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

Briefs

NEW DELHI

Court acquits Patkar in 20-yr-old case

A Delhi court on Saturday acquitted activist Medha Patkar in a 20-year-old criminal defamation case filed by Delhi LG VK Saxena. Judicial Magistrate Raghav Sharma ruled that Saxena failed to prove "beyond reasonable doubt" that Patkar made defamatory remarks during a 2006 television broadcast. Saxena, then heading an NGO, alleged Patkar falsely accused him of receiving Sardar Sarovar Nigam contracts. Originally filed in Ahmedabad and transferred to Delhi in 2010, the court concluded the prosecution did not establish the offence under Section 500 of the IPC, ending two decades of litigation.

RAIPUR

Sex CD case: Baghel faces fresh trial

A Special CBI Court in Raipur has reversed a 2024 order that discharged former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel in the 2017 sex CD case. The court also rejected appeals from co-accused Vinod Verma, Kailash Murarka, and Vijay Bhatia, upholding the charges against them. The case involves a controversial video allegedly targeting then-minister Rajesh Munat. Originally arrested for extortion and defamation, Baghel and journalist Vinod Verma were accused of circulating the "doctored" content. Following a CBI probe, the special court's ruling brings the veteran Congress leader back under trial.

BENGALURU

Arson sparks fresh political rift in Ballari

The political rivalry in Ballari intensified Friday night after a model house owned by former minister Gali Janardhan Reddy was set ablaze. While police attributed the fire to a "reels-related" dispute among eight detained youths, Reddy and the BJP dismissed the claim, demanding a CBI inquiry. Reddy alleged the vandalism was orchestrated by Congress MLA Bharath Reddy, citing previous threats and January's violent clash that killed a Congress worker. Opposition leaders R. Ashok and Chalavadi Narayanaswamy accused the government of shielding the MLA and sponsoring local violence. As Janardhan Reddy consolidates his influence following a court-ordered return to the district, the incident signals a dangerous resurgence of Ballari's factional wars, fueled by a long history of mining-related political conflict.

QUIET RIFT | The MP is believed to be upset over Rahul Gandhi not adequately acknowledging his presence at a recent event

Will raise internal issues with leadership: Tharoor

KOZHIKODE

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Saturday said he has some "issues" with the party which he would take up with the leadership, and asserted that he has never violated the organisation's stated positions in the Parliament.

Any internal differences should be discussed within the organisation and not through the media, he said.

His remarks come amid reports that Tharoor is upset over Congress leader Rahul Gandhi not adequately acknowledging his presence at a recent event in Kochi and over alleged repeated attempts by state party leaders to sideline him.

"All I can say is that there are issues which I need to take up with my own party leadership and not in a public forum. I will be going to Delhi for Parliament and I will get an opportunity, I believe, to make my concerns very clear to the party leadership and get their viewpoint, have a proper conversation."

"I am in Congress for the past 17 years. Let's not go too far. As far as I am concerned, whatever has gone wrong, needs to be addressed and it



Congress leader Shashi Tharoor speaks to PTI, in Kozhikode on Saturday

PTI

'I will remain unapologetic on Op Sindoor stance'

Kozhikode: Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Saturday said that there has been only one instance of "public disagreement on principle," with the party, which occurred after the Pahalgam terror attack and the response with Operation Sindoor, for which he remains unapologetic. "After the terror attack, which killed 26 people, the Congress leader had said that the act "cannot go unpunished, there has to be a kinetic response. I have at no stage violated any of the Congress' positions in Parliament; the only issue on which there has been public disagreement on principle is about Operation Sindoor, where I did take a very strong stand, and I remain unapologetic about that," Tharoor said.

will be addressed in an appropriate forum," he told PTI Videos.

Speaking to reporters here, the Thiruvananthapuram MP said he had informed the

Congress leadership about his inability to attend a party meeting. He said that some reports about him might be true, while others could be false. Tharoor explained that he wanted to attend a literature festival and that continuous travel was difficult.

"However, I will certainly attend all party activities in Parliament, and at that time I can meet the party leadership," he said.

Responding to a question on alleged unfair treatment at a party event in Kochi, Tharoor said he would not comment on it.

He also said that he wanted to exhibit his book on Sree Narayana Guru at the literature festival.

Earlier, answering questions during a session at the Kerala Literature Festival here, Tharoor said he had taken a strong stand on Operation Sindoor and remained "unapologetic," about it.

Explaining his position, Tharoor said that as an observer, commentator and writer, he had written a newspaper column after the Pahalgam terror attack, stating that it should not go unpunished and that there should be a kinetic response.

Government calls all-party meet ahead of Budget Session

NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Budget Session of Parliament, the government has called an all-party meeting on January 27 to discuss the legislative and other agendas.

The Budget Session will begin on January 28, with President Draupadi Murmu's address to the joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

In a rare occasion in parliamentary history, the Union budget would be presented on February 1, which is a Sunday. This will be Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's ninth consecutive budget.

"The all-party meeting, convened by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju, will be held at the main committee room of Parliament House annexe at 11 am on January 27," a government source said.

The Budget Session will continue till April 2. The first phase will conclude on February 13, with Parliament reassembling on March 9.

The session comes at a time when the opposition Congress is conducting a nationwide campaign against the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, which replaces the UPA-era Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

SIR in Bengal done in hurry: Amartya Sen

The Nobel laureate says it may jeopardise democratic participation

KOLKATA

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has voiced deep unease over the SIR process in West Bengal, warning that the exercise is being conducted with "undue haste" and may jeopardise democratic participation, particularly with the assembly elections approaching in a few months.

The economist, speaking to PTI from Boston, reflected on the democratic value of electoral roll revisions and the circumstances under which they can strengthen voting rights.

He stressed that such an exercise must be conducted with care and adequate time, which he believes are "missing" in Bengal's case.

"A thorough review of electoral rolls done carefully with adequate time can be a good democratic procedure, but this is not what is happening in West Bengal at this time," Sen said.

"The SIR is being done in a hurry, with inadequate time for people with voting rights to have sufficient opportunity to submit documents to vindicate their entitlement to vote in the coming assembly elections. This is both unjust to the



electorate and unfair to Indian democracy," he said.

Speaking of his experience during the special intensive revision in Bengal, Sen said time pressure was evident even among poll officials.

"Sometimes, the officials of the Election Commission themselves seem to lack enough time.

"When they questioned my right to vote from my home constituency in Santiniketan - from where I have voted earlier, and where my name, address and other details are registered in official records - they questioned me about my deceased mother's age at my date of birth, even though, as a voter herself, my mother's details, like mine, were stored also in their own official records," he said.

ISRO chief : PSLV failure won't affect Gaganyaan timeline

COIMBATORE

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chairman V. Narayanan on Saturday denied any possibility of delay in the Gaganyaan mission following the failure of the PSLV rocket mission earlier this month.

The ISRO chief said that the organisation is currently studying the cause of PSLV mission failure, and called it an individual mission which would not affect the progress of the Gaganyaan mission.

"These two are independent programs, and it (failure of PSLV) will not have any impact. The investigation is ongoing," V. Narayanan told ANI.

On January 12, the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)-C62 mission carrying the 'Anvesha'/EOS-N1 satellite



and 15 co-passenger satellites launched by India encountered an anomaly during the end of the PS3 burn stage, with ISRO chairman V. Narayanan stating that "a deviation in the vehicle's flight path" was observed.

"A detailed analysis has been initiated," the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) posted on X.

ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan said a disturbance was observed in the vehicle at the end of the third stage, which was otherwise proceeding as expected.

"Today, we have attempted

the PSLV C62 / EOS - N1 Mission. The PSLV vehicle is a four-stage vehicle with two solid stages and two liquid stages. The vehicle's performance near the end of the third stage was as expected. (However), near the end of the third stage, we are seeing increased disturbance in the vehicle. Subsequently, a deviation in the vehicle's flight path is observed. We are analysing the data and will come back at the earliest," Narayanan said.

This was ISRO's first major launch of 2026. The mission aimed to place an Earth observation satellite into orbit from the First Launch Pad (FLP) at Sriharikota.

The mission was carried out by NewSpace India Limited and represents the ninth dedicated commercial mission to build and launch an Earth Observation satellite.

Congress slams BJP govt over transfer of Sambhal CJM

New Delhi: The Congress slammed the BJP-led government on Saturday over the transfer of Sambhal Chief Magistrate Vibhanshu Sudheer, who had directed that an FIR be lodged against police personnel in connection with the Sambhal violence, and alleged that this is not an administrative move but a "direct assault on judicial independence".

The opposition party urged the Supreme Court and the Allahabad High Court to take suo-motu (on its own) cognisance of the "arbitrary and deeply-troubling transfer" of Sudheer.

Congress's media and publicity department head Pawan Kherra said timely judicial intervention is essential to uphold the rule of law.

Vande Bharat veg-only menu sparks regional cultural row

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has frequently alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is attempting to rewrite history while imposing its own preferences on the public without consultation.

The ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC), supported by several prominent figures, has now seized an opportunity to slam the Central government to alter a vegetarian-only menu was served on the inaugural Vande Bharat Sleeper Express traveling from Howrah to Guwahati.

Speaking to the Free Press Journal, TMC Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya characterized the move as "autocratic," predicting it would be rejected by the

people of Bengal.

"Bengalis love non-vegetarian food, especially fish. The BJP thinks they can dump their choices on people. They make an outward show of caring for Bengal, but they truly don't. We export non-vegetarian products; if these foods are sidelined, what happens to the producers? What has the BJP done for these farmers while they harp on vegetarianism?" Bhattacharya questioned.

The Howrah-Kamakhya Vande Bharat Sleeper was flagged off on January 17 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During recent visits, both the PM and Union Home Minister Amit Shah emphasized their commitment to the state, promising to build a "Shonar Bangla" if voted to power. During the 2021 Assembly campaign, Mamata

Banerjee had warned that a BJP victory would lead to a ban on non-vegetarian food—a claim the saffron party strongly denied at the time. TMC youth leader Debangshu Bhattacharya told FPI that the Centre has seemingly forgotten that animal sacrifice remains a relevant tradition at the Kamakhya temple.

"BJP leaders are against non-vegetarian food, and now the Central government has proven it. They have forgotten that the people of both Bengal and Assam are predominantly non-vegetarians," he added.

Despite Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav's earlier assurance that the menu would feature specialties from West Bengal and Assam to suit local palates, the IRCTC menu currently excludes fish and meat.

IndiGo vacates 717 slots after DGCA curbs flights

MUMBAI

IndiGo has vacated 717 slots at domestic airports after aviation watchdog DGCA curtailed the airline's winter schedule by 10 per cent following major operational disruptions in early December, sources said.

Of the 717 slots, 364 are from

six metro airports: Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Hyderabad. Most of the vacated slots among these cities are from Hyderabad and Bengaluru, the sources added.

Data shared by the sources show that the vacant slots are spread over the January to March period. As many as 361 slots have been vacated for

March, compared to 43 for February, while 361 slots have been vacated for January.

Against this backdrop, the civil aviation ministry on Thursday asked other airlines to submit their requests for operating domestic flights on the vacated slots.

"IndiGo has submitted a list of 717 slots to the ministry, which it has vacated after the

domestic winter schedule was reduced by 10 per cent in early December last year," one of the sources said.

The airline generally operates over 2,200 flights daily, trimmed services following the DGCA directive.

Meanwhile, Air India will operate its newly inducted Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner with certain limitations as approx-

vals from the US Federal Aviation Administration are awaited for sliding privacy doors in business class and 18 economy class seats. The aircraft will begin commercial operations on the Mumbai-Frankfurt route from February 1. The airline said other seat features are available and approvals are expected soon.

UltraTech Cement December quarter profit at ₹1,729.44 cr

UltraTech Cement, India's leading cement maker on Saturday reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 1,729.44 crore for December quarter FY26. It had posted a net profit of Rs 1,363.44 crore in the October-December period a year ago, the Aditya Birla group flagship firm said in a regulatory filing. Revenue from operations was at Rs 21,829.68 crore in the December quarter of FY26. It was at Rs 17,778.83 crore a year earlier.

APSEZ will invest ₹30K cr in devpt of Vizhinjam sea port: Karan Adani

Karan Adani, MD of Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) which manages the Vizhinjam port, on Saturday said the company will be investing a cumulative Rs 30,000 crore in the development of the seaport. Along with the additional investment of Rs 16,000 crore under phase 2 and a cumulative commitment of Rs 30,000 crore, the port's capacity will be increased from 1 million Twenty lakh equivalent units (TEUs) to 5.7 million TEUs by 2029, he noted.

INOXGFL signs MoUs with 3 states to invest ₹17,000 crore in RE

INOXGFL Group has signed three MoUs worth Rs 17,000 crore with Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Kerala governments to invest in renewable energy space, a company official said. The MoUs were signed on the sidelines of the WEF summit in Davos, Switzerland on Friday.

ESIC's 'SPREE 2025' scheme: Last Chance to Register

The Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) has approved SPREE 2025 (Scheme for Promotion of Registration of Employers and Employees)—during its 196th ESI Corporation Meeting held in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, under the chairmanship of Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister for Labour & Employment and Youth Affairs & Sports. The Scheme for Promotion of Registration of Employers and Employees (SPREE) 2025, approved by the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), is a special initiative aimed at expanding social security coverage under the ESI Act. The scheme will be active from 1st July 2025 to 31st

January 2026 and provides a one-time opportunity for unregistered employers and employees—including contractual and temporary workers—to enrol without facing inspections or demands for past dues. The launch of SPREE 2025 marks a progressive step by the Employees' State Insurance Corporation towards inclusive and accessible social security. By simplifying the registration process and offering immunity from retrospective liabilities, the scheme not only encourages employers to regularize their workforce but also ensures that more workers, especially those in contractual sectors, gain access to essential health and social benefits under the ESI Act.

money special

India's tax-to-GDP ratio mirrors major global economies: Report

NEW DELHI



India's combined tax-to-GDP ratio, accounting for both central and state collections, currently stands at 19.6 per cent, positioning the country at par with several major global economies. While the central gross tax revenue remains lower at 11.7 per cent, the integrated figure exceeds those of other emerging markets such as Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

However, the ratio still lags behind advanced economies like Germany and the United States, which report ratios of 38 per cent and 25.6 per cent, respectively.

A report from Bank of

Baroda highlights that this gap represents a significant policy opportunity, as India possesses larger potential due to favourable demographics. The report notes that more efforts are being directed towards holistic tax reforms, including simplification, rationalisation, and digitisation, with signs of an improving tax-to-GDP ratio in the near term.

Key regulatory changes,

including the enactment of the Income Tax Act 2025 and the rationalisation of corporate tax structures, aim to improve transparency and streamline compliance.

Historical analysis shows a growing consonance between tax collections and nominal GDP. Following a period of volatility between FY93 and FY02 due to a narrow tax base, the relationship has shifted towards directional convergence.

"From FY14 till date, there have been visible signs of convergence between Gross tax revenue collections and nominal GDP with convergence being more pronounced from FY23 onwards," the report states.

Kotak Mahindra Bk Q3 profit up 4% at ₹3,446 cr

MUMBAI

Kotak Mahindra Bank on Saturday reported a 4 per cent increase in standalone net profit at Rs 3,446 crore for the third quarter ended December 2025, due to moderate growth in core income.

The Mumbai-based private sector lender had earned a net profit of Rs 3,305 crore in the year-ago period.

Total income rose to Rs 16,741 crore during the quarter under review, from Rs 16,050 crore in the same period last year, Kotak Mahindra Bank said in a regulatory filing.

The bank's interest income also grew to Rs 13,903 crore, as against Rs 13,428 crore a year ago. Net Interest Income (NII) in Q3FY26 increased to Rs 7,565 crore from Rs 7,196 crore in the year-ago period.

The Spring of Knowledge Blossoms Through Kriya Yoga Practice: Swami Yogi Satyam

The practice of Kriya Yoga is the true and scientific worship of Basant Panchami



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj

At the Kriya Yoga camp on Mahatma Gandhi Marg - Sangam Mori Junction in the Magh Mela area, on the occasion of Basant Panchami, internationally renowned Kriya Yoga scientist Swami Shri Yogi Satyam Ji Maharaj

explained the scientific and spiritual significance of the festival to practitioners from India and abroad. He said that the practice of Kriya Yoga is the true and scientific worship of Basant Panchami. Swami Shri Yogi Satyam Ji Maharaj explained that through Kriya Yoga meditation, a person experiences eternal unity with



all the creations of the universe. In this state, the practitioner is able to truly serve all beings and continuously experiences supreme peace. He said that the "arrival of spring" does not merely signify a change of season, but rather the manifestation of knowledge in life. When the flower of knowledge blossoms within

a person, it manifests as the awakening of the consciousness centers located in the head and spine, which are called chakras.

These chakras awaken during the spring season, spreading the fragrance of peace, patience, and courage in life. Swami Ji explained that the concept of spring is



incomplete without Panchami. The five main knowledge centers located in the spine—Muladhara, Swadhisthana, Manipura, Anahata, and Vishuddha—when awakened, lead to the experience of true spring.

This process of awakening consciousness is called Basant Panchami. He said that

this consciousness is awakened through the regular practice of Kriya Yoga, therefore, the practice of Kriya Yoga is the scientific worship of Basant Panchami. A large number of practitioners were present at the program and absorbed this message through meditation and spiritual practice.

Serious Questions Raised by Energy Minister A.K. Sharma Over Posting of Officers in UP, Allegation of 25 Lakh for District Posting

Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh politics witnessed turmoil after the state Energy Minister, A.K. Sharma, raised serious concerns regarding the posting of officers. Speaking from a public platform, Sharma said that discussions have emerged suggesting that in some places, up to 25 lakh is being paid for district-level postings. His statement is being seen as a major question mark over the administrative system. The



minister said that if such reports are true, it is extremely worrying and must be investigated seriously. He clarified that the government intention is to ensure a transparent

and corruption-free system and if any irregularities are found, strict action will be taken. Following his statement, discussions have intensified in administrative and

political circles. Opposition parties have termed it a direct attack on the government functioning, while leaders of the ruling party say that the minister's remarks reflect the government's zero-tolerance policy against corruption. Political observers believe that such a statement from a responsible minister indicates that there is introspection within the government regarding the system.

Blackout Mock Drill Held at Police Lines Parade Ground

Bahraich

To further strengthen the internal security system in the district, keep the general public vigilant and alert during emergency situations, provide information on first aid and life-saving techniques and assess the preparedness of various departments in the event of a natural disaster, a blackout mock drill was successfully conducted at the Police Lines Parade Ground late Friday evening. This mock drill was organized under the directions of the Additional Chief Executive Officer, State Disaster Management Authority, Lucknow and under the able guidance of District Magistrate Akshay Tripathi and



Superintendent of Police Ramnayan Singh. During the drill, a blackout situation was created at exactly 6 PM. Complete darkness and silence prevailed all around, and then the sirens of the fire service started blaring. Realistic scenarios of a sudden attack were presented at the Police Lines Parade

Ground. Ambulances were seen providing first aid to the injured and rushing them to the hospital, while fire tenders promptly took charge to control fires at various locations. The police force effectively demonstrated security arrangements, patrolling, surveillance, information exchange and

coordinated action in a disciplined manner. SSB personnel, NCC cadets, police, health department, urban development department, Home Guards, disaster relief volunteers and members of the local disaster management team actively participated in making the mock drill a success.

Municipal Corporation to Honor Three Brave Men Who Saved Pilots' Lives



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj: The Prayagraj Municipal Corporation will honor the young men who saved the lives of Indian Air Force pilots. A resolution to this effect was passed at a mini-council meeting held at the Municipal Corporation on Saturday. Mayor Umesh Chandra Ganesh Kesarwani said that the three brave men will be honored on January 26th. He stated that they displayed

immense courage, risking their own lives to save the lives of the country's soldiers. Councillor Akash Sonkar raised the demand in the mini-council meeting that Pankaj Sonkar, one of the men who saved the pilots' lives, be given a government job. He demanded that until he gets a government job, he should be given a job at the Municipal Corporation on an outsourcing basis. Mayor Ganesh Kesarwani assured that he would write a letter to the Chief

Minister regarding Pankaj's case and also assured him of a job on an outsourcing basis. He also said that Pankaj would be honored at the Municipal Corporation council meeting on Republic Day. Councillor Nem Yadav proposed that all three citizens involved in saving the lives of the two pilots—Alok Yadav, Pankaj Sonkar, and Lal Saheb Yadav—be honored. The Mayor approved the proposal to honor all three on Republic Day.

Fire breaks out again at Magh Mela, two tents gutted at girls' camp in Sector-6

Fire sparked by embers from a brazier, fire brigade brought it under control in time

Akhand Bharat Sandesh Prayagraj

Another fire incident was reported at the Prayagraj Magh Mela on Saturday evening. Two tents were gutted in a sudden fire at the girls' camp located in Sector-6. Upon receiving the information, more than 10 fire tenders reached the spot, and fire personnel promptly brought the fire under control. Panic spread among the pilgrims present in the camp as soon as the fire broke out. People started shouting and ran towards a safe place. Fortunately, there were no casualties reported in this incident. Police and fire department officials were present at the spot. According



to the information, the camp of Kishori Math Chitrakoot is set up on Tulsi Shivala Marg, where a total of 10 tents have been erected. On Saturday evening, a fire suddenly broke out in one tent, which quickly spread to the adjacent tent. Chief Fire Officer of

Magh Mela, Animesh Singh, said that a brazier was being used in the tent where the fire started.

The fire was sparked by embers from the brazier. Due to the timely action of the fire personnel, the fire was prevented from spreading further,

thus averting a major accident. Following the incident, the administration has appealed to the camp organizers to strictly follow fire safety rules. Surveillance and vigilance regarding fire safety have been increased in the area.

Grand Event in Prayagraj with the Resolution of 'Developed Uttar Pradesh – Developed India

'Cabinet Minister Nand Gopal Gupta Nandi inaugurated the program and honored those who performed outstanding work



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj

On the occasion of Uttar Pradesh Day-2026, a grand program based on the theme 'Developed Uttar Pradesh, Developed India' was organized on Saturday at the Ganga Pandal in Magh Mela Sector-3. The chief guest of the program, State Cabinet Minister (Industrial Development, Export Promotion, NRI and Investment Promotion) Nand Gopal Gupta Nandi, inaugurated the program by lighting the lamp. On this occasion, Divisional

Commissioner Soumya Agarwal, District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma and Chief Development Officer Harshika Singh were present. The minister inspected the stalls set up by various departments and obtained information about the schemes, achievements and works. A live broadcast of the Uttar Pradesh Day program organized in Lucknow by the Union Home Minister and the Chief Minister was also shown at the venue. During the program, a special video clip showcasing the development path of Prayagraj division was screened.

In the cultural programs, students of Jagat Taran Girls Inter College presented a welcome song, while students of St. Anthony Girls Inter College and Guru Tegh Bahadur Khalsa Balika Inter College gave attractive cultural performances on the theme of 'Developed India'. Folk songs and Dhedhiya dance by folk artists mesmerized the audience. On this occasion, the minister honored the beneficiaries who have done outstanding work under various departments and schemes. Certificates of appreciation, shawls, toolkits and dummy checks were given



to 10 farmers from the Agriculture Department, 10 women from self-help groups, beneficiaries of the Chief Minister's Youth Employment Scheme, One District One Product scheme, Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana, Matikala Gramodyog, Chief Minister's Youth Entrepreneur Development Campaign, Chief Minister's Youth Self-Employment Scheme and other schemes. The Department for Persons with Disabilities also distributed hearing aids, wheelchairs and MR kits to disabled children. Artists who have made

significant contributions in the field of art, literature and culture were also honored. In his address, Minister Nand Gopal Gupta Nandi said that Uttar Pradesh Day is being celebrated at a time when devotees from India and abroad have arrived in Prayagraj, the city of the confluence, for the Magh Mela. This is a living example of the state's cultural heritage and spiritual consciousness.

He said that the Prime Minister's mantra of 'development with heritage' has been strongly implemented in the state under the leadership of

the Chief Minister. The Minister said that due to the robust law and order situation, Uttar Pradesh is becoming the first choice for investors, and the state is rapidly moving towards a one trillion dollar economy. He said that the happiness, progress, and prosperity of the 24 crore people of the state are the government's top priority, and the double-engine government is continuously working with the resolve to take the light of development to the last person. The program was conducted by Dr. Prabhakar Tripathi.

12 Complainants Arrive at Kokhraj Police Station for Grievance Redressal Day

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Kokhraj, Kaushambi. On Saturday, a grievance redressal day was organized at the Kokhraj police station under the supervision of Station House Officer Chandrabhushan Maurya, as per government directives. Twelve complainants submitted applications regarding land disputes and other departmental issues, seeking resolution of their problems. Station House Officer Chandrabhushan Maurya listened to the com-



plainants on the spot and resolved five cases, for which the complainants

expressed their gratitude. He instructed that the remaining cases be

resolved by a joint team of revenue and police officials. He emphasized that

complaints should be resolved within the stipulated time frame and with

quality, ensuring the satisfaction of the complainants. He stated that any negligence in resolving complaints would not be tolerated. Present on the occasion were Sub-Inspector, police personnel, revenue officials, village headmen, Kanungo Rohit Agrahari, Kanungo Sohan, Lekhpal Pawan Rai, Ravi Vishwakarma, Shiv Shankar Pal, Kamal Singh, Lakshmi Narayan, Neha Jain, Aparna Srivastava, Anuradha Verma, and other prominent citizens of the area.

Wanted Accused Arrested by Baldev Police Station

Mathura

The police team of Baldev Police Station arrested a wanted accused on 22.01.2026 based on information received from a confidential informant. In Case Crime No. 001/2026, registered under Sections 191(2), 191(3), 190, 109(1), 115(2), 352, 351(3), 125 of the BNS and Sections 5/25/27 of the Arms Act,

Speeding Ambulance Runs Over Cyclist Students in Ghurpur, Two Dead



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj: A tragic accident occurred on Saturday in Chhoti Kanti village, under the Ghurpur police station area of the Yamunapar region. Two students on bicycles were killed after being hit by a speeding ambulance. One student died on the spot, while the other was seriously injured and succumbed to his injuries on the way to SRN Hospital. The families of the deceased were devastated after the incident. Upon receiving the information, the police

reached the spot and took control of the situation. There was widespread anger among the local residents regarding the accident. It is reported that both students were returning home from school on their bicycles when a speeding ambulance hit them. The deceased students have been identified as Shobhit Patel and Rinku Patel. The police have seized the ambulance and started an investigation. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem examination. A pall of gloom has descended over the village after the incident.

18th Employment Fair Organized in Prayagraj, Union Minister of State Anupriya Patel Distributes Appointment Letters

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare and Chemicals and Fertilizers, Smt. Anupriya Patel, participated as the chief guest at the 18th Employment Fair organized on Saturday at the Group Centre, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Phaphamau. On this occasion, she presented appointment letters to the selected newly appointed candidates and extended her best wishes for their bright future. The candidates and their families showed great enthusiasm upon receiving the appointment letters. A live broadcast of the appointment letter distribution program organized by the Prime Minister was also shown during the event. In her address, Union Minister of State Anupriya Patel said that she was extremely happy to participate in the



18th Employment Fair in Prayagraj. She informed that the selected candidates will serve in the Home, Health, Financial Services, and Higher Education departments, as well as in Central Armed Police Forces such as the CRPF, BSF, SSB, ITBP, and CISF. She said that through the 18th Employment Fair, organized at 45 locations

across the country, the Prime Minister virtually distributed appointment letters to more than 61,000 young people. She expressed her expectation that all the newly appointed youth would discharge their duties with dedication, honesty, and transparency, and contribute to realizing the vision of a developed India @2047. The Union Minister

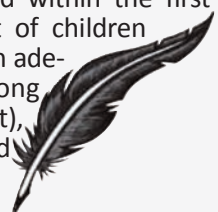
said that making the youth self-reliant and providing them with employment is the top priority of the central government. Such employment fairs are an effective means of providing opportunities to the youth.

She urged the youth to work with discipline, dedication, and a spirit of national service, and to bring glory to the country, society, and their families through their conduct. The program concluded peacefully and in an orderly manner. The successful organization of the employment fair has instilled new hope and confidence in the youth, reflecting the government's commitment to job creation and youth empowerment. On this occasion, public representatives, administrative officers, senior officers of the security forces, and a large number of candidates and their families were present.

Editorial

Revamp anganwadi model for Viksit Bharat. Workers should be seen as frontline educators

Integrated Child Development Services Scheme – the Anganwadi Services Scheme was launched in 1975 as an innovative experiment to address maternal and child health, nutrition, and early childhood development. Aligned with the objectives to improve children’s health, nutrition, and development, reduce mortality, morbidity, and dropout rates, and empower mothers through counselling, the ICDS framework is designed to nurture holistic development. Through a lifecycle approach, it targets children aged 0-6 years, pregnant and lactating mothers, and adolescent girls, delivering supplementary nutrition, immunisations, health check-ups, non-formal pre-school education, and nutrition counselling. Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) are the focal points for delivering ICDS services, and Anganwadi workers (AWWs) and helpers are the fulcrum of rendering these vital services through AWCs and home visits. Today, through a strong network of more than 1.4 million Anganwadi centres (AWCs) covering 100 million particularly vulnerable mothers and children, ICDS has emerged as the largest service delivery program for mother care and child development. As ICDS celebrates 50 years this year, it presents a valuable opportunity to celebrate its achievements, reflect on the gaps and challenges, and propose a way forward to align with the futuristic needs of Viksit Bharat. Since this launch, ICDS boasts a robust framework that enables it to adapt and evolve meaningfully in the future. Its evolution to currently Saksham Anganwadi & Poshan 2.0, combines schemes Poshan Abhiyaan, Scheme for Adolescent Girls, and Poshan Bhi, Padhai Bhi, emphasising holistic development and real-time monitoring. Today, all AWCs and over 101 million beneficiaries are registered on the Poshan Tracker, enabling real time tracking of service delivery and outcomes. Over the years, ICDS has played a crucial role in equitably addressing malnutrition, early childhood care, and maternal health across India. India is moving in the right direction toward achieving the SDG 2030 targets for maternal and child mortality. Research has demonstrated that early childhood interventions targeting nutrition, education, and health can substantially enhance human capital, especially in developing countries. An IFPRI study published in the Bulletin of the World Health Organisation highlighted improvements in both equity and coverage of ICDS from 2006 to 2016, with increased service utilisation (58 per cent to 71 per cent), especially among Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Another study examining the linkages between utilisation of ICDS and underweight among children aged 6-59 months from 2015-16 to 2019-21, attributed improvements in ICDS utilisation to 9-12 per cent of the observed reduction in underweight children. A peer-reviewed study in The University of Chicago Press Journals found that children who were exposed to ICDS during the first three years of life completed 0.1-0.3 more grades of schooling than those who were not. As India advances towards Viksit Bharat, ICDS must not only strengthen its existing interventions but also embrace transformative paradigm shifts to effectively address emerging challenges, harness new opportunities, and align with the evolving aspirations of society. Firstly, the pace of improvement in nutrition needs to be accelerated. Malnutrition rates remain high—stunting among children under five is 36 per cent, underweight at 32.1 per cent, and anaemia prevalence at 67 per cent, especially in comparison to global benchmarks. Sub-optimal Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices, where only 42 per cent of infants are breastfed within the first hour, and only 11 per cent of children aged 6–23 months receive an adequate diet. Anaemia among pregnant women (52 per cent), children (67 per cent), and women of reproductive.



Religious autonomy isn’t absolute



Imarat-e-Shariah, a strong socio-religious group with a big influence on a section of Indian Muslims, organised a huge protest at Patna’s Gandhi Maidan. The rally, named ‘Waqf Bachao, Samvidhan Bachao – Save Waqf, Save the Constitution’ – quickly gained momentum, with thousands of Muslim protesters from Bihar and nearby states vocally condemning the Waqf Act amendment as a violation of both constitutional rights and religious freedom. This was not just a protest; it was a firm declaration against a law perceived as an infringement on fundamental freedoms—freedoms that many believe must be protected at all costs. Speakers at the rally claimed that the Waqf Amendment Act crushes not only the Islamic principle of Waqf (charitable endowment) but also assaults the very core of religious autonomy. Faisal Wali Rahmani, head of Imarat-e-Shariah, made it clear: the Act is a dangerous overreach that jeopardises the community’s ability to govern its own affairs. “This conference,” he declared, “is a peaceful, constitutional demand to roll back this draconian legislation.” His words rang out as a challenge to those who would allow such overreach to stand unchecked. I fully agree that every Indian has the right to free speech and peaceful protest, as guaranteed by our

Constitution. But the argument surrounding religious autonomy is far more complicated than it seems. This notion of autonomy isn’t about personal religious practice—it’s about collective and organisational control. The idea that a religious group should have the unrestricted right to manage its own affairs raises some troubling questions. First, does this imply that such a group is somehow separate, not truly a part of the larger nation? Second, is there not a risk in projecting this image of self-containment—as though the community exists outside the national fabric? The implications are far more profound than they may appear. What if every community or tribe starts to argue that no one has the right to interfere in their affairs, claiming that their practices and core values are above the reach of national laws or human rights? Imagine a community that argues the government should have no say in child marriage, defending it as a matter of

religious or cultural tradition. Would such a stance be accepted simply because it aligns with the idea that each group should be able to uphold its own values? Surely, we would not accept such practices under the guise of religious freedom. At what point do we draw the line between protecting religious rights and ensuring that these practices don’t violate basic human rights or endanger individuals? The core issue is whether any belief or practice—no matter how deeply rooted in religion or culture—can be allowed to override the fundamental principles of justice, equality, and human dignity. When leaders of the Muslim community, or any religious group, invoke the Constitution, they often present it as though it grants them an unfettered right to religious freedom—one that allows them to manage their affairs without interference from the state, its legislature, or its judiciary. But what is overlooked is that this right to religious free-

dom is not absolute or separate from other constitutional values. It exists within a broader framework that includes human rights, equality, and justice for all citizens. The Constitution, in its design, ensures religious freedom—but it does so with the understanding that such freedom must never come at the expense of the dignity or rights of others. This means that the Constitution’s values—those of equality and justice—must always take precedence over any individual or collective religious right when they begin to infringe on these fundamental principles. Once we are clear on this, we can oppose Waqf amendments that we believe infringe upon our rights. The idea that any community has the inherent right to manage its own affairs solely under the umbrella of constitutional rights is a dangerous one. As I make this distinction, it is crucial to point out some things. While the Patna protest may be framed as a defence of constitutional rights, the very organisation leading it—Imarat-e-Shariah—operates a parallel system within the Muslim Personal Law framework despite lacking formal judicial authority. The argument often put forward is that these bodies deal with matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, and Waqf when all parties

involved consent to the process. However, we all know the reality of social pressure within Indian Muslim society. In practice, these institutions often function without any regard for constitutional values that guarantee equality and human rights for all citizens, particularly women. This contradiction is visible when they invoke the Constitution to protect their own interest but fail to understand the very values it stands for. The Constitution is not just meant to protect religious autonomy and the collective religious right of a community; it is also supposed to protect the fundamental rights of every individual, regardless of their religion or background. Moreover, such protests and gatherings only represent a section of Indian Muslims – not each and every one of us. These events are led mostly by elite Ashraaf Muslims, with Pasmandas being utilised as mob followers. It is disheartening to see how these institutions, controlled by Ashraafs, continue to use Pasmandas as pawns in their own power negotiations while claiming to represent the community as a whole. Take, for example, the claims made during this protest. Faisal Wali Rahmani warned that after the Waqf Board amendment, anyone could lay claim to Muslim religious sites: “If tomorrow someone demands .

Karnataka’s fake news bill won’t survive a court challenge

Karnataka’s proposed Misinformation and Fake News (Prohibition) Bill, 2025, is poorly drafted and replete with structural infirmities. It is also at odds with existing central laws and its constitutional validity is questionable. Let’s see how. The bill deprives social media intermediaries of their statutory immunity from state persecution for user-generated content, a legal protection commonly referred to in internet law as ‘safe harbour’. India’s nodal Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act) provides for safe harbour protections and allows social media companies to host user content with conditional immunity, within a clearly defined legal framework. In contrast, Karnataka’s fake news bill proposes to hold social media companies accountable for violating any provision of the proposed law. The bill envisions a government-appointed Fake News on Social Media Regulatory Authority, with sweeping

powers to preemptively block or ban content it deems illegal. However, it does not clarify how these powers will sync with the safe harbour protections under the IT Act. Without safe harbour protections, social media companies could face a deluge of criminal penalties for content that is difficult to monitor and filter, such as superstitions or unscientific claims, both deemed illegal under the bill. The Authority’s blocking powers create a parallel mechanism to the content-blocking procedures already prescribed under the Centre’s IT Act. The lack of standard procedural safeguards, such as the need to notify penalised parties or offer them a fair hearing, further disregards the minimum standards set by the IT Act. That law limits content blocking to specific grounds such as public order, sovereignty, and integrity of India, friendly relations with foreign states, or preventing incitement to an offence – all of which correspond to the restrictions.

Indian Muslims must face the truth—Muslim countries don’t care about them

West Asia has ever been on the boil, and its tumultuous events perturb Indian Muslims no end. Their attitude toward international affairs, particularly events in Muslim countries, is determined more by their religious identity and extraterritorial loyalty than by their national identity and the country’s interests. Since the establishment of the Mughal rule in 1526, Muslim rulers of India stopped swearing allegiance to any foreign entity, as was the practice during the Sultanate period (the reason why that period came to be known by this name), when the Sultan tacitly recognised the suzerainty of the Abbasid caliphate, which, after the sacking of Baghdad by the Mongol army led by Halagu Khan in 1258, moved to Cairo where it resided until 1527. Later, the caliphate was transferred to the Ottoman rulers of Turkey. In the political lexicon of Islam, Sultan means an autonomous governor of the caliph. The Mughals didn’t recognise the new Ottoman caliphate in Turkey, and called themselves Padshah (king) instead of Sultan. However, so long as India was under Muslim rule, it didn’t really matter whether the caliph was recognised or not. But with the termination of the titular Mughal sovereignty in 1857, the Muslim ruling class found itself stranded. In order to find an ideological mooring for their adrift theo-politics, they anchored themselves in the theocratic institution of the Ottoman caliphate. The Muslim ruling class had so maintained its foreign character that this transfer of allegiance to a new overlord outside India seemed normal and caused no consternation. Rather, this instinctive reaction was understood as a default action. The first stirrings of the newly incubated pro-Turkish sympathies became visible during the Russo-Turkish War of

1877-78. Unsurprisingly, the newly established Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College in Aligarh, the precursor to Aligarh Muslim University, chose the Turkish dress, with the distinctive Fez – the red hat with black tassel – as its uniform. This trend of associating with the Ottoman caliphate matured during the Khilafat Movement, which, in the Muslim mind, forever subordinated Indian nationalism to pan-Islamism, and also to a great extent made the Indian foreign policy sensitive to the extraterritorial loyalty of the Muslims. India’s Muslim ruling class had cultivated a sense of identity that made it easier for them to associate with their foreign co-religionists than the native compatriots. Therefore, it was inevitable that Muslims diverged into pan-Islamism when the national movement emerged in India. It’s true that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had been wary of the pan-Islamist ideas, and opposed its propagation by the peripatetic preacher, Jamaluddin Afghani (1838-1897). But his opposition was because of pan-Islamism’s anti-British edge – and Sir Syed was a British loyalist.

— rather than any thought for Indian nationalism, which he had contested. What’s known as global Islam or Ummah today was, in the late 19th and early 20th century, termed pan-Islamism. Contrary to what the terminology conveys – an ideology encompassing and shared by the entire Islamic world – it actually denoted the political attitude of Indian Muslims who, though domiciled in India, sought the meaning of their existence in belonging to the global Muslim community. India was incidental to their worldview. They were born here, but belonged elsewhere. What affected them the most, at the deep emotional.

Success to failure, UPSC is a family affair

A couplet by Mirza Ghalib could well serve as the unofficial motto of UPSC aspirants: Ragon mein daudte phirne ke hum nahin qayal; jab aankh hi se na tapka to phir lahu kya hai— I’m not impressed by blood that runs in the veins; if it doesn’t spill from the eyes, what kind of blood is it? After all, aspirants live, for lack of a better description, a suspended life built on the edifice of junoon (passion) and self-doubt. But sometimes, it all comes together. The result is announced, and the aspirant’s name appears on the list. Those who succeed are elevated to near-mythical status. Their photos decorate news-

paper pages and coaching centre hoardings, and they are invited for felicitations and motivational talks. But what is not celebrated is the silent effort of an entire support system—a quiet, unpaid workforce made up of family members, friends, and partners. It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. Clichéd but true. The same holds for success in the UPSC exam. If UPSC is the Everest of Indian competitive exams, and the topper is the climber, then their family members are the sherpas who make the ascent possible. The mother, often a school dropout herself, becomes the

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Google under CCI investigation over gaming firm complaint

Delhi: India's Google regulatory issues are growing. In 2022, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) fined the US tech giant for abuse of dominant position in its Play Store and Android mobile device ecosystem. Now, the fairplay regulator is investigating a complaint filed by gaming company WinZO. CCI directed its investigation arm to investigate and report within 60 days after finding a prima facie case. "Based on the facts and circumstances of the case, the commission believes Google is in violation and justifies further inquiry. The CCI bench, chaired by Ravneet Kaur and three members, ordered the director general to investigate. A Google spokesman declined to comment. WinZO, an online gaming company, claimed that Google's Play Store prohibits Real Money Game hosting. "Due to Google's unreasonable and



restrictive policy, all apps offering real money games of skill are only available for download from their website (a process called sideloading)," it told CCI. On Android devices, using this process to reach WinZO displays a disclaimer/warning, tarnishing its image. WinZO stated warnings are without validity and "completely illegal" and cost the company. It also claimed Google displays another "baseless warning" when users pay for skill-based games. "Such payment warnings are arbitrary as Google has not set any criteria for displaying them," WinZO complained to CCI.

US retailers utilize Trump tariff threats to boost sales

Delhi: Local media stated that many US businesses are advising clients to buy now before President-elect Donald Trump's proposed tariffs hike prices. Trump threatened 60% tariffs on all Chinese goods and 10% to 20% tariffs on other goods during his campaign. He announced plans to impose 25% tariffs on Mexican and Canadian imports and 10% on Chinese imports. According to Xinhua,

The Union government wants 100% FDI in insurance

Delhi: The Union Finance Ministry proposed raising the insurance sector's FDI ceiling from 74% to 100% in a consultation paper. The insurance FDI limit was raised from 49% to 74% in February 2021. The government said the proposal to alter insurance legislation will make insurance more affordable, grow the insurance industry, and streamline corporate operations.

An office memorandum dated November 26 proposed lifting the FDI ceiling in Indian insurance businesses from 74% to 100% and



allowing insurers to conduct one or more kinds of insurance business and associated or incidental operations. The suggestion also cut foreign reinsurers' Net Owned Funds from Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 1,000 crore. IRDAI can also set lesser entry capital (Rs 50 crore) for underserved or unserved regions on

a case-by-case basis. The sector regulator is trying to increase capital in this capital-intensive industry. The Chairman of IRDAI suggests that the insurance market requires 50,000 crore yearly to double penetration in the country. Insurance penetration is the ratio of annual premiums issued to GDP.

Gold loans rise 50% in seven months

Delhi: Bank loans against gold jewelry rose 50.4% in the first seven months of the year. Despite single-digit growth in every other personal loan area, credit rose sharply. RBI issued sectoral deployment of bank credit Gold loans totaled Rs 1,02,562 crore in March 2024. Growth was 56% year-over-year, up from

13% in October 2023. NBFCs' move and a preference for secured loans over unsecured ones contributed to the first-seven-month gold loan surge, bankers said. Bank loans to NBFCs fell 0.7% to Rs 1.5 lakh crore in the first seven months. Bankers also said that rising gold prices allow borrowers to repay previous loans

and get higher new ones. Analysts see rising gold loan demand as an indication of financial instability. RBI ordered banks and financial companies to review and fix their gold loan rules and procedures within three months last month. After an examination, evergreening was found to hide bad loans.

TRAI deadline may prevent Jio, Vi, and Airtel subscribers from receiving OTPs

Delhi: As Airtel, Vodafone-Idea, and Reliance Jio struggle to reach a crucial Telecom Regulatory Authority of India deadline, Indian mobile subscribers may experience OTP delays. The telecom watchdog extended the deadline for spam and phishing traceability requirements to December 1, 2024. Telecom companies must now track all commercial messages, including OTPs, to combat fraud. Telecom companies can block scams by identifying message sources. However, missing this deadline could delay or prohibit OTPs, harming banking, e-commerce, and social networking. The TRAI imple-



"The TRAI implementation timeframe is phased. Operators will notify chain declaration violators daily until November 30. All non-compliant messages will be prohibited starting December 1"

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A former employee being sued by Google India for disclosing Pixel secrets

Delhi: Google and its subsidiary in India filed a lawsuit in the US against former Bengaluru office employee Harshit Roy for revealing trade secrets that were considered confidential. In order to prevent Roy from further disseminating the stolen trade secrets that had irreparably harmed Google, Google hired an outside investigator to find him. Among the information that was revealed were comprehensive specifications of proprietary hardware.

New Honda Amaze Variants and Top Features



Delhi: India will launch the third-generation Amaze on December 4, 2024, and unofficial bookings have begun. The car is arriving at dealer yards nationwide ahead of its much-anticipated launch. It will rival the new Maruti Suzuki Dzire, Tata Tigor, and Hyundai Aura. The 2025 Honda Amaze will come in three variants—V, VX, and ZX—with many interior and exterior changes. Since its inception in India over a decade ago, the Amaze has been a popular sedan. Several new features and technolo-

gies will be added. The top model will have a floating touchscreen infotainment system with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity, automatic climate control, ADAS technology, six airbags, reversing camera, wireless smartphone charger, multi-functional steering wheel with mount-

ed controls, rear AC vents, dual cup holders, type-c charging ports, and more. However, an electric sunroof, motorized seats, and 360-degree camera will be missing. It will keep its 1.2L four-cylinder VTEC naturally aspirated petrol engine, which produces 90 PS, and no major mechanical alterations.

French energy giant Total puts Adani Gp investments on hold

Delhi: Total Energies, a French oil company, has suspended investments in Adani Group entities pending the conclusion of US bribery allegations against its founder. The Paris-based company, which owns key investments in Adani Group's renewable energy and gas distribution operations, said it was unaware of the US solar power corruption inquiry. "Total Energies rejects corruption in any form," it declared. "This indictment does not target Adani Green Energy (AGEL) itself, nor any AGEL-related companies." Total Energies claimed it learned about Gautam Adani's and others' indictment from US public pronouncements. Gautam Adani, his nephew



and Adani Green Energy executive director Sagar Adani, and others are accused of a \$265m bribery scam. Total Energies bought 19.7% of Adani Green Energy in January 2021. It invested \$444 million in an equal joint venture with the Indian company to acquire three 1,150MW operational renewable assets in September. Additionally, it owns 37.4% of Adani Total Gas, which supplies CNG to cars and natural gas to homes.

NBCC India will buy sick PSUs and redevelop land banks

Delhi: Two sources say NBCC India Ltd. wants to buy defunct public sector undertakings (PSUs) to redevelop and monetize their land. The state-run construction company wants to leverage its success in developing land for government-owned companies. Developer is in talks to acquire non-operational PSUs through a new entity to monetize their land banks. Details are not yet

Cabinet's 30k cr bank guarantee relief for telcos

Delhi: Government sources claimed the Union Cabinet has agreed in principle to waive bank guarantee requirements for telecom companies' deferred spectrum payments, but with strict conditions. The waiver will require telcos to pay three months' instalments in addition to their annual fees. Sources said the government will give up its right to collect Rs 30,000 crore in bank guarantees upfront. The Cabinet waived the requirement for telcos to buy spectrum in six auctions between 2012 and 2022. Spectrum auction regulations from 2022 and 2024 removed the necessity. Airtel and Jio would guarantee Rs 2,300 crore and Rs 4,000 crore. Vodafone Idea (Vi) spectrum auction moratorium ends in October 2025. Current



"Vi was accused of not paying its second bank guarantee of Rs 350 crore for spectrum purchased in a 2012 auction. November 1 was the payment deadline"

rules required the corporation to file bank guarantees 13 months before the next payment due date. The DoT requested bank guarantees from Vi for the September 2025 spectrum payment of Rs 24,747 crore. The DoT also asked the finance ministry to exempt operators from bank guarantees for spectrum payments. The waiver should help Vi. Telco shares

increased 7.8% intra-day to Rs 7.53. After opening higher, Airtel shares fell 0.1% to Rs 1,577. Vi was accused of not paying its second bank guarantee of Rs 350 crore for spectrum purchased in a 2012 auction. November 1 was the payment deadline. Vi skipped the payment of about Rs 4,600 crore in 2016 auction guarantees two months earlier.

Tgana rejects Adani's 100-cr contribution

Delhi: Telangana chief minister A Revanth Reddy announced that the state government will not accept the ₹100 crore CSR donation from the Adani Group for the Young India Skills University in Ranga Reddy district, citing current circumstances and controversies. We thank you for committing 100 crore to Young India Skills University on behalf of your Foundation via letter. We have not sought donors for physical transfers of monies since the university did not acquire the IT exemption under section 80G, Ranjan wrote. The official added that he was "instructed by the chief minister not to seek the transfer of funds in view of the present circumstances and arising controversies". According to the US Department of Justice indictment, Adani executives and Azure Power executives bribed Indian government officials in five states to win solar energy supply contracts worth over \$2 billion over 20 years between 2020 and 2024. The scam purportedly started in Odisha and spread to Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, and Jammu & Kashmir. The Telangana chief minister said everyone may lawfully invest, despite accusations that the state government accepted Adani Group funding. Reddy said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has stated that the company that wins the bids according to the regulations will invest.





An emotional tribute



TITLE: *Border 2*
DIRECTOR: Anurag Singh
CAST: Sunny Deol, Varun Dhawan, Ahan Shetty, Diljit Dosanjh, Mona Singh, Sonam Bajwa, Medha Rana and Anya Singh
WHERE: In theatres near you
RATING: ★★★★★

In 1997, filmmaker JP Dutta directed *Border*, starring Sunny Deol, Jackie Shroff, Suniel Shetty, Akshaye Khanna, Puneet Issar, Sudesh Berry, and Kulbhushan Kharbada. The film, which was based on the India-Pakistan War of 1971, was a superhit at the box office. Now, after 29 years, a sequel to the film titled *Border 2* has hit the big screens.

The sequel also revolves around the 1971 War. It showcases that while there was a lot of tension going on in East Pakistan, the neighbouring country thought they could attack India from the western

ver, the Indian Army, the Indian Navy (Ahan Shetty as Lt Cdr M. S. Rawat), and the Indian Air Force (Diljit Dosanjh as Fg Offr Nirmaljit Singh Sekhon) were all set to face Pakistan and defeat them in their evil mission.

The story of *Border 2* is written by JP Dutta's daughter, Nidhi Dutta, and the screenplay is written by Sumit Arora and Anurag

Singh. The film is directed by Singh, who is known for helming the Akshay Kumar starrer *Kesari* (2019).

Border 2 starts with the introduction of all four lead characters, and later, goes into flashback (1961), focusing on the training and friendship of Dahiya, Rawat, and Sekhon. The first half is a perfect package; it has a couple of good action sequences, there's a bit of comedy, romance, drama, and a lot of emotional scenes. You will get tears in your eyes a lot of times while watching the first half of *Border 2*. The interval point promises that the second half will concentrate on the war.

The second half of *Border 2* begins on an emotional note. There's a scene featuring Mona Singh that will make you cry a lot. The movie then moves towards the war sequences. The war scenes have been shot very well, especially the scenes featuring the Indian Navy and the IAF. There are many goosebump moments.

But the film dips a bit when the war focuses on the Indian Army. The scenes look stretched and messy. However, towards the climax, the film gains momentum, giving us a goosebump moment, and of course, it makes us cry a lot again.

Actors' performances
 Sunny Deol steals the show with his performance in *Border 2*. At 68, he is doing action effortlessly in the movie, proving that he is the legendary actor 'Dharmendra Ji Ka Beta'. The actor has been given some of the best scenes in the film, and he nails it. And of course, how can we forget his

roaring voice that does wonders for the movie!

Varun Dhawan was trolled after the trailer and the songs of the film were released. But the actor has given a slam to all trolls with his excellent performance in *Border 2*.

Diljit Dosanjh is in his element in the film, and his scenes in the first half will surely make you laugh out loud. The actor has once again impressed us. Ahan Shetty is a revelation. He has performed wonderfully, and when he mouths the dialogue, 'Shakti De Maa Shakti...', it will give you goosebumps.

When it comes to female leads, Mona Singh has been given the best role. She shines and proves that she is currently one of the most talented actresses we have in the industry. Medha Rana and Sonam Bajwa are good in their respective roles, but Anya Singh doesn't get much to do.

Supporting actors like Anurag Arora, Paramvir Cheema, Neeta Mohindra, Ishika Gagneja, Azad Chauhan, Vansh Bhardwaj, and others have performed amazingly in their respective roles.

Music

The music of *Border 2* is good. *Ghar Kab Aaoge* and *Jaate hue Lamhon* have been recreated very well in the film. *Mitti Ke Bete* is an emotional track that will get tears in your eyes.

Overall, *Border 2* is an emotional film that gives a perfect tribute to our soldiers from the Indian Army, the Indian Air Force, and the Indian Navy. So, you should watch it! **P.S.** Please carry a lot of tissues, you will need them!

Ishika defends Varun

Border 2 actress reacts to negative PR campaign against Varun Dhawan, calls it heartbreaking



Varun Dhawan has recently found himself at the centre of a massive online backlash ever since the announcement of *Border 2*, one of India's most iconic war film franchises. The actor has been trolled relentlessly for his height, smile, and even called a "misfit" for the role of a soldier in the much-anticipated sequel to *Border* (1997). While the film stars Varun Dhawan, Diljit Dosanjh, Ahan Shetty, and Sunny Deol, a section of social media has been aggressively targeting Varun - a campaign that many now allege is part of a paid negative PR drive. Several content creators have claimed they were contacted to post critical reels and videos against the actor. Amid this noise, *Border 2* actress Ishika Gagneja, who plays Diljit Dosanjh's sister in the film, has strongly reacted to the trolling and defended Varun Dhawan, calling the hate "heartbreaking" and completely unfair.

The actress said, "It was very heartbreaking when I saw it. To create such negativity and such hate towards someone just felt very wrong. I saw videos where people were talking about his smile. I mean, a smile is a beautiful thing, and to make fun of someone's smile felt extremely wrong. Why would someone want to shame someone for the way they smile? All of us smile in the most beautiful ways. As actors, what people bring are their human emotions, and that doesn't mean they have to change the way they feel those emotions. It was very heartbreaking. Only snippets of the film have been released so far. The full picture only comes after audiences watch the film and give feedback, which is constructive and very important. But judging someone just on snippets, without knowing the character's backstory or what led to that moment, feels unfair. People are creating hate just for views and likes. He's

playing a PVC of the country, and it just feels sad. I felt really sad seeing all of this, and I hope that when people watch the film, they realise he has done an amazing job."

Ishika also revealed if she ever felt Varun Dhawan was a misfit for *Border 2*. "No, not at all. From the very first time we shot together, he worked really hard - I saw it myself. He used to discuss scenes with Abhijat sir, asking how we should do certain things, how we should take a scene. He would also talk to me about how we could make a scene better. He was completely there, fully in character, and had worked very hard for it. It wasn't like he was sitting there in a star's capacity, thinking it was just another film. He was genuinely working for the film. I never felt he was a misfit. I felt he played the part amazingly well, and I hope that when people watch the film, they'll realise he's actually very good in it."

Ishika also praised Varun for being kind and encouraging on set. "I shot with Varun sir and he was sweet and kind. I had met him earlier at a screening of *Dhadak*, so I told him that we had met before, and he said he felt the same. During the interval at *Dhadak* screening, he came up to me and said, 'You were very good in the film.' I was honestly shocked - Varun Dhawan knew me. He had just watched the film, and I didn't even know he was attending the screening. He spoke to my father and told him that I was very good in the film. On *Border 2* set, my mother had come with me, and he went up to her and told her the same thing. From the very first day we shot, he kept encouraging me and told me multiple times that I was doing well. That kind of validation from a star like him really boosts your confidence, especially when it's such a big opportunity and you constantly wonder if you're doing justice to your part."



Actors' performance

Checkatilo rests squarely on Sobhita Dhulipala's shoulders, and she carries the film with an earnestness that keeps it from collapsing altogether. She lends Sandhya a well-grounded mix of fatigue, moral conflict, and grit. Her performance alone gives the narrative a pulse.

Everyone else, unfortunately, stands in the shadow of her. Vishwadev Rachakonda appears as the supportive love interest, orbiting the margins of the story with a calm that borders on invisibility. Aamani and Vadlamani Srinivas, as his parents, shine in their limited scenes and bring warmth which the film lacks. The police officers, victims, and assorted side characters are all rendered in broad strokes. Their personalities are so thinly sketched that one half expects them to flutter away with a strong breeze. The emotional stakes, therefore, remain perfunctory.

Music

Sricharan Pakala's music is among the film's more successful choices. The score knows when to brood and when to accelerate. It creates an atmosphere that the writing does not fully support. Aesthetically, the film is meticulous. The textures, tones, and transitions evoke the right world for a slow-burning thriller. What is missing is the spark that binds these fine elements into a gripping whole. The mood is there, but the momentum is not.

Checkatilo aspires to be a socially conscious thriller but ends up feeling like a déjà vu buffet of familiar tropes. It has a commendable premise and robust technical backing, yet the writing falters and the execution stumbles. The result is a polished but underwhelming echo of thrillers we have seen before. A recycled jamboree that promises far more than it delivers.



TITLE: *Checkatilo*
DIRECTOR: Sharan Kopishetty
CAST: Sobhita Dhulipala, Vishwadev Rachakonda, Chaitanya Visalakshmi, Isha Chawla, Jhansi, Aamani, Vadlamani Srinivas
WHERE: Prime Video
RATING: ★★★

Checkatilo arrives with the swagger of a thriller ready to rattle skeletons in society's cupboards, only to realise halfway that it has misplaced the key. At 2 hours and 6 minutes, the film certainly has time on its side, yet much of that time wanders into cul-de-sacs of clichés and narrative detours. The premise

is juicy enough. Sandhya Neluri, a crime anchor tired of peddling TRP tantrums, chooses to expose the rot festering beneath polite silences. When her beloved intern Bobby dies under suspicious circumstances, she launches a podcast named *Checkatilo* to chronicle true crime and embolden victims to come forward.

It is a setup that practically begs for urgency and intrigue. For a brief moment, the film seems to promise precisely that. Then, in a curious act of creative self-sabotage, it laces the plot with disjointed episodes that feel more like anthology fragments than a cohesive investigation. As Sandhya traces an unsettling pattern of deaths across the Godavari region since 2000, the film ought to tighten its grip. Instead, it loosens it and occasionally drops the rope entirely.

The technical finesse only highlights what the writing

Sleek craft, sluggish soul



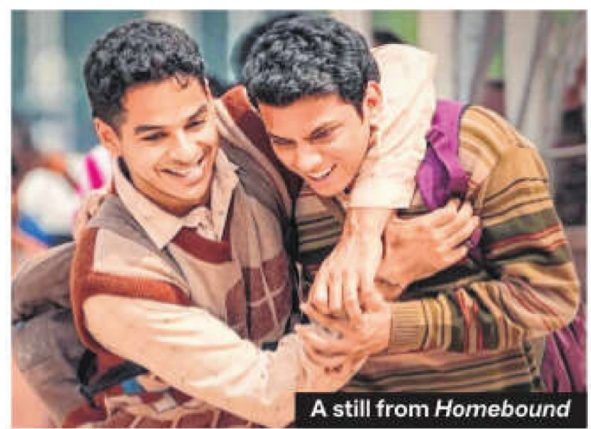
withholds. The production values sparkle, the frames are polished, and the lighting team has clearly worked overtime. Yet the story feels like a polite party guest who refuses to make meaningful

conversation. One can sense intention behind the craft, but little inspiration guides the narrative. The overall impact becomes strangely hollow. It's a thriller stranded without palpable thrill.

Aditya shares update on *Dhurandhar* sequel



Director Aditya Dhar shared an update regarding the release of the sequel to the blockbuster film *Dhurandhar* on Friday. Taking to his Instagram handle, Aditya Dhar replied to a fan who asked him to release the film's teaser soon. In response, the filmmaker assured him of its release in a "few days." He wrote, "Teaser will be out in few days," accompanied by the folding hands emoji. Earlier, Director Ram Gopal Varma predicted the upcoming film *Dhurandhar 2* to be the biggest "multi-starrer" movie of Bollywood after the success of its first instalment.



A still from *Homebound*



KJo stands by *Homebound*

Karan Johar expressed pride and support for *Homebound* and director Neeraj Ghaywan

India's official entry for the Oscars 2026, *Homebound*, failed to secure a nomination in the Best International Feature Film category, extending the country's long wait for recognition in the segment.

The nominations for the 98th Academy Awards were announced on Thursday by actors Danielle Brooks and Lewis Pullman. The awards ceremony is slated to take place on March 15.

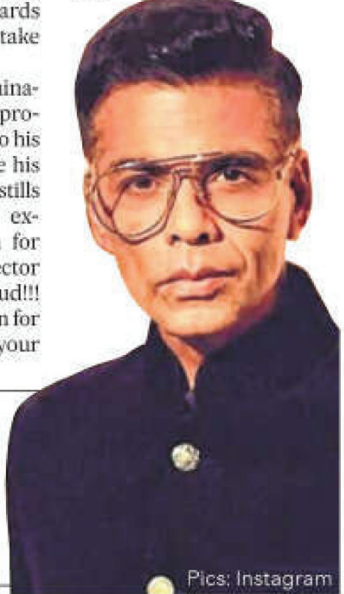
Soon after the nominations were revealed, producer Karan Johar took to his Instagram story to share his reaction. Posting several stills from *Homebound*, he expressed his admiration for the film and its director Neeraj Ghaywan. "Proud!!! Love you Neeraj Ghaywan for allowing us to bask in your

light," he wrote, signalling his continued support despite the film missing out on an Oscar nod.

Responding to Karan's message, director Neeraj Ghaywan also shared his gratitude. Reposting the producer's story, he wrote, "Thank you, @karanjohar! You have been an absolute rock. Couldn't have come this far without you. Love you."



Neeraj Ghaywan



Pics: Instagram

What is your take on *Homebound* not making it to the Oscars? Please share your views at kabir@fpj.co.in.

'I felt honoured'

Veteran filmmaker Subhash Ghai on being invited by the President of India for Republic Day 'At Home Reception'

Veteran filmmaker and educationist Subhash Ghai has expressed gratitude after being invited to the 'At Home Reception' hosted at Rashtrapati Bhavan on the eve of India's 76th Republic Day. Calling it a moment of pride and humility, Ghai said the invitation recognised not only his

personal journey but also the contribution of cinema and education to nation-building. Sharing his thoughts on Instagram, he described the honour as appreciation for his 50 years in filmmaking and 25 years in education. Ghai thanked his team and reaffirmed their commitment to contributing towards a *Viksit Bharat*.



Pandit Rakesh Chaurasia



Ustad Shujaat Husain Khan

Sitar meets flute magic

Two of India's most celebrated classical music maestros — Padma Shri awardee and sitar virtuoso Ustad Shujaat Husain Khan and two-time Grammy Award-winning flautist Pandit Rakesh Chaurasia — came together on stage for the first time on Friday in Mumbai. The historic collaboration marked the debut of *Sings & Wind*, a new Indian classical music intellectual property curated by Perfect Harmony Productions and Cine. The concert is part of a four-city India tour spanning Bengaluru, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Delhi, scheduled between January 22 and February 21, 2026.

Briefs

Karachi fire: Kin protest as many missing

Nearly a week after the fire in shopping centre in Pakistan's Karachi, anger and despair among families of the missing erupted as they protested against the lack of urgency by officials, "The Express Tribune" reported. Women clutching photos of sons, husbands and brothers assembled near the site, accusing officials and rescuers of moving painfully slowly while their loved ones remained unaccounted for. The toll from the January 17 fire has risen to at least 67.

Ruling party boss reelected in Vietnam

Vietnam's To Lam was re-elected on Friday as the general secretary of its ruling Communist Party. The decision came at the conclusion of the National Party Congress, the country's most important political conclave. No announcement was made about whether he will also become president. If To Lam were to get both positions, he would be the country's most powerful leader in decades, akin to Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

2 dead as boat sinks in South China Sea

Two people died and four were missing when a Singapore-flagged cargo ship with 21 Filipinos on board capsized in the South China Sea, Chinese officials said on Friday. The Chinese Coast Guard and navy operations from People's Liberation Army's Southern Theatre Command have rescued 15 people. The boat sank 100 kms north-west of Scarborough Shoal, said Chinese Coast Guard.

Nine killed in Pakistan's KP avalanche

Nine people were killed after an avalanche struck a house in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Friday, police said. A child was also injured in Chitral's Domel mountainous area.

21 killed in Myanmar airstrike

A military airstrike this week on a Myanmar village sheltering displaced people from Bhamo, where a final round of the 3-phase poll is to be held, killed 21 people, a rebel group said.

UAE MEET | As trilateral talks involving US begin, no sign of Moscow and Kyiv softening their positions on Donbas region**Land dispute in focus at Ukraine peace talks**

ABU DHABI

Ukrainian, Russian and American negotiators were holding meetings on Friday in the UAE, marking the first trilateral talks since the start of the war in Ukraine, tackling the vital issue of territory with no sign of a softening of positions to end the four-year conflict.

This round of talks, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Friday, could focus on post-war control of territory in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region, which has emerged as a major stumbling block through months of negotiations.

"The question of Donbas is key. It will be discussed how the three sides..., see this in Abu Dhabi today and tomorrow," he said. The talks would resume on Saturday morning.

The Kremlin confirmed Russian officials would take part in a security working group meeting in Abu Dhabi with the Russian delegation led by Igor Kostyukov, the head of Russia's military intelligence. The secretary of the national security council, Rustem Umerov, will lead Ukraine's delegation.

A bilateral working group on economic issues between Russia and the US was slated to take place separately, the Kremlin said.

On the table is a revised 20-



Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) greets US President Donald Trump's envoys Steve Witkoff (C-L), Jared Kushner (2nd R) and Josh Gruenbaum, the head of the Federal Acquisition Service at the General Services Administration in Moscow. —AP

point peace plan drawn up by Ukraine and the US. That plan covers a range of issues like potential territorial arrangements and security guarantees, as well as plans to rebuild the war-ravaged nation.

But the Ukrainian and Russian authorities are still at odds over territory, with Russia demanding a big chunk in the Donbas, and on security guarantees.

Steve Witkoff, US President Trump's special envoy, and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, were also expected to be in Abu Dhabi. The Kremlin said Witkoff would lead the bilateral economics talks alongside Kirill Dmitriev, the

Kremlin special envoy and head of the country's sovereign wealth fund.

Witkoff said on Thursday in Abu Dhabi, working groups would handle components of the peace plan, including what he called "military-to-military" aspects and "prosperity," or postwar economic recovery. Late on Thursday, Witkoff and Kushner met for 4 hours in Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Yuri Ushakov, Putin's foreign policy adviser, said after the meeting it had been "useful in all aspects, both for us and the US."

He said Russia wanted to end the war "through political

and diplomatic means" but that until then it would continue to push on the battlefield, "where the Russian Armed Forces hold the strategic initiative."

During the Kremlin meeting, Putin underscored there was no hope of achieving a long-term settlement if Ukraine was not prepared to resolve "the territorial issue according to the formula agreed upon in Anchorage," Ushakov said, referring to a meeting in Alaska last year. During that meeting, Putin agreed to cease fighting if Kyiv handed over the remainder of the Donetsk region and agreed to other nonterritorial demands.

Ties with US have taken a big blow: EU foreign policy chief

BRUSSELS

Transatlantic relations have suffered serious strain over the past week, the European Union's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said, as EU leaders met for an emergency summit amid escalating tensions with the US over Greenland.

Kallas told reporters the situation had become increasingly unpredictable. "One day, one way; the other day, again, everything could change," she said, referring to the shifting signals from US President Donald Trump. She said ties between Europe and the US "have definitely taken a big blow over the last week", but added, Europe was "not willing to junk 80 years of good relations".

After the summit, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the EU's united approach and its effort to engage Washington in "a firm but non-escalatory

manner" had helped ease tensions.

BRUSSELS MEET
EU leaders gathered in Brussels late on Thursday to review ties with Washington and to revive talks on an EU-US trade deal, Bloomberg



reported. The European Parliament had earlier paused ratification of the deal in protest against US pressure over Greenland.

The leaders said they wanted to strengthen cooperation with the US and were ready to respond if new threats emerged.

GREENLAND SEEKS TALKS WITH US

In Nuuk, Greenland PM Jens-Frederik Nielsen said he was unaware of the deal details, but the territory wanted a "peaceful dialogue" with the US and its sovereignty cannot be compromised. He said if the Greenland people were forced to make a choice, their position was clear. "We choose the Kingdom of Denmark, we choose the EU, we choose Nato."

MACRON FOR RESPECT

French President Emmanuel Macron said firm pressure from Europe pushed Trump to step back from his earlier threats over Greenland, AP reported. He said Europe's collective response showed its strength on the global stage. "Europe can make itself be respected, and that's a very good thing," Macron said, adding, "When we use the tools we have at our disposal we get respect and that's what happened this week."

POTUS plans China visit in April, to host Xi later in 2026

Washington: President Donald Trump said he would travel to China in April and host Chinese President Xi Jinping in the US later this year, signalling renewed leader-level engagement between the two countries.

"We are gonna make a trip. I am going in April," Trump told reporters. He said the two leaders would meet twice in 2026. He added Xi would visit the US "towards the end of the year". Trump described his relationship with Xi in positive terms. "I've always had a great relationship."

He acknowledged ties were strained during the Covid period. "It was a very strained relationship during Covid, but now it's an excellent relationship," he said.

The president pointed to trade as evidence of improving ties. He said China is buying more US farm products. "Look at all the farm products they're buying now," Trump said. "Soybeans — they're buying a lot of soybeans."

Trump said the purchases benefit American farmers. "That makes our farmers happy, and that makes me happy," he said. He also praised Xi personally. Trump called him "an amazing guy" and spoke favorably about Xi's wife. His remarks suggested a focus on personal diplomacy.

Nato troops avoided Af frontline: Don sparks row

LONDON / WASHINGTON

Donald Trump has sparked outrage among British MPs and veterans after claiming Nato troops stayed away from the frontline in Afghanistan, "The Guardian" reported.

The US president made his comments in an interview with 'Fox News' in which he reiterated his suggestion Nato would not support the US if asked. Trump has long criticised the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which also includes 30 European allies and Canada, over his belief that other members don't pay their fair share.

"Maybe we should have put Nato to the test: Invoked Article 5, and forced Nato to come here and protect our Southern Border from further Invasions of Illegal Immigrants, thus freeing up large numbers of Border Patrol Agents for other tasks," Trump posted on Truth Social. Article 5 refers to Nato's mutual defence clause, which states that an "armed attack" on one member is considered an attack on all 32 member-states.

His remarks drew condemnation, with critics pointing to the 457 British deaths in Afghanistan and highlighting Trump's avoidance of military service in Vietnam.

A total of 3,486 Nato troops died in the 20-year conflict, of which 2,461 were US service men. Canada suffered 165 deaths, including civilians.

Denmark, which has been at loggerheads with the US



over Trump's designs on Greenland, had 44 combat deaths in Afghanistan, the most per capita outside the US. In the interview with 'Fox News', Trump said: "We've never needed them. They'll say they sent some troops to Afghanistan ... and they did, they stayed a little back, a little off the frontlines."

"I will never forget their courage, their bravery and the sacrifice they made for the country. President Trump's remarks are insulting, appalling. I am not surprised the remarks have hurt the loved ones of those killed or injured," said UK PM Keir Starmer.

Armed forces minister Al Carns said, "Trump's comments are utterly ridiculous and a real shame."

Tory party leader Kemi Badenoch called US president's remark a disgrace.

Calvin Bailey, a Labour MP and former RAF officer who served alongside US special operations units in Afghanistan, said Trump's claim "bears no resemblance to the reality experienced by those of us who served there".

The Conservative MP Ben Obese-Jecty, who served in Afghanistan as a captain in the Royal Yorkshire Regi-

ment, said it was "sad to see our nation's sacrifice, and that of our Nato partners, held so cheaply by the US president".

Tan Dhesi, the chair of the Commons defence committee, said the US president's comments were "appalling and an insult to our brave British servicemen and women, who risked life and limb to help our allies, with many making the ultimate sacrifice".

The foreign affairs committee chair, Emily Thornberry, described the comments as "so much more than a mistake", and "an insult" to the families of those who had died. Stephen Stewart, a former soldier and an author and journalist, said: "Trump's comments are as offensive as they are inaccurate. It's hugely ironic someone who allegedly dodged the draft for the Vietnam war should make such a disgraceful statement."

"He has desecrated the memory of hundreds of British soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan, people who we called friends and comrades. If he was a man of honour, he would get down on bended knees to ask forgiveness from the families of the fallen."

Bailey added: "As I reminded the US forces I served with on 4 July in 2008, we were there because of a shared belief, articulated at America's founding, that free people have inalienable rights and should not live under tyranny. That belief underpinned the response to 9/11, and it is worth reflecting on now."

TikTok seals deal to form new US entity

Washington: TikTok has finalised a deal to create a new American entity, avoiding the looming threat of a ban in the US that has been in discussion for years on the platform now used by over 200 million Americans.

The social video platform firm signed pacts with investors including Oracle, Silver Lake and the Emirati investment firm MGX to form the new TikTok US joint venture.

The new version will operate under "defined safeguards that protect national security through comprehensive data protections, algorithm security, content moderation and software assurances for US users," the company said. American TikTok users can continue using the same app.

Trump praised the deal, thanking Chinese leader Xi Jinping specifically "for working with us and, ultimately, approving the Deal". He hoped "long into the future I will be remembered by those who use and love TikTok."



Beijing/Sao Paulo: China's President Xi Jinping (L) assured his Brazilian counterpart on Friday China would stand by the Latin America's biggest economy and the Global South, and called for both nations to maintain the role of the UN, Xinhua said. Xi's comments in a telephone call with President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva followed the latter's criticism of the US attack on Venezuela in an opinion piece in the 'New York Times' this week. Xi said China and Brazil should safeguard the shared interests of the Global South and jointly maintain the role of the United Nations in the "current turbulent international situation", the agency said. Lula's office confirmed the 45-minute call, saying both leaders "reiterated their commitment to strengthening the United Nations as a path to safeguarding peace and stability in the world".

benefit American farmers. "That makes our farmers happy, and that makes me happy," he said. He also praised Xi personally. Trump

called him "an amazing guy" and spoke favorably about Xi's wife. His remarks suggested a focus on personal diplomacy.

Hasina alleges anarchy

MUMBAI

In her first public audio address in New Delhi, since fleeing Bangladesh, former PM Sheikh Hasina accused the interim administration led by Muhammad Yunus of pushing the nation into what she dubbed "murderous anarchy", declaring that democracy now survives "in exile".

The message, played to a packed audience at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia in Delhi, came amid rapidly fraying ties between India and Bangladesh and as New Delhi moves families of Indian diplomats out of Dhaka, anticipating escalating political violence ahead of next month's elections.

Hasina said Bangladesh had slipped into its "darkest hour", transformed from a peaceful nation into a landscape marked by fear, bloodshed and repression. "What was once fertile and calm is ruled by terror," she said, alleging, violence, torture and sexual assaults were being carried out with impunity, particularly against women and minorities.

Hasina, who was forced into exile after her govern-

AMERICA TRYING TO BEFRIEND JAMAAT IN BANGLADESH: CLIP

Washington: As Jamaat-e-Islami readies for its strongest showing in Bangladesh poll next month, 'The Washington Post' has reported US diplomats are quietly signalling a willingness to engage with the once-banned party. The paper on Thursday cited a leaked audio clip of a closed-door interaction between a US diplomat and some female Bangladeshi journalists on December 1, 2025, at the US embassy in Dhaka.

The US official said Bangladesh had "shifted Islamic" and predicted Jamaat would "do better than it's ever done before" in the Feb 12 poll. "We want them to be our friends," the official added, asking if journalists could bring members of the party's "influential student wing", Islami Chhatra Shibir, onto their programmes. The unnamed diplomat downplayed worries Jamaat would try to force its interpretation of Islamic law on Bangladesh, saying "we would have 100% tariffs put on them the next day".



ment was toppled during violent protests in August 2024, accused what she called a "fascist clique" of conspiring to seize power. She blamed Yunus for dismantling democratic institutions and allowing extremist forces to flourish.

"Bangladesh today resembles a prison and an execution

ground," she said, claiming, religious minorities, especially Hindus, were under sustained attack since her ouster.

She warned the February 12 general election would face a legitimacy crisis if her party, the Awami League, remains barred from contesting. The party's registration has been suspended and its activities banned by the interim government. Hasina said law and order had collapsed, daily life had become a struggle for survival, and the promise of a free and fair poll was hollow without political pluralism.

The shooting on January 8,

Woman shot at by Border Patrol sentenced for illegal entry in US

PORTLAND (US)

A woman who was shot and wounded by a Border Patrol agent during a recent immigration stop in Portland, Oregon, pleaded guilty on Thursday to illegally entering the US and was sentenced to one year of probation.

Yorlenys Zambrano-Contreras appeared by video from an immigration detention facility in Tacoma, Washington, for the federal court hearing in Portland, 'The Oregonian/OregonLive' reported.

She won't face time in prison but will have location monitoring and certain nighttime curfew requirements during probation.

She will be able to remain out of custody in Oregon under the negotiated resolution of the case, the news outlet reported.

The case was initially filed in Texas, where she was accused of illegally entering the US, but she waived her right to appear there for prosecution, the outlet reported.

The shooting on January 8,



one day after a federal agent shot and killed a driver in Minneapolis, prompted protests over agents' aggressive tactics during immigration enforcement operations.

The FBI said in a court filing it had found no surveillance or other video of the shooting, in which a Border Patrol agent wounded Zambrano-Contreras and Luis Nino-Moncada while they were in a pickup truck in a medical complex parking lot.

According to court filings, the agent opened fire after Nino-Moncada put the truck in reverse and repeatedly slammed into an unoccupied car Border Patrol agents had

rented, smashing its headlights and knocking off its front bumper. The truck struck the agent, and he fired two rounds out of fear for his life, the filings say.

Nino-Moncada has been indicted on charges of aggravated assault on a federal employee and damaging federal property. He has pleaded not guilty and remains in custody, with a jury trial set for March.

The Department of Homeland Security said Zambrano-Contreras and Nino-Moncada entered the US illegally in 2023 and 2022, respectively, and were affiliated with the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua.

HARRIS FLAYS ICE

Former US Vice-President Kamala Harris criticised Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sharply after a five-year-old child was taken to a detention centre in Texas. "The child should be at home with the family and not used as bait by ICE and held in a Texas detention centre. I am outraged, and you should be too," she said.

Minnesota traders stand against ICE

WASHINGTON

No work, no shopping, no dining out. Hundreds of businesses across Minnesota were expected to close and many people vowed to pause everyday activities on Friday as part of a general strike against the Trump administration's immigration crackdown, NYT reported.

As tensions mount and a sense of fear of detention by immigration agents permeates the state, vendors, labour unions and residents said they would take part in an economic blackout and gather at prayers and protests on what organisers called a "Day of Truth and Freedom."

"It's tense and emotional, and folks are hurting," said Bishop Dwayne Royster, the executive director of Faith in Action, which is helping with the organising effort.

Minnesotans, he said, are demonstrating "deep resilience and willingness to stand together in ways I haven't seen folks do in a very long time".

The day of the strike, which



A man brings out an 18th century Bible to the anti-ICE stir site, Minneapolis

was set to include outdoor demonstrations, dawned with much of the Midwest, including all of Minnesota, under an extreme cold warning from the National Weather Service. The cold was particularly bitter in Minneapolis, with temperatures as low as -20°C forecast for much of the day, with wind chills even lower.

On Thursday, Vice President JD Vance said the Trump administration wanted to "turn down the temperature" in Minneapolis after weeks of clashes. Vance, who said he had travelled to the city to understand the tensions",

Briefs

JOHANNESBURG

Coles, M'swamy power Cape



All-rounder **James Coles** and seasoned spinner Senuran Muthuswamy shone bright as Sunrisers Eastern Cape defeated Paarl Royals by seven wickets to enter their fourth successive SA20 final here. The two-time champions will face Sourav Ganguly-coached Pretoria Capitals at Newlands, Cape Town, on Sunday. After restricting Royals to a below-par 114 for seven on Friday night, Sunrisers reached 117 for three in 11.4 overs.

NEW DELHI

Anahat Singh advances in Sprott meet



India's top women's player **Anahat Singh** defeated Lucy Turlmel and moved into the second round of the Sprott Tournament of Champions in New York. The World No. 31 Anahat beat England's Turlmel 11-3, 11-6, 9-11, 13-11 in the PSA Platinum event, and will meet Japanese sixth seed Satomi Watanabe next. Meanwhile, men's world No. 29 Abhay Singh of India went down to Spain's Iker Pajares 4-11, 11-4, 7-11, 11-3, 3-11.

JOHANNESBURG

SA well covered for T20 World Cup: Nortje



South Africa pace spearhead **Anrich Nortje** has played down the Proteas' injury concerns ahead of the T20 World Cup, saying the team has the depth and quality to absorb the setbacks, with replacement players performing strongly and ready to step up for the global event. South Africa were forced to make two changes to their 15-man squad for the T20 World Cup with Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs included in place of the injured duo of Tony de Zorzi and Donovan Ferreira.

English Daily

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ICC drops Bangladesh from T20 World Cup

World body brings in Scotland; informs all member nations

NEW DELHI

The ICC has pushed Bangladesh out of the upcoming T20 World Cup, bringing in Scotland after BCB refused to let its team travel to India citing security concerns in the wake of Mustafizur Rahman's ouster from the IPL.

Scotland's entry ended the month-long suspense after Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) repeatedly insisted that their matches be shifted to Sri Lanka and even suggested their group being swapped with Ireland.

The Irish Cricket board however categorically dismissed the suggestion.

At the ICC Board meeting, Bangladesh were taken to the cleaners with an overwhelming 14-2 verdict in favour of the "Tigers" travelling to India for their games. The ICC gave the BCB a 24-hour deadline to change its stance but with Asif Nazrul being adamant, the cricket crazy nation's hopes of playing the T20 World Cup went up in smoke.

It has been learnt that top ICC officials including chairman Jay Shah were in Dubai on Friday and late evening an e-mail was sent to BCB chairman Aminul Islam Bulbul informing him about global body's decision.

"An e-mail was sent last evening to Bangladesh Cricket Board chairman intimating him that his board didn't get back to ICC officially after the 24 hour deadline that was given to them to decide if they wanted to come to India," an ICC source told PTI on conditions of anonymity. "The BCB did a press con-

An e-mail was sent last evening to BCB chairman intimating him that his board didn't get back to ICC officially after the 24 hour deadline that was given to them to decide if they wanted to come to India **ICC source**

ference in Dhaka before officially intimating the global body which is a violation of protocol. They have been categorically told that they are being replaced. Scotland is the new team in the World Cup." The ICC also intimated all the participating member nations separately about Bangladesh being dropped from the tournament.

Bangladesh Sports Ministry advisor Asif Nazrul had advised against national team travelling to India, citing security issues despite being given repeated assurances by the ICC. Scotland will thus play their first group league games against West Indies (February 7), Italy (February 9) and England (February 14) in Kolkata followed by a game against Nepal in Mumbai on February 17. The BCB, in a desperate measure, had also approached the Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) of the ICC, unaware about the terms of reference of the sub-committee.

INTERVIEW | South Africa legend feels team that handles pressure best will win

JONTY BACKS INDIA AT T20 WC

MUMBAI

South Africa legend **Jonty Rhodes** feels the team that can handle pressure the best will triumph at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup starting next month but felt India certainly had the home advantage.

The South Africa legend was speaking on the sidelines of unveiling the ICC Men's T20 World Cup trophy at the Brew District for the Lollapalooza India event for Budweiser, at the Mahalaxmi Racecourse, here on Saturday.

"It's so interesting, I mean, the South African teams had a few injuries, they've had to change a team. There's so much cricket happening globally that quite a few of the squads are having similar issues. But with 20 teams at this T20 World Cup, I reckon there's probably eight on any given day that can put their hand up and say, we can win this World Cup. So try and predict four of them."

Rhodes felt the home ground advantage was certainly there with India.

"I mean, India, you've got home ground advantage. But we've seen that doesn't always work. There's no guarantee for success, but it does play a big part. It's got to be the team that can handle the pressure on the day. Because that's what T20 cricket is about. It's about high intensity moments. And those players, not just the most talented ones, but the ones that can



Cricket and Music come together

Vineet Sharma, CMO of Budweiser: I think, first of all, I'm very happy to have Jonty, he's a legend of the game. I have grown up watching his games in South Africa, beating India and giving a tough competition. But I'm very excited what we did today. We launched the ICC Trophy. It's the season of ICC T20 Cricket World Cup and we launched here in India. Of course, with Jonty being there, the moment was Lollapalooza. We've been partners in Lollapalooza for the last four years. And no better moment to bring culture, community, music and sports together. And of course, in the august presence of Jonty, we're very excited.

kind of calm down. Deal with each ball on its merit. Make the right decisions. And that's where you win and lose trophies," he added.

With ICC ousting Bangladesh from the T20 World Cup owing to the latter's refusal to play their matches in India, Rhodes felt it was a tough call but he can understand the situation saying he was reminded of South Africa's Apartheid era situation. "I think it's tough. You know, I come from a background of apartheid era South Africa, where sport and politics had to mix and because of that we were forced to change. Political and

sporting sanctions were imposed upon the minority government. And eventually we changed. And at the right time, for me, the 1992 Cricket World Cup came about when we were not yet a democracy. So, you know, I've seen politics and sport. And everyone talks, oh, you can't mix the two. But sometimes it does," the legendary fielder explained.

"So, difficult. You know, it's a tough decision. I feel really sad, hard done by the Bangladesh players. You know, the T20 World Cup is such a platform to showcase your skills. And their cricket has obviously grown. And T20 cricket brings everyone down

to a similar level. You know, test cricket, 50 overs even. Your top four, five teams in the world can dominate. But in T20, there's a lot of teams out there who can cause a hiccup. And Bangladesh is certainly one of those. So, sad not to have them. But I understand."

The South Africa legend quipped on a lighter note that India T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav will play a key role on the field.

"Well, as long as SKY keeps taking those catches inside the boundary in the last over, India should be good. You know, I think we've seen with his captaincy, there's always pressure on an Indian captain.

And it's slightly affected his performance. It's good to see some of his knocks recently against New Zealand. And what I do like about his captaincy though, he's calm and measured. He's not someone that gets carried away.

"T20 cricket has those high-intensity moments. And if you can slow it down and breathe and make more good choices than bad ones, you know, that impacts the team. You know, if you're all panicking and change your mind every ball that is bowled, it unsettles the side. So, I think the team on the day is able to make those choices. And it often comes from the captaincy," he added.

"So, SKY has that sort of temperament. He can lead with a calm mind."

Rhodes had words of high praise for Team India's batting sensation Abhishek Sharma.

"We've seen his experience. I mean, just in what he's brought in IPLs and playing for India, not just in India. He really does, for a little guy, no disrespect, he strikes the ball incredibly."

India look to seal T20I series

Ishan Kishan's fiery comeback puts Sanju Samson under pressure

GUWAHATI

Ishan Kishan's sensational comeback will reignite debate over who should be Abhishek Sharma's preferred opening partner with Sanju Samson's increasing struggles as the hosts look to seal the five-match T20 series in the third game here on Sunday.

With just two weeks and three matches against New Zealand in the ongoing series left before the start of their T20 World Cup title defence, India's combination looks largely settled.

The batting and bowling units appear sorted and only a few spots remain under scrutiny and one such slot currently belongs to Samson.

Kishan's superb 76 off 32 balls, however, intensified the spotlight on Sanju.

Reinstated as opener alongside Abhishek Sharma at the expense of Test and ODI skipper Shubman Gill, Samson has been failing to make the most of his chances and he has got quite a lot of games.

Gill, despite his technical solidity,



India's Ishan Kishan during a warm-up session before the start of the second T20I in Raipur. PTI

struggled to make an impact in T20Is and was sidelined in a bold call to accommodate Sanju, who had scored three centuries in five matches late last year.

But back in his preferred slot, the Kerala man has not delivered, and time is running out with hardly any turnaround time before the T20 World Cup as the series would be a make-or-break for him. His vulnerabil-

ity against express pace has once again resurfaced.

During the England series earlier this year, he fell cheaply five times to fast bowlers, including three dismissals in a row to Jofra Archer. Against New Zealand, he managed only 10 and 6, dismissed by Kyle Jamieson and Matt Henry respectively.

Former India opener and noted coach WV Raman summed it up on social media after his Raipur dismissal.

"Samson will be inconsis-

TEAMS (FROM) INDIA:

Suryakumar Yadav (captain), Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Ishan Kishan, Shreyas Iyer, Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Varun Chakravathy, Rinku Singh, Arshdeep Singh, Ravi Bishnoi, Harshit Rana.

NEW ZEALAND:

Mitchell Santner (captain), Devon Conway, Bevon Jacobs, Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Tim Robinson, Jimmy Neesham, Ish Sodhi, Zak Foulkes, Mark Chapman, Michael Bracewell, Rachin Ravindra, Kyle Jamieson, Matt Henry, Jacob Duffy.

ent as long as he doesn't adjust the speed of his bat on the downswing in relation to the pace of the ball. In simple terms one can't drive a car at the same speed all the time, everywhere," Raman posted on X. Samson also looked untidy behind the stumps, failing to collect a wide yorker from Arshdeep Singh that ran away for four byes.

HYDERABAD

A dominant Mumbai closed in on an outright win with bonus point against Hyderabad on the third day of their Ranji Trophy Elite Group D clash, reducing the hosts to 166 for seven after enforcing follow-on here on Saturday.

Lanky spinner Himanshu Singh returned with superb figures of 27-10-39-3 while pacer Tushar Deshpande (2/68) and Mohit Avasthi (2/54) chipped in as well, bowling out Hyderabad for 267 in their first innings after the hosts had resumed the third day's play on 138/2 in reply to Mumbai's 560. Musheer Khan, opener Akhil Herwadkar and injury substitute Onkar Tarmale took one wicket each as Hyderabad, buried under scoreboard pressure, conceded a huge lead of 293 runs.

Tarmale came into the playing eleven after Atharva Ankolekar was ruled out of the game due to an injury he suffered on Day Two. Ankolekar was stretched off the field.

There was no change in for-

Brief Scores:

In Hyderabad: Mumbai 560 lead Hyderabad 267 in 82.2 overs (Rahul Gahlaut 96; Himanshu Singh 3/39, Mohit Avasthi 2/54, Tushar Deshpande 2/68) & 166/7 in 39.3 overs (Kodimela Himateja 43; Mohit Avasthi 3/31, Musheer Khan 3/38) by 127 runs.

In COE (Bengaluru): Delhi 216 & 158/3 in 30 overs (Priyansh Arya 82; Shubham Agrawal 1/25) trail Chhattisgarh 505 in 102 overs (Ayush Pandey 183, Anuj Tiwari 108; Sumit Mathur 3/94) by 131 runs.

In Jaipur: Himachal Pradesh 406 & 38/0 in 10 overs (Innesh Mahajan 21 not out) lead Rajasthan 342 in 131.2 overs (Manav Suthar 120, Ajay Kukna 55, Amol Chelani 52; Aryaman Dhaliwal 5/101, Mukul Negi 4/108) by 102 runs. **In Puducherry:** Puducherry 233 lead Jammu & Kashmir 150/6 in 60 overs (Shubham Khajuria 46, Abdul Samad 40 not out; Safar Udeshi 2/41) by 83 runs.

tunes for Hyderabad, for whom India pacer Mohammed Siraj is playing his first Ranji game this season, as their batters cut a sorry figure against persistent Mumbai bowlers.

It was Avasthi (3/31) and Musheer (3/38) who caused the damage, as Hyderabad crawled to 166 for seven at stumps with another 127 runs in deficit in their second innings with only three wickets in hand and an entire day's play left. Delhi, on the

other hand, showed gumption in their second innings on the third day after being dominated by Chhattisgarh on the first two.

Delhi reached 158/3 in the second innings with another 131 runs in deficit, as Chhattisgarh had piled up 505 in their first innings in response to their opponents' 216. Priyansh Arya fell for 82 off 57 balls with 15 fours and a six, leading Delhi's counter-attack with opener Sanat Sangwan making 40.

captain's knock

Dube lavishes praise on Suryakumar's top display

RAIPUR

Shivam Dube had the best seat in the house as he enjoyed his Mumbai mate Suryakumar Yadav finally display the wide range of shots he is known for.

It was Suryakumar's first fifty plus score after 23 innings, silencing his doubters ahead of the T20 World Cup at home next month.

The Indian captain shared an unbeaten 81-run stand

with Dube as India made short work of the 200-run target set by New Zealand. Batting ahead of Hardik Pandya considering the left-right combination, Dube made an 18-ball 36.

"I was asked about Surya's form in a press conference not so long ago. That's when I said that he is the type of player, when he will show his form, the world will know what type of player he is. So, today he showed

Suryakumar Yadav, why he is the number one T20 batter.

I was asked about Surya's form in a press conference not so long ago. That's when I said that he is the type of player, when he will show his form the world will know **Shivam Dube**, India all-rounder

"So, I enjoyed a lot. And it felt really good to see him," said Dube.

Before Suryarum-Dube stand, Kishan took the game away from the opposition with a 32-ball 76 in his comeback series.

"Ishaan is one of the best left handers I have seen. He is called a small pocket blast in the dressing room. So, I think his batting is very strong. And he has shown that what he was doing in the domestic, he got out in the last match.

"But he knows what he can do. He showed it tonight," said Dube.

The southpaw said it was a batting beauty and the heavy dew made it tougher for the bowlers. Dube is also being used in the bowling department regularly. On Friday, he got the important wicket of Daryl Mitchell with a slower ball.

"Definitely, hard work has been put in. But it is important that the captain and the coach support me. They have backed me a lot."



India's captain Suryakumar Yadav (left) and New Zealand's captain Mitchell Santner at the toss before the start of the second T20I. PTI