

# AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

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## Briefs

### Probe into crop cover scam ordered

**JAIPUR**  
Rajasthan Agriculture Minister Dr. Kirodi Lal Meena has ordered a Special Operations Group (SOG) probe into large-scale irregularities within the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. Investigations revealed systemic fraud by banks and insurers across several districts, including Sri Ganganagar and Churu. In one instance, surveyors forged signatures to report "zero damage" despite actual losses of 70%, allegedly costing farmers ₹128 crore in compensation. Another scam involved 71 fake bank accounts used to siphon funds. The state has moved to blacklist implicated companies and flagged the fraudulent practices to the Central government for further action.

### Akhilesh: BJP conspiracy to purge voters

**LUCKNOW**  
Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav has accused the BJP of a "direct conspiracy" to delete minority and PDA (Pichda, Dalit, Alpasankhyak) voters in Uttar Pradesh. Citing the ongoing Special Intensive Revision, Yadav alleged the illegal use of Form 7 to strike off genuine voters, claiming the Election Commission has failed to act. In Ayodhya, Yadav noted that 76% of notices targeted PDA groups, with 46% aimed specifically at Yadav and Muslim communities. He further alleged that 100 votes were deleted at a single Babaganj booth via forged signatures, calling for FIRs against those manipulating the rolls.

### RJD demand for 85% quota sparks furor

**PATNA**  
The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) sparked an uproar in the Bihar Assembly on Monday, demanding a hike in reservation quotas to 85% for government jobs and education. Opposition MLAs stormed the well, accusing the Nitish Kumar government of being "anti-reservation" and demanding quotas proportional to population. The RJD urged the state to send the proposal to the Centre for inclusion in the 9th Schedule. This follows the Patna High Court's invalidation of Bihar's previous 65% quota hike. Meanwhile, LJP (RV) members countered with protests, accusing the RJD of insulting the late Ram Vilas Paswan.

### FIR lodged as Moosewala's parents stir

**CHANDIGARH**  
Days after the parents of slain Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala staged a protest outside the office of senior superintendent of police (SSP), district Mansa, demanding registration of an FIR over their complaint in an alleged fraud involving two companies owned by their late son, the police have registered a case in the regard. It may be recalled that Moosewala's parents, Balkaur Singh and Charan Kaur, had last week sat on the floor outside the SSP office, demanding registration of an FIR over their complaint lodged with police about six months ago. Singh had told newsmen that the local police had not even registered an FIR in connection with alleged financial fraud involving two companies of their late son.

## SHARPENING ATTACK | Surjewala says India's \$38bn trade surplus is under threat from 'financially burdensome' pact

# Congress: US deal based on equality or coercion?

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday asked if the India-US trade deal, in which a clause mandates that India would purchase \$500 billion worth of goods from the United States over five years, has been "made on the basis of equality or on the basis of coercion". At a press conference at the Congress headquarters, party general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala noted that when Prime Minister Modi had visited the United States on February 13, 2025, a joint statement was issued stating that both countries would increase their "mutual trade" to \$500 billion. But now, he said, that has been replaced with a mandatory demand on India to purchase \$100 billion worth of American goods every year for the next 5 years. Stating that at present, India enjoys a \$38 billion annual trade surplus over the US, Surjewala said the new mandate would change that and financially burden India.



The Congress leader also charged that the terms of the India-US trade deal were unfavourable to India because of the way it plays with India's energy security. "On February 6, US President Donald Trump wrote in the penalty tariff order: India has promised the United States that it will not buy crude oil from Russia. Trump also wrote: The United States will monitor whether India buys crude oil from Russia directly or indirectly. If this happens, the penalty will be reimposed," he said. As a consequence, he said, "the Modi government will buy crude oil from the US and Venezuela, but the rates will not be cheap" and asked "is this not playing with India's self-reliance?". Surjewala said while "trade agreements are the path to economic progress", the terms of the trade agreement have led to questions being asked on whether "this a 'strong' government" or a "helpless" government" and whether "India is 'self-reliant' or 'America-dependent'". The Congress general secretary also claimed that the trade impact would harm the interests of the Indian farmers.

### India team in US next wk

**New Delhi:** A team of Indian officials will visit the US next week to finalise the legal text for an interim trade agreement, which is expected to be signed in March, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Monday. The visit is likely to start from February 23. "The joint statement lays down the contours of the deal. Now the contours of the deal has to be translated into a legal agreement, which will be signed between the two sides," he told reporters here. Both sides are engaged in finalising that legal agreement and virtual talks are going on. "Next week (India's) chief negotiator Darpan Jain will be leading a delegation to the US to finalise the legal trade agreement," he said.

## Kerala: Will take apt stand on Sabarimala women's entry

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The ruling Left in Kerala on Monday said the Sabarimala women entry issue is a matter involving several constitutional complications, and so the government would take an appropriate stand through discussions. Clarifying the government's stand, State Law Minister P Rajeev said the Supreme Court had already made it clear that it would take the review petitions only after addressing seven constitutional questions. So, the state government has enough time to inform its stand, he said, adding that it is not the time to say a "yes or no" in the matter. He, however, said the government is here to protect the faith of believers and it would stand by them cutting across belief. "This is not an issue that can be solved in one minute. Several constitutional complications are involved in it," Rajeev said. The state government, in its earlier affidavit, had suggested constituting a commission of scholars having deep knowledge of Hindu beliefs to study the women's entry issue, but the apex court didn't consider it, he added.

## Resignation drama rattles Assam Cong

GUWAHATI

The brief resignation of senior Congress leader Bhupen Kumar Borah on Monday has once again exposed the internal strain within the Assam unit of the party, just two days before Priyanka Gandhi's scheduled visit to the poll-bound state. Early in the morning, Borah sent his resignation to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, marking a copy to Rahul Gandhi. The move caught many in the party off guard. A two-time MLA from Bihpuria and a Congressman since 1994, Borah served as president of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee from July 2020 to May 2025 before being replaced by Gaurav Gogoi. He currently heads the party's campaign committee for the upcoming Assembly elections. Within hours, the party shifted into damage control mode. AICC general secretary and Assam in-charge Jitendra Singh, along with Gaurav Gogoi and other senior leaders, rushed to Borah's residence in Guwahati. Rahul



### Rahul failed dynast: BJP

**New Delhi:** The BJP on Monday attacked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, alleging that he is a "failed dynast" as neither his own party leaders nor allies have any confidence in him.

Gandhi is understood to have spoken to him personally. By afternoon, Jitendra Singh announced that the resignation had not been accepted and that Borah had agreed to withdraw it after discussions with the leadership. Though the immediate crisis was defused, the episode has highlighted deeper tensions within the state unit.

## 'AI misuse can hurt democratic set-ups'



**NEW DELHI**  
Union Minister Jitin Prasada on Monday urged caution in the use of AI tools, saying misinformation generated through artificial intelligence has the power to undermine democratic systems. Speaking at a session in the AI Impact Summit here, the Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology said, "If you don't get into digital literacy, then you have the vulnerability of falling to cyber threats. Cyber security is such a big issue, and AI deep fakes misinformation. And a country like India, which is truly democratic, and elections are happening all around the year, be it at the central level, state or municipality. But if there's kind of misinformation using AI, it has the power to derail democracies. "It has the power to change people's minds in the wrong fashion, and once a decision has been taken, as far as the vote goes, it could be so counterproductive, because you people have voted on false information."

## Andhra CM showcases feats to Gates

**Amaravati:** Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday showcased several initiatives of the state government to Microsoft founder Bill Gates here, including WhatsApp governance, Sanjeevani project, greenfield capital city Amaravati, date lake and others. Elaborating through a presentation on the Real Time Governance System (RTGS) at the state secretariat, the chief minister informed the tech czar that the southern state has synced all the departments through a data lake. Naidu informed the Microsoft founder that the government is eliciting information in real-time through Aware 2.0 platform to make quick decisions. —PTI

## Shut after Pahalgam attack, 14 J&K tourist spots reopen

JAMMU

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Monday ordered the reopening of 14 tourist spots in the Union territory, including Asia's largest tulip garden in Srinagar and the serene alpine meadow of Yousmarg, which were closed in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack last April. The L-G administration shut down nearly 50 tourist spots in J-K after the terror attack at the Baisaran meadow in Pahalgam on April 22 last year, which claimed 26 lives, mostly tourists. "After a thorough security review and discussions, I have ordered the reopening of more tourist spots in the Kashmir and Jammu divisions, which were temporarily closed as a precautionary



measure," the L-G's office said on X. Eleven tourist spots in the Kashmir Division — Yousmarg, Doodhpathri, Dandipora Park in Kokernag, Peer Ki Gali, Dubjan and Padpawan in Shopian, Astanpora, Thajwas Glacier, Hung Park in Ganderbal, Wullar and Watlab in Baramulla, and the tulip garden in Srinagar — are to be reopened immediately, Sinha said. Three tourist spots in the Jammu Division — Devi Pindi in Reasi, Mahu Mangat in

## EC suspends 7 WB officials for tardy work

**New Delhi:** Using its powers under the electoral law, the Election Commission has suspended seven officials, deployed as assistant electoral registration officers (AEROs) in West Bengal, with immediate effect for serious misconduct, dereliction of duty and misuse of statutory powers. These suspended officials were state government employees who were working on deputation for the EC to update the voters' list and help hold elections. Quoting orders, EC officials said the poll authority has directed state Chief Secretary Nandini Chakravarty that disciplinary proceedings be initiated against these officials by their respective cadre controlling authorities immediately, without any delay and the Commission be apprised in this regard. —PTI

## Bihar EOU launches drive against mule accounts

**Patna:** Bihar police's Economic Offences Unit (EOU) has launched a massive drive for detecting mule accounts and checking their operations by keeping a special vigil on any suspected activities by bankers and customer service centre (CSC) operators. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had recently registered an FIR against a branch head of Punjab and Sindh Bank and 17 others in this connection. During the investigation, it was found that transactions involving an amount of Rs 1,084 crore was done through 13 such accounts, opened on the basis of fake KYC documents. —Dhaceraj Kumar

## Disappointing: Cong on NGT nod to Great Nicobar project

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday termed as "deeply disappointing" the National Green Tribunal clearing the Great Nicobar project and said there is clear evidence that the project will have "disastrous ecological impacts". A six-member special bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) Monday reportedly disposed of challenges to the Great Nicobar mega infrastructure project and concluded that it found "no good ground to interfere", as there were "adequate safeguards" in the project's environmental clearance. Congress general secretary in-charge communications



Jairam Ramesh pointed out that the matter is, however, still under argument in the Calcutta High Court and said that now is the only beacon of hope. "The decision of the National Green Tribunal giving its approval to the Great Nicobar project is deeply disappointing. There is clear evi-

dence that the project will have disastrous ecological impacts," Ramesh said. "The conditions for its clearance, that the NGT draws reference to, will do little to deal with these long-term consequences. The matter is, however, still under argument in the Calcutta High Court that now is the only beacon of hope," the former environment minister said in a post on X. Ramesh further said that he has had "animated exchanges" with Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav on the project. The Congress leader shared the exchanges in which he has strongly opposed the project and demanded its scrapping.

## Kejriwal blames Congress, SAD, BJP for Punjab drug menace

CHANDIGARH

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal and the AAP-ruled Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann on Monday alleged that the opposition parties - Congress, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the BJP - had allowed the state to sink into narcotics. They claimed the AAP government is now mounting a sustained crackdown to reverse the damage. Speaking at the Village Defence Committee (VDC) oath ceremony in Moga district, AAP leaders delivered a message on Punjab's 'Yudh Nashean Virudh' (war against drugs) drive and held that for the first time in Punjab's history, a government has taken firm action against drug peddlers rather than protecting them.

## Rahul & Khera in the line of Aiyar ire

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday learnt the hard way what a double-edged sword can do when its motormouth and former union minister Mani Shankar Aiyar lashed out at various senior party leaders, including Rahul Gandhi and spokesperson Pawan Khera, for criticising him for his praise of the Pinarayi Vijayan-led Left Democratic Front government in poll-bound Kerala. Aiyar had on Sunday stoked a controversy when while speaking at an international seminar he had expressed that the Left government would return to power in the state. "I do not know whether this is a compliment or an insult, but I deeply regret the absence of my party colleagues on this occasion," he

had said, adding, "in the presence of the chief minister, who I am confident will continue in office, I renew my plea — to reinforce Kerala as the best panchayati raj state in the country." His remarks had not gone down well with the central party leadership and its media and publicity head Pawan Khera had sought to distance the party from his remarks saying Aiyar has not had any connection with the Congress for the past many years. This irked Aiyar, who reacted sharply to Khera's comments by calling him a "puppet" of party general secretary Jairam Ramesh as also a "parrot" who just speaks what he is told. The former union minister also attacked the present Congress leadership by asserting that he was a Gandhian and not a "Rahulian."

## SC questions govt on Wangchuk videos

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday questioned the Centre over the transcripts of videos cited against activist Sonam Wangchuk in his detention order under NSA. Hearing the plea moved by Wangchuk's wife Gitanjali Angmo against his detention, a Bench of Justices Arvind Kumar and PB Varale directed the Jodhpur Jail Superintendent to produce before it in a sealed cover the pen drive given by the Union

authorities to Wangchuk while he was in detention on September 29, 2025. LiveLaw and Bar and Bench reported. This was after Angmo's counsel, Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal, argued that the four videos of his speeches, which were cited by the detaining authority in the detention order, were not present in the pendrive which was handed over to Wangchuk in custody. The SC said: "The tabular list you have filed, some of these things don't even find a place in the detention order.



There should be at least the correct transcript of what he (Wangchuk) says! There should not be a variance. If the speech is of 3 minutes and your transcription goes on for 7-8 minutes, there is certainly malice in that." In response, Additional

Solicitor General KM Nataraj said: "A department did it. We are not experts in it." However, the SC said that in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the precision should be 98%, at least. During the hearing, the SC referred to an Urdu couplet: "In a lighter vein, there's this couplet humme wo bhi suna jo unhone kaha hi nahi (we even heard what they never said!)." In response, Sibal said, "Yes. Aur jo hum ke rahe hai unhone suna hi nahi (And what we are saying, they didn't hear at all!)"



# Jeweler's shop theft in Prayagraj uncovered, 4 suspects arrested 450 grams of gold, 1.8 kg of silver, and two motorcycles recovered

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** Police have successfully uncovered the theft of jewelry worth lakhs of rupees from a jewelry shop in the Cantt police station area of the city. In a joint operation by the Cantt police station, SOG Nagar, and the Surveillance Cell, four accused were arrested. 450 grams of yellow metal (gold), 1.8 kg of white metal (silver), and two motorcycles used in the crime were recovered from their possession. According to the police, on February 13, 2026, Priyanshu Verma, a resident of Ganganagar Nevada Rajapur, reported that unknown thieves had broken the shutter of his gold and silver shop and stolen the jewelry from the shop. In this case, an investigation was initiated by registering FIR No. 38/2026 under Section 331(4)/305(A) of the IPC at Cantt Police Station. Given the seri-



ousness of the incident, police teams were formed. Based on surveillance and information from informants, four accused were arrested on Monday near Kali Paltan Baba Ji's hut. During interrogation, the accused admitted that they would conduct reconnaissance of shops and

houses. At the time of the crime, an accomplice would stand outside with a vehicle and keep an eye on passers-by. They would sell the stolen goods to fund their own expenses. **Those Arrested** The arrested accused include Gaurav Kanojia alias Mukul (Meerapur, Atrasuiya), Bakridul

Sheikh alias Popo (Sahibganj, Jharkhand), Samiul Sheikh alias Chhotu (Sahibganj, Jharkhand), and Parvez Alam alias Tausif alias Nepali. All currently reside in the Karaili area. **Details of the seizure** Police recovered a total of 450 grams of gold and 1 kg 800 grams of

silver from the accused. The Hero Splendor and FZ motorcycles used in the crime were also seized. Based on the seizure, Section 317(2) of the IPC has been added to the case. **Criminal history also revealed** Police investigation revealed that some of the arrested accused

have previous cases of theft and other criminal offenses. Police say the gang was active in the city and surrounding areas. The police have described this operation, led by the Cantt Police Station in-charge, as a major success. Further legal action is being taken against the accused.

## Patriotism resonated at the annual function of Vikas Vidyalaya Ishwar Sharan Ashram, with children's performances captivating audiences

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** The annual function of Vikas Vidyalaya Ishwar Sharan Ashram, located in Salori, was held with great enthusiasm and zeal. The program began with the national anthem, after which the school campus was filled with cultural colors. A large number of teachers, students, parents, and dignitaries attended the function.

Girish Chandra Tripathi presided over the program. He said that the purpose of education should not be limited to textbooks; it is equally important to develop students' character, values, and personality. He praised the school's efforts towards the all-round development of children. Social worker and entrepreneur Ritu Kamal Agarwal, who was present as the special guest, said that the students' performances clearly reflected confidence and discipline. This is the result of the teachers' guidance and the children's hard work. In the cultural programs organized under the direction of Principal Satya Prakash Tiwari, patriotic songs, group dances, and drama performances moved the audience. The entire campus was awash in patriotic spirit. At the conclusion, the Principal expressed his gratitude to all guests and parents. Sweets were distributed to the children, and everyone pledged to continue their efforts for the unity and progress of the country.



**Adhvik, who was on his way to buy a cake with his grandfather on a bike, suffered a slit throat from Chinese thread**

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** Despite a ban, the sale and use of Chinese thread continues to pose a threat to residents in the city. On Sunday evening, two-year-old Adhvik Sonkar was on his way to buy a cake with his grandfather, Jitendra Sonkar, in the Pura Padain area of Daraganj when his throat became entangled in a sharp thread. The child narrowly escaped injury. According to the family, the bike was immediately stopped during the incident. A delay of a few seconds could have proved fatal. The child suffered minor injuries, but the family and surrounding communities are treating the incident as extremely serious. Recently, Mahendra Singh, an employee of a private finance company in Civil Lines, was injured by a similar Chinese thread. Following similar incidents in Lucknow, the administration issued strict guidelines, but the situation in Prayagraj remains the same. Danger Increases in Daraganj, Kidganj, and Khuldabad According to locals, banned manjha is being sold openly in the Daraganj, Kidganj, and Khuldabad areas. The greatest danger is posed to bike riders, children, and pedestrians. Chinese manjha is not only dangerous to humans but also proves fatal to birds. This nylon and metal-mixed thread acts like a sharp blade, which can cause serious injuries. The police and administration have appealed to the public to take strict action against the use and sale of such manjha and to immediately report any suspicious activity to the authorities.

## On court orders, a public announcement was made against the accused on the rape warrant, and a notice was declared a fugitive

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Utran.** Following court orders, police have intensified legal action against warrant/accused Praveen Patel, son of Lalji Patel, a resident of Yakubpur in the Uttaran police station area of Prayagraj. The accused is wanted in a rape case. Sub-Inspector Ravindra Kumar Yadav is investigating the case, registered in 2025 at the Uttaran police station



under sections 64(1), 110/115(2) of the IPC. The

case is pending in ACJM Chamber No. 8. In compli-

ance with court orders, a police team launched a search operation at the accused's residence and surrounding areas to arrest him. A formal public announcement was made through a speakerphone and a court notice was posted at the accused's home. According to the police, the accused is not appearing in court, due to which action is being taken under the process of declaring him a fugitive.

Investigating officer, Sub-Inspector Ravindra Yadav, has appealed to the general public that if they receive any information regarding the accused, they should immediately inform the Uttaran police station so that he can be arrested soon. He also informed that if the accused does not appear despite the court's order, then action to confiscate his property will also be taken as per the rules.

## DC Held Important Meeting and Inspection of Chand Khamaria Blackbuck Reserve, Issued Essential Instructions

**Prayagraj.** On Monday, Divisional Commissioner, Mrs. Soumya Agarwal, convened a high-level meeting at the Meja Tehsil Complex to protect, enhance, and comprehensively develop the Chand Khamaria Blackbuck Reserve. This meeting proved to be a significant step towards environmental conservation, wildlife protection, and local development. Senior officials and representatives from the Forest Department, Minor Irrigation Department, Land Reforms Department, Revenue Department, Rural Development Department, Tourism Department, ICRISAT, and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) actively participated in the meeting. The main focus of the discussion was on issues related to the establishment, expansion, and conservation of the Chand Khamaria Blackbuck Reserve. DFO of the Forest Department, Arvind Kumar Yadav, stated that the area currently encompasses 126 hectares of land, where rare wildlife such as the blackbuck are being protected. He presented detailed information on



the establishment process, details of the land involved, and progress made so far. The Divisional Commissioner issued several concrete directives at the meeting, which will accelerate the conservation and development of the area. The Revenue Department and the Meja SDM were directed to mark 126 hectares of reserved land on maps and through on-site inspections and hand it over safely to the Forest Department. Other available village community land was also directed to be identified and demarcated and submitted promptly so that the Village Development Department could construct a strong boundary around the entire area. Following the meeting, the Divisional Commissioner personally visited the Blackbuck

Reserve. During the visit, he observed roaming Blackbucks and assessed the ground situation. Based on the on-site inspection, the Divisional Commissioner directed all concerned departments to undertake the following immediate actions: construct ponds to develop water sources in the area. Ensure the construction of bunds for rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge. Develop grasslands and plant suitable trees for afforestation. The security of the entire reserved area's boundaries, including fencing, surveillance, and encroachment prevention, should be given top priority. The Divisional Commissioner clarified that these instructions must be strictly followed, and a subsequent meeting will be held soon to review progress.

## A close friend turned murderer, smashing his head with a wooden plank after a drinking party; his body found lying on the roadside

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Jhansi.** A stir erupted in Bajha Daulatpur, in the local police station area, on Sunday morning when the blood-soaked body of 24-year-old Kuldeep was found on the roadside outside his best friend's house. Based on a complaint from the deceased's father, police registered a case against four family members, including the friend, and detained two accused. Kuldeep (24), the fifth son of farmer Ramsurat, a resident of Daulatpur, was a close friend of Munna Bind, a resident of the same village. According to villagers, their friendship was so strong that they spent day and night together and often slept at Munna's house. It is reported that



both were drug addicts. They were together on Saturday night, but no one knew that this would be their last meeting. When Kuldeep's body was

found outside Munna's house on Sunday morning, there were deep wounds on his head. Upon receiving the information, ACP Daraganj Vimal Kishore

Mishra and police station in-charge Mahesh Mishra, along with forensic experts and a dog squad, began the investigation. Police found blood stains, empty liquor bottles, and glasses on the floor inside Munna's room. It is suspected that Kuldeep was repeatedly beaten to death with a wooden plank during a dispute over alcohol. Upon receiving the news of Kuldeep's death, his family erupted in grief. Father Ramsurat filed a complaint accusing Munna Bind, his brothers Pappu and Desi Bind, and his mother Babni of murder. Police have sent the body for post-mortem examination and are interrogating two named accused in custody. The station in-charge stated that the real reason for the murder will soon be revealed.

# Prayagraj DM Manish Verma conducted a surprise inspection of the Meja Health Center and BDO, issuing strict instructions for improving arrangements

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma conducted a surprise inspection of the Meja Community Health Center and Block Development Officer's office on Monday to review health facilities, infrastructure, and progress of development work. During the inspection, the District Magistrate conducted a detailed assessment of the Community Health Center's drug distribution, wards, doctor and staff attendance, functioning of medical equipment, record keeping, cleanliness, drinking water, toilets, waste management, and patient seating facilities. Expressing displeasure over the excessive stock of medicines such as iron and folic acid and Betadine in the drug distribution room, with expiry dates extending to April 2026, the District Magistrate directed the Chief Medical Officer to provide an explanation for



the delay in providing the medicines. An explanation was sought from the Medical Officer-in-Charge after outsiders were found working in the male ward. Expressing strong displeasure over the lack of

cleanliness, the lack of regular cleaning of toilets, and irregularities in garbage collection, the District Magistrate directed the hospital campus to conduct a campaign to improve the arrangements. He also

directed that steps be taken through the Block Development Officer and NTPC to ensure adequate seating and drinking water for patients. The District Magistrate also directed that the duty details of doctors

posted at the hospital be displayed on a board, details of patients admitted to the wards be displayed, and the availability of ambulances be ensured. All staff were ordered to report to duty on time. Following this, the

District Magistrate conducted a surprise inspection of the Block Development Officer's office and assessed the budget utilization and progress of development projects. Expressing displeasure over the remaining funds under the 13th Finance Commission, cowshed maintenance, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, MLA fund, Rozgar Sevak, and MNREGA, he directed that the budget be utilized promptly and efficiently. The District Magistrate also directed to complete the under-construction and non-started Anganwadi centres soon, to finish the ongoing MNREGA works in 30 villages soon and to maintain cleanliness, drinking water and sitting facilities for visitors in the office premises. On this occasion, Sub-District Magistrate Meja Surendra Yadav, District Development Officer G.P. Kushwaha, Block Development Officer and other concerned officers were present.

## A grand launch of the five-day Research Methodology course was held at NGBU



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** Addressing the inaugural session of the five-day Research Methodology course sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, at the Shashi Campus Research Centre of Nehru Gram Bharati Deemed University, Prayagraj, Chief Guest Prof. Anand Shankar Singh, Principal of Ishwar Sharan PG College, said that the process of learning is education and understanding. Expansion of knowledge is research. It is also important to consider and incorporate our holistic thinking into our research. Your research should progress while embracing Indianness. In his presidential address, University Vice Chancellor Prof. Rohit Ramesh said that such programs on research paradigms are essential for the quality of research. Researchers should have a deep understanding of research methodology. In his address, Professor Ramashankar Tripathi of Kashi Vidyapeeth stated that research methodology and paradigms cannot be underestimated, and that this workshop is crucial for faculty and researchers. Vice-

Chancellor Dr. S.C. Tiwari stated that the five-day course in research methodology will benefit students in developing research designs. Program coordinator Dr. Raghavendra Malviya delivered the welcome address. Dr. Ramesh Chandra Mishra introduced the university, and Dr. Vidhushakar Pandey introduced the program. In the inaugural session, books by Dr. Raghavendra Malviya and Dr. Sadhana Tripathi were released, and the program was conducted by Dr. Himanshu Shekhar Singh. Registrar S.S. Mishra delivered the vote of thanks. Following the inaugural session, two technical sessions were also held. The speaker of the first technical session was Prof. P.K. Pandey, Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University and the speaker of the second technical session was Dr. Sabyasachi, Dean Academic, Nehru Gram Bharati Deemed University. In the program, Dr. Alok Mishra, Dr. Shrawan Kumar, Dr. Santeshwar Mishra, Dr. Vidhu Shekhar, Dr. Shivashree Yadav, Dr. Devendra Yadav, Dr. Kiran Singh, along with research students and teachers from many universities across the country were present in large numbers and everyone played an important role in making the program successful.

## A grand divisional children's festival was held in Prayagraj, with 10 students selected as "Champions of Change"

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** The divisional children's festival, "Progress - Towards Self-Respect and Success 2.0," was organized on Monday at Adarsh Composite School, CPI Nagar area. The program was presided over by Divisional Assistant Director of Education (Basic), Sanjay Kumar Kushwaha. Chief Guest, Joint Development Commissioner Matsya Nath Trivedi, inaugurated the festival by garlanding the statue of Goddess Saraswati and lighting a lamp. Students from various districts of the division presented colorful cultural performances. Children shared their experiences through inspiring stories related to self-respect and success. Meena Manch alumni inspired the audience by narrating their stories of struggle and achievements. Parents also shared the positive changes in their children after joining Meena Manch. Five theme-based stalls were set up by master trainers of the Self-Esteem Program in Prayagraj district,



where children had the opportunity to express their dreams and creativity. District Nodal for Girls' Education, Shatrunjay Sharma, stated that "My Badlaav Ki Kahani," comic book, and poster making activities were organized at the district level. Based on the selected entries, 40 participants from all four districts of the division presented their work at the stalls. Evaluation was conducted by lecturers. Pratapgarh District Nodal Ashutosh Nirmal and Antariksh Shukla assisted in

the quiz competition. The program was conducted by Block Nodal, City Area Anuragini Singh. Block Education Officer, Divisional Headquarters, Harischandra Giri, stated that 10 students selected from each district, along with a teacher/Meena Manch facilitator and two parents, participated in the program.

Fifty students from Divisional Headquarters, Prayagraj, participated. In his presidential address, Sanjay Kumar Kushwaha stated that the selected students were

divided into five groups, and each group was given the opportunity to participate in all five stall activities in sequence. Each stall was awarded one to five points based on its performance. Based on the total points, the 10 best-performing students were selected for the state-level program as "Champions of Change." The names of these selected students have been sent to the State Project Office. The state-level "Champions of Change" program will be held at the end of February.

## Arrest of Policeman Accused of Rape Under Pretense of Marriage Stayed

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** The Allahabad High Court has granted an interim stay on the arrest of a policeman accused of raping and forcing an abortion under the pretext of marriage. It also ordered the victim and the state government to file their response within four weeks. A division bench of Justice Ajay Bhanot and

Justice Tarun Saxena issued this order. The victim, a resident of Badaun, filed an FIR at the Women's Bareilly police station on December 20, 2025, against Police Constable Akshay Kumar and his family members, alleging rape under the pretext of marriage, blackmailing by making obscene videos, forcing an abortion, and other charges. The accused filed a petition in the High Court seek-

ing quashing of the FIR and a stay on their arrest. Petitioner's lawyer, Sunil Chaudhary, argued that the victim herself admitted that she befriended the petitioner through Instagram and that they had been in a love relationship for the past two years. He argued that the victim had consensual sex and that she herself had made reels with the petitioner and uploaded them on social media.

The victim is pursuing a nursing course. She was well-informed. The petitioner did not have an abortion. The victim had arranged her marriage with someone else. When that marriage broke down, she began pressuring the petitioner to marry her and demanded five lakh rupees. However, when things did not work out, she filed an FIR against him on false charges.

## Editorial

**Amit Shah looks sure of ruling till 2049 but Team Modi is losing steam and imagination**

Amit Shah had declared at the Bharatiya Janata Party's national executive meeting in 2018 that the party will win the 2019 Lok Sabha election and "no one can dethrone the BJP for the next 50 years"—that is, till 2069. Last month, the Union Home Minister and BJP chief strategist said in the Lok Sabha that the Opposition parties would be there (on the Opposition benches) "for the next 20 years"—that is, till 2045. Let's make it 2049 because the Lok Sabha election will have taken place in 2044. It also takes into account Prime Minister Narendra Modi's goal of making India a developed country by 2047. Modi is looking to remain at the helm till 2035, at least. In his Independence Day address, he said that "in the coming 10 years, till 2035, I want to expand this (national security shield) ...strengthen it, modernise it." "I" is key here. He will be only 85 by then. And he is much fitter than Joe Biden who demitted the US President's office at 82. Mahathir Mohamad was the Prime Minister of Malaysia till he was almost 95. You may think I can't be serious. Talks of 20 or 50 years are just rhetorical, aren't they? A former BJP MP advised me not to take PM Modi's reference to 2035 seriously. "The day a leader throws a hint that he is even thinking of a retirement plan, everybody around him starts abandoning him. You can't afford to do that in politics," he explained. Maybe. What if BJP leaders truly believe what they say? How else could you explain the Modi-led government's sudden decision to bring the Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill, envisaged to unseat the Prime Minister, chief ministers, and ministers on the 31st day of their arrest or detention in custody? The PM figures in it for effect, of course. The proposed legislation places the CMs and ministers at the mercy of mostly Central investigation agencies whose track record in impartiality is better left undiscussed. These central agencies are known to often go out of their way to please the political bosses. The CMs and ministers who are not from the ruling party/coalition at the Centre have reasons to be alarmed by the proposed legislation. It is always prone to being used against the Opposition. Former Union minister Sharad Pawar recently pointed out how during the Manmohan Singh government, it was P Chidambaram who had backed the amendment in the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to put the onus to prove innocence on the accused. Pawar told Singh that it was dangerous. "If the government changes, we will also have to face consequences. But the advice was not heeded," disclosed Pawar. In 2019, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested Chidambaram in a PMLA case. He had to spend 106 days in jail before he got bail. The proposed law—Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill—can potentially be weaponized by a ruling party at the Centre (not necessarily BJP) to destabilise governments in states ruled by rival parties (the BJP, included). So, why would Shah or the BJP want to make such a law? The most conceivable answer is that the BJP doesn't see itself sitting on the Opposition benches in the Lok Sabha ever—till 2049, at least. Look at the Centre's stand on the Supreme Court setting a timeline for the governors to act on the bills passed by state assemblies. It wants the elected governments in the states to be placed at the mercy of its nominees in the Raj Bhawans. Only a party that is confident of being in power at the Centre forever would want to take such a stand. This confidence of the BJP is reflected in so many other ways—from overturning the SC's ruling to end government's control over the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioners and ECs to the alleged use of central investigative agencies to target Opposition leaders. There are many other instances. Here is the catch, though.



## Why Modi, BJP should worry about bad blood between CEC Gyanesh Kumar and Rahul Gandhi?

Amit Malviya must be a harried man as Rahul Gandhi set out on his 'Voter Adhikar Yatra' in Bihar on Sunday. Bharatiya Janata Party's social media department, headed by Malviya, is facing flak in the Right-wing ecosystem. The reason: its purported failure to counter the Opposition's narrative about the Election Commission's special intensive revision of electoral rolls in Bihar. Let's look at one such thread. Tushar Gupta, whose bio proclaims him to be "anti-Left", took to X to express his concern about the "fake news" being spread about the electoral process. "Absolutely zero resistance. ECI's press releases are not going to cut it...", he wrote. His argument was that the 18-24 age group in 2029 would be "reelers", not readers, and could be easily swung by Gandhi. "And this is exactly what he (Gandhi) is doing right now," he added. X users reacted to the thread, venting their ire on Malviya, with some even demanding his resignation as the BJP's IT cell chief. Dr Ratan Sharda, who has written several books on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), agreed with Tushar and said that Gen Z is "not clued on" to the BJP. "The communication, the enunciation, the slogans — all present a middle-aged projection of a young successful party led by the most popular PM of all times whom youth love. @BJP4India needs to reinvent its SM approach and communication," he wrote. To be fair to Malviya, headline management and narra-



tive-building aren't so easy after 11 years in power. The belligerence of the Election Commission (EC) in dealing with the Opposition isn't helping him either. "Give an oath or apologise to the nation. There is no third option," Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar said at a press conference Sunday, taking on Gandhi's 'vote theft' charge. Many Constitutional experts like former Lok Sabha Secretary General PDT Achary have rubbished the EC's demand for Gandhi's oath under Rule 20(3)(b) of the Registration of Electors Rules 1960, maintaining that it does not apply in this case. Kumar wouldn't bother. Since when has the CEC assumed the authority to instruct public representatives to apologise? Even former CEC MS Gill, who joined the Congress and went on to become a Union Minister after retirement, never demanded it from Opposition leaders as long as he helmed the EC. One may not agree with Gandhi's phraseology—from 'chowkidar chor hai (the gatekeeper is the thief)' to 'vote chori (vote theft)'. He often gets carried away, trying to bring

'earthquakes' in Indian politics. But that can't be the reason for a constitutional body to publicly berate the Leader of the Opposition. Also, it's not the first time that the EC has been accused of favouring the ruling party. After all, the fact is that the CEC was and still is essentially Prime Minister Narendra Modi's handpicked man—the ruling party's choice in that chair. After losing the South Delhi Lok Sabha seat to the Congress in the 1971 elections, Jan Sangh leader Balraj Madhok had gone to court complaining of rigging allegedly facilitated by the ruling Congress and the EC. He had alleged that the ballot papers were chemically treated and mechanically stamped to favour the Congress candidate, Shashi Bhushan. The Supreme Court dismissed his appeal. In 2002, then Gujarat Chief Minister Modi drew censure from Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee for attacking CEC JM Lyngdoh. There are myriad instances of politicians attacking the EC, but no CEC made it a personal issue until now. The body is entrusted to conduct free and fair polls, with no malice toward any party or politi-

cian. If there is bad blood and a public spat between the CEC and the Opposition leaders, it will shake the people's trust and faith in the election results. And that is the worst thing that could happen to Indian democracy. Instead of attacking Rahul Gandhi, the EC could have simply ordered an investigation into his claims of fake voters in Bengaluru's Mahadevapura—or, for that matter, the supposedly inflated number of voters in Maharashtra. It could have done a Bihar-like special intensive revision (SIR) in Mahadevapura immediately to rebut the allegations. That would have bolstered its credibility and its Bihar SIR case. BJP leader Anurag Thakur also made allegations about fake voters in the constituencies of Opposition leaders such as Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, and others. Thakur also accused them of 'vote theft'. Gandhi and Thakur were making the same disclosure—that voter lists across the country have issues. CEC Kumar hasn't reacted to Thakur's allegations yet. Fake voters' list is no news, anyway. The CEC could have thanked the Congress and BJP leaders for highlighting this issue again and used it to justify a countrywide SIR. What to speak of allegations of irregularities in Assembly or Lok Sabha elections, in the recent Delhi Constitution Club election (in which incumbent and former MPs are voters), Congress leader and former MP Brijendra Singh found to his dismay that his vote had already been cast. So did

another former MP from the BSP. It's plausible that Kumar—who was Secretary in Amit Shah's cooperation ministry—is extremely upset by Gandhi's diatribe against the Commission. The best way to deal with this would have been to invite Gandhi over for Kashmiri Kahwa, as he used to treat journalists with, and thrash it out. But Kumar has chosen to slug it out publicly with the Opposition. What must worry the BJP is the fact that the Opposition's diatribe against the EC seems to be resonating on the ground. As per a Lokniti-CSDS survey published in The Hindu on Sunday, 45 per cent of the respondents believe that genuine voters may get removed from the voters' list under the SIR, as against only 25 per cent who said 'no'. Only 60 per cent of respondents were very or somewhat confident of the EC's ability to ensure inclusivity. The survey was conducted in six states: Delhi, Assam, Kerala, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. The Lokniti-CSDS survey, as compared to its 2019 and 2024 post-poll surveys, shows declining trust in the Commission. In Assam, the number of respondents who said they have "no trust" in the EC increased from 6 per cent in 2019 to 10 per cent in 2024 and 17 per cent in 2025. In Kerala, this increased from 10 per cent in 2019 and 2024 to 24 per cent in 2025. In Madhya Pradesh, the lack of trust in the EC rose from 6 per cent in 2019 to 22 per cent in 2024 and 2025.

### After rosogolla, Odias and Bengalis fight over Mamata's Jagannath Dham

In the season of Conclave, what if a church suddenly decided to call itself Vatican — not just a tribute, but a claim to spiritual status? That's what the Mamata Banerjee government effectively did, as far as Odias are concerned, when it named the new Jagannath temple in Digha after Jagannath Dham in Puri, Odisha. For the Odias, this 'appropriation' was the last straw and has put them eyeball to eyeball with the Bengalis like never before. Why did Banerjee tread this path? If a temple was her big trip, why a Puri Jagannath lookalike and not something in the tradition of Bengal's own terracotta temples that dot Bishnupur in Bankura district? Alternatively, it could have opted for something original. Bengalis, it seems, have a peculiar fondness for replicas. During Durga Pujas, Buckingham Palaces, Golden Temples and the Pyramids pop up all over the state — pandals built with bamboo and tarpaulin to house the goddess in the festive season. But

those are temporary structures, dismantled once the pujas end. The Jagannath Temple in Digha is permanent, a silent testimony to the Bengalis' copycat gene. A few months after becoming the chief minister in 2011, Banerjee was on her way home via Newtown, parts of which today resemble Gurgaon from 50 years ago, when she suddenly halted her vehicle, got off, and stood to survey 480 acres of green dotted with waterbodies. On the spot, she declared it a park — and the next thing we know, in 2013, she was inaugurating Eco Park, a brand-new destination in Kolkata a la Victoria Memorial, or the historic Botanical Gardens with the centuries-old Banyan Tree. That wasn't the end of it. Past the tree-lined boundary came up the Pyramids of Giza, an Eiffel Tower, a Taj Mahal, a Colosseum, and even a towering Christ the Redeemer — all of them exact replicas of the originals in miniature form.

### History teaching requires revision more than textbooks

What does it mean to be a historian in India? Both of us have formally studied the subject. In the years we've spent working as public historians, we've told myriad stories of India's chequered past through heritage walks, museum trails, cultural events, podcasts, an annual journal, book reviews, articles, and social media posts. We've pored over archives and conducted on-ground research. We've also translated scholarship into language and experiences that anyone, from an academic to a casual listener, can connect with. Yet, despite this range of work, one question almost always follows when we explain what we do: "Okay, but what is your real job?" The question says as much about our profession as it does about how history itself is perceived in India. After all, how often do Indian households encourage history as a job? A base-level problem here is: how do you support the study of history when it isn't even clear what a historian does? In childhood, history may occasionally bask in the dreamy, cinematic glow of Indiana Jones and Night at the Museum. Or Bharat Ek Khoj, Akbar-Birbal adaptations, the delightfully

paradoxically, history seems to dominate our headlines. It's everywhere: in TV debates, political speeches, social media threads. Everyone, it seems, has something to say about the past. That's why the current debate on revisions matters. The problem isn't with 'updating' history. Our understanding of the past evolves as our present changes. Every historian is shaped by their time, drawing not only on the materials and theoretical bases available, but also on their own perspectives and questions. So revisions themselves aren't the issue. The real concern is how history textbooks are revised. If these changes were aimed at helping students approach the past critically, and provided them with the historian's toolkit — by introducing them to a range of sources, perspectives, and debates — then they would be fruitful. Our NCERT textbooks have been subject to regular revisions, with new theories and ideas inserted alongside scholars' evolving approaches to history. This exercise is necessary, so long as the emphasis remains on updations that accurately convey the latest reflections on continuities.

gory Horrible Histories, and Amar Chitra Katha. In adulthood, though, it either fades into collective amnesia, gets wrapped in nostalgia, or turns into a battlefield of contested claims. Where is the middle ground where we carry forward that childlike curiosity, tempered with adult discernment, to engage with the past with the depth and nuance it deserves? A polarising debate has recently been sparked after yet another round of revisions in NCERT history textbooks. But more than textbooks, history teaching requires revision. What do you remember from your history classes? For most, the answers fall into familiar buckets: rote learning of names, dates, dynasties, and wars. There was little room to explore the texture of lived experience, or to ask: how can this subject help me become a better thinker, a more reflective human? The discipline was frozen in time, and with it, many of us felt we too were trapped — learning about the past in a way that felt wholly disconnected from the present, let alone the future. This is part of the reason historical studies aren't seen as foundations for sustainable careers. But

### GST reform is pointless if it doesn't simplify tax slabs

Over the last few days, there have been extensive discussions on the prospects of reforming India's Goods and Services Tax (GST). An important element of the proposed reform is to reduce the present 4-rate structure to a 3-rate one. There could be several objectives behind such a reform. Simplification of the tax structure is an obvious one. Revenue mobilisation could be another, as simpler tax structures are easy to administer and improve compliance. The third is to provide a stimulus to the economy, which is presently dealing with significant uncertainty. I am young enough to be excit-

ed by the prospects of tax reforms, but old enough to know better. More so, given my prior experience in trying to understand the GST. Popular perception suggests there are just four GST tax slabs: 5, 12, 18, and 28 per cent. Why so many slabs for an indirect tax? Because somehow Indian policymaking believes in the progressivity of taxes—even for consumption goods. A lesser-known reality of the GST is that it has a total of eight tax slabs, excluding the exemptions. These start at 0.25 and go all the way up to 28 per cent. Tax rates of 0.25, 1.5, 3 and 7.5 per cent apply to just 1.5 per cent of total

goods traded in India. Some sectors, such as construction services, have six different applicable tax rates ranging from 0 to 18 per cent. The sheer complexity of India's present GST, even after nine years of existence, should be reason enough for an urgent reform. A major issue with the GST's present structure is the pervasive use of end-use exemptions. That is, for certain items, a GST rate is applicable — but if the goods are used for a specific purpose, then there is no GST on the item. Therefore, the same item has two different tax slabs depending on the buyer and end-use of the item.

Moreover, it creates room for rent-seeking, as many would exploit the tax arbitrage introduced by having a 0 per cent and 18 per cent tax rate as applicable on the same goods. Administering such exemptions is excessively costly and goes against the spirit of a self-enforcing tax such as the GST. A comprehensive reform would do away with such end-use exemptions and identify a specific list of items, such as food — irrespective of whether packaged, processed, or prepared in a restaurant — to be classified as exempt. Similar exemptions could be extended to certain kinds of insurance.

## A competition in India is now Rapido, not Ola, according to Uber's CEO

Delhi : In

Bengaluru, According to Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi, Rapido has surpassed Ola in India and is now the company's most formidable rival. Our primary rival in the past was Ola. At this point, Rapido is the more formidable rival in India. They entered the two-wheeler and three-wheeler markets with a zero-commission subscription model in a robust way. Very flimsy too. In an interview with Zerodha co-founder Nikhil Kamath that was released on Sunday, he mentioned that Ola is currently in third place. Khosrowshahi stated that Uber views India as a crucial market. With over 1.4 million drivers spanning vehicles, two-wheelers, three-wheelers, and cars, the country has surpassed all others to become the third-largest in the world according to the company's trip count. "India is a must win for Uber, not just tomorrow, but ten years



from now," stated the CEO. Khosrowshahi credited Rapido's early success to the company's subscription model, which allowed drivers to keep more of their money. However, he did mention that Rapido was "not making money" and that the company's ability to grow financially will be evaluated. "We've got a lot of respect for them and we intend to compete really hard," according to him. The CEO of Uber pondered the larger realm of fast commerce and mobility, telling entrepreneurs not to be paralyzed by concern over market size. "Successful businesses are constantly changing to stay ahead.

### PM to inaugurate SEMICON India 2025

Delhi : The administration boasted that the fourth edition of SEMICON India 2025, which has grown double the size of last year's edition, will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on September 2. New Delhi's Yashobhoomi (IICC) will host the gathering from September 2-4, 2025. Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, and South Korea will all have their very own pavilions during SEMICON India. The United States, Malaysia will each host one of six country-specific roundtables. The number of states

## Starting operations with iPhone 17 manufacture, Foxconn's B'luru unit

Delhi: According to individuals familiar with the matter, the Bengaluru facility of the Taiwanese electronics company Foxconn has recently started operations with small-scale manufacture of the iPhone 17. With an investment of \$2.8 billion (about Rs 25,000 crore), Foxconn was established at Devanahalli near Bengaluru, becoming the second-biggest plant outside of China and the largest assembler of iPhones.

The manufacturing of the iPhone 17 has begun at the



Foxconn Bengaluru factory. This is on top of what its Chennai unit is already producing, according to a source familiar with the matter.

Neither Apple nor Foxconn responded to an email seeking comment on the matter.

Hundreds of Chinese engineers returned suddenly, briefly halting operations. Nevertheless,

Foxconn has managed to fill the void by enlisting the help of specialists from a variety of locations, including Taiwan.

## DOT Is Waiting for PMO's Decision on Vodafone Idea Relief Options

Delhi: In what could be a lifeline for the faltering telecom provider, the Department of Telecommunications (DOT) has proposed multiple relief alternatives for Vodafone Idea. This comes at a time when the firm is encountering serious financial difficulties

due to the intense competition in the Indian telecom industry. It is clear that the government is cognizant of the dire condition facing one of India's leading telecom companies, Vodafone Idea, because the DOT has taken action to propose relief measures for

them. Although the details of the potential relief options have not been revealed, it is anticipated that they will try to alleviate the financial strain on the corporation. PMO will now decide whether or not to provide Vodafone Idea any kind of help.

## Expect price cuts for SUVs and sedans as a result of 40% GST cut

Delhi : With the goods and services tax (GST) set to drop from its current level of up to 50% to a suggested 40%—the slab for luxury and sin items—price reductions are likely to affect not only tiny automobiles and two-wheelers, but also large sedans and SUVs. The possibility that the GST Council would impose a new tax on luxury cars is another source of concern. In addition to the 40% tax, several states wanted a cess at the ministerial panel conference on rate rationalization. Sedans and SUVs with



engine capacities above a specific level and length exceeding four meters are currently subject to a cess of 22% and a GST of 28%. Following hints that the Centre is keen on a flat 40% levy on a handful

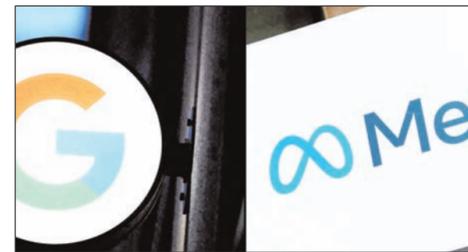
of sin and luxury products without a cess, the GST Council, headed by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, will make a final rate decision next month.

### Another setback causes Oyo to postpone IPO plans

Delhi: Due to pushback from SoftBank and the unpredictable stock market this year, Oyo Hotels has decided to postpone its October IPO. Sources close to the situation say that SoftBank has expressed concerns about the planned timeframe and has asked Oyo to delay an IPO until its earnings are more stable. With investor appetite for risk dwindling due to Trump's trade policies, Oyo encounters a bleak market in its third attempt to go public since 2021. While Oyo founder Ritesh Agarwal indeed owns more than 30% of the company.

## Meta signs over \$10 billion cloud deal with Google

Delhi : The news comes after Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg's comments in July that the company would spend hundreds of billions of dollars to build several massive AI data centers. The company raised the bottom end of its annual capital expenditures forecast by \$2 billion, to a range of \$66 billion to \$72 billion last month. Meta is seeking outside partners to help it fund the massive infrastructure needed to power AI by offloading \$2 billion



in data center assets, the company disclosed in a filing earlier this month. In June, Reuters reported that OpenAI was planning to add Alphabet's Google Cloud service to meet its growing needs for computing capacity, a surprising collaboration

between two prominent competitors in the artificial intelligence sector. Amid this flurry of deals, Google parent's cloud-computing unit delivered an almost 32% jump in second-quarter revenue in July, which surpassed expectations.

## The president signs off on an online gaming bill, and regulations will soon be drafted

Delhi : An announcement states that the comprehensive prohibition on internet gambling in India was signed into law by President Droupadi Murmu after the bill passed the parliament in a record-breaking three days. Both the Lok Sabha and the Senate had already approved the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, 2025 and the president gave his assent to the bill, as reported on the Rashtrapati Bhavan website and by a spokesperson for the Ministry of



Electronics and Information Technology (Meity). Dream11, MPL, and PokerBaazi are among the popular apps that are banned under the new rule, which takes a two-pronged approach by restricting real-money gaming and while supporting e-Sports and online social gaming.

Online money gaming services, including their offering, operation, facilitation, advertising, and financial transactions, are prohibited. According to Minister Ashwini Vaishnav's statement in Parliament, over the past few years, these kinds of games have cost around 450 million gamers ₹20,000 crore.

## Sale of IDBI Bank nears as LIC obtains Sebi approval

Delhi : Sebi has approved Life Insurance Corporation's reclassification as a public shareholder from IDBI Bank's promoter after the sale. The RBI's approval is contingent on LIC's voting rights being capped at 10%, no board representation or



influence over the bank's business, and lowering its holding to 15% or less within

two years of the deal closing. Dipam informed LIC of Sebi's decision after the Cabinet's 2021 strategic disinvestment in IDBI Bank. UAE NBD received an RBI license to operate a wholly owned subsidiary in India, sparking rumors that it will

acquire IDBI bank. "We acquired up to 51% of IDBI Bank because their recapitalization provided an opportunity," stated LIC chairman R Doraiswamy. Currently 49.2%. The government and LIC will sell part of our interest during

## Buyers anticipate GST and price cuts as holiday retail sales take a nosedive

Delhi : Though the news of a decrease in the goods and services tax (GST) has brought joy to consumers and businesses alike, it has also created an unusual dilemma for brick-and-mortar and online stores. According to businesses, festive demand, which typically starts with the Ganesh holiday in Maharashtra and Onam in the south, is being subdued while consumers wait for the GST rates to truly decrease, leading to a decline in retail prices. In the days



leading up to Dussehra and Diwali, the festive opening is typically a very busy time, so this is causing us concern. Companies selling automobiles and consumer products, as well as retailers, are sitting on

their hands until a decision is made on the ground, due to the news of a GST rate cut and the imminent fall in retail prices. Stores selling white goods, such as televisions, air conditioners, and dishwash-

### Get ready to travel the world with Indian Ports Global!

Delhi: The consortium plans to buy and run twenty ports in various parts of the world, including India, Africa, and Asia. The Indian government-owned Indian Ports Global Ltd is spearheading a consortium that plans to buy and administer

twenty ports across Asia, Africa, and India, according to two sources familiar with the situation. The Iranian firm that runs the famous Chabahar terminal is looking to expand into other ports in the Indian subcontinent.

ers, have the same challenge. Customers are already contacting us in droves to find out when they may expect to see price reductions. According to the CEO of

a leading consumer products company, buyers are now saying they will wait for the price cut before taking delivery.

### 'Mujhe abhi bhi iss desh mein rehna hai...'

Taapsee Pannu is one actress who has always been vocal about her political views. During an interview with TV9, when she was asked to choose her favourite politician between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi, the actress surprised everyone by choosing PM Modi.

She chose the Prime Minister and said, "Mujhe abhi bhi iss desh mein rehna hai (I still have to live in this country (sic))." Well, her answer has grabbed everyone's attention, and the clip from the video has gone viral on social media.

In the same interview, Taapsee was asked to choose her favourite female politician from Mamta Banerjee, Smriti Irani, Mayawati, and Priyanka Gandhi. She initially took Sushma Swaraj's name, but when asked to choose from the given options, the actress chose Smriti Irani.

# The brutal reality of the number 80

After *Mulk* and *Thappad*, Anubhav Sinha and Taapsee Pannu have teamed up for the third time for the film, *Assi*



**TITLE:** *Assi*

**DIRECTOR:** Anubhav Sinha

**CAST:** Taapsee Pannu, Kani Kusruti

**WHERE TO WATCH:** In theatres near you

**RATING:** ★★★★★

The film revolves around Parima (Kani Kusruti), a teacher who stays in Delhi with her husband Vinay (Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub) and son Dhruv (Advik Jaiswal). One night, while coming home from a party at school, five men abduct her in a car, rape her, and then throw her on the railway tracks. In the morning, a man spots her and takes her to the hospital. The

rape accused are arrested, and the case goes into court. Raavi (Taapsee Pannu) is representing Parima in the court. So, will Parima get justice?

*Assi* is written by Anubhav Sinha and Gaurav Solanki, and Sinha has directed the movie. It is a fictional story, but it is something that we read and hear in the news, mostly every other day. Sinha has made a very realistic film. The first scene of the movie itself is so disturbing that you will understand how difficult it will be to watch the movie further.

The makers of the film have shown that every 20 minutes, a rape is reported in the country, and on the day Parima was raped, there were 80 rape complaints filed. During the movie,

every 20 minutes, a slate comes on screen, and we are reminded that while we are in a theatre watching *Assi*, a rape has been reported outside.

*Assi* has scenes that will leave you disturbed. Even though it is not a horror film, some scenes will send a shiver down your spine. The movie

showcases how the life of the rape survivor and her family changes after the incident. Some scenes are shown from her child's point

of view, and they are heartbreaking. This is not a dramatic courtroom drama, but a very realistic film. As soon as the lawyers raise their voices, the judge quickly reminds them to maintain decorum.

While the film mainly concentrates on the rape case, there's a sub-plot about Chatri Man, which doesn't impress. Also, the pace is a bit slow.

impresses us a lot with his performance. It is not an easy character, but the cute kid has performed very well.

Supporting actors like Manoj Pahwa, Satyajit Sharma, Kumud Mishra, Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub, Naseeruddin Shah, Supriya Pathak, Seema Pahwa, and Jatin Goswami are good in their respective roles.

#### Music

After *Mardaani 3* and *Tu Yaa Main*, this is the third film in a row whose background score has turned out to be fantastic. Ranjit Barot's background music is very impressive in *Assi*.

Overall, *Assi* is a hard-hitting and disturbing film. It reminds us that even in 2026, one of the biggest issues in our country is women's safety. *Assi* does not entertain, but it gives you a reality check that hits hard.



## SNIPPETS

### Kanye West's India debut



Grammy-winning artist Kanye West is all set to make his first-ever debut in India this year. In a groundbreaking moment for the country's growing concert culture, Ye, formerly known as Kanye West, will perform his maiden show in India. The mastermind behind iconic hip-hop albums and hits like *Through the Wire*, *Stronger*, *Heartless*, and *Runaway* will set Delhi on fire with his electrifying performance, further proving

his influence across countries and genres. The 48-year-old artist will perform at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium on March 29. Tickets for the rapper's show will go live via District by Zomato on February 18 at 4 PM, though prices have not been announced yet.

### Hrithik calls for 'stricter' safety measures

Bollywood actor Hrithik Roshan reacted to the tragic metro pillar collapse in Mumbai that claimed one life and left several others injured. Hrithik wrote on his Instagram, "Heartbreaking and traumatic. My condolences to the family of the deceased and prayers for the speedy recovery of those injured. I commend the swift action taken by the authorities to ensure accountability, but the need for safety checks and prevention of such accidents is a priority, especially with all the development work going on across Mumbai, on the busiest streets."



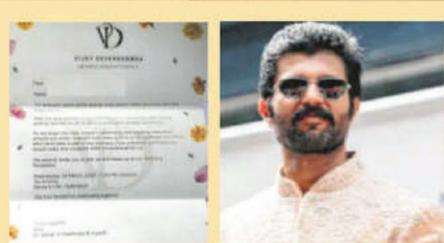
### Dua Lipa's 'naked dress'

This Valentine's Day, Dua Lipa swapped candlelit dinners for flashing cameras as she stepped out at the 2026 Berlinale Film Festival with fiancé Callum Turner, and together, they delivered peak red carpet romance. The couple attended the premiere of Turner's upcoming film *Rosebud Pruning*, directed by Karim Aïnouz, and let's just say: all eyes were on them.

For the evening, Dua leaned all the way into the naked dressing trend with a custom Chanel creation. The body-contouring gown featured an intricate open-knit crochet construction that revealed just enough while maintaining couture-level sophistication.



# Vijay-Rashmika Wedding Card leaked?



Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda are all set to get married soon. Now, a wedding card has gone viral, claiming to be the wedding invitation. The card reads that the couple will get married in an intimate wedding ceremony on February 26, and the wedding reception will take place on March 4 in Hyderabad.

The card read, "I'm writing to share some special news and to invite you to be part of a huge moment. With the love and blessings of our families, Rashmika and I will be getting married on 26.02.26 in a small and intimate ceremony. As we begin this new chapter-celebrating and creating memories around our union-it would truly mean a lot to us to celebrate with those who have been a part of our journeys. Your presence and blessings would make this occasion even more special for us."

It further read, "We warmly invite you to join us and bless us at our Wedding Reception, Wednesday, 04 March, 2026 | 7:00 PM onwards Taj Krishna Banjara Hills, Hyderabad. We look forward to celebrating together. Warm regards, Vijay (on behalf of Rashmika & myself)."



## What's Up Mumbai!

### Nrityagurukul 2026

*Vakrākāra* reflects on the curved geometry that defines Odissi. Through its unfolding arc, the production examines the relationship between discipline, repetition and artistic becoming. The same evening features *Vajragovinda-dāśāvātāram*. Drawing from Jayadeva's *Daśāvātāra* and interpretive traditions of the *Natya Shastra*, the work explores the evolution of consciousness through movement, voice and embodied expression, presenting a rarely seen approach to *Marga Nritya*.

**WHERE:** NCPA, Nariman Point

**WHEN:** February 17, 6:30 pm



# From Hollywood to Bollywood

Composer Prateek Rajagopal opens up on his Bollywood debut

Film composer-producer Prateek Rajagopal, who is based in Los Angeles, has been part of franchises such as *The Mandalorian*. He recently made his Bollywood debut with Bejoy Nambiar's *Tu Yaa Main*, starring Shreya Kapoor and Adarsh Gourav, which is currently running in theatres.

He opens up about his musical journey and his experience working in the Indian film industry. **Excerpts:**

**Until now, your experience has been in Hollywood. How different was it working in Bollywood?**

So it's been actually really good. I've had a really good experience. And, you know, that's really testament to the team at *Tu Yaa Main*. So, Color Yellow, the producers, Harini, and then, of course, most importantly, Bejoy Nambiar. It's just been such a joy working with people who are very open-minded to new ideas, to

experimenting, to even hiring someone like me, who they're like, wait, we don't want the typical, background score composer. We want somebody who can bring a different kind of an edge and thinking to the movie. And so it was actually a really pleasant experience, even though it was just a two-and-a-half-month deadline. I was kind of happy to do everything. It was a lot of work, but it was very fulfilling, for sure.

**Background scoring is a very crucial element in any kind of story telling, be it a film or web series. Why do you think film composers have not received enough recognition in India?**

I think that's because India is very song-dominated whereas the rest of the world, I think, the concept of songs is more like needle drops. Whereas the songs in Indian films, like songs, you build traditionally, you would build the background score out of the DNA of the songs. So it's like the complete opposite of the West. And I think because of that, it's way easier to identify a song versus a score and sometimes that is the point of, background music is to have a score that's



Prateek was part of *The Mandalorian*

little bit, elevate the story a little bit. But it's extremely important, like you said, and so I think, now people are becoming more aware. And I would, I'd say after, truly, I think after Hans Zimmer and Chris Nolan's, their collaboration blew up, you know, with the whole, like all of Chris Nolan's movies, is when people started to realize, oh, Hans Zimmer is becoming like this household name.

**What was your creative process for *Tu Yaa Main*?**

So for *Tu Yaa Main*, I had three

people, Anthony Baldino, who I've worked with before as a part of Ludwig Göransson's camp. He did a little bit of sound, musical sound design for me. And I kind of give him direction and "I'm like, hey, can you do this, just make it kind of strange and abstract". And I'll give him some direction. And then I had Jose and Isaac, a violin, viola and cello player. And they basically, so Jose plays violin and viola and Isaac plays cello. And I told them to create a bunch of interesting loops for me. And I just took that, took all of this material, I processed it. I tried to give it its own sonic voice and create a sound bank of my own. So I like to do that. And I love writing themes even before I see any-

thing. And that's what happened with this movie where Bijoy asked for a bunch of ideas and themes and I wrote a lot of ideas and he kept filtering it down. And all of that made it into a movie. So, that's where you, it's like reading from a script you channel. Sort of like you get ideas like reading a book, or writing an album. It's when you see lyrics, you're like, oh, okay, cool, I'm going to build a sonic world around this concept. And then you come up with more interesting ideas. So that's what I like to do a lot.



## Briefs

## Don repeats Indo-Pak war stopped claim

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

## Cannot be shared: Nobel Committee

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

## Six killed in Mississippi, suspect held

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

## Porn content? Indonesia blocks Grok

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

## Russian oil depot hit by Kyiv drone

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

## Fighting resumes in Aleppo after ceasefire collapses

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

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

### Don: Repair Venezuela's rotting energy industry

WASHINGTON

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

He was flanked by top executives from Exxon Mobil, ConocoPhillips, Chevron and others. "We are going to be making the decision as to which oil companies are going to go in. One of the things the US gets out of this will be even lower energy prices," the Republican president said. Companies including Chevron, Vitol and Trafigura are competing for US licences to market Venezuela's existing crude oil, but oil majors are hesitant to commit to big, longer-term investments due to high costs and political instability. CEO Darren

## CUBA PREPS FOR AFTERSHOCKS

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

## Another ICE case clip brings fresh scrutiny

MINNEAPOLIS

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

The Minneapolis killing and a separate shooting in Portland, Oregon, a day later by Border Patrol have set off protests in multiple cities and denunciations of immigration enforcement tactics by the US government. The reaction to the shooting has been focused on witness cellphone video. A new, 47-second video published online by a Minnesota-based conservative news site, Alpha News, and reposted on social media by DHS shows the shooting from the perspective of ICE officer Jonathan Ross, who fired the shots. Sirens blaring in the background, he approaches and circles Good's vehicle in the middle of the road while filming on his cellphone. At the same time, Good's wife was recording the encounter and can be seen walking around and approaching the officer. A series of exchanges occurred: "That's fine, I'm not mad at you," Good says as the officer passes by her door. She has one hand on the steering



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

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

Woods said Exxon sees Venezuela as currently "uninvestable" and needs to see significant changes to return there. "We have had our assets seized there twice, and so you can imagine to reenter a third time would require significant changes," he said. "You have total safety. You are dealing with us directly and not dealing with Venezuela at all. We don't want you to deal with Venezuela," Trump said. Exxon and ConocoPhillips departed Venezuela nearly 20

years ago after their assets were nationalised. Chevron Vice Chairman Mark Nelson said the company is committed to investments in Venezuela. Chevron is the only US oil major still operating in the country. "You know, these are not babies," Trump said of the oil industry executives. "These are people that drill oil in pretty rough places. I can say a couple of those places make Venezuela look like a picnic." Other companies repre-

## NICARAGUA NABS US 'SUPPORTERS'

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

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

DHAKA

As violence against minorities continues to mount across Bangladesh, another Hindu man died after consuming poison over a debt of 500 Bangladeshi Taka in Dirai upazila of Sunamganj district, local media reported. The deceased, **Joy Mohapatra**, 19, died on Friday morning while undergoing treatment at MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital in Sylhet. Citing the deceased's cousin, Ayan Das, Bangladesh Bengali media outlet Sylhet View 24 reported Joy had purchased a mobile phone for 5,500 Taka from grocery shopkeeper Amirul Islam. He



paid 2,000 Taka cash and agreed to pay the balance in weekly installments of 500 Taka. Although he made the payments regularly, the final installment was delayed. It is alleged Joy went to Amirul Islam's shop on Thursday to pay the installment but was beaten up, humiliated and had his mobile phone seized. Ayan said Joy admitted to consuming poison on Thursday evening. He was

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

**Karachi/Islamabad:** Pakistan and the US are holding 2-week-long joint anti-terrorism exercises at a counter terrorism centre in the Punjab province, it was announced on Saturday. The 13th Pakistan-US bilateral joint exercise, "Inspired Gambit-2026", began on Friday, the military's media wing said. The manoeuvres are taking place at the National Counter Terrorism Centre in Pabbi town of the Kharian district, the Inter-Services Public Relations said. Meanwhile, Pakistan Navy successfully test-fired a surface-to-air missile during an exercise in the North Arabian Sea. It live-fired the LY-80 (N) surface-to-air missile from the vertical launching system at extended range, showing "operational readiness and combat preparedness", a release said. Further, the Pakistan army said Iraq has expressed "keen interest" in JF-17 Thunder fighter jets and Mushshak training aircraft. —PTI

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

AMSTERDAM

A Dutch couple had their marriage annulled after the person officiating used a ChatGPT-generated speech intended to be playful but failed to meet legal requirements, as per a court ruling, Reuters reported. The couple from the city of Zwolle, whose names were redacted from the January 5 decision under Dutch privacy

rules, argued they had intended to marry regardless of whether the right wording was used when they took their vows. According to the decision, the person officiating their ceremony last April 19 asked if they would "continue supporting each other, teasing each other and embracing each other, even when life gets difficult." The pair said "I do" and the officiant declared them "not only husband and wife, but

above all a team, a crazy couple, each other's love and home base". But the judge found they had not actually sworn to fulfil their marriage duties — something that is required under Dutch law. "The court understands that the date in the marriage deed is important to the man and woman, but cannot ignore what the law says." It ordered the marriage removed from the Zwolle city registry.

## 'Protesters enemies of God'

Iranian regime warns of death penalty in crackdown

DUBAI

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

With the internet down in Iran and phone lines cut off, gauging the demonstrations from abroad has grown more difficult. But the death toll in the protests has grown to at least 65 people killed and over 2,300 others detained, according to the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency. Iranian state TV is reporting on security force casualties while portraying control over the nation. Iran escalated its threats against demonstrators, with the country's attorney general warning that anyone taking part in protests will be considered an "enemy of God", a death-penalty charge.

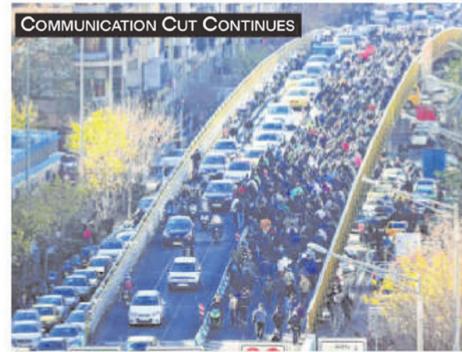
The comments by Iran's attorney general Mohammad Movahedi Azad were reported by Iranian state TV. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has signalled a coming clampdown, despite US warnings.

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

## TV SPLIT-SCREEN

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

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



COMMUNICATION CUT CONTINUES

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

Donald Trump, US President

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Blow as judge blocks Trump's polls order

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

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

"Today's ruling is a huge vic-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



period in recent weeks.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Briefs

**KOLKATA**  
Clinical  
England seal  
Super 8 berth



Will Jinks delivered a fiery all-round performance as England overcame a spirited Italian fightback to beat them by 24 runs and seal their Super Eights berth, in their T20 World Cup Group C clash at Eden Gardens, here on Monday. Opting to bat, England rode on Jinks' scintillating unbeaten 53 off just 22 balls (4x6, 3x4) to pile up 202 for 7 -- their first 200-plus total of this edition. In reply, debutants Italy put up a spirited display and threatened twice in the chase through Ben Manenti's breathtaking assault.

**NEW DELHI**  
Omarzai's all-round heroics seal Afg win



All-rounder Azmatullah Omarzai delivered a match-winning performance, claiming four wickets before smashing an unbeaten 40 to guide Afghanistan to a five-wicket victory over United Arab Emirates in their must-win T20 World Cup clash here on Monday. The win opened Afghanistan's account in the tournament and kept their slim Super Eight hopes alive in Group D. It also confirmed South Africa's place in the next round as they occupy the top spot with six points.

**CHENNAI**  
NZ seek Super Eight berth against Canada



New Zealand will look to address the frailties exposed by South Africa and reaffirm their status as title contenders by sealing a Super Eight berth when they face bottom-placed Canada in their final Group D fixture of the T20 World Cup here on Tuesday. Having played a five-match T20 series in India just before the World Cup, the Black Caps entered the tournament fairly acclimatised to subcontinental conditions.

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**ISHAN KISHAN** | The flamboyant stroke-maker had the finest hour of his rising career against Pakistan on Sunday

## Man who stayed in the present, then and now

NEW DELHI

There is a famous Asha Bhoshle number from 1960 Bollywood blockbuster 'Waqt' which certainly won't be on Ishan Kishan's playlist.

"Aage bhi jaane na tu, peeche bhi jaane na tu, jo bhi hai bas yahi ek pal hai."

But the lines do resonate with how the 27-year-old from Patna turned his career around from a point when Indian cricket ecosystem was about to give up on him.

Rishabh Pant had made a comeback into T20 World Cup winning team, there was Dhruv Jurel doing well, the forever present Sanju Samson and the street-smart Jitesh Sharma, everyone had something to offer.

If someone is as low as number five in pecking order, where did it leave Kishan? A flamboyant stroke-maker who couldn't actually take the boredom and stress of living out of a suitcase without knowing where the next chance would come from.

In a day and age where mental health issues are no longer considered a taboo, Kishan wanted a break as he was emotionally spent and needed rejuvenation. All he got was a selectorial snub where his central contract was cancelled and he was deemed not serious about playing domestic cricket.

"It started the very next day when he people literally assumed that he is not serious about his cricket, he doesn't want to play domestic cricket. All sorts of things were being written and he never reacted, just kept a smile and worked hard, because.

"To live in present is difficult



India's Ishan Kishan arrives at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport ahead of the match against Netherlands. PTI

but he did that as process became sacrosanct for him," Anshumat Srivastava, his best friend, someone who has been like a family relived the last two years.

"What you see today against Pakistan is a result of process that he started following two years ago. Runs are just a byproduct of that process," said Anshumat, who has been a silent witness to his daily grind, away from the prying

eyes.

Along with the India batter, Anshumat is also a co-founder of the Ishan Kishan Cricket Academy in Patna.

Whether Anshumat, who played collegiate tennis in the United States or Kishan's father Pranav Pandey or his doctor brother Raj Kishan, everyone formed a cordon around the talented southpaw -- a cocoon that had love, security and care that he

To live in present is difficult but he did that as process became sacrosanct for him

— Anshumat Srivastava, Ishan's best friend

needed in that comeback journey.

Kishan's entire routine changed.

He started meditation for better concentration. On his father Pranav's insistence, he started reading Bhagavad Gita.

On the training front, he would go to his academy twice a day to do his skills training. He employed his own chef, who took care of nutrition as he avoids eating hotel food. The sleeping patterns and rest was well monitored.

While Kishan didn't say anything public, the questions about his commitment to Indian cricket must have hurt him.

"During the time he took that break, he was tired and spent, he needed that break. His commitment to Indian cricket was questioned and he dealt with it in his own way.

"It was never like I have to make these many runs in Ranji, these many in SMAT or Hazare Trophy, even in NZ series and in domestic cricket, his average has been fabulous."

Ishan is a fun-loving guy and a people's person, who loves his near and dear ones around him.

Anshumat travelled to Colombo to not just watch the Pakistan game but to also be around his "brother".

"He loves to crack a joke, share a good laugh and keep things light around the group," he added.

## Axar: India's 'Everyday Hero' silently killed Pakistan chase

The left-arm spinner's celebration was triggered by realisation that he had all but ended Pakistan's hopes

COLOMBO

Axar Patel stood with his hands stretched, a smile beaming across his face. He just had Pakistan batter Usman Khan stumped by Ishan Kishan by a mile for 44.

The dismissal reduced Pakistan to 73 for five, signalling a realistic end to their chase of 176 in the high-voltage T20 World Cup match on Sunday.

From a match perspective, the left-arm spinner's celebration was perhaps triggered by the realisation that he had all but ended Pakistan's hopes.

But it could also have been something deeply personal.

Usman had smashed Axar for six boundaries in his 34-ball innings, including back-to-back fours on two occasions.

However, the critical moment of his dismissal was hardly dramatic.

There was no magic like what Kuldeep Yadav or Varun Chakravarty routinely conjure up -- a big rip from outside the off-stump or a missile that darts past the batter in a flash.

But then Axar has never been a sorcerer like them.

Even on helpful pitches like the one at the Premadasa, shrewd variations of length stemming out of his sharp observatory powers makes him a formidable customer.

Axar pulled his length back by just that bit, preempting Usman's shimmy. The Pakistan wicketkeeper batter could only swish in hope and Kishan did the rest with ease from behind the stumps.

Axar explained his method.

"Basically, what was happening on the wicket, the odd ball was skidding a little more, and some other balls were spinning more. When we



India's Axar Patel with skipper Suryakumar Yadav, celebrates the wicket of Pakistan's Usman Khan. ANI

Basically, what was happening on the wicket, the odd ball was skidding a little more, and some other balls were spinning more. When we came to bowl in the second innings, I realised that the new ball was skidding a little more

**Axar Patel, India spinner**

came to bowl in the second innings, I realised that the new ball was skidding a little more," Axar said in the post-match press conference.

"So the plan is to observe what the batsman wants to do, in which area he wants to target me.

After that I change my line or length. And the second dismissal (Usman) happened when he was stepping out. So I again went for my length. So, yeah, I plan like that," he added.

A few minutes earlier, Axar also snapped an edgy 16-minute stay of Babar Azam. Sensing the Babar's grow-

ing impatience, the 32-year-old slipped in a fuller delivery on the off-stump and the former Pakistan captain took the bait.

A wild slog sweep intended to release the mounting pressure ended in Babar losing his stumps.

"He has always been a kid with a big heart. His biggest asset is his ability to observe, and put those observations into practice. He clearly knows what are his strengths and what are his limitations. It is a good quality to have for sportspersons," tells Amrith Patel, childhood coach of Axar.

## Nissanka's brilliant hundred powers SL into Super Eights

Lankan opener smashes 100 off 52 balls as the co-hosts beat Australia by eight wickets to go through

PALLEKELE

Pathum Nissanka's epic hundred ensured Sri Lanka breezed through to the Super Eights beating Australia by eight wickets in their ICC Men's T20 World Cup Group B clash, here on Monday.

Chasing a tough 182 for victory, the Lankans romped home at 184/2 in 18 overs.

Nissanka's ton came off 52 balls and comprised 10 fours and five sixes at a strike rate of 192.30.

Kusal Mendis' chipped in with a half-century as well scoring 51 in 38 balls with six fours and a six.

Earlier, skipper Mitchell Marsh and Travis Head blazed away to explosive fifties before Sri Lanka rallied to bowl out Australia for 181 in their T20 World Cup match here on Monday. Coming back into the playing XI after missing the team's first two matches of the tournament due to an injury, Marsh got into the act straightaway, clobbering 54 in 27 balls.

### Scoreboard

**Australia:** M Marsh lbw Hemantha 54, T Head c P Mendis b Hemantha 56, C Green st K Mendis b Wellalage 3, T David c Hemantha b P Mendis 6, J Inglis c Wellalage b Chameera 27, G Maxwell c Nissanka b Hemantha 22, M Stoinis c Theekshana b Chameera 4, C Connolly c Perera b Theekshana 3, X Bartlett (run out) 0, N Ellis (not out) 0, A Zampa (run out) 1. **Extras** (NB-1, W-4) 5. **Total** (all out, 20 overs) 181

**Fall of wickets:** 1-104, 2-110, 3-116, 4-130, 5-160, 6-174, 7-177, 8-180, 9-180

**Sri Lanka's Pathum Nissanka plays a shot during the match against Australia.** —PTI



**Bowling:** D Chameera 4-0-36-2, M Theekshana 4-0-37-1, M Pathirana 0-4-0-3-0, D Shanaka 1.2-0-16-0, D Hemantha 4-0-37-3, D Wellalage 4-0-33-1, K Mendis 2-0-19-1.

**Sri Lanka:** P Nissanka (not out) 100, K Perera c Ellis b Stoinis 1, K Mendis c Connolly b Stoinis 51, P Rathnayake (not out) 28. **Extras** (W-4) 4. **Total** (For 2 wks, 18 overs) 184.

**Fall of wickets:** 1-8, 2-105

**Bowling:** X Bartlett 2-0-22-0, M Stoinis 4-0-46-2, N Ellis 3-0-32-0, C Connolly 3-0-27-0, A Zampa 4-0-41-0, G Maxwell 2-0-16-0

MUMBAI

At the time of writing this Scotland-Nepal preview, Scotland technically were the only team with an outside chance of qualifying for the Super Eight stage of the tournament but England had humbled the high-flying Italians by 24 runs a little later at the Eden Gardens to ensure their passage into the Super Eights.

Richie Berrington's side will look to put on a strong showing against a struggling Nepal side whose fortunes have been wildly fluctuating in the tournament after the extreme high of the performance against England in their opening match.

The Scots will look to enjoy the game and put their best foot forward against a struggling Nepal side. Scotland are currently placed third in Group C behind West Indies and England with two points although they have a better NRR (0.359) than England (-0.143), who have four points.

Irrespective of what their



fortunes maybe post the game, Scotland would aim to exhibit a fine display of their cricketing potential at the iconic Wankhede with Nepal clearly overawed at the big stage except for the England game.

Nepal have been dealt a psychological body blow after their shock defeat to Italy by 10 wickets and the pulverising

### Teams (from):

**Scotland:** Richie Berrington (c), Tom Bruce, Matthew Cross, Michael Jones, Finlay McCreath, George Munsey, Oliver Davidson, Michael Leask, Brandon McMullen, Brad Currie, Chris Greaves, Safyaan Sharif, Mark Watt, Brad Wheel, Zainullah Ihsan.

**Nepal:** Rohit Paudel (c), Aarif Sheikh, Aasif Sheikh (wk), Dipendra Singh Airee, Basir Ahmad, Kushal Bhurtel, Sundeeep Jora, Lokesh Bam, Gulsan Jha, Karan KC, Sompal Kami, Sandeep Lamichhane, Sher Malla, Lalit Rajbanshi, Nandan Yadav.

loss to the mighty West Indies.

After their inspiring performance against England in the opening fixture, the Rohit Kumar Paudel-led side have gone completely off the boil perhaps finding it hard to deal with the expectations that come with the World Cup and the big stage.

The Nepal side will have to pull up their socks in every department and both the batters and bowlers will have a lot of soul-searching work to do. Dipendra Singh Airee made a mark in the huge defeat to the West Indies and was the only silver lining for the Nepal team on a surface where most of their batters

struggled to come to terms with the Windies pacers.

It not only threw spotlight back on the fact that teams like Nepal would need more international exposure in different conditions for overall improvement, but also the fact that their specialist batters simply lacked discipline in shot selection which led to their downfall.

While Scotland would want to live to fight another day, the contest on Tuesday will be Nepal's final appearance in the tournament where they have enjoyed the benefit of playing at a single venue and in front of their passionate crowd.

## debacle

## Livid former Pak players demand Babar's axing

KARACHI

Under-performing batting star Babar Azam found himself in the line of fire after Pakistan's 61-run loss to bitter foes India in a T20 World Cup match as several former players in the country demanded his sacking alongside some other seniors.

Former captain Babar, senior spinner Shadab Khan and pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi failed to come good in the lop-sided contest

in Colombo on Sunday night. While the Pakistani bowling was taken apart by young opener Ishan Kishan (77 off 40), their batters were foxed by the combined might of India's top pacers and spinners.

"If it was in my hands, I would not pick Babar, Shadab and Shaheen again in the T20 team. They have had plenty of chances to come through for Pakistan but failed again yesterday," former captain Shahid Afridi said. Afridi said it was time to



Pakistan's Babar Azam being bowled by India's Axar Patel at the Premadasa. PTI

groom younger players in the format. While Shaheen was hammered for 31 runs in two overs, Babar was cleaned up by Axar Patel for five while attempting a slog even though his team was three down for 13 runs in a steep chase of 176. Former skipper and batting great Javed Miandad was not even willing to speak elaborately on the loss but acknowledged that Pakistan's cricket team has been unable to fight when put under pressure.

"Bhai bade matches main

hi players ko character dikhana padta hai, woh hamare players nahi dekha paye (In big matches, players have to show character).

Unfortunately our players didn't show that character. Mohammad Yousaf, another former captain who has always backed Babar, also said that the debacle should end the T20 careers of Babar and Shaheen.

"Time's up for Shaheen, Babar, and Shadab, Pakistan's T20 squad needs new performers, not empty wins

against weaker sides," Yousaf posted on X.

Former pacer Shoaib Akhtar mocked Babar's superstar status here. "You have made a superstar out of a player (Babar Azam) who cannot win you a game," he said.

"For the last 15-20 years, there has been no investment. The sad reality of the situation is that while we fought with India on the ground at one point, today we can't dream of beating them," he added.