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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 23-12-2025

NATIONAL NEWS

Odisha to Host Regional Artificial Intelligence Impact Conference 2025

The Odisha Government will host the Regional Artificial Intelligence Impact Conference from 19 to 20 December 2025, positioning the state as an emerging contributor to artificial intelligence–driven governance and public service delivery in India.

A curtain-raiser event was organised by the Electronics and Information Technology Department, outlining Odisha's artificial intelligence vision, policy roadmap, and ongoing real-world applications.

The state aims to develop a comprehensive artificial intelligence innovation ecosystem supported by strong governance, advanced digital capabilities, and long-term policy certainty.

The conference forms part of the national build-up towards the India Artificial Intelligence Impact Summit, scheduled for February 2026.

Regional Artificial Intelligence Impact Summits are planned across eight states, including Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Meghalaya, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, and Odisha.

It was noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has envisioned Odisha as a major artificial intelligence hub in the country.

The conference is guided by the principle of the "Three Ps – Planet, People, and Progress", focusing on sustainability, inclusive growth, and sector-specific artificial intelligence applications in governance.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

India and Oman Ink Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

India and Oman signed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The CEPA marks a major milestone in India's strategic engagement with the Gulf region.

The agreement unlocks export opportunities for India's labour-intensive sectuors including textiles, leather, footwear, gems and jewellery, engineering products, plastics, furniture, agricultural products, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and automobiles.

Zero-duty access is granted on 98.08% of Oman's tariff lines, covering 99.38% of India's exports by value.

This is the second Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed by India in the last six months, after the United Kingdom.

Oman has offered ambitious services commitments, covering 127 sub-sectors including Computer Related Services, Business Services, Professional Services, Audio-visual Services, R&D, Education, and Health Services.

The agreement provides enhanced mobility for Indian professionals, including Intra-Corporate Transferees, Contractual Service Suppliers, Business Visitors, and Independent Professionals.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Apple Launches Open-Source AI Model SHARP

Apple has released a new open-source AI model called SHARP, which can convert a single 2D photograph into a photorealistic 3D scene.

The model is detailed in the research paper titled "Sharp Monocular View Synthesis in Less Than a Second" and is publicly available on GitHub.

SHARP reconstructs a realistic 3D representation of a scene from just one image, allowing the scene to be viewed from slightly different angles while maintaining scale and depth consistency.

The model works by creating a lightweight 3D representation, which can be rendered in real-time from nearby viewpoints without generating a new image each time.

SHARP uses a 3D Gaussian representation, where millions of tiny points of colour and light combine to form a smooth and realistic 3D scene.

This approach produces smooth parallax effects, similar to natural head movement when viewing a real object.

Unlike earlier methods requiring multiple photos and slow per-scene optimisation, SHARP predicts the entire 3D structure from a single image in less than a second on a standard GPU.

The model complements Apple's Spatial photos and depth effect features available on newer iPhone models like the iPhone 15 Pro and later.

BANKING

Google Pay, Axis Bank Launch UPI-Enabled RuPay Co-Branded Credit Card

Google Pay partnered with Axis Bank Limited to launch the 'Google Pay Flex Axis Bank Credit Card', a UPI-enabled co-branded credit card on the RuPay network.

The card is the first product under "Flex by Google Pay", an initiative aimed at making credit simpler and more accessible in India.

It enables users to make payments at millions of offline merchants and online platforms directly using the Google Pay app via QR code scanning.

The card is embedded within Google Pay, allowing users to apply digitally at zero cost, with no physical paperwork, and start transactions instantly upon approval.

Axis Bank is responsible for card issuance and underwriting, while Google Pay provides the digital payment experience and interface.

The card is designed to integrate credit with everyday UPI transactions, enhancing digital payment convenience for small-ticket daily spends.

Users earn reward points called "Start", where 1 Start point = ₹1, which are instantly redeemable on eligible transactions within the app.

The card offers flexible repayment options, allowing users to convert outstanding bills into Equated Monthly Instalments (EMIs) directly through the Google Pay app.

Customers can manage the credit card digitally, including blocking/unblocking the card, setting transaction limits, and resetting the PIN within the app.

BoB Underwrites $500 Million, 5-Year Foreign Currency Loan for OVL Overseas IFSC Limited

Bank of Baroda (BoB) has underwritten a $500 million, 5-year foreign currency term loan for OVL Overseas IFSC Limited (OOIL).

OOIL is a wholly owned subsidiary of ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) and is registered in GIFT City.

Bank of Baroda acted as the Sole Mandated Lead Arranger (SMLA) for the loan, showcasing its strength in syndicated foreign currency lending.

The transaction highlights the growing maturity of GIFT City as a hub for cross-border and offshore financing.

The drawdown ceremony for the term loan was held at Bank of Baroda IFSC Banking Unit (IBU), GIFT City, in the presence of senior officials from BoB and OVL.

The IFSC Banking Unit (IBU) at GIFT City is a critical pillar of BoB's international footprint and is its

third-largest branch outside India, with a diversified portfolio covering syndicated credit, retail banking, and trade finance.

RBI Imposes Restrictions on Gauhati Cooperative Urban Bank

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has imposed restrictions on The Gauhati Cooperative Urban Bank due to its weak financial and liquidity position.

Under RBI directions, customers can withdraw a maximum of ₹35,000 from their accounts during the restriction period.

The restrictions came into force after business hours on Tuesday (December 17, 2025) and will remain valid for six months, subject to review.

The bank is prohibited from granting or renewing loans, making investments, incurring liabilities, or making payments without prior RBI approval.

Depositors are protected under deposit insurance, and eligible customers can claim up to ₹5 lakh from the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC).

The Gauhati Cooperative Urban Bank Ltd was established in 1965.

RBI Grants Payment Aggregator Approval to Paytm Payments Services

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) authorized Paytm Payments Services Limited (PPSL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of One 97 Communications Limited, to operate as a Payment Aggregator (PA) for offline (physical) payments and cross-border transactions.

The authorization allows PPSL to facilitate physical merchant transactions through Point-of-Sale (PoS) devices, such as Card Machines and Soundboxes.

PPSL is also permitted to aggregate inward and outward cross-border payments in strict compliance with the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999.

With this approval, PPSL now holds a comprehensive Payment Aggregator licence covering online, offline, and cross-border payment segments.

The expanded licence enables end-to-end payment services for merchants across both domestic and international markets, removing the need for third-party rails.

Compliance conditions require PPSL to commence its cross-border operations within six months of the authorization date.

PPSL must adhere to strictly prescribed transaction limits (such as the ₹25 lakh cap for certain cross-border payouts), net worth requirements (minimum ₹15 crore, rising to ₹25 crore), and regulatory reporting norms.

A critical security mandate requires that any unusual or adverse incidents must be reported to the RBI within six hours.

The authorization supports Paytm's domestic and global expansion, enables direct control over merchant infrastructure, and significantly reduces dependence on third-party payment aggregators, which is expected to improve operating margins.

Airtel Payments Bank, NPCI Bharat BillPay Limited Enable EV Wallet Recharges

Airtel Payments Bank partnered with NPCI Bharat BillPay Limited (NBBL), a wholly owned subsidiary of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), to enable Electric Vehicle (EV) wallet recharges through Bharat Connect.

Bharat Connect is the new name of the Bharat BillPay System (BBPS), operated by NBBL.

The initiative allows users to recharge EV wallets directly via the Airtel Thanks app.

The EV wallet recharge facility is powered by BBPS, ensuring instant, secure, and reliable

The partnership enables interoperable EV wallet recharges across multiple EV charging service providers.

It offers a single, unified payment platform, reducing fragmentation across EV charging networks.

The initiative enhances convenience and seamless digital payments for EV users.

NBBL ensures standardised, secure, and interoperable bill payment infrastructure through Bharat Connect.

The partnership expands BBPS coverage from traditional utility payments to modern services like EV charging.

DEFENCE

India–UAE Exercise DESERT CYCLONE-II

The 2nd edition of the joint military exercise "DESERT CYCLONE-II" between the Indian Army (IA) and the UAE Land Forces commenced at Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, and will continue till 30 December 2025.

The two-week long exercise aims to enhance interoperability and strengthen bilateral defence cooperation through joint training in urban environments.

The exercise focuses on sub-conventional operations under a United Nations (UN) mandate, preparing both forces for peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, and stability operations.

The Indian contingent comprises 45 personnel, primarily from a battalion of The Mechanised Infantry Regiment.

The UAE Land Forces contingent includes 53 personnel from the 53rd Mechanised Infantry

Battalion.

Planned activities include fighting in built-in areas (FIBUA), heliborne operations, and detailed joint mission planning.

The exercise incorporates Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) and counter-UAS techniques for operations in urban terrain.

DESERT CYCLONE-II reflects the strengthening strategic partnership between India and the UAE and is expected to boost military-to-military relations.

AWARDS & PRIZES

World's Best International Airport 2025

Singapore's Changi Airport has been named the World's Best International Airport for 2025 at the Travel + Leisure India's Best Awards 2025.

The recognition was based on global reader voting, highlighting Changi Airport's excellence in overall travel experience, passenger comfort, and world-class facilities.

The award was announced during the 14th edition of Travel + Leisure India's Best Awards, which honour excellence across the travel and hospitality sector.

Winners are selected through an online reader-voting process, making the outcome a direct reflection of traveller preferences and real-world experiences.

Changi Airport emerged at the top among global airports, reaffirming sustained passenger trust and satisfaction.

The recognition highlights Changi's ability to combine operational efficiency, innovation, aesthetics, and passenger-centric services.

The airport is renowned for its sky-lit terminals, open spaces, indoor gardens, and art installations, creating a relaxing travel environment.

Iconic attractions include the world's tallest indoor waterfall, butterfly gardens, and immersive leisure zones, transforming long layovers into memorable experiences.

Air India Wins Best Domestic Airline Award at Travel + Leisure India

India's national carrier Air India has won the Best Domestic Airline title at the Travel + Leisure India and South Asia's Best Awards 2025, marking its second consecutive win.

The recognition comes during Air India's major transformation phase, focusing on fleet renewal, service quality, and enhanced customer experience.

The Travel + Leisure India and South Asia Awards are organised by Travel + Leisure India and South Asia and are completely reader-voted, unlike jury-based awards.

Votes are cast by travellers based on actual travel experiences, with key evaluation parameters including service quality, comfort, reliability, and overall travel experience.

The award therefore directly reflects passenger trust and preference.

The win highlights rising expectations of Indian travellers and validates Air India's efforts toward improved onboard comfort, consistent service delivery, and better operational reliability.

It also strengthens Air India's credibility in the domestic aviation market.

According to Air India, the award reflects strong customer confidence in its domestic services.

Oman's Highest National Honour

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has been conferred Oman's highest civilian honour, the First Class of the Order of Oman, during his official visit to Muscat, marking another major milestone in India's diplomatic outreach.

With this recognition, PM Modi has now received 29 top foreign State honours, reflecting India's rising global stature and his personal international influence.

The honour was presented during the final leg of PM Modi's three-nation foreign tour.

The Order of Oman is the highest civilian award of the Sultanate of Oman.

It has earlier been awarded to globally renowned leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Queen Elizabeth II, Queen Máxima, Emperor Akihito of Japan, and King Abdullah of Jordan, highlighting the prestige of the award.

PM Modi's inclusion in this list underlines the strength, depth, and maturity of India–Oman bilateral relations.

IMPORTANT DAYS

International Human Solidarity Day 2025

International Human Solidarity Day 2025 is observed on 20 December to promote the spirit of solidarity, unity, and collective responsibility among nations and people.

The day is celebrated to raise awareness about the need for governments to honour their commitments to international agreements aimed at peace, development, and social justice.

It highlights the principle of "Unity in Diversity", emphasising cooperation among different cultures, societies, and nations to address global challenges.

On 22 December 2005, the United Nations General Assembly recognised solidarity as one of the

fundamental and enduring values of the twenty-first century by adopting Resolution 60/209.

As part of this initiative, the World Solidarity Fund was created to support efforts aimed at ending poverty and promoting social development, particularly in developing countries.

The declaration of International Human Solidarity Day helped propagate the idea that global problems such as poverty, inequality, and exclusion require shared responsibility and collective action by the international community.