

AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

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

Briefs

SHIMLA Himachal bans mobiles in schools

In a significant move to enhance the academic environment, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu on Thursday announced a ban on the use of mobile phones by students in all government and private schools in the state from March 1. If a student is found in possession of a mobile phone, he/she will face a fine of Rs 500 and the confiscation of the device.

LUCKNOW Over one lakh missing in 2 years in UP

More than one lakh people have gone missing in Uttar Pradesh in the last two years, a staggering figure that has exposed serious gaps in the state's policing and left thousands of families living in limbo. The gravity of the situation came in the spotlight on Thursday when the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court heard a suo motu petition on missing persons. The court sought complete data and records from the concerned state government departments and fixed March 23 as the next date of hearing. It also directed the Additional Chief Secretary (Home) and the Director General of Police to remain present through video conferencing.

-Biswajeet Banerjee

PATNA Nitish takes 'child' dig at Tejashwi

Bihar assembly on Thursday witnessed exchange of barbs between chief minister Nitish Kumar and leader of opposition Tejashwi Yadav, as the former called the RJD leader a child and reminded him that he was from his father's time. Replying to the motion of thanks on the governor's address in the house, Nitish told Tejashwi to sit down and listen to him quietly when he tried to intervene. "Sit down quietly and listen to me. Where did you get the money to lure away six MLAs? You were involved in wrongdoing, that's why we left you." Earlier, Tejashwi claimed that NDA had spent Rs 40,000 crore to defeat the opposition INDIA bloc in the last assembly election.

CHANDIGARH Cong accuses Haryana govt of power con

Former two-time chief minister of Haryana and leader of the opposition (LoP) Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Thursday alleged that BJP government is cheating electricity consumers. Alleging that under guise of the "Solar for Every Home" scheme, the government is adopting a policy of offering a subsidy with one hand, and taking it back with the other.

MALAYSIA VISIT | With eye on semiconductors, India is set to ink a slew of MoUs during PM's two-day tour beginning tomorrow

Modi-Anwar talks to focus on trade, Asean

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Modi will visit Malaysia on a two-day official visit from February 7-8. In an MEA special press briefing, Secretary (East) P Kumaran stated that this will be the Prime Minister's first visit to Malaysia since the two sides elevated their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in August 2024. MEA officials said Modi will hold bilateral talks with his Malaysian counterpart Anwar Ibrahim, which will largely focus on the economic front, with the 10th India-Malaysia CEO Forum being held alongside.

Asked as to whether India would take up Malaysia's repeated anti-Kashmir remarks during the visit, Kumaran stated that New Delhi had been engaging with Kuala Lumpur on this front. "We had a parliamentary delegation visit Malaysia after Operation Sindoor. The



Ministry of External Affairs Secretary (East) Periasamy Kumaran briefs media about PM Narendra Modi's Malaysia trip, in New Delhi on Thursday

Malaysian side engaged us quite actively. We had discussions at multiple levels: ministers, Members of Parliament, and think-tanks," he said. Kumaran added: "We had an opportunity to explain to various interlocutors our position on terrorism, the kind of steps taken as part of our counter-terrorism activity, and why this requires a strong response from us because of provocations caused by cross-border terrorism."

On the issue of Zakir Naik's

extradition, Kumaran said India was still actively pursuing the matter. "As far as Zakir Naik is concerned, I can assure you that all issues will be discussed during the visit and we hope to get the outcome that we desire."

The visit is expected to result in a number of MoUs being signed. Kumaran said that on the anvil were MoUs in disaster management, audio-visual co-production, and in Standards on Training and Certification for Seafarers. The

8 of 16 Indian sailors held in Iran released

Eight of the 16 Indian sailors held in Iran have been released and will be able to travel back to India soon after completing the necessary formalities, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India is in touch with the Iranian authorities for the release of remaining eight sailors.

MoU on UN peace-keeping cooperation would be renewed, and there would be an Exchange of Notes to cooperate in the semi-conductor industry. "30% of Malaysia's exports are related to semi-conductors. We are looking at multi-layered cooperation - both at the government-to-government level and industrial cooperation."

Kharge and Nadda in war of words over Parliament logjam

NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha on Thursday witnessed a heated exchange between senior leaders of the Congress and the BJP over the issue of parliamentary procedure with BJP's Leader of House JP Nadda accusing the Opposition of stalling House proceedings through protests and Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge attacking the government for not letting LoP in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi speak in the Lower House to "hide its mistakes".

When the House assembled for the day, Kharge raised the issue of Gandhi not being allowed to place his



views in the Lok Sabha. "The Lok Sabha has not been allowed to function for the last four days because the Leader of Opposition is not being permitted to speak. Parliament is formed only when both Houses meet.. they are both pillars of Parliament. But the government is not allowing one House to function in order to hide its mistakes; it has paralysed it".

Kharge also charged that "the Modi government is

deceiving the country and insulting it" by not allowing the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha to speak.

At this Nadda objected to Kharge's raising the issue saying, "proceedings of Lok Sabha cannot be discussed in the Rajya Sabha."

He also countered the allegation of Gandhi not being permitted to speak and the issue of Prime Minister Narendra Modi skipping the House last evening when he was supposed to speak on the Motion of Thanks, by saying, "PM Modi is always prepared to answer a question in Lok Sabha but the Opposition is not letting the House transact any business".

Closely monitoring situation in Iran: Govt

New Delhi is "closely monitoring" the situation in Iran and there are no reports of any Indian national missing or being killed during recent protests in that country, the government informed Parliament on Thursday. In a written response to a query in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh also said the Indian embassy in Tehran continues to be in "regular contact" with the Indian nationals, including students, in Iran, and is providing them suitable guidance.



BharatGen's text-based service soon

Government's sovereign multilingual AI engine BharatGen is expected to complete text-based service by this month-end, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said in the Rajya Sabha. BJP's Bhubaneswar Kalita, MoS for Science and Tech said the work for developing BharatGen AI is a dynamic process and may add more languages as well as dialects.

137 AI planes identified for repetitive defects

A total of 377 aircraft have been identified as having recurring defects since Jan last year until Feb 3 across various scheduled airlines, the government told Lok Sabha on Thursday. Of these, 405 aircraft belonging to IndiGo were analysed for repetitive defects and 148 were identified for repetitive defects, as on February 3, this year. Similarly, of the 166 Air India aircraft analysed, 137 were identified as having repetitive defects, while 54 Air India Express aircraft were identified for repetitive defects.

Didi woos women, youth with pre-poll, 'pro-people' budget

KOLKATA

In the interim budget ahead of Assembly polls, Trinamool Congress (TMC) government on Thursday has increased the amount in various flagship schemes including 'Lakshmi Bhandar'.

Talking to the media after the interim budget, which was presented by state finance minister Chandrima Bhattacharya, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said that the budget is 'pro-people'. "Our budget is pro-people. It is not directionless or aimless as the union budget. We have maintained fiscal discipline while increasing spending in the social sector. This interim budget is of Rs 4.06 lakh crore. Despite a backlog from the central government, our government thinks about welfare of the poor," said Mamata.

The West Bengal Chief Minister also mentioned that the interim budget is not an election 'gimmick'.



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya (left), and Principal Chief Advisor to CM Amit Mitra (right) after the presentation of the budget in the Assembly, in Kolkata, on Thursday

"Our TMC government has brought discipline in borrowing under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) framework," said Mamata.

"Our social welfare schemes had helped 1.72 crore people to come out of poverty. 32 lakhs houses have been built and modernisation of cities would be carried out without causing any sort of inconvenience to the residents," further added Mamata.

Shah launches app to benefit taxi drivers

NEW DELHI

The Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Thursday launched the 'Bharat Taxi' App, aimed at strengthening cooperative participation and enhancing welfare measures for taxi drivers across the country.

Speaking on the occasion, Amit Shah said the launch of the Sahkar Taxi initiative was being held in the presence of around 8 lakh sarathi (driver) representatives and several cooperative bodies.

"This launch of Sahkar Taxi is taking place in the presence of 800,000 Sarathi representatives and some cooperatives, so that within three years, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Dwarka to Kamakhya, this Sahkar Taxi is going to become a very significant means for the welfare of our taxi Sarathis", he told media-persons.

Bharat Taxi is India's first cooperative-led ride-hailing platform.

Cong to go solo in Bengal polls

The Congress announced on Thursday that it will go solo in the upcoming West Bengal Assembly polls and contest all the 294 seats in the state. The decision was taken at a key meet of the party's top brass with senior leaders of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee.

Man killed 3 months after marriage; wife, lover held

JAIPUR

A 23-year-old woman allegedly orchestrated the murder of her husband, just three months after their marriage, by conspiring with her long-time boyfriend and two accomplices in Rajasthan's Sri Ganganagar, police said on Thursday.

The accused wife, Anjali (23), her lover Sanjay (25), and his friends Rohit (20) and Siddharth (20) were arrested on Tuesday, Sri Ganganagar Superintendent of Police (SP) Amrita Duhan said.

The incident occurred on the night of January 30 when Ashish Kumar (27), a resident of 1 KLM village in the Rawla area, went for his daily walk with his wife after dinner. He was allegedly attacked

with sticks on a deserted stretch of the road near the village, and later strangled with a muffler when he did not succumb immediately, the SP said.

What initially appeared to be a case of robbery and murder was later found to be a pre-planned murder, Duhan said.

Anjali had been in a relationship with Sanjay for the past six to seven years and was unhappy with her arranged marriage to Ashish on October 30 last year, the police said. Her family was aware of the affair, they added. Her Uncle, Ravi, said, "If we had known that a child from our family would turn out to be like this, we would have never allowed Anjali to take such a step. We would rather have died than let her marry."

Row over TN min's remark on N Indians

CHENGALPATTU

Tamil Nadu Agriculture Minister and senior DMK leader MRK Panneerselvam has sparked a fresh political row following his remarks regarding North Indian migrants and the nature of jobs they undertake in the state.

A video clip showed the minister saying during a public address in Mathuranthakam that "North Indians come to Tamil Nadu only to sell panipuri, work in construction (sector), and wipe tables", while "people over here (in Tamil Nadu) are studying well".

While BJP accused the ruling DMK of inciting hatred, AIADMK also hit out against its archrival.

HAL: Five Tejas jets ready for delivery to IAF

NEW DELHI

State-run aerospace behemoth Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) on Thursday said five Tejas light combat aircraft are fully ready for delivery to the Indian Air Force. In February 2021, the defence ministry sealed a Rs 48,000 crore deal with HAL for the procurement of 83 Tejas Mk-1A jets for the IAF.

The delivery of jets are facing delays primarily due to GE Aerospace missing several deadlines for supply of its aero engines. "HAL confirms that 5 aircraft are fully ready for delivery, incorporating major contracted capabilities in accordance with agreed specifications," a HAL spokesperson said.

Ghaziabad suicides: Diary points to Korean obsession

GHAZIABAD

A diary recovered in the Ghaziabad triple suicide case has revealed an intense obsession with Korean culture among three minor sisters, leading police to examine whether a task-based online game influenced their deaths.

The three sisters, Pakhi (12), Prachi (14) and Vishika (16), jumped to their deaths early Wednesday. An eight-page handwritten note found in a pocket diary detailed their emotions, interests and resentment over parental restrictions.

In the note, the girls described Korean culture as central to their identity. "We love Korean, love, love, love," it

Police are also probing a so-called 'Korean love game' the girls allegedly began playing in Covid pandemic

said, accusing their parents of trying to separate them from what they called their "life". They wrote that they loved Korean actors and K-pop groups more than their family and felt misunderstood at home. Police are also probing a so-called "Korean love game" that the girls allegedly began playing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The diary listed several influences the girls claimed to be obsessed with. These

included Korean music, dance and actors, Thai, Chinese and Japanese songs and films, Hollywood movies, English songs, cartoons such as Doraemon and Peppa Pig, and Disney characters Elsa and Ariel. It also mentioned survival and horror-themed mobile games, including Poppy Playtime, The Baby in Yellow, Evil Game and Ice Cream Man Game.

The note repeatedly mentioned another sister, Devu, whom the girls wanted to influence. "You introduced her to Bollywood, which we hated more than our lives," it said.

Raj to relax panchayat polls norms

JAIPUR

Amending rules of its own previous governments, the BJP government in Rajasthan is all set to remove minimum educational qualification and two children norm to contest the panchayat raj and urban local bodies election. The provision making educational qualifications mandatory for contesting local body and panchayat elections will not be implemented in forthcoming polls while a bill to remove ban on individuals with more than two children is under consideration in the Law Department. This was informed in the legislative assembly in a written reply.

UK asks AI to explain 787-8 fuel switch case

MUMBAI

The United Kingdom's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has issued a formal notice to Air India, seeking an urgent explanation over why a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner was allowed to fly from London to Bengaluru despite a reported technical issue during engine start. The UK regulator has warned that failure to respond could lead to regulatory action affecting Air India's Dreamliner fleet.

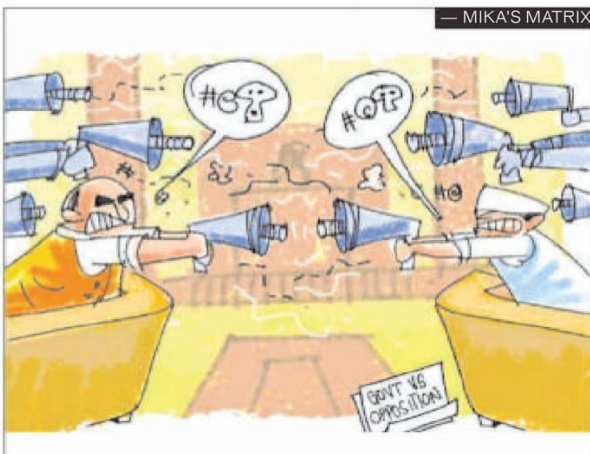
The incident occurred on Feb 1 at London Heathrow, when the flight crew of AI-132 noticed that the left engine's Fuel Control Switch did not lock into the "RUN" position during start-up. On two occasions, the switch slipped back to "CUTOFF" when light



pressure was applied. The switch appeared to latch properly on the third attempt.

After the aircraft was grounded on arrival, India's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) carried out a probe concluding that the issue was procedural and linked to human error.

However, the UK CAA has taken a tougher stance. In a Feb 3 letter, it asked for details of maintenance actions and a root-cause analysis, questioning how the aircraft was cleared for a long-haul flight.



MIKA'S MATRIX

PATNA

Tightening action against the public playing of vulgar songs, the Bihar government has directed the police to register FIRs against offenders found playing obscene or double-meaning songs in buses, autos, taxis, trains or other public places.

The order has been issued by Deputy Chief Minister and Home

Minister Samrat Choudhary, who said strict action will now be taken against those who play such songs openly. Under the directive, cases will be registered under Sections 296/79 of Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS). While Section 296 deals with obscene acts and songs, Section 79 relates to words, gestures or acts intended to insult the modesty of a woman.

Police have also been instructed to launch a special campaign

across all districts. Action will be taken against anyone playing obscene or double-meaning Bhojpuri, Magahi, Maithili or other songs in buses, trucks, autorickshaws or other public places. Bhojpuri songs often contain lot of vulgarity, officials said. Choudhary said that playing obscene songs in public has a negative impact on society, especially on children, and also compromises the safety and dignity of women.

This is not the first such move by Bihar police. Last year, authorities ordered a crackdown on public broadcast of vulgar Bhojpuri songs after a song by popular rapper Yo Yo Honey Singh triggered a controversy.

In 2025, actress Neetu Chandra also filed a PIL in Patna High Court, seeking a ban on what she described as "cheap, double-meaning" Bhojpuri and Hindi songs.



Bihar bleep

Playing vulgar songs in public? Face the music

The School, Once a Sapling, Has Grown into a Banyan Tree - Chairman

Bahraich

On the Foundation Day of Kanhaiyalal Parmeshwar Deen Memorial High School (Nagar Panchayat Rupaidiha) was celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm within the school Premises. The Program commenced with the garlanding of the Portrait of Goddess Saraswati and the lighting of the ceremonial lamp, Performed jointly by the Chief Guest—Chairman Dr. Umashankar Vaishya—along with SHO Rupaidiha, Ramesh Singh Rawat, and Block Pramukh of Nawabganj, Jaiprakash Singh. The students of the school welcomed the guests by Presenting a welcome song and Performing the Saraswati Vandana (hymn to Goddess Saraswati).



Subsequently, the students captivated the hearts of all Present by delivering a series of cultural Performances—each more attractive and enchanting than the last. Principal Suresh Kumar Verma welcomed the guests by Presenting them with bouquets and highlighted the Progress achieved by the school. He noted that the institution, which began 25 years ago with a modest strength of just 150 students and 8 teachers, has—through continuous growth—transformed today into a

vast family comprising 1,200 students and 45 teachers. In their addresses, the Chief Guest (Nagar Panchayat Chairman Dr. Umashankar Vaishya), SHO Ramesh Singh Rawat and Jaiprakash Singh lauded the school achievements and extended their best wishes for its bright future. The event was attended by all members of the school family, including Manager Suresh Kumar Verma, Munna Lal Verma, Vinay Prakash, Mahesh Yadav, Mohammad Shafiq and Aarti Verma.

“Hamara Aangan–Hamare Bachche” Program Successfully organized in Airayan

Fatehpur

A “Hamara Aangan–Hamare Bachche” Program was successfully organized on Saturday in Airayan Block under the leadership of Block Education Officer Ratnamani Mishra. The event was graced by Geeta Singh, Chairperson of Nagar Panchayat Khaga, as the Chief Guest. Vijay Tripathi, District General Secretary of the Primary Teachers Association, was also Present. The Program commenced with the garlanding of the idol of Goddess Saraswati and the ceremonial lighting of the lamp. Anganwadi workers Vimla Sharma and Suman Devi Presented a Saraswati Vandana and a welcome song, creating a cultural and devotional ambiance. During the event, ARP and Block Nodal Officer Deepak Kumar Presented key developments under Operation Kayakalp, highlighting infrastructural improvements in schools and Anganwadi centres along with various school readiness initiatives. ARP Akash



Kumar Singh elaborated on the objectives and significance of the NIPUN Bharat Mission and its role in strengthening foundational learning. As Part of the Program, five students from each Nyaya Panchayat were awarded educational kits in recognition of their achievements. Students from Bal Vatika, Kuti Par, Kat Kherwa and Fatehpur Tekari delivered impressive demonstrations using the NIPUN Lakshya App, which were highly appreciated by the audience. Anand Kumar Mishra, a teacher from Primary School Malookpur, shared his experiences on achieving foundational learning outcomes among students. Former ARP Ajay Singh also addressed the gathering, emphasizing school readiness and Parental orientation. In her address, Chief Guest Geeta Singh

lauded the efforts of students and teachers and remarked that the ongoing positive transformation in schools is contributing significantly to the advancement of the education system. The Program was efficiently conducted by Dr. Ambika Prasad Mishra. At the conclusion, Vijay Kumar Tripathi expressed gratitude to all dignitaries and Participants for their Presence and support. The event witnessed the participation of a large number of nodal teachers, Anganwadi workers, special educators and students, including Navneet Soni, Arvind Singh, Shailesh Kumar, Lal Chandra Maurya, Dharmesh Prasad, Sajjan Singh, Rupali Gupta, Sunaina Devi, Shobha Devi, Rajdeep, Anil Kumar, Vinod Kumar, and Ravi Kumar Tiwari.

Teenager Abducted and Assaulted; Condition Critical

Sultanpur: A sensational case has come to light from a village within the Shivgarh police station area. It is alleged that a teenage girl was abducted, physically assaulted, and—after being subjected to indecent acts—was dumped near her home. The teenager has been admitted to the District Hospital in critical condition. Reports indicate that the girl was abducted by a group of individuals who then brutally beat her. Furthermore, she was subjected to molestation. Subsequently, the accused abandoned her near her home and fled the scene. Following the incident, her family members rushed her—in a critical state—to the District Hospital, where she is currently undergoing treatment. The family alleges that the teenager had been abducted once before, an incident for which a formal complaint had already been registered. They suspect that relatives of the accused from that previous case are behind the commission of this latest crime. In this regard, Shivgarh Police Station In-charge Chandrabhan Verma stated that the information has been received, and an investigation into the matter is underway.

Brutal Murder of Ice Vendor in Broad Daylight: Head Severed

Barabanki

A Shocking incident in the Tikaitnagar Police Station area on Saturday afternoon has sent Shockwaves across the district. Amid the usual hustle of village life, a horrifying crime unfolded. Bablu (21) who had set out on his bicycle to sell ice, likely had no idea it would be his final journey. In a gruesome act, a mentally unstable man allegedly attacked Bablu with a Cleaver (gadaasa), brutally killing him. The accused then reportedly carried the severed head and even attempted to cook it on a stove. The horrifying nature of the crime has created Panic in the area, while Police are Closely investigating every Aspect.



From a Routine Day to a Scene of Horror Bablu, a resident of Behta vil-

lage under Ramnagar Police Station, had gone to the Tikaitnagar area as Part of his

daily routine of selling ice. Around noon, he reached near Parsawal village, where he encountered a local resident, Shankar. What began as a minor argument quickly escalated into a deadly Confrontation. **Everything Changed in a Moment** According to eyewitnesses, an enraged Shankar suddenly Picked up a Cleaver and launched a brutal attack on Bablu. The assault was so violent that Bablu was decapitated on the spot. The terrifying scene caused Panic, with people screaming and fleeing from the area. Within moments, the normal village atmosphere turned into one of chaos and Silence. **Police Probe**

Underway

Upon receiving information, the Police reached the scene and brought the situation under control. Superintendent of Police Arpit Vijayvargiya stated that the accused, Shankar, has been arrested and is being interrogated. The exact motive behind the murder is still unclear. Villagers have claimed that the accused may be mentally unstable and Police are also examining this angle. It is reported that the accused brother was the first to alert villagers about the incident, following which the Police were informed. The body has been sent for Post-mortem and a detailed investigation is Ongoing. **Family Devastated**

Bablu was the sole breadwinner of his family. His sudden death has left his wife and two young children in deep distress. The entire village is mourning, with anger also brewing among locals who are demanding strict action against the accused. **Questions Over Accused Mental State** According to Circle Officer Ramsanehighat, Preliminary findings suggest that the accused's mental condition may not be stable. He had reportedly been living separately from his family for years. Police are continuing interrogation to uncover the exact sequence of events and the motive behind the Crime.

Shivendra Gets Key Role, Work Style in Focus

Lucknow

BJP worker Shivendra Singh has been appointed as the District General Secretary of Ayodhya by the Party leadership, citing his consistent hard work and active role in organizational activities. Following his appointment, a debate has emerged around his image and working style. While his supporters describe it as the result of years of dedication and commitment to the Party, his opponents have raised questions based on cases registered against him. The development has once again brought the long-standing debate of 'image versus work' in Politics into focus. Supporters argue that if Shivendra is being labeled as a "criminal," then how should leaders with a "strongman" image in other Parties be viewed. They also Point out that such questions



were not raised when he was working actively for the organization Earlier. Over the Past few years, Shivendra Singh has been counted among the active workers of the Party. He has participated in various campaigns such as "Seva Hi Sangathan," booth strengthening, membership drives and other outreach Programs. At the local level, he has been seen as a grassroots worker. However, after receiving the new responsibility, discussions around his Past cases have intensified. Opponents stress the need for transparency in Public life, while supporters argue that these issues are being Politically highlighted

now despite being known earlier. **Debate Over Standards in Politics** The number of cases registered against Shivendra Singh has also become a Point of discussion. While critics view it as a serious concern, supporters consider it Part of Political rivalry. This has also raised a broader question—whether different standards are applied to different leaders There are several examples in state and national Politics where leaders have held significant Positions despite facing allegations. This has turned the issue into a wider debate on whether a Political identity should be judged by one work or by just allegation. **Balancing Work, Image and Allegations Remains a Challenge** Overall, the matter is no longer limited to an individual but reflects a broader Political mindset where balancing hard

Varanasi

In Zulfiqar Zaidi, Office Secretary of Anjuman Haideri Chowk, Varanasi, stated in a press release that a symbolic Alam (standard) Procession was taken out on Saturday at 10:00 AM from the Shia Mosque in Kalimahah. Organized under the aegis of Anjuman Haideri and supported by the city mourning committees (Matami Anjumans), the Procession followed its traditional route through Nai Sarak, Dalmandi, Chowk, Bulanala, Maidagin and Visheshwarganj, eventually culminating in a Public gathering at the Shia Jama Masjid, Daranagar, at 12:00 PM. The Procession was held under the direction of Anjuman Haideri President Syed Abbas Murtuza Shamsi and coordinated by



General Secretary Nayab Raza. All mourning committees of Varanasi participated. Before the march commenced, Poets Shad Siwani and Zain Banarasi Presented their Elegiac verses at the Kalimahah Mosque. Addressing the gathering, Maulana Tausif Ali said: "After the Prophet departed from this world, his only daughter, Janabe Sayyada, was Persecuted to such an extent that she had to recite elegies (Marsiya). Then, 103 years ago, her shrine in Medina was razed to

the ground. Today, we raise our voices against that very oppression." Historical Context? It is noteworthy that 103 years ago, on the 8th of the Islamic month of Shawwal, the then-government of Saudi Arabia demolished the grand shrines built over the graves of Prophet Muhammad daughter, Janabe Sayyada and four Imams. This act sparked a wave of grief and anger among followers of the Prophet family worldwide. For the Past 102 years, Anjuman Haideri has organized this annual Protest march in

Varanasi to demand the reconstruction of these shrines. A signed memorandum addressed to the President of India is submitted, requesting the President to use the United Nations to Pressure the Saudi government to facilitate the Reconstruction. The Protest and Demands? Thousands of devotees marched while chanting slogans such as "Al-Saud Hosh Mein Aao... Zahra Ka Rauza Jald Banao" (House of Saud, come to your senses... rebuild the shrine of Zahra immediately). Led by the Ulema (clerics) of Varanasi, the march turned into a formal assembly at the Shia Jama Masjid, Daranagar. Professor Aziz Haider presented his Poetry. Maulana Syed Haider Abbas and Maulana Tausif Ali spoke on the historical significance of the Jannat-ul-Baqi

cemetery in Medina. They urged the Government of India to respect their religious sentiments and Pressure the Saudi government to fulfill their demands. Maulana Syed Amin Haider Husaini, while addressing the Majlis (congregation), Stated "The Prophet and his family are everything to us. We cannot tolerate any injustice toward them. This is why for over 100 years we have taken out this Procession—to show the world that we stand not with the oppressor, but with the oppressed." The Proceedings were conducted by Syed Abbas Murtuza Shamsi. The event saw the Presence of officials from Anjuman Haideri, all local mourning committees and thousands of members of the Shia Community.

Gomti Mitras' Aspirations Fulfilled; MLA Honored

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Sultanpur | It was a long journey spanning thirteen years—marked by knocking on every door and submitting a lengthy series of letters—yet the Gomti Mitras, endowed with immense resilience, never gave up and continued their efforts ceaselessly. However, as the saying goes, destiny has a plan for everything. When Vinod Singh was elected as the MLA from Sultanpur in the 2022 Assembly elections, the needle of the Gomti Mitras' hope once again turned toward him, and they appealed to him for the development of Sitakund Dham. Recognizing the sincerity of the Gomti Mitras' appeal and efforts, he submitted a proposal to the government for the development of Sitakund Dham and the creation of a Gomti Corridor. Through per-



sistent follow-ups and meetings with the Chief Minister, he successfully secured the sanction of a substantial sum—approximately ₹5 crore. On Sunday, under the

leadership of Patron Ratan Kasoudhan, State President Rudra Pratap Singh Madan, and State President of the Women's Wing Shalini Kasoudhan, the entire

group of Gomti Mitras visited the MLA's residence.

They honored him by presenting a floral bouquet and garlanding him, while also convey-

ing their heartfelt gratitude. Media In-charge Ramesh Maheshwari, along with Ajay Pratap Singh, Senjit Kasoudhan, Munna Singh, Rakesh Singh

'Daddu', Dinkar Singh, Alok Tiwari, Saurabh Gupta, Ramu Kasoudhan, Rajiv Kasoudhan, Ayush Soni, and others, were present on the occasion.

Khadi Seminar Organized on March 30 Under the Scheme for Research, Design, and Standardization of Khadi

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj – Under the scheme for the research, design, standardization, and promotion of Khadi, the Khadi and Village Industries Board will organize a divisional-level Khadi seminar in the district on March 30 at 10:00 AM at the Ashirwad Guest House in Prayagraj. The program will be inaugurated by the Honorable MLA of Phaphamau, Shri Guru Prasad Maurya. The primary objective of the seminar is to promote Khadi as an eco-friendly, indigenous, and sustainable fabric. Additionally, the younger generation will be apprised of Khadi's modern avatars and its utility in contemporary fashion, with the aim of

inspiring them to embrace Khadi as a trendy and practical choice of attire. During the event, detailed information will be provided regarding the unique features of Khadi products, innovations, design aspects, and employment opportunities within the sector. Zonal Officer Jawahar Lal urged the public to participate in the seminar in large numbers to enhance awareness regarding Khadi and to contribute to indigenous self-reliance and environmental conservation by adopting the use of Khadi products. Present on this occasion were Khadi and Village Industries officials Jawahar Lal, Sunil Kumar, Ashish Yadav, Himanshu Yadav, Ram Lal, and others.

Former MLA Santosh Pandey and Others Granted Major Relief

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Sultanpur: On Saturday, MP-MLA Court Magistrate Shubham Verma delivered his verdict regarding a protest petition filed by the complainant against the police's final report in a case involving allegations of the murder of Sunil Yadav. In its order, the court accepted the final report while dismissing the complainant's protest petition; the court concluded that Sunil Yadav's death was caused by a heart attack and found no deficiencies in the police investigation. This order by the court has brought significant relief to the accused, including former MLA Santosh Pandey. The complainant, Sarita Yadav—a resident of Madardih village under the Chanda police station jurisdiction—had lodged a First Information Report (FIR) at the local police station on July 8. Alleging the murder of her husband, Sunil Yadav, she had filed the complaint against former MLA



Santosh Pandey, his brother-in-law Vivek Kumar Mishra (also a resident of Madardih-Chanda), and co-accused Sushil Nishad.

In this matter, the investigat-

ing officer, Dipendra Vikram Singh, had submitted a final report to the court, effectively giving a "clean chit" to the accused. The complainant, Sarita Yadav, subsequently

filed a protest petition challenging this report; after hearing arguments on the matter, the court had reserved the case file for its final order.

High Court Order: Judicial Magistrate to Appear Before Court via Video Conferencing

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. The Allahabad High Court has expressed displeasure over the delay in registering a complaint and the disregard for court orders in a case related to a bounced cheque. The Court has ordered the Presiding Officer of the concerned court to appear personally via video conferencing on the next scheduled date, April 2, 2026, at 2:00 PM. This order was issued by the bench of Justice Tej Pratap Tiwari in response



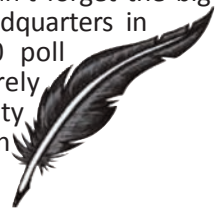
to a petition filed by Hira Mani Yadav. The petitioner, a resident of the Jhusi police station area in Prayagraj, had filed a petition in the High Court seeking the expeditious disposal of a cheque bounce case that has been pending since 2023. On December 10, 2025, the High Court had sought an explanation from the concerned Judicial Magistrate regarding the delay in the disposal of the complaint. To date, no response has been received in this regard. The High Court

Registry had also sent a formal letter to the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Prayagraj, concerning this matter; however, no compliance report has been received from the trial court. Consequently, the Court has ordered the Presiding Officer of the concerned court to appear personally via video conferencing. The Court has further directed its Registry to ensure that both the previous and the current orders reach the concerned officer in a timely manner to ensure necessary compliance.

Editorial

Op Sindoor setting the tone for Bihar polls

In October 2016, addressing the national council of the Janata Dal (United), Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party for 'politicising' the surgical strike. The entire nation stands with you [Narendra Modi] as you are the Prime Minister, but what about those BJP leaders who have repeatedly used the strike to play politics?" Kumar said. A couple of months earlier, as the BJP was organising Tiranga Yatras ahead of the 70th Independence Day, Kumar had taken a dig at it. Those who "never recognised the tricolour as national flag", he said, were taking out Tiranga Yatras. Much water has flowed under the Gandhi Setu since then. As the BJP took out Tiranga Yatras across Bihar for 10 days to celebrate Operation Sindoor's success, Kumar watched them silently—and warily, perhaps. The operation has brought springs to BJP leaders' feet. The 2024 Lok Sabha poll blow is a thing of the past. PM Modi has started taking his own name again—Modi's cool mind and the hot sindoor in his veins, Modi's chest, et al. It was in his first public rally after the Pahalgam terror attack in Bihar's Madhubani, when PM Modi had vowed to punish the perpetrators "beyond their imagination". The vow fulfilled, he will be back in Bihar on 29 and 30 May. The BJP's preparations for Modi's roadshow in Patna are in full swing. People standing on both sides of the road would be showering flower petals on him. That's how a victor is welcomed. How will Operation Sindoor impact the Bihar elections? Let's first look at where the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) stood before the strikes on Pakistan's terror infrastructure and military installations. DesignBoxed, a political digital campaign management company, conducted a survey in Bihar last month. I got access to its report, which has great news for the NDA: Overall, the DesignBoxed survey indicated a clear edge for the NDA. Mind you, it was conducted before Operation Sindoor. Nitish Kumar's principal challenger, Tejashwi Yadav, also has some positive takeaways from the survey. If elections were to be held tomorrow, 46.7 per cent of respondents said they would vote for the NDA, against 35.6 per cent who favour the INDIAN bloc, with 13.8 per cent 'undecided'. If Tejashwi were to swing the 'undecided', the game would be on. For 43.8 per cent respondents, unemployment and migration are the most important issues in the upcoming elections—Tejashwi's key plank in 2020. What would make him even happier is the survey finding that 63.76 per cent people want the current government to be replaced. This sounds incongruous, as a majority of respondents were satisfied with Kumar's performance. Those involved in the DesignBoxed survey, however, claim that it's no surprise. One of them told me: "You come across many respondents who are ok with Nitish Kumar but still want his government changed. It's vice versa, too. It's a lot to do with people's castes becoming the main determinant." Kumar has been the chief minister since 2005, except for a short interlude of nine months in 2014-15. The yearning for change is understandable. How much of it can Tejashwi exploit? Can he beat the caste arithmetic that seems to be in the NDA's favour today? We will find out in November. Union home minister and the BJP's chief strategist Amit Shah once told journalists: "People in Bihar are so political. They sit at tea stalls and read the entire newspaper—from the first to the last page." Five months is obviously a long time for such political people to change their mind. But it's not just Tejashwi that CM Kumar would be worried about. The BJP says that the next election will be fought under his leadership, but it's evasive on the question of Kumar becoming the CM again if the NDA wins. Kumar wouldn't forget the big celebrations at the BJP headquarters in New Delhi after the 2020 poll results. The NDA had barely managed to cross the majority mark, securing 125 seats in the 243-member Assembly.



AIADMK led the way on caste census

In the intricate fabric of Indian democracy, few questions strike at the heart of equality and representation like that of caste. The recent announcement by the Union government to conduct a comprehensive caste census is a landmark moment—one that promises to reshape the contours of social justice policy in India. As the Leader of the Opposition in Tamil Nadu, I welcome this move with conviction and pride, for it affirms a demand the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam first articulated with clarity and foresight. This moment did not emerge overnight. The call for a caste-based census, now

accepted at the national level, has its roots in the firm ideological soil of Tamil Nadu's social justice movement. And in that journey, it was the AIADMK, under the visionary leadership of Puratchi Thalaim Amma J. Jayalalitha, that laid the foundation for genuine representational equity. As early as 2021, during my tenure as chief minister, our government was among the first to demand a fresh caste census. We argued vociferously that welfare policies cannot be built on outdated data from 1931. We recognised then, as we follow now, that progress requires not just empathy but evidence. Tamil Nadu has long stood as a bea-

con of affirmative action, with its unique 69 per cent reservation policy. That achievement was not accidental but was made possible by AIADMK's political resolve and constitutional acumen. When the Supreme Court's Indra Sawhney (Mandal) judgment in 1992 imposed a 50 per cent cap on reservations, the very framework of Tamil Nadu's policy was threatened. But Amma Jayalalitha rose to the challenge. In 1993, she convened a special assembly session, passed a unanimous resolution, and led an all-party delegation to Delhi. Her persistent persuasion ensured the Tamil Nadu Reservation Act was placed in

the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution, protecting it from judicial review. That was not just governance; it was transformative leadership. Our 2021 demand for a caste census was not political posturing. It was a reflection of AIADMK's long-standing understanding of Tamil Nadu's evolving social realities. We recognised the urgent need to reassess the representation and well-being of Backward Classes (BC), Most Backward Classes (MBC), Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in education, employment, and welfare. This demand, when initially raised, was met with silence from the ruling DMK.

PMFBY is failing. It has the same flaws of earlier schemes

India's farmers steward the country's food security, yet they live in chronic distress and policy indifference. Though their contribution is crucial, they continue to be vulnerable and voiceless. Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar who comes from a farming family, has repeatedly expressed discontent by consistently bringing up farmers' grievances into the public limelight, stressing that "it is the government's foremost responsibility to take care of the farmers". Agriculture, despite accounting for only 18.2 per cent of India's GDP, remains the primary source of livelihood for nearly 42.3 per cent of the population. However, over the last decade, India has witnessed a significant decadal drop in agricultural employment, underlining the sector's declining viability. Agrarian distress is now endemic, driven by crop failures, falling prices, and a broken promise of security through insurance. As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2015 data, 80 per cent of suicides among farmers were due to debt and bankruptcy. The crisis has also exhibited a steady trend upward, with more than 1,12,000 people who work in the agricultural sector having died by suicide over the last ten years, according to NCRB data released in December 2023. The figures indicate that no fewer than one farmer died by suicide every hour in India. A 2018 survey conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) found that over 50 per cent of farm households in India had debt. Launched in 2016, the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) assured crop



insurance and restored farmers' confidence. On paper, it addressed many of the earlier shortcomings. But a closer look reveals that this ambitious insurance service ends up replicating several flaws of earlier schemes. It not only falls short of meeting the expectations of the farming community but alienates the very people it was meant to safeguard. A fundamental flaw resides in the impenetrable, convoluted, and overly technical process of settling claims. The use of satellite imaging and averaging data across vast units has created a mechanism highly disconnected from ground realities. Importantly, satellite inspections are limited in scope: they can only identify the presence or absence of crops. They cannot, and do not, determine the health or yield capacity of the crop, nor can they tell one type of crop from another. This technological weakness, when used as the basis for compensation, results in miscalculations that cost real livelihoods. A farmer who suffers heavy losses due to pest damage or loss of nutrients might be deprived of compensation just because their crops appear green from above. Even more appalling is the inherent inequity of the existing model. While farmers pay premiums on an

individual level, compensation is calculated by generalised averaging within village clusters or vaguely defined large patches aggregating both large and small landholdings without any equity-based method in delineating the units. This results in discriminatory denials of claims—most importantly, for those experiencing localised or complete loss of crops. The ongoing application of area-based measurement models exacerbates these issues. Localised weather conditions like a flash flood in a corner of a village can destroy a small farmer's crop, while that of his neighbour remains intact. However, both are measured using the same parameter. It is deeply unfair that individual agony and suffering are erased by collective statistics. The programme also does not cover those most at risk: tenant farmers, sharecroppers, female cultivators, and non-loanee farmers. These are systematically and indirectly excluded by land title requirements, archaic tenancy laws, and bureaucratic obstacles such as Aadhaar-linked bank accounts. Women who increasingly become the main cultivators because of male migration are not accounted for in this system through absence of

formal landholding. These omissions are not accidental; they are manifestations of a design that does not see the true face of Indian agriculture in the present day. On-ground realities expose serious flaws in crop insurance delivery. Forced enrollment, delayed or denied claims, and faulty surveys have left farmers uncompensated and in debt. In Tamil Nadu's Mayiladuthurai district, a mere 68 villages among 277 were covered in the 2024 crop insurance settlements—and compensation was paid in just 16 of them. Similar cases were found in other districts too. D Arogyam, a 55-year-old Tamil Nadu farmer who was not a loanee, was compelled by officials to sign up for PMFBY. Despite paying his premiums on time, he got no claims for two successive years of crop failure due to drought, pushing him into debt. S. Velu, a loanee cultivator from Sivagangai near Kiliyur, availed Rs 70,000 for his 15-acre field. Even though he was in the surveyed and insured area, he faced claim settlement problems as liabilities piled up. In Thoothukudi, farmers demonstrated against one-sided compensation. Villages that were affected by floods were not considered, while those with equal damage were compensated. Farmers accused the faulty surveys and demanded accountability. In Haryana, as reported by Down to Earth, Ramesh Lal from Sonipat was forced to pay a premium under threat of losing his interest subsidy on a loan, even though he never consented to the insurance coverage. When his crop failed, no claim was paid due to "tech-

nical issues" with the policy documentation he was never shown. In Rajasthan, many farmers lost their claims because the State Bank of India delayed crediting their premiums. Consequently, they went into the subsequent cropping season without anticipated reimbursement. Even when the Centre and states subsidise 80-85 per cent of premium charges, private insurance companies consistently make profits while farmers do not gain much. Claims get delayed, disputed, or rejected, even as companies collect risk-free premiums. Meanwhile, crop-cutting experiments are done by inadequate manning, delayed rolling out, and poor-quality control, and the technological solutions like drones and AI-based analytics remain underutilised due to infrastructural gaps and lack of field-level training. Most alarmingly, a 2022 CAG report says that only 37 per cent of farmers surveyed had any real awareness of PMFBY's benefits, premium structures, or claim processes. On-ground realities expose serious flaws in crop insurance delivery. Forced enrollment, delayed or denied claims, and faulty surveys have left farmers uncompensated and in debt. In Tamil Nadu's Mayiladuthurai district, a mere 68 villages among 277 were covered in the 2024 crop insurance settlements—and compensation was paid in just 16 of them. Similar cases were found in other districts too. D Arogyam, a 55-year-old Tamil Nadu farmer who was not a loanee, was compelled by officials to sign up for PMFBY.

Threats to India are not over. Why it must build fortress-like defences

The Sindhudurg Fort, located on an islet in the Arabian Sea near Maharashtra's Malvan town, is one of the most significant sea forts. It was built between 1664-1667 by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the founder of the Maratha Empire, for the purpose of strategic maritime defense and protection against foreign naval threats. The fort was central to Shivaji's plan to build a strong navy and protect the Konkan coastline, and marked the beginning of India's maritime defense strategy. In a similar vein, having demonstrated its military prowess in Operation Sindoor, India should now transform itself into Sindoor Durg, an impenetrable fortress, safe from multi-domain threats emanating from land, sea, air or cyberspace. It will also mark the beginning of India's new doctrine against terrorism, as outlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address to the nation earlier this month—"Terror and trade cannot go together, water and blood cannot flow together". The

military strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan under Operation Sindoor have only been paused. Pakistan, still smarting from the costs imposed on it, both reputational and on its military, will be thirsting for revenge. The brief skirmish has only served as a distraction for Pakistan from its domestic issues, especially its dire internal economic conditions, and has predictably united the country, even if temporarily, against a traditional foe. Buoyed by the grant of the IMF bailout, and by promoting Asim Munir to the rank of Field Marshal, Pakistan's politico-military leadership hopes to retain their tenuous hold on power. Since another misadventure cannot be ruled out, we have to guard against even more varied and audacious threats.

The first purpose of a fort is to provide for its own security and that of its inhabitants. India has demonstrated quite forcibly its capability to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

India must look beyond Bangladesh

The political turmoil in Bangladesh has made it more urgent for India to complete the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, or KMTTP, which links Mizoram to Kolkata via Sittwe port in Myanmar. If fully operationalised, ideally with a rail link to Sittwe Port, it could offer a more resilient corridor for movement of goods to the Northeast, while also opening up longer-term trade possibilities with Southeast Asia. India's role as the pivot in South Asia extends beyond dominant power to that of a regional integrator. Intra-regional development is primarily a function of mutual friendship, interdependent trade, economic ties, and joint ventures. The goal may be to advance national interest, but the net effect is regional prosperity, which acts as a force multiplier for India's own development. South and Southeast Asian countries, joined together through bilateral and multilateral frameworks like the BBIN and BIMSTEC, have therefore started looking beyond the region—in line with India's Act East Policy. Apart from economic commitments, physical connectivity—especially in infrastructure and energy—has assumed unparalleled significance. Railways, high-

ways, civil aviation, and inland waterways are now crossing borders for mutual growth and development. The East South Asia region is on the cusp of unprecedented intra-regional physical connectivity. It is the only way forward for the 21st century. For instance, Nepal and Bhutan, both landlocked nations, have gained access to Indian markets and ports. Newer cross-border rail links have been operationalised between India and Bangladesh, and several projects to connect Bhutan and Myanmar were put in place during the last 10 years.

India-Bangladesh bilateral relations, in particular, had never been this strong and comprehensive—until last year. On 5 August 2024, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned following a massive uprising. An interim government headed by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has since been formed. This civil strife in Bangladesh has come with ripple effects. It's brought with it a certain straining of relations, causing collateral damage to trade and commerce. There have also been instances of cross border movements and joint project developments coming to halt. Existing trade corridors have been impacted

and ongoing rail/road projects to provide shorter transit corridors across Bangladesh to and from India's Northeastern states are on hold. It's time now to look at alternative possibilities for north-eastern states in addition to the Siliguri corridor. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project requires revisiting and a fresh reassessment. During his visit to China in late March, Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Mohammad Yunus made remarks that were considered provocative, to say the least. "The seven states of India, the eastern part of India, are called seven sisters...."

They are a landlocked country, landlocked region of India. They have no way to reach out to the ocean," he said. "We are the only guardian of the ocean for all this region." Shortly thereafter, Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the BIMSTEC conference in Thailand. He met Yunus on the sidelines and reiterated his support for a democratic, progressive, and inclusive Bangladesh, according to a Ministry of External Affairs release. He also underlined India's desire to forge a constructive relationship with Bangladesh. More importantly,

Honking ban ordered by DoE for schools

Delhi: The Delhi DoE has instructed all schools to prohibit illegal parking and honking. In response to increased noise and congestion outside schools, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee DPCC wrote to civic bodies, including DoE, with directives. New guidelines require private unaided recognized schools to create a silence zone awareness plan and issue letters to SHOs to reduce illegal parking and honking. All deputy directors of education (DDEs) at the district and zonal levels have been asked to inform school heads and ensure compliance with these measures. Dr. CS Verma, DoE deputy director at science. Order emphasized school zone traffic restriction. Officials said the initiative improves learning conditions. "Traffic congestion outside schools has been a long-standing issue, with frequent complaints from parents and residents about vehicles blocking gates



and causing excessive honking," a DoE spokeswoman said. Mount Abu School principal Jyoti Arora in Rohini said illegal parking and honking around Delhi schools are longstanding difficulties. "We are fighting a court case regarding an illegal auto stand near one of our schools," she said, adding that morning traffic is terrible. E-rickshaws and street vendors choke roads, she said. Delhi Parents' Association president Aprajita Gautam said most schools are in traffic zones and may struggle to comply. Parents should limit horn use to reduce this. School transportation limitations and no-honking signs .

Telangana govt resolute in raising reservation

HYDERABAD:

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao announced on Monday that the Congress government is determined to increase reservation for backward classes in education, employment, and political representation from 23% to 42%. In a post on the social media platform 'X,' he highlighted that the population of backward classes in the state stands at 56.36%, based on the recent caste survey conducted in Telangana.

The US canceled 2,000 Indian visa appointments

Delhi: The US embassy in India reported the cancellation of over 2,000 visa applications. Indians are one of the largest groups of immigrants to the US for labor, tourism, and study. Fraud prompted the US Embassy in India crackdown. Due to "bad actors" or bots' severe appointment system infractions, the embassy deactivated their accounts. "Consular Team India cancels 2,000 bot-made visa appointments. We don't tolerate agents and fixers who break scheduling rules. "Effective immediately, we are cancelling these appointments and sus-



pending the associated accounts' scheduling privileges," said the message. US visa applications in India are already backlogged, notably for B1 and B2 applicants. This visa is for business and tourism. Application wait times in 2022-23 ranged from 800 to 1,000 days. New Delhi has regularly expressed reservations about the wait time with

Washington. In 2022, foreign affairs minister S Jaishankar complained to then-US secretary of state Antony Blinken about visa delays. The Biden administration blamed COVID-19 for the backlog. During his January visit to Washington for Donald Trump's inauguration, Jaishankar raised the issue again with Marco Rubio, Blinken's successor.

The dual degree option at DU will help students learn more

Delhi: The University of Delhi (DU) now allows students to pursue two degrees simultaneously. DU students can enroll in one degree through the normal mode at any DU-affiliated college or department and a second through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) through the School of

Open Learning. This policy gives existing students the option to expand their academic horizons without choosing between conventional and distant education. It has restrictions, though. Even with normal and ODL enrollment, students cannot enroll in two identical degrees (such as

BCom Hons and BCom Pass). DU dual degree qualifying requirements are simple but require careful planning. Students must meet both degrees' academic requirements. Attending classes, completing assignments, and passing tests for each program.

Most states, even non-BJP, give Hindi or Sanskrit as 3rd language

Delhi: As the Centre and Tamil Nadu argue over the controversial "three-language formula" in schools under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, most Hindi-speaking states, including those ruled by non-BJP parties, offer Sanskrit as a third language of study. Non-Hindi-speaking states usually offer Hindi. Private schools are offering foreign languages as third languages due to student demand. The method allows states to choose Indian languages for government and private schools. Most states have implemented the "three-language formula" up to Class 8, with some extending it to Class 10. Tamil Nadu, however, has a two-language policy.



Hindi, Sanskrit, and other languages are taught as third languages in most states, along with the region's mother tongue and English, depending on the medium of teaching. French, German, and Spanish are also in demand in Hindi- and non-Hindi-speaking countries. The Tamil Nadu govern-

ment has refused to sign an MoU with the Centre to implement the PM Schools for Rising India (PM-SHRI) scheme, which aims to upgrade 14,500 schools and make them model schools that embody NEP 2020, citing concerns about the "three-language formula" and Hindi language imposition.

IT-Delhi rose 255 places to 171st globally

Delhi: Among Indian universities for sustainability, IIT-Delhi rose 255 places to 171st globally, according to 2025 QS Rankings released. The QS Sustainability Rankings include 78 Indian universities, with nine of the top 10 improving and 21 new institutions entering. Two IITs—Delhi and Kanpur—are in the world's top 100 for impact. With 177 and 67 rank improvements, each became fourth and fifth in India. Bangalore's IISc is among the world's top 50 environmental education schools.

NAAC adopts e-inspections for new accreditation

Delhi: To eradicate corruption and speed up accreditation, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has stopped physical college inspections. Accreditation teams will now perform evaluations exclusively online, replacing on-cams visits with virtual examinations. But for colleges, the changeover will be hybrid; most inspections will be remote, but some reviewers will still visit campuses to retain some monitoring. The decision fol-



lows the CBI's recent arrests in the case involving Andhra Pradesh's Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation (KLEF), where management reportedly bribed NAAC peer visit inspectors for good ratings. "We chose to do whatever it takes

to eliminate corruption. "Stopping in-person visits will greatly reduce the issue," stated NAAC executive committee head Prof Anil Sahasrabudhe. "With so many weekly inspection visits, it was hard to track what happened. Now, all this is recorded." NAAC head Ganesan Kannabiran hailed the switch to online inspection a "surgical strike" against corruption. The latest CBI lawsuit challenged NAAC's peer review system.

Kerala cuts minority scholarships due to financial difficulties

Delhi: Kerala's government has cut minority community scholarships by 50%, putting thousands of students' education at risk, citing the financial crisis. Nine of the 11 minority welfare scholarship programs originally allotted Rs 13.6 crore are affected by the decision. The Government says the plan size reduction is a priority, but the disproportionate cut to minority student educational support raises questions about governmental priorities and social justice. Twitter shares The Prof Joseph M u n d a s s e r y Scholarship, which received Rs 5.2 crore this year, suffered most. It has saved Muslim, Sikh, Jain, and Parsi high-achieving children by paying Rs 10,000 to those who scored A-Plus in all SSLC subjects and Rs 15,000 to those

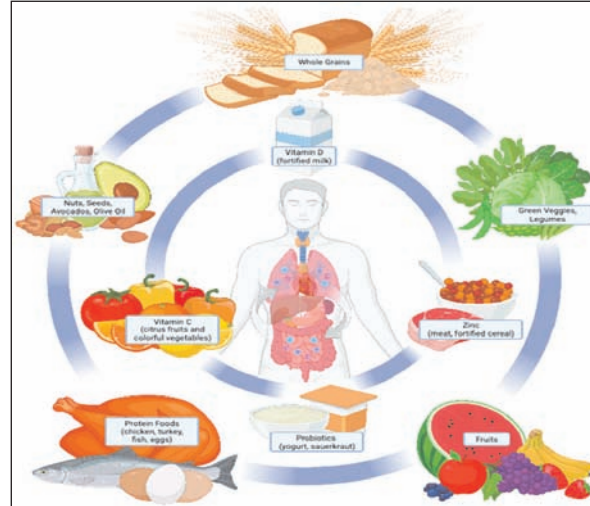


who scored 80% in upper secondary or 75% in vocational higher secondary. It ensured that bright students from underprivileged backgrounds were not forced to drop out due to financial constraints by prioritizing BPL students and providing provisions to economically weaker APL students. The crucial APJ Abdul Kalam Scholarship for minority students has also been cut in half. Those admitted to government-approved colleges on merit, with priority for BPL families,

receive the Rs 6,000 grant. Since it reserves 30% of funds for female students, the reduction could hurt young women who already struggle to enter higher education. Another affected program is the Mother Teresa Scholarship, which helps Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, and Parsi students in government nursing and paramedical diploma programs. Many aspiring nurses and paramedics, whose families cannot afford professional training, may have to quit.

Hospital visits decreased, learning metrics improved. Meal program passes

Delhi: The State Planning Commission SPC found that Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's breakfast policy had improved health and education in government schools, which shows that hospital visits among government primary school pupils reduced by 68.4% in rural areas and 29.4% in urban areas throughout this period, illustrating the program's impact on nutritionally challenged regions. In addition to health metrics, the Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission reported to Stalin on 13 March that the plan has increased student involvement in class. Nearly 5,300 urban and rural children showed improvements in attention and comprehension. Students' attention without urging grew



from 85.8 percent to 93.7 percent, and their ability to follow teachers' instructions increased from 91.3 percent to 95.5 percent. Students are also completing more written work, rising from 89.6% to 95.4%. The ability to learn new content increased from 88.1 percent to 92.5 percent, while lesson recall increased from 71.4 percent to 77 percent. Nearly 5,300

urban and rural children showed improvements in attention and comprehension. Students' attention without urging grew from 85.8 percent to 93.7 percent, and their ability to follow teachers' instructions increased from 91.3 percent to 95.5 percent. Students are also completing more written work. rising from 89.6% to 95.4%.

SC calls Punjab's NRI quota a 'fraud' on medical education

Delhi: The Supreme Court called Punjab's medical colleges' extension of the non-resident Indian (NRI) quota a "fraud" that excludes meritorious candidates. A bench chaired by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud dismissed petitions challenging a Punjab and Haryana high court ruling that invalidated the Punjab government's proposal to widen the NRI quota criteria to include distant relatives. We must end NRI quotas today! The bench, which included Justices JB Pardiwalla and Manoj Misra, said the NRI quota was being used to circumvent merit-based admissions. The bench called such a broad interpretation of NRI eligibility, which permitted distant relatives to qualify, a "money-spinning tactic" that undermined the school system. "All three petitions fail. Keep this under control. This scam must end. This NRI business is a scam. Senior counsel Shadan Farasat stated that Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh previously employed the larger NRI quota interpretation during the hearing. The Court rejected these arguments, stressing that the larger definition weakened merit and permitted less deserving individuals to be admitted based on money and connections rather than academic performance. The panel agreed with Bhandari that NRI quotas should be kept for real NRIs and merit should not be ignored.



Movie controversies over real-life portrayals

Films like *O'Romeo*, *Haq*, *Dhurandhar* and others have sparked backlash for allegedly depicting real-life people and events without consent, raising debates on accuracy, ethics and creative freedom in cinema

Films like *O'Romeo*, *Haq*, *Dhurandhar* and others have recently come under the scanner for allegedly depicting real-life individuals and events without consent. Families and close relatives have raised objections, filed suits and demanded changes, arguing that such portrayals distort facts and risk emotional harm. These disputes have reignited debates on the ethical responsibility of filmmakers, the balance between creative freedom and accuracy, and the sensitivity required when adapting real-life stories. With audiences drawn to cinema inspired by reality, these controversies highlight the thin line between storytelling and misrepresentation

1 O'Romeo faces legal challenge:

Sanobar Shaikh, daughter of the late gangster Hussain Shaikh alias Hussain Ustara, has filed a suit in the Mumbai City Civil Court at Kalaghoda against the makers of the upcoming film *O'Romeo*, alleging that it is an unauthorised biopic based on her father's life.



3 Dhurandhar faced backlash: Aditya Dhar's upcoming spy film *Dhurandhar* courted controversy after allegations that it drew from the real-life story of martyr Major Mohit Sharma. The film sparked conversations around sensitivity, representation and ethical responsibility in cinema. Addressing the backlash, Dhar clarified on social media that the film was not based on Major Mohit Sharma.



3 Haq film sparks objections: Shah Bano Begum's daughter, Siddiqua Begum Khan, had opposed the release of the film *Haq*, starring Emraan Hashmi and Yami Gautam. She claimed the film is inspired by her mother's life without the family's consent and has raised concerns over factual accuracy and emotional impact.



4 Film faces family backlash: The family of underworld figure Haji Mastan reportedly objected to the 2010 film *Once Upon a Time in Mumbai*, claiming it misrepresented his life. They sought changes and requested to view the film before release, sparking debates on accuracy, consent, and ethical responsibility in portraying real-life figures on screen.

Good news for BTS FANS

BTS comeback concert and documentary to stream live globally

There is good news for BTS fans as K-pop superstars are making their long-awaited return this March with a landmark global event. Streaming live from Gwanghwamun in Seoul, this monumental performance celebrates the release of their highly anticipated new album, *Arirang*. Netflix, in collaboration with HYBE, has announced a comeback event for K-pop supergroup, featuring a live performance and a feature-length documentary slated for release in March 2026.

The comeback concert, titled *BTS The Comeback Live/ Arirang*, will be streamed

live on Netflix on March 21, broadcasting live from the historic Gwanghwamun area in Seoul, South Korea. The performance marks BTS's first global stage reunion following the completion of mandatory military service by all seven members, RM, Jin, SUGA, J-hope, Jimin, V and Jung Kook.

The live event celebrates the release of BTS's fifth studio album, *Arirang*, which explores the group's identity, roots and evolution. Netflix stated that the live concert will be the platform's first-ever globally live-streamed event broadcast from Korea.

Following the live performance, Netflix will premiere *BTS: The Return*, a feature-length documentary, on March 27, 2026. Directed by acclaimed filmmaker Bao Nguyen, the documentary offers behind-the-scenes access to the band's reunion and the making of their comeback album.



Rhea all set to make acting comeback

After Sushant Singh Rajput's demise (2020), Rhea Chakraborty made it to the headlines for many wrong reasons. She was only seen in one movie titled *Chehre* (2021), which was already shot before Sushant's death.

However, Rhea is now all set to make her acting comeback with Netflix's series *Family Business*, which also stars Anil Kapoor and Vijay Varma.

On Tuesday, Netflix announced their new slate of films and series at a grand event in Mumbai. At the event, *Family Business* was announced, and its teaser was released.

While sharing the teaser, Netflix wrote on Instagram, "New blood meets old money. With immense power at stake, the lines blur between family and business. Watch *Family Business*, coming soon, only on Netflix."

Ranveer returns to action-packed espionage saga

Dhurandhar: The Revenge teaser unveils a darker, violent sequel with Ranveer in a high-stakes spy avatar

The official Hindi teaser of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* dropped on Tuesday, setting the tone for a darker and more violent sequel to the 2025 blockbuster. Directed by Aditya Dhar, the film is positioned as a high-stakes continuation that expands the franchise's espionage-driven universe.

Running for approximately 1 minute and 12 seconds, the teaser opens with a relentless, blood-soaked action montage that underscores the psychological and physical transformation of Jaskirat Singh Ranghi into the spy Hamza Ali Mazari.

Ranveer Singh appears in a clean-shaven avatar, the same look briefly teased at the conclusion of the first film. The teaser also hints at extensive flashback sequences, tracing Hamza's origin story and his journey into becoming a lethal undercover operative in



Karachi. Glimpses of returning cast members Sanjay Dutt, Arjun Rampal and R. Madhavan are featured, with Madhavan expected to play a more substantial role this time.

Produced by Jio Studios and B62 Studios, with T-Series taking over as the music label, *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* is slated for a pan-India theatrical release on March 19, 2026, coinciding with *Eid*, *Gudi Padwa* and *Ugadi*. It will release in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam.

I am in love with India: Tal Kravitz

The Israeli musician, who sings in 58 languages, wowed Mumbai with his multi-instrument performance at Kala Ghoda Arts Festival 2026



Singing in 58 languages without speaking them:

One of the most fascinating aspects of Kravitz's performances is his ability to sing in 58 languages. Surprisingly, he admits he doesn't speak most of them. Tal says, "I don't really learn languages; I learn how to sing in them." He further says with a smile, "I memorise the sound, the phonetics." Kravitz writes lyrics using Latin letters, spelling words exactly how they sound. He says, "That's how I remember songs, whether it's Hindi, Arabic, or something else." Although he speaks only three languages, including Hebrew, English, and Swahili, having lived in Kenya, he has basic knowledge of Spanish, Arabic, and Russian.

Israeli musician and multi-instrumentalist Tal Kravitz left Mumbai spellbound and deeply moved through his performance at Elphinstone College Quadrangle during the ongoing Kala Ghoda Arts Festival 2026.

Tal is an Israeli musician and singer who has performed around 3,000 times in 28 languages. The singer performs classical, traditional and modern songs.

Beyond the stage, Tal is a dedicated educator who empowers the youth, including those in special education, to craft and play their own instruments.

Speaking exclusively to after his performance at Elphinstone College Quadrangle, Kravitz shared insights into his musical journey, inspirations, and his growing love for India.



TAL IS A DEDICATED EDUCATOR

'India has one of the richest musical cultures in the world!': Reflecting on Indian audiences, Kravitz was full of admiration. He says, "India has one of the most amazing, diverse, and rich musical cultures in the entire world. With so many regions and traditions, India contains almost every kind of music within one country." What struck Tal most was the openness of listeners. He further said, "People here are extremely receptive. They want to listen, learn, and experience music from all over the world. That makes Indian audiences one of the most open-minded I've ever encountered."

How Israel's diversity shaped his sound: Growing up in Israel played a defining role in Kravitz's musical identity. Describing Israel as a country built by immigrants, he explained how that diversity shaped his sound. Tal says, "When Jewish communities migrated from Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, they brought their music with them." He further added, "I was lucky to grow up surrounded by such a wide range of musical traditions."

Love for instruments: During his Kala Ghoda Arts Festival performance, Kravitz played nearly 10 instruments, some of which left audiences guessing how he pulled off such an amazing feat. Talking about his instruments, he reveals, "I own more than 100 instruments. I collect local instruments from every place I visit and learn how to play them." One standout factor during the performance was the 'soul' instrument. It is a flexible piece of metal capable of producing hauntingly emotional sounds. "Even though it's just metal, it can express deep emotion," he explains. If Tal has to choose just one instrument, he'd turn to the piano. "It's an entire orchestra," he admits. "You can play melody, harmony, and rhythm with your fingers."

Being in love with India: Kravitz visited India for the sixth time, and he jokingly admitted that he doesn't like the noisy traffic, but apart from that, he has no complaints. "I'm in love with India—the people, food, hospitality, smiles, energy, and vibe," he smiles. While comparing the global audience to the desi crowd, Kravitz highlights India's unmatched emotional connection. "In Europe and America, the audience is polite but reserved. In India, people sing, dance, scream, and shower you with love. The energy is unreal," he concludes.



Revisiting Om Puri via Ardh Satya

As part of the ongoing Kala Ghoda Arts Festival 2026, a special screening of *Ardh Satya* (1983) was held to mark the 75th birth anniversary of actor Om Puri. The screening was preceded by a panel discussion featuring key members of the film, moderated by Nandita Puri. Directed by Govind Nihalani, *Ardh Satya* follows a newly appointed police officer as he confronts corruption, romance, and brutality.

Briefs

Gadhafi's son killed in Libya

Seif al-Islam Gadhafi, the son and one-time heir apparent of Libya's late dictator Moammar Gadhafi, was killed in the northern African country, Libyan officials said. The 53-year-old was killed in the town Zintan, 136 kms southwest of the capital, Tripoli, as per Libyan's chief prosecutor's office. The office said an initial probe found Seif al-Islam was shot to death, but did not provide details about the circumstances of his killing. Khaled al-Zaidi, a lawyer for Seif al-Islam, confirmed his death on Facebook, without providing details. Abdullah Othman Abdurrahim, who represented Gadhafi in the UN-brokered political dialogue which aimed to resolve Libya's long-running conflict, announced the death on Facebook. Seif al-Islam's political team later released a statement saying "four masked men" stormed his house and killed him in a "cowardly and treacherous assassination".

162 killed in Nigeria

Armed extremists killed at least 162 people during attacks on two villages in Nigeria, a lawmaker said on Wednesday, in one of the deadliest assaults in recent months. Attacks targeted Woro and Nuku villages in Kwara on Tuesday evening, Mohammed Omar Bio, an MP representing the area, said. The attacks were carried out by Lakurawa, an armed group affiliated with the IS group, he added.

700 agents to leave US state

The Trump administration will withdraw 700 immigration agents from Minnesota, President Trump's "border tsar" Tom Homan has announced. At a news conference, he said the withdrawal would begin immediately and include agents from ICE and Border Patrol. He said he had aimed to cut the federal immigration presence in Minneapolis to the level it was before Trump ordered a surge in Dec. But for now 2,000 agents would remain.

Singer dies of snakebite

In her last message to friends, **Ifunanya Nwangene**, 26, wrote: "Please come." The singer and former contestant on *The Voice Nigeria* had been bitten by a snake while asleep in her flat in Nigeria's Abuja and was in hospital, awaiting care. Nwangene died a few hours after being bitten, as her friend waited at a pharmacy to buy the antivenom. As the news of her death on Jan 31 has spread, it has sparked a fierce row over the ready availability of drugs needed to treat snakebites in Nigeria.

Boat collision leaves 14 dead

A collision between a speedboat carrying migrants and a Greek coast guard patrol vessel off the Aegean island of Chios has killed at least 14 people, the coast guard said, while a search was on for missing people. The coast guard said 25 migrants, including 11 children, were rescued and moved to a hospital.

Norway royal scion's trial

The son of Norway's crown princess pleaded not guilty to rape charges as he went on trial Tuesday for multiple alleged offences, opening weeks of proceedings in a case that has cast a shadow on the royal family's image. Marius Borg Høiby, 29, stood while prosecutor Sturla Henriksba read out the 38 counts against him in the Oslo court, asking him if he pleaded guilty. He replied "no" to the most serious charges, including the 4 counts of rape.

HIGH-LEVEL TALKS | Jaishankar holds discussions with Rubio, Bessent to strengthen economic and strategic ties

In US, EAM builds on trade deal momentum

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON

Amid growing enthusiasm in both the US and India over the trade deal, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held discussions with senior American officials, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, focusing on advancing bilateral economic ties and strategic cooperation.

In Jaishankar's meeting with Rubio on Tuesday, the two leaders "welcomed" the agreement and discussed "formalising" bilateral cooperation on critical minerals exploration and mining.

The discussions were held at State Dept, ahead of the inaugural Critical Minerals Ministerial meet being convened by the US on Wednesday. "Delighted to meet US Secretary Rubio this afternoon. A wide ranging conversation that covered our bilateral cooperation agenda, regional and global issues," the EAM posted on X.

"Facets of India-US strategic partnership discussed inclu-



EAM Jaishankar with US Treasury Secy Scott Bessent (L) & Secy of State Marco Rubio

'US WANTS TO CRITICAL MINERALS TRADING BLOC'

Trump administration wants to create a critical minerals trading bloc with its allies that will use tariffs to maintain price floors and defend against China's tactic of flooding the market to undermine any potential competitors. Vice President JD Vance said the trade war over the past year exposed how dependent most countries are on the critical minerals China has a stranglehold on. "We want members to form a trading bloc among allies and partners, one that guarantees American access to American industrial might while expanding production across the zone," Vance told foreign ministers.

A readout said, "The two leaders emphasised the importance of our democracies working together to unlock new economic opportunities and advance our shared interests," he wrote.

ded trade, energy, nuclear, defence, critical minerals and technology. Agreed on the early meetings of various mechanisms to advance our shared interests," he wrote.

'India didn't nominate Trump for Nobel but got better deal' Pak's US outreach under fire at home

Pakistan's leadership and military establishment are facing flak after India secured a trade deal with the US, sparking a wave of backlash from journalists, opposition figures, and civil society voices. Opposition voices, including Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leaders, have contrasted India's approach with Pak's outreach to US. PTI leaders argue India secured lower tariffs by asserting its "strategic autonomy", Pak was "gifted" a higher tariff after 'personal lobbying by the Army chief'. Commentators mocked frequent travels between Islamabad and DC, with critics on social media likening the trips

to "rickshaw-style shuttling", undertaken more for political survival than national interest.

Journalist Asad Toor said Pak's broader economic picture made the tariff outcome more damaging. Exports are declining, foreign investment has vanished, and the country's economic leverage has "completely collapsed".

Analyst Moeed Pirzada said, "We were told the 'Field Marshal' title and the 'minerals briefcase' were the keys to Trump's heart. Yet Modi gets a call and an 18% rate after defying US on Russia. Our leader gets 19% after doing everything. It is not diplomacy, but transactional surrender."

Russia, Ukraine envoys meet in UAE for US-brokered talks

Kyiv: Envoys from Russia and Ukraine met in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday for another round of US-brokered talks on ending the almost 4-year war, a Ukrainian negotiator said.

The delegations from Moscow and Kyiv were joined in the UAE by US officials, Rustem Umerov, Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council chief, present at the meeting, said on social media.

Umerov said the planned 2-day negotiations started with all three delegations present, after which negotiators were to break into groups according to topics and then meet as a full group again at the end.

The American team was due to include special envoy



Steve Witkoff and President Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who also attended last month's meeting, according to the White House.

The current talks also coincide with the expiry of the last remaining nuclear arms pact between Russia and the US on Thursday. Trump and Putin could extend the terms of the treaty or renegotiate its conditions in an effort to prevent a new nuclear arms race.

Xi, Putin reinforce relations in video call

Beijing: President Vladimir Putin (L) hailed Russian's growing economic cooperation with China in a video call with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping on Wednesday.

China has continued to trade with Russia, providing some relief from Western economic sanctions.

"I would like to once again assure you of firm support for our shared efforts to ensure the sovereignty and security of our countries, our socio-economic welfare and the right to choose our own development path," Putin said in opening remarks broadcast by Russian state television.

The Russian leader noted "our partnership in the energy sphere is mutually beneficial and has a truly strategic character."

He added the two countries were "conducting an active dialogue in peaceful use of nuclear energy and developing high-tech projects, including in the industry sphere and space research."

Xi said he and Putin would discuss a new "grandiose plan for the development of bilateral ties" and "exchange views on major strategic issues", according to a Russian translation of his opening remarks. He noted the two countries

XI SPEAKS TO TRUMP

Chinese state-run media on Wednesday said President Xi Jinping held a phone call with US President Donald Trump, but did not provide details of what was discussed between them.



Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin

need to "use a historic opportunity to continue deepening strategic cooperation."

Putin, in his call with Xi, applauded China's decision to allow visa-free entry for Russians, their partnership in energy including the peaceful use of nuclear power, and high-tech cooperation in space and industry. He noted Wednesday marked the beginning of spring in the traditional Chinese calendar and said "any season is springtime in Russia-China relations".

Russian Security Council Secretary Sergey Shoigu also visited Beijing last weekend, during which he met China's top foreign policy official, Wang Yi. —AP

We want to cut Russia off: US Congressman

Congressman and co-chair of India Caucus, Rich McCormick said the US wanted to make it arduous for Russia to continue funding for war. McCormick said, "We want to cut Russia off entirely, make it hard for them to continue to prosecute this war, and get rid of their bullying in Europe. Ukraine is a top-five country of resources when it comes to titanium, steel, cobalt, lithium, and uranium. 70% of Europe's wheat is produced in Ukraine," he said.

He said, "We don't want Russia any close to Nato allies. Russia has a \$2.1tn economy, smaller than Texas. Europe has a \$20tn economy, it alone can outpace Russia by 10 to 1. Germany has two and a half times the economy of Russia. When two leaders of great nations get together, decide what to do collectively. You look at the long-term benefits India-US deal will have on the Indian economy; Russia is not the answer. The US has a \$30tn economy. Who do you want to do business with?" He said Indian Constitution represents American values. —ANI

IRAN-US TALKS ON FRIDAY IN OMAN

Dubai: Talks between Iran and the US will be held on Friday in Oman, Iranian media reported.

The semi-official ISNA and Tasnim news agencies, as well as the Student News Network, all reported the talks would take place in Oman, though the sultanate did not acknowledge it would host them.

The US has not acknowledge the talks would take place in Oman, though the White House said it anticipated the negotiations would take place even after the US shot down an Iranian drone on Tuesday and Iran tried to stop a US-flagged ship.

Also on Wednesday, activists said the number of

arrests topped 50,000 in the government crackdown, according to the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency.

At least 50,834 people have been arrested in the Iranian government's crackdown on protests, the activists said.

Earlier on Tuesday, President Masoud Pezeshkian said he told Iran's foreign minister to "pursue fair and equitable negotiations" with the US.

Further, President Trump has said the US is negotiating with Iran and indicated the talks involve more than one meeting, saying if the negotiations with Iran were happening this week, Trump said, "Yeah."

Don: Colombia's Petro terrific

Washington: US President Donald Trump met Colombian President Gustavo Petro for nearly two hours at the White House on Tuesday, conducting a friendly face-to-face mere weeks after threatening military action against the South American country and accusing the leader of pumping cocaine into the United States.

Trump said afterwards he and Petro had not been "the best of friends", suggesting he had felt insulted by the president of Colombia as he did not know him and as the two had never met. Later, he had changed his mind, saying, "We had a very good meeting. I thought he was terrific." Trump said the pair discussed cooperation in counter-narcotics operations and a number of other topics. The meeting followed Trump saying Petro has become willing to work with his govt. —AP

Trump says CNN reporter is worst

Washington: US President Trump laced into CNN correspondent Kaitlan Collins, calling her "the worst reporter" and scolding her for not smiling as she tried to ask about the latest release of files related to Jeffrey Epstein.

"She's a young woman — I don't think I've ever seen you smile," Trump said in a sarcastic tone, while sitting at the Resolute Desk. "I've known you for 10 years. I don't think I've ever seen a smile on your face."

"You know why you're not smiling? Because you know you're not telling the truth," he said. "You are so bad," he said. "You know, you are the worst reporter. No wonder. CNN has no ratings because of people like you," he president said.

Meanwhile, British police opened a criminal probe into Peter Mandelson over alleged



Kaitlan Collins, CNN correspondent, and Donald Trump.

misconduct in public office. PM Keir Starmer said Mandelson "repeatedly lied".

Also, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor has moved out of his home in Windsor to the Sandringham Estate in Norfolk. Meanwhile, philanthropist Melinda French Gates has said her ex-husband, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates dredged up "painful times in my marriage". She said she felt "unbelievable sadness", and "whatever questions remain" needed to be answered by those named in the records, including her ex-husband. "I am so happy to be away from all the muck." The couple divorced in 2021.



Snow havoc in Japan

People walk in snow in Kanazawa, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan. Heavy snow piling up in northern Japan over the past two weeks has blocked roads and is being blamed for dozens of deaths nationwide. As of Wednesday, 15 prefectures have been affected, with snow reaching up to 2 metres in worst-hit areas. The unusually heavy snowfall is largely due to a cold air mass from the Arctic that has lingered over the Japanese archipelago. More than 1,700 homes were without electricity, and most train lines weren't running, including the bullet trains, according to Aomori prefecture. —Kyodo News via AP

free drinks, counsels | No more career crisis in Japan

If you are struggling with your career path, thinking of changing job and looking for a small talk or a piece of advice, this recently opened bar in Japan is totally made for you. Located in Yokohama, Tenshoku Sodan Bar, which literally means Job-Changing Consultation Bar. The bartenders here are all counselors from staffing service LIA, who are trained to counsel the customers with career worries.



consultations are conducted in private rooms, creating a safe and comfortable environment for open conversations. Each session typically lasts between 60 and 90 minutes, giving visitors ample time to talk through their concerns without feeling rushed.

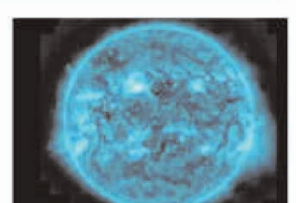
What sets this bar apart is its strong emphasis on trust and confidentiality. The establishment follows strict guidelines regulated by Japan's Labour Bureau for employment placement agencies, reassuring guests that their personal and professional con-

cerns will remain private. This makes it an appealing space for those hesitant to seek traditional career counselling.

The bartenders, who are also career counsellors, are trained to listen rather than judge. Guests are encouraged to speak freely about workplace stress, job dissatisfaction, career switches or uncertainty about the future, without the pressure of resumes and formal interviews. Adding to the experience, the bar offers both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for free, with no consultation fees involved. The idea is simple yet effective: when people are relaxed, they are more likely to open up about what's truly bothering them.

Oz boy called superhuman

In a feat described as "superhuman" by rescuers, a boy, 13, from Perth swam for 4 hours in rough seas to save his mother and siblings after they were swept offshore in Australia on January 30. They were vacationing in Quindalup. "The Guardian" said strong winds and waves pushed the family, including Austin Appelbee, his mother Joanne, 47, brother Beau, 12, and sister Grace, 8, into Geopraphe Bay while they were using hired paddleboards and a kayak. The teen paddled his kayak back towards shore before it was hit by rough seas. He swam for an 4 hours to reach the shore and alert others.



Sun erupts with powerful X1.5 solar flare

Sun erupts with powerful X1.5 solar flare, NASA captures event. The Sun unleashed a powerful solar flare on Feb 3, triggering heightened attention from space weather scientists.

The flare, classified as X1.5, peaked at 9:08 am ET and was among the strongest recorded in recent weeks.

Images of the intense burst were captured by NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory.

Spanish PM is a tyrant: Musk

Spain has proposed a ban on social media use by teens as attitudes hardened in Europe against the technology, drawing personal insults against PM from Elon Musk.

The government is preparing a series of measures including a social media ban for under-16s, PM Pedro Sánchez said promising to protect kids from the "digital wild west" and blamed tech companies for hateful and harmful content.

Musk wrote on X in response: "Dirty Sánchez is a tyrant and a traitor to the people of Spain." About an hour and a half later, he escalated his criticism, posting on X: "Sánchez is the true fascist totalitarian."



Game On, India!



Briefs

BENGALURU
SRH bowling was poor, says Vettori



Sunrisers Hyderabad head coach **Daniel Vettori** termed his side's bowling performance against Royal Challengers Bengaluru as poor, admitting they allowed Virat Kohli and Devdutt Padikkal too many scoring opportunities in the IPL opener. After posting 201/9 on Saturday, Hyderabad failed to contain Kohli and Padikkal as RCB chased down the target in just 15.4 overs. "You have to get a good start with the ball, which we did against Phil Salt, but we were not disciplined enough. We gave a lot of scoring opportunities to Virat and Padikkal, who played exceptionally well. We should have maintained better discipline," he said.

NEW DELHI
Modi lauds J&K's Ranji triumph



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lauded the cricket team of Jammu and Kashmir for bagging the Ranji Trophy title for the first time and expressed hope that this winning streak of sports persons there continues in the future. Addressing his monthly radio broadcast 'Mann Ki Baat', Modi said "It is most heartening to note that after a long wait of nearly seven decades, the team achieved its first Ranji Trophy title. This unprecedented success is the result of years of continuous efforts by the players."

FLORIDA
Sabalenka beats Gauff to win in Miami



Aryna Sabalenka etched her name in tennis history, defeating world No. 4 Coco Gauff 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 on Saturday to win the Miami Open women's singles title and complete the elusive "Sunshine Double". By winning back-to-back titles at Indian Wells and Miami, the world No. 1 became the first player to achieve the feat since Iga Swiatek in 2022. The victory also marked Sabalenka's second consecutive title in Miami Gardens and gave

CLINICAL CHASE | The six-wicket win was hosts first opening win in 13 seasons

Rohit, Rickelton power MI home

MUMBAI

Rohit Sharma and Ryan Rickelton produced a commanding opening partnership as Mumbai Indians registered their first home win of the IPL season, defeating Kolkata Knight Riders by six wickets at the Wankhede Stadium on Sunday.

The MI openers set the tone with an aggressive approach. Rohit struck 78 off 38 balls, hitting six fours and six sixes, while Rickelton hammered 81 off 43 balls to anchor the chase.

Their opening stand of 148 off 72 balls laid the foundation for Mumbai Indians to chase down 221 comfortably. The five-time champions reached 224/4 in 19.1 overs to seal victory. Hardik Pandya and Naman Dhir remained unbeaten on 18 and five respectively at the end.

Earlier, Kolkata Knight Riders posted 220/4 in 20 overs, riding on captain Ajinkya Rahane's 67 and Padikkal, who played exceptionally well. We should have maintained better discipline," he said.

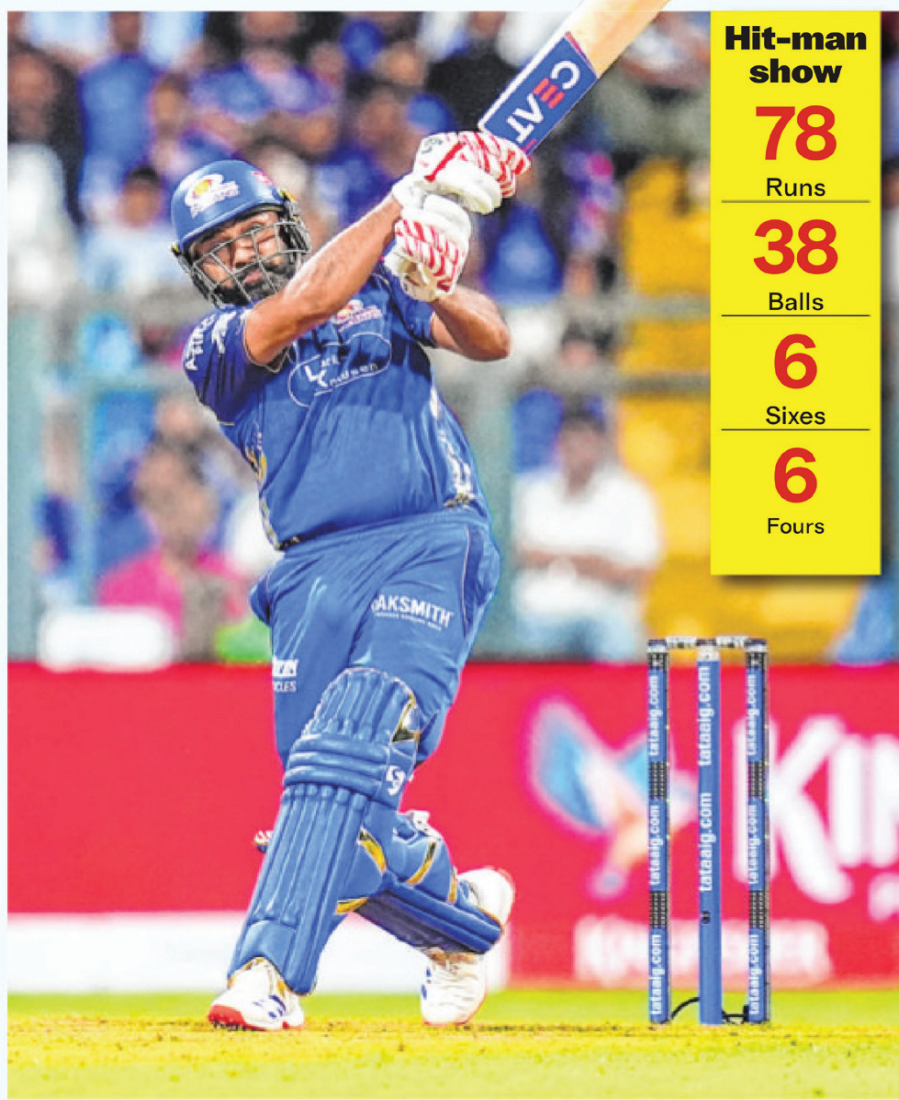
Rahane led from the front with an attacking innings, while Raghuvanshi provided strong support to propel KKR past the 200-run mark.

For Mumbai Indians, Shardul Thakur was the standout bowler, finishing with figures of 3/39. Hardik Pandya picked up one wicket for 39 runs.

KKR made a brisk start despite some early wayward bowling. Trent Boult conceded 10 runs in the opening over, including two wides and a six from Rahane.

Pandya followed with a tight second over, giving away just four runs.

Debutant Allah Ghazanfar was introduced in the third over, and Finn Allen capital-



Mumbai Indians' Rohit Sharma plays a shot against Kolkata Knight Riders at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Sunday. PTI

Hit-man show

78

Runs

38

Balls

6

Sixes

6

Fours

Scoreboard

Kolkata Knight Riders:

A Rahane c Pandya b Thakur 67, F Allen c Varma b Thakur 37, C Green c Rutherford b Thakur 18, A

Raghuvanshi c Varma b Pandya 51, Rinku Singh (not out) 33, Ramandeep Singh (not out) 4 **Extras:** (LB-2, NB-1, W-7) 10 **Total:** 220-4 (In 20 overs)

FoW: 1-69, 2-109, 3-145, 4-205 **Bowling:** Trent Boult 4-0-38-0, Hardik Pandya 3-0-39-1, AM Ghazanfar 4-0-51-0, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-35-0, Shardul Thakur 4-0-39-3, Mayank Markande 1-0-16-0.

Mumbai Indians: Ryan Rickelton run out 81, Rohit Sharma c Roy b Arora 78, S Yadav c Singh b Tyagi 16, T Varma c MK Pandey b Narine 20, H Pandya (not out) 18, N Dheer (not out) 5

Extras: (LB-2, NB 1, W 3) 6 **Total:** 224-4 (in 19.1 overs) **FoW:** 1-148, 2-179, 3-184, 4-215

Bowling: Vaibhav Arora 4-0-52-1, Blessing Muzarabani 3-0-34-0, Varun Chakravarthy 4-0-48-0, Kartik Tyagi 4-0-43-1, Sunil Narine 3-0-30-1 Anukul Roy 1-1-0-15-0.

ised, striking a four and two sixes as 17 runs came off it.

Rahane accelerated in the fourth over, hitting two sixes off Pandya, while Allen added three fours in the same over as KKR raced to their fastest fifty in IPL history, reaching the mark in just four overs.

At 57/0 after four overs, KKR were off to a flying start. Shardul Thakur provided the

breakthrough in the final over of the powerplay, dismissing Allen for 37, with Tilak Varma taking the catch at long-on.

KKR finished the powerplay strongly at 78/1 and looked set for a massive total. Rahane continued his aggressive approach, reaching his fifty off 27 balls.

However, Mumbai Indians pulled things back in the

middle overs. Thakur struck again in the ninth over, removing Cameron Green for 18.

Rahane's innings came to an end in the 14th over when Thakur claimed his third wicket, helping Mumbai Indians curb KKR's scoring rate.

Raghuvanshi, who started rather sedately, came to the

party in the 15th over with a four and a six, with the former coming off a catch grassed by Rohit Sharma at long on.

Thakur's 17th over costed 14 runs as Rinku and Raghuvanshi struck a four and a six respectively to keep the Kolkata Knight Riders run rate ticking at a healthy rate and take them closer to a 200-plus score.

Padikkal unleashes new-age aggression in RCB victory

Left-hander's transformed approach powers Bengaluru with explosive knock against Sunrisers

BENGALURU

Devidutt Padikkal signalled a striking shift in his white-ball approach with a blazing innings that powered Royal Challengers Bengaluru's early charge in IPL 2026.

Padikkal regally whipped pacer Jaydev Unadkat's full delivery on his pads over backward square leg for a six. While the flick has long been one of his bread-and-butter shots, what stood out was the timing of the stroke.

The left-hander has rarely hit a six off the first ball he has faced, preferring to settle before taking on bowlers. Against Sunrisers Hyderabad in the season opener, however, Padikkal shed that restraint and set the tone immediately.

Over the next 10 balls, he struck two more sixes and three fours, racing to 34 off 11 deliveries. His 26-ball 61 encapsulated a transformation in his batting approach that has been evident since 2024.

During this period,



RCB's Devdutt Padikkal plays a shot on Saturday. PTI

I think that boils down to his preparation. He is very clear about it. He approaches the game keeping in mind the different phases of play, whether it is the powerplay, middle overs or the death overs. **Yere Goud**, Karnataka coach

Padikkal has amassed 543 runs at an average of 60.33 in the Ranji Trophy, 725 runs at 90.62 in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, and 309 runs at a strike rate of 167.02 in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

Karnataka coach Yere Goud said the innings did not come as a surprise.

"I think that boils down to

his preparation. He is very clear about it. He approaches the game keeping in mind the different phases of play, whether it is the powerplay, middle overs or the death overs. That is contributing to his consistency," Goud said, adding, that leading Karnataka has added a new dimension to Padikkal's game.

Samson, Jadeja set for big reunion as CSK face RR

MS Dhoni, Dewald Brevis absent as Chennai face Parag-led Rajasthan

GUWAHATI

Sanju Samson is set for an emotional clash against Rajasthan Royals, the side he led and shaped for over a decade, as he turns out for Chennai Super Kings. Ravindra Jadeja will also face his former franchise, adding a poignant sub-plot to the IPL match between the two teams here on Monday.

For more than a decade, Samson was synonymous with Rajasthan Royals as their batting mainstay, leader and all-time leading run-scorer. He guided them to the IPL final in 2022 and remained central to their identity.

Much like MS Dhoni at Chennai Super Kings, Samson defined the Royals' core. However, in a high-profile swap that sent Jadeja back to Rajasthan, the Kerala batter now finds himself in yellow, adding a new dimension to Chennai's evolving setup.

Samson arrives in prime form, having played a decisive role in India's triumphant T20 World Cup campaign. His hat-trick of 50-plus scores in most



Chennai Super Kings batter Sanju Samson. CSK/X

win matches against West Indies, England and New Zealand underlined his stature, and the wicketkeeper-batter is expected to carry that confidence into the IPL.

He is set to open alongside captain Ruturaj Gaikwad, forming a crucial leadership axis in the absence of Dhoni, who is sidelined for at least two weeks due to a calf strain.

Dhoni has not travelled with the side to Guwahati, placing greater responsibility on Samson and Gaikwad to deliver under pressure.

Brevis out of few games

CSK have been dealt a second telling blow in the form of Dewald Brevis' side strain which will keep him out for the first few games, head coach Stephen Fleming confirmed here on Sunday.

For Rajasthan Royals, Samson's departure signals the end of one era and the beginning of another under Riyan Parag, who will begin his captaincy stint at his home ground. The return of Jadeja adds experience and balance to the side.

Squads

RR: Riyan Parag (captain), Dhruv Jurel, Donovan Ferreira, Lhuan-Dre Pretorius, Ravi Singh, Aman Perala, Shimron Hetmyer, Shubham Dube, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Ravindra Jadeja, Sam Curran, Adam Milne, Brijesh Sharma, Jofra Archer, Kuldeep Sen, Kwena Maphaka, Nandre Burger, Ravi Bishnoi, Sandeep Sharma.

CSK: Sanju Samson, Dewald Brevis, Shivam Dube, Ruturaj Gaikwad (captain), Ayush Mhatre, Matt Henry, Akeal Hosein, Noor Ahmad, Jamie Overton, Matthew Short, Khaleel Ahmed, Zak Foulkes, Anshul Khambhoj, Nathan Ellis, Sarfaraz Khan, Rahul Chahar, Kartik Sharma, Urvil Patel, Aman Khan, Ramakrishna Ghosh, Prashant Veer, Shreyas Gopal, Gurjapneet Singh, Mukesh Choudhary.

showman

Kohli walks the talk with relentless energy: Ashwin

BENGALURU

All praise for Virat Kohli, former off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin said the Indian stalwart continues to "walk the talk" with unmatched energy and intensity despite having retired from Test and T20I formats.

Returning to T20 cricket for the first time since last year's IPL final on June 3, Kohli showed no signs of rust. He smashed his 28th

IPL half-century, scoring an unbeaten 69 off 38 balls, to power defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a commanding six-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad in the 2026 season opener. "He walks the talk," Ashwin said on a JioHotstar show.

"It's almost like he's putting on a show for people to see how the game should be played, play it hard and play it the way it's meant to be played. That stood out for me with respect to what Virat

did." Kohli was already in sublime touch heading into the IPL. He had scored 93, 23 and 124 in the ODI series against New Zealand in January, finishing as India's leading run-getter in the series.

The 37-year-old had also topped the charts in the preceding series against South Africa in December, amassing 302 runs, including two centuries, underlining his consistency across formats despite stepping away from two of them.

Ashwin cited Kohli's running between the wickets as a prime example of his extraordinary energy levels, even at this stage of his career.

"I find him quite bizarre at this age. I tell him this during our chats now and then. He was batting on 40-odd, there was a partnership going on, and RCB were coasting.

"He ran through for the first single, stopped there, and the other batter hadn't even reached halfway, but he was already looking for a second. That was a 57-metre

boundary on the leg side, and it shows the enthusiasm he still brings to the game," Ashwin added.

The former India off-spinner, now a commentator, also highlighted the performance of Jacob Duffy, who bounced back strongly after a disappointing T20 World Cup.

"He has bowled a lot in New Zealand and knows exactly what he is doing. What really stood out is that he can swing the ball both ways."



RCB batter Virat Kohli at Chinnaswamy Stadium on Saturday ahead of the IPL opener against SRH. PTI

RCB not focused on title defence, says Patidar

Bengaluru captain emphasises fresh approach after strong start

BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bengaluru captain Rajat Patidar said the team has moved past the euphoria of winning the IPL last season and is focused on executing plans afresh to secure another title.

RCB began their IPL 2026 campaign in emphatic fashion, defeating Sunrisers Hyderabad by six wickets here on Saturday. However, Patidar said the team is not treating the season as a title defence.

"We are not here with the mindset that we have to defend anything. What we did in 2025 has passed. We are here with the mindset that in 2026 we have to tick all the boxes and that will help us win the trophy this year," Patidar said in the post-match press conference.

RCB's win was built on strong performances from Virat Kohli, Devdutt Padikkal and Jacob Duffy, each playing a key role in the chase and with the ball. Patidar reserved special praise for Kohli, describing him as one of the best in chases.

"Virat Kohli is a number one chase master. I have always admired his batting, and to watch him from the dugout, the way he played his shots and assessed the situation, was really good to see."

"I feel he is at his peak. I have no words to describe his innings. He is my idol, and the way I saw him in the nets, the same energy and eagerness to perform and dominate the game, I am learning a lot by watching him," he added.

The skipper also com-



We are not here with the mindset that we have to defend anything. What we did in 2025 has passed.

Rajat Patidar
RCB captain

mended New Zealand pacer Jacob Duffy, who claimed three wickets to dismantle SRH's top order.

"Jacob Duffy is a specialist T20 bowler and we have a lot of confidence in him. The way he executed his skills was tremendous," Patidar said.

The match began on a sombre note, with players and spectators observing a minute's silence in memory of the 11 fans who lost their lives in a stampede near the stadium last year.

"Of course, you feel bad when you miss a family member. I say family member because everyone who has supported us over the years is like family to us. We miss them and I do not have words to express it," he said on the tragedy.