

AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

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MORNING EDITION PRAYAGRAJ

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

Briefs

GNEVA

₹2cr swindled from India mission

The CBI has launched a probe into the swindling of more than 2 lakh Swiss francs (around Rs 2 crore) at India's Permanent Mission in Geneva by a former accounts officer posted there, who allegedly siphoned the amount to bankroll his crypto-gambling ventures, officials said.

LUCKNOW

Bengali drama contest starts

The 59th Prakash Chandra Ghosh Memorial All India Full-Length Bengali Drama Competition began at the Bengali Club and Youngmen's Association in Lucknow on December 20 and will continue till January 8, 2026. Organisers said the event is India's only full-length Bengali language drama competition. Sixteen theatre troupes from leading groups based in Delhi, Ahmedabad and West Bengal are taking part in the festival.

BHUBANESWAR

Minor 'raped,' two arrested

A 17-year-old girl was allegedly raped at a rented house in Odisha's Bhubaneswar, police said on Sunday. "The girl was subjected to sexual assault without her consent by two persons in the rented place," police said.

JAIPUR

Row over Save Aravalli campaign

Political rhetoric has started in Rajasthan over "Save Aravalli" campaign. BJP leader Rajendra Rathore alleged that Ashok Gehlot is trying to create confusion in the name of saving the Aravalli range, while reality is that the decisions taken by the Congress government led by Ashok Gehlot in 2002 regarding the Aravalli range are the reason for the current situation. "The definition of 100 metres for the Aravalli range was established by the government led by Ashok Gehlot in 2002," claimed Rathore.

CHANDIGARH

Sikhs object opposition to 'nagar kirtan'

Expressing concern over the opposition by some local residents to a religious 'nagar kirtan' organised by Sikhs in New Zealand, Shriomani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), which is known as mini parliament of Sikhs, on Sunday urged New Zealand and India governments to take serious note of the matter and ensure a safe and supportive environment for Sikh community there.

ROW INTENSIFIES | While govt calls scheme a decisive reform in rural employment, Cong plans nationwide stir against it

President nod makes VB-G RAM-G official

NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday gave her assent to the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, which replaces the MGNREGA and has a provision for 125 days of wage employment for rural workers.

With the presidential assent, it now becomes the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025, and a notification in this regard was published in the Gazette of India. The Rural Development Ministry, in a statement, called it a decisive reform in India's rural employment and development framework.

According to the government, the VB-G RAM G scheme, which has replaced Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, aims to establish a rural development framework aligned with the national vision of 'Viksit Bharat 2047'.

Besides providing for 125 days of wage employment, the Act also facilitates adequate availability of agricultural labour during peak sowing and harvesting seasons by empowering states to notify a pause period aggregating to sixty days in a financial year, the Ministry said.



Congress workers holding posters of Mahatma Gandhi stage a protest to oppose the central government's decision to repeal MGNREGA Act at Rajiv Bhawan, in Guwahati on Sunday

It stressed that the Act seeks to transform rural employment from a standalone welfare intervention into an integrated instrument of development.

The Bill was passed in Parliament last week amid protests by the Opposition.

The Congress, which continued its protests in various parts of the country against the new scheme on Sunday, accused the Narendra Modi government of "desecrating the groundbreaking law" MGNREGA in Parliament and said that two decades of progress have been overturned "without consultation" and by sidestepping all Parliamentary conventions.

Dismissing criticism of the Bill, Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh

Chouhan on Sunday alleged that misinformation is being spread about the new scheme, which he described as a step ahead of MGNREGA.

In a video posted on X, the minister said that over Rs 1,51,282 crore will be allocated for the VB-G RAM G scheme to ensure adequate funds for rural employment.

"There is a conspiracy to misguide the country, and false information is being spread, while the truth is that the VB-G RAM G scheme is a step ahead of MGNREGA," Chouhan said.

The ministry said the Act replaces MGNREGA with a modern statutory framework that enhances livelihood security and is aligned with the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

'Second killing of Mahatma'

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Sunday said the removal of Mahatma Gandhi's name from the MGNREGA is the "second killing of Mahatma Gandhi".

The Congress will continue to protest till the previous rural employment guarantee scheme is restored, he said.

"The party will expose this fraud by going from house by house, village by village, and our struggle will continue until this Act is repealed," he said.

Congress leader KC Venugopal in a post on X on Sunday said MGNREGA has been reduced from a legal right to a "favour".

Venugopal stressed that MGNREGA was never meant to be a welfare handout. "MGNREGA was a legal right to work, not a welfare handout," he said, alleging the BJP has weakened the scheme by restricting funds and centralising decision-making.

"In protest, the Congress party is holding nationwide protests in all district headquarters across the country, standing with workers whose livelihoods and dignity are under attack," he said, adding the issue would be discussed at Congress Working Committee meeting scheduled for December 27.

Centre seeks report on death of elephants on rly tracks in Assam

GOSABA

Union Minister Bhupender Yadav on Sunday said the Centre has sought a report on the death of elephants in a collision between a train and a herd of tuskiers in Assam's Hojai district a day ago.

Speaking to reporters after a meeting on Project Elephant and the National Tiger Conservation Authority in the Sundarbans of West Bengal, Yadav also asserted that "no relaxation has been granted" with regard to the protection of the Aravalli region.

"In the total area of 1.44 lakh square kilometres of the Aravalli, mining eligibility can only be in 0.19 per cent of the area. The rest of the entire Aravalli is preserved and protected," Yadav, the environment, forest and climate change minister, said.

The minister said the Centre would implement the Supreme Court guidelines with immediate effect.

The Supreme Court, on November 20, 2025, accepted the recommendations of a committee under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change



Restoration work is underway after seven elephants were killed when Sairang-New Delhi Rajdhani Express hit a herd in the Jamunamukh-Kampur section under Lumding Division of N.F. Railway, in Hojai on Saturday

on the definition of Aravalli Hills and Ranges.

According to the new definition, "Aravalli Hill is any landform in designated Aravalli districts with an elevation of 100 metres or more above its local relief" and an "Aravalli Range is a collection of two or more such hills within 500 metres of each other".

Speaking on the death of elephants on railway tracks, Yadav said all states have been asked to monitor elephant movement along the railway lines.

"The railway authorities have been directed to coordi-

nate with the forest departments of states on elephant movement along the tracks. A report on elephant deaths in Assam has been sought," the minister said.

He said coordination between train drivers and forest officials is essential.

Seven elephants were killed after a herd of jumbos was hit by the Sairang-New Delhi Rajdhani Express in Assam's Jorhat district early on Saturday. Five coaches and the train's engine also derailed. One elephant calf succumbed to its injuries on Sunday, taking the toll to eight.

Cong plans campaign to revive party in Bihar

PAINA

Congress will launch a comprehensive campaign to revive the party in Bihar by strengthening its organisation at the grassroots level after its dismal performance in the recently-concluded assembly election.

After the inauspicious period of Kharman ends on January 14, Congress will launch the campaign to empower the party's organisation down to the panchayat level, identify organisational weaknesses, and infuse new energy into the party workers. As part of the party's initiative for revival, senior and experienced Congress leaders will camp in various districts and review party activities from the district to the panchayat level. A concrete action plan for the future will be prepared based on its findings.

Congress sources said that the campaign would be conducted in a phased manner

across the state. In each district, a team of senior leaders will stay for a few days to assess the organisational situation at the district, block and panchayat levels. During this time, a detailed review will be conducted of the party's activities, booth-level strength, progress of the membership drive, and the reasons for the electoral defeat. Senior party leaders will hold discussions with local leaders and workers directly during the district camps. Workers will be encouraged to express their problems openly, give suggestions, and list out local issues so that shortcomings can be addressed.

Manjhi demands Rajya Sabha seat

Union Minister Jitan Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) patron Jitan Ram Manjhi on Sunday created a flutter in political circles when he demanded a Rajya Sabha seat in the upcoming elections to the upper house of the parliament.

Zero tolerance: Def Min after Lt Col held on bribery charge

NEW DELHI

Amid the arrests of an Army officer and a middleman in an alleged bribery case, the Defence Ministry on Sunday said punitive action has been taken against them under the Government's policy of "Zero Tolerance Against Corruption".

A senior Defence Ministry official said, "The present action has been taken under the Government of India's stated policy of 'Zero Tolerance Against Corruption'."

On Saturday, the CBI arrested Lieutenant Colonel Deepak Kumar Sharma, who was serving as Deputy Planning Officer in the Department of Defence Production under the Ministry of Defence, and Vinod Kumar, a private individual, in connection with an alleged bribery and criminal conspiracy case linked to defence-related clearances and favours.

Kurmis emerge as game changers on 128 UP seats, BJP's caste push reshapes politics

LUCKNOW

Kurmi voters have once again moved to the centre of Uttar Pradesh politics, with the BJP's decision to appoint Maharajganj MP Pankaj Chaudhary as state president sharpening the battle for control over one of the state's most influential OBC blocs. The move is being seen as a direct attempt to consolidate Kurmi votes across 128 Assembly constituencies where the community plays a decisive or influential role.

Estimated to form around 7.4% of the state's population,



the Kurmi and Patel community is believed to number between 1.75 crore and 2 crore in UP. Their electoral influence stretches across Purvanchal, Awadh, central Uttar Pradesh and Bundelkhand. Of the 128 constituencies where Kurmi voters matter, they are considered decisive in nearly 50 seats.

The BJP already holds a

numerical edge among Kurmi legislators, with 27 MLAs from the community compared to 12 from Samajwadi Party (SP) and one from Congress. In Parliament, however, the picture is more competitive. Of the 11 Kurmi MPs from Uttar Pradesh, seven belong to the SP, three to BJP and one to Apna Dal(S) chief Anupriya Patel. It is this balance that BJP now appears keen to alter.

The immediate political impact of the BJP's Kurmi card is expected to be felt by Apna Dal (S), a party whose entire political identity is built around the Kurmi and Patel community. Despite being a

long-standing NDA ally since 2014, Apna Dal (S) has often asserted itself within the alliance. With a senior Kurmi leader now heading the BJP's state unit, political observers believe Anupriya Patel's leverage in seat-sharing talks could weaken.

The SP, which used the Kurmi factor effectively in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls under its PDA plank, also has reason to be cautious. However, with Pankaj Chaudhary at the helm of the BJP's state organisation, the party is expected to aggressively court non-Yadav OBC voters, with Kurmis at the top of the list.

With startups and education, India aims to cross the 'final frontier'

NEW DELHI

In a bid to bolster the space technology ecosystem, India's space sector promoter INSPACe has floated a proposal to set up 'Antariksh Prayogshala' at seven institutes across the country.

The 'Antariksh Prayogshala' is billed as a first-of-its-kind initiative aimed at creating state-of-the-art space laboratories within Indian academic institutions to provide hands-on training and exposure to students pursuing space tech courses.

The Indian National Space

Promotion and Authorisation Centre (INSPACe) has rolled out a Request for Proposal (RfP) to establish Antariksh Prayogshala (space labs) at select academic institutions across India.

Several higher education institutions have started offering space technology courses and such space labs will allow students to receive practical training and help provide talent for the private space sector taking root in the country.

This initiative is intended to enable meaningful industry-academia collaboration, and support India's long-term vision of becoming a leading

global space economy, said Vinod Kumar, Director, Promotion Directorate, INSPACe. Under the scheme, up to seven academic institutions will be selected in a phased manner from seven different zones across the country. INSPACe will provide financial support of up to 75 per cent of the total project cost, with a cap of Rs 5 crore per institution, to be released on a milestone-linked basis.

MISSILE MONITORING

Meanwhile, Indian startup Digantara, which specialises in monitoring space debris, has ventured into the domain of

tracking missiles using satellites, citing greater interest from governments across the world for such information.

Space debris and traffic monitoring has emerged as a key segment of the global space economy as companies launch more satellites in low Earth orbit.

"We were tracking fast-moving space objects. So, with that experience and lessons that we learnt there, we will use the same architecture to work on missile tracking and detection from space," Anirudh Sharma, co-founder and CEO of Digantara Industries, told media.

Adivasi family carries their deceased infant in veg bag

RANCHI

In a shocking revelation, an Adivasi family was forced to carry home their deceased four-month-old in a vegetable bag due to the unavailability of an ambulance in Jharkhand's West Champaran district. After the death of the infant at Sadar Hospital on December 19, infant's father, Dimba Chatomba and his wife Roybari Chatomba of Bala Barijori village near Chaibasa carried the body home in a vegetable bag as there was no

mortuary van available, exposing the chinks in the state's health infrastructure. Chatomba claimed that the hospital staff told him that he could not be allowed to carry body openly on a bus. The hospital staff then allegedly pooled Rs 400 to buy a vegetable bag for keeping the body in it and also the bus tickets for the infant's parents. Their home is 80 km away from the hospital. Civil Surgeon, Chaibasa, Bharti Minz, however, claimed that the hospital's mortuary van was not immediately available at the hospital. She said that parents concerned were asked to wait for the vehicle but instead they took the infant's body in a bag. She said that since the infant's condition was not good, he was also

referred to MGM Medical College Hospital (MGMMC:H) Jamshedpur, but the father insisted on keeping his son at the Sadar Hospital itself. Jharkhand health Minister Irfan Ansari announced that the government would procure four mortuary vehicles for every district hospital at a cost of Rs 15 crore to "ensure families do not face indignity during emergencies". He said that it was found during an inquiry that the family left on their own "without waiting for the ambulance", and that two mortuary vehicles were available at the time — "one of which was non-functional due to technical reasons, while the other was en route".

Kodaikanal observatory helps solve Sun mystery

CHENNAI

Daily solar observations gathered for years at the century-old Kodaikanal Solar Observatory have led to a breakthrough understanding of how the Sun's magnetic activity varies across its latitudes — a discovery that could deepen insights into the solar dynamo, impact space-weather forecasting, and even help climate models.

The study, led by researchers from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), an autonomous body under

the Department of Science and Technology (DST), analysed 11 years (2015-2025) of spectroscopic data captured in the calcium-K line of sunlight — a spectral signature that forms high in the Sun's chromosphere and serves as a sensitive marker of magnetic activity.

The Kodaikanal Solar Observatory, which recently celebrated 125 years of continuous observation, maintains one of the world's longest solar datasets, said Apoorva Srinivasa, one of the authors of the study, to PTT.

According to him, the



research team used this rich archive to track how the Sun's magnetic intensity changes across latitudes — revealing consistent zones of heightened activity that correspond with the Sun's well-known 11-year cycle of sunspot peaks.

"The Sun is not a static ball of fire, but a magnetically active star that follows large-

scale cycles of activity," said KP Raju, lead author of the study.

"By slicing the Sun into latitude bands and analysing integrated light from each, we can reveal patterns invisible when studying isolated features like sunspots," added the former professor at IIA.

The team found that most magnetic activity clusters between 40 degrees north and south latitude, with pronounced peaks around 15 degrees to 20 degrees, matching zones where sunspots are most frequent.

"These spectral variations directly mirror how the Sun's

magnetic field evolves," said co-author K Nagaraju.

"We verified this correlation using data from NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory," added the associate professor at IIA, whose focus area of research is solar magnetism.

They also observed hemispheric asymmetries — with the southern hemisphere generally showing stronger or faster variations in activity — providing new hints about how the internal magnetic field reorganises itself over each solar cycle.

The findings were published in the journal, 'Monthly

Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society' and represent a step toward refining solar dynamo models, which explain how magnetic energy is generated and cycles through the Sun's surface layers.

Srinivasa, who was interning at IIA when he began to study the datasets, and who is currently a PhD scholar at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham in Coimbatore, said the work on Kodaikanal data opened up several new research paths — including the possible use of machine learning in solar studies.



Allegations of misbehavior with women at Mundera Mandi, BKU stages protest



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. The atmosphere at the Mundera Agricultural Produce Market Committee became tense following complaints of misbehavior and harassment of women by intoxicated men at night. Calling these allegations a direct attack on women's dignity, the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) launched an indefinite protest at the mandi office. At the protest site, BKU

workers made it clear that no official would be allowed to sit in the office until strict action was taken against the Mandi Secretary and the culprits. During the protest, farmer leaders said that the insult to women's power would not be tolerated under any circumstances. Referring to women as the embodiment of maternal power and the mother of the universe, they demanded strict action against the culprits. Later, the protest was called

off after positive and reassuring talks with the Mundera Mandi Secretary. The farmers' union stated that the officials had assured them of resolving the complaints and preventing such incidents in the future. However, BKU leaders warned that if any kind of anti-farmer or insensitive behavior contrary to the assurances given during the talks is observed in the future, the organization will be forced to launch a larger and decisive movement.

Sanitation Workers Protest Over Non-Payment of Wages at Magh Mela, Work Halted in Several Sectors

Sanitation drive continued throughout the day in Sector-7 Arail under the leadership of Dharmendra Yadav



Prayagraj. The anger of sanitation workers over the non-payment of wages and outstanding dues by the contractor at the Magh Mela 2026 erupted on Friday. The angry sanitation workers stopped work in several sectors of the fairground, disrupting services for some time. The workers allege that despite repeated assurances, they are not being paid on time, which is exacerbating their financial difficulties. Considering the seriousness of the situation,

the fair administration and concerned officials tried to pacify the sanitation workers. During the talks, the officials assured them of prompt payment, after which efforts continued to bring the situation under control. Meanwhile, in Arail Sector-7, due to the efficient leadership and vigilance of Inspector Dharmendra Yadav, a strike-like situation was prevented.

Through his effective coordination, the sanitation workers remained

engaged in their work throughout the day, and the sanitation system in the area remained smooth. The administration says that efforts are being made to find a quick solution regarding the outstanding payments. Foreman Raju Kumar says that the fair authority makes payments every 10 days. Some sanitation workers in other sectors have outstanding payments from the Mahakumbh, which the fair authority will also pay soon.

Western Disturbance active, rain expected in the state from January 22

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Lucknow/Prayagraj

The weather in the state is set to change once again. A slight drop in minimum temperature may be recorded in the next 48 hours, but after that, due to the influence of two consecutive Western Disturbances, rainfall is likely to begin in Uttar Pradesh from late night on January 22. According to the Meteorological Department, after the passage of the Western Disturbance, a change in wind direction and clear skies led to a drop in minimum temperature in western and central Uttar Pradesh last night. This situation may continue for the next 24 hours. Meanwhile, in eastern Uttar Pradesh, despite a gradual drop in temperature over the next 48 hours, the minimum temperature is expected to remain around or above normal. The reduction in fog will provide some relief from the cold for the time being.

Major accident averted at Prayagraj Junction, RPF's vigilance saves lives of passenger and child

Prayagraj. A major accident was averted at Prayagraj railway station on Tuesday due to the vigilance and swift action of the Railway Protection Force (RPF). RPF personnel present on the platform saved the lives of a passenger and a child who was with him. It was reported that a passenger lost his balance while a train was arriving at the platform, putting him and the child in a dangerous situation. Sensing the danger, the RPF personnel stationed at the spot immediately launched a rescue operation without wasting any time and safely rescued both of them. This swift action by the RPF prevented a stampede-like situation on the platform. After the incident, the passenger and other people present breathed a sigh of relief and appreciated the promptness of the security forces. Railway officials also praised the presence of mind and courageous actions of the RPF personnel, saying that their vigilance prevented a major accident.

Govt. must immediately apologize to the saint community: Ajay Rai

Congress state president reaches Magh Mela to meet Shankaracharya, extends support to the protest Administration's stance: The convoy was stopped due to crowd management and security reasons, the situation is under control

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj: Politics has heated up over the alleged misbehavior with Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya. Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee State President Ajay Rai reached Shankaracharya's ashram in Sector No. 4 of the Magh Mela area and extended his support to his protest. During this time, he demanded that the government immediately apologize to the entire saint community and the Sanatan Dharma community. It is reported that on the day of Mauni Amavasya, the police stopped Shankaracharya's con-



voy from proceeding towards the Sangam. During this time, a heated argument and scuffle broke out between the disciples, supporters, and the police

leading the convoy, causing tension in the fair area. The police pushed back the supporters to control the crowd, which led to protests from the saint

community. Upon receiving information about the protest, Congress State President Ajay Rai, Kaushambi Congress District President Gaurav

Pandey, Prayagraj City President, Gangapar and Yamunapar Presidents, and NSUI State Vice President Amit Dwivedi Azad, along with a large number of Congress workers, reached the spot. On this occasion, Ajay Rai said that the treatment meted out to the saints is unforgivable. He accused the BJP government of using the Magh Mela for political gain and insulting the saints and sages through a conspiracy.

He also demanded a high-level inquiry into the incident. Administrative officials say that Shankaracharya had requested to go to the Sangam

on foot, but due to the large number of his followers, there was a possibility of a stampede. The convoy was stopped keeping in mind security and crowd management. According to the officials, the situation is now completely under control and necessary steps have been taken to prevent any untoward incident. Former Congress city president Pradeep Anshuman Mishra, along with Harkesh Tripathi, Sachin Pandey, Akram Zaka, Asad Ahmed, Mohammad Mizaj, Vivekananda Pathak, Jitendra Tiwari, Akshay Yadav, Sonu, Monu Yadav, and hundreds of other Congress workers were present at the protest site.

Audience enthralled by devotional songs at the 'Chalo Re Man Ganga Yamuna Teer' program

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. The program 'Chalo Re Man Ganga Yamuna Teer', held on Tuesday evening, January 20, at the National Cultural Zone Center (NCZCC) on the sacred land of Triveni Sangam, captivated the audience. In the auditorium of the cultural center, renowned devotional singer Surya Prakash Dubey and his accompanying artists presented a series of captivating bhajans, creating a devotional and enthusiastic atmosphere. Surya Prakash Dubey, who came from Mumbai, presented several bhajans on this occasion, including: "Ko Kahin Sakhani Prayag Prabhu Kalush Punj Panjar Mrig Rahu," "Prayag Nagari Base Sangam Ke Teere," "Pavan Teerath



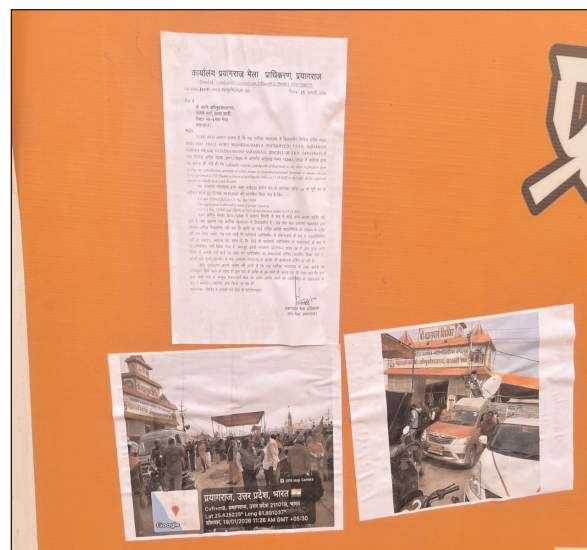
Prayagraj Mein Punya Kamate Hain, Jahan Triveni Sangam Hai Ghum Ke Aate Hain." With the grace of Meera, his accompanying artists also gave a splendid performance, and the entire hall was mesmerized by the thunderous applause. On this occasion, Surya Prakash Dubey also expressed his concern about Prayagraj. He said that some unreliable and social media bloggers are spreading confusion by calling Ardh Kumbh as Kumbh, and Kumbh as Mahakumbh, which

is sending the wrong message to people. He said that people who consider Prayagraj only as a center of commerce are forgetting the importance of Sanatan culture and religion. Surya Prakash Dubey said that he likes to come to Prayagraj repeatedly and the atmosphere here always calls him back. At the end of the program, NCZCC Director Sudesh Sharma honored Surya Prakash Dubey and all the artists, appreciating their hard work and performance.

Dispute over Shankaracharya title escalates Magh Mela Magh Mela administration issues notice to Swami Avimukteshwaranand

Prayagraj. The dispute over the Shankaracharya title of Jyotishpeeth in the Magh Mela area of Prayagraj has now openly reached the administrative and legal levels.

Following a confrontation during the bathing ritual at the Sangam on Mauni Amavasya, the tension between Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati and the Mela administration has been steadily increasing. The situation has become even more serious with the issuance of a notice to Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati by Rishi Raj, the Vice Chairman of the Prayagraj Mela Authority. After the incident on Mauni Amavasya in the Magh Mela area, where his procession



was stopped, Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati has not yet returned to his camp. Meanwhile, the Mela administration has objected to the words "Shankaracharya of Jyotishpeeth" written on the board at his camp. The notice sent by the administration clearly states that the matter regarding the Shankaracharya title

of Jyotishpeeth is currently pending before the Supreme Court. The notice, referring to an appeal filed in 2020, states that until the final decision of the Supreme Court is reached, or it is clarified in whose favor the consecration to the Shankaracharya title is valid, the public use of the word

"Shankaracharya" can be considered contempt of court. On this basis, the Mela administration has directed Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati to present his side within 24 hours and take necessary action. It is noteworthy that this dispute began on Mauni Amavasya when Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati's palanquin was stopped while he was going for a bath at the Sangam. As a result, he could not bathe in the Sangam. Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati alleged that police officers assaulted more than a dozen of his disciples and forcibly removed them from the Sangam banks. He claimed that he was forced to stay where he was left. The

administration, however, has completely rejected these allegations. Divisional Commissioner Soumya Agarwal and Police Commissioner Jogendra Kumar had stated that no devotee or disciple was subjected to any violence. According to the administration, some people were misbehaving with police officers, after which they were removed from the area to maintain law and order. Currently, the matter appears to be escalating following a notice issued by the fair administration. All eyes are now on Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati's response and the further proceedings in the case pending before the Supreme Court.

District Magistrate angered by poor ranking on CM Dashboard

Warning issued to officials Strictness on quality and timelines of construction works Instructions to expedite progress of public welfare schemes

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. A review meeting was held on Tuesday at the Sangam Auditorium under the chairmanship of District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma regarding the Chief Minister's Dashboard and the progress of construction works. During the meeting, the District Magistrate expressed strong displeasure over the district's poor ranking on the CM Dashboard and gave clear instructions to the concerned departmental officers to immediately improve the ranking. The District Magistrate stated that explanations would be sought from the officers of the departments that have B, C, and D categories on the Chief Minister's Dashboard. All officers were also instructed to regularly review their respective departmental schemes and ensure weekly monitoring of pending cases. He emphasized the importance of ensuring that the benefits of the government's public welfare schemes reach all eligible beneficiaries, stating that no negligence in the implementation of schemes and construction works would be tolerated.



All construction works must be completed within the stipulated timeframe and with quality. During the review of construction works, the District Magistrate said that projects that are on schedule should be completed quickly. For schemes requiring time extensions or additional budget, proposals with justifications should be sub-

mitted. Instructions were also given to remove projects that are not feasible from the dashboard. Daily monitoring of departments in categories C and D was also instructed. In the review of development schemes, special emphasis was placed on the PM Suryaghar Yojana. The District Magistrate instructed that 100% progress be ensured against the

target. The PO NEDA was asked to conduct extensive publicity through other departments and vendors and to facilitate as many solar connections as possible with the cooperation of Block Development Officers. The Electricity Department was instructed to resolve pending cases quickly. Expressing displeasure over the poor ranking

of scholarship schemes, the District Magistrate instructed the Minority Welfare, Backward Classes Welfare, and Social Welfare departments to hold meetings with educational institutions to bring about improvements. While reviewing the Pradhan Mantri and Chief Minister Awas Yojana, Block Development

Officers were directed to complete incomplete houses quickly. The District Magistrate, expressing dissatisfaction with the poor progress in the creation of Family IDs and the resulting C ranking, instructed the District Development Officer to launch a campaign to complete the work quickly. The Animal Husbandry Department was also given strict instructions to ensure that no stray cattle are seen on the roads and that all are safely housed in cow shelters. At the end of the meeting, the District Magistrate warned that all schemes must achieve an A ranking next month, failing which strict action would be taken against the concerned officers. Instructions were also given to ensure that there is no negligence in the feeding program. The meeting was attended by Chief Development Officer Harshika Singh, District Development Officer G.P. Kushwaha, Project Officer, District Panchayat Raj Officer Ravishankar Dwivedi, District Economics and Statistics Officer Santosh Kumar, and officers from all concerned departments.

Encroachments removed from Nazul land near Royal Hotel, illegal shops

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. The Prayagraj Development Authority (PDA), with the cooperation of the Municipal Corporation, removed illegal encroachments and demolished all shops built on Nazul land next to the Royal Hotel on Nawab Yusuf Road. This action was taken as part of a special drive conducted on Monday. The PDA had previously issued notices to the



encroachers to remove the illegal shops themselves, but despite the

given deadline, the shopkeepers did not remove the encroachments. Following this, the PDA sought the cooperation of the Municipal Corporation to clear the Nazul land of encroachments. Under the leadership of Additional Municipal Commissioner Arvind Kumar Rai, the anti-encroachment team reached the spot and took action. During the operation, all illegal shops were demolished. The concerned police station was also informed to pre-

vent any further encroachment. The operation was attended by Additional Municipal Commissioner Arvind Kumar Rai, Anti-Encroachment In-charge Colonel Dinesh Tanwar, the Municipal Corporation's anti-encroachment team, local police force, and junior engineers from the Prayagraj Development Authority. The administration has made it clear that no kind of encroachment on Nazul land will be tolerated in the future

District Road Safety Committee Meeting Concludes Ethah

Under the directions of District Magistrate Prem Ranjan Singh, a meeting of the District Road Safety Committee was held at the Collectorate Auditorium, chaired by Additional District Magistrate (Administration) Satyaprakash. During the meeting, a detailed review of various activities and public awareness programs conducted

Administration on High Alert for Republic Day Preparations, Instructions Issued for Grand Celebrations



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj: The administration has intensified preparations for celebrating the national festival of Republic Day on January 26th with great enthusiasm and fanfare in the district. Under the direction of District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma, City Magistrate Vinod Kumar Singh held a meeting with concerned officials at the Sangam Auditorium to review the programs and issued necessary guidelines. The City Magistrate said that Republic Day celebrations should be properly organized in all government offices and establishments in the district, and all preparations should be completed on time. He instructed the District Basic Education Officer and the District School Inspector to organize special programs in schools to educate students about the history and significance of Republic Day. He directed the

Additional Municipal Commissioner, District Panchayat Raj Officer, and the Executive Officers of Municipalities and Nagar Panchayats to ensure proper cleanliness arrangements at places where statues of freedom fighters and great personalities are installed, and to arrange for garlanding of the statues. The City Magistrate also instructed that cleanliness arrangements be maintained at all Tehsil and Block headquarters. He also asked the Sub-Divisional Magistrates and Block Development Officers to organize various cultural and patriotic programs in their respective areas on the occasion of Republic Day. The meeting was attended by the Additional Municipal Commissioner, District School Inspector, District Basic Education Officer, and representatives from the District Crime Prevention Committee, Civil Defence, and other organizations.

Crowd of complainants gathers at public hearing, Municipal Commissioner directs prompt resolution of grievances

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. During the public hearing held at the Municipal Corporation office on Tuesday, Municipal Commissioner IAS Seelam Sai Teja listened to the problems of the citizens. A large number of complainants arrived at the public hearing and registered complaints related to encroachment, property transfer, correction in birth certificates, drain and road repair, sewer and drinking water issues. The Municipal Commissioner listened to the complainants' problems seriously and directed the concerned departmental officers to resolve them promptly. He clarified that immediate action should be ensured on complaints related to drinking water supply, cleaning of drains, and clogged drains. During the public hearing, the corporators also presented the problems of



their respective wards to the Municipal Commissioner. Following this, a meeting was held with all the corporators of the zonal office to seek suggestions regarding platforms, drinking water facilities, toilets-urinals, shed construction, and other public amenities at various places in the city. A proposal

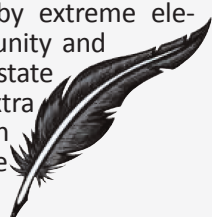
was also put forward in the meeting to arrange a QRT (Quick Response Team) in the VIP area so that problems like cleanliness, street lighting, debris removal, and encroachment can be resolved quickly. On this occasion, Additional Municipal Commissioner Arvind Kumar

Rai, Chief Tax Officer PK Dwivedi, General Manager Gaurav Kumar, City Management Officer, Chief Engineer (Civil and Electrical), Executive Engineer (Electrical), Animal Welfare Department, Water Works Department, and all zonal officers were present.

Editorial

Punjab govt must take Centre into confidence on new anti-sacrilege bill

The Aam Aadmi Party-led Punjab government has tabled the Punjab Prevention of Offences Against Holy Scripture(s) Bill, 2025 which was discussed in the Assembly on Tuesday amidst ruckus and then referred to a select committee. It might take about six months for the committee to send the bill back to the Assembly for clearing and then to the governor for approval. If the bill is referred to the Union government, then it would be another year before it finally becomes an Act. Earlier governments — the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coalition government and the Congress government headed by Captain Amarinder Singh — had also brought similar bills which were found to be insufficient to meet the demands of the situation and hence junked. The new anti-sacrilege bill is said to have taken note of the shortcomings of the earlier bills and is hence more comprehensive, secular, and sufficiently stringent to be a deterrence for sacrilege offences considered very serious in the state. Meanwhile, 42-year-old Gurjeet Singh Khalsa, supposedly a non-political activist, has been staging a protest on top of a BSNL mobile tower in Punjab's Samana since October 2024 demanding an anti-sacrilege law. Though not widely reported in the mainstream media, such protests should be handled deftly by the government, lest it rakes up discontents of the past. In fact, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), under Sections 298, 299, and 300, already provides stringent punishments for religious offences. Punjab government as well as the activists who are protesting for a new law against sacrilege of religious texts are of the view that the provisions of the current Union laws are not stringent enough. Incidentally, the bill inadvertently equates the Bhagavad Gita with the holy books of other faiths, which may trigger a controversy. The bill could be amended to also include other religious texts considered holy by a vast majority of Hindus and/or be worded appropriately to capture the essence of all holy books of all faiths without naming any of them. Needless to say, the issue is a complex one. Going by the text of the present bill, albeit a short one, there are sufficient indications to suggest that adequate care has been taken to make the acts of sacrilege a serious offence inviting harsh punishments. But it is not clear why these provisions could not be added to the existing Sections of the BNS. After all, the BNS is an all-India law that applies equally to all states and all faiths. The AAP-led Punjab government appears to have not consulted the Union government or had any discussions with the Union Law Ministry on this issue. What should be of concern are the possibilities of other states following suit and enacting separate laws to suit the political environment of respective states citing the Punjab bill as a precedent. In a federal setup, the Constitution allows states to enact sufficient laws to maintain law and order and preserve religious harmony through stringent punishments for offences involving religious practices, texts, icons, and symbols. There have been instances of religious books being vandalised, places of worship desecrated, and statues of widely revered socio-political leaders popular among certain communities damaged. Another aspect of concern should be the misuse of any law, however sincere the intentions of the lawmakers might be. The anti-sacrilege bill may have good intentions, but there is hardly any guarantee that such a law will not become a tool for miscreants wanting to drive a wedge between communities and followers of different faiths in the state. In a politically volatile border state where religious fault lines have been exploited by extreme elements bent on hurting the unity and integrity of the country, the state government needs to be extra vigilant and take the Union government into confidence at every stage.



Critical minerals are the new oil. India can't afford to depend on China

Critical minerals have now become instruments of geopolitical bargaining and means to assert domestic autonomy and security. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Argentina and meeting with Chilean President, Gabriel Boric, the two legs of the lithium triangle, on the sidelines of the recently held BRICS summit in Brazil, were strategically aimed at exploring cooperation and engagement on critical minerals. At the Summit, Modi warned against the weaponization of critical minerals and stressed the need to

work together to make supply chains secure and reliable. Other global leaders have also echoed similar concerns at the G20, Quad, and BRICS summits, and have discussed collaborating to secure and diversify critical mineral supply chains. Currently, India is heavily dependent on imports for critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare earth elements (REE). Much of this supply comes through re-export channels, which creates a third-level dependency while exposing us to potential supply shocks and strategic coercion.

Mineral security is no longer just an economic concern but a national security imperative, underpinning the country's ambitions in clean energy, defence self-reliance, and advanced manufacturing. Globally, China holds roughly 62 per cent of lithium refining capacity, 33 per cent for nickel, 77 per cent for cobalt, 87 per cent for graphite, and 76 per cent for REEs, according to the International Energy Agency's (IEA) Global Critical Minerals Outlook 2025. This underscores China's overwhelming dominance in supply

chains, even though it does not host most raw material reserves. Compared to 2023, India's lithium imports from China surged by roughly 921 per cent in 2024, while graphite imports rose 85 per cent between 2022 and 2024 and Nickel imports jumped 137 per cent in 2024. Such dominance gives Beijing an asymmetric leverage over supply chains vital to clean-tech sectors and key defence applications, including advanced electronics, missile systems, and communication technologies. As a result, securing reliab

India's TRP ecosystem needs a reset. Time to end BARC monopoly



Television advertising revenues have been in freefall, declining from Rs 334 billion to Rs 294 billion in just two years. Twelve per cent of the brands that used TV to reach the masses in 2023 adopted a different distribution medium in 2024. Despite this, the TV industry continues to expand its offerings. DD Free Dish, a state-run distribution platform that requires only a one-time installation fee and no subscription charges, added both consumers and channels last year. The number of Free-to-Air channels on TV that recover costs from advertising is also increasing. Clearly, there is a disconnect between broadcasters' and advertisers' assessment of the true value of India's 160 million-household-strong TV market. At the heart of this mismatch is a measurement gap that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) is now trying to resolve through reforms to TV ratings guidelines. The MIB is in the process of amending the 2014 television ratings guidelines that led to the accreditation of the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) to measure the relative popularity of TV channels. This much-needed proposal aims to end BARC's monopoly and allow additional entities to conduct TV ratings,

which can revitalise TV advertising. Before BARC, TAM (Television Audience Measurement)—a joint media research venture by Kantar and Nielsen—tracked what India watched. But India is a large country, and TAM could only place meters to measure audience preferences in a limited number of households, that too mostly in urban areas. As a solution, broadcasters, advertisers, and media agencies came together in 2010 to form BARC, which was empanelled by the MIB and started operations in 2015. BARC roped in TAM for back-end technological expertise and rejigged sampling methods. When BARC was rolled out, it measured 12,000 out of the 145 million TV households in India.

This was still only 0.008 per cent. Panel sizes have grown over the years to 55,000, but BARC continues to use the same data-collection methods. Watch time is measured in clock minutes through audio-watermarking tech-

nology that detects the channel being viewed. Before watching, each family member in a metered household must press a button to indicate whether they are an adult or a child, and to record their gender. They must press the same button again when they stop viewing. This approach rests on the optimistic assumption that viewers comply every time they switch channels. Meanwhile, the global media landscape has been moving ahead with qualitative, platform-agnostic measurement tools enabled by big data, advanced meter technologies, and more demographically inclusive panels. Advertisers rely on BARC's single measurement currency, Television Rating Point (TRP), which estimates the duration and frequency of viewership. These ratings help them determine which channels attract the most viewers and where to spend their ad budgets. There are no alternative estimates to go by. In con-

trast, financial institutions can access data from seven credit rating agencies to determine the creditworthiness of a borrower. There are a dozen or more agencies that news channels can commission for exit poll surveys of elections. A one-agency, one-currency system also leaves TV audience measurement vulnerable to manipulation. The first complaints of TRP manipulation emerged in 2018, when Hansa Research — the entity that installs meters for audience measurement — filed a police complaint alleging that households were being paid to watch a particular channel. Later, in 2020, the TRP scam implicated broadcasters and former officials at BARC, with allegations of manipulation dating back to 2016, according to an audit report that Mumbai Police received from BARC. The council suspended ratings for three months, but the damage had already been done: advertisers had lost trust in the TRP system, and some broadcasters exited BARC. Other mature media markets have gone through challenges involved in relying on a single entity to track consumer attention across platforms, devices, and demographics, and have therefore transitioned to 'multi-currency models' that allow multi-

ple measurement providers to coexist. Ad-industry bodies in the US, such as the Video Advertising Bureau and the Television Bureau of Advertising, encourage alternative measurement providers. Even in Singapore, where the TV market is smaller than those in India and the US, multiple agencies operate. A ratings monopoly in India has led to a lack of technological variation, resulting in sluggish systems detached from market dynamics. The rationale for MIB's latest move is therefore strong, and if advertisers can choose between multiple measurement providers, they will gain access to sharper audience data and become more confident in their fiscal planning. This policy rejig also makes room for multi-stakeholder collaborations between distributors with last-mile reach and specialist measurement companies. The resulting competition will drive improvements in advertisers' access to quality data.

The ministry should allow the players to freely collaborate, and the best measurement models to emerge in the market. Even as advertising revenue dwindles, TV in India is far from its swan song. This year, 169 million people tuned in to the Indian Premier League final on TV.

India's solar ambition needs financial vision – ISA must move from commitments to execution

As the world confronts the realities of climate change and energy insecurity, solar energy presents itself not merely as a technological solution but as a transformative geopolitical and developmental strategy. The International Solar Alliance is uniquely positioned to catalyse this transformation. But to succeed, it must go beyond declarations. It must now design and implement financial architectures capable of supporting its ambitions. The potential of solar energy is undeniable. It is modular, scalable, and increasingly cost-effective. Yet, for the nations most abundant in sunlight, finance remains a key constraint. The International Energy Agency estimates that clean energy investments in emerging economies must rise from \$770 billion in 2022 to over \$2.2 trillion annually by 2030. A significant portion of this must be allocated to solar energy. However, the fiscal realities of many countries—either still recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic, burdened by debt, or struggling to cope with press-

ing social needs—limit the ability of governments to invest at scale. India's experience illustrates this well. Despite policy successes in solar deployment, the government's ability to directly invest in grid infrastructure or generation assets is capped by fiscal deficit targets and debt ceilings. Even green bonds, while helpful, are bound by ring-fenced rules and are limited in scale. Public financing, therefore, can only act as a catalytic lever—it cannot be the backbone. Turning to the private sector, we find both potential and limitations. Many solar developers operate on highly leveraged balance sheets, and with rising global interest rates, the space for fresh capital is narrowing. Moreover, risks such as currency volatility, regulatory uncertainty, and weak transmission infrastructure dampen investor appetite, especially in frontier markets. Private capital is crucial but requires structured entry points, credible exit mechanisms, and active risk mitigation to be effective.

Trump's sanctions have failed to deter Russia. Now the West faces a dilemma

Last week, Russia once again pulled the nuclear weapon threat out of its sleeves, two days after US President Donald Trump — following his meeting with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte — threatened to impose 100 per cent secondary tariffs on Moscow if it doesn't reach a deal with Kyiv in 50 days. Trump also confirmed that “top-of-the-line” weapons, including the Patriot missile defence system and batteries, would be sent to Ukraine in an operation coordinated by NATO members. Russia's newly updated nuclear doctrine apparently allows Moscow to use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear weapon state that is supported by a nuclear one, unsettling deterrence dynamics in Europe. Though Trump's about-turn on the Russia-Ukraine war might bring some sigh of relief in Kyiv, Moscow's counter-threats echo a Biden-era tit-for-tat escalation when Washington's no-holds-barred support for Ukraine's war efforts was met with Moscow's nuclear threats. The question is: will Trump's threats be enough to affect any change in Russia's behaviour? Or will such threats be counter-productive, embolden Putin's hand, and give him more ammunition to project a Russia reclaiming its lost status of parity with the US and standing up to the combined might of the Western alliance? Sanctions are meant to bite, and not just bark. They are coercive economic tools that the US and its Western allies have often used as a default policy to punish adversaries. However, do they really affect consequential changes in a country's behaviour as expected? In the case of Russia, sanctions have won tactical gains, but have failed to achieve the desired strategic goals. US-led Western sanctions have hit Russia since 2014, when the latter annexed Crimea from Ukraine after the Maidan Square event. Though Russia has seen rising infla-

tion, labour shortage, and devaluation of its currency, the sanctions have had too little impact to make Moscow kowtow. On the contrary, the Central Bank of the Russian Federation has kept the key rate at 21.5 percent per annum, indicating that inflation and economic growth are relatively stable under the current circumstances. The Russian stock exchange market has also continued to grow despite Trump's warnings. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forecasted Russia's growth rate in 2025 at 1.5 per cent while the Russian Economic Development Ministry has kept it at 2.5 per cent. This month, the US Senate tabled additional sanctions on Russia, calling them a 'sledgehammer'.

Sanctions on Russia will also impact countries that trade with Russia in oil, gas, uranium, and other products. Such secondary sanctions on third countries are reportedly proposed to touch 500 per cent. Some US lawmakers are even hinting at the US, together with its European allies, accessing frozen Russian assets, including the \$5 billion located in the US, to dent Russia's warfighting resources and utilise the money in Ukraine's reconstruction. This would be an unprecedented move as no US president has ever taken the central bank assets of a foreign country that the US is not at war with. However, secondary sanctions have not been too successful either, with Russia, through its 'shadow fleet', exporting energy to the other countries, including China, Turkey, UAE, Belarus, and Armenia. Moreover, partner countries of the US such as Turkey, UAE, and Armenia have not participated in sanctions, creating an enforcement gap, helping Russia maintain access to sanctioned goods and continue its economic activities. A report, published by the Kyiv School of Economics.

SBI plans to raise a Rs 45,000 crore in a mix of stock

Delhi : Capital markets are expected to generate Rs 45,000 crore for the biggest lender in the nation, SBI. This week, the largest equity issue of its sort in the Indian market will occur, with Rs 25,000 crore coming through a qualified institutional placement (QIP). The issue would dilute equity by 3.3% at the present market valuation of around Rs 7.4 lakh crore. Following shareholder approval on June 13 and board approval on May 3, the bank started the share sale. In accordance with the SBI Act and its General Regulations, the shares will be issued having a face value of Re 1. Up until now, the



biggest equity fundraising under QIP has been Coal India's 2015 Rs 22,560 crore offering. When fully subscribed, SBI's placement will surpass this. The offer's floor price, determined using Sebi's pricing formula, is Rs 811.05 per share. This amount can be reduced by as much as 5% by the bank. The book-running lead managers will be consulted to decide the ultimate pricing.

The PM SHRI Institute

Delhi: The Government of India is a major backer of SHRI School. Every student should feel welcomed and cared for in more than 14,500 PM SHRI Schools managed by the Central Government, State Government, UT Government, and local bodies like KVS and NVS. These schools should also provide a safe and stimulating learning environment, a variety of learning opportunities, and adequate physical infrastructure and resources that help students learn.

Stricter bad loan policy cuts Axis Bank profit 4%.



Delhi : A steep surge in provisions lowered Axis Bank's net profit to Rs 5,806 crore in the quarter ended June 2025, down 4%. The bank described a one-time accounting adjustment as a "technical impact" or internal recalibration of their poor credit categorization, which increased provisions. This modification affected cash credit, overdraft, and one-time cleared accounts, causing Rs 2,709 crore in slippages. That alone prompted Rs 821 crore in provisions. Without this,

quarter provisions would have been Rs 3,127 crore instead of Rs 3,948 crore. The bank called this hit a "prudential application" of regulatory standards, not a decrease in asset quality. Gross non-performing assets rose 29

basis points quarter-on-quarter to 1.57% after the policy change. Net NPAs rose 12 basis points to 0.45%. A technical recalibration hurt headline profit, while revenue, loan book, and fee income grew more evenly.

RIL makes record profit amid oil decline, sets clean energy outlook

Delhi : India's most valuable company, Reliance Industries Ltd., surpassed predictions to register a strong increase in revenue and profit for the April-June quarter, driven by better telecoms and retail profitability despite crude-based difficulties. Profits from its Asian

Paints disposal also boosted the bottom line. According to an investor presentation, Reliance's new energy business's production plants—which will drive its growth over the next decade—are being commissioned quickly. The new energy business would create solar mod-

ules, generate clean electricity from them, use electrons to run data centres, and make hydrogen, ammonia, and aviation fuel. Reliance did not provide timescales. Reliance Industries' oil-to-chemicals (O2C) business's operating profit fell in the first quarter.

A parliamentary committee on the income tax bill supports the expedited settlement of tax disputes

Delhi : In its 285 recommendations on the proposed legislation to streamline and update tax regulations, a parliamentary committee that reviewed the Income Tax Bill, 2025, Delhi, argued that litigation should have a deadline. On the opening day of Parliament's monsoon session (July 21), the IT Bill was reviewed by a select committee of the Lok Sabha presided over by BJP leader Baijayant Panda. The committee then adopted a report outlining the proposed law. Our team has put out 285 suggestions. Nearly two hundred fifty have been approved by the government. Huge improvements have transpired, as can be seen in the case of



refunds, but we have stated that tax litigations should not drag and that there should be time-bound settlement," a panel member added. The majority of the legislative panel's suggestions on the Income Tax Bill, 2025 were of a "corrective" character, according to one of its mem-

bers. The document's size has been reduced from 850 pages to 600 pages as a result of the simplification efforts. Simplifying the wording and structure of the IT Act 1961 was the goal of the IT Bill, 2025, which was submitted in Parliament.

To simplify TDS refund provisions under Income Tax Bill 2025

Delhi : Even if their income is not taxable, taxpayers must file income tax returns to receive a refund for tax deducted at source. This criterion is apparently being simplified by the government. According to The Hindustan Times, taxpayers may be able to receive TDS refunds without completing ITRs by filling out a simple form. The Select Committee on the Income Tax Bill 2025 advised the administration, according to bill-related officials.

MTNL has failed to repay bank debts totaling 8,585 crore rupees



Delhi: In a regulatory filing, the state-run telecom giant MTNL announced that it has defaulted on loans totaling Rs 8,585 crore from seven public sector banks. The public sector telecom firm's overall debt liabilities reached Rs 34,484 crore as of June 30, 2025, according to the filing.

This included a bank loan of Rs 8,585 crore, a sovereign guarantee bond of Rs 24,071 crore, and a loan of Rs 1,828

crore from the DoT to cover the interest on the Sovereign Guarantee Bond. A sum of 3,733 crore INR, 2,434 crore INR, 1,121 crore INR, 474.7 crore Punjab National Bank, 363.4 crore State Bank of

India, 273.6 crore UCO Bank, and 184.8 crore Punjab & Sind Bank debts, plus principal and interest, make up the total amount of loans that have gone into default.

Tesla sets foot in India with Rs 61 lakh Model Y

Delhi: Tesla is finally here. The electric car giant run by Elon Musk opened its first India showroom in Mumbai's BKC. Musk had set his eyes on India since at least 2015, but high tariffs, limited flexibility, and charging infrastructure challenges, kept Tesla away from the country, which the company had described as a hard market. While bookings opened, deliveries of Model Y SUVs, prices for which start at Rs 61-lakh on-road (500km range), will begin in Oct. A 'long-range' (622km) Model Y variant will be available from Jan 2026 with an on-road price tag of just over Rs 69 lakh. For context, BMW iX1 LWB electric SUV is priced at about Rs 51 lakh on-road, and Mercedes-Benz EQA electric SUV costs just over Rs 70 lakh. Users will have a simple 'plug and charge



SC recognizes firms as criminal victims

Delhi: The Supreme Court ruled that firms can be regarded "victims" under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPc) and can appeal acquittals even if the state does not. This might profoundly change corporate rights in criminal litigation. Asian Paints Ltd. appealed a Rajasthan High Court ruling denying its right to dispute the acquittal of an individual convicted of selling counterfeit paint under its brand name. Justices Ahsanuddin Amanullah and Prashant Kumar Mishra approved the appeal. Whether the appellant is a 'victim' under Section 2(wa) and the provision to Section 372 of the CrPc is a significant legal question. This bench believes the High Court erred in ruling otherwise.

experience' with up to 267km range in superchargers adding 15 minutes.

Sources suggest Japan's SMBC wants RBI clearance for 4.9% more Yes Bank ownership

Delhi : Japan's Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (SMBC) [RIC:RIC:SUM-FGI.UL] has sought approval from the Reserve Bank of India to acquire an additional 4.9% stake in India's Yes Bank (YESB.NS), bringing its total ownership to just under 25%, two sources told Reuters. Yes Bank disclosed in a stock exchange filing that SMBC bought a 20% share in the private lender for \$1.6 billion in May. Receive the latest Indian news and its global impact with the Reuters India File newsletter. Join here. The first source stated the RBI, India's central bank and banking regulator, is reviewing the transaction. Both sources declined to be identified due to transaction confidentiality. The additional pur-



Samsung may make India a US hub amid rising tariffs

Delhi: Samsung may move some smartphone production from Vietnam if US tariffs drop in India. The world's largest smartphone maker would follow Apple in making India a top US smartphone manufacturing base. Samsung manufactures in various countries. Due to heightened US uncertainty, we are ready for several possibilities.

chase's timeline was unknown to Reuters. Answers to Reuters' emails from Yes Bank and the RBI were delayed. On specific

deals, SMBC declined to comment. SMBC is considering a \$1.1 billion investment in Yes Bank for a 5% stake held by the U.S.

An amnesty program for overdue VAT taxes of 85,000 crore

Delhi : Resolving roughly ?85,000 crore in unpaid dues - mostly under the pre-GST Value Added Tax (VAT) regime - from before 2017, the long-awaited tax amnesty scheme is expected to be approved soon by the Delhi Cabinet. Over 300,000 traders from various sectors operating in Delhi will be encouraged to clear their long-pending tax bills through a scheme that is now being discussed at a high level. The scheme would offer large concessions on penalties and interest. The Trade and Taxes Department has presented a comprehensive plan detailing a framework for complete or partial waivers on penalties, interest, or both, according to a top source in the Delhi government's finance department. More than 85,000 crore is owed by over 300,000 merchants collectively. The government hopes to recoup half of this sum through the amnesty program. According to the official, it will increase tax revenue while also reducing the administration's legal load.

500 executive positions to be eliminated at Tata-owned Jaguar Land Rover

Delhi : Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), which is owned by Tata, will be laying off 500 managers in the UK as a result of falling profits and US tariffs. The automaker announced a 15.1% drop in retail sales and a 10.7% drop in wholesale sales for the three months ending June 30, 2025, on July 7. This is mainly due to JLR's stated intentions to halt shipments to the US in April 2025, after the implementation of US import taxes, and the planned retirement of older Jaguar models.

Ananya reveals what she is manifesting in 2026

Actress Ananya Panday sets 2026 fitness goal, shares chin-up challenge on Instagram while inspiring fans with workout updates

Actress Ananya Panday has set some goals for the year 2026. Through her latest social media post, Ananya revealed that in the New Year, she plans to manifest a special fitness goal, doing a chin-up.

The *Kesari: Chapter 2* actress took to the Stories section of her Instagram handle and posted a picture of herself trying a chin-up.

"2026 manifestation is to get a chin up (Crying face and fingers crossed emojis)," the text on her photograph from the gym read.

Ananya loves to stay on top of her fitness game to maintain that picture-perfect physique and also motivates netizens by providing a peek into her workout sessions time and again.

On another note, Ananya recently graced the new episode of the popular reality show *The Great Indian Kapil Show* with her *Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri* co-star Kartik Aaryan.

During the episode, Ananya and Kartik were seen calling out red flags, green flags, and relationship rules of Gen Z.

Further dis-



closed her dad Chunky Panday's masterplan. She explained that the *Housefull* actor believes that turning up together means earning less, so the smarter move is for

each family member to appear individually across *The Great Indian Kapil Show* seasons and keep the money coming.



Photos: X/AP

Angelina Jolie visits Rafah Crossing

Actress tours Gaza aid warehouse, raises concerns over restrictions on medical and humanitarian supplies amid Israel's suspension of operations

Hollywood actor and former special envoy to the United Nations Refugee Agency

Angelina Jolie visited the Rafah Crossing on Friday as part of a humanitarian trip to Egypt, her representatives said, amid Israel's decision to suspend the operations of several aid groups working in the Gaza Strip, according to CNN.

Jolie's visit comes at a time when Israel has announced it will halt the activities of dozens of aid organisations that have not renewed their registration. The new requirements include the submission of personal details of staff members working in Gaza, a move that has raised serious safety concerns among

humanitarian agencies.

In a statement, Jolie said she had spoken with aid agencies struggling to overcome restrictions on delivering assistance

into Gaza. She said she walked through a large warehouse filled with supplies that had been denied entry, most of them medical in nature.

"I spoke to humanitarian agencies who are working hard to do their best to overcome the restrictions and challenges of delivering necessary aid into Gaza. I walked through a large warehouse that was full of items that were denied entry, most of them medical," Jolie said in a statement, as quoted by CNN.



Love. Set. Match

Actor Shrenu Parikh Mhatre opens up about meeting husband Akshay Mhatre, falling in love on set & their journey to marriage

HOW I MET MY PARTNER

Shrenu Parikh Mhatre is currently playing Parvati, the wife of Lord Shiv, in the TV serial *Gatha Shiv Parivar Ki* — *Ganesh Kartikey*. Shrenu is married in real life to Akshay Mhatre. Their marriage is near perfect and seems to be blessed by God.

Q. How did you first meet your husband Akshay Mhatre?

A. We met on the sets of the TV show *Ghar Ek Mandir* in Jaipur. It was during the post-Covid days.

Q. What was your initial reaction when you met him?

A. We were in a professional set-up. He seemed extremely sweet and caring, a co-star. We gradually became friends, and then I fell for him.

Q. Who played Cupid?

A. I think time played Cupid in our case. There was also a lot of help from many of the actors on the set — mostly from Archana Mittal, who played my mom-in-law in the show, and from Ankit, who played the villain.

Q. What proved to be the ice-breaker between the two of you?

A. The ice-breaker was one Scrabble game we played post pack-up. We all lived together in Zee Studios, and Akshay loves board games, so we played Scrabble when we packed up early for once.

Q. Which qualities of his were you attracted to?

A. His simplicity and his calm demeanour. He was liked by everyone on set, and that attracted me the most. I learned this quality from him — that respect is a two-way street; if you give love and respect to everyone, you receive it too.

Q. Who took the initiative to get to know each other better?

A. Akshay is very shy, and his way of ex-

pressing is different, so I had to take the initiative.

Q. Who fixed the first date? And where did you guys go?

A. He fixed our first date. We lied to everyone on set and went to Shikhar Baug, a lovely place in Jaipur! He then planned a trip to Pushkar as his gift to me.

Q. Is he a gift person?

A. He is! I am not. He loves to surprise me in several ways — be it flowers, my favourite objects, or our favourite food delicacies.

Q. Who said 'I love you' first?

A. I!

Q. How long did you date each other before you both decided to marry?

A. One and a half years. But we started dating knowing that we were looking for marriage.

Q. Who proposed marriage?

A. He did. One day, in our early days, he just randomly said, "I can't wait to be married to you." I wasn't even thinking about marriage then.

Q. Was there any kind of opposition when you both decided to marry?

A. Nope, none, as both the families met each other and they loved us respectively.

Q. How has your relationship changed from being girlfriend-boyfriend to being husband and wife?

A. Oh, a lot. When we were dating, there were fewer responsibilities, fewer expectations, fewer dreams. Now, we have grown up in our relationship.

Q. Any lifestyle changes after marriage?

A. Yes. Both of us have become much more home-ground now! We like to stay at home and eat home-cooked food. He loves to try new dishes, and so do I! We occasionally cook for each other.

Q. Who apologises after a fight first?

A. He does — both before marriage and even now! He cannot stay upset or let me be upset for long; he has to sort out the fight.

Q. Do you believe one must not sleep over a fight?

A. Yes! Both of us do! We try to resolve our fight and then retire to bed.

Q. Do you'll take career advice from each other?

A. Yes, both of us take each other's advice very seriously.

Q. Who is more possessive?

A. I am.

Q. Who is more short-tempered?

A. I am.

Q. Who is a cleanliness freak?

A. He is.

Q. What is your definition of love?

A. Love, for me, is standing by that person who's not perfect but is still your lifeline, and you cannot do without him.



Ishaan flies to US for Oscar campaign

Ishaan Khatter has kicked off 2026 on a high note, flying to the United States on Friday to promote his film *Homebound* ahead of the Academy Awards. The film has been officially short-listed for the Oscars, with nominations set to be announced on January 22, 2026.

Homebound has made waves internationally over the past year, premiering at the

Cannes Film Festival and later being showcased at the Toronto International Film Festival and the Melbourne International Film Festival. Critics have widely praised the film for its storytelling and performances, helping it build a strong global reputation. With its Oscar shortlist status, *Homebound* has achieved a rare milestone, becoming only the fifth Indian film in history to be shortlisted for Best International Feature Film at the Academy Awards. This recognition

highlights not just the film's success, but also Indian cinema's growing presence on the global stage.

Adding to the film's accolades, Ishaan recently won Best Actor for his performance in *Homebound*, cementing his impact both in India and internationally. Beyond cinema, Ishaan has also been named the campaign ambassador for luxury fashion brand Hugo Boss, making him the first Indian actor to represent a European fashion house of this scale.

What's new to watch in theatres and OTT? Here's the list for you!



Get ready for an exciting weekend of entertainment! From big-screen blockbusters to binge-worthy OTT series and movies, there's something for everyone. Here's what you can watch this Sunday across theatres and streaming platforms:

OTT Releases

NETFLIX (OTT SERIES)

- Dr. Seuss's Red Fish, Blue Fish S2
- Love from 9 to 5 S1
- My Korean Boyfriend
- Run Away
- Time Flies
- Land of Sin S1
- Your Turn to Kill S1

Theatrical Releases

- Ikkis
- Azad Bharath
- The Housemaid
- The SpongeBob Movie - Search for SquarePants
- Rappata (Marathi)
- Krantijyoti Vidyalyal Marathi Madhyam (Marathi)
- Magic (Marathi)
- Maanus Naavaacha Vaadal (Marathi)



Gandhi Talks to release on January 30

Gandhi Talks, headlined by Vijay Sethupathi and Aditi Rao Hydari, is set to release in theatres on January 30, the makers said on Saturday.

Directed by Kishore Belekar, the Zee Studios project is described as a "rare silent film in modern Indian cinema, which stands as a bold creative leap where silence becomes the strongest form of storytelling," according to a press release.

Belekar said the film is about "trusting silence." "As Indian cinema marks over a century of storytelling, we wanted to return to the

medium's most elemental form pure performance and emotion," he said in a statement.

"The actors embraced that vulnerability completely, and A R Rahman's score became the film's voice. With Zee Studios', Meera Chopra's support, we were able to make a bold, honest piece of cinema," he added.

Also starring Arvind Swamy and Siddharth Jadhav, the film has music composed by A R Rahman. Vijay Sethupathi was last seen in the film *Thalaivan Thalaivi*, directed by Pandiraj. Aditi Rao Hydari was last seen in *Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar*, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali.

Briefs

6 IS militants, 3 cops die in Turkiye clash

Islamic State militants clashed with police in Turkiye on Monday, leaving three police officers and six militants dead, Turkiye's interior minister said. At least eight other police officers and a night guard were wounded. The shooting occurred in Elmalı district in Yalova province, south of Istanbul, as police stormed a house where the militants were hiding. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said the operation in Yalova was one of over a hundred simultaneous raids carried out against IS suspects in 15 provinces in the country.

Boy, 5, dies as arm trapped in travelator

A boy has died after becoming trapped in a moving travelator at a ski resort in northern Japan, media said. Hinata Goto, 5, died on Sunday after his right arm became trapped in the walkway's winding mechanism during a family skiing trip to Otaru, a city on Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido. Firefighters had freed the unconscious boy, who was wearing ski wear and boots, from the mechanism about 40 minutes after receiving an emergency call from his mother, the Asahi Shimbun said, adding, he was pronounced dead after being taken to hospital.

Midair copter collision kills both pilots

A midair collision between two helicopters in New Jersey, US, on Sunday left both the pilots dead, prompting a probe into the cause of the crash, CNN reported. The incident occurred around late morning near Hammonont Municipal Airport, where two Enstrom helicopters were flying at the time.

Strip activist of citizenship, says UK oppn

Political opposition leaders in the UK have called for a human rights activist to be stripped of his citizenship over past social media posts allegedly containing violent and antisemitic language within days of the dual national returning to Britain after years in Egyptian prisons. Conservative and Reform parties leaders sought the deportation of Alaa Abd el-Fattah following the discovery of tweets from over a decade ago in which he allegedly endorsed killing "Zionists' and police".

South Korean Prez returns to palace

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung on Monday commuted to Cheong Wa Dae, country's traditional presidential palace, for the first time since taking office in June, over 3 years after his ousted predecessor Yoon Suk Yeol moved the presidential office to the Defence Ministry compound. It was the first time a president had commuted to Cheong Wa Dae since May 9, 2022. Yoon opened Cheong Wa Dae to public as a tourist site, which drew millions of visitors.

North Korea tests missiles

North Korea said on Monday it fired long-range strategic cruise missiles into the sea to test the country's nuclear deterrence, days after it showed apparent progress in the construction of its first nuclear-powered submarine.

FLORIDA MEET | US offered 15 years: Ukrainian leader**Zelenskyy seeks 50-yr security guarantees**

WASHINGTON

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Monday said US President Donald Trump had informed him of a 20-yr peace proposal for Ukraine that Trump had discussed with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

During the meeting with Trump in Florida, Zelenskyy said he pressed for long-term security guarantees extending over the next 50 years (the US offered 15 years), and clarified that any engagement with Russia would only be possible if Trump and European leaders reached consensus on formalised documents.

Outlining Kyiv's position on the proposed peace framework, Zelenskyy said Ukraine wants national security advisers from Ukraine, the US and Europe to meet in the coming days. He added Ukraine hopes security guarantees would be delivered at the moment the peace plan is formally signed.

He said the peace plan should be signed by Ukraine, the US, Russia and Europe,

**'Russia wants to see Ukraine succeed': Zelenskyy reacts to Trump's claim**

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appeared to raise an eyebrow during a peace summit in Florida when his host Donald Trump remarked Russia wanted Ukraine to succeed. Zelenskyy smiled and nodded when the US president acknowledged the claim sounded 'a little strange'. Trump said a draft agreement to end the Russia-Ukraine war was nearly '95% done' and the leaders signalled progress towards a US-Ukraine security agreement, but they acknowledged lingering disagreements on territorial disputes. Zelenskyy did not expressly comment on Trump's assessment of Vladimir Putin's intentions. During the press conference, he repeatedly thanked Trump and paid tribute to his US team.

noting a technical group may be required to carry out its implementation. Zelenskyy said Ukraine remains open to all formats of communication with Russia and proposed that the peace plan be put to a referendum in Ukraine.

To facilitate such a referen-

dum, Zelenskyy said a ceasefire of at least 60 days would be necessary, adding, details of ceasefire monitoring would be outlined within the security guarantees. He said discussions would take place on establishing a free economic zone in the Donbas region.

90% of the 20-point peace plan has been agreed.

US security guarantees for Ukraine are 100% agreed, these are key to lasting peace.

Any decision on territory must be approved by the Ukrainian people, possibly through a referendum or parliamentary process, in line with Ukraine's constitution.

The future of the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant remains a sticking point, with no clear agreement announced.

US and Ukrainian teams could meet again as early as next week to finalise remaining points.

16 older residents perish in blaze in retirement home

MANADO

A fire at an Indonesian retirement home killed 16 older people on Sunday evening, police said. The fire in the single-storey house in Manado, Indonesia's North Sulawesi Province, started while the residents were asleep, police said.

"The team on the ground has confirmed that the death toll currently is 16," North Sulawesi police spokesperson Alamsyah Hasibuan said. "Fifteen of them were burned to death, while one victim's body remains intact."

There were 15 survivors who were treated at two hospitals in Manado, Hasibuan said.

Iran cent bank guv quits after protests over currency drop

Tehran: The head of Iran's Central Bank resigned on Monday as protests erupted in Tehran and other cities after the country's currency plummeted to a new record low against the US dollar.

The resignation of Mohammad Reza Farzin was reported by state TV, as hundreds of traders and shopkeepers rallied in Saadi Street in downtown Tehran as well as in the Shush neighbourhood near Tehran's main Grand Bazaar.

Merchants at the market played a crucial role in the 1979 Islamic Revolution that ousted the monarchy and brought Islamists to power.

The official IRNA news agency confirmed protests. Witnesses reported similar rallies in Isfahan in central Iran, Shiraz in the south and Mashhad in the northeast. In in Tehran, police fired tear gas to quell the crowd. Witnesses told AP traders shut shops and asked others to do so. The semiofficial ILNA news agency said businesses stopped trading even though some kept shops open. Iran's rial on Sunday fell to 1.42 million to the dollar. On Monday, it traded at 1.38 million rials.

China begins drills in Taiwan Strait

BEIJING

The Chinese military on Monday started new major drills in the "middle areas" of the Taiwan Strait amid rising diplomatic tensions with Japan over Taiwan that Beijing claims as its territory.

"The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theatre Command is employing fighters, bombers and unmanned aerial vehicles in coordination with long-range rocket fires to conduct drills in the waters and airspace in the middle areas of the Taiwan Strait on Monday," state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Focusing on striking mobile ground targets, the drills intend to test the troops' capabilities of precision strikes on key targets, it said. China

claims the self-governing Taiwan as part of its mainland and vows to integrate it.

Taiwan condemned China's joint military drills around the island, disregarding international norms and using military intimidation to threaten neighbouring countries.

Taiwan's Defence Ministry said on X rapid response exercises were underway, with forces on high alert to defend the island.

In a separate statement, it said it had deployed appropriate forces in response, conducting combat readiness drills. "The Chinese Communist Party's targeted military exercises further confirm its nature as an aggressor and the biggest destroyer of peace," it said.

Further, Taiwan's aviation authority said over 100,000 air travellers will be hit.

Hadi's party gives 24-day ultimatum to Yunus regime

Sharif Osman Bin Hadi's party, Inqilab Moncho, has given a "24-day ultimatum" to the Muhammed Yunus-led interim government to complete the trial in the murder of 32-year-old youth leaders and bring the guilty to justice.

With the situation still tense in Dhaka, Abdullah Al Jaber, member secretary of Inqilab Moncho, on Facebook said, "The trial of the entire killing squad, including the killer, the mastermind, the accomplices, those who aided the escape, and those who provided shelter, must be completed within 24 days."

The party also asked the Yunus regime to suspend the work permits of Indians

**BNP leader Tarique Rahman files his nomination for the upcoming election in in Segunbagicha on Monday.**

residing in Bangladesh. "The Daily Star" said. "To protect the independence and sovereignty of Bangladesh, the work permits of Indians must be suspended," Jaber said.

The party also asked the government to file a case

Mexico train derails, kills 13, hurts dozens

MEXICO CITY

Officials said a train accident in Mexico killed at least 13 people and injured dozens, halting traffic along a rail line connecting the Pacific Ocean with the Gulf of Mexico.

The Interoceanic Train linking the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz went off the rails on Sunday as it passed a

curve near the town of Nizanda. "The Mexican Navy has informed me that, tragically, 13 people died in the Interoceanic Train accident," Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said in a post on X, adding, 98 people sustained injuries, five of them were critical.

Officials said 241 passengers and nine crew members were on the train at the times.

T'gana women die in US crash

WASHINGTON

Two women from Telangana were killed in a road accident in US's California. Pulakhandam Meghana Rani, 25, was from Garla in Mahbubabad and Kadiyala Bhavana, 24, from Mulkanoor.

Reports said the accident took place on Sunday at 4pm. Meghana and Bhavana were travelling with friends for sightseeing to Alabama Hills. Eight friends were touring in separate cars. While taking a curve, Meghana and Bhavana's car lost control, went off the road, and plunged into a valley. Bhavana and Meghana moved to the US 3 years ago for higher studies. They completed Master's recently, and were looking for a job.

China, Cambodia and Thailand envoys meet Beijing seeks stronger role in feud

HONG KONG

Foreign ministers from Cambodia and Thailand convened with their Chinese counterpart on Monday as the Beijing government, building on its expanding presence in global diplomacy, sought to play a stronger mediating role in the violent border dispute between the two Southeast Asian countries. "We haven't resolved everything, but we are making progress in the right direction, and we have to keep up the momentum," Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said after the meeting in Yunnan. He said the chief priorities are to ensure a sustained ceasefire and continue rebuilding trust.

The meetings represented China's latest efforts to strengthen its role as an international mediator and, in particular, its influence in Asian regional crises. As China grows into an economic and political force globally, Beijing has spent the past decade and more working in various ways to increase its voice as a third



party in diplomatic matters.

China's Wang Yi called for joint efforts to promote regional peace, stability and development, language typical for China in such situations. "Allowing the flames of war to be reignited is absolutely not what the people of the two nations want and not what China, as your friend, wants to see. So, we should resolutely look ahead and move forward," Wang said.

Cambodian minister Prak Sokhonn said he believed the ceasefire would last and create an environment for both nations to resume previously agreed-upon ways to settle differences. Sihasak also expressed hopes for peace with neighbouring countries.

My target was just to take gun: Hero

Ahmed al-Ahmed, who disarmed one of the Bondi gunmen before being shot five times, says he knows his bravery saved many lives but is sad for those who were killed in the attack.

In an interview with CBS News, Ahmed said he "didn't worry about anything" except for the lives he could save as he disarmed Sajid Akram on December 14. The act was

**BONDI SHOOTING**

caught on camera and shared around the world.

"My target was just to take the gun from him, and to stop him from killing a human

being's life and not killing innocent people," he said.

"I know I saved lots, but I feel sorry for the lost." Akram was shot dead by police during the attack on a Hanukah event where 15 people were killed. His son, Naveed Akram, was wounded by police, and he was later charged with 59 offences.

Footage from the attack shows Ahmed leaping from

behind a parked car to grapple with Sajid Akram, whose gun was knocked to the ground in the struggle. Ahmed picked it up and pointed it at the gunman, who retreated to his son on a nearby footbridge. "I jumped in his back, hit him. I hold him with my right hand and start saying a word, you know, like to warn him, 'drop your gun, stop doing what you're doing'."

Ship's long detour to deliver cranes

An 800-foot cargo vessel travelled 19,700 nautical miles to deliver just 5 giant ship-to-shore cranes. The ship, Zhen Hua 29, departed Shanghai on June 20, heading west through the South China Sea before crossing the Indian Ocean.

After over three months at sea and crossing three oceans, the vessel docked at the Port of Kingston in Jamaica in October. The cranes it carried, built in China, were destined for ports in Jamaica and the US Gulf Coast.

For decades, such long jour-

neys have been a routine part of global trade. As heavy machinery is manufactured in one part of the world and shipped across continents and installed thousands of kilometres away, Zhen Hua 29's voyage made it worry about the ultra-long shipping routes, "The Washington Post" said.

Both Republican and Democratic governments in the US have raised concerns about relying on cranes made in China, saying it could be risky to depend on them, hinting they may be a threat to national security. US officials say around 80% of the ship-to-

**3 MONTHS, 37K KM**

shore cranes at American ports are made by China.

The White House is now seeking US ports to source cranes from countries other than China and revive domestic crane manufacturing. However, that change is not easy. For almost 20 years,

Chinese cranes have been the cheapest and easiest option.

In fact, the fastest way from Shanghai to Mississippi would normally take about a month, sailing across the Pacific Ocean and through the Panama Canal. But the cargo it was carrying made it impossible to pass through the canal.

But the cranes' long arms, known as booms, stick out from the ship's sides, and canal authorities do not allow overhanging cargo that could damage locks and other infrastructure. As a result, the ship had to take the long route.

Pak YouTuber attacked inside court premises in Karachi

Karachi: A famous Pakistani YouTuber was attacked on Monday inside a court in Karachi. Rajab Butt appeared at the Karachi Sessions Court to get bail in a case filed against him for allegedly hurting religious sentiments.

According to his lawyer, Butt was physically manhandled in the court building premises, and his shirt was also torn off. Butt was

attacked by lawyers who kept on beating him despite pleas to stop their attack. Butt has 8 million subscribers. In recent days, he has been facing legal proceedings in many cases.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's former PM Imran Khan and wife Bushra Bibi on Monday filed separate pleas in a high court, challenging their 17-year jail term in Toshakhana-2 case.

US vows \$2b for UN humanitarian aid

Geneva: The US on Monday announced a \$2 billion pledge for UN humanitarian aid as President Trump's gov continues to slash US foreign aid and warns UN agencies to "adapt, shrink or die" in a time of new financial realities.

Briefs

PUNE

Pune Grand Tour from Jan 19-23



Former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni was on Thursday named ambassador of the Bajaj Pune Grand Tour, a first-ever UCI 2.2 category multi-stage road race cycling event in the country, to be held here from January 19 to 23. The five-day Continental Road Cycling Race for Men will wind through a 437km route across the Deccan Plateau and Sahyadri Range, featuring sharp bends and challenging elevations. The event has attracted 171 riders from 29 teams across 35 countries.

BULAWAYO

India cruise past USA in U-19 WC



India Under-19 began their World Cup campaign on a positive note with a clinical six-wicket victory over USA Under-19 in Bulawayo on Thursday. After winning the toss, India opted to bowl first and produced a disciplined bowling performance to bundle out USA for 107 in 35.2 overs. Chasing a revised target of 96, India suffered early setbacks. Vaibhav Sooryavanshi was dismissed for 2, followed soon by Vedant Trivedi, who also managed 2 runs. Both wickets were taken by Ritvik Appidi.

KOLKATA

Gill will return 'better and stronger'



Shubman Gill's omission from India's T20 World Cup squad is merely "one of the hiccups" that occur in every elite sportsperson's career and the India Test and ODI skipper will return a "better, stronger" cricketer, Gujarat Titans chief operating officer Colonel Arvinder Singh said on Thursday. Gill, who was vice-captain of the T20i side, was the most high-profile absentee when the national selectors named a 15-member squad for the global showpiece in India and Sri Lanka starting

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Harleen stars as UP Warriorz outplay RCB

Deol's unbeaten 70 helped UP chase 162 comfortably to win

NAVI MUMBAI

Harleen Deol slammed a fine half-century as the UP Warriorz beat Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) by seven wickets in the Women's Premier League (WPL) match at the DY Patil Stadium, here on Thursday.

Chasing 162 for a win, UP Warriorz were in a bit of a

78/3 in 13 overs. While Sciver-Brunt hit nine fours and a six in her knock, where she toyed with fields and timed the ball beautifully, Carey hit five quickfire boundaries.

UP Warriorz, meanwhile, will rue their inability to contain the late onslaught after maintaining control through the middle overs. The chase now rests on their batters to overhaul a target that looked



bother at 45/2 but Harleen in the company of Phoebe Litchfield (25) and later Chloe Tryon (27) powered them home at 162/3 in 18.1 overs.

Earlier, on return to the playing eleven, Nat Sciver-Brunt smashed 65 off 43 balls while Nicola Carey remained unbeaten on 32 off 20 deliveries as defending champions Mumbai Indians recovered from a slow start to post 161/5 against UP Warriorz in their Women's Premier League (WPL) 2026 clash at the Dr. DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai on Thursday.

Mumbai Indians (MI) flexed their batting depth in a brutal final seven overs, fetching them 83 runs after finding themselves at a precarious

unlikely when they had MI in trouble at the end of 13 overs.

MI's innings had a stuttering start as Amanjot Kaur, promoted to open the batting in the absence of Hayley Matthews, and G. Kamalini struggled to get going against UPW's new-ball attack, leaving MI with their lowest Power-play score of the season - 32/0.

In a bid to up the ante, Amanjot went for a slog-sweep, but holed out to deep mid-wicket off Deepti Sharma, while Kamalini holed out to long-off against Sophie Ecclestone.

Captain Harmanpreet Kaur provided brief resistance with an 11-ball 16 before falling to a spectacular catch by Chloe Tryon off Asha Sobhana Joy.

IND-NZ | India asst coach says T20 WC is still a long way away

Doeschate's focus still on winning ODI series

RAJKOT

India assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate says the next month's T20 World Cup is still a "long way" to go and the team's immediate focus on the ongoing ODI series against New Zealand, which is tied 1-1 after the visitors won the second match here.

The defending champions India will co-host the 20-team T20 World Cup starting on February 7, while they are in the middle of a high intensity ODI series with the series-decider slated in Indore on Sunday.

"There's a real chance that you're so focused on the World Cup that you think, 'oh, these three games this week just comes and goes' and we don't learn anything and we don't put our best foot (forward), or we don't put our best performances out there," he said after India lost the second ODI by seven wickets.

"Strategy (wise), I can't see anything that we've had to skirt around in terms of prepping for the (T20) World Cup. We are fully focused on this series. Every series is important. Individually for these players, there's a lot at stake." "The World Cup is still a long way away, but (it's about) building from series to series and getting in good habits, so (we are) trying to manage both and put the excitement of the T20 World Cup just on the back burners for another few more days," ten Doeschate added.

But he underlined the need to "protect" the players who are part of the T20 World Cup.

"We're very cautious or conscious about not doing that. But at the same time, you do want to protect the guys

who are going to play in the T20 World Cup and you are thinking about it." The Indian squad has been hit by a string of injuries that has sidelined T20 World Cup-bound Tilak Varma, Rishabh Pant and Washington Sundar.

Ten Doeschate said there shouldn't have been a situation of Indian players not being able to perform given the two set-ups have different players.

"You've got to be able to apply yourself to both situations. Particularly with the two sets of personnel that we have, they're very different so there's no real excuse for not focusing on this," he said.

A depleted New Zealand side romped home with seven wickets and more than two overs to spare in the second ODI here, a game in which Indian spinners were once again out-bowled by the visitors.

The loss threw the spotlight back on the two Test series defeats at home to the same opponent in 2024-25 and South Africa earlier this season.



Strategy (wise), I can't see anything that we've had to skirt around in terms of prepping for the (T20) World Cup. We are fully focused on this series.

Ryan ten Doeschate
India assistant coach

BCB removes Najmul from key post after players revolt

DHAKA

The Bangladesh Cricket Board was forced to sack its finance committee chairman Najmul Islam on Thursday after senior players of the national team revolted against him for making derogatory comments against them.

Despite the removal of Najmul from a key BCB post, two matches of Bangladesh Premier League scheduled on the day were postponed.

The players taking part in the BPL were unified in their demand for immediate removal of Najmul as BCB director. Under player and public pressure, BCB removed Najmul as chairman of the board's finance committee but he remains a BCB director.

"...Following a review of recent developments and in the best interest of the organisation, the BCB President has decided to release Mr. Najmul Islam from his responsibilities as Chairman of the Finance Committee with immediate effect," said the BCB in a statement.

"Until further notice, the BCB President will assume the role of Acting Chairman of the Finance Committee. The BCB reiterates that the interests of the cricketers remain its highest priority.

"The Board remains fully committed to upholding the honour and dignity of all players under its jurisdiction...BCB hopes that all cricketers will continue to display the highest standards of professionalism and dedication to the betterment of Bangladesh cricket during what is a challenging period for the game..."...and will do their utmost to ensure continued participation in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL)."

Gujarat Giants seek revival against in-form RCB

RCB have grown in strength with every outing

NAVI MUMBAI

Hoping to arrest their recent slide, Gujarat Giants have a tough task at hand when they take on table-toppers Royal Challengers Bengaluru in their Women's Premier League clash here on Friday.

After briefly leading the six-team standings, Giants have slipped to third following their defeat to Mumbai Indians on Tuesday, while former champions RCB have surged to the top with back-to-back wins.

RCB, on the other hand, have grown in strength with every outing, the latest being a commanding chase of 144 against UP Warriorz in under 13 overs.

The biggest positive for them was skipper Smriti Mandhana's return to form after she was dismissed for 18 in the season-opener against Mumbai Indians.

Mandhana anchored the chase with her trademark elegance and calm, while her opening partner Grace Harris was at her explosive best.

Gujarat will need to find a

Match starts
at 7.30 P.M
Live on Star
Sports

Teams

Gujarat Giants:

Ashleigh Gardner (c), Beth Mooney, Sophie Devine, Renuka Singh Thakur, Bharti Fulmali, Titas Sadhu, Kashee Gautam, Kanika Ahuja, Tanuja Kanwer, Georgia Wareham, Anushka Sharma, Happy Kumari, Kim Garth, Yastika Bhatia, Shivani Singh, Danni Wyatt-Hodge, Rajeshwari Gayakwad

and Ayushi Soni.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru:

Smriti Mandhana (c), Richa Ghosh, Shreyanka Patil, Georgia Voll, Nadine de Klerk, Radha Yadav, Lauren Bell, Linsey Smith, Prema Rawat, Arundhati Reddy, Pooja Vastrakar, Grace Harris, Gautami Naik, Prathyosha Kumar, D. Hemalatha and Sayali Satghare.

way to contain RCB's formidable batting line-up, which also features the in-form

Nadine de Klerk and the destructive Richa Ghosh, as they look to recover.

VHT: Punjab to take on Saurashtra in semifinals

Victory against Mumbai has spurred Punjab ahead of the last-4 clash

BENGALURU

Punjab will head into the Vijay Hazare Trophy semifinal against Saurashtra here on Friday brimming with confidence after surviving a nail-biting one-run victory over domestic powerhouse Mumbai in their final group match.

That thrilling win has set the tone for the rest of their campaign as was evident in the manner in which Punjab demolished Madhya Pradesh in the quarterfinal. Now, a young and determined Saurashtra side stands in their way.

With charismatic India opener Abhishek Sharma unlikely to feature, wicket-keeper-batter Prabhsimran Singh is expected to lead the side, having already steered Punjab to a commanding 183-run triumph over Madhya Pradesh, underpinned by a colossal 345-run total.

Harnoor Singh, Prabhsimran Singh, Anmolpreet Singh, and Nehal Wadhwa all struck impres-



sive half-centuries to turn the contest decisively in Punjab's favour, and a similar batting performance could prove pivotal in steering them towards the final.

The bowling, spearheaded by right-arm pacer Gurnoor Brar, played a crucial role in skittling the opposition for a meagre total, wrapping up the innings with nearly 19 overs to spare.

As Punjab chase their maiden Vijay Hazare Trophy title, they will rely on skipper Prabhsimran's experience, having

been one of the team's leading run-scorers with four half-centuries, including his most recent effort in Tuesday's quarterfinal against Madhya Pradesh.

With a deep batting lineup and a roster of destructive hitters, including Harnoor Singh, Anmolpreet Singh, Naman Poonia, Nehal Wadhwa, and Ramandeep Singh, Punjab have the firepower to go all the way. Their bowling attack also looks well-rounded, featuring Gurnoor Brar, who sharpened his skills as a

Teams

Saurashtra: Ruchit Ahir, Parth Bhut, Yuvraj Chudasama, Harvik Desai, Sammar Gajjar, Ansh Gosai, Vishvaraj Jadeja, Dharmendrasinh Jadeja, Chirag Jani, Jay Gohil, Hiten Kanbi, Pranav Karia, Hetvik Kotak, Prerak Mankad, Ankur Panwar, Parswaraj Rana, Chetan Sakariya, Tarang Gohel.

Punjab: Abhishek Sharma, Anmolpreet Singh, Salil Arora, Arshdeep Singh, Sukhdeep Singh Bajwa, Gaurav Chaudhary, Gurnoor Brar, Harnoor Singh, Harpreet Brar, Jashanpreet Singh, Krish Bhagat, Naman Dhir, Prabhsimran Singh, Ramandeep Singh, Uday Saharan, Sanvir Singh, Raghu Sharma, Shubman Gill.

net bowler for Mumbai Indians before being drafted as a replacement for Punjab Kings in IPL 2023.

Vijay Hazare Trophy

Mokhade's hundred carries Vidarbha into VHT final

BENGALURU

The unflappable Aman Mokhade struck his fifth hundred of this season's Vijay Hazare Trophy, powering Vidarbha to a smooth six-wicket victory over defending champions Karnataka and to the tournament's final here on Thursday.

Mokhade (131, 122 balls) and R Samarth (76 not out, 69b) were the lead actors in Vidarbha's 284 for four in

out, which was built around fifties from Karun Nair and KL Shriji.

Pacer Darshan Nalkande (5/48) helped Vidarbha stymie Karnataka's progress in the backend, and they will face the winner of the second semifinal between Punjab and Saurashtra in the title round on Sunday.

Vidarbha had never beaten Karnataka in the country's premier 50-over domestic competition and they chose the perfect occa-

Mokhade played an important role in it with a stoic knock.

After losing his opening partner Atharva Taide early in the chase, Mokhade braved confident Karnataka bowlers, a tight situation and cramps towards the end of his innings to bring up a hundred in 101 balls.

He was involved in two significant partnerships - a 99-run second wicket alliance with impressive Dhruv Shorev (47) and then milked

with Samarth, who turned it on his old team with an array of sparkling shots.

That pacer Vysakh Vijaykumar had to go out of the field due to concussion after the 20th over hindered the Karnataka bowling in the middle overs.

Vysakh had pinged on his helmet in the last over of Karnataka's innings by pacer Yash Thakur, as Manvanth Kumar came in as on-concussion substitute.

Mokhade reached his

off pacer Vidyadhar Patil and celebrated the moment with gusto.

The 24-year-old right-hander eventually played a tired-looking swipe off Patil to be caught by Devdutt Padikkal inside the circle.

But by then he had put the match well beyond Karnataka's grasp.

Earlier, Karnataka produced a batting effort of many highs and lows to reach a total that was just enough and competitive at

