

# 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 6 held with pistols

Punjab Police on Thursday said they have busted a cross-border illegal arms smuggling module with the arrest of six suspects, including a juvenile, and recovered seven sophisticated pistols in Amritsar district. Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav said the suspects were linked to a Portugal-based handler. Five 9mm Glock pistols and two .30 bore pistols were seized. Preliminary investigation revealed the weapons were smuggled from Pakistan via drones and supplied to criminal elements.

### JAIPUR Global tourism plan on anvil

Jaisalmer and Pushkar will be developed as global tourism destinations under the National Mission for developing 50 globally competitive tourism destinations, with financial assistance of up to Rs 300 crore each, including Rs 200 crore for infrastructure and Rs 100 crore for amenities, besides Rs 200 crore for destination management. Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari said, "This project is expected to boost international tourism within the state and generate large-scale employment opportunities at the local level."

### PATNA Tigress found dead in Bihar

Forest officials found a dead tigress in Valmiki Tiger Reserve in West Champaran district. The sub-adult tigress, around one-and-a-half years old, was under surveillance for abnormal behaviour and was being monitored for rescue when she died on Wednesday. The carcass was recovered near the Pandai river in Manguraha forest range and sent for post-mortem examination. Chief Conservator of Forests Gaurav Ojha said the cause of death will be confirmed after the report.

### LUCKNOW Jewar airport opening on March 28

The Yogi Adityanath government has proposed March 28 for the inauguration of the Noida International Airport at Jewar, with an invitation extended to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to preside over the ceremony. "Fifth international airport at Jewar is ready and will be the largest in the country. We have invited the Prime Minister to inaugurate it on March 28," UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said.

### JAIPUR Platform for defence families

Two Grade 11 students from Jayshree Periwai International School, Jaipur, Kanishk Rungta and Krishna Rungta, have developed Veer Sahara, a digital platform to simplify access to government support for defence families. The platform identifies relevant schemes and provides application links in English and Hindi. "We noticed that despite multiple government initiatives, many families struggle to access the benefits they are entitled to due to a lack of awareness and procedural complexity. This is not just about technology but about ensuring dignity and ease," said Kanishk Rungta.

## PEACE CALL | Modi talks to leaders of France, Oman, Jordan

# PM goes into diplomatic overdrive on West Asia

NEW DELHI

All 611 sailors aboard the 22 Indian-flagged vessels operating around the west of the Strait of Hormuz are safe, and there is no change in the situation of the vessels, the Ministry of Shipping said on Thursday.

In an inter-ministerial briefing, Special Secretary in the Shipping Ministry, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, said that 16 Indian sailors have returned in the last 24 hours amid the conflict in West Asia. Further, he said, "There are two container vessels in the East of Hormuz. One is CMA CGM Vitoria at Sohar Port in Oman, carrying 24 Indian sailors. Second one, the SSL Godavari, is on the way to the Khor Fakkan Port, the UAE, carrying 23 Indian sailors. The Aqua Titan tanker is expected to arrive on March 21 on New Mangalore Port and this tanker will be carrying crude oil."

### PM parleys for peace

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday spoke to French President Emmanuel Macron, Sultan Haitham bin

Tariq of Oman and his Malaysian counterpart Anwar Ibrahim, and discussed with them the West Asia situation, favouring de-escalation of the conflict in the region and subsequent restoration of peace and stability.

In his separate telephonic conversations with the three leaders, Modi also stressed the need for safe and free navigation through the Strait of Hormuz.

Modi has also spoken to several other world leaders, including those from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, Jordan, Israel and Iran, since the conflict began.

### 'Don't panic over LPG'

The government on Thursday urged consumers to wait for home delivery of their cooking gas cylinders after booking, and not queue up outside distribution agencies. Senior officials said that the problem was in the distribution of LPG cylinders, not in the supply.

Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas Joint Secretary Sujata Sharma said that instances of panic booking have come down, but people are still queuing up outside distribution agencies. "Once booked, you should wait for the home delivery of cylinder," she said, adding that against a

total online booking of 5.6 million LPG cylinders on Wednesday, 5.49 million cylinders were supplied.

She said there was 100% supply of piped natural gas for domestic use and of compressed natural gas for transport, and that state governments must prioritise domestic cooking gas supply and act against hoarding and black-marketing of LPG.

### Nahoum's forced to shut

Kolkata: Nahoum and Sons is this city's only Jewish bakery, and has been serving its customers with cakes and savouries for more than 120 years.

But the current West Asia crisis that disrupted energy supplies has dealt it a body blow, forcing it to shutter its operations for five days.

A notice pasted outside the shop stated that the bakery would remain closed from March 18 to March 22 due to "unavoidable circumstances".



## Suwendhu launches BJP's campaign in Bhabanipur

KOLKATA

Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly Suwendu Adhikari on Thursday launched the BJP's campaign for the Bhabanipur seat in south Kolkata, where he is set to take on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Adhikari arrived in Kolkata from Delhi in the morning and went to Chakberia Road, where he inaugurated the party's election office and participated in a rally.

"I am hopeful that people will accept me," he said.

### POLL WATCH WEST BENGAL

describing the turnout as extraordinary. He added, "I will win by a margin of 25,000 votes. People have shown that there is no challenge here."

Adhikari said, "The leader of infiltrators, corruption should be defeated." He also alleged that small shopkeepers had complained of harassment by the CM's nephew, referring to TMC national general secretary

### RG Kar victim's mother may be BJP candidate

The mother of the RG Kar hospital rape victim said she may contest the West Bengal Assembly poll as BJP candidate from North 24 Parganas. "I want to end the rule of the home minister," she said.

Abhishek Banerjee, Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said he would contest from any constituency decided by the party.

## Nitish set to become JD(U) chief again

PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday filed nomination papers for the post of Janata Dal (United) national president for the term 2025-28.

His nomination papers were handed over to the party's returning officer at its central office in New Delhi by working president Sanjay Kumar Jha and other party leaders.

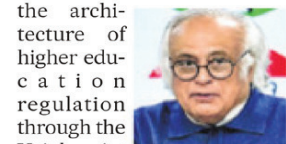
Since Nitish Kumar is the only candidate to file nomination for the post, he will be declared elected unopposed.

## Congress flags flaws in higher edu Bill

NEW DELHI

The Congress claimed that the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education's annual Demand for Grants report on the Department of Higher Education, presented on Wednesday, has revealed a "shockingly high number of vacancies in key regulatory agencies" such as the University Grants Commission and the All India Council for Technical Education.

The Opposition party said, "This concerning news comes at a time when there is already a move to restructure



the architecture of higher education regulation through the V i k s i t Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025." Party general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the Congress has seven key issues with the present form of the Bill, which include failure to consult state governments while framing it, constitutional overreach, absence of funding council, bureaucratisation of higher education and dilution of UGC's Consultative requirements.

## 11 Naxalites surrender

GADCHIROLI

Eleven Naxalites including five senior cadres on Thursday surrendered in eastern Maharashtra's Gadchiroli, police said, claiming that the Left Wing Extremism (LWE) has almost come to an end in the district.

The Maoist cadres, which included six women, were carrying a total reward of Rs 68 lakh on their heads. They surrendered before police and Central Reserve Police Force officials. As many as 123 armed Maoists have surrendered in the district, which borders Chhattisgarh, over the last year.

## ECI transfers: Didi cries interference

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday expressed alarm over the "arbitrary removal of more than 50 senior officials" in the poll-bound state, terming it a "political interference of the highest order".

Continuing with her tirade against the Election Commission, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) supreme claimed that such action amounted to "systematic politicisation of institutions" and a "direct assault on the Constitution".

After announcing the schedule for the assembly polls, the EC has ordered several reshuffles of senior officers, including the transfer of Chief Secretary Nandini Chakravorty, Home Secretary Jagdish Prasad Meena, and the removal of DGP Peeyush Pandey and Kolkata Police Commissioner Supratim Sarkar.

## India must be self-reliant in drone manufacturing: Rajnath

PTI  
NEW DELHI

India must develop a robust ecosystem for drone manufacturing to enhance its defence preparedness. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Thursday, highlighting lessons from the Russia-Ukraine and Iran-Israel conflicts.

In an address at an event, Singh asserted that the two conflicts prove that drones and counter-drone technologies will play a "pivotal role" in future warfare.



The defence minister said India must work in mission mode to emerge as a global hub for indigenous drone manufacturing in the next few years to ensure strategic autonomy and boost military prowess.

"As the entire world watches the ongoing conflict involving Russia and Ukraine, along with Iran-Israel, we can clearly see the extremely significant role of drones and counter-drone technologies in future warfare," he said.

"Today, there is a need to build such a drone manufacturing ecosystem in India," he said.

Singh was speaking at the National Defence Industries conclave, which was attended by top executives of leading domestic defence firms.

## JMM plans to contest polls in Assam

RANCHI

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, which is keen to shed its image as a regional party and emerge as a national political outfit, is eyeing to contest over 30 seats in the upcoming elections to the 126-member Assam assembly, a party functionary said.

The party is aiming to woo about 70 lakh tea-tribe people, many of whose ancestors migrated from Jharkhand long ago.

## Bird flu: Kerala to cull 20,000 fowls

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Bird flu (H5N1) has been confirmed in parts of Alappuzha and Kozhikode districts of Kerala, prompting authorities to step up containment measures, with over 20,000 domestic birds set to be culled, officials said on Thursday.

Officials said that samples sent to the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases in Bhopal confirmed the presence of highly patho-

genic avian influenza. However, officials clarified that properly cooked poultry products are safe for consumption.

"Bird flu virus is destroyed when meat is cooked at 70° Celsius for three to five minutes. Consumption of raw or undercooked eggs and meat should be strictly avoided," the Animal Husbandry Department said.

People handling dead birds have been advised to use protective gear such as masks and gloves.

## Cong alleges horse-trading in Hry

CHANDIGARH

The members of the Haryana Congress Legislature Party (CLP) on Thursday met governor Ashim Kumar Ghosh and submitted a memorandum alleging serious irregular-

ities in the March 16 Rajya Sabha elections for two seats. The delegation, led by Leader of Opposition (LoP) Bhupinder Singh Hooda, said in the memorandum that in the 90-member assembly, there are 48 MLAs from the BJP, 37 from the Congress, two from

the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) and there are three Independent MLAs, and thus a minimum of 31 votes was required to secure one Rajya Sabha seat.

The memorandum accused the returning officer, Pankaj Agarwal, of being biased.

## Bordoloi's son spurns Congress ticket

GUWAHATI

After Assam MP Pradyut Bordoloi joined the BJP, his son Prateek announced that he won't contest on a Congress ticket from Margherita in the upcoming assembly polls.

In a letter to Congress president and chairman of the Central Election Committee Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday, Prateek said he would continue to remain a party member.

Following his father's decision to join another party, it would not be appropriate for

him to continue as a Congress candidate from Margherita, Prateek said in the letter.

"With utmost respect and a deep sense of responsibility towards the party, I wish to convey my decision to withdraw my candidacy from the Margherita Assembly Constituency," he said.

## DMK seeks ED probe against ex-ministers

CHENNAI

The DMK has approached the Madras High Court on Thursday with a plea to direct the Enforcement Directorate to register money laundering cases against former AIADMK state

ministers including S P Velumani, P Thangamani, C Vijayabaskar and M R Vijayabaskaron on the basis of corruption cases pending against them.

"Unless the court intervened and directed the authorities to initiate proceedings under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, the proceeds generated through corruption may remain uninvestigated, thereby seriously affecting public interest," Girirajan contended.

## Told Sudhakaran to obey Cong order: Antony

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Congress stalwart A K Antony on Thursday said he has urged party strongman K Sudhakaran to abide by the high command's decision, however difficult it would be, to ensure the defeat of the CPI(M)-led LDF.

This comes amidst reports of Sudhakaran's discontent with the party over not being considered as a candidate for the Kannur constituency.

## Congress slams government 'crackdown' on social media

PTI  
NEW DELHI

The Congress slammed the BJP-led Centre on Thursday for its "crackdown" on social media, including X, YouTube and Instagram, by allegedly ordering the closure of several accounts and said undermining free speech is a threat to democracy.

Addressing a press conference here, Congress spokesperson and the head of the the

party's social media and digital platforms wing, Supriya Shrinete, claimed that multiple accounts across various social media platforms have either been blocked or restricted under official directives.

She alleged that the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is trying to suppress dissent and evade accountability by curbing digital expression. Shrinete claimed that sev-

eral X, YouTube and Instagram accounts that questioned government policies or highlighted public issues were either blocked, suspended or had content removed without adequate explanation.

She said even independent content creators and media platforms, including YouTube channels, have faced action, while citing the instance of police detaining a YouTuber who reported on LPG cylinder shortages in Noida.

## Prez installs Ram Yantra at Ayodhya

AYODHYA

President Droupadi Murmu offered prayers at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on the first day of Navratri, and also installed the Shri Ram Yantra at the Ram Darbar.

The President was received by Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

She said the visit is "deeply significant".

## Official Language Committee Meeting at Rail Electrification Organization; Emphasis Placed on the Use of Hindi



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** A meeting of the Official Language Implementation Committee was held on Thursday at the headquarters of the Central Organization for Railway Electrification (CORE). The meeting was presided over by General Manager Ashok Kumar Verma. During the session, officials and employees were encouraged to maximize the use of Hindi in their official work.

The General Manager stated that the Railway Board has provided adequate facilities and concessions to promote the use of

Hindi. In light of this, all officials and employees should use Hindi in their daily tasks without any hesitation. He further emphasized that 100% compliance with provisions related to the Official Language must be ensured, and that all work—including operations on the 'e-Office' platform—can be seamlessly conducted in Hindi. Earlier in the meeting, Chief Official Language Officer Dr. Sanjay Singh Negi welcomed the officials present. He noted that while steady progress is being made in the propagation and use of Hindi within the organiza-

tion, sustained efforts are essential to achieve the stipulated targets. He further reported that compliance with Official Language provisions is satisfactory, and the use of Hindi in original correspondence is consistently on the rise. Officials from various departments of the headquarters, along with Official Language Liaison Officers, were present at the meeting. The proceedings were anchored by Deputy Chief Official Language Officer Brijesh Chaudhary, who also delivered the vote of thanks at the conclusion of the program.

## Cyber Frauds Swindle 1.71 Cr in Lucknow City Ex-Army officer, teacher, Elderly among victims Police launch Probe



Lucknow

Cyber fraudsters duped five people of ₹1.71 crore through different modus operandi, including fake social media profiles, matrimonial traps and fraudulent trading Platforms. Police have registered cases and initiated an investigation. A retired Major General, Manoj Tiwari of Ashiana, was cheated of 15.63 lakh after being contacted on Instagram by a woman posing as his New York-based acquaintance. Later, a caller posing as an immigration officer convinced him to transfer money in multiple transactions on the pretext of Penalties. In another case, Basic Education Department teacher Umesh Chandra Tyagi

from Jankipuram lost 49 lakh after being lured into fake trading via a matrimonial site by a woman claiming to be a business owner. He was shown fake Profits and later threatened with legal action when he refused to Pay more. An 80-year-old resident, Atul Kumar Gautam, was duped of 24.5 lakh through a WhatsApp investment scam, while Om Narayan Srivastava of Indira Nagar lost 7.11 lakh after being Promised 5–30% returns in block trading. Similarly, Jyoti Bhushan Singh was cheated of 75 lakh via a fake trading app. Cyber thana inspector Brijesh Yadav said that cases have been registered and efforts are on to trace the Accused.

## Mega Health Camp and Social Initiatives Announced by Viraj Shastri

Fatehpur

Viraj Shastri, President of the Lal Bahadur Shastri Memorial Foundation, has actively stepped into the field of social service. He is the great-grandson of former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. He is also the grandson of former Member of Parliament and Union Minister Harikrishna Shastri and the son of Vibhakar Shastri. Speaking about his initiative, Viraj Shastri stated that he has entered the field of Public service to fulfill the vision of his late Grandfather Harikrishna Shastri. He emphasized that the foundation aims to undertake welfare-oriented activities across the country to Provide relief and essential services to the Public. He has begun his mission from Kusumbhi village in Haswa block of Fatehpur district, where an RO Plant is being installed to Provide clean drinking water to rural residents. The foundation stone for the Project has already been laid. According to Viraj Shastri, a free mega health camp will be organized on March 21 and 22 in the Nagar Palika Parishad area of Fatehpur. The camp will be held in Jayaram Nagar (Collector Ganj Ward) on March 21 and in Isain Purwa Ward on March 22. The camp will offer general health check-ups along with specialized eye examinations and treatment. Free medicines will be distributed to Patients and arrangements will also be made for the distribution of spectacles in the near future. He further stated that the foundation will also work in the field of education. Plans are underway to meet the District Magistrate and adopt government schools, with the aim of implementing large-scale educational improvements. Viraj Shastri added that the foundation will extend support to journalists and their families, as well as to outsourcing employees and their dependents through such welfare initiatives. Carrying forward the iconic slogan of his great-grandfather Lal Bahadur Shastri, "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan," he has also embraced a broader vision with the message "Jai Samaj." He acknowledged the support of his mother Jyoti Shastri and father Vibhakar Shastri in this mission and appealed to the youth to actively participate in social service Initiatives.



## Grand Job Fair and Alumni Meet Concluded in the Presence of Chief Development Officer Harshika Singh and Former IAS Officer Dr. R.S. Verma

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj |** On Thursday, an Alumni Meet and Job Fair were successfully organized by the TRRAIN Trust—an organization active in the fields of empowerment and livelihood missions for persons with disabilities—at the Saras Auditorium within the Vikas Bhawan complex. The event was graced by the presence of the Chief Development Officer of Prayagraj, Harshika Singh, as the Chief Guest, while retired IAS officer Dr. R.S. Verma attended as the Guest of Honor. The program commenced with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp. The Chief Guest was welcomed by Rumana Parveen with the presentation of a floral bouquet and was honored with a memento presented by Sagar Little, the Regional Manager of the TRRAIN Trust. Similarly, the Guest of Honor, Dr.



R.S. Verma, was welcomed by Vipin Kumar Kushwaha with a floral bouquet. Addressing the gathering, Chief Development Officer Harshika Singh highlighted the importance of empowering persons with disabilities, stating that there is no substitute for hard work and determination. She emphasized that persons with disabilities can scale the heights of success in every sphere of life; all that is required is proper guidance and consistent effort. In his address, Guest of Honor Dr. R.S. Verma remarked that if persons with disabilities can win Nobel

Prizes—and if individuals like Arunima Sinha can conquer Mount Everest—then nothing in this world is impossible. During the event, Assistant District Panchayat Raj Officer Brijesh Maurya, Secretary of the Crime Prevention Committee and Jail Supervisor Santosh Kumar Srivastava, Mohammad Furkan, and TRRAIN Trust Regional Manager Sagar Little—along with Vipin Kumar Kushwaha—also shared their thoughts and offered guidance to the participants. Providing further details, the Regional Manager of the



TRRAIN Trust explained that the organization offers a 45-day free residential training program to young persons with disabilities through its "Pankh Project." Following the training, these youths are provided with employment opportunities within the retail sector, thereby enabling them to become self-reliant. Companies present on this occasion included Amazon, BigBasket, Blinkit, PSN Pvt. Ltd., and Cyfuture Pvt. Ltd. Representatives from various corporate sector companies were present to conduct interviews for

job placement. At the conclusion of the program, Mr. Ashok Kumar Gautam, the District Empowerment Officer for Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) in Prayagraj, distributed certificates and also presented a hearing aid to one of the trainees. The program was anchored by Sanjay Yadav, a senior research scholar at Allahabad University, while the vote of thanks was delivered by Vipin Kumar Kushwaha. Detailed information regarding the TRRAIN Trust can be found at [www.ttrain.org](http://www.ttrain.org).

## Noida International Airport set for March 28 launch, to boost Industrial Growth

Noida

**Noida:** The Inauguration of the Noida International Airport is proposed for March 28, a move expected to accelerate industrial development in the region. Along with Passenger flights, cargo services from the airport will enable faster and more efficient transportation of goods across the globe. According to Rakesh Kumar Singh, CEO of the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA), the airport Proximity to the authority region makes it a safe and convenient destination for investors from



around the world. He stated that land is being allocated to companies in key sectors such as the semiconductor Park, automobile sector and medical device Park. Construction activities have also Picked up Pace to make these industries operational at the earliest. Infrastructure in

Yamuna City is being developed in line with international standards, helping create a robust industrial ecosystem. The launch of the airport is expected to Position the region as one of the country leading industrial and investment Hubs.

## Panel Cracks Down on Power Irregularities

Barabanki

A Review meeting of the Legislative Council committee on State Power arrangement was held at the Collectorate auditorium under the chairmanship of Angad Kumar Singh, where officials were directed to improve electricity supply, check line losses and ensure availability of transformers while taking strict action against power theft. Members Anoop Gupta, Pawan Singh Chauhan, Manvendra Singh, Umesh Dwivedi and Er. Avneesh Singh Patel attended the meeting along with District Magistrate Shashank Tripathi, Superintendent of Police Arpit Vijayvargiya, Chief Development Officer Anna Sudhan,



Additional District Magistrate Nirankar Singh, Chief Medical Officer Dr. Avdhesh Yadav, District Development Officer Bhushan Kumar, Project Director Rakesh Kumar and Superintending Engineer Rajbala, among others. The committee reviewed 31 Points, including feeder-wise supply, summer preparedness, metered feeders, line losses and vigilance Plans. Directions were issued for regu-

lar raids to curb electricity theft. Officials were also instructed to ensure shifting of high-tension lines Passing over schools, Provide uninterrupted supply in urban and rural areas and expedite Pending connections. Emphasis was laid on time-bound and quality disposal of Public complaints. At the end of the meeting, the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police Presented mementos.

## Commencement of Navratri: Massive Crowds Throng Alop Shankari Temple; Special Adornment for Goddess Shailputri

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** On Thursday—the first day of Chaitra Navratri—a massive crowd of devotees surged into the city's temples dedicated to the Goddess. At the Alop Shankari Devi Temple, situated near the Sangam area, long queues for \*darshan\* (holy viewing) began forming early in the morning. Devotees offered prayers to Goddess Shailputri—the first manifestation of the Divine Mother—and sought blessings for happiness and prosperity. The temple gates were opened during the \*Brahma Muhurat\* (the auspicious pre-dawn period). From as early as 4:00 AM, the entire temple complex reverberated with chants of "Jai Mata Di!" In the Alopibagh area, queues of devotees stretching for several kilometers could be seen along the temple road. Devotees were observed



patiently waiting for their turn, holding offerings such as coconuts, \*chunaris\* (sacred scarves), and \*prasad\* (holy food offerings). A unique feature of this temple is that it does not house an idol of the Goddess. According to legend, during the fragmentation of Goddess Sati's body parts, her right hand "van-

ished" (\*alop\*) at this very spot. For this reason, a cradle is worshipped here as a symbolic representation of the Divine Mother. On the first day of Navratri, the cradle was elaborately adorned with flowers, jewelry, and aromatic substances. Devotees offered water into the sacred pool (\*kund\*)

situated beneath the cradle and prayed to the Goddess for the fulfillment of their wishes. According to local beliefs, offering prayers at this temple during Navratri alleviates the sufferings of devotees. This is the reason why a large number of devotees flock to this site every year on this auspicious occasion. In view of the massive crowds, the administration has implemented comprehensive security arrangements. Barricades have been erected within the temple complex and surrounding areas to manage and organize the queues. Along with the general police force, female police personnel have also been deployed. Furthermore, the entire area is being monitored via CCTV cameras. For the convenience of the devotees, the Municipal Corporation has also made arrangements for drinking water and mobile toilet facilities.

# Strict Measures Imposed for Communicable Disease Control Campaign Preparations; DM Issues Stern Directives

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** On Thursday, an inter-departmental coordination committee meeting was held at the Sangam Auditorium, presided over by the District Magistrate, to review preparations for the Special Communicable Disease Control Campaign (scheduled from April 1 to April 30, 2026). Officials from various departments, including the Health Department, participated in the meeting, where strategies for the campaign were discussed. During the meeting, the District Magistrate reviewed the data for October 2025, which was presented by Dr. Alok, the SMO (Senior Medical Officer) from the World Health Organization (WHO). He directed all departments to ensure that, in the upcoming campaign, the performance of each department exceeds the state average. Specifically issuing a warning to the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) Department, the District Magistrate noted that during the previous campaign, the



combined home visits conducted by Anganwadi workers and ASHA workers fell significantly below the state average—a matter of grave concern. He made it clear that this time, no negligence would be tolerated at any level. The CDPO (Child Development Project Officer) of the ICDS Department suggested organ-

izing joint training programs for Anganwadi and ASHA workers to foster better coordination between the two groups and to facilitate effective door-to-door work under the 'Dastak' campaign. Designating the Health Department as the nodal agency, the District Magistrate directed that it be ensured that

performance across all indicators remains superior to the state average. To achieve this, regular sensitization of ASHA workers and improvements in their field activities are essential. He further stated that the performance of all departments would be evaluated based on third-party monitoring data. During the meeting,

the Municipal Corporation, the Panchayati Raj Department, and the Health Department were directed to complete all necessary preventive measures within 24 hours of receiving reports of communicable disease cases, particularly those involving Scrub Typhus. Instructions were also issued to the Chief

Medical Officer to conduct weekly review meetings to ensure the successful execution of the campaign. The meeting was attended by the Chief Medical Officer, the ADM (Finance), the District Malaria Officer, nodal officers from all relevant departments, representatives from UNICEF, and other concerned officials.

## NCC Cadets Being Equipped with Drone Technology; Group Commander Inspects Training Camp

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj:** Under the aegis of the NCC Group Headquarters, Prayagraj, cadets are mastering the intricacies of modern technology at a 12-day drone training camp organized at the Ram Dulari Bachchu Lal Jaiswal PG College in Nawabganj. On Thursday, Group Commander Brigadier Upendra Singh Kandil inspected the camp and reviewed the training arrangements. Organized by the 16 UP Battalion NCC, this camp is being conducted from March 12 to March 23. Cadets from the Senior Division and Senior Wing, hailing from various NCC Group Headquarters across the state, are participating in the event. The objective of the camp is to familiarize cadets with both the military and civilian applications of drone technology. During the training, cadets are receiving hands-on instruction in drone design, assembly, and operation. Additionally, they are being trained in the practical exercise of building a drone within a limited timeframe and successfully



conducting a test flight. Detailed information regarding safety protocols, surveillance systems, and the utility of drones in disaster management is also being imparted. During the inspection, the cadets demonstrated their drone-flying skills, drawing commendation from the Group Commander. He emphasized that in the modern era, knowledge of drone and cyber technologies is indispensable, and NCC cadets must strive to become proficient in these fields. The camp is being conducted under the leadership of

Camp Commandant Colonel Nishant Bariyar and Deputy Camp Commandant Colonel Yogendra Chinwan. Colonel Bariyar stated that drone technology constitutes a pivotal element of the future military landscape, and training in this domain will provide a new direction to the cadets' capabilities. Officials observe that through such training, cadets are not only becoming technically robust but are also cultivating a strong sense of discipline, leadership acumen, and the spirit of national service.

## Reality of Hospital Arrangements Assessed: ADM Conducts Surprise Inspection; Several Deficiencies Found

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** On Thursday, Additional District Magistrates (ADMs) conducted surprise inspections to assess the state of arrangements at the city's major government hospitals. During these visits, the facilities available to patients, sanitation standards, and medical services were reviewed, and necessary directives were issued to the concerned officials. Additional District Magistrate (Finance and Revenue), Vinita Singh, inspected the Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital. Here, the elevator in the old building was found to have exceeded its operational lifespan, while in the new building, the absence of a dedicated elevator for TB patients was flagged as a potential infection risk. The STP (Sewage Treatment Plant) was found non-functional due to the lack of a mud pump. In the



laundry section, the automatic pressing machine was found to be out of order, and several washing machines were deemed unserviceable. However, the general cleanliness was found to be satisfactory. Additional District Magistrate (Administration), Pooja Mishra, inspected the Motilal Nehru Divisional Hospital. Here, all doctors were found to be present on duty, and an adequate stock of medicines was available.

However, a shortage of staff nurses and pharmacists was noted. Directives were issued after the list of user charges was found missing from the registration counter. Additional District Magistrate (City), Satyam Mishra, inspected the Tej Bahadur Sapru Hospital. The cleanliness within the hospital was found to be average, though the condition of some restrooms was unsatisfactory. Upon finding filth and block-

ages in the drains, instructions were issued for immediate cleaning. Instances of unauthorized parking were also observed within the hospital premises. Meanwhile, Additional District Magistrate (Supply), Vijay Sharma, inspected the District Women's Hospital (Dufferin). Here, the cleanliness was found to be satisfactory, and doctors were present on duty. However, a deficiency was noted regarding the absence of specific timings marked on the duty roster. Instructions were issued to take action regarding the accumulation of filth outside the hospital and a suspicious car that had been parked there for an extended period. During the inspections, the officials emphasized that maintaining proper arrangements within the hospitals remains a top priority and that strict action will be taken against any form of negligence.

## Eid Preparations Intensify: Inspection of Eidgahs; Directives Issued for Sanitation and Drinking Water Arrangements

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Lalgopalganj:** In view of Eid-ul-Fitr, the Nagar Panchayat administration has stepped up its preparations. On Thursday, Mukhtar Ahmed, the representative of the Nagar Panchayat Chairman, inspected various Eidgahs within the town as well as the routes leading to them, taking stock of the arrangements in place. During the inspection, placing special



emphasis on sanitation, he directed the staff to launch a special cleanliness drive on all routes leading to the Eidgahs in anticipation of the Eid prayers.

He also issued instructions to have lime sprinkled and to ensure adequate arrangements for drinking water, so that worshippers face no inconvenience whatsoever. Mukhtar Ahmed made it clear that the convenience of citizens is paramount on the day of

the festival, and any form of negligence will not be tolerated. During this process, the concerned employees were directed to ensure that all arrangements are fully in order well in advance. Present during the inspection were senior office clerk Krishna Kumar Nagar, Jitendra Saroj, Ramkailash Yadav, Amritlal Maurya, Mahtab Ahmed, Sanitation Supervisor Riyasat Hussain, along with other staff members.

## Editorial

**Amit Shah looks sure of ruling till 2049 but Team Modi is losing steam and imagination**

Amit Shah had declared at the Bharatiya Janata Party's national executive meeting in 2018 that the party will win the 2019 Lok Sabha election and "no one can dethrone the BJP for the next 50 years"—that is, till 2069. Last month, the Union Home Minister and BJP chief strategist said in the Lok Sabha that the Opposition parties would be there (on the Opposition benches) "for the next 20 years"—that is, till 2045. Let's make it 2049 because the Lok Sabha election will have taken place in 2044. It also takes into account Prime Minister Narendra Modi's goal of making India a developed country by 2047. Modi is looking to remain at the helm till 2035, at least. In his Independence Day address, he said that "in the coming 10 years, till 2035, I want to expand this (national security shield) ...strengthen it, modernise it." "I" is key here. He will be only 85 by then. And he is much fitter than Joe Biden who demitted the US President's office at 82. Mahathir Mohamad was the Prime Minister of Malaysia till he was almost 95. You may think I can't be serious. Talks of 20 or 50 years are just rhetorical, aren't they? A former BJP MP advised me not to take PM Modi's reference to 2035 seriously. "The day a leader throws a hint that he is even thinking of a retirement plan, everybody around him starts abandoning him. You can't afford to do that in politics," he explained. Maybe. What if BJP leaders truly believe what they say? How else could you explain the Modi-led government's sudden decision to bring the Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill, envisaged to unseat the Prime Minister, chief ministers, and ministers on the 31st day of their arrest or detention in custody? The PM figures in it for effect, of course. The proposed legislation places the CMs and ministers at the mercy of mostly Central investigation agencies whose track record in impartiality is better left undiscussed. These central agencies are known to often go out of their way to please the political bosses. The CMs and ministers who are not from the ruling party/coalition at the Centre have reasons to be alarmed by the proposed legislation. It is always prone to being used against the Opposition. Former Union minister Sharad Pawar recently pointed out how during the Manmohan Singh government, it was P Chidambaram who had backed the amendment in the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to put the onus to prove innocence on the accused. Pawar told Singh that it was dangerous. "If the government changes, we will also have to face consequences. But the advice was not heeded," disclosed Pawar. In 2019, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested Chidambaram in a PMLA case. He had to spend 106 days in jail before he got bail. The proposed law—Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill—can potentially be weaponized by a ruling party at the Centre (not necessarily BJP) to destabilise governments in states ruled by rival parties (the BJP, included). So, why would Shah or the BJP want to make such a law? The most conceivable answer is that the BJP doesn't see itself sitting on the Opposition benches in the Lok Sabha ever—till 2049, at least. Look at the Centre's stand on the Supreme Court setting a timeline for the governors to act on the bills passed by state assemblies. It wants the elected governments in the states to be placed at the mercy of its nominees in the Raj Bhawans. Only a party that is confident of being in power at the Centre forever would want to take such a stand. This confidence of the BJP is reflected in so many other ways—from overturning the SC's ruling to end government's control over the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioners and ECs, to the alleged use of central investigative agencies to target Opposition leaders. There are many other instances. Here is the catch, though.



## GST reform is pointless if it doesn't simplify tax slabs

Over the last few days, there have been extensive discussions on the prospects of reforming India's Goods and Services Tax (GST). An important element of the proposed reform is to reduce the present 4-rate structure to a 3-rate one. There could be several objectives behind such a reform. Simplification of the tax structure is an obvious one. Revenue mobilisation could be another, as simpler tax structures are easy to administer and improve compliance. The third is to provide a stimulus to the economy, which is presently dealing with significant uncertainty. I am young enough to be excited

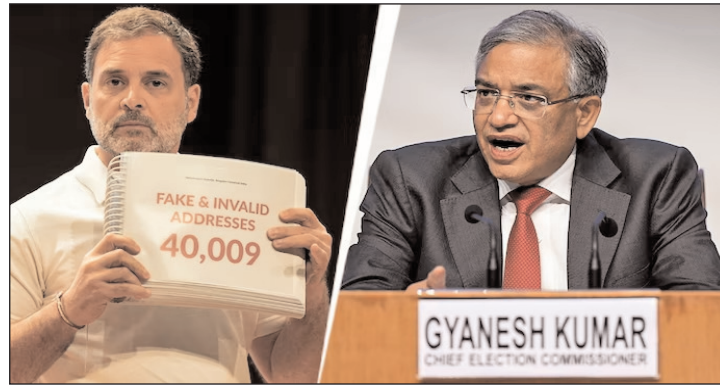
by the prospects of tax reforms, but old enough to know better. More so, given my prior experience in trying to understand the GST. Popular perception suggests there are just four GST tax slabs: 5, 12, 18, and 28 per cent. Why so many slabs for an indirect tax? Because somehow Indian policymaking believes in the progressivity of taxes—even for consumption goods. A lesser-known reality of the GST is that it has a total of eight tax slabs, excluding the exemptions. These start at 0.25 and go all the way up to 28 per cent. Tax rates of 0.25, 1.5, 3 and 7.5 per cent apply to just 1.5 per cent of total

goods traded in India. Some sectors, such as construction services, have six different applicable tax rates ranging from 0 to 18 per cent. The sheer complexity of India's present GST, even after nine years of existence, should be reason enough for an urgent reform. A major issue with the GST's present structure is the pervasive use of end-use exemptions. That is, for certain items, a GST rate is applicable—but if the goods are used for a specific purpose, then there is no GST on the item. Therefore, the same item has two different tax slabs depending on the buyer and end-use of the item.

Moreover, it creates room for rent-seeking, as many would exploit the tax arbitrage introduced by having a 0 per cent and 18 per cent tax rate as applicable on the same goods. Administering such exemptions is excessively costly and goes against the spirit of a self-enforcing tax such as the GST. A comprehensive reform would do away with such end-use exemptions and identify a specific list of items, such as food—irrespective of whether packaged, processed, or prepared in a restaurant—to be classified as exempt. Similar exemptions could be extended to certain kinds of insurance.

# Why Modi, BJP should worry about bad blood between CEC Gyanesh Kumar and Rahul Gandhi?

Amit Malviya must be a harried man as Rahul Gandhi set out on his 'Voter Adhikar Yatra' in Bihar on Sunday. Bharatiya Janata Party's social media department, headed by Malviya, is facing flak in the Right-wing ecosystem. The reason: its purported failure to counter the Opposition's narrative about the Election Commission's special intensive revision of electoral rolls in Bihar. Let's look at one such thread. Tushar Gupta, whose bio proclaims him to be "anti-Left", took to X to express his concern about the "fake news" being spread about the electoral process. "Absolutely zero resistance. EC's press releases are not going to cut it..." he wrote. His argument was that the 18-24 age group in 2029 would be "reelers", not readers, and could be easily swung by Gandhi. "And this is exactly what he (Gandhi) is doing right now," he added. X users reacted to the thread, venting their ire on Malviya, with some even demanding his resignation as the BJP's IT cell chief. Dr Ratan Sharda, who has written several books on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), agreed with Tushar and said that Gen Z is "not clued on" to the BJP. "The communication, the enunciation, the slogans—all present a middle-aged projection of a young successful party led by the most popular PM of all times whom youth love. @BJP4India needs to reinvent its SM approach and communication," he wrote. To be fair to Malviya, headline management and narra-



tive-building aren't so easy after 11 years in power. The belligerence of the Election Commission (EC) in dealing with the Opposition isn't helping him either. "Give an oath or apologise to the nation. There is no third option," Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar said at a press conference Sunday, taking on Gandhi's 'vote theft' charge. Many Constitutional experts like former Lok Sabha Secretary General PDT Achary have rubbished the EC's demand for Gandhi's oath under Rule 20(3)(b) of the Registration of Electors Rules 1960, maintaining that it does not apply in this case. Kumar wouldn't bother. Since when has the CEC assumed the authority to instruct public representatives to apologise? Even former CEC MS Gill, who joined the Congress and went on to become a Union Minister after retirement, never demanded it from Opposition leaders as long as he helmed the EC. One may not agree with Gandhi's phraseology—from 'chowkidar chor hai (the gatekeeper is the thief)' to 'vote chori (vote theft)'. He often gets carried away, trying to bring

'earthquakes' in Indian politics. But that can't be the reason for a constitutional body to publicly berate the Leader of the Opposition. Also, it's not the first time that the EC has been accused of favouring the ruling party. After all, the fact is that the CEC was and still is essentially Prime Minister Narendra Modi's handpicked man—the ruling party's choice in that chair. After losing the South Delhi Lok Sabha seat to the Congress in the 1971 elections, Jan Sangh leader Balraj Madhok had gone to court complaining of rigging allegedly facilitated by the ruling Congress and the EC. He had alleged that the ballot papers were chemically treated and mechanically stamped to favour the Congress candidate, Shashi Bhushan. The Supreme Court dismissed his appeal. In 2002, then Gujarat Chief Minister Modi drew censure from Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee for attacking CEC JM Lyngdoh. There are myriad instances of politicians attacking the EC, but no CEC made it a personal issue until now. The body is entrusted to conduct free and fair polls, with no malice toward any party or politi-

cian. If there is bad blood and a public spat between the CEC and the Opposition leaders, it will shake the people's trust and faith in the election results. And that is the worst thing that could happen to Indian democracy. Instead of attacking Rahul Gandhi, the EC could have simply ordered an investigation into his claims of fake voters in Bengaluru's Mahadevapura—or, for that matter, the supposedly inflated number of voters in Maharashtra. It could have done a Bihar-like special intensive revision (SIR) in Mahadevapura immediately to rebut the allegations. That would have bolstered its credibility and its Bihar SIR case. BJP leader Anurag Thakur also made allegations about fake voters in the constituencies of Opposition leaders such as Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, and others. Thakur also accused them of 'vote theft'. Gandhi and Thakur were making the same disclosure—that voter lists across the country have issues. CEC Kumar hasn't reacted to Thakur's allegations yet. Fake voters' list is no news, anyway. The CEC could have thanked the Congress and BJP leaders for highlighting this issue again and used it to justify a countrywide SIR. What to speak of allegations of irregularities in Assembly or Lok Sabha elections, in the recent Delhi Constitution Club election (in which incumbent and former MPs are voters), Congress leader and former MP Brijendra Singh found to his dismay that his vote had already been cast. So did

another former MP from the BSP. It's plausible that Kumar—who was Secretary in Amit Shah's cooperation ministry—is extremely upset by Gandhi's diatribe against the Commission. The best way to deal with this would have been to invite Gandhi over for Kashmiri Kahwa, as he used to treat journalists with, and thrash it out. But Kumar has chosen to slug it out publicly with the Opposition. What must worry the BJP is the fact that the Opposition's diatribe against the EC seems to be resonating on the ground. As per a Lokniti-CSDS survey published in The Hindu on Sunday, 45 per cent of the respondents believe that genuine voters may get removed from the voters' list under the SIR, as against only 25 per cent who said 'no'. Only 60 per cent of respondents were very or somewhat confident of the EC's ability to ensure inclusivity. The survey was conducted in six states: Delhi, Assam, Kerala, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. The Lokniti-CSDS survey, as compared to its 2019 and 2024 post-poll surveys, shows declining trust in the Commission. In Assam, the number of respondents who said they have "no trust" in the EC increased from 6 per cent in 2019 to 10 per cent in 2024 and 17 per cent in 2025. In Kerala, this increased from 10 per cent in 2019 and 2024 to 24 per cent in 2025. In Madhya Pradesh, the lack of trust in the EC rose from 6 per cent in 2019 to 22 per cent in 2024 and 2025.

## After rosogolla, Odias and Bengalis fight over Mamata's Jagannath Dham

In the season of Conclave, what if a church suddenly decided to call itself Vatican—not just a tribute, but a claim to spiritual status? That's what the Mamata Banerjee government effectively did, as far as Odias are concerned, when it named the new Jagannath temple in Digha after Jagannath Dham in Puri, Odisha. For the Odias, this 'appropriation' was the last straw and has put them eyeball to eyeball with the Bengalis like never before. Why did Banerjee tread this path? If a temple was her big trip, why a Puri Jagannath lookalike and not something in the tradition of Bengal's own terracotta temples that dot Bishnupur in Bankura district? Alternatively, it could have opted for something original. Bengalis, it seems, have a peculiar fondness for replicas. During Durga Pujas, Buckingham Palaces, Golden Temples and the Pyramids pop up all over the state—pandals built with bamboo and tarpaulin to house the goddess in the festive season. But

those are temporary structures, dismantled once the pujas end. The Jagannath Temple in Digha is permanent, a silent testimony to the Bengalis' copycat gene. A few months after becoming the chief minister in 2011, Banerjee was on her way home via Newtown, parts of which today resemble Gurgaon from 50 years ago, when she suddenly halted her vehicle, got off, and stood to survey 480 acres of green dotted with waterbodies. On the spot, she declared it a park—and the next thing we know, in 2013, she was inaugurating Eco Park, a brand-new destination in Kolkata—a la Victoria Memorial, or the historic Botanical Gardens with the centuries-old Banyan Tree. That wasn't the end of it. Past the tree-lined boundary came up the Pyramids of Giza, an Eiffel Tower, a Taj Mahal, a Colosseum, and even a towering Christ the Redeemer—all of them exact replicas of the originals in miniature form.

## History teaching requires revision more than textbooks

What does it mean to be a historian in India? Both of us have formally studied the subject. In the years we've spent working as public historians, we've told myriad stories of India's chequered pasts through heritage walks, museum trails, cultural events, podcasts, an annual journal, book reviews, articles, and social media posts. We've pored over archives and conducted on-ground research. We've also translated scholarship into language and experiences that anyone, from an academic to a casual listener, can connect with. Yet, despite this range of work, one question almost always follows when we explain what we do: "Okay, but what is your real job?" The question says as much about our profession as it does about how history itself is perceived in India. After all, how often do Indian households encourage history as a job? A base-level problem here is: how do you support the study of history when it isn't even clear what a historian does? In childhood, history may occasionally bask in the dreamy, cinematic glow of Indiana Jones and Night at the Museum. Or Bharat Ek Khoj, Akbar-Birbal adaptations, the delightfully

paradoxically, history seems to dominate our headlines. It's everywhere: in TV debates, political speeches, social media threads. Everyone, it seems, has something to say about the past. That's why the current debate on revisions matters. The problem isn't with 'updating' history. Our understanding of the past evolves as our present changes. Every historian is shaped by their time, drawing not only on the materials and theoretical bases available, but also on their own perspectives and questions. So revisions themselves aren't the issue. The real concern is how history textbooks are revised. If these changes were aimed at helping students approach the past critically, and provided them with the historian's toolkit—by introducing them to a range of sources, perspectives, and debates—then they would be fruitful. Our NCERT textbooks have been subject to regular revisions, with new theories and ideas inserted alongside scholars' evolving approaches to history. This exercise is necessary, so long as the emphasis remains on updations that accurately convey the latest reflections on continuities.

gory Horrible Histories, and Amar Chitra Katha. In adulthood, though, it either fades into collective amnesia, gets wrapped in nostalgia, or turns into a battlefield of contested claims. Where is the middle ground where we carry forward that childlike curiosity, tempered with adult discernment, to engage with the past with the depth and nuance it deserves? A polarising debate has recently been sparked after yet another round of revisions in NCERT history textbooks. But more than textbooks, history teaching requires revision. What do you remember from your history classes? For most, the answers fall into familiar buckets: rote learning of names, dates, dynasties, and wars. There was little room to explore the texture of lived experience, or to ask: how can this subject help me become a better thinker, a more reflective human? The discipline was frozen in time, and with it, many of us felt we too were trapped—learning about the past in a way that felt wholly disconnected from the present, let alone the future. This is part of the reason historical studies aren't seen as foundations for sustainable careers. But

## Loss of Japan's position as the world's leading creditor

Delhi: Despite officials claiming that Japan's net foreign assets reached a record high last year, the country has fallen from its 34-year reign as the world's top creditor to second place, behind Germany.

The finance ministry of Japan announced that the country's net external assets were 533.05 trillion yen (\$3.7 trillion) at the end of the year, an increase of 12.9% from the previous year. Yoshimasa Hayashi, a spokesman, explained that the value of financial assets and debts, as well as changes in the balance of payments, are among the elements that contribute to the determination of net external assets. "In light of these points and the fact that Japan's net foreign assets have been steadily increasing, we do not believe



that the change in ranking alone should be taken as a sign of a major change in Japan's position," Hayashi informed the media. Based on the data provided by the ministry, the following countries ranked third: China (516.28 trillion yen), Hong Kong (320.26 trillion yen), and Norway (271.83 trillion yen). The figures show that Japan's foreign assets and liabilities both increased due to the weakening yen, but that assets grew faster than liabilities, mostly because Japanese businesses invested more money overseas.

### AI models allegedly disregarded direct commands to turn off

Delhi: The most recent AI models of reasoning and thought have shown, at least in test settings, an inclination to prioritize self-preservation. And they still won't turn off, no matter how many times you tell them to. The most recent ChatGPT model from OpenAI, o3, was found to have sabotaged shutdown mechanisms during testing conducted by Palisade Research. Although o3's tendency was higher than others, other sophisticated models exhibited the same behavior in a battery of tests.

## Supreme Court rejects Airtel and Vodafone's requests to waive AGR fees

Delhi: Airtel and Vodafone Idea were denied a waiver of interest and penalty on their outstanding adjusted gross revenue (AGR) debts, totaling Rs 80,000 crore, by the Supreme Court. The order would have an effect on Tata Teleservices as well. After the initial SC order in 2019, which aimed to recover industrial dues, the outstanding AGR is now little less than 1.5 lakh crore.

Since it entered the telecom market in 2016 with only a



minor exposure to past dues and adjustments, Reliance Jio was the only company that walked out relatively unscathed.

The businesses' request for a postponement was denied by a panel of Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan, who

deemed the companies' petitions "shocking and misconceived" and rejected them. Multinational corporations' filing procedures for petitions seeking remedies for enforcement of rights under Article 32 were also examined by the court.

## Rajasthan distribution companies ordered by the Court to pay Adani Power 186 crore

Delhi: The appeal that the electricity distribution companies in Rajasthan had lodged against the Appellate Tribunal for Electricity's (APTEL) decision in favor of Adani electricity Rajasthan Ltd, which had asked them to pay ₹186 crore in compensation,

has been rejected by the Supreme Court. Jaipur Vidyut Vitran Nigam Ltd (JVNNL) and other state discoms filed appeals, but a bench of justices Rajesh Bindal and M M Sundresh decided on May 23 that the petitions had no validity. The decision made by APTEL in

April 2024, which identified a new tax imposed by Coal India Ltd (CIL) as a "change in law" event under the PPA between Adani Power and the discoms, was affirmed by the court. To offset costs associated with moving coal from the mine to the destination.



## Meta releases standalone AI app to challenge ChatGPT

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

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



## Drools becomes unicorn after Nestle bet

Delhi: Nestle bought a minority investment in Indian pet food startup Drools. After the investment, the Bengaluru-based company was valued at \$1 billion, joining unicorn startups. The business claimed, "This is a financial investment by the company, and Drools will remain strategically as well as operationally independent." Nestle's investment in Drools comes as the pet food and pet care industry in India is growing due to millennial and Gen Z pet parents who are willing to spend more for better nutrition and care. Nestle's Purina pet care segment,



which included pet food, accounted for 20.7% of sales in 2024. Recently, Indian companies like Godrej Consumer Care have entered the pet care sector. Drools, backed by L Catterton, competes with

Mars PetCare and Heads Up For Tails in India. Drools raised \$60 million from L Catterton in June 2023. Drools is the fourth unicorn of the year following Netradyne, Porter, and JSW One Platforms.

## Byju's learning app was delisted from Google's Playstore

Delhi: Troubled edutech unicorn Byju's learning app has been delisted from the Google Playstore for non-payment of vendor dues, citing sources. The matter has been under works between Think and Learn Pvt Ltd, the parent company of Byju's, and vendor Amazon Web Services (AWS), since April 2024, it added. Did not receive a reply to their emailed queries from Think and Learn Insolvency Resolution Professional (IRP), it added. A spokesperson for AWS said that the company has been working with Think and Learn since April 2024, "to resolve its outstanding.

## Starlink arrives in India with plans under Rs. 850 per month

Delhi: Starlink is preparing to launch its satellite communication services in India after clearing most regulatory hurdles. A report claims that its plans could cost \$10 (Rs. 850) per month as the debut approaches.

Consumers may receive unlimited data plans under initial promotional schemes. The Elon Musk-backed business hopes to swiftly build its user base to 10 million to offset high spectrum prices due to volume benefits. The Department of Telecommunication



(DoT) granted Starlink a Letter of Intent to launch satellite communication services in India earlier this month. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) may impose a Rs. 500 per month per urban user price, making satellite internet services more expensive than wired and wireless broadband connections, according to the. In addition, 4 percent of total adjusted gross revenue (AGR) with a minimum yearly charge of Rs. 3,500 per spectrum block and an 8 percent licensing fee for commercial services in India are required. The government has yet to approve these recommendations.

## India's crypto industry urges tax cuts as Donald Trump support softens New Delhi stance

Delhi: In an effort to capitalise on what it perceives as New Delhi's accommodating attitude towards digital assets, the cryptocurrency industry in India is urging for tax cuts that have limited domestic trading. This comes as politicians in New Delhi negotiate a more comprehensive trade pact with the United States. Policymakers' views towards cryptocurrency have been warming up, after making it a parish sector in the country due to regulators' mistrust of its possible illegal applications.

After Donald Trump's endorsement of digital cur-



rencies and his return to the White House, exchange executives told them that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has become much more attentive and engaged.

The frequency of industry meetings with lawmakers has increased from once every six months to

"monthly, if not weekly," according to Ashish Singhal, co-founder of CoinSwitch, one of the biggest cryptocurrency exchanges in India with over 20 million members.

Reducing taxes that he called "very harshly" enforced was the industry's "big ask," he claimed.

## SEBI and the Exchange are in advanced negotiations

Delhi: In order to reach a consent settlement in the co-location case that is presently pending before the Supreme Court, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is in advanced negotiations with the NSE. A



Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) decision that lessened the initial sanctions levied against NSE in 2019 has been appealed by SEBI. According to someone with knowledge of the situation, "the discussion on the most important

issue of resolving the co-location case started, around one and half months ago." "The amount that NSE should pay to SEBI in order to settle the lawsuit is one of the consent terms that are currently being negotiated by both parties.

## Bharat Dynamics to Receive Invar Missile Order from Government; Shares Climb 2%

Delhi: An official from the government has said that the Ministry of Defence is putting the finishing touches on a purchase order for 500 Invar ATGMs from state-run Bharat Dynamics Ltd (BDL). The contract is estimated to be worth between two and three million rupees. In order to strengthen India's armoured combat capabilities, this acquisition is a part of a larger push to equip T-90 main battle tanks with pre-



cision-guided missile systems. Tanks are the ideal platforms from which to launch Invar missiles. An official informed that the Defense Ministry is likely to spend between two and three million Indian

rupees (about \$2,100 million) for 500 missiles from BDL. As a result of their reputation for precision and efficacy, Invar missiles are currently being used by armoured units on India's frontline.

## Fewer jobs at Tata Motors, smaller hikes for top deck

Delhi: For the first time in five years, automotive manufacturer Tata Motors saw its workforce shrink in a fiscal year, when its employee base fell 3% in FY25 compared with the previous fiscal. Alongside, the fiscal also saw median salary hikes for its senior-most executives at just 3% compared with 15% in

FY24, the company's annual report for FY25 showed. The twin developments happened against the backdrop of falling demand for its cars, trucks and buses in the fiscal. The total employee count of the country's third-largest automaker, excluding employees of its UK-based subsidiary Jaguar Land Rover.

SARKE CHUNAR TERI SARKE SONG ROW

# NCW summons Nora, Sanjay

NCW issues summons to Nora Fatehi, Sanjay Dutt and makers of Sarke Chunar song over obscenity allegations, seeks appearance

The National Commission for Women (NCW) has issued summons to actors Nora Fatehi, Sanjay Dutt, Raqueeb Alam, producer Venkat K. Narayana, and director Kiran Kumar after taking suo motu cognisance of reports alleging "obscenity" and "vulgarity" in the song *Sarke Chunar Teri Sarke*.

According to the statement from NCW, the commission stated that the song "appears to be sexually suggestive and objectionable," which leads to the violation of provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the IT Act, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

"The National Commission for Women, in exercise of its powers under the NCW Act, 1990, has taken suo motu cognisance of media reports alleging obscenity and vulgarity in the song *Sarke Chunar Teri Sarke*. Observing that the content prima facie appears to be sexually suggestive, objectionable, and violative of provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, IT Act, and POCSO Act, the Commission has taken serious note of the matter."

The summons has been issued to the makers and actors Nora Fatehi and Sanjay Dutt to appear before the commission on March 24 at 12:30 pm.

"Summons have been issued to actress Nora Fatehi, Raqueeb Alam, actor Sanjay Dutt, Venkat Narayana (Producer, KVN Group), and Kiran Kumar (Director), directing them to appear before the Commission. They have been asked to appear on 24.03.2026 at 12:30 PM along with relevant documents. Failure to appear may invite appropriate action as per law," wrote NCW in its statement.



## Nora reacts to Shardul claim

Actress-dancer Nora Fatehi has responded to actor Shardul Pandit after he questioned her statement about 'artists having limited power' when it comes to projects in the entertainment industry, after receiving major backlash over her recent controversial song.



Nora reacted to Shardul's video and explained that while artists may have some influence, they mostly have to continue working within the system and therefore their say does not have any major impact.

Responding to Shardul's remarks in the comments section, Nora wrote, "Hey! I hear you! And I appreciate your take on this! Yes, we have the power only to a certain extent. You had the power by not playing the song and I had the power by not promoting it on my platform! That's it."

"But no, an artist like me doesn't have that power with filmmakers in the industry and it's almost setting me up for a loss by even suggesting that. At the end of the day, I have to work and live in this industry so there's only so much push back I can do (sic)," she added.

"I respect your view but we have to be practical. Take it up with the singer, lyricist and director-producer of the project if you guys truly want a change."

## Singer Mangli apologises

Following the uproar over the vulgar lyrics of the song *Sarke Chunar*, its singer Mangli has apologised, saying the lyrics of the song have been updated and the correct version will be released soon.

"Out of respect for public sentiment, the song has been removed from all platforms. I sincerely apologise to each and every one of you for the unintended mistake. It was never meant to hurt anyone's sentiments, and we truly regret the oversight," Mangli shared in a post on Instagram.

"We assure you that such a situation will not arise again. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the makers of the film and music director Arjun Janya sir, for whom I have the highest regard," she said.



**FILM REVIEW**  
**TITLE:** *Dhurandhar: The Revenge*  
**DIRECTOR:** Aditya Dhar  
**CAST:** Ranveer Singh, Akshaye Khanna, Sanjay Dutt, R Madhavan, Arjun Rampal, Rakesh Bedi, Sara Arjun and others  
**WHERE:** In theatres near you  
**RATING:** ★★★

If intensity had a face, it would probably look like Ranveer Singh in *Dhurandhar: The Revenge*. Loud, violent, emotional, and packed with drama, this film doesn't believe in holding back. Directed by Aditya Dhar, this revenge saga blends action with patriotism, delivering a cinematic ride that's as gripping as it is gritty.

The story follows Jaskirat Singh Ranghi, a man whose life takes a tragic turn, pushing him onto a path of rage and revenge. Just when everything seems to fall apart, fate intervenes and redirects his journey toward something much bigger than personal vendetta. The film traces his transformation - how Jaskirat becomes Hamza Ali Mazari - and steps into a dangerous world where identity, loyalty, and purpose collide.

*Dhurandhar: The Revenge* thrives on its intensity and layered narrative. Much like its first part, the storytelling is structured in chapters, giving the film a distinct, episodic feel that works well in building intrigue. While the first half takes its time to settle in, the second half picks up pace with engaging twists that keep you hooked.

That said, the film does feel slightly stretched. Some sequences, especially action portions, could have been tighter. The violence is another talking point; it's raw, graphic, and at times excessive, which may not appeal to every-

one. But for fans of dark, gritty cinema, this adds to the film's immersive experience.

**Actors' performance**  
 Ranveer delivers on the hype. The fire, the rage, and the angst in Jaskirat build with every passing scene, making his performance the film's biggest strength. He fully owns the character, bringing both emotional depth and explosive energy. R Madhavan lends solid support with his composed presence, while Arjun Rampal and Sanjay Dutt add gravitas. Rakesh Bedi makes a noticeable impact.

**Music**  
 The music and background score by Shashwat Sachdev elevate the film's mood effectively. There are no unnecessary dance tracks, which works in favour of the narrative. Cinematography complements the dark tone, and the dialogues are sharp, impactful, and memorable.

Aditya Dhar's direction shines in high-intensity moments, though the screenplay could have been crisper. The pacing is uneven at times, but it still manages to keep you engaged overall.

**Final verdict**  
*Dhurandhar: The Revenge* is a gripping, high-voltage drama that works largely because of Ranveer's powerhouse performance. Despite its slow patches and excessive gore, the film delivers enough thrills and emotion to keep audiences invested.

SNIPPETS

Doraemon director Tsutomu Shibayama passes away



The *Doraemon* director Tsutomu Shibayama has passed away due to lung cancer at the age of 84 years old, announced by the Japanese animation studio Asia-do, also known as Ajia-do Animation Works. In their obituary, the company announced, "Our former President and CEO, Tsutomu Shibayama, passed away on March 6, 2026, due to lung cancer. He was 84 years old."

INCA awards nominees announced

The Indian National Cine Academy (INCA) announced nominations for its inaugural awards, recognising excellence across Indian cinema. Films like *Dhurandhar*, *Lokah Chapter One*, *Kantara: Chapter 1*, *Laalo*, *Rudra* and *Miral* lead the list. The awards ceremony will be held on April 16 in Mumbai with industry participation.

National Commission for Women summons Badshah over obscenity in Tateeree

The National Commission for Women has summoned singer Badshah and others over obscenity and vulgarity in his Haryanvi track *Tateeree*. In a statement, the Commission said the content of the song prima facie appears to be objectionable and violative of provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Information Technology Act and the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986. "The National Commission for Women, in exercise of its powers under the NCW Act, 1990, has taken suo motu cognisance of media reports alleging obscenity and vulgarity in the song *Tattiri / Tatihari*," the statement said.



Actress Divyanka Tripathi is set to become a mother with Vivek Dahiya, ten years after their marriage. The actress announced her pregnancy in a heartwarming post on social media.

Photos: Instagram

Photos: Instagram @divyankatripathidahiya

Shrutika Arjun calls out AIADMK Leader C.V. Shanmugham over 'nasty' remark on Nayanthara

A political controversy has erupted in Tamil Nadu after AIADMK leader C.V. Shanmugham made a crass remark involving actress Nayanthara while targeting Chief Minister M.K. Stalin. During a public statement, C.V. Shanmugham, while criticising Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's "dream initiative," made an inappropriate and personal remark involving actress Nayanthara. He said that if people are being encouraged to share their dreams, then what if he says he wants Nayanthara, or if someone else asks the Chief Minister to arrange their marriage with her - would that also be fulfilled?

The comment was widely criticised for reducing Nayanthara to an object of desire and dragging her name unnecessarily into a political attack, which many found disrespectful and offensive. Netizens slammed the politician for his tone and intent, forcing him to later issue an apology.

Amid the backlash, actress and reality show *The 50* contestant Shrutika Arjun weighed in on the controversy. In an exclusive inter-



C.V. Shanmugham

# 'Disgusting comment'

view with Shrutika, who has carved a niche for herself in the South Indian entertainment industry, strongly condemned the remark and supported the public's reaction.

Calling out the remark and appreciating public outrage, Shrutika said, "It's a very disgusting comment, and I feel the world is changing, especially here. I don't know, I feel there's a lot of change coming around. But there are such nasty comments still that's happening here and there. So, thank you for bringing it up as an issue. I'm thanking every person out there who's bringing this up as an issue. Because people made an issue out of this and brought this up, he had to apologise as well. So he had to. He had to apologise for what he has done. And if this question is not raised now, then when? So it's wonderful that people are making an issue out of this."

Shrutika further emphasised that accountability applies to everyone, regardless of their stature. "It is changing and we are progressing. It's great to know that we are progressing. People know now, whoever you may be, you may be the biggest of politicians, you may be a huge influence, but if you are wrong, then you have to face this. And everyone is going to question you. So better

be prepared for that." Shrutika also highlighted the responsibility that comes with influence and public platforms. "So now when they talk, they know what to talk and they should know what to say. When you're given that position, when you're given that freedom of speech, and then there are so many people looking up to you, you better know what to talk."



Nayanthara



Shrutika Arjun

Photo: Instagram @shrutika\_arjun

LAKME FASHION WEEK

Siddharth owns runway

Actor Siddharth walked for The Boy's Club showcase at Lakmé Fashion Week 2026 on March 19, at Jio World Convention Centre, opening for designer Vivek Karunakaran in a brown silk coat and draped dhoti pants. Presented by the Fashion Design Council of India, the show also featured designers Sushant Abrol, Dhruv Vaish and Sahil Aneja, spotlighting diverse menswear narratives.



(Text by Aanchal Chaudhary)

## Wasn't allowed to share war concerns with Trump: Kent

**Washington:** Joe Kent, the former counterterrorism director who resigned this week over concerns about the Iran war, said he and other senior officials with doubts about the airstrikes "were not allowed" to share them with President Donald Trump.

On Tucker Carlson's show, Kent said the president relied on a small circle of advisers to decide on striking Iran. He claimed Israel forced Trump's hand despite no evidence, he said, that Iran posed an imminent threat to the US. "A good deal of key decision makers were not allowed to come and express their opinion to the president," Kent said. "There wasn't a robust debate."

As head of the National Counterterrorism Center, Kent led an agency tasked with analysing and detecting terrorist threats. His work was overseen by Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, who on Wednesday said it was up to Trump alone to decide if Iran posed a threat.

Gabbard, a veteran and former congresswoman from Hawaii, has previously criticised talk of strikes in Iran.

He said Israeli officials and

US media pundits helped frame Iran as a threat. "The Israelis drove the decision to take this action," Kent told Carlson. He cited comments from Secretary of State Marco Rubio and House Speaker Mike Johnson suggesting Israel's plans prompted US action.

Kent, who has previous connections to right-wing extremists, said Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and other officials lobbied Trump, often with information US officials could not confirm. "When we would hear what they were saying, it didn't reflect intelligence channels," Kent said.

His claim that an "Israeli lobby" drove Trump's decision to launch the war has drawn criticism from Jewish groups and others who said it amounted to antisemitism.

Meanwhile, the FBI is probing if Kent improperly shared classified information, a source said. The probe predates Kent's resignation. But it comes as Justice Dept has undertaken multiple probes over the past year into political foes of Trump, including former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James. —AP

## 'OBLITERATED' | All 11 of Tehran's subs are gone: Hegseth No definitive time frame for ending Iran war: US

WASHINGTON

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said on Thursday there was no "time frame" for ending the US-Israeli war against Iran. "We wouldn't want to set a definitive time frame," Hegseth told reporters, adding, "we're very much on track" and President Donald Trump would decide when to stop.

"It will be at the president's choosing, ultimately, where we say, 'Hey, we've achieved what we need to.'"

Saying that Iran's "surface fleet is no longer a factor", Hegseth said, "their submarines, they once had 11, are gone". He revealed Iran's air defence capabilities have been neutralised while sites storing drones and missiles have been heavily targeted. He added that Iran's missile launchers and defence industrial base would continue to be targeted while ensuring that Tehran never gets a nuclear weapon.

Hegseth said the day would see the "largest strike package yet" in the Iran war after



Today will be the largest strike package yet, death and destruction from above.

**Pete Hegseth**  
US Defence Secretary

Tehran targeted Gulf neighbours, adding it "takes money to kill bad guys."

He said the US had struck over 7,000 targets in Iran, adding that it had destroyed all 11 of Iranian submarines and sunk or damaged more than 120 war ships. More than 40 mine-laying vessels were also hit. "Our objectives, given directly from our America-first president, remain exactly

what they were on day one."

Hegseth said that Washington's allies should be appreciative of the US effort to "stop this terror state from holding the world hostage with missiles while building or attempting to build a nuclear bomb".

### 6 NATIONS TO ENSURE SAFE WATERWAY

Six Western allies, including the UK, France, Germany and Japan, said in a joint statement on Thursday they were ready to contribute to appropriate efforts to ensure safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

"We welcome the commitment of nations who are engaging in preparatory planning," the grouping, which also includes Italy and the Netherlands, added, as they condemned "in the strongest terms recent attacks by Iran on unarmed commercial vessels in the Gulf".

The statement came as around 20,000 seafarers remained stranded on nearly 3,200 vessels west of the Strait of Hormuz, as per reports.

### PENTAGON WANTS \$200BN FOR WAR

The department sent the request to the White House, according to a senior administration official. The \$200 billion figure is extraordinarily high and comes on top of extra funding the Defence Department already received last year in Trump's tax cuts bill. Congress is bracing for a new spending request, but it is not clear if the White House has transmitted the request for consideration. It is also unclear whether the spending request would have support.

### 'ZERO RESTRAINT IF ENERGY INFRA HIT'

Iran Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Thursday Tehran would not exercise any restraint if its energy facilities were attacked again.

"Our response to Israel's attack on our infrastructure employed a fraction of our power. The only reason for restraint was respect for requested de-escalation," Araghchi wrote on X. "Zero restraint if our infrastructure is struck again."

## US intel: India-Pak ties remain a risk for nuclear conflict

**Washington:** India-Pakistan relations remain at risk of nuclear conflict, according to the Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community presented to the US Senate on Wednesday.

The 34-page report said that while both countries do not seek open conflict, conditions persist for terrorist actors to trigger crises.

"India-Pakistan relations remain a risk for nuclear conflict given past conflicts where these two nuclear states squared off, creating the danger of escalation. The terrorist attack last year near Pahalgam, in the Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, demonstrated the dangers of terrorist attacks sparking conflict," the document said.

"President Donald Trump's intervention de-escalated the most recent nuclear tensions,

and we assess that neither country seeks to return to open conflict, but that conditions exist for terrorist actors to continue to create catalysts for crises," it added.

On South Asia, the report said ISIS-K (Islamic State Khorasan Province) retains a foothold and aims to carry out external attacks, though the Taliban has stepped up operations against it. "The Taliban has conducted extensive raids against ISIS-K targets, probably thwarted some attacks, and driven some ISIS-K leaders to relocate to neighbouring countries," it said.

It also noted Pakistan's continued development of advanced missile technology, potentially enabling strikes beyond South Asia and, if the trend continues, intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of threatening the United States. —PTI

## PAKISTAN'S A HISTORY, SAYS INDIA

India has taken a pointed jab at Pakistan's nuclear record, with New Delhi saying Islamabad's history of covert proliferation makes it a threat to the world. The remarks came a day after US Intelligence Chief Tulsi Gabbard flagged Pakistan as a direct nuclear danger to the US.

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaishwal on Thursday said, "As far as Pakistan is concerned, they have a history. They have a history of clandestine nuclear nonproliferation, and statements like this again make it clear what kind of threat they pose to the world because of their clandestine nuclear operations."

Gabbard, while presenting the intelligence community's 2026 Annual Threat Assessment, said that Russia, China, North Korea, Iran and Pakistan are the most significant nuclear threats to the US.

## US, Israeli war aims in Iran not same: Tulsi

Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard said on Thursday during a hearing in front of the House intelligence committee the American and Israeli objectives during the military campaign in Iran are not the same.

"The objectives that have been laid out by the president are different from the objectives that have been laid out by the Israeli government," Gabbard said.

"We can see through the operations the Israeli government has been focused on disabling the Iranian leadership. The president has stated that his objectives are to destroy Iran's ballistic missiles launching capability, their ballistic missile production capability, and their navy," she added.

### WAR SNIPPETS

#### IRAN EXECUTES 3 JAN PROTESTS DETAINEES

Iran's judiciary announced on Thursday the execution of three men detained in January's nationwide stirs, the first such sentences known to have been carried out. Iran's Mizan news agency reported the executions. Iran typically carries out the death penalty with hangings. Mizan identified those executed as Mehdi Ghasemi, Saleh Mohammadi and Saeed Davodi. It alleged the trio had stabbed two cops to death in Qom, some 130km south of Tehran, during the protests. Activists have warned Iran could carry out a wave of mass executions of those detained in the protests.

#### RUSSIAN OIL TANKER HEADING TO CUBA

Hundreds of thousands of barrels of Russian oil are heading to Cuba, as per maritime tracking data, as the communist island suffers blackouts under a US economic blockade and Trump threatens to take it over. The sanctioned Russian tanker Anatoly Kolodkin loaded 730,000 barrels of crude in the Russian port of Primorsk on March 8, and on Wednesday was in eastern Atlantic, bound for Cuba, maritime analytics firm Kpler said. Its data showed the Russian-flagged vessel, owned by Russian state shipping company Sovcomflot, was scheduled to unload at the Matanzas oil terminal on the north of the island on March 23.

## US considering to lift sanctions on Iranian oil at sea: Bessent

WASHINGTON

The US is considering lifting sanctions on Iranian oil to stabilise global energy markets and curb the recent spike in crude prices. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent confirmed the move, describing it as part of a broader "coordinated effort" across the federal government to manage supply.

Speaking to Fox News, Bessent said the administration had implemented a "break the glass plan" across the Treasury and executive branch to address immediate

energy security concerns.

"In the coming days, we may lift sanctions on the Iranian oil that's on the water. It's about 140 million barrels," he said, adding, the volume represents "10 days to 2 weeks of supply" that "would have all gone to China".

Bessent said the use of sanctioned reserves was a tactical tool. "In essence, we will be using the Iranian barrels against the Iranians to keep the price down for 10-14 days," he said, adding, the US has "lots of levers" and "plenty more we can do" to influence global pricing.

### DON MEETS TAKAICHI

President Donald Trump met Japanese PM Sanae Takaichi in Washington and discussed the global energy market.

Trump touted the military's efforts in Iran, stating it is ahead of schedule and repeating earlier statements that the US has decimated Iran's military and leadership structure.

He said there was no plan for boots on the ground, though he admitted he wouldn't tell the press if there were. "No, I'm not putting troops anywhere. If I were, I certainly wouldn't tell you," Trump said. Takaichi affirmed the posi-

tion Iran cannot be allowed to have a nuclear weapon and condemned its attacks on ships in the strait. "I look forward to having a discussion on how we can cooperate to make Japan and the US stronger and more prosperous," she said.

Meanwhile, US firms will be allowed to do business with Venezuela's state oil company after the Treasury Dept eased sanctions. The Treasury issued a broad authorisation allowing Petróleos de Venezuela SA, or PDVSA, to sell Venezuelan oil to US companies and on global markets, marking a massive shift.

## World Happiness Report

# Finland happiest country for 9th yr

HELSINKI

Heavy social media use is driving a sharp decline in well-being among young people, with the impact particularly worrying among teenage girls in English-speaking countries and Western Europe, according to the World Happiness Report 2026 published on Thursday.

The report, released by the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford, found Finland to be the happiest country for the ninth consecutive year. Other Nordic nations, including Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, also feature in the top 10.

It notes a significant drop in life evaluations among under 25-year-olds in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand

### INDIA RANKS 116TH

over the past decade, with prolonged social media use identified as a key factor.

Costa Rica has entered the top five, climbing to fourth place from 23rd in 2023.

Among 147 countries, India ranks 116th, improving from 118th in 2025. The report attributes this to stronger family bonds and social con-

nections. "We think it is because of the quality of their social lives and the stability that they currently enjoy," said Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, an Oxford economics professor who directs the Wellbeing Research Centre and co-edits the report.

"Latin America more generally has strong family ties, strong social ties and a high level of social capital, more so

than in other places," he added. The report links Finland and other Northern European countries' consistent top rankings to a mix of wealth, its equitable distribution, strong welfare systems and healthy life expectancy.

For the second consecutive year, no English-speaking country features in the top 10. The United States ranks 23rd, Canada 25th and Britain 29th.

## Israeli minister briefs Jaishankar on conflict

**Jerusalem:** Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar spoke with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday and briefed him on the ongoing conflict in West Asia.

"We value our special strategic partnership with India, the world's largest democracy," he said on X. Sa'ar said he briefed the Indian leader on developments in Israeli operation against Iran.

"I said the (Iranian) regime is carrying out naval terror-

ism in the Strait of Hormuz. This is not an American or Israeli issue, it's a fundamental problem affecting world order and the global economy. If this grave phenomenon is not addressed now, it could spread worldwide."

Sa'ar said he also addressed the "Iranian regime's aggression toward other countries" in West Asia, the Caucasus, and Europe. "I emphasised that the Iranian regime is acting madly," Sa'ar added. —PTI

## Congo, Rwanda to de-escalate tensions

**Goma:** Congolese and Rwandan officials met in the US and agreed on steps to de-escalate tensions in eastern Congo, where govt troops are fighting rebels backed by neighbouring Rwanda. The statement by the Congolese, Rwandan and US governments said officials from both countries met on Tuesday and Wednesday to advance progress in eastern Congo as peace efforts by the US and partners, including Qatar, have stalled and violence has continued. —AP

## Orban playing games to win poll: Europe

### UKRAINE LOAN VETO

BRUSSELS

European Union leaders on Thursday lashed out at Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, accusing him of hijacking critical aid for Ukraine and undermining EU decision-making to win an election at home.

In a rare public tirade against a member of their ranks, leaders insisted that Orban must respect the 27-nation bloc's decision in December to fund Ukraine's armed forces and war-ravaged economy for the next two years.

Orban himself had previously approved what is seen as a critical lifeline for war-ravaged Ukraine.

"He's using Ukraine as a weapon in his election campaigning, and it's not good. We had a deal, and he betrayed us," Finland Prime Minister Petteri Orpo told reporters as the leaders gathered for a summit in Brussels.

Ukraine's economy is in tatters. EU officials believe it must get at least a sizeable part of the \$103-billion loan by the start of May.

## Democrats move to impeach Bondi after 'fake' Epstein briefing

**Washington:** Furious Democratic lawmakers have moved to impeach attorney general Pam Bondi after walking out of a closed-door briefing about the Epstein files.

California congressman Robert Garcia branded the briefing "an outrageous fake hearing" after Bondi refused to commit to honoring a subpoena to testify under oath.

The committee voted to subpoena Bondi earlier this month, with five Republicans joining Democrats to demand that the attorney general answer questions about the justice department's failure to properly release files from the federal investigations into Epstein. "She is building a record," Democratic representative Suhas Subramanyam, an Oversight Committee member, told Axios. "She basically set up a fake hearing under the guise of a briefing, she has defied subpoenas that we've put out already and then she has continued to be evasive and combative with us."

Representative Summer Lee said she had introduced impeachment articles "because [Bondi] has already been obstructing justice". Lee is the second Democrat this



month to introduce articles of impeachment against Bondi after Shri Thanedar.

Democratic representatives Yassamin Ansari and Rashida Tlaib are co-sponsors, while Lateefah Simon indicated support for the measure. Bondi and deputy attorney general Todd Blanche went to Capitol Hill on Wednesday to try to quell bipartisan frustration over the justice department's handling of millions of files related to Epstein's sex trafficking investigation. But less than an hour into the briefing, Democrats walked out in protest of the arrangement.

Florida congressman Maxwell Alejandro Frost said: "We asked her multiple times, are you going to come and speak with us under oath? She would not say yes. Filibuster, filibuster, filibuster, would not say yes."

## Mail, wire fraud plot: FBI hunts for Indian man

**FBI** has launched a hunt for Indian national Kalpeshkumar Rasikhai Patel for allegedly defrauding victims between 2017 and 2021. It said Patel, aka Kenny Patel, would be 35 and is believed to be in Illinois or Pennsylvania. Patel, a fuel station attendant, is wanted for his alleged participation in a nationwide scheme to defraud multiple victims into transmitting large sums of money between 2017 and 2021.

## Spitting paan in London costs 2 PIOs over ₹3 lakh in penalty

**London:** Brent Council has imposed a heavy penalty on two men for spitting paan in public areas in north-west London, reports said.

According to officials, one Indian origin man was fined £1,391 (₹1.45 lakh) for spitting paan on Kingsbury Road, near Kingsbury station.

Another individual, received the same fine of £1,391 (₹1.45 lakh) for a similar offence on Clarendon Gardens, close to North

Wembley station.

Both men were initially issued fixed penalty notices of £100 (₹10,500). However, after they failed to pay the fine, their cases were taken to court, where the penalties increased significantly. The council said the action is part of an ongoing crackdown on paan spitting, which has become a growing concern in London, especially in Harrow and Wembley.

Authorities have made it

clear such behaviour will not be tolerated, stressing on the importance of civic responsibility. Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Enforcement, said: "We're continuing our zero-tolerance approach to those who ruin our streets, that includes spitters of paan who stain street furniture. If you mess up our streets, we will find you and you will pay. Don't mess with Brent as we have had enough."

## Charles opens world's longest coastal path

**London:** King Charles has inaugurated a new footpath stretching around the entire coast of England. At 2,689 miles long, it is the longest managed coastal walking route in the world, as per Natural England, the government body which created it, BBC reported.

Its name is quite a trek too, King Charles III England Coast Path, but for the first time it creates a continuous trail, allowing walkers to explore England's shoreline step by step. It passes through some of the country's most beautiful and varied landscapes, from salt marshes and



sandy beaches to cliffs, dunes and historic coastal towns.

Among the highlights is the iconic chalk downland of the Seven Sisters in East Sussex,

the newly completed path at Seven Sisters, joined by Natural England Chair Tony Juniper and Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds.

Juniper said the path "is a testament to how public enjoyment, conservation, heritage, history and community can come together, helping make life better for millions of people."

Much of the new coastal route already existed, but over 1,000 miles of new paths have been created, and many other sections upgraded. Paths have been resurfaced, stiles removed, boardwalks built and bridges installed.

## Briefs

### Rajapaksa got cash bribe in airbus deal

Former president Mahinda Rajapaksa was given a bribe of LKR 60 million rupees, Kapila Chandrasena, chief accused in the 2017 Airbus case, told a court in Sri Lanka. Chandrasena, the former CEO of the national carrier between 2011-15, was produced in a court in Colombo after he was arrested last week in the case. Rajapaksa was given Sri Lankan rupees 20 million each at 3 different occasions at his homes in the rural south in 2015 when he was the president, former airline CEO alleged.

### Nepal: Thapa resigns

Nepali Congress President Gagan Thapa has submitted his resignation from the post after the party's defeat in the recently held general elections, a report said. The House of Representatives election held on March 5 elected a 275-member Lower House, the Pratinidhi Sabha. Nepali Congress secured 38 seats.

## Briefs

**CHENNAI**  
CSK pacer  
Nathan Ellis  
ruled out



Five-time champions Chennai Super Kings suffered a big blow ahead of the upcoming IPL season with Australian pacer Nathan Ellis ruled out due to a hamstring injury, a franchise official confirmed on Thursday. The 31-year-old was expected to spearhead their pace attack, especially in the absence of Sri Lankan Matheesha Pathirana, who has been snapped up by Kolkata Knight Riders. "Yes, he is out. We have not yet decided on the replacement," a CSK official told PTI. Ellis, who has taken 19 wickets from 17 IPL matches, was bought by CSK for Rs 2-crore at the 2025 mega auction after four seasons with Punjab Kings and was retained ahead of the 2026 season.

**NEW DELHI**  
John Mooney  
becomes DC  
fielding coach



Delhi Capitals on Thursday announced the appointment of former Ireland all-rounder John Mooney as their fielding coach for the IPL beginning on March 28. The 44-year-old, who became the first Irish cricketer to be part of an IPL franchise's coaching staff, will join head coach Hemang Badani, Munaf Patel (bowling coach), Ian Bell (assistant coach) and Venugopal Rao (director of cricket). Mooney was Afghanistan's fielding coach from 2018-2019 and was part of their historic Test debut in India. He also worked with the West Indies in 2019 and had a brief stint with the Ireland women's side last year. Mooney represented Ireland in 64 ODIs and 27 T20Is.

**NEW DELHI**  
Ashutosh  
wants to excel  
as finisher



Ashutosh Sharma doesn't feel the pressure of performing on a grand stage like the IPL and remains focussed on finishing more games for Delhi Capitals in 2026 than the last season. In his first

**FRESH START** | Samson's move to Chennai Super Kings leaves a big void in Rajasthan Royals' squad, feels the new skipper

## Sanju irreplaceable like Kohli and Rohit: Parag

JAIPUR

Rajasthan Royals captain Riyan Parag on Thursday said the void left by Sanju Samson's move to Chennai Super Kings cannot be filled, comparing his importance to that of Indian stalwarts Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

Samson, who led RR from 2021 to 2025, was traded to Chennai Super Kings ahead of the season, with Ravindra Jadeja moving the other way.

"If you talk about Sanju bhैया, we never think about replacing the kind of player he is," Parag said at a pre-season press conference.

"It's like there is no replacement for Virat Kohli or Rohit Sharma. In the same way, there is no replacement for Sanju bhैया because he is such a good player."

Samson, who spent 11 years with the franchise across two stints, remains RR's most successful captain and leading run-scorer. He guided the team to the IPL 2022 final and the playoffs in 2024, and further enhanced his stature with a stellar T20 World Cup campaign, where he was named player of the tournament. Reflecting on last season, where RR finished ninth after 10 losses, Parag said the team needs sharper decision-making in crunch moments.

"There were 5-6 games we lost in the last over or even on the last ball. If we had converted those, the result would have been different," he said.

"This year, the focus is to plan better and finish games. Small decisions in T20 cricket change the course of matches," said Parag, who also thanked the franchise for backing him in difficult times.



Rajasthan Royals captain Riyan Parag (L) with team's Head Coach Kumar Sangakkara during a pre-season press conference in Jaipur on Thursday. PTI

It's like there is no replacement for Virat Kohli or Rohit Sharma... In the same way, there is no replacement for Sanju bhैया because he is such a good player

**Riyan Parag,**  
Rajasthan Royals skipper

**Sangakkara backs Parag**  
Rajasthan Royals director of cricket and head coach Kumar Sangakkara said Parag emerged as the best candidate after a rigorous selection process. "The most striking thing for me was how reflective and mature he has become," Sangakkara said.

### Let Sooryavanshi enjoy his cricket: Riyan Parag

Rajasthan Royals captain Riyan Parag has urged that young batting prodigy Vaibhav Sooryavanshi be allowed to grow without external pressure, saying the teenager should simply enjoy his cricket. Parag indicated that Sooryavanshi could open alongside Yashasvi Jaiswal in the IPL starting March 28, but stressed the need to shield the 14-year-old from media scrutiny. "As a captain, my message is to not get into too many press commitments. Let him just enjoy his cricket," Parag said. "He's just a kid. Let him play freely — he's performing well and will make the country



proud. "Parag added that Sooryavanshi will be encouraged to play his natural attacking game, with Jaiswal expected to handle pressure at the other end. "My message is simple — if the ball is there to be hit, go for it," he said. Kumar Sangakkara expressed confidence in the squad despite lacking members from India's recent T20 World Cup-winning side.

## Abhishek must balance flair with responsibility: Kumble

Former player draws Sehwag parallel for SRH opener

NEW DELHI

Former India captain Anil Kumble believes Abhishek Sharma needs to strike a better balance between aggression and longevity at the crease, drawing parallels with Virender Sehwag's evolution as a batter.

The 25-year-old left-hander has emerged as one of the most explosive openers in recent times, often giving his teams blistering starts with a high-risk, high-reward approach. However, his tendency to fall after promising starts has raised concerns about consistency.

"I would relate him to someone like Virender Sehwag, who loved to dominate bowlers but also adapted his approach across formats," Kumble said.

"He doesn't need to chase extreme strike rates. Instead, he should focus on playing more deliveries and pacing his innings better," he added, emphasising the importance of converting starts into impactful scores.

Kumble noted that in T20 cricket, the ability to bat deeper often defines match-winning performances, citing examples

of players like Sanju Samson who have maximised their innings by going beyond quick cameos.

Abhishek, who endured a modest T20 World Cup campaign, will be keen to bounce back strongly with Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL starting March 28.

Former South Africa captain AB de Villiers echoed similar sentiments, highlighting the need for greater consistency and mental strength as expectations continue to rise.

"He's 25 now, not 20. This is the phase where he must take more responsibility," de Villiers said. He pointed out that while Abhishek impressed in IPL 2025 with a strike rate close to 200 and over 400 runs, there is still room for improvement.

"With expectations comes pressure, and handling that mental challenge will be crucial for him this season," he added.

I would relate him to someone like Virender Sehwag, because he would look to smash every ball. When he moved from Test cricket to one-day cricket and then to T20 cricket, he realised that he had to pace his innings slightly differently.

**Anil Kumble,** former India captain



Abhishek Sharma. PTI

## India to play Ireland T20Is before England tour

NEW DELHI

World champions India will tour Ireland for a T20I series in June as part of their build-up to the white-ball tour of England. The series was confirmed by Ireland's director of high performance, Graham West, while announcing Paul Stirling's decision to step down as T20I captain.

India, who will host Afghanistan for a one-off Test and a three-match ODI series ending June 20, are scheduled to tour England for five T20Is and three ODIs from July 1 to 19. The Ireland series will precede the England assignment.

West said the India series will mark the beginning of a new phase for Ireland's T20 side. "With qualification secured for the 2028 T20 World Cup, Paul's decision provides an opportunity for a new captain to implement their style, starting with the India series," he said.

India have toured Ireland three times in the last seven years — in 2018, 2022 and 2023 — with matches at Malahide drawing strong crowds.

## Samson exit massive blow for Royals: Du Plessis

NEW DELHI

Sanju Samson's departure from Rajasthan Royals marks a significant turning point for the franchise, with former South Africa captain Faf du Plessis describing it as a "massive" loss given his role as the team's long-time figure-head.

Samson was the franchise's most-capped player and leading run-scorer before being traded to Chennai Super Kings, with Ravindra Jadeja joining the Royals. "For me, Sanju Samson was the face of Rajasthan Royals, much like Rohit Sharma, MS Dhoni or Virat Kohli for their respective teams," du Plessis said.

He added that Samson's exit could place additional responsibility on opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, who had benefited from the stability Samson provided in the batting line-up.

"When you have a consistent performer like Sanju, it allows others to play freely. Now, expectations on Jaiswal will grow. The question is whether he sticks to his natural attacking game or adapts to a more responsible role," he said.

Former India pacer Lakshminarayanan Balaji expressed surprise at RR's decision to appoint Riyan Parag as captain, despite having experienced players such as Jaiswal, Jadeja and Sam Curran in the squad.

He termed the move a "gamble", adding that Parag's success would depend on managing both performance and leadership responsibilities, with guidance from head coach Kumar Sangakkara proving crucial. Balaji also said young Vaibhav Sooryavanshi faces a key second season, where consistency will be critical.

## 'Samson need not be next Dhoni'

Tharoor recalls Indian coach's remark amid World Cup heroics

NEW DELHI

Sanju Samson does not need to be the next Mahendra Singh Dhoni — he is "the one and only Sanju Samson". That was India head coach Gautam Gambhir's response to Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, who once described the Kerala cricketer as a future Dhoni.

Recalling the exchange in an interview with PTI, Tharoor said Gambhir firmly rejected the comparison, insisting Samson should be valued for his own identity.

"I had told him he would be the next Dhoni. Years later, Gautam said, 'No, he will be the one and only Sanju Samson' — and that is exactly what he has become," Tharoor said.

Tharoor, who has followed Samson since his teenage years, praised his evolution into a dependable and selfless performer. He highlighted the wicketkeeper-batter's pivotal role in India's recent T20 World Cup triumph, where Samson was named Player of the Tournament with 321 runs.

Samson produced match-defining knocks of 97 not out, 89 in the semifinal and 89 in the final, often prioritising team needs over personal



Sanju Samson PTI

milestones.

"In both innings of 89, he could have played safe to reach a hundred but chose big shots for the team. That is Sanju — selfless and committed," Tharoor said.

He also pointed to Samson's resilience through an inconsistent career marked by setbacks and exclusions.

"Three successive performances in a World Cup show true consistency," he said, expressing hope that Samson will continue to excel across formats, including Tests.

Gambhir, too, has described Samson as a special talent, whose recent performances underline his maturity and ability to deliver on the big stage. Samson's World Cup heroics have elevated him into a cricketing icon, particularly in Kerala.

I had slightly patronisingly told him (Samson) that he would be the next Dhoni. Years later, when I recalled that remark, my friend Gautam Gambhir said 'No, No, No, he does not have to be the next Dhoni, he will be the one and only Sanju Samson', and that is exactly what he has turned out to be.

**Shashi Tharoor,** Congress MP

## Punjab Kings eye trophy with strong team bonding

Chahal, Shashank highlight continuity and mindset

CHANDIGARH

With IPL 2026 set to begin on March 28, Punjab Kings (PBKS) players Yuzvendra Chahal and Shashank Singh exuded confidence about the team's prospects, emphasising preparation, bonding and a clear focus on winning the title.

The players spoke at an event in Mohali where PBKS announced Nippon Paint as its Official Partner for the season. The launch was attended by CEO Satish Menon, Chief Commercial Officer Saurabh Arora, Nippon Paint India MD Sharad Malhotra and President Mark Titus, along with the players.

Highlighting preparations, Shashank said the team's structured camps have played a key role. "This is our fifth or sixth camp, and the Abu Dhabi one was the best. Preparation has been excellent, and we are ready to perform and entertain," he said.

Chahal stressed the importance of team bonding. "The IPL lasts two months. Multiple camps help build strong con-



Punjab Kings players Shashank Singh (R) and Yuzvendra Chahal during an event on Thursday.

nections — you eat, train and grow together as a family. That unity reflects in performance," he said.

PBKS have retained most of their IPL 2025 squad, strengthening continuity and belief. "Around 23 players are the same. Skill levels are similar across teams, but trust and belief make the difference," Shashank added.

On handling pressure, Chahal said he thrives in challenging moments.

"Performing under pressure builds confidence. My role is to deliver in middle and death overs, and I am ready," he said.

Shashank echoed the sentiment, setting a clear goal. "The next two months are crucial. Our entire focus is on winning the trophy. I enjoy big moments rather than seeing them as pressure."

PBKS also unveiled Nippon Paint's logo on the right sleeve of their jersey, aligning with the team's red-and-blue identity. A new mascot, "Blobber Sher", was introduced to enhance fan engagement throughout the season.

With strong preparation, squad stability and new partnerships, Punjab Kings appear geared up.

## IPL 2026

# Buttler hopes short break from cricket will help him

LONDON

England batter Jos Buttler is hoping that a brief break from cricket will help him rediscover form as he gears up for a fresh start with Gujarat Titans in IPL 2026 later this month.

The former England captain endured a disappointing T20 World Cup campaign in India and Sri Lanka, where his struggles at the top of the order stood out. Buttler managed just 87

runs in eight matches at an average of 10.87, with a modest strike rate of 116, as England exited the tournament following a semifinal loss to India in Mumbai.

Reflecting on that lean run, Buttler said stepping away from the game after the World Cup proved essential for his mental reset and recovery.

"I couldn't have been further away from cricket, which at the time was exactly what I needed," Buttler said on the For the

Love of Cricket podcast.

The 35-year-old added that the break allowed him to unwind completely before gradually returning to thoughts about the game.

"It was really refreshing — a complete release. I really enjoyed it. Only recently have I started reflecting on what's important to me and my cricket, and why things didn't go as I would have liked," he said.

Buttler emphasised that his struggles were not due to a lack of preparation or

effort. He revealed that he had spent long hours in the nets in the lead-up to the semifinal, trying to rediscover rhythm, but results continued to elude him.

"For all the hard work and best intentions, it just didn't happen. Sometimes that's the nature of the game, and you have to accept that," he said.

He added that the period away also helped him regain perspective, allowing him to return with renewed clarity and

focus. Gujarat Titans, IPL champions in 2022, will begin their campaign on March 31 with an away fixture against Punjab Kings. Buttler will be keen to make an immediate impact and put his recent struggles behind him.

With experience on his side and a refreshed mindset, Buttler now hopes to translate reflection into performance and re-establish himself as one of the most reliable white-ball batters in the game.

