

Gujarat govt forms panel for Uniform Civil Code draft

Gandhinagar: The BJP government in Gujarat announced the formation of a committee, headed by a retired Supreme Court judge, to frame guidelines for implementing the Uniform Civil Code (UCC).

The five-member committee, to be headed by former Supreme Court judge Ranjana Desai, will submit its report within 45 days, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel said on Tuesday.

"To assess the need for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and to prepare a draft bill for the same, we have decided to form a committee under the former judge of the Supreme Court," he said. Other members of the panel include retired IAS



officer CL Meena, advocate RC Kodekar, educationist Daxesh Thakar and social worker Gita Shroff.

Gujarat Home Minister Harsh Sanghavi said that all aspects will be considered in preparing the report. "The Chief Minister has directed this committee to do detailed research on it in the next 45 days and present a report to the government," he said. The state government will take a decision about the implementation of the UCC after receiving the report, he added.

SC seeks reply from Centre on NEET-PG plea

■ **Blocking seats caused meritorious candidates to lose their seats: The Plea**

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought replies from the Centre, National Medical Commission (NMC), and others on a plea filed by a batch of students seeking fresh counselling of all India quota (AIQ) round 3 of NEET-PG 2024.

A two-judge bench of Justices B R Gavai and K Vinod Chandran issued notices to UOI, NMC, and others, sought their respective replies, and posted the matter for further hearing on February 7. The petitioners, eligible for NEET-PG 2024 counselling, said round 3 of AIQ counselling for NEET-PG started before the second round could conclude in certain states. The plea



said that when round 2 counselling opened, they had the option to choose between the best options and leave the AIQ seat if they were getting a better seat in the next round of counselling.

"This created a grave prejudice to the petitioners and similarly placed candidates since they

were deprived of the seats which were blocked by the candidates from the states whose round 2 did not commence earlier," the plea said.

The petitioners alleged that the respondents' act was inconsistent with the schedule of NEET-PG counselling laid down by the apex court.

Tejashwi seeks Governor's intervention in Bihar law, order



Patna: Leader of opposition in Bihar assembly Tejashwi Prasad Yadav on Wednesday met Governor Arif Mohammad Khan at Raj Bhavan and handed over a memorandum seeking his intervention in the state's deteriorating law and order situation.

The meeting has created ripples in political circles as the budget session of the Bihar legislature is expected to begin on February 28. During a brief meeting with Governor, Tejashwi expressed his deep concern over frequent incidents of murder, loot, indiscriminate firing and rape.

"There is anarchy in the state. Criminals are operating under the tutelage of ruling dispensation, which is a matter of grave concern. People belonging to minority communities are being targeted on one pretext or the other. The chief minister is little concerned about such happenings," he alleged. Tejashwi shared information about his meeting with the Governor on social media 'X' explaining that the memorandum contained the problems of the people across the state during the present dispensation.

Government raises tax exemption to ₹12 lakh, easing middle class burden

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday gave the middle class and the common man enough reasons to smile when she announced her personal income tax proposals.

Not only did she increase the income threshold up to which no taxes would be levied from Rs 7 lakh to Rs 12 lakh, she also changed the income tax slabs that will lead to a substantial reduction in tax burden for all taxpayers under the new tax regime. With these changes, and the standard deduction of Rs 75,000, an individual earning Rs 12.75 lakh a year will have to pay no taxes under the new tax regime.

However, if one's taxable income crosses that threshold, all the income would be taxed as per the new slabs, which are both magnanimous and generous.

The new tax slab increases the basic exemption limit from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 4 lakh, which means the first Rs 4 lakh would attract no taxes. Income from Rs 4-8 lakh would attract a rate of 5%, Rs 8-12 lakh would attract 10%.

From Rs 12,00,001 to Rs



16 lakh, there will be 15% tax and from Rs 16,00,001 to Rs 20 lakh, the tax rate would be 20%. The government has introduced a new tax slab of 25%, which would be applicable on income from Rs 20,00,001 to Rs 24 lakh. The highest tax slab of 30% kicks in only if the income crosses Rs 24 lakh per annum.

A taxpayer in the new regime with Rs 12 lakh income will save Rs 80,000 in tax (which is 100% of tax payable as per existing rates). A person earning Rs 18 lakh will get a tax benefit of Rs 70,000 (30% of tax payable as per existing rates), while a person with an income of Rs 25 lakh gets a benefit of Rs 1,10,000 (25% tax payable as per existing rates). Meanwhile, the FM also announced that the new direct tax bill will be

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- » **No tax** up to ₹12 lakh (New Regime)
- » **₹12.75 lakh** tax-free for salaried
- » **₹1 lakh crore** in direct tax revenue foregone
- Seven tariff rates removed
- Social Welfare Surcharge on 82 tariff lines exempted
- 50,000 Atal labs to be set up in schools in 5 years
- Rs 10,000 cr fund of funds proposed for start-ups

introduced in the Budget session of Parliament. "The new income-tax bill will carry forward the same spirit of 'Nyaya'," said the FM, adding that the new bill will be clear and direct in text with close to half of the present law, in terms of both chapters and words.

Congress to decide on joining Omar Abdullah govt in J&K

■ **Party ties joining cabinet to J&K statehood restoration**

Srinagar: With uncertainty looming large on Congress's alliance with ruling National Conference in Jammu Kashmir, the party high command would take a call on the party joining the Omar Abdullah-led government. At present, J&K has six cabinet ministers including Chief Minister Omar Abdullah.

Since J&K's Legislative Assembly strength is 90, there can only be nine ministers in the elected government in the Union Territory. Three cabinet berths are lying vacant in the Omar government and there are expectations that before the Budget session, the CM may go for expansion of the cabinet and fill



all three vacant posts. At present J&K does not have a Finance Minister and CM Omar is himself looking after the ministry.

It remains to be seen whether the CM leaves one or two cabinet berths for its pre-poll ally, Congress. The Congress, which had contested the Assembly polls in alliance with Congress and won five seats, decided against joining the Omar government when the CM and five cabinet ministers took oath on October 16.

'We are three-member body, not run by one person': EC hits back at AAP

New Delhi: Amid allegations levelled by the Aam Aadmi Party that the Election Commission is being run by CEC Rajiv Kumar, the poll panel on Tuesday hit back saying it is a three-member body which has collectively noted "repeated deliberate pressure tactics" to malign the poll authority in Delhi polls. It



said an impression is being created that the EC is a single member body. In a post on X, the EC said it has decided to have constitutional restraint, absorbing such

outbursts with sagacity, stoically and not to be swayed by such insinuations.

Top AAP leaders, including its convenor Arvind Kejriwal, have claimed that the EC has been ignoring the BJP's alleged violations of poll code. Kejriwal claims Kumar avoids action against BJP for post-retirement assignment

VPP accuses Congress leader of exploiting religion for political gain

Shillong: The Voice of the People Party (VPP) has hit back at Meghalaya Congress leader Ronnie V Lyngdoh, accusing him of repeatedly bringing religion into politics. VPP spokesperson Batskhem Myrboh claimed that Lyngdoh is "playing the religious card" in his own constituency, Myllem.

Myrboh's remarks came in response to Lyngdoh's accusations that the VPP was using religion in politics. The VPP spokesperson denied these alle-



gations, suggesting that Lyngdoh's own actions were motivated by a desire to exploit religious sentiments for political gain.

In a separate allegation, Lyngdoh had claimed that VPP's Myllem candidate, Aibandaplin Lyngdoh Nonglait, had misled voters by falsely claiming to

have completed her education in Theology during the 2023 Assembly election. Myrboh dismissed this claim, pointing out that Nonglait had not mentioned the qualification in her affidavit, but this did not necessarily mean she was lying. The VPP has challenged Lyngdoh to conduct his own investigation into the matter, saying, "Let Ronnie conduct his private investigation and complete whatever process he deems necessary."

Centre passes buck on illegal rat-hole mining to Assam govt

New Delhi: The Union Minister of State for Environment and Forest, Kirti Vardhan Singh, admitted in Lok Sabha that rat-hole mining is illegal and falls under the purview of the state government. The Minister's response came on Monday to questions raised by Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi and other members regarding the government's efforts to combat this illegal practice.

Minister Singh acknowledged that rat-hole mining, a dangerous and environmentally destructive practice, is illegal and falls under the purview of the state administration. He detailed actions taken following an incident near the Dehing Patkai National Park (then wildlife sanctuary) in Assam's Tinsukia district, including a suo motu case by the National Green Tribunal (NGT). The tribunal's judgment directed the Tinsukia Deputy Commissioner to secure the mines and prevent further rat-hole mining.

He mentioned that the North Eastern Coal Field Limited (NECL) has been tasked with guarding the area, and the Assam government has implemented measures like drone surveillance, restrictions under Section 144 CrPC, eviction operations, and joint patrolling. He outlined efforts to rehabilitate areas with safe drinking water, river treatment, afforestation, and alternative livelihood projects.

Manipur Governor launches anti-addiction campaign

Imphal: Launching the 'Addiction Free Manipur Campaign,' Governor of Manipur, Ajay Kumar Bhalla has called upon the people particularly the youth, to come together to combat the menace of drugs and contribute towards achieving a developed India (Viksit Bharat) by 2047.

At a glittering function held at the Raj Bhavan in Imphal on Monday, the campaign is being organized by Brahma Kumaris in collaboration

with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India under Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan (NMBA) – a flagship program of the Ministry.

The campaign aims to tackle the problem of substance abuse across the state through awareness generation, mass mobilization, and community outreach targeting vulnerable groups and the general masses. Officially, there are around 1.5 lakh drug addicts in Manipur.

Separate electoral roll for non-tribals in GHADC deemed "legally untenable"

Shilllong: A recent demand by the Sarvadaliya Sammelan, a minority body, for a separate electoral roll for non-tribals in the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC), Meghalaya has been met with strong opposition.

Social activist Cherian Momin termed the demand as a blatant attempt to subvert the constitutional safeguards provided under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution towards the Scheduled Tribes.

Momin stated that the GHADC is a constitutionally mandated autonomous institution, established to ensure self-governance and self-determination for the indigenous Garo people. He added that any effort to restructure its electoral framework in favour of



non-tribals would be an assault on the constitutional sovereignty of Scheduled Tribes. The exclusion of non-tribals from the electoral rolls of GHADC, Momin pointed out, is not an act of discrimination but a protective mechanism to prevent the political marginalization of indigenous communities. He urged constitutional authorities, policymakers, and the judiciary to prevent any move that threatens the sanctity of the Sixth

Jhumoir Binandini 2025 zonal event begins in Tezpur with cultural splendor

Tezpur: The first Zonal-Level performance of Jhumoir Binandini 2025 took place yesterday at Church Field, Tezpur, with great enthusiasm and cultural fervor. The event was graced by the Minister of Health & Family Welfare and Irrigation, Government of Assam, Ashok Singhal, as the chief guest.

The zonal competition saw enthusiastic participation from three districts—Sonitpur, Biswanath, and Nagaon. It provided a stage for talented performers to showcase the region's rich



culture and artistic skills. The event focused on the vibrant tradition of Jhumoir dance, attracting cultural enthusiasts and important guests. Meanwhile, earlier last month, under the Cultural Affairs Department of the Government of Assam and the aegis of the Demow Co-District administration,

the Mega Jhumoir Binandini 2025 programme had been organized in Kaliapani Tea Estate Playground from January 20 for four days. In the training, more than 300 students of the Demow Constituency had participated. In the training, 102 students had been selected, said an expert committee member. Sushanta Borgohain, Demow Constituency MLA, had also visited a day of the training. The ATSSA leaders, along with other dignitaries, had also been present.

16 advanced weapons were seized from slain KNA-B members Manipur: three militants killed in border encounters, receive revolutionary salutes

Imphal: Three leaders of different proscribed underground outfits were martyred in the fights against the enemies along the Manipur-Myanmar border. Four underground groups – the proscribed People's Liberation Army (PLA), the armed wing of the banned Revolutionary People's Front (RPF), United National Liberation Front – Koirang (UNLF-K), Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), and the Peoples Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) have expressed deep sorrow over



the deaths of three leaders/cadres.

The UNLF/MPA (self-styled) Captain Chirom Chiromcha @Robindro, KYKL/MYL cadre Pvt. Moirangthem Sushil alias Athouba (21) and PLA/RPF (SS) captain Henthouba alias Salam Nganba Meitei, 28,

lost their lives during the exchange of gunfire from January 27 to 30, against the Myanmar-based rebel group Kuki National Army (Burma) while these outfits termed as a proxy war supported by the Indian security forces along the border areas.

Assam University staffer held for alleged minor molestation

Silchar: A 57-year-old non-teaching employee of Assam University in Silchar was arrested on Sunday following accusations of molesting a 14-year-old girl on the university campus. According to police, the alleged incident occurred on Friday morning.

The victim, who had accompanied a relative working as a university cleaner to the campus, was waiting outside an empty classroom in the law department when the accused allegedly forced her inside and attempted to sexually assault her.

Other staff members and students intervened and rescued the girl. The victim's family stated that she had been at Assam University with the relative on Thursday night.



The relative, required to report for duty on Friday morning, asked the girl to wait at the university while he worked.

Police have identified the accused as Faruque Ahmed. A First Information Report (FIR) has been filed at the Dwarbond police station under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). Cachar Superintendent of Police (SP) Numal Mahatta confirmed the arrest and filing of charges. Police said that the girl has been sent to a shelter home.

Maharashtra's Skill India Digital Hub goes Marathi, boost digital skilling across the state

Guwahati: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis unveiled the Marathi version of Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH) at the Vishwa Marathi Sammelan 2025, held at Fergusson College in Pune.

The platform, launched with the support of Deputy Chief Ministers Shri Eknath Shinde and Shri Ajit Pawar, aims to make skilling opportunities more accessible to the state's youth by offering content in Marathi, in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

SIDH provides over 7,000 courses in sectors like Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Drone Technology. It has already seen tremendous success nationwide, with Maharashtra among the top five states in terms of registrations and user traf-



fic. Shri Ved Mani Tiwari, CEO of NSDC, highlighted the platform's role in bridging skill gaps and creating job-ready youth, with more than 1.26 crore registrations across India.

In Guwahati, there is a growing demand for digital skilling platforms, especially in fields like IT and electronics. Local professionals and students are

increasingly turning to online courses to enhance their skills and remain competitive in emerging sectors.

The introduction of SIDH's Marathi version is expected to inspire similar digital initiatives in the northeastern market, further propelling regional growth in the tech and industrial sectors.

Godrej Agrovet executives hail Budget 2025 for farmer focus

Guwahati: Godrej Agrovet executives have praised the 2025 budget for its strong emphasis on strengthening the agricultural sector and empowering farmers. Managing Director Balram Singh Yadav highlighted the budget's comprehensive approach, citing initiatives like the increased Kisan Credit Card loan limit (from ₹3 lakh to ₹5 lakh) and the drive for self-sufficiency in pulses and edible oils as key drivers towards a "Viksit Bharat."

He stated the budget's focus on high-yielding, climate-resilient seeds and boosting cotton productivity. Rajavelu N.K., CEO of Godrej Agrovet's Crop Protection Business, lauded the focus on crop productivity and protection, particularly the Mission for Cotton Productivity and the Prime Minister

Joyana. He stressed the importance of integrating crop protection, sustainable farming, and robust post-harvest infrastructure for enhanced farmer incomes and food security. He also acknowledged the proposals to reopen dormant urea plants and involve FPOs in fruit and vegetable initiatives while emphasizing the need for awareness of urea's usage. In Guwahati, a key agricultural market in Northeast India, these budget proposals are expected to have a significant impact. The increased loan limits and focus on crop diversification could stimulate agricultural activity in the region, boosting trade and benefiting local businesses. Focusing on post-harvest infrastructure can boost market access for Northeast farmers, enabling better prices for their produce.

Budget 2025: Godrej CFO sees boost for FMCG sector



Guwahati: Aasif Malbari, Chief Financial Officer of Godrej Consumer Products Ltd., has lauded the Union Budget 2025 for its balanced approach to strengthening key pillars of the FMCG sector. Malbari highlighted the budget's focus on rural infrastructure, manufacturing, and consumer spending as drivers of growth. He believes investments in rural development and job creation will stimulate economic activity and increase consumption, creating market expansion opportunities. The CFO also praised the National Manufacturing Mission, emphasizing its potential to enhance domestic production, reduce import reliance, and improve cost efficiencies. Tax reforms benefiting the middle class were also noted as a positive factor, increasing disposable income and driving demand for both essential and aspirational FMCG products. Malbari said that the budget lays a solid foundation for a consumption-driven economy, generating substantial growth prospects for the FMCG industry.

Nissan Magnite goes global; over 10,000 LHD units exported from India



Guwahati: Nissan Motor India has strengthened its global presence with the export of over 10,000 units of the Left-Hand Drive (LHD) New Nissan Magnite.

The first shipment of nearly 2,900 units was dispatched from Chennai's Kamarajar Port in January 2025 to select Latin American (LATAM) markets. The second wave, comprising over 7,100 units, will be shipped in February 2025 to the Middle East, North Africa, and select markets in LATAM and the Asia-Pacific region.

The New Nissan Magnite, manufactured at Nissan's Alliance JV plant in Chennai, now serves as the entry-level B-SUV for Nissan worldwide. Nissan executives emphasized

the importance of India as a key manufacturing hub. Frank Torres, Divisional VP of AMIEO Region Business Transformation, stated, "This milestone highlights Nissan's commitment to expanding exports and reinforcing India's role in our global strategy."

"In India, the Magnite continues to perform well, particularly in regions like Guwahati, where compact SUVs have gained popularity. With its bold design, turbocharged engine, and affordability, the model has attracted buyers in the city's growing automobile market.

With exports spanning over 65 markets, Nissan's 'Make in India, Make for the World' vision is gaining momentum in the global automotive landscape.

Air India Express expands in Northeast with direct Dibrugarh-Guwahati flights

Dibrugarh: Air India Express has strengthened its presence in Northeast India by launching daily direct flights between Dibrugarh and Guwahati, offering seamless onward connectivity to Delhi without an aircraft change. This expansion marks Dibrugarh as the airline's fifth destination in the region, following Agartala, Dimapur, Guwahati, and Imphal.

The new service follows a structured schedule, with flights departing Dibrugarh at 1:45 PM, reaching Guwahati at 3:15 PM, and continuing to Delhi at 3:50 PM, arriving at 7:00 PM.



The return leg from Delhi departs at 9:10 AM, ensuring daily connectivity. Passengers from Dibrugarh now have convenient one-stop access to Bengaluru, Chennai, Jaipur, and Kolkata. As part of its Tales of India initiative, Air India Express has introduced Assamese-themed liveries, featuring Gamosa and Jaapi motifs, symbolizing

Assam's cultural richness. The airline's rapid expansion now covers over 50 destinations, including international routes. Dibrugarh, a key hub for the tea industry and emerging trade sectors, stands to benefit from improved connectivity. The direct flights are expected to boost business travel, facilitate trade, and enhance tourism, strengthening economic links with major cities.

Catch Spices rolls out new TVCs starring Akshay Kumar and Rajpal Yadav to boost brand positioning

Guwahati: Catch Spices, a key brand of the Dharampal Satyapal Group (DS Group), has launched two new television commercials featuring Bollywood celebrities Akshay Kumar and Rajpal Yadav. This campaign aims to reinforce its brand philosophy, "Kyunki Khana Sirf Khana Nahi Hota" (Food is more than just food), with engaging narratives centered around Catch Turmeric and Catch Garam Masala. The commercials, conceptualized by Dentsu Inter-



national and directed by Hemant Bhandari, focus on how these spices elevate culinary experiences. The Catch Turmeric TVC humorously depicts a mix-up

leading to an unexpected bonding moment with neighbors, while Akshay Kumar emphasizes the importance of food in fostering relationships. In the Catch Garam Masala TVC, a head chef's journey highlights the flavor-enhancing power of the spice. Catch Spices is now expanding its reach across

television and digital platforms, with sponsorships and brand integrations in top shows like "Laughter Chef" and "MasterChef." The brand has also seen significant growth, entering the INR 1000 crore club and expanding its portfolio to over 125 variants. In Guwahati, preference for premium, high-quality spices like Catch aligns with evolving consumer trends, contributing to a strong brand presence and growing consumer engagement in the region.

Budget 2025 fuels growth with focus on skills, startups and rural economy

Guwahati: The Union Budget 2025, presented on February 1st, lays out a comprehensive plan for economic growth, prioritizing investments in human capital, innovation, and rural development. Hon'ble Minister Jayant Chaudhary highlighted the budget's forward-thinking approach, emphasizing tax reforms, support for key sectors like agriculture and MSMEs, and a strong focus on skills development. Notably, individual taxpayers earning up to Rs. 12 lakh will receive tax relief.

The budget emphasizes skilling and education, with initiatives such as 50,000 Atal Tinkering Labs, BharatNet expansion, and targeted skill

development programs. Five National Centres of Excellence for Skilling will be established, focusing on global best practices and the "Make for India, Make for the World" initiative. ARs 10,000 crore Fund of Funds for Startups will support over 1.5 lakh ventures. A Rs. 500 crore Centre of Excellence in AI for Education will transform learning accessibility. Employment-led growth will be driven by skill development, Mudra loans for home stays, and state incentives. The "Rural Prosperity and Resilience" program aims to combat rural underemployment through targeted skilling and investment.

In Guwahati, the bud-

get's emphasis on skilling and entrepreneurship is expected to have a significant impact. The National Centres of Excellence for Skilling could provide valuable opportunities for local youth, enhancing their employability in sectors crucial to the Northeast's expanding economy.

Support for startups and MSMEs could further stimulate growth within Guwahati's business community, particularly in sectors like tourism, logistics, and trade, which are vital to the region's development. The focus on rural development is expected to further enhance demand for goods and services in Guwahati, the commercial hub of the Northeast.

Bandhan Bank's total business grows 17%, hitting ₹2.73 lakh crore

Agartala: Bandhan Bank has reported a solid 17% growth in its total business, which now stands at Rs. 2.73 lakh crore for the third quarter of FY 2024-25. The bank's total deposits grew by 20% YoY, reaching Rs. 1.41 lakh crore, with retail deposits making up nearly 69% of the total. Additionally, its loan book expanded by 15%, reaching Rs. 1.32 lakh crore.

The CASA (current account and savings account) ratio stands strong at 32%, highlighting the bank's robust liquidity position. Bandhan Bank continues to experience remarkable growth, driven by its strategic focus on distribution expansion, business efficiency, and a favorable operating en-

vironment. Serving customers through nearly 6,300 outlets across India and employing approximately 78,400 people, the bank remains committed to financial inclusion and customer satisfaction. In regions like Agartala, Bandhan Bank's rapid expansion is facilitating greater financial inclusion, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas.

The bank's increasing digital banking services have resonated with local consumers, driving a more inclusive economic landscape in Tripura. This is contributing to a stronger, more accessible banking infrastructure in Agartala, with enhanced customer engagement and growing financial literacy.

RBI begins rate talks, 25-bps cut expected

Mumbai: Days after the Union Budget, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday started deliberations on the monetary policy amid expectations of a 25 basis-points rate cut, which will be the first in five years, as inflation remains within central bank's comfort zone, though the sliding rupee continues to be a concern.

RBI last cut rates by 40 bps to 4% in May 2020 during the Covid crisis. But in May 2022 the central bank started a rate hike cycle in view of the Russia-Ukraine war and paused it only in May 2023. New RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra to chair his first MPC meeting from

Budget 2025-26 lauded for focus on financial inclusion and MSME growth

Guwahati: Satish Kumar Kalra, MD & CEO of North East Small Finance Bank, has praised the Union Budget 2025-26 for its emphasis on financial inclusion, rural development, and MSME growth.

Kalra highlighted the increased Kisan Credit Card limit of ₹5 lakh and the new taxation reforms as particularly positive steps. He believes these measures



will empower individuals and communities, especially in regions like the Northeast, by boosting access to credit and financial services, thereby fueling entrepreneurship and economic development.

Vi launches 'Number Rakshak' at Maha Kumbh to ensure pilgrim safety

Prayagraj: Vodafone Idea (Vi) has launched the 'Vi Number Rakshak' initiative at the Maha Kumbh, reinforcing its commitment to public safety and seamless connectivity.

The initiative provides pilgrims with Rudraksh and Tulsi bracelets engraved with emergency contact numbers, ensuring they can reunite with their families if separated in the massive crowds. With over 250 individuals reported lost on the first day and millions expected for the Shahi



Snan at Triveni Sangam, Vi has set up a booth near Swami Ramanand Acharya Shibir Akhada to distribute the bracelets.

This initiative particularly benefits elderly pilgrims

and children who may not have mobile phones. In addition to this safety measure, Vi has enhanced its network infrastructure by deploying 30 new sites, 40 macro and small-cell sites, and 32 km of fiber to provide uninterrupted

connectivity. Avneesh Khosla, CMO of Vi, said, "Vi Number Rakshak reflects our people-first approach, ensuring both safety and seamless communication

at large gatherings.

"Vi's initiative has resonated in Guwahati's telecom market, where retailers have observed an uptick in demand for Vi's services. Pilgrims traveling to the Kumbh are actively choosing Vi for its enhanced connectivity, reinforcing the brand's reliability during high-traffic events. Vi continues to strengthen its market presence, combining social responsibility with network expansion at one of the world's largest religious gatherings.

Northeast sees surge in Oesophageal cancer, calls grow for advanced medical investments

Guwahati: The rising incidence of oesophageal cancer in Northeast India is fueling demand for advanced medical technologies and investment in specialized healthcare. According to a recent Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) report, tobacco consumption—48.2% among adults in the region compared to the national average of 29%—is a key driver behind this alarming trend. Assam is at the epicenter of the crisis, with Dibrugarh reporting the highest proportion of cases at 15.7% (1 in 54 males), followed by Kamrup Urban at 14.3% (1 in 27 males) and Cachar

at 11.6% (1 in 53 males).

Due to the limited availability of high-end medical facilities, patients from the Northeast often seek treatment in other parts of the country. Leading oncologists, including Dr. Sunder Kumar Dabas and Dr. Bikram Kumar Deka, emphasize the need for investments in robotic-assisted surgery. Dr. Deka, Consultant - Surgical Oncology & Robotic Surgery at Max Hospitals, highlighted the gaps in medical infrastructure. "Key diagnostic tools like PET scans remain inaccessible in many areas, and robotic-assisted surgery is un-



derutilized," he noted. Dr. Dabas, Vice Chairman & HOD - Surgical Oncology at Max Hospitals, advocates for adopting minimally invasive surgical techniques to enhance patient outcomes.

"Traditional oesophageal surgeries carry high risks. Robotic-assisted procedures improve precision,

reduce complications, and ensure faster recovery, allowing quicker access to follow-up treatments like chemotherapy and radiotherapy," he explained. Guwahati, as the region's primary healthcare and business hub, is witnessing a shift in healthcare investments.

Private hospitals are exploring partnerships to introduce advanced cancer treatment facilities, including robotic-assisted surgeries. With rising demand, stakeholders are pushing for strategic investments to curb medical outflow and enhance local healthcare infrastructure.

Sensex rises 1.8 per cent as trade tension eases

Mumbai: Domestic equity market surged on Tuesday as global trade tensions eased after US President-Former President Donald Trump postponed new tariffs on goods from Mexico and Canada by one month. Additionally, the planned 10% levy on Chinese exports to the US did not take effect as scheduled on Tuesday.

Following these positive global cues, the Indian equity benchmarks - BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty - rallied up to nearly 2% on Tuesday. After hitting an intraday high of 78,658.59, the 30-share index Sensex settled at 78,583.81, up 1,397.07 points or 1.81%



while the Nifty50 ended at 23,739.25, up 387.20 points or 1.62%. The index traded in the range of 23,762.75 to 23,423.15 on Tuesday.

Investors' wealth rose by Rs 5.89 lakh crore to Rs 425.40 lakh crore (BSE m-cap) on Tuesday compared to Rs 419.54 lakh crore recorded on Monday.

Index heavyweight HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries gained between 2.5-3%.

HSBC Mutual Fund launches new fund to leverage India's growing financial services sector

Guwahati: HSBC Mutual Fund today launched the HSBC Financial Services Fund, a new open-ended equity scheme designed to tap into the rapidly expanding financial services sector. The New Fund Offer (NFO) opens for subscription on February 6, 2025, and closes on February 20, 2025.

The financial services sector is poised for significant growth in India, driven

by factors such as digitalization, increasing financial inclusion, and evolving regulatory frameworks. With a focus on long-term capital appreciation, the fund will invest in a diverse range of financial services businesses, including banks, fintech, asset management, and insurance companies.

Led by Gautam Bhupal, SVP Fund Management Equities at HSBC Mutu-

al Fund, the fund aims to leverage the sector's growth potential, focusing on both traditional lending and non-lending segments. The scheme will track the BSE Financial Services Index TRI.

As the financial services sector grows across India, Guwahati is emerging as a key market with increasing demand for mutual fund investments. Investors in the region are increasing-

ly looking to diversify their portfolios and capitalize on long-term growth opportunities in financial products, driven by a shift toward digital investment solutions.

Kailash Kulkarni, CEO of HSBC Mutual Fund, highlighted that India's financial sector is set to grow at twice the rate of the country's GDP, helping achieve the "Viksit Bharat" vision by 2047.

Gold demand rises 1% in 2024, economic uncertainty to provide support: WGC

New Delhi: Global gold demand including over-the-counter (OTC) trading rose by 1 per cent to a record high of 4,974.5 metric tonnes in 2024 as investment increased, the World Gold Council (WGC) said on Wednesday, adding that central banks sped up buying in the fourth quarter.

Spot gold prices rose by 27 per cent last year, the most since 2010, as investors chose the metal to hedge against global risks and as the US Federal Reserve slashed interest rates. Prices hit another all-time high on Tuesday, driven by safe-haven demand after China retaliated with tariffs on the United States in response to President



Donald Trump's trade levies.

Central banks, a major source of gold demand, bought more than 1,000 tonnes of the metal for the third year in a row in 2024. The National Bank of Poland was the largest such buyer, adding 90 tonnes to its reserves, the WGC, an industry body whose

members are global gold miners, said in a quarterly report.

In the final quarter of 2024, when Trump won the US election, buying by central banks accelerated by 54 per cent year on year to 333 tonnes, the WGC calculated, based on reported purchases and an estimate of unreported buying.

Atlantia Electricals files IPO papers with Sebi, aims to raise Rs 400 cr

Mumbai: Atlanta Electricals Ltd, manufacturer of power, auto and inverter duty transformers, has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi seeking its approval to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO).

The Gujarat-based company's IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 400 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of 38.1 lakh equity shares by a promoter and other selling shareholders, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed on Tuesday. The offer includes a reservation of equity shares for subscription by eligible employees.

Besides, the company may consider raising Rs 80



crore in a pre-IPO placement round. If such placement is undertaken, the size of the fresh issue will be reduced.

The company proposes to utilize the proceeds from the issue for payment of debt, supporting working capital requirements of the company and for general corporate purposes. According to a Crisil report, India's

transformer market is driven by the relentless growth in electricity demand, with per capita consumption surging by over 50 per cent in the last decade. Also, the government is investing in the renewable energy sector and expanding the power transmission network, which will create opportunities for the transformer market's growth.

SEBI announces new 'algo trading' rules



Mumbai: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has mandated stock exchanges to empanel algorithmic trading providers and has also defined rules for using application programming interfaces (APIs), according to a Business Standard report.

Algorithmic trading, also known as algo trading, is a method of executing trading orders by providing a predefined set of rules to a computer program.

This helps in placing share orders at a speed and frequency not possible for human traders.

Algo trading is already prevalent in India among both institutional as well as retail investors. However, existing regulations had several loopholes, posing risks to investors, according to a Business Standard report.

As a result, The Brokers' Industry Standards Forum will formulate algo trading standards before April 1, 2025, and they will become effective from August 1.

The new guardrails will be implemented through the exchanges. This also includes criteria for empanelment.

Brokers will thus, only be able to onboard algo trading providers that are empaneled with the exchanges. Apart from this, they also have to obtain exchange approval, address grievances and even monitor prohibited activities.

Swiggy Q3 results: Net loss widens to Rs 799 crore, GOV grows 38%



Bangalore: Food and grocery delivery firm Swiggy on Wednesday said its gross order value (GOV) grew 38 per cent year-on-year to Rs 12,165 crore. The company reported results today for the quarter and nine months ended December 31, 2024.

The consolidated adjusted Ebitda loss reduced by 2 per cent Y-o-Y to Rs 490 crore but rose Rs 149 crore quarter-on-quarter (Q-o-Q). The platform's average MTU (monthly transacting users) increased 25.3 per cent Y-o-Y to reach 17.8 million, with nearly a third of all users utilising more than one service on the platform.

Sriharsha Majety, managing director and group chief executive officer, Swiggy, said it continued to focus on creating segmented of-

ferings for the consumer during the festive quarter, which it believes will open up more consumption occasions.

In recent months, Majety said the firm introduced Bolt and Snacc (10-minute food delivery), expanded into new categories within quick-commerce, and plans to offer a greater assortment. The company also launched Swiggy Scenes, focused on restaurant event reservations, and introduced One BLCK, the premium tier of its Swiggy One subscription programme.

"We delivered higher Y-o-Y growth across all three of our primary businesses during Q3, which accelerated B2C GOV growth to 38 per cent Y-o-Y," said Majety.

RBI meeting kicks off; markets await rate decision

Mumbai: The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting begins on Wednesday under the leadership of newly appointed Governor Sanjay Malhotra. This will be the first policy meeting of Sanjay Malhotra as RBI Governor.

Analysts are divided on whether the RBI will cut the repo rate for the first time in nearly two years or maintain the current rate to manage inflation and currency stability.

The six-member committee will announce its decision on February 7, 2025. Experts believe the RBI may reduce the repo rate by 25 basis points (bps) to support economic growth, especially after the Union Budget 2025 focused on boosting demand.

The repo rate has been unchanged at 6.5%



since February 2023, and the last rate cut was announced during the Covid-19 pandemic in May 2020.

adan Sabnavis, Chief Economist at Bank of Baroda, believes economic conditions are suitable for a rate cut. "The budget has provided a growth stimulus, and inflation is expected to ease.

However, the rupee remains under pressure due to global trade uncertainties," he said. While some believe a rate cut is likely, others feel the RBI may wait for global economic conditions to stabilise before making any changes.

Two in a row: India U19 World Champions, again



Chennai: WHEN Sanika Chalke heaved Monalisa Legodi past the square-leg fielder, the Indian dug out broke out with the loudest cheer at the Bayuemas Oval, Kuala Lumpur on Sunday evening. The moment the ball touched the ropes, players ran in with flag in hand to hug and celebrate with Chalke and G Trisha in the middle.

Defending champions India had beaten South Africa by nine wickets to win the 2025 ICC Women's U19 T20 World Cup. For a bunch of teenagers who have been together several months in their pursuit of one goal, it was a moment of jubilation. Some of them could barely hold their emotions together while a few were overwhelmed with happiness. And behind

every player is a story of sacrifice, heartbreaks and tireless hard work in getting to this point.

G Kamalini, the 17-year-old keeper-batter from Tamil Nadu, yelled in Tamil "Cup ah thookitom (We have lifted the trophy)," in delight. Six years ago, she hadn't picked up a cricket bat. She bowled for the first time while her father Gunalan was training her brother during lockdown. It was then Gunalan and Saranya saw a dream. They shifted from a tier two town of Madurai to Chennai for Kamalini's cricket and has been with her in every step of the way. "Cannot express our happiness. For all the struggles went through, this feels like god's gift. She is our gift," an emotional Gunalan told this daily.

Arsenal's 5-1 demolition of Man City sends warning



London: Arsenal beat Manchester City 5-1 to keep their Premier League title hopes alive on Sunday, while Manchester United slumped to another meek 2-0 home defeat to Crystal Palace.

In the battle between the sides that have finished in the top for the past two seasons, the Gunners prevailed to move within six points of leaders Liverpool, who have a game in hand. Arsenal were gifted the

perfect start inside two minutes as Manuel Akanji lost possession and Kai Havertz squared for Martin Odegaard to open the scoring. Havertz exposed Arsenal's lack of a clinical goalscorer when he wasted a glorious chance to double the lead.

That could have proved costly when Erling Haaland headed in his 250th career club goal early in the second half to bring City level.

EXPLOSIVE ABHISHEK!

All-round Abhishek seals 4-1 win for India

Mumbai: Abhishek Sharma lit up the Wankhede Stadium with boundaries as India beat England by 150 runs in the fifth and final T20I to win the series 4-1. The Punjab batter smashed his second T20I century, this time 135 runs from 54 balls, before taking 2/3 as England were bundled out for 97 in the chase of 248.

Opting to field first, England were welcomed with a six off the very first ball as Sanju Samson pulled Jofra Archer into the stands. The short-ball ploy against Samson had worked so far, but this time the India opener was keen to take them on. He went on to hit another six and a four in the same over before falling to Mark Wood.

That, however, in no way affected India as Abhishek went berserk. The southpaw hit 13 sixes and seven boundaries on his way to a 54-ball 135 while the others tried to keep up with him. Tilak Varma (24) and Shivam Dube (30) chipped as India finished with 247/9 in 20 overs.

In response, England lost Ben Duckett early to Mohammed Shami. But as it has been the case, spinners led to the visitors downfall. Ravi Bishnoi (1/9) and Varun Chakravarthy (2/25) set the ball rolling before Abhishek piled on. Dube also took a couple of wickets before Shami came back to finish things of.

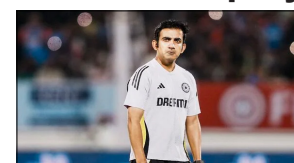
The veteran pacer has blown hot and cold since his comeback and will take a lot of confidence from the 3/25 show against England in Mumbai on Sunday. He will be the key focus in the three-match ODI series between the two teams that begins in Nagpur on Thursday.



Gambhir lauds Abhishek's T20 century and India's fearless play

Mumbai: India head coach Gautam Gambhir on Sunday said he has not seen a "better T20 hundred" than Abhishek Sharma's 54-ball 135 against England here and asserted that the team will continue to play in a "fearless" manner going forward. Abhishek's brutal century was the cornerstone of India's heavy 150-run win over England here, which also helped India bag the T20I series 4-1.

"We are going to do this going forward, got to play fearless cricket. We want to keep backing players like Abhishek Sharma. We have to be patient to with these boys. Most of these boys believe in the ideology of playing fearless cricket," Gambhir told host broadcaster after the match. "I haven't seen a better T20 hundred (Abhishek's ton)



against bowlers who are bowling at 140-150 kph consistently," he added.

There were talks about rift in Indian dressing room after the team's disastrous outing in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series against Australia. Gambhir said everything will fall in place once the team returns to the winning ways. "They (these players) have played a lot of cricket against each other. That's all Indian cricket is all about us. "When results start going your way, everything goes well. Our players know what it means to represent 140-150 crore Indians," he added.

India look for balance against England in last CT

Nagpur: Form and fitness of seasoned stars is under the scanner as India enter the final phase of their Champions Trophy preparations with the three-match ODI series against England starting here on Thursday, aiming to find the right balance for some specific slots in the line-up. The likes of skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli have been under tremendous scrutiny after their dismal run in red-ball cricket.

The two stars, after making hyped but disappointing appearances in Ranji Trophy last month, will be eyeing strong performances in a format that they have dominated for several years. They were the top two run-getters of the 2023 World Cup with Kohli scoring 765 and Rohit smashing 597.

Gill seeks ODI rebound against England

Nagpur: From the time the Border-Gavaskar Trophy came to an end, one of the debates about the Indian team was how long before Yashasvi Jaiswal made the ODI team.

While it did not take long, as the youngster was included in the squad for the England ODIs and Champions Trophy, he is still a standby. For, India have their captain Rohit Sharma and vice-captain Shubman Gill at the top. Although there is no one questioning Rohit's place in the ODI team at this point, Gill has come under the lens. Gill's poor form sparks calls for Jaiswal to replace him.

Berrettini stuns Shimabukuro in Chennai Open

Chennai: Italy's Jacopo Berrettini, the younger brother of former Wimbledon finalist Matteo Berrettini, caused the first big upset in the main draw of the Chennai Open ATP Challenger with a straight sets win over sixth seed Sho Shimabukuro.

Berrettini, ranked No. 324 in the world won 6-3, 7-6



last 16. Meanwhile, the four Indians in action on Monday failed to win their final round in the qualifying draw against higher-ranked opposition. In the qualifying draw, all four Indians who won their matches on Sunday failed to repeat their success in the final round of qualifying. 21-year-old

Chirag Duhan battled hard before falling in a third set tiebreak to seventh seed Yurii Dzhavakian 4-6, 6-1, 7-6. Dev Javia also went to three sets against Egor Agafonov before going down 4-6, 7-5, 6-3. Coppejans, Barton, Vanshelboim, and Zhukov joined Dzhavakian and Agafonov as qualifiers for the main draw.