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

Rahul calls G RAM G bill anti-rural poor, vows to force govt. to withdraw it

NEW DELHI

Raising the battle stakes over MGNREGA with the BJP, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi Friday said Congress will force the Modi govt to withdraw the disbanding of the job guarantee scheme, with the party warning that farmers' protest forced the Centre to roll



back the "three black farm laws". Congress also warned that after

MGNREGA, the BJP will target the acts on forest rights, food secu-

urity and land acquisition, while RTI has already been allowed out. In comments issued while abroad, Rahul said MGNREGA provided the vulnerable sections with "leverage" and "bargaining power" which brought down "exploitation" and distress migration, while improving wages and working condi-

tions."That leverage is precisely what this govt wants to break ... Prime Minister Modi's targets are clear: weaken labour, weaken the leverage of rural India, especially Dalits, OBCs and adivasis," he said, adding the VB-G RAM G will enfeeble the job guarantee that was "rural poor's last line of defence", and is "anti-

state and anti-village". Rahul's statement of intent - he did not participate in the LS debate as he is in Germany for an international political meeting - came as the Congress Working Committee is set to meet on Dec 27, likely to discuss an action plan for a nationwide stir.

At Speaker's chamber, a rare show of govt. opposition bonhomie



New Delhi

Rancour and blame game inside Parliament made way for conviviality and cordiality at a customary post-parliamentary session get-together of govt functionaries, including PM Narendra Modi, and opposition MPs at Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla's chamber over tea. Congress and other opposition parties, which had skipped the meeting in a few previous sessions to convey their protest with happenings inside Parliament, were present in full force in an informal setting marked by Modi's wit and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's relaxed and easy presence. Sources said Priyanka made polite enquiries from Modi about his

foreign trip, setting the tone for a rare convivial setting involving govt & opposition members, some of whom nudged for a longer session as the 15-day sitting of winter session, which was adjourned sine die, was one of the shortest ever. With her brother Rahul Gandhi, leader of opposition in LS being in Germany, first-time MP Priyanka was the main Congress voice in the meeting. Her confidence but easy manner was a change from Rahul's more aggressive and confrontational approach, a source said. Modi, sources said, asked opposition MPs about the session and praised RSP MP NK Premachandran, a Congress ally, for his diligence in parliamentary business.

PM launches global e-library, which puts traditional meds on world map

NEW DELHI: PM Narendra Modi Friday put traditional medicine at the centre of global health conversation, flagging launch of Traditional Medicine Global Library (TMGL) as a shared international platform to anchor ayurveda, yoga & other ancient systems in research, policy and evidence-based care. Addressing the closing ceremony of the Second WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine at Bharat Mandapam, Modi said the digital library fulfils a commitment made during India's G20 presidency and will bring together scientific data, research and policy documents related to traditional medicine on a single global platform. "This will ensure equal access to authentic information for every country," he said. The TMGL hosts



Lifestyle imbalances are driving diseases

He also inaugurated the new WHO South-East Asia Regional Office Complex in Delhi, describing it as a global hub for research, regulation and capacity building. Linking traditional medicine to modern health challenges, he said lifestyle imbalances are driving diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, depression and cancer. "Restoring balance is not just a global cause but a global urgency," he said. The PM announced steps to strengthen integrative cancer care, combining traditional systems with modern treatment.

content from 194 countries and marks a shift from fragmented, region-specific knowledge to a shared global repository, enabling evidence-based research, regulation and safer integration of traditional medicine into national health systems.

The PM said the three-day summit reflected a new convergence of tradition and technology, with deliberations on research, digital tools, AI, global standards and investment. Declaration, which will serve as a common roadmap for coopera-

Modi launched key Ayush initiatives

During the event, Modi launched key Ayush initiatives, including the My Ayush Integrated Services Portal and the Ayush Mark as a global quality benchmark, and released a WHO technical report on yoga training. He also felicitated the recipients of Prime Minister's Awards for Outstanding Contribution to the Promotion and Development of Yoga, recognising their sustained efforts in taking yoga to a global audience.

tion on safety, standards and training. Highlighting India's leadership, he said it was a matter of pride that WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine is based in Jamnagar.



The Union Minister for Home Affairs and Cooperation, Shri Amit Shah at the CREDAI National Conclave "Viksit Bharat @ 2047" in New Delhi on December 19, 2025

Asking wife to keep expense sheet not cruelty, rules SC

New Delhi

A man asking his wife to maintain an Excel sheet for all the household expenses cannot be termed as cruelty to initiate criminal proceedings, Supreme Court on Friday said while quashing an FIR registered by the wife

against her husband. The court said that it maybe a reflection of Indian society where men often try to dominate and take charge of the finances but cannot be a basis to initiate criminal proceedings. A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and R Mahadevan said courts

have to be extremely careful in dealing with matrimonial complaints and must take pragmatic realities into consideration while dealing with such cases as many of them are because of daily wear and tear of marriage which can in no way, be categorised as cruelty. Allowing the

plea of husband for quashing of criminal case which was initiated after various allegations were made against him including that he was sending money to his parents, asking her to maintain account of daily, constantly taunting her about afterbirth weight etc.

Everything back to normal in Kashmir: ATOAI

SRINAGAR

Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI), the national representative body of Indian adventure tour operators, on Friday described J&K as a safe and secure tourist destination, calling for the reopening of all spots closed by the Union Territory administration after the Pahalgam terror attack. Addressing a press conference, ATOAI president Ajeet Bajaj said the body had successfully held its 17th

annual convention in Srinagar without any issues. "Some of our members also went on trips to Pahalgam, Sonamarg and Gulmarg. Everything is great here, and back to normal. We want to get more tourists back to J&K as early as possible and are keen to see all our areas open to adventure tourism," Bajaj said, even as he admitted that certain situations weren't in anyone's control. "I have been coming to Gulmarg every winter.

EC deletes over 97 lakh voters in poll-bound Tamil Nadu

NEW DELHI: Tamil Nadu chief electoral officer Archana Patnaik on Friday said the draft electoral roll, after the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), for the state now includes 5,43,76,755 voters, comprising 2.66 crore women and 2.77 crore men. She said that prior to the SIR, the poll-bound state had around 6.41 crore registered voters, and the exercise led to the deletion of 97,37,832 names from the rolls. According to Patnaik, the deletions included 26.94 lakh voters who



had died, 66.44 lakh voters who had permanently shifted or migrated, and 3,39,278 duplicate entries where individuals were found to be registered in more than one place. She added that among those marked as migrated, 66,44,881 persons were found not

residing at their registered addresses after three rounds of door-to-door verification conducted across the state. The SIR in the DMK-ruled state was conducted amid vehement opposition by chief minister MK Stalin, whose party filed a petition in the

Supreme Court against the major roll-revision exercise in the southern state. "To prevent this anti-democratic move, we convened an all-party meeting and passed a resolution condemning the SIR. The Election Commission's decision to carry out a full revision of the electoral roll just months before the election is part of a well-planned strategy to delete legitimate voters," CM Stalin said while criticising the Election Commission's electoral roll sanitisation exercise.

Sex assault: Ex-principal jailed after sign language testimony

MUMBAI

With victims and eye-witnesses deposing in sign language, a special Pocco court recently convicted and sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment the former headmaster and a retired teacher of a school for the deaf and aphasic for the sexual assault of three students between 2013 and 2014. The judge noted school is a "pious institute" and children trust their teach-

ers and consider them as guiding light for life. "If this trust is betrayed and when (a) Godlike figure himself sexually tortures, no doubt the victims would carry a trauma for life," special judge Satyanarayan R Navander said. Finding the accused, both in their 60s, guilty of aggravated sexual assault, the court said "the accused were teachers of the school for the deaf and dumb students i.e. the victims.

'No agreement': CM Siddaramaiah rejects power-sharing theory

NEW DELHI

Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah on Friday dismissed claims of a two-and-a-half-year "power-sharing arrangement" within the state government. Facing repeated questions from the Opposition over his tenure on the last day of the Legislative Assembly session in Belagavi, Siddaramaiah said there was no such agreement in place and



made it clear that he would remain the CM until the party high command decides otherwise. "First, the people must bless us. Then the legislators elect the leader in the Legislative Party

meeting, and after that, the high command decides. That is all I have said. Even now, I am the Chief Minister, and I will remain the Chief Minister until the high

command decides otherwise," he said. Reacting to Siddaramaiah's remarks, BJP MLA and Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, R Ashoka, questioned the claim, saying, "You were elected for five years by the Legislative Party. What about 2.5 years?" Siddaramaiah responded, "I never said anything about two and a half years. There is no such agreement as two and half years."

The AQI in Delhi-NCR has crossed 400

New Delhi

Pollution levels in Delhi-NCR have risen again. On Saturday, the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Delhi was recorded at 401 at 10 AM, which falls into the "severe" category. In view of the rising pollution levels, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has implemented restrictions under the Graded Response Action Plan.

Flight delays, cancellations: Air travelers have rights during disruptions

New Delhi

The Ministry of Civil Aviation has provided for extensive rights and protections of air travelers. It gives clear guidelines on flight delays, cancellations, baggage, ticket management among other things. These provisions become significant to understand to ensure consumer rights especially after the recent flight disruption crisis.



Here's a glimpse at certain key provisions to ensure passenger convenience: The Ministry has laid down regulations regarding compensation and assistance for disrupted flights, such as:

Delays: Passengers are entitled to free meals in flights delayed between 2 to 4 hours, while alternative flights or refunds have to be given for flights that are delayed for over 6 hours.

Briefs

GUWAHATI

Modi begins 2-day visit to Assam today

PM Narendra Modi is set to arrive in Guwahati on Saturday, beginning a two-day visit to Assam on December 20 and 21, during which he will inaugurate key infra projects, pay tribute to martyrs of the Assam Movement, and engage with party workers and the public. The Prime Minister is expected to reach Guwahati around 2:40 pm on Saturday. His visit will begin at the Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport (LGBIA), where he will inaugurate the newly constructed integrated terminal building, 80 foot tall statue of Bharat Ratna and first Chief Minister of Assam Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi and address a public gathering.

CHANDIGARH

Use of goons in Punjab polls: BJP for probe

The Punjab BJP chief Sunil Jakhar on Friday demanded an impartial and time-bound investigation into the allegations made by a gangster during a TV interview, in which he accused the Punjab chief minister and the ruling AAP of taking help from gangsters during the recently held Zila Parishad elections. Jakhar held that he is prepared to believe the word of the chief minister rather than that of a gangster, but to maintain this trust, the chief minister must ensure an immediate investigation into these allegations.

JAIPUR

Raj age limit for working minors raised

In Rajasthan, minimum age for minors working in shops, hotels, restaurants, and commercial establishments has been raised from 12 to 14 years. Teenagers aged 14 to 18 will no longer be allowed to work night shifts. The state government has issued an ordinance to raise the age limit, which was 12 to 15 years. Now minors in the age group of 14-18 years can be employed for a maximum of three hours a day.

LUCKNOW

Yogi links cough syrup accused to SP

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday said a probe is underway into the toxic cough syrup case and several arrests have been made. He claimed that links of those arrested have surfaced with leaders of the Samajwadi Party.

HOUSE CALL | Winter Session logs 111% productivity, nod to 8 of 10 Bills; Speaker, PM interact with Oppn MPs**After sound & fury, a balmy chai pe charcha**

NEW DELHI

The Winter Session of Parliament, which witnessed a lot of protests from the Opposition on issues ranging from the conduct of the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls to the way several legislations were brought and pushed, concluded on Friday. The short session, with just 15 sittings, also witnessed discussions on electoral reforms and Vande Mataram and transacted a great deal of business, including the introduction of 10 Bills and the passage of eight of them.

During the day a number of government papers were laid on the table before both Houses adjourned sine die amid protest by Opposition members over the passage of the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill that replaces the 20-year-old Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Incidentally, the Opposition MPs protested for nearly 12

hours in the complex after the Bill was passed by the Rajya Sabha last night.

Meanwhile, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla acknowledged that the House showed a high productivity of 111 percent. During the session, as many as 10 government Bills were taken up for discussion and eight were passed. Apart from this, 137 Private Members' Bills were introduced on December 5 while on December 12, one Private Members' resolution moved by Shafi Parambil was withdrawn, after discussion, with the permission of the House.

The Rajya Sabha had an even higher productivity of 121% as it functioned for about 92 hours. This was also the first time that CP Radhakrishnan, who was elected Vice-President earlier this year, took charge as the Chairman of the House and conducted the proceedings. The House adopted a statutory resolution and passed eight Bills during the session.

Following the end of the session, the Speaker also held a meeting with the party leaders in his chambers.

**A SESSION OF JOVIALI-TEA**

■ SP's Dharmendra Yadav suggested the session could have been a little longer. PM replied in a lighter vein: "I didn't want to strain your voice so much."

■ At the tea session, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said she consumes an

herb from Wayanad to check allergies. The remark elicited smiles from PM Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

■ Priyanka also asked the PM about his recent trip to Ethiopia, Jordan and Oman. The PM responded that the visit was good.

■ Some Opposition MPs suggested a central hall in the new parliament building.

■ The PM told them that was for post-retirement and the MPs have more to contribute in the Houses. He also praised RSP's NK Premachandran, calling him one of the best parliamentarians.

RS sits beyond midnight, passes VB-G RAM G Bill

NEW DELHI

Just the way the Lok Sabha had passed the (VB - G RAM G Bill, 2025 following a lengthy sitting, the Rajya Sabha approved the legislation that seeks to establish a rural development framework and seeks to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act following a marathon session on Thursday night which extended past midnight.

With the Rajya Sabha passing it by a voice vote, the path has been paved for the new Act that guarantees 125 days of wage employment to every rural household in a financial year provided their adult members volunteer to undertake unskilled manual work.

The Bill was passed in the Upper House after Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan replied to the

discussion in which he claimed the legislation was aimed at correcting structural flaws in the existing scheme.

Since the Opposition had protested in both Houses against the renaming of the Bill alleging that it sought to erase the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, Chouhan countered the charge by lashing out at the Opposition for stalling the proceedings and walking, saying, "making allegations and then running away is like murdering the dreams and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi".

The minister criticised the Congress for using Gandhi's name for politics. "If anyone has murdered Gandhi's ideals, it is the Congress," he alleged, contextualising his argument by citing the Emergency, various scams which took place under Congress-led governments and its frequent disruption of Parliament proceedings.

Veil row: Complaint against Nitish filed with J&K cops

SRINAGAR

PDP leader Itija Mufti on Friday lodged a police complaint seeking registration of an FIR against Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for recently pulling off the veil from a woman doctor's face. However, there was no response from the police on whether the FIR has been registered.

"I'm writing to bring to your attention a vile incident which has caused immense distress and hurt among Muslims, especially women. A few days ago, we watched with shock, horror and worry as Bihar CM Nitish Kumar pulled down the 'naqab' of a young Muslim doctor in full public glare," Mufti said in her complaint to the

'DOC TO JOIN DUTY TODAY'

Patna: Amid rumours that the doctor whose veil was removed by Nitish Kumar has declined a government job, a Bihar official on Friday said she would join duty. Dr Mahfoozur Rahman, principal of the Government Tibbi College and Hospital, said AYUSH doctor Nusrat Parveen's family has confirmed that she will join duty on Saturday. "I spoke to Parveen's husband, relatives and her classmates. They told me that she would join duty on December 20," Rahman said. Bihar Minister Dilip Jaiswal claimed that a controversy is being created unnecessarily over the issue. —Dheeraj Kumar

Kothibagh SHO.

Itija's mother and PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti also strongly criticised Union minister Giriraj Singh for defending the Bihar CM and remarking it was up to the woman doctor to refuse the appointments or "go to hell".

"India is a secular country. It is the country of (Mahatma) Gandhi, who laid down his life

for secularism. But leaders like Giriraj Singh want to turn it into 'Kaurav Rajya'. I am not saying 'Ram Rajya', in which the Kauravs stripped Draupadi's clothes," Mufti said. Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq also slammed Nitish Kumar, describing his act as a "grave violation of personal dignity and moral boundaries".

BJP MP moves privilege notice in LS against 8 Oppn members

NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla is learnt to be examining a notice by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey alleging breach of privilege and contempt by eight opposition members when the House was taking up the VB-G RAM G Bill on Thursday.

Citing House rules, Dubey on Thursday submitted a notice for breach of privilege and contempt of the House against eight opposition MPs for "contemptuous and unbecoming" behaviour.

Dubey named Hibi Eden, Dean Kuriakose, S Muraloli, K Gopinath, Sashikant Senthil, Shafi Parambil, S Venkateshan and Jothimani in his notice.

Officials said the Speaker is examining the notice.

"They continuously obstructed the smooth functioning of the House by creating obstructions" for Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and the officers assisting the House, Dubey alleged.

"As such, this is misconduct in the House, disobedience to the authority of Speaker, obstructing officers of the House in discharge of their duties which is clearly a breach of privileges of Members of Parliament collectively and the contempt of the House," Dubey said.

He urged Birla to take "strict action" against the MPs. When Chouhan was responding to the debate, opposition members rushed to the Well, tore copies of the Bill and stood on tables to register their protest against the provisions of rural job guarantee Bill.

Manjhi 'clip' on poll win stokes 'vote chori' fire

PATNA

Union minister and HAM leader **Jitan Ram Manjhi** was caught in a thick of controversy on Friday when a purported viral video showed him telling a gathering how he secured the victory of a candidate in an election held in 2020 with the help of the then district magistrate.

In this viral video, Manjhi can be heard saying in Magahi (a local dialect) in a public gathering, that he ensured the victory of a candidate who was losing by 2,600 votes by speaking to the district magistrate (DM) in 2020.

"This time, the candidate was losing by 1,600 votes, but he wasn't informed," he added.

Manjhi reportedly made these remarks while addressing a gathering at a pro-



gram me i n Mohanpur block of Barachatti constituency in Gaya district. He also mentioned the then district magistrate, who is currently reportedly posted in Tripura.

Meanwhile, he also claimed that the viral video had been tampered with.

"Some people, who tampered with one of my videos to make it go viral, think they can defame the son of a Musahar," he remarked.

Sharing the video, RJD wrote on social media, "This is Jitan Ram Manjhi, a cabinet minister in the Government of India. He is openly revealing the royal formula for winning elections."

**Goa seals popular pub linked to Phogat death**

Panaji: Curlies, one of the most popular nightlife destinations in north Goa, has been sealed following action by the CRZ authorities. While the exact grounds for the sealing are yet to be disclosed, sources indicated the action

follows inspections after a recent fire incident at Birch by Romeo Lane restaurant.

Curlies is the same restaurant where actor and BJP leader Sonali Phogat had visited on Aug 22, 2022, a day before she was found dead.

Port security bureau on anvil

PTI NEW DELHI

The government will set up a statutory body, Bureau of Port Security, which will ensure timely analysis, collection and exchange of security-related data of ports and vessels, officials said on Friday.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday convened a meeting for the constitution of the dedicated body, the Bureau of Port Security (BoPS), which was attended by Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal, and the Minister of Civil Aviation, Ram Mohan Naidu.

The meeting also noted that lessons learned from the maritime security framework shall be replicated in the aviation security domain, an official statement said.

First Quad logistics drill

NEW DELHI

Quad partners have carried out the first Indo-Pacific Logistics Network Field Training Exercise to enhance shared logistics capacity, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Friday.

The field training exercise of the grouping, comprising Australia, India, Japan and the US, was held from Dec 8 to 12.

"On the sidelines of Operation Christmas Drop, Quad partners carried out first Indo-Pacific Logistics Network Field Training Exercise to enhance shared logistics capacity for swift responses to regional humanitarian needs," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X.

Village of 1,500 registers 27k births in 3 months, Maha initiates probe

NAGPUR

A village with a population of 1,500 in Maharashtra's Yavatmal district recorded 27,398 "delayed birth registrations" in just three months, prompting the authorities to launch a probe amid suspicion of a large-scale cyber fraud, officials said on Friday.

The anomaly came to the fore during a vigilance drive by the health department, said a release by the district information officer.

Following a recent order by the Maharashtra government to cancel illegal and delayed birth-death registrations, the department launched a programme to



scrutinise records between September and November, said officials.

However, the data captured in the birth-death registration system of Shendursani gram panchayat in Arni taluka stunned them.

The release said over 27,000 delayed births were registered through the system in a span of three months. Considering that the village has a population of

According to a technical probe report, these records fall under the possibility of cyber fraud

just 1,500, the discovery of such a massive number of records was a serious matter, it said.

The District Health Officer and District Registrar (Births-Deaths) were alerted about the findings, and they subsequently informed the Chief Executive Officer of the Yavatmal Zilla Parishad, Mandar Patki, the release said.

Patki formed an inquiry

committee and ordered a detailed probe.

The inquiry concluded that 27,397 of 27,398 birth records and seven death records do not belong to the panchayat area and are suspicious, making it impossible for such numbers to have been registered through the gram panchayat, the release said.

The case was then forwarded to the Deputy Director of Health Services, Pune, for technical investigation. According to a technical investigation report received on December 11, these records fall under the possibility of cyber fraud, it said, adding that a case has been registered at the City police station in Yavatmal.

10k classrooms in Delhi to get air purifiers

NEW DELHI

Delhi Education Minister Ashish Sood on Friday announced that air purifiers will be installed in 10,000 classrooms to ensure clean air for the students.

Sood said that the government is committed towards tackling the problem of pollution through long-term administrative reforms and policy measures.

"We are not those who flaunt IIT degrees and do campaigns like Odd-Even or Gaadi On, Gaadi Off campaign," he said, taking a dig at previous AAP government. On Friday, Delhi recorded an average AQI reading of 374 in the 'very poor' category.

'Cannot use forest land for farming sans Centre's nod'

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has held that forest land cannot be leased or used for agricultural purposes without the prior approval of the Central government under Section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, and that any such lease granted in violation of the law is illegal and cannot be continued.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta on Thursday set aside a Karnataka HC order which had allowed a cooperative society to seek continuation of a lease over forest land by way of a representation.

The SC held that the very

SC sets aside an HC order which had allowed a coop society to seek continuation of a lease of forest land

grant of lease for agricultural purposes over forest land was illegal and contrary to the Act of 1980 and directed the State forest department to restore the land by planting indigenous trees and plants within twelve months.

The dispute related to land situated in Benachi and Tumarikoppa villages of Kalaghatagi Taluk in Dharwad district. The State government had granted the land to a

cooperative society on a ten-year lease starting from June 1976, for agricultural purposes. During the lease period, the members of the society cleared trees and cultivated the land. After expiry of the lease, the state terminated the lease in 1985.

The termination was challenged by the society through writ petitions filed in 1985 and 1987, which were dismissed by the HC. The society then filed a civil suit seeking protection of possession. Though the trial court partly decreed the suit by restraining the Forest Department from disturbing possession except in accordance with law, the state's appeal and second appeal were dismissed.

Action will also be taken under the NDPS Act in the cough syrup case; the path is clear for the arrest of the accused

Prayagraj: The Allahabad High Court has stated that if cough syrup containing codeine is being used for intoxication rather than for medical purposes, then action can be taken under the NDPS Act along with the Drugs and Cosmetics Act. While making this observation, the court dismissed the petition seeking to quash the FIR and stay the arrests. This order was given by a division bench of Justice Siddharth Verma and Justice Achal Sachdev on a petition filed by Birendra Lal Verma and four others, and approximately 40 other accused, including Shubham Jaiswal. Police and the Excise Department had seized millions of bottles of cough syrup in several districts of the state, including



Sonbhadra, Ghaziabad, Varanasi, Kanpur, and Jaunpur. The investigation revealed that these syrups were being smuggled from Ranchi (Jharkhand) to Uttar Pradesh and other neighboring

states like Bihar and Tripura through fake bills and e-way bills. In this case, the police have registered FIRs against approximately 40 people, including Shubham Jaiswal of Varanasi, in various districts.

The accused had filed petitions seeking to quash these FIRs and stay their arrests. Codeine is used as an intoxicant. The petitioner's lawyer argued that these medicines are being sold under license and, due to

the low quantity of codeine, it does not fall under the purview of the NDPS Act. However, Additional Advocate General Anoop Trivedi and advocate Paritosh Malviya argued that codeine was used in

the seized medicine. Therefore, if codeine is being used as an intoxicant instead of a medicine, then action can also be taken under the NDPS Act. After hearing both sides, the court held that the Drugs and Cosmetics Act is for maintaining standards in the market, while the NDPS Act is a law enacted to prevent the illegal trade of narcotics. Therefore, both laws can be applied simultaneously. The High Court dismissed all the petitions and directed the police to continue the investigation carefully and without any malice. They were involved in drug trafficking under the guise of a license. Now they could face harsh penalties under the NDPS Act and lengthy prison sentences.

New ACP Takes Charge as Assistant Commissioner of Police, Tharwai

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Tharwai / Arun Parashar, a dynamic officer from Agra district, has taken charge as the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Tharwai Police Commissionerate, Prayagraj. Upon

assuming charge, he gathered information about the areas falling under the police stations of his circle. During this time, he stated that this is his first assignment in the police department as ACP Tharwai. As the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Tharwai, Arun Parashar will fulfill his duties responsibly and will take strict action against anyone who creates any kind of disorder in the area. He will ensure the quick resolution of problems faced by complainants, and will crack down on crime and criminals. No laxity in work will be tolerated. Strict action will be taken against those involved in incidents of robbery, snatching, theft, etc. He will also expedite the resolution of public grievances. Arun Parashar is originally from Agra district and previously served as a Medical Officer in the Indian Army for 11 years. After that, he was selected as a PCS officer in the 2023 batch of the Uttar Pradesh Police Department. He has now taken charge as the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Tharwai, and has familiarized himself with the problems of the area, paying special attention to sensitive areas. He stated that action will be taken against anyone who disrupts peace and order in the area, and criminals will be dealt with strictly. His father was also involved in education, and his wife is a computer engineer. It is evident that the entire family is highly educated, and each son and daughter has achieved a good position through hard work and dedication. The newly appointed ACP Arun Parashar has been a top performer in academics, studying science in high school and intermediate, and also pursuing an MBBS degree. He served as a Medical Officer in the Indian Army for eleven years. His dream is to perform his duties diligently and responsibly and to ensure that justice prevails in every case of injustice. No crime will be tolerated; action will be taken.



One accused in cattle slaughter incident injured in police encounter, another arrested

Kaushambi. On December 14th, in Fakirabad under Sarai Akil police station, Shiv Prasad's cow was untied and taken away and slaughtered. Case number 346/25 under Section 325 of the IPC and Sections 3/5A/8 of the Cow Slaughter Prevention Act was registered at Sarai Akil police station. Considering the seriousness of the incident, Superintendent of Police Rajesh Kumar formed teams and instructed them to investigate the incident and arrest the accused quickly.

In this sequence, the formed teams were conducting raids at possible locations to arrest the accused.



During this time, Sarai Akil police received information that the accused in the cattle slaughter incident were present near Shakeel Ahmed's mango orchard on the Usmanpur to Hasanpur link road in Purkhas and were planning to commit a similar crime again. Based on

this information, as soon as the police teams reached the spot to apprehend them, the accused, seeing themselves surrounded, fired at the police team with the intention of killing them. When the police team asked them to surrender, they again fired at the police team with the

intention of killing them while trying to escape. The police fired in self-defense, in which one accused was shot in the leg, and another accused, taking advantage of the darkness, tried to escape but was also surrounded and arrested by the police team.

Upon questioning, the injured accused identified himself as Sartaj alias Taj, son of late Hayatullah, resident of Fakirabad, Sarai Akil police station, and the arrested accused identified himself as Nihal, son of Ayub, resident of Fakirabad, Sarai Akil police station. An illegal 315 bore pistol, one live 315 bore cartridge, two spent 315 bore cartridges,

4 cleavers, a wooden block, a nylon rope and Rs. 1,340/- were recovered from the accused. Upon being interrogated strictly, the accused confessed that they, along with their accomplices Cash alias Monu and Khalid alias Ganthu, had taken the complainant's cow and slaughtered it. They also stated that they were spotted by some people while transporting the beef, which is why they fled their homes. The injured accused was sent to the district hospital in Manjhanpur for primary treatment. Further legal action is being taken. Both the injured and arrested accused are notorious cattle smugglers.

Gram Panchayat Meeting Held in Tisra Village, Mission Shakti Team Provides Awareness Information to Women and Girls

Bureau Report by Pradeep Kumar Pandey

Ghazipur: A village meeting was organized today, December 19, 2025, in Tisra village under the Bahariyabad police station area of ??the district, chaired by Village Head Satish Chauhan. BDO Sadat and Station House Officer Krishna Pratap Singh, along with their team, were present at the meeting. The Mission Shakti team, including Head Constable Kamlesh Kumar Yadav, Constable Abhishek Tiwari, Constable Shivam Yadav, Woman Constable Manisha Singh, and Cyber ??Help Desk employee Woman Constable Namita Yadav, were present on the



stage. During the meeting, under Mission Shakti Phase-5, women and girls were given detailed information about important emergency numbers related to safety and assistance—112, 1090, 1076, 1930, 1098, and 181. Information about various welfare schemes launched by

the Chief Minister, such as the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana and the Widow Pension Scheme, was also provided to the villagers. A large number of villagers were present at the meeting and played an active role in making the program a success.

Manoj Gupta to become Chief Justice of Uttarakhand

Prayagraj. Justice Manoj Kumar Gupta, who is set to become the Chief Justice of the Uttarakhand High Court, is known for his landmark decision allowing a 17-and-a-half-year-old rape victim to terminate her 31-week pregnancy. In this judgment, he emphasized that the pregnant woman's wishes and consent are paramount, even if terminating the pregnancy poses a risk to the mother's and child's lives. He has also delivered several other significant judgments that have enhanced the credibility of the judiciary in society. Some of the key judgments include: Directing Omare Buildhome Limited to deposit Rs. 25 crore and release 50 flats in addition to the 170 flats already released in favor of homebuyers in stalled projects in Noida. Ruling that

merely the threat of encroachment and the assertion that the land is required for planned development for a public purpose does not fulfill the conditions under Section 17 of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894, and does not negate the need to hear and decide on the objections of the landowners. Stating that there is no provision for a re-medical examination after an appeal is rejected by the Divisional Medical Board under the Uttar Pradesh Police Constable and Head Constable Service Rules, 2015. Awarding compensation of Rs. 5 lakh to a 35-year-old law student who was admitted to a law college against the rules and whose admission was canceled after he passed the first-semester examination. Ruling that a writ petition can be filed in a contractual dispute if it is for the

protection of rights created by the contract/agreement. It was also stated that new rights cannot be claimed under the contract. Biography Manoj Kumar Gupta obtained his law degree from Lucknow University in October 1987 and registered as an advocate the same year, beginning his practice in the High Court. He specialized in civil, rent control, and constitutional matters. On April 12, 2013, he became an Additional Judge of the Allahabad High Court, and on April 10, 2015, he became a Permanent Judge. His name was recommended by Supreme Court Justice Altamas Kabir, and President Pranab Mukherjee approved the appointment. Justice Manoj Kumar Gupta will serve at the Allahabad High Court from November 22, 2023 to 2024.

DM holds meeting with representatives of national and state political parties

Regarding electoral rolls of assembly constituencies The main objective of the special intensive revision program is to make the voter list updated, error-free and free from discrepancies

Prayagraj: A meeting was held on Friday at the Sangam Auditorium under the chairmanship of District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma, in the presence of representatives of recognized national and state political parties, regarding the special intensive revision program of the electoral rolls of the assembly constituencies. In the meeting, the District Magistrate gave detailed information to the representatives of the national and state political parties about the progress and activities of the re-verification and mapping of ASD (Absent, Shifted, Dead) voters being carried out under the special intensive revision program. The District Magistrate said that the main objective of the special intensive revision program of the voter list is to make the voter list updated, error-free and free from discrepancies, ensuring that the names of eligible voters are included and the names of ineligible voters are not included. All the representatives of the political parties have a special role in this work, and their cooperation is needed. He said that the ASD



list of voters prepared by the BLOs has been shared with all of you. If any person has been mistakenly included in the ASD list, they can be removed from the list by December 26, otherwise the name of the concerned voter will not be included in the draft publication list. Therefore, you are requested that the BLOs appointed by you should work with full dedication and cooperate with the BLOs so that no eligible voter is left out. The District Magistrate informed that the ASD (Absent, Shifted, or Deceased) list, prepared by the BLOs (Booth Level Officers) identifying deceased, permanently shifted, duplicate/already enrolled, absent, and other voters, has been shared with the BLAs

(Booth Level Agents) appointed by all political parties and has also been pasted at all polling booths. A searchable list of ASD voters, prepared in a polling station-wise format, has also been uploaded on the Prayagraj district website - <https://prayagraj.nic.in>, where the general public can check their names in the ASD list. If a person's name has been incorrectly marked in the ASD list by the BLO, they can contact the concerned BLO or ERO (Electoral Registration Officer) to have their name removed from the list. The District Magistrate further stated in the meeting that special focus is currently being placed on identifying and locating these ASD voters.

Arrest Made in Search Warrant Campaign

Bureau Report by Pradeep Kumar Pandey **Ghazipur.** Under the direction of the Superintendent of Police, Ghazipur, the campaign against crime and criminals in the district has achieved another success. On Friday, December 19, 2025, under the guidance of the Additional Superintendent of Police (Rural) and Circle Officer Sudhakar Pandey, the Mohammadabad police station conducted a significant operation as part of a search warrant campaign. A police team, led by Sub-Inspector Lallan Ram Bind, raided various suspected locations. During the operation, the team arrested Arvind Kushwaha, son of Ayodhya Kushwaha, approximately 41 years old, a resident of Bakharipur village, Mohammadabad police station, Ghazipur district, who had been wanted for a long time. Following the arrest, the accused was sent to be presented before the Honorable Court after necessary legal procedures were completed. The successful operation involved Station House Officer Pramod Kumar Singh, Sub-Inspector Lallan Ram Bind, and other members of the police team.



Young man dies after being burned in Dhoomanganj; police launch investigation

Prayagraj: A young man died under suspicious circumstances after being severely burned near Nehru Park in the Dhoomanganj police station area. The incident came to light in the morning. Police arrived at the scene after receiving information about the discovery of the burnt body and have launched an investigation. The young man has not yet been identified. Police are investigating several angles. The man is believed to be around 30 years old. Some people are suggesting that he died from burns sustained from a bonfire, while others suspect foul play.

Editorial

Clumsy and ill-informed analogy gone wrong

President George W Bush was famous for his quite often hilarious gaffes, but he has been receiving steady competition from the 81-year-old President Joe Biden. The latest Biden pronouncement may be more by way of a clumsy and ill-informed analogy gone wrong. Luckily for him, his presidential election rival, the almost 78-year-old Donald Trump, makes quite a few bloopers too.

Republican contender, former President Donald Trump, may be tough on Mexican immigrants with his infamous, if not too effective, border fence and wall, but Democrat Joe Biden, the incumbent president, is in harmony with the Democratic Party pro-immigration stance. This even in the face of internal advice that he should tough talk on the same border issue. Of course, hordes of poor and largely illiterate illegal immigrants in 2024 who don't speak English are not as welcome as they were in the 1870s. In the 19th century and before, immigrants, largely from Europe, slaves brought in from Africa, and some immigration from China, helped to populate the vast country. They threw out the British colonists, pushed back the French and Mexicans, subdued the native Red Indians, built the engines of growth, and even fought a civil war amongst themselves. Immigrants, many originally poor and persecuted in their erstwhile home countries, have been a crucial feature of American DNA. This is what Biden meant, but perhaps he should have stopped right there. Immigrants into America are known and lauded for their hard work, ingenuity, and grit, and Biden was addressing a crowd of mostly Asian Americans. More recently, the brilliant IIT educated ones from India, its 'brain drain' and America's gain, have been most useful in building America's preeminence in IT, other technology, and commerce. Scores of Indian-origin CEOs of marquee companies on the Nasdaq and S&P 100 indices have led to the joke that you can't be CEO in America if you aren't Indian. It is a complete makeover of the earlier American image of India as a land of teeming poverty, with tigers, snake charmers, and fakirs thrown in. President Joe Biden, keen to distinguish his candidature from that of Donald Trump, decided to praise immigrants at a campaign reception fundraiser. On the campaign trail for Biden 1.0, he had vowed to enact legislation to make the immigration process more 'humane' in contrast to President Trump's mostly intended, but not implemented, harsh measures. This time, too, Trump is speaking of deportations. However, as president, Biden could not make much progress on immigration legislation without bipartisan support because of surges of illegal immigration at the southern border. And calls, certainly from Republicans, but even from Democrats, to seal the border and crack down on asylum seekers. Some went so far as to call for banning asylum altogether. But the consensus is that, at this fundraiser, Biden let his analogies run away with him. Biden said American allies and partners Japan and India are struggling economically 'because they're xenophobic'. He included 'frenemy' China and combatant Russia in the illustration as well. Japan is opening up to a cautious immigration policy as it grapples with its diminishing and ageing population, and its economy has been showing signs of recovery from a 25-year-long recession. It is keen, however, not to import terrorism and other social upheavals into its very well-ordered culture. India is the most populous country in the world, with 65 per cent of its people under the age of 35. It is the fastest-growing major economy in the world, with 6-7 per cent GDP growth per annum.



Petroleum products continue to be strategic assets



Petroleum products continue to be strategic assets that are still the drivers of all transportation, significant electricity production, and many industrial processes. Petroleum and gas reserves are nature's blessing to only a few select regions of the world. Most large economies in Europe, China, Japan, and India, among others, are major importers of petroleum products. Global strategic petroleum reserves refer to crude oil inventories (or stockpiles) held by the government of a particular country, as well as private industry, to safeguard the economy and help maintain national security during an energy crisis. Strategic reserves are intended to be used to cover short-term supply disruptions. The Ukraine war once again emphasised the need for logistic supply chain management and how disruptions can upset any country's strategic and tactical intentions. They also impact the day-to-day lives of the citizens. The disruption of electric power, petrol, and gas in winter 2022 in Europe and Ukraine was severe.

American sanctions on Iranian and Russian oil have greatly upset demand and supply dynamics. The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) often operates as a cartel to control production and thus

influence prices. There is thus a need for all importing nations to not only broaden the basket of sourcing countries but also to build their own strategic storage capacities.

Global Petroleum Reserves The world consumes roughly 100 million barrels of crude oil per day. This translates to 36.5 billion barrels per year. The proven global oil reserves currently are nearly 1,650 billion barrels, and that will last nearly 45 years. For the last one decade there has been no addition to known oil reserves. Major countries with percentages of reserves are Venezuela (18.2 per cent), Saudi Arabia (16.2 per cent), Canada (10.4 per cent), Iran (9.5 per cent), Iraq (8.7 per cent), Kuwait (6.1 per cent), UAE (5.9 per cent), Russia (4.8 per cent), Libya (2.9 per cent), United States (2.1 per cent), China (1.5 per cent), India (0.29 per cent), and Pakistan (0.021

per cent), among many others.

Global Strategic Petroleum Reserves

The International Energy Agency (IEA), a group of 31 countries, requires members to hold strategic reserves equal to 90 days of the previous year's net imports, though commercial stockpiles can be included in that total. Only net-exporter members of the IEA are exempt from this requirement. The forward commercial storage agreements allow oil-exporting countries increased flexibility in commercial storage and allow petroleum to be stored within an oil-importing country. Such reserves remain technically under the control of the oil-exporting country.

In 2022, approximately 4.1 billion barrels of oil were held in strategic reserves by IEA member states, of which 1.4 billion were government-controlled and the remain-

der were held by private industry. The US, China (non-IEA member), and Japan are leading crude oil consumers and maintain the largest SPR. Many other non-IEA countries have started working on their own SPR.

China's Strategic Petroleum Reserves

China has the second largest storage, at 511 million barrels. China's daily consumption is around 12 million barrels of crude. Thus, their SPR is equivalent to between 40 and 50 days of imports. China eventually wants to raise the figure to 90 days of reserve. Russia has been the major supplier to China of late, contributing as much as 2.14 million barrels per day, overtaking Saudi Arabia. Russian oil was substantially discounted due to Western sanctions. Stockpiling partly insulates Beijing from the supply chain and pricing dynamics. Also, larger stocks will be required for a possible Taiwan Strait conflict that could result in a military blockade or economic or trade sanctions. China has also secured supply chains through pipelines from Russia, the trans-Myanmar oil and gas pipeline, and from central Asia, predominantly Turkmenistan.

Simultaneously, China is rapidly shifting to electric vehicles and is not only building lithium stocks for batteries but has also acquired pro-

cessing facilities and mines, including overseas. Investment bank UBS estimates that China might control a third of all global lithium supplies by 2025. The US SPR is the world's largest, with an authorised maximum capacity of 727 million barrels. The reserves are kept in salt caverns located at different locations along the Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coasts. The US consumed an average of about 20.01 million barrels of petroleum per day. It was a net petroleum exporter of 1.64 million barrels per day in 2023. It thus has the capacity to play around with the SPR. The US government has historically tapped into its SPR following man-made accidents, economic crises, and natural disasters, though it has also sold and loaned crude oil from the SPR to other nations at times. Japan held SPR equivalent to 133 days of crude oil imports in early 2022. That amounts to 332 million barrels based on the country's average monthly imports in 2021. Commercial stocks amounted to 86 days of imports. Japanese SPR storage is spread across nearly a dozen facilities. South Africa has an SPR storage capacity of 45 million barrels, managed by PetroSA. Singapore has sophisticated oil refineries and storage terminals, is one of the world's major oil refining centres.

Rafah offensive and war in Gaza

A girl walks next to a tent sprayed with a message in solidarity with pro-Palestinian university students, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestinians, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, May 2, 2024. Image: REUTERS The war in Gaza is due to complete seven months on May 7, marking the longest war in Gaza since Israel's voluntary vacation of Gaza in 2005. Contrary to expectations, borne more out of Israel's enormous military superiority against Hamas as well as past conflicts in Gaza, the conflict has not ended swiftly. During this time, however, Israeli strikes have flattened Gaza to the ground, making it completely uninhabitable, perhaps for decades. The stench of death and decay overwhelms the thin strip straddling

the Mediterranean Sea, with estimates of over 34,500 deaths, including 13,000 children, and over 77,500 injured and maimed for life. Medical aid, food, and water have been severely restricted, and most international aid agencies, including UNRWA as well as WCK (World Central Kitchen), have been targeted and prevented from delivering lifesaving aid. Despite a UN Security Council resolution of March 25 calling for an immediate ceasefire and the unconditional release of hostages, neither of the warring parties has been able to come to a common understanding.

In the midst of it, there was a period of dangerous escalation when an Israeli strike on April 1 targeted the Iranian Consulate building in Damascus, Syria, resulting in the

deaths of seven members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), including General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, the senior-most commander in Lebanon and Syria. Outraged by the attack on its 'sovereign territory', Iran retaliated on April 13 with a massive and well-synchronised attack by drones and missiles. While most of the drones were intercepted mid-air, some of the missiles found their mark and struck the Nevatim Israeli air base in the Negev desert. Nevatim is the air base from which Israel launched its F-35 fighters that attacked the Iranian consulate in Damascus. Despite decades of hostility between Israel and Iran, this was the first time that Iran had launched strikes directly on Israel from its territory.

The prosecutors see this as a criminal act, especially as it led to tax evasion and suppression of information, preventing the American voter from making an informed judgement. Numerous legal experts are not convinced and opine that the case is weak. The Trump legal team tried hard to delay the trial until after the elections or have it shifted to another city. They have been successful in most of the cases, including three prospective criminal trials involving unlawful possession of classified documents by Trump even after demitting office and an attempted insurrection on January 6, 2021, to overturn the people's mandate. His lawyers took the stand that their client could not get justice in the Manhattan Court in New York, a bastion of the Democratic Party. They further alleged that Judge Merchan's daughter had a business relationship with the Biden administration, and hence there was a conflict of interest. They demanded that the judge must recuse himself.

Next, they asked that the hearing be deferred until the Supreme Court's decision on Trump's claim of absolute presidential immunity from all public or private actions. They tried to delay the jury selection. None of these worked, prompting intemperate rants from the defendant, despite numerous gag orders by the courts. Earlier this week, Judge Merchan finally cracked the whip, holding

Trump in contempt for nine violations. He imposed a \$1000 fine for each violation, the maximum permitted under the law, while recognising that it may not mean anything to the defendant but ominously cautioning that further violations could even result in his incarceration. Trump is putting up a brave front, but the legal troubles are taking their toll. He is short of funds; his campaign has lost some momentum, as he is obliged to be present in court for eight hours or more, four days a week. It may possibly have even begun to sow doubts in the minds of some supporters. In any event, his family members are conspicuously absent at the trials.

Some of his former friends and associates, including former Vice President Mike Pence, have gone cold or even turned hostile. That is not to say that his grip over the party has weakened. Very few in the Republican Party dare to cross swords with him. He continues to be ahead of President Biden in opinion polls by 4 to 6 percentage points. That brings us back to the question about the timing of the court cases. The 'hush-money' case dates back eight years, and the other criminal cases date back at least three years. The civilian cases also go back in time. What were the prosecutors doing all these years? Even if he had immunity from prosecution as president, it has been over three years since he relinquished office. Is it a mere hap-

penstance that a flurry of court cases has come up for hearing bang in the middle of the presidential campaign? If they have coalesced organically at this juncture, it is indeed too much of a coincidence! Given the stakes involved, it is prudent not to take things at face value. The Biden administration naturally maintains that the Department of Justice and courts are independent and that it has no role to play. True, division of power is enshrined in the Constitution, but is it so watertight? Trump and his followers blame the White House for master-minding his legal troubles. He has been calling President Biden 'crooked' besides deploying even more colourful language. He describes the trials as an 'assault on America'. Be that as it may, it is a no-loss proposition for the ruling Democrats. If Trump is disqualified, the Republican campaign could be thrown into disarray. At the very least, the renewed spotlight on Trump's character-flaws and misdemeanours is bound to dent his standing with the independents and moderate Republicans voters. And yet the greatest irony is that, come November, Trump could very well succeed in reclaiming the high office. All court cases could then instantly vanish in thin air, and everything could be forgiven if not forgotten. Would therefore one be wrong to surmise that when it comes to the rich and powerful, the wheels of justice.

Tibet and Myanmar is a geostrategic milestone

West Siang, Upper Siang, Dibang Valley, Lower Dibang Valley, Anjaw, and Changlang in Arunachal Pradesh adjoining Tibet and Myanmar is a geostrategic milestone. It was conceived in 2016 and is expected to be completed in 2027. Work in this direction has started at a quick pace. This shows the urgency and importance India gives to its territorial integrity.

The infrastructural development that China has brought along the McMahon Line is quite extensive. The frontier highway is a precise and direct response to this and to curb China's irrationality. The highway will become an all-weather road to handle any geopolitical and geostrategic pres-

sure likely to emanate from the other side of the border. From Tawang to Vijayanagar, which covers the entire border space in Arunachal Pradesh, the frontier highway is a milestone in India's robust preparedness in the eastern Himalayas. The dragon finds a fitting competitor. The scale with which China develops its infrastructural might, both at the border and in the hinterland, the frontier highway is a geostrategic imperative. The risk these complex infrastructures present leaves no scope for a second thought but to act urgently to protect the territorial integrity of India. The frontier highway manifests India's right intent and seriousness in addressing the pos-

sible dangers that the enemy constantly poses. The frontier highway will present the required checkmate to Chinese bullying attitudes in the region. Beijing's reaction to these infrastructural initiatives is not new. It always does this to keep itself relevant in the thick of things. However, it has no business in making any comment as Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of the sovereign India. China uses this drama to keep the issue alive and effectively uses its propaganda machinery to develop some geopolitical weight in the region. It presents no hesitation in developing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) through Pakistan-occupied

Kashmir (PoK). It knows the disputed character of PoK and exercises no restraint. Instead, it tutors India on what it does in its sovereign territory. India understands China's cunning and exercises patience and quietness, making necessary preparations to check the latter's possible misadventures. However, the work-in-progress frontier highway will significantly strengthen India's border infrastructure and seamless connectivity. It will present a significant impetus for encouraging economic engagement in the region. Infrastructure and connectivity have always played a pivotal role in modernising the economy and opening the scope for economic.

Briefs

LUCKNOW

UP Launches Statewide Youth Entrepreneur Yatra

The 'Invincible Bharat 5.0 - UP Mukhyamantri Yuva Udyami Yatra' will start from Lucknow on January 24, covering 25 districts and Delhi institutions. It aims to support the CM YUVA mission by providing on-the-spot help for project reports, bank linkages, and skill registration to turn job seekers into entrepreneurs. The initiative targets awareness for over one crore youth and training for 25,000 aspiring entrepreneurs.

BAHRAICH

DGP Seeks Clarification Over Salute to Preacher

UP DGP has sought an explanation from Bahraich SP after a video showing a ceremonial police salute to religious preacher Pundrik Goswami went viral. The police stated he was invited for a motivational session to address stress among personnel. However, opposition leaders SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and Bheem Army Chief Chandrashekhar Azad criticized the act, questioning law & order and calling it an attack on constitutional principles.

LALITPUR

BEO Honored for Voter List Revision Work

District Magistrate Satyaprakash honored Block Education Officer Mahroni Rajkumar Purohit with a commendation certificate. The BEO was recognized for completing 100% digitalization work in the first phase of the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls for the 2026 elections within the stipulated time for Lalitpur and Mahroni assembly segments.

KANPUR

DM Declares School Holiday Until Dec 20

In view of the severe cold wave, Kanpur DM Jitendra Pratap Singh has declared a holiday for all schools in the district until December 20. The order applies to all educational institutions from nursery to class 12, including government, aided, private, CBSE, and ICSE board schools. The decision was taken considering children's health and safety amid continuously dropping temperatures.

LUCKNOW

37th Cycle Yatra Honors Kakori Martyrs

The 37th annual cycle yatra in memory of the Kakori train action martyrs was taken out by the Uttar Pradesh Krantikari Parishad. Flagged off by a historian from Netaji Subhash Chowk, the yatra culminated at the Kakori Shahid Smarak. En route, street plays and folk songs were performed. Parishad chief Anil Mishra 'Guruji' termed the Kakori incident an inspiration for the youth.

LALITPUR

Cyber Crime Awareness Campaign Organized

Under the direction of Superintendent Mohammad Mushtaq, a cyber crime awareness campaign was conducted by the Cyber Crime Cell and Jakhura Police. People were informed about cyber-crugging, phishing, cyber-stalking, slebbery, identity theft, deepfake, and digital arrest.

WINTER SESSION | Codeine cough syrup case sparks political exchange, becomes big issue

Barbs fly between CM and SP chief over syndicate

LUCKNOW

Ahead of the Uttar Pradesh legislature's winter session, the codeine cough syrup case triggered a sharp political exchange between Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav. Speaking to the media before the session, the Chief Minister used a well-known couplet to criticise the SP chief, alleging links between arrested accused and the party. Akhilesh Yadav later responded through a post on social media platform X, countering the remarks in a similar poetic tone.

The Chief Minister said codeine-based cough syrup falls under the NDPS Act and is meant strictly for medical use in serious cases of cough. According to him, the Central Narcotics Bureau allocates production quotas for such medi-



CM links arrested accused in codeine syrup case to SP, Akhilesh responds with poetic counter on social media

cines. Following complaints of misuse of the syrup as an intoxicant, enforcement agencies initiated action. He said the crackdown involved

the UP government, police, Food Safety and Drug Administration (FSDA) and the Special Task Force (STF), resulting in large seizures and arrests. Referring to preliminary findings, the Chief Minister claimed that some of the accused arrested during the investigation had links with the Samajwadi Party. He stated that a state-level Special Investigation Team (SIT) is probing the matter and that

Akhilesh hits back with poetic reply

Reacting to the Chief Minister's remarks on the codeine cough syrup case, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav posted a response on social media platform X. Using a poetic line, he alleged that accusations were being levelled to divert attention. His post came shortly after the Chief Minister claimed that some accused in the case had links with the SP. The exchange quickly drew political attention, with party supporters sharing and debating the remarks online, adding to the intensity of the issue ahead of the legislature's winter session.

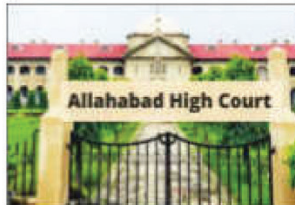
Winter session begins amid tensions

The Uttar Pradesh legislature's winter session began on December 19 and will continue till December 24. After paying tribute to a deceased MLA, the Assembly was adjourned. Opposition parties indicated protests over the codeine syrup case and other issues during the session

further details would emerge once the investigation is completed. He added that the issue would also be raised in the Legislative Council. The remarks came just as the winter session of the legislature

began. The Chief Minister said the session, scheduled from December 19 to 24, would focus on development-related issues and include discussions marking milestones related to the national song 'Vande Mataram'.

40 accused in Codeine racket face arrest



PRAYAGRAJ

The Allahabad High Court has dismissed petitions filed by 40 accused, including the alleged key conspirator Shubham Jayswal, seeking anticipatory bail and the quashing of an FIR in the codeine-laced cough syrup smuggling case. The court's refusal to grant relief clears the path for their potential arrest. The FIR was registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

The case, investigated by the Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force (STF), involves an alleged interstate smuggling network. According to the investigation, Shubham Jayswal, using a super stockist license obtained in his father's name from a company in Ranchi, Jharkhand, operated a supply chain. The syrup was allegedly

STF reveals interstate smuggling network, trafficked via fake E-way bills

sourced from firms in Himachal Pradesh, stored in a godown in Ghaziabad, and then distributed using fake E-way bills to cities like Agra, Lucknow, and Varanasi.

From Varanasi, large consignments were purportedly routed through Sonbhadra to Jharkhand and West Bengal, with the contraband eventually reaching Bangladesh and Nepal. Two other arrested accused had earlier told the STF that they worked for associates named Vishal and Vibhor Rana, who had business dealings with Jayswal, further detailing the network's reach.

Dense fog paralyzes daily life in Uttar Pradesh

LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh continues to reel under intense cold and dense fog, severely affecting daily life across the state. On Friday, large parts of the state remained enveloped in thick fog, leading the India Meteorological Department (IMD) to issue a red alert for extremely dense fog in 50 districts for Saturday. In addition, a cold day warning has been issued for around 40 districts, indicating the possibility of a sharp drop in daytime temperatures.

According to the Regional Meteorological Centre in Lucknow, visibility in several districts fell to dangerously low levels. Cities such as Agra, Bareilly, Kushinagar and Gorakhpur reported near-



Experts say western disturbances may bring slight relief after sunday

zero visibility during morning hours. Bahraich recorded visibility as low as 20 metres, while Aligarh and Farrukhabad reported visibility around 30 metres. Lucknow and surrounding areas also witnessed a significant dip in maximum temperatures due to persistent fog

and cold winds.

Senior meteorologist Atul Kumar Singh stated that two consecutive western disturbances are expected to become active from Sunday. Their impact may lead to a marginal rise of up to two degrees Celsius in daytime temperatures and a slight reduction in fog intensity. However, until then, severe cold conditions are likely to persist. Districts under red alert include Prayagraj, Varanasi, Kanpur, Gorakhpur, Ayodhya, Bareilly, Meerut, Agra, Mathura, Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Gorakhpur, Bahraich and Lakhimpur Kheri, among others. Authorities have advised people to avoid unnecessary travel during early morning hours and take precautions against extreme cold.

HSBC expands to Lucknow

LUCKNOW



HSBC India opened its 30th branch in Lucknow on December 19, 2025, targeting affluent and NRI clients. Deputy CM Brajesh Pathak inaugurated the site alongside a solar kitchen partnership with Akshaya Patra. This strategic move is part of a major expansion plan following RBI approval earlier during this calendar year.

Recently, HSBC India has also opened new branches in Amritsar, Indore and Vadodara.

Mayawati sets agenda at All-India BSP meeting

LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) national president Mayawati chaired an all-India meeting in Lucknow on Friday, attended by party office-bearers from several states except Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The meeting primarily focused on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls being carried out by the Election Commission.

Mayawati directed party leaders and workers to temporarily pause other organisational activities and concentrate fully on the SIR process. She emphasised that special attention must be given to ensure that the poor, labourers and people from the Bahujan community are not excluded



BSP chief instructs leaders to prioritise voter list revision to prevent exclusion of poor and marginalised sections

from voter lists during the revision exercise. According to her, voting rights are the outcome of long social struggles and must be safeguarded with seriousness. During the meeting,

Mayawati reviewed state-wise organisational reports and expressed dissatisfaction over lapses in implementing instructions issued in previous meetings. She asked leaders to address shortcomings related to organisational strengthening, expansion of public support and financial discipline without delay. Referring to difficulties faced during SIR in some states, she advised party units elsewhere to prepare in advance. Raising broader concerns, Mayawati questioned the role of money power, muscle power and alleged misuse of government resources in elections. She also criticised attempts to influence voters through financial means and flagged issues related to changes in rural employment schemes.

Tripura assembly team studies UP legislative practices



LUCKNOW

A delegation of the Tripura Legislative Assembly's Estimates Committee, led by its Chairman Ram Pada Jamatia, visited the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly as part of an official study tour and paid a courtesy call on Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana at his office. The visit provided an opportunity for meaningful discussions on parliamentary procedures, the role and functioning of legis-

lative committees, financial discipline and issues related to good governance.

During the interaction, Speaker Satish Mahana briefed the delegation on the working style of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly, highlighting its democratic traditions, procedural framework and the importance of committees in legislative oversight. He also shared insights into how committees contribute to accountability, budgetary scrutiny and effective governance.

Winter session begins with heated debate on education policies

LUCKNOW

Proceedings of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council witnessed extensive discussion on education-related issues on the first day of the winter session on Friday. While the Legislative Assembly was adjourned till Monday after a condolence meeting for sitting MLA Sudhakar Singh, the Council continued its business and took up multiple questions raised by members across party lines.

A major focus of the debate was the appointment of former Director General of Police Prashant Kumar as chairperson of the State Education Service Selection Commission. Several Council members questioned the suitability of a retired police officer for the post, arguing that qualified academicians



Opposition flags falling school numbers, teacher transfers, and alleged erosion of educational standards

and educationists were available in the state. The issue led to sharp exchanges between ruling and opposition members. Members also raised concerns over the

merger of government schools with low student strength. The opposition alleged that school mergers would adversely affect access to education, particularly for disadvantaged communities, and could lead to a reduction in teaching posts. Reference was made to official data indicating a decline in the number of primary schools and a significant number of students moving out of the government school system in recent years.

Congress's 'Talent Hunt' enters final stage in Lucknow

LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Congress on Friday conducted the fourth phase of its 'Talent Hunt' competition in Lucknow as part of an exercise to identify spokespersons capable of representing the party at various levels. Participants from across the state appeared for interviews at the party headquarters, with the process continuing throughout the day.

According to the party, the Talent Hunt aims to select individuals who can articulate party positions effectively and respond to political issues in public forums. Those found suitable will be appointed as spokespersons and panelists at the national, state, divisional and district levels.

Vice Chairman of the Congress Media Communication Department, Dr Manish Hindvi, said the



Selected candidates to Be appointed as national, state and district level spokespersons

programme is being conducted in a transparent manner without any age or educational qualification criteria, apart from the requirement that participants must be adults. He stated that emphasis is being placed on communication skills, clarity of thought and understanding of political and social issues.

The Talent Hunt process in Uttar Pradesh is being carried out in five phases.

initiative

How a Fatehpur girl became a symbol of self-reliance

PRAYAGRAJ

The Yogi government's continuous efforts to make rural women self-reliant under the Rural Livelihood Mission are showing visible results across Uttar Pradesh. Women joining the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) are not only transforming their own lives but also empowering others by providing employment opportunities.

Rita of Dagariya village, in Fatehpur district under Prayagraj division, is one such example. Her husband was a



marginal farmer and their family struggled to make ends meet. Upon learning about the

Rural Livelihood Mission in 2017, she joined hands with ten other women to form the Jai

Empowered by mission, Rita employs 10 women and ventures into mushroom production

Santoshi Maa Self-Help Group. Through this, she availed a loan of ₹1.4 lakh from the CCL fund and started fish farming in her village.

Today, Rita owns three fish tanks and earns between 15,000 and 20,000 monthly. With her earnings, she opened

a beauty parlour and later built her own house. Her two children now study in Mumbai — a testimony to how empowerment can reshape rural lives. District NRLM Officer Mukesh Kumar stated that so far, 18,344 women self-help groups have been formed in Fatehpur, covering 1,95,000 families. He added that women like Rita have become a source of inspiration for others. Rita has now expanded into mushroom cultivation, employing 12 more women, thus extending the circle of empowerment that began with one small step in a village.

AISPLB finalizes plans for annual convention

LUCKNOW

In a decisive move to finalize preparations for its upcoming annual summit, the All India Shia Personal Law Board (AISPLB) convened a high-level executive committee meeting at its Lucknow headquarters, 'Awadh Point.' Under the presidency of Maulana Syed Saem Mehdi Naqvi, the session served as a strategic briefing for the highly anticipated Izlas-e-Aam (Annual Convention).

The convention is slated to take place on December 28, 2025, at the iconic Bada Imambara



starting at 11:00 AM. General Secretary and prominent cleric Maulana Yasoob Abbas utilized the meeting to issue a heartfelt rallying cry to the community. He urged a wide spectrum of society—including religious scholars, poets, madrasa leaders, and local organizations—to attend the gathering in large numbers to demonstrate unity and address pressing communal concerns.

Briefs

Pak: India undermining Indus treaty

Pakistan's Dy PM Ishaq Dar on Friday accused India of consistently attempting to undermine the Indus Waters Treaty, claiming the current material breaches strike at the heart of the pact. Dar, also the foreign minister, was addressing the media a day after Pakistan sought clarification from India regarding variations in the flow of the Chenab river.

YT content on WH website

The livestream of a YouTube content creator talking about investments mysteriously appeared to take over a White House website, raising questions about whether the site was hacked. The livestream appeared for at least eight minutes late on Thursday on [whitehouse.gov/live](https://www.whitehouse.gov/live), where the White House usually streams live video of the president speaking.

US lifts Syria sanctions

Syria's government and its allies welcomed the final lifting of most draconian sanctions imposed on the country in recent decades. The US Congress imposed the so-called Caesar Act sanctions on Syria's govt and financial system in 2019 to punish then-President Bashar Assad for human rights abuses during the country's 14-year civil war that began in 2011. After Assad was ousted in a lightning rebel offensive in December 2024, advocates, including some who had previously lobbied for the imposition of the curbs, pushed to have the penalties removed.

UK systems hacked

UK Foreign Office systems containing sensitive documents were targeted by suspected Chinese hackers a few months ago, media reported. Trade minister Chris Bryant told 'Sky News' it is "not entirely clear" who is responsible for the hack. 'The Sun' reported a Chinese group of hackers known as Storm-1849 targeted Foreign Office servers and had accessed information relating to visa details, with "thousands" of confidential documents and data stolen.

Taiwan knife attack: 3 dead

A man with a knife and a smoke grenade attacked crowds indiscriminately in Taiwan's capital on Friday evening, killing at least three people and injuring nine others. The suspect later fell to his death from a department store building. Chang Wen, 27, threw a smoke grenade near an underground exit of the Taipei Main subway station, sending pedestrians running.

7 die in US plane crash

A business jet crashed on Thursday while trying to return to a North Carolina airport shortly after takeoff, killing all seven people aboard, including retired NASCAR driver Greg Biffle and his family, authorities said. Cessna C550 erupted into a fire when it hit the ground. It had departed Statesville Regional Airport, but soon crashed while trying to return and land.

Jeddah Tower to be tallest

Jeddah Tower, poised to become the world's tallest building at over 1,000 metre, has reached 80 floors since construction resumed in January 2025. The completion is likely by 2028. The skyscraper will be 172-180 m taller than Burj Khalifa, which holds the record at 828 m. It will be the first building in the world to reach 1 km height.

ANNUAL NEWS CONFERENCE | Russia has fully seized strategic initiative, will make more gains by end of year: President Putin

'All military goals will be achieved in Ukraine'

MOSCOW

Russian President **Vladimir Putin** said on Friday Moscow's troops were advancing across the battlefield in Ukraine, voicing confidence that the Kremlin's military goals would be achieved nearly four years after he ordered troops into the neighbouring nation.

Speaking at his highly orchestrated year-end news conference, Putin declared that Russian forces have "fully seized strategic initiative" and would make more gains by year-end.

In the early days of the conflict in 2022, Ukraine's forces managed to thwart an attempt by Russia's larger, better-equipped army, to capture the capital of Kyiv. But the fighting soon settled into grinding battles, and Moscow's troops have made slow but steady progress over the years.

Putin frequently touts this



There won't be any operations if you (West) treat us with respect, if you respect our interests just as we've always tried to respect yours. Claims that Moscow is planning to attack European countries are nonsense.

Vladimir Putin
Russia's President

EU TO LEND €90B TO KYIV

Brussels: European Union leaders agreed on Friday to provide a massive interest-free loan to Ukraine to meet its military and economic needs for the next two years, EU Council President Antonio Costa said. "We have a deal. Decision to provide €90 billion (\$106 billion) of support to Ukraine for 2026-27 approved. We committed, we delivered," Costa said in a post on social media, without providing details about how the money would be raised.

progress — even though it is not the lightning advance many expected.

"Our troops are advancing all across the line of contact, faster in some areas or slower

US varsity shooting suspect found dead

PROVIDENCE

A man who is suspected of killing two and wounding several at Brown University has been found dead in a New Hampshire storage facility where he had rented a unit, officials said.

Claudio Neves Valente, 48, a former Brown student and Portuguese national, was found dead on Thursday evening from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, Col Oscar Perez, the Providence police chief, told reporters. Perez said as far as investigators know, the suspect acted alone.

Investigators believe Valente is responsible for both the shooting at Brown and the killing of a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor who was fatally shot in



his Brookline home on Monday, a law enforcement said. Authorities have not formally confirmed a connection between the two shootings.

Brown University President Christina Paxson said Valente was enrolled at Brown from the fall of 2000 to the spring of 2001. He was admitted to the graduate school to study physics beginning in September 2000. "He has no current affiliation with the university," she said.

Some naturalised Americans may be stripped of citizenship

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON

The Trump administration is looking at plans to strip some naturalised Americans of their citizenship, the latest in a series of efforts undertaken by President Donald Trump to crack down on immigration.

An NYT report cited internal guidance issued to US Citizenship and Immigration Services field offices, asking them to "supply Office of Immigration Litigation with 100-200 denaturalisation cases per month" in 2026.

While federal law provides for stripping naturalised Americans of their citizenship if they committed fraud while applying for citizenship or in a handful of other situations, the new guidance "would represent a massive escalation of denaturalisation in the mod-

ern era," said the report. It added such a move could impact people who had made honest mistakes on citizenship paperwork and "sow fear among law-abiding Americans". The NYT report added there are 26 million naturalised Americans, citing Census Bureau data. USCIS estimates show 8,000,000 new citizens were sworn in last year, most were born in Mexico, India, the Philippines, the Domini-

can Republic or Vietnam. Meanwhile, Trump signed an executive order laying out an "America First" vision for space, committing the US to a return to the Moon by 2028, the establishment of a permanent lunar outpost by 2030, and the expansion of national security, commercial, and technological capabilities beyond Earth. He also signed an order to federally reclassify marijuana as less dangerous.

Both federal government and state government of New South Wales, where Sydney is located, have pledged a raft of reforms, including tightening gun control laws. A 50-year-old gunman, who was killed at the scene, held a firearm licence and had six guns registered.

If a man in Sydney's suburbs needs "six high-powered rifles and is able to get them under existing licensing schemes, then there's something wrong," Albanese said. Nearly 4 million guns are in the country. The government would work with states to target surplus, newly banned and illegal firearms, with the costs to be shared between the governments, he said.

Bondi massacre: Oz plans gun buyback

SYDNEY

Australia will launch a national gun buyback scheme following the mass shooting in Sydney. PM **Anthony Albanese** said on Friday, as hundreds of surfers and swimmers paddled out at Bondi Beach to honour victims.

The buyback would be similar to gun reforms introduced soon after the massacre in 1996 in Tasmania's Port Arthur after a lone gunman killed 35 people, which prompted authorities to implement some of the world's toughest gun laws. "Australia's gun laws were last substantially reformed in the wake of the Port Arthur tragedy. The terrible events at Bondi show we need to get more guns off our streets," Albanese said.

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Sajid visited Hyd 6 times

Sajid Akram, the slain suspect in the Bondi attack, visited Hyderabad six times over 27 years after leaving India in 1998, Telangana DGP Shivadhar Reddy said. He visited the city for the first time in October 2000 after migrating abroad. His last visit was in July 2022. Meanwhile, Philippines police said Sajid visited a firearms shop during his visit to the country two weeks before the shooting.

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Bond hearing for Indian detainee

Washington: A US federal court has ordered immigration authorities to provide an Indian national held in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody with a bond hearing within five business days or release him, ruling his continued detention violates federal immigration law and the Fifth Amendment's Due Process Clause.

US District Judge Jane M Beckering of the Western District of Michigan conditionally granted a habeas corpus petition by Lakhwinder Singh Multani, a native and citizen of India, detained at the North Lake Processing Centre in Baldwin, Michigan.

Multani was taken into ICE custody after his arrest on July 22, 2025, for driving under the influence in Baldwin, Michigan. The court

TikTok inks deal to sell US unit to 3 investors

SAN FRANCISCO

TikTok has signed a deal to sell its US business to three American investors — Oracle, Silver Lake and MGX — ensuring the popular social video platform can continue operating in the US.

The deal is expected to close on January 22, according to an internal memo. CEO Shou Zi Chew told employees in the memo ByteDance and TikTok have signed binding agreements with the three investors. Half of the new TikTok US joint venture will be owned by a consortium of investors — among them Oracle, Silver Lake and MGX will each hold a 15% share. Another 30.1% will be held by affiliates of existing ByteDance investors and 19.9% will be retained by the China-based ByteDance, according to the memo.

The US venture will have a new, 7-member majority-American board of directors, the memo said.

5 killed in 2 strikes on drug boats

Washington: The US military said on Thursday it had conducted two more strikes against boats it said were smuggling drugs in the eastern Pacific Ocean, killing five people.

US Southern Command posted on social media, "Intelligence confirmed the vessels were transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and were engaged in narco-trafficking operations." It did not provide evidence. It posted videos of each boat speeding through water before being struck by an explosion. The military said three people in one vessel and two in the other were killed.

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It added such a move could impact people who had made honest mistakes on citizenship paperwork and "sow fear among law-abiding Americans". The NYT report added there are 26 million naturalised Americans, citing Census Bureau data. USCIS estimates show 8,000,000 new citizens were sworn in last year, most were born in Mexico, India, the Philippines, the Domini-

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Assange sues Nobel panel

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has filed a legal complaint against the Nobel Foundation, seeking to halt payments to Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize winner. He argues Machado's public support for Trump's military actions against Venezuela runs counter to the core principles of the Peace Prize.

WikiLeaks said Assange is trying to prevent the foundation from releasing \$1 million Machado is set to receive. The complaint cites Alfred Nobels will, which says the Peace Prize should be granted to individuals who have "conferred the greatest benefit to humankind" by doing "the most or the best work."



unusual rain in UAE

A flooded street after heavy rain in Sharjah. Heavy thunderstorms continue across the UAE, with authorities urging residents to stay indoors, avoid flood-prone areas, and limit travel as unstable weather persists. Emirates and flydubai have cancelled or rescheduled several flights due to the severe weather.

—Courtesy: Gulf News

Epstein files probe

New pics show lines from Lolita, Bill Gates, Chomsky

WASHINGTON

Democrats on the House oversight committee have released a new batch of photos from the estate of the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, as the deadline for the justice department to release its files related to Epstein looms.

The images, released on Thursday, are undated and lack captions or context. Among them are photographs of what appear to be lines from Vladimir Nabokov's novel Lolita, which is about a middle-aged man's sexual obsession with and sexual abuse of a 12-year-old girl, written on different parts of a woman's body. 'The Guardian' reported.

The release maintains pressure on Donald Trump, whose

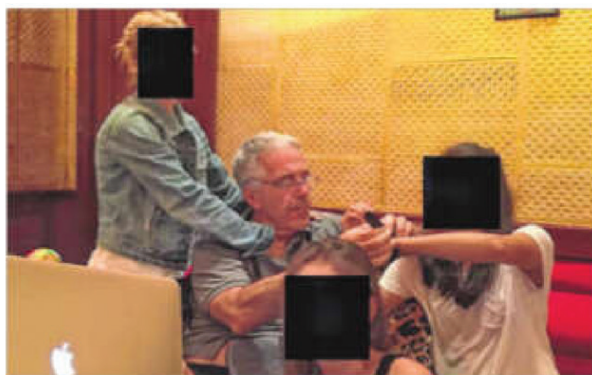


justice department has to comply with the Epstein Files Transparency Act, requiring the Department of Justice to release its files, with some exceptions, related to Epstein.

The release also includes photographs of Bill Gates posing with a woman whose face has been redacted, and of the prominent linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky sitting on a plane with Epstein. It has been previously reported that

Gates and Chomsky knew Epstein. Gates has previously said that he made a "huge mistake" in meeting with Epstein.

Other images show Woody Allen, the director; Steve Bannon, Trump's former adviser; and David Brooks, the author and New York Times opinion columnist, among others. No context for these photographs has been provided, and the appearance of these people in the photos is



not evidence of wrongdoing.

One image shows text written on a woman's chest, that reads: "Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth."

The second image shows a passage written on a woman's foot: "She was Lo, plain Lo, in

the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock."

Additional images show the line "She was Lola in slacks" written on a woman's body, and the passage "She was Dolly at school" on a woman's neck. The final image shows the line "She was Dolores on the dotted line" written on a woman's

spine. It was reported earlier this year that photos from inside Epstein's Manhattan mansion revealed that he kept a first-edition copy of Lolita in his office. The batch also includes photos of a number of foreign passports, with the information redacted, as well as Epstein's US passport.

There is also a screenshot of a text message conversation from an unknown sender referring to an 18-year-old from Russia. The sender says "I have a friend scout she sent me some girls today" then sends "But she asks 1000\$ per girl" and following messages that read "I will send u girls now", and "Maybe someone will be good for J?"

In a statement after the release, Robert Garcia, a US representative and ranking

member of the committee on oversight and government reform, said: "Oversight Democrats will continue to release photographs and documents from the Epstein estate to provide transparency for the American people.

The new photos came after Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein's longtime associate, who is currently serving a 20-year sentence for sex-trafficking crimes, asked a federal court to "vacate, set aside, or correct her conviction and sentence."

The habeas petition, filed on Wednesday by Maxwell, claims "substantial new evidence" had emerged from civil actions, government disclosures, investigative reports and other documents that she says support her claim that she did not receive a fair trial.

Sanjay, Mahima deliver divided dividend



TITLE: *Durlabh Prasad Ki Dursi Shadi*
DIRECTOR: Siddhant Raj Singh
CAST: Sanjay Mishra, Mahima Choudhary, Vyom Yadav, Pallak Lalwani, Shrikant Verma, Pravin Singh Sisodiya
WHERE: In theatres near you
RATING: ★★

The advent of OTT has not just opened up windows and doors to many talents, it has also become a 'platform' to free flowing cuss words... of course, not all of them. Amid such a situation, does the Sanjay Mishra and Mahima Choudhary starrer *Durlabh Prasad Ki Dursi Shadi* stand out as a breath of fresh air, let's find out!

The film starts off with the introduction of a 50 - something widower Durlabh Prasad (Sanjay Mishra) and his family consisting of his brother-in-law Ram Manch Prasad (Shrikant Verma) and nephew Murli (Vyom Yadav). All the three jointly run a barber shop in Banaras. Life becomes a challenge for the trio when the father of Murli's love interest Mehak Pallak Lalwani (Pallak Lalwani) becomes reluctant to get his daughter married in the trio's household - a family which is devoid of any lady.

That's when Murli hits upon an idea of getting his father remarried. After lots of efforts, Durlabh lands up reuniting with his lost love Babita (Mahima Choudhary). Just as when love rekindles between them, Braj becomes ready to get his daughter married to Murli. This time, the condition is that Durlabh should forget Babita forever and should bury his dreams of marrying her.

What does Murli choose - his ladylove or his father's happiness, what happens to Durlabh Prasad and Babita's blossoming love life and other such questions is what forms the rest of the film.

Actors' performance
 Even though the film rides

completely on the tired and tested shoulders of the veteran actor Sanjay Mishra, the slow paced script and direction fails to live up to the sheer brilliance of the genius like 'The Sanjay Mishra'. Despite everything, the film remains true to his character and does not disappoint. On the other hand, there is Shrikant Verma, the proverbial dark horse in the running for the top slot. After having impressed everyone with his sheer brilliance in *Jolly LLB 3* and other projects, he rises (yet again) to the occasion with this film. Just the right set of films, meaningful roles and avoiding overexposure will surely take this man places and to dizzying heights!

Strangely though, actress Mahima Choudhary enters the film after quite some time. Even though she holds the fort thereafter, here again, the slow paced script and direction fails her sheer brilliance we had seen in films like *Pardes* etc.. Young actors Vyom Yadav and Pallak Lalwani have a long way to go in terms of their emotional scenes. Pravin Singh Sisodiya is decent in his role. Besides them, most of the other actors have been used as 'props' with no significant roles.

As for the film's direction, Siddhant Raj Singh really needs to buckle up his craft. Although his direction mirrors his sincerity, but, in the times of AI, one needs to be 'ace of the pace', something that is terribly lacking in the film. The film's writing (Prashant Singh) should have been more convincing. The film's dialogue (Adesh K Arjun) is very simple. Since the film is a slice of life starring Sanjay Mishra, sprinkling a few one liners or punches could have helped the film in a big way.

Cinematography (Anil Singh) is just about good. The film's editing (Sanjay Sankla) is okay. The film's music (Anurag Saikia) is decent, but suffers from a lack of recall value. The film's background music (Arabinda Neog) tends to get repetitive at a few places.

If you want to enjoy a squeaky clean film that's devoid of any abuses or sleaze fest, watching this film won't hurt your eyes.

TITLE: *Avatar: Fire and Ash*
DIRECTOR: James Cameron
CAST: Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana, Sigourney Weaver, Stephen Lang, Kate Winslet
WHERE: In theatres near you
RATING: ★★

If this third film of the franchise proves anything, it is that James Cameron still believes cinema should overwhelm the senses before it nudges the intellect. Returning to Pandora, Cameron shifts his gaze inward this time, away from the familiar human-versus-native conflict and toward something thornier: civil fracture among the Na'vi themselves. The film opens in the emotional aftermath of personal loss and uses that grief as fuel for a narrative about belonging, inheritance, and the costs of perpetual war.

The plot advances less like a march and more like a tide, swelling, retreating, then crashing again. There are

moments when the sheer length tests patience, and stretches of combat risk blurring into one another. Yet Cameron's control over scale and rhythm keeps the film from sagging. The focus on clan rivalries adds texture, even if the moral binaries remain broad. *Fire and Ash* is less about surprise and more about immersion, and on that front, it rarely missteps.

Beneath the spectacle, the film carries a quiet but insistent political pulse. The conflict between Na'vi clans mirrors the old tragedy of fractured solidarities, where external threats succeed less through force and more through division. Cameron frames war not as a heroic rite of passage but as an inheritance passed unwillingly to the young, asking what survival costs when tradition hardens into dogma. The Ash People are not merely adversaries but reflections of what prolonged violence can calcify a culture into, making the film less a parable of conquest and more a cautionary tale about internal erosion.

Actors' performance
 The returning ensemble performs with the assurance of actors who know both their



James Cameron's epic burns bright, but not without scorch marks

characters and the digital skin they inhabit. Sam Worthington brings a weathered restraint to Jake Sully, while Zoe Saldana continues to ground Neytiri's ferocity in

palpable grief. The emotional centre, however, lies with Jack Champion as Spider, whose outsider status becomes the film's most human dilemma. His struggle for ac-

ceptance is played with a vulnerability that cuts through the spectacle.

Among the new faces, Oona Chaplin makes a striking impression as Varang, leader of

the Ash People. She resists caricature, lending the antagonist an unsettling calm rather than operatic menace. The supporting cast, including Kate Winslet and Stephen Lang, fit seamlessly into the expanded world without clamouring for attention.

Music
 Visually, the film is a marvel of technical exactitude. The fusion of advanced motion capture, high-frame-rate photography, and meticulous production design makes Pandora feel tactile rather than ornamental. Cinematographer Russell Carpenter ensures that even chaos is legible. Simon Franglen's score swells and recedes with classical assurance, enhancing mood without drowning it. In 3D, the film achieves what few others manage: depth that feels purposeful, not gimmicky.

Overall, the film stands as both myth and movie. It offers no reinvention, only conviction: familiar patterns, glowing craft, and an undimmed faith in cinema as communal spectacle. Cameron returns to old fires and reminds us he still knows how to make them burn.

TITLE: *Mrs Deshpande*
DIRECTOR: Nagesh Kukunoor
CAST: Madhuri Dixit, Siddharth Chandekar, Priyanshu Chatterjee
WHERE: JioHotstar
RATING: ★★

Mrs Deshpande is about an investigation in which police seek help from an imprisoned serial killer to catch a copycat murderer mimicking her methods. Featuring Madhuri Dixit in a role she has never played before, most of those of have seen her through her rise in the 90s were quite excited to watch her in this never seen before avatar.

Madhuri is a respected senior among the inmates of the jail, and heads the kitchen department, with all the others relying on her to make sure the taste of the dal is just right. However, it seems surprising that there is so much reverence for a serial killer accused of taking multiple lives. This aspect becomes clear once we realise that she is an inmate in the prison under a completely new identity.

Even in a place like prison where the waking up time is quite early, on most counts she is the first one who is up, starting her day with yoga beginning with the *Surya Namaskar*, Warrior Pose, Tree Pose and others.

Actors' performance
 Once a series of murders take place with a clear connection to her case, the police take her help in nabbing the killer. Right from the time she starts helping them, even though most of those around her don't trust her, Madhuri's expressions paint a picture of someone who knows that she is smarter than the rest, but



A bland serial killer tale

just playing by the rules till her time comes.

Although the series starts off on an extremely promising note, with the first 20 minutes making me think that this is something which I would have really loved, by the end of the first episode, the spark seems to be dying out. I realised that the only new thing in the entire series which I actually learned was how to attack and disable a person from behind, something which is Madhuri's signature style and is mimicked by the new killer too.

It isn't like *Mrs Deshpande* doesn't have twists and turns - in fact there are three major twists, with the last one taking the cake, however, there isn't any sense of excitement or novelty which you get from the series. Something which may have looked great on paper, clearly does not translate into the telly.

Apart from the investigation, the romance aspect has this one scene where dialogue stuck with me - the lead cop on the case meets his girlfriend after a long day, however, she isn't giving him attention because she is feeling let down as he did

not disclose certain details about the case to her. So when he asks her if 'thora pyaar milega' she replies in the negative. But once he explains the entire situation to her according to her satisfaction, she replies, 'Ab pyaar milega.' But moments like these which can be mentioned are painfully missing, and the thrill which one would expect from such a series isn't there at all. While Siddharth Chandekar does a decent job playing the lead investigator, Priyanshu Chatterjee is the one I thought who fit his role the best.

Having gone through the entire series, I wouldn't recommend anyone to watch it, save the first 30 minutes. Rather, if you do want to see Madhuri, watch her debut OTT series, *The Fame Game*, where she has been excellently utilised, along with a totally watchable story and the characters which come with it.

TITLE: *Four More Shots Please! Season 4*
DIRECTORS: Arunima Sharma, Neha Parti Matiyani
CAST: Sayani Gupta, Kirti Kulhari, Maanvi Gargoo, Bani J, Dino Morea, Rajeev Siddhartha, Ankur Rathee
WHERE: Prime Video
RATING: ★★

Four More Shots Please! Season 4 signs off like a well-mixed cocktail. Familiar, potent, and slightly indulgent. This season, consisting of seven episodes, is less a slice of life and more a spice of life, frothy on the surface, emotionally laden underneath. Shot across Mumbai, Goa and Bangkok, the series leans into its unapologetic glamour

while attempting something rarer for it. Introspection. The writing is wholesome and tactful, allowing its quartet to stumble, sulk, sparkle and slowly circle back to themselves. It oscillates from agony to ecstasy, sometimes within the same episode, and that tonal whiplash is both its thrill and its weakness.

The show remains candid about intimacy in all its forms. Emotional, sexual, physical. It even pauses to explain asexuality with empathy rather than exhibitionism. Relationships are foregrounded, but let us not pretend. Hook-ups still do most of the heavy lifting. Episode five meanders into a party zone with pre-and post-wedding bachelorettes, while the final stretch grows reflective and, at times, mildly preachy with its self-realizations and life lessons. Yet, the season earns its champagne fizz.



Bold, glossy & emotionally stirring

Actors' performance

The Fab Four return with lived-in ease. Sayani Gupta plays Damini Rizvi Roy with bruised bravado, her arc benefiting from time and contemplation. Kirti Kulhari brings brittle strength to Anjana Menon, navigating her situation with control. Maanvi Gargoo makes Siddhi Patel endearing in her confusion, while Bani J anchors Umang Singh with earthy swagger and vulnerability.

The men remain largely on the fringe, written to support the women's bloom. Prateik Smita Patil as Jeh Wadia, Milind Soman as Dr Aamir Warsi, Dino Morea as Rohan, Ankur Rathee as Arjun Nair, Rajeev Siddhartha as Mihir Shah, and Kunal Roy Kapur as Ashish collectively orbit the protagonists rather than eclipse them. Guest appearances by Shonali Bose, Plabita Borthakur and Uorfi Javed add sparkle.

Music
 If the writing carries the soul, the music supplies the bloodstream. The background score and original

tracks elevate the viewing experience, with songs that linger long after the screen fades to black. Songs like *Kiss Me Like Strange*, *Let Me Go Down*, *You Ain't Here To Stay*, *Water Under The Bridge*, *Hip Hop Sex*, *Killing It Back Together* and *Let's Be Romantic* slip seamlessly into the narrative. Visually, the series is glossy, bright and vibrant. The mise-en-scene crackles, and the live podcast graphics add playful texture.

Overall, this season remains glossy, provocative, occasionally indulgent, and knowingly imperfect. It documents a particular emotional geography where desire, confusion, friendship and self-worth collide. The occasional sermonising does dilute the drama, yet the honesty of intent keeps it afloat. By the time the final reflections roll in, the show leaves you not with answers, but with recognition. For viewers curious about life's messiness rather than its certainties, that sense of familiarity becomes its quiet, lasting high.

Inside Alia's intimate Christmas bash

Shaheen Bhatt shared pictures from the celebrations, showing her posing with Alia & their mother Soni Razdan

Bollywood actor Alia Bhatt has officially kick-started her Christmas festivities, starting off with an intimate yet glittering celebration with her family.

The actor's sister, Shaheen Bhatt, shared pictures from the family's annual Christmas gathering, capturing cute decorations, bright lights, a furry friend, and, of course, a Christmas tree decked up for the occasion. Shaheen also shared pictures from the celebrations, showing her posing with Alia

and their mother Soni Razdan. Alia Bhatt looked stunning in an off-the-shoulder black dress, which she paired with a pair of stockings and heels. The actress tied her hair in a half-up style and wore minimal makeup.

"This season, etc etc," Shaheen wrote in the caption, to which Soni Razdan responded with, "This season is a special one!" Alia Bhatt and her mother-in-law, veteran actor Neetu Kapoor, hosted the Christmas bash for the family, which was attended by many others, including Rima Jain and Alekha Advani Jain.



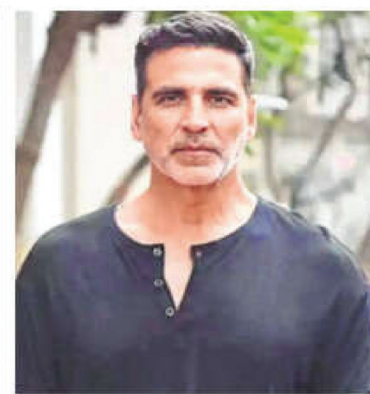
Actor Mallika Sherawat calls White House Christmas invite surreal

Bollywood actress Mallika Sherawat shared her excitement after receiving an invitation to the White House Christmas dinner on Friday. Describing the experience as "completely surreal," she expressed her gratitude for the honour, marking a special moment in her illustrious career.



Rapper Wiz Khalifa sentenced to 9 months in Romanian prison

Rapper Wiz Khalifa has been sentenced to nine months in prison in Romania on Friday, People reported. Over a year after the rapper, whose real name is Cameron Jibril Thomaz, was arrested and charged with illegal drug possession, he has now been sentenced to a Romanian jail.



Akshay Kumar set to host Indian edition of Emmy-winning game show

Emmy-winning popular TV game show *Wheel of Fortune* is all set to arrive in India, with Bollywood star Akshay Kumar gearing up to headline the Indian edition. Promising to be a high-energy, star-powered spectacle, the Indian edition of *Wheel of Fortune* will be presented by Sony Pictures Networks India.

Briefs

MUMBAI

Rohit to play two Vijay Hazare games



Former Indian captain Rohit Sharma has been included in the Mumbai team and will play two matches in the upcoming Vijay Hazare Trophy 2025-26 on Friday. All-rounder Shardul Thakur will captain the Mumbai side. However, India T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav and opener Yashasvi Jaiswal have not been included in the squad for the upcoming tournament. The group stage will be played from December 24 to January 8.

Mumbai squad: Rohit Sharma (2 matches), Shardul Thakur (captain), Hardik Tamore (wk), Ishan Mulchandani, Shams Mulani, Musheer Khan, Tanush Kotian, Angkrish Raghuwanshi, Tushar Deshpande, Sarfaraz Khan, Onkar Tarmale, Siddesh Lad, Sylvester Dsouza, Chinmay Sutarm Sairaj Patil, Akash Anand (wk), Suryanash Shedge.

COLOMBO

SLC sacks Asalanka as skipper



Sri Lanka on Friday named Dasun Shanaka as skipper of its preliminary 25-member squad for the T20 World Cup as the co-hosts sacked **Charith Asalanka** as the leader of side. P Wickramasingha, who is back as the chairman of selectors, said Asalanka's poor batting form and Shanaka's experience in playing three previous World Cups were factors in making the decision. Asalanka was speculated to be out-of-favour since he abandoned the white-ball tour to Pakistan last month over safety concerns following a suicide bomb explosion in Islamabad. Sri Lanka have been clubbed with Australia, Ireland, Zimbabwe and Oman in the tournament.

BENGALURU

Nagal, Shrivalli shine as Eagles down Hawkes



Indian stars **Sumit Nagal** and **Shrivalli Bhamdipaty** played lead roles as Eagles downed Hawkes to all but seal a World Tennis League

FIFTH T20I | Varma and Bumrah also shine as hosts beat SA by 30 runs

Pandya, Varun star for India

AHMEDABAD

India won the five-match Twenty20 International series against South Africa 3-1, after winning the last match by 30 runs in Ahmedabad on Friday. Mystery bowler Varun Chakravarthi took four wickets to bamboozle the visitors in the mid overs after Quinton De Kock (65) and Dewald Brevis (31) had given Proteas a good platform.

Chakravarthi gave 53 runs in the process but Hardik Pandya making a comeback after missing third game was miserly taking 2 for 17 in his four overs. South Africa were restricted to 201/ 8 in the allotted 20 overs.

Earlier, Hardik Pandya (63) hit the second fastest T20I fifty for India while Tilak Varma produced a fluent 73 to help the hosts set a imposing 232-run target in their fifth and final contest against South Africa here on Friday.

In a whirlwind knock laden with five sixes and as many fours, Pandya's seventh half-century (63 off 25 balls) came off only 16 balls - now the second-fastest ever for any Indian with Yuvraj Singh's 12-ball milestone against England at Kingsmead back in 2007, still perched firmly at the top.

He put on 105 off only 44 balls in a brilliant fourth wicket partnership with Tilak making 73 off 42 balls with 10 fours and a six.

Pandya walked out amidst chants of his name at his former IPL home ground as out-of-sorts India captain Suryakumar Yadav (5) endured yet another failure.

It was Pandya's brute force



Hardik Pandya celebrates his half century against South Africa in Ahmedabad on Friday. India won series 3-1. PTI

in the strokes that he played which stood out, sending the ball flying far into the stands of the world's largest stadium.

At the other end, Tilak provided the assurance with a second half-century of the series, mixing up aggression and rotation of strike deftly after Abhishek Sharma (34) and Sanju Samson (37) provided early fireworks.

Samson dazzled on what is now a rare opportunity to open with India vice-captain Shubman Gill sidelined due to an injury, and almost made a strong case for a discussion for the World Cup selection in Mumbai on Saturday.

However, as ever has been the case, Samson made all the right moves until he was done in by a beautiful George Linde delivery that pitched on leg

Scoreboard

India: S Samson b Linde 37, A Sharma c de Kock b Bosch 34, T Varma run out 73, S Yadav c Miller b Bosch 5, H Pandya c Hendricks b Baartman 63, S Dube (not out) 10, J Sharma (not out) 0 **Extras:** (LB-3, W-6) 9 **Total:** 231-5 (In 20 overs) **FoW:** 1-63, 2-97, 3-115, 4-220, 5-227 **Bowling:** L Ngidi 4-0-29-0, M Jansen 4-0-50-0, O Baartman 3-0-39-1, C Bosch 3-0-44-2, D Ferreira 2-0-20-0, G Linde 4-0-46-1.

South Africa: Q de Kock c & b Bumrah 65, R Hendricks c Dube b Varun 13, D Brevis c Sundar b Pandya 31, D Miller c Samson b Arshdeep 18, A Markram lbw b Varun 6, D Ferreira b Varun 0, G Linde b Varun 16, M Jansen c Samson b Bumrah, C Bosch (not out) 17, L Ngidi (not out) 7 **Extras:** (W 14) 14 **Total:** 201-8 (In 20 overs) **FoW:** 1-69, 2-120, 3-122, 4-135, 5-135, 6-154, 7-163, 8-177 **Bowling:** A Singh 4-0-47-1, W Sundar 4-0-30-0, J Bumrah 4-0-17-2, V Chakravarthi 4-0-53-4, H Pandya 3-0-41-1, A Sharma 1-0-13-0.

stump and gripping before beating Samson's bat to crash into the middle stump.

He began with a six over wide long on against Marco Jansen and followed it with two spectacular hits down the wicket off Ottneil Baartman to make a strong statement at the top of the order.

While putting on 63 runs for the first wicket, neither Abhishek nor Samson took the foot off the pedal and provided a glimpse of another possible successful pair tailor made for the format.

Shortly before he was dismissed, Samson also got a lifeline when a powerful hit

straight back to the bowler Donovan Ferreira burst through his hands and hit the umpire, Rohan Pandit, near the knee roll. Later, even Pandya's six injured a broadcast crew, who got a big bruise on his left bicep even as spectators enjoyed balls landing 10 rows behind.

Travball takes over bazball

Travis Head's hundred helps Australia to a 356-run lead in third Ashes Test against England

ADELAIDE

Travis Head took off his helmet and gloves, dropped to his knees and planted a kiss on the pitch after posting a century in a fourth consecutive test on his home ground at the Adelaide Oval.

It was trademark "Travball" on Day 3 of the third Ashes cricket test. The free-wheeling Australia batter had a huge reprieve on 99 when he slashed at a Jofra Archer delivery and was dropped by Harry Brook at gully. That was after he fended a Joe Root twacker and took off for a quick single, only to be sent back by batting partner Alex Carey.

Head faced eight balls without scoring while on 99, then went for broke and advanced down the pitch and drove the ball back over Root's head to the long-on boundary to move to 103.

It was his 11th century in 63

tests, and second in five innings since being promoted from No. 5 to open the innings in Perth. That's where his match-winning innings sealed Australia's eight-wicket win to open the series.

By stumps Friday, Head was unbeaten on 142 and his unbroken partnership with fellow South Australian Carey (52) was 122. Australia was 271-4, with a lead of 356.

Head said his new-look celebration of the century



Australia's Travis Head celebrates after scoring century against England in Adelaide on Friday. AP

was designed to get a laugh out of his teammates.

"I got the rise out of the dressing room that I expected," he said in comments published by Fox Sports. He added, more seriously, that his hometown "wicket has looked after me over the last few years.

"I didn't think I'd get one, so to get four (centuries at the Adelaide Oval) is not too bad. I felt alright."

Brook took two excellent catches in the slips to remove Marnus Labuschagne (13) and Cameron Green (7) off Josh Tongue's bowling, but the one he missed against Head was costly.

Stokes and Archer

The Australians went in to bat after dismissing England for 286 just before lunch, after Ben Stokes and Archer helped cut the first-innings margin to 85 with a record 106-run ninth-wicket stand.

Stokes walked off the field yelling at himself and shaking his head after being bowled for 83 by Mitchell Starc, bringing an end to a defiant, 198-ball innings.

figures released by WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency), India conducted 7113 tests (6576 urine samples and 537 blood samples) last year.

Of these, 260 returned adverse analytical findings, accounting for a positivity rate of 3.6 per cent, the highest among all major countries which conducted 5,000 or more tests.

India thus topped the list for a third consecutive year, something that might hurt its chances when the International Olympic

Committee (IOC) evaluates its bid to host the 2036 Olympic Games. Asked if the Sports Ministry is concerned about the impact of this doping record on the ambitious Olympic bid, a top source pointed to the marginal decline compared to 2023.

"From 3.8 per cent in 2023, the positivity rate dropped marginally to 3.6 per cent even though significantly more tests were conducted. In 2025 too, over 7,000 tests have already been conducted and our positivity rate so far

India Colts to meet Pakistan in Asia Cup U-19 final

DUBAI

Vice-captain Vihaan Malhotra's exhilarating stroke-play was well complemented by Aaron George's composure as India U-19 set up an U-19 Asia Cup summit date with arch-rivals Pakistan after crushing Sri Lanka colts by eight wickets in a rain-curtailed semi-final on Friday.

After rain reduced the match to 20-overs per side, the Indian bowling unit, which has been spot on throughout the tournament, restricted Sri Lanka to 138 for 8 in 20 overs.

In reply, left-handed Malhotra (61 not out off 45 balls), who was snapped by RCB at the recently-concluded IPL mini auction, flicked and pulled with ease to hit a couple of sixes apart from muscling a few boundaries. His partner and India's crisis man in this event, George (58 not out), was technically perfect with his strokes as India chased down the target in 18 overs.

In the other semi-final, Pakistan beat Bangladesh by eight wickets.

Ishan 2.0: Calm, and matured cricketer eyes future journey

KOLKATA

Ishan Kishan's mind now does not rage. Delight of leading Jharkhand to their maiden Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy title and the uncertainty surrounding him a day ahead of India's T20 World Cup squad selection are met with the same stoicism.

The emotions are now walled behind the soothing verses of Bhagavad Gita, Kishan's new companion as indicated to PTI by his father Pranav Pandey.

On his part, Kishan now lives in the present, and all that matters is Jharkhand's SMAT victory.

"Bahut achha khele, bahut maja aya; jaldi aur baat hogi aur aise hi jeet te rahenge (We really played well and hope we keep playing like this)," Kishan said after arriving to a rousing welcome at the Ranchi airport on Friday.

The Kishan-led Jharkhand defeated Haryana by 69 runs in the final at Pune, and the left-hander finished the tournament as the leading run-scorer, amassing 517 runs in 10 innings at an average of 57.44 and a strike rate in excess of 197.

No surprises likely in T20WC selection

The tournament could be SKY's last engagement as India skipper

MUMBAI

Skipper Suryakumar Yadav and his deputy Shubman Gill's indifferent form is a massive concern but the national selection committee is unlikely to make any shocking changes when it picks the 15-member squad for next year's T20 World Cup here on Saturday.

The BCCI would be at liberty to replace any of the named 15 till the start of the T20 World Cup on February 7. For the record, during the Champions Trophy earlier this year, Varun Chakravarthi replaced Yashasvi Jaiswal after slow tracks in Dubai were taken into consideration.

While nobody in BCCI is spelling it out, the global event in India could well be the last for Suryakumar as national T20 skipper. He is already 35 and has been out of form for the past one year.

Having endured a barren run for almost 14 months and across 24 games, Suryakumar is holding on to his place only because he is the captain.

The committee will also pick the T20 squad for New Zealand which will be the same as the one chosen for the T20 World Cup. For the time being, there aren't any slots up for grabs although Gill's position has repeatedly come under scanner while an in-form Yashasvi Jaiswal waits in the wings.

It remains to be seen if the selectors name Jaiswal as an extra player for the New Zealand series just to observe him in case he is needed during the mega-event to be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

The reserve opener's slot currently belongs to Sanju Samson, who was wrongfully

India Likely 15

Suryakumar Yadav (captain), Shubman Gill (vice-captain), Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Axar Patel, Jasprit Bumrah, Arshdeep Singh, Varun Chakravarthi, Kuldeep Yadav, Harshit Rana, Sanju Samson (wk), Washington Sundar

Likely Stand Bys (5/6): Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rinku Singh, Riyan Parag, Shahbaz Ahmed/Nitish Kumar Reddy, Prasidh Krishna.

displaced from his position when the selection committee and an important member of the team think-tank decided to fix something that wasn't broken.

Had the T20 World Cup been six months away, there was every possibility of the selection committee looking at alternative options for leadership. However, what has worked for Suryakumar is an early T20 World Cup and form deserting his deputy Gill, who was being seen as the all-format captain after taking over the reins of the Test and ODI sides.

But with only five games left before the opening World Cup match against the United States of America in Mumbai on February 7, no selection panel would want to break the continuity.

While there is a good chance that the 15 selected against South Africa for the home assignment will also play against New Zealand and subsequently the T20 World Cup, Jaiswal's name is almost certain to come up.



Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren with wife and JMM MLA Kalpana Soren and state team's captain Ishan Kishan and others during a meeting after the team won the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy 2025, in Ranchi. PTI

Kishan smashed 101 off 49 balls -- his fifth century in the competition -- in the final equalling India T20I opener Abhishek Sharma's record for the most hundreds in the tournament.

The reaction was more crisp than flamboyant. "Achi thi, bahut khushi hui aur wapas tournament chalu hue toh usme bhi jeet ke aenge (I really felt good hope we win more)."

Kishan and the Jharkhand team were understandably received with enthusiasm at home.

Accompanied by former

India batter and Jharkhand State Cricket Association (JSCA) secretary Saurabh Tiwary, they were received with dhols and mandars greeting the players at the airport.

The squad was garlanded, felicitated at the stadium and later visited Chief Minister Hemant Soren's residence.

So, is it Kishan's revival after waves of unpleasantness wrapped him since losing his central contract and a place in Team India in early 2024? Only time will tell! But those dark hours helped him discover his spiritual side.

Ministry musings

India's doping crisis being addressed, ISL will happen

NEW DELHI

India's shambolic doping record is being addressed aggressively and a marginal decline in the overall positivity rate in the recently-released 2024 international testing figures is evidence that awareness campaigns are making a difference as the country bids to host the 2036 Olympics, a Sports Ministry source asserted on Friday.

As per the latest testing

figures released by WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency), India conducted 7113 tests (6576 urine samples and 537 blood samples) last year.

Of these, 260 returned adverse analytical findings, accounting for a positivity rate of 3.6 per cent, the highest among all major countries which conducted 5,000 or more tests.

India thus topped the list for a third consecutive year, something that might hurt its chances when the International Olympic

Committee (IOC) evaluates its bid to host the 2036 Olympic Games. Asked if the Sports Ministry is concerned about the impact of this doping record on the ambitious Olympic bid, a top source pointed to the marginal decline compared to 2023.

"From 3.8 per cent in 2023, the positivity rate dropped marginally to 3.6 per cent even though significantly more tests were conducted. In 2025 too, over 7,000 tests have already been conducted and our positivity rate so far

is just over one per cent. So, the improvement cannot be ignored," the source said in response to a PTI query.

"To be a bit blunt, the athletes and coaches have to rise above their desperation for government jobs which trigger doping violations. Some of the violations are inadvertent, we don't deny that, like taking a medicine which might contain prohibited substances but that's being addressed through apps like 'Know Your Medicine,'" he said.

Football will happen

Another major crisis that has engulfed Indian sports is the pause on the domestic football season. On Friday, the Indian Super League clubs submitted a fresh proposal to the AIFF and the ministry, seeking perpetual operational and commercial rights for a club-owned league model while retaining the national federation as the sport's regulator.

"Proposals will keep coming but be assured, the league will happen."



Mohun Bagan Super Giants were crowned the ndian Super League Champions in 2024-25 season. ISL Media