

AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

Title Code - UPENG04488

NATIONAL ENGLISH DAILY

MORNING EDITION PRAYAGRAJ

Friday, 06 March, 2026

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

Briefs

BENGALURU

Vijayendra for internal reservation in hiring

Karnataka BJP president BY Vijayendra on Mar 5 urged the Congress government to fill vacant posts by implementing internal reservation for marginalised communities. Speaking to media, he said the move would create employment opportunities for youth. Vijayendra warned the BJP would launch an agitation if the government failed to act. He said the BJP government had increased reservation to 56% to ensure justice for communities.

NEW DELHI

2 charred bodies found after fire

Two unidentified charred bodies were recovered from the fourth floor of a building after a fire broke out in a toy godown in central Delhi's Paharganj area, a Delhi Fire Service (DFS) official said on Thursday. The building has a ground floor and four upper floors, with a temporary structure on the fourth floor where the godown operated. "The fire was finally extinguished around 3.20 am on Thursday."

TELANGANA

Tainted ghee unit busted

Hyderabad police on Thursday busted an adulterated dairy products unit in Banjara Hills and arrested one person for allegedly mixing palm oil, vanaspati and other low-quality substances in ghee, according to the Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police. A team from the Commissioner's Task Force raided "Pride Dairy" at Bholanagar and seized adulterated ghee, cream and equipment worth Rs 18.26 lakh, including 460kg ghee, 2,090kg cow cream and 1,170kg buffalo cream.

ALAPPUZHA

Elephant runs amok, mahout hurt

One of three elephants brought for a temple festival near Nooranad in Kerala's Alappuzha district turned violent between 8.30 pm and 9 pm on Wednesday, injuring its mahout and damaging several roadside vehicles, police said. The elephant threw the mahout and ran around the area, creating panic among locals. It was later tranquilised by wildlife officials and removed. The mahout is undergoing treatment.

IMPHAL

Narcotics seized in Manipur

Security Forces intercepted an SUV at a Naka check post under Tengnoupal Police Station and recovered 2.33 kg of WY tablets, 0.592 kg of brown sugar, a mobile phone, an Aadhaar card and the vehicle's registration certificate, Manipur Police said on X.

BARABANKI

11 injured in Holi clash

At least 11 people were injured after a dispute over playing with colours during Holi escalated into a violent clash between two groups in Tikaria village in Uttar Pradesh's Barabanki on Wednesday afternoon police said. According to police the argument turned violent and both groups attacked each other with sticks and iron rods. Villagers intervened before police arrived and pacified both sides.

W ASIA TENSION | Conflict is in our backyard, says Rahul

Cong slams PM on Iran ship attack

NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday raised the issue of the United States sinking an Iranian warship in the Indian Ocean, even as it was returning after participating in a joint exercise with the Indian Navy, and charged that while at moments such as these India needs a "steady hand at the wheel", it has a "compromised PM who has surrendered our strategic autonomy".

Gandhi, in a post on "X", made a reference to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and wrote that, "The world has entered a volatile phase. Stormy seas lie ahead. India's oil supplies are under threat, with more than 40% of our imports transiting the Strait of Hormuz. The

situation is even worse for LPG and LNG. The conflict has reached our backyard, with an Iranian warship sunk in the Indian Ocean."

Are Indians safe, asks Kharage

New Delhi: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharage asked how the Centre intended to secure the well-being of Indians stranded in the Gulf and Middle East and on evacuation plans, if any. He also flagged the issue of some Indians also being killed in the conflict between Iran on one side and the United States and Israel on the other.

Akhilesh says govt silence is 'deliberate inaction'

LUCKNOW

Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday criticised the Central government for maintaining silence over the recent US-Israel attacks near India's strategic neighbourhood and said the situation was a matter of concern for the country.

Taking to X, the Samajwadi Party chief said the reach of the US-Israel strikes close to India's borders and up to the Indian Ocean had raised serious concerns among citizens. He questioned why the government had maintained what he described as an unprecedented silence on such a serious international issue.

Yadav asked whether the government's silence should be seen as deliberate inaction or the result of fear. He said people wanted to know why the government had not issued any clear statement on the matter.

Calling it an international issue, Yadav said it was the joint responsibility of the government, the foreign ministry and the defence ministry to clarify India's position.

The Nitish endgame

PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has opted to move to the Rajya Sabha, paving the way for the installation of a chief minister from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — a post the saffron party has coveted in the state for nearly two decades.

Though long anticipated, the sudden turn of events has taken political circles by surprise, coming barely four months after Nitish was sworn in for a record tenth term as chief minister. Nitish, who dominated Bihar's politics for over two decades, filed his nomination on Thursday, clearing the path for his son Nishant Kumar to enter politics and potentially assume the role of deputy chief minister under a BJP chief minister. However, the vacuum created by Nitish Kumar's departure to Delhi will be difficult for both the Janata Dal (United) and the BJP to fill.

His move has triggered protests among Janata Dal (U) leaders and supporters, many of whom have accused the BJP of sidelining Nitish Kumar despite his mass support

among non-Yadav backward castes, extremely backward castes (EBCs), Dalits and Pasmanda (backward) Muslims — social blocs that helped the NDA secure a landslide victory with 202 seats in the state assembly. "It is nothing short of a coup in Bihar. The BJP leadership, along with a section of JDU leaders loyal to the saffron outfit, have ditched Nitish Kumar and conspired to remove him from the top post unceremoniously," said JDU leader and former minister Bikram Kunwar.

Seeking to calm ruffled party workers — many of whom had begun protesting outside the chief minister's residence and elsewhere in the state — Nitish tweeted that he wished to become a Rajya Sabha member so that he could fulfil his desire of having served in both Houses of the state legislature as well as both Houses of Parliament. Notably, ahead of the 2025 state elections, the BJP had refrained from declaring Nitish as the chief ministerial candidate — unlike previous elections.

Full article on freepressjournal.in



Planned bid to sideline Nitish: JD(U) MLA

Dheeraj Kumar/Patna: Jharkhand's lone JD (U) MLA Saryu Roy on Thursday claimed that Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's move to the Rajya Sabha was a "planned design" to sideline him from the CM's post.

Nitish filed his nomination papers for Rajya Sabha, thus bringing the curtains down on his 20-year tenure as the longest-serving CM of the state. "The manner in which a person like him was sidelined from the CM's post, looks as if he is being sent to a shelter," the MLA said.

Nabin, 39 others file RS papers

New Delhi: Nitish Kumar, Nitin Nabin, and NCP-SP supremo Sharad Pawar were among the 40 candidates who filed their papers on the last day of nomination for 37 Rajya Sabha seats that are falling vacant in 10 states, leading to a keen contest for one seat each Bihar, Odisha and Haryana.

Seven seats are falling vacant in Maharashtra, six in Tamil Nadu, five each in Bihar and West Bengal, four in Odisha, three in Assam and two each in Haryana, Telangana and Chhattisgarh, besides one seat in Himachal Pradesh.

The scrutiny of papers will take place on Friday, and the nominations can be withdrawn till March 9. If needed, polling will be held on March 16.

In Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Assam, assembly elections are likely to be held in April.

3 ex-Congress MLAs join BJP in Assam

GUWAHATI

Three suspended Congress MLAs joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Assam on Thursday, adding a fresh dimension to political developments in the state ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections.

The three legislators — Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, Basant Das and Sashikanta Das — were formally inducted into the BJP at the party's state headquarters, 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan' in Guwahati, in the presence of state president Dilip Saikia and other senior leaders.

Speaking after joining the BJP, Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha said the decision was taken keeping in mind the larger interests of Assam and the country.

He said the three legislators were keen to work in line with the BJP's policies and contribute to the development and security of the state as well as the nation.

Purkayastha also took a swipe at Congress, alleging that the party's politics of appeasement had weakened its organisational strength.

Delhi nabs over 1,200 for Holi drunk driving

NEW DELHI

Delhi Traffic Police booked more than 1,200 motorists for drunk driving during a special enforcement drive carried out across the city on Holi, with the highest number of such violations reported from the western range, an official said on Thursday.

According to data released by the traffic police, a total of 3,725 were penalised for other traffic violations.

What will happen to Om Birla on Monday?

NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha will witness a rare moment when Om Birla will not chair the proceedings but will be seated amongst the members as the House takes up a notice seeking his removal from office.



As Parliament meets for the second phase of the Budget session on March 9, the Lok Sabha is likely to take up the resolution moved by the opposition against Birla for allegedly acting in a "blatantly partisan" manner. According to the rules and laid down procedure, Birla will have the right to defend

himself when the resolution is discussed by the lower house. He will also have the right to vote against the resolution. Constitution expert P D T Achary explained.

The expert said that while Birla will not chair the proceedings when the resolution comes up before the House, he will be seated in the Treasury benches.

The day the notice was submitted, Birla had stopped chairing the House.

Achary, a former Lok Sabha secretary general, told PTI that the "allocation of the seat, which the Speaker occupies under such circumstances, is not mentioned in the Rules".

RSS hastens grassroots mobilisation in UP

LUCKNOW

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has intensified its organisational preparations as the political atmosphere ahead of upcoming elections begins to gather momentum.

The organisation has started working on a strategy aimed at activating its cadre at the grassroots level while expanding social outreach.

Sources said the RSS is planning to mobilise workers up to the booth level through its shakhas and affiliated

organisations. Under the plan, a contact in charge is expected to be identified for every booth. Workers will also carry out a detailed study of the voter list, with a focus on identifying missing names and ensuring they are added to the electoral rolls.

At the same time, preparations are being made to increase dialogue on ideological issues during the election period. Themes such as nationalism, cultural identity and the Uniform Civil Code are expected to feature in outreach efforts.

BJP's 2024-25 earning was 85% of all parties

NEW DELHI

The ruling BJP declared an income of Rs 6769.14 crore in FY 2024-25, the highest among national parties, while the Congress was a distant second, declaring an income of around Rs 918.28 crore, said a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

According to the report analysing the declarations made by political parties to the Election Commission, six national parties (BJP, INC, CPI(M), AAP, BSP and NPEP) declared a total income of Rs 7960.09 crore in 2024-25, and the BJP accounted for 85.03 per cent of it.

America is not a charity organisation: US Dy Secy

NEW DELHI

US Deputy Secretary **Christopher Landau** made it clear that America was not a "charity organisation," and would do all it could to advance its national interests. Speaking at a curtain-raiser at the session of the Raisina Dialogue entitled "Power, Purpose, & Partnerships: American Foreign Policy in a New Era", the US official was asked just how he viewed the role and purpose of the US's foreign policy.

"The purpose of foreign policy of the United States is to advance our national interests. We are not a charity organisation. We are not the United



Nations...However, America first does not mean America alone. Just as President Trump wants to make America great again, he will expect that the PM of India and other countries want to make their countries great," he said.

Calling President Trump a "President of Peace" Landau also stated that this century will see the rise of India. He

did add a caveat. "It is in our interest, and we think it is also India's interest to be partnered with us," he said. Landau added that the US would not make the same mistake with India that it did with China "where we let you develop all these markets and then let you beat us with them."

Speaking on the Middle East, Landau said that the region had been unsettled for some time, and much of this could be attributed to Tehran. Stating that the US would not allow Tehran to get nuclear weapons, he called for the international community, including India, to play a positive role in supporting a change in Iran's political landscape.

Bihar, T'gana get new Guvs

NEW DELHI

Former Indian ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu has been appointed the new Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, a Rashtrapati Bhawan communique said.

In another key development, VK Saxena will take over as the lieutenant governor of Ladakh. Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain (ret'd) was appointed as Governor of Bihar and Himachal Pradesh Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla appointed Telangana Governor, it said.



India seeks US cover for ME energy cargo

NEW DELHI

India is tapping the United States to secure marine cover for vessels ferrying oil from the Middle East as it looks to ensure continuity in energy supplies beyond its current stockpile, a top Oil Ministry official said.

The country has stocks in tanks, pipelines and ships in transit to meet 25 days' requirement of crude oil, and a similar number of days' stock of finished fuel.

The widening war in West Asia has disrupted tanker movement through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow sea lane that carries about one-fifth of the world's oil and large volumes of liquefied natural gas (LNG).

India imports about 88% of its crude oil and around half of its LNG, with 40-50% of crude oil and 50-60% of LNG shipments routed through the corridor.

Indian-origin social media influencer killed in Canada

CHANDIGARH

A 45-year-old social media influencer of Punjabi origin, Nancy Grewal, was stabbed to death in Canada with her mother in Jalandhar on Thursday claiming that she had received death threats.



On social media, Nancy used to express her opinions on different social and political issues in Punjab. She had

spoken against Khalistanis and even made remarks against pro-Khalistan leader Gurbatwain Singh Pannun.

LaSalle Police Service in a post on social media stated, "Shortly before 9:30 pm on March 3, 2026, emergency services responded to the 2400 block of Todd Lane for a

report of a stabbing. A 45-year-old female was located with injuries. She was transported by Essex-Windsor Emergency Medical Services to the hospital where she later succumbed to her injuries."

Later, LaSalle Police Service identified the victim as Nancy Grewal, adding that it continues to investigate a homicide that occurred on Todd Lane on March 3.

"To ease public concern, we are sharing that investigators are viewing this as an isolated incident," it further said, while urging people for any information and providing video surveillance.

Another pit death for biker, in Kerala

KOLLAM

A motorcycle rider died after falling into a pit dug as part of National Highway construction here, police said on Thursday.

The deceased was identified as Aji Kumar, 50, a resident of Memana. According to police, at around 11.30 am, people saw Kumar lying in a water-filled pit dug for constructing

drainage as part of the National Highway-66 project at Skylab Junction in Ochira.

Later, a road barricade and Kumar's motorcycle were also recovered from the pit.

Officials at the Ochira police station suspect that Kumar might have lost control of his vehicle and crashed.

Residents alleged that construction work was being carried out and deep pits were dug without barriers to ensure public safety.

Mamata gears up for dharna today

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will return to one of her most familiar political arenas — the streets — on Friday, beginning a dharna at Kolkata's Metro Channel against what the TMC alleges are "arbitrary deletions" in the state's revised electoral rolls following the SIR.

The sit-in protest, scheduled from 2 pm at the Esplanade

Metro Channel, was announced by TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Sunday, who accused the Election Commission of carrying out a politically motivated exercise that could disenfranchise lakhs of legitimate voters months ahead of the Assembly elections.

"She will announce our next line of action from the venue. We are against this SIR," he had said.

Separate tender for project expansion: Saini

CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Thursday said the necessary expansion of ongoing projects in Haryana will be executed through separate tenders.

The move is aimed at effectively addressing issues related to cost enhancement and budget escalation. Saini said that often, once a project is underway, its scope is expanded midway.

Birth incentive for 2nd kid in Andhra

AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday said the state government is considering a Rs 25,000 birth incentive for couples having a second child or more to boost the falling birth rate.

Addressing the Assembly, Naidu said the government aims to raise the state's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) to 2.1 from

the current 1.5, which is below the replacement level.

"We are looking at a novel method. We will give Rs 25,000 to parents having a second child or more at the time of delivery itself. This will be a big game-changer. If we can do it, it will be very useful," Naidu said.

Underscoring the importance of population management, the CM noted that several countries are facing challenges due to ageing populations.

Auto overturned near Andawa intersection, one passenger dead, several injured



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. On Wednesday morning, near Andawa intersection in the Jhansi police station area, a speeding auto rickshaw lost control and overturned several times, hitting a wall. One passenger died in the accident, while several others, including the driver, were injured. According to information, the incident occurred around 9 a.m. The speeding auto rickshaw suddenly lost control. It overturned several times on the road and crashed into a

nearby wall. The accident caused chaos at the scene. Mahesh, son of Lalaram Bharatiya (40), a resident of Khojapur, Phulpur, was seriously injured in the accident. With the help of locals, efforts were made to take him to the hospital, but by then he had already died. The driver and other passengers were also injured in the accident and were sent to the hospital for treatment.

Upon receiving the information, police arrived at the scene, took

possession of the body and sent it for post-mortem. Police sent the injured to the hospital for treatment and have begun an investigation. According to family members, Mahesh used to support his family by driving an e-rickshaw in Prayagraj. He has a son and a daughter, who are not yet married. Upon receiving news of the accident, the family was devastated, and family members rushed to the scene. Several local residents and relatives were also present.

Miscreants set fire to a car and a kiosk



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. Miscreants set fire to a parked car. Then, a short distance away, they rang the doorbell of a house and fled the scene. Across the street, they set fire to a samosa and tea stall. The incident occurred in Tharwai police station area, near Gomti No. 40 on Kodsar Road, about two hundred meters from the Upkar Charitable Clinic. Some miscreant elements carried out the incident last Wednesday night. At around 12:24 a.m., a neighbor noticed four cars burning. Then a neighbour called and informed that the car was on fire. When the victim, Sanyogita Gehlot, came out and saw that her four-wheeler was parked some distance away and was burning. She raised an alarm and tried a lot but could not control the fire and the fire kept increasing. The fire brigade was immediately informed by dial 112 and the fire service was informed. The fire brigade reached the spot within a short time and quickly controlled the fire in the burning car, but by then the car had been reduced to ashes. Then on Wednesday morning, the victim gave a written complaint against unknown persons at the local police station Tharwai and

also informed ACP Tharwai Arun Parashar about the incident. Taking cognizance of the matter, he reached the spot and conducted a site inspection and investigated the matter from every angle. Similarly, miscreants also set fire to a samosa and tea stall near Gomti Road No. 40. ACP Tharwai investigated the incident, investigating the CCTV cameras installed at various locations. Inspector Tharwai Santosh Kumar Pandey also arrived at the scene and conducted inquiries, examining CCTV footage and other related information. The victim, Sanyogita Gehlot, stated that she has been living in the house for three months. She is originally from Sadiabad in Ghazipur district. Her husband is a sub-inspector in the CRPF in Pulwama, Srinagar. A neighbor reported that around ten to twelve unidentified individuals came to their home at the time of the incident and rang the doorbell, before fleeing. ACP Tharwai Arun Parashar stated that the matter is being investigated, and the perpetrators of this incident will soon be apprehended. Police teams are actively investigating the matter. The victim said that the glass of the car was also broken after which an attempt was made to set it on fire.

Prisoners at Naini Central Jail in Prayagraj celebrated Holi in a peaceful atmosphere

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. On the occasion of Holi, the festival of colors, prisoners at Naini Central Jail celebrated Holi in a traditional and disciplined manner.

They played Holi with herbal abir-gulal (colourful powder) and flowers and shared the joy of the festival by singing Phaguwa songs to the beats of drums and cymbals. Holi played with herbal colors and flowers as per the instructions of the prison administration, no chemical colors were used in the prison premises. The prisoners themselves prepared herbal colors a week in advance. These natural colors were mixed in water tankers and Holi was played in circles. Prisoners went to different barracks, applying gulal to each other and greeting each other with hugs. Festival celebrated in the presence of officials. Prison officials were also present in various circles on the occasion of Holi and joined the prisoners in the festivities. The administration had already issued instructions to prevent any disturbance or disorder. The prisoners observed discipline and celebrated the festival in a peaceful atmosphere. Monitored by CCTV cameras. The entire event was monitored through approximately 65 CCTV cameras installed in the prison premises. This was monitored from the prison command center as well as from Lucknow to ensure order was maintained in all circles and officers were present. Visits banned due to the festival. In view of Holi, the prison administration had banned visitors for one day. A notice was posted outside the prison in advance to avoid inconvenience to visitors from distant places. Visits were strictly conducted a day before Holi, and items brought in from outside were thoroughly checked. Visits will be restored to normal after the festival. Prisoners seen in prison uniform. Prisoners were seen in prison uniform while playing Holi. Some appeared in white clothes, others in yellow kurtas and red caps. Everyone greeted each other with abir-gulal (coloured powder) and wished the festival well. Special food arrangements also made. On the occasion of Holi, the jail administration prepared special meals for the prisoners. One meal will consist of dal, rice, roti, and vegetables, while another will include paneer curry, puri, and semolina pudding. Senior Jail Superintendent Vijay Vikram Singh said that, like every year, the prisoners celebrated Holi with mutual brotherhood.



In Holagarh, a middle-aged man was shot by miscreants in a car over a dispute regarding the removal of a vehicle

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. On Wednesday afternoon, Ram Asare Yadav was shot by miscreants in a car in Kasturipur Harikishan village over the removal of a vehicle. The middle-aged man was injured by the bullet. The injured man fell to the ground and writhed in pain. The sound of the gunshot caused panic in the village. The attackers fled in the car, while villagers chased and apprehended one of them. They also vandalized the car and began beating the arrested youths. Upon receiving the news of the shooting on Holi, Holagarh police immediately arrived at the scene and admitted the injured to Sadar SRN Hospital for treatment. His condition is reported to be critical. Police are



currently interrogating the arrested youth, who has been detained. The incident has caused panic in the village. In Kasturipur Harikishan village, under the Holagarh police station area, a dispute arose over the removal of a vehicle by a car driver. Four or five criminals arrived in the village, where an altercation ensued.

Eyewitnesses reported that the criminals fired a shot from a pistol. Ram Asare Yadav (50), son of Ram Charan Yadav, was injured. The attackers also brutally beat Ram Kailash, who tried to intervene, and fled. When villagers heard the gunshots, the attackers threatened them and fled. The villagers chased and

apprehended one of the attackers, beating him. Upon receiving news of the incident, Holagarh police station in-charge Virendra Kumar Mishra arrived with his force and rushed to the village. The injured was admitted to Swarup Rani Nehru Hospital for treatment. The arrested youth is being questioned by police. At present, after the incident, the police have started investigation into the matter by taking the car along with the youths into custody. Holagarh police station in-charge Virendra Kumar Mishra said that on the complaint of Ram Kailash Yadav, a preliminary FIR is being registered against six named and seven to eight unknown persons and a youth is being interrogated after being taken into custody.

Dr. Dinesh Sharma has been honored with an Honorary Doctorate

Mathura

Mathura

Internationally renowned artist and senior journalist Dr. Dinesh Sharma has been honored with an Honorary Doctorate (Honorary Causa) by the Visionary Doctorate Awards (VDA) for his outstanding contributions to the fields of music and folk dance. The award was presented on January 11, 2026, at A Ceremony held in Delhi by Manoj Tripathi, President of

the Visionary Doctorate Awards. Upon his arrival in Mathura after receiving the honor, Dr. Sharma was given a grand welcome and felicitation by respected gurus and well-wishers at Radha Kund in the Govardhan area. On this occasion, he performed a traditional milk abhishek and offered prayers at Radha Kund, seeking blessings. This achievement has created an atmosphere of joy in both the art

world and the field of journalism. Many distinguished personalities, artists and journalists extended their heartfelt congratulations to Dr. Sharma on this accomplishment. During his stay in Mathura, he was accompanied by Arun Rawal, Braj folk singer and All India Radio artist Aakash, Pandit Hari Shankar Shukla, Narendra Sharma, Mukut Bihari Kaushik, Amit Sharma, Kallan Utsaj, Jeeva Nagar, and Ajit Chauhan.

Ramrath' creates a golden chapter in history— Dr. Rajeshwar Singh's Ayodhya pilgrimage reaches its 50th milestone

Lucknow

The 'Ramrath-Shravan Ayodhya Yatra' free bus service, launched by BJP MLA Dr Rajeshwar Singh has created a golden chapter in the field of social service, devotion and people's connect. The 50th pilgrimage was flagged off from the Jagdambeshwar Mahadev Temple, Ashiyana, through two buses carrying around 120 senior citizens associated with the Second Innings Senior Citizen Club, who were taken for darshan at Ayodhya Dham. This initiative, led by Dr Singh, has become a living symbol of social harmony, compassion, and commitment—a movement that connects faith with service,

devotion with humanity and belief with belongingness. **History and Purpose of the Journey** The service was inaugurated on 27 September 2022 by Dr Rajeshwar Singh in the sacred memory of his late mother Tara Singh. Since its inception, the pilgrimage has enabled over 7000 devotees from the Sarojini Nagar constituency to visit Ayodhya Dham, including senior citizens, women, students, trainees and residents of old-age homes. This initiative has become a blessing for those who once considered the darshan of Ayodhya merely a distant dream due to financial or physical limitations. Dr Singh's team actively

accompanies every trip, ensuring complete arrangements for food, water, prasad and medical assistance.

In Ayodhya, where buses cannot reach, devotees are taken via battery rickshaws to visit Ram Lalla, Hanuman Garhi, and the holy banks of the Saryu River, ensuring every participant experiences a complete and joyful spiritual journey. MLA Dr Rajeshwar Singh in the Role of 'Shravan Kumar' This journey has redefined the identity of Sarojini Nagar. The elderly residents proudly say, "Dr Rajeshwar Singh is not just our MLA he is our Shravan Kumar." Indeed, he has proved that politics can transcend.

The festival of colors was celebrated with great enthusiasm in various localities of Prayagraj, life was immersed in joy



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. Holi was celebrated with joy and traditional enthusiasm in various localities of the city on Wednesday. Many areas, including Civil Lines, Chowk, Jansenganj, and Mutthiganj, witnessed a splash of colors and gulal from early morning. People were seen applying abir-gulal to each other in the streets and roads, wishing each other a happy Holi. Children had fun with water guns and colors, while groups of young people danced and sang Fagua songs to the beats of dholak and DJ music. Traditional Fagua and Chautal gatherings



were also held at many places,

creating a festive atmosphere.

Women formed groups and sang folk songs and shared the joy of the festival by applying colors to each other. Elderly people also participated enthusiastically, embracing each other and spreading the message of love, brotherhood, and harmony. People visited each other's homes, distributing sweets and wishing each other a happy Holi. Holi celebrations in the city were held peacefully amid vigilant administration. Police were deployed at various locations. The colorful celebrations continued well into the evening, with people enjoying traditional dishes.

People rejoiced in the Sangam city with a splash of colors, blockade Holi, and rain dances

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. The festival of colors, Holi, is being celebrated with great enthusiasm and zeal in the Sangam city of Prayagraj. Abir-gulal (colourful powder) is flying in the streets and squares of the city, and people are seen immersed in the joy of colors. Youths organized blockade Holi celebrations at many places, enjoying the rain dance to the tunes of DJ music and artificial fountains. In many areas of the city, including Chowk, Loknath, Jansenganj, Bahadurganj, Meerapur, Shastri Nagar, Leader Road, Malviya Nagar, Mutthiganj, Kidganj, Bai Ka Bagh, Daraganj, Allahpur, and Alopibagh, young people and children celebrated Holi with great enthusiasm amidst a rain of colors. Traditional dung and mud Holi was also seen at many places. In the Chowk-Loknath area, Holi was celebrated with a different flavor amidst the beats of dholak, cymbals, and tambourines, accompanied by Phaguni songs. At Loknath Square, people played Holi with Tesu flowers, abir-gulal, and rose petals. Colors were mixed in large drums and sprayed on the Holi revelers. The Loknath Milan Sangha arranged special fountains, allowing people to enjoy the splashes of color.

Historical Significance of Loknath Holi



Senior citizen Naresh Sehgal explains that Holi in Loknath has always been special. He said he previously lived in the area and has been witnessing

Holi here for years. He says that in ancient times, many prominent figures used to come here to enjoy Holi. It is said that figures like the country's

first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and educationist Madan Mohan Malaviya once visited. Besides, many famous figures like Chunnan Guru, Janeshwar

Mishra, and Satish Chandra Jaiswal also participated in the Holi celebrations in Loknath. The tradition of Loknath's cloth tearing and col-

orful Holi will continue in the city on Thursday also, while on Friday the tradition of heavy color showering will be followed in Thatheri Bazaar.

Cricket dispute: Two communities face off, tension in Kiraon, Mauaima

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. A dispute broke out between two communities over a cricket ball in Kiraon village, Mauaima. As the dispute escalated, the two sides clashed, prompting a heavy police deployment in the village. The incident occurred in Chauhan Ka Pura, Kiraon. Some Muslim youths were playing cricket when their ball landed on the nearby shed of Kuldeep Saroj. When Sahjad, son of Ilyas, a resident of Kiraon, asked for



the ball back, Anant (son of Nanhe, about 21 years old) and Abbe (son of Raju,

about 21 years old), along with 4-5 other youths from the Hindu community, who

were present nearby, refused to return the ball. When the ball was not

returned, members of both communities clashed. Police arrived at the scene on the information of villagers and somehow calmed the situation. Given the gravity of the situation, the police force conducted a flag march in the village. According to sources, when the two sides confronted each other, one side reportedly opened fire in the air, although the police have denied any such incident. The entire matter relates to an ongoing dispute between the Dalit and Muslim communities over a piece of

land, a case pending in court. The two communities frequently clash over this piece of land. Following the incident, a heavy police force, led by ACP Phulpur Vivek Yadav, has been deployed in the village to prevent any untoward incident. ACP Phulpur Vivek Yadav stated that the dispute began over children playing cricket, leading to a confrontation between the two communities. Police are deployed at the scene, and legal action will be taken based on the complaint.

Dr. Vikrant Appointed Youth President of Labour Party

Lucknow
The national leadership of the National Labour Party (NLP) has appointed Dr. Vikrant Pratap Singh as the State Youth President of Uttar Pradesh to strengthen the organization. In the official appointment letter issued by National President of the National Labour Party, Neeraj Rai, it was stated that Dr. Vikrant Pratap Singh has consistently demonstrated dedication, active leadership.

The body of an unidentified youth was found in the Ganges River near Semra, and police are working to identify him

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Gazipur. The discovery of the body of an unidentified youth in the Ganges River near Semra village in the Muhammadabad police station area of the district on Thursday created a stir in the area. Police, responding to information from local residents, retrieved the body from the river, took it into custody, and have begun efforts to identify it. According to information received, on Thursday, March 5, 2026, some villagers spotted a body floating in the Ganges River near Semra. They immediately called 112. Upon receiving the information, Kotwali in-charge Inspector Rajesh Tripathi arrived at the scene with police



force, took necessary action, and began the post-mortem process. According to police, the deceased is estimated to be between 30 and 35 years old. The youth was wearing black jeans, a green round-neck shirt, and a jacket. His identity has not been established yet. Inspector Rajesh Tripathi, in-charge of the police station, stated that efforts are being made to identify the unidentified youth. A missing person

report has also been registered at the police station, so that if any information is received, he can be identified. The police have appealed to the public that if anyone has any information about this unidentified youth, they can contact the police station's CUG number 9454403458 and provide information. At the time of writing, the body had not been identified, and the police are investigating the matter.

Holi was celebrated with great enthusiasm in Sarayataki, with people applying abir-gulal



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. Holi, the festival of colours, was celebrated with great enthusiasm and zeal on Wednesday in the Sarayataki locality of the Jhansi area. People shared the joy of the festival by applying abir-gulal (colour-

ful colour) to each other and spread the message of mutual brotherhood. The presence of Bhairav Baba Maharaj, a disciple of the Girnar Ashram, made the event special. He spoke to the audience about the social and cultural significance of Holi. The event was held at the

residence of Anoop Mishra, manager of Akhand Bharat Sandesh, and was attended by a large number of people from the locality. People enjoyed Holi by applying gulal (colourful colour) to each other and exchanging greetings. Vishnu Kant Mishra, Kamal

Kant Mishra, Satish Mishra, Yogesh Mishra, Seema Mishra (co-editor), Mohit Mishra (social media in-charge), Ranjana Mishra, Gauri, Soni, Nishi, Nishant, Aman, Pihu, Mohini, and Durgansh Shukla, among others, were present on the occasion.

Editorial

T Kharagpur wants students to run to mommy. 'Campus Mothers' is regression not innovation

At a time when gender equity discussions are taking centre stage, IIT Kharagpur's reductive framing of women through the 'Campus Mothers' initiative as default caregivers is tragically regressive. Reinforcing outdated gender norms under the guise of support, it sidelines efforts for gender parity and ultimately does a disservice to all genders. The urgent need to expand mental health support on college campuses and create multiple avenues of care and intervention is not under debate here. What merits scathing scrutiny is the blatant gender stereotyping disguised as an innovative initiative. The core idea of community-based health-care initiatives like 'Campus Mothers' is not new. One of the earliest examples is Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), developed in the US in the 1970s, which includes Peer Support Specialists to provide mental health support. From India, Atmiyata is a community-based mental health initiative that has shown evidence-based success in Maharashtra and Gujarat. Similar community mental health models in Japan and other countries have also shown encouraging rates of success. However, in their decades-long global history, community mental health support has never been the exclusive domain or responsibility of women. Framing caregiving as inherently feminine erases the contributions of others and reinforces regressive gender norms that hinder equitable participation in both caregiving and mental health advocacy. By soliciting the active participation of women as 'Campus Mothers', the initiative is likely to exclude other genders, especially men from this important mental health initiative, undermining the very equity that such programmes should strive to promote. "Many of these women have experienced motherhood themselves—some have grown up children who may now be living abroad or otherwise independent. Having gone through motherhood, they understand the unique challenges children face," said the director of IIT Kharagpur, Suman Chakraborty. We find this quote especially problematic.

The notion that experiencing motherhood inherently grants women a magical capacity for empathy is both reductive and exclusionary. By that logic, men—having never experienced motherhood—are naturally disqualified from being empathetic. But empathy is not biologically bestowed through motherhood; it is cultivated through a range of life experiences, self-awareness, and emotional engagement. The best counsellors and therapists, or psychiatrists are not defined by their gender or parental status. A nurturing environment requires participation from all genders. Since 'Campus Mothers' involves training, why not train all genders? This initiative deliberately propagates the surrogate maternal figure, reinforcing the "run-to-mommy-when-hurt" stereotype. Equally troubling is the assumption that older women, having completed their primary caregiving roles, now need something to "fill their time". And 'Campus Mothers' is supposed to be a productive way to keep them occupied. This framing is deeply patriarchal and condescending, reducing women's identities to domestic roles and positioning them as permanent caregivers for other people's children once their own have left home. Audaciously enough, the 'Campus Mothers' initiative has also been called a leadership opportunity for women. "By involving women as key emotional anchors on campus, the initiative also promotes women's participation and leadership in the academic community," reads an article on The Bridge Chronicle. What kind of leadership opportunity is envisaged for women who participate in this programme? Do they get visibility for leadership roles traditionally held by men in the administrative.

RJD has an EBC dream in Bihar. It'll take more than tickets & tokenism

The former means nominating candidates from those castes and communities, while the latter involves promising policies that benefit them. The RJD relied on the first strategy, nominating a high number of EBC candidates in the 2020 election. One may counter that the RJD also adopted the strategy of policy change by promising 10 lakh government jobs, from which EBCs would also potentially benefit. So why did EBCs not respond to such promises?

One answer could be low educational attainment among EBCs and their limited ability to benefit from reservation policies. Across North Indian states, EBCs have demanded a sub-categorisation within OBC reservations, arguing that they are unable to compete with politically dominant OBC groups such as Yadavs and Kurmis. The BJP responded by appointing the Justice Rohini Committee to examine this demand. At the same time, welfare schemes introduced by the Narendra Modi government have also reached these communities. Because of its alliance with the BJP, the JDU has benefited from both strategies—ticket splitting and policy response—while opposition parties like the RJD have remained stuck on the for-



mer. This could partly explain the aversion of EBCs toward the RJD. In the upcoming election, RJD's Tejashwi Yadav is promising to extend the limit of reservation, along with the introduction of a domicile policy for government jobs. However, none of these policies are specifically targeted to address the grievances of EBCs. Unless the party does that, it would be a herculean task to break the aversion. To sum up, the RJD's attempt to expand its social coalition by adding EBCs to its MY base did not deliver encouraging results in the last election. Relying on ticket-splitting alone to mobilise these communities hasn't worked. The party now needs to explore mechanisms beyond candidate nomination. Offering specific welfare schemes could be one of them. Otherwise, it may just be staring at a repeat of 2020.

As Bihar gears up for the assembly elections later this year, the opposition

Rashtriya Janata Dal has appointed Mangani Lal Mandal as its new state president—the first time it has chosen someone who belongs to the Extremely Backward Classes, or EBCs, a voting bloc that comprises 113 castes and makes up 36 per cent of the state's population. So far, though, EBCs have shown an aversion toward the RJD. Instead, they have gravitated toward the JDU, now in alliance with the BJP, which mobilised its election machinery in Bihar immediately after winning the Delhi assembly election. The question now arises whether the RJD will succeed in its efforts to attract EBCs through the appointment of Mandal. Based on an analysis of caste-wise candidate nominations by the RJD and JDU, and their respective victories in the 2020 Bihar assembly election, I argue that the RJD needs to move beyond political appointments for the mobilisation of such communities. It also needs to focus on exclu-

sive policies intended to empower EBCs. Otherwise, it will be extremely difficult to break the scepticism of the EBCs. Bihar is well known for caste-based political mobilisation. The caste background of candidates is an important indicator of how parties build their social coalitions. It also helps us to understand the support of different castes for various political parties. Let's take a look at the caste-wise candidate nominations and wins of the RJD and JDU in the 2020 Bihar assembly election. This analysis examines the caste composition of nominees and elected representatives from the RJD and JDU in the 2020 Bihar Assembly election, based on candidate data from media reports. The graph below shows that the RJD's highest number of candidates came from the Yadav community (58). After them, only three other groups—EBCs (19), Scheduled Castes (19), and Muslims (18)—had candidates in double digits. Seen as a whole, the RJD focused primarily on its traditional MY (Muslim-Yadav) base, followed by an attempt to bring in EBCs. However, its EBC candidates performed badly. Out of 19 nominated, only four won. In contrast, JDU's EBC candidates performed impressively. It nominated 17

EBC candidates, out of which 12 won. The party's overall ticket distribution was also not concentrated on any one social group. Seven social groups—Yadav (18), EBC (17), SC (16), Kurmi (15), Kushwaha (15), Muslim (11), and Bhumihar (10)—had candidates in double digits. It's worth noting, though, that the highest number of JDU candidates also came from the Yadavs. This nomination profile might be symbolic, but it also conveys a message that the party is not against the legitimate representation of any particular social group. Here, the RJD did not appear as above board, as it had nominated only one candidate from the Kurmi caste, which is the support base of the JDU. In short, the above comparative analysis reveals EBCs have largely steered clear of the RJD.

Despite nominating a larger number of candidates from the group, only four of its 19 EBC candidates won, compared to 12 of JDU's 17. It is often stated that Nitish Kumar has created a constituency of women, MBCs, and Mahadalits, and these social groups have gradually become a strong support base of the JDU. To break the social base of any political party, a rival typically deploys two strategies: ticket splitting and policy changes.

Bombay HC has left women advocates without a PoSH shield

The Bombay High Court recently rejected a petition asking it to order the Maharashtra-Goa Bar Council and the Bar Council of India to set up permanent committees for handling sexual harassment complaints under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013. Every woman advocate in India is now outside the PoSH net. The Division Bench of the Bombay High Court concluded that no employer-employee relationship exists between advocates and Bar Councils. That nexus is the linchpin of the PoSH Act. The Act's architecture presupposes an employer capable of setting up an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC), enforcing penalties, and supervising compliance. Since Bar Councils are not "employers" and advocates are not "employees", the judges held, PoSH's machinery simply has nothing to attach itself to. Hence, there is no obligation to set up ICCs at state or national Bar Councils. The Court noted that victims of sexual harassment could

instead use the avenue of filing a complaint of misconduct under the Advocates Act. The Bombay High Court order reopens the faultline that has shadowed the PoSH Act since its birth. The Act traces back to the Vishaka guidelines rooted in the 1992 gang rape of Bhanwari Devi, a government field worker who was attacked by dominant-caste men while campaigning against child marriage. Although the Supreme Court invoked constitutional guarantees to establish guidelines on redressing sexual harassment at work, it confined those safeguards to a model that required a formal employer. When Parliament finally codified PoSH in 2013, that structure was embedded in the Act. The duty to constitute ICCs, train staff and committee members, and create a safe working environment was placed wholly on an identifiable employer. The Bombay High Court Bench relied squarely on that design architecture to reject the current plea.

Paradox of India's S-400 deal—key asset delayed when country needs it most

On the sidelines of the otherwise contentious Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Qingdao, a quiet yet significant development unfolded. India was once again assured by Russia of the timely delivery of the remaining two S-400 Triumf air defence systems. Russian defence minister Andrei Belousov himself communicated this to his Indian counterpart Rajnath Singh, offering some comfort to New Delhi's strategic planners. Indian media outlets covered the commitment with cautious relief. The S-400 systems, which form the outermost layer of India's integrated air defence shield, have proven particularly effective during Operation Sindoor. They successfully integrated with domestically developed platforms like the Akash surface-to-air missiles, L-70 anti-aircraft guns, and indigenous drones. Unsurprisingly, there is a growing consensus within India's strategic community that New Delhi must not only complete the current S-400 procurement but also explore future acquisitions, possibly including the more advanced S-500 systems. However, this optimism belies the long and complicated journey of the S-400 deal. Signed in 2018 at a value of \$5.43 billion, the agreement was initially hailed as a bold assertion of India's strategic autonomy, especially during the Trump administration. In 2020, NATO ally Turkey faced sanctions under CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) for pursuing the same system. India had escaped US sanctions, a testament to its rising importance in the evolving Indo-Pacific calculus. Yet, what was once a symbol of defiance and diplomatic balance has now become a victim of President Putin's protracted war in Ukraine.

Originally scheduled for delivery between 2021 and 2023, the first three S-400 systems did arrive by

late 2021. The remaining two, however, remain undelivered as Russia's war in Ukraine enters its fourth year, with no clear end in sight. The timeline has repeatedly slipped. There are at least four critical factors behind these delays, which highlight both vulnerabilities and priorities of the Russian defence sector, as well as the geopolitical complexities surrounding Moscow's partnerships. Russia has suffered significant material losses in Ukraine. While propaganda from both sides makes verification difficult, independent monitoring groups like Oryx have documented that at least 12 S-400 systems have been partially or completely destroyed. This is significant, given the S-400's role as the backbone of Russia's long-range air defence, with more than 30 regiments reportedly in service. The S-400 is vital for safeguarding Russia's expansive territory—particularly as its military posture faces new threats from NATO's rejuvenated eastern flank. If Russia is short on operational systems, it is far more likely to divert new production toward replenishing its own arsenals than fulfilling export obligations. To understand how important the S-400 programme is for Russia,

we must look back at its roots. Revitalised around 2000 under President Putin, the programme was part of a broader effort to restore Russia's defence industrial base and resuscitate its economy. A state-backed investment drive led to the expansion of three major production hubs: Obukhov Plant in St Petersburg, the Avitek Plant in Kirov, and the NMP Plant in Nizhny Novgorod. These efforts bore fruit by 2016, enabling large-scale production of the S-400 as well as newer systems like the S-300V4 and S-500. In January 2023, Putin even visited the Obukhovsky Plant, publicly claiming.

Can Musk And His American Party Rely On 'Vibes'?

The American Party. Is it the birth of a new political force of disruption and even hope in the United States, or just another Independence Day startup with a flag? While most Americans were busy enjoying fireworks and patriotic ballads on July 4, Elon Musk was hunched over his phone, obsessing not over liberty but over the results of a poll he posted on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, now moonlighting as his personal megaphone and emotional weather vane. The question was, should he launch a new political party? The answer, to his delight, was a resounding yes, with nearly two-thirds of

1.2 million respondents cheering him on. Musk took this as nothing short of divine instruction, promptly declaring the birth of the America Party. Until recently, billionaires busied themselves buying sports teams or building vanity rockets. But that looks old-school. Starting your own political party? That's the new superpower. Musk insists this isn't just a passing whim but a much-needed emancipation from what he calls the "Uniparty", his term for the interchangeable swamp monsters that allegedly populate both the Republican and Democratic machines. "Do you want independence from the two-party

system?" he asked his followers. Over 1.2 million users clicked "yes", which in Muskland is basically a constitutional convention. But before we light any more sparklers in celebration of the claim of American democracy's rebirth, let's step back. Is this really a new political force or just Musk rage-quitting the Republican Party in full view of his followers? After all, just weeks ago, he was Donald Trump's golden boy, literally. Musk was chairing the Department of Government Efficiency (aka 'Doge'), a symbolic nod to his uncanny ability to combine governance with meme stock aesthetics. Trump praised

Musk as a genius who would revolutionise Washington. Their bromance, once sealed with Tesla stock and campaign donations, turned into an electrified divorce. Musk denounced Trump's new tax-and-spend 'orgy' as fiscal lunacy. Trump, in return, called Musk a "train wreck" trying to force electric cars down America's throat. To which Musk replied, essentially: "Fine. I'm starting my own party. With blackjack. And freedom." At first glance, this seems like classic Silicon Valley hubris - another tech mogul who believes that because he can colonise Mars, he can also fix swing states.

Privatized entities can employ Aadhaar authentication

Delhi : The ministry of electronics and IT (Meity) announced that the Union government has amended the Aadhaar rules to allow private entities to use Aadhaar authentication for service delivery. The amendments aim to give residents "ease of living" and "better access to services". Ministry Notified Aadhaar Authentication for Good Governance (Social Welfare, Innovation, Knowledge) Amendment Rules, 2025, revising 2020 rules. "The amendment allows government and non-government entities to use Aadhaar authentication, promoting trusted transactions for both providers and users," stated the announcement. It stated that the amendment will make non-government e-commerce, travel, tourism, hospitality, and health services easier to use.

The 2020 rules allowed the Centre to



allow Aadhaar authentication only "in the interest of good governance, preventing leakage of public funds, promoting ease of living of residents and enabling better access to services for them" to use digital platforms for good governance, social welfare benefit dissipation prevention, and innovation and knowledge dissemination. The amendments removed "in the interest of good governance, preventing leakage of public funds access to services for them" and added "promoting ease of living of residents and enabling better access to services for them" as the fourth purpose, expanding the reasons for authentication.

Prasanna S, the Supreme Court's advocate-on-record who challenged Aadhaar's constitutionality, called the expansion the "spectre of a surveillance state", "unwarranted" and in violation of the top court's ruling that struck down Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act, 2016 to bar private entities from using authentication services. The 2025 Rules change contradicts the five-judge Supreme Court ruling in Puttaswamy v Union of India (2018). Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act, 2016 prohibiting private entities from employing authentication services was overturned. He claimed this amendment practically re-legislates what was ruled down.

Women own almost 50% of small manufacturing businesses

A survey found that 58% of manufacturing businesses were owned by women in 2023-24, up 4% from the previous year.The Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) 2023-24 found that 28.1% of workers were women. More than one-third (33.7%) of OAES' workforce is female in OAEs (owned enterprises). Female-owned businesses rose to 26.2% in 2023-24 from 22.9% in and 9.7% to 14.2% in other services. Female workers comprised 18.5% of recruited workers. Female workers were



most prevalent in manufacturing (46.5%), followed by other services (22.5%) and trade. West Bengal has the most female workers (12.7%), followed by Uttar Pradesh (10.4%) and Maharashtra (9.7%) in ASUSE 2023-24. West Bengal and Maharashtra have the most rural and urban female workers, at 16% and 13%,

respectively. Non-incorporated non-far establishments are not registered under the Companies Act 1956 or the 2013 Act.

Every fourth proprietary establishment in India was owned by a woman. Women run one-third of private businesses in Gujarat, Karnataka, Telangana, and West Bengal.

Health and wealth benefit from flexible work hours

Delhi: The Economic Survey supports allowing manufacturers to average legally capped working hours over three weeks or longer rather than week-by-week. Industry captains want larger hours. It claims that agile regulations will assist management satisfy production

demands and grow. "New Labour Laws are an improvement. With flexible legislation and competent implementation, firms may develop and create more jobs. "They protect labor rights and boost wages," it stated. The Survey complained that labor laws like the

Factories Act (1948) limit working hours to 48 per week, whereas other nations "allow these caps to be averaged over multiple days and weeks". It said India's working hour laws impede manufacturers from satisfying demand and competing globally.

IT panel to propose TV, print, online media umbrella

Delhi: The Parliamentary panel on communications and information technology, led by BJP lawmaker Nishikant Dubey, will recommend that the Union government form the Media Council of India to regulate print, television, and online media, sources said. A senior panelist suggested an umbrella body because the same content occurs across platforms. You work for a paper. The Press Council of India oversees your newspaper articles. No regulation exists for the identical story in the paper's online edition." There is no central regulator for online material, but two groups regulate print and electronic media. The Press Council of India, a statutory quasi-judicial



autonomous authority established by Parliament, protects press freedom and improves newspaper and news agency standards. Among other major media regulatory reforms, the panel, which addressed fake news extensively will recommend this. In the discussion,

Dubey added, "Paid news is rampant. Illiterate and gullible individuals think alike. Without strict regulations, ethical boundaries are crossed. Investigative journalism is discouraged by expensive and lengthy legal fights for journalists and media corporations.

Foreign insurers gain ownership via 100% FDI

Delhi: 100% FDI will attract new capital, as multinationals can now invest without worrying about control or Indian partners. The capital gains tax rate of 12% applies to ULIP proceeds, which do not benefit from tax exemptions, instead of the higher marginal tax rate of 30%. Crop cover reinsurance is exempt from service tax, and the threshold for tax deduction at source on insurance commission has risen from Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000. M Nagraju, financial services secretary, said the FDI relaxation was one of the suggested insurance measures, and the modifications would

WhatsApp claims Israeli spyware Paragon targets users

Delhi: After the hack, WhatsApp issued Paragon a cease-and-desist letter. WhatsApp stated it "will continue to protect people's ability to communicate privately." Paragon wouldn't comment. WhatsApp officials reported a hacking attempt on 90 users. A number of civil society and media figures were targeted, although the official did not specify who or where. He said WhatsApp has stopped the hacking and was referring targets to Citizen Lab. Officials would not reveal how they determined



Paragon was responsible for the hack. He claimed law enforcement and industry partners were informed but declined to elaborate. Paragon sells high-end surveillance software to government clients, claiming it is essential to combating crime and defending national security. However, journalists, activists, opposition

politicians, and at least 50 US officials have found surveillance capabilities on their phones, raising fears about the technology's unregulated expansion. Paragon, which was apparently acquired by Florida-based investment group AE Industrial Partners last month, has strived to identify as a responsible industry actor.

Public infrastructure spending rises, but private sector participation falls

Delhi: The 2024-25 Economic Survey delivered to Parliament found that India still struggles with infrastructure development despite government efforts. The union government's capital investment on major infrastructure sectors grew 38.8% from FY20 to FY24, although private sector participation in core areas remained low, according to the survey. "India needs a continued step-up of infrastructure investment over the next two decades to sustain a high rate of growth," the research says. The National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) program has met its FY22-24 objective of 4.30 lakh crore with transactions totaling 3.86 lakh crore. In Q1 FY25, average monthly capital spend-



The National Critical Mineral Mission gets 16,300 crore from the cabinet

Delhi : The Union Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, launched the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM) with a 16,300 crore expenditure and a projected 18,000 crore investment from PSUs and other businesses. "Several crucial decisions have created new scientific and technology prospects for our children, future generations, and the economy. Minister told a Cabinet briefing that PM Modi the National Critical Minerals Mission today.

ing dropped to 0.60 lakh crore from 0.66 lakh crore in July-November 2024. Railway network expansion remained constant at 2,000 kilometers, with 17 Vande Bharat train pairs and 228 carriages added.

Price pressure caps senior citizen health premium hikes at 10%

As medicare policy rates skyrocket for seniors over 60, Irdai has ordered insurers not to raise senior people's health premiums by more than 10% without approval. Before canceling senior health coverage, insurers must get regulator clearance. As healthcare prices rise, insurers are



advised to standardize hospital empanelment and negoti-

ate package rates like the government's PM Jan Arogya Yojana. Irdai reported a large increase in prices for various health insurance policies for subscribers over 60. Premium rates depend on projected claims, administrative expenditures, and acquisition costs, the regulator said. Private

insurance doesn't standardize hospitalization expenses, unlike PMJAY, which negotiates consistent package rates, which drives these rises. Seniors have reported virtually doubling their costs when entering a higher age category during an insurer's pricing change.

Redesigning agri export policies

Delhi: Three sources intimately involved in the process said India's six-year-old Agricultural Export Policy (AEP) will be overhauled as export destinations vary and the country's farm export basket diversifies. The planned study will improve Indian agricultural products' competitiveness, assure global standards compliance, and promote value-added products. The officials quoted above added on condition of anonymity that it will also aim to enhance commercial links with emerging countries while main-



taining strong partnerships with old partners. "Our agricultural exports have grown over the past five years. We must examine the policy to match export targets with market demands. One of the three persons cited above claimed

the agriculture ministry will assist with the review and set a deadline. India was the eighth-largest agricultural exporter in 2023 despite a drop from \$51.12 billion to \$48.77 billion in FY24. Recently, changing global demand pat-

Norms to stop annoying calls and surrogate advertisements next month

Delhi: Thirteen businesses, including significant producers of alcohol, tobacco, and paan masala, have received notifications from the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) for using surrogate advertising. The dishonest practice of using the

same brand name to promote products that are prohibited from direct advertising is known as "surrogate advertising." Pralhad Joshi, the union minister of consumer affairs, stated that the CCPA is creating regulations to control the issue.

terns, trading partners, and agricultural technology have changed how and where agricultural products are sold. Two newly appointed MPC members have revived the Economic Survey's dis-

ussion on removing food inflation from monetary policy. Q2 GDP growth and November food inflation may have unnerved MPC outsiders.

'Women-led films need theatres'

Konkona Sensharma says theatrical offers have reduced, hopes for diverse, women-led and intimate dramas to return to cinemas soon

Actor Konkona Sensharma has a desire to return to the big screen with a theatrical film, saying such offers have become rare for her. For the actor, the rise of streaming platforms has helped bridge that gap. She has earned critical acclaim for her performances in series *Mumbai Diaries* and *Killer Soup* as well as the anthology film *Ajeb Daastaans*.

"By and large I've to say that these (offers) are usually web series. Thank God I'm so happy. I've been a part of wonderful web series, working with absolutely wonderful people. So, I've been very lucky. But it is true that very few offers come for theatrical nowadays to me," the actor told PTI.

Early in her career, the 46-year-old actor made a mark with her off-beat theatrical films like *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer*, for which she won the *National Award*, followed by diverse range of films such as *Page 3*, *Life In a Metro*, *Omkaara*, *Wake up Sid*, *Talvar*, *Zoya Akhtar's* debut movie, *Luck by Chance* and ensemble film *Lipstick Under my Burkha*.

Speaking on the current state of the industry, Sensharma said that for a healthy cinematic ecosystem a variety of films should be

feel these (women-led) should be in theatres. why

should we only watch epic action based or war films. I would've loved to watch all kinds of films in theatres, even more intimate family dramas or comedies, how it used to be. Unfortunately, that is not the trend right now. But I hope that things will change," the actor said.

I feel these kinds of films (women-led) should be in theatres, why should we only watch epic action based or war films — Konkona Sensharma

Sensharma believes that due to commercial pressures, women-led stories and intimate dramas are getting sidelined today.

"I feel that all kinds of films should exist and make it to the theatres, and that is what is best for the audience as well as they can pick and choose (what they want to watch). Unfortunately, a lot of decisions that are taken, are not just for what is best for a cause or for films or society or for women, a lot of these decisions are economic. Those are the factors which determine these things and that is the unfortunate reality," she said.

The actor currently stars in the Netflix movie *Accused*. The movie is directed by Anubhuti Kashyap and also stars Pratibha Ranta of *Laapataa Ladies*.



Photo: Instagram_@konkonas



Photos: Instagram_@selenagomez

Selena hopes to have four kids with Blanco

Singer-actress Selena Gomez has spoken about her having children with husband Benny Blanco.

She was seen talking about her expanding her brood in the second episode of the *Friends Keep Secrets* podcast, reports people.com.

The 33-year-old appeared on the new podcast, hosted by her husband Benny Blanco, 37, and close friends Lil Dicky (whose real name is Dave Burd) and his wife Kristin Batalucco.

During the episode, Blanco asked Burd and Batalucco how many children they hope to have. "One, two max," Burd answered, before Batalucco said, "like three." "I want four, but that's out there," Gomez, who married Blanco in September 2025.

Gomez then shared a major reason for wanting four children, a notable scene from *The Family Stone*, a holiday film about the unique dynamics present in an unusual family hosting their son's girlfriend for *Christmas* for the first time.

Diane Keaton played the



Selena Gomez and Benny Blanco

matriarch of the family, with Craig T. Nelson, Dermot Mulroney, Sarah Jessica Parker, Rachel McAdams, Luke Wilson and Claire Danes also starring. Gomez noted that the character played by late Keaton, who died aged 79 in October 2025, reminded her of her "nana."

When Blanco chimed in to ask if Burd had seen it, the rapper replied he had not, and Gomez and Blanco described the film as 'sweet' and 'touching,' with Gomez adding that it is 'also sad.' Gomez then began explaining the scene to Burd, saying that she 'can't get it out of

(her) head.' "One day at my dinner table, when I'm her age, I want to see that dinner table," Gomez said.

"Whatever happens, happens. If we're only able to have one, none, I hope... we don't know. But my dream for sure was that scene where they're all at the dinner table and they're just with their partners or their significant others or kids or single and it's just like this beautiful cast of characters." "It's the community of family," Batalucco chimed in. "So, it's actually going to be crazy hell until they become adults," Gomez quipped.

SNIPPETS

Karan Aujla reacts to Holi backlash

Punjabi singer Karan Aujla faced backlash after his Mumbai *Holi* concert at MMRDA Grounds, where fans alleged poor management and a near stampede-like situation. Currently on the India leg of his P-Pop Culture World Tour, he responded on Instagram, hinting at adding a night concert in Mumbai. Tagging organisers Team Innovation, he wrote, "Bombay, I think we need to add a night concert," asking if they were "coming back stronger."



Rajshri Deshpande diagnosed with cancer

Sacred Games actress Rajshri Deshpande on Wednesday revealed that she has been diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer. The actor said she is recovering well after a successful surgery. Sharing a hospital photo on Instagram, she said she found the "courage" to inform her parents about being diagnosed with Infiltrating Ductal Carcinoma (NOS), Grade 1. She added that it was detected during a routine check-up, giving her a "fighting chance," and thanked everyone for their love and support.

Bhai Tera Star Hai begins

Raghav Juyal's comedy drama *Bhai Tera Star Hai* goes on floors in London

Raghav Juyal is currently busy shooting for his comedy film titled *Bhai Tera Star Hai*. Sanjay Kapoor, Niki Aneja, Niharika NM, Barkha Singh, Vivaan Bhatena, Vikalp Mehta, The Jordindians, Parvathy Omanakuttan, Tina Desai and Chandan Roy Sanyal are also a part of the movie.

Excited about the project, Raghav in a press note read, "Last couple of years have been overwhelming to say the least. I am being offered all kinds of scripts which I am really grateful for, but it also comes with the pressure of choosing the ones which I give my everything to. I felt that *Bhai Tera Star Hai* had something which I can add a little bit of my magic to, making

it a complete entertainer. I hope audiences have as much fun watching this one, as much as I have had making it."

The makers described the film as "a fast-paced comedy that blends humour, heart, and contemporary storytelling, backed by a unique multi-platform cast."

Speaking about the start of production, writer/director Vivek B Agrawal shared, "We're excited to begin filming *Bhai Tera Star Hai*. It's a fun and energetic project with a fantastic mix of actors led by Raghav. London gives the film a great canvas, and we're looking forward to bringing this story to audiences very soon." Produced by Eastwood Pictures / Indian Stories2, *Bhai Tera Star Hai* is slated to release this year only.



Photo: Instagram_@raghavjuyal

Photo: Instagram_@iamshitaraj

Ishita Raj calls SKTKS 'a turning point'

Actress Ishita Raj, who played the unforgettable Pihu, has talked about the re-release of *Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety*, which she tagged as a 'turning point' for her. Ishita said: "When I got the news that *Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety* is re-releasing in cinemas, my first reaction was, 'Oh God, Pihu is coming back to break more bromances!' I was honestly on cloud nine. For me, this film was a turning point and will always remain extremely close to my heart, especially because audiences continue to quote the dialogues even today."

She said that she has been a part of new generation films like *Pyaar Ka PUNCHAMA*, but *Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety* is truly special. "I still remember our 10 day schedule in Georgia, where we were shooting and just living those moments as a unit. Working with Luv Ranjan sir and the same crew felt like being with family," she said.

Ishita added: "Sometimes it is difficult to be in sync even with one person, but here there were almost 100 people working on the film and everyone was emotionally aligned. We were just living the moment and it never felt like work." "Watching it return to theatres now feels like reliving that energy all over again. I am grateful to have been part of a film that people still celebrate and are excited to experience on the big screen once more," Ishita concluded.



Stars attend private birthday bash

Ranbir Kapoor, Aryan Khan, Varun Dhawan, Ahan Shetty and Arjun Kapoor were spotted at a private birthday bash



Photo: Instagram_@sinankader

Actors Ranbir Kapoor, Aryan Khan, Varun Dhawan, Ahan Shetty and Arjun Kapoor were seen together at a private birthday party. Photos and videos from the celebration surfaced online on Wednesday.

The event was held at a friend's residence and showed the actors spending time together away from work. The casual gathering quickly caught attention on social media. Fans also speculated about a possible collaboration, though nothing has been confirmed.

Ranbir Kapoor, who is currently busy with *Ramayana* and *Love and War*, took time out to attend the

party. Earlier in the day, he celebrated *Holi* with his daughter, Raha Kapoor. At the event, he was seen singing the birthday song and clapping during the cake-cutting ceremony. Aryan Khan, who has maintained a low profile after his web series *The Baatish of Bollywood*, was also present. He posed for a group photo and appeared relaxed.

Varun Dhawan and Ahan Shetty, recently seen in *Border 2*, attended the party along with Arjun Kapoor. The actors were dressed casually and were seen enjoying the evening in a relaxed setting.

REGIME CHANGE | US holds talks with Iranian opposition groups, Iraqi Kurds CIA working to arm Kurdish forces to spark Iran uprising?

WASHINGTON (US) AND ERBIL (IRAQ)

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is working to arm Kurdish forces to foment a popular uprising in Iran, sources told CNN.

The Donald Trump administration has been in active discussions with Iranian opposition groups and Kurdish leaders in Iraq about providing them with military support, the sources said.

Iranian Kurdish armed groups have thousands of forces operating along the Iraq-Iran border, primarily in Iraq's Kurdistan region. Several groups have released public statements since the beginning of the war hinting at imminent action and urging Iranian military forces to defect. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has been striking Kurdish groups and said on Tuesday it targeted Kurdish forces with dozens of drones.

Also on Tuesday, President Trump spoke to the president of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI), Mustafa Hijri, according to a senior Iranian Kurdish official. KDPI was one of the groups targeted by the IRGC.

Iranian Kurdish opposition forces are likely to take part in a ground operation in Western Iran, in the coming days, the senior Iranian Kurdish official told CNN. "We believe we have a big chance now," the source said, explaining the timing of the operation. The source added the militias expect US and Israeli support.

Trump also called Iraqi Kurdish leaders on Sunday to discuss the US military operation in Iran and how the US and the Kurds could work together as the mission progresses, two US officials and a



A cleric leads a group of volunteers in prayer next to a police facility struck during the US-Israeli military campaign in Tehran, Iran, on Wednesday. —AP/PTI

1,045

people have died in Iran during the ongoing war with the US and Israel, as per an Iranian agency.

third source familiar with the conversations said, as first reported by Axios.

Any attempt to arm Iranian Kurdish groups would need

Blow By Blow

AMERICAN ASSETS ATTACKED BY IRAN

CIA station at the US Embassy in Riyadh

US Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain

US military command site at Shuaiba port, Kuwait

Al Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi

Al Minhad Air Base near Dubai

US consulate in Dubai

support from the Iraqi Kurds to let the weapons transit and use Iraqi Kurdistan as launch-

ing ground. One person familiar with the discussions said the idea would be for Kurdish armed forces to take on the Iranian security forces and pin them down to make it easier for unarmed Iranians in the major cities to turn out without getting massacred again as they were during unrest in January.

Another US official said the Kurds could help sow chaos in the region and stretch the



CIVILIAN ASSETS DAMAGED

Dubai International Airport (Terminal area)

Jebel Ali port (fire after debris from intercepted missiles fell)

Luxury hotels & buildings

Iranian regime's military resources thin. Still other ideas have centred around

IRGC WARNS OF 'COMPLETE DESTRUCTION'

Dubai: Iran's paramilitary Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps issued its strongest warning yet as tensions in West Asia escalated, saying it was prepared for the "complete destruction of the region's military and economic infrastructure." "The continued mischief and deception by the US in the region will come at the cost of the complete destruction of the region's military and economic infrastructure," the IRGC said.

MISSILE INTERCEPTED IN TURKEY

Turkey's defence ministry said Nato defences intercepted a ballistic missile launched from Iran before it entered Turkey's airspace.

KHAMENEI'S FUNERAL RITES

The farewell ceremony for Khamenei was postponed, Iran's state news agency, IRNA, reported. The 3-night observance had been scheduled to start on Wednesday. Hojjatoleslam Seyed Mohsen Mahmoudi, head of Islamic Propagation Coordination Council of Tehran, said millions of people were expected and authorities need to provide "the necessary infrastructure."

FIRST US SOLDIERS TO DIE ARE IDENTIFIED

The US military has named its first troops killed. Six soldiers died when an "unmanned aircraft system" evaded air defences to hit a command centre in Port Shuaiba, Kuwait, on Sunday. US Central Command initially said 3 soldiers died, but officials confirmed the toll had doubled, after one person succumbed and two more bodies were found in the rubble.

CONTAINER SHIP ATTACKED OFF OMAN

A container ship was attacked on Wednesday afternoon off the coast of Oman, causing fire in its engine room. The vessel was transiting eastbound through the Strait of Hormuz, 2 nautical miles north of Oman, when it was hit by an unknown projectile, said the UK Maritime Trade Operations.

Isfahan nuclear technology center

IRGC command and control facilities

Missile launch sites and storage depots

Drone launch facilities, military airfields

Compound of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

Presidential office

Supreme National Security Council building

Over 17 ships and a sub

whether the Kurds could take and hold territory in the northern part of Iran that

would create a buffer zone for Israel. The CIA declined to comment for this story.

Sanchez 'no to war' in Iran despite US trade threats

MADRID / WASHINGTON

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez again criticised the US and Israel's military actions in Iran, standing firm on Wednesday against trade threats from Washington and warning the war in West Asia risked "playing Russian roulette" with millions of lives.

"We are not going to be complicit in something that is bad for the world and is also contrary to our values and interests, just out of fear of reprisals from someone," Sanchez said in a televised address. Sanchez has called the US and Israeli attacks on Iran an "unjustifiable" and "dangerous" military intervention. It's unclear how Trump would cut off trade with Spain, an EU member. The EU negotiates trade on behalf of all its 27 member states.

On Wednesday, Sanchez expressed concern the attacks on Iran could lead to another costly military quagmire in West Asia, similar to the past American interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"In short, the position of the government of Spain can be summarised in four words," Sanchez said. "No to the war." The EU said on Wednesday it would protect its interests and work to stabilise its trade relationship with the US, with which it struck a trade deal last



German Chancellor Friedrich Merz with US President Donald Trump in the Oval office.

year after months of economic uncertainty over Trump's tariff blitz.

"We stand in full solidarity with all member states and all their citizens and, through our common trade policy, stand ready to act if necessary to safeguard EU interests," said European Commission spokesperson Olof Gill.

Earlier on Tuesday, US President Donald Trump sharply criticised European allies and expressed frustration over their limited support for US airstrikes on Iran and singling out the UK and Spain for particular rebuke.

Speaking at the White House, Trump compared British PM Keir Starmer unfavourably with wartime leader Winston Churchill, suggesting London had not shown the kind of resolve he

expected from a close ally. "This is not Winston Churchill that we're dealing with," he said, referencing Starmer's famed WW 2 predecessor.

During a bilateral meeting with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, he offered a blunt assessment of Europe's overall response to the situation. Trump directed sharp criticism at Spain, accus-

ing it of failing to meet defence spending commitments and refusing to allow the US to use its bases.

"But some of the European — like, Spain has been terrible. In fact, I told Scott to cut off all dealings with Spain," Trump said. He added Spain had resisted pressure to raise defence spending to 5% of GDP. Trump warned the US could take economic steps against Madrid, saying Washington did not want to continue trade ties under the present circumstances. He also reiterated dissatisfaction with Britain over an island lease dispute that complicated US aircraft operations.

TRUMP SLAMS OBAMA'S NUCLEAR DEAL WITH IRAN

MUMBAI

US President Trump sharply criticised former president Barack Obama's Iran nuclear deal during a meet with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, saying the pact had empowered Tehran and paved the way for nuclear weapons.

Trump accused the previous administration of strengthening Tehran's position in West Asia through the nuclear agreement and argued it had shifted the balance of power in the region. "The other thing was Barack Hussein Obama made maybe the worst deal I've ever seen because he gave all power in the Middle East to

Trump admin has no plan in Iran.

This illegal war is based on lies and it was launched without any imminent threat to our nation. Trump still hasn't given a single clear reason for this war and he seems to have no plan for how to end it either.

Elizabeth Warren, Senator

Iran," Trump said. "He went the exact opposite way. And I terminated that. If I didn't terminate that deal, they would be sitting with a massive nuclear weapon 3 years ago, which would have been used already on Israel, at least, and other countries also," he said.

Trump said without terminating the agreement, the

situation in the region would have been more dangerous.

"And we wouldn't be talking about it right now. But if I didn't terminate the deal Obama made giving them everything, including plane loads of cash — do you remember the aeroplane flew over there?" he said.

The president alleged aircraft were used to transport large amounts of cash to Iran.

"It was a Boeing 757. It was two of them, loaded. They took out all the seats. It was loaded with green cash," Trump said. "So much cash that you could — it was in Virginia, Maryland, and Washington. They got all the cash from all the banks. They put it — and they flew it to Iran."

Israel orders evacuations in southern Lebanon ... strikes on Beirut intensify

Beirut: Israel's military ordered on Wednesday residents of dozens of border villages in southern Lebanon to evacuate "immediately" as airstrikes on suburbs of Beirut intensified and Hezbollah claimed more attacks.

Lebanon was dragged early on Monday into the war in West Asia, which erupted following US-Israeli strikes on Iran, when the Iranian-backed Hezbollah group fired rockets and drones into northern Israel, triggering Israeli retaliatory airstrikes on different parts of the country that killed over 50 people and wounded about 300. The conflict displaced thousands of people from southern Lebanon, the eastern Bekaa Valley and Beirut's southern suburbs.

The Israeli military issued a statement on Wednesday telling people living in dozens of



villages in southern Lebanon close to the border with Israel to evacuate and move "immediately" north of the Litani River.

The Israeli army's Arabic spokesperson warned on X if people decide to move south of the river, they will be endangering their lives.

The area south of the Litani River, about 8% of the size of Lebanon, is mostly along the border with Israel. The Lebanese government says it has cleared the area of Hezbollah's military presence there over the past months.

Iran is toast, more US forces on the way, says Hegseth

WASHINGTON

The US "is winning" in its war on Iran, Secretary of Defence **Pete Hegseth** said in a Pentagon press briefing on Wednesday, "devastatingly, decisively, and without mercy." Hegseth emphasised only four days of the campaign have gone by, but "metrics are shifting, dust is settling and more forces are arriving." "We will take all the time we need to make sure we succeed," he said, citing the US commander-in-chief, President Trump.

The results of the campaign "have been incredible," he argued. Hegseth said the US was "leading" the campaign.

Iranian regime's military resources thin. Still other ideas have centred around

SON OF LATE SUPREME LEADER CANDIDATE?

Mojtaba Khamenei, a son of Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has long been considered a contender to the post of the country's next paramount ruler — even before an Israeli strike killed his father at the start of the war last week and despite the fact he's never been elected or appointed to a government position. A secretive figure within the Islamic Republic, Mojtaba Khamenei has not been seen publicly since the Israeli airstrike targeting the supreme leader's offices killed his 86-year-old father. Also killed were the younger Khamenei's wife, Zahra Haddad Adel. Khamenei is believed to still be alive and has likely gone into hiding.

"But when you add the Israeli Defense Forces, a devastatingly capable force, the combination is sheer destruction for our radical Islamist Iranian adversaries."

Iran is "toast, and they know it," he says, "or at least, soon enough, they will know it." Hegseth stressed the US and Israel "have only just

begun" hunting and degrading Iranian capabilities.

The defence secretary said the US military campaign against Iran was accelerating, with more warplanes arriving in the region, as he warned Iranian leaders American forces would deliver "death and destruction all day long."

BRIEFS

US mayor convicted of raping boy, 16

The former mayor of a Louisiana city has been convicted of raping a 16-year-old boy during a party at her house while she was still in office. Misty Roberts, 43, faces sentences of up to 10 and seven years in prison after a jury in the municipality of DeRidder on Tuesday found her guilty of two felonies: carnal knowledge of a juvenile — or statutory rape — and indecent behaviour with a minor.

US military operation in Ecuador to crack down on drug-trafficking

Ecuadorian and US forces have carried out joint operations in the South American country targeting drug trafficking, the US military's Southern Command has said. The US embassy in Quito announced US forces, working with their Ecuadorian counterparts and European international police agency

Europol, had dismantled a large-scale drug-trafficking network linked to the Los Lobos gang.

Presidium elected, agenda set for China's yearly legislative session

Deputies to the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) gathered in Beijing on Wednesday at a preparatory meet to elect the presidium and set the agenda for the fourth session of the 14th NPC, scheduled to begin on Thursday. Zhao Leji, chairman of NPC Standing Committee, presided over the preparatory meet. All the preparatory work for the annual session has been completed, Zhao said. A 167-member presidium was elected, with Li Hongzhong as secretary-general of NPC session.

Cop killer executed

A man convicted of fatally shooting a police officer with his own service weapon during a traffic stop was executed Tuesday evening in Florida, becoming the third person put to death by the state this year after a record 19 executions in 2025.

Pakistan targets Bagram airbase in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan targeted the famed Bagram airbase in Afghanistan as its operation was going against the Afghan Taliban over their alleged failure to stop terrorist attacks from their soil, media reports said on Wednesday.

State-run PTV on X said Pakistan carried out a "major attack on Bagram Air Base" as it was giving a "befitting response to Afghan Taliban aggression". "Pakistan continues to conduct vigorous ground and air operations against the unprovoked aggression of the Afghan Taliban," it said.

PTV often quoted unnamed security sources for reports on the Afghanistan attacks, but for the Bagram attack, it quoted 'The New York Times'. "An aircraft hangar and two warehouses at Bagram Air Base were destroyed in a Pakistani attack, satellite



images of which have also emerged," PTV reported.

It said Afghanistan's ministry of defence confirmed the Pakistani airstrike, adding Pakistan carried out 50+ airstrikes on military targets in Afghanistan in the past week.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan government on Wednesday arranged a closed-door briefing for leaders of political parties to take them into confidence about the prevailing regional security situation.

Officials briefed about the ongoing conflict with the Afghan Taliban and the West Asia situation.

TTA COMMANDER DEAD

Pakistan Army has killed the commander of the Afghan Taliban during an operation near Torkham border in northwest Pakistan, security officials said on Wednesday. The commander of Tehreek-e-Taliban Afghanistan (TTA), Qahraman, and his associates were eliminated during an operation late last night.

Texas SC stops Dallas County from counting late votes

Changes to Election Day voting procedures in two Texas counties on Tuesday led to hundreds of voters being turned away from polling places, angry recriminations from candidates and an 11th hour scramble to delay poll closings. In a rollercoaster day, Democratic voters in the Dallas area received two extra hours to cast their ballots after a judge intervened — only to have the state Supreme Court order the county to keep separate any votes cast during the extended voting period.

But even before polls closed, Representative Jasmine Crockett — locked in a competitive battle with state Rep James Talarico for the Democratic Senate nomination — raised the possibility the confusion at the polls could shape the primary's outcome, CNN reported.

NEPAL GENERAL ELECTION TODAY



Over 3,00,000 security men deployed

Security men keep a vigil at a polling station ahead of Nepal's parliamentary elections at Durbar Square in Kathmandu on Wednesday. —PTI

Kathmandu: Thousands of Nepalese will vote on Thursday in crucial general elections, the first since a violent Gen Z-led protest toppled the KP Sharma Oli-led government last year.

Over 18.9 million eligible Nepalese will exercise their franchise to elect the 275-member House of Representatives from among the 3,406 candidates vying for 165 seats under direct voting and 3,135 candidates vying for 110 seats through proportionate voting. The voting will start at 7am and conclude at 5pm. The counting will start after the ballot boxes are collected. At a press meet, Acting Election Commissioner Ram Prasad Bhandari said all preparations for the election have been completed and urged voters to take part actively in the democratic exercise. Foolproof security arrangements have been made. —PTI

Briefs

MUMBAI

Arjun marries Saaniya



Cricketer Arjun Tendulkar, son of batting legend Sachin Tendulkar, married entrepreneur Saaniya Chandhok in a star-studded ceremony at The St. Regis Mumbai on Thursday. The wedding was attended by prominent figures from sports, entertainment and politics. Arjun, who has represented India at the U-19 level and played for Mumbai Indians in the IPL, currently represents Goa in domestic cricket. Saaniya is granddaughter of industrialist Ravi Ghai.

KOLKATA

Sammy pleads to go home



West Indies head coach Daren Sammy has voiced frustration as the Caribbean team remains stranded in India for more than four days due to airspace restrictions following US and Israeli strikes on Iran. The team, eliminated from the T20 World Cup after a Super Eight loss to India on Sunday, has been unable to return home as flights through parts of the Gulf remain disrupted. Sammy expressed his frustration on social media, posting on X: "I just wanna go home."

MAGENTA SHORES (AUS) Diksha is best Indian after first day



Diksha Dagar carded a three-under 69 to emerge as the best-placed Indian, finishing tied 20th after the opening round of the Australian Women's Classic on the Ladies European Tour here on Thursday. Starting from the back nine at Magenta Shores, Diksha recovered well after an early bogey, striking three birdies in four holes before another bogey on the 18th saw her turn in one-under. She added two more birdies on the front nine to complete a solid round. Pranavi Urs shot 72 to lie tied 52nd, while

India Women bank on Test form against Australia

Visitors rely on seniors to excel with pink-ball after ODI setback

PERTH

After being hammered in the ODI leg, the Indian women's cricket team will look to its experienced players to deliver when it takes on Australia in a pink-ball Test — the first day-night Test between the sides in nearly five years — starting here on Friday.

India will take confidence from its recent Test form, having remained unbeaten in the last five matches. The Harmanpreet Kaur-led side won three consecutive Tests between December 2023 and July 2024, defeating England, Australia and South Africa, although all those victories came on home soil.

India's last two overseas Tests ended in draws against England and Australia in 2021. The match against Australia during that tour was also a day-night Test, which the visitors managed to draw. One of the highlights of that contest was Smriti Mandhana's century — the second of her two Test hundreds at the time.

The pink-ball Test will conclude the multi-format series between the two rivals. India won the T20I leg but was blanked in the ODIs, leaving Australia with an 8-4 lead in the points tally.

While two points were awarded for each win in the T20Is and ODIs, the Test carries four points for an outright victory.

Australia will secure the overall series honours with a draw, while India must win the Test to level the final standings.

India will also draw confidence from its historic eight-



Squads:

India: Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Smriti Mandhana (vc), Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Richa Ghosh (wk), Deepti Sharma, Kashvee Gautam, Sneha Rana, Amanjot Kaur, Uma Chetry (wk), Pratika Rawal, Harleen Deol, Kranti Gaud, Vaishnavi Sharma, Sayali Satghare.

Australia: Alyssa Healy (c&wk), Darcie Brown, Maitlan Brown, Nicola Carey, Ashlee Gardner, Kim Garth, Alana King, Phoe

wicket win over Australia at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai in December 2023 — its first-ever Test victory against the hosts.

The onus will be on senior players Harmanpreet Kaur, vice-captain Smriti Mandhana, Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues and Deepti Sharma to shoulder the batting responsibility. Attention will also be on stylish right-hander Pratika Rawal, who is expected to make her Test debut on Friday.

TRIUMPH | Jacob Bethell's brilliant hundred in vain as India win by seven runs Samson special floors England

MUMBAI

Defending champions India held their nerves to beat England by seven runs and set up a final clash with New Zealand in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup.

Sanju Samson blazed his way to 89 in 42 balls, powering India to 253 for 7 at the Wankhede Stadium here on Thursday. Jacob Bethell kept England in the hunt with a blistering knock of 105 runs in 48 balls, but the target proved too much in the end. Bethell was run out in the last over after hitting eight boundaries and seven sixes. England managed 246 for 7 in 20 overs.

Playing their third straight semifinal in the IT20 World Cup against England and losing a crucial toss, Samson negated the impact of a possible dew factor by setting a platform for a massive score to give his bowlers enough cushion.

England made one change, leaving out last match hero Rehan Ahmed and bringing in pacer Jamie Overton. But England pacers leaked 150 runs in 11 overs while spinners Will Jaks (2 for 40) and Adil Rashid (2 for 41) picked top-order wickets.

Samson made full use of an early reprieve given by Harry Brook off Jofra Archer to come up with another masterclass that included eight boundaries and seven sixes, following his unbeaten 97 against West Indies in Kolkata.

The Kerala dasher was given good company by Ishan Kishan (39 in 18 balls) as the left and right-handed duo shared 97 runs for the second wicket in just 45 balls to set the platform for the middle-order with half of the overs remaining. Shivam Dube (43



Scoreboard

India: S Samson c P Salt b W Jaks 89, A Sharma c P Salt b W Jaks 9, I Kishan c W Jaks b A Rashid 39, S Dube (run out) 43, Suryakumar st J Buttler b A Rashid 11, H Pandya (run out) 27, T Varma b J Archer 21, A Patel (not out) 2, V Chakaravathy (not out) 0. **Extras** (B-2, LB-1, W-9) 12. **Total** (For 7 wks, 20 overs) 253. **Fall**

of wickets: 20-1, 117-2, 160-3, 190-4, 212-5, 236-6, 251-7. **Bowling:** J Archer 4-0-61-1, W Jaks 4-0-40-2, J Overton 3-0-36-0, S Curran 4-0-53-0, A Rashid 4-0-41-2, L Dawson 1-0-19-0. **England:** P Salt c A Patel b H Pandya 5, J Buttler b V Chakaravathy 25, H Brook c A Patel b J Bumrah 7, J Bethell (run out) 105, T Banton b A Patel 17, W Jaks c S Dube b A Singh

35, S Curran c T Varma b H Pandya 18, J Overton (not out) 2, J Archer (not out) 19. **Extras** (LB-3, W-10) 13. **Total:** (For 7 wks, 20 overs) 246. **Fall of wickets:** 13-1, 38-2, 64-3, 95-4, 172-5, 222-6, 225-7. **Bowling:** A Singh 4-0-51-1, H Pandya 4-0-38-2, J Bumrah 4-0-33-1, V Chakaravathy 4-0-64-1, A Patel 3-0-35-1, S Dube 1-0-22-0.

in 25 balls) carried forward the momentum before Hardik Pandya (27) and Tilak Varma (21) did the finishing act.

Abhishek Sharma, who had just 80 runs in six games before the semifinal, took a thorough look at the pitch before the toss along with Kishan.

However, Abhishek's struggles against off-spinners continued as he fell to a mid-

wicket trap again set by Will Jaks, bowling into his legs. He could score just nine runs.

Opting to field first, England pacer Archer tested Samson with short stuff, but the opener got underway with a boundary and six in the first over. Samson, on 15, was let off by Brook at mid-on as Archer was the bowler at the receiving end. He latched on with a big six and a boundary to give

India a flying start. Archer gave 61 runs in his spell, including three sixes by Varma in the penultimate over, before hitting the timber. Sam Curran went for 53 runs, and Jamie Overton gave 36 in three overs.

Kishan also got into action in Overton's first over as India raced to 50 in 4.3 overs. Sam Curran was also wayward as hosts had a good powerplay

which yielded 67 runs. Adil Rashid bowled a tight seventh over, but Liam Dawson and Curran conceded 19 and 20 in their respective overs as Samson and Kishan's flurry of boundaries sent the Wankhede crowd louder. Rashid, who dismissed Kishan, was miserly in the first two overs but was taken apart by Shivam Dube in his third over.

New Zealand's Allen all praise for team's bowlers

Explosive knock and disciplined bowling had powered Kiwis into final

KOLKATA

New Zealand opener Finn Allen praised his team's bowlers for setting up a commanding victory in the T20 World Cup semifinal, saying their early breakthroughs laid the foundation for a memorable performance in a high-pressure knockout match.

Allen, who played a sensational innings at the top of the order, said the bowlers were instrumental in establishing control from the start.

"First of all, it was an extremely impressive start from our bowlers," he said after the match. "They set the game up for us. Taking early wickets against a strong batting lineup like South Africa's was crucial."

The New Zealand attack struck early and never allowed South Africa to build momentum, restricting them to a manageable total. Allen credited the team's preparation, particularly the recent series against India, for helping the players adapt quickly to the conditions.



New Zealand's Finn Allen plays a shot. ANI

"I think it shows the importance of the India series we played before the World Cup," Allen said.

"We had five games on black-soil pitches, and that experience helped us understand these conditions better. As a team, we really rise to big occasions and are prepared to fight to the end."

The semifinal was played at Eden Gardens in Kolkata, a venue Allen is likely to return to during the Indian Premier League as part of the Kolkata Knight Riders setup. He

admitted it was a special experience performing at what could soon become a familiar ground.

"It was actually my first time playing in Kolkata," he said. "Obviously, it's nice to get a feel for the wicket here."

The last game against India helped me understand the surface a bit, and that experience definitely helped going into this match."

Allen's partnership with Tim Seifert proved decisive during the chase. Seifert launched an aggressive

First of all, it was an extremely impressive start from our bowlers. They set the game up for us. Taking early wickets against a strong batting lineup like South Africa's was crucial

Finn Allen
New Zealand batter

assault in the early overs, allowing Allen to settle into his rhythm before accelerating.

"Tim started brilliantly," Allen said. "He put their bowlers under pressure early, which made it easier for me to settle in. My role was just to support him—if the ball was in my area I tried to hit it for four or six, and if not I took singles and kept the strike rotating."

KOLKATA

South Africa's hopes of reaching the T20 World Cup final ended in disappointment as New Zealand delivered a dominant performance in the semifinal. After the defeat, the South African coach admitted his side simply failed to match the opposition's intensity and quality on the night.

"I don't think we were good enough," he said candidly after the match. "Obviously, it would have been nice to get the win, but that's no excuse. We were nowhere close to being competitive. New Zealand were excellent and fully deserved the result."

South Africa struggled to build momentum with the bat as New Zealand's bowlers exploited the conditions effectively. Their spinners applied early pressure, and the South African lineup never fully recovered.

"They strangled us upfront," the coach said. "We kept losing wickets and never really got any momentum. A lot went wrong for us tonight, but that was largely because they were so good and never



They strangled us upfront. We kept losing wickets and never really got any momentum. A lot went wrong for us tonight

Conrad Shukri
South Africa coach

gave us any opportunities."

Reflecting on the team's campaign, he admitted it was frustrating that the setback came after a strong tournament. South Africa had performed consistently well throughout the competition but faltered at a crucial stage.

"We probably chose a really bad time to have an off night," he said. "In tournament cricket, especially in T20s, the margins are very small. You can do everything right for most of the tournament and then suddenly have one poor game."

The coach dismissed suggestions that nerves or the pressure of a semifinal affected the team. Instead, he pointed to the challenging pitch and disciplined bowling from New Zealand.

"In T20 cricket you sometimes have to make plays and take risks," he explained. "The wicket was a bit slow early on, which made things difficult. Maybe the batters could have given themselves a little more time, but it certainly wasn't nerves or the occasion getting to them."

South Africa eventually managed to post a total of around 170, which the team believed could have been defendable under the right circumstances.

However, the bowlers were unable to create enough opportunities to put New Zealand under sustained pressure.

relief

ICC arranges alternate flights for stranded Zim team

NEW DELHI

A batch of Zimbabwe cricketers stranded in India due to the closure of Gulf airspace has begun its journey home after the International Cricket Council (ICC) arranged alternate travel routes to avoid the conflict-hit region.

Zimbabwe's players had been stuck in New Delhi following the end of their T20 World Cup campaign after flights through the Gulf were

disrupted by the ongoing tensions triggered by US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

The team was originally scheduled to depart on March 2 but was unable to leave because of the airspace closures. The first group of players finally departed on Wednesday using alternate flight arrangements.

"Zimbabwe Cricket confirms that the Zimbabwe senior men's team participating in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 are on their way home from India after

Zimbabwe Cricket confirms that the Zimbabwe men's team are on their way home from India

Zimbabwe Cricket statement

the International Cricket Council secured alternative

travel arrangements following recent transit disruptions," the board said in a statement on X.

"Due to flight availability and revised routing, the squad will return to Harare in batches. The first group of players departed India today, Wednesday, while the final group is scheduled to leave on Friday afternoon," the statement added.

Zimbabwe had a memorable campaign in the tournament, defeating Australia and Sri Lanka to reach the

Super Eights before being eliminated last week.

The team's original travel plan involved flying from India to Harare via Dubai on an Emirates flight. However, that route had to be changed due to the Gulf airspace shutdown.

Zimbabwe's players are now travelling to Harare via Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, sources said.

Meanwhile, the West Indies cricket team is also stranded in India due to the same disruption.

