

International

UN elects former Iraqi President Barham Salih as UNHCR.

The United Nations General Assembly(UNGA) has elected Barham Salih, the former president of Iraq, as the next UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Salih, who will begin a five-year term on January 1, 2026, becomes the first official from the Middle East to lead the premier global refugee agency in at least three-quarters of a century.

The 193-member world body elected the 65-year-old Kurdish politician as the U.N. high commissioner for refugees by consensus.

U.S. approves \$11 billion in arms sales to Taiwan.

The United States has approved \$11 billion-worth of arms to Taiwan, announcing one of the largest weapons packages for the island nation. The proposed arms sales cover eight items, including HIMARS rocket systems, howitzers, Javelin anti-tank missiles, Altius loitering munition drones and parts for other equipment.

The arms sale announced on December 18, 2025, which still needs U.S. Congressional approval, would be the second since Mr Trump returned to office in January, after a \$330 million sale of parts in November.

International Migrants Day 2025 observed on Dec. 18.

International Migrants Day is observed every year on 18 December to raise awareness about the rights, safety and dignity of migrants and refugees across the world. The day draws attention to the challenges people face when they leave their homes in search of safety, work or a better future. This year's theme, "My Great Story: Cultures and Development," highlights how human mobility drives growth, enriches societies, and helps communities connect, adapt, and support one another.

Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Peter Arnett dies .

Peter Arnett, the Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter who spent decades dodging bullets and bombs to bring the world eyewitness accounts of war from the rice paddies of Vietnam to the deserts of Iraq, has died. He was 91.

Arnett won the 1966 Pulitzer Prize for international reporting for his Vietnam War coverage for The Associated Press.

Israel signs historic \$35 billion gas agreement with Egypt.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has approved a \$35 billion natural gas export deal to Egypt, the biggest gas deal in Israeli history. The agreement could also help repair relations between the two countries strained during the two-year war in the Gaza Strip.

The gas will be delivered to Egypt over the next 15 years by U.S. energy giant Chevron, a key owner of the gas field off Israel's coast in the Mediterranean Sea. Half of the proceeds are expected to go to Israel's state coffers.

National

India & Oman ink Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement to deepen trade ties.

India and Oman signed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which will open doors for overall development and trade in various sectors for both countries. Both friendly nations are marking the 70th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between them.

The two sides also signed 6 agreements and MoUs in the fields of maritime cooperation, higher education, agriculture, millet cultivation and an MoU between the Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry and Confederation of Indian Industry as well.

Prime Minister Modi receives Oman's Highest Civilian Honour.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conferred with the Order of Oman (First Class) by Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in recognition of his contribution to strengthening India-Oman ties and his leadership.

Instituted in 1970 by the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Order of Oman (Civil Order) is among the Sultanate's highest honours and has been awarded to select global leaders for contributions to public life and bilateral relations.

AFMS launches India's first AI-driven community screening programme for diabetic retinopathy.

The Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS) has launched India's first Artificial Intelligence-driven community screening programme for Diabetic Retinopathy. This initiative has been undertaken by the AFMS in collaboration with AIIMS and the e-Health AI Unit of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The initiative marks a significant step towards strengthening early detection of diabetic eye disease and building a real-time national health intelligence framework.

It added that the platform facilitates automated screening, grading and triaging of retinal images along with generating real-time data on disease prevalence and geographic distribution.

Parliament passes Nuclear Energy Reform Bill 2025.

Parliament has passed the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India Bill, 2025. It replaces the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010. The legislation aimed at the development of nuclear energy and ionising radiation for nuclear power generation for the welfare of the countrymen. It also seeks to provide a robust regulatory framework for its safe and secure utilisation. The Bill seeks to constitute the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board and establish the Atomic Energy Redressal Advisory Council.

The Bill also provides for the liability of the Central Government in the event of a nuclear incident. The Central Government has established a Nuclear Liability Fund for the purpose of meeting its liability under the Bill.

India and Argentina sign Work Plan 2025-27 to boost bilateral agricultural research & technology exchange.

India and Argentina have signed the Work Plan 2025-27 in New Delhi to boost bilateral agricultural research and technology exchange. Signed between the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA), Argentina, this work plan establishes collaboration across natural resource management, sustainable agronomy, including zero tillage, mechanisation, micro-irrigation and fertigation. The agreement will also include germplasm exchange, expert engagements, and training in cutting-edge agricultural technologies.

IndiaAI Mission invites global submissions on AI applications in agriculture.

The IndiaAI Mission, under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), has invited global submissions for a compendium on the real-world impact of AI in agriculture. The mission is undertaken by the ministry in collaboration with the Government of Maharashtra's AI and Agritech Innovation Centre and supported by the World Bank and a private institute. The initiative seeks to document deployed and scalable AI solutions that enhance crop planning, strengthen farm operations, expand market access, and improve financial resilience for farmers.

Railways commissions over 2,000 km of Kavach system to enhance safety.

Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has said that over two thousand route kilometres of the Kavach system have been commissioned on Indian Railways. The Automatic Train Protection system, Kavach, has been introduced to enhance the safety of passengers and train operations. The Indian Railways has successfully installed the indigenously developed Kavach train protection system on four thousand 154 locomotives.

IIT-Bombay partners with Vertiv to develop AI Data centre cooling solutions.

IIT-Bombay has partnered with digital infrastructure solutions provider Vertiv to develop advanced cooling solutions for artificial intelligence-powered data centres. The collaboration addresses rising thermal challenges as AI adoption grows rapidly across Indian businesses, and the power consumption of graphics processing units is expected to increase sharply by 2025.

The project will begin with the design of a dry cooler for a 40-kilowatt liquid cooling load, to be tested at IIT-Bombay's Heat Pump Laboratory and later evaluated at Vertiv's Pune facility. Vertiv said the initiative will also help create a pool of industry-ready engineering talent.

Nitin Gadkari says ANPR system to replace traditional toll collection by the end of next year.

Road and Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari has said that the Automatic Number Plate Recognition system will be implemented across the country by the end of next year, to replace the traditional toll collection system. He said the government is implementing it to enhance efficiency and reduce transit times for vehicles on highways. After the implementation of this system, fuel of around one thousand 500 crore rupees will be saved. He also informed that the toll evasion will be eliminated and it will generate the income of six thousand crore for the government.

The Minister said that a Multi-Lane Free-Flow tolling system is at an advanced stage, where the vehicle will pay tolls at highways without stopping.

Noted Sculptor Ram Sutar passes away.

Noted sculptor Ram Sutar, known for designing the world's tallest statue — the Statue of Unity in Gujarat, passed away at his Noida residence. The iconic statues of Mahatma Gandhi seated in a meditating pose and of Chhatrapati Shivaji riding a horse on the Parliament premises rank among his finest creations. In his long career, Sutar has designed 350-plus statues in 150-plus Indian cities.

Sutar is a recipient of the coveted Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan.

Business and Economy

IDFC FIRST Bank launches zero-fee USD, EUR global savings account for NRIs.

IDFC FIRST Bank has launched the IDFC FIRST Global Savings Account in USD and EUR, an exclusive foreign-currency savings solution offered through GIFT City, Gujarat, for Non-Resident Indians. The account is designed for internationally mobile customers who want to hold, save, and remit funds in foreign currency without conversion risks or cross-border banking friction.

Both the principal and the interest earned are freely and fully transferable to an overseas bank account without any limits or restrictions.

RBI imposes curbs at Gauhati Co-operative Urban Bank.

India's central bank, RBI, has barred The Gauhati Co-operative Urban Bank from issuing new loans and suspended deposit withdrawals of more than 35,000 rupees (\$387.31) for six months, citing supervisory concerns and liquidity issues with the lender. It also directed the co-operative bank not to make any investments or borrow funds.

Centre unveils new logo for Regional Rural Banks.

The Central government has unveiled a new logo for Regional Rural Banks (RRBs). The logo symbolises progress, nurture and enlightenment, reflecting the core values of RRBs in serving rural India. The colours of the RRB logo have been chosen to convey the objectives of the RRBs, it said, adding that dark blue signifies finance and trust, while green signifies life and growth, reflecting their mission to serve rural India. This common branding initiative by the government is expected to give RRBs a distinct, modern and easily recognisable brand identity nationwide.

On the principle of 'One State One RRB', the Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance, has consolidated 26 Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) across 11 states/UTs, effective from May 1, 2025.

At present, 28 RRBs operate across the country with a vast network of over 22 thousand branches in more than 700 districts, playing a crucial role in promoting financial inclusion and supporting rural development.

Coal production reached nearly one billion tonnes in 2024-25.

Union Coal Minister G. Kishan Reddy said that for the first time, the coal production in the country has reached nearly one billion tonnes in 2024-25. The Minister said India is now the world's second-largest producer and consumer of coal. Mr Reddy informed that India has the fifth-largest coal reserves globally and the country has coal reserves sufficient for nearly seven years. The government is working on the Coal Gasification Mission, and the mission is set to achieve 100 million tonnes by 2030.

OpenAI taps former UK finance minister Osborne to lead global Stargate expansion.

OpenAI has appointed former British finance minister George Osborne as the Managing Director and head of its "OpenAI for Countries" initiative, as the ChatGPT maker ramps up efforts to work with governments on national AI strategies.

Osborne, who served as chancellor of the exchequer from 2010 to 2016, will take up the role in January and will oversee the expansion of OpenAI for Countries.

Airtel Payments Bank partners with NPCI Bharat BillPay to enable EV wallet recharges.

Airtel Payments Bank, in partnership with NPCI Bharat BillPay, has enabled electric vehicle (EV) wallet recharges through the Bharat Connect (BBPS) platform on the Airtel Thanks app.

The new facility allows customers to instantly top up wallets of charging point operators (CPOs) that are partnered with Bharat Connect, removing the need for users to access individual operator apps for payments. The service aims to make EV charging payments interoperable, seamless and secure across networks.

Over Rs 7,000 crore saved through Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System.

The Central government has said that more than seven thousand crore rupees have been saved in more than 23 lakh complaints so far through the Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System. Minister of State for Home Bandi Sanjay Kumar informed this in a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha. He said the Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System was launched in 2021 for immediate reporting of financial frauds and for stopping the siphoning off funds by fraudsters.

The Ministry has established the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) to evolve a framework and ecosystem for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of cybercrime in the country.

Warner Bros rejects Paramount's \$108.4b bid, backs Netflix offer.

Warner Bros Discovery's board has rejected a US\$108.4 billion takeover offer from Paramount, calling the bid risky and lacking in reliable financing. Paramount and Netflix have both sought to acquire Warner Bros, which owns major film and TV studios as well as the HBO Max video-streaming service.

The board said Paramount's US\$30-per-share cash offer was not fully guaranteed by the Ellison family, despite claims, and raised concerns over Paramount's financial stability and creditworthiness.

Instead, Warner Bros prefers a binding US\$27.8 per share cash-and-stock deal from Netflix, which the board said does not require equity financing and has strong debt backing.

TRAI sets Feb. 15 deadline for IRDAI regulated entities to switch to 1600 series numbers.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has directed all entities regulated by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) to adopt '1600' series numbers by February 15, 2026, for making service and transactional calls to the consumers.

The mandate regarding the deadline is being issued in consultation with IRDAI, and the move is aimed at enhancing consumer trust, curbing spam and preventing fraudulent activities perpetrated through voice calls. TRAI had already issued similar directions for mandatory adoption of 1600 series numbers by entities regulated by RBI, SEBI and PFRDA.

BoB underwrites \$500 million forex loan facility to ONGC unit.

Bank of Baroda (Bank), acting as the sole mandated lead arranger, has underwritten a \$500 million 5-year foreign currency term loan facility to OVL Overseas IFSC Ltd (OOIL), a GIFT City-registered wholly owned subsidiary of ONGC Videsh Ltd(OVL).

The successful underwriting of this \$500 million facility showcases Bank of Baroda's capabilities in syndicated foreign currency loans. This transaction highlights the growing maturity of GIFT City and the ability of Indian banks in raising cross-border financing and supporting the global operations of PSUs like ONGC.

Sports

Football: PSG wins Intercontinental Cup.

Paris St-Germain beat Brazilian side Flamengo on penalties to win the Intercontinental Cup final and secure a sixth trophy of the year, with Matvey Safonov saving four spot-kicks in a row during the shootout. Khvicha Kvaratskhelia opened the scoring for PSG seven minutes before half-time at the Ali Stadium in Qatar, before Jorginho equalised from the penalty spot in the 62nd minute.

India worst doping offender for third straight year, says WADA.

India tops the rankings of global sports drug cheats for a third straight year, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said, marking a dubious hat-trick for the country. Indian athletics (76) had the highest number of doping cases in 2024, followed by weightlifting (43) and wrestling (29).

India's National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) collected 7,113 urine and blood samples, out of which 260 tested positive in 2024, the international watchdog said in its annual report.

Jharkhand wins their first-ever Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT) title.

Jharkhand has won its first-ever Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT) title at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium, defeating Haryana by 69 runs. Led by a historic ton from captain Ishan Kishan, Jharkhand posted a massive 262/3 - the highest-ever total in a T20 tournament final - before their bowlers clinically dismantled the Haryana chase.