

International

UK to Launch Paid Military 'Gap Year' Programme for Youth

The UK Ministry of Defence will introduce a paid military 'gap year' scheme from March 2026 to familiarise young people with military life under a new "whole of society" approach to defence.

Participants will spend a year training and working across the British Army, Royal Navy, and Royal Air Force—without any long-term commitment or deployment on active operations.

The pilot will initially recruit about 150 school leavers and young adults under 25, with plans to scale to 1,000+ based on interest. While final pay details are pending, a basic recruit typically earns around £26,000 annually.

Afghanistan Exports Kandahar Pomegranates to Qatar for the First Time

Afghanistan has exported pomegranates from Kandahar province to Qatar for the first time, marking a key step in expanding access to new international markets.

The inaugural shipment of about 20 tonnes highlights efforts to diversify export destinations beyond the region.

Pomegranate exports from Kandahar have risen by around 32% year-on-year, with nearly 22,000 tonnes shipped to markets including Malaysia, Uzbekistan, and Russia, reflecting growing global demand for Afghan produce.

Mount Etna Erupts Again, Lava and Ash Spew in Sicily

Mount Etna, Europe's most active volcano, has become active again on Italy's east coast, sending glowing lava and ash into the air from its north-eastern crater.

Italy's National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology said winds carried ash towards the north-east, with light ashfall reported in Taormina and nearby ski areas.

Scientists also observed small explosions from another crater, ejecting hot material several metres high.

The volcano is under constant monitoring due to its frequent activity.

Important Days

International Day of Epidemic Preparedness: 27th December

Observed on 27 December, the International Day of Epidemic Preparedness highlights the need for strong health systems and global cooperation to prevent and respond to epidemics.

Established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2020 after the COVID-19 crisis, the day underscores lessons from the pandemic on health, society, and economies.

It promotes international collaboration, resilient healthcare, and a "One Health" approach, with institutions like the World Health Organization playing a central coordinating role to ensure preparedness for future public health emergencies.

National

PM Modi Chairs 5th National Conference of Chief Secretaries in New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired the 5th National Conference of Chief Secretaries in New Delhi, aimed at strengthening Centre-State partnership through cooperative federalism.

The three-day conference focuses on structured dialogue for national development priorities.

Anchored in the vision of cooperative federalism, the conference is themed "Human Capital for Viksit Bharat", with emphasis on Early Childhood Education, Schooling, Skilling, Higher Education, Sports, and Extracurricular Activities.

It also includes six special sessions on deregulation, technology in governance, AgriStack, tourism development, Atmanirbhar Bharat, and post-Left Wing Extremism strategies.

REPM Scheme to Build India's First Integrated Manufacturing Ecosystem for High-Value Magnets

The Government of India has approved over ₹7,000 crore for the Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Sintered Rare Earth Permanent Magnets (REPM) to create India's first fully integrated domestic ecosystem for high-value magnets.

India possesses significant rare-earth mineral reserves across coastal and inland regions in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Gujarat, and Maharashtra.

The scheme aims to establish 6,000 tonnes per annum capacity, covering the entire value chain from rare-earth oxides to finished magnets crucial for sectors like electric mobility, renewable energy, electronics, aerospace, and defence.

The Ministry of Mines has also signed bilateral agreements with mineral-rich countries, including Australia, Argentina, and Zambia.

India Conducts RPREX-2025 to Strengthen Maritime Oil Spill Preparedness

RPREX-2025, a large-scale regional pollution response exercise, was conducted off the Mumbai coast to enhance India's preparedness for marine oil spill emergencies under the National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan.

Led by the Indian Coast Guard with participation from ONGC, the exercise simulated a tanker-fishing vessel collision in the Arabian Sea.

It tested inter-agency coordination, specialised pollution-control assets, and sea-to-shore response mechanisms to safeguard coastal ecology, livelihoods, and maritime safety.

Business and Economy

Small Business Credit Exposure Touches ₹46 Trillion, Grows 16%: CRIF-SIDBI

India's aggregate small business credit exposure rose 16.2% year-on-year to ₹46 trillion as of September 30, according to a

report by CRIF and Small Industries Development Bank of India.

Growth moderated from 19.3% in the previous quarter, reflecting cautious underwriting and seasonality.

MSME-focused policy measures continue to support credit expansion, with sole proprietors accounting for ~80% of exposure.

Private lenders lead enterprise lending, followed by public-sector banks, while NBFCs are expanding among sole proprietors.

Gold and Forex Assets Lift India's Reserves by \$4.4 Billion

India's foreign exchange reserves increased by \$4.37 billion to \$693 billion in the week ended December 19, driven by a rise in gold reserves and foreign currency assets, according to the Reserve Bank of India.

The jump followed a \$5 billion USD/INR buy-sell swap auction conducted by the RBI.

Gold reserves rose by \$2.6 billion, while foreign currency assets increased by \$1.6 billion.

During the volatile week, the RBI intervened aggressively in forex markets to stabilise the rupee.

Special Drawing Rights and India's IMF reserve position also recorded marginal increases.

Sports

England End 15-Year Drought with Historic Win in 4th Ashes Test

England scripted a memorable victory by defeating Australia by four wickets in the fourth Ashes Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, ending a nearly 15-year winless run on Australian soil.

The triumph snapped England's 18-match drought in Australia and prevented a series whitewash.

Josh Tongue starred with a five-wicket haul as Australia were bowled out for 152 and 132, while Brydon Carse took four wickets in the second innings. Chasing 175, England recovered from early setbacks with key contributions from Jacob Bethell (40) and Zak Crawley (37).

Deepti Sharma Scripts History with Record-Breaking Feat in International Cricket

Indian all-rounder Deepti Sharma shattered multiple records during the third T20I against Sri Lanka in Thiruvananthapuram.

With figures of 3/18, she overtook Ellyse Perry to become the third-highest wicket-taker in women's international cricket with 333 wickets.

Deepti also became the first Indian (men or women) to claim 150 T20I wickets, equalling Megan Schutt with 151 wickets, and the first cricketer globally to achieve 1,000 runs and 150 wickets in T20Is.

In ODIs, she is India's second-highest wicket-taker after Jhulan Goswami, while only Goswami and Katherine Brunt have more

wickets overall in women's international cricket.

Tilottama Sen Wins National Title in 50m Rifle Three Positions

Karnataka's Tilottama Sen clinched the women's 50m rifle three positions title at the National Shooting Championships held at the MP State Shooting Academy, Bhopal.

The 17-year-old, also India's youngest shooter to earn a Paris Olympics quota, topped the final with 466.9 points.

Kerala's Vidarsa K. Vinod secured silver with 462.9, while Railways' Ayonika Paul took bronze scoring 451.8. Earlier, Tilottama dominated qualifications with 591, excelling in kneeling, prone, and standing positions.