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UNIQUE GIFT OF KRIYAYOGA ASHRAM AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE TO GIVE IMPETUS TO WORLD BUILDING AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

Briefs

LUCKNOW

Six dead as overcrowded bus overturns

Six people were killed and 21 injured when an overcrowded double-decker bus overturned on Monday. The bus, traveling from Darbhanga to Ludhiana to Darbhanga at over 80 kmph, reportedly carried nearly 150 passengers—mostly migrant workers. Preliminary findings suggest the driver may have dozed off or was intoxicated before losing control and fleeing the scene. Emergency teams used cranes to rescue those trapped inside, while the injured were rushed to SGPGI and local hospitals. Authorities confirmed the vehicle had multiple pending challans and was operating well beyond its legal capacity.

JAIPUR

Blanket denial to Muslims triggers row

A controversy has erupted in Rajasthan after a viral video showed former BJP MP Sukhbir Singh Jaunapuria reclaiming blankets from Muslim women during a charitable event in Tonk. Jaunapuria reportedly stated that those who "abuse" Prime Minister Modi have no right to the aid. Defending his actions, the two-term MP claimed certain groups are consistently biased against the PM. Congress leaders, including Sachin Pilot and Govind Singh Dotasara, condemned the move as "despicable" and "discriminatory." On Monday, local residents in Kureda Buzurg village held protests and burned an effigy of the leader in response.

CHANDIGARH

Punjab to provide free ration kits

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Monday announced the "Meri Rasoi" scheme, providing free ration kits to 40 lakh blue card holder families starting this April. Ahead of the 2027 Assembly polls, the AAP government has allocated Rs1,000 crore for the initiative. The kits include sugar, chana dal, mustard oil, salt, and turmeric, supplementing the existing monthly wheat supply. Additionally, Mann confirmed the state budget will be presented on March 8, coinciding with International Women's Day. While pledging cooperation for the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, the CM asserted he would oppose any voter deletions.

CHANDIGARH

₹1 cr each for 2 cops found dead

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Monday announced an ex-gratia of Rs1 crore each for the families of ASI Gurnam Singh and Home Guard Ashok Kumar. The two personnel were found dead with bullet wounds at a check-post near the Indo-Pak border in Gurdaspur on Sunday. In a post on X, Mann hailed their "bravery and sacrifice," noting that HDFC Bank would provide an additional Rs1 crore in insurance per family. While forensic teams are investigating the deaths, an outfit named Tehreek-e-Taliban Hindustan (TTH) reportedly claimed responsibility on social media. Meanwhile, the opposition Congress and SAD have criticized the AAP government over the security lapse.

WOMEN POWER | 7.4L new named included after SIR; tally of male voters stand at 2,77,38,925, females number 2,89,60,838

97.37L voters deleted in TN's final electoral roll

CHENNAI

The final electoral roll for 2026 was published in Tamil Nadu on Monday following the completion of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) carried out between October 27, 2025 and February 23, 2026, with January 1, 2026 as the qualifying date. Under various categories, 97.37 lakh names of voters have been deleted.

The state now has 5.67 crore voters, Chief Electoral Officer Archana Patnaik, who released the final electoral roll, said. Addressing a press conference, Patnaik said that before the SIR exercise, the state's electorate stood at 6.41 crore. She said that 97.37 lakh names were deleted under various categories while 7.40 lakh people in the 18-19 age bracket have been included in the electoral roll.

Cal HC CJ, CEO hold talks on SIR role of judicial officers

Kolkata: Calcutta High Court Chief Justice Sujoy Paul on Monday held an internal coordination meeting with West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) and senior administrative and police officials over the SIR work entrusted to judicial officers, officials said. Chief secretary, home secretary and DGP were among those present at the meeting. Speaking to reporters after the nearly hour-long meeting, CEO Manoj Agarwal described it as an "internal meeting". He said training of judicial officers on the online portal for the SIR of electoral rolls in the state was completed on Monday morning, and the exercise has already commenced in several places.

Continuous updation will be taken up with immediate effect, she added.

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, with reference to January 1, 2026 as the qualifying date, was conducted in the state from October 27, 2025, to January 30, 2026, the names of 27.53 lakh eligible electors were added, and 4.23 lakh ineligible persons' names were deleted," she said.

As on October 27, 2025, there were 6.41.14.587 electors

enrolled in the state. Following the enumeration, draft roll was published on December 19, 2025, and the number stood at 5,43,76,756.

"Subsequently, during the period for filing of claims and objections from December 19, 2025, to January 30, 2026, the names of 27.53 lakh eligible electors were added, and 4.23 lakh ineligible persons' names were deleted," she said.

Check UP complaints: SC

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Lucknow district election officer to examine and take remedial action on the grievances of 91 residents of Akbar Nagar in the state capital who were allegedly excluded from the Uttar Pradesh SIR of electoral rolls following demolition of their homes in September 2023. A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi was initially of the view that the matter, pertaining to the disputed facts relating to abode of the petitioners, cannot be looked into by it in a writ petition here.

-Agencies

Disgraceful: Academics decry 'shirtless' stir at AI summit

NEW DELHI

A group of academics has condemned the recent shirtless protest by the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) at the AI Summit, describing it as "ill-timed" and "disgraceful" conduct.

Led by Binay Kumar Singh, Director, Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation, the academics issued a joint statement on Monday saying that the actions of leaders of the Congress cannot be defended as "democratic dissent".

"A broad cross-section of India's academic and intellectual community has issued a formal collective statement expressing deep concern over the highly shameful and disgraceful conduct of leaders from the IYC at the India AI Impact Summit," said the statement issued by the academic community.

The signatories included JNU V-C Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit, University of Mumbai V-C R.D. Kulkarni, NIT Jalandhar Director B.K. Kanaujia, IIM Amritsar Founding Director N. Ramamoorthy, IIT Jodhpur director A.K. Agarwal, IIT Dharwad, and



World praised India, says PM

New Delhi: In a post on X (formerly Twitter), Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said the entire world wholeheartedly praised India's potential at the just-concluded AI Impact Summit. Charges of promoting enmity between groups and assertions harmful to national integration were added to the FIR against them. -Agencies

professors and former teachers from Delhi University and Jamia Millia Islamia.

The signatories noted that the summit represented a

3 more Cong workers held

New Delhi: Delhi Police has made seven arrests, including three from Gwalior, in connection with the "shirtless" protest by the IYC workers at the AI Impact Summit. Charges of promoting enmity between groups and assertions harmful to national integration were added to the FIR against them. -Agencies

significant moment for India to present its technological capabilities, strategic vision, and growing leadership in artificial intelligence before the global community.

Sidda, DKS supporters fan power struggle fire again

BENGALURU

At a time where the Congress High Command is busy with elections in five states in the country, the power struggle between the Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his deputy D K Shivakumar has gained wings again, with supporters of both the camps engaging in a pitched battle.

While Siddaramaiah himself has taken up to X-handle social media to send across messages to his detractors, his supporters have floated the "Dalit Chief Minister" demand to keep D K Shivakumar at bay. The issue gained momentum on Saturday after PWD Minister Sathish Jarkiholi, a close aide of Siddaramaiah returned from Delhi and said that the party high command would be resolving the leadership issue soon.

Siddaramaiah immediately took to his X-handle and sent across a series of messages saying that he was being targeted by 'vested interests' as he belonged to a backward community.

He went on to say that he will fight till the end and would not budge to any pressures by the vested interests.

Will take membership in your gym: Rahul

NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday met a gym owner from Uttarakhand who shot into the limelight as "Mohammad Deepak" for taking on Bajrang Dal activists allegedly harassing a Muslim shopkeeper, and expressed support by telling him that he would come to Kotdwar to take membership in the gym.

Congress leader Vaibhav Wadia, the gym owner Deepak Kumar and his friend Vijay Rawat, along with several others, were present at the meeting, which took place at the 10, Janpanth residence of Congress Parliamentary Party chief Sonia Gandhi. Deepak also met Sonia Gandhi.

"Every human being is equal. This is Indianness, this is 'mohabbat ki dukaan'. Meeting with brother Mohammad Deepak from Uttarakhand - This same flame of unity and courage should burn in every Indian youth," Rahul Gandhi, who also spoke with Deepak's wife over the phone, said in a Facebook post.

Modi calls for change in WB

NEW DELHI

Ahead of the high stakes Assembly elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday has penned an open letter for the people of Bengal urging them to vote wisely. In the letter instead of 'Jai Shri Ram' chant, Modi has adopted the local invocation and greeted people with 'Joy Maa Kali' at the beginning of the letter.

"Joy maa Kali! Only a few months remain, after which the fate of West Bengal will be decided. The future of the next generation depends on your well-considered decision. From the children to the elderly are victims of extreme deprivation today. My heart is heavy with their pain. Therefore, from the depths of my soul, I have taken a single pledge: the pledge to make West Bengal 'developed and prosperous' and build 'Shonar Bangla'," wrote the Prime Minister.

In the open letter, Modi has also mentioned the legacies of several Bengali icons.

Mukul Roy dies at 71



Kolkata: Former railway minister Mukul Roy, once regarded as West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's most trusted lieutenant and the TMC's principal strategist, died of cardiac arrest at a private hospital here early on Monday. He was 71, and is survived by his son, Subhranshu Roy. He breathed his last around 1.30 am at the hospital in Salt Lake, Subhranshu Roy said. He had been suffering from multiple ailments and was in and out of the hospital over the past two years. A former Union minister and two-time Rajya Sabha member, Roy's four-decade-long political journey saw his stints in the Congress, TMC and the BJP.



Rajaji at Prez house
President Droupadi Murmu pays respect to Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, the only India-born Governor General, during the unveiling of his bust at Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi on Monday -ANI

Andhra cops arrest IPS officer in Bihar, court finds flaw

PATNA

Patna Civil Court, on Monday refused to grant transit remand of Bihar Home Guard and Fire Service Inspector General (IG) Sunil Kumar Nayak, citing "procedural lapses" after his arrest by a team of Andhra Pradesh police in a custodial 'torture' case.

The court also questioned the procedure adopted by the Andhra Pradesh Police for the IPS officer's arrest and termed the action legally flawed.

The matter was heard in the court of Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate, where the Andhra Pradesh Police sought transit remand to take IG Sunil Nayak to Andhra Pradesh in connection with a criminal case.

Taking strong exception to these lapses, the court outright rejected the transit remand application.

Patna City SP (West) Bhanu Pratap Singh said that the court had refused to grant transit remand as Andhra Pradesh police could not provide case diary, warrant to the court and also did not give prior information to local police before arresting him.

UP town masjids get 'juta maar Holi' cover

SHAHJAHANPUR

Authorities have covered mosques and mazzars along the routes of the traditional 'Juta Maar Holi' procession in Shahjahanpur with tarpaulin sheets, and announced enhanced security for the annual event.

'Juta Maar Holi' is a unique, centuries-old tradition celebrated in Shahjahanpur on Holi, when people hurl shoes and sandals at a person

dressed as a British-era 'Laat Sahab' riding a buffalo cart as the centrepiece, while playing with colours.

Last year, shoes, slippers and bottles were thrown at police personnel during the Laat Sahab procession, forcing a mild lathi charge.

Though Superintendent of Police Rajesh Dwivedi said security will be beefed up for this year's annual procession, locals see last year's mild police action as an aberration and rule out any problems.

Assam polls: Cong signals Oppn unity

GUWAHATI

Senior Congress leaders on Monday asserted that efforts to forge a broad opposition alliance ahead of the 2026 Assam Assembly elections are moving in a positive direction, even as they dismissed speculation about internal setbacks within the party.

Addressing the media in New Delhi after a Screening Committee meeting at Indira Bhawan, Assam Pradesh Congress Committee presi-

dent Gaurav Gogoi and Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia said the party is committed to contesting the next Assembly elections in a "strong and united" manner against the ruling BJP.

Gogoi said discussions with several regional and Left parties are underway and have been "extremely positive". Talks are being held with the Asom Jatiya Parishad, Rajgor Dal, All Party Hills Leaders Conference, as well as the CPI and CPM.

Bihar to ban non-veg sale near schools, religious institutions

PATNA

Bihar government has decided to ban the open sale of meat and fish near educational and religious institutions, as well as in crowded public areas.

Deputy chief minister Vijay Kumar Sinha said the decision was aimed at preventing violent tendencies among children, promoting social harmony and protecting public health. He said that the decision was also taken in

view of the state government's initiative to regulate the sale of meat in urban areas.

While referring to a letter issued by the state urban development and housing department (UDHD) principal secretary, Sinha said the matter was discussed thoroughly at a meeting held by the urban development department following feedback received during 'Jankalyan Samvad' interactions with intellectuals.

He asserted that the government was not opposed to the

consumption of any particular food, but stressed that people should adhere to the rules without any laxity.

Deputy CM said that the move was also aimed to ensure respect for public sentiments, and check environmental pollution. He warned that action would be taken against those who failed to comply with the new regulations.

The move is in line with chief minister Nitish Kumar's governance roadmap under the Saat Nischay-3 programme.

NE grievance on attacks: SC boosts shield

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court recently asked the Monitoring Committee, set up to address the issues of racial discrimination and other grievances faced by the North-Eastern community, to meet at least once in three months. It has also asked the committee to take cognisance of all issues, including those reported in any newspaper.

A bench comprising Justice Sanjay Kumar and Justice K Vinod Chandran

passed the order on February 17, in a 2015 writ petition seeking intervention of the Union Government for the protection of persons from the Northeast residing in various parts of the country, who have been subjected to racial attacks and insults. It sought the framing of guidelines for the safety and security of the Northeast community.

"In that regard, the Committee must take note of any newspaper report(s) relating to any issue or if a member of the Committee brings it to the notice of the



Chairman of the Committee, and a meeting should immediately be called for to address the issue and take corrective measures, if necessary." The bench has also directed the committee to meet on March 15 and at...

status report of the issues raised, discussed and addressed in the meeting shall be placed before the Court.

It may be recalled that the Ministry of Home Affairs constituted a Monitoring Committee to monitor issues and address grievances related to racial discrimination faced by Northeastern people.

The committee is headed by Niraj Kumar Bansod, Joint Secretary, MHA and has eleven other members. The committee was charged to

review the implementation of another committee constituted in terms of the 2014 writ petition in Karma Dorjee & Ors v UOI, under the chairmanship of M.P. Bezbaruah, IAS(retd), member of the North Eastern Council, to look into the various concerns of the people from Northeast States who live in different parts of the country, particularly in metropolitan cities. In Karma Dorjee petition, similar issues were raised and the Bezbaruah committee itself suggested for a Monitoring Committee.

Teacher assaults 32 students in Latur for damaging bike, held

LATUR

A schoolteacher has been arrested for allegedly beating around 32 students over damaging his motorcycle.

The incident occurred at Christ International School near Ahmedpur in Maharashtra's Latur district. The shocking incident of alleged brutality against schoolchildren has triggered outrage in Ahmedpur teshil after around 30 to 32 hostel students were

reportedly beaten with a bamboo stick.

According to police sources, the incident occurred around 10 pm on February 21 inside the school hostel. The accused, Ujjwal Prakash Soni, a resident of Betul in Madhya Pradesh, suspected that students had damaged his motorcycle. Acting on the suspicion, he allegedly lost his temper and assaulted dozens of minor students with a stick while hurling abuses.

Major relief for junior engineers of the Public Works Department (PWD), the High Court ordered regularization of old pension from 2001

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. The Allahabad High Court accepted a special appeal from junior engineers working in the Public Works Department (PWD). They stated that under similar circumstances, they should also receive the benefits of the Lucknow bench's order. A division bench of Justice Saumitra Dayal Singh and Justice Indrajit Shukla issued this order while hearing a petition filed by eight individuals, including Rakesh Kumar Tripathi. Seven junior engineers (civil) and one junior engineer (mechanical) were appointed on daily wages between 1986 and 1989.

Following

previous court orders, they were regularized on different dates in 2006-07. The petitioners' counsel argued that they were entitled to regularization immediately after the 2001 amendment. If they were considered regularized from December 20, 2001, they would be covered under the old pension scheme under the Uttar Pradesh Retirement Benefits Rules, 1961. In a similar case, the Lucknow bench, in its 2024 ruling, ordered the employees' regularization date to be considered December 20, 2001, and also mandated the granting of all service and retirement benefits. The state government filed a special leave petition in the Supreme Court against the Lucknow

bench's decision, which was dismissed. The government advocate argued that their appointment to service would be considered after April 1, 2005, and therefore, they were placed under the new pension scheme. The old pension and GPF benefits cannot be granted.

The court stated that since the Lucknow bench's decision is effective under similar circumstances, and the Supreme Court did not interfere, the present appeal should have the same outcome. The court accepted the special appeal and directed that the appellants be considered regularized from December 20, 2001, and that all service and pension benefits be granted on that basis.

196 Grievances Received at Samadhan Diwas, 22 Resolved on the Spot



Fatehpur

In line with the government directive to ensure prompt and qualitative redressal of Public Grievances, a Sampoorna Samadhan Diwas was organized at the auditorium of Khaga tehsil under the Chairmanship of Additional District Magistrate Sunil Kumar. During the Public grievance redressal Programme, a total of 196 complaints were received from various departments, including agriculture, irrigation, revenue, education, Police, health, Prime Minister/Chief Minister housing schemes, old age Pension, (Disability) Pension, destitute women pension, tube wells, MGNREGA, horticulture, consolidation, and district supply. Of these, 22 grievances were resolved on the spot by the officials Present. The remaining applications were forwarded to the concerned departments with instructions to

ensure qualitative disposal within the stipulated time frame. Addressing the officials, the Additional District Magistrate emphasized that the satisfaction of complainants is the core objective of Sampoorna Samadhan Diwas. He directed all departmental officers to avoid any negligence in official duties and to ensure that the benefits of welfare schemes reach every eligible beneficiary. He further instructed that no deserving individual should be deprived of government welfare initiatives. The programme was attended by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (Khaga), Chief Medical Officer, Circle Officer (Khaga), Tehsildar, Nayab Tehsildar, District Development Officer, District Probation Officer, District Programme Officer, District Social Welfare Officer, Block Development Officer and other officials and staff from the revenue and Police Departments.

Allegations of Amrit Sarovar on Pasture Land, Fake MNREGA Payments

Bahraich

A serious case of corruption at the Gram Panchayat level has come to light in the development block area. Allegations of the illegal construction of an Amrit Sarovar on Gram Sabha-protected pasture land, fraudulent payments under the MNREGA Scheme and significant irregularities in development works have caused a stir in administrative circles. The role of the village head representative and the village secretary is suspected in this entire Episode. This case concerns the village head of Tendwa Alpi Mishra, under the Kaiserganj tehsil. Village head Tulsiram is very old and uneducated. Taking advantage of this, Udayraj Verma declared himself the village head representative and throughout his tenure, misused funds by arbitrarily influencing government schemes. Government funds were transferred to the accounts of his family and close associates in the name of development works. Most of the hand pumps in the village are out of order. However, Payments were withdrawn by showing their repairs and the construction of new hand pumps on paper. Similarly, allegations of misappropriation of government funds by laying only gravel in the name of an interlocking road have also been made. The most serious allegation relates to the MNREGA Scheme. Villagers Claim that MNREGA payments have been made to people who never even went to work. Furthermore, fraudulent wages have been withdrawn in the names of elderly people over the age of 60. This has raised questions about the credibility of such an ambitious scheme as MNREGA. Furthermore, the Amrit Sarovar was constructed on the Gram Sabha's protected pasture land, Plot number 215 (b), which was reserved for grazing animals. The villagers claim that this construction is completely illegal and represents a gross misuse of government funds. Aggrieved villager Neeraj Kumar Pathak has submitted a petition to the District Magistrate and Sub-District Magistrate, demanding an impartial investigation into the entire matter, recovery of government funds from the culprits and strict action against those responsible. The villagers Clearly State that corruption is rampant in the village and without strict action, it is impossible to stop such cases. It remains to be seen how seriously the district administration will address this serious matter and whether strict action will be taken against the culprits or whether this case will remain confined to paperwork. The villagers are now keenly watching the administrative Action.

Illegal soil mining in Amrit Sarovar, villagers angry

Bahraich

In Majra Mansukh village of Govindapur Pandit Gram Panchayat, under the Nawabganj development block, the ambitious Amrit Sarovar project of the central and state governments appears to be falling prey to corruption and negligence. With the consent of the village head, illegal soil mining is being carried out openly within the Amrit Sarovar, defeating the very purpose of the project. Villagers say that lakhs of rupees were spent under the Amrit Sarovar project for water conservation, beautification and providing amenities to the villagers. However, the situation in Mansukh village is completely opposite. Instead of filling the



Sarovar with water, JCB machines and tractors are being used to excavate the soil, severely damaging the structure of the Sarovar. Villagers reported that the proposed cement chairs, boundary walls and other beautification work on the Amrit Sarovar were either not completed or left incomplete. Villagers reported that the entire Project funds were withdrawn by the village head, Jakrun. But no concrete

action is visible on the ground. Bushes have grown around the lake and the existing boundary wall has Collapsed. Protesting villagers Tirbhuvan Prasad, Ganga Ram, Shobha and others say that if the Amrit Sarovar is filled with water, it will solve the problem of drinking water for animals and provide villagers with recreational facilities. However, currently, instead of being used by the vil-

lage, the lake has become a hub of illegal mining. Attempts were made several times to contact the village head representative and the APO in this regard, but no one answered their Phone. The villagers have demanded from the district administration and relevant officials that an impartial investigation be conducted into the illegal mining of soil in the Amrit Sarovar. Strict action be taken against the culprits and the lake be refilled with water and fully beautified so that the village can truly benefit from the government Scheme. The villagers have warned that if immediate action is not taken, they will intensify their agitation by complaining to higher Officials.

MP Hema Malini Inspects Animal Birth Control Centre and Dog Shelter in Mathura

Mahtura

Member of Parliament Hema Malini today inspected the Animal Birth Control Centre and Dog Shelter located at Civil Lines, Mathura, along with Municipal Commissioner Jag Pravesh. During the inspection, the MP closely reviewed all operational arrangements at the centre. She gathered detailed information about the quality of food provided to the dogs, the duration for which dogs are kept at the centre after sterilization (ABC), the process followed for releasing them after recovery, methods used for capturing dogs and the procedures related



to medication and vaccination. The MP also examined the cleanliness, maintenance, and overall care of the animals at the facility and expressed satisfaction with the arrangements. She interacted with the veterinary staff and obtained technical insights regarding sterilization, treatment and vaccination Processes. On this occa-

sion, Municipal Commissioner Jag Pravesh, Additional Municipal Commissioner Anil Kumar, Dr. Vikas Pathak (Dean, Veterinary College), Professor Dr. Sanjay Purohit, Senior Veterinary Officer Dr. R.C. Pandey, ABC Centre clerk Bhagwan Singh and the vaccination team were Present.

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number 215 (b), which was reserved for grazing animals. The villagers claim that this construction is completely illegal and represents a gross misuse of government funds. Aggrieved villager Neeraj Kumar Pathak has submitted a petition to the District Magistrate and Sub-District Magistrate, demanding an impartial investigation into the entire matter, recovery of government funds from the culprits and strict action against those responsible. The villagers Clearly State that corruption is rampant in the village and without strict action, it is impossible to stop such cases. It remains to be seen how seriously the district administration will address this serious matter and whether strict action will be taken against the culprits or whether this case will remain confined to paperwork. The villagers are now keenly watching the administrative Action.

PDA' Recast During Akhilesh Yadav Visit, Political Energy Surges in Fatehpur

Fatehpur

The visit of Samajwadi Party (SP) National President and former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav generated palpable political momentum across the district. The tour drew attention not only for its public outreach but also for the party revised articulation of "PDA." Traditionally understood within SP discourse as an acronym for backward classes, Dalits, Adivasis and minorities, "PDA" was presented in a new light as "Peedit, Dukhi aur Apmaanit" (the oppressed, distressed and humiliated). Party leaders described the shift as a broader social justice narrative aimed at expanding outreach, while supporters framed it as an inclusive political message. Across Fatehpur, large hoardings portrayed Yadav as a "PDA Mahanayak" (hero of PDA). From urban centers to rural stretches, party workers erected welcome gates and banners in a visible show of strength. Supporters lined up along the route from Afoi to Fatehpur city and onward toward Lucknow, briefly halting the convoy at multiple points to greet the former Chief Minister. Youth participation was particularly noticeable, with many taking selfies and sharing them on social media. Yadav reciprocated with informal interactions and photographs. At certain venues, however, instances of indiscipline among local leaders created brief challenges in maintaining order.



Volunteers were seen working to manage crowds at reception points and event locations. Although the visit was officially described as a courtesy call and attendance at a private wedding function, Yadav used the opportunity to address the media and party workers on a range of political issues. He criticized the central government over its reported U.S. deal, corporate influence involving major industrial groups, the University Grants Commission (UGC) and concerns related to the Union Budget. He also targeted the Uttar Pradesh government, questioning budget priorities and remarks made by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in the Assembly. Yadav

further commented on the Shankaracharya controversy, raised questions regarding official credentials and made sharp remarks about governance in Gorakhpur. He also criticized both Deputy Chief Ministers of the state. During the visit, he met the family of Advocate Jayaraj Man Singh, assuring them that a thorough investigation would be conducted if the SP returns to Power. Inset: 'Hatheli Garam-Police Attention' Speaking to journalists Yadav made a pointed remark regarding alleged lapses in his security arrangements. Using the Phrase "Hatheli garam, Police naram" (loosely implying bribery leading to leniency), he sarcastically ques-

tioned whether he would need to "warm Palms" to ensure adequate security. Without directly naming officials, he alluded to the Superintendent of Police, asking what it would take to "warm the palm." The comment quickly gained traction on social media, with video Clips circulating widely. Inset: The Red Cap Sparks Discussion Throughout the Program, Yadav was seen wearing the SP symbolic red cap, a hallmark of party identity. However, several local leaders accompanying him were not wearing it, prompting quiet discussion among supporters. Observers suggested that the absence of the party signature attire during a high-profile visit reflected lapses in discipline and Messaging. Inset: Local Tea Vendor "Sheshman And Aryan" Gets a Moment in the Spotlight. A lighter moment during the tour came from Sultanpur Ghosh area in Khaga tehsil, where the popular "Sheshman's Famous Tea" stall at Chowki Chauraha became an unexpected highlight. Aryan Yadav, a digital content creator and son of tea vendor Sheshman Yadav, personally served two cups of tea to Yadav. After tasting the tea, the former Chief Minister appreciated it, and a Photograph of the moment was later shared on his official social media handle. The gesture brought Pride to the vendor family, who described the occasion as a memorable Honor.

Workshop on the Prime Minister's Vikasit Bharat Rojgar Yojana (PMVB) in Prayagraj, DM directs for extensive publicity

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. A workshop on the Prime Minister's Vikasit Bharat Rojgar Yojana (PMVB) of the Government of India was held on Monday in the Sangam Auditorium in the Collectorate premises, chaired by District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma. Officials from various departments, industry representatives, and business organizations participated in the workshop. At the event, the Regional Provident Fund Commissioner, Prayagraj, provided detailed information about the scheme, stating that the Central Government has implemented the scheme from August 1, 2025, with the aim of creating employment, promoting manufacturing and industries, and ensuring social security for employees. The scheme will remain in effect until July 31, 2027. He informed that employees seeking employment for the first time under the scheme will receive an incentive of ₹15,000 upon completing six months of continuous service. The second installment will be released after completing a financial literacy course developed by the Provident Fund Organization.



Establishments generating additional employment will receive incentives for two years as per the rules. Establishments in the manufacturing sector will receive this benefit for four years. The scheme will benefit both new and re-employed workers. The

District Magistrate, describing the scheme as an important initiative towards increasing employment, directed all departments to promote it widely. He said that related establishments should be encouraged to register under the scheme so that maximum

workers and entrepreneurs can benefit. The District Magistrate directed the Provident Fund Organization and the Labor Department to organize camps at the district, tehsil, and block levels to disseminate information about the scheme to the public and establishments. He

also emphasized the need to coordinate with other departments and share data on potential beneficiaries. The Deputy Labor Commissioner, District Development Officer, Assistant Commissioner of Industries, Executive Engineer of the Electricity Department,

District School Inspector, Labor Enforcement Officer, representatives from the National Chamber of Commerce, Laghu Udyog Bharti, IFFCO, and various non-governmental organizations were present at the workshop.

An employee who arrived to install a smart meter was attacked and his head was broken



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Naini. A case of assault has come to light involving an employee of the GMR Company (representative ADCO), the executing agency, who had come to install a smart meter in the Prayagraj area. The injured employee has filed a complaint at the Naini police station, demanding that a case be filed against the accused. The incident occurred at around 12:28 pm on Monday in Prayagraj Gali No. 10, connected to the Post Office feeder under the 33/11 kV Jail Road power substation. It is alleged that GMR employee Vinayak Pandey, a resident of Veerpur Post Khai Karchana, was working with departmental contract workers to install smart

meters in the area. Meanwhile, Ajju Khan, son of Azhar Khan, a resident of the neighborhood, arrived and began protesting the meter installation. According to the complaint, as the dispute escalated, the accused verbally abused and assaulted the employee, striking him on the head, resulting in bleeding. It is alleged that after the attack, the accused went inside the house, threatening to kill. The injured employee called 112, and the complaint number was registered as P23022608779. The victim's side also submitted a CD of the incident to the police. The Naini police station stated that the case is being investigated based on the complaint and further action will be taken based on the evidence.

A young man wanted in two POCSO Act cases was arrested

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. Police arrested a young man wanted in two separate POCSO Act cases in the Sarai Inayat police station area. The police team apprehended him near his village, Dakshin Kotwan, and sent him to court. Under the direction of the Police Commissioner, the Ganganagar Zone team is continuously taking action as part of the ongoing campaign against crime and criminals. In this sequence, Anil Mishra (24), son of Anuj Mishra, resident of Dakshin Kotwan, named in FIR Nos. 209/2025 and 375/2025 registered at Sarai Inayat police station, was arrested on Saturday. The accused faces charges under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and sections 5/6 of the POCSO Act. According to the police, the accused had been wanted for a long time. Acting on a tip from an informant, the police apprehended him near his



village. According to police records, the accused has previously been charged with assault, theft, and other offenses. He has also been named in various

criminal cases in 2022, 2023, and 2025. The arrest was carried out by a team from Sarai Inayat police station, including Sub-Inspector Ramayan Singh

and Sub-Inspector Upendra Tiwari. Police stated that legal action has been taken against the accused as per the rules and he has been presented in court.

"Gram Chaupal" will be held in consolidation villages, land disputes will be resolved on the spot

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. "Gram Chaupal" will be organized from February 23rd to 28th to address land-related issues faced by farmers in villages undergoing consolidation. This initiative is being undertaken on the instructions of the Consolidation Commissioner, Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow, to ensure that revenue and consolidation matters can be resolved at the village level. Settlement Officer, Consolidation, Sanjeev Kumar, stated that the

Chaupal will be held on scheduled dates under the chairmanship of the concerned officials. Farmers will be able to present their land-related objections and complaints with their documents, which will be resolved on the spot. He further stated that on February 23rd, a Chaupal will be held in Atanpur village of Phulpur tehsil, chaired by the Settlement Officer, Consolidation, Prayagraj. On the same day, a Chaupal will be held in village Sarai Khandev village, chaired by the Consolidation Officer,

Soraon. On February 24, a Chaupal will be held in village Raidepur (Tehsil Phulpur) under the chairmanship of Chakbandi Officer Sadar. On February 25, a Chaupal will be held in village Babupur Sathar and Qazipur Sathar of Tehsil Handia under the chairmanship of Chakbandi Officer Handia and in village Balapur of Tehsil Koraon under the chairmanship of Chakbandi Officer Meja/Koraon. On the same day, a program will be held in village Rajepur of Tehsil Phulpur under the

chairmanship of Chakbandi Officer Phulpur I. On February 26, a Chaupal will be held in village Kahli (Tehsil Phulpur) under the chairmanship of Chakbandi Officer Soraon, in village Jhariahi (Tehsil Meja) under the chairmanship of Chakbandi Officer Meja/Koraon and in village Khanpur (Tehsil Phulpur) under the chairmanship of Chakbandi Officer Phulpur I. On February 27th, a Chaupal will be held in village Chandrawat alias Pure Matadin (Tehsil Phulpur)

under the chairmanship of Consolidation Officer Soraon and in village Chakia Hinauta under the chairmanship of Additional District Magistrate (Civil Supplies) and Deputy Director Consolidation Prayagraj. The officials have appealed to the farmers of the concerned villages to attend the Chaupal with their land records and get their problems resolved. Assistant Consolidation Officer, Consolidation Worker and Consolidation Lekhpal will also be present in the Chaupal with all the necessary records.

Editorial

Agni V with MIRV gets India into global deterrence league

The successfully test-fired Agni-V ballistic missile equipped with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) technology vastly extends India's strategic envelope. The Agni-V boasts an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) range, exceeding 5,000 kilometres. This extended reach significantly alters India's strategic landscape. Traditionally, India's missile arsenal primarily focused on deterring threats from its immediate neighbours. However, the Agni-V's extended range allows India to potentially engage targets across vast distances, encompassing a broader spectrum of potential adversaries. This expanded reach compels any potential aggressor to consider the wider ramifications of a conflict with India. The psychological impact of this extended deterrence capability is undeniable. The stakes have just gone up.

The integration of multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicle technology turbocharges India's capability to launch a survivable multiple nuclear attack from a single source. MIRV allows a single missile to carry multiple independently targeted warheads. During the final stages of flight, these warheads separate and manoeuvre towards pre-designated targets. This capability significantly complicates an enemy's missile defence system. Previously, an enemy could potentially expend a single interceptor missile to neutralise an incoming threat. However, with MIRV technology, the enemy's defence system would need to engage and destroy each independently targeted warhead, exponentially increasing the defensive burden. This complexity significantly enhances the effectiveness of the Agni-V as a deterrent. It's important to acknowledge the regional context. China, India's hostile neighbour, possesses a robust and growing missile arsenal. China's Dongfeng-41 (DF-41) ICBM, with an estimated range exceeding 12,000 kilometres, dwarfs the Agni-V in terms of sheer reach. However, the Agni-V's successful test firing demonstrates India's commitment to closing the strategic gap. Furthermore, India's indigenous development programme allows for greater flexibility and faster production. It makes a greater range and more powerful warhead-integrated missile system just a matter of time and investment.

Nuclear deterrence: Maintaining stability

The Agni-V, with its extended range and MIRV technology, serves as a potent deterrent against potential nuclear threats. The concept of deterrence relies on the credible threat of massive retaliation to dissuade an enemy from launching a nuclear attack. India has no first use of nuclear weapons posture, though there has been ambiguity on India's commitment to that posture lately. The Agni-V's capabilities complicate strategic choice for an adversary especially with regards to a nuclear first strike against India, knowing the potential for devastating retaliation across multiple targets. This strengthens regional stability and discourages the use of nuclear weapons.

Road ahead

While the successful test of the Agni-V marks a momentous milestone for India's strategic defence, the journey doesn't end here. Continued development and modernisation of India's missile programme are crucial to maintaining a credible deterrent in the face of an ever-evolving global security landscape. India must prioritise research and development in areas like hypersonic missiles and advanced defence penetration capabilities to stay ahead of potential threats. The next logical step in India's evolving deterrence strategy should be the enhancement of the submarine-launched ballistic missile.



CAA is not against Indian Muslims, but its opposition clearly smacks of anti-Dalit prejudice

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is back in the news. The Modi government, after keeping the momentous legislation in a limbo for three years after it had sparked massive protests then, has decided to implement the law, which gives citizenship to religious minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. The Act states that Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan will not be treated as illegal migrants, and therefore, be eligible for naturalisation. These communities are given this leeway because they have been facing religious persecution in their respective countries and are often forced to cross the border to save their lives and dignity. While the government says the new law gives sanctuary to people fleeing religious persecution, its critics find it to be anti-Muslim. While the government is categorical in saying that the legislation has nothing to do with Muslims staying within the country, those in opposition refuse to be convinced. One senior journalist called it a testament of sagging moral values in the country, while another bemoaned at not including Muslims in the list of 'beneficiaries'. What the opponents of CAA don't understand, deliberately or otherwise, is that Muslims from Pakistan, Afghanistan



and Bangladesh can still seek India's citizenship under the old Citizenship Act — just the same way former Pakistani singer Adnan Sami did. Other countries, including the United States, too have similar citizenship laws. Also, what most critics don't understand, as highlighted by senior journalist Abhijit Majumder in his Firstpost article, dated 12 March, 2024, that the US has a CAA-like "narrow-window legislation called the Lautenberg-Specter Amendments which give preferential shelter to persecuted minorities from Russia and Iran".

In fact, by delaying it in providing succour to minorities for so long, especially in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Indian leadership has com-

mitted a moral transgression. The famous Liaquat-Nehru pact signed between India and Pakistan in 1950 promised to provide safety to minorities in the divided subcontinent. While India kept its side of promise by not just providing minorities equal rights and opportunities but also — as then prime minister Manmohan Singh insisted publicly in 2009 — giving them the first right to the nation's resources, the same cannot be said about the state of minorities in the neighbourhood. There were over two lakh Sikhs in Afghanistan in the 1980s. By the beginning of 2021, the number dwindled to 400 Sikhs, and after the Taliban's takeover of that country, the number barely touches a

three-figure mark now. Similarly, Hindu population in Pakistan today finds itself below the 2 per cent mark, while in Bangladesh, it has dwindled from being almost a third of the total population in 1950 to about 20 per cent in 1971 to less than 8 per cent today. Worse, if a leading Bangladeshi intellectual, Prof Abdul Barkat of Dhaka University, is to be believed, there won't be a Hindu in that country after 30 years. There is no doubt that minorities, especially Hindus, are facing existential crises in the neighbourhood. The same cannot be said about Muslims, though a few Islamic sects like Shias and Ahmediyyas do feel the occasional brunt of Islamic fundamentalism. Without denying

the scale of persecution faced by them, it would be ludicrous on India's part to grant a CAA-like relief to the descendants of those who had actively participated in its Partition. The fact of the matter is that Shias and Ahmediyyas, among others, were at the forefront of the Pakistan project. In fact, the main architect of the Pakistan movement, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, too was a Shia Muslim, today facing the brunt of Islamic fundamentalism. So, can the Indian state open its arms for the very people who once took an active part in its dismemberment? What's the guarantee that the descendants of the same sects won't participate in a similar Partition-like movement in future? Can the Indian State take this chance? But why special treatment for Hindus, critics could still ask. The answer lies beyond the Liaquat-Nehru pact of 1950. One can also for a moment ignore the civilisational aspect of the crisis where Hindus have no country but India to secure their safety and security. What makes the Indian state obligated to look after the Hindus of the neighbourhood is the fact that these people stayed back at the time of Partition after Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru proactively discouraged them from leaving the territories that would later become Pakistan.

Modi's India is ensuring it doesn't end up on the losing side this time

Many centuries ago when the world at large didn't have much clue about statecraft and strategy, Kautilya had advised Chandragupta Maurya, his disciple, that the country with which his kingdom would share an immediate border will always be its enemy. But the enemy's enemy will be a friend and hence all strategic calculation must be undertaken keeping this basic premise in mind. It seems India was following this exact logic when a set of very interesting images from Afghanistan splashed across the media this week. An Indian delegation led by JP Singh, joint secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, met Taliban's foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Kabul. The Indian delegation also met former President Hamid Karzai,

officials of the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan as well as some people from the business community. This was the second such public engagement between India and Taliban after the latter returned to power in 2021. The first public engagement took place in 2022 when at that time also, Joint Secretary Singh met Taliban's foreign minister Muttaqi. In the last three years since Taliban has come back to rule the country by establishing the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, India's diplomatic engagement with the new rulers has been on a very firm footing. Time and again, India's foreign policy establishment has invoked civilisational ties and the role of history to justify maintaining strong ties with Kabul. Not without Prime

Minister Narendra Modi urging Taliban to form an inclusive government in the country. Although, India has not accorded diplomatic recognition to the state set up by Taliban yet but it has continued to engage the various stakeholders in Afghanistan including Taliban itself. A major part of this engagement is focused on humanitarian aid to people of Afghanistan which is being coordinated by a technical team posted by India since June 2022. As a part of this aid, India had provided Afghanistan with food-grains to tide over an unprecedented food shortage, medical aid that also included Covid-19 vaccines besides continued support for more than 500 projects in critical sectors such as power, water supply, road.

Crime and cupid: Intriguing romance of criminals

After one of the most headline-grabbing and glitzy pre-wedding functions in the recent past (Anant Ambani and his soon-to-be wife Radhika Merchant) just a few days ago, a drastically different romantic union has captured the public's imagination in the past week or so: the nuptials of two of India's high profile criminals, Gangster Sandeep alias Kala Jathedi and 'history sheeter', Anuradha Chaudhary who also goes by the moniker 'Madam Minz', in Delhi's Dwarka. It was an unusual wedding with most of the baraatis/wedding guests being heavily armed policemen, including SWAT commandoes carrying hi-tech weapons, deployed to prevent the gangster from escaping and also to protect him from rival gangs' assassination attempts. Sandeep who is currently incarcerated at Tihar jail was granted parole between 10 am to 4 pm to complete his wedding rituals. A known associate of gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, Kala Jathedi faces over a dozen cases of armed robbery, attempts to murder, Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. His lady love Anuradha Chaudhary is no shy bride, a 'history sheeter' herself currently out on bail, and facing several cases involving money laundering, abduction, and illegal arms in Rajasthan and Delhi. The lovey-dovey twosome's romance reportedly started in



2020, when they were introduced through a mutual associate Vicky Singh in Indore. Delhi Special Cell proved to be quite the Grinch as they arrested our local Bonnie and Clyde-inspired couple from a dhaba on the Yamuna-Saharanpur expressway in July of 2021. The couple remained devoted to each other and finally married on Tuesday, 12 February. Though probably not an aspiration to most people, this unsocial and misanthropic love story is the stuff movie scripts and novels are made of. There is a word for it in the English dictionary: hybristophilia. It is defined as feeling romantic or sexual arousal for criminals or an act of crime by itself. Psychologists say, shared experiences or common tendencies and habits are often an emotional binding factor, so this could also be a reason for real-life criminal couples to fall in love with each other. As distasteful as this phenomenon might be, there are many such couples in history, their infatuation and intimacy ignited by a common passion for psy-

chopathic/criminal behaviour. Some of the more high-profile precedents for such romantic unions are: Bonnie and Clyde: One of the most iconic outlaw couples of the 20th century Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow were idolized for their dedication to each other through prison breaks, robberies and murder. They met each other at a mutual friend's place in West Dallas, USA, but their budding romance was quickly cut short when Clyde was imprisoned for auto theft, his crime just catapulting Bonnie's affection for him. Classic case of hybristophilia. Bonnie helped him escape by smuggling a gun into prison and the two soon descended into a life of crime, committing robberies, burglaries and murders for the next couple of years around Texas and the Midwest while they remained on the run. They were finally killed in a shootout when they were ambushed by law enforcement officials on the side of a highway in Louisiana in May, 1934. Their "love story" was further romanticised.

Double Income No Kids: A cause for alarm rather than a sign of liberal feminism

DINK - Double Income No Kids is the new cool. Married young women often throw around this label under the garb of feminist choice, asserting their desire to enjoy their freedom and pursue their careers without any hindrances. In this article, I do not intend to question women's ability to choose, but I do want to provoke them to delve deeper into the societal structures that have made this choice attractive. Especially in the current context of falling birth rates in many parts of the world. We are facing a dire reality, the world is losing the

ability to reproduce itself. It is about time that we pause and question, what is going on? Why are increasing numbers of women today, particularly those with economic resources, unwilling to have children? **The cost of liberal feminism** Growing up as a young Indian woman in Dubai and Canada in the late 1990s and early 2000s I was not expected to learn to cook, clean and demonstrate any maternal inclinations. From an early age, I defied gender norms in the clothes I wore, choosing to

play tennis at a young age when most girls around me were not playing any sport, and chomping down shawarmas not caring about putting on weight. I was by no means unique in my preferences. But at the time, I was one of the few girls in my social circle who had the luxury of navigating unconventional choices. The liberal feminist discourse of (individualistic) choice was still new and only more available to me due to parents who were intent on being progressive. As with any social shift, while allowing me immense

privilege and freedom, this came with unintended consequences: I grew up believing the world was "my" oyster, and there were no limitations or costs associated with pursuing what I wanted. I just had to do the hard yards and get there. Little did I know. I am telling you this because the aberration of my childhood is now the norm in well-to-do urban parts of the world. Young women are told it is okay and even desirable to operate based on their individualistic preferences, needs, and wants.

Privatized entities can employ Aadhaar authentication

Delhi: The ministry of electronics and IT (Meity) announced that the Union government has amended the Aadhaar rules to allow private entities to use Aadhaar authentication for service delivery. The amendments aim to give residents "ease of living" and "better access to services". Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (Meity) announced that the Union government has amended the Aadhaar rules to allow private entities to use Aadhaar authentication for service delivery. The amendments aim to give residents "ease of living" and "better access to services". Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (Meity) announced that the Union government has amended the Aadhaar rules to allow private entities to use Aadhaar authentication for service delivery. The amendments aim to give residents "ease of living" and "better access to services".



allow Aadhaar authentication only "in the interest of good governance, preventing leakage of public funds, promoting ease of living of residents and enabling better access to services for them" to use digital platforms for good governance, social welfare benefit dissipation prevention, and innovation and knowledge dissemination. The amendments removed "in the interest of good governance, preventing leakage of public funds access to services for them" and added "promoting ease of living of residents and enabling better access to services for them" as the fourth purpose, expanding the reasons for authentication.

Prasanna S, the Supreme Court's advocate-on-record who challenged Aadhaar's constitutionality, called the expansion the "spectre of a surveillance state", "unwarranted" and in violation of the top court's ruling that struck down Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act, 2016 to bar private entities from using authentication services. The 2025 Rules change contradicts the five-judge Supreme Court ruling in *Puttaswamy v Union of India* (2018). Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act, 2016 prohibiting private entities from employing authentication services was overturned. He claimed this amendment practically re-legislates what was ruled down.

Women own almost 50% of small manufacturing businesses

A survey found that 58% of manufacturing businesses were owned by women in 2023-24, up 4% from the previous year. The Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) 2023-24 found that 28.1% of workers were women. More than one-third (33.7%) of OAEs' workforce is female in OAEs (owned enterprises). Female-owned businesses rose to 26.2% in 2023-24 from 22.9% in and 9.7% to 14.2% in other services. Female workers comprised 18.5% of recruited workers. Female workers were



most prevalent in manufacturing (46.5%), followed by other services (22.5%) and trade. West Bengal has the most female workers (12.7%), followed by Uttar Pradesh (10.4%) and Maharashtra (9.7%) in ASUSE 2023-24. West Bengal and Maharashtra have the most rural and urban female workers, at 16% and 13%,

respectively. Non-incorporated non-far establishments are not registered under the Companies Act 1956 or the 2013 Act.

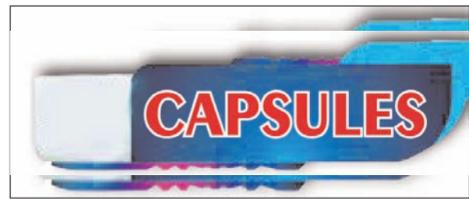
Every fourth proprietary establishment in India was owned by a woman. Women run one-third of private businesses in Gujarat, Karnataka, Telangana, and West Bengal.

Health and wealth benefit from flexible work hours

Delhi: The Economic Survey supports allowing manufacturers to average legally capped working hours over three weeks or longer rather than week-by-week. Industry captains want larger hours. It claims that agile regulations will assist management satisfy production

demands and grow. "New Labour Laws are an improvement. With flexible legislation and competent implementation, firms may develop and create more jobs. They protect labor rights and boost wages," it stated. The Survey complained that labor laws like the

Factories Act (1948) limit working hours to 48 per week, whereas other nations "allow these caps to be averaged over multiple days and weeks". It said India's working hour laws impede manufacturers from satisfying demand and competing globally.



Sebi to attract rural investors with MF-life insurance



Delhi: Sebi chief Madhabi Puri Buch stated that the regulator will offer mutual fund schemes with term life insurance. She added the FDA will soon release a combo product consultation paper. Puri Buch said the MF-insurance combo targets investors, particularly rural ones, where SIPs have great potential but low investment values. "We are now proposing to come out with a consultation paper again, to try and include insurance pure and simple vanilla life, term life insurance, along with our mutual funds, which is our main product for financial inclusion, and so that we are able to go, including to people where we have very, very low value SIPs coming from the hinterland, and to be able to offer them a combo product of term life insurance along with the mutual fund investment," said Buch. UTI Mutual Fund offers life insurance and tax savings. This 1971 program has a portfolio value of Rs 5,434 crore in December 2024. Even if existing investors can invest, UTIMF's website revealed no new applications for the schemes.

IT panel to propose TV, print, online media umbrella

Delhi: The Parliamentary panel on communications and information technology, led by BJP lawmaker Nishikant Dubey, will recommend that the Union government form the Media Council of India to regulate print, television, and online media, sources said. A senior panelist suggested an umbrella body because the same content occurs across platforms. You work for a paper. The Press Council of India oversees your newspaper articles. No regulation exists for the identical story in the paper's online edition. "There is no central regulator for online material, but two groups regulate print and electronic media. The Press Council of India, a statutory quasi-judicial



autonomous authority established by Parliament, protects press freedom and improves newspaper and news agency standards. Among other major media regulatory reforms, the panel, which addressed fake news extensively will recommend this. In the discussion,

Dubey added, "Paid news is rampant. Illiterate and gullible individuals think alike. Without strict regulations, ethical boundaries are crossed. Investigative journalism is discouraged by expensive and lengthy legal fights for journalists and media corporations.

Foreign insurers gain ownership via 100% FDI

Delhi: 100% FDI will attract new capital, as multinationals can now invest without worrying about control or Indian partners. The capital gains tax rate of 12% applies to ULIP proceeds, which do not benefit from tax exemptions, instead of the higher marginal tax rate of 30%. Crop cover reinsurance is exempt from service tax, and the threshold for tax deduction at source on insurance commission has risen from Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000. M Nagraju, financial services secretary, said the FDI relaxation was one of the suggested insurance measures, and the modifications would

WhatsApp claims Israeli spyware Paragon targets users

Delhi: After the hack, WhatsApp issued Paragon a cease-and-desist letter. WhatsApp stated it "will continue to protect people's ability to communicate privately." Paragon wouldn't comment. WhatsApp officials reported a hacking attempt on 90 users. A number of civil society and media figures were targeted, although the official did not specify who or where. He said WhatsApp has stopped the hacking and was referring targets to Citizen Lab. Officials would not reveal how they determined



Paragon was responsible for the hack. He claimed law enforcement and industry partners were informed but declined to elaborate. Paragon sells high-end surveillance software to government clients, claiming it is essential to combating crime and defending national security. However, journalists, activists, opposition

politicians, and at least 50 US officials have found surveillance capabilities on their phones, raising fears about the technology's unregulated expansion. Paragon, which was apparently acquired by Florida-based investment group AE Industrial Partners last month, has strived to identify as a responsible industry actor.

Public infrastructure spending rises, but private sector participation falls

Delhi: The 2024-25 Economic Survey delivered to Parliament found that India still struggles with infrastructure development despite government efforts. The union government's capital investment on major infrastructure sectors grew 38.8% from FY20 to FY24, although private sector participation in core areas remained low, according to the survey. "India needs a continued step-up of infrastructure investment over the next two decades to sustain a high rate of growth," the research says. The National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) program has met its FY22-24 objective of 4.30 lakh crore with transactions totaling 3.86 lakh crore. In Q1 FY25, average monthly capital spend-



The National Critical Mineral Mission gets 16,300 crore from the cabinet

Delhi: The Union Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, launched the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM) with a 16,300 crore expenditure and a projected 18,000 crore investment from PSUs and other businesses. "Several crucial decisions have created new scientific and technology prospects for our children, future generations, and the economy. Minister told a Cabinet briefing that PM Modi the National Critical Minerals Mission today.

ing dropped to 0.60 lakh crore from 0.66 lakh crore in July-November 2024. Railway network expansion remained constant at 2,000 kilometers, with 17 Vande Bharat train pairs and 228 carriages added.

Price pressure caps senior citizen health premium hikes at 10%

As medicare policy rates skyrocket for seniors over 60, Irdai has ordered insurers not to raise senior people's health premiums by more than 10% without approval. Before canceling senior health coverage, insurers must get regulator clearance. As healthcare prices rise, insurers are



advised to standardize hospital empanelment and negoti-

ate package rates like the government's PM Jan Arogya Yojana. Irdai reported a large increase in prices for various health insurance policies for subscribers over 60. Premium rates depend on projected claims, administrative expenditures, and acquisition costs, the regulator said. Private

insurance doesn't standardize hospitalization expenses, unlike PMJAY, which negotiates consistent package rates, which drives these rises. Seniors have reported virtually doubling their costs when entering a higher age category during an insurer's pricing change.

Redesigning agri export policies

Delhi: Three sources intimately involved in the process said India's six-year-old Agricultural Export Policy (AEP) will be overhauled as export destinations vary and the country's farm export basket diversifies. The planned study will improve Indian agricultural products' competitiveness, assure global standards compliance, and promote value-added products. The officials quoted above added on condition of anonymity that it will also aim to enhance commercial links with emerging countries while main-



taining strong partnerships with old partners. "Our agricultural exports have grown over the past five years. We must examine the policy to match export targets with market demands. One of the three persons cited above claimed

the agriculture ministry will assist with the review and set a deadline. India was the eighth-largest agricultural exporter in 2023 despite a drop from \$51.12 billion to \$48.77 billion in FY24. Recently, changing global demand pat-

Norms to stop annoying calls and surrogate advertisements next month

Delhi: Thirteen businesses, including significant producers of alcohol, tobacco, and paan masala, have received notifications from the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) for using surrogate advertising. The dishonest practice of using the

same brand name to promote products that are prohibited from direct advertising is known as "surrogate advertising." Pralhad Joshi, the union minister of consumer affairs, stated that the CCPA is creating regulations to control the issue.

cussion on removing food inflation from monetary policy. Q2 GDP growth and November food inflation may have unnerved MPC outsiders. Economic Survey's dis-

Mrunal Thakur: Love is beautiful

Mrunal Thakur calls love the most beautiful feeling, addressing dating and wedding rumours with Dhanush

Bollywood actress Mrunal Thakur recently said that "love is the most beautiful thing in the world" amid dating and wedding rumours with actor Dhanush. During one of her latest interviews, Mrunal stated that she hopes everyone finds love in their life. For those unversed, several media reports

have claimed that Mrunal and Dhanush are set to marry on February 14 in an intimate ceremony.

During an interaction with Filmgyan, Mrunal said, "Love is a beautiful feeling and should happen to each and everyone on this planet. It changes you into a better person. It is literally like re-parenting and fixing your inner child issues. It's like the most beautiful thing in the world. I really pray and hope that everyone finds love in their life."

When asked, who in her opinion, is more giving in love - a man or a woman, Mrunal replied, "Anyone who is in love is more giving. But what is important in love is to accept it also. Sometimes, it is very difficult to receive love and acknowledge love. The definition of love has been changing," Mrunal said.

She continued, "The only constant thing is love. It's how you receive it - there's a lover, there's a beloved. When anyone is in love, they are the givers. It doesn't matter woman, man, no. Jab pyaar hota hai (when there's love), you just do things for that person. You just surrender."

On the work front, Mrunal is busy with the promotions of her new music video *Bheegi Bheegi*. The song is composed by AR Rahman, sung by AR Ameen and Jasleen Royal, and written by Irshad Kamil. The video of the song also features Dulquer Salmaan with Mrunal.



Photos: Instagram



Photos: Instagram @hrithikroshan

Hrithik loves desi food after gym

Actor shares 'Indian mishmash' post-workout meal, calls it 'quirky craving'

Hrithik Roshan may be Bollywood's ultimate fitness icon, but when it comes to food, the superstar keeps it refreshingly real and deeply *desi*. At 52, the actor continues to stun with his chiselled physique, yet his latest post proves that staying fit doesn't mean surviving on bland chicken and boiled veggies. Instead, Hrithik is proudly championing Indian comfort food, even after a hardcore workout.



His food mantra

This isn't the first time Hrithik has spoken about mindful eating. Earlier, in a January 5 post, the actor shared another thoughtfully curated meal along with a simple yet impactful line, "Eat less, love better. But make the plate look huge." That plate was a visual lesson in smart eating. It came with a lean protein drenched in a green sauce, charred Brussels sprouts, sautéed zucchini, bell peppers, broccoli, carrots, and even shredded beetroot. A banana on the side completed the meal, highlighting his belief in volume eating without overindulgence.

He balanced it out with egg whites and *dal*, turning what might look like an unconventional gym meal into a powerhouse of fibre, plant-based nutrients and protein.

What Hrithik Roshan eats after his workout

On February 1, Hrithik gave fans a peek into his post-gym plate, cheekily calling it his personal "Indian mishmash." Sharing a photo of his meal on Instagram, he wrote, "The most unlikely post workout meal? जवहर rotis(s) with भिण्डी, बीटरूट, बैंगन, पापड़ी, लोकी और egg white + दाल (one of my fav quirks) ..."

He asked the fans, "What's the most quirkiest food craving u guys have?," further adding, "Mine is the #indiannishmash. Uff... is there anything better?"

The plate was a vibrant feast of Indian home food, featuring *jowar rotis* paired with a colourful mix of vegetables like *bhindi*, *beetroot*, *baingan*, *papdi* and *lauki*.

Photos: Instagram @arjunkapoor

'Life's been kinda cruel to me lately'

Arjun Kapoor shared an emotional note for late mother Mona Kapoor, admitting life's recent struggles while drawing strength from her teachings

Actor Arjun Kapoor on Tuesday remembered his late mother Mona Kapoor on her birth anniversary with an emotional note, sharing how life has been testing him lately, but her teachings continue to give him strength. Arjun, who has been relentlessly mocked in social media comment sections, where users often cross the line from humour to bullying, took to Instagram to share a picture with his mother.

Taking to the caption section, Arjun admitted that life has been "kinda cruel" of late, but added that he is ready to face every challenge head-on, just the way she taught him.

He wrote: "Happy birthday Maa, I miss u so much today... Life's been kinda cruel to me lately but it's ok. I've taken the punches before I'll take em again and still rise."

Arjun added: "Because u taught me how to fight by standing up facing life head on while being graceful & dignified thru it

all. We will ride it out together U & I'll see u again soon & we will celebrate ur bday together someday. Your loving son Arjun (sic)."

Arjun's mother, Mona Shourie Kapoor died aged 48 due to multiple organ failure after batt-



ling with cancer and hypertension in 2012. Talking about Arjun, he was last seen in *Mere Husband Ki Biwi* in the romantic comedy film directed by Muddassar Aziz.

Aamir visits Arijit

Aamir Khan visited Arijit Singh's Jiaganj home, sparking buzz days after the singer announced his retirement from playback singing

Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan made a special visit to singer Arijit Singh at his residence in Jiaganj, West Bengal. The actor was spotted landing in Kolkata on Sunday, where he attempted to avoid the paparazzi but was eventually caught on camera, smiling and waving at them.

He reportedly headed straight to Arijit's Jiaganj home by road, keeping the visit under wraps until he arrived late Sunday night. However, despite his efforts to maintain a low profile, videos of Khan's visit quickly went viral on social

media, alerting even Arijit's neighbourhood to the actor's presence.

On Monday afternoon, Aamir was spotted on the rooftop of Arijit's home, also his studio, near Shibatala Ghat in Jiaganj, where the actor was seen flying a kite.

Aamir was accompanied by his crew, with visuals suggesting the moment was being filmed. Several people gathered on nearby terraces, eager to catch a glimpse of the superstar.

Reportedly, as filming continued, Arijit quickly moved away from the frame. Aamir's visit to Arijit comes days after the singer announced his retirement as a playback singer after 15-years in the industry.



Anil Kapoor flaunts all greys

Veteran actor Anil Kapoor has raised the bar once again by showcasing his all-grey look, exuding effortless style and charm. Anil took to Instagram, where he shared a picture of himself. In the image, Anil looks stylish as he flaunts silver-gray hair styled neatly and a matching mustache, giving him a sophisticated and mature appearance. "The day doesn't know what's coming,"

he wrote as the caption. Anil's new look caught the eyes of actor Riteish Deshmukh, who took to the comment section and heaped praise on his new look. "Mind blowing!!!! How good are you looking," Riteish wrote as the caption.

Anil Kapoor did not disclose the reason behind his new look. On the acting front, Anil was last seen in *War 2*, directed by Ayan Mukerji. It is the sixth instalment in the YRF Spy Universe and a sequel to the 2019 film *War*

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Photo: Instagram

Adivi Sesh wraps final schedule of *Dacoit*

Actor Adivi Sesh has wrapped up the final shooting schedule of his upcoming film *Dacoit*. With the completion of the last leg of filming, *Dacoit* has now entered its final phase of production.

Adivi Sesh has been involved in every stage of the project, from writing the script to bringing the character to life on screen. Sharing his thoughts on completing the shoot, Sesh said that wrapping the final schedule felt both surreal and emotional.

"Wrapping the final schedule of *Dacoit* feels both surreal and deeply emotional for me. This film has

been an intense journey, physically, creatively, and mentally. From writing the first draft to now standing at the edge of completion, every phase has demanded complete honesty and commitment. We just wrapped up the last schedule, and there's a quiet sense of fulfilment that comes with knowing we've given this story everything we had," Adivi said in a statement.

Adivi described *Dacoit* as an intense journey that demanded complete physical, creative and mental commitment, adding that there was a deep sense of fulfilment in knowing the team gave the story everything they had.

Photo: Instagram @anilkapoor

Three Indians held in Canada for shooting outside home

OTTAWA

Three Indian nationals have been arrested by Canadian police on an anti-extortion patrol and charged after bullets were fired at a home.

Harjot Singh, 21, Taranveer Singh, 19, and Dayajeet Singh Billing, 21, face one count each of discharging a firearm, and all have been remanded in custody until Thursday, the Surrey Police Service (SPS) said in a statement on Monday.

The suspects were arrested by patrol officers after an early morning report of shots fired and a small fire outside a home in Surrey's Crescent Beach neighbourhood, the LakelandToday reported.

On February 1, the SPS members were patrolling in Surrey's Crescent Beach neighbourhood when reports came in of shots being fired and a small fire outside a residence near Crescent Road and 132 Street. The three accused were arrested by SPS officers a short time later, the statement said.

SPS's Major Crime Section took over the investigation, and the three men have now been charged with Criminal Code offences, it said.

Jaishankar's discussions with Rubio & other senior American officials to bolster India-US ties amid euphoria over trade deal

Meet on key minerals to map sourcing blueprint

WASHINGTON

External Affairs Minister **S. Jaishankar** will meet US Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** in Washington on Tuesday, ahead of an inaugural ministerial on critical minerals, as President Donald Trump announced a trade deal with India.

The meeting will be held at the US Department of State on Tuesday afternoon. Jaishankar is on an official visit to the United States from February 2 to 4 and will participate in the Critical Minerals Ministerial convened by Rubio on Wednesday.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs, Jaishankar will also hold discussions with senior members of the US administration during his visit, focusing on strengthening bilateral cooperation across strategic, economic and geopolitical areas. The meetings come amid renewed momentum in India-US ties following the trade



agreement announced by Trump.

The US President said Washington would reduce reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods from 25 per cent to 18 per cent. The announcement was made on Truth Social a day before Jaishankar's meeting with Rubio, giving fresh impetus to economic engagement between the two countries.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed the announcement, saying he was

delighted that Made in India products would now face a reduced tariff of 18 per cent. He thanked Trump on behalf of India's 1.4 billion people and said cooperation between the world's largest democracies would unlock immense opportunities for mutual benefit.

The State Department said the inaugural Critical Minerals Ministerial would focus on advancing collective efforts to strengthen and diversify supply chains critical

for technological innovation, economic resilience and national security.

The meeting is expected to bring together senior representatives from multiple countries to coordinate strategies on sourcing and processing key minerals.

US Vice President JD Vance, Rubio, and senior officials responsible for global supply chains and economic affairs are expected to deliver opening remarks at the ministerial.

'Trade deal offers an exciting opportunity'

NEW YORK

India has agreed to reduce tariffs on a range of agricultural products, manufactured goods and chemicals under a trade deal with the United States, US Trade Representative **Jamieson Greer** said, describing the agreement as an "exciting opportunity" for both countries.

In an interview with CNBC, Greer said the US would continue to impose an 18 per cent tariff on Indian imports due to its significant trade deficit with India. However, he said India had agreed to lower its tariffs across several key sectors, including agriculture, chemicals, medical devices and manufactured goods.

"This is it. The time has come, and now we have the deal," Greer said, adding that the two sides were in the process of finalising documentation but were already clear on the specifics and scope of the agreement.

President Donald Trump announced the deal after speaking with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying Washington would reduce reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods from 25 per cent to 18

US leaders hail India pact

New York: Top American leaders welcomed the trade deal announced by President Donald Trump with India, saying it would expand US farm exports, strengthen bilateral ties and help counter Russian aggression. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman **Jim Risch** congratulated Trump on the agreement, saying India's decision to reduce trade barriers marked a significant step forward. He described India as a close partner and a key player in countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. US Agriculture Secretary **Brooke Rollins** said the deal would open India's massive market to American farm products, helping reduce the US agricultural trade deficit with India, which stood at USD 1.3 billion last year. Several leaders also linked the agreement to broader geopolitical objectives, saying India's commitment to reduce purchases of Russian energy would increase pressure on Moscow amid the Ukraine war.

—Agencies

per cent. Trump had earlier imposed some of the world's highest tariffs on Indian products, including penalties linked to India's purchases of Russian energy.

Following the announcement, Modi said he was delighted that Made in India products would benefit from reduced tariffs. He thanked Trump and described the US President as a close friend, saying the agreement reflected the strength of ties between the two democracies. Modi said cooperation

between India and the US would unlock immense opportunities for mutually beneficial growth and strengthen global economic stability. He added that closer engagement between the two countries would benefit their people and industries.

US officials said the agreement signalled a significant step forward in bilateral trade relations and would help address long-standing trade imbalances. The deal is expected to be formally finalised in the coming weeks.

India-UK FTA boosts strategic benefits

LONDON

The India-UK free trade agreement offers strategic benefits and stability to businesses at a time of heightened global uncertainty for international commerce, according to a parliamentary scrutiny report released in the United Kingdom.

The House of Lords International Agreements Committee, which reviewed the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, described the pact as a significant achievement reached amid geopolitical turbulence and global tariff disputes.

The committee said the agreement would help UK



File pic of PM Narendra Modi with UK's Keir Starmer

businesses diversify and de-risk their supply chains, particularly as firms seek alternatives in response to changing global trade patterns and disruptions.

However, the report highlighted shortcomings in the agreement, including limited progress on legal services, investment protection and market access for financial and

professional services. It also noted missed opportunities, such as the failure to include a bilateral investment treaty.

The committee recommended that India and the UK treat the agreement as a "living" arrangement rather than a static pact, urging both governments to strengthen its provisions as the bilateral relationship evolves.

It also cautioned that India's recently concluded free trade agreement with the European Union could have implications for UK exporters, particularly in terms of competitiveness and market access.

Once implemented, the agreement is expected to increase annual bilateral trade by £25.5 billion, a significant rise from current levels. The deal is undergoing parliamentary scrutiny, with debates scheduled in both houses before ratification.

The committee called on the UK government to support businesses, especially small and medium enterprises, in utilising the agreement and to ensure adequate resources are provided through diplomatic missions.

Russian aerial strike on power grid in Ukraine

Kyiv: Russia launched its heaviest attack this year on Ukraine's power grid, firing around 450 drones and 70 missiles overnight, Ukrainian officials said.

The assault included a record number of ballistic missiles and targeted multiple regions, including Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa. Ukrainian authorities said the strikes were aimed at crippling energy infrastructure during extreme winter conditions. President **Volodymyr Zelenskyy** said Russia was prioritising terror over diplomacy accusing Moscow of deliberately targeting civilians to inflict suffering during freezing temperatures.

Cops interrogate Rajapaksa family

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's former president **Mahinda Rajapaksa's** wife and son were questioned separately by police on Tuesday in connection with two different investigations, officials said.

Former first lady **Shiranthi Rajapaksa** was questioned over alleged financial irregularities linked to a charitable foundation she once headed. Her son, **Namal Rajapaksa**, an opposition legislator, was questioned over alleged links to an underworld figure extradited from Dubai last year.

Both were questioned by

the Criminal Investigation Department for more than four hours. Supporters of **Namali Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna** party gathered outside the CID office to express solidarity during the questioning.

In a statement, **Namal** alleged political victimisation by the ruling National People's Power government, accusing it of targeting political opponents to divert attention from governance failures.

He said the government was attempting to suppress dissent and thanked supporters for standing by his family during what he described as a difficult time.

Prosecutors seek to torpedo Le Pen prez bid

PARIS

French prosecutors are seeking to bar far-right leader **Marine Le Pen** from holding public office, putting her 2027 presidential bid at serious risk.

Le Pen is appealing a conviction for misuse of European Parliament funds, with prosecutors arguing the case represents a grave breach of public trust that gave her party a financial advantage.

During the appeal trial, prosecutors said party leaders deliberately misused public funds and concealed the actions over several years.

Le Pen acknowledged that some aides performed party work while being paid as EU parliamentary assistants but denied intentional wrongdoing, calling it an administrative error.

If convicted again, Le Pen could face a ban from office, a prison sentence and heavy fines. The verdict, expected later this year, could significantly reshape France's political landscape ahead of the 2027 election.

Mandelson to exit Lords amid Epstein storm



LONDON

British politician **Peter Mandelson** is set to quit the House of Lords as he faces mounting questions and the prospect of a police investigation over his relationship with the late financier and convicted sex offender **Jeffrey Epstein**.

The Speaker of the House of Lords, **Michael Forsyth**, said Mandelson had announced he would retire from Parliament's upper chamber with effect from Wednesday. The move came as the British government prepared legislation to eject him from the Lords and strip him of his lifetime peerage, **Lord Mandelson**.

The government has also confirmed that it has sent a file of material to police, who are assessing allegations that Mandelson may have passed sensitive government information to Epstein. Officers said they are reviewing reports of potential misconduct to determine whether they meet the criminal threshold for a formal investigation.

Prime Minister **Keir Starmer** told his Cabinet that he was "appalled" by the revelations contained in newly released Epstein-related files and warned that more damaging details could yet emerge.

Weeks after 'sick man' insult, Trump hosts Colombia prez at White House

WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump is set to welcome Colombian President **Gustavo Petro** to the White House on Tuesday for talks only weeks after threatening military action against the South American country and accusing the leader of pumping cocaine into the United States.

US administration officials say the meeting will focus on regional security cooperation and counternarcotics efforts. And Trump on Monday suggested that Petro - who has continued to criticise Trump and the US operation to capture Venezuela's **Nicolas Maduro** - seems more willing to work with his administration to stem the flow of illegal drugs from Colombia.

"Somehow after the Venezuelan raid, he became very nice," Trump told reporters. "He changed his atti-



tude very much." Yet, bad blood between the leaders overshadows the sit-down, even as Trump sought to downplay any friction on the eve of the visit.

The conservative Trump and leftist Petro are ideologically far apart, but both leaders share a tendency for verbal bombast and unpredictability. That sets the stage for a White House visit with an anything-could-happen vibe.

In recent days, Petro has continued poking at the US presi-

dent, calling Trump an "accomplice to genocide" in the Gaza Strip, while asserting that the capture of **Maduro** was a kidnapping.

And ahead of his departure for Washington, Petro called on Colombians to take to the streets of **Bogota** during the White House meeting.

Historically, Colombia has been a US ally. For the past 30 years, the US has worked closely with Colombia, the world's largest producer of

cocaine, to arrest drug traffickers, fend off rebel groups and boost economic development in rural areas.

But relations between the leaders have been strained by Trump's massing US forces in the region for unprecedented deadly military strikes targeting suspected drug-smuggling boats in the Caribbean Sea and the eastern Pacific. At least 126 people have been killed in 36 known strikes.

In October, Trump's Republican administration announced it was imposing sanctions on Petro, his family and a member of his government over accusations of involvement in the global drug trade.

The Treasury Department leveled the penalties against Petro; his wife, **Veronica del Socorro Alcocer Garcia**; his son, **Nicolas Fernando Petro Burgos**; and Colombian Interior Minister **Armando Alberto Benedetti**.

offgrid

Gandhi statue stolen in Oz, Indians aghast

NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday strongly condemned the theft of a statue of **Mahatma Gandhi** from the Australian Indian Community Centre in Melbourne and urged Australian authorities to take immediate steps to recover the statue and bring the culprits to justice.

The bronze statue, located at the community centre in Rowville, a suburb in Melbourne, was allegedly

removed in the early hours of January 12, according to Australian media reports. The External Affairs Ministry said the incident was a matter of serious concern and reflected an act of vandalism against a globally respected symbol of peace and non-violence.

"We strongly condemn the vandalism and removal of the Mahatma Gandhi statue located at the Australian Indian Community Centre in Rowville, Melbourne, by unidentified people,"



External Affairs Ministry spokesperson **Randhir Jaiswal** said at a media briefing in New Delhi.

He said India had taken up the matter firmly with Australian authorities. "We have strengthened the

matter with Australian authorities and urged them to take immediate action to recover the missing statue and hold the culprits accountable," **Jaiswal** said.

According to media reports, the statue, weighing approximately 420 kilograms, was cut from its base using a grinder, leaving only the feet behind. The method used to remove the statue has raised concerns about the level of planning involved in the act.

The statue had been gifted

by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and was unveiled in 2021 as a symbol of the strong and growing ties between India and Australia. It was inaugurated by former Australian prime minister **Scott Morrison** during his tenure, highlighting its significance as a marker of shared democratic values and people-to-people links.

Members of the Indian diaspora in Australia have expressed shock and disappointment over the incident.

Nepal junks social media bill after flak



KATHMANDU

Nepal's government has withdrawn the controversial Social Media Bill 2025 from Parliament following widespread criticism and youth-led protests.

The bill, introduced by the previous government, was accused of seeking to control social media platforms and restrict freedom of expression.

Home Minister **Om Prakash Aryal** said the cabinet decided to withdraw the bill after consultations and public feedback.

The legislation had sparked protests led largely by young people demanding digital freedom and action against corruption.

The protests played a key role in the resignation of former prime minister **K. P. Sharma Oli**. The government said it would consult stakeholders before proposing new digital legislation.

Briefs

AHMEDABAD
Gavaskar feels India need to let go of ego

India needed to take a cue from South Africa's innings, shed their ego and adapt to the conditions instead of walking out with overconfidence and throwing their bats at everything in their T20 World Cup clash, feels batting legend Sunil Gavaskar. South Africa snapped India's 12-match unbeaten streak at the T20 World Cup, handing the defending champions a heavy 76-run defeat.

BRISBANE
India Women eye another triumph

Having secured a stunning T20I series triumph, reigning world champions India will have the psychological edge when they take on Australia in the first women's ODI of a three-match series here on Tuesday. India had beaten Australia in the World Cup semifinal last year in Navi Mumbai and the hosts would be looking to avenge that stunning defeat. What makes the series even more significant is the fact that one of Australia's greatest players, Alyssa Healy, will be making her swansong.

AHMEDABAD
Pathan disappointed with Varun

Former Indian all-rounder Irfan Pathan expressed disappointment after India's mystery spinner Varun Chakaravarty's unsuccessful outing against South Africa in their first Super 8 fixture in Ahmedabad on Sunday. Pathan noted that Chakaravarty was clueless once the Proteas batters took on the mystery spinner. He also said that the Ahmedabad pitch didn't offer much for the spinners, but South Africa's Keshav Maharaj also took three wickets, which turned the match on its head.

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TRIUMPH | Rutherford and Powell contribute as West Indies win by 107 runs

Hetmyer stars as WI beat Zim

MUMBAI

Shimron Hetmyer's blinder of an innings and some incredible batting from West Indies middle order humbled Zimbabwe by 107 runs in their ICC Men's T20 World Cup Super Eights match, at the Wankhede Stadium, here on Monday.

After the West Indies had accumulated the second highest total in T20 World Cup history of 254/6 in 20 overs, Zimbabwe were a pursuit of 255 and they capitulated for 147 in 17.4 overs to hand the Windies a massive victory.

Hetmyer's 85 off just 34 balls with seven fours and as many sixes was the highlight of their innings with Rovman Powell's 59, Sherfane Rutherford's 31 and Romario Shepherd's 21 all contributing to Mt 254.

Spinner Gudakesh Motie was the pick of the West Indies bowlers as he scalped 4/28.

Brad Evans played a cameo of 43 in 21 balls with five sixes for Zimbabwe but it was too late to challenge the Windies.

Earlier, West Indies were off to a quiet start with just four runs coming off the first over by Richard Ngarava that included a wide as well.

The second over by the tall and lanky pacer Blessing Muzarabani conceded only three runs as Zimbabwe kept the pressure on the West Indies openers Brandon King and Shai Hope.

Ngarava struck for Zimbabwe in the third over when he sent King packing having him caught by Tashanga Musekiwa in the deep as the Windies lost their first wicket.

Shimron Hetmyer was dropped on nine by Muzarabani off Muzarabani's bowling in the fourth over as Zimbabwe struggled a bit with their fielding and the catch having the



West Indies batter Shimron Hetmyer celebrates his half-century against Zimbabwe at the Wankhede Stadium on Monday. —PTI

potential to be a costly miss. Hetmyer was in ominous form from a Zimbabwean perspective as he smashed for

two consecutive fours and Hope struck one too as 17 runs came off the fifth over with West Indies at 46/1.

Hope slammed another four off Brad Evans in the sixth over but perished on the fifth ball of the same over holing out to Bryan Bennett for 14 off 12 balls.

At the end of the powerplay, the Windies were 55/2 with Hetmyer and new batter Rovman Powell in the middle.

Zimbabwe skipper Sikandar Raza brought in spinner Graeme Cremer to plug the West Indies scoring rate.

However, that had very little bearing on Hetmyer's approach as he tonked Cremer for back-to-back sixes off the last two balls of the seventh over.

Hetmyer was absolutely unstoppable as he hoisted Raza for two big sixes in the eighth over as he reached 47 in just 18 balls with four fours and four sixes at a strike rate of 261.

When he struck the third six of the over, Hetmyer brought up a lightning quick half-century off just 19 balls, the fastest by a West In-

dian at a T20 World Cup.

The Windies brought up their 100 in 9.1 overs reaching 104/2 with another massive Hetmyer six.

Hetmyer was dropped in the 12th over by Muzarabani again when he was on 70 as Zimbabwe continued their sloppy show on the field.

Powell got to his fifty in 29 balls with a single off Cremer in the 15th over and Hetmyer blasted a six off the very next ball.

However, Cremer had the last laugh as he dismissed Hetmyer for 85 as he had the West Indian caught by Bennett.

West Indies' 200 came in the 17th over as they reached 202/4 in 16.5 overs.

Romario Shepherd went on the offensive in the 19th over with two huge sixes off Ngarava and then was caught at long off by Ryan Burl for an invaluable 21 off 10 balls. Rutherford cracked an incredible flat six off the last ball as 20 runs came off the 19th over.

Scoreboard

WEST INDIES: B King c Muzarabani b Ngarava 9, S Hope c Bennett b Evans 14, S Hetmyer c Bennett b Cremer 85, R Powell c Muzarabani b Muzarabani 59, S Rutherford (not out) 31, R Shepherd c Burl b Ngarava 21, J Holder c Munyonga b Muzarabani 13, M Forde (not out) 1. Extras (LB-10, NB-1, W-10) 21. Total (For 6 wks, 20 overs) 254.

FALL OF WICKETS: 1-17, 2-54, 3-176, 4-194, 5-229, 6-248.

BOWLING: R Ngarava 4-0-47-2, B Muzarabani 4-0-42-2, B Evans 4-0-46-1, G Cremer 4-0-38-1, S Raza 3-0-52-0, D Myers 1-0-19-0.

ZIMBABWE: T

Marumani c Hetmyer b Forde 14, B Bennett b Hosein 5, D Myers b Motie 28, R Burl c Hetmyer b Hosein 0, S Raza b Motie 27, T Munyonga c Joseph b Motie 14, T Muzarabani c Joseph b Motie 0, B Evans c Hosein b Forde 43, G Cremer c b Holder 0, B Muzarabani c Joseph b Hosein 0, R Ngarava (not out) 7. Extras (LB-4, W-5) 9. Total (all out, 17.4 overs) 147.

FALL OF WICKETS: 1-20, 2-20, 3-20, 4-52, 5-94, 6-94, 7-101, 8-102, 9-103

BOWLING: A Hosein 4-1-28-3, M Forde 3-4-0-27-2, G Motie 4-1-28-4, S Joseph 3-0-35-0, J Holder 3-0-25-1

Doeschate puts onus on boys to make turnaround

Asst coach admits inclusion of Samson will be a talking point

MUMBAI

India assistant coach Ryan Ten Doeschate was 'very disappointed' with the 76-run loss against South Africa in the first match of Super Eights in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in Ahmedabad on Sunday. The big loss also affected India's net run rate, and they now must win games against Zimbabwe and the West Indies to stay in the tournament.

"Very disappointed in the performance. But, when you set up or set out to win a World Cup, don't expect someone to come deliver the World Cup to you on halfway through the competition. So we understand we've made a lot of mistakes tonight. We understand you're probably allowed one mess-up in this phase of the competition. And we've messed up on a grand scale," he said in the post-match press conference.

The Dutch coach put the onus on the Suryakumar-Yadav-led boys to make a turnaround after a dismal outing against the Proteas.

"Now the onus is on this group of guys to turn around and put in two solid performances against Zimbabwe and West Indies. Obviously, with the way the group goes, you need at least four points to get through now, and it's going to need two big performances and a big bounce back from everyone involved," Ten Doeschate added.

The assistant coach acknowledged that the inclusion of Sanju Samson will be the talking point as rival off-spinners, mostly part-timers, have picked wickets in the first over against the left-



"Very disappointed in the performance. But, when you set up or set out to win a World Cup, don't expect someone to come deliver the World Cup to you on halfway through the competition."

Ryan ten Doeschate
India assistant coach

handed pair of Abhishek Sharma and Ishan Kishan on four occasions in the tournament.

"Yeah, of course, we have, and look in the five outings we've had now four teams have opened with part-time off spin, and it's got a wicket every time apart from the USA game where we lost Abhi (Abhishek Sharma) without score in any case. So to start every inning zero for one, I think it's literally been zero or a couple of runs for one every time, is obviously putting pressure on the link players. Tilak (Varma) and SKY (Suryakumar), their role is to link up with the guys at the back end, and it hasn't gone that way," he said.

He said the team will think whether to go for twist or stick with the same team who have performed over last 18 months.

Spinners in focus as England, Pakistan eye crucial Super 8s

England may not have hit top gear yet, but the two-time champions have found ways to win

PALLEKLE

On a surface expected to assist slow bowlers, both England and Pakistan will lean heavily on their spin resources in their Super Eights clash in the T20 World Cup here on Tuesday.

England may not have hit top gear yet, but the two-time champions have found ways to win. They kicked off their Super Eights campaign with a commanding 51-run victory over Sri Lanka, a result that significantly boosted their net run rate and took them to the top of the standings.

Defending a modest total against Sri Lanka, England played according to the conditions perfectly. Their spinners did the bulk of the work along with pacer Jofra Archer to trigger a dramatic Sri Lankan batting collapse.

The ever-reliable leg spinner Adil Rashid and left arm spinner Liam Dawson have combined well to get the wickets.

Meanwhile, Will Jacks has emerged as an unlikely match-winner. His off-spin has been handy, but it is his contributions with the bat, 39 against Nepal, 16 against Scotland and 53 versus Italy, that have repeatedly bailed England out of trouble.

Opener Phil Salt returned to form with a match-winning knock against Sri Lanka, as he batted beyond the powerplay for the first time in the tournament.

However, Jos Buttler's form remains a concern. But the veteran batter has got the backing of his captain Harry Brook, who himself is yet to find runs.

England also hold the advantage of familiarity with the venue, having swept a three-match T20I series here 3-0 earlier this month and also winning the Super Eight game against Sri Lanka.

"We still haven't had that perfect game with the bat. We haven't managed to get the starts and the big scores that we'd like," Brook said after the win against Sri Lanka.



Teams (from)

England: Harry Brook (c), Tom Banton, Jos Buttler, Ben Duckett, Sam Curran, Liam Dawson, Will Jacks, Jamie Overton, Rehan Ahmed, Jofra Archer, Adil Rashid, Josh Tongue, Luke Wood.

Pakistan: Salman Ali Agha (c), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Nafay, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan, Usman Tariq.

India to consider top order changes, hints Kotak

Having three left-handers at the top has become predictable: Sitanshu

AHMEDABAD

India's batting had been floundering in the ongoing ICC Men's T20 World Cup. But one man came to the rescue in the initial games to cover for batting failures. However, there was no rescue act when it mattered the most as India lost by 76 runs in their first Super Eights game against South Africa at the Narendra Modi Stadium on Sunday.

Since the game against Pakistan, an off-spinner has been coming in the first over and getting an early wicket. With six left-handers in the side, three of them at the top of the order, Indian batting has become predictable. Suryakumar Yadav-led side capitulated 111 all-out in chase of 187, forcing a reality check.

Abhishek Sharma has been the biggest disappointment, managing just 15 runs in the four games. Tilak Varma has got few starts but hasn't been at his best since his comeback on the side. The way he got out against South Africa for just one was disappointing for him,



also. Indian batting coach Sitanshu Kotak admitted that they need to think about altering the top order.

"That is definitely a concern, and we need to do something about it. We have to think if we need to change something, but how we change and what we change needs to be seen," he told reporters after the match in the mixed zone.

Considering the top order struggles, the Indian think-tank must be under pressure to leave out ODI and Test skipper Shubman Gill, who might have given stability at the top and also a right-handed batting option. But he

is not part of the squad, and they can go back to inconsistent Sanju Samson and trust his ability to give them a different option at the top. Slam Bang cricket hasn't worked for them so far in the tournament.

Abhishek needs to plan innings better

Kotak said the coaching staff can't do much about underperforming batters like Abhishek before the Zimbabwe game, as there is too little time left, and insisted they need to plan their innings better.

"There is always a three-four match lean period... four or five people go and give advice, I

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India batting coach

don't think that's correct. If anything, you give him more doubts," Kotak said.

"For Abhishek, it should be him planning his innings better and watching the ball more closely. The more complicated you make it with constant advice, the more cluttered the mind gets," he added. He didn't seem to agree that Indian team was inexperienced. "Honestly, there is no pressure or inexperience. So many IPL and T20 matches they play... if we call that inexperience, then I am not sure what experience is," Kotak said.

on point

Miller keeps things simple to soak up pressure

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South Africa has suffered many heartbreaks and has often been given the chokers tag, especially when it comes to ICC knockouts. The last over loss to India in the 2024 World Cup final after having things in control in the chase was more hurtful.

David Miller was out in the last over in 2024, and the emotions got over. But South Africa never stops fighting, and they won the ICC Test

mace to shed the choker tag for now and won a double super over earlier in the tournament to show they can hold nerves under pressure.

Miller handled pressure well on Sunday after South Africa were 20 for 3 and led a charge to set up a 76-run win for the Proteas to outplay India in the Super Eights of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup clash. The men in green and gold can now breathe easy before the knockouts.

"Look, I think it's taken a bit of time. I've been playing

the game for a while now, and it's about making sure that I really do stick to it when there's high-pressure moments in front of a big audience like tonight. It's about making sure that you really stick to the simple things and the basics and do that really well. This game is a game of risks, and you are going to fail as a cricketer, so it's about making sure that you playing to your terms," Miller said after the match.

The South African left-

hander admitted it wasn't easy playing against defending champions who were on a 12-match winning streak in the T20 World Cups. He, though, made it look easy with stroke play in the middle. "No, it wasn't easy. Playing against India is always really difficult, and they've got an incredible team and players. We played a lot against them and with them as well for the IPL on that and when it's two big teams like that it's about making sure that you do the simple things for longer period of time

when the pressure does come you kind of absorb it get through that and like I said it takes a team effort so scoring 187 I think we got I thought it was a fair total," he said.

Miller said that South Africa is not allowing itself to get that far ahead. "They are beatable," he said.

"India comes with, as I mentioned, an incredible team, but I think for us in a tournament like this, it's about making sure that we stay in our lane as a player and do the job and get the job done."



South Africa's David Miller plays a shot. ANI