

**BUZZ POINTS**

Peak Cold Wave Likely Across Telangana, Hyderabad from Dec 18-21

02

# Speaker Rejects BRS Disqualification Petitions, Party Set to Move Supreme Court

Hyderabad:

In a significant political development in Telangana, Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar has rejected the disqualification petitions filed by the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) against several MLAs accused of defecting to the ruling Congress party. The decision has trigge red strong reactions fro m the opposition BRS, which has announced its intention to approach the Supreme Court challenging the Speaker's order.

The petitions were filed by the BRS seeking disqualification of ML As who were elected on the party's ticket but we re later alleged to have aligned with the Congress. The BRS argued that the legislators had violated the provisions of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, commonly known as the anti-defection law, by switching loyalties after winning the elections. The party maintained that such actions amounted to a betrayal of the mandate given by the voters.

After examining the submissions and responses, the Speaker dismissed the petitions, stating that there was insufficient material to conclusively establish defection as defined under the law. The ruling ef ectively allows the MLAs concerned to continue as members of the Assembly, dealing a setback to the BRS,



which had hop ed for disqualification a nd possible by-elections.

The Speaker's decision came against the backdrop of judicial scrutiny, as the Supreme Court had earlier directed that the disqualification petitions be decided within a stipulated time. The apex court had also expressed concern over delays in adjudicating such matters, underlining the importance of timely decisions to uphold democr atic principles. In this context, the Speaker's order has assumed greater political and legal sign ificance.

Reacting sharply to the ruling, senior BRS leaders al-

leged that the decision was biased and politically motivated. They claimed that the Speaker had failed to consider the public conduct and statements of the MLAs, which, according to the party, clearly indicated a change in political allegiance. The BRS leadership said the order weakens the anti-defection law and encourages political opportu nism.

The party announced that it would move the Su preme Court to seek justice and ensure a strict interpretation of constitutional provisions. BRS leaders said they are confident that the apex court will examine the matter in depth

and deliver a verdict that upholds the spirit of democracy and the sanctity of the people's mandate.

On the other hand, leaders of the ruling Congress welcomed the Speaker's decision, asserting that the disqualification petitions were filed with political motives rather than legal merit. They maintained that the MLAs in question had not formally defe cted and that the Spe aker's ruling was in line with constitutional norms and established procedures. Congress leaders also accused the BRS of attempting to destabilise the government through legal and political pressure.

Political analysts say the episode once again highlights the contentious nature of defection politics in India and the challenges in enforcing the anti-defection law. The outcome of the impending legal battle is expected to have far-reaching implications for Tel- angana's political landscape, particularly in terms of legislative stability and opposition strategy.

As the BRS prepares to approach the Supreme Court, the issue is likely to remain at the centre of political debate in the state. The final verdict, whenever it comes, will not only decide the fate of the MLAs involved but also shape the future course of defection- related disputes in Telang ana.

## Tummala Calls for Turmeric Summit to Boost Farmer Welfare and Global Competitiveness

Hyderabad, De- cember 17:

S tate Agricultu re Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao on Tuesday said coordinated efforts are essential to make Indian turmeric globally competi tive and ensure sustainable welfare for turmeric farmers. Addressing the Turmeric Value Chain Summit – 2025, jointly organised by CII Telangana and the National Turmeric Board in Hyderabad, the Minister stressed the need for policy-driven interventions, value addition and export-oriented growth.

Recalling the recently held Telangana Rising Global Summit, the Minister said the state government has unveiled Agri Vision 2047, which views agricul- ture not merely as a welfare sector but as a key engine of econom- ic growth. "Turmeric has a clear and impor- tant role in this vision," he said, adding that Telangana aims to integrate traditional crops with modern market opportunities.

Tummala noted that turmeric is deeply rooted in India's cul- ture and traditions and is no longer confined to kitchen use. Its growing applications in medicine, nutraceuti- cals and functional foods have opened new avenues for farmers. He said India remains the world's largest pro- ducer of turmeric, and Telangana is among the leading states, with Nizamabad and Ar- moor regions enjoying national recognition. The GI tag awarded to Armoor turmeric, he said, is a matter of pri



de for the state's farm- ing community.

The Minister ob- served that although the National Turmeric Board was set up in re- sponse to the long- standing demand of Nizamabad farmers, it must now become fully operational and farm- er-centric. "The Board should not remain con- fined to office spaces. It must guide policy, take research to farmers' fields, and lead efforts in marketing, branding and exports," he asser- ted.

Expressing concern over fluctuating prices, Tummala said that de- spite favourable cli- matic conditions and hardworking farmers, turmeric cultivation area is shrinking due to price instability. He pointed out that farm- ers spend around 8,000 to 9,000 per quintal on production, while mar- ket prices hover only around 12,000, discour- aging cultivation. He urged the National Turmeric Board to take responsibility for ensuring remunerative prices and providing advance market sig- nals to farmers.

The Minister called for uniform moisture standards, certified moisture meters and a transparent market

mechanism to bring stability. Aligning with Vision 2047, he suggest- ed promoting high-cur- cumin varieties, set- ting up quality testing laboratories and ensur- ing production that meets global stand- ards. "Only then can Telangana turmeric secure a strong and lasting presence in in- ternational markets," he said.

He also recommend- ed integrating turmer- ic into integrated farm- ing systems. Intercro pping turmeric in crops like oil palm, he said, can help farmers earn higher income with lower risk. Em- phasising value addi- tion, Tummala urged farmers to move be- yond selling raw tur- meric and focus on pro- cessing. "The future of turmeric lies not in raw produce, but in value-added products," he said.

He suggested estab- lishing turmeric pro- cessing centres and en- couraging production of nutraceuticals, im- munity boosters, cos- metics and curcumin extracts. Such initia- tives, he said, would in- crease demand, im- prove farmer incomes and help achieve the goals set under Agri Vision 2047.

## Counting Begins After Final Phase of Telangana Panchayat Elections; High Voter Turnout Reported

Hyderabad, Decem- ber 17, 2025

T he counting of v otes began on Wed nesday following the completion of polling for the third and final phase of the Telan- gana Gram Panchayat elections, concluding a three-stage electoral process that saw significant rural participation across the state. The electio ns were held for the positions of sarpanch and ward members, with officials reporting smooth polling and a voter turn- out exceeding 80 perc ent. Polling in this last pha se started at 7 a.m. and concluded at 1 p.m., covering 182 mandals and 31 districts. A total of 3,752 sarpanch seats and 28,410 ward member po sts were contested in gram panchayats where results remained unde- cided following earlier

phases. More than 53 lakh voters were eligible to cast their votes in this phase. Security arrange- ments ts were tightened across polling stations, with police and local au- thorities ensuring a peaceful environment. Additional personnel were deployed in sensi- tive areas to prevent dis- ruptions and maintain order throughout the day.

Initial reports indicat- ed that approximately 85 percent of voters exer- cised their franchise, re- flecting strong engage- ment in the democratic process. Of the over 50 lakh registered voters, more than 43 lakh had cast their ballots.

With polling now con- cluded, the counting of votes began in the after- noon. Election officials emphasized that count- ing would be conducted carefully to ensure accu- racy and transparency



before the formal de- clARATION of results. The re- sults are expected to be announced later in the evening.

The three-phase elec- tion process, which be- gan on December 11, was structured to manage lo- gistics across thousands of rural constituencies. Earlier phases also re- corded high voter turn- out, with figures exceed- ing 84 and 85 percent in

the first and second phases, respectively.

Political observers ha- ve closely watched these elections, noting that lo- cal bodies play a critical role in grassroots go- vernance and rural de- velopment. In the first two phases, candidates sup- ported by the ruling Con- gress party made signi- ficant gains, prompting heightened competition in the final phase.

## Peaceful Gram Panchayat Polls a Matter of Pride for Telangana: Minister Seethakka

Hyderabad:

T elangana Pan- chayat Raj, Rural Development, and Women & Child We lfare Minister Dr. Dha- nasari Anasuya Seeth- akka on Tuesday said the peaceful and smooth completion of Gram Panchayat elections is a matter of pride for the state. She congratulated officials of the Panchay- at Raj department and other allied departme nts for successfully con- ducting the polls in a transparent and orderly manner.

In a press note issued here, the Minister stated that the conduct of these crucial grassroots- level elections in a calm and incident-free atmos- phere has strengthened democracy at the village level. She noted that the absence of any untow- ard incidents, violence or the need for re-pollin g reflects the collective commitment and effi- ciency of the election machinery.

Minister Seethakka extended special con- gratulations to State



Election Commissioner Rani Kumudini for her constant monitoring, impartial approach and dedication in oversee- ing the election process. She also lauded Pan- chayat Raj and Rural De- velopment Commissioner G. Srijana for effecti- vely discharging her res- ponsibilities as the elec- tion authority and en- suring the smooth exe- cution of polling across the state.

The Minister ex- pressed her gratitude to the police department and officials from vari- ous other departments

who worked in coordi- nation to ensure law and order during the elec- tions. "The successful completion of the elec- tions without any dis- ruption is a clear testi- mony to the teamwork and disciplined efforts of all officials involved," she said.

Congratulating the newly elected Sarpanches and Ward Members, Dr. Seethakka urged them to rise above po- litical differences and work collectively for the comprehensive develop- ment of their villages.

She said that while elec- tions may involve com- petition, governance de- mands unity and cooper- ation. "From today onw ards, development shou ld be the only agenda. All elected representa- tives must work beyond party lines for the wel- fare of the people," she emphasized.

The Minister advised the newly elected repre- sentatives to honour the trust reposed in them by the people and to adopt transparent and acco- untable governance pra- ctices. She said village- level leadership plays a vital role in translating government schemes into tangible benefits for citizens and called u pon them to act with in- tegrity and dedication.

Highlighting the im- portance of rural devel- opment, Seethakka said villages are the back- bone of Telangana's progress. "The prosper- ity of the state depends on the development of its villages. Only when our villages grow will the state achieve holi- stic development," she remarked.

## President Draupadi Murmu Arrives in Hyderabad for Winter Sojourn

Hyderabad:

P resident of India Draupadi Murmu arrived in Hy- derabad to com- mence her winter so- journ, a traditional period when the head of state resides at the official presidential retreat in Telangana. She landed at Hakimpet Air Force Station, where she was received by Telangana Go vernor J. Sankarana- rayanan, Chief Minister A. Revanth Re ddy, and other senior state offi- cials in a ceremonial wel- come reflecting the im-

portance of the visit.

The President will be staying at Rashtrapati Nilayam in Bolarum, the official presidential resi- dence in Hyderabad, which serves as a base for official engagements, public interactions, and cultural programmes during her stay. Rashtra- pati Nilayam has long served as a venue for Presidents to engage with local communities, government representa- tives, and officials out- side the national capital, providing opportunities for decentralised admin- istration and outreach.

During her stay in Hy- der abad, President Mur- mu is expected to partici- pate in a series of official engagements that high- light national initiatives, cultural heritage, and social welfare pro- grammes. Her presence in the city is also intend- ed to strengthen the re- lationship between the Union government and Telangana, reflecting the significance of regional engagement by the high- est constitutional office in the country.

Security and logistical arrangements for the visit were carefully coor-

dinated by state and central agencies to ensure a smooth and secure stay. Detailed planning was undertaken to manage ceremonial protocols, transportation, and public events, demon- strating the priority accorded to the President's winter sojourn. Local authori- ties, including the police and administrative staff, have been mobilised to facilitate her engage- ments while ensuring minimal disruption to daily city life.

President Murmu's schedule is expected to include interactions



with various civic bod- ies, cultural organisa- tions, and public repre- sentatives. These meetings aim to promote awareness of national programmes, encourage citizen participation in

developmental initia- tives, and highlight achievements in governa nce and social welfare across Telangana. In addition, she is anticipated to meet community lead- ers and officials from sectors such as educa- tion, he alth, and rural development, further emphasising her role as a unifying figure con- necting citizens with national governance.

The President's visit coincides with a busy po- litical and cultural sea- son in Telangana, mak- ing her presence particularly significant.

It offers an opportunity for state leaders and citi- zens to engage directly with the head of state, reinforcing the values of democracy, public ser- vice, and community development.

Officials noted that the winter sojourn at Rash- trapati Nilayam allows the President to conduct official work efficiently while also experiencing the cultural and social environment of the state. The visit underscores the importance of re- gional engagement in India's federal structure and provides a platform

for highlighting Telan- gana's achievements, challenges, and aspira- tions at the national level.

President Draupadi Murmu's arrival in Hy- derabad has been widely welcomed by state offi- cials, political leaders, and citizens, marking a significant event in Tel- angana's public and ad- ministrative calendar. Her presence in the city is expected to inspire lo- cal communities and re- inforce the spirit of uni- ty, culture, and governance during her winter sojourn.



# Ponnam Prabhakar Felicitates Indurthi Sarpanch, Assures Support for Village Development

Husnabad: State Minister Ponnam Prabhakar on Tuesday felicitated the newly elected Sarpanch and Ward Members of Indurthi village in Chiguru Mamidi mandal, who secured victory in the recent Gram Panchayat elections. The felicitation ceremony was held at the Husnabad MLA Camp Office, where the Minister congratulated the elected representatives and wished them success in their new responsibilities.

Addressing the gathering, Minister Ponnam Prabhakar said the victory of the Sarpanch Chintapula Narendra and the Ward Members reflects the trust and confidence reposed in them by the people of Indurthi village. He urged the newly elected representatives to work with dedication, unity and trans-

parency to fulfil the aspirations of the villagers. The Minister assured full support from the state government for the overall development of Indurthi village. He announced that if new mand als are formed in the state in the future, Indurthi village would be given priority to be developed as a mandal headquarters. This announcement was received with enthusiasm by the villagers and party workers present at the event.

Ponnam Prabhakar also assured that the long-pending bridge construction on the road connecting Chiguru Mamidi to Koheda would be completed at the earliest. He said the bridge is crucial for improving connectivity, easing transportation and boosting economic activity in the region. "Infrastructure development is essential for rural progress, and



the government is committed to completing key projects that benefit villages," he said.

Emphasising the importance of collective effort, the Minister advised the Sarpanch and Ward Members to work in unity for the development of Indurthi village. He said political differences should be set aside once elections are over

and the focus should shift entirely towards public welfare. "Development can be achieved only when all elected representatives work together with a common goal," he added.

The Minister stressed that village-level leadership plays a crucial role in implementing government welfare schemes and ensuring that bene-

fits reach every household. He urged the Sarpanch and Ward Members to maintain close coordination with officials and actively involve villagers in decision-making processes.

Ponnam Prabhakar reiterated that the state government would stand by Indurthi village in all aspects of development, including infrastruc-

ture, drinking water, sanitation, roads and welfare programs. He said special attention would be given to addressing local issues and improving basic amenities to enhance the quality of life in rural areas.

The newly elected Sarpanch Chintapula Narendra and the Ward Members thanked the Minister for his encouragement and assurances. They pledged to work tirelessly for the comprehensive development of Indurthi village and to fulfil the expectations of the people who elected them.

The event was attended by local leaders, party workers and villagers, who expressed confidence that with government support and collective effort, Indurthi village would witness steady progress in the coming years.

## Peak Cold Wave Likely Across Telangana, Hyderabad from Dec 18-21

Hyderabad: Telangana is set to experience a peak cold wave from December 18 to 21, with Hyderabad and other districts likely to see significant drops in temperature, according to weather experts. Early mornings are expected to be particularly chilly, marking one of the coldest spells of the winter season so far.

Weather analysts have predicted that many parts of the state, especially in the northern and western regions, could experience nighttime temperatures dropping below 7°C, while Hyderabad may record lows around 7-9°C during this period. The state has already been experiencing cooler-than-normal conditions, and the upcoming days are expected to intensify the chill.

Officials noted that the cold wave is being driven by prevailing winter weather patterns, keeping daily minimums well below normal for this time of year. Recent observations indicate that temperatures in some Hyderabad localities have already reached early winter lows, prompting public advisories for safety.

Residents are advised to take precautions against severe cold, particularly chil-

dren, the elderly, and individuals with health conditions. Authorities recommend wearing warm clothing, covering exposed skin during early morning and late-night hours, and ensuring that homes are properly heated.

Health experts have cautioned that prolonged cold can increase the risk of respiratory illnesses such as coughs, colds, and seasonal flu. People are encouraged to maintain good nutrition, stay hydrated, and limit unnecessary exposure to the cold during peak chill hours.

The agricultural sector is also expected to feel the impact of the extended cold spell. Farmers have been urged to protect temperature-sensitive crops and livestock, as prolonged low temperatures can affect both yield and animal health.

While daytime temperatures may remain relatively moderate, nights and early mornings are expected to stay particularly cold throughout the forecast period. Citizens are advised to remain vigilant and take appropriate measures to safeguard themselves, their families, and livestock during this peak cold wave in Telangana.

# NFHH and Rural Bank Employees Seek Social Security, Public Sector Protection

New Delhi: A senior leader on Tuesday said the demands raised by handloom artisans and rural bank employees are justified and assured that the issues would be taken up with the concerned departments and raised in Parliament.

Participating in a seminar organised by the National Federation of Handloom and Handicrafts (NFHH), the leader said representatives of the federation highlighted the urgent need for increased budgetary allocations to the handloom sector. They stressed that traditional artisans, who play a vital role in preserving India's cultural heritage, continue to face economic insecurity despite their contribution to the economy.

During the interaction, NFHH representa-

tives urged the government to extend social security benefits such as Employees' State Insurance (ESI) and Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) to handloom and handicraft workers. They pointed out that most artisans work in unorganised settings without access to health insurance, retirement benefits or income security. Providing ESI and EPF coverage, they said, would significantly improve the living conditions of traditional craftsmen and ensure dignity and stability in their livelihoods.

The leader agreed with the concerns raised by the federation, noting that social security is essential for safeguarding the future of artisans and encouraging younger generations to remain in traditional occupa-



tions. He said handloom and handicrafts are not only sources of employment but also symbols of India's rich cultural identity, which deserve sustained policy support.

Later in the day, the leader also participated in a seminar organised by the All India Regional Rural Bank Employees Association. At this meeting, bank employees expressed strong opposition to any proposals

related to the initial public offering (IPO) or privatisation of Regional Rural Banks (RRBs). They demanded that rural banks should continue to function strictly within the public sector framework.

The employees explained that RRBs play a crucial role in providing banking and financial services to farmers, self-help groups, small traders and rural households. They argued that

privatisation could weaken the social mandate of rural banks and adversely affect credit flow to agriculture and rural development sectors. Maintaining RRBs in the public sector, they said, is essential to ensure inclusive growth and financial inclusion in villages.

Responding to the concerns, the leader said the role of rural banks in supporting farmers and grassroots economic activity cannot be undermined. He acknowledged that RRBs have been instrumental in implementing government welfare schemes, extending agricultural credit and empowering women through self-help groups.

Stating that the demands raised by both the NFHH and the rural bank employees are reasonable, the leader as-

sured them of full support. He said the issues would be brought to the attention of the respective ministries and would also be raised in Parliament to seek appropriate policy action.

"The protection of traditional artisans and the strengthening of rural banking institutions are closely linked to the welfare of rural India," he said, adding that sustainable development cannot be achieved without ensuring livelihood security for artisans and accessible financial services for rural communities.

He reiterated his commitment to act as a bridge between stakeholders and the government, and assured both organisations that their voices would be represented at the national level.

# Telangana Minister Urges Congress Panchayat Representatives to Deliver Efficient Governance

Koosumanchi, December 17, 2025 — Telangana Minister for Revenue, Housing, and Information, Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, met newly elected Congress representatives from the recent Gram Panchayat elections at the MLA camp office in Koosumanchi on Wednesday. During the meeting, the minister emphasized that providing efficient and accountable governance at the village level is the primary responsibility of elected representatives.

Minister Srinivas Reddy felicitated the newly elected Sarpanches by presenting them with shawls and sweets, appreciating their efforts and electoral success. He also congratulated the Upa Sarpanches and Ward Members, urging them to work collectively to ensure comprehensive development in their villages. The minister stressed that representatives must uphold transparency, fulfill their duties responsibly, and maintain the trust placed in them by villagers.

Highlighting the importance of coordinated governance, the minister



encouraged representatives to focus on key areas of rural development, including infrastructure improvements, social welfare initiatives, and community engagement programs. He emphasized that responsible leadership at the grassroots level would create lasting benefits for the people and strengthen local governance structures.

In addition to congratulating the winners, Minister Srinivas Reddy met with candidates who were defeated in the elections. He motivated them not to be disheartened and urged them to continue working for the party and the welfare of the community. He reminded them that dedication to public service, regardless of electoral outcomes, is essential for

the growth of both the party and the villages they serve.

The minister also highlighted the broader goal of strengthening the Congress Party's presence in rural areas, emphasizing that unity among all representatives—both elected and runners-up—would enable the party to achieve greater impact. He encouraged collaborative

efforts to complete ongoing development projects and address pending issues effectively, ensuring that citizens experience tangible improvements in their daily lives.

The meeting concluded with a strong message of unity and commitment. Minister Srinivas Reddy expressed confidence that through coordinated and transparent governance, Congress

representatives could provide better services, uphold public trust, and contribute to the holistic development of villages across Telangana. The interaction underscored the party's focus on grassroots empowerment and accountable leadership, sending a clear message about the importance of dedication and integrity in local governance.

## Telangana Cabinet Approves Third DISCOM to Strengthen Power Sector

Hyderabad: The Telangana government has approved the establishment of a third power distribution company (DISCOM) in the state to strengthen the electricity sector and improve operational efficiency. The decision was taken at a recent Cabinet meeting after detailed discussions on reforms in power distribution.

Currently, Telangana has two DISCOMs — Northern Power Distribution Company Limited (NPDC) and Southern Power Distribution Company Limited (SPDCL). The new DISCOM will operate alongside these entities, primarily handling power delivery for government-sponsored welfare schemes and critical utility services.

Officials said the new company will manage electricity connections and distribution related to agricultural connections, lift irrigation schemes, Mission Bhagiratha water supply, safe drinking water schemes, and power supplied to urban and rural utilities. By consolidating subsidy-linked supply categories under one entity, the government aims to streamline operations and reduce the financial burden on existing DISCOMs.



The move is also part of broader reforms aimed at improving efficiency and sustainability in the power sector. With growing electricity demand, policymakers emphasised the need for structural changes to ensure reliable supply and better financial health for distribution companies. Separating commercial and subsidy-linked power distribution is expected to make operations more transparent and manageable.

The Cabinet also approved plans to strengthen energy infrastructure, including implementing underground power cabling systems in Hyderabad to modernise power delivery and reduce outages caused by weather or infrastructure faults.

Industry officials noted that Telangana's energy landscape is evolving rapidly, with expanding renewable energy procurement plans forming a key part of future strategies. The creation of a new DISCOM is seen as a significant step in addressing current challenges and aligning power distribution mechanisms with the state's long-term developmental goals.

The government expects that the third DISCOM will enhance operational efficiency, improve service delivery for subsidy-linked consumers, and contribute to a more sustainable and financially healthy electricity sector across Telangana.



# Telangana Sarpanch Oath-Taking Ceremony Postponed to December 22

Hyderabad, December 17, 2025 — The Telangana government has postponed the oath-taking and assumption of office of newly elected Sarpanches and Ward Members to December 22, officials from the Panchayat Raj Department announced on Wednesday. The ceremony was initially scheduled for December 20, but the date was revised following representations from several elected representatives.

According to officials, many newly elected Sarpanches requested a change in the schedule, stating that December

20 was not considered an auspicious day for the oath-taking ceremony. Taking these requests into consideration, the Panchayat Raj Department issued fresh instructions, rescheduling the swearing-in to December 22 across the state.

With the revised schedule, all newly elected Sarpanches and Ward Members will take their oaths on the same day in their respective gram panchayats. Officials also clarified that the first official meetings of the gram panchayats will be held on December 22, during which the



election of Upa-Sarpanches is expected to take place. Preparations for the ceremony are underway in several villages, with gram panchayat offices being readied for the

formal assumption of charge by the newly elected representatives. In many places, the oath-taking is expected to be marked by community gatherings, with villagers, local leaders,

and officials attending the event.

The postponement comes after the successful completion of the third and final phase of the Telangana Gram Panchayat elections, which concluded on December 17. The elections witnessed keen participation from rural voters, with newly elected representatives preparing to begin their tenure and address local development priorities.

Officials stated that the decision to reschedule was taken to ensure smooth conduct of the ceremonies and to accommodate the sentiments of the elected representatives. The department emphasized that the change in date will not affect the administrative functioning of gram panchayats and that all arrangements are being made to ensure uniform implementation across the state.

With the oath-taking set for December 22, the newly elected Sarpanches and Ward Members are expected to formally take charge and begin their responsibilities, marking a new phase in grassroots governance and rural administration in Telangana.

## BRS MLAs Criticise Telangana Assembly Speaker Over Disqualification Ruling

Hyderabad, December 17, 2025 — Several Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) legislators held a forceful press conference on Wednesday to condemn the recent decision by the Telangana Assembly Speaker, asserting that it undermines constitutional norms and political accountability. The BRS MLAs criticised the Speaker's handling of disqualification petitions against legislators accused of defecting to the ruling party, escalating political tensions in the state.

At the briefing, BRS leaders KP Vivekananda and M. Sanjay Kumar described the Speaker's dismissal of disqualification petitions against five defected MLAs as a "failure" of his constitutional responsibilities. They argued that the decision appeared influenced by political pressure and did not reflect



the principles of democratic accountability. The controversy revolves around petitions filed by BRS leaders seeking the disqualification of legislators who had won on BRS tickets in the 2023 Assembly elections but later shifted allegiance to the ruling party. Acting under the Constitution's Tenth Schedule, the Speaker recently dismissed these petitions. BRS lawmakers claimed this weakens anti-defection safeguards and sets a troubling precedent for legislative conduct.

During the press meet, the MLAs also announced plans to pursue legal

remedies, including approaching the High Court, contending that the Speaker's ruling was fundamentally flawed and unconstitutional. They reiterated that BRS remains committed to upholding democratic norms and will continue its legal battle to ensure elected representatives who change party allegiance face appropriate consequences.

The dispute has fuelled wider political debate in Telangana, highlighting growing tensions between the opposition BRS and the state's ruling party. Analysts note that the episode underscores ongoing ques-

tions about legislative norms, party loyalty, and the role of institutional authority in managing defections and ensuring political accountability. This development follows earlier directives from the Supreme Court, which had urged the Speaker to decide on disqualification petitions within a stipulated timeframe. Delays and the eventual dismissal have drawn public attention and scrutiny, raising concerns about the enforcement of constitutional safeguards for political stability and integrity.

As BRS prepares to escalate the matter through legal channels, political observers suggest that the dispute could influence public perceptions and shape strategic calculations ahead of upcoming elections in Telangana.

## BJP MLA Criticizes Telangana Speaker Over Delay in Defected MLAs' Cases

Hyderabad: BJP leader and MLA Aleti Maheshwar Reddy has criticized the Telangana Assembly Speaker for allegedly violating the Constitution by delaying decisions on defected MLAs, calling the selective handling of cases "unacceptable" and "contemptuous of law." He stated that the Supreme Court had clearly instructed that verdicts on such matters be issued within three months, yet nearly one year and nine months have passed without a complete resolution.

MLA Maheshwar Reddy noted that on March 18, three MLAs defected from the BRS party to the Congress. While the Speaker granted a clean chit to MLA Venkata Rao due to lack of evidence, no decision has been announced regarding MLAs Danam Nagender and Kadiyam Srihari, leav-



ing their cases pending. Additionally, seven other MLAs, including Gudem Mahipal Reddy, Krishna Mohan, Gandhi, and Prakash Goud, were cleared, while Yadayya, Pocharam Srinivas Reddy, and Sanjay Kumar remain under scrutiny.

He questioned why, despite the Supreme Court's clear directive, the Speaker has delayed verdicts selectively, allow-

ing relief for some defected MLAs while keeping others pending. Maheshwar Reddy alleged that the Speaker appears to be acting under pressure from the Chief Minister, instead of upholding constitutional responsibilities.

The BJP leader emphasized that this delay undermines democratic principles and the people's mandate. He de-

mandated that the Speaker act impartially and provide clear explanations for the delay, ensuring that decisions on all defected MLAs are issued in accordance with the Supreme Court's timeline. He further stressed that timely and fair adjudication is essential to maintain the integrity of the Constitution and prevent political manipulation. According to Maheshwar Reddy, failure to act impartially not only violates the rights of elected representatives but also sets a dangerous precedent for the democratic framework of Telangana.

The BJP leader urged the Speaker to uphold transparency, fairness, and the rule of law, ensuring that all pending cases are resolved without further delay, in line with constitutional mandates.

## Jaggareddy Slams BJP for Targeting Nehru, Gandhi

Senior Congress leader Jaggareddy has strongly criticised the BJP and the Modi government, alleging that Parliament has become a place where public issues are no longer discussed. Addressing party workers and the media, he said debates on farmers' problems, women's issues and youth unemployment have completely disappeared under the current regime.

Jaggareddy accused the BJP of deliberately targeting former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, who, he said, sacrificed their lives and property for India's freedom. "The BJP is working with the sole aim of erasing the names of Nehru and Gandhi from public discourse," he alleged, calling it a "deeply deplorable mindset".

Referring to recent parliamentary debates, Jaggareddy praised Priyanka Gandhi for giving a firm response during the discussion on "Vande Mataram". He said that earlier Nehru was targeted, and now even Mahatma Gandhi is being dragged into political controversy. "People



who were not even born when Gandhi and Nehru fought for freedom are today speaking against them," he remarked, urging citizens to think seriously about the direction the country is taking.

Highlighting history, he said Mahatma Gandhi launched the Salt Satyagraha in 1930, long before Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah were born. "Those who came after independence are questioning the very leaders who won freedom for this nation," he said. Jaggareddy accused Modi and Amit

Shah of using politics to deliberately diminish the legacy of Gandhi and Nehru so that their names are no longer heard in public life.

He reminded that Nehru spent nearly 12 years in jail during the freedom struggle. "According to your calculations, are such people criminals?" he asked sarcastically, adding that even spending a single day in jail is frightening for many. Jaggareddy said Modi becoming Prime Minister thrice was possible only because of the democratic framework created by the Consti-

tution framed under Dr B.R. Ambedkar and the values upheld by the Gandhi family.

Jaggareddy alleged that while Mahatma Gandhi used the name of Lord Ram to unite people, the BJP is using it to divide society. He questioned whether the promise of depositing 15 lakh into every poor person's bank account was ever discussed or fulfilled in Parliament.

Stating that Mahatma Gandhi's ideology continues to guide the world, Jaggareddy accused the BJP and RSS of deliberately avoiding Gandhi's name and questioned what their real ideology stands for. He said the BJP's politics revolves around targeting Rahul Gandhi, Nehru and the Gandhi family.

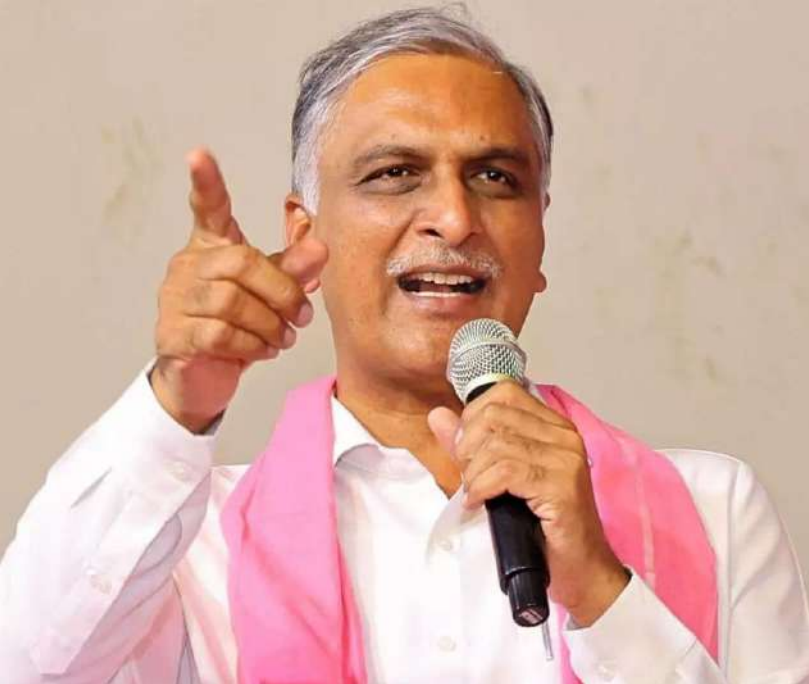
Announcing future plans, Jaggareddy said a massive protest meeting would be organised in Sangareddy soon against what he called a conspiracy by Modi to malign Nehru and Gandhi. "We will hold a public meeting with nearly one lakh people. The date will be announced shortly," he declared.

## Harish Rao Slams Speaker's Ruling on Defected MLAs as 'Grave Constitutional Violation'

Hyderabad: Senior BRS leader T. Harish Rao on Wednesday strongly criticised the Telangana Assembly Speaker's recent decision to reject disqualification petitions against MLAs accused of defecting to the ruling Congress party, calling the ruling a "grave constitutional violation" and an assault on democratic values.

Harish Rao's remarks came shortly after Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar dismissed the petitions filed by the BRS against five legislators who were elected on BRS tickets but were alleged to have shifted allegiance to the Congress. The Speaker ruled that there was insufficient evidence to prove formal defection under the anti-defection provisions of the Constitution.

Describing the decision as an attempt to "trample the Constitution," Harish Rao charged that the ruling Congress government and the Speaker had undermined the anti-defection law for political convenience. He said that while the Congress claims to champion constitutional morals and speaks of protect-



ing the Constitution in national campaigns, its actions in Telangana reveal a starkly different approach.

"The provisions of the anti-defection laws clearly outlined in the Constitution were ignored," he said, asserting that the Speaker's ruling favoured the ruling party and set a dangerous precedent. Rao accused the government of seeking political gains at the expense of constitutional safeguards designed to maintain the integrity

of elected mandates. Rao also highlighted that the controversy comes amid earlier judicial scrutiny, where the Supreme Court reprimanded the Speaker for delays in adjudicating disqualification petitions and had set deadlines for a final decision. The top court had emphasised that undue delay in such matters undermines the Tenth Schedule and democratic accountability.

The senior BRS leader said people are ob-

serving what he characterised as hypocrisy in the government's public messaging versus its actions, and warned that the ruling will have far-reaching implications for democratic norms and legislative ethics.

Harish Rao's comments reflect sustained opposition pressure following the ruling, with the party planning further legal recourse to challenge the decision and uphold what it describes as constitutional propriety.



# From Bidar to Hyderabad - The Complete, Simple Story of Sachet Reddy and TAG (Take A Gift)

Hyderabad, December 17: This is a longer, more detailed telling of Sachet Reddy's journey. I'll keep the language simple and clear, but I'll explain each step so you can see how a small idea turned into a real business.

**Early life and the first idea**

Sachet grew up in Bidar, a small town. He was an ordinary student with big hopes. While studying at Reva University, he noticed a small need: campus events needed good-looking, affordable t-shirts. Instead of waiting, he decided to try.

He designed some t-shirt ideas and showed them to his seniors and to the head of his department. He didn't push; he listened. They liked his design and asked him to supply shirts for an event. That first order was small, but it mattered a lot. It was his first real sale. It taught him two things: people will buy if the product is right, and asking politely and showing work can open doors.

**Learning fast and growing confidence**

After that success, Sachet kept going. He learned how to talk to clients, how to manage small orders, and how to make sure the product reached on time. He worked with college groups and student clubs. Word spread, and soon colleges in Bangalore — such as Dayananda Sagar and Bangalore Institute of Technology — started placing orders too.



Those early orders were not huge. But they did something precious: they gave him money and confidence. He used the earnings carefully. He learned to balance design, quality, and cost. He also learned to handle people — students, teachers, club coordinators. Each order was practiced in running a small business.

**Bringing the idea home**

With some savings and a clearer plan, Sachet returned to Bidar to speak with his parents. He told them about his work and his dream of starting a business. His parents

could have said no. But they listened. They trusted him enough to let him try. That family talk was a turning point. They agreed to support him. In 2017, from that trust and planning, TAG — Take A Gift — was born. The idea was simple: provide thoughtful, well-made gifts and items that companies could give to employees, clients, or guests. The focus was on quality and presentation, not just price.

**Humble beginnings**

TAG started very small. The office was tiny — about 10 by 15 feet. There was no fancy

furniture, no big team. It was just a place to plan, pack, and ship. But inside that small room, Sachet and his early helpers worked hard. They designed gift boxes, chose products, and learned about packaging and branding. In those first months, TAG handled gifts and items that companies could give to employees, clients, or guests. The focus was on quality and presentation, not just price.

Scaling up — serving

Hyderabad's companies

Step by step, the business grew. TAG began to get orders from bigger companies, especially IT firms in Hyderabad. These companies needed reliable gifting partners for festivals, employee welcome kits, client giveaways, and special events. TAG delivered good quality and punctual service, and that built trust. To serve bigger clients, Sachet improved operations. He created checklists, timed production, and set quality checks. He hired people he could trust. He learned simple systems for handling many orders at once. That made it possible for

TAG to work with multiple big clients at the same time.

TAG did not sell only t-shirts. Over time, the company widened its products. They offered corporate gift items like mugs, pens, notebooks, custom boxes, food hampers, and branded apparel. Sachet focused on details — neat logos, clean packaging, and small touches that made gifts feel special. A big reason TAG grew was this care for details. When a company gifts something, it reflects its brand. Sachet kept that in mind. His team matched the company's message, colors, and tone in every package.

Sachet did something unexpected: he diversified. He entered the dairy business. This was a different world — food supply, farm-to-home logistics, and product freshness. He chose to work with A2 Gir cow milk and make ghee. The idea was to offer premium, natural dairy products that many people now prefer. This move showed Sachet's willingness to explore new markets. It also showed his focus on quality. Whether a gift box or a jar of ghee, he wanted the product to feel trustworthy and high-quality.

As TAG grew, it began to attract wider attention. Clients in corporate circles praised the brand for reliability and taste. Celebrities also took notice. When public figures use or mention a brand, it brings visibility. That attention helped TAG become known not only



among companies but also in social circles.

**What made Sachet succeed**

**Several simple things explain his success:**

- Hard work and patience: He started small and kept going.
- Listening and learning: He listened to customers and improved.
- Care for quality: Packaging and product quality mattered.
- Good relationships: From seniors at college to corporate clients - he valued every link.
- Willingness to try new things: Like moving into dairy products.

Today TAG is more than a college side project. It is a company that began in a small room and grew into a brand serving Hyderabad's business community and beyond. Sachet's journey is still continuing. He keeps looking for ways to improve, and he keeps his focus on quality and trust.

Sachet's story shows a clear lesson: small beginnings can lead to big things when you combine a good idea with hard work, care, and steady decisions. From selling a few t-shirts at college to building a trusted corporate gifting firm — and then adding a dairy line — his path is a model of steady growth and practical work.

## HYDRA Launches Week-Long Training for 'Yuva Aapada Mitra' Volunteers

Hyderabad, December 17:

HYDRA Commissioner A.V. Ranganath on Tuesday inaugurated a week-long training program for "Yuva Aapada Mitra" volunteers, stressing that the true meaning of human life lies in thinking beyond oneself and extending a helping hand to others. Addressing the volunteers at Pathullaguda, he said a life devoted to the welfare and safety of society gains real purpose.

Quoting renowned poet C. Narayana Reddy, Ranganath recalled the line, "What is the value of a life that does not strive for others?" He said the verse beautifully explains the essence of humanity and the importance of living for others. He urged the youth to imbibe this philosophy and translate it into action, especially during times of natural disasters and emergencies.

The HYDRA Commissioner said the "Yuva Aapada Mitra" scheme was designed to prepare young volunteers to not only protect themselves but also safeguard people living around them during natural calamities and crisis situations. He appreciated the volunteers for coming forward with a spirit of service and said such initiatives reflect social responsibility and compassion.

Ranganath emphasized that one hand should always be extended to help others. "Reaching a higher position in life should not be the end goal. We must also sup-



port and uplift those around us," he said. He explained that the training program would equip volunteers with essential skills to respond effectively during emergencies and raise awareness about local conditions and potential risks. "Only when you understand your surroundings can you protect others during critical moments," he added.

He encouraged the participants to thoroughly learn all aspects of the training over the week and later pass on this knowledge to many more people. According to him, this multiplier effect would help build a strong and prepared community capable of responding swiftly during disasters.

During the interaction, the Commissioner addressed several questions raised by students regarding HYDRA's activities. He also sought feedback from the volunteers, making the session interactive and informative. The students praised HYDRA's efforts in restoring water bodies, protecting public utility lands and preserving parks, calling them vital for sustainable urban development and disaster mitigation.

Several senior officials

participated in the program and shared valuable guidance with the volunteers. HYDRA Admin SP R. Sudarshan, Additional Director Varla Papayya, NDRF Deputy Commandant Damodar Singh, My Bharat Assistant Director Ganta Rajesh, HYDRA RFO Jayaprakash, and DAP VOs Yagna Narayana and Gautham addressed the gathering and offered practical suggestions on disaster preparedness, discipline and teamwork.

HYDRA ADRF RFO D. Mohan Rao explained the details of the week-long training program. He said the training includes both theoretical sessions and field-level exposure, as per the Commissioner's instructions, to ensure volunteers gain hands-on experience. Field visits have been included to help participants understand real-time challenges and response mechanisms during emergencies.

The program aims to create a strong network of trained youth volunteers who can act as first responders during disasters, reinforcing community resilience and supporting official agencies in safeguarding lives and property.



## Police Told to Ignore Borders, Act With Zero Delay: Sajjanar

Hyderabad, December 17: Hyderabad Police Commissioner VC Sajjanar on Wednesday stressed that police station limits and commissionerate boundaries should never become obstacles in maintaining law and order or controlling crime in the city. Emphasising swift justice for victims, he called for strict and effective implementation of the "Zero Delay" policy at the ground level.

Addressing a high-level coordination meeting of three police commissionerates at the Telangana Integrated Command and Control Centre (TICCC) in Banjara Hills, Sajjanar said criminals do not respect territorial boundaries and neither should the police while responding to crimes. The meeting was attended by Cyberabad Police Commissioner Avinash Mohanty and Rachakonda Police Commissioner Sudheer Babu, along with senior officers.

During the meeting, detailed discussions were held on city security, crime control, traffic management and the movement of criminals across commissionerate jurisdictions. Field-level officers highlighted that with the rapid advancement of technology, criminals often commit offences in one commissionerate and flee into another, exploiting jurisdictional delays. Sajjanar warned that any delay in response due to boundary issues could allow offenders to escape.

He instructed officers to ensure there is no communication gap among lower-level staff and directed that the nearest police unit must respond immediately to a crime, irrespective of jurisdiction. "What matters is prompt action and justice to the victim, not boundaries," he asserted.

The Police Commissioner also called for joint surveillance on

rowdy-sheeters and habitual offenders across the three commissionerates. He noted that many criminals frequently change their residences to evade monitoring and stressed the need for constant tracking through shared intelligence and coordinated information exchange.

Traffic management also featured prominently in the discussions. The three commissionerates decided to strictly enforce uniform traffic regulations. Sajjanar directed that 'no entry' timings for heavy vehicles entering the city should be implemented uniformly and that such vehicles must be stopped outside city limits during peak hours to avoid congestion.

Special emphasis was laid on weekend enforcement. Sajjanar instructed officers to conduct simultaneous joint checks across all three commissionerates to

prevent drunk driving offenders from escaping by moving from one area to another. He also ordered coordinated special drives to recover pending traffic challans across the city.

At border junctions, traffic police from adjacent commissionerates were told to work in real time coordination, especially on signal timings, to ensure smooth vehicular movement. Sajjanar also raised concerns over traffic problems caused by private travel buses and called for coordinated steps to find a permanent solution. Stating that Hyderabad's safety is a shared responsibility, Sajjanar said, "When criminals have no borders, police too should have none. Zero Delay in responding to victims is our priority. Though there are three commissionerates, our goal is one — Safe Hyderabad." Cyberabad Police Commissioner Avinash Mohanty said Hy-

derabad is expanding rapidly, particularly in areas like the IT corridor and Financial District, making inter-commissionerate coordination essential for crime control and traffic regulation. He highlighted the importance of integrating advanced technology and CCTV networks to track criminal movements in real time. Rachakonda Police Commissioner Sudheer Babu advocated forming joint teams to control crime across Hyderabad and underlined the importance of intelligence sharing, especially in monitoring habitual offenders and curbing anti-social activities such as drug trafficking.

The meeting was attended by Additional CP M. Srinivasulu, Joint Commissioners Tafseer Iqbal, Joel Davis and Gajarao Bhupal, along with Deputy Commissioners of Police from all three commissionerates.



# Check Dam Wall Collapses in Bhupalpally District; Probe Ordered

Hyderabad: A check dam wall has collapsed in Bhupalpally district, causing concerns among local residents and prompting officials to launch an investigation into the incident, police and officials said.

The incident occurred at a check dam constructed over a local stream in Bhupalpally district, where a portion of the concrete wall suddenly gave way. The collapse triggered anxiety among villagers who rely on the structure for irrigation and water retention, especially during the dry season. While no casualties



alties have been reported so far, the damage has affected water storage and agricultural activities in the surrounding area.

Local residents immediately raised concerns about the cause of the collapse, with some villagers suspecting structural weaknesses due to poor maintenance. Others expressed fears that illegal activities such as sand mining or unauthorised tampering could have contributed to the failure of the dam wall. These concerns echo similar episodes in other districts where check dams and water

structures have been damaged under mysterious circumstances.

Officials from the district administration and local irrigation department visited the site soon after the incident was reported. They conducted an initial assessment of the collapse and cordoned off the affected area to prevent any risks to passersby. Authorities ordered a detailed technical inspection to determine whether the failure was due to engineering faults, lack of maintenance, natural erosion or possible sabotage.

The district administration has also sought cooperation from the police for a parallel inquiry, given the suspicions raised by the local community. Initial checks are focusing on structural integrity, erosion patterns and any signs of external damage. Officials said they would assess water flow levels, soil conditions and quality of construction materials as part of the probe.

Residents emphasised the importance of the dam for irrigation and livestock, and expressed hope that the authorities would expedite repairs or reconstruction to mitigate further impact on farming. Local leaders have urged the government to ensure that essential water infrastructure is regularly inspected and strengthened to prevent similar incidents in the future.

The investigation continues, and officials have assured the community that necessary steps will be taken based on the technical findings. They reiterated that public safety and sustainable water management remain top priorities as the inquiry progresses.

## Clash Erupts Between BRS and Congress Workers in Vikarabad District

Vikarabad, Telangana: Tensions flared on Thursday as workers from the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) and the Congress clashed in Vikarabad district, underscoring rising political friction amid the ongoing Gram Panchayat elections. The confrontation took place in a village area where supporters of both parties were engaged in heated exchanges, police and local residents said.

According to eyewitnesses, the clash began when activists from the two parties confronted each other during campaign activities. Both groups were reportedly engaged in discussions over election support and local influence when the situation quickly escalated into physical confrontation. With tempers running high, the disagreement turned into a scuffle involving sticks and shouts, prompting local police to intervene and bring the situation under control.

Officers deployed at the scene managed to separate the groups and restore order, and no serious injuries were reported. Police told reporters that they are investigating the circumstances that led to the clash and have urged party workers to maintain peace and abstain from violence. They emphasised that



all political activity must adhere to democratic norms and lawful conduct.

Local leaders from both parties condemned the incident, with each side blaming the other for instigating the conflict. Some community members expressed concern that such clashes could undermine the democratic process at a time when voters are casting their ballots in panchayat elections, which play a crucial role in grassroots governance and local development.

This incident in Vikarabad reflects a broader pattern of heightened political competition in parts of Telangana this election season, with occasional reports of agitation and confrontations between rival party workers. Political analysts say that such clashes often arise from intense competition at the grassroots level, especially in areas where local bodies and community influence are closely contested.

Officials reiterated

## Mother and Daughter Contest Sarpanch Seat in Telangana Gram Panchayat Polls



Hyderabad: In a rare development during the ongoing Gram Panchayat elections in Telangana, a mother and her daughter-in-law have emerged as rivals for the same sarpanch seat, highlighting intense local political competition within families. The unusual electoral contest occurred in Heerapur village in Adilabad district, where the panchayat seat is reserved for women this election cycle.

Both Thodasam Lakshmi and her daughter-in-law Thodasam Maheshwari filed nominations for the sarpanch post after efforts to elect a candidate unanimously failed. Seats are periodically reserved for women and various social categories to promote inclusive representation, and this reservation opened the opportunity for both candidates from the same household to enter the fray.

Lakshmi, a long-time resident of the village, said she knows the community well and, despite having limited formal education, believes her experience and dedication to village welfare make her the right choice. She emphasised her commitment to addressing local needs and working for the betterment of all residents.

Maheshwari, who holds Intermediate and ITI qualifications, explained that she had initially sought employment but did not succeed. With the sarpanch position reserved for women, she saw an opportunity to serve her community directly and decided to contest. She believes her educational background and fresh perspective can contribute positively to village development.

The face-off between family members has drawn significant local attention and reflects the broader enthusiasm and competitive spirit surrounding panchayat elections in Telangana. In some villages, such intra-family contests illustrate how reservation policies can open doors for new faces and redefine traditional roles within rural communities.

## Voters Still in Queue After Polling Time Ends in Nirmal District GP Elections

Nirmal (Telangana): Villagers in parts of Nirmal district continued to stand in long queues to cast their votes even after the official polling hours had ended, officials and voters said, highlighting the strong enthusiasm for the Gram Panchayat elections in the region.



Polling in rural areas across Telangana has been marked by high turnout despite chilly weather and other logistical challenges, and Nirmal district was no exception. Several polling stations in the district saw large numbers of voters waiting to exercise their franchise even after the scheduled closing time, demonstrating the rural electorate's keen interest in participating in local self-governance. Election officials assured the public that voters who were already in line at the end of polling hours were allowed to cast their ballots in accordance with electoral rules.

The Election Commission's guidelines clearly state that any voter standing in the queue before the scheduled closing time must be permitted to vote, and officials at the Nirmal polling booths followed this directive to ensure every eligible voter's right was upheld. The extension of service beyond the

closing hour at several booths did not lead to any untoward incidents, and polling staff remained calm and coordinated throughout the process.

Local residents expressed satisfaction that officials respected voters' rights and ensured that people did not lose their chance to vote just because of timing or long lines. Many villagers said they had lined up early in the day but only reached the polling counters as the closing hour approached, resulting in extended service times. Their comments reflect the importance that rural communities place on Gram Panchayat elections, which directly affect village development decisions and local welfare schemes.

Despite the delay in some booths, authorities reported that the overall polling was

conducted smoothly, with no major law and order issues or disruptions. Security personnel were deployed in key areas to manage crowds and assist the polling staff.

The strong turnout and willingness of voters to wait beyond official hours show the deep engagement of the electorate in the democratic process at the grassroots level. Counting of votes is expected to take place soon, and early indications from many parts of the state suggest active participation and competitive contests in several villages.

Officials reiterated that all voters who arrived before the official end time were allowed to vote without prejudice, ensuring that the democratic principle of universal franchise was upheld in every polling station across Nirmal district.

# Khammam and Kothagudem Report Record Voter Turnout in Third Phase of GP Polls

Hyderabad: The third and final phase of Gram Panchayat (GP) elections in Telangana witnessed remarkable voter participation, with Khammam and Kothagudem districts recording exceptionally high turnout. Election officials described the polling as peaceful and orderly, reflecting strong public engagement in local governance and grassroots democracy.

In Khammam district, polling was conducted across 168 Gram Panchayats and 1,372 wards in seven mandals, including Kallur, Penuballi, Sathupalli, Singareni, Tallada, and Vemsur. District Collector Anudeep Durishetty reported that the voter turnout reached an impressive

88.84 percent by the conclusion of polling. Officials noted that the turnout had gradually increased throughout the day, with more than 27 percent of voters casting their ballots by 9 am and nearly 87 percent by early afternoon. A total of 2,16,765 voters out of 2,43,983 registered electors exercised their franchise in this phase. Authorities confirmed that polling proceeded without any significant disturbances, underlining the efficiency and preparedness of the election machinery.

In neighbouring Kothagudem district, polling was held in Allapalli, Gundala, Julurupad, Laxmidevipally, Sujathanagar, Tekulapalli, and Yellandu mandals.



Out of 1,75,074 registered voters, 1,48,230 citizens cast their votes, resulting in a voter turnout of 86.47 percent. Officials emphasised that polling remained smooth, with security arrangements ensuring a peaceful environment for voters. The authorities also highlighted that no law and order issues were reported during the entire process.

Election officials undertook extensive measures to ensure a seamless

polling process. Adequate polling staff, security personnel, and technical support were deployed across polling stations to facilitate smooth operations. Measures were also taken to ensure compliance with voter identification protocols and to provide assistance to elderly and differently-abled voters. Counting of votes was scheduled immediately after polling concluded, with authorities coordinating closely to ensure accuracy and transparency in the process.

Observers noted that the high turnout in both districts indicates strong public faith in local governance and the democratic process at the grassroots level. The enthusiasm shown by rural

voters demonstrates their keen interest in having a say in the administration of their villages and local development projects. Such active participation also strengthens the legitimacy of elected representatives and reinforces accountability in local administration.

The smooth conduct of the elections is being seen as a testament to the effective coordination between the election authorities, police, and administrative officials. Both Khammam and Kothagudem districts are now among the highest-performing districts in terms of voter turnout in the final phase of Gram Panchayat elections across Telangana.

Officials and observers hailed the participation as a positive sign for democratic engagement in the state. The successful conclusion of the third phase of polling marks the end of a crucial exercise in strengthening the Panchayati Raj system, with villagers exercising their right to vote and shape the future of local governance.

With such high participation rates and the absence of major disturbances, the third phase of GP elections in Khammam and Kothagudem underscores the importance of citizen involvement and the vitality of grassroots democracy in Telangana.





# Delhi’s 2025 Toxic Winter: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Emergency Measures, Judicial Mandates, and the BS-VI “Clean Air” Crusade

As of Wednesday, December 17, 2025, the National Capital Region (NCR) has reached a critical environmental tipping point. Following several consecutive days where the Air Quality Index (AQI) remained lodged in the "Severe Plus" category—frequently exceeding the hazardous 450 mark—the Delhi Government has unleashed its most stringent and technologically advanced pollution mitigation plan to date.<sup>1</sup> Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa has declared an "all-out war" on pollutants, effectively sealing the city's borders to high-emission vehicles and introducing a radical "No PUC, No Fuel" policy that utilizes AI-driven surveillance.<sup>2</sup> This emergency response, conducted under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) Stage IV, is designed to protect the health of over 30 million residents from a toxic cocktail of winter smog, stagnant winds, and vehicular exhaust that has turned the region into a "gas chamber."

### The Border Blockade: A "BS6-Only" Gateway



The most significant impact on daily life in the NCR began on Thursday, December 18, 2025.<sup>4</sup> Under the direct orders of the Environment Ministry, Delhi is transforming into a restricted-entry zone.<sup>5</sup> The centerpiece of this strategy is the mandatory enforcement of Bharat Stage 6 (BS-VI) standards for all vehicles entering from outside the city limits.<sup>6</sup> This measure is specifically aimed at the estimated 1.2 million vehicles that daily cross into Delhi from neighboring industrial and residential hubs like Gurugram, Noida, Ghaziabad, and Faridabad.<sup>7</sup>

Starting tomorrow, the 156 entry points into the capital will be heavily guarded.<sup>8</sup> Only private cars and commercial vehicles that meet BS-VI standards, or those running on clean

alternative fuels like Electricity (EVs), Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), will be permitted to pass.<sup>9</sup> This effectively bans all BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel vehicles registered outside Delhi.<sup>10</sup> To enforce this, over 580 police personnel and transport department officials have been deployed, supported by 37 Prakhar Vans (high-tech enforcement vehicles). Any non-compliant vehicle attempting to enter will be intercepted by Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras at the borders and turned back immediately.<sup>11</sup>

### "No PUC, No Fuel": The Digital Enforcement Era

In a move that has sent shockwaves through the local automotive community, Minister Sirsa has mandated that no petrol, diesel, or CNG pump in the National Capital Territory (NCT) shall dispense fuel to a vehicle without a valid Pollution Under Control (PUC) certificate.<sup>12</sup> Unlike previous years where checks were manual and sporadic, the 2025 mandate is entirely digital.<sup>13</sup>

The government has successfully integrated ANPR cameras across nearly all fuel stations in the city.<sup>14</sup> As a vehicle approaches a fuel dispenser, the camera scans the number plate and cross-references it with the centralized Vahan database.<sup>15</sup> If the vehicle's PUC has expired or is invalid, the fuel dispensing system is electronically locked for that transaction. Minister Sirsa has clarified that this "seamless and automated" system is designed to remove the burden of enforcement from fuel pump attendants and prevent on-ground altercations with drivers. This policy targets the estimated 8 lakh vehicles currently operating in Delhi with expired emission certificates, which are major contributors to particulate matter (PM2.5)

levels.<sup>16</sup>

### The Impact on Commuters and the Public Transport Response



The suddenness of the BS-VI mandate has created a logistical challenge for the roughly 1.2 million commuters whose vehicles are now effectively "stranded" outside Delhi.<sup>17</sup> To mitigate the inevitable crisis in urban mobility, the Delhi government has announced an emergency expansion of its public transport infrastructure.<sup>18</sup> Currently, the city has successfully inducted 3,427 electric buses into its fleet, with a fast-tracked target to reach 7,500 e-buses by late 2026.<sup>19</sup> For the current emergency, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) has been instructed to increase train frequencies during peak and off-peak hours to manage the anticipated 20% surge in ridership. Furthermore, the government is reportedly in talks with Google Maps to integrate real-time traffic management data to identify and clear congestion at the 100 identified pollution hotspots across the city.<sup>20</sup>

### Stricter Measures Under GRAP Stage IV

Beyond vehicular curbs, the GRAP-IV activation has brought the city's construction and industrial sectors to a virtual standstill.<sup>21</sup> The following measures are now in full effect:

- **Construction Ban:** A total prohibition has been placed on all construction and demolition (C&D) activities.<sup>22</sup> This includes major public infrastructure projects

like flyovers, highways, and power transmission lines, which are significant sources of dust pollution.

- **Mandatory Work From**

home (WFH): Labour Minister Kapil Mishra has issued a directive requiring all government and private offices to operate with at least 50% of their staff working from home.<sup>23</sup> Only emergency and essential services, such as hospitals, fire departments, and police, are exempt.<sup>24</sup>

- **Education Shift:** All educational institutions have moved to a hybrid or purely online mode for all classes except for Grades 10 and 12, who are preparing for board examinations.<sup>25</sup>

- **Industrial Shutdowns:** Only those industrial units registered to run on piped natural gas (PNG) or electricity are allowed to operate; any unit found using coal or biomass is subject to immediate sealing and heavy fines, which have already totaled ₹9.21 crore this season

### The Judicial Mandate: Supreme Court Eliminates the "Grey Area"

The current crackdown is supported by a landmark Supreme Court ruling delivered on December 17, 2025, which ended the lingering legal confusion over older vehicles.<sup>26</sup> Previously, an August 12 order had suggested a stay on coercive action against 10-year-old diesel and 15-year-old petrol vehicles.<sup>27</sup> However, a bench

of Delhi (MCD) to consider suspending toll collection at nine major entry points for one week to prevent idling traffic from further deteriorating the air quality.<sup>33</sup>

### Political and Environmental Context: A Transition Year

Politically, the measures have become a flashpoint. Minister Sirsa has defended the current government's record, stating that air quality showed improvement for eight out of the last eleven months compared to 2024.<sup>34</sup> He attributed the current "Severe" levels to unfavorable meteorological conditions—low wind speeds and temperature inversion—and what he termed the "inherited disease of pollution" from

previous administrations.<sup>35</sup> While apologizing for the inconvenience to citizens, he emphasized that "pollution cannot be fully controlled in a short period" and called for a collective, non-partisan effort to save the city's air.<sup>36</sup>

### Conclusion: The Road Ahead

As Delhi enters the coldest weeks of the year, the efficacy of these measures remains to be seen. The city is currently navigating a transition toward an all-electric and BS-VI-compliant fleet,



but the immediate human and economic cost of these restrictions is substantial. For millions of residents, the coming days will be a test of endurance, as they swap private cars for metros and offices for digital screens, all while waiting for the winds to shift and the toxic grey blanket to finally lift.

On the environmental front, the 2025 Air Pollution Mitiga-





# Supreme Court Mandatory BS-VI Ruling for Delhi Vehicles

In a critical move to combat the hazardous air quality in the National Capital Region (NCR), the Supreme Court of India has refined its stance on the vehicular ban, introducing a strict “BS-IV and above” mandate. This judicial intervention, delivered on Wednesday, December 17, 2025, modifies an earlier, more lenient directive. Previously, the court had suggested a stay on strict punitive action against 10-year-old diesel and 15-year-old petrol vehicles. However, following an urgent intervention by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), the court acknowledged that age alone is an insufficient metric for environmental safety. The new order specifies that only vehicles meeting Bharat Stage IV (BS-IV) emission standards or higher will be exempt from the ongoing crackdown.

This clarification effectively seals the fate of older BS-III compliant vehicles, which were largely manufactured before the 2010 rollout of BS-IV standards. According to the CAQM’s submission, these older engines contribute disproportionately to the toxic smog currently engulfing Delhi, lacking the sophisticated



particulate filters and exhaust treatment systems found in later models. The court’s decision removes the “grey area” that previously frustrated both law enforcement agencies and vehicle owners. Prior to this, many owners of vintage or well-maintained older cars hoped for a reprieve based on the car’s condition; the current ruling firmly prioritizes engine compliance over individual maintenance records.

The ruling comes at a time when the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Delhi has frequently crossed the “Severe+” threshold. By aligning the ban with Bharat Stage standards, the judiciary aims to modernize the capital’s fleet rapidly. Enforcement agencies, including the Delhi Traffic Police and the Transport Department, have been directed to impound non-compliant vehicles found plying on the roads from De-

cember 18. While this provides a clearer roadmap for environmental policy, it poses a significant challenge for middle-class families and small-scale transporters who still rely on older, well-functioning vehicles. The government is now under pressure to expedite scrappage incentives to help citizens transition to newer, cleaner transport options in the wake of this strict judicial mandate.

## Federal Regulation of OTT Platforms and Social Media



The Government of India has formally clarified the regulatory landscape for digital content, confirming that Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms like Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar, and Amazon Prime Video will remain outside the jurisdiction of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). In a statement to the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, Minister of State for Information and Broadcast-

ing, L. Murugan, emphasized that digital content is governed by the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. This framework established a three-tier grievance redressal mechanism, prioritizing self-regulation and age-based classification over the traditional “censorship” model applied to theatrical releases.

This distinction is vital for the creative industry, as it preserves the creative freedom of digital creators while enforcing a “Code of Ethics.” Under these rules, platforms are required to categorize content into age groups (U, U/A 7+, U/A 13+, U/A 16+, and A) and implement robust parental locks for mature content. The Minister highlighted that while the government does not

“censor” content pre-release, it maintains strict oversight regarding obscenity and national security. In a proactive strike against harmful content, the Centre revealed it has already disabled access to 43 smaller OTT platforms that were found to be streaming pornographic or obscene material under the guise of entertainment.

Furthermore, the government is tightening the screws on social media giants. Platforms with more than 50 lakh users are now legally mandated to appoint local grievance officers, chief compliance officers, and 24/7 nodal contact persons based in India. These entities must publish monthly compliance reports detailing the number of complaints received and the actions taken. This move is designed to make the internet safer for women and children by ensuring that illegal or defamatory content is removed within 36 hours of a court or government order. By shifting the focus from “pre-censorship” to “post-publication accountability,” the Centre aims to balance the ease of doing business in the digital economy with the necessity of maintaining public decency and communal harmony.

## Reciprocal Airspace Ban Between India and Pakistan

The diplomatic chill between New Delhi and Islamabad has reached a new low with the extension of reciprocal airspace closures, now set to continue until January 24, 2026. Pakistan’s aviation authorities issued a new Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) this week, formally prohibiting Indian-registered aircraft, as well as any aircraft owned, operated, or leased by Indian airlines, from entering or overflying its territory. This extension comes just days before the previous ban was set to expire, indicating that neither nation sees an immediate path toward de-escalation. India is expected to respond in kind within the next 48 hours, ensuring that the ban on Pakistani aircraft remains equally stringent.

This conflict in the skies originated in April 2025, following a devastating terror attack in Pahalgam, which India blamed on Pakistan-based militants. In response to the heightened security situation, Pakistan initiated the closure on April 24, and India followed suit on April 30. The bans have now entered their ninth consecutive month, creating significant logistical and financial hurdles for commercial aviation. While international carriers from third-party nations are permitted to overfly both territories, Indian and Pakistani national carriers are forced to take circuitous



routes. For Indian airlines flying to Europe, the US, or the Middle East, this means avoiding the direct path over Pakistan and flying southward over the Arabian Sea, adding 45 to 90 minutes of flight time and increasing fuel costs by lakhs of rupees per flight.

The financial burden of this “airspace war” is being felt sharply by state-run and pri-

vate airlines alike. Beyond the fuel costs, the increased flight duration disrupts crew scheduling and reduces the operational efficiency of long-haul fleets. On the diplomatic front, the extension of the NOTAM signals a complete breakdown in civil aviation dialogue. Typically, airspace rights are governed by international treaties under the ICAO

(International Civil Aviation Organization), but both nations have invoked “national security” clauses to bypass these norms. As the ban stretches into 2026, the prospect of a return to normalcy remains dim, leaving air travelers to bear the brunt of increased ticket prices and longer travel times due to the geopolitical stalemate.

## Tragic Death of Dehradun Journalist Following Assault

The journalistic community in Uttarakhand is in mourning and outrage following the death of Pankaj Mishra, an independent digital journalist based in Dehradun. Mishra passed away in the early hours of Tuesday, December 16, after a brutal physical assault at his residence in the Rajpur area. According to the First Information Report (FIR) filed by the victim’s family, a group of men—including a rival digital media professional—barged into Mishra’s home late Monday night. The assault was reportedly sparked by a professional dispute that had recently escalated into a heated and public confrontation on social media platforms.

The details of the attack are particularly harrowing. Mishra’s brother, Arvind, alleged in the police complaint that the attackers

specifically targeted Mishra’s chest and stomach, despite being aware that he was suffering from chronic heart and liver ailments. The complaint claims that one of the accomplices explicitly encouraged the main accused to hit the victim where he was most vulnerable, saying, “This will be enough to finish him.” Mishra was reportedly kicked and punched until he began bleeding from the mouth. Although the police arrived at the scene shortly after the group fled, Mishra initially declined a medical examination due to shock and physical trauma, intending to file a formal complaint the following morning. Unfortunately, his condition deteriorated rapidly at 3:00 AM, and he was declared dead upon arrival at Doon Hospital.

The Dehradun Police, led

by SSP Ajai Singh, have registered a case under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for murder, snatching, and house-trespass. While a post-mortem was conducted, the initial findings were inconclusive, prompting the family to request a second, more detailed forensic procedure to establish the direct link between the physical assault and the fatal collapse. The incident has raised serious concerns regarding the safety of independent journalists and the toxic nature of “social media wars” within the digital media fraternity. As of Wednesday, the main accused remains at large, and local press clubs have called for a swift investigation to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice for what they describe as a “premeditated silencing” of a media voice.

## India-Ethiopia Strategic Partnership and PM Modi’s Visit



The diplomatic relationship between India and Ethiopia, a bond spanning over 2,000 years of trade and cultural exchange, has officially entered its most significant phase following Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s state visit to Addis Ababa. In a landmark ceremony on Wednesday, the two nations formally upgraded their bilateral ties to a “Strategic Partnership,” focusing on defense cooperation, digital infrastructure, and food security. PM Modi was also conferred with Ethiopia’s highest civilian honor, “The Great Honour Nishan of Ethiopia,” making him the first global head of state to receive this distinction, signifying India’s rising influence in the Horn of Africa.

This visit was not merely symbolic; it resulted in several high-impact agree-

ments designed to integrate Ethiopia into India’s digital and economic success stories. Key among these is the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on digital transformation, which will see India helping Ethiopia implement a localized version of the “India Stack,” including digital identity systems and UPI-style payment interfaces. Furthermore, India announced a new Line of Credit specifically for Ethiopia’s agricultural sector, aiming to leverage Indian expertise in high-yield farming to bolster Ethiopian food sovereignty. In return, Ethiopia has offered Indian companies preferential access to its emerging manufacturing zones, particularly in the textile and pharmaceutical sectors.

The strategic elevation of this partnership is also seen

as a counterpoint to the growing influence of other global powers in Africa. By focusing on “people-centric development,” PM Modi’s administration is positioning India as a partner that offers sustainable, debt-friendly infrastructure rather than extractive economic models. The 2,000-year history—which began with ancient Aksumite trade with Indian ports—now serves as the foundation for modern security cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region and the Red Sea. As Ethiopia continues to play a pivotal role in the African Union, India’s deepened engagement ensures that New Delhi remains a primary stakeholder in the continent’s economic future, blending historical affinity with 21st-century technological leadership.

## Controversy Over TMC MP Vaping in Parliament

The hallowed halls of the Indian Parliament were the site of a bizarre and heated controversy this week as the BJP accused Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP Kirti Azad of “vaping” during active proceedings. The row erupted on Wednesday afternoon when Amit Malviya, the head of the BJP’s IT cell, shared a video clip on social media purportedly showing the former cricketer-turned-politician using an e-cigarette inside the Lok Sabha chamber. This followed a formal letter of complaint sent by BJP MP Anurag Thakur to the Speaker, alleging that an unnamed opposition leader was violating the strict rules of conduct within the House.

The BJP has characterized the act as an “unacceptable misconduct” and a bla-

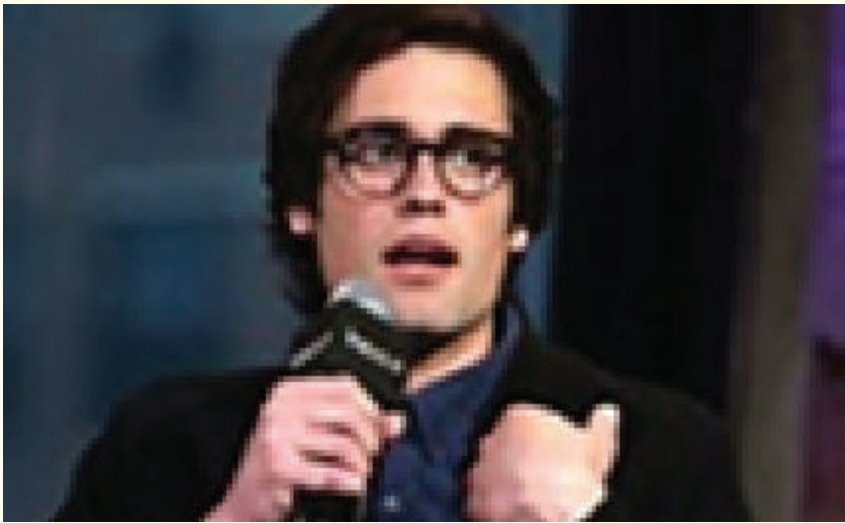
tant disregard for the sanctity of the Parliament. Malviya’s post took a direct jab at West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, demanding a clarification on whether her party sanctioned such behavior from its lawmakers. The saffron party argued that Parliament is the seat of law-making, and for an MP to ignore the nationwide ban on e-cigarettes—enacted by the very House they sit in—is a sign of deep-seated “audacity.” The video, which has since gone viral, shows the MP bringing a small device to his mouth, leading to widespread condemnation from treasury benches who have called for a formal inquiry and potential suspension.

On the other side of the aisle, TMC supporters and several opposition members

have questioned the timing and the source of the video. While the TMC leadership has not yet issued a formal rebuttal, some supporters suggested the clip might be taken out of context or misidentified. However, the optics of the situation have already caused significant political damage. Under the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Lok Sabha, the use of any smoking or tobacco products inside the chamber is strictly prohibited. If the Speaker determines that a violation occurred, Kirti Azad could face disciplinary action. This incident adds to a series of recent disruptions and decorum-related disputes that have plagued the current winter session, further deepening the rift between the government and the opposition.



The Reiner Tragedy: A Hollywood Dynasty Shattered



The entertainment industry is reeling from the news that Nick Reiner, 32, has been charged with the double murder of his parents, the legendary director Rob Reiner and photographer Michele Singer Reiner.<sup>31</sup> Prosecutors in Los Angeles filed two counts of first-degree murder with “special circumstances” on Tuesday, an allegation that carries the possibility of life without parole or the death penalty.<sup>32</sup> The couple was found stabbed to death on Sunday in their Brentwood residence, a crime that has prompted tributes from global figures, including former President Barack Obama.<sup>33</sup>

New details from the investigation paint a harrowing picture of the days leading up to the tragedy. Reports indicate that Rob and Nick were heard in a heated argument at a Christmas party hosted by comedian Conan O’Brien just 24 hours before the killings.<sup>34</sup> Family friends have revealed that Michele Reiner had expressed growing concern over Nick’s mental health in recent weeks.<sup>35</sup> Nick, who

had lived on the family’s Brentwood property, was arrested hours after the bodies were discovered by his sister.<sup>36</sup> The Los Angeles District Attorney, Nathan Hochman, emphasized the “intimate and brutal nature” of the crime, noting that the use of a knife as a weapon adds a “special allegation” to the charges.<sup>37</sup>

Rob Reiner’s legacy—spanning from All in the Family to directing classics like The Princess Bride and A Few Good Men—makes this personal tragedy a cultural one for Los Angeles.<sup>38</sup> Tributes have poured in from colleagues who remember the Reiners as a couple defined by activism and purpose.<sup>39</sup> Nick Reiner is currently undergoing a medical evaluation and is expected to be arraigned as soon as he is cleared by hospital staff.<sup>40</sup> The case has reignited discussions about the intersection of wealth, mental health, and domestic violence in high-profile families, as Hollywood prepares for a series of memorials for one of its most cherished couples.

South Africa: The Assassination of DJ Warras and the “Big Five” Cartel

The murder of Warrick Stock, better known as DJ Warras, has sent shockwaves through South Africa, highlighting the dangerous intersection of the entertainment industry and organized crime.<sup>41</sup> Stock, 40, was gunned down “execution-style” outside Zambesi House in the Johannesburg CBD on Tuesday.<sup>42</sup> CCTV footage captured a suspect dressed in a security uniform opening fire before fleeing on foot. Despite being armed with an unused firearm, Stock had no opportunity to defend himself, and nothing was stolen during the hit.<sup>43</sup>

Investigators believe the murder was a targeted hit linked to Stock’s business ventures in private security and property management.<sup>44</sup> Specifically, the hit appears connected to a disputed inner-city building eviction. This incident is not isolated; it is the latest in a string of murders targeting DJs and media personalities in the Gauteng province.<sup>45</sup> Law enforcement officials have linked these killings to a “law enforcement scandal” involving a powerful drug cartel known as the “Big Five.” Evidence suggests that criminal networks have infiltrated South Africa’s criminal justice system, using private security firms as fronts for drug distribution and extortion.<sup>46</sup>

The political reaction has been swift, with Sports, Arts, and Culture Minister Gayton McKenzie expressing “anger and sadness” over the loss



of a man who “spoke his truth without fear.” South Africa continues to grapple with one of the world’s highest murder rates, with recent police data showing approximately 63 murders occurring every day. The “brazen” nature of this daylight assassination in a busy city center has fueled public outcry for a massive crackdown on the cartels. As DJ Warras’s family mourns the loss of a “heart and anchor,” the South African Police Service is under immense pressure to break the cycle of violence that is claiming the nation’s cultural icons.

Streaming Wars: Warner Bros. Discovery Chooses Netflix Over Paramount

In a historic restructuring of the media landscape, the Warner Bros. Discovery (WBD) board has officially recommended that shareholders reject a \$108.4 billion hostile takeover bid from Paramount Skydance.<sup>47</sup> Instead, the board has reaffirmed its support for a merger with Netflix, valued between \$72 billion and \$83 billion.<sup>48</sup> While the Netflix offer carries a lower headline price, WBD’s leadership argues it represents “superior, more certain value” and a significantly clearer path through the regulatory “obstacle course.”<sup>49</sup>

The rejection of the Paramount bid—which was backed by the wealthy Ellison family and initially by Jared Kushner’s Affinity Partners—comes after WBD officials characterized the offer as “inadequate” and “illusory.”<sup>50</sup> A major turning point occurred when Kushner’s firm exited the financing group on Tuesday, weakening Paramount’s argument regarding “certainty of funding.”<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, WBD warned that accepting Paramount’s bid would trigger a \$2.8 billion termination fee to Netflix and face years of antitrust

scrutiny.<sup>52</sup> Under the proposed Netflix deal, shareholders would receive \$23.25 in cash plus a significant stake in Netflix common stock, effectively merging the world’s most powerful content library with the leading streaming technology.<sup>53</sup>

If the Netflix merger proceeds, it will fundamentally change how consumers access media. Iconic franchises like Harry Potter, DC Comics, Game of Thrones, and the entire HBO catalog would be integrated into the Netflix platform.<sup>54</sup> This consolidation signals the end of the “siloe” streaming era, as legacy studios admit that scale and tech-driven distribution are the only ways to survive. However, the move has faced criticism from the Writers Guild of America, which warns that such a massive consolidation will lead to job cuts and reduced creative diversity. As shareholders prepare to vote, the battle for Warner Bros. stands as a real-life episode of Succession, with the future of global entertainment hanging in the balance.

The Bondi Beach Massacre: Charges and Aftermath of Australia’s Deadliest Attack



The Australian legal system reached a pivotal moment today as Naveed Akram, 24, was formally charged in a hospital-bed hearing for his role in the Sunday mass shooting at Bondi Beach.<sup>1</sup> The tragedy, which claimed 15 lives and left dozens injured, has been officially designated a terrorist incident. Akram faces a staggering 59 charges, including 15 counts of murder and one count of committing a terrorist act.<sup>2</sup> New South Wales Police also con-

firmed 40 counts of causing grievous bodily harm with intent to murder and a specific charge for the public display of a prohibited terrorist symbol.<sup>3</sup>

The attack specifically targeted Sydney’s Jewish community during a Hanukkah celebration on the beach.<sup>4</sup> Victims identified so far include two prominent rabbis, a 10-year-old girl named Matilda, and a Holocaust survivor. The brutality of the event was further

highlighted by reports of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) found in the suspects’ vehicle at the scene.<sup>5</sup> While Naveed survived a confrontation with police, his 50-year-old father, Sajid Akram, was killed in the exchange of fire.<sup>6</sup> Investigations have revealed that the pair, who held Australian and Indian passports respectively, recently traveled to the southern Philippine city of Davao—a detail that has sparked international intelligence

inquiries into their radicalization path.<sup>7</sup>

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese stated that the attack appeared to be “motivated by Islamic State group ideology,” marking a dark chapter for a nation that has largely avoided mass casualties since the 1996 Port Arthur massacre.<sup>8</sup> The social fallout has been immediate, with thousands attending the funeral of British-born Rabbi Eli Schlanger to-

day.<sup>9</sup> Public discourse is now centered on the sufficiency of police protections for religious events and a potential legislative overhaul of anti-terror laws.<sup>10</sup> With 17 victims still hospitalized and five in critical condition, the nation remains in a state of mourning. The case has been adjourned until April 2026 to allow the legal team and medical experts to prepare for a trial that will likely be the most significant in Australian history.<sup>11</sup>

The Venezuela Blockade: Trump’s “All-Out War” on the Maduro Regime<sup>12</sup>

In a dramatic escalation of U.S. foreign policy, President Donald Trump has ordered a “total and complete” naval blockade of all sanctioned oil tankers entering or leaving Venezuela.<sup>13</sup> Announcing the move via Truth Social, the President described the mobilization as the “largest Armada ever assembled in the history of South America.”<sup>14</sup> This strategy aims to choke the financial lifeblood of President Nicolás Maduro’s government, which the U.S. has now officially designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).<sup>15</sup> The President alleged that oil revenues are being used to fund drug trafficking, human trafficking, and “drug terrorism.”<sup>16</sup>



The blockade is not merely a diplomatic threat; it follows a series of lethal military actions.<sup>17</sup> Since September 2, 2025, U.S. forces have conducted more than 20 naval and air strikes on vessels suspected of drug smuggling, resulting in at least 95 confirmed deaths.<sup>18</sup> Last week’s seizure of a massive oil tank-

er carrying two million barrels of crude served as the precursor to this formal blockade.<sup>19</sup> The legal grounds for such an action are hotly contested; while the administration cites counter-narcotics and anti-terrorism statutes, Democratic lawmakers, led by Rep. Joaquín Castro, have branded the

move an “unauthorized act of war.”<sup>20</sup>

Economically, the impact on Venezuela is expected to be catastrophic. Oil accounts for over 90% of the nation’s exports.<sup>21</sup> While the “dark fleet” of tankers—vessels used to bypass sanctions—continues to operate, experts

suggest that a sustained blockade will trigger hyperinflation and severe shortages of food and medicine. Caracas has responded by denouncing the move as “international piracy” and “colonialist aggression.”<sup>22</sup> As global oil prices edge higher in anticipation of supply disruptions, the

international community at the UN is bracing for a showdown over the principle of free navigation. The presence of a U.S. aircraft carrier and nearly a dozen warships in the Caribbean suggests that the “shock” promised by the Trump administration is only just beginning.

Miss Finland Controversy: Racial Slurs and Political Fallout

The pageant world and Finnish politics have been thrown into turmoil following the fall of Sarah Dzafece.<sup>23</sup> The 22-year-old, of Kosovo-Finnish descent, was stripped of her Miss Finland 2025 crown on December 11 after a viral photo showed her making a “slanted-eyes” gesture with the caption “eating with a Chinese.”<sup>24</sup> The fallout has extended far beyond the catwalk, impacting dip-

lomatic relations with East Asian nations and creating a rift within the Finnish government coalition.

Backlash erupted across China, Japan, and South Korea, where the gesture is viewed as a deeply offensive mockery of East Asian features.<sup>25</sup> Dzafece’s attempts to mitigate the damage—claiming she was massaging a headache and that a friend

wrote the caption—were undermined by a subsequent video.<sup>26</sup> In that clip, filmed in a Finnair business class seat, she appeared to mock the “hate” she was receiving, which critics interpreted as arrogance.<sup>27</sup> The Miss Finland organization ultimately ruled that her actions were “offensive, harmful, and completely against the values of the competition,” promptly naming runner-up Tara

Lehtonen as the new titleholder.<sup>28</sup>

The controversy took a partisan turn when right-wing Members of Parliament, Juho Eerola and Kaisa Gäredek, posted photos mimicking the racist gesture in a supposed show of support for Dzafece.<sup>29</sup> Prime Minister Petteri Orpo issued a scathing rebuke, labeling the MPs’ actions “thoughtless, stupid, and damaging to the coun-

try.”<sup>30</sup> The incident has strained the National Coalition Party’s alliance with the Finns Party, testing the government’s commitment to its anti-racism declaration. As international boycotts of Finnish brands began to trend on social media, the incident has sparked a national conversation about the responsibilities of public figures and the persistence of casual racism in modern European society.



# Regulatory Reform: SEBI’s Mutual Fund “Clean-Up” for 2026



The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has approved the SEBI (Mutual Funds) Regulations, 2026, marking the most significant overhaul of the industry in nearly three decades. These new rules, which replace the outdated 1996 framework, are designed with a single-minded focus: lowering costs for the retail investor. The most critical change is the introduction of the Base Expense Ratio (BER), which mandates that statutory

levies like GST, STT, and Stamp Duty be charged separately on actuals. This ensures that fund houses cannot “hide” management fees within a bundled expense limit. In a move to curb “churning” and excessive trading costs, SEBI has drastically tightened the caps on brokerage and transaction charges. The new limits are set at just 2 basis points (bps) for cash market transactions and 1 bp for derivatives. This is a sharp reduc-

tion from previous norms and is expected to save investors thousands of crores in aggregate costs annually. Furthermore, the regulator has scrapped the 5 bps additional expense allowance previously linked to exit loads, removing an extra layer of cost that often went unnoticed by casual investors. The 2026 regulations also introduce a “performance-based” fee option, which fund houses can adopt voluntarily. This “no

gain, no fee” (or reduced fee) model aligns the interests of the asset management company directly with the investor’s returns. By reducing the regulatory rulebook’s word count by 54%, SEBI aims to eliminate ambiguity and simplify compliance. For the average SIP investor, these reforms translate into a higher Net Asset Value (NAV) over the long term, making mutual funds an even more attractive vehicle for wealth creation.

## Corporate Restructuring: Ola Electric’s Debt-Free Push



Bhavish Aggarwal, the founder and CEO of Ola Electric, executed a significant block deal on December 16, 2025, offloading 2.62 crore shares valued at approximately ₹92 crore. While the sale caused a temporary dip in the stock price—which hit a record low of ₹34.50—the company clarified that this was a strategic, one-time move to fully repay a personal promoter-level loan of ₹260 crore. This loan was originally raised to provide

seed funding for Aggarwal’s AI venture, Krutrim. The primary objective of this stake sale was to eliminate all share pledges. Previously, about 3.93% of the company’s equity was pledged as collateral, a factor that often creates “pledge overhang” and scares away institutional investors. By clearing this debt, Aggarwal has ensured that the promoter group’s holding—now standing at approximately 34%—is entirely

free of encumbrances. This “zero-pledge” status is a positive signal for corporate governance, as it removes the risk of forced liquidation of shares by lenders during market downturns. Despite the positive news regarding debt clearance, Ola Electric continues to face a challenging operational environment. The stock has plummeted nearly 60% in 2025, driven by concerns over declining

market share and persistent quarterly losses. While the company narrowed its net loss to ₹418 crore in the September quarter, its revenue saw a sharp decline. Investors are now looking beyond the “pledge-free” status toward the company’s ability to stabilize its service network and regain its dominance in the electric two-wheeler market against resurgent competitors like TVS and Bajaj.

## Market Volatility: Sensex and Nifty Extend Losing Streak

The Indian equity benchmarks, Sensex and Nifty 50, recorded their third consecutive day of losses, reflecting a cautious and somewhat fragile investor sentiment. The BSE Sensex ended the session down 120.21 points (0.14%) at 84,559.65, while the NSE Nifty 50 shed 41.55 points (0.16%) to close at 25,818.55. This downward trajectory persists despite a promising start to the day, where the

Sensex initially gained over 170 points. The primary weight on the market remains the persistent selling by Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs), who appear to be reallocating capital amid global uncertainty. Market analysts point to a “wait-and-watch” approach regarding the progress of a potential India-US trade deal, which has faced delays in recent weeks. Sectoral performance

was markedly divided; the Media and Realty indices bore the brunt of the selling pressure, while Oil & Gas and Metal stocks provided a defensive cushion. Heavyweights such as HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank were among the top laggards, while State Bank of India (SBI) and Infosys emerged as resilient gainers. On the currency front, the Indian Rupee staged a remarkable

recovery, appreciating to 90.37 against the US Dollar. This move is largely attributed to timely intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to curb volatility. Meanwhile, the commodities market saw Brent crude stabilizing near \$60.34 per barrel, a level that offers some relief to India’s import bill, even as Gold prices remained elevated at \$4,320.20 per ounce.

## Digital Credit Revolution: Google Pay & Axis Bank Launch “Flex”



In a move that signals the next era of digital lending in India, Google Pay has officially launched “Flex,” a co-branded RuPay credit card in partnership with Axis Bank. This launch is strategically timed to capitalize on the massive success of the UPI-RuPay integration, allowing users to link their credit cards directly to Google Pay for seamless “scan and pay” transactions at millions of merchant locations. The “Flex” card is designed for the “instant gratification” generation. Its standout feature is the “Stars” reward system, which bypasses the traditional monthly billing cycle. Instead of waiting weeks for reward points to accrue, “Stars” are credited immediately after a transaction, allowing a user to redeem the value for their very next payment.

The card utilizes a tiered earning structure: users earn 1 Star for every ₹500 spent, with the potential to unlock 8X rewards (reaching 8 Stars per ₹500) for monthly spends exceeding ₹30,000. With only about 5% of Indians currently having access to formal credit cards, Google Pay’s entry into the space aims to bridge the “credit gap.” By embedding the application process entirely within the app—promising approval in minutes—and offering flexible repayment tenures of 6 or 9 months, the “Flex” card is positioned as a tool for financial inclusion rather than just a luxury product. This launch marks Google’s most aggressive step yet into the Indian fintech ecosystem, turning a payments app into a comprehensive financial services hub.

## Automotive Revival: Tata Sierra SUV’s Record-Breaking Return



The Indian automotive sector witnessed a historic milestone as the Tata Sierra made its highly anticipated return. On December 16, 2025, the very first day of official reservations, the Sierra secured an unprecedented 70,000 confirmed bookings. This surge in demand has caught even industry veterans by surprise, with over 1.35 lakh customers submitting preferred configurations on the Tata Motors portal, signaling a massive order backlog even before deliveries begin. Priced between ₹11.49 lakh and ₹21.29 lakh, the Sierra targets the lucrative mid-size SUV segment, currently dominated by the Hyundai Creta and Kia Seltos. Tata Motors has packed the Sierra with cutting-edge technology to justify its “legacy” branding. The SUV is available with three engine options, most notably the

1.5-litre Hyperion T-GDi petrol engine, which achieved a record-breaking 29.9 kmpl in certified endurance tests at NAT-RAX. This focus on high fuel efficiency, combined with a top speed capability of 222 kmph, positions the Sierra as both an enthusiast’s choice and a practical family vehicle. The interior of the Sierra is a significant leap forward for the brand, featuring a triple-screen dashboard layout and a 12-speaker JBL audio system with Dolby Atmos. Safety remains a priority, with Level 2+ ADAS offering 22 distinct functions. With deliveries set to commence on January 15, 2026, Tata Motors is now under immense pressure to ramp up production at its Pune and Sanand facilities to manage a waiting period that is already estimated to stretch beyond six months for top-end variants.



# The Evolution of the Vivo and ZEISS Strategic Alliance

The five-year partnership between Vivo and ZEISS has transitioned from a standard branding exercise into a unified “One Team” operation. Oliver Schindelbeck of ZEISS highlights that the collaboration has matured to a point where basic technical hurdles are bypassed in favor of high-level problem-solving. This synergy balances ZEISS’s traditional German focus on “perfection” with Vivo’s rapid “speed” of innovation, creating a development cycle that prioritizes the best possible results within strict consumer electronics timeframes.

The current focus of the partnership is the shift toward AI and computational photography. Schindelbeck notes that the most dramatic change in the last five years is not physical hardware, but the algorithmic ability to open new creative spaces. This allows smartphones to perform tasks—such as advanced bokeh or low-light reconstruction—that traditional cameras cannot easily replicate. While AI-enhanced imagery is the trend, the partnership remains committed to “traditional” photography by offering professional modes and RAW image support for purists.

Looking forward, Schindelbeck expresses a desire



for “invisible marking” or metadata in images. This would transparently indi-

cate the level of AI intervention in a photo, allowing users to distinguish

between natural captures and AI-assisted art. As the brands launch the X300

and X300 Pro in India, the focus remains on delivering flagship-tier optics

that blend professional-grade glass with cutting-edge software.

## Navigating the Gadgets 360 Mobile Finder Ecosystem

The Gadgets 360 mobile phone finder serves as a comprehensive digital architecture designed to streamline the smartphone purchasing process. By leveraging one of the world’s largest mobile databases, the tool allows users to move beyond brand loyalty and focus on specific technical requirements. The platform’s utility is centered on a series of granular filters that address every facet of modern hardware. This includes a price slider for budget management and brand-specific checkboxes covering major Indian market players like Apple, Samsung, and Xiaomi.

Technical specifications form the core of the search engine. Users can filter by RAM (ranging from under 512MB to over 8GB) and internal storage (up to 256GB+), which directly impact multitasking and media capacity. The tool also distinguishes between complex storage needs, such as dedicated microSD slots versus hybrid SIM slots. Battery capacity filters go up to 6,000mAh, while screen size filters accommodate the trend toward “phablet” dimensions of 6 inches and above.

The finder is particularly detailed regarding camera optics. It allows users to filter by the number of rear sensors (dual to penta setups) and primary resolutions exceeding 21 megapixels. Connectivity is another pillar, with toggles for 5G, 4G, and 3G networks, alongside SIM-specific configurations like eSIM and Nano-SIM support. Performance seekers can filter by processor clock speeds (up to 2.5GHz+) and core counts (up to deca-core). Finally, the “Market Status” filter ensures users only see devices currently available, upcoming, or out of stock, providing a practical roadmap for “hard-earned money” investment

## High-End Handhelds: The Success of Asus ROG Xbox Ally X

Asus has observed a significant shift in the Indian gaming market with the launch of its Xbox-branded ROG Ally handhelds. Despite a premium price tag of Rs. 1,14,990 for the ROG Xbox Ally X—which is Rs. 45,000 more expensive than the standard Xbox Ally—the higher-end model is significantly outselling its mainstream counterpart. This “happy burden” of demand outpacing supply surprised Asus executives, who previously found that more affordable “mainstream” versions typically drove volume in the Indian market.

The success of these devices suggests that for the handheld console segment, price is no longer the primary barrier; Indian consumers are willing to spend over Rs. 1 lakh for premium performance and ecosystem integration. The partnership with Xbox provides a seamless transition for console owners to continue their games on the go. Both devices utilize the Ryzen Z2 Extreme chip, placing them in direct competition with global rivals like the MSI Claw and Lenovo Legion Go.

As the market evolves, Asus is keeping a close watch on new hybrid categories, such as Valve’s “Steam Machine.” While currently focused on the Windows-based handheld PC market, Asus remains open to studying these new PC/console hybrid concepts. The rapid sell-out of the Xbox Ally X across global and Indian stores highlights a maturing gaming demographic in India that prioritizes top-tier specs and “ecosystem” mobility over entry-level pricing.

# Xiaomi’s 2026 Strategy: From Value to Premium Experience



Xiaomi India is undergoing a major strategic “recalibration,” moving away from its historical “value-for-money” identity toward a “value-for-experience” model. This shift, led by COO Sudhin Mathur, is a response to the rising Average Selling Price (ASP) in India and a consumer base that

increasingly prioritizes quality over sheer volume. While the market volume has slowed, the value of the market is growing, leading Xiaomi to focus on its three distinct sub-brands: Xiaomi (premium), Redmi (mid-range), and Poco (online-heavy/performance).

The upcoming Redmi Note series (likely the Note 15) will be a cornerstone of this 2026 strategy. In a major move to reassure consumers about device longevity, Xiaomi is promising four years of OS updates and six years of security patches. This series will also push AI features beyond

simple gallery edits, integrating AI more deeply into the core user experience. To support this premium push, Xiaomi is adopting an “omni-channel” approach, ensuring identical pricing and experiences across both online platforms and physical retail “touch and feel” outlets.

Beyond smartphones, Xiaomi is planning a massive IoT (Internet of Things) push for 2026. Recognizing that many consumers still view them primarily as a “phone company,” Xiaomi intends to double down on its ecosystem, including TVs, tablets, and smart home devices. While

government Quality Control Orders (QCO) and BIS regulations have presented some “bottlenecks” for new launches, the brand’s 13% market share and strong performance in the tablet sector provide a solid foundation for its goal of becoming a comprehensive ecosystem leader in India.



# India vs. South Africa: 4th T20I Lucknow Fog Crisis1

The cricketing world turned its eyes to the Bharat Ratna Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow on Wednesday, December 17, 2025, but the spectacle was overshadowed by atmospheric conditions rather than athletic prowess.<sup>2</sup> A severe blanket of dense fog, which triggered an orange alert from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), descended upon the venue, forcing the toss for the decisive fourth T20I between India and South Africa to be delayed multiple times.<sup>3</sup> As visibility dropped to precarious levels, spectators in the stands reported being unable to see the pitch from the middle tiers, creating a surreal and frustrating atmosphere for the sell-out crowd.<sup>4</sup>

The situation drew sharp criticism from veterans of the game. Former India international Robin Uthappa, part of the broadcasting panel, voiced his bewilderment at the umpires' decision-making process.<sup>5</sup> Uthappa argued that the repetitive inspections were counterproductive, noting that in the specific geography of central



Uttar Pradesh, winter fog typically thickens as the night progresses rather than dissipating.<sup>6</sup> His comments sparked a wider debate about “dead time” in cricket and the need for more decisive scheduling during North Indian winters. Amidst the gloom, a photograph of India's star all-rounder Hardik Pandya surfaced on social media, showing him wearing a protective

mask while attempting to warm up.<sup>7</sup> This image quickly went viral, serving as a stark visual representation of the challenging air quality and extreme weather conditions that modern athletes must navigate.

On the competitive front, the stakes remain high.<sup>8</sup> India currently holds a 2-1 lead in the five-match series, and a victory

in Lucknow would secure their 14th consecutive T20I series triumph.<sup>9</sup> However, the team sheet has been hampered by injury; vice-captain Shubman Gill has been officially ruled out of the remainder of the series due to a persistent foot injury.<sup>10</sup> This absence has forced a recalibration of the opening pair, with Sanju Samson—who has been in scintillating form

with three centuries during the recent tour of South Africa—expected to return to his preferred slot at the top of the order alongside Abhishek Sharma.<sup>11</sup> While South Africa, led by Aiden Markram, is desperate to level the series, the persistent fog has left the fate of the match in the hands of the match officials, with inspections scheduled deep into the night.<sup>12</sup>

## ICC Rankings: Varun Chakaravarthy Scales New Heights13

The latest update to the ICC Men's T20I Player Rankings has confirmed the arrival of a new era in Indian spin bowling.<sup>14</sup> Varun Chakaravarthy, the 34-year-old “mystery spinner,” has not only consolidated his position as the World No. 1 T20I bowler but has also broken a significant national record.<sup>15</sup> Following his consistent performance in the ongoing series against South Africa, where he recorded three successive two-wicket hauls, Chakaravarthy's rating surged to a career-best 818 points.<sup>16</sup> This achievement makes him the highest-rated Indian bowler in T20I history, surpassing the previous record of 783 points held by Jasprit Bumrah since early 2017.<sup>17</sup>

Chakaravarthy now enjoys a commanding 119-point lead over his nearest competitor, New Zea-



land seamer Jacob Duffy, who sits at 699 points.<sup>18</sup> This peak performance is perfectly timed for the Indian squad as they prepare for their T20 World Cup title defense in early 2026. The spinner's ability to remain incisive on varying subcon-

tinental tracks has made him an indispensable asset for captain Suryakumar Yadav. His rise is mirrored by fellow left-arm seamer Arshdeep Singh, who moved up four places to 16th overall following a Player of the Match performance in

Dharamsala.<sup>19</sup> The bowling charts also saw significant movement for South Africa's Marco Jansen and Lungi Ngidi, who climbed to 25th and 44th respectively, underscoring the high-quality bowling displays seen throughout this bilateral

series.<sup>20</sup>

In the batting department, the “young brigade” of Indian cricket continues to dominate.<sup>21</sup> Abhishek Sharma maintains a firm grip on the top spot with 909 rating points, while the explosive Tilak Varma has surged to a career-equalling 4th place.<sup>22</sup> The presence of two Indian batters in the top five highlights the aggressive “fearless” brand of cricket India has adopted in the shortest format.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, the Test arena saw its own shifts; Australia's Mitchell Starc climbed to a career-high 2nd place in the Test bowling rankings, trailing only behind teammate Josh Hazlewood.<sup>24</sup> These rankings reflect a period of significant transition across all formats, as veteran legends make way for a new generation of statistically dominant performers.

## IPL 2026 Auction: The Rise of the Uncapped Millionaires

The IPL 2026 mini-auction held in Abu Dhabi will be remembered as the moment when the financial ceiling for uncapped Indian players was completely shattered. Chennai Super Kings (CSK) emerged as the primary architects of this shift, spending a staggering ₹28.4 crore on just two young talents. The headlines were dominated by 19-year-old wicketkeeper-batter Kartik Sharma from Rajasthan and 20-year-old all-rounder Prashant Veer from Uttar Pradesh. Both players entered the auction with a modest base price of ₹30 lakh, but an intense bidding war saw their value skyrocket to ₹14.20 crore each, making them the joint-highest paid uncapped players in the history of the Indian Premier League.<sup>25</sup>

Kartik Sharma's journey to this windfall is the stuff of cricketing folklore. Known for his explosive power-hitting—having smashed 28 sixes in just 12 T20 matches—Kartik had already caught the eye of luminaries like Ravichandran Ashwin and Kevin Pietersen.<sup>26</sup> During the auction, his price surged past the ₹10



crore mark as KKR, SRH, and LSG battled fiercely before CSK clinched the deal.<sup>27</sup> The emotional weight of the moment was evident; Kartik later shared that he was unable to stop crying as the bids kept rising, overwhelmed by the realization that his life had changed forever.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Prashant Veer, a left-arm orthodox spin-

ner and hard-hitting batter, was targeted by CSK as a strategic “Jadeja-like” replacement following the trade of Ravindra Jadeja to Rajasthan Royals.<sup>29</sup> Veer's versatility was proven in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, where he maintained a strike rate of 170 while bowling with an economy rate under 7.30

These record-breaking signings signal a broader trend in IPL strategy, where franchises are now willing to invest massive portions of their purse to secure domestic talent with high “skill-set” specificity. CSK head coach Stephen Fleming explained that the franchise had been monitoring both players through trials and felt their specific

roles were essential for the team's balance. While the prices may seem astronomical for players yet to debut on the international stage, the “uncapped millionaire” phenomenon proves that the IPL remains the ultimate platform for domestic cricketers to bridge the gap between grassroots talent and global superstardom.

## Sarfaraz Khan: A “New Life” with Chennai Super Kings



For Sarfaraz Khan, the IPL 2026 mini-auction was less about the money and more about redemption.<sup>31</sup> After being overlooked in the previous two mega-auctions despite a prolific record in domestic red-ball cricket and a solid debut Test series for India, the Mumbai batter finally found a home with the Chennai Super Kings.<sup>32</sup> Snapped up at his base price of ₹75 lakh during the accelerated round of the auction, Sarfaraz took to Instagram to express his profound gratitude, stating that the five-time champions had given him a “new life.”<sup>33</sup> The signing was an emotional culmination of years of being labeled as a “red-ball specialist” unfit for the modern T20 game.

Sarfaraz's selection was backed by immediate and undeniable form.<sup>34</sup> Just hours before the auction gavel fell, he had silenced critics by smashing a blistering 22-ball 73 in a Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy match.<sup>35</sup> This “intent-filled” knock proved that he possessed the range and strike rate required for the middle-order finisher role that CSK often utilizes. His journey back to the IPL has been a rollercoaster; once

the youngest player in the league's history with RCB at age 17, he faced disciplinary issues, fitness concerns, and a shifting reputation before reinventing himself as a domestic titan. His average of 70.75 across two U-19 World Cups and his triple-century exploits in the Ranji Trophy have always suggested world-class talent, but the IPL remained his final unconquered frontier.<sup>36</sup>

At CSK, Sarfaraz joins a culture known for rehabilitating experienced domestic players and providing them with clear roles. His close friend Anaya Bangar, daughter of Sanjay Bangar, was among the first to celebrate the news, reflecting the widespread joy in the domestic circuit regarding his comeback.<sup>37</sup> For the 28-year-old, the focus now shifts to the 2026 season, where he has vowed to help MS Dhoni and the Yellow Army lift their sixth title. In a league often dominated by high-priced overseas imports, Sarfaraz's return serves as a heartwarming reminder that persistence and domestic excellence can still pave a path back to the world's most lucrative T20 stage.

## KKR's High-Risk Gambit: Pathirana and the ₹18 Crore Tag38



Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) made the most controversial move of the IPL 2026 auction by spending ₹18 crore on Sri Lankan pacer Matheesha Pathirana.<sup>39</sup> The 22-year-old, nicknamed “Baby Malinga” for his unique slinging action, became the center of a three-way bidding war between Lucknow Super Giants, Delhi Capitals, and KKR.<sup>40</sup> While Pathirana's ability to bowl lethal yorkers in the death overs is undisputed, the massive price tag has divided opinion among experts. Former India selector Kris Srikkanth was among the most vocal critics, labeling the move a “huge risk” and questioning whether a player who struggled with consistency and an economy rate of over 10 in the previous season was worth such a significant outlay.<sup>41</sup>

The logic behind KKR's gamble rests on the scarcity of elite death-over specialists. Pathirana has claimed 47 wickets in 32 IPL matches at an average of 21, and his “X-factor” lies in his unpredictability.<sup>42</sup> England spinner Adil Rashid, a teammate of Pathirana at the Sharjah Warriorz, defended the

pacer, suggesting that in the IPL, “predictability is the enemy” and that Pathirana's action makes him nearly impossible to prepare for in a net session. KKR's management appears to have prioritized match-winning potential over statistical stability, viewing Pathirana as the final piece in a bowling attack that already features the strategic acquisition of Mustafizur Rahman as a backup and mentor.<sup>43</sup>

This high-stakes acquisition followed KKR's earlier record-shattering move for Australian all-rounder Cameron Green, for whom they paid ₹25.20 crore (though he will receive ₹18 crore per IPL regulations).<sup>44</sup> By spending over ₹43 crore on just two players, KKR has essentially bet their entire 2026 campaign on a high-ceiling, high-variance strategy. The franchise nearly exhausted its entire purse, leaving just ₹45 lakh unused, meaning they will rely heavily on their top-heavy superstars to deliver. Whether this “Gamble in the Desert” results in a fourth title or a financial disaster will be the primary storyline for the Knight Riders when the season kicks off in the spring.





‘Shambhala’ Secures Solid Pre-Release Deals Ahead of December 25 Opening



Hyderabad, December 17 — Actor Aadi Sai Kumar is set to explore a striking new genre with ‘Shambhala: A Mystical World’, a supernatural thriller that has rapidly emerged as one of the most anticipated releases of the season. Directed by Ugandhar Muni and produced by Rajasekhar Annabhimoju under the Shining Pictures banner, the film has generated strong buzz among trade circles and audiences alike.

Riding high on this momentum, Shambhala has locked in impressive pre-release business, with both theatrical and non-theatrical rights fetching lucrative deals. Industry sources indicate that the producers have already secured table profits, reflecting strong confidence in the film’s content and commercial potential.

The theatrical rights have been snapped up by leading distributors across key territories. Usha Pictures acquired the Andhra and Ceded regions, while Mythri Distributors secured the Nizam territory. The overseas rights have been picked up by Moonshine Cinemas, and Kumar Bangalore Films acquired the Karnataka rights. With such widespread backing, the film is gearing up for a wide release across India and overseas markets.

A major contributor to the growing excitement is the film’s strategic promotional campaign. From visually striking concept posters and intriguing glimpses to a gripping teaser and a well-received theatrical trailer, each update has added layers of mystery around the narrative.

The recently released first single, “Naa Peru Shambhala,” sung by Geetha Madhuri, has quickly become a chart-buster, further amplifying the film’s buzz. Music for the film is composed by Sricharan Pakala.

Adding depth to the project is a strong ensemble cast featuring Archana Iyer, Swasika, Ravi Varma, Madhuranandan, and Siva Karthik. The film’s visual appeal is enhanced by cinematographer Praveen K Bangari, whose work is expected to elevate the mystical tone of the story.

With solid pre-release traction, a compelling genre, and strong promotional momentum, ‘Shambhala: A Mystical World’ is all set to hit theatres on December 25, aiming to make a significant impact at the box office during the holiday season.

Rajendra Prasad’s ‘Nenevaru?’ Nears Censor Clearance

Veteran actor Padma Shri Dr. Rajendra Prasad is set to impress audiences once again with his key role in the upcoming heart-touching film ‘Nenevaru?’, which has now entered the crucial censor formalities stage. The film has completed its post-production work and is gearing up for release soon.

Directed by Chiranjeevi Tanneeru, Nenevaru? features Sai Kiran, known for his performances in Nuvve Kavali and Preminchu, and Jogini Shyamala in prominent roles. The film is presented by Srikonda Mallikarjun and jointly produced by Andekar Jagadeesh Babu and Sakinana Bhulakshmi under the banner Jai Chiranjeeva Film Makers.

The movie introduces Abhilash and Sai Cherry, disciples of renowned acting teacher Vizag Satyanand, as lead actors. Deepika and Sonakshi play the female leads, marking a fresh ensemble cast backed by experienced performers. The film is said to revolve around strong emotions and meaningful storytelling, making it a content-driven project.

Speaking at the teaser launch event, Rajendra Prasad described Nenevaru? as one of the films he would



proudly remember in his long and illustrious career. His remarks have significantly boosted the film’s buzz, especially among trade and industry circles. Producer Sakinana Bhulakshmi confirmed that the official release date will be announced shortly, adding to the growing anticipation.

The film boasts a solid technical team. Chinikrishna has composed the music, while Naidu Prasad Kolli handled cinematography. Editing is by Nandamuri Hari and Nandamuri Tarakaramarao. Dialogues are penned by Srinivas Angireddy, lyrics by S.S. Veeru, and choreography by Ajay Krish and Santosh. Public relations are managed by Dheeraj-Appaji.

With censor formalities currently underway and positive word-of-mouth building steadily, ‘Nenevaru?’ is shaping up as an emotionally rich film to watch out for in the coming days.

Cameron–Rajamouli Chat Fuels Excitement for ‘Avatar: Fire and Ash’



Hyderabad, December 17 — Global filmmaking icons James Cameron and SS Rajamouli recently came together for an engaging conversation that has heightened anticipation for the next chapter in the Avatar franchise, ‘Avatar: Fire and Ash’. The interaction offered rare insights into their creative philosophies, large-scale storytelling, and the emotional pressures surrounding the release of big-budget cinematic spectacles.

Speaking about his experience after watching Avatar: Fire and Ash, Rajamouli said he felt like “a child watching the film in a theatre,” completely absorbed by its scale and imagination. He praised Cameron for continuously raising the bar in cinematic spectacle while keeping emotions at the heart of the narrative.

Rajamouli also recalled how Avatar enjoyed an extraordinary theatrical run in Hyderabad, screening for nearly a year at an IMAX theatre, underscoring the franchise’s massive impact in India.

Rajamouli described the Avatar series as a benchmark for immersive big-screen storytelling, stating that Cameron’s work has redefined how audiences experience cinema. He admired the way technology, world-building, and emotional depth seamlessly come together in the franchise, inspiring filmmakers across the globe.

In response, James Cameron expressed his admiration for Rajamouli’s cinematic vision and storytelling prowess. The Hollywood director acknowledged the Indian filmmaker’s ability to mount epic narratives with strong emotional resonance and said he would love to visit Rajamouli’s film sets in India in the future.

The conversation between the two celebrated directors resonated strongly with film lovers, symbolising a meeting of minds between East and West and highlighting the global nature of contemporary cinema.

Produced by 20th Century Studios, Avatar: Fire and Ash is set for a grand theatrical release in India on December 19. The film will be released in six languages — English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada — ensuring wide accessibility for Indian audiences.

With two of the world’s most influential filmmakers publicly appreciating each other’s craft, excitement around Avatar: Fire and Ash has reached new heights, reinforcing expectations of another visually stunning and emotionally powerful cinematic experience.

Rashmika Mandanna’s Sri Lanka Getaway Triggers Bachelorette Buzz

Popular actress Rashmika Mandanna has once again grabbed attention on social media, this time with her recent Sri Lanka vacation, which has sparked widespread speculation about a possible bachelorette celebration. The actress shared a series of cheerful pictures from the trip, featuring beachside moments, scenic views, and relaxed time with her close group of friends.

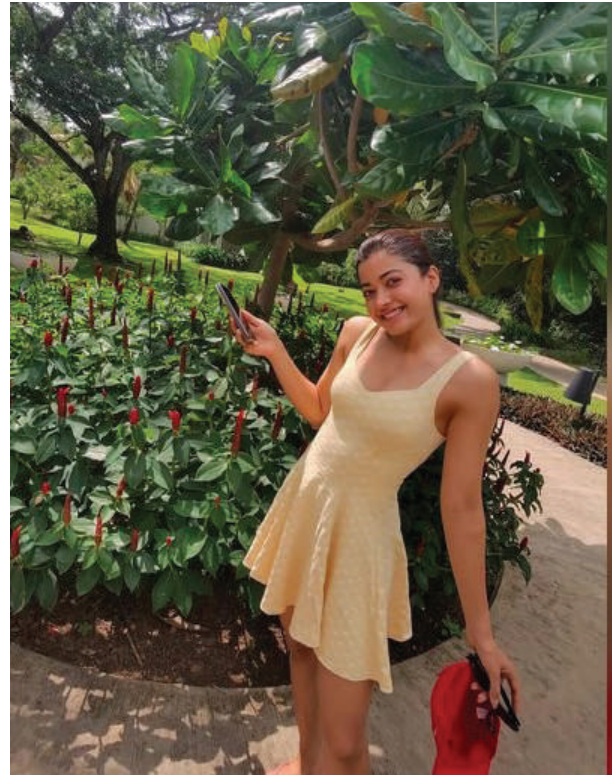
Rashmika described the trip as a short and spontaneous break from her busy shooting schedule, mentioning that she managed to squeeze in a quick getaway with her “best girls.” While the actress portrayed the holiday as a simple girls’ trip, fans were quick to read between the lines, flooding the comment section with playful questions and assumptions about it being a pre-wedding bachelorette party.

The buzz comes amid long-standing rumours surrounding Rashmika’s personal life, particularly her alleged relationship with actor Vijay Deverakonda. The duo, who have worked together and have often been spotted at similar locations during vacations and events, have remained tight-lipped about their relationship status. However, frequent coincidences and social media hints have kept speculation alive among fans and industry watchers.



Photos from the Sri Lanka trip showcased Rashmika in a relaxed and happy mood, enjoying sunsets, beach walks, and intimate moments with friends. The absence of any official clarification from the actress has only added fuel to the rumours, with fans interpreting the timing and nature of the trip as a sign of upcoming personal celebrations.

Despite the growing chatter, Rashmika has chosen to stay focused on her professional commitments. She continues to juggle multiple projects across Telugu, Tamil, and Hindi cinema, maintaining her position as one of the most sought-after actresses in the country. Industry sources say she has an exciting lineup ahead, keeping her calendar



packed in the coming months.

For now, the actress has neither confirmed nor denied the bachelorette or wedding rumours, leaving fans to speculate and celebrate her joyful moments online. Whether it was a simple friends’ getaway or something more special, Rashmika Mandanna’s Sri Lanka trip has certainly become one of the most talked-about celebrity moments of the season.

‘Police Complaint’ Teaser Released Amid Strong Buzz

The Telugu and Kannada teaser of the upcoming action thriller ‘Police Complaint’ was launched in a grand manner at Prasad Labs, Hyderabad, generating strong excitement among film circles. The film is produced by Balakrishna Maharana under the MSK Pramidha Shree Films banner, with Sanjeev Megoti serving as both writer and director.

Billed as a horror thriller and complete entertainer, Police Complaint features Varalaxmi Sarathkumar in a powerful and impactful role, while Naveen Chandra appears in a strong heroic character. The film boasts a massive ensemble cast of 52 senior artists, making it a content-rich project with scale and intensity.

Speaking at the teaser launch, director Sanjeev Megoti described the film as a hide-and-seek drama revolving around love and revenge, right and wrong, and the conflict between good and evil. He revealed that the film blends horror elements with commercial entertainment.



Kannada star Ragini Dwivedi appears in a special role designed to thrill audiences. The director praised Varalaxmi Sarathkumar’s commitment, noting that the entire shoot was completed in just 45 days. The film is being made in four languages — Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada.

Varalaxmi Sarathkumar said she was instantly drawn to the subject and shared that, apart from action, she has also performed full-on comedy in the film. She expressed confidence that the film

would appeal to a wide audience.

The cast also includes Aditya Om, Ravi Shankar, Prithvi, Srinivas Reddy, Saptagiri, Sarath Lohithaswa, Gemini Suresh, and Dil Ramesh. The makers highlighted S.N. Harish’s cinematography and the action choreography by Dragon Prakash and Ravi Teja as major highlights. Film personalities and guests at the event praised director Sanjeev Megoti’s intense storytelling and strong screenplay, calling Police Complaint a promising entertainer to watch out for.