

# 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

### CHANDIGARH Bomb threat ahead of CM Mann's visit

Police have launched an investigation and conducted searches in several areas in Punjab's Ropar district after bomb threat emails were received by various institutions, including banks and courts, on Monday. According to information, the emails, allegedly sent by the pro-Khalistan militant outfit Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF), threatened to blow up the Nangal court complex and some banks in Ropar district. Following the threats, police conducted checks at multiple locations, including the Nangal court complex and a few banks in the area. The searches were under way at the time of filing this report.

### CHANDIGARH Cong takes dig at CM on NAS ranking

Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring on Monday took a dig at chief minister Bhagwant Mann over "celebrating" the state's ranking on education based on the National Achievement Survey (NAS). Warring reminded him and other leaders of the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders that when Punjab topped the same survey in 2021 - under Congress government -, they dismissed it, saying this was manipulated. So much so, he added, Manish Sisodia, then deputy chief minister of Delhi had said that Punjab's top rank showed a hidden understanding between the then Congress government in Punjab and the BJP government at the centre.

### LeT handler Shabir Lone arrested

The Special Cell of Delhi Police has arrested a suspected Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) handler, Shabir Ahmed Lone, from the Ghazipur area here, officials said on Monday. After his arrest, he was produced before a court, which sent him to five days of police custody. Terming Lone as a "hard-core and highly-trained terrorist," the police said that he reportedly established links with handlers operating on behalf of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Lone, also known by aliases Raja and Kashmiri, is a resident of Srinagar.

### SITAPUR (UP) Mosque on 'pond land' in UP razed

A mosque allegedly constructed on government land 12 years ago was demolished by the administration here early Monday after a prior notice went unheeded, officials said. Additional District Magistrate Nitish Kumar, along with other senior officials, reached the site in the Leharpur area of the district around 3 am.



**TOP GUNS ENTER FRAY:** DMK supremo MK Stalin, TVK chief Vijay and BJP's Suvendu Adhikari on Monday filed their nomination papers for Kolathur and Perambur constituencies in TN and Nandigram in West Bengal. In poll affidavit, Vijay declared assets worth ₹625 crore and loans extended to all family members, including his estranged wife. Stalin reported no car and combined assets of ₹9.70 crore with his wife.

### RAHUL RHETORIC | Congress leader tears into 'hidden hand'

## 'PM Sabarimala silence signals BJP-Left nexus'

Launching a sharp attack on Narendra Modi, senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday alleged that the Prime Minister



Rahul Gandhi rides a bicycle in Kottayam on Monday

### POLL WATCH KERALA

remained silent on the Sabarimala issue during his Kerala visit, indicating that the BJP-LDF works together. Addressing a Congress election meeting in Adoor, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, claimed that the party was facing a "combination" of CPI(M) and BJP in the April 9 Assembly elections.

"We are fighting an election against the LDF, which is fully supported by the BJP. On one side is the UDF and on the other is a CPI(M)-BJP combination," he said.

He alleged that there was a "hidden hand" of the BJP in Kerala, a concept often used by economists in the market.

**Rahul bats for woman CM Kottayam (Kerala):** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday drew loud cheers from the crowd when he said he was looking forward to Kerala having a woman chief minister. Addressing a rally in Puthuppally here, Gandhi spoke about the guarantees announced by the Congress if it comes to power, including free KSRTC bus travel for women and monthly aid of Rs 1,000 for college-going girl students.

### UP SIR completes verification of 3.26 cr voters

**Lucknow:** The Election Commission has completed hearings for 3.26 cr voters in Uttar Pradesh under SIR campaign, claiming that action has been taken on 100% of notices issued during the process. Officials said final electoral roll will be published on April 10 and is expected to include over 13.25 cr voters. The previous voter list had around 12.55 crore names. During the SIR exercise, over one crore entries were flagged due to mismatch with the 2003 voter list.

## BJP stoking communal fights: Mamata

BELDA (WB)

Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee on Monday accused BJP of stoking fights among all sections of society and claimed the saffron party wants to loot the country by taking advantage of such situations.

At a poll rally here, she expressed strong reservations about Union Home Minister Amit Shah's political 'chargesheet' against the TMC government. "The first chargesheet should be filed against (PM Narendra) Modi and Amit Shah, who came to power by stoking riots," she said.

### BJP alleges Didi's code violation

Alleging violation of Model Code of Conduct (MCC), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday had visited the office of Election Commission of India (ECI) at the national capital and sought ban on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's campaign.

Notably, a delegation comprising Union Ministers Piyush Goyal, Kiren Rijju, and Sukanta Majumdar, BJP national general secretary and MP Arun Singh among others had visited the ECI office.

### ED questions TMC MLA over land grab

**Kolkata:** Ahead of the Assembly polls, Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday questioned TMC MLA and candidate from the Rashbehari constituency in South Kolkata, Debashish Kumar, in connection with a land-grabbing case. Kumar is also Mayor-in-Council at the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) and became MLA from Rashbehari seat in 2021 and this time he is again contesting from that seat against BJP's Swapn Dasgupta.

### A day after quitting TMC MLA in Cong

**New Delhi:** A day after resigning from the Trinamool Congress, West Bengal MLA Qazi Abdur Rahim on Monday joined the Congress and said he has returned "home".

Rahim, the sitting MLA from the Baduria constituency in North 24 Parganas district, had resigned from all his party posts on Sunday after being denied a ticket by the Trinamool Congress. He will now contest the election from the Baduria seat on a Congress ticket, Congress leaders said.

## Retired Army brigadier killed in cross firing in Dehradun road rage

DEHRADUN

A retired Army brigadier was killed here after he was caught in cross firing between two car occupants during a road rage incident on Monday, police said.

The incident took place in Johri village on Mussoorie Road when an argument broke out between the occupants of a Delhi-registered Fortuner and a Scorpio N over giving way, they said.

As the argument escalated, the occupants in the Scorpio allegedly chased the Fortuner and opened fire at its tyres, but a bullet struck retired Army brigadier Mukesh Joshi (74), who was out for his morning walk, police said.

Joshi was taken to a hospital, where he died during treatment, they added. After a bullet hit the Fortuner's tyre, the driver lost control of the vehicle and crashed it into a roadside tree near a school in Johri.

## Navy staff kills woman, chops body, stores parts in fridge

VISAKHAPATNAM

An Indian Navy staff allegedly murdered a 28-year-old woman, dismembered her body, and attempted to destroy evidence in Gajuwaka area here, a police official said on Monday.

According to the police, the accused procured a knife online, dismembered the body, stored some parts in a refrigerator, and burnt the head and hands at a vacant place near Adavivaram on

Sunday.

The accused, identified as Chintada Ravindra, posted at INS Dega, had been in contact with the deceased Polipalli Mounika since 2021 after meeting her through a dating application, police said.

"A Navy staff (Ravindra) on Sunday killed Mounika at his residence following an altercation and later dismembered the body, disposed of the parts at different locations," the official told PTL.

The two developed a relationship over time and fre-

## Red dists down to 2, days of Naxal violence are over: Shah

NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said the Centre's policy on Naxalism was clear: it is open to dialogue with those who surrender their weapons and prepared to give a firm response to those who choose violence.

Noting that the number of Naxal-affected districts has come down from 126 in 2014 to just two now, Shah insisted that the days of those who carry out Maoist and Naxal violence are over.



Replying to a discussion on Naxalism in the Lok Sabha, the Home Minister said that after the formation of a BJP government in Chhattisgarh in 2024, he had, on Aug 24 that year, announced that by March 2026, Naxalism would be eradicated from the entire country.

With that deadline expiring on Tuesday, Shah said that in

the last two years, the "security perimeter" was increased, due to which violence was contained. "In Modi's 11 years, 596 fortified police stations were built; Naxal-affected districts, which were 126 in 2014, are now down to just two; and most affected districts, which were 35 in 2014, are now down to zero. This success has been achieved by us," he said.

Speaking on what he termed India's decisive fight against Naxalism, Shah said the government had urged Naxals to lay down their arms and assured rehabilitation.

### Adequate stock of fertilizer available: Govt

NEW DELHI

The Centre on Monday sought to allay fears around the availability of fertilizers due to the ongoing crisis in the Gulf region by insisting that gas supply to urea plants was also being ramped up to increase domestic production. It added that adequate stocks amounting to 180 lakh tonnes were currently available as against 147 lakh tonnes at the same time last year.

At a briefing, Additional Secretary in the Department of Fertilizer, Aparna S. Sharma, said the gas supply to urea plants, initially reduced to around 60 percent, has been increased to 65 percent and further augmented to 75-80 percent through alternative arrangements.

### Two Indian LPG carriers exit Persian Gulf safely

NEW DELHI

With two more LPG carriers having crossed the Strait of Hormuz on March 28 and due to reach Indian ports on March 31 and April 1 respectively, the Centre on Monday said the LPG supply situation in the country was "adequate" even as it urged people to stop indulging in panic booking, saying that would bring the delivery time down from 4-5 days to just 2 days.

At an inter-ministerial briefing on the West Asia crisis, Special Secretary in Ministry of Shipping, Rajesh Kumar Sinha said now there are 18 Indian vessels, with 485 Indian seafarers are left in the Persian Gulf, as two more LPG carriers, the BW TYR and the BW ELM, successfully cleared the Strait of Hormuz on March 28 and are now en route to Indian ports.

The official said the BW

### Oppn walks out of LS over LPG crisis

The Opposition MPs on Monday protested against the denial of a discussion on the current LPG crisis and staged a walkout from the Lok Sabha. Several Opposition MPs demanded a discussion. However, as Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju rose to say that the House take up the list of business before it first, the Opposition members staged a symbolic walkout.

ELM is scheduled to reach the Mumbai port on March 31 while BW TYR is expected to reach New Mangalore on April 1. Together, he said, these two LPG vessels are carrying nearly 94,000 metric tons of gas.

### Oppn hits out at govt over CAPF Bill

Opposition members in Rajya Sabha on Monday hit out at the government for trying to negate a judgement by Supreme Court to progressively reduce deputation of IPS officers in Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) by bringing a new legislation. Participating in a discussion on The Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026 in the Upper House, opposition members Tiruchi Siva (DMK), Sanjay Singh (AP), Md Nadimul Haque (TMC), Sanjay Yadav (RJD) and Muzibulla Khan (BJD) demanded the government must give due respect to the CAPF personnel for their work and sacrifices for the nation.



### Walkout over OBC quota row

The Rajya Sabha on Monday witnessed a walkout by several opposition parties over BJP member K Laxman's remarks that OBC reservation is being misused in the name of religion. Leader of the House and Union Minister J P Nadda criticised the walkout, saying the Congress leadership and the opposition's INDIA alliance are neither interested in debates nor have any respect for democratic values or the Constitution.

### No concern on data centres' water use

No concerns have been received regarding water consumption by data centres in the country, the government said on Monday, amid questions over their potential impact on water resources. Responding to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Jal Shakti Raj Bhushan Choudhary said the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has not reported any issues related to excessive water usage by data centres. The minister said the industry is adopting new approaches for improving cooling systems, enhancing water efficiency, and reducing overall energy consumption.

## 'Tipu Sultan one of few freedom fighters in British history books'

BENGALURU

Indirectly referring to the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the construction of the Ram Mandir, Karnataka Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Minister Priyank Kharage said, "Digging a masjid may give you a temple, but demolishing a temple gives a stupa."

Kharage also said that unlike Indian history books, which list a number of freedom fighters, British history books mention only a few Indian freedom fighters, of whom Tipu Sultan is one. Priyank

Kharage was releasing a book, Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan in the Coastal History, when he said that one may get into trouble when digging into history.

"If you dig any masjid, you may get a temple. Digging a temple gives a stupa. I do not know what you get if a stupa is dug. My limit is 3,000-3,500 years of history," he said.

Buddhist history was preserved by Devanampriya Ashoka 2,500 years ago but came to light only 150 years ago. "Many do not know Kanishka, Harshavardhana, Gupta and Maurya dynasties," Kharage said.

## Lonely UP man holds his own 'terahvi'

AURAIYA

In a deeply moving incident from Uttar Pradesh's Auraiya district, a 65-year-old man has decided to perform his own 'terahvi' ritual while still alive, reflecting the quiet despair of a life marked by loss and loneliness.

Rakesh Yadav, a resident of Laxmanpur village, has organised a community feast on Monday, inviting nearly 1,900 people from nearby vil-

lages as part of what he calls his own 'terahvi' ceremony. Unmarried and living alone, Yadav says the decision comes from a growing fear that there will be no one left to perform his last rites after his death.

The eldest among three brothers, Yadav has endured personal tragedies that have left him emotionally isolated. His younger brother Chandrapal Yadav died after a prolonged illness, while another brother, Naresh Yadav, was murdered. None of

the three brothers ever married. Though he has a married sister, she lives with her own family.

"At this stage of life, there is no one to stand by me," Yadav said, speaking quietly outside his modest dwelling. "I kept thinking about what would happen after I am gone. Who would perform the rituals? That thought stayed with me."

Over time, the anxiety turned into a decision. Yadav printed and distributed invitation cards across villages,

asking people to attend the feast. For him, it is not just a ritual but a way to ensure that his existence is acknowledged in the same manner as others in the community.

Villagers say the news has sparked intense discussion across the area. Some see it as a heartbreaking reflection of his loneliness, while others describe it as an unusual but deeply personal choice.

Yadav clarified that the ceremony will be limited to a community meal.

## STORM ERUPTS OVER DUBEY'S BIJU REMARKS

NEW DELHI

BJD chief Naveen Patnaik on Monday said BJP MP Nishikant Dubey should consult a "mental doctor" for making "outrageous" remarks against freedom fighter and former Odisha CM Biju Patnaik.

Dubey had claimed on March 27 that Biju Patnaik acted as a link between former PM Jawaharlal Nehru and CIA during the 1960s war with

China. The remarks sparked a political storm, with BJD MPs staging a walkout in the Rajya Sabha over "disrespectful and defamatory" comments. Dubey later said on X that his statement was aimed at exposing the "misdeeds of Congress, not Biju Patnaik." BJP also distanced itself from the controversy, with senior leader Bajajant Jay Panda calling any aspersions on Biju Patnaik's patriotism "totally unacceptable."



## Three Candidates from Koraon Achieve Success in PCS Examination 2024

MLA, Other Public Representatives, and Local Residents Offer Congratulations



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Koraon.** In the results of the PCS Examination 2024, declared on Monday, three bright candidates from Koraon have brought glory to the region, sparking a wave of joy among the local populace. People are pouring in their congratulations to the successful candidates. Among those selected for the PCS are Akanksha Tiwari—daughter of retired Justice Jai Krishna Tiwari and a native of Badhwari Kala Mishrapur vil-



lage; Pushpraj Mishra—son of Indra Dev Mishra and a resident of Bhagesar village; and Vijay Singh Patel—son of Lal Ji Singh and a resident of Barokhar Basaha. Regional public representatives and other citizens are extending their congratulations to all three successful candidates on their achievement. The families of the candidates are filled with immense joy and jubilation. Prominent among those offering congratulations to the successful candidates were Koraon MLA



Rajmani Kol, Nagar Panchayat Chairman Omprakash Kesari, former Nagar Panchayat Chairman Narsingh Kumar Kesari (alias Gopal Ji), District Panchayat Member Pintu Chaubey, District Panchayat Member Somdutt Singh Patel, District Panchayat Member Representative Rajesh Patel, as well as Rajesh Pandey, Arun Tripathi, Raju Chaubey, Devraj Mishra, Shivam Mishra, Suraj Yadav, Vipin Shukla, Jitendra Mishra, and others.

## Scholarships for the first time disbursed to 2.8 Million Students by CM Yogi

Lucknow

Setting a new benchmark in the field of education in Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath distributed Scholarships and fee reimbursements to around 2.8 million Students. This landmark initiative took Place on Monday in Lucknow during a Scholarship and fee reimbursement transfer Program for Students from underprivileged and weaker Sections. The event marked a record, with 3,350 crore disbursed to empower Students from disadvantaged backgrounds and help them move forward. The Program not only Showcased the achievements of various Schemes but also reflected the aspirations and renewed hope among Students whose futures have been Positively impacted by this Assistance. This initiative stands not just as financial support but as a broader effort toward social empowerment through education, where the visible confidence and hope among students

is the true measure of Success. In FY 2025-26, approximately 6.7 million Students have already received around 4,800 crore in Scholarships. **Beginning of a new educational Transformation** As Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath released the Scholarship funds into students' accounts at the click of a button, the auditorium echoed with applause. Students including Deependra Kumar, Neha Singh, Vaibhavkar Pathak, Sujit, Divyanshi, Nihal Fatima, Paridhi Pandey and Monika were awarded Scholarship certificates. Their faces reflected Pride and confidence as they Posed with the Chief Minister. During the event, beneficiaries of the National Family Benefit Scheme were also Provided financial assistance certificates. Beneficiaries such as Deepmala, Archana, Shalini Verma and Sarveshwati received certificates from the Chief Minister. **Timely Scholarships**

Bring Major Relief

The Program highlighted improvements in the Scholarship distribution system. Previously disbursed at the end of the academic session, Scholarships are now being released Starting October 2. Plans are also underway to introduce a semester-based scholarship system from next year, ensuring Students receive financial assistance at the time of fee Submission. Additionally, Student cards aligned with courses are being Planned to Streamline semester-wise disbursement. **Focus on technology and Transparency** Efforts are being made to ensure that students who Previously missed out due to bank-related technical issues also receive benefits. Those deprived this year due to such issues will be covered in the next financial year. This move is seen as a significant step toward making the system more transparent and inclusive. **Abhyudaya Coaching Scheme, 43 Students.**

## Interstate Vehicle Thief Arrested with Stolen Motorcycle and Illegal Knife by Barsana Police

Barsana

The Barsana Police have arrested an interstate vehicle thief and recovered a stolen motorcycle along with an illegal knife from his Possession. On March 29, 2026 at around 5:45 PM, the Barsana Police apprehended the accused near the mud track along the drain, approximately 50 meters from the nala in Nagla Nagar area. The accused has been identified as Anil, son of Bachchu, resident of village Shernagar, Police Station Kosi Kalan, district Mathura, aged about 26 Years. During the arrest, the Police recovered a Stolen Hero Splendor Plus motorcycle (without registration number) bearing Chassis number MBLHA10AMC9M13614 and engine number HA10EJC9M20351, along with an illegal knife. Legal Proceedings have been initiated against the accused at Barsana Police Station. **Arrest Details:** Location: Mud track near the drain, Nagla Nagar (about 50 meters from the Nala) Date & Time: March 29, 2026 at 5:45 PM Recovered Items: One stolen Hero Splendor Plus motorcycle (without registration number) One illegal knife Criminal History of the Accused: The accused has multiple criminal cases registered against him, including Charges under the Arms Act, IPC and BNS in various Police Stations of Mathura district such as Barsana, Shergarh, Kosi Kalan and Jait. Police Team Involved in the Arrest: Inspector Ashwani Kumar, Station House Officer, Barsana Sub-Inspector Deepak Kumar, In-charge Sahar Outpost, Barsana Head Constable Chandraprakash (No. 309) Constable Sandeep Kumar (No. 1606).

## Prioritize the Resolution of Entrepreneurs' Issues; Ensure No Obstacles Hinder Industrial Development: Divisional Commissioner

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. A meeting of the Divisional Udyog Bandhu Committee was organized with the objective of accelerating industrial development and promoting investment within the division. The meeting was presided over by Divisional Commissioner Saumya Agarwal at Gandhi Auditorium, and was attended by departmental officials and entrepreneurs. Emphasizing the swift and time-bound resolution of entrepreneurs' issues during the meeting, the Divisional Commissioner directed officials to ensure that all complaints are resolved on a priority basis. She also issued instructions for the regular convening of District Udyog Bandhu meetings.



Noting the irregularity of meetings in Fatehpur, she directed that a meeting be held by March 31st—without fail—to ensure compliance. While reviewing employ-

ment-oriented schemes, the Divisional Commissioner stated that all departments must achieve 100 percent of their respective targets. She clarified that the primary

objective of these schemes is to provide maximum employment opportunities to the youth; therefore, no negligence whatsoever should be tolerated in their effec-

tive implementation. During the meeting, satisfaction was expressed regarding the progress of credit-linked schemes. Officials reported that under the 'One District One Product' (ODOP) Margin Money Scheme, 115 percent of the targeted loans were disbursed during the financial year 2025-26, while 95.13 percent of the target was achieved under the 'Chief Minister Youth Entrepreneur Development Campaign' scheme. While reviewing the 'Nivesh Mitra' portal, the Divisional Commissioner sought an explanation from the concerned Regional Manager after discovering that five cases pertaining to UPSIDA remained pending even after the stipulated deadline had passed. She emphasized that it is

essential to make the investment process simple, transparent, and time-bound in order to maintain investor confidence. Noting that work on shifting electricity poles in the Naini Industrial Area had not yet commenced, she directed the Chief Development Officer to conduct an on-site inspection and submit a report. Additionally, entrepreneurs were requested to submit written suggestions to further enhance the 'Ease of Doing Business' environment.

Joint Commissioner of Industries Ajay Kumar Chaurasia, the LDM, members of the Industries Committee—including Murari Lal Agarwal and Natwar Lal—and officials from concerned departments were present at the meeting.

## Shivendra Gets Key Role, Work Style in Focus

Lucknow

BJP worker Shivendra Singh has been appointed as the District General Secretary of Ayodhya by the Party leadership, citing his consistent hard work and active role in organizational activities. Following his appointment, a debate has emerged around his image and working style. While his supporters describe it as the result of years of dedication and commitment to the Party, his opponents have raised questions based on cases registered against him. The development has once again brought the long-standing debate of 'image versus work' in Politics into focus. Supporters argue that if Shivendra is being labeled as a "criminal," then how should leaders with a "strongman" image in other Parties be viewed. They also Point

out that such questions were not raised when he was working actively for the organization Earlier. Over the Past few years, Shivendra Singh has been counted among the active workers of the Party. He has participated in various campaigns such as "Seva Hi Sangathan," booth strengthening, membership drives and other outreach Programs. At the local level, he has been seen as a grassroots worker. However, after receiving the new responsibility, discussions around his Past cases have intensified. Opponents stress the need for transparency in Public life, while supporters argue that these issues are being Politically highlighted now despite being known earlier. **Debate Over Standards in Politics** The number of cases registered against Shivendra Singh has

also become a Point of discussion. While critics view it as a serious concern, supporters consider it Part of Political rivalry. This has also raised a broader question—whether different standards are applied to different leaders There are several examples in state and national Politics where leaders have held significant Positions despite facing allegations. This has turned the issue into a wider debate on whether a Political identity should be judged by one work or by ast allegation. **Balancing Work, Image and Allegations Remains a Challenge** Overall, the matter is no longer limited to an individual but reflects a broader Political mindset where balancing hard .work, Public image and allegations remains a Challenge. It will be important to see how this debate evolves in the coming time.

## Divisional Road Safety Committee Meeting Concludes Under the Chairmanship of the Additional Commissioner

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj | A meeting of the Divisional Road Safety Committee was held on Monday at Gandhi Auditorium, presided over by Additional Commissioner Ratnapriya. While statistics indicate a decline in road accidents across the division, the Additional Commissioner directed that special emphasis be placed on road engineering corrective measures and enforcement actions, particularly in light of an increase in accidents within the Kaushambi district. She issued directives for the effective implementation of the Rural Road Safety Committees established at the Tehsil level, under the chairmanship of the



respective Sub-Divisional Magistrates. The Additional Commissioner instructed the PWD and NHAI to close off unauthorized cuts or openings on highways. She further directed that the ZFF program be implemented effectively in the districts of Fatehpur and Prayagraj. Instructions were also issued regarding the widespread publicity and promotion of the 'Sadak Suraksha Mitra' (Road Safety Friend) and 'Rahveer' schemes. Road accidents

have shown a decline in Prayagraj and Fatehpur, attributed to the road safety measures and enforcement actions undertaken in these districts. The Additional Commissioner directed that enforcement actions be continued rigorously to achieve a further reduction in road accidents. The Additional Commissioner issued directives to clear away overgrown bushes at points where rural roads intersect with National Highways, and to install speed breakers and

appropriate signage at these specific junctions. She also directed that adequate lighting arrangements be ensured on highways—specifically, by the Municipal Corporation within urban limits, and through the installation of solar lights in rural areas. Finally, the Additional Commissioner called for ensuring effective action against individuals who fail to wear helmets or seat belts, violate traffic rules, drive at excessive speeds, drive in the

wrong direction, use mobile phones while driving, or operate vehicles under the influence of intoxicants. On this occasion, the meeting was attended by Divisional Transport Officer Himesh Tiwari, Divisional Transport Officer (Enforcement) Sanjeev Kumar Gupta, ARTO (Enforcement) Rajiv Kumar, ARTO (Enforcement) Anand Pratap Rao, ARTO (Enforcement) Fatehpur Prateek Mishra, and Passenger Tax Officer Ramsagar. In addition to officials from the Police Department, NHAI, the Health Department, and other concerned departments, Raghunath Dwivedi and others were present as members of the Road Safety Committee.

# Appointment Letters Issued to 669 Anganwadi Workers in Prayagraj; 34 Centers Inaugurated and 79 Foundations Laid



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** On Monday, a state-level program organized in Lucknow—under the initiatives run by the Department of Child Development and Nutrition on behalf of the state government—was telecast live across the district. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath distributed appointment letters to 18,440 Anganwadi workers and assistants, smartphones to 69,804 individuals, and over 200,000 growth monitoring devices. Additionally, under projects costing more than ₹450 crore, 3,170 Anganwadi center buildings and 140 Child Development Project offices were either inaugurated or had

their foundations laid. In the Prayagraj district, the live broadcast of this event was screened at the Sangam Auditorium located within the Collectorate complex, where public representatives, officials, and a large gathering of citizens listened to the Chief Minister's address. The program was conducted in a hybrid mode. On this occasion, parallel events were also organized across various development blocks of the district, where public representatives distributed appointment letters to the newly appointed Anganwadi workers. At the Sangam Auditorium, in the presence of Phaphamau MLA Guru Prasad Maurya and Member of the Legislative Council (MLC)

Surendra Chaudhary, appointment letters were handed over to workers from the Phaphamau, Phulpur, and Soraon assembly constituencies. Furthermore, through a remote interface, 11 new Anganwadi centers were inaugurated, and the foundations for 26 centers were laid. Continuing this sequence, programs were also held in the Koraon, Jasra, and Karchhana development blocks, attended by their respective MLAs. Appointment letters were distributed to 66 newly appointed workers in Koraon, 159 in the Bara region, and 28 in Karchhana. Similar ceremonies were conducted in other blocks as well to hand over appointment letters. In total, 669



Anganwadi workers have been selected across the district. These include 159 workers in Bara, 94 in Meja, 66 in Koraon, 28 in Karchhana, 78 in Handia, 83 in Pratappur, 36 in Phulpur, 59 in Soraon, and 66 in Phaphamau.

Additionally, 34 newly constructed Anganwadi centers in the district were inaugurated, while the foundation stones for 79 new centers were also laid. Most of these centers are being constructed under the MGNREGA convergence scheme, while some are state-funded. Addressing the gathering, public representatives stated that Anganwadi centers serve as a crucial link for children's nutrition, health, and early edu-

cation. Pregnant and lactating women, as well as young children, receive nutritional supplements and health services through these centers. The construction of these new centers will further strengthen the accessibility of these facilities in both rural and urban areas. Member of the Legislative Council (MLC), Surendra Chaudhary, encouraged the newly appointed workers to perform their duties with honesty and dedication. He remarked that the participation of women strengthens both the family and society. Meanwhile, MLA Guru Prasad Maurya stated that the role of Anganwadi workers is pivotal in building a 'Developed India' (Viksit Bharat), as they

are instrumental in shaping the future of the children. Chief Development Officer (CDO) Harshika Singh affirmed that the administration's objective is to ensure that no child is deprived of nutrition and education. The construction of new centers and the strengthening of existing infrastructure will lead to an improvement in the health, nutrition, and educational standards of children across the district. The event was organized under the guidance of District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma. Officials and staff from the Child Development Department, including District Programme Officer Dinesh Singh, were present on the occasion.

## 10 Nominated Corporators Take Oath at Prayagraj Municipal Corporation; Mayor and Public Representatives Present



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** A swearing-in ceremony for nominated corporators was held at the Municipal Corporation on Monday. Ten corporators, nominated by the Government of Uttar Pradesh, were administered the oath in the new House building of the Municipal Corporation. The ceremony was graced by the presence of Mayor Umesh Chandra Ganesh Kesharwani, MLA Deepak Patel, Member of the Legislative Assembly Surendra Chaudhary, and District President Sanjay Gupta. Those who took the oath included Akhilesh Singh, Arun Kumar Mishra, Praveen Bhartiya, Swarika Bhardwaj, Shyamchand Hela, Durgesh Nandini,

Rajesh Kushwaha, Babban Prajapati, Dilip Kesharwani, and Lal Bahadur Sahu. On this occasion, alongside the Municipal Corporators, other public representatives and members—including Ashish Kumar Dwivedi, Kusum Lata, Ranvijay Singh, and Deepika Singh Patel—were present. Senior officials of the Municipal Corporation also participated in the event; among those present were Additional Municipal Commissioners Dipendra Yadav, Rajiv Kumar Shukla, and Arvind Kumar Rai, along with other departmental officials. During the ceremony, the public representatives pledged to work together for urban development and for ensuring better civic management within the city.

## Two Smugglers Arrested with 121 kg of Ganja in Bhadohi; Other Gang Members Absconding



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Gopiganj (Bhadohi):** The Gopiganj police have achieved a major breakthrough as part of an ongoing campaign aimed at curbing the trafficking of illicit narcotics within the district. During a routine check, the police arrested two smugglers in possession of 121 kg and 450 grams of ganja, while a search for other members of the gang remains underway. Acting under the directives of Superintendent of Police Abhinav Tyagi—and as part of the ongoing drive to prevent narcotics trafficking—the Gopiganj police

team, under the supervision of Additional Superintendent of Police Shubham Agarwal, acted upon a tip-off from an informant on Sunday. Near the vacant railway land adjacent to Gyanpur Station Road, the team cordoned off a suspicious vehicle and apprehended the two accused individuals.

The arrested accused have been identified as Samarjeet Yadav (25), a resident of Mehboobpur (Bhadohi Police Station area), and Pradeep Saroj (26), a resident of Raipur (Sureri Police Station area) in the Jaunpur district. From their possession—specifically from a white Tata



Punch car—the police recovered 121 kg and 450 grams of illicit ganja packed in three sacks, along with two Android mobile phones.

### Revelations During Interrogation

During interrogation, the accused revealed that they had purchased the ganja at a low price in Odisha and had brought it to the area with the intention of selling it at a higher price in Varanasi. They were waiting at the location to deliver the consignment to certain individuals. According to the police, other members of this gang are currently absconding, and efforts to apprehend them are ongoing.

\*\*Case Registered\*\* In connection with this incident, a case has been registered against the accused at the Gopiganj Police Station under Sections 8/20/25 of the NDPS Act and Section 207 of the Motor Vehicles Act; they have subsequently been produced before the court. \*\*Team Involved in the Operation\*\* The team involved in the arrests included Crime Inspector Ajay Vikram Yadav, Sub-Inspectors Kailash Singh Yadav, Kuldeep Kumar Mishra, and Umesh Singh, along with other members of the Gopiganj police force and the SWAT/Surveillance team.

## 'Khadi for Fashion, Khadi for Nation' Seminar Kicks Off in Prayagraj; Youth Engaged in 'Swadeshi' Campaign

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj:** With the objective of linking Khadi with modern fashion and employment opportunities, a divisional-level seminar titled 'Khadi for Fashion, Khadi for Nation' was organized in the district. The event was inaugurated by Phaphamau MLA Guru Prasad Maurya, who lit the ceremonial lamp. Organized by the Uttar Pradesh Khadi and Village Industries Board, the seminar featured detailed discussions on the promotion, dissemination, designing, innovation, and employment opportunities associated with Khadi. The primary objective of the program was to promote Khadi as an eco-friendly, indigenous



product and to familiarize the youth with its modern avatar. MLA Guru Prasad Maurya stated that Khadi is not merely a garment, but a symbol of indigenous spirit and

self-reliance. In the contemporary era, it can be popularized among the youth by integrating it with modern fashion trends. He urged the youth to embrace Khadi and



actively participate in its promotion. During the seminar, fashion design students from Allahabad University presented an attractive showcase of Khadi garments,

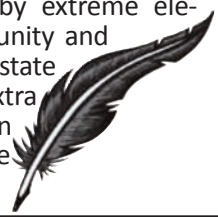
which was well-received and appreciated by the audience. The program also highlighted the unique features of Khadi products, new design concepts, and their

market potential. On this occasion, the Khadi and Village Industries Board distributed free popcorn-making machines to 10 beneficiaries and leaf-plate making machines to another 10 beneficiaries. Additionally, selected beneficiaries were felicitated during the event. Experts and officials present at the program emphasized that promoting the use of Khadi would not only contribute to environmental conservation but also generate new employment opportunities at the local level. The event was attended by several dignitaries—including Dr. Monisha Singh and Dr. Arundhati Singh—as well as students and officials from the Khadi and Village Industries Department.

## Editorial

### Punjab govt must take Centre into confidence on new anti-sacrilege bill

The Aam Aadmi Party-led Punjab government has tabled the Punjab Prevention of Offences Against Holy Scripture(s) Bill, 2025 which was discussed in the Assembly on Tuesday amidst ruckus and then referred to a select committee. It might take about six months for the committee to send the bill back to the Assembly for clearing and then to the governor for approval. If the bill is referred to the Union government, then it would be another year before it finally becomes an Act. Earlier governments — the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coalition government and the Congress government headed by Captain Amarinder Singh — had also brought similar bills which were found to be insufficient to meet the demands of the situation and hence junked. The new anti-sacrilege bill is said to have taken note of the shortcomings of the earlier bills and is hence more comprehensive, secular, and sufficiently stringent to be a deterrent for sacrilege offences considered very serious in the state. Meanwhile, 42-year-old Gurjeet Singh Khalsa, supposedly a non-political activist, has been staging a protest on top of a BSNL mobile tower in Punjab's Samana since October 2024 demanding an anti-sacrilege law. Though not widely reported in the mainstream media, such protests should be handled deftly by the government, lest it rakes up discontents of the past. In fact, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), under Sections 298, 299, and 300, already provides stringent punishments for religious offences. Punjab government as well as the activists who are protesting for a new law against sacrilege of religious texts are of the view that the provisions of the current Union laws are not stringent enough. Incidentally, the bill inadvertently equates the Bhagavad Gita with the holy books of other faiths, which may trigger a controversy. The bill could be amended to also include other religious texts considered holy by a vast majority of Hindus and/or be worded appropriately to capture the essence of all holy books of all faiths without naming any of them. Needless to say, the issue is a complex one. Going by the text of the present bill, albeit a short one, there are sufficient indications to suggest that adequate care has been taken to make the acts of sacrilege a serious offence inviting harsh punishments. But it is not clear why these provisions could not be added to the existing Sections of the BNS. After all, the BNS is an all-India law that applies equally to all states and all faiths. The AAP-led Punjab government appears to have not consulted the Union government or had any discussions with the Union Law Ministry on this issue. What should be of concern are the possibilities of other states following suit and enacting separate laws to suit the political environment of respective states citing the Punjab bill as a precedent. In a federal setup, the Constitution allows states to enact sufficient laws to maintain law and order and preserve religious harmony through stringent punishments for offences involving religious practices, texts, icons, and symbols. There have been instances of religious books being vandalised, places of worship desecrated, and statues of widely revered socio-political leaders popular among certain communities damaged. Another aspect of concern should be the misuse of any law, however sincere the intentions of the lawmakers might be. The anti-sacrilege bill may have good intentions, but there is hardly any guarantee that such a law will not become a tool for miscreants wanting to drive a wedge between communities and followers of different faiths in the state. In a politically volatile border state where religious fault lines have been exploited by extreme elements bent on hurting the unity and integrity of the country, the state government needs to be extra vigilant and take the Union government into confidence at every stage.



## Critical minerals are the new oil. India can't afford to depend on China

Critical minerals have now become instruments of geopolitical bargaining and means to assert domestic autonomy and security. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Argentina and meeting with Chilean President, Gabriel Boric, the two legs of the lithium triangle, on the sidelines of the recently held BRICS summit in Brazil, were strategically aimed at exploring cooperation and engagement on critical minerals. At the Summit, Modi warned against the weaponization of critical minerals and stressed the need to

work together to make supply chains secure and reliable. Other global leaders have also echoed similar concerns at the G20, Quad, and BRICS summits, and have discussed collaborating to secure and diversify critical mineral supply chains. Currently, India is heavily dependent on imports for critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare earth elements (REE). Much of this supply comes through re-export channels, which creates a third-level dependency while exposing us to potential supply shocks and strategic coercion.

Mineral security is no longer just an economic concern but a national security imperative, underpinning the country's ambitions in clean energy, defence self-reliance, and advanced manufacturing. Globally, China holds roughly 62 per cent of lithium refining capacity, 33 per cent for nickel, 77 per cent for cobalt, 87 per cent for graphite, and 76 per cent for REEs, according to the International Energy Agency's (IEA) Global Critical Minerals Outlook 2025. This underscores China's overwhelming dominance in supply

chains, even though it does not host most raw material reserves. Compared to 2023, India's lithium imports from China surged by roughly 921 per cent in 2024, while graphite imports rose 85 per cent between 2022 and 2024 and Nickel imports jumped 137 per cent in 2024. Such dominance gives Beijing an asymmetric leverage over supply chains vital to clean-tech sectors and key defence applications, including advanced electronics, missile systems, and communication technologies. As a result, securing reliab

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

Over the years, democracy has come to mean many things, often abstract and distorted, especially used to invoke a necessary "value" of the global order. Such a "value" has depended upon a few aspects: economic and military hard power and alignment with Western interests. As India finally announced its democracy rankings, nations that depend on using inaccurate "expert opinions" to subvert data raised a hue and cry. Domestically, there is a cohort that disagrees with the idea of such rankings and argues one of two ideas: That the collective West has more expertise in deciding such rankings and must be unchallenged; That India and other nations can eschew Western validation and need not care about the rankings and other indices. The first is a group that believes in Western supremacy and has formed the ideological collaborator class of any foreign group that has sought to "govern" as a euphemism for colonisation by other means. This is reflected in their calling directly for foreign interference regarding India's domestic policy setting and makes no bones about their preference for externalised decision-making. This is not a group with the interests of Indian citizens at heart, seeking only to maintain their position as an intellectual and social elite, watching self-righteously from atop a high horse made of colonial dreams. As such, malintent entails that their ideas cannot pertain significantly to the will of the people of the country. The second group is



made of those with well-intentioned naivete. A little knowledge would go a long way in explaining an economic, and otherwise, interconnected world. The fact that interests and debt ceilings on investments and loans are dependent on credit ratings and indices such as these need us to be concerned about them. Moreover, they create a legacy for judgment by other nations we interact with. At its peak of wealth, knowledge and value creation, Bharat stood as a beacon, inviting engagement, not insularity, and not content in hubris. That is a later doing, a subject of an era of turmoil preventing recognition of a national conscience underlying its diversity. For an endeavour such as a democracy index to fill a void in data and not in propaganda, the rankings need to take into consideration several true indicators of the values that define self-governance. To prevent further distortions, though, it is necessary to reiterate what democracy means — governance by the representatives of all citizens. The universal adult franchise is the most inclusive indicator of true democracy and a basic pre-requisite. Other parameters aid in measuring

the refinement of processes that allow for universal franchises to be executed during elections. The below parameters offer a relevant set of data that measures people's participation in governance and are significant in calculating the functioning of democracy in a nation: Women voting percentage: Women form a major part of the population, and yet, across the world, have been kept away from the ballot system for socio-cultural reasons. Their participation determines the freedom of a notable part of the population to implement universal franchises.

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

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

the laws of the land. Its co-optation by powers within the legislature, or by powers inimical to the nation, through institutionalized corruption or systemic exclusion causes the citizenry to be unable to access recourse under national law. Legislative freedom: Once elected, the representatives must have the freedom to enact a policy they determine. The lack of political will causes a weakened democracy unable to then articulate a people's will. This does not mean the passing of merely popular and populist policies such as hyperinflationary welfare, but of policies that ensure long-term citizen well-being. Number of parties participating in an electoral contest: A thriving democracy offers the freedom of choice to its individual. A smaller number of parties can easily be co-opted by vested interests such as corporates or powerful individuals, rendering them puppets rather than true democracies. For example, the default win of a single party in Singapore renders the country a single-party dictatorship, unarguably a benign one.

Barriers to entry for new parties and independent candidates: To affect change within a populace outside of existing frameworks, representatives must have the option of functioning outside of them. A lack of barriers to creating political parties that represent citizens at all levels, local, regional and national, is necessary to ensure that democracy is an ongoing and dynamic process and not an unsustainable sys-

tem that can collapse with the downfall of a few entities. Campaigning by representatives: Robust campaigning by leaders who represent their constituents is a sign of their entrenchment in the political system not being guaranteed through unfair means such as through electoral malpractices. Moreover, it ensures that citizens are aware of their representatives and their election promises. Constituents' knowledge of representatives and election promises: Campaigning is one of the ways to enhance citizen knowledge about candidates. Digital messaging, use of media and surveys to determine knowledge of party manifestos determine if the people understand who they are being represented by and if they wish to see the manifesto promises fulfilled. Without such knowledge, the citizenry can vote for candidates under misguided premises and such an exercise can derail a functioning democracy for at least a single election cycle, or even longer.

Citizen participation in governance at the grassroots: Governance is not merely top-down, much like representation. The participation of the people in their localities and communities determines their participation at local levels. A more organised decentralization functioning within national consciousness and constitutional mandates is necessary. Public understanding of policy via

publicization: In a democracy, citizens often participate by seeking legal recourse as well as accountability.

### India's solar ambition needs financial vision — ISA must move from commitments to execution

As the world confronts the realities of climate change and energy insecurity, solar energy presents itself not merely as a technological solution but as a transformative geopolitical and developmental strategy. The International Solar Alliance is uniquely positioned to catalyse this transformation. But to succeed, it must go beyond declarations. It must now design and implement financial architectures capable of supporting its ambitions. The potential of solar energy is undeniable. It is modular, scalable, and increasingly cost-effective. Yet, for the nations most abundant in sunlight, finance remains a key constraint. The International Energy Agency estimates that clean energy investments in emerging economies must rise from \$770 billion in 2022 to over \$2.2 trillion annually by 2030. A significant portion of this must be allocated to solar energy.

However, the fiscal realities of many countries—either still recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic, burdened by debt, or struggling to cope with press-

ing social needs—limit the ability of governments to invest at scale. India's experience illustrates this well. Despite policy successes in solar deployment, the government's ability to directly invest in grid infrastructure or generation assets is capped by fiscal deficit targets and debt ceilings. Even green bonds, while helpful, are bound by ring-fenced rules and are limited in scale. Public financing, therefore, can only act as a catalytic lever—it cannot be the backbone. Turning to the private sector, we find both potential and limitations. Many solar developers operate on highly leveraged balance sheets, and with rising global interest rates, the space for fresh capital is narrowing. Moreover, risks such as currency volatility, regulatory uncertainty, and weak transmission infrastructure dampen investor appetite, especially in frontier markets. Private capital is crucial but requires structured entry points, credible exit mechanisms, and active risk mitigation to be effective.

### Trump's sanctions have failed to deter Russia. Now the West faces a dilemma

Last week, Russia once again pulled the nuclear weapon threat out of its sleeves, two days after US President Donald Trump — following his meeting with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte — threatened to impose 100 per cent secondary tariffs on Moscow if it doesn't reach a deal with Kyiv in 50 days. Trump also confirmed that "top-of-the-line" weapons, including the Patriot missile defence system and batteries, would be sent to Ukraine in an operation coordinated by NATO members. Russia's newly updated nuclear doctrine apparently allows Moscow to use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear weapon state that is supported by a nuclear one, unsettling deterrence dynamics in Europe. Though Trump's about-turn on the Russia-Ukraine war might bring some sigh of relief in Kyiv, Moscow's counter-threats echo a Biden-era tit-for-tat escalation when Washington's no-holds-barred support for Ukraine's war efforts was met with Moscow's nuclear threats. The question is: will Trump's threats be enough to affect any change in Russia's behaviour? Or will such threats be counter-productive, embolden Putin's hand, and give him more ammunition to project a Russia reclaiming its lost status of parity with the US and standing up to the combined might of the Western alliance? Sanctions are meant to bite, and not just bark. They are coercive economic tools that the US and its Western allies have often used as a default policy to punish adversaries. However, do they really affect consequential changes in a country's behaviour as expected? In the case of Russia, sanctions have won tactical gains, but have failed to achieve the desired strategic goals. US-led Western sanctions have hit Russia since 2014, when the latter annexed Crimea from Ukraine after the Maidan Square event. Though Russia has seen rising infla-

tion, labour shortage, and devaluation of its currency, the sanctions have had too little impact to make Moscow kowtow. On the contrary, the Central Bank of the Russian Federation has kept the key rate at 21.5 percent per annum, indicating that inflation and economic growth are relatively stable under the current circumstances. The Russian stock exchange market has also continued to grow despite Trump's warnings. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forecasted Russia's growth rate in 2025 at 1.5 per cent while the Russian Economic Development Ministry has kept it at 2.5 per cent. This month, the US Senate tabled additional sanctions on Russia, calling them a 'sledgehammer'.

Sanctions on Russia will also impact countries that trade with Russia in oil, gas, uranium, and other products. Such secondary sanctions on third countries are reportedly proposed to touch 500 per cent. Some US lawmakers are even hinting at the US, together with its European allies, accessing frozen Russian assets, including the \$5 billion located in the US, to dent Russia's warfighting resources and utilise the money in Ukraine's reconstruction. This would be an unprecedented move as no US president has ever taken the central bank assets of a foreign country that the US is not at war with. However, secondary sanctions have not been too successful either, with Russia, through its 'shadow fleet', exporting energy to the other countries, including China, Turkey, UAE, Belarus, and Armenia. Moreover, partner countries of the US such as Turkey, UAE, and Armenia have not participated in sanctions, creating an enforcement gap, helping Russia maintain access to sanctioned goods and continue its economic activities. A report, published by the Kyiv School of Economics,.

## Age of retirement for Tata Trusts trustees is something to think about

**Delhi:** One day after stepping down as a director, Vijay Singh, vice chair of Tata Trusts, was present at the Tata Sons board meeting. Tata Sons welcomed him attend the meeting as a token of their thanks for his time on the board, but since he had already resigned, he was unable to vote on any matters on the agenda. Despite his status as a nominated director of Tata Trusts—the parent company of Tata Sons—Singh did not have any additional authority during board meetings. Nominee directors of Tata Trusts have far more clout than other directors at Tata Sons; they can veto acquisitions or capital expenditure programs worth more than Rs 100 crore, for example. But they still need the majority vote of the Tata Trusts trustees to make decisions. The only item on the agenda that did not pass was an investment plan that did not receive approval from Tata Trusts; all the others included Air India,



### When oil prices drop every month, US stocks go up

**Delhi:** Wall Street indexes rose in choppy rises as in-line European markets ended flat, continuing their 10-week winning streak. The Federal Reserve is expected to decrease interest rates twice this year, according to U.S. inflation figures. Crude prices fell 1%, the first monthly decline since November, as markets braced for fresh levies from Washington and crude exports from Iraq's Kurdistan

Tata International, and Tata Capital. After the approval of the biggest shareholder is obtained, the proposal would be reviewed again at the subsequent board meeting

region. According to a White House source, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy of Ukraine will depart the Oval Office early Friday after a contentious meeting with Trump. Following reports of falling yearly inflation and sluggish consumer spending in the latest statistics tracked by the Federal Reserve, U.S. Treasury rates hit multi-month lows. A drop of 2.93 points, or 0.34%, was recorded by MSCI's global stock index.

of Tata Sons. After Singh left, the two remaining nominee directors at Tata Sons are Noel Tata, chairman of Tata Trusts, and Venu Srinivasan, vice-chairman.

## Adani group bans sanctioned ships at ports

**Delhi:** India's largest private port operator, Adani Group, has banned entry of tankers that are sanctioned by Western countries at all of its ports - sources said and documents show move that could hit Russian oil supplies for two Indian refiners that regularly get Russian oil delivered at Adani's Mundra Port in Gujarat. India is the biggest buyer of Russian seaborne oil, mostly shipped on tankers that are



sanctioned by the European Union, the US and Britain.

HPCL-Mittal Energy, which operates a 226,000-barrels per day Bathinda refinery in northern Punjab, gets all of its crude supplies at the Mundra Port. The

port is also used by Indian Oil Corp, the country's biggest refiner, for oil imports. IOC gets crude supplies for its 10 refineries at multiple ports in India.

Adani, IOC and HMEL had no immediate comment when reached out.

## Gadkari says Mercedes-Benz wants to export 'made in India' cars

**Delhi:** According to Nitin Gadkari, India's minister of road transport and highways, Mercedes-Benz has told the government that it plans to increase production at its plant outside of Pune in order to fulfill its goal of exporting "Made in India" automobiles to

markets worldwide. The chairman of Mercedes, according to Gadkari, informed him that the production quality in India is strong, which has led the company to consider increasing manufacturing in the nation to fulfill the demands of worldwide

markets. "The chairman of Mercedes was telling me that they are going to look at increasing the productivity of Mercedes in India... And they want to export Mercedes from here to (markets) all over the world," Gadkari said. at the Auto Retail

## India resists full crypto framework, fears systemic risks

**Delhi:** A government paper reveals that India is considering not regulating cryptocurrencies but rather maintaining partial monitoring, due to concerns that integrating digital assets into the country's mainstream financial system could pose systemic dangers. According to the memo reviewed by Reuters, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) believes that it would be impossible to regulate cryptocurrencies in a way that effectively limits their dangers. The inauguration of U.S. President



Donald Trump has coincided with a rise in the price of bitcoin, the most valuable cryptocurrency by market capitalization, and a general improvement in the worldwide acceptability of cryptocurrencies. Stablecoins, a type of cryptocurrency

that is backed by fiat currency and hence less susceptible to violent swings, have also been legalized in the US. Despite China's ongoing cryptocurrency ban, Reuters reported last month that the country is looking into a stablecoin.

### India, UAE set \$100 bn non-oil trade goal by 2030

**Delhi:** India and the United Arab Emirates are targeting \$100 billion in trade by 2030, excluding oil and precious metals, India's commerce ministry said in a statement. The target was decided during a meeting between Union commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal and the UAE's minister of foreign trade, Dr. Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, in New Delhi last week. They were reviewing bilateral trade between the two countries under the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) that came into effect in 2022. Both leaders stressed deeper cooperation in emerging sectors renewable energy.

## Adani will spend 70,000 crore in Maha; gov. inks five MoUs for 1.08 lakh

**Delhi:** Adani Enterprises Limited would invest 70,000 crore in Nagpur, Maharashtra, to establish a coal gasification and downstream derivatives complex. This MoU was signed with the state government. Project is projected to enhance state energy and industrial output and create 30,000 jobs. The Maharashtra government signed five MoUs worth 1.08 lakh crore. Adani's investment tops. The com-



pany develops high-growth enterprises and spins them off as independent companies in mining, infrastructure (airports, roads, data centres, water management), solar manufacturing, defence, and edible oils. Adani Enterprises

would invest ₹70,000 crore in the Integrated Surface Coal Gasification and Downstream Derivatives Project in Linga, Kamleshwar, Nagpur to provide next-generation energy solutions for Maharashtra.

## Tata Capital's home financing records substantial growth

**Delhi:** Housing financing has been a consistent area of growth for Tata Capital, and the company sees this as a key component of its overall retail growth plan. Tata Capital Housing Finance is well-positioned to take advantage of structural opportunities in India's underdeveloped housing finance sector, as its portfolio expanded at a robust 33 percent compounded annual growth rate between FY23 and FY25. With an increase from ₹30,850 crore in FY24 and ₹22,100 crore in FY23, the home loan segment of the firm now accounts for ₹38,400 crore, or 17 percent, of Tata Capital's consolidated gross loan book as of March-end. This represents a gain of 74% over the past two years and a 24% increase over the past year, suggesting that



### Govt allows companies to display revised MRP on old unsold packs

**Delhi:** As a comfort to packaged goods makers who were waiting for labelling and packaging clarity to figure out how to pass the GST gains on to customers, the government has authorized them to display revised MRPs on unsold old packs of items. But before the end of the

the demand for residential credit is still high and that the category is expanding. Tata Capital continues to

year, businesses must sell off their old inventory. The consumer affairs ministry announced on Tuesday that until December 31 or until supplies run out, whichever comes first, makers, packers, or importers of pre-packaged goods can show amended MRPs. The government has

cater to a diverse range of clients, including salaried individuals, entrepreneurs, and small enterprises,

## EU to Give a Hand to India's Seafood Exports Following US Tariff

**Delhi:** After suffering under the US's harsh tariff regime, Indian seafood exporters are about to receive a vital lifeline in the EU. Shrimp exports, which were struck particularly hard by Washington's recent 50% tariff on Indian goods, could see an immediate 20%



increase, according to the Commerce Ministry. The European Union (EU) cleared

102 new Indian fishing operations for export this month, effectively eliminating all pending permissions, marking a significant milestone. With the listings in place, which encompass aquaculture units, sea-caught processing factories, and cold storage facilities,

all of India's main seafood exporters can now begin shipping to the EU. India sent \$1.1 billion worth of seafood to the European Union in FY24, making it the country's second-biggest seafood export market. The ministry anticipates that

## Ad exchange sues Google for monopolistic violations

**Delhi:** The advertising exchange PubMatic Inc. is suing Alphabet Inc.'s Google, claiming that Google has unlawfully monopolized the ad technology market and is seeking billions of dollars in damages. This is the second lawsuit that an advertising exchange has filed against Google in as many months. In April, a federal judge found that Google had unlawfully monopolized two important technology markets, namely ad exchanges and the tools used by websites to sell ad space, called ad servers. The lawsuit was filed in a federal court in Virginia. Another trial to determine whether



Google must divest portions of its advertising business to fix the unlawful behavior is scheduled to take place this month before the same Virginia judge who agreed with the Justice Department and a few states in April. The US Department of Justice has demanded that the

corporation sell its AdX advertising exchange and enable its technology to communicate with competitors' systems without delay. Instead of selling off its assets, Google plans to integrate its advertising exchange with other technologies. and put a compliance

### Amazon eyes bumper sales

**Delhi:** Amazon is preparing for an even greater surge in festive sales this year as a result of the reorganization of GST slabs, which would lower the prices of many consumer goods. This will increase spending by the salaried class, many of whom look for online offers when purchasing products, especially for expensive ones. Outside of ethnic clothing, which is the norm for festivals, the most purchased items during festivals tend to be smartphones, gadgets,

and durables. We anticipate a greater increase in holiday sales compared to previous year. Regardless, consumers typically wait for sales to begin before making large purchases; however, this time around, the trend has quickened thanks to the GST cuts. Customers can expect to save a ton of money this holiday season because of merchants' enticing bargains and a drop in GST on millions of products, according to Saurabh Srivastava, VP of categories at Amazon India.

## Reimagined: Love, lust and literary sacrilege

**D**irector Emerald Fennell's *Wuthering Heights* arrives trailing perfume, provocation, and the faint smell of sacrilege. This is not Emily Brontë's 19th-century English classic preserved in formaldehyde; it is Brontë hurled into a bonfire and filmed in slow motion. Fennell treats the novel less as scripture and more as emotional raw material, extracting obsession, desire, and spectacle while discarding much of its moral grit and generational sprawl. What emerges is a feverish romance con-

**TITLE:** *Wuthering Heights*  
**DIRECTOR:** Emerald Fennell  
**CAST:** Margot Robbie, Jacob Elordi, Hong Chau, Shazad Latif, Alison Oliver, Martin Clunes, Ewan Mitchell, Amy Morgan  
**WHERE:** In theatres near you  
**RATING:** ★★★

vinced that passion alone is plot enough. Fennell narrows the story to the centrifugal force between Catherine and Heathcliff, sanding away the social architecture that once made their love so corrosive. Class conflict, racial otherness, and the long shadow of vengeance are softened, sometimes to the point of vanishing. In their place is a heightened, sensual melodrama that wants to be felt before it is understood. The result is intoxicating in stretches, exasperating in others. The film knows exactly whom it is courting and does so without coyness, even if

that courtship occasionally mistakes excess for depth.

**Actors' performance**  
Margot Robbie's Catherine is impulsive, wilful, and keenly aware of her own power. She plays Cathy as a woman driven by appetite rather than introspection, which suits Fennell's vision even as it distances the character from her literary roots. Robbie captures the thrill of cruelty and the ache of regret, though the role often asks her to emote at full volume, leaving little room for modulation. Jacob Elordi's Heathcliff is a more divided proposition. He brings physical presence and wounded intensity, crafting a lover who is magnetic rather than monstrous. What is lost is the novel's sense of menace and moral rot. This Heathcliff aches more than he terrifies. Among the supporting cast, Hong Chau quietly commands attention, grounding the film with a watchful restraint that the central romance frequently lacks.

**Music**  
Visually, the film is unabashedly

lush. The moors are drenched in colour, the interiors flamboyant to the point of theatricality. Period detail flirts freely with modern stylisation, creating a world that feels less historical England and more heightened fantasy. At times this boldness exhilarates; at others it distracts, drawing attention to itself rather than the story it frames. The music plays a crucial role in bridging centuries. Contemporary pop elements pulse through the narrative, collapsing time and insisting that this torment is eternal, not archival. The score amplifies emotion with a heavy hand, pushing scenes toward operatic intensity. Subtlety is not the aim here, and viewers resistant to sonic insistence may find it overwhelming.

This film is bold, confident, and willfully divisive. Thrilling in parts and excessive in others, it favours emotional heat over moral depth. As a film, it dazzles; as an adaptation, it strays freely. Overall, you may admire its passion while questioning its simplifications.



## Brass notes and the fine art of not falling in line



**TITLE:** *Bandwaale*  
**DIRECTOR:** Akshat Verma  
**CAST:** Swanand Kirkire, Shalini Pandey, Zahan Kapoor  
**WHERE:** Prime Video  
**RATING:** ★★★

woman conditioned to apologise for ambition. While her performance does not always plumb emotional depths, her presence anchors the narrative. Sanjana Dipu, as Mariam's younger sister Cynthia, is a delight, sharp, supportive, and often more emotionally legible than the protagonist herself.

Zahan Kapoor's DJ Psycho functions more as a narrative device than a fully inhabited presence, competent and contemporary but emotionally contained. Swanand Kirkire's Robo, a brass band singer with weathered optimism, adds warmth and lived-in charm. Ashish Vidyarthi, as Mariam's overbearing father, David Bastian, resists caricature, playing control as concern rather than cruelty. The rest of the ensemble registers as natural, if occasionally restrained.

**Music**  
Music in the series is not garnish; it is grammar. The composers keep the soundscape grounded, resisting viral theatrics in favour of soulful understatement. Poetry flows into melody without announcement, mirroring Mariam's own journey from silence to self-expression. The series also gestures toward the modern paradox of visibility, where anonymity online offers freedom, but recognition remains hostage to algorithms and approval. Ratlam itself is filmed without cosmetic ambition, streets, homes, and community spaces appearing lived-in rather than picturesque. The aesthetic choice reinforces the show's central argument: beauty exists even when ambition is boxed in.

This series is slow, occasionally indulgent, and emotionally cautious. Yet, it remains earnest to a fault. Its strength lies in treating small-town aspiration without mockery or melodrama. While it could have benefited from sharper emotional payoffs and tighter pacing, the series compensates with warmth, gentle humour, and an uncommon empathy for quiet dreamers. Not a rousing anthem, but a soft, persistent tune that lingers longer than expected.

**Actors' performance**  
Shalini Pandey shoulders the series with quiet conviction. As Mariam, she brings softness and restraint, making her believable as a young



## On love, closure and the ghosts that linger

**TITLE:** *A Beautiful Breakup*  
**DIRECTOR:** Ajithvasan Uggina  
**CAST:** Thaksh and Matylda Bajer  
**WHERE:** In theatres near you  
**RATING:** ★★★



**B**reakups are usually untidy affairs, conducted over cold coffee, unread messages, or the dull hum of ceiling fans. *A Beautiful Breakup* proposes something far more ceremonial. It asks what might happen if a relationship were given the courtesy of a farewell tour, complete with ancestral property, scenic isolation, and a few inconvenient ghosts. Director Ajithvasan Uggina's film opens not as a love story in bloom, but as one already pressing flowers between the pages, determined to preserve the memory even as it accepts the inevitable wilt.

At its core, the film is less about ghosts than about the hauntings of modern relationships. Ruby and Krish carry London with them in their accents, habits, and emotional evasions, even as rural India surrounds them with quiet indifference. The mansion becomes a confessional, a battlefield, and eventually a playground for unresolved feelings. The script lingers, sometimes too lovingly, on their disagreements and silences. The haunted-house promise teased at the start is deliberately sidelined, replaced by prolonged domestic sparring. This choice both grounds the film emo-

tionally and tests the viewer's patience. Tonally, the film wobbles between romantic melodrama and supernatural whimsy. When it works, the contrast is charming, as if the ghosts are stand-ins for all the unspoken grievances couples drag into a breakup. When it does not, the narrative feels stretched, circling the same emotional drain more than once. The final act finally lets the supernatural loose, shifting the film into stranger, darker territory and hinting that this goodbye may not be as final as promised.

**Actors' performance**  
Thaksh plays Krish as a distracted, laptop-tethered professional who mistakes busyness for purpose. The performance captures emotional neglect well, though it occasionally slips into stiffness, making his romantic gestures feel more rehearsed than lived-in. Matylda Bajer, as Ruby, brings greater ease and emotional clarity. Her frustration, vulnerability, and quiet resignation register with convincing warmth, making her the emotional

anchor of the film. Together, their chemistry feels believable enough to justify both their love and their exhaustion with each other.

**Music**  
Visually, the film is polished to the point of sheen. Aerial shots of the estate and surrounding landscape give the story a travelogue quality, underscoring the irony of a relationship ending amid postcard beauty. The ghosts are imaginatively designed, their introduction playful rather than frightening. Ilaiyaraaja's music, however, is an indulgent presence. The score often announces emotions that the actors are already conveying, occasionally tipping scenes into melodrama instead of enhancing them.

Overall, this is a curious, earnest film. Slightly silly, undeniably sincere, and intermittently haunting, it may not be for everyone. For those willing to go along for the ride, it offers a strangely gentle meditation on love, closure, and the ghosts we carry long after goodbye.

## The perfect crime, imperfect people

**T**his film arrives wearing the tailored suit of a heist thriller but insists on checking the audience's pulse rather than their adrenaline levels. It pretends to be about a robbery, yet spends most of its time circling the more interesting question of why people convince themselves that one decisive act can tidy up a lifetime of compromises. Director Bart Layton treats the genre like a well-thumbed rulebook that can be respected, bent, and occasionally mocked. The film unfolds with deliberate patience, resisting the urge to rush towards gunfire or grand twists. Instead, it allows unease to accumulate, the way it does in real life, quietly and with intent.

Set largely against a nocturnal Los Angeles that gleams even as it corrodes, the film uses the city less as backdrop and more as subtext. This is a world governed by transactions, where worth is measured, negotiated, and steadily eroded. The narrative's strength lies in its refusal to glorify criminal bravado. It understands the romance of the last job fantasy, then calmly dismantles it piece by piece. At times, the pacing flirts with indulgence, and a few stretches feel more contemplative than compelling. Yet even in its weaker moments,

**TITLE:** *Crime 101*  
**DIRECTOR:** Bart Layton  
**CAST:** Chris Hemsworth, Mark Ruffalo, Barry Keoghan, Monica Barbaro, Corey Hawkins, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Nick Nolte, Halle Berry  
**WHERE:** In theatres near you  
**RATING:** ★★★

*Crime 101* remains alert, intelligent, and faintly amused by its own seriousness.

**Actors' performance**  
Chris Hemsworth delivers a performance built on subtraction rather than spectacle. He sheds charisma the way his character sheds certainty, playing a man whose confidence is eroded by the very precision that once defined him. Halle Berry is quietly formidable, inhabiting her role with a weariness that feels earned rather than per-



formed. Her character's moral hesitation becomes the emotional hinge of the film.

Mark Ruffalo brings a lived-in credibility to the pursuing lawman, avoiding theatrics in favour of observation and instinct. He plays the chase like a slow burn rather than a sprint, making the pursuit feel inevitable instead of urgent. All three characters, in different ways, are confronting their own redundancy, a shared anxiety that binds hunter, hunted, and bystander more closely than the plot admits.

The supporting cast sharpens this tension further. A volatile younger presence briefly disrupts the film's careful order, while ageing intermediaries and fleeting personal reckonings add texture, suggesting a world where crime and authority alike are quietly being inherited rather than conquered.

**Music**  
Visually, the film favours restraint over dazzle. The camera lingers on empty spaces, muted interiors, and faces caught in moments of calculation. The aesthetic is clean but not cold, stylish without being self-conscious. The score follows the same philosophy. It murmurs instead of announcing itself, allowing silence to do much of the heavy lifting. The result is a mood that feels sustained rather than imposed.

Overall, Bart Layton's film finds its power not in closure but in corrosion, watching competence, desire, and certainty quietly fray. The heist fades; the damage doesn't.

## Mayasabha: Living in the projection light

*In Mayasabha: The Hall of Illusion, Rahi Anil Barve crafts not a thriller about a haunted cinema hall, but a study of inherited narrative. Vashu is not trapped by his father's actions, but by the story he was raised inside. What unfolds is a psychological excavation of memory, masculinity, and the quiet violence of being made to live in someone else's unfinished script*

**S**ome sons inherit land. Some inherit debt. Vashu (Vashu) inherits a story. *Mayasabha* is not about a son trapped by a father. It is about a son trapped by a narrative that predates him. Vashu never meets Jaymala (Vashu's mother) or Sohrab, yet they orbit his life like twin suns he has been warned never to look at. His childhood is not built on memory, but on narration.

*Mayasabha's* cinema hall is not a house. It is a mausoleum with tickets still on sale. Posters fade but never fall. Smog lingers like a thought refusing to die. This is archival, not domestic. Vashu is on



night duty, preserving evidence like a watchman guarding heartbreak that was never his.

The yellow helmet is not cowardice, it is filtration. Living inside someone else's bitterness requires a visor. The helmet narrows sight,

muffles sound, and controls exposure. It is a private atmosphere inside a public ruin. Inherited trauma feels airborne. He can see the world, but only in measured doses. When he finally tosses it aside, it is not heroic. It is necessary.

Parmeshwar, his father, sprays DDT obsessively, as if mosquitoes carry contamination. He fears memory, not insects. Unable to control desire, reputation, or abandonment, he over-controls air. But trauma does not evaporate with pesticide. It settles. Vashu grows up breathing what his father tried to kill. Gold, too, shifts meaning. It is never about greed. For Vashu, gold is proof of his father not being entirely delusional, and that years of isolation had substance. The child's need is simple and brutal: "Tell me this was not pointless." A child can survive cruelty more easily than meaninglessness.

Zeenat is less villain than destabiliser. She says what the house

does not want said. In doing so, she threatens the only story holding Vashu upright. Narrative collapse is identity collapse. The coat he wears is too big for him. It also carries a blade. There is a scene where Vashu is seen sitting outside a shut India Post office at night. He sits outside a system built for delivery, like a letter sent to the wrong address. His life was stamped and sealed before he had a say in its contents.

The film is careful about how Vashu addresses his father. "Parmeshwar" in public. "Papa" only at certain emotional peaks. The naming becomes survival. Distance is discipline. Affection is rationed. He speaks like an observer documenting a life he never fully inhabits. The ending refuses spectacle.

Instead of revelation, we get atmosphere. Instead of exposure, we get smoke. Vashu does not tear down the illusion he was raised inside. He does something gentler and more radical. He lets it remain ambiguous. But the boy who lived inside the projection light walks into unfiltered air.

**FILM:** *Mayasabha: The Hall of Illusion*  
**LANGUAGE:** Hindi  
**RELEASE:** Theatrical  
**DIRECTOR:** Rahi Anil Barve  
**CAST:** Jaaved Jaaferi, Mohammad Samad, Veena Jankar, Deepak Damle  
**GENRE:** Psychological thriller/fantasy drama  
**RUNTIME:** 104 minutes

## Briefs

## China expels three corrupt military men

Chinese parliament has expelled three high-ranking military officials in the latest crackdown against corruption. The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress expelled Wang Renhua, head of the Central Military Commission's Political and Legal Affairs Committee; Zhang Hongbing, political commissar of the People's Armed Police, and Wang Peng, director of the CMC's training department. All 3 remain full members of Central Committee, ruling Communist Party of China's decision-making body.

## Thailand parties name PM nominees

Political parties in Thailand on Sunday registered their candidates for the next PM, marking the unofficial start of campaigning for the Feb 8 general election. PM Anutin Charnvirakul dissolved Parliament earlier this month to call early poll, after the main opposition prepared to seek a no-trust vote over constitutional change. Calling a new election allows Anutin and his Bhumjaithai Party to build up their numbers in House of Representatives to gain a more secure grip on govt. Voters will also cast votes in a referendum asking if they want a new constitution.

## S Africa bldg collapse kills baby, 2 others

Three people, including a 1-year-old child, died when a 2-storey building collapsed in South Africa's Soweto township, west of Johannesburg, early on Sunday. Three others sustained injuries. A total of six people were inside the building when it collapsed, and emergency officials rescued the three people injured who were trapped under the rubble.

## Three dead, scores hurt in Syria clashes

Clashes broke out in Syria between protesters from Alawite religious minority and counterdemonstrators on Sunday, killing over three and injuring dozens, officials said. The clashes came two days after a bombing at an Alawite mosque in Homs killed eight people and hurt 18 during prayers. Thousands gathered in Latakia and Tartous and elsewhere. Sunday's protests were called for by Ghazal Ghazal, an Alawite sheikh living outside of Syria who heads a group called the Supreme Alawite Islamic Council in Syria and the Diaspora.

## Khaleda Zia is 'extremely critical'

Bangladesh's former PM Khaleda Zia is "extremely critical", her personal physician has said. Zia, 80, the BNP boss, has been undergoing treatment since Nov 23. "It cannot be said her condition has improved. She is passing through an extremely critical phase," Dr AZM Zahid said.

## NY subway switches to tap-go fares

When the MetroCard replaced the New York City subway token in 1994, the swipeable plastic card infused modernity into one of the world's oldest and largest transit systems. Now, over 3 decades later, the gold-hued fare card and its finicky magnetic strip are following the token into retirement. The last day to buy or refill a MetroCard is Dec. 31, 2025.

## 'SHAM POLL' | First voting since military seized power in 2021

## First round: Myanmar poll 'widely criticised'

YANGON

The first of three phases of voting has finished in Myanmar in an election widely dismissed as a "sham", with major political parties dissolved, leaders jailed and as much as half the country not expected to vote due to an ongoing civil war.

The military government is holding a phased ballot nearly five years after it seized power in a coup, prompting widespread opposition and spiralling into civil war.

Observers say the junta, with China's support, is seeking to legitimise its power as it seeks a way out of the devastating stalemate.

More than 200 people have been charged for disrupting or opposing the polls under a new law which carries severe punishments, including the death penalty. There were reports of explosions and airstrikes across multiple regions as the first round of voting took place on Sunday. A rocket attack on an uninhabited house in the Mandalay region in the early hours of the morning injured three people, the region's chief minister told the BBC.

Separately, a series of blasts damaged over 10 houses in the Myawaddy township, near the border with Thailand, late on Saturday. A resident told the BBC a child was killed and three others were taken to hospital. Voters said the election feels more "disciplined and systematic" than previous polls. "The experience of voting has changed a lot," said Ma Su Zar Chi, who lives in the Mandalay region.

First-time voter Ei Pyay Phyo Maung, 22, said she was voting as she believed it is "the

## KOSOVO TRIES TO END CRISIS

**Pristina:** Voters in Kosovo cast ballots on Sunday in an early parliamentary election in hopes of breaking a political deadlock that has gripped the small Balkan nation for much of this year. The snap vote was scheduled after PM Albin Kurti's governing Vetevendosje, or Self-Determination, party failed to form a government despite winning the most votes in a February 9 election.

## GUINEA VOTES IN FIRST POLL SINCE 2021 COUP

**CONAKRY:** Guineans are voting on Sunday to elect a new president in the country's first election since a 2021 coup, as analysts say a weakened opposition will result in a likely win for junta leader Gen Mamadi Doumbouya. Sunday's election is the culmination of a transition process that began 4 years ago after Doumbouya ousted President Alpha Conde.

## KATHMANDU MAYOR PM FACE

**KATHMANDU:** Kathmandu Metropolitan City Mayor Balendra Shah, aka Balen, 35, was named PM candidate as he and Rastriya Swatantra Party inked a pact to jointly contest March 5 Nepal poll. The 7-point agreement designates Balen as parliamentary party leader and PM face, while Rabi Lamichhane will continue as chairperson of RSP, 4th-largest party in dissolved house of representatives.



## Agitating Serbia students urge support for early poll to oust Vucic

**Belgrade:** Serbia's protesting university students on Sunday collected signatures across the country for their request for an early parliamentary election they hope would oust the autocratic government of President Aleksandar Vucic from office.

Braving freezing weather, the students set up nearly 500 stands in dozens of cities, towns and villages in the Balkan country for residents to sign the election demand, which isn't a formal petition. Students have said Sunday's action was meant to pressure Vucic and as a test of support.

Young protesters have been at the forefront of a nationwide movement against Vucic's populist rule in Serbia. More than a year of street protests first started in November 2024 after a train station disaster that killed 16 people.

responsibility of every citizen".

"My hope is for the lower classes. The prices are skyrocketing. I want to support someone who can bring them down for those struggling the most," she said.

While over 4,800 candidates from 57 parties are competing for seats in national and regional legislatures, only six are competing nationwide with the possibility to gain political clout in Parliament. The well-organised and funded Union Solidarity and Development Party, with its support from the military, is by far the strongest contender, reported AP.

"An election organised by a junta that continues to bomb civilians, jail political leaders, and criminalise all forms of dissent is not an election — it

is a theatre of the absurd performed at gunpoint," Tom Andrews, the UN-appointed human rights expert for Myanmar, posted on X.

Khin Marlar, 51, a Yangon's Kyauktada township voter, said she felt she needed to vote as she hoped peace would follow afterwards. "I had fled my village in Thaingta in central Mandalay due to the fighting. I will go back to my village when it is peaceful," she said.

A resident of Mon state, Khin, fearing arrest by the military, said, "I have to go and vote even though I don't want to, because soldiers showed up with guns to our village to pressure us yesterday."

Suu Kyi, 80, Myanmar's former leader, and her party are not participating.

**Dhaka:** Dhaka rejected India's concerns over treatment of minorities in Bangladesh, calling it an "inaccurate, exaggerated, or motivated narrative" that does not reflect the facts. Bangladesh foreign ministry spokesperson SM Mahbul Alam said,

"The Govt of Bangladesh categorically rejects any inaccurate, exaggerated, or motivated narratives that misrepresent Bangladesh's longstanding tradition of communal harmony." Alam claimed there were "systematic attempts to portray the iso-

lated incidents of criminal acts as systemic persecution of the Hindus and maliciously used to propagate anti-Bangladesh sentiments" in different parts of India.

"We observe a selective and unfair bias in certain quarters, where isolated incidents are

## Russia's response to European attack will be devastating: FM

MOSCOW

Russia does not intend to attack anyone in Europe, but its response to any strike will be devastating, its Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Sunday, noting the EU's "war party" has become a stumbling block in Ukraine peace efforts.

"My message for European politicians who seem to have problems getting to grips with this fact is to repeat one more time that there is no need to be afraid of Russia attacking anyone," Lavrov said in an interview with state-run news agency TASS.

"However, should anyone consider attacking Russia,

they would face a devastating blow," Lavrov added.

"Whether leaders like (EU chief) Ursula von der Leyen, (German Chancellor) Friedrich Merz, (UK PM) Keir Starmer and (French President) Emmanuel Macron and the like have reached a point of no return is hard to say. "We do see so far, the European war party has been investing its political capital in inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia, and is ready to go the whole nine yards," the minister said.

"I would emphasise on the fact these actions on their behalf were totally illegitimate. After all, Russia has never taken the initiative to target its European neighbours with unfriendly

actions," Lavrov stated.

## KYIV MUST END THINGS PEACEFULLY: PUTIN

Earlier on Saturday, President Vladimir Putin visited a command post of the Russian Armed Forces and said, "Ukraine must end things peacefully," reported TASS.

Putin said, "If Kiev does not want peace, Russia will achieve all special military operation goals by military means."

He said the establishment of a buffer zone on the Russian-Ukrainian border is proceeding well, and Russian Armed Forces are advancing in Donbass and the Zaporozhye Region along the entire line of engagement.

## ZARDARI WAS ADVISED TO 'HIDE IN A BUNKER'

## OP SINDOOR

**Lahore:** Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari has revealed he was advised to "hide in a bunker" when India launched Operation Sindoor in May this year.

Zardari made the revelation at an event in Larkana, Sindh, to mark the 18th death anniversary of his wife and former PM Benazir Bhutto, assassinated in a gun and bomb attack in Rawalpindi on December 27, 2007.

"My MS (Military Secretary) came to me and said, 'Sir, the war has started.' I had actually told him four days earlier that a war was going to happen. He said, 'Sir, let's go to a bunker (being a safe place)... I said, 'If martyrdom is to come, it will come here. Leaders don't die in bunkers. They die on the battlefield. They don't die sitting in bunkers,' he said on

## India hit air base, damaged installations, injured men: Dar

**Islamabad:** The Pakistani government has again found itself embarrassed on the world stage, now acknowledging the impact of India's strategic and precision strikes on their military installation during the escalation in May, following Operation Sindoor. This time around, the embarrassment came from Pakistan's Foreign Minister and Dy PM Ishaq Dar, who, during the year-end press briefing on Saturday, confirmed India had targeted its Nur Khan Air Base in Rawalpindi's Chakala, damaging their military installation and injuring personnel there.

Dar told the briefing India had sent multiple drones within 36 hours, and one drone damaged the military installation, highlighting the operation's scale and precision. "They (India) send drones towards Pakistan. In 36 hours, at least 80 drones were sent... We were able to intercept 79 out of the 80 drones. Only one drone damaged a military installation and personnel were also injured," Dar claimed.

Saturday. The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) top leader claimed that the international community is now acknowledging Pakistan's stance and even US President Donald Trump had praised Munir. "Pakistan desires peace but remains fully prepared to defend itself," Zardari said. He praised Army chief Asim Munir for what he called a "befitting reply to India".

## Dhaka rejects India's claim of hostilities against minorities

## Thai and Cambodian envoys meet in China to solidify ceasefire

BEIJING

Top diplomats from Thailand and Cambodia kicked off two days of talks in China on Sunday as Beijing seeks to strengthen its role in mediating the two countries' border dispute, a day after they signed a new ceasefire.

Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow and Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn were set to meet in China's southwest Yunnan province for talks mediated by their Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi.

The talks aim to ensure a sustained ceasefire and promote lasting peace between the countries, according to a statement by Sihasak's office.

Wang was scheduled to join both bilateral meetings with each of the diplomats and a trilateral talk on Monday. China has welcomed the ceasefire announcement, which freezes the front lines and allows for displaced civilians to return to



Cambodia's Prak Sokhonn China's Wang Yi.

## US has become real UN: Trump

US has become the "real" UN, which has been of very little help in resolving conflicts around the world. President Donald Trump said as he announced the Thailand-Cambodia fight will stop momentarily.

their homes near the border. "China stands ready to continue to provide the platform and create conditions for Cambodia and Thailand to have fuller and more detailed communication," Chinese foreign ministry said.

China has sought to position itself as a mediator in the crisis, along with the United States and Malaysia.

US, Israel, Europe waging full-scale war on Iran, prez Pezeshkian says

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian says that the US, Israel and Europe are waging a "full-fledged war" against his country.

The president's remarks on Saturday came ahead of Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu's meeting on Monday with US President Trump. They also come six months after Israel and the US launched strikes on Iran, and after France, Germany and the UK reimposed UN sanctions on Iran in Sept over its nuclear programme.

"In my opinion, we are in a full-fledged war with America, Israel and Europe. They do not want our country to stand on its feet," Pezeshkian told the official site of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in an interview.

"Our dear military forces are doing their job with strength, and now, in terms of equipment and manpower, despite all the problems we have, they are stronger than when they [Israel and the US] attacked."

## 3 KILLED IN SWEDEN AS MAJOR STORM SWEEPS ACROSS NORDIC COUNTRIES



A third person has died in Sweden after a powerful winter storm swept across Nordic countries, causing travel disruption and power outages.

The Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute issued alerts for strong winds for large parts of the northern half of the country as Storm Johannes hit. One man in his 50s died after being struck by a tree in the Kungsberget ski resort in the country's south, local media and police reported; while further north, regional utility company Hemab said that one of its employees died in an accident while out working.

Police said a man in 60s was hospitalised after being hit by

a tree while working in a forest in Hofors, Sweden, and later died. Thousands of homes in Sweden, Norway and Finland have been left without power. In Sweden, over 40,000 homes were affected by power outages and numerous rail services were cancelled, Swedish news agency TT reported.

Several flights, rail and ferry services in the Nordic nations have been cancelled. Roads and rail services have also been hit due to the storm conditions. In Norway's Nordland region, one of the most northerly counties in the country, the fire department responded to over 200 weather-related incidents, broadcaster NRK reported.



**SNOW-COVERED MOUNT ETNA ERUPTS, SPEWS LAVA AND ASH:** Italy's most active volcano erupted on Saturday, prompting scientists to issue a red Volcano Observatory notice for aviation, signalling a potential risk for aircraft. Despite the alert, authorities said flights continued operating normally at Catania-Fontanarossa airport, adding no disruption was expected unless ashfall increased.

Storm Johannes cut power to around 23,000 homes in Nordland and a further 9,000 were without electricity in the Inland region, NRK said.

In Finland, the storm, known there as Hannes, subsided on Sunday morning but had left over 60,000 homes without power, according to public broadcaster Yle.

Flights at Kittila airport in northern Finland were grounded after heavy winds

pushed a passenger jet and a smaller plane off the runway and into a bank of snow, the Helsinki Times reported.

The Swiss Air jet, carrying about 150 passengers, had just landed from Geneva and was taxiing when it veered off. The smaller jet, a 400XT model, was on the ground at the same time and was also pushed off course by the wind, it said.

There have been no reported injuries.

## offgrid

## PIO wins £67k claim over 'slave' remark against UK KFC franchise

LONDON

An Indian man who accused his manager at a KFC franchise outlet in south-east London of wrongful dismissal and race discrimination has won nearly £67,000 in compensation after a tribunal ruled in his favour.

Madhesh Ravichandran, from Tamil Nadu, told an employment tribunal hearing

that his Sri Lankan Tamil boss discriminated against him and used references such as "slave" and "Indians are fraudsters" directed at him. In details from the hearing published this week, tribunal judge Paul Abbott upheld Ravichandran's claim of wrongful dismissal and race discrimination against Nexus Foods Limited.

"The complaints of direct race discrimination are well-



founded and succeed," reads the judgment.

"We have found on the facts the claimant was subject to the less favourable treatments. his holiday request was refused as he was Indian and [restaurant manager] Kajan wished to prioritise requests from Lankan Tamil colleagues, and he was referred to as a 'shit' and a 'slave' which is self-evidently less favourable treatment," it notes.

Ravichandran began work at the West Wickham outlet of KFC in January 2023 following his interview with Kajan, whom he reported to directly.

After facing months of problems, matters came to a head in July of that year when his boss attempted to make Ravichandran work excessive hours on a shift and handed in his notice.

Judge Abbott said he

accepted the evidence that his decision followed "Kajan's persistent efforts" to make him work "excessive hours".

During follow-up calls, Kajan was said to have become "racially abusive and threatening" towards Ravichandran.

"The race abuse from a manager had, we find, the purpose and the effect of violating the claimant's dignity," reads the judgment.

The tribunal concluded that

Ravichandran was "summarily dismissed" whilst serving out his notice and was denied his statutory right to one week's notice.

"It was not asserted by the respondent that the claimant had done anything to entitle it to dismiss the claimant without notice.

The claimant was, therefore, wrongfully dismissed and is entitled to be paid one week's pay in lieu of notice," it states.



# Game On, India!

Mumbai, Tuesday, March 31, 2026

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## Briefs

**SYDNEY**  
**KKR aware Green can't bowl: CA**



Cricket Australia on Monday said Kolkata Knight Riders were "fully aware" of Cameron Green's injury status after captain Ajinkya Rahane's remarks created uncertainty over the all-rounder's inability to bowl in their IPL opener against Mumbai Indians. Rahane had deflected questions on Green's absence as a bowler by saying, "Ask Cricket Australia," leading to speculation about the player's fitness. "Cameron has a lower back injury which is being managed, but he needs to refrain from bowling for a short period," a Cricket Australia spokesperson said.

**NEW DELHI**  
**Harbhajan criticises Narine**



Former India off-spinner Harbhajan Singh criticised Kolkata Knight Riders captain Ajinkya Rahane for not using Sunil Narine against Rohit Sharma during the powerplay in their IPL match against Mumbai Indians. Chasing 221, Rohit struck 78 off 38 balls and shared a 148-run opening stand with Ryan Rickelton (81 off 43 balls) as KKR's bowlers struggled on a flat Wankhede surface on Sunday. "The best match-up was to bowl Sunil Narine in the powerplay, at least one or two overs to target Rohit early. That was their best chance to take wickets and build pressure."

**HARARE**  
**Shaheen, Raza face allegations**



Pakistan Super League side Lahore Qalandars captain Shaheen Shah Afridi and overseas player Sikandar Raza have been accused of breaching team security protocols at their hotel, leading to a formal complaint by local authorities. Muhammad Faisal, DIG (Operations), Lahore, has informed the PSL CEO of a serious violation of security measures in place for teams

**RUTHLESS** | Sooryavanshi slammed the joint fastest fifty in IPL history in 15 balls as Rajasthan beat Chennai by eight wickets

## Vaibhav, bowlers help Royals thump CSK

GUWAHATI

Teenage prodigy Vaibhav Sooryavanshi was at his ruthless best as he smashed the third joint-fastest fifty in IPL history in 15 balls to power Rajasthan Royals to an easy eight-wicket victory against Chennai Super Kings at the Barsapara Stadium, Guwahati.

Chasing a paltry 128 for victory, Royals were barely troubled as they made mince-meat of the target coasting home at 128/2 in 12.1 overs.

Sooryavanshi struck 52 in 17 balls with four fours and five sixes at a strike rate of 305.88. Earlier, Rajasthan Royals made effective use of helpful overhead conditions to bowl out a struggling Chennai Super Kings for 127. It turned out to be a disappointing batting display from CSK, who were put in to bat by Riyan Parag after the pitch remained under covers for a considerable period due to rain.

Both Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals, who finished at the bottom of the table last season, had traded key players Ravindra Jadeja and Sanju Samson ahead of the new campaign. Jadeja marked his return to the Royals in style, striking twice in his opening over to put the opposition on the back foot early.

However, Samson endured a poor outing on his CSK debut. Attempting to hit Nandre Burger over mid-wicket, he saw his off stump knocked over by a delivery that moved away sharply.

Burger and Jofra Archer exploited the conditions well in the powerplay, consistently

Rajasthan Royals' Vaibhav Sooryavanshi celebrates his record-setting fifty. BCCI



**CSK:** S Samson b Burger 6 R Gaikwad b Archer 6, A Mhatre c Jurel b Burger 0, M Short c Jaiswal b S Sharma 2, S Khan lbw Jadeja 17, K Sharma lbw B Sharma 18, S Dube c R Bishnoi b Jadeja 6, J Overton (run out) 43, N Ahmad c Jurel b Archer 1, M Henry c & b R Bishnoi 5, A Kamboj (not out) 7. Extras (LB-9, NB-1, W-6) 16. Total (all out, 19.4 overs) 127.

**Fall of wickets:** 1-14, 2-19, 3-19, 4-38, 5-51, 6-57, 7-74, 8-82, 9-94

**Bowling:** J Archer 4-0-19-2, N Burger 4-0-

26-2, B Sharma 3-0-17-1, S Sharma 2.4-0-22-1, R Bishnoi 3-0-16-1, R Jadeja 3-0-18-2

**RR:** Y Jaiswal (not out) 38, V Sooryavanshi c Khan b Kamboj 52, D Jurel b Kamboj 18, R Parag (not out) 14. Extras (B-4, LB-1, W-1) 6. Total (For 2 wks, 12.1 overs) 128

**Fall of wickets:** 1-75, 2-99

**Bowling:** M Henry 3-0-40-0, K Ahmed 3-0-17-0, A Kamboj 3-0-27-2, N Ahmad 2-0-24-0, J Overton 1-0-14-0, M Short 0-1-0-

troubling the CSK batters.

After removing Samson, Archer dismissed CSK captain Rituraj Gaikwad, who backed away to play an attacking shot on the off side but ended up losing his stumps.

Burger nearly claimed a hat-trick in his second over after a sharp bouncer forced Ayush Mhatre into an edge, which carried to the wicketkeeper.

Jadeja was introduced in the eighth over and struck immediately, trapping Sarfaraz Khan leg before wicket after the batter missed a slog sweep. He followed it up by dismissing Shivam Dube, who failed to clear the long-off boundary.

At 57 for six in eight overs, CSK were left reeling with little chance of recovery.

Jamie Overton provided some resistance with a 36-ball 43, but lacked support from the other end as the innings folded quickly.

Royals' medium pacer Brijesh Sharma also impressed by picking up a wicket on debut, dismissing Kartik Sharma. Archer, Burger and Jadeja finished with two wickets each, underlining a collective bowling performance that set up a dominant start for Rajasthan Royals.

'SKY as impact substitute was a precautionary step'

Mahela states move was aimed at managing niggles



Mumbai Indians' Suryakumar Yadav in action. ANI

So please do not create any stories. I have to take precautions. These are very valuable players and we need them fit throughout the season. These are calculated decisions taken by me and the management. There is nothing beyond that

- Mahela Jayawardene, Mumbai Indians head coach

MUMBAI

India's T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav featuring as an impact substitute in Mumbai Indians' IPL opener here was a precautionary step due to a minor niggle, head coach Mahela Jayawardene said, asserting that there is no reason for speculation.

Suryakumar did not take the field for Mumbai Indians in their opening match against Kolkata Knight Riders and scored a brisk 16 off eight balls as the hosts defeated KKR by six wickets, registering their highest successful run chase in IPL history here on Sunday.

"I hope we do not create unnecessary stories here. The camp is happy. He had a couple of extra days that he wanted," Jayawardene said when asked why, similar to former India and MI captain Rohit Sharma last season, Suryakumar was used as an impact substitute.

"He had a slight tightness in

the groin and was doing fielding and other activities. But I knew we had another five days before the next game. I wanted to give him that additional time. He was keen towards the end to go out and field for three to four overs, but I said it was not necessary."

Jayawardene reiterated that the decision was purely precautionary and part of long-term planning. "So please do not create any stories. I have to take precautions. These are very valuable players and we need them fit throughout the season. These are calculated decisions taken by me and the management. There is nothing beyond that," he added.

The former Sri Lanka captain expressed satisfaction that Mumbai Indians ended their

winless run in opening IPL matches. Rohit Sharma (78) and Ryan Rickelton (81) stitched together a 148-run opening partnership while chasing 221, after Shardul Thakur (3/39) delivered an effective spell on a batting-friendly pitch.

"It is brilliant. It was a good batting wicket. When they reached 220, I felt we were slightly poor in execution and could have conceded 20 fewer runs. But the way Rohit and Ryan batted was a pleasure to watch," Jayawardene said.

Explaining the tactical use of Thakur, he added: "It was again a tactical decision. If we are using AM Ghazanfar and Hardik Pandya with the new ball, we cannot have too many new-ball bowlers."

## Royals' Sooryavanshi aims to dominate powerplay

Young batter focuses on aggressive starts, big scores

GUWAHATI

Following a remarkable debut season, prodigy Vaibhav Sooryavanshi returns for his second Indian Premier League campaign with Rajasthan Royals, determined to dominate bowlers and make a strong impact in the powerplay.

Representing Rajasthan Royals last season, the 15-year-old featured in seven matches and amassed 252 runs, including a blistering 35-ball century, while maintaining a strike rate in excess of 200. His performances marked him as one of the most exciting young talents in Indian cricket.

Sooryavanshi said his approach remains centred on maximising the powerplay and then building a substantial innings. "When I was picked, my only goal was to give the team a strong start. I wanted to play my natural game in the powerplay and, if I got going, continue and bat deep without losing my wicket," Sooryavanshi told JioStar.

"I knew that if I played my shots, the situation of the game



When I was picked, my only goal was to give the team a strong start. I wanted to play my natural game in the powerplay and, if I got going, continue and bat deep without losing my wicket

**Vaibhav Sooryavanshi**  
 Rajasthan Royals batter

would change, because chasing 200-plus would not be easy for any team. This season, the goal is to win the trophy. If the team performs well, individual performances will automatically stand out, and that is what matters most."

The youngest IPL debutant also impressed earlier this year by scoring 175 in the 2026 Under-19 World Cup final, further underlining his growing stature. Sooryavanshi revealed that he grew up idolising West Indies great Brian Lara and India's World Cup-winning all-rounder Yuvraj Singh, both known for their match-winning abilities.

"I watched Brian Lara and Yuvraj Singh win matches

single-handedly. When they were at the crease, opponents had little chance of making a comeback. That was something I really admired," he said. "I scored heavily in domestic cricket for Bihar, in league matches and probables, which helped build my confidence."

His childhood coach Manish Ojha recalled that Sooryavanshi's fearless intent and timing were evident from an early stage. "In 2018, when he joined the academy, it was clear he had immense potential and passion for the game. He always liked to attack and had excellent timing. In every session, he would face 400 to 500 balls," he added.

## KKR skipper Rahane unfazed by criticism, focuses on self-improvement

Captain stresses growth mindset amid scrutiny over form and future

MUMBAI

Unmoved by persistent speculation surrounding his future, experienced India batter and Kolkata Knight Riders captain Ajinkya Rahane said he is focused on personal growth rather than responding to critics.

The 37-year-old had stepped down from Mumbai's Ranji Trophy captaincy last season and did not lead the side in domestic white-ball competitions either, prompting renewed debate about his place in Indian cricket. Rahane has not represented India since 2023.

"Let people talk about me. They have been talking about me for nearly 20 years. Let them continue," Rahane said when asked if his 40-ball 67, featuring five sixes and three fours against Mumbai Indians here on Sunday, was a statement to critics, particularly within Mumbai's cricket circles.

"I am really happy with the way I am batting at the moment. I am not here to show anyone how talented I am or what my game is. People are watching, so let



Kolkata Knight Riders' skipper Ajinkya Rahane plays a shot.

Let people talk about me. They have been talking about me for nearly 20 years. Let them continue.

**Ajinkya Rahane**  
 KKR skipper

them watch and talk," he added.

Rahane said he is satisfied with the progress he has made in white-ball formats over the past few years.

"In the last two to three years, especially in white-ball formats, I have improved my

"We initially felt that 220 for four was a good total. We were on course to reach around 235 to 240, but those two overs from Bumrah made a significant difference. That is why he is regarded as a top bowler," Rahane said.

Rahane acknowledged that KKR's relatively inexperienced bowling unit would need time to develop, adding that the team combination could evolve once Australian all-rounder Cameron Green resumes bowling. Green is currently recovering from a back injury. "Our bowling attack is relatively inexperienced. Vaibhav Arora, who performed well last season, is leading the attack. Then we have Karthik Tyagi and Blessing Muzarabani. Although Muzarabani has international experience, the IPL presents different challenges," Rahane said.

"It is a challenging phase because some of our bowlers are injured. However, it also presents an opportunity for others to step up and perform. Players like Saurabh Dube, Umran Malik and Navdeep Saini have been impressive in practice sessions and matches."

## preview

# Gill, Shreyas eye statement as captains in opener

MULLANPUR

Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer, two India T20I batters who have often found themselves on the fringes, will lead Gujarat Titans and Punjab Kings respectively in a high-stakes Indian Premier League opener here on Tuesday, each keen to make a strong statement.

India's Test and ODI captain Gill, who was named T20I vice-captain but later omitted from the World Cup

squad to accommodate Sanju Samson, has much to prove in the shortest format. Despite India going on to win a record third ICC T20 World Cup, Gill enters this IPL season at a crucial juncture in his T20 career.

Since 2023, only Virat Kohli has scored more IPL runs than Gill. However, the focus has increasingly shifted from consistency to strike rate.

With a career T20 strike rate of around 138, Gill showed marked improvement last season, scoring at over 155, a

trend he will look to sustain. With former Australia opener Matthew Hayden joining the coaching staff as batting coach, Gill's intent and six-hitting ability at the top of the order will be under scrutiny.

Following Hardik Pandya's exit after IPL 2023, Gill has grown into his leadership role, and the team now revolves around him. Gujarat Titans, who won the title in their debut season in 2022, have remained one of the most consistent sides, finish-



ing third last year before losing to Mumbai Indians in the Eliminator.

They appear to be a settled unit again, retaining 20 players. The opening combination of Gill and Sai Sudharsan, last season's highest run-scorer with 759 runs, remains a key strength.

Sudharsan returns after recovering from a rib fracture but was in good form in domestic cricket, including an unbeaten 101 and several half-centuries prior to the injury.

Gujarat Titans also have promising backup options such as wicketkeeper-batter Kumar Kushagra, who impressed in domestic cricket with a strike rate exceeding 160 and an average above 60 in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, offering flexibility if the middle order falters.

For Kings, much will once again depend on captain Shreyas, a proven IPL leader who has taken three different teams to finals: DC in 2020, Knight Riders in 2024 and Punjab Kings last season.