

# AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

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

## Briefs

JAMMU

### Cricketer dons Palestinian flag on helmet

The Jammu and Kashmir Police on Friday ordered a preliminary enquiry after a cricketer from south Kashmir wore a helmet with the Palestinian flag during a private cricket tournament match in Jammu, a police spokesperson said. A video and photos of the cricketer, Furqan Ul Haq, were circulated online after he was seen displaying the flag on his helmet during the Jammu and Kashmir Champions League here on Thursday. "Yesterday, a video circulating on social media showed a cricket player, Furqan Ul Haq, resident of Tangipuna, Pulwama, playing cricket at KC Door in Muthi, while displaying a Palestine logo on his helmet," the spokesperson said.

CHANDIGARH

### CM's copter: Media protest on January 4

Members of journalists fraternity on Friday announced a protest in Sector 17 Chandigarh, here on January 4 after the cyber cell of the Ludhiana police booked 10 persons including some YouTubers and an RTI activist for allegedly spreading "rumours and misleading information" about the alleged "misuse of the chief minister Bhagwant Mann's helicopter during his foreign tour last month. The said announcement was made after a meeting of journalists held by Bathinda Press Club on Thursday.

GUWAHATI

### Zubeen Garg Foundation announced

Ahead of the scheduled court proceedings related to legendary Assamese singer and cultural icon Zubeen Garg on January 12, his wife Garima Saikia Garg and sister Palmee Borthakur on Friday announced the formation of the Zubeen Garg Foundation, a dedicated trust aimed at preserving, documenting and celebrating his vast artistic legacy. Addressing a press conference at their residence in Kahlilipara, the family said the foundation would work to ensure that Zubeen Garg's life, music, creative philosophy and cultural contributions continue to inspire generations to come.

## War over Kashmir can erupt anytime: J&K's top clergyman

SRINAGAR

After Mirwaiz Umar Farooq was forced to remove Hurriyat faction chairman tag from his X-handle, the Kashmir's top clergyman man Mirwaiz Umar on Friday warned of war erupting in Kashmir "despite unilateral changes in 2019".

In his tweet via his X-handle, Mirwaiz said, "The reality is that the Kashmir conflict continues to keep the region in an unsettled state that can erupt anytime. That is why wars are paused, not ended, and dia-

logue finds no takers. The year-end witnessed another tragedy — the massive blast and loss of life in New Delhi.

"Yet beyond these incidents, in which Kashmiris find themselves at the receiving end of suspicion and attacks in parts of India, not much has changed for them. The trust deficit between them and New Delhi has widened, not shrunk. Enforced silence is projected as acquiescence. Wounds remain open, problems unaddressed, and an elected government of a UT complains of being powerless.

### The trust deficit between Kashmiris and New Delhi has widened, not shrunk, says Mirwaiz Umar

A sense of hopelessness prevails, along with an existential crisis of losing one's identity through demographic change since the state was downgraded to a Union Territory, constitutional guarantees withdrawn, and rules and laws tweaked," Mirwaiz Umar

added. He recalled that bygone year witnessed the banning of the Awami Action Committee — a socio-political institution that reached out to people in need, advocating peace, dialogue and resolution — along with Ittiadul Muslimeen, which were part of the Hurriyat Conference. Much of that space has now been extinguished. "Today we are operating in an environment where any expression of views contrary to the state, or any disagreement, is increasingly criminalised, branded as "anti-

national" and penalised," he observed.

"No public space is available to us, and mediums of communication, including most local media, are not ready to provide any space for voicing expressions of people's demands or views. I do not have the privilege of addressing press conferences. I cannot move without getting official clearance, and people cannot meet me without seeking permission. My access to the pulpit of Jama Masjid — the spiritual heart of Kashmir — is also curtailed. Even last Friday, I

was placed under house arrest, and again this Friday too. In fact, last year I was under house arrest for fourteen Fridays. Arbitrary house arrests have become a recurring feature in my life. All this is deeply suffocating — not only for me, but for an entire society that increasingly feels voiceless. So when pressed to make changes to my social media profile — as Hurriyat constituents are banned under UAPA, displaying the title would be considered illegal and the platforms barred to me," he said .

## RAISING A STINK | Court to hear on Jan 6 PIL on the tragedy as civic body tries to evade responsibility while Rahul Gandhi takes 'poison' dig at BJP

# Indore water crisis reaches HC, truth over deaths contested

INDORE

The Indore Municipal Corporation has come under sharp judicial scrutiny after submitting a status report to the Madhya Pradesh High Court in the Bhagirathpura contaminated drinking water case, with the court fixing January 6 for the next hearing in a public interest litigation challenging both the handling of the crisis and the disputed death count. In its submission, the IMC listed emergency measures undertaken, including tanker-based water supply, deployment of over 100 personnel for sanitation and monitoring, public advisories urging residents to boil water, and extensive sampling of water sources. It claimed a "probable contamination point" near the Bhagirathpura police outpost had been identified, repaired and sealed. What the report failed to disclose was the most critical detail: the number of deaths

### NHRC has taken cognisance of the incident and sought a report from state's Chief Secretary within two weeks

and people affected. Instead, it stated that verification was ongoing and that detailed figures would be submitted separately by the state government — an omission that drew sharp reaction from the court. Advocate Rishi Anand, appearing for intervenor Varun Gaikwad, told the bench it was "shocking" that the government continued to officially acknowledge only four deaths when newspapers, on the very day the petition was filed, had reported 11 confirmed fatalities with photographs of victims. Persisting with a lower figure, he argued, appeared to be a deliberate attempt to minimise the scale of the tragedy and raised serious questions about the credibility of official data.

The High Court also declined to entertain a plea by another intervenor seeking restrictions on media reporting to prevent public panic, signalling that transparency, not suppression, was essential in a public health emergency of this magnitude. Parallel to judicial scrutiny, the National Human Rights Commission has taken suo motu cognisance of the incident and sought a detailed report from the state's Chief Secretary within two weeks, underlining the gravity of the situation. The legal proceedings have transformed the Indore water crisis from a civic failure into an institutional reckoning, with courts and rights bodies demanding clarity on accountability, transparency and the true human cost of contaminated drinking water. As the next hearing approaches, the central question remains unresolved: how many lives were lost before the system acknowledged the disaster — and why did it take judicial intervention to seek the truth?



Congress workers and locals take out a candlelight vigil in Bhopal on Friday for the victims of Indore water contamination

## DEATHS, DENIALS, DAMAGE CONTROL



### Who knew what — and when

**DEC 25-26** Residents complain of foul-smelling, bitter water.

**DEC 27-28** Diarrhoea cases spike. No water shutdown.

**DEC 29** Hospital admissions rise. Sewage leakage reported.

**DEC 30** First deaths reported. Crisis termed "under control".

**DEC 31** Samples confirm bacterial contamination. Leak traced near police outpost.

**JAN 1** Political backlash begins.

**JAN 2** IMC submits report to Madhya Pradesh High Court. Official toll still four.

**JAN 6** Next HC hearing.

### HARD FACTS

■ **Cause confirmed:** Sewage contamination due to pipeline leakage

■ **Location of breach:** Near police outpost, beneath toilet structure

■ **Patients affected:** Over 1,100 reported ill

### What officials say | What residents saw

**IMC:** Complaints addressed promptly

**Residents:** Warnings ignored for days

**IMC:** Situation under control

**Residents:** Water supply never stopped

**IMC:** Leak fixed quickly

**Residents:** Sewage visible earlier

**IMC:** Four deaths confirmed

**Residents/media:** 11-15 deaths reported

**IMC:** Tankers ensured safety

**Residents:** Bottled water now the norm

**IMC:** Door-to-door health checks

**Residents:** Neighbours rushed patients to hospital

■ **Water samples contaminated:** 26 out of 50

■ **Hospitalised (peak):** Over 150

■ **Official deaths acknowledged by state:** 4

■ **Compensation announced:** Rs 2 lakh per deceased

## Rajnath: Educated people indulging in anti-national acts

UDAIPUR

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said that an alarming trend of white-collar terrorism is emerging in the country, wherein highly-educated people are engaging in anti-social and anti-national activities.

Singh pointed at the November 10 car bomb blast near the Red Fort in Delhi, where the perpetrators were found to be doctors.

"Today, an alarming trend of white-collar terrorism is emerging in the country. Highly-educated people are working against society and the country," Singh said at the 104th foundation day event of Bhupal Nobles' University here.

"The perpetrators of the (Delhi) bomb blast were doctors - those who write 'Rx' on prescriptions, yet have RDX in their hands. This highlights the need for knowledge to be accompanied by values and character," the defence minister said.

"The purpose of education is not only professional success but also the development of morality, ethics and human character," he said.

The explosives-laden i20 car that detonated outside the Red Fort on November 10, killing 15



**"The perpetrators of the (Delhi) bomb blast were doctors - those who write 'Rx' on prescriptions, yet have RDX in their hands," said Rajnath Singh**

people, was driven by Dr Umar-un-Nabi.

The probe unravelled a 'white-collar' terror module, leading to the arrests of three doctors -- Muzammil Ganai, Adeel Rather and Shaheena Saeed -- among others.

Singh added that knowledge leads to competence, which leads to prosperity, and prosperity leads to righteousness, and ultimately, true happiness comes only from righteousness. "Any education system that cannot fulfil this objective, which does not impart humility, a sense of character and 'dharma' (righteousness) along with knowledge, is incomplete," he said.

## Cabinet secy says no plans to change land acquisition policy

NEW DELHI

With land acquisition emerging as one of the biggest impediments in the timely execution of infrastructure projects in the country, Cabinet Secretary TV Somanathan said the government has no plans to change its policy for acquiring land.

He said that in the over 3,300 projects worth Rs 85 lakh crore that were taken up during review meetings of the Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation

(PRAGATI), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, 7,735 issues were raised, and 7,156 of them were resolved.

PRAGATI is a review mechanism to expedite projects that have been delayed for various reasons. Regular issues are resolved at the ministry level, while complex and critical issues are escalated for review by it.

Somanathan said PRAGATI has a multi-tier follow-up mechanism that ensures the timely implementation of decisions.

## 19-yr-old dies in HP, three students, prof booked for ragging, sex harassment

SHIMLA/DHARAMSHALA (HP)

Three students of a government college in Himachal Pradesh's Dharamshala have been booked for ragging and voluntarily causing hurt while a professor has been booked for sexual harassment of a 19-year-old woman who died on December 26, police said on Friday.

The woman student died during treatment at a Ludhiana hospital on December 26 and the case was registered on Thursday following a complaint by the father of the victim. In his complaint, the deceased student's father alleged that his daughter was beaten by three seniors, Harshita, Aakriti and Komolika, on September 18, 2025, while a college professor, Ashok Kumar, indulged in obscene acts with her.

Due to the beating and harassment, the student was hospitalised and she died during treatment, the complaint said. The father of the deceased woman alleged that following these incidents, his daughter went into severe mental stress

### The student died during treatment at a Ludhiana hospital on Dec 26 and the case was registered after her dad's plaint

and fear, leading to a rapid deterioration in her health.

He said that a police complaint could not be lodged earlier as his daughter was traumatised and had to be hospitalised.

A case under sections 75 (sexual harassment), 115(2) (voluntarily causing hurt), 3(6) (common intention) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and Section 3 of the Himachal Pradesh Educational Institution (Prohibition of) Ragging Act 2009 has been registered and investigations are underway, the police said.

Confirming that a case has been registered, Kangra Superintendent of Police (SP) Ashok Ratan said that all the allegations are being thoroughly investigated. Medical records, video evidence and statements of all concerned are being examined, he said.



## Boy survives after 40 train wagons pass over him

LUCKNOW

A 10-year-old boy in Uttar Pradesh's Chandauli district narrowly escaped death after lying flat on a railway track as a high-speed freight train passed over him. Remarkably, the boy did not suffer even a scratch, leaving onlookers stunned and many calling it a miracle.

The incident took place on

Wednesday in Saiyadraja town under the Saiyadraja police station area. The boy, identified as Piyush Kesari, had gone kite flying with his friends near a railway crossing close to the Dedicated Freight Corridor down line, a short distance from Saiyadraja railway station.

According to eyewitnesses, Piyush ran towards the track while trying to catch a kite. As he reached the railway line, one



of his legs got stuck in the track. At the same time, a fast-moving freight train approached. Panicking on seeing the train extremely close, the boy lay down between the tracks, face

down, in an attempt to save his life.

Eyewitnesses said the boy remained on the track for around 30 seconds as nearly 40 wagons of the freight train passed over him. Once the train crossed, he stood up and ran away. The shocking scene left people present at the spot speechless, as the child emerged completely unhurt.

Those who witnessed the

incident later caught hold of the boy and thrashed him for risking his life. Overwhelmed, the child broke down and hugged the people who had beaten him. A video of the incident has also surfaced and is being widely shared.

Piyush is the son of Rajkumar Kesari, a rickshaw puller who lives in Ward Number 9 of Azad Nagar in Saivadraia town. Locals said the

incident highlights the serious risks posed by children playing near railway tracks during kite flying.

Following the incident, residents demanded increased monitoring near railway crossings and tracks. They also urged the administration to raise awareness among children and parents to prevent such life-threatening incidents in the future.



## Briefs

LUCKNOW

**Two-Day Heritage Film festival begins**

The Mahindra Sanatkada Lucknow Festival and Lucknow Bioscope are organizing a two-day film festival, panel, and heritage walk on January 3-4, 2026, at Rai Umanath Bali Auditorium. The curtain raiser will feature a screening of Muzaffar Ali's 1986 film Anjuman starring Shabana Azmi and Farooq Shaikh, highlighting Lucknow's culture and themes of labor and gender.

KANPUR

**GRP Arrests Liquor Smuggler at Station**

The Government Railway Police (GRP) arrested a liquor smuggler at Kanpur Railway Station during a checking drive on Platform 1. The accused, identified as Adil, was caught with illegal liquor worth approximately ₹10,000. Station House Officer GRP Om Narayan Singh and sub-inspectors led the operation. Legal proceedings are underway against the accused.

LALITPUR

**Protests Over Killings of Hindus in Bangladesh**

Saints, seers, and Hindu organizations staged a protest in Lalitpur against the ongoing killings and persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh. Led by State Minister Manohar Lal Panth Mannu Kori, hundreds marched from Tuvan Temple to the Collectorate. They submitted a memorandum demanding the Indian government pressure Bangladesh to ensure security for Hindus and take strict action.

BALLIA

**Farmer Dies of Cold While Irrigating Field**

A 35-year-old farmer, Anjani Chauhan, died from extreme cold while irrigating his wheat field in Keertupur village, Bansdih. He collapsed in the field due to the severe cold wave. Family members took him to Bansdih PHC, where doctors declared him dead. Police have sent the body for postmortem. A student union coordinator informed the authorities.

CHANDAULI

**DRM Inspects Station Ahead of Magh Mela**

In preparation for the Magh Mela-2026, DRM Uday Singh Meena of the DDU Junction conducted a surprise inspection of passenger facilities. He reviewed holding areas, ticket counters, waiting halls, foot overbridges, sanitation, lighting, and security arrangements. Additional measures like mobile UTS counters and the RailOne app will be deployed for crowd management and passenger convenience.

MAU

**Three Liquor Shops Sealed for Early Sales**

Acting on complaints, the Excise Department in Mau sealed three shops and registered cases against vendors for selling country liquor before the stipulated time. Raids were conducted in Khurhat, Nadwansari, and Hasanpur based on secret purchases. Notices have been issued to the licensees under the Excise Act, 1910. The administration warned of continued strict action against rule violators.

**WEATHER HAVOC | Cold wave intensifies as mercury drops, dense fog alert expected in 34 Districts****Cold wave returns to UP**

LUCKNOW

Weather conditions across Uttar Pradesh have taken a sharp turn, with biting cold returning after the weakening of a western disturbance. The resurgence of cold north-westerly winds has led to a significant drop in both day and night temperatures, intensifying cold conditions across large parts of the state.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), strong cold winds blowing at speeds of 10-15 km per hour, combined with persistent fog, have increased the chill factor even in areas that briefly received sunlight. Residents across urban and rural regions reported severe cold throughout the day on Friday, with reduced visibility affecting early morning movement.

The weather department has issued an orange alert for dense fog in 34 districts, particularly across eastern, southern, and Terai regions of the



state. In addition, a cold day warning has been issued for eight districts, including the state capital Lucknow, where daytime temperatures are expected to remain unusually low. IMD officials stated that temperatures across Uttar Pradesh are likely to decline further over the next three days. Both maximum and minimum temperatures may fall by 3 to 4 degrees Celsius, as cold winds from the Himalayan region continue to dominate weather patterns.

On Friday, Barabanki and Hardoi recorded the lowest

**Cold northwesterly winds tighten grips on state, IMD issues orange alert for dense fog**

minimum temperature, dropping to around 6 degrees Celsius, making them the coldest locations in the state. Meanwhile, Bareilly reported the coldest daytime temperature at 13.3 degrees Celsius, reflecting the severity of the cold wave.

Dense fog reduced visibility

**Schools closed till 5th January, Many accidents reported**

Severe cold wave and dense fog have paralyzed Uttar Pradesh, prompting Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to extend school closures for all boards up to Class 12 until January 5, 2026. The extreme weather has caused immense logistical disruptions, highlighted by an Air India flight from Delhi that had to circle Lucknow 17 times before diverting back due to zero visibility at the airport. Across the state, over 100 trains are significantly delayed and numerous flights have been cancelled, while tragic fatalities have been reported due to the hazardous conditions. In Etawah, a driver was burnt alive after his truck collided with another vehicle in thick fog, and in Firozabad, two men died of suffocation while sleeping in a generator room to escape the chill.

to near zero in several districts, including Kanpur, Agra, Gorakhpur, and Amethi, causing disruption to road and rail movement during early hours. Meteorological officials have advised commuters to exercise caution, especially during morning and late-night travel.

Senior meteorologist Dr. Atul Kumar Singh said that the weakening of the western disturbance has allowed cold winds to strengthen, leading to a steady fall in nighttime

temperatures. He added that cold day conditions may persist in parts of central and eastern Uttar Pradesh if cloud cover and fog continue.

The IMD has urged district administrations to remain alert and take necessary precautions, particularly for vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, and homeless residents, as cold conditions are expected to intensify further in the coming days.

**CM's directive puts district officials on guard for winter relief**

LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday issued a series of directives to district administrations across Uttar Pradesh to intensify relief efforts in response to the severe cold wave gripping the state. The Chief Minister's instructions came alongside the decision to extend the closure of all schools up to Class 12 until January 5.

The CM specifically ordered officials to ensure that no individual is found sleeping in the open. He mandated surprise inspections of all government-run night shelters (rain baseras) to ensure the availability of adequate bedding, blankets, heaters, clean drinking water, electricity, and security. He emphasized that all basic facilities at these shelters must be fully functional.

Further, the district administrations have been

**Administrators told to guarantee no one sleeps in open, adequate bedding, heaters, water mandated at relief centers**

directed to organize the widespread distribution of blankets and the setting up of bonfires, with priority given to the poor, destitute, and homeless. The Chief Minister warned of strict action against any officer found negligent in executing these winter relief measures, underscoring the administration's responsibility to protect citizens from the harsh weather.

**STF probe leads to suspension of three ARTOs in bribery case**

LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has suspended three Assistant Regional Transport Officers (ARTO-Enforcement) following allegations of accepting bribes to allow overloaded trucks to pass through multiple districts. The suspended officers include Rajiv Kumar Bansal (Lucknow), Pushpanjali Mitra (Fatehpur), and Ambuj (Raebareli). All three have been attached to the Transport Department headquarters, and a departmental inquiry has been initiated.

The action comes after the Special Task Force (STF) registered FIRs on November 12 in connection with an alleged bribery syndicate operating across several districts of

**Transport Department initiates departmental inquiry, officers attached to headquarters**

Bundelkhand, including Hamirpur and Mahoba. The FIRs were lodged in Madaon (Lucknow), Lalgaonj (Raebareli), and Unnao, naming 25 individuals, including transport department officials, staff members, and

others allegedly involved in facilitating the movement of overloaded trucks carrying construction materials such as morrum and stone aggregates. Following the registration of cases, several named officials reportedly stopped attending their offices. After a delay of 48 days, the Transport Department issued suspension orders. Jhansi Deputy Transport Commissioner K.D. Singh Gaur has been appointed as the inquiry officer.

Earlier, on November 29, the Transport Commissioner had suspended three other officials, including a PTO and enforcement staff, in the same case. Additional enforcement supervisors, constables, and drivers from Lucknow, Unnao, and Raebareli have also been suspended.

**Outrage over indecent act at historic Imambarra**

LUCKNOW

A viral video of a youth urinating in Lucknow's historic Imambarra Bhulbhulaiya on January 1, 2026, has sparked severe outrage within the Shia community. The Alham-e-Jama Society has petitioned the District Magistrate, demanding strict legal action and improved security measures to protect the religious sanctity of the site.

**₹1,400 cr irregularity case in monument construction**

LUCKNOW

The investigation into the ₹1,400 crore memorial construction scam in Lucknow and other districts of Uttar Pradesh has gathered momentum after nearly 11 years. The case, registered by the Vigilance Department in 2014, pertains to large-scale financial irregularities in the construction of monuments and parks between 2007 and 2011.

Lucknow Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant has intensified the probe and directed the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) to immediately submit all relevant records. Acting on government instructions issued on December 22, 2025, the commissioner has been asked to complete the investigation and submit an action-taken report.

**Vigilance case registered in 2014 sees renewed momentum after government directive**

The alleged scam involves procurement irregularities, particularly in stone purchases, for projects such as the Ambedkar Social Transformation Site, Kanshiram Memorial, Gautam

Buddha Park, and eco-garden developments in Lucknow and Noida.

Around 57 officials and employees from the LDA and the State Construction Corporation were earlier brought under the scanner. Direct action is now being prepared against the then Superintending Engineer Vimal Kumar Sonkar and then Chief Engineer Triloki Nath, both retired.

**Police aspirants demand age relief in recruitment**

LUCKNOW

The ongoing Uttar Pradesh Police constable recruitment has triggered political intervention after several NDA legislators and a state minister wrote to the Chief Minister demanding a three-year age relaxation for general category candidates. The demand follows the release of the recruitment notification for 32,679 constable posts, which fixed the age limit for general category applicants between 18 and 22 years.

State Minister Dr Arun Kumar, Nishad Party MLA Anil Kumar Tripathi, and BJP MLA from Haidergarh Dinesh Rawat have formally urged the Chief Minister to grant age relaxation, citing earlier assur-

**Letters sent to CM after recruitment notification sparks discontent**

ances and administrative delays that allegedly disadvantaged aspirants. In their letters, the legislators argued that recruitment irregularities and procedural lapses caused many candidates to cross the age threshold.

**UP's first sports university nears completion**

MEERUT

Uttar Pradesh's first sports university, named after hockey legend Major Dhyan Chand, is under construction in Meerut's Salawa area and is expected to be fully completed by March 2026, according to university authorities. The project, launched in January 2022, has crossed nearly 77-78 per cent completion, even as academic activities have already begun.

Despite the delay beyond the originally scheduled timeline, student admissions have taken place and classes are being conducted from temporary facilities. The university's administrative office is currently functioning from the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University of Agriculture and Technology in Modipuram, while practical sports training



is being carried out at the Kailash Prakash Stadium in Meerut. The sports university is being developed over 91.38 acres at an estimated cost of around ₹700 crore. So far, more than ₹97 crore has been released for construction. The permanent campus will include academic and administrative blocks, hostels for male and female students, an auditorium, central library, guest house, and residential facilities for staff.

University officials said an Academic Council meeting scheduled for January 10 will decide on new courses for the 2026-27 academic session.

**Shankh air to launch low cost domestic flights**

LUCKNOW

Shankh Air, a new domestic carrier headed by Shrawan Kumar Vishwakarma, is scheduled to commence flight operations from Lucknow in March 2026. Having received a No Objection Certificate from the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the airline will initially connect ten cities, including Delhi, Mumbai, Varanasi, and Ahmedabad. Distinguishing itself from competitors, Shankh Air claims it will reject dynamic pricing, meaning fares will remain stable during peak morning or evening hours and even during major festivals. The airline will utilize Airbus A320 aircraft, starting with three planes and targeting a fleet of twenty-five by 2027.

**Sigra stadium set to host national volleyball championship**

VARANASI

The Senior National Volleyball Championship will commence on January 4 at Sigra Stadium in Varanasi, with matches scheduled across four courts. The eight-day tournament will see participation from 1,022 male and female players representing 73 teams from different states and regions of the country.

According to officials, preparations for the championship

have been completed at Dr. Sampurnanand Stadium, Sigra, where players, officials, and technical staff will be accommodated during the event.

Teams arriving in Varanasi will be housed in designated hotels and facilities arranged by the organizers to ensure smooth conduct of the competition.

Ahead of the tournament, selection trials for the national team were also held at Sigra Stadium.

**occasion****Over 4 lakh Kalpvasis to observe Magh mela**

PRAYAGRAJ

The annual Magh Mela at the Sangam in Prayagraj will begin on January 3 with the Pausa Purnima bathing festival and will continue until February 15, culminating on Mahashivratri. The month-long religious congregation marks the start of Kalpvas, a traditional period of austerity, discipline and spiritual practice observed on the banks of the Ganga and Yamuna.

This year, the Magh Mela administration expects participation from more than 4



lakh Kalpvasis, a significant increase compared to previous years. Kalpvasis traditionally reside in temporary tents on the riverbanks for the entire duration of the mela, following strict routines of daily bathing, prayer, fasting and meditation despite harsh

winter conditions.

The mela area has been transformed into a large temporary settlement on the sandy stretch of the Sangam. Religious orders, including Dandi sadhus, Ramanandi saints, Khalsa sects and other spiritual institutions, have

**Temporary tent city set up on Sangam sands as month-long Kalpvas begins from January 3**

established camps across multiple sectors. Various religious discourses and spiritual activities are scheduled throughout the mela period.

To manage the rising number of Kalpvasis, the mela administration has, for the first time, developed a separate residential zone named Prayagwal Nagar, spread

across nearly 950 bighas. The new settlement has been established across the Ganga near the Nagvasuki Temple. According to officials, the decision was taken after consultations with pilgrimage priests and stakeholders to ensure better accommodation and crowd management.

Additional tents have also been arranged in different sectors, keeping in mind the age and physical condition of Kalpvasis. Camps have been located close to the riverbanks to minimise walking distance for daily ritual bathing.

**BJP MLA Dr. Shyam Bihari Lal passes away**

BAREILLY

Dr. Shyam Bihari Lal, the BJP MLA representing the Faridpur constituency, passed away following a massive heart attack on Friday, January 2, 2026. The tragic incident occurred at the Bareilly Circuit House during an official meeting chaired by Livestock Minister Dharampal Singh.

According to reports, the MLA suddenly collapsed while the meeting was in progress. Colleagues and aides immediately rushed him to Medicity Hospital, but he could not be



revived and breathed his last during treatment. Notably, Dr. Lal had celebrated his birthday just one day prior to his sudden demise. His passing has triggered a wave of mourning within the Bharatiya Janata Party and across the Bareilly region.



# Prayag Utthan Samiti fulfills its social responsibility, providing relief to the helpless from the biting cold



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Meja.** In view of the increasing severity of the cold, the Prayag Utthan Samiti organized a blanket distribution program at Shri Kashi Prasad Singh Intermediate College

in Katholi, Meja Road. Blankets were distributed to disabled, widowed, and helpless people, providing them with much-needed relief.

The chief guest of the program, Dr. Uday Pratap Singh, said that serving the

weaker sections of society is the main objective of the committee. He said that the Prayag Utthan Samiti will continue to organize such programs from time to time to help those in need. A large number of villagers, social workers,



and local people were present at the program. Discipline and order were maintained during the blanket distribution.

At the end of the program, the school manager, Ajit Singh, expressed his gratitude to all the

guests and contributors. The committee's General Secretary, Abhishek C. Singh, and Dr. Anurag Singh were present as special guests. On this occasion, former village head of Katholi, Hemant Sharma, Madho Prasad Mishra,

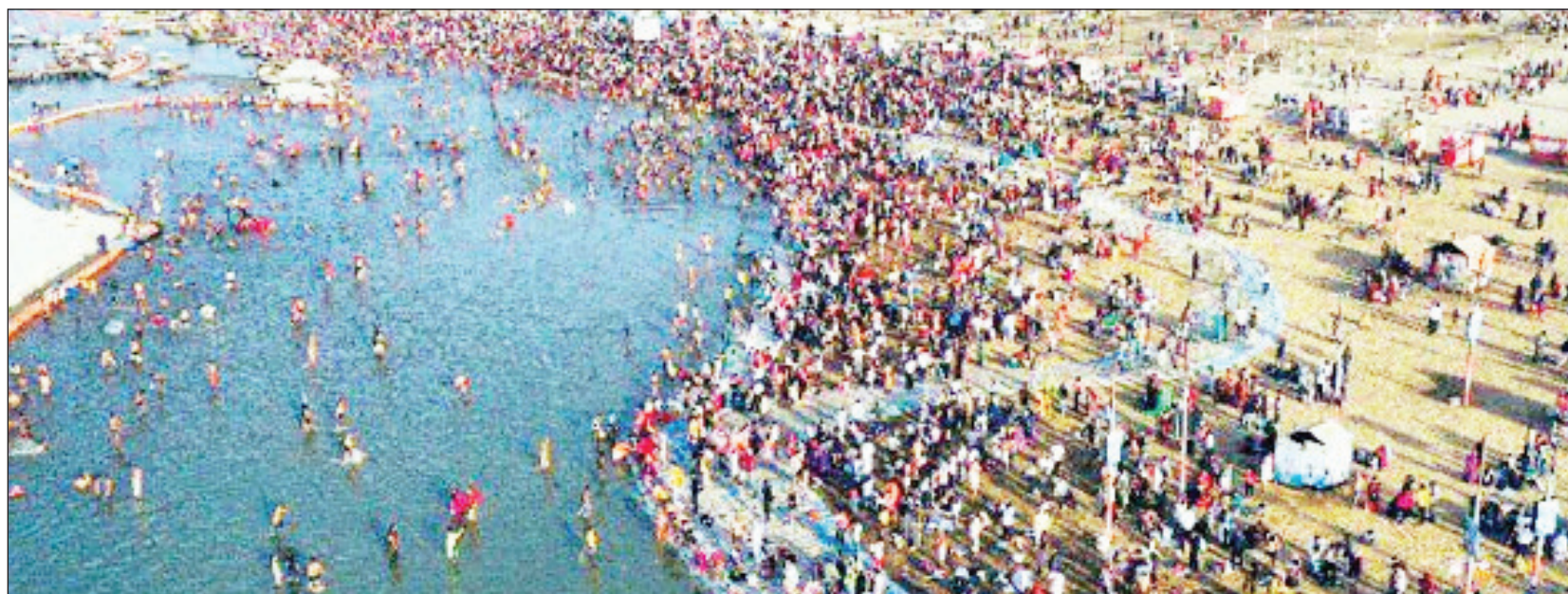
Jitendra Sharma, Jai Prakash, Daya Shankar Gautam, Sheela Yadav, Ramesh Sharma, Girija Sharma, Kripa Shankar Pandey, and a large number of villagers and dignitaries were also present.

## No relief for licensee accused of black marketing ration to 697 cardholders using only three Aadhaar cards

**Prayagraj:** The Allahabad High Court has upheld the Ghaziabad District Magistrate's order canceling the license of a fair price shop, finding a serious case of black marketing of rations to 697 ration cardholders using only three Aadhaar cards. Justice Arun Kumar's single-judge bench recently dismissed the petition of the petitioner, Shaheen Begum, stating in its order that the shopkeeper did not provide any satisfactory explanation as to how rations were distributed to so many ration cardholders using only three Aadhaar cards. The allegations were not answered with concrete evidence. The court stated that there is nothing in the record to show that the affidavits of 162 cardholders filed by the petitioner, which state that they received essential commodities, belong to these same 697 cardholders in whose names the rations were drawn. The investigation revealed that one Aadhaar card was being used to draw rations in the names of multiple cardholders. An FIR was registered against the petitioner and 21 others under Section 66 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 and Section 3/7 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 at Khoda police station. The court said, "The central and state governments are making every effort to reduce the theft of essential commodities meant for genuine cardholders by using electronic devices and biometric authentication of beneficiaries." The petitioner had challenged the order of the competent authority dated January 10, 2019, which cancelled his dealership.

# Strict Police Surveillance for Smooth Movement and Peacekeeping for Devotees at Magh Mela

**Prayagraj.** No encroachment on roads in view of Magh Mela: ACP Tharwai Arun Parashar. Police personnel will be deployed at all points created in view of the fair. Treat arriving devotees well: Guide them to the correct route if needed. Akhand Bharat Sandesh, Tharwai. Prayagraj, the city of Sangam, is called the king of pilgrimage sites. Prayagraj is famous in all respects – religious and historical – where grand fairs like Kumbh, Ardh Kumbh, and Maha Kumbh are organized. It is the confluence of the three rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati, also known as Triveni. The confluence of these three rivers is known as Sangam, and the city is also called Sangam Nagari, where people from India and abroad come for a holy dip. Sangam Nagari is considered a very famous and religious place where people come from far and wide to visit. Once again, a



grand fair is starting today, which will include major bathing festivals like Purnima, Makar Sankranti, Mauni Amavasya, Basant Panchami, Maghi Purnima, and Mahashivratri. Keeping this in mind, to ensure that devotees coming to and from the fair do

not face any inconvenience and there are no traffic jams on the roads, and for the peaceful and smooth conduct of the event, DCP Gangangar Kuldeep Singh Gunawat and ACP Tharwai Arun Parashar continuously inspected traffic control, the points created in view of the

fair, and major intersections, markets, and traffic within the Gangangar zone.

ACP Tharwai Arun Parashar stated that in the Tharwai police station area, including Garapur, Bhopatpur, and other routes, and at the major checkpoints established

under the Sarai Inayat police station, and in the markets under the Phaphamau police station area, strict measures are being taken to prevent any kind of encroachment on the roads. The roads are being kept clear, and shops are being ensured to be in their designated places,

not on the roads, so that devotees do not face any problems. He also inspected the Phaphamau bypass, the bridge, and the pontoon bridges constructed for traffic movement. He further stated that to maintain smooth traffic flow and law and order, adequate police force has been deployed, and all police personnel are performing their duties diligently. Health and medical services, ambulance services, and police emergency services are also in place and will be available whenever needed.

Devotees are being treated courteously and guided properly when necessary. Illegal encroachments in the markets will also be controlled. Additional police force will be deployed at Phaphamau bridge, market, and other places to ensure smooth traffic flow. Additional police force arrangements have also been made for the major bathing festivals.

## Dense Fog in Prayagraj: Traffic Affected Due to Cold and Darkness, Passenger Boards Wrong Train

Prayagraj

**Dense fog** has enveloped Prayagraj city for the past three days. The fog continued today, Friday. The cold winds and biting chill have disrupted daily life. On Thursday, there was a brief period of weak sunshine in the afternoon, but it was ineffective against the intense cold. Doctors advise people to only leave their homes if absolutely necessary. The maximum temperature recorded on Thursday was 20.4 degrees Celsius, while on Wednesday it was 16.2 degrees Celsius. This means that the maximum temperature increased by 4.2 degrees Celsius in 24 hours. Today, Friday, the



minimum temperature will remain between 11 and 12 degrees Celsius. The visibility in the morning was so poor that nothing was visible even at close range. The fog was so thick at Prayag Junction, Allahabad University, and the Civil Lines area that people couldn't see anything nearby. This is why the speed of vehicles has been reduced to

40 to 50 km/h due to the fog. At Prayag Junction, a passenger who arrived in the morning to catch the AJ Passenger train boarded a train going to Ayodhya. Later, when he realized it was the wrong train, he got off at Phaphamau station. The dense fog at the station made it difficult to see, and he mistakenly boarded the wrong train.

## Maharshi Vidya Mandir wins the thrilling final match and lifts the trophy



**Phaphamau.** The final match of the New Vardaan Hospital 5-match series was played on Friday at the Dev Sports Cricket Ground. Maharshi Vidya Mandir won the toss and elected to bowl first. Dev Sports, batting first, managed to score 154 runs in 31.4 overs, losing all their wickets in the stipulated 35-over match. Aman Singh scored 43 runs, Sushant Singh Patel 27 runs, and

Akash Patel 15 runs. In bowling, Shreyayu took 3 wickets, Vipul 3 wickets, and Varsh Gupta 2 wickets. Maharshi Vidya Mandir, batting second, scored 155 runs in 34.5 overs, losing 8 wickets, and won the New Vardaan Hospital Cricket Series title 3-2. Ashutosh Pratap Singh contributed 35 runs, Shreyayu 29 runs, Vipul 27 runs, Armaan 16 runs, and Varsh Gupta 10

runs. From Dev Sports, Dev Yadav and Ved Prakash Yadav took 2 wickets each. The Man of the Match award was given to Vipul by Mr. Vimal Yadav, the owner of New Vardaan Hospital. The Best Batsman of the series was Aman Singh, Best Bowler Neeraj Bhartiya, Best Wicket Keeper Armaan, and Player of the Tournament Varsh Gupta. The chief guests for this final match

were Ramakant Mishra (Owner of Dev Durga Petrol Pump) and Vimal Yadav (New Vardaan Hospital). Tournament organizers included Ramchandra Prajapati, Saurabh Mishra, Rajesh Yadav, Vikas Yadav, Lalmani Yadav, Sunil Kumar Prajapati, Vivek Yadav, and Vishal Patel. Umpires were Anubhav Yadav and Ranveer Sharma, and the scorer was Sunny Soni.

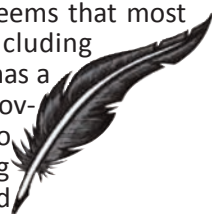


## Editorial

### Indian students flouting cautionary advisories

To prevent violent attacks against Indian students and other Indians, the current Biden administration has provided security, both on and off campus, and in the community at large. But do some Indian students put themselves in harm's way by flouting cautionary advisories on dangerous areas? Four Indian students have been killed in two weeks according to a news report datelined 2 February 2024. They were 19-year-old Shreyas Reddy Benigher from the Linder School of Business, Ohio, Neil Acharya of Purdue University, Vivek Saini from Panchkula in Haryana. The latest is Sameer Kamath, an Indian-American pursuing his doctorate in mechanical engineering at Purdue University again. In addition, Akul Dhawan was found dead of hypothermia outside the University of Illinois UIUC in Champaign. G Dinesh of Telangana and Nikesh of Andhra Pradesh were found gassed to death in their flat in Connecticut. Kuchipudi and Bharat Natyam dancer Amarnath Ghosh, age 34, was shot to death in St Louis Missouri. Paruchuri Abhijit of Boston University was found dead in his car, making up the ninth death so far in 2024. There is at least one death of an Indian every day across the US, says an American community leader Mohan Nannapaneni, founder of volunteer-based non-profit organisation TEAM Aid. These are mostly students and H-1B employees who have recently come to America. Are some Indian students lonely and feeling alienated far from home? Do some of them, unable to fit in socially or cope academically, persist in their studies there due to societal and parental pressures emanating from back in India? Though more often than not, Indian students who go to American universities are exceptionally bright and are there on earned scholarships. But are they mature and experienced enough in the Western cultural mores and milieu to avoid bullying and ridicule? Sometimes, there are underlying mental health issues even amongst gifted students which are activated by the pressures of academics and fitting in. Some die of physical illness and natural causes. Perhaps the lack of seeking timely medical attention in an alien medical system is to blame. Again, this is a phenomenon that affects foreign students even here in India, because many tend to neglect themselves in the absence of relatives to keep an eye on them. In January 2024, a young girl graduate student Jaahnvi Kandula was run over by a speeding policeman Officer Kevin Dave in a police car at a street intersection crosswalk in Seattle. To compound matters, the manslaughter caused by the police car being driven at 119 kmph was laughed off by another Seattle Police Officer Daniel Auderer, who said Kandula's life had 'limited value'. He dismissed the proposition that officer Dave was at fault and that a criminal investigation was necessary. The Ministry of External Affairs in India has said a total of 403 Indian students have died abroad from various causes since 2018. The largest number of deaths occurred in Canada followed by

Britain. Several voices in India are being raised against the necessity of sending Indian students to study abroad. Perhaps the answer lies in sending them to better regulated and safer places such as Singapore where the spectre of racism is largely absent. It seems that most of the White world, including Australia and New Zealand, has a racist problem that their governments are struggling to quell. The lure of obtaining lucrative jobs in Europe and America by studying and graduating from their universities.



## Attack on Gwadar: Crucial lessons for Pakistan

**Striking** Gwadar has immense geopolitical significance, as such attacks are designed to scare away whatever investment and economic activities are being carried out in the coastal city and also reveal the vulnerability of CPEC. Image Courtesy: AP The attack on Gwadar's Port Authority Complex on March 20, 2024, is yet another reminder of the grim trajectory of militancy in Pakistan. Within days of a major terrorist attack in North Waziristan, in which seven Pakistan Army soldiers, including two officers, were killed, militants targeted a facility that houses government offices, including those of security agencies. On March 18, between the two

attacks, the Pakistan Air Force conducted strikes on multiple targets in Spera district of Khost Province and Barmal district of Paktika Province, in Afghanistan. The Pakistan Foreign Office had issued a press release stating that, in addition to the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), commanders of the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Network (HGB) were also the "prime targets" of these airstrikes. The Majeed Brigade, affiliated with the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), claimed responsibility for the attack. The lethal Guerilla Cell Majeed Brigade formed in 2011 is named after a guard of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was killed while attempting to assassinate the PPP founder. It is known for mostly targeting security forces and Chinese interests in Pakistan. A press release from Inter Services Public Relations said that a group of eight terrorists attempted to enter the Port Authority Colony but were successfully thwarted by security forces personnel. "Own troops employed for security responded immediately and effectively engaged the terrorists, and in ensuing fire exchange, all eight terrorists were sent to hell," said the statement. They also reported the deaths of two Pakistani soldiers in the attack while stating that the security forces in Pakistan 'remain determined to thwart attempts at sabotaging

peace and stability of Balochistan'. In yet another incident on March 21, two soldiers were killed after a suicide bomber struck a military convoy on Tank Road in Dera Ismail Khan. It is reported that the attack also injured at least 22 personnel. These incidents reveal that, far from being neutralised, separatist militants remain a potent threat in Pakistan. **Previous Incidents** This is not the first time Gwadar and its environs have been targeted by insurgents. Here, separatism and geopolitics combine in a lethal cocktail as militants target Chinese interests in what is supposed to be the 'jewel in the CPEC crown'.

peace and stability of Balochistan'. In yet another incident on March 21, two soldiers were killed after a suicide bomber struck a military convoy on Tank Road in Dera Ismail Khan. It is reported that the attack also injured at least 22 personnel. These incidents reveal that, far from being neutralised, separatist militants remain a potent threat in Pakistan. **Previous Incidents** This is not the first time Gwadar and its environs have been targeted by insurgents. Here, separatism and geopolitics combine in a lethal cocktail as militants target Chinese interests in what is supposed to be the 'jewel in the CPEC crown'.

# The demystification of MS



that hour, that time. And then of course, someone like MS came along. There were too many stark differences between the dadi era and the Dhoni era that followed, but we won't go into any of that. That is not at the heart of this narration. But there's a reason I bring up the dadi announcement, made at a time when social media was not the monster it is today. So I get the intent behind that and the manner in which it was made. Living in a time now when every movement of a public figure is somehow caught on camera and splashed across social media platforms, MS Dhoni's abstinence from the same, is remarkable. To understand this you somehow have to understand the man. And the only way you can truly get him, is if you interact with him face to face. There is no WhatsApp culture with MS (surprise, surprise). I worked

with the Chennai Super Kings franchise for close to five years. That is a long time when you look at career goals and what you want to do, because there has to be constant evaluation and recalibration. This obviously doesn't apply to the man who held on to the same position at CSK for 17 long years. I think I was lucky to be a part of a set up back then with all the senior hands in the system at their peak. Age was not on their side, but the vigour was sky-high because the franchise had just come out of a 2-year suspension. I guess to this day, if you ask anyone who walks down the corridors of Chepauk or the India Cements building, the 2018 season would be remembered as one of the best years for this group. A miracle season that only MS could have manifested. I'll circle back to this in just a bit. Chennai Super Kings, I realise

now, is the equivalent of Gryffindor of Harry Potter world - the House that every young wizard entering the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, desires to be a part of. It's the right of passage. And it sounds about correct doesn't it? CSK has witnessed a lot of wizardry over the years too. So I only have gratitude. Not because of getting an opportunity to work with CSK alone, though I am certain that is on everyone's bucket list. But because I got to spend time and get glimpses into what made MS, well MS. I just want to share what I believe makes MS think the way he does. I want to connect the dots so you get a picture - maybe not the complete one - but a semblance of it, to fathom just why the hero you grew up idolising, or who inspired you to take up the sport, or who made you the leader you are today, does what he does and in the way he does it in. We talk of MS making things happen on the field. We see him controlling and taking charge of the moments that somehow define the game and the end result. I think a lot of that comes from the way he thinks off the field too. Staying in control of the little things that eventually lead him to the big one. He resides in the small moments yes, but his sight is always on the bigger picture. Even the night after that 4th IPL title win, MS was already in the future. The squad had executed a fantastic turnaround from the horror season that 2020 was. That win in 2021 was a superb one, given the

situation and MS approaching his big 40. And even when the whole group was celebrating the season that was, MS was already thinking of title number 5. That's the kind of person he is. He is able to compartmentalise his life to fit into boxes that make it part of a massive assembly line in the machinery of his brain. He believes that one needs to focus on moving from point A to B and henceforth to get to the ultimate goal - if that is infact Z. That's what you see on the field too. He talks about the process so much. It's a phrase that I am sure many of us in the sporting and broadcast industry would have casually scoffed at, at some point. But there is so much truth to that phrase or mantra because that is what he has constantly lived by. It has worked for him, and so he continues to believe that it will. Every franchise has its traditions, routines, certain things that they do. There are a few traditions in CSK too. And one of those is the inaugural team dinner. It is held just before the start of every season. The entire group from players, support staff, management, owners and families are invited to reflect on the past seasons and look to the future. There are a few moments that are highlighted, MS usually makes a speech, sometimes he refrains. It is a very private affair and is off camera, not for the media or even to post on their own platforms. In a world where every franchise lives on creating, curating and publishing real to reel and turn interactions to digital imprints.

## Occasional protests were witnessed that were germane

**Occasional** protests were witnessed that were germane due to the death of long-time dissident leader Navalny in an Arctic jail, the arrest of some opposition leaders, and the disqualification of others. But the Russians are at war, which might be the key to understanding. Some might oppose it, as is natural, and would want a change in the leadership. But when the question of Russian nationalism and patriotism confronts them, they want a leader who can withstand the external pressures and win it for them. Russian history attests to that. The Russians have an uncanny ability to handle pain and adversity. This also explains Putin's wide margins of victory, apart from the fact that this has been a trend all

along with weak, not so popular, and credible opposition candidates or parties. The there-is-no-alternative (TINA) factor also operates in such a scenario. Regime change agendas of the West and continuous tirades against their strongest opponent add to his appeal. Ironically, the West is equally responsible for Putin's victory. Well, Russia says it has its own democratic governance model. Apart from the Russian pride and Putin redeeming their pride back after the greatest humiliation in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war is being perceived, at a popular level, as the war by the West against Russia as the Grey Zone warfare and one-sided narratives predominate their respective global

spaces. The unprecedented Western sanctions may have definitely impacted the Russian economy and policy. But the Russian 'war economy', which has performed as well, if not better, than their Western partners, growing at over 3 per cent, has gone in Putin's favour. During his 24 years, the GDP seems to have grown by over 11 times to \$2.2 trillion, and its debt-to-GDP ratio went down from 92 per cent to 23 per cent of GDP. Consequently, with a declining population, per capita income also went up by 10 times, and inflation is said to be down to 3.5 per cent from a high of 36.6 per cent in 1999. All these do have an impact on people's political preferences. Hence, Putin's approval ratings.

## How the US stance on India's CAA is misplaced, misinformed

**When** India took steps to implement the Citizenship

Amendment Act, not many countries took a deeper look at it. Not much opposition was visible among the Indian public. Why did the US State Department unconstructively react to it? Did such a knee-jerk reaction serve any American interest? Did it benefit any community that the US State Department perceived as a potential victim of CAA?

Without any doubt, such a reaction only supplements the growing areas of mistrust between India and the United States in recent times. It serves only one purpose. It helps create cracks in the painstakingly constructed strategic partnership between the two countries by successive administrations in Washington and New Delhi. American stand on the Indo-Canadian Nijjar episode, Washington's inaction over anti-India separatist groups targeting Hindu temples and Indian consulates in the US, India's neutrality over the US-Russian Cold War in Ukraine, its hesitation to be fully on board with the US in containing China, India's selective participation in the US-sponsored Indo-Pacific Economic Forum, New Delhi's strong position to defend the interests of the developing countries in WTO negotiations, and several other



factors have come in the way of realising the full potential of strategic partnership. American policymakers are aware of modern Indian history. The US reaction to CAA is perhaps not "misplaced, misinformed, and unwarranted". The expression of "concern" and desire to carefully "monitor" the implementation of the CAA by the US government are based on cautious calculation and strategic considerations. The Indian government officials have conveyed multiple times to their US counterparts the rationale behind the CAA, and the Ministry of Home Affairs has made it amply clear that the implementation of the CAA will not adversely affect the Muslim citizens of India. The American diplomats residing in India are also aware that CAA has been politicised to serve the interests of the opposition parties. The main reason the US State Department is reportedly "concerned" over a purely domestic issue in India is the American irritation over India's determination to maintain its strategic autonomy,

notwithstanding its desire to sustain strategic companionship with Washington on selected issues. Despite about a quarter of a century of US efforts to make India a very close strategic partner that would support US positions on international affairs, Washington's ambition remains distant. India has adopted a measured stand on the Ukraine War, has not abandoned its strategic relations with Russia, maintains its strategic partnership with Iran, and follows a foreign economic policy that suits India's interests the most. However, India, at the same time, has not done anything that would adversely affect the US. The US policy community needs to appreciate that India does not support the Russian war efforts in Ukraine, India does play an active role in addressing the unconventional warfare in the Red Sea, and though not part of US-led international efforts, India does support the idea of managing the aggressive role of China in the Indo-Pacific by being part of the Quadrilateral Security Initiative.



## Jaunpur Teams Emerge as Champions and Runners-up



### Ghazipur

The final match of the inter-collegiate cricket tournament, organized under the aegis of Veer Bahadur Singh Purvanchal University, Jaunpur, was played on January 2nd at the postgraduate college sports ground. This exciting tournament, which began on December 28th saw enthusiastic participation from various college teams. In the final match, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar College, Jaunpur, delivered a stellar performance and clinched the title. The players showcased excellent teamwork, skill and determination. During the final match, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar PG College, Jaunpur, scored 148 runs, thanks

to a brilliant 80-run innings by Ajit Verma. In reply, the team from Mohammad Hasan PG College, Jaunpur, could only manage 126 runs in 19.3 overs before being all out. Thus, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar College emerged as the winner and Mohammad Hasan PG College as the runner-up. At the closing ceremony, the chief guest and Principal of the college, Professor Dr. Raghavendra Kumar Pandey, said that success in cricket is achieved not only through talent but also through hard work, discipline and honesty. He encouraged the young players, emphasizing that sportsmanship and adherence to rules are the keys to success in every aspect of life.

## Inspection of Divisional Railway Manager at DDU Junction in view of Magh Mela-2026

### Chandauli

Keeping in mind the possible crowd on the occasion of Magh Mela-2026, a surprise inspection of Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Junction (DDU Junction) was conducted on Friday by Uday Singh Meena, Divisional Railway Manager of Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Division of East Central Railway. On this occasion, all the branch officers including Additional Divisional Railway Manager Dilip Kumar were present. During the inspection, the circulating area, proposed holding area in the main building, controlled entry system, passenger waiting room, foot over bridge, ticket counter located at the southern end, platform number 7/8 and 1/2, new foot over bridge, CCTV control room located on platform number 2, special festival control room and the condition of rest rooms, availability and condition of toilets was thoroughly observed. Additional arrangements are being made keeping in mind the possible movement of a large number of devotees during the fair period. For



the convenience of passengers, PRS counters at both ends of the station, mobile UTS counters at the entry gates and the facility of booking reserved, unreserved and platform tickets through 'RailOne' app are available. Holding areas have been identified at the station for crowd management, where proper arrangements have been made for passengers to sit, wait and receive information. Help booths are operational. To avoid unnecessary crowd on the platform, passengers have been requested to wait in the holding area only. There will be 24x7 surveillance through the special festival control room established at the station and the war room located in the divisional office. All departments have been directed to ensure availability of necessary

resources for the convenience, safety and smooth movement of passengers. Railway administration requests passengers to use 'RailOne' app on priority for their travel related needs. This app acts as an integrated digital platform through which passengers can avail reserved, unreserved and platform ticket booking, live train status, PNR status, coach position, onboard meal booking, complaint/suggestion registration, parcel tracking and other services at one place. The app also reduces the need to stand in queues at the station while promoting digital transactions. Passengers are expected to follow the signals displayed at the station and instructions of the staff and in case of any inconvenience, seek assistance from the nearest railway personnel.

## Former Principal Secretary (Justice) J.S. Yadav Passes Away



Initially operating in the garden of the late Rameshwar Das, a moneylender from Sadat, the college is now located in Atampur Chhapra

J.S. Yadav, a retired District Judge and former Principal Secretary (Justice) of the Uttar Pradesh government passed away on January 1st at 10:30 PM. He was a native of Daharmawa Kaura village in the Sadat area of Ghazipur and was currently residing with his family in Keshav Bihar Colony, Pandeypur, Varanasi. He established the Baba Gajadhar Das Women's College for the education of girls in rural areas. Initially operating in the garden of the late Rameshwar Das, a moneylender from Sadat, the college is now located in Atampur Chhapra. He also established the Baba Gajadhar Das Nursing College, which is benefiting girls from the region. His death is an irreparable loss to the district. Prominent citizens, social and educational institutions of the area have expressed deep sorrow over his demise and prayed to God for the peace of the departed soul and for strength for the bereaved family.

## Religion Islam is the religion of peace: Maulana Mohd. Hashim Ashrafi

### Bhadohi

Islah Maashra and Jashne Ghausul Wara Conference was organized last night in the ground in front of Kujrane Wali Mosque located in Mohalla Goryana. The conference was inaugurated by Hafiz Qari Ali Raza and Hafiz Qari Fahad Attari. After that, Maddahe Khairul Anam Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam poet Qasim Nadimi, Ayaan Akhtar, Abdul Qadir, Qais Raza recited Naati Nabi and made people dance. Hazrat Allama and Maulana Mohd. Hashim Ashrafi, while giving an Islamic speech, said that the religion of Islam is a religion of peace and tranquility.



Said, every command of my prophet is a lesson for the people of the world. Said the Prophet has given great importance to the rights and entitlements of women and girls. Said to fulfill the rights of daughters and sisters. Make marriage easy as is the

Sunnah of the Prophet. Maulana Syed Shane Alam said that you should mold the children in the Islamic mold and teach them knowledge. Today our society seems to be far away from education. Said that education is the light by which home, family and society can be illuminated.

Without training we cannot progress. Said if you want respect and glory then pray Namaz and read Quran. All troubles are averted by reading the Quran. Reading Quran is the guarantee of success in this world. The conference was presided over by Imame Eidgah Hafiz Ashfaq Rabbani and sponsored by Ustadul Huffaz Hafiz Parvez alias Achhe Mian. Nizammat was done by Asif Barkati. Members Noor Pe Jalwa Afroz were Maulana Mufti Zakir Ismaili, Hafiz Fahad Attari, Hafiz Ali Raza, Hafiz Rehan. Bani Hafeez and Maulana Arafat Hussain of the conference thanked the gathering.

## CO Ramsanehighat Receives Mahakumbh Seva Medal

### Barabanki

For his commendable contribution to the successful organization of Mahakumbh-2025 held in Prayagraj, Circle Officer (CO) Ramsanehighat Jatashankar Mishra, posted in Barabanki district has been honored with the Mahakumbh Seva Medal and a certificate of appreciation. The award, conferred by the Government of Uttar Pradesh, recognizes his outstanding efficiency, dedication and exemplary



service in ensuring the safety of devotees, smooth traffic management, effective crowd control and maintenance of law and order during the Mahakumbh. On Friday, during a program held at the Police Office in

Barabanki, Superintendent of Police Arpit Vijayvargiya presented the medal to Mishra and lauded his commendable performance and services rendered during the Mahakumbh.

## Emotional Farewell for Retiring Postal Worker Rakesh Awasthi



### Barabanki

A heartfelt farewell ceremony was organized at the Bahramghat Post Office for postal worker Rakesh Kumar Awasthi, who is retiring from his service at the Bhitoli Sub-Division branch office. The program was presided over by Postmaster Santosh Shukla.

During the ceremony, officials and employees praised Awasthi for his long, dedicated and exemplary service and wished him good health and a bright future. Speakers highlighted that he had set a benchmark of honesty, commitment and devotion during his tenure, which will always be remembered by the postal

department. Colleagues shared experiences and memories with him, making the farewell an emotional occasion. Postal staff including Nitin Mishra, Subhash Verma, Suresh, Vijay Kumar, Joya and Avdhesh extended their best wishes and New Year greetings. The event concluded in a harmonious and warm atmosphere.

## Illegal Tree Felling and Encroachment on Irrigation Department Bund

### Barabanki

A serious case involving government property under the Irrigation Department has come to light from Gram Panchayat Akouna in Surtganj block. Villager Kaushal Kishor, son of Sheetal Prasad has filed a complaint on the Integrated Grievance Redressal System (Jan Sunwai) Uttar Pradesh under reference number 40017626000207, regarding illegal tree felling and encroachment on the department bund. Kaushal Kishor, resident of Gram Dihua, Majra Akouna, Surtganj block, Ramnagar tehsil, Mohammadpur Khala police station, Barabanki district stated in his petition that 12 trees on the bund near Madraha village, Hetmapur were illegally cut on 19 December

2025. According to the petition, the trees were cut secretly by Santaram, son of Ishwar Din, resident of Gram Madraha, Majra Akouna. The complaint says the felling was done without permission, directly damaging government property. **(No action despite reporting)** Kaushal Kishor said that the incident was immediately reported to PRB 112, the Irrigation Department and the Forest Department officials. Despite this, no concrete or effective action has been taken. Officials reportedly only inspect the site and leave, while no punitive action has been taken against the accused, emboldening him further. **(Encroachment of bund land)** The complaint also mentions that the

accused has cultivated about three meters of bund land on both sides, integrating it into his own field and sowing crops. This clearly constitutes illegal encroachment and violation of rules. **(Potential future risk)** Villagers warned that if action is not taken in time, it could adversely affect the structural integrity of the bund, irrigation management and flood safety in the area. Illegal felling and land encroachment may weaken the bund. **(Demand for high-level inquiry)** Kaushal Kishor has urged the Executive Engineer, Irrigation Department, Barabanki, to conduct a high-level investigation, take strict legal action against the guilty and immediately restore the illegally cut trees and encroached bund land to prevent recurrence.

## Free Eye Camp at Hadiyakol Ashram, 1500 Successful Surgeries



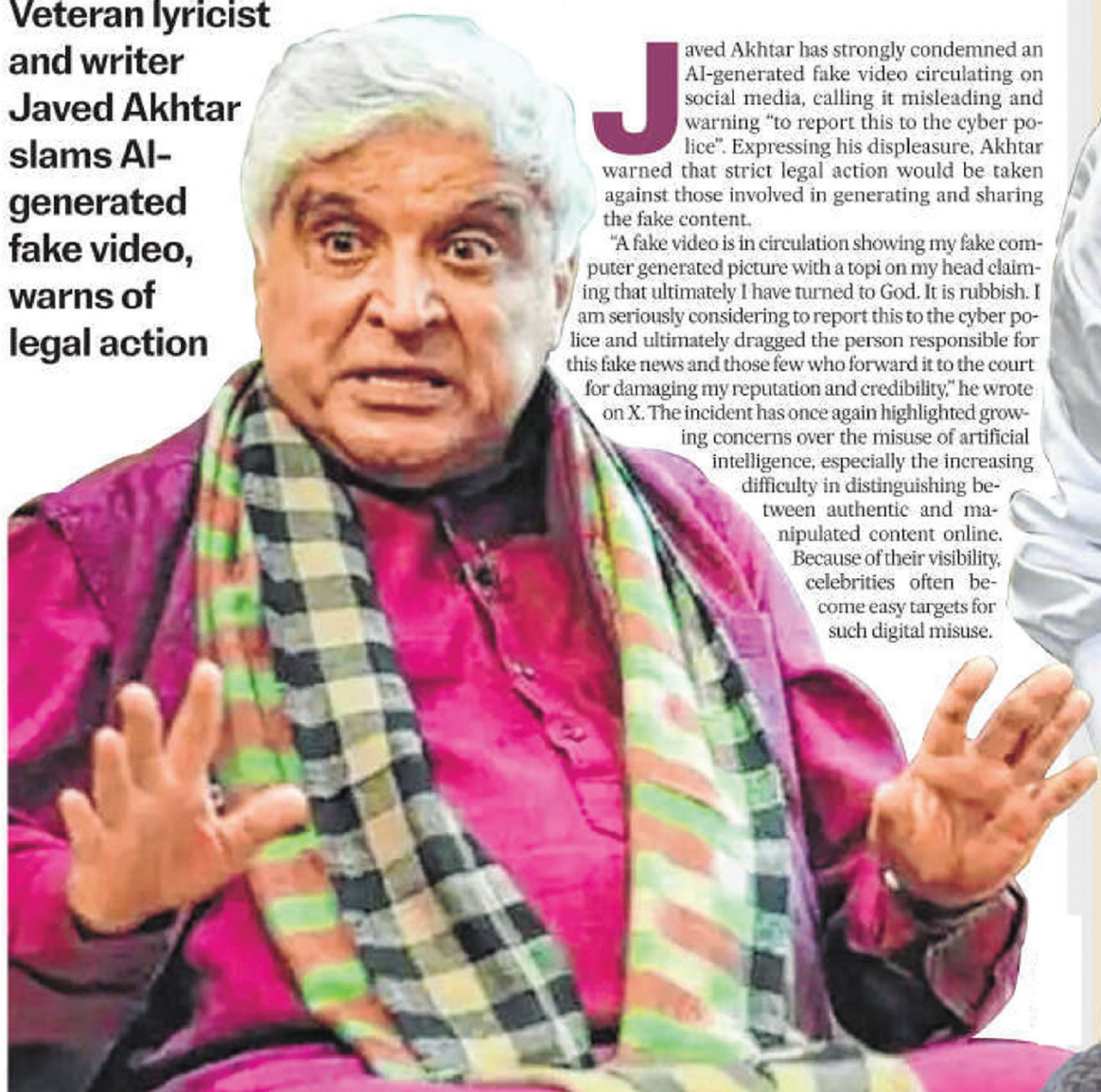
### Barabanki

A large-scale free eye (cataract) surgery camp is being organized at Shri Ram Van Kutir Ashram, Hadiyakol, where a total of 1500 successful cataract surgeries have been performed using the IOL method since December 28. The camp was inspected by Additional Chief Medical Officer Dr. D.K. Srivastava, DPM Barabanki, Senior Eye Officer T.N. Verma and Ramachal. The surgeries are being conducted by the team of Dr. Jacob Prabhakar from Jalandhar, Punjab. According to ashram volunteer Manish Mehrotra, a 14-member delegation of Shri Sita Ram Satsang Samiti, Kolkata (West Bengal), visited the camp and appreciated the humanitarian services being carried out. The OPD services are being handled by the team of Dr. Ramesh Hooda from Rohtak, Haryana.



# 'I am seriously considering to report this'

**Veteran lyricist and writer Javed Akhtar slams AI-generated fake video, warns of legal action**



**J**aved Akhtar has strongly condemned an AI-generated fake video circulating on social media, calling it misleading and warning "to report this to the cyber police". Expressing his displeasure, Akhtar warned that strict legal action would be taken against those involved in generating and sharing the fake content.

"A fake video is in circulation showing my fake computer generated picture with a topi on my head claiming that ultimately I have turned to God. It is rubbish. I am seriously considering to report this to the cyber police and ultimately dragged the person responsible for this fake news and those few who forward it to the court for damaging my reputation and credibility," he wrote on X. The incident has once again highlighted growing concerns over the misuse of artificial intelligence, especially the increasing difficulty in distinguishing between authentic and manipulated content online. Because of their visibility, celebrities often become easy targets for such digital misuse.

Jennifer Lopez addresses online trolls during her Las Vegas residency debut, dismissing age-shaming and criticism over her bold fashion choices

# JLO CLAPS BACK



**J**ennifer Lopez has responded sharply to online criticism surrounding her bold fashion choices during the opening night of her new Las Vegas residency, *Up All Night*, at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace.

The 56-year-old global pop icon addressed trolls during her December 30 debut performance, shutting down comments questioning her age and attire with a confident and clear statement.

Taking a moment to speak directly to the audience during the live performance, Lopez acknowledged the negative remarks she often encounters on social media. She made it clear that "they no longer affect her". "Thank God I've been doing this a long time. I can ignore a lot of it. It really doesn't mean anything," she said.

She added that she often reminds her children not to take online negativity seriously, noting that some comments even make her laugh. Lopez went on to quote some of the criticism she regularly sees online, "Why does she always dress that way? Why don't she dress her age? Why she always naked?" she said, before delivering a punchline that drew loud cheers from the crowd, "And I said, If you had this booty, you'd be naked too."

The 56-year-old global pop icon addressed trolls during her December 30 debut performance

# Ranbir Kapoor decodes ARKS name

**RANBIR REVEALS MEANING BEHIND ARKS NAME**

**A**ctor Ranbir Kapoor turned entrepreneur with the launch of his first-ever lifestyle brand, ARKS, which was announced on his 42nd birthday on September 28, 2024. Soon after the announcement, netizens began speculating about the meaning behind the brand name, with many guessing that ARKS was named after his wife Alia Bhatt and daughter Raha Kapoor. The actor has now finally revealed the real meaning behind ARKS in a recent interview, where he gave a tour of his factory and spoke about the future of his business.

**RANBIR PRAISES BROTHER-IN-LAW BHARAT SAHNI**

Ranbir also shared that the factory belonged to his brother-in-law, Bharat Sahni. He praised him as 'the amazing Bharat', calling him a gem of a person who was kind enough to let him borrow the space. Ranbir added that Bharat is a big part of ARKS' story, as he is one of the brand's manufacturers for one of its products.

**RANBIR KAPOOR ON THE FUTURE OF ARKS**

Ranbir added that he is closely involved in developing products at his company. He shared that as he grows older, his desire for material things has reduced, as one always needs basics like a T-shirt or a denim jacket worn anytime. That's where ARKS comes in. The actor said the plan is to expand into lifestyle segments, including athleisure. He also revealed interest in the furniture market, adding that under ARKS umbrella, the brand aims to sell a sensibility, aesthetic, and lifestyle.



# That chapter ended: Malhan

Abhishek Malhan aka Fukra Insaan slams reports of engagement with Jiya Shankar

**Y**ouTuber Abhishek Malhan, popularly known as Fukra Insaan, reacted to reports linking him romantically to actress and former *Bigg Boss OTT 2* co-contestant Jiya Shankar. He dismissed the claims as baseless and urged people to stop dragging his name into unfounded relationship rumours.

The clarification came a few days after an entertainment page shared a post that went viral, claiming that Abhishek and Jiya were set to get engaged. The post suggested that the two had made their relationship official and were preparing to take the next step, even extending congratulatory wishes to the "cute couple." Soon after, similar claims began circulating on X, with some users going a step further and alleging that the duo was already engaged.

Addressing the speculation, Abhishek took to his Instagram story on January 1 to set the record straight. "I want to make one thing very clear-please stop linking my name with anyone. I was part of a show three years ago, and that chapter end"



there. My choices and stance were made very clear back then, and nothing has changed since," he wrote.

Expressing his frustration, Abhishek added that such rumours tend to resurface repeatedly without any basis. "What's disappointing is that this has become a pattern. Almost every year, out of nowhere, the same narratives resurface without any reason or context. Even I can see it, and I believe the audience is smart enough to notice this pattern too," he stated. He further clarified that he does not engage in "games, assumptions, or un-

# AP Dhillon rings in NY 2026 with BSF jawans

**S**inger and global music sensation AP Dhillon began the New Year on a patriotic note by visiting the Longewala Post in Rajasthan, where he met soldiers of the Border Security Force (BSF). The artist shared glimpses from his visit on social media and expressed gratitude for the sacrifices made by the armed forces to protect the nation.

Taking to his official handle on Thursday, AP Dhillon wrote, "Meeting the brave BSF soldiers at Longewala Post to start off the New Year. Grateful for the sacrifices they make each and every day to keep us and our families safe."

His post was accom-

panied by a video that caught the attention of fans and netizens alike.

In the clip, the singer is seen interacting with BSF personnel, engaging in conversations, and attentively listening to their experiences.

One of the standout moments from the clip shows AP Dhillon learning how to properly salute, guided by the soldiers. Longewala Post is a site known for its strategic importance and its role in India's military history.

Soon after the post went live, fans flooded the comments section with praise, applauding AP Dhillon for starting the year by honouring the nation's protectors. Many users hailed the gesture as "heartwarming" and "truly inspiring," while others thanked the BSF soldiers for their service.







## Indian student succumbs while trying to flee Germany fire

**Berlin:** Hruthik Reddy's family had been eagerly awaiting his homecoming for the festival of Sankranti. Now it is the body of the student from Telangana that will arrive in the new year.

The 25-year-old student died in a fire accident in Germany late on Wednesday night. A severe fire reportedly broke out at his Berlin house.

While trying to escape the rapidly spreading blaze and thick smoke, Hruthik is said to have jumped from the upper floor of the apartment and suffered head injuries. He was rushed to a nearby hospital but died while undergoing treatment. The mishap took place on New Year's Day.

A cloud of gloom has descended upon his home at Malkapur village in Jangaon, with the family now grappling with the shock of his untimely demise. Hruthik Reddy had reportedly left for Magdeburg in Germany in June 2023 to pursue an MS degree at the University of Europe. He graduated from Vaagdevi College of Engg in 2022. He postponed taking a break during Dussehra, planning instead to come home in January for Sankranti.

Authorities in Germany are probing the cause of the fire. Meanwhile, Hruthik's family in Telangana has reached out to ministry of external affairs and the Indian Embassy in Germany to expedite the process of bringing his mortal remains back to his home village for the final rites.

**SWITZERLAND SKI RESORT INFERNO** | Multiple people, including a teenager, remain missing; there is an agonising wait as officials rush to identify victims

## Flames apparently started by sparklers, prosecutor says

CRANS-MONTANA

Valais attorney general Beatrice Pilloud said the fire appeared to have started from "sparklers put on bottles of champagne that was moved too close to the ceiling."

She said: "Everything leads us to believe the fire was started from sparkling candles or sparklers put on bottles of champagne that were moved too close to the ceiling."

"From that a blaze began very quickly...There are videos that have been analysed; there are people who have been interviewed and reports have been made."

Lists have been provided of those who were present on New Year's Eve, she added.

Italian foreign minister Antonio Tajani has said three of the hospitalised casualties following the New Year's fire in the Swiss ski resort of Crans-Montana, Switzerland, are not identifiable, CNN reported. "There are still three injured that have not been identified, and they might be Italian," Tajani said to reporters on his arrival to the Swiss resort, adding, six Italians remain missing and 13 of those injured are Italian.

**POPE LEO EXPRESSES 'COMPASSION AND CONCERN' TO FAMILIES**  
Pope Leo XIV has expressed his condolences to the families of victims of the deadly New Year's fire at the Swiss ski resort Crans-Montana. "His holiness Pope Leo XIV joins in the mourning of the families and of the entire Swiss confederation," a



A man lights a candle next to the tributes laid for the victims outside Le Constellation bar. —Reuters

telegram sent on his behalf and signed by the Vatican's secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, said on Friday. "He wishes to express to the relatives of the victims his compassion and solicitude," the telegram said.

**TEENS AMONG DEAD OR MISSING**  
Many victims of the Crans-Montana blaze were young people "full of plans, hope and dreams," according to president of the Swiss Confederation, Guy Parmelin. Some of those missing or confirmed dead are under 18. Under Swiss federal law, beer and wine can be sold to people from the age of 16, while spirits can be sold to people aged 18 or over, according to the country's Federal Office of Public Health.

**FRENCH SOCCER PLAYER INJURED**  
Tahiry Dos Santos, a 19-year-old trainee soccer player from French club FC Metz, has suffered burns to 30% of his body,

according to his agent. "I can't tell you he's doing well, simply because he's suffering, he's suffering terribly," Christophe Hutteau told CNN. "He's suffered burns to 30% of his body." The young player was transferred on Thursday night to a specialised hospital center in Stuttgart, Germany, with his agent noting his breathing ability had "significantly improved since yesterday morning."

**TEEN ITALIAN GOLFER NAMED AMONG VICTIMS**  
Emanuele Galeppini, a 17-year-old Italian golfer, has been named as one of the people who died in the Crans-Montana fire, according to a spokesperson for the Italian foreign ministry and the Italian Golf Federation. The golf federation paid tribute to the teen golf star, describing him as "a young athlete who embodied passion and authentic values." Galeppini lived in Dubai, a spokesperson for the Italian Golf Federation said.

### FACTS AND FIGURES

14 injured receiving treatment in Polish hospitals, PM Donald Tusk says

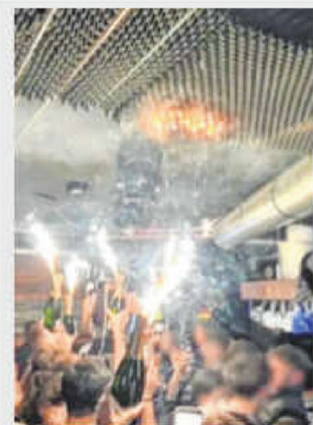
Video shows person trying to put out flames in first moments of fire

19 Italians involved in Swiss bar fire — 6 missing, foreign ministry says

Italian teenager reportedly killed in fire — but foreign ministry not confirming

UK Foreign Office monitoring situation and ready to support any Brits

Discussions under way to fly in burns specialists from France



### WHAT'S KNOWN

40 people have died and 115 are injured, some severely — a Swiss doctor says patients are "very young", between 15 and 25 years old

The fire is thought to have started at 1.30 am on January 1 at Le Constellation bar

Witnesses suggest the flames spread rapidly and the fire could have been caused by waitresses carrying champagne bottles with "flares" or "candles" on top

Eyewitnesses describe scenes of chaos as people tried to escape, including by breaking windows

Swiss President Guy Parmelin says the blaze is "one of the worst tragedies that our country has experienced"

### WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN

The cause remains unknown

It may take days or weeks to identify victims. French and Italians are among missing



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, his wife Ri Sol Ju and their daughter Kim Ju Ae at an event to mark the New Year in Pyongyang. —Reuters

### SUCCESSION BUZZ

## Kim daughter visits family mausoleum

SEOUL

The teenage daughter of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made her first known visit to a sacred family mausoleum, a step experts say bolstered her status as her father's potential heir.

The visit, which occurred on New Year's Day on Thursday, even sparked speculation that the girl, reportedly named Kim Ju Ae and aged about 13, could be named a high-level official at the upcoming ruling Workers' Party congress.

Images carried by North Korea's state media on Friday showed Kim Ju Ae standing in the front row with her parents and deeply bowing at Pyongyang's Kumsusan Palace of the Sun in Pyongyang, where the embalmed bodies of her late grandfather and great-grandfather are on display. The palace is "a place that symbolises legitimacy of the North Korean regime" and her visit there ahead of the Workers' Party congress is a politically orchestrated move, said Cheong Seong-Chang, deputy head of the private Sejong Institute in South Korea.

### Xi invites Lee for 2nd summit

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday invited Korean President Lee Jae Myung to a state visit in Beijing, highlighting China shift towards mending relations South Korea amid regional turbulence. 'Al Jazeera' reported. South Korea's national security adviser Wi Sung-lac said Lee will meet Xi in Beijing on Monday before travelling to Shanghai to visit the historic site of South Korea's provisional government during Japan's 35-year colonial rule.

Kim Jong Un, 41, is the third generation of his family to rule North Korea since the its foundation in 1948. He often marks key state anniversaries by visiting the Kumsusan palace and paying respect to father Kim Jong Il and grandfather Kim Il Sung. Cheong predicted Kim could give daughter the first secretary post at the Workers' Party, the party's No 2 job, at the congress. Others say she is too young to accept such a post and might be given a lower-level job.

## Briefs

### Strong quake jolts Mexico

A quake rattled Mexico on Friday, interrupting President Claudia Sheinbaum's first press briefing of 2026 as seismic alarms sounded. The quake had a magnitude of 6.5, and its epicentre was near San Marcos in Guerrero near the Pacific coast resort of Acapulco. Sheinbaum resumed her briefing a little later saying she had spoken to Guerrero's Governor Evelyn Salgado, and there was no serious damage so far. Residents and tourists in Mexico City and Acapulco rushed into the streets.

### China missile destroyer

Chinese navy has commissioned a new "upgraded" missile destroyer as it's expanding its fleet at a breakneck speed to catch up with the US naval strength. The Chinese PLA Navy has commissioned a new Type 052D guided missile destroyer named Loudi, which features upgraded radar, weapon and network systems.

### Clooney fires back at Don

George Clooney has lashed out at US President Trump for criticising France's decision to grant the actor and family French citizenship. He said his kids have a 'much better life' being raised in France than L.A. He hailed French privacy laws.

## PIO Singaporeans to be nominated MPs

SINGAPORE

Two Indian-origin personalities in Singapore, notable for their contributions in work, community and society, are set to be nominated as members of Parliament next week, a media report said on Friday. The duo is part of the 9 names announced to be Nominated Members of Parliament by President Tharmar Shanmugaratnam on January 8, and take their oaths at the next sitting of Parliament this month, Channel News Asia said. Dr Haresh Singaraju, family physician at National University Polyclinics, and Sanjeev Kumar Tiwari, general secretary of Amalgamated Union of Public Employees, have been named as the proposed NMPs.

The names were released

by the Office of the Clerk of Parliament on Friday, the channel said. Among the nine, CEO of apparel company Sing Lun Holdings Mark Lee Kean Phi is to return for a second term. "They (new NMPs) have made notable contributions in work, community and society, and excelled in their respective fields. I am confident their diverse expertise and experience will enrich the discussions in Parliament as we chart Singapore's path forward in an uncertain and disrupted world," said Leader of the House Indraneel Rajah, an Indian-origin political veteran of ruling People's Action Party, in welcoming the new cohort to the 15th Parliament.

Earlier, a Special Select Committee had invited the general public and functional groups to submit names for its consideration.

## Woman and her grandson die in Gaza tent blaze

**Deir Al Balah:** A grandmother and her grandson, 5, burned to death in Gaza when their tent caught fire, as Palestinians battle harrowing winter in flimsy makeshift housing and the humanitarian crisis deepens. The nylon tent in Yarmouk caught fire on Thursday night from cooking, a neighbour said.

As 2026 begins, the shaky 12-week-old Israel-Hamas ceasefire has ended large-scale Israeli bombardment of Gaza. But Palestinians are being killed daily by Israeli fire, and humanitarian crisis shows no signs of abating.

Over the past weeks, cold winter rains have lashed the sprawling tent cities. Unicef said 6 kids died of weather causes, including a 4-year-old who died in a building collapse; 3 kids have died of hypothermia, officials said. —AP

## Pak archaeologists find rare coins and decorative stones near Taxila

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan archaeologists found rare decorative stones and coins while excavating a Unesco-listed site near Taxila, providing a rare view of the earliest urban settlement of the extensive ancient civilisation. The discoveries were made at the ancient Bhir Mound, where experts unearthed decorative stones dating to the 6th century BC and coins from the 2nd century AD. 'Dawn' reported officials hailed the discovery as the most significant at the site in a decade.

It reported experts uncovered fragments of metamorphic decorative stone identified as lapis lazuli, alongside the rare bronze coins attributed to the Kushan dynasty, dramatically pushing forward the



material narrative of ancient Gandhara. Aasim Dogar, the deputy director of the Punjab Department of Archaeology who serves as head of the excavation team, confirmed the preliminary analysis of the artefacts. "The decorative stones are lapis lazuli, a prized semi-precious stone, while the coins belong to the Kushan period," Dogar said.

The excavation team relied on specialised forensic assistance to date the metal artefacts. Dogar noted detailed numismatic analysis con-



ducted by specialists from the University of Peshawar confirmed the coins bear the image of Emperor Vasudeva.

Vasudeva is recognised by historians as the last of the 'great Kushan rulers' who presided over the region. Dogar said the obverse of the coinage depicts Vasudeva, while the reverse features a female religious deity. He described this specific imagery as a distinct hallmark of Kushan-era religious pluralism, which often blended various theological traditions.

## Maduro open to US talks on drug trafficking

**Caracas:** Venezuela is open to negotiating an agreement with the US to combat drug trafficking, the South American country's President Nicolás Maduro said in a pre-taped interview on Thursday, but he declined to comment on a CIA-led strike last week at a Venezuelan docking area the Trump administration believed was used by cartels.

Maduro, in an interview with Spanish journalist Ignacio Ramonet, reiterated the US wants to force a gov-

ernment change in Venezuela and gain access to oil reserves through monthslong pressure campaign that began with a military deployment to the Caribbean Sea in August.

"What are they seeking? It is clear they seek to impose themselves through threats, intimidation and force," Maduro said, adding, it is time for both nations to "start talking seriously, with data in hand." "The US government knows, because we've

told many of their spokespeople, if they want to seriously discuss a deal to combat drug trafficking, we're ready," he said.

"If they want oil, Venezuela is ready for US investment, like with Chevron, whenever they want it, wherever they want it and however they want it," Chevron Corp is the only major oil firm exporting Venezuelan crude to the US. Venezuela has the world's largest proven oil reserves. —AP



## Greece cuts number of univ students by half

**Athens:** Over 300,000 inactive university students have been removed from the rolls in Greece, cutting the student population by nearly half, authorities said on Friday.

The move marks the end of a decades-long practice, formally abolished in recent legislation, allowing extended enrollment to facilitate lifelong learning and lengthy breaks for work.

Education ministry said

3,08,605 students admitted to state universities' 4-year degree programmes before 2017 had been removed from the records.

"Student status is not valid for life in any modern European university. We want degrees with value, reflecting effort, skills and passion," Education Minister Sofia Zacharakis said. Notably, 35,000 people applied for reenrollment in 2025. —AP

## Saudi warplanes kill 7 UAE-backed Yemeni rebels

**Aden:** Saudi warplanes have targeted separatist fighters in Yemen, killing 7 in a counter-attack against a sweeping advance by the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council. The deaths on Friday are the first from coalition fire since the secessionist STC seized swathes of Hadramout and al-Mahra last month.

Following the strikes, a military spokesperson for the STC said it was in a "decisive and existential" war with Saudi-backed Yemeni government forces, characterising the conflict as a fight against radical Islamism — a longtime preoccupation of the UAE.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have for years supported rival factions in Yemen's government-run territories, but the STC's offensive has angered Riyadh and left the oil-rich Gulf powers at loggerheads.

Meanwhile, Saudi ambassador to Yemen accused the STC head of blocking a Saudi mediation team from landing in Aden.

## Kate to be 'ambitious' Queen

The Princess of Wales shares the same desire as husband William for "impactful change", palace aides say. A new report by 'The Times' Kate Mansey reiterates Kate's desire to make real and lasting change, while reflecting the Princess, as Queen, may be "more ambitious and bold than any of us appreciate".

### QUEEN 'WHO LISTENS'

Looking ahead to when she becomes Queen, Mansey

spoke to Happy Mum, Happy Baby podcast host Giovanna Fletcher.

Giovanna, who interviewed the Princess in 2020, was among the 80 plus attendees at an engagement in Nov 2025 when Kate delivered a keynote speech about how the "love we feel in our earliest years fundamentally shapes who we become and how we thrive as adults". The Princess was speaking at the inaugural Future Workforce Summit. an



event organised by her Royal Foundation Business Taskforce for Early Childhood, in her first public speech in two years. "She's full of heart," Giovanna said. "She'll be a Queen who really listens, who leans in, who's aware of what's going on — like the King with the King's Trust."

## PIO cabbie picks up 2, delivers 3 to hospital

TORONTO

An Indian-origin cab driver who picked up a couple, including a pregnant woman, as passengers, delivered three people safely to a hospital on a cold winter night, with the female giving birth on board, media reported.

**Hardeep Singh Toor**, a Calgary taxi driver, answered a late-night dispatch call last Saturday for what he was told



was an urgent ride to a hospital, which turned out to be a couple racing against time for the birth of their child, 'Global News' reported. "It was a pregnant lady, and

her companion was helping her get in (the cab). She was in pain," CTV reported. Toor realised the urgency of the situation as soon as he saw the couple in distress. "My thought was I should call an ambulance ... but looking at the weather, I thought maybe it's not the right call," he told CTV.

"Her body language was telling me she did not have the time. I decided to drive," he added. Toor recalls the drive to the hospital as the longest 30

minutes, marked by kicking and shouting in the back seat, with red lights testing his nerves at regular intervals.

With -23°C, stormy weather and slippery roads, Toor said his focus was getting them to the hospital ASAP and safely, Global News reported.

Blocks away from the hospital, Toor noticed the kicking and screaming had stopped. The baby was born in the backseat with the building already in sight. —PTI



## Briefs

MANCHESTER

## Haaland gifts signed boots to Gill



Football's goal machine met up with cricket's run machine in a crossover for the ages early in the new year. Manchester City's **Erling Haaland (right)** and India captain Shubman Gill met at a Nike event. The duo sporting white Nike kits exchanged pleasantries and the video of their meeting has since gone viral. Haaland then surprised Gill with a pair of boots. The Norwegian ace signed the shoes for the Indian captain who looked visibly in awe. This is not Gill's first meeting with the Manchester City ace. Back in 2023, the Gujarat Titans star had travelled to watch the FA Cup Final between Man City and Manchester United alongside Virat Kohli. He had even had a guided tour of the Etihad Stadium, and met Haaland and De Bruyne during their treble celebrations.

NEW DELHI

## Neeraj, Sachin in AIU's Testing pool



Javelin throwers **Neeraj Chopra** and Sachin Yadav are the only Indian athletes to figure in the Registered Testing Pool (RTP) of World Athletics' anti-doping watchdog Athletics Integrity Unit's (AIU) for the first quarter of this year. While two-time Olympic medal-winning Chopra has been a regular on this list, Yadav is a new entrant after his fourth-place finish in the World Championships last year. The Asian Championships silver-medallist outperformed Chopra at the world event where the latter finished eighth due to nagging fitness issues that hampered his performance. Yadav covered a personal best of 86.27m to not just end up higher than Chopra.

JOHANNESBURG

## Super Kings beat Durban's Super Giants



**Donovan Ferreira** (33 not out) and Richard Gleeson (3/41) starred for Joburg Super Kings as they beat Durban Super Giants in first-ever Super Over finish

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## FAREWELL | Pakistan-born cricketer is the first Muslim to play for Australia

## Khawaja, set to retire, criticises racial stereotypes

SYDNEY

Veteran Australia batter **Usman Khawaja** has announced he will retire from international cricket after the fifth Ashes test beginning Sunday at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

## He didn't go quietly

The Pakistan-born Khawaja, who was the first Muslim to play for Australia, used his retirement announcement Friday to criticize the "racial" stereotyping he experienced during his career.

It will be the 39-year-old Khawaja's 88th and final test - played at the ground where he began his first-class career. Khawaja scored his first Ashes century at the SCG with 171 against England in 2018.

It was also at that the SCG where he revived his career at age 35, scoring two centuries against England. That prompted one of the great late-career revivals, as Khawaja hit seven centuries in his next two years back in the side.

But Khawaja's position had come under scrutiny and criticism this season after being unable to open in the first Ashes test in Perth due to back spasms and then missing the Brisbane test with the injury.

He was then initially left out in Adelaide until Steve Smith's vertigo allowed Khawaja to return, before an 82 in the first innings there ensured he would stay in the side for the fourth test in Melbourne, Australia, with a 3-1 lead going into the fifth test, has retained the Ashes.

Khawaja said he felt he was treated "a little bit different, even to now," because of his Pakistan and Muslim background.

"Different in the way I've been treated, different in how things have happened,"

Once the racial stereotypes came in, of me being lazy, it was things I've dealt with my whole life. Pakistani, West Indian, colored players...we're selfish, we only care about ourselves, we don't care about the team, we don't train hard enough

**Usman Khawaja**, veteran Australia batter



he said at a media conference in Sydney. "I had back spasms, it was something I couldn't control. The way the media and the past players came out and attacked me... I copped it for about five days straight. Everyone was piling in.

"Once the racial stereotypes came in, of me being lazy, it was things I've dealt with my whole life. Pakistani, West Indian, colored players...we're selfish, we only care about ourselves, we don't care about the team, we don't train hard enough."

Khawaja was criticized in the days leading up to the Perth match for golfing twice and not taking part in an

"I can give you even more examples of guys who have had 15 schooners (large glasses of beer) the night before a game and have then been injured, but no one said a word because they were just being Aussie larrikins," they were just being lads. But when I get injured, everyone went at my credibility and who I am as a person.

## Khawaja said he knew the end of his career was imminent

"I guess moving into this series, I had an inkling this would be the last series," he said. "I'm glad I can go out on my own terms." Khawaja has scored 6,206 runs at an average of 43.49 in his 87 tests with 16 centuries and 28 half-centuries.

"Usman has made a huge contribution to Australian cricket both through his outstanding achievements as one of our most stylish and resilient batters... and off field, particularly through the Usman Khawaja Foundation." Cricket Australia chief executive Todd Greenberg said in a statement.

"Usman has been one of Australia's most reliable opening batters and testament to his success was him being named ICC test cricketer of the year the same season that Australia won the World Test Championship (in 2023)."

Khawaja said his No. 1 emotion on announcing his retirement was "contentment."

## India to tour Bangladesh for white-ball series in Sept

DHAKA

The Bangladesh Cricket Board on Friday announced it will host India for a three-match ODI as well as T20I series to be played in September this year.

However it is not clear if BCCI will agree to travel to Bangladesh in prevailing conditions with no stable government in place. According to a media release by the BCB, the three ODIs will be played on September 1, 3 and 6, while the T20Is will be played on September 9, 12 and 13.

The Indian team will reach Bangladesh on August 28 for their limited-overs affair.

In July last year, India's tour of Bangladesh was called off indefinitely and the six-match white-ball tour was deferred for more than one year. "The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) have mutually agreed to defer the white-ball series, three ODIs and three Twenty20 Internationals, between Bangladesh and India in August 2025 to September 2026," BCCI had informed in a statement.

## comeback

## Gillespie reveals he felt humiliated in Pakistan job

Ex-head coach states reasons for leaving the role

KARACHI

The sacking of Tim Nielsen as high performance red-ball coach was among a number of issues with the PCB which left him "completely humiliated," says former Australia great Jason Gillespie, looking back at his short nine-month stint as Pakistan head coach.

In April 2024, the Pakistan Cricket Board had appointed Gillespie as the head coach in red-ball cricket and former South African batter Gary Kirsten was roped in for a similar role in white-ball formats.

However, Kirsten's resigna-

tion in October later that year followed Gillespie's in December, when Nielsen was communicated by the PCB that his services would not be needed before the tour of South Africa 2024-25.

A former head coach of the Australian team, Nielsen was appointed as the high performance red-ball coach in August 2024.

"I was coaching the Pakistan Test side. The PCB sacked our senior assistant coach with ZERO communication with me about it- as Head Coach I found this situation completely unacceptable," Gillespie wrote on 'X' when asked by a

user why he had left his role with the Pakistan Test team.

"There were a number of other issues which left me completely humiliated," he added. Nielsen's axing, before Pakistan's tour of South Africa, was perhaps the final blow to a rapidly disintegrating relationship between Gillespie and the PCB, which ended with him refusing to board the flight from Adelaide to South Africa and eventually resigning.

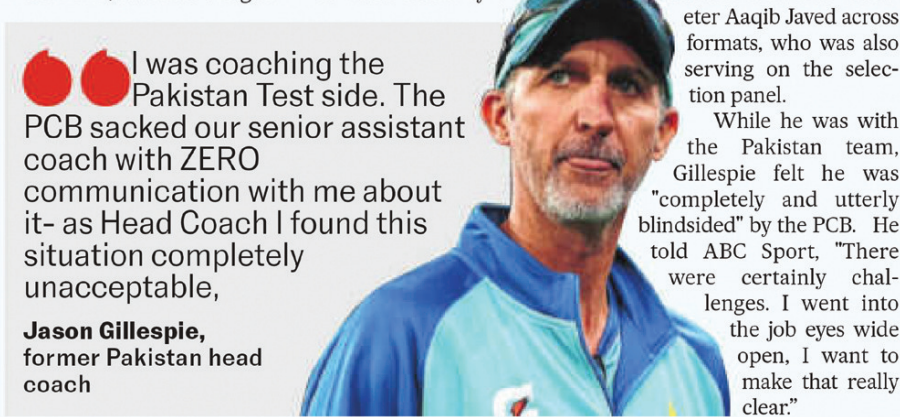
In between his resignation and the exit of Kirsten, Gillespie had also served as the interim white-ball coach.

Gillespie was succeeded by former Pakistan cricketer Aaqib Javed across formats, who was also serving on the selection panel.

While he was with the Pakistan team, Gillespie felt he was "completely and utterly blindsided" by the PCB. He told ABC Sport, "There were certainly challenges. I went into the job eyes wide open, I want to make that really clear."

I was coaching the Pakistan Test side. The PCB sacked our senior assistant coach with ZERO communication with me about it- as Head Coach I found this situation completely unacceptable,

**Jason Gillespie**, former Pakistan head coach



## Marijne returns as India women's hockey chief coach

NEW DELHI

Dutchman Sjoerd Marijne was on Friday reappointed as the chief coach of India's women's hockey team, five years after guiding the side to a historic fourth-place finish at the Tokyo Olympics following which it has been battling a difficult transition phase.

Marijne would be replacing Harendra Singh, who had to resign in December last year due to the team's under-

whelming results and allegations of a "high-handed coaching approach".

The 51-year-old Marijne, who was associated with the team from 2017 to 2021, will be supported by Matias Vila as analytical coach. Also returning to the Indian hockey set-up is South African Wayne Lombard, who will once again serve as scientific advisor and head of athletic performance.

"It's great to be back. After 4.5 years, I return with fresh energy and a clear vision to

Sjoerd Marijne interacts with media.  
PTI File Photo



support the team's growth and help the players achieve their full potential on the world stage," Marijne stated in a press release issued by Hockey India.

Marijne, who had immense goodwill within the team and was widely credited for building a cohesive unit that revelled in each other's success, quit immediately after the Tokyo Games, citing family reasons. During his tenure, India also broke into the top 10 of world rankings.

Vila, a former Argentina mid-fielder, made his international debut in 1997 and represented his country at the Olympic Games in 2000 and 2004. He has been

## All eyes on Siraj, Pant's ODI future

First point could be Rishabh's position as the 2nd wicketkeeper

NEW DELHI

The indefatigable duo of Rishabh Pant and **Mohammed Siraj** is expected to be the big talking point on Saturday when the selectors pick a 15-member Indian ODI squad for a three-match series against New Zealand starting January 11 in Vadodra.

While no major shake ups can be foreseen in the squad that beat South Africa in a preceding series a few weeks ago, two specific concerns could be addressed by the Ajit Agarkar-chaired selection committee.

The first point could be Pant's position as the second wicketkeeper with Ishan Kishan showing his hitting prowess in the middle order for Jharkhand and Dhruv Chand Jurel also smashing a 'Daddy Hundred' for UP in the domestic circuit.

Whether it is Agarkar or head coach Gautam Gambhir, both have shown an inclination to select personnel based on team combination.

Therefore in T20 Internationals, they have gone for keepers who are openers in Sanju Samson and Kishan.

In ODIs, the same keeper is needed to primarily be a middle-order batter, coming in at No.5 or 6.

To be fair to Pant, since the arrival of Gambhir as head coach, he has played just one ODI between July 2024 to December 2025.

Only 31 ODI games in eight years with an average of less than 35 isn't a true reflection



## Pandya, Bumrah likely to be rested

While Hardik Pandya and Jasprit Bumrah are likely to be rested keeping the T20 World Cup in mind, it will be interesting to see if the selectors opt to give a break to the other two speedsters -- Harshit Rana and Arshdeep Singh.

of the resilient Rourkee man's potential. In terms of impact, even his greatest detractors would agree that he is scores over Kishan and Jurel.

However, his shot selection in the recent lost Guwahati Test against South Africa neither impressed the head coach nor the selection committee. But dropping him without giving a fair run could also raise a few uncomfortable questions. The second aspect to be discussed is the selection of pacers for the three-match series. While Hardik Pandya and Jasprit Bumrah are likely to be rested keeping the T20 WC in mind, it will be interesting to see if the selectors give a break to Arshdeep and Harshit.

## Sai Sudharsan fractures rib, could be out for six weeks

The 24-year-old is unlikely to be fit for Tamil Nadu's remaining Ranji Trophy games but may play IPL

NEW DELHI

Young India batter **Sai Sudharsan** could be sidelined for more than a month after sustaining a rib fracture during a recent Vijay Hazare Trophy game against Madhya Pradesh, a BCCI source said on Friday.

Sudharsan, who isn't a part of India's white ball set-up, fractured the "anterior cortex of seventh right rib" while completing a diving run in Tamil Nadu's VHT game against Madhya Pradesh in Ahmedabad.

The 24-year-old is unlikely to be fit for Tamil Nadu's remaining Ranji Trophy games but a more realistic possibility remains that he will be available for Gujarat Titans in the IPL.

According to sources, Sudharsan reported to the Centre Of Excellence in Bengaluru on December 29 and a scan report mentioned "a slender, undisplaced fracture of the anterior cortex of the right seventh rib." The area where he sustained the



Sai is undertaking lower-body strength and conditioning work with appropriate protection to the injured rib to facilitate healing, and he has responded well to the program.

## BCCI Centre of Excellence (CoE) Report

fracture was the same spot where he got hit during a net session earlier in the tournament.

According to a COE report, "Sai is undertaking lower-body strength and conditioning work with appropriate protection to the injured rib to facilitate healing, and he has responded well to the pro-

gram."Upper-body training will be introduced once acute symptoms settle over the next 7-10 days, following which he will be gradually progressed into a structured upper-body strength and conditioning program," the report stated.

It is understood that an injury like this normally takes six to eight weeks to heal.