

# Aryana Age

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## "Pillar of Trust"

Amit Shah hails NDRF on Raising Day



**New Delhi :** Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday praised the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) on its Raising Day celebrations, saying the force has emerged as "the pillar of trust for the nation" that has been instrumental in realising the Modi government's vision for a disaster-resilient India.

In a post on X, Shah highlighted the important role of the NDRF in enhancing the preparedness of India in the context of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'disaster-resilient India.'

He described the force as "the pillar of trust, the nation relies on during calamities," and also paid homage to personnel who laid down their lives while saving others. Along with his message, Shah shared images of NDRF teams engaged in rescue and relief operations.

"Warm greetings to the personnel of NDRFHQ on

Raising Day. Through its significant role in realising the Modi govt's resolve to build a disaster-resilient India, the NDRF has today become the pillar of trust the nation relies on during calamities. Salute to the martyrs who sacrificed themselves for the safety of others," Shah wrote.

The National Disaster Response Force was formed on January 19, 2006, as an all-round skilled and specialized response force for natural as well as man-made disasters. The key functions include search and rescue in case of earth quakes and landslides, flood and cyclone rescue, handling chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear emergencies, and medical relief.

The NDRF is strategically deployed across the country with 16 battalions and 28 Regional Response Centres. Its training academy is located in Nagpur.

## Final Hearing on Shiv Sena and NCP Party Symbols to Begin Wednesday

**New Delhi:** The long-running legal battle over party names and election symbols of Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party has reached its final stage. The Supreme Court will begin final hearings from Wednesday, January 21, and will hear arguments for two continuous days.

A bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant will hear the case related to Shiv Sena's name and the 'bow and arrow' symbol. The court will also later hear matters linked to the NCP and its 'clock' symbol. No other cases will be listed on these days, showing the importance of the matter.

The dispute began after the split in Shiv Sena in 2022, when Eknath Shinde rebelled

against Uddhav Thackeray, leading to the fall of the Maha Vikas Aghadi government. Later, the Election Commission gave the Shiv Sena name and symbol to the Shinde group based on majority support. Uddhav Thackeray challenged this decision in the Supreme Court, calling it illegal and unconstitutional.

Similar issues have arisen in the NCP after its split. Sharad Pawar has filed a petition regarding the party name and symbol, while Jayant Patil has challenged the Speaker's decision not to disqualify Ajit Pawar group MLAs. The court's verdict is expected to have a major impact on Maharashtra politics.

## Power-Sharing Tension Over Thane Mayor Post

**Thane:** After political tussles over the Mumbai mayor's post, a new power-sharing dispute has emerged in Thane. BJPM LANiranjan Davkhare has warned that if BJP is not given the mayor's post for at least two years, the party will sit in opposition instead of staying in power.

Davkhare said BJP has performed strongly in areas from Shil to Vadavali and won all seats it contested. He stated that party workers want a BJP mayor in Thane, and the party deserves respect for its contribution.

Currently, the Thane

Municipal Corporation is controlled by the Shiv Sena faction led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. However, BJP's support is crucial for the ruling alliance. Davkhare's statement has increased pressure on the alliance and raised the possibility of tension between BJP and Shinde's Shiv Sena.

With BJP also pushing for the mayor's post in Mumbai, its demand in Thane is being seen as a strategic move. All eyes are now on how the Shinde-led Shiv Sena responds to this challenge.

# PM Modi receives UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan at Delhi airport

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi received Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, at Delhi airport on Monday, marking the start of his official visit to India.

This is Sheikh Mohamed's third official visit to India since assuming office as President of the UAE, and his fifth visit to the country over the past decade.

The visit builds on the strong momentum from recent high-level exchanges between the two nations, including the visit of Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin

Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, in September 2024, and Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, and Crown Prince of Dubai, in April 2025.

India and the UAE share warm, multi-faceted relations underpinned by strong political, cultural, and economic ties.

The countries are major trading and investment partners, strengthened by the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the Local Currency Settlement (LCS) system,

and the Bilateral Investment Treaty. They also maintain a robust energy partnership,

agreements covering investments in special economic zones, food

developments in West Asia, including the ongoing instability in Gaza, the

The visit will provide an opportunity for the two leaders to chart new frontiers for the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. It will also enable an exchange of views on regional and global issues of mutual interest, where India and the UAE share a high degree of convergence.

Sheikh Mohamed's visit coincides with a critical period in West Asia, as US President Donald Trump launched Phase 2 of the Gaza Peace Plan, aimed at establishing a National Committee for Gaza's administration.



including long-term energy supply arrangements.

During the visit, both leaders are expected to sign

security, and nuclear cooperation.

The discussions are also likely to focus on regional

unresolved conflict in Yemen involving Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and the strained Iran-US relations.

## Nitin Nabin set to become BJP President

**New Delhi:** New Delhi, Jan 19 (UNI) The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) election process for its National President has reached the final stage, with Nitin Nabin emerging as the sole candidate for the post, according to an official press statement issued on Monday.

The process was initiated after the completion of organisational elections in 30 of the party's 36 state units, comfortably exceeding the mandatory requirement of elections being completed in at least 50 per cent of the states.

As per the schedule, the notification for the election process was issued on January 16, 2026, along with the publication of the Electoral Roll. The nomination process was held on January 19 between 2 pm and 4 pm.

A total of 37 sets of nomination papers were received in favour of Nitin Nabin for the post of BJP National President. On scrutiny, all nomination papers were found to be duly filled in the prescribed format and declared valid.

Following the completion of the withdrawal period, the National Returning Officer for the BJP Sangathan Parv, Dr K. Laxman, announced that only one valid nomination -- that of Nitin Nabin remains for the post of National President of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

With no other candidate in the fray, Nitin Nabin is set to be elected unopposed as the BJP's National

President, marking the culmination of the party's organisational election process.

Backed by senior party leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and union Home Minister Amit Shah, Nabin's elevation reflects the BJP leadership's confidence in his organisational abilities and mass connect.



At 45, Nitin Nabin will be among the youngest leaders to head the Bharatiya Janata Party. He will be succeeding J P Nadda, who has held the position since January 2020.

The transition marks a significant moment for the ruling party as it prepares for key Assembly elections and navigates long-term political and organisational challenges.

Nabin began his electoral journey at the age of 26 when he won the Patna West by-election, drawing on the strong organisational network built by his

father and the BJP cadre base in the region.

Following the 2008 delimitation, he shifted to the Bankipur Assembly constituency—one of Patna's most prominent urban seats, home to institutions such as Patna College and Science College.

He currently represents Bankipur in the Bihar Legislative Assembly and is a five-time MLA, having retained the seat consistently since 2010.

In the 2025 Bihar Assembly elections, Nabin registered a decisive victory with a margin of over 51,000 votes, reinforcing his reputation as a leader with deep grassroots connect and urban electoral appeal.

Within the party organisation, Nitin Nabin is widely regarded as a product of the BJP's cadre-based system. He rose through the ranks of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), serving as its Bihar state president and later as national general secretary.

During this period, he played an active role in youth mobilisation programmes and several national-level organisational initiatives, earning recognition as an effective organiser and strategist.

His unopposed election as BJP National President is seen as a generational shift within the party's leadership, underscoring the BJP's emphasis on organisational discipline, cadre strength, and continuity as it looks ahead to upcoming electoral battles.

## Fake 'Bhatpuri' Village Scam Exposed, SIT to Probe

**Jalgaon:** A serious case exposing major flaws in the government's digital systems has come to light in Parola taluka of Jalgaon district. Thousands of fake birth certificates were created in the name of a non-existent village called "Bhatpuri" by misusing the Civil Registration System portal.

Police investigations revealed that Bhatpuri village does not exist at all. Despite this, fake birth records were generated over a long period. Jalgaon Superintendent of Police has now formed a Special Investigation Team to probe the case in detail. Local MLA Amol Patil is also pushing for strict action.

The main accused is Adarshkumar alias Vicky

Dubey from Bihar. Between 2010 and 2025, he allegedly created 4,907 fake birth records using a Gram Panchayat ID linked to the fake village. Investigators also found that he created 27,397 fake birth entries in the name of Shendursani village in Yavatmal district, indicating the scam may be spread across states.

Birth certificates are key documents needed for citizenship, Aadhaar, voter ID, passport, education records and government schemes. Because of this, police say the scam poses a serious threat to national security. The accused has been arrested and sent to seven days of police custody. Authorities are now checking portal logins, fake IDs and whether more people are involved.

## HC kept in abeyance Collector's decisions de-recognising the Ambernath Vikas Aghadi

**Mumbai :** The Bombay High Court on Monday kept in abeyance the Thane district collector's decisions de-recognising the Ambernath Vikas Aghadi (AVA), which was formed after the BJP joined hands with later-suspended Congress members, and recognising the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's NCP alliance as a pre-poll alliance in the municipal council elections.

Termed the side-switching of NCP members of the Ambernath Municipal Council as "globe-trotting", the bench of Justices Ravindra V Ghuge and Abhay J Mantri

directed the Thane district collector to pass a reasoned order on rival factions' contentions



Earlier during the hearing, the bench temporarily postponed the meeting for the formation of various subject committees, including those related to public health, public works, and education, in the Council,

till January 19 evening .

Ambernath in neighbouring Thane district grabbed national attention when the BJP joined hands with arch-rival Congress to sideline Shinde Sena, its state ruling partner, from power in the municipal council.

While the BJP won the post of municipal council chairperson through a direct election, the Shinde Sena, with 27 of 60 seats, became the single-largest party, followed by the BJP (14), the Congress (12), the Ajit Pawar-led NCP (4), and Independents (2). None reached the halfway mark on its own.

Initially, the AVA,

comprising 14 BJP, 12 Congress, 4 NCP (AP), and 1 Independent leader, submitted a letter to the Thane collector, with BJP's Abhijeet Gulabrao Karanjule-Patil as the group leader (for the post of Deputy Chairperson). On January 7, the AVA was recognised by the collector as a pre-poll alliance.

After the furore over the alliance, Congress suspended all 12 elected members, and Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis also directed his party to break the alliance with Congress, calling it "unacceptable." Later, the 12 Congress members joined the BJP.

# SC suggests shifting Bikram Majithia to Chandigarh jail

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court on Monday suggested that Shiromani Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia be shifted to a jail in Chandigarh while hearing his plea seeking interim bail on the ground that he apprehended threat to his life.

"We are saying shift him to Chandigarh jail, what is the problem?" remarked Justice Sandeep Mehta during the hearing.

A bench comprising Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Sandeep Mehta was hearing Majithia's petition. On the issue of an alleged threat to life, Justice Mehta queried how many attempts had been made on Majithia since he was taken into custody.

Senior Advocate Gaurav Aggarwal, appearing for

Majithia, urged the court to grant interim bail, submitting that there was a genuine threat, as reflected in the state's own intelligence report dated January 3.

In response to a specific query from the bench, Aggarwal said Majithia has been lodged in Nabha jail since June 2025.

During the hearing, Justice Mehta observed, "Rs 540 crore of public money (is involved)," to which Aggarwal responded that, as per the chargesheet, the allegation pertained to around Rs 40 crore.

Senior Advocate Siddharth Dave, appearing for the state, sought time to file a response. He informed the court that the Punjab and Haryana High Court was already seized of the issue and that the state had assured the High

Court that all necessary steps were being taken to ensure Majithia's safety.

The matter was adjourned, granting time to the state to file a counter-affidavit. Before parting, the bench observed that Majithia's request for interim bail would be considered on the next date of hearing.

Majithia has approached the Supreme Court challenging a Punjab and Haryana High Court order, which dismissed his bail plea in an FIR registered by the Punjab Vigilance Bureau under Sections 13(1)(b) read with Section 13(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

Notice on the plea was issued by the Supreme Court in December 2025.

The FIR was registered on the

basis of a June 7, 2025, report of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing an earlier NDPS case against Majithia.



The SIT alleged that Majithia and his wife had accumulated assets worth over Rs 540 crore, disproportionate to their known sources of income, through a network of domestic and foreign entities.

The allegations pertain to the period between 2007 and 2017, when Majithia served as a member of the Legislative Assembly and later as a Cabinet minister in Punjab.

The state has alleged that he exercised direct or indirect control over several companies, including Saraya Industries Limited and its subsidiaries, and that unexplained cash deposits, foreign investments routed through Cyprus- and Singapore-based entities, and inter-corporate transactions were used to acquire assets and benami properties.

It was also alleged that Majithia misused his official position to build business interests in the liquor, transport, and aviation sectors through family members and front entities.

Before the High Court, Majithia had contended that the corruption case was an offshoot of the NDPS case in which he was granted bail in August 2022, and that the Supreme Court had dismissed the state's plea for cancellation of that bail in April 2025.

He argued that the same material could not form the basis of a fresh FIR and alleged political motivation behind the prosecution.

He also pointed out that the investigation was complete, with a chargesheet filed on August 22, 2025, comprising nearly 40,000 pages and citing 272 witnesses.

Rejecting these submissions, the High Court held that there was no legal bar on registration of a second FIR when investigation

discloses a larger conspiracy or distinct offences.

Relying on Supreme Court precedent, it observed that economic offences form a separate class for the purpose of bail.

The High Court further noted that the allegations pointed to deep-rooted financial conspiracies with serious implications for the state's financial health, and that release at that stage could hamper further investigation and influence witnesses.

While declining bail, the High Court had directed the investigating agency to complete the remaining investigation within three months and observed that Majithia could seek bail thereafter, noting that he could not be kept in custody indefinitely.



# KTR slams Centre for delay in sanctioning Mega Power Loom Cluster for Sircilla

**Hyderabad:** Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) Working President and former Minister K T Rama Rao on Monday accused the BJP-led Central Government of deliberately delaying and discriminating against Telangana by not sanctioning a Mega Power Loom Cluster for Sircilla, calling it a “political vendetta” against the State’s weaving community.

In a letter, addressed to union Minister for Textiles Giriraj Singh, KTR said the proposal had been pending for over a decade despite Sircilla fulfilling every eligibility norm under the Comprehensive Powerloom Cluster Development Scheme (CPCDS).

He recalled writing multiple letters and holding several personal meetings with successive union Ministers over the last 12 years, including the late Arun Jaitley, Smriti Irani and the present minister.

“Despite meeting Central Ministers nearly ten times and submitting de-



tailed reports, the Centre has failed to take a positive decision. What is the real reason behind keeping Sircilla’s file aside?” he questioned, alleging that political bias was the only reason for the prolonged delay.

KTR said Central teams had also inspected the region and confirmed its eligibility under CPCDS norms. He pointed out that Sircilla, considered the backbone of

Telangana’s textile economy, houses over 30,000 power looms and provides livelihood to thousands of families.

He also alleged that Mega Clusters were sanctioned to regions in other States with comparatively lower workforce and capacity, while Sircilla continued to be ignored despite its proven strength.

Stating that the Telanga-

na Government under former Chief Minister K Chandrababhai Rao had completed all preparatory work for the cluster, KTR said land allocation, uninterrupted power and water supply, single-window clearances and State-level incentives were already in place. “Keeping the proposal pending without citing any technical or financial reason is nothing but admin-

istrative arrogance,” he remarked.

Taking a swipe at the Centre, KTR said the BJP spoke about “Make in India” and “Atmanirbhar Bharat” but failed to support one of the country’s most capable textile hubs.

He warned that the delay was inflicting a heavy human and economic cost on the weavers and claimed the sector had slipped back into crisis, with reports of weavers’ suicides resurfacing.

He also criticised BJP MPs and union Ministers from Telangana for failing to raise the issue and protect the interests of the State. “They have been reduced to mere ceremonial showpieces,” he alleged.

KTR demanded that the forthcoming union Budget should officially announce the Sircilla Mega Power Loom Cluster and urged the Centre to take an immediate decision in the interest of Telangana’s weavers, stating that prolonged inaction would only deepen their anguish.

# Weather forecasting in UP to receive a major boost with the installation of 5 State-of-the-art radars

**Lucknow:** A major step is being taken to further strengthen the weather forecasting system in Uttar Pradesh. Five state-of-the-art dual-polarimetric Doppler radar systems are being installed in the state, which will become operational in the next six months.

This information was provided by Manish Kumar, Director of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) Lucknow on Monday. He said that these radars are being installed in Lucknow, Azamgarh, Jhansi, Aligarh, and Varanasi. Four of these radars are being installed by the Uttar Pradesh government, while one radar in Varanasi is being installed by the IMD. This will ensure overlapping coverage in the radar network and significantly increase the accuracy of weather forecasts.

According to Manish Kumar, these advanced radars are capable of tracking the reflectivity and three-dimensional structure of clouds, which will further improve the capacity for 'nowcasting' or short-term weather forecasting. Along



with this, 2,450 automatic weather stations and 2,000 automatic rain gauge stations are being established at the block level across the state. This will create a robust block-level weather network throughout Uttar Pradesh. He also informed that there is a proposal to install wind profiler radar meters in Lucknow and Varanasi. The site selection and tendering process have been completed, and these radars will become operational in the next one year, making daily weather monitoring more effective. In addition, under IMD’s ‘Mission Mausam’ scheme, state-of-the-art observation systems will be established in Bareilly, Deoria, and Prayagraj,

which will be operational in the next one and a half years. These systems will assist in surface, remote sensing, and upper atmospheric observations, strengthening forecasting accuracy and disaster management capabilities.

Senior scientist Mohammad Danish of IMD Lucknow said that the shift from traditional systems to digital systems will provide real-time data, more frequent updates, and high-quality weather data. This will make it possible to issue accurate weather warnings in a timely manner. Overall, these initiatives are expected to significantly strengthen weather forecasting, disaster management, and public safety in Uttar Pradesh.

# Bengaluru civic polls after May 25, ballot papers to replace EVMs

**Bengaluru:** Karnataka Chief Election Commissioner G S Sangreshi on Monday announced that elections to the five new municipal corporations formed under the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) will be held after May 25, with ballot papers replacing Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).

Addressing the media, Sangreshi said the poll schedule would be finalised after the conclusion of SSLC and PUC examinations.

He made it clear that the same method would be followed for the forthcoming zilla and taluk panchayat elections later this year.

Explaining the rationale, the Chief Election Commissioner said both ballot papers and EVMs are legally valid methods of conducting elections, and there is no prohibition under existing laws or Supreme Court rulings on the use of ballot papers.

He observed that while EVMs have been widely



used over the last few decades, ballot papers remain a recognised and credible system.

Sangreshi noted that many elections in India, including Gram Panchayat, cooperative society and MLC polls, are still conducted using ballot papers, and several countries across the world continue to follow the same practice.

He pointed out that the previous Bengaluru civic elections held in 2015 were conducted using EVMs.

Rejecting suggestions of political influence behind the decision, he stressed that the State Election Commission functions as an independent constitutional authority. Since the law allows flexibility in the choice of voting method, the commission has exercised its discretion after assessing the present circumstances, he said.

The decision comes against the backdrop of the Karnataka government’s move last year to recommend ballot papers for all

future panchayat and urban local body elections.

Sangreshi underlined that opting for ballot papers should not be viewed as a step backward. “Ballot-based elections are still in practice and widely accepted. It is a tested and reliable system,” he said.

The announcement follows a recent Supreme Court direction to the state government and the election commission to complete Bengaluru’s local body elections by June 30. The elected council of the erstwhile Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) completed its term in September 2020, after which the civic body has been under administrative control.

In September 2025, the city was reorganised into five separate municipal corporations — Central, East, West, North and South — under the Greater Bengaluru Authority, replacing the unified BBMP structure.

# Odisha’s cooperative sector heading towards bankruptcy :Congress

**Bhubaneswar:** All India Kisan Congress National Coordinator and President of the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee Cooperative Cell, Amiya Kumar Patnaik, on Monday alleged that cooperative institutions in Odisha are steadily moving toward bankruptcy. Patnaik said that during the last 25 years of BJD rule and under the present BJP government, cooperative institutions have turned into centres of large-scale corruption, while the legitimate demands of cooperative employees continue to be ignored.

He alleged that cooperative-based oil mills, spinning mills and sugar mills have become defunct, and Regulated Market Committees (RMCs) are failing to function effectively for farmers.

The Congress leader also pointed out the acute shortage of warehouses for storing paddy and other crops, along with the complete absence of cold storage facilities for vegetables across the state.

To address these issues, Patnaik announced that the Odisha Pradesh Congress Cooperative Cell on Monday launched the Cooperative Protection Campaign, starting from Ganjam district.

The campaign aims to strengthen

the cooperative sector from the grassroots by making institutions active, transparent and free from corruption.

He said the Congress party has prepared a detailed roadmap to create widespread awareness about various welfare schemes implemented through cooperatives for people of all sections during previous Congress governments.

The campaign will focus on overall development of cooperative institutions, fulfillment of employees’ legitimate demands, firm action against corruption, strengthening infrastructure and improving human resources.

Recalling history, Patnaik said that under the Five-Year Plans of India’s first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Primary Agricultural Cooperative Service Societies were established at every panchayat to promote rural economic development, providing farmers relief from moneylenders and exploitation.

In Odisha, the cooperative vision of Utkal Gourav Madhusudan Das was sincerely implemented during Congress rule.

He further stated that during the Congress-led UPA government under Chairperson Sonia Gandhi and former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh,

cooperative institutions—from PACS to Central and State Cooperative Banks—were revived following the recommendations of the Vaidyanathan Committee.

Human resources were strengthened, infrastructure was developed, computerisation was accelerated, and agricultural loans worth Rs 72,680 crore were waived for over five crore farmers, giving new momentum to the cooperative sector.

Patnaik alleged that current government announcements remain confined to publicity and paperwork, and urged immediate action to revive cooperatives.

He demanded comprehensive reforms, including the formation of a state-level task force of cooperative experts, establishment of a Cooperative Academy, strengthening of the State Cooperative Union Ltd, increased education funds, and higher budgetary allocations for the cooperative sector.

He also demanded complete waiver of agricultural loans for all farmers by March 31, construction of cold storage facilities in every subdivision and warehouses in every gram panchayat, and full electricity subsidy for cold storage entrepreneurs.

# Telangana BJP questions CM Revanth Reddy’s US visit for Harvard leadership programme

**Hyderabad:** The Telangana BJP on Monday expressed surprise and strong disapproval over Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy’s decision to travel to the United States to attend what it termed a “crash leadership course,” questioning the timing and financial prudence of the visit.

According to reports, the Chief Minister has enrolled in a programme titled “Leadership for the 21st Century: Chaos, Conflict, and Courage” at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. He is scheduled to be on the Cambridge, Massachusetts campus from January 25 to 30, travelling to the US directly from Davos, where he will attend the World Economic Forum.

Reacting to the development, BJP State Chief Spokesperson and Media In-Charge N V Subash in a statement said leadership is not acquired through short-term courses but proven through governance, accountability and performance.

“Shouldn’t such academic pursuits have been completed earlier in life?” he asked, adding that the Chief Minister’s focus should be on addressing issues within the state rather than attending overseas programmes.

Subash also questioned whether the trip reflects personal aspirations being prioritised over public responsibilities.

He alleged that the Chief Minister was using public funds for personal



interests, citing what he called recent “public theatrics” that distract from governance.

The BJP leader pointed to what he described as a contradiction in the government’s claims.

While the Chief Minister has stated that the state exchequer is under strain and funds are insufficient to implement Congress’ electoral promises, he argued that spending on an overseas leadership programme sends a conflicting message.

He said the resources and administrative attention directed toward such international engagements could instead be utilised to address key concerns such as farmer welfare, employment generation, infrastructure development and implementation of welfare schemes.

The BJP expressed hope that the Chief Minister would return with “greater seriousness and dignity” and focus on delivering tangible outcomes for the people of Telangana.

“The people of the state did not vote for foreign certifications.

They voted for transparent, efficient and accountable leadership at home,” Subash said.

# JK: SFs launch search op to track down hiding terrorists in Kishtwar

**Jammu:** The joint team of Security Forces (SF) launched a massive search operation on Monday morning to track down the hiding terrorists in the forests of Singhpora in Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir.

A fierce gun battle erupted between security forces and terrorists on Sunday in the Singhpora area of Chattroo in the Kishtwar when acting on a tip off about the presence of two to three terrorists of Pakistan based Jaish-e-Mohammad outfit, in the forest area, a team of army, police and special operation group launched searches.

The terrorists fired upon the search party, which was retaliated and the encounter



triggered.

However, as per reports, around eight soldiers have also suffered injuries, primarily due to splinter injuries caused by a sudden grenade attack from the hiding

terrorists.

“The search operation resumed in the early morning supported by drones and sniffer dogs,” they said, adding that the area has been cordoned off.

# UP’s cyber security prowess to be showcased at Cybertech Global show in Tel Aviva

**Lucknow:** At ‘Cybertech Global Tel Aviv-2026’, counted among the world’s most prestigious cyber security platforms, India and especially Uttar Pradesh’s cyber strength will be presented before the global community this time.

At the international conference to be held in Tel Aviv, Israel, from January 26-28, UP’s and Asia’s top cyber cop, Prof Triveni Singh will represent India, along with Madhavan Unnikrishnan Nair, naational cyber security coordinator, government of India.

Both experts will present the nuances of cyber security and the technologies being adopted before the world’s top cyber scientists and policymakers.

Prof. Singh, who is running the ‘Cyber Safe Uttar Pradesh’ campaign for awareness, will share information about the innovative measures being undertaken in Uttar Pradesh regarding cyber security and will hold discussions on cyber security support at the international level. Based on his experience of more than 25 years, Singh will explain how Uttar Pradesh, under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, has built a robust system to deal with cyber crime, financial fraud and technology-driven crimes. At the same time, Nair will share India’s national cyber framework and policy experience on the global platform.

At this global gathering

in Tel Aviv, leading experts from the United States, Japan, Spain, Italy, England, Germany, Cyprus, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, Romania, Philippines, United Arab Emirates, Belgium, Latvia, Netherlands, Albania, Uruguay, Hungary and several other countries will participate. In Uttar Pradesh, cyber security is being made an important part of the administrative and academic framework under the directions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, with a strong focus on AI and cyber security. The Chief Minister has issued strict instructions to deal firmly with challenges such as misuse of social media, misinformation, deepfake, dark web, cyber crime and terror networks.

# Multiple road accidents in UP leave five dead, many injured

**Lucknow:** In separate road accidents across Uttar Pradesh, at least five people were killed and several others injured in Gonda, Unnao, Barabanki, and other districts.

On the Lucknow–Ayodhya service lane near Palhari under Kotwali Nagar area, an auto-rickshaw carrying passengers met with a fatal accident in the wee hours of Monday. Seeing a gravel-laden trailer approaching from the opposite direction, the auto driver swerved left. As a result, Ashish Yadav (resident of Pandeypur, Maurawan, Unnao), who was sitting on the right side of the auto, fell onto the road. The rear wheel of the trailer ran over his head, killing him on the spot. Police seized both vehi-

cles, but the drivers fled. According to Kotwali Nagar SHO Sudhir Kumar Singh, Ashish worked with an NGO and taught young children at anganwadi centers. He was living on rent near the police station in Zaidpur.

On the Lucknow–Bahraich National Highway near Hari Narayanpur turn, an Innova car collided head-on with an Ertiga car while attempting to overtake an Alambagh depot bus. After the collision, the Ertiga veered right and was hit by an oncoming roadway bus.

Devendra Kumar Tiwari (resident of Rosipurwa, Colonelganj, Gonda), who was seated in the front of the Ertiga, died in the accident. He worked at a petrol pump and was travelling after taking a lift. Two others, Islam

(resident of Siddharthnagar) and Atikur Rahman (from Gonda), were injured and referred from the CHC to the district hospital. Innova passenger Makbool Ahmad of Bahraich sustained serious injuries, while his family members suffered minor injuries.

In another tragic incident at Ganjaria village (Gadhi Rakhmau), a seven-year-old boy, Anshu, was crushed to death by a pickup vehicle while playing on the road. The vehicle was being driven by a villager, Gulshan. Police have seized the pickup and managed the situation.

On the Purvanchal Expressway at kilometer 39.9, a car travelling from Varanasi to Lucknow met with an accident after the driver report-

edly fell asleep. Driver Raj Kaushal Rai (Azamgarh) and passenger Anil Singh were injured and admitted to Haidergarh CHC.

Meanwhile, at Lonicatra’s Dahila Pokhra road, a tractor-trolley carrying devotees participating in a Kailash Yatra overturned while overtaking near Khairaburu turn on Sunday night. Around 25 people were on board, and 15, including children, were injured. Several injured devotees were referred from Trivediganj CHC to the district hospital, while others were admitted to private hospitals. The tractor was being driven by Ramdev Verma of the village.

In the last accident, two cousins riding a scooter were killed in a road accident on

Sunday in Sultanpur, while their third sister sustained serious injuries. The injured girl is undergoing treatment at a private hospital. Police reached the spot after receiving information and sent the bodies for post-mortem, initiating legal proceedings.

The incident occurred in Vaidaha village under the Gosainnagar police station area.

The deceased have been identified as Priyadarshini alias Shubhi (16), daughter of Vijay Kumar Tiwari and a Class 8 student, and her cousin Anvi Tiwari (17), daughter of Deepak Kumar Tiwari, who was a Class 11 student. Priyadarshini’s younger sister, Prashali Tiwari, was critically injured in the accident.

According to informa-

tion, the three sisters were going to Motiganj market on a scooter to buy items. When they reached near a liquor shop on the canal bankment, an out-of-control tractor hit their scooter. After the collision, the tractor driver fled the scene.

It was reported that Anvi’s birthday was on January 30, and the three sisters were going together to make preparations for the celebration. On receiving information from villagers, the police arrived at the scene and sent the bodies for post-mortem.

Gosainnagar Station House Officer Ram Ashish Upadhyay said that an FIR will be registered in the case after receiving a written complaint.

Police are investigating all incidents.



# Youth Power to Fuel Mumbai Climate Week 2026

**Mumbai** : UNICEF YuWaah has officially teamed up as the Youth Engagement Partner for the upcoming Mumbai Climate Week (MCW) 2026, scheduled from February 17 to 19. This strategic partnership, involving UNICEF India, Project Mumbai, and YuWaah, aims to integrate the perspectives of children and young adults into the heart of environmental policy. Starting this January, a series of preparatory activities will empower the younger generation to contribute meaningfully to urban resilience strategies and local climate discussions.

The initiative recognizes the climate crisis as a fundamental child rights issue that requires urgent local attention. By transforming global environmental goals into localized actions, the platform seeks to elevate the voices of those who will inherit the planet. UNICEF India Representative Cynthia McCaffrey highlighted that young people are essential drivers of change. By focusing on



their rights, the city can build a more sustainable and safer future for all residents while addressing immediate ecological threats.

In the days leading up to the main event, “Campus Climate Roadshows” will tour various colleges across the city from February 9 to 16. A centerpiece of these roadshows will be a unique e-waste art installation created by Eco Clubs under

the Ministry of Education’s Mission LiFE initiative. This installation serves as a visual reminder of the impact of responsible consumption and the role students play in waste management. It highlights how creative expression can be used to spark serious environmental dialogue.

Additionally, the “Youth Green Innovation Challenge” will invite participants aged 16 to 24 to pres-

ent creative solutions in sectors like food systems and renewable energy. Successful innovators will have the chance to pitch their ideas to policymakers and industry experts during the summit. This national platform is designed to identify young changemakers who can provide practical answers to urban challenges. The goal is to ensure that these innovations receive the support needed to scale and make a real impact.

Shishir Joshi, the CEO of Project Mumbai, emphasized that the roadshow and the innovation challenge are about turning ideas into tangible actions. By engaging college students directly, the organizers are building a durable network of climate advocates. These young leaders are expected to carry the momentum of Mumbai Climate Week far beyond the month of February. Their involvement ensures that the conversation about climate resilience remains a priority within their local communities and professional circles.

# Media Stars and Experts Converge at St. Xavier’s Fest

**Mumbai** : The Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at St. Xavier’s College recently concluded its signature media festival, Zeitgeist, drawing a massive crowd of students. The event featured a high-profile lineup of industry leaders and celebrities who shared their professional journeys and creative philosophies. It served as a bridge between academic learning and the fast-paced reality of the media world. Students from across Mumbai participated in the sessions, seeking inspiration and networking opportunities.

The festival kicked off with a practical session on international education, guiding students through scholarship opportunities and the application process for global universities. This segment addressed the growing interest among Indian students in pursuing advanced degrees abroad. Experts discussed which international universities are currently in high demand and how to navigate the competitive selection process. It provided a roadmap for those looking to expand their horizons beyond domestic media landscapes. A major highlight was the Artist Panel, where comedy icon Vir Das, actress Mithila Palkar, and performer Srushti Tawade discussed their craft. They shared insights into their latest projects and the importance of maintaining authenticity in a digital world. Vir Das spoke about

the need for creative work to feel natural, while Mithila Palkar encouraged young creators to “keep it real.” Their presence highlighted the shifting trends in Indian entertainment, from traditional cinema to digital-first action comedies.

Throughout the day, specialized panels delved into various niches, including sports broadcasting and the advertising industry. Sports commentators provided a deep dive into the world of live broadcasting and the skills needed to succeed in that high-pressure environment. Meanwhile, the advertising panel explored the massive shift from conventional marketing to purpose-driven digital campaigns. Industry veterans analyzed how brands are now focusing on target-oriented communications to reach modern consumers effectively.

To provide a well-rounded perspective, the festival also included discussions on filmmaking and public policy. Filmmakers shared the technical and emotional aspects of visual storytelling, emphasizing that a good story is the foundation of any successful film. The event concluded with a policy panel that tackled serious issues like urban development, privacy rights, and displacement. This ensured that the students left with a better understanding of both the creative glamour and the social responsibilities inherent in the media field.

# Marathon Campaign Amplifies Fight Against Child Abuse



**Mumbai** : The Tata Mumbai Marathon 2026 served as a massive platform for the non-profit organization Arpan to promote its #POCSOPakadLega campaign, aimed at eradicating Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). Building on the momentum of its 2025 Child Safety Week, the organization used the high-visibility event to educate the public and reinforce the importance of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The initiative sought to turn a somber issue into a mainstream conversation of collective accountability. The campaign’s central message, fronted by National Award-winning actress and Arpan Goodwill Ambassador Vidya Balan, delivered a stern warning to potential offenders.

By using the slogan “Kisi bhi bacche ko galat tareeke se chhua toh #POCSOPakadLega,” the organization aimed to make the legal consequences of abuse visible and inevitable. During the Dream Run segment of the marathon, Arpan’s team marched with placards and slogans, turning the race into a demonstration of community-led protection.

On-ground engagement at the event was bolstered by innovative installations, including a motorized “handcuff” display at the Motivational Zone. This visual metaphor was designed to arrest the attention of the 60,000 participants and spectators, symbolizing that no offender is beyond the reach of the law. Additionally, a public pledge board allowed attendees to formally commit to child safety, while life-sized cut-outs of Vidya Balan encouraged social media amplification through “photo-ops” with a purpose.

Pooja Taparia, the Founder and CEO of Arpan, emphasized that the campaign is about breaking the long-standing silence surrounding

CSA in India. She stated that the marathon provided an unparalleled opportunity to transform awareness into action, noting that even a single adult stepping up can change a child’s life forever. The organization’s presence was a continuation of its award-winning efforts from the previous year, focusing heavily on making the POCSO Act a household name.

Arpan remains a leading voice in the field, having impacted over 2 crore individuals since 2007 through prevention and healing services. With a team of over 150 professionals, the NGO works on everything from school-based personal safety education to policy advocacy at the national level. By integrating their message into major public events like the Mumbai Marathon, they continue to drive the social change necessary to create a safer environment for children across the country.



Editorial

The Opposition's Declining Unity

The balance of power in Indian politics is currently clearly tilted in one direction. The Bharatiya Janata Party has taken such a lead at all three levels - organization, leadership and electoral strategy - that the opposition's mass is becoming increasingly fragmented day by day. While the process of leadership change in the BJP is going smoothly, on the other hand, the opposition parties seem to be stuck in internal differences, selfish equations and directionless politics.

Currently, there is only one dominant force that is constantly underlining its influence on the horizon of Indian politics, and that is the Bharatiya Janata Party. The BJP will get a new full-time president in the coming week, and the election of a relatively new but organizationally loyal leader, Nitin Nabin, as the full-time president from the post of working president says a lot. This election has once again proven how tight and impenetrable the grip of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah on the party is. Despite facing many challenges at the international level and some degree of political deadlock, the BJP's coin is still ringing in domestic politics. The issue of Hindutva is currently at the center of all political discussions and all other questions and problems seem to be secondary for the time being. This era of victory that began in 2014 is still going on with the same vigor, and the BJP has become a huge and precise machine for winning elections, not just a political party, although the opposition is criticizing that it has become a huge and precise machine for winning elections.

In the face of this storm of BJP, the condition of non-BJP parties has become very bad. The Congress, which once brought independence to the country under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, is in a state of disarray today. Although Rahul Gandhi is trying to raise important issues, the party does not seem to be getting the desired momentum. Although the opposition is constantly criticizing the functioning of the Election Commission and the role of Commissioner Dnyanesh Kumar, it does not seem to have any impact on the actual voting or the results. Although the opposition is crying foul over the Commission's conduct, it is becoming helpless before the BJP's electoral tactics. The 'India' alliance of the opposition parties is currently going through a struggle for existence. Most of the regional parties in this alliance seem to have their vision limited to their own states. Be it China's infiltration or the controversial statements of US President Donald Trump, these regional parties have little to do with international issues like that. As long as the BJP does not bother them in their own states, they pretend to unite at the national level. 'Our business should run smoothly' is their main motto, and this alliance goes down the drain when selfishness gets in the way.

In this age of instant noodles, political loyalties and alliance unity have become as fleeting as water on a taro leaf. The 'INDIA' alliance finds itself in a precarious situation, unable to hold on to its gains, and appears to have completely lost its momentum after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The BJP, like a skilled magician, creates confusion by raising multiple issues simultaneously and achieves its political objectives amidst the chaos. The opposition is repeatedly failing to understand this technique. As the upcoming elections in Kerala draw closer, the conflict there is becoming more intense. After the last parliamentary session, Prime Minister Modi and opposition leaders, including Priyanka Gandhi, had an informal tea meeting. This cordial picture drew sharp criticism from the Left parties in Kerala against the Congress. The Left parties are becoming restless due to the increasing strength of the Congress in Kerala, and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's popularity also appears to be declining. Vijayan's working style is being criticized as that of 'Kerala's Modi' even within his own party, and this decline of the Left has become a matter of concern for democracy.

On the other hand, Amit Shah has geared up to oust Mamata Banerjee's government in West Bengal. Efforts are underway to corner the Trinamool Congress using new legal and political issues. Although Mamata Banerjee is formally part of the 'INDIA' alliance, she is not inclined to leave any seats for the Congress in the upcoming elections. Therefore, a direct contest is expected between the BJP and the Trinamool in Bengal. The situation is no different in Tamil Nadu. Since Chief Minister M. K. Stalin does not want to give the Congress a share in power, the Congress is now reportedly in contact with film star Vijay and his 'TVK' party. The BJP has also started working on forming a coalition of smaller parties there, along with the AIADMK. The conflict between the Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress in Punjab is well-known, with the Congress trying to weaken Kejriwal's party, while the Congress accuses Kejriwal of acting as the BJP's 'B team'. In Jammu and Kashmir, the ruling National Conference appears to be under pressure from the BJP, which is why the BJP's dominance is also felt in the politics there. Overall, given the current political situation, the possibility of opposition parties uniting in the coming year is extremely slim. While every regional party is struggling for its own existence, the BJP is strengthening its organization at both the central and state levels. It will be interesting to see how the new president, Nitin Naveen, under the guidance of Modi and Shah, carries forward the party's triumphant march. The lack of a concrete program and universally accepted leadership among the opposition is making these battles easier for the BJP. Looking at today's political situation, the defeat of the opposition is not only a result of the BJP's strength, but also a reflection of their own failures. Beyond declarations of unity, the opposition is failing to present a concrete program, credible leadership, and a national perspective. Regional self-interest, personal ambitions, and mutual distrust make opposition alliances appear strong only on paper. Until the opposition overcomes these limitations, it will be impossible to stop the BJP's organized juggernaut. Until the opposition moves beyond its narrow regional identities and presents a national vision, it will be difficult for any alliance to stop the BJP's victorious march. The coming period will not only be about power equations, but also about determining who survives in the battle of ideologies.

Fostering India's Indigenous Chip Design Ecosystem

India is strengthening its semiconductor ecosystem as a strategic pillar of economic growth, technological capability, and national resilience. With global demand for advanced electronics and AI-driven applications rising steadily, the semiconductor industry is projected to reach nearly USD 1 trillion by 2030. At present, the global semiconductor workforce faces a shortfall of semiconductor talent, resulting in a requirement for over 1 million additional skilled professionals by 2032. This positions India as a pivotal contributor to the global semiconductor ecosystem through targeted initiatives.

Recognizing chip design as a strategic national priority, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has implemented proactive measures to transform India's semiconductor design landscape. These initiatives span approximately 400 organizations, including 305 academic institutions under the Chips to Start-up (C2S) Programme and 95 startups under the Design Linked Incentive (DLI) Scheme.

By enabling nationwide participation in semiconductor chip design, the C2S Programme democratizes access to advanced design capabilities. It empowers students, researchers, and entrepreneurs irrespective of institution or location to develop innovative semiconductor solutions, and accelerating indigenous innovation in line with the vision of technological self-reliance and global competitiveness.

The C2S Programme is an umbrella capacity-building initiative launched by the MeitY in 2022, with a total outlay of ₹250 crore over five years, covering academic institutions across India.

The C2S Programme targets the development of 85,000 industry-ready professionals across undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral levels. This includes: 200 PhD scholars engaged in advanced research in chip design,

7000 M. Tech graduates specializing in VLSI or Embedded Systems, 800 M. Tech graduates from computer, communication, or electronic systems programmes with focused VLSI exposure, 69,000 B. Tech students trained through VLSI-oriented coursework.

Moreover, beyond manufacturing, the C2S Programme aims to catalyse the incubation of 25 start-ups and enable 10 technology transfers. The programme also seeks to provide access to SMART lab facilities, train one lakh students, generate 50 patents, and support at least 2,000 focused research publications.

This integrated approach of the C2S programme supports innovation, enhances employability, and enables academic institutions to play a more active role in India's semiconductor value chain. This programme is a strong foundation for self-reliance, innovation, and global competitiveness in the semiconductor sector.

The C2S Programme adopts a comprehensive approach, providing students with hands-on experience in chip design, fabrication, and testing. This is achieved through regular training sessions in collaboration with industry partners, combined with mentorship and practical support. Students gain access to advanced chip design tools, fabrication facilities, and testing resources, including state-of-the-art

EDA software and semiconductor foundries, enabling them to design, build, and test their own chips. These opportunities also include implementing R&D projects under the C2S Programme to develop working prototypes of Application-Specific Integrated Circuit (ASICs), Systems-on-Chip (SoCs), and

infrastructure, intellectual property cores, and technical mentorship. This centralized support enables institutions to undertake chip design and fabrication activities, strengthening India's domestic semiconductor design capability.

The Chips to Start-up Programme has delivered

support and large-scale capacity building. Key programmes and institutions such as C-DAC and ChipIN centre, provide end-to-end enablement for chip design education and innovation. By integrating R&D institutions and industry partners, the C2S institutional framework supports indigenous chip design and advances India's objective of a self-reliant and globally competitive semiconductor design ecosystem.

MeitY leads national semiconductor initiatives, provides policy direction, and anchors schemes such as Chips to Start-up Programme. It also coordinates institutional and industry partnerships to strengthen India's chip design and manufacturing ecosystem. MeitY provides overall policy direction, funding support, and programme oversight for C2S. It aims to offset the existing disabilities in India's domestic semiconductor design industry. It seeks to help Indian companies move up the semiconductor

value chain.

C-DAC has established and operates the ChipIN Centre at Bengaluru, which serves as the national hub for chip design enablement. The Centre provides shared access to commercial EDA tools, high-performance computing resources, IP libraries, and technical mentoring. It also manages design onboarding, verification, and aggregation

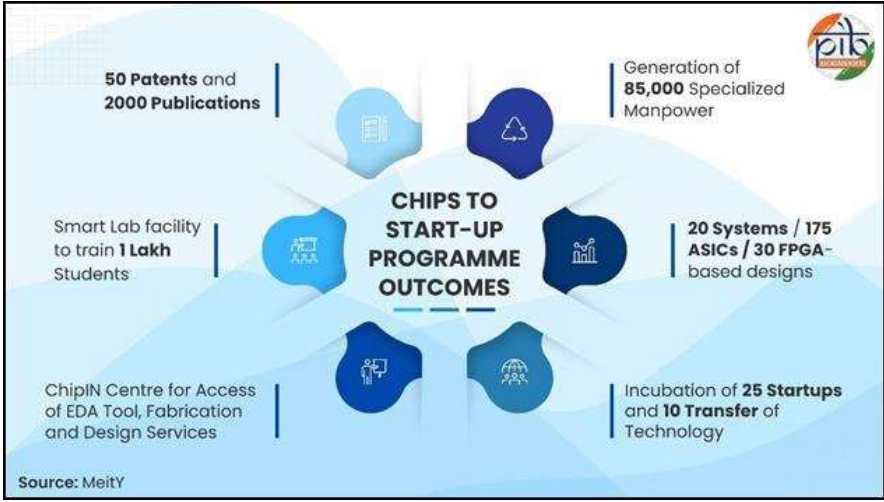
for fabrication.

Under the Chips to Start-up Programme, SCL facilitates fabrication of chip designs developed by students and researchers from participating academic institutions through shared wafer runs. SCL undertakes fabrication using established process technologies and provides packaging support for approved designs. Fabricated chips are delivered back to institutions, allowing students to validate designs on silicon and gain practical exposure to post-fabrication testing and evaluation.

These coordinated institutional frameworks ensure equitable access to national chip design infrastructure, strengthens academia-industry collaboration, and builds a steady pipeline of industry-ready chip designers. It plays a critical role in advancing indigenous chip design capability and positioning India as a credible participant in the global semiconductor ecosystem.

Semiconductors have emerged as a strategic foundation for innovation, economic growth, and national security. Leadership in semiconductor design and talent development is increasingly central to global technological competitiveness. Recognising this, India is positioning its academic and innovation ecosystem to play a decisive role in shaping future semiconductor technologies.

The Chips to Start-up Programme reflects India's commitment to building a strong and self-reliant semiconductor ecosystem. By enabling large-scale skill development, hands-on design experience, and access to national infrastructure, the programme is empowering students, researchers, startups, and entrepreneurs to contribute to indigenous chip design and innovation. These efforts are strengthening India's talent base, supporting technological self-reliance, and advancing the country's journey towards becoming a globally competitive hub for semiconductor design and development.



IndiaSkills 2025–26: North East Regional Competition

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship is organising the North East Regional Competition of IndiaSkills 2025–26 from 19 to 22 January 2026 at Gauhati University, marking a significant milestone in India's national skilling ecosystem. This is the first time a dedicated IndiaSkills Regional Competition is being conducted exclusively for the North Eastern Region, with participation from all eight North Eastern States. The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) is serving as the knowledge partner and implementing agency for IndiaSkills Competition 2025–26. The competition will bring together skilled youth from all eight North-Eastern states to compete across 26 skill categories on a national platform celebrating regional talent and excellence.

The competition will be inaugurated on 19 January 2026 by Shri Jayant Chaudhary, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and Minister of State for Education, Government of India, reaffirming the Government's commitment to strengthening skill development, regional inclusion and competitive excellence across emerging regions of the country.

Smt. Hena Usman, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government of India addressed the pre-event press conference. The North East Regional Competition represents a decisive step in deepening India's skilling architecture across emerging regions.

IndiaSkills is the country's premier national skill competition framework, designed to identify, nurture and benchmark India's best vocational talent against global standards, while creating a structured progression pathway for skilled youth from the grassroots to national and international platforms, including the WorldSkills Competition. The ongoing IndiaSkills Competition 2025–26 cycle has witnessed one of the widest participation footprints to date, with 3.65 lakh candidates registering from 35 States and Union Territories across 63 skill categories, through the Skill India Digital Hub.

The competition will commence with the Opening Ceremony at the B.K.B Auditorium, Gauhati University followed by a familiarisa-

tion programme on January 19.

The regional competition has been conceptualised to reduce geographic and logistical barriers for participation, strengthen skill ecosystems in the North Eastern Region, and identify region-specific strengths and high-potential candidates aligned with industry demand and national priorities.

This integrated approach ensures strong industry alignment, high-quality competition standards and adherence to national and international benchmarks. Winners from the North East Regional Competition will advance to the national stage of IndiaSkills Competition 2025–26, contributing to India's growing pipeline of skilled talent for global opportunities.

ing down Distribution utility payment cycles from 178 days in FY 2020-21 to 113 days in FY 2024-25.

The Ministry of Power has put in concerted efforts over the past decade to improve the performance of distribution utilities across the country. In addition to the different policy initiatives, extensive engagements with States and UTs have emphasized reforms in the distribution sector. These include discussions led by Shri Manohar Lal, Union Power Minister during the Regional Conferences of Energy Ministers of States/UTs in 2025 - Gangtok (Northeastern Region), Mumbai (Western Region), Bengaluru (Southern Region), Chandigarh (Northern Region) and Patna (Eastern Region). Regular interactions and review have played an important role in DISCOMs accomplishing this remarkable turnaround.

Several Initiatives in the Distribution Sector Improve Key Performance Indicators

The country's power distribution utilities (DISCOMs and power departments) have collectively recorded a positive Profit After Tax (PAT) of ₹2,701 crore in year FY 2024-25 marking a significant turning point for the sector. The distribution utilities as a whole have been reporting PAT losses for past several years since unbundling and corporatization of State Electricity Boards.

The positive PAT of ₹2,701 crore returned in FY 2024-25 compares to a loss of ₹25,553 crore in year FY 2023-24 and a loss of ₹67,962 crore in FY 2013-14.

While commenting on this, Shri Manohar Lal, Union Minister of Power said that this marks a new chapter for the distribution sector and is a result of several steps that have been taken to redress the concerns of

the distribution sector.

The Minister said this achievement was possible due to the leadership and vision of the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi captured in his words that, "India is driving not only its growth but also the growth of the world, with the energy sector playing a significant role in this". Shri Manohar Lal said the government is committed to the required reforms in the sector so that the power sector can support our growing economy and play its part in the journey towards Viksit Bharat.

Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS): Enhancing financial viability through infrastructure modernization and accelerated smart metering.

Additional Prudential Norms: Linking access to finance for Power sector Utilities to achievement against performance benchmarks to

promote fiscal and operational discipline. Amendments to Electricity Rules: Enforcing timely cost adjustments, prudent tariff structures, and transparent

utilities for improved financial governance.

Late Payment Surcharge Rules: Enforcing legal contracts through timely payments in the power sector



thereby supporting investment in new RE projects. Incentivizing states to implement critical power sector reforms, with borrowing limits tied to performance metrics as part of Additional Borrowing Scheme.

The result of these reforms is evident not just in the positive PAT posted by the Distribution Utilities after so many years, but also in other performance indicators.

The Aggregate Technical & Commercial (AT&C) losses have reduced over the years, signalling a transformation. The AT&C losses have reduced from 22.62% in FY 2013-14 to 15.04% in FY 2024-25. Further, signalling much improved cost recovery, the Average Cost of Supply-Average Revenue Realized (ACS-ARR) gap has narrowed from ₹0.78/kWh in FY 2013-14 to ₹0.06/kWh in FY 2024-25. Reforms such as the Electricity (Late Payment Surcharge) Rules have led to a 96% reduction in outstanding dues to generating companies—from ₹1,39,947 crore in 2022 to just ₹4,927 crore by January 2026—while bring-

ing down Distribution utility payment cycles from 178 days in FY 2020-21 to 113 days in FY 2024-25.

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# Sewage-mixed water supply sparks health concerns in Pune’s Karve Nagar

**Pune:** Serious public health concerns have surfaced in Pune’s Karve Nagar area after residents reported the supply of sewage-mixed drinking water, triggering widespread anger and alarm among locals.

The incident has raised fears of a potential outbreak of waterborne diseases, including diarrhoea, vomiting, fever, and skin infections, particularly affecting children and the elderly.

According to residents, contaminated and foul-smelling water was supplied across several parts of the locality, rendering the water unfit for consumption or daily household use.

The issue came to light on Sunday, January 18, in the Gaikwad Chawl area near Bhujbal Bungalow, where sewage-contaminated water was found flowing through the main water supply pipeline.



Residents said that during the morning water supply, multiple households received dirty and discoloured water directly from their taps.

In several homes, the water appeared blackish in colour and emitted a strong, unbearable odour, prompting immediate concern and panic among families.

Many citizens claimed that visible traces of sewage were present in the water, leaving no doubt about the extent of contamination.

Several residents said they refrained from using the water even for basic activities such as washing utensils or bathing, fearing serious health consequences. Angry locals accused the civic administration of gross negligence, alleging that repeated complaints about pipeline issues in the area had gone unaddressed.

# Clash Erupts in Bhiwandi; Former Mayor Injured, Police Lathi-Charge Protesters

**Thane:** Tension continues to prevail in the powerloom town of Bhiwandi after a clash erupted between two rival political groups late on Sunday night, triggering concern over law and order in the area.

The incident reportedly followed the recent municipal corporation election results and has deepened political hostilities between the competing factions.

Former Bhiwandi Mayor Vilas Patil alleged that Mit Choughule, son of BJP MLA Mahesh Choughule, led an attack on the bungalows of Konark Vikas Aghadi’s winning candidates.

According to Patil, the bungalows targeted in the alleged attack belong to him and his wife, Pratibha Patil, both of whom have previously served as mayors of Bhiwandi.

He claimed that window panes were damaged during the attack and that women and children inside the houses were threatened, creating panic among family members. Patil further alleged that his wife, Pratibha Patil, sustained injuries during the incident, though details regarding the nature and severity of her injuries were not immediately clear.

Following the alleged attack, members and supporters of the Konark Vikas Aghadi staged a sit-in protest at Shivaji Chowk, demanding action against those responsible. Vilas Patil claimed that while the protest was underway, supporters of the BJP MLA attacked the demonstrators in the presence of police personnel.

He accused the Bhiwandi police administration of acting under political pressure and failing to protect his supporters during the confrontation.

Patil alleged that Mit Choughule and his supporters carried out the attack out of anger over their defeat in the recent municipal corporation elections.

As tensions escalated and clashes intensified between the two groups, police intervened to prevent further violence. To disperse the crowd and restore order, the police resorted to a lathi-charge, after which the situation gradually came under control.

# BJP MLC Sandip Joshi announces exit from active politics

**Nagpur:** BJP Member of the Legislative Council Sandip Joshi, known to be close to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and union Minister Nitin Gadkari, on Monday declared his decision to retire from politics, saying the move is intended to create space for the younger generation.

In a letter shared on his social media platforms and addressed to his supporters, the 55-year-old leader said politics for him was never about power or status but about selfless service and commitment.

Joshi expressed concern over the present political environment, marked by defections for power, opportunism, and intense competition.

Such developments disturb not only common citizens but also sincere party workers. With limited opportunities and growing ambitions, hardly anyone is willing to step aside, which he described as “today’s harsh reality.”

Stating that he still considers himself an ordinary

BJP worker, Joshi said the prevailing situation convinced him that he should be the one to step back. He announced this decision through his letter, noting that he has served as a corporator and mayor of Nagpur in the past.

Emphasising the need to encourage young leadership, Joshi said that after deep introspection, he has decided to bring his political journey to a close.

Acknowledging the role played by the party in shaping his career, he sought forgiveness from senior leaders Nitin Gadkari and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis while announcing his decision.

Joshi clarified that his current term as an MLC will continue until May 13 this year and he will fulfill this responsibility as entrusted by the party.

However, after that date, “he will neither seek a ticket nor accept one even if offered,” he said. The opportunity, he added, should go to a young grassroots worker or to whoever the party deems fit.

He further stated that following May 13, he would completely withdraw from active politics, stressing that the decision was made after careful and thoughtful consideration, not due to any emotional impulse. Going forward, he plans to function as a social worker and continue serving the public.

Joshi also acknowledged the significant influence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in his life after his family and expressed heartfelt gratitude to the BJP for the various opportunities he received throughout his political career.

He noted that if he chose to remain in politics, future opportunities would likely arise. Highlighting the BJP’s culture, he said it is a party where even an ordinary worker can rise to become the Prime Minister of the country. However, he firmly believes that his continued presence should not deprive any ordinary worker of opportunities.

“In my absence, nothing will be obstructed for anyone. This is the ultimate truth,” he added.

# Bombay HC rules love affair and refusal to marry do not amount to Abetment of Suicide

**Ch. Sambhajanagar:** The Aurangabad bench of the Bombay High Court has quashed a first information report and criminal proceedings for abetment of suicide registered against a young nursing student from Beed, holding that a mere love affair or refusal to marry does not constitute instigation to suicide in the absence of any specific overt act or guilty intent.

The ruling was delivered by Justice S. G. Chapalgaonkar recently, while allowing Criminal Application No. 2475 of 2025 filed by the applicant, Aarti Suresh Sonavane, under Section 482 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The court quashed Crime No. 21 of 2024 registered at Shivajinagar Police Station, Beed and the consequential charge-sheet in RCC No. 152 of 2024 pending before the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Beed, for an offence under Section 306 of the Indian Penal Code.

The criminal proceedings had arisen from a complaint lodged by the father of one Nilesh, who was preparing for recruitment in the police department and was allegedly in a romantic relationship with the applicant. According to the complaint, Nilesh informed his parents about the relationship on November 30, 2023, travelled to Beed on December 20 to appear for an examination, and was found dead by suicide through strangulation on December 23, 2023, at around 7 pm.

It was alleged in the FIR that due to the relationship, the applicant frequently contacted the deceased and that her conduct amounted to abetment, leading him to take the extreme step. On this basis, a case under Section 306 IPC was registered and investigation culminated in the filing of a charge-sheet before the trial court.

Before the High Court, the defence counsel argued that even if the FIR and charge-sheet material were accepted at face value, they failed to disclose the essential ingredients of abetment of suicide as defined under Sections 107 and 306 IPC.



It was contended that the applicant, a BSc Nursing student, had been unnecessarily implicated and that a relationship and mobile phone conversations, by themselves, could not amount to instigation, aiding or conspiracy.

The defence relied on recent Supreme Court rulings, including Prabhu v State represented by Inspector of Police, to submit that even in cases involving broken relationships, criminal liability for abetment cannot be imposed unless there is clear material showing intentional provocation or goading to commit suicide.

Opposing the plea, the Additional Public Prosecutor argued that a witness statement indicated the deceased had ended his life after the applicant allegedly refused to marry him. However, after examining the FIR, witness statements and charge-sheet material, the court observed that the allegations against the applicant were confined to the existence of a relationship and did not attribute any specific act, threat, humiliation or continuous conduct that could have driven the deceased to suicide.

In its legal analysis, the High Court referred to Chapter V of the IPC and reiterated settled principles on abetment. The court cited Ramesh Kumar v State of Chhattisgarh, where the Supreme Court held that instigation involves goading or provoking with reasonable certainty of inciting the consequence, and that words spoken in anger or emotion without intent cannot amount to instigation. Reference was also made to Chitresh Kumar Chopra v State (NCT of Delhi), which emphasised the requirement of intention to provoke or encourage suicide.

Applying these principles, High Court held that the only allegation discernible from the record was that the applicant had refused to marry the deceased, which could not, by itself, be treated as a positive act with the requisite guilty intent to attract Section 306 IPC. The court concluded that continuation of the criminal proceedings would amount to an abuse of the process of law.

Accordingly, the High Court exercised its inherent powers under Section 482 CrPC, quashed the FIR, the charge-sheet, and all related proceedings against the applicant, and disposed of the application.

# British NHS consultant halted at Mumbai airport over social media posts

**Mumbai :** British citizen and NHS UK consultant Dr Sangram Patil was stopped at Mumbai International Airport while attempting to return to the United Kingdom, days after being questioned by Mumbai Police over social media posts critical of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The incident has triggered renewed scrutiny of the case against him and the continued enforcement of a Look Out Circular despite his cooperation with investigators. Dr Patil, who has been openly critical of the BJP on social media platforms, had travelled to India earlier this month with his family.

On January 10, Mumbai Police detained him for questioning in connection with a Facebook post. The Crime Branch later clarified that the action did not constitute an arrest and was limited to questioning alone. As part of the investigation, Dr Patil appeared before Unit 3 of the Mumbai Crime Branch on the same day and



again on January 16, when he submitted a written statement.

According to sources, Dr Patil had informed investigating officers that he would be returning to the UK on the morning of January 19 and was assured that the Look Out Circular issued against him would be withdrawn prior to his departure. However, the situation unfolded differently at the airport. Dr Patil reached Mumbai International Air-

port early on January 19 to board an 8 am IndiGo flight to London, but was stopped at the immigration counter and informed that he could not travel abroad due to an active Look Out Circular. His onward journey was halted without prior notice. The case against Dr Patil is being investigated by Mumbai Crime Branch officers Sharad Dharave and Milind Kathe. A case has been registered in the Cyber Crime Department under the provisions of the Information Technology Act, based on which the Look Out Circular was issued. The complaint in the matter was filed by Nikhil Shamrao Bhambre, a resident of Thane West and social media convener of the BJP Maharashtra region. According to the complaint, objectionable content was published on December 14 from the Facebook accounts ‘Shahar Vikas Aghadi’ and ‘Dr Sangram Patil’. The posts were alleged to be derogatory, misleading and hateful towards national leaders and the BJP, with claims that objectionable remarks were also made about a woman. Acting on these allegations, the Cyber Crime Department initiated action. With Dr Patil being prevented from leaving the country despite complying with investigation procedures, the episode has drawn wider attention, including from political circles, and has intensified debate around free expression, due process, and procedural fairness.

# BJP responds to Shinde Sena’s mayoral demand , Councillors housed in five-star hotel

**Mumbai:** Politics surrounding the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation have intensified following the civic poll results, with discussions emerging over power-sharing within the ruling alliance taking center stage.

Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde reportedly accommodated 29 Shinde Sena councillors at a five-star hotel in Mumbai immediately after the results, sparking widespread political speculation.

According to political observers, the move is being seen as an attempt to exert pressure on the Bharatiya Janata Party for securing the mayor’s post for two and a half years, along with key positions in important civic committees.

The issue gained further attention after senior BJP

leader and cabinet minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule commented publicly on the matter for the first time.

Although the BJP emerged as the single largest party by winning 89 seats in the Mumbai civic polls, it requires the support of the Shinde Sena to form the municipal administration, as both parties had contested the elections as allies. In contrast, only 29 candidates from the Shinde Sena were elected as councillors. Despite the smaller number, there are claims that efforts are being made to negotiate a stronger share of power.

Responding to questions on how the mayoral decision would be taken, Bawankule said that the party’s parliamentary board would consider any formal demands once they are officially



placed. He clarified that no such demand had been communicated to him personally so far.

He also noted that Shinde is a member of the parliamentary board and that key decisions would be taken collectively in the coordination committee, which includes Devendra Fadnavis, Ajit Pawar, and Shinde.

Bawankule further stated that if there is any demand related to the mayor’s

post, Shinde would discuss it directly with Chief Minister Fadnavis. He emphasised that such discussions are not held in the media or with journalists, and would remain internal between the senior leaders concerned. Beyond this clarification, he chose not to elaborate further.

Meanwhile, all Shinde Sena councillors are currently staying at the Taj Lands End hotel in Mumbai. There

is speculation in some sections of the media that a few councillors are in contact with Uddhav Thackeray. Reports have also claimed that certain councillors have expressed that they do not hold any disrespect towards Thackeray. Political observers suggest that keeping the councillors together in a hotel is a precautionary measure to prevent defections, although no official confirmation of this has been provided so far.

At the same time, it is being said that the Shinde Sena is keen on securing representation in key committees of the Mumbai civic body. This has fuelled further discussion that the hotel stay arrangement was part of a broader strategy to strengthen bargaining power within the alliance.

# Tenneco Clean Air, Indian Army and Vaghmi Foundation Launch 5,000-Tree Plantation Drive in Pune

**Pune:** Rapid urbanization in recent years has led to large-scale tree cutting, disturbing ecological balance and contributing to rising temperatures and declining air quality. Against this backdrop, urban forestry has emerged as a vital solution for restoring environmental harmony and building climate resilience.

In a strong step towards environmental conservation and sustainable urban forestry, Tenneco Clean Air India Ltd, in association with the Indian Army (15 Battalion, Jat Regiment) and Vaghmi Foundation, organized a large-scale Vrikshavropan Abhiyan (Tree Plantation Drive) aiming to plant 5,000 trees within a month, reinforcing the collective commitment of corporate, civil society, and the armed forces towards a cleaner and healthier environment, a release stated on Monday.

The Vrikshavropan Abhiyan, conducted under the guidance and protocol of the Indian Army – 15 Battalion, Jat Regiment, reflects a collaborative effort to enhance green cover and promote long-term environmental sustainability.

As part of the initiative, 5,000 trees will be planted in phases, with the first set of saplings planted during the event and the remaining to be planted within a month.

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Speaking to the media here, Rishi Verma, President of Tenneco Clean Air, said the initiative reflects the company’s commitment to a cleaner and healthier environment.



Our project is to plant 5,000 trees. This initiative is closely linked to our core purpose of working towards a cleaner and healthier environment for tomorrow. Through this plantation drive, we are making a humble contribution to society,” Verma said.

Explaining the decision to carry out the plantation on Army land, Verma added that earlier drives faced challenges in ensuring the survival of saplings. We have conducted plantation campaigns earlier, but the survival rate was not very encouraging. This time, we approached Colonel Jhala to allow plantation on Army land so that the trees can be properly cared for with the support of Vaghmi Foundation. The saplings are geo-tagged, which will help us monitor them and ensure timely watering,” he said.

R.C. Subramanyam, Manager at Tenneco Automotive India said sustained maintenance is crucial for the success of such initiatives. As business professionals, it becomes difficult for us to look after plants on a daily basis. That is why we chose Army land, where the trees will receive regular care and are expected to have a near-100 percent survival rate. We appeal to citizens to plant more trees for the betterment of the climate and society, he said.

Samairah, Founder and Director of Vaghmi Foundation, highlighted We have been working on green initiatives for the last five years. In Pune, a large number of trees have been cut in recent years, and we are fighting against this from the street level to the Supreme Court. Oxygen is essential for survival, and our work is for the people she said.

Our target is not limited to 5,000 trees. So far, we have planted more than 13,000 trees with a 100 percent survival rate. Army land was chosen because plantations here are regularly audited. We have a dedicated team of ten members to take care of these trees. This initiative is not limited to Pune; we are planning similar drives across India,” Samairah said. The plantation drive was organized under the guidance and protocol of the Indian Army and reflects a joint effort by the corporate sector, civil society and the armed forces to address environmental challenges arising from rapid urbanization. The event was attended by Tenneco’s leadership team, Col Bharat Singh Jhala - Sena Medals Bar commanding officer of 15 battalion of jat regiment, Major Pankaj Kumar, Social Activist Amcet Singh .



## Hans Christian Andersen biopic ‘My Fairytale Life’ set under Nikolaj Arcel direction

**Mumbai** : An ambitious biographical feature chronicling the life of legendary Danish author Hans Christian Andersen is officially moving forward, with acclaimed filmmaker Nikolaj Arcel attached to direct the project titled My Fairytale Life.

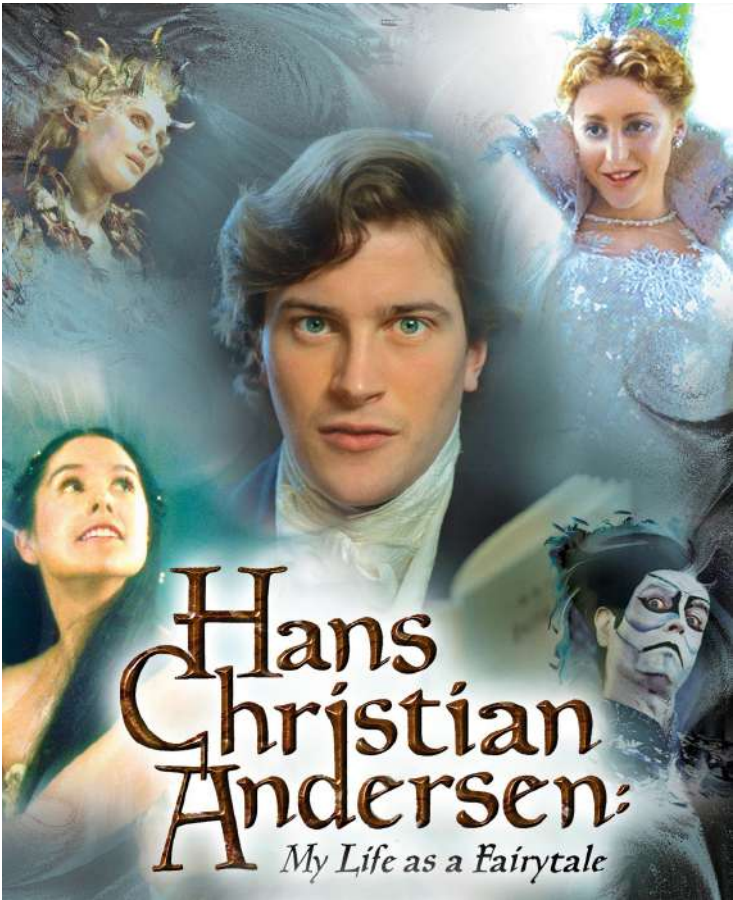
The film aims to explore the complex personal journey of Andersen, whose timeless stories such as The Little Mermaid, The Ugly Duckling, and The Snow Queen have left an indelible mark on world literature.

My Fairytale Life marks a significant reunion between Arcel and screenwriter Anders Thomas Jensen, rekindling a creative partnership that was recently revived on the historical epic The Promised Land, according to a report by Deadline.

Known for their sharp storytelling and nuanced character studies, Arcel and Jensen are expected to bring both emotional depth and dark humour to Andersen’s life story.

Rather than focusing solely on Andersen’s later fame, the film delves into his formative years, portraying him as a socially awkward outsider driven by ambition and deep emotional insecurity.

The synopsis reveals that Andersen arrives in Copenhagen as a virtual nobody, armed with grand dreams of conquering Denmark’s cultural elite and becoming a celebrated artist.Set against a vibrant yet unforgiving backdrop, the story unfolds in a world populated by actors, playwrights, and elitist patrons, where talent alone is not always enough to secure acceptance.



Christian’s fierce determination to gain recognition and affection

becomes the emotional core of the narrative, highlighting his lifelong struggle to belong in society.

However, the film also examines the darker side of ambition, as

Andersen’s delusions of grandeur threaten to undermine his chances of success.

Ironically, the very identity that would later immortalise him — that of a children’s fairytale writer — is something the young Andersen vehemently resists, viewing it as a limitation rather than a triumph.

The production of My Fairytale Life will be led by producers Louise Vesth and Tine Mikkelsen under the banner of Zentropa Entertainments4.

The project is being mounted as an international co-production with Zentropa Berlin GmbH, underscoring its broad European scope and appeal.

Financial and institutional support has been extended by The Danish Film Institute Market Scheme and FilmFyn, in cooperation with broadcaster TV2, Nordisk Film Distribution, and Plaion Pictures.

The film is also co-funded by the European Union, reflecting continued backing for culturally significant European storytelling.

Nordisk Film Distribution will handle domestic release in Denmark, while TrustNordisk has secured international sales, positioning the film for a strong global presence.

Principal photography on My Fairytale Life is expected to begin in late 2026, with anticipation building around what promises to be a richly textured and revealing portrait of one of literature’s most enduring figures.

## Lyricist Varun Grover stands by AR Rahman after online criticism

**Mumbai** : Lyricist and screenwriter Varun Grover has come out in support of AR Rahman after the Oscar-winning composer faced backlash over his recent remarks, which were interpreted by some as “communal.”

Rahman had courted controversy during a public interaction where he described the film Chhaava as “divisive” and hinted at experiencing communalism within the industry.

His comments triggered sharp criticism online, prompting the composer to later issue a statement expressing regret for any “pain” his words may have caused.

Amid the outrage, National Award-winning lyricist Varun Grover publicly defended Rahman. Sharing the iconic song ‘O Paalanhaare’ from Lagaan, composed by Rahman, on X, Grover criticised the reaction to the composer’s remarks.

In his post, he wrote, “The greatest living composer of the last 3 decades got attacked and abused (even by people within the industry) for stating an opinion in the politest, mildest manner, that too based on his lived-experience.”

He further added, “And the very next day was

cause pain, and I hope my sincerity is felt,” he said.

In a separate interview



forced to issue an apology/clarification to calm the toxic mob down. If any further proof was needed to confirm his hints at the rising divisiveness...”

Earlier on Sunday, Rahman released a video message addressing the situation, reaffirming his deep connection with India and his purpose as an artist.

“Music has always been my way of connecting, celebrating and honouring our culture. India is my inspiration, my teacher and my home.

I understand that intentions can sometimes be misunderstood. But my purpose has always been to uplift, honour and serve through music.

I have never wished to

with BBC Asian Network, Rahman was asked whether he had ever faced prejudice in Bollywood as a Tamil composer.

Reflecting on his journey, he remarked, “Maybe I never got to know of this, maybe it was concealed by God, but I didn’t feel any of this.

The past eight years, maybe, because a power shift has happened, and people who are not creative have the power now. It might be a communal thing also... but it is not in my face.”

During the same interview, Rahman reiterated his criticism of Chhaava, accusing.

The film of exploiting “divisiveness.”

## Bhansali Productions unveil teaser for ‘Do Deewane Seher Mein’

**Mumbai** : Zee Studios and Bhansali Productions have unveiled the teaser for their upcoming romantic drama Do Deewane Seher Mein, offering audiences a glimpse into a contemporary love story rooted in emotion, nostalgia, and urban life, according to Variety.

The film stars Siddhant Chaturvedi and Mrunal Thakur in the lead roles, bringing together two actors known for their nuanced performances and strong on-screen presence.

Described as a “perfect love story between two imperfect people,” the film promises a modern romance that unfolds gently.

Evoking emotions that feel both personal and universal.

The teaser suggests a narrative that lingers like a half-forgotten memory, capturing fleeting moments, unspoken emotions, and the quiet intensity of love in a bustling city.

Helmed by director Ravi Udyawar, Do Deewane Seher Mein is primarily set in Mumbai, using the city’s energy, chaos, and intimacy as an essential backdrop to the love story.

One of the teaser’s standout elements is its incorporation of the timeless song “Do Deewane Seher Mein” from the 1977 classic Gharaonda.

Originally sung by Bhupinder Singh and Runa Laila, composed by Jaidev, and penned by legendary lyricist Gulzar, the song adds a layer of nostalgia and poetic depth to the film’s modern setting.



Siddhant Chaturvedi, who rose to prominence with his breakout role in Gully Boy, continues to expand his range with recent projects such as Dhadak 2, Kho Gaye Hum Kahan, and Gehraiyaan, as noted by Variety.

Mrunal Thakur, meanwhile, has carved a space for herself across both commercial and content-driven cinema, with notable performances in Son of Sardaar 2, Sita Ramam, Jersey, and the Netflix anthology Lust Stories 2.

Director Ravi Udyawar is best known for helming the critically acclaimed thriller Mom, which marked the final on-screen appearance of legendary actor Sridevi.

He has also collaborated with Chaturvedi previously on Yudhra, further strengthening their creative association on this romantic project.

Do Deewane Seher Mein is produced by celebrated filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali, along with Prem Singh, Umesh Kumar Bansal, and Bharat Kumar Ranga, in association with Ravi Udyawar Films.

Bhansali, whose recent directorial ventures include Gangubai Kathiawadi and the Netflix series Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar, continues to support diverse storytelling through his production banner.

Bhansali Productions has previously backed films such as Malaal and Tuesdays and Fridays, showcasing a mix of fresh talent and intimate narratives.

Zee Studios, one of the film’s key backers, is also set to release the dialogue-free film Gandhi Talks on January 30, starring Vijay Sethupathi, Aditi Rao Hydari, Arvind Swamy, and Siddharth Jadhav.

The studio’s recent slate includes titles like Aga Aga Sunbai Kay Mhan-tay Sasubai, Pennu Case, Rubaab, Rahu Ketu, and Champion, reflecting its strong presence across regional and mainstream cinema.

Do Deewane Seher Mein is scheduled for a theatrical release on February 20, with expectations building around its promise of a soulful, music-infused romance that bridges nostalgia and modern sensibilities.

## Amruta Khanvilkar recalls injury during intense Taskaree action shoot: “My wrist remained swollen for over a month”

**Mumbai** : Amruta Khanvilkar has long been admired for her courage in embracing challenging and unconventional roles, and her experience on the sets of Taskaree: The Smuggler’s Web proved that reputation well-earned.

The Netflix web series marked a major milestone in Amruta’s career, as it was her first full-fledged project driven heavily by action, pushing her into physically demanding and unfamiliar territory.

Known primarily for her strong performances across genres, the transition to an action-oriented role required intense physical preparation, discipline, and mental focus—areas that were relatively new for the actor.Recalling her early days on the shoot, Amruta revealed that her introduction to action choreography came with an unexpected and painful setback. During her very first action sequence, she sustained an injury after accidentally hitting a stuntman on the face, an incident that left her wrist swollen for over a month. Despite the pain and discomfort, Amruta chose not to halt filming, demonstrating her professionalism and commitment to the project.

“While shooting my first action sequence, I got injured

but continued filming,” she shared, candidly describing the incident that occurred on set.The actor explained that the intensity of action scenes often makes it difficult to accurately judge force, timing, and movement, especially for performers new to the genre. What initially appeared to be a discouraging experience gradually turned into a valuable learning curve for Amruta.

“Despite the injury, it was a very rewarding experience for me, as it helped me understand the dos and don’ts of action sequences,” she said, reflecting on the lesson the mishap taught her.

Amruta also openly acknowledged that her boundless enthusiasm sometimes led to unintended consequences during action scenes.She revealed that she would occasionally end up hitting her co-actors unintentionally, making certain moments more real than planned.

“People on set were often hesitant to perform action scenes with me because I would unintentionally hit them,” she said, laughing about it in

hindsight.

One such instance became a light-hearted joke on the set,



with co-star Emraan Hashmi playfully refusing to perform action scenes with her.“Emraan would jokingly tell everyone on set that he refused to do any action scenes with me,” Amruta recalled, highlighting the camaraderie that helped balance the demanding shoot.Ultimately, what began as a physically taxing experience helped Amruta gain a deeper understanding of the discipline, control, and precision required in action choreography.

## Leesa Gazi to direct contemporary Tagore adaptation ‘Shasti’

**Mumbai** : Bangladeshi filmmaker Leesa Gazi is set to direct “Shasti” (Punishment), a contemporary adaptation of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore’s 1893 short story, backed by an international production consortium, reports Variety.

The psychological drama stars Pori Moni, Chanchal Chowdhury, Aanon Siddiqua, and Arka Das in lead roles, with Kazi Ruma and Kamrunnahar Munni in supporting parts. Principal photography is scheduled to take place in Dhaka during October and November.

Inspired by Tagore’s original work, the film centres on the mysterious death of social media influencer Lucky, allegedly killed by her sister-in-law Meera, triggering an intense media frenzy. As a manipulated trial unfolds, the narrative delves into buried family secrets, betrayal and power dynamics within a society consumed by public judgement and punishment, according to Variety.

“Shasti” marks Gazi’s second fiction feature, following “A House Named

Shahana,” which made history as Bangladesh’s first woman-directed submission for the Academy Awards’ Best International Feature category at the 98th Oscars.

The film is produced by Komola Collective, Sanat Initiative, Awedacious Originals, Goopy Bagha Productions, Screenxcope Australia and Black & White Workshop Inc. Gazi produces alongside Abid Aziz Merchant, Apoorva Bakshi and Arifur Rahman, with Sakib Iftekhar and Rainbow Fong serving as co-producers. Faisal Gazi and Tulip Kabir are executive producers, while Abbas Nokhasteh and Kazi Ruma serve as co-executive producers.

The creative team includes Gazi and Aanon Siddiqua on the original story, with the screenplay written by Gazi, Siddiqua and Sadia Khalid Reeti. Alex Unai serves as cinematographer, Tania Rahman as casting director and line producer, Nahid Masud handles on-location sound, Rasheed Sharif Shoaib



oversees background score and sound design, Sharmim Doza is the script supervisor, and Raza Sumit Rahman serves as Maizbhandari song music director.

“I have been trying to understand the time we are living in, and this film emerged from that urgency and restlessness,” Gazi said. “It lives in contrast—between timelines, between perception and reality, between actual and virtual life, and between what is visible and what remains hidden. It reflects on truth, justice and the silent battles many continue to fight. Making this film is both a

reckoning and a search for hope,” as quoted by Variety.

Producer Abid Aziz Merchant described the film as “a modern-day interpretation of Tagore’s short story that will leave a lasting impact on audiences and inspire change through its powerful narrative.”

Apoorva Bakshi added, “Working with Leesa Gazi on this adaptation of Tagore’s ‘Shasti’ has been creatively exhilarating. She has an instinctive understanding of character, silence and moral tension—qualities essential to translating Tagore’s world into cinema. The script honours

the emotional complexity of the original while boldly reimagining it for our times.”

Arifur Rahman said, “I always choose the filmmaker before the film. Leesa Gazi is a powerful voice who challenges society through empathetic storytelling. This is our second collaboration, and I believe ‘Shasti’ will be among the most intense psychological dramas of our time.”A previous adaptation of “Shasti,” directed by Chashi Nazrul Islam, was released in Bangladesh in 2004. Co-producer Sakib Iftekhar noted that the film offers “an unflinching examination of how power, gender and mental health collide with public judgement in contemporary society, without offering false resolution,” while remaining deeply rooted in present-day Dhaka.Rainbow Fong added, “‘Shasti’ is a rare cinematic experience—emotionally powerful and rich in meaning. I’m confident it will resonate widely and find strong support on the global festival circuit.”

## Varun Tej’s Indo-Korean film officially titled ‘Korean Kanakaraju’

**Mumbai** : The makers of director Merlapaka Gandhi’s upcoming Indo-Korean horror-comedy, previously referred to as VT15, have officially announced the film’s title as ‘Korean Kanakaraju’. Telugu star Varun Tej leads the project.

The announcement was made by First Frame Entertainments on social media to coincide with Varun Tej’s birthday on Monday.

Sharing a link to a title glimpse video, the production house wrote, “VT15 is KoreanKanakaraju. KOKAGlimpse Out Now. Happy Birthday IAmVarunTej. Get ready for a roller-coaster of fun and thrills in theatres this Summer 2026. HBDVarunTej”

Varun Tej also shared the glimpse on his X timeline, stating, “Meet Korean Kanakaraju. See you all in theatres this SUMMER 2026. KoreanKanakaraju”

The 30-second glimpse opens with an Indian photographer being interrogated by Korean police, who demand information about a mysterious figure called Kanakaraju. Initially, the photographer struggles to understand due to the lan-



guage barrier. When the interpreter Ritika Nayak translates their query, he claims ignorance.

The scene takes a chilling turn on a full moon night when a possessed Kanakaraju (Varun Tej) enters the station, brutally dispatching the cops with a Samurai sword.

Laughing eerily, he declares in Korean, “I’m back,” prompting the photographer to exclaim, “This Kanakaraju isn’t our Kanakaraju...”

Fans and cinephiles have been eagerly awaiting the film ever since its announcement, especially given its status as a first-of-its-kind Indo-Korean collaboration.

The film’s music is composed by top South Indian composer S Thaman,

while Paneer Selvam handles art direction.

Varun Tej began shooting in Korea in June 2025, following the wrap of the Ananthapur schedule in May.

The production initially commenced with a traditional pooja ceremony in Hyderabad and filmed several sequences in Ananthapur, including a visually striking song at KIA grounds and scenic village locales.

While the first two schedules focused on a mix of thrills and comedy, the Korean schedule emphasizes action-packed and entertaining sequences, promising audiences a roller-coaster cinematic experience. ‘Korean Kanakaraju’ is slated for a summer 2026 release.



# “Women’s HIL helped me grow as a striker & handle pressure moments better”: Lalremsiami

**New Delhi:** Shrachi Bengal Tigers forward Lalremsiami reflected on her side’s runners-up finish in the Women’s Hockey India League (HIL) 2025-26, calling the season a valuable learning experience both personally and collectively, while expressing confidence that the team will go one step further next year.

“It was a very good season for us and I got a lot to learn from it. Of course, we wanted to win the title and become champions, but as a team I think we performed really well. Sometimes the final result is not in your control, but overall, I really liked the HIL this time. We enjoyed it a lot and learned a lot together,” Lalremsiami said.

The Tigers were involved in multiple high-pressure encounters that went down to penalty shoot-outs, including the Final against SG Pipers. Reflecting on those moments, the Indian veteran said the team focused more on backing their own strengths rather than overthinking the outcome.

“In our matches against the Pipers earlier, one game went to shootout after we conceded late, and in the other we dominated most of the match but couldn’t score. So, we felt the matches were ours to win and that we had let them slip rather than being outplayed. Before the Final, the idea was simple – play our game, focus on ourselves and our skills, and try to finish the match in regulation time. Unfortunately, it didn’t happen, but the experience was very important for all of us.”

After a slow start to the tournament, Shrachi Bengal Tigers found consistency and momentum as the league progressed. Lalremsiami credited the team environment, communication and leadership group for building strong on-field chemistry in a short period.

“We didn’t have much

time to build combinations, but everyone – players and coaches – gave 100 percent to understand each other quickly. Our team culture and communication were very good, and that helped us on the pitch. Senior players handled the team very well and guided the younger players. Everyone played their own game, and that consistency was very important for us.”

Looking ahead, the 25-year-old was clear about the team’s ambition. “Last time we finished third, this season we finished second. Next season, we will definitely aim for the trophy,” she said.

Individually, Lalremsiami enjoyed one of her most productive seasons, scoring three goals and finishing among the top five scorers in the tournament, after playing the full campaign as a striker.

“In the last season, I was playing more as a midfielder, but this season I played the entire tournament as a striker. That gave me more chances to score goals. The midfielders and defenders supported me a lot, and I’m really grateful for that. I enjoyed this season and I’m happy with how I played.”

She added that the league significantly improved her decision-making inside the circle.

“As a striker, you have to make quick decisions in 1v1 situations and under pressure inside the circle. In Hero HIL, I experienced a lot of those moments. Sometimes I made wrong decisions early on, but match by match I learned what to do better. Especially inside the circle, my decision-making has improved a lot.”

Speaking about the strong Indian core in the Tigers squad, Lalremsiami highlighted the importance of familiarity and leadership. “Players like Vandana, Monika, and Gurjeet are our seniors and we play together for India, but we hadn’t



played together for some time. Reuniting in HIL was exciting and a lot of fun. As Indian players, we understand our responsibility to guide the juniors, communicate well under pressure and help everyone play their natural game. I think we succeeded in doing that.”

The forward also underlined the impact of leagues like the Women’s HIL on Indian players’ confidence. “Hero HIL is a huge stage. Young players dream of playing here and playing alongside foreign players. When you start, the confidence may not be very high, but with time it increases a lot. For both seniors and youngsters, this league is very important for improvement.”

With a packed international calendar ahead, including Women’s 2026 FIH Hockey World Cup Qualifiers, which are set to take place in Hyderabad in March, 2026 Asian Games and other major tournaments, Lalremsiami believes her HIL experience will prove crucial.

“We will play many high-pressure matches where shootouts can decide the result. In HIL, we faced many of those situations, so mentally it helps a lot. Even when you miss or fail, you learn. I want to keep improving, score more goals and build confidence in my skills. This experience will definitely help me in the upcoming World Cup qualifiers and future tournaments.”

“Women’s HIL helped me grow as a striker & handle pressure moments better”: Lalremsiami

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“We didn’t have much

made wrong decisions early on, but match by match I learned what to do better. Especially inside the circle, my decision-making has improved a lot.”

Speaking about the strong Indian core in the Tigers squad, Lalremsiami highlighted the importance of familiarity and leadership. “Players like Vandana, Monika, and Gurjeet are our seniors and we play together for India, but we hadn’t played together for some time. Reuniting in HIL was exciting and a lot of fun. As Indian players, we understand our responsibility to guide the juniors, communicate well under pressure and help everyone play their natural game. I think we succeeded in doing that.”

The forward also underlined the impact of leagues like the Women’s HIL on Indian players’ confidence. “Hero HIL is a huge stage. Young players dream of playing here and playing alongside foreign players. When you start, the confidence may not be very high, but with time it increases a lot. For both seniors and youngsters, this league is very important for improvement.”

With a packed international calendar ahead, including Women’s 2026 FIH Hockey World Cup Qualifiers, which are set to take place in Hyderabad in March, 2026 Asian Games and other major tournaments, Lalremsiami believes her HIL experience will prove crucial.

“We will play many high-pressure matches where shootouts can decide the result. In HIL, we faced many of those situations, so mentally it helps a lot. Even when you miss or fail, you learn. I want to keep improving, score more goals and build confidence in my skills. This experience will definitely help me in the upcoming World Cup qualifiers and future tournaments.”



## Pro Wrestling League: Jyoti Sihag Downs Olympic Silver Medallist Guzman Lopez

**Noida :** Straight from Haryana’s wrestling heartland, Sisai, Tigers of Mumbai Dangal’s 53kg pick, Jyoti Sihag, produced one of the standout results of Pro Wrestling League 2.0, defeating Paris 2024 Olympic silver medallist Yusneylys Guzman Lopez of Cuba 9-5 on Sunday at the Noida Indoor Stadium. With the scores tied at 5-5 and only 20 seconds remaining, the 2024 World Military Wrestling Championships gold medallist sealed her victory with a decisive takedown during the Power Minute, turning the bout in the closing seconds and capping a composed, high-pressure performance.

Speaking of her triumph, Jyoti said, “I want to thank my team and Aksha (Kamboj) ma’am, who believed in me, who trusted me and gave me an opportunity to represent Tigers of Mumbai Dangals in Pro Wrestling League. This is my debut season. I am happy with my performance today and getting a good bout result for the team. I hope I can continue this form, and I am sure we will find our winning strength in the next match.”

Stepping into the league environment with Tigers of Mumbai Dangals, Jyoti reflected the fearless approach the Mumbai franchise represents, embracing the spirit of the city that never sleeps. Under lights and noise, Jyoti stayed measured, drawing strength from her corner and executing with intent rather than urgency. It was a performance that justified the faith shown in her and aligned seamlessly with the identity Tigers are shaping in their debut campaign.

Commenting on Jyoti’s achievement, Aksha Kamboj, Co-Owner, Tigers of Mumbai Dangals, said, “What Jyoti did out there reflects the kind of belief and fearlessness we want this team to play with. She backed her ability, stayed brave under pressure, and showed what’s possible when talent meets confidence. This group has the hunger and the mindset to do something special, and moments like these show the direction we’re moving in and the standards we’re trying to build.”

Jyoti began wrestling in her early teens, driven by her uncle’s belief that she could reach the highest level of the sport. With steady backing from her family, including her husband and his family, she progressed through the domestic circuit before making her mark internationally. A defining moment came in Yerevan, Armenia, where she secured international gold by defeating Mongolia’s Monkhboldyn Dolgoon 10-0 in the 55kg final, underlining her control and competitiveness on the mat. “I credit my victory today to my uncle. He had a dream: to see me become a world champion. I haven’t yet achieved that dream, but after defeating an Olympic silver medalist today, I feel I have it in me to fulfill it one day—that spark which he saw that made me believe I could achieve such great things,” Jyoti added.

## KogniVera Polo Cup 2026 unveils world’s tallest Polo trophy in Jaipur

**Jaipur :** KogniVera IT Solutions, in association with the Rajasthan Polo Club, on Monday unveiled a landmark moment in the world of polo with the launch of the KogniVera Polo Cup 2026 trophy, set to become the largest polo trophy globally, standing at an imposing nearly seven feet tall. Surpassing the previous six-foot benchmark held by the Kolkata Cup in Chennai, the towering trophy redefines scale and symbolism in the sport, reflecting ambition, excellence and a deep respect for polo’s rich heritage.

The trophy was unveiled at Sonu Nigam’s ‘Deewana Tera’ Tour at Zee Studios, Sipur, in the presence of Sawai Padmanabh Singh of Jaipur.

The dramatic reveal, set against the energy of a packed concert venue, officially marking the countdown to one of the most anticipated fixtures on India’s polo calendar.

The tournament will feature India’s and the world’s finest riders and exceptional polo ponies, promising fiercely contested chukkers and high-octane on-field action. Over the course of the tournament, multiple teams will compete in league and knockout matches starting from January 26, 2026, culminating in a grand final on February 1, 2026.

The tournament will be held across different polo grounds in Jaipur.

Speaking on the occasion, Kamlesh Sharma, Managing Director & CEO, KogniVera IT Solutions, said, “Polo is a sport that represents precision, discipline and teamwork — values that resonate strongly with us at KogniVera. The KogniVera Polo Cup 2026 is not just about competition; it is about celebrating heritage, nurturing excellence and bringing together a community that values tradition and innovation alike. The decision to create the world’s largest

polo trophy was a deliberate one, it reflects our ambition to set new benchmarks, honour the stature of the sport, and create a lasting symbol of excellence. We are immensely proud to associate our name with a trophy and a tournament that stand for scale, legacy and the relentless pursuit of excellence.”

With Jaipur’s iconic polo grounds as the backdrop, the KogniVera Polo Cup 2026 is expected to attract polo enthusiasts, sports connoisseurs and cultural patrons from across India and abroad, reinforcing the city’s position as a premier destination for elite equestrian sport.

## Swiatek begins abid for history with shaky

**Melbourne:** Iga Swiatek’s quest to create history by completing a career Grand Slam began on a cautious and underwhelming note as the world number two battled past Chinese qualifier Yuan Yue in the first round of the Australian Open on Monday.

The Melbourne title remains the only Grand Slam missing from Swiatek’s otherwise glittering résumé, and expectations were high as the Polish star stepped onto Rod Laver Arena to begin her campaign.

However, the four-time Grand Slam champion struggled to find rhythm early, particularly on serve, and was pushed far harder than anticipated by the 130th-ranked Yuan. Swiatek committed a surprising 34 un-

forced errors during the match, frequently misfiring off both wings as she searched for timing and control that went to a tiebreak.

Despite moments of visible frustration, Swiatek showed composure when it mattered most, edging the first set 7-6 (7-5) to regain control of the contest.

The Pole raised her level in the second set, cutting down on errors and using her superior movement and baseline depth to gradually wear down the Chinese qualifier. Swiatek eventually sealed a 7-6 (7-5), 6-3 victory, ensuring her campaign for a seventh Grand Slam title stayed on track, albeit without the dominance she is known for. Reflecting on the match, Swiatek admitted she was far from her best but took encouragement from winning despite the difficulties. “It wasn’t perfect but that’s why I am happy,” Swiatek said. “It is not hard to win matches when everything is going well. Today it wasn’t, but I managed to win, so that’s good.”

One area of concern for Swiatek was her second serve, which was repeatedly targeted by Yuan, who won 59 percent of the points off it.



## 'Arsenal will never forgive themselves if they don't win title now'

**London:** Arsenal may have left Nottingham Forest on Saturday night regretting a missed opportunity. The reality is they will actually never have a better chance of ending a Premier League title drought stretching back to ‘The Invincibles’ of 2004. Mikel Arteta’s side have emerged from the weekend with an advantage stretched to seven points as the chasing pack aiming to put them under pressure stumbled badly, according to BBC Sport. Arsenal and Arteta will rightly urge caution, but the Gunners will never forgive themselves if they do not claim the crown that has proved so elusive, faced with the domination of Manchester City and the successes of Liverpool. When every circumstance is examined, this feels like the ‘now or never’ season for Arteta’s Arsenal. If they fail to win the title this season from such a position, the regrets will run deep. Everything is in place for a triumphant surge towards the finishing tape. Back-to-back goalless



draws has left some questioning Arsenal’s firepower but, with the tightest defence in the league and their rivals continually slipping up, it would take a brave person to back against them now. Bigger leads have been lost at the top of the Premier League before - and later in the season - but none of the teams below them are showing signs of producing the consistency needed to challenge them. Manchester City failed to turn up the pressure valve before Arsenal travelled to the City Ground by losing the derby at Manchester United - a fourth straight match without a win. And then, here at Villa Park, Aston Villa saw their hopes of

leap-frogging Pep Guardiola’s side into second place undone as excellent Everton secured a fully deserved win. As for reigning champions Liverpool, they have mounted a miserable defence of their crown, Saturday’s disappointing draw against Burnley at Anfield that provoked jeers from their fans leaving them fourth, a distant 14 points behind Arsenal. Villa had won their previous 11 games at home, but Everton threatened the decisive moments long before Thierno Barry cashed in on keeper Emi Martinez’s decision to turn a routine stop into an item for his showreel with a classy finish.

## Victoria Mboko storms into second round at 2026 Australian Open

**Melbourne:** Victoria Mboko made a confident start to her 2026 Australian Open campaign, advancing to the second round with a straight-sets victory on Monday.

The 19-year-old Canadian, seeded 17th, overcame Australian teenager Emerson Jones 6-4, 6-1 in an all-

teenage first-round encounter at Melbourne Park. Despite strong support for the home favourite, Mboko delivered a composed and authoritative performance to register her first win of the tournament.

The opening set was closely contested, with both players holding serve

through the early stages. At 4-4, Mboko shifted gears, unleashing her powerful forehand and greater consistency from the baseline to break Jones and close out the set 6-4.

Momentum firmly with her, Mboko dominated the second set, racing through it 6-1 in what proved to be an

almost flawless display. Jones, ranked 153 in the world, struggled to contain the Canadian’s pace and depth, even as the crowd attempted to lift the local teenager. Fresh off a runner-up finish at the Adelaide International, Mboko’s performance at the 1573 Arena underlined her growing stature

on the WTA Tour. She wrapped up the match in one hour and 12 minutes, showcasing maturity beyond her years.

Mboko will next face American Caty McNally in the second round as she looks to build on her promising start at the season’s first Grand Slam.

## Laureus World Sports Awards to be held in Madrid in 2026

**Madrid:** The Laureus World Sports Awards will take place in Madrid for the 2026 edition, with the Spanish capital set to host the prestigious ceremony for the third consecutive time. The awards, which recognise outstanding achievements across global sport, will be held on Monday, April 20, at the Cibeles Palace in central Madrid. The venue also staged the previous two editions of the annual event, further reinforcing the city’s growing association with international sporting excellence.

Laureus World Sports Academy member and former Real Madrid and Spain footballer Raúl González Blanco welcomed the decision to host the awards in his home city once again, highlighting the broader impact of sport beyond competition.

“I feel truly honoured that my home city is once again hosting this wonderful celebration of global sport,” Blanco said. “The Laureus World Sports Awards are special not only because they recognise sporting achievement and success, but also the positive change that sport can drive in our society.”

Since the 2024

edition, the Laureus Awards in Madrid have been closely linked with Laureus-supported community initiatives in and around the city. These programmes focus on providing educational opportunities and encouraging young people to engage in sport as a means of social development and inclusion. The Laureus platform also continues to engage elite athletes as ambassadors for social change. Real Madrid midfielder Jude Bellingham, who won the Laureus World Breakthrough of the Year Award in 2024, was named a Laureus Ambassador in

September, further strengthening the organisation’s connection with contemporary sporting icons. Winners across seven major categories will each receive a Laureus Sports statuette, with recipients selected by the Laureus World Sports Academy jury, made up of former world-class athletes. At the 25th anniversary Laureus World Sports Awards held last year, world pole vault record holder Mondo Duplantis was named Sportsman of the Year, while gymnastics legend Simone Biles claimed the Sports-woman of the Year honour.



BSE Sensex		Nifty 50		Nifty 500		Nifty Next 50		Nifty 100		Nifty Bank		Nifty Midcap 100	
Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change
83,246.18	-0.39%	25,653.10	-0.42%	23,373.75	-0.47%	68,693.90	-0.24%	26,181.95	-0.39%	59,891.35	-0.34%	59,647.65	-0.37%
Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open
83,570.35	83,494.49	25,694.35	25,653.10	23,485.30	23,443.30	68,857.90	68,792.25	26,285.30	26,245.95	60,095.15	60,093.30	59,867.80	59,739.55
High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
83,539.93	82,898.31	25,653.30	25,494.35	23,443.35	23,324.85	69,233.70	68,516.90	26,246.10	26,104.95	60,107.50	59,594.60	59,938.70	59,480.30

Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
Interglobe Avi	4,941.50	4.25
Tech Mahindra	1,718.30	2.86
HUL	2,413.90	2.27
Kotak Mahindra	426.90	2.08
Bajaj Finance	969.45	2.02

Top Losers

Company	Current	%Loss
Wipro	245.95	-8.04
Reliance	1,413.60	-3.04
Eternal	281.35	-2.21
ICICI Bank	1,380.60	-2.14
TMPV	344.00	-2.71

Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Feb 05	144,980.00	2,463.00 1.73
Silver Mar 05	303,425.00	15,663.00 5.44
Crudeoil Feb 19	5,396.00	-53.00 -0.97
Naturalgas Jan 27	328.10	47.70 17.01

Sensex, Nifty succumb to selling pressure in blue-chips Reliance, ICICI Bank

**Mumbai :** Indian equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Monday, weighed down by sharp losses in heavyweight stocks such as Reliance Industries, Eternal, and ICICI Bank amid persistent global tariff-related uncertainties.

Investor sentiment remained fragile as concerns over global trade tensions, a weakening rupee, and continued foreign capital outflows kept market participants cautious, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 324.17 points, or 0.39 per cent, to close at 83,246.18. During intraday trade, the benchmark index fell as much as 672.04 points, or 0.80 per cent, to hit a low of 82,898.31.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty slipped 108.85 points, or 0.42 per cent, to settle at 25,585.50, snapping its recent gains.

Heavyweight Reliance Industries emerged as the biggest drag on the indices, falling 3.04 per cent after the company reported a flat net profit of Rs 18,645 crore for the third quarter.

The muted earnings performance came as a decline in gas production and weakness in the retail segment offset gains in other business verticals, disappointing investors.

Banking stocks also faced selling pressure, with ICICI Bank sliding 2.26 per cent following a decline in its December-quarter consolidated profit.

The lender's profit fell 2.68 per cent to Rs 12,537.98 crore, impacted by an RBI-mandated Rs 1,283-crore provision related to agricultural loans that were wrongly classified as priority sector advances. On a standalone basis, ICICI Bank, the country's



second-largest private sector lender, reported a more than 4 per cent decline in October–December profit at Rs 12,883 crore. Other prominent Sensex laggards included Eternal, Titan, Adani Ports, Tata Consultancy Services, and UltraTech

Cement, reflecting broad-based selling across sectors.

However, selective buying was seen in pockets of the market, with InterGlobe Aviation, Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever, and Bajaj Finance ending the session in the

green. Asian markets presented a mixed picture, as South Korea's Kospi index and Shanghai's SSE Composite closed higher, while Japan's Nikkei 225 and Hong Kong's Hang Seng ended lower.

European markets were trading significantly lower during Indian market hours, mirroring the cautious global mood, while US markets had ended marginally lower on Friday. "Global risk appetite weakened after US President Donald Trump announced new tariff threats against eight European nations, reigniting concerns of a potential US–EU trade dispute," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Investments Limited. "This development triggered a broad risk-off mood across global equity markets, prompting investors to rotate toward safe-haven assets like gold," he added.

On the domestic front, market sentiment remained subdued amid continued foreign institutional investor (FII) outflows, with volatility expected to persist as the third-quarter earnings season progresses. Currency markets added to the pressure, with the rupee breaching the 91-per-dollar mark for the second time this month before ending 14 paise lower at 90.92 (provisional) against the US dollar.

In the commodities market, Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, slipped 1.22 per cent to USD 63.35 per barrel, offering some relief on the inflation front. Data from the exchanges showed that foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth Rs 4,346.13 crore on Friday, while domestic institutional investors stepped in as buyers, purchasing stocks worth Rs 3,935.31 crore.

PSBs clear over Rs 52,300 cr loans to MSMEs via digital credit model: Ministry

**New Delhi:** Public Sector Banks (PSBs) have sanctioned loans worth more than Rs 52,300 crore to nearly 3.96 lakh Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) during the period from April 1 to December 31, 2025, under the newly introduced digital credit assessment model, an official statement said on Monday here.

The digital model marks a major shift in the way MSME loans are processed, replacing traditional manual evaluation with a technology-driven system that relies on verified digital data.

The initiative aims to improve speed, transparency and reach of credit delivery to small businesses across the country.

Under this framework, banks assess loan applications using digital footprints

such as GST filings, income tax data, bank transaction history and credit bureau information.

This has significantly reduced paperwork and shortened turnaround time, enabling faster in-principle approvals and quicker disbursement of funds.

The digital credit model allows MSMEs to apply for

loans through an end-to-end online process, eliminating the need for repeated branch visits.

It also supports both existing borrowers and new-to-

government-backed credit guarantee mechanisms, which reduces lending risk for banks and encourages higher loan sanctions to small and micro enterprises.

This has helped widen credit penetration, especially among smaller businesses that often face challenges in meeting conventional collateral requirements.

MSMEs play a crucial role in employment generation, exports and overall economic growth. Improved access to timely and affordable finance is expected to strengthen business expansion, technology adoption and capacity building in the sector.

The strong loan sanction numbers achieved within a short period indicate growing acceptance of digital lending frameworks within the public banking system.



bank enterprises, helping first-time borrowers gain easier access to formal credit channels.

A key feature of the model is its linkage with

AP: IIMCIP, RTIH structures co-incubation pathway for market-ready startups

**Visakhapatnam:** In a move aimed at converting startup potential into measurable outcomes, IIM Calcutta Innovation Park (IIMCIP) here on Monday announced a strategic partnership with RatanTata Innovation Hub (RTIH), Visakhapatnam, to create a structured co-incubation pathway for market-ready and revenue-generating startups from Andhra Pradesh.

This partnership is focused on execution and measurable outcomes. The collaboration will jointly identify high-potential startups, offer structured co-incubation and hands-on scale support, and enable access to capital of up to Rs 2 crore, helping founders move confidently from early traction to scalable growth. The MoU was signed between Ravi Eswarapu, CEO, RTIH, Visakhapatnam and Dr VK Rai, CEO, IIMCIP, reinforcing a shared commitment to building fundable, scalable, and nationally visible and globally competitive startups emerging from the region.

Speaking on the collaboration, Ravi Eswarapu said, "This partnership is all about creating real impact. By combin-



ing RTIH's innovation ecosystem with IIMCIP's proven incubation expertise, together, we aim to empower startups from Andhra Pradesh to scale nationally and globally."

Dr VK Rai, CEO, IIM Calcutta Innovation Park, added, "There is a strong entrepreneurial energy in Andhra Pradesh. Our role is to help convert that energy into fundable, scalable businesses with structured support and by connecting founders to the right networks,

mentors, and markets. IIMCIP's partnership with RTIH is about turning regional entrepreneurial potential into scalable, fundable enterprises with national impact."

This collaboration aligns with IIMCIP's broader mission of strengthening entrepreneurship in emerging and under-represented regions. Its core offerings span structured mentoring, capacity building, seed funding and access to markets and investors.

Space sector demands new space Act, infra status, PLI, tax incentives

**Chennai:** A comprehensive new Space Act, statutory position for Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe), infrastructure status for the industry, increasing the foreign direct investment (FDI) limits under automatic route, productivity linked incentive scheme (PLI), tax holiday are some of the 2026-27 union Budget wishlist submitted by the industry body Indian Space Association (ISpA).

ISpA is an industry association of private space companies.

As India stands at the threshold of becoming a global space power, with private sector participation enabled under the Space Policy 2023, the next critical step is fiscal, regulatory and structural support to accelerate growth and position India among the top three space-faring nations, ISpA said.

ISpA has outlined key private space sector recommendations for government consideration, which aim to boost domestic manufacturing, enhance national security, create high-value jobs and foster global competitiveness while ensuring controlled and secure access to strategic satellite and geospatial data.

India's space sector is entering a decisive growth phase, yet it remains structurally disadvantaged in access to finance due to its capital-intensive nature and

long gestation cycles of 5-7 years. While global peers classify space assets as strategic or critical infrastructure, India's space ecosystem currently lacks formal infrastructure status, limiting access to long-term, low-cost capital.

Recognising space infrastructure as a distinct infrastructure sub-sector is essential to unlock scale, private investment, and global competitiveness.

Space infrastructure underpins telecommunications, defence, navigation, finance, weather forecasting, disaster management, and governance. Formal recognition will enable infrastructure-grade financing, reduce the cost of capital by 2-3%, and strengthen national resilience.

ISpA wants the government to include "Space & Satellite Infrastructure" under the Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure Sub-Sectors notified by the Ministry of Finance and RBI and also notify a separate infrastructure sub-sector covering launch vehicles and spaceports, satellite manufacturing and integration facilities (LEO/MEO/GEO), ground stations, TTC networks, and mission control centres, Earth Observation and communication constellations.

According to ISpA, the government should mandate that at least 50% of all its procurement for space-based services, hardware, and mis-

sions be sourced from Indian private entities (NGEs). There should be scope to include satellite manufacturing and payloads, earth observation (EO) data and analytics, SATCOM services and ground infrastructure, launch subsystems and deep-tech components and space situational awareness (SSA) networks. The government should also position its various ministries as anchor customers.

With the growing use of satellite-derived data in governance and commercial applications, standardisation and security are critical. A structured procurement and access framework will support the domestic industry while safeguarding national interests.

As to the financial incentives, ISpA has sought PLI scheme for satellites, launch vehicles, space-grade components, and critical subsystems; provide a five-year tax holiday for space manufacturing, launch services, and space-based service providers; enable R&D tax credits of 20-30% for qualifying space-sector R&D; accelerated depreciation for satellites, rockets and launch-related hardware and capital investment tax credits for launch pads, ground stations, and satellite production plants.

The industry lobby body also wants the government to provide interest subvention, incentives to promote R&D, rationalisation of Goods.

EscrowTech India now EscrowNXT

**Chennai:** EscrowTech India, a pure-play software escrow services provider, has officially rebranded as EscrowNXT to underscore its focus on next-generation software escrow solutions for AI-driven systems, enhanced capabilities, and global expansion.

EscrowNXT officially came into effect on January 1, 2026.

With a focus on next-generation software escrow solutions for AI-driven systems, EscrowNXT plans to incorporate automated veri-

fication and smart contract integration, the company said.

As part of its international growth strategy, the company is establishing an office in Dubai to strengthen its presence in the GCC region and support regional enterprises and financial institutions.

Software escrow is a secure, tripartite arrangement between a software developer, a client or end user, and an independent escrow provider, under which the software's source code and docu-

mentation are held safely and released only if pre-defined events, such as vendor insolvency or contract breaches, occur.

Escrow services protect clients by ensuring business continuity when vendor support fails, while helping developers build trust and credibility without exposing their intellectual property. By acting as a neutral custodian, escrow services reduce risk and strengthen confidence for all parties in today's fast-evolving digital landscape.

EscrowNXT pioneered

the institutionalisation of software escrow services in India at a time when technology risk mitigation was largely unexplored.

Over the past 20 years, it has offered a comprehensive suite of ISO 9001:2015-certified services including software escrow, technology escrow, IP archival, verification and testing, and secure vault solutions.

"As the first mover in software escrow in India, EscrowNXT has played a pivotal role in mitigating enterprise risks such as vendor

insolvency, technology obsolescence, and regulatory compliance, including the Reserve Bank of India's requirements on source code access for critical applications," Arun Mahadevan, Managing Director said.

The transition to EscrowNXT reflects our evolved vision and expanded capabilities, with a sharp focus on global markets and next-generation software escrow solutions for AI-driven systems, incorporating automated verification and smart contract integration, he said.

Insurance sector issued over 41 crore policies in FY25: DFS

**New Delhi:** M. Nagaraju, Secretary, DFS, on Monday said during the Financial Year 2024–25, the Insurance sector has issued 41.84 crore policies, collected premiums of Rs 11.93 lakh crore, paid claims of Rs 8.36 lakh crore, and reported assets under management of Rs 74.44 lakh crore as on 31 March 2025.

He further said the total reinsurance market in India stood at Rs 1.12 lakh crore in 2024–25.

While addressing the 3rd Edition of the IFSCA–IRDAI–GIFT City Global Reinsurance Summit in Mumbai, the DFS said the Indian insurance sector, an integral part of the financial system, plays a significant role in the economy by providing protection against mortality, property, and casualty risks, encouraging



savings, and providing long-term funds for infrastructure development and other long-gestation projects.

The summit was themed around "Bridging India Today, Insuring India Tomorrow – the India Evolution Roadmap".

He mentioned that the government and the insurance regulator have enabled policy frameworks and structural reforms to further growth and insurance accessibility.

Foreign Direct Investment in the insurance sector has been raised to

100 percent, a new reinsurer was registered last year, and the Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Act, 2025 provides for the formation of a Policyholders' Education and Protection Fund, aligns data protection with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, and enhances IRDAI's regulatory powers.

The IFSCA–IRDAI GIFT City Global Reinsurance Summit was described by the Secretary as a vital platform that brings together key stakeholders from the financial services sector.

Insurance and reinsurance were emphasised as crucial in driving India towards its economic objectives, particularly as the country strengthens its role in the global economy.