

AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

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Briefs

BENGALURU

Power sharing row resurfaces

Power-sharing debate resurfaced in Karnataka soon after the Assembly session ended, with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's son and MLC Dr Yathindra saying the Congress high command cleared his father to continue till the term ends. Home Minister Dr G Parameshwar said there was no proposal to change the Chief Minister. Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar reacted sarcastically, saying, "If Dr Yathindra has said so, he is our high command." The row grew after Shivakumar's supporters sought intervention. Dr Yathindra insisted, "High Command has given a green signal." Shivakumar said the "bande" would take more blows in the ongoing controversy.

-Vinay Madhava Gowda

MATHURA

Six killed in Yamuna Eway crash

Six people were killed, and nine were injured after a speeding container hit passengers on an expressway in Uttar Pradesh's Mathura district early Saturday. The accident occurred around 2.45 am near Milestone 88 under the Surir police station limits. A Delhi-Kanpur bus stopped on the roadside when passengers got down to relieve themselves. Police said it was not halted at the designated "green zone". A container rammed the bus, lost control and ran over passengers. Six died on the spot. Nine injured were hospitalised and are stable. Police are tracing the fleeing container driver. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath ordered treatment for the injured.

CHANDIGARH

SYL tribunal visit mixed amid protests

The Ravi-Beas Waters Tribunal (RBWT) visit to Ropar was cancelled on Friday after farmers' unions protested, calling the inspection an attempt by the Union government to push the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal project. The tribunal team was to inspect stalled SYL construction near Lohand Khad in Kiratpur Sahib, but members of Kirti Kisan Union blocked the Chandigarh-Una national highway, disrupting traffic. District officials said the visit, planned on the Supreme Court's direction, would be rescheduled after consulting tribunal members. Punjab farmers oppose the project, saying the state faces water scarcity and has "no water to share."

TRADE TUSSE | Ruling party asserts that sensitive sectors like agriculture and dairy remain 'strongly safeguarded'

No room for doubt: BJP defends US trade deal

NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Saturday countered the charge of the Opposition that the interests of Indian farmers and agriculture sector have been compromised due to the trade deal with the United States by insisting that the interests of farmers have been "firmly protected" and those of the dairy sector have also been "strongly safeguarded".

Addressing a press conference at the party headquarters, BJP MP and national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said India's entering into a deal with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and signing Free Trade Agreements with Australia, Great Britain, Northern European countries (Switzerland-Norway) and thereafter with the European Union and the United States demonstrates that "all the major developed economic powers of the world are eager



Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal with Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agarwal during a press conference in New Delhi on Saturday -PTI

to do business with India." Trivedi added that the Narendra Modi government has "moved towards a new direction while skillfully protecting the interests of its workers, its farmers, and its dairy entrepreneurs." He added that the details of the India-US trade agreement leave "no rooms for doubts

that this agreement safeguards the interests of Indian farmers." Elaborating on the subject, he said, the protection extends to "items such as wheat, rice, sugar, pulses, millets, jowar, bajra, and others, as well as worn-out clothing and domestic gold covering an extensive list."

RJD warns of unrest

New Delhi: Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) Member of Parliament Manoj Kumar Jha launched a sharp attack on the Union government on Saturday regarding the India-US Interim Trade Framework Agreement, alleging that the Centre was "misleading the entire nation" over revised tariff structures. Speaking about the deal, Jha said that India's historical tariff of 2.9% was raised to 50% under "threats" before being reduced to 18%, a move he argued is a loss for the country rather than a cause for celebration. The MP further said that once the full implications of the deal are revealed, it could trigger widespread "unrest on the streets".

Biker's death: Delhi CM Gupta issues 8-point safety norms

NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta has issued an eight-point safety framework to prevent Janakpuri-like accidents where a biker died after falling into a DJB dug pit, and sought a list of excavation sites in the city within three days.

Taking a "very strong" view of the tragic accident reported in the Janakpuri area of west Delhi on Friday, the chief minister has ordered immediate, time-bound action across all departments and executing agencies to prevent any recurrence of such an incident, a statement from the Delhi Chief Minister's office said. The chief secretary, on the directions of the chief minister, has issued a memorandum listing an eight-point safety framework to be followed without exception at all construction, repair and maintenance works involving digging or excavation of roads, footpaths and underground utilities across the city.

Rahul slams Pappu's arrest

NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Saturday that the arrest of Bihar MP Pappu Yadav is an act of political vendetta aimed at intimidating and silencing every voice that demands accountability from the government.

In a post on X, Gandhi said Yadav stood as the voice for justice for an NEET aspirant who recently died under mysterious circumstances in Patna.

"This is not politics; it is a

question of justice. It is a question of the honour and safety of Bihar's daughters," the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha said.

"His arrest today is clearly an act of political vendetta, aimed at intimidating and silencing every voice that demands accountability," he added. Gandhi said the suspicious death of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) aspirant in Patna and the entire sequence of actions that followed have once again "exposed the deep rot" in the system.

Assam cabinet to hand over Gogoi case to MHA

Guwahati: The Assam Cabinet, led by Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, reviewed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) report alleging links between Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi and a Pakistani national, Ali Taqueer Sheikh, and decided to hand over the case to Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for further investigation. The report, which indicates "shocking details" and alleged foreign links, will be made public at 10:30 am on February 8 in presence of national media. The SIT investigated alleges that Ali Taqueer Sheikh, a Pakistani national linked to Gogoi's British wife, Elizabeth Colburn, interfered in India's internal affairs.

Cong accuses PM of 'surrender'

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "surrender" in the India-US trade deal, saying The White House has noted that it would still be monitoring whether India is importing oil from Russia or not.

Raising the issue, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "If the US decides India has imported Russian oil directly or indirectly the extra 25% tariff penalty is back. This is truly extra-

ordinary." Wondering how the Modi government accepted such a clause, the Congress leader, while citing a slogan coined by party leader Rahul Gandhi in June last year said, "Naam Narender Kaam Surrender".

Ramesh also shared in a post on "X" the "monitoring and recommendations" details under Section 4 shared by The White House which spelt out how the US would monitor India's oil purchases.

The document said, "The Secretary of Commerce, in coordination with the Secretary of State, the

Secretary of the Treasury, and any other senior official the Secretary of Commerce deems appropriate, shall monitor whether India resumes directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil, as defined in section 7 of Executive Order 14329."

It added that, "If the Secretary of Commerce finds that India has resumed directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil, the Secretary of State, in consultation with... shall recommend whether and to what extent I should take additional action as to India" and

whether the "additional ad valorem rate of duty of 25 per cent on imports of articles of India" should be reimposed on India.

Congress's head of the media cell Pawan Khera also termed the deal a "betrayal of everything India has stood for over the last 75 years" saying it was "not a deal in India's interest."

Khera also noted that under the deal, India has committed to buying \$500 billion worth of US products over the next five years, without any corresponding commitment from the US.



Kuno Celebrates Aasha's Cubs

Namibian cheetah Aasha birthed five cubs at Kuno, boosting India's Project Cheetah count to 35 -PTI

Brahmin groups protest 'Ghooskhor Pandit' film title

AGRA: Members of the Brahmin community staged a semi-nude protest in Agra against the title of actor Manoj Bajpayee's upcoming film 'Ghooskhor Pandit', alleging it insulted their identity. Protesters blew conch shells and raised slogans, demanding the title be withdrawn. Police said an FIR was lodged against the director and production team for hurt-

ing religious sentiments and promoting disharmony.

Amid protests, the filmmakers apologised and withdrew all promotional material. BJP leader Aparna Yadav and Union Minister Kirti Vardhan Singh criticised the title, while cleric Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi sought a ban. Protests continued in Uttar Pradesh.



Sengar moves SC for bail, hearing on Feb 9

NEW DELHI

Rape convict and former Bharatiya Janata Party Member of Legislative Assembly Kuldeep Singh Sengar has approached the Supreme Court seeking bail in the case relating to the custodial death of the rape victim's father. The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear Sengar's bail plea on Monday, February 9.

In the custodial-death case, a trial court has sentenced Sengar to ten years imprisonment. On January 18, the Delhi High Court refused to grant him bail. Sengar has now challenged the High Court's decision before the Supreme Court.

In the rape case, the Supreme Court had earlier stayed the bail granted to Sengar by the High Court.

The Delhi High Court had on January 19 this year dis-

missed Kuldeep Singh Sengar's plea seeking suspension of his 10-year sentence in the Unnao custodial-death case. Earlier, Sengar had been granted bail in the minor rape case on December 23, 2025. However, on December 29, the Supreme Court stayed the High Court's order granting him bail.

He is also serving a life sentence in the minor's rape case. These cases arise from FIRs registered in 2018 at Makhli Police Station in Unnao, Uttar Pradesh and were decided by the District and Sessions Judge (West) at the Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi.

The background of the present case is that on June 4, 2017, the minor daughter of the victim was allegedly enticed on the pretext of being offered a job and taken to the house of appellant Kuldeep Singh Sengar, where she was raped.

Meghalaya: Toll in coal mine blast reaches 27

Shillong: Two more bodies were found at the illegal coal mine in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills district on Saturday, taking the toll in the blast to 27, police said.

The bodies were found as a multiple-agency search was continuing in the Thangsku area of Umsngat village, where the blast happened on Thursday, they said.

Several people are still missing, and the search operation will continue, they added.

Work is also underway to verify the identities of the deceased, Superintendent of Police Vikash Kumar said. A suo motu FIR has been registered at Khliehriat police station under provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act and the Explosive Substances Act, police said. -Agencies

BJP launches Bengal manifesto campaign

KOLKATA

In the run up to the Assembly election, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Saturday launched the 'Sankalp Patra Paramarsha Yatra' seeking suggestions of the voters of the state before publishing the party's election manifesto.

Addressing a press conference, party's state president and Rajya Sabha MP Samik Bhattacharya said that the drop boxes will be kept across the state at 1000 locations till February 18.

"People of the state can give their valuable suggestions and can mention their names, phone numbers and address. Earlier election manifestos would get launched at the last moment by few party leaders. BJP wants to break this and take suggestions from the common people to form people's government," said Bhattacharya.

BJP state president and RS MP Samik Bhattacharya said 1000 drop boxes will be kept across the state till Feb 18

Bhattacharya also stated that the 'change' is inevitable in Bengal.

"People gave Mamata Banerjee a chance for the last 15 years to re-establish democracy in the state. Now the change is inevitable. In 2021 Around 2.38 crore people voted for the BJP. People of the state are aware that only BJP is the alternative," further mentioned the BJP state president.

Notably, along with drop boxes, a toll-free number (9727294294) and email id (sankalp.wb2026@bjpbengal.org) have also been provided for citizens to share their suggestions.

money special

India-US interim pact to support MSMEs integration into global value chains: FM

NEW DELHI

The India-US Interim Agreement framework will support Indian MSMEs in integrating into global value chains and lower costs for businesses and consumers, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Saturday.

As part of the framework announced last night, both countries will reduce import duties on a number of goods to boost two-way trade. While the US will reduce tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from the present 50 per cent, India will eliminate or cut down import duties on all US industrial goods and a wide range of American food and agricultural products,



including dried distillers' grains, red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits.

According to a joint statement, India has expressed its intention to purchase USD 500 billion of US energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products and coking coal over the next five years.

"India has safeguarded the sensitivities of its agriculture

and animal husbandry sectors. The framework protects key farm and dairy products, spices, and staples, strengthening farmer incomes," the office of Sitharaman said in a post on X.

Meanwhile, India's jewellery and diamond industry has welcomed the unveiling of the interim trade agreement between India and the United States on Saturday, which will reduce tariffs on many Indian exports, including levies on gems and diamonds that have been reduced to zero. Rajesh Rokde, chairman of the All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC), said they were grateful to PM Modi and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal for securing this landmark agreement.

SBI reports all-time high PAT of ₹21,028 crore in Q3

MUMBAI

State Bank of India (SBI) reported a 13% jump in its December quarter net profit to Rs 21,317 crore on Saturday.

On a standalone basis, a special dividend by the IPO-bound asset management arm helped the country's largest bank report a 24% jump in the net profit to Rs 21,028 crore, its highest ever.

SBI Mutual Fund, which is preparing for an initial public offering, paid a Rs 2,200 crore special dividend which was stated as among the reasons for the high profit growth by chairman C S Setty.

The bank's core net interest income grew 9.04% to Rs 45,190 crore from Rs 41,446 crore in the year-ago period on the back of 15.14% loan growth and a 0.03% compression in the domestic net interest margin, demand-based

at 3.12%. Setty announced an upward revision in the loan growth target for the ongoing FY26 at 13-15% as against the earlier 12-14%, encouraged by the "rebound" in the corporate loan growth and retail segment holding up well.

The bank reported a 9.02% deposit growth during the October-December period.

Setty said the bank's credit-deposit ratio stands at a comfortable 72% allowing a lot of headroom to grow, but flagged challenges from a "structural change" to banks given the "financialisation" in the economy which is leading household savings getting channelled to avenues beyond deposits. Going forward, banks will have to formulate strategies to ensure that they are able to raise sufficient resources at a favourable price for addressing the credit

Vaishnav: India in close talks with US on electronics, IP

The Indian government is closely engaged with the US for electronics and IP-related matters, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said on Saturday, as the two nations announced a framework for an interim trade agreement.

Asked about views on the statement and its expected impact, Vaishnav said that as far as electronics is concerned India is closely engaged in the discussion.

"We are very closely engaged from our side as far as electronics and IP is concerned. We believe in co-development, co-creation, we believe in IP, respecting IP. We believe that India has a lot to offer to the entire world in terms of new products, new ideas, new technologies and that journey is progressing at a very rapid measure, good pace," the minister said. -PTI

CBI boosts Bhiwandi's textile hub with MSME outreach programme

In a significant move to strengthen the local industrial landscape, the Central Bank of India (CBI), Thane Region, organized a high-impact Mega MSME Outreach Programme in the textile hub of Bhiwandi on February 7, 2026. The event, aimed at accelerating financial support to Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, saw an enthusiastic turnout from the local business community. The programme was chaired by Ashwini Dhangra, Zonal Head of the (MMZO), alongside Vibhor Agarwal, Regional Head of Thane. Their presence underscored the bank's commitment to providing



direct, accessible credit facilities to the backbone of the region's economy. "Our goal is to ensure that no viable project in the Bhiwandi textile cluster faces a hurdle due to lack of credit," stated Ashwini Dhangra. Vibhor Agarwal added that the Thane Region would continue to hold such intensive camps to bridge the gap between traditional weavers and modern banking solutions, fostering a more robust industrial ecosystem in the district.

Appointment and Renewal of 14 Wardens in Civil Defence, Promotion Orders Issued for Officers



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. In accordance with the order dated February 4, 2026, issued by the District Magistrate and Controller of Civil Defence, Prayagraj, Manish Kumar Verma, the appointment and renewal of 14 members to honorary positions under the Warden Service of Civil Defence Prayagraj, in the Colonelganj block, has been carried out. Along with this, orders for promotions and new postings within the organization have also been issued. According to the order, L.K. Aherwar,

Deputy Divisional Warden of Colonelganj block, has been promoted and appointed to the vacant post of Staff Officer to the Chief Warden. Similarly, Ashish Bajpai, the Incident Control Officer posted in Colonelganj block, has been appointed to the post of Deputy Divisional Warden. The said orders have been issued by the Civil Defence office. Upon receiving information about the appointments and promotions, a sense of joy was observed among the officers and members of the organization. Deputy Controller of Civil

Defence Neeraj Mishra, Chief Warden Anil Kumar, Deputy Chief Warden Sanjeev Kumar Bajpai, Assistant Deputy Controller Rakesh Kumar Tiwari, Divisional Warden Dr. Shashank Ojha, along with wardens and members from various blocks, extended their best wishes to the newly appointed and promoted officers. The officers expressed hope that the new postings and promotions would further strengthen the efficiency of the Civil Defence organization and provide greater impetus to disaster management and public service activities.

Young Man Dies in Tragic Motorcycle Accident



Utraon. Late Friday night, in the Utraon police station area of Prayagraj district, two motorcycles collided head-on on the service road of the Balipur-Nagnathpur National Highway. In this accident, Vinod Kumar Patel (28), a resident of Chaka village, died on the spot. Prashant Kumar and Himanshu, residents of Jalalpur Nagnathpur, who were on the other motorcycle, were seriously injured. According to information, the deceased Vinod was returning from a wedding ceremony at his aunt's house in Chirauda, in the Phulpur police station area, with his sister Ujala Patel and niece Muskan. Meanwhile, the injured youths, Prashant and

Himanshu, were going home after filling up petrol at a petrol pump. According to reports, due to sand on the service road, both motorcycles went out of control and collided head-on. Upon receiving information about the accident, the Utraon police reached the spot. The police immediately admitted the injured to the hospital and took the body into custody, sending it for post-mortem examination. Vinod was a farmer and worked on married for about a year and a half. He was the youngest of three brothers. His parents, Rajwanti Devi and Kamala Shankar, and other family members are devastated by grief.

Five-Day Sports Competition Concludes at ML Public School



Meja. The five-day sports competition held at ML Public School in Bagaha, Sirsa area, concluded on Saturday with great enthusiasm. Prayagraj's popular Member of Parliament, Ujjwal Raman Singh, attended the closing ceremony as the chief guest and encouraged the winning students by presenting them with trophies, shields, and medals. During the competition, students showcased outstanding performance in various sports such as volleyball, cricket, badminton, running, kho-kho, and kabaddi, which was appreciated by all present. Addressing the students, Chief Guest Ujjwal Raman Singh said that sports are essential for the all-round development of children. It not only develops physical abilities but also strengthens mental resilience. He urged the students to remain active in sports along with their studies. The school's director, Babita Gupta, inspired the students to have equal interest in both studies and sports. The college chairman, Durga Prasad Gupta, and manager, Ved Prakash Gupta, encouraged the children to participate enthusiastically in sports. On this occasion, the college principal, Satish Upadhyay, along with teachers Vipin Shukla, Navdeep Yadav, Kamlesh Sharma, Prabhanshu Dubey, Rishu Sharma, Neha Gupta, Pooja Tripathi, Reena Yadav, Savita Shukla, Iti Singh, Lavlesh Yadav, Mohan Mishra, Vipul Yadav, Gaurav Pandey, Avinash, Divyanshu Gupta, Akash Gupta, Bhola Nath Sonkar, Jamuna Yadav, and a large number of teachers and parents were present.

Uncontrolled Magic van runs over elderly man, killing him

Koraon. A 60-year-old man died after being hit by an uncontrolled Magic van in Amilia Pal village under the Koraon police station area. The incident occurred on Friday evening around 6 pm when the elderly man was filling air in his bicycle. The seriously injured man succumbed to his injuries during treatment at 4 am on Saturday. According to the information, Shambhu Nath, son of Raghuvir Prasad (60), a resident of Amilia Pal village, Koraon, was filling air in his bicycle at a shop in the village on Friday evening. At that moment, an uncontrolled Magic van hit him forcefully, running over his waist before speeding away. Shambhu Nath was seriously injured in the accident. He was immediately taken to the



Community Health Center (CHC) in Koraon, where doctors provided first aid and then referred him to the district hospital. Villagers stopped the accident-involved Magic van at the spot and took it into custody. The deceased, Shambhu Nath, was also a former area panchayat member of the village. He has

four sons, namely Surya Prakash, Akhilesh, Mithilesh, and Tara Shankar. The police were informed about the accident. Taking cognizance of the matter, the police have started further legal proceedings. However, the enraged family members created a ruckus for several hours at the CHC in Koraon with the body.

Later in the afternoon, the police pacified the family and sent the body for post-mortem.

Koraon Station House Officer Rakesh Kumar Verma said that a case has been registered against the owner of the Magic van based on a complaint filed by the deceased's son, Surya Prakash.

Forest Officer Imposes 25,000 Fine on Truck Carrying Illegal Timber

Koraon. A truck loaded with timber overturned after losing control in Ratyora Karpiya village under Koraon police station area. After the accident, the timber owner fled the scene, while the truck driver remained present. It is noteworthy that illegal logging is rampant in the Khiri police station area these days. The timber mafia is targeting even lush green trees. According to discussions among local residents, indiscriminate felling of government trees along the roadside is also taking place under the cover of darkness. A clear example of this was seen on Saturday morning in Ratyora Karpiya village under the Koraon

police station area. A truck loaded with timber overturned near a culvert under construction by the PWD on the Ratyora Subhash link road. According to eyewitnesses, the truck was fully loaded with green timber, including trees of Mahua, Jamun, and Kauha. The timber mafia is carrying out indiscriminate logging in the villages of Koraon and Khiri police station areas. There are also rumors that the police and forest department are involved in this, receiving monthly bribes and facilitating the timber mafia, giving them a free hand. Former area panchayat members Taulan, Wahid Khan, Vijendra Prasad Singh,

Ramjatan Kushwaha, Ahmed Ullah, and other villagers said that trucks pass through the area daily. The truck overturned at night, exposing the illegal logging operation. When contacted regarding this matter, Forest Officer Koraon, Pramod Kumar Singh, said that this timber comes from Madhya Pradesh. The timber is of the 4/10 size from the rural area.

If the truck hadn't overturned, it would have escaped. Forest Officer Pramod Kumar Singh stated that a fine of ₹25,000 has been imposed on the truck and the illegal timber, and the amount has been recovered.

Education Standards Have Declined Under the BJP Government: Ujjwal Raman

Meja. A grand annual day celebration and statue unveiling ceremony was held on Saturday at SD Public School and College in Ramnagar market area of Meja tehsil. The chief guest of the program was Allahabad MP Ujjwal Raman Singh. The program began with Ramnagar village head Sangeeta Yadav and SP leader Neeraj Yadav honoring MP Ujjwal Raman Singh by presenting him with a crown. The MP then inaugurated the program by lighting the lamp. On this occasion, the school students captivated the audience with their rendition of Saraswati Vandana and a welcome song. During the program, MP Ujjwal Raman Singh also unveiled the statues of Bharat Ratna and 'Missile Man' Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, and Lord Buddha. Addressing the students, the MP said that education is the key to development. The future of the country can be

bright only through education, therefore, quality education is extremely important for children. During this time, he targeted the Yogi government of the state, saying that the standard of the education system has declined under the BJP government and only deception is being done in the name of education. The program was conducted by Ramnagar village head Sangeeta Neeraj Singh and Pankaj Yadav. The school's founder, Yashwant Singh, honored the children with medals and expressed his gratitude to all the guests. The program concluded around 5 pm. On this occasion, thousands of people were present, including Dilawar Singh, Block Pramukh Raj Kumar Yadav, former Chairman Sirsa Pappu Yadav, Anshu Singh, Vishal Patel, Atul Yadav, Sanjay Pradhan, Raksha Mantri Yadav, Vimlesh Yadav, Suraj Mahi, Ashish Kumar, Vivek Kumar, Nihal Yadav, and Alok Mishra.

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Kaushambi. In Purab Sharira, under the Paschim Sharira police station area, a woman was shot dead in the chest with a rifle inside her house last night. After the woman's death, her family members took her to the hospital where doctors declared her dead. After the woman's death, her family members told the police a fabricated story, claiming she was mentally ill and had committed suicide. Hearing the sound of the gunshot, local residents rushed to the scene. The incident was reported to the police station. Police officers, including senior officials, arrived at the scene and, after inspecting the crime scene, took the woman's body into custody and sent it for post-mortem examination. The way the family members are claiming that the woman shot herself in the chest with a rifle and committed suicide is not possible. It seems



impossible to commit suicide by shooting oneself in the chest with a rifle, making this a very serious case of murder, and a thorough investigation is needed to expose the culprit. According to reports, Karan Singh Patel, a resident of Panchambha village in the Paschim Sharira police station area, had been living in Purab Sharira with his wife for several years. Around midnight, people in the area heard a loud gunshot coming from their

house in Purab Sharira and rushed to the scene. When the villagers arrived, Karan Singh Patel told them that his wife had shot herself in the chest with a rifle, resulting in her death. The blood-soaked woman was taken to the district hospital by her family members, where doctors declared her dead. The woman's husband claims that she was suffering from a mental illness and committed suicide by shooting herself in the chest with a rifle.

However, people from both Purab Sharira and Panchambha village have denied that the woman suffered from any serious mental illness. Upon hearing about the woman's death late at night, hundreds of people from the town gathered at the scene. Most people expressed suspicion regarding this apparent suicide. The matter was reported to the police. Upon receiving information about the woman's death, the station house officer arrived at the scene with a large police force. Police officials also inspected the crime scene and took the woman's body into custody, sending it for post-mortem examination. The police say that all aspects of the incident are being thoroughly investigated, and the truth will come to light after a complete investigation. Meanwhile, experts say that it is impossible for someone to shoot themselves in the chest with a rifle in this manner.

District Magistrate directs quality and timely resolution of complaints received at the grievance redressal day

A total of 208 cases were heard at the grievance redressal day, and 11 cases were resolved on the spot. The District Magistrate performed the baby shower ceremony for 3 women and the first solid food ceremony for 2 children under the Poshan Abhiyan (Nutrition Campaign)

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Prayagraj: A comprehensive grievance redressal day was organized on Saturday at the Karchhana Tehsil under the chairmanship of District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma. The District Magistrate strictly instructed all concerned officers that any kind of negligence or indifference in resolving public grievances would not be tolerated. He directed them to resolve the complaints in a timely and qualitative manner. On this occasion, he inspected the stalls set up by various departments in the Tehsil premises, gathering information about their respective schemes and programs. He directed the officers of the concerned departments to widely publicize the schemes and ensure that eligible people benefit from them. On this occasion, the District Magistrate also performed the baby shower ceremony for 3 women and the first solid food ceremony for 2 children under the Poshan Abhiyan (Nutrition Campaign) at the Tehsil. He also obtained information about the vaccinations given to pregnant women. On the occasion of the comprehensive grievance redressal day, the District Magistrate listened to public grievances and directed the officers of the Revenue, Police, Health, and other concerned departments to conduct on-the-ground investigations of the cases and



resolve the complaints in a qualitative and timely manner. He also directed that strict action be taken against the concerned officer if there is any delay in the timely investigation, action, and resolution of the applications and problems. The District Magistrate directed the Revenue Inspectors and Lekhpals (village accountants) present at the grievance redressal day to resolve public grievances quickly and with quality. The District Magistrate said that the resolution of public grievances is one of the top priorities of

the government, and any kind of negligence or indifference in this regard is unacceptable. He also instructed that feedback be taken from the complainants and that they be satisfied with the resolution of their complaints. The District Magistrate has directed that the complaints regarding inheritance, illegal encroachment, and other issues raised at the grievance redressal day be resolved expeditiously. The District Magistrate instructed that separate lists of the applications be prepared and the

concerned officials be directed to take necessary action. Akhilesh, son of Ganesh Shankar, a resident of Patulki village, Karchhana tehsil, who came to the grievance redressal day with his complaint, alleged that a co-sharer had illegally encroached upon his share of land. The District Magistrate directed the Sub-Divisional Magistrate and the Station House Officer to jointly investigate the matter and resolve the problem according to the rules. Ramesh Kumar, son of the late Bhailal, a resident of Hinauta

Mahori village, complained that some villagers had illegally demolished a structure on his land and forcibly occupied it. The District Magistrate directed the Sub-Divisional Magistrate and the Station House Officer to jointly investigate the matter and ensure legal action is taken. Udaybhan Pratap Singh, a resident of Chandi village, complained that another person's name had been illegally included in the land record (khatoni) of the land he had purchased, and that an incorrect inheritance entry had been made. The District Magistrate directed the Sub-Divisional Magistrate to investigate the matter and take strict action against those responsible. Thakur Prasad, a resident of Panasa Uparhar village, complained that the revenue inspector was neglecting his duty in carrying out the demarcation of land boundaries. The District Magistrate directed the Sub-Divisional Magistrate and the Assistant Commissioner of Police to jointly ensure legal action is taken in the matter. Similarly, Ramdhan, son of Mohan Lal, a resident of Akodha, complained that a criminal from his village was preventing him from plowing and sowing his land. The District Magistrate directed the Sub-Divisional Magistrate to investigate the matter and ensure action is taken according to the law.

Petitioner Sanjeev Kumar, a resident of village Mahori, submitted an application regarding the removal of illegal constructions carried out by influential persons on the village's government threshing ground and newly fallow land. The District Magistrate instructed the Sub-Divisional Magistrate to remove the illegal encroachments from the government land and secure it. A total of 208 complaints were received at the complete grievance redressal day held at Karchhana Tehsil, including 166 related to the Revenue Department and Revenue Court, 8 from the Development Department, 22 from the Police Department, 8 from the Electricity Department, and 4 from other departments. Of these, 11 complaints were resolved on the spot. The District Magistrate instructed the officers of the concerned departments to receive the remaining complaints today itself and resolve them in a timely and qualitative manner within the stipulated timeframe. The District Magistrate cautioned all concerned officers, stating that the complaints must be resolved within the prescribed time limit. Joint Magistrate Bharti Meena, City Magistrate Vinod Kumar Singh, District Development Officer G.P. Kushwaha, and other concerned officers were present on this occasion.

Hard Work Leads to Success: Shashwat Mishra Brings Honor by Securing JRF in UGC NET Exam

He achieved this significant success by scoring 77.29 percentile in Sociology

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Saidabad. Shashwat Mishra of Rasulpur village in the Saidabad area has brought honor not only to his family but to the entire region by securing the Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) in the UGC NET examination. He achieved this significant success by scoring 77.29 percentile in Sociology. As soon as the news of his achievement spread, an atmosphere of joy and pride prevailed in the area. Coming from an ordinary middle-class family, Shashwat Mishra did not compromise on his goal despite limited resources and financial difficulties. He made self-study his greatest support. He studied regularly for 5 to 6 hours every day, preparing through the internet, standard books, and previous years' question papers. A strong grasp of the basic concepts of the subject became the biggest reason for his success. With the JRF, Shashwat will now have



the opportunity to pursue a Ph.D. at prestigious universities in the country. In addition, he will also receive a fellowship from the central government for his research work. Shashwat wishes to contribute positively to society by conducting research on important topics in the field of sociology such as caste, social inequality, education, politics, and gender. His father, Ramesh

Chandra Mishra, and mother, Shashi Mishra, expressed their happiness at his achievement and attributed his success to his hard work. Teachers and dignitaries of the area have also congratulated Shashwat. People say that his success is an example for the youth of the rural area and proves that any goal can be achieved with dedication and continuous effort.

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. A meeting of all judicial officers was held on Saturday in the District Court auditorium to ensure the success of Mediation Campaign 2.0, which is being conducted under the directions of the National Legal Services Authority, New Delhi, and the Uttar Pradesh State Legal Services Authority. The meeting was presided over by the Honorable District Judge, Prayagraj. During the meeting, the Honorable District Judge informed that the period for referring identified cases for mediation has been extended by 15 days. Now, identified cases can be referred for mediation from February 1, 2026, to February 15, 2026. He directed that as many cases as possible from all courts and subordinate courts in Prayagraj district should be referred to the media-

Mediation Campaign 2.0: Refer Identified Cases by February 15th



tion center for resolution through conciliation and settlement. On this occasion, the Secretary of the District Legal Services Authority, Prayagraj, Mr. Shashi Kumar, appealed to all judicial officers to send

more and more case files to the mediation center so that the parties can receive quick and accessible justice.

The officers present at the meeting were also given necessary instructions to

make the mediation process effective and to achieve the campaign's goals in a timely manner. This information was provided by the Secretary, District Legal Services Authority, Prayagraj.

Water Dedication Ceremony: MP Inaugurates Water Tank, Manikpur Village Receives Uninterrupted Water Supply

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj, Handia. Under the guidance of the State Drinking Water and Sanitation Mission, a grand water dedication ceremony was organized on Saturday in Manikpur Gram Panchayat of Handia development block. The Bhadohi MP inaugurated the water tank installed in the premises by cutting the ribbon. Following this, water was symbolically poured from a small



pot into a larger one and dedicated to the village head. Manikpur Gram Panchayat has a total population of 1838, with 403 families residing there. Under the scheme, all houses have been provided with tap connections, and currently, each household receives a supply of pure drinking water three times a day. A total of 11.46 kilometers of pipeline has been laid in the village, covering the entire Gram Panchayat area with water

supply. This ambitious project cost a total of Rs. 191.03 lakhs. To ensure uninterrupted water supply, a sufficient number of solar panels have been installed in the premises, along with a generator, so that the water supply is not affected even in case of power outages. The ADM Namami Gange, Block Head of Handia, Executive Engineer of Jal Nigam, District Coordinator, and Chief Engineer of Jal Nigam were present at the pro-

gram. Officials informed that the implementing agency will maintain the scheme for the next ten years. A large number of villagers, engineers from Jal Nigam, and officers and employees of the implementing agency L&T were present at the water dedication ceremony. The villagers expressed their happiness over the successful implementation of the scheme, calling it a major step towards health and sanitation.

Editorial

Did a junior Chinese diplomat wave Beijing's 'olive branch' at EAM Jaishankar?

At a media event organised by a leading Indian newspaper in New Delhi, EAM Jaishankar responded to a junior Chinese diplomat, stating, 'I think it's in our common interest that we should not have that many forces on the LAC, it's in our common interest that we should observe agreements that we have. And today, it's not just in common interest. I believe it's in China's interest as well.' Image: PTI

It is not always that a diplomat from one country shoots a question to a veteran from a purportedly 'adversarial nation'. It is even more rare if the question is fired at the foreign minister of that adversarial nation, that too, a person with long years as a career diplomat, including a stint in the country of the junior diplomat — and at a public function, to boot. The fact is that Chinese diplomats do not say or do things without express instructions from HQ. Such a rarity occurred at a media event organised by a leading Indian newspaper in capital New Delhi the other day. The questioner was Zhou Yongsheng, political counsellor at the Chinese embassy in New Delhi. The respondent happened to be Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister (EAM), who has been increasingly acknowledged as a key international interlocutor, of course representing his government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The question was on how China and India, as 'important neighbours', could find common interests and be partners instead of being rivals, Pat came the reply: 'I think it's in our common interest that we should not have that many forces on the LAC, it's in our common interest that we should observe agreements that we have. And today, it's not just in common interest. I believe it's in China's interest as well.' The EAM did not stop there. He referred to the strong troop presence on either side of the LAC for four years now, and had this to say: 'The tension has not served either of us well. So the sooner we resolve it, I genuinely believe it's good for both of us. And I'm still very much committed to finding a fair, reasonable outcome. But one which is respectful of agreements, which recognises the LAC, and doesn't seek to change the status quo.' Jaishankar made an even more pointed observation on domestic politics and border disputes. When asked if the Modi leadership would get more empowered to talk on the issue with more seats in the current Lok Sabha elections, He was reported to have said: 'To me, the territory of India and the fairness of a boundary solution has nothing to do with how many seats. Either it's a good deal or not a good deal. The issue today is not whether you have a political majority or not. It is whether you have a fair deal on the table, that is the issue.' With this in a succinct way, the minister underscored how the border dispute with China was a 'national concern' for India, independent of whoever ruled and whichever party had whatever majority in Parliament. At the event in which envoys of Australia, Bhutan, Germany, Indonesia and Nepal, among diplomatic representatives from many other countries participated, he disclosed how he has remained in touch with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, whom he has known for many years, on many of these issues. 'We have been constantly in touch. Even on the morning after the Galwan incident, he was the person I spoke to,' Jaishankar said, reiterating the present situation at the LAC was 'very tense and dangerous'. Ironically, China purportedly waved the proverbial olive branch or at least an olive leaf, if that was it, days after raising objections to Prime Minister Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh, the whole of which is in India's possession but which Beijing claims as its own.

Holi: Festival of joy in material

Once Sri Krishna went to his mother and said, "Maa, why is my complexion dark and blue while my beloved Radha's complexion is so clear and beautiful? Radha teases me for my blue complexion." Upon this, Maa Yashoda said, "O Krishna, in deep love and friendship, colour of skin has no meaning, because love and friendship have a range of colours in them, and moreover, why don't you go and put some colours on Radha's face and let her put some colours on your face, so that both of you become the same coloured one? Then nobody will tease you, and then you both will look the same." Hearing this, Sri Krishna joyfully went out and coloured his beloved Radha with so many beautiful colours, and Radha too poured all the colours on Sri Krishna. All the beloved Gopi's (friends and devotees) of Sri Krishna also joined this amazing event. Everyone started pouring colours on each other, and soon they all started to look the same. At that moment, all outer differences vanished, and they all experienced a deep sense of oneness with their beloved Krishna. This was the start of one of the most loved and joyful festivals of colours in Bharat, which we know as Holi. This is the festival of divine love and friendship, of realising our joyful oneness, and of spreading this joy and sense of oneness that we



feel in our hearts to the world out there. When we look around, it feels like we have created a very comfortable life that is materially rich, filled with entertainment media, technology, and everything else that can make our physical life easy and comfortable, but that has not provided us with much joy. In fact, in the name of growth and development, we have actually created a very 'joyless society'. Humans are not happy; there is a sharp rise in all kinds of mental ailments across the world, and people are living materially rich but inwardly lonely lives. The rise in the number of hospitals, old age homes, orphanages, crime rates, and prisons is proof that we have succeeded in creating an utterly 'Joyless society'. In a society where love and friendship are losing their meaning, where purpose is lost, hope is gone, mean-

ingfulness is hard to find, and where even the youth are becoming increasingly joyless, Holi brings some respite. This joylessness is life-negating; this is not the life that our ancestors wanted us to create. But maybe Sri Krishna knew about this kind of possible future, where humans will start to live in their own self-created misery. That is why, thousands of years ago, Bhagwan Vishnu ji took an incarnation on earth as Sri Krishna to give us this message and a secret formula through numerous Leela's (divine playfulness) that life means divine love and friendship, which is equal to joy. As humans, we experience a range of thoughts and emotions. Every thought and each emotion has the tone of a certain colour matched to it. Some of them are life-negating and dark, like fear, anger, jeal-

ousy, and hatred, and some are really life-affirmative and light, like love, friendship, compassion, and appreciation. The beauty of human incarnation is that we can choose which colour we want to inculcate in our lives. Remember, whichever colour of thoughts and emotions we have, we will be able to give only that colour to people around us. If we are constantly delving into the life-negating colours within ourselves, then we will be able to share only those colours with others. It is because we can only give what we have. So, think deeply, feel clearly, and choose mindfully which colours of thoughts and emotions you want to choose and grow in your life. If we can look at the inner heart of any person, we will see that everybody wants to experience the light and life-nourishing colours of

love, friendship, compassion, and appreciation. We all want these colours from our relatives, but our expectations of them will never be fulfilled unless we start to give them out to the world. Also, we must surround ourselves with people who have developed the capacity to paint the world with such beautiful, life-enriching colours. Along with this, one of the most effective ways to cultivate these colours in our lives is to start to appreciate the diversity of actual colours in nature. Just look around and see that on a single tree, a variety of shades of green are on its leaves. Nature continuously shows us abundant diversity and eternal unity amidst this diversity. Let us learn this from nature. Then, let us start to appreciate the light and life-nurturing colours of thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in people around us. The more we appreciate such colours in others, the more we will be able to absorb and cultivate these colours in our own lives too. Holi is the divine festival of joy. Today on Holi, let us remember this beautiful message of Sri Krishna and colour our lives and the lives of our friends and loved ones with the colours of divine joyfulness. Only then will our lives have some meaning, hope, and, above all, shades of divine love and friendship.

Why Donald Lu's Pak testimony in the US Congressional hearing is significant

One of the most interesting and debated Congressional testimonies in recent years was surely that of State Department Donald Lu, Assistant Secretary of State in the State Department. That was not just on social media, but in the House itself. The chair commented on the number of Congressmen at the hearing, while there were clearly a large number of Pakistanis in the audience. It's not just that Donald Lu was the 'accused' in the conspiracy theory launched by Imran Khan, which involved slinging out Khan, allegedly because he decided to visit Moscow. It's that the hearing occurs just after one of the most 'selected' elections even Pakistan has ever seen. It had some unusual features, to say the least. This was an important

testimony for the present government in Islamabad and the Pakistani military, and they were preparing for it in their separate ways. Days before, a Cabinet committee on energy cleared the construction of a section of pipeline to connect to the (already constructed) Iran pipeline, which had been in the works since 2013 but stalled due to US sanctions. According to Lu's testimony, Pakistan did not ask for a waiver, and there is no indication at all that they have the money for it, but that move alarmed Congressmen anyway and led to a directive to 'engage' Pakistan on the issue. Second, days earlier, air strikes were conducted against Afghanistan border areas in reaction to an alleged attack against its own soldiers. Pakistani officials went on record

to talk of attacks on 'safe havens' for terrorists in Afghanistan, which is as ironic as it can get, given that the US has identified at least 12 designated terrorist groups operating inside Pakistan. But the strike became an add-on to the narrative of 'Pakistan in danger'. Also active were a raft of Imran Khan supporters who booed and called out Donald Lu as a liar time and again, until they were removed from the House. In other words, this was domestic politics being played out on US soil. Donald Lu's testimony was a model of bureaucratic caution. He praised the Pakistani people fully but condemned attacks in the run-up to the elections, restrictions on the internet, and that a well-known watchdog had been denied access to half the constituencies.

Rescue of MV Ruen by Indian Navy

On 19 December 2023, writing for gCaptain, Mike Schuler reported The European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) was continuing to closely monitor the situation of the hijacked Maltese-flagged MV Ruen in cooperation with local Somali authorities. The ship was en route from Gwangyang, South Korea, carrying a cargo of metals, was hijacked on the morning of 14 December in the Indian Ocean at approximately 680 nautical miles (1,260 kilometres), east of Bossaso, Somalia. At this stage the exact demands, motivations etc., of the hijackers were unknown. EUNAVFOR flagship, a Spanish Navy ship ESPS Victoria was dispatched to gather more information and evaluate future action in conjunction with other naval ships in the area. Victoria remained with MV Ruen and entered Somali waters somewhere between Eyl and Xaafun peninsula in Somalia (normal hijack area). With the help of Somali authorities, it was confirmed that MV Ruen had been hijacked. Thus, this became the first successful hijacking involving Somali pirates since 2017. It may be recalled that an earlier attempt by five Somali pirates was thwarted by India Navy. On 15 December an Indian Navy P8 I Maritime Patrol Aircraft arrived in the area and established contact with the crew



who were safely locked up in a citadel. Victoria was joined by the Japanese naval ship Akebono and the Indian Navy destroyer INS Kochi on 16 December. It is important to remember that these hijacking attempts come amid the broader maritime security situation in the Red Sea as Yemen-based Houthis target commercial ships in the region in support of Hamas in Gaza. Later, the pirates broke into the citadel and took the crew hostage. One of the crew was evacuated for a medical emergency. MV Ruen is being managed by Bulgaria's Navigation Maritime Bulgare. The Somali government permitted the shadowing of Ruen even within their territorial waters. Victoria was using its UAV, Scan Eagle to obtain situational awareness by collecting data on the hijacked vessel. However, MV Ruen left this area for some logistics and other replenishment. It was not under the control of the crew.

MV Ruen after having been taken over by pirates would have

been used as a mother ship for other piracy attempts as had been the trend. INS Kolkata replaced INS Kochi during the movement of MV Ruen. And then the next 40 hours of actions will go down in the history of anti-piracy/hijacking operations as a text and standard operating procedure worth emulation by the navies of the world. When INS Kolkata began the operation the MV Ruen was almost 2,600 kilometres (1,400 nautical miles) from the Indian coast. Calibrated actions of INS Kolkata were supported by INS Subhadra, a high altitude long endurance unmanned aerial vehicle, P8 I maritime patrol aircraft and MARCOS (Marine Commandos) air-dropped by a C17 aircraft of the Indian Air Force. These actions had become necessary since the pirates had opened fire on the warship INS Kolkata while they were being warned to surrender or face consequences. The actions taken by the Indian Navy were under international law, i.e., in self-defence and to counter pira-

How EU-India FTA, IMEC are fundamental to saving Europe from Chinese dominance

"Cacio pepe" is a pasta dish that has come to signify typical Roman cuisine over time. It is, however, in its simplicity, the witness of millennial trade between India and Italy, the will and need to connect the Mediterranean with the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Cacio, or pecorino romano, is a cheese that has been traditionally made in the agro romano, the farmland controlled and influenced by Rome. The pepe, or pepper (both longum and nigrium), increased in popularity in Rome around 30 BC, and

eventually over 70 per cent of Roman recipes required the use of Indian pepper. This simple dish stands for the importance of the trade and trade routes between India and Europe (and Italy), which have been strategically important for over 2,000 years. The first major change in these trade routes was when Constantinople became the hub for trade between Europe and India, once Egypt fell to Islam. The fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1452 started the

race between European powers to find a new route to India. Vasco da Gama, in 1498, "discovered" a longer route around the Cape of Good Hope, landing again in Kerala, from where the Romans used to load their pepper. The third change was the actual creation of the Suez Canal, which brought back the Roman route. Only this time were the Mediterranean and the Red Sea finally connected, rather than shipping goods to Alexandria by land and barge from Berenice. The persistence

with which Europe has pursued its links with India, eventually leading to European colonisation of India and the Indo-Pacific, has demonstrated the importance of the Europe-India trade routes. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), launched during the G20 in New Delhi in September 2023, only tried to politically secure this trade route by including countries that the United States-New Delhi partnership viewed as politically safe and strategic.

Commendable Contribution to Strengthening Democratic System: 49 BLOs Honoured

Barabanki

Under the Special Intensive Revision Campaign-2026 being conducted as per the guidelines of the Election Commission of India, the district administration is making continuous and effective efforts to make the electoral roll more reliable, transparent and technologically robust. In this sequence, on Monday, District Magistrate and District Election Officer Shashank Tripathi honoured 49 Booth Level Officers (BLO) with certificates of appreciation for achieving 100 percent mapping in their respective areas ahead of the stipulated deadline and praised their outstanding performance. The honoured BLO completed the mapping work in their assigned areas well before the prescribed timeline, thereby strengthening the campaign. Notably, several BLO who had shown exemplary performance earlier have also been honoured by the District Magistrate in the past. This recognition reflects not only individual efficiency but also collective dedication and strong team spirit. On this occasion,



Additional District Magistrate Nirankar Singh and other officers and staff were present. **(Goals to Be Achieved Through Motivation and Coordination)** Addressing the BLO, the District Magistrate said that they should continue to perform their duties with the same commitment, dedication and sense of responsibility. He emphasized that the purification of electoral rolls is not a routine exercise but a crucial responsibility that strengthens the very foundation of democracy. **(Dialogue Based on BLO' Field Experiences)** During the programme, the District Magistrate held an interactive dialogue with all the honoured BLO. The BLO

shared their practical challenges faced during fieldwork, experiences related to voter awareness, and suggestions to make the process more effective. Taking all suggestions seriously, the District Magistrate assured that these would be incorporated into future strategies. He said that the experiences of BLO working at the grassroots level play a vital role in making the campaign simpler more effective and result-oriented. Expressing confidence, the District Magistrate stated that through mutual coordination, team spirit and sustained efforts the district would not only achieve the set targets but also establish new benchmarks of excellence in electoral work.

Salary to Be Withheld If IGRS/CM Helpline Satisfaction Falls Below 70%

District Magistrate Dr. Indramani Tripathi has issued strict instructions to all departmental officers, warning that salaries will be withheld if the satisfaction level on IGRS and CM Helpline complaints remains below 70 percent. The directive was issued during a review meeting held via Zoom at the Collectorate. The District Magistrate directed officers to improve the quality of grievance redressal within the next two days and ensure timely and effective disposal of pending cases. He made it clear that failure to achieve the prescribed targets would result in stoppage of salary disbursement. Reviewing preparations to deal with the cold wave, the District Magistrate instructed officials to ensure proper arrangements for bonfires in urban areas as well as at the gram panchayat level to protect the public from extreme cold. He also directed that citizens be made aware of preventive measures to avoid cold-related illnesses. Taking a strict stance on healthcare services, Dr. Tripathi instructed CHC and PHC in-charges to remain present at their respective postings and ensure uninterrupted medical facilities for all needy patients. He further mandated compulsory



participation in the daily Zoom meeting at 10:00 am, warning that absence would invite stringent disciplinary action against the concerned employees. In view of the intensifying cold wave, the District Magistrate emphasized ensuring adequate shelter, fodder and care for cattle. Continuous monitoring of cow shelters was ordered and officials were instructed to submit daily inspection reports to the Chief Development Officer to ensure completion of pending arrangements. The District Magistrate also expressed strong displeasure over the absence of officials from the Commercial Tax Department and the AIG Stamp office during the Zoom meeting. He directed that action be taken against the concerned officers as per rules and that the matter be reported to the government.

Heartfelt Farewell Given to BRC Employee on Retirement



Bahraich

A farewell and felicitation ceremony was organized by teachers for Farid Ahmed, a non-teaching staff member working at the Block Resource Center (BRC) Jarwal Road under Jarwal Development Block, upon his retirement after reaching the superannuation age. At the ceremony held on Wednesday in the BRC auditorium, Block Education Officer Arvind Bahadur Singh presented the retiring employee with a garland of flowers, a shawl, gifts and a memento and wished him good health and a bright future. On this occasion, teachers from various schools praised his service and described him as a dedicated, disciplined and friendly employee. The Block Education Officer said that Farid Ahmed discharged his departmental duties with complete honesty, integrity and dedication during his nearly 30 years of service, for which the Basic Education Department will always be grateful. At the end of the program, the BEO of Jarwal, showing his humane side, respectfully dropped the retiring employee to his residence in his personal vehicle. The ceremony was attended by teachers Asif Ali, Obaidur Rahman, Akhand Pratap Singh, Mohd. Arif Hashmi, Khaliqzama, Shailendra Pratap Singh, Vinay Srivastava, Vinay Kumar Singh, Shailendra Verma, Adnan Shakir, Suresh Saroj, Manish Maurya, Raman Shukla, Deepbhan Singh, Omprakash Awasthi the president and secretary of the Retired Teachers Association along with Taskir Ahmed, Mufid Ahmed, Faraz Ahmed, office assistants Pawan Kumar, Jaiprakash Yadav, Arvind Kumar and many other teachers from the development block.

100 Buses to Depart Daily from Payagpur for Rashtra Katha Mahotsav: MLA Subhash Tripathi

Bahraich

Arrangements will be made to transport devotees and workers from the Payagpur assembly constituency to the Rashtra Katha Mahotsav, which will be held from January 1st in Nandini Nagar, Nawabganj, Gonda district, using 100 buses daily. This information was given by MLA Subhash Tripathi. In this regard an important meeting was held at the Payagpur assembly office with workers from the Payagpur, Visheshwarganj and Dhanuhi blocks. The meeting was chaired by MLA Subhash Tripathi. It was decided in the meeting



that devotees and workers would be transported to the festival venue from each village by at least one bus. This will ensure organized and effective participation from the area. Responsibilities were assigned at the block, sector and booth levels and necessary instructions were given to the coordinators.

Addressing the workers, MLA Subhash Tripathi said that events like the Rashtra Katha Mahotsav strengthen national spirit, cultural awareness and social unity. He said that increasing public participation is the responsibility of every worker and everyone must work in coordination. The meeting was attended

by MP representative Kamlesh Singh, former Block Chief Sachchidanand Pathak, Block President Vishnu Dayal Chauhan, Santosh Gautam along with many sector coordinators and a large number of prominent workers. Everyone pledged to work together to make the program historical and successful. Finally, the workers were appealed to conduct public outreach in their respective areas and encourage as many devotees as possible to participate in the Rashtra Katha Mahotsav, so that this event can be successful and memorable.

ANTF Arrests Two Drug Traffickers with 82 kg of Ganja

Barabanki

The Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF), Barabanki, carried out a major operation against drug trafficking and arrested two active traffickers. The accused have been identified as Ankur Shivhare (35), son of Ramprakash Shivhare and Shyam Shivhare (40), son of Ramprakash Shivhare, residents of Rajendra Nagar locality near Hanuman Chabutra, under Kotwali Orai police station, Jalaun district. A total of 81.824 kilograms of

illegal ganja with an estimated value of around 41 lakh, was recovered from their possession. In addition, an Alto 800 car, an Android mobile phone and ₹800 in cash were also seized. The arrest was made on December 30, 2025, about 150 meters away from Iglas Pura Chauraha in the Kotwali Orai police station area. In this connection, a case has been registered under the NDPS Act at Kotwali Orai police station, Jalaun district and further legal action is underway. The opera-

tion was carried out by the ANTF Barabanki team, led by In-charge Inspector Apnuddin, along with Sub-Inspector Arvind Kumar Singh, Suraj Singh, Purushottam Vishwakarma, Head Constable Ved Prakash Dubey, Alok Singh, Deepak Kumar, Sunil Rai, Kaushal Kumar Yadav, Gaurav Tiwari and Krishna Kumar Yadav. The team received support from Kotwali Orai police station, including Sub-Inspector Ramashankar Tiwari and Constables Sanjeev Kumar and Rajat Singh.

Friend Shoots Friend After Heated Argument, SP Abhishek Bharti Reveals Case Details

Auraiya

Police have successfully cracked a murder case within 36 hours, arresting the prime accused and recovering the licensed firearm used in the crime. The revelation was made by Superintendent of Police Abhishek Bharti on Wednesday. According to police, the main accused, Omji Gupta alias Abhishek Gupta has been arrested, and a licensed .32 bore revolver along with live cartridges and an empty shell have been recovered from his possession. SP Abhishek Bharti informed that on December 29, 2025 Ashok Gupta a resident of Govind Nagar, lodged a complaint stating that his 23-year-old son Kishan, who was working as a contractual employee at the Nagar Palika Inter College tubewell, was shot dead around 9:30 pm inside the tubewell room. After the incident, the accused Omji Gupta, along with his associates, rushed the injured Kishan to the district hospital and fled from the spot. Upon receiving informa-



tion, a case was registered at Kotwali Auraiya police station. The forensic team collected evidence from the crime scene and after completing legal formalities, the body was sent for post-mortem examination. Senior police officers inspected the site and issued instructions for a swift investigation. Acting on a tip-off, the police team arrested the accused at around 3 am on December 31 near the canal culvert close to LG Garden. During the arrest, police recovered a licensed .32 bore revolver, three live cartridges and one empty cartridge. During interrogation, the accused confessed that the deceased Kishan was his friend and that an

argument broke out between them. In a fit of rage, he shot Kishan in the chest using the licensed revolver he was carrying. Based on the recovery and confession, additional sections of the Arms Act have been added to the case. Action is also being initiated under Section 30 of the Arms Act against Anoop Kumar Gupta, the licensed owner of the revolver. The criminal history of the accused is also being verified. The arresting team included Station House Officer Rajkumar Singh, Inspector Satyaprakash Singh and Sub-Inspector Samit Chaudhary (In-charge, Surveillance Cell/SOG) along with their respective teams.

Seminar Held on the Death Anniversary of Raj Narayan



Barabanki

A seminar was organized by Samta Trust at Gandhi Bhavan to pay tribute to former Union Minister and socialist leader Lokbandhu Raj Narayan on his 39th death anniversary. Presiding over the event, senior Samajwadi Party leader Pramod Vajpayee described Raj Narayan as a symbol of struggle and satyagraha. Author-journalist and democracy defender Dharendra Nath Srivastava referred to

him as the true leader of social justice and the PDA (Backward, Dalit, Minority) concept. Samta Trust founder Rajnath Sharma said that had Babu Jagjivan Ram become Prime Minister after the Emergency, the Janata Party would not have split. Senior journalist Anil Tripathi recalled Raj Narayan lifelong struggle for social harmony. The seminar was conducted by Pateshwari Prasad. Among those present were SP State Secretary Humayun

Naim Khan, former Congress Organization Minister Shivshankar Shukla, CPI State Council member Randhir Singh Suman, social worker Vinay Kumar Singh, educationist Ashok Shukla, senior advocate Shaur Kamil Kidwai, Jameel-ur-Rehman, Mrityunjay Sharma, Irfan Hussain, Manish Kumar, Rajesh Yadav, Satyawan Verma, Kaleem Khan, Om Singh, Manish Singh, Ankit Sharma, Ayush Yadav, Umesh Srivastava and several others.

Route March Conducted to Strengthen Crime Control and Public Safety

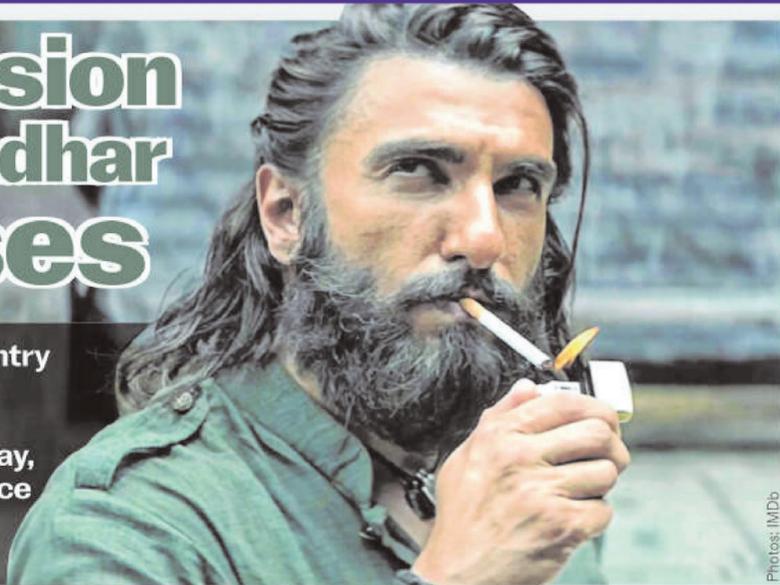


Bahraich

With the objective of maintaining peace, security and law & order in the district and to instill a sense of safety and trust among the general public, the Additional Superintendent of Police (City) Ashok Kumar Singh, conducted a route march/foot patrol in the city area on Tuesday. The route march was carried out along major roads and busy market areas under the jurisdiction of Kotwali Nagar Police Station with the participation of police personnel and recruited constables. During the patrol, the Additional SP inspected sensitive mixed-population areas, crowded locations and hotels situated within the urban limits. He also interacted with local residents and shopkeepers, assuring them of police vigilance and encouraging cooperation to maintain peace and harmony in the city. The initiative aimed to enhance public confidence and ensure a safe environment across the city area.

New version of Dhurandhar releases

Theatres across the country received an urgent communication from distributors on Wednesday, instructing them to replace *Dhurandhar's* Digital Cinema Package (DCP)



Photos: IMDb

Aditya Dhar's blockbuster film *Dhurandhar*, starring Ranveer Singh, Akshaye Khanna, and others, has continued its remarkable run at the global box office. The high-octane action film has officially crossed the Rs 1,100 crore mark at the box office worldwide, showing no signs of slowing down. Amid this, a revised version of the film has made its way to theatres on Thursday.

According to a report by Bollywood Hungama, theatres across the country received an urgent communication from distributors on Wednesday, instructing them to replace the film's Digital Cinema Package (DCP). The



move was made to accommodate minor edits mandated by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of India.

A source told the publication, "The reason for the change is that the makers have muted two words and



changed a dialogue in the film, as per the directives received from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting."

Industry insiders have already pointed out one of the key alterations. "One of the words removed from the new version of *Dhurandhar's* Bal-

och," the source revealed.

Despite the tweaks, the revisions are said to be minimal and are unlikely to impact the film's narrative or audience reception.

Despite the tweaks, the revisions are said to be minimal and are unlikely to im-

act the film's narrative or audience reception.

Dhurandhar has been enjoying a strong theatrical run, driven by positive word of mouth, Ranveer's intense performance, and Akshaye's commanding presence, further cementing its status as one of the biggest blockbusters in recent times.

Directed by Aditya Dhar, the film also features Sanjay Dutt, Arjun Rampal, Sara Arjun, R Madhavan, Rakesh Bedi, Manav Gohil, Danish Pandor, Saumya Tandon, and Gaurav Gera, among others.

The second installment of the film is set to hit the big screens in March 2026 and will clash with Yash, Kiara Advani and Nayanthara's *Toxic*.

First look of Prabhas-starrer Spirit unveiled



First look of the film

New Year 2026 started on a great note for the fans of Prabhas as the first look of his most-awaited film *Spirit* was unveiled at midnight. The poster features actress Triptii Dimri helping Prabhas light a cigarette. Prabhas is seen wounded, leaving movie buffs intrigued.

Sharing the first look, director Sandeep Reddy Vanga on his X account wrote, "INDIAN CINEMA... witness your AJANUBAHU / AJANUBAHU Happy New Year 2026 #SpiritFirstLook #spirit @InSpiritMode."

Actor Vivek Oberoi also has a key role in the film, which is set to be released in 2026. It is a collaboration between Bhushan Kumar's T-Series and Sandeep's Bhadrakali Pictures.

Last year, in October, on Prabhas' birthday, Sandeep Reddy Vanga shared the film's audio teaser in Telugu, Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam, revealing Prakash Raj and Vivek as key cast members.

The audio teaser suggested that Prabhas portrays an IPS officer who

is currently behind bars.

"Right from childhood, I have one bad habit," the teaser ended with Prabhas' line. Vivek, who will reportedly be seen as an antagonist, expressed excitement about the film via a post on X.

"#OneBadHabit is all it takes to get you #inspirit-mode. And what a powerful 'SOUNDSTORY' that was! Happy Birthday to the Rebel Star, #Prabhas! Hoping the surprise lifted your spirits! Super kicked about bringing this action to life with your unmatched magic @imvanganadeep," he posted.



Photos: Instagram

Power, performance and paranoia



TITLE: *The Housemaid*

DIRECTOR: Paul Feig

CAST: Amanda Seyfried, Sydney Sweeney, Brandon Sklenar, Michele Morrone, Elizabeth Perkins and Indiana Elle

WHERE: In theatres near you

RATING: ★★★★★

The *Housemaid* arrives dressed like a polite domestic thriller and promptly kicks off its shoes to sprawl on the sofa of excess. Adapted from a bestselling novel authored by Freida McFadden and directed by Paul Feig, the film toys gleefully with familiar genre tropes.

At its centre is Millie (Sydney Sweeney), a young woman on the economic margins who accepts a live-in job in the pristine suburban home of Nina Winchester (Amanda Seyfried). Nina projects affluence and control, though cracks surface quickly, erupting into sudden rages and accusations. Hovering over this brittle arrangement is her husband, Andrew (Brandon Sklenar), outwardly reassuring, whose attentions towards Millie complicate the household. As Millie negotiates rituals of wealth and dependence, al-

iances shift, and hierarchies warp, turning the home into a battleground of performance and concealed intent.

What distinguishes the film is not restraint but audacity. It lunges into melodrama with eyes open, often winking at the audience even as it tightens the screws. The narrative thrives on reversals, pushing assumptions off balance. Not all twists land evenly, but the pace rarely slackens. Logic takes a holiday, yet the film is not courting realism. It wants sensation, and mostly gets it.

Actors' performance

The film is anchored by a combative duet between Sydney Sweeney and Amanda Seyfried. Seyfried is the undisputed scene-stealer, playing volatility like a finely tuned instrument. Her character oscillates between brittle charm and operatic fury, and she commits so fully that disbelief becomes beside the point. Sweeney begins in a more muted register, her performance initially inward and cautious. This choice can feel underpowered in the first half, but it pays off later when the character's layers peel back, and the actor finally unleashes a darker energy.

Brandon Sklenar, as the husband caught between appearances and appetites, is serviceable rather than strik-

ing, functioning more as a narrative pivot than a psychological puzzle. Supporting players add texture, particularly the acerbic presence of an interfering elder, who sharpens the film's satirical edge.

Music

Visually, the film revels in polished artificiality. The mansion, all gleaming surfaces and cavernous spaces, becomes a pressure cooker where resentment echoes off designer walls. The camera lingers on staircases, corridors, and locked doors with knowing relish. The background score underlines the hysteria, sometimes too insistently, but it suits the film's pulp sensibility. Editing can be abrupt, occasionally stitching visible seams, yet the overall aesthetic remains glossy and intentional.

The *Housemaid* may not be subtle, but it is rarely dull. Its pleasures are messy, stylised, and unapologetically loud. While it stumbles when it strains for plausibility or hesitates between camp and seriousness, it ultimately leans into its own absurdity. For viewers willing to surrender to its theatrical impulses, this is a slick, mischievous thriller that knows exactly how trashy it wants to be, and enjoys every minute of it.

TITLE: *The SpongeBob Movie: Search for SquarePants*

DIRECTOR: Derek Drymon

CAST: Tom Kenny, Clancy Brown, Rodger Bumpass, Bill Fagerbakke, Carolyn Lawrence, Mr Lawrence, George Lopez, Isis "Ice Spice" Gaston, Arturo Castro, Sherry Cola, Regina Hall, Mark Hamill

WHERE: In theatres near you

RATING: ★★★

This film opens on an unexpectedly anxious note. SpongeBob, long the eternal child of Bikini Bottom, discovers that he is finally tall enough to ride a roller-coaster.

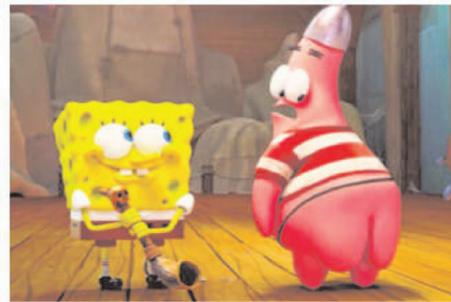
Instead of delight, this milestone triggers dread. That wobble between innocence and self-doubt becomes the film's emotional hook. When a cursed pirate, the Flying Dutchman, offers SpongeBob a chance to prove his bravery by climbing a

perilous underwater mountain, our porous hero eagerly accepts, unaware that he is part of a larger con.

What follows is a serviceable quest narrative. SpongeBob marches towards danger with misplaced confidence, while Mr Krabs and Squidward mount a rescue mission that doubles as a road trip through familiar comic territory. Along the way, the film delivers a string of absurd situations, conversational loops, and deliberately silly detours that nod to the franchise's anarchic past. Yet the story remains curiously cautious. The swashbuckling framework, while functional, reins in the wild unpredictability that once made SpongeBob feel like a joyous act of rebellion against the norms of children's television.

The film is pleasant rather than piercing. There are jokes, visual gags and stretches of inspired silliness, but they rarely spiral into the surreal anarchy that once defined Bikini Bottom. The plotting leans heavily on a quest structure that feels safe, even conservative, for a universe that once thrived on chaos. For Indian viewers who grew up watching SpongeBob on afternoon television, the ex-

Plays safe with nostalgia and nerves



perience is akin to meeting a childhood friend who is still funny but now more refined in their manners.

Actors' Performance

Tom Kenny continues to be the franchise's unsinkable anchor. His SpongeBob retains that manic sincerity which makes even mediocre mat-

terial feel earnest. Mark Hamill attacks the role of the Flying Dutchman with gusto, but the character itself is too generically villainous to leave a lasting impression. The supporting voices, particularly those of Mr Krabs and Squidward, deliver familiar rhythms that feel comforting, if slightly autopiloted.

Music and Aesthetics

The film's digital polish gives Bikini Bottom a glossy, contemporary look, though some of its tactile charm is lost in translation. The music effectively underlines moments of mock-epic fear and emotional hesitation, without becoming especially memorable. Visually and sonically, the film is bright, clean, and efficient, more theme park attraction than fever dream.

FPJ Verdict

Search For SquarePants is not so much a misfire as a mild tide. It understands SpongeBob's legacy but seems reluctant to fully embrace the lunacy that once defined it. The film's greatest strength lies in its attempt to frame fear and growing up through the eyes of a character built on perpetual childishness. Its weakness is an overreliance on safe plotting and predictable humour. For younger viewers, it remains cheerful and accessible. For long-time fans, it offers moments of nostalgia tempered by the sense that SpongeBob, like many ageing icons, now prefers floating steadily to making waves.



TITLE: *Stranger Things Season 5 Episode 8*

DIRECTORS: Matt and Ross Duffer

CAST: Winona Ryder, David Harbour, Sadie Sink, Millie Bobby Brown, Finn Wolfhard, Gaten Matarazzo

WHERE: Netflix

RATING: ★★★★★

The final episode of *Stranger Things* arrives with a burden few series finales escape. It must end a sprawling mythology, honour a decade of emotional investment, and still feel like a story rather than a checklist. This two-hour-long eighth episode largely succeeds not by subverting expectations but by leaning into familiarity, closure and sentiment. It is a finale that values resolution over surprise, sometimes to its detriment, often to its credit.

The episode is expansive, even indulgent, moving from an operatic showdown in the

Upside Down to a long farewell that stretches time itself. The climactic battle delivers spectacle in abundance, staging its confrontation with Vecna and the Mind Flayer as a collective effort rather than a lone hero's triumph. Yet, the pacing is uneven. The action resolves decisively, perhaps too cleanly, while the aftermath lingers longer than necessary. The multiple epilogues are individually effective but collectively overextended, diluting the emotional punch through repetition.

Where the finale falters slightly is in its handling of revelation. Certain mythological clarifications arrive too late to surprise, and some thematic threads are acknowledged rather than explored. Still, the episode understands that *Stranger Things* was never solely about monsters. It was about what growing up costs, and what it leaves behind.

Actors' performance

The cast rises to the occasion with assurance born of long familiarity. Millie Bobby Brown anchors the episode with controlled intensity, giving Eleven's final choices a sense of calm inevitability

No stranger way to say goodbye



rather than melodrama. David Harbour delivers some of his finest work in the series, playing Hopper not as a saviour but as a parent finally willing to let go.

Jamie Campbell Bower's Vecna remains compelling to the end, balancing menace with flashes of wounded humanity. Among the younger cast, Finn Wolfhard quietly reclaims emotional ground, while Sadie Sink and Caleb

McLaughlin lend warmth and continuity to the series' core friendships. Winona Ryder, though underused in the season, is granted a moment of fierce, cathartic resolution that feels earned.

Music

Visually, the finale is among the series' most confident. *The Upside Down* is rendered with scale and clarity, and the final confrontation benefits from focused staging rather than visual excess. The electronic score, steeped in nostalgia, is used with restraint, allowing silence and ambient sound to carry weight. When music swells, it does so to underline emotion rather than manufacture it.

Final verdict

This is not a perfect farewell. It explains too much, lingers too long, and occasionally opts for comfort over daring. Yet, it understands what matters. The finale closes its doors gently, prioritising character, memory and emotional truth over shock value. *Stranger Things* ends not with a scream, but with acceptance. For a story that began with missing children and flickering lights, that feels like the right goodbye.

Italy nabs 9 for Hamas funding

ROME

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

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

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

The EU has Hamas listed on its terror list.

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

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

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

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

COSTLIEST CLIMATE EVENTS

The 10 most financially damaging climate events of



People flee floodwaters in Hat Yai, Southern Thailand

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

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

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

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

Cyclones and floods across Southeast Asia ranked second, inflicting \$25 billion in losses and killing over 1,750 people across Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Malaysia. Devastating floods in China followed, displacing thousands, killing at least 30 people and causing \$11.7 billion in damage.

MOST COSTLY DISASTERS IN 2025

- Palisades and Eaton fires in the US: **\$60b**
- South & Southeast Asia cyclones in Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Malaysia: **\$25b**
- Seasonal flooding in China: **\$11.7b**
- Hurricane Melissa in Jamaica, Cuba and Bahamas: **\$8b**
- Monsoon season floods in India and Pakistan: **\$5.6b**
- Typhoons in Philippines: **\$5b**
- Drought, Brazil: **\$4.75b**
- Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred in Australia: **\$1.2b**
- Cyclone Garance in Réunion: **\$1.05b**
- Texas floods, US: **\$1b**

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

ASIA AMONG WORST HIT

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

Typhoons in the Philippines caused over \$5 billion in damage and displaced around 1.4 million people.

Other severe events included drought in Brazil, summer wildfires in Spain and Portugal, and cyclones that hit Australia and Reunion Island off Africa's coast earlier in the year.

While the top 10 disasters were ranked by financial losses, Christian Aid emphasised some most devastating

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

POOR NATIONS BEAR THE HIDDEN COST

Flooding in Nigeria in May and in the Democratic Republic of Congo in April hit thousands, with Nigeria alone reporting up to 700 deaths. Prolonged drought in Iran and across West Asia threatened water supplies for around 10 million people in Tehran, raising the prospect of mass evacuation.

The report also highlighted unusually severe events such as record-breaking heat that sparked wildfires in the Scottish Highlands, burning 47,000 hectares, and Japan's experience of both extreme snowstorms and record heatwaves in the same year.

Climate-related extremes were also recorded in Antarctica and the world's oceans, with record sea temperatures and coral bleaching in

Western Australia posing major threats to biodiversity.

CALL FOR URGENT ACTION

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

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

PEACE TALKS | Zelenskyy heads to Florida to meet Trump

Prez: Kyiv strikes show Putin's true attitude

KYIV

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



FULL-SCALE ATTACK SWITZERLAND CANNOT DEFEND SELF: Army chief

Zurich: Switzerland cannot defend itself against a full-scale attack and must boost military spending given rising risks from Russia, the head of its armed forces said.

The country is prepared for attacks by "non-state actors" on critical infrastructure and for cyber attacks, but its military still faces major equipment gaps. **Thomas Suessli** told NZZ newspaper.

"What we cannot do is defend against threats from a distance or even a full-scale attack on our country," said Suessli, who is stepping down at the end of the year.

US air travel hit, 1600 flights cancelled and 7400 delayed

Thousands of flights across the US have been cancelled or delayed as the north-east braces for a severe winter storm during the peak holiday travel season. As of Friday night, 1,600 flights had been cancelled and 7,400 delayed, as per flight tracking website FlightAware.

The most affected airports are John F Kennedy International, Newark Liberty, and LaGuardia, which all serve the New York area. Boston, Chicago, and Toronto, Canada, are also impacted. The National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning from 16:00 local time on Friday until 13:00 on Saturday, with as much as 23cm of snow expected in New York and southern Connecticut.



JetBlue Airways cancelled 229 flights, while Delta Air Lines

scrapped 241 flights. Republic Airways and Southwest Airlines cancelled 180 and 151 flights respectively. About 100 scheduled flights by American Airlines and United Airlines were also cancelled. On social media, airports

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

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

Maduro seeks talks with US

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

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

Rahman registers as B'deshi voter

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

African regional bodies reject Israel's recognition of Somaliland

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

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

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

Taiwan hit by strong quake

A magnitude 6.6 earthquake struck off eastern Taiwan at 11:05 pm on Saturday, sending strong tremors through Taipei, New Taipei, and Yilan County. Data from the USGS showed the quake occurred at a depth of 67-72.8 kms, producing significant shaking across northern and eastern regions. Early reports showed no casualties.

Kash plan to shut FBI bldg final

FBI Director **Kash Patel** said FBI's J Edgar Hoover building in Washington DC will be "shut down permanently" after previously discarding plans to move the bureau's headquarters to Maryland, *The Hills* reported. Instead, employees will report to the Ronald Reagan Building to occupy the former location of the US Agency for

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

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

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

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

Thailand, Cambodia sign new ceasefire agreement

BANGKOK

Thailand and Cambodia signed a ceasefire agreement on Saturday to end weeks of fighting along their border over competing territorial claims. The agreement took effect at noon and calls for a halt in military movements and airspace violations for military purposes.

Only Thailand has carried out airstrikes, hitting sites in Cambodia as recently as Saturday morning, according to the Cambodian Defence Ministry.

The deal also calls for Thailand, after the ceasefire has held for 72 hours, to repatriate 18 Cambodian soldiers it



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

has held as prisoners since earlier fighting in July. Their release has been a major demand of the Cambodian side. Within hours of the signing, Thailand's foreign ministry protested to Cambodia a Thai soldier sustained a permanent disability when he stepped on an anti-personnel land mine, which it charged

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

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

1-stop help desk for distressed Indian women in Canada

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

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

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

\$2 lottery ticket wins \$1.8b jackpot

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

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



win of 2025, according to Powerball. The winner can choose a lump sum cash payout of \$834.9 million. "Congratulations to the

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

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

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

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

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

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

Briefs

CHENNAI

Rashid wants to play in Afghanistan



Rashid Khan and his Afghanistan teammates have travelled across the globe to play cricket and have achieved several honours, but one dream of them is still unfulfilled—playing an international match at their home. "Yes, that's bigger than the World Cup to be honest, for me and for the team and every individual. We play an international game in Afghanistan and then all these people will see how people back home in Afghanistan are," Rashid said on Saturday.

CHENNAI

Santner puts trust on pace bowlers



New Zealand skipper Mitchell Santner on Saturday said he would trust in the variety of his fast bowling unit to keep the opposition batters silent in the Power Play and at the death overs -- the phases when the bowlers leak runs generally -- during the T20 World Cup. "I think when you come to India, you don't see as much lateral movement off the pitch. So, I think swing and bounce is very important. We've got all our fast bowlers to give us different options," he said.

MANILA

Kochhar fires course record to take lead



India's Karandeep Kochhar roared back in the third round with a course record to take the third-round lead in the Philippine Golf Championship here on Saturday. Kochhar, who recently won in Egypt and his own country at the IGPL Tour, celebrated his return to the Asian Tour with a bogey free 65 that had seven birdies. With rounds of 74-69-65 he is now 8-under and leader by two. "The way this course has been playing for the past two days and today, with a little bit of rain, I would say I think it was probably one of my finest performances," Kochhar said.

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FIRST BLOOD | Shadley van Schalkwyk shocks famed Indian batting line-up

SKY, bowlers save India blushes

MUMBAI

India were not at their best but still managed to thump USA by 29 runs after the latter gave their famed batting line up a shock in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Group A match at the Wankhede Stadium, here on Saturday.

However, the victory came largely thanks to skipper Suryakumar Yadav's brilliant and timely 84 and a disciplined bowling performance by the Indian bowlers, both the pacers and spinners.

The USA bowlers led by Shadley van Schalkwyk had initially wrecked the Indian batting line-up to leave them tottering at 77/6 in 12.4 overs. Suryakumar then took things into his own hands to ensure India had something reasonable to fight with at 161.

In pursuit of a competitive 162, USA were off to a horror start with Indian bowlers applying pressure at the Wankhede. Mohammad Siraj and Arshdeep scalped three wickets between them as Andries Gous, Monank Patel and Saiteja Mukkamalla were dismissed with just 13 runs on the board. Milind Kumar and Sanjay Krishnamurthi then stitched a 58-run partnership.

Shubham Ranjane slammed 37 off 22 balls with two fours and three sixes to resist and delay the inevitable but India eventually emerged victors by 29 runs as the USA were restricted to 132/8 in 20 overs.

Siraj scalped 3/29 while Arshdeep and Axar Patel picked up two wickets apiece and Varun Chakravarty took one wicket.

Earlier, Shadley van Schalkwyk ripped through India's famed batting line-up to shock the home side but captain Suryakumar Yadav's timely innings of 84 rescued India to a healthy total of 161.



India's captain Suryakumar Yadav plays a shot during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup match against USA at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Saturday. PTI

Suryakumar's 84 off 49 balls was the highlight of the Indian batting effort that had a dramatic collapse triggered by Shadley van Schalkwyk, who returned with figures of 4/25.

Earlier, India were off to a rather sedate start by their own standards with just seven runs coming off the first over with Ishan Kishan managing a six off the fifth ball after USA's Saurabh Netravalkar had tied him down in the first four deliveries.

It was then Ali Khan's turn to silence the Wankhede crowd when he sent the swashbuckling Abhishek Sharma back to the pavilion for a golden duck off the first

ball of the second over of the match.

Kishan was dropped by USA's Shubham Ranjane on 10 off Ali Khan's bowling as the India opener got a reprieve. The wicket-keeper batter then made USA pay for that by smashing a six over deep mid-wicket as the home side reached 44/1.

Thereafter, there was a mini-collapse with Kishan and then Tilak Varma falling in quick succession in the same over, the sixth.

And when Shivam Dube departed for a first-ball duck, India were in a seriously embarrassing position at 46/4 at the end of the powerplay.

Shadley van Schalkwyk was the chief architect of India's batting woes as he scalped three wickets in an over to snuff out Kishan, Varma and Dube.

USA were over the moon with their exceptional performance in the powerplay and stunning the Wankhede faithful.

There was a 26-run partnership between captain Suryakumar Yadav and Rinku Singh that looked to give India some hope of a fighting total.

However, Mohammad Mohsin put paid to those plans as he had Rinku caught by Milind Kumar for six runs as India slipped to 72/5.

Scoreboard

INDIA: I Kishan c Milind Kumar b van Schalkwyk 20, A Sharma c Krishnamurthi b Ali Khan 0, T Varma c Patel b van Schalkwyk 25, S Yadav (not out) 84, S Dube c Netravalkar b van Schalkwyk 0, R Singh c Milind b Mohsin 6, H Pandya c Mukkamalla b Harmeet 5, A Patel c Mohsin b Harmeet 14, A Singh c Milind b van Schalkwyk 4, V Chakravarty run out 0 **Extras:** (W-3) 3 **Total:** 161-9 (In 20 overs) **Fall of wkts:** 1-8, 2-45, 3-46, 4-46, 5-72, 6-77, 7-118, 8-140, 9-161. **Bowling:** Saurabh Netravalkar 4-0-65-0, Ali Khan 2-0-13-1, Shadley van Schalkwyk 4-0-25-4, Mohammad Mohsin 4-0-16-1, Shubham Ranjane 2-0-16-0, Harmeet Singh 4-0-26-2.

USA: A Gous c Tilak b Siraj 6, M Saiteja c Chakravarty b Siraj 2, M Patel c Dube b Arshdeep 0, M Kumar st Kishan b Chakravarty 34, S Krishnamurthi c Arshdeep b Axar 37, S Ranjane lbw Siraj 37, H Singh c Siraj b Axar 0, M Mohsin c Tilak b Arshdeep 8, S van Schalkwyk (not out) 2 **Extras:** (LB-3, W-3) 6 **Total:** 132-8 (In 20 overs) **Fall of wkts:** 1-8, 2-11, 3-13, 4-71, 5-98, 6-98, 7-110, 8-132. **Bowling:** Arshdeep Singh 4-0-18-2, Mohammad Siraj 4-0-29-3, Varun Chakravarty 4-0-24-1, Axar Patel 4-0-24-2, Hardik Pandya 4-0-34-0.

Pakistan survives Netherlands scare

Faheem Ashraf's breezy knock takes his team to 3-wicket victory

COLOMBO

All-rounder Faheem Ashraf emerged as the hero for Pakistan, hammering 29 off 11 balls in a stunning late assault to snatch a dramatic three-wicket win over the Netherlands in the T20 World Cup opener here on Saturday.

Chasing 148 for a win, Pakistan were 90 for 2 at the halfway stage but lost wickets in a heap as they were 114 for 7 in 16.1 overs, needing 34 more runs.

It looked all but over for Pakistan at that stage but walking in at number 8, Ashraf, who was dropped on 7, had other plans.

Needing 29 runs from the last two overs, Ashraf hit three sixes and one four off Logan Van Beek and finished off the match with a four in the final over as Pakistan reached 148 for 7 in 19.3 overs.

Max O'Dowd dropped Ashraf when he was on seven in the second ball of the 19th over and perhaps that cost the match for the Dutch.

Pakistan's build-up was dominated by off-the-field matters after their Board decided to boycott the February 15 marquee match against India here, though they had beaten a depleted Australia 3-0 in the home T20I series.

At the Sinhalese Sports Club Ground which is hosting a T20I for the first time after 2010, Pakistan, the champions of the 2009 edition, huffed and puffed to win the match with three balls to spare.

Sahibzada Farhan top-scored with 47 off 31 balls while his opening partner Saim Ayub contributed 24 off 13 balls, but senior batter Babar Azam struggled with a 18-ball 15 with just one bound-



Pakistan's Faheem Ashraf plays a shot in Colombo on Saturday. AP

Needing 29 runs from the last two overs, Ashraf hit three sixes and one four off Logan Van Beek in the 19th.

ary. Captain Salman Agha made 12 off eight balls.

Pakistan were 90 for 2 at the halfway stage and looked like they would wrap up the match quickly. But Paul van Meekeren's two-wicket burst in the 12th over -- removing Farhan and Usman Khan (0) -- and dismissal of Azam in the 13th over put them on the backfoot.

From 98 for 2 at the end of the 11th over, Pakistan were 100 for 5 in 12.4 overs, losing three wickets in the space of 10 balls for the addition of just two runs. They had just one sub-substantial partnership of 45 runs between Farhan and Azam for the third wicket.

All hell broke loose after the 15th over when they needed 37 runs from the last five overs. The Dutch tightened the screw with the experienced Kyle Klein removing Mohammad Nawaz for 6 in the 16th over.

England aim to start on a high

Brook-led side will clash with a rising Nepal outfit

MUMBAI

England will be looking to make shortwork of Nepal when the two clash in their ICC Men's T20 World Cup Group C match at the Wankhede Stadium, here on Sunday.

The England skipper Harry Brook will be hoping to redeem himself after the infamous developments in Wellington, where Brook was involved in an incident at a nightclub and received much criticism for the same.

Coming to the match on Sunday, England will be overwhelming favourites given their formidable batting arsenal that covers all bases and a fine mix of world-class pacers and spinners in the bowling department.

England will be hoping to go all the way in the competition having been world champions in this format in 2010 and 2022 and were also finalists in 2016, where Carlos Brathwaite famously spoilt their party winning the trophy for the West Indies at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata.

In terms of the build-up for the marquee event, England have been almost perfect and will be one of the teams



England's Jos Buttler in a training session. PTI

expected to make it to the semifinals, from where any team can mount a challenge for the World Cup.

The English are grouped alongside debutants Italy, Nepal, Scotland and the West Indies. England would be expected to go hard against all teams with no scope for complacency whatsoever given the tricky, unpredictable nature of the format.

Having been victorious in 11 out of the 17 T20Is they featured in last year, losing only two, England have the ability to set massive totals and at the same time chase down huge targets as well.

Dew could be a factor at the Wankhede during the latter half of the match and England will have to rely on the experi-

Squads

England: Harry Brook (c), Tom Banton (wk), Jos Buttler (wk), Ben Duckett, Phil Salt (wk), Jacob Bethell, Sam Curran, Liam Dawson, Will Jacks, Jamie Overton, Rehan Ahmed, Jofra Archer, Adil Rashid, Josh Tongue, Luke Wood. **Nepal:** Rohit Paudel (c), Aarif Sheikh, Aasif Sheikh (wk), Dipendra Singh Airee, Basir Ahamad, Kushal Bhurtel, Sudneep Jora, Lokesh Bam, Gulsan Jha, Karan KC, Sompal Kami, Sandeep Lamichhane, Sher Malla, Lalit Rajbanshi, Nandan Yadav.

ence of Adil Rashid to deal with that challenge.

Nepal, on the other hand, will certainly be up against it when they face a strong England side and will have to bring their A-game to the table.

The Rohit Paudel-led side had ran South Africa mighty close in the 2024 T20 World Cup with the Proteas scraping through by just one run.

New Zealand face Afghans, hosts SL take on Ireland

CHENNAI

An underwhelming New Zealand will be hoping to rediscover their explosive game against a dangerous Afghanistan in the opening Group D match of the ICC T20 World Cup on Sunday.

The Kiwis went through a rather unstable preparatory phase ahead of the ICC showpiece, going 1-4 down to India, and Afghanistan are no less a threat.

The arrival of Tim Seifert and Finn Allen have given their top order a tad more firepower, but they need more substantial and consistent contributions from Rachin Ravindra, Mark Chapman and Devon Conway to capitalise on the starts given by the openers.

Afghanistan is a capable T20 outfit, evidenced in their rout of the West Indies in a bilateral series last week.

An undercooked Sri Lanka would look to put behind a disappointing preparation and dish out a solid effort when they take on an unpredictable Ireland in their opening Group B match in front of home fans here on Sunday.

Hetmyer fifty, Shepherd fifer power Windies to easy win

Two-time champions began their T20 WC campaign with a comfortable 35-run win over Scotland

KOLKATA

Shimron Hetmyer struck a counter-attacking fifty before Romario Shepherd unleashed a stunning five-wicket burst including a hat-trick as two-time champions West Indies began their T20 World Cup campaign with a comfortable 35-run win over Scotland in their group C fixture here on Saturday.

Back at the venue where they had lifted their second T20 World Cup title a decade ago, West Indies were made to work early before Hetmyer's 36-ball 64 (6x6, 2x4) lifted them to a competitive 182/5.

In reply, Guyanese pacer Shepherd blew away the lower order with a sensational spell of 5/20 to bowl out Scotland for 147 in

18.5 overs.

Shepherd finished the game in dramatic fashion as he ripped through the tail with four wickets in five deliveries -- including Matthew Cross, Michael Leask and Oliver Davidson off successive balls -- to complete his second T20I hat-trick in four months.

He later added Safyaan Sharif to register his maiden five-wicket haul, returning with outstanding figures of 5/20 in three overs. He had also taken a hat-trick against Bangladesh in

October. For West Indies, who had a difficult build up including a shock series loss to Nepal, it was redemption of sorts, having endured a shock loss to Scotland in the 2022-23 edition.

Scotland showed discipline with the ball but their lack of preparation reflected in the chase. Having trained indoors through winter full of one-foot snow back home, Scotland got their first proper outdoor sessions only during the warm-ups at Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru in India.

Captain Richie Berrington struck a brisk 42 off 24 balls (3x4, 2x6) and Tom Bruce made 35 from 28 balls (1x4, 2x6), but the boundaries dried up regularly and the asking rate kept climbing.

Romario Shepherd (L) celebrates with teammate Shimron Hetmyer after taking a hat-trick. PTI



Davis Cup

Dhakshineswar Suresh steps up again as India draw level

BENGALURU

The Fast emerging as a vital cog in India's Davis Cup plans, Dhakshineswar Suresh once again rose to the occasion, outgunning Dutch number one Jesper de Jong in a battle of big servers to level the Qualifiers Round 1 tie 1-1 against the Netherlands here on Saturday.

Ranked as low as 465, Dhakshineswar won the battle of big servers against

the world No. 88 de Jong, ensuring India did not slip further after Sumit Nagal's defeat in the opening singles earlier in the day.

The victory reinforced Dhakshineswar's growing stature as a dependable Davis Cup player, following his match-winning effort against a higher-ranked opponent against Switzerland last year.

India had fallen behind after Nagal mounted a strong comeback from a disastrous start but could not sustain

the momentum, losing 0-6 4-3-6 to Netherlands' Guy de Ouden in a two-hour-and-28-minute battle.

Nagal was blown away in the opening set as De Ouden dropped just one point on his serve and wrapped it up in 38 minutes, repeatedly pinning the Indian behind the baseline with deep returns.

The Indian fought back strongly in the second set, improving his serve and converting a crucial break to draw parity, but De Ouden

struck at key moments in the decider, breaking in the eighth game before serving out the match to give the Netherlands a 1-0 lead.

With the pressure firmly on him to keep India alive in the tie, Dhakshineswar responded with a composed display against de Jong, who had come into the contest without a win this season.

The two players served strongly in the opening set, keeping points short, before the Indian seized his chance late to nose ahead.

Dhakshineswar showed similar composure in the second set, saving a break point early and capitalising on de Jong's faltering serve at the crucial stage to seal the contest. The tie is now evenly poised at 1-1.

Yuki Bhambri and N. Sriram Balaji will face Sander Arends and David Pel in the doubles on Sunday. The reverse singles will be played after the doubles rubber. The winner of the tie will advance to the Qualifiers Round 2 in September.



India's Dhakshineswar Suresh celebrates a point against Netherlands' Jesper De Jong. PTI