



## NEWS IN BRIEF

**DELHI GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES REMISSION FOR CERTAIN CATEGORY OF PRISONERS ON REPUBLIC DAY EVE**

**Diary Times Desk :** The Delhi Government on Sunday announced the remission of the sentence for certain categories of convicts on the occasion of Republic Day, which will benefit over 2,000 prisoners.

The Delhi Home Minister, Ashish Sood, said the remission would apply to convicts sentenced by courts in Delhi and those undergoing imprisonment as of January 26, subject to prescribed conditions, under provisions of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023. Sood said, "This remission of the sentence will benefit over 2,000 prisoners."

According to a statement, women prisoners above 65 years of age and sentenced to more than 10 years will receive 90 days of remission, while those serving for five years up to 10 years will get 60 days. Prisoners serving over one year up to five years will be granted 30 days, and those sentenced up to one year will receive 20 days of remission, it said.

**ONLY 2.66% INDIA'S TRADE WILL BE IMPACTED: GOVT ON EUROPEAN UNION'S NEW GSP RULES**

**Diary Times Desk :** The Commerce Ministry has said the suspension of export benefits by European Union (EU) under its Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) will impact only 2.66% of India's exports to the 27-nation bloc.

EU has suspended export benefits under its GSP to sectors like textiles and plastics for India and two other countries from January 1. Interestingly, this development has come at a time when the two sides are expected to announce the closure of negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA) on January 27.

Earlier, some media reports claimed that the suspension would impact 87% of India's export value to EU. However, the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) clarified it does not imply that 87% of country's exports will face higher duties. FIEO, in a statement, outlined that EU notification refers to broad product groupings, within which.

## PADMA AWARDS 2026



## DHARMENDRA, ACHUTHANANDAN, ROHIT SHARMA, SAVITA PUNIA AMONG 131 PADMA AWARDEES

**Diary Times Desk :** On Republic Day eve, the government announced 131 Padma awards for the year 2026, including five Padma Vibhushan, 13 Padma Bhushan and 113 Padma Shri which include two cases in which the award for two individuals is counted as one. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said.

Former Kerala Chief Minister and veteran communist leader V. S. Achuthanandan and actor Dharmendra have been awarded the second-highest civilian honour, Padma Vibhushan, posthumously for 2026, a government statement said Sunday.

Former Supreme Court judge KT Thomas for public affairs, Hindustani Classical musician and violinist N Rajam in Art, eminent Malayalam journalist P Narayanan in literature and education have been awarded Padma Vibhushan, it said. Playback singer Alka Yagnik, former Uttarakhand chief minister Bhagat Singh Koshyari, actor Mammootty and banker Uday Kotak are among those awarded Padma Bhushan, the Home Ministry said.

Ad guru Piyush Pandey, JMM founder Shibu Soren and BJP leader VK Malhotra have been awarded Padma Bhushan, while actor and comedian Satish Shah has been awarded Padma Shri, posthumously, it said. Ninety awardees are women and the list includes six persons from the category of foreigners, NRI, PIO and OCI, and 16 posthumous awardees, it said.

Tennis legend Vijay Amritraj has been awarded Padma Bhushan; cricketer Rohit Sharma, women's cricket captain Harmanpreet Kaur and hockey player Savita Punia have been awarded Padma Shri, the statement said. Former JNU VC M Jagadesh Kumar, former Prasar Bharti CEO Shashi Shekhar Vempati and actors R Madhavan and Prosenjit Chatterjee are also among those awarded Padma Shri, the ministry said.

## INDIA MESSENGER OF PEACE IN CONFLICT RIDDEN WORLD: PRESIDENT MURMU IN R-DAY ADDRESS

**Diary Times Desk :** Amidst geopolitical tensions escalating across multiple continents, President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday said India is spreading the message of peace in the world which is crucial to secure the future of humanity. In her address to the nation on the eve of 77th Republic Day, she spoke about various issues, including Operation Sindoar and women empowerment, and also touched upon the topics of Vande Mataram and growing economy of the country.

President Murmu outlined India's position as a "messenger" of peace while reinforcing ancient civilisational commitment to universal harmony. "In our tradition, we have been offering prayers for peace to prevail in the entire universe. The future of humanity can remain secure only if there is peace in the whole world. "In an atmosphere marked by conflicts in many parts of the world, India is spreading the message of peace," she said.

During her speech, the President also underscored a firm commitment to national security by highlighting the recent success of Operation Sindoar, a precision strike that dismantled terror infrastructure across the border. "Last year, our country launched precision strikes against terror infrastructure...terror centres were destroyed, and many terrorists met their end," she said, highlighting country's "self-reliance" in the field of defence that powered the historic success of Operation Sindoar.



## SHUBHANSU SHUKLA, FIRST INDIAN TO VISIT ISS, AWARDED ASHOKA CHAKRA



**Diary Times Desk :** Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, who created history by becoming the first Indian to visit the International Space Station (ISS), was on Sunday awarded the Ashoka Chakra, India's highest peacetime gallantry award. In June last year, Shukla became the second Indian to have gone to space and the first one to set foot on the ISS as part of the Axiom-4 mission.

Shukla's 18-day space odyssey came 41 years after cosmonaut Rakesh Sharma flew aboard a Russian Soyuz in 1984. As a fighter pilot, Shukla has an impressive record of 2,000 hours of flight experience across various aircraft, including the Su-30 MKI, MiG-21, MiG-29, Jaguar, Hawk, Dornier and An-32. On the eve of the Republic Day, President Droupadi Murmu approved gallantry awards to 70 armed forces personnel, including six who would receive the honour posthumously. These include one Ashoka Chakra, three Kirti Chakra, 13 Shaurya Chakra, including one posthumous, one Bar to Sena Medal (gallantry) and 44 Sena Medals (gallantry). The Kirti Chakra award winners are Major Arshdeep Singh, Naib Subedar Doleswar Subba and Group Captain Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair.

## REPUBLIC DAY PARADE TO SHOWCASE BRAHMOS, AKASH, SURYASTRA SYSTEMS, ARJUN TANKS



**Diary Times Desk :** BrahMos and Akash weapon systems, rocket launcher system 'Suryastra' with deep-strike capabilities, and Main Battle Tank Arjun will be among the key military platforms that India will showcase during the Republic Parade on the Kartavya Path on Monday.

The newly-raised Bhairav light commando battalion and Shaktibhan Regiment, Zanskar ponies and Bactrian camels will be part of the ceremonial event for the first time, officials said. Marking another first, the contingent members of the mounted 61 Cavalry will be seen in battle gear, while key Army assets, including indigenous platforms accompanied by personnel, will roll down the Kartavya Path in a "phased battle array formation".

The 61 Cavalry, known for its imposing presence with its members wearing ceremonial uniform and a striking headgear, has traditionally been the leading contingent of the armed forces in the ceremonial parade.

According to officials, India will display its development journey, cultural diversity and military might, including newly-raised units and mock-ups of major weapon systems deployed during Operation Sindoar, at the 77th Republic Day celebrations on Monday.

## ASSAM POLLS NEWS

### ASSAM GOVT GIVES ONE-TIME FINANCIAL AID TO 6 LAKH TEA GARDEN WORKERS AHEAD OF ASSEMBLY POLLS, EACH RECEIVES RS 5,000



**Diary Times Desk :** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday disbursed a one-time assistance of Rs 5,000 each among 6 lakh tea garden workers, while launching the 'Eti Koli Duti Paat' scheme.

The state government has assured the tea garden workers of providing ownership of land in labour lines of tea estates. It has reserved government jobs, MBBS seats and enhanced educational and healthcare facilities in a bid to reach out to the sizeable Tea Tribe community ahead of the assembly elections likely in March-April. "Whatever Assam does, it does at scale! Today, over 6 lakh tea garden workers received Rs 5,000 each as a mark of gratitude for their hard work, which has made tea synonymous with Assam," Sarma posted on X after launching the scheme at Dooomda in Tinsukia district, a hub of the tea industry. He said the scheme is also in sync with Assam Tea celebrating 200 years. "This community, for over 200 years, has toiled hard to give Assam Tea its distinct identity and can be truly termed as Assam's tryst with industries. The people of the state acknowledge their unparalleled contributions and our govt promises to keep working for their welfare," Sarma added.

## VETERAN JOURNALIST MARK TULLY PASSES AWAY AT 90



**Diary Times Desk :** Legendary broadcaster and veteran journalist Mark Tully, the voice of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the sub continent for years, is no more. He was 90. Tully, the British correspondent, who made Delhi his home, covered momentous events that marked India's politics and history until the mid-1990s. The former Bureau Chief of BBC, New Delhi, Tully held the position for 20 years. Born on October 24, 1935, Sir William Mark Tully, KBE, worked with the BBC for three decades before resigning in July 1994. The recipient of several awards, Tully has authored nine books. The UNESCO courier describes Tully as a 'living witness' of the time when radio was the main medium to reach the masses, telephone communications were unreliable, and radio recordings were made on magnetic tapes that had to be physically sent to the editorial offices. "For over a quarter of a century, one of the most recognised and trusted radio voices in India was that of Mark Tully," the despatch states.

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Among the Padma Bhushan awardees, advertising guru Piyush Pandey, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha founder Shibu Soren and BJP leader V K Malhotra have been honoured posthumously.

Playback singer Alka Yagnik, former Uttarakhand Chief Minister Bhagat Singh Koshyari, actor Mammootty and banker Uday Kotak have been conferred the Padma Bhushan. Tennis legend Vijay Amritraj has also been awarded the Padma Bhushan, while cricketer Rohit Sharma and Indian women's hockey team captain Savita Punia have been honoured with the Padma Shri.

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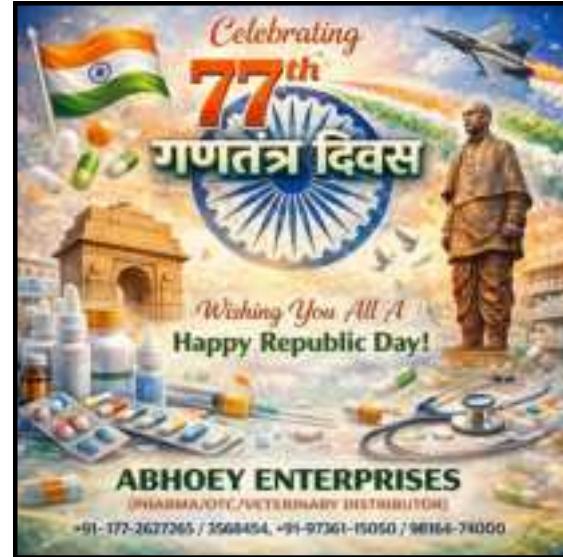
## PRESIDENT MURMU ASKS INDIANS TO 'EXERCISE RIGHT TO VOTE' RISING ABOVE ALLUREMENT, PREJUDICE, MISINFORMATION ON NATIONAL VOTERS' DAY



**Diary Times Desk :** President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday said she hoped that Indians would exercise their right to vote by employing wisdom and shunning allurement, prejudice and misinformation to strengthen the country's electoral system. She also lauded women voters for coming out in large numbers to exercise their franchise during elections. Addressing a 16th National Voters' Day event held here, Murmu asserted that while the right to vote is important, it is also imperative that all citizens exercise it by keeping in mind their constitutional duties. Addressing the gathering, the president said the strength of India's democracy lies not only in the sheer size of its voters but also in the depth of its democratic spirit. Murmu said public participation gives a practical shape to the spirit of democracy at the grassroots level.

## PROFESSOR'S MURDER AT MUMBAI STATION: HOW KILLER GOT NABBED BY POLICE IN 12 HOURS

**Diary Times Desk :** The Government Railway Police (GRP) have arrested a 27-year-old daily-wage labourer in connection with the fatal stabbing of a professor at a crowded railway station here within 12 hours of the crime, an official said on Sunday. According to the Borivali GRP, the accused, Omkar Eknath Shinde, was apprehended from the Kurar area of the western suburb for the murder that took place on Saturday evening. A minor argument between the victim, Alok Kumar Singh, a professor with NM College, and Shinde while they were alighting from a local train escalated into a brutal attack, the official said. Shinde, a labourer engaged in metal polishing work, stabbed Singh in the stomach on platform number 1, of Malad railway station. He fled the scene, leaving the victim in a pool of blood. Singh was immediately rushed to a hospital, where he was declared dead. The accused took advantage of the crowd and escaped from the spot.



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**Diary Times Desk :** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday disbursed a one-time assistance of Rs 5,000 each among 6 lakh tea garden workers, while launching the 'Eti Koli Duti Paat' scheme. The state government has assured the tea garden workers of providing ownership of land in labour lines of tea estates. It has reserved government jobs, MBBS seats and enhanced educational and healthcare facilities in a bid to reach out to the sizeable Tea Tribe community ahead of the assembly elections likely in March-April. "Whatever Assam does, it does at scale! Today, over 6 lakh tea garden workers received Rs 5,000 each as a mark of gratitude for their hard work, which has made tea synonymous with Assam," Sarma posted on X after launching the scheme at Doomdoma in Tinsukia district, a hub of the tea industry. He said the scheme is also in sync with Assam Tea celebrating 200 years. "This community, for over 200 years, has toiled hard to give Assam Tea its distinct identity and can be truly termed as Assam's tryst with industries. The people of the state acknowledge their unparalleled contributions and our govt promises to keep working for their welfare," Sarma added. The chief minister's office (CMO) said that over Rs 300 crore was disbursed as a one-time financial assistance to over 6 lakh tea garden workers.

## 5 KILLED IN FIRE AT FURNITURE SHOP BUILDING IN HYDERABAD, OFFICIALS FIND BASEMENT VIOLATIONS

**Diary Times Desk :** Five persons, including two children and an elderly woman, died of "asphyxiation" after a fire broke out in a four-storey building housing a furniture shop in Nampally here, officials said on Sunday. A massive fire broke out on Saturday in the building, after which rescue operations were launched to save five persons trapped in its basement, officials said. "We got information that five people were missing. We were able to retrieve all the five bodies, including those of two boys and an elderly woman from different places within the cellar of the building on Sunday," a senior police official told PTI. The other two men, in their 30s, among the five deceased were from Hyderabad, and were workers in the building. "They (two workers) rushed inside to save them (the children and the woman) but as flames became so huge that they were unable to come out and got stuck," officials said. The two children, aged seven and 11, were sons of a security guard of the building, whose family was residing in the basement.

## GAZIABAD: MAN ARRESTED FOR GARGLING IN GOLDEN TEMPLE SAROVAR AFTER VIDEO GOES VIRAL

**Diary Times Desk :** A 32-year-old man from Loni in Ghaziabad was arrested after a purported video surfaced on social media showing him gargling and washing his mouth and legs in the holy sarovar at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, police said on Sunday.

The accused, identified as Subhan, a resident of Nasbandi Colony under Ankur Vihar police station area, who was allegedly seen in the viral video, performing the profane act in the sacred pool, hurting religious sentiments of the Sikh community, they said.

According to police, Subhan had travelled to Amritsar on January 15 and visited the Golden Temple. After the video went viral, members of the Sikh community expressed strong resentment and lodged a complaint in Amritsar, accusing him of intentionally hurting religious sentiments.

Acting on information, Ankur Vihar police arrested the accused on Saturday on charges related to breach of peace, police said. Subhan was produced before a court and subsequently sent to jail, Additional Commissioner of Police (ACP) Gyan Prakash Rai said.

## POCSO TIMELINES MEANT TO PROTECT CHILD, NOT TO SECURE BAIL BY DELAY: PUNJAB AND HARYANA HC



**Diary Times Desk :** Holding that timelines under the POCSO Act are meant to safeguard child victims and cannot be invoked by accused to claim bail on the ground of delay, the Punjab and Haryana High Court has refused relief to an accused facing allegations of repeatedly sexually assaulting a 13-year-old girl. The assertion by Justice Neerja K. Kalson came in a case where the accused was "incarcerated for over a year". His counsel had contended, among other things, that the trial was proceeding at a slow pace. Only five out of the 23 witnesses had been examined. As such, "prolonged detention infringes upon the petitioner's right to liberty and the presumption of innocence". Rejecting the argument that delay in trial entitled the accused to bail, Justice Kalson made it clear that "the statutory mandate regarding completion of trial within a particular period" was provided under the POCSO.

## RASHTRIYA JANATA DAL APPOINTS TEJASHWI YADAV AS WORKING PRESIDENT

**Diary Times Desk :** RJD chief Lalu Prasad's younger son and heir apparent Tejashwi Yadav was on Sunday named the working president of the party at its national executive meeting here. Yadav's elevation comes after the RJD's drubbing in the recent assembly polls, which the 'Mahagathbandhan' had fought with the 36-year-old leader as its chief ministerial candidate. In a post on X, the Rashtriya Janata Dal said the decision, which makes clear the line of succession in the party, was taken at its national executive meeting, which was attended by Yadav, Prasad and other senior leaders. Yadav's eldest sister and Patliputra MP Misa Bharti, who was said to be eying that party post, was also present at the meeting. Tejashwi, a former deputy chief minister of Bihar, is currently the leader of the opposition in the Assembly. He had, on Saturday, appeared confident of his elevation in the party, as he had told workers at the RJD office that he was thinking of revamping the party structure from the booth.

## INDIA TO DISPLAY MILITARY MIGHT, GROWTH STORY AT REPUBLIC DAY PARADE

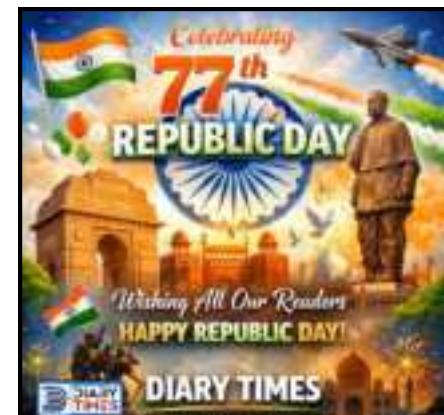
**Diary Times Desk :** India will display its development journey, cultural diversity and military might, including newly-raised units and mock-ups of major weapon systems deployed during Operation Sindoora, at the 77th Republic Day celebrations on Monday. The President of the European Council, Antonio Costa, and the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, will be the chief guests at the event in the national capital. The overarching theme of the event at the Kartavya Path will be 150 years of 'Vande Mataram'. President Droupadi Murmu will lead the ceremony that will commence at 1030 hours and will last for approximately 90 minutes. It will start with the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the National War Memorial, where he will lead the nation in paying solemn tributes to the fallen heroes by laying a wreath. Murmu and the chief guests are expected to arrive at the venue in a 'traditional buggy'.

## RED FORT BLAST: INTERPOL HELP SOUGHT TO NAB MUZAFFAR RATHER FOR PROVIDING LOGISTICAL HELP

**Diary Times Desk :** An Interpol Red Corner notice may soon be issued against Dr Muzaffar Rather, an accused in the white-collar terror module, after his name emerged as a co-conspirator who provided critical logistical support and funding from Afghan soil for the devastating November 10 blast near Delhi's Red Fort, officials said on Sunday. Rather, a paediatrician by profession and a resident of South Kashmir, has already been declared as a proclaimed offender by a special NIA court. The Interpol notice for Rather, who provided help in logistics, funding, communication and planning to Dr Umar-un-Nabi, the driver of the explosive-laden car that detonated outside the Red Fort killing over a dozen people, is in the process, they said. The officials alleged that Rather has emerged as a primary co-conspirator who allegedly orchestrated the attack from abroad after fleeing India. Investigators have traced a trail of logistics, encrypted communications and radicalisation efforts.

## MAMATA ACCUSES EC OF DESTROYING FOUNDATION OF INDIA'S DEMOCRACY ON 'BJP'S BEHALF'

**Diary Times Desk :** Terming the Election Commission's celebration of National Voters' Day as a "tragic farce", West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday accused the poll panel of bulldozing the Opposition and destroying the foundation of the country's democracy on "behalf of the BJP". Banerjee alleged that the commission was working as "His Master's Voice" and was busy "snatching away" people's voting rights. "On behalf of BJP, their Master, they are busy in bulldozing the opposition and destroying the foundation of Indian democracy, and yet they have the guts to celebrate Voters' Day!!" Banerjee wrote on X. The chief minister has been accusing the EC of holding the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal in undue haste. "Election Commission of India is celebrating National Voters' Day today, and what a tragic farce that is! The Commission — working as His Master's Voice — is busy now in snatching away.



# INTERNATIONAL

## FROM QUIET TO OUTRAGED SORROW, MINNEAPOLIS STREET SWELLS WITH EMOTIONS WHERE AGENTS KILLED MAN



**Diary Times Desk :** Saturday morning started frigid and quiet on Minneapolis' "Eat Street," a stretch of road south of downtown famous for its small coffee shops and restaurants ranging from New American to Vietnamese. Within five hours, seemingly everything had changed. A protester was dead. Videos were circulating showing multiple federal agents on top of the man and gunshots being fired. Federal and local officials again were angrily divided over who was to blame. And Eat Street was the scene of a series of clashes, federal officers and local and state police pulled back and protesters took over the area. It all started around 9 am when a federal immigration officer shot and killed a man there, about 1.5 mile (2.4 kilometres) from the scene of a January 7 fatal shooting of a local woman by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer that sparked outrage and daily protests. And in just over an hour, anger exploded again in the city already on edge. Even before the current immigration enforcement surge, networks of thousands of residents had organised to monitor and denounce it while national, state, and local leaders traded blame over the rising tensions. Two Associated Press journalists reached the scene minutes after Saturday's shooting. They saw dozens of protesters quickly converging and confronting the federal agents, many blowing the whistles activists use to alert to the presence of federal officers.

## PROTESTERS DEMAND IMMIGRATION AGENTS LEAVE MINNEAPOLIS AFTER MAN IS SHOT AND KILLED DURING CRACKDOWN



**Diary Times Desk :** Democrats demanded that federal immigration officers leave Minnesota after a US Border Patrol agent fatally shot a man in Minneapolis, drawing hundreds of protesters onto the frigid streets and increasing tensions in a city already shaken by another shooting death weeks earlier. Family members identified the man who was killed as Alex Pretti, a 37-year-old intensive care unit nurse who protested against President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown in his city. After the shooting, an angry crowd gathered and protesters clashed with federal officers, who wielded batons and deployed flash bangs. The Minnesota National Guard was assisting local police at the direction of Governor Tim Walz, officials said. Guard troops were sent to both the shooting site and a federal building where officers have squared off with demonstrators daily. Information about what led up to the shooting was limited, Police Chief Brian O'Hara said.

### US FEDERAL AGENTS KILL MAN IN MINNEAPOLIS AMID IMMIGRATION CRACKDOWN

**Diary Times Desk :** United States federal agents have fatally shot another individual in Minneapolis during an ongoing immigration enforcement drive, triggering widespread protests and renewed demands for President Donald Trump to withdraw heavily armed federal personnel from the city, Al Jazeera reported. On Saturday, Minneapolis Police chief Brian O'Hara confirmed that a 37-year-old man succumbed to multiple gunshot injuries after being taken to hospital. The victim was a resident of Minneapolis and a US citizen, according to O'Hara. "Our demand today is for those federal agencies that are operating in our city to do so with the same discipline, humanity and integrity that effective law enforcement in this country demands," he said, quoted by Al Jazeera. The shooting occurred amid a sustained deployment of US immigration enforcement and other federal agents to Minneapolis, where they have been carrying out.

## LAST 2 PANDAS IN JAPAN ARE LEAVING FOR CHINA AS TIES ARE STRAINED

**Diary Times Desk :** Japanese panda fans gathered on Sunday for the final public viewing at Tokyo's Ueno zoo before twins Xiao Xiao and Lei Lei return to China this week. Their departure on Tuesday will leave Japan with no pandas for the first time in half a century, and the chances of getting a replacement are poor, with Tokyo's relations with Beijing at their lowest point in years. China first sent pandas to Japan in 1972, a gift meant to mark the normalisation of diplomatic ties between the two wary neighbours. The cuddly black-and-white bears immediately won Japanese hearts, and a dozen successors have become national celebrities. The latest departing panda twins have attracted massive crowds despite a one-minute viewing limit per visitor in the panda zone set by the zoo. Visitors, many of them carrying panda-themed toys, call out the bears' names and use smartphones to capture them as they nibble bamboo and stroll around. Many of those who couldn't get panda viewing tickets still came to the zoo anyway to mark the last day. Longtime panda fan Michiko Seki, in a panda-patterned black-and-white shirt, said she was happy to see and photograph the twins looking healthy and eating well. She was using the same camera she had bought when she started taking photos of their elder sister Xian Xian, who left Japan two years ago.



## MASSIVE WINTER STORM: US AIRLINES, AIRPORTS BRACE FOR BRUTAL TRAVEL DAY

**Diary Times Desk :** A massive winter storm set the stage for a brutal travel day Sunday, with airlines warning of widespread cancellations and delays at some of the nation's busiest airports. Widespread snow, sleet and freezing rain threatened nearly 180 million people - more than half the US population - in a path stretching from the southern Rocky Mountains to New England, the National Weather Service said Saturday night. After sweeping through the South, forecasters said the storm was expected to move into the Northeast, dumping about 1 to 2 feet (30 to 60 centimetres) of snow from Washington through New York and Boston. More than 13,500 flights have been cancelled across the US since Saturday, according to flight-tracking site FlightAware. About 9,600 of those were scheduled for Sunday. Aviation analytics company Cirium says its data shows that Sunday will be the highest cancellation event since the pandemic, with over 29 per cent of all US departing flights axed. Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport warned travellers on its website of widespread flight cancellations. Nearly all of its departing flights scheduled for the day - 414 flights, or 97 per cent - have been cancelled.

## UK PLANS TO CREATE 'BRITISH FBI' TO BRING NATIONAL INVESTIGATIONS UNDER SINGLE POLICE FORCE

**Diary Times Desk :** The British government said on Sunday that it will unveil plans this week to create a new national police force, dubbed the "British FBI," to take charge of complex investigations such as counterterrorism, fraud, online child abuse and criminal gangs. The National Police Service will bring under the same umbrella the work of existing agencies dealing with terrorism and crime, police helicopters and policing of the roads, and regional organised crime units in England and Wales. Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood said the new body will lift the burden on the 43 local police forces in England and Wales, helping them focus solely on day-to-day crimes within their jurisdictions. "Some local forces lack the skills or resources they need to fight complex modern crime such as fraud, online child abuse or organised criminal gangs," she said. Mahmood said the current model was "built for a different century" and that the new body will attract "world-class talent" as well as help to keep a lid on costs by moving procurement to one national force. She said the full proposals will be unveiled to Parliament on Monday. Other changes expected include slashing.

## INDONESIAN RESCUERS SEARCH FOR ABOUT 80 MISSING AFTER LANDSLIDE KILLS 11

**Diary Times Desk :** Indonesian rescuers struggled on Sunday with mounds of mud, debris and water-soaked ground, searching for dozens still missing after a landslide triggered by torrential rains the day before on the country's main island of Java killed at least 11 people. The predawn landslide roared down the slopes of Mount Burangrang in West Java province on Saturday, burying some 34 houses in Pasir Langu village. On Sunday, 79 people remained missing, many feared buried under tons of mud, rocks and uprooted trees. About 230 residents living near the site have been evacuated to temporary government shelters. Rescue workers retrieved two more bodies on Sunday morning, bringing the death toll to 11, according to Ade Dian Permana from the search and rescue office. Videos released on Saturday by the country's search and rescue agency, known as Basarnas, showed rescuers using farm tools and their bare hands to pull a mud-caked body from the ground and placing it in an orange bag to take it away for burial. Heavy equipment and excavators were mostly idle because the ground was too soft and unstable. "If the slope does not stabilise, crews are prepared to continue manually," Permana said, estimating the height of the mounds of mud to be up to 5 metres (16 feet). "Some homes are buried up to the roof level," he added. Visiting the area on Sunday, Indonesian Vice President Gibran Rakabuming Raka pledged that authorities would take measures to prevent similar disasters. He urged the local authorities in West Java and West Bandung to "address the issue of land conversion in disaster-prone areas," including ways to reduce risks.



## KARACHI SHOPPING PLAZA FIRE TOLL RISES TO 72

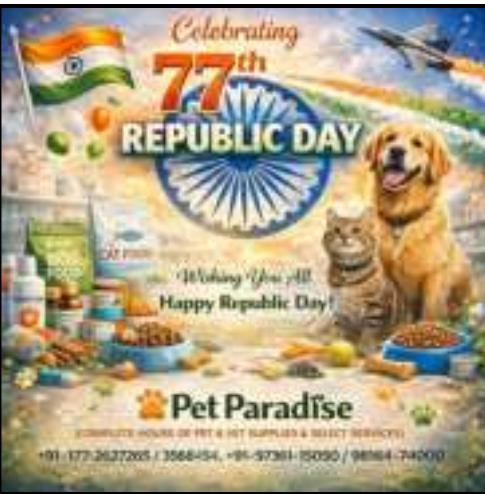
**Diary Times Desk :** The death toll in the fire at a shopping plaza in Pakistan's Karachi climbed to 72 with a dozen people still reported missing a week after the tragic incident, officials said Sunday. The fire broke out in the basement of the Gul Shopping Plaza, a wholesale and retail market, and quickly spread to the rest of the building in the Saddar area on January 17 night. It was brought under control only after 36 hours. A case has been registered over the massive fire incident at the complex that housed nearly 1,200 wholesale and retail shops spread over an area of 8,000 square feet was left dilapidated. Deputy Commissioner South Javed Nabi Khoso told the media on Sunday that 72 bodies or human remains have been recovered from the rubbles and debris of the shopping plaza. "The rescue and search operations which have continued for a week now would likely be wound up by tomorrow as the rubbles and debris are also being cleaned up from the building site," Khoso said. He said that they still had a list of some 12 people feared missing in the fire. Dr Summaiya Syed, the police surgeon in Sindh province, said that they had received 72 bodies and human remains since last Sunday.

## SUNITA WILLIAMS REVEALS TWO 'STRANGEST' THINGS SHE SAW IN SPACE

**Diary Times Desk :** After 27 years of soaring above Earth, Sunita Williams has hung up her flight suit. In a recent podcast with RajShamani, the India-origin space veteran—who logged 608 days on orbit, nine spacewalks and 62 hours of extravehicular activity—revealed the two 'strangest' sights that she came across—orbit crowded with communication satellites and glow of Transient Luminous Events (TLEs) flickering above thunderclouds. "There's a lot of stuff up there, and it's great for global connectivity, but you can't help feeling the planet's orbital neighbourhood is getting a bit... crowded." "We have some really great cameras now," she explained, "and not me, but Don Pettit and Matt Dominic managed to snap blue jets and red sprites—energy shooting out of thunderstorms like lightning's ghostly cousins." These blue jets and red sprites are types of TLEs, fleeting flashes that occur miles above powerful thunderstorms and are hard to see from the ground. Nicole Ayers, another ISS crew member, captured similar images as the station flew over Mexico and the United States, and the resulting photos have been shared widely online. "Those pictures are out there—Don Pettit's shots are incredible. I had the luxury of being up there with some amazing photographers who could catch that energy in a single frame." In the podcast, she also affirms "absolutely" there's life out there.

## MYANMAR HOLDS ITS LAST ELECTION ROUND WITH ARMY ALREADY CERTAIN TO KEEP CONTROL OVER GOVERNMENT

**Diary Times Desk :** Voting began on Sunday in Myanmar in the final round of a three-stage general election, capping a nearly month-long process that has already ensured the country's military rulers and their allies will command a parliamentary majority to form a new government. Critics say the polls are neither free nor fair and are designed to legitimise the military's grip on power after it ousted the elected civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021. The army-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) has already won most of the seats contested in the first two rounds of voting. Twenty-five per cent of the seats in the upper and lower houses of the national parliament are reserved for the military, guaranteeing it and its allies control of the legislature. Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, who heads the current military government.



## 13,000 FLIGHTS CANCELLED AS MAJOR WINTER STORM MOVES ACROSS US

**Diary Times Desk :** Thousands of flights across the US set to take off over the weekend were cancelled as a monster storm started to wreak havoc on Saturday across much of the country, knocking out power and snarling major roadways with dangerous ice. Roughly 140 million people, or more than 40 per cent of the US population, were under a winter storm warning from New Mexico to New England. The National Weather Service forecast widespread heavy snow, sleet and freezing rain from Saturday to Monday, stretching from the southern Rocky Mountains to New England. It warned people to brace for a string of frigid days. "The snow and the ice will be very, very slow to melt and won't be going away anytime soon, and that's going to hinder any recovery efforts," said Allison Santorelli, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service. President Donald Trump had approved emergency declarations for at least a dozen states by Saturday with more expected to come. The Federal Emergency Management Agency pre-positioned commodities, staff and search and rescue teams in numerous states, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said. "We just ask that everyone be smart and stay home if possible," Noem said. As crews in some southern states began working to restore downed power lines on Saturday, officials in some eastern states issued final warnings to residents.



## INDIA PIVOTS CRUDE SOURCING FOR CERTAINTY, KEEPS RUSSIAN BARRELS SELECTIVELY

**Diary Times Desk :** India's crude oil sourcing strategy has shown a clear shift toward lower-risk and more execution-reliable supply, with the Middle Eastern barrels gaining share as Russian crude flows remain present but increasingly selective and compliance-driven. Import of Russian crude oil dropped to around 1.1 million barrels per day in the first three weeks of January, from an average of 1.21 million bpd in the previous month and over 2 million bpd imports in mid-2025, according to data from real-time analytics company Kpler. India, which is almost 90 per cent dependent on imports to meet its needs for crude oil — the raw material which is turned into fuels such as petrol and diesel in refineries, is again leaning on its traditional suppliers in the Middle-East. Iraq is now supplying almost the same volumes as Russia, up from an average of 9,04,000 bpd in December 2025, according to Kpler data. Volumes from Saudi Arabia too have risen to 9,24,000 bpd this month, from 7,10,000 bpd in December and lows of 5,39,000 bpd in April 2025. Russia displaced Iraq as India's top crude supplier in 2022 after Indian refiners moved quickly to buy heavily discounted Russian oil that was left stranded when Europe.



## UNESCO PROVIDES EMERGENCY SUPPORT TO SAFEGUARD VIETNAM HERITAGE

**Diary Times Desk :** The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has announced an emergency assistance package worth approximately USD 740,000 to support efforts to protect cultural heritage and sustain education in areas of Vietnam heavily affected by a series of severe storms in November 2025. "Typhoons Wipha, Bualoi and Matmo left a devastating trail: hundreds of people killed or injured, hundreds of thousands of homes damaged, and nearly 10,000 schools affected nationwide. In response, UNESCO is deploying targeted assistance to help national and local partners stabilise cultural heritage assets and restore learning continuity for children and youth," UNESCO said in its statement. In the field of culture, UNESCO, in cooperation with Vietnam's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and local authorities, is conducting technical assessments and implementing emergency protection measures at World Heritage Sites in Hue and Hoi An.

## SHARP DECLINE IN ASYLUM APPLICATIONS TO AUSTRIA IN 2025

**Diary Times Desk :** The number of asylum applications submitted in Austria fell by 36 per cent year-on-year in 2025, reaching 16,284 applications. Afghan nationals topped the list of asylum applicants, followed by Syrians. According to the latest official data, the Austrian authorities approved asylum or subsidiary protection for 11,384 cases, in addition to granting 1,315 humanitarian residence permits. Austria's Federal Minister for the Interior, Gerhard Karner, revealed that deportations and returns of offenders recorded a new record last year, totalling 14,156 cases. Karner said Austria will in the future focus on establishing "return centres" to receive and process asylum applications and procedures outside the European Union. He explained that a working group comprising Austria, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and Greece will work to achieve this goal, describing the implementation of the new European Migration Pact.

## "OVER 500 TAMIL SCHOOLS IN MALAYSIA": PM MODI PRAISES INDIAN COMMUNITY'S "COMMENDABLE WORK" DURING 'MANN KI BAAT'



**Diary Times Desk :** Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during the 130th episode of the 'Mann ki Baat' program on Sunday, praised the Indian community in Malaysia for their efforts in preserving Indian languages and culture. He highlighted the presence of over 500 Tamil schools in Malaysia, where Tamil is taught alongside other Indian languages such as Telugu and Punjabi. He said, "Our Indian community in Malaysia is doing commendable work... There are more than 500 Tamil schools in Malaysia. In these schools, along with the teaching of the Tamil language, other subjects are also taught in Tamil. In addition, there is a lot of focus here on other Indian languages, including Telugu and Punjabi." PM Modi also appreciated the vibrant performances of Odissi dance and Baul music in Malaysia, reflecting the strong cultural bond between India and Malaysia. He said the Malaysia India Heritage Society organised the "Lal Paad Saree" iconic walk last month. The Prime Minister said, 'This saree has a special connection to the culture of Bengal. There is a considerable goodwill for India in Malaysia at people-to-people level, which hosts approximately 2.75 million PIOs, which is the second largest PIO community in the world after the US and the third largest Indian diaspora in the world (2.9 million). The official spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, Randhir Jaiswal, also commended the work of the 'Malaysia India Heritage Society' in deepening historical and cultural ties between India and Malaysia. In a post on X, he said, "Nurturing age-old cultural ties between India and Malaysia. In the first episode of 2026 #MannKiBaat today, PM @narendramodi applauded the commendable work done."

## TOP GENERAL ZHANG YOUNG THREATENED CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY'S LEADERSHIP OVER MILITARY

**Diary Times Desk :** PLA Daily, the mouthpiece of the Chinese military, has accused top military official Zhang Youxia and senior General Liu Zhenli of threatening the Communist Party's absolute leadership over the armed forces as one of the reasons why they were placed under investigation. They have severely fuelled political and corruption problems that threaten the Communist Party's absolute leadership over the armed forces and undermine the party's governance foundation, an editorial in People's Daily said on Sunday. The two senior Chinese military officials were placed under investigation for serious violations of the ruling Communist Party's discipline and laws, the Defence Ministry here said on Saturday. The charge of threatening the party's absolute leadership is regarded as "very serious" as the Chinese military functioned under the command of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which exercises absolute control of the armed forces. Ever since he took over the leadership in 2012, President Xi Jinping, 72, who also heads the party, the military besides the presidency has been emphasising that it is imperative for the military to function under the party leadership.

## JAISHANKAR DISCUSSES TIES, INDO-PACIFIC, UKRAINE WITH US CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION

**Diary Times Desk :** External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Sunday met with a US congressional delegation and held wide-ranging discussions on several aspects of bilateral ties, the Indo-Pacific, and the conflict in Ukraine. He highlighted the interactions as an important aspect of the relationship between New Delhi and Washington. In a post on X, Jaishankar shared that he interacted with US Reps Mike Rogers of Alabama, Adam Smith of Washington state, and Jimmy Patronis of Florida, as well as the US Ambassador to India, Sergio Gor. In a post on X, Ambassador Gor called the meeting "productive" and how it would give boost to India-US ties for stronger security, expanded trade and cooperation on critical technologies. He wrote on X, "Just wrapped a productive meeting with EAM @DrSJaishankar, @RepMikeRogersAL, @RepAdamSmith, and @JimmyPatronis on ways to strengthen U.S.-India partnership for stronger security, expanded trade, and cooperation."

## US MILITARY COMMANDER VISITS ISRAEL TO 'STRENGTHEN' DEFENCE COOPERATION



**Diary Times Desk :** The Commander of the United States Military's Central Command (CENTCOM), Admiral Brad Cooper, visited Israel yesterday as the official guest of the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Eyal Zamir. During the visit, the CENTCOM Commander and the Chief of Staff held a lengthy personal meeting. This was followed by a meeting with senior officials. "The meeting is a further expression of the personal bond between the commanders, the close strategic relationship between the IDF and the United States Military, and the continued strengthening of defence cooperation between the two countries," said the IDF. US CENTCOM "directs and enables military operations and activities with allies and partners to increase regional security and stability in support of enduring U.S. interests." The region of the world it covers includes the Middle East and Israel.

## TAIWAN RECORDS 4 PLA AIRCRAFT SORTIES, 7 PLAN VESSELS AROUND ITS TERRITORY

**Diary Times Desk :** Taiwan recorded the presence of seven PLAN vessels and four sorties by PLA aircraft around its territory on Monday, as reported by Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence (MND). As per the MND, two out of four sorties crossed the median line and entered Taiwan's northern and southwestern ADIZ. Sharing the details in a post on X, MND said, "4 sorties of PLA aircraft and 7 PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6 a.m. (UTC+8) today. 2 out of 4 sorties crossed the median line and entered Taiwan's northern and southwestern ADIZ. #ROCArmedForces have monitored the situation and responded." On Sunday, MND shared that "2 sorties of PLA aircraft and 7 PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6 a.m. (UTC+8) today. 1 PRC balloon was detected during this timeframe. #ROCArmedForces have monitored the situation and responded." Meanwhile, a former US defence official from the Joe Biden administration has expressed support for Japanese.

## EARTHQUAKE OF MAGNITUDE 4.6 STRIKES TAJIKISTAN

**Diary Times Desk :** An earthquake of magnitude 4.6 struck Tajikistan on Monday, a statement by the National Center for Seismology (NCS) said. As per the statement, the earthquake struck at a shallow depth of 23km, making it susceptible to aftershocks. In a post on X, the NCS said, "EQ of M: 4.6, On: 21/07/2025 04:43:29 IST, Lat: 37.39 N, Long: 72.58 E, Depth: 23 Km, Location: Tajikistan." 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. Earlier, an earthquake of magnitude 4.0 jolted Tajikistan on Sunday, a statement by the National Center for Seismology (NCS) said. As per the statement, the earthquake occurred at 160km. In a post on X, the NCS said, "EQ of M: 4.0, On: 20/07/2025 01:01:55 IST, Lat: 36.87 N, Long: 72.10 E.

## REASONS CITED FOR US DECISION TO WITHDRAW ARE UNTRUE, SAYS WHO CHIEF

**Diary Times Desk :** After the United States' withdrawal from the World Health Organisation (WHO), Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said they hoped the US would return to active participation in the WHO in the future. In a post on X, the WHO Chief hailed the contributions of the United States, a founding member of the WHO, which played a significant role in many of the WHO's greatest achievements, including the eradication of smallpox. He said on X, "WHO has always engaged with the US, and all Member States, with full respect for their sovereignty. Unfortunately, the reasons cited for the US decision to withdraw from WHO are untrue. The notification of withdrawal makes both the US and the world less safe. We hope the US will return to active participation in WHO in the future" "Meanwhile, WHO remains steadfastly committed to working with all countries in pursuit of its core mission and constitutional mandate: the highest attainable standard of health as a fundamental right for all people." He also shared the WHO statement on the notification of withdrawal of the United States. The statement highlighted America's contributions to many of the WHO's greatest achievements, including the eradication of smallpox and progress against other public health threats, such as polio, HIV, Ebola, influenza, tuberculosis, malaria, neglected tropical diseases, antimicrobial resistance, food safety, and more. "In its statements, the United States cited as one of the reasons for its decision, 'WHO failures during the COVID-19 pandemic', including 'obstructing the timely and accurate sharing of critical information' and that WHO 'concealed those failures'.



## ISRAELI MILITARY RECAPS MAJOR ANTI-TERROR ACHIEVEMENTS IN GAZA IN PAST WEEK

**Diary Times Desk :** The IDF (Israel Defence Forces) recapped the recent activities of its 7th Armored Brigade in the southern Gaza Strip including the destruction of an underground terror tunnel approximately four kilometers long and the detection of rocket launchers and provided videos of its actions. Last week, after the exchange of fire in which six terrorists were eliminated, the forces searched the area and located equipment and weapons, including: explosives, cartridges and an instruction manual for preparing explosives. In additional activities, the forces located five inactive rocket launchers and several weapons. Also, the activity to destroy an underground route, which began about a year ago, in cooperation with (Diamond) Combat Engineers Special Forces, was completed, with a length of about four kilometers, in which several sleeping rooms and weapons were found. "IDF forces in the Southern Command are deployed in the area in accordance with the outline of the ceasefire agreement and will continue to act to remove any immediate threat," said the IDF.

## DALAI LAMA EXTENDS WISHES ON 2ND GLOBAL BUDDHIST SUMMIT 2026

**Diary Times Desk :** The Dalai Lama extended warm greetings to all participants of the 2nd Global Buddhist Summit 2026, which will see participation of delegates from across the world. On the occasion of the Summit, the Dalai Lama said in a statement, "As you are aware, I have long been committed to fostering closer relationships with our Buddhist spiritual brothers and sisters, particularly in Asia, and I am grateful for the many opportunities I have had over the years to meet with them. Earlier this month, I was pleased to meet monks and spiritual brothers from six Asian countries participating in the Pali and Sanskrit International Bhikkhu Exchange Program. Such regular exchanges are truly heartening, and I offer my deep appreciation to both the participants and the organisers for their efforts." He highlighted how there is a growing interest among many people in Buddhist principles, and within Asians themselves, as it forms an important part of their cultural inheritance. Scientists, too, are increasingly interested in Buddhist philosophy, particularly its insights into the nature of the mind and emotions, he said in the statement.



## WINGS INDIA 2026 TO SPOTLIGHT INDIA'S RISE AS WORLD'S FASTEST-GROWING CIVIL AVIATION MARKET

**Diary Times Desk :** Hyderabad is set to become the centre of global aviation as Wings India 2026, a key civil aviation event, takes place from 28-31 January 2026 at Begumpet Airport. Organised by the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the four-day mega event will showcase India's rapid ascent as one of the world's fastest-growing civil aviation markets. The event will be formally launched by the Union Minister of Civil Aviation, Rammohan Naidu Kinjarapu, in the presence of senior dignitaries from India and abroad. The launch will mark the beginning of a landmark global aviation gathering highlighting India's transformation into a major hub for connectivity, manufacturing, services, innovation and sustainability. Anchored around the theme "Indian Aviation: Paving the Future - From Design to Deployment, Manufacturing to Maintenance, Inclusivity to Innovation and Safety to Sustainability," Wings India 2026 will underline the role of aviation as a key driver of economic growth, regional development and global integration. Over the last decade, India's civil aviation sector has witnessed unprecedented expansion. Passenger traffic has grown multi-fold, placing India among the world's top aviation markets.

## PROCUREMENT OF 3.37 LAKH METRIC TONNES OF TUR APPROVED IN MAHARASHTRA FOR RS 2,696 CRORE

**Diary Times Desk :** Union Minister for Agriculture Shrivraj Singh Chouhan on Sunday approved the procurement of 3.37 lakh metric tonnes of Tur (Arhar) in Maharashtra, with an MSP amount of approximately Rs 2696 crore, under the Price Support Scheme (PSS). At a meeting, Union Agriculture Minister discussed procurement arrangements with State Marketing Minister Jaykumar Rawal. He provided necessary guidance to NAFED, NCCF, and relevant state officials. As per a statement from the Agriculture Ministry, Chouhan said that due to this decision of purchasing tur, the Central Government will have to bear a "huge financial burden", but despite this, the government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is fully committed to the welfare.

## MCAP OF TOP 9 MOST VALUED-FIRMS PLUNGES RS 2.51 LAKH CRORE; RELIANCE BIGGEST LAGGARD

**Diary Times Desk :** The combined market valuation of nine of the top-10 most valued firms slumped by Rs 2.51 lakh crore last week, with Reliance Industries taking the biggest hit, in line with a weak trend in equities. Last week, the BSE benchmark Sensex tacked 2,032.65 points or 2.43 per cent. "Markets witnessed a sharp sell-off during the week, with bears firmly in control. Weak global cues, persistent FII outflows, a depreciating rupee, and subdued corporate earnings kept pressure elevated throughout the week," Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. The combined market valuation of nine of the top-10 most valued firms, including Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Bharti Airtel, plunged by Rs 2,51,711.6 crore. The market valuation of Reliance Industries tumbled Rs 96,960.17 crore to Rs 18,75,533.04 crore. ICICI Bank's valuation eroded by Rs 48,644.99 crore to Rs 9,60,825.29 crore. The valuation of HDFC Bank tacked Rs 22,923.02 crore to Rs 14,09,611.89 crore and that of Bharti Airtel diminished by Rs 17,533.97 crore to Rs 11,32,010.46 crore.



## DELHI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY SETS STAGE FOR CITY'S FIRST-EVER GREEN EXPO IN FEB

**Diary Times Desk :** Guided by Lieutenant Governor's successful experiments of rejuvenating the Yamuna floodplains by creating public green spaces like Asita, Baansera, Vasudev Ghat and Yamuna Vatika, which have not only rejuvenated the floodplains but also brought the people of Delhi closer to the River, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is set to host the first-ever DDA Green Expo 2026 on February 14th and 15th at Baansera Park in the national capital. Focused on sustainability, urban greening and nature-based solutions, the Expo will serve as a flagship national platform for envisioning the future of Indian cities, while underscoring DDA's continued commitment to embedding environmental sustainability and a climate-first approach into urban planning and city development. Envisioned as a benchmark-setting national platform aligned with global best practices, the Expo will bring together international thought leaders, policymakers and urban practitioners to shape future-ready, climate-resilient cities in India. The first-of-its-kind, two-day Expo will feature exhibitions, live demonstrations and expert-led sessions showcasing innovations and best practices in sustainable urban ecosystems and green infrastructure, with a strong focus on scalable and replicable models for cities facing climate, water and environmental challenges.



## INDIA'S COMMERCIAL VEHICLE SECTOR ENTERING NEXT UPCYCLE: NOMURA

**Diary Times Desk :** India's commercial vehicle industry is entering the early stages of a cyclical recovery, driven by improving fundamentals and supportive structural factors, according to a recent research report by Nomura. The global brokerage firm said the commercial vehicle sector appears poised for an upcycle after several years of muted growth, with volumes expected to pick up over the next two to three years. The India Medium and Heavy Commercial Vehicles (M&HCV) industry appears to be entering the next upcycle, and Nomura estimates volumes to grow 8-10 per cent year-on-year in 2025-26-2026-27 after a period of modest growth. Rising freight rates, lower GST-led affordability, a high average age of trucks are likely to drive replacement demand in the next years - 2026-27-2027-28. Nomura highlighted a visible improvement in fleet operator economics as a key driver of the recovery. "Our analysis shows a clear improvement in fleet operator economics driven by lower GST cuts and better freight rates, leading to higher profitability. We have been positive on the sector given the strong potential of a CV upcycle and improving demand visibility," the Nomura report read.



# BUSINESS | FINANCE

## INDIA'S FOREIGN RESERVES RISE OVER \$14 BILLION TO \$701 BILLION AS OF JANUARY 16

**Diary Times Desk :** India's foreign exchange reserves rose sharply, by USD 14.167 billion in the week that ended January 16, to USD 701.360 billion, driven by a jump in both gold reserves and foreign currency assets, the Reserve Bank of India's latest 'Weekly Statistical Supplement' data showed. This followed a marginal rise in the previous week. Over the past few weeks, the forex kitty has been largely in an uptrend. The country's foreign exchange (forex) kitty has been hovering near its all-time high of USD 704.89 billion, set in September 2024. For the reported week (that ended January 16), India's foreign currency assets (FCA), the largest component of foreign exchange reserves, stood at USD 560.518 billion, up USD 9.652 billion. The RBI data showed that gold reserves currently stand at USD 117.454 billion, up USD 4.623 billion from the previous week. The price of the safe-haven asset gold has been on a sharp uptrend over recent months, perhaps amid heightened global uncertainties and robust investment demand.

## DOMESTIC STRENGTH ANCHORS INDIA GROWTH OUTLOOK AMID GLOBAL UNCERTAINTIES: PRABHUDAS LILLADHER REPORT

**Diary Times Desk :** India enters the year 2026 with a relatively strong macroeconomic footing, even as global markets remain shaped by policy uncertainty, geopolitical risks, and uneven growth across regions, according to a report by Prabhudas Lilladher. After a year of consolidation in 2025, the outlook for India is best described as stable, selective, and earnings-driven, with domestic demand acting as the primary anchor for growth. Economic growth is expected to remain among the highest globally. India's GDP is projected to expand by around 6.5-7.0 per cent in the current financial year 2025-26, supported by resilient consumption, services exports, and sustained public capital expenditure. Inflation has moderated meaningfully and is expected to stay within the Reserve Bank of India's comfort band (2-6 per cent), allowing monetary policy to remain growth-supportive, it said. Crucially, India's earnings growth outlook remains intact, supported by improving balance sheets.

## GLOBAL ECONOMY FACES UNCERTAINTY IN 2026; 53% WEF CHIEF ECONOMISTS SEE WEAKNESS

**Diary Times Desk :** The global economy is expected to face a challenging year in 2026, according to the World Economic Forum's latest Chief Economists' Outlook released this month. While confidence has improved slightly compared to last year, more than half of leading economists still believe global economic conditions will weaken in the coming months. The survey showed that 53 per cent of chief economists expect the world economy to slow down, while only 19 per cent see stronger growth ahead. "With 53 per cent of chief economists expecting global economic conditions to weaken, 28 per cent expecting no change and 19 per cent expecting a stronger economy, the prospects for the global economy tilt towards the negative in the year ahead, albeit with improved sentiment compared to last year's outlook," the survey report read. Rising risks from high debt levels, inflated asset prices, and ongoing geopolitical tensions continue to weigh on the outlook. Trade disputes and shifting alliances are also reshaping global investment and supply chains.



## BUDGET LIKELY TO SEE CONTINUITY IN GOVERNMENT'S CAPEX PUSH: HSBC REPORT



**Diary Times Desk :** The upcoming Union Budget is expected to maintain continuity in the government's capital expenditure (capex) push, even as policymakers operate within a constrained fiscal and policy environment, according to a budget preview report by HSBC Mutual Fund. A capex expenditure worth Rs 11.21 lakh crore (or 3.1 per cent of GDP) was earmarked in 2025-26, rising year-on-year. The report noted that while the government has limited room for large policy shifts or major announcements, expenditure priorities are likely to remain focused on sustaining growth through public investment. "On the expenditure front, we may continue to expect continuity in the Centre's commitment to CapEx," the report said, underscoring infrastructure spending as a key pillar of economic strategy despite ongoing fiscal consolidation efforts. HSBC Mutual Fund is of the view that the Budget is unlikely to introduce major changes to tax policy, given the limited policy levers available. "Unlikely to see major policy changes or big-bang policy measures at this Budget given the limited policy levers," it said. Transfers to states and the use of long-dated, interest-free loans from the Centre to the States are also expected to remain in focus. From a spending perspective, the report identified defence, agriculture and rural development as sectors that could see targeted allocations, alongside increased attention to technology and artificial intelligence. The report also pointed to the possibility of continued support for manufacturing and exports. "Fiscal discipline and policy continuity following last year's Budget may in itself be growth supportive. Having said that, given the persistently high tariffs, we think the government might come up with steps to support tariff-hit export sectors - either by way of subsidies, incentives or targeted support, possibly, in its recently established Export Promotion Mission," it said. Policy continuity amid gradual fiscal consolidation is likely to define the budget's approach, with capex remaining central to the government's growth strategy in the year ahead, the report asserted.

## YELLOW ALERT ISSUED FOR ALL HIMACHAL DISTRICTS

TILL JAN 28

**Diary Times Desk :** Heavy snowfall accompanied by rainfall is very likely to continue across the state till January 28, with the State Meteorological Department issuing a yellow weather warning for all 12 districts for January 27. According to the department, snowfall will persist in the higher reaches on January 25, while the rest of the state is expected to experience largely dry weather. However, from January 26 to January 28, the state is likely to receive widespread snowfall and rainfall, with a few spells of heavy snow and rain predicted on January 27. Weather conditions are expected to clear across the state from January 29 onwards. Meanwhile, a cold wave continued to grip several parts of the state, although weather remained mostly dry during the past 24 hours. Minimum temperatures were normal at many places, while they were 2°C to 3°C below normal in a few areas, ranging between minus 7°C and 9°C. Maximum temperatures rose by 5°C to 12°C and ranged between minus 3°C and 18°C.

## QUALITY EDUCATION, SPORTS VITAL FOR STUDENTS' GROWTH: MINISTER

**Diary Times Desk :** Education Minister Rohit Thakur on Friday underlined that quality education, along with encouragement for sports, was essential for the holistic development of students. He presided over a meeting of the Education Department and issued clear directions for strengthening sports hostels, expediting the recruitment process and accelerating key academic reforms. The minister said that sports hostels played an important role in nurturing talent and sought a brief report on the issues being faced by them, particularly the Majra Sports Hostel. He directed the officials concerned that these hostels be provided with better infrastructure, boarding and lodging facilities, nutritious diet, medical support and transport arrangements.

Proposals regarding the merger and consolidation of schools and colleges, including the merger of boys' and girls' institutions, were discussed in detail at the meeting. He also instructed the department to ensure timely transport facilities for students affected due to mergers or rationalisation.

## SNOWSTORM BRINGS MANALI TO A STANDSTILL, HUNDREDS STRANDED

**Diary Times Desk :** Manali witnessed widespread disruption after an intense spell of snowfall brought traffic to a grinding halt on Friday, leaving hundreds of tourists stranded for hours along the Patlikul-Manali stretch. In several areas, snowfall exceeded two feet, turning roads into icy traps and making vehicular movement nearly impossible, particularly on steep gradients. Officials said the worst congestion was reported at multiple choke points, including the police station area, Volvo stand, Rangri, Tibetan School, Aloo Ground and 17 Mile. Vehicles skidded uncontrollably on snow-laden roads, leading to minor collisions and damage. Tourist vehicles piled up across narrow stretches, compounding the chaos. Ironically, despite peak winter conditions, hotels in Manali recorded relatively low occupancy of around 55-60 per cent, as a large number of visitors remained stuck on approach roads and could not reach the town. The district administration remained on high alert throughout the night. Relief teams were deployed continuously to assist stranded tourists, distributing food and drinking water at vulnerable points. Manali SDM Raman Kumar Sharma supervised relief and traffic management efforts on the ground, appealing to tourists to stay calm and cooperate with authorities.



## SOLAN MAYER 'MISSING' FROM PARIVAR REGISTER

**Diary Times Desk :** The credibility of Solan Municipal Corporation's first-ever Parivar Register (PR) has come under scrutiny after the startling revelation that the name of the city's Mayor, Usha Sharma, does not figure in the finalised register. The omission has raised serious questions about the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the family enrolment exercise, which was intended to provide an authentic demographic profile of the city. Prepared through designated common services centres, the Parivar Register was approved last year, nearly 18 months after the exercise began in January 2024. As per official records, the PR enrolled 16,829 families comprising 51,829 individuals, officially placing Solan's population above the 50,000 mark. This reflects an increase of just 4,411 people over the 2011 Census figure of 47,418. However, the modest rise has been widely disputed. Residents and local observers argue that Solan has witnessed rapid and sustained growth over the past decade, with estimates suggesting an annual population increase of 10-12 per cent. Many families have alleged that they were excluded from the enumeration, casting doubt on the reliability of the data. Confirming her exclusion, Mayor Usha Sharma said she was among the first to enrol herself and her family through the designated agency.

## ROGI KALYAN SAMITI APPROVES BUDGET FOR 2026-27

**Diary Times Desk :** A meeting of the governing body of the Rogi Kalyan Samiti (RKS) of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Zonal Hospital, Mandi, was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Apoorv Devgan yesterday, during which the proposed budget for the financial year 2026-27 was formally approved. The meeting focused on strengthening patient care services, improving facilities in special wards, and taking concrete steps to enhance the income of the Rogi Kalyan Samiti. Emphasis was laid on ensuring better, accessible, and patient-friendly healthcare services at the hospital.

Addressing the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner instructed hospital authorities to widely publicise the hospital's ambulance service, which is available to patients at a nominal rate of Rs 12 per km. A decision was also taken to repair special ward rooms and classify them according to the facilities available, ensuring improved comfort and organised services for patients. The approved budget dedicated Rs 35 lakh for staff salaries, Rs 40 lakh for laboratory reagents, X-ray and ultrasound equipment, Rs 2 lakh for repair of motorised beds, Rs 15 lakh for medicines and Rs 5 lakh for purchase of an audiometry machine.

## YOUR HOROSCOPE

26-01-2026

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

## AAP GOES ALL OUT TO WOO VOTERS AHEAD OF 2027 PUNJAB ASSEMBLY POLLS

**Diary Times Desk :** In the run-up to the 2027 Punjab Assembly elections early next year, the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government is going all out to woo different categories of voters. Being in power, the party has all government resources to chase all sections of voters – farmers, women, different castes, and professions. After their on-off love with farmers, the AAP is now ready to offer them doles in the shape of subsidies and new schemes that will promote crop diversification, and in turn, give a fillip to the sagging agrarian economy. The local industry – large, medium, and small scale – will soon get incentives as the government prepares to unveil its industrial policy in February. But the biggest voter outreach, undoubtedly, will be the universal health insurance launched by the government for three crore Punjabis on Thursday, and the monthly honorarium of Rs 1,000 to be given to women in the next financial year, which begins from April 1. It is speculated that the women will get a lump sum amount together for either five or ten months (Rs 5,000 or Rs 10,000), just before the model code of conduct for Vidhan Sabha polls comes into place.

### WILL DISCUSS HOLY CITY STATUS FOR NANDED WITH MAHARASHTRA GOVT: BHAGWANT MANN

**Diary Times Desk :** Paying obeisance at the Takht Sachkhand Sri Hazur Sahib in Nanded, Maharashtra, Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Saturday sought Holy City status for Nanded Sahib. Mann said the state government would formally discuss the idea with the Maharashtra government, underscoring that the sacred town holds immense spiritual significance for Sikhs and humanity at large. Noting that Amritsar Sahib, Anandpur Sahib and Talwandi Sabo have been declared holy cities, he asserted that his government remains fully committed to the Guru Sahib. The CM also paid obeisance at the holy shrine of Kalgi Dhar Patshah, met the shrine management and witnessed a strong turnout of devotees and local residents. Addressing the gathering, he said, "Nanded Sahib is a sacred place not only for Sikhs but for entire humanity, as Guru Gobind Singh spent a considerable part of his life on this holy land." Mann asserted that the holy city status.

## MOHALI POLICE ARREST TAXI DRIVER AS KEY FINANCIAL LINK IN INTER-STATE NARCO-TERROR NETWORK

**Diary Times Desk :** The State Special Operation Cell (SSOC), Mohali, has arrested Sathnam Singh, 22, a taxi driver from Punnewal village in Sangrur district, for allegedly acting as a financial conduit in an inter-state and cross-border narco-terror network, officials said on Saturday. Investigators said Sathnam facilitated the routing of drug proceeds and terror financing on the instructions of a Pakistan-based drug smuggler, identified as Ali. The arrest is linked to an NDPS Act case registered on December 10, 2025, by SSOC Mohali, in which Rajbir Singh, a key narco-terror operative, was arrested near the Indo-Nepal border in Raxaul, Motihari (Bihar) while trying to flee to Nepal. The operation led to the recovery of 500 grams of heroin and a hand grenade. Further investigation revealed that Rajbir supplied heroin to Chirag, a courier arrested earlier and from whom 107 grams of heroin, a 9 mm pistol and live cartridges were seized. Rajbir was also found to be involved in the grenade attack at the Women Police Station in Sirsa, Haryana, in November 2025, apart from narcotics trafficking, terror financing and espionage.



## SAINI, MANN TO MEET ON SYL ISSUE ON JAN 27

**Diary Times Desk :** The Chief Ministers of Punjab and Haryana will meet in Chandigarh on January 27, with the next date of hearing on the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal matter slated for April. Sources said the decision to hold a "bilateral" meeting has been taken in the light of a letter written by the Union Minister of Jal Shakti to both the Chief Ministers in November. The letter stated that the two states should hold a bilateral meeting to arrive at an amicable solution, indicating that this meeting would not be chaired by the Union minister. It added that the outcome of the discussions should be provided to the ministry to place before the Supreme Court on the next date of hearing. This was followed by another letter from the Secretary, Department of Water Resources, Government of India, on December 26, seeking the outcome of the meeting to place it in the court. While the media secretary to Haryana CM, Parveen Attrey, confirmed that a meeting had been scheduled for January 27, sources in the Irrigation Department said the state government had a one-point agenda—that Punjab complete the construction of the canal on its side in view of the Supreme Court's directions. According to information, Haryana took the initiative for the meeting. "Haryana took the initiative and wrote to the Punjab CM.

## WORLD BANK OKAYS RS 5,700-CR LOAN TO STRENGTHEN WATER SECTOR

**Diary Times Desk :** The World Bank has approved technical and loan of Rs 5,700 crore under the Jal Sanrakshit Haryana Project, with the objective of making the state self-reliant in the water sector. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini said the amount would be disbursed over six years, from 2026 to 2032, and the funds would be utilised for large-scale works in the canal sector. Of a total of 1,570 canals in the state, 892 canals had been restored over the past 20 years, and the restoration of the remaining canals was to be completed in the next five years. This includes restoration of 115 canals at a cost of Rs 2,325 crore with World Bank assistance; 284 canals at a cost of Rs 2,230 crore from the state budget; and 279 canals at a cost of Rs 2,880 crore through NABARD. He said of 15,562 canal minors under MICADA, 4,487 had been restored over the past 20 years, and the remaining 1,961 were proposed to be restored over the next five years. This includes 400 canal minors at a cost of Rs 450 crore with World Bank assistance. The Agriculture Department will develop tubewell-based drainage and surface drainage systems to resolve the problem of waterlogging, covering about 2,00,000 acres of land.

## COLD CONDITIONS PERSIST IN PARTS OF HARYANA AND PUNJAB, TEMPERATURE DROPS TILL 2.6 DEGREES



**Diary Times Desk :** Cold weather conditions prevailed in many places in Haryana and Punjab on Sunday, with Narnaul and Ferozepur the coldest places in the two states with a minimum of 2.6 degrees Celsius and 3.4 degrees Celsius respectively. According to the weather office, among other places in the state, Faridkot, Bathinda and Gurdaspur also experienced a cold night recording respective minimums of 4.5 degrees, 4 degrees and 4.5 degrees Celsius. Amritsar also braved the chill, recording a low of 4.7 degrees while Ludhiana, Patiala and Mansa recorded respective minimum temperatures of 7.4 degrees, 6.2 degrees and 5.8 degrees Celsius. Chandigarh, the common capital of the two states, recorded a low of 6.2 degrees Celsius. In Haryana, biting cold prevailed in Gurugram, Bhiwani, Sirsa and Faridabad, which recorded respective minimums of 3.3 degrees, 3.5 degrees, 3.2 degrees and 5.3 degrees Celsius. Ambala recorded a low of 6.8 degrees while Rohtak's minimum settled at 5.4 degrees Celsius.

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.



**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.

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.

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 spy-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?



**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 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.

"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 its children.

INFA

## A Blue Schoolbag In A Mass Grave

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



**Tamil**, 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.

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.

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.



# ARTS & INFOTAINMENT

## TWO CENTURIES OF BERLIN'S MUSEUM ISLAND: 'SOMEWHERE YOUR IMAGINATION CAN ROAM FREE'

**Diary Times Desk :** In June 1840, Friedrich Wilhelm IV acceded to the Prussian throne, following the death of his father. The new king was full of ideas, one of which — according to an Order of Cabinet he swiftly issued — was to create a 'sanctuary of the arts and sciences' at the heart of his capital, Berlin.

This was to take the form of a small district where the royal art holdings could be publicly presented — on an island nestled between two arms of the River Spree (in what is now the borough of Mitte). The king's long-term aim was to see Berlin become 'Athens on the Spree'.

The island already housed the Royal Museum (today called the Altes Museum), which the king's father, Friedrich Wilhelm III, had opened a decade earlier, putting on public view standout examples of classical statuary and painting from recent centuries.

A total of five museums would eventually be built in a 21-acre cluster. This area of land has come to be known as Museumsinsel (Museum Island). A few years ago, it was given its own station on Berlin's U-Bahn network — testament to its status as one of the city's most popular attractions. It welcomes more than 2.5 million visitors each year.

There's a certain complexity as to what is on show where. However, broadly speaking, the island comprises: the Altes Museum (art of classical antiquity); the Neues Museum (Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age objects, plus a panoply of items from ancient Egypt); the Alte Nationalgalerie (European painting and sculpture from the 19th and early 20th centuries); the Bode Museum (European sculpture from earlier periods, plus Byzantine art and a huge coins collection); and the Pergamon Museum (Islamic art and reconstructions of architectural ensembles of yore). 'More than a physical location, Museumsinsel has become a global brand,' says Marion Ackermann, president of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (SPK), which manages Museum Island. 'Each venue is unique, yet what's really special is the unit they form together.'

A huge amount of knowledge and history is concentrated in one place. It's also somewhere your imagination can roam free! The influence of Museum Island is marked. Clusters of different museums have subsequently been built in many other locations, including London in the second half of the 19th century (where institutions such as the V&A and the Science Museum emerged in the South Kensington area) and Abu Dhabi today (where the Zayed National Museum has just opened, and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi will soon follow, in Saadiyat Cultural District). 'The celebrations will be extensive, but that's because there's a lot to celebrate,' Ackermann says.



## COLLECTING GUIDE: THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

**Diary Times Desk :** When collecting ancient objects, it is often the history that speaks to us. Whether it is from one, two, three thousand years ago, it carries with it a long-forgotten tale. The societies that made up the ancient Near East, beginning with the Sumerians in southern Mesopotamia, which dates back to more than 5,000 years ago, produced the first written language — a system of writing consisting of wedge-shaped characters we call cuneiform (coming from the Latin word cuneus for wedge).

From massive stone wall panels to more intimate gold images of deities, there is much more than meets the eye when looking this deep into the past. Near Eastern art refers to works created in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and the Levant, as well as the South Arabian peninsula, Iran and Afghanistan, from the 6th millennium BC until the Arab conquest in the 7th century AD. In present-day terms, this is the area bounded by the Mediterranean sea to the West, Turkey to the North, Afghanistan in the East and Yemen in the South.

Perhaps the most typical type of objects that one sees on today's art market are stamp and cylinder seals. These had figural scenes engraved onto their surfaces that were designed to be viewed in relief once the seal was pressed or rolled into clay. Stamp seals appeared first, with the earliest examples dating to the 6th millennium BC, while cylinder seals emerged a bit later, during the second half of the 4th millennium BC, around when cuneiform writing was developed.

The usage of cylinder seals was a direct response to the needs of a growing bureaucracy that was increasingly involved with long-distance trade. Many of them are of the highest artistic quality, illustrating mythological subjects and often accompanied by cuneiform inscriptions identifying the owner. They can be carved from colourful stones such as jasper, chalcedony, agate, hematite and limestone, while less common examples are made from shell, bronze and frit.

Another class of object encountered on today's market are cuneiform tablets, typically in clay but copper, stone and even gold examples are known. Most clay tablets are humble documents that focus on an aspect of the detailed administrative functions of daily life, such as the number of livestock brought to temples, allotments of agricultural fields, and crop harvests. More elaborate tablets, cylinders or barrels can record political and diplomatic letters sent by rulers to their counterparts, mythological stories such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, or the exploits and lineages of a king.



## BARCELONA MIDFIELDER PRODIGY REJECTS MOVE TO GALATASARAY – REPORT



**Diary Times Desk :** The future of Marc Casado has become a hot topic at Barcelona lately, especially after the midfielder started to fall behind even Eric Garcia in the pecking order. Earlier this week, the youngster was linked with a move to Galatasaray, who were keen on acquiring the services of the Barcelona midfielder. Casado was also linked with a move to Atletico Madrid, but it appears Barcelona are not interested in offloading the player in January. Now, a recent report from Ekrem Konur suggests Casado himself has turned down a move to Galatasaray. It appears the youngster is not interested in the prospect of moving to Turkey and starting a new chapter in his career. Instead, Casado wants to remain at Barcelona and fight for his place in the starting eleven. This is despite the fact that the Spaniard is no longer Hansi Flick's first-choice option in midfield.

## BARCELONA SET TO COMPLETE THE CAPTURE OF 18-YEAR-OLD STRIKER NEXT WEEK – ROMANO

**Diary Times Desk :** Barcelona have been quite active in the market this January, but apart from Joao Cancelo, the club have been mostly busy with deals involving the youth teams.

Indeed, recent reports suggest Barcelona are close to acquiring the services of Egyptian talent Hamza Abdelkarim, while Uruguayan fullback Patricio Pacifico may also join soon.

Barcelona are now working on a deal to sign yet another youth player in the form of Yusuf Rassul Ndjai.

This is according to Fabrizio Romano, who suggests that Barcelona will formally complete the process to sign the young striker next week.

The player will serve as a reinforcement for the Barça Juvenil side managed by Pol Planas, as Barcelona continue to beef up their ranks in the youth department. A striker by trade, Ndjai currently plays for Terrassa FC's youth academy. He has made waves in the youth leagues with his performances and was reportedly involved in 31 goals last season.

## REAL OVIEDO MIDFIELDER CONFIDENT FATIGUE WON'T AFFECT BARCELONA: 'THEY ARE USED TO PLAYING EVERY THREE DAYS'

**Diary Times Desk :** Barcelona take on Real Oviedo on Sunday evening in what will be a top-of-the-table vs bottom-of-the-table clash in La Liga.

The Catalans, surprisingly, enter the game having lost their last fixture in the competition. With Real Madrid taking all three points against Villarreal, the game becomes a must-win.

On the night, however, Hansi Flick's side will be without Pedri who suffered an injury against Slavia Prague and will thus be out for a month. Real Oviedo player Haissem Hassan spoke to Cadena SER ahead of the clash against Barcelona and began by responding to whether Barcelona's fatigue from the UEFA Champions League will play a part on the night.

"If they play a bad game it will be because it was not their day or because we have complicated things, but not because of the physique. Barça players are used to playing every three days." The player was then asked if Pedri's absence weakened the Catalans' midfield and whether his team saw that to be a boost. To that, Hassan responded saying.

## SPANISH FORWARD NOT RULED OUT OF BARCELONA'S MUST-WIN CLASH AGAINST FC COPENHAGEN – REPORT

**Diary Times Desk :** The UEFA Champions League's league stage is set for a grandstand finish next week with as many as 13 teams competing for a place in the top-8. Barcelona, sitting in ninth place, are serious contenders to finish in the top-8 and thereby skip an additional playoff round to directly qualify for the knockout stages.

In order to achieve that objective, however, they must win against Copenhagen next Wednesday at the Spotify Camp Nou, and do so with a massive goal difference to secure their place in the top-8. Hansi Flick's side will enter the complicated fixture next week without both Pedri and Frenkie de Jong, for the former is injured and the latter suspended. In such a situation, the team can do with every bit of help they can get.

SPORT, on that front, reports that Ferran Torres is not ruled out for the UCL game next week despite missing the team's games against Slavia Prague and Real Oviedo.

## MANCHESTER CITY ACE READY TO JOIN BARCELONA ON A FREE TRANSFER NEXT SUMMER

**Diary Times Desk :** Barcelona may have had a busy January so far, trying to churn out the youth academy. But the club are bracing themselves for a busier summer ahead.

The Catalans are expected to shore up multiple positions, with the focus primarily on signing a new defender and a striker.

However, the coming summer could present Barcelona with the opportunity to sign one of their long-time midfield targets in Bernardo Silva. According to Diario SPORT, Bernardo Silva has informed Barcelona that he is keen on joining the club at the end of the season.

The Manchester City star's contract at Etihad expires in the summer, making him a potential free agent at the end of the season.

Although Bernardo has offers from Saudi Arabia, he has told his agent Jorge Mendes he wants to continue at the highest level of football, and Barcelona, to that end, have emerged as an attractive destination.

## BARCELONA SHUT THE DOOR ON THE EXIT OF TALENTED LA MASIA DUO AMID MASS EXODUS

**Diary Times Desk :** Barcelona have had a busy January transfer window so far, but unlike most teams, the club have mostly had to work with deals involving the youth team. The January transfer window was already headlined by Pedro Fernandez's decision to leave the club, with PSG ready to snap him up. This was coupled with Mamadou Mbacke Fall's departure, while Como are reportedly finalising a deal to sign Andres Cuenca.

Alvaro Cortes is another player linked with a potential exit, in addition to the talented La Masia duo, Dani Rodriguez and Guille Fernandez. According to Mundo Deportivo, Barcelona have effectively closed the door on both Guille and Dani, leaving this winter. Despite the massive restructuring currently underway at Barça Atletico, which includes letting go of players like Mbacke and Cuenca who are deemed to have no first-team future, the club draw the line at these two talents. The reasoning is purely sporting. Barça Atletico's primary objective this season is promotion to the Primera RFEF, and the administration believes.

