

AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

Title Code - UPENG04488

NATIONAL ENGLISH DAILY

MORNING EDITION PRAYAGRAJ Thursday, 19 February, 2026 UNIQUE GIFT OF KRIYAYOGA ASHRAM AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE TO GIVE IMPETUS TO WORLD BUILDING AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

Briefs

KOLKATA Shah visits Mayapur as a devotee

Union Home Minister Amit Shah visited Nadia district on Wednesday to commemorate the 152nd birth anniversary of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur. Eschewing his official stature, Shah stated he arrived "as a devotee" rather than a minister. He lauded ISKCON for globalizing the Bhagavad Gita and strengthening the Bhakti movement. Chanting 'Hare Krishna,' Shah emphasized that devotion encompasses social service. He expressed confidence that by 2047, a "Viksit Bharat" would successfully spread the message of Sanatan Dharma globally.

PATNA Bihar Cong expels two senior netas

The Bihar Congress has expelled former MLA Chhatrapati Yadav and spokesperson Anand Madhav for six years over "anti-party activities." The disciplinary committee, led by Kapildev Prasad Yadav, took the decision following consultations with AICC in-charge Krishna Allavaru and state president Rajesh Ram. The expelled leaders had reportedly revolted against the leadership, alleging corruption in ticket distribution during the recent assembly elections.

PATNA Mantri's fake degree? Fury in House

The Bihar Legislative Council witnessed a heated standoff on Wednesday after RJD MLC Sunil Singh accused JD(U) minister Ashok Choudhary of holding "fake" educational certificates. The row erupted during a debate on crop procurement when Choudhary mocked Singh's knowledge of the subject. In retaliation, Singh alleged discrepancies between the minister's appointment name and his PhD degree. An agitated Choudhary dared the MLC to prove the claims or resign immediately. Singh later challenged the minister to file an FIR if the allegations were false.

CHANDIGARH Cong to corner Saini govt in budget session

Ahead of the Haryana budget session starting February 20, Leader of Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda announced that Congress will aggressively challenge the BJP government. Citing a "complete collapse" of law and order, Hooda plans to introduce a special resolution addressing the 80 active gangs and rising drug abuse in the state. The Opposition also intends to highlight farmer grievances, specifically the reduced weight of fertilizer bags and "false" MSP claims.

BENGALURU Karnataka set to resume tiger safaris

The Karnataka Forest Department is set to resume safaris in Nagarahole and Bandipur Tiger Reserves following their suspension last November due to surging human-animal conflicts. Minister Bhimanna Khandre announced a cautious restart, with vehicle numbers slashed by 50% and daily safari durations significantly reduced. Remaining resources will be diverted to conflict management camps.

KEY TALKS | Modi meets European heads of state a day before AI Impact Summit kicks off

PM: India-EU FTA marks golden era

NEW DELHI

PM Narendra Modi on Wednesday held separate meetings with Spain's President Pedro Sánchez and Finland's PM Petteri Orpo, asserting the India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has ushered in a golden era in India-Europe relations. The meetings took place on the sidelines of the India AI Impact Summit.

Modi said he had a productive meeting with President Sánchez and discussed ways to boost the India-Spain friendship, especially in areas such as defence, security and technology. "The historic FTA with the EU will have a very positive impact on the economic partnership with Spain and provide new opportunities to the people of our nations." During his "extensive discussions" with Finnish PM Orpo, Modi thanked him for his personal support to the India-EU FTA, which "ushers in a golden era" in India-Europe relations.

Modi also had an "excellent" meeting with Estonia's President Alar Karis and discussed with him how to add further vigour to the bilateral economic partnership, particularly in the context of the India-EU FTA. Modi said they talked about working together in futuristic technologies, energy management, skilling and more.

Advantage BJP in RS polls to 37 seats

NEW DELHI

The BJP is set to gain strength in the Rajya Sabha when 37 seats go for biennial polls on March 16 as it has governments or is an alliance partner in six of the 10 states where seats are falling vacant. The 37 seats fall vacant on April 2 and 9.

According to the Election Commission, the states where seats are falling vacant are Maharashtra (7 seats), Odisha (4 seats), Telangana (2 seats), Tamil Nadu (6 seats), Chhattisgarh (2 seats), West Bengal (5 seats), Assam (3 seats), Haryana (2 seats), Himachal Pradesh (1 seat) and Bihar (5 seats).

Bhupen Borah hits back at Gaurav Gogoi

GUWAHATI

Former Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Bhupen Kumar Borah on Wednesday launched a blistering counterattack on Lok Sabha member Gaurav Gogoi, exposing "sharp fault lines" within the Assam Congress that appear to be widening rapidly amid "defections and leadership turmoil".

Reacting to the Congress leader's recent critical remarks against him, Borah questioned the Jorhat MP's political standing, asking, "Who is Gaurav Gogoi to demand an apology from me?" Borah said he was surprised by Gogoi's tone and asserted that he owed no explanation or apology, signalling a complete breakdown of trust between senior leaders of the party.



PM Narendra Modi with his Finnish counterpart Petteri Orpo in New Delhi on Wednesday -PTI

Namaste, India: Brazil's Lula

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Wednesday greeted with "Namaste, India" upon his arrival in New Delhi. In a post on X, Lula said, "We continue working to build more cooperation, innovation, and opportunities between our countries." He will be attending the ongoing India AI Impact Summit and is scheduled hold talks with PM Narendra Modi.

During his "extensive discussions" with Finnish PM Orpo, Modi thanked him for his personal support to the India-EU FTA, which "ushers in a golden era" in India-Europe relations. Modi also had an "excellent" meeting with Estonia's President Alar Karis and discussed with him how to add further vigour to the bilateral economic partnership, particularly in the context of the India-EU FTA. Modi said they talked about working together in futuristic technologies, energy management, skilling and more.

During his meeting with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, Modi discussed ways to deepen cooperation in areas such as defence, manufacturing, fertilisers and infrastructure.

Childish, irresponsible: Rijju tears into Rahul

NEW DELHI

Union Parliamentary Minister Kiren Rijju on Wednesday criticised Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, calling his behaviour "childish" and "irresponsible". In an exclusive interview with ANI, the Union Parliamentary Affairs leader said, "His behaviour is childish and irresponsible for someone in his position... A Leader of the Opposition represents the whole opposition... Going outside the House, calling people traitors, staging theatrical sit-ins and insisting on reading from an unpublished book, all this is child-like behaviour... We have never seen such a LoP in the history of India."

'Federalism needs structural reset'

CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Wednesday proposed an amendment to the Constitution to strengthen federalism at the Centre and state autonomy, calling for a "structural reset" of the country's federalism.

Tabling the first part of Justice Kurian Joseph committee report on Centre-state relations in the Tamil Nadu Assembly, he said federalism was about trust and autonomy. "India's federalism needs a structural reset. If we wish, we can again amend the Constitution. Meaningful federalism is not about control, but about trust, autonomy, and governance that responds to people's realities," Stalin, the ruling DMK president, said.



India didn't bow to US on tariffs: RSS

LUCKNOW

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat on Wednesday said the RSS does not run the Bharatiya Janata Party and rejected the charge that the organisation acts as the party's remote control.

He said RSS volunteers join the BJP and some rise within the party, but it was incorrect to claim that the RSS controls it. Those opposing the BJP were also opposed to the RSS, he added. Speaking on the issue of American tariffs, Bhagwat said such measures reflected an old approach of exerting pressure through arms and economic power. He said India was strong enough not to bow to such pressure and that the country's people were prepared. He asserted that these moves would not have an impact on India.

On questions related to freeing temples from government control, Bhagwat said the larger issue is who would take responsibility for managing temples and ensuring regular worship and upkeep. Drawing a comparison with the Sikh community's management of gurdwaras, he said religious leaders should deliberate on the matter and society must take responsibility.

Courses in English: Macron woos pupils

NEW DELHI

French President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday announced that France will streamline visa and sourcing procedures for Indian students and expand the availability of courses to be taught in English. "We want to welcome more Indian students and have more French students coming here. We are currently speaking about 10,000 per year. We have decided with PM Modi to increase this number to 30,000 per year by 2030. From the French side, we will simplify the sourcing and the visa process," Macron said at a meeting on the future of Indo-French cooperation at AIIMS.

Highlighting France's academic strengths, Macron said Indian students choosing France would have access to world-class teaching and lead-



Union Health Minister JP Nadda with France President Emmanuel Macron in New Delhi on Wednesday -PTI

ing research centres with strong interdisciplinary collaboration and also emphasised that France would offer diverse academic programmes in English to make higher education more accessible for Indian students. "I would like to tell all Indian

students who come to France that we have best-in-class teaching and access to research centres with strong interdisciplinary collaboration. I want you to be sure that we can offer you different approaches in English," he added.

Robodog row spurs Rahul-BJP faceoff

NEW DELHI

The fiasco over an Indian university claiming at the AI Impact Summit here that a Chinese robot was actually developed by it led to a political clash as Congress leader Rahul Gandhi termed the event a "disorganised PR spectacle" and the BJP hit back saying "those who lack intelligence should not post about artificial intelligence".

Even as the university was told by the Centre to pack up and leave the summit venue at Bharat Mandapam, the Congress reacted sharply terming its actions "brazenly shameless". The party added in a post on "X" that, "The Modi government has made a laughing stock of India globally, with regard to AI. In the ongoing AI summit, Chinese robots are being displayed as our own. The Chinese media has mocked us. This is truly embarrassing for India."

The Congress added that what was even "more shameful" was that Union Minister



for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw was "indulging in the same falsehood, promoting China's robots at the Indian summit". Stating that the Centre has caused "irreparable damage to the image of the country", the Congress had added that it has also "reduced AI to a joke -- a field in which we could be world leaders given our data power."

The BJP reacted sharply to Gandhi's post accusing him of tarnishing India's image at every possible opportunity. Addressing a press conference BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said, "When it comes to artificial intelligence, anyone who doesn't have intelligence should not post ready-made tweets."

BSP to go alone in UP elections

Lucknow: BSP chief Mayawati has officially rejected all alliance rumors, announcing her party will contest the upcoming Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections independently. Aiming to replicate her 2007 majority win, she urged Ambedkarite supporters to unite against the "narrow ideologies" of the BJP, SP, and Congress. Mayawati also addressed her recent Type-8 bungalow allotment in Delhi, citing heightened security needs following decades of threats. She warned workers to remain vigilant against misinformation campaigns orchestrated by political rivals.

Kerala actor's assets frozen

Kochi: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has frozen assets worth Rs 39 lakh belonging to Malayalam actor Jayasurya regarding the "Save Box" auction app scam. As the firm's brand ambassador, Jayasurya and his wife allegedly received Rs 1 crore from the prime accused. While the actor claims the funds were legitimate professional fees, the ED is intensifying its probe into celebrity endorsements of fraudulent platforms. Jayasurya has been summoned for further questioning and financial documentation. -PTI

Raj SOG arrests fake examinees

Jaipur: Rajasthan's Special Operations Group (SOG) has arrested three MBBS students and two government teachers for acting as dummy candidates in the 2023 Senior Teacher competitive exam. The suspects reportedly received Rs 3-5 lakh each to impersonate applicants. Using specialized photo-matching software against state databases, investigators identified the fraudsters across multiple states. To date, 26 individuals—including original candidates and middlemen—have been apprehended. The SOG continues to track further suspects linked to the RPSC recruitment scam.

Ex-ISRO staffer kills wife, held

Bengaluru: A 65-year-old retired ISRO employee allegedly strangled his wife to death with a towel at their residence on Wednesday, police said. The incident was reported at around 11 am within the Avalahalli police station limits. The accused, Nageshwar Rao, has been taken into police custody. A senior police officer said Rao was reportedly undergoing treatment for depression. Rao allegedly wanted to end his life after killing his wife, police added. After the alleged attack on his wife, Sandya Sri, Rao reportedly remained at the spot. He then contacted an acquaintance, who alerted the police.

Terrorised in West Bengal, ED tells SC on I-Pac raids

NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) told the Supreme Court on Wednesday that it has been "terrorised" in West Bengal, as the apex court adjourned hearing on its plea accusing the state government and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of interfering in recent search operations at the office of political consultancy firm Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) and the residence of its co-founder Pratik Jain in Kolkata.

During the hearing, Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju, appearing for the federal anti-money laundering agency, strongly refuted the submission that the ED had "weaponised" its powers.



JEE-M: Twins score identical percentile

Kota: Competitiveness ended at home for identical twins Mahroof Ahmed Khan and Masroor Ahmed Khan, as they both scored an identical 285 in their JEE Main, hitting the 99.998th percentile. The exam result declared on Monday. Born on May 7, 2008, the brothers studied together throughout, from school to coaching classes. According to their coaching institute, their mother, Dr Zeenat Begum, had been a gynaecologist working with the Odisha government, before she resigned to move to Kota with them in 2023.

3 cubs born at Kuno, India's cheetah tally now roars to 38

NEW DELHI

Three cheetah cubs have been born at Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park, taking India's total population of the big cat to 38. Union Environment Minister Bhopender Yadav announced on Wednesday.

The cubs were born to Gamini, who was translocated from South Africa as part of the ambitious project to revive the population of the world's fastest land animal in the country.

"Kuno welcomes three new cubs - A roaring new chapter at Kuno on the occasion of the completion of 3 years of arrival of cheetahs from South Africa. Celebrations echo through



Kuno National Park as Gamini, the South African cheetah and second-time mother, has brought 3 new cubs into the world," Yadav said. "A moment of pride for Kuno, and for India - may Gamini and her three little sprinters grow strong and carry the nation's cheetah revival story forward with speed and grace," he added.

risk factor Alzheimer's in the air

NEW DELHI

A study conducted in 27.8 million people in the US has shown that exposure to air pollution can directly contribute towards increased risk of Alzheimer's disease, rather than causing indirectly through chronic conditions such as hypertension and stroke. The findings, published in

the journal PLOS Medicine, also reveal that people with a history of stroke may be particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of air pollution on brain health, highlighting an important intersection between environmental and vascular risk factors, researchers said. The team from Emory University said that improving air quality could be an important way to prevent

dementia -- of which Alzheimer's disease is the most common form -- and protect older adults. They added that while air pollution known to increase one's risk of Alzheimer's disease and several chronic conditions, including hypertension and depression, it was previously unclear whether air pollution causes the chronic conditions, which then lead to dementia, or whether the chronic conditions amplify pollution's effects on brain health.



The District Magistrate visited the examination centers set up for the UP Board exams

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma on Wednesday conducted a surprise inspection of the examination centers set up at Jwala Devi Inter College, Civil Lines, and other colleges, with the aim of ensuring a fair cheating-free conduct of the High School and Intermediate Board Examinations 2026 conducted by the Uttar Pradesh Board of Secondary Education. He obtained information regarding the ongoing board exams from the



static magistrates and principals appointed at the centers. During the inspection, the District Magistrate checked the functioning of CCTV cameras in the schools and directed that all CCTV

cameras remain operational and the CCTV monitoring center continuously monitor the exams. The District Magistrate directed that all necessary arrangements, including water supply, be main-

tained at the examination centers. He instructed the principals to ensure that no unauthorized persons are found loitering near the examination centers. He has given strict instructions that

any form of negligence or indifference during the examination will not be tolerated. He has directed strict action against those who compromise the integrity of the examination.

The Bara Police Station Incharge was arrested red-handed by the Anti-Corruption Team while accepting a bribe of 75,000

Prayagraj. Complainant Santosh Kumar Dubey, son of the late Jyala Prasad, resident of Lukmanpur, Birampur, Surianwa Police Station, Bhadohi district, submitted a petition to the unit alleging that non-gazetted public servant Inspector Vinod Kumar Sonkar, currently the Inspector-in-Charge of Bara Police Station, Yamunanagar, Prayagraj, demanded ₹75,000 in exchange for filing an FIR in a case registered against the



complainant. In this sequence, while taking action on the complaint application given by the complainant Santosh

Kumar Dubey on Tuesday in the B.N.S. Unit office Prayagraj, on Wednesday, a 15-member team of Anti-Corruption Organization, Police Station/Unit Prayagraj, under the leadership of Inspector Mrityunjay Kumar Mishra, arrested the accused Vinod Kumar Sonkar, son of late Rajkumar Sonkar, resident of Rasulgarh, Police Station Sarnath, District Varanasi, currently Inspector in Charge,

Police Station Bara, Prayagraj, red-handed at around 14.40 hrs while accepting a bribe of Rs. 75,000/- from the complainant from the office of Inspector in Charge, Police Station Bara, Yamuna Nagar Commissionerate, in front of public servant witnesses and trap team. After taking further legal action, a case has been registered at Police Station Ghurpur Commissionerate Prayagraj.

STF Prayagraj apprehended a cattle smuggler with a reward of 50,000 rupees



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. STF Prayagraj arrested cattle smuggler Dharendra Gupta, carrying a reward of 50,000 rupees, from the Tharwai police station area and handed him over to the relevant police.

A case has been

registered against the accused in Chandauli's Saidaraja police station under several sections, including the Cow Slaughter Prevention and Animal Cruelty Act. According to information, Dharendra Gupta, a resident of Faizullapur village, had been absconding after

eluding police and other agencies. Today, the STF field unit apprehended him from the Tharwai police station area and handed him over to the police after conducting an investigation. Legal proceedings have been initiated against the arrested accused.

Certificate and Appointment Letter Distribution Program organized by MUNPL for Trained Youth under the Skill Development Initiative

Meja. On 17 February 2026, Meja Urja Nigam Private Limited organized a ceremony under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative to distribute training certificates and appointment letters to young men and women trained at CIPET, Lucknow under the Skill Development Initiative. The program was held at the St. Joseph School Auditorium of MUNPL, where 88 trainees were awarded certificates and appointment letters. This is an important step toward realizing the vision of the Skill India Mission, which is being advanced through such training programs. "Youth power is the future of the nation, and by providing them with the right training and opportunities, we can lay the foundation

of a developed and self-reliant India." In this direction, Meja Urja Nigam Limited, under its CSR initiative and in collaboration with CIPET, Lucknow, has successfully provided technical training to youth and connected them with employment opportunities. The trainees were provided four months of free residential training at CIPET, Lucknow in the following trades, after which 100% placement was ensured: 1. Machine Operator – Plastic Processing – 42 trainees 2. Machine Operator – Injection Molding – 45 trainees The trained youth not only received certificates but also secured employment in various leading companies across the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Haryana.

The Chief Guest of the program was Shri G. Srinivasa Rao, CEO (MUNPL). In his address, he stated, "Youth power is the future of the nation. By providing them with the right training and opportunities, we can build a strong foundation for a developed and self-reliant India. Skill development is the true strength of nation-building." He further emphasized that such training programs not only provide employment to youth but also develop their confidence and technical competence, enabling them to adapt to the needs of the industry. He extended his best wishes to all trainees for a bright future and encouraged them to move forward in life. On this occasion, Shri Narendra Nath Sinha (General Manager,

Operation & Maintenance), Shri. Ashok Kumar Samal (General Manager, Maintenance), Dr. A.K. Chaudhary (Chief Medical Officer), Shri Vivek Chandra (HoHR), Shri Anil Kumar (Vice Chairman), along with Shri K.P. Singh and other officials from CIPET, village heads, parents, and a large number of local residents were present. The program not only enhanced the skills of the youth but also ensured their participation in nation-building by empowering rural talent in line with the "Skilled India – Empowered India" mission. It clearly demonstrates that with the right direction, resources, and determination, the youth of rural India can confidently move forward in the technical world.

The Anti-Corruption Team caught the Municipal Corporation's Tax Collector accepting a bribe of 10,000 rupees

Prayagraj. The Anti-Corruption Team caught the Tax Collector posted in Municipal Corporation Zone 6, Khuldabad, red-handed while accepting a bribe of 10,000 rupees. The action caused a stir among Municipal Corporation employees. According to information, the Anti-Corruption Team received a complaint alleging bribery by Anoop Chandra Mishra, Tax Collector, Municipal Corporation Zone 6. After verifying the complaint, the team laid a trap and caught the accused while accepting the bribe. The action was carried out by the Anti-Corruption Team, Prayagraj. Following the arrest, the accused has been detained for questioning. A case has been registered under the relevant sections and further legal action is underway. The Municipal Corporation administration is also preparing for departmental action in the matter.

STF Prayagraj apprehended a cattle smuggler with a reward of 50,000 rupees

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. STF Prayagraj arrested cattle smuggler Dharendra Gupta, carrying a reward of 50,000 rupees, from the Tharwai police station area and handed him over to the relevant police. A case has been registered against the accused in Chandauli's Saidaraja police station under several sections, including the Cow Slaughter Prevention and Animal Cruelty Act. According to information, Dharendra Gupta, a resident of Faizullapur village, had been absconding after eluding police and other agencies. Today, the STF field unit apprehended him from the Tharwai police station area and handed him over to the police after conducting an investigation. Legal proceedings have been initiated against the arrested accused.



Following the death of a student in a truck accident, the family members blocked the road by placing her body on the road, demanding arrest and compensation

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. On Wednesday, the family members of 12th-grade student Vaishnavi Maurya, who was crushed by a truck on Monday in the Baharia area, created a huge uproar. After the post-mortem, the family members placed the body on the road near their home and staged a protest, demanding the arrest of the truck driver and compensation. Around 3 p.m., the family members arrived at the Bajaj Agency intersection in Saraigani village with the body. They blocked the road and began a protest. The family members stated that despite more than 24 hours having passed, the police had neither arrested the truck driver nor recovered the truck. They stated that they would only perform the last rites after an arrest and an announcement of compensation. The Baharia police station in-charge, ACP Phulpur Vivek Yadav, and tehsil administration officials arrived at the scene. The ACP stated that the truck had been recovered and the search for the driver was ongoing. Tehsil administration officials are in talks with the family regarding compensation. According to reports, the accident occurred on Monday afternoon near the Saraigani-Dhamour Idgah turn. An uncontrolled truck crushed 17-year-old student Vaishnavi, who was traveling to the exam center on a bike with her cousin, killing her on the spot. The student was a resident of Saraigani and was scheduled to begin her intermediate exams on Wednesday.

Instructions for 100% progress against targets under the PM Solar Power Scheme; action will be taken against negligent vendors

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. A review meeting on the progress of the PM Solar Power Free Electricity Scheme was held in the NIC auditorium on Wednesday under the chairmanship of Manish Kumar Verma. Officials from the concerned departments were instructed to ensure 100% progress against targets by promptly resolving pending cases. After vendor selection, the meeting conducted a detailed review of pending applications, name and load corrections, electricity bill corrections, inspections, smart meters, and bank loan approvals and par-



tial payments. The District Magistrate inquired about the progress of the PM Solar Power Free Electricity Scheme. The In-charge PO, NEDA, reported that

as of February 17, 2026, a total of 27,837 applications have been received, of which solar panels have been installed in 12,481 homes, while installation work is pend-

ing in 19,304 applications. The District Magistrate directed the PO in charge of NEDA to hold a meeting with the Electricity Department, bank offi-

cial, and vendors associated with the scheme and launch a campaign to resolve all pending cases.

He stated that each vendor must ensure the

installation of solar systems on a priority basis, as per the set target. Electricity Department officials were also directed to expedite the resolution of all pending cases at their level and issue as many solar connections as possible.

The District Magistrate clearly warned that action will be taken against vendors who show laxity or negligence in their work, and their contracts will be terminated. Chief Development Officer Harshika Singh, PO NEDA Komil Dwivedi, along with officials from the Electricity Department and other concerned officials were present at the meeting.

Corps officers honored for outstanding work, ceremony held at headquarters



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. The Central Railway Electrification Organization (CORE) headquarters held a Distinguished Railway Service Awards ceremony on Wednesday. The event was held in the office premises and was attended by officers and employees associated with railway electrification. Ramendra Kumar Tiwari, Additional Member (Railway Electrification), Railway Board, New Delhi, was the chief guest at the ceremony. He presented the Distinguished Railway Service Award to Kalyan

Singh, Deputy Chief Electrical Engineer, CORE, for his outstanding work. He was honored with a certificate and a memento on the occasion. Officials said that this honor motivates employees to perform better and gives a new direction to the organization's efficiency. Following the award distribution ceremony, a cultural program was also organized. A large number of officers and employees from the headquarters and various projects were present. During the program, participants' cultural performances enlivened the atmosphere.

Teachers' organizations formulated a strategy to eliminate the TET requirement



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. A joint meeting of the three major teachers' organizations of the district was held on Tuesday at Shikshak Bhawan, South Malaka. The issue of eliminating the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) requirement was discussed in detail, and a decision was made to submit a memorandum to the central

government in this regard. The meeting was attended by the district presidents and district general secretaries of the Uttar Pradesh Primary Teachers' Association, Uttar Pradesh Junior High School Teachers' Association, and Uttar Pradesh Women Teachers' Association. All officials unanimously stated that the TET requirement is affecting a large

number of candidates, and therefore, the government should reconsider its decision.

The meeting decided that a memorandum addressed to the Honorable Prime Minister, demanding the abolition of the TET requirement, would be sent through the District Magistrate. A delegation would soon seek time from the district administration

to submit the memorandum. District presidents Devendra Kumar Srivastava, Vinod Kumar Pandey, Anuragini Singh, and district general secretaries Rajendra Anuragi and Sangeeta Singh Bhadauria were present at the meeting. The officials said that a strategy for the movement will also be made till the demands are met.

Free Homeopathic Medical Camp at the Civil Court on February 21st

Prayagraj. Under the "Ayush at Your Doorstep" program, a free homeopathic medical, health check-up, and medicine distribution camp will be organized on February 21st at the Civil Court premises. Consultations and medicines will be provided free of charge to the public. This camp is

being organized by the Government Homeopathic Motilal Nehru District Hospital. A team of doctors will examine patients in the morning, provide neces-

sary advice, and distribute medicines based on their condition. In-charge Medical Officer Dr. Jagdish Ram stated that the camp's objective is to provide

accessible and affordable medical care to the general public. He appealed to the public to attend the camp in large numbers and take advantage of the camp.

Editorial

The airport is being developed through a public-private partnership

Some geopolitical weight in the region. It presents no hesitation in developing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). It knows the disputed character of PoK and exercises no restraint. Instead, it tutors India on what it does in its sovereign territory. India understands China's cunning and exercises patience and quietness, making necessary preparations to check the latter's possible misadventures.

However, the work-in-progress frontier highway will significantly strengthen India's border infrastructure and seamless connectivity. It will present a significant impetus for encouraging economic engagement in the region. Infrastructure and connectivity have always played a pivotal role in modernising the economy and opening the scope for economic.

Noida International Airport Ltd (NIAL) at Jewar, in the Gautam Buddha Nagar district of Uttar Pradesh, conducted its first flight validation test on 9 December. According to NIAL officials, the first commercial flight from Noida International Airport is scheduled to take off on 17 April 2025. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had inaugurated the construction of NIAL during a well-attended foundation stone-laying ceremony on 25 November 2021. An IndiGo test flight travelled from Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) to NIAL, completing the final security-related analysis for the facility. Officials stated that the flight was conducted under close coordination between the pilots and the air traffic controllers (ATC). There were no passengers on board when the flight landed on the 3.9-kilometre runway shortly after noon. Earlier, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) had granted flight and security approvals. Technically, the airport will now be readied for commercial operations. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) oversaw the exercise, and all data collected will be submitted to the DGCA for review. Supervising personnel included officials from the DGCA, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), NIAL, and the Uttar Pradesh Civil Aviation Department. The test assessed systems such as airspace coordination, communication protocols, emergency response readiness, and runway performance. Previous milestones included the successful calibration of the Instrument Landing System (ILS) and the Precision Approach Path Indicator (PAPI) in October 2024.

With the validation flight completed, we are committed to finishing the airport project before the end of April", said Union Minister for Civil Aviation Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu. "Today marks a very important occasion in the progress of the airport and definitely whatever support is required from the Ministry of Civil Aviation, we will continuously provide, so that the early operations from the airport can begin," he said. The aim is to complete the validation process by December 15, after which the airport concessionaire will apply for an aerodrome license, a key requirement for commercial operations. This greenfield airport will be the largest in the country. It is located approximately 72 kilometres from Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA), which, until now, has been the only other international airport in the National Capital Region and is nearing its capacity. Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, currently has 15 operational civil airports. The airport is being developed through a public-private partnership (PPP) model. It will be owned by Noida International Airport Ltd (NIAL) and operated by Yamuna International Airport Private Limited (YIAPL), a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) of Zurich Airport AG. In June 2022, Tata Projects.



To stand in this house is to be reminded of what is most beautiful about religious faith

Suman

To stand in this house is to be reminded of what is most beautiful about religious faith: its ability to give solace and to inspire, its aspiration to these great and lovely heights, in which strength and delicacy are so perfectly conjoined. In addition, to be asked to speak here on this day, the fourth anniversary of the notorious fatwa of the late Imam Khomeini, is a particular honour. When I was an undergraduate at this college, between 1965 and 1968, the years of flower-power and student power, I would have found the notion of delivering an address in King's Chapel pretty far-out, as we used to say; and yet, such are the journeys of one's life that here I stand. I am grateful to the Chapel and the college for extending this invitation, which I take as a gesture of solidarity and support, support not merely for one individual but, much more importantly, for the high moral principles of human rights and human freedoms that the Khomeini edict seeks so brutally to attack. For just as King's Chapel may be taken as a symbol of what is best about religion, so the fatwa has become a symbol of what is worst. It feels all the more appropriate to be speaking here because it was while in my final year of reading history at Cambridge that I came across the story of the so-called satanic verses or temptation of the Prophet Muhammad, and of his rejection of that temptation. That year, I had chosen as one of my special subjects a paper on Muhammad, the rise of



Islam, and the caliphate. So few students chose this option that the lectures were cancelled. The other students switched to different special subjects. However, I was anxious to continue, and Arthur Hibbert, one of the King's history dons, agreed to supervise me. So as it happened I was, I think, the only student in Cambridge who took the paper. The next year, I'm told, it was not offered again. This is the kind of thing that almost leads one to believe in the workings of a hidden hand. The story of the 'satanic verses' can be found, among other places, in the canonical writings of the classical writer al-Tabari. He tells us that on one occasion the Prophet was given verses which seemed to accept the divinity of the three most popular pagan goddesses of Mecca, thus compromising Islam's rigid monotheism. Later he rejected these verses as being a trick of the devil

saying that Satan had appeared to him in the guise of the Archangel Gabriel and spoken 'satanic verses.' Historians have long speculated about this incident, wondering if perhaps the nascent religion had been offered a sort of deal by the pagan authorities of the city, which was flirted with and then refused. I felt the story humanized the Prophet, and, therefore made him more accessible, more easily comprehensible to a modern reader, for whom the presence of doubt in a human mind, and human imperfections in a great man's personality, can only make that mind, that personality, more attractive. Indeed, according to the traditions of the Prophet, even the Archangel Gabriel was understanding about the incident, assuring him that such things had befallen all the prophets, and that he need not worry about what had happened. It seems

that the Archangel Gabriel, and the God in whose name he spoke, was rather more tolerant than some of those who presently affect to speak in the name of God. Khomeini's fatwa itself may be seen as a set of modern satanic verses. In the fatwa, once again, evil takes on the guise of virtue; and the faithful are deceived. It's important to remember what the fatwa is.

One cannot properly call it a sentence, since it far exceeds its author's jurisdiction; since it contravenes fundamental principles of Islamic law; and since it was issued without the faintest pretence of any legal process. (Even Stalin thought it necessary to hold show trials!) It is, in fact, a straightforward terrorist threat, and in the West it has already had very harmful effects. There is much evidence that writers and publishers have become nervous of publishing any material

about Islam except of the most reverential and anodyne sort. There are instances of contracts for books being canceled, of texts being rewritten. Even so independent an artist as the filmmaker Spike Lee felt the need to submit to Islamic authorities the script of his film about Malcolm X, who was for a time a member of the Nation of Islam and performed the hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca. And to this day, almost one year after the paperback of *The Satanic Verses* was published (by a specially constituted consortium) in the United States, and imported into Britain, no British publisher has had the nerve to take on distribution of the softcover edition, even though it has been in the bookstores for months without causing the tiniest frisson. In the East, however, the fatwa's implications are far more sinister. 'You must defend Rushdie,' an Iranian writer told a British scholar recently. 'In defending Rushdie you are defending us.' In January, in Turkey, an Iranian-trained hitsquad assassinated the secular journalist Ugur Mumcu. Last year, in Egypt, fundamentalist assassins killed Farag Fouda, one of the country's leading secular thinkers. Today, in Iran, many of the brave writers and intellectuals who defended me are being threatened with death-squads. Last summer, I was able to participate in a literary seminar staged in a Cambridge college and attended by scholars and writers from all over the world.

When a country actually sort of does not observe written agreements

Abhinav

Between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and resulted in the creation of the Quad. The centrality of India today to the Indo-Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific, is a result of former prime minister Abe's strategic genius and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's eventual vision and persistence. The Indian move increases pressure on China which attaches great political, spiritual and strategic importance to Tibet. Tibet's Dalai Lama and its government in exile has sheltered in India, adding to tensions between the neighbours. The rumoured creation of a new Indian fighting command on the land border creates pressure for China at a time when it seeks to achieve dominance in the seas, both the South China Sea as well as the Indian Ocean. At the same time, Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu Jaushieh was interviewed by a national Indian channel, infuriating the Chinese Communist Party. A

public protest was quickly issued by the Chinese embassy in New Delhi condemning the interview's content as "totally unacceptable". Taiwan and India have moved closer in several spheres as China's threat to Taiwan has increased with increased investments and manufacturing by Taiwanese companies in India to protect their value chain in case of an invasion by the mainland. India's policies at countering China have been deliberate, with the country starting to respond to Chinese aggression swiftly, especially given the upcoming general election. During his bilateral visit to Japan, India's Foreign Minister S Jaishankar said that China has not respected its agreements with India. "We can disagree on many things, but when a country actually sort of does not observe written agreements with a neighbour, I think, you have caused ... because ... then raises a question mark about the stability of the relationship and frankly.

The battle for freedom of expression, and for political and gender rights

Syed Hussain

Since it was issued without the faintest pretence of any legal process. (Even Stalin thought it necessary to hold show trials!) It is, in fact, a straightforward terrorist threat, and in the West it has already had very harmful effects. There is much evidence that writers and publishers have become nervous of publishing any material about Islam except of the most reverential and anodyne sort. There are instances of contracts for books being canceled, of texts being rewritten. Even so independent an artist as the filmmaker Spike Lee felt the need to submit to Islamic authorities the script of his film about Malcolm X, who was for a time a member of the Nation of Islam and performed the hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca. And to this day, almost one year after the paperback of *The Satanic Verses* was published (by a specially constituted consortium) in the United States, and imported into Britain, no British publisher has had the nerve to take on distribution of the softcover edition, even though it has been in the bookstores for months without causing the tiniest frisson. In the East, however, the fatwa's implications are far more sinister. 'You must defend Rushdie,' an Iranian writer told a British scholar recently. 'In defending Rushdie you are defending us.' In January, in Turkey, an Iranian-trained hitsquad assassinated the secular journalist Ugur Mumcu. Last year, in Egypt, fundamentalist assassins killed Farag Fouda, one of the country's leading secular thinkers. Today, in Iran, many of the brave writers and intellectuals who defended me are being threatened with death-squads. Last summer, I was able to participate in a literary seminar staged in a Cambridge college and attended by scholars and writers from all over the world.

touched by the friendship and enthusiasm with which the Muslim delegates greeted me. A distinguished Saudi journalist took my arm and said, 'I want to embrace you because you, Mr Rushdie, are a free man.' He was fully aware of the ironies of what he was saying. He meant that freedom of speech, freedom of the imagination, is that freedom which gives meaning to all the others. He could walk the streets, get his work published, lead an ordinary life, and did not feel free, because there was so much he could not say, so much he hardly dared to think. I was protected by the Special Branch; he had to watch out for the Thought Police. Today, as Professor Fred Halliday says in this week's *New Statesman & Society*, 'the battle for freedom of expression, and for political and gender rights, is being fought out not in the senior common rooms and dinner tables of Europe, but in the Islamic world.' In his essay, he gives some instances of the way in which the case of *The Satanic Verses* is being used as a symbol by the oppressed voices of the Muslim world. One of the many Iranian exile radio stations, he tells us, has even named itself *Voice of the Satanic Verses*. The *Satanic Verses* is a committedly secular text that deals in part with the material of religious faith. For the religious fundamentalist, especially, at present, the Islamic fundamentalist, the adjective 'secular' is the dirtiest of dirty words. But here's a strange paradox: in my country of origin, India, it was the secular ideal of Nehru and Gandhi that protected the nation's large Muslim minority, and it is the decay of that ideal that leads directly to the bloody sectarian confrontations which the subcontinent is now witnessing, confrontations that were long foretold and could have been avoided, had not so many politicians chosen to fan the flames of religious hatred. Indian Muslims have

Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme

Simran

"One can expect new allocations towards augmentation of power distribution infrastructure,

, especially in high density/urban.

load centres, in view of the sharp rise in peak demand over the last few years," said Anujesh Dwivedi, Partner at Deloitte India. He noted that there may be some allocation towards supporting the preparatory work especially on the listing of power utilities, or some incentive mechanism for promoting initiatives on private sector participation or listing of utilities at the state level because they are increas-

ingly being seen as the much needed structural reforms the sector needs. The industry is optimistic of a wider coverage of the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme by including smart metering in infrastructure definition.

"This would direct more financing for a sector which seeks to bring down India's transmission and distribution losses to 12% and improve recovery for state utilities," Goyal said. Goyal also noted that power transmission despite significant potential has not seen any notable monetisation events which could address the latent investor demand. "Government should

announce a time-bound privatisation programme for assets owned by PGCIL," he said. The sector also sees the PLI scheme for solar value chain to continue with possible reduction in the duty structures for solar equipment. Jacob highlighted.

that there may be some rationalisation of duties on capital goods required for solar upstream manufacturing could be seen so that overall that industry can really take off. "We expect continuation and maybe broadening of the PLI support towards the solar module value chain. We already have a few interventions there, which are likely to

be extended deeper," Dwivedi said. Similarly, on the battery manufacturing front, the industry expects localization of the value chain given competing countries have already advanced beyond India. In the green hydrogen segment, the industry believes the government may bring in hydrogen purchase for specific sectors like (green) steel. On the EV front, the industry seeks more support towards building public charging infrastructure given the anticipated increase in the EV penetration. "Under the PM E-drive, we already have an allocation of about Rs 1,100 crores for FY26. Given that the final guidelines.

, including many Muslims. I was

In a joint venture, Ambani and Adani will sell transportation fuel

Delhi : In a joint statement, Adani Total Gas Ltd and Jio-bp, an arm of Reliance Industries Ltd, announced their partnership to sell auto fuel at select outlets. Certain ATGL outlets will offer Jio-bp's gasoline and diesel, while Jio-bp outlets will incorporate ATGL's compressed natural gas (CNG) dispensers. "This partnership will enable us to leverage each other's infrastructure, thus enhancing customer experience and offerings," said Suresh P. Manglani, executive director and CEO of Adani Total Gas. After Reliance bought a 26% interest in an Adani Power project in Madhya Pradesh, the two opposing billionaires teamed together again. "We are united by a shared vision to offer our customers a superior selection of high-quality fuels," stated Jio-bp chairman Sarthak



Behuria. "The partnership between RIL and the Adani Group is anticipated to be extremely complementary, providing substantial operational advantage via their combined physical presence," stated Nirav Karkera, head of research at Fisdom. A more holistic consumer experience is the goal of the relationship, which is why both companies are offering complementary items. Both parties stand to benefit from this partnership, which is especially noteworthy in an industry where state-run corporations predominate.

Centre will borrow 8L cr, 54% of the objective

The government plans to borrow Rs 8 lakh crore, 54% of its Rs 14.8 lakh crore FY26 borrowing, in the first half. It didn't front-load the borrowing program to avoid raising rates while the RBI pumped record liquidity into the system. Since the market reported little demand for 30-year and longer bonds, the government announced it would borrow less in FY26. Thus, front-loading of the borrowing program has been avoided due to government (fiscal consolidation without compromising quality of expenditure).

JioHotstar Reaches 300 Million Subscribers, Closer to Netflix

Delhi: JioHotstar, a worldwide OTT player from India, is closing in on Netflix's subscriber dominance. JioCinema and Disney+Hotstar now have 300 million users, up from 50 million in February 2025 after the 2025 TATA IPL. The 2025 Indian Premier League season greatly impacted JioHotstar's client base. It rose from 50 million subscribers in February to 280 million by May and 300 million currently. Digital viewership overtook television for the first time, causing tremendous development. Digital reach was 652 million versus 537 million TV viewers. The final IPL 2025 match



received 237 million digital viewers and 189 million TV viewers. Along with user growth, the platform broke revenue records. JioStar, the parent company of JioHotstar, announced that the 2025 IPL had the largest advertising and subscrip-

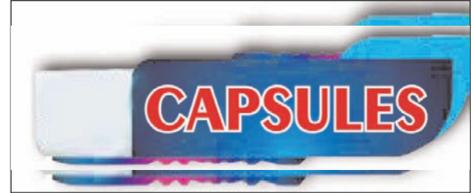
tion revenue. Historically, league rights were auctioned for 23,575 crore for TV and 20,500 crore for digital over 5 years, indicating great value. The IPL's peak internet viewership was 55.2 million and TV viewing time was 514 billion minutes.

Bank loan growth drops for eighth straight month in February, RBI data reveals

Delhi: Central bank statistics revealed that personal and credit card loans fell for the eighth straight month in February due to Reserve Bank of India tougher policies. Last month, banks' credit rose 12% year-over-year, slower than 16.6% a year earlier,

excluding HDFC Bank's merger. Housing Development Finance Corp, Loans rose 11% in February, compared to 20.5% a year earlier, including the merger. In January, loan growth fell to 12.5% excluding the merger and 11.4% including it. Retail

demand for unsecured loans drove strong loan growth for several years in the banking sector. However, in late 2023, the RBI tightened capital requirements for personal, credit card, and non-banking finance company loans. In its Mumbai headquarters.



NCLAT reduces penalty on Google to 216 crore in Play Store matter

Delhi: Appellate tribunal NCLAT upheld the order passed by fair trade regulator CCI against Google for abusing its dominant position with respect to Play Store policies, however, reduced the penalty on the tech giant to ₹216 crore from 936.44 crore. A two-member bench comprising Chairperson Justice Ashok Bhushan and Technical Member Barun Mitra said Google "has abused its dominant position and has violated Section", however in some sections, violation was "not proved, but penalty was still leviable on proof of violation".

Small savings program interest rates unchanged April-June quarter

Delhi: For the fifth quarter starting April 1, 2025, the government maintained interest rates on PPF and NSC. The rates of interest on various Small Savings Schemes for the first quarter of FY 2025-26, starting on 1 April 2025 and ending on 30 June 2025, would stay unaltered from those notified for the fourth quarter of a finance ministry notification. The notification states that Sukanya Samriddhi deposits will earn 8.2% interest, while three-year term deposits will earn 7.1%. Popular Public Provident Fund (PPF) and post office savings deposit scheme interest rates remain at 7.1% and 4%, respectively. Kisan Vikas Patra investments mature in 115 months at 7.5%. National Savings Certificate (NSC) interest rates will stay at 7.7% for April-June 2025. Like the current quarter, investors will earn 7.4% from the Monthly Income Scheme.

JSW to acquire Dulux Paints for 9,000 crore

Delhi : JSW Paints will buy 75% of Dulux-owner Akzo Nobel's India operations for Rs 9,407 crore (\$1.1 billion), the sector's biggest purchase amid rising competition. JSW Paints, founded by steel tycoon Sajjan Jindal in 2019, will become the fourth largest participant in the sector, controlled by Asian Paints, Berger Paints, and Kansai Nerolac. Aditya Birla Group launched Birla Opus in 2024. According to Indian takeover legislation, JSW Paints would openly offer Rs 3,929 crore to Akzo Nobel India's public stockholders for a 25% stake. Public shareholders would



receive Rs 3,418 per share in the open offer, while JSW Paints will pay the Dutch firm Rs 2,762.

Based on the open offer response, JSW Paints would buy enough shares from the Dutch company to maintain 75% ownership in

Akzo Nobel India. JSW Paints, part of the \$23-billion JSW Group, will market Akzo Nobel India after the purchase, with the Dutch corporation perhaps remaining a public shareholder.

Birla Co. recovers Rs 2 crore in stolen digital gold

Delhi : Hackers breached the ABCD mobile app run by Aditya Birla Capital and stole digital gold valued at approximately Rs 1.95 crore from 435 user accounts, according to Delhi. On June 9, the scam was exposed after multiple consumers contacted the company's call center to express their dissatisfaction with the theft of their digital gold. Concerned about this, the company's technical staff launched an internal investigation and filed a first information report. According to our sources, the affected accounts now have their balances returned by the company.

The BSE was fined 25L for the unfair distribution of corporate information

Delhi : According to Delhi, the 45-page SEBI order confirmed that the BSE's system design allowed paying clients and the internal listing compliance monitoring (LCM) staff to view business announcements ahead of schedule. Prior to the information being made public on its website, this occurred. Because there were no measures in place to ensure that all stakeholders had equal and contemporaneous access to the data, the regulator deemed this to be a breach of norms. To keep information



inequality at bay and guarantee fair markets, this is crucial. After reviewing the Securities Contracts (Regulation) SECC (Stock Exchange and Clearing Corporations Regulations, 2018), SEBI determined that BSE had broken Regulation 39(3). All users must have fair and transparent access for stock exchanges to

comply with the rules. Additionally, the regulator brought attention to the fact that BSE neglected to establish a really basic syndication (RSS) feed, which would have mitigated the possibility of unequal access to corporate filings. Inspections revealed gaps, but BSE just created a time gap to fix the problem, according to SEBI. The regulator also pointed out significant problems with BSE's oversight of client code updates, which are permitted only for legitimate mistakes.

NHAI to blacklist FASTags 'kept in hand', seeks details from toll operators

Delhi: Drivers who don't fix their FASTags on the windshield of their vehicles will face permanent blacklisting of tags, a measure taken in view of the malpractice of people handing out "loose or unfixed tags" for payment of highway-user fee, which leads to congestion at toll plaza lanes and sometimes altercations with toll collectors. The NHAI company dealing with toll collection and management of highways, IHMCL, has asked federations of toll collectors, highway builders and operators to report such cases for quick action. "Tags-in-hand" have been categorised as "loose tags". Despite repeated advisories against the practice there have been several cases of people handing out FASTag at toll gates for deduction



Total bids for three initial public offerings (IPOs) reached 22.5 billion rupees

Delhi : Nearly 22,500 crore rupees were raised in three separate initial public offerings (IPOs) that concluded. The combined target amount for all three was 2,562 crore rupees. According to data from the exchanges and merchant bankers, the 119 crore rupee IPO of Globe Civil Projects was subscribed 86 times, the 853 crore rupee IPO of Ellenbarrie Industrial Gases was subscribed 22 times, and the 1,590 crore rupee IPO of Mumbai-based real estate giant Kalpataru was subscribed 2.3 times.

of user fee. In letters addressed to these federations, IHMCL said, "This leads to lane-level congestion due to manual handling and viola-

tion issues, misuse in closed-loop tolling operations, generation of false chargeback demands and overall disruption.

GST compensation fund likely to have 95k cr surplus

Delhi: They requested anonymity and stated the GST Council may determine how to use this extra compensation cess. Cess funds are used for a specified purpose and are levied in addition to taxes. These insiders claimed the GST Council, the top indirect



tax decision-making body, will meet before or after the Monsoon session of

Parliament, depending on member availability. They said the Council meeting is overdue and coming soon. Last December 21, the 55th GST Council met in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan. They stated the Council will discuss tax rate rationalization, compliance

ease, and cess reform during its 56th meeting. The council may replace the GST compensation cess on sin goods and luxury commodities like cigarettes and cars with two specific-purpose levies to fund health and clean energy projects.

1 in 5 Indians with over Rs 5 crore worth plans to relocate overseas

Delhi: One in five ultra-rich Indians with a net worth over Rs 25 crore plans to settle abroad for investment opportunities, tax advantages, and greater global connectivity, according to a Kotak Mahindra Bank private banking survey. The first two quarters of 2024-25 survey interviewed 150 ultra-high networth people (UHNIs) and private bankers in 12 cities. EY ordered and validated the findings with industry. For this report, those worth over Rs 25 crore were canvassed.



However, Kotak's private banking division targets individuals worth over Rs 300 crore. Many UHNIs buy abroad property for migration and permanent residency. "Ultra-HNIs are diversifying their portfolios and embracing domestic and global assets, setting the stage for a sig-

nificant increase. Alternative assets and equities are becoming more popular in domestic and international markets. Nearly a third of India's Ultra-HNIs own worldwide assets. With two in three ultra-HNIs planning structured wealth transition, succession planning is crucial.

JB Chemicals' promoter KKR will sell 10% of the company for 2,6k crore rupees

Delhi: In a series of block agreements, the promoter of JB Chemicals—Tau Investment Holdings, a subsidiary of global private equity giant KKR—is selling around 1.6 crore shares, or 10.2% of the firm, for approximately Rs 2,575 crore (\$300 million). According to the deal's term sheet, the minimum price at which the shares can be sold is Rs 1,625—a 5%

reduction to JB Chem's closing price of Rs 1,709 on Wednesday on the NSE. Shareholding reports on the BSE indicate that as of December 31, 2024, KKR owned 53.7% of the pharmaceutical company situated in the city. Midway through 2020, at a share price of Rs 745, the PE giant had taken over the pharmaceutical manufacturer.

Neena on *Choli Ke Peeche* shoot

Neena Gupta recalls Subhash Ghai asked her to wear a padded bra during *Choli Ke Peeche* shoot to enhance her screen appearance



A still from *Choli Ke Peeche*

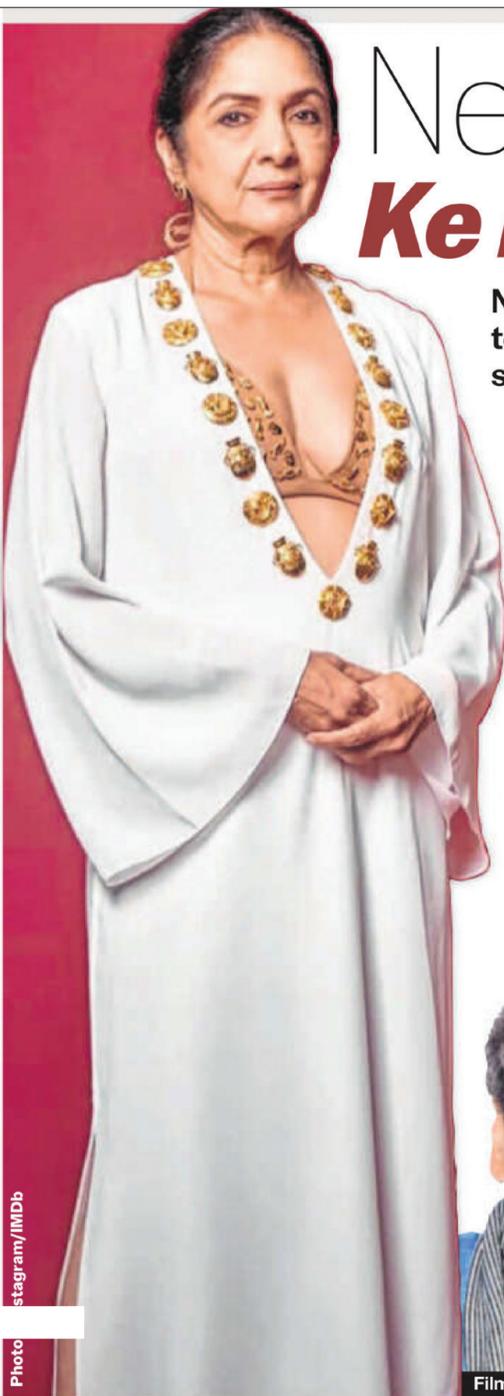
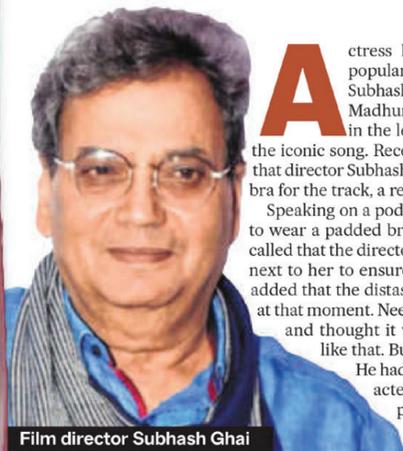


Photo: Instagram/IMDb

Photo



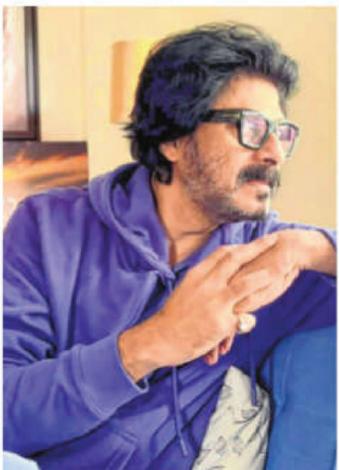
Film director Subhash Ghai

Actress Neena Gupta, who featured in the popular dance number *Choli Ke Peeche* from Subhash Ghai's 1993 film *Khal Nayak*, starring Madhuri Dixit, Sanjay Dutt, and Jackie Shroff in the lead, continues to be remembered for the iconic song. Recently, the 66-year-old actress recalled that director Subhash Ghai had asked her to wear a padded bra for the track, a request that left her feeling angry.

Speaking on a podcast, Neena stated that she was asked to wear a padded bra to 'make her appear fuller.' She recalled that the director told the costume designer standing next to her to ensure she looked fuller for the song. She added that the distasteful comment left her feeling angry at that moment. Neena said, "At that time, I felt very angry and thought it was inappropriate to say something like that. But now I feel he was just doing his job."

He had a certain image in mind for the character in the song, and he expressed it plainly. I was new then, today I understand it differently."

Yogesh Deshpande's Hindi film debut



Filmmaker Yogesh Deshpande is set to enter mainstream Hindi cinema with his upcoming directorial debut, marking a new chapter in his creative journey. The film is currently in pre-production and is expected to go on floors in the coming months. Casting is underway and extensive location recce has already been completed.

Deshpande began his career in advertising in 2005 and has since written and directed over 100 ad films. He is the founder of RedefineZ Concepts, which later expanded into RedefineZ Productions, a Pune-based production house. Over the years, he has built a reputation for visual storytelling rooted in culture and emotion.

He made his feature film debut with *66 Sadasiv* and later directed the musical biopic *Swaragandharva Sudhir Phadke*, which received critical acclaim and was released in five countries. The film was noted for its use of original songs recorded by legendary singers including Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhosale, Sudhir Phadke and Kishore Kumar.

His upcoming Hindi feature is set in the Konkan region and explores the human impact of the digital divide. Led by a strong female protagonist, the film promises an emotionally layered narrative rooted in contemporary realities.



Shruti's graveyard shift update

Actress shares candid Instagram update about sinus and cramps while preparing for another late-night graveyard shoot schedule

Actress Shruti Haasan shared a light-hearted update from her busy schedule, saying her "long lost friends" sinus and cramps were keeping her company as she headed for a graveyard shift.

Taking to Instagram Stories, the actress posted a candid selfie and wrote about gearing up for another late-night schedule, adding a touch of humor to her health woes.



Photo: Instagram @shrutihaasan

Shruti, who is the daughter of star Kamal Haasan, has been shooting regularly at night for her upcoming project. However, she did not share details about her project. The actress' look in Dulquer Salmaan's *Aakasamlo Oka Tara* was unveiled last month in January.

Taking to its X timeline, production house Geetha Arts, which is presenting the film, shared the first look posters of the actress and wrote, "A trailblazer in every sense.. Team #AakasamLoOk-aTara wishes @shrutihaasan a very Happy Birthday. And Meet a character that stands her ground and owns her space."

In the first look posters, Shruti sported an intense, unvarnished look, with glasses framing a steady, downward gaze that reflected quiet intensity. The cigarette in her lips and the drifting smoke added a gritty layer to her character, hinting at emotional depth.

Sources shared that Shruti's character will play a decisive role in the film's narrative arc, with her entry steering the story into a new phase. Currently in its final phase of production, *Aakasamlo Oka Tara* is slated for a Pan-India release in Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, and Malayalam in the summer of 2026.

She will next be seen in *Salaar Part 2: Shouryanga Parvam*. The first installment of *Salaar: Part 1 - Ceasefire* released in 2023. The epic neo-noir action thriller film directed by Prashanth Neel. The film stars Prabhas in the titular role, alongside an ensemble cast of Prithviraj Sukumaran, Shruti Haasan, Jagapathi Babu, Bobby Simha, Sriya Reddy, Ramachandra Raju, John Vijay, Easwari Rao, Tinnu Anand, Devaraj, Brahmaji and Mime Gopi.



Poster of *Dhurandhar*

AICWA slams violations on *Dhurandhar 2* set

BMC proposes blacklisting B62 Studios over alleged safety violations during *Dhurandhar 2* shoot in Mumbai

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) proposed blacklisting filmmaker Aditya Dhar's production banner, B62 Studios, after alleged violations of safety and regulatory norms during the shoot of Ranveer Singh-starrer *Dhurandhar 2* in Mumbai.

The civic body has recommended that the company be barred from seeking future filming permissions in the city following repeated breaches during the production.

The development has led to a strong reaction from the All India Cine Workers Association (AICWA), which condemned the reported lapses on set. Extending its support to the BMC's move, the association called for strict implementation of safety protocols to safeguard the well-being of crew members and technicians.

According to a report in Moneycontrol, AICWA president Suresh Shyamal Gupta described the violations as "alarming" and stressed the need for greater accountability within the industry. He said that "the life, safety, and dignity of film in-

dustry workers, technicians, and labourers cannot be compromised under any circumstances."

For those unversed, BMC's A ward office recently recommended strict action against B62 Studios, proposing that the production house be permanently blacklisted from seeking future filming permissions. In a letter to the Deputy Municipal Commissioner (Zone 1), the office also suggested a penalty of Rs 1 lakh for allegedly shooting on a building terrace and operating two generator vans

without authorisation.

The Rs 25,000 security deposit submitted by the applicant has also been forfeited, according to a report in The Indian Express. Officials said permission for a February 7 and 8 shoot between Modi Street and Perin Nariman Street was granted on January 30 through the Maharashtra Film, Stage and Cultural Development Corporation Limited. However, authorities alleged that the team violated police conditions that prohibited the use of crackers and flammable materials.

A later request to shoot on February 13 and 14 was cancelled due to the earlier violations. A fresh application for filming between 12.30 am and 4.00 am on February 14 was conditionally approved after assurances that no flammable materials would be used.

Despite this, police reportedly received complaints around 12.45 am about burning torches on set. Authorities are now seeking approval to impose fines, register the seized items, and blacklist the applicants and production house permanently.



Photos: Instagram

Filmmaker Aditya Dhar



Photo: Instagram @arjunkapoor

Arjun Kapoor gets online support

After months of trolling, Arjun Kapoor shares cryptic 'clarity' post as fans flood his comments with love and support online

Actor Arjun Kapoor has been at the receiving end of persistent trolling and online bullying over the past few months, especially last year, though the reason behind the sudden wave of negativity remains unclear. While he has not directly addressed the criticism, the actor has been sharing cryptic posts on Instagram, seemingly responding to the backlash in his own subtle way.

On February 3, Arjun shared an emotional post remembering his mother, Mona Shourie Kapoor, on her birth anniversary. In the post, he ad-

How netizens reacted

A fan advised, "We don't know what people are going through mentally, so be kind." Another wrote, "So good to see you. May you be blessed, always." A third user wrote, "You deserve pyaar only." "Good to see people have stopped trolling him...I also once did that and I feel guilty," read another comment. One user wrote, "No trolling button." Another said, "He is a great guy."

mitted that life has been 'cruel' to him lately, indirectly hinting at the trolling he has faced. Following this, netizens now appear to have finally stopped the bullying, instead showering him with positive comments and love. On Wednesday, Arjun took to his Instagram handle and shared a black-and-white photo. In the caption, he wrote, "Clarity changes everything."

Bangash brothers announce Tiger album



Sarod maestros Amaan Ali Bangash and Ayaan Ali Bangash have announced their new album, *Celebrating Our Tigers*, marking their association with WWF-India as Goodwill Ambassadors. The seven-track album is a musical ode to India's wild tiger population and the landscapes they call home. Launched in association with WWF-India, founded in 1969, the album highlights iconic tiger habitats including Jim Corbett, Bandhavgarh, Ranthambore, Kabini, Kaziranga, Pench and the Sundarbans. The project comes at a time when India's wild tiger population is witnessing a steady rise due to sustained conservation efforts.

Fresh from their recent collaborations, the sons of Ustad Amjad Ali Khan said the album aims to create awareness about wildlife conservation through music. Amaan said the compositions are a tribute to the resilience of tigers and those working to protect them, while Ayaan called the project an emotional journey inspired by India's tiger reserves.

WWF-India Programme Director Dr Sejal Worah welcomed the duo as Goodwill Ambassadors, saying the album beautifully blends music and nature while drawing attention to threatened ecosystems. The album also features contributions from leading wildlife photographers and musicians, further strengthening its conservation message.

Briefs

Don repeats Indo-Pak war stopped claim

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

Cannot be shared: Nobel Committee

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

Six killed in Mississippi, suspect held

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

Porn content? Indonesia blocks Grok

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

Russian oil depot hit by Kyiv drone

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

Fighting resumes in Aleppo after ceasefire collapses

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

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

Don: Repair Venezuela's rotting energy industry

WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump met executives from the oil giants at the White House on Friday to discuss Venezuela, saying he wants them to invest \$100 billion in the country to vastly expand its production.

"American companies will have the opportunity to rebuild Venezuela's rotting energy infrastructure and eventually increase oil production to levels never, ever seen before," Trump said.

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

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



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

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

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

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

Exxon and ConocoPhillips departed Venezuela nearly 20

years ago after their assets were nationalised.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'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.

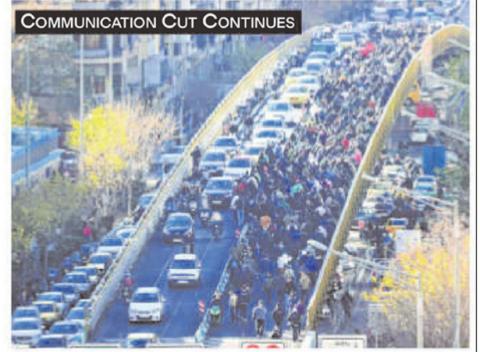
Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has signalled a coming clampdown, despite US warnings.

"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.

CUBA PREPS FOR AFTERSHOCKS

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

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

NICARAGUA NABS US 'SUPPORTERS'

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

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

Another ICE case clip brings fresh scrutiny

MINNEAPOLIS

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

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

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



wheel and the other outside the open driver side window.

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

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

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

Beaten up & 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

rushed to the Dirai Upazila Health Complex, and when his health deteriorated, the doctor referred him to Sylhet.

Moni Rani Talukder, resident medical officer of Dirai Upazila Health Complex, said, "I was on duty at the time. As the patient's condition was critical, he was referred to Sylhet." Joy's mother, Shelly Mohapatra, was quoted as saying by Sylhet View 24, "When they asked for money from him in the morning and did not get it, they took my son's mobile phone away. Later, when he asked for the SIM, they asked him to come in the evening. When he went in the evening, they slapped my son. My son consumed poison at that shop."

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

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

CANBERRA

Pacers give India Women confidence



Aiming to establish an unassailable lead over Australia, Harmanpreet Kaur's India would draw confidence from a strong bowling performance in the rain-hit opening win when the two sides square off in the second and penultimate T20 International here on Thursday. It was a commanding display from seamer **Arunhati Reddy**, whose four-wicket haul rattled the hosts and spearheaded a superb bowling effort as Australia were unable to bat out.

NEW DELHI

Ponting rues lack of aura in Aussie side



Former captain **Ricky Ponting** says the current Australian side lacked the aura that defined its past teams at global events and termed the country's early exit from the men's T20 World Cup as a 'really poor campaign'. Speaking on the latest episode of the ICC Review, Ponting said the team on paper did not carry the same presence as previous Australian outfits that dominated ICC tournaments. "You look at that Australian team on paper, it just doesn't look to have that sort of aura."

COLOMBO

Agha feels Pak have quality spinners



Describing his team's 102-win over Namibia as a "complete performance", Pakistan skipper **Salman Agha** on Wednesday expressed confidence in his spinners' ability to fire in their first Super Eights game of the T20 World Cup against New Zealand. Pakistan rode on Sahibzada Farhan's maiden hundred and their spinners' excellent display to crush Namibia and make the next stage of the tournament, bouncing back from the heavy defeat to India. "It is a complete performance. We batted well in the powerplay and the middle overs as well."

Sahibzada ton, bowlers lift Pak into Super Eights

Pakistan beat Namibia by 102 runs after posting 199 batting first

COLOMBO

Pakistan rode on Sahibzada Farhan's scintillating, maiden hundred and their spinners' excellent display to beat Namibia by a handsome margin of 102 runs and enter the Super Eights of the T20 World Cup here on Wednesday.

Batting first, Pakistan posted a formidable 199 for three in their must-win game.

Farhan, who needed just 20 deliveries to move from 50 to 100, ended on 100 not out off 58 balls, becoming only the second player from Pakistan to score a century in the tournament after Ahmed Shehzad's ton against Bangladesh in 2014 at Mirpur.

In all, Farhan hit 11 boundaries and four sixes while adding 67 runs with skipper Salman Agha (38 off 23 balls) and 81 runs with Shadab Khan (36 not out off 22 balls).

In reply, Namibia were all out for 97 in 17.3 overs with mystery spinner Usman Tariq (4/16 in 3.3 overs) and leg-



Pakistan's Sahibzada Farhan celebrates his century. AP

spinner Shadab Khan (3/19 in 4 overs) leading Pakistan's charge with the ball, picking up four and three wickets respectively.

Salman Mirza and Mohammad Nawaz chipped in with a wicket each as Namibia fared miserably in the chase to finish their campaign winless after four outings. With this win, Pakistan have also ensured their qualification to the next edition of the T20 World Cup.

Scoreboard

PAKISTAN: S Farhan (not out) 100, S Ayub c Z Green b J Brassell 14, S Agha c G Erasmus b J Brassell 38, K Nafay c and b G Erasmus 5, S Khan (not out) 36. **Extras** (LB-2, W-4) 6. **Total** (For 3 wickets, 20 overs) 199. **Fall of wickets:** 1-40, 2-107, 3-118. **Bowling:** JJ Smit 3-0-28-0, G Erasmus 3-0-25-1, R Trumpelmann 4-0-36-0, J Brassell 4-0-48-2, W Myburgh 2-0-27-0, B Scholtz 4-0-33-0.

NAMIBIA: L Steenkamp c U Khan b M Nawaz 23, J Frylinck b S Mirza 9, J Nicol Loftie-Eaton (run

out) 5, G Erasmus c U Khan b S Khan 7, A Volschenk st U Khan b S Khan 20, JJ Smit c S Khan b U Tariq 9, Z Green c S Ayub b S Khan 7, R Trumpelmann b U Tariq 0, W Myburgh c U Khan b U Tariq 8, B Scholtz b U Tariq 1, J Brassell (not out) 1. **Extras** (LB-3, W-4) 7. **Total** (all out, 17.3 overs) 97. **Fall of wickets:** 1-32, 2-39, 3-43, 4-49, 5-79, 6-81, 7-81, 8-95, 9-96.

Bowling: F Ashraf 2-0-16-0, S Mirza 2-0-11-1, S Ayub 2-0-10-0, M Nawaz 4-0-22-1, S Khan 4-0-19-3, U Tariq 3.3-1-16-4.

CLINICAL | Suryakumar-led side top Group A beating Netherlands by 17 runs

Dube, Hardik, Varun star as all-round India humble Dutch

AHMEDABAD

India produced a typically professional all-round display to defeat Netherlands by 17 runs and top their group in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, at the Narendra Modi Stadium, here on Wednesday.

Chasing a big target of 194 for victory, the Dutch fought hard but it was just not enough in the end as they were restricted to 176/7 in 20 overs.

Shivam Dube's spectacular innings of 66 off 31 balls with four fours and six sixes was the highlight of India's batting effort and he also picked up two wickets while bowling.

Earlier, Netherlands off-spinner Aryan Dutt bowled a stellar spell in the powerplay as India's struggles against spinners continued in the T20 World Cup.

It was only in the second half of the innings that Shivam Dube (66 off 31) was able to break the shackles by hitting a barrage of sixes. Opting to bat, India were hoping for Abhishek Sharma's return to form ahead of the Super 8 stage but the left-hander had to endure his third consecutive duck in the tournament. In the form of his life not so long ago, he is yet to score a run in his maiden ICC event.

It was the off-spin of Namibia captain Gerhard Erasmus, Usman Qadir and Saim Ayub that had troubled the Indians in the previous league games. On Wednesday, it was the turn of Indian-origin offie Dutt to shine against a star studded home team at the world's largest cricket stadium. On the eve of the match day, the Indian batters focussed on their game against the spinners in the nets but going forward, but



India's Shivam Dube plays a shot during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 match against Netherlands. ANI

Scoreboard

INDIA: A Sharma b Dutt 0, I Kishan b Dutt 18, T Varma c van der Merwe b van Beek 31, S Yadav c sub (van der Gugten) b Klein 34, S Dube c sub (van der Gugten) b van Beek 66, H Pandya c van der Merwe b van Beek 30, R Singh (not out) 6. **Extras:** 8 (B-1, W-

7) **Total** (For 6 wks, 20 overs) 193. **Fall of wickets:** 1-0, 2-39, 3-69, 4-110, 5-186, 6-193. **Bowling:** A Dutt 4-0-19-2, L van Beek 4-0-56-3, C Ackermann 3-0-36-0, K Klein 4-0-38-1, De Leede 4-0-28-0, R van der Merwe 1-0-15-0. **NETHERLANDS:** M

Levitt c W Sundar b Pandya 24, M O'Dowd b Varun 20, B de Leede c Varun b Dube 33, C Ackermann c Singh b Varun 23, A Dutt b Varun 0, S Edwards (c) b Bumrah 15, Z Lion-Cachet c W Sundar b Dube 26, N Croes (not out) 25, L van Beek (not out) 4. **Extras**

(LB-2, W-4) 6. **Total** (For 7 wks, 20 overs) 176. **Fall of wickets:** 1-35, 2-51, 3-94, 4-94, 5-112, 6-125, 7-172. **Bowling:** A Singh 3-0-22-0, J Bumrah 3-0-17-1, W Sundar 4-0-36-0, V Chakravarthy 3-0-14-3, H Pandya 3-0-40-1, A Sharma 1-0-10-0, S Dube 3-0-35-2

they still have work to do.

While Dutt was the stand-out bowler, the variations used by the Netherlands pacers also tested the Indians.

Dutt, who is used to opening the bowling, was employed for three overs in the powerplay to counter the left-handed trio of Abhishek,

Ishan Kishan (18 off 7) and Tilak Varma (31 off 27).

Having played two dot balls in the opening over, Abhishek went for the pull off a faster ball from Dutt only to see his stumps disturbed. The in-

form Kishan was quick to get off the blocks before falling to Dutt in a bizarre fashion.

Trying to dispatch Dutt on the leg-side, Kishan played on to his stumps with the ball ricocheting from his thigh and elbow.

Tilak, who started with a crisp straight six off pacer Logan van Beek, fell to the same bowler in the ninth over with 41-year-old Roelof van

der Merwe taking a stunner at long-off. India would have been four down inside 10 overs if Michael Levitt had not dropped a sitter off van Beek when Suryakumar Yadav (31 off 27) was on 13. Having stuttered to 74/3 in 10 overs, Dube gave the innings much needed momentum.

Brevis, bowlers make short work of hapless UAE side

Proteas finish group stage with an all-win record

NEW DELHI

Dewald Brevis warmed up nicely with some monstrous sixes as South Africa hardly broke sweat during a walk-in-the-park six-wicket victory over United Arab Emirates in their final group league fixture of the T20 World Cup here on Wednesday.

Chasing a target of 123, the Proteas romped home in 13.1 overs with Aiden Markram smashing 28 off 11 balls to set the stage for young Brevis who also helped himself to a 36 off 25 balls.

Ryan Rickleton hit some lusty sixes to get 30 off 16 balls in an all-round effort. With the big Super Eights match against India coming up on Sunday, South Africa needed Brevis to fire, and he did have a good session out there in the middle.

The pull off a bouncer sent down by wrong-footed left-arm seamer Muhammad Jawadullah was

a treat for the eyes.

Brevis quickly went onto the backfoot and pulled it from above eyeline into the top tier of the square leg stand. When left-arm spinner Haider Ali tossed one outside the off-stump, Brevis thumped it over extra cover into the Hill B of the Feroz Shah Kotla stands.

The two shots were indicators that Brevis was in prime form. He then picked up a slower one from the Proteas bowler Mohammad Arfan to

dispatch it into the cow corner as South Africa finished proceedings in a jiffy.

Earlier, young Alishan Sharafu led a charmed life with double reprieves but Anrich Nortje, playing his first match of the tournament, bowled quick and straight to restrict UAE to 122 for 6 in stipulated 20 overs.

With Lungi Ngidi and Marco Jansen rested before the India game in Ahmedabad on Sunday, Nortje (2/28 in 4 overs) and Corbin Bosch (3/12 in 4 overs) bowled short and quick consistently as the UAE batting unit never really looked in control of the situation.

While Sharafu managed a 38-ball 45 with five fours and a six, he was lucky due to the 'butter-fingered' Proteas fielders, who dropped two catches.

South Africa's Dewald Brevis plays a shot against UAE in New Delhi. PTI



Cricket Scotland CEO feels exposure to big teams tough

The European nation was not originally part of the 20-team competition

MUMBAI

Scotland were elated when they got the last minute call to make it to the T20 World Cup at Bangladesh's expense but Cricket Scotland CEO **Trudy Lindblade** believes what they're eagerly looking for is exposure against the more established teams, which is a tough proposition in her own words.

The European nation was not originally part of the 20-team competition for the T20 World Cup but Bangladesh's refusal to travel to India citing security concerns saw them getting ousted and replaced with Scotland.

"It is really tough because that crowded schedule is making it tougher for those of us to get more content," Lindblade told reporters after Scotland's disappointing seven-wicket loss to Nepal at the Wankhede Stadium, here on Tuesday.

"We need to work collectively. We have all the Associate members that are playing here in this tournament. We talk regularly, we



It is really tough because that crowded schedule is making it tougher for those of us to get more content

Trudy Lindblade
CEO, Cricket Scotland

with more top-flight cricket on regular basis, not just by playing against top teams.

"We've all been consistent in terms of what we want - more cricket on a more regular basis, playing against the top teams. You don't always have to play the England and Australia of the world. We want to play a mix of teams because that will help improve our cricket," she said.

Lindblade said Scotland, like other Associates, have to come up with solutions to the problem while underlining cricket's global growth. Cricket Scotland is one of the

founding members of the European T20 Premier League along with boards of Ireland and the Netherlands.

"We've got a new franchise league coming into Europe with the European T20 Premier League later this year and that is so exciting for us, because we are part of the founding countries in that," Lindblade said.

"You've seen how Italy and the Netherlands have performed at this World Cup. There is a real opportunity in Europe, going back to global growth. We want to be part of that. We want to be part of that showcase that this game is a really beautiful game," she said.

"Yes, we didn't have the same preparation as everybody else. Yes, we had to do a lot of things, but that took the pressure off us so we could come in with a different mindset. We were trending on social media in India last Saturday, so for us, what an opportunity." "...we showed the might and fight of Scotland, and that I'm really proud of," she added.

heady

Currie thrilled after 'cricket in a nightclub' experience

MUMBAI

Although Scotland would be disappointed to exit the World Cup on a losing note, seamer **Brad Currie** (pic, left) will take back the mindboggling experience of playing 'cricket in a nightclub' when he heads back to Scotland.

Currie was talking to reporters in the mixed zone after Scotland's defeat to Nepal by seven wickets in their last group match.

The Scots had put up a strong showing against both England and West Indies during their encounters after making their way into the tournament through the back door after Bangladesh were ousted by the ICC for refusing to travel to India for the marquee event.

"(In) the England game, we had 40 odd thousand (fans), maybe even 50 (at the) Eden Gardens. For me, that as a kid growing up, was a dream come true. Here at the Wankhede (Stadium), again,

a dream come true," Currie told media after Scotland's seven-wicket loss to Nepal here on Tuesday night.

"That's (in Kolkata) the loudest game I've ever played. It was crazy. It was genuinely like playing a cricket game in a nightclub. "In the England game, a lot of Indian fans - and that's exactly what we want as players - we want that experience, (it) almost normalises playing in front of 40,000 in what feels like a nightclub."

As is the case among players from associate nations, Currie wanted Scotland to have more opportunities to play the bigger teams and the highest level. "We grow as players for that experience and what we ask for is more, just give us more, we love playing these games and we'd love to sort of entertain, really," he said. "...it's going to feel like we're playing in a library when we go back to Scotland," he added.

Currie revealed Scotland

were not at sea when they got the invite to the T20 World Cup in the last moment.

"We had two warm-up games (and) we had plenty of net sessions. As far as I'm concerned, we were all preparing for our Namibia series next month and (the) Cricket World (Cup) League 2. I don't think any of us were too undercooked," he said. Scotland skipper Richie Berrington also reiterated the demand of needing more game-time with top nations.

