

NEWS IN BRIEF

GOVT KEEPS INTEREST
RATES ON SMALL
SAVINGS SCHEMES
UNCHANGED

Diary Times Desk :

The government on Wednesday left interest rates unchanged for various small savings schemes, including PPF and NSC, for the seventh straight quarter, beginning January 1. "The rates of interest on various Small Savings Schemes for the fourth quarter of FY 2025-26, starting from January 1, 2026, and ending on March 31, 2026, shall remain unchanged from those notified for the third quarter (September 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025) of FY 2025-26," the finance ministry said in a notification. As per the notification, deposits under the Sukanya Samridhi Scheme will attract an interest rate of 8.2 per cent, while the rate on a three-year term deposit remains at 7.1 per cent prevailing in the current quarter. The interest rates for popular Public Provident Fund (PPF) and post office savings deposit schemes, too, have been retained at 7.1 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on the Kisan Vikas Patra will be 7.5 per cent, and the investments will mature in 115 months.

SYDNEY RINGS IN
NEW YEAR WITH
NOD TO VICTIMS OF
BONDI ATTACK

Diary Times Desk :

Australia's Sydney began 2026 with a fireworks display held under an enhanced police presence, weeks after gunmen killed 15 people at a Jewish event in the city.

Sydney's annual New Year's Eve celebrations are known globally for their spectacular fireworks, with 40,000 pyrotechnic effects stretching seven km (four miles) across buildings and barges along its harbour, including the city's iconic Harbour Bridge and Opera House. Organisers held a minute's silence for the victims of the attack at 11 pm local time (1200 GMT), with the Harbour Bridge lit up in white and a menorah — a symbol long used to symbolise Judaism — projected onto its pylons. "After a tragic end to the year for our city, we hope that New Year's Eve will provide an opportunity to come together and look with hope for a peaceful.

10-MIN
DELIVERY'END 10-MIN DELIVERY': GIG WORKERS LAUNCH
NATIONWIDE STRIKE AGAINST LOW PAY, SAFETY
CONCERNS ON NEW YEAR'S EVE

Diary Times Desk : Gig and platform workers stayed off delivery and ride-hailing apps on Wednesday as they observed a nationwide strike against platform companies. Workers across food delivery, quick commerce and ride-hailing platforms said falling pay, long hours, safety risks and arbitrary ID blocking were the main reasons behind the protest.

Sushil, a delivery worker who has worked with Zomato and other platforms since 2019, said many workers did not log in during the day as part of the strike. He added that earnings have dropped sharply over the years. "Earlier, a full-time worker could earn Rs 2,500 to Rs 3,000 a day. Today, after petrol, food and maintenance, you are left with Rs 700 or Rs 800."

He also pointed to safety issues. "Fast delivery creates pressure. There have been cases where delivery boys have died, but the company does not give any support," he said. Nearly 40,000 delivery workers across India participated in a nationwide flash strike on December 25, 2025, reportedly causing 50-60 per cent service disruptions in many cities.

Sushil says, "Zomato has blocked his ID after he took part in the protest." Similar concerns were raised by Sugam, a student at Delhi University and part-time gig worker who uses Rapido, Zomato and Swiggy. "These companies say work hours are flexible, but that is not true," he said. "If you leave your shift or slow down, you are penalised." Sugam said he earns around Rs 7 to Rs 7.5 per km on ride-hailing apps.

"After vehicle rent, petrol and daily platform charges, there is no money left," he said. Workers also said there is no proper grievance system. "No one listens. You either work or leave," Sushil said. Sugam added that platforms call workers 'partners' but do not take responsibility. "If there is an accident, first you are penalised for not completing the order," he said.

TMC DISSATISFIED AFTER ELECTION COMMISSION MEET,
SAYS CEC HAD NO CLEAR ANSWERS

Diary Times Desk : A 10-member delegation of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Wednesday expressed dissatisfaction after a nearly two-and-a-half-hour meeting with Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, alleging that the poll chief "lost his temper" and failed to give clear answers to concerns raised over the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal.

The Election Commission, however, rejected the party's allegations, cautioned against any intimidation of poll officials and said steps were being taken to facilitate voters, including setting up polling stations in high-rise buildings, gated communities and slums.

The TMC delegation submitted a detailed memorandum to CEC, flagging what it described as serious issues related to transparency, fairness and voter protection during the SIR exercise, which covers over 7.66 crore voters in the state. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, senior TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee said the party had placed 10 specific points before the Election Commission, but received no satisfactory clarification. "Apart from two or three basic issues, the Chief Election Commissioner failed to answer any of our core questions. When I tried to speak, he interrupted us repeatedly, raised his voice and even pointed his finger. I had to remind him that he is nominated and we are elected," Banerjee said.

GOA NIGHTCLUB BUILT ON SALT PAN, OPERATED
SANS LICENCE: PROBE REPORT

Diary Times Desk : The Goa nightclub, where a devastating blaze killed 25 persons in the first week of December, stood in the middle of a salt pan and operated without a valid trade licence, said a state government-constituted magisterial inquiry whose report was released on Wednesday.

The 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub, located in Arpora village in North Goa, continued to run illegally without a valid licence and no action was taken by the local panchayat to seal the property, said the probe report.

According to a police report cited in the inquiry, fireworks were organised at the establishment "without taking proper care and caution" and without adequate fire safety equipment, triggering the blaze on December 6 night that killed 25 persons, including tourists and staffers of the nightclub.

ARAVALLI ROW: SC ASKS EXPERT COMMITTEE TO
CONSULT STAKEHOLDERS; SETS OUT PARAMETERS
FOR EXAMINING CRUCIAL ISSUES

Diary Times Desk : The Supreme Court has asked a new expert committee set up by it to consult stakeholders to resolve critical ambiguities and to provide definitive guidance on issues relating to definition of Aravalli Hills.

A three-judge special vacation bench led by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant — which on Monday ordered to keep in abeyance its November 20 order that was based on a previous committee's recommendations — also set out parameters for the new panel to approach these issues.

It said that prior to the implementation of the committee's report, or the execution of the directions contained in its November 20 judgment, "a fair, impartial, independent expert opinion must be obtained and considered, after associating all requisite stakeholders". It asked the panel to examine if the definition of 'Aravalli Hills and Ranges', restricted exclusively to the 500-meter area between two or more Aravalli Hills, creates a structural paradox wherein the geographical scope of protected territory is significantly narrowed. Consequently, it should be determined if this restrictive demarcation has inversely broadened the scope of 'non-Aravalli' areas, thereby facilitating the continuation of unregulated mining and other disruptive activities in terrains ecologically contiguous but technically excluded by this definition, it said.

AIR INDIA NEWS

DGCA SEEKS EXPLANATION
FROM AIR INDIA FOR
OPERATING DREAMLINER
DESPITE SNAGS

Diary Times Desk : Aviation watchdog DGCA has sought an explanation from Air India for operating a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner despite repetitive technical snags, according to sources.

In a show-cause notice issued this week, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has flagged snags pertaining to Dreamliner VT-ANI.

Non-compliance with the Minimum Equipment List (MEL) for the flight operated on June 28 this year has also been mentioned in the notice. According to sources, the regulator has flagged that there were safety concerns related to aircraft dispatch, MEL compliance and flight crew decision-making during the operation of flights AI 258 and AI 357.

While details about the dates of operations for these flights could not be immediately ascertained, these flights operate on the Delhi-Tokyo route. Among other aspects, the regulator has mentioned that the aircraft was operated despite prior knowledge of repeated snags and existing system degradations, sources said. There was no comment from Air India. It was also not immediately clear whether the aircraft VT-ANI is out of operation now.

ENFORCEMENT DIRECTORATE
SEIZES RS 5 CRORE IN CASH, RS
8-CRORE JEWELLERY FROM
DELHI HOUSE

Diary Times Desk : The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday seized Rs 5.12 crore in cash, a suitcase containing gold and diamond jewellery worth Rs 8.8 crore, and documents linked to assets worth Rs 35 crore during searches at a Delhi house, officials said.

The raid at the residential premises in south Delhi's Sarvapriya Vihar is being undertaken by the federal probe agency in a money-laundering investigation linked to Haryana-based absconding criminalINDERJIT Singh Yadav, who, according to the ED, is operating from the UAE.

ED officials said the house is linked to one Aman Kumar, an alleged associate of Yadav, and the raids that began on Tuesday are continuing. Bank officials equipped with currency counting machines were called in on Wednesday morning, and so far, Rs 5.12 crore in cash, a suitcase full of gold and diamond jewellery worth Rs 8.8 crore and a bag containing bank cheque books and documents linked to assets worth Rs 35 crore have been seized, they said.



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INDIA SUCCESSFULLY TEST-FIRES 2 PRALAY MISSILES OFF ODISHA COAST

Diary Times Desk : India on Wednesday successfully test-fired two Pralay missiles in quick succession off the coast of Odisha, paving way for its induction into the military. Pralay is a short-range surface-to-surface missile with a payload capacity of 500-1,000 kg. It is capable of carrying multiple conventional warheads and has a range of 150 to 500 km. It is an indigenously developed weapon system featuring state-of-the-art navigation system to ensure high precision. The test-firing of the missiles was carried out by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). "The flight-test was conducted as part of user evaluation trials. Both the missiles followed the intended trajectory meeting all flight objectives as confirmed by tracking sensors," the defence ministry said. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh complimented the DRDO, the Indian Air Force, the Indian Army, the defence public sector undertakings and the industry on the successful launch of the missiles.

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SC VACATION BENCHES INCLUDING OF CJI SURYA KANT SITS DURING WINTER BREAK FOR FIRST TIME

Diary Times Desk : The Supreme Court has held vacation courts for the first time with Chief Justice of India Surya Kant himself sitting twice during the winter break to hear urgent matters involving life and liberty as well as those requiring immediate judicial intervention. The top court holds vacation benches during longer summer break, which has now been rechristened as partial court working days, but this year was the first instance when the apex court held vacation benches even in a shorter winter break. The Supreme Court was closed for Christmas and New Year holidays from December 22 to January 2, 2026. It will reopen on January 5. Justice Surya Kant, who was sworn in as Chief Justice of India on November 24, had made it clear on December 19 that vacation benches including him will be sitting during the winter break to hear urgent matters. On December 22, the first day of the winter break, a vacation bench comprising the CJI and Justice Joymalya Bagchi sat to hear 17 urgent matters including several criminal and civil cases.

26/11 HERO SADANAND DATE APPOINTED AS NEW DGP OF MAHARASHTRA; TO TAKE CHARGE ON JANUARY 3

Diary Times Desk : Sadanand Vasant Date, a soft-spoken yet tough taskmaster and a decorated officer of the 26/11 terror attacks, was on Wednesday appointed as the new DGP of the Maharashtra Police. A 1990 batch IPS officer, the 59-year-old Date will succeed Rashmi Shukla, who retires on January 3. He will have a fixed tenure of two years as the head of the over two lakh strong Maharashtra Police force. Date's appointment follows his recent premature repatriation from central deputation where he was heading the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Date is widely hailed as one of the heroes of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. On the fateful day of November 26, 2008, known as 26/11 terror attacks, Date was serving as the Additional Commissioner of Police (Central Region) in 2008. He had led a police team that pinned down Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists Ajmal Kasab and Abu Ismail on the rooftop of Cama Hospital and despite being severely injured by grenade splinters, he continued to engage the terrorists. He was later honoured with the President's Police Medal for Gallantry. Even today, Date carries metallic splinters from that night embedded in his body, especially one near his eye and he describes them as "medals" from a war zone rather than injuries.

CONSUMPTION OF CONTAMINATED WATER CLAIMED 7 LIVES SO FAR IN INDORE, CONFIRMS MAYOR BHARGAVA

Diary Times Desk : Seven persons have died so far due to diarrhoea and vomiting after allegedly consuming contaminated water in Indore city of Madhya Pradesh, its Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargava confirmed on Wednesday amid conflicting claims over the number of fatalities.

"The health department has reported three deaths due to the diarrhoea outbreak in the Bhagirathpura area. But to my knowledge, four more people suffering from the disease were brought to hospitals and they too died," he told reporters.

Bhargava said a preliminary assessment suggested that drainage water entered the drinking water pipeline due to leakage, which triggered an outbreak of diarrhoea and vomiting in the Bhagirathpura area. Meanwhile, District Magistrate Shivam Verma said doctors have confirmed four deaths due to the diarrhoea outbreak caused by contaminated drinking water. He said 149 patients suffering from the disease have been admitted to 27 hospitals across the city and their health condition is being monitored.

RELIEF FOR DEBT-LADEN VODAFONE IDEA AS GOVT APPROVES PACKAGE, FREEZES AGR DUES

Diary Times Desk : The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a relief package for debt-laden Vodafone Idea, freezing the AGR (Adjusted Gross Revenue) dues at Rs 87,695 crore and rescheduling the payment from FY32 to FY41, according to sources.

The Telecom Department will also reassess the AGR dues frozen based on the Deduction Verification Guidelines and audit reports, sources told PTI. The outcome will be decided by a committee appointed by the government.

Sources said that in addition, the AGR dues pertaining to FY18 and FY19 (already finalised by the Supreme Court order of 2020) will be payable by Vodafone Idea over FY26 to FY31, without change.

The steps will protect the interest of the government, having about 49 per cent stake in the telco, enable orderly payment of dues to the Centre by way of spectrum auction charges and AGR dues, ensure competition in the sector and protect the interest of 20 crore VIL consumers.

WATCH PRESIDENT MURMU SING A SOULFUL SANTHAL PRAYER, CELEBRATING INDIA'S TRIBAL HERITAGE



Diary Times Desk : President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday deeply moved the audience as she recited a traditional Santhal prayer during the closing ceremony of the Parsi Maha and centenary celebrations of the Ol Chiki script in Jamshedpur. Her recitation, dedicated to Jaher-Ma, the revered deity of the Santhal community, reflected her deep cultural roots and reverence for India's indigenous traditions. The President's soulful rendering of the prayer, which invokes the blessings of Jaher-Ma as the creator, nurturer and protector of life, resonated deeply with the gathering. Through verses seeking wisdom, strength and divine guidance, she highlighted the spiritual richness and philosophical depth embedded in Santhal traditions. The moment drew warm appreciation from the audience, many of whom described it as deeply moving and spiritually uplifting. Speaking on the occasion, President Murmu emphasised that Santhali literature.

RENOWNED BENGALI POET JOY GOSWAMI SUMMONED FOR SIR HEARING

Diary Times Desk : Renowned Bengali poet Joy Goswami has been summoned by the Election Commission for a hearing in connection with the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls, his family said on Wednesday. Goswami, a Sahitya Akademi Award-winning poet, has undergone surgeries recently and is unwell, his daughter Devarti said. She said her 74-year-old father was asked to appear for the SIR hearing on January 2. Devarti said all the family members had duly filled and submitted the enumeration forms on time. She said both she and her father were 'unmapped' voters as their names did not figure on the 2002 list. "Some information and documents have been sought from my father. Given his current health condition, it does not seem possible for him to attend the hearing. I will go with the required documents and information on the day of the hearing," Devarti said. However, Goswami has been voting regularly for the past several years.

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The 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub, located in Arpora village in North Goa, continued to run illegally without a valid licence and no action was taken by the local panchayat to seal the property, said the probe report.

According to a police report cited in the inquiry, fireworks were organised at the establishment "without taking proper care and caution"

and without adequate fire safety equipment, triggering the blaze on December 6 night that killed 25 persons, including tourists and staffers of the nightclub.

MOTHER OF KALIGANJ BLAST VICTIM ATTEMPTS SUICIDE, FAMILY ALLEGES THREATS

Diary Times Desk : Six months after a minor girl was killed in a bomb blast during post-poll celebrations in West Bengal's Nadia district, her mother attempted suicide by consuming sleeping pills due to alleged threats and delay in trial, family members said on Wednesday. Sabina Yasmin, mother of Class 4 student Tamanna Khatun, consumed an overdose of sleeping pills at her residence in Kaliganj on Tuesday night. She was rushed to Shaktinagar District Hospital in Krishnanagar, where doctors said her condition is stable and she is out of danger. Tamanna was killed on June 23, the day the Kaliganj Assembly byelection results were announced, when a bomb allegedly hurled during Trinamool Congress victory celebrations exploded at Molandi village. The incident triggered statewide outrage, prompting Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to order swift arrests and strict action. Police have so far arrested at least 10 people in the case.

EAM JAISHANKAR HANDS OVER PM MODI'S LETTER TO BNP'S TARIQUE RAHMAN

Diary Times Desk : External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday handed over to Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Tarique Rahman a letter from Prime Minister Narendra Modi as thousands of people bid farewell to former prime minister Khaleda Zia at her funeral. Shortly after landing in Dhaka, Jaishankar met Rahman, the acting chairman of BNP and the eldest son of Zia, and conveyed India's deepest condolences over the death of the iconic leader who dominated the country's politics for over three decades. The top BNP leader died on Tuesday following a prolonged illness. The external affairs minister is representing India at Zia's funeral. "Handed over to him a personal letter from Prime Minister @narendramodi. Conveyed deepest condolences on behalf of the Government and people of India," Jaishankar said on social media. "Expressed confidence that Begum Khaleda Zia's vision and values will guide the development of our partnership," he said. On Tuesday, PM Modi condoled Zia's death and recalled his meeting with her during his visit to Dhaka in 2015.



QUEEN CAMILLA DESCRIBES BEING
ASSAULTED BY MAN AS A TEENAGER



Diary Times Desk : Britain's Queen Camilla has described for the first time fighting off an attack by a man on a train when she was a teenager, speaking in an interview with the BBC in which she recounted how furious the assault had left her.

"When I was a teenager, I was attacked on a train ... I remember at the time being so angry," she said during a discussion broadcast on Wednesday about violence against women. "I was reading my book and you know this boy — man — attacked me, and I did fight back."

She said she did not know the man who attacked her. Camilla, 78, has for many years championed charities and causes that seek to end sexual and domestic violence and to support victims. The assault was first reported in September when a book about the royal family was serialised in the Times newspaper, but had not previously been confirmed by Buckingham Palace.

"I remember getting off the train and my mother looking at me and saying 'Why is your hair standing on end and why is the button missing from your coat?'" she told the BBC. "I was so furious about it and it's sort of lurked for many years."

The book said the incident happened on a train to Paddington Station in London when Camilla was about 16 or 17 years old, and she responded by taking off her shoe and using it to hit him in the genitals.

AFTER TRUMP, CHINA CLAIMS IT MEDIATED INDIA-PAKISTAN CONFLICT

Diary Times Desk : After US President Donald Trump repeatedly claimed that Washington stopped a potential war between India and Pakistan, China has now claimed that it mediated tensions between the two countries following their military clashes earlier this year.

Speaking on Tuesday (local time) at the Symposium on the International Situation and China's Foreign Relations, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Beijing had played a mediating role in several global conflicts, including the India-Pakistan standoff, the Chinese Foreign Ministry shared a statement on X. "To build peace that lasts, we have taken an objective and just stance, and focused on addressing both symptoms and root causes. Following this Chinese approach to settling hotspot issues, we mediated in northern Myanmar, the Iranian nuclear issue, the tensions between Pakistan and India, the issues between Palestine and Israel, and the recent conflict between Cambodia and Thailand," Wang said. Wang's remarks come months after India and Pakistan were locked in a brief but intense military confrontation in May, triggered by a terror attack in the Pahalgam valley of Jammu and Kashmir on April 22, which took 26 innocent lives.



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NEW ZEALAND'S AUCKLAND KICKS OFF 2026
CELEBRATIONS WITH FIREWORKS

Diary Times Desk : Auckland rang in 2026 with a downtown fireworks display launched from New Zealand's tallest structure, Sky Tower, making it the first major city to greet the new year at a celebration dampened by rain. South Pacific countries are the first to bid farewell to 2025. Clocks strike midnight in Auckland, a population of 1.7 million, 18 hours before the famous ball drops in New York's Times Square. The five-minute display involved 3,500 fireworks launched from various floors of the 240-metre Sky Tower. Smaller community events were cancelled across New Zealand's North Island on Wednesday due to forecasts of rain and possible thunderstorms. Australia's east coast welcomes 2026 two hours after New Zealand, but in Sydney, the country's largest city, celebrations will be held under the pall of Australia's worst mass shooting in almost 30 years. Two gunmen targeted a Hannukah celebration at Bondi Beach on December 14, killing 15 and wounding 40. A heavy police presence monitored the thousands.

LATEST DEEP-SEA SEARCH FOR
MISSING MALAYSIA AIRLINES
FLIGHT 370 GETS UNDERWAY

Diary Times Desk : A deep-sea search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 began in the Indian Ocean on Wednesday, reviving efforts to solve one of aviation's greatest mysteries more than a decade after the jet vanished with 239 people on board.

Malaysia's Transport Ministry said on Wednesday that a search vessel, the Armada 86 05, arrived at a designated search area with two autonomous underwater vehicles.

The location of the search area was not disclosed in the statement. It said the vessel had prepared for the search in Fremantle Port in Western Australia. The government did not specifically mention Ocean Infinity, the company that helmed a previous search and had long been slated to lead the new one. But the craft that the government specified by number has been widely identified by maritime and aviation websites as belonging to Ocean Infinity. Earlier in December, the Malaysian government said that the Texas-based marine robotics firm would begin searching targeted areas of the seabed under a renewed "no-find, no-fee" agreement.

TRUMP MOBILE DELAYS
SHIPMENT OF GOLD-COLORED
SMARTPHONE, FT REPORTS

Diary Times Desk : Trump Mobile has pushed back plans to deliver its gold-colored smartphone by year-end, the Financial Times reported on Wednesday.

Donald Trump's family business licensed its name in June to launch a U.S. mobile service and a \$499 smartphone, the T1, branded as Trump Mobile. The venture marks the latest effort by the president's children to monetize the Trump name.

According to the Financial Times, the company's customer service team said the recent U.S. government shutdown disrupted shipments and warned there was a "strong possibility" the device would not be delivered this month. The company did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Trump Mobile had promised a gold-colored handset, though it remains unclear who would manufacture it, as the U.S. has limited domestic smartphone production. The company has rolled out a mobile network priced at \$47.45 per month, while its website states that customers can reserve the phone with a \$100 pre-booking fee, with delivery initially expected this year.

KHALEDA ZIA'S FUNERAL PRAYER HELD IN BANGLADESH AMID TIGHT SECURITY

Diary Times Desk : Bangladesh's former prime minister Khaleda Zia's funeral prayers were held on Wednesday amid tight security. The funeral prayer (namaz-e-janaza) was held at the Manik Mia Avenue on Wednesday afternoon. Baitul Mukarram National Mosque Khatib Mufti Mohammad Abdul Malek conducted the funeral prayers while Bangladesh Nationalist Party's Standing Committee Member Nazrul Islam Khan read out a brief biography of Zia. Zia, who dominated Bangladesh's politics for decades, died on Tuesday in Dhaka. Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus, Chief Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury, and Khaleda Zia's son and BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman joined the funeral prayers along with foreign dignitaries, advisers of the interim government, leaders of different political parties and senior government and military officials. "Please pray to Allah seeking her place in heaven," Zia's elder son, Rahman, told the crowd ahead of the prayers. Millions of people joined namaz-e-janaza of Zia, three-time Prime Minister and political icon of Bangladesh. Mourners from all walks of life offered prayers seeking forgiveness for the departed soul of Zia as they burst into tears, being emotional with the passing of their beloved leader. The national flag-draped coffin of Zia was placed at the west end of Manik Mia Avenue. After the funeral prayers, Zia will be laid to eternal rest beside her husband, Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman's grave in the city with state honours while the general public will not be allowed during the burial as there will be an elaborate state funeral ceremony.



BRAZIL, INDIA PUSH FOR DEEPER TRADE TIES AS LULA PLANS NEW DELHI VISIT

Diary Times Desk : President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is scheduled to visit New Delhi in the second week of February 2026, leading what is expected to be Brazil's largest-ever official delegation to an Asian nation. According to Brasil 247, the visit is designed to unlock new avenues for trade and investment, with particular emphasis on fertilisers, agribusiness, and technology. Both governments have set an ambitious target of raising bilateral trade to approximately USD 20 billion, underscoring their mutual intention to substantially strengthen economic ties. Among Brazil's corporate leaders, India is widely regarded as a "dream market". This perception stems not only from India's vast consumer base but also from its wide-ranging commercial prospects in areas such as fruit and vegetable exports.

CHINA'S DISINFORMATION OFFENSIVE INTENSIFIES AS MILITARY DRILLS ENCIRCLE TAIWAN

Diary Times Desk : Taiwan's defence authorities have warned of an escalating wave of Chinese disinformation campaigns accompanying China's ongoing large-scale military drills around the island, cautioning the public against falling prey to fabricated narratives designed to erode morale and sow confusion. According to the Ministry of National Defence (MND), at least 46 separate pieces of false information have been detected since the start of the latest exercises, many of which appear aimed at undermining confidence in Taiwan's armed forces and its partnerships with allies, as reported by The Taipei Times. According to The Taipei Times, Major General Chu Hui-fang, head of the MND's Political Warfare Bureau, said the false narratives were largely spread.

ENVOYS OF QUAD COUNTRIES HOLD RARE PUBLICISED MEETING IN BEIJING

Diary Times Desk : Ambassadors of the Quad nations, consisting of the US, India, Australia and Japan, held a rare publicised meeting in Beijing. The meeting took place on Tuesday at the US Embassy in Beijing, according to a post on X with a photo by the American Ambassador to China, David Perdue.

"The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is a force for good in maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region," Perdue said in his post. "It is a pleasure to meet with the ambassadors of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue countries in Beijing," he said.

"The relations among the four countries—the United States, Australia, India, and Japan—continue to be stable and strong," he said and posted a photo of the four envoys, including Indian Ambassador to Beijing Pradeep Kumar Rawat. The Indian Embassy here has not yet commented on the meeting.

China, over the years, has been a strong critic of the Quad and has not yet reacted to the meeting. Beijing, in the past while reacting to the Quad meetings, said it was opposed to countries forming cliques, engaging in group politics and bloc confrontation.



HEAVY SNOW IN POLAND LEAVES DRIVERS STRANDED IN TAILBACKS OF UP TO 20 KM

Diary Times Desk : Heavy snowfall in Poland caused tailbacks stretching as far as 20 km (12.43 miles) on a motorway between the capital Warsaw and the Baltic port city of Gdansk during the night, police said on Wednesday.

While the situation left hundreds of people trapped in their cars in freezing conditions, by the early hours of Wednesday morning traffic was moving again, according to police.

"The difficult situation began yesterday after 4 pm, when the first trucks on the S7 route... began having trouble approaching the slopes," said Tomasz Markowski, a spokesperson for police in the northern city of Olsztyn. "This led to a traffic jam stretching approximately 20 kilometres overnight." Deputy Infrastructure Minister Stanislaw Bukowiec told a press conference that nobody had been hurt as a result of the difficult situation on the roads.

Anna Karczewska, a spokesperson for police in Ostroda, said officers had tried to help drivers who found themselves stuck. Ostroda lies on the highway about 40 km west of Olsztyn.

BANK FRAUD CASE: ED ATTACHES RS 150 CRORE WORTH PROPERTY NEAR BUCKINGHAM PALACE IN LONDON

Diary Times Desk : The Enforcement Directorate has attached a high-value property located near Buckingham Palace in London, valued at around Rs 150 crore, in connection with a Rs 1,400-crore bank fraud case allegedly committed by former textile baron Nitin Shambhukumar Kasliwal, officials said on Tuesday.

The attachment order was issued on December 30 under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. The property, situated in a prime area of the UK capital, is stated to be held under the beneficial ownership of Kasliwal and his family members.

Kasliwal is the former chairman and managing director of S Kumars Nationwide Limited and is accused of defrauding a consortium of Indian banks of approximately Rs 1,400 crore, as per multiple FIRs registered against him. According to the ED, searches were conducted on December 23 under Section 17 of the PMLA, during which several incriminating documents and digital devices were seized. "Analysis of the seized material revealed that Kasliwal had allegedly created a complex web of offshore trusts and companies across multiple tax havens, including the British Virgin Islands.

A PARTNERSHIP TESTED: INDIA-RUSSIA TIES IN SANCTION-HIT WORLD

Diary Times Desk : In a year marked by wars, sanctions and sharpening trade tensions, India-Russia relations were put to a clear test. As Western pressure intensified on Moscow over the Ukraine conflict and on New Delhi over its continued imports of Russian crude, the two countries leaned on their long-standing strategic partnership to navigate a sanction-hit global order. Western pressure on Russia over the Ukraine conflict remained intense, with fresh restrictions on oil exports and financial system. India, meanwhile, found itself under growing scrutiny from the United States for continuing to buy Russian crude. US President Donald Trump's administration imposed higher tariffs on Indian goods and repeatedly warned New Delhi against its energy ties with Moscow. India's position, however, remained consistent through the year. The Ministry of External Affairs made it clear that decisions on energy imports would be guided by national interest, affordability and the needs of Indian citizens, not by external pressure. Russian President Vladimir Putin publicly backed India's stance. Referring to the additional 25 per cent tariff imposed by the US for continued Russian oil purchases, which took the total tariff burden to 50 per cent, Putin said Indians would never allow themselves to be humiliated.

**IRELAND RAISES ALARM OVER CHINA'S EXPANDING INFLUENCE IN UNIVERSITIES**

Diary Times Desk : Ireland's security establishment has issued a rare and pointed warning over the potential risks posed by academic and research engagement with China, signalling growing unease about foreign influence within the country's higher education sector. Irish Military Intelligence has quietly briefed senior university officials about the dangers associated with research collaborations that could compromise national security, as reported by Phayul.

According to Phayul, the warnings emerged after a senior officer from Ireland's Military Intelligence Service (IMIS) spoke to the media about the growing concern surrounding "dual-use" research - academic work that appears civilian but could be repurposed for military or strategic use. The intelligence agency cautioned that advanced research in areas such as artificial intelligence, engineering, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies could be vulnerable to exploitation by foreign states, particularly China. The intelligence briefings reportedly highlighted risks including espionage, intellectual property theft, cyber intrusions, and covert influence operations.

TURKISH PRESIDENT ERDOGAN SLAMS ISRAEL'S RECOGNITION OF SOMALILAND AS "ILLEGITIMATE", WARNS OF HORN OF AFRICA INSTABILITY

Diary Times Desk : Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has strongly criticised Israel's decision to recognise Somaliland as a sovereign state, calling the move "illegitimate" and unacceptable and warning that it could fuel instability across the Horn of Africa.

Speaking at a joint press conference with Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in Ankara, Erdogan said Ankara viewed Somalia's territorial unity as non-negotiable and accused Israel of taking steps that could undermine regional stability, Al Jazeera reported. "Preserving the unity and integrity of Somalia in all circumstances holds special importance in our view. Israel's decision to recognise Somaliland is illegitimate and unacceptable," Erdogan said. Erdogan further accused the Israeli government of pursuing destabilising policies beyond the Middle East. "The Netanyahu government has the blood of 71,000 of our Palestinian brothers and sisters on its hands. Now it is trying to destabilise the Horn of Africa as well.

GUYANA INVITES INDIAN COMPANIES TO BID IN OIL BLOCKS AUCTION IN 2026

Diary Times Desk : Seeking to diversify players in its fast-growing energy sector, Guyana has invited Indian companies to participate in the exploration and production of crude oil, with oil blocks slated for auction in 2026. Speaking to ANI on Wednesday, Guyana High Commissioner Dharamkumar Seeraj expressed optimism that energy ties between the two countries will grow in the coming years, while noting that Guyana supplied nearly six million barrels of crude oil to India in 2025.

This statement comes at a time when India is actively working to diversify its energy supply chains, geopolitical uncertainties, and US sanctions linked to purchases of Russian oil. Guyana's oil sector is booming, transforming the small South American nation into a major global player after massive offshore discoveries in the Stabroek Block, with production soaring past 800,000 barrels per day (bpd) in mid 2025 and aiming for 1.7 million bpd by 2030.

EARTHQUAKE OF MAGNITUDE 3.4 STRIKES TIBET

Diary Times Desk : An earthquake of magnitude 3.4 struck Tibet on Sunday, the National Center for Seismology (NCS) said. As per the NCS, the earthquake occurred at a depth of 98km. In a post on X, NCS said, "EQ of M: 3.4, On: 24/08/2025 14:11:02 IST, Lat: 28.09 N, Long: 88.08 E, Depth: 98 Km, Location: Tibet." Earlier on August 19, an earthquake of magnitude 4.2 struck the region at a shallow depth of 10km. In a post on X, the NCS said, "EQ of M: 4.2, On: 19/08/2025 13:02:51 IST, Lat: 28.36 N, Long: 87.89 E, Depth: 10 Km, Location: Tibet." Shallow earthquakes are generally more dangerous than deep earthquakes. This is because the seismic waves from shallow earthquakes have a shorter distance to travel to the surface, resulting in stronger ground shaking and potentially more damage to structures and greater casualties. The Tibetan Plateau is known for its seismic activity due to tectonic plate collisions. Tibet and Nepal lie on a major geological fault line where the Indian tectonic plate pushes up into the Eurasian plate.

SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES' HIGH-LEVEL REPRESENTATIVES ATTEND KHALEDA ZIA'S FUNERAL

Diary Times Desk : High-level representatives from South Asian countries, including India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, attended the funeral of former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia.

Foreign guests paid their final respects to Khaleda Zia and met with her son, Tarique Rahman, to offer their condolences. Jaishankar met with Zia's family members at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban on Wednesday, ahead of her funeral prayers. Bangladesh Law Adviser Professor Asif Nazrul and National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman were present at the meeting.

Pakistan National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq also met with Zia's family members. Adviser Nazrul and National Security Adviser Rahman today met visiting EAM Jaishankar, Speaker of the Pakistan National Assembly Sadiq, Nepal's Foreign Minister Bala Nanda Sharma, and Bhutan's Foreign Minister DN Dhungyel at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

They expressed their gratitude to the visiting dignitaries for their presence and for showing solidarity with the people of Bangladesh during this time of national mourning. Vijitha Herath, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism of Sri Lanka, Dr Ali Haidar Ahmed, Minister of Higher Education, Labour and Skills Development of the Republic of Maldives, also attended the funeral of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

CHINA CONTINUES 'JUSTICE MISSION 2025' DRILLS AROUND TAIWAN, SHOWCASES JOINT BLOCKADE CAPABILITY



Diary Times Desk : The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theater Command continued its "Justice Mission 2025" military drills around Taiwan Island for a second consecutive day on December 30, involving naval, air and ground forces in what it described as a demonstration of joint operational and blockade capabilities. According to details released by the PLA Eastern Theater Command, destroyers, frigates, fighters and bombers were deployed from early morning to conduct drills focused on identification, warning and expulsion, strikes on hostile vessels, fleet air defence and anti-submarine warfare in airspace and waters to the north and south of Taiwan. During the exercises, H-6K bombers carried out simulated precision strikes against designated targets in Taiwan. The drills were aimed at testing the troops' ability to conduct joint operations and enforce a regional blockade. On Tuesday afternoon, a flotilla from the PLA Southern Theater Command, led by an amphibious assault ship, coordinated with destroyers, frigates and drones from the Eastern Theater Command to conduct joint drills. These included rapid landing operations and the seizure of key ports in waters to the east of Taiwan.

TAIWAN DETECTS 77 CHINESE AIRCRAFT, 17 NAVAL VESSELS AROUND ITS TERRITORY AS CHINA CONDUCTS EXTENSIVE DRILLS

Diary Times Desk : Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence (MND) on Wednesday said it detected 77 Chinese military aircraft and 17 naval vessels operating around the island as of 6 am local time, amid ongoing military drills by China's People's Liberation Army (PLA).

In a post on X, the MND said that 35 of the 77 aircraft crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait and entered Taiwan's northern, central and southwestern Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ).

"77 PLA aircraft, 17 PLAN vessels and 8 official ships operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6 a.m. (UTC+8) today. 35 out of 77 sorties crossed the median line and entered Taiwan's northern, central and southwestern ADIZ. We have monitored the situation and responded," the ministry said. The latest activity comes after the PLA's Eastern Theatre Command conducted military drills in waters east of Taiwan, which it described as an all-dimensional force projection.

Taiwan's Minister of National Defence Wellington Koo on Tuesday said that the PLA's actions pose a risk to regional stability. According to Taiwan's MND, Koo said the drills also threaten civilian maritime and air traffic.

US CONDUCTS COVERT DRONE STRIKE ON VENEZUELA PORT IN FIRST SUCH ATTACK

Diary Times Desk : The United States carried out a covert drone strike on a port facility along Venezuela's coastline earlier this month, in what is believed to be the first known American attack on a target inside Venezuelan territory, CNN reported.

According to CNN, the strike was executed by the CIA and targeted a remote dock that US agencies believe was being used by the criminal gang Tren de Aragua to store drugs and transfer them onto boats for onward trafficking. No casualties were reported, as the site was reportedly empty at the time of the strike.

The operation was not publicly disclosed earlier and marks a significant escalation in Washington's actions against Venezuela. CNN cited two sources that US Special Operations Forces had provided intelligence inputs for the strike, though this claim was rejected by the US Special Operations Command.

THIEVES DRILL INTO GERMAN BANK VAULT, STEAL EURO 30 MILLION IN OVERNIGHT HEIST

Diary Times Desk : Just days before the New Year, valuables worth around Euro 30 million (about USD 33 million) were stolen from a bank in the western German city of Gelsenkirchen, in what police described as one of the largest bank heists in the country in recent years. Authorities confirmed the incident on Tuesday, DW reported. Police believe the robbery was carried out by a highly organised and well-prepared group, citing the level of planning, technical skill and coordination involved in the operation. According to investigators, the burglars entered the bank through an underground parking garage. From there, they drilled through a wall to gain access to the vault area. After breaking open thousands of safe-deposit lockers, the suspects escaped using the same route, DW reported. More than 3,000 safe-deposit boxes were damaged during the break-in. The lockers reportedly contained cash, gold and jewellery. Based on an average insured value of Euro 10,000 per box (around USD10,900).

DENMARK DELIVERS LAST LETTER AS DIGITAL SHIFT ENDS 400-YEAR POSTAL TRADITION

Diary Times Desk : Denmark's state-run postal service, PostNord, delivered its final letter on Tuesday (local time), bringing an end to more than 400 years of traditional mail delivery as the country fully embraces digital communication, CNN reported. With this move, Denmark becomes the first country in the world to officially decide that physical letter delivery is no longer essential or economically sustainable in the digital age. The decision reflects a sharp and long-term decline in letter usage. According to CNN, in 2024, PostNord delivered over 90 per cent fewer letters than it did in 2000. A similar trend has been seen elsewhere, including in the United States, where the US Postal Service delivered about half as much mail in 2024 compared to 2006. As communication has shifted online, from emails and WhatsApp messages to video calls and social media, the role of traditional letters has steadily faded.

CHINA'S DRILLS AROUND TAIWAN PROMPT GLOBAL ALARM, LAWMAKERS URGE SWIFT RESPONSE

Diary Times Desk : China continued military drills around Taiwan for a second consecutive day on Tuesday, conducting live-fire exercises that drew strong reactions from lawmakers in the United States, Germany and a global alliance of legislators, who warned of escalating tensions and called for urgent steps to support Taipei, Focus Taiwan reported. Reacting to the drills, US Senator Roger Wicker said on X (formerly Twitter) that Beijing's actions showed intensifying preparations against Taiwan, highlighting the People's Liberation Army's ability to enforce a blockade and the Chinese Communist Party's capacity to pressure Taipei.

Wicker said Washington must move swiftly by accelerating production linked to recent Foreign Military Sales to Taiwan and by executing congressionally approved Presidential Drawdown Authority and Taiwan Security Cooperation Initiative funding to deliver key defence capabilities. The remarks were made by the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, according to Focus Taiwan. He also urged "our Taiwanese allies" to put aside political divisions to ensure passage of President Lai Ching-te's proposed special defence budget.

The appeal was directed at Taiwan's opposition Kuomintang and Taiwan People's Party, which have continued to block the NT 1.25 trillion (USD 39.96 billion) plan approved in late November to finance weapons procurement and joint development programmes with the US from 2026 to 2033.



**STOCK MARKETS REBOUND IN
EARLY TRADE**

Diary Times Desk : Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty bounced back in early trade on Wednesday and were trading in positive territory amid sustained buying by domestic institutional investors.

After five days of decline, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 254.38 points to 84,929.46 during initial trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 89.15 points to 26,028 after four days of decline.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Tata Steel, Bharat Electronics, Titan, Axis Bank, Adani Ports and Hindustan Unilever were among the biggest gainers. However, Bajaj Finserv, Tata Consultancy Services, Mahindra & Mahindra and Infosys were among the laggards.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index quoted lower. US markets ended lower on Tuesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,844.02 crore on Tuesday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 6,159.81 crore, according to exchange data. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dipped 0.10 per cent to USD 61.27 per barrel.

**INDIA SURPASSES ONE BILLION
BROADBAND SUBSCRIBERS IN
NOVEMBER 2025: TRAI**

Diary Times Desk : The broadband subscriber base in India crossed the 1 billion (100 crore) mark in November 2025. This milestone reflects a significant expansion in digital connectivity over the last decade. According to a press release from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), the number of broadband users increased more than sixfold over ten years. There were 131.49 million (13.15 crore) subscribers at the end of November 2015, which rose to 100.37 crore by the end of November 2025.

The surge in connectivity aligns with the government's focus on advanced telecommunications infrastructure. Earlier this month, Union Minister of Communications, Jyotiraditya Scindia, addressed the progress of the Bharat 6G Alliance, which was established in 2023 under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

GOVT KEEPS INTEREST RATES ON SMALL SAVINGS SCHEMES UNCHANGED

Diary Times Desk : The government on Wednesday left interest rates unchanged for various small savings schemes, including PPF and NSC, for the seventh straight quarter, beginning January 1. "The rates of interest on various Small Savings Schemes for the fourth quarter of FY 2025-26, starting from January 1, 2026, and ending on March 31, 2026, shall remain unchanged from those notified for the third quarter (September 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025) of FY 2025-26," the finance ministry said in a notification. As per the notification, deposits under the Sukanya Samriddhi Scheme will attract an interest rate of 8.2 per cent, while the rate on a three-year term deposit remains at 7.1 per cent prevailing in the current quarter. The interest rates for popular Public Provident Fund (PPF) and post office savings deposit schemes, too, have been retained at 7.1 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively. The interest rate on the Kisan Vikas Patra will be 7.5 per cent, and the investments will mature in 115 months. The interest rate on the National Savings Certificate will stay at 7.7 per cent for the January-March quarter. Like the current quarter, the monthly income scheme will earn 7.4 per cent for investors during the fourth quarter of the current fiscal.



**RELIEF FOR DEBT-LADEN VODAFONE IDEA AS GOVT APPROVES PACKAGE,
FREEZES AGR DUES**

Diary Times Desk : The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a relief package for debt-laden Vodafone Idea, freezing the AGR (Adjusted Gross Revenue) dues at Rs 87,695 crore and rescheduling the payment from FY32 to FY41, according to sources.

The Telecom Department will also reassess the AGR dues frozen based on the Deduction Verification Guidelines and audit reports, sources told PTI. The outcome will be decided by a committee appointed by the government.

Sources said that in addition, the AGR dues pertaining to FY18 and FY19 (already finalised by the Supreme Court order of 2020) will be payable by Vodafone Idea over FY26 to FY31, without change. The steps will protect the interest of the government, having about 49 per cent stake in the telco, enable orderly payment of dues to the Centre by way of spectrum auction charges and AGR dues, ensure competition in the sector and protect the interest of 20 crore VIL consumers.



**BLINKIT WRAPS UP 2025 WITH WITTY BILLBOARDS THAT TURN DATA INTO DESI
HUMOUR**

Diary Times Desk : As 2025 draws to a close, quick-commerce platform Blinkit has rolled out a cheeky new billboard campaign that turns consumer data into laugh-out-loud storytelling, as posted by Social Media Dissect on their Instagram page.

Titled "2025 in a Blink," the campaign is built on real order data from the year and highlights some of the most unexpected and amusing; shopping habits of Indian consumers. From grocery staples and personal care items to late-night snacks, each hoarding features a sharp, insight-driven line rooted in everyday Indian behaviour.

One of the most talked-about billboards reads, "India ordered 1,05,16,879 kg of ghee this year," followed by the punchline, "Ab bas bhi karo, mummy." Another playful comparison notes that students from XLRI ordered nearly twice as many non-alcoholic mixers as those from IIM Calcutta, cheekily nodding to campus social culture. Blinkit also spotlighted rider appreciation, revealing that Indians tipped delivery partners a total of ₹47.36 crore during the year. The campaign has sparked widespread admiration online, with users calling it "brilliant marketing" and likening it to a desi version of Spotify Wrapped. Its mix of humour, data and cultural insight has resonated strongly, earning praise for being both relatable and refreshingly clever.



INDIA STOCKS SIGN OFF 2025
ON STRONG NOTE; SENSEX
RISES 545 POINTS; SILVER
CORRECTS SHARPLY

Diary Times Desk : Indian stock indices jumped substantially on Wednesday, the last day of 2025, supported largely by value buying after the year-end thin trade.

Sensex jumped 0.64 per cent or 545 points to 85,220 points, while Nifty rose 191 points or 0.74 per cent to 26,130 points. The domestic stock market opened with marginal gains on Wednesday, reflecting a balanced but soft mood among investors amid thin year-end volumes and limited global cues.

According to analysts, going ahead, market participants will keep a close watch on news flow on the India-US trade deal front, auto sales data, Budget announcements, Q3 earnings, among other key global indicators.

"The market has the potential for a directional move upwards but is being weighed down by sustained FII selling and absence of fresh triggers like positive news on the US-India trade front," said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited.

UNION CABINET APPROVES 6-LANE GREENFIELD HIGHWAY CORRIDOR IN MAHARASHTRA, WILL COST OF RS 19,142 CRORE

Diary Times Desk : The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the construction of a six-lane greenfield access-controlled Nashik-Solapur-Akkalkot corridor in Maharashtra on BOT (Toll) Mode with a project length of 374 km with a total capital cost of Rs.19,142 crore. This project will provide connectivity to important regional cities such as Nashik, Ahilyanagar, and Solapur connecting to Kurnool, as indicated in the map. This infrastructure is a significant step to facilitate integrated transport infrastructure development under the PM Gatishakti National Master Plan principle. The greenfield corridor from Nashik to Akkalkot is proposed to be connected to Delhi-Mumbai Expressway near Vadhawan port interchange, Agra-Mumbai corridor at Nashik at junction with NH-60 (Adegao) and Samruddhi Mahamarg at Pangri (near Nashik).

DGFT'S STRATEGIC POLICY OVERHAUL AND DIGITAL INTEGRATION
RESHAPE INDIA'S TRADE LANDSCAPE IN 2025

Diary Times Desk : The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has concluded 2025 with a series of strategic policy updates and digital reforms aimed at strengthening India's trade facilitation ecosystem.

According to a DGFT press release, the year was marked by the institutionalisation of formal consultations and the expansion of digital platforms to enhance the ease of doing business for Indian exporters.

Throughout the year, the department focused on aligning the Foreign Trade Policy 2023 with evolving domestic and global requirements, ensuring a streamlined process for the issuance of authorisations and the rationalisation of trade measures.

Policy transparency remained a central pillar of the year's achievements as DGFT amended the Foreign Trade Policy to introduce Paras 1.07A and 1.07B. These amendments institutionalised formal consultations for future policy changes, ensuring greater stakeholder engagement.

Additionally, the department issued several notifications to align India's Import and Export Policy Schedules with updates to the Customs Tariff and Finance Acts of 2024 and 2025. This regulatory coherence was supported by the restoration and alignment of RoDTEP benefits for Advance Authorisation holders, Special Economic Zones, and Export Orientated Units.



INDIAN ECONOMY REMAINS SOUND AMID PERSISTENT GLOBAL
CHALLENGES: RBI



Diary Times Desk : India's economy continues to grow strongly on the back of robust domestic demand, despite persistent global challenges, according to the Financial Stability Report (FSR) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The Financial Stability Report (FSR) is a half yearly publication that includes contributions from all financial sector regulators. It presents the collective assessment of the Sub Committee of the Financial Stability and Development Council on current and emerging risks to the stability of the Indian financial system.

Benign inflation in India, fiscal consolidation, and prudent macroeconomic policies have enhanced economic resilience, the RBI report noted on Wednesday. The domestic financial system remains sound, supported by strong balance sheets, easy financial conditions, and low market volatility, it supplemented, the report said. The economy and the financial system, however, faces near-term risks from external uncertainties - geopolitical and trade related, it, however, cautioned.

"These factors could increase exchange rate volatility, dampen trade, reduce corporate earnings, and lower foreign investment," it noted. A sharp correction in US equities could influence domestic equities and tighten financial conditions. However, the economy and financial system have strong buffers to withstand adverse shocks.

Globally, growth has proven more resilient than expected despite trade tensions, geopolitical risks, and uncertainty around economic policy, supported by front-loaded trade, fiscal measures, and strong AI-related investment. Nonetheless, risks to the outlook remain skewed to the downside due to still elevated uncertainty, high public debt, and the risk of a disorderly market correction, the RBI report said.

"Financial markets appear strong on the surface but show growing underlying vulnerabilities. Sharp rise in equities and other risk assets, high hedge funds' leverage, expanding opaque private credit markets and growth of stablecoins all heighten global financial system fragilities," it added.

INCREASING VULNERABILITY
HITTING STATE ECONOMY

Diary Times Desk : Initiating climate change-mitigation measures to minimise the impact of natural disasters like cloudbursts, flash floods, landslides and glacial bursts has become a major challenge for the Himachal Pradesh Government as massive devastation to infrastructure in the past few years during monsoons has become a norm. Even as there is concern over rising disaster vulnerability, the political slugfest over inadequate central financial assistance for undertaking relief and restoration of the damaged infrastructure is dominating the debate, with Congress and BJP indulging in blame game. Notwithstanding the political narrative, the repeated calamities have left deep economic and emotional scars on the people. The havoc wreaked by unprecedented rain during 2023 monsoon alone caused total loss of Rs 9,042 crore. Two very heavy spells of rainfall between August 11-14 and August 21-23 caused widespread devastation, claiming 448 lives and rendering thousands homeless. The damage in 2024 was relatively less but again in 2025, districts of Mandi, Kullu, Chamba, Kinnaur, Kangra and Shimla suffered huge damage to both public and private property. A total of 366 people died while Himachal suffered loss of over Rs 4,000 crore.

DESPITE PUSH TO LURE
INVESTORS, EXIT OF UNITS
CONTINUES

Diary Times Desk : With few new industries having been set up, the industrial atmosphere remained grim in the state even as efforts to rope in new investment by improving infrastructure remained high on the government's agenda. The migration of industry owing to inimical policies like hike in electricity duty as well as tariff generated much debate in Assembly sessions. With as many as 115 industrial units having closed in Himachal Pradesh from August 2022 to July 2025, as many as 3,350 people were rendered unemployed. The governments, however, asserted that 55 of those units had resumed operations after takeover and 3,918 persons were employed. The state government constantly criticised the previous BJP government for giving out the state's valuable resources to investors at a pittance in the garb of customised package.

HIGHER REACHES OF HIMACHAL PRADESH RECEIVE SNOW

Diary Times Desk : With the higher reaches of Himachal Pradesh witnessing light snow on Wednesday, the state received the first snow of the season, ending the prolonged dry spell in the state at several places. Light snow was witnessed in Lahaul and Spiti, Kinnaur and Kullu districts, bringing cheer to locals as well as tourists. As per the State's Meteorological Department, snow and rain are likely to continue across the state till January 2 after which the state will experience dry weather conditions till January 4. While the weather will continue to remain dry in plains, low and mid hills of the state, the higher reaches will again witness snow along with rain on January 5 and 6. Meanwhile, very light precipitation at isolated places was observed over the high hills of the state during the past 24 hours. Minimum temperatures in most of the places in the state were 2°C to 5°C above normal and were in the range of minus 3°C to 11°C. Similarly, maximum temperatures were also 3°C above normal and were in the range of 3°C to 19°C. Shimla recorded 8.7°C as minimum temperature while Dharamsala recorded 6.8°C.



FOCUS ON UPGRADING FACILITIES; STAFF
SHORTAGE A CONCERN


Diary Times Desk : The Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu government's focus this year has been on modernising health facilities and equipping hospitals with the latest, state-of-the-art equipment and technology.

According to the CM, the government has decided to invest Rs 3,000 crore for upgrading healthcare infrastructure and expanding modern health services. While the decision to introduce robotic surgery, approving latest MRI machines, CT scan, digital X-ray and other diagnostic equipment for hospitals, PET scan facility at IGMC were the positive developments, the erratic functioning of Ayushman and Himcare facilities, staff shortage and the strike by the doctors were the low points. The introduction of robotic surgery was the biggest addition to the state's health infrastructure this year. The facility has become functional at Atal Institute of Medical Super Specialty, Chamyana, and Tanda Medical College, and will be gradually made available/expanded to other medical colleges as well. The high capital cost for the facility has been balanced with the argument of high precision and faster recovery time for the patient.

BAGHAT BANK'S CASE TO BE FORWARDED TO
UNION MINISTER


Diary Times Desk : The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will soon approach the Union Cooperative Minister to enquire into financial irregularities in the Solan-based Baghat Urban Co-operative Bank Limited where the Reserve Bank of India has capped withdrawals following financial imbroglio.

While addressing mediapersons here today, party spokesperson Rajinder Rana said it was lamentable that the bank's non-performing assets (NPA) were a whopping Rs 120 crore, but those who defaulted on loan repayments worth crores did not face any action owing to alleged political patronage. He said, "It is surprising that a small bank has 499 defaulters with NPA of Rs 120 crore. Despite irregularities having emerged in disbursement of loans with a single property pledged against multiple finances, no action has been taken against erring officials or the bank management." While coming out in support of depositors, he asked what action was taken against loan defaulters against whom arrest warrants were issued. He said they were let-off after paying thousands against default of crores. He alleged that the police were under pressure not to arrest defaulters.



YOUR HOROSCOPE

01-01-2026



Aries
Today, you will meet old friends, which will refresh old memories. Employed people may be fired from the job due to heavy arguments with colleagues in the workplace. People doing business should thank God for getting financial benefits from the advice of their spouse. Due to irritation in the eyes, you should consult an ophthalmologist.

Taurus
Today you will get success as your long pending legal proceedings will come in your favor. There will be an atmosphere of happiness in the family as employed people will get progress in their workplace. People doing business should make a budget and spend the money in order to get financial benefits. Housewives should change their food according to health and season.

Gemini
Today you should include yoga and meditation in your daily routine. For employed people, your responsibilities may increase due to promotion in the workplace. People doing business may suffer financial loss from any unknown person today. There may be difficulty in walking due to nerve pain problems.

Cancer
Today you will get relief from all your problems due to sudden financial gain. Employed people may have to get scolded by their boss due to being hasty in the workplace. People doing business may face increased difficulties in business due to arguments with business partners. As the problem of foot pain increases, you must consult a specialist doctor.

Leo
Today, you should offer water to Lord Shiva to avoid difficulties. A heated argument with HR in the workplace will spoil your whole day. Businessmen have to exercise patience, there are chances of improvement in business. Today, you may face stomach and pancreas problems due to eating too much fried food.

Virgo
Today you should take special control over your speech and behavior. People in employment will get success in the workplace with the help of friends. People doing business will get financial gain due to some special offer, your financial condition will be strengthened. Old diseases of elders in the house may emerge.

Libra
Today is going to be a busy day for you. Employed people will get a chance to work with senior officers due to advancement in their professional field. People doing business should avoid exchanging money with any unknown person today. Pregnant women may have to face problems due to changing weather.

Scorpio
Today you may have to face huge arguments in your family over small matters. Employed people may have to face mental problems due to extra workload in the workplace. People doing business may have to travel abroad in connection with business expansion. Diabetic patients should get themselves checked by a doctor in case of any problem today.

Sagittarius
Today you should take all important decisions of your career thoughtfully. Employed people may have to face some problems due to the start of a new job in the workplace. Due to financial gain for business people, you can invest in a new business. Problems like leg pain and headache may bother you.

Capricorn
Today you can invest especially in land and buildings. Employed people may have to travel long distances due to office work, due to which your health may deteriorate. People doing business may face difficulties in repaying business loans due to loss of money. High BP and cholesterol problems will increase the problems of your spouse.

Aquarius
Today you may have to face huge arguments in your family over small matters. Employees will be suspended due to indiscipline in the workplace. People doing business should solve all the problems of their customers in time. Due to worsening weather, problems related to cold and cough may increase in the family.

Pisces
Today your interest in creative work will especially increase. Employed people may be given an important project by their boss to handle important projects in the workplace. People doing business should control their speech and behavior with their customers. You should walk carefully on the road, problems may arise due to injury.

PUNJAB EXTENDS SCHOOL HOLIDAYS UNTIL JANUARY 7 DUE TO COLD WEATHER

Diary Times Desk : The Punjab government has extended holidays in all schools across the state until January 7 in view of persistent cold weather and fog. Earlier, they had declared holidays in all schools from December 24 to December 31.

In a post on X, Punjab Education Minister Harjot Bains announced the extension, saying, "In accordance with the directives of the Honorable Chief Minister of Punjab, S. Bhagwant Singh Mann Ji, keeping in view the continuously increasing cold and fog in the state, and with due consideration to the health and safety of children and staff, holidays are being declared in all government, aided, recognized, and private schools of the state until January 7. Now, all schools in the state will reopen on January 8 as per regular days."

EDUCATION IN 2025 A MIX BAG OF ACHIEVEMENT AND CONTROVERSIES OVER POLITICISATION OF EDUCATION REFORMS

Diary Times Desk : One of the core focus areas in the governance model of the AAP, performance in education has been a mix bag of achievements — punctuated with controversies over politicisation of education reforms in government schools by the ruling party to further its political agenda.

The year 2025 saw several significant controversies, ranging from language mandates and university governance to allegations of political indoctrination. A 54-day drive under Punjab 'Sikhya Kranti' to inaugurate 25,000 works in 12,000 schools, which included minor repairs like mending toilets and installing large granite plaques for each small project, such as a classroom or a boundary wall, drew criticism from the Opposition parties Congress, SAD and BJP — that termed it as 'theatrics to gain publicity', and allegedly diverting resources from academics to political events. The ribbon-cutting events also attracted brickbats from teachers' unions that questioned the plaques prominently featuring the names of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, Education Minister Harjot Bains and at places of local MLAs and teachers being asked to bear the cost of the plaques as the funds were released late by the department.

RS 175 CRORE SOUGHT FROM CENTRE TO PROCURE MORE ANTI-DRONE SYSTEMS: PUNJAB DGP

Diary Times Desk : The Punjab government has sought funds to the tune of Rs 175 crore from the Centre to procure 17 anti-drone systems in the next financial year, DGP Gaurav Yadav said on Wednesday. The top cop also said Punjab Police would operationalise two software for tackling organised crime in a scientific way. Addressing media persons here, Yadav spoke in detail about the focus areas of the police next year. Three anti-drone systems have already been installed in the border areas and six more would be operationalised, he said. "The state government has sought Rs 175 crore funds from the Centre to procure 17 more anti-drone systems in the next financial year. A high-powered committee has been formed for this purpose." "Trials (in coordination) with the BSF are going on, an expression of interest has been issued, and the best available system will be procured in a coordinated manner with the BSF and other agencies," Yadav said. The committee will be headed by Special DGP Ram Singh, and comprise senior IPS officers Praveen Sinha and Neelabh Kishore. On the ongoing anti-drug drive 'Yudh Nashian Virudh', Yadav said police received major success under the Safe Punjab helpline.



SENIOR IPS OFFICER AJAY SINGHAL APPOINTED NEW HARYANA DGP

Diary Times Desk : Senior IPS officer Ajay Singhal was appointed the new director general of police of Haryana on Wednesday, an official order said.

A 1992-batch IPS officer, Singhal replaces OP Singh, who retired from service on Wednesday.

On the consideration of the panel received from the Union Public Service Commission, the governor of Haryana is pleased to appoint Ajay Singhal, IPS (HY-1992), as Director General of Police, Haryana, for a minimum tenure of two years from the date of his assumption of charge, the order said.

Singhal was the director general of Haryana State Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau.

OP Singh retired from service on Wednesday after a career spanning more than three decades.

Singh was given the additional charge of DGP on October 14 when Shatrueet Kapur proceeded on leave amid mounting attacks from the opposition over fellow IPS officer Y Puran Kumar's alleged suicide. On December 14, Singh was appointed the officiating DGP.

PADDY SCAM 2022-23: FORMER GHARAUNDA MARKET PANEL SECY AMONG 7 BOOKED

Diary Times Desk : The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), Karnal police station, has registered a case against seven persons, including the then secretary of the Gharaunda market committee, in connection with an alleged paddy procurement scam worth Rs 2.56 crore that took place in 2022-23. The case was registered following an investigation by the ACB on the directions of the government. Investigation revealed that paddy was shown transported from the Gharaunda market to mills for custom milling (CMR) using fake vehicle entries. Verification of records on the e-procurement portal and vehicle registration details revealed that several two-wheelers like bikes, and small vehicles, including an Alto car, were shown as transport vehicles. Out-gate passes were generated, falsely showing transportation of paddy to mills, said the FIR. The accused have been identified as Naresh Mann, the then secretary of the market committee; Sandeep Kumar, the then inspector of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department; owner of M/s Sukhdev and company.

ENFORCEMENT DIRECTORATE SEIZES RS 5 CRORE IN CASH, RS 8-CRORE JEWELLERY FROM DELHI HOUSE



Diary Times Desk : The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday seized Rs 5.12 crore in cash, a suitcase containing gold and diamond jewellery worth Rs 8.8 crore, and documents linked to assets worth Rs 35 crore during searches at a Delhi house, officials said.

The raid at the residential premises in south Delhi's Sarvapriya Vihar is being undertaken by the federal probe agency in a money-laundering investigation linked to Haryana-based absconding criminal Inderjit Singh Yadav, who, according to the ED, is operating from the UAE. ED officials said the house is linked to one Aman Kumar, an alleged associate of Yadav, and the raids that began on Tuesday are continuing. Bank officials equipped with currency counting machines were called in on Wednesday morning, and so far, Rs 5.12 crore in cash, a suitcase full of gold and diamond jewellery worth Rs 8.8 crore and a bag containing bank cheque books and documents linked to assets worth Rs 35 crore have been seized, they said. Neither Yadav nor Kumar could be contacted for a comment on the ED charges made against them.

Drones have already revolutionized warfare.
They're about to do it again

"Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos." Mary Shelley, "Frankenstein," 1818.

"War is chaos. It always has been. But technology makes it worse. It changes the fear." Pierce Brown, "Golden Son," 2015.

Drones – and artificial intelligence – have reshaped the modern battlefield and are about to do so again. Nowhere is that more evident than in Ukraine.

Invaded by Russia in 2022, outmanned and outgunned by one of the world's strongest militaries, Kyiv quickly proved that drones – in the air, on the ground, and at sea – could hold off a Russian victory that many expected within weeks, if not days.



Cheaper and easier to build than manned vehicles, and in some cases more effective, drones are a military planner's dream – and greatly reduce the risk of a pilot or operator being killed in action.

Brad Lendon
But drones came to the forefront of warfare relatively recently, some analysts say, with the 2020 conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh a major turning point.

Much like the Kalashnikov rifle in the previous century, mass adoption of drones became an asymmetric weapon of choice for forces facing long odds in global warfare, such as the Hamas militant group in Gaza; anti-junta rebels in Myanmar's civil war; and the militaries of poorer nations, including many in Africa.

But the Goliaths have caught up, while – according to one report – drug cartels the world over are innovating, improving and adapting drones to fight the narco-wars of the future. "It's like gunpowder. That's how insanely it's changed the war," Patrick Shepherd, a former US Army officer, said of the advent of cheap aerial drones.

It's invention from chaos, as myriad regional conflagrations coincide with an era of unparalleled technological advance.

It's probably just the beginning.

The evolution of drones

Drones aren't a recent invention. Britain and the United States experimented with radio-controlled unmanned aircraft during World War I, according to the Imperial War Museum in London.

"We were flying hundreds of drones over North Vietnam during the war," said Russ Lee, a curator in the aeronautics department at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington. During that Southeast Asian conflict in 1960s and early '70s, US forces began using drones for many of the same missions we see today – reconnaissance or carrying munitions, or for use as decoys and psy-ops platforms, according to the Imperial War Museum.

The US began widespread use of drones during Operation Desert Storm, the response to Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. The Tomahawk land-attack missile – a cruise missile but also an unmanned aerial vehicle as it can change course and target in-flight – saw its first combat in 1991.



Australia's About To Find Out

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU KICK MILLIONS OF TEENS OFF SOCIAL MEDIA?

It's August, and a show of hands in an auditorium filled with 300 students at All Saints Anglican School in Australia shows that few of the Grade 9 and 10 students sitting in plush red seats had heard of the country's impending ban on social media, much less how to prepare for it.



Hilary Whiteman

Yoti advises social media platforms including Meta about their age verification options. The group now has 12 methods, including phone, email, and ID checks, and the list is growing. Age-restricted sites give users a choice about which method they'd prefer.

"It's very important to save photos," Kirra Pendergast, founder of cyber safety organization Ctrl+Shift, lectures from the stage. "You need to prepare."

An alarmed murmur spreads around the room as the students realize what's about to be lost. "Can you get your account back when you turn 16?" one girl asks. "What if I lie about my age?" asks another.

Less than two weeks before the ban, we have more answers.

From December 10, sites



"People have basically thought, what is it we do offline? Do we let young people into strip clubs, into bars, buying alcohol, buying cigarettes? What are the norms that we have and what are the norms that we want to have online?"

that meet the Australian government's definition of an "age-restricted social media platform" will need to show that they're doing enough to eject or block children under 16 or face fines of up to 49.5 million Australian dollars (\$32 million).

The list includes Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, Kick, Reddit, Threads, TikTok, Twitch, X, and YouTube. The government says it's protecting children from potentially harmful content; the sites say they're already building safer systems.

Meta says it'll start deactivating accounts and blocking new Facebook, Instagram and Threads accounts from December 4. Under-16s are being encouraged to download their content.

Snap says users can deactivate their accounts for up to three years, or until they turn 16. Snap streaks – the daily swapping of photos of ordinary life, vacations, walls, foreheads, anything to signal an online presence – will end.

There's another sting in the ban, too, coming at the end of the Australian school year before the summer break in the southern hemisphere. For eight weeks, there'll be no school, no teachers – and no scrolling.

For millions of children, it could be the first school break they spend in years without the company of time-killing social media algorithms, or an easy way to contact their friends. Even for parents who support the ban, it could be a very long summer.

Other countries around the world are taking notes as Australia explores new territory that some say mirrors safety evolutions of years past – the dawning realization that maybe cars need safety belts, and that perhaps cigarettes should come with some kind of health warning.

As with any seismic step in social policy, there are cheer squads, naysayers and those who don't care what Australia – a country known to love rules – is doing to (and for) its children.

INFA

A Blue Schoolbag In A Mass Grave

SRI LANKA'S BLOODY PAST IS RE-EMERGING FROM THE SOIL

Two human skeletons lie entangled on the rough earth – the arms of one wrapped around the other's head, as though protecting them from danger. Simply known as numbers 177 and 178, their identities remain a mystery.



Tamils, who have lived in the north and east of Sri Lanka for thousands of years, are primarily followers of Hinduism, with a significant Christian minority population, but the commission determined that the fact the bodies were buried naked rules out customary Hindu burials. "There is a reasonable likelihood that the burials were unlawful and pursuant to extrajudicial killings," it said.

They are among 240 human skeletal remains, including children and babies, uncovered at this mass gravesite in Chemmani in Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna district.

"This place is a crime scene no entry," reads a sign at the entrance.

Numbered white cards placed alongside the bones mark how many skeletons have been found since digging began in May of this year, reviving decades-old allegations of wartime atrocities and cover-ups.

In the heartland of the country's ethnic Tamil minority, a bloody and brutal history is re-emerging from the soil. But it is difficult to bury the past entirely.

From 1983 to 2009, the South Asian island nation of 21 million endured a brutal civil war between the Sri Lankan army and the separatist militant group the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). More commonly known as the Tamil Tigers, the group was listed as a terrorist organization by many countries including the United States.

The war was fought along ethnic lines, pitting the majority Buddhist Sinhalese state against the predominantly Hindu ethnic minority rebels fighting for a separate Tamil homeland in the north and east after years of anti-Tamil violence. The Tigers were ultimately defeated.

Atrocities were committed by both sides, according to the United Nations, which estimates up to 100,000 people were killed in the conflict, with thousands of others forcibly disappeared.

Sixteen years after the war ended, families of the victims and missing are still fighting for justice and accountability.

"One day the truth will come," said V S Niranjan, a lawyer representing relatives of people who went missing in Jaffna.

A blue school bag

Just a stone's throw from a main road, the Chemmani gravesite is one of more than 20 mass graves identified in Sri Lanka.

Many of the gravesites that pockmark the north and east of the country are believed to contain the victims of atrocities committed during the civil war. Caught between warring rebel fighters and the Sri Lankan army, the Tamil community in these regions bore the brunt of the violence.

The military occupied Jaffna from 1995 until the end of the war. Chemmani first gained international attention in 1998 when Sri Lankan soldier former Lance Cpl. Somaratne Rajapakse, who was on trial for the rape and murder of schoolgirl Krishanthi Kumaraswamy, confessed that hundreds of Tamils had been buried there after the Sri Lankan army retook Jaffna.

For decades, the mass grave remained hidden until construction workers clearing land in the grounds of a Hindu cemetery in February unearthed human skeletal remains.

Their discovery prompted a court-ordered forensic excavation of the site in May and June, which initially uncovered 19 skeletons. Since then, the bones of hundreds more people have been found.

A baby's milk bottle, a blue schoolbag, bangles and cloth fragments have been uncovered alongside the bones.

More than 90% of the remains had no form of clothing. The bodies were buried in a disordered way, heaped together in shallow graves of 1.5-2 feet, according to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, an independent national body that investigates violations of fundamental rights.



DOUBLE-SIGNED WATCHES: A COLLECTOR'S GUIDE

Diary Times Desk : Among all the tiny details that make a watch appealing, the double-signed, or co-signed dial is one of the most intriguing. So exactly what is it, and why can it make a watch worth much more than its non-double-signed counterpart?

Put simply, a double-signed dial will be found on a watch that was manufactured by one firm and retailed by another, and therefore features the signatures of both.

This phenomenon began in the first half of the 20th century, before European watch businesses had their own boutiques dotted around the world. Instead, they relied on a network of trusted retailers to represent them in what were then nascent markets, whether in South America, the United States, Africa or the Middle East. Sometimes, to help increase the watches' appeal to local collectors, those retailers were permitted to add their own stamp to the dial, usually at six or 12 o'clock.

'Double-signed dials had almost entirely disappeared by the 1990s, as watch manufacturers began overseeing their own retail outlets,' says Geneva-based Watches and Wristwatches specialist Eli Fayon. 'However, it wasn't long before the appetite for luxury goods collaborations started to take off again.'

Today, the mark of a storied retailer may significantly increase the value of a watch, adding desirable layers of recognition, provenance and rarity. 'Vintage examples still conjure up images of South American oil barons and North American tycoons,' says Fayon, 'while newer collaborations offer a chance to acquire a watch that is a little bit different from others in the same reference. As a result, the demand for double-signed dials continues to climb.'

Here are some of the most in-demand double-signed dials. Known as 'the jeweller of kings, and the king of jewellers', Cartier was founded by Louis-François Cartier in Paris in 1847. Between the 1930s and the 1950s, Cartier struck up a unique relationship with the Henri Stern Agency (aka Patek Philippe USA), which channelled the Swiss-made watches to American tycoons through the French jeweller's iconic Fifth Avenue boutique. A brilliant example of this collaboration is the Patek Philippe ref. 130 from 1930, above left, which was custom-made for the American entrepreneur and aviation pioneer William E. Boeing. It's one of just 10 examples of this early split-second chronograph model in existence, of which only two were double-signed by Cartier. It sold for CHF485,000 (US\$520,000) at Christie's Geneva in 2014.



COLLECTING GUIDE: JEAN DUNAND

Diary Times Desk :

Much like his talent, Jean Dunand's fame knows no bounds. Works by Dunand, who is widely considered one of the Art Deco era's preeminent artists and designers, graced the homes of top aesthetes during his day, and his vases, screens, and other designs remain popular fixtures in esteemed collections today. Given his extraordinary eye and hand, Dunand was also selected for numerous public commissions, including world's fairs.

'What makes Dunand so special is the refinement of his technique. His iconography is very much in line with the 1920s — it's geometric and graphic but with very modern and pure lines,' says Daphné Riou, Head of Christie's Design Department in New York, on what makes the Swiss-born French artists' creations so timeless. 'The shapes are so simple, yet so chic, so they go really well with contemporary art and give a sophisticated touch to any interior.'

Below, discover the many materials Dunand mastered throughout his career, the synergies between his work and Asian art, as well as the artistic movements of his time.

As the son of a goldsmith who was later trained as a sculptor, Dunand worked across categories while constantly elevating his skill set. From dresses and belt buckles to tables and armoires, the pieces he produced were all exquisitely crafted, but it was his vases and screens that were his most sought after then and now. On several occasions, Dunand was commissioned to design entire rooms full of his panels for both private residences and commercial spaces. In 1925-26, at the height of his career, for example, he created a music room for Mr. and Mrs. Solomon Guggenheim.

Early on, Dunand developed a fascination with metals, and prior to the First World War, he became the most brilliant dinandier, or worker in non-precious metals, of his era. The unique finish of his metal vessels resulted from extensive research into and experimentation with patination. Dinanderie was a technique of creating a structure by applying single sheets of metal and then delicately hammering other metals atop for further decoration. Dunand, and Claudius Linossier a decade later, were considered the masters of this technique.



BARCELONA LOANEE VISITS CIUTAT ESPORTIVA AS HE STARTS REHAB AFTER UNDERGOING SURGERY



Diary Times Desk : According to Mundo Deportivo, Barcelona starlet Hector Fort, currently on loan at Elche, visited the Ciutat Esportiva Joan Gamper this morning to see the club's medical staff and gradually begin his rehabilitation process.

The La Masia product underwent surgery last Monday, carried out by Barcelona's medical services, after suffering an anterior dislocation of his left shoulder. The injury occurred in the most recent league match, during the celebration after Fort scored a spectacular goal against Rayo Vallecano, his first in the league, which also opened the scoring in a 4-0 win. As the young right-back ran towards the stands, he was knocked off balance by Nobel Mendy and injured his shoulder when he fell. There is no timeline provided for his recovery at this point, but Fort visited the Barça training facilities today to meet with the medical staff who assessed him ahead of the beginning of his rehabilitation programme. The injury came at a very inopportune moment for Fort, as he was starting to establish himself as a starter at Elche under Eder Sarabia.

BARCELONA MIDFIELDER NOT TRAINING WITH GROUP, STILL EXPECTED TO BE AVAILABLE VS ESPANYOL

Diary Times Desk : FC Barcelona trained this morning for the final time in 2025 as they focus their attention on Saturday's match against RCD Espanyol away from home.

Having ended the first part of the season on a winning note, the Catalans will be eager to begin 2026 in the same vein of form. The fact that they face their local rivals in the first game of the year will only serve as added motivation. However, according to SPORT, Hansi Flick is still unable to count on Dani Olmo in the group sessions, who once again trained alone and only partially, away from the group. The Spanish attacking midfielder is still recovering from a dislocated shoulder he suffered early in the month, during the win against Atletico Madrid. While he has resumed working on the pitch, he has yet to start training with the rest of the group and did not do so today either. As things stand, the plan is for the former RB Leipzig midfielder to rejoin group training gradually with the aim of being included in the squad to face Espanyol on Saturday. If the context of the match requires it, Olmo could even be given minutes in the second half at the RCDE Stadium, helping him build some rhythm ahead of the Spanish Super Cup fixtures.

SPAIN MANAGER TALKS FLICK, LAMINE, BALDE, JOAN GARCIA, ERIC, MESSI: 'SHOULD NEVER RETIRE'

Diary Times Desk : In recent months, there has been some tension built up between FC Barcelona and the Spanish national team, with the club not being entirely happy with how manager Luis de la Fuente handled Lamine Yamal's physical issue during an international break.

Now, in a recent interview with AS, the Spain head coach opened up on the matter, discussing the differences with Hansi Flick as well as the importance of Lamine in the national team setup ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup. "I understand the role we each have, and that we're going to defend what's ours. I understand his position, just as he surely understands mine, because he was also the coach of his country, Germany," said Flick. Continuing, he added: "I'm focused on my responsibility, which is being the coach of Spain, and that means bringing in the best players to represent our country. This reflection alone justifies any of our decisions. "And I want to emphasise that we take care of the players' health, that it's a priority, and that we can prove it. Because when we've had the slightest doubt about Lamine, or anyone else, he hasn't played and has returned to his club. I have a clear conscience."

AL AHLY 'LIKELY TO APPROVE' BARCELONA'S IMPROVED OFFER FOR FORWARD AS NEW MEETING SCHEDULED

Diary Times Desk : FC Barcelona's efforts to rope in Egyptian teenager Hamza Abdelkarim from Al Ahly could be about to reap rewards.

The Catalans have been in talks with the African outfit to sign the 17-year-old striker with the plan of reinforcing the Barça Athletic roster, who are short on options in the No. 9 position.

The Blaugrana's initial offers, however, have been met with rejections from Al Ahly, who see the youngster as one of the most talented young players from the region. But, according to the latest update from Mundo Deportivo, Al Ahly's technical committee will meet in the coming hours, under the presidency of Mahmoud El Khatib, and that "it is very likely they will approve Barcelona's offer". As per the report, the Catalan club have improved certain clauses in their offer as they await a definitive response, increasing the percentage of a future sale from 10% to 15%. And, within the club, there is a belief that this could be the final proposal, with Al Ahly expected to green-light the proposal for a loan deal with a buy option.



BARCELONA REMAIN INTERESTED IN ATLETICO MADRID SUPERSTAR DESPITE COMPLICATIONS

Diary Times Desk : As we finally wrap up 2025, Barcelona are gearing up for an important and rather busy 2026, where the club will be expected to sign a new striker in the summer transfer window.

Robert Lewandowski's contract at Camp Nou expires at the end of the season. Although there's still a chance it could be renewed, Barcelona will inevitably have to find a replacement.

The club have been linked with multiple stars, but one option that stands out the most is Julian Alvarez, the player who has already proven himself in La Liga and could be an ideal long-term investment for the Blaugrana. A recent report from SPORT has offered an update on Barcelona's pursuit of Julian Alvarez.

The report suggests the Catalans are still interested in the services of the Argentine international, who has racked up as many as 40 goals in just 80 matches for Atleti. However, Alvarez is not a priority option for Barcelona right now, which does make sense given the complexities involved in the operation.

BARCELONA PROJECTING ANNUAL REVENUE OF €360 MILLION FROM THE SPOTIFY CAMP NOU

Diary Times Desk : FC Barcelona are looking to the future with the Spotify Camp Nou as the central pillar of their economic recovery.

This was made clear by Manel del Rio, the club's CEO, in an interview on TV3 in which he set out figures, timelines and context for what he described as the most strategic project for the club over the coming decades.

Del Rio explained that the club is waiting to obtain the IC licence that would allow the opening of the Gol Nord stand and the supporters' section. This is a key step towards reaching a capacity of 62,000 spectators and could become a reality for the match against Real Oviedo, the first home game of 2026, scheduled for 24 or 25 January, if the City Council gives its approval. Barcelona's forecast is that the complete redevelopment, including the roof, will be finished by the end of 2027. However, the economic impact is expected to begin earlier. According to the Barcelona CEO, as early as next season the stadium could reach a capacity of 105,000 seats, still without the roof, but with the third tier and VIP areas fully operational.