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

Briefs

BHUBANESWAR BJD suspends six MLAs for cross-voting

The Biju Janata Dal on March 21 suspended six MLAs for cross-voting during the recent Rajya Sabha elections in Odisha. The decision was taken at the party's Political Affairs Committee meeting led by Naveen Patnaik. The legislators had been issued show-cause notices on March 17, but their replies were found unsatisfactory. In the biennial polls, the BJD won two seats, while the BJD and an Independent candidate backed by the BJD secured one seat each. Cross-voting by BJD and Congress MLAs was reported.

NEW DELHI Surjewala slams police action at UNI

Congress leader Randeep Surjewala on March 21 criticised police action at news agency UNI's Delhi office, alleging a pattern of targeting the media by the BJP-led Centre. He cited past instances involving NDTV, BBC and The Quint to support his claim. The UNI premises were sealed following a Delhi High Court order over land allotment. UNI termed the move an attack on press freedom, while police said due process was followed and denied any wrongdoing.

BHOPAL Woman dies as car catches fire on h'way

A woman was charred to death after a moving car caught fire on the Sagar-Damoh highway in Madhya Pradesh on March 21, police said. The victim, Seema Kurmi, wife of a doctor, was trapped inside the vehicle as flames spread rapidly. Her husband and two others escaped. The incident occurred near a toll plaza. Police have registered a case and launched an investigation, suspecting a short circuit or collision as the possible cause of the fire.

MALKANGIRI Odisha MLA, 36 escape bus fire mishap

An Odisha MLA and 36 other passengers had a narrow escape after a bus caught fire following a tyre burst in Andhra Pradesh on March 21, police said. The incident occurred near Ramabhadrapuram when the vehicle was travelling from Bhubaneswar to Nabarangpur. All passengers were safely evacuated without injuries. The bus was gutted in the fire. Police said the driver's prompt action helped avert a major tragedy. An investigation into the cause of the fire is underway.

GEOPOLITICS | From battlefield to cyberspace, warfare evolving

Threat to energy security part of warfare: Rajnath

NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Saturday that present-day warfare transcends borders, with national security encompassing economic, digital, energy, and even food security.

Virtually addressing the Raising Day celebrations and the Diamond Jubilee of Sainik School, Ghorakhal in Uttarakhand, the Defence Minister said that the nature of conflicts has undergone a paradigm shift as a nation can today be weakened through economic, cyber, space and information warfare, which demands every citizen to remain vigilant and prepared at all times.

He underscored the need for a robust military supported by prepared citizens capable of standing shoulder-to-shoulder to protect the nation under any circumstances.

Rajnath Singh said that while the Government, under the leadership of Prime



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh being welcomed by Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on his arrival, in Udhham Singh Nagar on Saturday -PTI

Minister Narendra Modi, is leaving no stone unturned to equip the defence forces with niche weapons and technologies, the citizens, especially the youth, need to develop mental toughness and intellectual clarity through discipline.

Highlighting the need for determination to help the nation tackle any and every situation, he referred to the concept of VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) challenges and

exhorted students to develop their own version of VUCA - Vision, Understanding, Courage and Adaptability, to navigate modern challenges.

Highlighting the steps taken by the government towards ensuring that a larger number of youth imbibe the values essential for nation-building, Rajnath Singh stated that recently a decision was taken to establish 100 new Sainik Schools across the country in the Public-Private Partnership model.

'Dhurandhar' CM Dhami

Haldwani: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday underscored the achievements of the "double-engine" BJP government in Uttarakhand across sectors such as tourism, infrastructure, employment, women empowerment and welfare of ex-servicemen, while praising Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami for his leadership. "He is not a normal Dhami but a 'Dhakkad' Dhami, and now he should be known as 'Dhurandhar' Dhami," he added. Praising Dhami's tenure, Singh said, "No one could have imagined that a government would be able to do so much work in such a small state as Uttarakhand. Today, Uttarakhand has achieved several milestones in various fields."

Consular demands rise amid global crises: Tharoor

NEW DELHI

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Friday said demands on consular systems have grown in both scale and sensitivity due to geopolitical tensions, public health crises, travel disruptions, and complex migration patterns.

Addressing an event held in the capital to mark Consular Day, Tharoor said consular work plays a key role in maintaining global connections even during uncertain political conditions.

"From geopolitical tensions to public health crises, from disruptions in travel to the complexities of migration, the demands placed upon consular systems have grown, both in scale and in sensitivity," the Thiruvananthapuram MP said.

He said consular work serves as both a stabilising force and a bridge that helps sustain international connections. "It contributes quietly but significantly to the resilience of global relationships," he said.

Make water a people's movement

BY C R Patil, Union Minister of Jal Shakti

On World Water Day, observed on 22 March, I extended my greetings to all citizens. This occasion is a reminder of the central role water plays in our lives and of our shared responsibility to conserve and protect it for the future.

Water sustains life, ecosystems, and economic activity. Yet, pressures on this vital resource are rising. India is home to nearly 18 percent of the world's population and livestock, but has access to only about 4 percent of global freshwater resources. Rapid urbanisation, rising demand, and climate change make efficient and responsible water management a national priority.

Recognizing this challenge, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, India has adopted an integrated approach to water governance. The creation of the Ministry of Jal Shakti brought diverse aspects of water management under a single



framework, marking a decisive shift towards holistic planning.

This approach addresses water across its full cycle—focusing on conservation and groundwater recharge; strengthening storage with dams and reservoirs; enabling balanced distribution via river interlinking; expanding access under programmes such as the Jal Jeevan Mission and modernised command area development; improving quality under initiatives like Namami Gange; and building resilience with research, innovation, and awareness. Together, these efforts reflect a comprehensive vision for long-term water security.

Mathura tense following cow vigilante's death in 'accident'

MATHURA

Mathura witnessed tension and sporadic violence after the death of a local cow vigilante, popularly known as 'Farsa Wale Baba', triggered protests and stone pelting on the Delhi highway in the Chhata area.

According to officials, angry crowds blocked the highway early in the morning, leading to long traffic snarls and panic among commuters. Despite police intervention, the situation flared up repeatedly, keeping the area on edge for several hours.

The administration said the incident stemmed from a road accident amid dense fog. A truck carrying metal wires with a Rajasthan registration allegedly rammed into a con-

tainer from behind. The impact proved fatal for the vigilante, who died on the spot. The truck driver was injured and the vehicle sustained heavy damage.

However, tensions escalated after allegations surfaced that the victim had been deliberately run over by cattle smugglers. The claim quickly spread among locals, intensifying anger and leading to large-scale protests.

Officials said the deceased, known in the region for his cow protection activities, was reportedly inspecting a container with his associates following a tip-off about cattle smuggling. The container, bearing a Nagaland registration, was later found to be carrying goods such as soap, phenyl and shampoo, ruling out the presence of cattle.

Eid celebrated across UP

Lucknow: Eid was celebrated across Uttar Pradesh on Saturday with prayers, greetings and tight security arrangements in major cities. In Lucknow, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav visited the Aishbagh mosque to greet people, where a large crowd gathered and briefly turned unruly as supporters raised slogans in his favour. Leaders from multiple political parties were seen sharing space at the venue, reflecting a show of outreach on the occasion. -Biswajeet Banerjee

Muslims stage protests against attacks on Iran

JAIPUR

On the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr (Eid), Shia Muslims staged protests against attacks on Iran across several districts of Rajasthan, including Jaipur, Sikar, and Ajmer. Eid prayers were offered, wearing black armbands as a mark of protest. Black flags were hoisted over mosques, and slogans were raised against the U.S. and Israel during these events.

Women and children from both the Shia and Sunni Muslim communities in Amer, Jaipur, took to the streets and raised slogans condemning the United States and Israel. The protesters said that their religious leader was killed through deceit, and their Eid festivities have been turned into an event of mourning.

Govt adds to litigation backlog, says SC judge

NEW DELHI

Supreme Court judge Justice B V Nagarathna on Saturday flagged the government as the single largest generator of litigation, underscoring a stark paradox — it laments judicial backlog while simultaneously fuelling it through routine appeals.

Speaking at the Supreme Court Bar Association's first national conference on "Reimagining Judicial Governance: Strengthening Institutions for Democratic Justice", she said the State has failed to act as a model litigant and instead carries disputes to the final stage.

"The pattern produces a paradox. The government publicly expresses concern about judicial backlog while simultaneously feeding that

backlog through relentless litigation. The State becomes both the complainant and the cause," she said, as reported by Live Law and Bar & Bench. She pointed out that government officers often file appeals as a precaution, fearing audit objections, vigilance scrutiny or political repercussions if disputes are settled.

"The result is predictable. Appeals become routine rather than rare. Cases that should end in lower courts continue through successive layers up to the Supreme Court," she said.

She noted that the trend is particularly pronounced in service and taxation matters, and stressed that better administrative training and adherence to principles of administrative law could significantly reduce litigation.

Bihar Dy CM in focus after RBI chief meets him

PATNA

A day after RBI governor Sanjay Malhotra met deputy chief minister and BJP leader Samrat Choudhary at his residence, speculations over appointment of Choudhary as the next chief minister in the new NDA government gathered momentum on Saturday.

The RBI governor was in Patna in connection with the 622nd meeting of the central board held in Patna on Friday.

The governor after meeting chief minister Nitish Kumar also called on Choudhary at his residence, being construed in the political circles that after Nitish, the Centre has also started giving subtle messages that it will appoint him as the next chief minister of the state.

Vaishno Devi yatra cancelled

Jammu: The pilgrimage to the cave shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi was suspended on Saturday due to heavy rush at the Bhawan, as 39,000 devotees offered prayers till late afternoon, officials said. The rush has increased due to the ongoing Chaitra Navratri, which began on March 19 and will end on March 27. The shrine board is expecting a heavy rush of devotees from across the country during this period. "The yatra has been suspended temporarily due to heavy rush at Bhawan," a shrine board official said.

Jaishankar speaks to Iranian counterpart

New Delhi: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday talked to Iran's counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi and conveyed greetings for Nowruz and Eid. Notably, this is the fourth time the leaders have talked since the ongoing conflict began. During the discussion, they talked about recent developments and their wider regional impact. "Spoke this evening to FM @araghchi of Iran. Conveyed greetings for Navroz and Eid. Our conversation was on the latest developments regarding the conflict. And its impli-

cations for the larger region," he wrote on X.

Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a discussion with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, extending greetings on the occasions of Eid and Nowruz and expressing hope for peace, stability, and prosperity across West Asia.

During the conversation, PM Modi strongly condemned attacks on critical infrastructure in the region, warning that such actions threaten regional stability and disrupt global supply chains.

Punjab minister Bhullar resigns

CHANDIGARH

Punjab Transport and Jails Minister Laljit Singh Bhullar on Saturday resigned from the state cabinet hours after Gagandeep Singh Randhawa, Amritsar district manager of the State Warehousing Corporation, died by suicide after alleging severe harassment by the minister.

Randhawa died by suicide on Friday evening. A video later surfaced on social media in which he said that he had consumed Gelpohs and accused Bhullar of harassment and intimidation.

Modi is biggest infiltrator: Mamata

KOLKATA

Attending an Eid event at Kolkata's Red Road area, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday called Prime Minister Narendra Modi "biggest infiltrator".

Mamata also mentioned that the SIR exercise was part of a larger effort to influence upcoming Assembly elections.

"BJP hatao, Desh Bhachao. Modi and his party leaders are the biggest infiltrators. Those who are targeting Bengal will go to hell. I have been to the Supreme Court to move against the exercise.

5 detained in lift death case

Kolkata: A senior police officer on Saturday said that police have detained five people in connection with a death due to lift malfunction on March 20 at RG Kar hospital. Based on the complaint made by the deceased's father, police registered an FIR invoking sections related to culpable homicide. The police also mentioned that those who are detained are connected to the maintenance of the elevator in which the incident took place.

money special

PFC appoints merchant banker for proposed merger with REC

Power Finance Corp. Ltd. has selected merchant banker for the proposed merger with REC Ltd., a senior company official said. "We had floated the tender and we have selected the banker to handle the merger," the official told Informist. The state-owned financier had issued the tender on Mar. 6. Interested merchant bankers had time till Mar. 13 to submit their bid. The official, however, refrained from naming the selected merchant banker. In the Union Budget for 2026-27, the government had proposed restructuring PFC and REC to achieve scale and efficiency in public sector NBFCs.

FPIs pull out ₹35,475 cr this week from Indian markets, March outflows hit ₹88,180 cr

MUMBAI

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) continued their selling spree in the Indian equity markets this week, with net outflows standing at ₹35,475 crore amid ongoing military conflict in West Asia, according to data from National Securities Depository Ltd.

The data showed that the highest selling during the week was recorded on Monday, with net outflows of ₹10,827 crore. This was followed by selling of ₹9,406.78 crore on Tuesday and ₹4,376.02 crore on Wednesday. Thursday was a settlement holiday due to the Gudi Padwa festival, while on

Friday FPIs sold equities worth ₹10,965.74 crore.

Overall, the continued selling pressure reflects cautious sentiment among foreign investors amid geopolitical uncertainty and rising global risks. So far in March, total net selling by FPIs has reached ₹88,180 crore, making it the highest monthly outflow recorded in 2026.

The figures include selling in stock exchanges after adjusting for investments in primary markets and other segments.

Market experts said that persistent global concerns, particularly due to tensions in West Asia and elevated crude oil prices, have weighed on investor sentiment.

HDFC Bank fires 3 senior officials for gaps in client onboarding at its DIFC branch

HDFC Bank has terminated the services of three employees for gaps in client onboarding at its Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) branch. According to sources, HDFC Bank has fired three senior executives over the alleged mis-selling of Credit Suisse's additional tier-1 (AT-1) bonds.

Following the allegations of mis-selling, the local regulator -- Dubai Financial Services Authority -- barred HDFC Bank from onboarding new customers at its DIFC branch last September. When approached for a comment, the bank said in a statement that it has identified certain gaps in client-onboarding requirements at its DIFC branch in the UAE and completed a detailed and objective review of the matter.

Mahatransco's Digital Stall draws huge crowd at BES in New Delhi

The Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Company Limited (Mahatransco) received an overwhelming response for its innovative and eco-friendly digital stall at the Bharat Electricity Expo (BES 2026) in the national capital. Union Power Minister Shri Manohar Lal Khattar, Union Minister of State for Power Shri Shripad Naik, and Maharashtra's Minister of State for Energy Smt. Meghana Sakore Bordikar visited the stall and appreciated Mahatransco's initiatives. The four-day event, held at Yashobhoomi, Dwarka, witnessed participation from



leading power sector organizations from across India and abroad. Mahatransco's stall, designed using advanced digital technologies, emerged as a major attraction for visitors. The stall was conceptualized under the leadership of Chairman and Managing Director Dr. Sanjeev Kumar (IAS), with guidance from Director (Operations) Satish Chavan and Additional Collector & Executive Director (HR) Suchita Bhikane.

Mahagenco aligns Vision 2035 with Viksit Bharat @2047 goals

The Maharashtra State Power Generation Company Ltd. (Mahagenco) pavilion at the ongoing Bharat Electricity Summit 2026, being held at



Yashobhoomi in New Delhi, continues to attract an enthusiastic response from visitors and industry stakeholders. On March 20, the MoS for Energy, Meghana Sakore Bordikar, visited the pavilion and closely reviewed the initiatives on display. She was given a detailed presentation on Mahagenco's Vision 2035, which is aligned with the national Viksit Bharat @2047 goals. The presentation outlined the company's strategic roadmap for a sustainable energy trans-

sition, featuring a range of forward-looking and environmentally friendly projects. Radhakrishnan B. (IAS), Chairman and Managing Director of Mahagenco, along with Abhay Harne, Director (Operations and Projects), also visited the pavilion. They conveyed their best wishes and appreciated the effective presentation of the company's vision. They conveyed their best wishes and appreciated the presentation of the company's vision.

Solar Lab and Sewing Center Inaugurated at Bara Power Plant; Youth and Women to Receive Training

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj: On Tuesday, Divisional Commissioner Saumya Agarwal inaugurated a Rooftop Solar PV Lab and a Sewing Lab dedicated to women's empowerment at the premises of Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited (PPGCL), located in the Bara Tehsil area. Senior officials from Tata Power were also present during the event. The Rooftop Solar PV Lab has been established under the aegis of the Tata Power Skill Development Institute. Its objective is to provide practical training to the youth in fields related to solar energy, electrical systems, and renewable energy, thereby enabling them to secure better employment opportunities. According to officials, this initiative will play a pivotal role in promoting clean energy dissemination and fostering technical skills within the region. In a parallel development, a Sewing Lab for women was launched under the 'Anokha Dhaga' (Unique Thread) initiative. This center houses over 35 modern sewing machines, where women will receive training in sewing, garment making, and bag manufacturing. Upon completing the training, these



women will be empowered to start their own self-employment ventures and enhance their income levels. During the program, students from DAV Sardar Patel Public School, Bara, presented cultural performances that infused the atmosphere with enthusiasm. The event concluded with a tree-plantation drive, accompanied by a message emphasizing environmental conservation.

Distinguished guests present on this occasion included Himal Tiwari (CHRO and Chief of Sustainability & CSR at Tata Power), Ashok Panda (CEO of PPGCL), along with other officials, public representatives, and local citizens. Speakers at the event hailed this initiative as a significant stride toward regional development, skill enhancement, and women's empowerment.

Three Absconding Accused Arrested in Cold Storage Explosion Case



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. Stepping up its efforts regarding the cold storage accident at Chandapur Morhu within the Phaphamu police station limits, the police have arrested three wanted individuals. On Tuesday, a joint police team apprehended them near the Bhadri Railway Overbridge in Malak Harhar. In this accident, which occurred on March 23, the walls and roof of the cold storage facility collapsed following the explosion of an ammonia gas chamber. 18 laborers were injured after being trapped under the debris; four of them subsequently succumbed to their injuries, while the others were rescued in time and rushed to the hospital for treatment. Following the incident, senior officials from

the administration and the police arrived at the scene. Teams from the NDRF, SDRF, Fire Brigade, and the Municipal Corporation jointly conducted rescue operations. In connection with this case, an FIR was registered at the Phaphamu police station against both named and unidentified accused individuals. Acting under a special drive launched on the directives of the Police Commissioner, Ansar Ahmed, Alauddin, and Manzoor Ilahi have been arrested. The police have also recovered a Fortuner car, along with crucial documents and registers related to the cold storage facility, from the possession of the accused. According to officials, the search for other accused individuals is ongoing, and strict legal action will be taken against all those found guilty.

Court Sentences Convicts Ajay Narayan Singh and Deepak Singh to Life Imprisonment in Ghanshyam Tiwari Murder Case



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Sultanpur: In the highly publicized murder case of physician Ghanshyam Tiwari, the court of Additional District Judge (ADJ-I) Sandhya Chaudhary delivered its verdict regarding the sentencing of the convicts today, Tuesday. The court sentenced the convicts, Ajay Narayan Singh and Deepak Singh, to life imprisonment along with a monetary fine. The court imposed a fine of ₹1.20 lakh on convict Ajay Narayan and ₹70,000 on convict Deepak; furthermore, the court ordered both convicts to be sent to jail to serve their sentences. Government Counsel Pawan Kumar Dubey, representing the prosecution, stated that he had complete faith in the judiciary and was confident that justice would be served to the victim's family. Everyone had been awaiting the court's verdict, which has now been delivered. The complainant, Nisha Tiwari—a resident of the Shastri Nagar locality under the Kotwali Nagar police station area—had lodged a complaint at the local police station, alleging the murder of her husband, Ghanshyam Tiwari, and recounting the events of September 23, 2023. In connection with this case, the police had filed a chargesheet against Jagdish Narayan Singh, Vijay Narayan Singh, and Ajay Narayan Singh (all residents of Narayanpur village), as well as Deepak Singh (a resident of Mayang under the Dhanpatganj police station jurisdiction). During the course of the trial, two of the accused passed away, while the proceedings continued against the remaining accused, Ajay Narayan Singh and Deepak Singh. The prosecution's case was argued by Government Counsel Pawan Kumar Dubey and private counsel Santosh Kumar Pandey.

PDA Bulldozes Illegal Plotting in Prayagraj; Action Taken on 15 Bighas of Land

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj: Continuing its drive against illegal construction and land plotting, the Prayagraj Development Authority (PDA) took significant action on Tuesday. Illegal plotting carried out on approximately 15 bighas of land within Sub-zone 2A of Zone 02 was demolished. According to PDA officials, illegal plotting had been undertaken on about 10 bighas of land in the Shaha (also known as Peepalgaon) area by



Wajit Ali (alias Guddu Bhusha) and others; this unauthorized development was cleared using bulldozers. Simultaneously, in

the Kasari Masari locality, action was also taken against illegal plotting spanning approximately 5 bighas—executed by

Shakeel, Danis, and others—resulting in its demolition. The Authority has clarified that First Information Reports (FIRs) will

also be lodged against those involved in illegal plotting to curb such activities in the future. This operation was conducted under the leadership of the Zonal Officer, with the presence of Junior Engineers, Supervisors, the PDA Enforcement Team, and personnel from the Airport Police Station. The PDA has issued a warning stating that similar strict action will continue to be taken against any illegal construction or land plotting found anywhere within the city.

Accused of Molesting Minor Girl Sentenced by Court 10 Years Later

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Kaushambi. In a village within the Sarai Akil police station area, an accused individual—charged with molesting a minor girl 10 years ago—has been sentenced by the court to 3 years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of 5,000. The incident of molestation involving a minor girl from the Sarai Akil police station area

occurred on March 14, 2016; upon her resistance, the perpetrator verbally abused her and issued death threats. A case was registered at the police station under FIR No. 84/2016, invoking Sections 354A, 323, 504, and 506 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), as well as Sections 7 and 8 of the POCSO Act. Following the investigation, a charge sheet was filed in the court. During the trial of

the accused—identified as Sadab, son of Afaq Ahmed, a resident of Yusufpur Purkhas (Sarai Akil police station area)—the court found the defendant guilty of the crime. Consequently, on March 24, 2026, the Court of the Special Judge (POCSO Act), District Kaushambi, sentenced the accused to 3 years of rigorous imprisonment and imposed a fine of 5,000.

Order Issued to Complete All Schemes by March; BDO Reviews Progress

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Ghazipur | On Tuesday, March 24, a crucial meeting was organized at the auditorium of the Block Development Office in Mohammadabad. The meeting was presided over by Block Development Officer (BDO) Yashwant Rao and was attended by all Village Secretaries from the region. During the meeting, the BDO issued directives stating that all key schemes of both the Central and State governments must be completed by the end of March, without fail. Emphasizing the utmost importance of work quality and transparency, he made it clear that no form of negligence would



be tolerated. During the proceedings, the ongoing development works in the villages were reviewed in detail. The Village Secretaries provided updates regarding the status, progress, and pending tasks related to the schemes being implemented in their respective areas. Furthermore, instructions were issued to accelerate the pace of work and ensure that the benefits of these schemes reach the maximum number of people. Assistant Development Officer

(Rural Development) Sanjay Kumar Singh, Accountant Neeraj Kumar, and other staff members were also present at the meeting. All officers and employees were instructed to work with mutual coordination to achieve their assigned targets within the stipulated deadlines. The meeting concluded with a collective resolve to give fresh momentum to rural development works and to ensure the timely completion of all schemes.

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. A crucial meeting of the District Health Committee (Governing Body) was held on Tuesday at the Sangam Auditorium, presided over by District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma. During the meeting, a detailed review of various Health Department programs was conducted; upon the revelation of several deficiencies, the District Magistrate expressed severe displeasure and issued directives for action against the officials responsible. During the meeting, noting that not a single child death report had been recorded on the MPCDSR portal throughout the entire financial year, the District Magistrate directed that adverse entries be recorded in the service records of the Medical Superintendents of Bahariya, Ramnagar, Chaka, Saidabad, Koraon, Kaudhiyar, and Soraon. Additionally, orders were issued to serve a show-cause



notice to Deputy CMO Dr. Rajesh Singh for negligence in monitoring the program. The District Magistrate directed that the salary of DCPM Ashfaq Ahmed be withheld for failing to obtain child mortality reports from ASHA workers. Meanwhile, citing negligence in conducting HBNC visits, orders were issued to withhold the

salaries of the BCPMs and Health Education Officers of several blocks—including Karchhana, Bahariya, Uruwa, and Phulpur—until further orders. Directives were also issued to serve show-cause notices to the BCPMs of Koraon and Kaudhiyar, as well as several Health Education Officers, for their absence from meet-

Strict Action at District Health Committee Meeting: Negligent Officials Face the Music; Strict Directives Issued for Improvement

ings related to the immunization drive. During the review of the progress of Ayushman Cards, the District Magistrate expressed strong displeasure regarding the district's poor ranking. He directed the District Program Officer (ICDS) to expedite the process of issuing Ayushman Cards to Anganwadi workers. Furthermore, all Medical Superintendents were instructed to coordinate with the District Supply Officer to ensure that cards are issued to all eligible beneficiaries. The District Magistrate issued a clear directive stating that 100% of Ayushman (Golden) Cards for all 'Zero Poverty' beneficiaries must be generated by tomorrow evening; failure to comply would result in strict action being taken against the concerned officials. The meeting was attended by Chief Development Officer Harshika Singh, Chief Medical Officer Arun Kumar Tiwari, and other officials from the Health Department.

Minister Visits Cold Storage Accident Site; Inquires About Injured, Orders Inspection of Safety Standards



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. Following the accident at the Adarsh Cold Storage facility located in Chandapur, State Minister (Independent Charge) Dinesh Pratap Singh visited the site on Tuesday to conduct an inspection. While taking stock of the ongoing relief and rescue operations, he issued necessary directives to the officials present. After the inspection, the Minister proceeded to the Bailey Hospital

and Swaroop Rani Medical College, where he met with the injured victims currently undergoing treatment to inquire about their well-being. He instructed the medical staff to ensure that the best possible medical care is provided to all the injured individuals. He also extended his best wishes for their speedy recovery. Subsequently, the Minister held a meeting with the Police Commissioner, the District Magistrate, and other officials

to review the entire sequence of events. He directed the Horticulture Department to conduct inspections of all cold storage facilities operating within the district to verify their compliance with prescribed safety standards, and to submit a comprehensive report. He further mandated that strict action be taken—

The Minister announced that a three-member committee, headed by the Joint Director of Horticulture, has been constituted to investigate the accident; this committee is expected to submit its report within one week.

including the suspension of operations—at any facility found to be in violation of these standards. The Minister announced that a three-member committee, headed by the Joint Director of Horticulture, has been con-

stituted to investigate the accident; this committee is expected to submit its report within one week. Based on the findings of this report, strict punitive action will be initiated against those found responsible. It was also disclosed that the District Horticulture Officer would be placed under suspension should preliminary investigations reveal any evidence of negligence on their part. The Minister emphasized that both the Central and State

governments have taken this incident with the utmost seriousness. He noted that teams from the district administration and the police force remain continuously engaged in relief and rescue operations. Furthermore, he issued directives ensuring that the operators of the cold storage facility would be held accountable for providing prompt compensation to farmers for the loss of their potato produce stored at the facility.

Shots Fired Following Altercation Over Old Enmity; Youth Injured

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj: On Tuesday evening, an altercation stemming from an old feud turned violent in Dandi—a hamlet within Devra village, located in the Kaudhiyara police station area. During the dispute, a young man was shot, triggering panic throughout the region. The long-standing dispute between two factions suddenly flared up around 7:00 PM on Tuesday near the primary school situated in Dandi, a hamlet under the Devra Gram Panchayat. It is reported that Dharmaraj Adivasi (30)—son of Ribai Adivasi—had been harboring a grudge against another youth from the same village for some time. This underlying animosity led to a heated argument between the two, which escalated rapidly. According to eyewitnesses, the accused, acting in a fit of rage during the altercation, opened fire on Dharmaraj using an illegal firearm. The bullet struck him in the back,



causing him to collapse on the spot and writhe in pain. Upon hearing the sound of the gunshot, locals from the vicinity rushed to the scene and informed the victim's family members. The family members immediately rushed the injured youth to the Kaudhiyara Community Health Center. After administering first aid, doctors—observing his critical condition—referred him to the District Hospital. He was subsequently admitted to Swaroop Rani Hospital, where he is currently undergoing treatment. According to the medical team, the bullet remains lodged inside his body, keeping his condition critical, although treatment is

ongoing. Following the incident, the accused fled the scene. The police are conducting continuous raids at potential hideouts in their search for him. As a precautionary measure, a police force has been deployed in the village, and the situation is being closely monitored. While the atmosphere is currently reported to be calm, the incident remains a subject of intense discussion and speculation among the villagers. ACP Abdul Salam Khan stated that the incident was a result of a long-standing dispute. Based on the written complaint filed by the victim's family, a case is being registered, and the accused is expected to be arrested shortly.

Divisional Commissioner Inspects Site Following Adarsh Cold Storage Accident



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj: Following the accident at the Adarsh Cold Storage facility located in Chandapur, Phaphamau, Divisional Commissioner Saumya Agarwal inspected the accident site on Tuesday. She was accompanied by District Magistrate Manish

Kumar Verma and other senior officials during the visit. The Divisional Commissioner reviewed the ongoing relief and rescue operations following the incident on March 23, in which a section of the cold storage facility collapsed.

She issued directives to clear the remaining

debris as expeditiously as possible and to ensure that no individuals remain trapped inside. In light of the ammonia gas leakage, she issued instructions to further strengthen safety protocols. Furthermore, she directed the concerned officials to continue the relief and rescue operations on a war footing to prevent any

lapses. Currently, 16 individuals injured in the accident are undergoing treatment at Bailey Hospital and Swaroop Rani Medical College. Officials have been instructed to ensure that no negligence occurs in the treatment of the injured and that they are provided with appropriate medical care.

Foundation Excavation Leads to Tragedy: House Collapses; Laborer Dies Under Debris, One Critically Injured

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj: A major accident occurred on Tuesday during construction work in the South Malaka area. Excavation for a foundation and the erection of pillars were underway on a plot when a section of an adjacent house suddenly crumbled and collapsed. Two laborers were trapped beneath the debris; they were subsequently rescued by teams from the police and the SDRF and rushed to a hospital. One of the laborers succumbed to his injuries during treatment, while the other remains hospitalized in critical condition. According to reports,



the accident took place around 3:00 PM. Construction work was being carried out on a vacant plot near the residence of Prakash Kesharwani in South Malaka. Approximately nine laborers were working at the site. Suddenly, a wall of the neighboring house collapsed due to structural weakness; the impact of the collapse extended across the ground and first floors, resulting in two laborers being buried under the rubble. Chaos ensued at the scene immediately following the accident. Other laborers and local residents raised an alarm, initiated preliminary rescue efforts, and alerted the police. Police and

SDRF teams arrived shortly thereafter, extricated the two trapped laborers, and transported them to the hospital. The deceased has been identified as 40-year-old Vinod Kumar, a native of Hanumana, Madhya Pradesh. He had been working as a daily-wage laborer in Prayagraj alongside his wife. Upon arriving at the scene after the incident, his wife was overcome with grief and broke down in tears. Meanwhile, the injured laborer, Sharda (30), remains in critical condition. According to local residents, the continuous excavation work had compromised the structural integrity of the adjacent house's

foundation, thereby triggering the accident. It is reported that the construction work was being supervised by a contractor named Shubham, who fled the scene immediately after the incident occurred. Upon receiving news of the tragedy, a heavy police force was deployed to the area. Several senior officials, including DCP (City) Manish Kumar Shandilya, arrived at the site to assess the situation. Officials stated that an investigation into the matter is underway and that further legal action will be initiated based on the formal complaint filed regarding the incident.

Editorial

Why China is blocking Dalai Lama's Sri Lanka visit

The Sri Lankans have been trying to have the Dalai Lama visit since January 2023

The—70 per cent plus Buddhist—Sinhala population of Sri Lanka fervently wants to welcome the 87-year-old Dalai Lama into their country at the earliest. A group of Sri Lankan Buddhist monks who met the Dalai Lama in Bodh Gaya in 2022 invited him to come. Dalai Lama is revered by his direct followers and other Buddhist sects as the 14th reincarnation of the Buddha, Avalokiteshvara. The current monk was anointed at the age of 15 in 1950, the very year the Chinese took over Tibet.

The Sri Lankans have been trying to have the Dalai Lama visit since January 2023. They are trying once more now as fresh efforts intensify on the open invitation from the various Buddhist monasteries. Many Sri Lankan Buddhists feel the Dalai Lama can help sort out the island nation's economic woes with his wisdom and blessings. Leading Sri Lankan Buddhist leader Waskaduwe Mahindawansa went on television to state that the Chinese had pressured the Sri Lankan government to prevent the visit. The Chinese, ever political and strategic, want the Sri Lankan Buddhists to team up with Gandharan Buddhists in Pakistan rather than the Indian-orders that are opposed to the Chinese. And certainly, they do not want the Dalai Lama to visit and be honoured. The impediment to a Sri Lankan visit comes every time by way of China. Beijing's debt restructuring will play a crucial role in obtaining further soft loans from the IMF. This has tied the hands of the Sri Lankan government. The Chinese still regard the elderly Dalai Lama as a dangerous separatist with massive influence, a living and highly popular symbol of resistance to the Chinese takeover of Tibet. One of the thorny problems stretching beyond the present incumbent is that the Buddhist monasteries in Tawang, Leh, and elsewhere in India do not agree that the Dalai Lama's successor can be chosen by the Chinese. The Buddhists everywhere are furious at the constant insults hurled by the Communist Chinese against the Dalai Lama, who do not recognise him as a spiritual leader at all, calling him a 'wolf' in monks robes. The internal facts in Tibet are quite damning. Since 1949, over 1.2 million Tibetans have been killed, over 6,000 monasteries destroyed, and thousands of Tibetans imprisoned. The Tibetans are being relocated to dense city enclaves in Lhasa; their smart phones are monitored; and the Mandarin language is being pushed in place of the Tibetan. With all this and 74 years of effort, including much infrastructure development and the relocation of ethnic Han Chinese to Lhasa, the Chinese are still not the masters of Tibetan hearts and minds. Similar problems of non-acceptance of unbridled repression plague the Communist CCP in Xinkiang, Hong Kong, against dissidence of any kind in the country, and of course, Taiwan. The Chinese authorities bristle at everything the Dalai Lama says and does, and are disturbed every time the Dalai Lama travels within India or internationally. Still, the Dalai Lama has been very successful at promoting the Tibetan cause. The Chinese don't like the fact that the Dalai Lama is completely free in India. They objected strongly to the Dalai Lama's visit to the Tawang Buddhist monastery and other parts of Arunachal Pradesh as a state guest in 2016. China, typically and audaciously, claims 90,000 sq km of the state, even today as 'South Tibet'. China is firmly opposed to the Nobel Laureate and international apostle of spiritual optimism. The fact that the young Lama escaped to India, which gave him sanctuary, is a constant thorn in the flesh.

Election manifestos and Sanatana Dharma

One of the primary issues of the national election campaign has become Sanatana Dharma. The BJP accuses the Opposition of insulting Sanatana Dharma. The Opposition rebuts this by saying that the BJP is deliberately politicising the issue and misguiding ordinary voters. Elections will come and go. Political parties will win and lose. But in a country where the overwhelming majority is Hindu, the debate is one of pivotal importance, transcending transient political dividends. It has a bearing on the very nature of Sanatana Dharma, its evolution, its philosophical wisdom, its inherently eclectic and inclusive character, and all the factors which make it different from Abrahamic faiths. Let me clarify at the outset that I am a proud Hindu. The number of books I have written on the Hindu faith, and the sheer profundity of its thought as well as the remarkable achievements of Hindu civilisation which forms the foundational period of our history, bears testimony to this. My real worry, however, is that this acrimonious political wrangling on Sanatana Dharma could reduce this great religion to a new level of fundamentalist illiteracy. And such a consequence goes far beyond the immediate political for-



tunes of expedient politicians.

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The crux of the matter is: what is Sanatana Dharma? Is it an unchanging monolith? Is it compiled in a single text, like the Bible or Koran, which cannot be transgressed by believers? Is it written in stone, to be interpreted by one Pope or Ayatollah? Or, has it evolved to be what it is precisely because it is none of the above? It is exceptionally significant that in its entire history, not a single Hindu has been burnt on the stake or killed for blasphemy, as is not uncommon in some other faiths. What this means is that Sanatana Dharma has allowed for differences of opinion within its fold, including trenchant criticism of some aspects of it, by its own followers. The

Hindu faith had not one but six systems of philosophy attempting to understand the truth behind the vast and bewildering plurality of the cosmos. Each of them had a different interpretation. In addition, there is the Lokayita Charvaka school, which cogently argued the materialist school of thought, denied the existence of God, and considered the Vedas, regarded as Shruti or revealed texts by many Hindus, as devoid of all sanctity. But the Charvakas were not ostracised, or worse, beheaded for blasphemy. Instead, they enriched the dialogic debate within Hinduism and were countered in a civilised manner by those opposed to them. In the 8th century CE, Adi Shankaracharya, who is considered the 'reviver' of

Hinduism, could say without fear: na mantra na teertham na veda na yajnah: neither mantras, nor pilgrimages, nor the Vedas or yajna (rituals), matter. What matters is: Chidananda roopam, Shivo hum, Shivo hum: bliss and awareness, I am Shiva, I am Shiva. In many religions, the declaration of equating oneself with God would be considered blasphemy. For instance, in Persia, a Sufi mystic, Al Hallaj (858-922 CE), almost contemporaneous with Shankaracharya, was put to death for having the temerity to say: 'Ana' Haq: I am the Truth'. But not so in Sanatana Dharma. The basic point is Sanatana Dharma is eternal for the grandeur of its philosophical vision, and not only for its religious practice; it is eternal for the diversity it allows for in thought, and not necessarily its rituals. Therefore, narrowing the interpretation of Sanatana Dharma to exclude all differences of opinion is distorting its greatness and, indeed, the very reason for survival. Unfortunately, this is precisely what we see happening today. Anybody and everybody is 'hurt' by anyone who does not blindly endorse everything that is deemed by the 'hurt' to be a part of Sanatana Dharma, including those ills that urgently need reform, such

as the pernicious caste system and gender disparity. If this is the criteria, then Veer Savarkar, the icon of Hindutva, would be hounded today, because he wrote extensively and consistently about what is wrong in the Hindu faith and practice. He called these the 'seven fetters, including the misinformed religious sanction given to the caste system, inter-dining between castes, inter-caste marriage, gender disparity (beti-bandi) and untouchability'. So would Dr Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, Vivekananda and Jotibhai Phule. The language used by Udhayanidhi Stalin against Sanatana Dharma—as I have written strongly about before—is abominable and unpardonable. But the original inspiration for the revolt against the social evils that were sanc\against 'inferior castes', as part of Hindu religious practice, in Tamil Nadu came from EV Periyar, who is the ideological inspiration for both the DMK and the AIADMK. The language of Udhayanidhi was emphatically wrong, but the idea behind it of attacking the discrimination, oppression and exploitation of Dalits and the backward classes, is still valid, especially in Tamil Nadu where 70 per cent of Hindus are of the backward classes.

Unravelling West Asia's Geopolitical Chessboard: Iran, Israel, and Saudi

In its effort to position Iran as a true Muslim power, it made anti-Israel posturing an intrinsic part of its foreign policy rhetoric. Image: Reuters File Photo
On Sunday, April 14, Israel experienced a barrage of missiles launched from Iran, marking a notable escalation in tensions between the two nations. Although Iran and Israel do not engage in direct conflict, their rivalry is entangled within the broader power struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both Tehran and Riyadh vie for regional dominance, not just through geopolitical manoeuvring but also through religious leadership. Lebanese analyst Patricia Karam posits that Iran perceives the

Iran-Palestine conflict as an opportunity to bolster its influence over Shiite groups in the Middle East. Iran aligns itself with the so-called "axis of resistance," loosely comprising regional military proxies closely linked to Tehran. The year 1979 witnessed a dramatic shift in the Middle East's power dynamics. Mass protests in February 1979 in Iran culminated in overthrowing the Pahlavi dynasty's decades-long rule. The new regime, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, established a Shi'ite Islamic Republic, directly challenging Saudi Arabia's self-proclaimed leadership of Sunni Islam. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia took it as an anti-royalist coup that happened earlier in Cairo and Baghdad. This sectarian divide intensi-

fied later that year when an extremist religious group led by extremist Juhayman Al-Otaybi, a follower of the Wahhabi Salafi creed of Islam, carried out a 14-day occupation of Mecca's Grand Mosque. Driven by a messianic mission, the group exhorted the Saudi population to rise up and overthrow the monarchy and establish an anti-Western, Islamist regime. According to the attackers, the Al-Saud family had lost its legitimacy because it was corrupt, ostentatious, and under the spell of the morally degraded values of the West. The siege of Mecca struck a direct blow to the religious and political legitimacy of the House of Saud. Saudi Arabia, as custodian of Islam's holiest sites in Mecca.

West Asia crisis: Israel's inevitable retaliation against Iran

In fact, even as this column predicting Israel's strike against Iran as inevitable was sent for publication, media reports have emerged that Israel has carried out retaliatory strikes inside Iran while Iranian state media, according to CNN, have reported explosions in the centre of the country. This completely changes the equation. The region and the world are now caught in a dangerous escalatory spiral, should Iran choose to respond to the latest strikes as it has vowed to, and India will inevitably get caught in the crossfire. The world, however, wanted Israel to show "restraint". It is being said that the April 13 attack by Tehran — in which a multifaceted strike package including over 300 cruise missiles, ballistic missiles and kamikaze drones were fired at Jerusalem — was "symbolic" in nature, a bit like scripted WWE 'fights'. The reasons behind such a suggestion are two-fold: one, that Israel did not suffer any meaningful damage and two, Tehran had announced its intent well before the attack, giving the other side enough time to prepare. World leaders led by the US are leaning on Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his war cabinet to "defuse and deesca-



late" tensions. There is even a cautious optimism in the air that the situation can be contained. UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres has urged "maximum restraint" and said at an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council on Sunday that "it's time to step back from the brink". The Joe Biden administration, which has already declared that the US "won't take part" in any counter-offensive against Iran, is sending a message to its ally that Washington is "not looking for a war with Iran". According to US media outlet Axios, Biden apparently told Netanyahu, "You got a win. Take the win." The US is apparently organizing a "diplomatic response" along with other G7 nations that is likely to involve fresh sanctions on Iran's missile and drone programmes. US secretary of state Antony Blinken, according to Axios, has said that "strength and wisdom must be the two sides of the same coin" in a veiled message to Israel. Germany and the UK have sent

Why Maldives may rework India relations after Majlis

Strategic thinkers in the two nations are keeping their fingers crossed, but are still hopeful, over the future of Maldives-India bilateral relations after parliamentary polls in the two countries, especially the former. That is to say, the negativity of the past months, particularly emanating from the Maldivian side, may slowly be replaced by positivity and even more objectivity in the coming weeks, months and years. The mostly unnoticed, yet quietly efficient posturing in the whole melee was the official position, as 'stated' by India. Rather, there was no official response to any of the nega-

tive observations and governmental initiatives that have had the potential to 'kill' bilateral relations for good. If anything, India has responded only with abundant positivity through deeds, still abiding by the nation's value-based 'Neighbourhood First' ethos to which Prime Minister Narendra Modi breathes in fresh air through words and deeds — especially in the case of a 'smaller neighbour' Maldives. It was thus that the Modi government took President-elect Mohamed Muizzu's reiteration of his poll-campaign 'commitment' on India withdrawing military pilots and technicians man-

ning the three flying platforms that were gifts from India through the past decade. Muizzu has since announced that the second of three batches of Indian personnel have since left Maldives as agreed upon. The third one is due to depart in May, all of them being replaced by civilian 'technical personnel'. The Indian acceptance of the Muizzu diktat with grace and dignity did ensure that the new President had nothing to fear from India or be suspicious about the larger Ocean neighbour in the north. Muizzu's estranged political mentor and jailed former President Abdulla Yameen

had injected those unnecessary and unjustified fears and suspicions into the bilateral discourse with his 'India Military Out' request in the closing months of his presidency in 2018. Barring India's regional adversary China's unilateral declaration that they would defend Maldives' 'sovereignty and territorial integrity in case of external threats', there was nothing to suggest that either India or any other nation or force was threatening the archipelago-nation at the time — or, even in the past six years since Yameen lost the presidential polls of 2018. Yet, after losing power and leaving without a cause.

Google under CCI investigation over gaming firm complaint



Delhi: India's Google regulatory issues are growing. In 2022, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) fined the US tech giant for abuse of dominant position in its Play Store and Android mobile device ecosystem. Now, the fairplay regulator is investigating a complaint filed by gaming company WinZO. CCI directed its investigation arm to investigate and report within 60 days after finding a prima facie case. "Based on the facts and circumstances of the case, the commission believes Google is in violation and justifies further inquiry. The CCI bench, chaired by Ravneet Kaur and three members, ordered the director general to investigate. A Google spokesman declined to comment. WinZO, an online gaming company, claimed that Google's Play Store prohibits Real Money Game hosting. "Due to Google's unreasonable and

restrictive policy, all apps offering real money games of skill are only available for download from their website (a process called sideloading)," it told CCI. On Android devices, using this process to reach WinZO displays a disclaimer/warning, tarnishing its image. WinZO stated warnings are without validity and "completely illegal" and cost the company. It also claimed Google displays another "baseless warning" when users pay for skill-based games. "Such payment warnings are arbitrary as Google has not set any criteria for displaying them," WinZO complained to CCI.

US retailers utilize Trump tariff threats to boost sales

Delhi: Local media stated that many US businesses are advising clients to buy now before President-elect Donald Trump's proposed tariffs hike prices. Trump threatened 60% tariffs on all Chinese goods and 10% to 20% tariffs on other goods during his campaign. He announced plans to impose 25% tariffs on Mexican and Canadian imports and 10% on Chinese imports. According to Xinhua,

The Union government wants 100% FDI in insurance

Delhi: The Union Finance Ministry proposed raising the insurance sector's FDI ceiling from 74% to 100% in a consultation paper. The insurance FDI limit was raised from 49% to 74% in February 2021. The government said the proposal to alter insurance legislation will make insurance more affordable, grow the insurance industry, and streamline corporate operations.

An office memorandum dated November 26 proposed lifting the FDI ceiling in Indian insurance businesses from 74% to 100% and



allowing insurers to conduct one or more kinds of insurance business and associated or incidental operations. The suggestion also cut foreign reinsurers' Net Owned Funds from Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 1,000 crore. IRDAI can also set lesser entry capital (Rs 50 crore) for underserved or unserved regions on

a case-by-case basis. The sector regulator is trying to increase capital in this capital-intensive industry. The Chairman of IRDAI suggests that the insurance market requires 50,000 crore yearly to double penetration in the country. Insurance penetration is the ratio of annual premiums issued to GDP.

Gold loans rise 50% in seven months

Delhi: Bank loans against gold jewelry rose 50.4% in the first seven months of the year. Despite single-digit growth in every other personal loan area, credit rose sharply. RBI issued sectoral deployment of bank credit Gold loans totaled Rs 1,02,562 crore in March 2024. Growth was 56% year-over-year, up from

13% in October 2023. NBFCs' move and a preference for secured loans over unsecured ones contributed to the first-seven-month gold loan surge, bankers said. Bank loans to NBFCs fell 0.7% to Rs 1.5 lakh crore in the first seven months. Bankers also said that rising gold prices allow borrowers to repay previous loans

and get higher new ones. Analysts see rising gold loan demand as an indication of financial instability. RBI ordered banks and financial companies to review and fix their gold loan rules and procedures within three months last month. After an examination, evergreening was found to hide bad loans.

Commercial LPG hike by Rs 16.5 per cylinder, jet fuel up 1.45%; household cooking gas remains unchanged

NEW DELHI: The cost of commercial LPG and aviation fuel prices surged on Sunday following the monthly revision aimed at aligning with trends in international oil prices. State-owned oil firms raised commercial LPG rates, used in hotels and restaurants by Rs 16.5 per to Rs 1818.50 per 19 kg cylinder. Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices in Delhi, which hosts one of India's most active airports, saw an increase of Rs 1,318.12 per kilo litre, marking a 1.45 per cent increment. The new rate stands at Rs 91,856.84 per kl, according to state-owned fuel retailers. The prices of ATF and LPG vary from state to state, depending on local taxes, including VAT. This marks the second consecutive monthly increase in jet fuel prices, which were previously raised by Rs 2,941.5 per kl, or 3.3 per cent, on November 1. ATF prices were reduced by 6.3 per cent (Rs 5,883 per kl) on October 1 and by Rs 4,495.5 per kl, or 4.58 per cent, on September 1. In Mumbai, the ATF price increased to Rs 85,861.02 per kl on Sunday from Rs 84,642.91 previously. The price of commercial LPG have also increased for the seventh consecutive month. In the most recent review on November 1, commercial LPG prices were raised by Rs 62 per 19-kg cylinder. Over the course of five price hikes, commercial LPG prices have increased by Rs 172.5 per 19-kg cylinder, reaching their peak this year. Four monthly price reductions before the current cycle began in August were offset by the recent hikes. Prices for 19-kg cylinders were reduced by Rs 148 across the four rounds. Currently, commercial LPG costs Rs 1,980 in Chennai, Rs 1,927 in Kolkata, and Rs 1,771 in Mumbai for a 19-kg cylinder. However, the rate of cooking gas used in domestic households, however, remained unchanged at Rs 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder. State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) revise the prices of ATF and cooking gas on the first of each month.

TRAI deadline may prevent Jio, Vi, and Airtel subscribers from receiving OTPs

Delhi: As Airtel, Vodafone-Idea, and Reliance Jio struggle to reach a crucial Telecom Regulatory Authority of India deadline, Indian mobile subscribers may experience OTP delays. The telecom watchdog extended the deadline for spam and phishing traceability requirements to December 1, 2024. Telecom companies must now track all commercial messages, including OTPs, to combat fraud. Telecom companies can block scams by identifying message sources. However, missing this deadline could delay or prohibit OTPs, harming banking, e-commerce, and social networking. The TRAI imple-



"The TRAI implementation timeframe is phased. Operators will notify chain declaration violators daily until November 30. All non-compliant messages will be prohibited starting December 1"

mentation timeframe is phased. Operators will notify chain declaration violators daily until November 30. All non-compliant messages will be prohibited starting December 1.

A former employee being sued by Google India for disclosing Pixel secrets

Delhi: Google and its subsidiary in India filed a lawsuit in the US against former Bengaluru office employee Harshit Roy for revealing trade secrets that were considered confidential. In order to prevent Roy from further disseminating the stolen trade secrets that had irreparably harmed Google, Google hired an outside investigator to find him. Among the information that was revealed were comprehensive specifications of proprietary hardware.

New Honda Amaze Variants and Top Features



Delhi: India will launch the third-generation Amaze on December 4, 2024, and unofficial bookings have begun. The car is arriving at dealer yards nationwide ahead of its much-anticipated launch. It will rival the new Maruti Suzuki Dzire, Tata Tigor, and Hyundai Aura. The 2025 Honda Amaze will come in three variants—V, VX, and ZX—with many interior and exterior changes. Since its inception in India over a decade ago, the Amaze has been a popular sedan. Several new features and technol-

gies will be added. The top model will have a floating touchscreen infotainment system with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity, automatic climate control, ADAS technology, six airbags, reversing camera, wireless smartphone charger, multi-functional steering wheel with mount-

French energy giant Total puts Adani Gp investments on hold

Delhi: Total Energies, a French oil company, has suspended investments in Adani Group entities pending the conclusion of US bribery allegations against its founder. The Paris-based company, which owns key investments in Adani Group's renewable energy and gas distribution operations, said it was unaware of the US solar power corruption inquiry. "Total Energies rejects corruption in any form," it declared. "This indictment does not target Adani Green Energy (AGEL) itself, nor any AGEL-related companies." Total Energies claimed it learned about Gautam Adani's and others' indictment from US public pronouncements. Gautam Adani, his nephew



and Adani Green Energy executive director Sagar Adani, and others are accused of a \$265m bribery scam. Total Energies bought 19.7% of Adani Green Energy in January 2021. It invested \$444 million in an equal joint venture with the Indian company to acquire three 1,150MW operational renewable assets in September. Additionally, it owns 37.4% of Adani Total Gas, which supplies CNG to cars and natural gas to homes.

NBCC India will buy sick PSUs and redevelop land banks

Delhi: Two sources say NBCC India Ltd. wants to buy defunct public sector undertakings (PSUs) to redevelop and monetize their land. The state-run construction company wants to leverage its success in developing land for government-owned companies. Developer is in talks to acquire non-operational PSUs through a new entity to monetize their land banks. Details are not yet

Cabinet's 30k cr bank guarantee relief for telcos

Delhi: Government sources claimed the Union Cabinet has agreed in principle to waive bank guarantee requirements for telecom companies' deferred spectrum payments, but with strict conditions. The waiver will require telcos to pay three months' instalments in addition to their annual fees. Sources said the government will give up its right to collect Rs 30,000 crore in bank guarantees upfront. The Cabinet waived the requirement for telcos to buy spectrum in six auctions between 2012 and 2022. Spectrum auction regulations from 2022 and 2024 removed the necessity. Airtel and Jio would guarantee Rs 2,300 crore and Rs 4,000 crore. Vodafone Idea (Vi) spectrum auction moratorium ends in October 2025. Current



"Vi was accused of not paying its second bank guarantee of Rs 350 crore for spectrum purchased in a 2012 auction. November 1 was the payment deadline"

rules required the corporation to file bank guarantees 13 months before the next payment due date. The DoT requested bank guarantees from Vi for the September 2025 spectrum payment of Rs 24,747 crore. The DoT also asked the finance ministry to exempt operators from bank guarantees for spectrum payments. The waiver should help Vi. Telco shares

increased 7.8% intraday to Rs 7.53. After opening higher, Airtel shares fell 0.1% to Rs 1,577. Vi was accused of not paying its second bank guarantee of Rs 350 crore for spectrum purchased in a 2012 auction. November 1 was the payment deadline. Vi skipped the payment of about Rs 4,600 crore in 2016 auction guarantees two months earlier.

Tgana rejects Adani's 100-cr contribution

Delhi: Telangana chief minister A Revanth Reddy announced that the state government will not accept the ₹100 crore CSR donation from the Adani Group for the Young India Skills University in Ranga Reddy district, citing current circumstances and controversies. We thank you for committing 100 crore to Young India Skills University on behalf of your Foundation via letter. We have not sought donors for physical transfers of monies since the university did not acquire the IT exemption under section 80G, Ranjan wrote. The official added that he was "instructed by the chief minister not to seek the transfer of funds in view of the present circumstances and arising controversies". According to the US Department of Justice indictment, Adani executives and Azure Power executives bribed Indian government officials in five states to win solar energy supply contracts worth over \$2 billion over 20 years between 2020 and 2024. The scam purportedly started in Odisha and spread to Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, and Jammu & Kashmir. The Telangana chief minister said everyone may lawfully invest, despite accusations that the state government accepted Adani Group funding. Reddy said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has stated that the company that wins the bids according to the regulations will invest.





Always alert around Manoj: Priyamani

Priyamani opens up about Manoj Bajpayee's instinctive acting, revealing how his surprises keep co-stars alert during rehearsals for the new season

Actress Priyamani opened up about her experience working with veteran actor Manoj Bajpayee on the sets of *The Family Man 3*. In an interview with IANS, she revealed how his instinctive acting keeps co-actors alert on set.

She shared that being around Bajpayee requires constant focus, as you never know what surprises he might bring to a scene. When asked about working with Manoj Bajpayee, Priyamani described the on-set process of bringing the layered and authentic relationship between his character and Suchitra to life.

She shared, "I believe both of us are very instinctive actors. Whenever Manoj sir is on set, we rehearse thoroughly before going for a take. But you have to be very alert around him - always on your toes. You never know what surprise he might throw your way, so your presence of mind needs to be sharp."

Speaking about her character, Priyamani shared, "I don't think Suchi has grey shades. From her perspective, she's absolutely justified. At the end of the day, she just wants to be seen and heard. She wants someone to sit down, have a conversation with her - about what's happening around her, especially in her personal and professional life. She's seeking understanding, and in that sense, she's valid in her stance. I wouldn't take that away from her." "I can't reveal much about the guilt or tension. But as a character, Suchi has grown a lot. Her dynamics have evolved significantly. You'll understand more once season three releases," she added.

Priyamani is set to return as Suchitra Tiwari in *The Family Man 3*, the upcoming season of the Amazon Prime Video series. The show, created by Raj and DK, also stars Manoj Bajpayee, Sharib Hashmi, Ashlesha Thakur, and Vedant Sinha. The new season is reportedly slated for release around *Diwali* 2025.



A still from Barfi

Saurabh Shukla overcomes acting struggles

Saurabh Shukla opened up about his low phase, overcoming frustration with cameo roles, and rediscovering passion through *Barfi*

Actor and writer Saurabh Shukla recently opened up about a difficult time in his life when he had almost started to lose interest in acting.

The veteran performer, known for his outstanding roles in films like *Satya* and *Jolly LLB*, shared that there was a phase when he only received small "cameos" in movies, which left him "frustrated." However, it was during the filming of *Barfi* that he rediscovered his love for acting, thanks to his interactions with Ranbir Kapoor.

While speaking to ANI, Shukla talked about the "low phase" and recalled how he had almost decided to step away when *Barfi* director Anurag Basu approached him for the film.

"I met Ranbir in *Barfi*. And that was the phase I was talking about... I was going through a low phase when Anurag Basu offered me this film, *Barfi*. By then, I had become so frustrated. People used to say, 'Saurabh, you're such a good actor', but when roles came, they were always cameos. I mean, you'd have a day of shooting... and in that one day, what could you do? How much of a role would

you have, and how much of your acting could you show?" said Shukla.

"I was really struggling. So, I started telling people that I don't act; I'm not an actor. I'm a writer, and I've made films. I started saying that. I was going through a low phase at that time," he added.

"When Anurag offered me this film, my first words were, 'Anurag, if you have something for me, call me. Otherwise, don't call me at all.' And I'm so lucky that he didn't take it the wrong way. He said, 'Sir, if I didn't have something for you, why would I call you?' He gave me that film, which was wonderful," he further said.



New film brewing

Abhishek Banerjee, Gajraj Rao, Ahsaas Channa, and Anshumaan spark buzz with social media posts hinting at new project



Actors Abhishek Banerjee, Gajraj Rao, Ahsaas Channa, and Anshumaan Pushkar have sparked excitement on social media, fueling speculation about a new project.

The talented performers shared glimpses of a table read, with scripts spread across tables, hinting at a collaboration. Fans quickly connected the dots as the actors

tagged each other with intriguing captions and behind-the-scenes photos. Known for their distinct screen presence, Abhishek Banerjee's versatility, Gajraj Rao's charm, Ahsaas Channa's fresh appeal, and Anshumaan Pushkar's nuanced performances have heightened curiosity about the project. While details remain under wraps, a source revealed that the film blends humour, emotion, and a rooted story. "The chemistry between the cast is already quite electric," the insider shared.



LAKME FASHION WEEK 2025

Runway filled with glamour

Vaani Kapoor closed the show at Lakmé Fashion Week X FDCI Day 3, walking the ramp in a swirling pink floral lehenga paired with a corset blouse and spaghetti straps.



Mrunal Thakur stole the spotlight as she walked for designer duo Pankaj & Nidhi in a bold golden metallic bodice and sleek black skirt. Her powerful, futuristic look wowed audiences.

Veteran actress Tabu mesmerized in a deep green embellished *Anarkali* for ITRH's "Noor" collection. Her graceful presence and traditional look radiated elegance and timeless beauty on the runway.



Yacht date sparks rumors

Katy Perry and Justin Trudeau spark dating rumors again after being spotted sharing a passionate kiss on her yacht in California

Popstar Katy Perry and former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau have once again ignited dating rumours after being spotted getting cosy and sharing a kiss on her lavish yacht in Santa Barbara, California.

This comes after reports suggested the two had drifted apart, with Trudeau reportedly feeling 'uncomfortable' with the media frenzy following their intimate dinner date in Montreal. However, the recent photos seem to put those rumours to rest.

In the viral photos, Katy was seen in a black swimsuit, passionately kissing a shirtless Justin, who wore denim jeans, as they enjoyed some quality time together. The couple was also spotted hugging, with Trudeau seemingly nuzzling Perry's cheek.

A witness told *The Daily Mail*, "She pulled up her boat next to a small public whale-watching boat, then they started making out. I didn't realise who she was with until I saw the tattoo on

the guy's arm and I immediately realised it was Justin Trudeau."

As of now, neither Katy Perry nor Justin Trudeau have reacted to the dating rumours. Earlier in July, the duo were spotted together for the first time, enjoying a cosy dinner date in Montreal. Trudeau later attended Perry's sold-out *Lifetimes* tour stop in Canada.



America is detached from reality, says Iran's foreign minister

Araghchi slams America over 'winning' claims, says 'same script' from Vietnam war; Not seeking conflict with Muslim states: President Pezeshkian

TEHRAN

Iran's Foreign Minister **Seyed Abbas Araghchi** said Iran is seeking "not a ceasefire, but a complete, comprehensive and lasting end to the war". In a telephone interview with Kyodo News, Araghchi described the US-Israeli strikes on Iran as "an illegal, unprovoked act of aggression" and called on the international community to take a stand against the attacks, Xinhua reported.

Araghchi added that while

diplomatic efforts are ongoing, the US has yet to demonstrate its readiness for a genuine resolution.

The report also noted that Tehran is ready to facilitate the passage of Japanese vessels through the Strait of Hormuz, a key artery for global energy shipments, and that negotiations with Japan on the issue are ongoing.

Araghchi also issued a sharp warning to the UK on Saturday, stating that Tehran would respond if British involvement in the conflict escalates. On X, Araghchi

wrote, "Vast majority of the British people do not want any part in the Israel-US war of choice on Iran. Ignoring his own people, Keir Starmer is putting British lives in danger by allowing UK bases to be used for aggression against Iran. Iran will exercise its right to self-defence."

Araghchi conveyed similar concerns during a phone call with UK Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, warning that such cooperation would be viewed as "participation in aggression" against Iran.

The UK government, how-



ever, has pushed back. In the same conversation, Cooper cautioned Iran against targeting "UK bases, territory or interests", underscoring the risk of further escalation. Araghchi compared the tone of US government statements to the overoptimistic

military briefings given during the Vietnam War, suggesting Washington was repeating a pattern of reassurances that later proved detached from events on the ground. On X, he said American officials had once sought to project confidence even as the Vietnam War turned against them.

"Americans haven't forgotten how, even as hundreds of US soldiers were dying in Vietnam, and the outcome was already clear, General William Westmoreland was flown home to reassure everyone that the war was going

well, that the US was 'winning.'" "The media haven't forgotten either; those briefings full of fantasy from the frontlines became infamous as the 'Five O'Clock Follies,'" Araghchi added.

The phrase refers to the daily 5pm press briefings held in Saigon between the mid-1950s and the 1970s, widely viewed as presenting an overly positive picture of the war and contributing to what became known as a credibility gap between official statements and reality. Araghchi then drew a direct line to the

present. "Fast forward to today: same script, different stage; Hegseth steps up, and the message is still detached from reality," he wrote.

"US government says one thing, reality says another. Right as US authorities claim Iran's air defences are gone, an F-35 gets hit. As they declare Iran's navy finished, USS Gerald Ford turns back, and USS Abraham Lincoln drifts farther away. Different decade, same 'we're winning'."

Meanwhile, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said his country does not seek war

with Muslim states, according to the official news agency IRNA. On the occasion of Eid and Nowruz, Pezeshkian said, "We do not intend to have any difference with Muslim countries. We do not seek conflict and war with Islamic states. They are our brothers."

Meanwhile, Bloomberg reported the Iranian Navy last week guided an Indian LPG tanker through the Strait of Hormuz along a pre-approved route, following diplomatic engagement by New Delhi, according to a senior officer onboard the vessel.

TO COOL PRICES | Temporary, short-term authorisation is strictly limited to oil already in transit, says Scott Bessent

US gives 1-month waiver on Iranian oil sanctions

WASHINGTON

The United States has announced the temporary lifting of sanctions on the sale of Iranian oil stranded at sea to cool soaring global crude prices, PTI reported.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the temporary measure would make available 140 million barrels of Iranian oil to global markets.

"This temporary, short-term authorisation is strictly limited to oil that is already in transit and does not allow new purchases or production," Bessent said on X.

The price of Brent crude has witnessed sharp swings from roughly \$70 per barrel before the war began to as high as \$119.50 this week.

"Today, the Department of the Treasury is issuing a narrowly tailored, short-term authorisation permitting the sale of Iranian oil currently



stranded at sea," Bessent said. The US official claimed that at present, sanctioned Iranian oil is being hoarded by China at low prices.

"In essence, we will be using the Iranian barrels against Tehran to keep the price down as we continue Operation Epic Fury," Bessent said. The pause on sanctions on Iranian oil loaded on vessels began on Friday and is set to end on April 19.

INDIAN REFINERS LOOK TO BUY IRANIAN OIL

Indian refiners plan to resume buying Iranian oil while refiners elsewhere in Asia are

examining such a move, traders said on Saturday.

Sources said the refiners would buy Iranian oil and were awaiting government directions and clarity from Washington on details such as payment terms.

Refiners in India, with much smaller crude stockpiles than other major Asian oil importers, rushed to book Russian oil after the US recently lifted curbs temporarily.

COMPLICATED BUYING

Potential complications for buying Iranian oil include uncertainty over how to pay for it, and a large share of it is

aboard ageing shadow fleet ships, traders said.

Also, some former purchasers of Iranian oil were contractually obligated to buy from National Iranian Oil Co, sources said. Since the US reimposed sanctions in late 2018, Iranian oil has been sold by third-party traders, Reuters reported. "It usually takes some time to work through compliance, administration and banking, but people will try to work as soon as possible," a Singapore trader said.

Earlier, major buyers of Iranian oil included China, India, South Korea, Japan, Italy, Greece, Taiwan and Turkey.

Labuan crude from Malaysia, Minas from Indonesia and Bach Ho from Vietnam, grades that rarely attract significant attention in global oil markets, are now trading at premiums of over \$10/barrel above the Dated Brent benchmark, Bloomberg reported.

Natanz nuclear facility hit again

● Iran's main enrichment site was also hit in first week; there was no radiation or leak
● War enters week 4 ● Attacks will intensify next week: Israel ● 20 die in Lebanon

DUBAI

Iran's Natanz nuclear enrichment facility was hit in an airstrike on Saturday, an official Iranian news agency reported, adding there was no radiation leakage, as Israel's Defence Minister warned of a surge in attacks on Iran as the war in West Asia entered its fourth week, AP reported.

Israel Katz, the Defence Minister, said that next week, "the intensity of the attacks" by Israel and the US against Iran's ruling theocracy will "increase significantly".

Fragments from an Iranian missile struck an empty kindergarten near Tel Aviv. Israeli army spokesman Nadav Shoshani posted a video on X of the building; no casualties were reported.

Iran's Mizan news agency said there was no leakage after the Natanz strike, about 220 km southeast of Tehran. The facility, Iran's main uranium enrichment site, was hit earlier in the war, with satellite images showing damage. The UN nuclear



watchdog had said "no radiological consequence" were expected from that strike. The International Atomic Energy Agency said on Saturday the bulk of Iran's 970 pounds (440 kg) of enriched uranium is elsewhere, beneath the rubble at its Isfahan facility, with a lesser amount at Natanz. Israel's military said it was "not aware" of a strike.

Meanwhile, Israel launched strikes targeting Iran-backed Hezbollah militants in Beirut's southern suburbs, AP reported. Smoke rose, fires broke out and loud explosions were heard after evacuation warnings for seven neighbourhoods.

DRONE HITS INTEL HQ IN IRAQ; OFFICER KILLED

Tehran saw heavy overnight airstrikes, residents said. In Iraq, a drone struck the intelligence service headquarters in Baghdad, killing an officer. No group claimed responsibility.

The Defence Ministry said Iran's "lashing out across the region and holding hostage the Strait of Hormuz, are a threat to British interests and British allies".

BRITAIN ALLOWS US TO USE ITS BASES

Britain has not joined US-Israeli strikes but has allowed American bombers to use UK

bases, including Diego Garcia, to target Iran's missile sites and secure shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.

AIRSTRIKES IN LEBANON

Israeli strikes in Lebanon have killed over 1,000 people and displaced more than 1 million, the Lebanese government said. At least 20 people were killed and 57 injured in the past 24 hours, taking the toll to 1,021 dead and 2,641 injured since March 2, IANS reported. Over 1,34,616 displaced people are sheltering in 644 centres, as pressure mounts on relief systems, Xinhua reported.

SYRIA INFRA TARGETED

Israel said it had carried out airstrikes on government infrastructure in the south of Syria, in response to what it described as attacks on Druze civilians in Suweida province.

The Israeli military said it hit a command centre and weapons stored at army compounds. "The IDF [Israel Defense Forces] will not tolerate harm towards the Druze population in Syria and continue to defend them."

WAR SNIPPETS

20 COUNTRIES VOW SUPPORT FOR SAFER STRAIT OF HORMUZ

Over 20 nations announced their readiness to ensure safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz, condemning Iran's effective closure of the vital waterway. In a joint statement, 22 nations, mostly European but also including the UAE and Bahrain, condemned Iran's actions in the Persian Gulf. "We condemn in the strongest terms recent attacks by Iran on unarmed commercial vessels in the Gulf, attacks on civilian infrastructure including oil and gas installations, and the de facto closure of the strait."

PUTIN OFFERED TO DITCH IRAN IF US CUT OFF UKRAINE?

Moscow has denied a media report claiming the Kremlin had offered to stop sharing intelligence with Iran if the US ceased supplying Ukraine with intel about Russia. A Politico report said Russian President Vladimir Putin's envoy Kirill Dmitriev had made a proposal about not sharing intel during a meeting with Trump administration envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner in Miami last week. The US, which has shared intelligence with Ukraine since it was invaded by Russia in February 2022, rejected the proposal. Dmitriev, however, labelled the report as "fake".

US CURBS ON GLOBAL NETWORK FINANCING

The US imposed sanctions on individuals and entities tied to what it described as a global financial network supporting Hezbollah, according to a US State Dept. "The sanctions are intended to disrupt fundraising and money laundering activities carried out on behalf of Hezbollah's finance team through a range of companies and projects operating across West Asia, Europe and North America, to cut off financial channels that help the Iran-backed group generate revenue and evade existing sanctions," it said.

CUBA-BOUND FUEL TANKER DIVERTED

A Russian diesel tanker bound for Cuba changed its destination to Trinidad and Tobago after the US Treasury said the island is barred from receiving Russian fuel. The Sea Horse was carrying 2,00,000 barrels of Russian diesel. On Friday, it updated its declared destination to Trinidad and Tobago.

TWO TRY TO ENTER N-SUB BASE, HELD

Two people including Iranian were arrested, after they tried to enter the Faslane nuclear submarine base in Scotland on charges of espionage. A man, 34, and a woman, 31, were detained after they had asked to enter one of Britain's most sensitive military sites late on Thursday.

IDF strikes IRGC compound in Tehran; explosions heard in Bahrain capital

DUBAI

As the conflict in West Asia entered its 22nd day on Saturday, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said it carried out wide-scale strikes in Tehran, targeting dozens of sites linked to the Iranian regime, including an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) compound, missile component storage facilities and fuel production units.

TEHRAN TARGETS HIT

According to the IDF, dozens of targets were hit, including a central compound of the IRGC, which Israel claimed had been "utilised for the production and development of ballistic missile components", as well as a missile component storage facility, a Defence Ministry compound where a fuel manufacturing site was located, and a missile component production facility.

Several air defence sites in Tehran were also attacked, the IDF added.

RETALIATORY ATTACKS UPS ENERGY CONCERNS

Iran has continued retaliatory attacks on Saudi Arabia and neighbouring countries, some targeting energy facilities, raising concerns of a global

AMONG THE SITES STRUCK

■ A central IRGC compound utilised for the production and development of ballistic missile components

■ A missile production components storage facility

■ A compound belonging to Ministry of Defence responsible for producing missiles fuel

■ Ballistic missiles components production site

energy supply shock, AP reported. Explosions were heard in Bahrain's capital, Manama, AFP reported, as regional tensions escalated.

CASUALTIES MOUNT ON BOTH SIDES

Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations, Amir Saeid Iravani, said the US-Israeli attacks have killed over 1,300 people, while the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency estimated the toll could be higher at 1,858. In Israel, at least 15 people have been killed, along with four

deaths in the West Bank. Also, 13 US troops have been killed.

The US military said Iran's ability to threaten the Strait of Hormuz had been "degraded" following strikes on an underground facility used to store cruise missiles and other weaponry, AP reported.

TENSIONS SPILL INTO GULF REGION

Further, authorities in Dubai confirmed loud sounds heard across the city were the result of successful air defence interception operations, signalling the spillover of hostilities into the Gulf.

In an escalation, the IRGC warned the UAE port city of Ras Al Khaimah could be targeted if Iran's strategically located islands, Abu Musa and Greater Tunb, are attacked again. The islands lie near the Strait of Hormuz and remain under Iranian control despite being disputed by the UAE.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia said it intercepted 20 drones within a few hours in its eastern region, home to key oil infrastructure. Officials reported no casualties or damage.

ECONOMIC IMPACT HITS DUBAI

The crisis is beginning to weigh on Dubai's economy, particularly its real estate sec-

tor. Analysts report a sharp decline in transaction volumes, down 37% YoY and 49% MoM in early March, Reuters reported.

Properties in premium locations, including areas near the Burj Khalifa and Palm Jumeirah, are seeing discounts of up to 15%. Shares of Emaar Properties have dropped more than 26% since the conflict began. While investors are increasingly cautious, some continue to seek discounted deals, indicating that market activity has slowed but not stopped.

AVIATION DISRUPTIONS ACROSS REGION

Aviation across the region remains severely disrupted due to airspace restrictions and safety concerns.

Emirates is operating a reduced schedule following partial airspace reopening, while Etihad Airways is running limited commercial services from Abu Dhabi.

Saudi carrier Flynas has suspended several regional routes, and Qatar Airways is operating a restricted flight schedule.

The disruptions have stranded thousands of passengers and continue to affect travel across key Gulf hubs, Reuters reported.

Insta pulls plug on 'MAGA dream girl'

MUMBAI

Instagram has removed an account featuring a viral "MAGA dream girl" after it attracted over a million followers, with experts confirming the persona was created using artificial intelligence.

The account of "Jessica Foster", portrayed as a US Army service member, gained traction within four months before it was taken down late on Thursday for violating policies, a Meta spokesperson said. The account showed Foster posing with an F-22 Raptor fighter jet, walking with President Donald Trump and appearing alongside global leaders. Experts said artificial intelligence generated the images and videos, Washington Post reported.

Authorities found no rec-

ord of Foster's military service, an Army spokesperson said. The account did not label its content as AI-generated but showed signs of fabrication, mixing pro-Trump messaging with sexualised content. The account initially directed users to OnlyFans, which removed it for violating rules requiring verified human creators, before redirecting to Fanvue.

Sam Gregory, executive director of Witness, said: "Foster is the apotheosis of what MAGA fantasises about... it's obviously AI. There's no provenance to the images." Foster's posts showed staged interactions with Melania Trump, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Vladimir Putin and Lionel Messi. Joan Donovan, an assistant professor at Boston University, warned: "The danger of this is that we're moving towards a society of the unreal."



Hawaii suffers worst flooding

Honolulu: Hawaii suffered its worst flooding in 20+ years as heavy rains fell on soil saturated by downpours from a winter storm a week ago.

Floodwaters smothered vast stretches of Oahu's North Shore, a community world-renowned for its big-wave surfing. Raging waters lifted homes and cars and prompted evacuation orders. Officials cautioned a 120-year-old dam could fail. Meanwhile, a record early heat wave striking the west of the US is a one-in-500-year type event and the result of human-caused climate change, experts say.

Musk misled investors in Twitter deal: Jury

San Francisco: A jury has found Elon Musk liable for misleading investors during his 2022 \$44 billion acquisition of Twitter, but cleared him of claims that he schemed to commit fraud.

The San Francisco civil trial centred on a class-action lawsuit over Musk's May 2022 tweets and podcast remarks. Jurors examined whether his statement that the deal was "temporarily on hold" misled shareholders. After nearly four days of deliberation, the nine-member jury ruled that two tweets misled investors,

but a podcast comment was opinion. It also held that Musk did not deliberately scheme to defraud.

The jury awarded damages of \$3 to \$8 per share per day, which plaintiffs' lawyers said totals roughly \$2.1 billion in stock and \$500 million in options. Musk's legal team said it will appeal, calling the verdict "a bump in the road".

The case focused on Musk's claims that fake and spam accounts exceeded Twitter's disclosed 5%. He had cited this to reconsider the deal before ultimately proceeding.

US: PIO judge convicted

Houston: An Indian-origin county judge has been convicted of money laundering following a jury verdict in a campaign finance case and faces sentencing on June 16.

KP George, Fort Bend County judge, was found guilty of misusing campaign funds for personal expenses. Prosecutors said he transferred \$46,000 to personal accounts for private use, including a home-related payment, while the defence said the transfers were reimbursements.

The jury returned verdict after deliberation.

Judith Rapoport, who introduced readers to OCD, passes away at 92

Samuel Johnson, the 18th-century man of letters, may have suffered from it, counting steps as he walked through the streets of London, compulsively touching every post he passed. Howard Hughes, the germ-averse aviation tycoon, is believed to have had it, too.

Yet for years, few Americans had ever heard of obsessive-compulsive disorder, in which patients find their lives upended by intrusive thoughts and repetitive behaviours — washing and counting, looking and hoarding — that they feel

compelled to repeat over and over, again and again.

Judith Rapoport, a leading child psychiatrist at the US National Institute of Mental Health, helped bring the condition into public understanding. Her widely read book, *The Boy Who Couldn't Stop Washing*, offered a clear, humane account of OCD and its impact on young patients and their families. Her work helped shift perceptions of the disorder from eccentric habit to serious medical condition, guiding diagnosis and

treatment for decades.

She also advanced research into the biological basis of the disorder, using brain imaging to deepen scientific understanding. Colleagues credited her with combining rigorous science and compassionate care, helping reduce stigma and improving treatment outcomes for patients worldwide. Rapoport died on March 20 at her home in Bethesda, Maryland, aged 92, according to family members. The cause of death was not immediately disclosed.



14 die in fire at S Korean unit

Seoul: A fire at a car parts factory in South Korea has killed 14 people and injured almost 60 others. Video footage of the blaze at the factory in Daejeon showed people jumping from the first floor of the 3-storey building to escape.

About 170 workers were believed to have been inside the factory when the fire was reported on Friday. It was extinguished until Saturday afternoon. President Lee Jae Myung visited the site and called for better protections for the workers, over 10,000 of whom died at work from 2000 to 2024, as per data.

Briefs

MUMBAI
De Grasse to be TMM 2026 ambassador

Two-time Olympic gold medalist sprinter **Andre De Grasse** was on Wednesday named the international event ambassador for the 21st edition of the Tata Mumbai Marathon, set to take place here on January 18. One of the most accomplished sprinters of his generation, De Grasse brings his presence and inspiration to the World Athletics Gold Label Race. Renowned for his electrifying finishes, composure under pressure, and ability to deliver on the sport's biggest stages, De Grasse is a global athletics icon whose journey continues to inspire millions worldwide. Rising from a humble beginning, he discovered sprinting at a local meet wearing basketball shoes and spikes, a moment that marked the beginning.

KARACHI
Afridi to return home from BBL

Experienced Pakistan left-arm pace bowler, **Shaheen Shah Afridi** will return home from Australia later on Wednesday with doubts over his availability for the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka early next year. Shaheen has been called by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for treatment and rehabilitation at the High Performance Centre in Lahore after he sustained a knee injury while fielding for Brisbane Heat in the Big Bash League (BBL). Shaheen, who has struggled in his maiden appearance in the BBL, had spent a long time out from cricket in 2021-22 after undergoing a knee surgery following an injury while fielding in a Test.

MADRID
Carlos undergoes heart surgeryVIJAY HAZARE | This is Mumbai's fourth successive victory in the league stage
Sarfraz stars in Mumbai win

JAIPUR

Sarfraz Khan ended 2025 with a magnificent 75-ball 157 studded with 14 sixes as Mumbai inched closer towards knock-out with a 87-run victory over Goa in a group C game of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Wednesday.

Sarfraz, who was also in prime form during the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, hit a 56-ball century, his third in List A as Mumbai posted an insurmountable 444 for 8 and then restricted Goa to 357 for 9.

This is Mumbai's fourth successive win in the group league stage and one more win out of the remaining three games will almost ensure a smooth passage into the quarterfinals.

On a day when Yashasvi Jaiswal (46) made his comeback after being laid low by gastritis during the opening week of the National One Day Championship, Sarfraz owned the stage at the Jaipuria Vidyalaya ground where he made a mince-meat of the Goa attack with nine fours and 14 sixes.

A many as 10 out of his 14 sixes were hit off-spinner Lalit Yadav (2/93 in 9 overs)



and left-arm spinner Darshan Misal (3/98 in 9 overs). He hit Lalit for four sixes, while Misal was dispatched for half-a-dozen maximums. Legendary Sachin Tendulkar's son Arjun was hammered for 78 runs in eight overs.

While Sarfraz was dismissed in the 42nd over when he was looking good for his maiden double hundred in List A cricket, Mumbai didn't lose the tempo with more

than 100 runs coming off the last 8 overs.

Musheer Khan (60 off 66 balls), wicketkeeper Hardik Tamore (53 off 28 balls), Shams Mulani (22 off 15 balls), Tanush Kotian (23 not out off 12 balls) and skipper Shardul Thakur (27 off eight balls) wielded the long handle to good effect as the winners hammered 35 fours and 25 sixes.

In reply, Goa were never in

the chase but Lalit Yadav (64), Abhinav Tejrana (100) and Deepraj Gaonkar (70) did bat well during the middle overs but it was never going to be enough.

Skipper Shardul Thakur (3/20 in 6 overs) once again showed his wares on a flat deck, while Yashasvi Jaiswal, bowling his leg-breaks, got smashed for 52 in just 3 overs but got a couple of wickets in the bargain.

Brief Scores:

Mumbai 444/8 in 50 overs (Sarfraz Jhan 157, Musheer Khan 60, Yashasvi Jaiswal 46, Darshan Misal 3/98). Goa 357/9 in 50 overs (Abhinav Tejrana 100, Lalit Yadav 64, Shardul Thakur 3/20). **Mumbai won by 87 runs.**

Chattisgarh 355/3 (Vikalp Tiwari 112, Ayush Pandey 86, Amandeep Khare 83).

Sikkim 126 in 34 overs (Gurinder Singh 47, Ajay Mandal 4/40, Dev Aditya Singh 4/25). **Chattisgarh won by 229 runs.**

Maharashtra 331/7 in 50 overs (Ruturaj Gaikwad 124, Satyajeet Bachhav 56, Ramakrishna Ghosh 47, DS Bora 3/81).

Uttarakhand 202 in 43.4 overs (Sankar Rawat 56, Satyajeet Bachhav 3/22). **Maharashtra won by 129 runs.**

Himachal Pradesh 221 in 47.2 overs (Pukhraj Mann 76, SS Bajwa 4/17, Naman Dhir 2/28).

Punjab 2/3 for 4 in 36.1 overs (Prabhsimran Singh 84, Anmolpreet Singh 72, Naman Dhir 50 not out). **Punjab won by 7 wickets.**

Pant fails to fire as Delhi suffer big defeat

Alur (Karnataka): India keeper Rishabh Pant's indifferent form coupled with Delhi's leading batters failing to fire saw their unbeaten run being interrupted by Odisha, who carved out a huge 79-run victory in a fourth-round Group D match of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Wednesday. With the national selectors set to announce the squad for the three-match ODI series against New Zealand in first week of January, it was the charismatic India keeper-batter and Delhi skipper Pant, who was the focus of attention. But the feisty cricketer could score only 24 as the much-vaunted Delhi batting imploded, managing just 193 in 43.3 overs in the chase of an immensely gettable 272/8 scored by Odisha after being sent in to bat first. Delhi's innings have largely been built around one solid batting performance so far this season of the competition.

Karnataka, MP continue unbeaten run in Group A

Ahmedabad: Defending champions Karnataka continued their unbeaten run in the tournament defeating Puducherry by 67 runs in a fourth round Group A match at the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Wednesday.

Skipper Mayank Agarwal (132 off 124; 15x4s, 2x6s) and Devdutt Padikkal (113 off 116; 10x4s, 4x6s) struck fluent centuries and added 228 runs in 37.5 overs for the opening stand to set the base for a total of 363 for 4 after electing to bat. Besides the duo, Karun Nair remained unbeaten on 62 off 34 balls, a knock which was studded with four boundaries and as many hits over the fence.

None of the Puducherry bowlers could inflict any damage on Karnataka with Jayant Yadav returning with best figures of 1/41 from his nine overs. Chasing, Puducherry made a decent start with Nayan Shyam Kangayan (68 off 66) and wicketkeeper Ajay Rohera (32) stitching 78 runs.

Afghanistan recall Naveen, Naib for T20 World Cup

Naveen returns after recovering from shoulder injury

KABUL

Afghanistan on Wednesday recalled pacer Naveen-ul-Haq and all-rounder Gulbadin Naib in a 15-member squad for the T20 World Cup to be held across India and Sri Lanka from February 7.

Star spinner Rashid Khan will continue to lead the side, with Ibrahim Zadran named as his deputy.

Naveen returns after recovering from a shoulder injury. He last featured in an international match in December 2024.

Naib, meanwhile, was left out of Afghanistan's white-ball tour of Bangladesh in October as was the experienced left-arm pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi, who has also been included in the squad. "We had good discussions over the past few days and finalized the squad. Gulbadin Naib is a big-match player, and his return boosts our team. We are also pleased to have Naveen Ul Haq back, which enhances the quality of our fast bowling," chief selec-



tor Ahmad Shah Sulimankhil said. The squad also features off-spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman. His inclusion has pushed mystery spinner AM Ghazanfar to the reserves.

Afghanistan enjoyed their best-ever run in an ICC event at the previous edition of the T20 World Cup in 2024, where they reached the semifinals.

This time, they have been drawn in a group alongside New Zealand, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates and Canada. Afghanistan will open their campaign against New Zealand on February 8 in Chennai. The same squad will also play a three-match T20I series against the West Indies

Afghanistan Squad

Rashid Khan (Captain), Ibrahim Zadran (VC), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (WK), Mohammad Ishaq (WK), Sediqullah Atal, Darwish Rasooli, Shahidullah Kamal, Azmatullah Omarzai, Gulbadin Naib, Mohammad Nabi, Noor Ahmad, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Naveen Ul Haq, Fazal Haq Farooqi and Abdullah Ahmadzai. Reserves: AM Ghazanfar, Ijaz Ahmadzai and Zia Ur Rahman Sharifi.

in the UAE ahead of the World Cup, starting January 19.

"Afghanistan had a terrific run in the previous edition of the T20 World Cup. We cherish excellent memories from the past, and hope for even better results this year, which will be played in Asian conditions," Afghanistan Cricket Board CEO Naseeb Khan said.

Mercurial Carlsen wins record-extending 9th title

Erigaisi becomes second from India to win a World Blitz medal

DOHA

Relieved after defending his world blitz crown, chess megastar **Magnus Carlsen** acknowledged it was an extremely tough field and admitted he was fortunate to win a record-extending ninth title following the reverses in the early rounds of the tournament.

World No.1 Magnus Carlsen showed his endgame genius yet again to add the Blitz crown to the Rapid gold medal he won last week by defeating Uzbek Grandmaster Nodirbek Abdusattorov 2.5-1.5 in the title showdown on Tuesday.

Indian Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi, impeccable in the 19-round qualification (Swiss), suffered a massive meltdown in the semifinal to settle for a bronze medal in the World Blitz Championship.

The third-place finish for 22-year-old Erigaisi on Sunday, not only helped him win the Blitz and Rapid bronze, it also made him only the second male chess player



from India after the legendary Viswanathan Anand to win a World Blitz medal.

"This was a very tough event for me. It could have gone either way. But when we got to the knockouts, I thought I should really enjoy it, and it worked out," Carlsen, who ended up winning both the Rapid and Blitz gold, told FIDE.

Carlsen refused to accept a draw in the final against young Uzbek GM Abdusattorov and came up with a unique pawn move out

of nowhere in the fourth game of the title clash to win the contest after both the players were tied at 1.5 points each.

The victory was all the more sweet and fulfilling for the Norwegian after a string of losses, and a big controversy, in the qualifying (Swiss round) where he struggled to secure a place in the semifinals. A draw in Round 19 against Abdusattorov saw both Carlsen (13.5 points) and the Uzbek (13 points) secure the last two slots in the semifinals on Tuesday behind sole

This was a very tough event for me. It could have gone either way. But when we got to the knockouts, I thought I should really enjoy it, and it worked out

Magnus Carlsen,
World Blitz Chess champion

leader Erigaisi (15 points) and second-placed American GM Fabiano Caruana (4 points).

Carlsen then went on to beat Caruana 3-1 to secure a place in the final, while an clinical Abdusattorov inflicted a shattering 2.5-0.5 semifinal defeat on Erigaisi.

Earlier, Erigaisi, after stunning the likes of Carlsen and Abdusattorov to emerge sole leader with 10 points from 13 games on Monday, went through the remaining six rounds on Tuesday with steely resolve.

football

AIFF asks clubs to confirm participation in delayed ISL

NEW DELHI

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Wednesday asked the clubs to confirm their participation in the delayed season of the Indian Super League (ISL) and the proposed format within a day so that it can inform the continental body the exact number of matches to be played in the competition.

With the ISL 2025-26 yet to start, it is certain that the

clubs will not be able to play the mandatory 24 matches in the season -- including top division league and domestic cup -- to be eligible to feature in the AFC Champions League 2.

In that regard, the ISL clubs had urged the AIFF to request the Asian Football Confederation for a one-time relaxation in the minimum requirement of 24 matches so that they can play in the ACL 2.

The representatives of the clubs and a committee

formed by the AIFF have had five meetings since December 24 on how to hold the 2025-26 ISL season.

"... the meetings held on 28th December 2025, wherein the ISL Clubs requested the All India Football Federation to take up the matter with the Asian Football Confederation regarding a one-time relaxation in the minimum requirement of 24 matches," the AIFF said in a letter to the ISL clubs.

"AIFF asks ISL clubs to

confirm participation and the proposed competition format in ISL 2024-25 by January 1, 2026. The AFC, the Sports Ministry and the Supreme Court will be informed accordingly.

"Considering the urgency of the matter, it would be highly appreciated if the above confirmation is received by tomorrow, i.e., 1st January 2026. We trust you will appreciate the seriousness and time-sensitive nature of the situation."

The AIFF also said it is

required to submit the outcome of the meetings it had with the ISL clubs to the Sports Ministry before January 2, 2026.

"Further, the Hon'ble Supreme Court is scheduled to resume after vacation on 5th January 2026, and all stakeholders may be required to file relevant documents in accordance with legal advice."

The AIFF had proposed two competition formats for the ISL 2025-26 season, which it wants to start in the

first week of February.

The first option is a conference-based league structure where the 14 participating teams would be divided equally into East and West groups. Teams would play against each other only within their respective conferences.

The top four sides from each group will advance to a single-leg championship round to decide the ISL winner. All the matches would be played at two centralised venues.



Kalyan Chaubey, AIFF President