Greenberg said a trend towards shorter Test matches was not in Cricket Australia’s interest.“A simple phrase I’d use is short Tests are bad for business. I can’t be much more blunt than that,” he said.“So I would like to see a slightly broader balance between the bat and the ball.”A host



of former greats have been critical of the Melbourne pitch, with former England captain Michael Vaughan on Saturday calling it “a joke”.“This is selling the game short,” he added, while another ex-England skipper, Alastair Cook, branded it “an un-

fair contest”. Curators in Australia are traditionally independent when it comes to preparing pitches, both from captains and Cricket Australia.Greenberg suggested a more interventionist approach might be needed.“It’s hard not to get more in-

volved when you see the impact on the sport, especially commercially, he said.“I’m not suggesting I’ll go around talking to ground staff, but we do have to have a careful eye on what our expectations are over the course of a summer.”

Patrick Dorgu Delivers For Depleted Manchester

**Mumbai:** Patrick Dorgu’s first Manchester United goal earned the depleted Red Devils a 1-0 win over Newcastle to propel Ruben Amorim’s men up to fifth in the Premier League. Shorn of captain Bruno Fernandes due to injury plus the absent Bryan Mbeumo and Amad Diallo due to the Africa Cup of Nations, Amorim’s change of role for Dorgu paid dividends. The Danish international connected sweetly with a looping ball on his left foot for the only goal to compound Newcastle’s miserable away form despite the visitors dominating the second half. A first home win in two months takes United level on points with fourth-placed Chelsea, while Newcastle remain down in 11th.