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Briefs

KOLKATA 5.4M B'desh earthquake jolts Kolkata

A 5.4 magnitude earthquake along India-Bangladesh border jolted Kolkata and several other districts on Friday afternoon. As per the meteorological department, the quake took place at Bangladesh's Asaashuni near Sathkira in the country's southwest Khulna division. The Met department also mentioned that Kolkata and the neighbourhood felt the jolt as Sathkira is not even 100 kms away from Kolkata.

SHEOPUR (MP) 8 cheetahs to arrive at Kuno Park

Eight more cheetahs will be airlifted from Africa and brought to Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh on Saturday morning, an official said on Friday. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and Union Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Bhupender Yadav will release the big cats into enclosures readied at the park under the ongoing cheetah revival programme in India via intercontinental translocations, he added. The batch from Botswana, comprising six females and two males, will fly to Gwalior on an IAF aircraft.

NEW DELHI Cheetah Gamini gives birth to cub

South African cheetah Gamini has given birth to the fourth cub at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, taking the number of these big cats in India to 39, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said on Friday. "The presence of the fourth cub was confirmed during intensive monitoring by the field and veterinary teams."

CHANDIGARH Witness turns hostile in Bishnoi case

A prosecution witness on Thursday refused to identify gangster Lawrence Bishnoi in a Chandigarh's 14-yr old murder bid case. Lawrence was produced in court via video conferencing from Ahmedabad jail. The case pertained to a clash at the Sector 10 DAV College in 2012 between two student unions in which Lawrence was booked for an attempt to murder one of the rivals. Prosecution witness Navneet Singh turned hostile as he held he neither knew nor recognised Lawrence Bishnoi.

KOLKATA HC nod to BJP march in WB

Calcutta High Court has given conditional nod to BJP's 'Parivartan Yatra' on March 1 and 2. According to High Court sources, Justice Suvra Ghosh imposed a limit of 1,000 participants per rally and set the timing from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.

POLITICAL SLUGFEST | Kejriwal's party, other Oppn outfits claim 'Satyamev Jayate'; BJP and Cong target former Delhi CM

AAP: Verdict vindicates our 'conspiracy' stand

NEW DELHI

AAP leaders on Friday described the Delhi court's decision to discharge former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and his ex-deputy Manish Sisodia in the excise policy case as a vindication of truth and constitutional values.

"Satyamev Jayate" was the common refrain among the Aam Aadmi Party leaders and workers, who claimed that theirs is an uncompromisingly honest party, and the court order has proved that.

The court discharged Kejriwal, Sisodia and 21 others in the politically charged liquor policy case, pulling up the CBI by saying it found no "overarching conspiracy or criminal intent" in the policy. Among the 21 people given a clean chit in the case is



AAP workers celebrate in New Delhi on Friday

Telangana Jagruthi president K Kavitha.

AAP leaders said the verdict had validated the party's consistent stand that the case lacked substance. Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh alleged the case was part of a conspiracy to defame the party leadership and referred to the period of incarceration faced

by several leaders. Saurabh Bharadwaj said that despite being in power in many states, the BJP had targeted the "tiny Delhi government". "Honest people are defamed day and night through false cases," he alleged and said the CBI, ACB, and police filed a case based on a false complaint.

We must accept court verdict: Anna Hazare

Pune: Social activist Anna Hazare welcomed the discharge of AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal. "Whatever I had said about Arvind Kejriwal regarding his involvement in the case was before any decision had come from the judiciary. At that time, the allegations were in the air. Now the judiciary has given its verdict that he had no role in the (wrongdoing). We have to accept the verdict," he said.

Mann says truth always triumphs

CHANDIGARH

Even as leaders and workers of the ruling AAP in Punjab celebrated acquittal of party supremo Arvind Kejriwal and former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, besides others by a Delhi court on Friday, CN Bhagwant Mann and senior leaders of the party held that the verdict reaffirmed people's faith in judiciary and exposed "politically motivated charges against top party leaders."

CEC says considering single-phase TN polls

CHENNAI

Termining the recently concluded SIR of electoral rolls in Tamil Nadu as a model for the country and a great success, CEC Gyanesh Kumar on Friday said parties in the state have suggested holding Assembly polls in a single phase and a decision on it would be taken after considering all the factors.

The Election Commission's decision over 'phases for polls' will be known once the election schedule is announced, he said, adding the Assembly election in Tamil Nadu will set a record in bettering the polls in Bihar.



Addressing a press conference here, the Chief Election Commissioner said: "Mandatory VVPAT counting shall take place and even after counting is over, any candidate, on fee payment, can match EVM with VVPAT during next 7 days."

Amongst the new initiatives, one major was that postal ballots will be counted 2 rounds before the EVM rounds.

Jaya loyalist, ex-CM OPS joins DMK

CHENNAI

Politics does make strange bedfellows. Yet, O Panneerselvam, a three-time former Chief Minister and expelled AIADMK leader, gave up his identity of a Jayalalitha loyalist, and joined the ruling DMK, which she detested during her lifetime, it did make heads turn on Thursday. The development was not unexpected as OPS, as he is better known, stood politically isolated and had dropped hints at switching loyalties earlier. But he remained indecisive, a trait that stopped him from emerging in his own right. OPS's entry into DMK marks the first instance of a former chief minister from the AIADMK crossing over to its principal rival.

Vijay's wife files for divorce ahead of polls



CHENNAI

Sankgeetha Vijay, wife of actor-politician and TVK founder Joseph Vijay Chandrasekar has petitioned a court near here seeking divorce. She has accused her husband of having an extramarital relationship with an actress and that he has subjected her to "persistent mental cruelty, neglect and desertion". If required, she said she would implead the actress as second respondent.

Sankgeetha has filed the petition at a jurisdictional family court in Chengalpattu District near here.

SC dismisses TMC plea on SIR objections

KOLKATA:

Supreme Court on Friday had refused to entertain the objections raised by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) to the Election Commission of India (ECI) over imparting training to judicial officers on the court that the SIR exercise.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi mentioned that the judicial officers should be trusted.

According to the apex court sources, senior advocate Kapil Sibal mentioned in the court that the ECI had given some training modules to the judicial officers specifying which documents will be accepted.

The bench also mentioned that the state government should not stall the exercise with small excuses.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Debjit Sarkar said that the state government should learn lessons from the apex court's order.

Ex-DGP among 4 in TMC's RS pick list

The TMC on Friday announced the names of minister Babul Supriyo, former Bengal DGP Rajeev Kumar, senior advocate Menaka Guruswamy and actor Koel Mallick as candidates for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections.

The TMC made the announcement in a post on X.

The Election Commission had declared that polling for 37 Rajya Sabha seats across multiple states, including West Bengal, will be held on March 16. From West Bengal, five Rajya Sabha seats are falling vacant in 2026, and four of them were held by the TMC.

'Moral death sentence' for BJP: Akhilesh

Lucknow: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday said the trial court's discharge of former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and others in the excise policy case was a "moral death sentence" for the BJP as it had betrayed the people of Delhi.

Reacting to the development in an X post, Yadav said

truth and justice stood firmly with Kejriwal, and that no allegation could be so big that it shrouded the truth.

"Today, every honest person will breathe a sigh of relief, while the BJP supporters must be writhing in deep shame. The BJP has betrayed the residents of Delhi," the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister

said. Launching a sharp attack on the saffron party, he remarked that those who level false allegations even against religious leaders and saints could go to any extent to defame a government, party or individual.

Yadav said the news is nothing short of a "moral death sentence" for the BJP.

Kejriwal already got political response from people: BJP

The BJP said on Friday that though a court has acquitted Arvind Kejriwal for "lack of evidence" in a case involving the Delhi excise policy, the people of the national capital have already given him a "political response on political grounds" and the probe agency will now decide its next course of action.

Cong: Action against BJP's 'convenient allies' will vanish

With a Delhi court discharging former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in the liquor policy case, the Congress on Friday said it was a "predictable script" from the BJP, and proceedings against its convenient "allies" in the AAP and others will quietly vanish in light of the Gujarat and Punjab elections due next year.



'Dolphin Hunter'

The Indian Navy on Friday commissioned INS Anjadip, a warship aimed at augmenting its anti-submarine warfare capabilities and coastal surveillance and one that comes with state-of-the-art combat features. Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi commissioned the ship at the Chennai Port. The Indian Navy aims to transform into a 200-plus ship maritime force by 2035 and plans to induct 15 additional vessels in 2026, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi said here on Friday.

HC paves way for release of The Kerala Story 2

KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Friday paved the way for the release of 'The Kerala Story 2-Goes Beyond' film by staying the single judge order which had put on hold the movie's screening by 15 days.

A bench of justices Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari and PV Balakrishnan passed the interim order on the appeal moved by the film's producer Vipul Amrutlal Shah late Thursday night, hours after the movie's release was stayed.

In its order, the bench said that the single judge's finding that guidelines for certification have not been borne in mind by the Central Board of



Film Certification (CBFC) were "merely on the basis of a few clippings and without viewing the movie" and therefore, it "cannot be countenanced".

"That apart, the fact that insertions, excisions and modifications, have been carried out by the appellant (Shah) in the movie as per the directions of the CBFC would only further reinforce the fact that there is an application of mind from the part of Board while granting the certificate," the bench said.

'This road not for Muslims': FIR in UP after E-way graffiti

SAHARANPUR

Authorities have registered an FIR after members of the Hindu Raksha Dal allegedly painted the words "This road is not for Muslims" on the elevated stretch of Delhi Dehradun Expressway near Biharigarh on Thursday night.

The message was written around 11 pm on the sound barrier of the road. The stretch falls under Biharigarh police station limits in Saharanpur district.

The graffiti came to light early Friday when passing motorists noticed the message and informed the police.

Prez undertakes 25-min sortie in Prachand copter



JAIPUR

President Droupadi Murmu undertook a sortie in the indigenous Light Combat Helicopter PRACHAND at Air Force Station Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, on Friday.

The mission was undertaken as a two-aircraft LCH formation. President

Droupadi Murmu flew in the lead aircraft with Group Capt. Nayan Shantil Bahua, while Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal AP Singh and Group Capt. A Mahendra flew as Number 2 in the second aircraft. During the approximately 25-minute mission, they flew over Gadisar Lake and Jaisalmer Fort and attacked a tank target.

'Honey trap' reveals sex racket at IPS officer's villa

BENGALURU

An investigation into a 'honey trap' complaint against a college girl at Malleswaram Police Station is now turning into a chilling reminder of the Epstein files in Bengaluru, with senior police officers allegedly figuring in the sexual exploitation of college girls.

Unlike Epstein, who targeted poor girls, here the victims are from affluent families studying in prestigious colleges. They were allegedly invited to a villa for parties, drugged and sexually exploited. The villa is owned by an Indian Police Service officer, who is now claiming

that it was rented out to someone else. However, his name has also figured in the list of people in the girls' statements.

The alleged kingpin of the racket has been identified as Nikhil from Sakaleshpur in Hassan district. He runs a second-hand car showroom and washing centre in Basaveshwarnagar. The second suspect is Diksen Sandra from West Bengal, who allegedly lured the first complainant, a native of Tamil Nadu.

According to investigating officers, Nikhil had three to four boys working for him, who lured girls under the pretext of love, relationships and partying. Nikhil allegedly organised parties at the villa. If

Several senior police officers in Karnataka are allegedly involved in sexual exploitation of college girls

a girl did not consent to sex, the gang allegedly spiked her drink with ketamine and raped her. They allegedly videographed the intimate acts and blackmailed the girls into attending subsequent parties. Later, the girls were allegedly shared with other "prominent people", including several police officers.

Police said Diksen befriended the complainant

on social media. After a couple of meetings at pubs, Diksen invited her to a party on February 14 and took her to the villa in Amruthahalli. When she refused to go to bed, they allegedly forced a pink-coloured tablet into her mouth and made her swallow it. When she regained semi-consciousness, she found Nikhil groping her. When she screamed, Diksen entered the room. The two allegedly sexually assaulted her.

The complainant later informed her brother and sought treatment at a hospital for the injuries sustained during the assault. On her brother's advice, she decided to file a police complaint.

When she informed Diksen that she would approach the police, Nikhil and Diksen lodged a 'honey trap' complaint against her. She subsequently filed a complaint at Amruthahalli Police Station.

Investigating officers said there was pressure from some senior officers to go soft on Nikhil. On Friday, about 19 college girls who were allegedly lured into the sex racket appeared at Amruthahalli Police Station and recorded their statements about their ordeal with Nikhil and his associates. They also mentioned the names of the "prestigious people" with whom they were allegedly forced to share a bed.

costly click

New phishing fraud: Fake e-challan SMSes

NEW DELHI

A new wave of phishing frauds is targeting citizens through fake "e-challan" SMS messages, prompting fresh alerts from the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

As per officials, victims receive an SMS claiming that a traffic e-challan has been issued against their vehicle. The message typically carries a link urging immediate payment to avoid penalties. Believing the message to be genuine, recipients click on the link and are redirected to a fake webpage designed to



closely resemble the official M-Parivahan portal of the Ministry of Road Transport

and Highways. Cyber experts say, "This is where the phishing cycle begins."

The I4C wing alerts that the fraudulent website prompts users to enter personal details such as vehicle number, mobile number, OTP, and even banking or card information under the pretext of paying the

challan. "Once submitted, the data is harvested by cyber-criminals, who then siphon off money from victims' bank accounts or misuse their credentials for further fraud."

The I4C wing has flagged a rise in such SMS-based phishing campaigns, particularly in urban areas where digital traffic enforcement systems are

widely used. Fraudsters exploit public familiarity with genuine e-challan systems to create panic and urgency, often warning of heavy fines or legal action if payment is not made immediately. Officials, privy to such cases, have clarified that "legitimate e-challans are issued only through authorised government platforms.



Journalists Safety is the Organization Top Priority—Devendra Kumar

National President of the National Journalists Security Council Devendra Kumar Mishra along with Uttar Pradesh State Patron Pramod Sharma Paid a courtesy visit to India Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in New Delhi and Presented him with a memento. Dr. Ranjita Sharma and Rishi Chaurasia were also Present on the Occasion. The meeting was organized with the objective of holding a meaningful dialogue on the organizational future Plans and key issues related to journalists safety. During the discussion, the outline of the proposed National Convention was also reviewed. The convention will witness participation from journalist delegations from various states, organizational office bearers and senior members of the media fraternity. Important topics such as journalists safety, Prevention of increasing attacks, Protection from false cases and challenges of digital journalism will be given special Emphasis. The delegation stated that the role of media in a democratic system is extremely



important. It is essential to ensure a safe environment for journalists so they can work fearlessly and impartially. The Council is continuously striving to Protect journalists' rights, ensure their safety and dignity, Provide legal assistance and offer a strong organizational Platform. National President Devendra Kumar Mishra emphasized that the safety of journalists is the organization highest Priority. State Patron Pramod Sharma added that the organization is expanding its units across the country to empower journalists at district and tehsil levels.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh appreciated the efforts of the Council, stating that journalists play a vital role in conveying the voice of

society to the government and the Public. Ensuring their safety and dignity is essential for strengthening democracy.

He described the Council work as Positive and assured all Possible support in the future. The delegation also formally invited the Defence Minister to attend the upcoming National Convention as the Chief Guest.

Organization officials termed this meeting an important achievement in the direction of journalists welfare, stating that it will Provide new momentum and strength to the Council activities at the national level. The objective of the National Journalists Security Council is Clear — the safety of journalists

Five Accused Arrested With illegal Liquor



Ghazipur

As Part of the ongoing campaign against criminals, the Zamania Police team arrested five accused with 96 tetra Packs of 8 PM English illicit liquor. In view of the festival, the Police team Present in the area, on the information of an informer, arrested the accused Pehlaj Kumar, son of Vijay Bind, resident of village Govindpur, Police station Bind, district Nalanda, Bihar, near the Hetimpur canal culvert in the area. The Police recovered 20 tetra Packs of 8 PM English illicit liquor from him. In the same sequence, the Police team recovered 18 tetra Packs of 8 PM English illicit liquor from the accused Rajesh Bind, son of Vijay Bind, resident of village Govindpur, Police station Bind, district Nalanda, Bihar, near the village

Karjahi railway station in the area. At the same time, from Badesar canal culvert, accused Ravish Kumar son of Nageshwar Singh resident of village Dilawarpur, Police station Bihta, district Patna, Bihar, Santosh Bind son of Sunil Bind resident of Mokar, Police station Karauna, district Jehanabad, Bihar were arrested and 39 tetra Packs of 8 PM English liquor were recovered from their Possession and then from Gai Ghat turn, accused Deepak Bind son of Vijay Bind resident of village Govindpur, Police station Bind, district Nalanda, Bihar were recovered with 19 tetra Packs of 8 PM English liquor.

A case under the Excise Act was registered against all the five accused at the Police station and after taking legal action, they were handed over to the Court.

Major Food Department Crackdown Ahead of Holi



Barabanki

Keeping in view the upcoming Holi festival, a special inspection drive was conducted on February 26, 2026 under the directions of the Commissioner of Food Safety and Drug Administration and the District Magistrate. The team, led by Nawabganj Sub-Divisional Magistrate Anand Tiwari and Assistant Commissioner (Food) Dr. Shailendra Pratap Singh, carried out intensive Checks in urban as well as tehsil Areas. **Sample collection in Lakhpedabagh and Nabiganj** Two samples of ghee were collected from M/s Balaji Ghee Store in Lakhpedabagh. In Nabiganj, one sample each of Vamsh brand mustard oil and refined soybean oil was taken from M/s Ravi Traders for laboratory examination. Suspecting irregularities, authorities prohibited the sale of Mayur vanaspati (10 tins worth 39,000), Biskin vanaspati (24 tins worth 53,340), and bakery shortening (14 jars worth 32,900). In total, food items worth 1,25,240 at this establishment were barred from sale.

Action also in Haidergarh and Ramnagar

At M/s Hari Traders located in the vegetable market of Haidergarh, samples of paneer and chhena were collected and sent for laboratory testing. Additionally, a sample of khoya was taken from the Giri Chauraha area in Ramnagar.

Seven samples sent for analysis

Altogether, seven samples were collected during the operation. The enforcement team included Chief Food Safety Officer Neerad Pandey along with Food Safety Officers Arun Kumar, Arshi Farooqui, Bhagauti Prasad, Pallavi Tiwari, Anuradha Mishra and Dr. Ankita Yadav. Officials stated that strict surveillance is being maintained against food adulteration during the festive season and further legal action will be taken based on the laboratory Reports.

The date will be set after Holi, CJI's quip on the 'effect of cannabis in Allahabad' sparked laughter in the courtroom

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. A light-hearted moment was witnessed during a hearing in the Supreme Court on Friday. While setting the next date, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant made a humorous remark about Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad), which brought smiles

to the courtroom. The case was listed under the title 'Suresh Devi vs. High Court of Allahabad.' The bench was deciding the date for the next hearing. Meanwhile, the Chief Justice suggested that the case be listed after the Holi holidays. During the conversation, he smilingly remarked, "This is

Allahabad, brother... it will take a week for the cannabis to wear off." This remark erupted in the courtroom, causing a mild laughter. However, the entire conversation was informal and not part of any judicial order. Such comments are sometimes made during court proceedings to ease the atmosphere. It was clarified

that this comment has no impact on the merits of the case or the direction of the hearing. The case is currently pending in the Supreme Court. The next hearing will be held on a date to be determined after the Holi holidays. The Special Identity of Prayagraj's HoliHoli is celebrated with enthusiasm and tradition in

the Sangam city of Prayagraj. The festival of colors continues for three days in many parts of the city. The Holi of the historic Loknath Chowk, in particular, is talked about far and wide. In some areas, the traditional "Kapda Phaad Holi" is also played on the third day, which is considered a unique identity of this place.

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. Rumors of a child abduction sparked panic in Karaili's 16 Market area on Wednesday. As soon as the news spread, a mob of locals gathered, and angry protesters vandalized a car. The vehicle's occupants were also assaulted. Later, police investigations revealed that the incident was not a kidnapping, but a mutual dispute following a road accident. As soon

as the incident was reported, Karaili police arrived at the scene and brought the situation under control. Initial investigations revealed that a minor collision between the car occupants and another party led to an altercation. Both parties knew each other. As the dispute escalated, some people present there linked it to a child abduction, leading to the spread of the rumor. Due to the rumor, people gathered at the scene and van-

dalized the car without verifying the truth. Police clarified that no child abduction had occurred. The situation is now completely under control. Police say they are identifying those who spread rumors and engaged in vandalism. Necessary legal action will be taken. The administration has appealed to the public not to believe any information without verifying it and to refrain from taking the law into their own hands.

Roadways Staff Leaves Cancelled for Holi, Additional Buses to Be Operated

Mathura

In view of the upcoming Holi festival, the Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation has made special arrangements. Assistant Regional Manager of Mathura, Madan Mohan Sharma, informed that due to the expected surge in Passenger traffic during Holi, the leaves of all officers and employees have been temporarily Cancelled. He stated that to ensure smooth travel for devotees and general Passengers during the festival, additional buses will be operated on various routes. The number of buses on busy routes will be increased as



required, so that Passengers do not face any inconvenience. The Assistant Regional Manager has also instructed all drivers and conductors to behave Politely and courteously with Passengers, especially the elderly, women and senior citizens and to assist them while boarding and alighting from buses. Passengers have also been

advised not to carry any flammable or Prohibited items while traveling on roadways buses. For safety reasons, the transport of such materials will be strictly Prohibited. The corporation administration has assured that all necessary arrangements are being made to ensure a safe, smooth and Pleasant journey for Passengers during the Holi festival.

Sanjay Singh Exposes 'Statistical Manipulation' in Uttar Pradesh Budget

Lucknow

Senior leader of the Aam Aadmi Party and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh has termed the Uttar Pradesh government 2026-27 budget as a "well-planned manipulation of figures," making serious allegations. He said the government first reduces the originally allocated budget for 2025-26 through revisions and then compares the new budget with these reduced figures to claim increases of 17%, 28% or even 59%. According to him, this is a deliberate attempt to mislead the Public and reflects the neglect of crucial sectors like education, health, agriculture and rural Development. Sanjay Singh explained that 1.03 lakh crore was originally allocated for education, sports, arts and culture in 2025-26, which was later revised down to 84,000 Crore. Subsequently 1.08 lakh crore was announced for 2026-27 and the government Projected it as a 28% increase. He emphasized that comparisons should be made with the original budget estimates, not the revised (reduced) figures. He Pointed out a similar Pattern in the energy sector, where the budget was first reduced and then an increase was claimed. In health and family welfare, a 12% cut was followed by a modest rise, which was Presented as a 24% increase. In sectors such as transport, rural development, social welfare and agriculture, budgets were initially reduced by 14% to 17% and later increased to claim a 30% to 59% Rise. He alleged that the same



pattern was followed in urban development, agriculture and social welfare. In rural development, there was first a cut of around 14.5%, followed by claims of a 59% increase—something he described as "mathematical illusion." In agriculture, a 15% cut was followed by Claims of a 51% increase. "This is not a budget, but a script of deception," he said. Presenting expenditure data, Singh stated that in 2024-25, 65% of the housing sector budget remained unspent. Similarly, 33% of the budget in water supply and sanitation, 32% in irrigation and flood control, 25% in health, 24% in urban development and 24% in rural development went unused. Welfare schemes for SC, ST, OBC and minorities saw 23% underutilization, while agriculture and allied activities recorded 21% less spending than allocated. He added that only the energy department exceeded its allocated spending, while most departments showed a trend of underutilization and budget cuts. Even in a review meeting chaired by

the Chief Minister, it was revealed that spending was 40% less in PWD, 44% less in child development, 41% less in agriculture, 23% less in rural development and 27% less in food and civil supplies. A Provision of 425 crore for the unorganized sector remained completely unused. Referring to the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Singh said that hundreds of schools still lack Physics, Chemistry and biology labs. He also claimed that 9103 crore received from the central government remained unutilized and had to be returned. "When Children are sitting on mats in schools and the government is beating the drum of a 28% increase, it is not education but deception," he said. On the issue involving the Shankaracharya, Singh alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party does not stand by anyone and is targeting even religious leaders for its interests.

He claimed that the actions against the Shankaracharya are part of a well-Planned conspiracy. He warned that if any action is taken

against the Shankaracharya, the Aam Aadmi Party will stand in support and take the matter from the streets to Parliament. He also announced that the Aam Aadmi Party will conduct the fourth Phase of its "Rozgar Do-Samajik Nyay Do Yatra" from April 4 to April 9, covering Agra to Mathura. The campaign will aim to raise Public awareness about the "truth" of the budget and employment Issues. Commenting on raids against BSP MLA Umashankar Singh, he said that Political vendetta should not drive action against anyone.

"If Umashankar Singh has done nothing wrong, he deserves justice," Singh Said. Regarding district panchayat elections, he demanded that the election of chairpersons and district heads be conducted directly by the Public to Prevent alleged horse-trading among members. On the UGC bill, Singh alleged that it is an attempt to divide society along caste lines. He said that if the intent were genuine, separate monitoring committees would have been set up in universities to address caste-based and other forms of discrimination. Sanjay Singh concluded by saying that the Uttar Pradesh budget is driven more by "announcements and Publicity" than by employment, education, health-care and rural development. He added that people must understand that real impact matters more than big numbers and the Aam Aadmi Party will launch a widespread awareness campaign to expose the truth across Districts.

A large crowd gathered for the soldier's funeral

Army personnel presented a guard of honor at the funeral site and bowed their heads in respect. The District Magistrate, Superintendent of Police, or administrative officials were unable to attend the soldier's funeral

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Ajhuwa, Kaushambi.

Brijesh Kumar, a soldier, approximately 30 years old, a resident of Ken village in the Saini Kotwali area, was involved in a road accident on the night of February 25th while returning home after attending a relative's wedding. He died while undergoing treatment in Prayagraj. Upon receiving the news of his death, his family was devastated. The police sent the soldier's body for post-mortem examination. As soon as the body returned home from the post-mortem examination, the entire family was devastated. Screams and cries were heard everywhere. Grief was visible on every face after the death of Brijesh Kumar. After getting information about the death of the soldier, Subedar Milan Sharma, Havildar LN Shukla, Havildar Mor, Havildar IS Pal, Signal Man Subho Roy of Indian Army Bamrauli Battalion participated in the funeral of the soldier and



salute was given. The soldiers carried the deceased soldier on their shoulders and took him to the funeral site located on the side of the National Highway. His last rites were performed in a field where he was given state and military honours during the funeral. The body was brought wrapped in the tricolour. The army soldiers gave guard of honour at the funeral site and bowed their heads in respect. His brother Vijay Pratap told that the Mundan ceremony of Shaurya, son of soldier Brijesh Kumar, was to be held on 27 February and the family and relatives had gathered for the Mundan ceremony, but meanwhile, soldier Brijesh Kumar died in a road accident, due to which a mountain of sorrow has fallen on the family and it is becoming difficult to handle the family. At the same time, due to the non-arrival of DM, SP or any administrative officer, anger has been seen in the deceased's family and the village area.

Students were given an exposure visit, a tour of the Planetarium, and Anand Bhavan under the National Invention Campaign



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. An exposure visit was organized on Thursday for students in grades 6 to 8 of the council's upper primary and merged schools under the National Invention Campaign. The program was presided over by Block Education Officer Pratibha Singh. Teachers, ARPs, and a large number of students participated. The program began at the City Resource Center (CPI), where all the students gathered. The Block Education Officer distributed T-shirts and caps bearing the National Invention Campaign logo to the students. They also provided notebooks, pens, fruits, and other essential items in jute bags. The students were then sent off on the excursion in two buses. Teachers and ARPs were entrusted with the responsibility of their safety and supervision. The students were first taken to the Jawahar Planetarium, where they were given information on planets, stars, and astronomy. The

group then visited the Ganga Gallery at the National Science Academy in Mumfordganj. Here, students were informed about the origin of the River Ganga, its flow through various states, its uses, and pollution-related aspects. They were also explained about BOD (Biological Oxygen Demand) and DO (Dissolved Oxygen). After lunch, students were taken on a tour of the museum located at Anand Bhawan, where they were briefed on historical facts and the museum's features. After the tour, all students were brought back to the City Resource Center, from where they returned home safely with their school teachers. ARP Manoj Kumar Pandey, along with Dr. Smita Srivastava, Deepa Kushwaha, Anshu, Asad, Rashid Mahmood, Deepti Srivastava, Madhulika Yadav, Shivani Jaiswal, Sudha, Seema Singh, Sandhya, Babita Kaithwas, and Lalita Tiwari, contributed to the successful implementation of the program.

Three schools in the Koraon Nagar Panchayat will be renovated with a cost of 60 lakh



Koraon. Municipal Council Chairman Om Prakash Kesari inspected three schools in Koraon on Friday evening. This inspection was conducted with Junior Engineer Saroj Kumar to prepare a blueprint for the renovation work.

The government has approved ₹20 lakh each for the renovation of these schools, totaling ₹60 lakh. The schools for which the funds have been approved include Primary School I, Primary School II, and

Pre-Secondary School Koraon. Chairman Om Prakash Kesari stated that the renovation work will begin soon.

He has also prepared the technical details of the work in collaboration with the junior engineer. Kesari stated

that these efforts will ensure clean, beautiful, and well-equipped schools, enabling Koraon's schools to develop into model schools. Some school teachers and residents were also present during the inspection.

Major PDA action: Bulldozers demolished 10 bighas of illegal plotting

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. The Prayagraj Development Authority (PDA) took major action against illegal plotting on Thursday, demolishing approximately 10 bighas of land in Subzone 2A of Zone 2. The action was carried out under the leader-



ship of the Zonal Officer. According to

authority officials, Ajay Yadav, Roshan Singh,

and others were plotting without an approved map at Gaja Kathula, near the Sasur Khaderi River in front of KP College, in the Airport Police Station area. After an investigation confirmed illegal construction, the plotting was demolished using a bulldozer. PDA officials stated that an FIR will be

filed against those involved in the illegal plotting. The campaign against illegal construction and plotting will continue in the future. During the action, the Zonal Officer was accompanied by a junior engineer, supervisor, PDA enforcement team, and Airport Police Station.

Editorial

Civil servants are running India's regulatory bodies. It dilutes institutional independence

Looking back at India's reform story of more than three decades, it is worthwhile to recall that economic liberalisation of the 1990s had a few implicit assumptions of how an economy should function and grow on a sustainable basis. One of those assumptions followed from the government decision to allow the private sector to operate in areas that were hitherto monopolised by state-owned enterprises. Under such liberalisation, it was assumed that while the government would continue to frame policies for areas opened up to the private sector, the regulation or enforcement of those policies would be undertaken by independent regulators through rules framed by them. A classic example of this thinking was India's telecommunications sector that was opened up to the private sector in the early 1990s. This was followed by the setting up of the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority of India or Trai a few years later. Subsequently, the business of basic telephone services, run in large parts of the country by a government department, was hived off to a newly created state-owned enterprise. Something similar, in varying degrees, happened in other areas such as the insurance, airports, and power sectors. In addition, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) was set up to regulate and adjudicate upon issues of market dominance and practices that undermined competition in various sectors. The principle was clear: Let the government frame the policy (and not run a business), while independent regulatory bodies could enforce the policy by framing necessary rules. Another implicit assumption behind such a separation of responsibilities between the government and the regulators was about who should steer those regulatory bodies. To impart autonomy and independence to these institutions and insulate them from government interference, the pool of talent for hiring key personnel was widened. Experts and private-sector professionals in related fields, along with even retired members of the judiciary (though under some pressure as was seen when the legislation for setting up the CCI was framed), were among those the government believed could be hired to head these regulatory institutions. Thus, the first chairperson of the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission was an economist. Trai was set up under the chairmanship of a retired judge and its next chairperson was a former banker. Even the first capital market regulator was a banker in the late 1980s, and the first chairperson of the insurance sector regulator was a former chairman of the Central Board of Direct Taxes. The first full-fledged chairperson of the CCI was a retired Indian Administrative Services (IAS) officer. So, there was a mix of regulatory heads chosen from a pool of experts from both the government and the private sector. In spite of a few civil servants heading these institutions, the idea that continued to be pursued was to insulate regulation from the stranglehold or influence of the political executive. The third significant aspect of regulation in the early days of economic reforms was the framing of rules for appointing heads of regulatory bodies in a way that effectively ruled out conflicts of interest. Thus, a regulator would usually not be considered for another job in the government system after the completion of his or her term. The idea was that the regulator should be able to act freely and fairly without any expectation of future assignments from the government or the private sector. Indeed, one of the regulators under the law was, until recently, barred from accepting any government job after having served in that regulatory post. These were guardrails to preserve the integrity and independence of regulators. However, the situation with regard to the last two assumptions behind the regulatory framework has changed significantly in the last few decades.

The last time the high command named an out-of-the-box candidate as state president

On June 9, 2024, as the Modi 3.0 government was set to swear in, Rajeev Chandrasekhar came up with a cryptic tweet: "Today, curtains down on my 18-year stint of public service, of which three years I had the privilege of serving with PM Narendra Modi's Team Modi 2.0. I certainly didn't wish to end my 18 years of public service as a candidate who lost an election, but that's how it has turned out". The tweet was deleted after a day, and the amended version conveniently laid the blame for the confusion on an "intern". It was an emotional response, a mark of Chandrasekhar's utter disappointment with not finding a place in Modi 3.0. It also signified how the 'technocrat' was not a run-of-the-mill politician who believed in rehearsed or curated responses. Less than a year since then, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) high command has now sprung a surprise by naming Chandrasekhar as its new Kerala state president. By no means was Rajeev Chandrasekhar the frontrunner. Incumbent K. Surendran, who overstayed his term by two years, was tipped to get another year's extension, until the assembly elections in the state in 2026. There were other contenders too, such as firebrand Sobha Surendran and veteran MT Ramesh. Even conventional wisdom suggested that social engineering compulsions would go against Chandrasekhar, a Nair hailing from Thrissur. With the two Malayalis in Modi's third ministry being a Nair and a Syrian Christian—Suresh Gopi and George Kurian—an



Ezhava/Hindu OBC candidate would've been the more practical option. But the high command had enough reasons to pick Chandrasekhar. The BJP in Kerala is a divided house with multiple factions, and none of the frontrunners would have been able to function smoothly on account of internal dissension. Even K. Surendran's five-year term was marred by friction with the PK Krishnadas-led faction, as well as his running feud with Sobha Surendran. The BJP leadership reckons that Rajeev Chandrasekhar can carry all the factions together. He is not a natural politician, but the central leadership deems that this very characteristic will become Chandrasekhar's USP. It is very much a repetition of the 'K. Annamalai' experiment in Tamil Nadu.

True, Chandrasekhar's acceptability cuts across factions. But there are various other considerations at play. For all the gains it made elsewhere, the BJP has hardly had any electoral impact in Kerala, despite a steady rise in vote share. Even after faring reasonably well in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, cornering nearly 20% votes and Suresh Gopi's win from Thrissur, it did badly in the Palakkad by-election last November. That loss probably

put paid to Surendran's hopes to stay on until the assembly polls, as he had turned the issue into a battle of prestige. The central leadership also cannot quite understand why the BJP does so poorly in a state where the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has the second-largest network of shakhas (branches) in the country. For a long, the RSS in Kerala had been deeply involved in the functioning of the state BJP, though the party's ideological mentor has taken a backseat in recent times. This was meant to afford more autonomy to the state party president, but it ultimately culminated in RSS organising secretary K. Subash's resignation, with the Sangh not naming a replacement in his stead for an extended period.

Now, Rajeev Chandrasekhar's appointment is likely to be followed by the RSS naming an organising secretary to assist the new president in his functioning. The last time the high command named an out-of-the-box candidate as state president was in the run-up to the 2016 assembly polls, when veteran Sangh leader Kummanam Rajasekharan, whose hardliner image and association with the Nilakkal protests of 1982

had proved to be a baggage for the party in the past. The central leadership also believes that Chandrasekhar can cater to sections of Kerala's aspirational middle class that are yearning for change and are unhappy with both the ruling Left government and the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF).

Since Chandrasekhar doesn't fit the mould of a regular politician, he may be able to connect better with this class and some increasingly 'apolitical' sections of voters that support, say, a Shashi Tharoor. In many ways in fact, it was the spirited contest that he put in against Tharoor in the Lok Sabha election in Thiruvananthapuram, despite being a late entrant, that may have propelled Chandrasekhar to the coveted position today. Giving a tough fight to Tharoor, a lot of people were left wondering whether Chandrasekhar could have emerged victorious had he been pencilled in sooner. "Ini Karyam Nadakkum" ('Now things will move') was Chandrasekhar's campaign slogan. This may well be called Chandrasekhar's second coming in Kerala politics. Contrary to what many may believe, the contest

in Thiruvananthapuram wasn't his initiation in state politics, even if he was based in Bengaluru until then. Much before that, he had been a key mediator for getting the Bharat Dharma Jana Sena (BDJS), affiliated to the Ezhava community outfit Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), to join the National Democratic Alliance

(NDA) in 2016. That is when Chandrasekhar was named the NDA's vice-chairman for Kerala, despite being a Rajya Sabha MP from Karnataka. Now, he may be expected to act as a bridge to the Christian clergy and cater to their grievances. The Christian community in Kerala has traditionally stood with the Congress, although cracks have begun to appear in recent times. Chandrasekhar may be expected to utilise issues such as the controversy surrounding the Munambam suburb of Ernakulam, where some 600 LChristian and Hindu families are protesting against the Wakf Board's claim over the area. Notably, Chandrasekhar was a key figure in getting veteran leader PC George to merge his splinter party with the BJP. Shone George, the latter's son, is also expected to emerge as an important leader during Chandrasekhar's term. It would also be remiss not to mention Chandrasekhar's ownership of Asianet News, which has consistently topped BARC (Broadcast Audience Research Council) ratings for Malayalam news channels. He is the majority shareholder of the news channel through the holding company Jupiter Capital. While some BJP leaders think that with the channel maintaining an independent editorial line Chandrasekhar's business interests may backfire on him, that could be a thin reading of the situation. This view got amplified recently when he had to tweet an apology on account of the channel's alleged slighting of the Maha Kumbh on a news show.

Why's Turkey erupting for Ekrem Imamoglu? He's the biggest threat to Erdogan yet

In Turkey, the vox populi is rising once again, reminiscent of the Gezi uprising that occurred 12 years ago. After a week of continuous protests in multiple cities—against the arrest of Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu—authorities have put a ban on gatherings and detained close to 2,000 individuals. The unlawful and unconstitutional arrest of Imamoglu is the culmination of over two decades of political erosion under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's increasingly autocratic governance. It has systematically undermined democratic institutions, silenced dissent, and played up the Islamista agenda internationally, particularly on the matter of Kashmir. Now, in the streets of Turkey's major cities, thousands of people, mostly students and youth, are pushing back against Erdogan, and their defiance is growing louder by the day. At the heart of this unrest lies the struggle for Turkey's political future—and the figure leading this charge—Ekrem. Imamoglu, a calm and charismatic mayor, was arrested

under politically motivated charges of corruption and embezzlement—accusations that many see as a pretext for silencing a rising political star. His arrest was an absurd spectacle. Taken from his walk-in closet while calmly adjusting his tie, Imamoglu was detained merely hours before he was set to be nominated as the presidential candidate by Turkey's Opposition in the 2028 elections. For a leader with immense support across Turkey, this act of political repression has galvanised protests not just in Istanbul but across the nation. But why has one figure—mayor of Istanbul since 2019—become the focal point of such a significant crisis. Obscurity in 2019, defeating the candidate supported by Justice and Development Party (AKP) by 13,000 votes—when no one thought he could. Before Imamoglu, conservatives from the AKP had ruled Istanbul for 25 years. Erdogan himself owes the foundations of his political career to his mayorship of Istanbul in the 1990s.

BJP has a new Muslim strategy up its sleeve. Saugat-e-Modi isn't just about Bihar election

This Ramadan, a quiet gesture from the Narendra Modi government has stirred conversation. Eid kits for 32 lakh underprivileged Muslims, described as a goodwill initiative timed with the holy month. The offering appears festive, including familiar Eid ingredients such as dry fruits, semolina, vermicelli and sugar. The kits also include kurta-pyjamas for men and suit fabrics for women, all neatly packaged to reach Muslim households before Eid. At first glance, it appears to be a thoughtful cultural outreach by the Bharatiya Janata Party, an attempt to bring warmth and festivity into homes that might otherwise go without. But as with most things in Indian politics, the surface is rarely the whole story. The move hasn't gone unnoticed by political observers. Why this sudden and massive outreach to Muslims—by a party that has so far built much of its narrative on distancing itself from appeasement politics? This is the same BJP whose leaders have routinely criticised political opponents for attending Iftar parties, framing such gestures as opportunistic pandering. And yet, here we are, with the ruling party preparing curated Eid hampers not just for a symbolic few but for over 30 lakh Muslim households. For many, the question is not whether the gesture is kind—but why now, and why like this? The BJP's 'Saugat-e-Modi' kits have not only surprised political commentators but also drawn scathing remarks from the Opposition. For some, it's a clear contradiction of the BJP's usual stance on such gestures. But for political analysts watching the timing closely, the move seems less like a change of heart and more like a strategic calculation—with Bihar in mind. The upcoming Bihar assembly election has raised concerns within the BJP that rising Opposition

momentum could impact not just the party, but also its key allies—Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United), Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), and Jitan Ram Manjhi's Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular). In that light, the Eid outreach feels less like an act of cultural generosity and more like a political buffer—an attempt to soften the blow in a state where coalition math can shift quickly. That analysis may hold some truth—but it also seems to overlook the broader outreach pattern the BJP has been steadily building, particularly toward poor Muslims, Pasmanda communities, and Muslim women. Over the past few years, the party has made targeted efforts to create an opening within sections of the Muslim electorate long seen as distant. In the 2023 urban local body elections in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP went as far as fielding Pasmanda Muslim candidates—a move once considered politically unthinkable. Of the 395 Muslim candidates it fielded, 54 went on to win. These numbers may seem modest when seen in the larger national context, but they speak to a subtle shift in the party's approach. One that goes beyond gift boxes and hints at reimagining of BJP's political strategy—at least on the surface. BJP's effort to engage with Pasmanda and poor Muslims isn't new. In UP, Danish Ansari, a Pasmanda Muslim, was appointed as Minister of State for Minority Welfare, Muslim Waqf, and Haj in Yogi Adityanath's second cabinet—which was seen by many as a symbolic but politically significant move. The party and its spokespersons often claim that it was the BJP that made APJ Abdul Kalam the President of India, citing it as proof of its inclusive credentials. Added to this are a number of welfare schemes that directly or indirectly benefit

Trump should withdraw USCIRF's authorisation. It's interfering in India's domestic governance

In a strongly worded statement, Government of India has condemned and refuted the findings of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom report as "biased and politically motivated, and continuation of persistent attempts to misrepresent isolated incidents and cast aspersions on India's vibrant multicultural society which reflects USCIRF's deliberate agenda rather than a genuine concern for religious freedom". Though this is not the first time such reports have painted India as a coun-

try highly intolerant of its religious minorities, the March 2025 report is the first time a recommendation has been made for India to be designated as "country of particular concern". It alleges that minorities in India are facing 'deteriorating treatment'. Fifteen other countries, including Afghanistan, Russia, China, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, have been found to be treating their respective minorities badly. Three aspects of this report should be of concern to New Delhi, and it should be brought to

the attention of those the report is supposedly submitted to. The first is the report's mention of the assassination of separatist Sikh elements in Canada posing as members of the Sikh religious community and the alleged attempt on the life of another Khalistani separatist. "The Indian government also continued to expand its repressive tactics to target religious minorities abroad, specifically members of the Sikh community and their advocates... International reporting and intelligence from the Canadian govern-

ment corroborated allegations linking an official in India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and six diplomats to the 2023 assassination attempt of an American Sikh activist in New York," the report has said. It's important to note that these radical elements do not represent the Sikh community. While the Government of India has categorically rejected the allegation, the Canadian government and the prosecuting authorities in the then Biden dispensation initiated legal actions against Indian officials.

Honking ban ordered by DoE for schools

Delhi: The Delhi DoE has instructed all schools to prohibit illegal parking and honking. In response to increased noise and congestion outside schools, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee DPCC wrote to civic bodies, including DoE, with directives. New guidelines require private unaided recognized schools to create a silence zone awareness plan and issue letters to SHOs to reduce illegal parking and honking. All deputy directors of education (DDEs) at the district and zonal levels have been asked to inform school heads and ensure compliance with these measures. Dr. CS Verma, DoE deputy director at science. Order emphasized school zone traffic restriction. Officials said the initiative improves learning conditions. "Traffic congestion outside schools has been a long-standing issue, with frequent complaints from parents and residents about vehicles blocking gates



and causing excessive honking," a DoE spokeswoman said. Mount Abu School principal Jyoti Arora in Rohini said illegal parking and honking around Delhi schools are longstanding difficulties. "We are fighting a court case regarding an illegal auto stand near one of our schools," she said, adding that morning traffic is terrible. Erickshaws and street vendors choke roads, she said. Delhi Parents' Association president Aprajita Gautam said most schools are in traffic zones and may struggle to comply. Parents should limit horn use to reduce this. School transportation limitations and no-honking signs

Telangana govt resolute in raising reservation

HYDERABAD:

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao announced on Monday that the Congress government is determined to increase reservation for backward classes in education, employment, and political representation from 23% to 42%. In a post on the social media platform 'X,' he highlighted that the population of backward classes in the state stands at 56.36%, based on the recent caste survey conducted in Telangana.

The US canceled 2,000 Indian visa appointments

Delhi: The US embassy in India reported the cancellation of over 2,000 visa applications. Indians are one of the largest groups of immigrants to the US for labor, tourism, and study. Fraud prompted the US Embassy in India crackdown. Due to "bad actors" or bots' severe appointment system infractions, the embassy deactivated their accounts. "Consular Team India cancels 2,000 bot-made visa appointments. We don't tolerate agents and fixers who break scheduling rules. "Effective immediately, we are cancelling these appointments and sus-



pending the associated accounts' scheduling privileges," said the message. US visa applications in India are already backlogged, notably for B1 and B2 applicants. This visa is for business and tourism. Application wait times in 2022-23 ranged from 800 to 1,000 days. New Delhi has regularly expressed reservations about the wait time with

Washington. In 2022, foreign affairs minister S Jaishankar complained to then-US secretary of state Antony Blinken about visa delays. The Biden administration blamed COVID-19 for the backlog. During his January visit to Washington for Donald Trump's inauguration, Jaishankar raised the issue again with Marco Rubio, Blinken's successor.

The dual degree option at DU will help students learn more

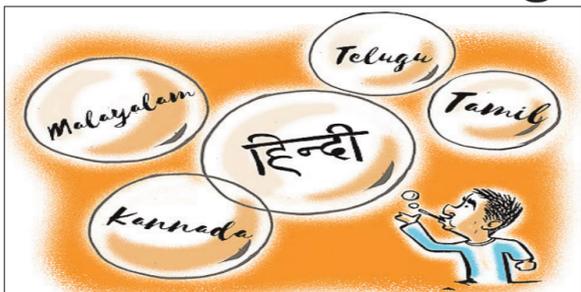
Delhi: The University of Delhi (DU) now allows students to pursue two degrees simultaneously. DU students can enroll in one degree through the normal mode at any DU-affiliated college or department and a second through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) through the School of

Open Learning. This policy gives existing students the option to expand their academic horizons without choosing between conventional and distant education. It has restrictions, though. Even with normal and ODL enrollment, students cannot enroll in two identical degrees (such as

BCom Hons and BCom Pass). DU dual degree qualifying requirements are simple but require careful planning. Students must meet both degrees' academic requirements. Attending classes, completing assignments, and passing tests for each program.

Most states, even non-BJP, give Hindi or Sanskrit as 3rd language

Delhi: As the Centre and Tamil Nadu argue over the controversial "three-language formula" in schools under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, most Hindi-speaking states, including those ruled by non-BJP parties, offer Sanskrit as a third language of study. Non-Hindi-speaking states usually offer Hindi. Private schools are offering foreign languages as third languages due to student demand. The method allows states to choose Indian languages for government and private schools. Most states have implemented the "three-language formula" up to Class 8, with some extending it to Class 10. Tamil Nadu, however, has a two-language policy.



Hindi, Sanskrit, and other languages are taught as third languages in most states, along with the region's mother tongue and English, depending on the medium of teaching. French, German, and Spanish are also in demand in Hindi- and non-Hindi-speaking countries. The Tamil Nadu govern-

ment has refused to sign an MoU with the Centre to implement the PM Schools for Rising India (PM-SHRI) scheme, which aims to upgrade 14,500 schools and make them model schools that embody NEP 2020, citing concerns about the "three-language formula" and Hindi language imposition.

IT-Delhi rose 255 places to 171st globally

Delhi: Among Indian universities for sustainability, IIT-Delhi rose 255 places to 171st globally, according to 2025 QS Rankings released. The QS Sustainability Rankings include 78 Indian universities, with nine of the top 10 improving and 21 new institutions entering. Two IITs—Delhi and Kanpur—are in the world's top 100 for impact. With 177 and 67 rank improvements, each became fourth and fifth in India. Bangalore's IISc is among the world's top 50 environmental education schools.

NAAC adopts e-inspections for new accreditation

Delhi: To eradicate corruption and speed up accreditation, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has stopped physical college inspections. Accreditation teams will now perform evaluations exclusively online, replacing on-cams visits with virtual examinations. But for colleges, the changeover will be hybrid; most inspections will be remote, but some reviewers will still visit campuses to retain some monitoring. The decision fol-

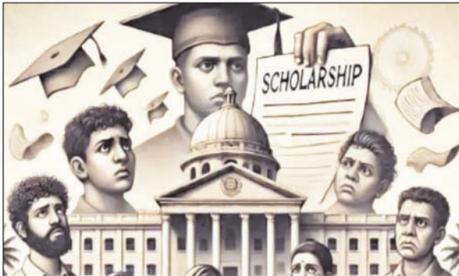


lows the CBI's recent arrests in the case involving Andhra Pradesh's Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation (KLEF), where management reportedly bribed NAAC peer visit inspectors for good ratings. "We chose to do whatever it takes

to eliminate corruption. "Stopping in-person visits will greatly reduce the issue," stated NAAC executive committee head Prof Anil Sahasrabudhe. "With so many weekly inspection visits, it was hard to track what happened. Now, all this is recorded." NAAC head Ganesan Kannabiran hailed the switch to online inspection a "surgical strike" against corruption. The latest CBI lawsuit challenged NAAC's peer review system.

Kerala cuts minority scholarships due to financial difficulties

Delhi: Kerala's government has cut minority community scholarships by 50%, putting thousands of students' education at risk, citing the financial crisis. Nine of the 11 minority welfare scholarship programs originally allotted Rs 13.6 crore are affected by the decision. The Government says the plan size reduction is a priority, but the disproportionate cut to minority student educational support raises questions about governmental priorities and social justice. Twitter shares The Prof Joseph Munda s e r y Scholarship, which received Rs 5.2 crore this year, suffered most. It has saved Muslim, Sikh, Jain, and Parsi high-achieving children by paying Rs 10,000 to those who scored A-Plus in all SSLC subjects and Rs 15,000 to those

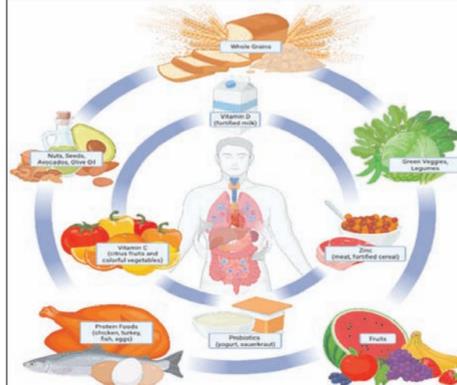


who scored 80% in upper secondary or 75% in vocational higher secondary. It ensured that bright students from underprivileged backgrounds were not forced to drop out due to financial constraints by prioritizing BPL students and providing provisions to economically weaker APL students. The crucial APJ Abdul Kalam Scholarship for minority students has also been cut in half. Those admitted to government-approved colleges on merit, with priority for BPL families,

receive the Rs 6,000 grant. Since it reserves 30% of funds for female students, the reduction could hurt young women who already struggle to enter higher education. Another affected program is the Mother Teresa Scholarship, which helps Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, and Parsi students in government nursing and paramedical diploma programs. Many aspiring nurses and paramedics, whose families cannot afford professional training, may have to quit.

Hospital visits decreased, learning metrics improved. Meal program passes

Delhi: The State Planning Commission SPC found that Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's breakfast policy had improved health and education in government schools. which shows that hospital visits among government primary school pupils reduced by 68.4% in rural areas and 29.4% in urban areas throughout this period, illustrating the program's impact on nutritionally challenged regions. In addition to health metrics, the Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission reported to Stalin on 13 March that the plan has increased student involvement in class. Nearly 5,300 urban and rural children showed improvements in attention and comprehension. Students' attention without urging grew



from 85.8 percent to 93.7 percent, and their ability to follow teachers' instructions increased from 91.3 percent to 95.5 percent. Students are also completing more written work, rising from 89.6% to 95.4%. The ability to learn new content increased from 88.1 percent to 92.5 percent, while lesson recall increased from 71.4 percent to 77 percent. Nearly 5,300

urban and rural children showed improvements in attention and comprehension. Students' attention without urging grew from 85.8 percent to 93.7 percent, and their ability to follow teachers' instructions increased from 91.3 percent to 95.5 percent. Students are also completing more written work, rising from 89.6% to 95.4%.

SC calls Punjab's NRI quota a 'fraud' on medical education

Delhi: The Supreme Court called Punjab's medical colleges' extension of the non-resident Indian (NRI) quota a "fraud" that excludes meritorious candidates. A bench chaired by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud dismissed petitions challenging a Punjab and Haryana high court ruling that invalidated the Punjab government's proposal to widen the NRI quota criteria to include distant relatives. We must end NRI quotas today! The bench, which included Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said the NRI quota was being used to circumvent merit-based admissions. The bench called such a broad interpretation of NRI eligibility, which permitted distant relatives to qualify, a "money-spinning tactic" that undermined the school system. "All three petitions fail. Keep this under control. This scam must end. This NRI business is a scam. Senior counsel Shadan Farasat stated that Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh previously employed the larger NRI quota interpretation during the hearing. The Court rejected these arguments, stressing that the larger definition weakened merit and permitted less deserving individuals to be admitted based on money and connections rather than academic performance. The panel agreed with Bhandari that NRI quotas should be kept for real NRIs and merit should not be ignored.



Samantha lauds Priyanka for her honesty

Samantha Ruth Prabhu praises Priyanka Chopra Jonas' honesty about daughter Malti Marie's premature birth and emotional announcement pressure in 2022

Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu has praised Priyanka Chopra Jonas for speaking about the premature birth of her daughter, Malti Marie, in 2022, and the emotional turmoil surrounding the announcement at the time.

Ruth Prabhu reshared a clip from Chopra Jonas' recent interview on her Instagram Stories, where the latter opened up about her daughter being born at 27 weeks and the couple feeling pressured to make the news public.

"So beautiful. Thank you, @priyankachopra. Your honesty is powerful. Loved this interview," Ruth Prabhu wrote.

In the interview, Chopra Jonas said she "shut down" upon learning about the early delivery and revealed that she and her husband, singer Nick Jonas, were compelled to announce the birth before they were ready.

"We were told that she's coming at 27 weeks. I just shut down. We got a text saying her birth is gonna be put out. We were kind of forced into announcing her birth. We weren't ready because we didn't know

what would happen with her," Chopra Jonas said. The actor and Nick Jonas welcomed Malti Marie via surrogacy in January 2022. Ruth Prabhu and Priyanka are connected through the global "Citadel" universe, they both play agents in different chapters of the Prime Video same spy-verse.



Photo: Instagram_@samantharuthprabhuoffi



Photo: Instagram_@mumtaztheactress

Mumtaz keeps fit at 78

Veteran actress Mumtaz shares a post-workout glimpse, flaunts her disciplined fitness routine in Instagram post

Veteran actress Mumtaz recently treated her fans and shared a glimpse of her post-workout routine. The actress who is 78 years old, is a regular with her workout.

She shared a picture on her social media of herself after exercising, and captioned it as, "#Mumtaz after Exercise". In the picture

shared by the actress, Mumtaz is seen standing at her home, dressed in an all-black workout T-shirt and leggings, paired with black footwear.

Mumtaz who is relatively new to social media, shares her life updates with her fans. A few weeks ago, Mumtaz was seen flaunting her freshly cut short hair. Facing the camera in a floral top, the actress asked her social

media family to comment on her new avatar as she values their opinion immensely.

She wrote the caption, "Hi lots of love to all my fans. I have cut my hair short today. I would like to know your opinion please. It means a lot for me. I value your opinion a lot. Whether you like or not. Let me know please. I will be waiting for your response. Thank you so much (red heart emoji) (sic)."

Ali Fazal turns presenter again

Actor returns to theatre roots as presenter for Amitosh Nagpal's *Mahanagar Jugnu* at Mumbai's Le' Chakallas Fringe Festival.

Ali Fazal is stepping into a powerful new role — that of a presenter for a stage production. The actor is backing *Mahanagar Jugnu*, a compelling play written and directed by noted playwright Amitosh Nagpal. The production will be staged as part of Le' Chakallas, a week-long fringe festival in Mumbai running from February 25 to March 1.

Produced by Ravi Srivastava at Artisan Coterie and presented by Mandali Talkies x Artisan Coterie, Le' Chakallas celebrates unfiltered art, fearless voices and radical creativity. The festival promises an immersive cultural experience, featuring theatre, poetry, storytelling, stand-up comedy, rap battles, beatboxing, open mics, music gigs, concerts, workshops, food pop-ups and artisan markets.

Unique acts like *Dastangoi*, *Jo Dooba So Paar*, *Qiseebaazi* and a stand-up performance by Varun Grover are also part of the line-up.

At the heart of the festival is *Mahanagar Jugnu*, a theatrical piece that captures the pulse and contradictions of urban life. Speaking about his association, Fazal said, "Theatre has always been my first love. It's where I learned to listen, to observe, and to truly inhabit a character. Turning presenter for *Mahanagar Jugnu* feels like coming full circle."

He added that the festival's spirit of rebellion and community makes it the perfect platform for stories that challenge and move audiences through live performance.

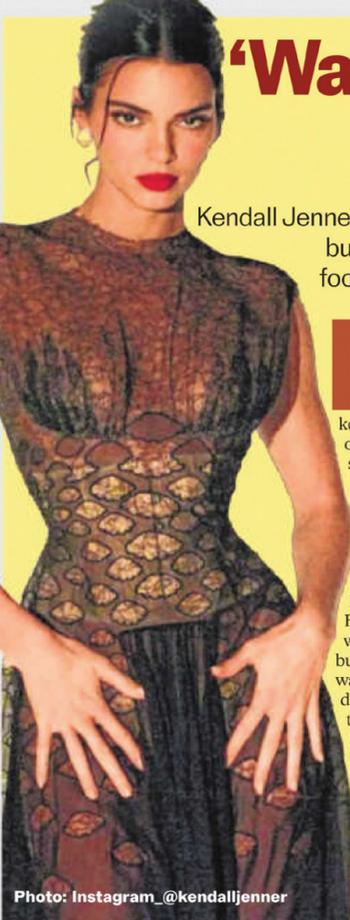


Photo: Instagram_@kendalljenner

'Want to focus on myself'

Kendall Jenner says she wants children someday but is currently too busy, choosing to focus on herself and personal growth

Model and reality TV star Kendall Jenner is keen to start a family one day, but feels she's simply too busy at the moment as she wants to focus on herself.

Kendall, who previously dated music star Bad Bunny, told *Vogue France* magazine: "I want to have some, but not right away. I want to make sure I can dedicate a lot of time to them, and for now, I'm still too busy."

Kendall's siblings Kourtney Kardashian, Kim Kardashian, Khloe Kardashian, Rob Kardashian and Kylie Jenner have all had children al-

ready. She is keen to "continue having a good time," reports *femalefirst.co.uk*.

Speaking about her goals for 2026, Kendall shared: "The most important thing will be to stay true to myself and continue having a good time. It might sound like a cliché, but it's very important to me."

She said that she was "too stressed" during her 20s, but she now feels more confident and stable than ever.

Kendall said: "I think most women, most people, understand this: when you're in your 20s, you don't always know exactly who you are or what you want, so things can quickly become difficult or stressful. "It was the same for me: when I was 20, I was too stressed and spent all my time running around. Now that I'm 30, I want to focus on myself."



Photos: Instagram Director Ali Abbas Zafar

Ali Abbas Zafar backs Ahaan

Director says Ahaan Panday has old-school romantic hero charm in upcoming action entertainer

Ali Abbas Zafar, known for blockbusters like *Sultan* and *Tiger Zinda Hai*, is now directing *Saiyaara* star Ahaan Panday in his upcoming untitled film produced by Yash Raj Films. The action entertainer will also feature Sharvari opposite him. The film goes on floors in Mumbai on March 30, followed by a 60-day schedule in the UK.

Ali Abbas Zafar says Ahaan has an old-school romantic hero charm that stands out in his generation. "What I love about Ahaan is his sincerity. In today's time, when everything can feel performative and an act, he brings a kind of old-school honesty to his performances, like the romantic heroes we have grown up watching and loving. The camera picks up on that. You can't act vulnerable on screen, it doesn't land, and he isn't afraid to be

vulnerable," he said.

Ali added that audiences have connected with Ahaan because "he's not trying to impress them. He's simply present in the moment." He believes Ahaan has the potential to become one of those rare romantic heroes who make viewers feel something long after the film ends.

Calling the film an emotional action-romance, Ali said, "Romance gives a hero grace. Action gives him fire. When grace and fire meet, it is a potent combination."



Photo: Instagram

Nargis Fakhri's painful win

Actress Nargis Fakhri had a rather painful end to what began as a celebratory moment as she lost her 'entire nail' after winning a game of darts, turning her victory into an unexpected mishap.

Sharing details of the incident on Instagram, Nargis gave fans a glimpse of how a fun game quickly resulted in an injury. The actress first shared a video of herself dancing as she won a game of darts, turning her victory into an unexpected mishap. "Playing darts. I won—that was my winner's dance." In the next story on Instagram, she shared a picture of her finger covered with a Band-Aid. She captioned the picture: "Lost the entire nail try to win." Darts is a competitive, skill-based target sport where players throw small, sharp-pointed missiles (darts) at a circular, numbered board.

Nargis was last seen in *Housefull 5*, a comedy thriller, directed by Tarun Mansukhani. It marks the fifth instalment of the *Housefull* franchise. The film features an ensemble cast including Akshay Kumar, Abhishek Bachchan,



Riteish Deshmukh, Sanjay Dutt, Fardeen Khan, Shreyas Talpade, Nana Patekar, Jackie Shroff, Dino Morea, Jacqueline Fernandez, Nargis Fakhri, Chitrangada Singh, Sonam Bajwa, Soundarya Sharma, Chunky Pandey, Nikitin Dheer and Johnny Lever.

A murder-mystery comedy, the film follows multiple impostors who claim to be the son of a recently deceased billionaire as they compete for his fortune aboard a luxury cruise ship. She was also seen in *Mastii 4* directed by Milap Zaveri.

It is the fourth installment in the *Mastii* film series. The film stars Riteish Deshmukh, Vivek Oberoi and Aftab Shivdasani. Nargis came to prominence in India with the 2011 romantic drama film *Rockstar*. She subsequently played a war correspondent in the political thriller *Madras Cafe*, and starred in the commercially successful comedies *Main Tera Hero* and *Housefull 3*. She has also appeared in the Hollywood action-comedy *Spy*.



Photos: Instagram_@nargisfakhri

Actress injures finger, loses entire nail after celebrating darts victory; shares mishap with fans on Instagram Stories

Briefs

Melania to preside over UNSC meet

US First Lady **Melania Trump** will preside over a UN Security Council meeting in what the UN on Thursday said would be a first.

When the wife of President Donald Trump takes her seat in the president's chair on Monday afternoon, it "will be the first time a first lady, or first gentleman for that matter, has ever presided over a Security Council meeting," UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters. The US takes over the rotating presidency of the 15-member council for March, and the First Lady's office said the meeting she will preside over will "emphasise education's role in advancing tolerance and world peace."

'Rapist' PIO sentenced to jail, caning

An Indian-origin Malaysian man was sentenced in Singapore to 12 years' jail and 12 strokes of the cane for raping a domestic worker outside a train station after tricking her into thinking he was a police officer. Sharveen Chetty, 48, pleaded guilty on February 4 to one charge of raping the 35-year-old Indonesian woman in the bushes outside Exit F of a subway, Little India Mass Rapid Transit station, at about 8pm on July 11, 2022. The victim was with her friends at the time, but Chetty lured her away before he sexually assaulted her.

Churchill statue defaced



Police said they caught a vandal red-handed, or at least with red paint, after he defaced a statue on Friday of former British PM Winston Churchill in London with pro-Palestinian graffiti. The 38-year-old suspect was arrested on suspicion of racially aggravated criminal damage for allegedly painting "Zionist war criminal" on the plinth beneath the 12-foot statue of Churchill leaning on a cane that faces Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament, Metropolitan Police said. "Stop the Genocide" and "Free Palestine" were also painted in red on the bronze sculpture.

Taylor Swift to marry on June 13

Reports confirm pop icon Taylor Swift and NFL star Travis Kelce are set to marry on June 13. The couple has chosen the exclusive Ocean House resort in Watch Hill for their nuptials. The selection of June 13 is a classic nod to Swift's signature lucky number, and the seaside venue sits just stoned away from her own famous high-hill mansion.

AF-PAK CONFLICT | UN, Russia and China ask the two warring neighbours to hold talks, resolve differences through diplomacy

Kabul, Islamabad urged to de-escalate tensions

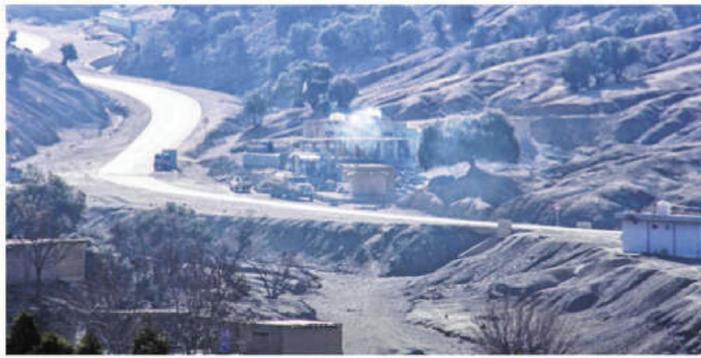
MUMBAI

After Pakistan said it considers itself in an "open war" with Afghanistan, post Kabul's retaliatory strikes, the United Nations, Russia and China have urged the warring nations to end the conflict and resolve their differences through diplomacy.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned escalating clashes between the two neighbours risk regional instability and urged them to hold dialogue and protect civilians. Guterres voiced concern over rising clashes and urged the two sides to avoid military confrontation. He asked both the countries to resolve disputes through talks and diplomacy and uphold international obligations, especially regarding the protection of people.

The Russian foreign ministry expressed concern over the "sharp escalation" of armed clashes, "involving regular army units, air force and heavy weapons". "There are casualties on both sides, including civilians. We call on our friendly countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, to abandon this dangerous confrontation and return to the negotiating table to resolve all differences through political and diplomatic means," foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said.

Kremlin's Special Envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov also urged Islamabad and Kabul to halt the hostilities. China, too, called on the



Smoke rises after a blast at a border post on the Afghan side of the Ghulam Khan crossing with Pakistan in Khost province on Friday. —AP/PTI

MUNIR BRIEFS PM ON WAR SITUATION

PM Shehbaz Sharif visited General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, where Chief of Defence Forces Asim Munir gave briefed him on the situation. Shehbaz said zero tolerance should be adopted against the nexus between the Afghan Taliban and Fitna al Khawarij and its malicious actions. "The actions of the Afghan Taliban regime and Fitna al Khawarij against Pakistan are unacceptable." Furthermore, a report said Shehbaz Sharif would visit Moscow, Russia, next week.

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Kremlin's Special Envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabul

Briefs

HOBART

Litchfield, Voll power Australia



Georgia Voll (101) made the most of three lifelines while Phoebe Litchfield hit a belligerent 80 to power Australia to a five-wicket win and an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match women's ODI series against reigning world champions India here on Friday. After India posted 251/9 on a batting-friendly deck following fifties from Pratika Rawal (52) and Harmanpreet Kaur (54), Australia batters romped home with 13.5 overs to spare. Voll completed her hundred after a dropped catch down the leg.

CHENNAI

Arshdeep says he's still honing craft



India pacer Arshdeep Singh said he is still learning the nuances of his craft like adaptability and staying ahead of batters from his senior partners Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammad Siraj. Arshdeep took three wickets, conceding a mere 24 runs, to keep the shackles on Zimbabwe batters in the T20 World Cup Super Eights match here. "I am the youngest of the bowling group. The team shows you trust, if you get a chance to put in two overs in power play, then the chance is that you'll get a lot of wickets."

NEW DELHI

Gavaskar lauds Abhishek



Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar admitted he was pleasantly surprised to see Abhishek Sharma play a defensive stroke, as the young opener returned to form with a composed half-century against Zimbabwe national cricket team in the T20 World Cup. Coming into the match after three successive ducks following a stomach infection, Abhishek appeared far from his usually dominant self.

English Daily

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CLOSE GAME | New Zealand, who lost by four wickets, will now have to wait for result of the Lanka-Pakistan game today

Jacks, Rehan propel England to stunning win

COLOMBO

Will Jacks and Rehan Ahmed pulled the rabbit out of the bag to stun New Zealand with a 44-run partnership that took England to what looked like an improbable four-wicket victory in their Super Eights match at the R Premadasa Stadium, on Friday.

Chasing 160 for victory, England were reeling at 117/6 in 16.5 overs and staring at defeat but Jacks' 32 off 18 and Ahmed's 19 off seven powered them home at 161/6 in 19.3 overs.

Pakistan will now need to beat Sri Lanka by 64 runs or chase in 13.1 overs, else NZ will make it to the semifinals with the first semifinal set to be staged in Kolkata if that happens.

Earlier, England's spinners showed their wares to limit a scratchy New Zealand to 159 for seven in their T20 World Cup Super Eights match here on Friday.

Opting to bat, the New Zealand innings lacked that one big knock that would have seen them post a better total in a game in which victory would secure their passage into the semifinals alongside England.

Glenn Phillips (39 off 28 balls), Tim Seifert (35 off 25 balls) and Finn Allen (29 off 19 balls) were the chief contributors for the Kiwis with the bat.

Will Jacks (2/23), Adil Rashid (2/28) and Rehan Ahmed (2/28) were excellent with the ball for England, stifling the New Zealand batters in the middle overs after their pacers were smashed around.

Jofra Archer, who was spit-



Scoreboard

NZ: T Seifert st Buttler b Rashid 35, F Allen c Bethell b Jacks 29, R Ravindra c Bethell b R Ahmed 11, G Phillips b Jacks 39, M Chapman st Buttler b Rashid 15, D Mitchell c Jacks b Dawson 3, M Santner (not out) 9, C McConchie b R Ahmed 14, M Henry (not out) 1. Extras (LB-1, W-2) 3. **Total** (For 7 wkts, 20 overs) 159. **Fall of wickets:** 1-64, 2-

66, 3-97, 4-123, 5-133, 6-135, 7-152 **Bowling:** J Archer 3-1-24-0, L Dawson 4-0-32-1, S Curran 1-0-10-0, A Rashid 4-0-28-2, W Jacks 4-0-23-2, J Bethell 1-0-13-0, R Ahmed 3-0-28-2.

ENGLAND: P Salt c Seifert b Henry 2, J Buttler c Seifert b Ferguson 0, H Brook c Mitchell b Phillips 26, J Bethell c Phillips b Ravindra 21, T Banton c Chapman b Ravindra 33,

S Curran c Phillips b Ravindra 24, W Jacks (not out) 32, R Ahmed (not out) 19. Extras (LB-3, W-1) 4. **Total** (For 6 wkts, 19.3 overs) 161 **Fall of wickets:** 1-2, 2-2, 3-50, 4-58, 5-100, 6-117 **Bowling:** M Henry 2.3-0-19-1, L Ferguson 2-0-14-1, M Santner 4-0-29-0, C McConchie 1-0-13-0, G Phillips 4-0-43-1, R Ravindra 4-0-19-3, I Sodhi 2-0-21-0

ting fire the other night against Pakistan, started with a maiden over that also included a New Zealand review after the on-field umpire adjudged Tim Seifert out caught behind following a loud appeal and a noise that probably came from the ball hitting the thigh pad.

TV replays, however, clearly showed that there was no

edge and the decision was overturned.

Liam Dawson too kept Seifert and Finn Allen quiet in the first four deliveries of the second over until the former swept the left-arm spinner for a boundary through deep square-leg.

At the other end, Archer seemed to be on song as he got the ball to swing, seam

and bounce at great speed, but when he tried the slower ball, Finn clobbered it over mid-on for the game's first six.

Finn was beginning to look dangerous and against Dawson, he went down the ground and timed his shot to perfection to get another six.

Taking a cue from his partner's batting, Seifert too got into the act.

Shepherd wants to keep level head ahead of India game

The West Indies all-rounder says they have destiny in their own hands to seek semifinal berth in Kolkata

AHMEDABAD

West Indies all-rounder Romario Shepherd hopes to recover quickly from the nine-wicket loss to South Africa and be ready for the must-win game against India in Kolkata on Sunday. West Indies and India have their destiny in their own hands, and a winner will progress to the semis of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, with South Africa already through from the group.

"We want to just keep a level head and try and, you know, recover as fast as possible, for that big game is a must-win game. So we know our destiny is in our own hands. So hopefully, you know, we can go there and you know, get a win and go to the setting," Shepherd said in the mixed zone interaction on Thursday night.

Shepherd lit up the ICC Men's T20 World Cup with five for against Scotland, including a hat-trick. He became the first from the West Indies to do that in the ICC T20 World Cups.

He later had a quiet tournament and also missed a couple of games, apparently due to a minor injury. But he was back in the news at the Narendra Modi stadium by smashing an unbeaten fifty at No 9 position and creating a record in the company of Jason Holder against South Africa with an 89-run partnership, which is the highest ever eighth wicket stand in T20Is, among full members.

"It was a good surface, and we had a good start. Maybe we could have capitalised on it as South Africa batters showed how good the wicket was. It was tough to defend.



West Indies' Romario Shepherd plays a shot during the Super Eights match against South Africa. PTI

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Romario Shepherd, West Indies all-rounder

Even when we lost wickets, every batter was telling the wicket was good. It was left to the lower order to do the job, and when I hit the first few balls through the line, I realised the wicket was actually good, and we carried on," Shepherd said after the match in the mixed zone.

The all-rounder smashed four huge sixes and showed the batting depth of the West Indies ahead of the do-or-die clash against India on Sunday. Holder also cleared boundaries with ease. With the likes of big hitters in Shimron Hetmyer, Sherfane Rutherford, and Rovman Powell, Indian bowlers need to execute well, as South African bowlers showed on Thursday.

West Indies didn't read the conditions well in Ahmedabad, but they have already played a couple of games in Kolkata and are familiar with the conditions. They won the T20 World Cup at Eden Gardens in 2016. India will be wary of the unpredictable and mercurial West Indies.

West Indies' worry will be their dot ball percentage; they played 53 dot balls against South Africa, while India has big hitting ability, and also rotates the strike smartly to keep the pressure on the opposition. Their bowling has lacked bite, and Shepherd and Holder will like to deliver with the ball in the company of Shamar Joseph and Matthew Forde.

Rinku Singh's father dies after battle with liver cancer

Khanchand Singh's condition had worsened significantly in the past few days: Dr Sunil Kumar

LUCKNOW

Khanchand Singh, father of Indian cricketer Rinku Singh, passed away at a private hospital in Greater Noida on Friday morning after battling stage 4 liver cancer.

Dr Sunil Kumar, spokesperson for Yatharth Hospital, said Khanchand Singh's condition had worsened significantly in the past few days. He was admitted to the hospital on February 21 and placed on ventilator support.

"His condition had deteriorated significantly. He was put on ventilator support and breathed his last early this morning," Dr Kumar said.

Rinku Singh left the ICC Men's T20 World Cup camp on Tuesday evening and rushed home after being informed about his father's critical health condition. He rejoined the team but when can to know about death of his father on Friday morning, he flew down to Delhi and reached Aligarh. Later he attended cremation of his father.

Stage 4 liver cancer refers



Cricketer Rinku Singh gives a shoulder to the mortal remains of his father, Khanchand Singh. ANI

to an advanced stage of the disease in which cancer cells spread beyond the liver to other parts of the body. While it cannot be cured at this stage, treatment can help in slowing its progression and managing symptoms.

Condolences poured in from the cricketing fraternity. Former India cricketers Yuvraj Singh and Harbhajan Singh were among those who expressed their sympathies on social media.

Rinku is engaged to Samajwadi Party MP Priya Saroj. Despite his illness, Khanchand Singh attended

his son's engagement ceremony at a hotel in Lucknow in June 2025.

A gas cylinder delivery worker by profession, Khanchand Singh was initially uncertain about his son's decision to pursue cricket. His perspective changed after Rinku was named player of the series at a School T20 World Cup held in Aligarh, his hometown. The organisers had presented Rinku with a motorcycle in recognition of his performance. Khanchand Singh later used the motorcycle for his delivery work, transporting gas cylinders.

Zealand, while England have already sealed a last-four berth. Pakistan, currently third in the table, are battling New Zealand for the second qualification spot. However, the Kiwis hold a command-

ing advantage with three points and a superior net run rate of 3.050, compared to Pakistan's solitary point and negative NRR of -0.461.

Pakistan can still progress if England hammer New Zealand by a massive margin and Salman Ali Agha's side respond with an equally dominant win over Sri Lanka. Yet, such a turnaround would demand a clinical display from a side that has largely misfired in the tournament.

Sahibzada Farhan has

Rabada puts team first over individual performance

Proteas pace spearhead says most importantly they are winning

AHMEDABAD

Kagiso Rabada has been the pace spearhead of the South African bowling ever since legendary Dale Steyn retired, and he has performed exceptionally well.

But he had not fully arrived in the tournament until the Super Eight game against West Indies, when he breathed fire, taking 2 for 22 to overtake legendary Steyn and become his side's second-highest wicket-taker in the history of the ICC T20 World Cup. Rabada has 32 wickets in 28 innings at an average of 25.46, as compared to Steyn's 30 wickets.

Before the game, he had just two wickets in five games in the tournament and had been expensive by his standards. However, he had also been unlucky to be at the receiving end of dropped catches and luck eluding him at times.

"That's just the game of cricket. How many times does it actually go for you, and how many times does it not? More often than not, it goes for you.



South Africa's Kagiso Rabada bowls against West Indies. PTI

Unfortunately, now it hasn't been, but the most important thing is that we've been winning," Rabada reacted to four dropped catches on his bowling in the tournament during an interaction with the media on Thursday.

That's just the game of cricket. How many times does it actually go for you, and how many times does it not? More often than not, it goes for you.

Kagiso Rabada
South Africa pacer

His previous wickets were against Canada and Afghanistan. In fact, he took a wicket against Afghanistan on the no-ball, giving Noor Ahmed a free hit when Afghanistan should have been all-out. Noor took full advantage to tie the match, but Proteas eventually prevailed after two super overs.

"I'm glad we won that game against Afghanistan. Otherwise, I would have blamed myself for sure. On the positive side, I made it interesting, but if we had lost that game, I would have taken

it quite heavily, to be honest," Rabada admitted.

Rabada delivered when the West Indies were threatening to take away the game with a rapid start of 29 in two overs. He dismissed Shai Hope and dangerous Shimron Hetmyer in his first over to put the Caribbean side on the back foot.

Lungi Ngidi, who has been a revelation in the tournament with his variations, followed with another double strike to further derail the Windies' innings. He has been their leading wicket-taker.

"I'm extremely happy for Lungis (Lungi Ngidi). He's been under quite a lot of scrutiny over the past two to five years, and that's what you have to deal with as an athlete. I'm incredibly proud of how he's actually turned that around for himself. And I'm extremely happy for him. He's a good friend of mine."

Talking about Ngidi's variations, especially the cutters, Rabada said. "It's incredibly hard. Everyone's just asking him, 'What do you do, what do you do?' And he says it's really simple, but it's difficult."

touch and go

Pakistan need big win to make it to semifinals

PALLEKELE

Pakistan national cricket team will require a thumping victory over already-eliminated Sri Lanka national cricket team — and a significant favour from England cricket team — to keep their semifinal hopes alive in the T20 World Cup when they play their final Super 8 fixture on Saturday.

Sri Lanka have bowed out of the semifinal race after defeats to England and New

Sri Lanka have bowed out of the semifinal race after defeats to England and New Zealand, while England have already sealed a last-four berth.

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ing advantage with three points and a superior net run rate of 3.050, compared to Pakistan's solitary point and negative NRR of -0.461.

Pakistan can still progress if England hammer New Zealand by a massive margin and Salman Ali Agha's side respond with an equally dominant win over Sri Lanka. Yet, such a turnaround would demand a clinical display from a side that has largely misfired in the tournament.

Sahibzada Farhan has

been Pakistan's standout performer, amassing 283 runs at an average of 70.75, including a century and two fifties at a strike rate of 158.10. Beyond him, however, the batting has struggled. Shadab Khan's 111 runs make him the second-highest scorer, while skipper Salman Ali Agha (44), Saim Ayub (70) and Babar Azam (91) have failed to find consistency.



Much will rest on the explosive Fakhar Zaman to ignite the innings.

In the bowling department, Usman Tariq's 10 wickets have offered encouragement, while Shaheen Shah Afridi showed glimpses of form against England despite the defeat.

For Sri Lanka, pride will be at stake in their final outing. The co-hosts began brightly, notably crushing Australia in the group stage, but successive losses to

Zimbabwe, England and New Zealand derailed their campaign.

Pathum Nissanka's century against Australia remains a rare highlight in an otherwise underwhelming tournament marked by fragile batting and ineffective bowling. Sri Lanka have repeatedly lost early wickets and struggled to contain opposition sides in key moments.

With nothing but pride to play for, Sri Lanka will hope to salvage some cheer from their passionate home.