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

## Briefs

### SHIMLA Himachal bans mobiles in schools

In a significant move to enhance the academic environment, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu on Thursday announced a ban on the use of mobile phones by students in all government and private schools in the state from March 1. If a student is found in possession of a mobile phone, he/she will face a fine of Rs 500 and the confiscation of the device.

### LUCKNOW Over one lakh missing in 2 years in UP

More than one lakh people have gone missing in Uttar Pradesh in the last two years, a staggering figure that has exposed serious gaps in the state's policing and left thousands of families living in limbo. The gravity of the situation came in the spotlight on Thursday when the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court heard a suo motu petition on missing persons. The court sought complete data and records from the concerned state government departments and fixed March 23 as the next date of hearing. It also directed the Additional Chief Secretary (Home) and the Director General of Police to remain present through video conferencing.

-Biswajeet Banerjee

### PATNA Nitish takes 'child' dig at Tejashwi

Bihar assembly on Thursday witnessed exchange of barbs between chief minister Nitish Kumar and leader of opposition Tejashwi Yadav, as the former called the RJD leader a child and reminded him that he was from his father's time. Replying to the motion of thanks on the governor's address in the house, Nitish told Tejashwi to sit down and listen to him quietly when he tried to intervene. "Sit down quietly and listen to me. Where did you get the money to lure away six MLAs? You were involved in wrongdoing, that's why we left you." Earlier, Tejashwi claimed that NDA had spent Rs 40,000 crore to defeat the opposition INDIA bloc in the last assembly election.

### CHANDIGARH Cong accuses Haryana govt of power con

Former two-time chief minister of Haryana and leader of the opposition (LoP) Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Thursday alleged that BJP government is cheating electricity consumers. Alleging that under guise of the "Solar for Every Home" scheme, the government is adopting a policy of offering a subsidy with one hand, and taking it back with the other.

## MALAYSIA VISIT | With eye on semiconductors, India is set to ink a slew of MoUs during PM's two-day tour beginning tomorrow

# Modi-Anwar talks to focus on trade, Asean

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Modi will visit Malaysia on a two-day official visit from February 7-8. In an MEA special press briefing, Secretary (East) P Kumaran stated that this will be the Prime Minister's first visit to Malaysia since the two sides elevated their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in August 2024. MEA officials said Modi will hold bilateral talks with his Malaysian counterpart Anwar Ibrahim, which will largely focus on the economic front, with the 10th India-Malaysia CEO Forum being held alongside.

Asked as to whether India would take up Malaysia's repeated anti-Kashmir remarks during the visit, Kumaran stated that New Delhi had been engaging with Kuala Lumpur on this front. "We had a parliamentary delegation visit Malaysia after Operation Sindoor. The



Ministry of External Affairs Secretary (East) Periasamy Kumaran briefs media about PM Narendra Modi's Malaysia trip, in New Delhi on Thursday

Malaysian side engaged us quite actively. We had discussions at multiple levels: ministers, Members of Parliament, and think-tanks," he said. Kumaran added: "We had an opportunity to explain to various interlocutors our position on terrorism, the kind of steps taken as part of our counter-terrorism activity, and why this requires a strong response from us because of provocations caused by cross-border terrorism."

On the issue of Zakir Naik's

extradition, Kumaran said India was still actively pursuing the matter. "As far as Zakir Naik is concerned, I can assure you that all issues will be discussed during the visit and we hope to get the outcome that we desire."

The visit is expected to result in a number of MoUs being signed. Kumaran said that on the anvil were MoUs in disaster management, audio-visual co-production, and in Standards on Training and Certification for Seafarers. The

### 8 of 16 Indian sailors held in Iran released

Eight of the 16 Indian sailors held in Iran have been released and will be able to travel back to India soon after completing the necessary formalities, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India is in touch with the Iranian authorities for the release of remaining eight sailors.

MoU on UN peace-keeping cooperation would be renewed, and there would be an Exchange of Notes to cooperate in the semi-conductor industry. "30% of Malaysia's exports are related to semi-conductors. We are looking at multi-layered cooperation - both at the government-to-government level and industrial cooperation."

## Kharge and Nadda in war of words over Parliament logjam

NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha on Thursday witnessed a heated exchange between senior leaders of the Congress and the BJP over the issue of parliamentary procedure with BJP's Leader of House JP Nadda accusing the Opposition of stalling House proceedings through protests and Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge attacking the government for not letting LoP in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi speak in the Lower House to "hide its mistakes".

When the House assembled for the day, Kharge raised the issue of Gandhi not being allowed to place his



views in the Lok Sabha. "The Lok Sabha has not been allowed to function for the last four days because the Leader of Opposition is not being permitted to speak. Parliament is formed only when both Houses meet.. they are both pillars of Parliament. But the government is not allowing one House to function in order to hide its mistakes; it has paralysed it". Kharge also charged that "the Modi government is

deceiving the country and insulting it" by not allowing the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha to speak.

At this Nadda objected to Kharge's raising the issue saying, "proceedings of Lok Sabha cannot be discussed in the Rajya Sabha."

He also countered the allegation of Gandhi not being permitted to speak and the issue of Prime Minister Narendra Modi skipping the House last evening when he was supposed to speak on the Motion of Thanks, by saying, "PM Modi is always prepared to answer a question in Lok Sabha but the Opposition is not letting the House transact any business".

### Closely monitoring situation in Iran: Govt

New Delhi is "closely monitoring" the situation in Iran and there are no reports of any Indian national missing or being killed during recent protests in that country, the government informed Parliament on Thursday. In a written response to a query in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh also said the Indian embassy in Tehran continues to be in "regular contact" with the Indian nationals, including students, in Iran, and is providing them suitable guidance.



### BharatGen's text-based service soon

Government's sovereign multilingual AI engine BharatGen is expected to complete text-based service by this month-end, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said in the Rajya Sabha. BJP's Bhubaneswar Kalita, MoS for Science and Tech said the work for developing BharatGen AI is a dynamic process and may add more languages as well as dialects.

### 137 AI planes identified for repetitive defects

A total of 377 aircraft have been identified as having recurring defects since Jan last year until Feb 3 across various scheduled airlines, the government told Lok Sabha on Thursday. Of these, 405 aircraft belonging to IndiGo were analysed for repetitive defects and 148 were identified for repetitive defects, as on February 3, this year. Similarly, of the 166 Air India aircraft analysed, 137 were identified as having repetitive defects, while 54 Air India Express aircraft were identified for repetitive defects.

## Didi woos women, youth with pre-poll, 'pro-people' budget

KOLKATA

In the interim budget ahead of Assembly polls, Trinamool Congress (TMC) government on Thursday has increased the amount in various flagship schemes including 'Lakshmi Bhandar'.

Talking to the media after the interim budget, which was presented by state finance minister Chandrima Bhattacharya, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said that the budget is 'pro-people'. "Our budget is pro-people. It is not directionless or aimless as the union budget. We have maintained fiscal discipline while increasing spending in the social sector. This interim budget is of Rs 4.06 lakh crore. Despite a backlog from the central government, our government thinks about welfare of the poor," said Mamata.

The West Bengal Chief Minister also mentioned that the interim budget is not an election 'gimmick'.



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya (left), and Principal Chief Advisor to CM Amit Mitra (right) after the presentation of the budget in the Assembly, in Kolkata, on Thursday

"Our TMC government has brought discipline in borrowing under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) framework," said Mamata. "Our social welfare schemes had helped 1.72 crore people to come out of poverty. 32 lakhs houses have been built and modernisation of cities would be carried out without causing any sort of inconvenience to the residents," further added Mamata.

### Shah launches app to benefit taxi drivers

NEW DELHI

The Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Thursday launched the 'Bharat Taxi' App, aimed at strengthening cooperative participation and enhancing welfare measures for taxi drivers across the country.

Speaking on the occasion, Amit Shah said the launch of the Sahkar Taxi initiative was being held in the presence of around 8 lakh sarathi (driver) representatives and several cooperative bodies.

"This launch of Sahkar Taxi is taking place in the presence of 800,000 Sarathi representatives and some cooperatives, so that within three years, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Dwarka to Kamakhya, this Sahkar Taxi is going to become a very significant means for the welfare of our taxi Sarathis", he told media-persons.

Bharat Taxi is India's first cooperative-led ride-hailing platform.

### Cong to go solo in Bengal polls

The Congress announced on Thursday that it will go solo in the upcoming West Bengal Assembly polls and contest all the 294 seats in the state. The decision was taken at a key meet of the party's top brass with senior leaders of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee.

## Man killed 3 months after marriage; wife, lover held

JAIPUR

A 23-year-old woman allegedly orchestrated the murder of her husband, just three months after their marriage, by conspiring with her long-time boyfriend and two accomplices in Rajasthan's Sri Ganganagar, police said on Thursday.

The accused wife, Anjali (23), her lover Sanjay (25), and his friends Rohit (20) and Siddharth (20) were arrested on Tuesday, Sri Ganganagar Superintendent of Police (SP) Amrita Duhan said.

The incident occurred on the night of January 30 when Ashish Kumar (27), a resident of 1 KLM village in the Rawla area, went for his daily walk with his wife after dinner. He was allegedly attacked

with sticks on a deserted stretch of the road near the village, and later strangled with a muffler when he did not succumb immediately, the SP said.

What initially appeared to be a case of robbery and murder was later found to be a pre-planned murder, Duhan said.

Anjali had been in a relationship with Sanjay for the past six to seven years and was unhappy with her arranged marriage to Ashish on October 30 last year, the police said. Her family was aware of the affair, they added. Her Uncle, Ravi, said, "If we had known that a child from our family would turn out to be like this, we would have never allowed Anjali to take such a step. We would rather have died than let her marry."

## Row over TN min's remark on N Indians

CHENGALPATTU

Tamil Nadu Agriculture Minister and senior DMK leader MRK Panneerselvam has sparked a fresh political row following his remarks regarding North Indian migrants and the nature of jobs they undertake in the state.

A video clip showed the minister saying during a public address in Mathuranthakam that "North Indians come to Tamil Nadu only to sell panipuri, work in construction (sector), and wipe tables", while "people over here (in Tamil Nadu) are studying well".

While BJP accused the ruling DMK of inciting hatred, AIADMK also hit out against its archrival.

### HAL: Five Tejas jets ready for delivery to IAF

NEW DELHI

State-run aerospace behemoth Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) on Thursday said five Tejas light combat aircraft are fully ready for delivery to the Indian Air Force. In February 2021, the defence ministry sealed a Rs 48,000 crore deal with HAL for the procurement of 83 Tejas Mk-1A jets for the IAF.

The delivery of jets are facing delays primarily due to GE Aerospace missing several deadlines for supply of its aero engines. "HAL confirms that 5 aircraft are fully ready for delivery, incorporating major contracted capabilities in accordance with agreed specifications," a HAL spokesperson said.

## Ghaziabad suicides: Diary points to Korean obsession

GHAZIABAD

A diary recovered in the Ghaziabad triple suicide case has revealed an intense obsession with Korean culture among three minor sisters, leading police to examine whether a task-based online game influenced their deaths.

The three sisters, Pakhi (12), Prachi (14) and Vishika (16), jumped to their deaths early Wednesday. An eight-page handwritten note found in a pocket diary detailed their emotions, interests and resentment over parental restrictions.

In the note, the girls described Korean culture as central to their identity. "We love Korean, love, love, love," it

### Police are also probing a so-called 'Korean love game' the girls allegedly began playing in Covid pandemic

said, accusing their parents of trying to separate them from what they called their "life". They wrote that they loved Korean actors and K-pop groups more than their family and felt misunderstood at home. Police are also probing a so-called "Korean love game" that the girls allegedly began playing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The diary listed several influences the girls claimed to be obsessed with. These

included Korean music, dance and actors, Thai, Chinese and Japanese songs and films, Hollywood movies, English songs, cartoons such as Doraemon and Peppa Pig, and Disney characters Elsa and Ariel. It also mentioned survival and horror-themed mobile games, including Poppy Playtime, The Baby in Yellow, Evil Game and Ice Cream Man Game.

The note repeatedly mentioned another sister, Devu, whom the girls wanted to influence. "You introduced her to Bollywood, which we hated more than our lives," it said.

## Raj to relax panchayat polls norms

JAIPUR

Amending rules of its own previous governments, the BJP government in Rajasthan is all set to remove minimum educational qualification and two children norm to contest the panchayat raj and urban local bodies election. The provision making educational qualifications mandatory for contesting local body and panchayat elections will not be implemented in forthcoming polls while a bill to remove ban on individuals with more than two children is under consideration in the Law Department. This was informed in the legislative assembly in a written reply.

## UK asks AI to explain 787-8 fuel switch case

MUMBAI

The United Kingdom's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has issued a formal notice to Air India, seeking an urgent explanation over why a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner was allowed to fly from London to Bengaluru despite a reported technical issue during engine start. The UK regulator has warned that failure to respond could lead to regulatory action affecting Air India's Dreamliner fleet.

The incident occurred on Feb 1 at London Heathrow, when the flight crew of AI-132 noticed that the left engine's Fuel Control Switch did not lock into the "RUN" position during start-up. On two occasions, the switch slipped back to "CUTOFF" when light



pressure was applied. The switch appeared to latch properly on the third attempt.

After the aircraft was grounded on arrival, India's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) carried out a probe concluding that the issue was procedural and linked to human error.

However, the UK CAA has taken a tougher stance. In a Feb 3 letter, it asked for details of maintenance actions and a root-cause analysis, questioning how the aircraft was cleared for a long-haul flight.



PATNA

Tightening action against the public playing of vulgar songs, the Bihar government has directed the police to register FIRs against offenders found playing obscene or double-meaning songs in buses, autos, taxis, trains or other public places.

The order has been issued by Deputy Chief Minister and Home

Minister Samrat Choudhary, who said strict action will now be taken against those who play such songs openly. Under the directive, cases will be registered under Sections 296/79 of Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS). While Section 296 deals with obscene acts and songs, Section 79 relates to words, gestures or acts intended to insult the modesty of a woman. Police have also been instructed to launch a special campaign

across all districts. Action will be taken against anyone playing obscene or double-meaning Bhojpuri, Magahi, Maithili or other songs in buses, trucks, autorickshaws or other public places. Bhojpuri songs often contain lot of vulgarity, officials said. Choudhary said that playing obscene songs in public has a negative impact on society, especially on children, and also compromises the safety and dignity of women.

This is not the first such move by Bihar police. Last year, authorities ordered a crackdown on public broadcast of vulgar Bhojpuri songs after a song by popular rapper Yo Yo Honey Singh triggered a controversy. In 2025, actress Neetu Chandra also filed a PIL in Patna High Court, seeking a ban on what she described as "cheap, double-meaning" Bhojpuri and Hindi songs.



## Bihar bleep

# Playing vulgar songs in public? Face the music

## Sunbeam School, Lahartara - CHAMPIONS of the Prestigious CBSE Heritage Quiz

Varanasi



We are immensely proud to announce that Sunbeam School, Lahartara has achieved a remarkable national-level success by emerging as the CHAMPIONS of the prestigious CBSE Heritage Quiz. This outstanding achievement reflects the students deep understanding of India rich cultural heritage, history and traditions along with their academic excellence and teamwork.

The National Finals of the CBSE Heritage Quiz were held today at the CBSE National Office, Dwarka, New Delhi, where the best teams from across the country competed in a highly challenging and intellectually stimulating environment. Demonstrating exceptional knowledge, confidence and presence of mind the Sunbeam Lahartara team outperformed all competitors to secure the coveted national title. The winning team comprised Aditya Jaiswal, Shubhan Singh and Soumy Shekhar Jha, who were ably guided and mentored by Sanjeev Mishra. Their dedicated preparation, disciplined approach and passion for learning culminated in winning the prestigious national trophy, bringing great honour and recogni-

tion to the school. The award was formally Presented to the team by Rahul Singh IAS Chairman CBSE. Receiving this distinguished honour from the Chairman himself was a moment of immense pride and joy for the entire Sunbeam fraternity, reaffirming the school commitment to holistic education, academic excellence and cultural awareness. The quiz was conducted by Kunal Savarkar, one of India most distinguished and celebrated Quiz Masters. On this momentous victory, the Chairperson of Sunbeam Group of Educational Institutions, Dr. Deepak Madhok, remarked, "This national Championship is a proud reflection of our school unwavering commitment to academic excellence and cultural values. Our students have demon-

strated outstanding knowledge, confidence and exemplary teamwork on a national Platform." Vice-Chairperson of the Sunbeam Group Bharti Madhok described the achievement, saying, "Winning the CBSE National Heritage Quiz is a true testament to our students intellectual depth and disciplined preparation. The dedication, curiosity and Perseverance displayed by our young scholars are truly commendable." Applauding the remarkable success,

Director Amrita Burman stated, "This achievement reaffirms our belief that education rooted in heritage nurtures confident global citizens. Our students have not only won a prestigious trophy but have also upheld the values and legacy of our institution with Distinction."

## A meeting was held under the chairmanship of District Judge Akhilesh Dubey to discuss and make Mediation 2.0 a success



Bhadohi

Under the Chairmanship of District Judge Akhilesh Dubey, a meeting of all judicial officers was called in the rest room of District Judge Akhilesh Dubey to discuss how to make the Mediation Campaign 2.0 successful for the nation. Under this campaign, those cases pending in the courts through mediation, in which there is more Possibility of resolution on the basis of conciliation, then such cases are to be resolved on the basis of conciliation through mediation under the said campaign. So that not only will the litigants get quick justice,

but their money and time will also be saved. Under this campaign, matrimonial dispute cases pending in courts, accident claim cases, domestic violence cases, check bounce cases, commercial dispute cases, service dispute cases, compoundable criminal cases, consumer dispute cases, loan recovery cases, cases related to division of property, eviction related cases, land acquisition cases other appropriate civil cases have been included. Along with this, all the judicial officers were also directed by the District Judge Akhilesh Dubey to refer as many cases as possible to the

mediation center in which a settlement can be reached through mediation. So that the campaign can be made successful. In the meeting Ratnesh Mani Tripathi, Chief Justice Family Court, Bansh Bahadur Yadav, Presiding Officer, Motor Accident Claims Tribunal, Amit Verma, Additional District Judge/SC/ST Act, Lokesh Mishra, Additional District Judge/POCSO Act, Anand Mishra, Chief Judicial Magistrate, Tarunima Pandey, Full Time Secretary, District Legal Services All judicial officers of the Authority, Bhadohi and District Court should be Present.

## Carpet industry got a boost after America reduced the 50% tariff to 18%. Now gradually Indian carpet will be popular in every country of the world: Yadvendra Rai

Bhadohi

The carpet industry was completely affected due to the imposition of 50 percent tariff by America. Lakhs of women who were earning their living by weaving, washing, stringing, latexing Etc. were dejected. Carpets were dumped in warehouses built near exporters and a dark cloud of recession had fallen on the carpet industry. People were forced to bear the brunt of unemployment, but the strategy of the Indian government changed the fortunes of the carpet industry and when the 50 percent tariff imposed by America was reduced to 18 percent, the people associated with it including exporters heaved a sigh of relief and once again there was activity in the market. In this regard, Yadvendra Rai Kaka, Chairman of senior carpet exporter Kaka Overseas Limited, said that the industry had completely come to a standstill due to the imposition of 50% American tariff. Old orders were dumped in warehouses and there were no new orders, leading to unemployment. Said we turned to the European market but Europe cannot compensate. He said that in our understanding this recession is due to political instability which affected the industry. The carpet fair held in Germany was a disappointment. There were very few American customers in the fair, due to which the fair proved to be nothing special. He said that the world biggest market for everything is USA where 70 percent of carpets are exported. Due to tariff, export had stopped. Rai said that first the duty was 2%, then 3%, then 4%, after that it was 6%, then 12%, after that, from 25% to 50%, i.e. a total of 62% of the traffic was exported by the exporters, which had to be paid to the customers, due to which the carpets were very expensive for them, hence all the customers had stopped buying our carpets. Rai said that now America has increased the tariff to 18%, which has given a huge relief to the industry, but it will take 4 to 5 months to experience this relief. When the train has derailed, it will take time to climb up. Rai said that our warehouses are filled with old orders, now they are of old design and color combination which customers are demanding at discount. Now it will take 4 to 5 months for the new order to come, which means the market will boom only after the new order comes. He said that due to 18% tariff, the coming times will be very good. Now the Indian carpet will gradually spread all over the world, the era of prosperity will be restored once Again



## ARTO Launches Crackdown on Unfit Vehicles in Aliganj, Seven Seized

Etah

In an effort to curb road accidents and streamline traffic management, the Transport Department conducted a special enforcement drive in the Aliganj area, taking strict action against unfit vehicles and those operating without mandatory documents. The campaign was led by Assistant Regional Transport Officer (ARTO) Satendra Kumar and carried out at key locations including Nagla Padav, Kaimganj Road, and the Malawan Bypass. During checking at Nagla Padav and Kaimganj Road, four loaders, one water tanker



and one truck were found unfit for road use and were seized on the spot. Similarly, at the Malawan Bypass, two trucks and one JCB machine were seized after being found unfit.

Inspection revealed that the seized vehicles were operating without valid fitness certificates, insurance documents and authorized number plates, posing a serious risk to road safety. For violations of transport regulations, penalties totaling ₹1.30 lakh were imposed by the department. Action was also taken against a milk tanker; however, considering the perishable nature of the milk and after

the penalty was deposited, the vehicle was later released.

All seized vehicles were handed over to Aliganj Kotwali police for further legal proceedings. ARTO Satendra Kumar stated that the drive is part of an ongoing initiative focused on road safety and will continue in the coming days. He appealed to vehicle owners and drivers to ensure that all documents are complete and that traffic rules are strictly followed to help reduce road accidents. Constables Ajit, Subhash and Chandrakant were also present during the enforcement Drive.

## BJP-Congress clash in Amingaon of Jalukbari, the constituency of the CM of Assam

Assam

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma constituency was hit by a strong protest at Amingaon in Jalukbari on Thursday during the Congress' political 'Parivartan Yatra'. The event was scheduled to be held in the presence of Assam Pradesh Congress president Gaurav Gogoi, but BJP workers tried to disrupt it. The Congress staged a sit-in in front of Bandhya International School, owned by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma wife. The incident reflected the political tension, with the Congress accusing the BJP of "murdering democracy". Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi, who arrived in Amingaon to participate in the 'Parivartan Yatra', launched a scathing attack on Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. He said that the politics of the state has become plagued by hooliganism. Addressing a dharna in front of the school, Gogoi accused the BJP workers of conspiring to stop the yatra. The Congress claims that the protest is reinforcing the demand for change in



Assam and the BJP is trying to suppress it. Senior Congress leader Jitendra Singh, MP Rakibul Hussain, MP Pradyut Bordoloi, senior leader Bhupen Bora, MLA Debabrata Saikia, Ripun Bora and Rakibuddin Ahmed were among those who participated in the sit-in. They raised slogans like 'Desh se mami badi nahi', which focused on local issues. Congress workers shouted slogans, saying that the BJP was polluting Assam politics and that Himanta Biswa Sarma pet goons were creating nuisance in areas like Jalukbari. BJP workers also raised comparative slogans. He even called Gaurav Gogoi a 'Pakistani agent', which made the atmosphere more tense. According to the

Congress, this strategy of the BJP is a failed attempt to stop the Congress. The police overtook both sides, but many BJP workers were not detained. "Our Parivartan Yatra will continue, BJP hooliganism cannot stop us. "This incident highlights the growing polarization in Assam Politics. The Congress says that it is a democratic right to protest outside an institution belonging to the Chief Minister family. Gaurav Gogoi called upon the supporters to remain united. Here, the locals appealed for peace. The police kept the situation under control. This journey of the Congress is claiming to bring a wave of change in the whole of Assam.

## International Conference on Climate-Resilient Agriculture and Sustainable Development Kicks off at BHU

Varanasi

As the world continues to grapple with concerns over climate change and food security, Banaras Hindu University is playing host to a key global dialogue on agricultural innovations and solutions. The university inaugurated a three-day International Conference on "Climate-Resilient Agriculture for Sustainable Development: Innovations and Solutions (ICRA-2026)." Agricultural scientists, researchers, policy makers, experts and students from leading institutions have gathered in large numbers at BHU for this programme. The inaugural session witnessed leading agricultural experts sharing insights on the challenges faced by the sector and ways to address them for larger good. Presiding over the inaugural session at the Swatantrata Bhawan, Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Ajit Kumar Chaturvedi, called upon the scientific community to ensure that the three-day deliberations translate into meaningful and transformative outcomes for Indian and global agriculture. Expressing his desire that ICRA-2026 be remembered as a landmark event, he underscored the importance of fostering new ideas, interdisciplinary collaboration and enduring partnerships beyond academic boundaries. Prof. Chaturvedi highlighted the urgent need to scientifically measure and quantify the impact of climate change on agricultural productivity, stressing that evidence-



based data must guide research, policy and practice rather than media-driven narratives. He advocated for deeper collaboration across institutions and disciplines and assured full institutional support for initiatives addressing real challenges faced by farmers and practitioners. Emphasizing societal accountability in research, he urged scientists to demonstrate how laboratory work translates into tangible benefits for communities, noting that public trust and government support increasingly depend on visible societal impact. Chief Guest, Dr. Himanshu Pathak, Director General, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Hyderabad, highlighted that the poorest communities, despite contributing the least to global climate change, are the most severely affected by its consequences. Climate change, he said, threatens food security,

livelihoods, and assets in vulnerable regions. While stressing that climate change is a collective challenge requiring collective solutions, he noted that individual action in mitigation and adaptation also remains critical. Dr. Pathak acknowledged the strong support of the Government of India and international partners and emphasized the need for sustained investments and funding. He elaborated on the 5 'R's' of agricultural resource management: Resistance, Recovery, Rebounding, Regeneration, and Robustness and stressed that integrated resource management, encompassing natural, genetic and socio-economic resources, is essential for building resilient agricultural systems. Guest of Honour, Prof. Punjab Singh, Chancellor, RLBCAU, Jhansi, outlined key challenges confronting agriculture today, including the need to increase and sus-

tain production, conserve natural resources, improve resource-use efficiency, enhance farm profitability, and adapt to climate change. He noted that India will need to feed nearly 1.7 billion people by 2050, requiring a significant increase in production without compromising ecological sustainability. Climate change, he warned, poses a serious threat to productivity unless addressed through targeted, science-driven interventions. Guest of Honour, Padma Bhushan Dr. Ram Badan Singh, emphasized the importance of sustainable development through the integration of traditional knowledge with modern technologies, supported by sound policies and strong institutional frameworks. He stated that evidence-based recommendations emerging from the conference could play a pivotal role in shaping national strategies for building resilient and low-carbon agricultural systems, reaffirming that serving science and humanity remains the ultimate goal. Dr. Shudhanshu Singh, Director, IIRI South Asia Regional Centre, observed that climate change is no longer a theoretical concept but a lived reality, particularly in the Global South and East with India among the most affected. Addressing the challenge of Climate change, he emphasized, requires collective global action involving international institutions and equitable access to innovation. He underlined the importance of bridging yield gaps, optimizing agricultural systems and

translating scientific outputs into actionable policy and investment frameworks, while acknowledging the collaborative efforts of BHU and its global Partners. Welcoming the delegates, Prof. U.P. Singh, Director, Institute of Agricultural Sciences, highlighted the university long-standing contributions to agricultural education, research and innovation adding that several advanced research initiatives are currently underway at the varsity. Prof. Shrawan Kumar Singh, Convener of the Conference and Head, Department of Genetics and Plant Breeding, remarked that the world stands at a critical juncture with climate change, population growth, diminishing natural resources and environmental degradation exerting unprecedented pressure on global food systems. Ensuring sustainable food security for present and future generations, he said, has become one of the defining challenges of our time.

He explained that ICRA-2026 has been designed around nine interlinked and highly relevant themes such as: Efficient techniques to develop climate-friendly varieties, methods to conserve the biodiversity for improving crops, Strategies for soil health management and adoption of water efficient farming practices, Use of A.I., Drones, remote sensing and nanotechnology in smart agriculture system, etc, that together form an integrated framework for agricultural resilience and Sustainability.

# DM holds meeting with representatives of political parties regarding electoral roll revision

The District Magistrate informed that the last date for filing claims and objections in the electoral roll is February 6

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** A meeting was held on Thursday at the Sangam Auditorium, chaired by District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma, regarding the special intensive revision program of electoral rolls - 2026. Representatives of recognized national and state political parties were present at the meeting. The District Magistrate informed that the last date for filing claims and objections in the electoral roll is February 6, 2026, with only one day remaining. He appealed to the representatives of the political parties to ensure that their appointed Booth Level Agents (BLAs) get Form-6 filled out by as many eligible voters as possible, so that their names can be included in the final voter list to be published on March 6, 2026. The DM said that in addition to January 1, 2026, young people who complete 18 years of age on April 1, July 1, and October 1, 2026, can also register their names in the voter list through Form-6. He requested all the representatives to cooperate in adding new voters and to coordinate with the BLOs to submit Form-6, Annexure-4, and the declaration form. In the meeting, Deputy District Election Officer Pooja Mishra informed that



there are a total of 35,36,555 registered voters in the district, out of which 32,47,898 voters have been mapped, while 2,88,657 voters are in the no-mapping category. These cases are being heard by the Electoral Registration Officers and Assistant Electoral Registration Officers of the respective assembly constituencies. She informed

that, as per the instructions of the Commission, 7,73,778 voters have been marked in the category of logical discrepancies based on various types of discrepancies, such as errors in the spelling of names, mapping of one person to multiple voters, and unusual differences in the age of parents or grandparents. Notices have been issued to such

voters, and the errors are being rectified by BLOs (Booth Level Officers) through door-to-door visits using the BLO app after the necessary documents are provided. The Additional District Magistrate (Administration) stated that a total of 10,62,435 notices are to be issued under the categories of no-mapping and logical discrepancies. Of these,

9,31,855 notices had been generated by 10:00 AM on February 5, 2026, while 1,70,300 notices have been distributed to the voters. Hearings have also been completed in 43,518 cases. The District Magistrate informed that 1,53,407 Form-6 applications have been received so far. He clarified that to ensure that no ineligible person's name

remains on the voter list and that all eligible citizens' names are included, maximum registration of young people who have completed 18 years of age should be ensured. The meeting was attended by Deputy District Election Officer Pooja Mishra, representatives of various political parties, and election-related officials.

## Legal Awareness Camp Held in Magh Mela Area, Devotees Informed About the Law

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** A legal awareness and literacy camp was organized in the Magh Mela area during the Magh Mela 2026. Through the camp, devotees visiting the fairgrounds were informed about their legal rights and government schemes. This event was organized under the direction of the Honorable District Judge and Chairman of the District Legal Services Authority, Prayagraj, Shri Satyaprakash Tripathi. Under the leadership of the Secretary of the District Legal



Services Authority, Prayagraj, Shri Shashi Kumar, camps were set up at various locations in the fairgrounds to provide the

general public with information related to legal aid. During this time, students from United Law College presented a street play

depicting the harmful consequences of drug abuse. Through the play, devotees were made aware of the dangers of drug

addiction, prevention methods, and necessary precautions. In addition, law students also conducted extensive publicity regarding the upcoming Lok Adalat (People's Court), which is to be held on March 14, 2026. People were informed about the quick and easy resolution of cases through the Lok Adalat.

During the program, the general public was also informed about the mega and large-scale literacy and service assistance camp to be held on February 22, 2026, in Nawabganj Tehsil, Soraoon.

Necessary guidelines were given regarding registration to avail the benefits of various welfare schemes of the government and the District Legal Services Authority at this camp. On this occasion, Shri Vishal and other paralegal volunteers from United Law College were present. This information was provided by the Secretary of the District Legal Services Authority, Shri Shashi Kumar. If you wish, I can prepare this in a more concise format, including photo captions, or in a breaking news format for a digital portal.

Wanted Accused Arrested by Baldev Police Station

Mathura

The police team of Baldev Police Station arrested a wanted accused on 22.01.2026 based on information received from a confidential informant. In Case Crime No. 001/2026, registered under Sections 191(2), 191(3), 190, 109(1), 115(2), 352, 351(3), 125 of the BNS and Sections 5/25/27 of the Arms Act,

## Questions Raised Over Investigation into MNREGA Corruption in Kheruwa Village

**Utraon.** Serious questions have been raised about the functioning of the investigation committee formed to look into allegations of massive irregularities under the MNREGA scheme in Kheruwa village of Saidabad development block. The complainant, Dilip Prajapati (District Minister), BJP (P.Mo.), has alleged that the three-member investigation committee constituted at the block level did not arrive at the site on the scheduled date and time, and later, in collusion with the village head, submitted a report without informing the complainant or recording his statement, thus closing the case. According to the complainant, Dilip Prajapati, a false investigation report had been submitted earlier by Dayashankar Patel, which led to a re-investigation order after a complaint was filed with the government. Following a complaint to the Principal Secretary, Rural Development Department, Lucknow, a three-member investigation committee was constituted by the Block Development Officer, Saidabad, comprising Akhilesh Tiwari, Saket Shukla, and Rakesh Yadav (JE Red). The committee was supposed to reach Kheruwa village on November 24 at 11 AM to conduct a physical verification. Villagers had also been informed in advance. Dilip Prajapati says that the investigation team did not arrive at the site at the scheduled time without any



prior notice. Despite waiting for a long time, no member was present. After this, without informing the complainant, and in collusion with the village head, an investigation report was secretly prepared and sent to the government. The complainant was completely unaware of this. Complaint to the Chief Minister, demand for a re-investigation. After learning about the report, the complainant has sent a letter to the Chief Minister and the Principal Secretary, Rural Development Department, alleging collusion between the members of the investigation committee and the village head, and demanding departmental action against them for submitting a false report. He has also demanded that an independent district-level team be constituted to conduct a fresh and impartial investigation against the Kheruwa village head. He alleges that the block team is not conducting an impartial investigation because of the collusion between

the village head and the block panchayat secretary, who are trying to protect each other in this scam. Serious Irregularities Alleged in MNREGA Scheme. The complaint alleges widespread corruption by the village headman under the MNREGA scheme over the past five years. These allegations include the creation of fake job cards, manipulation of construction projects, irregularities in pond excavation, scams in tree plantation work, and payments for incomplete and substandard work. Villagers claim that these irregularities have resulted in financial losses of millions of rupees in government funds. Villagers Express Outrage. The villagers have warned that they will be forced to launch protests and demonstrations if a fair and transparent investigation is not conducted. Several villagers, including Narendra Pratap Singh, Rajkumar, Rahul, and Ankit, were present during this time.

## Signing of MoU between Meja Urja Nigam and ALIMCO for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities and Senior Citizens

**Meja.** On 04.02.2026, Meja Urja Nigam Private Limited (MUNPL), under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, took an important step towards the empowerment of persons with disabilities and senior citizens by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with ALIMCO (Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India), a Government of India undertaking. Under this agreement, persons with disabilities and senior citizens residing in the project-affected and nearby areas will be identified and provided with artificial limbs, assistive devices, and other necessary aids. This initiative aims to improve their daily lives and enable them to live independently. The MoU signing ceremony was held in the gracious presence of Shri G. Srinivas Rao, CEO, MUNPL. The MoU was signed on behalf



of the corporation by Shri Vivek Chandra, HOHR, Shri Ajay Singh, Deputy General Manager (HR), and Dr. Arvind Singh, Medical Officer (Hospital), and on behalf of ALIMCO by Shri Rishi Raj, Assistant Manager (ALIMCO). Addressing the gathering on this occasion, Shri G. Srinivas Rao, CEO, MUNPL stated: "Meja Urja Nigam is continuously striving to bring positive change in the lives of

underprivileged and specially-abled sections of society. This partnership with ALIMCO will prove helpful in enhancing the dignity, mobility, and quality of life of persons with disabilities and senior citizens by providing them with assistive devices." This initiative strengthens Meja Urja Nigam's commitment to "Health for All" and inclusive development, and reflects the corporation's

sensitivity towards social concerns through CSR activities. On this occasion, Shri Narendra Nath Sinha (General Manager, Operations & Maintenance), Shri Ashok Kumar Samal (General Manager, Maintenance), Shri A. K. Chaudhary (Chief Medical Officer), Shri Vivek Chandra, HoHR along with authorized representatives from ALIMCO, were also present.

## Editorial

**Civil servants are running India's regulatory bodies. It dilutes institutional independence**

Looking back at India's reform story of more than three decades, it is worthwhile to recall that economic liberalisation of the 1990s had a few implicit assumptions of how an economy should function and grow on a sustainable basis. One of those assumptions followed from the government decision to allow the private sector to operate in areas that were hitherto monopolised by state-owned enterprises. Under such liberalisation, it was assumed that while the government would continue to frame policies for areas opened up to the private sector, the regulation or enforcement of those policies would be undertaken by independent regulators through rules framed by them. A classic example of this thinking was India's telecommunications sector that was opened up to the private sector in the early 1990s. This was followed by the setting up of the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority of India or Trai a few years later. Subsequently, the business of basic telephone services, run in large parts of the country by a government department, was hived off to a newly created state-owned enterprise. Something similar, in varying degrees, happened in other areas such as the insurance, airports, and power sectors. In addition, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) was set up to regulate and adjudicate upon issues of market dominance and practices that undermined competition in various sectors. The principle was clear: Let the government frame the policy (and not run a business), while independent regulatory bodies could enforce the policy by framing necessary rules. Another implicit assumption behind such a separation of responsibilities between the government and the regulators was about who should steer those regulatory bodies. To impart autonomy and independence to these institutions and insulate them from government interference, the pool of talent for hiring key personnel was widened. Experts and private-sector professionals in related fields, along with even retired members of the judiciary (though under some pressure as was seen when the legislation for setting up the CCI was framed), were among those the government believed could be hired to head these regulatory institutions. Thus, the first chairperson of the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission was an economist. Trai was set up under the chairmanship of a retired judge and its next chairperson was a former banker. Even the first capital market regulator was a banker in the late 1980s, and the first chairperson of the insurance sector regulator was a former chairman of the Central Board of Direct Taxes. The first full-fledged chairperson of the CCI was a retired Indian Administrative Services (IAS) officer. So, there was a mix of regulatory heads chosen from a pool of experts from both the government and the private sector. In spite of a few civil servants heading these institutions, the idea that continued to be pursued was to insulate regulation from the stranglehold or influence of the political executive. The third significant aspect of regulation in the early days of economic reforms was the framing of rules for appointing heads of regulatory bodies in a way that effectively ruled out conflicts of interest. Thus, a regulator would usually not be considered for another job in the government system after the completion of his or her term. The idea was that the regulator should be able to act freely and fairly without any expectation of future assignments from the government or the private sector. Indeed, one of the regulators under the law was, until recently, barred from accepting any government job after having served in that regulatory post. These were guardrails to preserve the integrity and independence of regulators. However, the situation with regard to the last two assumptions behind the regulatory framework has changed significantly in the last few decades.



On June 9, 2024, as the Modi 3.0 government was set to swear in, Rajeev Chandrasekhar came up with a cryptic tweet: "Today, curtains down on my 18-year stint of public service, of which three years I had the privilege of serving with PM Narendra Modi's Team Modi 2.0. I certainly didn't wish to end my 18 years of public service as a candidate who lost an election, but that's how it has turned out". The tweet was deleted after a day, and the amended version conveniently laid the blame for the confusion on an "intern". It was an emotional response, a mark of Chandrasekhar's utter disappointment with not finding a place in Modi 3.0. It also signified how the 'technocrat' was not a run-of-the-mill politician who believed in rehearsed or curated responses. Less than a year since then, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) high command has now sprung a surprise by naming Chandrasekhar as its new Kerala state president. By no means was Rajeev Chandrasekhar the frontrunner. Incumbent K. Surendran, who overstayed his term by two years, was tipped to get another year's extension, until the assembly elections in the state in 2026. There were other contenders too, such as firebrand Sobha Surendran and veteran MT Ramesh. Even conventional wisdom suggested that social engineering compulsions would go against Chandrasekhar, a Nair hailing from Thrissur. With the two Malayalis in Modi's third ministry being a Nair and a Syrian Christian—Suresh Gopi and George Kurian—an



Ezhava/Hindu OBC candidate would've been the more practical option. But the high command had enough reasons to pick Chandrasekhar. The BJP in Kerala is a divided house with multiple factions, and none of the frontrunners would have been able to function smoothly on account of internal disension. Even K. Surendran's five-year term was marred by friction with the PK Krishnadas-led faction, as well as his running feud with Sobha Surendran. The BJP leadership reckons that Rajeev Chandrasekhar can carry all the factions together. He is not a natural politician, but the central leadership deems that this very characteristic will become Chandrasekhar's USP. It is very much a repetition of the 'K. Annamalai' experiment in Tamil Nadu.

True, Chandrasekhar's acceptability cuts across factions. But there are various other considerations at play. For all the gains it made elsewhere, the BJP has hardly had any electoral impact in Kerala, despite a steady rise in vote share. Even after faring reasonably well in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, cornering nearly 20% votes and Suresh Gopi's win from Thrissur, it did badly in the Palakkad by-election last November. That loss probably

put paid to Surendran's hopes to stay on until the assembly polls, as he had turned the issue into a battle of prestige. The central leadership also cannot quite understand why the BJP does so poorly in a state where the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has the second-largest network of shakhas (branches) in the country. For a long, the RSS in Kerala had been deeply involved in the functioning of the state BJP, though the party's ideological mentor has taken a backseat in recent times. This was meant to afford more autonomy to the state party president, but it ultimately culminated in RSS organising secretary K. Subash's resignation, with the Sangh not naming a replacement in his stead for an extended period.

Now, Rajeev Chandrasekhar's appointment is likely to be followed by the RSS naming an organising secretary to assist the new president in his functioning. The last time the high command named an out-of-the-box candidate as state president was in the run-up to the 2016 assembly polls, when veteran Sangh leader Kummanam Rajasekharan, whose hardliner image and association with the Nilakkal protests of 1982

had proved to be a baggage for the party in the past. The central leadership also believes that Chandrasekhar can cater to sections of Kerala's aspirational middle class that are yearning for change and are unhappy with both the ruling Left government and the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF).

Since Chandrasekhar doesn't fit the mould of a regular politician, he may be able to connect better with this class and some increasingly 'apolitical' sections of voters that support, say, a Shashi Tharoor. In many ways in fact, it was the spirited contest that he put in against Tharoor in the Lok Sabha election in Thiruvananthapuram, despite being a late entrant, that may have propelled Chandrasekhar to the coveted position today. Giving a tough fight to Tharoor, a lot of people were left wondering whether Chandrasekhar could have emerged victorious had he been pencilled in sooner. "Ini Karyam Nadakkum" ('Now things will move') was Chandrasekhar's campaign slogan. This may well be called Chandrasekhar's second coming in Kerala politics. Contrary to what many may believe, the contest

in Thiruvananthapuram wasn't his initiation in state politics, even if he was based in Bengaluru until then. Much before that, he had been a key mediator for getting the Bharat Dharma Jana Sena (BDJS), affiliated to the Ezhava community outfit Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), to join the National Democratic Alliance

(NDA) in 2016. That is when Chandrasekhar was named the NDA's vice-chairman for Kerala, despite being a Rajya Sabha MP from Karnataka. Now, he may be expected to act as a bridge to the Christian clergy and cater to their grievances. The Christian community in Kerala has traditionally stood with the Congress, although cracks have begun to appear in recent times. Chandrasekhar may be expected to utilise issues such as the controversy surrounding the Munambam suburb of Ernakulam, where some 600 LChristian and Hindu families are protesting against the Wakf Board's claim over the area. Notably, Chandrasekhar was a key figure in getting veteran leader PC George to merge his splinter party with the BJP. Shone George, the latter's son, is also expected to emerge as an important leader during Chandrasekhar's term. It would also be remiss not to mention Chandrasekhar's ownership of Asianet News, which has consistently topped BARC (Broadcast Audience Research Council) ratings for Malayalam news channels. He is the majority shareholder of the news channel through the holding company Jupiter Capital. While some BJP leaders think that with the channel maintaining an independent editorial line Chandrasekhar's business interests may backfire on him, that could be a thin reading of the situation. This view got amplified recently when he had to tweet an apology on account of the channel's alleged slighting of the Maha Kumbh on a news show.

### Why's Turkey erupting for Ekrem Imamoglu? He's the biggest threat to Erdogan yet

In Turkey, the vox populi is rising once again, reminiscent of the Gezi uprising that occurred 12 years ago. After a week of continuous protests in multiple cities—against the arrest of Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu—authorities have put a ban on gatherings and detained close to 2,000 individuals. The unlawful and unconstitutional arrest of Imamoglu is the culmination of over two decades of political erosion under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's increasingly autocratic governance. It has systematically undermined democratic institutions, silenced dissent, and played up the Islamists agenda internationally, particularly on the matter of Kashmir. Now, in the streets of Turkey's major cities, thousands of people, mostly students and youth, are pushing back against Erdogan, and their defiance is growing louder by the day. At the heart of this unrest lies the struggle for Turkey's political future—and the figure leading this charge—Ekrem. Imamoglu, a calm and charismatic mayor, was arrested

under politically motivated charges of corruption and embezzlement—accusations that many see as a pretext for silencing a rising political star. His arrest was an absurd spectacle. Taken from his walk-in closet while calmly adjusting his tie, Imamoglu was detained merely hours before he was set to be nominated as the presidential candidate by Turkey's Opposition in the 2028 elections. For a leader with immense support across Turkey, this act of political repression has galvanised protests not just in Istanbul but across the nation. But why has one figure—mayor of Istanbul since 2019—become the focal point of such a significant crisis. Obscurity in 2019, defeating the candidate supported by Justice and Development Party (AKP) by 13,000 votes—when no one thought he could. Before Imamoglu, conservatives from the AKP had ruled Istanbul for 25 years. Erdogan himself owes the foundations of his political career to his mayorship of Istanbul in the 1990s.

### BJP has a new Muslim strategy up its sleeve. Saugat-e-Modi isn't just about Bihar election

This Ramadan, a quiet gesture from the Narendra Modi government has stirred conversation. Eid kits for 32 lakh underprivileged Muslims, described as a goodwill initiative timed with the holy month. The offering appears festive, including familiar Eid ingredients such as dry fruits, semolina, vermicelli and sugar. The kits also include kurta-pyjamas for men and suit fabrics for women, all neatly packaged to reach Muslim households before Eid. At first glance, it appears to be a thoughtful cultural outreach by the Bharatiya Janata Party, an attempt to bring warmth and festivity into homes that might otherwise go without. But as with most things in Indian politics, the surface is rarely the whole story. The move hasn't gone unnoticed by political observers. Why this sudden and massive outreach to Muslims—by a party that has so far built much of its narrative on distancing itself from appeasement politics? This is the same BJP whose leaders have routinely criticised political opponents for attending Iftar parties, framing such gestures as opportunistic pandering. And yet, here we are, with the ruling party preparing curated Eid hampers not just for a symbolic few but for over 30 lakh Muslim households. For many, the question is not whether the gesture is kind—but why now, and why like this? The BJP's 'Saugat-e-Modi' kits have not only surprised political commentators but also drawn scathing remarks from the Opposition. For some, it's a clear contradiction of the BJP's usual stance on such gestures. But for political analysts watching the timing closely, the move seems less like a change of heart and more like a strategic calculation—with Bihar in mind. The upcoming Bihar assembly election has raised concerns within the BJP that rising Opposition

momentum could impact not just the party, but also its key allies—Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United), Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), and Jitan Ram Manjhi's Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular). In that light, the Eid outreach feels less like an act of cultural generosity and more like a political buffer—an attempt to soften the blow in a state where coalition math can shift quickly. That analysis may hold some truth—but it also seems to overlook the broader outreach pattern the BJP has been steadily building, particularly toward poor Muslims, Pasmanda communities, and Muslim women. Over the past few years, the party has made targeted efforts to create an opening within sections of the Muslim electorate long seen as distant. In the 2023 urban local body elections in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP went as far as fielding Pasmanda Muslim candidates—a move once considered politically unthinkable. Of the 395 Muslim candidates it fielded, 54 went on to win. These numbers may seem modest when seen in the larger national context, but they speak to a subtle shift in the party's approach.

One that goes beyond gift boxes and hints at reimagining of BJP's political strategy—at least on the surface. BJP's effort to engage with Pasmanda and poor Muslims isn't new. In UP, Danish Ansari, a Pasmanda Muslim, was appointed as Minister of State for Minority Welfare, Muslim Waqf, and Haj in Yogi Adityanath's second cabinet—which was seen by many as a symbolic but politically significant move. The party and its spokespersons often claim that it was the BJP that made APJ Abdul Kalam the President of India, citing it as proof of its inclusive credentials. Added to this are a number of welfare schemes that directly.

### Trump should withdraw USCIRF's authorisation. It's interfering in India's domestic governance

In a strongly worded statement, Government of India has condemned and refuted the findings of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom report as "biased and politically motivated, and continuation of persistent attempts to misrepresent isolated incidents and cast aspersions on India's vibrant multicultural society which reflects USCIRF's deliberate agenda rather than a genuine concern for religious freedom". Though this is not the first time such reports have painted India as a coun-

try highly intolerant of its religious minorities, the March 2025 report is the first time a recommendation has been made for India to be designated as "country of particular concern". It alleges that minorities in India are facing 'deteriorating treatment'. Fifteen other countries, including Afghanistan, Russia, China, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, have been found to be treating their respective minorities badly. Three aspects of this report should be of concern to New Delhi, and it should be brought to

the attention of those the report is supposedly submitted to. The first is the report's mention of the assassination of separatist Sikh elements in Canada posing as members of the Sikh religious community and the alleged attempt on the life of another Khalistani separatist. "The Indian government also continued to expand its repressive tactics to target religious minorities abroad, specifically members of the Sikh community and their advocates... International reporting and intelligence from the Canadian govern-

ment corroborated allegations linking an official in India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and six diplomats to the 2023 assassination attempt of an American Sikh activist in New York," the report has said. It's important to note that these radical elements do not represent the Sikh community. While the Government of India has categorically rejected the allegation, the Canadian government and the prosecuting authorities in the then Biden dispensation initiated legal actions against Indian officials.

## 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.

## 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.

### IT-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 education 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-

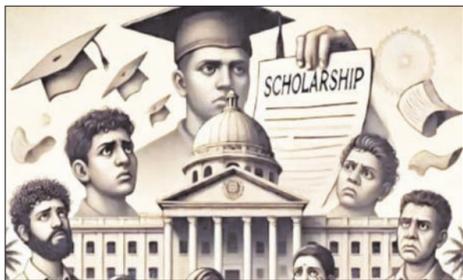


lows the CBI's recent arrests in the case involving Andhra Pradesh's Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation (KLEF), where management reportedly bribed NAAC peer visit inspectors for good ratings. "We chose to do whatever it takes

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 M u n d a s s e r y 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

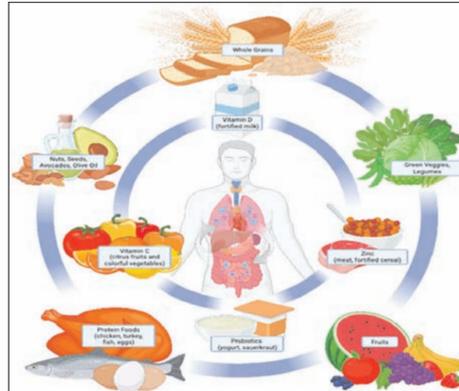


who scored 80% in upper secondary or 75% in vocational higher secondary. It ensured that bright students from underprivileged backgrounds were not forced to drop out due to financial constraints by prioritizing BPL students and providing provisions to economically weaker APL students. The crucial APJ 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 from poor families 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 Pardiwalla 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.



# Movie controversies over real-life portrayals

Films like *O'Romeo*, *Haq*, *Dhurandhar* and others have sparked backlash for allegedly depicting real-life people and events without consent, raising debates on accuracy, ethics and creative freedom in cinema

Films like *O'Romeo*, *Haq*, *Dhurandhar* and others have recently come under the scanner for allegedly depicting real-life individuals and events without consent. Families and close relatives have raised objections, filed suits and demanded changes, arguing that such portrayals distort facts and risk emotional harm. These disputes have reignited debates on the ethical responsibility of filmmakers, the balance between creative freedom and accuracy, and the sensitivity required when adapting real-life stories. With audiences drawn to cinema inspired by reality, these controversies highlight the thin line between storytelling and misrepresentation

## 1 O'Romeo faces legal challenge:

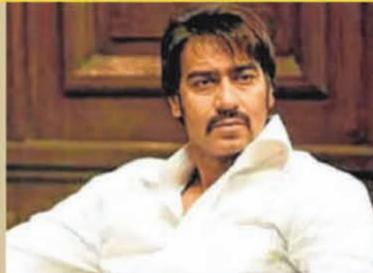
Sanobar Shaikh, daughter of the late gangster Hussain Shaikh alias Hussain Ustara, has filed a suit in the Mumbai City Civil Court at Kalaghoda against the makers of the upcoming film *O'Romeo*, alleging that it is an unauthorised biopic based on her father's life.



**3 Dhurandhar faced backlash:** Aditya Dhar's upcoming spy film *Dhurandhar* courted controversy after allegations that it drew from the real-life story of martyr Major Mohit Sharma. The film sparked conversations around sensitivity, representation and ethical responsibility in cinema. Addressing the backlash, Dhar clarified on social media that the film was not based on Major Mohit Sharma.



**3 Haq film sparks objections:** Shah Bano Begum's daughter, Siddiqua Begum Khan, had opposed the release of the film *Haq*, starring Emraan Hashmi and Yami Gautam. She claimed the film is inspired by her mother's life without the family's consent and has raised concerns over factual accuracy and emotional impact.



**4 Film faces family backlash:** The family of underworld figure Haji Mastan reportedly objected to the 2010 film *Once Upon a Time in Mumbai*, claiming it misrepresented his life. They sought changes and requested to view the film before release, sparking debates on accuracy, consent, and ethical responsibility in portraying real-life figures on screen.

# Good news for BTS FANS

BTS comeback concert and documentary to stream live globally

There is good news for BTS fans as K-pop superstars are making their long-awaited return this March with a landmark global event. Streaming live from Gwanghwamun in Seoul, this monumental performance celebrates the release of their highly anticipated new album, *Arirang*. In collaboration with HYBE, they announced a comeback event for K-pop supergroup, featuring a live performance and a feature-length documentary slated for release in March 2026.

The comeback concert, titled *BTS The Comeback Live/Arirang*, will be streamed

live on Netflix on March 21, broadcasting live from the historic Gwanghwamun area in Seoul, South Korea. The performance marks BTS's first global stage reunion following the completion of mandatory military service by all seven members, RM, Jin, SUGA, J-hope, Jimin, V and Jung Kook.

The live event celebrates the release of BTS's fifth studio album, *Arirang*, which explores the group's identity, roots and evolution. Netflix stated that the live concert will be the platform's first-ever globally live-streamed event broadcast from Korea.

Following the live performance, Netflix will premiere *BTS: The Return*, a feature-length documentary, on March 27, 2026. Directed by acclaimed filmmaker Bao Nguyen, the documentary offers behind-the-scenes access to the band's reunion and the making of their comeback album.



## Rhea all set to make acting comeback

After Sushant Singh Rajput's demise (2020), Rhea Chakraborty made it to the headlines for many wrong reasons. She was only seen in one movie titled *Chehre* (2021), which was already shot before Sushant's death.

However, Rhea is now all set to make her acting comeback with Netflix's series *Family Business*, which also stars Anil Kapoor and Vijay Varma.

On Tuesday, Netflix announced their new slate of films and series at a grand event in Mumbai. At the event, *Family Business* was announced, and its teaser was released.

While sharing the teaser, Netflix wrote on Instagram, "New blood meets old money. With immense power at stake, the lines blur between family and business. Watch *Family Business*, coming soon, only on Netflix."

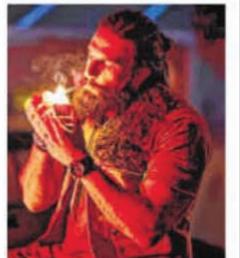
# Ranveer returns to action-packed espionage saga

*Dhurandhar: The Revenge* teaser unveils a darker, violent sequel with Ranveer in a high-stakes spy avatar

The official Hindi teaser of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* dropped on Tuesday, setting the tone for a darker and more violent sequel to the 2025 blockbuster. Directed by Aditya Dhar, the film is positioned as a high-stakes continuation that expands the franchise's espionage-driven universe.

Running for approximately 1 minute and 12 seconds, the teaser opens with a relentless, blood-soaked action montage that underscores the psychological and physical transformation of Jaskirat Singh Ranghi into the spy Hamza Ali Mazari.

Ranveer Singh appears in a clean-shaven avatar, the same look briefly teased at the conclusion of the first film. The teaser also hints at extensive flashback sequences, tracing Hamza's origin story and his journey into becoming a lethal undercover operative in



Karachi. Glimpses of returning cast members Sanjay Dutt, Arjun Rampal and R. Madhavan are featured, with Madhavan expected to play a more substantial role this time.

Produced by Jio Studios and B62 Studios, with T-Series taking over as the music label, *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* is slated for a pan-India theatrical release on March 19, 2026, coinciding with *Ekl*, *Gudi Padwa* and *Ugadi*. It will release in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam.

# I am in love with India: Tal Kravitz

The Israeli musician, who sings in 58 languages, wowed Mumbai with his multi-instrument performance at Kala Ghoda Arts Festival 2026



## Singing in 58 languages without speaking them:

One of the most fascinating aspects of Kravitz's performances is his ability to sing in 58 languages. Surprisingly, he admits he doesn't speak most of them. Tal says, "I don't really learn languages; I learn how to sing in them." He further says with a smile, "I memorise the sound, the phonetics." Kravitz writes lyrics using Latin letters, spelling words exactly how they sound. He says, "That's how I remember songs, whether it's Hindi, Arabic, or something else." Although he speaks only three languages, including Hebrew, English, and Swahili, having lived in Kenya, he has basic knowledge of Spanish, Arabic, and Russian.

**Love for instruments:** During his Kala Ghoda Arts Festival performance, Kravitz played nearly 10 instruments, some of which left audiences guessing how he pulled off such an amazing feat. Talking about his instruments, he reveals, "I own more than 100 instruments. I collect local instruments from every place I visit and learn how to play them." One standout factor during the performance was the 'soul' instrument. It is a flexible piece of metal capable of producing hauntingly emotional sounds. "Even though it's just metal, it can express deep emotion," he explains. If Tal has to choose just one instrument, he'd turn to the piano. "It's an entire orchestra," he admits. "You can play melody, harmony, and rhythm with your fingers."

**Being in love with India:** Kravitz visited India for the sixth time, and he jokingly admitted that he doesn't like the noisy traffic, but apart from that, he has no complaints. "I'm in love with India—the people, food, hospitality, smiles, energy, and vibe," he smiles. While comparing the global audience to the desi crowd, Kravitz highlights India's unmatched emotional connection. "In Europe and America, the audience is polite but reserved. In India, people sing, dance, scream, and shower you with love. The energy is unreal," he concludes.

Israeli musician and multi-instrumentalist Tal Kravitz left Mumbai spellbound and deeply moved through his performance at Elphinstone College Quadrangle during the ongoing Kala Ghoda Arts Festival 2026.

Tal is an Israeli musician and singer who has performed around 3,000 times in 28 languages. The singer performs classical, traditional and modern songs.

Beyond the stage, Tal is a dedicated educator who empowers the youth, including those in special education, to craft and play their own instruments.

Speaking exclusively to after his performance at Elphinstone College Quadrangle, Kravitz shared insights into his musical journey, inspirations, and his growing love for India.



## TAL IS A DEDICATED EDUCATOR

**'India has one of the richest musical cultures in the world!':** Reflecting on Indian audiences, Kravitz was full of admiration. He says, "India has one of the most amazing, diverse, and rich musical cultures in the entire world. With so many regions and traditions, India contains almost every kind of music within one country." What struck Tal most was the openness of listeners. He further said, "People here are extremely receptive. They want to listen, learn, and experience music from all over the world. That makes Indian audiences one of the most open-minded I've ever encountered."

**How Israel's diversity shaped his sound:** Growing up in Israel played a defining role in Kravitz's musical identity. Describing Israel as a country built by immigrants, he explained how that diversity shaped his sound. Tal says, "When Jewish communities migrated from Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, they brought their music with them." He further added, "I was lucky to grow up surrounded by such a wide range of musical traditions."



## Revisiting Om Puri via Ardh Satya

As part of the ongoing Kala Ghoda Arts Festival 2026, a special screening of *Ardh Satya* (1983) was held to mark the 75th birth anniversary of actor Om Puri. The screening was preceded by a panel discussion featuring key members of the film, moderated by Nandita Puri. Directed by Govind Nihalani, *Ardh Satya* follows a newly appointed police officer as he confronts corruption, romance, and brutality.

## Briefs

## Gadhafi's son killed in Libya

Seif al-Islam Gadhafi, the son and one-time heir apparent of Libya's late dictator Moammar Gadhafi, was killed in the northern African country, Libyan officials said. The 53-year-old was killed in the town Zintan, 136 kms southwest of the capital, Tripoli, as per Libya's chief prosecutor's office. The office said an initial probe found Seif al-Islam was shot to death, but did not provide details about the circumstances of his killing. Khaled al-Zaidi, a lawyer for Seif al-Islam, confirmed his death on Facebook, without providing details. Abdullah Othman Abdurrahim, who represented Gadhafi in the UN-brokered political dialogue which aimed to resolve Libya's long-running conflict, announced the death on Facebook. Seif al-Islam's political team later released a statement saying "four masked men" stormed his house and killed him in a "cowardly and treacherous assassination".

## 162 killed in Nigeria

Armed extremists killed at least 162 people during attacks on two villages in Nigeria, a lawmaker said on Wednesday, in one of the deadliest assaults in recent months. Attacks targeted Woro and Nuku villages in Kwara on Tuesday evening, Mohammed Omar Bio, an MP representing the area, said. The attacks were carried out by Lakurawa, an armed group affiliated with the IS group, he added.

## 700 agents to leave US state

The Trump administration will withdraw 700 immigration agents from Minnesota, President Trump's "border tsar" Tom Homan has announced. At a news conference, he said the withdrawal would begin immediately and include agents from ICE and Border Patrol. He said he had aimed to cut the federal immigration presence in Minneapolis to the level it was before Trump ordered a surge in Dec. But for now 2,000 agents would remain.

## Singer dies of snakebite

In her last message to friends, **Ifunanya Nwangene**, 26, wrote: "Please come." The singer and former contestant on The Voice Nigeria had been bitten by a snake while asleep in her flat in Nigeria's Abuja and was in hospital, awaiting care. Nwangene died a few hours after being bitten, as her friend waited at a pharmacy to buy the antivenom. As the news of her death on Jan 31 has spread, it has sparked a fierce row over the ready availability of drugs needed to treat snakebites in Nigeria.

## Boat collision leaves 14 dead

A collision between a speedboat carrying migrants and a Greek coast guard patrol vessel off the Aegean island of Chios has killed at least 14 people, the coast guard said, while a search was on for missing people. The coast guard said 25 migrants, including 11 children, were rescued and moved to a hospital.

## Norway royal scion's trial

The son of Norway's crown princess pleaded not guilty to rape charges as he went on trial Tuesday for multiple alleged offences, opening weeks of proceedings in a case that has cast a shadow on the royal family's image. Marius Borg Høiby, 29, stood while prosecutor Sturla Henriksba read out the 38 counts against him in the Oslo court, asking him if he pleaded guilty. He replied "no" to the most serious charges, including the 4 counts of rape.

## HIGH-LEVEL TALKS | Jaishankar holds discussions with Rubio, Bessent to strengthen economic and strategic ties

## In US, EAM builds on trade deal momentum

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON

Amid growing enthusiasm in both the US and India over the trade deal, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held discussions with senior American officials, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, focusing on advancing bilateral economic ties and strategic cooperation.

In Jaishankar's meeting with Rubio on Tuesday, the two leaders "welcomed" the agreement and discussed "formalising" bilateral cooperation on critical minerals exploration and mining.

The discussions were held at State Dept, ahead of the inaugural Critical Minerals Ministerial meet being convened by the US on Wednesday. "Delighted to meet US Secretary Rubio this afternoon. A wide ranging conversation that covered our bilateral cooperation agenda, regional and global issues," the EAM posted on X.

"Facets of India-US strategic partnership discussed included trade, energy, nuclear, defence, critical minerals and technology. Agreed on the early meetings of various mechanisms to advance our shared interests," he wrote.



EAM Jaishankar with US Treasury Secy Scott Bessent (L) &amp; Secy of State Marco Rubio

## 'US WANTS TO CRITICAL MINERALS TRADING BLOC'

Trump administration wants to create a critical minerals trading bloc with its allies that will use tariffs to maintain price floors and defend against China's tactic of flooding the market to undermine any potential competitors. Vice President JD Vance said the trade war over the past year exposed how dependent most countries are on the critical minerals China has a stranglehold on. "We want members to form a trading bloc among allies and partners, one that guarantees American access to American industrial might while expanding production across the zone," Vance told foreign ministers.

A readout said, "The two leaders emphasised the importance of our democracies working together to unlock new economic opportunities and advance our

shared energy security goals." Rubio and Jaishankar "concluded their meet by expressing their commitment to expanding bilateral and multilateral cooperation through the Quad. They acknowledged that a prosperous Indo-Pacific region remains vital to advancing our shared interests."

Bessent said he enjoyed his meeting with Jaishankar. "During our talks, we addressed the importance of securing supply chains, and national and economic security issues of mutual interest." Bessent had been critical of India's purchases of Russian oil.

## 'India didn't nominate Trump for Nobel but got better deal' Pak's US outreach under fire at home

Pakistan's leadership and military establishment are facing flak after India secured a trade deal with the US, sparking a wave of backlash from journalists, opposition figures, and civil society voices. Opposition voices, including Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leaders, have contrasted India's approach with Pak's outreach to US. PTI leaders argue India secured lower tariffs by asserting its "strategic autonomy", Pak was "gifted" a higher tariff after "personal lobbying by the Army chief."

Commentators mocked frequent travels between Islamabad and DC, with critics on social media likening the trips

to "rickshaw-style shuttling", undertaken more for political survival than national interest.

Journalist Asad Toor said Pak's broader economic picture made the tariff outcome more damaging. Exports are declining, foreign investment has vanished, and the country's economic leverage has "completely collapsed".

Analyst Moeed Pirzada said, "We were told the 'Field Marshal' title and the 'minerals briefcase' were the keys to Trump's heart. Yet Modi gets a call and an 18% rate after defying US on Russia. Our leader gets 19% after doing everything. It is not diplomacy, but transactional surrender."

## Russia, Ukraine envoys meet in UAE for US-brokered talks

Kyiv: Envoys from Russia and Ukraine met in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday for another round of US-brokered talks on ending the almost 4-year war, a Ukrainian negotiator said.

The delegations from Moscow and Kyiv were joined in the UAE by US officials, Rustem Umerov, Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council chief, present at the meeting, said on social media. Umerov said the planned 2-day negotiations started with all three delegations present, after which negotiators were to break into groups according to topics and then meet as a full group again at the end.

The American team was due to include special envoy



Steve Witkoff and President Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who also attended last month's meeting, according to the White House.

The current talks also coincide with the expiry of the last remaining nuclear arms pact between Russia and the US on Thursday. Trump and Putin could extend the terms of the treaty or renegotiate its conditions in an effort to prevent a new nuclear arms race.

## Xi, Putin reinforce relations in video call

Beijing: President Vladimir Putin (L) hailed Russian's growing economic cooperation with China in a video call with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping on Wednesday.

China has continued to trade with Russia, providing some relief from Western economic sanctions.

"I would like to once again assure you of firm support for our shared efforts to ensure the sovereignty and security of our countries, our socio-economic welfare and the right to choose our own development path," Putin said in opening remarks broadcast by Russian state television.

The Russian leader noted "our partnership in the energy sphere is mutually beneficial and has a truly strategic character."

He added the two countries were "conducting an active dialogue in peaceful use of nuclear energy and developing high-tech projects, including in the industry sphere and space research."

Xi said he and Putin would discuss a new "grandiose plan for the development of bilateral ties" and "exchange views on major strategic issues", according to a Russian translation of his opening remarks. He noted the two countries

## XI SPEAKS TO TRUMP

Chinese state-run media on Wednesday said President Xi Jinping held a phone call with US President Donald Trump, but did not provide details of what was discussed between them.



Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin

need to "use a historic opportunity to continue deepening strategic cooperation."

Putin, in his call with Xi, applauded China's decision to allow visa-free entry for Russians, their partnership in energy including the peaceful use of nuclear power, and high-tech cooperation in space and industry. He noted Wednesday marked the beginning of spring in the traditional Chinese calendar and said "any season is springtime in Russia-China relations".

Russian Security Council Secretary Sergey Shoigu also visited Beijing last weekend, during which he met China's top foreign policy official, Wang Yi. —AP

## We want to cut Russia off: US Congressman

Congressman and co-chair of India Caucus, Rich McCormick said the US wanted to make it arduous for Russia to continue funding for war. McCormick said, "We want to cut Russia off entirely, make it hard for them to continue to prosecute this war, and get rid of their bullying in Europe. Ukraine is a top-five country of resources when it comes to titanium, steel, cobalt, lithium, and uranium. 70% of Europe's wheat is produced in Ukraine," he said.

He said, "We don't want Russia any close to Nato allies. Russia has a \$2.1tn economy, smaller than Texas. Europe has a \$20tn economy, it alone can outpace Russia by 10 to 1. Germany has two and a half times the economy of Russia. When two leaders of great nations get together, decide what to do collectively. You look at the long-term benefits India-US deal will have on the Indian economy; Russia is not the answer. The US has a \$30tn economy. Who do you want to do business with?" He said Indian Constitution represents American values. —ANI

## IRAN-US TALKS ON FRIDAY IN OMAN

Dubai: Talks between Iran and the US will be held on Friday in Oman, Iranian media reported.

The semi-official ISNA and Tasnim news agencies, as well as the Student News Network, all reported the talks would take place in Oman, though the sultanate did not acknowledge it would host them.

The US has not acknowledged the talks would take place in Oman, though the White House said it anticipated the negotiations would take place even after the US shot down an Iranian drone on Tuesday and Iran tried to stop a US-flagged ship.

Also on Wednesday, activists said the number of

arrests topped 50,000 in the government crackdown, according to the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency.

At least 50,834 people have been arrested in the Iranian government's crackdown on protests, the activists said.

Earlier on Tuesday, President Masoud Pezeshkian said he told Iran's foreign minister to "pursue fair and equitable negotiations" with the US.

Further, President Trump has said the US is negotiating with Iran and indicated the talks involve more than one meeting, saying if the negotiations with Iran were happening this week, Trump said, "Yeah."

## Don: Colombia's Petro terrific

Washington: US President Donald Trump met Colombian President Gustavo Petro for nearly two hours at the White House on Tuesday, conducting a friendly face-to-face mere weeks after threatening military action against the South American country and accusing the leader of pumping cocaine into the United States.

Trump said afterwards he and Petro had not been "the best of friends", suggesting he had felt insulted by the president of Colombia as he did not know him and as the two had never met. Later, he had changed his mind, saying, "We had a very good meeting. I thought he was terrific." Trump said the pair discussed cooperation in counter-narcotics operations and a number of other topics. The meeting followed Trump saying Petro has become willing to work with his govt. —AP

## Trump says CNN reporter is worst

Washington: US President Trump laced into CNN correspondent Kaitlan Collins, calling her "the worst reporter" and scolding her for not smiling as she tried to ask about the latest release of files related to Jeffrey Epstein.

"She's a young woman — I don't think I've ever seen you smile," Trump said in a sarcastic tone, while sitting at the Resolute Desk. "I've known you for 10 years. I don't think I've ever seen a smile on your face."

"You know why you're not smiling? Because you know you're not telling the truth," he said. "You are so bad," he said. "You know, you are the worst reporter. No wonder. CNN has no ratings because of people like you," he president said.

Meanwhile, British police opened a criminal probe into Peter Mandelson over alleged



Kaitlan Collins, CNN correspondent, and Donald Trump.

misconduct in public office. PM Keir Starmer said Mandelson "repeatedly lied".

Also, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor has moved out of his home in Windsor to the Sandringham Estate in Norfolk. Meanwhile, philanthropist Melinda French Gates has said her ex-husband, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates dredged up "painful times in my marriage". She said she felt "unbelievable sadness", and "whatever questions remain" needed to be answered by those named in the records, including her ex-husband. "I am so happy to be away from all the muck." The couple divorced in 2021.



**Snow havoc in Japan**  
People walk in snow in Kanazawa, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan. Heavy snow piling up in northern Japan over the past two weeks has blocked roads and is being blamed for dozens of deaths nationwide. As of Wednesday, 15 prefectures have been affected, with snow reaching up to 2 metres in worst-hit areas. The unusually heavy snowfall is largely due to a cold air mass from the Arctic that has lingered over the Japanese archipelago. More than 1,700 homes were without electricity, and most train lines weren't running, including the bullet trains, according to Aomori prefecture. —Kyodo News via AP

## free drinks, counsels | No more career crisis in Japan

If you are struggling with your career path, thinking of changing job and looking for a small talk or a piece of advice, this recently opened bar in Japan is totally made for you. Located in Yokohama, Tenshoku Sodan Bar, which literally means Job-Changing Consultation Bar. The bartenders here are all counselors from staffing service LIA, who are trained to counsel the customers with career worries.

Unlike a conventional bar, Tenshoku Sodan Bar operates with a clear structure and purpose. Visitors are required to make a prior reservation before arriving, ensuring that each guest receives uninterrupted attention. Once inside,



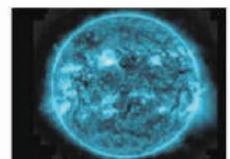
consultations are conducted in private rooms, creating a safe and comfortable environment for open conversations. Each session typically lasts between 60 and 90 minutes, giving visitors ample time to talk through their concerns without feeling rushed.

cerns will remain private. This makes it an appealing space for those hesitant to seek traditional career counselling.

The bartenders, who are also career counsellors, are trained to listen rather than judge. Guests are encouraged to speak freely about workplace stress, job dissatisfaction, career switches or uncertainty about the future, without the pressure of resumes and formal interviews. Adding to the experience, the bar offers both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for free, with no consultation fees involved. The idea is simple yet effective: when people are relaxed, they are more likely to open up about what's truly bothering them.

## Oz boy called superhuman

In a feat described as "superhuman" by rescuers, a boy, 13, from Perth swam for 4 hours in rough seas to save his mother and siblings after they were swept offshore in Australia on January 30. They were vacationing in Quindalup. The Guardian said strong winds and waves pushed the family, including Austin Appelbee, his mother Joanne, 47, brother Beau, 12, and sister Grace, 8, out into Geopraphe Bay while they were using hired paddleboards and a kayak. The teen paddled his kayak back towards shore before it was hit by rough seas. He swam for an 4 hours to reach the shore and alert others.



## Sun erupts with powerful X1.5 solar flare

Sun erupts with powerful X1.5 solar flare, NASA captures event. The Sun unleashed a powerful solar flare on Feb 3, triggering heightened attention from space weather scientists.

The flare, classified as X1.5, peaked at 9:08 am ET and was among the strongest recorded in recent weeks. Images of the intense burst were captured by NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory.

## Spanish PM is a tyrant: Musk

Spain has proposed a ban on social media use by teens as attitudes hardened in Europe against the technology, drawing personal insults against PM from Elon Musk.

The government is preparing a series of measures including a social media ban for under-16s, PM Pedro Sánchez said promising to protect kids from the "digital wild west" and blamed tech companies for hateful and harmful content.

Musk wrote on X in response: "Dirty Sánchez is a tyrant and a traitor to the people of Spain." About an hour and a half later, he escalated his criticism, posting on X: "Sánchez is the true fascist totalitarian."

## Briefs

MUMBAI

## 3rd stage of ticket sales commences



With the countdown to the opening match now underway, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced the commencement of the third stage of ticket sales (<https://tickets.cricketworldcup.com/>) for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, as it continues to work closely with the International Cricket Council (ICC) to deliver a tournament that reflects the scale and stature of a global championship. The opening of Phase 3 follows two successful ticketing windows.

LAHORE

## Marsh offers dead bat on WC issues



Australia skipper **Mitchell Marsh** fielded queries on Pakistan's boycott of its T20 World Cup match against India and Bangladesh's removal from the tournament but refused to comment on both the controversies, insisting that his sole focus is on winning the showpiece. Marsh was facing the Pakistani media after his team was handed a 0-3 T20 series whitewash by the home side here last night. He was also asked about his views on the off-field drama.

HARARE

## India start favourites against Afg



Unbeaten so far in the tournament, a confident and all-round India will be overwhelming favourites against Afghanistan in the semifinal of the ICC Under-19 World Cup here on Wednesday. India are the most successful team in the history of the event, having annexed the title five times (2000, 2008, 2012, 2018, 2022), followed by Australia, who have won the trophy four times. Come Wednesday, India will look to take one step forward towards a record sixth title. India have had a great run in the tournament, having won all their five matches quite comfortably, including a 58-run win over arch-rivals Pakistan in the Super Six stage. Afghanistan too has had a fairly good tournament, winning four

## PAK BOYCOTT | ICC might withhold entire annual revenue share of Pakistan Broadcasters may move court

KARACHI/NEW DELHI

The ICC has warned the Pakistan Cricket Board that it faces the prospect of legal action from T20 World Cup's official broadcasters JioStar for boycotting its February 15 game against India, a PCB source said on Tuesday.

Pakistan decided to boycott the match in Colombo on February 15 on instructions of their government but haven't yet officially specified the reasons to ICC.

As reported by PTI, there is a possibility that the ICC will withhold the entire annual revenue share of Pakistan, which is around USD 35 million and pay the broadcasters from that purse.

A PCB source informed that although chairman Mohsin Naqvi had taken advice from the board's legal experts before briefing PM Shehbaz Sharif on the issue last week, the board is bracing for some serious consequences.

"If Pakistan doesn't relent and play against India, not only will they face financial penalties, perhaps a lawsuit from broadcasters but also any efforts to go to the ICC Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) are likely to fail," a PCB source told PTI.

ICC's DRC is an internal committee which doesn't hear appeals against the decisions made by its own board.

"The PCB might face problems regardless of their government directive to not play India as they are playing all their matches at a neutral venue (Sri Lanka) as per their wishes and not in India," another PCB source said.

"Secondly, while the Indian government has not given permission to its team to play in Pakistan, it has not stopped them from playing against Pakistan at neutral venues in Asia Cup or ICC events even



Jay Shah, ICC chairman

after the May conflict," the board source, who tracks Naqvi closely, added.

The PCB is yet to communicate in writing to the ICC but the boycott decision is being seen as an act of solidarity with Bangladesh after their ouster.

"When the ICC signed its four year deal with the broadcaster for all ICC events, the contract included Pakistan and India matches based on which the broadcaster made the payments to the ICC," the source explained.

"So the broadcaster will be within its rights to take the PCB and ICC to court over a major breach of the contract." It is reliably learnt that the PCB approached other members boards for support on the matter but failed to find any backers.

Will Naqvi make U-turn

after Bangladesh elections?

There is a school of thought that Naqvi, who is also the interior minister of his country, might just make a U-turn once the general elections are held in Bangladesh on February 12 and a democratic government takes charge instead of the present one headed by Mohammed Yunus.

"Naqvi more than a cricket administrator is a politician, who is not one bit bothered about the welfare of the national team. He is trying to score a brownie point with his and could well flip once elections are held on February 12.

"There would still be two days before the India game and things could just change. Else he knows that Pakistan could be ostracised," another source tracking Pakistan cricket said.

### ICC, PCB open 'back-channel talks' amid financial concerns

Pakistan's decision to boycott their T20 World Cup group match against India has reportedly prompted "back-channel talks" between the International Cricket Council (ICC) and the Pakistan Cricket Board amid concerns over potential financial fallout.

On Sunday, Pakistan government announced that its national cricket team would not play the T20 World Cup group-stage match against India at Colombo's R.Premadasa Stadium on February 15. The decision could reportedly cost world cricket more than

250 million dollars.

As per The Dawn report, a few other cricket boards have also extended support to the ICC in its attempt to reach an understanding with PCB.

It is currently unclear whether Pakistan will be sanctioned for the move, with the ICC urging the PCB to consider the significant and long-term implications if the boycott were to go ahead.

In response to Pakistan's announcement, the ICC issued a strong statement on Sunday, urging the PCB to seek a mutually acceptable resolution.

If Pakistan doesn't relent and play against India, not only will they face financial penalties, perhaps a lawsuit from broadcasters but also any efforts to go to the ICC Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) are likely to fail  
PCB source

## Klinger feels India would be difficult to beat at T20 WC

Hosts' aggressive top-order core makes them the strongest unit



VADODARA

India's performance in the recent series against New Zealand showed why the defending champions would be extremely tough to beat in the T20 World Cup beginning on February 7, said former Australian cricketer turned coach Michael Klinger.

India's aggressive top-order core makes them arguably the strongest unit going into the ICC event, according to Klinger, the head coach of WPL franchise Gujarat Giants.

"With the form they're in and what I saw recently against New Zealand, India are going to be extremely difficult to beat. A team will probably have to catch them on a bad night in a final to beat them

ing to watch," said Klinger, who played three T20s for Australia besides appearing in 182 first-class games. India's fearless approach was displayed by Abhishek and Kishan, who consistently put New Zealand bowlers under pressure. "Ishan Kishan has come back in fantastic form and is certainly putting a case forward to start in the XI at the World Cup," he said, adding that India's depth has turned selection into a challenge rather than a concern.

With the form they're in and what I saw recently against New Zealand, India are going to be extremely difficult to beat. A team will probably have to catch them on a bad night in a final to beat them

Michael Klinger  
former Australia cricketer

## Cummins says love for Tests reason to skip T20 WC

Aus pace spearhead was ruled out with a back injury

MELBOURNE

Australia pace spearhead **Pat Cummins** says his injury-forced withdrawal from the T20 World Cup was also driven by a desire to be completely fit for the upcoming Test season in which he wants to play all the games.

The Test and ODI captain of his team was ruled out of the T20 World Cup as he failed to recover from a back injury and was replaced by Ben Dwarshuis.

Cummins has been dealing with the back injury since Australia's tour of the West Indies last July and although he is feeling "really good" right now, he decided to skip the tournament starting February 7 after a scan.

"It was really unfortunate. I feel pretty good, just a minor setback and just ran out of time really. I'll rest up for a few weeks and go from there," Cummins was quoted as saying by the 'Australian Associated Press'.

"We knew after the (Adelaide) Test match we were going to need some-



It was really unfortunate. I feel pretty good, just a minor setback and just ran out of time really. I'll rest up for a few weeks and go from there

Pat Cummins  
Australia pacer

where between four and eight weeks to let the bone settle right down before then build-

ing back up. Initially, we thought it might only be four weeks, because I was feeling really good, but just had a follow-up scan.

"They thought it probably needs another couple of weeks, so the timeline just became a bit too tight." Australia have a jam-packed Test schedule starting August when they host Bangladesh for two Test matches in Darwin and Mackay, followed by a Test and ODI tour of South Africa in September.

The Aussies will then host New Zealand before touring India for a five-Test Border-Gavaskar series.

## Jemimah, Lizelle power Capitals into WPL final

Rodrigues and Lee struck 41 and 43 respectively as DC won by 7 wickets

VADODARA

Jemimah Rodrigues and Lizelle Lee propelled Delhi Capitals to a clinical seven-wicket victory over Gujarat Giants in the WPL Eliminator that saw them reach the final, here on Tuesday.

Chasing 169 for victory, Capitals romped home at 169/3 in 15.4 overs after brilliant knocks from Lee, who struck 43 in 24 balls while Jemimah slammed 41 off just 23 with fours boundaries and a six.

Earlier, Beth Mooney played the role of a sheet anchor with a composed unbeaten half-century as Gujarat Giants posted a competitive 168 for 7 against Delhi Capitals in the Women's Premier League Eliminator, here on Tuesday.

The Australia opener struck 62 not out off 51 balls, laced with six boundaries, holding the innings together after the Giants were put under severe pressure early by the Delhi bowlers.

Mooney found crucial sup-



Delhi Capitals' Lizelle Lee plays a shot during the Women's Premier League (WPL) 2026 Eliminator. PTI

port from fellow Australian Georgia Wareham (35), with the duo adding a brisk 61 runs for the fifth wicket.

Mooney then stitched together another valuable 39-run stand with Kashvee Gautam (18) to lift the Giants to a fighting total.

Delhi made early inroads through Chinelle Henry (3/35), who removed the dangerous Sophie Devine (6), before Nandini Sharma (2/44) made an immediate impact by striking off her first two deliveries

in the sixth over.

Nandini first accounted for Anushka Sharma (16), who attempted a flick off her pads but only managed a mistimed shot to mid-on, where Henry completed a diving catch.

She followed it up with an even bigger scalp, inducing a thick outside edge from skipper Ashleigh Gardner (0), safely taken by Sneha Rana at slip.

Mooney attempted to counter-attack with a four off

### Brief scores

Gujarat Giants 168/7 in 20 overs (Beth Mooney 62 not out, Georgia Wareham 35; Chinelle Henry 3/35, Nandini Sharma 2/44) It to Delhi Capitals: 169/3 in 15.4 overs (Lizelle Lee 43, Jemimah Rodrigues 41).

Nandini, but the boundaries dried up once spinners Minnu Mani (1/23) and Rana (0/30) were introduced.

The pressure mounted as Mani had Kanika Ahuja (6) stumped by Lizelle Lee, bringing Wareham to the crease.

Wareham struck three boundaries and a six to inject momentum into the innings as Mooney continued to anchor from the other end.

However, just when the Giants appeared to be gaining control, Henry returned to dismiss Wareham and Bharti Fulmali in the same over.

The Giants recovered late in the innings as Mooney and Kashvee found the boundary in the closing overs to ensure a competitive total on the board.

## Himalayan Dreams

# Bunch of 15 Nepal cricketers and their 30 million fans

NEW DELHI

Indian cricketer Priyank Panchal spent a month in Kathmandu last year, and came back with one memory that has stayed with him.

It wasn't the thrill of playing in front of a packed stadium but the easy warmth of a cricket-mad nation. Nestled in the Himalayas, the country breathes the game but with a smile instead of the all-consuming passion that defines cricket fandoms in the sub-

continent.

"Every player I met, every official I encountered and all the fans I came across greeted me with a lot of warmth and a big smile. No one raises their voice. The passion for cricket and the love for their stars is so genuine," Panchal, the former India A captain told PTI about his stint in the second edition of the Nepal Premier League with the Karnali Yaks franchise.

A nation of over 3 crore will place its hopes on 15

### NEPAL SQUAD:

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

cricketers when Nepal walk into the Wankhede Stadium on February 8 for their lung-opener against England after a second successive T20 World Cup qualification.

They would be carrying the weight of Himalayan dreams, hoping to be bol-

stered by the support of an adoring fan base that has turned every match into a festival.

For a team that once struggled for basic infrastructure, the upcoming T20 World Cup is being viewed as a defining leap rather than

just another appearance.

Nepalese fans are expected to throng Chennai for the warm-up games and for the tournament-proper in Mumbai when Rohit Paudel and his men take the field.

"I have heard that ticket sales for Nepal's matches at the Wankhede Stadium have been very brisk. Had we played in Delhi, there would have been a sizeable crowd at Kotla too. Our fans, the biggest number of travelling ones after India and Pakistan, are our strength."



Sandeep Lamichhane. ICC