

# AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

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

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## Briefs

NEW DELHI

ED conducts searches in fake job scam

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday conducted nationwide searches against an organised gang involved in a fake government job scam that duped aspirants by offering fraudulent appointments across multiple government departments. The raids are underway from early morning at 15 locations across India. The agency's Patna Zonal office is conducting the search operations at Muzaffarpur (one) and Motihari (two) in Bihar; Kolkata (two) in West Bengal; one each in Ernakulam, Pandamal, Adoor and Kodur in Kerala; Chennai (one) in Tamil Nadu; Rajkot (one) in Gujarat; and Gorakhpur (two), Prayagraj (one) and Lucknow (one) in Uttar Pradesh.

DEHRADUN

CBI probe sought in Ankita death

The parents of Ankita Bhandari have urged Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami for a CBI probe into the murder of their daughter, according to their letter. Ankita's father, Virendra Singh Bhandari, and mother, Soni Devi, met Dhami Wednesday night and handed him a letter demanding an enquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation into the case under the supervision of a Supreme Court judge. In the letter, Ankita's father said that his daughter was murdered because of a 'VIP' whose identity is still unknown. He wrote, "I appeal to the government to get this case investigated by the CBI under the supervision of a Supreme Court judge to apprehend the VIP."

PANAJI

Filipino held with Indian passport

A 41-year-old Filipino was arrested in Goa for allegedly procuring an Indian passport using forged documents, an official said on Thursday. A case was registered at the Crime Branch police station against Federico Pinapin Moreno on a complaint filed by the Regional Passport Office (RPO) here, he added. "Moreno secured a passport in the name of Erica Achumi using forged documents. He was working as a hairstylist at a salon in Porvorim. He was held on Wednesday under Foreigners Act and Passport Act for various offences, including cheating, forgery. Moreno disclosed the involvement of Vinit Bandiwdekar, who is accused of helping him obtain an Aadhaar card and other documents," the official said. Bandiwdekar was also arrested on Wednesday, he added.

NARMADA

Forty tiger skins, 133 nails seized

More than 40 suspected tiger skins and 133 nails were seized in Rajpipli in Gujarat's Narmada district, forest officials said on Thursday. The seizure was made after a pungent smell was reported from a room in an old tenement near Dhammeshwar Mahadev Temple, which is currently undergoing renovation, they said. "The room was earlier occupied by an elderly priest who died about five months ago. Following suspicion, temple trustees informed police, which found over 40 suspected tiger skins and 133 nails," an official said.

**VOCAL PROTEST** | Opposition parties come together in assailing Bengal CM Mamata for storming into I-PAC chief's house during central agency's raids

## Didi interfering in ED's work, says BJP, demands legal action

KOLKATA

The Leader of Opposition in West Bengal Assembly, Suvenu Adhikari, on Thursday demanded strong legal action against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for allegedly interfering in the job of the ED which is probing a money laundering case by a coal smuggling syndicate of the state.

Banerjee dramatically turned up at the residence of I-PAC chief Pratik Jain and later at the main office of the TMC's poll advisor amid an ongoing ED search, alleging that the central agency was attempting to seize the party's internal documents, hard disks and sensitive digital data linked to its strategy for the upcoming elections.

Responding to her statements made at those locations during search operations by the Enforcement Directorate, the BJP said that attempts to politicise a lawful investigative process or to undermine constitutional authorities only weakens public trust in institutions and the rule of law.



TMC members demonstrate against ED's searches at the office of consultancy firm I-PAC and the home of its director Pratik Jain, in Kolkata on Thursday

### CPM alleges raids stage managed

**Kolkata:** The CPI(M) on Thursday alleged that the raid at political consultancy firm I-PAC's office and the home of its director, Pratik Jain, is a "stage-managed" affair between the BJP and the TMC before the West Bengal assembly elections. "Drama over the raid is being done, but the truth will not come out," CPI(M) West Bengal secretary Mohammed Salim said. He asked what stature does Jain has in the Trinamool Congress that the chief minister "had to rush to his residence and office during the ED raid." Addressing a hurriedly called press conference, Salim alleged that the kingpins in the alleged coal scam case are not being investigated by the central agencies.

## I-PAC's Jain: An engineer turned political analyst

KOLKATA

Pratik Jain, a former engineer turned high-stakes political strategist, serves as a co-founder of the Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC). An alumnus of the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay (IIT-B), Jain earned

his degree in Metallurgical Engineering and Materials Science.



His early career was marked by a blend of finance and consulting; he gained significant market exposure through an internship at Axis Mutual Fund before joining Deloitte as

an analyst in 2012. Jain's transition into the political sphere began with Citizens for Accountability and Governance (CAG), a non-profit that eventually evolved into I-PAC in 2015, which he co-founded alongside Vinesh Chandel and Rishi Raj Singh. Following the

high-profile exit of strategist Prashant Kishor, Jain took the helm of the firm's operations in West Bengal.

Today, Jain is a central figure in the state's electoral landscape, leading I-PAC's partnership with the Trinamool Congress (TMC). He specifically manages the party's IT cell and digital outreach, utilizing

data-driven insights to shape grassroots political narratives. Based in the upscale Loudon Street area of South Kolkata, Jain operates from I-PAC's strategic "war room" in Salt Lake, Sector V, where he continues to bridge the gap between corporate efficiency and complex political campaigning.

## K'taka assault: NCW takes up suo moto case, min backs cops

BENGALURU

The National Commission for Women (NCW) has taken up a suo moto case in connection with a BJP woman activist Sujatha Handi allegedly dispersed by the Hubballi police.

The Hubballi police have arrested the Congress Corporator Suvarna Kallunkutlu amidst high drama, following a complaint by brother of Sujatha Handi

for inciting violence in the area. Meanwhile, referring to the BJP's criticism over the alleged assault and stripping case involving a woman worker, Karnataka Home Minister G. Parameshwara said the party should not indulge in politics in the name of a woman and that the government stands by the statement issued by the police department.

## Cong criticises easing of environmental norms for non-coal mining projects

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday charged that the Centre last month eased the environmental norms for non-coal mining projects by changing the policy which required that first land acquisition must be completed as per law and only then can environmental clearances be sought.

In a statement, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh while raising the issue said "on December 18, 2025, this policy was changed by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change and environmental clearances for non-coal mining projects can now be sought before land acquisition."

The senior Congress leader

### Probe Indore deaths: Cong

Congress's media and publicity department chairman Pawan Khera on Thursday sought a Supreme Court level probe into the Indore water contamination incident, which caused 15 deaths.

## K'taka moves SC against G RAM G

BENGALURU

The Karnataka Cabinet on Thursday passed a unanimous resolution to legally challenge the Central government's newly enacted Vixsit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeekila Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act.

The state government has decided to move the SC against the legislation, which recently replaced the long-standing Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Briefing the media, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K. Patil emphasised that the Cabinet considers the new Act

a direct violation of the right to work and livelihood as protected under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Furthermore, while the Centre previously bore the full cost of unskilled wages under MGNREGA, the VB-G RAM G Act mandates a 60:40 funding-sharing pattern, requiring states like Karnataka to cover 40% of the expenditure on terms unilaterally decided by the Union Government.

Beyond the legal battle in the Supreme Court, the Karnataka government plans to take the issue to the "people's court" to raise awareness about the potential dilution of rural employment guarantees.

Chairing a roundtable with Indian AI startups ahead of the India AI Impact Summit 2026, Modi suggested that the startups should work towards

## PM: Our AI models should be distinct, promote desi content

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the world's trust in India is its biggest strength and emphasised the need to ensure that Indian Artificial Intelligence (AI) models are ethical, unbiased, transparent, and based on data privacy principles.

He also said the Indian AI models should be distinct and should promote local and indigenous content and regional languages.

The prime minister said startups and artificial intelligence entrepreneurs are the co-architects of the country's future.

As many as 12 Indian AI

startups that have qualified for the 'AI for ALL: Global Impact Challenge' summit to be held next month attended the roundtable and presented their ideas and work.

Later, in a post on X, Modi said he talked about AI with youngsters from the Indian startup world.

"It was a memorable and insightful interaction, in which they shared their vision and work on how India is transforming the world of AI. It is commendable how these startups are working on diverse fields such as e-commerce, marketing, engineering, simulations, material research, healthcare, medical research and more," he said.

## Closure of J&K med college injustice: CM

JAMMU

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday said the government will accommodate students affected by the closure of a medical college by adjusting them in other institutions through supernumerary seats, asserting that their education will not be allowed to suffer.

The chief minister also said that accountability must be fixed if standards were not maintained at Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Medical College. The Health Minister is standing here with me. Yesterday, she was with me in Samba. We have discussed this issue thoroughly and, as I said yesterday in Samba after the issuance of the order, these students have passed the NEET examination in a



lawful manner. They have merit," Abdullah told reporters here.

"It is our legal responsibility to accommodate them. We will adjust them by creating supernumerary seats in colleges close to their homes so that their education does not suffer," he said.

### BIGOTRY, SAYS ILTIJA

PDP leader Iltija Mufti on Thursday termed the celebrations in Jammu over the closure of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Institute of Medical Excellence in Reasi "heights of bigotry".

## hic hic hurray

## UP booze to spread global cheers?

LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh is preparing to scale up its excise economy with an export-oriented policy framework and a sharply higher revenue target of Rs 68,000 crore for the next financial year, as the state looks to transform its liquor sector into a stronger manufacturing and investment-driven industry.

Excise Minister Nitin Agarwal said the upcoming

excise policy will focus on building global brands from Uttar Pradesh, rationalising licensing norms and attracting fresh investment, while strengthening enforcement to curb illegal liquor.

"The next excise policy will be export-oriented. Our focus is to build the brand of Uttar Pradesh so that liquor produced here captures a larger share of both domestic and international markets. A few brands from UP have gone global, but their footprint is still very

limited," Agarwal told FPJ. For the current financial year 2025-26, Uttar Pradesh's excise revenue target was Rs 63,000 crore. Agarwal said collections had crossed Rs 41,000 crore by December, suggesting the state is on course to meet the annual goal.

The minister said excise revenues in the state have almost doubled in four years. In 2022, the target stood at Rs 36,000 crore. "We are now moving towards Rs 68,000 crore... commercially viable. The next

policy will focus on making the sector more competitive and investment-friendly," he said.

He attributed the steady rise in revenue to the introduction of e-auctions, wider participation and the dismantling of monopolies. This year, nearly 40 percent of those who secured retail shops through e-auctions were new entrants. "This shows that the monopoly of a few has been broken and confidence in the system has increased," Agarwal said.



## Aliganj Bar Association Elections: Scrutiny Process Underway, Unopposed Outcome Likely



### Etah

The election process of the Aliganj Bar Association has reached its final Phase with only the scrutiny of nomination papers remaining after the completion of filing. Considerable buzz has been witnessed among advocates, particularly regarding the post of Bar Association President, creating an atmosphere of intense discussion within the Bar premises. According to members of the legal fraternity, there is a strong possibility that the President and other office-bearers may be elected unopposed this year. As per the election programme announced by the Elders Committee, the processes of nomination, objection and withdrawal

have already been completed and the scrutiny of nomination papers is currently in progress. Following these developments, enthusiasm was evident among advocates in the Bar campus, as indications point towards an unopposed election for all major posts.

The entire election process is being conducted peacefully and transparently under the supervision of the Election Officer and Chairman of the Elders Committee, Birendra Awasthi.

By the last date of nomination, the nomination paper of senior advocate Mahendra Singh Shakya for the post of President was found valid. As no other candidate remained in the fray during the withdrawal period, he is likely to be declared President unopposed, subject to the final scrutiny. Similarly, Ved Prakash Yadav is likely to secure the post of Secretary, Ratiram the post of Vice President, Arvind Dubey the post of Junior Vice President, Mahendra Pal Kashyap the post of Treasurer, Anand Kumar Shakya the post of Librarian and Shailendra Singh Chauhan the post of City Secretary.

The final picture regarding the election results, including confirmation of the unopposed President of the Aliganj Bar Association, will become clear after the completion of the scrutiny process scheduled for tomorrow.

## Prayagraj administration on alert to combat cold wave, 6,369 blankets distributed to needy

### Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** In view of the severe cold and the prevailing cold wave, the district administration in Prayagraj has made extensive arrangements for relief and rescue operations. With the cooperation of elected representatives and through the night patrol teams of the district administration, 6,369 blankets have been distributed to helpless and needy people so far. To protect against the cold wave, a total of 48 night shelters are being operated in the district. These include 40 shelters under the Municipal Corporation and 8 under the Nagar Panchayats. The total capacity of these shelters is 1,210 people. Basic facilities such as quilts, mattresses, mats, drinking water, toilets, and electricity have been provided in all the shelters, enabling a large number of needy people to safely spend the night there every day. The details of every person staying in the night shelters are being uploaded daily online on the



Disaster Sentinel mobile application provided by the government. In addition, arrangements for bonfires have been made at a total of 1,037 locations in the district to provide relief from the cold. These include 715 locations in the Municipal Corporation area, 181 in the Nagar Panchayats, and 141 in the Tehsils. Bonfires are being lit regularly at all the identified locations, and geotagged photos of these are being uploaded daily on the Disaster Sentinel mobile application. The district administration has clarified that to ensure that no needy person faces any inconvenience during the cold wave, all concerned departments have been instructed to remain on high alert and continuously monitor the situation and take necessary action.

**The play 'Fareb-e-Hasti' to be staged at Ravindralaya on January 11**

### Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** The play 'Fareb-e-Hasti', presented by Backstage organization in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, will be staged on January 11 at Ravindralaya Auditorium, Jagat Taran Golden Jubilee School. Two shows of the play will be held, the first at 4 PM and the second at 6:30 PM. Written by Sadiq, the play is directed by Praveen Shekhar. The music is composed by Amar Singh, while the lighting is handled by Tony Singh. On stage, actors including Satish Tiwari, Amar Singh, Dilip Srivastava, Chahat Jaiswal, Upasana Tiwari, Kumar Sanu, Durgesh Gupta, Ayush Kesarwani, Ashutosh Manjulsharan, Shikhar Chandra, Ashish Yadav, and Satyawan Kashyap will captivate the audience with their powerful performances. Alok Singh will be in charge of stage management.

## 'Khet Ki Baat' conducted with 20.15 lakh farmers

On the direction of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, farmers are being regularly trained for modern farming, government schemes and innovation in farming by setting up Kisan Pathshala. Under the auspices of the agriculture department, training was given to farmers this year as well. Kisan Pathshala 8.0 Rabi (2025-26) was held with the theme 'Kheti Ki Baat Khet Par'. It trained 20.15 lakh farmers. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had inaugurated the Kisan Pathshala from Padmashri Kisan Ramsaran Verma village Daulatpur, Barabanki on December 12. 12.62 lakh male and 7.53 lakh female farmers were given training on innovation Agriculture Minister Surya Pratap Shahi informed that during the Rabi season, Kisan Pathshalas were organized in Krishi Vigyan Kendra, PACS Society, Gram Panchayat Secretariat, Pragatisheel Kisanas as well as 21 thousand Gram Panchayats of the state.

## A river of folk and classical art flowed at the Magh Mela, with a cultural evening held at the Kala Sangam pavilion



### Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** On Thursday, the Kala Sangam pavilion, organized by the Culture Department of Uttar Pradesh in Parade Sector-3 of the Magh Mela area, witnessed captivating performances of folk songs, folk dances, dance-dramas, and classical music. Renowned artists

from various districts of the state mesmerized the audience with their performances. The listeners immersed themselves in the confluence of folk and classical music, repeatedly applauding and encouraging the artists. The program began with a performance by Pandit Vinod Dwivedi, an expert in Dhrupad singing. He gave an impressive performance of "Dhan Prayag Dhara Dham, Param Pawan Puran Kaam" and "Sur Taal Sangam Man Bhawan" in Raag Bhimpalasi on Chautaal. Following this, he won the hearts of the audience by presenting a hymn in praise of King Ramchandra in Raag Char Ukeshi.

Ramesh Pal, an artist from Banda district of Bundelkhand, gave a spectacular performance of the Diwari folk dance "Pai Danda". In this dance performed with sticks, a young artist from his team thrilled the audience by balancing a wheel on his body. Renowned Bhajan singer Ravindra Pandey from Ayodhya enthralled the audience with bhajans in praise of Shri Ram, including "Sagar Paar Se Siya Ka Samachar Laane

Wale...", "Ram Ki Nagri Shri Ayodhya Mein...", "Duniya Mein Pawan Ayodhya Dham Hai..." and "Rama Rama Ratte Ratt...". Classical singer Seema Verma from Kanpur captivated classical music lovers with her performances of "Dagar Chalte Shyan Chhede...", "Bhajan Ram Charan Dukhda..." and "Jag Asaar Mein Saare Rehna Hari Hari Bol..." based on

Chautarang in Raag Bhairavi. Kathak dancer Emily Ghosh gave a soulful solo performance of "Ardhanarishwar" in Teen Taal, which was appreciated by the audience with rapt attention. Renowned folk singer Pratima Mishra from Prayagraj, along with her team, enlivened the atmosphere by performing popular folk songs such as "Hum Magh Mahina Mein Ganga Nahaaw," "Lehar Lehari Ho Ganga Tori Lahariya..." "Likh Le Daroga Ji Hamari Rapatiya..." and "Le Le Balam Bajariya Se Chudi..." depicting the significance of the month of Magh. The program was successfully conducted by Shweta Srivastava. Finally, the artists were honored with shawls and certificates by Rang Bali Patel (Member, State Executive Committee, BJP), Subhash Chandra (Nodal Officer, Culture Department), and Ghulam Sarwar.

## Major Action by Rishor Police: Three Accused Arrested with Illegal Firearms and Knife



### Etah

In a significant operation aimed at strengthening law and order and ensuring effective control over crime and criminal elements in the district, Rishor Police have achieved notable success. The action was taken under a special drive being conducted on the directions of the Senior Superintendent of Police, Etah and under the close

supervision of the Additional Superintendent of Police, Etah. During a checking campaign, the police team of Rishor Police Station arrested three accused persons. Two illegal country-made pistols, four live cartridges of 315 bore and one illegal knife were recovered from their possession. A case has been registered against the arrested accused at Rishor Police

## Pubali Gohain Assumes Charge as New DC of Darrang District, Assam

In a recent administrative reshuffle by the Assam government, Pubali Gohain, a 1993 batch ACS (Assam Civil Service) officer, assumed charge as the new District Commissioner (DC) of Darrang district in Assam at the district headquarters on Wednesday. She formally received the charge from the outgoing DC, Parag Kumar Kakoti of the 1999 batch ACS, who has been transferred to the position of District Commissioner in Golaghat district. Prior to this, Pubali Gohain served as Secretary in the Assam government Home and Political Department and also



held the additional responsibility of Inspector General of Prisons, Assam. Having joined the ACS cadre in 1993,

Gohain brings extensive experience from various key administrative positions. This appointment is part of the Assam govern-

ment major administrative reorganization in December 2025, which involved transfers of 14 IAS and ACS officers. Sources indicate that the reshuffle, amid election preparations, aims to strengthen district and ensure impartiality.

# Leopard terrorizes Chibaiyan village in Jhansi; captured by Forest Department after a 10-hour rescue operation

After the rescue operation, the Forest Department team tranquilized the leopard with a tranquilizer gun



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Jhansi.** Panic spread in Chibaiyan village of the Jhansi police station area on Thursday when a leopard entered the populated area and attacked two people and a cattle. Two young men were seriously injured in the leopard attack. After a tense and exciting rescue operation that lasted for about 10 hours, the Forest Department team tranquilized the leopard with a tranquilizer gun and safely captured it in a cage. The villagers then breathed a sigh of relief. The incident occurred

around 4 am on Thursday when the leopard was seen coming towards the village from the riverbank. Seeing the leopard, there was an uproar in the village, and villagers came out with sticks and clubs. According to District Panchayat member Suresh Yadav, the leopard was hiding in the bushes outside the village. When the villagers threw stones to chase it away, the leopard suddenly attacked. During this, two young men were seriously injured and were immediately sent to the hospital for treatment. After the attack, the leop-



ard entered the house of Shekhar Singh, located behind



the house of former village head Rajkumar Singh. Upon

receiving the information, a large crowd gathered in the village. Considering the situation, Jhansi Police Station in-charge Mahesh Mishra reached the spot with police force and cordoned off the entire area, taking control of the security. From the Forest Department, DFO Arvind Yadav reached the spot with a tranquilizer gun and his entire team. To safely capture the leopard, Phulpur Ranger Laxmikant Dubey brought wildlife expert Dr. Nasir from Kanpur, who reached Chibaiyan around 4 pm. Dr. Nasir fired two shots

from the tranquilizer gun through the window of the house, which tranquilized the leopard.

After that, the Forest Department team safely captured it in a cage. According to the officials, the leopard was rescued completely safely. After a medical examination, there are plans to release it into either the Ranipur forest area (Chitrakoot) or the Chandra Prabha Wildlife Sanctuary in Kashi. While the incident initially caused panic in the village, the villagers felt relieved after the leopard was captured.

## The sanctity of Prayagraj is incomplete without the worship of Maharishi Bharadwaj

### Prayagraj

On the occasion of Bharadwaj Jayanti and Prayagraj Day, the District Magistrate of Prayagraj said that Maharishi Bharadwaj is the identity of Prayagraj. The government and administration are committed to upholding the honor of Prayagraj. The pilgrimage site will be developed from a tourism and other perspectives in every possible way. He said that Prayagraj has a glorious history, and its development will be carried out accordingly. Saints and enlightened people also spoke positively about declaring Prayagraj a pilgrimage site and imposing a public ban on meat and alcohol within a 5-km radius of the Sangam. Mahant Yama Puri, secretary of the Mahanirvan Akhara, said that the sanctity of

Prayagraj is incomplete without the worship of Maharishi Bharadwaj. Mahant Shridharanand Maharaj of Mankameshwar Temple said that Maharishi Bharadwaj is the first guru in Prayagraj, and his worship is essential. Mahant Shridharacharya of Baikunth Dham said that Maharishi Bharadwaj was a great guru who had 10,000 disciples. His university was in this region, and he was the first Vice-Chancellor. The public sale of meat and alcohol in this Vaishnava region causes us saints distress. The government should consider the words of us saints. Virendra Pathak, convenor of the Prayagraj Vidvat Parishad, spoke in detail about Maharishi Bharadwaj. Despite the severe cold, Maharishi Bharadwaj Jayanti and Prayagraj Day were



celebrated with great pomp and show under the auspices of the Prayagraj Vidvat Parishad. A large number of saints, sages, and enlightened people gathered to offer floral tributes to Maharishi Bharadwaj, the first guru of Prayagraj. On the fifth day of the month of Magh, the birth anniversary of Maharishi Bharadwaj, the

Bharadwaj. The District Magistrate, along with other enlightened people, offered floral tributes on behalf of the district administration. The police band and folk artists added to the festive atmosphere of the procession. Aarti (ritualistic worship) and flower showers were offered to Bharadwaj Ji at various places.

The procession carrying the idol of Maharishi Bharadwaj reached the Sangam (confluence of rivers), where Ganga Puja (worship of the Ganges) was performed. Maharishi Bharadwaj is also considered the founder of the Magh Mela and Kumbh Mela. The program was conducted by Dr. Prabhakar Tripathi. Mahant Shridharanand, Mahant Yamanapuri, Secretary of Mahanirvan Akhara, Jagadguru

Shridharacharya Vaikunth Dham, Nityanathacharya Ji, Chandra Dev Ji Sachchashram, Radhamadhab Das, Jagadguru Narayana Shandilya Guru, Convenor Virendra Pathak, Prof. Devdutt Sarode, Prof. R.S. Pandey, Abhishek Mishra, Ashutosh Shukla, Brajendra Mishra, Shashikant Mishra, Vikram Malviya, Dheeraj Dwivedi, Shailendra Awasthi, Dr. Pramod Shukla, Rahul Dubey, Dr. Shrawan Kumar Mishra, Sandeep Sharma, Anil Mishra, Sudhir Dwivedi, Jagat Narayan Tiwari, Yogmata, Sunita Mishra, Deepu Shukla, Ashok Tiwari, Rajesh Jaiswal, Annu Ghildiyal, Corporator Ratnesh Mishra, Kuldeep Singh, Raghunath Dwivedi, Dr. Ranjan Bajpai, Neeraj Dixit, Shardul Srivastava, and others participated in offering floral tributes.

### Mau will be made mafia free like Maharajganj: AK Sharma

A grand and unprecedented welcome ceremony was organized under the presence and active leadership of Urban Development and Energy Minister A.K. Sharma on the first arrival of Uttar Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Party state president Pankaj Choudhary in Mau. On this occasion, a huge crowd of BJP workers and common citizens gathered in Mau district to give a historic welcome to the state president.

## Admissions Begin for January 2026 Session at Rajarshi Tandon Open University

### Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Prayagraj, commenced the admission process for the January 2026 session on Wednesday. Inaugurating the admission process for the January 2026 session, Vice-Chancellor Professor Satyakam said that the university has made the admission process very simple and accessible this time. Students will not face any difficulty in applying. According to UGC guidelines, the admission process will be completed only after students create their APAAR ID, ABC ID, and UGC Debit ID. The university's expert technical team has greatly simplified this process so that students do not face any problems while filling out the forms. Professor Satyakam said that the university is committed to conducting all admissions in the January 2026 session in accordance with the National Education Policy 2020. In this era of digital revolution, the open university has ensured an online admission system keeping in mind the convenience of the learners. The open university is striving to make higher education accessible to every individual aspiring for quality education.



The university has started admissions in a total of 64 programs in the January 2026 session, including 24 postgraduate programs, 06 undergraduate programs, 04 awareness programs, 07 diploma programs, and 23 certificate programs. An Artificial Intelligence (AI) based skill course is being introduced in the second year of all undergraduate programs. In the first year of the January 2026 session, Diploma in Museology, MA Home Science, and BCA programs are also being launched. Vice-Chancellor Professor Satyakam, while addressing the coordinators of all 12 regional centers – Prayagraj, Lucknow, Bareilly, Agra, Ballia, Ayodhya, Jhansi, Meerut, Ghaziabad, Kanpur, Varanasi, and Gorakhpur – who were connected online during the admission inauguration session, instructed them to provide all possible assistance to the students visiting the centers.

so that they do not face any difficulties during the admission process. He also advised the coordinators to use various social media platforms to disseminate information about admissions to as many people as possible. Professor Satyakam expressed hope that with the cooperation of all regional center coordinators, they would definitely achieve the target of one lakh students this time, and no student would be deprived of admission. Earlier, the admissions in-charge, Professor Jai Prakash Yadav, gave a detailed presentation on the online admission process. Professor Ashutosh Gupta, Director of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell, welcomed the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Satyakam, and Registrar Colonel Vinay Kumar offered the vote of thanks. Directors and in-charges of various academic departments were also present on the occasion. Present on the occasion were Divisional Commissioner Mrs. Soumya

## Magh Mela Preparations Reviewed Before Makar Sankranti; Senior Officials Interact with Saints



### Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** Prayagraj. With the aim of reviewing the arrangements for the Magh Mela before the Makar Sankranti festival and establishing dialogue with the saint community, all senior administrative and police officers visited the Mela area on Wednesday. During this visit, a thorough review of security, sanitation, traffic, health, and other basic facilities was conducted. Present on the occasion were Divisional Commissioner Mrs. Soumya

Agarwal, Police Commissioner Joginder Singh, District Magistrate Manish Verma, Additional Police Commissioner Dr. Ajay Pal, Mela Officer Rishi Raj, Mela Superintendent of Police Neeraj Pandey, Additional Mela Officer Dayanand Prasad, and Deputy Mela Officer Vivek Shukla. The officers visited the senior saints residing in the Mela area, inquired about their well-being, and received their blessings. In this regard, they met with Swami Rameshwaracharya Ji Maharaj, Swami Vimaldev Ji



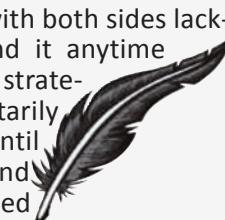
Ji Maharaj, Shri Brahmashram Ji Maharaj, Swami Achyut Prapannacharya Ji Maharaj, Shri Kaushlendra Prapannacharya Ji Maharaj, and Pandit Krishnanand Ji Maharaj and sought their guidance. During the interaction with the saints, the officers clarified that all concerned departments have been instructed to remain vigilant and work in a coordinated manner to ensure that saints and devotees do not face any inconvenience during the Mela period. Special empha-

sis was placed on further improving sanitation, drinking water, electricity, security, and transportation arrangements. Thereafter, the officers reached Prayagwal and met with the office bearers present there and discussed the Mela arrangements. During this time, many elderly and distinguished pilgrims were also honored. The administrative officers assured that the administration is fully prepared to conduct the Makar Sankranti bathing festival safely and in an orderly manner.

## Editorial

### Putin's worry isn't the military

Recently sworn in for a fifth term, Russian President Vladimir Putin did a surprise reshuffle of his defence establishment, demoting two of his closest aides—former defence minister Sergei Shoigu and ex-secretary of Security Council of Russia Nikolai Patrushev. This re-shuffle comes at a time when 'mobilisation' was expected to be Putin's first move after re-election. The President has chosen deputy prime minister and long-time economic advisor Andrei Belousov to replace Shoigu, who in turn has replaced Patrushev. The latter's new appointment remains unknown. The move is being seen as an effort to reduce the unsustainable and soaring costs of the war in Ukraine. It also challenges the narrative that the Russian economy is unaffected by the sanctions in the long-standing war. For 2024 alone, Putin has allocated \$117 billion for the special military operation against Ukraine. His war economy runs feverishly in an overheated mode. Most international estimates state that 7.5 per cent of Russia's GDP is directed to the military-industrial complex although Kremlin's official estimates claim it is 6.7 percent. It is a rare submission of a rising-cost problem from Putin, who had preferred to continue with his hunting-holidaying excursions pal Shoigu despite repeated allegations of systemic corruption and inefficiency against him for years. These allegations became the order of the day when mercenary group Wagner, led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, was brought to deliver victory in the infamous battle for Bakhmut in 2023. Putin's slighting of Prigozhin's outright allegations against Shoigu and Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov led to the incredible Wagner mutiny against the two generals, which ended up with Prigozhin's death in uncanny circumstances. It, however, unleashed an investigation into rampant corruption inside Russia's military leadership, of which Prigozhin had become the most notorious victim. Russia-watchers had an inkling of Shoigu's exit after Prigozhin and his aides were made to bid adieu into the flannel skies, and many corrupt links started to get exposed in the Ministry of Defence. The inkling became stronger as Shoigu's deputies, including Timur Ivanov, got arrested on corruption charges last month. Soon, two other deputy defence ministers allegedly backdated their resignations before 9 May, or the Soviet Victory Day. The Russian army was supposed to make an impressive win in Chasiv Yar on the eastern front but had to make do with American tanks captured at a small village called Berdychi when Ukrainians retreated, running out of ammunition to fire. All has certainly not been going as planned. The latest reshuffling in key defence and security offices has been Putin's biggest shake-up in the past 15 years. There are two reasons for this. One is ensuring economic efficiency at a time when the stakes are very high for Russia and Putin. And two, Shoigu's leadership has not been able to yield the anticipated results in the Ukraine war. His current appointment is a step-down with little direct authority. Getting an economist like Belousov in the key position of a defence minister also shows that Putin is preparing for the longer haul. It is a solemn reiteration that the Ukraine war has indeed been reduced to a grinding war of attrition, with both sides lacking the capabilities to end it anytime soon. Europe's combined strategies to support Kyiv militarily won't come to fruition until mid-2025. American aid and the conditionalities attached are likely to help Ukraine stay afloat, but not gain a decisive edge.



## With Taiwanese President set to assume office

Given that there is no let-up in either Taiwan's defence preparedness posture or the US' backing of the island, China is likely to dig into its coercive toolkit to respond to Lai's swearing in. Image: REUTERS With newly elected Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te set to assume office on May 20, there is intense speculation surrounding China's potential response to the event. In anticipation of an aggressive response, Tsai Ming-yen, Director-General of Taiwan's National Security Bureau, announced on May 1 that island authorities will be implementing measures to strengthen national critical infrastruc-

ture. Aiding the island's overall defence posture, on April 24, United States President Joe Biden has also signed a bill to mobilise \$8 billion in defence aid to the Indo-Pacific in general and Taiwan in particular. With neither the US nor China backing down on their respective positions on the Taiwan issue, these developments add fire to the already deteriorating cross-Strait dynamics.

**US' proactive role worries China**

During the recently concluded meeting between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing, Xi conveyed that the very first "red line" the US

should not cross in its relations with China is the Taiwan issue. However, the US' decision to continue to provide political and military support to Taiwan is motivated by two key factors: shared values and national security interests. While from a values-based perspective, the US sees its role in the Taiwan Strait as a defender of democracy and a provider of net security, from a national security interests perspective, it sees immense value in deterring China, preventing undue escalation, and securing supply chains in critical sectors such as semiconductor chips, wherein Taiwan plays a vital role. Hence, in the run up to Lai's assump-

tion of the presidential office, the US has embarked on a mission to demonstrate commitment to Taiwan. In addition to quickly signing the above-mentioned Indo-Pacific Security Supplemental Bill into law, over the past week, the Biden administration has also engaged with counter During this latest round of negotiations, concluded on May 3, the two sides reportedly discussed agriculture, environment, and labour issues with the hope of progressing the initiative to its second stage. After the first stage plan was signed by Washington and Taipei in May last year and brought into force through

## Why India should not put all its 'eggs' in military junta's basket alone



Three years after the military coup in Myanmar, there seems to be no signs of the conflict abating between the junta and the various Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) across the country. Especially after the successful launch of Operation 1027 against the military junta by the Three Brotherhood alliance members comprising the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) from the Kokang region of the Shan state, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army also from the Shan state, and the Arakan Army (AA) based in the Rakhine state. After the success of Operation 1027, the rebellion quickly spread across Myanmar and by November 7, 2023, with the launch of Operation 1107 in support of Operation 1027, many other insurgent groups across the country joined hands. This was perhaps one of the rare occasions in the troubled history of Myanmar where EAOs from a variety of ethnic groups had come together in a meticulously coordinated attack against the junta. Subsequently, many Myanmar observers debated the pushback by the rebel groups as a victory for democracy, with some reports stating only 30-40 per cent of Myanmar was under the control of the junta. However, whether that means it is a victory in

the real sense for the disparate groups that are fighting the junta is arguable. The junta has been relentless in its own offensive against EAOs. Not only does the junta have larger access to weapons but also has decades of experience in dealing with EAOs. It was evident in the recapture of Myawaddy, a border town and entry point for Thailand. A town destined to be a full international crossing as part of the Asian Highway Route Network AH1, that will extend to Tokyo, Japan. It also is a route for border trade of over \$1 billion. There were various reports that claimed that the strategic town of Myawaddy was actually never captured by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Though KNLA didn't claim it in explicit terms, through videos and strategic perception building, it gave the impression that it had cap-

tured the whole town. On the contrary, the truth might be that the town is actually under the control of the Border Guard Force (BGF), a Karen-dominated pro-junta militia group. And if not entirely pro-junta anymore, it is still playing a neutral role as the junta pays the salaries of its soldiers. Earlier this week the BGF warned, saying: "All foreigners who are doing online business around the Kayin state, Myawaddy township, must leave between May 1 (1-5-2024) and October 31 (31-10-2024). Foreigners who illegally cross the border must leave the country by the way they came. If found after October 31 (31-10-2024), effective action will be taken." This warning was aimed at online scammers and gambling operations that have found place in Shwe Kokko Myaing, the "new city" that is a short distance from Myawaddy fund-

ed by Chinese money and BGF partnership. The notice was posted in Burmese, Chinese and English. The statement in itself is reminiscent of the fate of the "four families" of Laukkaing in the Shan state who were involved in cyber-crime, cyber slavery and gambling operations that adversely impacted China. With the launch of Operation 1027, Tatmadaw looked towards the Chinese for support and in return withdrew support from the "four families".

Operation 1027 was launched by the Three Brotherhood alliance that included the China-backed MNDAA. Today, trade between Myanmar through the northern Shan state has resumed. Similarly, in the case of Myawaddy it might be pertinent to note that the warning by the BGF has come less than a week after the visit of Lt Gen Yar Pyae, Union Minister for Home Affairs, to China. Lt Gen Yar Pyae met with Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong and Xu Datong, Vice Minister of Public Security, China. They signed agreements on assistance worth RMB 5 million to the Myanmar police force. The Chinese side also made it clear that they view the China-Myanmar relationship from a strategic perspective.

Simultaneously, more than

500 Chinese nationals have arrived in Kyaukphyu Township in the troubled Rakhine state. Kyaukphyu, which has Chinese investments in various projects, particularly Myanmar's long-delayed deep-water port project, supported by the CITIC Group, China's largest state-owned transnational conglomerate. Kyaukphyu also has the China twin oil and gas pipeline that extends to the Yunnan province in China. Importantly, the EAOs, especially AA that is active in Rakhine, have given a guarantee of protection to these projects. The investments that go into billions of dollars will also give the junta a much-needed reinforcement. India too has ambitions in Myanmar as a part of its Act East policy. India, Myanmar, and Thailand are building the Asian Trilateral Highway, which will connect India to ASEAN. The road is expected to boost trade and commerce in the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area, as well as with the rest of Southeast Asia. India is also building the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport, a road-river-port cargo transport project, to link Kolkata to Sittwe in Myanmar and from Myanmar's Kaladan river to India's Northeast, a project of strategic importance giving India an alternative route to the Siliguri;

## Why Delhi-Tehran deal on Chabahar Port is good news for India's Shia Muslims

After extensive negotiations, India and Iran have finally sealed a historic 10-year bilateral agreement for the operation of the strategically located Chabahar Port on the Gulf country's eastern coast. While India initially engaged in short-term agreements with Iran starting in 2016, the newly inked deal marks a significant milestone. With its presence in Chabahar, India aims to circumvent reliance on Pakistan's ports in Karachi and Gwadar, facilitating smoother access to landlocked Afghanistan and other Central Asian nations via Iran.

This deal has a lot of economic significance for India. Despite the nation's preoccupation with the ongoing Lok Sabha election, the

Narendra Modi government's decisive action, including the special permission reportedly obtained from the Election Commission of India (ECI) to dispatch a central minister to Iran, underscores the paramount importance of this deal for the nation's strategic interests and economic future. In geopolitical dynamics, this deal is a major achievement for India and a testament to Modi's personal diplomacy. It marks our first step into managing overseas ports and serves as a strategic move against the emerging

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Its timing, amid the chaos in West Asia disrupting important trade routes, makes it even more significant.

Furthermore, beyond these tangible benefits, India's diplomatic success shines through the forging of successful ties with conflicted powers. Its diplomatic success is evident in its ability to foster friendly relations with Israel while extending support to Palestine. Simultaneously, New Delhi adeptly navigates deepening ties with the United States and successfully negotiates with Iran, showcasing its diplomatic prowess. Meanwhile, our long-standing partnerships with countries such as Saudi Arabia, Russia, and Japan continue to flourish. India's leadership roles in the G20 forum and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) highlight that its diplomacy is actually working.

## Why BJP-led NDA Seems to Have Advantage in Elections

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections have entered midway with the completion of four phases and only three phases remaining. During this election, the centre of discussion has been the low voter turnout — although in the fourth phase, this trend reversed with a marginal increase in turnout percentage compared to 2019. Amid this, the Opposition leaders have started claiming that the BJP's numbers are falling. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the BJP would win 180 seats, but days later he revised the figures to 150. Compared to Rahul, who seems to be very strict regarding the BJP's figures, TMC supremo and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee gave more seats to the BJP — 195, at best. However, AAP supremo and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal seems to be more liberal than

Gandhi and Banerjee when it comes to assigning numbers to the BJP. He projected that the saffron party may get 220 seats. When the Opposition leaders are trying their best to propagate that the BJP is even struggling to cross the 200 mark, this month, in an election rally in Krishnanagar, West Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi claimed that people have decided that the BJP-led NDA is poised to secure not only 370 seats but is

power for the second time only because of the opportunity provided by the Pulwama terror attack. This argument is faulty, that's why a revisit to the 2019 elections is necessary. According to the Lokniti-CSDS post-poll study, the Pulwama terror attack and Balakot air strike were important issues for only 0.4 per cent of voters. The survey pointed out that development was an important issue for 14.3 per cent of voters. This was followed by unemployment, which was important for 11.3 per cent of voters. Other issues included economic growth, corruption, price rise, water-related problems etc. These figures have been in the public domain for the last five years, still, it is amazing that in this country, we have some eminent journalists and political commentators misinterpreting the 2019 election as mostly decided on the basis of Pulwama and Balakot. Coming to the 2024 elections, Lokniti-CSDS released a pre-poll survey in April where the data pointed out that the satisfaction level towards the Modi government has seen a dip of around 8.1 per cent — a sign of serious concern for the BJP. Increasing unemployment (12.2 per cent), price rise (7.6 per cent) and falling income (4.1 per cent) are some of the crucial issues.



Filmmaker Aditya Dhar's *Dhurandhar* has emerged as the highest-earning Hindi film of all time, with a nett India collection of over Rs 831 crore, the makers announced on Wednesday.

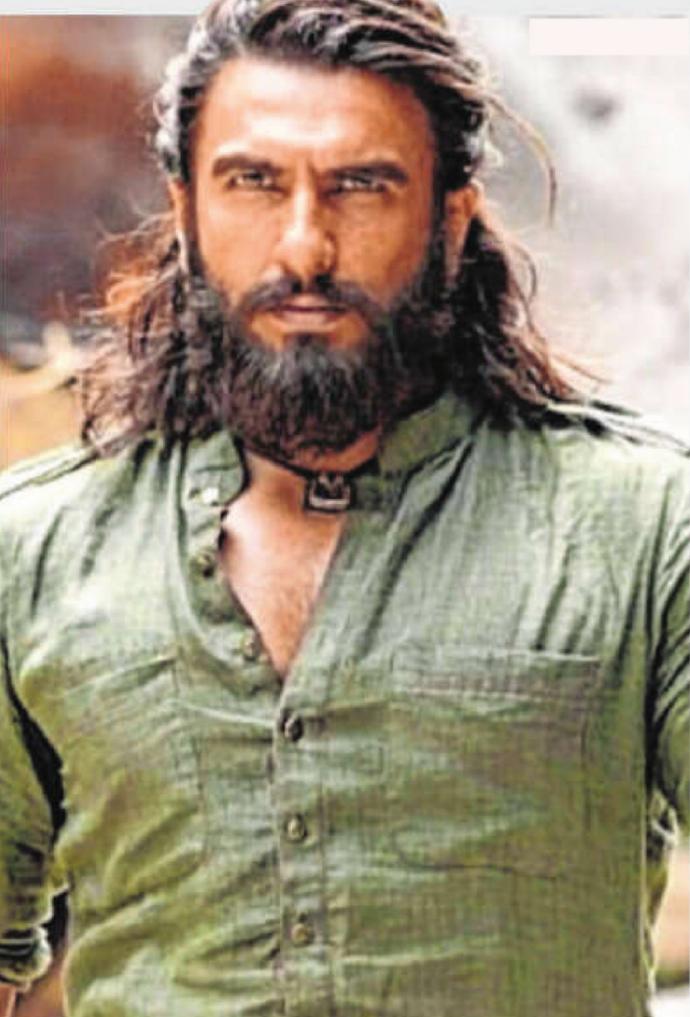
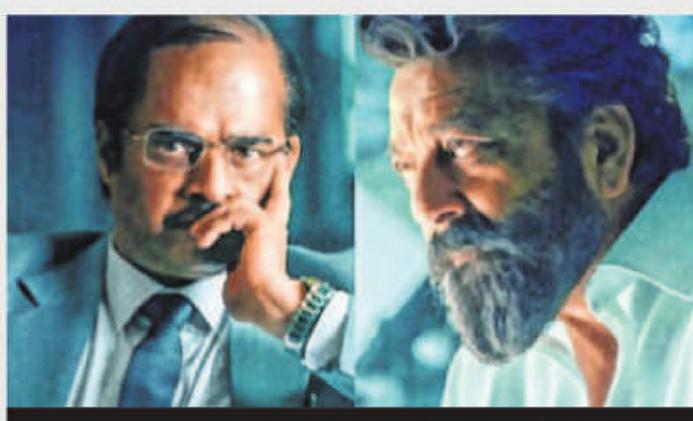
The Ranveer Singh-starrer earned Rs 5.70 crore nett on Day 33 (on Tuesday), taking its total India nett collection to Rs 831.40 crore and securing the top spot among all Hindi releases.

"History has been rewritten. With Tuesday's collections, *Dhurandhar* has officially become the highest-earning Hindi film of all time, redefining Indian box office success," the makers said in a statement.

The record was previously held by the Hindi version of Allu Arjun's *Pushpa 2: The Rule* (2023), which had earned Rs 830 crore.

Other top-grossing Hindi films include Shah Rukh Khan's *Jawan* and the horror comedy *Street 2*, with collections of Rs 643 crore and Rs 627 crore respectively.

According to box office figures, *Dhurandhar* collected Rs 218 crore in its opening week, followed by Rs 261.50 crore in week two, Rs 189.30 crore in week three and Rs 115.70 crore in week four. The film added Rs 35.80 crore over its fifth weekend and continues to maintain a steady weekday run.



## Dhurandhar becomes biggest Hindi film ever

**Aditya Dhar's Ranveer Singh-starrer creates history, surpasses Pushpa 2 with ₹831.40 crore to become the highest-grossing Hindi film ever**



**Ranveer Singh expresses pride**  
Actor Ranveer Singh reacted to *Dhurandhar* creating box office history by surpassing *Pushpa 2: The Rule* to become the highest-grossing Hindi film of all time. Yash Raj Films, which presented the film, congratulated the team in an official statement, calling *Dhurandhar* a "milestone moment in Indian cinema" and praising director Aditya Dhar's vision, storytelling and leadership. Responding to the statement, Ranveer wrote on social media, "My beloved alma mater. Only ever wanted to make you proud!"



## Hrithik's fitness food mantra

Bollywood actor Hrithik Roshan gave fans a glimpse into his fitness routine, sharing a post about his new motto: 'Eat lesser, love better. But make the plate look huge'

**H**rithik Roshan has once again proved that fitness isn't about extremes but about discipline, intention and a little creativity on the plate. The 51-year-old actor recently offered fans a glimpse of what really powers his sculpted physique, sharing a photo of his meal with his new mantra: "Eat lesser, love better. But make the plate look huge."

### About *Krrish 4*

What featured on his plate was more than just food; it was a masterclass in mindful eating. The star built his meal around lean protein soaked in a vibrant green sauce, then packed the rest of the plate with colour, showcasing charred Brussels sprouts, sautéed zucchini, bell peppers, broccoli, carrots and more. In another shot, shredded beetroot made an appearance, along with a banana on the side. This is classic "volume eating", piling up high-fibre, low-calorie foods so portions feel generous while nutrition remains intact. Instead of processed carbs or greasy sides, vegetables become the main hero, meaning more vitamins, more fibre, and fewer unnecessary calories.

**Fans react**  
Predictably, the internet had plenty to say. Some fans were inspired, admitting that his post nudged them back toward healthier habits after the holiday binge. Others had only



## Vicky, Katrina name their baby boy Vihaan

**V**icky Kaushal and Katrina Kaif were blessed with a baby boy on November 7, 2025. Now, after two months, the couple has announced their son's name. They have named him Vihaan Kaushal. The couple shared a cute picture and captioned it, "Our ray of light, Vihaan Kaushal विहान कौशल (sic)."

They further wrote, "Prayers are answered. Life is beautiful. Our world is changed in an instant. Gratitude beyond words (sic)."

Several fans and celebrities commented on the post and congratulated Vicky and Katrina. Parineeti Chopra commented, "Little buddy! (sic)."



## Nicole Kidman, Keith Urban finalise their divorce



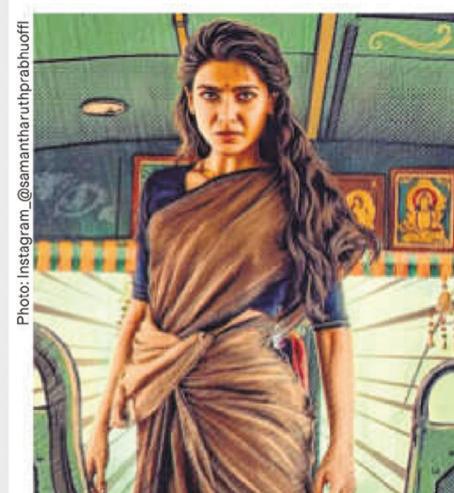
**H**ollywood actor Nicole Kidman has officially finalised her divorce with singer Keith Urban, ending their 19-year marriage. *The Perfect Couple* actor filed for divorce in September last year, citing "irreconcilable differences", following which the former couple entered into an agreement in court on Tuesday.

As per a news report in People, Kidman and Urban have agreed to waive all child and spousal support rights, with each being responsible for their own legal fees and expenses.

"They are required to behave with each other and each child so as to provide a loving, stable, consistent and nurturing relationship with the child, even though they are divorced. They will not speak badly of each other or the members of the family of the other parent. They will encourage each child to continue to love the other parent and be comfortable in both families," the court documents read, as quoted by People.

While the girls will be staying with their mother for 306 days of the year, Urban has been allotted to spend "every other weekend" with them.

Nicole Kidman and Keith Urban tied the knot in 2006 and share two daughters -- Sunday Rose, 17, and Faith Margaret, 14.



## Samantha serves intense look in *Maa Inti Bangaram*

**A**ctress Samantha Ruth Prabhu is gearing up for her return to the Telugu film industry with her next *Maa Inti Bangaram*. Adding to the buzz for the already hyped drama, the makers have unveiled the first look poster from BV Nandini Reddy's directorial.

The poster has Samantha standing inside a bus in a simple brown saree. She seems all ready to pick a

fight with intensity clearly visible in her eyes. Sharing the poster with her Instagram Family, Samantha wrote, "You just keep watching... #MaaIntiBangaram will be connecting with y'all. (sic)"

Along with the first look poster, Samantha also revealed the release date for *Maa Inti Bangaram* teaser trailer. "#MiBTeaserTrailer out on 9th JAN at 10 AM," she added.



## Krystle takes a stand for Tamannaah!

Krystle D'Souza slams people for bringing Tamannaah Bhatia down, says she would have 'killed it' in *Dhurandhar* song *Shararat*

not approached, I'm sure she would have nailed it. Like, there's no way that she wouldn't kill it. And even if Ayesha was alone in the song, she would have killed it. If I was alone in the song, I would have killed it. Everyone would have

done what they could do best. So, I'm never going to take away from anyone who's hardworking, who's self-made, who has, you know, who has been consistent and is ready to, you know, put in the effort. So, I feel like she's doing big

things. She's going to do bigger things. And this is our time and we are doing things and we are going to do bigger things. So, there's enough fun for everyone, as I've always said. Everyone needs to shine like Ranveer Singh let us shine. To bring somebody up, you don't need to bring others down. I don't know how many times I need to say this. But just to bring another person up, please don't tear another person apart. Because you don't know mentally how it can affect somebody."

Speaking about her *Shararat* co-star Ayesha, Krystle had nothing but praise for the dancer and performer. "She's a very confident girl. She's so good at what she does, you know. Before I met her, I did stalk her because they told me Ayesha was in. And I went through her reels and I'm like, oh my god, she's such a beautiful performer. She dances on reels, and she dances so well. So it's just like, you know you're going to perform with somebody good. So your performance is going to look good. Like, when you have a good co-actor for an intense scene, you know that scene is going to turn out well. So you know if you have a good person who's dancing with you, that dance is going to turn out well."



Photos: Instagram @hrithikroshan

## Italy nabs 9 for Hamas funding

ROME

Italian authorities arrested nine people linked to three charitable organisations on suspicion of raising millions of euros in funds for the Palestinian militant group Hamas, anti-terrorism prosecutors said in a statement on Saturday.

The suspects are accused of sending €7 million euros (\$8.2 million) to "associations based in Gaza, the Palestinian territories, or Israel, owned, controlled, or linked to Hamas," the statement said.

Among those arrested was Mohammad Hannoun, president of the Palestinian Association in Italy, prosecutors said, describing him as the "head of the Italian cell of the Hamas organisation."

The EU has Hamas listed on its terror list.

## Heatwaves, wildfires, droughts, storms cost world over \$120b: Report

Heatwaves, wildfires, droughts and storms cost the global economy more than US \$120 billion in 2025, underscoring the rising financial and human toll of climate change, a new report by UK-based non-governmental organisation Christian Aid said.

According to the analysis, extreme weather events intensified across continents this year, with the most expensive disasters concentrated in richer countries where insured losses are higher, even as poorer nations suffered widespread devastation with limited financial protection.

These disasters are not natural. They are the predictable result of continued fossil fuel expansion and political delay," said Joanna Haigh, Emeritus Professor at Imperial College London.

### COSTLIEST CLIMATE EVENTS

The 10 most financially damaging climate events of



People flee floodwaters in Hat Yai, Southern Thailand

2025 each caused losses running into billions of dollars, with combined damages exceeding US \$122 billion, the report said.

Most of the figures reflect insured losses alone, suggesting the true economic impact is likely to be significantly higher, while human suffering often remains uncounted.

The US bore the largest financial burden, with wildfires in California topping the list as the single costliest

event, causing an estimated \$60 billion in damage and over 400 deaths.

Cyclones and floods across Southeast Asia ranked second, inflicting \$25 billion in losses and killing over 1,750 people across Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Malaysia.

Devastating floods in China followed, displacing thousands, killing at least 30 people and causing \$17 billion in damage.

### MOST COSTLY DISASTERS IN 2025

- Palisades and Eaton fires in the US: \$60b
- South & Southeast Asia cyclones in Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Malaysia: \$25b
- Typhoons in Philippines: \$5b
- Drought, Brazil: \$4.75b
- Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred in Australia: \$1.2b
- Hurricane Melissa in Jamaica, Cuba and Bahamas: \$8b
- Cyclone Garance in Réunion: \$1.05b
- Texas floods, US: \$1b

"No continent was spared from crippling climate disasters in 2025," the report said, noting at least one major event struck each of the world's six populated regions.

### ASIA AMONG WORST HIT

Asia accounted for four of the six costliest disasters. Flooding in India and Pakistan killed over 1,860 people, cost up to \$6 billion and affected over 7 million people in Pakistan alone.

events occurred in poorer countries where insurance coverage is low and data is scarce.

Western Australia posing major threats to biodiversity.

### CALL FOR URGENT ACTION

Christian Aid said the events of 2025 underline the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels and increase funding for climate adaptation in vulnerable regions. "This year has again shown the stark reality of climate breakdown," said Patrick Watt, CEO of Christian Aid. "Violent storms, devastating floods and prolonged droughts are turning lives and livelihoods upside down. The poorest communities are first and worst affected."

The climate disasters are a warning of what lies ahead if we do not accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels. They underline the urgent need for adaptation, particularly in the global South, where resources are stretched and people are vulnerable to climate shocks," he said.

## PEACE TALKS

# Zelenskyy heads to Florida to meet Trump Prez: Kyiv strikes show Putin's true attitude

KYIV

Russia attacked Ukraine's capital with missiles and drones early on Saturday morning, killing one person and wounding 27, a day before talks between Ukraine and the US authorities said.

Explosions boomed across Kyiv for hours as ballistic missiles and drones hit the city. The attack began in the early morning hours on Saturday and was continuing as the day broke. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is prepared to meet US President Donald Trump in Florida on Sunday for further talks on ending the nearly 4-year-old war. Zelenskyy told reporters he was on a plane en route to



Florida on Saturday afternoon, and would stop in Canada on the way to meet Prime Minister Mark Carney.

Russian Defence Ministry said it carried out a "massive strike" overnight, using "long-range precision-guided weapons from land, air and sea, including Kinzhal hypersonic aeroballistic missiles" and drones. It said it targeted

energy infrastructure facilities used by Ukraine's forces and military-industrial enterprises. The ministry said the strike came in response to Ukraine's attacks on "civilian objects" in Russia.

Poland scrambled fighter jets and closed airports in Lublin and Rzeszow near the border with Ukraine for several hours during the Russian

attacks, the country's armed forces command said on X. There was no violation of Polish airspace. Civil aviation authority Pansa said the two airports had since resumed operations. It was unclear what caused the alert in Poland.

Zelenskyy said the main target was energy and civilian infrastructure in Kyiv. In some districts, there is no electricity or heating. "Today, Russia demonstrated how it responds to peace talks between Ukraine and the US on ending Russia's war against Ukraine. They carried out massive attacks on Ukraine precisely as we move toward peace negotiations," said Zelenskyy, speaking to reporters via audio note while travelling. "That is Russia's response."

## Maduro seeks talks with US

**Caracas:** Venezuelan President **Nicolas Maduro** has expressed willingness to hold talks with the US based on mutual respect, provided the US gives up interference in Venezuela.

In a televised speech on Friday (local time), Maduro said if the US side is willing to engage in dialogue with Venezuela on the basis of mutual respect and abandon its failed attempts to interfere in Venezuela over the past 25 years, he will welcome it and seek a path toward peace, cooperation and prosperity.

## Taiwan hit by strong quake

A magnitude 6.6 earthquake struck off eastern Taiwan at 11.05 pm on Saturday, sending strong tremors through Taipei, New Taipei, and Yilan County. Data from the USGS showed the quake occurred at a depth of 67.28 kms, producing significant shaking across northern and eastern regions. Early reports showed no casualties.

## Rahman registers as B'deshi voter

**Dhaka:** BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman on Saturday completed the formalities to enlist himself on Bangladesh's voter list and obtain a national identity (NID) card, two days after his return from over 17 years of self-exile in London.

The 60-year-old leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party visited the Election Commission office in Dhaka under tight security, where he provided fingerprints and iris scans for biometric enrollment, news portal tbsnews.net reported.

Meanwhile, Awami League, banned by the interim government from contesting the elections, in an article, claimed Rahman is "receiving one privilege after another,

with repeated violations of the law". "After the announcement of the election schedule, becoming a new voter is legally prohibited; yet questions have arisen about Tarique Rahman becoming a voter while that schedule was still in effect. Moreover, the day was a Saturday, a weekly govt holiday. So how was the law followed, and under whose instructions?" it asked.

**VISITING HADI'S GRAVE** Rahman visited Dhaka University and offered prayers at the grave of slain student leader Sharif Osman Hadi.

**CONCERT CALLED OFF** At least 20 students were injured in a mob attack that

forced the cancellation of a concert by popular rock singer James, who has also sung hit Hindi film songs on Friday, officials and organisers said.

The concert in Faridpur was cancelled amid a recent spate of attacks on cultural institutions. James' concert was to mark the closing of Faridpur Zilla Schools' 185th anniversary celebrations.

A group of outsiders tried to force entry after being turned away, throwing bricks and stones and attempting to seize the stage.

Students of the school resisted the attackers, and at least 20 were injured by flying debris, according to the organisers.

## Kash plan to shut FBI bldg final

**FBI Director Kash Patel** said FBI's J Edgar Hoover building in Washington DC will be "shut down permanently" after previously discarding plans to move the bureau's headquarters to Maryland, The Hill's reported.

Instead, employees will report to the Ronald Reagan Building to occupy the former location of the US Agency for

International Development, which was dismantled by the Trump administration earlier this year.

"After over 20 years of failed attempts, we finalised a plan to permanently close the FBI's Hoover headquarters and move the workforce into a safe, modern facility. Working directly with

President Trump and Congress, we accomplished what no one else could," Patel said.

"This decision puts resources where they belong: defending the homeland, crushing violent crime, and protecting national security. It delivers better tools for today's FBI workforce at a fraction of the cost."

## Xmas eve miracle

# \$2 lottery ticket wins \$1.8b jackpot



A Powerball ticket sold at a gas station in Arkansas, US, has won a massive \$1.817 billion jackpot in the Christmas Eve drawing, marking one of the biggest lottery wins in American history. The winning numbers were 04, 25, 31, 52 and 59, with the Powerball number 19. Lottery officials said the ticket was purchased at a Murphy USA outlet in Cabot, Arkansas.

The prize is the second-largest lottery jackpot ever in the US and the biggest Powerball

newest Powerball jackpot winner! This is truly an extraordinary, life-changing prize," said Matt Strawn, Powerball Product Group Chair and Iowa Lottery CEO.

"We also want to thank all the players who joined in this jackpot streak — every ticket purchased helps support public programs and services across the country."

The winner's identity has not yet been disclosed. Karen Reynolds, a spokesperson for the Arkansas Lottery, said the claims centre is closed for the

holidays and the winner is unlikely to come forward before Monday.

The jackpot followed 46 consecutive drawings without a top prize winner. The previous Powerball jackpot was won on September 6, when players in Missouri and Texas shared \$1.787 billion.

Officials said this is only the second time a Powerball jackpot has been won with a ticket sold in Arkansas, the first being in 2010. Powerball noted the last Christmas Eve jackpot win occurred in 2011. —AP

## African regional bodies reject Israel's recognition of Somaliland

**Nairobi:** Africa's regional governance bodies on Saturday rejected the recognition of Somaliland as an independent nation by Israel a day ago, the first by any country in more than 30 years.

Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991 amid a descent into conflict and, despite having its own government and currency, had never been recognised by any nation in the world until Friday.

African Union chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssouf said any attempt to undermine Somalia's sovereignty risks peace and stability on the continent. The commission "firmly rejects any initiative or action aimed at recognising Somaliland as an independent entity, recalling Somaliland remains an integral part of the Federal Republic of Somalia."

## Massive crash on Japan's highway kills 2, as holiday season starts

**Tokyo:** A massive crash involving 67 vehicles in snowy weather has killed two people and injured 26 on an expressway in Japan as the country kicked off its end-of-year holiday season.

The Gunma prefectural highway police said on Saturday the pileup on the Kanetsu Expressway late on Friday started with a collision between two trucks in Minakami, about 160 km

northwest of Tokyo.

The initial crash blocked parts of the expressway, and cars coming from behind them were unable to brake on the snowy surface.

A fire erupted at the far end of the pileup, spreading to 20 vehicles, some of which were completely burned. The fire was extinguished about seven hours later, police said.

A 77-year-old woman from Tokyo died in a passenger car,



### WINTER STORM

were warning travellers to check with their airline to determine the status of their flights.

The heaviest snow was expected between 18:00 local time and midnight. Drivers were warned of hazardous conditions and advised to bring an emergency supply kit, BBC reported on Saturday.



Burnt vehicles are seen after a massive crash on an expressway in Minakami, northwest of Tokyo, on Saturday.

—AP

## Thailand, Cambodia sign new ceasefire agreement

BANGKOK



Cambodian Defence Minister Tea Seiha (L) with his Thai counterpart Nattaphon Narkphanit.

had been laid by Cambodian forces. The agreement was signed by the countries' defence ministers, Cambodia's Tea Seiha and Thailand's Nattaphon Narkphanit, at a border checkpoint. It followed 3-day lower-level talks by military officials.

It declares the sides are committed to an earlier ceasefire that ended 5 days of fighting in July and follow-up pacts. The original July ceasefire was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from US President Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. It was formalised in more detail in Oct at a regional meet in Malaysia that Trump attended.

## 1-stop help desk for distressed Indian women in Canada

**Toronto:** The Consulate General of India in Toronto has established a 'One Stop Centre for Women', a dedicated support centre exclusively to assist women Indian nationals in distress.

The consulate has set up a 24x7 helpline and said the new centre aims to provide critical and timely support to Indian passport holder women facing domestic violence, abuse, family conflict, abandonment, exploitation and legal challenges, among others.

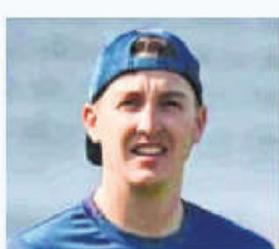
One Stop Centre for Women will provide coordinated, beneficiary-centred assistance by connecting aggrieved women to timely and right pathways of support. —PTI



Indian batter Tilak Varma has undergone a surgery for an abdominal issue in Rajkot on Wednesday. He will miss the first three matches of the upcoming T20 International series against New Zealand. The Hyderabad player complained of pain during the Vijay Hazare Trophy. "He was discharged from the hospital on Thursday morning and is scheduled to fly back to Hyderabad on Friday. He is currently stable and progressing well," BCCI said in a release. "Tilak will resume physical training and gradually return to skill-based activities once his symptoms have fully resolved and wound healing is satisfactory. His availability for the remaining two matches will be assessed based on his progress during the return-to-training and skill phases."

SYDNEY

**Brook regrets nightclub incident in NZ**



England's Harry Brook apologised on Thursday for clashing with a nightclub bouncer in October during the tour of New Zealand that preceded the Ashes series. London's Telegraph reported that Brook, the England white-ball captain, was hit by a bouncer after being denied entry to the club in Wellington on Oct. 31, the day before the third and last one-day international against New Zealand.

Brook was fined about 30,000 pounds (\$40,300) at the time and given a final warning for his future conduct. He was not stripped of the white-ball captaincy. The incident was revealed after England lost the fifth Test by five wickets in Sydney.

DAMBULLA

**Shadab makes impressive comeback**



Allrounder Shadab Khan staked his claim for a spot at next month's T20 World

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**WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE** | World Cup-winning captain Harmanpreet will aim to go one-up on Smriti Mandhana

## Two-time champions MI face gritty RCB in opener

NAVI MUMBAI

The Women's Premier League's (WPL) 2026 edition will be held with Indian women cricketers participating emboldened by the historic and epic World Cup success that they achieved in November of last year.

Action will begin on Friday at the DY Patil Stadium here when two-time champions Mumbai Indians led by the all-conquering Harmanpreet Kaur lock horns with Smriti Mandhana's Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the opening clash of the tournament.

When Harmanpreet keeps reiterating that the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai is her favourite venue to play, the statement evokes barely any surprise considering the gargantuan achievement from two months ago.

The Mumbai Indians have possibly the best team on paper with the legendary Harmanpreet at the helm of affairs and the England and West Indies skipper Nat Sciver-Brunt and Hayley Matthews respectively, on board.

What makes MI formidable would be their enviable batting riches with the likes of Amelia Kerr of New Zealand, talented Australian Millie Illingworth and India's dependable Amanjot Kaur.

Mumbai Indians players celebrate their win against Delhi Capitals in the Women's Premier League 2025 final match in Mumbai on March 15, 2025. PTI

games has often been crucial for the side.

While De Klerk is yet to make a significant impact in the WPL, her international credentials speak volumes. The South African all-rounder has scored 667 runs and taken 52 wickets in Women's T20 Internationals, making her a valuable asset for RCB going forward.

Meanwhile, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) now boast one of the most dangerous finishing combinations in the Women's Premier League (WPL), with Richa Ghosh and Nadine de Klerk strengthening the middle order.

The presence of both batters gives RCB the confidence to either chase challenging targets or recover from tricky situations, while consistently putting pressure on opposition bowlers.

Richa has been a consistent performer for RCB over the years and remains one of their most dependable batters. In 26 WPL matches, she has scored 625 runs, including eight half-centuries, at an impressive strike rate of 150.96.

Her ability to finish

### MI- Best team on paper

The Mumbai Indians have possibly the best team on paper with the legendary Harmanpreet at the helm of affairs and the England and West Indies skipper Nat Sciver-Brunt and Hayley Matthews respectively, on board.

rounder Grace Harris and South Africa's Nadine de Klerk will share the batting responsibilities.

Richa Ghosh will do the job for RCB behind the wickets and also don the crucial role of the finisher.

India's Arundhati Reddy, Pooja Vastrakar, and England's Lauren Bell are among the premier seamers for RCB who also have quality spin bowlers in England's Linsey Smith, India's Radha Yadav and Shreyanka Patil.

Mandhana's form isn't something RCB would be too worried about given the immense potential that the 2024 edition winners have in their ranks. Australia's Georgia Voll, all-

India's Radha Yadav and Shreyanka Patil.

When the two captains of Mumbai Indians and Royal Challengers Bengaluru assembled before the media for the customary pre-match PC, the resonant theme was invariably Indian women's cricket's ascendance on the world stage.

When RCB skipper Smriti Mandhana was asked about what the next step forward would be for Indian women's cricket after the ecstasy of Women's ODI World Cup win last year, Mandhana immediately responded: "Winning the T20 World Cup would be great. But yeah, I mean, we all know that, yeah, we won the World Cup, yes, but there are a lot of things in the team where we need to work on.

"We really want to sit back and say that, yeah, we are the best team in the world and World No 1 team in the world. And I think we still have a lot of things to move on," she added.

Mandhana also stressed the crucial role WPL is playing in the development and growth of Indian women's cricket.

"And I'm sure WPL is going to bridge that gap for us. And in the coming years, we want to do that. Whenever we play for India, we always discuss how we want to be the best team in the world.

Not for one tournament or two tournaments, but the whole year. Any cricket we play and dominate it. And I think every WPL is just getting us closer to that," the India opener added.

Mumbai Indians captain Harmanpreet seconded Mandhana's thoughts.

"Yeah, I think what Smriti said, that one, we are not satisfied with just one World Cup. We have, you know, so much cricket coming up this year and in the next 2-3 years. So every time we go to the field, we want to go with the best mindset.

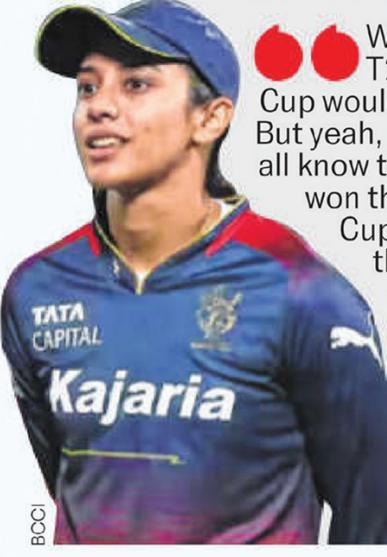
And that winning mindset, we have been always talking about. And good to see that, you know, not only us, other players are also coming up and thinking and speaking about we want to be champions all the time. So, I think that shows that, you know, WPL has made a lot of impact on us," Harmanpreet added.

The India Women skipper also said the exposure of plying their trade with foreign players will obviously further sharpen the skills of Indian players as well.

"Players are not, you know, in their comfort zone. They are, you know, working really hard. They are playing against overseas cricketers. So I think they are learning a lot from them. And now that gap has, you know, not there which we used to feel when they are coming for international

## Mandhana wants to win T20 World Cup

Harmanpreet feels exposure to foreign players in WPL helping Indian women's cricketers a lot



Winning the T20 World Cup would be great. But yeah, I mean, we all know that, yeah, we won the World Cup, yes, but there are a lot of things in the team where we need to work on

**Smriti Mandhana, RCB skipper**

fied with just one World Cup. We have, you know, so much cricket coming up this year and in the next 2-3 years. So every time we go to the field, we want to work on.

So I think, yeah, it has, you know, impacted a lot on our cricket. And I am really happy that, you know, as a team, we are setting bigger goals for us. And hopefully we will keep working for that. And keep improving as a team," she added.

Mandhana also was effusive in her praise for Anya Shrubsole, RCB's assistant coach cum bowling coach and her influence in the team's growth.

"There is a lot of work to do. But again, I know Anya for a very long time. We have played KSL and 100 together. One of the very good captains who have played under as well in the 100. And I always like the way she thought about cricket. And the way she is around her bowling, very clear with her plans.

So I am really happy that a lot of Indian girls are going to get to work with her. And pick her brain around how they can get better. And again, on my bowling, I don't think that is another thing," Mandhana said.

The India Women skipper also said the exposure of plying their trade with foreign players will obviously further sharpen the skills of Indian players as well.

"Players are not, you know, in their comfort zone. They are, you know, working really hard. They are playing against overseas cricketers. So I think they are learning a lot from them. And now that gap has, you know, not there which we used to feel when they are coming for international

## BCB sends another letter to ICC asking for venue change

NEW DELHI

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Thursday formally sent a second communication to the ICC, explaining the specific security concerns about travelling to India for the T20 World Cup while reiterating its demand for a change of venue to Sri Lanka.

The World Cup gets underway on February 7 and Bangladesh are scheduled to play four games (three in Kolkata and one in Mumbai).

They have refused to travel to India after pacer Mustafizur Rahman was released from the IPL on instructions of the BCCI, which cited unspecified "developments all around" to justify the decision.

Following discussions with sports ministry advisor Asif Nazrul, the BCB has once again sent a communication to the ICC. The BCC wanted to know areas of concern with regards to security and BCB has cited them," a source close to the BCB told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

The BCB has also been asked to submit the CCTV footage of the said date, police said that a case under Section 6 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and Section 351(2) of the BNS had been registered against the coach.

Meanwhile, the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) has also suspended Bhardwaj from all duties pending police investigation. The accused is said to be among the 13 national pistol coaches appointed by the NRAI.

Stating that the hotel management has also been asked to submit the CCTV footage of the said date, police said that a case under Section 6 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and Section 351(2) of the BNS had been registered against the coach.

According to information, the incident took place in Faridabad, on December 16 after the athlete participated in a national-level shooting competition at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range, New Delhi.

In her complaint to police, the 17-year-old national-level shooter alleged that Bhardwaj asked her to meet him at his hotel in Surajkund area of Faridabad, Haryana, saying that her performance required to be evaluated.

The coach called the minor athlete to his room when she reached the hotel, and subsequently sexually harassed her, she alleged adding that he also threatened to ruin her sports career if she disclosed the incident to anyone.

The coach called the minor athlete to his room when she reached the hotel, and subsequently sexually harassed her, she alleged adding that he also threatened to ruin her sports career if she disclosed the incident to anyone.

## Australia wins Ashes series 4-1

Home team registers a five-wicket win over England in Sydney

SYDNEY

Mitchell Starc took 31 wickets. Travis Head posted three centuries and tallied 629 runs. Alex Carey completed 28 dismissals.

The bowling, batting and fielding performances feature highly on the all-time lists for Aussies in the Ashes, under-scoring Australia's dominance in the 4-1 series win that was completed on Day 5 of the fifth test with a five-wicket win in Sydney.

"Yeah, it has been magnificent," Steve Smith, Australia's stand-in captain for four of the five tests in the absence of Pat Cummins, said of the individual contributions.

"I think everyone's stood up at different times. (Starc, Head and Carey) were obviously huge standouts, but other guys stood up at different times throughout the series and, you know, that's what makes a good team."

The Australians bowled England out for 342 on the fifth morning of the series finale and, chasing 160 for victory, finished 161-5 with Carey hitting the winning runs and Cameron Green unbeaten on

22. "It was nice to finish on a high note," said Smith, who scored a century in the first innings to move up to No. 6 on the all-time list.

"We know the importance of every test match with the World Test Championship, so to get the result here and finish the series on a high was incredibly pleasing."

The Australians retained the Ashes with wins in the



The Australian team celebrates with the Ashes trophy in Sydney on Thursday. AP

first three tests, but England was determined to narrow the margin after its drought-breaking win in Melbourne.

"Tough one to take knowing that we can play a lot better than that, but ... the Australian cricket team, they've just been incredible for five test matches," injured England captain Ben Stokes said.

"But also, being pretty truthful to ourselves, we've

done a little bit of damage ourselves."

### Khawaja's kiss goodbye

Usman Khawaja walked to the crease in his last Test after Smith was bowled by Will Jacks and Australia was 92-3 on Thursday. He was given a guard of honor from the England players, shook hands with Stokes and hugged Marnus Labuschagne.

## Vijay Hazare

## Sarfaraz's fastest fifty in vain as Mumbai lose by 1-run

JAIPUR

Sarfaraz Khan smashed the fastest fifty by an Indian in List A cricket, but four-wicket hauls each from Gurnoor Brar and Mayank Markande helped Punjab script a dramatic one-run win over Mumbai in a last-ball thriller in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, here on Thursday.

Already qualified for the knockout stage from Group

C, Punjab and Mumbai produced one of the matches of the season, with the former showing nerves of steel to pull off an incredible victory.

Chasing a modest 217, Sarfaraz lit up the stadium with a 15-ball half-century as Mumbai appeared firmly in control at 139 for two inside 15 overs.

Sarfaraz's blistering 20-ball 62 was studded with seven fours and five sixes. His pyrotechnics were highlighted by a brutal assault on Punjab

with Rahil Chahar removed by 201 for six in the 23rd over, triggering a dramatic collapse.

Mumbai required just five runs to win with four wickets in hand but lost all their remaining wickets for a mere three runs, slumping to a one-run defeat.

Earlier, Punjab were bowled out for 216, with Ramandeep Singh (72) and Anmolpreet Singh (57) scoring fifties. The result ensured Punjab finished on top of

Group C, with Mumbai settling for the second place.

Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh finished with 16 points each at the third and fourth position in the table.

**Brief Scores:** Punjab 216 all out in 45.1 overs (Anmolpreet Singh 57, Ramandeep Singh 72; Musheer Khan 3/37) beat Mumbai 215 all out in 26.2 overs (Sarfaraz Khan 62, Shreyas Iyer 45; Gurnoor Brar 4/57, Mayank Markande 4/31) by 1 run.



Mumbai's Shreyas Iyer (L), Suryakumar Yadav (C) and Sarfaraz Khan (R) exchange greetings after Punjab won the match in Jaipur on Thursday. PTI