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

INTERNAL RIFT | Protests erupt across constituencies as 75 sitting MLAs denied re-nomination

Ticket snub triggers dissent in TMC

KOLKATA

A day after the announcement of 291 candidates, dissent erupts in Trinamool Congress (TMC) after several heavyweight leaders and sitting MLAs were denied tickets.

Sitting MLA Rabindranath Ghosh talking to the media had hinted towards his retirement.

"I don't know what went wrong and I was denied a ticket but I had worked for the people and will continue to do so in my own capacity," said Ghosh.

TMC supporters and local leaders were seen agitating and burning tyres in front of TMC MLA Saukat Molla's house demanding that he

POLL WATCH WEST BENGAL

should contest from Canning (East) where he is the sitting MLA. This time he got a ticket from Bhangar.

Molla said that he will inform Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and TMC national secretary Abhishek Banerjee about the dissent and will take action accordingly.

After Khageswar Roy sitting MLA of Rajganj was replaced by Swapna Barman, Roy's supporters warned that the party would lose the seat in the upcoming elections.

Roy said that he had built the base of the party in his region and also that he along with his supporters will resign from TMC.

Chuchura MLA Asit Mazumdar to quit politics as he thinks that the party had done 'injustice' by not giving him a ticket.



Security personnel conduct a route march in the run up to the Assembly elections, in Bolpur on Wednesday

EC orders fresh rejig of officials

Kolkata: The Election Commission on Wednesday ordered a fresh round of reshuffle of senior officers in poll-bound West Bengal, appointing 13 IAS officers as DMS-cum-DEOs and posting five IPS officers as deputy inspectors general (DIGs).

The IAS officers were appointed as district magistrates (DMs) who will also serve as district election officers (DEOs), placing them at the centre of poll management and supervision at the district level.

According to an official communication, officers including Jitin Yadav (Cooch Behar), Sandeep Ghosh (Jalpaiguri), Vivek Kumar (Uttar Dinajpur),

Rajanvir Singh Kapur (Malda) and R Arjun (Murshidabad) have been posted as DMS-cum-DEOs. Similarly, Srikant Palli has been appointed as DM-cum-DEO of Nadia, Sweta Agarwal in Purba Bardhaman, Shilpa Gorisaria in North 24 Parganas, Abhishek Kumar Tiwary in South 24 Parganas, Harishankar Panicker in Darjeeling and T Balasubramanian in Alipurduar.

Smita Pandey has been posted as Municipal Commissioner of Kolkata Municipal Corporation and DEO of Kolkata North, while Randhir Kumar will serve as DEO of Kolkata South.

Purbasthali (north) MLA Tapas Chatterjee also expressed strong discontent after being denied a ticket.

It can be recalled that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee

before announcing the list of candidates had mentioned that she would utilize those leaders who are not getting tickets in organizational works.

TVK says Vijay was offered CM post & 50% of Assembly seats

CHENNAI

TVK general secretary Aadhav Arjuna has claimed that his party leader Vijay was offered chief minister's post and even fifty per cent Assembly seats by a party to contest in the ensuing election.

The Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam was offered 50:50 seats besides the chief minister's post for two-and-a-half years, but party president Vijay declined, Arjuna said without naming the party that had engaged the fledgling party in electoral pact talks and extended the offer.

The TVK will be making its electoral debut this April 23 Assembly election.

During his recent interaction with the mediapersons,

POLL WATCH TAMIL NADU

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami had insisted that his party was not involved in any alliance talks with the TVK. BJP state chief Nainar Nagenthran endorsed ally Palaniswami's stance on the issue, though it was widely speculated that sources close to the saffron party had attempted to negotiate with the TVK for a poll pact to take on the ruling DMK.

ARJUNA APOLOGISES

Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) General Secretary (Campaigns) Aadhav Arjuna on Wednesday apologised to superstar Rajinikanth for his

DMK allots 5 seats to CPI

Chennai: The ruling DMK on Wednesday allotted five seats to its ally CPI, for the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, ending several rounds of talks held between the two parties.

controversial remarks, even as he sought to recalibrate his earlier claim that the DMK had forced the actor to stay away from politics.

"Had my comments, made with a different objective, saddened Rajini sir, I publicly express my regret and apologise," Aadhav said, attempting to defuse the political storm that erupted days after his remarks.

Vessel docks; Centre admits LPG concerns



NEW DELHI

Even as LPG continues to be discharged from two vessels, Shivalki and Nanda Devi, which arrived from the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz, the Centre on Wednesday admitted that due to the West Asia conflict "the LPG issue is still worrisome" and "long lines were being witnessed at distributorships".

However, it added that there has been an "improvement in its online booking" and that the domestic production has been increased by 40 per cent since March 5.

Joint Secretary in Ministry of Petroleum Sujata Sharma said at a press briefing that "our crude availability is normal, and refineries are operating at optimal capacity."

She made the announcement on day when another Indian-flagged crude vessel Jag Laadki - carrying nearly 80,886 metric tonnes of crude oil sourced from the United Arab Emirates -- arrived at Adani Ports in Mundra, Gujarat, marking the third Indian vessel to safely return from Gulf region in three days.

Hormuz top priority: PM

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday exchanged views on the evolving situation in West Asia with Crown Prince of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and said that ensuring safe and free navigation through the Strait of Hormuz remains the foremost priority.

Tanker diversion

A Russian oil tanker originally bound for China reversed course mid-voyage and is now heading to India, highlighting New Delhi's renewed efforts to secure crude supplies after a temporary US waiver, Bloomberg News reported. The Aframax vessel Aqua Titan is expected to arrive at New Mangalore on March 21, according to ship-tracking data cited in the report.

'Humiliated' Cong MP joins BJP

NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI

In yet another jolt to the Congress ahead of the April 9 Assam Assembly polls, its senior leader and Lok Sabha MP Pradyut Bordoloi joined the BJP on Wednesday.

A Congress member for more than five decades and the chairman of the manifesto committee for the Assembly polls, Bordoloi claimed that he resigned on Tuesday as he was facing humiliation in the party and was sidelined after he supported Shashi Tharoor's candidature for the party president's post.

POLL WATCH ASSAM

A two-term MP from Nagaon and a former four-time MLA, Bordoloi was inducted into the BJP in the presence of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and other party leaders in the national capital, weeks after former Assam Congress chief Bhupen Kumar Borah switched to the ruling party.

The Congress termed his decision as "unfortunate", while the BJP claimed it

IUML fields two women

Kozhikode: In a first, the IUML is fielding two women candidates in the Kerala Assembly elections to be held on April 9. Earlier, the IUML had given a seat to each woman in the 1996 and 2021 Assembly elections.

reflected the opposition party's weakening base, with Sarma saying that "no self-respecting individual" can remain in the Congress.

Briefs

BENGALURU

Key names missing in SIT Prajwal case

The SIT charge sheet in the Prajwal Revanna obscene videos case has sparked controversy after omitting several prominent names. The SIT named 39 accused, mostly Congress and BJP workers, but excluded individuals such as former BJP MLA Preetham Gowda and Congress MP Shreyas Patel, raising concerns from the complainant. The case pertains to pen drives containing obscene videos circulated in Hassan ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Advocate Poorna Chandra questioned the omissions, while another accused, Devaraje Gowda, said he would challenge the charge sheet in the Karnataka High Court.

-Vinay Madhava Gowda

LUCKNOW
Yogi marks nine years as UP CM
Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has completed nine years in office, with the government highlighting its tenure as one marked by infrastructure expansion, improved law and order, and investment growth. Since assuming office in 2017, Adityanath has overseen expressway development, industrial initiatives and technology-driven governance. The government claims the state economy has expanded significantly, supported by welfare delivery and fiscal management. While industry groups cite improved investment conditions, experts note that translating proposals into actual investments remains a key challenge. Industry bodies have noted improved investor confidence in recent years.

Cong initiates action against 4 MLAs for voting in BJP's favour

CHANDIGARH

Haryana Congress in-charge B K Hariprasad on Wednesday named four party MLAs who voted in favour of two BJP candidates in the Rajya Sabha elections in Haryana and said disciplinary action has been initiated against them.

Addressing reporters in New Delhi, Hariprasad said show-cause notices were being issued to Shailli Chaudhary, Mohammad Ilyas, Mohammad Israil and Renu Bala.

Alleging that the election

process was influenced by money, muscle power and institutional pressure, the AICC general secretary said several votes were deliberately declared invalid to alter

HARYANA RS ELECTION

the outcome.

He said he, along with party leader Bhopinder Singh Hooda, reviewed ballot papers and found that four MLAs had voted in favour of the BJP.

He referred to the 2016 Rajya Sabha election controversy, alleging a similar pat-

tern. In 2016, R K Anand, backed by the Congress and the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), lost after 12 votes were declared invalid.

Meanwhile, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Saini attacked the Congress over the Rajya Sabha elections, alleging that the party was undermining democratic principles.

Speaking during the ongoing budget session, Saini said the issue did not formally arise for discussion in the House, but Congress MLA Raghuraj Kadian questioned the need to field a third candidate.

Congress faces action dilemma

Patna: Despite its three MLAs not casting their votes in the recent Rajya Sabha election, Congress would not find it easy to take action against them due to multiple factors. There is a possibility that Bihar Congress, acting on the directives of the party high command, may request the assembly speaker to take action against the concerned MLAs. However, Congress leaders are well aware that the speaker is unlikely to take action against their legislators so promptly. The matter rests entirely at the discretion of the speaker.

-Dheeraj Kumar

63 lateral entry since 2018: Centre

As many as 63 appointments have been made in various government departments through lateral entry since 2018, the Lok Sabha was informed on Wednesday. "So far, 63 appointments have been made at the level of joint secretary/director/deputy secretary on contract/deputation basis into various government departments through lateral entry since 2018," Union Minister of State for Personnel, Jitendra Singh, said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha.



'One Nation One Election' panel gets extension

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday extended the tenure for the Joint Parliamentary Committee's report on the 'One Nation, One Election Bill', allowing the committee to submit its findings by the first day of the last week of the Monsoon Session in 2026.

Govt pushes online gaming law

The government is committed to ensuring a safe, responsible and accountable online-gaming ecosystem in the country, Parliament was informed on Wednesday. In a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, MoS for Information and Broadcasting L Murugan said the government has enacted the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025 (Gaming Act), with the objective of promoting innovation in e-sports and online social games and prohibiting online money games.

Cabinet nod to ₹33,660 cr industrial park scheme

NEW DELHI

The Cabinet on Wednesday approved a "new era" scheme called Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna (BHAVYA) for promotion of industrial parks in the country. Under this, a sum of Rs 33,660 crore has been allocated for developing 100 plug-and-play industrial parks across the country.

The Cabinet said the scheme would help develop

world-class industrial infrastructure and thereby help unlock the country's manufacturing potential. It said on the lines of the Industrial Smart Cities developed under the National Industrial Corridor Development Programme (NICDP), BHAVYA will be implemented in partnership with states and private sector players.

The scheme would deliver plug-and-play industrial ecosystems and thus enable

industries to move to production with speed and certainty. It would provide for pre-approved land, ready infrastructure, and integrated services and thus "significantly reduce entry barriers for investors".

Under the scheme, industrial parks ranging from 100 to 1000 acres will be taken up for development and financial support of up to Rs. 1 crore per acre will be provided for setting up of core infrastructure.

Cabinet clears ₹45k cr projects

NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved four schemes worth nearly Rs 45,000 crore and these include the construction of a four-lane access-controlled National Highway-927 from Barabanki to Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh; minimum support price (MSP) funding to Cotton Corporation of India crore for the 2023-24 season; and promoting a Small Hydro Power (SHP) Development Scheme.

9 of family killed in Delhi blaze

NEW DELHI

Nine members of a family, including a 70-year-old woman and three young girls -- one just three years old -- were killed after a massive fire tore through a four-storey residential building in south-west Delhi's Palam area on Wednesday morning.

The incident triggered a large-scale rescue operation, with eyewitnesses alleging delays due to faulty firefighting equipment.

Three others were injured



in the incident, including a two-year-old girl who slipped from her father's hands while he was trying to lower her from the third floor to the second, where there was access

EV charging: Blast kills 8

Indore: Eight members of a family were killed after a fire broke out at a local businessman's three-storey house following an explosion at an Electric Vehicle (EV) charging point outside the building in Indore city of Madhya Pradesh early on Wednesday, officials said.

to a ladder, in a desperate bid to escape the flames.

Love, shaadi and divorce

Bengaluru: Former PM and JD(S) chief HD Deve Gowda on Wednesday said his alliance with Congress was a "forced marriage" that ended in a "divorce" due to it being an "abusive relationship".

He was responding to Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge's remark: "I have known Deve Gowda for 54 years... He fell in love with us, but married (Narendra) Modi sahab," drawing laughter from the PM in the House.

BJP moves privilege notice against Sukhu

Shimla: Himachal Pradesh Assembly Budget Session began on Wednesday on a stormy note with the opposition BJP submitting a breach of privilege notice against Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, accusing him of misleading the House by making false claims on government's loans.

Just before the House reconvened after 28 days, BJP MLAs, shouting slogans,

marched toward the Speaker's chamber to submit a notice under Rule 75.

Leader of the Opposition Jai Ram Thakur told reporters that the chief minister informed the House on August 26, 2025, that the government had raised loans amounting to Rs 26,830 crore, repaid Rs 8,253 crore and made a provision of Rs 10,581 crore in 2025-26 for loan repayment.

Indecent gaze: Man kills bro

Mathura: A man allegedly hacked his younger brother to death with a sharp-edged weapon for "casting an inappropriate gaze at his wife", police said on Wednesday. The accused, identified as Meghshyam Singh, attacked his 35-year-old brother Niranjana at Ahamal village under the Magorra police station limits around 10 pm on Tuesday, they said. According to police, the incident occurred after Meghshyam returned home from work.

Man shot dead near gym in Chandigarh

CHANDIGARH

A 31-year-old man was shot dead by two unidentified assailants in a brazen daylight attack in Sector 9 here on Wednesday, police said.

The attackers arrived on a motorcycle, and one of them, wearing a helmet, opened fire at the victim -- Charanpreet Singh -- who had gone to a gym in the upscale market of Chandigarh.

Nitish bats for Samarat as CM

Patna: Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday dropped ample hints that he preferred deputy CM and BJP leader Samrat Choudhary as his successor.

Addressing a public gathering in Jamui as part of the fourth leg of his ongoing "Samridhhi Yatra", Nitish placed his hand on Choudhary's shoulder and appealed to the people to support him. With a smile, he remarked now he (Samrat) would handle all the work.

Pumped Storage Power Projects to Gain Momentum: Nandi

Lucknow

To accelerate the development of Pumped Storage Power (PSP) Projects, Uttar Pradesh Minister for Industrial Development, Nand Gopal Gupta 'Nandi', chaired a high-level review meeting on Tuesday at the PICUP Bhawan auditorium in Lucknow. During the meeting, discussions were held on water availability for proposed projects in Sonbhadra (Sone River), Chandauli (Muskhand Dam), Mirzapur (Adwa Dam and Belan River) and Prayagraj (Belan River). Special emphasis was also laid on removing regulatory and procedural hurdles to ensure smooth implementation of approved PSP Projects. These Projects are expected to play a crucial role in strengthening the state renewable energy capacity and energy storage systems. Reiterating the commitment of the "double engine government" towards the effective execution of PSP Projects, Minister Nandi assured that all issues would be resolved within a defined timeline. He further stated that under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh



has emerged as a Preferred investment destination. The state government is Promoting advanced technologies along with a robust Ease of Doing Business (EODB) framework. Assuring full support to Project developers, Nandi emphasized improved inter-departmental coordination to resolve issues Promptly. Land-related matters were a key agenda in the meeting. Particularly discrepancies between forest and revenue records. The minister directed the Forest and Revenue Departments to coordinate and ensure time-bound solutions for PSP Projects. Representatives from ten major developers,

including Greenko Energies Pvt. Ltd., JSW Energy, Avaada, Torrent Power, Jharia Pvt. Ltd., Adani Green Energy Ltd., THDC, ReNew Group, GSC and Venser, participated in the Meeting. On this occasion, Additional Chief Secretary for Infrastructure and Industrial Development Alok Kumar and CEO of Invest UP, Vijay Kiran Anand, along with other senior officials were also Present. The Additional Chief Secretary assured developers that the state government is working in a time-bound manner to resolve all issues and ensure the swift execution of these Projects.

Agreement Signed between the World Bank and the Uttar Pradesh Govt to improve air Quality

Lucknow

With the objective of improving air quality in Uttar Pradesh, a significant agreement has been signed in New Delhi between the World Bank, the Government of India, and the State Government. Under this agreement, the Uttar Pradesh Clean Air Management Program will receive financial assistance of USD 299.66 Million. The Primary objective of the Program is to Promote integrated solutions for improving air quality and cleanliness across key sectors such as transport, agriculture and industry, benefiting not only Uttar Pradesh but also neighboring States. The MOU has been signed in line with the vision of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. It was signed on behalf of the Uttar Pradesh Government by B. Chandrakala, CEO of the Clean Air Management Authority and Secretary of the Forest, Environment and Climate Change Department, on behalf of the Government of India by Juhí Mukherjee, Joint Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs and on behalf of the World Bank by Paul Procee, Acting Country Director for India. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said, "Uttar Pradesh is moving steadily toward becoming a USD 1 trillion economy.

Economic growth, Productivity and environmental balance complement each Other. Through this program, prosperity will be measured not only by GDP but also by clean Skies, healthy citizens, and a sustainable Environment." Paul Procee, Acting Country Director of the World Bank in India, said "The program will help leverage approximately USD 150 million in private capital in the transport and MSME sectors. It will also support investments in electric buses and three-wheelers, emission monitoring systems in industries and the adoption of clean technologies to enhance Productivity." "The Program will Provide clean cooking solutions to 3.9 million households in the state and support more than 700 brick kilns in adopting resource-efficient Technologies. It will also encourage the efficient use of fertilizers to enhance farmers' Productivity. This Program is Part of the World Bank Indo-Gangetic Plains and Himalayan Foothills Regional Air Quality Management initiative, which has a maturity period of 10 Years. This joint initiative of the World Bank and the Uttar Pradesh Government will not only help the state tackle air Pollution but also strengthen its Path toward environmentally sustainable Development.

U-Hub to transform the landscape of innovation and Entrepreneurship in UP

Lucknow

The government of Yogi Adityanath is taking major steps to transform Uttar Pradesh into a leading hub for innovation and startups. In this direction, the Budget 2026-27 has announced the establishment of U-Hubs in Lucknow and Gautam Buddha Nagar. The state government believes that this initiative will strengthen the startup culture in the state while giving fresh momentum to technology-based enterprises. The hub is Planned to be developed on the lines of the country leading innovation centers with a budgetary allocation of 100 Crore. Similar to innovation centers established in Telangana, Odisha, Kerala and Karnataka, the U-Hub aims to emerge as a world-class innovation center. Its Primary objective is to Provide a strong Platform for young innovators and new ideas. Through this hub, startups and entrepreneurs will receive the resources, guidance and technical support required to transform their ideas into successful businesses. This initiative is expected to Promote entrepreneurship in the state and create new employment opportunities for the Youth. According to the government Plan, the hub will be developed on a Plug-and-Play model, where startups will receive support at every stage - from the initial phase to scaling up. The center will run incubation, acceleration, research, development and collaboration Programs. Startups will also get access to mentorship from experts, opportunities to connect with investors and modern technological facilities. Experts believe that the establishment of U-Hub will Promote innovation-driven industries in Uttar Pradesh. It is expected to encourage the emergence of new startups in sectors such as Artificial Intelligence, Information Technology, Financial Technology, Health Technology and other technology-based fields. This will also encourage young people to move toward entrepreneurship instead of relying solely on traditional job opportunities. A Provision of 100 crore has been made in the budget for this Project. The government believes that this initiative will inject new energy into the state's startup ecosystem and accelerate the growth of technology-driven industries. Experts also note that the U-Hub will help connect national and international investors with the startup ecosystem of Uttar Pradesh. This is expected to increase investment in the state, lead to the establishment of new companies and create large-scale employment opportunities for the Youth. In the coming years, U-Hub could emerge as a major center for innovation and entrepreneurship in Uttar Pradesh. It will strengthen the state economy and help the state establish a strong identity among the leading startup ecosystems.

15th Meeting of Uttar Pradesh State Seed Sub-Committee Concluded

Lucknow

A significant step was taken today toward the development of horticultural crops in Uttar Pradesh and ensuring the availability of improved seed varieties to farmers. The 15th meeting of the Uttar Pradesh State Seed Sub-Committee was held at the Central Institute for Subtropical Horticulture (CISH), Telibagh, Lucknow under the chairmanship of Additional Chief Secretary, Horticulture and Food Processing, B.L Meena. During the meeting, the committee constituted by the Government of India held detailed discussions on the release and notification



of newly developed varieties of horticultural Crops. It was informed during the meeting that out of the 12 varieties Presented in the Previous (14th) meeting of the State Seed Sub-Committee, 11 varieties were notified in the Government Gazette on

September 1, 2025. These notified varieties include mango varieties 'Awadh Abhay', 'Awadh Samridhi', and 'ICAR Sagarika' developed by CISH, Lucknow. Additionally, bael varieties 'Awadh Arpan' and 'Awadh Shreshtha', pointed gourd

(parwal) varieties 'Awadh Suchitra' and 'Surekha Awadh' and guava variety 'Awadh Bhushan' were also included. Varieties developed by Acharya Narendra Dev University of Agriculture & Technology, Ayodhya—Narendra Bael-17, Narendra Ber-2, and Narendra Haldi-5—have also received notification from the central Government. In today 15th meeting, a total of 20 new varieties from various institutions were Presented for release. The Indian Institute of Vegetable Research, Varanasi, presented 15 varieties, including 5 of tomato, 2 of Peas and one each of bitter

gourd, bottle gourd, cluster bean, winged bean, amaranthus (chaulai), water chestnut (singhada), baby corn and lotus. Similarly, CISH, Lucknow presented 4 varieties—1 of jamun, 1 of bael and 2 of sem (hyacinth bean). Acharya Narendra Dev Agricultural University, Ayodhya also Presented 1 new variety of Ber. The release and notification of these new varieties will Provide horticulturists and farmers in the state with high-yielding and disease-resistant crops. The meeting was attended by Director of Horticulture Bhanu Prakash Ram, Joint Director, along with other senior officials and agricultural Scientists.

SP Abhimanyu Manglik Holds Public Hearing, Orders For Swift and Fair Resolution

Fatehpur

The newly appointed Superintendent of Police, Abhimanyu Manglik, conducted a Public hearing at the Police office on Tuesday, where he attentively listened to grievances brought forward by citizens from various Parts of the District. A wide range of complaints were Presented during the session, including land disputes, family conflicts, assault cases and allegations of fraud. Taking serious note of each application, the SP directed concerned officials to ensure prompt, fair and quality resolution of all complaints. Emphasizing accountability, the Superintendent of Police stated that delivering justice to the Public is the foremost responsibility of the Police and any negli-



gence in this regard would not be tolerated. He Personally interacted with the complainants to understand their issues in detail and in several cases, immediately contacted the respective station house officers over the Phone to issue necessary instructions for action. Additionally, he reviewed Pending cases and warned officials against unnecessary delays, making it clear that strict action would be taken against those found responsible for

lapses. He reiterated that Providing timely justice in line with the government directives remains a top priority for the Police department. The Public hearing initiative continues to serve as an effective Platform for addressing citizens concerns and strengthening Public trust in the Police system. Senior officers and staff of the department were also present during the session and actively assisted in the grievance redressal Process.

Investment Momentum Accelerates in Yamuna Expressway Region, Land Allotted to Three Companies

Noida

To Promote industrial investment in Uttar Pradesh, the Yogi government continues to take Proactive steps. In this direction, land has been allotted to three major companies in the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA) area. The allocation was made on the recommendation of Invest UP, further strengthening the investment climate in the state. These Projects will bring in investments worth over ₹3400 crore and are expected to generate employment for more than 5700 people. Major Investment and Employment from Escorts Kubota M/S Escorts Kubota Limited has been allotted 154 acres of land in Sector-10. The company will establish a manufacturing unit for tractors and construction equipment. This Project will involve an investment of approximately ₹2029 crore and is expected to create around 4,000

jobs. The unit will Provide a significant boost to the agriculture and infrastructure sectors in the State. Boost to Agricultural Machinery Sector by CNH Industrial M/S CNH Industrial India Pvt. Ltd. has been allotted 100 acres of land in Sector-8D. The company will set up a tractor manufacturing unit with an investment of ₹1,219.81 crore. This Project is expected to generate employment for about 1200 people. The investment will help Position Uttar Pradesh as a key hub for agricultural machinery Manufacturing. Strengthening Food Processing Sector with Sun Organic M/S Sun Organic Industries Pvt. Ltd. has been allotted 30,000 square meters of land in Sector-8D. The company will establish a dry fruit processing and packaging unit. The project will involve an investment of approximately ₹225.16 crore and is expected to cre-

ate 569 jobs. This will boost the food processing sector and create new employment opportunities at the local level. Investor Confidence Rises Due to Government Policies. The growing investment in the state is attributed to the Yogi government's industry-friendly policies, single-window system, and improved infrastructure. The Yamuna Expressway region is rapidly emerging as an industrial hub, attracting major companies. These projects will not only generate thousands of jobs but also strengthen the local economy. Additionally, they will accelerate supply chain, logistics and industrial activities, contributing to the state overall Development. The Uttar Pradesh government aims to make the state a \$1 trillion economy, and the ongoing investments in the Yamuna Expressway region are seen as a significant step in that Direction.

Special campaign against food adulteration to be launched across the state: Dr. Dhan

Dehradun

A special statewide campaign will be launched to curb food adulteration. Along with sampling of food items, the campaign will also focus on Public awareness. In view of the Char Dham Yatra, awareness meetings will be organized at major travel halts in coordination with local trade Associations. State Medical Health and Medical Education Minister Dr. Dhan Singh Rawat chaired a review meeting of the Health Department and the Food Safety and Drug Administration through virtual mode. During the meeting, he directed officials to conduct a 15-day special campaign across the state to Prevent food adulteration. Under this campaign, food samples will be collected and awareness drives will also be Conducted. Special emphasis will be Placed on markets and towns along the Char



Dham Yatra route, where awareness meetings will be held with traders and strict measures will be taken to Prevent adulteration. The minister also instructed officials to prepare a comprehensive action plan in view of the pilgrimage and to take strict action against offenders. He further directed that food safety hoardings be installed along the Yatra routes, traders must display information related to food items and toll-free numbers outside their establishments and mobile "Food Safety on Wheels" vans should be used to test food items at various locations. Special inspections will also be carried out in

weekly markets, fairs and local haats across the State. During the meeting, officials informed that a proposal worth ₹7.34 crore had been sent to the Government of India for various activities under the Food Safety Department, which has now been approved. The Plan includes Public awareness campaigns, seminars, IEC workshops and the "Eat Right" Campaign. The virtual meeting was attended by Secretary Health and Commissioner, Food Safety and Drug Administration Sachin Kurve, Director General Health Dr. Sunita Tamta, Director Medical Education Dr. Ajay Kumar

Arya, Director Health Dr. Shikha Jangpangi, Char Dham Yatra Nodal Officer Dr. Sujata, Additional Director Medical Education Dr. R.S. Bisht, Deputy Commissioner FDA Ganesh Kandwal, Additional Commissioner FDA Tajbar Singh and Chief Medical Officers of Dehradun, Haridwar, Tehri, Pauri, Rudrapur, Uttarkashi and Chamoli Districts. Box Item Vacant Posts in Food Safety Department to be filled on Deputation. Dr. Dhan Singh Rawat directed officials to fill long-Pending vacant Posts, including food inspectors, in the Food Safety Department through deputation. He emphasized that, in view of the Char Dham Yatra, it is essential to address the staff shortage urgently. He also instructed that a proposal seeking approval be sent to the government at the Earliest.

Prayagraj Development Authority's 142nd Board Meeting: Emphasis on City Expansion and Drone Surveys

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. To accelerate development works and ensure the systematic expansion of the urban area, the 142nd Board Meeting of the Prayagraj Development Authority (PDA) was held on Wednesday at Gandhi Auditorium. The meeting was presided over by Divisional Commissioner and Authority Chairperson, Soumya Agarwal. Present at the meeting were District Magistrate Manish Verma, Vice Chairperson Rishi Raj, Municipal Commissioner Sai Teja, Secretary Ajit Singh, and other officials. During the meeting, detailed discussions were held regarding the holistic development of the city and the expansion of the Authority's jurisdiction under the 'Chief Minister's Urban Expansion and New City Promotion Scheme.' Officials were directed to assess requirements and prepare proposals expeditiously. A decision was taken to conduct a drone survey to ensure transparency and efficiency in land management within the Authority's jurisdiction. Under this initiative, urban boundaries will be demarcated, lands belonging to



the Improvement Trust will be verified, and land records will be digitized. By cross-referencing images captured by drones with existing maps, any discrepancies can be accurately identified. Officials were also instructed to compile online

records for government, Nazul (leasehold), and other public lands. The meeting also addressed the sale of vacant flats within the Authority's residential schemes. Members suggested that the pricing of these flats be revised—after studying

the rates offered by private developers—to provide relief to the general public. The Chairperson gave assurances that the pricing would be determined in strict accordance with government guidelines and prevailing market conditions.

Furthermore, a proposal to select a Project Management Unit (PMU) to oversee various projects and ensure quality standards was approved. Additionally, a consensus was reached on appointing consultants to provide technical and

administrative support for land-related operations.

Officials expressed confidence that these decisions would accelerate development activities and facilitate the timely completion of various schemes.

883-Page Response Opposing Shankaracharya's Bail: Ashutosh Maharaj Presents His Case in Court, Submits Apology for Delay

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj The Allahabad High Court has stayed the arrest of Swami Avimuktেশwaranand, who is accused of sexually abusing minor *Batuks* (students). The Court had directed Ashutosh Maharaj—the plaintiff who filed the case—to present his arguments and evidence. On Tuesday, amidst tight security, Ashutosh Maharaj filed a response spanning approximately 883 pages in the High Court. Opposing the Shankaracharya's bail and demanding his immediate arrest, Ashutosh Maharaj submitted a voluminous bundle of documents to the High Court. Regarding the contents of the 883-page response, Ashutosh Maharaj stated that he has submitted several significant facts and pieces of evidence, in the form of documents, to the Court. Ashutosh Maharaj has also filed his *Vakalatnama* (Power of Attorney) to personally represent himself in this case. In his response, while opposing the



Shankaracharya's bail, Ashutosh Maharaj raised concerns regarding the safety and security of the *Batuks*. He stated that he has filed a crucial response in the Court and remains hopeful that he will receive justice. Refusal to appear on March 12, Ashutosh Maharaj—who filed the sexual harassment case against Swami Avimuktেশwaranand—is now expressing his displeasure and adopting an aggressive stance against the UP Police themselves. In fact, Ashutosh Maharaj failed to present his arguments in the High Court on the scheduled date. In the matter concerning the stay on Avimuktেশwaranand's

arrest and the granting of anticipatory bail, Ashutosh Maharaj was required to present his arguments, submit evidence, and file necessary documents in the High Court by March 12. Ashutosh Maharaj did not present his case in Court; instead, he laid the entire blame for this failure upon the administration. He alleged that adequate security cover was not provided to him and that his life remains under threat. Following an attack on him aboard the Rewa Express, Ashutosh Maharaj has been staying at an undisclosed location. He maintains that despite repeated requests to the administration, he has not been provided with sufficient security.

*Surprise Inspection of Swaroop Rani Hospital Reveals Several Flaws; Directives Issued to Improve Arrangements

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj: With the objective of providing better healthcare facilities to patients, several Additional District Magistrates (ADMs) of the district conducted a surprise inspection of the Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital on Wednesday. During the inspection, while taking stock of the hospital's arrangements, aspects such as cleanliness, attendance of doctors, medicine distribution, and treatment protocols were scrutinized. Several deficiencies came to light during this process, and directives were issued to rectify them immediately. ADM (Nazul) Sanjay Pandey inspected the Emergency and Trauma Center. While the cleanliness here was found to be satisfactory, the Consultant-in-Charge was found to be absent from the Triage Room. Additionally, the duty chart was not displayed. Consequently, he issued directives stating that the duty chart for junior doctors must be prepared one day in advance and displayed



before 8:00 AM. In the Pathology Lab, a technician was found to be absent, while the door to the X-ray room was found broken, posing a security risk to the staff. Directives were issued to have this repaired immediately. ADM (Administration) Pooja Mishra and ADM (Supply) Vijay Sharma. During their inspection, senior doctors were found to be absent from the Neurology OPD, while junior doctors were observed attending to patients. Although duty charts were posted in the wards, the specific timings were not indicated. Some of the

Pharmacy and the Jan Aushadhi Kendra. Due to a shortage of X-ray films, patients are currently being provided with their reports via mobile devices or on paper printouts. The new building was inspected by ADM (Administration) Pooja Mishra and ADM (Supply) Vijay Sharma. During their inspection, senior doctors were found to be absent from the Neurology OPD, while junior doctors were observed attending to patients. Although duty charts were posted in the wards, the specific timings were not indicated. Some of the

found to be non-functional. ADM (City) Satyam Mishra described the cleanliness arrangements within the hospital premises as satisfactory. Most doctors and paramedical staff members were found to be present on duty. He issued strict directives ensuring that no employee remains absent without prior permission. Additionally, the need to clear unauthorized parking within the hospital premises and to conduct fire and electrical safety audits was emphasized. Additional District Magistrate (Finance and Revenue), Vinita Singh, also found the arrangements to be satisfactory during her inspection, though she issued directives to all staff members to ensure their punctual attendance. The distribution of medicines at the counter was observed to be taking place on a regular basis. Officials stated that periodic inspections would continue in order to further enhance the hospital's arrangements, thereby ensuring that patients receive quality healthcare services.

Wife Murdered in Front of Son: Innocent Child Tells Police—"Dad Strangled Mom at Night and Scolded Us

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj | A husband attacked and murdered his wife using a sharp-edged weapon. After committing the murder, the husband fled the scene, leaving the body behind. Upon receiving information about the incident, the police arrived at the spot. Speaking to the police, the couple's 6-year-old son recounted: "Dad was strangling Mom last night. When I woke up, he scolded me and told me to go back to sleep." The deceased woman has been identified as Sangita



Devi (32), a mother of two young children. Domestic discord is reported to be the motive behind the incident.

Currently, the police are investigating the matter. The crime occurred within the jurisdiction of the Sarai

Inayat Police Station. The entire incident took place in the village of Patti Chheet, located within the Sarai Inayat police station area. Shailesh Kumar lived here with his wife, Sangita. The couple had been married for 13 years. They have two sons: Shivam (12 years old) and Siddharth (6 years old). Sangita Devi was a resident of the Sheikhpur locality in Phulpur and was the youngest of three sisters. Late on Tuesday night, a dispute arose between the husband and wife over some issue. As the argument escalated, the husband

first strangled his wife. Subsequently, he attacked her with a sharp-edged weapon. Blood splattered across the room during the attack. Hearing the sounds of their parents, the children—who were sleeping in the room—woke up. The children witnessed their father strangling their mother. When both children began to scream, their father scolded them into silence and put them back to bed.

On Wednesday morning, around 5:00 AM, a neighbor named Anupama Rao arrived to call Sangita for work in the

fields. Despite calling out repeatedly, no one came out of the house. A short while later, the children emerged from the house, crying and screaming. When Anupama went inside, she found Sangita lying on the floor. There were injury marks on her head, and her tongue was protruding. Upon hearing the commotion, local residents gathered at the scene. Upon receiving the information, the 112 police unit and a team from the Sarai Inayat police station arrived at the scene. The police have initiated an investigation.

Editorial

India's naval advancements will fuel its Indian Ocean ambitions

As India approaches its 75th Republic Day, the nation has achieved a significant milestone in strengthening its naval capabilities. In an exceptional move reflecting strategic foresight, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently commissioned three advanced naval platforms in a single day: a destroyer, a frigate, and a submarine. However, in a fast-changing security environment in the Indo-Pacific, the developments in naval capabilities must be measured in a relative context—capabilities of arch rivals and a swiftly evolving security domain, that is. Now, five points need to be underscored in this context. The commissioning of advanced naval platforms highlights India's aspiration to establish itself as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Over the years, India's maritime security strategy has significantly evolved. The 2015 Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) vision reflects India's dedication to fostering regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. This vision is supported by initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Island Countries (IOIC), which emphasise coastal connectivity and sustainable development. PM Modi's address at the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue further reinforced India's strategic perspective for the Indo-Pacific. The SAGAR vision has gained traction through frameworks such as the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), aiming to tackle regional security issues and counter China's expanding influence. While China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has grown to become the world's largest by fleet size, it still lacks the operational capabilities and combat experience of the United States. India's navy, although the smallest of its armed forces, has consistently demonstrated efficiency and timely acquisitions. Compared to the Indian Air Force, which faces critical squadron shortages, the navy pragmatically acknowledges domestic limitations in engine development. It relies on foreign collaborations to fill gaps, ensuring progress. However, I'll turn to that later. To establish itself as a net security provider, the Indian Navy must sustain the momentum it has recently achieved in naval defence exports. Although this initiative began in earnest only in 2011, it gained significant traction after 2016. India has transitioned from being a cautious supplier of naval equipment, primarily targeting countries such as Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, to a more prominent player in defence exports. For many years, India's exports to nations such as Seychelles, the Maldives, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka were limited to refurbished ex-navy and coast guard vessels. However, this trend has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years. Naval ships, as of 2024, account for over 61 per cent of India's total defence exports. This shift highlights India's growing capability to manufacture advanced platforms and its determination to emerge as a dependable supplier of defence equipment to neighbouring countries. This development is a critical component of India's regional and maritime strategy, especially given China's rapid ascent in modernising PLAN and expanding its influence in the Indian Ocean by providing naval assets to smaller nations. China has already established itself as the leading defence exporter to both Pakistan and Bangladesh. It delivered two Ming-class submarines to Bangladesh in 2017, gifted a P625 frigate to Sri Lanka in 2019, and committed to exporting Yuan-class submarines to Thailand. Although the Thai deal encountered difficulties when Germany refused to supply key propulsion components.



Tulip's resignation in the UK is troublesome for Hasina. Spotlight on daughter Saima

The sins of fathers shall be visited upon the sons—this ominous pronouncement in the Bible has now come true for Tulip Siddiq, a 42-year-old minister in the British government, but with a twist. In her case, it wasn't her father's sins that visited upon her but those allegedly committed by her aunt, the deposed prime minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina Wazed. And it cost Siddiq her job. Slapped with a range of corruption charges by Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Committee (ACC), which forced an internal gov-

ernment inquiry, Siddiq has strenuously denied any wrongdoing—except that of ignorance about benefiting from dubious transactions. But she has paid the price and resigned as UK treasury minister on Tuesday, though she stressed that an independent review found she had "not breached the ministerial code". If the sins of aunts can impact nieces, then can daughters escape their mothers'? Ever since Siddiq's case hit the headlines, the spotlight has slowly but surely turned to Sheikh Hasina's daughter,

Saima Wazed, also known as Putul, who was elected regional director of the World Health Organisation's Southeast Asia branch amid considerable controversy in February 2024. An editorial in the eminent medical journal *The Lancet* had earlier questioned if she was fit for the job, as she only held a master's degree in psychology while rival aspirants were doctors with years of public health experience. The ACC has now initiated a probe into how she got the job: on her own merit or her mother's

intervention as prime minister. All eyes are now on Putul and whether she'll be forced to follow in her cousin's footsteps. What does it all mean for 77-year-old Sheikh Hasina, who has been sheltering in New Delhi since fleeing Dhaka on 5 August after a violent student uprising against her 15-year continuous tenure as Bangladesh's prime minister? There is no doubt that the charges being hurled at her, her family, and her friends are coloured by political prejudice from those now in power in Bangladesh.

Slowing capital expenditure is good. Don't invest in BSNL, save for shortfall instead



The Union government's capital expenditure (capex) continues to be a cause for concern. Of course, the extent of its decline has reduced somewhat — from 35 per cent at the end of the first quarter of the current financial year to 15 per cent at the end of six months. But the latest number for the April-November 2024-25 period shows that the Union government's capex was still 12 per cent lower than what it was in the same period of 2023-24. Instead of aiming for the targeted 17 per cent growth to ~11.11 trillion in capex for 2024-25, the government will have to strive hard to at least cross the figure of ~9.48 trillion reached last year. What has led to this decline? A widely held view is that the seven-phase general elections, which began on April 19 and ended on June 1 last year, caused a slowdown in capex. But if that indeed is the reason, the decline in capex in the first quarter should have been reversed in the second quarter of 2024-25. And certainly, the first two months of the third quarter should have raised the trajectory of capex growth to a higher level. There has been some improvement, but a 12 per cent decline in the April-November 2024-25 period is no comfort. Look at the slightly different trajectory seen in the Union government's revenue expenditure growth during the same period. The Budget for 2024-25 had projected a rise of over 6 per cent to ~37.1 trillion in revenue expendi-

ture. At the end of June 2024, the growth was just about 2 per cent, but it has been rising since then, reaching 4.2 per cent by the end of the first six months of 2024-25 and climbing even higher to 7.8 per cent during April-November 2024-25. So, if revenue expenditure has gained momentum, why has capex failed to follow suit? A close analysis of the government's capex numbers presents an interesting picture. Over 90 per cent of the Centre's total capex during 2024-25 was accounted for by just six sectors — roads, railways, defence, telecom, transfer to states and new schemes. Their share in total capex in 2023-24 was a little less at 87 per cent. But the 12 per cent decline in the first eight months of 2024-25 is primarily the result of a marked slowdown in only two of these six areas — roads and defence, which accounted for over 40 per cent of the total capex outlay for 2024-25. Capex on the construction of roads and highways fell by 16 per cent, while defence saw a decline of 15 per cent. This is serious and has worrying implications

for both infrastructure and defence. The problem of slowing expenditure in these two areas should not have been difficult to fix. Either effective monitoring of spending is lacking, or there are serious problems with project execution, reflecting the poor expenditure-absorbing capacity of these two sectors. This is borne out by a relatively good performance of the Indian Railways, which accounts for over 22 per cent of this year's capex. At ~1.68 trillion, the Indian Railways' capex is just about 1 per cent lower than its spending during April-November 2023. With regard to the transfer of special assistance as loans to states for their capex and additional central assistance for their externally aided projects, the Union government's performance was slightly better. In the April-November 2024-25 period, these transfers rose by about 5 per cent, although much lower than the budgeted increase of 41 per cent.

In contrast, such transfers during the entire 2023-24 had risen sharply

by about 24 per cent to ~1.15 trillion. It appears that these transfers will take a hit in the current year and for the first time since this initiative to help states boost their capex was undertaken a couple of years ago. Significantly, this has not yet adversely impacted the states in a big way. The capex of 25 states (accounting for 95 per cent of all the states' and Union territories' total capex budget) has risen by just about 1 per cent in the April-November 2024-25 period, although states like Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Mizoram, Odisha, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal saw their capex fall by varying margins. Eventually, however, this will have an adverse impact on the states' capex programme and its growth-enhancing effect. There are two more sectors that account for another 13 per cent of the Centre's capital expenditure budget. But they bring out an intriguing aspect of why the government's capex has been slowing. They suffer from a peculiar problem, which has nothing to do with either the relevant sectors' expenditure-absorbing capacity or the absence of effective expenditure monitoring. The bulk of the capex under telecommunications was meant for infusing equity into state-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd, or BSNL. Of the total capex of ~0.84 trillion, the proposed amount for BSNL's equity infusion accounted for as

much as ~0.83 trillion. But the total expenditure under this head in the first eight months of 2024-25 is only 6 percent of what has been budgeted. In other words, a decision to transfer the equity amount promised to BSNL would increase the government's capex by a significant margin. Why this money has not been transferred is puzzling. Last year, against a budgeted BSNL equity infusion of ~0.53 trillion, the actual infusion was higher at ~0.65 trillion. This year, no action on this front even after eight months is a puzzle as this failure also contributes significantly to the decline in the Centre's capex. More importantly, the Budget for 2024-25 had allocated a significant amount of ~0.66 trillion for capex on central sector schemes and projects. Of this, a large chunk, estimated at ~0.62 trillion, was earmarked for new schemes that the government would announce during the year. However, in the first eight months of the current year, only 4 percent of that total outlay has been used up, leaving ~0.63 trillion yet to be spent. It is likely that the government may not need this amount or it may have kept its powder dry to meet any new schemes that it might announce later in the year, for which such capital allocations will be useful. For the Union finance ministry, currently busy preparing the Budget for 2025-26, such a state of play with regard to slowing capital expenditure could well be an opportunity.

Will Israel-Hamas Ceasefire Really Lead To Peace?

On January 20, 1981, on the day Ronald Reagan took over as the new US president, Iran freed 52 American hostages it had been holding for over a year. That projected Reagan as a strong leader sending a powerful signal to US allies and its foes. His predecessor, Jimmy Carter, did all the negotiations and tried his best to have the hostages released while he was still the president. But Tehran would not let him take the glory. Forty-four years on, Donald Trump is taking the credit for the Gaza ceasefire deal, which will come into effect a day before his inauguration, cementing his reputation as a tough leader. Biden can say that the deal happened under his watch. But there is no doubt that it was Trump whose pressure led to achieve the goal. He declared on his social media platform Truth Social: "This EPIC ceasefire agreement could have only happened as a result of our Historic Victory in November, as it signalled to the entire World that my

Administration would seek Peace and negotiate deals to ensure the safety of all Americans, and our Allies." Days after he threatened that there better be a Gaza deal by his January 20 inauguration or "all hell would break out", his special envoy to the Middle East, Steven Witkoff, landed in Tel Aviv last Saturday. It was the Sabbath, the day of rest for Jews. But Witkoff insisted on meeting the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, that day. At their meeting, he conveyed Trump's message that the incoming President of the United States wanted to end the Gaza war and demanded that a ceasefire agreement be signed immediately. The format of the three-stage deal announced on Wednesday was proposed by Biden in May last year and was later also endorsed by the UN Security Council. But both Hamas and Israel kept dragging the negotiations over it. In Israel, Netanyahu refused to give any concessions to Hamas and continued with his brute military operation in Gaza.

Investors line-up for Excitel's \$200-million equity deal

Extension of the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for solar energy value chain, increased allocation towards PM Suryaghar Muft Bijlee Yojana, and greater thrust to distribution and transmission infrastructure are likely to be the key features of the upcoming Budget, as far as the energy sector is concerned. Sources said these proposals figured not only in the budget wish lists of the industry, but also in the respective recommendations from the ministries of power and renewable energy to the finance ministry, ahead of the Budget. "Given the success of PM Suryaghar scheme with almost 600,000 installations in just nine months since its launch, one could probably see additional allocation to target more households," said Ashwin Jacob, partner at Deloitte India. "As far as evacuation of power from offshore wind projects is concerned, we would want to see the VGF or budgetary support to continue or get enhanced," he added. "We hope to see a decisive increase in funding to accelerate the green energy transition. Priorities must include scaling renewable energy by addressing grid and transmission challenges, advancing Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) for grid stability and reliable power, doubling energy efficiency and digitalizing the energy sector through AI, smart meters, and data-driven solutions. Streamlining rooftop solar programs with simplified approvals, financing, and monitoring is equally vital," said Saurabh Kumar, Vice President — India, Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP). Sharat Goyal, CEO of Impact Infracap also expects the government to remove restrictions on state wise caps on roof top capacity for net-metering for industrial establishments. "Further, adoption of batteries to substitute use of diesel generators for back-up power should receive incentives and policy support

given their role in reducing dependence on imports," he said. While the government is increasingly working towards enhancing the country's RE capacity, the distribution and transmission infrastructure for its evacuation still needs to be strengthened. With the peak demand for power growing at a rate of 8-9% annually, the industry is looking forward to strengthening of climate resilient infrastructure augmentation. "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 increasingly 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.

Honking ban ordered by DoE for schools

Delhi: The Delhi DoE has instructed all schools to prohibit illegal parking and honking. In response to increased noise and congestion outside schools, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee DPCC wrote to civic bodies, including DoE, with directives. New guidelines require private unaided recognized schools to create a silence zone awareness plan and issue letters to SHOs to reduce illegal parking and honking. All deputy directors of education (DDEs) at the district and zonal levels have been asked to inform school heads and ensure compliance with these measures. Dr. CS Verma, DoE deputy director at science. Order emphasized school zone traffic restriction. Officials said the initiative improves learning conditions. "Traffic congestion outside schools has been a long-standing issue, with frequent complaints from parents and residents about vehicles blocking gates



and causing excessive honking," a DoE spokeswoman said. Mount Abu School principal Jyoti Arora in Rohini said illegal parking and honking around Delhi schools are longstanding difficulties. "We are fighting a court case regarding an illegal auto stand near one of our schools," she said, adding that morning traffic is terrible. E-rickshaws and street vendors choke roads, she said. Delhi Parents' Association president Aprajita Gautam said most schools are in traffic zones and may struggle to comply. Parents should limit horn use to reduce this. School transportation limitations and no-honking signs

Telangana govt resolute in raising reservation

HYDERABAD:

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao announced on Monday that the Congress government is determined to increase reservation for backward classes in education, employment, and political representation from 23% to 42%. In a post on the social media platform 'X,' he highlighted that the population of backward classes in the state stands at 56.36%, based on the recent caste survey conducted in Telangana.

The US canceled 2,000 Indian visa appointments

Delhi: The US embassy in India reported the cancellation of over 2,000 visa applications. Indians are one of the largest groups of immigrants to the US for labor, tourism, and study. Fraud prompted the US Embassy in India crackdown. Due to "bad actors" or bots' severe appointment system infractions, the embassy deactivated their accounts. "Consular Team India cancels 2,000 bot-made visa appointments. We don't tolerate agents and fixers who break scheduling rules. "Effective immediately, we are cancelling these appointments and sus-



pending the associated accounts' scheduling privileges," said the message. US visa applications in India are already backlogged, notably for B1 and B2 applicants. This visa is for business and tourism. Application wait times in 2022-23 ranged from 800 to 1,000 days. New Delhi has regularly expressed reservations about the wait time with

Washington. In 2022, foreign affairs minister S Jaishankar complained to then-US secretary of state Antony Blinken about visa delays. The Biden administration blamed COVID-19 for the backlog. During his January visit to Washington for Donald Trump's inauguration, Jaishankar raised the issue again with Marco Rubio, Blinken's successor.

The dual degree option at DU will help students learn more

Delhi: The University of Delhi (DU) now allows students to pursue two degrees simultaneously. DU students can enroll in one degree through the normal mode at any DU-affiliated college or department and a second through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) through the School of

Open Learning. This policy gives existing students the option to expand their academic horizons without choosing between conventional and distant education. It has restrictions, though. Even with normal and ODL enrollment, students cannot enroll in two identical degrees (such as

BCom Hons and BCom Pass). DU dual degree qualifying requirements are simple but require careful planning. Students must meet both degrees' academic requirements. Attending classes, completing assignments, and passing tests for each program.

Perfume manufacturing is the focus of the newest DU course

Delhi: As one enters this studio in the middle of Hindu College at Delhi University, they are greeted by pulsating scents and a diverse range of notes, from sweet to spicy, balmy to effluvous. Instead of books, pupils in this classroom-like setup experiment with different combinations of essential oils to produce scents that they associate with their favourite perfumes. Enter the Sangneria Olfactory Studio, a place that looks like a cleanroom



but functions more like the Hogwarts House of Potions from the beloved Harry Potter books. In accordance with the New Education Policy, 2020, the college has instituted a new certificate program called "Sustainable Perfumery: the art of creating fragrances and nurturing careers," which is held at the studio. According to Benu Arora, a faculty member affiliated with the course, it is the first of its sort in the country. The course's concept emerged during the development of the Undergraduate Curriculum Framework. This course is 11 months long. Since the nation lacks any formal education programs teaching people how to create their own fragrances, we recognized a significant unmet need in the market and set out to provide it. Hindu College principal Anju Srivastava explained that the lengthy implementation process was due to the fact that, when the curriculum was drafted, it was forwarded to specialists and knowledge partners for refinement.

Most states, even non-BJP, give Hindi or Sanskrit as 3rd language

Delhi: As the Centre and Tamil Nadu argue over the controversial "three-language formula" in schools under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, most Hindi-speaking states, including those ruled by non-BJP parties, offer Sanskrit as a third language of study. Non-Hindi-speaking states usually offer Hindi. Private schools are offering foreign languages as third languages due to student demand. The method allows states to choose Indian languages for government and private schools. Most states have implemented the "three-language formula" up to Class 8, with some extending it to Class 10. Tamil Nadu, however, has a two-language policy.



Hindi, Sanskrit, and other languages are taught as third languages in most states, along with the region's mother tongue and English, depending on the medium of teaching. French, German, and Spanish are also in demand in Hindi- and non-Hindi-speaking countries. The Tamil Nadu govern-

ment has refused to sign an MoU with the Centre to implement the PM Schools for Rising India (PM-SHRI) scheme, which aims to upgrade 14,500 schools and make them model schools that embody NEP 2020, citing concerns about the "three-language formula" and Hindi language imposition.

IIT-Delhi rose 255 places to 171st globally

Delhi: Among Indian universities for sustainability, IIT-Delhi rose 255 places to 171st globally, according to 2025 QS Rankings released. The QS Sustainability Rankings include 78 Indian universities, with nine of the top 10 improving and 21 new institutions entering. Two IITs—Delhi and Kanpur—are in the world's top 100 for impact. With 177 and 67 rank improvements, each became fourth and fifth in India. Bangalore's IISc is among the world's top 50 environmental schools.

NAAC adopts e-inspections for new accreditation

Delhi: To eradicate corruption and speed up accreditation, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has stopped physical college inspections. Accreditation teams will now perform evaluations exclusively online, replacing on-cams visits with virtual examinations. But for colleges, the changeover will be hybrid; most inspections will be remote, but some reviewers will still visit campuses to retain some monitoring. The decision fol-

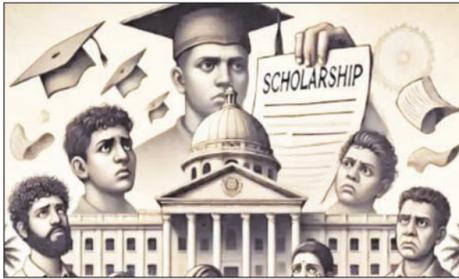


lows the CBI's recent arrests in the case involving Andhra Pradesh's Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation (KLEF), where management reportedly bribed NAAC peer visit inspectors for good ratings. "We chose to do whatever it takes

to eliminate corruption. "Stopping in-person visits will greatly reduce the issue," stated NAAC executive committee head Prof Anil Sahasrabudhe. "With so many weekly inspection visits, it was hard to track what happened. Now, all this is recorded." NAAC head Ganesan Kannabiran hailed the switch to online inspection a "surgical strike" against corruption. The latest CBI lawsuit challenged NAAC's peer review system.

Kerala cuts minority scholarships due to financial difficulties

Delhi: Kerala's government has cut minority community scholarships by 50%, putting thousands of students' education at risk, citing the financial crisis. Nine of the 11 minority welfare scholarship programs originally allotted Rs 13.6 crore are affected by the decision. The Government says the plan size reduction is a priority, but the disproportionate cut to minority student educational support raises questions about governmental priorities and social justice. Twitter shares The Prof Joseph Mundassery Scholarship, which received Rs 5.2 crore this year, suffered most. It has saved Muslim, Sikh, Jain, and Parsi high-achieving children by paying Rs 10,000 to those who scored A-Plus in all SSLC subjects and Rs 15,000 to those

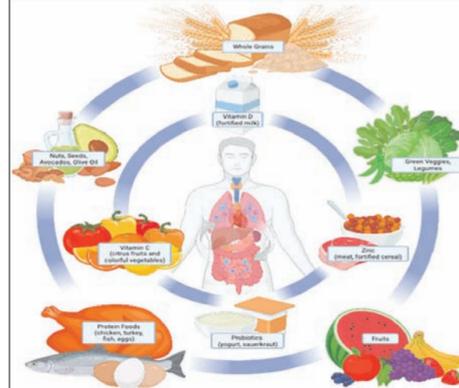


who scored 80% in upper secondary or 75% in vocational higher secondary. It ensured that bright students from underprivileged backgrounds were not forced to drop out due to financial constraints by prioritizing BPL students and providing provisions to economically weaker APL students. The crucial APJ Abdul Kalam Scholarship for minority students has also been cut in half. Those admitted to government-approved colleges on merit, with priority for BPL families,

receive the Rs 6,000 grant. Since it reserves 30% of funds for female students, the reduction could hurt young women who already struggle to enter higher education. Another affected program is the Mother Teresa Scholarship, which helps Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, and Parsi students in government nursing and paramedical diploma programs. Many aspiring nurses and paramedics, whose families cannot afford professional training, may have to quit.

Hospital visits decreased, learning metrics improved. Meal program passes

Delhi: The State Planning Commission SPC found that Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's breakfast policy had improved health and education in government schools. which shows that hospital visits among government primary school pupils reduced by 68.4% in rural areas and 29.4% in urban areas throughout this period, illustrating the program's impact on nutritionally challenged regions. In addition to health metrics, the Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission reported to Stalin on 13 March that the plan has increased student involvement in class. Nearly 5,300 urban and rural children showed improvements in attention and comprehension. Students' attention without urging grew



from 85.8 percent to 93.7 percent, and their ability to follow teachers' instructions increased from 91.3 percent to 95.5 percent. Students are also completing more written work, rising from 89.6% to 95.4%. The ability to learn new content increased from 88.1 percent to 92.5 percent, while lesson recall increased from 71.4 percent to 77 percent. Nearly 5,300

urban and rural children showed improvements in attention and comprehension. Students' attention without urging grew from 85.8 percent to 93.7 percent, and their ability to follow teachers' instructions increased from 91.3 percent to 95.5 percent. Students are also completing more written work, rising from 89.6% to 95.4%.

SC calls Punjab's NRI quota a 'fraud' on medical education

Delhi: The Supreme Court called Punjab's medical colleges' extension of the non-resident Indian (NRI) quota a "fraud" that excludes meritorious candidates. A bench chaired by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud dismissed petitions challenging a Punjab and Haryana high court ruling that invalidated the Punjab government's proposal to widen the NRI quota criteria to include distant relatives. We must end NRI quotas today! The bench, which included Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said the NRI quota was being used to circumvent merit-based admissions. The bench called such a broad interpretation of NRI eligibility, which permitted distant relatives to qualify, a "money-spinning tactic" that undermined the school system. "All three petitions fail. Keep this under control. This scam must end. This NRI business is a scam. Senior counsel Shadan Farasat stated that Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh previously employed the larger NRI quota interpretation during the hearing. The Court rejected these arguments, stressing that the larger definition weakened merit and permitted less deserving individuals to be admitted based on money and connections rather than academic performance. The panel agreed with Bhandari that NRI quotas should be kept for real NRIs and merit should not be ignored.



Nora Fatehi reacts to song controversy

Actress says she was unaware of Hindi lyrics, calls them inappropriate, thanks backlash as makers removed the controversial version

Actress Nora Fatehi addressed the controversy surrounding her song *Sarke Chunar Teri Sarke*, from the film *KD: The Devil*, and said she had no idea about the Hindi version. She also thanked everyone for the backlash because the makers were forced to take down the song after criticism.

On Wednesday, Nora shared a post in which she clarified that she was not aware of the song's Hindi translation as it was shot long back in Kannada.

Nora said, "I shot this song three years ago in Kannada. I said yes to it because it was a part of a big film, with a big icon, Sanjay Dutt. Who would say no to work with him? He's such an icon. I also thought it is a remake of an iconic song. When I'm on set shooting for this song, I'm relying on the filmmakers to translate the song, and that is what I go by. When they're translating the song to me, nothing seemed inappropriate or vulgar." The actress added, "Whatever they've done right now, which is creating a Hindi version and dubbing the voice in Hindi with those lyrics, which are very inappropriate, I

had no idea about that. They didn't take any approvals or permission from me." She also stated that she disassociated herself from the project after she was unhappy with the Hindi version of the song and its lyrics.

"I again flagged it to the director. I said my image and reputation are on the line. As artists like me, we don't really have this backing. We're not nepo kids. We don't come with a certain power behind us. It's just us and the audience behind us. We have little power and control. Thankfully, I've been lucky in Bollywood to work with people who have respected my opinion and creative calls. However, there are certain places and industries where they don't listen or care about my opinion. Because of this backlash, it pushed them to remove these songs and I'm grateful for that," she said.

She also urged the media to mention the filmmakers and hold them accountable in such situations, not just the artists. "You start using their names and images when such controversies arise. Only then will they feel accountability and responsibility when they create content. If you're only going to bombard the audience with just the artist's name and image, it's counterproductive because we don't have control of such scenarios," she added.



Photo: Instagram_@norafatehi

Divya Dutta embraces singlehood

Actress opens up on breaking patriarchal norms and living life on her terms

Actress Divya Dutta, known for her outspokenness and calling spade a spade, has opened up about the idea of being single and the societal conditioning around marriage and motherhood. Divya expressed her opinion by saying that not just a woman's but anybody's life choices cannot be generalised. The actress, who has always lived her life on her own terms, was asked whether staying single in today's world is difficult and whether society still believes a woman is "complete" only through marriage or motherhood.

Responding candidly yet firmly, Dutta said, "Even if I had a partner, even if I am single, I enjoy my life and that's what matters. I think har ek ki kahani alag hoti hai. To generalise and say partner ho toh bahut achi baat hai, single ho toh bahut achi baat hai, kisi ke liye koi achi baat nahi. Whatever works for you is great. So this works for me. I am happy about it."

She further added that people should not judge someone's life choices. "If somebody's got a great partner, it works for them. If somebody doesn't have a good partner, maybe they need to do something that they feel is right about it."

"You cannot generalise somebody's life. You can't just say, you know, how you make your choices. My life was such and I enjoy it. So I am proud of what I decided to do." Speaking about societal conditioning and patriarchal expectations, the actor said these ideas continue to persist despite progress. "Even today's education has nothing to do with progress. That's conditioning, no? That's the conditioning that comes and that's what you kind of somewhere, with life and with the patriarchy, have to break those norms," she said.



Photo: Instagram



'All wars must stop'

Suniel Shetty reacts to Pakistan's Kabul air strike, calls the incident devastating and expresses concern over the impact on innocent lives

Bollywood actor Suniel Shetty reacted to the devastating Pakistani airstrike in Kabul, calling for an immediate end to war and violence. Taking to his official X (formerly known as Twitter) account on Wednesday, the actor expressed anguish over the attack on a drug rehabilitation centre in the Afghan capital and stressed the need for humanity and peace in the face of escalating conflict.

"What has happened in Kabul is devastating, ALL WARS MUST STOP! We stand with Humanity. India stands with Peace," Suniel wrote.

The actor's post comes amid reports of a deadly Pakistani airstrike on a hospital and drug addiction treatment facility in Kabul. India has also condemned the strike, calling it a "heinous act of aggression" and urging the international community to hold those responsible accountable.

Meanwhile, the United Nations has called for restraint, warning that the escalating hostilities have already impacted several healthcare facilities across Afghanistan in recent weeks. The situation along the 2,600-kilometre border remains tense, with casualties reported on both sides amid continuing violence.

Indian creators at Tokyo Fashion Week

Nidhi Bhanushali, Kashish Ratnani and Simran Balar Jain showcase Indian fashion, craftsmanship and storytelling at Tokyo Fashion Week 2026

Photos: Instagram



Nidhi Bhanushali

Kashish Ratnani

Simran Balar Jain

Indian creators Nidhi Bhanushali, Kashish Ratnani and Simran Balar Jain represented India at Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo 2026, marking a significant moment for Indian creators on the global fashion stage.

For the first time in the history of Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo, the three creators made their debut, bringing Indian artistry, craftsmanship and storytelling to Japan's largest fashion platform. Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo Autumn/Winter 2026, being held from March 16 to 21, features 33 brands across official and partnership showcases, reaffirming Tokyo's position as a key global fashion capital.

The season also marks the latter half of the event's 20th anniversary year under the theme *Be The Seam Of The World*.

Nidhi Bhanushali represented women-led Indian label Suta, styling a traditional saree with a structured shirt and flared trousers. Kashish Ratnani wore a couture ensemble by KALKI Fashion, highlighting Indian embroidery, while Simran Balar Jain focused on sustainability with an Indo-Western outfit by Aggunj.

Their participation highlights India's growing fashion identity globally and strengthens cultural exchange between India and Japan. Founded in 2005, the Japan Fashion Week Organization (JFWO) has evolved into a robust platform for Japanese fashion, adapting to societal and industry changes over the years.



Photo: Instagram

Jannat makes first appearance

PHYSICAL ASSAULT INCIDENT

A few days ago, there was a buzz on social media that actress and influencer Jannat Zubair and her Ayaan Zubair faced physical assault in Panvel, New Mumbai. The details of the incident are not yet out, but Jannat's team had shared a statement revealing that the investigation is going on, and both are safe. Now, Jannat has made her first appearance post the incident.

Ananya undergoes a scissor session



Photos: Instagram_@ananyapanday

Actress Ananya Panday has undergone a scissor session and unveiled a fresh new look with bangs. The actress took to her social media account to share glimpses of her new hairstyle, and her chic makeover. Sharing a collage of pictures from a salon, the *Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri* actress gave a closer look at her new hairstyle featuring soft layers and front bangs. In one of the pictures, the actress is seen seated in a salon chair posing with a hairstylist, and in another picture is seen flaunting her voluminous layered locks paired. The caption on the post read, "She's got bangs now, love it @amityashwant hair" The actress seems to be thrilled and excited with her new look.



WAR EXPANDS | Strikes widen beyond Beirut as offensive intensifies across Lebanon; Hezbollah leader and wife killed

Israel hits Beirut, 20 die

DUBAI

Israel bombed a building in Bashoura, central Beirut, Lebanon's National News Agency (NNA) reported, with smoke rising shortly after an evacuation alert was issued.

The strike was part of a wave of Israeli attacks across Lebanon that killed more than 20 people and wounded dozens on Wednesday, according to the ministry of public health. The raids spanned Beirut and southern and eastern regions, marking an escalation in the wider US-Israeli war against Iran.

At least six people were killed in Beirut, with dozens injured. Israeli attacks also hit multiple regions overnight, including central Beirut, Al Jazeera reported.

A 15-storey building, partially damaged a week earlier, was completely demolished in the latest strike. The Israeli army claimed Hezbollah had stored cash there.

Hezbollah-affiliated Al-Manar TV said the director of its political programmes, Mohammad Shari, and his wife were killed in a strike on



Fire men rescue the victims after an Israeli airstrike in Beirut's Bashoura on Wednesday, as the Israeli military targeted Lebanon's south.

the Zuqaq al-Bat area. His children and grandchildren were wounded.

Israel's military said it had launched limited ground operations in southern Lebanon and issued evacuation warnings for residents of four towns near the Zaharani River and Tyre, urging them to head north. NNA reported pre-dawn strikes on Tyre and nearby Burj Shemali. The total toll was 16.

The offensive has killed at least 912 people in Lebanon, including 111 children, and wounded more than 2,200

since March 2, according to official figures.

More than a million people have been displaced. The UN warned that attacks on residential buildings and civilian infrastructure may constitute war crimes under international humanitarian law.

Hezbollah secretary-general Naim Qassem on Tuesday set out conditions for ending the war, including a halt to Israeli attacks, return of displaced people, release of detainees held over the past two years, and withdrawal of Israeli forces.

IRAQ INKS DEAL TO RESUME OIL EXPORTS VIA TURKIYE

The conflict in West Asia continued and ship traffic through the Strait of Hormuz was slowed. Iraq reportedly struck a deal with Turkiye to resume oil exports through its territory, having agreed with Kurdistan to pump oil through a pipeline in the region. 'The Guardian' reported.

According to 'Reuters', crude exports from Iraq's Kirkuk fields by pipeline to Turkiye's Ceyhan port have resumed, providing an alternative route rather than braving the strait.

The rerouting of Iraqi oil through Turkiye will only partially relieve supply concerns, Bloomberg reported, adding, Iraq's oil production has fallen to about 1.4 million barrels a day, a third of levels before the closure of Hormuz strait. Saudi is also rerouting exports towards the Red Sea.



Power broker who could not be supreme leader of Iran

Ali Larjani, a top Iranian security official and a conservative force within Iran's theocracy, was killed in an Israeli strike. Iranian authorities confirmed on Tuesday. He was 67.

Larjani was widely seen as a key power broker and was believed to be running the country following the killing of its Supreme Leader in US and Israeli strikes late last month that sparked a widening war.

He had been appointed to advise Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on strategy in nuclear talks with the Trump administration and had travelled to Oman to meet mediators two weeks before the war began. Like other senior Iranian leaders, Larjani was under heavy US sanctions and was implicated in the violent repression of mass protests in January.

He was ineligible to become Supreme Leader after Khamenei's death as he was not a Shia cleric. He was widely expected to serve as a top adviser, and many believed he was effectively running the country. The Supreme National Security Council said his son, Morteza Larjani, was also killed.

Larjani was born into one of Iran's prominent political families, often compared by media to the Kennedys in the US. One brother, Sadeq Larjani, served as the head of Iran's judiciary, while another, Mohammad Javad Larjani, was a senior diplomat who closely advised the late Khamenei on foreign affairs. -AP

Kabul rehab centre airstrike: Afghans hunt for missing kin

Families of people undergoing treatment at a drug rehabilitation centre in Kabul continued searching for their loved ones two days after it was bombed by Pakistan, in the deadliest attack so far in the months-long conflict between the two countries. The Guardian reported. On Wednesday, relatives gathered at the site, unsure if their kin were alive, dead or moved elsewhere.

"We came here looking for our patient. He is missing," said Mazar, 50. "We came to find out if he is well, alive or what has happened to him."

He said his relative had been admitted to the centre for the second time, but there was no information about him. "We checked the lists, but his name was not on the list. Maybe he is injured or has been killed," he said.

Another man said he hunted on Tuesday but was not allowed entry. "We did not find his body, nor was he among the wounded, and his name is not on the list of survivors. We have come again today for more information."

A witness told Reuters smoke was still rising as firefighters doused small blazes 36 hours after the bombing.

PAK, AF ANNOUNCE EID PAUSE



Red Crescent Society volunteers stand near the coffins of victims of a Pakistani air strike on a drug rehab centre during a mass burial in Kabul.

—AP Furniture, mattresses and clothing lay scattered among the debris. Funerals of some of the deceased took place later.

"Some of the bodies were not identifiable and are currently at the forensic dept. Some bodies were intact and were handed over to families," said Abdul Mateen Qanie, a spokesperson. "Others were destroyed, collected almost like pieces of flesh."

Najibullah Feroqi, head of Afghanistan's legal medicine directorate, said bodies were being pulled out of the debris late on Tuesday night. "Some bodies were handed over after identities were confirmed. However, a large number

remain with us," he said.

Meanwhile, Pakistan criticised India for what it called "unwarranted" remarks about its military campaign against the alleged terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan. "Pakistan rejects the baseless, misleading and unwarranted statement by Indian government on Pakistan's action against terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan," Foreign Office Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said. Andrabi said the statement "merely reflects India's blatant hypocrisy and duplicity". New Delhi should refrain from "supporting and sponsoring terrorist groups operating from Afghan soil."



Med aid: Tehran thanks Delhi

Tehran: Iran on Wednesday thanked India after receiving its first shipment of medical assistance. The aid consignment was delivered to the Iranian Red Crescent Society in Tehran, the Iranian Embassy in India said, as per news agency ANI.

TAJIKISTAN SENDS 3,610 TONNES OF AID

Tajikistan dispatched 3,610 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Iran in a 110-truck convoy, IANS reported. "Tajikistan's humanitarian aid comprises 3,610 tonnes of cargo, including 45 tonnes of medicines, a large volume of sanitary and hygiene products, children's clothing, various food products, household items, bedding, tents, building materials, and other necessary supplies," foreign ministry said.

Meanwhile, Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei vowed to avenge the killing of Ali Larjani. Assuring justice will be served, he warned "every drop of blood has a price" the US and Israel must pay. "Such acts of terror only reflect the enemies' hostility and will strengthen the resolve of the Islamic nation. Undoubtedly, justice will be served."

Ukraine to face missile shortage

Washington: Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukraine will face a deficit of missiles due to the war in West Asia, BBC reported.

The Ukrainian president said Russian leader Vladimir Putin wanted a "long war" between the US, Israel and Iran as it would weaken Kyiv, with US resources being directed elsewhere.

Zelenskyy also claimed that US President Donald Trump was not on "any side" in the war between Russia and

Ukraine and did not want to "irritate" Putin.

He urged Trump and Sir Keir Starmer to meet and find common ground, after the US president's repeated criticism of the UK prime minister.

Zelenskyy said he had a "very bad feeling" about the impact of the conflict on the war in Ukraine, saying negotiations towards peace are being "constantly postponed. There is one reason — war in Iran". He said the situation

was benefiting Putin as it

raised energy prices, which was a problem for Ukraine, and meant there could be a "deficit" of missiles.

"For Putin, a long war in Iran is a plus. In addition to energy prices, it means the depletion of US reserves, and the depletion of air defence manufacturers. So we [Ukraine] have a depletion of resources," Zelenskyy said there would "definitely" be a deficit of Patriot missiles which would be "a challenge".

WAR SNIPPETS

IRAN HOLDS FUNERAL FOR SUNK FRIGATE'S CREW, SECURITY OFFICIAL, BASIJ FORCE LEADER

People in large numbers attended a funeral in Tehran on Wednesday for the crew members of a frigate sunk by the US as well as one of the country's top security officials and a high-ranking military commander killed in Israeli attacks. The funeral was attended by the deceased's family members, Iranian state officials and military commanders and a large number of people from all walks of life, who began in the iconic Enghelab Square, featuring a procession to a place in southern Tehran where martyrs are taken for a farewell before their burial.

FOOTBALL TEAM RETURNS

Iranian media reported the national women's football team had returned to the Islamic Republic after several players sought asylum in Australia. The outlets shared footage of the women entering

Iran after landing in Turkiye and taking a bus to the border. They were greeted by officials. Fatemeh Pasandideh and Atefeh Ramezansadeh chose to remain in Australia. Others who initially sought asylum later changed their minds.

AL-MANAR TV JOURNALIST KILLED IN AIRSTRIKE

A journalist with Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV was killed in an Israeli airstrike on Wednesday. Al-Manar said Mohammed Sherri, head of its political programme, was killed along with wife during a strike on Beirut's Zokak Blatt neighbourhood. His children and grandchildren were wounded. Sherri was known in Lebanon and had been a presenter for years.

ALBANESE: IRANIAN PROJECTILE STRUCK NEAR UAE AIR BASE

Australian PM Anthony Albanese confirmed an Iranian projectile struck near an air base in the UAE where Australian soldiers are stationed, but no personnel was injured. Albanese said the projectile

hit a road leading to the Al Minhad Air Base south of Dubai.

IRAN EXECUTES MAN IT SAYS SPIED FOR MOSSAD

Iran's judiciary said it executed a man who spied for Israel's Mossad intelligence agency. The judiciary's Mizan news agency identified the man as Kourosh Keyvani, the first publicly announced execution for spying during the current war. Iran alleged he "provided images and information on sensitive locations" to Mossad.

GAS SURGE DRIVES SENATORS TO TAX MAJOR OIL COMPANIES

US lawmakers moved to tax major oil firms as fuel prices surged, with Democrats accusing energy firms of profiting while US consumers face rising costs. US Senator Sheldon Whitehouse and Indian American Congressman Rohanna reintroduced the Big Oil Windfall Profits Tax Act, pointing to a recent steep rise in petrol prices.

Cuba prez vows 'impregnable resistance' to Trump seize bid

MUMBAI Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel has condemned US President Donald Trump's open threat to forcibly seize control of the island nation and vowed that any such aggression would be met with "impregnable resistance", CNN reported.

"The US publicly threatens Cuba, almost daily, with overthrowing the constitutional order by force," Diaz-Canel wrote on social media.

"And it uses an outrageous pretext: the harsh limitations of the weakened economy that they have attacked and sought to isolate for more than six decades. They intend and announce plans to seize the country, its resources, its properties, and even the very economy they seek to strangle to make us surrender," he added.

17 dead in fighting on Sudan's border

Latest heavy fighting between warring parties along Sudan's border with Chad has killed 17 people and many wounded, a medical group said. Monday attacks in Tina left 66 people critical. Doctors Without Borders said. -AP

Pakistan among top nuclear threats: US

MUMBAI Pakistan figures among the most significant nuclear threats to the US, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard has warned, placing it alongside Russia, China and North Korea in her latest global security assessment, according to Reuters.

Her remarks come amid internal churn within the US intelligence establishment following the resignation of her deputy, Joe Kent. Without naming him directly, Gabbard pushed back against a key claim in his resignation letter — that Israeli officials and sections of the American media misled President Donald Trump into believing Iran posed an imminent threat.

Gabbard underscored that Trump, "overwhelmingly elected by the American people", is solely responsible for determining what constitutes an imminent threat to the United States.

Appearing before a Senate panel, she said Iran's regime remains intact but has been "largely degraded" by recent US military operations. She added that Iran's nuclear enrichment programme had been "obliterated" during strikes in June, with no immediate signs of restoration.



However, she cautioned that Tehran could gradually rebuild its military strength, including missile and drone capabilities, if the regime survives. "Iran and its proxies remain capable of attacking US and allied interests in the Middle East," she said.

Broadening her threat outlook, Gabbard identified Al Qaeda and ISIS as the most serious risks to US interests overseas, particularly across Africa, West Asia and South Asia. She pointed to North Korea's growing alignment with Russia and China as a factor that could further complicate global security dynamics.

The White House sought to dampen speculation of discord, with Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt affirming that President Trump continues to have "full confidence" in Gabbard despite the recent resignation within the intelligence leadership.

Briefs

POTUS moves to lower costs of crude oil

The White House said US President Donald Trump would waive, for 60 days, Jones Act requirements for goods shipped between US ports to be moved on US-flagged vessels. The 1920s law, designed to protect the American shipbuilding sector, is often blamed for making gas more expensive. The moves highlight the increased pressure that the Republican administration is under to ease soaring oil prices as the US, along with Israel, wages a war with Iran without a foreseeable end date.

Raja loses to Juliana

A Democrat Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi has lost the Illinois primary race to Lt Gov Juliana Stratton, who bagged the party nomination for the US Senate elections for the seat vacated by incumbent Dick Durbin. Stratton, who had the support of Illinois Governor JB Pritzker, had been lagging until recent weeks.

Don expands \$15k visa bond to 12 more nations

Washington: US President Donald Trump's administration will now require citizens from 50 countries to post bonds of \$15,000 to apply for US entry, a latest report has said.

A State Department official, requesting anonymity, told Reuters 12 countries are being added to a list that already includes 38 other nations, largely in Africa.

The expanded visa bond programme, which requires those foreign nationals to pay \$15,000 for a B1 or B2 visa for

business and tourism, goes into effect on April 2. The aim is to prevent visitors from overstaying their visas, the official said. The new nations are Cambodia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Grenada, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mongolia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles and Tunisia.

The official said bonds will be returned to visa recipients who return home in compliance with the terms of the visa and the bond, or do not travel in the first place.



Nirav Modi seeks to reopen extradition case in London

Fugitive diamantaire says 'real risk of torture' in India

London: Fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi's application hearing seeking permission to reopen his extradition appeal concluded in the High Court in London, with claims that he faces a "real risk of torture" during interrogations by the investigating agencies in India. Lord Jeremy Stuart-Smith and Justice Robert Jay, presiding over the appeal at the Royal Courts of Justice, reserved their judgment at the end of a day-long hearing on Tuesday.

"This case is of extreme importance, to Mr Modi and to the Indian officials who have travelled from India. We will deliver the judgment as soon as possible," said Stuart-Smith, as the hearing listed over two days was wrapped up early.

The 54-year-old businessman, wanted in India to stand trial on charges of fraud and money laundering in the nearly \$2 billion Punjab National Bank loan scam case, appeared via video link from Pentonville prison in London. His lawyers relied heavily on the extradition case of Sanjay Bhandari — the defence sector

consultant accused of tax evasion and money laundering, who was discharged from extradition bail on human rights grounds last year.

The Crown Prosecution Service, representing the Indian government in court, argued against the grounds for reopening a matter in which Nirav's extradition had been ordered nearly six years ago. Extradition poses a real risk of inhuman or degrading treatment or torture arising from probe in India, argued Nirav's barrister Edward Fitzgerald KC.

Stubb replies, "Huge, after I said I watched Dhurandhar."

The video was shared on Stubb's social media account and later circulated widely online. It caught the attention of Indian social media users, many of whom reacted to the unexpected mention of the blockbuster film by two world leaders.

"No ice-hockey rinks available, so a nice morning run in Hyde Park with Prime minister Mark/Carney, Diana and Suzanne," Stubb said.

Insta went huge after saying watched Dhurandhar: Stubb

A video posted by Finland President Alexander Stubb has drawn attention online after it showed him jogging through London's Hyde Park with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney and their spouses. The two leaders were seen running together during Carney's official visit to the United Kingdom.

In the video, Stubb and Carney are seen having a brief conversation while jogging. Carney asks the Finnish presi-



dent about the recent rise in his Instagram following in India. Stubb responds that the reaction was very strong after

he mentioned watching the Hindi film 'Dhurandhar'. Carney asks, "How is your Insta thing in India?" to which

Briefs

GOLD COAST (AUS)

Diksha leads five Indians at Aus WPGA



Diksha Dagar will lead a strong five-member Indian contingent at this week's Australian WPGA Championship starting here on Thursday. Diksha, who is currently ninth on the LET Order of Merit, will have for company Pranavi Urs, Avani Prashanth, Hitaashee Bakshi and Vani Kapoor. Both Diksha and Pranavi have Top-10 finishes in their Australian swing. Avani's show has been modest, but Hitaashee is struggling while Vani missed the cut last week. Hannah Green leads a stacked field in the championship as the Major winner goes in pursuit of a third victory in three starts. The field includes Shannon Tan of Singapore, who won the LET Order of Merit in 2025 and her successes included the Hero Women's Indian Open.

HYDERABAD

Naveen-Musa pair secures WRC3 podium



Hyderabad-based rally driver Naveen Puligilla, along with seasoned co-driver Musa Sherif secured a podium finish in the WRC3 category at the Safari Rally Kenya 2026, the third round of the FIA World Rally Championship in Naivasha. Competing in one of the toughest rallies in the world, the Indian duo finished third in WRC3 class, and second in the African ARC3 class. They clocked a total time of 5 hours, 22 minutes, 17.9 seconds to be placed 24th overall in the common field, where higher-class cars also competed. Their effort came against extreme conditions, including punishing rocky terrain, deep ruts, unpredictable weather that tested both machine and driver to the limit.

NEW DELHI

Humpy undecided on Candidates



Indian Grandmaster Koneru Humpy remains undecided about participating in the upcoming Candidates Tournament in Cyprus,

KKR | Former South Africa captain backs mystery spinner Chakravarthy despite modest T20 World Cup performance

Du Plessis backs Varun, Narine on Eden track

NEW DELHI

An underwhelming T20 World Cup campaign notwithstanding, Indian mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy will be crucial for Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) in the Indian Premier League (IPL) beginning on March 28, former South Africa captain Faf du Plessis said.

Du Plessis, who has played for Chennai Super Kings, Delhi Capitals and Royal Challengers Bengaluru, said the Eden Gardens pitch should be tailor-made for Sunil Narine and Chakravarthy.

"If I were part of the KKR team management, I would ask the groundsman at Eden Gardens to make the wicket spin-friendly. KKR are blessed to have two absolute cannons in Varun Chakravarthy and Sunil Narine," he said.

"They are two of the best T20 spinners in the game right now. Both Varun and Narine have to be in the game. If they play on surfaces where they are not in contention, then you are losing those two cannons and your superpower."

"Yes, they can bowl well on any wicket and trouble batters. But for KKR to be successful this IPL, Varun and Narine need to fire. The pitch should be prepared keeping those two players in mind," he added.

Chakravarthy was not particularly effective during India's title-winning campaign at the T20 World Cup, managing 14 wickets at an economy rate of more than 9.

KKR finished third from bottom on the points table last



season after winning five of their 14 games. The Ajinkya Rahane-led side will open their campaign against Mumbai Indians on March 29 in an away fixture.

Du Plessis said another player who could prove crucial for the side is Cameron Green, though he warned that the Australian all-rounder would be under pressure due to his 25.2 crore contract.

"Cameron Green is a highly talented player who has a lot of potential to succeed. He is the multi-skilled marquee buy for KKR and the replacement for Andre Russell.

"Green is six-foot tall, a massive player. He bowls well, has a good bouncer and yorker, can hit the ball out of

“If I were part of the KKR team management, I would ask the groundsman at Eden Gardens to make the wicket spin-friendly.”

Faf Du Plessis
South Africa captain

the stadium easily and is a proper batter. In short, he is a complete package. He balances KKR very well," he said. "But form has not been on

his side recently. With a price tag of 25.2 crore, there is pressure he will carry. There is a lot of weight on his shoulders," he added.

Former India player Lakshmi Prasad Balaji urged Rahane to bat in the top order.

"I always feel that KKR skipper Ajinkya Rahane should bat in the top order. He should not bat lower than number three. He has done phenomenally well with Chennai Super Kings at number three and scored a lot of runs. "So, him batting one down would be good for both him and KKR. Cameron Green can come in at number four. That will give him time to settle and then attack the bowlers."

Germany coach Joachim Low voices safety concerns

COLOGNE (GERMANY)

Former Germany coach Joachim Low has raised concerns about safety at the World Cup being hosted by the United States, Mexico and Canada.

"We had debates before the 2018 World Cup in Russia, and calls for a boycott before the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. But playing in a country that is actively at war is even more dangerous," Low told the Cologne Express newspaper in comments published Tuesday. "The political situation completely overshadows the tournament." The U.S.-and-Israeli war with Iran is ongoing, and a wave of violence followed the

Mexican army's killing of cartel chief Nemesio Ruben Oseguera Cervantes, "El Mencho," last month. Low, who led Germany to the World Cup title in Brazil in 2014, spoke on Monday evening at an event, focused on previous World Cups, with Rainer Bonhof, who helped West Germany win the 1974 tournament, and other World Cup winners.

Attention turned to the upcoming tournament near the end of their discussion.

"I don't even know if you should play at all," Bonhof said to loud applause, Express reported.

"Given the current circumstances, for me only Canada is a neutral country," Bonhof said of the co-hosts. "I don't want to boycott any World Cup — we're too fond of football. But we really need to think about security measures, which we haven't considered yet." Bonhof, who is currently the president of Bundesliga club Borussia Mönchengladbach, said he "wouldn't have any urge to go" to Mexico."

Ponting's support for pacer Jansen

South Africa pacer had joined PBKS late due to logistical issues



NEW DELHI

Punjab Kings (PBKS) head coach Ricky Ponting has approved the late arrival of Marco Jansen for the Indian Premier League (IPL), considering that the South African all-rounder was among the last batch of players to depart from India following the T20 World Cup due to logistical issues.

South Africa and West Indies players were stranded in India for more than a week after concluding their World Cup campaigns. Some of them, including West Indies head coach Darren Sammy and South Africa batter David Miller, expressed frustration over the delay in their departure due to restricted operations at major airports such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi amid the West Asia conflict.

Jansen, a key member of the PBKS squad, will join the team on March 26. Ponting and the majority of overseas players are set to link up with

the squad on March 21. Afghanistan all-rounder Azmatullah Omarzai will join the team on March 23 from Kabul. His country is currently involved in a conflict with Pakistan.

In their first season with PBKS, the Ponting and Shreyas Iyer combination took the franchise to the final last season, its first appearance since 2014.

"Ricky fully supports his players. Considering Marco left India late, he understands the need to give him adequate time at home," a source told PTI. The left-arm pacer took 16 wickets last season at an economy rate of 9.20.

Captain Shreyas Iyer is expected to join the squad on March 19.

With Dubai and Abu Dhabi airports still operating below full capacity, teams are facing additional challenges in arranging players' travel from the West Asia region. Punjab Kings will open their 2026 campaign against Gujarat Titans at home on March 31.

PCB panel raises fitness concerns over Babar, Fakhar

Investigation likely after players suspected to be below full fitness during T20 World Cup selection

KARACHI

The medical panel of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has raised concerns that senior players Babar Azam and Fakhar Zaman might not have been fully fit when they were selected for the T20 World Cup squad.

The issue was flagged by senior selector Aaqib Javed during a media interaction last week, where he said the board would look into the matter. A source close to the board said that Dr Javed Mughal, a UK-based consultant in sports physiotherapy and medicine who joined the PCB medical panel as Director of Sports Exercise and Medicine in January, expressed concerns after examining Babar and Fakhar following the World Cup.

The matter came to light

when Babar declined to play in the National T20 Championship after returning from the World Cup, citing hamstring irritation. Fakhar has also been dealing with a similar issue.

"When Babar was exam-

“When Babar was examined, his injury was found to be more serious than initially diagnosed, PCB source”



ined, his injury was found to be more serious than initially diagnosed, while Fakhar has been struggling with the same problem for several months," the source said.

The source added that the national selection committee informed the medical panel that both players were picked for the World Cup squad after receiving clearance from Pakistan team physiotherapist Cliffe Deacon.

There have also been allegations that Deacon previously allowed players with minor injuries to continue playing due to his close relationships with them.

Kishan to lead SRH as Cummins to miss few games

Wicketkeeper-batter named interim captain; Abhishek Sharma appointed deputy of the team ahead of the IPL 2026 season

HYDERABAD

Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) on Wednesday appointed India wicketkeeper-batter Ishan Kishan as interim captain for the early part of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026, with Abhishek Sharma named his deputy, while regular skipper Pat Cummins recovers from injury.

Cummins has been sidelined with a lower back stress injury, which also kept him out for a significant part of the last Ashes series in Australia as well as the T20 World Cup.

"Pat Cummins will miss a few games while recovering from injury. Until he recovers, Ishan Kishan will be the captain and Abhishek Sharma will be the vice-captain," the franchise said in a social media statement.

The IPL 2016 champions, however, did not specify the number of matches Cummins is expected to miss. Kishan's appointment as SRH's stand-in captain follows a strong run



across formats. The left-handed batter played a key role in India's title-winning

campaign at the T20 World Cup, finishing as the fourth-highest run-scorer in the tour-

namment with 317 runs in nine matches at a strike rate of 199.37. He averaged 80.25 and scored three half-centuries.

His performances also saw Kishan rise to the No. 2 spot in the ICC rankings for T20I batters, a list currently topped by Abhishek Sharma.

Earlier this season, Kishan captained Jharkhand to their maiden title in India's premier domestic T20 competition, the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

The leadership role at SRH marks another milestone in Kishan's career as he takes charge of the franchise during a crucial phase of the tournament. With Cummins unavailable for the initial matches, the team management has placed its confidence in Kishan's recent form and leadership credentials.

SRH will look to maintain stability in the early part of the season under Kishan's captaincy, with Abhishek providing support as vice-captain. The team will aim to build momentum before Cummins returns to lead the side later in the tournament.

hockey

Marijne plans mix of tours, camps to prepare India

NEW DELHI

India women's hockey team chief coach Sjoerd Marijne is relying on a combination of overseas tours, competitive exposure and national camps to prepare the side for the World Cup and Asian Games this year.

The World Cup is scheduled to be held in Belgium and the Netherlands in August, while the Asian Games will take place in Japan in September.

The Indian team will compete in the FIH Hockey Nations Cup in Auckland from June 15 to 21. They are also scheduled to tour the United States and Argentina, and play matches against Germany and the Netherlands as part of their preparations.

"We have a tour to the United States and Argentina, the Nations Cup in New Zealand, and practice matches in Germany. We will also play some matches in the Netherlands," Marijne

The Indian team will compete in the FIH Hockey Nations Cup in Auckland from June 15 to 21

said in a media release. "These scheduled games, combined with our camps, give us a very good mix of matches and training to be ready for the World Cup and Asian Games," he added. India have been placed in

Pool D alongside England, China and South Africa.

China are the top-ranked side in the group at world No. 4, followed by England at No. 6, while India and South Africa are ranked ninth and 19th respectively.

"This is a very competitive and balanced pool. There are teams like England and China that bring different styles and a lot of experience, while South Africa are always unpredictable and dangerous on their day," Marijne said.

"However, for us, it is not about the draw. It is about how we perform. At a World Cup, every match demands your best. We

respect all opponents, but our focus is on playing our style of hockey with consistency and courage," he added. India finished runners-up in the recently concluded World Cup qualifiers, losing to England in the final.

Despite the defeat, there were positives, with India emerging as the second-highest

scorers in the tournament with 11 goals, including six from penalty corners. Having guided India to a historic fourth-place finish at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, Marijne returned as head coach in January this year. "We are building something for the long term. We want to develop a team that is resilient, adaptable and fearless. Qualifying was an important step, but we are aiming for much more. The first steps have been in the right direction."