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

Briefs

CHATRA (JHARKHAND) Man lynched over kidnap rumours

A mentally challenged man was beaten to death in Jharkhand's Chatra district, police said on Tuesday. The 45-year-old man, who was allegedly severely beaten up by some people in Chatra district on Sunday on suspicion of being a childlifter, succumbed to his injuries at the Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) in Ranchi on Monday, a police officer said.

Piparwar police station officer-in-charge Abhay Kumar said, "It is a clear case of mob lynching and police have initiated a thorough probe into the matter." So far, no arrest has been made.

COIMBATORE Sidhu's wife attacks RaGa

Former Congress leader Navjot Kaur Sidhu has launched a scathing critique of Rahul Gandhi, accusing the Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition of being completely "disconnected from ground realities" and failing to address internal corruption in the Punjab unit.

Speaking in Coimbatore, Sidhu claimed Gandhi's inaction is "killing Congress in Punjab," alleging that his inner circle is busy selling election tickets while he remains unaware.

LUCKNOW 'Ayodhya growth tied to temple'

A detailed case study by Indian Institute of Management Lucknow has underlined a sharp economic transformation in Ayodhya following the consecration of the Ram Temple, citing strong gains in tourism, investment, employment and tax revenue.

The report, titled "Economic Renaissance of Ayodhya", presents a comparative assessment of the city's economy before and after the consecration and credits policy support and infrastructure push by the state government for accelerating growth.

JAIPUR Farmers' platform in Raj launched

Union Minister for Agriculture Shivraj Singh launched the AI-based farmers' platform 'Bharat-VISTAAR' in Jaipur on Tuesday. This platform will provide farmers with information on weather, market prices, pests and diseases, soil, crop advice, and government schemes all in one place, eventually on an app.

Addressing the nationwide launching ceremony, Shivraj Singh, without naming, took a jibe at leader of opposition Rahul Gandhi and said, "One leader is... a part-time politician and a full-time drama king. He has neither understanding of trade nor tradition. He hasn't seen a field, a crop, or dirt."

'TURBULENT LANDSCAPE' | World is seeing weaponisation of finance, says Jaishankar

India is in position of strength: EAM

MUMBAI

India is engaging with international partners more intensively and from a "position of strength", External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Tuesday, citing a string of recent trade agreements as evidence of the country's growing economic clout.

In an address at the Global Economic Cooperation conference, Jaishankar highlighted the successful negotiation of several high-profile deals, including a significant trade pact with the US.

The Global Economic Cooperation is organised by the Future Economic Cooperation Council in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs and the Government of Maharashtra.

Describing the current international landscape as perhaps the most turbulent in living memory, the minister warned that the world is witnessing the "weaponisation" of production and finance, alongside tightening export controls and volatile market shifts.

"The established global order is clearly changing. Replacements are hard to create, and we appear to be headed to a long twilight zone. This will be messy, risky,



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar speaking at the Global Economic Cooperation Conference. - ANI

unpredictable, perhaps even dangerous," he said.

Key dimensions are transforming simultaneously, be it strategic, political, economic or technological. Solutions lie in derisking and diversifying across multiple domains. This approach is increasingly visible in the policy of nations, the EAM said.

"From a position of strength, India is engaging international partners more intensively. This is demonstrated in the recently concluded trade deals," he said.

Economic security is best served through stronger self-reliance and more trusted partners, the minister added.

Jaishankar said that the world has entered a volatile and uncertain era, possibly the most turbulent in living mem-

ory. He emphasised that India will also be more salient in the global calculus of production, on services, technology, skills and knowledge.

Economics will give way to politics and security when it comes to making choices and technology in the age of AI (Artificial Intelligence), he noted.

Technology competition is intensifying and polarising. Energy trade flows are being significantly redefined. New mindsets are encouraging greater risk-taking, including through military means. Migration and even mobility are getting contentious, he emphasised.

"Each nation and each society will respond as per their interests and calculations," Jaishankar said.

Obey the law; don't let caste trap you: RSS chief Bhagwat

LUCKNOW

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Tuesday weighed in on the controversy surrounding the new University Grants Commission guidelines, and said the rules were not targeted against any community. He said the government frames laws and those who disagree should place their objections through constitutional channels. The matter, he said, is pending before the Supreme Court and the law framed by the government must be followed.

Addressing a social harmony meeting, Bhagwat, who is on a two-day visit to Lucknow, also voiced concern over society being divided along caste lines and said people should not remain trapped in caste identities. He said efforts had been underway for decades to eliminate caste divisions, but the problem continued to persist.

He also said that Muslims living in India are Hindus and advocated their ghar wapsi, adding that the process should happen gradually.

Bhagwat said Muslims in India did not come from Arab lands and were part of the country's civilisational roots. He said any effort towards social integration should move forward step by step and with mutual understanding.

Mamata lashes out at EC, calls it 'Tughlaqi'

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday accused the Election Commission of behaving like a "Tughlaqi Commission" and alleged that it was acting at the behest of the BJP to manipulate voters' lists in the state.

Speaking to reporters at the state secretariat, she drew parallels with Delhi's Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq, known for whimsical decisions, and Adolf Hitler.

Banerjee alleged that the EC was violating rules, defying Supreme Court directives, and creating confusion that had even resulted in deaths.

"There were complaints in Haryana, Bihar and Maharashtra. Then why is Bengal being targeted? The EC is doing all this just to please the BJP," Banerjee told reporters.

The Bengal CM also pointed out that documents accepted in other states like Bihar were being rejected in Bengal.

"Why is Bihar not part of India, or is Bengal not part of India?" she questioned.

On the suspension of seven assistant electoral registration officers (AEROs) deputed from the state, she said the officials were not given a chance to speak for themselves.

"In the name of deletion of voters' names the poll body is snatching away the rights of the voters. A woman functionary in the BJP IT cell removed



She said documents accepted in other states like Bihar were being rejected in Bengal, asking why the state was targeted.

names of 58 lakh voters' from Bengal using AI. The EC is defying Supreme Court orders and undermining democracy. If Bengal officers are being victimised then we will 100 per cent protect them. In the name of logical discrepancies Bengal is being targeted to please BJP. The same manipulation was done in Haryana and Maharashtra," she said.

The chief minister cautioned the EC to ensure that genuine voters from all religions and social backgrounds were included in the final voters' list.

She also highlighted potential voter deletions in her constituency. Bhowanipore, claiming that 40,000 out of over two lakh voters had disappeared from the rolls.

SC declines to take up plea against hate speech

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court of India on Tuesday refused to entertain a public interest litigation filed by twelve petitioners, including former Delhi Lieutenant Governor Najeeb Jung and academic Roop Rekha Verma, seeking guidelines for public officials, constitutional functionaries and executive administrators to follow constitutional morality in their conduct.

The plea had specifically alleged discriminatory remarks by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, among others and sought guidelines to tackle such remarks made by public figures.

A three-judge bench of the Chief Justice of India, Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and BV Nagarathna expressed disapproval of the selective nature of the allegations.

"The petitioners are eminent persons. We respect them. Ask the petitioners not to target any particular individual. Only selected individuals. Others were very conveniently ignored. It is not fair."

The Bench indicated that it would be inclined to hear a plea that was framed with complete objectivity and impartiality.

Himanta: Sonia asked me to fix oath date, Rahul scuttled move

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday claimed that then Congress president Sonia Gandhi had asked him to decide on the date for his swearing in as CM when 58 party MLAs had supported him in 2014.

The scenario, however, changed after Rahul Gandhi, who was then in the USA, made phone calls to party leaders, Sarma told reporters here after a cabinet meeting at the state legislative assembly.

Assam Congress had witnessed dissidence after the 2011 assembly polls, with a section of the MLAs supporting Sarma as the chief minister, replacing the incumbent Tarun Gogoi. He left the party

to join the BJP in 2015 and played a pivotal role in ensuring the saffron party's first victory in the assembly polls.

"Madam (Sonia Gandhi), whom I still refer to as such, had asked me to decide on the date and I had told her that I would take oath the day after the Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya Temple in June (2014)," Sarma said.

The situation changed after

Rahul Gandhi made the calls, he said.

"I was hurt then, but God has given me much more than what I would have got, had I remained in the Congress," he said.

"As the BJP CM, I got a chance to serve both Assam and Sanatan dharma wholeheartedly, which would not have been possible had I been in the Congress," he said.

Cong neta Borah set to join BJP

Guwahati: In a development that has sent shockwaves through the regional political landscape, the former President of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), Bhupen Kumar Borah, is officially defecting to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This high-profile transition, confirmed on Tuesday, is expected to fundamentally alter the electoral dynamics ahead of the upcoming Assam Assembly elections.

- Digjyoti Lahkar

SC ON VANUATU

'No country like that, it's like Kailasa'

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday observed that there is no such country as Vanuatu while hearing a bail plea filed by a man described as a Vanuatu national.

Senior Advocate Siddhartha Dave, appearing for the accused, was asked by the bench of justices Vikram Nath, Sandeep Mehta and N V Anjaria which country his client was a citizen of.



When Dave said he was a citizen of Vanuatu, the bench asked, "Have you been there?"

When the lawyer said no, the bench observed, "There is no country like that. We also know a country called Kailasa. Similar to that."

Self-proclaimed godman Nithyananda claims to have set up a country called the "United States of Kailasa". Dave said that the country was "somewhere in the Caribbean".

The plea was eventually withdrawn.

Incidentally, Vanuatu (above) is a country in the Melanesia subregion of the South Pacific Ocean.

Puri lying about Epstein files: Cong

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday accused Union minister Hardeep Puri of "lying" on the Epstein files issue, and asked the BJP leader to come clean on the "62 email exchanges" and "14 meetings" he had with convicted American sex offender Jeffrey Epstein between 2014 and 2017.

The opposition party also reiterated its demand that Puri must resign immediately. Puri has, however, denied all the charges levelled at him by the opposition party.

"Between 2014 and 2017, there were 62 email exchanges between Hardeep Puri and Epstein. Apart from that, what was discussed in the meetings on June 5, 6, 8 and 9, September 19, 23 and 24, and October 9 and 10 in 2014?" Congress' media and publicity department head, Pawan Khera, asked at a press conference here.

"Puri wrote 32 emails while Epstein sent him 30 emails. There were 14 meetings,



which began soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to office in 2014, and went on till 2017.

"The question is — what position did Hardeep Puri hold in June 2014, and in what capacity did he meet Epstein?" Khera asked.

The Epstein files are thousands of pages of documents related to two criminal investigations into sex trafficking by financier Jeffrey Epstein and his accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell, including travel logs, recordings, and emails, which have been a topic of conversation since Epstein died in custody in 2019.

Savarkar kin moves court, seeks Rahul voice sample

PUNE

Satyaki Savarkar, VD Savarkar's grandnephew, on Tuesday filed an application in a local court seeking voice samples of Rahul Gandhi in relation to a defamation case against the Congress leader on his comments about the late revolutionary and Hindutva ideologue.

Advocate Sangram Kolhatkar, Satyaki's lawyer, moved the application before Judicial Magistrate (First Class) (MP/MLA Special Court) AA Shinde.

Satyaki has produced evidence to prove the case beyond reasonable doubts, but "for the proper adjudication of certain electronic recordings, the voice samples of accused (Rahul Gandhi) is an indispensable piece of evidence," the plea stated.

The court should direct the accused to provide his voice samples before the competent authority, Satyaki said, and also sought a direction to Forensic Science Laboratory authorities to conduct a scientific analysis and comparison of the collected samples with the recordings on court record.

Satyaki filed a complaint in 2023 before the magistrate alleging that Gandhi, currently Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, claimed in a speech in London that VD Savarkar had written in a book that he and 5-6 of his friends once beat up a Muslim man, and he (Savarkar) felt happy. VD Savarkar never wrote this, the complaint said.

K'taka leadership row heats up with minister's 'dog' remark

BENGALURU

The simmering leadership row in Karnataka took a sharp turn on Tuesday after Minister H C Mahadevappa made remarks invoking a High Court observation on stray dogs, drawing reactions from senior Congress leaders and the Opposition.

Speaking to reporters in Mysuru on Monday, Mahadevappa, considered close to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, in cryptic remarks said, "Where is the discussion on leadership? The High Court says time and again to catch stray dogs and confine them. Here the politi-

cal leadership is strong."

When asked whom he was referring to with the dog metaphor, the social welfare minister said he was only citing the High Court order.

"I was only referring to what the High Court had said. I do not know how you people perceive it," he added.

Mahadevappa's remarks come amid the ongoing speculation over the leadership tussle between Siddaramaiah and his deputy D K Shivakumar. The minister also dismissed talk of any change at the top.

Shivakumar's brother D K Suresh said he was unaware of the context of Mahadevappa's remark.

"I don't have the information whom Mahadevappa referred to as dogs," the former Lok Sabha member told reporters.

However, he added, "devout Congress leaders are not stray canines but honest dogs. They never ditch those who favoured them. They clear the debts of their master."

Taking a swipe at Mahadevappa, Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy said the statement implies that all the leaders in Congress are dogs.

"Mahadevappa has subtly explained whether the dog is wagging its tail or tail is wagging the dog."

offgrid

Bee corridors along highways planned

NEW DELHI

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is planning bee corridors to aid pollination and reduce ecological stress, an official statement said on Tuesday.

At least three such corridors are expected to come up along national highways within the next financial year, starting April 1, the Union Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) said. The bee corridors will have

a continuous linear stretch of bee-friendly vegetation comprising flowering trees and plants that will ensure the availability of nectar and pollen throughout the year, the ministry said.

The Bee Corridor initiative is expected to help reduce the increasing ecological stress faced by honeybees and other pollinators, which is adversely impacting pollination services, agricultural and horticultural productivity, and overall ecological balance, MoRTH said.

The corridors will be developed along national highway stretches and other vacant NHAI land parcels, depending upon agro-climatic conditions and local suitability. NHAI field offices across the country will identify national highway sections where clusters of flowering trees can be planted at intervals of approximately 500 metres to 1 km, corresponding to the average foraging distance of honeybees and wild bees.

NHAI field offices will also plan and develop at least

The corridors will have a stretch of bee-friendly vegetation to ensure availability of nectar and pollen.

three pollinator corridors during 2026-27.

NHAI plans to plant around 40 lakh trees along national highways during the year 2026-27, around 60 per cent of which will be planted

under the Bee Corridor initiative.

The Bee Corridor initiative will help enhance ecological outcomes, contribute to pollinator conservation, and further strengthen NHAI's commitment to environmentally National Highway development.

In the statement, the ministry did not share any further details related to particular highway stretches along which the corridors will be developed.

After life extension, Tarapur's Unit-1 gets reconnected to electricity grid

PALGHAR

The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) has announced the successful reconnection of Tarapur Atomic Power Station's Unit-1 (TAPS-1) to the electricity grid following a landmark life-extension programme.

The achievement marks a major milestone for the country's oldest nuclear facility, which has undergone extensive renovation and modernisation to ensure long-term operational reliability.

the NPCIL said on Monday.

An official release issued by the NPCIL said the life-extension activities were executed under "stringent regulatory oversight" and align with global nuclear safety standards.

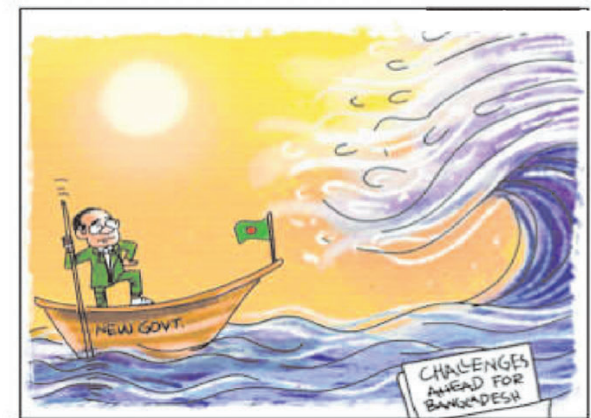
"The successful completion of such complex activities in this reactor type reflects NPCIL's engineering excellence and strong renovation and modernisation capability," it said, noting that TAPS-1 and its twin Unit-2 are currently the oldest reactors in operation globally.

The comprehensive upgrade involved high-end

engineering interventions to enhance safety margins.

The NPCIL also confirmed that similar renovation activities for Unit-2 are in an "advanced stage of completion". The second unit is expected to be reconnected to the grid shortly.

Commissioned in 1969, TAPS-1 and 2 were Asia's first nuclear power reactors outside the erstwhile Soviet Union. Through more than five decades of service, the twin units have generated over 1,00,000 million units of clean electricity, the statement said.



Administration Takes Strict Stance on Fuel Crisis Rumors; Adequate Availability of Petrol, Diesel, and Gas: DM

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Amidst rumors circulating regarding a shortage of petrol, diesel, and LPG in Prayagraj, the district administration has clarified the situation, stating that there is absolutely no scarcity of fuel within the district. A review meeting regarding the supply management system was held on Thursday, presided over by District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma. During the meeting, officials reported that misleading information spreading on social media is leading to unnecessary crowding at petrol pumps, despite the presence of adequate fuel reserves within the district. Currently, approximately 6.5 million liters of petrol and diesel are available across the district's 368 petrol pumps, and fresh supplies are being received in sufficient quantities on a daily basis. Similarly, the regular supply of LPG cylinders continues through 144 gas agencies, and there is no shortage whatsoever.

The administration has



clarified that there is no need for the general public to panic. The District Magistrate directed officials to maintain constant vigilance over the sale of petrol, diesel, and LPG, and to take strict action in the event of any black marketing or illegal hoarding. He stated that punitive action must be ensured against offenders, including the registration of FIRs under the Essential Commodities Act. Furthermore, instructions have been issued to maintain adequate stock levels at all petrol pumps, to increase supplies in accordance with

demand, and to coordinate with the police to manage crowds effectively. Adopting a strict stance against rumor-mongers, the District Magistrate has also directed officials to identify such individuals and initiate legal proceedings against them. To ensure the prompt redressal of complaints related to fuel supply, a control room has been established at the District Supply Office, where members of the public can register their grievances. The administration has appealed to the public not to pay heed to rumors and to purchase fuel only as per their actual requirements

Assam CS Dr. Ravi Closely Reviews Poll Preparedness in Nagaon



Assam

Assam Chief Secretary Dr. Ravi Kota visited Nagaon district on Thursday to take Stock of the overall Poll Preparedness of the district. Participating in a special meeting held in the auditorium of Nagaon District Commissioner office for this purpose, he closely reviewed the efficiency of various efforts related to the conduct of elections. In the meeting, the Chief Secretary laid special emphasis on the completion of the election Process in a completely transparent, fair and Peaceful manner. He gave strict instructions to the officers and employees of each cell to follow their responsibilities faithfully. District Election Officer and District Commissioner Debasish Sharma Presented a holistic Picture of the district Election preparedness through a data-rich PowerPoint Presentation. Sharma apprised the Chief Secretary about the Progress of the infrastructure of Polling stations, Protection and test-

ing of EVMs and VVPAT machines, training of Polling Personnel and Steps taken to increase voter awareness. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) of Nagaon district, Partha Pratim Das, gave details of the arrangements made to maintain law and order during the Election. He elaborated on Plans to ensure security of Particularly sensitive Polling Stations, intensify search operations to Prevent supply of illegal material and deployment of central Paramilitary forces. In today important meeting, returning officers of various departments of the district, additional commissioners, election officers and top officials of the District administration and police administration were Present. He reiterated his commitment to ensure that elections are conducted without any hindrance. Expressing satisfaction over the readiness of the administration, Chief Secretary Dr. Kota advised to be alert to deal with any Emergency.

Emperor Ashoka Maurya Birth Anniversary Celebrated with Grandeur At SP Office Varanasi

The Birth anniversary of Emperor Ashoka Maurya was celebrated with great enthusiasm today at the District Samajwadi Party (SP) Office in Ardali Bazar. On this occasion, a seminar was organized which saw the Participation of various Samajwadi Party leaders and Workers. Presiding over the Program, District Spokesperson Santosh Yadav 'Bablu' Advocate stated that Emperor Ashoka spread the message of secularism, justice and non-violence in society. He noted that Ashoka achieved the Political unification of the country, binding it together through one religion, one language and Practically one script known as Brahmi. He further added that the Emperor taught people the principle of "live and let live" and emphasized compassion toward animals. His teachings were aimed at strengthening families, institutions and existing Social Classes. The event was Presided over by District Spokesperson Santosh Yadav 'Bablu' Advocate and conducted by Gopal Pandey. Key speakers who expressed their views during the Program included Deepchand Gupta, Akhilesh Yadav, Chandrashekhar Singh Yadav, Vidya Bharti, Heeru Yadav, Rajendra Prasad, Ramkumar Yadav, Suresh Pal, Shivprasad Gautam, Dharamveer Patel, Vijay Yadav 'Vijju', Vinod Patel, Subhash Yadav, Ayaz Khan and Vinod Shukla Among Others.

Statue of Shri Ram and Manuscript Exhibition Displayed at Museum on Ram Navami

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj: On the auspicious occasion of Ram Navami in Prayagraj, a special exhibition dedicated to Lord Shri Ram was inaugurated at the Allahabad Museum. This exhibition features a wooden statue of Shri Ram and a manuscript based on the theme of 'Ram Janma' (the birth of Ram). The exhibition was inaugurated by Saint Balbir Giri in the central hall of the



museum. On this occasion, Divisional Commissioner and Museum Director Saumya Agarwal was also present. Welcoming the dis-

tinguished guest, she outlined the objective and significance of the exhibition and conducted a tour of the museum's various galleries.

During the inauguration, Balbir Giri remarked that organizing such an exhibition on Ram Navami is a significant initiative aimed at preserving our cultural and spiritual traditions. He urged the public to draw inspiration from the life of Lord Shri Ram and to embrace the values of propriety, truth, and exemplary conduct. He described the wooden statue of Shri Ram as an outstanding example of Indian craftsmanship, while characterizing

the 'Ram Janma' manuscript as a vital component of the nation's rich intellectual tradition and literary heritage. He further stated that such events play a pivotal role in connecting the younger generation with their culture and traditions. The exhibition was curated by the museum's Assistant Curator, Dr. Sanju Mishra. Other museum officials, staff members, and media representatives were also present on this occasion.

Kotwali Police Apprehend Youth with Stolen Goods; Mobile Phone

Prayagraj | Acting on a case of theft, the Kotwali Police have arrested an accused individual and recovered a stolen mobile phone, a wallet, and other important documents from his possession. According to the police, acting under Case No. 30/2026 registered at the Kotwali Police Station, the accused was arrested on Monday based on a tip-off from an informant. The arrest took place near the

GIC School, under the Rambagh Bridge. The arrested accused has been identified as Aditya Singh (20), a resident of Gorakhpur. During a search, a stolen mobile phone and a wallet were recovered from the accused. Inside the wallet, police found Union Bank and Bank of Baroda debit cards, an Aadhaar card, a driving license, a PAN card, a watch, a charger, earbuds, and a Union Bank

chequebook. The police stated that, based on the arrest and the recoveries made, relevant sections of the law applicable to the case have been enhanced. Further legal action is being initiated against the accused. Several officers and personnel of the Kotwali Police Station team played a pivotal role in this operation; their vigilance proved instrumental in successfully apprehending the accused.

Assam Wins Silver in Freestyle Relay at Khelo India Tribal Games



Assam

Swimmers continued their impressive run on the second day of the Khelo India Tribal Games 2026 being held in Raipur, bringing Pride to the State with outstanding Performances. According to Assam Swimming Association Publicity secretary Mukuteshwar Goswami, the State men 4x100m

freestyle relay team secured the silver medal with a timing of 4:02.86. The team, comprising Firmino Emon Lalung, Nibir Nilim Kro, Andiquel Wilson Terang, and Santosh Narzary, Showcased excellent coordination and speed. Assam also excelled in individual events. In the men 100m backstroke, Nibir Nilim Kro Clinched the silver medal with a timing

of 1:09.25, further highlighting his talent. Assam Swimming Association secretary Bhaskar Ranjan Das congratulated the athletes for their achievements. The team is being guided by coaches Momi Barman and Jyoti Basumatary. This Performance reflects a Promising future for Assam in upcoming national and international Competitions.

India-Sri Lanka Strengthen Cooperation in Water & Sanitation: Parliamentary Delegation on Study Tour

Lucknow

A High-level Parliamentary Delegation from the Sectoral Oversight Committee on Infrastructure and Strategic Development of the Parliament of Sri Lanka, led by Chairman and MP S.M. Marikkar, is currently on a week-long official study tour to India. As Part of the visit, the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS) under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, organized a detailed Presentation on two of India flagship initiatives—Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) and Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen (SBM-G). The session was attended by Ashok K. K. Meena, Secretary, DDWS, Kamal Kishore Soan, Additional Secretary & Mission Director, National Jal Jeevan Mission (NJJM), along with other Senior Officials. Addressing the delegation, Secretary Ashok K. K. Meena highlighted India governance model, where central and state governments implement large-scale Programmes to empower local bodies, Particularly Gram Panchayats,



ensuring effective delivery of essential services at the grassroots level. He noted that the Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen, launched in 2014 and the Jal Jeevan Mission, launched in 2019, have significantly transformed rural water supply and sanitation in India. He outlined four key Pillars behind the success of these missions: decentralisation and community-led service delivery, convergence across departments, use of technology for transparency and monitoring and sustainability in design and implementation. During the session Hari Narayanan Murugan, Director JJM, Presented India journey in rural drinking water supply. He highlighted that following Prime Minister

Narendra Modi announcement on August 15, 2019 to Provide tap water to every rural household, the Jal Jeevan Mission was launched. Since then, rural tap water coverage has increased from 17% to 82%, benefiting over 150 million households. He also elaborated on the extended Phase, JJM 2.0, which aims to ensure long-term sustainability, operational efficiency and Strengthened community Participation until 2028. Kritika Kulhari Deputy Secretary SBM-G, Presented India sanitation journey, noting that the Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen, launched in 2014, achieved nationwide Open Defecation Free (ODF) status by October 2019. The mission has now entered its

second Phase, focusing on sustaining ODF outcomes and Promoting comprehensive waste management under the ODF Plus framework. She added that over 120 million household toilets and more than 2.72 lakh community sanitary complexes have been constructed across the Country. An interactive discussion followed, during which the Sri Lankan delegation appreciated India achievements and Shared their own Challenges. They highlighted concerns regarding high levels of heavy metals, including mercury contamination in water bodies, which Pose serious Public health risks. They also Pointed out the high cost of water treatment, especially as treated water is used for multiple domestic purposes beyond drinking, increasing the financial Burden. The delegates emphasized the need for collaborative innovation and cost-effective technologies for heavy metal removal and called upon DDWS and its Partners to Share affordable and comprehensive water management Solutions. In her concluding remarks,

Under the 'Mission Shakti' Campaign, Women and Girls Are Taught the Principles of 'Nari Shakti' The Primary Objective of Mission Shakti is to Empower Women and Make Them Self-Reliant

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj | Under 'Mission Shakti Phase 5.0', women and girls were sensitized regarding their rights and dignity. On Thursday, under the supervision of Assistant Commissioner of Police (Tharwai), Arun Parashar, and led by the In-charge Inspector of Tharwai Police Station, Santosh Kumar Pandey, the Mission Shakti team conducted an awareness drive as part of the second phase of Mission Shakti 5.0. This event took place in the village of Purushottampur (alias Garapur), located within the Tharwai police station jurisdiction. During the event, the women and girls in attendance were educated about their rights and the importance of their dignity. On this occasion, Sub-Inspector Khushboo Pandey—a member of the Mission Shakti team—imparted lessons on 'Nari Shakti' (Women's Power) to everyone present. While raising awareness, she informed the audience that if they face harassment of any kind, they can seek assistance by utilizing designated helpline numbers.



She provided details regarding various helplines, such as the Women Power Line (1090), Women's Helpline (181), Child Helpline (1098), Chief Minister's

Helpline (1076), and the Police Emergency Service (Dial 112), emphasizing that these numbers should be used whenever help is required. Furthermore, she

raised awareness regarding cybercrime and provided information about the Cyber Helpline number (1930). Also speaking at the event, Sub-Inspector Akanksha

Dwivedi provided detailed information regarding various public welfare schemes currently being implemented by the government, including the Kanya

Sumangala Yojana, Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, Chief Minister's Mass Marriage Scheme, and the Destitute Women's Pension Scheme.

Accused Wanted in Attempted Murder Case Arrested; Extensive Criminal History Revealed

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. The police at the Georgetown Police Station in Prayagraj have arrested an accused individual who was wanted in connection with several serious charges, including attempted murder. Acting on a tip-off from an informant, the police apprehended the accused within the jurisdiction of the police station. The arrested accused has been identified as Abhay Goswami alias 'Prince' (35), a resident of Lowther Road, Georgetown. According to the police, he was arrested on March 25 near a kiosk located close to the police station. Cases involving serious charges—including various sections of the BNS (Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita) as well as the SC/ST Act—were already registered against the accused at the Georgetown Police



Station. The police stated that the accused had been absconding for a considerable period and was being actively sought. Following his arrest, he was produced before a court, and further legal proceedings were initiated. The investigation also revealed that the accused possesses an extensive criminal history. Multiple cases have been registered against him across various police stations in Prayagraj—including

Civil Lines, Kotwali, Kidganj, and Naini—involving charges such as assault, criminal intimidation, obstruction of government duty, and other serious offenses. Police officials stated that continuous action is being taken against such criminals to maintain law and order within the area. The team from the Georgetown Police Station played a pivotal role in effecting this arrest.

No Disposables at Kanya Pujan; Pledge Taken for Ganga Cleanliness

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj: On the occasion of Navratri in Prayagraj, the message of environmental conservation and the cleanliness of the River Ganga took center stage at the *Kanya Pujan* (worship of young girls) program organized by the *Vishal Sankalp* organization. Held at *Vishal Sankalp Park* near the Boat Club, the event saw the participation of over 200 young girls from slum areas. The objective of this annual program—organized by the organization every year—is to integrate girls from underprivileged sections of society into the social mainstream. During the event, in addition to a meal, the girls were presented with books, notebooks, and hygiene kits as a traditional offering (*Dakshina*). Dr. Anjali Kesari, the head of the organization, explained that this initiative aims to instill self-confidence in the girls, enabling them to recognize their potential and move forward in life. She noted that by associating with the organiza-



tion, hundreds of girls have already brought about positive changes in their lives. A highlight of this year's program was the conscious effort to minimize the use of disposable items; consequently, the girls were served their meals on steel plates. Through this gesture, a collective pledge was also taken to

help keep the River Ganga clean. The Chief Guest, Anil Kesharwani (*Annu Bhaiya*), lauded the organization's efforts and administered a pledge for Ganga cleanliness to the attendees and the girls. Meanwhile, Major Harsh encouraged the girls to pursue higher education, emphasizing that a city

can be kept clean only through small, collective efforts. Several individuals, including Mayank Dubey, Amit Tripathi, and Sumit Gupta, praised the organization's work during the event. Other dignitaries present on the occasion included Kavita Srivastava, Rakesh Chaurasia, and Ashok Gupta.

Gang Operating Fraudulent Website Exposed; Two Accused Arrested

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. The Cyber Crime Police Station in Prayagraj has busted a gang involved in fraud by creating a fake website of the Uttar Pradesh Board of Secondary Education (Madhyamik Shiksha Parishad) and has arrested two accused individuals. The accused created a replica of the official website of the Uttar Pradesh Board of Secondary Education and illegally extorted money from students and parents. According to the



police, the arrested individuals include Shashi Prakash Rai alias Rajan Sharma (from Azamgarh district) and Manish Kumar Rai (from Azamgarh district). Both were arrested on March 25, 2026, and further legal proceedings are underway. The investiga-

tion revealed that the accused operated a call center under the name 'Shri Education.' From this location, they created a fake website modeled after the Board's official site and placed advertisements on social media—particularly Facebook—

offering to inflate marks on mark sheets and to produce fake certificates. Upon being contacted, they would collect money from students, parents, and institutions, subsequently creating fake mark sheets and degrees for High School, Intermediate, and university levels, which were then dispatched via courier. Interrogation further revealed that the accused charged between 4,000 and 5,000 per document and had been involved in this illicit activity for a considerable period. The prime

accused had been engaging in such fraudulent activities since 2014. The police have recovered 10 mobile phones, several SIM cards, 42 fake seals, 217 fake mark sheets, computer equipment, a printer, pen drives, and a large number of holograms from the possession of the accused. Furthermore, the investigation has revealed that approximately 7,000 fake mark sheets have been created and distributed to date. This operation was conducted by a joint team comprising

the Cyber Crime Police Station and the STF (Special Task Force), under the direction of the Police Commissionerate, Prayagraj. Police officials have appealed to the public to verify the authenticity of any suspicious website or online transaction before proceeding with it. In the event of falling victim to cybercrime, individuals have been advised to register a complaint by calling the helpline number 1930 or by visiting the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal.

EDITORIAL

Shashi Tharoor has always disliked 'statist Congress'

Power is in the words. Language has mystical powers. I enjoy playing with words. Those words are hot. You can be moved to tears by words. You can find humor in words. Moreover, there are few things that can convey the planet and all its inhabitants as vividly and comprehensively as words. During the 2009 austerity drive of the Congress-led UPA administration, Tharoor was embroiled in controversy for his response to a query regarding flying "cattle class" to Kerala. His statement, "Absolutely, in cattle class out of solidarity with all our holy cows!" caused a political storm following his response. Tharoor, an accomplished writer of numerous best-selling books on Indian society and politics, was forced to clarify that he did not want to offend economy class passengers after the Congress party swiftly censured him. After 16 years, Tharoor is now again in trouble for comments he made in an interview. In response to a Malayalam report that he had claimed, "We have many leaders, but many feel that there are no ordinary workers," Tharoor clarified that he had really said, "several workers feel there is an absence of a leader in Kerala's Congress." "You should not think that I have no option to spend my time. I have options," Tharoor added earlier in the interview. I have speeches, books, and invitations to speak all around the globe. Some saw his comments as a covert signal to the highest levels of Congress that he was thinking about other political paths. Amidst the upcoming Assembly elections in the state next year, Tharoor is now facing accusations of "crossing the line" from the top leaders of the Congress's faction-ridden Kerala unit, putting him in the center of a maelstrom. Because of this, Shashi Tharoor has been named this week's ThePrint Newsmaker. Actually, Tharoor's essay praising the new industrial policies of the Left-led Kerala government had already been a hot topic before the interview controversy erupted. Tharoor had stated that, during the course of 18 months last year, Kerala's startup ecosystem was valued at an astounding \$1.7 billion, which is five times higher than the worldwide average for the same time period. While the fact that this change has started happening under an LDF government run by communists is shocking, it is not totally unexpected. "The path to growth and prosperity for their people lies in capitalism, entrepreneurship, and initiative, not in red flags, strikes, and agitations," he said in the post, comparing the Communists in Kerala to their West Bengali counterparts at the turn of the century. While he disagrees that the state's industrial climate has changed generally, Tharoor defended himself by saying that "when something good emerges, even if only in one area, it is petty not to acknowledge it" in response to attacks from Kerala Congress officials over the piece. Tharoor, a former UN diplomat, has had a tumultuous political career with the Congress since his 2009 victory in the Lok Sabha elections from the Thiruvananthapuram constituency. Mostly because he had a habit of saying things that went against the party line. However, he consistently gets himself into problems by more than simply his words. In 2009, as the UPA was implementing its austerity measures, Tharoor and then-External Affairs Minister SM Krishna came under fire from the government for allegedly residing in a five-star hotel in Delhi while their official quarters were still being prepared. Tharoor lost his position in the Manmohan Singh government's council of ministers in 2010 due to the scandal surrounding the sweat equity provided to Sunanda Pushkar, his then-girlfriend and later-wife, by a consortium that owned the Kochi club of the Indian Premier League. His ordination as a junior minister was renewed in 2012. Tharoor was thrust into his gravest professional crisis in January 2014, when Pushkar was discovered dead in a luxurious Delhi hotel room—months prior to the Lok Sabha elections.



Muslims want waqf reforms too. It's not an issue for political acrimony

When the Waqf Amendment Bill 2024 was first tabled in the Lok Sabha on 8 August last year, it triggered fears within the Muslim community, as it was perceived to have been introduced without adequate consultation with stakeholders. After all, the issue of waqfs—Muslim institutions through which property is bequeathed for religious or charitable purposes—is sensitive because it involves socio-religious spaces such as qabristans, masjids, idgahs, and madrasas. As such, the government and Parliament were exhorted to adopt procedures that allayed rather than stoked the fears of

Muslims. In this backdrop, the decision to refer the bill to a joint committee of both Houses of Parliament was welcome. The 31-member committee, drawn from across party lines, received 97,27,772 memoranda overall. There were representations from various ministries and departments—including Minority Affairs, Law and Justice, Railways, Housing and Urban Affairs, Road Transport, and Culture (Archaeological Survey of India)—as well as state waqf boards and experts, ensuring a diversity of opinions. As such, the government and Parliament were exhorted to adopt pro-

cedures that allayed rather than stoked the fears of Muslims. In this backdrop, the decision to refer the bill to a joint committee of both Houses of Parliament was welcome. The 31-member committee, drawn from across party lines, received 97,27,772 memoranda overall. There were representations from various ministries and departments—including Minority Affairs, Law and Justice, Railways, Housing and Urban Affairs, Road Transport, and Culture (Archaeological Survey of India)—as well as state waqf boards and experts, ensuring a diversity of opinions. It is not entirely

correct to state that waqf reforms are being externally foisted. Rather, to a large extent, the demand for waqf reforms has emerged from within the Muslim community also. The Ministry of Minority Affairs received numerous complaints from Muslims on the maladministration of waqf properties, which manifested in voluminous litigations. The ministry's analysis of grievances received from April 2023 found that 148 complaints pertained mostly to encroachments, illegal sales of waqf land, delays in surveys and registration, and complaints against waqf boards and mutawallis.

There has been a paradigm shift in US foreign policy

Donald Trump has spent only a month in his second term as the US President. However, he has disrupted the international order, weakened the Western alliance and created a sense of insecurity and uncertainty among its members, surprising even some of his supporters. There has been a paradigm shift in US foreign policy under Trump. He is now closer to Moscow than Washington's traditional allies. He has embraced the Kremlin's narrative on Ukraine and has sidelined US allies. Although senior members of the Trump administration have denied that the US has abandoned Kyiv and ignored its European allies, Trump himself has not made any serious attempts to pacify Ukrainians and Europeans. His closeness to Russia has been on display since he talked for 90 minutes on the phone with Russian leader Vladimir Putin, in which they agreed to start negotiations to end the Ukraine war, which will mark its third anniversary on Monday. Trump did speak to Zelenskyy soon after that call with Putin, but a nervous Ukrainian President warned that excluding his country from the talks would be "very dangerous". Events after that only made Ukrainians feel sidelined. Trump's Vice President, JD Vance, met European leaders in Munich two days later. But his comment that Europe will not be included in the peace talks only helped fuelled the speculation that they were being left out of the future of Ukraine, which is closer to their homes and in which they have invested a lot of money and effort since



the Russian invasion. Vance's meeting with Zelenskyy did not go well either as the Ukrainian leader refused to give access to the country's vast reserves of critical minerals unless he was given security guarantees. That angered Washington. Ending the Russia-Ukraine war was Trump's major campaign promise. But hardly anyone expected him to brazenly take Russia's side and even blame Ukraine for the conflict, which he did. Last Tuesday, a US delegation led by Secretary of State Marco Rubio met the Russian delegation headed by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Saudi Arabia, to discuss peace. Ukraine was not invited. Putin—who had been shunned by the US and its allies since the invasion of Ukraine—was delighted. A frustrated Zelenskyy dismissed the Riyadh talks as worthless. Trump did not like those comments and called the Ukraine President a dictator, even accusing him of starting the war. Zelenskyy said the US President was living in a Russian-made "disinformation space". This infuriated Trump, who does not take kindly to any criticism. He described Zelenskyy as "a modestly successful comedian" who "talked the United

States of America into spending \$350 Billion, to go into a War that couldn't be won, that never had to start, but a War that he, without the U.S. and 'TRUMP,' will never be able to settle." Trump's behaviour towards Zelenskyy is in stark contrast to Biden's, who had backed Ukraine against Russia with all the possible military and financial aid. President Biden travelled to Ukraine many times since the Russian invasion in February 2022 to display his administration's full support. He also promised NATO membership to Ukraine at a future date. Russia was severely punished for invading Ukraine. The US joined hands with its allies to isolate Moscow. Russia faced tough sanctions and its assets in the West were seized. The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant against Putin for alleged war crimes in Ukraine. There were even plans to put Putin and his close allies on Nuremberg-style trials. Until a year ago, Ukraine's leader was talking about even liberating all its territory, including Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014, with the help of Western military equipment. Ukraine even succeeded in occupying the

Russian territory of Kursk, which it had thought would be used as a bargaining chip during negotiations with Moscow. But all that now looks like a distant dream. With Trump back in the White House, Ukraine fears that Russia will be allowed to keep all the occupied territory as part of the deal to end the war. Kyiv is now likely to be denied NATO membership. That could be a promise to Russia to end the war. The US under Trump has now even opposed calling Russia an aggressor in a G-7 statement being prepared to mark the third anniversary of the war. The US team removed the phrase from the first draft, which was prepared by Canada, the current holder of the group's presidency. It is not just Ukraine, America's European allies are also now nervous about the intent of Trump. Since the Second World War, they enjoyed the US security umbrella under NATO. But now they are unsure if the US under Trump will honour Article 5 of the NATO, which is triggered when a member state comes under attack. It implies that an attack on one member is an attack on all. There is even fear in Europe that Donald Trump may sign a deal with the Russian leader Vladimir Putin that will lead to the withdrawal of US forces from Baltic states and effectively kill the NATO alliance. That could be similar to the non-aggression treaty signed by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany on August 23, 1939, sending shockwaves to other European countries and prompting Hitler and Stalin to annex neighbouring countries. It is another matter

that Hitler invaded the Soviet Union two years later, putting an end to the treaty. European members of NATO may call themselves major powers, but they can't match Russia's military might without US support. Even after losing more than a hundred thousand men and lots of military equipment in the Ukraine conflict, Moscow remains a strong power, mainly because of its nuclear arsenal. So Why Has Trump Changed The Narrative? Trump has always been an admirer of strongmen like Putin. Even during his first term, he developed a rapport with him. He also dislikes Zelenskyy, whom he sees as more of a roadblock in ending the Ukraine conflict. As a former businessman, Trump sees things from the perspective of profitable deals. Western sanctions have hit Russia, but American companies have also suffered business losses, running into billions of dollars. He would like to reverse that. And despite Ukraine's resistance, Trump believes Zelenskyy will have to give access to critical minerals in return for any future US support. Some in the Trump administration suggest Kyiv should provide Americans with those minerals in return for the US military and financial aid already received by Ukraine. Trump has blamed European leaders for not doing enough to end the Ukraine war. He has also complained for a long time that Europe has lived off the US for too long and it must pay for its security. Europeans have increased their defence budgets but not enough to survive without US support.

The Hindutva Pitch of the BJP: Will Bihar Pay Attention This Time?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attacked the opposition, calling members of the party who support "jungle raj" anti-Indian and anti-faith. Furthermore, he said that the state's citizens would hold anybody who insults Maha Kumbh in contempt forever. Political circles were captivated by his attention on Maha Kumbh, which he displayed barely two days before Maha Shivratri, as the event was coming to a close. For what reason did Modi bring up the holy event, which has been going on for almost two months, Was all he was doing was addressing the Opposition's strong criticism of what they saw as poor administration during the world's largest religious gathering, the Maha Kumbh, and the two stampedes that occurred there. Did he want Maha Kumbh to be a part of the National Democratic Alliance's Bihar election platform? It is quite probable that Modi, who had begun the NDA's Bihar election campaign with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, purposefully

brought up the controversy surrounding Maha Kumbh in order to strengthen the Hindu support among the OBC. Many also saw it as an effort to win over religiously inclined female voters. Meanwhile, political scientists claimed Modi didn't really need to mention Maha Kumbh. In contrast to Uttar Pradesh, religious and communal appeals do not have the same impact on elections in Bihar. A transformative governance agenda has traditionally had a greater impact on the state. Rather than a rising embrace of the Hindutva ideology of the BJP, observers pointed out that Bihar was shifting away from the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) led by Lalu Yadav owing to fears of his previous misrule. North Bihar is still firmly under the control of the NDA, and yatras, which were once used to communalize politics, have not been very successful. The Hindu Swabhimani Yatra, which Union Minister Giriraj Singh attempted last year but was unable to launch, is a prime example.

Bangalore and Tel Aviv Emerge as 'Innovation Twins' Shaping the Future of Global Technology

touchwithworld.com
Rahul Upadhyay

Amid rising geopolitical tensions in West Asia, supply Chain uncertainties and an intensifying global race for technological dominance, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu have once again drawn global attention. In this evolving landscape, India and Israel are not only strengthening diplomatic ties but are also deepening collaboration in critical sectors such as innovation, Startups and advanced technology. At the heart of this Growing Partnership are Bangalore and Tel Aviv, which are rapidly emerging as "Innovation Twins." These two technology hubs are bridging continents through shared ambitions and complementary strengths, driving a new wave of global innovation. Technology has always been central to India-Israel relations, but in recent years, the collaboration has become more structured and institutionalized. The Karnataka Digital Economy Mission (KDEM) has signed agreements with leading Israeli incubators and accelerators, aiming to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, capital and market access between startups in both countries. Simultaneously, the Israel Innovation Authority is actively supporting joint research and development (R&D) initiatives. These Projects focus on addressing global Challenges such as water scarcity, agricultural efficiency and cybersecurity—areas where both

nations Possess significant Expertise. At the Corporate level, collaboration is accelerating. Major Indian IT companies like Wipro and Tech Mahindra are Partnering with Israeli cybersecurity startups. Israel is widely recognized as a global hub for cybersecurity innovation, and Indian firms are leveraging this expertise to strengthen their digital Solutions. This Partnership goes beyond technological integration—it enhances global competitiveness. Indian companies contribute scale, cost efficiency and access to vast markets, while Israeli startups bring cutting-edge innovation. Together, they are developing solutions that are scalable and globally Relevant. While Tel Aviv has long been known as the center of the "Startup Nation," Bangalore is widely regarded as India's Silicon Valley. Investment flows between the two are increasing rapidly. Israeli investors are showing strong interest in Bangalore Saas (Software-as-a-Service) ecosystem, driven by India large digital consumer base and strong engineering talent. In return, Bangalore-based startups are benefiting from Israel expertise in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and deep-tech innovation. Importantly, this collaboration extends beyond the IT sector. Through centers of excellence in Karnataka, Israeli technologies such as drip irrigation and Precision farming are being implemented on the ground. These innovations are helping Indian farmers improve Productivity and optimize

resource usage, especially in water-scarce Regions. Talent exchange is another Key Pillar of this Partnership. While Israel leads in research and deep-tech innovation, India excels in large-scale software development and implementation. By combining these strengths, both countries are building a powerful talent ecosystem capable of solving complex global Challenges. However, Challenges remain. Differences in regulatory frameworks, data protection standards and market dynamics can complicate collaboration. Cultural and business Practice differences also Pose hurdles. Despite this, experts believe that Clear Policies, strong private sector Participation and continuous dialogue can help overcome these Barriers. The rise of Bangalore and Tel Aviv as "Innovation Twins" represents more than a symbolic Partnership—it offers a Glimpse into the future of Global innovation. Under the leadership of Modi and Netanyahu, this collaboration demonstrates how nations- and their leading cities- can harness technology, capital and talent to address global Challenges and Shape a new era of innovation-driven Growth.

Age of retirement for Tata Trusts trustees is something to think about

Delhi: One day after stepping down as a director, Vijay Singh, vice chair of Tata Trusts, was present at the Tata Sons board meeting. Tata Sons welcomed him to attend the meeting as a token of their thanks for his time on the board, but since he had already resigned, he was unable to vote on any matters on the agenda. Despite his status as a nominated director of Tata Trusts—the parent company of Tata Sons—Singh did not have any additional authority during board meetings. Nominee directors of Tata Trusts have far more clout than other directors at Tata Sons; they can veto acquisitions or capital expenditure programs worth more than Rs 100 crore, for example. But they still need the majority vote of the Tata Trusts trustees to make decisions. The only item on the agenda that did not pass was an investment plan that did not receive approval from Tata Trusts; all the others included Air India,



When oil prices drop every month, US stocks go up

Delhi: Wall Street indexes rose in choppy rises as in-line European markets ended flat, continuing their 10-week winning streak. The Federal Reserve is expected to decrease interest rates twice this year, according to U.S. inflation figures. Crude prices fell 1%, the first monthly decline since November, as markets braced for fresh levies from Washington and crude exports from Iraq's Kurdistan

Tata International, and Tata Capital. After the approval of the biggest shareholder is obtained, the proposal would be reviewed again at the subsequent board meeting

region. According to a White House source, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine will depart the Oval Office early Friday after a contentious meeting with Trump. Following reports of falling yearly inflation and sluggish consumer spending in the latest statistics tracked by the Federal Reserve, U.S. Treasury rates hit multi-month lows. A drop of 2.93 points, or 0.34%, was recorded by MSCI's global stock index.

of Tata Sons. After Singh left, the two remaining nominee directors at Tata Sons are Noel Tata, chairman of Tata Trusts, and Venu Srinivasan, vice-chairman.

Adani group bans sanctioned ships at ports

Delhi: India's largest private port operator, Adani Group, has banned entry of tankers that are sanctioned by Western countries at all of its ports - sources said and documents show move that could hit Russian oil supplies for two Indian refiners that regularly get Russian oil delivered at Adani's Mundra Port in Gujarat. India is the biggest buyer of Russian seaborne oil, mostly shipped on tankers that are



sanctioned by the European Union, the US and Britain.

HPCL-Mittal Energy, which operates a 226,000-barrels per day Bathinda refinery in northern Punjab, gets all of its crude supplies at the Mundra Port. The

port is also used by Indian Oil Corp, the country's biggest refiner, for oil imports. IOC gets crude supplies for its 10 refineries at multiple ports in India.

Adani, IOC and HMEL had no immediate comment when reached out.

Gadkari says Mercedes-Benz wants to export 'made in India' cars

Delhi: According to Nitin Gadkari, India's minister of road transport and highways, Mercedes-Benz has told the government that it plans to increase production at its plant outside of Pune in order to fulfill its goal of exporting "Made in India" automobiles to

markets worldwide. The chairman of Mercedes, according to Gadkari, informed him that the production quality in India is strong, which has led the company to consider increasing manufacturing in the nation to fulfill the demands of worldwide

markets. "The chairman of Mercedes was telling me that they are going to look at increasing the productivity of Mercedes in India... And they want to export Mercedes from here to (markets) all over the world," Gadkari said. at the Auto Retail

India resists full crypto framework, fears systemic risks

Delhi: A government paper reveals that India is considering not regulating cryptocurrencies but rather maintaining partial monitoring, due to concerns that integrating digital assets into the country's mainstream financial system could pose systemic dangers. According to the memo reviewed by Reuters, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) believes that it would be impossible to regulate cryptocurrencies in a way that effectively limits their dangers. The inauguration of U.S. President



Donald Trump has coincided with a rise in the price of bitcoin, the most valuable cryptocurrency by market capitalization, and a general improvement in the worldwide acceptability of cryptocurrencies. Stablecoins, a type of cryptocurrency

that is backed by fiat currency and hence less susceptible to violent swings, have also been legalized in the US. Despite China's ongoing cryptocurrency ban, Reuters reported last month that the country is looking into a stablecoin.

India, UAE set \$100 bn non-oil trade goal by 2030

Delhi: India and the United Arab Emirates are targeting \$100 billion in trade by 2030, excluding oil and precious metals, India's commerce ministry said in a statement. The target was decided during a meeting between Union commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal and the UAE's minister of foreign trade, Dr. Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, in New Delhi last week. They were reviewing bilateral trade between the two countries under the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) that came into effect in 2022. Both leaders stressed deeper cooperation in emerging sectors renewable energy.

Adani will spend 70,000 crore in Maha; govt. inks five MoUs for 1.08 lakh

Delhi: Adani Enterprises Limited would invest 70,000 crore in Nagpur, Maharashtra, to establish a coal gasification and downstream derivatives complex. This MoU was signed with the state government. Project is projected to enhance state energy and industrial output and create 30,000 jobs. The Maharashtra government signed five MoUs worth 1.08 lakh crore. Adani's investment tops. The com-



pany develops high-growth enterprises and spins them off as independent companies in mining, infrastructure (airports, roads, data centres, water management), solar manufacturing, defence, and edible oils. Adani Enterprises

would invest ₹70,000 crore in the Integrated Surface Coal Gasification and Downstream Derivatives Project in Linga, Kamleshwar, Nagpur to provide next-generation energy solutions for Maharashtra.

Tata Capital's home financing records substantial growth

Delhi: Housing financing has been a consistent area of growth for Tata Capital, and the company sees this as a key component of its overall retail growth plan. Tata Capital Housing Finance is well-positioned to take advantage of structural opportunities in India's underdeveloped housing finance sector, as its portfolio expanded at a robust 33 percent compounded annual growth rate between FY23 and FY25. With an increase from ₹30,850 crore in FY24 and ₹22,100 crore in FY23, the home loan segment of the firm now accounts for ₹38,400 crore, or 17 percent, of Tata Capital's consolidated gross loan book as of March-end. This represents a gain of 74% over the past two years and a 24% increase over the past year, suggesting that



Govt allows companies to display revised MRP on old unsold packs

Delhi: As a comfort to packaged goods makers who were waiting for labelling and packaging clarity to figure out how to pass the GST gains on to customers, the government has authorized them to display revised MRPs on unsold old packs of items. But before the end of the

the demand for residential credit is still high and that the category is expanding. Tata Capital continues to

year, businesses must sell off their old inventory. The consumer affairs ministry announced on Tuesday that until December 31 or until supplies run out, whichever comes first, makers, packers, or importers of pre-packaged goods can show amended MRPs. The government has

cater to a diverse range of clients, including salaried individuals, entrepreneurs, and small enterprises,

EU to Give a Hand to India's Seafood Exports Following US Tariff

Delhi: After suffering under the US's harsh tariff regime, Indian seafood exporters are about to receive a vital lifeline in the EU. Shrimp exports, which were struck particularly hard by Washington's recent 50% tariff on Indian goods, could see an immediate 20%



increase, according to the Commerce Ministry. The European Union (EU) cleared

102 new Indian fishing operations for export this month, effectively eliminating all pending permissions, marking a significant milestone. With the listings in place, which encompass aquaculture units, sea-caught processing factories, and cold storage facilities,

all of India's main seafood exporters can now begin shipping to the EU. India sent \$1.1 billion worth of seafood to the European Union in FY24, making it the country's second-biggest seafood export market. The ministry anticipates that

Ad exchange sues Google for monopolistic violations

Delhi: The advertising exchange PubMatic Inc. is suing Alphabet Inc.'s Google, claiming that Google has unlawfully monopolized the ad technology market and is seeking billions of dollars in damages. This is the second lawsuit that an advertising exchange has filed against Google in as many months. In April, a federal judge found that Google had unlawfully monopolized two important technology markets, namely ad exchanges and the tools used by websites to sell ad space, called ad servers. The lawsuit was filed in a federal court in Virginia. Another trial to determine whether



Google must divest portions of its advertising business to fix the unlawful behavior is scheduled to take place this month before the same Virginia judge who agreed with the Justice Department and a few states in April. The US Department of Justice has demanded that the

corporation sell its AdX advertising exchange and enable its technology to communicate with competitors' systems without delay. Instead of selling off its assets, Google plans to integrate its advertising exchange with other technologies. and put a compliance

Amazon eyes bumper sales

Delhi: Amazon is preparing for an even greater surge in festive sales this year as a result of the reorganization of GST slabs, which would lower the prices of many consumer goods. This will increase spending by the salaried class, many of whom look for online offers when purchasing products, especially for expensive ones. Outside of ethnic clothing, which is the norm for festivals, the most purchased items during festivals tend to be smartphones, gadgets,

and durables. We anticipate a greater increase in holiday sales compared to previous year. Regardless, consumers typically wait for sales to begin before making large purchases; however, this time around, the trend has quickened thanks to the GST cuts. Customers can expect to save a ton of money this holiday season because of merchants' enticing bargains and a drop in GST on millions of products, according to Saurabh Srivastava, VP of categories at Amazon India.

Mrunal Thakur reveals she approached Aditya Dhar for work, recalls early struggles and says she created her own opportunities

Mrunal: I asked for work

Mrunal Thakur started her career with the television show, *Mujhse Kuchh Kehti Yeh Khamoshiyaan* (2012), but rose to fame with her performance in *Kumkum Bhagya*. Her first movie was a Marathi film titled *Hello Nandan* (2014), and she made her Hindi debut with the 2019 release *Super 30*.

Recently, during an interview with News18, Mrunal revealed that opportunities didn't come to her easily, and she had to approach filmmakers to get work. The actress revealed, "Opportunities didn't come to me easily. I had to create them. I had to chase them. I had to make sure that I flash my face in front of the directors, saying, 'Sir, main hoon! Kisi na kisi din cast kar lena please.' I don't shy away from doing these things."

Mrunal recollected that Dhurandhar director Aditya Dhar was the first filmmaker she approached and asked for work. She said, "In fact, Aditya Dhar was the first director I had approached and asked for work from. When I spoke to him after *Dhurandhar*, I told him that I'll always remember that day. I didn't know how to ask for work. I didn't know how to communicate."

The actress in the interview also revealed that after watching Sridevi starrer *MOM*, she had told filmmaker Ravi Udyawar that she wants to work with him. Ravi has directed Mrunal's upcoming film *Do Deewane Seher Mein*.

Do Deewane Seher Mein also stars Siddhant Chaturvedi in the lead role, and it is slated to hit the big screens on February 20, 2026. The film is produced by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, and the pre-release buzz about it is strictly average. So, the box office fate clearly depends on the reviews and word of mouth.

Also, the film is not getting a solo release. It will clash at the box office with *Assi*. The Taapsee Pannu starrer is already getting positive reviews from the critics.



Aditya Dhar

'Being King has never meant power, always responsibility'

Shah Rukh Khan opens up about the meaning of 'King', saying it stands for responsibility, humility and purpose

He's King Khan to his fans and the industry and his next film quite coincidentally is called *King* too. Shah Rukh Khan, however, brushes off the power the title bestows on him, saying it's less an identity and more "a reminder to live with heart, humility, and purpose".

"The word 'king' has never meant power to me. It has always been about responsibility -- to the people who believe in you and the stories you choose to tell..." Shah Rukh told PTI in an email interview.

The star, first seen in the TV show *Fauji* in 1989, has worn the 'Bollywood king' crown with ease over three decades. Maybe not any more.

"As time passes, you realise that what truly matters is not the title, but the intention behind your work," said Shah Rukh, who has lent his voice to fire-works show *The Lion King: Celebration in the Sky* aboard Disney Cruise Line's latest ship, Disney Adventure next month.

"At this stage of my life and career, the title *King* feels less like an identity and more like a reminder to live with heart, humility, and purpose. Whether it's narrating a story aboard the Disney Adventure or choosing my next film, what matters most to me is creating work that brings people together, makes them feel something, and leaves behind a little bit of joy," the 60-year-old said.



Photo: Instagram

SNIPPETS

Rashmika, Vijay's Udaipur wedding with no-phone rule

Actors Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda are reportedly set to tie the knot in an intimate ceremony in Udaipur on February 26. Despite the growing buzz, neither Vijay nor Rashmika has officially confirmed the wedding. Over the years, the duo has remained tight-lipped about their relationship, choosing to focus on their professional commitments and neither confirming nor denying dating rumours. According to a report by India Today, the wedding will be an extremely private affair, with festivities commencing on February 24 and culminating in the ceremony on February 26. A source was quoted as saying, "It's a very small guest list. No phones will be allowed. Even the team capturing the wedding has signed NDAs (Non-disclosure agreement)."



Aamir denies playing mediator in Ranveer-Farhan Don 3 feud



Ranveer Singh and Farhan Akhtar's production house Excel Entertainment are reportedly at loggerheads following Singh's exit from *Don 3*, with reports claiming Excel is seeking Rs 40 crore in compensation to recover pre-production costs. With the feud intensifying, reports recently stated that actor Aamir Khan stepped in as a peacemaker to resolve the issue between Farhan and Ranveer. Amid the reports, Aamir denied playing a mediator in Ranveer and Farhan's *Don 3* feud, "flatly denying any hand in the Ranveer-Farhan Akhtar dispute," according to Bollywood Hungama. A few days ago, several prominent producers were spotted leaving Aamir's Mumbai residence on Thursday evening.



Oscar-winning filmmaker Frederick Wiseman dies

Oscar-Winning documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman has passed away. He was 96. He breathed his last on Monday. The news of his demise was announced by Zipporah Films, the distribution company he founded in 1971, as per The Hollywood Reporter.

"For nearly six decades, Frederick Wiseman created an unparalleled body of work, a sweeping cinematic record of contemporary social institutions and ordinary human experience primarily in the United States and France," a statement from the company read.

A law professor turned filmmaker, Wiseman pretty much made one documentary a year since his first one, the controversial *Titicut Follies* (1967), which exposed appalling brutalities at Bridgewater State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

Richa welcomes indie filmmakers

Richa Chadha invites indie filmmakers to approach her directly, opens up about early career betrayal, and stresses choosing meaningful cinema



Photo: Instagram

Actor-producer Richa Chadha has urged independent filmmakers to approach her directly for collaborations, saying she is open to meaningful and story-driven projects. Speaking about her journey in the film industry, Richa said many independent creators assume actors like her are inaccessible, which is not true. She stressed that if a script is honest and the intention behind it is clear, she would be happy to be part of such conversations. The actress reiterated her commitment to supporting strong, content-led cinema.

Richa also spoke candidly about a difficult phase early in her career. Without taking any names, she revealed that someone she deeply trusted had worked against her interests at a crucial time. She said the experience made her realise that not everyone who appears supportive truly has good intentions. The actress shared that the episode was unsettling but also became an important learning moment. It taught her to be more careful, protect her voice and choices, and not remain naive in professional relationships.

Richa added that over the years, she has grown stronger and more aware, focusing on projects that align with her values rather than outside expectations.



Photos: Instagram, @readynews

Delhi court seeks update on Celina Jaitly's brother

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday granted time to the Centre and the Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi to pursue through diplomatic channels and seek cooperation of the UAE authorities in the matter of detention of Major Vikrant Jaitly (ret'd), brother of actor Celina Jaitly, in the Gulf country.

The Centre's counsel told Justice Purushendra Kumar Kaurav that the embassy requested consular access to Vikrant Jaitly on February 13, which was denied by the UAE authorities, and the next date for such a meeting was

awaited. The Centre's lawyer sought a reasonable time of 3-4 weeks to be granted to enable the Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian Embassy to pursue the matter with the UAE authorities through diplomatic channels to seek necessary cooperation in the matter.

"The prayer seems to be reasonable. Accordingly, the hearing is deferred," the court said. "It is not the case of the ministry not doing anything? After 10-15 days, nothing is going to change. The ministry says grant us 3-4 weeks so that we can do something substantial," it said.



Photo: X

Kiran Rao down with chikungunya

Filmmaker Kiran Rao has shared that she is down with chikungunya and is currently recuperating at home, while urging people to take necessary precautions.

Kiran took to her Instagram stories section, where she shared a picture of herself lying down with her cat beside her.

Sharing a health update on social media, Rao wrote, "Ok folks, I now have chikungunya. And yes, Miri is an excellent paramedic, timely monitoring her mamma's fever."

She also shared a picture of a book, thermometer and a card kept next to her. Despite the illness, the filmmaker said she is trying to stay positive and take things slow. She also highlighted the severity of the symptoms.



Kiran wrote: "Taking it slow, admiring my friends' cards, and catching up on my reading - when I can hold up the book! 'I know you know this but the joint pain is so TAKE ALL PRECAUTIONS!'"

Three Indians held in Canada for shooting outside home

OTTAWA

Three Indian nationals have been arrested by Canadian police on an anti-extortion patrol and charged after bullets were fired at a home.

Harjot Singh, 21, Taranveer Singh, 19, and Dayajeet Singh Billing, 21, face one count each of discharging a firearm, and all have been remanded in custody until Thursday, the Surrey Police Service (SPS) said in a statement on Monday.

The suspects were arrested by patrol officers after an early morning report of shots fired and a small fire outside a home in Surrey's Crescent Beach neighbourhood, the LakelandToday reported.

On February 1, the SPS members were patrolling in Surrey's Crescent Beach neighbourhood when reports came in of shots being fired and a small fire outside a residence near Crescent Road and 132 Street. The three accused were arrested by SPS officers a short time later, the statement said.

SPS's Major Crime Section took over the investigation, and the three men have now been charged with Criminal Code offences, it said.

Jaishankar's discussions with Rubio & other senior American officials to bolster India-US ties amid euphoria over trade deal

Meet on key minerals to map sourcing blueprint

WASHINGTON

External Affairs Minister **S. Jaishankar** will meet US Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** in Washington on Tuesday, ahead of an inaugural ministerial on critical minerals, as President Donald Trump announced a trade deal with India.

The meeting will be held at the US Department of State on Tuesday afternoon. Jaishankar is on an official visit to the United States from February 2 to 4 and will participate in the Critical Minerals Ministerial convened by Rubio on Wednesday.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs, Jaishankar will also hold discussions with senior members of the US administration during his visit, focusing on strengthening bilateral cooperation across strategic, economic and geopolitical areas. The meetings come amid renewed momentum in India-US ties following the trade



agreement announced by Trump.

The US President said Washington would reduce reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods from 25 per cent to 18 per cent. The announcement was made on Truth Social a day before Jaishankar's meeting with Rubio, giving fresh impetus to economic engagement between the two countries.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed the announcement, saying he was

delighted that Made in India products would now face a reduced tariff of 18 per cent. He thanked Trump on behalf of India's 1.4 billion people and said cooperation between the world's largest democracies would unlock immense opportunities for mutual benefit.

The State Department said the inaugural Critical Minerals Ministerial would focus on advancing collective efforts to strengthen and diversify supply chains critical

for technological innovation, economic resilience and national security.

The meeting is expected to bring together senior representatives from multiple countries to coordinate strategies on sourcing and processing key minerals.

US Vice President JD Vance, Rubio, and senior officials responsible for global supply chains and economic affairs are expected to deliver opening remarks at the ministerial.

'Trade deal offers an exciting opportunity'

NEW YORK

India has agreed to reduce tariffs on a range of agricultural products, manufactured goods and chemicals under a trade deal with the United States, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said, describing the agreement as an "exciting opportunity" for both countries.

In an interview with CNBC, Greer said the US would continue to impose an 18 per cent tariff on Indian imports due to its significant trade deficit with India. However, he said India had agreed to lower its tariffs across several key sectors, including agriculture, chemicals, medical devices and manufactured goods.

"This is it. The time has come, and now we have the deal," Greer said, adding that the two sides were in the process of finalising documentation but were already clear on the specifics and scope of the agreement.

President Donald Trump announced the deal after speaking with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying Washington would reduce reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods from 25 per cent to 18

US leaders hail India pact

New York: Top American leaders welcomed the trade deal announced by President Donald Trump with India, saying it would expand US farm exports, strengthen bilateral ties and help counter Russian aggression. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jim Risch congratulated Trump on the agreement, saying India's decision to reduce trade barriers marked a significant step forward. He described India as a close partner and a key player in countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. US Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins said the deal would open India's massive market to American farm products, helping reduce the US agricultural trade deficit with India, which stood at USD 1.3 billion last year. Several leaders also linked the agreement to broader geopolitical objectives, saying India's commitment to reduce purchases of Russian energy would increase pressure on Moscow amid the Ukraine war. —Agencies

per cent. Trump had earlier imposed some of the world's highest tariffs on Indian products, including penalties linked to India's purchases of Russian energy.

Following the announcement, Modi said he was delighted that Made in India products would benefit from reduced tariffs. He thanked Trump and described the US President as a close friend, saying the agreement reflected the strength of ties between the two democracies. Modi said cooperation

between India and the US would unlock immense opportunities for mutually beneficial growth and strengthen global economic stability. He added that closer engagement between the two countries would benefit their people and industries.

US officials said the agreement signalled a significant step forward in bilateral trade relations and would help address long-standing trade imbalances. The deal is expected to be formally finalised in the coming weeks.

India-UK FTA boosts strategic benefits

LONDON

The India-UK free trade agreement offers strategic benefits and stability to businesses at a time of heightened global uncertainty for international commerce, according to a parliamentary scrutiny report released in the United Kingdom.

The House of Lords International Agreements Committee, which reviewed the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, described the pact as a significant achievement reached amid geopolitical turbulence and global tariff disputes.

The committee said the agreement would help UK



File pic of PM Narendra Modi with UK's Keir Starmer

businesses diversify and de-risk their supply chains, particularly as firms seek alternatives in response to changing global trade patterns and disruptions.

However, the report highlighted shortcomings in the agreement, including limited progress on legal services, investment protection and market access for financial and

professional services. It also noted missed opportunities, such as the failure to include a bilateral investment treaty.

The committee recommended that India and the UK treat the agreement as a "living" arrangement rather than a static pact, urging both governments to strengthen its provisions as the bilateral relationship evolves.

It also cautioned that India's recently concluded free trade agreement with the European Union could have implications for UK exporters, particularly in terms of competitiveness and market access.

Once implemented, the agreement is expected to increase annual bilateral trade by £25.5 billion, a significant rise from current levels. The deal is undergoing parliamentary scrutiny, with debates scheduled in both houses before ratification.

The committee called on the UK government to support businesses, especially small and medium enterprises, in utilising the agreement and to ensure adequate resources are provided through diplomatic missions.

Russian aerial strike on power grid in Ukraine

Kyiv: Russia launched its heaviest attack this year on Ukraine's power grid, firing around 450 drones and 70 missiles overnight, Ukrainian officials said.

The assault included a record number of ballistic missiles and targeted multiple regions, including Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa. Ukrainian authorities said the strikes were aimed at crippling energy infrastructure during extreme winter conditions. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia was prioritising terror over diplomacy accusing Moscow of deliberately targeting civilians to inflict suffering during freezing temperatures.

Cops interrogate Rajapaksa family

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's former president Mahinda Rajapaksa's wife and son were questioned separately by police on Tuesday in connection with two different investigations, officials said.

Former first lady Shiranthi Rajapaksa was questioned over alleged financial irregularities linked to a charitable foundation she once headed. Her son, Namal Rajapaksa, an opposition legislator, was questioned over alleged links to an underworld figure extradited from Dubai last year. Both were questioned by

the Criminal Investigation Department for more than four hours. Supporters of Namal's Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna party gathered outside the CID office to express solidarity during the questioning.

In a statement, Namal alleged political victimisation by the ruling National People's Power government, accusing it of targeting political opponents to divert attention from governance failures.

He said the government was attempting to suppress dissent and thanked supporters for standing by his family during what he described as a difficult time.

Prosecutors seek to torpedo Le Pen prez bid

PARIS

French prosecutors are seeking to bar far-right leader Marine Le Pen from holding public office, putting her 2027 presidential bid at serious risk.

Le Pen is appealing a conviction for misuse of European Parliament funds, with prosecutors arguing the case represents a grave breach of public trust that gave her party a financial advantage.

During the appeal trial, prosecutors said party leaders deliberately misused public funds and concealed the actions over several years.

Le Pen acknowledged that some aides performed party work while being paid as EU parliamentary assistants but denied intentional wrongdoing, calling it an administrative error.

If convicted again, Le Pen could face a ban from office, a prison sentence and heavy fines. The verdict, expected later this year, could significantly reshape France's political landscape ahead of the 2027 election.

Mandelson to exit Lords amid Epstein storm



LONDON

British politician **Peter Mandelson** is set to quit the House of Lords as he faces mounting questions and the prospect of a police investigation over his relationship with the late financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The Speaker of the House of Lords, Michael Forsyth, said Mandelson had announced he would retire from Parliament's upper chamber with effect from Wednesday. The move came as the British government prepared legislation to eject him from the Lords and strip him of his lifetime peerage, Lord Mandelson.

The government has also confirmed that it has sent a file of material to police, who are assessing allegations that Mandelson may have passed sensitive government information to Epstein. Officers said they are reviewing reports of potential misconduct to determine whether they meet the criminal threshold for a formal investigation.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer told his Cabinet that he was "appalled" by the revelations contained in newly released Epstein-related files and warned that more damaging details could yet emerge.

Weeks after 'sick man' insult, Trump hosts Colombia prez at White House

WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump is set to welcome Colombian President **Gustavo Petro** to the White House on Tuesday for talks only weeks after threatening military action against the South American country and accusing the leader of pumping cocaine into the United States.

US administration officials say the meeting will focus on regional security cooperation and counternarcotics efforts. And Trump on Monday suggested that Petro - who has continued to criticise Trump and the US operation to capture Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro - seems more willing to work with his administration to stem the flow of illegal drugs from Colombia.

"Somehow after the Venezuelan raid, he became very nice," Trump told reporters. "He changed his atti-



tude very much." Yet, bad blood between the leaders overshadowed the sit-down, even as Trump sought to downplay any friction on the eve of the visit.

The conservative Trump and leftist Petro are ideologically far apart, but both leaders share a tendency for verbal bombast and unpredictability. That sets the stage for a White House visit with an anything-could-happen vibe.

In recent days, Petro has continued poking at the US presi-

dent, calling Trump an "accomplice to genocide" in the Gaza Strip, while asserting that the capture of Maduro was a kidnapping.

And ahead of his departure for Washington, Petro called on Colombians to take to the streets of Bogota during the White House meeting.

Historically, Colombia has been a US ally. For the past 30 years, the US has worked closely with Colombia, the world's largest producer of

cocaine, to arrest drug traffickers, fend off rebel groups and boost economic development in rural areas.

But relations between the leaders have been strained by Trump's massing US forces in the region for unprecedented deadly military strikes targeting suspected drug-smuggling boats in the Caribbean Sea and the eastern Pacific. At least 126 people have been killed in 36 known strikes.

In October, Trump's Republican administration announced it was imposing sanctions on Petro, his family and a member of his government over accusations of involvement in the global drug trade.

The Treasury Department leveled the penalties against Petro; his wife, Veronica del Socorro Alcocer Garcia; his son, Nicolas Fernando Petro Burgos; and Colombian Interior Minister Armando Alberto Benedetti.

offgrid

Gandhi statue stolen in Oz, Indians aghast

NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday strongly condemned the theft of a statue of Mahatma Gandhi from the Australian Indian Community Centre in Melbourne and urged Australian authorities to take immediate steps to recover the statue and bring the culprits to justice.

The bronze statue, located at the community centre in Rowville, a suburb in Melbourne, was allegedly

removed in the early hours of January 12, according to Australian media reports. The External Affairs Ministry said the incident was a matter of serious concern and reflected an act of vandalism against a globally respected symbol of peace and non-violence.

"We strongly condemn the vandalism and removal of the Mahatma Gandhi statue located at the Australian Indian Community Centre in Rowville, Melbourne, by unidentified people."



External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at a media briefing in New Delhi.

He said India had taken up the matter firmly with Australian authorities. "We have strongly criticised the

matter with Australian authorities and urged them to take immediate action to recover the missing statue and hold the culprits accountable," Jaiswal said.

According to media reports, the statue, weighing approximately 420 kilograms, was cut from its base using a grinder, leaving only the feet behind. The method used to remove the statue has raised concerns about the level of planning involved in the act.

The statue had been gifted

by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and was unveiled in 2021 as a symbol of the strong and growing ties between India and Australia. It was inaugurated by former Australian prime minister Scott Morrison during his tenure, highlighting its significance as a marker of shared democratic values and people-to-people links.

Members of the Indian diaspora in Australia have expressed shock and disappointment over the incident.

Nepal junks social media bill after flak



KATHMANDU

Nepal's government has withdrawn the controversial Social Media Bill 2025 from Parliament following widespread criticism and youth-led protests.

The bill, introduced by the previous government, was accused of seeking to control social media platforms and restrict freedom of expression.

Home Minister Om Prakash Aryal said the cabinet decided to withdraw the bill after consultations and public feedback.

The legislation had sparked protests led largely by young people demanding digital freedom and action against corruption.

The protests played a key role in the resignation of former prime minister K. P. Sharma Oli. The government said it would consult stakeholders before proposing new digital legislation.

Briefs

DHAKA
Rana rattles
new-look
Pakistan

Fast bowler Nahid Rana claimed a maiden five-wicket haul as Bangladesh crushed Pakistan by eight wickets in the first ODI on Wednesday. Rana returned figures of 5-24, while captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz took 3-29 with his off-spin as Pakistan were bowled out for 114 in 30.4 overs, their lowest ODI total against Bangladesh. Pakistan's inexperienced top order collapsed after debutants Sahibzada Farhan and Maaz Sadaqat added 41 runs for the opening stand. Rana struck repeatedly with sharp short deliveries to leave Pakistan struggling. Faheem Ashraf top-scored with 37 as Pakistan were reduced to 82-9 before the last-wicket stand lifted them past 100. Bangladesh chased down the target comfortably.

ADELAIDE
Diksha to lead
5-player
challenge

Diksha Dagar will spearhead the Indian challenge as the Ladies European Tour continues in Australia with the Women's Australian Open this week. Pranavi Urs, Avani Prashanth and Hitaashee Bakshi are also in the field, while Vani Kapoor will compete as an invitee, taking the Indian contingent to five players. Diksha heads into the tournament with confidence after a top-five finish last week, which lifted her into the top 10 of the Ladies European Tour Order of Merit. The Women's Australian Open returns to the tour schedule for the first time since 2016 and will be played at the Kooyonga Golf Club in Adelaide. Champions Hannah Green, Grace Kim and Minjee Lee headline field.

NEW DELHI
Mandaviya
pushes for
F1 revival

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has stepped up efforts to revive Formula One racing in India, holding a meeting with officials of

WC winning India
receive 25 crore
as prize money

Overall prize purse reflects a significant increase since 2024

DUBAI

Champions India received USD 2,639,423 (approximately 25 crore), the biggest share from the prize money pool after winning the men's T20 World Cup at home, as the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday announced the distribution of a record USD 11.25 million players' prize fund following the tournament's conclusion.

India beat New Zealand by a comprehensive 96-run margin in the final to lift their second successive title and secure the highest payout from the prize fund. The overall prize purse reflects a significant increase in ICC tournament prize money introduced in 2024. The governing body said the revised structure is aimed at boosting financial rewards for players and strengthening the global development of cricket.

Runners-up New Zealand earned USD 1,422,692, which is approximately Rs 13 crore. Semi-finalists South Africa

11.25 million
ICC's total prize money
in USD for all teams

and England also received substantial payouts from the prize pool, earning around 9.24 crore and USD 8.96 crore respectively for their performances in the tournament. Among the other top finishers, the West Indies were awarded USD 538,269. Pakistan, which played all its matches in Sri Lanka during the tournament, received USD 522,692. Further down the prize distribution list, Zimbabwe were allocated USD 491,538, while Sri Lanka received USD 475,962.

The group of Afghanistan, Australia and the United States, which were eliminated at the Super 8 stage, each earned USD 309,808 from the tournament prize pool.

Scotland received USD 278,654 for their participation and performance, while Ireland took home USD 271,731.



India's Jasprit Bumrah, Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson and Shivam Dube celebrate after winning the T20 World Cup. PTI

IPL | All matches at Chinnaswamy remain subject to clearance from K'taka govt

First phase games announced

NEW DELHI

Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru will face Sunrisers Hyderabad in the opening match of IPL 2026 in Bengaluru on March 28, as the BCCI on Wednesday announced the schedule for the first phase of the tournament amid concerns over international travel caused by the ongoing conflict in West Asia.

However, all matches scheduled at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium remain subject to clearance from the Karnataka government-appointed expert committee. The committee is scheduled to meet on March 13 to assess venue preparedness following the deadly stampede at the stadium during last season's event.

The BCCI released the schedule for the first 20 matches of the tournament and said the complete schedule will be announced once the election dates in three states, Tamil Nadu, Assam and West Bengal, are finalised.

Apart from the state elections, the escalating conflict in West Asia is also a concern for the board, as it has disrupted international travel. Major aviation hubs such as Doha and Dubai are currently operating under restrictions, affecting flight availability.

As a result, several players from South Africa and the West Indies have not yet returned home even a week after the conclusion of their T20 World Cup campaign.

It remains uncertain whether players from those two nations who are part of IPL squads will be able to report to their respective franchises on time.

"There was a substantial

Middle
East
crisis a
factor

Apart from the state elections, the escalating conflict in West Asia is also a concern for the board, as it has disrupted international travel. Major aviation hubs such as Doha and Dubai are currently operating under restrictions, affecting flight availability. As a result, several players from South Africa and the West Indies have not yet returned home even a week after the conclusion of their T20 World Cup campaign.

Date	Start	Home	Away	Venue
28/03/26	7:30 PM	RCB	SRH	Bengaluru
29/03/26	7:30 PM	MI	KKR	Mumbai
30/03/26	7:30 PM	RR	CSK	Guwahati
31/03/26	7:30 PM	PBKS	GT	New Chandigarh
01/04/26	7:30 PM	LSG	DC	Lucknow
02/04/26	7:30 PM	KKR	SRH	Kolkata
03/04/26	7:30 PM	CSK	PBKS	Chennai
04/04/26	3:30 PM	DC	MI	Delhi
04/04/26	7:30 PM	GT	RR	Ahmedabad
05/04/26	3:30 PM	SRH	LSG	Hyderabad
05/04/26	7:30 PM	RCB	CSK	Bengaluru
06/04/26	7:30 PM	KKR	PBKS	Kolkata
07/04/26	7:30 PM	RR	MI	Guwahati
08/04/26	7:30 PM	DC	GT	Delhi
09/04/26	7:30 PM	KKR	LSG	Kolkata
10/04/26	7:30 PM	RR	RCB	Guwahati
11/04/26	3:30 PM	PBKS	SRH	New Chandigarh
11/04/26	7:30 PM	CSK	DC	Chennai
12/04/26	3:30 PM	LSG	GT	Lucknow
12/04/26	7:30 PM	MI	RCB	Mumbai

delay in the departure of West Indies and South Africa players. It will be a tough task to get them back to India on time. Airfares have also increased significantly because of the conflict in West Asia," a team official told PTI.

The second match of the opening weekend will see Mumbai Indians take on Kolkata Knight Riders at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. The opening weekend will not feature any double-headers.

In its statement, the BCCI also confirmed the distribution of home venues for several franchises during the first phase of the tournament.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru will play five home matches in Bengaluru and two in Raipur. Punjab

Kings will host four home matches in New Chandigarh and three in Dharamshala, while Rajasthan Royals will play three home games in Guwahati and four in Jaipur.

During the first 16 days of the competition, the tournament will feature four double-headers. The afternoon matches will begin at 03:30 PM IST, while the evening matches will start at 07:30 PM IST. "Following the opening encounter on Saturday, Mumbai Indians will take on Kolkata Knight Riders at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Sunday," the BCCI said in its statement.

The board is closely monitoring both the domestic election schedule and the evolving situation in West Asia before finalising the remainder of the IPL 2026 fixtures.

Abhishek retains top spot
in ICC T20I rankings

Chakravarthy loses No 1 bowling position to Rashid

DUBAI

India wicketkeeper-batter Ishan Kishan rode on his impressive T20 World Cup campaign to climb to a career-high second position in the latest International Cricket Council (ICC) rankings for T20I batters released on Wednesday.

Kishan is now just four rating points behind India opener Abhishek Sharma, who retained the No. 1 spot following his quick half-century against New Zealand in the T20 World Cup final.

The left-handed Kishan moved up two places in the rankings after scoring 317 runs during the tournament. He now has 871 rating points, trailing Abhishek, who leads the list with 875 points.

New Zealand's Tim Seifert and England's Jacob Bethell also achieved career-best rankings after notable performances in the T20 World Cup. Seifert climbed four places to sixth position, while Bethell jumped 17 places to reach 16th in the latest list.

However, there was a change at the top of the T20I



India's Abhishek Sharma plays a shot during the World Cup final. ANI

bowlers' rankings. India spinner Varun Chakravarthy lost the No. 1 position to Afghanistan's Rashid Khan following the conclusion of the global tournament.

Chakravarthy now occupies the second spot with

875

Abhishek's rating points

740 rating points, while Rashid moved to the top with 753 points. Afghanistan had exited the tournament at the group stage.

Chakravarthy dropped a place despite his strong performances during the competition. Rashid reclaimed the No. 1 ranking even though he did not play any matches in the last week.

Several bowlers gained places in the updated rankings after impressive displays in the T20 World Cup. England leg-spinner Adil Rashid moved up one place to fourth, while India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah climbed one position to sixth.

India all-rounder Axar Patel also made significant progress, rising six places to 17th after a series of effective performances during the tournament. Meanwhile, the race for the top position among T20I all-rounders remained tight. Zimbabwe captain Sikandar Raza retained the No. 1 spot.

Babar skips
National T20
Championship

KARACHI

Former Pakistan captain Babar Azam has opted out of the National T20 Championship to focus on correcting flaws in his batting technique ahead of the Pakistan Super League (PSL), which begins on Mar 26.

Babar was earlier named in the Lahore Whites squad for the National T20 Championship, which is currently underway in Peshawar. However, it has now emerged that he will not take part in the domestic competition.

Instead, the star batter has decided to work with coaches to address technical issues in his batting before returning to competitive cricket in the PSL.

There has been no official confirmation regarding the identity of the coaches assisting him. However, a source close to the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said Babar and the team management had mutually agreed that he should focus on correcting flaws in his batting technique rather than participate in the national tournament. Babar is expected to represent Peshawar Zalmi in PSL II.

Dube sneaks into train to
reach Mumbai after WC win

India all-rounder boarded the Sayaji Nagari Express

MUMBAI

Shivam Dube, whose explosive batting added 24 runs to India's total in the final over of the T20 World Cup final, quietly travelled by train from Ahmedabad to Mumbai, railway officials said on Wednesday.

A senior railway official said they learnt from media reports that with all flights to Mumbai fully booked, Dube chose to travel by train so he could reach the city as early as possible to be with his two young children, despite the possibility of being mobbed by cricket fans.

The India all-rounder boarded the Mumbai-bound Sayaji Nagari Express from Ahmedabad in the early hours of Monday, along with his wife Anjum and a friend, just hours after he and his teammates lifted the World Cup.

According to the official, railway staff became curious after noticing Dube's name on the reservation chart. A ticket checker wondered if the passenger was the cricketer Shivam Dube. However, his



India's Shivam Dube and Tilak Varma hug each other after finishing the first innings. ANI

wife handled the situation deftly and dismissed the possibility, saying there was no reason for the cricketer to travel by train.

To avoid being recognised by fellow passengers, Dube reportedly wore a cap, mask and a full-sleeved T-shirt when he boarded the train at 5.10 am. He then climbed to his upper berth in an AC three-tier coach, the official said.

The train journey from Ahmedabad to Mumbai takes at least eight hours. The offi-

cial said Dube spent most of the trip resting after the hectic tournament and celebrations that followed India's triumph.

He was also reportedly concerned about disembarking at Mumbai's Borivali station in broad daylight, after 1 pm, fearing he might be recognised by fans. A Government Railway Police official said that before the train reached Borivali, Dube sought police assistance to ensure that his exit from the station remained as discreet as his departure from Ahmedabad.

logistics

ICC defends travel plans for stranded T20 WC players

DUBAI

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday expressed sympathy for international players stranded in India after the T20 World Cup but criticised what it called "uninformed and unhelpful" suggestions that anything other than safety is guiding the travel plans disrupted by the ongoing West Asia conflict.

The conflict, which began after American and Israeli

bombing of Iran last month, has led to the closure of airspace across the Gulf region, throwing international flight schedules into disarray.

The ICC said it empathises with players who remain stranded, particularly those from South Africa and the West Indies. However, it emphasised that the safety, feasibility and welfare of the teams are being carefully considered while arranging alternative travel routes.

Providing an update on travel arrangements, the ICC

said the South African contingent will begin departing for home on Wednesday night, with all members expected to leave within the next 36 hours.

Nine West Indies players have already departed, while the remaining 16 have been booked on commercial flights scheduled to leave India within the next 24 hours, the ICC said.

Their earlier charter flight, which was scheduled to take off from Kolkata, had to be cancelled due to logistical

issues.

The ICC has faced criticism from several figures in international cricket. Former England captain Michael Vaughan raised concerns, while South African cricketer David Miller suggested that England players were provided better travel arrangements, noting that they were able to leave within a day of their semifinal exit. Earlier, West Indies head coach Darren Sammy had also expressed frustration over the lack of updates

from the governing body.

Responding to the criticism without naming any individual, the ICC rejected the allegations.

"The ICC rejects any suggestion that these decisions have been driven by anything other than safety, feasibility and welfare.

Suggestions otherwise across a variety of media platforms from people uninformed of the situation are as unhelpful as they are incorrect," the governing body said.

