

# AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

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

## Briefs

AYODHYA

### Surya Tilak lights up Ram Lalla forehead

A precisely aligned beam of sunlight fell on the forehead of Ram Lalla at exactly 12 noon on Friday, marking the Surya Tilak ritual on the occasion of Ram Navami at the Ram temple in Ayodhya. The illumination lasted for about four minutes, drawing large numbers of devotees to witness the alignment of faith and science. The radiant mark, measuring about 58 mm, appeared on the deity's forehead as sunlight was channelled through a specially designed system of mirrors and lenses.

-Biswajeet Banerjee

SHAHJAHANPUR (UP)

### Kakori statues 'purified'

Congress workers on Friday took a torch march and performed a symbolic 'purification' ritual on the reinstalled statues of the Kakori incident martyrs in Shahjahanpur, days after the idols were allegedly demolished and dumped at a garbage site triggering outrage. The protest comes a day after the statues of the freedom fighters were reinstalled at the Town Hall tri-junction following directions from Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. The statues of Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan and Roshan Singh, who hailed from Shahjahanpur, were installed at the Shaheed memorial site along a road outside the municipal corporation office here and were regularly garlanded by visiting public representatives.

PATNA

### Nitish set to quit Council on Monday

Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar is likely to resign from the state legislative council on March 30 in view of his election to Rajya Sabha. Nitish, as well as BJP president Nitin Nabin, who is a member of assembly, were elected to the Rajya Sabha unopposed on March 16. Bihar assembly speaker Prem Kumar said that an individual was required to resign from their membership in the assembly or legislative council within 14 days of being elected to another house. Based on this stipulation, both Nitish and Nabin should resign from the membership of their respective houses by March 30.

BENGALURU

### Minor stabs woman, her bro after tiff

In a gruesome incident, a 16-year-old boy stabbed a woman and her brother, who had come to his house and picked up a quarrel with his mother. The deceased have been identified as Yamuna (36) and her brother Sandeep (34), who were earlier neighbours of the boy's family. The boy's father was an autorickshaw driver, who lived at Tigalara Palaya in Peenya police station limits along with his mother Chaya. The deceased Yamuna's husband Malle Gowda owned a fabrication unit and lived in the house opposite to Chaya's house. Earlier, both the families shared good relationships. Since Malle Gowda was doing well in business, Chaya and her husband used to take a hand loan from him and later return it also. Slowly, Chaya started becoming close to Malle Gowda, which irked Yamuna.

## W ASIA CRISIS | Indian crude basket price hits \$100 per barrel

# Commercial LPG supplies now restored to 70% level

NEW DELHI

Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas Sujata Sharma on Friday said commercial LPG supplies, which were initially halted to prioritise domestic consumers, have since been restored to 70% level.

"We have sufficient crude inventory, with supplies lined up for the next two months. The situation is also comfortable with respect to LPG and PNG availability. Our refineries are operating at 100% or above capacity, and domestic LPG production has increased by almost 40%," Sharma said.

She added that unlike many neighbouring countries, petrol and diesel prices in India have not been raised. She added that several decisions taken by the Centre have cushioned the impact.

The Centre said there was no shortage of petrol, diesel and LPG supplies as adequate stocks were available across refineries, terminals and pipelines. It, however, said India is in a "war situation", which has impacted supplies and pushed the Indian crude basket price from \$70 to over \$100 per barrel.



## India in touch with nations for safe ship transit: MEA

NEW DELHI

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal on Friday did not directly respond on whether India sought a US waiver to buy Russian LPG. As per reports, New Delhi has approached the Trump administration for waiver on gas from Russia.

"Our energy approach is predicated on securing the needs of our people, market dynamics and the global situation," Jaiswal said, adding that such sourcing decisions are vital. Regarding maritime safety, Jaiswal confirmed four Indian LPG ships have successfully crossed the Strait of Hormuz.

"We continue to be in touch with all concerned countries for the safe transit of our ships," he said.

On the G7 foreign ministers meeting, Jaiswal said, "Jaishankar attended a session on global governance where he spoke about UNSC reforms and on streamlining peacekeeping operations."

## Rajnath to head ministerial group on W Asia crisis

NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will head a high-level inter-ministerial group to manage India's response to the West Asia conflict. The team includes Home Minister Amit Shah, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri. Singh recently chaired an all-party meeting to brief MPs on the regional developments.

## Excise cut on petrol, diesel due to polls: Cong

The Congress on Friday alleged that the government's excise cuts on petrol and diesel were because of assembly elections and pointed out that consumer prices in India were not reduced even when global crude oil prices fell on global different occasions in the past 12 years. Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "Today's announcement was because of assembly elections. Wait till April 30th," he said.

## 2nd edition of Jan Vishwas bill introduced

The government on Friday introduced in the Lok Sabha the second edition of the Jan Vishwas bill seeking to amend certain provisions to decriminalise a host of minor offences to promote ease of doing business, rejecting objections raised by Congress members. The Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026, which was introduced by Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada, proposes to amend 79 central acts administered by 23 ministries. A total of 784 provisions are being proposed to be amended, out of which 717 provisions are being decriminalised.



## Panel on bill to remove PM, CMs gets extension

A Joint Parliamentary panel examining three bills for the removal of prime minister, chief ministers and ministers if they are under arrest for 30 consecutive days on serious charges has been given more time to submit its report. Lok Sabha on Friday granted the committee time till first day of the last week of Monsoon Session of Parliament 2026.

## 'E-addiction claims lives of 20K kids'

Trinamool Congress MP Derek O'Brien on Friday raised in the Rajya Sabha the issue of growing digital addiction among children and youth, warning that approximately 20,000 children die by suicide every year as a consequence, and demanded that the government address the crisis urgently. Raising the matter during Zero Hour in the Upper House, O'Brien said studies indicate that children and youth are spending up to eight hours a day on screens and mobile phones -- amounting to more than 100 days every year.

## Centre cracks down on fertilizer hoarding

NEW DELHI

Amidst the West Asia crisis affecting supplies, the Centre on Friday announced a crackdown on hoarding and black-marketing of fertilizers. Over the last year, authorities have cancelled more than 6,900 licences and registered over 800 FIRs to curb these malpractices. Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilizers Anupriya S Patel informed Lok Sabha that since April 2025, enforcement

agencies have conducted 4,66,415 raids and issued 16,246 show-cause notices. These actions resulted in 6,802 licences being suspended or cancelled and 821 FIRs registered against violators. In February 2026 alone, 28 show-cause notices were issued and two FIRs filed. Separately, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan recently reviewed the sector's stability amidst global volatility. He directed officials to expedite Farmer IDs to ensure transparent distribution.

## J&K Assembly disrupted over attack on Iran

JAMMU

The concluding phase of the budget session of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly, which resumed on Friday after the Ramzan

recess, witnessed disruptions and chaos over the ongoing Middle East crisis.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah condemned the ongoing war with Iran and urged the GOI to use its diplomatic relations to help

end the conflict. Speaking in the Assembly, CM Omar said no one could support the manner in which the war was waged, referring to the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and others during the conflict. He

also referred to civilian casualties, including children, and said such incidents could not be supported.

The chief minister questioned the stated objectives of the war, saying there was no clarity on its purpose.

## AAIB seeks SOP to end turf war with DGCA over probe roles

MUMBAI

The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) has recommended a standard operating procedure (SOP) to clearly define the roles of the AAIB and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) during the critical 'pre-categorisation' phase of aviation occurrences.

The recommendation was formalised as part of the final investigation report into a serious engine fire involving an Air India Express aircraft, which investigators traced to a persistent oil leak.

The investigation centred on an occurrence involving an Air India Express aircraft, registered as VT-ATF, where the crew was forced to return to Bengaluru airport soon after take-off due to a fire in

one of the engines on May 18, 2024. The report observed that engine parameters in the cockpit did not show abnormalities, but the crew and passengers reported flames bursting from the right engine. After declaring Mayday, the crew returned the aircraft to Bengaluru airport, where firemen extinguished the flames.

According to AAIB findings, the most probable cause of the fire was a leakage of lubricating oil into the exhaust system, where it ignited. "The failure of the No.4 bearing subsequently caused heavy wear of the aft sump abradable sealing area and associated rotor imbalance, leading to lubricating oil leakage into the exhaust system and subsequent fire," the report stated. In its safety recommendations, the AAIB called for an

SOP to delineate the roles and responsibilities of the aviation regulator and the aviation accident investigator. It noted that while the Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation Rules provide a framework, practical gaps remain. Since the AAIB was carved out of the DGCA Safety Directorate in 2012, the transition of power has occasionally led to parallel investigations and duplication of effort. To rectify this, the AAIB proposed formalising the 'pre-categorisation' SOP, emphasising that the absence of defined procedures during the initial response phase risks compromising evidence. The proposed SOP would clearly define what the DGCA and AAIB should do the moment a notification is received and create a methodology for the orderly transfer of evidence.

## AIADMK announces 2nd list, names 127 candidates

CHENNAI

The Opposition AIADMK in Tamil Nadu on Friday announced the second list of its party candidates for the April 23 Assembly election, retaining some of its MLAs.

The list also contains a number of former ministers and other senior party functionaries.

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami announced the candidates' names for 127 seats, including Tirunelveli assembly constituency from

where BJP state chief Nainar Nagenthran won in the 2021 polls. The party has fielded Thanjai N Ganesaraja, a sen-

## POLL WATCH TAMIL NADU

ior member, from the southern constituency.

Nagenthran had earlier in the day said that he would contest from Sattur seat (Virudhunagar dt) in the coming polls.

Former state minister B V Ramana has been nomi-

nated to contest from Tiruvallur, while another ex-minister and sitting MLA, Pollachi V Jayaraman have been fielded again from Pollachi.

Party legislator from Madurai Maragadam Kumaravel has been renominated.

The AIADMK, which is leading the National Democratic Alliance in Tamil Nadu, is contesting from 169 seats and it has already announced the candidates for 23 constituencies in the first list and it includes Palaniswami.

## What happens when candidate makes communal remarks: HC to ECI

KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Friday asked the ECI what happens when a candidate makes hate or communal remarks that cause harm to a community, society and the country.

The High Court's query came during the hearing of a plea alleging inaction by the Election Commission of India (ECI) against B Gopalakrishnan, BJP's candidate from Guruvayur assembly constituency, for his alleged communal remark in a campaign video.

## Will break the 'backbone' of Bangladeshi Miyas: Himanta

DHAKUAKHANA (ASSAM)

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said his government will "break the backbone" of Bangladeshi Miyas in the state if the BJP-led coalition returns to power in next month's election.

He asserted that the government will work to build a "strong Assamese society" and the illegal migrants will no longer be able to dare the indigenous community.



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and others during the public meeting, held at the North Bank of Brahmaputra, Lakhimpur, on Friday

Addressing an election campaign meeting at Dhakuakhana in Lakhimpur

district, Sarma said, "We have worked very hard for the indigenous people of the state."

## Over 700 candidates in fray; independents form big chunk

GUWAHATI

As the stage is set for the upcoming Assembly elections in Assam, a total of 722 candidates will contest the polls across the state. Of them, 663 are men and only 59 are women, highlighting once again the limited representation of women in the electoral race.

According to official figures released after scrutiny of nomination papers, the highest number of candidates will contest from Alagapur-Katlicherra (122) and

Karimganj South (124) constituencies, making them the

## POLL WATCH ASSAM

most crowded battlegrounds in the election.

On the other hand, several constituencies will see a much smaller contest, with the lowest number of candidates recorded in Rangia (31), Jagiroad (SC), Hojai, Naduar, Jonai (ST), Doom Dooma, Mahmora, Teok and Lakhimpur. Political parties across the

spectrum have fielded candidates, while a large number of Independents have also entered the fray.

Among the major parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has fielded 90 candidates, while the Congress has put up 99 candidates. The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) has fielded 26 candidates, and the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) has nominated 30 candidates.

The AAP has entered the contest with 18 candidates, while UPPL has fielded 18. The Bodoland People's Front (BPF) has nominated 11 candidates.

## Peeved, man kills niece, two nephews

PATNA

In a fit of anger, a man on Friday killed his two nephews and a niece by cutting them with a cutter machine for not opening the door of their house quickly under Hasanpura police station limits in Aurangabad district.

Police said the deceased have been identified as Anish (10), Ayush (7) and niece Anushka (5), sons and daughter of the accused, Aman Pal's brother, Guddu Pal.

After committing the crime, the accused also wanted to end his life by attempting to slit his throat. Pal has been referred to a hospital in Patna under police custody.

## Heroin worth ₹50 crore dropped by drone at Pak border; 5 arrested

JAIPUR

On Thursday, a joint team of the police and the BSF busted an international smuggling network, seizing a large quantity of heroin that had been sent across the border by a drone. Security agencies confiscated approximately 10 kilograms of heroin, which carries an estimated value of around Rs 50 crore in the international market, in the Rawla sector of Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan.

Five accused have been arrested in connection with this case. Superintendent of Police Harishankar said that a consignment of heroin was dropped by a drone in village 2 KND, located near the India-Pakistan border. Five accused

have been arrested in this case who are being interrogated. Preliminary investigations have revealed indications of an international network, which is expected to be exposed shortly.

According to the police, the security agencies had prior intelligence regarding the dropping of heroin into Indian territory via a drone from the Pakistani side. Acting on this information, the police, and the BSF established a blockade across the entire region and launched a search operation.

Three suspects were identified who were attempting to breach the blockade and flee towards Punjab via Sri Ganganagar. The police apprehended them within the jurisdiction of the Padampur police station.

## World's tallest one-foot-standing statue consecrated at Akshardham

MUMBAI

In a significant spiritual milestone, a 108-foot-tall statue of Neelkanth Varni has been consecrated at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Delhi, marking what is being described as the world's tallest "one-foot-standing" murti.

The statue represents the youthful ascetic form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, depicting Neelkanth Varni in deep meditation while standing on one leg.



## Kareli Police Apprehend 19-Year-Old Youth; Stolen Goods Recovered



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj:** The Kareli Police have arrested a cunning youth and recovered cash and other items from his possession. According to the police, the accused was apprehended based on information provided by an informant. Acting under Case No. 59/2026 registered at the Kareli Police Station, a police

team arrested Mizan—son of Parvez Ahmed and a resident of Kareli—on Marc 26, 2026, in the Ainuddinpur area. The accused is reported to be approximately 19 years of age. During a search, the police recovered a wristwatch, 1,810 in cash, and a pair of shoes from his person. Based on these recoveries, an additional section of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)

has been added to the case. The police stated that a case has been registered against the accused under the relevant sections, and further legal action is being initiated in accordance with the law. Sub-Inspector Ramanand Yadav, Sub-Inspector Sonu Kumar, and Constable Sumit Kumar Singh were part of the team involved in this operation.

## Liquor Consumption in Fatehpur Crosses 1.77 Billion in Four Months



Fatehpur

The District has witnessed an unprecedented rise in liquor consumption over the Past four months, with official figures indicating that residents consumed alcohol worth over 1.77 billion (177.79 crore) between November 2025 and February 2026. According to data from the Excise Department, liquor sales surged significantly across the district 317 country liquor Shops, 100 composite Shops (selling Indian Made Foreign Liquor and beer) and one model Shop. During this Period, approximately 4.046 million liters of country liquor, 1.304 million bottles of IMFL, and 1.817 million cans of beer were sold. Revenue estimates based on government-approved rates Show that country liquor accounted

for 1.09 billion, IMFL contributed 521.86 million and beer generated 163.57 million in sales. Notably, country liquor dominated the market, indicating a higher demand among consumers for lower-priced alcohol. Experts attribute this Sharp increase in consumption to the wedding season and the winter months, which traditionally drive higher demand for alcoholic beverages. The combination of social gatherings and cold weather appears to have significantly boosted sales during this Period. However, officials note that these figures are based solely on licensed sales at government rates. The actual volume of consumption could be considerably higher due to overpricing in some outlets, as well as unaccounted illegal or unlicensed liquor sales.

## Lord Ram is the 'Rashtra Purush' of Aryavarta: Rakesh Singh Algu

Varanasi

Rakesh Singh Algu, the former District President of the Bharatiya Janata Party and Chairman of the District Cooperative Federation (DCF), extended his greetings on the auspicious occasion of Ram Navami, Stating that Lord Ram is the Rashtra Purush (National Icon) of Aryavarta. He emphasized that every individual occupying a seat of Power, authority and duty should draw inspiration from Lord Ram. Algu Singh further remarked that Lord Ram is the living embodiment of Dharma. He represents the Personification of compassion, mercy, friendship and Valor. On behalf of the DCF family and the residents of Kashi, Algu Singh also Congratulated Yogi Adityanath on completing nine glorious years as Chief Minister. He stated that figures in governance who dedicate their entire Personal lives and time to Public welfare are rare in the annals of history. He offered Prayers to Lord Ram, wishing that under the guidance of dignitaries like Yogi Adityanath and JPS Rathore, the Cooperative Department and the State continue to march forward on the Path of Progress. Key Vocabulary Used: Rashtra Purush: National Icon/National Hero Aryavarta: The ancient name for the northern Indian subcontinent Dharma. Righteousness/Duty DCF.

## Two Absconding Accused Arrested in Ammonia Gas Tragedy; Four Lives Lost

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** In connection with the ammonia gas tragedy that occurred at the Adarsh Cold Storage in Chandapur, located within the Phaphamau police station area, the police have arrested two accused individuals who had been absconding. Both were apprehended near the Phaphamau Railway Station. This action was taken as part of an ongoing campaign against criminals, conducted under the directives of the Police



Commissioner and other senior officials. The wanted accused—Mohd. Usman (48) and Mohd. Irfan (40), both residents of Chandapur village—who are

linked to Case No. 44/2026 registered at the Phaphamau police station, were arrested on Friday. It is noteworthy that a major tragedy occurred on

March 23, 2026, when an ammonia gas chamber exploded at the Adarsh Cold Storage in Chandapur Morahu. Following the blast, the building's walls and roof collapsed, trapping several laborers beneath the debris. Relief and rescue teams arrived at the scene and extricated 18 individuals, rushing them to a hospital; there, four laborers succumbed to their injuries, while the other injured individuals received treatment and were subsequently stabilized. In this case, the police had already

## DM Ravindra Singh Launches HPV Vaccination Campaign

Fatehpur

The Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign was formally launched on Friday at the District Women Hospital by District Magistrate Ravindra Singh, who inaugurated the initiative by cutting the ribbon. He urged Parents to ensure that eligible girls receive the Vaccine. The District Magistrate highlighted that cervical cancer is a serious health concern among women and emphasized that the

HPV vaccine is an effective Preventive measure. He informed that girls who have completed 14 years of age but have not yet turned 15 are Eligible for vaccination. Additionally, girls who are expected to turn 15 within 90 days from the Start of the campaign are also included. District Immunization Officer Dr. Suresh Kumar stated that a target has been set to vaccinate 31,443 girls across the district. For this Purpose, 7,920 doses of the vaccine have already been received

from the Prayagraj division and distributed across various Cold Chain Points. He further explained that the HPV vaccine Protects against infections caused by the human papillomavirus and helps Prevent cervical cancer, as well as other related cancers. The event was attended by Chief Medical Officer Dr. Rajeev Nayan Giri, Dr. Ishiyaq Ahmad, Dr. Vimlesh Kumar, along with officials and staff of the health department and representatives from UNICEF and WHO.

## The Grim Reality of Healthcare in the Hills-A Disturbing Truth !!

Uttarakhand

Healthcare facilities in mountainous regions continue to remain severely inadequate and deeply concerning. An incident from the Dewal area of Chamoli district in Uttarakhand starkly exposes this harsh Reality. A mother from a Below Poverty Line (BPL) family had been suffering from Persistent abdominal Pain for the Past 3-4 months. Initially, She was taken to a nearby health center in Tharali, where no effective treatment was Provided. She was repeatedly given basic medications for gas or general Pain and sent back home. Her condition continued to worsen, with no sign of Relief. As time Passed, her situation became critical. The family then took her to Subharti

Hospital in Dehradun, hoping for better care. After Preliminary examinations, doctors suspected uterine cancer and advised immediate surgery. However, within two days, they expressed their inability to Proceed and referred her to a higher specialist — after valuable time had already been lost. Enduring immense Pain, She was then brought to Apollo Hospital in Delhi. Here too, 5-6 days were spent merely waiting for diagnostic reports, including CT Scans, MRI, blood tests, and biopsy results. Once the reports were ready, doctors recommended Chemotherapy and further treatment. However, the high cost of treatment Proved to be overwhelming for the family, making it nearly impossible for them to Proceed. Prior

to this, the family had also approached AIIMS, but could not receive timely attention. Later, they revisited AIIMS with all reports, only to be advised additional tests, causing another delay of three days. Even securing an appointment in the oncology department required a waiting period of four more Days. Weeks have now Passed in this exhausting struggle... yet there is still no concrete solution to alleviate the mother suffering. The family continues to move from one hospital to another, burdened by delays, uncertainty and escalating Pain. This is not just the story of one family — it reflects the Painful reality of countless lives in the hills, where even basic healthcare remains out of Reach.

## CM Pushkar Singh Dhama Expresses Gratitude to PM Modi for Centre Support in State Development

Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhama today Paid a courtesy visit to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi. During the meeting, the Chief Minister expressed his gratitude for the continuous support and guidance extended by the Central Government towards the development of Uttarakhand, stating that the State is achieving new milestones of Progress with the Centre Cooperation.

He also invited the Prime Minister to visit Uttarakhand. On the occasion, the Chief Minister Presented the Prime Minister with a replica of Shaktipeeth Maa Surkanda Devi located in Tehri district, along with desi cow ghee, five varieties of rajma sourced from different districts, and honey from the State. The Chief Minister thanked the Prime Minister for approving 500 crore assistance for Haridwar Kumbh-2027, conducting feasibility studies under the river-linking Project through the National Water Development Agency, sanctioning 100 crore for the development of Chaurasi Kutia in Rajaji National Park and for



the MOU related to Naini-Saini airstrip in Pithoragarh. He also expressed gratitude for support in operating Safe heli-services for the Char Dham Yatra and for approving key infrastructure Projects such as underground Power lines in Rishikesh, Champawat bypass, Dehradun Ring Road and the Dehradun-Mussoorie Road. During the meeting, the Chief Minister briefed the Prime Minister on the action taken by the state government based on his Previous suggestions. He highlighted efforts to develop Uttarakhand as a global wedding destination, with Projects underway in Chopta, Duggalbitta, Patwadangar, and

the Sharda Corridor, while Ramnagar, Dehradun, Rishikesh and Triyuginarayan have already emerged as popular wedding destinations. A dedicated Policy is also being Prepared. He further informed that areas such as Bel Kedar, Anjanisain (Tehri) and Lohaghat-Shyamlatol are being developed as Spiritual Economic Zones. The introduction of winter Pilgrimage has significantly increased the number of visitors. The number of Pilgrims to Adi Kailash rose from 1761 in 2022 to 36,453 in 2025 and heli-services have also been introduced. Adventure tourism activities such as river rafting,

Paragliding and kayaking are being Promoted, while local Products are being marketed Globally under the "House of Himalayas" brand as Part of the Vocal for Local Initiative. The Chief Minister also Shared details of initiatives like "One District-One Fair," Cluster School Schemes, Bharat Darshan and Uttarakhand Darshan Programs aimed at boosting education, tourism, rural economy and Self-Employment. Request for Expansion of Rapid Rail. The Chief Minister requested the extension of the Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) from Meerut to Haridwar and Rishikesh. He also sought Policy support and Priority for establishing defence equipment manufacturing units in Uttarakhand, citing the State Strategic location, Skilled workforce, and developed industrial infrastructure. He Proposed setting up defence industrial hubs in Kotdwar, Haridwar and Dehradun, along with development of a BI-Duck bridge in Raiwala and expansion of the Chinyalisaur airstrip in Uttarkashi.

# Four Children Drown While Bathing in the Ganges; Had Entered River to Save Friends



हिमांशु

निहाल

दीपक

रिषभ

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj:** In a tragic accident that occurred on Friday morning within the Manda police station area, four children drowned while bathing in the Ganges River. It is reported that, in an attempt to save one another, all the children ventured into the deep waters. The incident took place around 10:30 AM. A total of nine children from the village had gone to the Ganges to bathe. While bathing, two children suddenly began to drown in the deep

water. Their companions rushed forward to save them, but one by one, they too were engulfed by the depths. Upon hearing the commotion, divers present nearby rushed to the scene and initiated rescue operations. After strenuous efforts, and following a rescue operation that lasted approximately three hours, the bodies of all four children were recovered. The deceased have been identified as Kunal (13), Nihal (10), Rishabh (10), and Deepak (17). Among them, Kunal and Nihal were biological brothers; both



were the sons of Anil Kumar, a resident of Bampur village. Meanwhile, Deepak was the son of Rajaram, and Rishabh was the son of Kamlesh Kumar. Upon receiving news of the tragedy, family members and villagers gathered in large numbers at the banks of the Ganges. The families were plunged into utter devastation. The mothers of the deceased children were inconsolable with grief. They lamented that two "lamps" of their household had been extinguished, and their entire world had been shat-

tered. Upon being informed of the incident, administrative and police officials arrived at the scene.

Meja Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Surendra Pratap Yadav, ACP SP Upadhyay, and other officials offered condolences to the bereaved families and assured them of every possible assistance. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also took cognizance of the tragedy and directed officials to immediately reach the site and expedite relief and rescue operations.

## Daughters Discover Their Rights: Mission Shakti Proves Successful



Akhand Bharat Sandesh Prayagraj

Under the direction of the Police Commissioner of Prayagraj, and under the supervision of the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Ganganagar) and Assistant Commissioner of Police (Tharwai)—Arun Parashar—and under the able leadership of the Station In-charge of Phaphamau—Ashwani Singh—an event was held on Friday at the Mission Shakti Center within the Phaphamau Police Station premises. During this event, young women were made aware of their rights regarding their safety, dignity, and

self-reliance. On this occasion, Sub-Inspector Nidhi Patel—a member of the Mission Shakti team—provided a detailed briefing. She highlighted various helpline numbers available for their assistance, including the Women Power Line (1090), Women's Helpline (181), Child Helpline (1098), and the Chief Minister's Helpline (1076). She further advised that if they were unable to recall any specific number, they should utilize the Police Emergency Service by dialing 112, assuring them that assistance would be provided within a very short time. She

urged them to utilize these provided numbers should any miscreant attempt to harass them. Furthermore, she provided information regarding various public welfare schemes being implemented by the government, including the Kanya Sumangala Yojana, Sukanya Samridhhi Yojana, Destitute Women Pension Scheme, and the Chief Minister's Mass Marriage Scheme, among others.

During the same event, awareness was also raised regarding cyber security, with detailed information provided about the Cyber Helpline number (1930).

## Pickup Truck Packed with Devotees Collides with Trailer; Several Dead, Dozens Injured

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Ajhuwa, Kaushambi:** A horrific road accident occurred on Friday near Dorma on the National Highway, within the Saini Kotwali police station area. A pickup truck, packed with religious devotees, collided head-on with an oncoming trailer. The impact of the collision was so severe that several people died on the spot, while dozens sustained injuries. Following the accident, the scene was filled with cries of distress and panic. A large crowd of locals from the surrounding area gathered at the site. Upon receiving the information, the police rushed to the spot and immediately initiated relief and rescue operations. The injured have been admitted to nearby hospitals. It is reported that all the occupants of the pickup truck were returning home after performing



the \*Mundan\* (head-shaving) ritual in Prayagraj. They are said to be residents of the Jahanabad and Bindki regions of Fatehpur district. According to eyewitnesses, the pickup truck was severely mangled fol-

lowing the collision, making it extremely difficult to extricate the people trapped inside. The police and local residents worked together tirelessly to pull the injured victims out of the wreckage. Currently, the adminis-

tration is in the process of officially confirming the exact number of fatalities and injuries.

A team of officials is present at the scene, and relief operations remain underway.

## Shakuntala's Separation Evokes Deep Emotion: A Commendable Presentation of 'Abhijnana Shakuntalam'

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** On the eve of World Theatre Day, an impressive stage production of Mahakavi Kalidasa's renowned play, \*Abhijnana Shakuntalam\*, was presented. The play, which opened with a dance performance by the forest maidens, saw music breathe life into the atmosphere. In the role of Shakuntala, Rupali Mishra compellingly portrayed the emotions of love, separation, and pathos. As Dushyanta, Sukhsagar Upadhyay maintained a fine balance between gravitas and humor. Priyamvada (Ishika Pathak), Anasuya (Anjali Gautam), Maharishi Kanva



(Ashutosh Tripathi), and Rishi Durvasa (Nitish Kumar) brought the narrative to life through their powerful acting, while Shwetank Kumar proved effective in the role of the Jester (Vidushak). The

Fisherman-Thief (Ankit Kumar), the Guards (Nitish Kumar, Manisha Devi), and the Kotwal (Aakarshit Pandey) also did full justice to their respective roles. Deepshikha's dance performance in the roles of Menaka and Sanumati was captivating. Other artists—including Gautami (Samridhhi), Kanchuki/Matali (Aakarshit Pandey), the Rishi's Daughter (Siya Patel), the Rishi's Disciple (Ankit Kumar), Sarvadaman (Deepika Yadav), and the Ascetics (Asha Pal, Deepshikha Chaudhary)—made their presence felt through their performances. The production was made truly impactful through the

music direction of Arun Tripathi and Ishita Arya, the playback vocals of Kartikeya

Tiwari, and the flute accompaniment of Ayush Kumar. Stage management and lighting design were handled by Ananya Pandey; makeup and hairstyling by K h u s h b o o Dwivedi and Juhi Maurya; and costume design by Deepshikha Chaudhary. NSD-trained Asgar Ali

served as the Production Controller, and the staging was executed in collaboration with the Buniyad Foundation.

### Information

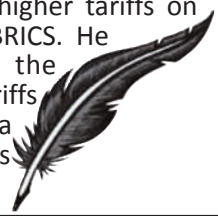
It is hereby notified to the general public that the correct name of my son is Shubham Patel, son of Chhedu, as recorded in his educational records. Due to an inadvertent error, his name has been recorded as "Sansad" in his Aadhaar Card (No. 323158085074), which is incorrect. Henceforth, my son shall be known and identified by his correct name: Shubham Patel, son of Chhedu. In this regard, it is hereby legally certified that all formalities pertaining to the aforementioned matter have been personally completed by me.

**Chhedu**  
Son of Amarnath |  
Resident of Village Mujahidpur, Palhana Uparhar,  
Tehsil Chayal, District Kaushambi.

## Editorial

## India uses BRICS to push reforms—not to challenge the US

The latest edition of the BRICS Summit was significant because all 10 member countries participated. It included Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the UAE, which attended as member states for the first time at the 2024 summit in Russia, and Indonesia, which joined in early 2025 as the first Southeast Asian country in the bloc. With its expansion, the group is now known as BRICS Plus—a term first used at the 2024 summit. Although forming groups of countries to promote cooperation is common globally, BRICS is more than a conventional grouping. It is a group of countries challenging the clout of the developed powers, particularly the US and European nations. In 2010, the first five members—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—constituted 18 per cent of the global GDP. Their collective share has risen to 26.5 percent in 2025. These nations are now challenging the hegemony of the West. Calls for de-dollarisation—reducing reliance on the US dollar in trade and finance—are becoming prominent, posing a threat to America's financial and geopolitical dominance. It gives China and Russia (and India too) a louder voice on the world stage. It fuels global economic realignment away from the dollar and Western institutions, pointing to a multipolar world order—something that US President Donald Trump doesn't support. The recent expansion of BRICS, with five new members joining, has increased the worries of the West, particularly the US. And without mincing words, Trump has started expressing his unhappiness over the developments happening in BRICS. Here are the key reasons why Trump opposes BRICS: The primary reason is that both the original members (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and new entrants like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Iran, and Ethiopia are openly discussing reducing reliance on the US dollar in trade and finance. Trump's long-standing "America First" stance makes any move away from the dollar a direct challenge to U.S. economic influence and its ability to enforce sanctions. The second point that irks Trump is BRICS' geopolitical opposition to the West. BRICS increasingly positions itself as a counterweight to Western institutions like the G7, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. The deepening ties between China and Russia within BRICS are seen as part of a broader anti-Western alignment. Third, Trump has consistently taken a hardline stance on China, through trade wars, tariffs, tech and investment restrictions, etc. BRICS giving China a leadership platform to challenge the US on the global stage agitates him. He views BRICS as a vehicle for China's global expansion under the guise of multipolarity. Fourth, the inclusion of Saudi Arabia and Iran gives BRICS influence over global energy markets. There is growing potential for oil trade to be conducted in non-dollar currencies (e.g., yuan or BRICS currency), which would weaken the petrodollar system—a critical pillar of US global economic power. Fifth, Trump perceives BRICS expansion as a sign that the 'Global South' is drifting away from Western influence, forming its own independent bloc. This runs contrary to Trump's vision of negotiating "from strength," where US dominance is unquestioned. Sixth, Trump views global influence in zero-sum terms. Any rise of a non-Western grouping that excludes the US is seen as a personal and national affront. BRICS summits that propose alternative visions for world order without US involvement are perceived as a threat to 'American prestige'—something Trump values highly. He has threatened to impose higher tariffs on countries siding with the BRICS. He has already announced the imposition of 50 per cent tariffs on Brazil. Although India is a member of BRICS, its approach is more nuanced.



## Saiyaara proves star kids don't need hype, just a good film and a killer soundtrack

Mohit Suri's Saiyaara is a lesson in successfully launching new actors. The film did not hold press conferences, 'exclusive' interviews, or have its lead pair jet-setting across cities to interact with crowds. Instead, it opted for radio silence. It banked on the release alone. The movie had a box office opening of Rs 21.5 crore, and has now crossed the 100-crore mark before completing the first week of its release. Ahaan Panday and Aneet Padda stole the thunder when it came to making a memorable big-screen debut.

The film's unprecedented opening even had Ajay Devgn scramble to postpone the release of his film Son of Sardaar 2 from 25 July to 1 August. The film relied on one star—the music. Suri, known for his films Zeher (2005), Woh Lamhe (2006), and Aashiqui 2 (2013), has let his films' music do the talking. Each of these films had a breakout song that pushed the film to audiences. Be it 'Woh Lamhe' from Zeher to 'Kya Mujhe Pyar Hai' of Woh Lamhe and 'Tum Hi Ho' from Aashiqui 2, Suri's films capture the mood of heart-

break like no other in their album.

The star-crossed lovers, the looming tragedy, and the music have all been done before by Suri. Gen Z has now succumbed to what was millennial 'poison'. While most star kids were launched with an overdose of PR appearances, from doing a hook step of their movie's title track to being part of creators' videos, Saiyaara's lead cast was conspicuous through their absence from social media. The PR team clearly decided to learn from others' mistakes.

Ahaan Panday had a blink-and-miss appearance in his sister Alanna's wedding and was absent from her Prime Video show, The Tribe (2024). In contrast, his cousin Ananya Panday was everywhere before and during her debut in Student of the Year 2 (2019). Her social media already had a massive follower count, and she was seen rubbing shoulders with the who's who of Bollywood. More recently, massive social media hype was built before Ibrahim Ali Khan made his debut with Nadaaniyan (2025).

## Defence, tech, education—Modi's visit will boost India-UK ties

Prime Minister Modi fourth visit to the UK. He held wide-ranging discussions with PM Keir Starmer on the entire gamut of India-UK bilateral relations, and exchange views on issues of regional and global importance. He is also expected to call on King Charles III. During the visit, the two sides reviewed the progress of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) with a specific focus on trade and economy, technology and innovation, defence and security, climate, health, education, and people-to-people ties. Following the UK's exit from the European Union, economic and trade relations between the two countries acquired a new salience. India-UK bilateral trade set a new record when it crossed \$55 billion (£42.6 billion) in 2024, registering an increase of around 10 per cent over the previous year. Indian companies have made significant investments in the UK. Grant Thornton (GT) and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) research in 2024 highlighted a record number of 971 Indian companies in the UK with a combined turnover of over £68 billion. The report India Meets Britain Tracker 2024 found that Indian companies in the UK are thriving, with 100 companies having a revenue growth of at least 10 per cent. The Britain meets India Tracker 2024 identified 667 British companies in India with a turnover of approximately £47.5 billion. The UK is the sixth-largest contributor of FDI to India. Cumulative FDI from the UK



to India is around \$36 billion between 2000 to March 2025. India's investment in the UK during this period is close to \$20 billion. The Indian diaspora in the UK is also a major presence in the UK's economic scenario. The 2020 GT report, done with the High Commission of India, London, and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), identified 654 diaspora-owned companies with a turnover of at least £100,000, generating a cumulative annual turnover of £36.84 billion. The wealth generated by Indian diaspora-owned businesses in the UK was estimated to be around £75 billion by this report. The 1.8 million Indian diaspora forms about 2.7 per cent of the UK's population. During PM Modi's visit, the signing of the India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is expected. The forward-looking agreement complements India's growth aspirations. The FTA has been described as both historic and ambitious. It is expected to boost jobs, exports, and growth, benefitting 99 per cent of Indian exports from zero per cent duty, opening export opportunities for labour-

intensive sectors such as textiles, marine products, leather footwear, sports goods and toys, gems and jewellery, and others such as engineering goods and organic chemicals. Trade in services is also expected to receive a significant fillip. Enhanced global mobility for aspirational young Indians and a three-year exemption from social security payments come as a major relief for Indian employees and companies based in the UK. Despite the record bilateral trade, the UK's trade with India accounts for around 2.5 per cent of its total trade. With both sides seeking trade diversification and supply-chain resilience, an India-UK FTA will hopefully create the doorway for businesses to drive the economic relationship forward. Given the immediate challenges on India's borders, cooperation in the defence sector with partners such as the UK has achieved greater importance. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's visit to the UK in January 2024 provided fresh impetus to the defence pillar of the relationship. In 2023, ties were elevated to a 2+2 mechanism. The British defence sector could emerge

as a key collaborator in technology transfers, the development of advanced capabilities, and supporting the Make in India effort by attracting more British FDI into the defence sector. Several defence cooperation agreements—covering production of Man Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS) and Lightweight Multirole Missiles (LMM), the establishment of an Advanced Short-Range Air to Air Missile (ASRAAM) assembly and test facility in India and a Statement of Intent to design and develop an Integrated Full Electric Propulsion system for Indian Navy ships—signal good times ahead for India's defence sector. India's focus on indigenous development does present challenges for the British industry, with fears that it could potentially make cooperation in certain sectors commercially unviable. Intellectual property (IP) issues also need to be resolved. These issues can hopefully be addressed through the robust defence engagement mechanism that now exists between the two countries. Moreover, the UK-India military cooperation has grown in recent times.

The Royal Navy made six ship visits to India in 2023, while its Littoral Response Group (South) conducted exercises with the Indian Navy in March 2024. In August 2024, the UK's Royal Air Force participated in exercise Tarang Shakti in India. An Indian naval officer, Lieutenant Commander N Dinesh Anand, has joined Britannia Royal Naval College

as Divisional Training Officer for the first time. India and the UK are making a serious effort to build technology partnerships. The new bilateral Technology Security Initiative (TSI), formally launched during UK Foreign Secretary, David Lammy's visit, aims to catalyse collaboration on critical and emerging technologies in seven key sectors: telecoms, critical minerals, semiconductors, Artificial Intelligence, quantum, biotechnology and health technology, and advanced materials. Tech collaboration between India and the UK also extends to sectors including financial services, innovation in health, climate, renewables, and startups. The participation of stakeholders from government, industry, and academia would be important for taking the Technology Security Initiative forward. Both countries are global hubs of innovation, science, technology, and research. India is one of the world's largest startup ecosystems and has over 100 unicorn companies. The increasing focus on these areas is welcome. Education is an important pillar of India-UK relations. The University of Southampton opened its campus in Gurugram on 16 July 2025, becoming the first foreign university campus under the New Education Policy (NEP). The UK remains one of the preferred destinations for Indian students, with around 1,70,000 students studying in the UK in the academic year 2023-2024.

## Pak accomplices, shootouts, sealed chargesheet—how the 7/11 blasts case fell apart

The men gathered early one morning in a one-room tenement inside the Deccan Cooperative Society in Sewri, on the grimy eastern fringes of suburban Mumbai. They began packing ammonium nitrate-fuel oil gel, the lethal but readily available commercial explosive used across India, inside 35-kilogram pressure cookers. Then, a detonator cap was loaded into each pressure cooker and linked to a simple Ajanta-brand digital clock, set to 6:30 pm. Each cooker was then packed in a shopping bag. Later that evening 209 people died—far more than on 26/11—when the bombs went off in packed first-class compartments on seven separate trains running from Churchgate. This week, 19 years on, the Bombay High Court finally held what successive governments, police services, and the intelligence services themselves have long known: The five men sent to death row for their role in the bombings, and the seven others given shorter sentences, had nothing to do with the bombing. The

Maharashtra government has announced it will appeal—but disturbing evidence will surface that the botched trial has enabled the terrorists actually responsible for the crime to evade responsibility. Intelligence and police services at the time were struggling to detect the real workings of the Lashkar-e-Taiba-linked network that came to be known as the Indian Mujahideen. Therefore, following the 7/11 bombing, the usual suspects—generally men with loose ties to conservative Muslim groups—were pulled in and charged with terrorism, as was the pattern in several prosecutions from the period. Following the bombing of the Sankat Mochan Temple in Varanasi, as well as the local railway station, the Imam of the mosque at Phulpur was arrested and charged with the murder of 28 people. The Uttar Pradesh police alleged that Waliullah had handed over the explosives and the pressure cooker cases to three terrorists from Bangladesh, who were never identified.

## China was quick to test the nuclear bomb. India missed vital landmarks

In an era of multiple strifes across continents, an anniversary quietly slipped under the radar of world watchers. Eighty years ago, an explosion ushered in a new age of combat, weapons, tactics, and technology. At 5:29 am local time on 16 July 1945, the United States tested the world's first atomic bomb in the desolate desert of New Mexico in an area called Jornada del Muerto—Spanish for "Dead Man's Road". The site couldn't have been chosen because of the irony in its name. In the days of Spanish expansion into the New World, this must have certainly been a deadly route to take, but that was centuries before America's wartime quest for the world's most potent weapon. And it was tested under the codename 'Trinity'. A multi-billion-dollar initiative that involved scores of enterprises, institutions, and scientists of various disciplines working under strict military supervision, it was innocently labelled 'Manhattan Project'. Innocent, since the name didn't convey its unifocal military purpose. The world entered the nuclear age with a military purpose, and its impact on 6 and 9 August 1945 over Hiroshima and Nagasaki are historical landmarks that will not be erased anytime soon. Reams have been written about the Manhattan Project and its impact. The ghastly use of the bomb against Japan has also been dissected. What has been relegated to dusty shelves and nerdy researchers, however, is the official report on the programme. It's unambiguously called Atomic Energy for Military Purposes. Among the most extraordinary aspects of the report is that it was made public on 12 August 1945, even before the radioactive clouds had lifted from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Princeton University physicist Henry DeWolf Smyth penned the report. Within the community that contributed to making the nuclear fission device a success, the Smyth Report

was the working paper on how the Manhattan Project was to be discussed. It is patently clear that the US was working on a long-term nuclear perspective. The American military approach is a far cry from how India viewed the arrival of the nuclear era. Although its nuclear journey is extraordinary among formerly colonised nations, India missed vital landmarks along the way. In July 1945, India already had a nuclear research programme at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), established months before Washington's Trinity test. Within a year of Independence, the country also had an Atomic Energy Commission, and in less than a decade, it had commissioned Asia's first nuclear reactor, APSARA, at Trombay. India was light years ahead of any other Asian country. In the 1950s, China was largely dependent on its larger ideological ally, the Soviet Union. It entered the nuclear age with a sole purpose, based on Chairman Mao's dictum, "Power flows from the barrel of a gun." The simple formulation offered Beijing both short-term benefits and dividends in the long run, too. It is now obvious that the possession of weapons of mass destruction will not invite military intervention.

In an era of mass hypocrisy. Iran and Iraq, which didn't possess nuclear arsenals, were attacked, while North Korea, which did, wasn't. Hypocrisy and discrimination are obviously kosher in today's world order. India, however, approached the nuclear era from the perspective of "peaceful utilisation" to harness unlimited energy and enter the club of rapidly developing countries. It officially launched a three-stage nuclear programme with an indigenous research and development project. But eight decades after TIFR initiated its research programme, India remains light years away from its early energy vision. And it has also missed the bus to power.

## Over 1,000 crypto heists have netted hackers \$12.7 billion.

Delhi: Data indicated that cyber thieves have stolen over \$1.71 billion this year, bringing total losses to \$12.7 billion spanning more than 1,000 heists. Cryptocurrencies' great value and anonymity attract criminals, driving the value of criminal crypto transactions to alarming highs, according to CryptoPresales.com. Comparitech data shows that hackers stole over \$1 billion in five of the past 10 years, including 2024, demonstrating the continued battle for law enforcement and regulators to manage these crimes. Crypto heists increased 15 times in the past decade, from 12 in 2014 to 176 this year. The disparity is even greater than the 283 crypto heists reported in 2023, the most ever. A decade of crypto heists is disturbing, even though the annual number has fallen. Research has found 1,008 crypto heists since 2014, costing the sector over \$12.7 bil-



lion. Data shows that almost 75% of these losses occurred in the last four years, with 2022 and 2023 leading the way. Exploits, hacks, and flash loan attacks account for approximately 65% of crypto heists, according to statistics. "So far, there have been 395 exploits, 271 hacks targeting systems or networks, and 220 flash loan attacks, which exploit smart contract bugs or manipulate crypto prices," the research stated. Despite fears about North Korea-linked hackers stealing bitcoin, South Korea and the US are researching ways to protect against them. Bitcoin's price rose to \$100,000.

### Honda and Nissan merge to form auto powerhouse

Delhi: Honda, Nissan, and Mitsubishi Motors plan to unite, producing the world's third-largest carmaker by sales. The merger addresses industrial difficulties caused by increased electrification and developing technology. Smaller alliance member Mitsubishi Motors joined discussions on a strategic cooperation after signing an MOU. Mitsubishi plans to decide on its integration role by January 2025. The

Delhi: The powerful GST Council may have to delay a decision on the middle class-focused issue of waiving goods and services tax (GST) on term insurance and lowering health insurance rates from 18% to 5% due to opposition from numerous states. However, it may raise the second-hand vehicle charge from 12% to 18%, rejecting demands to cut it to 5% for electric vehicles. Due to concerns from states like West Bengal, Kerala, and Karnataka, insurance has not received the backing expected while there is no consensus on



adjusting pricing. Bihar deputy chief minister Samrat Chaudhary led a GoM to modify prices. The Centre will need to work hard on Saturday to convince states to agree to Chaudhary's GoM's insurance tax adjustments. States worry that lower rates may reduce revenue, especially since the compensating cess was removed to compensate for gaps. The Centre and states collected Rs 16,400 crore from GST on life and health insurance in 2023-24, down somewhat from the year before. Revenue loss could reach Rs 2,500 crore yearly. Since the anti-profiteering clause has been removed, it is unclear how the GST Council can ensure that consumers benefit from lower taxes.

## Adani Defence & Aerospace buys Air Works for Rs 400 crore

Delhi: Adani Defence & Aerospace said that it had reached a formal agreement to acquire Air Works, India's largest private-sector MRO provider, for Rs 400 crore. Adani Defence Systems & Technologies Ltd (ADSTL) has signed a

share purchase agreement to acquire 85.8 per cent shareholding in Air Works India (Engineering) Private Ltd," a press release said. Air Works maintains narrow-body, turboprop, and rotary aircraft in Hosur, Mumbai, and Kochi

with regulatory permits from over 20 countries. The statement stated Air Works, a civil aviation industry leader, has deep defence MRO capabilities, executing projects for major Indian Navy and Air Force aircraft.

## Over 1.6 crore Jio subscribers leave in four months

Delhi: At Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd., India's largest telecom operator, approximately 1.65 crore subscribers have dropped in the past four months. Reliance Jio lost 37.6 lakh mobile users in October, 79 lakh in September, 40 lakh in August, and 7.58 lakh in July. Airtel, India's second-largest telecom carrier, gained roughly 24 lakh members in October after losing 14.3 lakh in September, according to TRAI data. In August and July 2024, Airtel lost 24 lakh and 16 lakh users. In October, Vodafone Idea lost 19 lakh mobile subscribers, up from 15.5 lakh in September.

## Redeveloping railway stations opens Rs 30,000 cr in business opportunities

Delhi: EPC companies are expecting Rs 30,000 crore in business from contracts to redevelop/revamp railway stations in the next two years. The Railways have sanctioned 1,318 station redevelopment/revamps, which IcrA Ratings estimates will provide Rs 30,000 crore in commercial potential for EPC firms over the next two years. The government previously planned most station renovation projects as public-private partnerships, accounting for 12% of the national asset monetisation pipeline target. However, due to pricing restrictions, real estate development market risks, and a lack of PPP experience in railways, the government reallocated station redevelopment work to the EPC mode in December 2022 and increased the budgetary allocation by more than seven times from Rs 2,159 crore in FY23 to Rs 15,511 crore in FY25. Railway station rehabilitation offers EPC businesses Rs 30,000 crore in business potential due to intense competition in traditional segments like roads and buildings, according to Vinay Kumar G of the agency. In the past two years, station redevelopment project awards have seen modest competition, with maximum discounts of up to 18% and a median discount of up to 4%, similar to other railway EPC projects with a median discount of up to 5%.

## The GST panel postpones calling for reduced insurance costs

Delhi: The GST Council voted to exempt gene therapy used to cure cancer from taxes and postponed a proposal for lower rates while lowering the tariff on fortified rice kernels used in PDS to 5%. The council determined that 18% GST would be applied to the margin of suppliers for all used cars, including electric vehicles. Even though there won't be any tax transactions involving private citizens, businesses or used car sellers would be subject to the fee. According to Sitharaman, states desired a greater fee, but the Center had suggested a 5% tax on EVs. The GST Council issued a number of clarifications, one of which was that ready-to-eat popcorn would be subject to a 12% tax, similar to the namkeen tax, if it were pre-packaged with salt



"The 'penal costs' that banks and NBFCs impose and collect from borrowers for failure to comply with loan terms do not need the payment of GST"

and spices. Caramelized sugar will be subject to an 18% tax. In a similar vein, the council stated that as voucher transactions were neither a delivery of commodities nor services, they

would not be subject to taxes. It also made it clear that small enterprises that pay rent to unregistered landlords and are covered by the reverse charge system will not be required.

### NCLAT accepts Sapphire Media's Big 92.7 FM purchase

Delhi: The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) affirmed Sapphire Media's resolution plan to acquire Big 92.7 FM, owned by Reliance Broadcast Network Limited, dismissing Radio Mirchi, Orange FM, and others' petitions.

NCLAT Bench Chair Justice Ashok Bhushan and Technical Member Barun Mitra said, "After considering the submissions, we find no grounds to interfere with the NCLT's order dated May 6, 2024, and consequently, the appeals are dismissed."

## Canon targets chip companies opening India operations

Delhi: Japanese image and optical products giant Canon India President and CEO Toshiaki Nomura feels its semiconductor lithography equipment for chip production has a bright promise in India and is in negotiations with firms putting up facilities here. Canon did not identify names but said there is huge potential since several chip manufacturers are considering India for semiconductor manufacturing. Many chipmakers are considering India as a new manufacturing location.



Nomura informed us that they are discussing our product and service with all chip manufacturers. He said this is a "good opportunity for us" for the Tokyo-based business to contribute its technology, goods, and services to this Indian market area. "We install equipment to make chips using our technology and goods.

We help chipmakers create strong India facilities. Once the chip manufacturer builds the facility in India, we will install our equipment and contribute to the Indian semiconductor industry with our good product and service," Nomura stated. Negotiations are underway.

## Indian gold demand is dampened by price fluctuations

Delhi: This week, unpredictable pricing in India delayed gold purchases, while rising rates in China may balance seasonal demand. A Chennai jeweller claimed buyers are waiting for gold prices to fall after two weeks of volatility. After climbing to Rs 79,120 last week, Indian 10 grams prices dipped to Rs 75,459 (\$887.28) this week. Indian dealers offered a discount of up to \$8 an ounce over official domestic pricing, including 6% import and 3% sales levies, down from \$9 last week. "This week, jewellers awaited the Fed's interest rate cut. "The rupee's record low surprised them," said a Mumbai-based private bullion importing bank trader. India's gold imports are expected to drop sharply in December



as gold prices rise and families choose lighter, lower-carat jewelry. Swiss gold exports surged in November due to increased supplies to India and China and Hong Kong compared to October. According to an independent analyst, high gold prices also lowered demand in other Asian countries, notably top customer China, which gave \$5 per ounce reductions to the international price. A trader said gold was sold at a \$2.00 premium in Hong Kong.

### Honda proposes CAFE compliant EVs and hybrids

Delhi: A top Honda Cars India executive said the next stage-3 of the Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) regulations will tighten pollution standards, therefore the company will sell hybrid and electric cars in the future years. It wants to launch three new electric vehicles by 2026-27 to align its India portfolio with its global electrification aspirations. "We are currently

## Indian steel imports from China reached record high

Delhi: Provisional government statistics revealed that India's completed steel imports from China reached an all-time high in the first eight months of the fiscal year to March 2025, raising fears among domestic mills over cheap Chinese supplies. With India, the world's second-largest crude steel producer, a net importer, finished steel imports reached an eight-year high. Data revealed India shipped 6.5 million metric tons of completed steel, up 26.6% year-over-year. Data indicated China shipped 1.96 million metric tons of steel to India in April-November, rising 22.8% year-over-year. Beijing exported mostly stainless steel, hot-rolled coil, plates, electrical sheets, galvanized plain or corrugated sheets, pipes, bars,



"New Delhi is investigating whether to levy a 25% safeguard duty to control unbridled steel imports. India began importing steel in the financial year ending March 2024"

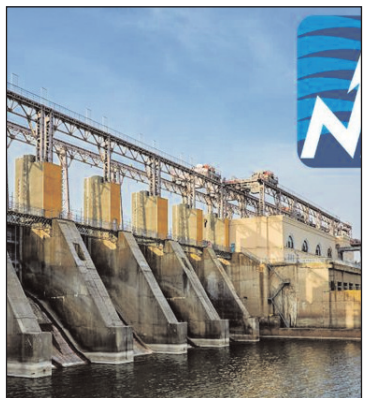
and rods. The report showed that Japanese finished steel imports more than doubled to 1.4 million metric tons in April-November, a six-year high. India imported 79% of finished steel from China, Japan, and South Korea. After hot-rolled coils, bars and rods were the most imported non-flat steel products.

New Delhi is investigating whether

to levy a 25% safeguard duty to control unbridled steel imports. India began importing steel in the financial year ending March 2024, and imports have gradually climbed. New Delhi joins a growing list of countries considering import restrictions as cheap Chinese steel has forced India's smaller factories to reduce operations and jobs.

## NHPC invests 25,500 cr in Bihar 1,000 MW solar project

Delhi: NHPC Ltd.'s chairman and managing director Raj Kumar Chaudhary announced that the country's largest hydropower company will invest Rs 5,500 crore in a 1,000-megawatt solar power project in Bihar. At the Bihar Business Connect 2024 investor forum, the business and state government signed an investment MoU. "We have proposed to invest Rs 5,500 crore in setting up a 1,000 MW solar power project," stated. The project might be launched in 1.5-2 years after land purchase. Land is essential for solar projects. He urged the state government to help acquire land so we could finish the project on schedule. The company's website says it has roughly 7 gigawatts of active hydropower projects and 9.3 under construction. Chaudhary said NHPC plans to build a modest solar plant to create green hydrogen. "The green hydrogen produced will be used to power passenger buses," stated. When burned, green hydrogen creates no carbon and just water, making it the cleanest energy source. He stated NHPC will fund the green hydrogen bus. The state government will administer it as part of the government's sustainable energy plan.



# Tiger Shroff admits he's an 'insecure' person

**Tiger Shroff explained that while insecurity can often be seen as a weakness, for him, it acts as a powerful motivator**

**B**ollywood actor Tiger Shroff recently got candid about his personal struggles and vulnerabilities during a conversation with Lilly Singh. Known for his high-octane action roles and chiseled physique, the actor surprised fans by admitting that beneath the confident exterior lies an 'insecure' and sensitive individual.

When asked if he considers himself a vulnerable person, Tiger said, "I would say so. I'm a very insecure person. I know change is constant but I'm scared of change as well."

He further explained that while insecurity can often be seen as a weakness, for him, it acts as a powerful motivator. His fear of failure, he said, keeps him striving to improve and stay ahead in a competitive industry.

Tiger said, "I like to hold on to things. I like to hold on to what's mine. I'm constantly insecure about the way I look. So that sort of insecurity drives me and pushes me...the fear of failure pushes me."

The Baaghi actor also stated that it is important to talk about what and how one feels. Soon after Tiger's video was

shared on Instagram, his mother, Ayesha Shroff, dropped heart emojis in the comments section. Choreographer Bosco Martis wrote, "Bless you bro."

Well, this is not the first time that the 36-year-old actor has opened up about being 'insecure'. In an interview with IANS in 2019, Tiger had said, "I am so insecure. But I am driven by my insecurities to constantly seek approval and appreciation... How am I going to... 'Is my dad going to like it (my work)?', 'Are my fans going to appreciate my work?' While doing a film with Hrithik Roshan sir, (I think) 'I hope he is impressed'... He is my hero and I look up to him and I hope that I am not letting him down or slowing him down."

Meanwhile, on the work front, Tiger is gearing up for Lag Jaa Gale, where he will share screen space with Lakshya Lalwani and Janhvi Kapoor. Additionally, reports suggest that he may team up with Vidyut Jammwal for an upcoming project, which is expected to be helmed by filmmaker Milap Zaveri.



# Rajshri Deshpande recalls breaking down alone

**Rajshri Deshpande, who is battling grade 1 breast cancer, recalled breaking down alone at a hospital after her diagnosis**

**A**ctress Rajshri Deshpande earlier this month revealed that she is battling grade 1 breast cancer, which was diagnosed earlier this year, and that she has undergone surgery at Kokilabai Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Mumbai. Days later, in an emotional social media post, the actress recalled breaking down in tears 'alone' at the hospital after learning about her diagnosis, admitting she could not stay strong and had no strength. She also shared that she just wants to "be still, like in Mary Oliver's poem, like the sparrows that sit on my window boughain-

villea and stare at the sunrise."

Taking to her Instagram handle on Friday, March 27, the 'Sacred Games' actress wrote "When I first learned about my breast cancer, I still remember breaking down all alone outside the histopathology report centre in the hospital. No, I couldn't stay strong. I had no strength. Till today, when people ask me how it happened to you... You're so fit, blah blah ... honestly, I don't have an answer."

Rajshri said that the pain was not just physical, but the mental and emotional pain was also 'unbearable.' She added that she crumbled many times, some-

times alone and sometimes with her friends, who held her up at every single step. However, there were many days when she rose again and made sure she didn't give up.

She added that on Friday, she managed to smile and give herself a hug while thinking about all the people who have been with her on this journey, who called, messaged, and gave her so much love. The actress said that tomorrow she knows there will be battles to prepare for, but today is a day for love.

Rajshri has starred in several films, including Kick, Mom, Joram, and Chote Nawab.

# Shatrughan Sinha opens up about Sonakshi's wedding

**Sonakshi Sinha and Zaheer Iqbal got married in 2024, and recently, during an interview, veteran actor and TMC MP, Shatrughan Sinha, spoke about his daughter's wedding.**

**V**eteran actor and TMC MP Shatrughan Sinha's daughter, Sonakshi Sinha, got married to Zaheer Iqbal in 2024. It was an interfaith marriage that took place under the Special Marriage Act. Recently, in an interview, the veteran actor opened up about his daughter's wedding, and stated that Sonakshi and Zaheer are 'made for each other'.

During an interview with News 18, when Sinha was asked that his house name is Ramayana and his daughter has got married (referring to a marriage with a Muslim), so is everything all right, the veteran actor said, "Bilkul thik thaak hai. Hum bahot khush hai. Sonakshi ki jo shaadi hui hai, made for each other lagte hai dono. Zaheer,

unka jo husband hai, aur Sonakshi, they look absolutely made for each other (Everything is fine. We are very happy. Sonakshi is married; they both seem made for each other. Zaheer, her husband, and Sonakshi look absolutely made for each other)."

Sinha further added, "Sabhi badi aur sabse ahem baat yeh hai, humne jo kuch bhi kiya hai, koi gair kaanonni kaam nahi kiya hai, aur samvidhan ke khilaf nahi kiya hai. Bachche jawan hai, bachche adults hai. Agar woh khush hai, toh miya-bivi raazi toh kya karega Qazi. Hume unka saath dena chahiye. Wholeheartedly, chattaan ki tarah unke saath ho (The biggest and most important thing is that whatever we have done, we have not done anything illegal or against the Constitu-



tion. The children are young, the children are adults. If they are happy, if the husband and wife are happy, then what can the Qazi do? I support them wholeheartedly, like a rock.)"

Sonakshi and Zaheer got married at their house in the presence of their close friends and family. While Shatrughan Sinha and Poonam Sinha attended the wedding, there were reports that the actress' brothers were not there on her special day.

# Alia Bhatt's stunning golden hour pictures

**Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt turned heads in Chennai with her dreamy mint-green organza saree and statement Kundan choker**

**W**hen it comes to effortless elegance with a modern twist, Alia Bhatt rarely misses, and her latest Chennai appearance is proof. Bathed in soft golden hour light, the actress served up a look that felt equal parts dreamy and sophisticated, leaving fans (and the internet) completely mesmerised.

For the event, Alia slipped into a refreshing sage green saree from the label Jadon, styled by celebrity stylist Priyanka Kapadia. The organza drape brought an ethereal vibe with its sheer texture, adorned with delicate floral embroidery in green and hints of metallic silver.

The saree was styled in a classic manner, with crisp pleats and a gracefully flowing pallu that trailed elegantly, making it perfect for an evening setting. Complementing the drape was a sleeveless silk blouse in a matching tone, featuring a plunging neckline and a structured fit.

But what truly elevated the outfit was her jewellery. Alia opted for an exquisite Kundan choker from Moksh, adorned with gemstones and diamonds that added a regal touch. Paired with gold earrings, the accessories brought just the right amount of drama, letting the saree shine while still making a statement.

Her makeup stayed true to her signature style with fresh, glowing skin, soft pink tones on the eyes and lips, a hint of highlighter and nude lips. Lastly, Alia wore her hair loose in soft waves with a centre parting, enhancing the romantic feel of the look.



# Sanjay Dutt starrer Aakhri Sawal gets release date

**Aakhri Sawal features Sanjay Dutt, Amit Sadh, Namashi Chakraborty, Sameera Reddy, Tridha Choudhury and Neetu Chandra**

**T**he poster of Aakhri Sawal is indeed a true reflection of the intensity and the subject the film explores. With Sanjay Dutt's intense face placed within a huge question mark, the poster leaves behind an intrigue to look forward to. What makes it even more compelling is the tagline, "The Question India Never Stopped Asking." This, in itself, suggests that the film is set to address a subject that India has long grappled with. The poster also clearly reveals the release date, 15th May 2026.

The makers took to their social media and shared poster and wrote - "The question India never stopped asking. Get ready to know the answer on 15th May only in cinemas."

Moreover, Aakhri Sawal is set to bring to the audience a true story of the 100-year journey of one of India's oldest unified organizations, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, founded in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. The audience will get to witness a pivotal meeting that altered the future of Bharat, transcending conventional historical narratives and going beyond what textbooks reveal. It sheds light on the core philosophy of selfless service to the nation and promises to introduce audiences to truths that have remained unseen and unheard. The youth of India have many questions and a deep sense of intrigue about an organization that seems closed to most, as it does not believe in propagating itself or holding press conferences.

The film features Sanjay Dutt, Amit Sadh, Namashi Chakraborty, Sameera Reddy, Tridha Choudhury and Neetu Chandra. With such an experienced and talented ensemble, it is poised to be a film that leaves a lasting impact on audiences.



A poster of the film



## CLOSED WATERWAY | 35 nations have joined talks on reopening Hormuz shipping: France Israel vows to step up strikes on Iran

JERUSALEM

Israel would step up strikes against Iran as a result of its continued missile fire, says Defence Minister Israel Katz, warning the Islamic republic would pay a "heavy price".

"Despite the warnings, the firing continues - consequently, IDF strikes in Iran will intensify and expand to other targets in sectors that help the regime develop and use military means against Israeli civilians. They will pay a heavy price, an increasingly heavy one, for this war crime," Katz said in a video released by his office.

Israeli Opposition leader Yair Lapid warned the government for the first time that the war was taking too high a toll. "The IDF is stretched to the limit and beyond. The government is leaving the army wounded out on the battlefield," Lapid said, echoing a warning delivered a day earlier by military chief Lieutenant General Eyal Zamir. "The government is sending the army into a multi-



A damaged residential building in Tehran. —AP

front war without a strategy, without the necessary means, and with far too few soldiers," Lapid said.

Meanwhile, France said that 35 countries joined a discussion to reopen shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

A videoconference of defence staff chiefs focused on how to reopen shipping "once the intensity of hostilities has sufficiently decreased," France's Defence Ministry said.

That could entail a "strictly

defensive" mission to escort commercial vessels and restore freedom of navigation, the ministry added.

Furthermore, the US intends to take over the Nord Stream pipelines, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in an interview with the France Television's broadcaster. He also noted Moscow saw Washington's desire to dominate global energy markets and its interest in controlling the strait.

## Nuclear facilities targeted: Iran

Iran state media said its nuclear facilities were attacked on Friday, hours after Israel threatened to "escalate and expand" its campaign against Tehran. IRNA reported a heavy-water plant and a yellowcake production plant were struck. Yellowcake is a concentrated form of uranium after impurities are removed from the raw ore. Heavy water is used as a moderator in nuclear reactors.

## Kash Patel's account hacked

A pro-Iranian hacking group claimed to have hacked an account of FBI Director Kash Patel and has posted online what appear to be years-old photos of him, along with a work resume and other personal documents. Many of those records appeared to be more than a decade old.

"Kash Patel, the current head of the FBI, who once saw his name displayed with pride on the agency's headquarters, will now find his name among the list of successfully hacked victims," said a message posted on Friday from the group Handala. The message was accompanied by over a half dozen photos of Patel, including ones of him standing beside an antique sports car and another with a cigar in his mouth. —AP

## G7 meets on Iran war as Rubio tries to sell US strategy to sceptical allies

VAUX-DE-CERNAY (FRANCE)

Group of Seven foreign ministers met in France on Friday to discuss the conflicts in West Asia, and between Russia and Ukraine, with deep divisions apparent over the US-Israel war with Iran following US President Donald Trump's repeated complaints that US allies have ignored or rejected requests for help in confronting Iran's retaliation, including the closure of the Strait of Hormuz to most of international shipping.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio joined his counterparts from G7 nations 24 hours after Trump's latest volley of insults lobbed at Nato, as instability in oil markets persisted with the Iran war entering its fourth week along with uncertainty over the status of potential negotiations to end the crisis.

Most of US' closest allies have greeted the Iran war with deep scepticism, sentiments that were on display as the G7 foreign ministers met at a historic 12th-century abbey in Vaux-de-Cernay, outside Paris, even as they urged a diplomatic solution to resolve the situation. As the diplomats gathered, France's Minister of



Clockwise from bottom: EU Vice-President Kaja Kallas with German leader Johann Wadepuhl, South Korea's Cho Hyun, Britain's Yvette Cooper, India's S Jaishankar, US's Marco Rubio, France's Jean-Noel Barrot, Canada's Anita Anand, Saudi Arabia's Faisal bin Farhan, Italy's Antonio Tajani, Brazil's Mauro Vieira and Japan's Toshimitsu Motegi at a G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting at Cernay-la-Ville near Paris. —AP/PTI

the Armed Forces Catherine Vautrin said the war in West Asia "is not ours", adding that France's position is strictly defensive.

"The aim is truly this diplomatic approach, which is the only one that can guarantee a return to peace," she said on Europe 1 and CNews. "Many countries are concerned, and it is absolutely essential that we find a solution. British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper, meanwhile, said Britain also favoured a diplomatic path, acknowledging differences with the US. "We

have taken the approach of supporting defensive action, but also we've taken a different approach on the offensive action that has taken place as part of this conflict," she said.

Rubio has already faced difficulties in trying to sell the US strategy for the Iran conflict, but Trump's vitriolic comments about Nato nations not stepping up to help the US and Israel during a Cabinet meeting on Thursday will likely make it an even tougher task.

Of the G7 nations — besides the US, Britain, Canada, France, Germany and Italy are

members of the trans-Atlantic military alliance. Japan is the only one that is not. "We are very disappointed with Nato because Nato has done absolutely nothing," Trump said, a sentiment echoed later by his top diplomat.

"Frankly, I think countries around the world, even those that are out there complaining about this a little bit, should actually be grateful that the US has a president that's willing to confront a threat like this," Rubio said on Thursday. Rubio, who chatted with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiba, still has work to do to smooth things over with allies like those in Europe that have faced criticism or outright threats from Trump and others in his Republican administration.

Europe is still smarting over Trump's earlier demands to take over Greenland from Nato-ally Denmark and are concerned over US support to Ukraine in its war with Russia. The conflict in West Asia has added another point of tension. Rubio said he was looking forward to gathering with his G7 counterparts, asserting "we're going to have great meetings". "I'm not there to make them happy," he said.

## S Arabia urging US to ramp up Iran attacks: Intel source

Saudi Arabia has urged the US to ramp up attacks on Iran, a Saudi intelligence source has confirmed, while it is weighing a decision on whether to join the fight directly.

The Saudi source confirmed reporting in the New York Times that said the kingdom's de facto leader, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has urged Donald Trump not to cut short his war against Iran, and that the US-Israeli campaign represented a "historic opportunity" to remake West Asia.

The source said Riyadh was not just calling for the military campaign to be continued, but to be intensified. Trump appeared to confirm the report about the crown prince's role, telling journalists on Tuesday: "Yeah, he's a warrior. He's fighting with us."

## WAR SNIPPETS

### RIGHTS HEAD URGES US TO FINISH PROBE INTO SCHOOL ATTACK

The UN rights chief urged the US to conclude a probe into a deadly strike on a primary school in Iran at a UN Human Rights Council meeting on Friday, as several states voiced outrage over the massacre of 170 people, mostly children. The emergency debate at the Geneva council was called by Iran to discuss the attack on the Shajarah Tayyebah Girls' School in Minab, a tragedy that took place on the first day of the nearly month-long war launched by the US and Israel. UN Human Rights chief Volker Turk called for Washington to conclude its probe as soon as possible and publish the results. "There must be justice for the terrible harm done," he said by videolink after meetings with US officials in Washington this week.

Israeli and US diplomatic missions to the UN in Geneva did not respond to questions and the status of their probes. Their seats were empty as both have disengaged from the body. Pakistan's ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Bilal Ahmad, said the deaths of schoolkids were unconscionable, while China's ambassador Jia Guide said he was deeply shocked.

### NORWAY TO RAISE DEFENCE BUDGET

Norway is set to raise defence spending by 3.5% of its gross domestic product to compensate for rising military equipment costs and to adjust to lessons learned from the Ukraine war, the government says. The proposed rise will amount to 115 billion kroner (\$11.84bn) and will be spread over 10 years, aligning with the country's Nato commitments. "We are allocating a significant rise in resources to the long-term plan, while carefully weighing the priorities needed to

rapidly strengthen Norway's defence capabilities," PM Jonas Gahr Stoere said.

### US WEAKENED IRAN FUNDING: BESSANT

Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent said the US had systematically weakened Iran's ability to fund operations and procure weapons after months of preparation, and asserted that threats to its national security have no place in the global economic system. He said the oil market remained well supplied and added the US had taken steps to ensure oil supplies stranded at sea reach global market. At a cabinet meeting, Bessent said a maritime reinsurance programme by the development finance corporation, in conjunction with Central Command, would soon provide shippers in the Gulf region with an unprecedented level of security. "Mr President, we are starting to see more and more movement in and out of the Gulf today. This is

more than yesterday. This is the beginning," he said, adding, shipping traffic would continue to increase daily even before authorities secure the straits.

### FUEL HOARDING: SRI LANKA JAILED

A man charged for hoarding four litres of petrol in a town in northwest Sri Lanka has been sentenced to 21 days in jail. Sri Lanka has banned fuel hoarding soon after the outbreak of the US and Israel's joint attack on Iran. Lasantha Kumara Balasuriya, 48, from Nikaweratiya township in the North Western province, pleaded guilty in the court on Thursday and said the fuel he stockpiled was to be used for cleaning up the surroundings for an annual religious ceremony of his late parents. The magistrate sentenced Balasuriya to imprisonment for 21 days for hoarding four litres of petrol, and imposed an additional LKR 1500 fine on him.

## War sparks global fertiliser crisis, threatens food prices

HANOI

Farmers around the world are feeling the squeeze of the Iran war. Gas prices have shot up and fertiliser supplies are waning due to Tehran's near shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz in retaliation for US and Israeli bombing.

The fertiliser shortage is putting the livelihood of farmers in developing countries, already troubled by rising temperatures and erratic weather systems, further at risk, and could lead to people everywhere paying more for food.

The poorest farmers in the Northern Hemisphere rely on fertiliser imports from the Gulf, and the shortage comes just as planting season begins, said Carl Skau, deputy executive director of the World

Food Programme.

"In the worst case, this means lower yields and crop failures next season. In the best case, higher input costs will be included in food prices next year."

Iran is seriously limiting shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow passage that usually handles about a fifth of the world's oil shipments and nearly a third of global fertiliser trade.

Nitrogen and phosphate, two major fertiliser nutrients, are under immediate threat from the blockade.

Supplies of nitrogen including urea, the most widely traded fertiliser that helps plants grow and boosts yields, are the hardest hit because of shipping delays and the soaring price of liquefied natural gas — an essential ingredient. The conflict has restricted

about 30% of global urea trade, said Chris Lawson of CRU Group, a London-based commodities consultancy.

Some countries are already facing critical shortages, according to Raj Patel, a food systems economist at the University of Texas. For example, Ethiopia gets over 90% of its nitrogen fertiliser from the Gulf through Djibouti, a supply route that was strained even before the war began in February.

"The planting season is now," Patel said. "The fertiliser isn't there." Phosphate supplies, which support root development, are also under pressure. Saudi Arabia produces about a fifth of the world's phosphate fertiliser, and the region exports over 40% of the world's sulfur, a key ingredient and byproduct of oil and gas refining, Lawson said.

## Arundhati Roy, Han Kang among winners

Washington: A novel by Nobel laureate Han Kang, Karen Hao's examination of artificial intelligence and OpenAI (the company behind ChatGPT) and a memoir by author Arundhati Roy were among the winners of the annual National Book Critics Circle awards.

Han's 'We Do Not Part', translated by e. yaewon and Paige Aniyah Morris, addresses a 1948-49 uprising on Jeju, an island south of the Korean mainland, in which thousands of people were killed.

Heather Scott Partington, who chaired the awards' fiction committee, described the novel as "a work of blinding melancholy, bleak weather, and murmuring syntax" and said it "lingers like an atmospheric and arresting dream".

The lifetime achievement award went to author and journalist Frances FitzGerald,

### US BOOK CRITIC AWARDS

whose 1972 'Fire in the Lake' was an early and prescient take on the Vietnam War.

NPR and PBS were presented with the achievement award honouring institutions that have made significant contributions to book culture.

"At a time when some question the value of public, service-minded media, we salute PBS and NPR for all you have done for both book culture and American democracy," said Jacob M. Appel, who chaired the selection process for the award.

Winners of other categories: — Hao's 'Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI' won for non-fiction. Roy's 'Mother Mary Comes to Me' won for autobiography. —AP

## Rapper-turned-politician becomes Nepal's youngest elected PM at 35

Kathmandu: Rapper-turned-politician **Balendra Shah** was sworn in as Nepal's PM on Friday, making history as the youngest leader to be democratically elected to the top office of the Himalayan nation, around six months after the dramatic collapse of the KP Sharma Oli government in an unprecedented youth movement.

The 35-year-old Rastriya Swatantra Party leader, 'Baleni', was sworn in by President Ram Chandra Paudel. Shah, a former mayor of Kathmandu, is the youngest leader to be democratically elected to the top office in the Himalayan nation. He is also the first person from the Madhes region to become the prime minister.

PM Narendra Modi greeted Shah shortly after the swearing-in ceremony and said he was looking forward to work-



ing closely with his Nepalese counterpart to take forward India-Nepal ties. "Your appointment reflects the trust reposed in your leadership by the people of Nepal. I look forward to working closely with you to take India-Nepal friendship and cooperation to even greater heights for the mutual benefit of our two

peoples," Modi said on X.

Further, the first cabinet meeting of the new government, chaired by PM Shah, decided to immediately implement the report of the high-level commission's investigation into the Gen Z movement in September last year.

The meet also decided to appoint Minister for Science and Technology Sasmith Pokharel as its spokesperson. The probe panel has recommended a maximum of 10 years imprisonment for officials, including then premier KP Sharma Oli and HM Ramesh Lekhak, for negligence during the uprising, despite being in high positions. Pokharel, sharing the cabinet decision, said among the recommendations made by the Gauri Bahadur Karki-led probe panel for actions against security officials, a study team would be formed. —PTI



## Trump's signature on dollar bills to mark 250th year of US freedom

Washington: US President Donald Trump's signature is set to feature on US paper currency soon, a first for a sitting president since the introduction of dollar bills in 1861.

The decision, by the US Treasury, coincides with the 250th anniversary celebrations of American Independence this year. "In celebration of America's 250th anniversary, President Donald J Trump's signature alongside (Treasury) Secretary Scott Bessent's will soon appear on US currency, marking a first in history, and symbolises POTUS' leadership and dedication to our great nation will carry a lasting

impact," US Treasurer Brandon Beach said on X. Earlier this month, a federal arts commission approved the final design for a 24-karat gold commemorative coin bearing Trump's image to help celebrate the 250th anniversary of American Independence.

Meanwhile, the White House on Friday launched its own mobile app to provide livestreams and real-time updates "straight from the source, no filter". "There have been a lot of launches lately...relax this one's an app," as per a video, featuring clips of attacks on Iran, posted by the White House on X. —AP

## Anthropic supply chain risk tag on hold

San Francisco: A federal judge has ruled in favour of artificial intelligence company Anthropic in temporarily blocking the Pentagon from labelling the company as a supply chain risk.

US District Judge Rita Lin said she was also blocking President Trump's directive ordering all federal agencies to stop using Anthropic.

Lin's ruling followed a 90-minute hearing in San Francisco federal court on Tuesday at which Lin questioned why the Trump administration took the extraordinary step of denouncing Anthropic as a supply chain risk after negotiations over a defence contract went sour over the company's attempt to prevent its AI technology from being deployed in fully autonomous weapons or surveillance of Americans. —AP

## Briefs

### US to return 3 rare statues stolen from TN temples

Three antique sculptures are set to return to India from the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art after research established these were stolen from temples in Tamil Nadu. India's Dy Chief of Mission Namgya Khampa signed a pact with National Museum of Asian Art Director Chase Robinson for the return of a 9th-

century Shiva Nataraja bronze, a 12th-century sculpture of Shiva and Uma, and a 16th-century depiction of Saint Sundarar with Paravi.

### Epstein survivors sue DoJ, Google

A group of survivors of convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein's sexual abuse is suing the Trump administration and Google over the release of their personal information in troves of files made public by the Justice Department. The survivors filed a class-action lawsuit in federal

court in California on Thursday arguing DoJ's disclosure of their personally identifiable information was a violation of federal privacy law. They are seeking at least \$1,000 per class member from the govt and an unspecified amount of damages from Google.

### Wiki bans AI content

Wikipedia has banned the use of artificial intelligence in the generation or rewriting of content for its voluminous online encyclopedia. In a recent policy change, Wikipedia said that the use of large

language models (or LLMs) "often violates" its core principles and will not be allowed. The English language version of Wikipedia has over 7.1m articles. The use of AI has been a contentious issue among Wikipedia's community of volunteer editors but a vote among the site's editors supported the ban, according to 404 Media.

### Hawaii copter crash kills 3

A tourist helicopter crashed on a remote beach on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, killing three people and injuring two others, authorities said. The

helicopter was carrying one pilot and four passengers when it crashed on Thursday afternoon at Kalalau Beach. The beach is on the Na Pali Coast on Kauai's north shore. The area is otherwise reachable only by hiking or boat. Police said three people died and two were undergoing treatment.

### Spanish woman dies by euthanasia

A Spanish woman, **Noelia Castillo**, 25, who fought a lengthy legal battle with her father for the right to end life has died by euthanasia. Castillo, a resident of

Barcelona, became paraplegic after a 2022 suicide attempt.

The Catalan govt had granted her the right to assisted dying in the summer of 2024, but the procedure was halted at the last minute following legal objections from her father, supported by conservative group Christian Lawyers (Abogados Cristianos).

### 'Disabled' ziplines, held

A 33-year-old woman in the UK who claimed she was too anxious to leave her

home has been spared jail after it was revealed she spent thousands of pounds on a luxury lifestyle, including a holiday to Mexico.

Catherine Wieland received over £23,000 (£30 lakh) in disability benefits under the Personal Independence Payment scheme. This benefit is meant to support people with long-term physical or mental health conditions that affect their daily life. She told the dept for work and pensions she was effectively "housebound". It means a person is unable to leave their home due to serious health issues, such as severe anxiety or physical disability, and needs financial support

to manage daily living.

### S'pore gold trading hub?

Singapore announced plans to boost its position as a gold trading centre as investor interest in storing and trading the yellow metal grows in Asia Pacific. "Our goal is to anchor high-value activities here, create good jobs for Singaporeans, enhance resilience and diversity of Singapore's financial sector, and benefit market participants in Singapore and the region," said a joint statement by the Monetary Authority of Singapore and the Singapore Bullion Market Associations.



# Game On, India!



## Briefs

### BENGALURU No NOC for RCB's Thushara



Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru suffered another blow on the eve of the IPL opener against Sunrisers Hyderabad, with pacer **Nuwan Thushara** being ruled out of the initial phase of the event starting here on Saturday. RCB have already lost Yash Dayal and question marks remain over Josh Hazlewood's participation in the beginning of the league. According to a Cricinfo report, the pacer was ruled out after failing a mandatory Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) fitness test. He was denied a No-Objection Certificate (NOC) by the SLC after failing to meet the required fitness standards.

### LAHORE PSL captains to submit two team sheets



In order to offset dew factor in day/night matches, Pakistan Super League (PSL) has introduced a new rule, allowing the captains to submit two team sheets and pick one after the toss of coin. The 11th edition of the PSL which began on Thursday in Lahore now requires captains to submit two separate team sheets, including playing elevens and four substitute fielders, to the match referee before the toss. After the toss, captains can choose either one of the two teams they have submitted to the referee.

### ARIZONA Aditi Ashok shoots even-par 72



Indian golfer **Aditi Ashok** carded a modest even-par 72 to be tied for 108th after the opening round, on a day when several top players posted impressive below-par scores at the Ford Championship on the Cattail Course. New Zealander Lydia Ko (60) and defending champion Hyo Joo Kim (61) of South Korea posted double-digit under-par scores on the opening day, marking the first time since the 2003 Kellogg-Keebler Classic that two

**IPL | On a high after Ranji exploits, pacer aims to shine for Delhi Capitals**

## High-flying Auqib eyes India colours ahead of IPL debut

MUMBAI

The flavour of the recently concluded Indian domestic season and Delhi Capitals' Rs 8.4 crore buy at the IPL 2026 auction, **Auqib Nabi** stated that his ultimate goal is to play for India although at present he is fully focused on the Indian Premier League beginning today.

Nabi was speaking to the media in a virtual interaction organised ahead of the league. "Obviously, playing for India and winning matches for India is my ultimate goal. It will be a dream come true if I play for India, so that is my main focus. (But) right now, I am focusing on IPL. Let's see what happens in the future," he added.

The Jammu & Kashmir pacer, who had a dream Ranji season where he scalped 60 wickets in 17 innings, has made it clear that he is entering the IPL with a simple approach: trust his strengths, focus on process and contribute meaningfully to his team's success.

Speaking ahead of his debut IPL season, Nabi said he is not driven by the idea of claiming a "dream wicket", despite the presence of several world-class batsmen in the tournament. "I don't have a dream wicket," he said, adding that his focus remains on performing consistently rather than targeting individual players.

The young pacer, who was the player of the tournament in Jammu & Kashmir's maiden Ranji Trophy winning



**Auqib in Ranji Trophy 2025-2026 season**

**17** Innings  
**60** Wickets  
**12.65** Avg

campaign, emphasised that his primary goal is to be a high wicket-taker across formats.

"Whatever tournament I play, whether domestic or local, my aim is to be among the top wicket-takers for my team and in the tournament," he said.

Nabi also expressed confidence in Delhi Capitals' chances this season. "We hope that this time our contribution

will be enough to win the trophy," he said, adding that he plans to stick to his natural game.

"I will back my strengths and not try to go out of the box."

Despite securing a significant deal at the IPL auction, Nabi said life has not changed drastically for him. He credited his busy cricketing schedule for keeping him

grounded. "I did not stay at home much after the auction. The next day I joined the Vijay Hazare camp, then played the tournament, and shortly after that the Ranji Trophy resumed," he said.

While expectations have increased, Nabi said he does not feel overwhelmed. "There is an expectation that I have to do well at this level, but I am not feeling excessive pressure. Expectations are natural when you perform well, but I am focusing on my game," he said.

Reflecting on his recent success, Nabi highlighted the role of coaching and mindset in his development. He said structured coaching support over the past few years has helped him identify and correct small technical flaws.

"Earlier, we did not have specialised coaching support, but now with proper guidance, small corrections have made a big difference," he said. He also credited his improved mindset for his performances. "In the last two to three years, I have focused more on my process rather than results. I believe that staying positive and sticking to the process has helped me succeed," he said.

On whether he has interacted with national selectors or senior Indian players following his domestic performances, Nabi said he has not had such conversations yet. "After the Ranji final, I went home for a week and then joined the team here. I have not spoken to selectors," he said. Addressing fans back home in Kashmir, Nabi acknowledged their support and urged them to continue backing him. "We need your support and prayers. Keep supporting us as you always have," he said.

When asked about the challenges of T20 bowling, Nabi admitted that he is still adapting to the format after focusing primarily on red-ball cricket in recent months. "I have been playing red-ball cricket for the past two-and-a-half months. I need to improve my white-ball skills, especially death bowling and with the new ball," he said.

On Delhi Capitals being labelled underdogs, Nabi disagreed, expressing confidence in the team's balance and preparation. "I would not call us underdogs. We have a well-balanced side in all departments. I believe we are title contenders this season," he said.

Nabi also spoke about learning from experienced players in the IPL. Rather than naming a specific individual he is keen to meet, he said he wants to absorb knowledge from everyone. "We are playing at a high level, and I want to learn from everyone. The more I learn, the better it will be for my game," he said.

Looking back at his inspirations, Nabi said he grew up watching leading fast bowlers and trying to emulate their actions.

## Shashank backs Punjab Kings to lift IPL 2026 title

Confident batter stresses on team belief, process and consistency

NEW DELHI

Punjab Kings batter **Shashank Singh** has expressed strong confidence in his team's chances of winning the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026 title, declaring that they will lift the trophy on May 31 at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru.

Punjab Kings came close to ending their title drought last season, reaching the final for the first time in a decade before losing to Royal Challengers Bengaluru by six runs in a closely fought contest. "I know that on May 31, we will be playing at the Chinnaswamy and lifting the cup. It is not just a feeling, I know this will happen," Shashank said.

He attributed this belief to the strong unity within the squad. "It is about self-belief and team belief. Everyone is on the same page, and there is confidence in the group," he added. Punjab Kings had an impressive campaign in 2025, finishing at the top of the league stage with nine wins from 14 matches. They then defeated Mumbai Indians in Qualifier 2 to secure a place in the final. Despite the success, Shashank stressed the importance of staying grounded and focusing on the present season rather than dwelling on past achievements.

"We will take it match by match because the ultimate aim is to win the trophy. If we keep thinking about last year's final, there will be pressure on us," he said. "Our immediate focus is to prepare for the first game against Gujarat Titans,



I know that on May 31, we will be playing at the Chinnaswamy and lifting the cup. It is not just a feeling, I know this will happen

**Shashank Singh**  
Punjab Kings batter

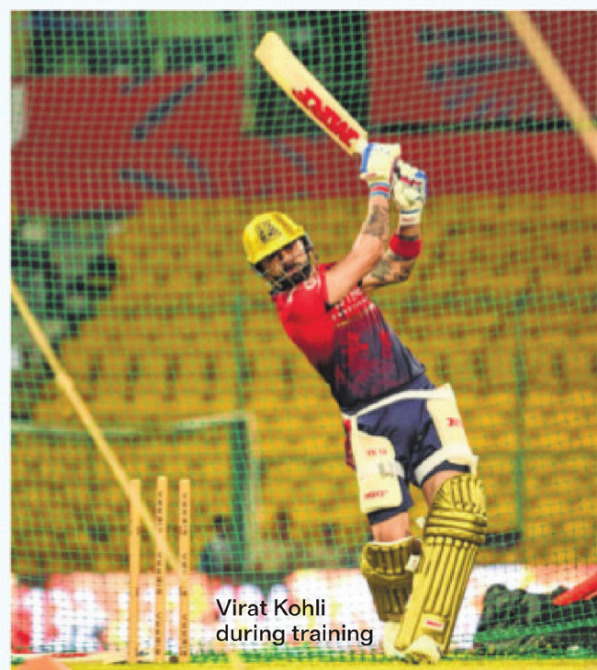
and then the matches that follow," he added.

The Shreyas Iyer-led side, coached by Ricky Ponting, has retained 21 players from its previous campaign, ensuring continuity and stability within the squad.

"To play the final and win is the ultimate goal, but we need to focus on each match and rectify our mistakes. We are motivated and excited because we have retained the same group and are better prepared than last year," Shashank said. The 34-year-old batter also reflected on his evolving role within the team. Having moved to the lower middle order, he said embracing the responsibility has been crucial to his growth.

## Preview: High drama in the offing as RCB regroup

Defending champions enter 19th edition under sombre circumstances



Virat Kohli during training

### Spotlight on MI, CSK, KKR

Beyond the opening clash, the spotlight will also be on traditional powerhouses Mumbai Indians (MI), Chennai Super Kings (CSK) and Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), who are seeking to reclaim their dominance after underwhelming campaigns last season.

MUMBAI

The 2026 Indian Premier League (IPL), beginning on Saturday, promises a compelling mix of redemption stories, emotional undertones and high-stakes competition as teams vie for supremacy over the next two months.

Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) enter the 19th edition under sombre circumstances. They will host Sunrisers Hyderabad in the opening match at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, but the build-up has been overshadowed by the tragic stampede on June 4 last year, which claimed 11 lives during the team's title celebrations.

In tribute, the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) has reserved 11 permanent empty seats in the stadium, while RCB players will wear jerseys bearing No. 11 during their first practice session. These gestures reflect a conscious effort to honour those who lost their lives, even as the tournament moves forward.

**11** RCB has reserved empty seats at Chinnaswamy as tribute to 2025 stampede victims

On the field, RCB face immediate challenges, particularly in their bowling department. The absence of Josh Hazlewood, who is undergoing rehabilitation in Australia, and left-arm pacer Yash Dayal leaves a significant void in their attack.

The team will rely on experienced campaigners such as Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Krunal Pandya, along with Suyash Sharma and Mangesh Yadav, to shoulder the responsibility. However, their depth will be tested, especially on batting-friendly surfaces. Sunrisers also enter the contest with concerns. Regular captain Pat Cummins is unavailable for the initial phase, with Ishan Kishan stepping in as stand-in skipper. Their pace attack, comprising Brydon Carse, Jaydev Unadkat, Harshal Patel and Harsh Dubey, could struggle for consistency.

## Sudharsan focuses on versatility over strike rate

Gujarat Titans opener looks to evolve after Test setback, backs adaptability as key to success

PTI  
NEW DELHI

Gujarat Titans opener **Sai Sudharsan** is placing greater emphasis on versatility rather than merely chasing high strike rates as he prepares for the 2026 Indian Premier League (IPL) season.

The 24-year-old, who returns from a rib-cage injury, has used the recovery period to reassess and upgrade his game following a challenging stint in Test cricket with India. Sudharsan enjoyed a prolific IPL season last year, winning the Orange Cap with 759 runs at a strike rate of around 145. However, his performances in the longer format did not match those standards, as he managed 302 runs from six Tests at an average of 27.45.

Despite the modest returns, Sudharsan remains positive about the experience. "I am grateful for the opportunity. I am not looking at it as a failure. It has shown me what I need to improve," he said.

He described his time in the Indian Test team as an important learning phase. "It has



shown me areas to work on as I move forward in Test cricket. It has helped me evolve and made me believe in myself more," he added.

Sudharsan's recent months were further disrupted by a rib injury sustained during the Vijay Hazare Trophy, which ruled him out of action. However, he viewed the enforced break as an opportunity rather than a setback.

"I did not see it as a difficult phase. It gave me time to work

on my body and my batting," he said, crediting his training sessions with childhood coach Jayakumar.

With T20 cricket evolving rapidly, Sudharsan acknowledged the growing emphasis on aggressive scoring but said his approach is centred on adaptability. "The game is evolving, and totals are getting higher. As batters, we need to understand how to approach big chases and make the right decisions," he said.

## valuation

# 'IPL among world's fastest-growing sports properties'

NEW DELHI

The growing interest of American investors in Indian Premier League (IPL) franchises reflects their belief that the league is the "highest growth sports opportunity in the world", Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) co-owner **Satyan Gajwani** said on Friday.

Recent ownership deals in the IPL have underscored the tournament's surging commercial value, with fran-

chises now commanding billion-dollar valuations and reinforcing its position as a premier global sports property.

"As you would have seen, there were multiple international parties interested in the teams through the process. It is great validation for the IPL and Women's Premier League (WPL) success so far, and their promise going forward," Gajwani told PTI in an exclusive interaction.

"Many of these investors

see the IPL as the highest growth sports opportunity around the world today," he added.

Gajwani is part of a consortium comprising the Aditya Birla Group, Times Group, David Blitzer's Bolt Group and Blackstone's BXPE, which acquired a 100% stake in RCB for \$1.78 billion (16,700 crore) from United Spirits Limited.

The rising influx of global capital is also evident in other franchises. The Rajasthan Royals ownership

group includes Walmart heir Rob Walton, Denver Broncos owner, and Sheila Ford Hamp, principal owner of the Detroit Lions. The RCB consortium also features Blitzer, who has stakes in several global sports teams, including the Philadelphia 76ers.

Asked whether the acquisition price was a "steal", Gajwani said valuations are subjective. "Pricing is always subjective. It is a strong price for a strong franchise, and I think

both the buyers and sellers are happy with the outcome," he said.

Gajwani revealed that the Times Group had also evaluated acquiring Rajasthan Royals before finalising its bid for RCB. "We evaluated both franchises closely. They are different and have their own sets of strengths. We are extremely happy with the outcome of the process," he said. He emphasised that the consortium's strength lies in the complementary expertise of its members.

