

AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

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Centre responsible for IndiGo's failure: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi

New Delhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has targeted the central government over the IndiGo operational crisis. In a recent social media post, he wrote, "IndiGo's failure is the price of this government's monopoly model." Once again, ordinary Indians are



paying the price in the form of delays, flight

cancellations, and a sense of helplessness.

He said India deserves fair competition in

every sector, not a match-fixing monopoly.

Flights to be fully normal by February 10: IndiGo

IndiGo canceled more than 550 flights on Thursday and another 400 on Friday, disrupting the travel plans of hundreds of passengers. On Thursday, IndiGo informed the

Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) that its flights would be fully normal by February 10, 2026. That day, the company also sought a temporary relaxation of flight duty rules, as the country's largest airline canceled more than 550 flights, disrupting the travel of hundreds of passengers.

In 2024, 485 people will die in road accidents every day: Govt.



New Delhi

The Ministry of Road Transport informed the Lok Sabha that 1.77 lakh people died in road accidents in the country in 2024. This is an average of 485 deaths per day. This is a 2.3% increase compared to 2023, when 1.73 lakh people died. National Highways, which constitute only 2% of the country's total road network, recorded 54,443 deaths (31%). This is the lowest share in the last four years. In a written reply to a question from MP A. Raja, Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari said that according to data received from states and union territo-

ries, 1,77,177 deaths were recorded in 2024. Data for West Bengal was taken from the www.ioffportal. The government said that real-time accident information is being received better. However, there is a possibility of slight improvement and the figures may increase slightly in the annual report. The trend of decreasing accidents and deaths on national highways was also shared in the Lok Sabha. Accidents on the National Highways decreased from 1.52 lakh in 2022 to 1.29 lakh, while deaths decreased from 56,007 in 2021 to around 54,000. In Uttar Pradesh, deaths on

India-Russia friendship is as steadfast as the Pole Star: Modi

New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Russian President Vladimir Putin at Hyderabad House on Friday. During the meeting, PM Modi also delivered an important message on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. He stated that India is not neutral. He emphasized that India is on the side of peace. Modi told Putin that the Russia-Ukraine conflict must end now, through dialogue and diplomatic efforts. He supported a peaceful solution. Responding to PM Modi's statement, Putin said that Russia is also working for a peaceful end to the conflict. He said, "The welfare of the world lies in the path of peace. We must all work together to find a path to peace. Given the efforts underway recently, I am confident that the



world will once again return to peace." Advertisement On their mutual relations? PM Modi said, "Our summit is progressing with many results. Your visit is historic. It has been 25 years since you assumed office in 2001 and visited India for the first time. That first visit laid a strong foundation for a strategic partnership. I am personally very happy that my relationship with you has also completed 25 years. I believe that the role you played in 2001 is a shining example of what a visionary leader is,

where he begins and how far he can take the relationship. India-Russia relations are a prime example of this." On Economic Relations? PM Modi said, "I am confident that we will discuss many topics today. May the economic relations between India and Russia expand further. May we reach new heights." What did Vladimir Putin say to PM Modi? Russian President Vladimir Putin then said, "First of all, thank you very much for inviting me. I can share many details about the events taking place in Ukraine. We

India-Russia to increase exchange of students and sportspersons

New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a joint press conference with Russian President Vladimir Putin at Hyderabad House in Delhi on Friday. During the press conference, Prime Minister Modi said, "I am delighted to welcome President Putin to the 23rd India-Russia Summit today. His visit comes at a time when our bilateral relations are experiencing significant milestones. 25 years ago, President Putin laid the foundation of our strategic partnership.

are discussing a possible peaceful solution with some partners, including the United States. Thank you for your attention to finding a solution to this situation. Our paths are deeply rooted in history, but words don't matter. What matters is



President Draupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Demand for ban on 10-minute delivery services: This is an atrocity on gig workers: Raghav

New Delhi

During Zero Hour in the Rajya Sabha, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MP Raghav Chadha strongly opposed the rapidly growing 10-minute delivery services, saying this practice should be

stopped immediately because it puts the lives of gig workers at risk. He said these delivery boys are not machines, but someone's father, husband, brother, or son. Chadha said, "We expect food to arrive in 10 minutes, but do we

consider the safety of those who make these deliveries?" Chadha said that delivery and ride-hailing workers working for companies like Zomato, Swiggy, Blinkit, Zepto, Ola, and Uber are the invisible wheels that drive the

country's economy. They ensure people's convenience by providing notifications like "Order has arrived" or "Ride has arrived" at the click of a button on a mobile app. But people don't see the plight and struggle of the people.

Plea to stop sale of Arundhati's book rejected; no relief for Shakira murder

New Delhi

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi upheld the Kerala High Court's decision and dismissed petitioner Rajasimha's appeal. The High Court had previously dismissed a public interest litigation (PIL) filed on the matter. During the hearing, the Chief Justice observed that Arundhati Roy is a

renowned author and has not promoted anything. The book also carries a warning. He noted that it appears to be a case of publicity stunting, as no major advertisements or billboards have been put up in the city. The image is visible only to readers who purchase the book and does not constitute any form of publicity. The bench ruled that the author and publisher, Penguin Hamish Hamilton,

Supreme Court's remark: 'Temple money belongs to God', 'Can't use it to rescue banks'

New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday ruled that temple offerings to deities cannot be used to rescue financially troubled cooperative banks. A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi made the strong remark while hearing an appeal filed by some cooperative banks challenging a Kerala High Court order directing them to return money deposited with the



Tirunelli Temple Devaswom. CJI's stern comment The CJI asked, "Do you want to use temple funds to save the bank? What's the problem with transferring temple funds, which are lying in a struggling cooperative

bank, to a competent nationalized bank that can offer maximum interest?" The CJI stated that temple funds belong to the deity and must be protected, safeguarded, and used solely for the benefit of the temple. It cannot

become a source of income or survival for the cooperative bank. The Mananthavady Co-operative Urban Society Limited and the Thirunelli Service Co-operative Bank Limited had filed petitions challenging the High Court's order. The High Court had directed five cooperative banks to break the fixed deposits (FDs) of the Devaswom and return the entire amount within two months, as the banks had not returned the

Reach a consensus or we will appoint Vice Chancellors: Supreme Court

New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday issued a stern remark, stating that if the Governor and the Chief Minister of Kerala do not reach an agreement on the appointment of Vice Chancellors, the Supreme Court will intervene. A bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and P.B. Varale made this remark while hearing a case related to the appointment of Vice Chancellors for the APJ Abdul Kalam Technological University and the University of Digital Sciences Innovation and Technology.

Land acquisition for fencing remains the biggest problem

Siliguri

Border Security Force North Bengal Frontier Inspector General Mukesh Tyagi stated that fencing along the border is essential to prevent Bangladeshi infiltration. Land acquisition for this purpose is becoming difficult. Fencing is not possible due to the lack of land. 104 kilometers of the border remains completely open. Speaking to reporters in Siliguri,



Bengal, he said that the total 936 kilometers of India-Bangladesh international border falls under our jurisdiction. Of this, 104 kilometers remains completely open. Of this, more than 56 kilometers are riverine areas, where fencing is not possible, while

the remaining 56 kilometers are open land. BSF has requested land from the Bengal government. The BSF has requested land from the Bengal government for this purpose. ₹51.92 crore has been deposited in the treasury, yet only 20 acres of land has been made available so far. This could allow for approximately five kilometers of fencing. He clarified that "limited support is being received from the state government."

Speed, stability and support will further accelerate UP's industrial development: Yogi

Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, while conducting a high-level review of ongoing efforts to boost foreign investment in the state on Friday, clearly stated that Uttar Pradesh is now not just a state of investment potential, but also a state of investment confidence. He instructed officials to maintain constant communication with every investor, and there



should be no room for delay at any level. The Chief Minister stated unequivocally that "speed, stability, and support" should be the hallmark of the new Uttar Pradesh. The meeting

was informed that Uttar Pradesh received US\$683 million in foreign investment in the financial year 2025-26, up to September 2025, and the state's total cumulative foreign

investment since October 2019 has reached US\$2,754 million. Officials also reported that the state has received foreign investment inflows of ₹5,963 crore in the current period, representing a sharp increase compared to previous years. The Chief Minister was informed that under the FDI-FCI-Fortune 500 Policy-2023, 11 investment applicants have submitted proposals.

Briefs

RAMPUR

Abdullah Azam faces fresh conviction

SP leader Abdullah Azam Khan's legal woes deepen as a Rampur court sentences him to seven years in two passport cases, adding to earlier convictions that have already led to his imprisonment.



ARARIA

Teacher mistakenly murdered in contract killing

Police revealed that a BPSC teacher, Shivani Verma (25), was shot dead due to mistaken identity in Araria. The main conspirator, Husn Ara, allegedly hired shooters for ₹3 lakh to kill her husband's girlfriend, a fellow teacher. Both teachers had red scooters. The shooters, waiting for the target, mistakenly killed Shivani. Two shooters and the woman have been arrested, with investigations ongoing for others.

KUSHINAGAR

Police conduct surprise security check

Additional Superintendent of Police Siddharth Verma conducted a surprise inspection of security arrangements at the Baira barrier in Kasya area. He reviewed the setup and gave necessary instructions to police personnel on duty for effective crime control, monitoring suspicious activities, and preventing nighttime incidents.

RAEBARELI

Teacher union calls off proposed protest

The Junior High School Teachers Association has called off its planned dharna following assurances from the Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA). The BSA stated that pending selection pay scales will be approved within three days of the portal reopening after maintenance. Issues regarding Mid-Day Meal conversion costs, e-service books, and CCL will also be resolved. The union termed the talks positive.

SAHARANPUR

Mayor fumes over irregularities in records

Mayor Dr. Ajay Kumar conducted a surprise inspection of the Birth and Death Certificate branch and found major irregularities. Certificates from years like 1966-68 were issued recently, and entries were suspicious. Residents complained about demands for bribes and delays. The mayor ordered an audit of the last five years' files and strict action against those responsible for the alleged malpractice.

BALLIA

Scorpio-Tempo collision kills one, injure five

In a head-on collision between a Scorpio and a Tempo near Haldi Chatti, a 25-year-old transgender person, Zoya from Delhi, died on the spot. Five others were seriously injured. All were returning from a wedding function. The impact was so severe that the Tempo overturned. The injured were referred to BHU Trauma Centre. Police have seized the vehicles and started an investigation.

NETWORK | Raids across districts seize large quantities of narcotic syrups**Statewide raids expose Codeine network, FIR count climbs to 128**

LUCKNOW

The UP government has intensified its state-level crackdown on the illegal misuse of codeine-based cough syrups and other narcotic-category medicines. Acting on directions from the CM, joint teams of the Anti-Narcotics Task Force and the Food Safety and Drug Administration (FSDA) conducted rapid inspections across districts, leading to the seizure of large quantities of unauthorised narcotic medicines. A total of 128 FIRs have been registered across 28 districts, and more than half a dozen individuals involved in unlawful drug storage and distribution have been arrested.

According to the FSDA Commissioner, inspections have been carried out at numerous establishments where sizeable stocks of codeine-based syrups and psychotropic-category medicines were recovered. In many loca-

**WhatsApp number issued for public inputs as inspections intensify against unlicensed storage and distribution**

tions, documentation related to procurement and sale was found suspicious. Pending detailed investigation, sales of codeine-based and narcotic syrups have been halted in over two dozen medical stores. The department has reiterated that any information regarding unauthorised drug storage,

transport, or sale may be shared through the dedicated WhatsApp number issued for public reporting.

District-wise figures indicate that the highest number of FIRs were recorded in Varanasi, followed by Jaunpur, Kanpur Nagar, Ghazipur, and four each in Lakhimpur Kheri

and Lucknow. Fifty-two additional FIRs were filed across several districts including Bahraich, Bijnor, Prayagraj, Sitapur, Sonbhadra, Balrampur, Raebareli, Hardoi, and others. Officials confirmed that action under the NDPS Act has been taken wherever applicable.

The FSDA stated that the special drive will continue, with enhanced scrutiny of suspicious medical stores and distributors to curb illicit narcotic movement within the state.

"I am innocent": shubham jaiswal

Varanasi: A separate development in Varanasi involved the individual identified as the key operator in a codeine-syrup supply chain issuing a video statement claiming innocence. He asserted that the syrups he sold were neither counterfeit nor linked to reported child deaths and alleged coercion by certain officials. The individual also denied political links and said his business followed licensing norms. While he remains untraceable, police have arrested several associates, including a former police constable. Authorities noted that the ongoing statewide crackdown is independent of his claims, and investigations will proceed based on evidence.

**Packaging hubs for local crops to get fast-track approval**

KAUSHAMBI

During a district-level review meeting at Maa Sheetla Atithi Grih in Sayara, the Deputy CM instructed officials of Kaushambi to expedite measures for setting up additional food-processing units. He stressed that packaging centres for crops produced in large quantities—particularly guava, banana, ber and chilli—should be established and linked with systematic branding and marketing to improve market reach.

He directed the Chief Veterinary Officer to ensure adequate winter arrangements at all cow shelters, including sufficient fodder and protection against cold. Officials were also told to operationalise the newly built incubation centre without delay.

The Deputy CM asked

Deputy CM Maurya orders swift action on new incubation centre and crop-based packaging hubs

departments to support self-help group women in setting up small enterprises such as school-uniform stitching through training and access to facilities. The electricity department was instructed to maintain scheduled power supply and replace faulty transformers within the prescribed timeframe. A proposal for an additional meeting hall at the Sayara guest house was also sought.

He directed that only suitable schools be selected as examination centres and asked the health department to ensure accessible medical services.

UP shifts old age pension to auto approval mode

LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Social Welfare Department has launched a new, simplified mechanism to deliver the National Old Age Pension directly to eligible beneficiaries through their Family ID. The move aims to increase transparency and ensure that no eligible senior citizen is left out of the scheme.

Under the updated system, people aged 60 and above will no longer need to submit applications. Their age and family details recorded in the Family ID database will be used to automatically determine eligibility. Individuals who will turn 60 within the next 90 days will also be added to the beneficiary list in advance. Authorities have been instructed to ensure

**Pilot rollout begins in five districts before statewide expansion**

timely transfers through SMS or phone-based confirmations.

The system includes safeguards such as life-certificate verification, identification of suspicious cases, prevention of incorrect payments, and regular data reviews. Cases involving deceased or ineligible

recipients will be resolved promptly. A pilot will begin in Amethi, Kasganj, Gorakhpur, Lalitpur and Basti. After successful testing, the model will be implemented across Uttar Pradesh. Districts have been directed to prepare detailed SOPs within 30 days. At present, nearly 6.75 million senior citizens receive pension under the scheme. Officials emphasise that the Family ID framework will help strengthen long-term social-sector service delivery in the state.

Sixth grader dies of cardiac arrest

LUCKNOW

A 12-year-old Class 6 student, Amey Singh, died from suspected cardiac arrest at Mountfort Inter College in Lucknow on Friday after collapsing immediately after submitting his English unit test paper. The tragedy has caused immense grief for his family; his grandfather is a High Court advocate in Lucknow.

School staff administered CPR and immediately rushed him to Bhawrao Devras Civil Hospital, where a team of four doctors also attempted resuscitation but were unsuccessful. Doctors declared the cause of death as cardiac arrest.

**Akhilesh slams 'Targeted Action' after Ambedkar event axed**

LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party on Friday criticised the Uttar Pradesh government after permission for its scheduled Dr Ambedkar Parinirvan programme was cancelled a day before the event. State president Shyam Lal Pal said the cancellation appeared to be a deliberate move, alleging that police withdrew the approval even though the Lucknow Development Authority had already granted clearance.

According to party officials, the event was planned at the Indira Gandhi Pratishthan, where SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and participants from across the state were expected to attend. Pal stated that the party had completed preparations and submitted all required

**SP leader say permission was withdrawn despite prior clearance by LDA, blames BJP**

documents. He claimed the withdrawal of permission signalled an attempt to restrict their outreach among Bahujan communities.

SP leaders said the police informed them late on Thursday that the approval stood cancelled "due to administrative reasons". The party

questioned the timing, arguing that no security or logistical concerns had been raised earlier. Pal further commented that the political atmosphere has remained tense since the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, stating that the rising support from Dalit and backward communities towards Sapa may be one of the reasons behind the move. He reiterated that the party would continue to organise programmes dedicated to Dr Ambedkar and raise issues related to social justice.

The cancellation triggered sharp reactions from party workers, who demanded a clear explanation from the administration. They said such decisions create obstacles for peaceful social events and undermine public expectations of fairness in the approval process.

HC throws out plea against Rahul Gandhi's MP status

LUCKNOW

A Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court on Thursday dismissed a petition seeking Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from the Lok Sabha. The Bench of Justice Shekhar B. Saraf and Justice Manjive Shukla ruled that the Supreme Court had already stayed Gandhi's 2023 conviction in a defamation case from Gujarat, making the plea untenable. The petitioner had argued that Gandhi's earlier conviction rendered him ineligible to serve as a Member of Parliament. The court noted that once the conviction was stayed, the disqualification ceased to operate under law. Accordingly, the petition was dismissed.

In a separate but related order, the court addressed delays in revenue cases pend-

**Bench says disqualification does not apply due to existing stay on sentence**

ing in various tehsils. It held that presiding officers would be accountable for unjustified delays and may face contempt proceedings if timelines fixed under the Revenue Code are not followed. The court also stated that if delays are caused due to recurring strikes by bar associations, the association officials could also face contempt action.

Hanuman Garhi Saint Escapes Arson Bid

AYODHYA

Suspected attempt to burn a Hanuman Garhi saint alive was reported in Ayodhya after a fire broke out inside the room of Maheshdas, also known as Swami Mahesh Yogi, at his Govindgarh-based ashram early Friday morning. The incident occurred at around 2:45 am when unknown individuals allegedly cut the iron grill of a rear window and threw a burning object inside.

According to the saint, a strong petrol-like smell was present in the room at the time of the fire, suggesting the use of a flammable substance. He was alone in the room when the incident occurred, while his disciples were staying in another section of the ashram. The fire was extinguished in time, preventing major loss or injuries.

**Officials examine CCTV footage after fire is set inside saint's room through a cut window**

Police teams, along with forensic experts, reached the spot soon after receiving information. Officers recovered the cut grill and traces of inflammable materials. Investigators are now reviewing CCTV footage, call records and electronic surveillance data to identify those involved.

IndiGo flight chaos continues at Lucknow airport

LUCKNOW

IndiGo services at Lucknow's Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport were severely disrupted for the fourth consecutive day on Friday, December 5, 2025, with numerous flights either canceled or delayed by several hours. The widespread chaos stems from technical issues, a persistent pilot shortage, and the enforcement of a new DGCA rule.

The new DGCA regulation, which prevents pilots appointed as inspectors from flying commercial routes, has created a sudden and significant pilot deficit for IndiGo and other airlines, acutely affecting airports across North India.

Rebel SP MLA Pooja Pal touches Maurya's feet

LUCKNOW

Rebel SP MLA Pooja Pal met Deputy CM Keshav Prasad Maurya in Prayagraj, touching his feet during the interaction at the Circuit House. Representing the Chail Assembly seat, Pal said she had come to seek blessings as the Deputy CM visited the city for the first time after the Bihar election victory.

Pal, expelled from the Samajwadi Party earlier, stated that both the CM and Deputy CM were like guardians to her. She reiterated that she received justice in her husband Rajju Pal's 18-year-old murder case during the current government, citing it as the reason behind her cross-voting in the recent Rajya Sabha election.

She confirmed she had been attending BJP programmes



regularly and even campaigned for the party in Bihar. When asked about formally joining the BJP, she said a decision would be taken at the appropriate time.

Regarding her candidature for the 2027 Assembly election, Pal said the final decision would follow consultations with senior leaders. Political discussions suggest she may contest again from her earlier seat, Allahabad West, where she once challenged the influence of Atiq Ahmed and his family.

initiative**SIR Push: CM and Deputies take direct charge**

LUCKNOW

The UP government has intensified its efforts to speed up the State Information Register (SIR) process, with the final date for submitting SIR forms set for 11 December. To ensure maximum coverage before the deadline, the administration has assigned 25 districts each to the CM and the two Deputy Chief Ministers for monitoring and review.

According to the administration, district-level meetings have been mandated to ensure that eligible citizens complete



and submit their SIR forms on time. The initiative aligns with the Election Commission's ongoing voter-list verification campaign aimed at preventing exclusion of genuine voters.

Officials emphasised that Booth Level Officers (BLOs) must carry out their responsibilities without influence from

political disputes surrounding the SIR process. They were reminded that voter-list entries—including removal of deceased voters, eliminating duplicate registrations, identifying irregular entries, and adding new eligible voters aged 18 and above—must follow standard electoral procedures.

25 districts allocated each to CM and deputy CMs for accelerating SIR process

The government noted that recent political criticism has increased tensions in some areas, but maintained that routine electoral verification should continue as usual. The administration also reiterated that identifying unauthorised residents falls under procedural norms of electoral rolls and should be completed accord-

ingly. In a separate briefing, officials stated that the SIR-related household sheets received by residents must be submitted through the BLOs to ensure their names appear correctly during voter-list publication. Authorities also called on residents to report details of those living without authorisation, as required under the verification process.

Senior officials acknowledged increased political reactions to the campaign but said that administrative instructions remain focused on accuracy of the electoral roll rather than political outcomes.

UP plates up 'One District, One Cuisine' as next growth recipe

LUCKNOW

Building on the success of the 'One District, One Product' (ODOP) scheme, the Uttar Pradesh government is actively exploring a new initiative tentatively titled 'One District, One Cuisine'. The plan aims to systematically promote the distinct culinary heritage of each district on national and international platforms to reinforce cultural identity and spur economic growth.

The proposed scheme seeks to brand and promote district-specific cuisines, which officials believe could significantly boost

Goal to revive fading traditional recipes, create market linkages for farmers and artisans

tourism by encouraging visitors to explore local flavours. It is expected to create wide-ranging opportunities, from supporting small hotels, restaurants, and food start-ups to generating rural employment. Increased demand for authentic local ingredients like grains, pulses, spices, and vegetables would directly benefit farmers and strengthen the rural economy.

Lawyers staged a road blockade to protest the shooting, demanding the attacker's license be revoked

Lawyers protested on Friday against the deadly attack on advocate Vijaykant Pandey

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. Lawyers protested on Friday against the deadly attack on advocate Vijaykant Pandey. They blocked the road in front of the District Magistrate's office, demanding the cancellation of the attacker's license and a permanent ban on his entry into the court premises. The incident occurred late Thursday evening. Advocate Vijaykant Pandey had stopped at a shop at Baba Chowraha to buy sweets. When his nephew Om Shiv Pandey arrived, an argument ensued, leading to Om Shiv Pandey firing his licensed revolver. The attacker fired five bullets in quick succession, three of which hit Vijaykant. He fell to the road, seriously injured. The inci-



dent spread panic in the area, and the shutters of nearby shops were immediately closed. Shivkuti police arrived at the scene upon receiving information. The injured Vijaykant was immediately admitted to Swarup Rani Nehru Hospital. After the victim revealed the attacker's name, police arrested Om Shiv

Pandey shortly after. On Friday morning, lawyers protested by blocking the road in front of the District Magistrate's office gate. They stated that the attack on a fellow lawyer was a very serious matter and that their protest would continue until strict action was taken.

The lawyers warned that

if the administration did not take strict action, the movement would be expanded. They stated that this attack was not just an attack on one individual, but an attack on the safety of the lawyer community. The administration and the Bar Council must take decisive action as soon as possible.

Live footage of the incident, CCTV footage of firing on lawyer goes viral



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. CCTV footage has surfaced in the case of the firing on lawyer Vijaykant Pandey. This footage depicts the entire incident. The video reveals that initially, a heated argument broke out between the two parties in front of a shop. This argument quickly escalated into a scuffle, and pushing and shoving ensued. First in the shop, then outside. A small girl, believed to be the daughter of Omshiv Pandey, the accused in the shooting, is seen amidst the commotion. During the scuffle, the girl appears to fall from the shop. The dispute then escalates to the street outside the shop, and ultimate-

ly, one party opens fire. The video also shows people running away after the shots were fired. The shooting occurred on Wednesday evening. Yugank Pandey, son of injured advocate Vijaykant Pandey, stated in his complaint to the police that his father had gone to Santosh Sweet House, Teliyarganj, to buy sweets around 6-7 pm on December 4th. As soon as he left the shop, his car was forcibly stopped by Omshiv Pandey, his father Ramsagar Pandey, his mother Saraswati Devi, and an unknown person accompanying them. Yugank alleges that as soon as his father got out of the car, Omshiv opened fire

with the intent to kill him. Vijaykant fell down after being hit by multiple bullets. A crowd gathered and he was taken to the hospital. Yugank claims he witnessed the entire incident. The Shivkuti police station in-charge states that based on the complaint, a case has been registered against four people: Omshiv Pandey, Ramsagar Pandey, Saraswati Pandey, and an unidentified accused. Omshiv Pandey has been in custody since the incident and is being interrogated. CCTV footage that has surfaced is being included as evidence in the investigation.

Gram Panchayat Secretaries Protest Against Online Attendance Protested by Wearing Black Bands at Soraon Block Headquarters

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Soraon. On Friday, Gram Panchayat Secretaries held a peaceful Satyagraha protest at the block headquarters against the government's online attendance order. Secretaries wore black bands as a mark of protest. All Gram Panchayat Secretaries from the block participated in this protest, opposing the government's



online attendance order. As previously announced, on December 5th, all secretaries sat on the ground and staged a

peaceful protest at the Soraon Block Headquarters. In addition, they also announced the removal of their per-

sonal mobile numbers from the department-run WhatsApp group. Meanwhile, Secretaries Nitesh Kumar Pal, Sushil

Kumar Dwivedi, and Rajiv Kumar were conducting Gram Chaupal programs in their pre-determined areas. General Secretary Ankit Maurya, Kaushal Kumar, Lal Pratap Yadav, Mohammad Saqib, Mohammad Sajid, Mukesh Maurya, Preeti Yadav, Richa Yadav, Sunita Singh, and Yashwant Yadav, along with all other secretaries, were present.

Special Voter Correction Camp Held at Shaheed Park, All Services Available Under One Roof

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Ghazipur. To expedite the voter list revision campaign under the district's Kotwali Muhammadabad police station, the local Shaheed Park was transformed into a temporary administrative facility center on Friday. Under the guidance of Sub-District Magistrate Dr. Harshita Tiwari, all Booth Level Officers (BLOs) from the tehsil were present at the special SIR camp, making it extremely accessible and convenient for the public. SDM Dr. Tiwari stated that, as per the Election Commission of India's directives, inclusion of every eligible citizen's name in the voter list and prompt resolution of errors is the administration's priority. This camp proved extremely bene-



ficial for those who had not yet received SIR forms or whose applications were pending. All services, including name additions, corrections, address changes, and photo updates, were handled on the spot. The BLOs verified the necessary documents, immediately uploaded the applications online, and initiated the digitization process. Complaints were also resolved promptly. Despite the crowd, the system

remained completely organized. People were seen completing their process without any hassle. During this, voters were also made aware by giving them information about election related rules and requirements. Dr. Tiwari said that the aim of the administration is that no eligible citizen should be deprived of the right to vote. He appealed to the people that those whose name is not in the list or whose details have errors,

Police arrested two accused in a robbery case and sent them to jail

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Tharwai / On November 27th, three unidentified individuals came near Semri village in the Tharwai police station area, snatched a phone, and fled. The victim, Nitesh Kumar Yadav, son of Deepchandra Yadav, a resident of Dhokri, Phulpur, was on his way from his home in Andawa for some work when the incident occurred. The incident occurred near Semri village in the Tharwai police station area. On November 27th, Nitesh Kumar Yadav was on his way from Dhokri to Andawa for some work. Around 8 p.m., he stopped near Semri village in Tharwai and was talking to someone when three unidentified miscreants arrived on a Bullet, snatched his phone, and fled the scene. He was deeply troubled but could not find out anything. The victim gave written information about the incident to Tharwai police station. The police took immedi-



ate cognizance of the matter and registered a case under section 304 (2) against three unknown bullet riders and continued investigation. Under the direction of DCP Ganganagar, ADCP Ganganagar and under the efficient leadership of ACP Tharwai Chandrapal Singh Nav, due to the activeness of the police, in the case of robbery on Friday, two accused, Prateek Mishra, son of Ramshankar Mishra, resident of Devhata police station Meja and the second accused Chandan Kumar Bharatiya, son of Chandrabali Bharatiya, resident of Ramnagar Budharpur Meja, were arrested near the highway underpass of village

Berui in Tharwai police station area. The looted mobile, Rs 2000, an illegal country-made pistol and cartridges were recovered from the possession of both the accused. On the basis of the said arrest and recovery, further legal action was taken by adding sections 310 (2) and 3/25 of the Arms Act. The police team that arrested the accused included Inspector Tharwai Santosh Kumar Pandey, SI Girish Chandra, Aleem Khan, and female sub-inspector Akanksha Dwivedi. Inspector Tharwai Santosh Kumar Pandey stated that three more accused are currently being searched for and will soon be in police custody.

District Magistrate chairs meeting of District Education and Monitoring Committee, MDM Task Force, and Nipun Task Force

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

District Magistrate Mr. Manish Kumar Verma chaired a meeting of the District Education and Monitoring Committee, MDM Task Force, and Nipun Task Force, constituted to review the schemes run by the Basic Education Department, in Sangam Auditorium on Friday. District Basic Education Officer Mr. Anil Kumar presented points related to the departmental schemes. During the review, topics such as meeting school standards on 19 parameters under Operation Kayakalp, updated progress by construction agencies, immediate completion of electrical connection/electrification work in schools by the Electricity Department, shifting of high-tension wires running



through school premises, progress on the construction of the Chief Minister's Model Composite School and Chief Minister's Abhyudaya School, quality education according to the school schedule, increasing student digital attendance, regular inspections of food items under the MDM scheme by Food Safety Officers, regular MDM distribution in all schools, development of kitchen gardens, school inspections by District and Block Development Officers in a

prescribed number and monthly review meetings chaired by the Sub-District Magistrate, availability of daily supplies in Kasturba Gandhi Residential Schools and completion of ongoing construction works according to the timeline, transfer of DBT benefits to all children, and providing government-approved benefits to children with disabilities were discussed. The District Magistrate directed that all work be completed in a timely manner. The executing agencies nominated for the

construction work were instructed to do quality work and the Electricity Department was instructed to complete the required work 100% within a month. District Basic Education Officer Shri Anil Kumar, In-charge Chief Development Officer, Project Director District Rural Development Agency, District Panchayat Raj Officer, District Social Welfare Officer, Chief Medical Officer, Principal District Education and Training Institute, District Supply Officer, District Food and Marketing Officer, Project Officer DUDA, District Information Science Officer, Electricity Department and officers of the executing agency UP CIDCO and RED, all Block Education Officers and District Coordinators were present in the review meeting.

Police Conduct Anti-Riot Mock Drill at Auraiya District Headquarters

Auraiya

To strengthen preparedness for emergency situations and maintain law and order, the Auraiya Police conducted a comprehensive anti-riot mock drill at the district headquarters in Kakor. Superintendent

of Police Abhishek Bharti was present on the spot to supervise the exercise. Personnel from ten different police units participated in the drill, practicing riot control techniques using modern equipment and resources. The mock drill saw the active involvement of

teams from the police department, fire services, tear gas unit, lathi-charge party, fire unit, reserve force, first-aid team, auxiliary units and videography teams. During the exercise, intensive training was provided in mob control tactics and the effective

use of anti-riot equipment. SP Abhishek Bharti informed that district police personnel were trained in the operation of tear gas shells, pellet guns, rubber bullet guns and anti-riot guns. In addition, different teams were formed to practice all legal procedures.

Editorial

Xi Jinping's Europe tour: A visit that raises eyebrows

On his first visit to Europe post-pandemic, Xi Jinping met French President Emmanuel Macron. Xi lauded China's ties with France as a "model for the international community amid threats of a trade war over Chinese electric cars and French cognac". Xi Jinping's tour through Europe, analysts point out, highlighted China's audacious strategy to exploit the fissures within Europe amid great power contestation. Among many other developments, the armed forces of China and France announced the setting up of a new inter-theatre cooperation and dialogue mechanism. This collaboration between the two militaries' naval and air forces is aimed at further deepening mutual trust and cooperation and jointly safeguarding regional security and stability.

Such a move towards forging closer Sino-French military ties, especially amid Beijing's assertive manoeuvres in the Indo-Pacific and the South China Sea, begs the question: Can Europe, and particularly France, remain a reliable ally, or will it become more accommodating of China's controversial actions in its neighbourhood? Countries like India are watching closely, concerned about France and Europe in the future and potentially succumbing to China's diplomatic and economic enticements. China claims to be "not at the origin of the Russian-Ukraine crisis, nor a party to it, nor a participant", and thus legitimises its silence. Can we anticipate a similar approach by Europe on issues concerning Taiwan and the Philippines? In the past few years, France's relationship with China has been marked by a mixture of scepticism and strategic engagement, reflecting broader geopolitical objectives and national interests. In the recent past, France has been quite critical of China, viewing it as a 'strategic threat'. The 2021 update to France's 2017 Defence and National Security Strategic Review painted China as a 'systemic rival', 'economic competitor', and 'sometimes an important diplomatic partner'. Even as Paris sought engagement with Beijing in 2019, substantial tensions clearly existed. During Xi Jinping's previous European tour, President Macron rallied a united European front to challenge Beijing on critical European issues like unfair trade practices, restricted market access for European companies, opaque financing under the BRI, and human rights abuses in Tibet and Xinjiang.

Recent events and official statements have further underscored this stance. A parliamentary report on foreign interference in France, requested by Marine Le Pen's far-right party, highlighted China's "aggressive and increasingly malicious methods". Labelling China as the "second most serious threat to France after Russia", the report echoed sentiments from Bernard Emié, Director of French External Intelligence (DGSE), who described China as an 'aggressive power' with 'unbridled diplomacy'. Furthermore, the issue of France selling arms to Taiwan resurfaced during the pandemic when Taiwan announced plans to buy defence equipment from France to upgrade missile systems on French warships purchased in 1991 and 1992. Beijing expressed 'serious concern' and urged Paris to avoid actions that could strain Sino-French ties. Following Chinese air intrusions into Taiwan's air defence zone, a French delegation led by former defence minister Alain Richard visited Taipei to meet with President Tsai Ing-wen. This visit was seen as a powerful symbol of France's commitment to opposing China's unilateral aggression and supporting peace, security, and stability in the Indo-Pacific.



The rough weather in north-west Iran took the lives of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian on Sunday (May 19), along with seven others, in a helicopter crash while returning after inaugurating a dam in East Azerbaijan with his Azerbaijani counterpart, Ilham Heydar oghlu Aliyev. The two Presidents looked happy and comfortable despite some intra-regional competition, especially in the wake of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The death of President Raisi, along with his foreign minister, has indeed caused a vacuum on key developments and initiatives, especially at this time when the region is going through a highly volatile war in Gaza, which threatens to expand beyond. In March and April, Iran and Israel had nearly come to a direct confrontation that could be avoided due to pragmatism and intervention by the US and others in the region. Limited strikes saved the face for both. President Raisi, despite his conservative approaches domestically, tried to be pragmatic even as, under his watch, Iran continued on its path to increase the enrichment of uranium to keep the pressure on the West and pursued the quest to acquire parity with Israel in the nuclear domain. Perhaps the biggest credit could go to him for the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement, along with working for a regional modus vivendi



with the Arab world. His Act East policy also brought about closer relations with India and China while they worked to closely enrich ties with Russia. At the same time, in the wake of Abraham Accords and the further potential normalisation of ties between key Arab countries and Israel, Tehran emerged as a major protagonist of the Palestinian cause, given its hold on Hamas in Gaza. However, the mutually assured destruction (MAD) syndrome between Tehran and Tel Aviv continues apace and could threaten stability in West Asia. Raisi successfully secured the release of \$6 billion in exchange for some US prisoners and even restrained Shia Iraqi militias from attacking US military assets. Although Iran has been able to blunt the impact of the severest sanctions to a considerable extent, it may have been severely compromised in the

area of spare parts and technology. The fact that the President was riding in a 15-year-old helicopter not only questions the choices of the pilot or the leadership in such a weather but also confirms the existence of restrictions on imports of spare parts that may have been imposed due to sanctions. What really caused the crash will only be confirmed by detailed investigations of the wreckage and Black Box. The untimely death of President Raisi has also caused a leadership vacuum, as he was mostly slated to succeed the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamanei, who is 85 and is said to be ailing. But as was witnessed in the wake of the helicopter crash, Khamanei immediately took hold of the situation, assuring the country that there would be no governance crisis. As such, he decides in the end, and the armed forces, security, and intelligence outfits, as

well as the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), look up to him for instructions. He also did not want to convey to his detractors, both internally and externally, that they could exploit the crisis and the transition. As for the succession issue, although the demise of Raisi has caused a vacuum, the argument for Mojtaba succeeding his father, Ayatollah Khamanei, would become more eloquent and vociferous even though the Supreme Leader personally appears not to be in favour of dynastic rule, as quoted by many insiders, for he would not like to be accused of nepotism. One more name that is being propounded to us is that of white-turbaned Ali Reza Arafai, whom the black-turbaned Supreme Leader called an original intellectual and prudent jurist. One would have to see if the colour of the turbans would matter at all. He is a member of the Assembly and was also appointed to the Guardian Council. His name has been circulating for quite some time. In any case, the presidency of an assembly of experts will identify the next leader in due course. But the 'Supreme Leader' will also have to be accepted by the masses since Iran is facing significant domestic discontent as well as huge external challenges, especially from the West and Israel. Of course, losing the President and foreign minister, especially at such a difficult time, is a challenge in itself for any

country, but the real power lies with the Supreme Leader, who is au fait with his authority and capacity to guide the Iranians. As per Article 131(1) of the Iranian constitution in the event of the president's demise or incapacitation, the first vice president will take over with the approval of the Supreme Leader (de facto), and fresh elections will have to be conducted within fifty days. It reads, "In case of death, dismissal, resignation, absence, or illness lasting longer than two months of the President, his first deputy shall assume the powers and functions of the President with the approval of the Leader." Accordingly, Vice President Mohammed Mokhber has taken over the reins to conduct day-to-day affairs and organise elections with the head of judiciary and speaker of the Iranian parliament. Whether Mokhber will be de jure promoted remains to be seen. Whether the next president will be among the known contenders for the highest post in the country is anyone's guess. Meanwhile, messages of support and condolences have been pouring in. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on learning about the hard landing of the presidential helicopter yesterday, expressed India's solidarity with Iran in this hour of their crisis in a tweet. PM Modi last met President Raisi in 2023 at the Johannesburg Summit, when India supported Iran's entry into BRICS, and has spoken to him.

The new Great Game: China, US and India

The original "Great Game" was fought in the mid-1800s between the Russian Empire and the combined might of the British, French and Ottoman Empires over control of Central Asia. The British feared an attack by the Imperial Russian Army through Afghanistan on their Indian colony. The Ottomans, though in decline, wanted to guard against Russian incursions into their Balkan possessions. As a report by Kallie Szczepanski (thought.com) described it: "Britain's Lord Ellenborough started 'The Great Game' on January 12, 1830, with an edict establishing a new trade route from India to Bukhara, using Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan as a buffer against Russia to pre-

vent it from controlling any ports on the Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, Russia wanted to establish a neutral zone in Afghanistan allowing for their use of crucial trade routes." "The Great Game officially ended with the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, which divided Persia (Iran) into a Russian-controlled northern zone, a nominally independent central zone, and a British-controlled southern zone. The Convention also specified a borderline between the two empires running from the eastern point of Persia to Afghanistan and declared Afghanistan an official protectorate of Britain." Russia's invasion of Ukraine nearly two centuries later has triggered a new Great

Game but with vastly different actors, motives and possible outcomes. In the mid-1800s the United States did not count. It was convulsed by a Civil War (1861-65) between northern unionist states and southern confederate states over slavery. China had been humiliated by Britain during the Opium Wars (1839-60). It lay in repose. India was a British colony, robbed of its wealth and morale. Today Russia lies weakened, its Soviet-era satellite states absorbed into NATO. They form a Western knife aimed at Moscow's jugular. Ukraine remains a non-NATO buffer state. If it joins NATO in future, Russia would be completely encircled by the US-led West.

The emergence of new-era 'Leviathans'

In China, the fear of chaos that can come from within and from without is a central rationale that legitimises Xi Jinping's power grab. Image: REUTERS Thomas Hobbes' seminal work, Leviathan, published in 1651, posits the necessity of a powerful, centralised authority to prevent societal chaos and ensure peace and security. Hobbes had a way with words; he famously said that without an all-powerful state, whom he calls the Leviathan, life would be nasty, brutish, and short. Those powerful words have a global resonance today, giving the state across the world a free run. We saw it in Washington when more than \$3 trillion was printed in monetary easing. In Paris, monetary welfare spending is out of hand, and the Leviathan dares not withdraw the free fund, for that itself causes riots and chaos. In China, state capitalism is running wild, and in India, the state subsidies everything from fertiliser and maternity care to free food to the tune of \$10 billion a year. Everywhere, a man who wrote 350 years ago rules. In our turbulent world, Hobbes's premise of avoiding chaos is so powerful that both autocracies and democracies are utilising it to empower the state further. It is not as if he has not been proved right. In fact, rarely in contemporary history has Hobbes gone wrong. In Iraq, Libya, and Egypt, when the Leviathan was toppled, it created chaos beyond imagination, only to be replaced by

the iron fist of the state. In China, the fear of chaos that can come from within and from without is a central rationale that legitimises Xi Jinping's power grab. Indeed, it's replacing the promise of prosperity as the basis of the communist party's hold over China. The fact that the Federal Reserve's policy of quantitative easing following the 2008 financial crisis and the purchase of government securities to increase the money supply were unquestioned exemplifies Hobbes' idea of the sovereign exercising control to prevent economic disorder and maintain stability. That, in the bastion of capitalism, it did not raise concerns about the erosion of financial autonomy and the distortion of free markets underlines the astonishing relevance of Hobbes. France's robust welfare state epitomises Hobbes' notion of the sovereign's responsibility to ensure the well-being of its citizens. The French government maintains an extensive social safety net, including comprehensive healthcare, unemployment benefits, and retirement pensions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, France's welfare spending surged as the government implemented measures to protect jobs and support incomes. However, this extensive welfare system can be critiqued for fostering dependency and reducing individual responsibility. The welfare-to-GDP ratio in 2023 was an astonishing 36 per cent. This is clearly unsustainable, but every time France has tried to pull back the Leviathan

or cut back welfare, there have been dramatic riots. Once you create the Leviathan, clearly, there is no way back. In 2020, the French government introduced the 'Solidarity Fund', providing financial aid to businesses affected by the pandemic, and expanded unemployment benefits to cover those furloughed under the 'partial activity' scheme. These interventions, amounting to over €100 billion in expansive welfare spending, can lead to high taxation, which burdens individuals and businesses, and totally stifles entrepreneurial spirit and innovation. Additionally, the extensive welfare system creates a culture of dependency, reducing the incentive for personal initiative and self-reliance. France and its Leviathan are in a doom loop. China's model of state capitalism illustrates Hobbes' concept of the sovereign's expansive control over economic life. The Chinese government exercises significant influence over the economy through state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which dominate key industries such as energy, telecommunications, and finance. While this control allows the state to direct economic development and maintain social order, it also restricts economic freedom and individual rights. The role of SOEs in China's economic strategy is particularly evident in the "Made in China 2025" initiative, aimed at transforming China into a global leader in high-tech industries. The state provides substantial funding.

As India votes for 5th phase, it's the contest of two economic outlooks

The day Aam Aadmi Party's national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal unveiled his 10 guarantees was also the day when Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced her government's commitment to economic freedom by opposing the very idea of wealth redistribution. It became very clear that day that the INDIA bloc must remain in the Opposition and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) should come back to power. Though Kejriwal did not consult his alliance partners about the 10 guarantees he promised, there is a likelihood of them agreeing with him. For, on their part, they have also made equal-

ly outlandish promises. Kejriwal has pledged, among other things, free 24-hour power supply, free healthcare that is not based on insurance schemes, freedom to the Indian Army to get back the Indian territory occupied by China, abrogation of the Agniveer scheme, legal status for MSP on all crops according to the Swaminathan Commission report, two crore jobs for the youth, and ease of doing business for traders. A few days later, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi said that the INDIA coalition, if victorious in the ongoing general elections, will work for the empowerment of women: "Our sisters across the country are ready to form

the INDIA Alliance government with enthusiasm. From July, Rs 8,500 deposited in women's accounts every month, i.e., Rs 1 lakh annually, will change the financial condition of every family." If wishes were horses, our politicians would bring heaven to earth, but that's not the reality. Sometimes it takes a lifetime for a wish to be realised, sometimes more than that. Just as calamities cannot be wished away, good outcomes cannot be ushered in just by wishing them. If Kejriwal pledges to offer free 24-hour power supply and free healthcare, for instance, he should also enlighten us where the money would come from to ensure such freebies. After all, it

costs a great deal to run power plants, transmit and supply electricity, pay doctors and paramedics, run hospitals, and so on. In the final analysis, it is the public exchequer that will bear the costs. And since it is the taxpayer money that makes the public exchequer, ultimately taxpayers will be burdened with these expenses — that is, the people who pay direct and indirect taxes. In short, all people, as indirect taxes are paid even by the poor. Freebies, after all, are not free. The same is true for the Congress' promise of offering the largesse of Rs 1 lakh per annum to women. If the grand old party wins and redeems its pledge.

Briefs

RAMPUR

Abdullah Azam faces fresh conviction

SP leader Abdullah Azam Khan's legal woes deepen as a Rampur court sentences him to seven years in two passport cases, adding to earlier convictions that have already led to his imprisonment.



ARARIA

Teacher mistakenly murdered in contract killing

Police revealed that a BPSC teacher, Shivani Verma (25), was shot dead due to mistaken identity in Araria. The main conspirator, Husn Ara, allegedly hired shooters for ₹3 lakh to kill her husband's girlfriend, a fellow teacher. Both teachers had red scooters. The shooters, waiting for the target, mistakenly killed Shivani. Two shooters and the woman have been arrested, with investigations ongoing for others.

KUSHINAGAR

Police conduct surprise security check

Additional Superintendent of Police Siddharth Verma conducted a surprise inspection of security arrangements at the Bairia barrier in Kasya area. He reviewed the setup and gave necessary instructions to police personnel on duty for effective crime control, monitoring suspicious activities, and preventing nighttime incidents.

RAEBARELI

Teacher union calls off proposed protest

The Junior High School Teachers Association has called off its planned dharna following assurances from the Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA). The BSA stated that pending selection pay scales will be approved within three days of the portal reopening after maintenance. Issues regarding Mid-Day Meal conversion costs, e-service books, and CCL will also be resolved. The union termed the talks positive.

SAHARANPUR

Mayor fumes over irregularities in records

Mayor Dr. Ajay Kumar conducted a surprise inspection of the Birth and Death Certificate branch and found major irregularities. Certificates from years like 1966-68 were issued recently, and entries were suspicious. Residents complained about demands for bribes and delays. The mayor ordered an audit of the last five years' files and strict action against those responsible for the alleged malpractice.

BALLIA

Scorpio-Tempo collision kills one, injure five

In a head-on collision between a Scorpio and a Tempo near Haldi Chatti, a 25-year-old transgender person, Zoya from Delhi, died on the spot. Five others were seriously injured. All were returning from a wedding function. The impact was so severe that the Tempo overturned. The injured were referred to BHU Trauma Centre. Police have seized the vehicles and started an investigation.

NETWORK | Raids across districts seize large quantities of narcotic syrups

Statewide raids expose Codeine network, FIR count climbs to 128

LUCKNOW

The UP government has intensified its state-level crackdown on the illegal misuse of codeine-based cough syrups and other narcotic-category medicines. Acting on directions from the CM, joint teams of the Anti-Narcotics Task Force and the Food Safety and Drug Administration (FSDA) conducted rapid inspections across districts, leading to the seizure of large quantities of unauthorised narcotic medicines. A total of 128 FIRs have been registered across 28 districts, and more than half a dozen individuals involved in unlawful drug storage and distribution have been arrested.

According to the FSDA Commissioner, inspections have been carried out at numerous establishments where sizeable stocks of codeine-based syrups and psychotropic-category medicines were recovered. In many loca-



WhatsApp number issued for public inputs as inspections intensify against unlicensed storage and distribution

tions, documentation related to procurement and sale was found suspicious. Pending detailed investigation, sales of codeine-based and narcotic syrups have been halted in over two dozen medical stores. The department has reiterated that any information regarding unauthorised drug storage,

transport, or sale may be shared through the dedicated WhatsApp number issued for public reporting.

District-wise figures indicate that the highest number of FIRs were recorded in Varanasi, followed by Jaunpur, Kanpur Nagar, Ghazipur, and four each in Lakhimpur Kheri

and Lucknow. Fifty-two additional FIRs were filed across several districts including Bahraich, Bijnor, Prayagraj, Sitapur, Sonbhadra, Balrampur, Raebareli, Hardoi, and others. Officials confirmed that action under the NDPS Act has been taken wherever applicable.

The FSDA stated that the special drive will continue, with enhanced scrutiny of suspicious medical stores and distributors to curb illicit narcotic movement within the state.

"I am innocent": shubham jaiswal

Varanasi: A separate development in Varanasi involved the individual identified as the key operator in a codeine-syrup supply chain issuing a video statement claiming innocence. He asserted that the syrups he sold were neither counterfeit nor linked to reported child deaths and alleged coercion by certain officials. The individual also denied political links and said his business followed licensing norms. While he remains untraceable, police have arrested several associates, including a former police constable. Authorities noted that the ongoing statewide crackdown is independent of his claims, and investigations will proceed based on evidence.



Packaging hubs for local crops to get fast-track approval



KAUSHAMBI

During a district-level review meeting at Maa Sheetla Atithi Grih in Sayara, the Deputy CM instructed officials of Kaushambi to expedite measures for setting up additional food-processing units. He stressed that packaging centres for crops produced in large quantities—particularly guava, banana, ber and chilli—should be established and linked with systematic branding and marketing to improve market reach.

He directed the Chief Veterinary Officer to ensure adequate winter arrangements at all cow shelters, including sufficient fodder and protection against cold. Officials were also told to operationalise the newly built incubation centre without delay.

The Deputy CM asked

Deputy CM Maurya orders swift action on new incubation centre and crop-based packaging hubs

departments to support self-help group women in setting up small enterprises such as school-uniform stitching through training and access to facilities. The electricity department was instructed to maintain scheduled power supply and replace faulty transformers within the prescribed timeframe. A proposal for an additional meeting hall at the Sayara guest house was also sought.

He directed that only suitable schools be selected as examination centres and asked the health department to ensure accessible medical services.

UP shifts old age pension to auto approval mode

LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Social Welfare Department has launched a new, simplified mechanism to deliver the National Old Age Pension directly to eligible beneficiaries through their Family ID. The move aims to increase transparency and ensure that no eligible senior citizen is left out of the scheme.

Under the updated system, people aged 60 and above will no longer need to submit applications. Their age and family details recorded in the Family ID database will be used to automatically determine eligibility. Individuals who will turn 60 within the next 90 days will also be added to the beneficiary list in advance. Authorities have been instructed to ensure



Pilot rollout begins in five districts before statewide expansion

timely transfers through SMS or phone-based confirmations.

The system includes safeguards such as life-certificate verification, identification of suspicious cases, prevention of incorrect payments, and regular data reviews. Cases involving deceased or ineligible

recipients will be resolved promptly. A pilot will begin in Amethi, Kasganj, Gorakhpur, Lalitpur and Basti. After successful testing, the model will be implemented across Uttar Pradesh. Districts have been directed to prepare detailed SOPs within 30 days. At present, nearly 6.75 million senior citizens receive pension under the scheme. Officials emphasise that the Family ID framework will help strengthen long-term social-sector service delivery in the state.

Sixth grader dies of cardiac arrest

LUCKNOW

A 12-year-old Class 6 student, Amey Singh, died from suspected cardiac arrest at Mountfort Inter College in



Lucknow on Friday after collapsing immediately after submitting his English unit test paper. The tragedy has caused immense grief for his family; his grandfather is a High Court advocate in Lucknow.

School staff administered CPR and immediately rushed him to Bhawrao Devras Civil Hospital, where a team of four doctors also attempted resuscitation but were unsuccessful. Doctors declared the cause of death as cardiac arrest.

Akhilesh slams 'Targeted Action' after Ambedkar event axed

LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party on Friday criticised the Uttar Pradesh government after permission for its scheduled Dr Ambedkar Parinirvan programme was cancelled a day before the event. State president Shyam Lal Pal said the cancellation appeared to be a deliberate move, alleging that police withdrew the approval even though the Lucknow Development Authority had already granted clearance.

According to party officials, the event was planned at the Indira Gandhi Pratishthan, where SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and participants from across the state were expected to attend. Pal stated that the party had completed preparations and submitted all required



SP leader say permission was withdrawn despite prior clearance by LDA, blames BJP

documents. He claimed the withdrawal of permission signalled an attempt to restrict their outreach among Bahujan communities.

SP leaders said the police informed them late on Thursday that the approval stood cancelled "due to administrative reasons". The party

questioned the timing, arguing that no security or logistical concerns had been raised earlier. Pal further commented that the political atmosphere has remained tense since the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, stating that the rising support from Dalit and backward communities towards Sapa might be one of the reasons behind the move. He reiterated that the party would continue to organise programmes dedicated to Dr Ambedkar and raise issues related to social justice.

The cancellation triggered sharp reactions from party workers, who demanded a clear explanation from the administration. They said such decisions create obstacles for peaceful social events and undermine public expectations of fairness in the approval process.

HC throws out plea against Rahul Gandhi's MP status

LUCKNOW

A Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court on Thursday dismissed a petition seeking Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from the Lok Sabha. The Bench of Justice Shekhar B. Saraf and Justice Manjive Shukla ruled that the Supreme Court had already stayed Gandhi's 2023 conviction in a defamation case from Gujarat, making the plea untenable. The petitioner had argued that Gandhi's earlier conviction rendered him ineligible to serve as a Member of Parliament. The court noted that once the conviction was stayed, the disqualification ceased to operate under law. Accordingly, the petition was dismissed.

In a separate but related order, the court addressed delays in revenue cases pend-



Bench says disqualification does not apply due to existing stay on sentence

ing in various tehsils. It held that presiding officers would be accountable for unjustified delays and may face contempt proceedings if timelines fixed under the Revenue Code are not followed. The court also stated that if delays are caused due to recurring strikes by bar associations, the association officials could also face contempt action.

Hanuman Garhi Saint Escapes Arson Bid

AYODHYA

Suspected attempt to burn a Hanuman Garhi saint alive was reported in Ayodhya after a fire broke out inside the room of Maheshdas, also known as Swami Mahesh Yogi, at his Govindgarh-based ashram early Friday morning. The incident occurred at around 2:45 am when unknown individuals allegedly cut the iron grill of a rear window and threw a burning object inside.

According to the saint, a strong petrol-like smell was present in the room at the time of the fire, suggesting the use of a flammable substance. He was alone in the room when the incident occurred, while his disciples were staying in another section of the ashram. The fire was extinguished in time, preventing major loss or injuries.



Officials examine CCTV footage after fire is set inside saint's room through a cut window

Police teams, along with forensic experts, reached the spot soon after receiving information. Officers recovered the cut grill and traces of inflammable materials. Investigators are now reviewing CCTV footage, call records and electronic surveillance data to identify those involved.

IndiGo flight chaos continues at Lucknow airport

LUCKNOW

IndiGo services at Lucknow's Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport were severely disrupted for the fourth consecutive day on Friday, December 5, 2025, with numerous flights either canceled or delayed by several hours. The widespread chaos stems from technical issues, a persistent pilot shortage, and the enforcement of a new DGCA rule.

The new DGCA regulation, which prevents pilots appointed as inspectors from flying commercial routes, has created a sudden and significant pilot deficit for IndiGo and other airlines, acutely affecting airports across North India.

Rebel SP MLA Pooja Pal touches Maurya's feet

LUCKNOW

Rebel SP MLA Pooja Pal met Deputy CM Keshav Prasad Maurya in Prayagraj, touching his feet during the interaction at the Circuit House. Representing the Chail Assembly seat, Pal said she had come to seek blessings as the Deputy CM visited the city for the first time after the Bihar election victory.

Pal, expelled from the Samajwadi Party earlier, stated that both the CM and Deputy CM were like guardians to her. She reiterated that she received justice in her husband Rajju Pal's 18-year-old murder case during the current government, citing it as the reason behind her cross-voting in the recent Rajya Sabha election.

She confirmed she had been attending BJP programmes



regularly and even campaigned for the party in Bihar. When asked about formally joining the BJP, she said a decision would be taken at the appropriate time.

Regarding her candidature for the 2027 Assembly election, Pal said the final decision would follow consultations with senior leaders. Political discussions suggest she may contest again from her earlier seat, Allahabad West, where she once challenged the influence of Atiq Ahmed and his family.

initiative

SIR Push: CM and Deputies take direct charge

LUCKNOW

The UP government has intensified its efforts to speed up the State Information Register (SIR) process, with the final date for submitting SIR forms set for 11 December. To ensure maximum coverage before the deadline, the administration has assigned 25 districts each to the CM and the two Deputy Chief Ministers for monitoring and review.

According to the administration, district-level meetings have been mandated to ensure that eligible citizens complete



and submit their SIR forms on time. The initiative aligns with the Election Commission's ongoing voter-list verification campaign aimed at preventing exclusion of genuine voters.

Officials emphasised that Booth Level Officers (BLOs) must carry out their responsibilities without influence from

political disputes surrounding the SIR process. They were reminded that voter-list entries—including removal of deceased voters, eliminating duplicate registrations, identifying irregular entries, and adding new eligible voters aged 18 and above—must follow standard electoral procedures.

25 districts allocated each to CM and deputy CMs for accelerating SIR process

The government noted that recent political criticism has increased tensions in some areas, but maintained that routine electoral verification should continue as usual. The administration also reiterated that identifying unauthorised residents falls under procedural norms of electoral rolls and should be completed accord-

ingly. In a separate briefing, officials stated that the SIR-related household sheets received by residents must be submitted through the BLOs to ensure their names appear correctly during voter-list publication. Authorities also called on residents to report details of those living without authorisation, as required under the verification process.

Senior officials acknowledged increased political reactions to the campaign but said that administrative instructions remain focused on accuracy of the electoral roll rather than political outcomes.

UP plates up 'One District, One Cuisine' as next growth recipe

LUCKNOW

Building on the success of the 'One District, One Product' (ODOP) scheme, the Uttar Pradesh government is actively exploring a new initiative tentatively titled 'One District, One Cuisine'. The plan aims to systematically promote the distinct culinary heritage of each district on national and international platforms to reinforce cultural identity and spur economic growth.

The proposed scheme seeks to brand and promote district-specific cuisines, which officials believe could significantly boost

Goal to revive fading traditional recipes, create market linkages for farmers and artisans

tourism by encouraging visitors to explore local flavours. It is expected to create wide-ranging opportunities, from supporting small hotels, restaurants, and food start-ups to generating rural employment. Increased demand for authentic local ingredients like grains, pulses, spices, and vegetables would directly benefit farmers and strengthen the rural economy.

PEACE TALKS| Ukraine-US to resume negotiations after talks with Russia end without breakthrough

NO COMPROMISE DECLARES PUTIN

WASHINGTON DC

Trump expands travel ban

US Homeland Security confirms President Trump plans to extend the travel ban to over 30 countries lacking stable governments capable of vetting refugees effectively.

KYIV

Russian drone strike

A Russian drone hit a house in central Ukraine, killing a 12-year-old boy and injuring two women, while peace talks with US envoys remain largely undisclosed.

DHAKA

Zia's flight delayed

Bangladesh ex-PM Khaleda Zia's medical evacuation to London is postponed to Sunday as the Qatar-provided air ambulance faces technical delays, awaiting clearance from her medical board.

GAZA

UAE hospital in Gaza

The UAE hospital in Gaza continues providing essential medical care and specialized treatment to residents, supporting the health sector amid ongoing humanitarian challenges.

WASHINGTON DC

US prioritises Russia

The US National Security Strategy lists normalizing relations with Russia and ending the Ukraine conflict swiftly as core national interests, emphasizing European stability and diplomatic engagement.

Putin's 'daughter' apologises

PARIS

Luiza Rozova, widely believed to be the secret daughter of Russian President Vladimir Putin, apologised for the war in Ukraine after being confronted by a Ukrainian journalist in Paris. Rozova, who reportedly works as a DJ in the city, was approached by journalist Dmytro Sviatnenko, who blamed Putin for the recent death of his brother in a Russian airstrike. Visibly uncomfortable and attempting to shield her face, Rozova responded, "I'm really sorry that this is happening. Unfortunately, I'm not responsible for this situation."

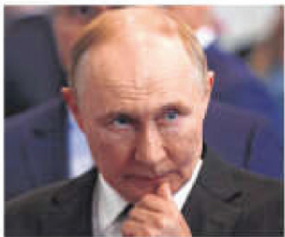
EU demands on Ukraine peace plan are unacceptable: Ushakov

MOSCOW

The Kremlin has accused European Union leaders of undermining ongoing Russia-US negotiations on a potential Ukraine peace settlement by placing "unacceptable" demands on Moscow. Russian presidential aide Yuri Ushakov said Western European states are complicating diplomatic

progress by insisting on conditions that Russia cannot accept. Speaking to Zvezda TV, Ushakov said Moscow has seen "encouraging" progress in discussions with the US following a five-hour meeting in the Kremlin earlier this week between President Vladimir Putin, US envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner. He described the talks as "constructive and substantive"

and signaled Russia's readiness to continue working with the current US team. However, according to the Wall Street Journal, European governments have been pressuring Kiev to reject any deal with Moscow unless Washington provides firm security guarantees.



KYIV

Ukrainian and US negotiators will resume discussions on Friday after nearly five hours of talks with Russia ended without any progress on Kyiv's peace proposals.

The Ukrainian delegation is being led by National Security Secretary Rustem Umerov and Chief of the General Staff Andrii Hnatov, while the US team is headed by Special Envoy Steve Witkoff.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in a post on X, emphasized that Ukraine's immediate priority is to obtain full clarity on what transpired during Moscow's latest engagements with Washington. He said Kyiv remains determined to ensure that its national interests remain central to all diplomatic efforts. Zelenskyy added that Ukraine is preparing for "any possible developments" and is

committed to working constructively with international partners to achieve what he called a "dignified peace."

"Ukrainian representatives will continue their discussions in the United States with President Trump's team," Zelenskyy wrote. "Our task is to fully understand what was said in Moscow and what new pretexts Putin is presenting to prolong the war and pressure Ukraine."

The talks follow a five-hour meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US negotiators aimed at finding an end to the nearly four-

year conflict. However, Kremlin adviser Yuri Ushakov confirmed that no compromise was reached on territorial issues—one of the core challenges in the negotiation process.

Putin, speaking separately to Aaj Tak India Today, reiterated that Moscow would not compromise on what it considers its security interests. He argued that Ukraine's security "cannot come at Russia's expense" and again criticized NATO's expansion. The Russian leader accused President Zelenskyy of abandoning earlier promises of peace and claimed Ukraine continues to prioritize military solutions influenced by "radical nationalist groups." Putin also said Russia remains open to negotiations but will not accept terms that threaten its security, criticizing Ukraine's 28-point peace proposal as unchanged from earlier rejected positions.

€1B aid for Kiev

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte has urged member states to spend at least €1 billion a month on weapons for Ukraine in 2025, channelled through the PURL program.

Israel may deport 25000 Ukrainians

Israel could begin deporting 25,000 Ukrainian migrants as their group protection status expires at the end of December, Haaretz reports. The government has yet to renew their permits, leaving many facing legal uncertainty amid tightened entry rules and limited support.

US fines NY firm

WASHINGTON DC

The US Treasury has fined New York-based Gracetown Inc. USD 7.1 million for violating sanctions by managing luxury properties linked to Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska. OFAC said the firm received 24 payments between 2018 and 2020 despite being warned that dealings with Deripaska were prohibited.

The oligarch, sanctioned since 2018 for ties to President Vladimir Putin and involvement in Russia's energy sector, faces multiple US investigations for sanctions evasion.

Forced conversion

Several Hindu schoolgirls in Sindh were allegedly pressured to convert to Islam to continue their education, triggering a government inquiry. Parents reported that a headmistress asked students to recite the Kalma and mocked their faith. Authorities have formed a committee to record statements from students, parents, and teachers.

Drones seen near Zelensky jet

DUBLIN

Drone flights, the origin of which are mostly unknown, have recently disrupted airspace operations in Europe. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has called the incursions "hybrid warfare".

An Irish navy ship spotted up to five drones operating near the flight path of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's aircraft as he arrived for a state visit to Ireland on Monday, local media reported on Thursday.

It quoted unnamed sources as saying the aircraft, which arrived slightly early, was not in any danger.

Four EU nations to boycott Eurovision 2026

BRUSSELS

Spain, Ireland, Slovenia and the Netherlands have announced they will boycott the 2026 Eurovision Song Contest after Israel was cleared to participate despite ongoing allegations of vote manipulation and international criticism over its military campaign in Gaza.

The decisions come amid

renewed scrutiny of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which rejected calls for a secret ballot on Israel's participation and instead unveiled stricter voting rules to curb interference. The boycott follows months of appeals from several European broadcasters demanding Israel's suspension over its alleged vote-rigging in the 2025 contest and the mounting civilian toll in Gaza.

Not even in the game, Russia tells Merz

MOSCOW

Russian negotiator Kirill Dmitriev has dismissed German Chancellor Friedrich Merz as irrelevant to the Ukraine peace process, accusing him of "warmongering" and attempting to sabotage US-led negotiations.

Dmitriev's comments followed a leaked Der Spiegel transcript in which Merz allegedly warned President Zelenskyy that US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner were "playing games" with Ukraine and Europe.

Responding on X, Dmitriev said Merz had "disqualified himself" with unrealistic proposals and should focus on Germany's domestic problems instead.

The leak has intensified concerns among EU leaders that Washington is sidelining Europe in its peace roadmap, which they fear favours Moscow. Russian officials, including Yuri Ushakov and Sergey Lavrov, have previously argued that Europe forfeited its role by refusing dialogue with Moscow.

Clear message to world: Chinese media on Putin's India visit

BEIJING

Chinese state media has described Russian President Vladimir Putin's two-day visit to India as a strong signal that both Moscow and New Delhi remain far from isolated despite sustained Western pressure.

The visit comes at a crucial moment as the United States pushes for a Ukraine peace deal and seeks wider international alignment.

According to Global Times, the visit reflects growing strategic trust between India and Russia, and underscores their ability to withstand external interference. Li Haidong, professor at China Foreign Affairs University, said that coordination between the two nations demonstrates their shared commitment to strengthening independent decision-making and resisting geopolitical pressure.

"The two sides enjoy extensive mutual support and strong complementarity," Li

said, arguing that attempts by the US and its allies to isolate either nation are unlikely to succeed. He added that the India-Russia relationship remains "highly strategic" and resilient to global attempts at influence.

Impact on US and EU relations

Putin's visit, however, comes at a delicate time for India's diplomatic balancing act. While India has historically relied on Russia for defence, energy and technology cooperation, its growing economic engagement with the US and Europe is seen as vital for exports and global market access. Critics believe that high-profile engagements with Moscow could complicate ongoing trade discussions with Western partners. In response, the US has reiterated its intention to strengthen ties with India.

Pak General accuses Imran of anti-army campaign

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's military on Friday launched a strong attack on jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, accusing him of orchestrating a calculated campaign against the armed forces.

Director-General of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhary said Khan was driven by "narcissism" and a "delusional mindset," adding that the army would no longer tolerate attempts to undermine its leadership. Without naming the PTI



founder, Chaudhary said Khan's actions had moved beyond politics and posed a threat to national security.

He claimed the PTI's anti-army messaging was being amplified "in collusion with external actors," particularly Indian media, which he accused of promoting PTI narratives.

Baloch rights suppressed

A BASC report says Iran's violent crackdown on Baloch minorities is worsening, with executions, shootings and mass detentions rising in 2025. It also accuses Pakistan of indirectly enabling the repression through joint border policies that restrict safe trade and silence Baloch voices on both sides.

Architect hired for WH ballroom

UNITED STATES

US President Donald Trump has hired a new architect for his \$300-million White House ballroom, a spokesman said Thursday, after reported disagreements with the project's original designer. Trump had differences with James McCrery, a specialist in classical architecture, including over the billionaire president's wishes to increase the size of the ballroom, US media reported. The Republican had now picked architect Shalom Baranes, who has "shaped the architectural identity of our nation's capital for decades," to come on board, said White House spokesman Davis Ingles.

Nirav Modi cites lack of legal papers in London jail, seeks relief

LONDON

Fugitive businessman Nirav Modi has told the High Court in London that severe restrictions inside HMP Pentonville are preventing him from preparing for his upcoming civil trial, prompting a request to postpone the January 2026 proceedings. Modi, wanted in India over the USD 2 billion Punjab National Bank fraud case, has been unable to access key legal documents since being moved from HMP Thameside in October for an unrelated debt matter.

At a pre-trial review regarding an unpaid USD 8 mil-

lion Bank of India loan, Justice Simon Tinkler noted Modi may be unable to properly defend himself without access to his handwritten notes and disclosure papers. He warned that the absence of documents could compromise a fair trial and ordered the immediate transfer of all legal materials from Thameside to Pentonville.

Modi's lawyer, James Kinman, said his client's cramped cell, lack of workspace and absence of IT facilities make preparing a defence nearly impossible. Bank of India's counsel, Tom Beasley, opposed the adjournment, accusing Modi of delaying tactics and noting



his pending extradition case in India.

Modi, who attended the hearing via video link, confirmed he still lacked essential paperwork. The court will revisit the adjournment request on December 19. Meanwhile, a separate hearing to reopen Modi's extradition appeal is also scheduled this month.

Ukraine condemns diver Sofia for Russia citizenship

MOSCOW

Ukraine's sporting establishment has accused European diving champion Sofia Lyskun of "betrayal" after the 23-year-old renounced her Ukrainian citizenship and obtained a



Russian passport. Lyskun, a four-time European champion and two-time Olympian, said she left Ukraine due to mounting political pressure to sever ties with Russia, including criticism for staying in touch with her first coach who moved to Moscow in 2022.

Lyskun said Ukrainian officials repeatedly reminded her that "no one else was in contact with Russians," despite claims that sport should remain separate from politics. She added that dissatisfaction with Ukraine's training environment and unmet professional standards further influenced her decision.

Brigitte reunites with giant panda Yuan Meng



CHENGDU

French First Lady Brigitte Macron ended her visit to China on a warm and emotional note as she reunited with Yuan Meng, a giant panda born in France and now living at a conservation base in southwest China.

Yuan Meng, whose name means "accomplishment of a dream," was born in 2017 at France's Beauval Zoo, where Brigitte Macron helped choose his name and served as his symbolic "godmother."

At the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding,

the first lady expressed amazement at how much the panda had grown since she last saw him as a tiny newborn "the size of two fingers." Now a fully grown male, Yuan Meng calmly munched on bamboo, largely indifferent to the visitors calling his name. "They have a very independent character. They do only what they want," Brigitte Macron remarked with a smile.

Her visit coincided with President Emmanuel Macron's fourth state trip to China, during which he met Chinese President Xi Jinping to discuss global issues including the war in Ukraine and trade relations.

13% VAT on contraceptives in China

BEIJING

China has introduced a 13% value-added tax (VAT) on contraceptives, ending a three-decade exemption that kept prices low during the country's strict one-child policy era. The change is part of Beijing's broader effort to encourage population growth as birth rates continue to fall.

Experts say the move is largely symbolic, aimed at

reshaping social attitudes to promote childbirth and discourage abortions. "It won't drastically change birth trends, but signals a shift in China's stance on family planning," said demographer He Yafu.

China is facing a deepening demographic crisis: births fell to just 9.54 million last year, half of 2016's number, despite the shift to a three-child policy. UN projections warn the population could shrink from 1.4



Representative Picture

billion today to around 800 million by 2100. The VAT decision comes amid rising

HIV cases, which increased sharply between 2002 and 2021, raising concerns

about access to protection if prices rise.

Economic pressures also deter couples from having children. Raising a child to 18 costs an estimated 538,000 yuan on average — more than 1 million yuan in major cities — pushing many young families to delay or avoid parenthood. To ease the burden, China recently introduced subsidies of up to \$500 per child annually for children under three.

Raj & Simran immortalised

A bronze statue of Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol's iconic *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (DDLJ) characters now stands proudly in Leicester Square as the film turns 30

Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol reunited in London to unveil a bronze statue of their iconic *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (DDLJ) characters, Raj and Simran, at Leicester Square. Marking 30 years of Aditya Chopra's landmark romance, the moment blended nostalgia, fanfare, and cross-cultural celebration. SRK shared the first look on X, writing his classic line, "*Bade bade deshon mein, aisi chhoti chhoti baatein hoti rehti hain, Senorita!*"

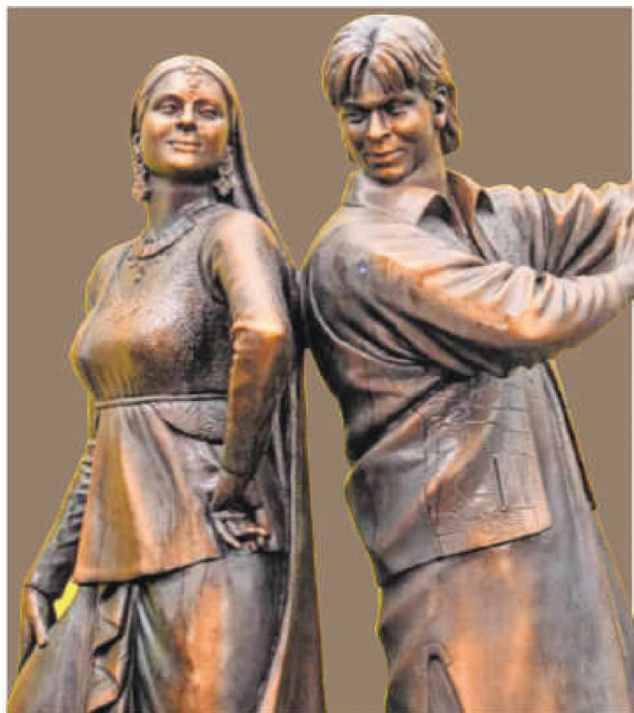
The unveiling ceremony saw the actors recreate their signature pose, while fans braved the

cold for a glimpse of the beloved pair. Calling DDLJ "part of my identity," SRK said the film still resonates because it celebrates love that crosses boundaries. Kajol added that witnessing the statue revealed "a piece of our history that has travelled across generations."

The statue is now part of the Scenes in the Square trail, making DDLJ the first Indian film to receive such recognition. YRF CEO Akshaye Widhani said it was a proud moment for Indian cinema to stand alongside global cultural icons. Released in 1995, DDLJ continues to be celebrated as one of Bollywood's most cherished romances, and the London tribute cements its enduring international impact.



Pics: X



Pics: X

30 years of a cultural phenomenon

More than just a love story, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* has become a milestone in Indian cinema, influencing fashion, music, and on-screen romance for three decades. Its portrayal of tradition meeting modernity made Raj and Simran household names. The film's theatre run, global fandom, and intergenerational appeal continue to reinforce its legendary status.

Why the London statue matters

The Leicester Square installation marks a historic first: an Indian film immortalised alongside Western classics like *Harry Potter*, *Mary Poppins*, and *Singin' in the Rain*. For Bollywood, this recognition symbolises international acceptance, diaspora connection, and the cultural footprint DDLJ left across continents. It also highlights London's role as a key filming location in the movie.

Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol — A timeless pair

Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol remain one of Bollywood's most adored on-screen duos. Their chemistry, beginning in the '90s, shaped an era of romance. From iconic dialogues to unforgettable scenes, their partnership helped *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* become a global classic. The London statue embodies not just characters, but a bond fans have cherished for 30 years.

'Thank you universe'

Celina Jaitley finds new hope as HC directs MEA to help the actress contact her detained brother in the UAE

Actress Celina Jaitley has expressed renewed hope for her brother, an Indian Army officer who has been detained in the UAE since September last year. In a heartfelt social media post, she said, "Today, hope was placed on record," after the Delhi High Court on Thursday directed the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to assist her in establishing contact with him.

Celina wrote, "Ma & Pa... I am doing my best! I haven't spoken to Vikrant in 15 months. Today, hope was placed on record. Thank you, Universe!" She added that her petition seeking access to, and legal representation for, her brother, Maj (Retd) Vikrant Kumar Jaitley—"who has been abducted and detained in the UAE since 6 Sep 2024"—was heard by the court. The actress shared that the MEA has submitted a status report and appointed a Nodal Officer to facilitate communication with her brother. She thanked Additional Solicitor General, Sr



Pics: Instagram, @celinajaitlyofficial

Adv Chetan Sharma, and the court for acknowledging her plea.

"I'm grateful to the Ld. ASG and the Court, who recognised my suffering and acknowledged our family's four generations of contributions to the Indian armed forces," Celina wrote.

Sharing a family photo, she informed followers that the next court hearing is scheduled for December 23 and added that she remains hopeful.

Mumbai gears up for Indian Sneaker Festival

Mumbai is gearing up for a massive cultural weekend as the Indian Sneaker Festival 2025 kicks off on Saturday and Sunday at the MMRDA Grounds, BKC. Touted as one of the country's biggest celebrations of youth culture, the festival will bring together global music acts, streetwear labels, sneaker collectors and food pop-ups under one buzzing space.

This year's lineup features international headliners including Tyla, Lil Yachty, Charlotte de Witte, Alok, Pan-Pot and Nicole Moudaber, along with home-grown artists such as KRSNA, Kayan (Live), Magdalena and Cristoph. Beyond the music, festival will showcase more

than 60 sneaker and streetwear installations, exclusive drops, interactive zones and photo-friendly setups designed for creators and enthusiasts. Curated food stalls from popular Mumbai brands add to the weekend's appeal. With large crowds expected, organisers promise an immersive experience blending fashion, music and urban culture, making it one of the most anticipated events of the season.



Charlotte de Witte

Tyla

TITLE: *Dhurandhar*
DIRECTOR: Aditya Dhar
CAST: Ranveer Singh, Sara Arjun, Sanjay Dutt, Akshaye Khanna, R. Madhavan, Arjun Rampal
WHERE: In theatres near you
RATING: ★★

Even though Ranveer Singh has always proved versatility with varied roles, *Dhurandhar* is possibly the first time he is seen in an out and out actioner. Will he be able to reclaim his superstar status with this film, or will it make him 'apologise' at the box-office? Let's find out!

The film, which starts off with a verse from the holy *Bhagwad Gita*, is divided into many chapters. Kickstarting the film is the hijacking of the Indian Airlines flight at Kandahar, which eventually paves the way for the introduction of various characters of the film... primarily R. Madhavan as Ajay Sanyal (Chief of IB), Akshaye Khanna as Rehman Daka, Sanjay Dutt as SP Chaudhary Aslam, and Arjun Rampal as Major Iqbal.

Amid all of them exists Ranveer Singh in the role of Hamza Ali Mazaari, who is in Pakistan on a mission. It's in the film's second half that it reveals his real identity and also his mission. The film, in totality, is about (dirty) politics that's interspersed with gory, merciless bloodshed, cuss words, and romance (in that order).

Actors' performance
It's a no-brainer that *Dhurandhar* is an out and out Ranveer Singh film, who excels in the 'titular' role. For a man who has always tried to push the envelope, he is yet again seen doing the same with this film. Even though the film's length plays the villain, Ran-



A war cry wrapped in rage and romance

veer succeeds in playing the hero! The character of Sara Arjun (who plays Ranveer's on-screen ladylove) develops more towards the film's second half. She surely has an endearing screen presence.

The film also stars silver screen's 'dhurandhars'—Sanjay Dutt, Akshaye Khanna, R. Madhavan, and Arjun Rampal. As for Sanjay Dutt, he continues to be the 'Deadly Dutt'. There is never a moment wherein his performance makes the audience say, 'Dutt teri ki!' The ever depend-

able Akshaye Khanna yet again pulls out a smooth, slayer performance. Even if this film may not count as one of his career best, he surely leaves a chilling impact with his role.

After *De De Pyaar De 2*, R. Madhavan strikes again! The effortlessness with which he plays the role of the IB officer is truly commendable. It's nice to see Arjun Rampal back on the silver screen. Just like a tiger never changes its stripes, Arjun too does not change his quest for per-

fection with this film as well. Manav Gohil and Saumya Tandon do justice to their respective roles, despite the limited screentime.

Dhurandhar, directed by Aditya Dhar (who has also written the film), not just brags of being one of Bollywood's lengthiest films, but also drags at a whole bunch of places. The film, which has been 'inspired by true incredible events', should have surely cut down on many scenes. Barring the first half, it's the second half from where the film develops the much-needed pace.

The film's action has been choreographed by Aejaaz Gulab, Sea Young Oh, Yannik Ben, and Ramazan Bulut. All those who love action, this film is a feast and a feast! The film's cinematography (Vishal Nowlakha) is top-notch. Stunning camera angles simply elevate the visual experience of the film.

The film's editing (Shivkumar V. Panicker) serves as a merciless test on the patience of the audiences, mostly in the first half. The film's music (Shashwat Sachdev) is decent, esp. the title song. The blending of the track with the narrative is just wow.

Music
Full points to the film's background music, which stands out like a King Cobra raising its hood! Special mention to the art department for having 'recreated' Pakistan. While the film's end does have an unexpected shock value, there is also something special in store for all those who loved the film!

Those who love action will surely find the film appealing. If you can withstand the slow-pace narrative of the first half, then do watch the film. Overall, you won't be disappointed... esp. the second half!



Blinks more than it bites

TITLE: *Five Nights At Freddy's 2*
DIRECTOR: Emma Tammi
CAST: Josh Hutcherson, Elizabeth Lail, Piper Rubio, Theodus Crane and others
WHERE: In theatres near you
RATING: ★★★

This film arrives with the swagger of a franchise that knows it has an audience and the confidence of a studio armed with bigger sets, more lore, and an army of animatronics. Adapted from the enormously popular horror video game, it opens with a surprisingly grim flashback that hints at a darker sequel, then follows Mike, his sister Abby, and officer Vanessa as they try to leave past horrors behind, only to be drawn back into the secrets lurking within Freddy Fazbear's Pizza. The new pizzeria, with its riverboat fantasy and sprawling corridors, is visually arresting, but the plot wanders through these spaces like a guest who has misplaced their tour guide.

The sequel tries to do a lot. Family bonds, buried trauma, and an ever-thickening mythology compete for attention alongside bursts of neon nostalgia. Yet this enthusiasm results in an uneven pace where scenes appear abruptly and vanish before they can settle. The animatronics, though technically superior, often resemble set pieces rather than true threats, their brief appearances diluting the promise of sustained terror.

Still, flashes of eerie brilliance emerge through clever puppetry and atmospheric lighting, offering glimpses of the taut, unsettling film this could have been had it chosen restraint over excess.



Actors' performance

If the plot occasionally loses direction, the cast holds the fort with steady hands. Josh Hutcherson returns as Mike with a quiet sincerity that anchors the film. Piper Rubio gives Abby a blend of innocence and perceptiveness that often carries the emotional weight, while Elizabeth Lail manages to keep Vanessa compelling even when the script cannot quite decide what tone she should inhabit.

Matthew Lillard, though seen too briefly, chews into his scenes with relish and supplies the menace that the animatronics sometimes fail to deliver. The supporting cast appears eager but underserved, as though the film's labyrinthine sets swallowed their character arcs whole. The chemistry among the central trio, however, remains one of the film's more reliable strengths.

Music

If Freddy, the Teddy Bear mascot and friends are shy about screen time, the sound department more than makes up for it. The score walks a playful tightrope between mischief

and menace, enriching scenes even when the visuals hesitate. Mechanical whirs, distorted laughter, and arcade hums conspire to create an atmosphere that often feels more unsettling than the scripted scares themselves.

Visually, the film is a marvel. The animatronics, crafted with painstaking detail, move with unnerving grace, and the expansive sets shimmer with creativity. Yet the beauty becomes bittersweet because these lovingly designed elements rarely get the spotlight they deserve. Sudden jump scares replace sustained dread, turning potential horror into fleeting shocks.

Overall, this film is an ambitious, visually impressive sequel that never quite harnesses its own power, yet it entertains just enough to keep viewers curious about what might come next. Fans of the franchise will appreciate the scale, craftsmanship, and expanding mythology, but those seeking a genuinely terrifying night at the movies may walk away craving something more intense.

THE KING'S QUEST | All eyes on Kohli as he aims for history in Visakhapatnam

CAN HE MAKE IT THREE IN THREE?

NEW DELHI

Sports minister fetes equestrian medallists



Equestrian Trailblazers

Union minister of labour & employment and youth affairs & sports Mansukh Mandaviya meets and felicitates the medal winners of the Asian Equestrian Championship 2025 held in Thailand in New Delhi on Friday ANI

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya felicitated Asian Equestrian Championships medallists (Ashish Limaye: Gold/Silver; Shruti Vora: three Silvers). He committed to establishing an equine quarantine centre in India within a year.

DUBAI

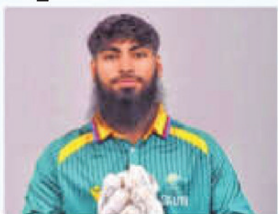
Fakhar Zaman fined for dissent



Pakistan batter Fakhar Zaman was fined 10% of his match fee and received one demerit point for showing dissent at an umpire's decision during the Tri-Series final against Sri Lanka on November 29. He admitted the Level 1 breach.

JOHANNESBURG

Bulbulia to captain SA U19 WC squad



South Africa revealed their 15-member squad for the ICC U-19 Men's Cricket World Cup (Jan 15-Feb 6, Namibia/Zimbabwe), with Muhammad Bulbulia as captain. The team will first play three Youth ODIs against India.

JAIPUR

Ahlawat's 62 wins Jaipur Open Golf title



Gurugram's Veer Ahlawat shot a sensational final round of 8-under 62 to win the Jaipur Open 2025 with a total of 19-under 261. He broke the previous lowest winning

VISAKHAPATNAM

As the series decider between India and South Africa arrives at the Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium, all attention turns to Virat Kohli, who stands on the verge of a monumental personal milestone: a second hat-trick of ODI centuries in the ongoing three-match series.

Having already amassed 237 runs in the series, Kohli enters the final ODI seeking his third consecutive ton – a feat that would place him in

rare company.

Chasing History

If successful, Kohli would become the first Indian batter to achieve two ODI century hat-tricks.

The only player to have done this before is Pakistan's Babar Azam.

Kohli's previous hat-trick came against West Indies in 2018 (140, 157*, 107).

Fortress in Visakhapatnam

This venue holds special memories for Kohli: 587 runs

in 7 innings at an average of 97.83 – his most runs at any Indian ground.

3 centuries & 2 fifties, with a best of 157*.

His iconic 118 vs Australia in 2010 at age 21 announced his arrival as a chase master.

Approaching Another Landmark

Kohli is also just 90 runs away from becoming the third batter in history to score 28,000 international runs, after: Sachin Tendulkar – 34,357 runs

Kumar Sangakkara –

28,016 runs

Virat Kohli – 27,910* runs

Series Context

The series is level at 1-1, making the Visakhapatnam clash a winner-takes-all encounter. Kohli's form will be crucial as India aims to seal the series against a spirited South African side.

What's at Stake?

Series victory for India after a tough Test loss earlier. Historic batting milestone for Virat Kohli. Momentum ahead of the upcoming T20I series.

SQUADS

INDIA: Rohit Sharma, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Rituraj Gaikwad, KL Rahul (c/wk), Washington Sundar, Ravindra Jadeja, Harshit Rana, Kuldeep Yadav, Arshdeep Singh, Prasidh Krishna, Rishabh Pant, Tilak Varma, Dhruv Jurel, Nitish Kumar Reddy

SOUTH AFRICA: Aiden Markram, ton de Kock (wk), Temba Bavuma, Matthew Breetzke, Dewald Brevis, Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Corbin Bosch, Keshav Maharaj, Nandre Burger, Lungi Ngidi, Ryan Rickelton, Otneil Baartman, Ruben Hermann, Prenelan Subrayen

As Vizag prepares for a full house, the stage is set for Kohli to once again deliver when it

matters most – under pressure, in a decider, on his favourite ground.



2024 ODI FORM

In 12 ODIs this year, Kohli has scored 586 runs at an average of 58.60, with 3 centuries and 3 fifties.

KOHLI'S RED-HOT FORM

RANCHI (1ST ODI): 135 off 120 balls
RAIPUR (2ND ODI): 102 off 93 balls
VISAKHAPATNAM (3RD ODI): ?

RUN RIOT | Weatherald, Smith, Labuschagne blitz give hosts to commanding lead in Gabba nightmare

AUSSIE ASSAULT ROCKS ASHES

BRISBANE

In a stunning reversal of fortunes, Australia turned the second Ashes Test on its head with a breathtaking, high-octane batting display on Day 2 at the Gabba. Spearheaded by a blistering 72 from debutant Jake Weatherald and polished half-centuries from Steve Smith (61) and Marnus Labuschagne (65), the hosts rocketed to 378/6 at stumps, securing a commanding 44-run lead and leaving England's bowlers shell-shocked.

THE MORNING MOP-UP & THE MITCHELL STARC SHOW

The day began with England's resistance crumbling swiftly. Overnight centurion Joe Root (138*) was left stranded as the innings folded for 334. The star with the ball was once again Mitchell Starc, who finished with a phenomenal 6/75, cementing his man-of-the-match credentials.

AUSTRALIAN ONSLAUGHT: INTENT FROM BALL ONE

Australia's reply was a masterclass in aggressive intent. Openers Weatherald and Travis Head (33) launched a furious counter-attack, racing to a 77-run partnership at nearly a run-a-ball. Weatherald, in particular, was electrifying, hammering his way to a maiden Test fifty and setting a ferocious tone. His 72 off 78 balls demoralised England



Ashes folklore

Australia's captain Steve Smith hits a six during the second Ashes Test against England in Brisbane on Friday AP/PTI

MOST RUNS IN A DAY'S PLAY IN DN TESTS

387/77 AUS (378/6) vs Eng (9/1) Brisbane 2025*
383/8 AUS (287/2) vs Pak (96/6) Adelaide 2019
379/14 AUS (251/9) vs Ind (128/5) Adelaide 2024
369/3 PAK (300/2) vs WI (69/1) Dubai 2016

Australia's Day of Domination

4.78

Run rate maintained by Australia through the day, showcasing complete batting control.

3

Major partnerships: 77, 115, and an unbeaten 40* (Carey-Neser), keeping England under relentless pressure.

72

Runs – Jake Weatherald's knock, featuring the fastest fifty by an Australian opener in an Ashes Test since 2013.

BRIEF SCORES

AUSTRALIA – 378 for loss of six wickets (Weatherald 72, Labuschagne 65, Smith 61, Carse 3-113) lead **ENGLAND** – 334 all out (Root 138*, Starc 6-75) by 44 runs

before a Jofra Archer yorker finally ended the assault.

The momentum never dipped. Smith and Labuschagne seamlessly took over, compiling a 115-run partnership with a mix of classical strokeplay and sharp running. Labuschagne's 65 was particularly fluent, featuring nine fours and a six.

THE LATE TWIST & THE CRUCIAL STAND

England found a brief flicker of hope under lights as Brydon Carse struck twice in an over, removing the dangerous Cameron Green (45) and Steve Smith (61). But Alex Carey (46*) and Michael Neser (15*) snuffed it out with a composed, unbroken 40-run stand, ensuring Australia finished the day firmly in the driver's seat.

THE VERDICT: MOMENTUM SWINGS VIOLENTLY

"That was a crucial last hour... to get to the end of play six down," said Marnus Labuschagne, highlighting the importance of their finish. "With Heady and Weathers at the top, they sort of just grabbed the momentum and the rest of us piggybacked off that."

From a position of parity, England now face a monumental task. With Australia's lead set to grow and the pink ball due to be at its most potent later on Day 3, the visitors' batting lineup must prepare for a trial by fire to save this Test.

COLTS HOLD NERVE

FROM BRINK TO BRILLIANCE | India beat Belgium in thriller to book semis date with Germany

CHENNAI

In an electrifying quarterfinal that lived up to its billing, the Indian junior men's hockey team staged a dramatic comeback and then held their nerve in a tense penalty shootout to defeat Belgium 2-2 (4-3 SO) and storm into the semifinals of the FIH Junior World Cup 2025. The victory sets up a colossal last-four clash against seven-time champions Germany.

The Hero: Prineedeeep Singh, The Sreejesh Protégé

The undisputed star was goalkeeper Prineedeeep Singh, who produced a performance straight out of the PR Sreejesh handbook. His crucial saves in regulation time, particularly during Belgium's third-quarter penalty corner barrage, kept India in the game. In the shootout, his composure was monumental.

A Roller-Coaster of Emotions

1st Half: Belgium took an early lead in the 13th minute through Gaspard Cornez-Massant.

2nd Half: India roared back post-break. Captain Rohit equalized with a fierce drag-kick (45'), before Sharda Nand Tiwari put India ahead from a penalty corner (48').

Late Drama: Just as victory seemed assured, Nathan Rogge struck for Belgium in the 59th minute to force a shootout.

Ice in their veins: The shootout

In the high-pressure shootout, Sharda Nand Ti-



Goal Roar

India's Ankit Pal (15) with teammates celebrates after scoring a goal against Belgium during the quarterfinals of FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup 2025 match at Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium in Chennai on Friday PTI

wari scored thrice, but it was Ankit Pal who netted the decisive stroke. Combined with Prineedeeep's saves, it was enough for a 4-3 triumph.

Semifinal Showdown: India vs Germany

The win books a dream semifinal against defending champions Germany on December 7. Germany survived their own scare, beating France in a shootout earlier. It will be a battle between India's resilient home support and Germany's legendary tournament pedigree.

Jr hockey WC teams experience Jallikattu tradition

MADURAI

Away from the hockey turf, international teams competing in the FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup 2025 soaked in Tamil Nadu's rich heritage on Friday, witnessing the state's iconic and ancient sport – Jallikattu – at the Kallignar Centenary Jallikattu Arena.

Global Gathering at the Arena

Teams from Canada, Namibia, Egypt, Austria, China, Bangladesh, Korea, Oman, along with tournament officials, made their way to Madurai throughout the morning to experience the traditional bull-taming spectacle firsthand.

The visit was graced by P Moorthy, Minister for Commercial Taxes and Registration, Government of Tamil Nadu, who welcomed the athletes and shared insights into the cultural significance of the sport.

Trump gets first-ever FIFA Peace Prize

WASHINGTON

In a move that sharply diverted global attention from sport to geopolitics, FIFA awarded its newly created FIFA Peace Prize to the US President Donald Trump during the 2026 World Cup draw ceremony on Friday. The decision, championed by FIFA president Gianni Infantino,

immediately sparked controversy and criticism for politicising the world's most popular sporting event.

The Award & The Justification

Presenting the award at the Kennedy Center, Infantino stated, "This is your prize, this is your peace prize." FIFA described the prize as recognising individuals who have

taken "exceptional and extraordinary actions for peace and by doing so have united people across the world."

Infantino has been a vocal advocate for Trump, previously arguing he deserved the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to broker a ceasefire in Gaza.

Trump-Infantino alliance

The award underscores the

close alliance between Trump and Infantino. Trump, who has openly sought the Nobel, struck a characteristically dismissive tone upon arrival, telling reporters, "I don't know whether I was going to get the award... I don't need prizes. I just want to save lives."

A Departure from FIFA's Mission

The move marks a signifi-

cant departure from FIFA's traditional mandate of football governance and using sport as an apolitical unifier.

By honouring a deeply polarising political figure at its flagship football event, FIFA has injected partisan world politics directly into the heart of the global game, risking its credibility as a neutral sporting institution.

Digital Dynasty

PBK AS MOST-SEARCHED IPL TEAM IN 2025

NEW DELHI

WHAT THIS SIGNIFIES

The ranking underscores: Strong digital engagement and a growing global footprint. The emotional connection fans share with the team's players, performances, and brand narrative. Strategic storytelling and cultural resonance that transcend on-field results.

BEYOND CRICKET

While football clubs dominate global searches, PBKS has broken through as a cricket powerhouse in the digital arena, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with internationally celebrated sports institutions. This recognition reflects not just fan curiosity, but a deeper year-round engagement with the team's journey, values, and community initiatives.

GLOBAL RANKING HIGHLIGHTS

PBKS claimed the 4th position worldwide, a testament to their massive and engaged fanbase across borders.

The top five list is as follows:
Paris Saint-Germain FC (Football)
SL Benfica (Football)
Toronto Blue Jays (Baseball)
Punjab Kings (Cricket – IPL)
Delhi Capitals (Cricket – IPL)

This ranking is based on total search volume, consistency over time, and geographic spread—indicating sustained interest from fans not just in India but around the world.



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Email ID:

akhandbharatsandesh@gmail.com

Mob. 9415235084, 9565333000