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

US thwarting India ties, says China

BEIJING

China on Thursday accused the United States of distorting its defence policy in an attempt to obstruct an improvement in ties between China and India.

Foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian made the remarks while responding to a question at a regular press briefing on whether China could exploit a recent easing of tensions with India over disputed border areas to prevent closer ties between New Delhi and Washington.

The Chinese government views its relationship with India from a strategic and long-term perspective, Lin said, stressing that the border issue was strictly a bilateral matter. "We object to any country passing judgment about this issue," he added.

His comments came against the backdrop of the Pentagon saying in a report on Tuesday that China "probably seeks to capitalize on decreased tension... to stabilize bilateral relations and prevent the deepening of US-India ties."

Beijing rejected the assessment, reiterating that its engagement with India is independent of third-party influence and focused on managing differences through bilateral channels.

THREAD OF UNITY | Modi claims groundwork for the decision on Kashmir had been laid by Jana Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee

PM links ideology to Art 370 action

LUCKNOW

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday asserted that his government "brought down the wall of Article 370" to strengthen national unity, saying the ideological groundwork for the decision had been laid decades ago by Jana Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee.

He said India cannot have two flags and two constitutions, and that the country is bound by a single thread of unity.

The Prime Minister was addressing a public gathering after inaugurating the Rashtriya Prerna Sthal in the Vasant Kunj area on the occasion of the 101st birth anniversary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The memorial has been developed as a national space to honour prominent personalities of independent India associated with the ideological journey of the Bharatiya Janata Party.



Rashtriya Prerna Sthal, Lucknow

Attacks pain Archbishop

NEW DELHI

Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) president Archbishop Andrews Thazhath on Christmas Eve appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and chief ministers of various states to ensure strict enforcement of law and extend



proactive protection to Christian communities across the country, citing a disturbing rise in attacks on Christians.

In a video appeal released by the CBCI, the Archbishop expressed "deep pain" over the incidents.

Navi Mumbai airport goes live

MUMBAI

Christmas day marked a historic turning point in Indian aviation as the Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) officially commenced commercial flight operations. After nearly three decades of planning and construction, the grand Lotus structure finally opened its gates, transforming Mumbai into a dual-airport city, joining global aviation cities such as London, New York, Moscow, Tokyo and Shanghai.

The atmosphere at the airport turned electric as IndiGo flight 6E460 from Bengaluru descended through the morning mist. While the first flight was scheduled to arrive at 8am, its tires kissed the 3,700-meter runway much earlier, at 7:32am, making it the first commercial flight to land at NMIA. As the aircraft taxied toward the terminal, it was greeted with the traditional water cannon salute, a celebratory gesture that signaled the birth of a new era.

Adani Group's chairman Gautam Adani, along with his wife Priti Adani, also reached the airport early on Thursday morning to personally greet and welcome the passengers of



Adani Group's chairman Gautam Adani (top) welcomed the passengers of the inaugural flight on Thursday.

port employees, community representatives and Adani Foundation beneficiaries.

The first flight flew unusual passengers with it as it included war heroes, airport's security

ryakumar Yoadab, Mithali Raj and Sunil Chhetri were also present during the ceremony.

Calling it a proud day for Mumbai and for India, he said, "NMIA stands as a promise of

DB Patil's kin among first arrivals

NAVI MUMBAI

Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) received Anup Patil, grandson of late Loknete DB Patil, who arrived on the first IndiGo flight from Bengaluru, in a symbolic reminder of the long-pending demand that the airport be named after the farmers' leader. Though Maharashtra government has recommended Patil be honoured by naming the airport after him, the Centre is yet to take a call.



Patil sported a T-shirt that read "Loknete DB Patil Antarbhakti".

Khaleda Zia's son back in Dhaka after 17 years

DHAKA

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman returned to Bangladesh on Thursday after more than 17 years in self-exile in the United Kingdom, drawing massive crowds and tight security as he made his way from the airport to a public reception before visiting his ailing mother, former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, at a Dhaka hospital.

Rahman, 60, arrived at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 11:40am on a regular Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight from London, accompanied by his wife Dr Zubaida Rahman, daughter Zaima Rahman and the family's pet cat, Zeebu. The flight had ear-



BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman (C) at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka on Thursday.

lier made a brief stopover at Sylhet's Osmani International Airport.

Senior BNP leaders, led by Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, received Rah-

man at the airport's VIP lounge, where he exchanged greetings with party leaders and supporters.

Another Hindu lynched in Bangladesh

DHAKA

Days after a Hindu worker, Dipu Das, was burnt alive by a mob, another Hindu man was beaten to death in Bangladesh amid continuing unrest.

The incident took place late Wednesday night in Rajbari's Pangsha upazila, where Amrit Mondal, also known as Samrat, was lynched following an alleged extortion bid. The Daily Star said the incident occurred at Hosendanga village.

According to the police, Mondal was attacked over allegations of extortion. On receiving information, police rushed to the spot and rescued him in a critical condition. He was immediately taken to the Pangsha Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared him dead.

Assistant Superintendent of Police (Pangsha Circle) Debrata Sarkar said Mondal had at least two cases filed against him with Pangsha Police Station, including a murder case. The officer added that Mondal had allegedly formed a criminal gang and had long been involved in extortion and other criminal activities. Police arrested one of Mondal's associates.

New Delhi Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav on Thursday refuted claims, attributed to the Forest Survey of India (FSI), that more than 90 percent of the Aravalli mountain range is less than 100 meters in height. Refuting the allegations leveled against the central government by Congress leader Jairam Ramesh in this regard, Yadav said that the BJP



will not allow Congress leaders to plunder the Aravalli range again. Former Union Minister for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh, citing the alleged survey, had claimed that under the new definition, more

Five major digital initiatives were launched on Good Governance Day

New Delhi

The Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions launched five transformative digital reforms on Good Governance Day to strengthen transparent and citizen-centric administration. These include the Ex-Servicemen Reservation Compilation, AI Recruitment Tool, e-HRMS 2.0 app, iGOT AI platform, and Karmayogi Digital Learning Lab 2.0. Their aim is to strengthen core governance processes, support key stakeholder groups, and prepare civil servants for the challenges of a rapidly evolving administrative landscape. Dr. Jitendra Singh, Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, inaugurated the National Workshop on Good Governance Practices 2025 in New Delhi today. Addressing senior government officials, policymakers, and stakeholders on the occasion of Good Governance Day, celebrated annually on December 25, he stated that good governance is not an abstract ideal but a daily administrative responsibility based on transparency, accountability, and citizen-centric delivery.

Lucknow

Aam Aadmi Party's Uttar Pradesh in-charge and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh in a press conference on Wednesday, exposed a massive scam in the Ram Temple Pran Pratishtha ceremony and Ayodhya beautification projects. He said that the BJP not only misused public money but also tarnished faith by committing corruption in the name of Lord Shri Ram and Mother Cow. Sanjay Singh stated that a report prepared by the Local Fund Audit Department, Ayodhya Division, under the Yogi government, revealed corruption worth over 250 crore. According to the report, irregularities were found in 4,305 construction works, of which only 102 cases were responded to, while the remaining thousands remained unexplained. Layers of Corruption—The Complete Story of the Scam in the Name of Shri Ram. Sanjay Singh stated that BJP leaders engaged in corruption in everything from cow fodder to roads and other projects. He revealed that payments were made at the Kanha Gaushala by simultaneously weighing two trucks, meaning two trucks of straw were weighed in one minute.



Similarly, a blacklisted company called Pratap Heights Limited was paid 6.05 crore without any work being done. Furthermore, agencies like Lion Security Service and King Security Service were paid over 1.31 crore without any contracts, and payments were made in the names of 1,500 'ghost employees.' According to an audit report conducted by IIT BHU students, lighting and decoration work was to be done at 22 intersections, but only 19 intersections missing, for which payments of 4.46 crore had already been made. Similarly, several schemes—the CCTV camera scheme (4.24 crore), the Health ATM scheme (1.46 crore), and the Walkway Illusion (3.95 crore)—are also untraceable. Sanjay Singh stated that payments were made for cleaning 28 kilometers of Rampath, while only 3-4 kilometers were actually cleaned. He

said, "They ate the roads, they ate the intersections, they ate the fodder of the mother cow—nothing is sacred for the BJP." "Sanjay Singh said that another corruption is the Pratap Heights project. They received a total payment of 1 crore 8 lakh 79 thousand 306, and there is no trace of this solar project at Kanha Gaushala. Work worth 18 crore was then carried out without tenders at Pratap Heights, in the name of various other projects, including installing hand pumps." "Chant Ram Ram, public's property is yours": A scathing attack on the BJP. The AAP MP said, "The BJP claims to be a devotee of Lord Shri Ram, but has committed a scam in his name. I want to tell BJP supporters: those who did not belong to Lord Shri Ram can never belong to you." "Sanjay Singh further said, 'I have said before, 'Look, you devotees, don't do such things, don't defame Ram's name.' But the BJP's real slogan is, 'Chant Ram Ram, public's property is yours.'" He said that this corruption in the name of the Ram Temple and Ayodhya beautification is the biggest attack on public faith. Sanjay Singh demanded that the Yogi conduct an impartial investigation.



The cat has landed

Tariq Rahman's cat Zeebu almost stole the show from him when she arrived in Dhaka. Zeebu, the Rahman family pet, arrived along with the BNP leader, his wife Zubaida Rahman and their daughter Zaima Rahman, drawing widespread atten-

tion on social media. The BNP's verified Facebook page on Thursday afternoon, sharing a photograph with the caption, "Zeebu has returned to the country."

▶ Contd on | nation

Surat man cheats death midair



MUMBAI

Surat woke up to a gasp on Thursday morning — the kind that catches in the throat and refuses to leave. At around 8 am, in the quiet hum of a residential high-rise, 57-year-old Nitin Adiya slipped from the 10th floor of his apartment and tumbled into a nightmare that should, by all logic, have ended in tragedy. Instead, it paused — improbably — on the 8th floor.

Nitin Adiya had been asleep near the window of his flat in the Time Galaxy-A building in Jahangirabad. What caused the slip is still unclear. What is clear is what followed: a sudden fall, a scream swallowed by concrete, and then the metallic mercy of a window grill two floors below. His leg wedged into the iron

bars and an external ledge, Adiya was left hanging upside down, suspended between life and death, the ground yawning far beneath him.

For nearly an hour, time stretched and twisted. Residents leaned out of balconies, phones frozen mid-record. Every movement risked turning a miracle into a morgue call. Dramatic visuals — later viral — showed Adiya trapped at a grotesque angle, his body pinned by gravity, his survival owed to a few inches of steel.

The alarm reached the Fire Control Room quickly. Within minutes, teams from Jahangirpura, Palanpur and Adajan fire stations converged on the site. What followed was a rescue choreographed with nerves of steel.

Shaheed Smarak College Writes a Golden Chapter, Achieves Runner-up Position in Girls' Category with 33 Medals



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Ghazipur. In the 36th Inter-Collegiate Athletics Competition-2025 held at Veer Bahadur Singh Purvanchal University, Jaunpur, the athletes of Shaheed Smarak Government College, Muhammadabad Yusufpur, from Ghazipur district, created history with their outstanding performance. In this prestigious university-level competition, the college achieved a remarkable feat by winning a total of 33 medals, including 4 gold and 13 silver. The biggest highlight of this spectacular performance was that Shaheed Smarak Government College secured the runner-up trophy in the girls' category for the first time. As soon

as the trophy was announced, an atmosphere of joy and celebration erupted among the players, teachers, and supporters, and the entire campus was filled with jubilation. In the boys' category, Ratan Paswan and Sunil Yadav made significant contributions to the college's success by winning four medals each. Ratan Paswan earned special recognition by winning gold medals in the triple jump and decathlon. Muhammad Belal, Nitesh, Golu, Akhilesh, and other players also enriched the medal tally with their strong performances in various events. In the girls' category, Neha Kushwaha won a gold medal in the high jump and Neha Yadav won a gold medal in the ham-

mer throw, bringing honor to the college. Along with them, Seetu Pal, Poonam Kumari, Riya Rai, Shivangi Tiwari, Sonam Kumari, Khushi Rai, Vinita Kushwaha, Gunja Bind, Prachi, and Priyanka Kumari also won medals in different events, strengthening the team's success. Throughout the competition, team managers Dr. Madhavam Singh and Dr. Aditya Kumar continuously guided and motivated the players. The college principal, Dr. Arun Kumar, congratulated all the winning and participating players and said that this achievement is a matter of pride for the college and will inspire the students to perform even better in the field of sports in the future.

Administration geared up to tackle the cold wave, providing relief to the poor and helpless

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Ghazipur. Due to the ongoing cold wave and intense cold in the district, the district administration has become fully active. Under the instructions of District Magistrate Avinash Kumar, relief work is being effectively carried out at the city and tehsil levels. In this regard, under the leadership of Harshita Tiwari, blankets were distributed to needy, poor, and homeless people in the city area, providing them with some relief from the biting cold. The night shelters operating in the tehsil area are being kept open regularly, where proper arrangements have been made for overnight stays. The Sub-Divisional Magistrate has appealed to people living in the open to stay in the night shelters to protect themselves



from the cold. The Municipal Council, Nagar Panchayat, and tehsil administration are continuously making arrangements for bonfires at public and crowded places. Officials have been instructed to ensure that the bonfires burn continuously so that passersby and needy people can get relief from the cold. The Sub-Divisional Magistrate appealed to the general public to exercise caution and avoid going out unnecessarily in view of the extreme cold. He advised them to wear warm clothes

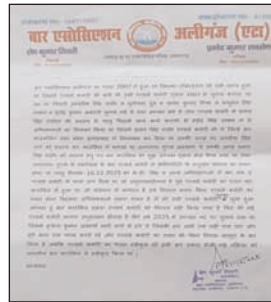
when going out and keep themselves safe. He said that with vigilance and cooperation, cold-related illnesses and accidents can be avoided.

The administration has also requested people to immediately inform the concerned authorities if they see any homeless person struggling with the cold, so that timely assistance can be provided to them. During this time, Tehsildar Mahendra Bahadur, Naib Tehsildar Vipin Kumar, and other officers and employees were present.

Controversy in Aliganj Bar Association Over Misleading Information, Allegations of Rule Violations

Pachauri

Etah: Internal differences within the Aliganj Bar Association have intensified after objections were raised regarding violations of organizational rules. Allegations have surfaced against the Junior Vice President of the Bar Association, K.P. Singh Yadav who is accused of publishing information related to the association in various newspapers in violation of the provisions of the Model Bye-laws prescribed by the Uttar Pradesh State Legal Council, Prayagraj. According to the association, misleading information is being continuously circulated in an attempt to advance the formation of the Elders Committee and the election process, which is entirely illegal. The act has been described not only as a breach of rules but also as anti-organizational and undisciplined, potentially harming the dignity and unity of the Bar Association. Association office-bearers have emphasized that the Elders Committee should be constituted strictly based on seniority among members. It is mandatory to follow the full process as prescribed under the Model Bye-laws to prevent any disputes or confusion. Any action taken in violation of these rules will not be recognized. Furthermore, it has been clarified that the term of office for the officials elected for 2025 is still ongoing. Therefore, initiating any election or formation process of the Elders Committee at this time would be against the rules. Following the emergence of this issue, a discussion has developed among the association advocates. Several senior members have stressed the importance of maintaining organizational discipline and ensuring that all activities are conducted in accordance with the rules.



Sanjay Singh vote Save Constitution Save Yatra reached Amroha

Demand for Hindu nation without constitution is the beginning of dividing the country: Sanjay Singh

Amroha

The 'Save Vote, Save Constitution' march against politics of hatred, language of fear and conspiracies to snatch votes left Moradabad on Thursday and entered Amroha with a new political message. The people of Amroha welcomed the march led by senior Aam Aadmi Party leader, Uttar Pradesh in-charge and MP Sanjay Singh amid fears of 35 million votes being cut off in Uttar Pradesh. The Welcome and crowds that gathered everywhere made it clear that the people no longer want hatred, but Politics of rights. The march started from Shriram Mandap, Budh Bazar, Pakbara, Moradabad at 10 am. A large number of local citizens joined the walk during the seven-kilometre journey. For an afternoon rest, the yatra reached the Ahmad Marriage Hall at Painty Kalan in Amroha, where people shared their concerns over vote cuts and administrative pressure. Sanjay Singh said that the power fears the vote of the people the most, because it is the force that holds the biggest leaders accountable. This fear is being used to weaken the vote. He said the Aam Aadmi Party political journey from Delhi to Punjab, Goa, Gujarat and Jammu and Kashmir proves that the math of power changes when the people exercise



votes. Baba Saheb Dr. To abolish the right given by Bhimrao Ambedkar Constitution, sometimes fear of intruders is being shown and sometimes detention centers are being threatened, so that Dalits, backward, tribals, minorities and poor sections can be criminalized. Sanjay Singh questioned why the burden of its failure is being placed on the people when border security is the responsibility of the government. He said that schools, hospitals and



employment should be built with public money, not jails, because if votes are taken away the country will slip from democracy to dictatorship. Addressing a press conference in Amroha at 2 Pm Sanjay Singh said that the votes of Dalits, backward and weaker sections in Uttar Pradesh are being cut in a planned manner where the BJP has not got votes. "This is not democracy but an open conspiracy to save power," he said. Sanjay Singh said that the Bharatiya Janata Party is also damaging the

country international image. Referring to the incident in Jabalpur, he said that the indecency committed by the BJP woman leader against a blind woman and her child is a shame to the entire country and the Prime Minister himself should apologize for such an incident. Sanjay Singh said that on holy festivals like Christmas, people associated with the BJP are breaking idols of Santa Claus, entering churches and beating them up and reciting Hanuman Chalisa in front of churches in Bareilly. He

questioned whether this was an honor to Hanuman or an insult to him. He said that such actions are spoiling the image of India in the whole world and that is why today the atmosphere is being created against India in countries like Canada and the United States. Questioning the continued bulldozing action by the Yogi government despite the court stay, Sanjay Singh said the government claims that no one will be spared, but in cases like codeine syrup, neither the bulldozer was run nor action was taken against anyone responsible. "When the government is not accepting the deaths, how can one expect a fair investigation," he said. Hitting out at the demands of the Hindu nation, Sanjay Singh said that Baba Saheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar Constitution declares India a secular nation. If the country is run by some one religious demands, tomorrow some one will demand a Sikh nation, some one a Tamil Nadu nation, someone a Telangana nation. He questioned whether the country would be run by the Constitution or by someone's arbitrariness. Sanjay Singh said that through the 'Save Vote, Save Constitution' padyatra, the Aam Aadmi Party wants to send a clear message to the people that if votes are not saved, there will be no hearing of the people in

democracy. He said that today the Prime Minister, Chief Minister and Ministers bow before the people on the strength of votes, but as soon as the votes are over, the same power will rule with the stick. Therefore, the people must leave their homes to protect their votes and the Constitution and fulfill their responsibility to save democracy by joining this march. During this time, the enthusiasm of the entire movement doubled as soon as Punjab Aam Aadmi Party state president and cabinet minister Aman Arora reached the 'Save Vote, Save Constitution' padyatra. His presence brought new enthusiasm and confidence among the workers and the general public. Aman Arora said that this march is not just a one-state movement, but a decisive battle to save the country's democracy and constitution. He made it clear that the Aam Aadmi Party would fight unitedly for the strength of the vote and the protection of the Constitution across the country. His joining gave the march a national tone and strengthened this fight against the government. After the press conference, the march resumed and reached Royal Garden, Telipura Mafi, Amroha on Kalsia Road for night rest. People joined the march at various places along the route to support this campaign to save democracy.

Grand Inauguration of New Friends Cricket Cp Tournament.

Etah

The New Friends Cricket Cup Tournament, organized to promote sports activities in the region was inaugurated on Sunday amidst an enthusiastic atmosphere. The opening ceremony was presided over by the chief guest, Aliganj MLA Satyapal Singh Rathore, who officially inaugurated the event by cutting the ribbon. The ceremony was also attended by distinguished guests, including Simpal Rathore, representative of Raja Ka Rampur Nagar Panchayat and Vivek Gupta, chairman of Jaithra Nagar Panchayat. Addressing the gathering, MLA Satyapal Singh Rathore emphasized that regular sports events in the region provide youth with new direction and positive energy. He stated that sports not only contribute to physical development but also foster mental strength and discipline. He urged the participants to compete with a true spirit of sportsmanship while maintaining discipline. Speaking at the event, Man Singh Yadav added that such tourna-



ments promote social harmony, brotherhood and goodwill and should be organized regularly. The inaugural match was played between the teams from Etawah and Mathura. Mathura won the toss and elected to bat first. Opening batsmen Gaurav and Kuldeep started the innings, but Gaurav was dismissed on the second ball by bowler Mohit, caught brilliantly by Sani at point, thrilling the spectators. In the 20-over match, Mathura managed to score only 73 runs. Chasing the target, the Etawah team performed exceptionally, winning the match by 9 wickets. The match commentary was provided by

Kamar Khan and Abhishek, while Satyendra handled the scoring. Umpires Vishal Sharma and Naushad Mewati officiated the game. The event witnessed robust security arrangements, managed by the Aliganj and Raja Ka Rampur police, ensuring a peaceful and orderly conduct of the tournament. The organizing committee included Vishal Sharma, Kamar, Naushad, Nizamuddin, Bittu, Bhanu Rathore, Bittu Chauhan, Sabir, Nafees, Sikandar, Manoj Rathore, Abhishek Shakya, Satyendra, Ikrar, Laltu, Chhotu Gupta, Cheetu Gupta and several others.

Social Worker 'Manu' Sets an Example of Humanity, Covers Cattle with Blankets Amid Cold Wave

Etah

In the midst of a severe cold wave that has disrupted daily life across the district, dedicated social worker Manvendra Singh Chauhan, popularly known as 'Manu,' once again set an exemplary standard of humanity, compassion and service. Understanding the suffering of the voiceless cattle, Manu visited a local gaushala (cow shelter) in Etah and personally covered the animals with blankets to provide relief from the biting cold. Onlookers at the gaushala witnessed Manu carefully attending to each animal, ensuring they were protected from the harsh winter conditions. This act of service not only symbolizes his commitment to social welfare but also underscores that true social work is reflected in actions, not words. In extreme cold,



when the most vulnerable—including animals—are heavily affected, such efforts are particularly commendable. Manu is widely recognized in Etah as a grassroots social worker who remains actively engaged in charitable activities throughout the

year. Whether it is providing food, clothing and footwear to the poor and needy or arranging fodder, medicines and other essential resources for cattle, he is always at the forefront of service initiatives. During the blanket distribution, Manu remarked that

while humans can protect themselves with warm clothing, fires and blankets the condition of animals in shelters is far more dire. He emphasized that cattle are an integral part of India's culture, tradition and faith and their care is not

only the responsibility of the government or organizations but a moral duty of every citizen. He also appealed to the district prominent citizens, social workers and volunteer organizations to contribute blankets, fodder and other essential resources to ensure that no animal suffers during the ongoing cold wave. Local residents and gaushala management praised Manu's humane and sensitive initiative, noting that such acts of service inspire positive thinking in society and encourage others to take responsibility for social welfare. Manvendra Singh Chauhan 'Manu' efforts stand as a living example of compassion and humanity, proving that genuine social service involves understanding and addressing the suffering of both humans and voiceless creatures alike.

A program was organized at the District Panchayat Auditorium on the occasion of the birth centenary of late Atal Bihari Vajpayee

Prayagraj. A program was organized at the District Panchayat Auditorium on Thursday on the occasion of the birth centenary of Bharat Ratna and former Prime Minister, late Atal Bihari Vajpayee. On this occasion, the program was inaugurated by lighting the lamp and offering garlands to the portrait of late Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the presence of Member of Parliament Phulpur Praveen Patel as the chief guest, District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma, and BJP District President Gangapar Nirmala Paswan. On this occa-



sion, the live broadcast of the speeches of the Prime Minister and Chief Minister at the inauguration program of the National Inspiration Site held in Lucknow was shown in the District Panchayat Auditorium. On this occasion, the winning

students and participants of the essay, speech, and poetry recitation competitions at the district level were honored by the Member of Parliament with the prescribed amount and certificates of appreciation. Sneha Tiwari, who secured the first posi-

tion in the essay competition, Akanksha Yadav, who secured the second position, and Navya Kumari, who secured the third position, were honored with checks of Rs. 5000, Rs. 3000, and Rs. 2000 respectively, along with certificates of appreciation. Similarly, Anugrah Pratap Singh, who secured the first position in the speech competition, Prabhat Shukla, who secured the second position, and Nishith Dubey, who secured the third position, were honored with checks of Rs. 10000, Rs. 5000, and Rs. 2500 respectively, along with certificates of apprecia-

tion. Likewise, Sakshi Mishra, who secured the first position in the solo poetry recitation competition, Devendra Pratap Singh, who secured the second position, and Hriday Mishra, who secured the third position, were honored with checks of Rs. 10000, Rs. 5000, and Rs. 2500 respectively, along with certificates of appreciation. On this occasion, Saraswati Vandana and a welcome song were presented by the students of Jagat Taran Inter College and Government Inter College, Civil Lines. On this occasion, Phulpur MP Praveen

Patel, in his address, said that when the name of former Prime Minister late Atal Bihari Vajpayee comes up, his towering personality as a journalist, writer, poet, politician, and visionary comes before us. His entire life was like an open book.

The personality, ideals, and nationalistic spirit of former Prime Minister late Atal Bihari Vajpayee are an inspiration to all of us. His life and thoughts are a source of inspiration for all of us. The revered Atal Ji was a great nationalist thinker, a visionary, a powerful orator, and a harbinger of good governance.

Poor People's Faces Light Up After Receiving Blankets: A Glimpse of Happiness on Everyone's Faces

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Tharwai. A blanket distribution ceremony was organized in Tikri Nayepura village of Soraon assembly constituency under the auspices of Apna Dal (S). The chief guest at the event was Kishan Saroj, former state secretary of Apna Dal (S) and in-charge of Sareni (Rae Bareilly) assembly constituency. The program began with a garland ceremony and musical welcome for the chief guest and Apna Dal (S) office bearers. The program was conducted by Ramamurti Patel, while Birha Emperor Devraj Patel captivated the audience with his melodious songs. Chief Guest Kishan Saroj encouraged the helpless and poor elderly women and men present by giving them shawls. He then distributed blankets to hundreds of needy people. The faces of the poor lit up with joy upon receiving the blankets. In his address, the chief guest paid homage to great personalities like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Chhatrapati Shivaji, Jyotiba Phule, and Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar. He stated that the mission of Apna Dal (S) National President Anupriya Patel is to help the poor, Dalits, helpless, and laborers. Its objective is also to educate and empower the youth, as well as to empower women and make them self-reliant. The program organizer, Shyam Lal Saroj, extended his greetings and gratitude to all those present. Also present on the occasion were Apna Dal (S) District Gangapar in-charge Bhanu Pratap Patel, Soraon Assembly President Sushil Patel, Jitendra Saroj, Rajendra Bahadur Singh, Monu Bhartiya, Chedilal Yadav, Satish Tiwari, Nanhe Lal Sahu, Shiv Lal Patel, Madhavrao Patel, Ram Kailash Pal, Satnu Nandu Bhartiya, Radheshyam, Radheshyam Maurya, Sajjan Yadav, and a large number of women, men, and other dignitaries.

Trailer going in the wrong direction collides with a bus and car, several passengers injured

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. On Thursday afternoon, a speeding trailer traveling in the wrong lane on the Prayagraj-Pratapgarh highway near Sarai Baju village in the Soraon area collided with a car and a state-run bus. Three people in the car were seriously injured, while several bus passengers sustained injuries. Upon receiving the information, the police cleared the traffic jam on the highway and sent all the injured to the Soraon Community Health Center for treatment. On Thursday afternoon, a bus from Akbarpur depot was traveling from Prayagraj to Pratapgarh with pas-



sengers. A car was also traveling just ahead of it. The car and the bus had just reached the Prayagraj-Pratapgarh highway near Sarai Baju village under the Soraon police station when a speeding trailer came from the opposite direction in the wrong lane. Due to the fog and mist, before the drivers of the

car and the bus could understand what was happening, the trailer collided forcefully with both vehicles. As a result, the out-of-control trailer and the bus ended up in a ditch on the side of the road. After the collision with the trailer, the car was damaged, and three occupants from Pratapgarh, Niazul Nisha,



Sajid, and Gungun Nisha, were seriously injured. Several passengers on the bus, including Ram Sumer, Richa Yadav, and Ruchi Yadav from Sultanpur district; Mohd. Arif from Jaunpur; and Dinesh Patel, Girija Pati, and Saumya Srivastava from Akbarpur, Ambedkar Nagar, sustained injuries. Upon

receiving the information, the Soraon police, with the help of villagers, rescued all the injured trapped in the car and the bus and sent them to the Soraon Community Health Center for first aid. There, the doctor provided first aid to the injured bus passengers and discharged them.



Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Legacy Inspires Us - Professor Satyakam

Prayagraj: On Thursday, a wreath-laying ceremony was held at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee auditorium in the Saraswati campus of Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Prayagraj, under the auspices of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Good Governance Chair, to commemorate the 101st birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari

Vajpayee. Despite the biting cold and fog, Vice-Chancellor Professor Satyakam, during the ceremony, said that former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was a true son of Mother India. His legacy inspires us. On Atal Ji's birth anniversary today, we resolve to carry forward his legacy. By adopting Atal Ji's ideals and thoughts, we will work to further the progress of Rajarshi Tandon Open

University. Professor Anand Anand Tripathi welcomed the Vice-Chancellor, and Registrar Colonel Vinay Kumar delivered the vote of thanks. On this occasion, Dr. Ravindra Pratap Singh recited some of Atal Ji's poems. All members of the university family offered floral tributes to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee during the wreath-laying ceremony.

House completely demolished by miscreants using a JCB

Kaushambi. The audacity of land grabbers is growing, and they are determined to forcibly seize anyone's land and property. These bullies have no fear of the law. Manoj Kumar Kesarwani, a former counselor and resident of Bharwari, informed the Sandipan Ghat police station in-charge that his house, located at Murattganj bus stop, Ward Number 14, Sauhard Nagar, Bharwari Municipal Council, was completely demolished by land mafia using a JCB on the night of December 24th and 25th.



Manoj learned about this from his neighbors and acquaintances. The house was being used as a doctor's clinic, and the demolition has resulted in a loss of Rs. 10 lakh for Manoj. In this matter, Santosh, son of Ram Pratap, a resident of Murattganj, had been eyeing the property since

its construction in 2007. The house was demolished at night with the support of Salman, son of Akbar, who was developing plots behind the demolished house, and his accomplices. Those who demolished the house have neither any documents nor any claim to the property, yet Manoj's house was arbitrarily demolished in the middle of the night, which directly raises questions about law and order. The police station in-charge has taken note of the information and started an investigation.

Priyanka Singh Wins Bahraich Title, Brings Pride to District

Bahraich: Under the guidance of Soni Srivastava, director of Metro Academy, Bahraich, Priyanka Singh won the prestigious Bahraich competition, bringing pride to the district. Priyanka Singh is not only a skilled homemaker but also a dedicated school teacher and successfully runs her own beauty parlour, Priyanka Makeover. Her confidence, personality and talent were highly appreciated during the competition.

A tribute program was organized in Kidganj on the death anniversary of former President Giani Zail Singh

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. A tribute program was organized today at Shri Vishwakarma Temple in Kidganj, Prayagraj, on the death anniversary of former President of India, Giani Zail Singh. People from far and wide offered floral tributes to the portrait of Giani Zail Singh. The program was successfully organized under the supervision of BJP leader Ajay Sharma. Ramakant Sharma, a senior advocate who presided over the program, said that Giani Zail Singh served as the seventh President of India from July 25, 1982, to July 25, 1987. In his address, Pankaj Kumar Manu said that Giani Zail Singh played an active role in the Indian independence movement and the Quit India Movement. Shiv



Shankar Vishwakarma, in his address, said that Giani Zail Singh, who passed away on December 25, 1994, inspires us with his contributions to Indian politics and his dedication to public service. Ram Murti Vishwakarma, addressing the program, said that after independence, he held several important political posi-

tions in Punjab, serving as a minister and later as Chief Minister. Several people, including senior social worker Krishna Prasad Vishwakarma, Pankaj Sharma, Ram Niranjan Vishwakarma, Satish Chandra Sharma, Satyendra Vishwakarma (Advocate), and Vinover, were present during the program.

Christmas traffic chaos in Civil Lines area, vehicles crawled through the city

Prayagraj: Due to the large crowds at the Christmas fair, the Civil Lines area experienced massive traffic jams on Thursday. MG Marg was the worst affected. Subhash Chowk, Civil Lines bus stand, Hanuman Mandir Chowk, and other areas were also severely congested. The presence of barricades at various points caused difficulties for commuters. A journey that would normally take five minutes took drivers half an hour to an hour. The situation only returned to normal after around 10 pm. On the occasion of Christmas, a large number of people gathered at the Patthar Girjaghar (Stone Church) in Civil Lines on Thursday. A festive atmosphere prevailed around St. Joseph's Church, Lal Girjaghar (Red Church), and other churches. Being a holiday, people from other communities also came out to celebrate. Most people came to Civil Lines to spend their holiday. A large crowd of Christmas revelers had already gathered there. As a result, from 4 pm onwards, MG Marg, along with Hot Stuff, Vivekananda Chowk, Mishra Bhawan Chowk, Eklavya Chowk, Nawab Yusuf Road, Auto Sales Chowk, Patrika Chowk, and other areas experienced severe traffic jams. Vehicles crawled along. Police had to barricade the road from Subhash Chowk leading towards Patthar Girjaghar. Similarly, traffic was diverted from Patthar Girjaghar as well. Vehicles crawled here too. The traffic situation was so bad that there was a long queue of vehicles on MG Marg from Hanuman Mandir to Hindu Hostel Chowk. A similar situation prevailed from Lok Seva Aayog Chowk to Hindu Hostel and from there to Company Bagh Gate Number One. Vehicles crawled for hours in these areas. Akash Kushwaha, a resident of Mumfordganj, who was on a motorbike with his friend, said that he was going to visit the Patthar Girjaghar Chowk but had been stuck in traffic near Hindu Hostel for about an hour and a half. However, the traffic police personnel present at the spot managed to clear the jam after considerable effort. Police have erected barricades on the following routes: Subhash Chowk to Patthar Girjaghar Chowk, Post Office Chowk to Patthar Girjaghar Chowk, Ambedkar Chowk to Patthar Girjaghar, MG Marg Hanuman Temple to Company Bagh, Patrika Chowk to Company Bagh Gate Number One, Hindu Hostel Chowk to Company Bagh Gate Number One.

Former Prime Minister's Birth Anniversary Celebrated Under the Auspices of Hindu Raksha Samiti

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Kaushambi. The 101st birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee was celebrated with great fanfare under the auspices of the Hindu Raksha Samiti. On this occasion, he was remembered as a symbol of good governance. Hindu leader Awadhesh Narayan Shukla was present as the chief guest at the program. Tributes were paid to Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was the first to complete a full term of a non-Congress government after India's independence, for his good governance and visionary leadership. The program was presided over by the organization's convenor, Ved Prakash Satyarthi. In his address, Satyarthi said



that Atal Ji, coming from a poor family, entered politics from journalism and became the first Prime Minister of the country who ran the government without the support of the Nehru family or the Congress.

His government is still considered synonymous with good governance. He set an example of running a government without the support of anti-national forces. Atal Ji resolved to make India a strong nation and fulfilled it. Chief guest Awadhesh

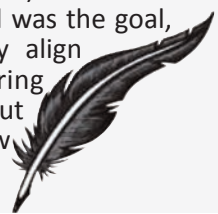
Narayan Shukla, while remembering Atal Ji's contributions, said that he was a leader in Indian politics who tried to free democracy from the new monarchy. During his tenure, the country witnessed important steps such as economic reforms, nuclear tests, and social development. A large number of organization workers and local people were offered at the program.

Everyone offered floral tributes to Atal Ji's statue and resolved to carry forward his ideals. Prominent among those present were Arjun Singh, Shivam Pandey, Deepak Maurya, Akshay Singh, Deshray Yadav, Dinesh Patel, Ashish Kumar Pandey, Govind Saroj, Dheeraj Patel, and hundreds of others.

Editorial

Buying Russian oil, misreading Trump—3 points will define India's next energy strategy

India's crude oil trade has evolved from a purely economic exchange into both a geopolitical test of strategic autonomy and a measure of the constraints in its energy policy. Over the past three years, India has gone from being a marginal buyer of Russian crude to one of its largest importers, carefully balancing ties with the US, Europe, and shifting global energy markets. That balance is now under pressure from Donald Trump's 50 per cent tariff offensive, aimed selectively at India and leaving little ambiguity about his objectives—and in Trump's world, what he wants, he usually gets. Yet the national debate has taken too many assumptions for granted. It is worth applying a deconstruction approach to India's famous oil bargains with Russia—a decision once hailed as tactical brilliance, but one now risking entanglement in overlapping economic and diplomatic challenges. While public commentary has focused heavily on Trump, tariffs, and New Delhi's indignation, the more pressing task is to interrogate the rationale behind these choices. To navigate the road ahead, India must revisit three fundamentals: why it embraced Russian oil, how it misread Trump's European recalibration, and where future India–Russia energy engagement should head. Clarity on these three points may well define the next chapter of India's energy strategy. Despite close political ties and deep defence cooperation, India and Russia were never bound by energy dependence. Even with India's heavy reliance on imports—currently 88 per cent of its daily crude requirement of 5.5 million barrels—its primary suppliers have traditionally been Gulf countries. The earlier chapter of India capitulating to Trump 1.0's sanctions on Iran and Venezuela is well known; today, however, the challenge is starker. Russia entered India's energy equation only after the geopolitical earthquake of President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. That act shattered the European order painstakingly built since the Second World War and crystallised after the Soviet Union's collapse. Central to this upheaval was Putin's weaponization of energy: Europe's decades-long dependence on cheap Russian oil and gas became a vulnerability. In response, Europe diversified away from Russia, while the G7 imposed a \$60 per-barrel price cap on Russian crude in December 2022. The logic was clear: as one of the world's top three oil producers, Russia could not be cut off overnight. The aim was instead to squeeze Moscow's revenues, which were funding its war machine, while keeping prices stable and securing alternative supplies for Europe. India saw opportunity in this upheaval. With vast import needs, it began rerouting Russian oil at supposedly lower prices, rejecting G7 sanctions and arranging direct and indirect deals through intermediaries. Early reports spoke of a “free on board” discount of 30 per cent, though never confirmed. Brent crude fell from \$86.51 in January 2022 to \$80.92 in December, peaking briefly at about \$90 in June 2023 before sliding again. While some credit India's purchases with stabilising prices, Russian oil for India almost always remained way above the \$60 price cap. The critical question is whether India ever bought below that threshold. Reports suggest an average discount of only \$5 per barrel—hardly transformative—and potentially offset by hidden costs and surcharges. Even so, large volumes (peaking at over 2 million barrels per day before dropping to 1.5 million) meant cumulative savings. But if cheap oil was the goal, why not join or informally align with the price cap, securing crude closer to \$60 without the complications of shadow fleets and sanctions risks?



Bank nationalisation will be a blow to India's mixed economy, lead to totalitarianism: Phiroze Shroff

Every now and then we hear the cry that banks should be nationalised. The taking over of banks by the State is urged on various grounds, namely, that it is necessary in order “to mobilise resources” for the economic development of the country, “to prevent the concentration of economic power”, “to check malpractices in the working of banks” and to put a stop to profiteering by banks. All these arguments will be found to be untenable on a dispassionate scrutiny of the issues involved. The primary function of banks

is to mobilise resources for economic development and that is exactly what the banks in our country have been doing. They have been working to attract deposits from those who have funds to spare on [a] long or short term basis. They have been making loans for industrial as well as agricultural expansion in accordance with numerous legislative requirements. During recent years, they have opened numerous branches in order to extend credit facilities to people even in remote areas, even though the banking business

in several branches has proved unremunerative. They have invested more than Rs 600 crore in Government securities. They have been broadening their capital base and increasing their reserves in accordance with statutory requirements. The enormous increase in their deposits during recent years bears testimony to the confidence which the public have in their working. By undertaking the foreign exchange business, our banks render considerable help in promoting exports. An occasional appearance of a black

sheep in the sphere of banking, as in any other sphere, does not detract from the value of the service which the banks as a whole are rendering to the country. What is regrettable is that though the Reserve Bank is invested with extensive powers to prevent malpractices, in one or two cases it failed to exercise them to protect the interests of the depositors as well as shareholders. Ninety-five per cent of bank advances in India are secured loans. The corresponding figures for the USA, is only thirty per cent.

Restoring J&K's statehood won't be enough. Kashmiris need to be treated like other Indians



Late one night in 1978, in a nation illuminated by the end of the Emergency, police dragged Ghulam Nabi Patel out of his home in Srinagar's Batamalo, and into the city's Central Jail. Leviathan still cast a long shadow in this corner of the republic, it became clear. The head of the Kashmir Motor Drivers Association, it later emerged, had campaigned for the Janata Party in the just-concluded elections. This action enraged then-Prime Minister Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah enough to make the trade union leader the first victim of Kashmir's just-legislated preventive detention law, the Public Safety Act. The High Court ordered Ghulam Nabi's release, but that wasn't quite the end of the story. In 2018, the elderly politician, battling cancer and on a trip home to arrange his daughter's wedding, was shot dead by terrorists. This time, the parties he'd served for decades — the Congress and the People's Democratic Party — denied their association with him, so they would not have to condemn the assassins. A last bit of the story remains. In 2020, Ghulam Nabi's children were served notice by the government, ordering them to vacate the premises they were provided to protect them from terrorist attack. This week, the Supreme Court is scheduled to resume hearing petitions seeking the restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood, an issue it elided over after 32 paragraphs of elegant prose, in return for a promise from the Solicitor General. The decision to hear

the issue is an important one, but it also evades a critical issue. The demotion of Kashmir to a Union territory isn't the only issue that needs to be discussed, as India moves forward to reimagine its constitutional relationship with the once-was-a-state. Kashmir has never been, in any sense of the world, allowed to be a normal state, with normal politicians and normal citizens. The state might have been the first to get rural radio sets, scholar Navnita Chadha Behera notes, but authorities were careful to disable their tuners with wire, so as to ensure only Radio Kashmir could be heard. There were elections to a constituent Assembly in 1951, true, but politician Syed Mir Qasim observed notices posted on walls, ordering people not to discuss politics. Thus, Kashmir was bound to the republic with terror and blood, not ideas or culture. For this, the long jihad Pakistan unleashed against Kashmir in 1947-1948, and has since continued without interruption, must be held responsible. Like many other regions in India, from the adivasi heartlands in central India to parts of the Northeast, democracy

has struggled to grow in exceptionally harsh conditions. All blame, though, does not lie across the Line of Control. Elections that served to undermine democracy, the state-enabled subversion of the political system through corruption, the use of coercion unconstrained by law: All these, the story of Ghulam Nabi Patel should remind us, were Indian inventions. Today, the challenge isn't just to restore statehood in Kashmir. The task Indians need to embrace is to build a state that is Indian, an unremarkable part of our republic. Eighty years ago, Prime Minister Abdullah had promised that a utopia would be built from the ruins of Partition and war. The Naya Kashmir manifesto — which, Andrew Whitehead reminds us, liberally helped itself to text from the 1936 constitution of the Soviet Union — held out promises to redistribute feudal landholdings to the peasants, to uphold the rights of women, and introduce universal access to healthcare and education. The communist couple Freda Houlston and her husband Baba Pyare Lal Bedi wrote the manifesto with Abdullah's encouragement,

though it is unclear if his commitment to communism was ever serious. To the great Kashmiri poet Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor, it seemed Abdullah was leading the region out of the darkness: “The ranges of the mountains shall yield gold,” he gushed, “Pearls shall emerge out of the Wular lake.” Less than five years after Independence, though, the poet had encountered disillusionment. The reality of ‘New Kashmir’, it turned out, was one-party authoritarianism, electoral malpractice, and communalism. “Freedom being of heavenly birth, can't move from door to door,” he avidly wrote, “You'll find her camping in the homes of a chosen few alone.” How did this come about? The story has something to do with bad luck, scholar Aijaz Ashraf Wani has written, in an excellent survey of the roots of misadministration in Kashmir. Two successive bad harvests, in 1949-1950 and 1950-1951, created enormous rural discontent. Forced levies of crops from farmers, imposed in a desperate effort to stave off famine, sharpened the resentment, while shortages of food in the cities grew to alarming levels. The National Conference succeeded in dominating the Constituent Assembly, winning all 75 seats in the 1951 elections. This was only possible, though, because 45 out of 49 candidates of the Hindu-nationalist Praja Parishad party were barred from contesting, mainly on frivolous technical grounds, Behera has observed. The media was muzzled, and opponents

were intimidated and imprisoned. Less than five years later, though, the relationship between Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Abdullah had begun to break down. The Praja Parishad, denied electoral space, started a mass movement seeking the full integration of Kashmir into India. Abdullah, in a 10 April 1952 speech in RS Pura, suggested it was becoming impossible to “convince the Muslims of Kashmir that India does not intend to swallow them up.” The threat of war with Pakistan was alive, Nehru could not countenance this rebellion. “I am afraid Kashmir is heading in an adverse direction,” Nehru warned in a 28 June 1953 letter. The new regime of Prime Minister Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad came to power on the back of a unanimous vote of confidence from Jammu & Kashmir's Constituent Assembly, many of whose members were released from prison that very day. Early in 1954, the Union government restricted Kashmir's special status by passing constitutional amendments that cut back the state's autonomy. Long before Kashmir's special status ended, 260 of the 395 Articles in the Indian Constitution were already applicable in Jammu & Kashmir; the remaining 135 were identical provisions found in the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir. Like his predecessor and incarcerated friend Abdullah, Bakshi hoped development would subsume the urge for political agency and dialogue.

Good politician, bad statesman — what Muhammad Yunus' one year in power reveals

If Sheikh Hasina had her way, Muhammad Yunus would have been dunked into the Padma River by now. Not once but twice. But it has been a year since the ousted Bangladeshi prime minister hasn't had her way. In that time, not only has Yunus avoided a plunge into the Padma, but also dashed Hasina's dreams of returning to Bangladesh, all while sitting pretty in the chair she was forced to vacate. In the one year since Yunus took over as the caretaker to the interim government of Bangladesh on 8 August 2024, the accidental politician has proved himself a consummate one. Detractors who had claimed he won't last three months are now worried if he will even vacate his chair. Not only has Yunus deftly navigated the choppy waters of Bangladeshi politics, he has even turned foes into friends. Plunged into chaos after Hasina's hasty exit on 5 August 2024, Bangladesh, though, is in desperate need of a statesman. There has been no love lost between Sheikh Hasina and Muhammad

Yunus, much before the latter replaced the former as Bangladesh's premier last year. On 18 May 2022, Hasina had allegedly said, “He (Yunus) stopped funding for a project like the Padma Bridge because of one managing director post. He should be given two dunks in the Padma River, but lifted up so he doesn't die. Then maybe he will learn a lesson.” Hasina had said this while blaming Nobel Peace Prize winner, economist Dr Muhammad Yunus, for blocking the World Bank's funding of the Padma bridge project. That's not all. As recently as 1 January 2024, a court in Bangladesh had sentenced the Nobel laureate to six months in jail for violating Bangladesh's labour laws. Yunus' supporters said the case was politically motivated. The acclaimed economist and three colleagues from Grameen Telecom—one of the firms Yunus founded—were found guilty of failing to create a welfare fund for their workers. I call for the Bangladeshi people to speak in one voice against injustice.

Dharali floods a wake-up call for IMD, NDMA to buck up

The deadly flash floods and landslides in Uttarkashi on 5 August, in which 16 people were killed, highlight the problems of illegal riverbank constructions and inadequate warning systems. Videos of submerged villages, ravaging floods sweeping up buildings and cars in their tide, and stranded people have become an almost annual occurrence now in the Himalayan region. Dharali's floods struck in the absence of any weather warning, and authorities are still confused about the actual cause. While the Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority called it a cloudburst, the India Meteorological Department could not confirm it with the available data. Uttarkashi district recorded 12.7 cm of rain in 8 hours on 5 August; it is still lower than districts such as Haridwar and Dehradun, which got 15-30 cm of rain on the same day. In a state that sees frequent cloudbursts and floods during the monsoon, and has been explicitly marked as a ‘high vulnerability zone’ for landslides by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), the damage from the Dharali floods is not merely nature's fault. The blame also rests squarely on building norms, mass road construction and mining projects, and other anthropogenic activities that have exacerbated Uttarakhand's fragility. The floods should be another wake-up call for the IMD and the NDMA to buck up and ensure the safety of people and ecology in the Himalayas. Dharali is a small hamlet 2,680 metres above sea level, situated 18 km from Gangotri, and is a common stopover for tourists and pilgrims going to one of the Char Dhams of Uttarakhand. It is dotted with hotels, restaurants, and homes built precariously close to the banks of the Kheerganga River that runs through the village. On Tuesday afternoon, a barrage of water descended upon the village and

damaged houses, roads, and the one bridge connecting Dharali and Hershil, another area affected by the landslide. Satellite images from ISRO now show that deposits of mud and sediments from the floods cover all of the village. Alongside civilian settlements, an Army camp near Hershil too was impacted by the floods, although the number of people missing there hasn't been reported. The IMD had issued warnings of heavy to extremely heavy rainfall in all of Uttarakhand, including the Uttarkashi district, from 1 August onwards. But compared to other districts, Uttarkashi's rainfall during this monsoon was still pretty low. From 1 to 5 August, Uttarkashi's recorded rainfall was 6 percent lower than the average rainfall it gets during this period. Over the monsoon season so far this year in the state, Uttarkashi has recorded 7 per cent lower rainfall than average. If there was indeed a cloudburst—100 mm of rain falling in one hour in a small area—then the IMD is not aware of it. The closest Automatic Weather System (AWS) station that could record this cloudburst is 7 km from Dharali, and it did not catch a cloudburst. But experts say that even without a cloudburst, the possibility of heavy rainfall, causing this disaster is not unfounded. Dharali's location and slope explain it. “The ‘cloudburst’ may have happened much higher at 12,000 ft above sea level, and Dharali is at 8,000 ft. Even this slope of 4,000 ft makes a huge difference to the intensity of the water flow,” Mahesh Palawat, vice president of meteorology and climate change at SkyMet Weather, told ThePrint. “The canal is very narrow, and a lot of trees and mud could have been uprooted and swept along with the water.” If extremely heavy rainfall can cause such damage without a rare event like a cloudburst, it should leave the system working /.

Briefs

GENEVA

₹2cr swindled from India mission

The CBI has launched a probe into the swindling of more than 2 lakh Swiss francs (around Rs 2 crore) at India's Permanent Mission in Geneva by a former accounts officer posted there, who allegedly siphoned the amount to bankroll his crypto-gambling ventures, officials said.

LUCKNOW

Bengali drama contest starts

The 59th Prakash Chandra Ghosh Memorial All India Full-Length Bengali Drama Competition began at the Bengali Club and Youngmen's Association in Lucknow on December 20 and will continue till January 8, 2026. Organisers said the event is India's only full-length Bengali-language drama competition. Sixteen theatre troupes from leading groups based in Delhi, Ahmedabad and West Bengal are taking part in the festival.

BHUBANESWAR

Minor 'raped,' two arrested

A 17-year-old girl was allegedly raped at a rented house in Odisha's Bhubaneswar, police said on Sunday. "The girl was subjected to sexual assault without her consent by two persons in the rented place," police said.

JAIPUR

Row over Save Aravalli campaign

Political rhetoric has started in Rajasthan over "Save Aravalli" campaign. BJP leader Rajendra Rathore alleged that Ashok Gehlot is trying to create confusion in the name of saving the Aravalli range, while reality is that the decisions taken by the Congress government led by Ashok Gehlot in 2002 regarding the Aravalli range are the reason for the current situation. "The definition of 100 metres for the Aravalli range was established by the government led by Ashok Gehlot in 2002," claimed Rathore.

CHANDIGARH

Sikhs object opposition to 'nagar kirtan'

Expressing concern over the opposition by some local residents to a religious "nagar kirtan" organised by Sikhs in New Zealand, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), which is known as mini parliament of Sikhs, on Sunday urged New Zealand and India governments to take serious note of the matter and ensure a safe and supportive environment for Sikh community there.

ROW INTENSIFIES | While govt calls scheme a decisive reform in rural employment, Cong plans nationwide stir against it

President nod makes VB-G RAM-G official

NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday gave her assent to the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, which replaces the MGNREGA and has a provision for 125 days of wage employment for rural workers.

With the presidential assent, it now becomes the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025, and a notification in this regard was published in the Gazette of India. The Rural Development Ministry, in a statement, called it a decisive reform in India's rural employment and development framework.

According to the government, the VB-G RAM G scheme, which has replaced Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, aims to establish a rural development framework aligned with the national vision of 'Viksit Bharat 2047'.

Besides providing for 125 days of wage employment, the Act also facilitates adequate availability of agricultural labour during peak sowing and harvesting seasons by empowering states to notify a pause period aggregating to sixty days in a financial year, the Ministry said.



Congress workers holding posters of Mahatma Gandhi stage a protest to oppose the central government's decision to repeal MGNREGA Act at Rajiv Bhawan, in Guwahati on Sunday

It stressed that the Act seeks to transform rural employment from a standalone welfare intervention into an integrated instrument of development.

The Bill was passed in Parliament last week amid protests by the Opposition.

The Congress, which continued its protests in various parts of the country against the new scheme on Sunday, accused the Narendra Modi government of "desecrating the groundbreaking law" MGNREGA in Parliament and said that two decades of progress have been overturned "without consultation" and by sidestepping all Parliamentary conventions.

Dismissing criticism of the Bill, Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh

Chouhan on Sunday alleged that misinformation is being spread about the new scheme, which he described as a step ahead of MGNREGA.

In a video posted on X, the minister said that over Rs 1,51,282 crore will be allocated for the VB-G RAM G scheme to ensure adequate funds for rural employment.

"There is a conspiracy to misguide the country, and false information is being spread, while the truth is that the VB-G RAM G scheme is a step ahead of MGNREGA," Chouhan said.

The ministry said the Act replaces MGNREGA with a modern statutory framework that enhances livelihood security and is aligned with the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

'Second killing of Mahatma'

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Sunday said the removal of Mahatma Gandhi's name from the MGNREGA is the "second killing of Mahatma Gandhi".

"The Congress will continue to protest till the previous rural employment guarantee scheme is restored, he said.

"The party will expose this fraud by going from house by house, village by village, and our struggle will continue until this Act is repealed," he said.

Congress leader KC Venugopal in a post on X on Sunday said MGNREGA has been reduced from a legal right to a "favour".

Venugopal stressed that MGNREGA was never meant to be a welfare handout. "MGNREGA was a legal right to work, not a welfare handout," he said, alleging the BJP has weakened the scheme by restricting funds and centralising decision-making.

"In protest, the Congress party is holding nationwide protests in all district headquarters across the country, standing with workers whose livelihoods and dignity are under attack," he said, adding the issue would be discussed at Congress Working Committee meeting scheduled for December 27.

Centre seeks report on death of elephants on rly tracks in Assam

GOSABA

Union Minister Bhupender Yadav on Sunday said the Centre has sought a report on the death of elephants in a collision between a train and a herd of tuskless in Assam's Hojai district a day ago.

Speaking to reporters after a meeting on Project Elephant and the National Tiger Conservation Authority in the Sundarbans of West Bengal, Yadav also asserted that "no relaxation has been granted" with regard to the protection of the Aravalli region.

"In the total area of 1.44 lakh square kilometres of the Aravalli, mining eligibility can only be in 0.19 per cent of the area. The rest of the entire Aravalli is preserved and protected," Yadav, the environment, forest and climate change minister, said.

The minister said the Centre would implement the Supreme Court guidelines with immediate effect.

The Supreme Court, on November 20, 2025, accepted the recommendations of a committee under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change



Restoration work is underway after seven elephants were killed when Sairang-New Delhi Rajdhani Express hit a herd in the Jamunamukh-Kampur section under Lumding Division of N.F. Railway, in Hojai on Saturday

on the definition of Aravalli Hills and Ranges.

According to the new definition, "Aravalli Hill is any landform in designated Aravalli districts with an elevation of 100 metres or more above its local relief" and an "Aravalli Range is a collection of two or more such hills within 500 metres of each other".

Speaking on the death of elephants on railway tracks, Yadav said all states have been asked to monitor elephant movement along the railway lines.

"The railway authorities have been directed to coordi-

nate with the forest departments of states on elephant movement along the tracks. A report on elephant deaths in Assam has been sought," the minister said.

He said coordination between train drivers and forest officials is essential.

Seven elephants were killed after a herd of jumbos was hit by the Sairang-New Delhi Rajdhani Express in Assam's Hajo district early on Saturday. Five coaches and the train's engine also derailed. One elephant calf succumbed to its injuries on Sunday, taking the toll to eight.

Cong plans campaign to revive party in Bihar

PATNA

Congress will launch a comprehensive campaign to revive the party in Bihar by strengthening its organisation at the grassroots level after its dismal performance in the recently-concluded assembly election.

After the inauspicious period of Kharman ends on January 14, Congress will launch the campaign to empower the party's organisation down to the panchayat level, identify organisational weaknesses, and infuse new energy into the party workers. As part of the party's initiative for revival, senior and experienced Congress leaders will camp in various districts and review party activities from the district to the panchayat level. A concrete action plan for the future will be prepared based on its findings.

Congress sources said that the campaign would be conducted in a phased manner

across the state. In each district, a team of senior leaders will stay for a few days to assess the organisational situation at the district, block and panchayat levels. During this time, a detailed review will be conducted of the party's activities, booth-level strength, progress of the membership drive, and the reasons for the electoral defeat. Senior party leaders will hold discussions with local leaders and workers directly during the district camps. Workers will be encouraged to express their problems openly, give suggestions, and list out local issues so that shortcomings can be addressed.

Manjhi demands Rajya Sabha seat

Union Minister Jitan Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) patron Jitan Ram Manjhi on Sunday created a flutter in political circles when he demanded a Rajya Sabha seat in the upcoming elections to the upper house of the parliament.

Zero tolerance: Def Min after Lt Col held on bribery charge

NEW DELHI

Amid the arrests of an Army officer and a middleman in an alleged bribery case, the Defence Ministry on Sunday said punitive action has been taken against them under the Government's policy of "Zero Tolerance Against Corruption."

A senior Defence Ministry official said, "The present action has been taken under the Government of India's stated policy of 'Zero Tolerance Against Corruption'."

On Saturday, the CBI arrested Lieutenant Colonel Deepak Kumar Sharma, who was serving as Deputy Planning Officer in the Department of Defence Production under the Ministry of Defence, and Vinod Kumar, a private individual, in connection with an alleged bribery and criminal conspiracy case linked to defence-related clearances and favours.

Kurmis emerge as game changers on 128 UP seats, BJP's caste push reshapes politics

LUCKNOW

Kurmi voters have once again moved to the centre of Uttar Pradesh politics, with the BJP's decision to appoint Maharajganj MP Pankaj Chaudhary as state president sharpening the battle for control over one of the state's most influential OBC blocs. The move is being seen as a direct attempt to consolidate Kurmi votes across 128 Assembly constituencies where the community plays a decisive or influential role.

Estimated to form around 7.4% of the state's population,



the Kurmi and Patel community is believed to number between 1.75 crore and 2 crore in UP. Their electoral influence stretches across Purvanchal, Awadh, central Uttar Pradesh and Bundelkhand. Of the 128 constituencies where Kurmi voters matter, they are considered decisive in nearly 50 seats.

The BJP already holds a

numerical edge among Kurmi legislators, with 27 MLAs from the community compared to 12 from Samajwadi Party (SP) and one from Congress. In Parliament, however, the picture is more competitive. Of the 11 Kurmi MPs from Uttar Pradesh, seven belong to the SP, three to BJP and one to Apna Dal(S) chief Anupriya Patel. It is this balance that BJP now appears keen to alter.

The immediate political impact of the BJP's Kurmi card is expected to be felt by Apna Dal (S), a party whose entire political identity is built around the Kurmi and Patel community. Despite being a

long-standing NDA ally since 2014, Apna Dal (S) has often asserted itself within the alliance. With a senior Kurmi leader now heading the BJP's state unit, political observers believe Anupriya Patel's leverage in seat-sharing talks could weaken.

The SP, which used the Kurmi factor effectively in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls under its PDA plank, also has reason to be cautious. However, with Pankaj Chaudhary at the helm of the BJP's state organisation, the party is expected to aggressively court non-Yadav OBC voters, with Kurmis at the top of the list.

With startups and education, India aims to cross the 'final frontier'

NEW DELHI

In a bid to bolster the space technology ecosystem, India's space sector promoter INSPIRE has floated a proposal to set up 'Antariksh Prayogshala' at seven institutes across the country.

The 'Antariksh Prayogshala' is billed as a first-of-its-kind initiative aimed at creating state-of-the-art space laboratories within Indian academic institutions to provide hands-on training and exposure to students pursuing space tech courses.

The Indian National Space

Promotion and Authorisation Centre (INSPIRE) has rolled out a Request for Proposal (RfP) to establish Antariksh Prayogshala (space labs) at select academic institutions across India.

Several higher education institutions have started offering space technology courses and such space labs will allow students to receive practical training and help provide talent for the private space sector taking root in the country.

This initiative is intended to enable meaningful industry-academia collaboration, and support India's long-term vision of becoming a leading

global space economy, said Vinod Kumar, Director, Promotion Directorate, INSPIRE. Under the scheme, up to seven academic institutions will be selected in a phased manner from seven different zones across the country. INSPIRE will provide financial support of up to 75 per cent of the total project cost, with a cap of Rs 5 crore per institution, to be released on a milestone-linked basis.

MISSILE MONITORING

Meanwhile, Indian startup Digantra, which specialises in monitoring space debris, has ventured into the domain of

tracking missiles using satellites, citing greater interest from governments across the world for such information.

Space debris and traffic monitoring has emerged as a key segment of the global space economy as companies launch more satellites in low Earth orbit.

"We were tracking fast-moving space objects. So, with that experience and lessons that we learnt there, we will use the same architecture to work on missile tracking and detection from space," Anirudh Sharma, co-founder and CEO of Digantra Industries, told media.

Adivasi family carries their deceased infant in veg bag

RANCHI

In a shocking revelation, an Adivasi family was forced to carry home their deceased four-month-old in a vegetable bag due to the unavailability of an ambulance in Jharkhand's West Champaran district. After the death of the infant at Sadar Hospital on December 19, infant's father, Dimba Chatomba and his wife Roybari Chatomba of Bala Barjori village near Chaibasa carried the body home in a vegetable bag as there was no

mortuary van available, exposing the chinks in the state's health infrastructure. Chatomba claimed that the hospital staff told him that he could not be allowed to carry body openly on a bus. The hospital staff then allegedly pooled Rs 400 to buy a vegetable bag for keeping the body in it and also the bus tickets for the infant's parents. Their home is 80 km away from the hospital. Civil Surgeon, Chaibasa, Bharti Minz, however, claimed that the hospital's mortuary van was not immediately available at the hospital. She said that parents concerned were asked to wait for the vehicle but instead they took the infant's body in a bag. She said that since the infant's condition was not good, he was also

referred to MGM Medical College Hospital (MGMMCH) Jamshedpur, but the father insisted on keeping his son at the Sadar Hospital itself. Meanwhile, Jharkhand health Minister Irfan Ansari announced that the government would procure four mortuary vehicles for every district hospital at a cost of Rs 15 crore to "ensure families do not face indignity during emergencies". He said that it was found during an inquiry that the family left on their own "without waiting for the ambulance", and that two mortuary vehicles were available at the time — "one of which was non-functional due to technical reasons, while the other was en route".



Kodaikanal observatory helps solve Sun mystery

CHENNAI

Daily solar observations gathered for years at the century-old Kodaikanal Solar Observatory have led to a breakthrough understanding of how the Sun's magnetic activity varies across its latitudes — a discovery that could deepen insights into the solar dynamo, impact space-weather forecasting, and even help climate models.

The study, led by researchers from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), an autonomous body under

the Department of Science and Technology (DST), analysed 11 years (2015-2025) of spectroscopic data captured in the calcium-K line of sunlight — a spectral signature that forms high in the Sun's chromosphere and serves as a sensitive marker of magnetic activity.

The Kodaikanal Solar Observatory, which recently celebrated 125 years of continuous observation, maintains one of the world's longest solar datasets, said Apoorva Srinivasa, one of the authors of the study, to PTI.

According to him, the



research team used this rich archive to track how the Sun's magnetic intensity changes across latitudes — revealing consistent zones of heightened activity that correspond with the Sun's well-known 11-year cycle of sunspot peaks.

"The Sun is not a static ball of fire, but a magnetically active star that follows large-

scale cycles of activity," said KP Raju, lead author of the study.

"By slicing the Sun into latitude bands and analysing integrated light from each, we can reveal patterns invisible when studying isolated features like sunspots," added the former professor at IIA.

The team found that most magnetic activity clusters between 40 degrees north and south latitude, with pronounced peaks around 15 degrees to 20 degrees, matching zones where sunspots are most frequent.

"These spectral variations directly mirror how the Sun's

magnetic field evolves," said co-author K Nagaraju.

"We verified this correlation using data from NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory," added the associate professor at IIA, whose focus area of research is solar magnetism.

They also observed hemispheric asymmetries — with the southern hemisphere generally showing stronger or faster variations in activity — providing new hints about how the internal magnetic field reorganises itself over each solar cycle.

The findings were published in the journal, 'Monthly

Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society' and represent a step toward refining solar dynamo models, which explain how magnetic energy is generated and cycles through the Sun's surface layers.

Srinivasa, who was interning at IIA when he began to study the datasets, and who is currently a PhD scholar at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham in Coimbatore, said the work on Kodaikanal data opened up several new research paths — including the possible use of machine learning in solar studies.

Kartik, Ananya starrer seems to be as confusing as the title itself

TITLE: *Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri*

DIRECTOR: Sameer Vidwans

CAST: Kartik Aaryan, Ananya Panday, Jackie Shroff, Neena Gupta, Chandni Bhabha and Tiku Talsania

WHERE: In theatres near you

RATING: ★★

After all the ultra glam trailers, the Kartik Aaryan, Ananya Panday starrer has finally been released in theatres on Thursday. Despite the humongous expectations from the film, the irony is that, despite the title being a tongue twister, the film in totality lacks any kind of twists and turns. The film starts with a voiceover introducing us to retired Col Amar Wardhan Singh (Jackie Shroff) and his two daughters - author Rummy (Ananya Panday) and Jia (Chandni Bhabha). One fine day, when Rummy travels abroad, she crosses paths with Rehaan Mehra aka Ray (Kartik Aaryan). What initially starts off as an irritation for Rummy and casual flirting for Ray, eventually culminates in true love from both sides.

And when the self confessed flirt Ray confesses his true love to Rummy and tells her that he would want to meet her father to seek her alliance for marriage, the latter immediately refuses it and turns him down, even though she also is heads over heels in love with him. What's the reason for Rummy to turn down Ray's proposal for marriage, is Ray really in love with Rummy or is it one of his impulsive casual flirts and what happens of the two in the end is what forms the rest of the film.

Actors' performance

Everyone plays their part staying true to

the film's screenplay. But, since the problem lies in the screenplay itself, everyone's performances get affected very badly. Kartik Aaryan's performance is decent, but, only till the time he is true to his name and character. During frequent intervals, one sees traces (read 'sliding into') likes of Shah Rukh Khan, Akshay Kumar, and Ranbir Kapoor in his performance. And that is where he loses the plot (no pun intended!).

As for Ananya Panday, we know her as the very lady who put her heart and soul

into her cute and convincing character in *Call Me Bae*. But, despite putting all her cuteness in the forefront, her character still fails to leave an impression in the minds of the audience in this film. She oscillates between being a glam doll and an actress trying to do a serious role. There's also Chandni Bhabha, who seems totally out of place. She really needs to read her role in any film rather than her co-stars.

On the other hand, one lands up feeling sad (actually very sad) for veteran talents

like Jackie Shroff, Neena Gupta and Tiku Talsania. The director had a blockbuster chance to extract stellar performances from this trio. But, he failed to do justice to that.

Also, why on earth would anyone want to see a middle aged married lady ogling Kartik Aaryan's character... who is her son's age. She not just ogles at his chiselled physique, but also clearly spits out desperation (for the lack of a better word). This character could have been avoided totally.

Music

Sameer Vidwans' direction is one of the many reasons for the film not being able to live upto the expectations and hype. Right from the word go, he seems to have gone on an lethargic overdrive about the direction, which clearly shows in the film. Sharing the blame-load has to be Shrikant Sharma for the 'un-magnetic' storyline, screenplay and even dialogues. The film, which has the box office darling Kartik Aaryan, remains devoid of having a decent seeti-maar worthy one liner/punch line. The existing dialogues seem to have been thrust in order to look cool and sound GenZ-ish.

Film suffers majorly in the editing department as well. Scenes like song parody could have been avoided totally. It would have not just made the film crisper, but also would have saved a lot of money for the producer. Film's cinematography seems to be the only saving grace of the film.

Even though the film is a visual treat for the die hard fans of Kartik Aaryan and Ananya Panday, but for those who are looking for meaningful wholesome entertainment, it's better to look elsewhere!



A nostalgic adventure that charms more than it thrills

TITLE: *Anaconda*

DIRECTOR: Tom Gormican

CAST: Jack Black, Paul Rudd, Thandiwe Newton, Steve Zahn, Seltan Mello and Daniela Melchior

WHERE: In theatres near you

RATING: ★★★

There is a particular kind of cinema that arrives with no pretensions of profundity, carrying instead a plastic smile, a memory of Saturday-afternoon thrills, and the promise of uncomplicated fun. *Anaconda* wants to belong firmly to this species. It is a film that knows its ancestry, winks at it repeatedly, and then proceeds to wander into the jungle with a self-aware shrug. The result is neither a disaster nor a triumph, but something curiously middling and faintly endearing.

At its core, *Anaconda* is less interested in terror than in nostalgia. It stages a meta-adventure about filmmaking, friendship, and the questionable wisdom of reviving beloved trash from the past. The Amazon rainforest becomes less a site of menace and more a playground where old dreams are dusted off, briefly admired, and then put back into storage. The snake itself, larger than life but oddly restrained, feels more like a narrative obligation than an existential threat. For a film named after its monster, it is surprisingly uninterested in what makes monsters linger in the imagination.

Actors' performance

The cast does much of the heavy lifting, leaning into charm where the script thins out. Jack Black plays a thwarted dreamer with enough warmth to keep him sympathetic even when the character's ambitions feel vague. Paul Rudd brings his fam-

iliar, self-deprecating ease to a role that gently mocks the insecurity of the almost-famous actor. Together, they generate an affable chemistry that sustains the film through its lazier stretches.

Thandiwe Newton is given less to do than she deserves, though she commits gamely, while Steve Zahn emerges as the unexpected comic anchor. His performance carries an unforced sweetness that lands more jokes than the screenplay sets up. The ensemble feels like a group of friends genuinely enjoying one another's company, which counts for more than one might expect in a film that often confuses motion for momentum.

Music

Visually, *Anaconda* prefers suggestion over spectacle. The jungle is photographed as a series of dark corridors and humid clearings, an economical choice that hides limited effects while also draining the serpent of menace. Action sequences come and go with a theme-park briskness, competent but rarely memorable. The music, serviceable and unobtrusive, signals danger on cue without ever deepening it. Everything works, technically speaking, but little lingers once the moment passes.

Anaconda is a film caught between affection and calculation. It wants to celebrate the joy of unpretentious entertainment, yet cannot quite deliver the reckless fun that would justify its own argument. There are laughs, a handful of effective jolts, and performances that keep it afloat. What is missing is bite. Like its famously fearsome namesake, this *Anaconda* coils impressively but strikes too softly. For viewers seeking light, nostalgic diversion, it suffices. For those hoping for something sharper, it slips away before leaving a mark.



Tamannaah Bhatia, Diana Penty and others celebrated Christmas 2025 in cosy pyjamas and sparkling decor

Christmas is here, and B-town is going all out this season with heartwarming celebrations. The festival in Bollywood this year felt less like red-carpet glamour and more like cosy house parties, sparkling trees, and *pyjamas* straight out of a holiday movie. From twinkling decor to intimate get-togethers, stars chose warmth over extravagance and still managed to make it all look effortlessly stylish. Let's take a look at how Bollywood brought in Christmas 2025.

Sonakshi Sinha and Zaheer Iqbal

Lovebirds Sonakshi Sinha and Zaheer Iqbal opted for simplicity as they posed beside a beautifully decorated tree, keeping their looks minimal yet festive. Sonakshi wore a crisp white shirt with denim, while Zaheer added holiday charm with a bright red jacket over jeans.

Stars' cosy celebration



Diana Penty

Diana Penty went the glamour route, looking elegant in a black gown with a V-neckline and silver accents, happily posing with her stack of Christmas gifts.



Shilpa Shetty

Shilpa Shetty celebrated with family fun at a Christmas carnival. Sharing heartwarming glimpses, she wrote, "Christmassing. Wishing you and your loved ones a season filled with love, joy, warmth, family time and being fully present (and also getting presents). Merry Christmas, all!"



Ranveer did not quit *Don 3*

Amid reports claiming that Ranveer Singh has stepped away from Farhan Akhtar's much-anticipated film *Don 3*, sources close to the development have strongly refuted the speculation, calling it "entirely untrue." According to India Today, a source close to the development clarified that the narrative doing the rounds does not reflect the actual situation.

"Ranveer Singh hasn't walked out of *Don 3* like the rumour mills claim. It's actually an entirely different story," the source said. "To start with, Ritesh Sidhwani and Farhan Akhtar offered him *Don 3* after he had delivered three colossal flops. They stood by him even after Sanjay Leela Bhansali shelved *Bajju Bawra* because he was considered not saleable at the time," the source added.

Dharma Productions denies copyright infringement allegations, calls author's claims 'baseless'

Filmmaker Karan Johar's Dharma Productions issued a firm response to allegations of copyright infringement surrounding *Homebound*, the Neeraj Ghaywan-directed film. The production house, on Wednesday, categorically denied claims made by author and journalist Puja Changoiwala, who alleged that the film unlawfully copies her 2021 novel *Homebound*.

In a statement shared with Hindustan Times, a spokesperson for Dharma Productions described the allegations as "baseless and unfounded," asserting that the

Homebound Controversy 'Baseless and unfounded'



film is not adapted from Changoiwala's book. "The allegations of copyright infringement are baseless and

unfounded, and Dharma Productions categorically denies the same," the statement read. "Homebound is an officially licensed adaptation inspired by the New York Times article by Basharat Peer, with all requisite rights lawfully acquired and due credit duly provided."

The production house also confirmed that it had received a legal notice from Changoiwala earlier this year. "A legal notice has been received and duly responded to by Dharma Productions' legal counsel," the spokesperson said. However, Dharma clarified that it has not received any formal communication regarding the legal proceedings reportedly initiated by the author in the Bombay High Court.

"Dharma Productions has become aware through media reports of an alleged pre-suit mediation before the Hon'ble Bombay High Court—however, no formal communication has been received to date," the statement added.

Briefs

Suicide attack at Nigeria mosque kills 5

Five people have been killed in Nigeria's Maiduguri after a bomb exploded during prayer at a mosque on Wednesday night. Police said 35 people were injured in the attack, which it said is likely a suicide attack.

Bondi heroes to be awarded

Australian PM Anthony Albanese announced plans on Thursday for a national bravery award to recognise civilians and first responders who confronted "the worst of evil" during an antisemitic terror attack that left 15 dead and has cast a heavy shadow over the nation's holiday season.

Flash floods, mudslides in California

A powerful winter storm swept across California on Wednesday, with heavy rains and gusty winds bringing mudslides and debris flows that have led to some water rescues and evacuation orders. Forecasters said Southern California could see its wettest Christmas in years and warned about flash flooding and mudslides.

Scores of IS suspects held

Istanbul police launched raids on Thursday at 124 locations and detained over a hundred suspected members of the Islamic State allegedly planning attacks against Christmas and NY celebrations.

Kilimanjaro crash kills 5

Five people have died after a helicopter crashed on Africa's highest mountain, Mt Kilimanjaro, in Tanzania. The Wednesday accident happened on one of the most popular tourist climbing routes, in what police said was a rescue mission to pick up patients.

SPIRALLING UNREST | Resignation came amid allegations of Hadi's brother linking Yunus administration to the killing

Key B'desh official quits

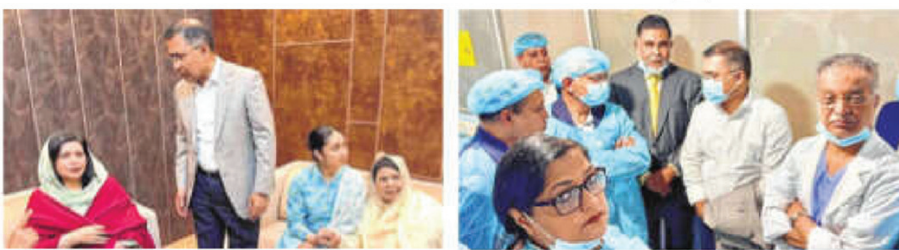
DHAKA

Amid the political turmoil in the country following the killing of Osman Hadi, a prominent figure in the July Uprising, special assistant to Bangladesh's ministry of home affairs Khuda Baksh Chowdhury resigned from his position, the 'Daily Star' reported.

A notification said the resignation was accepted by the Bangladeshi president and takes effect immediately. The notification was signed by Bangladesh's cabinet secretary Sheikh Abdur Rashid, and issued under the president's order.

The chief adviser's press wing confirmed the development, though no details were provided. Khuda Baksh Chowdhury, a former IGP, was appointed as special assistant to interim government led by Muhammad Yunus on November 10, 2024. "Md Khuda Baksh Chowdhury, special assistant (Ministry of Home Affairs) to the chief adviser, has resigned from his post. The president has accepted his resignation," an official statement said.

His resignation might not come as a surprise, as calls for him to step down from his position were made by Inqilab Moncho, a mass cultural movement formed during last year's July Uprising, in which Hadi also took part.



BNP leader Tarique Rahman visits ailing mother Khaleda Zia at a Dhaka hospital

Burning minorities alive: Hasina flays Yunus regime

Amid spiralling violence against minorities in Bangladesh, ousted PM Sheikh Hasina, in a Christmas speech, has attacked the Yunus regime, saying the "current ruling group" has seized illegal power and is now subjecting minorities to "unspeakable torture".

On Christmas, Hasina started her speech by extending greetings to citizens and reminded them that in the past, Bangladesh had always been a "shining example of communal harmony".

"The father of the nation dreamed of a non-

communal Bangladesh. Bangladesh Awami League has ensured the smooth living of people of all religions to realise that dream. It is sad to say the current ruling group that has seized illegal power is interfering with the freedom of people of all religions and communities to practice their own religion," Hasina said.

About the lynching of minorities, she said non-Muslims are "subject to unspeakable torture" under the current regime. It has created examples of atrocities such as the burning of religious minorities."



by Inqilab Mancha.

GOVT WON'T BE ABLE TO EVADE RESPONSIBILITY, SAYS HADI'S RELATIVE

The resignation is the result of the Hadi's brother allegation that a section within the Yunus-led interim government plotted the killing to derail the upcoming election.

"It is you who got Osman Hadi killed, and now you are trying to foil the election by using this as an issue. Those in power when Osman Hadi was killed, you won't be able to evade the responsibility," Hadi's brother Omar Hadi told a protest rally in Dhaka staged

Hadi's brother Omar Hadi said the government must "immediately expose the entire group involved" in his brother's killing to the nation. He warned, "Otherwise, you will be forced to flee the country," referencing the fate of deposed PM Sheikh Hasina's Awami League regime. He alleged a section of the government got his brother killed at the direction of an "agency or country". He said Hadi wanted the election to be held by February and asked authorities not to disrupt the poll environment.

'Jovial' Trump warns against US infiltration by 'bad Santa'

WEST PALM BEACH (US)

US President Trump marked Christmas Eve by quizzing children calling in about what presents they were excited about receiving, while promising not to let a "bad Santa" infiltrate the country and even suggesting that a stocking full of coal may not be so bad.

Vacationing at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, the president and first lady

Melania Trump, participated in the tradition of talking to youngsters dialling into the North American Aerospace Defense Command, which playfully tracks Santa's progress around the globe.

"We want to make sure that Santa is being good. Santa's a very good person," Trump told kids ages 4 and 10 in Oklahoma. "We want to make sure that he's not infiltrated, that we're not infiltrating into our country a bad Santa."

He didn't elaborate. Trump has often marked Christmases past with criticisms of his political enemies, including in 2024, when he posted, "Merry Christmas to the Radical Left Lunatics."

During his first term, Trump wrote online early on Dec 24, 2017, targeting a top FBI official he believed was biased against him, as well as the news media.

But Trump was in a jovial mood this time.

Don's 'nominee' triumphs in Honduras prez vote

TEGUCIGALPA

Trump-backed candidate Nasry Asfura won Honduras' presidential election, electoral authorities said on Wednesday afternoon, ending a weeks-long count that has whittled away at the credibility of the Central American nation's fragile electoral system.

The election is continuing Latin America's swing to the right, coming just a week after Chile chose the far-right politician José Antonio Kast as its next president.

Asfura, of the conservative

National Party, received 40.27% votes in the Nov 30 poll, edging out 4-time candidate Salvador Nasralla of the conservative Liberal Party, who finished with 39.53% votes.

The former mayor of Honduras' capital Tegucigalpa, won in his second bid for the presidency, after he and Nasralla were neck-and-neck during a weeks-long vote count that fuelled international concern.

On Tuesday night, a number of electoral officials and candidates were already fighting and contesting the results of the election.

Meanwhile, followers in Asfura's campaign headquarters erupted into cheers.

"Honduras: I am prepared to govern," Asfura said on X after the results were released. "I will not let you down."

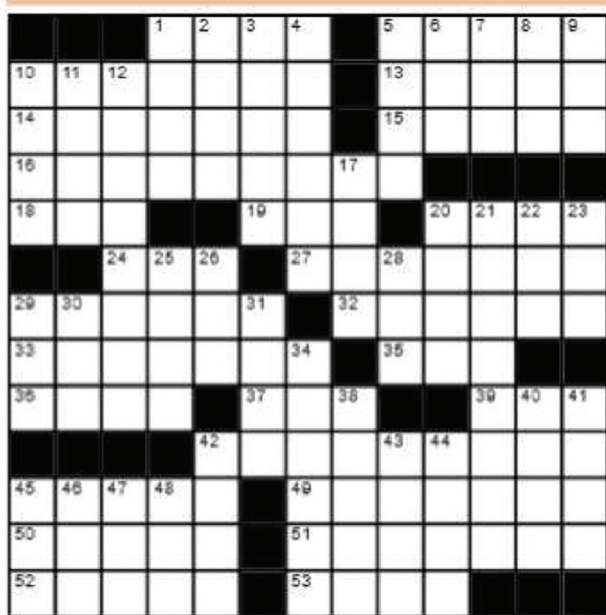
First 1-person, 1-vote poll in decades held in Somalia

Residents of Somalia's Mogadishu were set to vote on Thursday in a controversial local election that marks the country's first-ever one-person, one-vote poll since 1969. Analysts say it is a major departure from clan-based power-sharing negotiations.

Algeria votes to declare French colonisation crime, demands restitution

Legislators in Algeria voted to declare France's colonisation of the North African country a crime, approving a law that calls for restitution of property taken by France during its 130-year rule, among other demands seeking to redress historical wrongs. France slammed the law as a "hostile act" threatening bilateral efforts to heal wounds of the past. The two countries retain close cultural and economic ties but have troubled diplomatic relations.

Crossword #1726



- Across**
- Palm - "pain" anagram?
 - Sum up
 - Thought - "i.e.dated" anagram?
 - Eagle's nest
 - Coats with a shiny white appearance?
 - Pleasantly overweight
 - Currents in surf
 - Please turn over, acronym
 - Monarchical letters
 - Winged insect
 - Narrow inlet, creek
 - Weeps or expresses sorrow for
 - See 45
 - Language
 - Insanity
 - _____ good boy : behave yourself (2,1)
 - Conspiracy
 - Anti-tetanus serum, abbr
 - Light-Emitting Diode
 - Ex-Chief Minister of West Bengal (5,4)
 - 45 & 29 Across US tennis star who has won eight Grand Slam singles titles (5,6)
 - Crimson dye
 - View or thoughts
 - Urged with a stick
 - Unspoken
 - Dry and withered

- Down**
- Pew area
 - Road to Rome - "tier" anagram?
 - Famous Australian city
 - Swallow
 - Sings like Eminem?
 - Long fish
 - French vineyard - "cur" anagram?
 - _____ at : make it one's goal?
 - American slang for 'energy'
 - The game _____ : you are exposed, in a way? (2,2)
 - By _____ of : by force or means of?
 - The Spanish city of gold? (2,6)
 - Sharpen
 - _____ down the drain : absolutely wasted?
 - State neighbouring Assam
 - Music director Malik
 - T.S. Eliot's initials
 - Is not, in contracted form
 - Enzyme suffix with a "sea" of change?
 - Crime syndicate
 - Stereo component
 - American slang for a sweetheart?
 - English exclamation (1,3)
 - Tramples heavily on
 - Gaze fixedly
 - Italian city famous for its ancient Roman ruins
 - Twosome, pair
 - Joke
 - Prince of grand opera
 - Adam _____ : the famous poetic character?
 - Islet
 - BIP and their allies?
 - X-mas month
 - Bollywood's Aishwarya _____ Bachchan

YOUR DAY By Vinayak Vishwas Karandikar



ARIES: A day for emotional and spiritual growth, sudden ideas, and social connections. Group activities or travel may expand your awareness. Expenses or gains through spiritual practices, education, or social networking are possible. Online ventures and group investments may bring returns. People in psychology, holistic healing, education, research, IT, and innovation fields will benefit. You may suffer from pain in ankles, calves, or nerve-related issues. Lucky number: 7; Lucky colour: Light Blue



TAURUS: Business partnerships, financial planning, and career recognition will take centre stage. Your focus will shift to public image and leadership. Expenses or gains through networking, legal dealings, or higher authorities are likely. Government-related income is possible. Those in finance, law, consultancy, politics, and public administration will benefit. Some may experience bone strain. Lucky number: 4; Lucky colour: Green



GEMINI: A day of learning, clarity, communication, and travel. Spiritual growth and foreign interactions are highlighted. Expenses or gains through higher studies, communication tools, or long-distance trade are likely. Teachers, writers, counsellors, astrologers, and travellers will benefit. Emotional discussions will bring healing. New connections may form through communication or travel. Some may suffer from throat pain, eye troubles. Lucky number: 5; Lucky colour: Yellow



CANCER: Transformation and emotional depth will define the day. Work and relationships may feel challenging but will bring inner strength. Money flow through inheritance, insurance, or family obligations is likely. Some expenses can be expected on home or health. Researchers and those in healthcare will benefit. Some may suffer from digestive issues. Lucky number: 2; Lucky colour: White



LEO: Recognition and partnerships will come into focus. Rewards for past efforts and collaborations are likely. Expenses or gains through luxury items, spouses, or business contracts are likely. Artists, businesspersons, consultants, HR professionals, and those in finance or medicine will benefit. Some may suffer from eye issues, lower back pain, or skin problems. Lucky number: 9; Lucky colour: Orange



VRGO: It is a productive day, emphasising work, routine, and stability. Practical efforts will bring long-term benefits. Expenditure or income through education, travel, or small contracts is likely. Employees, healthcare professionals, and teachers will benefit. Some will suffer from stress and digestive or nervous issues. Lucky number: 6; Lucky colour: Brown



LIBRA: Creativity, romance, and relaxation will dominate the day. A harmonious mood encourages joy and expression. Expenses or gains through arts, entertainment, speculation, or family leisure are possible. Artists, media professionals, and those in spiritual or creative fields will benefit. Some may suffer from headache, spine problems, or respiratory issues. Lucky number: 3; Lucky colour: Pink



SCORPIO: Emotional healing and domestic concerns will dominate. Focus on stability, property, and self-reflection. Money flow through property, education, or family business is seen. Builders, consultants, researchers, and real estate professionals will benefit. You will have peaceful energy at home, but handle tension patiently. Some may suffer from chest pains or allergies. Lucky number: 2; Lucky colour: White



SAGITTARIUS: Communication, travel, and learning will bring progress. Hard work and patience will yield rewards. Gains through media, communication, or teaching are likely. Stuck payments may get cleared. Writers, public speakers, journalists, and educators will succeed. Your siblings or children will need attention; short trips with family are favourable. Lucky number: 9; Lucky colour: Red



CAPRICORN: It is a stable day, focused on family, finances, and material comfort. Long-awaited gains may arrive. Money flow through family wealth, home investments, or banking activities is seen. Bankers, educators, and traders will benefit. It is time for rest and family bonding. Some may suffer from throat pain or dental sensitivity. Lucky number: 8; Lucky colour: Silver



AQUARIUS: It is a day emphasising travel, individuality, and self-growth. Personal image and innovation will stand out. Expenditure on self-improvement, professional tools, or health is likely. Gains through self-effort or investments are seen. Innovators, healthcare professionals, and entrepreneurs will benefit. Some may suffer from throat pain, sinus issues. Lucky number: 3; Lucky colour: Blue



PISCES: A day of spirituality, emotions, and celebrations. Solitude may bring insights and peace. Expenses or hidden gains through celebrations, travel, or spiritual work are likely. Artists, healers, and NGO workers will benefit. Travel or emotional bonding will bring joy, though minor delays are possible. Some may suffer from fatigue, sleep disturbance, or immunity issues. Lucky number: 7; Lucky colour: Black

SUDOKU - 616



WHAT TO DO: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9. Every puzzle has only one correct solution.

Solution

Across: 1 Nip, 5 Reep, 10 Ideated, 13 Aerie, 14 Silvers, 27 Benares, 32 Tongue, 33 Madness, 35 Be a 36 Plot, 37 Aye, 38 Across, 39 Aye, 40 Ede, 41 Dumb, 42 Aye, 43 90c, 44 ND, 45 Aie, 46 ND, 47 Beac, 48 Rai, 49 Magma, 50 Ideas, 51 Prodded, 52 Tact, 53 Bere.

Earth's Pradakṣiṇa: A New Year Reflection

Swami Brahmadevananda Saraswati

In a few days, we will celebrate the new year—it is simply our home and the earth completing one circle around the sun. Put like that, it seems no big deal.

Yet, this journey is responsible for a lot of things on our planet, including changing seasons. Given all this, even though it appears ordinary, it provides us a reference point in the flow of time and space that governs our functioning lives—a chance to examine where we are and where we're going.

This is a time to look back and review how we spent our year. Did we achieve what we set out to do? Did we get sidetracked? Did we change our goals? Did deeper priorities emerge? It's valuable to look back honestly and evaluate our lives over the past year—the good, the bad, and the ugly, everything. Take a good, honest look at your life.

This pause also lets us plan for the year ahead, breaking down our long-term priorities into manageable goals in the coming year. What do we wish to achieve? Are we thinking of life's deeper facets

or merely caught up in externals? These few days offer a precious opportunity to look both behind and ahead, considering what we can make of our lives.

We can find deeper meaning in this through Sanātana Dharma, or Hinduism, as it's popularly called. The sun symbolises Īśvara, or Bhagavān, and the earth—representing all humanity—circles around it, performing pradakṣiṇa. The earth's revolution around the sun is thus a pradakṣiṇa, a while its rotation on its own axis is pradakṣiṇa to itself.

Viewed this way, the earth itself participates in the worship of Bhagavān, of Īśvara. We will be blessed by adopting such an attitude to divinise our own lives. As we complete this cosmic circle, let us embrace both reflection and aspiration, recognising that our journey through time mirrors the sacred movements of creation itself.

The writer is the founder of Aarsha Vidya Foundation. You can write to him at aarshavidya@gmail.com



GODDESS LAKSHMI MESSAGE FOR THE DAY

A day to communicate effectively and clearly, explore opportunities, be practical and focus on moving on. Your words are key to abundance. Ask yourself what kind of words you are using while communicating with yourself and others.

Get out of your comfort zone and explore alternate options. Be flexible and ethical. I love the way you offer worship.

Tip for the day: Write a letter of gratitude to Goddess Lakshmi and keep it safe.

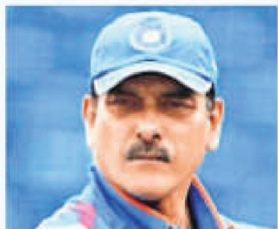


Lots of divine miracles your way, Sheetal Sapan Mhatre.

Briefs

NEW DELHI

Panesar backs Shastri to be Eng coach



Former England spinner Monty Panesar has called for a bold reset in English cricket, backing **Ravi Shastri** as a potential successor to Brendon McCullum following England's Ashes defeat in Australia. Australia's commanding 3-0 lead, sealed inside 11 days, has intensified scrutiny on McCullum's tenure and the 'Bazball' philosophy, which has struggled badly in fast, bouncy conditions. Panesar reportedly argued that England need a coach with a proven blueprint for beating Australia on their own turf. "You have to think, who exactly knows how to beat Australia? How will you take advantage of Australia's weakness, mentally, physically, and tactically," Panesar said. "I think Ravi Shastri should become England's next head coach."

COLOMBO

IGPL: Jeev ends 13-year title drought



India's golf legend **Jeev Milkha Singh** ended a 13-year title drought after securing the IGPL Invitational Sri Lanka with a perfect finish to the inaugural season of the IGPL here on Thursday. The 54-year-old, who has not won a pro event since 2012, gave his young rivals a perfect lesson, producing a closing six-under 65 to total 15-under to outwit Aryan Roopa Anand (68) by one shot. "I had never played in Sri Lanka before. It is an emotional moment for me. Because this is where my parents fell in love and began their relationship," said an emotional Jeev. "My mother played volleyball and my father was here for athletics. So, this is where their journey together began."

JAMSHEDPUR

Joshi, Ahlawat take opening day honours



Khalin Joshi and **Veer Ahlawat** took the opening day honours at the TATA Open, the PGTT's season-finales, by returning identical cards of seven-under 63, here Thursday. In round one,

WHITE BALL CRICKET | It is unfortunate that Yashasvi is being left out time and again for no fault of his, says former Chairman of Selectors Dilip Vengsarkar

Jaiswal needs clarity on future

JAIPUR

You don't want to be Yashasvi Jaiswal these days.

You would perhaps feel that you are caught in the middle of a constant state of flux that Indian cricket is and would probably be more unsure than ever after being pigeonholed as a "one format specialist".

And that too after being the only young cricketer in the post-Rohit Sharma-Virat Kohli generation, who has shown perfect qualities of being an all-format regular.

Yet it can't be a mere coincidence that every time India has gone for a major white ball assignment in the last two years, the rub of the green has always decided to play hide and seek with the Bhadohi-born man.

In 2024, he had to accept that Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma's experience on those tacky American and Caribbean tracks was valued more. That was the T20 format.

Within another seven months, Jaiswal would first find himself in the 15 for the Champions Trophy but then on the insistence of head coach Gautam Gambhir that a fourth spinner was required, he once again became disposable. That was 50-over format.

And when Shubman Gill, perceived as India's next all-format captain, was dumped by the wayside in 20-over format, the selectors suddenly felt that the second wicket-keeper should be an opener too, hence in comes Ishan Kishan, who smashed a 49-ball century against Haryana in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy final.

No one bothered that Jaiswal also scored a 50-ball ton against the same opposition in a chase of 230-odd only days before.



India's opening batter Yashasvi Jaiswal celebrates his century during the third ODI against South Africa in Visakhapatnam on December 6. PTI

And within another two and half weeks, we will again find Jaiswal out of an Indian ODI playing eleven come January 11 despite scoring a hundred in national team's previous game against South Africa. This time, he will have to make way for regular ODI skipper Shubman Gill.

He will turn 24 on Sunday and has enough years to make up for the chances he is forced to miss but he needs to be told where he is going wrong. These are times when self belief does take a hit.

"It is unfortunate that Yashasvi is being left out time and again for no fault of his. He has been in tremendous form across all formats of the game and I don't know what else he has to do to get into the team," Dilip Vengsarkar, perhaps the finest chairman of selectors in the last three decades, told PTI when asked how he looks at it.

He last played T20Is in Sri Lanka in July, 2024 after which India prioritised Test cricket for next six months and Jaiswal was also asked to

concentrate in red ball cricket.

His last five T20I scores read 93, 12, 40, 30 and 10 -- all while opening the innings -- and at a strike-rate of close to 200, conforming to current team's philosophy of attack at all costs without worrying about volume of runs.

"Nobody should leave a match winner out of the team," Vengsarkar said in a forthright assessment.

Vengsarkar, who basically pushed a 19-year-old Virat Kohli into the Indian side back in 2008, however, agreed with



He has been in tremendous form across all formats of the game and I don't know what else he has to do to get into the team

Dilip Vengsarkar
former chairman of selectors

Jaiswal's last five T20I scores

93, 12, 40, 30 and 10

Strike rate:
200 approx

current selection committee on Shubman Gill's exclusion as he feels current form does play a huge role in picking a particular cricketer. But, he is also clear in his mind who would have been his first choice while excluding Gill.

"They are all excellent players but I am with selection committee when they judge players on basis of current form and fitness. Current form does play an important role in context of selection. And if you ask whom I would have picked instead of Gill, my choice would have been Jaiswal. He has proven time and again what a class performer he is and has always given the team kind of starts required these days," said the former India skipper and a veteran of 116 Tests and 129 ODIs.

The T20 format doesn't reward absence. Rhythm is the main currency, and visibility does matter.

No room for spin at MCG

Australia goes with a pace-heavy attack against England for 4th Test

MELBOURNE

Australia won't attempt to replace injured Nathan Lyon with another spin bowler for the fourth Ashes test against England and will go into Friday's start of the match with a 12-man, pace-heavy squad.

After Lyon suffered a long-term hamstring injury in the Ashes-clinching win in Adelaide and later underwent surgery, offspinner Todd Murphy was called into the squad. But with the MCG pitch showing plenty of grass, Australia opted to leave Murphy out when it named its squad Thursday.

Captain Steve Smith will wait until the toss at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Friday before confirming a starting XI. England lost each of the first three tests to allow Australia to retain the Ashes in just 11 days of on-field action. It's unusual for an Australian team not to select a spinner at the MCG, a place where Shane Warne and Lyon have had success.

"A lot of the wickets we're playing on at present are certainly more seam-friendly

Ashes Squads

Australia: Travis Head, Jake Weatherald, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith (C), Usman Khawaja, Alex Carey, Cameron Green, Michael Naser, Mitchell Starc, Jhye Richardson, Brendan Doggett, Scott Boland.

England: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Jacob Bethell, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (C), Jamie Smith, Will Jacks, Gus Atkinson, Brydon Carse, Josh Tongue.

than spin-friendly," Smith said. "Last week (in Adelaide) was an anomaly; we saw some rough and we saw Nathan come in to play big-time.

"It's a tricky one. You've just got to play what surface you're presented with, and this one out here looks like it's going to offer a fair bit of assistance for the seam bowlers."

Joining Lyon and Pat Cummins on the sidelines are Josh Inglis, with fast bowlers Jhye Richardson, Brendan Doggett and Michael Naser included.



Australia's players celebrate after winning the third Ashes Test against England in Adelaide on Sunday. AP

India look to seal series with another dominant show against Sri Lanka

Hosts have been outstanding with bat and ball in the first and 2nd T20Is

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A dominant India will look to seal the five-match series with another ruthless display when they take on a low-on-confidence Sri Lanka in the third women's T20 International here on Friday.

India have been outstanding with both the bat and the ball in the first and second T20Is, registering comprehensive eight-wicket and seven-wicket wins respectively in Visakhapatnam to underline their overall dominance over Sri Lanka.

It was India's ninth win in their last 11 T20Is against the island nation, who last tasted victory against the hosts in July 2024 at Dambulla.

India boast of an enviable batting line-up, with different players stepping up in the two games. While newly-appointed Delhi Capitals captain Jemimah Rodrigues starred in the opening T20I, opener Shafali Verma finished the job in the second.

The bowling unit



India's Sneha Rana celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka's captain Chamari Athapaththu in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday. PTI

has been equally sharp, with the spinners calling the shots by restricting Sri Lanka to 121 for 6 and 128 for 9 in the two matches. Youngsters N Shree Charani, Vaishnavi Sharma and Kranti Gaud have shared the workload effectively.

Match starts at 7.00 P.M
Live on Star sports

We are trying new things, says Muzumdar

A well-settled India are trying out a few new things against visiting Sri Lanka

keeping in mind next year's ICC Women's T20 World Cup in the UK, said head coach Amol Muzumdar here on Thursday.

"We tried to be as settled as possible during the ODI World Cup as well. Six months down the line there is a T20 World Cup and we are very well aware of certain things, what we need to do and in what direction we want to take this T20 side," Muzumdar said.

"Trying out a lot of stuff,

Squads

India: Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Deepti Sharma, Sneha Rana, Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Harleen Deol, Amanjot Kaur, Arundhati Reddy, Kranti Gaud, Renuka Singh Thakur, Richa Ghosh (WK), G Kamalini (WK), N Shree Charani, Vaishnavi Sharma.

Sri Lanka: Chamari Athapaththu (C), Hasini Perera, Vishmi Gunaratne, Harshitha Samarawickrama, Nilakshika de Silva, Kavisha Dilhari, Iresha Dulani, Kaushini Nuthyangana, Malsha Shehani, Inoka Ranaweera, Shashini Gimhani, Nimesha Madushani, Kawya Kavindi, Rashmika Sewwandi, Malki Madara.

making sure that we are well and truly settled before the World Cup."

NEW DELHI

India's Davis Cup captain Rohit Rajpal on Thursday said experienced doubles specialist N Sriram Balaji remains very much in the national reckoning despite being left out of the squad for the upcoming tie against the Netherlands, stressing that team combinations dictated the selection.

Rajpal explained that the choice was influenced by the need for a deuce-court specialist in the doubles pairing, with Rithvik Bollipalli fitting that role alongside Yuki Bhambri, who prefers to play from the ad court.

"Looking at combinations, we were searching for a deuce-court player. Yuki plays only from the ad court, so Rithvik is a deuce-court specialist. Balaji will remain in the fray," Rajpal told PTI.

The deuce court is the right side of the court from where each game starts, while the ad court (Advantage) is the left side. The skipper underlined that Balaji's omission



N. Sriram Balaji in a file pic. Asian tennis Federation

should not be seen as a reflection of his ability or standing within the team, pointing to the Chennai-based player's proven record in pressure situations.

"Balaji has played singles earlier at crucial times for India and has handled crucial rubbers for the country. He is a core member of the Indian team and could very well be considered for the next tie, if fit," Rajpal added.

India will face the Netherlands in the Davis Cup Qualifiers on February 7-8 in Bengaluru.

Aryan Shah pulls out

It has been learnt that reserve player Aryan Shah has pulled out of the tie, a development that has irked the All India Tennis Association (AITA).

"He made himself available for the tie but after the team announcement, he wrote to the AITA that he was not available for the match. This is not appreciated," said an AITA source.

Aryan Shah is ranked 403, and is the number two India player behind top-ranked Sumit Nagal (277) and could have felt ignored.

Africa Cup of Nations

Proud dad Zidane sees Algeria win; Ivory Coast shine

RABAT

Ivory Coast got its Africa Cup of Nations title defense off to a winning start and France great Zinedine Zidane watched his goalkeeper son's safe hands as Algeria also started its campaign with a victory.

Riyad Mahrez scored twice and the 20-year-old Ibrahim Maza scored his first international goal for Algeria, one of the tournament favorites, to beat 10-

man Sudan 3-0 on Wednesday to move top of Group E.

"The most important thing was to start with a win," Mahrez said. "The last two AFCONs, we didn't start good. Today, we really wanted to make it happen and we did."

Zidane, who was at the sweet-smelling Moulay El Hassan Stadium in Rabat to see his son Luca Zidane playing in the Algeria goal, was feted by the crowd every time he was shown on the

big screens. Luca Zidane opted to represent his grandfather's country after getting the Fennec Foxes' invitation and he's been given his chance to shine because of an injury to Alexandre Oukidja.

Algeria wasted little time Wednesday with Mahrez sweeping in the opener in the second minute after unselfish play from Hicham Boudaoui to set him up.

Zidane was called into action shortly afterward to deny Yaser Awad on a break.

Sudan had to play all its qualification games away from home because of the near 1,000-day old civil war ravaging the country.

Though the Algerians looked confident and played with intensity, the big chances fell at the other end, with Zidane saving again from Awad before Abdel Raouf fired over.

Mohammed Amoura produced a brilliant cross with the outside of his boot for Mahrez to score in the 61st, and Baghdad Bounedjah

headed the ball into Maza's path for the substitute to complete the scoring in the 85th.

Elephants begin title defense

Amad Diallo's second-half strike was enough for defending champion Ivory Coast to beat Mozambique 1-0 in a rain-soaked game in Fez. The Elephants' captain, Franck Kessie, headed the ball back and Diallo struck it inside the far corner shortly after the break.



Algeria's Ibrahim maza (L) celebrates with Bahgdad Bounedjah after scoring his side's third goal. AP