

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

PATNA

PK: New Bihar govt will work for Gujarat

Former poll strategist and Jan Suraaj Party (JSP) founder Prashant Kishor on Wednesday alleged that Bihar's new government, to be headed by a BJP chief minister, would work more in the interest of Gujarat. Speaking in Munger during his ongoing Bihar Navnirman Abhiyan, Kishor said, "Whoever becomes the next chief minister, his primary focus will be Gujarat. They will work to serve Gujarat's interests." He claimed that Bihar's youth would be packed into trains and transported to Gujarat to work for a meagre wage of ₹10,000-₹12,000. Gujarat will not find such cheap labour elsewhere, he claimed.

RANCHI

Army defuses two WWII-era bombs

The Army on Wednesday defused two suspected World War II-era American bombs found along the Subarnarekha River near Panipara-Nagudsai under Baharagora block of Jharkhand's East Singhbhum district. The first bomb was discovered nearly 10 days ago, while the second was found two days ago. No damage was reported during the operation. Sub-Divisional Officer (Ghatsila) Sunil Chandra said. The operation was carried out jointly by the Indian Army, Jharkhand Police and West Bengal Police. A 1.5 km area was declared a no-movement zone, and residents within a 1 km radius were evacuated.

JAIPUR

18 held for forged med certificates

The Special Operations Group (SOG) of the Rajasthan Police has arrested 18 persons, including former Rajasthan Medical Council Registrar Dr Rajesh Sharma, for issuing forged Foreign Medical Graduate (FMG) certificates. Raids were conducted across Rajasthan to arrest 18 persons, including the then Registrar of the Rajasthan Medical Council (RMC), Dr Rajesh Sharma. The arrested include 15 candidates who could not pass the FMG examination despite completing their MBBS degrees abroad, SOG Additional Director General Vishal Bansal said. The candidates were attempting to obtain medical registration and internships using fraudulent certificates.

POLL BOUND | TMC chief alleges technical glitches, electoral revisions are part of BJP conspiracy to strip people's citizenship

NRC will follow voting rights snatch: Mamata

JALPAIGURI

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee launched a blistering attack on the BJP, the Centre and the Election Commission on Wednesday, accusing them of undermining democracy through the SIR and warning that the next step could be attempts to strip people of citizenship through the NRC.

Launching her campaign for the upcoming assembly polls from the politically crucial north Bengal, a region where the BJP has built a formidable base since the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the TMC supremo alleged that constitutional institutions were being misused to "snatch away people's voting rights". Addressing back-to-back rallies in Maynaguri and the Thakurnagar area of Jalpaiguri district, Banerjee claimed the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls was creating fear among voters.

"The EC, BJP and the Centre are not following the



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee addresses a public rally in Maynaguri Assembly constituency

Constitution. They are trying to snatch voting rights," she said.

In Thakurnagar, she alleged irregularities in the SIR process, claiming that even her own name had appeared as "under adjudication".

"Do you know that last night everyone's name was put under adjudication? It was as if all the people of Bengal suddenly disappeared. Then they said it was a 'technical fault'."

"When I checked, I saw

Adjudication list: EC probing technical glitch

Kolkata: The Election Commission is examining the cause of a technical glitch that briefly showed all voters in West Bengal as "under adjudication", an official said on Wednesday. The problem came to light on Tuesday night when voters attempting to access their details on the EC website using their EPIC numbers found their status marked as "under adjudication", even in cases where names were already included in the final electoral rolls. "The issue was noticed on Tuesday night and was caused by a technical error, possibly related to the server or backend integration. It has since been rectified, and we are probing the cause behind it," the EC official said.

POLL WATCH WEST BENGAL

There is nothing they cannot do," the TMC supremo said. The Election Commission is examining the cause of a technical glitch that briefly showed all voters in West Bengal as "under adjudication". At the rallies, Banerjee mixed sharp political attacks with welfare messaging to consolidate her party's core voter base.

Congress nominee's papers rejected

GUWAHATI

The nomination of a Congress candidate from the Barpeta (SC) Assembly constituency was rejected on Wednesday, dealing a setback to the party ahead of the Assam Assembly elections.

Officials said the nomination of Mahananda Sarkar was rejected during scrutiny as he failed to submit the original party authorisation letter and instead attached a photocopy without the required signature of Jitendra Singh, All India Congress Committee in charge of Assam.

The scrutiny of nomination papers was conducted by the Election Commission of India for the Assembly polls. While scrutiny for most constituencies was completed on Tuesday, the process for

Barpeta (SC) and Dhekiajuli resumed on Wednesday.

Barpeta, a key seat in lower

Assam, was won by the Congress in the 2021 Assembly elections.

Polling is scheduled for April 9. Officials said scrutiny

POLL WATCH ASSAM

has now been completed for all 126 constituencies. In Barpeta (SC), one nomination was rejected and three were found valid, while all 10 nominations in Dhekiajuli were valid.

Altogether, 815 candidates filed 1,389 nomination papers, of which 789 were found eligible after scrutiny. The last date for withdrawal of candidature is March 26 up to 3 pm.

IRCTC portal purged of 3 cr fake accounts

More than three crore fake accounts from the IRCTC portal have been removed as part of efforts to deal with touts selling train tickets and around 78 per cent of the seats in trains are in the non-AC categories, Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Wednesday. Asserting that the government's focus is to ensure comfortable and affordable services to the people, the minister also said that more than 75,000 special trains have been operated so far this financial year. Vaishnaw was responding to supplementary queries during Question Hour in the Lok Sabha.



IN PARLIAMENT

Milk output rises 70% in last 11 years

Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh on Wednesday highlighted that India's milk production increased nearly 70 per cent in the last 11 years to 248 million tonnes in 2024-25 and that the country will become free from food and mouth disease (FMD) in next three years. Singh was replying to supplementary queries during Question Hour in Rajya Sabha.

CAPF Bill introduced in RS

The government on Wednesday introduced the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026 in the Rajya Sabha, brushing aside Opposition notices on its introduction through a voice vote. The bill seeks to create a unified legal framework governing personnel across different CAPF forces, replacing the current patchwork of separate service rule regimes for the five Central Armed Police Forces. Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai, who introduced the bill, sought to allay concerns about its scope.

A rare moment when presiding officer participated in Lok Sabha Question Hour

It was a rare occasion in parliamentary proceedings when the presiding officer himself raised a query during the Question Hour in Lok Sabha on Wednesday. Telugu Desam Party leader Krishna Prasad Tenneti was in the Chair when a question he had listed on rare earth minerals came up for discussion. Tenneti took the permission of the House to ask the question from the Chair. "The next question is in my name. If you wish, you can reply," he told Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Earth Sciences, Jitendra Singh.

"Sir, with the permission of the House, I ask: when we find rare earth on the coastline and the seashore, we have to protect the environment and also exploit the ...(resources). How do we balance both?" the TDP leader asked Singh, who is also Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office and the Departments of Atomic Energy and Space. In his response, Singh explained that beach sand minerals, a key resource Tenneti was mentioning, came primarily from two sources: beach deposits and rock formations.

Govt asks states to reserve 20% jobs for Agniveers

Hamirpur: Union Home Minister Amit Shah has written to all states to reserve 20 per cent jobs for Agniveers for their rehabilitation after they complete their four-year term in 2027, an official said on Wednesday.

The letter is addressed to the chief ministers, said Sainik Welfare Department director Brigadier Madan Sheel Sharma (Retd).

Following the receipt of the letter, the Himachal Pradesh Sainik Welfare Department sent a report to the state government to consider the proposal. The ministry called for a 20 per cent reservation in positions such as forest guards, mining guards, police constables, firemen, mounted police, jail wardens, Special Police Officers and the state disaster response force.

Cong slams PM bid to pass women quota amendments

NEW DELHI

Taking a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Congress on Wednesday claimed that the "U-turn Ustad" now wants to implement the women's reservation law without completing the delimitation and census exercises by passing amendments at a "special two-day session" of Parliament in the next fortnight.

The opposition party alleged that this was a "weapon of mass diversion" to change the narrative from the government's "foreign policy failures and setbacks and from the LPG and energy crisis facing the country".

Congress general secretary in charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, said the Modi government is also planning to increase the size of the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabhas by 50 per cent, which also needs careful deliberation.

In September 2023, the new Parliament House was inaugurated with the passage of the women's reservation bill -- or Nari Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023 -- that amended the Constitution to provide for one-third reservation of women in the Lok Sabha and also provided for one-third reservation for women in seats reserved for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, Ramesh pointed out.

Rana: Ordeal ends, organs donated

GHAZIABAD

Don't cry, he is in a happy place now, the parents of Harish Rana, the first person in India to be permitted passive euthanasia, said on Wednesday as they bid farewell to their son one last time. Harish's last rites were conducted at the Green Park cremation ground in South Delhi on Wednesday morning, marking a quiet end to his 13-year ordeal.



In a final act of generosity, Harish's family consented to donate five of his organs. The 31-year-old man passed away on Tuesday after slipping into a coma in 2013, following a fall from a fourth-floor balcony while he was a B.Tech student at Panjab University. During the last rites, Harish's mother bid an emotional farewell to her son with folded hands and met those present, while his father Ashok Rana urged mourners not to cry, a neighbour told PTI over the phone.

No fuel, LPG crisis in Telangana: Min

HYDERABAD

Amid growing rumours of petrol, diesel and LPG shortages that triggered panic buying and long queues at fuel stations across Hyderabad, the Telangana government on Wednesday firmly assured the public that there is no shortage of any petroleum products in the state.

Addressing a press conference, Minister for Civil Supplies and Irrigation N Uttam Kumar Reddy, along with Civil Supplies Commissioner Stephen Ravindra, categorically stated that stocks are more than adequate for the next three months and that supply is currently running well ahead of demand.

Hyderabad Police Commissioner, VC Sajjanar, on Wednesday urged the people not to believe in any rumours regarding fuel shortage blindly and assured that



People carry empty LPG cylinders to a nearby gas agency, at Sanpada, in Navi Mumbai, on Wednesday

there is enough fuel supply for the next sixty days as people continue to line up at petrol stations. He noted that the owners have been directed not to sell fuel in loose cans and containers.

Meanwhile, addressing the Inter-Ministerial briefing, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, highlighted that the govern-

'No scarcity of LPG, petrol in UP'

Lucknow: Amid concerns over a possible shortage of cooking gas and fuel, the Uttar Pradesh government on Wednesday clarified that supply of LPG, petrol and diesel across the state remains normal and adequate.

The government said there is no disruption in the supply chain and urged people not to indulge in panic buying or unnecessary booking of LPG cylinders. It also appealed to consumers to refrain from believing or spreading rumours, warning that such actions could create artificial shortages and put pressure on the distribution system.

Addressing concerns over LPG and fuel shortage, she asked the public not to believe any rumours and avoid panic buying.

Parliament passes transgender bill

NEW DELHI

Parliament on Wednesday passed a bill to amend a law on protection and rights of transgender persons that proposes excluding social orientations from the ambit of the statute, with Rajya Sabha giving its nod, even as opposition members pressed for sending it to a select committee.

The bill, which seeks to amend Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act 2019, also provides for graded punishment based on the gravity of harm inflicted on such people. The bill was passed in Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

Replying to the debate on the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, in the Upper House, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister

posed legislation is an effort to take along all segments of the society together.

He said that the bill aims to provide protection to only those who face discrimination due to biological issues. The minister asserted that the amendment will ensure that transgender persons continue to get legal recognition and protection.

The Modi government is committed to protecting all those people who are suffering due to biological reasons, he said adding that their rights will be protected.

The minister opined that such persons should be brought into the mainstream so that they should not live in dejection.

Highlighting the steps taken by the government for the welfare of the community, the minister said that transgender welfare boards have

Sleeper bus overturns in Delhi; 2 dead

NEW DELHI

A speeding sleeper bus from Jaipur overturned while taking a sharp turn near Hanuman Mandir in Karol Bagh's Jhandewalan area here early Wednesday, leading to the death of two passengers and injury to 23 others, police said. Around 1 am, Karol Bagh police station received a PCR call, with the caller saying that several passengers were trapped inside a bus following an accident, a police officer said.

The Delhi-bound bus had around 30 passengers on board, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Rohit Rajbir Singh said in a statement. An officer present at a post near the accident site said the bus was speeding and toppled while taking a turn at a roundabout near the

Landslides hit Sikkim, 200 tourists stranded

GANGTOK

Nearly 200 tourists were stranded at Chungthang in North Sikkim after multiple landslides, triggered by heavy rainfall, disrupted road connectivity, officials said on Wednesday morning.

Mangan District Collector Anant Jain said the landslides occurred along the crucial Chungthang-Lachen route on Tuesday night, leaving tourists headed for Lachen stuck midway.

Stranded visitors were accommodated overnight at an ITBP camp and a gurdwara in Chungthang, he said.

Restoration work by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) is underway, officials said, adding that authorities will review the situation and may allow travel only after routes are declared safe, depending on weather condi-



Some tourists have since returned to Gangtok and cancelled their travel plans, they said.

Meanwhile, the road to Lachung, which was also blocked on Tuesday night, has been cleared, and tourists from that side were safely sent back to Gangtok on Wednesday morning.

Officials said the situation is being monitored closely as intermittent rainfall persists in the region.

The Lachen route had only recently reopened on March 9 after being severely damaged in the 2023 glacial lake out-

HC extends stay on Sambhal police FIR

PRAYAGRAJ

The Allahabad High Court has extended its interim stay on the Sambhal chief judicial magistrate's order directing registration of FIR against several policemen, including the then Circle Officer Anuj Kumar Chaudhary.

When the matter was taken up on Tuesday, the complainant's counsel filed a counter affidavit in the case. The court then granted time for the petitioner's counsel to file a response on this.

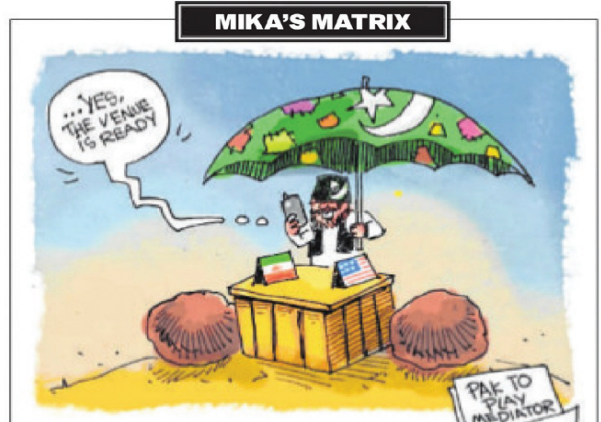
It extended the interim order granted earlier and fixed April 21 as the date for next hearing. Earlier, Justice Samit Gopal had, after hearing a petition filed by the then Sambhal Circle Officer Anuj Chaudhary, stayed operation of the January 9 order of then chief judicial magistrate directing registra-

Zubeen died due to 'accidental drowning': Singapore Coroner

Singapore: A state coroner on Wednesday upheld the Singapore Police Coast Guard's (PCG) finding that there was no foul play in the death of Indian singer Zubeen Garg and ruled the death an accidental drowning.

Directly addressing a concern raised by Garg's widow regarding the PCG's finding

that there was no foul play, State Coroner Adam Nakhoda stated that the PCG had conducted a comprehensive and thorough investigation in this case. Nakhoda found that Garg's death was "simply due to an unfortunate and tragic accidental drowning" and that no one had forced, coerced or pushed him into the water.



No Tokenism, Visible Results Needed: Zonal Officers Told to Stay in Active Mode

Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Minister for Urban Development and Energy, A.K Sharma, held a review meeting with officials of the Varanasi Municipal Corporation at the Circuit House auditorium. During the meeting, he conducted a detailed assessment of ongoing development works, sanitation, Arrangement and the Progress of various Schemes, while issuing Clear directions to the Officials. Minister Sharma instructed that bricks, gravel and debris lying along the roadsides be removed immediately. He gave strict directions to zonal officers to avoid mere formality and instead work with full alertness and close monitoring. He emphasized that citizens should experience a Clean, well-organized city. Municipal Commissioner Himanshu Nagpal assured the minister that a special campaign would be launched and all debris across the city would be Cleared within 10 days. During the meeting, the minister also reviewed



the Cleanliness of Varanasi Ghats and directed officials to Pay special attention to their sanitation and beautification, so that the city religious and cultural identity is further strengthened. He also instructed the development of thematic Parks in various Parts of the City, including Kabir Chaura, stating that there is no Shortage of resources—only the need for focused and time-bound execution of Plans. The Municipal Commissioner briefed the minister on the Progress of several initiatives, including door-to-door waste collection, legacy waste disposal, zero Plastic Promotion,

Miyawaki Plantation, Namo Van, CM Smart Grid, digital library, Chitaipur Food Plaza and city beautification Projects. Minister Sharma directed that all Projects be regularly monitored and stressed that all officials must work in coordination to develop Varanasi into a Clean, beautiful and modern City. Mayor Ashok Tiwari, MD Jal Nigam/Urban Development Secretary Ravindra Kumar, Municipal Commissioner Himanshu Nagpal, Additional Municipal Commissioners, and officials from Jal Kal, DUDA and other concerned departments were Present at the Meeting.

Students Explore Science in Prayagraj Tour



Fatehpur

Nearly a hundred Students from council-run Schools in the Airayan development block were taken on an educational exposure visit to Prayagraj under the National Avishkar Abhiyan. During the tour, the students visited Anand Bhavan, Nehru Planetarium and Allahabad Museum, gaining enriching academic and experiential Knowledge. Block Education Officer Ratnamani Mishra stated that the initiative aims to Promote curiosity-based learning, develop scientific temperament and encourage experiential education among students of Classes 6 to 8. The National Avishkar Abhiyan includes quizzes at the School level, followed by block-level competitions. Students from 41 upper Primary and composite Schools participated in the Selection Process and around 100 students were Chosen for this exposure visit. Comprehensive arrangements, including T-shirts, caps, snacks, jute bags, stationery, science Practical books and lunch, were Provided to ensure

a comfortable and engaging Experience. Science ARP Sheshnarayan Dubey informed that students gained detailed knowledge about the solar system, Planets and constellations at the Nehru Planetarium. Meanwhile, ARP Akash Kumar Singh highlighted that at the Allahabad Museum, students explored rare artifacts related to India freedom movement and historical Heritage. Students from Composite Schools Dhankamai, Nihalpur Sani and Raipur described the tour as highly engaging and informative, stating that it Provided them with valuable new insights. Several dignitaries and Educators, including Vijay Kumar Tripathi, Umesh Maurya, Anand Kumar Mishra, Ajay Singh, Dr Ambika Prasad Mishra, Raghuraj Maurya, Deepak Kumar, Dilip Singh, Navneet Soni, Prem Prakash Singh, Veerban, Nandlal Kamal, Mulchand, Narvada Singh, Jai Narayan, Garima Singh, Mamta Gupta, Vinod Kumar, Gyanendra Kumar and Harshit Singh were Present on the Occasion.

A New Identity for UP tourism under Yogi Government, Emerging as a Global spiritual tourism Hub

Lucknow

Over the Past nine years under the leadership of Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh tourism sector has transitioned from a "Graveyard Economy" to a "temple Economy." Tourism and Culture Minister Jaiveer Singh, while addressing a Press conference at Lok Bhavan, highlighted the achievements of Yogi government, Stating that this transformation reflects not just a Change in mindset but also a Shift in Governance Priorities. He said, "Before 2017, a significant Portion of the State budget was spent on building boundary walls for graveyards, whereas under the current government, the focus has Shifted to developing Pilgrimage Sites, Religious corridors, cultural routes and tourism infrastructure." This Change has linked the Preservation and Promotion of cultural heritage with tourism development in Uttar Pradesh. The minister said that in line with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath vision, the convergence of faith, Culture and tourism has become a strong foundation for economic growth in the state over the Past nine years. Pilgrimage Development Councils have been established to enhance facilities for devotees visiting religious Sites. Major destinations such as Ayodhya, Kashi (Varanasi), Prayagraj, Mathura, along with Mirzapur, Chitrakoot, Naimisharanya and Maa Shakumbhari Devi Shaktipeeth in Saharanpur, have emerged as key tourism Hubs. Notably, after the construction of the Kashi Vishwanath Dham Corridor, the number of devotees has increased by four to five times. Meanwhile, Ayodhya Ram Temple is expected to attract around 30 Crore devotees in 2025. Cultural events in Uttar Pradesh have also gained global recognition. The Deepotsav in Ayodhya set a world record in 2025 by lighting over 26 lakh lamps. Dev Deepawali in Varanasi has been granted the status of a state fair. Events such as Deepotsav (Started in 2017), Magh Mela, Kumbh and Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, and Rangotsav in Braj have significantly accelerated tourism Growth. The Mahakumbh 2025 is considered a historic milestone, witnessing a record footfall of 66 crore visitors. These cultural traditions and festivals have become

Farmers Protest Over Power Dept Conduct, Agitation Deferred. Farmers outraged over allegations of misconduct and corruption by Officials

Barabanki

In Fatehpur area, strong resentment has emerged among farmers over the alleged Poor behavior and irregularities by officials of the electricity department. The Bharatiya Kisan Union (Shramik Janshakti) had warned of a Protest, but the proposed dharna Pradarshan has been temporarily deferred after the administration assured Action. **Deep dissatisfaction over the department Conduct**



Farmer leaders stated that the behavior of electricity department officials towards the general public has remained unsatisfactory. Complaints of rude conduct with consumers are frequently reported from both urban and rural areas. Farmers and com-

mon people are forced to make repeated visits to offices for even minor tasks. It is alleged that responsible officers not only show negligence in resolving issues but often behave harshly. Farmer leaders cited this case as another example

of such ongoing Problems. **Allegations of irregularities and illegal recovery against JE** Under the leadership of National President Kamlesh Yadav, farmers submitted a memorandum to the District Magistrate, leveling serious allegations against Junior Engineer Vikas Shukla, Posted at Kursi Power House. They Claimed that electricity bills of consumers were being manipulated and inflated illegally, leading to growing anger

among rural Residents. **Allegations of misconduct against Police as Well** Farmers also accused a Police outpost in-charge of the Kursi Police Station area of using abusive language over the Phone. In Protest, a gherao of the Police station was announced for Wednesday. On Wednesday, SDM Kartikeya Singh held a meeting with farmer representatives, listened to their grievances and assured appropriate action.

Toll Contract Scam Exposed, ₹2.72 Crore Recovery Ordered.

Barabanki

District Magistrate Shashank Tripathi has ordered recovery of over 2.72 crore in two cases of Stamp duty evasion linked to toll contracts. In both cases, only 200 e-stamp was Paid instead of the required amount, causing major revenue loss. Recovery of 1,29,50,920, including Penalty, has been ordered against Shivchandra



Tripathi for the 2025-26 Contract. 1,42,30,360 recovery has been ordered from Skylark EEG Pvt. Ltd. in a similar case. A Both contracts were treated

as leases but proper stamp duty was not Paid. The DM directed strict monitoring and timely deposit of dues with interest, warning of zero tolerance in such Cases.

Headmaster Falls Ill at BSA Office, Referred to Lucknow

Barabanki

A headmaster health suddenly deteriorated when he reached the Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA) office with his complaint. Due to his critical condition, he was referred from the district hospital to the Lucknow Trauma Centre. Following the incident, the family has made serious allegations of harassment and negligence against teachers and Officials. **Stress Escalated due to School Dispute** Dharmraj Gautam, headmaster of

Primary School Badosarai-1 in Sirauligaupur area, had earlier filed a complaint regarding the treatment he was receiving. According to family members, an assistant teacher at the school remained frequently absent and disputes would arise whenever the headmaster asked him to attend regularly. It is alleged that abusive language was used against him, along with caste-based remarks. He was also reportedly threatened with false Cases. **Condition worsened at the Office**

On Wednesday, Dharmraj visited the BSA office again with his wife, demanding a change in the inquiry officer and a transfer. During this time, his condition suddenly worsened and he collapsed unconscious. The family said he was taken to the district hospital by Private means, from where doctors referred him to Lucknow due to his critical State. **Family Warning** The family has warned that if anything untoward happens to Dharmraj, the concerned individuals and officials will be held responsible.

Transformation of Sarojini Nagar Through 297 Development Works Worth 1991.11 Crore: Dr. Rajeshwar

Lucknow

Under the "Viksit Sarojini Nagar Abhiyan", a dialogue, foundation-laying and inauguration ceremony organized by LDA effectively showcased the achievements and future Plans for the comprehensive development of the Sarojini Nagar Assembly constituency. Over the Past four years, unprecedented development works have given a new direction and momentum to the region. A total of 297 development Projects have been advanced, including the inauguration of 124 works and the foundation laying of 171 Projects. An amount of 1991.11 crore has been spent on these initiatives, marking a significant milestone in transforming Sarojini Nagar into a modern, well-Planned and Self-reliant model Region. This development is not limited to numbers alone but reflects a visible transformation in the lives of citizens—better roads, improved drainage systems, Cleaner surroundings, modern Public amenities and secure housing



Clearly demonstrate this Progress. Key Dimensions of Development. Open-air gyms: 143 (36 inaugurated, 15 under construction, 92 approved) – 6.44 Crore. Swings: 28 – 0.50 crore. Prime Minister Housing Complex: 2 (completed and in use) – 1631 crore. Parking: 1 – 0.20 crore. Lighting arrangements: 13 (10 inaugurated, 3 foundation laid) – 1.81 crore. Irrigation: 4 – 0.35 crore. Other works: 10 – 9.29 crore. Lake development: 2 – 1.66 crore. Electrification: 4 – 0.23 crore. Tourism: 1 – 45.27 crore. Community Solar Parks (Net-Zero): 9 – 1.54 crore. Beautification: 2 – 0.45 crore. Fountain: 1 – 0.15 crore. Roads: 39 (7 inaugurated, 32 foundation laid) –

29.98 crore. Drains: 6 – 8.02 crore. Green belts: 4 – 2.14 crore. Community centers: 4 – 2.82 crore. School rejuvenation: 2 – 1.41 crore. Parks: 12 – 33.46 crore. Flower Valley: 1 – 12.62 crore. Food court: 1 – 4.50 crore. Yoga sheds: 3 – 0.30 crore. STP (Sewage Treatment Plant): 1 – 4.50 crore. Sewage/Jogging Tank: 2 – 192.17 crore. Water harvesting: 1 – 0.10 crore. EV charging station: 1 – 0.20 crore. Residential schemes: 2. A Model of Holistic Development Through these initiatives, Sarojini Nagar is witnessing the strengthening of infrastructure alongside a focus on green energy, environmental conservation, Cleanliness, and smart facilities. Projects like solar Parks,

EV charging stations and green belts are shaping the region for the future, while roads, drains, Parks, and community centers are making daily life more convenient and Comfortable. Commitment of the MLA On this occasion, MLA Dr. Rajeshwar Singh stated: "The development of Sarojini Nagar is not limited to construction activities; it is a continuous effort to improve the quality of life for every citizen. Our goal is to establish it as an ideal model constituency with a balanced development of modern amenities, a clean environment, and strong infrastructure." He further added: "The trust of the people is my greatest strength and with that trust, this journey of development—focused on service, dialogue and soluRajeshwar Singh also expressed gratitude to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, stating that under his able leadership, this development will Play a significant role in establishing Lucknow as a Strong model of a "New Uttar Pradesh."

Growing Farmer Unrest in Prayagraj: Multiple Rounds of Talks with Administration Over Land Acquisition and Circle Rates

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. Farmers' outrage in the district continues to escalate over issues such as land acquisition, irregularities in circle rates, and the declaration of green belts. A series of dialogues with administrative officials regarding these concerns is currently underway, led by Anuj Singh, the State President (Youth Wing) of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU). To date, discussions have been held across three phases. A crucial meeting took place two days ago, while detailed talks were concluded in two separate sessions on Wednesday. Present during these proceedings were District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma, DIG Ajay Pal Sharma, the Additional District Magistrate (ADM), the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM), and officials from relevant departments. Additionally, village heads and representatives from areas affected by land acquisition participated in large numbers, presenting their grievances directly to the administration. During the talks, the farmers registered strong objections regarding significant disparities in circle rates, forced land acquisition, and decisions pertaining to the



declaration of green belts. They argued that decisions being taken without their consent or prior dialogue have jeopardized their livelihoods and are fueling growing discontent within the villages. The Bharatiya Kisan Union unequivocally stated that land

acquisition would not be accepted under any circumstances without the farmers' explicit consent. The organization also put forward demands to revise circle rates to align with market values and to either reconsider or revoke the decisions regarding green

belts. In response, the District Magistrate provided assurances that no individual's land would be acquired without their consent. However, the organization emphasized the critical need to ensure that this assurance is effectively implemented on the ground. Anuj

Singh, the Union's State President, issued a warning that if the administration fails to take concrete measures promptly, the organization will be compelled to launch a large-scale agitation. Meanwhile, a meeting has been convened at 11:00 AM on March 26 at the

Union's office in Jhalwa to finalize preparations for the 'Kisan Kranti Mahapanchayat' (Farmers' Revolution Grand Assembly) scheduled for March 28. During this meeting, the future strategy and the detailed framework for the agitation will be determined.

Mother Saves Son's Life by Donating Her Kidney; First Kidney Transplant Conducted in Prayagraj

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj | The first successful kidney transplant in Prayagraj was performed on Wednesday at SRN Hospital. A mother saved her son's life by donating one of her kidneys. The process for the kidney transplant had been underway for approximately one month. Following approval from the Kidney Transplant Committee, a team of doctors led by Dr. Dilip Chaurasia, Head of the Department of Urology, successfully carried out the procedure. This marks the first kidney transplant ever performed in the district. The transplant was conducted at Motilal Nehru Medical College (SRN) after the Transplant Authorization Committee granted approval to the patient and the donor (the mother and son). Motilal Nehru Medical College had been preparing for this event for



a month. A meeting of the Kidney Transplant Authorization Committee was held under the chairmanship of Dr. VK Pandey, Principal of MLN Medical College and Chairman of the Kidney Transplant Committee. During the meeting, committee members—including former IG KP Singh, Advocate Anand Singh, Dr. Jitendra Shukla, Dr. Shanti Chaudhary, and Transplant Coordinators (Nurses) Preeti and Sushma—verified the identities and details of the patient, the donor (mother and son), and their family

members. In addition to scrutinizing the documents, statements from all individuals involved were recorded via video. Subsequently, the committee gave its approval for the transplant. Under the leadership of Dr. Dilip Chaurasia, Head of the Department of Urology at SRN, a team comprising Dr. Arvind Gupta, Dr. Santosh Maurya, and Dr. Saumya Gupta successfully performed the kidney transplant. Previously, people requiring such procedures had to travel to cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and others.

Shankaracharya Avimukteshwaranand Granted Anticipatory Bail; Court Directs: No Interviews to the Media

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj | The Allahabad High Court has granted anticipatory bail to Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati and his associate, Mukundanand Giri, in a case involving allegations of sexual exploitation. Concurrently, the Court has imposed a ban on all three parties—the applicants, the victims, and the complainant—from giving any interviews to the media while this matter remains pending. This order was issued by a single-judge bench comprising Justice Jitendra Kumar Sinha. Swami Ashutosh Brahmachari had filed an application before the Special Judge (POCSO) under Section 173(4) of the BNSS, seeking the registration of an FIR against the Shankaracharya and Mukundanand on charges of sexual harassment. It was alleged that between January 2025 (Mahakumbh) and



February 2026 (Magh Mela), two teenagers were subjected to sexual harassment in Prayagraj.

Acting on the orders of the Special Judge, an FIR was registered at the Jhusi police station, citing various charges. In connection with this case, the Shankaracharya and others had filed an application for anticipatory bail to avoid arrest. Arguing on behalf of

the petitioners, a Senior Advocate contended that the FIR had been lodged solely with the malicious intent of tarnishing Swami Avimukteshwaranand's reputation. It was submitted that the victims had never had any association with his ashram or school, and that false allegations had been leveled against the petitioners. Conversely, the counsel for the com-

plainant and the State opposed the bail application. After hearing the arguments from all parties, the Court observed that the medical report did not rule out the possibility of a sexual assault; however, an FSL report has been requisitioned. This implies that the doctor has not definitively stated that sexual harassment was inflicted upon the victim. Citing various precedents set by the Delhi High Court, the Allahabad High Court clarified that the presumption of guilt cannot be applied at the bail stage—prior to the framing of charges. The Court further held that, under special circumstances, an applicant may directly approach the High Court for anticipatory bail, even if they have not previously filed an application before the Sessions Court. With this, the Court granted anticipatory bail to both applicants upon furnishing a personal bond of 50,000 and two sureties.

Nominated councilors bowed their heads at the Maa Kali Temple, welcomed by supporters

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Lalgopalganj. The government has selected three nominated members for the Lalgopalganj Nagar Panchayat Committee.

The members bowed their heads and sought blessings at the ancient Kali Temple in the town. BJP officials and supporters then welcomed them with garlands. Recently, the state government released the list of nominated members for



municipal bodies.

Sarvesh Kumar Kesarwani, Sharda Patel, and Ashok Kumar Saroj have been selected for the Lalgopalganj Nagar Panchayat Committee. Following the release of the list, the newly appointed members visited the temple of Maa Kali.

They performed rituals and received blessings for the city's prosperity and a successful tenure. After the darshan, dozens of workers, led by BJP Mandal President

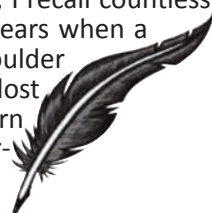
Rajendra Kesarwani and former Chairman Pradeep Kesarwani, greeted the councilors.

People greeted them with garlands and sweets. Manoj Mittal, Vinay Agarwal, Krishna Kumar Bachcha Kesarwani, Guddu Kesarwani, Sitaram Kaushal, Ramu Agarwal, Anil Soni, Advocate Arvind Kesarwani, Anoop Kesarwani, Shera Jaiswal, Rohit, Kundan etc. were present here.

Editorial

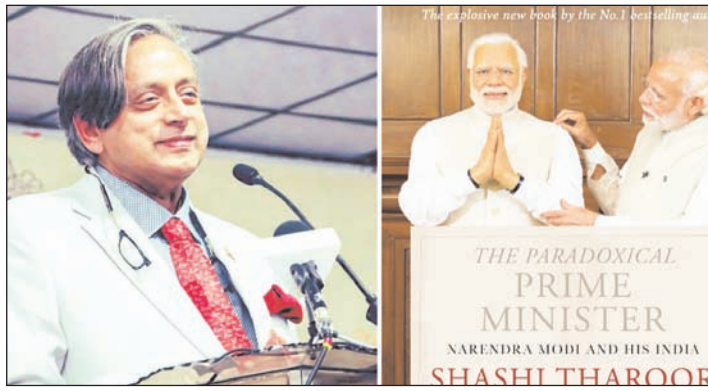
India's GDP victory over Japan is still a year away

There has been much discussion about the assertions made by BVR Subrahmanyam, the CEO of NITI Aayog, India's only official think tank. Speaking at a press conference following the 10th NITI Aayog Governing Council Meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and presumably attended by senior bureaucrats, Subrahmanyam said that "as I speak", India has overtaken Japan in current dollar GDP. Critics of the government's assertion make two points, one relevant and the other "noisy". The relevant point is that the IMF World Economic Outlook (WEO) database clearly shows that for the fiscal year 2024-25 (ending in March 2025), India's GDP was \$3.9 trillion while Japan's was \$4.0 trillion—that is, Japan was 2.6 per cent ahead. Fortunately, both Japan and India have the same fiscal year—April-March—hence adjustments to WEO data are not needed. Equally clearly, the database presents estimates of India's GDP for fiscal year 2025-26 as \$4.187 trillion and Japan's as \$4.186 trillion—that is, India's GDP exceeds Japan's by 0.02 per cent in 2025-26. From this, many, if not most, analysts have erroneously concluded that this won't happen until March 2026. Why erroneous? Because it is a fiscal year conclusion, and the 'centre of gravity' of an April-March fiscal year is September. So, it is likely that the NITI Aayog CEO, in making his hasty conclusion, was wrong by only four months. As it happens, Subrahmanyam was hasty by approximately a year. Note that his conclusion and inference pertains to current dollar GDP, and we have to contend with the conversion from rupees to US dollars, and from Japanese yen to US dollars. First, let us look at the Indian estimate. Data just released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Friday shows that India's GDP in current prices for January-March 2025 quarter was Rs 88.17 trillion, or annualised Rs 352.7 trillion. On 23 May, the last market day before Subrahmanyam's assertion, the exchange rate was Rs 85.4/\$—that is, current GDP in March 2025 was 352.7/85.4 or \$4.13 trillion. Indian nominal GDP is growing by about 10 per cent a year. So, by March 2026, we should expect current India GDP to reach \$4.54 trillion. Now we examine the fortunes of Japan's GDP. The seasonally adjusted quarterly estimate of Japan's GDP is 624.9 trillion yen for Q1 of 2025. On 23 May, the exchange rate was 142.6 yen/\$; hence Japan's GDP in March 2025 was \$4.38 trillion, some 6.1 per cent ahead of India's GDP on the same date. Given that exchange rates change every day, we need to decide as to what exchange rate we should use. Amongst many, we can use a calendar year estimate, a quarterly estimate or a 23 May estimate. But no matter which one we use, it will be wrong because exchange rates do not remain constant, and the future is not asked to see, que sera sera. All of us are concerned with the 23 May estimate, hence the discussion and this note. Japan's nominal GDP growth has averaged 3.4 per cent for the last three years. Assuming this to be the average for 2025-26, the estimate for March 2026 is \$4.53 trillion GDP (as 4.38*1.034). So it will be sometime in March 2026 that India's GDP will exceed Japan's in current dollars. Again, que sera sera, the conclusion will depend on what happens to exchange rates. Changes in exchange rates affect nominal dollar GDP calculations. Assume in March 2026 all estimates come true except the \$ yen exchange rate changes from 142.7 to 135 (the yen has become stronger by 5.7 per cent), then Japan's GDP will be 5.7 per cent higher and the day of decision will be delayed beyond March 2026. How do we interpret the dash to conclusion by the CEO? As a sports junkie, I recall countless occasions over the last 50 years when a sprinter looked over his shoulder to see his competitor — and lost the race. What do we learn from this data-heavy exercise?



Tharoor's loyalty keeps colliding with Congress scepticism

"Would you be interested in contesting for the post of (UN) Secretary-General?" It's a question that then-Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asked Shashi Tharoor in New York in 2005. Tharoor, who was serving as the United Nations Under-Secretary-General, would later admit that Singh's question caught him a little off guard. Having served in various capacities at the UN since 1978, Tharoor felt that his "entire working life had seemed like a preparation" for the organisation's top post. Yet, he had no reason to believe that New Delhi was ready to back such a bid on his behalf, at least not at the time. India did eventually nominate him, albeit after a delay, for the position in mid-2006. Tharoor lost to Ban Ki-moon of South Korea, whose government mounted an aggressive campaign for its candidate. It was, however, the United States that emerged as the biggest stumbling block to Tharoor's candidacy. "Three factors—the bilateral relationship with Korea, a perception of a lack of conviction on India's part, and the Bush Administration's desire not to repeat the Kofi Annan experiment of a 'strong' Secretary-General—combined to ensure the US veto that scuttled my candidacy," he wrote in Open magazine in 2016. Two decades later, in a classic twist of irony, Tharoor finds himself embroiled in a controversy tinged with diplomatic hues. The same Congress party that once championed his bid for the highest seat in global diplomacy is now glum over the Centre naming him as the leader of a multi-party delegation visiting various world capitals on Operation Sindoor. His UN battle lost in



2006, Tharoor started spending more time in India and found a home in the Congress party, which offered him the post of Minister of State for External Affairs after his first Lok Sabha victory from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, in the 2009 general elections. Tharoor continues to retain the seat, winning four elections on the trot. In 2015, Tharoor claimed that when he was still considering his options after the UN stint, he had also received offers to join the BJP and the Left. But he chose the Congress because, as he explained in 2009, "I have nothing economically in common with the ideology of the Left and Communist parties. Those who have followed my writing for years know that I have nothing in common with the communalism that has been unfortunately encouraged by people associated with the Bharatiya Janata Party... and that basically means the Congress party." Nevertheless, Tharoor's loyalty to the Congress has remained suspect in the eyes of a section of party leaders from the beginning. His words of praise for Narendra Modi just days after the Congress' drubbing in the 2014 general elections marked the beginning of a series of statements over the last decade that cemented

this perception. In a HuffPost article, Tharoor wrote that just as Modi "remade himself from a hate-figure into an avatar of modernity and progress, he is seeking to remake the BJP from a vehicle of Hindu chauvinism to a natural party of governance." He continued: "For an opposition member of Parliament like myself, it would be churlish not to acknowledge Modi 2.0's inclusive outreach and to welcome his more conciliatory statements and actions. The moment he says or does something divisive or sectarian in the Modi 1.0 mould, however, we will resist him robustly. India's people, and its pluralist democracy, deserve no less." Following criticism from his party colleagues, Tharoor reaffirmed his commitment to the Congress and the principles of secularism in a letter to the party's communication department. "By praising him (Modi) for specific things, we help frame public expectation of his continued behaviour and raise the bar against which we will judge him in future," he wrote. However, it did little to dispel the growing perception of Tharoor as a misfit within the Congress. As Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh told a press huddle last month, "Congress mein hona aur Congress ka hona

mein zameen aasmaan ka antar hai" (There is a major difference between being in the Congress and being of the Congress). At the same time, the Congress leadership agrees that any disciplinary action against Tharoor will likely backfire. "His popular appeal, especially in urban India, is not lost on the party," a senior Congress leader told ThePrint when asked whether the party was considering action against Tharoor. His standing has also risen at a time when Kerala, his home state, is heading to the polls in less than a year. As it is, a section of the party close to the Congress high command was miffed with Tharoor for accepting the Centre's invitation to lead a multi-party delegation on Operation Sindoor without first seeking the leadership's concurrence. His public statements during the trip have only deepened the rift. On 29 May, addressing a gathering of the Indian community in Panama, Tharoor said that in 2016 "for the first time, India breached the Line of Control between India and Pakistan to conduct a surgical strike on a terror base." "Even during the Kargil War, we had not crossed the LoC; in Uri we did. Then came the attack in Pulwama... this time we crossed not only the LoC but [also] the international border and we struck terrorist headquarters in Balakot."

"And let me say to you that this is going to be the new normal. The PM has made it very clear that Operation Sindoor was necessary because these terrorists came and wiped the sindoor off the foreheads of 26 women," he said. These remarks riled up the Congress leadership so much so that it endorsed statements by party

functionary Udit Raj, known for his controversial remarks, that Tharoor should consider becoming a BJP spokesperson. Tharoor hit back, dismissing such critics as "zealots" and "trolls". Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera, considered close to Rahul Gandhi, promptly produced excerpts from Tharoor's own book to highlight the contradiction in his position. In his 2018 book *The Paradoxical Prime Minister*, Tharoor had pointed out that the Congress, while in the government, had authorised many cross-border surgical strikes, but did not exploit them politically—an assertion that countered his statement that India under Modi crossed the LoC "for the first time" in 2016. "The shameless exploitation of the 2016 'surgical strikes' along the Line of Control with Pakistan, and of a military raid in hot pursuit of rebels in Myanmar, as a party election tool—something the Congress had never done despite having authorised several such strikes earlier—marked a particularly disgraceful dilution of the principle that national security issues require both discretion and non-partisanship," Tharoor wrote in the book. Currently in Colombia, Tharoor is yet to respond to Khera.

However, a tweet made by him in 2018 to introduce his book remains instructive. "My new book, *THE PARADOXICAL PRIME MINISTER*, is more than just a 400-page exercise in floccinaucinihilipilification," Tharoor had posted, emphasising that the book was more than just a critique of the prime minister. Perhaps Khera should take note.

Orthodox Russia doesn't take orders from the Pope. Vatican can't convince Putin for a ceasefire

Russia's rejection of Vatican-led ceasefire talks with Ukraine should come as a surprise only to those who are ignorant of the historic animosity between the two religious institutions, the Vatican and the Russian Orthodox Church. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's clarification that it is a little 'awkward' for Orthodox countries to discuss issues on a Catholic platform should put at rest all efforts initiated by US President Donald Trump. The election of the hitherto unknown Robert Francis Prevost, a quiet lawyer-bishop with years of experience in Church matters, as the vicar of Jesus Christ, the first American Pope, does not change the ground realities of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, head of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), did not attend the funeral of Pope Francis, though the two held a meeting in 2016 in Cuba, after almost 10 centuries of schism. There is no reason why Pope Leo XIV would broker peace between Russian President

Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy just because the president of America wants him to do it. Trump's idea of involving the Papal office in the Vatican, the highest seat of the Catholic Church, in the ceasefire talks was a blunder for several reasons. Russia's Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Roman Catholic Church have been at loggerheads for over ten centuries, probably right from 988 when Grand Prince Vladimir was baptised. The theological split first appeared in 1054 when the then Pope Leo IX of Rome excommunicated Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople, who responded with his own excommunication of the Bishop of Rome, Pope Leo IX. The October Revolution of 1917 further alienated the two Christian faiths, even as Moscow under the brutal atheist regime of Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin stifled religious freedom. After deriding religion as the 'opium of the masses.'

Bangladesh Army Chief wants elections. Muhammad Yunus wants to get rid of him

Among military chiefs in the Indian subcontinent, Bangladesh Army chief Waker-Uz-Zaman must have the most unenviable job right now. While his Pakistan counterpart Asim Munir has been elevated to Field Marshal after a military confrontation with India, General Waker-Uz-Zaman risks losing his job. Or worse. His one big mistake? Saying that the national election be held by December this year so that Bangladesh can return to being an electoral democracy. On 22 May, *The Daily Star*, Bangladesh's highest-selling English newspaper, reported that Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman said the national election should be held by December this year, "according to three sources with direct knowledge of his remarks made at a high-level gathering in Dhaka cantonment." "Bangladesh needs political stability. This is only possible through an elected government, not by unelected decision-makers," one source quoted the army chief as saying in an Officers' Address. This was not the first time the General had spoken about the national election. The *Daily Star* report mentioned an

event marking the National Martyred Army Day at Raawa Club on 25 February this year, where the General was quoted as saying—"Every time I spoke with Dr Yunus, I completely agreed with him that there should be a free, fair, and inclusive election and that the election should be held within December or close to that." Soon after, reports that Muhammad Yunus, caretaker to the interim government in Bangladesh, was mulling resignation came out. "He (Yunus) said he is thinking about it (resignation). He feels that the situation is such that he cannot work," Nahid Islam, student-led National Citizen Party chief, said on the night of 22 May, after a meeting with Yunus. Two days later, on 24 May, it was clarified that Yunus would remain as the head of Bangladesh's interim government by an adviser in his cabinet. Former High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh Veena Sikri claimed that the speculation about Yunus resigning was "complete drama" to distract from the Bangladesh Army chief's statement on elections. "He had no intention of resign-

ing at all, and in fact, he never said himself that he would resign," the former High Commissioner said in an interview. But this "complete drama" generated hate towards Yunus's perceived detractors, the main target being General Waker-Uz-Zaman. Students, radicals, and some of Bangladesh's most popular and influential YouTubers openly attacked the army chief. Bangladeshi journalist Sahidul Hasan Khokon told ThePrint that both the student-led, newly formed political party National Citizen Party and the Islamist political outfit Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami have been busy channelising mob rage against General Waker. "The local media is not reporting this, but the mob is ready. If need be, there will be violent street protests against the Army, like there were during the July revolution against Hasina when the mob turned against the police and killed many policemen," Hasan said. Hasan added that Jamaat had got a free rein ever since Yunus took over and the new student's party will need more time to organise itself. Hence, December polls, as suggested by General Waker.

India May Be Barking Up The Wrong Tree As It Takes On Pakistan In IMF

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved the disbursement of another \$1 billion to Pakistan under its latest Extended Fund Facility (EFF), reinstating Pakistan's dependence on international bailouts. As a country with a high dependence on imported oil, whenever oil prices hike or international borrowing declines, Islamabad's reserves take a further hit. Since 1958, whenever this occurs, Pakistan has approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a bailout approximately every three years, seek-

ing to save its economy under the condition of improving macroeconomic indicators. While the role of the IMF has been minimal in reforming Pakistan's governance, its fund facilities have stabilised the economy from falling into the pit grave. However, the key question remains: have IMF bailouts inadvertently enabled an environment to facilitate terror financing? If so, should India try to block IMF funds to Pakistan? Contrary to popular imagination, the IMF's role is distinct, and its programmes impose strict conditions that

compel Islamabad to demonstrate some accountability in governance and economic management. And India needs an accountable Pakistan. While the IMF can serve as a platform for India to signal its displeasure and apply international diplomatic pressure following the Pahalgam attack on April 22 by alleged Pakistan-backed terrorists, a more effective route to achieving strategic objectives would be to target terror financing networks and financial opacity through the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global watchdog on

money laundering and terror financing, where reports suggest India is already preparing to build a robust case against Pakistan. Persistent macroeconomic imbalances have led to a state of massive public debt, with the country facing massive external debt repayment dues. The Pakistani economy has structural weaknesses, from a narrow tax base to low productivity. Islamabad is also extremely dependent on imported energy, with energy imports accounting for 20 to 40 % of total imports. Of the previous 25 IMF programmes.

Privatized entities can employ Aadhaar authentication

Delhi: The ministry of electronics and IT (Meity) announced that the Union government has amended the Aadhaar rules to allow private entities to use Aadhaar authentication for service delivery. The amendments aim to give residents "ease of living" and "better access to services". Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) notified Aadhaar Authentication for Good Governance (Social Welfare, Innovation, Knowledge) Amendment Rules, 2025, revising 2020 rules. "The amendment allows government and non-government entities to use Aadhaar authentication, promoting trusted transactions for both providers and users," stated the announcement. It stated that the amendment will make non-government e-commerce, travel, tourism, hospitality, and health services easier to use.

The 2020 rules allowed the Centre to



allow Aadhaar authentication only "in the interest of good governance, preventing leakage of public funds, promoting ease of living of residents and enabling better access to services for them" to use digital platforms for good governance, social welfare benefit dissipation prevention, and innovation and knowledge dissemination. The amendments removed "in the interest of good governance, preventing leakage of public funds access to services for them" and added "promoting ease of living of residents and enabling better access to services for them" as the fourth purpose, expanding the reasons for authentication.

Prasanna S, the Supreme Court's advocate-on-record who challenged Aadhaar's constitutionality, called the expansion the "spectre of a surveillance state", "unwarranted" and in violation of the top court's ruling that struck down Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act, 2016 to bar private entities from using authentication services. The 2025 Rules change contradicts the five-judge Supreme Court ruling in *Puttaswamy v Union of India* (2018). Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act, 2016 prohibiting private entities from employing authentication services was overturned. He claimed this amendment practically re-legislates what was ruled down.

Women own almost 50% of small manufacturing businesses

A survey found that 58% of manufacturing businesses were owned by women in 2023-24, up 4% from the previous year. The Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) 2023-24 found that 28.1% of workers were women. More than one-third (33.7%) of OAEs' workforce is female in OAEs (owned enterprises). Female-owned businesses rose to 26.2% in 2023-24 from 22.9% in and 9.7% to 14.2% in other services. Female workers comprised 18.5% of recruited workers. Female workers were



most prevalent in manufacturing (46.5%), followed by other services (22.5%) and trade. West Bengal has the most female workers (12.7%), followed by Uttar Pradesh (10.4%) and Maharashtra (9.7%) in ASUSE 2023-24. West Bengal and Maharashtra have the most rural and urban female workers, at 16% and 13%,

respectively. Non-incorporated non-far establishments are not registered under the Companies Act 1956 or the 2013 Act.

Every fourth proprietary establishment in India was owned by a woman. Women run one-third of private businesses in Gujarat, Karnataka, Telangana, and West Bengal.

Health and wealth benefit from flexible work hours

Delhi: The Economic Survey supports allowing manufacturers to average legally capped working hours over three weeks or longer rather than week-by-week. Industry captains want larger hours. It claims that agile regulations will assist management satisfy production

demands and grow. "New Labour Laws are an improvement. With flexible legislation and competent implementation, firms may develop and create more jobs. They protect labor rights and boost wages," it stated. The Survey complained that labor laws like the

Factories Act (1948) limit working hours to 48 per week, whereas other nations "allow these caps to be averaged over multiple days and weeks". It said India's working hour laws impede manufacturers from satisfying demand and competing globally.

IT panel to propose TV, print, online media umbrella

Delhi: The Parliamentary panel on communications and information technology, led by BJP lawmaker Nishikant Dubey, will recommend that the Union government form the Media Council of India to regulate print, television, and online media, sources said. A senior panelist suggested an umbrella body because the same content occurs across platforms. You work for a paper. The Press Council of India oversees your newspaper articles. No regulation exists for the identical story in the paper's online edition. "There is no central regulator for online material, but two groups regulate print and electronic media. The Press Council of India, a statutory quasi-judicial



autonomous authority established by Parliament, protects press freedom and improves newspaper and news agency standards. Among other major media regulatory reforms, the panel, which addressed fake news extensively will recommend this. In the discussion,

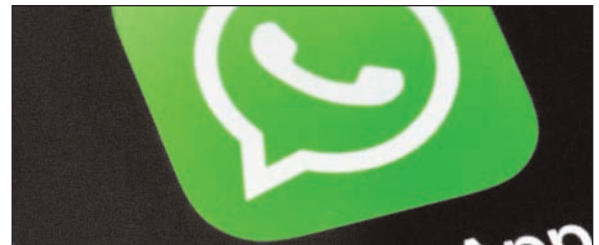
Dubey added, "Paid news is rampant. Illiterate and gullible individuals think alike. Without strict regulations, ethical boundaries are crossed. Investigative journalism is discouraged by expensive and lengthy legal fights for journalists and media corporations.

Foreign insurers gain ownership via 100% FDI

Delhi: 100% FDI will attract new capital, as multinationals can now invest without worrying about control or Indian partners. The capital gains tax rate of 12% applies to ULIP proceeds, which do not benefit from tax exemptions, instead of the higher marginal tax rate of 30%. Crop cover reinsurance is exempt from service tax, and the threshold for tax deduction at source on insurance commission has risen from Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000. M Nagraju, financial services secretary, said the FDI relaxation was one of the suggested insurance measures, and the modifications would

WhatsApp claims Israeli spyware Paragon targets users

Delhi: After the hack, WhatsApp issued Paragon a cease-and-desist letter. WhatsApp stated it "will continue to protect people's ability to communicate privately." Paragon wouldn't comment. WhatsApp officials reported a hacking attempt on 90 users. A number of civil society and media figures were targeted, although the official did not specify who or where. He said WhatsApp has stopped the hacking and was referring targets to Citizen Lab. Officials would not reveal how they determined



Paragon was responsible for the hack. He claimed law enforcement and industry partners were informed but declined to elaborate. Paragon sells high-end surveillance software to government clients, claiming it is essential to combating crime and defending national security. However, journalists, activists, opposition

politicians, and at least 50 US officials have found surveillance capabilities on their phones, raising fears about the technology's unregulated expansion. Paragon, which was apparently acquired by Florida-based investment group AE Industrial Partners last month, has strived to identify as a responsible industry actor.

Public infrastructure spending rises, but private sector participation falls

Delhi: The 2024-25 Economic Survey delivered to Parliament found that India still struggles with infrastructure development despite government efforts. The union government's capital investment on major infrastructure sectors grew 38.8% from FY20 to FY24, although private sector participation in core areas remained low, according to the survey. "India needs a continued step-up of infrastructure investment over the next two decades to sustain a high rate of growth," the research says. The National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) program has met its FY22-24 objective of 4.30 lakh crore with transactions totaling 3.86 lakh crore. In Q1 FY25, average monthly capital spend-



The National Critical Mineral Mission gets 16,300 crore from the cabinet

Delhi: The Union Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, launched the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM) with a 16,300 crore expenditure and a projected 18,000 crore investment from PSUs and other businesses. "Several crucial decisions have created new scientific and technology prospects for our children, future generations, and the economy. Minister told a Cabinet briefing that PM Modi the National Critical Minerals Mission today.

ing dropped to 0.60 lakh crore from 0.66 lakh crore in July-November 2024. Railway network expansion remained constant at 2,000 kilometers, with 17 Vande Bharat train pairs and 228 carriages added.

Price pressure caps senior citizen health premium hikes at 10%

As medicare policy rates skyrocket for seniors over 60, Irdai has ordered insurers not to raise senior people's health premiums by more than 10% without approval. Before canceling senior health coverage, insurers must get regulator clearance. As healthcare prices rise, insurers are



advised to standardize hospital empanelment and negoti-

ate package rates like the government's PM Jan Arogya Yojana. Irdai reported a large increase in prices for various health insurance policies for subscribers over 60. Premium rates depend on projected claims, administrative expenditures, and acquisition costs, the regulator said. Private

insurance doesn't standardize hospitalization expenses, unlike PMJAY, which negotiates consistent package rates, which drives these rises. Seniors have reported virtually doubling their costs when entering a higher age category during an insurer's pricing change.

Redesigning agri export policies

Delhi: Three sources intimately involved in the process said India's six-year-old Agricultural Export Policy (AEP) will be overhauled as export destinations vary and the country's farm export basket diversifies. The planned study will improve Indian agricultural products' competitiveness, assure global standards compliance, and promote value-added products. The officials quoted above added on condition of anonymity that it will also aim to enhance commercial links with emerging countries while main-



taining strong partnerships with old partners. "Our agricultural exports have grown over the past five years. We must examine the policy to match export targets with market demands. One of the three persons cited above claimed

the agriculture ministry will assist with the review and set a deadline. India was the eighth-largest agricultural exporter in 2023 despite a drop from \$51.12 billion to \$48.77 billion in FY24. Recently, changing global demand pat-

Norms to stop annoying calls and surrogate advertisements next month

Delhi: Thirteen businesses, including significant producers of alcohol, tobacco, and paan masala, have received notifications from the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) for using surrogate advertising. The dishonest practice of using the

same brand name to promote products that are prohibited from direct advertising is known as "surrogate advertising." Pralhad Joshi, the union minister of consumer affairs, stated that the CCPA is creating regulations to control the issue.

terns, trading partners, and agricultural technology have changed how and where agricultural products are sold. Two newly appointed MPC members have revived the Economic Survey's dis-

ussion on removing food inflation from monetary policy. Q2 GDP growth and November food inflation may have unnerved MPC outsiders.

Akshay clarifies Golmaal 5 role

Akshay Kumar confirms Ajay Devgn leads Golmaal 5, says he is happy to be part of franchise without insecurity



Akshay Kumar



Ajay Devgn

A few days ago, on Rohit Shetty's birthday, an announcement video of *Golmaal 5* was released, in which it was revealed that Akshay Kumar is also a part of the film. But, recently in an interview, the actor revealed that he is not

playing the lead role in the film, and Ajay Devgn is the hero.

While talking to News18 about Ajay's comment in the announcement video, 'koi bhi franchise nahi chhodta hai', Akshay said, "But isn't it a great thing? It's nice that whenever there's any franchise, they want me."

Further talking about his role in the fifth instalment of the *Golmaal* franchise, Akshay said, "I'm happy that they think I was good enough to be a part of *Golmaal*. Ajay is the main hero. I'm not playing the main part. But what's wrong with it? I look at a film as a film and never think *ki main kya kar raha hoon uss film mein*. For me, it's far more important what the film is setting out to achieve. If I like the story, I'll do it."

When Akshay was asked if he was hesitant before taking up *Golmaal 5*, as it is a franchise that a contemporary actor was heading, the *Bhool Bhulaiyaa* actor said, "Mera role badhiya hai *Golmaal* mein, but Ajay's the hero. I've no insecurity. *Uski koi zaroorat nahi hai*."

This is not the first time Akshay and Ajay have worked together in a movie. They have earlier shared screen space in movies like *Insan*, *Suhaag*, *Khakee*, *Sooryavanshi*, and *Singham Again*.

'Many people are leaving Mumbai'

Fitness enthusiast Milind Soman reflects on Mumbai's changing lifestyle, says many seek greener homes outside city while others enjoy its vibrant pace



Photo: Instagram @milindrinning

Actor and fitness enthusiast Milind Soman, expressed his thoughts over the growing desire among people to move out of Mumbai in search of more space, greenery and a quieter lifestyle.

Highlighting this shift in mindset, he told IANS, "A lot of people feel that 'I want my garden and I want trees, good space and those people move out.'"

"In fact, a lot of people are moving out of the city, whoever can. They are buying land, they're starting farming," he said. At the same time, the actor also acknowledged that while Mumbai has its own set of flaws, it still appeals to many. "There are people who love living in Mumbai because it's crowded, because it's exciting, because there's so much energy," said Milind.

Reflecting on how the city has changed over time, he added, "I have seen pictures of Mumbai from the 1800s when it was just a village and the bridges were not even built, they were islands. So things change, and they have changed of course." Sharing his personal connection to the city, he said, "Shivaji Park in Dadar where I lived from my childhood, I mean it's not the same, but the park is still there, and it is a fantastic place."

Sunder Poonam goes on floors

Actress Sanya Malhotra starts filming romantic thriller *Sunder Poonam*, shares *muhurat puja* pictures with co-stars Aditya Rawal, Aditya Seal



Sanya Malhotra has kick-started working on her new film titled *Sunder Poonam*. On Tuesday morning, Sanya took to Instagram and shared several pictures from the film's *muhurat puja*. In the images, she could be seen posing with her *Sunder Poonam* team including actors Aditya Rawal and Aditya Seal.

"#SunderPoonam It begins," Sanya captioned the post. *Sunder Poonam* was officially announced at Prime Video's slate event in Mumbai on March 19. Speaking of the project, Sanya, in a press note, stated, "*Sunder Poonam* is an incredibly exciting film for me as it brings me face-to-face with one of the most challenging roles I've taken on so far. It pushes me into an unexplored space as an actor. The character is layered, intense, and emotionally demanding, which instantly drew me in. Collaborating with Vikram and Abundantia Entertainment has always been incredibly fulfilling, and after Shakuntala Devi, I'm excited to begin a new chapter with them and Prime Video. Pulkit is an exceptionally



talented director, and his sensitivity towards storytelling adds so much depth to the narrative. I'm looking forward to starting this journey and sharing a new side of myself with the audience."

Photos: Instagram @sanyamalhotra_



Seerat backs social initiative

Actress joins Lakshmi Manchu's education fundraiser in Hyderabad, supporting initiatives aimed at improving government school infrastructure and learning facilities



Seerat Kapoor

Photo: Instagram @iamseerat Kapoor

Actress Seerat Kapoor is set to walk the ramp for a social cause as she joins the annual fashion fundraiser organised by Lakshmi Manchu's NGO Teach For Change. The event will be held in Hyderabad on March 27.

The initiative focuses on improving the quality of education in government schools through volunteer-driven programmes and the introduction of smart classrooms. The fashion fundraiser aims to generate support and funds for the NGO's educational projects planned for the year.

The event is expected to see participation from several celebrities from Bollywood and the South Indian film industries, along with personalities from the sports fraternity. Organisers believe the presence of well-known faces will help amplify awareness about the cause.

Sharing their excitement on social media, the organisers expressed happiness over Seerat's participation, stating that her presence would add energy and visibility to the initiative.

They also highlighted the importance of collective efforts in supporting education for underprivileged children.

Teach For Change has been actively working towards creating better learning environments and equal opportunities for children from disadvantaged communities.

Known for her performances and fashion sense, Seerat's association with the fundraiser reflects her support for social causes. The event is expected to bring together fashion and philanthropy for a meaningful evening.



Lakshmi Manchu

Photo: Instagram @lakshimanchu

Kim Kardashian and Lewis Hamilton holiday in Tokyo



British racing star Lewis Hamilton has joined reality TV star Kim Kardashian and her children for a spring break trip in Tokyo. A source confirmed that Kardashian, her three younger children, Saint, 10, Chicago, 9, and Psalm, 6, are on a vacation with Hamilton, with whom Kim has been romantically linked, reports people.com.

Kim shares three children and daughter, North, 12, with ex-husband Kanye West. Kim and her children are in Tokyo for spring break, alongside Khloé Kardashian and her children, True and Tatum, the source said. The source's confirmation comes after Kim and Hamilton were spotted in Tokyo.



Photos: X

A crossover moment

Hrithik Roshan and Ryan Gosling discuss *Project Hail Mary*, sci-fi storytelling and global collaboration in virtual conversation

Actor Hrithik Roshan and Hollywood star Ryan Gosling recently came together for an exclusive virtual interaction centred on their association with the upcoming film *Project Hail Mary*. The conversation marked a rare cross-continental exchange between the two actors, highlighting their shared interest in science fiction, space and impactful storytelling. The interaction follows

the global attention generated by Hrithik's association with the project through a collaboration video that drew interest from fans worldwide. During the discussion, both actors spoke about the film's unique narrative and its appeal to audiences across cultures. The conversation also touched upon Hrithik's popular science fiction film *Koi... Mil Gaya*, with the two drawing comparisons on how the genre connects audiences through emotion and imagination.



Ryan Gosling

Hrithik Roshan

Photos: Instagram

Briefs

ISLAMABAD

Pak ranked most polluted country

Pakistan is the most polluted country in the world, followed by Bangladesh and Tajikistan while India is at the sixth spot, according to the 8th World Air Quality report. The annual report by Swiss air quality monitoring firm IQAir found that concentrations of PM2.5, tiny airborne particles that pose serious health risks, were up to 13 times higher than the guideline set by the World Health Organisation. According to the report, only 13 countries and territories managed to maintain average PM2.5 levels within the WHO's recommended limit of less than 5 micrograms per cubic metre in 2025, an increase from seven countries in 2024.

HAVANA

Aid vessel arrives in Havana

A ship bringing humanitarian aid to Cuba arrived in Havana on Tuesday loaded with solar panels, bicycles, food and medicine as the island's economic and energy crises deepen. Some 30 people were aboard the first of three ships expected to arrive in Cuba as it grapples with severe blackouts, a crumbling power grid and a US energy blockade. The ship departed Puerto Progreso, in Mérida, Mexico, last week and two others are heading to Cuba. The flotilla is part of a caravan called "Our America Convoy to Cuba," with more than 650 participants from 33 countries who arrived on the island last weekend with tons of aid and were received by President Miguel Diaz-Canel.

KABUL

Afghanistan releases US national

Afghanistan's Taliban authorities on Tuesday released American academic Dennis Coyle after holding him for over a year, with the Foreign Ministry saying the release came on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, the Muslim holiday that marks the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. A statement from the ministry said the academic researcher had been released in Kabul, the country's capital, following an appeal from his family and after Afghanistan's Supreme Court "considered his previous imprisonment sufficient." Coyle was detained in January 2025. Afghan authorities accused him of violating laws, but never specified which ones. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio welcomed the release.

NAIROBI

Floods worsen as two rivers burst banks

The Kenyan government said Tuesday that two rivers have burst their banks, flooding farms and displacing families as the death toll in flooding in the east African nation this month rises to 88. At least 21 counties have been affected by the floods, raising concerns over public safety, infrastructure damage and growing humanitarian needs. The number of people displaced from their homes in flooding that started earlier in March has now reached over 34,000. The latest flooding incident occurred in western Kenya, where the Nyando River overflowed on Monday, submerging sections of the Ahero Bridge and disrupting transport in the region.

FIGHT CONTINUES | Trump says he is in talks with Iran to end the war, but both sides continue to carry out heavy airstrikes

US strikes hit Iran; Tehran targets Israel, Gulf states

DUBAI

Airstrikes battered Iran's capital and Iranian missiles and drones targeted Israel's Tel Aviv and sites across the Mideast on Tuesday, even as President Donald Trump said the United States was in talks with the Islamic Republic to end the war.

With thousands more US Marines on their way to the Gulf, both sides firing intense barrages and Iran denying any negotiations are taking place, the war's tempo remained high a day after Trump delayed his self-imposed deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Tehran's chokehold on that crucial waterway has snarled international shipping, sent fuel prices skyrocketing, and threatened the world economy.

Any talks between the US and Iran — which appeared at the most tentative on Tuesday — would face monumental



challenges. Many of Washington's shifting list of objectives — particularly over Iran's ballistic missile and nuclear programs — remain difficult to achieve. Meanwhile, it's not clear who in Iran's government would have the authority to negotiate — or be willing to, particularly as Israel has vowed to continue taking out leaders after killing several.

Iran also remains highly suspicious of the United States, which twice, under the Trump administration, has attacked during high-level

diplomatic talks, including with the Feb. 28 strikes that started the current war.

Iran's military has conducted strikes on the orders of local commanders, rather than from the political leadership. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said early in the war. It remains unclear whether Iran's new Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, who reportedly was wounded and has yet to be seen publicly, is issuing orders to Iran's regular military or its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which answered only to his late father.

16 killed, 4.5k injured: Israel

Tel Aviv/New Delhi: Sixteen people have been killed and over 4,500 injured in Israel since the conflict with Iran began late last month, according to Israel's emergency medical service.

2,100 children killed or injured

United Nations: More than 2,100 children have been killed or injured since the military escalation in the Middle East, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Deputy Executive Director Ted Chaiban said. The casualties included 206 children killed in Iran, 118 in Lebanon, four in Israel and one in Kuwait, he said.

Pete said, 'Let's do it': Trump on how decision was made to attack Iran

WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump said that Secretary of War Pete Hegseth was the "first one" to suggest attacking Iran when he discussed the "problem in the Middle East" with his close aides.

Trump, who is facing backlash in his country over the issue, praised Hegseth for his quick response on the issue. "Pete, I think you were the first one to speak up and you said let's do it because you can't let them have a nuclear weapon," he said.

Earlier, Trump said on social media that he has extended the deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, the strategically-located shipping lane between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, and that he will hold off strikes against Iranian energy sites for five days.

The US president, without sharing any details, also said that there have been "productive conversations" between the US and Iran for "complete and total resolution" to the conflict in West Asia.

Four killed in latest Russian drone attacks

KYIV

A major Russian drone and missile attack on civilian areas of Ukraine killed four people and injured at least 27, officials said Tuesday.

Moscow's army stepped up efforts to break through Ukrainian front-line defence in what could be the start of an anticipated spring ground offensive.

Russia fired almost 400 long-range drones at Ukraine overnight, Ukraine's air force said, in its biggest attack in weeks.

The onslaught continued into Tuesday morning as dozens of drones targeted the capital Kyiv during daylight.

Russia also launched 23 cruise missiles and seven ballistic missiles at Ukraine during the night, hitting at least 10 locations across the country, according to the air force.

Ukrainian civilians have endured relentless barrages since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of its neighbour more than four years ago.

Russia fired almost 400 long-range drones at Ukraine overnight, Ukraine's air force said, in its biggest attack in weeks

US-brokered talks between Moscow and Kyiv over the past year have brought no respite, with Russia rejecting Ukraine's offer of a ceasefire and in recent weeks the Iran war has diverted international attention from Ukraine's plight.

On the roughly 1,250-kilometer front line snaking along eastern and southern parts of Ukraine, the short-handed defenders have been bracing for a new offensive by Russia's bigger army as the weather improves.

The Commander-in-Chief of Ukraine's armed forces, General Oleksandr Syrskyi, said Russian troops in recent days have made simultaneous attempts to break through defensive lines in several strategic areas.

Ex-general behind 2007 coup arrested in Dhaka police raid

DHAKA

Police in Dhaka have arrested retired Lieutenant General Masud Uddin Chowdhury, a pivotal figure in the 2007 military-backed interim government. Chowdhury was taken into custody on Monday night from his residence in the Baridhara area by plainclothes officers.

According to the detective branch, the former general faces at least five separate cases, though officials have not yet provided specific

details regarding the charges.

The arrest is significant due to Chowdhury's central role in the "1/11" transition, which saw an army-backed administration replace a caretaker government.

That interim period lasted two years and was widely seen as an attempt to implement a "minus two formula" to remove the country's top political leaders from power.

During that time, the current Prime Minister, Tarique Rahman, was arrested and allegedly tortured before

spending 17 years in exile in the United Kingdom.

Chowdhury's career shifted into diplomacy and politics following his military service. He previously served as Bangladesh's ambassador to Australia and later became a Member of Parliament for the Jatiya Party.

His party was a key electoral ally of the now-disbanded Awami League, led by deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, which took power following the 2008 elections that ended the interim rule.

Lebanon orders Iranian envoy to leave country

DUBAI

The Lebanon government on Tuesday ordered Iran's ambassador to leave country.

The Foreign Ministry said Tehran's diplomatic representative in the tiny war-torn country has to leave by Sunday, declaring him persona non grata.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Denise Rahme told The Associated Press that Iran's embassy will still have a charge d'affaires to head its diplomatic mission.

Colombian military aircraft crash kills 66; 4 still missing

BOGOTA

A military transport plane with 128 people on board, mostly soldiers, crashed shortly after taking off Monday in Puerto Leguizamo, Colombia, killing at least 66 people and leaving dozens injured, the head of Colombia's armed forces said.

General Hugo Alejandro Lopez Barreto said that four military personnel were still missing.

"Sadly, as a consequence of this tragic accident, 66 of our

military elements died," he said.

"At the moment, we have no information, or indications, that it was an attack by an illegal armed group," Barreto added.

In a video posted on social media, Deputy Mayor Carlos Claros said that the bodies of the victims were taken to the small town's morgue, and that the only two clinics in town treated the injured before they were flown to larger cities.

Puerto Leguizamo is located in Putumayo, an Amazonian province that borders Ecuador

and Peru.

"I want to thank the people of Puerto Leguizamo who came out to help the victims of this accident," Claros told Colombian television station RCN.

Defence Minister Pedro Sanchez said on X that the plane that crashed Monday was transporting troops to another city in Putumayo.

Images shared online by Colombian media outlets showed a black cloud of smoke rising from a field where the plane crashed and a truck with soldiers rushing to the site.

Bahrain puts forward UN-backed action for Hormuz shipping

PARIS

Bahrain has put forward a draft U.N. Security Council resolution that would authorise countries to use "all necessary means" - diplomatic language for force - to protect commercial shipping in and around the Strait of Hormuz, according to a text seen by Reuters on Monday.

Diplomats said the draft text was backed by other Gulf Arab states and the United States, although they said it was unlikely to get through the council, where Russia and China had veto power.

France circulated a more conciliatory alternative draft resolution, seen by Reuters, on Monday evening.

The move underscores mounting concern in the region that Iran could continue to threaten the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic chokepoint that carries about a fifth of global oil supplies and



underpins Gulf economies.

Closing the Strait has been one of Iran's main objectives. Shipping through the waterway has ground to a near-halt after Iran hit vessels in its conflict with the U.S. and Israel.

The draft resolution calls Iran's actions a threat to international peace and security.

The Bahraini text would authorise countries, acting alone or through voluntary multinational naval coalitions, to use "all necessary means" in and around the Strait of Hormuz - including in the territorial waters of countries along its shores - to ensure passage and to prevent moves that block or interfere with international navigation.

Asia boosts coal use as Iran war squeezes LNG supplies

BANGKOK

Asian countries are turning to coal as the Iran war disrupts oil and gas shipments.

The continent is exposed because it relies on imported fuel, much of it passing through the Strait of Hormuz — a chokepoint for about a fifth of global oil and natural gas trade.

The war has countries shifting back to coal to cover LNG shortfalls. India is burning more coal to meet higher summer demand. South Korea has lifted caps on electricity from coal. Indonesia is prioritising using its domestic supply. Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam are boosting coal-fired power.

Burning more coal risks worsening smog in major cities, slowing the transition to renewable energy and increasing the region's planet-warming emissions.

Kim vows irreversible nuclear power status

SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has pledged to irreversibly cement his country's status as a nuclear power while maintaining a hard-line stance toward South Korea, which he called the "most hostile" state, state media said Tuesday.

In a speech Monday to Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament, Kim accused the United States of global "state terrorism and aggression," in an apparent reference to the war in the Middle East, and said the North will play a more forceful role in a united front against Washington amid rising anti-American sentiment.

But Kim didn't call out US President Donald Trump by name and said whether his adversaries "choose confrontation or peaceful coexistence is up to them, and we are prepared to respond to any choice." His comments largely aligned with his statements at last month's ruling Workers' Party Congress, where he vil-



ified Seoul but left open the door for dialogue with the Trump administration, urging Washington to drop its demands for the North's nuclear disarmament as a precondition for talks.

State media said the Supreme People's Assembly, which concluded its two-day session Monday, passed a revised constitution but did not specify the changes.

There had been expectations the revisions would codify South Korea as a permanent enemy and remove references to shared nationhood.

That's in line with Kim's hard-line stance after he declared in 2024 that the North would abandon its long-term goal of a peaceful unification with the South.

Jury orders Bill Cosby to pay \$19 million in 1972 sexual abuse case

AGENCIES
SANTA MONICA

A California jury on Monday ordered disgraced comedian Bill Cosby to pay \$19.25 million in damages to a former waitress, finding that he drugged and sexually assaulted her more than 50 years ago.

The plaintiff, 84-year-old Donna Motsinger, testified that the assault occurred in 1972 after Cosby picked her up in a limousine to take her to one of his stand-up shows. Motsinger, who worked at a celebrity-frequented restaurant near San Francisco at the time, alleged that Cosby gave her wine and a pill she believed to be aspirin.

According to court filings, Motsinger quickly lost consciousness, recalling only "flashes of light" before waking up at her home the following morning. She stated she realized then that she had been drugged and raped.

Cosby, 88, has consistently denied Motsinger's allegations. His legal team argued that because Motsinger admitted to having gaps in her memory of the night, the claims were unsubstantiated.

Following the verdict, Cosby's attorney, Jennifer Bonjean, confirmed to U.S. media that her client intends to appeal the decision. The legal battle may not be over, as the jury in Santa Monica has yet to determine the amount of additional punitive damages that could be awarded.

This civil verdict is the latest chapter in the total collapse of the reputation of the man once known as "America's Dad." While dozens of women have accused Cosby of similar misconduct dating back to the 1960s, he has maintained that all encounters were consensual.

Monday's decision marks a significant legal victory for the "Me Too" era movement.

NASA unveils roadmap for permanent moon base

WASHINGTON

NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman announced a sweeping agency-wide transformation on Tuesday, unveiling a strategic roadmap dubbed "Ignition" that aims to accelerate lunar landings and cement American dominance in deep space. Speaking at the Ignition event, Isaacman declared that the United States is officially engaged in a "great-power competition" and must establish an enduring presence on the Moon before the end of the decade.

The plan shifts NASA's focus toward a phased architecture for a permanent lunar base and the development of nuclear propulsion technology for future Mars missions.

The center of this updated strategy is a move to standardize the Space Launch System (SLS) rocket and increase the frequency of missions. NASA plans to launch Artemis III in 2027 to test integrated systems in Earth orbit, followed by Artemis IV, which will target a lunar landing. Beyond Artemis V, the agency intends to transition to commercially

procured and reusable hardware to support crewed lunar surface missions every six months. In a significant shift, NASA announced it will "pause" the Gateway space station in its current form to prioritize infrastructure that directly supports sustained operations on the lunar surface.

The proposed lunar base will be developed in three distinct stages. The first phase, "Build, Test, Learn," focuses on robotic deliveries and technology demonstrations involving power generation and mobility.

Vietnam, Russia advance nuclear power deal

Hanoi: Vietnam and Russia signed a deal to build a nuclear power plant in Vietnam as the Southeast Asian country revives its nuclear plans with hopes of boosting energy security while curbing greenhouse gas emissions.

The deal for the Ninh Thuan 1 plant, reported by Vietnamese state media, comes after two similar projects were shelved in 2016 over rising costs and safety issues.

The agreement was signed Monday during Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh's visit to Moscow. -AP

Hong Kong grants police power to demand phone, computer passwords

HONG KONG

Hong Kong authorities have enacted a significant expansion of police powers under the city's national security framework, now requiring individuals suspected of security violations to surrender passwords for their mobile phones and computers. The new measures, which officially took effect on Monday, grant law enforcement the authority to compel suspects to provide any necessary decryption methods or information required to access electronic



data. This development is part of a series of amendments to the implementation rules of the sweeping national security law imposed by Beijing in 2020, following a period of intense pro-democracy protests in the territory.

The updated regulations carry heavy legal consequences for those who refuse

to cooperate with police demands. Under the new rules, an individual who fails to provide a password or decryption assistance faces up to one year in prison and a fine of 100,000 Hong Kong dollars. The penalties are even more severe for those found to have provided false or misleading information to authorities, which can result in a three-year prison sentence and a fine of up to 500,000 Hong Kong dollars. Furthermore, the amendments extend power to customs officers, allowing them to seize materials deemed to have "seditious intention".

Briefs

BRIGHTON

Ekitike injured in Liverpool's match



Liverpool striker **Hugo Ekitike** lasted less than eight minutes before hobbling off with a left leg injury in the Premier League game against Brighton on Saturday. The France international was hurt in a challenge by Brighton midfielder James Milner in the third minute. After receiving treatment, he tried to run it off but couldn't continue and was replaced by Curtis Jones. Ekitike was selected in France's latest squad ahead of friendlies against Brazil and Colombia in the United States.

GOLD COAST (AUS)

Diksha, Hitaashee in top 10



Indian golfer **Hitaashee Bakshi** and **Diksha Dagar** are both placed T-6 after the third round of the Australian WPGA Championship with a total score of 9-under par here. Hitaashee carded a round of 4-under 67 to gain two positions, while Diksha put together a round of 6-under 65 on the third day to move up from T-16 to T-6. Hannah Green is looking set to claim her third title in as many events as she won her home event, the Women's Australian Open just last week.

VALSPAR PALM HARBOUR

Rai, Theegala miss cut at Valspar



Aaron Rai and **Sahith Theegala** missed the cut at the Valspar Championship after disappointing second rounds in Palm Harbour, Florida. Rai, who was in the top 10 after an opening round of 68, carded a five-over 77 in the second round to finish at three-over par and exit early. Theegala also failed to progress after a poor start to the tournament. He followed up his opening 77 with an even-par 72 but ended at six-over, falling short of the cut line. Meanwhile, Sungjae Im continued to lead the field after the second round. He carded a two-under 70 to move to nine-under overall,

Akash Deep ruled out of IPL with back injury

KKR face mounting pace concerns as injuries hit bowling resources

KOLKATA

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) have suffered another blow to their pace attack, with India seamer **Akash Deep** ruled out for at least eight weeks due to a stress reaction in his lower back, effectively sidelining him from the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL).

The injury has also placed the right-arm pacer in serious doubt for the one-off Test against Afghanistan scheduled for early June.

"Akash Deep has a stress reaction in his lower back. There has been a recurrence and it might take eight to 12 weeks to heal. He is not going to play the IPL and is very unlikely to be selected for the Afghanistan Test," a BCCI source said.

The 29-year-old Bengal pacer was last seen in action during the Ranji Trophy semifinal against Jammu and Kashmir, where he appeared short of full fitness, bowling 13 overs in the first innings and fewer than seven in the second. He has since been undergoing rehabilitation at the BCCI Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru and did not join KKR's preparatory camp, which began in Kolkata on Wednesday.

"It will take considerable time for healing, followed by workload adaptation and return-to-play protocols. A conservative estimate of recovery is around 10 weeks, but it could take longer," the source added.

Akash Deep's absence adds to KKR's growing list of injured pacers, including India seamer Harshit Rana



Akash Deep has a stress reaction in his lower back. There has been a recurrence and it might take eight to 12 weeks to heal.

BCCI source

and Sri Lanka's Matheesha Pathirana, further weakening the team's fast-bowling options.

With both Akash Deep and Rana unavailable, KKR will rely heavily on domestic bowlers such as Vaibhav Arora, Kartik Tyagi and Umran Malik, who has recently regained fitness.

KKR, who finished eighth in their title defence last season, had already been dealing with Rana's absence due to a ligament strain in his right knee.

Earlier this year, left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman was released following a BCCI directive, prompting the franchise to bring in Zimbabwe pacer Blessing Muzarabani as his replacement.

VIEWPOINT | Ex-India spinner cites fading novelty, injuries and personnel gaps

KKR bowling lacks fear factor ahead of IPL, says Ashwin

CHENNAI

Former India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has said Kolkata Knight Riders' (KKR) bowling attack no longer carries the same aura of fear, adding that the "novelty factor" around their mystery spinners has faded ahead of the upcoming IPL season.

Analysing KKR's strengths and weaknesses, Ashwin said India spinner **Varun Chakravarthy** will shoulder significant responsibility in the absence of the element of surprise that once defined the attack.

"I do not think oppositions will be worried after looking at KKR's bowling attack. The mystery factor, the novelty factor and the fear associated with it have gone. Earlier, batters used to go to the analyst's room, watch the bowler's hand or just look to take a single," Ashwin said on his YouTube channel.

"Varun is at a stage in his career where he has to find answers. It is a natural progression in any cricketer's career. I think the novelty factor is out," he added.

Ashwin also pointed out that seasoned all-rounder Sunil Narine's effectiveness has reduced, particularly due to restrictions on certain variations in his bowling.

"Sunil Narine also cannot bowl the faster ball anymore because of his action. Eden Gardens is a small ground, so it becomes easier for the opposition to say, 'Here is a team that is not going to make me scared, so let us go after them,'" he said.

He stressed that without unpredictability, KKR's bowlers could struggle to con-



tain aggressive batting line-ups, especially on smaller venues.

Ashwin further noted that injuries and personnel changes have weakened the bowling unit since the auction.

"After the auction, I had said that KKR's bowling attack is solid. But now Mustafizur Rahman is not there, Matheesha Pathirana is injured and Harshit Rana has been ruled out," he said.

"KKR have the blessing of Blessing Muzarabani. He has worked hard and I am excited to see him, but with all the injuries plaguing them, somebody has to do the heavy lifting. I cannot see anyone who can do that," he added.

In another setback, KKR have also lost India seamer

Varun is at a stage in his career where he has to find answers. It is a natural progression in any cricketer's career. I think the novelty factor is out

R Ashwin
former India spinner

Akash Deep for the entire season.

Ashwin also reflected on the absence of Shreyas Iyer, who had led KKR to their third IPL title in 2024 but is no

longer part of the squad.

"Korbo is there, Lorbo is there, but I do not think Jeetbo is there. KKR won the title three times, twice under Gautam Gambhir and once under Shreyas Iyer. With Shreyas Iyer, you had a qualifying opportunity that went to another team," Ashwin said.

"Shreyas Iyer's captaincy history is compelling. KKR's loss ended up being Punjab Kings' gain," he added.

Ashwin also raised a broader issue regarding player availability and workload restrictions in the IPL, suggesting franchises should have financial safeguards.

"There is a question about Cameron Green. Will Cricket Australia allow him to bowl all four overs? That is also a possi-

bility. In this scenario, the board is saying he can play in the IPL but with workload restrictions," Ashwin said.

"IPL teams should have an opportunity where if a player bowls only two overs, then they should deduct 2 crore. If a player is not able to deliver his full quota, teams should have the right to adjust the contract value," he added.

"When you come into the IPL auction, the expectation is that you will bowl four overs and also contribute with the bat. If there are restrictions, the team should be allowed to make deductions," he elaborated. "Imagine if you are Shah Rukh Khan and you have paid Rs 5 crore for a player, but he says he will bowl only one over. How will you feel?" Ashwin said.

Kohli urges RCB to stay sharp ahead of title defence

Star batter stresses intensity, discipline, urgency as Bengaluru start prep

BENGALURU

Talismanic batter **Virat Kohli** on Saturday urged his Royal Challengers Bengaluru teammates to "switch on" and not waste even a minute during training sessions as they gear up for their IPL title defence.

Addressing the squad during their first practice session at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, Kohli underlined the importance of sustaining the intensity that helped them secure the title last year. He reminded the players that the coming season would demand even greater focus and consistency. "We worked really hard over the last two to three seasons to achieve what we did last year, and it's only going to get tougher because other teams are going to come hard at us," Kohli said.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru will open their IPL 2026 campaign against Sunrisers Hyderabad on March 28 at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium. With expectations high, Kohli emphasised the need to build



momentum from the very beginning of preparations.

"We do not waste these days. We stay ahead. So, switch on now. Let's not waste even a minute of any session that we are a part of. We must give our 120% for these two-and-a-half months," he added.

The franchise strengthened their squad at the auction by bringing in Venkatesh Iyer, Mangesh Yadav, Jordan Cox, Vicky Ostwal and Satvik Deswal, adding depth across departments. Head coach Andy Flower expressed satisfaction with the squad

assembled, stating that the team had addressed key areas through strategic additions.

"We had an interesting auction and I think we have improved our squad, to be quite frank. We have brought in some great new additions. Integrating them into the RCB way alongside established players led by Virat and Rajat is an exciting part of building this team," Flower said.

Highlighting the significance of being defending champions, Flower said the team would embrace the challenge rather than dwell on

We worked really hard over the last two to three seasons to achieve what we did last year, and it's only going to get tougher because other teams are going to come hard at us

Virat Kohli
RCB batter

past success.

"There is one difference this year, we have got a star on our shirt. That's a very proud feeling for all RCB fans. But that season is gone. Now we have a new challenge ahead, and it's an exciting one. We are here to win this year's IPL," he added. Wicketkeeper-batter Jitesh Sharma spoke about the positive atmosphere within the group as new and existing members came together during the initial sessions.

NEW DELHI

Reigning world champions India will play two Twenty20 Internationals against Ireland on June 26 and June 28, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said on Saturday. The series will precede India's white-ball tour of England.

Both matches will be held in Belfast, marking India's return to the venue for the first time since 2007.

"Team India (Senior Men) will travel to Ireland for a two-match T20I series in June 2026. Having toured Ireland three times in the past eight years in 2018, 2022 and 2023, this tour will mark India's return to Belfast for the first time since 2007," BCCI secretary **Devajit Saikia** said in a statement.

The announcement comes two days after Ireland's director of high performance, Graham West, confirmed the series while also announcing Paul Stirling's decision to step down as the team's T20I captain.

India are scheduled to host Afghanistan for a one-off Test and a three-match One Day



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Devajit Saikia, BCCI secretary

International (ODI) series, which will conclude on June 20. The team will then travel to England for five T20Is and three ODIs from July 1 to July 19.

India have toured Ireland three times in the past eight

years, drawing strong crowds at Malahide, located on the outskirts of Dublin.

West said on Thursday that the India series forms an important part of Ireland's preparations for the upcoming season.

squash

Olympic inclusion a watershed moment: Ghosal

NEW DELHI

Former India No. 1 **Saurav Ghosal** has termed squash's inclusion in the 2028 Olympics a watershed moment and stressed the need to expand access, improve coaching and strengthen the ecosystem to sustain the sport's growth.

Recently appointed Sports Commissioner of World Premier Squash, Ghosal described the role as a culmination of his journey in the

sport. "I played professional squash and for India for more than 20 years. It has been a blessing. This phase is a coming together of all those experiences and I am excited to hopefully make a contribution at the global level and democratise the sport," he said.

"I have always viewed pressure situations as opportunities. This is an opportunity to do something substantial in the sport," he added. On India's rise in squash,

Ghosal underlined the importance of participation and building a wider base of players.

"Strength lies in numbers. If you have more players playing, the probability is that you will produce champions," he said.

"The upward trajectory is very heartening and this is an attempt to democratise the sport, get more kids, more people and recreational players involved because the entire ecosystem has to be involved," he added.

He also highlighted the role of exposure and opportunity for emerging players.

"There are so many players who have not had the financial backing or the right guidance. This can give them a window to showcase their talent on the world stage," he said. India currently has multiple players in the top 50, including teenager Anahat Singh.

"It is great that we have four boys in the top 50. We also have Anahat in the top 20. Success breeds success

and that will help the overall ecosystem," Ghosal said.

"She has everything going for her: talent, mentality, support. If she continues the way she is, there is no reason she cannot be a mainstay in the top 10," he added.

"I do not want to put undue pressure on her. She is still 18 and needs to enjoy this time," he said.

On squash's Olympic debut at the 2028 Games in Los Angeles, Ghosal said it marks a defining moment for the sport.

