

# AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

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

## Briefs

### NEW DELHI 2 nurses show Nipah virus symptoms

Two suspected cases of Nipah virus have been detected at the Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratory at AIIMS Kalyani, West Bengal, official sources said on Monday. According to a senior official of the West Bengal health department, two nurses working at a private hospital in North 24 Parganas district were showing symptoms of Nipah virus. The condition of the two nurses, one male and one female, is stated to be "very critical", he said. "Both nurses work in the same hospital in Barasat. They are suspected of being infected with Nipah virus. Samples of both nurses were sent to Kalyani AIIMS, and preliminary reports indicate a possible Nipah infection," the official told PTI.

### NEW DELHI Dhankar admitted in AIIMS

Former Vice President of India Jagdeep Dhankhar has been admitted to the Cardiology Department of All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, on Monday. According to sources, the former Vice President is in stable condition. Further details are awaited. The former Vice President resigned in July 2025 "to prioritise health care and abide by medical advice."

### CHANDIGARH Kabaddi murder case: 3 more held

Punjab police on Monday claimed to have arrested two shooters and their accomplice involved in the sensational murder of Kabaddi promoter Kanwar Digvijay Singh alias Rana Balachauria from Howrah in West Bengal. The accused have been identified as Karan Pathak alias Karan Defaulter, a resident of Amritsar; Tarandeep Singh, of Barhwal in Ludhiana and Akashdeep, a resident of Upala in Tarn Taran. It may be recalled that Balachauria was shot dead by assailants during a Kabaddi tournament at Sohana in SAS Nagar on December 15, 2025.

### KOLKATA Poster row between BJP, TMC

Controversy erupted between BJP and Trinamool Congress on Monday during birth anniversary celebration of Swami Vivekananda, after TMC posters featuring picture of party's national secretary Abhishek Banerjee with the caption 'Welcome Yuvraaj' outside the ancestral house of Swami Vivekananda in Simla street in north Kolkata. Notably, the posters were set up Jorasanko TMC MLA Vivek Gupta ahead of Banerjee's visit to that area. Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari said, "By setting such posters TMC has insulted Swami Vivekananda."

## TO SIR WITHOUT LOVE | AI-driven digitisation errors causing widespread hardship during SIR, says the West Bengal CM

# Procedural lapses: Didi writes fifth letter to EC

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee wrote to CEC Gyanesh Kumar again on Monday, claiming that AI-driven digitisation errors in the 2002 electoral rolls were causing widespread hardship to genuine voters during the SIR exercise in the state.

In her fifth letter to the chief election commissioner (CEC) since the beginning of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, Banerjee said serious errors occurred in electors' particulars during the digitisation of the 2002 voters' list using AI tools, leading to large-scale data mismatches and wrongful categorisation of genuine voters as having "logical discrepancies".

Accusing the EC of disregarding its own statutory processes followed over the last two decades, she said electors were being compelled to re-establish identity despite earlier corrections made after "quasi-judicial hearings".

"Such an approach, disowning its own actions and mechanisms spanning more than two decades, is arbitrary, illogical and contrary to the letter



Police personnel detain a protester during BLO workers protest, in Kolkata on Sunday

**BLOs protest over deaths, work stress**  
**Kolkata:** A section of BLOs on Monday staged a protest in front of the office of the West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer, alleging that the EC has remained indifferent to the deaths of several BLOs during the ongoing SIR of electoral rolls. The protesters, who are members of the BLO Adhikar Raksha Committee, claimed that BLOs across the state have been under "tremendous mental and physical pressure" ever since the revision exercise began, with the workload taking a serious toll on their health.

and spirit of the Constitution of India," she alleged.

Banerjee further claimed that no proper acknowledgement was being issued for documents submitted during SIR, claiming that the proce-

dures were "fundamentally flawed".

Highlighting the human cost, she wrote that the exercise, which should have been constructive, "has already seen 77 deaths with 4 attempts to

## SC seeks EC reply on fresh pleas

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court on Monday sought a response from the Election Commission on fresh interim pleas of Trinamool Congress MPs alleging arbitrariness and procedural irregularities in the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal. A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi took note of applications filed by lawmakers Derek O'Brien and Dola Sen in their pending petitions challenging the procedural actions taken in the ongoing SIR in the state.

suicide and 17 persons falling sick and necessitating hospitalisation," attributing it to "fear, intimidation and disproportionate workload due to unplanned exercise undertaken by ECI."

## China reaffirms claims over Shaksgam Valley

NEW DELHI / BEIJING

China on Monday reaffirmed its territorial claims over the Shaksgam Valley in the backdrop of India's objections, stressing that the Chinese infrastructure projects in the area are "beyond reproach".

India last Friday criticised China's infrastructure development projects in the Shaksgam Valley, saying it reserves the right to take necessary measures to safeguard its interests as it is an Indian territory.

Pakistan illegally ceded 5,180 sq km of Indian territory in the Shaksgam Valley to China in 1963 from areas illegally occupied by it.

"Shaksgam Valley is Indian territory. We have never recognised the so-called China-Pakistan 'boundary agreement' signed in 1963. We have consistently maintained that the agreement is illegal and invalid," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Friday.

"We also do not recognise the so-called China-Pakistan



Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning

Economic Corridor, which passes through Indian territory that is under forcible and illegal occupation of Pakistan," he said.

Reacting to Jaiswal's comments, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing here that "first of all, the territory you mentioned is part of China's territory".

"China's infrastructure activities in its own territory are beyond reproach," she said while responding to a question on India's criticism. Mao said China and Pakistan have signed a border agreement and determined the border between the two countries since the 1960s. These are the

rights of Pakistan and China as sovereign states, she said.

On India's criticism of the CPEC, Mao repeated Beijing's narrative that it is an economic initiative aimed at local economic and social development and improving people's livelihoods.

"Such agreement and CPEC will not affect China's position on the Kashmir issue and China's position remains unchanged in this regard," Mao said.

China's official stand on the Kashmir issue, as often reiterated by Beijing, is that "Jammu and Kashmir dispute is left over from history, and should be properly and peacefully resolved in accordance with the UN Charter, relevant UN Security Council resolutions and bilateral agreements".

In his response to a question on China's infrastructure development in the Shaksgam Valley, Jaiswal said, "The entire Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are an integral and inalienable part of India. This has been clearly conveyed to Pakistani and Chinese authorities several times."

## Bengaluru police arrests 18-yr-old for techie murder

BENGALURU

Bengaluru Police have arrested an 18-year-old youth for the murder of Kavoore resident techie Sharmila (35). It was initially suspected that Sharmila died in a fire accident in her flat in Bengaluru last week, officials said.

Police said Sharmila was unmarried and lived in a flat in Sankalp Nilayam. A fire broke out in her flat between 10.15 pm and 10.45 pm on January 3. The fire brigade rushed to the spot, doused the fire and found Sharmila's charred body.

"The police initially suspected the fire might have started due to a short circuit. However, one of Sharmila's friends suspected that it was a malicious act. In the wake of this, the Ramamurthy Nagar police registered a case of unnatural death," a police official said.

Investigation revealed that

## UP: Man shoots wife inside police station

A 36-year-old man allegedly shot his wife dead at a police station in Hardoi on Monday morning, just days after he had lodged a complaint accusing her of eloping with her lover, a senior officer said. The accused, identified as Anoop, was overpowered and arrested from the spot, he added.

Sharmila's neighbour, Karnal Kurai (18), a native of Kerala, entered Sharmila's flat through a window at around 9 pm. He asked Sharmila to cooperate sexually. When she refused, Kurai held her mouth and nose tightly and rendered her semi-conscious. Kurai then set fire to Sharmila's clothes and other evidence to destroy them, snatched her mobile phone and fled.

## UP under cold wave, two die in Chitrakoot

LUCKNOW

A harsh cold wave swept across Uttar Pradesh on Monday, bringing life to a near standstill in many parts of the state as dense fog reduced visibility, disrupted transport services and forced authorities to shut schools in several districts.

Officials said two people died in Chitrakoot due to extreme cold. Temperatures dipped sharply following snowfall in the hill regions, intensifying icy conditions across the plains. Bareilly recorded a minimum temperature of 3.8 degrees Celsius, while thick fog enveloped at least 25 districts including Gorakhpur, Jaunpur and Basti from early morning. Visibility dropped to less than 20 metres at several locations, making movement on roads extremely difficult. Traffic thinned out on highways and arterial routes.

## Bhojpuri singer quits PK's party, RCP may follow suit

PATNA

After suffering a crushing defeat in the last Bihar assembly election, poll strategist-turned-politician Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraj Party (JSP) on Monday suffered another jolt when Bhojpuri star Ritesh Pandey resigned from the membership of the party.

Pandey made the announcement of his resignation on social media. He wrote on 'X', "As a responsible Indian and by right, I joined the Jan Suraj Party and participated in the grand festival of democracy, but the results were not favourable — yet I have no regrets whatsoever, because I did my work with complete honesty. Well — now, through the same work, I must continue serving all of you, through which you people have showered so much love, affection, and respect on a simple boy from a modest farming family like me, bringing me this far. And doing this on while being an active member

## Cyber fraudsters rob India of ₹20k cr in a year

NEW DELHI

A few lakh rupees here, a few crores there, and once as much as Rs 23 crore. With relentless regularity, cyber fraudsters have stolen a cumulative Rs 1,250 crore from unsuspecting victims in Delhi region alone in the last one year, officials said on Monday.

The nationwide figure is believed to be around Rs 20,000 crore or as much as the budget of a small state.

The new-age dacoity once again came to the forefront of public consciousness last week with a Rs 14.85 crore fraud perpetrated on a senior citizen couple in Greater Kailash colony of New Delhi, leaving them nearly penniless and the community in shock at how easily the cyber thieves are able to manipulate their victims.

## Govt denies it wants smartphone source code

MUMBAI

The government has firmly refuted reports by an international news organisation claiming that India is planning to compel smartphone manufacturers to share source code and implement sweeping software changes as part of new security measures, a move allegedly opposed by global giants such as Apple and Samsung.

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said the reports were misleading and failed to quote any official comment from smartphone makers or industry associations that represent them.

## Ahead of Budget Session, Cong flags 3 challenges to economy

NEW DELHI

The Congress has flagged concerns around the state of the economy, saying the issues of private corporate investment being sluggish, domestic savings declining and growing inequality in wealth, income and consumption need to be addressed urgently by the Centre in the upcoming Union Budget.

Noting that the schedule for the Budget session of Parliament has been announced, party general secretary Jairam Ramesh said this budget will undoubtedly reflect the 16th Finance Commission recommendations, submitted on November 17, 2025, which cover the period from 2026/27 to 2031/32



and pertain to the sharing of tax revenue between the Centre and the states, as well as the distribution of this revenue among the states.

Ramesh added that the state governments were already "deeply concerned by the 60:40 cost-sharing formula introduced in the new law that bulldozes MGNREGA out of existence".

At the same time, he said, the economy is facing several challenges" and listed how despite tax cuts and healthy profits, private corporate

investment rates remain conspicuously sluggish. The Congress leader also noted that there has been a significant decline in domestic savings rates, which has constrained investment capacity. And finally, he said, inequalities related to wealth, income, and consumption continue to deepen relentlessly.

In such a scenario, he said, "It remains to be seen whether the upcoming budget steps out of the comforting confines of its statistical illusions to acknowledge these realities and challenges, and whether it takes any meaningful steps to address them. The high GDP growth rates, so essential for a large-scale expansion in job creation, cannot remain sustainable unless these steps are taken now."

## 38 constables booked

# Fake docus, dummy candidates for Raj cop jobs

JAIPUR

The Special Operations Group (SOG) of Rajasthan police has registered a case against 38 constables who allegedly secured jobs in the 2018 and 2021 constable recruitments using fake documents and dummy candidates. The SOG investigation has found strong evidence against 26 con-

stables from the 2018 batch and 12 from the 2021 batch in its investigation.

The SOG, in its investigation report, has stated that the signatures of several constables did not match, and some of their documents were found to be fake. All will soon be sent notices for interrogation. "There is evidence against all of them. In the investigation conducted by the District



Internal Committee, all these police personnel have been found suspicious. Discrepancies (mismatches) have been found in their application forms, photo-

graphs, signatures, and educational certificates. All will be interrogated, and further legal action will be taken based on the facts. The report has been sent to the government," said Vishal Bansal, the ADG of SOG Rajasthan police.

The investigation was carried out following the directions of the Police Recruitment and Promotion Board to the Superintendent

of Police of Jalore in July 2024. The Police Recruitment and Promotion Board had asked the SP Jalore to investigate all constable recruitments conducted over the past five years.

The investigation revealed cases of forged signatures in some instances. Subsequently, a committee was formed to investigate both examinations. Forensic

reports revealed that the photographs and signatures of 38 police personnel did not match the documents submitted at the time of recruitment. The committee's report was then sent to the SOG, after which a case was registered against the accused.

As per sources, a probe is underway in other districts, and similar cases of fraud may come to light there as well.



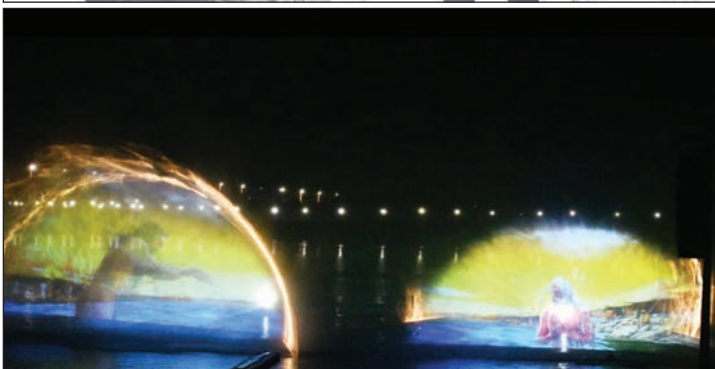


## Sangam Ghat illuminated again from Kali Ghat, Water Laser Show begins at Magh Mela

**Grand 45-minute show every evening, showcasing the stories of Prayagraj and the Kumbh tradition**

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** On the occasion of Magh Mela-2026, the water laser show has been restarted from Kali Ghat in Prayagraj. It was formally inaugurated on Monday. Earlier, this project was started by the Tourism Department during Mahakumbh-2025, and was inaugurated by Cabinet Minister Nand Gopal Gupta 'Nandi'. After the flood situation subsided, the Tourism Department is now operating it again through the implementing agency UPCCCL Unit-2, Prayagraj. On Monday, Divisional Commissioner Saumya Agarwal, along with Police Commissioner Jogendra Kumar, District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma, Additional Police Commissioner Dr. Ajaypal Sharma, and other officers, witnessed the laser show. The officers reviewed the arrangements and described it as a major attraction for tourists. According to the Tourism Department, the water laser show will be held daily at 7 PM from Kali Ghat. In this approximately 45-minute show, the mythological and cultural stories



associated with Prayagraj, along with the religious and historical significance of Magh Mela, Kumbh, and Mahakumbh, will be presented through modern technology. Water sports and a floating restaurant are also being operated near Kali Ghat under the

Smart City project. With the restart of the water laser show, an increase in the number of devotees and tourists visiting Sangam city is expected. The Tourism Department believes that this event will further strengthen the cultural identity of the city during the Magh Mela.

## A mother lands in lockup for fraud



**Ghazipur.** The Sadat police station has taken strict action against the plaintiff who filed a false case against her in-laws, claiming her living daughter was dead. It is noteworthy that the plaintiff, Rajwanti Devi, wife of the late Ramji Das, resident of village Barhapar Bhojurai, Sadat police station, Ghazipur district, had filed a case alleging that her daughter, Ruchi (a fictitious name) was harassed for dowry by her in-laws, murdered her and then disappeared with her body. The investigation into the case was conducted by the Circle Officer, Saidpur. Electronic records and evidence collection revealed that the Plaintiff daughter was alive and currently residing in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh. To locate her, the Circle Officer, Saidpur formed a police team from the Sadat police station and obtained permis-

sion from a senior officer to travel to another state. The formed team was dispatched to Gwalior. During the investigation of the victim, it was found that she was coming from Gwalior to Sadat area. On the basis of electronic evidence and informant, the police team promptly recovered the alleged deceased Ruchi alive and safe from near Barheta bridge in Sadat area. Meanwhile, the Station House Officer of Sadat along with his team arrested the complainant Rajwanti Devi from Barhapar Bhojurai Police Station, Sadat, who had registered a false case against her in-laws by declaring her living daughter dead. Legal action was taken against the accused. The police team that arrested the accused included Sub-Inspector Puneet Kumar along with his team and lady constable Gayatri Yadav.

## Maternal Distress Compounded by Gross Administrative Indifference, Maternity Grant Hanging in Limbo for Months

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Ghazipur.** In most areas of the district, the joy of motherhood is turning into worry and distress for mothers who gave birth at the district hospital or local government hospitals. The funds from the maternity grant scheme, launched by the government to provide financial support to pregnant and new mothers, have not yet reached many beneficiary mothers. As a result, this grant has been stuck in administrative files for months, hanging in limbo. For these poor and middle-class mothers, this grant is not just government assistance, but a crucial support system for the upbringing, nutrition, medicines, and other essential needs of their newborns. Unfortunately, the delay in the payment of the maternity grant has further exacerbated the financial difficulties of these families. Many mothers are forced to take loans for their own treatment and their child's care after delivery. When local hospital and district hospital officials were contacted regarding this matter, they clearly stated that all necessary documents related to the maternity grant have been sent to higher authorities several times. Despite this, the payment process has not moved forward. This situation not only raises questions about the administrative system but also affects the intent of the government's welfare schemes. Most surprisingly, the very schemes designed to provide safe motherhood and financial support to women are falling victim to bureaucratic procedures and negligence. The affected mothers are forced to repeatedly visit hospitals, block offices, and concerned departments, but they are only receiving assurances, not solutions. Now the question arises: who is responsible for this delay—administrative indifference or the negligence of the concerned officials? And most importantly, when will these helpless mothers receive their rightful dues? The government and administration are expected to take immediate notice of this serious problem and ensure the prompt payment of the pending maternity grants so that the joys of motherhood are not overshadowed by the burden of financial hardship.

## Random Water Quality Testing Continues for Second Day in Greater Noida

Greater Noida

As a Precautionary measure, the Greater Noida Authority has continued its citywide water quality testing for the second consecutive day. Eight teams of the authority conducted water quality checks in Sector Alpha 1 and 2, Beta 1 and 2, Knowledge Park 1, 2 and 3, Chi-1, Mu-1, Ecotech 1, 6, 7 and 8, Techzone-4, Sector-10 and residential societies in Greater Noida West. The teams are carrying essential testing equipment such as TDS meters, PH meters and chlorine testing kits. The water samples collected were found to be within the prescribed standards. Wherever the teams visited, they interacted directly with residents and also took feedback from



RWA (Resident Welfare Associations). Residents appreciated the authority random inspection campaign. The teams are also recording written statements from residents regarding water quality along with their name, contact number and address. Notably, Greater Noida Authority CEO N.G. Ravi Kumar had directed random water quality testing at various locations as a precautionary measure.

Following his instructions, eight work-circle-wise teams have been formed. The campaign will continue for four consecutive days. Saturday marked the second day of the drive, during which water quality was tested in over 100 houses across different sectors. Additionally, two teams from Shriram Institute for Industrial Research Laboratory have also been deployed by the authority to conduct independent random testing. The inspection teams are thoroughly checking for any leakage in water supply lines, sewer choking/overflow and drainage-sewer-water connection points. Samples are also being collected from UGR (Underground Reservoirs) and pumping stations. Eight teams comprising managers and assis-

tant managers of the Water-Sewer Department are actively involved in this inspection drive. Authority Appeal Greater Noida Authority ACEO Sunil Kumar Singh stated that the authority is fully committed to providing clean drinking water in the Greater Noida area. If anyone receives information about contaminated water supply in any area, they should immediately inform the Water Department. **Contact numbers issued:** **Senior Manager (Water):** 9205691408 **Manager (Water):** 8937024017 The authority team will promptly resolve the issue. Residents are also requested to operate water motors only during the scheduled water supply timings.

## BJP Shahdara District Minority Front performed Rudrabhishek of Lord Bholenath: Deepak Gaba

Delhi

The 1000th anniversary of the Mughal invaders attack on the Somnath temple, the BJP Shahdara District Minority Front performed the Rudrabhishek of Lord Bholenath. Currently, the entire nation of India is celebrating "Somnath Swabhimana Parv" on "January 2026" to mark 1000 years since the attack by Mughal invaders on the Somnath Temple (located in Gujarat). In this series, under the leadership of BJP Shahdara District President Deepak Gaba, the BJP Shahdara District Minority Front, led by its District President Vipin Jain, performed the Rudrabhishek of Lord Bholenath at "Siddh Peeth Shri Sitaram Santseva Mandir evam Gaushala" located in Chandu Park, Old Anarkali Colony, Krishna Nagar Assembly Constituency, wishing for the prosperity of the country. It is noteworthy that BJP workers performed the Rudrabhishek of Lord Bholenath under the guidance of Mahamandasleshwar Ram Govind Das Mahatyagi Maharaj. On this occasion, BJP Shahdara District



President Deepak Gaba, Krishna Nagar MLA Dr. Anil Goyal, BJP Shahdara District Spokesperson Advocate Bharat Gaur, Municipal Councilors Meenakshi Sharma and Raju Sachdeva, Front District General Secretaries Shubham Jain and Mohd. Shamim, Ashraf Ali Khan, social worker Rajiv Sharma, Sanjeev Jain, Jasbir Singh Bhatia, Rajiv Jain, Sanjay Gupta, along with Manmohan Sharma and a large number of BJP workers were present. After performing the Rudrabhishek of Lord Shri Bholenath, BJP Shahdara District President Deepak Gaba said that Somnath Temple is a symbol of our faith and belief. History bears witness that

during the Mughal Sultanate, between January 6 and 8, 1026 Mahmud Ghaznavi made the first attack on the Somnath Temple, inflicting such a blow to the faith of millions of Hindus that it can never be forgotten. Ghaznavi may have looted the temple and left, but he could not take away our feelings for Somnath. This is why even today in 2026, Somnath Temple is sending a message to the world that those who have the mentality to erase are themselves erased, but symbols of faith and belief like Somnath Temple can never be erased. On this occasion, Krishna Nagar MLA Dr. Anil Goyal said that foreign invaders, with their malicious intent, could never shake our eternal faith by attacking our temples. It should be remembered that if the Somnath Temple, which was destroyed a thousand years ago, can stand again in its full glory, then we can also build the prosperous India of a thousand years ago. Under the leadership of the country's successful Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we are moving forward with this inspiration to build a developed India.

## Human Rights Commission Shows Strictness in Gahmar Triple Murder Case

Ghazipur

Taking Cognizance of the triple murder that took place on the night of December 24, 2025, in Kheluray Patti under Gahmar village of Gahmar police station area in the district, the State Human Rights Commission has considered it a serious human rights violation. The commission has directed the Additional Director General of Police, Varanasi Zone to investigate the matter and take action. The commission issued this directive on the application of human rights activist and Chandauli advocate Khalid Waqar Abid. The

incident occurred on the night of December 24, 2025 when three young men were returning from a birthday celebration. About a dozen attackers, lying in ambush, chased and brutally murdered the three young men, Vicky Singh, Saurabh Singh and Ankit Singh with sharp weapons. The fearless killers then threw the bodies of the three young men into a pond. The next day, the bodies of Vicky Singh and Saurabh Singh were recovered from the pond. After much effort, Ankit Singh body was also recovered from the same pond on December 30. The post-mortem confirmed fatal injuries to

their heads and other parts of their bodies. The police registered a case against more than a dozen attackers in the murder. So far, the police have arrested five of the accused. The other attackers are still at large. In the complaint, the applicant demanded a fair investigation into the entire matter, the arrest of the absconding accused, action against the guilty officials and compensation for the victim families. The State Human Rights Commission taking cognizance of the matter and issuing directives has given the victim families hope for justice.

## Chandauli will soon get the gift of roadways bus depot



Chandauli

A historic good news has emerged in the field of transportation for the residents of the district. All the major obstacles to the construction of the proposed Chandauli Roadways Bus Depot at Bichhian, near Vikas Bhawan located at the district headquarters, have now been completely removed. Preparations to launch this long awaited project have now been completed. According to administrative sources, there is a strong possibility that the construction work of this modern bus depot, which will be built at a huge cost of about Rs 22 crore, will start by the end of this month. The

department is completely confident about the current status of the project. The survey work required for the construction of the depot has already been completed and the Detailed Project Report (DPR) has received the green signal from the government.

At present the Transport Department is only waiting for the release of the first installment of the budget. This new bus depot to be built in Bichhiyaan will be spread over a vast land of about 4.5 acres. Keeping in mind the future needs, this depot has been designed in such a way that all the modern facilities like drinking water, rest rooms and informa-

tion center are available to the passengers under one roof. At Present, due to Chandauli district not having its own depot, about 50 government buses here are operated from the Cantt Bus Depot of Varanasi. For maintenance and stoppage of these buses one has to depend on Kashi depot located at Golagadda in Varanasi. Due to this arrangement, not only extra time is spent in operating the buses, but the revenue benefit of Chandauli also goes elsewhere. Construction of an independent depot in Chandauli will ease the operation of buses and the economic development of the district will get a new Impetus.

## Dr. Mayank receives Vidya Niwas Mishra Award Varanasi

The Vigyan Srinivasa Foundation, established in memory of Pandit Vidya Nivas Mishra, announced its annual awards for the year 2026 on Friday. The awards will be held from January 13th to 15th.

Vidyashree Trust Secretary Dr. Daya Nidhi Mishra said that this year the Vigyan Niwas Award will be given for his work Jambu Deepe Bharatkhande. The Folk Poet Award will be given to poet Dr. Jaiprakash Mishra. The Radhika Devi Folk Art Award will be given to Santosh Srivastava and the Lyricist Shrikrishna Tiwari Award will be given to poet and storyteller Dr. Amit Dubey. This year, the Acharya Vidya Niwas Mitra Journalism Award will be given to Dr. Atri Bhardwaj. In memory of Shahid literary scholar Arunesh Nirani, the first Arunesh Nirani Bhojpuri Vaibhav Award is being given to storyteller, critic and thinker Professor Ramdev Shukla. Poet, storyteller, Mukta artist Sunil Kumar Vishwakarma, Manish Khatri, poet Brijendra Narayan Dwivedi Shailesh, Kavindra Narayan Srivastava, sculptor Dnyaneshwar Nath Sharma, and poet and writer Kanchan Singh Parihar will be honored.



# Magh Mela: Minister AK Sharma Reviews Preparations, Says Convenience and Safety of Devotees are Top Priority



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** Urban Development and Energy Minister A.K. Sharma held a meeting with officials at the Integrated Command and Control Center (ICCC) auditorium on Monday to review the preparations for the fair. He clearly stated that the convenience, safety, and well-organized arrangements for the devotees are the government's top priority. He instructed all departments to fulfill their responsibilities with mutual coordination. The minister directed that proper arrangements for cleanliness, uninterrupted drinking water

supply, electricity, night shelters, and bonfires be ensured in the fair area. He also emphasized the need for clear and sufficient signage at routes, ghats, medical services, and other essential locations for the convenience of the devotees. Regarding crowd management, the minister said that continuous monitoring and quick action are crucial during major bathing festivals. He instructed the officials that the fair and festivals are also a major source of livelihood for street vendors, therefore, if there is no obstruction to traffic, a humane approach should be adopted, and unnecessary

anti-encroachment drives should be avoided, so that a balance is maintained between order and employment. In the meeting, Fair Officer Rishiraj gave information about the preparations for the Magh Mela through a PowerPoint presentation. He informed that due to two major bathing festivals between January 14 and 18, a large crowd of devotees is expected, and keeping this in mind, all necessary prepa-



rations have been completed.

Officials informed that the

**Special emphasis on cleanliness, drinking water, electricity, and night shelters; strict instructions for crowd management**

lighting system in the fair area has been completed, electricity connections are

available in all camps, and there is no problem with drinking water. Giving information about health facilities, the Fair Officer informed that two large hospitals named 'Triveni' and 'Ganga' have been established in the fair area, where facilities including X-ray are available. So far, 31,651 OPD registrations have been done. In addition, 80 ambulances have been deployed and 12 community health centers are fully operational. Regarding security arrangements, the SP Mela gave information about the traffic control room, fire fighting arrangements, and cyber security arrangements.

After the meeting, Minister Shri Sharma also inspected the ICCC (Integrated Command and Control Centre) and gave necessary instructions regarding crowd management. Present on the occasion were Special Secretary Urban Development Satyaprakash Patel, MD Purvanchal Vidyut Vitran Nigam, Municipal Commissioner Seelam Sai Teja, SP Mela Neeraj Pandey, Additional Mela Officer Dayanand Prasad, Chief Engineer Water Corporation (Urban) Sanjay Kumar Gautam, and other senior officers from various departments.

## Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary Celebrated as Youth Day: Students from the School Held a Grand Rally

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Tharwai** Swami Vivekananda Vidyashram Senior Secondary School in Tharwai celebrated Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary with great pomp and show on Monday. A grand "Swadeshi Swabhiman Yatra" (Indigenous Pride March) was organized on this Youth Day. Approximately 250 students from classes 9 to 12 and 20 teachers participated in this rally. The main



objective of the march was to guide the nation towards prosperity through the use of indigenous products. The school principal, Dinesh Kumar Pandey, shed inspiring light on Swami Vivekananda's life values and the importance of indigenous products in his philosophy. Senior teacher Chandradhar Tiwari elaborated on Swami Vivekananda's life philosophy and the concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family). The program was conducted

by Gaurav Upadhyay, who presented a concise explanation of the human values of the Bhagavad Gita and Swami Vivekananda's thoughts. Ashutosh Pandey, Yaduvendra Pandey, Ashutosh Mishra, Girish, Himanshu, Ramsur, Tungnath Tiwari, and Saroj Tiwari, Vinita Sharma, Aparna Singh, Siddhi Datri, Shalini Shukla, and the entire Swami Vivekananda Vidyashram family were present, making the program a success. The inspiring slo-

gans and chants raised by the students made the program even more impactful and special. Inspector Santosh Kumar Pandey of Tharwai was also present on the occasion, ensuring security arrangements. He was present throughout the rally and the program and, in his address, stated that Swami Vivekananda was not only a spiritual guru but also a skilled orator. He was considered a master of science, art, religion, philosophy, and literature.

### Potato Production in the State Remains Strong

Uttar Pradesh is among the leading Potato-Producing states in the country. Potatoes are cultivated over an area of more than 600,000 hectares in the state and this year too, as in the previous year, a good yield of potatoes is expected. Due to surplus production, potatoes from Uttar Pradesh are supplied to other states of the country as well as exported abroad.

## Motivational Seminar on Swami Vivekananda's Ideas Held at Women's PG College on National Youth Day



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Ghazipur** A seminar was organized at the Women's Postgraduate College, Ghazipur, on the occasion of National Youth Day, under the auspices of the Youth Welfare and Regional Development Department, Ghazipur. The program was attended by Chief Guest Anita Kumari, Principal of Women's PG College, Ghazipur, senior professors, Regional Youth Welfare Officer Chandrakant Yadav, Akhilesh Yadav, Chief Program Officer Ramnath

Kesharwani, and other program officers of the National Service Scheme. The seminar began with the chief guest and other dignitaries offering garlands and flowers to a portrait of Swami Vivekananda. The chief guest and other guests informed the students of the PG College and others about Swami Vivekananda's life and achievements and encouraged them to internalize his ideals. The program concluded with the felicitation of meritorious students. Finally, Regional Youth Welfare Officer Ms. Anchal Singh expressed her gratitude to all.

## Divisional Commissioner Inspects Information and Public Relations Department Exhibition at Magh Mela

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj:** Divisional Commissioner Saumya Agarwal on Monday inspected the exhibition organized by the Information and Public Relations Department on Fort Road at Parade Ground in the Magh Mela area. The exhibition showcased the works, schemes, projects, and achievements of the Central and State Governments, as well as exhibits related to the historical, cultural, and religious sites of Prayagraj district. She praised the exhibition, stating that it would provide visitors with information about the welfare schemes, projects, works, and achievements of the Central and State Governments, enabling them to benefit more from these government initiatives. The exhibition featured pictorial displays based on various schemes and projects, including the Chief Minister's message to the people of the state, Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, ODOP, Pradhan Mantri and Chief Minister Awas Yojana, Jal Jeevan Mission, religious, spiritual and cultural tourism, Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, air connectivity, MSME units, payment of subsidies



through DBT, zero tolerance policy towards crime and criminals, improved law and order, expansion of medical facilities, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Atal Pension Yojana, free irrigation, and expressways, among others. The Divisional Commissioner also visited the "Historical, Cultural and Religious" exhibition in the same complex, which compiled information about the religious, historical, and cultural sites of Prayagraj at one place. She said that this exhibition would be useful for devotees visiting the Mela, providing them with information about the importance of Prayagraj's historical, cultural, and religious sites. She added that the compilation of information about Prayagraj's historical, cultural, and religious sites in one place further enhances the importance

of the exhibition. The exhibition conveys the religious, cultural, and historical significance of the Magh Mela and the message of preserving Indian culture. The exhibition features photographs of various religious, historical, and cultural sites, including Bade Hanuman Ji, Akshayavat, Sangam,

Ulta Qila, Khusro Bagh, Shringverpur Dham, Mankameshwar Temple, Naulakha Temple, Allahabad University, Anand Bhavan, Jain Temple, Planetarium, Bharadwaj Muni, Lalita Devi, Nag Vasuki Temple, Curzon Bridge, Naini Bridge, Allahabad Library, Ashoka Pillar, Jain Temple (Jhansi), Shri Narayan Ashram, and Prayag Mahatmya.

### Information

I, Sunil Kumar Singh, S/O of Ashok Kumar Singh resident of H. No-19/10 PURANA SINDHI BHATTA PATEL NAGAR SHAH SHAH DISTT FATEHPUR (UP) 212601. Have changed my name from "Sunil K Singh" to "Sunil Kumar Singh" on my son's class 10th marksheet. This has been done vide an affidavit sworn before a notary public dated 03-01-26. Henceforth, my name should be read and addressed as "Sunil Kumar Singh" for all future purposes.

Sunil kumar Singh

### Information

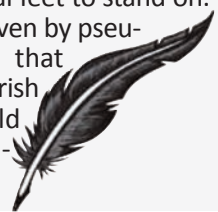
I'm Aryan Singh S/o A.K. Singh (Arun Kumar Singh) R/o 191H/3J/1k Ops Nagar. Kalindipuram Prayagraj up - 211011. I completed High school in the year 2022 from Bishop Johnson School & College Allahabad. Unique Id 7670466, Index no. 1223810/326. In my school certificate, my father's name print "A.K Singh" which is the abbreviated form of Arun Kumar Singh. The name of Arun Kumar Singh and A.K Singh refer to same person. The name Ak singh and Arun Kumar Singh should be considered and read as the Same name.



## Editorial

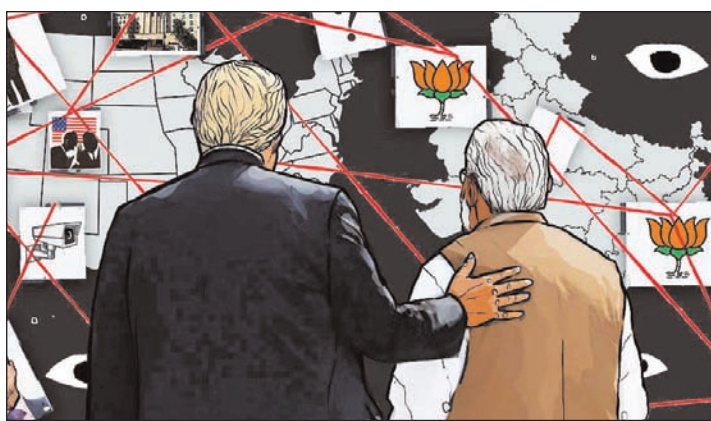
### Halal certification is turning into a scam. It's creating a Muslim-only economy

**Halal** is the latest Islamic fad. The internet is buzzing with content on Halal living, Halal dating, and even Halal sex. Halal certification is a booming global industry created by New Islam. A religion that has so far been proudly political is becoming brazenly commercial too. And why not, when catchphrases like "Islam is the complete way of life"—making detailed prescriptions for politics, economy, and every imaginable aspect of life—go unchallenged? In an ongoing Supreme Court case, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta submitted that while nobody had any objection to Halal certification for meat, nowadays even cement, iron rods, and bottled water were being certified as Halal. Since such certification comes at a cost—charged by private agencies in the Halal certification business—even customers who have no interest in such labels are being made to pay higher prices for the commodities thus certified. Halal certification preys on the naïveté of the newly prosperous Muslim masses. The Indian economy has been steadily growing, and Muslims have shared in this prosperity as much as anyone else. But this upward mobility has to be matched by enhanced self-esteem and social respectability, which, for a Muslim, still comes through overt piety and demonstrative religiosity. The Halal industry sows such fervour and reaps a good harvest from it. In the process, not entirely unwittingly, it also fosters a narrow and rigid religious attitude among Muslims—one that leads, inevitably, to radicalisation. The growth of the Indian economy has placed unprecedented purchasing power in Muslim hands too. And though the Halal certification business is aimed at tapping into the vast and growing Muslim market, it is bound to have some insidious and unforeseen consequences. For one, it will result in economic separatism, creating a Muslim-only parallel economy. In effect, it will lead to the systemic economic boycott of other communities. Stray calls to boycott Muslim street vendors, which keep circulating on social media, are a red herring compared to the harm the Halal market is insinuating into the political economy. Its normalisation and mainstreaming will have far-reaching consequences for inter-community relations—even greater than what Muslim Personal Law or vote bank politics have had so far. If a non-Muslim were to buy and sell in the Halal market, he would have to comply with the terms prescribed by Sharia, as interpreted by the agents of Halal certification. In such a market, they would be second-class citizens. Dhimmis. We would have the economic version of an Islamic state. Having suffered from the Two-Nation Theory, are we now sleepwalking into a Two-Economy reality? The path is nearly charted as a parallel economy develops around Islamic banking, Halal stocks, Halal mutual funds, Halal investments, and Halal travels. This trend will eventually lead to demands for the Halal certification of India itself as a country fit for Muslims. Then for the Constitution as a document that doesn't conflict with Sharia. And, as has already been happening informally, Halal certification for political parties—determining whether it is right for a Muslim to vote for some of them. One wonders, why should the religious lens be used to look at everything from iron rods and cement to electric wires and batteries? How will someone who looks at iron and cement through an Islamic filter see people of other religions? An outlook like this, even if genuinely Islamic, would have no place in the modern world. But as I will show in the latter part of this article, this isn't even Islamic. It has no precedence in history or theological feet to stand on. It's pop Islam—faux piety, driven by pseudo-Islamic power theology that seeks to paint the world in garish green. It divides the world between Islamic and non-Islamic and posits.



## Deep State is the convenient bogeyman of modern politics. It's entered India too

**Circa 1900:** Rudyard Kipling wrote *Kim*, placing the eponymous hero at the centre of the Great Game of espionage between the British Empire and Russia in the 19th century. The book is set after the Second Anglo-Afghan War, which ended in 1881, but before the Third, likely in the period 1893–98. Kim, short for Kimball O'Hara, is an impoverished Irish orphan who lives on the streets of Lahore and works for Mahbub Ali, a Pashtun horse trader. He later befriends an aged Tibetan lama, accompanies him on his journey along the Grand Trunk Road, learns about the Great Game, and is eventually recruited by Mahbub Ali, who works for the British Secret Service in their quest to extend influence in both Afghanistan and Tibet. Whether or not the Great Game—the expression used by British imperialists to describe the perceived expansion of Russian influence in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Tibet—actually existed, the fact remains that surveys were undertaken, expeditions mounted, spymasters recruited, and novels written, even as soldiers lost their lives. Taking a cue from Viceroy George Curzon, all pro-establishment papers—from the Civil and Military Gazette of Lahore to *The Pioneer* of Lucknow, *The Statesman* of Calcutta (now Kolkata), and *The Times* of India of Bombay (now Mumbai)—concurred that Tsarist Russia posed a real threat to the jewel in Britain's crown. A hundred and twenty years later, histo-



rians remain sceptical of Curzon's assertions. Is the hue and cry about the Deep State similar to the Great Game? Whether or not it exists, whether it operates in all countries, and whether the 'deep state' of one country is connected with others through the dark web or entrenched corporate interests remains unclear, as the discourse is more ideological than empirical. Sometimes, those who claim to be part of the deep state ascribe to themselves a larger-than-life role in state affairs—for example, AS Dulat and Asad Durrani in their 2018 book *The Spy Chronicles: RAW, ISI and the Illusion of Peace*. Their claim to be arbiters of one of the most tense and difficult relationships in the region has been widely critiqued by reviewers. The term first gained wide currency in the context of Türkiye as *derin devlet*, which literally translates to "deep state" in English. In Türkiye, it refers to a non-elected military elite dominating elected governments, especially when they attempt to dismantle the secular foundations of the Republic, established by Mustafa Kemal Pasha after

the abolition of the caliphate in 1923. In Pakistan, "deep state" refers to a government controlled by powerful military leaders, as documented by Stephen Cohen in *The Idea of Pakistan* and Ishfaq Ahmed in *Pakistan: The Garrison State*. Elected governments in Pakistan have rarely exercised real control over defense and foreign policy. In the US, Democrats and Republicans accuse each other of controlling the 'deep state.' Democrats claim the pro-Republican arms lobby and military-industrial complex constitute the deep state, while Republicans argue that Ivy League universities promote 'wokeism' and diversity, equity, and inclusion narratives that, according to Donald Trump, undermine America's greatness. Trump has accused the deep state within the Democratic regime of election interference, citing the Freedom Medal awarded to George Soros as evidence. However, skeptics argue that if the deep state were so powerful, how could Daksh Patel dismantle it simply by firing 'interns and associates' whose tenure is co-terminus

with that of President Biden? Ultimately, the deep state serves as a convenient scapegoat for anything that goes wrong or for political parties losing popular support. If Republicans and Democrats are battling it out in Washington, India faces a similar scenario, with Left liberals and Right nationalists accusing each other of leveraging the 'deep state' to gain or retain power. Publications like *The Caravan* and *Organiser Weekly* lead these respective narratives. Left liberals claim the RSS is India's deep state, while Right nationalists accuse the Ford Foundation and George Soros' Open Society Foundations of attempting to discredit the democratically elected Modi government. Left liberals find support in the speeches of Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, while Right nationalists, led by Vice President Dhankhar, minister Kiren Rijiju, and BJP spokespersons like Sambit Patra, vehemently counter these claims. In a pre-budget article for *The Indian Express*, economist Surjit Bhalla, a former member of the PM's Economic Advisory Council, alleged that India's deep state comprises "major industrialists, senior IAS babus, and their friendly influencers in the media", slowing down economic growth. This claim was firmly repudiated, point by point, by Vivek Kaul in *Newsland*, who questioned the logic behind such allegations.

Kaul argued that neither the IAS, corporates, nor the media benefit from econom-

ic deceleration. Instead, he pointed out that the real cause of economic slowdown is the compulsion of all political parties—BJP, Congress, and AAP—to allocate budgetary resources to freebies rather than long-term investments in social and physical infrastructure, which are crucial for sustained economic growth. Journalist Josy Joseph, in his book *The Silent Coup: A History of India's Deep State*, argues that the deep state is actually led by the IPS. He claims that in the name of combating terrorism in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, and the Northeast, as well as 'Left-wing extremism' (LWE) in Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, and Andhra Pradesh, the triumvirate of the NIA, CBI, and ED have consolidated unchecked power, with neither the legislature nor the judiciary exercising adequate oversight. He documents human rights violations of individuals caught in the crosshairs of state action. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Steve Coll offers another perspective, alleging that India's deep state mainly comprises serving and retired IFS officials. However, if the IAS, IPS, and IFS were truly dominant, why would they have allowed the creation of the Department of Military Affairs under the Chief of Defence Staff, effectively relegating the Defence Secretary (an IAS officer) to a largely ceremonial role? A completely contrarian view is presented by Sandhya Ravishankar, news editor at NDTV Profit.

### India's GST system is now a mess. Those who designed it also are confused

While this may seem like a trivialisation of GST, it actually lays bare how the system has now rebounded on its initial promise of bringing ease of doing business in the country. The Finance Minister's four-minute explanation on the taxation of popcorn highlighted how complex the system has become. It shouldn't take anybody that much time to explain the applicable tax rates on a single product. Since then, GST has been ridiculed, derided, lamented about, and generally panned by laypeople and even former government officials who worked on its implementation. That is why India's Goods and Services Tax is *ThePrint's* Newsmaker of the Week. So, what is the issue behind GST on popcorn? You see, as per the taxman, depending on your taste preferences, popcorn can either be a namkeen (salty) or a mithai (sweet) — forget that those

two terms have never been used by anyone to refer to popcorn. Ready-to-eat popcorn, salted and spiced for taste, and sold loosely attracts a GST rate of 5 per cent. That same popcorn, if packaged and labelled, attracts a rate of 12 per cent. One wonders what happens if the vendor tears open the packet and sells loose popcorn to the customer. Perhaps the universe will explode, who knows? Things get even trickier when you talk about caramel popcorn. Those who prefer this flavour will have to shell out 18 per cent GST, regardless of whether it is packaged or sold loose. Then some head to the movie hall and ask for salted and caramel popcorn mixed together. What happens to them? Over the week, one particular meme stood out among the lot. It was a picture of salted caramel popcorn packets with questions along the lines of.

### Tax cuts won't fix low growth. Govt must look beyond fiscal policy

The Modi government's main move in the Union Budget 2025 has been to cut personal income tax. As finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her speech, it is meant to boost demand in the economy. However, the government doesn't expect a higher-than-usual increase in other non-debt receipts and has budgeted a decline in the deficit. The budgeted capital expenditure is the same as the revised estimates for 2024-25. The tax cut should be seen in the context of other fiscal policy moves the Modi government has made in the last decade to boost growth. Since 2016, the Indian economy has struggled to sustain rapid growth. From 2016 to 2019, it was in a relentless showdown, with GDP growth falling to 3.9 per cent in 2019-20. The GDP then fell sharply in 2020-21 due to the pandemic. After this sharp decline, high GDP growth numbers created a false sense of complacency, but the compound annual growth rate between 2019-20 and 2024-25 is only 4.8 per cent. The latest GDP estimates suggest that the economy is slowing down again—with growth clocking at 5.4 per cent in the July-September quarter of 2024. Even if we set aside the critiques of GDP estimation in India, growth remains a topic of concern in policy conversations. The government's response to an economic challenge depends on what it considers to be the root cause. The Modi government's actions over the past decade suggest that it seeks to address India's economic growth pangs through fiscal policy. Consequently, fiscal policy has done much of the heavy lifting in the government's growth strategy over the past decade. In the economic slowdown from 2016-17 to 2019-20, the government sought to maintain its expenditure. To do so without increasing the reported fiscal deficit, from 2017-18 to 2019-20, it

transformed a significant part of its on-budget expenditure into off-budget expenditure done by public enterprises. It also sharply raised cesses and surcharges on petroleum products, which are not shared with the states. These unusual tactics allowed the government to spend more, and expenditure continued to outpace GDP growth. These tactics also allowed the government to introduce new cash transfer schemes such as PM KISAN and increase allocations to existing schemes. In 2019, in an effort to stimulate investment, the government announced major tax breaks for corporates, especially in manufacturing. At the time, corporate tax collection had been growing rapidly while other taxes were struggling to deliver the budgeted increase. The tax cut led to a sharp reduction in the corporate tax to GDP ratio in the subsequent years. As the pandemic hit, fiscal policy became even more central. The pandemic allowed the government to suspend its concern for deficits and bring the off-budget expenditure to the Budget in 2020-21. For a few years, revenue expenditure as a percentage of GDP was higher than its pre-pandemic levels. Among other things, this allowed the government to increase subsidies and cash transfers, and introduce production-linked incentives for manufacturing in India. Total subsidies as a percentage of GDP have now gone back to their pre-pandemic levels. The most important change in expenditure since the pandemic has been in its composition. Of the Union government's total expenditure, the share of capital expenditure has increased. Its share rose from 12.5 per cent of total expenditure in 2019-20 to 22.2 per cent in 2023-24. In 2019-20, capital expenditure was 1.67 per cent of GDP. It rose to 3.21 per cent.

### Why Syrians Are Between A Rock And A Hard Place

The replacement of the much-reviled Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria by a so-called "rebel force" that is actually just an Islamist offshoot of al-Qaeda and ISIS—which, remember, was headquartered in the Syrian city of Raqqa from 2014 to 2017—once again underlines how the turbulent history of that region is painted in countless shades of grey. As if the ongoing war between Israel and the equally Islamist Hamas left you in any doubt about that, of course. The Assads had ruled Syria with a mix of fear and murderous brutality for over 50 years. But that family, their Ba'ath Party and that general cohort were not religious fanatics. In fact,

they professed the sort of secular socialism which evolved into the crony socialism-cum-authoritarianism seen in many countries ruled by similarly inclined people and parties. Even India and the Congress Party of the mid-1970s were not unlike Syria during that same period. The difference, of course, is that the Emergency in India marked the apogee and also the end of authoritarianism. India never degenerated into a single-party rule—which appears to be the main cause of the rise of the Islamist factions all over West Asia today. Ironically, authoritarian secularism (and in Syria's case, also minority rule by the Shia Alawite tribe of the Assads) has

led to the ascent of doctrinaire Sunni Islam and power being captured by its adherents. As the news channels broke the news of the fall of Assad's government in Syria, I saw London's Oxford Street become an impromptu victory procession of cars with young men honking, shouting and hanging out of windows brandishing their homeland's distinctive opposition flag. It continued for well over an hour without any of London's uniformed finest visible. Maybe the Metropolitan Police were just relieved it was not yet another fraught pro-Gaza demonstration. But having lived in Syria during the regime of this just-ousted socialist dic-

tator's father, I had mixed feelings. How would those fashionably puffer-jacket-clad Syrians cheering in London fare under the country's new rulers whose roots are in the Salafijihadist school although they profess to have "moved" to a more accommodating position? Do Syrians not know what's happening in Afghanistan, whose Taliban rulers mouthed similar lines and then recanted? When my father was India's ambassador to Syria, the then President Hafez al-Assad ordered the Hama massacre in 1982, triggered by a long-brewing uprising in that city 200km north of Damascus by the Muslim Brotherhood.



## Over 60% of June three wheeler sales are EVs

**Delhi:** The Federation of Indian Automobile Dealers Associations reported that over 60% of three-wheeler retail sales in June 2025 were electric, indicating a strong increase in green mobility. From 55.5% in the same month last year, electric three-wheelers jumped to 60.2%. From little under 6% in June 2024, two-wheeler EV sales rose to 7.3%. The penetration of passenger electric vehicles—cars and SUVs—rose to 4.4% from 2.5% a year earlier. EVs made up 1.6% of truck and bus sales and 0.1% of construction equipment sales in the business sector.

June car retail sales reached 2 million, up 5% year-over-year. Construction equipment sales rose 55% due to infrastructure



spending. Tractor sales grew 9%, passenger vehicles 2.5%, commercial vehicles 6.6%, and two-wheelers 4.7%. FADA president C.S. Vigneshwar said early monsoon rains and the rise in electric vehicle options had influenced customer purchase decisions, especially for two-wheelers. He noted that incentives and fresh bookings helped passenger vehicle sales, but liquidity and geopolitical concerns remain. According to experts, EV penetration across several industries is nearing an inflection point.

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

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

## Elon Musk says Tesla will ask shareholders about investing in xAI

**Delhi :** Elon Musk says Tesla will ask shareholders about investing in xAI. After the Wall Street Journal reported that SpaceX would invest \$2 billion in xAI, the billionaire spoke. Musk wrote on X that shareholders decide whether to invest in xAI. Musk also asked X users last year if Tesla should invest \$5 billion in xAI, saying he was testing the waters. It's not my call. To my mind, Tesla should have invested in xAI long ago. Musk replied to a post that a shareholder vote will be held. In reaction to



ChatGPT's popularity, Elon Musk founded xAI in early 2023. Since then, the company has released its Grok AI chatbot, which was updated to Grok 4 models. The chatbot rivals ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude. Musk merged xAI and X earlier this year,

valuing the AI startup at \$80 billion and X at \$33 billion. Musk wants \$200 billion in investments in the combined business, Bloomberg reports. Tesla investing in xAI looks to be part of his aim to integrate his corporate empire. image.png

## ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund to sell 10% of Rs 10k crore IPO

**Delhi:** Another huge IPO is anticipated for this year. Prudential Corp of UK, ICICI Bank's joint venture partner in ICICI Prudential Asset Management, is selling 10% of the company through an IPO worth roughly Rs 10,000 crore. ICICI Bank, the

fund house's primary owner, said AMC filed the filings with Sebi. Two IPOs over Rs 5,000 crore have occurred this year: HDB Financial Services, an HDFC bank unit, completed its 12,500-crore IPO last month. February saw Hexaware Tech raise

roughly Rs 8,760 crore. ICICI Prudential AMC manages I-Pru MF, which manages over Rs 9.5 lakh crore in investors' assets (AMFI data for April-June quarter). ICICI Bank owns 51% of the fund firm and the UK financial giant 49%.

## 8th Pay Commission Could Hike Salaries 30–34%

**Delhi :** Central government personnel and pensioners may receive large wage and pension increases. Ambit Capital expects the 8th Pay Commission will propose a 30-34% increase in effective take-home pay, more than double the 14.3% hike under the 7th Pay Commission. The 8th Pay Commission, however unformed, may be launched in 2026-27. This modification is expected to cost the government Rs 1.8 lakh crore annually, compared to Rs 1.02 lakh crore for the 7th Pay Commission rollout in FY17. This expected increase is driven by the



fitment factor, a multiplier for revised pay. Ambit Capital expects a higher fitment factor than the 7th Pay Commission 2.57. One important point: A new Pay Commission eliminates the Dearness Allowance (DA), which is

currently 55% of the basic wage. Even if nominal basic pay rises dramatically, salary calculation is recalculated. For example, the 6th Pay Commission made Rs 7,000 a take-home wage of Rs15,750.

## Even if the visa is approved, the individual may still face deportation proceedings

**Delhi :** American officials have reiterated their stance that visitors must adhere to all regulations or face deportation. Screening for US visas continues even after the visa has been awarded. We make sure that visa holders respect all US laws and immigration rules by checking them constantly. According to the US embassy in India, if they do not comply, their visas will be revoked and they will be deported. Representational picture The visa process has become more stringent under the Trump administration. After halting processing of student visas at the end of May due to social media screening, it has only now begun processing them again for this fall. "Effective immediate-



### Priya Nair will replace Rohit Jawa as HUL's first female CEO

**Delhi:** Hindustan Unilever Ltd. (HUL) named Priya Nair, 53, as its new managing director and CEO on August 1, succeeding Rohit Jawa, who will retire after two years, the shortest term for any MD at India's largest consumer products giant. Nair, Unilever's beauty and well-being president, will become HUL's first female CEO. After a year and a half as CEO, Unilever replaced Hein Schumacher with Fernando Fernandez, its finance leader, to accelerate its turnaround.

ly, all individuals applying for an F, M, or J nonimmigrant visa are requested to adjust the privacy settings on all of their social media accounts to public to

facilitate vetting necessary to establish their identity and admissibility to the United States under US law," the embassy stated.

## All EU and Mexico imports will be subject to 30% tariffs as imposed



**Delhi :** President Trump of the United States has decided to levy a 30% tariff on goods imported from Mexico and the European Union, with the duty going into effect on August 1. The new tariffs on two of the US's most important trading partners were announced by Trump in separate letters uploaded to his Truth Social platform. He blamed a trade imbalance with the European Union and

what he saw as Mexico's involvement in illegal immigration and drug trafficking into the United States. Trump levied a 50% tariff on copper and more tariff announcements for over 20 nations earlier this week. These nations include Brazil, South

Korea, Japan, and South Korea. The tariffs are more severe than the 25% tax that Trump levied on Mexican imports earlier this year, with the exception of items that enter the US through the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

## Tesla May Start Indian Deliveries in August

**Delhi :** Tesla Inc. will open its first showroom in India and begin deliveries next month, according to sources, as the Elon Musk-led electric vehicle maker seeks to capitalize on demand in the third-largest auto market to offset slowing sales elsewhere. The Mumbai showroom will mark



Tesla's formal market entry, giving prospective customers access to pricing, variants, and trim

options, according to one person, who requested anonymity, and Bloomberg News documents. Last month, Bloomberg News claimed that the Mumbai store was opening in mid-July and that the first Model Y rear-wheel drive SUVs from Tesla's China factory had arrived. People

say a second Tesla showroom in New Delhi would open in late July. Tesla's highly anticipated foray into the Indian market comes at a vital time for the EV maker, which suffered a drop in global sales in the second quarter despite Musk's claims that business.

## JPMorgan may reduce EM Bond Index China, India shares



**Delhi:** JPMorgan Chase & Co. may reduce the weight of China and India, the major bond issuers in its flagship emerging-market index, to reflect more developing-nation debt. According to Bloomberg documents, the Wall Street bank is seeking customer opinion on changes to its GBI-EM Global Diversified index, which tracks local-currency developing-nation debt by more than \$200 billion of assets. According to the documents, cutting a cap on individual countries

from 10% to 8.5% might increase the benchmark rate if nations with higher borrowing costs gain a larger position. bigger yields represent bigger risks and returns. The documents indicate that the revisions are tentative and may not be implemented. At a consultation last year, JPMorgan proposed a

methodology adjustment that would have reduced China's index contribution to 6%, but then withdrew it. The latest modifications will reduce weighting for the major bond sellers in emerging countries like Indonesia, Mexico, Malaysia, China, and India, according to the documents.

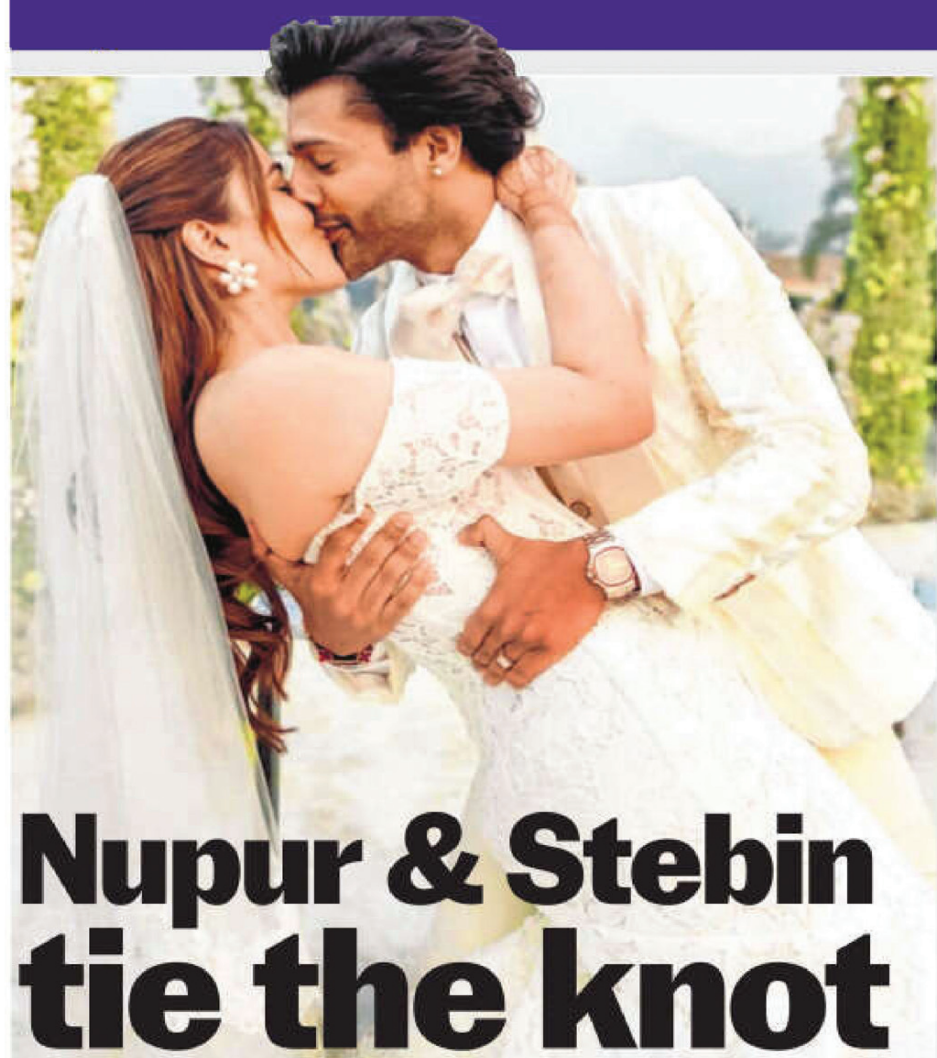
### Trump's latest announcements raise trade concerns for textile exporters

**Delhi:** Trump's newest tariff announcements have raised uncertainty, and purchasers are anticipated to postpone new orders. Textile exporters seem to have an advantage over Bangladesh, which Trump has slapped with 35% duty, but industry is watching India's bilateral trade deal with the US because Trump claims the agreement with Vietnam allows him to impose a 20% tariff, although there may be

exceptions. As usual, countries like Bangladesh are racing to Washington to equalize tariffs in the coming weeks. We must monitor tariffs. Buyers are confused, "SNQS International managing director V Elangovan said from Tirupur. "Retailers must stock shelves.

Since the Chinese were offering greater prices this year, our merchandisers in Shanghai last week could not compete.





## Nupur & Stebin tie the knot

**Long-time couple Nupur Sanon and Stebin Ben tie the knot in a dreamy Christian wedding among close friends and family**

Photos: Instagram, @nupursanon



**L**ovebirds Nupur Sanon and Stebin Ben are finally married. The couple said 'I Do' as they tied the knot in a dreamy Christian wedding in Udaipur.

The newlyweds took to social media and posted some breathtaking photos from their fairytale nuptials. Nupur made for a stunning bride in a classic off-shoulder white wedding gown, whereas Stebin looked all handsome in an off-white tuxedo jacket, along with a black lapel and bow tie.

The stills also had big sister, Kriti Sanon, being a part of the big day in a green off-shoulder dress, twinning with the other bridesmaids. We could also see Nupur and Stebin locking lips amidst a beautiful backdrop filled with colours.

One of the pics had the bride being walked down the aisle by her father. From Stebin coming down the stairs with the groomsmen, to the bridesmaids facing the camera with Nupur and Stebin, these photos gave an insight into a fun wedding.

## Before Spirit, did Triptii replace Deepika in O'Romeo?

Vishal Bhardwaj's *O'Romeo* casting sparks buzz as Triptii Dimri appears to replace Deepika Padukone in roles planned earlier by makers



Deepika Padukone

Photos: Instagram



**V**ishal Bhardwaj's *O'Romeo* stars Shahid Kapoor and Triptii Dimri in the lead roles. The makers shared a promo of the film on Saturday and revealed that the movie is 'inspired by true events'.

Netizens started speculating that the movie is based on the life of Hussain Ustara and Sapna Didi. Now, this reminds us that in 2018, Bhardwaj was all set to direct a film with Irrfan Khan and Deepika Padukone, in which their characters' names were Ustara and Afshan, respectively.

In *O'Romeo*, Shahid plays the role of Ustara, and Triptii's character's name is Afsha. So, does this mean that even before replacing Deepika in *Spirit*, Triptii had already replaced the *King* actress in *O'Romeo*?

### Why Irrfan-Deepika movie was not made?

In 2018, Bhardwaj shared a long post on Facebook informing everyone about the postponement of his film with Irrfan and Deepika due to their health. He wrote, "I am pushing back the film by a few months as both of my lead actors are down with different health problems. Irrfan is down with jaun-

dice and it will take him a few weeks to recover and Deepika Padukone's back problem which had previously developed during the shooting of *Padmaavat* has now resurfaced. Her role in the film is very physically demanding and the doctor has advised her not to do any strenuous work for a couple of months. In the past few weeks, I felt like I was back in the days of *Maqbool* while prepping with them. Deepika and Irrfan's look tests have come out exceptionally well, nothing like you've seen before, and it took me a moment to recognize them when I saw the test photographs (sic)."

### Not a biopic on Sapna Didi

While at that time there were reports that it was a biopic on Sapna Didi, Bhardwaj had clarified that it is not a biopic. The filmmaker wrote, "I would also like to clear that the film is still untitled and is not based on Rahima Khan/Sapna Didi's life. Yes, it's a takeoff from the story *Femme Fatale* from Hussain Zaidi's book *Mafia Queens of Mumbai* but as we worked on this idea, the story and screenplay have taken on a new identity and shape which is nowhere close to the above-mentioned names. Hence, it's definitely not a biopic (sic)." The film was never made as later Irrfan was diagnosed with neuroendocrine cancer, and in 2020, he passed away.

### Triptii replaces Deepika

Last year, there was a lot of buzz about one film, *Spirit*. Reportedly, Deepika was supposed to star in it, but due to the actress' demand for an 8-hour work shift, things didn't work out and she exited from the film. Later, the makers of *Spirit* roped in Triptii to play the female lead. On January 1, 2026, the first look poster of the Sandeep Reddy Vanga director was released. So, *Spirit* is not the only film in which Triptii might have replaced Deepika.

## Helping hands



**B**ollywood actor Sonu Sood paid a visit to the Varahi Gaushala in the Santalpur Tehsil of Patan, Gujarat. In visuals from the gaushala, the actor could be seen feeding the cows and interacting with the officials.

A large crowd gathered to catch a glimpse of the actor on Saturday, who expressed delight at their enthusiasm. He also commended the villagers for their continued efforts to support animal wel-

fare. "The contribution of the entire village and the trustees of the gaushala are praiseworthy. I would love to visit the place again and even have food at your home," he said at the event.

While speaking to the media, Sonu Sood expressed great pride in the journey of the gaushala and their consistent assistance toward the animals. The actor shared about making a donation of Rs 11 lakh to support the institution.

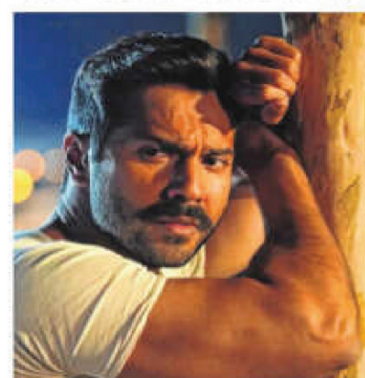


### Indian Idol 3 winner Prashant Tamang passes away at 43

In a shocking turn of events, Prashant Tamang, winner of *Indian Idol 3*, passed away at the age of 43 in Delhi due to cardiac arrest. According to reports, he died on Sunday morning, as confirmed by his close friend, music composer and film producer Rajesh Ghatani. He was rushed to a hospital in Dwarka, where he was declared dead. Prashant had recently returned from a live performance in Arunachal Pradesh.

Raju Bista, Member of Parliament from Darjeeling and BJP National Spokesperson, mourned the singer's passing and expressed his grief in a heartfelt note, writing, "The untimely demise of Prashant Tamang, the popular singer and actor who shone brightly on the stage of *Indian Idol* across the entire Hindi and Nepali music worlds, has left the entire realm of art and music, including Hindi and Nepali, stunned and deeply heartbroken."

## ₹5 lakh offer to target Varun Dhawan



**A**ctor Varun Dhawan is currently gearing up for the release of *Border 2*, slated to hit theatres on January 23, 2026. The film also stars Sunny Deol, Diljit Dosanjh and Ahan Shetty.

The actor has been facing attacks and trolling ever since the song *Ghar Kab Aaoge* and the teaser of the war drama were released. However, *Border 2* producer Nidhi Dutta recently pointed out an alleged smear campaign against the film and labelled the trolls 'anti-na-



Thara Bhai Joginder

tional' for targeting Varun.

Amid this, popular social media influencer Thara Bhai Joginder shared a shocking post on his Instagram handle, exposing the negative campaign being run against the actor.

On Saturday, he shared a post, where he was heard saying, "Varun Dhawan ki image kharab karne ke liye social media par ek campaign chal raha hai. Yeh log paisa de rahe hain aur keh rahe hain ki bas itna bolna hai ki Varun Dhawan ne bahut gandhi acting ki hai."

## 'It's funny and, at the same time, chillingly frightening'

Actress Joyeeta Dutta opens up about *The Great Shamsuddin Family*, working with film director and screenwriter Anusha Rizvi, theatre roots, physical training and empathy-driven storytelling

**I**n an exclusive interview with actress Joyeeta Dutta opens up about *The Great Shamsuddin Family*, her latest release directed by Anusha Rizvi, and the creative world that drew her to the family comedy. She reflects on portraying stories that balance humour with deeper, unsettling truths, and working alongside a largely female ensemble of celebrated actors. Joyeeta also speaks about her journey from her screen debut in Mira Nair's *A Suitable Boy* to years of rigorous theatre training across India and Europe. From physical theatre in Italy to stage work in Mumbai, she discusses vulnerability, discipline, and why empathy-driven storytelling continues to shape her choices as an actor. Excerpts:

**The Great Shamsuddin Family marks your first collaboration with Anusha Rizvi. What drew you to this family comedy, and what excited you most about the world of the film?**

What stood out for me was how adeptly Anusha Rizvi uses a comedy lens to mask something so deep. It's funny and, at the same time, chillingly frightening—just like the reality of our times. I am in awe of how she masters these shifting balances of pain and joy in her film using comedy. I was elated to work in a mostly female ensemble and breathe the same air as some of our country's finest actors like Farida Ji and Sheeba Chaddha. I am really inspired by their joy and fun for acting.

**You began your screen journey with A Suitable Boy under Mira Nair. Looking back, how did that debut shape the actor you are today?**

It's made me realise that nothing comes easy. A lot of the people on that set—cast and crew—are masters of their craft, which has been built on the back of a lot of work. Looking back, I know there is no substitute for the work that needs to be put in. At the same time, being cast by Mira Nair for my debut was also a matter

of luck, so I know that both hard work and luck have their parts to play. Mira takes care of people, and everything is thought out and planned for with love and care. It's not work; it's personal for her. And that is very meaningful and inspiring for me. How can I make it personal? That's something I think of often. I have learnt that the relationship between director and actor is crucial and can provide a sense of fortitude to an actor who most often is very vulnerable because of the nature of our job. That energy exchange can be very powerful and magnetic. That's how it was for me on that set with masters like Mira and Tabu.

**Born in Assam and now based in Mumbai, how has your cultural journey across geographies shaped your sensibility as a performer?**

I think stories of people who feel the need to be loved and to belong—in any shape or form, not just in terms of cultural identity—really draw me. The idea of being enough and every voice mattering counts for me.

### Views



Photos: Instagram, @joyeeta\_dutta

A still from the film

**As The Great Shamsuddin Family released on JioHotstar, what do you think audiences take away from the film—and from your performance in it? Also, it's been lauded for its balanced portrayal of a Muslim family. Your thoughts on that aspect.**

When the gaze is from the community, its portrayal can be very authentic. The story makes room for the audience to take away what they wish. It could be a simple, light-hearted comedy for some, and at the same time, it can also make people feel seen and heard in a very personal way. So, the story makes space for people to collectively laugh and feel the painful realities of what it means to be alive in our times. It draws people to see both joy and pain depicted in a real, lucid manner, with no self-pity.



## Briefs

## Landlord kills Hindu farmer in Pak's Sindh

A Hindu farmer was shot dead in Pakistan's Sindh allegedly by his landlord for building a shelter on his land, leading to widespread protests by the Hindus. Police arrested landlord Sarfaraz Nizamani and his facilitator Zafarullah Khan from Hyderabad.

## Bride, groom, 6 others die in cylinder blast

A newlywed couple was among 8 people who died in a gas cylinder blast in Islamabad on Sunday. The incident occurred at a house where a wedding was underway. Rescuers said 8 people were killed and 11 hurt, as they pulled 19 people out of the debris.

## At -37°C, air travel badly hit in Finland

Thousands of tourists were stranded in Finland on Sunday after flights at Kittilä were cancelled due to severe cold. The airport temperature dropped to -37°C on Sunday morning, after days of similar frigid weather, making de-icing of aircraft and other operations difficult, Finland's national public broadcaster Yle reported.

## Mamdani flays language used at stir

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani criticised the language used during a protest outside a synagogue in Queens, where pro-Palestinian demonstrators chanted in support of Hamas while pro-Israel demonstrators shouted racial and homophobic slurs. "The New York Times" reported. The NYT said the protest was held on Thursday night and featured chants of "Say it loud, say it clear, we support Hamas here", after which Mamdani was questioned by reporters on Friday about the demonstration.

## Renowned US historian Howe dies

Daniel Walker Howe, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian whose "What Hath God Wrought" became a widely acclaimed chronicle of the vast technological and social changes in the US in the first half of the 19th century, has died at age 88. Walker died on December 25, according to a spokesman for the University of California, Los Angeles, where he was a professor emeritus.

## Killer nurse gets 'top' job in UK prison

Lucy Letby, the UK nurse convicted of murdering 7 babies and attempting to kill 6 others, has landed a new job at a prison in Surrey. After working as a cleaner at the prison, where she has been held since 2020, Letby is now working as a librarian.

TALKING TOUGH | Havana will get no more oil, money: Trump

## Make a deal: US to Cuba

WASHINGTON/CARACAS



There will be no more oil or money going to Cuba — zero! I strongly suggest they make a deal, before it is too late. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Donald Trump, US President

US President Donald Trump on Sunday warned Cuba to "make a deal" with the United States or face serious consequences, warning that Venezuelan oil and money flowing to Havana would stop.

Trump posted on his Truth Social platform that Cuba had long relied on large amounts of Venezuelan oil and financial support, but that would no longer continue.

"Cuba lived, for many years, on large amounts of oil and money from Venezuela. In return, Cuba provided 'security services' for the last two Venezuelan dictators, but not anymore! Most of those Cubans are dead from last weeks USA attack, and Venezuela doesn't need protection anymore from the thugs and extortionists who held them hostage for so many years. Venezuela now has the US, the most powerful military in the world (by far!), to protect them, and protect them we will," Trump said.

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel condemned the US for attacking Venezuela and capturing its president at a massive rally near the US embassy in Havana.

"Cuba condemns and denounces these actions as an act of state terrorism," Diaz-Canel said. "It is a shocking violation of the norms of international law — the military aggression against a

peaceful nation that poses no threat to the US," he added.

Venezuela supplies around 30% of Cuba's already scarce oil imports in exchange for thousands of medical personnel who work in the South American country.

Also, Trump signed a new executive order on Venezuelan oil revenue, which is meant to ensure the money remains protected from being used in judicial proceedings.

The executive order said if the funds were to be seized for such use, it could "undermine critical US efforts to ensure economic and political stability in Venezuela." "I love the Venezuelan people, and am already making Venezuela rich and safe again," Trump said. "Congratulations and thank you to all those people who are making this possible!"

## JAILED MADURO: WE'RE WELL, I AM A FIGHTER

Venezuelan lawmaker Nicolas Maduro Guerra said his father President Nicolas Maduro sent a message through his lawyers saying he was in good condition and remained resolute in US custody.

"The lawyers told us they

were strong and we should not be sad," Guerra told leaders of the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela. He quoted his father as saying: "We are well. I am a fighter."

## AMERICANS TOLD TO LEAVE VENEZUELA

The US state department's Bureau of Consular Affairs warned as flights have resumed, US citizens in Venezuela "should leave the country immediately". The bureau said the security situation in Venezuela "remains fluid" and there were "reports of groups of armed militias, known as colectivos, setting up roadblocks and searching vehicles for evidence of US citizenship or support for the US."

US citizens are advised to "remain vigilant and exercise caution" when travelling by road and to monitor airlines' communications and websites for updated information, Xinhua agency reported.

## PRISONERS RELEASED

The release of prisoners continued on third day in Venezuela, as Diogenes Angulo was freed on Saturday after a year and five months.

## America launches new retaliatory strikes against ISIS in Syria after deadly ambush

WASHINGTON

The US has launched another round of retaliatory strikes against the Islamic State in Syria following last month's ambush that killed two US soldiers and one American civilian interpreter in the country.

The large-scale strikes, conducted by the US alongside partner forces, occurred around 12.30 pm ET, accord-

ing to US Central Command. The strikes hit multiple IS targets across Syria.

The Jordanian military later announced it had taken part in the strikes.

Saturday's strikes are part of a broader operation that is part of President Trump's response to the deadly IS attack that killed Sgt Edgar Brian Torres-Tovar, Sgt William Nathaniel Howard, and Ayad Mansoor Sakat, the

civilian interpreter, in Palmyra last month.

"Our message remains strong: if you harm our warfighters, we will find you and kill you anywhere in the world, no matter how hard you try to evade justice," US Central Command said.

A day earlier, Syrian officials said their forces had arrested the military leader of IS's operations in the Levant.

The US military said

Members of Venezuela's opposition, activists, journalists and soldiers were among the detainees that families hoped would be released.

Angulo was detained two days before the 2024 presidential election after he posted a video of an opposition protest in Barinas, the home state of the late President Hugo Chavez. He was 17 at the time.

Trump said the release of people detained for political reasons came at US's request. "Venezuela has started the process, in a big way, of releasing their political prisoners," Trump wrote on Truth Social. "Thank you! I hope those prisoners will remember how lucky they got that the US came along and did what had to be done." Trump added should prisoners forget, "it will not be good for them."

## 'DON'T STAIN INDIA TIES'

An eminent Republican Indian American warned the proposed US bill targeting countries importing Russian oil could hurt India-US relations. Ashok Mago, founder chairman of the Greater Dallas Indo American Chamber, now the US-India Chamber of Commerce, said the move was "not very helpful while negotiations are going on between Delhi and Washington about the tariffs", and argued lawmakers should allow talks to reach a conclusion before escalating pressure.

"The 500% tariff is not a very good idea," Mago said.

## Not 1, not 1,000: Azhar's suicide bombers alert

An audio recording allegedly by Masood Azhar, the chief of the banned terror group Jaish-e-Mohammed, has surfaced, where he claims a large number of suicide attackers are prepared to strike at any moment, NDTV reported.

Azhar is heard saying over 1000 suicide bombers are ready and pressing him to allow them to infiltrate India.

He said the sheer number of fighters would shock the world if made public. He said, "Ye (suicide bombers) ek nahi, do nahi, 100 nahi, ye 1000 bhi nahi, agar poori taadat bata doon, toh kal duniya ki media par hungama mach jayega." (These suicide bombers are not one, not two, not 100, not even 1,000. If I tell you the number, there will be an uproar in the world media).

He said the individuals are motivated to carry out attacks and achieve martyrdom. The date and authenticity of the tape could not be verified.

## 'The Grateful Dead' guitarist-singer Bob Weir, 78, passes away

LOS ANGELES

Celebrated singer-guitarist and co-founder of 'The Grateful Dead', Bob Weir, has passed away at 78.

As confirmed by his family on social media, Bob Weir died after a long battle with cancer and lung issues. "It is with profound sadness that we share the passing of Bobby Weir. He transitioned peacefully, surrounded by loved ones, after courageously beating cancer as only Bobby could. Unfortunately, he succumbed to underlying lung issues," they wrote.

In a statement, his family reflected on his journey that started six decades ago and added, "For over sixty years, Bobby took to the road. A guitarist, vocalist, storyteller, and founding member of the Grateful Dead, Bobby will forever be a guiding force whose unique artistry reshaped



## Anti-ICE stirs continue in US

MINNEAPOLIS (US)

Thousands of people have marched in Minneapolis to protest the fatal shooting of a woman by a federal immigration officer there and the shooting of two protesters in Portland, Oregon, as Minnesota leaders urged demonstrators to remain peaceful.

The Minneapolis gathering on Saturday was one of hundreds of protests planned in towns and cities across the country over the weekend. It

came in a city on edge since the killing of Renee Good on Wednesday by an ICE officer.

"We're all living in fear right now," said Meghan Moore, a mother of two from Minneapolis who joined the protest on Saturday. "ICE is creating an environment where nobody feels safe and that's unacceptable."

On Friday night, a protest outside a Minneapolis hotel that attracted about 1,000 people turned violent as demonstrators threw ice, snow and rocks at officers, Minneapolis police said.

## Moms pass on maths anxiety to girls: Sunak charity survey

**London:** Mothers tend to pass on their own anxiety over maths to daughters, creating a gender gap of confidence in the subject over time, new research by an education charity set up by UK's former PM Rishi Sunak and wife Akshata Murty has found.

The findings of the survey by the Richmond Project, reported in 'The Sunday Times' ahead of its official publication next week, reveal girls become less confident and hence less able in maths from the age of 8. It found 51% of boys aged 4 to 8 thought maths was "easy" compared to 41% of girls. This gap widened over time, with 86% of boys aged 9 to 18 saying they were confident in the subject compared to 63% of girls. "Our survey shows if they are parents, women tend to struggle more with helping kids with maths homework compared to men," Murty said. —PTI

## Nepal royalists want monarchy restored

KATHMANDU

Supporters of Nepal's deposed royal family rallied in Kathmandu on Sunday, demanding the restoration of the monarchy ahead of March elections. It was the first rally by supporters of ousted King Gyanendra since a wave of violent demonstrations by disgruntled youth in September installed an interim government that set fresh parliamentary elections in March.

"We love our king. Bring back the king," the rally participants chanted around the statue of King Prithvi Narayan Shah, who started the Shah dynasty in the 18th century. The last Shah king, Gyanendra, was forced to step down, and the monarchy was abolished in 2008, making Nepal a republic. "The last and only alternative for this country is a king and monarchy only, said protester Samrat Thapa.

"In the present context and the path the country has taken after the Gen Z move-

ment, there needs to be a monarchy restored to manage the situation."

Sunday marks the birth anniversary of Prithvi Narayan, and the annual rally in the past has turned violent with clashes between demonstrators and police.

Meanwhile, Nepal President Ramchandra Paudel called for "safeguarding" national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, as the Himalayan nation observed National Unity Day — the birth anniversary of nation-builder Prithvi Narayan Shah.

Paudel paid tributes to then-Gorkha King Shah on his 304th birth anniversary. He unified around two dozen smaller states into a greater Nepal in the mid-18th century.

Meanwhile, dissident faction of Nepali Congress kicked off a Special General Convention in Kathmandu on Sunday to chalk out the strategy ahead of the March 5 general election, despite objections by senior leaders.

## Mandelson declines to apologise for association with Epstein

LONDON

**Peter Mandelson** declined to apologise to Jeffrey Epstein's victims for remaining friends with the paedophile financier after his conviction but said he was sorry for "a system" that meant Epstein's victims were ignored, 'The Guardian' reported. The Labour peer, who was sacked as US ambassador when details of his support for Epstein emerged in September, gave an interview to the BBC on Sunday, saying he had paid a "calamitous" price for his association with the "evil monster".

Lord Mandelson's association with Epstein had long been known when Keir Starmer appointed the peer as US ambassador. However, he was removed from his diplomatic post after No 10 said it had been unaware of emails from Mandelson to Epstein suggesting the financier's 2008 conviction for soliciting a child for prostitution was wrongful and should be challenged.

In his interview with the



BBC's Laura Kuenssberg on Sunday, the peer sought to distance himself from Epstein, saying he was "at the edge of this man's life", despite "toe-curlingly embarrassing" emails showing his support and a birthday message describing him as a best pal.

The interview is Mandelson's first broadcast appearance since being sacked from his diplomatic role in Washington in September 2025. Mandelson said: "I never saw anything in his life when I was with him, when I was in his homes, that would give me any reason to suspect what this evil monster was doing in preying on these young women."

He added: "The issue is as I was a gay man in his circle, I

was kept separate from what he was doing in the sexual side of his life."

If he wanted to apologise, Lord Mandelson said: "I want to apologise to those women for a system that refused to hear their voices and did not give them the protection they were entitled to expect."

Pressed on whether he would apologise for his friendship with Epstein after his conviction, the peer and former business secretary said: "If I had known, if I was in any way complicit or culpable, of course I would apologise ... but I was not culpable, I was not knowledgeable for what he was doing, and I regret, and will regret to my dying day, the fact that powerless women were not given the protection they were entitled to expect."

Asked if he deserved to be sacked, he said: "I understand why I was sacked." "I understand why [Starmer] took the decision he did. But one thing I'm clear about is I'm not going to seek to reopen or relitigate this issue. I'm moving on."

## 'AI may be used as bioterror weapons'

Microsoft co-founder **Bill Gates** has warned AI could be used to develop bioterrorism weapons by non-government groups who may have access to open-source software. In his annual letter titled 'Optimism with footnotes', Gates claimed though AI will change society the most, it carries considerable threats to the global population.

"In 2015, I gave a TED talk warning that the world was not ready to handle a pandemic. If we had prepared properly for the Covid pandemic, the amount of human suffering would have been dramatically less," wrote Gates. "Today, an even greater risk than a naturally caused pandemic is that a non-government group will use open source AI tools to design a bioterrorism weapon."

Gates said humanity needed to be deliberate about how AI is developed, governed and deployed. He added there was no upper limit on how intelligent the AIs would become. "I



believe the advances will not plateau before exceeding human levels," said Gates.

Apart from the threat of bioweapons, Gates said the next big challenge will be the disruption to the job market. The pace of growth of AI was already disrupting the job demand in areas like software development. Biological weapons involve the use of bacteria, viruses, or toxins to cause disease or inflict harm on people, animals, and agriculture. This practice is categorised as bio warfare when conducted by nation-states and bioterrorism when orchestrated by non-state actors. The illicit trafficking of biological materials pose a challenge for the future of humanity.



**FIRST INDIA-FUNDED BAILEY BRIDGE OPENS FOR TRAFFIC IN CYCLONE-HIT SRI LANKA:** The first Bailey Bridge built with India's aid to Sri Lanka has been opened for traffic in the cyclone-hit island nation, the Indian mission said in Colombo on Sunday. The 100-ft Bailey bridge was erected by the Indian Army, restoring a vital road link between the Central Province and Uva Province, the Indian High Commission said.

## Kim Jong Un's sister seeks explanation from Seoul

SEOUL

The influential sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has called for Seoul to provide a detailed explanation about recent drone incursions, claiming the drones from South Korea clearly violated the North's airspace.

Kim Yo-jong, vice department director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, made the remarks as South Korea's

## AIRSPACE BREACH

Defence Ministry denied Pyongyang's claim about the drone incursions from the South's military, raising the possibility that private entities may have been involved in the alleged drone operations, Yonhap News Agency reported. "Fortunately, the ROK's military expressed an official stand it was not done by itself and it has no intention to provoke or irritate us," Kim said.

## Apple extends hotel stays in S Korea

Apple has stationed executives in South Korean hotels close to Samsung and SK Hynix factories as the company works to secure long-term memory chip supplies. The move comes amid a global shortage of DRAM, with RAM prices surging up to 300% since mid-2025. The team is negotiating multi-year contracts for LPDDR5X modules required in upcoming iPhone models, currently costing \$70/12GB unit more than double the price at the start of 2025,

media reports said.

Apple's purchasing teams are residing in hotels in Hwaseong, Gyeonggi, within easy access to semiconductor plants. The strategy aims to ensure a stable supply of critical components as AI-driven demand continues to strain the global memory market.

## TECH GIANTS COMPETE FOR SCARCER MEMORY

Apple is not the only tech company taking extreme measures. Dell, Google, and Amazon have also established

extended stays in South Korea to secure memory chips. The high demand has even benefited hotels, with business accommodations like Doubletree and Nine Tree in Pangyo seeing significant rise in long-term bookings.

Samsung and SK Hynix remain firm on short-term contracts, providing quarterly agreements, anticipating further price hikes through 2027. Server DRAM prices in Q1 2026 have risen 60-70% compared to Q4 2025, highlighting the tight supply situation.

## AI DEMAND FUELS MEMORY CRUNCH

The shortage is largely driven by AI infrastructure needs, particularly high-bandwidth memory (HBM3E) for AI accelerators like Nvidia's H200, which requires eight HBM3E units per card.

Chinese orders alone have added \$3 billion in new demand since receiving US export approval, limiting DRAM availability for smartphones and other consumer devices.



## Briefs

NAVI MUMBAI

## Harris' 22-ball fifty powers RCB



Grace Harris produced a breathtaking display of power-hitting en route to a 40-ball 85 to script Royal Challengers Bengaluru's emphatic nine-wicket win over UP Warriorz in their Women's Premier League match here on Monday. UP Warriorz had recovered admirably from a dramatic collapse to post 143/5, thanks to a superb rescue act by seasoned all-rounders Deandra Dottin and Deepti Sharma. Harris then smashed the fastest fifty of the season, racing to the landmark in just 22 balls before finishing with a scintillating knock that was studded with 10 fours and five sixes. The second successive victory lifted the former champions to the top of the standings. Skipper Smriti Mandhana played the perfect foil with an elegant unbeaten 47 from 32 balls, including nine boundaries.

NEW DELHI

## IOA brings NOA with Usha at helm



Calling it a major step towards strengthening the Olympic movement in India, the IOA on Monday announced the "formal reactivation" of a National Olympic Academy (NOA) in Ahmedabad with its President and sprint legend PT Usha leading its management. The IOA (Indian Olympic Association) also said that a National Olympic Education and Development Programme (NOEDP) will also be launched. "The IOA General House unanimously approved President **P T Usha** as the President of the National Olympic Academy, and Shri Gagan Narang, Vice President of the IOA and Olympic medalist, as the Director of the National Olympic Academy."

NEW DELHI

## All ISL clubs give written confirmation



All the 14 Indian Super League (ISL) clubs have written to the All India Football Federation (AIFF), formally confirming participation in the delayed 2025-26 season, clearing

## Kohli walks the talk, says Iyer

He struck 93 off 91 balls as India chased down a target of 301

VADODARA

India vice-captain Shreyas Iyer lavished praise on Virat Kohli, saying the batting great has been "walking the talk" for years, the latest being his masterclass in a successful run chase against New Zealand in the ODI series opener.

Kohli struck a fluent 93 off 91 balls as India chased down a target of 301 to register a four-wicket win and take a 1-0 lead in the three-match rubber here on Sunday.

During the innings, Kohli also became the fastest player to reach 28,000 international runs across formats and the second-highest run-scorer in international cricket, behind Sachin Tendulkar.

"Whatever we talk about his innings, it would be less. We have been seeing it for so many years now he's been

doing it consistently. The way he rotates the strike and he takes on the bowlers, he basically walks the talk," Iyer said in a video posted by BCCI.

Iyer, who returned to international action after a long injury layoff following a spleen laceration with internal bleeding sustained during the third ODI against Australia in Sydney in October last year, said he was delighted to begin the series on a winning note.

"Great start to the series. Coming back after a while into the team, it feels great to be a part of this squad. More than that, it was a great feeling to share the dressing room with each and every one. I was missing it for quite a while, but I am happy to be back," Iyer said. Fast bowler Harshit Rana made an impact with the ball, dismissing openers Devon Conway and Henry Nicholls, before chipping in.



India's Virat Kohli plays a shot during the first ODI. PTI

Whatever we talk about his innings, it would be less. We have been seeing it for so many years now he's been doing it consistently. The way he rotates the strike and he takes on the bowlers, he basically walks the talk

Virat Kohli  
India batter

**BACKING** | He played a vital role in India's 4-wicket victory in the opening ODI

## Rana says management wants to groom him as all-rounder

VADODARA

India head coach Gautam Gambhir has an affinity for all-rounders and fast bowler Harshit Rana has confirmed that the team management has asked him to work on improving his batting skills.

Rana played a vital role in India's four-wicket victory in the opening ODI against New Zealand here on Sunday, taking a couple of wickets at the top to derail the Kiwis' progress and chipped in with a vital 29 off 23 late in the chase.

Rana batted ahead of an injured Washington Sundar, who suffered from a side strain, putting his availability in doubt for the second ODI on Wednesday.

"The team management wants to groom me as an all-rounder and it is my task to keep working on it," Rana told reporters here.

"I am working on it in the nets as well, and it was a matter of confidence which KL (Rahul) bhai helped me with when I went in (to bat). I kept my focus on it and made the runs," he added.

With premier all-rounder Hardik Pandya not available for the ODI series, India's playing eleven featured both Ravindra Jadeja and Washington in the opening ODI, whereas the team combinations in other formats now regularly features more than one all-rounder.

Both Pandya and Shivam Dube played four games each in India's five-match T20I series against South Africa last month, whereas the playing elevens for the two-Test series which the hosts lost 0-2, featured at least three all-rounders each in both matches including Jadeja, Washington, Axar Patel and

Nitish Kumar Reddy.

Playing multiple all-rounders in the Test side following the crushing loss was criticised heavily by former Indian pacer and KSCA president Venkatesh Prasad, who had expressed that "the all-rounder obsession is absolute brain-fade".

The idea of having so many all-round players as possible can be gauged with the fact that specialist batters Yashasvi Jaiswal, Tilak Varma and even Abhishek Sharma have rolled



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Harshit Rana  
India all-rounder

their arms over for India and they bowl in their domestic appearances as well.

In the build-up to the second ODI against South Africa last month, both Jaiswal and Tilak were seen putting in equal time in the nets to hone their skills as a batter and a bowler.

After he helped



India's Harshit Rana plays a shot during the first ODI. PTI

India win the Asia Cup T20, the world No 1 T20I bowler

Varun Chakravarthy had told the media that the head coach has asked him to work on his batting skills, for bolstering his chances for selection in ODI team where he gets picked on as-per-need basis.

"My team wants me to bat at No 8 as an all-rounder and whatever time I can give to it in the nets, I focus on that. I believe I can score 30-40 runs for the team lower down the order whenever needed and that's what the team management believes that I can do as well," Rana added.

Rana put on 37 runs for the sixth wicket to stabilise India's innings in the chase with Rahul, after they lost Virat Kohli (93), Jadeja (4) and Shreyas Iyer (49) in quick succession.

"Till Virat bhai was there it felt that the match would end early, maybe with 5-6 overs to spare but a game of cricket can change anytime and you cannot predict it."

When asked if the Indian bowlers struggle to take wickets upfront with the new ball in the absence of Jasprit Bumrah, Rana retorted by saying the troika of Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna and he bowled well to contain the South African batters.

## Surprise maiden India call-up for Ayush Badoni

Washington suffered an injury in the series-opener in Vadodara

NEW DELHI

Uncapped **Ayush Badoni** on Monday replaced Washington Sundar in India's squad for the remaining two ODIs against New Zealand after the all-rounder was ruled out due to a rib injury.

Washington suffered the injury in the series-opener in Vadodara on Sunday.

The 26-year-old, who bowled five overs for 27 runs, walked off midway through the New Zealand innings and did not return to field. Despite the discomfort, he later came out to bat at No. 8 as India picked up a four-wicket win.

"India all-rounder Washington Sundar reported an acute onset discomfort in his left lower rib area while bowling during the first ODI against New Zealand at the BCA Stadium, Vadodara, on Sunday," said the BCCI in a statement.

"He will undergo further scans, following which the BCCI Medical Team will seek expert opinion. Washington has been ruled out of the

remaining two matches.

"The Men's Selection Committee has named Ayush Badoni as his replacement. Badoni will link up with the squad in Rajkot (the game is on Wednesday), the venue for the second ODI," it added.

Badoni being named in the national squad means that he will miss Delhi's quarterfinal against Vidarbha in Bengaluru on Tuesday.

Badoni, primarily a batter who bowls off-spin, has captained Delhi and was deputy to Rishabh Pant



in the team's latest Vijay Hazare Trophy campaign.

The 26-year-old rose to prominence with his performances for Lucknow Super Giants in the Indian Premier League where he played under the mentorship of current India head coach Gautam Gambhir.

While Badoni has a batting average of 57.96 in first-class cricket, his List A returns are not that impressive.

He averages 36.47 in 27 games and has done more with the ball than bat in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Delhi head coach Sarandeep Singh spoke about the work Badoni has put on his off-spin over the last year or so.

"He bowls at least 30 balls in every practice session after batting in the nets. He realises that he needs to improve his off-spin to make a strong case as an all-



India all-rounder Washington Sundar reported an acute onset discomfort in his left lower rib area while bowling during the first ODI against New Zealand at the BCA Stadium, Vadodara, on Sunday

BCCI statement

rounder who can fit into the Indian team," Sarandeep said.

"He has improved as a bowler considerably over the last 12 months. He is getting wickets for us regularly, he is a very smart cricketer and learns quickly. "His off-spin turns sharply and he has a good carrom ball and arm ball as well," the former India spinner told PTI.

DHAKA/NEW DELHI

Bangladesh sports advisor Asif Nazrul on Monday claimed that the ICC has acknowledged his country's specific security concerns on travelling to India for the T20 World Cup but the game's global governing body termed his assertion "a complete lie".

Bangladesh have expressed reluctance to tour India for the tournament, scheduled to begin on February 7, and have sought to shift their matches to co-host Sri Lanka citing security concerns. This was after pacer Mustafizur Rahman was released from the IPL on instructions of the BCCI which cited unspecified "developments" as the reason.

"I need to inform you that the security team of the ICC and those in charge of security have sent a letter (to BCB). In that letter, it has been said that three things will increase the security threat to the Bangladesh team," Nazrul said during a press conference in Dhaka, according to local newspaper "Daily Star".

"One is if **Mustafizur**



(Rahman) is included in the Bangladesh team.

Two, if the supporters of the Bangladesh team walk around wearing the national jersey of Bangladesh. And the third is that the security threat of the Bangladesh team will increase as the (Bangladesh) elections approach," he added.

However, the ICC, while admitting to have contacted the BCB, denied Nazrul's claims that it has accepted Bangladesh's listed concerns.

"There has been an internal communication from ICC to BCB with regards to security in India. But what Asif Nazrul said is a complete lie. ICC's communication never mentions that Mustafizur's selec-

tion will be an issue.

"It's complete falsehood...There is no such advisory in formal communication," an ICC source told PTI.

The upcoming T20 World Cup is scheduled to be held from February 7 to March 8 across venues in India and Sri Lanka.

The BCB's apprehensions followed the release of Mustafizur from IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders amid attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh.

As per the existing fixtures, Bangladesh are scheduled to play their first three group matches in Kolkata and the final one in Mumbai.

Following Mustafizur's removal from the KKR franchise, the Bangladesh government banned the broadcast of the IPL in the country.

However, former captain Tamim Iqbal and current Test skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto have cautioned against a hard-line approach on the matter with the former saying that the decisions taken today would have repercussions 10 years down the line.

all praise

## Jamieson marvels about superstar Kohli's greatness

VADODARA

Having been a rival as well as a teammate to Virat Kohli, New Zealand all-rounder Kyle Jamieson says he can only marvel at the Indian superstar's craft as he operates at a "different level", one where great batters have their way even if bowlers try to contain them.

Kohli looked set for a record-extending 54th ODI century on Sunday in the opening ODI against the Kiwis

that India won by four wickets. However, Kohli fell seven runs short of his milestone when the imposing Kiwi bowler had him caught at mid-off for 93.

Jamieson, who has shared the dressing room with Kohli at Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the IPL, said it's tough to determine if the Indian batter has been at his best right now.

"It's hard to say from an opposition point of view whether this is the best version of him or not -- he's

been pretty good for a long time, right?," Jamieson told the media after Sunday's loss.

"You feel every time you come up against him, you've got to be at your absolute best to even compete. He's on a different level, he plays the game on a different level to most cricketers, (and) he looked pretty good for the most part." "We'll just have to try and come up with some plans to try and contain him, but (then) you don't contain the greats, they have their way a little bit, so just

enjoyed watching him play for sure," Jamieson added.

Jamieson was by far the best bowler from both the teams returning figures of 4/41 but could not avert a defeat for his side even as he sparked a minor collapse, dismissing Kohli, Ravindra Jadeja (4) and Shreyas Iyer in quick succession.

"He (Kohli) controlled the tempo through the middle and set the innings up for his team," Jamieson admitted.

Jamieson said he looks at his career with more grati-

tude than ever before.

"Like any player's journey has got its ups and downs and its own experiences, I was fortunate to (have) burst onto the scene in a way and have a bit of an impact and spend some time here with the IPL early on," he said.

"(It) certainly (was an) eye-opening experience and something I probably wasn't quite ready for at that stage in my life, and (I've) been on a bit of a journey as well with the back issues over the last couple of years.



New Zealand's Kyle Jamieson bowls a delivery during the first ODI. PTI