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

Briefs

AYODHYA

Ram Yantra signals BJP south push

The installation of the 'Shri Ram Yantra' at Ayodhya's Ram Mandir ahead of Navratri is being seen as carrying political undertones, signalling the BJP's outreach to Tamil Nadu before upcoming polls. Crafted in Tamil Nadu and installed during President Droupadi Murmu's March 19 visit, the yantra symbolises a north-south cultural link. Weighing 150 kg and gold-coated, it holds religious significance, but analysts view it as part of BJP's broader strategy to expand its base in the southern state.

PATNA

Successor must follow Nitish: Manjhi

HAM leader Jitan Ram Manjhi on Friday warned that any successor to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar would have to follow his path to survive politically. Speaking during Nitish's 'Samridhi Yatra' in Gaya, Manjhi said, "Whoever succeeds him will have to follow in his footsteps." Amid reports of Nitish moving to the Rajya Sabha, BJP and JD(U) are said to have agreed on a new government structure, with the BJP likely to take the chief minister's post.

PATNA

Successor must follow Nitish: Manjhi

Seat-sharing talks between the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and Congress for the Assam Assembly polls are in the final stage, JMM leader Manoj Pandey said on Friday. He asserted that the party would contest the elections "under any circumstances" and may try to form some seats to finalise an alliance aimed at ousting the BJP. Congress, while open to an alliance, said seat allocation should reflect ground strength as both parties look to consolidate support among tribal communities.

JAIPUR

Raj rejects Punjab water royalty claim

The Rajasthan government has rejected Punjab's demand for Rs1.44 lakh crore as water royalty, calling it unconstitutional and legally untenable. Water Resources Minister Suresh Singh Rawat said past agreements on Ravi-Beas waters contain no provision for royalty, and inter-state river water is a national resource under Article 262. He added that allocations to Rajasthan are governed by Centre-supervised arrangements, dismissing Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann's claim based on a 1920 agreement as factually incorrect.

CHANDIGARH

Cong issues notice over cross-voting

The Congress on Friday issued a show-cause notice to a fifth MLA, Jarnail Singh, over alleged cross-voting in the March 16 Haryana Rajya Sabha polls. Four other MLAs had earlier been served notices for reportedly backing BJP-supported independent candidate Satish Nandal. The party has asked all five legislators to respond within seven days or face action. The move follows concerns over party discipline after voting irregularities in the closely contested election.

FUEL CRISIS | LPG a concern but supply steady; deliveries near booking levels

India is impacted but no LPG, NG, or crude shortage: Centre

NEW DELHI

The Centre on Thursday said the ongoing West Asia war is impacting India, even as it confirmed that all Indian vessels and sailors in the Gulf remain safe. It added that a Russian crude oil shipment is expected to arrive on March 21 and assured that supplies of LPG, natural gas and crude oil are being managed effectively. Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum Sujata Sharma said at a press briefing that the conflict in West Asia is having an impact since "90% of our LPG import was from the Middle East and 47% of our LNG import was from Qatar." She said the Centre's efforts to seek the support of states in the expansion of the piped natural gas network by offering additional 10 per cent commercial LPG to states and UTs has paid off as "approximately 1.25 lakh new domestic, commercial, and industrial connections have been provided in the last two weeks." Sharma said while LPG situation "remains a cause for concern due to the ongoing war", no gas shortage has been reported at any distribution centre and the delivery of cylinders on Wednesday was 54.91 lakh as against 56 lakh bookings.



A man sits over an LPG cylinder amid rainfall, during an ongoing supply crisis, in Prayagraj on Friday -PTI

India scripting a decisive chapter: PM Modi

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said that India is scripting a decisive chapter in the global energy landscape, driven by a strong push towards electrification, clean energy and manufacturing. Prime Minister Modi shared an article written by Minister of State for Power and New and Renewable Energy Shripad Yesso Naik, highlighting the rapid transformation of India's energy sector. Talking to social media platform X, Prime Minister emphasised that the country's energy transition is being guided by practical policy decisions and a clear focus on self-reliance. -IANS

IEA advocates work from home, reduced air travel

New Delhi: The International Energy Agency (IEA) has advocated a set of immediate demand-side measures, including work-from-home, lower speed limits, and reduced air travel to cushion the impact of a historic global oil supply shock triggered by disruptions in the Middle East.

Covid-like exodus being seen: Cong

NEW DELHI

The Congress has claimed that the ongoing shortage of LPG in many parts of the country is once again leading to an exodus from cities to villages of the kind witnessed during the Covid crisis.

The party on Friday put out images of people leaving while carrying their goods on their head due to both the "LPG crisis" and the "Corona crisis." The Congress also shared a video of a news report in which people returning to their home states from Gujarat narrated how due to shortage of gas they were unable to cook and have been compelled to return to their villages. It showed one of them saying, "We've been eating just once a day for the last three days, so we're returning to our village". The Congress said "this is the pain of the poor struggling with the LPG shortage, whom Narendra Modi has abandoned to their fate". The party alleged that "people are extremely distressed and unable to get gas, they are forced to abandon their work and livelihoods, returning hungry and thirsty from Gujarat to their homes." The video also showed another person complaining that cooking has become prohibitively expensive with LPG cylinders being sold for as much as Rs 5,000. "At least we have wood and other fuel to cook in our villages," the unnamed person was shown saying.

Zomato fee up by 19%

New Delhi: Food delivery platform Zomato has increased platform fee by 19.2 per cent or Rs 2.40 per order, according to the latest billing details available on its app on Friday.

On a pre-GST basis, the platform fee now stands at Rs 14.90 per order, up from Rs 12.50 earlier. The latest hike comes amid rising energy costs, which have increased operating expenses for restaurants and delivery partners. -IANS

C'garh: Tough law for exam malpractices

RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh assembly on Friday passed a bill to curb paper leaks and malpractices, proposing up to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of up to Rs 1 crore to ensure transparency in public recruitment and professional entrance exams. The Chhattisgarh (Lok Bharti evam Vyavsayik Parikshao me Anuchit Sadhano ki Roktham) Vidheyak 2026 (Chhattisgarh Public Recruitment and Professional Examinations Prevention of Unfair Means Bill), was passed after a detailed discussion in the House. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo

Sai said the legislation sends a strong message against those involved in examination-related malpractices.

He alleged that the previous government had "crushed the dreams of youth", referring to alleged irregularities in recruitment processes and scams such as the Chhattisgarh Public Service Commission (CGPSC) issue. The CBI is investigating the alleged scam in the CGPSC recruitment unearthed during the previous Congress government. "This law sends a strict message to the exam mafia. Whoever is involved in cheating or irregularities in examinations will face stringent action," Sai said.

Man dies after being trapped in hospital lift

Kolkata: A middle-aged man died after allegedly getting trapped in a lift at a state-run hospital in north Kolkata on Friday, an official said. The man had come to R G Kar Medical College and Hospital with his four-year-old son for treatment, family members said. He was stuck inside a lift at the trauma care unit along with his wife after it suddenly malfunctioned. -PTI

Union minister Jayant Chaudhary gets death threat

New Delhi: Union minister Jayant Chaudhary allegedly received a death threat from an unknown caller, following which a police complaint was lodged, an official said on Friday. Police said the complaint was submitted on Chaudhary's behalf at Tughlak Road police station here and the matter is now under investigation. -PTI

Kerala can't just rely on remittances, lotteries, liquor: Tharoor

NEW DELHI

The LDF government in Kerala keeps the state reliant on remittances, lotteries, and liquor, a model that will not work anymore, Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said, as he batted for the UDF, which has been out of power in the state for a decade. In an interview with PTI, Tharoor said the Congress-led UDF's plank for the upcoming polls in Kerala is much more positive than just the anti-incumbency element against the LDF's 10-year rule. He accused the Left Democratic Front dispensation of mismanagement, saying the state government runs out of salaries by September and has to borrow money to pay. Asked whether the Congress would be the anti-

POLL WATCH KERALA

incumbency against the Pinarayi Vijayan government, Tharoor said. "No, I think our plank is much more positive. It is about Kerala 2.0." "Yes, there is an anti-incumbency element. One of our key campaign slogans is - it's time for an accounting of everything that the government has done wrong. "But in addition to that, there is a very positive message. For example, we delivered specific five guarantees from free travel for women in buses to improved pension payments, which is something that the Left front government has consistently failed to do," Tharoor told PTI.

People of Kerala ready for change: Rahul

New Delhi

People of Kerala are ready for change, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Friday, as he pitched for a UDF government in the state. "Team UDF is Team Kerala," he said in a post on X. "Each candidate reflects the voice, the aspirations and the trust of the people of Kerala. This is a collective of experienced leaders and young change-makers - a strong team of men and women who understand the intricacies of the constituencies they represent," Gandhi said in his post.

TMC releases 10-pts election manifesto

KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress on Friday unveiled its 10-point election manifesto, with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee calling it her "10 protiya before the people of Bengal". "If we make promises we keep them. I am placing my 10 commitments before the people of Bengal," Mamata said, adding that she pledges focus on expanding welfare schemes, increasing financial support, strengthening public healthcare, boosting industry, aiding farmers, enhancing skill development and modernising education.

POLL WATCH WEST BENGAL

She also alleged that the Centre had imposed an "undeclared President's rule" in the state. "People do not like BJP and BJP will not return to power at the Centre. Election Commission is working at the behest of the BJP.. There is a limit to everything," she said. Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition Suwendu Adhikari alleged Mamata had "violated" the Model Code of Conduct by using her official letterhead for political purposes.

Cong's Shama Mohamed flags low representation

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Congress national spokesperson Shama Mohamed on Friday expressed dissatisfaction over the low representation of women in the party's candidate list for the upcoming Kerala Assembly elections.

In a Facebook post, the AICC leader said it was disappointing that very few women have been given tickets. "Rejected, but not defeated. I respectfully urge my leader, Rahul Gandhi ji, whom I admire and respect deeply, to support Congress women in Kerala," she said.

According to Mohamed, out of the 92 seats the Congress is contesting, only nine have been allotted to women. She also pointed out that in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, only one woman was given a ticket out of 16 seats. "If capable women are not being recognised, the situation is indeed very poor. It is deeply disappointing," she said.

SIT finds DGP Rao videos authentic

BENGALURU

Director General of Police (DGP) K Ramachandra Rao has been found guilty by a SIT probing videos that allegedly show him in compromising positions with two women in his office. Though the incident dates back to his tenure as IGP in the Belagavi division, the videos surfaced recently amid multiple controversies involving the officer. An SIT led by ADGP Hitendra, constituted after the videos went viral, relied on a forensic science laboratory (FSL) report which ruled out any tampering. The report stated the footage was original and recorded on a mobile phone in 2016-17. Investigations also found that the two women frequently visited the IGP office during Rao's tenure. A driver and other staff members reportedly identified them.

The SIT said one of the women may have recorded and circulated the videos. Both are currently absconding. Rao had earlier dismissed the videos as AI-generated and alleged a conspiracy to malign him before going on leave. He was subsequently suspended, and a departmental inquiry has now been initiated by the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms (DP&AR). The findings could impact Rao's retirement benefits, with his superannuation due on May 31. Rao had earlier courted controversy in May 2025 when his stepdaughter, Kannada actor Ranya Rao, was arrested by the DRI at Kempegowda International Airport for allegedly smuggling 14.5 kg of gold. Subsequent probes also flagged alleged financial irregularities linked to investments in the name of poultry businesses.

Citing HC order, police seal UNI's office

New Delhi: Delhi Police on Friday sealed news agency UNI's office here, citing a high court order, even as the media organisation termed the action an "unprecedented atrocity and attack on freedom of media". The news agency also alleged that their female staff members were manhandled by the police team. However, Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Sachin Sharma told PTI that legal process was followed and no wrongdoings happened as everything was videographed. Earlier, Delhi High Court dismissed a petition filed by the news agency challenging the cancellation of its land allotment. The case pertained to an order issued by the Land and Development Office (L&DO) under the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, which had asked the news agency to vacate the premises.

ABVP raps Jinnah chapter in course

JAMMU

The ABVP on Friday staged protests at the University of Jammu, demanding the withdrawal of a chapter on former Pakistan president Muhammad Ali Jinnah included in the revised post-graduate political science syllabus under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The university, however, maintained that the chapter on Jinnah is part of academic curricula in several universities across India and aligns with the University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines. Led by ABVP Jammu and Kashmir secretary Sannak Shrivats, activists assembled on the university campus and raised slogans against the administration, seeking immediate removal of the chapter from the "Modern Indian political thought" module under the paper "Minorities and the Nation".

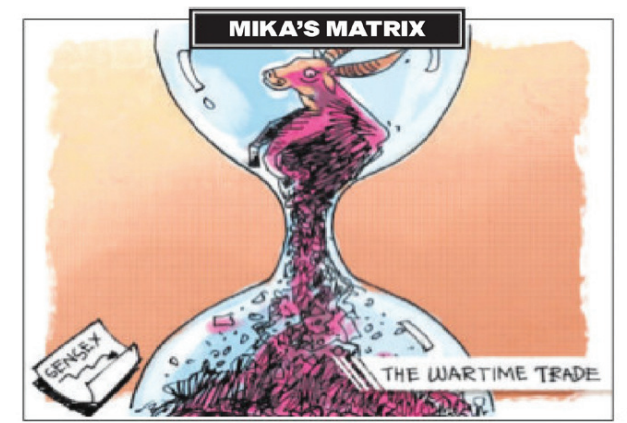
The incident occurred around 11.30 pm when she was returning to the clinic after treating birds in the aviary. While passing the hippopotamus enclosure, she reportedly stopped to click a photograph when the animal suddenly attacked her. She was rushed to a Shivamogga hospital but succumbed to her injuries around 6.30 am.

Hippo mauls vet at Shivamogga zoo

BENGALURU

A young veterinary doctor was mauled to death by a hippopotamus at Thyavarekoppa near Shivamogga, about 300 km from Bengaluru. The deceased has been identified as Dr Sameeksha Reddy, who had recently joined the zoo on a contract basis.

The incident occurred around 11.30 pm when she was returning to the clinic after treating birds in the aviary. While passing the hippopotamus enclosure, she reportedly stopped to click a photograph when the animal suddenly attacked her. She was rushed to a Shivamogga hospital but succumbed to her injuries around 6.30 am.



Two Accused of Attempted Murder Arrested in Prayagraj; Perpetrators Who Shot and Injured Youth Now in Custody



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

The police have arrested two individuals wanted in connection with an attempted murder case in Prayagraj. On Friday, March 20, 2026, the Mutthiganj police apprehended the suspects following a cordon-and-search operation at Kakahara Ghat, Mirapur, within the jurisdiction of the Atarsuiya police station. They are accused of opening fire on a young man, leaving him critically injured. The arrested individuals have been identified as Sandeep Kanojia—alias Sandeep Dhobi (30), a resident of Daraganj—and Akash Arora—alias Bhola Punjabi (23), a resident of Malviya Nagar.

This police action was initiated based on intelligence received from

an informant. The incident falls under the jurisdiction of the Mutthiganj police station. Saksham Sharma, a resident of Malviya Nagar, had filed a written complaint with the police stating that the named accused—acting on account of an old rivalry—had initially assaulted him and his friend. When they resisted, the accused opened fire on them using illegal firearms with the intent to kill, resulting in serious injuries to both victims. Upon receiving information regarding the incident, the Mutthiganj police immediately rushed to the scene and admitted the injured victims to a hospital for medical treatment. Given the gravity of the case, the police registered a First Information Report (FIR) under various sections of the

Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). Acting on the directives of the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) and the Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), several teams were constituted to effect the arrest of the accused. According to the police, legal proceedings have been initiated against both accused individuals under Case No. 27/2026, specifically under Sections 115(2), 352, 351(3), and 109(1) of the BNS. Following their arrest, the accused underwent a medical examination and were subsequently produced before a court, from where they have been remanded to judicial custody (jail). The police are now also conducting an investigation into their criminal antecedents.

UPTET-2026 Announced, Exam to be held over three Days in July

Lucknow

There is big news for lakhs of youth preparing to become teachers in Uttar Pradesh. The official notification for the Uttar Pradesh Teacher Eligibility Test (UPTET)-2026 has been released by the Uttar Pradesh Education Service Selection Commission. The advertisement has been made available on the Commission website from March 20, 2026.

Applications have been invited for both the Primary level (Classes 1 to 5) and upper Primary level (Classes 6 to 8). It is noteworthy that under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, continuous efforts are being made to improve the education sector and Provide employment opportunities to youth. Conducting UPTET-2026 in a time-bound manner is an important step toward accelerating the teacher recruitment Process in the State. Chairman of the Commission, Dr. Prashant Kumar, stated that to make the recruitment Process

more transparent, systematic and candidate-friendly, a One-Time Registration (OTR) system has been introduced this time. Candidates will first have to complete OTR before applying for UPTET-2026. This system is expected to curb malpractices and speed up the recruitment Process. Deputy Secretary Sanjay Kumar Singh informed that the application Process will run from March 27, 2026 to April 26, 2026. Candidates will also be given an opportunity until May 1, 2026 to make corrections in their application forms and resolve fee-related issues. The examination is proposed to be conducted on July 2, 3 and 4, 2026. The Commission focus is on strengthening the state basic education system by appointing qualified and trained teachers. Candidates have been advised to carefully read the detailed notification and instructions available on the official website before applying to avoid any Errors.

A Major Step by the Yogi government towards increasing farmers income and making them Self-Reliant

Lucknow

The Yogi government Nandini Krishak Samridhhi Yojana is emerging as an effective initiative in strengthening the dairy sector in Uttar Pradesh. Aimed at increasing farmers income, making them self-reliant and boosting the rural economy, the state government has set a target of establishing 204 dairy units over three years under this scheme. To accelerate implementation, continuous monitoring of bank loan approvals and subsidy distribution is being carried out, leading to rapid expansion of the dairy Network. During this, Additional Chief Secretary of the Animal Husbandry Department, Mukesh Meshram, Stated that in the financial year 2023-24, a target of 50 units was set across 10 divisional headquarters districts. Out of these, only 2 bank loan approval cases (Meerut and Lucknow) are under consideration. Meanwhile, subsidy disbursement is in Process for 12 first-installment cases (Lucknow, Kanpur Nagar, Gorakhpur, Prayagraj, Ayodhya and Bareilly) and 35 second-installment cases (Agra, Lucknow, Kanpur Nagar, Jhansi, Gorakhpur, Ayodhya, Varanasi, Meerut and Bareilly). For the financial year 2024-25, a target of 40 units has been set across 8 divisional headquarters districts. In this, 18 bank loan approval cases are Progressing rapidly in districts such as Mirzapur, Basti, Azamgarh, Gonda, Banda, Saharanpur and Aligarh. Additionally, the first installment of subsidies for 32 beneficiaries will soon be released as Per Procedure, including beneficiaries from Aligarh, Banda, Azamgarh, Gonda, Basti, Saharanpur and Moradabad. In the financial year 2025-26, the scope of the scheme has been expanded further, with a target of establishing 114 units (2 units per district) across 57 districts. Loan approvals have already been completed 100% in districts like Jaunpur, Lalitpur, Jalaun, Sambhal, Deoria and Rampur. Moreover, the Process of releasing the first installment of subsidies for 114 beneficiaries across all 57 districts is Progressing Rapidly. The state government has issued clear instructions for the timely disposal of all Procedural matters and speedy distribution of subsidies to ensure that the benefits of the scheme reach farmers on time. Through the Nandini Krishak Samridhhi Yojana, Uttar

Heavy Rains Accompanied by Thunder Rock District; Two Farmers Killed by Lightning Strike

Prayagraj | The weather took a sudden turn in Prayagraj on Friday. Heavy showers starting at 6:30 AM made the weather pleasant. The rain, accompanied by loud thunder, led to waterlogging on roads as well as in narrow lanes and residential neighborhoods. In rural areas, two farmers lost their lives due to lightning strikes. The son of one of the farmers sustained severe burns. Several livestock animals also perished prematurely in the incident. Rain occurred across most parts of the district. The sun remained hidden throughout the day, and light drizzle continued into the afternoon. Heavy

downpours were witnessed in various city localities, including Kalindipur, Allapur, Daraganj, Civil Lines, Katra, Jansenganj, Alopibagh, Dhoomanganj, Naini, Jhusi, Phaphamau, Atala, and Chowk. Rain was also reported in the blocks and areas of Soraon, Nawabganj, Shankargarh, Jasra, Meja, Manda, Koraon, Karchhana, Phulpur, Lalgalganj, Mauaima, Sahson, Handia, Pratapur, Baraut, and Janghai. Following several days of weather warnings, Friday's rainfall marked a significant shift in weather patterns.

It is estimated that farmers will suffer sub-

stantial losses due to the rains. Farmers are particularly distressed by fears that their Arhar (pigeon pea) and wheat crops may be ruined. Farmer Dies in Lightning Strike in Sahson In Chakia Gharhara village—located under the Sahson police outpost within the Sarai Inayat police station jurisdiction—Sangram Singh Yadav (58) died on the spot after being struck by lightning. His son, Gyan Singh Yadav, also sustained burns and is currently undergoing treatment at a city hospital. Two cows also perished after being caught in the lightning strike. Upon reaching the scene, the police completed the nec-

essary preliminary formalities (panchnama) and sent the body for a post-mortem examination. Similarly, a farmer lost his life due to a lightning strike in Kalandarpur, located in the Soraon area. Several cattle have also sustained burns. On Friday, the weather in the district took a sudden turn. Heavy rain, accompanied by loud thunder, began around 6:30 AM. The rain made the weather pleasant and provided people with relief from the heat and humidity; however, its impact was felt across the entire region, from the city to the villages. Due to the heavy downpour, roads in several areas—including

Chowk, Roshanbagh, Atala, Jansenganj, and Mutthiganj—have become waterlogged. Those heading out for Eid shopping or to offer *Alvida Jumma* (Farewell Friday) prayers faced significant difficulties. Rainfall occurred across most parts of the district. Clouds blanketed the sky throughout the day, and the sun remained out of sight. Intermittent light showers continued into the afternoon. The cooling effect of the rain led to a noticeable drop in temperature. While the rain offered people relief from the heat, the resulting waterlogging and incidents of lightning strikes have raised concerns.

Strong Winds and Rain Spark Wave of Anxiety Among Farmers

Varanasi

A sudden change in weather, accompanied by thunder, lightning and wind-driven light rain, has sent a wave of anxiety through the farming community. The shifts have brought agricultural activities, including the mustard harvest, to a complete Standstill. While the sun emerged Friday afternoon following a morning of light drizzling—offering a brief moment of relief—the damage remains a major concern. Most farmers wheat crops are fully ripe and were being prepared for harvesting



and threshing during the Navratri Period. However, the abrupt weather shift has left farmers deeply worried. If heavy rains occur now, the standing wheat crops face total Destruction. Key Vocabulary in This Context

Flattened/Lodged: When crops like wheat fall over due to wind and rain. Threshing: The Process of loosening the edible Part of grain from the straw. Ripe: When the crop is fully grown and ready to be Gathered.

SP Leader Vishnu Sharma Urges ADM to Ensure Gas Cylinder Supply for Navratri and Eid

Varanasi

Despite Claims made by Petroleum companies, the supply of domestic gas cylinders remains derailed in Varanasi, causing significant distress to consumers. Vishnu Sharma "Vishwakarma," Samajwadi Party leader and Metropolitan President of the Vishwakarma Society, contacted the Additional District Magistrate (Supply), Amit Bharti, via telephone to highlight the ongoing Crisis. Key Demands and Concerns: Supply Disruptions: Sharma Pointed out



that even after booking, consumers are forced to wait several days for delivery, rendering the companies claims of smooth supply hollow. Festive Priority: He specifically requested the ADM to ensure a seamless supply of cylinders during the upcoming festivals of

Navratri and Eid, so that celebrations are not hindered by fuel Shortages. Trolley-men Misconduct: The SP leader raised concerns regarding the arbitrary behavior of delivery Personnel (trolley-men). Reports suggest that consumers are being forced to follow them around and despite valid bookings, delivery men are often reluctant or evasive about Providing the Cylinders. administration to monitor the situation closely and ensure that consumers do not face unnecessary hurdles during the festive Season.

Outstanding Performance in Green Energy Corridor: Minister A.K. Sharma

Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Minister for Urban Development and Energy A.K. Sharma, participated in the Bharat Electricity Summit 2026 organized by the Ministry of Power, Government of India at Yashobhoomi, New Delhi. During the event, he effectively Presented the state achievements and future Plans in the energy sector. Addressing the summit, Minister Sharma stated that Uttar Pradesh is rapidly emerging as a leading state in the field of energy management in the country. He highlighted that the state government is working to ensure affordable, sustainable and uninterrupted Power supply to consumers by maintaining high Standards. He Noted that during last year summer, Uttar Pradesh successfully met the highest Peak Power demand in the country and comprehensive preparations have been made to meet even higher demand this year. To enhance Power



availability, approximately 4,000 MW of additional capacity has been added over the Past year, while concrete steps have already been taken to establish more than 5,000 MW of new capacity within this Year. Minister Sharma further stated that under the Prime Minister Surya Ghar Yojana, Uttar Pradesh ranks first in the country in terms

of daily solar installations. Additionally, rapid Progress is being made in utility-scale solar Parks, pumped storage Projects (PSP) and battery storage systems to sustainably meet future energy requirements. He also mentioned that Uttar Pradesh has Performed excellently under the Green Energy Corridor-II Project and has requested early

approval for the Green Energy Corridor-III Project. Minister Sharma added that the state Power Plants are operating at a record Plant Load Factor (PLF) of 85% and there has been a significant reduction in AT&C losses. Around 20% of consumers in the state have been equipped with prepaid smart meters, enhancing transparency and enabling millions of consumers to Pay their bills digitally. He emphasized that the government goal is to Provide affordable, accessible and quality electricity to every consumer by continuously Promoting reforms, innovation and investment in the energy Sector. On this occasion, Union Power Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, energy ministers from other states, Uttar Pradesh Additional Chief Secretary (Energy) Narendra Bhushan, Chairman Ashish Goyal, Managing Director Pankaj Kumar and other officials were also Present.

Alvida Juma observed peacefully in Ghazipur; Eid fervour lights up markets

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Ghazipur: The last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan, known as Alvida Juma, was marked by deep religious devotion and discipline across the Mohammadabad Yusufpur area of the district on Friday. Thousands of worshippers gathered at mosques in the town and adjoining rural pockets, offering prayers in an atmosphere of peace and harmony. Major mosques, including Jama Masjid, Kot Masjid, Tehsil Masjid, Ganj Masjid and Salempur Masjid, witnessed heavy turnout as people participated in special congregational prayers. Devotees prayed for peace, communal harmony and prosperity of the nation, with authorities ensuring smooth conduct of the occasion. The local administration remained on high alert to maintain law and order. Officials, accompanied by adequate police force, carried out regular patrols across sensitive zones. Security was tightened at key locations, ensuring



that prayers concluded without any untoward incident. Meanwhile, the festive spirit ahead of Eid al-Fitr has begun to take

over the town's markets. Shopping hubs are witnessing a surge in footfall, especially during evening hours. Stores

selling garments, sweets and traditional sewaiyan are bustling with activity as families gear up for the celebrations.

Children, youth and women were seen actively participating in Eid shopping, adding vibrancy to the marketplaces. With

preparations in full swing, the region is now set to welcome Eid with enthusiasm and joy.

Ghazipur students lead anti-drug drive, take out awareness rally in Mohammadabad

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Ghazipur: In a strong push toward building a drug-free society, students of Shaheed Smarak Government College organized an awareness rally in the Mohammadabad Kotwali area, drawing attention to the growing concerns around substance abuse. The rally, held under the banner of the National Service Scheme (NSS), began from the college campus and moved through key streets of the town. Students, raising slogans advocating a "drug-free society," sought to engage residents and spark conversations on the harmful effects of addiction. Participants highlighted the adverse impact of alcohol, gutka and other intoxicants, noting that substance abuse not only affects individual health but also disrupts fami-



lies and erodes the social structure. The enthusiastic turnout and coordinated messaging ensured that the campaign resonated with a wide cross-section of the public. Students also called for stricter enforcement against the sale of intoxicating substances. They stressed that while awareness campaigns play a crucial role, effective administrative interven-

tion is equally necessary to tackle the issue at its roots. The initiative stood out as more than a routine exercise, reflecting the growing role of youth in driving social change. With their active participation and clear messaging, the students underscored the importance of collective responsibility in shaping a healthier and safer society.

Second Phase of Mission Shakti Phase-5 in Prayagraj: Emphasis on Women's Safety and Self-Reliance



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. Under the second phase of 'Mission Shakti Phase-5'—an initiative aimed at promoting women's safety, dignity, and self-reliance—a comprehensive awareness campaign was conducted on Friday at the Prayagraj Police Commissionerate. During this event, the Police Commissioner, Additional Police Commissioner, Nodal Officer (Mission Shakti), and Deputy Commissioners of Police (Headquarters, City, Gangapar, and Yamunapar zones)—along with all Assistant Commissioners of Police (ACPs) and administrative officials—participated in various programs. As part of the cam-

campaign, awareness programs were organized at various locations across the City, Gangapar, and Yamunapar zones by the Anti-Romeo Squads, Women Beat Police, and Mission Shakti teams. In the City Zone, special drives were conducted at intersections and markets within the Kotwali area, Balson Crossing, the Sangam Petrol Pump in George Town, Mastan Market, and the Barrier T-point in the Kareli area. In the Gangapar Zone, women were sensitized through community gatherings (*Chaupals*) held in the villages and markets of Phulpur town, Sarai Inayat, Mau Aima, Phaphamau, Utraon, Tharwai, and Soraoon areas. Meanwhile, in the



Yamunapar Zone, programs were organized in the villages of Meja Khas, the Industrial Area, Chheoki Railway Station (Naini), Ghurpur Market, Lalapur, and the Bara region. During these activities, members of the Anti-Romeo Squad and Women Beat Police personnel provided information regarding various helpline numbers to women and girls at schools, colleges, and crowded public places. These helplines include the Women Power Line (1090), Emergency Services (112), Childline (1098), Chief Minister's Helpline (1076), Ambulance Services (102 & 108), and the Cyber Helpline (1930). The programs also provided detailed information regarding "Good Touch

and Bad Touch," women's safety protocols, and laws related to the prevention of crimes against women. Furthermore, women were made aware of various welfare schemes launched by the Central and State governments—including the Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana, the Nirashrit Mahila Pension Yojana, the UP State Rural Livelihood Mission, and the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana. Police officials stated that the objective of the 'Mission Shakti' campaign is to boost women's self-confidence and apprise them of the various forms of assistance available to them, thereby enabling them to contribute to the creation of a safe and empowered society.

Partnership with the Netherlands for Flood Control and Drainage Improvement in Prayagraj; Emphasis on River-Based Development

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj | The administration has taken a significant initiative toward finding a permanent solution to the city's chronic problems of poor drainage and flooding. A two-day workshop, aimed at developing the city based on a 'river-centric' urban model, concluded on Friday. The workshop was presided over by Divisional Commissioner Saumya Agarwal. Held under the theme 'Water as Leverage,' the workshop saw the participation of national-level officials alongside experts from the Netherlands. Its primary objective was to transform water management challenges into opportunities for development and to for-

mulate long-term solutions for the city. Preparations to Implement the River Management Plan. The workshop featured detailed discussions on the implementation of the 'Urban River Management Plan' (URMP). Following an assessment of the condition of the city's major drains and internal waterways, a proposal was put forward to develop the Kalindipuram drain into a green and clean corridor. Experts recommended developing separate drainage systems for rainwater and sewage. It is anticipated that this dual system will not only mitigate the problem of waterlogging but also lead to improvements in overall sanitation. Development of the Yamuna Riverfront with an Eye on



Kumbh 2031. With the upcoming Kumbh Mela of 2031 in view, a blueprint for the development of

the Yamuna riverfront was also presented. The proposed plan outlines the development of ecological parks and exhibition ghats (riverbanks), which are expected to boost both biodiversity and tourism. Furthermore, emphasis was placed on creating a cohesive riverfront by integrating the existing ghats with a proposed boat club. Focus on the Rejuvenation of the Sasur Khaderi River. During the meeting, concerns were also raised regarding the current state of the Sasur Khaderi River. Due to illegal encroachments and the dumping of waste, the river has become constricted and polluted. Experts offered suggestions to clear the river of encroachments, enhance its

water-retention capacity, and integrate it into the city's primary drainage network. Assistance in Preparing DPRs. The Netherlands offered to provide technical assistance and collaborate on the preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for two key projects. These reports will take into account challenges such as silt management, urban infrastructure, and waste management. Discussion on the Role of Women in Water Management. During the concluding session, the Divisional Commissioner stated that the city's major problems have been identified, and it is now imperative to implement solutions within a stipulated timeframe. He highlighted the

utility of the Netherlands' experience in the field of water management. Municipal Commissioner Sai Teja emphasized that restoring the ecological balance of rivers is essential for the future of the city. Held ahead of World Water Day, this event also featured deliberations on the theme "Water and Women's Leadership," underscoring the critical role of women's participation in ensuring water security. This workshop was organized through the joint collaboration of the State Clean Ganga Mission (Uttar Pradesh) and the Government of the Netherlands, and was attended by numerous experts from both national and international levels.

Editorial

Reimagining democracy: Why India's call for transparent rankings rattles the West

Over the years, democracy has come to mean many things, often abstract and distorted, especially used to invoke a necessary "value" of the global order. Such a "value" has depended upon a few aspects: economic and military hard power and alignment with Western interests. As India finally announced its democracy rankings, nations that depend on using inaccurate "expert opinions" to subvert data raised a hue and cry. Domestically, there is a cohort that disagrees with the idea of such rankings and argues one of two ideas: That the collective West has more expertise in deciding such rankings and must be unchallenged; That India and other nations can eschew Western validation and need not care about the rankings and other indices. The first is a group that believes in Western supremacy and has formed the ideological collaborator class of any foreign group that has sought to "govern" as a euphemism for colonisation by other means. This is reflected in their calling directly for foreign interference regarding India's domestic policy setting and makes no bones about their preference for externalised decision-making. This is not a group with the interests of Indian citizens at heart, seeking only to maintain their position as an intellectual and social elite, watching self-righteously from atop a high horse made of colonial dreams. As such, malintent entails that their ideas cannot pertain significantly to the will of the people of the country. The second group is made of those with well-intentioned naivete. A little knowledge would go a long way in explaining an economic, and otherwise, interconnected world. The fact that interests and debt ceilings on investments and loans are dependent on credit ratings and indices such as these need us to be concerned about them. Moreover, they create a legacy for judgment by other nations we interact with. At its peak of wealth, knowledge and value creation, Bharat stood as a beacon, inviting engagement, not insularity, and not content in hubris. That is a later doing, a subject of an era of turmoil preventing recognition of a national conscience underlying its diversity. For an endeavour such as a democracy index to fill a void in data and not in propaganda, the rankings need to take into consideration several true indicators of the values that define self-governance. To prevent further distortions, though, it is necessary to reiterate what democracy means – governance by the representatives of all citizens. The universal adult franchise is the most inclusive indicator of true democracy and a basic pre-requisite. Other parameters aid in measuring the refinement of processes that allow for universal franchises to be executed during elections. The below parameters offer a relevant set of data that measures people's participation in governance and are significant in calculating the functioning of democracy in a nation: Women voting percentage: Women form a major part of the population, and yet, across the world, have been kept away from the ballot system for socio-cultural reasons. Their participation determines the freedom of a notable part of the population to implement universal franchises.

Voter percentage: A clear determinant of a population's participation in the democratic exercise, voter turnout in percentage terms is a necessary parameter for inclusion in such an index.

Electoral malpractices (such as poll-related violence, ballot stuffing, coercion regarding voting choice etc.): The prevention of exercising individual freedom of choice in electing one's representative through safe and secret exercise of ballot options is a hindrance towards an exercise in democracy.



Status of Indian job market: Fact versus fiction

Every once in a while, there will be news items and columns on the state of employment in India. Some of this is ill-informed, based on old or unreliable data. Essentially, there are three sources of data on employment: (1) Household-based surveys; (2) Establishment-based surveys; and (3) Administrative data. (I am leaving out private surveys.) These are the three official sources of data. EPFO, ESIC, and NPS are examples of administrative data. For instance, in 2022-23, almost 14 million net members were added to EPFO. Is this a meas-

ure of new job creation? For various reasons, it isn't. As an example, the moment an establishment crosses the threshold of 20 workers, all of it gets counted as a net addition. Administrative payroll data are indicators of formalisation, not employment. Establishment-based surveys are ASI by MoSPI (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation) and QES by MoLE (I wish people would stop using this acronym for the Ministry of Labour and Employment). In an informal economy like India, where there are usually no clear employer-employee rela-

tionships, unlike in more advanced countries, I am sceptical about establishment-based surveys telling us much about employment. Don't get me wrong. They do tell us something about demand for employment and, potentially, about skills and their lack. At present, both the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) and the Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) have biases. Agriculture is a different proposition. But even outside of agriculture, neither is comprehensive in coverage. Both can be streamlined and improved, and time lags can be reduced.

Outside of agriculture, until the Indian economy changes dramatically, I think there is no getting away from household-based surveys. This means the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). We can complain about PLFS: The quarterly estimates only cover urban India, not rural. It is annual or quarterly, and why can't it be monthly, like the Current Population Survey (CPS) in the US? To emulate the US, data collection would have to move from personal interviews to personal interviews spliced with telephone interviews. Is that feasible? In the US.

Strategic shield: Need to recalibrate defence diplomacy

Ever since ancient times, military officers have been employed in foreign lands as part of a politico-military approach to national security to safeguard national interests. There are references to such a role in Kautilya's Arthashastra, in the history of the pre-Judean era, and in Roman history. In those times, the role of military officers was largely focused on spying. In the 17th century, when the Prussians found ambassadorial reports neither sufficiently detailed nor updated for the purpose of decision making in war, they began to employ generals in diplomatic assignments. Napoleon frequently used generals as ambassadors. By the mid-nineteenth century, most European powers were assigning military officers to foreign countries, and in 1857, these military officers were designated as military attaches and given diplomatic status. In more recent times, defence diplomacy has emerged as one of the most important tools of military statecraft. The term "defence diplomacy" was perhaps first used by the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence (MoD) to consolidate a bouquet of military activities being conducted by the MoD. Although there is no universally accepted definition of defence diplomacy, it is generally considered the nonviolent use of a state's defence



apparatus to advance the strategic aims of a government through cooperation with other countries. Typically, the term includes activities such as officer exchanges, ship visits, training missions, and joint military exercises. The significance of defence diplomacy dimmed for Indian decision makers post-independence, and it was in the early 1990s that India's defence engagement began to gain momentum. C Raja Mohan, as late as 2015, lamented: ...India's military diplomacy has been severely limited by the lack of adequate political support and insufficient coordination between the armed forces, the ministry of defence, and the foreign office. While the services and the MEA see the value of leveraging India's military strengths, the MoD has neither the aptitude nor the institutional capability to meet the growing interna-

tional demand for defence cooperation with India. Fortunately, things have begun to change. The MoD and the services are proactively involved in defence diplomacy, and as of date, the Indian Army is engaging with 110 countries through defence cooperation activities. In 2023, the Indian Army participated in 39 joint exercises with foreign armies, out of which it was lead service in 28 exercises. In addition, the Indian Army and the US Army co-hosted the 13th Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference (IPACC), the 47th Indo-Pacific Armies Management Seminar (IPAMS), and the 9th Senior Enlisted Leaders Forum (SELF). The Army has been playing a crucial role in promoting multilateralism by organising the Inaugural India-Africa Army Chiefs' Conclave (IACC) and AFINDEX (2023), themed on Humanitarian Mine Action &

Peace Keeping Operations. Several high-level visits were conducted in 2023 in pursuit of the objectives of defence diplomacy. Based on the recommendations of the MoD's Study on Realignment of Defence Wings, new defence wings are being established in Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Poland by the end of 2024. Reportedly, new defence wings are also being established in Armenia, Djibouti, the Philippines, and Tanzania. These wings are being established through optimisation of the existing billets of the defence attaches in countries like Russia and the United Kingdom. Although the establishment of new defence wings is a welcome development, there are certain issues that require institutional attention. Among the varied tasks the military attaches would be undertaking, they would be expected to help achieve the target for defence exports set by the government, facilitate India's defence procurements, secure supply chains, and mitigate causes of national security risks. Defence exports require building a long-term relationship with the importing countries and their armed forces. Business also requires special aptitude, which goes beyond formal training and the learning of manuals and procedures. Military attaches are expected to navigate the

realm of defence business, which is unlike any other. In addition, they must be prepared for adverse PR from inimical interests and business competitors. India has supplied weapon platforms and radars to Armenia. Should the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia flare up again, Indian systems would be tested under extreme conditions. It is possible there would be some failures, like those of any other equipment produced anywhere in the world. Indian military attaches must be prepared to face the barrage of adverse PR in all forms of media. The character of warfare is changing. If the Russia-Ukraine war is indicative of the wars of the future, India must prepare for a protracted war and secure supply chains against sanctions and export control regimes. The export control measures imposed by the West on Russia are, perhaps, the most stringent applied against a single country since the Cold War. India may face a similar situation, which may include measures aimed at cutting off high-tech imports, restricting access to vital technological inputs, weakening its industrial base, and undercutting its influence on the world stage. The defence sector may be subjected to sweeping restrictions due to the denial of sensitive technology.

Finance surveillance radars for the Navy

This is unacceptable with regard to the freedom of the seas and a potential flashpoint for all, including India, already plagued by China. Chinese spy ships, navy and submarines, constantly ply in the Malacca Straits and Andaman/Nicobar Islands area, the broader Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and the Bay of Bengal. This is aided by Chinese bases in Sri Lanka at Hambantota, in Bangladesh where it has ostensibly built a submarine base for it, from the Maldives, from the Coco Islands of Myanmar, farther afield at Djibouti. India is helped in guarding the Indian Ocean area by the US Navy, plus the French and British navies in particular.

regular basis with other countries but joins in the naval exercises in the South China Sea as well. It has now opened two shipyards, in Kattupalli, near Chennai, and another in Cochin, to repair and service US and British ships. Ever since the legendary Ferdinand Marcos' son, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., nick-named Bongbong in his youth, came to power, the Philippines has upped the ante against Chinese hegemony. There is no longer much effort to appease China or deal with it using do-nothing but hot rhetoric, though diplomatic and political dialogue is still maintained. The Philippines is the first foreign country to order three batteries of Brahmos anti-ship shore-based supersonic cruise missiles from India. It has

had its navy personnel trained in their use by India. These missiles, ordered a couple of years ago, are presently being delivered and placed. They are being deployed to protect Filipino interests in the South China Sea. The Indo-Russian Brahmos, manufactured in India, come in air, sea, land and submarine variants, and are widely acknowledged to be the fastest and most devastating missiles in the world. In November 2023 Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. began work on a security pact that would allow the conduct of joint military exercises. Japan has also agreed to finance surveillance radars for the Philippine Navy.

Manama mosaics: 72 hours of heritage and history in Bahrain

In Manama, the ancient and the modern intertwine like the threads in its vibrant souqs. Skyscrapers pierce the azure sky while narrow alleyways whisper tales of a bygone era. At the aromatic chaos of the Bab el-Bahrain Souq, spices dance with textiles and shimmering pearls hold the secrets of the deep. Then, turn a corner and you will find yourself transported to the serenity of the Al Fateh Grand Mosque. Manama is a city of contrasts, a blend of tradition and progress, waiting to be explored by the curious traveller. And the beauty lies in the fact that you can experience it in just 72 hours.

Al Fateh Grand Mosque interiors
No matter how long you linger in this Middle Eastern land, a breakfast extravaganza awaits. As you step into one of the city's cherished cafes, let the intoxicating aroma of Bahraini cuisine envelop you, a prelude to a flavour-filled odyssey that will tantalize your taste buds and ignite your spirit for the day to come. Dive into the gastronomic classics by indulging in the timeless delights of Balaleet vermicelli noodles, the rustic allure of



Khameer and Regag, alongside the hearty flavours of Foul Fava beans and the savoury embrace of Samboosa fried pastries. Elevate your culinary journey with falafel and shawarma, and don't forget to snag some Halwa, a quintessential Middle Eastern sweet sensation. Among the culinary havens dotting Bahrain's landscape, seek refuge in esteemed establishments such as Al Ameer, renowned for its culinary finesse; Emmawash celebrated for its mastery of dried shrimp and mung beans; and Freej Bin Al Rashdan, nestled near Dohat Arad Lagoon, where the aromas of lamb machboos and Bahraini kebabs beckon the discerning palate. Conclude your epicurean odyssey at Haji Gahwa, nestled within the bustling enclave of Manama Souq, where authenticity reigns supreme and traditional Bahraini cuisine is savoured with a gen-

erous sprinkle of heritage and charm. Manama delivers all the bling you'd expect from a modern Arab metropolis – sleek malls and skyscrapers that wouldn't look out of place in a sci-fi movie. But amidst the shiny veneer, you'll find whispers of a charming past, a reminder of Manama's days as a bustling port. Old and new coexist with playful harmony, most evident in the legendary Manama Souq, where ancient market vibes and the scents of exotic spices swirl. Before you hunt down the perfect gold bangle or spice up your culinary repertoire at the Souq, soak in the history of Bab Al Bahrain, the gateway to Manama's bustling souq. This venerable archway, erected in 1949, once held court but now finds itself a few kilometres inland. Today, it's a colossal arch framing a road—flanked by two smaller arches for pedestrians.

Zomato's Q4 net profit falls 77% to Rs 39 crore

Delhi : Eternal Ltd. (previously Zomato) announced a 77% drop in overall net profit to Rs 39 crore in Q4 FY25 from Rs 175 crore the year before. Zomato, which owns Blinkit, lost 33% of its quarterly net profit to Rs 59 crore in October-December. Overall expenditures rose 67% to Rs 6,104 crore from Rs 3,636 crore. QoQ, costs rose over 10%. Food delivery company consolidated income from operations rose 64% to Rs 5,833 crore from Rs 3,562 crore in the January-March quarter of the previous financial year. Zomato earned Rs 6,201 crore in the quarter, up from Rs 3,797 the year before. Its expenses rose from Rs 3,636 crore to Rs 6,104 crore. Zomato shares finished at Rs 232.5 on the BSE, up 0.58 percent. According to its stock exchange filing, Blinkit opened 294 net new stores in Q4 and is on track to reach 2,000 by



December 25. Deepinder Goyal, Founder and CEO, Eternal, said, "We don't see any long-term structural reason for this slowdown, as the fundamentals – low penetration of restaurant food and increasing urbanisation and per capita income in India – remain unchanged." The company has several promising initiatives in the pipeline and hopes some will work and lead to higher growth without compromising profitability. The company began reporting NOV and GOV for its B2C activities (food delivery, rapid commerce, and going-out) in Q4 FY25.

Wagah closure hurts Afghan dry fruit imports

Delhi: The closing of the Attari-Wagah border has hampered the movement of dry fruits from Afghanistan to India, which may raise domestic prices by 10 to 25%. Afghanistan is India's greatest dried fruit supplier despite war and civil upheaval. Anil Mehra, National President of the Federation of Grocery and Dry Fruit Commercial Association, when the Attari-Wagah border closed, no trucks transporting dry fruits from to Attari had come. "50 trucks are at the Pakistani Wagah border.

Private sector capex may fall 25% to Rs 4.88 lakh cr in FY26: Govt survey

Delhi: A government survey research estimates private business capital spending will drop 25% to Rs 4.88 lakh crore in 2025-26 from Rs 6.56 lakh crore in FY25. The Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation's Forward-Looking Survey on Private Sector CAPEX Investment Intentions between November 2024 and January 2025 found that private corporate capex was Rs 3.94 lakh crore in 2021-22, Rs 5.72 lakh crore in 2022-23, and Rs 4.22 lakh crore in 2023-24. To establish a fixed panel, 2,172 firms provided complete infor-



mation for all five years of the reference period. The government said the aggregated (unweighted) capex data from this panel of firms is credible for five-year capital expenditure trends. Over four years from 2021-22 to 2024-25, aggregate capex (unweighted) increased 66.3%. Of the

3,064 responding companies, 2,172 planned 2025-26 capex. The data suggests respondents are cautious when revealing capital spending plans. The research advised caution when interpreting 2025-26 Capex data due to the conservative stance and fear of responding firms.

Possible goal of India-US trade deal: equal access to technology

Delhi: According to insiders, as part of the intended bilateral trade agreement (BTA), India is expected to request that the United States relax export controls and provide it with access to vital technologies on par with important American

allies such as Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, they mentioned that India might be interested in pursuing these kind of concessions in the following industries: semiconductors, biotechnology, artificial intelli-

gence (AI), pharmaceuticals, quantum computing, and telecom equipment. Textiles, gems and jewelry, leather goods, clothing, plastics, chemicals, shrimp, oil seeds, chemicals, grapes, and bananas are among the labor-intensive sectors.



Meta releases standalone AI app to challenge ChatGPT

Delhi: competing with ChatGPT creator OpenAI with a standalone AI app. Meta said that its new AI assistant will use Llama AI. The Discover stream shows how others are using the tool and provides prompts. The AI arms race pits Meta's new software against ChatGPT and other AI platforms. Claude, Grok, and Gemini from Anthropic, xAI, and Google are also leading contenders. In September



2023, Meta debuted an AI chatbot as a generative AI-powered digital assistant that can respond to user questions and produce graphics in its apps. Meta AI became prominent in April when it replaced Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Messenger's search feature with a chatbot. Zuckerberg claimed in January that 2025 "is going to be the year when a highly intelligent and personalized AI assistant reaches more than 1 billion people, and I expect Meta AI to be that leading AI assistant." Meta finance head Susan Li said Meta AI has 700 million monthly active users in January. It rose from 600 million in December. Meta launched a standalone AI app after Google and Elon Musk's xAI. Both firms released Gemini and Grok applications recently.

ATM withdrawals cost more: All about the new fees

Delhi : ATM users in India will incur revised transaction rates starting May 1, 2025, under the RBI's amended fee regime. The revisions aim to simplify ATM usage charges and promote digital banking for both financial and non-financial activities. Under the new guidelines, metro consumers will get three free ATM transactions each month and non-metro customers five. Free transactions include cash withdrawals and balance checks.

After this limit, banks can charge Rs 23 per transaction, excluding taxes. This applies to ATM and CRM transactions, although CRM



cash deposits are free. Many big banks have revised their client policies: HDFC said, "With effect from 1st May 2025, the ATM transaction charge rate beyond free limits will be revised from Rs 21 + taxes to Rs 23 + taxes."

Bank emphasized that only cash withdrawals at HDFC Bank ATMs exceeding the free limit will be charged, while non-financial transactions are free. Other banks' ATMs count both sorts of transactions toward the free limit.

The government raises sugarcane FRP by 4.41% to Rs 355 per quintal for 2025-26

Delhi: The government raised the fair and remunerative price (FRP) of sugarcane by 4.41 percent to Rs 355 per quintal for the 2025-26 season in October.

An official statement said the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi made this decision in the interest of sugarcane farmers. Sugarcane FRP is Rs 340 per quintal for 2024-25. Sugar mills must pay sugarcane growers FRP, the minimum price set by the Indian government. I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told the media after the meeting that the FRP of Rs 355 per quintal for a 10.25%



basic recovery rate was approved. "The FRP for sugar season 2025-26 is 4.41 per cent higher than current sugar season 2024-25," says the report. Farmers will receive Rs 3.46 per quintal for each 0.1% sugar recovery increment above 10.25%. FRP decreases by Rs 3.46 per quintal for every 0.1% recovery rate decline. The government also agreed

not to deduct sugar mills with recovery below 9.5%. These farmers will receive Rs 329.05 per cent for sugarcane in 2025-26. The statement states that sugarcane production costs Rs 173 per quintal in 2025-26. The 2025-26 FRP of Rs 355 per quintal at 10.25% recovery is 105.25% higher than manufacturing cost.

For 2025-26, I-T Department notifies ITR forms 1, 4

Delhi: Individuals and companies with income up to Rs 50 lakh must file ITR forms 1 and 4 for assessment year (AY) 2025-26 with the income tax department. Anyone with long-term capital gains up to Rs 1.25 lakh in a fiscal year can submit ITR-1. Previously, they had to file ITR-



2. With the notification, individuals, HUFs, corporations with income up to Rs 50 lakh, and

those with business and professional incomes in 2024-25 (April-March) can file I-T returns. ITR Form 1 (Sahaj) and ITR Form 4 (Sugam) are easier forms for many small and medium taxpayers. Sahaj can be filed by a resident with an annual income of up to Rs 50 lakh from

salary, one residential property, other sources (interest), and agricultural income up to Rs 5,000. Individuals, Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs), and firms (other than LLPs) with yearly income up to Rs 50 lakh and business and profession revenue can file sugam.

Q4 Adani Enterprises net profit jumps 7.5x to Rs 3,845 crore, incubating enterprises thrive

Delhi : Adani Enterprises Ltd. (AEL), the flagship firm of the Adani Group, reported strong financial results, with net profit rising 7.5 times to Rs 3,845 crore in Q4 FY25 from Rs 449 crore in FY24. Adani Wilmar Ltd.'s 13.5% stake sale in Q4 gave AEL an outstanding gain of Rs 3,946 crore. Revenue rose 2% to Rs 1,00,365 crore and consolidated PBT rose 16% to Rs 6,533 crore in FY25. Incubating firms' solid operational performance drove EBITDA up



26% to Rs 16,722 crore last fiscal, the company said. Gautam Adani, Chairman of Adani Group, said Adani Enterprises is establishing firms that will shape India's infrastructure and energy sector. Our scale, speed, and sustainability drove our strong FY25 success. The billionaire industri-

alist said disciplined execution, future-focused investments, operational excellence, innovation, and sustainability drove impressive development across our incubation businesses. Adani New Industries Limited (ANIL) began expanding solar cell and module operations

WB: Oil prices might drop 17% and commodity prices 12%

Delhi: Commodity prices, according to the World Bank, could drop 12% this year, with the oil index possibly falling 17%, as a result of slowing economic development. "If realised, these declines will end a period of ele-

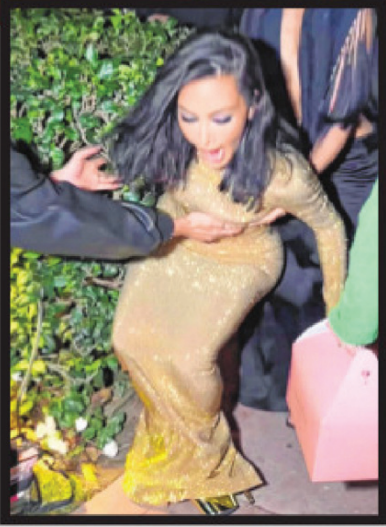
vated inflation-adjusted commodity prices in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine," recent commodities Markets Outlook. Reports indicate that supplies might be higher this year.

for 6 GW in Q4 FY25 with financial close. Improved realization and operational efficiency drove solar module sales up 59% to 4,263 MW and greater

EBITDA margins. The company reported that ANIL wind business expanded capacity to 2.25 GW in Q4 FY25 with 5.2 MW, 3.3 MW, and 3.0 MW WTG.

Kim Kardashian's dramatic Oscars fall

Reality star Kim Kardashian suffered a fall before the Oscars red carpet, but later impressed in a bold fashion look



Photos: Instagram_@kimkardashian

Even the most seasoned red carpet regulars have their off-balance moments, and Kim Kardashian just proved it in the most relatable way possible. The reality star grabbed eyeballs at the recent Vanity Fair Oscars 2026 after-party, not just for her head-turning look, but for a near fall that quickly became the internet's latest obsession.

As Kim made her way into the star-studded bash, all eyes were on her towering eight-inch platform heels, and for good reason. In a now-viral clip, she briefly lost her

footing near a bush, however, she quickly steady herself.

The moment, which she later shared herself, showed her grabbing onto a passer-by for support before bursting into laughter. "That poor lady, I grabbed her," she added, clearly amused by the situation. Despite the slip, Kim kept her cool, brushed it off effortlessly, and continued walking like a pro. Fall scare aside, Kim's after-party look was nothing short of striking. She stepped out in a sculpted, figure-hugging gold gown from Gucci's Fall 2026 collection, designed by Demna. The ensemble featured a sleek high neckline, full-length sleeves, and a

shimmering finish that hugged her silhouette to perfection.

The dramatic outfit was paired with statement eight-inch mirrored platform heels, adding serious height, and clearly, a bit of risk. Kim leaned fully into a bold beauty moment to complement the look. She opted for icy blue contact lenses that instantly stood out, paired with bronzed, contoured skin, a smoky eye, and glossy nude lips.

Her accessories remained minimal yet luxe, featuring diamond ear cuffs by Ofira Jewels. A tousled, shoulder-length bob added a relaxed edge to the otherwise high-glam ensemble.

Chand Dekh Lena full song out

Salman Khan Films drops *Chand Dekh Lena*, a romantic track blending *Eid* and *Karwa Chauth* emotions with of love and separation

After teasing audiences with the first glimpse of the song *Chand Dekh Lena*, Salman Khan Films has now dropped the full version of the song ahead of *Eid*.

Featuring Salman Khan and Chitrangada Singh from *Maarubhum: May War Rest in Peace*, the song beautifully weaves in the emotional significance of the moon, an element deeply rooted in both *Eid* and *Karwa Chauth*.

While the sighting of the moon marks celebration and togetherness during *Eid*, it also symbolises love, longing, and faith during *Karwa Chauth*, further making the song a poignant blend of two traditions connected by emotion and hope. *Chand Dekh Lena*, composed by Himesh Reshammiya, is touted as a classic Bollywood rendition of love and longing. The song captures the emotional reality of relationships shaped by a soldier's duty.



Photo: Instagram

The visuals of the song show Chitrangada Singh's character waiting with quiet resilience for her husband, played by Salman Khan, who returns home

after serving at the border.

Adding a refreshing musical touch, Salman Khan has also used the song to introduce fresh voices. *Chand Dekh Lena*

is sung by young talents like *Indian Idol* fame Nihal Tauro, known for his popular spiritual *bhajans* and *kirtans*, along with Anika Mukherjee.



Photo: Instagram_@madhuridixitme

Madhuri Dixit celebrates Gudi Padwa

Actress Madhuri Dixit shared festive greetings through a video on her social media on the occasion of *Gudi Padwa*. In the clip, the actress was seen celebrating the festival by decorating the traditional *gudi*. She was dressed in a green *saree* paired with traditional Maharashtrian jewellery, including a nath, layered gold necklaces and earrings. Madhuri was also seen holding a *puja thali* while marking the occasion.

Actor Ajay Devgn marks *Gudi Padwa* with a plate of traditional *Puran Poli*

Devgn celebrated the festival of *Gudi Padwa* by sharing a glimpse of a festive delicacy, *Puran Poli*, a traditional Maharashtrian delicacy that is synonymous with the occasion.

Taking to his social media account, Ajay posted a picture of a plate of freshly prepared *Puran Poli* served with *ghee* and flavoured milk, arranged on a banana leaf placed on top of a wooden table. The caption on the picture read, "Nothing says *Gudi Padwa* like a plate of *Puran Poli*." Talking about *Gudi Padwa*, the festival marks the Maharashtrian New Year and is celebrated with great enthusiasm across Maharashtra.



Tom Holland unveils *Spider-Man: Brand New Day* trailer, introducing a darker chapter in Peter Parker's life after *No Way Home*

Spider-Man Brand New Day trailer out



After the first-of-its-kind global fan-driven trailer tease, Tom Holland spectacularly unveiled the full trailer for the iconic Empire State Building, surrounded by passionate *Spider-Man* fans as the sun rose over New York City, marking a truly unforgettable moment for audiences worldwide.

After the record-breaking global success of *Spider-*

Man: No Way Home, *Spider-Man: Brand New Day* marks an entirely new chapter for Peter Parker and *Spider-Man*. Four years have passed since the events of *No Way Home*, and Peter is now an adult living entirely alone, having voluntarily erased himself

from the lives and memories of those he loves.

Crime-fighting in a New York that no longer knows his name, he's devoted himself entirely to protecting his city — a full-time *Spider-Man* — but as the demands on him intensify, the pressure sparks a sur-

prising physical evolution that threatens his existence. Even as a strange new pattern of crimes gives rise to one of the most powerful threats he has ever faced.

Directed by Destin Daniel Cretton, Tom Holland returns as *Spider-Man* alongside Zendaya, Jacob Batalon, Sadie Sink, Jon Bernthal, Mark Ruffalo, Michael Mando and Tramell Tillman in pivotal roles.

Produced by Sony Pictures Entertainment India, the film will release in theatres on July 31 in English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam across all premium formats.

Raveena, Rasha visit Tirupati temple

Bollywood star Raveena Tandon visited the Tirupati temple along with her daughter Rasha Thadani on the occasion of her birthday month.

The actress shared a carousel of pictures from their spiritual visit on her social media account. Raveena posted umpteen number of pictures from the temple premises, where the mother-daughter duo were seen posing against the majestic backdrop of the famous Tirupati temple.

In the pictures shared by Raveena, Rasha looks elegant in a vibrant red-and-green traditional *saree* with gold borders. Raveena is seen dressed in a cream and gold *saree* paired with a green blouse.

The actress, who is also seen wearing her *mangalsutra*. Another picture shows the beautiful two standing together in front of the temple complex, and smiling for the camera.

The caption read, "Eeshwar, Family and Friends the babies @rashathadani's birth-



Photos: Instagram_@officialraveenatandon

day month starting with blessings at Tirupati. Then a weekend with The Sun and Son. Fiends and fun. and an amazing Indian win (sic)."



Sara Arjun steals the spotlight

Sara makes a striking appearance at *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* music launch, impressing with her bold and glamorous couture look

Sara Arjun turned heads alongside Ranveer Singh at the *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* music launch in Mumbai recently, effortlessly stealing the spot-

light with her bold fashion choice. For the glamorous evening, the young actress opted for a couture three-piece ensemble by Anamika Khanna, blending edgy glamour with artistic detailing.

She donned a chic black crop top intricately embellished with red, blue and black beadwork, adding a textured, high-fashion appeal.

The look was balanced with a sleek, plain black midi skirt, allowing the upper silhouette and layering to truly stand out. The highlight of the outfit was a vibrant, multi-hued tribal-printed long jacket, reportedly priced at Rs 1.50 lakh, which added drama.

Elevating the look further, Sara accessorised with bold trio earrings featuring blue sapphires, diamonds and emeralds, paired with a co-ordinated bangle and ring.

Her glam stayed on point with smoky eyes, softly flushed cheeks, radiant highlighted skin and nude lips, while her sleek, middle-parted straight hair completed the runway-ready look.



Photos: Instagram_@saraarjun

Briefs

Karachi fire: Kin protest as many missing

Nearly a week after the fire in shopping centre in Pakistan's Karachi, anger and despair among families of the missing erupted as they protested against the lack of urgency by officials. 'The Express Tribune' reported. Women clutching photos of sons, husbands and brothers assembled near the site, accusing officials and rescuers of moving painfully slowly while their loved ones remained unaccounted for. The toll from the January 17 fire has risen to at least 67.

Ruling party boss reelected in Vietnam

Vietnam's To Lam was re-elected on Friday as the general secretary of its ruling Communist Party. The decision came at the conclusion of the National Party Congress, the country's most important political conclave. No announcement was made about whether he will also become president. If To Lam were to get both positions, he would be the country's most powerful leader in decades, akin to Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

2 dead as boat sinks in South China Sea

Two people died and four were missing when a Singapore-flagged cargo ship with 21 Filipinos on board capsized in the South China Sea, Chinese officials said on Friday. The Chinese Coast Guard and navy operations from People's Liberation Army's Southern Theatre Command have rescued 15 people. The boat sank 100 kms north-west of Scarborough Shoal, said Chinese Coast Guard.

Nine killed in Pakistan's KP avalanche

Nine people were killed after an avalanche struck a house in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Friday, police said. A child was also injured in Chitral's Domel mountainous area.

21 killed in Myanmar airstrike

A military airstrike this week on a Myanmar village sheltering displaced people from Bhamo, where a final round of the 3-phase poll is to be held, killed 21 people, a rebel group said.

UAE MEET | As trilateral talks involving US begin, no sign of Moscow and Kyiv softening their positions on Donbas region

Land dispute in focus at Ukraine peace talks

ABU DHABI

Ukrainian, Russian and American negotiators were holding meetings on Friday in the UAE, marking the first trilateral talks since the start of the war in Ukraine, tackling the vital issue of territory with no sign of a softening of positions to end the four-year conflict.

This round of talks, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Friday, could focus on post-war control of territory in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region, which has emerged as a major stumbling block through months of negotiations.

"The question of Donbas is key. It will be discussed how the three sides... see this in Abu Dhabi today and tomorrow," he said. The talks would resume on Saturday morning.

The Kremlin confirmed Russian officials would take part in a security working group meeting in Abu Dhabi with the Russian delegation led by Igor Kostyukov, the head of Russia's military intelligence. The secretary of the national security council, Rustem Umerov, will lead Ukraine's delegation.

A bilateral working group on economic issues between Russia and the US was slated to take place separately, the Kremlin said.

On the table is a revised 20-



Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) greets US President Donald Trump's envoys Steve Witkoff (C-L), Jared Kushner (2nd R) and Josh Gruenbaum, the head of the Federal Acquisition Service at the General Services Administration in Moscow. —AP

point peace plan drawn up by Ukraine and the US. That plan covers a range of issues like potential territorial arrangements and security guarantees, as well as plans to rebuild the war-ravaged nation.

But the Ukrainian and Russian authorities are still at odds over territory, with Russia demanding a big chunk in the Donbas, and on security guarantees.

Steve Witkoff, US President Trump's special envoy, and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, were also expected to be in Abu Dhabi. The Kremlin said Witkoff would lead the bilateral economics talks alongside Kirill Dmitriev, the

Kremlin special envoy and head of the country's sovereign wealth fund.

Witkoff said on Thursday in Abu Dhabi, working groups would handle components of the peace plan, including what he called "military-to-military" aspects and "prosperity," or postwar economic recovery. Late on Thursday, Witkoff and Kushner met for 4 hours in Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Yuri Ushakov, Putin's foreign policy adviser, said after the meeting it had been "useful in all aspects, both for us and the US."

He said Russia wanted to end the war "through political

and diplomatic means" but that until then it would continue to push on the battlefield, "where the Russian Armed Forces hold the strategic initiative."

During the Kremlin meeting, Putin underscored there was no hope of achieving a long-term settlement if Ukraine was not prepared to resolve "the territorial issue according to the formula agreed upon in Anchorage," Ushakov said, referring to a meeting in Alaska last year. During that meeting, Putin agreed to cease fighting if Kyiv handed over the remainder of the Donetsk region and agreed to other nonterritorial demands.

Nato troops avoided Af frontline: Don sparks row

LONDON / WASHINGTON

Donald Trump has sparked outrage among British MPs and veterans after claiming Nato troops stayed away from the frontline in Afghanistan, 'The Guardian' reported.

The US president made his comments in an interview with 'Fox News' in which he reiterated his suggestion Nato would not support the US if asked. Trump has long criticised the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which also includes 30 European allies and Canada, over his belief that other members don't pay their fair share.

"Maybe we should have put Nato to the test: Invoked Article 5, and forced Nato to come here and protect our Southern Border from further Invasions of Illegal Immigrants, thus freeing up large numbers of Border Patrol Agents for other tasks," Trump posted on Truth Social. Article 5 refers to Nato's mutual defence clause, which states that an "armed attack" on one member is considered an attack on all 32 member-states.

His remarks drew condemnation, with critics pointing to the 457 British deaths in Afghanistan and highlighting Trump's avoidance of military service in Vietnam.

A total of 3,486 Nato troops died in the 20-year conflict, of which 2,461 were US service men. Canada suffered 165 deaths, including civilians.

Denmark, which has been at loggerheads with the US



over Trump's designs on Greenland, had 44 combat deaths in Afghanistan, the most per capita outside the US. In the interview with 'Fox News', Trump said: "We've never needed them. They'll say they sent some troops to Afghanistan ... and they did, they stayed a little back, a little off the frontlines."

"I will never forget their courage, their bravery and the sacrifice they made for the country. President Trump's remarks are insulting, appalling. I am not surprised the remarks have hurt the loved ones of those killed or injured," said UK PM Keir Starmer.

Armed forces minister Al Carns said, "Trump's comments are utterly ridiculous and a real shame."

Tory party leader Kemi Badenoch called US president's remark a disgrace.

Calvin Bailey, a Labour MP and former RAF officer who served alongside US special operations units in Afghanistan, said Trump's claim "bears no resemblance to the reality experienced by those of us who served there."

The Conservative MP Ben Obese-Jecty, who served in the Royal Yorkshire Regi-

ment, said it was "sad to see our nation's sacrifice, and that of our Nato partners, held so cheaply by the US president".

Tan Dhesi, the chair of the Commons defence committee, said the US president's comments were "appalling and an insult to our brave British servicemen and women, who risked life and limb to help our allies, with many making the ultimate sacrifice".

The foreign affairs committee chair, Emily Thornberry, described the comments as "so much more than a mistake", and "an insult" to the families of those who had died. Stephen Stewart, a former soldier and an author and journalist, said: "Trump's comments are as offensive as they are inaccurate. It's hugely ironic someone who allegedly dodged the draft for the Vietnam war should make such a disgraceful statement."

"He has desecrated the memory of hundreds of British soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan, people who we called friends and comrades. If he was a man of honour, he would get down on bended knees to ask forgiveness from the families of the fallen."

Bailey added: "As I reminded the US forces I served with on 4 July in 2008, we were there because of a shared belief, articulated at America's founding, that free people have inalienable rights and should not live under tyranny. That belief underpinned the response to 9/11, and it is worth reflecting on now."

Ties with US have taken a big blow: EU foreign policy chief

BRUSSELS

Transatlantic relations have suffered serious strain over the past week, the European Union's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said, as EU leaders met for an emergency summit amid escalating tensions with the US over Greenland.

Kallas told reporters the situation had become increasingly unpredictable. "One day, one way; the other day, again, everything could change," she said, referring to the shifting signals from US President Donald Trump. She said ties between Europe and the US "have definitely taken a big blow over the last week", but added, Europe was "not willing to junk 80 years of good relations".

After the summit, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the EU's united approach and its effort to engage Washington in "a firm but non-escalatory

manner" had helped ease tensions.

BRUSSELS MEET
EU leaders gathered in Brussels late on Thursday to review ties with Washington and to revive talks on an EU-US trade deal, Bloomberg



reported. The European Parliament had earlier paused ratification of the deal in protest against US pressure over Greenland.

The leaders said they wanted to strengthen cooperation with the US and were ready to respond if new threats emerged.

GREENLAND SEEKS TALKS WITH US

In Nuuk, Greenland PM Jens Frederik Nielsen said he was unaware of the deal details, but the territory wanted a "peaceful dialogue" with the US and its sovereignty cannot be compromised. He said if the Greenland people were forced to make a choice, their position was clear. "We choose the Kingdom of Denmark, we choose the EU, we choose Nato."

MACRON FOR RESPECT

French President Emmanuel Macron said firm pressure from Europe pushed Trump to step back from his earlier threats over Greenland, AP reported. He said Europe's collective response showed its strength on the global stage. "Europe can make itself be respected, and that's a very good thing," Macron said, adding, "When we use the tools we have at our disposal we get respect and that's what happened this week."

POTUS plans China visit in April, to host Xi later in 2026

'Turbulent' times: Jinping assures Brazil's Lula of Beijing's support

Washington: President Donald Trump said he would travel to China in April and host Chinese President Xi Jinping in the US later this year, signalling renewed leader-level engagement between the two countries.

"We are gonna make a trip. I am going in April," Trump told reporters. He said the two leaders would meet twice in 2026. He added Xi would visit the US "towards the end of the year". Trump described his relationship with Xi in positive terms. "I've always had a great relationship."

He acknowledged ties were strained during the Covid period. "It was a very strained relationship during Covid, but now it's an excellent relationship," he said.

The president pointed to trade as evidence of improving ties. He said China is buying more US farm products. "Look at all the farm products they're buying now," Trump said. "Soybeans — they're buying a lot of soybeans."

Trump said the purchases

Beijing/Sao Paulo: China's President Xi Jinping (L) assured his Brazilian counterpart on Friday China would stand by the Latin America's biggest economy and the Global South, and called for both nations to maintain the role of the UN, Xinhua said. Xi's comments in a telephone call with President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva followed the latter's criticism of the US attack on Venezuela in an opinion piece in the 'New York Times' this week. Xi said China and Brazil should safeguard the shared interests of the Global South and jointly maintain the role of the United Nations in the "current turbulent international situation", the agency said. Lula's office confirmed the 45-minute call, saying both leaders "reiterated their commitment to strengthening the United Nations as a path to safeguarding peace and stability in the world".



benefit American farmers. "That makes our farmers happy, and that makes me happy," he said. He also praised Xi personally. Trump called him "an amazing guy" and spoke favorably about Xi's wife. His remarks suggested a focus on personal diplomacy.

Trump praised the deal, thanking Chinese leader Xi Jinping specifically "for working with us and, ultimately, approving the Deal". He hoped "long into the future I will be remembered by those who use and love TikTok".

TikTok seals deal to form new US entity

Washington: TikTok has finalised a deal to create a new American entity, avoiding the looming threat of a ban in the US that has been in discussion for years on the platform now used by over 200 million Americans.

The social video platform firm signed pacts with investors including Oracle, Silver Lake and the Emirati investment firm MGX to form the new TikTok US joint venture.

The new version will operate under "defined safeguards that protect national security through comprehensive data protections, algorithm security, content moderation and software assurances for US users," the company said. American TikTok users can continue using the same app.

Trump praised the deal, thanking Chinese leader Xi Jinping specifically "for working with us and, ultimately, approving the Deal". He hoped "long into the future I will be remembered by those who use and love TikTok".

Hasina alleges anarchy

MUMBAI

In her first public audio address in New Delhi, since fleeing Bangladesh, former PM Sheikh Hasina accused the interim administration led by Muhammad Yunus of pushing the nation into what she dubbed "murderous anarchy", declaring that democracy now survives "in exile".

The message, played to a packed audience at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia in Delhi, came amid rapidly fraying ties between India and Bangladesh and as New Delhi moves families of Indian diplomats out of Dhaka, anticipating escalating political violence ahead of next month's elections.

Hasina said Bangladesh had slipped into its "darkest hour", transformed from a peaceful nation into a landscape marked by fear, bloodshed and repression. "What was once fertile and calm is ruled by terror," she said, alleging, violence, torture and sexual assaults were being carried out with impunity, particularly against women and minorities.

Hasina, who was forced into exile after her govern-

AMERICA TRYING TO BEFRIEND JAMAAT IN BANGLADESH: CLIP

Washington: As Jamaat-e-Islami readies for its strongest showing in Bangladesh poll next month, 'The Washington Post' has reported US diplomats are quietly signalling a willingness to engage with the once-banned party. The paper on Thursday cited a leaked audio clip of a closed-door interaction between a US diplomat and some female Bangladesh journalists on December 1, 2025, at the US embassy in Dhaka.

The US official said Bangladesh had "shifted Islamic" and predicted Jamaat would "do better than it's ever done before" in the Feb 12 poll. "We want them to be our friends," the official added, asking if journalists could bring members of the party's "influential student wing", Islami Chhatra Shibir, onto their programmes. The unnamed diplomat downplayed worries Jamaat would try to force its interpretation of Islamic law on Bangladesh, saying "we would have 100% tariffs put on them the next day".



ment was toppled during violent protests in August 2024, accused what she called a "fascist clique" of conspiring to seize power. She blamed Yunus for dismantling democratic institutions and allowing extremist forces to flourish.

"Bangladesh today resembles a prison and an execution

ground," she said, claiming, religious minorities, especially Hindus, were under sustained attack since her ouster.

She warned the February 12 general election would face a legitimacy crisis if her party, the Awami League, remains barred from contesting. The party's registration has been suspended and its activities banned by the interim government. Hasina said law and order had collapsed, daily life had become a struggle for survival, and the promise of a free and fair poll was hollow without political pluralism.

She won't face time in prison but will have location monitoring and certain nighttime curfew requirements during probation.

The shooting on January 8,

Woman shot at by Border Patrol sentenced for illegal entry in US

PORTLAND (US)

A woman who was shot and wounded by a Border Patrol agent during a recent immigration stop in Portland, Oregon, pleaded guilty on Thursday to illegally entering the US and was sentenced to one year of probation.

Yorlenys Zambrano-Contreras appeared by video from an immigration detention facility in Tacoma, Washington, for the federal court hearing in Portland, 'The Oregonian/OregonLive' reported.

She won't face time in prison but will have location monitoring and certain nighttime curfew requirements during probation.

She will be able to remain out of custody in Oregon under the negotiated resolution of the case, the news outlet reported.

The case was initially filed in Texas, where she was accused of illegally entering the US, but she waived her right to appear there for prosecution, the outlet reported.

The shooting on January 8,



one day after a federal agent shot and killed a driver in Minneapolis, prompted protests over agents' aggressive tactics during immigration enforcement operations.

The FBI said in a court filing it had found no surveillance or other video of the shooting, in which a Border Patrol agent wounded Zambrano-Contreras and Luis Nino-Moncada while they were in a pickup truck in a medical complex parking lot.

According to court filings, the agent opened fire after Nino-Moncada put the truck in reverse and repeatedly slammed into an unoccupied car Border Patrol agents had

rented, smashing its headlights and knocking off its front bumper. The truck struck the agent, and he fired two rounds out of fear for his life, the filings say.

Nino-Moncada has been indicted on charges of aggravated assault on a federal employee and damaging federal property. He has pleaded not guilty and remains in custody, with a jury trial set for March.

The Department of Homeland Security said Zambrano-Contreras and Nino-Moncada entered the US illegally in 2023 and 2022, respectively, and were affiliated with the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua.

HARRIS FLAYS ICE

Former US Vice-President Kamala Harris criticised Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sharply after a five-year-old child was taken to a detention centre in Texas. "The child should be at home with the family and not used as bait by ICE and held in a Texas detention centre. I am outraged, and you should be too," she said.

Minnesota traders stand against ICE

WASHINGTON

No work, no shopping, no dining out. Hundreds of businesses across Minnesota were expected to close and many people vowed to pause everyday activities on Friday as part of a general strike against the Trump administration's immigration crackdown, NYT reported.

As tensions mount and a sense of fear of detention by immigration agents permeates the state, vendors, labour unions and residents said they would take part in an economic blackout and gather at prayers and protests on what organisers called a "Day of Truth and Freedom."

"It's tense and emotional, and folks are hurting," said Bishop Dwayne Royster, the executive director of Faith in Action, which is helping with the organising effort.

Minnesotans, he said, are demonstrating "deep resilience and willingness to stand together in ways I haven't seen folks do in a very long time".

The day of the strike, which



A man brings out an 18th century Bible to the anti-ICE stir site, Minneapolis

was set to include outdoor demonstrations, dawned with much of the Midwest, including all of Minnesota, under an extreme cold warning from the National Weather Service. The cold was particularly bitter in Minneapolis, with temperatures as low as -20°C forecast for much of the day, with wind chills even lower.

On Thursday, Vice President JD Vance said the Trump administration wanted to "turn down the temperature" in Minneapolis after weeks of clashes. Vance, who said he had travelled to the city to understand the tensions,

Briefs

INDIAN WELLS

Bhambri in ATP Masters 1000 semis



Indian tennis player Yuki Bhambri reached his maiden ATP Masters 1000 semifinal after he and Swedish partner Goran Goransson defeated Alexander Erler and Andrea Pavassori 6-3, 7-6 in the Indian Wells quarterfinals on Thursday. The Indo-Swedish pair dominated on serve, winning 83% of first-serve points to seal the win in over 90 minutes. Bhambri and Goransson will face Arthur Rinderknech and Valentin Vacherot in Friday's semifinal.

BASEL

Manepalli enters Rd 2 of Swiss Open



Indian shuttler Tharun Manepalli advanced to the men's singles second round of the Swiss Open after Japan's Kenta Nishimoto retired in the decider on Wednesday. Manepalli, ranked 43rd, was leading 16-21, 21-16, 7-2 when the fifth seed pulled out due to a shoulder injury. He will next face Malaysia's Justin Hoh. In women's singles, Malvika Bansod lost 11-21, 15-21 to Thailand's world No. 4 Pornpawee Chochuwong, her fourth straight defeat against the Thai star.

BANGKOK

Gunjan wins at World Boxing Futures Cup



Gunjan, Radhamani Longjam and Chandrika Pujari secured victories as the Indian youth boxing team delivered strong performances on the fifth day of the World Boxing Futures Cup on Thursday. Gunjan (48kg) beat Poland's boxer 5-0 by unanimous decision, while Radhamani Longjam (57kg) defeated her Ecuador opponent by first-round RSC. Chandrika Pujari (50kg) later outclassed a United States boxer 5-0. However, Prachi (60kg) lost 5-0 to a Slovakian rival, and Priyansh Sehrawat (70kg) also went down 5-0 against Morocco's boxer in the men's division bout earlier.

BUMRAH RELISHES THRIVING UNDER PRESSURE

Indian pacer reflects on match-winning spell in T20 World Cup final at his home venue

India's Jasprit Bumrah (R) celebrates after dismissing New Zealand's Matt Henry during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 final in Ahmedabad on Sunday. PTI

AHMEDABAD

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah said he thrives on responsibility in pressure situations and described defending the ICC Men's T20 World Cup title as one of the most satisfying achievements of his career.

Bumrah delivered a match-winning performance in the final, claiming four wickets as India thrashed New Zealand by 96 runs to become the first team to win the T20 World Cup three times.

The fast bowler, who was named Player of the Match for his outstanding spell, said he always looks forward to taking on the toughest challenges. "I don't want to hide behind; I want to be in the thick of things. I always wanted to do a tough job," Bumrah said in a video shared by the BCCI after the victory.

I don't want to hide behind; I want to be in the thick of things. I always wanted to do a tough job

Jasprit Bumrah
India pacer

"I've played cricket for that. I started cricket for that. When I'm able to make a difference, that gives me so much joy. There is no better feeling than that."

For the Gujarat-born pacer, the triumph held special significance as it came at the venue where he began his cricketing journey.

"I started my cricket here. I played all my cricket here and came up the ranks playing for

Gujarat," Bumrah said. "Winning the World Cup here and being the Man of the Match is really special. The last time we fell just short, but this time we crossed the line. I'm really happy."

Bumrah also spoke about the emotional aspect of the moment, particularly the presence of his family during the title victory. "My son was here. He was there last time as well, and this time he was here again. My mum came too — it's really special," he said. Reflecting on the team's achievement, Bumrah said winning back-to-back World Cups is a rare accomplishment and one he feels grateful to have experienced.

"I don't know about full circles, but I'm really, really happy. Back-to-back World Cups never really happen. I feel very grateful. God has been very kind and I couldn't be more thankful," he added.

Shubman Gill set for BCCI Cricketer of Year

Rahul Dravid to receive CK Nayudu Lifetime Award, Mumbai CA likely to be named Best Association

NEW DELHI

India's Test and ODI captain Shubman Gill is set to be named Cricketer of the Year at the BCCI's annual awards ceremony scheduled to be held here on March 15.

The 26-year-old enjoyed an outstanding year across formats, delivering consistent performances in both Test and ODI cricket. Although he was not part of the Indian side that defended the ICC T20 World Cup title last month, Gill's achievements in the longer formats have placed him firmly in line for the prestigious honour.

Gill amassed 983 runs in Test cricket during the year, including a remarkable 754 runs in the drawn away series against England in 2025. He maintained an average of over 70 in the series, underlining his growing stature as one of India's most dependable batters in the format.

In One-Day Internationals, Gill scored 490 runs, including 188 runs during India's



Indian Test and ODI skipper Shubman Gill. PTI

successful Champions Trophy campaign, where the team went on to lift the title.

Across formats, Gill accumulated a total of 1,764 runs at an average of 49. While his T20 International performances were relatively modest, Gill displayed exceptional form in the IPL.

Former India head coach Rahul Dravid is also set to be honoured during the awards ceremony. Dravid will receive

the Col CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his immense contribution to Indian cricket.

During his tenure as head coach, Dravid guided India to several notable achievements, including the triumph in the 2024 ICC T20 World Cup.

Meanwhile, the Mumbai Cricket Association is expected to be named the Best Association in domestic cricket.

HUNDRED AUCTION | The leg-spinner becomes first Pakistan player in Indian-owned team, Usman Tariq also sold

Sunrisers Leeds rope in Pakistan spinner Abrar

LONDON

Sunrisers Leeds, owned by Chennai-based media conglomerate Sun Group, signed Pakistan mystery spinner Abrar Ahmed during the Hundred player auction on Thursday, making him the first Pakistan cricketer to be picked by an Indian-owned franchise in the competition.

The franchise secured Ahmed for £190,000 (approximately ₹2.34 crore) after a bidding battle with Trent Rockets.

His signing ended speculation that franchises owned by Indian Premier League (IPL) stakeholders might avoid selecting Pakistan players due to the long-standing diplomatic tensions between India and Pakistan, which have prevented Pakistani cricketers from featuring in the IPL since 2009.

The Sun Group, which owns IPL franchise Sunrisers Hyderabad, completed a full takeover of the team formerly known as Northern Superchargers last year. The group acquired a 49% stake from the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and the remaining 51% from Yorkshire for around £100 million.

Sunrisers CEO Kavya Maran was present at the auction and raised the winning bid for the Pakistan spinner. The Sun Group also owns Sunrisers Eastern Cape in South Africa's SA20 league, though the franchise does not currently include any Pakistan players in its squad.

Abrar was the second Pakistan cricketer sold in the auction. Earlier, mystery spinner Usman Tariq was



Pakistan mystery spinner Abrar Ahmed in a file pic. X

bought by Birmingham Phoenix for £140,000 (around ₹1.72 crore).

Phoenix, however, do not have ownership links with any IPL franchise.

Pakistan pacer Haris Rauf and off-spin all-rounder Saim Ayub went unsold during the auction.

The upcoming edition of The Hundred will be played from July 21 to August 16.

Meanwhile, uncapped Sussex all-rounder James Coles was the most expensive player, attracting an £390,000 salary from London Spirit after a five-way bidding war.

The talented 21-year-old cricketer earned just £31,000 in the Hundred last summer when he played for Southern Brave.



RAISING THE WINNING BID

Sunrisers CEO Kavya Maran was present at the auction and raised the winning bid for the Pakistan spinner for approximately ₹2.34 crore.

Pandya faces complaint over alleged flag disrespect

PUNE

A complaint has been filed against Indian cricketer Hardik Pandya at the Shivajinagar police station in Pune over alleged disrespect to the national flag during celebrations following India's T20 World Cup victory at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad.

The complaint was lodged by Pune-based lawyer Wajed Khan Bidkar, who submitted a written application seeking action against the cricketer.

According to the complaint, several videos of the Indian team's on-field celebrations after winning the tournament have circulated widely on social media. In one such clip, Pandya is seen celebrating with the Tricolour draped over his shoulder while running and dancing on the field.

The complainant alleged that during the celebrations Pandya was also seen lying on the stage with his girlfriend while the national flag was still draped over his shoulder, which he claimed amounted to disrespect to the Tricolour.

Sumit Antil wins javelin gold

Paralympic champion throws 69.25m for gold in Delhi

NEW DELHI

Double Paralympic champion Sumit Antil lived up to his reputation by winning gold in the men's javelin throw (F43/F44/F64) as India enjoyed another dominant day at the World Para Athletics Grand Prix here on Thursday.

Antil, who won gold at both the Tokyo and Paris Paralympics, topped the event with a powerful throw of 69.25 metres. Pushpendra Singh secured the silver medal with a throw of 56.91m, while Poonam Ram claimed bronze with an effort of 49.48m.

The 27-year-old from Sonapat in Haryana said the throw exceeded his expectations. "I expected around 67-68m, but today the throw went to 69.25m, which makes me happy," said Antil, a three-time World Championship gold medallist.

He added that he is targeting the Asian Para Games later this year in Japan and hopes to breach the 75m mark. India also dominated the men's 400m T13 event with Subodh Bhatt winning gold in 51.88 seconds. Priyanshu Kaushik took



Para athlete Sumit Antil in a file pic. PTI

silver in 53.19 seconds, while Avnil Kumar secured bronze in 56.91 seconds.

In the men's 400m T46/T47 race, Bhavikkumar Din Bharwad won gold with a time of 49.89 seconds, with fellow Indian Jasbeer finishing second in 50.09 seconds. Serbia's Ivan Cvetkovic claimed bronze.

The hosts also swept the podium in the men's 400m wheelchair event (T53/T54), with Manojkumar Sabapathi winning gold in 54.33 seconds, followed by Anil Kumar in second and Manikandan Jothi emerging third.

Gulf conflict, Ramzan hit Para GP entries

The ongoing conflict in West Asia and the holy month of Ramzan have significantly affected participation at the World Para Athletics Grand Prix here, with only six foreign nations ultimately competing despite nearly 30 countries having earlier confirmed their presence. Coaches associated with the Indian team said the war and travel disruptions played a major role in the reduced turnout. They also noted that Ramzan prevented several Muslim-majority nations from sending athletes. The participation is far lower compared to last year's inaugural edition at the same venue, when 18 foreign nations had taken part. A total of 257 athletes are competing in the Grand Prix, with India fielding a massive contingent of 219 athletes.

Women's Qualifiers

World Cup berth secured, India now eye title triumph

HYDERABAD

Having already secured a berth in the FIH Women's Hockey World Cup 2026, India will now shift focus to winning the title when they face Italy in the semifinal of the Women's World Cup Qualifiers here on Friday.

The Indian women's hockey team topped Pool B with seven points from three matches. Scotland also finished with seven points but placed second due to India's

superior goal difference.

The hosts registered two wins and one draw in the group stage, displaying strong attacking intent and defensive discipline. Their performances ensured qualification for the next year's World Cup and also set up a favourable semifinal clash.

Italy finished second in Pool A with four points after recording one win, one draw and one loss. While India start as favourites on paper, the Italian side has shown

enough quality during the tournament to pose a challenge.

India will once again rely on the impressive form of forward Navneet Kaur, who is currently the joint top-scorer of the tournament with four goals. Navneet delivered a standout performance in India's final pool match against Wales, scoring a hat-trick to guide the hosts to a convincing win.

Italy, meanwhile, will depend heavily on Federica Carta, who has emerged as

their main attacking threat with three goals so far in the competition.

Historically, India also enjoy an advantage in head-to-head encounters. Since 2012, the two teams have faced each other seven times, with India winning five matches. Italy have managed one victory, while one match ended in a draw.

India chief coach Sjoerd Marjine, who returned to the role after guiding the team during the Tokyo Olympics cycle, described the World

Cup qualification as an important milestone for the squad.

"Securing qualification for the FIH Hockey Women's World Cup 2026 is a significant achievement for this group," Marjine said. "The players deserve credit for the discipline, composure and attacking intent they have shown throughout the pool stage."

However, the Dutchman made it clear that the team's objective extends beyond qualification.



Indian hockey team topped Pool B. Hockey India