

# AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

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

## Briefs

BENGALURU

**There is time for everything: DKS on row**

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Monday indicated that the leadership issue involving himself and CM Siddaramaiah has been discussed by the two leaders in the presence of Congress high command, they have arrived at a decision and that there was time for everything. Time will answer everything, he said. Shivakumar, who is also the state Congress President, asserted that he has the support of 140 ruling legislators, including CM Siddaramaiah. His remarks came on his return from New Delhi, where he had been campaigning for last couple of days.

JAIPUR

**ESZ notified around sanctuary**

The Central Government has notified an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) of 0 to 1 km around the Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary to protect the fragile Aravalli ecosystem. The ESZ covers parts of Udaipur, Pali and Rajasmand districts and will restrict mining and industrial activities in 94 adjoining villages. The move aims to conserve the sanctuary's biodiversity, forests, flora and wildlife. While mining, large industries, brick kilns and new hotels or resorts will be restricted, eco-friendly tourism and small, environment-friendly industries will be allowed. The final notification follows a draft issued in 2020 and review of public feedback by an expert committee.

GURUGRAM

**SUV owner runs over delivery agent**

The Gurugram Police has arrested a government Ayurveda doctor for allegedly running over a delivery worker multiple times with his SUV, leaving him critically injured, in Sector 93 here, police said on Monday. The horrific act, captured on a CCTV camera, was allegedly committed in a fit of rage as the victim would often park his motorcycle in front of the accused's Scorpio vehicle, causing him difficulty, an official said.

**BENGAL SIR | Top court says the process should be transparent and documents can be submitted at gram panchayat bhavans**

## SC to EC: Display lists of 'logical discrepancies'

NEW DELHI

Observing that the Special Intensive Revision process in West Bengal should be transparent and not cause inconvenience, the Supreme Court directed the Election Commission (EC) on Monday to display the names of those on the "logical discrepancies" list at gram panchayat bhavans and block offices, where documents and objections will also be submitted.

Logical discrepancies in progeny linking with the 2002 voter list include instances of a mismatch in the parent's name and the age difference between a voter and their parent being less than 15 years or more than 50 years.

Noting that 1.25 crore voters in the state figure on the "logical discrepancies" list, a three-judge bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Dipankar Datta and Joyimalya Bagchi directed that the offices for submitting documents and objections be set up within the panchayat bhavans or block offices and asked the West Bengal government to provide adequate manpower to the election authorities.

The court directed that the director general of police (DGP) of West Bengal shall be obligated to ensure that there is no law-and-order problem



BJP and TMC workers clash over the submission of Form 7, objecting to the inclusion of voters, as part of the SIR, in West Bengal's Murshidabad district on Monday

### Victory of Ma, Mati, Manush, says TMC

**Kolkata:** TMC on Monday welcomed the Supreme Court's order to the EC to make public the list of voters with logical discrepancies in SIR. Addressing a public rally, TMC national secretary Abhishek Banerjee mentioned that the issues, which were

raised by TMC in public, gets affirmative nod by the apex court. "This is the victory of 'Ma, Mati, Manush. We have defeated BJP in court and we will also defeat them in court in April. We have protested on streets, at Parliament for the sake of common

people. BJP's SIR game is over. On December 31, I went to Delhi with ten members. We conducted a meeting with the Chief Election Commissioner. It was suggested that the list of logical discrepancies be published.

—Aritra Singha

and that all the activities shall be completed smoothly.

The apex court was hearing pleas alleging arbitrariness and procedural irregularities in the ongoing SIR exercise in West Bengal, including those related to the "logical discrepancies" category.

The bench noted that notices have been issued that are broadly classified in three categories - mapped, unmapped and logical discrepancy.

The top court added that under the 'logical discrepancy' category, mismatches in

father's name or parents' age, and a difference in the age of the grandparents were noticed by the authorities.

The apex court said those likely to be affected by the ongoing SIR in West Bengal must be allowed to submit their documents or objections.

## Work will be 'revdi' handed by Centre, no longer a right: Cong

NEW DELHI

Opposing the new VB-G RAM G Act that has replaced the MGNREGA, Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi have claimed that work for the country's rural population will now become a "revdi", to be handed over to them as the government decides, and will no longer be a right.

Writing this in a letter to the rural folk, the Congress leaders have alleged that their right to work is being "stolen" even as states are being burdened financially through the new Act.

The letter written by Kharge and Gandhi is part of the Congress's countrywide "MGNREGA Bachao Sangram" demanding the restoration of the earlier law. The campaign was launched on January 10 and will continue till Feb 25. The Congress has asked all its state unit chiefs to disseminate the letter among the rural folk after getting it translated into all local languages.

The letter said 20 years ago, the Congress government led by then prime minister Manmohan Singh brought life to the constitutional right to work by enacting the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Since then, the MGNREGA has generated more than 180 crore days of work, created



Minister of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and Rural Development Shivraj Singh Chouhan addresses media on VB-G RAM G Act, 2025, in New Delhi on Monday

### Chouhan accuses Cong of spreading misinformation

**NEW DELHI:** Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Monday accused the Congress of spreading misinformation across the country regarding the VB-G RAM G Act (Viksit Bharat -- Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill, 2025), which was passed in the Winter Session of Parliament to replace the existing MGNREGA rural employment guarantee scheme. Chouhan attacked the Nehru-Gandhi family and the Congress leadership of deliberate falsehood. "I would like to tell Rahul Gandhi ji and Mallikarjun Kharge ji, that by spreading misinformation about the VB-G RAM G, they are not strengthening but rather weakening the Congress," he said. Stating that the VB-G RAM G Act was an improvement over MGNREGA, Chouhan added that "the proof is that we spent around Rs 9 lakh crore while the UPA govt had spent around Rs 2 lakh crore" on the scheme.

—Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar

almost 10 crore assets like village tanks and roads, and strengthened the panchayati raj system by empowering gram panchayats to decide on

village-level projects, it said. "During crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, it was the lifeline of the rural Indian economy," the letter said.

## Fresh buzz over Nitish son's political plunge

PATNA

Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar's son, Nishant Kumar, has kept everybody guessing when he will take a plunge into the political field, although there have been some clear indications about it emanating from time to time.

The latest trigger for speculation stemmed from reports about Nishant's "keen interest" in development activities being undertaken in Bakhtiyarpur near Patna. In Bakhtiyarpur, Nitish Kumar was born and spent his childhood. Nishant had gone to Bakhtiyarpur to participate in a private function after Makar Sankranti. Last month, JD (U) working president Sanjay Kumar Jha said that "all party workers and supporters wanted Nishant to work for

the party.

Meanwhile, state JD (U) president Umesh Kushwaha while echoing Jha's views said that all party leaders and workers wanted Nishant to enter mainstream politics. The party believes that Nishant is a highly educated, qualified and capable young man who can effectively carry forward Nitish's ideology of 'development with justice', he added.

"Party workers want Nishant to play a role in carrying forward the blueprint for Bihar's development and the ideological foundation laid by Nitish Kumar. Our party sees him as a natural and worthy successor", he added. He said that Nishant had to take a final decision on the matter, as he was completely free and capable of making his own decision on his future.

## Nabin, 45, elected unopposed, BJP gets youngest president

NEW DELHI

Five-time Bihar MLA Nitin Nabin was on Monday elected unopposed as the BJP national president, the youngest ever to occupy the top party post at a time when the saffron party seeks to further expand its footprint with key state elections around the corner.

Nabin, 45, emerged as the sole candidate for the post with PM Narendra Modi and other BJP leaders filing nomination papers in his support. Nabin will be formally declared as BJP president on Tuesday signalling a generational shift in its top organizational leadership and a new era in the party, which was founded in 1980, the same year he was born.

Earlier in the day, BJP



BJP President JP Nadda, Union Ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadkari and Kiren Rijiju proposing the name of Nitin Nabin for BJP chief at party headquarters in New Delhi on Monday

national president JP Nadda and several union ministers, including Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah and Nitin Gadkari, accompanied Nabin to the office of BJP's national returning officer and MP K Laxman for the filing of his nomination.

A former Bihar minister and five-term MLA, Nabin was in December 2025 picked by the BJP as its new national working president and his formal election to the post of president had thereafter seemed only a matter of time.

## Rahul accuses BJP of centralising power

KOCHI

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday accused the RSS and the BJP of attempting to centralise power, while asserting that his party believes in decentralisation and strengthening grassroots democracy.

Speaking at a Mahapanchayat of newly elected Congress local body members here, he said the grand old party brought the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments to empower the three-tier Panchayati Raj system.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha also alleged that the NDA government was "attacking" the MGNREGA because it was implemented through local self-government institutions.

He stressed that protecting the Constitution also meant protecting decentralised governance at the grassroots level. The basic principle of democracy was that votes are the voice of citizens and that this voice must be protected, he added.

Drawing a contrast, Gandhi said the BJP and RSS stood for centralisation, while the Congress stood for decentralisation. "They want compliance from people for India, not the voice of the people of India," he said.

Referring to his interaction with veteran Malayalam writer M Leelavathy at an award function, Gandhi said the 98-year-old author talked about "culture of silence".

Accusing the BJP and RSS, he alleged that their ideological attack was aimed at enforcing silence.

## Sikh guru remark row: SAD seeks action against Atishi

CHANDIGARH

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief spokesman Arshdeep Singh Kler on Monday demanded an independent probe into what he alleged was a criminal conspiracy by the Punjab police to protect AAP's Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly, Atishi Marlena, who is accused of making derogatory remarks against Sikh Gurus.

Addressing a press conference here, Kler alleged that Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann chose to shield Atishi instead of seeking action against her. He claimed the Jalandhar police commis-

sionerate was used to cover up the matter by obtaining a report from the state Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL), Mohali, stating that the video in which Atishi allegedly made the remarks had been tampered with.

Kler said this claim was exposed after the Delhi Speaker presented a report asserting that the video was genuine and not edited. He demanded an independent probe into how evidence in a case related to sacrilege was allegedly sought to be erased.

Questioning the Punjab police's role, Kler asked what jurisdiction it had as the incident took place in Delhi.

## Minor girl ends life in Bihar, row erupts

**Patna:** Amid the outrage over the death of a NEET aspirant following suspected sexual assault in Patna, the alleged suicide of a minor girl living in another hostel in the city has come to light, an official said on Monday. Opposition parties criticised the government for the two deaths, which happened on the same day, and demanded that Chief Minister Nitish Kumar immediately postpone his public outreach programme 'Samridhi Yatra', while calling for a CBI probe.

## J&K: Paratrooper succumbs to injuries

JAMMU

A paratrooper, who was critically injured in gunfight with terrorists, succumbed to his injuries on Monday, while the ongoing search operation uncovered a suspected terror hideout packed with rations for winter in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district, officials said.

The operation was launched in Sonnar village near Mandral-Singhpura in the Chatroo belt on Sunday, where an encounter broke out between the forces and terror-



A security officer during a search operation to track down and neutralise terrorists, in Kishtwar district, Jammu and Kashmir, on Monday

ists in which eight soldiers sustained injuries, primarily due to splinter from a sudden grenade attack.

The operation was suspended late Sunday night and

### Republic Day parade

## Construction workers to start-up chiefs, 10k spl guests

NEW DELHI

For the first time, the Centre has invited nearly 10,000 "special guests" from across the country to witness the 77th Republic Day Parade at Kartavya Path on January 26. The guest list is merit-based and includes individuals who have made exemplary contributions to income generation, employment creation and nation-building.

According to the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the invitees come from 53 different categories and include innovators, researchers, start-

up founders, entrepreneurs, self-help group members and top performers under various government initiatives. The special guests will be given prominent seating arrangements during the parade.

The MoD said arrangements have also been made for these guests to visit key landmarks in Delhi, including the National War Memorial and the PM Sangrahalaya, the museum dedicated to India's prime ministers. They will also get an opportunity to interact with ministers related to their respective fields of work.

An important feature of the initiative is the inclusion of people whose

contributions often go unnoticed. These include construction workers from the Border Roads Organisation, water warriors under the National Mission for Clean Ganga, and workers involved in building Kartavya Bhawan and the Common Central Secretariat complex.

The government has also invited beneficiaries of key welfare schemes, including unorganised sector workers under PM Shramyogi Maandhan Yojana, rural housing beneficiaries under PM Awaas Yojana (Grameen), and farmers covered under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

### J&K woman officer to command all-male CRPF marching contingent

**New Delhi:** Simran Bala, a 26-year-old CRPF Assistant Commandant hailing from J&K, will lead an all-male contingent of her force during the Republic Day parade at Kartavya Path in Delhi on January 26, officials said on Monday. While there have been instances when women Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) officers commanded various Republic Day contingents, this is the first time that a lady officer will command a party of more than 140 male personnel during the annual national event, the officials told PTI. Bala hails from Rajouri in Jammu and Kashmir and is the first female from the district to join the country's largest paramilitary force in the officer rank.





## The accused who took payment by making fake bills of the company was arrested

Chandauli

In the fraud case, Mughalsarai police has arrested an accused who is accused of taking payment from the company by making fake bills and sending forged bills through e-mail. According to the information received, the wanted accused, 46-year-old Francis E, son of Ellis, resident of Shivananda Layout JJ Nagar, Bangalore City, Karnataka has been arrested by the Mughalsarai police team under the leadership of Inspector-in-charge Santosh Singh. The above accused fraudulently prepared a forged bill and using it as genuine, sent the bill through e-mail through the company and received payment from the concerned company. When Prem Narayan Rai, resident of Mughalsarai, owner of Plaza Road Lines and Plaza Logistics, came to know that payment was being taken from the company by fraudulently



preparing fake documents. As soon as the information was received, a complaint was lodged at the Mughalsarai police station and a case was registered. During interrogation by the police, the accused told that he was appointed as the regional manager in South India at Plaza Logistics Pvt. Ltd, Mughalsarai. During his appointment, he along with one of his colleagues, Janmejy Nayak, prepared forged bills and used them as real ones and kept receiving payment by sending e-mails to the company. To take the company into confidence, he used to make some payments through UPI and the rest told the company that he had

not yet received the remaining payment. The accused told that all the payments from Plaza Logistics have been sent to the SBI account of Janmenjay Nayak wife. When the owner of the company asked whether the payment was made in the name of only one vendor, he lied to the company that this vendor provides good facilities at a cheap rate. Throughout the episode, Janmenjay Nayak lived with me and received money from his wife's account. A case was registered against the accused under sections 318(4), 319(2), 338, 336(3), 340(2), 316(2) BNS. Manoj Tiwari outpost in-charge town, Bunty Singh was in the arresting team.

## Jalkal surcharge waived on residential and mixed buildings

Varanasi

Surcharge of Municipal Corporation Jalkal A 100% waiver has been granted. Residential and mixed-use buildings in the city will benefit from this. Consequently, until March 31st, not a single rupee surcharge will be levied on the old water tax. However, commercial buildings have been excluded from the exemption. In the general session of the corporation house held on Monday in the Town Hall at Maidagin under the chairmanship of Mayor Ashok Kumar Tiwari, the mayor ordered to issue the revised bill by the end of this month. This issue was raised in the house under section-91 (2) of the Municipal Corporation Act. Councilor Suresh Kumar Chaurasia raised the issue of integrated bills and said that the Jalkal department had issued the revised bills without any prior notice. However, commercial buildings are excluded from the scope of exemption. In the general session of the Municipal Corporation House, chaired by Mayor Ashok Kumar Tiwari, held on Monday at the Town Hall in Maidagin, the Mayor ordered the issuance of revised bills by the end of this month. Councilor Suresh Kumar Chaurasia raised the issue of unified bills under Section 91 (2) of the Municipal Corporation Act. He stated that the Jalkal Department



had sent bills containing outstanding surcharges for several years without prior notice. He pointed out that the Jalkal Department had previously provided a 100 percent rebate on surcharges under the annual lump sum settlement scheme. This time, the Corporation had sent unified bills for water tax, sewer tax and house tax. Furthermore, surcharges for several years had been added without notice. He suggested waiving the surcharge on water tax, as previously, which the House unanimously accepted. This surcharge waiver provided significant relief to defaulters. In the House, Deputy Chairman Narsingh Das raised the issue of taxes on Banaras Hindu University (BHU). He argued that since BHU has its own water and sewage treatment plants, it should not be charged. The issue of tax was raised. He argued that since BHU has its own water and sewage treatment plant, it is not appropriate to levy water and sewer tax on them. The House directed the Municipal Commissioner to

revise the water tax, sewer tax and interest from the bills. The House agreed to the proposal of the Deputy Speaker and decided to issue revised bills with interest waived. It was also agreed to provide the facility of payment in installments. The House also agreed to his proposal to adjust the 'deceptive' double connections given under the Amrit Jal Mission. **Protecting tourists visiting Kashi from fraud Rate** Board will save youln view of the large influx of tourists, Councilor Amresh Kumar stated that shopkeepers from Maidagin to Assi are charging exorbitant prices. Therefore, it will now be mandatory to display rate boards at all food stalls. The House approved this. It was also decided to seriously consider building a government-run dharamshala with 400-500 rooms within a two-kilometer radius of the Baba Vishwanath Temple so that tourists don't have to sleep in the open. The whole family of the aer and the pir family.

## Mother and Daughter Beaten for Asking for Loaned Money; Case Registered

**Mauaima:** A mother and daughter were beaten with sticks and rods and injured for asking for money they had loaned. A case has been registered against five people. Khushboo, daughter of Suresh Kumar, a resident of Chakshyam village in the area, said that her neighbors had borrowed ten thousand rupees from her. When she asked for the money back, they beat her. When she informed the police via Dial 112, and they arrived, all the accused fled. Khushboo alleges that she and her mother were going to the police station when, near the Chauhan Ka Pura canal, the opposing party surrounded them, beat them with sticks and rods, and threatened to kill them. Khushboo has registered a case at the Mauaima police station against Virendra Kumar, Rajaram, Virendra's wife (name unknown), Virendra's brother-in-law (name unknown), and Virendra's father-in-law (name unknown), all residents of Malkhanpur.

## Dalit woman's boundary wall demolished, she was beaten and assaulted; case registered under SC/ST Act

**Mauaima:** Sita Devi, wife of the late Jagdish Kumar, a resident of Dhanpari ka Pura Gadiyani village in the Mauaima police station area, alleges that she was constructing a boundary wall for her house. She claims that the accused, acting in concert, trespassed onto her property, demolished the wall, hurled caste-based abuses at her, and then beat and assaulted her, also threatening to kill her. Sita Devi has filed a case against Vijay Bahadur Patel, Suresh Patel, Ramesh Patel, Sunil Patel, and Sandeep Patel under the SC/ST Act at the Mauaima police station.

# 11th Meeting of Banke Bihari Temple High Powered Management Committee Held

Mathura

The 11th meeting of the High Powered Management Committee of Thakur Banke Bihari Temple, Vrindavan Mathura was held at the Laxman Shaheed Memorial Building auditorium under the chairmanship of retired Allahabad High Court Justice Ashok Kumar. During the meeting, detailed discussions were held on several important issues including the internal structural audit report received from IIT Roorkee, matters related to Dehri worship, progress on property details received from Kota



(Rajasthan), completion of a semi-constructed site measuring 357 square yards, security arrangements at Nidhivan and approval of contracts for various temple Properties. The com-

mittee also reviewed progress reports on the audit being conducted by chartered accountants, appointment of a senior assistant accounts officer, installation of railings inside



the temple under CSR funds from major banks, improvement of cleanliness arrangements with support from Canara Bank and proposals related to HDFC Bank regard-

ing CSR initiatives such as installation of 200 solar street lights in the Banke Bihari Temple corridor. Additional discussions included proposals for live streaming by media agen-

cies, beautification of other temple properties, progress of conservation work by the Archaeological Survey of India, survey reports by the Municipal Corporation at Lalita Kund (Nidhivan), regulation of e-rickshaws and arrangements for sweet water supply and uninterrupted water for RO systems in the temple premises. Several dignitaries were present in the meeting, including retired judges, district administration officials, senior police officials, municipal corporation officers, representatives of the Archaeological Survey of India, and members of various temple service Groups.

## Flower market will be free for farmers, the game of middlemen will end

Varanasi

**Municipal Corporation** After freeing the "Kisan Phool Mandi" located on the Maldahiya-Inglesia Line from illegal occupation, a major decision has been taken in the interest of farmers. Now, flower sellers and farmers will no longer have to beg for help from middlemen or illegal extortionists. The Municipal Corporation has appealed to farmers to enter into contracts directly with the corporation and secure their space legally. Under this new system, allotment of flowers in the flower market is completely free for poor farmers. Middlemen are being completely eliminated and contracts are being made directly between the corporation and farmers. The Municipal Corporation Deputy Tehsildar personally distributes garlands and flowers. We are contacting vendors and farmers and connecting them to this transparent process. Preparations are underway to keep it. Middlemen are being completely eliminated and contracts are being made directly between the corporation and the farmers. The Deputy Tehsildar of the Municipal Corporation himself is contacting garland-



flower sellers and farmers and connecting them with this transparent process. This will give about 500 farmers and small traders the right to exploitation-free trade. This land belongs to the Defence Estate Department and is under the management of the corporation. The corporation clarified that any activity against the rules will not be tolerated in the market premises. If in future anyone tries to illegally occupy this government land or tries to intimidate the farmers, strict legal action will be taken against him and an FIR will be registered. Municipal Commissioner Himanshu Nagpal stated that this initiative was taken to root out the illegal extortion that previously occurred in the market. Farmers should contact the corporation directly and obtain legal recognition by signing contracts. This will allow them to conduct their business without fear and

strengthen the corporation system. Meanwhile, Assistant Municipal Commissioner Anil Yadav appealed to farmers to complete the contract process as soon as possible for their own safety and legal recognition. After the contract is signed, no farmer will be allowed to sign. If in future anyone tries to illegally occupy this government land or tries to intimidate the farmers, strict legal action will be taken against him and an FIR will be registered. Municipal Commissioner Himanshu Nagpal stated that this initiative was taken to root out the illegal extortion that previously occurred in the market. Farmers should contact the corporation directly and obtain legal recognition by signing contracts. This will allow them to conduct their business without fear and strengthen the corporation system.

# After returning to power, work will be done to recruit the youth again in the army- Manoj Singh

Chandauli

Former Syedaraja MLA Manoj Singh W said that youth are the future of the country and the promises made with the future of the country should never be forgotten. There was a promise to the youth of the race in Dhanapur, which was postponed due to inclement weather, which is being fulfilled today. The zeal and enthusiasm of the youth gathered at Dhanapur sports ground showed that they just need an opportunity, which the government has failed to provide. The public representatives to whom these youth and their families voted and gave them the power of power, failed



to provide them the opportunity to serve the country. Former MLA Manoj Singh W said these things while addressing the race program organized at Amarveer Inter College, Dhanapur. He said that the fight being fought for the youth will continue in future also. He assured that after returning to power, work will be

done to get the youth recruited in the army again, so that the youth can fulfill their dream of joining the army. Providing better education and employment to the youth is a priority. During this, there were six rounds of race each in boys and girls category. Manoj Singh W honored Babulal of Chanhata, who stood

first in the said competition, by giving him a motorcycle and Manisha Rai of Jamunipur, who stood first in the girls' category with a scooter. Six boys and six girls were given bicycles. Apart from this, shields, medals and cash were awarded to the candidates who stood second and third. Along with this, the former

MLA assured the youth that next year a race competition will be organized again, in which 25 boys and girls will be provided bicycles and five boys and girls each will be provided motorcycles. Along with this, four-wheeler vehicles will be provided to the boys and girls who come first in the race. On this occasion, Ramjanam Yadav, Ramesh Yadav, Meraj Khan Laddu, Shahalam Khan, Janaki Yadav, Sahre Alam Khan, Ramdhani Yadav, Sandeep Gupta, Akhilesh Singh, Suryapal Singh, Rajneesh Singh, Suresh Yadav, Ramdulare Kanojia, Mahngur Ram etc. were present. Conducted by Atif Khan.



# Shankaracharya Protocol: Officials' Response: No Provision Under Supreme Court Order

## The Mela administration and district administration held a joint press conference on Monday

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** The Mela administration and district administration held a joint press conference on Monday to clarify the situation regarding the allegations made by Swami Avimukteshwaranand. Officials stated that there is no provision to provide Swami Avimukteshwaranand with the protocol of a Shankaracharya as per the Supreme Court's order. Previously, he was not provided with any special facilities as a Shankaracharya during the Magh Mela either. Divisional Commissioner Soumya Agarwal, Police Commissioner Jogendra Kumar, District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma, and Mela Officer Rishiraj were present at the press conference held in the auditorium of the Mela Authority office. The officials responded to the allegations made by the Shankaracharya point by point. Divisional Commissioner Soumya Agarwal explained that due to the excessive crowd at the Sangam ghat, he was stopped from proceeding further for security reasons. He was repeatedly requested to alight from his chariot and go



for the holy dip on foot, but he refused. If he had gone to the ghat, a stampede could have occurred, therefore, he was not given permission. District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma said that the administration is following the order passed by the Supreme Court on October 14, 2022. Providing

any special facilities contrary to this would be a violation of the court's order. Mela Officer Rishiraj clarified that Swami Avimukteshwaranand has never been given the protocol of a Shankaracharya, nor has a camp been allotted to him in the Mela as a Shankaracharya. He stated that the path of devotees was

blocked for three hours, which created a tense situation. Police Commissioner Jogendra Kumar said that there was considerable pressure exerted for a long time regarding his refusal to go on foot, which led to a struggle. To avoid a stampede, some people were separated from the crowd. He said that no one was beaten

by the police and CCTV footage is available. The safety of millions of devotees is paramount, and no risk can be taken to provide a VIP bath to anyone. Chaos during the press conference. During the press conference, officials started leaving while the media was asking questions, which angered

the journalists and led to a commotion. Seeing the situation escalating, the officials returned after a short while and answered the journalists' questions. However, the officials appeared to evade the tough questions by saying they would conduct an investigation.

## Enter Prayagraj Junction from both sides now, all restrictions lifted

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** Following the conclusion of the Mauni Amavasya bathing festival, the railway administration has lifted all restrictions imposed at the city's stations until further notice. This has been implemented with immediate effect. Following this decision, passenger movement has resumed from both sides of Prayagraj Junction. A day before the Mauni Amavasya bathing festival, the Prayagraj divi-



sion of North Central Railway had imposed several restrictions at stations including Prayagraj Junction, Prayagraj Chhivki, Subedarganj, and Naini Junction. Due to the implementation of single-direction entry at these stations, entry from one side and exit from the other had been in effect since January 17th. These restrictions were supposed to remain in place until January 20th. This was causing considerable inconvenience to passengers. At Prayagraj

Junction, entry was allowed from the city side and exit from the Civil Lines side. This forced passengers to take a long detour. However, all restrictions have now been lifted. Regarding this, Amit Kumar Singh, PRO of the Prayagraj division, said that there is now normal passenger movement at the stations. Therefore, the restrictions have been lifted with immediate effect. He added that if the crowd increases, necessary restrictions may be reimposed.

**Woollen Clothes Distributed to Elderly at Old Age Home**

Auraiya

Nearly five dozen elderly residents of Madhav Happy Old Age Home, located in Aaneapur area of Auraiya city, were provided with woollen clothes to protect them from the ongoing cold wave. Jackets and sweaters were distributed as part of a welfare initiative aimed at ensuring the well-being of senior citizens.

## Nandganj Police Take Major Action: Two Notorious Criminals Arrested with Illegal Pistols and Ammunition



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Ghazipur.** The Nandganj police station of the district arrested two accused persons with two country-made pistols of .315 bore and two live cartridges of .315 bore. In a campaign against crime and criminals, on January 18, 2026, Sub-Inspector Santosh Kumar Yadav, along with his team, arrested two accused persons, Rahul Dubey alias Shyam Narayan Dubey son of Kedar Dubey and Chandrashekhar Chauhan son of Awadh Narayan Chauhan, near the Mudarbha canal bridge during a checking operation

based on information from a confidential informant. They were found in possession of one country-made pistol of .315 bore and one live cartridge of .315 bore each. More than a dozen cases under various sections have been registered against them in Ghazipur district and several other districts. In this regard, a case has been registered at the local police station under FIR No. 21/2026, Section 3/25 of the Arms Act, and further legal action is being taken. The police team that made the arrest included Sub-Inspector Santosh Kumar Yadav and his team.

## Grand Display of Unity Among Advocates at Munsif Court Complex, Newly Elected Office Bearers Take Oath



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Ghazipur.** A unique scene of dignity, joy, and unity among advocates was witnessed at the Mohammadabad Munsif Court complex in the district when the oath-taking ceremony of the newly elected office bearers of the Civil Bar Association for the year 2026 was held in a highly dignified atmosphere. This program, adorned with a blend of judicial decorum, social concerns, and respect for advocates, became memorable for all those present. The ceremony was graced by the presence of the Honorable Dharmendra Kumar Pandey

(District and Sessions Judge, Ghazipur) as the chief guest and the Honorable Nutan Dwivedi (Chief Judicial Magistrate, Ghazipur) as the special guest. Their presence, along with that of renowned social worker Meera Rai and a large number of advocates, further enhanced the dignity of the ceremony. The program commenced with the lighting of a lamp before the image of Goddess Saraswati, which filled the entire complex with positivity and energy. Following this, the guests were warmly welcomed with shawls and garlands. The program was effectively conducted by advocate Satyendra



Kumar Rai, while senior advocate Prem Prakash Rai presided over the ceremony. During the oath-taking ceremony, the newly elected office bearers of the Civil Bar Association—President Subhash Chandra Singh Yadav, Vice President Shyama Pandey, Secretary Saurabh Sahay, Joint Secretary Shivanand Singh, and Treasurer Sheikh Irshad Alam Mehndi—were administered the oath of office and secrecy by the chief guest. All the office bearers pledged to protect the interests of the advocates, uphold judicial values, and develop the Bar Association into a strong

platform.

In their addresses, the guests described the advocates as the strong backbone of the justice system and urged the newly elected team to work with impartiality, dedication, and mutual cooperation. At the conclusion of the ceremony, President Prem Prakash Rai expressed his gratitude to all the guests, advocates, and the assembled gathering. This oath-taking ceremony, full of harmony, trust, and renewed enthusiasm, conveyed a message of a new beginning towards a bright and strong future for the Civil Bar Association.



## Editorial

## India's reliance on imported technology despite its strong indigenous

It delivered two Ming-class submarines to Bangladesh in 2017, gifted a P625 frigate to Sri Lanka in 2019, and committed to exporting Yuan-class submarines to Thailand. Although the Thai deal encountered difficulties when Germany refused to supply key propulsion components. Thailand decided to proceed with the acquisition, underscoring China's persistence in maintaining its naval export commitments. Additionally, Pakistan is set to acquire at least eight Hangor-class submarines and other naval equipment from Beijing, further enhancing China's presence in the region. India has increasingly aligned itself with Western naval powers to address maritime challenges through collaborative efforts. France was among its earliest Western partners, and the countries' cooperation has grown stronger over time. India also participates in joint maritime missions with European nations and European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) initiatives such as Operation Atlanta and Aspides. Furthermore, India contributes to significant maritime security dialogues such as the Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP) and Enhancing Security Cooperation In And With Asia (ESIWA). India's 2023 inclusion in the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), led by the US Central Command, underscores its dedication to enhancing collaborative security in the western Indian Ocean. The IFC-IOR exemplifies India's commitment to collective security, even though it remains a preliminary step toward a more robust maritime security framework. Advancing to the next level will require India to engage in the technically complex task of real-time information sharing through secure legal frameworks beyond Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT). The Quad's Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative highlights the challenges in achieving seamless data-sharing capabilities. To counter hybrid threats and protect critical infrastructure, India must prioritise sharing vital intelligence and deploying unmanned systems for coordinated surveillance. Strengthening such partnerships will bolster India's naval capabilities and contribute to broader maritime security across the Indian Ocean Region. The commissioning of new naval platforms marks a significant milestone for India but also highlights persistent challenges, particularly in achieving technological self-reliance in engine manufacturing. Although the INS Surat, INS Nilgiri, and INS Vagsheer were designed by India's Warship Design Bureau and built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited, their engines were procured from foreign manufacturers, exposing a critical dependence on external sources. INS Surat, the fourth and final ship of the P15B Guided Missile Destroyer Project, employs a Combined Gas Turbine and Gas Turbine (COGAG) propulsion system. This system uses Me6E and DT-59 reversible engines sourced from Ukraine's Zorya Mashproekt, a key supplier for India's frontline warships. Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, India has continued to rely on Zorya, underscoring the critical nature of this dependence. To secure the supply chain, Bharat Forge acquired a 51 per cent stake in Zorya's India arm in 2023. Similarly, INS Nilgiri, the first ship of the P17A Stealth Frigate Project, launched in 2019, uses a Combined Diesel and Gas (CODAG) propulsion system. This system incorporates LM2500 engines from General Electric in the US and MAN diesel engines from Germany, further emphasising India's reliance on imported technology despite its strong indigenous design capabilities. INS Vagsheer, the sixth and final submarine of the P75 Scorpene project developed in collaboration with France, also depends on



With tax revenue growth slowing in the last few months, the possibility of an upside earlier expected on the revenue front may be receding rapidly. Revenue expenditure is also rising at a rate higher than the budgeted 6 per cent. If the fiscal deficit target of 4.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) has to be met for 2024-25, which the government must in view of the uncertainties and challenges emerging both domestically and globally, the finance ministry may see in the composition of the current year's capex a sliver of hope. The finance ministry should not spend ~0.83 trillion for equity infusion into BSNL. Instead, it should ask the telephone company to raise resources from the market. The ministry should also desist from spending the remaining ~0.6 trillion earmarked for capital allocation to new schemes. Saving about ~1.43 trillion (a little less than half a percent of GDP) will be a cushion against other expenditure slippages and revenue shortfall. Not too many tears would be shed for a squeeze on capex if the hit is primarily on infusing equity into a state-owned enterprise and on new schemes that are yet to be announced. Quite ironically, a slowdown in the government's capex may well turn out to be an opportunity.

capital expenditure (capex) continues to be a cause for concern. Of course, the extent of its decline has reduced somewhat — from 35 per cent at the end of the

first quarter of the current financial year to 15 per cent at the end of six months. But the latest number for the April-November 2024-25 period shows that the Union government's capex was still 12 per cent lower than what it was in the same period of 2023-24. Instead of aiming for the targeted 17 per cent growth to ~11.11 trillion in capex for 2024-25, the government will have to strive hard to at least cross the figure of ~9.48 trillion reached last year. What has led to this decline? A widely held view is that the seven-phase general elections, which began on April 19 and ended on June 1 last year, caused a slowdown in capex. But if that indeed is the reason, the decline in capex in the first quarter should have been reversed in the second quarter of 2024-25. And certainly, the first two months of the third quarter should have raised the trajectory of capex growth to a higher level. There has been some improvement, but a 12 per cent decline in the April-November 2024-25 period is no comfort. Look at the slightly different trajectory seen in the Union government's revenue expenditure growth during the same period. The Budget for 2024-25 had projected a rise of over 6 per cent to ~37.1 trillion in revenue expenditure. At the end of June 2024, the growth was just about 2 per cent, but it has been rising since then, reaching 4.2 per cent by the end of the first six months of 2024-25 and climbing even higher to 7.8 per cent during April-

November 2024-25. So, if revenue expenditure has gained momentum, why has capex failed to follow suit? A close analysis of the government's capex numbers presents an interesting picture. Over 90 per cent of the Centre's total capex during 2024-25 was accounted for by just six sectors — roads, railways, defence, telecom, transfer to states and new schemes. Their share in total capex in 2023-24 was a little less at 87 per cent. But the 12 per cent decline in the first eight months of 2024-25 is primarily the result of a marked slowdown in only two of these six areas — roads and defence, which accounted for over 40 per cent of the total capex outlay for 2024-25. Capex on the construction of roads and highways fell by 16 per cent, while defence saw a decline of 15 per cent. This is serious and has worrying implications for both infrastructure and defence. The problem of slowing expenditure in these two areas should not have been difficult to fix. Either effective monitoring of spending is lacking, or there are serious problems with project execution, reflecting the poor expenditure-absorbing capacity of these two sectors. This is borne out by a relatively good performance of the Indian Railways, which accounts for over 22 per cent of this year's capex. At ~1.68 trillion, the Indian Railways' capex is just about 1 per cent lower than its spending during April-November 2023. With regard to the transfer of special assistance as loans to states

for their capex and additional central assistance for their externally aided projects, the Union government's performance was slightly better. In the April-November 2024-25 period, these transfers rose by about 5 per cent, although much lower than the budgeted increase of 41 per cent.

In contrast, such transfers during the entire 2023-24 had risen sharply by about 24 per cent to ~1.15 trillion. It appears that these transfers will take a hit in the current year and for the first time since this initiative to help states boost their capex was undertaken a couple of years ago. Significantly, this has not yet adversely impacted the states in a big way. The capex of 25 states (accounting for 95 per cent of all the states' and Union territories' total capex budget) has risen by just about 1 per cent in the April-November 2024-25 period, although states like Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Mizoram, Odisha, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal saw their capex fall by varying margins. Eventually, however, this will have an adverse impact on the states' capex programme and its growth-enhancing effect. There are two more sectors that account for another 13 per cent of the Centre's capital expenditure budget. But they bring out an intriguing aspect of why the government's capex has been slowing. They suffer from a peculiar problem, which has nothing to do with either the relevant sectors' expenditure-

absorbing capacity or the absence of effective expenditure monitoring. The bulk of the capex under telecommunications was meant for infusing equity into state-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd, or BSNL. Of the total capex of ~0.84 trillion, the proposed amount for BSNL's equity infusion accounted for as much as ~0.83 trillion.

Under this head in the first eight months of 2024-25 is only 6 per cent of what has been budgeted. In other words, a decision to transfer the equity amount promised to BSNL would increase the government's capex by a significant margin. Why this money has not been transferred is puzzling.

Last year, against a budgeted BSNL equity infusion of ~0.53 trillion, the actual infusion was higher at ~0.65 trillion. This year, no action on this front even after eight months is a puzzle as this failure also contributes significantly to the decline in the Centre's capex. More importantly, the Budget for 2024-25 had allocated a significant amount of ~0.66 trillion for capex on central sector schemes and projects. Of this, a large chunk, estimated at ~0.62 trillion, was earmarked for new schemes that the government would announce during the year. However, in the first eight months of the current year, only 4 per cent of that total outlay has been used up, leaving ~0.63 trillion yet to be spent. It is likely that the government.

## Will Israel-Hamas Ceasefire Really Lead To Peace?

On January 20, 1981, on the day Ronald Reagan took over as the new US president, Iran freed 52 American hostages it had been holding for over a year. That projected Reagan as a strong leader sending a powerful signal to US allies and its foes. His predecessor, Jimmy Carter, did all the negotiations and tried his best to have the hostages released while he was still the president. But Tehran would not let him take the glory. Forty-four years on, Donald Trump is taking the credit for the Gaza ceasefire deal, which will come into effect a day before his inauguration, cementing his reputation as a tough leader. Biden can say that the deal happened under his watch. But there is no doubt that it was Trump whose pressure led to achieve the goal. He declared on his social media platform Truth Social: "This EPIC ceasefire agreement could have only happened as a result of our Historic Victory in November, as it signalled to the entire World that my

Administration would seek Peace and negotiate deals to ensure the safety of all Americans, and our Allies." Days after he threatened that there better be a Gaza deal by his January 20 inauguration or "all hell would break out", his special envoy to the Middle East, Steven Witkoff, landed in Tel Aviv last Saturday. It was the Sabbath, the day of rest for Jews. But Witkoff insisted on meeting the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, that day. At their meeting, he conveyed Trump's message that the incoming President of the United States wanted to end the Gaza war and demanded that a ceasefire agreement be signed immediately. The format of the three-stage deal announced on Wednesday was proposed by Biden in May last year and was later also endorsed by the UN Security Council. But both Hamas and Israel kept dragging the negotiations over it. In Israel, Netanyahu refused to give any concessions to Hamas and continued with his brute military operation in Gaza.

## These proposals figured not only in the budget

**Extension** of the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for solar energy value chain, increased allocation towards PM Suryaghar Muft Bijlee Yojana, and greater thrust to distribution and transmission infrastructure are likely to be the key features of the upcoming Budget, as far as the energy sector is concerned. Sources said these proposals figured not only in the budget wish lists of the industry, but also in the respective recommendations from the ministries of power and renewable energy to the finance ministry, ahead of the Budget. "Given the success of PM Suryaghar scheme with almost 600,000 installations in just nine months since its launch, one could probably see additional allocation to target more households," said Ashwin Jacob, partner at Deloitte India. "As far as evacuation of power from offshore wind projects is concerned, we would want to see the VGF or budgetary support to continue or get enhanced," he added. "We hope to see a decisive increase in funding to accelerate the green energy transition. Priorities must include scaling renewable energy by addressing grid and transmission challenges, advancing Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) for grid stability and reliable power, doubling energy efficiency and digitalizing the energy sector through AI, smart meters, and data-driven solutions. Streamlining rooftop solar programs with simplified approvals, financing, and monitoring is equally vital," said Saurabh Kumar, Vice President — India, Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP). Sharat Goyal, CEO of Impact Infracap also expects the government to remove restrictions on state wise caps on roof top capacity for net-metering for industrial establishments. "Further, adoption of batteries to substitute use of diesel generators for back-up power should receive incentives and policy support

given their role in reducing dependence on imports," he said. While the government is increasingly working towards enhancing the country's RE capacity, the distribution and transmission infrastructure for its evacuation still needs to be strengthened. With the peak demand for power growing at a rate of 8-9% annually, the industry is looking forward to strengthening of climate resilient infrastructure augmentation. "One can expect new allocations towards augmentation of power distribution infrastructure, especially in high density/ urban load centres, in view of the sharp rise in peak demand over the last few years," said Anujesh Dwivedi, Partner at Deloitte India. He noted that there may be some allocation towards supporting the preparatory work especially on the listing of power utilities, or some incentive mechanism for promoting initiatives on private sector participation or listing of utilities at the state level because they are increasingly being seen as the much needed structural reforms the sector needs. The industry is optimistic of a wider coverage of the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme by including smart metering in infrastructure definition.

"This would direct more financing for a sector which seeks to bring down India's transmission and distribution losses to 12% and improve recovery for state utilities," Goyal said. Goyal also noted that power transmission despite significant potential has not seen any notable monetisation events which could address the latent investor demand. "Government should announce a time-bound privatisation programme for assets owned by PGCIL," he said. The sector also sees the PLI scheme for solar value chain to continue with possible reduction in the duty structures for solar equipment. Jacob highlighted.

## Government of India has categorically rejected the allegation

In a strongly worded statement, Government of India has condemned and refuted the findings of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom report as "biased and politically motivated, and continuation of persistent attempts to misrepresent isolated incidents and cast aspersions on India's vibrant multicultural society which reflects USCIRF's deliberate agenda rather than a genuine concern for religious freedom". Though this is not the first time such reports have painted India as a coun-

try highly intolerant of its religious minorities, the 2025 report is the first time a recommendation has been made for India to be designated as "country of particular concern". It alleges that minorities in India are facing 'deteriorating treatment'. Fifteen other countries, including Afghanistan, Russia, China, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, have been found to be treating their respective minorities badly. Three aspects of this report should be of concern to New Delhi, and it should be brought to the attention of

those the report is supposedly submitted to. The first is the report's mention of the assassination of separatist Sikh elements in Canada posing as members of the Sikh religious community and the alleged attempt on the life of another Khalistani separatist. "The Indian government also continued to expand its repressive tactics to target religious minorities abroad, specifically members of the Sikh community and their advocates... International reporting and intelligence from the Canadian government corroborated alle-

gations linking an official in India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and six diplomats to the 2023 assassination attempt of an American Sikh activist in New York," the report has said. It's important to note that these radical elements do not represent the Sikh community. While the Government of India has categorically rejected the allegation, the Canadian government and the prosecuting authorities in the then Biden dispensation initiated legal actions against Indian officials.



## Privatized entities can employ Aadhar authentication

**Delhi :** The ministry of electronics and IT (Meity) announced that the Union government has amended the Aadhaar rules to allow private entities to use Aadhaar authentication for service delivery. The amendments aim to give residents "ease of living" and "better access to services". Ministry Notified Aadhaar Authentication for Good Governance (Social Welfare, Innovation, Knowledge) Amendment Rules, 2025, revising 2020 rules. "The amendment allows government and non-government entities to use Aadhaar authentication, promoting trusted transactions for both providers and users," stated the announcement. It stated that the amendment will make non-government e-commerce, travel, tourism, hospitality, and health services easier to use.

The 2020 rules allowed the Centre to



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

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

## Women own almost 50% of small manufacturing businesses

**A survey found that 58% of manufacturing businesses were owned by women in 2023-24, up 4% from the previous year.**The Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) 2023-24 found that 28.1% of workers were women. More than one-third (33.7%) of OAES' workforce is female in OAEs (owned a c c o u n t enterprises). Female-owned businesses rose to 26.2% in 2023-24 from 22.9% in and 9.7% to 14.2% in other services. Female workers comprised 18.5% of recruited workers. Female workers were



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

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

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

## Health and wealth benefit from flexible work hours

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

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

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

## IT panel to propose TV, print, online media umbrella

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



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

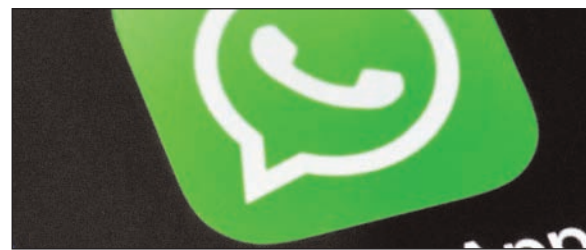
Dubey added, "Paid news is rampant. Illiterate and gullible individuals think alike. Without strict regulations, ethical boundaries are crossed. Investigative journalism is discouraged by expensive and lengthy legal fights for journalists and media corporations.

## Foreign insurers gain ownership via 100% FDI

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

## WhatsApp claims Israeli spyware Paragon targets users

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



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

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

## Public infrastructure spending rises, but private sector participation falls

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



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

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

ing dropped to 0.60 lakh crore from 0.66 lakh crore in July-November 2024. Railway network expan-

sion remained constant at 2,000 kilometers, with 17 Vande Bharat train pairs and 228 carriages added.

## Price pressure caps senior citizen health premium hikes at 10%

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



advised to standardize hospital empanelment and negoti-

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

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

## Redesigning agri export policies

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



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

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

### Norms to stop annoying calls and surrogate advertisements next month

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

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

terns, trading partners, and agricultural technology have changed how and where agricultural products are sold. Two newly appointed MPC members have revived the Economic Survey's dis-

cussion on removing food inflation from monetary policy. Q2 GDP growth and November food inflation may have unnerved MPC outsiders.



## 'No malice in it at all'



Sunil Grover

**Aamir Khan reacts to Sunil Grover mimicking him on *The Great Indian Kapil Show***



Photos: Instagram

**A**ctor Sunil Grover, in the latest episode of Kapil Sharma's Netflix show *The Great Indian Kapil Show*, featuring Kartik Aaryan and Ananya Panday, who had arrived to promote their latest film *Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri* took everyone by surprise when he appeared dressed like Aamir Khan and delivered a spot-on mimicry so seamless that the internet almost believed it was the superstar himself.

While audiences showered him with praise, Aamir Khan has now reacted to Sunil's impersonation. In an interview with Subhash K Jha for Bollywood Hungama, Aamir said, "I won't even call it mimicry. It was so authentic, I felt I was watching myself. I saw a small clip. Now I'm going to watch the whole episode. But what I saw was priceless. I was laughing so much I couldn't breathe!!" "There was no malice in it at all. I must have laughed the loudest," added Khan.

During the episode, Sunil also subtly took a dig at veteran actress and politician Jaya Bachchan. A clip from the latest episode has been doing the rounds on social media, leaving viewers amused. In the viral clip, Sunil is seen posing for paparazzi on the show's set and interacting with them. While praising the photographers, he cheekily remarks, "*Kapde acche pehne hue hai tumhe. Pant acchi hai aaj*," a line that many viewers interpreted as a tongue-in-cheek reference to Jaya's recent controversial comments about paparazzi.

Meanwhile, on *The Great Indian Kapil Show*, Sunil often mimics other celebrities, including Shah Rukh Khan, SS Rajamouli, and Salman Khan.

His perfect mimicry consistently leaves the audience in splits.

## Leonardo questions cinema's future

**Leonardo DiCaprio questions if audiences still visit cinemas, worried streaming platforms may change the future of movie theaters**

**H**ollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio says he is unsure if the audience still has the "same appetite" for cinema halls amid the surge of streamers and wonders if theatres will become as rare as jazz bars and other cultural rarities.

DiCaprio said there is a "huge transition". "It's changing at a lightning speed. We're looking at a huge transition... First, documentaries disappeared from cinemas. Now, dramas only get finite time and people wait to see it on streamers. I don't know. Do people still have the appetite? Or will cinemas become silos - like jazz bars, he said.

"I just hope enough people, who are real visionaries, get opportunities to do unique things in

the future that are seen in the cinema. But that remains to be seen," the Shutter Island actor added.

He previously spoke on the same topic in an interview with the entertainment news outlet Deadline, where he explained how getting people to theatres has been turning into "more of a challenge".

"This year seems like one of the most lightning-rod moments in cinema history... We're up against it - the future of the cinematic experience - more than ever, I feel. Getting people to come to the theaters seems like more and more of a challenge," DiCaprio said.

DiCaprio's latest work is *One Battle After Another*, which released in September 2025. Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson, the film also featured Sean Penn, Teyana Taylor and Benicio del Toro alongside the actor.

## Alia shares New Year moment

Photos: Instagram\_@aliaabhatt



**B**ollywood couple Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor rang in the New Year with family, giving fans a glimpse into their holiday time.

Alia posted an adorable picture on Instagram on Sunday that quickly caught everyone's attention.

The *Raazi* actress posted a silhouette photo from what appears to be a beach holiday. The picture shows the family standing by the sea, dressed in soft white outfits. Ranbir Kapoor is seen lifting their daughter, Raha, high in the air, while the little one looks at her father with joy. Alia stands close to them, smiling freely and holding a fairy wand as she watches the moment.

The picture soon won hearts online, and fans were quick to react in the comments section. One fan wrote, "Life in a full circle picture <3. (Aww)dorable." Another fan commented, "Awww...beautiful pic."

On the work front, Alia Bhatt will next be seen in the film *Alpha*. As per trade analyst Taran Adarsh, the makers have decided to postpone the release of the film. The move, according to Adarsh, has been made to avoid a clash with Salman Khan's upcoming war film *Battle of Galwan*.

Directed by Shiv Rawail, *Alpha* is the sixth film in the YRF Spy Universe. The franchise includes films like *Ek Tha Tiger*, *Tiger Zinda Hai*, *War*, and *Pathaan*. Along with Alia Bhatt, the film also stars Sharvari and Bobby Deol in key roles.



## Jana Nayagan: Thalapathy Vijay seeks revenge

**T**amil superstar Thalapathy Vijay's film *Jana Nayagan*, one of the most anticipated releases of 2026, is set to be his last outing as an actor, as he has announced his retirement from acting after a 33-year-long career in the film industry.

On Saturday, the makers unveiled the action-filled trailer of *Jana Nayagan*, leaving fans emotional. The 2-minute-and-52-second trailer opens with a tense exchange in which one man questions another about a figure

named Thalapathy Vetri Kondan, introduced as the 'King of criminals', as he is seen fighting goons.

The story takes a turn when Vetri's daughter, played by Mamitha Baiju, is kidnapped. This pushes Vetri to go on a dangerous rescue mission and face the villain, played by Bobby Deol, as Vijay's character vows revenge.

The trailer showcases Vijay performing high-octane action sequences, including fights with an axe. In the final moments, he looks straight into the camera and declares, "I am coming," giving a fresh twist to his iconic line, "I am waiting."

A still from the *Jana Nayagan*

Rajinikanth and filmmaker Cibi Chakaravarthi

## Cibi Chakaravarthi to direct *Thalaivar 173*

**F**ilmmaker Cibi Chakaravarthi is set to direct Rajinikanth's upcoming film *Thalaivar 173*. Produced by Kamal Haasan and R. Mahendran under the banner of RaajKamal Films International, the film will release around the festival of Pongal in 2027.

Haasan shared the news with a post on his X handle on Saturday. "Celebrations begin #Arambikalama #Thalaivar173 #SuperStarPongal2027," read the caption.

Chakaravarthi penned a lengthy note on his handle and said he is grateful for the opportunity to direct the film. "Once, a small-town boy's big dream was to meet his favourite star

"SUPER STAR" & take a picture with him, which drove his passion towards cinema - and the big dream happened one day. Then he had the biggest dream of directing his Superstar. He came so close, but got missed. Then he continued to believe it would happen one day - and today is that day. #Thalaivar173 Day," he wrote.

"At times, life goes beyond dreams and becomes even bigger, with legendary Ulaganayakan, Padma Shri @ikamalahaasan sir and #Mahendran sir as our producer. Grateful forever @rajinikanth sir, @ikamalahaasan sir & #Mahendran sir - and I promise to put my heart & soul to keep up the trust. Big thanks to @Disney. So happy to be working again with my dearest @anirudhofficial sir. Love you sir," he added.



Photo: Instagram\_@anupamkher

Anupam Kher and Ravi Kishan

## 'Worked together long time back'

**Veteran actor Anupam Kher welcomes Ravi Kishan to the cast of his upcoming film, *Khosla Ka Ghosla 2***

**V**eteran actor Anupam Kher has welcomed actor and MP Ravi Kishan to the cast of his upcoming film *Khosla Ka Ghosla 2* and praised his acting skills and personal qualities.

On Sunday, Anupam Kher posted a video on Instagram. The actor looked happy as he introduced Kishan to the cast and spoke about his long association with him. While welcoming him, Kher described Kishan as a "brilliant actor" and a "great human being."

In his post, Kher wrote, "A BRILLIANT ACTOR AND A GREAT HUMAN BEING: Extremely Happy, Delighted and Joyous to have a very dear friend @ravikishan join the cast of #KhoslaKaGhosla2. We worked together long time back. But this is going to be super special. I admire Ravi as an excellent actor, a hardworking parliamentarian and above all as the PERSON that he is!! Calm, Humble, Compassionate, Helpful, Sincere and someone who LOVES #Bharat passionately! Looking forward to our scenes together! Har Har MAHADEV! Actor #KKG2."



## Briefs

## Don repeats Indo-Pak war stopped claim

Claiming again he solved the conflict between India and Pakistan, US President Donald Trump has said "no one in history is more deserving than him" of the Nobel Peace Prize, as he criticised former President Barack Obama for getting the honour even though he "didn't do anything". "Look whether people like Trump or don't like Trump, I settled eight wars, big ones. Some going on for 36 years, 32 years, 31 years, 28 years, 25 years, some just getting ready to start like India and Pakistan, where already eight jets were shot out of the air," Trump said.

## Cannot be shared: Nobel Committee

Days after Nobel Laureate and Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado vowed to share her Nobel Peace Prize with US President Trump, the Norwegian Nobel Committee clarified the coveted award cannot be "shared, revoked or transferred" to another person. "A Nobel Prize can neither be revoked, shared, nor transferred to others. Once the announcement has been made, the decision stands for all time," the Nobel Committee said.

## Six killed in Mississippi, suspect held

Authorities say a person was in custody on Saturday after six people were killed in a series of related shootings in Mississippi. Clay County Sheriff Eddie Scott said in a Facebook post "multiple innocent lives" were lost "due to violence" in the town of West Point, near the Alabama border. The sheriff told WTVA 6 people were killed in 3 locations. A suspect was in custody and there was no threat to the community, the sheriff wrote on Facebook.

## Porn content? Indonesia blocks Grok

Indonesia temporarily blocked Elon Musk's Grok chatbot on Saturday due to the risk of AI-generated pornographic content, becoming the first country to deny access to the AI tool. The move comes after governments, researchers and regulators from Europe to Asia have condemned and some have opened inquiries into sexualised content on the app.

## Russian oil depot hit by Kyiv drone

A Ukrainian drone strike sparked a fire at an oil depot in Russia's southern Volgograd region, officials said on Saturday, after Russia launched a powerful hypersonic missile along with drones and other weapons that disrupted Kyiv's power supply and heating. There were no reports of casualties, Volgograd Gov Andrei Bocharov was quoted as saying in a Telegram post.

## Fighting resumes in Aleppo after ceasefire collapses

**Aleppo:** Fighting resumed in Syria's Aleppo after Kurdish militias rejected the government's order to abandon their positions late on Friday. Syrian forces, in response, targeted the Sheikh Maqsood and Ashrafieh neighbourhoods, which have remained under the control of Kurdish militias since the early days of the civil war that broke out in the country in 2011. Syrian defence ministry, while announcing a ceasefire on Friday, had called on

## OIL GIANTS MEET | Trump vows total safety, urges execs to invest billions; Exxon says Venezuela currently 'uninvestable'

## Don: Repair Venezuela's rotting energy industry

WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump met executives from the oil giants at the White House on Friday to discuss Venezuela, saying he wants them to invest \$100 billion in the country to vastly expand its production. "American companies will have the opportunity to rebuild Venezuela's rotting energy infrastructure and eventually increase oil production to levels never, ever seen before," Trump said.

He was flanked by top executives from Exxon Mobil, ConocoPhillips, Chevron and others. "We are going to be making the decision as to which oil companies are going to go in. One of the things the US gets out of this will be even lower energy prices," the Republican president said.

Companies including Chevron, Vitol and Trafigura are competing for US licences to market Venezuela's existing crude oil, but oil majors are hesitant to commit to big, longer-term investments due to high costs and political instability. CEO Darren



One thing I think everyone has to know is if we didn't do this (capturing Maduro and reviving oil industry), China or Russia would have done it.

China can buy oil only from US markets.  
Donald Trump, US President

Woods said Exxon sees Venezuela as currently "uninvestable" and needs to see significant changes to return there.

"We have had our assets seized there twice, and so you can imagine to reenter a third time would require significant changes," he said. "You have total safety. You are dealing with us directly and not dealing with Venezuela at all. We don't want you to deal with Venezuela," Trump said.

Exxon and ConocoPhillips departed Venezuela nearly 20

years ago after their assets were nationalised.

Chevron Vice Chairman Mark Nelson said the company is committed to investments in Venezuela. Chevron is the only US oil major still operating in the country.

"You know, these are not babies," Trump said of the oil industry executives. "These are people that drill oil in pretty rough places. I can say a couple of those places make Venezuela look like a picnic." Other companies repre-

sented at the meeting include Halliburton, Valero, Marathon, Shell, Singapore-based Trafigura, Italy-based Eni and Spain-based Repsol.

After the meeting, Energy Secretary Chris Wright told reporters the firms showed "tremendous interest," adding, Chevron made a specific pledge. Trump said the discussions with oil firms are aimed at securing commitments. "We have to get them to invest and then we have to get their money back as quickly as we can," Trump said.

Woods said apart from security guarantee Exxon needed durable investment protections introduced and the Venezuela's hydrocarbons law needed to be reformed.

Chevron Vice Chairman Mark Nelson highlighted the company's 100-year history in Venezuela and its current status as the only American oil major operating there.

Meanwhile, pusing 1-year, 10% cap on credit card interest, Trump wrote on Truth Social: "We'll no longer let Americans be ripped off by credit card companies charging interest rates of 20-30%."

## CUBA PREPS FOR AFTERSHOCKS

**Havana:** As US seizures of Venezuela-linked oil tankers surge, concerns grow in Cuba about whether the island's government and economy will survive. Experts warn a sudden halt in Venezuelan oil shipments to Cuba could lead to widespread social unrest and mass migration. "I'd be lying if I told you I don't want to leave the country," said 16-year-old Cuban student Amanda Gómez. "We are all thinking about leaving, from the youngest to the oldest." Long before the January 3 attack, severe blackouts were sidelining life in Cuba, where people endured long lines at gas stations and supermarkets amid the island's worst economic crisis in decades. The lack of Venezuelan oil could push Cuba over the brink, experts say.

"This will take an already dire situation to new extremes," said Michael Galant, senior research and outreach associate at the Centre for Economic and Policy Research in Washington. "This is what a collapsing economy looks like."

## NICARAGUA NABS US 'SUPPORTERS'

Authorities in Nicaragua have arrested at least 60 people for reportedly celebrating or expressing support for the capture of Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro, a human rights watchdog group and local media outlets said.

Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega and wife vice president Rosario Murillo are staunch allies of Maduro, reported 'The Guardian'. Since the capture of Maduro, "at least 60 arbitrary arrests" have occurred over alleged support for the operation, the NGO Blue and White Monitoring, which compiles reports of rights violations in Nicaragua, said, adding, 49 people remained in detention on Friday "without information about legal status" while 9 people have been released and 3 were temporarily detained. "This new wave of repression is carried out without a judicial order and is based solely on expressions of opinion: comments on social media, private celebrations, or not repeating official propaganda," the group said.

## Another ICE case clip brings fresh scrutiny

MINNEAPOLIS

A Minnesota prosecutor called on the public to share with investigators any recordings and evidence connected to the fatal shooting of **Renee Good** as a new video emerged showing the final moments of her encounter with an immigration agent.

The Minneapolis killing and a separate shooting in Portland, Oregon, a day later by Border Patrol have set off protests in multiple cities and denunciations of immigration enforcement tactics by the US government. The reaction to the shooting has been focused on witness cellphone video. A new, 47-second video published online by a Minnesota-based conservative news site, Alpha News, and reposted on social media by DHS shows the shooting from the perspective of ICE officer Jonathan Ross, who fired the shots.

Sirens blaring in the background, he approaches and circles Good's vehicle in the middle of the road while filming on his cellphone. At the same time, Good's wife was recording the encounter and can be seen walking around and approaching the officer. A series of exchanges occurred: "That's fine, I'm not mad at you," Good says as the officer passes by her door. She has one hand on the steering



wheel and the other outside the open driver side window.

"US citizen, former f---ing veteran," says her wife, standing outside the passenger side of the SUV holding up her phone. "You wanna come at us, you wanna come at us, I say go get yourself some lunch big boy." Other officers are approaching the driver's side of the car at about the same time and one says: "Get out of the car, get out of the f---ing car."

Ross is now at the front driver side of the vehicle. Good reverses briefly, then turns the steering wheel toward the passenger side as she drives ahead and Ross opens fire. The camera becomes unsteady and points towards the sky and then returns to the street view showing Good's SUV careening away. "F---ing b---," someone at the scene says. A crashing sound is heard as Good's vehicle smashes into others parked on the street.

Meanwhile, Renee's wife said the couple had stopped to support their neighbours on the day of the shooting and described the mother of three as leaving a legacy of kindness. "We had whistles. They had guns," **Becca Good** said.

## Beaten up &amp; humiliated, another Hindu youth dies in Bangladesh

DHAKA

As violence against minorities continues to mount across Bangladesh, another Hindu man died after consuming poison over a debt of 500 Bangladeshi Taka in Dirai upazila of Sunamganj district, local media reported.

The deceased, **Joy Mohapatra**, 19, died on Friday morning while undergoing treatment at MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital in Sylhet. Citing the deceased's cousin, Ayan Das, Bangladeshi Bengali media outlet Sylhet View 24 reported Joy had purchased a mobile phone for 5,500 Taka from grocery shopkeeper Amirul Islam. He



paid 2,000 Taka cash and agreed to pay the balance in weekly installments of 500 Taka. Although he made the payments regularly, the final installment was delayed.

It is alleged Joy went to Amirul Islam's shop on Thursday to pay the installment but was beaten up, humiliated and had his mobile phone seized.

Ayan said Joy admitted to consuming poison on Thursday evening. He was

## Pakistan, United States begin joint anti-terrorism military exercises

**Karachi/Islamabad:** Pakistan and the US are holding 2-week-long joint anti-terrorism exercises at a counter terrorism centre in the Punjab province, it was announced on Saturday.

The 13th Pakistan-US bilateral joint exercise, 'Inspired Gambit-2026', began on Friday, the military's media wing said.

The manoeuvres are taking place at the National Counter Terrorism Centre in Pabbi town of the Kharian district, the Inter-Services Public Relations said.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Navy successfully test-fired a surface-to-air missile during an exercise in the North Arabian Sea. It live-fired the LY-80 (N) surface-to-air missile from the vertical launching system at extended range, showing "operational readiness and combat preparedness", a release said. Further, the Pakistan army said Iraq has expressed "keen interest" in JF-17 Thunder fighter jets and Mushshak training aircraft. —PTI

## Dutch couple's marriage annulled as ChatGPT vows fail legal test

AMSTERDAM

A Dutch couple had their marriage annulled after the person officiating used a ChatGPT-generated speech intended to be playful but failed to meet legal requirements, as per a court ruling, 'Reuters' reported.

The couple from the city of Zwolle, whose names were redacted from the January 5 decision under Dutch privacy

rules, argued they had intended to marry regardless of whether the right wording was used when they took their vows. According to the decision, the person officiating their ceremony last April 19 asked if they would "continue supporting each other, teasing each other and embracing each other, even when life gets difficult".

The pair said "I do" and the officiant declared them "not only husband and wife, but

above all a team, a crazy couple, each other's love and home base".

But the judge found they had not actually sworn to fulfil their marriage duties — something that is required under Dutch law. "The court understands that the date in the marriage deed is important to the man and woman, but cannot ignore what the law says." It ordered the marriage removed from the Zwolle city registry.

## 'Protesters enemies of God'

Iranian regime warns of death penalty in crackdown

DUBAI

Protests in Iran neared the two-week mark on Saturday, and the Islamic Republic's government acknowledged the demonstrations despite an intensifying crackdown and as the nation remains cut off from the world. An internet blackout imposed by the authorities was also ongoing.

With the internet down in Iran and phone lines cut off, gauging the demonstrations from abroad has grown more difficult. But the death toll in the protests has grown to at least 65 people killed and over 2,300 others detained, according to the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency.

Iranian state TV is reporting on security force casualties while portraying control over the nation.

Iran escalated its threats against demonstrators, with the country's attorney general warning that anyone taking part in protests will be considered an "enemy of God", a death-penalty charge.

The comments by Iran's attorney general Mohammad Movahedi Azad were reported by Iranian state TV.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has signalled a coming clampdown, despite US warnings.

"The US supports the brave people of Iran," US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on X on Saturday. The State Department separately warned: "Do not play games with President Trump. When he says he will do something, he means it."

## TV SPLIT-SCREEN

Saturday marks the start of the work week in Iran, but many schools and universities reportedly held online classes, Iranian state TV reported.

State TV played a driving, martial orchestral arrangement from the 'Epic of Khorramshahr' by Iranian



So Iran's in big trouble. It looks to me the people are taking over certain cities that nobody thought were really possible just a few weeks ago. I have made the statement very strongly if they start killing people like they have in the past, we will get involved. We will be hitting them very hard where it hurts.

Donald Trump, US President

composer Majid Engezami, while showing pro-government demonstrations. The song, aired repeatedly during the 12-day war launched by Israel, honours Iran's 1982 liberation of the city of Khorramshahr during the Iran-Iraq war. It has been used in videos of protesting women cutting away their hair to protest the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini as well.

"Field reports indicate that peace prevailed in most cities of the country at night," a state TV anchor reported.

"After a number of armed terrorists attacked public places and set fire to people's private property last night, there was no news of any gathering or chaos in Tehran and most provinces last night."

That was directly contradicted by an online video that showed demonstrations in Tehran's Saadat Abad, with

what appeared to be thousands on the street. "Death to Khamenei!" a man chanted.

The semiofficial Fars news agency, believed to be close to Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and one of the few media outlets able to publish to the outside world, released surveillance camera footage of what it said came from demonstrations in Isfahan. In it, a protester appeared to fire a long gun, while others set fires and threw gasoline bombs at what appeared to be a government compound.

Iran's exiled Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, who called for protests on Thursday and Friday, asked demonstrators to take to streets on Saturday and Sunday with Iran's old lion-and-sun flag, used during the time of the shah.

Pahlavi claimed he was preparing to return to Iran.

Meanwhile, the Institute for the Study of War, a policy research organisation, on Saturday said it recorded 116 protests in at least 100 cities across all 31 provinces since 3.30pm on January 8. As per the report, Iran saw 20 huge protests, ones that have a turnout of over 1,000 people.

Meanwhile, Australia, Canada and the EU in a joint statement condemned the killing of the anti-government protesters, asking the regime to end the use of lethal force.

## Blow as judge blocks Trump's polls order

**Washington:** A federal judge has blocked US President Donald Trump's administration from enforcing most of his executive order on elections against the vote-by-mail states Washington and Oregon, in the latest blow to Trump's efforts to require documentary proof of citizenship to vote and to require that all ballots be received by Election Day.

US District Judge John H Chun in Seattle found that those requirements exceeded the president's authority, following similar rulings in a Massachusetts case brought by 19 states and in a Washington case by Democratic and civil rights groups.

"Today's ruling is a huge vic-

tory for voters in Washington and Oregon, and for the rule of law," Washington Attorney General Nick Brown said.

## 'US GOVT CAN'T BLOCK CHILD CARE MONEY'

A federal judge ruled Trump administration cannot block federal money for child care subsidies and other programmes aimed at supporting needy children and their families from flowing to 5 Democratic-led states for now.

California, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota and New York argued a policy announced to freeze funds for three grant programmes is having an immediate impact on them and creating "operational chaos".

## Priti calls for UK intervention to protect Hindus in Bangladesh

**London/Dhaka:** UK Shadow Foreign Secretary **Priti Patel** has called on the British government to intervene in the "increase in violence" in Bangladesh that has involved murders of Hindus and use its influence to bring about stability in the country.

The British Indian Opposition Conservative MP posted her letter to Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper on social media on Friday, which also calls upon the Labour Party government to make a statement on the issue in the House of Commons.

"The situation in Bangladesh is very concerning. Religious freedoms should be protected and the murders of Hindus and persecution taking place are wrong and must stop," said Patel.

"The UK government must use its influence and convening powers to work to bring about stability in Bangladesh and a future where religious freedoms are protected and Hindus as safe," she said.

In her letter to Cooper, the shadow minister points to reports of at least six Hindus being killed within an 18-day



period in recent weeks.

"This level of persecution and violence is unacceptable. Given the increase in violence, can you advise what steps have been taken over the last year to monitor and make representations?" she said.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has condemned a "disturbing pattern" of recurring attacks on minorities in Bangladesh.

"We continue to witness a disturbing pattern of recurring attacks on minorities as well as their homes and businesses by extremists. Such communal incidents need to be dealt with swiftly and firmly," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"We have observed a troubling tendency to attribute such incidents to personal rivalries, political differences,

or extraneous reasons. Such disregard only emboldens the perpetrators, and deepens the sense of fear and insecurity among minorities," he said.

## B'DESH MUST NOT RETURN TO PRE-AUG 5 PERIOD: RAHMAN

Newly-appointed BNP chairman Tarique Rahman on Saturday said there is "no reason" for Bangladesh to return to the political conditions that existed before the toppling of Sheikh Hasina's regime on August 5, 2024.

Weeks ahead of Feb 12 general elections, Rahman claimed his Bangladesh Nationalist Party would lead the country "in the right direction if it comes to power".

Rahman, 60, has emerged as a leading contender for the post of the prime minister.

The Standing Committee of the BNP approved Rahman's appointment as the chairman of the party in a meeting on Friday, days after the demise of his mother, party chairperson and three-time prime minister Khaleda Zia on December 30 after a prolonged illness.



## Briefs

WIJK AAN ZEE (NED)

## Pragg goes down again, to Nodirbek



Defending champion R Praggnanandhaa lost his second game in as many days, going down to Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan, even as D Gukesh was held to a draw by Netherlands' Jorden van Foreest in the Tata Steel Masters Chess here. Having been at the top of his game for a major part of 2025, Praggnanandhaa seems to be running low on steam as a drawn endgame turned into a painful loss against the Uzbek on Sunday.

PUNE

## Browning shines at Pune GT



India's first-ever Continental multi-stage road race for men burst into life on Monday afternoon as the Bajaj Pune Grand Tour 2026 rolled out from Goodluck Chowk near Deccan Gymkhana. It was Fergus Browning who stamped his authority on the opening day. Riding for Terengganu Cycling Team, he produced a blistering ride.

SURAT

## Singams Suffer first defeat of ISPL Season 3



Chennai Singams faced their first setback of Indian Street Premier League Season 3, going down by 20 runs to Ahmedabad Lions in Match 17. Asked to bowl first, Chennai Singams began on a disciplined note. Anurag Sarshar continued his habit of striking early, dismissing Sikandar Bhatti in his opening over. Tight spells upfront, including Jagannath Sarkar's economical 0/5 in two overs using the ISPL Swing Ball, helped restrict the Lions to 26/2 at the five-over mark.

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## ANALYSIS | Inability to turn promising starts haunted the hosts' prospects

INDORE

India's first-ever bilateral ODI series defeat at home against New Zealand was not just a statistical jolt but a moment of uncomfortable clarity, and skipper Shubman Gill did not hide behind the margin of defeat or missing personnel.

Speaking after the loss in the series-deciding game here on Sunday, the India captain instead laid bare a pattern that, in his words, "made the difference between the two teams".

"For me, it wasn't that we didn't bat well. It was that we didn't bat long enough. When batsmen are getting starts and they're not able to convert those starts, especially in high-scoring matches, it becomes very difficult. At least two batters need to go on and play that long innings," said Gill after the 41-run defeat at Holkar Stadium.

"That was the difference between them and us."

The inability to turn promising starts into match-defining scores haunted India throughout the series, including in Indore where Virat Kohli's century briefly threatened to swing the momentum back.

Gill repeatedly returned to the contrast with New Zealand's approach.

"Whenever their batsmen got set, they scored long. That's the difference. Even in the first two matches, I got set, but I wasn't able to convert it into 100, 120 or 130, and that's something we need to get better at as a batting unit."

The conversation then inevitably turned to Ravindra Jadeja, whose returns with both bat and ball have dipped over the last two to three years.

Gill was quick to contextualise the all-rounder's struggles rather than isolate them.

"Jaddu bhai was looking in good touch with the bat. But it wasn't just him. I don't think any of our batsmen were able

## Gill wants India to get better at converting starts



India's Rohit Sharma walks off the field after his dismissal during the third ODI in Indore. PTI

to consistently convert the starts we were getting. On pitches like these, if you don't make those starts count, you're always chasing the game."

Gill also acknowledged that Jadeja's wicket-taking impact - once a cornerstone of India's ODI dominance - hasn't been the same recently.

"The way he has been bow-

ling in the past couple of years, he has always been a strike option for us. It's unfortunate he couldn't pick as many wickets as he would have liked, but that happens in series like these. You learn from it and you grow."

India's fielding lapses emerged as another decisive factor, especially as overseas teams continue to narrow the

gap in Indian conditions. Gill admitted that missed chances shifted momentum at critical moments.

"We dropped some catches at very important stages of the game. On wickets like these, bowlers are trying to force chances, and when those catches don't stick, it's not easy. No one drops a catch intentionally, but it's one area

## Gavaskar says Team India failed to get good starts

India went down in the third and final ODI in Indore by 41 runs

NEW DELHI

Former captain Sunil Gavaskar says India's failure to make good starts cost them the ODI series against New Zealand and the team's batters should take a leaf out of Virat Kohli's book to understand how an innings should be paced while chasing difficult targets.

India went down in the third and final ODI in Indore by 41 runs to lose their first ever 50-over home series against New Zealand, continuing the trend of recent underwhelming results. Kohli top-scored with a 108-ball 124 but could not get a stable partner to steer the challenging chase of 338.

"Unless Virat Kohli got substantial support, it was always going to be difficult, and he got very little of it. The real problem for India throughout the series has been the starts. As they say, well begun is half done," Gavaskar said on 'Amul Cricket Live' on JioStar.

"India never began well, and that's one of the main reasons they weren't able to chase these big scores," he pointed out. India had lost half the side at 159, which severely dented their chances.

"...when you lose someone in good form like KL Rahul, and you have Nitish Kumar Reddy, who hadn't really done justice to his ability until this innings of 53 runs and then Harshit Rana, someone you are never quite sure what you are going to get, it becomes an uphill climb. That's exactly what India found," Gavaskar explained.

The legendary former batter lauded Kohli for trying



Unless Virat Kohli got substantial support, it was always going to be difficult, and he got very little of it. The real problem for India throughout the series has been the starts. As they say, well begun is half done.

Sunil Gavaskar former India captain

till the end and urged the others to emulate his mindset and consistency.

"The thing about him is that he's not tied down to an image. A lot of batters and bowlers are constrained by how they're perceived, and they feel they must live up to that image. Virat isn't like that," he said.

"He's tied to the job at hand, and that job is to score runs. Sometimes, that means starting watchfully and then opening up. Sometimes, it means attacking early and then spreading the field."

## Struggling Mumbai Indians, Delhi Capitals eye revival

The Harmanpreet Kaur-led side have managed just two victories from five outings so far

VADODARA

Defending champions Mumbai Indians will be desperate to arrest their slide and revive their campaign when they take on an equally struggling Delhi Capitals in a Women's Premier League match here on Tuesday.

The **Harmanpreet Kaur-led** side have managed just two wins from five outings so far and have looked off the pace for large parts of the season.

They began with a loss to Royal Challengers Bengaluru, before thrashing bottom-placed Delhi Capitals by 50 runs in the reverse fixture after defending 195.

Wins over Gujarat Giants by seven wickets offered some momentum, but back-to-back defeats against UP Warriorz -- failing to defend 161/5 and then falling short while chasing 188 -- forced them to play catch-up, even as they hung on to No. 2



spot in the five-team standings.

MI's biggest concern has been their powerplay returns.

Hayley Matthews' delayed comeback from injury and experimentation with Amelia Kerr and G Kamalini at the top have left them with their lowest powerplay run rate of the tournament (6.50).

The onus thus has fallen heavily on skipper Harmanpreet and Nat Sciver-Brunt and Nat Sciver-Brunt and MI have struggled whenever the duo have not produced substantial scores lately.

Match starts at 7.30 PM Live on Star Sports

## Teams (from)

## Delhi Capitals:

Jemimah Rodrigues (c), Shafali Verma, Marzianne Kapp, Niki Prasad, Laura Wolvaardt, Chinelle Henry, Shree Charani, Sneha Rana, Lizelle Lee, Deeya Yadav, Taniyaa Bhatia, Mamatha Madiwala, Nandni Sharma, Lucy Hamilton, Minnu Mani and Alana King.

## Mumbai Indians:

Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Nat Sciver-Brunt, Hayley Matthews, Amanjot Kaur, G. Kamalini, Amelia Kerr, Shabnim Ismail, Sanskriti Gupta, Sajana Sajeevan, Rahila Firdous, Nicola Carey, Poonam Khemnar, Triveni Vasistha, Nalla Reddy, Saika Ishaque and Milly Illingworth.

INDORE

Daryl Mitchell says New Zealand's historic triumph was built on calm decision-making under pressure and collective belief, as the visitors sealed their first-ever bilateral ODI series victory on Indian soil.

India threatened to nail a stiff chase of 338 with a key partnership between centurion Virat Kohli and Harshit Rana but fell short once the stand broke in the series-deciding third game here on Sunday.

Mitchell admitted the pressure was real and praised his team's composure.

"They had a really good partnership and there was a lot of pressure, especially considering the nature of this ground, the surface and the size of the dimensions," Mitchell, who scored 137, said.

"I was really proud of how calm the group stayed and how clear the plans were in terms of how we wanted to operate." Calling the decider a contest worthy of the occa-



New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell celebrates his century during the second ODI. PTI

sion, he added, "It was a great game of cricket to go down to where it did. I think both teams should be very proud of the way they played."

Reflecting on the magnitude of the achievement, Mitchell said the win carried special significance.

"A number of New Zealand teams have toured India in the past and every time you come here, you learn and grow. But to come here with this group and achieve what we have is something the guys in the shed are really proud of.

There will be some big smiles going back home." Asked to place the ODI series win alongside New Zealand's recent Test series success in India, Mitchell said both achievements reflected the team's growth.

"Beating India here is never easy, in any format. To do it with this group makes it very special for New Zealand cricket." Mitchell also spoke warmly about the experience of playing in front of Indian crowds.

"We're used to pretty small

crowds back in New Zealand. Then you come here and the noise people create is very special. It's amazing to be part of that," he said with a smile.

Mitchell, who has enjoyed consistent success in Indian conditions, credited his time in the IPL for helping him adapt. "I am very grateful for the time I spent in Chennai, and also in Rajasthan. Hopefully, I'll be back here a few more times in the future. India is a great place to tour. Playing in front of these fans is very special."

However, he stressed that New Zealand's preparation back home was equally vital.

"We spent a lot of time preparing in Lincoln and at Mount Maunganui.

International cricket gives you exposure to different surfaces and different ways of scoring runs. We're very lucky to have good preparation back home and groundsmen who help us simulate conditions."

Mitchell had words of praise for Indian wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav, despite New Zealand's apparent intent to attack him.

## T20 WC

## ICC issues Jan 21 ultimatum to BCB on participation

NEW DELHI

The ICC has asked the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to decide on its participation in the T20 World Cup in India by January 21 or "risk being replaced by another team" in the tournament beginning February 7.

Despite the back and forth between ICC and BCB, no solution has been found to the crisis that was triggered by the removal of Bangladesh pacer **Mustafizur Rahman** from the 2026 Indian Premier League on BCCI's instruc-

tions for unspecified "developments all around." "The BCB officials have been told to decide on the participation by January 21. If they refuse to travel to India, then they should be ready to be replaced by another team as per rankings," said an ICC source.

Citing security concerns and national pride, the BCB has announced that its national team won't be travelling to India for its group games in Kolkata and Mumbai.

However, with the event schedule already finalised, the ICC has shown reluctance to shift

Bangladesh's games to co-host Sri Lanka, where the marquee India-Pakistan clash will be held as per the mutually agreed arrangement for ICC events till 2027.

In case Bangladesh continue to be unyielding, the replacement team would most likely be Scotland based on current rankings. Bangladesh are scheduled to play three leagues games in Kolkata and

one in Mumbai.

The BCB has remained adamant on either a change of venue or a change of groups to facilitate its games in Sri Lanka. Bangladesh are currently placed in Group C along with the West Indies, Italy, England and Nepal.

In their last meeting with ICC officials in Dhaka, the BCB proposed that

Bangladesh be swapped with Ireland in Group B alongside Sri Lanka, Australia, Oman and Zimbabwe.

Such a move would allow the team to be based completely in Sri Lanka for all its league engagements.

"...the possibility of moving Bangladesh to a different group as a means of facilitating the matter with minimum logistical adjustments was discussed," the BCB had stated after the meeting on Saturday.

While the BCB considers it unsafe for its players to travel to

India, ICC's risk assessment report does not flag any specific or direct threat to the team if it participates in the tournament.

## Pakistan offers support

There were unconfirmed reports in the Pakistani media stating that Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman had asked the team to halt its preparations for the T20 World Cup in support of Bangladesh and may boycott T20 WC. However, it was later understood that Pakistan has no such plans in that direction as they are already playing their T20 World Cup games in Sri Lanka.

