

AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

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

Briefs

CHANDIGARH

‘Mann foreign visit blocked by Centre’

The Union government has denied political clearance to the Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann to visit the UK and Israel in February to attract investments, ruling Aam Aadmi Party said here on Wednesday. Mann was to be accompanied by Industries minister Sanjeev Arora along with some senior officials on his visit to the UK and Israel for about 10 days, next month, though the Centre has denied the political clearance to Mann and his delegation. The senior officials who were to accompany Mann were said to be chief secretary KAP Sinha, principal secretary to CM, Ravi Bhagat, besides others from the industries department.

KOLKATA

2 more nurses show Nipah symptoms

Two more nurses were on Wednesday admitted to the Beliaghata ID Hospital here after they showed symptoms of the Nipah virus infection, a health department official said. The two were engaged in the treatment of a health worker who tested positive for the Nipah virus at Burdwan Medical College and Hospital. One of the duo was brought to city hospital late Jan 13 night, while the other, a house staff member, was shifted from the Bardhaman facility on early Wednesday.

CHANDIGARH

Bomb threat at Ludhiana district court

Security agencies across Punjab were put on alert mode on Wednesday after bomb threats were received by Ludhiana district court and a school in Moga district on their respective official email addresses. While the court proceedings were disrupted as the same remained suspended during the police search operation, the Moga school was also suspended and the students sent home ahead of the police search operation. It is the second time in less than a week that a bomb threat was received by a district court, earlier being on January 8, last, when such threats were received by district courts of Ropar, Anandpur Sahib, Ferozepur, Mansa and Moga, which had turned out to be hoax.

LUCKNOW

10th India Food Expo from Jan 16

Positioning Uttar Pradesh as a rising hub for food processing and agri-based industries, the Indian Industries Association on Wednesday announced the 10th edition of India Food Expo 2026, which will be held in Lucknow from Jan 16 to 18, bringing together stakeholders from across the country's food value chain.

EYE ON TN | Modi celebrates ‘global festival’ at Union minister Murugan’s home in Delhi, praises Tamil culture and way of life

Pongal turns poll field

NEW DELHI

With the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections barely four months away, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday effusively praised the Tamil culture and way of life while speaking at a Pongal celebration organised at union minister DL Murugan's residence here.

Extending greetings to people in Tamil, Modi also noted how “today, Pongal has become a global festival” and is celebrated with enthusiasm by Tamil communities and those who cherish Tamil culture across the world.

Insisting that Pongal inspires us to be grateful towards nature, Modi also stressed on keeping the soil healthy, conserving water and using resources in a balanced



PM Narendra Modi performs rituals as Union ministers G Kishan Reddy and L Murugan look on during ‘Pongal’ celebrations at the latter’s residence, in New Delhi

manner for the next generation.

Stating that he was someone who celebrated this festival as well, the PM said, “Pongal is a pleasant experience, which embodies gratitude towards the toil of the farmers, the earth, and the Sun, and also

guides us towards maintaining a balance in nature, family and society.”

Modi also declared that “Tamil culture is one of the most ancient living civilizations in the world”. Recalling his visits to Tamil Nadu and its various temples last year, Modi

said Tamil culture is a shared heritage of the entire nation, and indeed, of all humanity.

Insisting that Pongal inspires us to be grateful towards nature, Modi also stressed on keeping the soil healthy, conserving water and using resources in a balanced manner for the next generation.

The Pongal celebration was also attended by union ministers G Kishan Reddy, K Rammohan Naidu, Arjun Ram Meghwal and V Somanna.

After the event, Modi posted on “X” about the celebration at Murugan's residence saying, they “reflected warmth and vibrancy of Pongal” and hoped the festival would “add joy in everyone's life”.

GUWAHATI

The final hours of Assam's most loved singer and cultural icon, Zubeen Garg, came into sharp and painful focus on Tuesday as a coroner's court in Singapore heard that the 53-year-old artist was severely intoxicated and swimming without a life vest when he drowned near Lazarus Island last September.

Testifying before the court, Assistant Superintendent of Police David Lim of the Singapore Police Coast Guard said Garg had consumed a “significant amount of alcohol” and repeatedly refused to wear a life jacket before entering the sea from a private yacht on September 19, 2025.

According to the testimony, Garg and several companions boarded the yacht at Marina at Keppel Bay around 2 pm. All passengers were briefed on safety procedures and instructed to wear life vests. Garg initially complied, but after jumping into the water, he removed the vest, reportedly saying it was too large and uncomfortable.

“He returned briefly to the yacht, and witnesses observed that he was breathing heavily,” ASP Lim told the court. Despite visible signs of fatigue and concern expressed by



While Singapore cops don't suspect any foul play over the death, Assam Police has filed a murder case

those around him, Garg chose to re-enter the water.

When a smaller life jacket was offered and placed over his shoulders, Garg again declined to wear it. Moments later, as friends urged him to swim back to the yacht, he suddenly stopped moving and was seen floating face down. Witnesses reported foam coming from his mouth, triggering panic on board.

Garg was quickly pulled out of the water by his companions, who attempted cardiopulmonary resuscitation before rushing him to Singapore General Hospital. He was pronounced dead at 5:13 pm. The official cause of death was confirmed as drowning.

Autopsy findings presented

in court underscored the risks Garg had faced in the water. Dr Chan Shijia, a pathologist with Singapore's Health Sciences Authority, testified that Garg had 333 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood — more than four times the legal drink-driving limit in Singapore. Such levels, she said, would have severely impaired his coordination, balance and judgment.

The autopsy found no illicit drugs in his system, apart from prescribed medication for hypertension and epilepsy. Bruises found on his chest and lips were consistent with attempts to revive him, the court was told.

State Counsel Sean Teh said the inquiry involves 35 witnesses, with seven testifying on January 14. ASP Lim confirmed that investigators found no evidence of suicide, coercion or external pressure leading up to the incident.

Garg was in Singapore to attend the North East India Festival, an event celebrating the culture and music of the region he had long represented on national and global stages. His uncle, Manoj Kumar Bothakur, appeared before the court and sought clarity on a question that continues to haunt the family—whether Garg had entered the water entirely of his own volition.

DMK MP's ‘girls in north’ remark stirs row

CHENNAI

Senior DMK leader Dayanidhi Maran on Wednesday said girls in Tamil Nadu were asked to study, whereas their counterparts in the north were asked to stay at home,

be in kitchen and bear children, and the remark evoked a strong reaction from the BJP. Condemning Maran's comment, BJP leader Narayanan Thirupathy accused the DMK of “trying to create regional rifts.” At a function here on

Tuesday, Maran said, “everything for everyone” (Elarukum ellam) is the goal of the Dravidian model of Stalin government. Boys and girls in Tamil Nadu are expected to use the laptop distributed by the government either to face an interview or for

their post graduation studies with confidence, the DMK MP said. “In Tamil Nadu, we tell the women to study. But what is told in the North India? They say girls should not go to work, they should be at home, be in the kitchen, bear children,” Maran said.

Lit fest discussion on book about Babur cancelled, writer protests

BHOPAL

Architect-turned-writer Aaabhass Maldahiya on Wednesday took to X to lament the cancellation of a discussion on his book about Mughal Emperor Babur at the Bhopal Literature and Art Festival (BLF).

Police apprehended that right-wing organisations would oppose the event and there would be vandalism, claimed the organisers of the festival, which was held from January 9 to 11.

Posting on X an open letter

addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Maldahiya said a session on his book “Babur: The Quest for Hindustan” was cancelled after a newspaper wrongly accused him of trying to glorify Babur.

“On the basis of these baseless accusations, some so-called Hindu organisations issued serious threats, which included threats to burn my book and damage book-stores,” he said.

Maldahiya told PTI over phone from Bengaluru that it was unfortunate that without reading the book, ‘Swadesh’

newspaper published a story, which led to the cancellation of the event.

The newspaper, however, claimed that they were not against the writer or the book, but considered Babur to be “irrelevant”.

According to Maldahiya, he sent a clarification to the newspaper which was not published. Subsequently, the organisers arranged a session on ‘Ancient Architecture’, he said.

Swadesh editor Atul Tare told PTI that they had no objection to the book or the author.

JAIPUR

Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi on Wednesday said the Army was actively integrating its veterans into the country's security framework and nation-building efforts, while expanding welfare, healthcare and resettlement initiatives for ex-servicemen and their families.

Addressing an event to mark Armed Forces Veterans Day, he said ex-servicemen contributed to India's security, governance, industry and social development well beyond active service.

“Whenever the nation has called, our veterans have stood firmly with the country under all circumstances,” General Dwivedi said and described it as a reflection of their “deeply ingrained sense of national duty and responsibility”.

Armed Forces Veterans' Day is celebrated on January



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh and Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi release a book during the 10th Defence Forces Veterans' Day celebrations, at Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi on Wednesday

14 every year to recognise the service rendered by the first Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Field Marshal K M Cariappa, who retired on this day in 1953.

Highlighting the Army's expanding welfare ecosystem, General Dwivedi said that Project NAMAN, launched in August 2024 to provide a dedi-

cated support system for defence pensioners and their families, has reached a major milestone. “On the occasion of this Army Day, the 100th NAMAN centre is being inaugurated,” he said, adding that the aim is to establish nearly 200 such centres by January next year, including in remote locations,” he said.

Today, the world listens when India speaks: Rajnath
Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday said that India has emerged as a strong and developed nation, adding that while the country was earlier not taken seriously on international platforms, today the world listens when India speaks. Addressing the 10th Armed Forces Veterans' Day, he urged veterans to continue guiding the nation and highlighted importance of promoting social harmony. He said, “Today, India is moving forward as a strong and developed nation. Earlier, India was not taken seriously on international platforms, but today, when India speaks, world listens.”

Lokpal bins graft complaint against BJP MP Dubey

NEW DELHI

Anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal has dismissed a graft complaint against BJP MP Nishikant Dubey and termed the allegations as “frivolous” and “vexatious”.

In its 134-page order, the Lokpal said the complainant -- ex-IPS officer Amitabh Thakur -- has failed to make out any case to persuade it to proceed against Dubey regarding the allegation of acquisition of disproportionate assets than the known sources of his income.

“The allegations made against RPS (Respondent Public Servant) are frivolous and vexatious, including complainant indulging in what-aboutery,” said the order issued on Tuesday by a Lokpal bench, headed by its chairperson Justice AM Khanwilkar.

Lucknow-based Thakur, who is also the national president of Azad Adhikar Sena party, had in May last year filed a complaint against Dubey alleging acquisition of disproportionate assets by him.

RJD will merge with my party, says Tej Pratap after hosting dad Lalu at feast



Tej Pratap Yadav with Lalu Prasad in Patna on Wednesday

PATNA

RJD president Lalu Prasad on Wednesday participated at ‘dahi-chuda’ party hosted by his elder son Tej Pratap Yadav on the occasion of Makar Sankranti at his residence, nearly eight months after expelling him from the party as well as also from the family.

Lalu, who is in his late 70s and keeps indoors because of multiple health complications, turned up at Tej Pratap's house. Significantly, when a reporter asked Lalu whether he was unhappy with Tej Pratap, he replied in the negative.

Besides Lalu, Bihar governor Arif Mohammad Khan,

deputy chief minister Vijay Kumar Sinha and other dignitaries also attended the feast. Tej Pratap's mother and former chief minister Rabri Devi, and his younger brother and leader of opposition in state assembly Tejashwi Yadav skipped the feast. Tej Pratap had floated his own political outfit, Janshakti Janata Dal (JJD), after his expulsion from RJD and also unsuccessfully contested the last assembly election from Mahua. He was expelled from RJD by Lalu over his “irresponsible behaviour” and “violation of family values” after a Facebook post featured him with a woman. He claimed that his Facebook account was hacked and also deleted the post.

HC ruling in ED raid case an embarrassment to Mamata: BJP

NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Wednesday termed the Calcutta High Court's setting aside the objection by the Trinamool Congress to the raid by the Enforcement Directorate at the office of its consultancy firm I-PAC on January 8 as a “massive embarrassment” for West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee.

In a statement, BJP's national information and technology department in-charge Amit Malviya said the High Court's decision was a “sharp rebuke” to Banerjee's “blatant interference” during the course of the ED raid.

Akhilesh urges party cadre to stay alert for 2027 battle

LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party national president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday met a large number of party workers and leaders from various districts at the party's state headquarters, calling on them to remain alert, united and fully prepared for the 2027 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections.

Greeting party workers on the occasion of Makar Sankranti, Yadav said the real battle of elections is fought at the booth level and stressed that every worker must strengthen their respective booths.

“Saving votes and winning booths is the biggest responsibility of Samajwadi Party

workers. Ensure that the names of all eligible voters who have been left out are added to the electoral rolls through Form-6. Remain completely alert to the BJP's tactics. There should be no lapse in 2027,” he said.

Launching a sharp attack on the BJP and the RSS, the former chief minister alleged that the “Sangh Parivar” posed the biggest threat to democracy and the Constitution. He accused the BJP of being adept at spreading misinformation and creating false narratives. Referring to the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, Yadav said not a single infiltrator was found in the entire process, yet attempts were made to mislead the public.

Swiggy, Flipkart, Zepto too drop 10-minute delivery claim

NEW DELHI

After Blinkit, major quick commerce players Zepto, Swiggy Instamart, and Flipkart Minutes have dropped their ‘10-minute’ delivery branding following pressure from the government and labour rights groups over the welfare and safety of delivery partners.

The move comes after Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya urged quick commerce firms to prioritise worker safety by removing 10-min deadlines. It was being said that such delivery promises put undue stress on riders, potentially compromising their safety.

Aravalli report

Encroachments, illegal mining hit eco system

NEW DELHI

Encroachments, deforestation, illegal mining and urban infrastructure expansion in the Aravalli ranges have severely impacted groundwater recharge, biodiversity, air quality and climate regulation, according to a study.

Extensive diversion of for-

Sariska and Bardod Wildlife Sanctuaries prior to the 1980s, led to a substantial decline in native forest cover, fragmenting critical wildlife habitats and water catchments, it noted.

The research, Eco-restoration of the Aravalli Landscape, was undertaken by Sankala Foundation with support from the Embassy of Denmark in India and Western States Forest



Department.

The Aravalli Range, one of the oldest mountain systems in India, is a critical natural

barrier and life-sustaining ecosystem for the NCR and the Indo-Gangetic Plains of India. “Encroachments, deforestation,

system, spanning over four states and 29 districts, home to over 50 million people, is under severe threat due to deforestation, unsustainable land use, including rapid urbanisation, and widespread land degradation and desertification,” said the report launched on Wednesday by Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav.

ation, illegal mining, and urban infrastructure expansion have severely impacted groundwater recharge, biodiversity, air quality, and climate regulation in this fragile ecosystem and have weakened the Aravalli's capacity to act as a green barrier, accelerating desertification and threatening the ecological stability of the northern plains,” the study



IIT (BHU), FAARD Foundation Join Hands for Sustainable Rural Development

Varanasi

In a significant step towards strengthening agri-innovation and rural development, the Indian Institute of Technology (Banaras Hindu University), Varanasi and the Foundation for Advancement of Agriculture and Rural Development (FAARD Foundation), Varanasi have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to collaboratively work for sustainable agricultural growth and livelihood security in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. The MOU was formally signed by Prof. Amit Patra, Director, IIT (BHU), Varanasi and Prof. Panjab Singh, President, FAARD Foundation. The agreement, valid for a period of five years, aims to integrate cutting-edge research, digital technologies and grassroots implementation to benefit farmers, rural youth and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPO). Under this strategic partnership, both institutions will jointly work towards creating Eastern Uttar Pradesh as a "Lighthouse Region" for agri-innovation by combining IIT (BHU) technical expertise and advanced research infrastructure with FAARD Foundation extensive grassroots network and experience in rural development. Addressing the gathering, Prof. Amit Patra, Director, IIT (BHU), stated that the collaboration reflects the institute commitment to translating research into real-world impact and empowering farming communi-



ties through technology-driven solutions. Speaking on the occasion, Prof. Panjab Singh, President, FAARD Foundation, highlighted that the partnership will strengthen farmers' access to modern technologies, knowledge and markets, ensuring sustainable livelihoods and enhanced income for rural households. Subsequently, Prof. Rajesh Kumar, Dean (Research & Development), IIT (BHU), elaborated on the key areas of collaboration under the MOU. He informed that the partnership will focus on demonstration and dissemination of smart agricultural technologies, development of AI and IOT-driven digital twin platforms, establishment of a digital knowledge repository, promotion of youth agripreneurship, integration of climate-smart and renewable energy solutions, capacity building of FPO, hands-on training for students, farmer field trials and joint development of funded research projects for large-scale technology deployment. The MOU signing ceremony was graced by senior officials and academicians from both institu-

tions. From IIT (BHU), Prof. N.K. Mukhopadhyay, Dean (Faculty Affairs), Prof. Rajesh Kumar, Dean (Students' Affairs), Prof. Hiralal Pramanik, Dean (Resources and Alumni) and Prof. Devendra Singh, Dean (Academic Affairs) were Present. From FAARD Foundation, Trustee Dr. Rajesh Singh, PRO, BHU and Editor, FAARD Samvaad, Trustee Dr. Umesh Singh, Training and Placement Officer, BHU and Sub-Editor, FAARD Samvaad and Trustee Dashrath Singh also attended the programme. Both institutions will jointly share intellectual property generated through collaborative projects and establish a strong two-way feedback and technology transfer mechanism between rural communities and research laboratories to foster continuous innovation and sustainable development. This landmark collaboration marks a major milestone in building a robust, inclusive and sustainable agri-innovation ecosystem in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, creating new opportunities for farmers, youth and agripreneurs.

The fearless voice of Banaras journalism has become silent

Varanasi

The passing of Gopesh Pandey, a renowned senior journalist from Varanasi, is not just the loss of an individual, but a profound blow to the journalistic tradition of Kashi. The void left by his passing will be difficult to fill. He was one of those rare journalists for whom journalism was not a profession, but a moral responsibility to society. In a condolence meeting organized by the Kashi Journalist Association on Tuesday, people associated with journalism, politics, education and social service shared their memories and paid heartfelt tributes. Speakers present on the occasion said, "Late Gopesh Pandey always made honesty, fearlessness and value-based journalism the basic mantra of his life. He never compromised on telling the truth. Neither was he afraid of power nor was he greedy for position. He never cowered or bowed down. When it came to principles, he strongly presented his point of view even in front of the management. This was the reason why he became a name of respect as well. In his contributions were unforgettable not only as a journalist, but also as a sensitive and committed citizen. As the former president of the Kashi Journalists' Association, he tirelessly fought for the unity, rights and dignity of



journalists. He was a mentor to young journalists, teaching them that humanity and truth came before news. The tribute paid to him at the Kashi Journalists' Association was not merely a formal event, but an expression of the respect and love that the city journalists, dignitaries, members of various political parties and social organizations held for him. Every eye was moist, every word expressed a sense of belonging and every silence deeply saddened. Gopesh Pandey may not be physically present with us today, but his fearless pen, value-based thinking and courageous legacy will forever guide Banaras journalism. He will live on, not in memories, but in principles. Kashi journalism will always remember him. The meeting was presided over by the association president, Arun Mishra. General Secretary Jitendra Srivastava conducted the proceedings. Raghvesh Pandey, Gopesh Pandey brother, proposed the vote of thanks.

Wedding Bells to Ring from February 2nd



Gazipur

The festival of Makar Sankranti will be celebrated on Thursday, January 15th. This will mark the beginning of auspicious events. Wedding ceremonies will begin from February 2nd. Traders and those involved in the wedding industry have been eagerly awaiting the end of Kharmas (an inauspicious period). This year, there are a total of 63 auspicious wedding dates from February to December. This has created considerable excitement in the market regarding weddings. According to Pandit Omkar Tiwari, the sun will enter Capricorn at 9:39 PM on January 14th. According to scriptures, if Sankranti falls at night, its auspicious effects are felt the next day, therefore Makar Sankranti will be celebrated on January 15th. Bathing, charity and performing good deeds are of special importance on this day. People will take a dip in the Ganges and donate khichdi (a rice and lentil dish). Auspicious ceremonies such as head shaving, housewarming, initiation of education and first feeding of solid food will begin from January 15th. The month of February has the most auspicious dates for weddings, with 21 dates available. Due to the limited number of wedding days, most banquet halls, guest houses, and (dharamshalas) in the city are already fully booked. The bride and groom families are prioritizing nearby and convenient banquet halls for their grand celebrations. This time, there are auspicious wedding dates from February 2nd to February 22nd. As a result, bookings for wedding venues have picked up pace. The market is becoming more vibrant.

Mayor's efforts bear fruit, 200 km of new sewer lines to be laid in 13 old wards at a cost of Rs 527 crore.

Varanasi

Drainage in the new city area. The biggest problem remains. There is a problem of sewer overflow in the old wards. The sewer has completely collapsed in many localities on the banks of the Ganga Ghats. Due to this, sewer overflow has become a permanent problem. In view of this, Mayor Ashok Kumar Tiwari has decided to lay new pipelines in 18 old wards in the first Phase. In this sequence, the government has given the green signal to lay 200 kilometers of new sewer lines in 13 old wards at a cost of Rs 527 crore. Municipal Commissioner Himanshu Nagpal said that new sewer



lines will be laid in the remaining five wards. 200 kilometers of submarine line has been given the green signal. Municipal Commissioner Himanshu Nagpal said that the proposal to lay new sewer lines in the remaining five wards is likely to receive cabinet approval this week. In this regard, Hukoolganj, New

Basti. Over four lakh people from around 100 localities in the Prahlad Ghat, Kritivasheshwar, Shivpurwa, Tulsipur, Birdopur, Kazipura, Shivala, Nagwan, Bagahada, Jangambadi and Bengali Tola wards will benefit. It has been decided to lay the pipeline using the trans-less method. Under this, pits will be

dug at the corners of the street and new pipelines will be laid in the entire street. The city is still dependent on the nearly 200-year-old drainage and sewerage system (Shahi Nala) for water drainage. The Municipal Corporation has no alternative to the Shahi Nala for drainage and sewerage. The Shahi Nala and the brick drain built during the British era are considered the backbone of Banaras. Due to the sewer pipelines of the British era in the old localities, the problem of blockage and overflow persists. Especially in the localities along the banks of the Ganga Ghats, the sewer is often blocked. In view of this, the Municipal Corporation has decided to replace the sewer pipelines in 18 wards.

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Kaushambi. Four children drowned in a pond on Makar Sankranti day in Husainpur, a hamlet of Ahmadpur Pawan village under Sadar Tehsil of Prayagraj district. The role of the Sadar Tehsil administration in this incident raises serious questions. JCB operators, with the administration's connivance, illegally mined soil from government land, transforming the level ground into a

deep pond – a death trap. The JCB operators sold the government soil for millions of rupees, and the Tehsil administration allegedly received a share of the proceeds. This resulted in the level ground being transformed into a deep pit, becoming a death trap. Due to this corruption and negligence by the administration, four young children tragically drowned in the pond. Following the deaths of the four children, serious questions are being raised

about the Tehsil administration. Had they stopped the illegal soil mining by the JCB operators from the government land, the four innocent children would not have drowned in the deep pit. The Sadar Tehsil administration of Prayagraj district is responsible for the deaths of the four innocent children, and the public has demanded that the Chief Minister take action against the Sadar Tehsil administration in this matter.

An Exemplary Confluence of Police, Media and Society Witnessed at Joint Police Station, Atmosphere Resonates with Devotion and Harmony

An inspiring and remarkable scene unfolded at the Joint Police Station premises in Mathura district, where the police administration, members of the media fraternity and prominent citizens came together to participate in a religious event, reflecting unity, devotion and social harmony. With traditional rituals and prayers at the Hanuman Temple located within the Joint Police Station campus, the grand and devotional inauguration of the Shrimad Bhagwat Katha Week-long Gyan Yagya was held on the auspicious occasion of the Pran Pratishtha of Thakur Shri Yugal Bihari Temple, situated in Tarang Society. On this sacred occasion, a grand Kalash Yatra was taken out, which passed through various routes before reaching Tarang Devic City Society. The enthusiasm of the devotees during the procession was truly commendable. The entire area echoed with devotional chants of "Jai Shri Ram," "Jai Hanuman," and "Thakur Shri Yugal Bihari Sarkar," immersing the surroundings



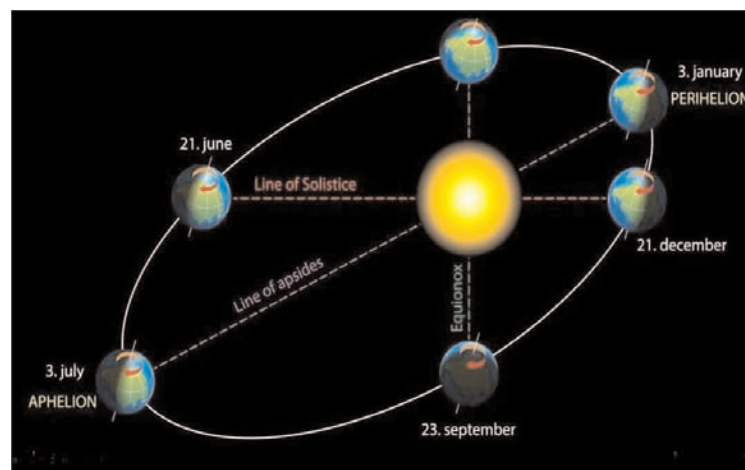
in a spiritual aura. The most noteworthy aspect of the event was the collective participation of the police administration, journalists from across the district and respected members of society. This positive interaction between the police and media conveyed a strong message of mutual trust, cooperation and social harmony. Organized with discipline and coordination, the event symbolized that unity in social and religious activities is key to building a strong and cohesive society. After the Kalash Yatra reached Tarang Devic City Society, the Shrimad Bhagwat Katha Gyan Yagya was formally inaugurated. The sacred Pran Pratishtha ceremony of Thakur Shri Yugal Bihari Ji was performed under the guidance

and auspices of senior journalist Thakur Prakash Singh, along with Naresh Sisodia and Sanjeev Agrawal. Several dignitaries, devotees, and residents of the area were present during the program. Throughout the event, an exceptional blend of devotion, faith and religious enthusiasm was evident. On this occasion, the police administration and fellow journalists, stating that such religious events strengthen social harmony, unity and spiritual consciousness and are essential for the moral upliftment of society. The seven-day-long Shrimad Bhagwat Katha will conclude on Monday, January 19 with a grand community feast (Bhandara).

Makar Sankranti is Dedicated to the Sun God



In Vedic and Puranic scriptures, the five elements of nature are considered equivalent to God. Followers of the Sanatani tradition have, since ancient times, acknowledged the importance of the five elements: earth, water, air, fire and sky. The sun plays a crucial role in maintaining the purity of nature and the environment. Its rays and light energize living beings. Today, solar energy is being successfully collected and utilized in various forms. Sun worship has been given special importance in Sanatani fasts and festi-



vals. In nature, the sun is considered a visible deity. It has a direct connection with the Earth and the solar system. To express gratitude to the sun, the source of life, knowledge, light, power and energy, saints, sages, yogis and devotees, as well as Vaishnavas, have been performing sun worship daily in every era. During the great festival of Surya Shashti (Chhath Puja) devotees offer prayers to the setting sun in the evening and the rising sun in the morning, absorbing its energy and activating the positive energy in their

bodies. The yogic practice of Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutation) helps in keeping the body healthy.

The reality is that the sun travels through the twelve zodiac signs of the solar system. When the sun enters from one zodiac sign to another, that time is called Sankranti. In this sequence, there are twelve Sankrantis in a year, of which Makar Sankranti is the most popular. On this day, the sun moves out of Sagittarius and enters Capricorn. This time falls on the fourteenth or fifteenth of January every year, which is celebrated

enthusiastically by Sanatani people every year. This day also has religious significance because on this day the sun moves from Dakshinayana to Uttarayana, meaning the sun's inclination shifts towards the north. The energy and willpower of living beings begin to increase. According to ancient beliefs, Capricorn is ruled by Saturn, the son of the Sun. On Makar Sankranti, the Sun visits his son Saturn for a month. With the Sun's entry into Capricorn, the days gradually become longer and the nights shorter. As the Sun moves northward, auspicious religious ceremonies begin. On Makar Sankranti, people take a holy dip in sacred rivers in the morning, worship the Sun, consume and donate sesame seeds and jaggery and partake in a special dish called khichdi. This festival is celebrated in different parts of the country with varying names and customs.

Magh Mela: A surge of devotion at Sangam before Makar Sankranti, 8.5 million devotees take a dip

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. An extraordinary display of faith and devotion was witnessed at the Sangam on the eve of Makar Sankranti, the second bathing festival of the Magh Mela. A massive crowd of devotees thronged towards the Sangam from early morning. Throughout the day-long bathing festival, approximately 8.5 million devotees took a holy dip in the sacred Sangam. The administration was fully prepared to ensure the convenience and safety of the devotees and the smooth conduct of the fair. All senior officers were stationed in the fair area since Tuesday night and continuously monitored the arrangements. During this time, Additional Director General of Police Jyoti Narayan, Inspector General of Police Ajay Mishra, Divisional Commissioner Saumya Agarwal, Police Commissioner Prayagraj Joginder Kumar, Additional Police Commissioner Ajaypal Sharma, District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma, Fair Officer Rishiraj, and Fair Police Superintendent Neeraj Pandey kept a close watch on the arrangements and issued necessary instructions on the spot. Thanks to the vigilance and well-planned arrangements of the administration, no untoward incident occurred during



the entire bathing festival. Devotees were safely guided to the bathing ghats and then safely transported to their destinations. Despite the suspension of the golf cart service, special attention was paid to the con-

venience of differently-abled devotees. When needed, ambulances and police vehicles were used to transport them to the Sangam ghats. The Rapido bike service, which transported devotees from various pickup

points to parking areas near the fairgrounds, also proved very useful. Approximately 12,000 devotees availed this service on Tuesday, and so far, about 127,000 people have used this

facility. The administration has breathed a sigh of relief after the successful conduct of the Magh Mela and has started preparing to further strengthen the arrangements for the upcoming bathing festivals.

Fire breaks out for the second consecutive day at Magh Mela; more than 10 tents gutted at Brahmashram camp

Prayagraj. Fire incidents continue unabated at the ongoing Magh Mela in Sangam city. On Wednesday evening, a fire broke out in a camp in the fair area for the second consecutive day. The fire suddenly erupted at the Brahmashram camp located on the Lower Road of Sector Four. Due to strong winds, the fire quickly intensified and engulfed two large camps. More than 10 tents were reduced to ashes in this incident. As soon as the fire broke out, panic spread among the pilgrims residing in the camp. People somehow managed to save their lives by running away. The towering flames and thick smoke were visible from a distance. Upon receiving the information, police, administration, and fire brigade teams reached the spot. Ten fire engines and about 30 firefighters took charge and brought the fire under control by dousing it with water. As a precaution, the entire area was sealed off to prevent the fire from spreading to other camps. Ten ambulances were also deployed at the spot. Firefighters shifted people to safe places. The belongings kept in the tents of the pilgrims were destroyed in the fire. However, the good news is that no casualties were reported in this incident. Due to the swift and effective action of the fire service, the fire was completely brought under control and the situation was normalized.

Film actor Rajpal Yadav arrived at the Magh Mela and took a dip in the Sangam

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. Film actor Rajpal Yadav, who visited the camp of Guru Dev Prabhakar Shastri Daddaji, said that Sanatan Dharma teaches harmony. When I come to the sands of the Sangam, I feel renewed energy, and then I return to my work with renewed enthusiasm. The Mahakumbh, Ardh Kumbh, and the annual Magh Mela are also a confluence of various cultures. Here we



find a confluence of culture, aquatic life, and avian life;

this is life. We believe that life should be lived well.

Rajpal said that Guru Daddaji has changed his

life. He finds peace only at Daddaji's ashram or in the camp established on the sands of the Sangam. Speaking in the presence of Dr. Anil Prabhakar Shastri, he said that here there is not only faith but also the pinnacle of devotion. Here we also learn the lessons of time management and discipline. If someone wants to learn time management, they should observe the birds. They wake up with the first rays of the sun, find food and water, and

then return to their nests by evening; therefore, a regular daily routine is essential. He said that this is now the age of AI.

If we adopt it like a mission, it will be beneficial, but if we treat it as a game, the consequences can be serious. Rajpal Yadav took a dip in the Sangam in the morning, then went to the camp and participated in a ritual after making a clay Shiva Lingam. He left the camp around 1 PM, saying he was going to Kolkata.

Schools Closed Until January 20 Due to Magh Mela

Prayagraj: In compliance with the order of the District Magistrate, all secondary schools of all boards operating in Prayagraj district, from classes 1 to 12, will remain closed from January 16, 2026, to January 20, 2026, due to the major bathing festivals of Makar Sankranti and Mauni Amavasya during the Magh Mela. This decision has been taken considering the crowds, traffic management, and the safety of the students. District School Inspector P.N. Singh clarified that the pre-board examinations scheduled during this period will also be completely postponed. Instructions have been given to ensure strict compliance with the order.

Massive Fire Engulfs Parked Car in Kareli, Fire fighters Bring it Under Control in Time



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj. Panic ensued on Tuesday near Tikonika Park in GTB Nagar, under the Kareli police station area, when a parked car suddenly caught fire. The flames quickly engulfed the entire vehicle. People nearby immediately informed the police and fire brigade. Upon receiving the information, the fire department team arrived at the scene and, after con-

siderable effort, brought the fire under control. The car was completely destroyed in the fire, but fortunately, there were no casualties. The initial cause of the fire is believed to be a short circuit. The police are investigating the matter. The timely intervention of the fire department prevented the fire from spreading to other parked vehicles and the surrounding residential area, thus averting a major disaster.

Four Children Drown in Pond, All Four Die, Family Devastated

Wave of grief sweeps through the family and the entire region after the death of four children

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

Prayagraj: Four children from Husainpur hamlet of Ahmadpur Pawan village in Puramufti police station area of the district had gone to the fields to eat chickpea greens on the evening of January 13th, around 3:00 PM. After eating the greens, the four children went towards a pond, but then they disappeared and could not be found. When the children did not return home, their families started searching for them. On the morning of January 14th, the bodies of the four children were found in the pond. With the help of villagers, the children's bodies were recovered from the pond. Seeing the four bodies together outside the pond, the family was devastated. Police arrived at the scene, took custody of the bodies, and sent them for post-mortem examination. However, the family members have alleged that the chil-



dren were murdered and then thrown into the pond. According to information, Prateek Sonkar, aged 11, and Prince Sonkar, aged 10, sons of Pradeep Sonkar from Husainpur hamlet of Ahmadpur Pawan village in Puramufti police station area, along with their relatives Priyanshu Sonkar, aged 11, and Karan Sonkar, aged 19, had gone from their home to the fields to eat chickpea greens around 3:00 PM on January 13th. After going to the fields, the four children suddenly disappeared and did not return home. When the four children did not return, their families

became worried and started searching for them. The family members informed the police. The police also searched, but there was no trace of the children throughout the night. On January 14th, the children's bodies were spotted in a pond near a brick kiln, and with the help of villagers, the children's bodies were recovered from the pond. Upon receiving the news of the death of the four children, a large crowd of villagers from the surrounding areas gathered at the scene. Grief was visible on everyone's faces after the death of the four children. Upon receiving the information, the

police arrived at the scene, took the children's bodies into custody, and sent them for post-mortem examination. The simultaneous death of the four children has plunged the entire family into grief, and a wave of sorrow has swept through the village. Pradeep Sonkar, in his complaint to the police, alleged that the children were murdered, but the motive for the killings remains unclear. The cause of the children's deaths is now the subject of a police investigation. The police station authorities stated that the cause of death will become clear after the post-mortem report is received.

Editorial

India's naval advancements will fuel its Indian Ocean ambitions

As India approaches its 75th Republic Day, the nation has achieved a significant milestone in strengthening its naval capabilities. In an exceptional move reflecting strategic foresight, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently commissioned three advanced naval platforms in a single day: a destroyer, a frigate, and a submarine. However, in a fast-changing security environment in the Indo-Pacific, the developments in naval capabilities must be measured in a relative context—capabilities of arch rivals and a swiftly evolving security domain, that is. Now, five points need to be underscored in this context. The commissioning of advanced naval platforms highlights India's aspiration to establish itself as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Over the years, India's maritime security strategy has significantly evolved. The 2015 Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) vision reflects India's dedication to fostering regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. This vision is supported by initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Island Countries (IOIC), which emphasise coastal connectivity and sustainable development. PM Modi's address at the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue further reinforced India's strategic perspective for the Indo-Pacific. The SAGAR vision has gained traction through frameworks such as the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), aiming to tackle regional security issues and counter China's expanding influence. While China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has grown to become the world's largest by fleet size, it still lacks the operational capabilities and combat experience of the United States. India's navy, although the smallest of its armed forces, has consistently demonstrated efficiency and timely acquisitions. Compared to the Indian Air Force, which faces critical squadron shortages, the navy pragmatically acknowledges domestic limitations in engine development. It relies on foreign collaborations to fill gaps, ensuring progress. However, I'll turn to that later. To establish itself as a net security provider, the Indian Navy must sustain the momentum it has recently achieved in naval defence exports. Although this initiative began in earnest only in 2011, it gained significant traction after 2016. India has transitioned from being a cautious supplier of naval equipment, primarily targeting countries such as Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, to a more prominent player in defence exports. For many years, India's exports to nations such as Seychelles, the Maldives, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka were limited to refurbished ex-navy and coast guard vessels. However, this trend has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years. Naval ships, as of 2024, account for over 61 per cent of India's total defence exports. This shift highlights India's growing capability to manufacture advanced platforms and its determination to emerge as a dependable supplier of defence equipment to neighbouring countries. This development is a critical component of India's regional and maritime strategy, especially given China's rapid ascent in modernising PLAN and expanding its influence in the Indian Ocean by providing naval assets to smaller nations. China has already established itself as the leading defence exporter to both Pakistan and Bangladesh. It delivered two Ming-class submarines to Bangladesh in 2017, gifted a P625 frigate to Sri Lanka in 2019, and committed to exporting Yuan-class submarines to Thailand. Although the Thai deal encountered difficulties when Germany refused to supply key propulsion components.



Tulip's resignation in the UK is troublesome for Hasina. Spotlight on daughter Saima

The sins of fathers shall be visited upon the sons—this ominous pronouncement in the Bible has now come true for Tulip Siddiq, a 42-year-old minister in the British government, but with a twist. In her case, it wasn't her father's sins that visited upon her but those allegedly committed by her aunt, the deposed prime minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina Wazed. And it cost Siddiq her job. Slapped with a range of corruption charges by Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Committee (ACC), which forced an internal gov-

ernment inquiry, Siddiq has strenuously denied any wrongdoing—except that of ignorance about benefiting from dubious transactions. But she has paid the price and resigned as UK treasury minister on Tuesday, though she stressed that an independent review found she had “not breached the ministerial code”. If the sins of aunts can impact nieces, then can daughters escape their mothers'? Ever since Siddiq's case hit the headlines, the spotlight has slowly but surely turned to Sheikh Hasina's daughter,

Saima Wazed, also known as Putul, who was elected regional director of the World Health Organisation's Southeast Asia branch amid considerable controversy in February 2024. An editorial in the eminent medical journal The Lancet had earlier questioned if she was fit for the job, as she only held a master's degree in psychology while rival aspirants were doctors with years of public health experience. The ACC has now initiated a probe into how she got the job: on her own merit or her mother's

intervention as prime minister. All eyes are now on Putul and whether she'll be forced to follow in her cousin's footsteps. What does it all mean for 77-year-old Sheikh Hasina, who has been sheltering in New Delhi since fleeing Dhaka on 5 August after a violent student uprising against her 15-year continuous tenure as Bangladesh's prime minister? There is no doubt that the charges being hurled at her, her family, and her friends are coloured by political prejudice from those now in power in Bangladesh.

Capital expenditure (capex) continues to be a cause for concern



The Union government's capital expenditure (capex) continues to be a cause for concern. Of course, the extent of its decline has reduced somewhat — from 35 per cent at the end of the first quarter of the current financial year to 15 per cent at the end of six months. But the latest number for the April-November 2024-25 period shows that the Union government's capex was still 12 per cent lower than what it was in the same period of 2023-24. Instead of aiming for the targeted 17 per cent growth to ~11.11 trillion in capex for 2024-25, the government will have to strive hard to at least cross the figure of ~9.48 trillion reached last year. What has led to this decline? A widely held view is that the seven-phase general elections, which began on April 19 and ended on June 1 last year, caused a slowdown in capex. But if that indeed is the reason, the decline in capex in the first quarter should have been reversed in the second quarter of 2024-25. And certainly, the first two months of the third quarter should have raised the trajectory of capex growth to a higher level. There has been some improvement, but a 12 per cent decline in the April-November 2024-25 period is no comfort. Look at the slightly different trajectory seen in the Union government's revenue expenditure growth during the same period. The Budget for 2024-25 had projected a rise of over 6 per cent to ~37.1 trillion in revenue expendi-

ture. At the end of June 2024, the growth was just about 2 per cent, but it has been rising since then, reaching 4.2 per cent by the end of the first six months of 2024-25 and climbing even higher to 7.8 per cent during April-November 2024-25. So, if revenue expenditure has gained momentum, why has capex failed to follow suit? A close analysis of the government's capex numbers presents an interesting picture. Over 90 per cent of the Centre's total capex during 2024-25 was accounted for by just six sectors — roads, railways, defence, telecom, transfer to states and new schemes. Their share in total capex in 2023-24 was a little less at 87 per cent. But the 12 per cent decline in the first eight months of 2024-25 is primarily the result of a marked slowdown in only two of these six areas — roads and defence, which accounted for over 40 per cent of the total capex outlay for 2024-25. Capex on the construction of roads and highways fell by 16 per cent, while defence saw a decline of 15 per cent. This is serious and has worrying implications

for both infrastructure and defence. The problem of slowing expenditure in these two areas should not have been difficult to fix. Either effective monitoring of spending is lacking, or there are serious problems with project execution, reflecting the poor expenditure-absorbing capacity of these two sectors. This is borne out by a relatively good performance of the Indian Railways, which accounts for over 22 per cent of this year's capex. At ~1.68 trillion, the Indian Railways' capex is just about 1 per cent lower than its spending during April-November 2023. With regard to the transfer of special assistance as loans to states for their capex and additional central assistance for their externally aided projects, the Union government's performance was slightly better. In the April-November 2024-25 period, these transfers rose by about 5 per cent, although much lower than the budgeted increase of 41 per cent.

In contrast, such transfers during the entire 2023-24 had risen sharply

by about 24 per cent to ~1.15 trillion. It appears that these transfers will take a hit in the current year and for the first time since this initiative to help states boost their capex was undertaken a couple of years ago. Significantly, this has not yet adversely impacted the states in a big way. The capex of 25 states (accounting for 95 per cent of all the states' and Union territories' total capex budget) has risen by just about 1 per cent in the April-November 2024-25 period, although states like Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Mizoram, Odisha, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal saw their capex fall by varying margins. Eventually, however, this will have an adverse impact on the states' capex programme and its growth-enhancing effect. There are two more sectors that account for another 13 per cent of the Centre's capital expenditure budget. But they bring out an intriguing aspect of why the government's capex has been slowing. They suffer from a peculiar problem, which has nothing to do with either the relevant sectors' expenditure-absorbing capacity or the absence of effective expenditure monitoring. The bulk of the capex under telecommunications was meant for infusing equity into state-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd, or BSNL. Of the total capex of ~0.84 trillion, the proposed amount for BSNL's equity infusion accounted for as

much as ~0.83 trillion. But the total expenditure under this head in the first eight months of 2024-25 is only 6 percent of what has been budgeted. In other words, a decision to transfer the equity amount promised to BSNL would increase the government's capex by a significant margin. Why this money has not been transferred is puzzling. Last year, against a budgeted BSNL equity infusion of ~0.53 trillion, the actual infusion was higher at ~0.65 trillion. This year, no action on this front even after eight months is a puzzle as this failure also contributes significantly to the decline in the Centre's capex. More importantly, the Budget for 2024-25 had allocated a significant amount of ~0.66 trillion for capex on central sector schemes and projects. Of this, a large chunk, estimated at ~0.62 trillion, was earmarked for new schemes that the government would announce during the year. However, in the first eight months of the current year, only 4 percent of that total outlay has been used up, leaving ~0.63 trillion yet to be spent. It is likely that the government may not need this amount or it may have kept its powder dry to meet any new schemes that it might announce later in the year, for which such capital allocations will be useful. For the Union finance ministry, currently busy preparing the Budget for 2025-26, such a state of play with regard to slowing capital expenditure could well be an opportunity.

Will Israel-Hamas Ceasefire Really Lead To Peace?

On January 20, 1981, on the day Ronald Reagan took over as the new US president, Iran freed 52 American hostages it had been holding for over a year. That projected Reagan as a strong leader sending a powerful signal to US allies and its foes. His predecessor, Jimmy Carter, did all the negotiations and tried his best to have the hostages released while he was still the president. But Tehran would not let him take the glory. Forty-four years on, Donald Trump is taking the credit for the Gaza ceasefire deal, which will come into effect a day before his inauguration, cementing his reputation as a tough leader. Biden can say that the deal happened under his watch. But there is no doubt that it was Trump whose pressure led to achieve the goal. He declared on his social media platform Truth Social: “This EPIC ceasefire agreement could have only happened as a result of our Historic Victory in November, as it signalled to the entire World that my

Administration would seek Peace and negotiate deals to ensure the safety of all Americans, and our Allies.” Days after he threatened that there better be a Gaza deal by his January 20 inauguration or “all hell would break out”, his special envoy to the Middle East, Steven Witkoff, landed in Tel Aviv last Saturday. It was the Sabbath, the day of rest for Jews. But Witkoff insisted on meeting the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, that day. At their meeting, he conveyed Trump's message that the incoming President of the United States wanted to end the Gaza war and demanded that a ceasefire agreement be signed immediately. The format of the three-stage deal announced on Wednesday was proposed by Biden in May last year and was later also endorsed by the UN Security Council. But both Hamas and Israel kept dragging the negotiations over it. In Israel, Netanyahu refused to give any concessions to Hamas and continued with his brute military operation in Gaza.

Investors line-up for Excitel's \$200-million equity deal

Extension of the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for solar energy value chain, increased allocation towards PM Suryaghar Muft Bijlee Yojana, and greater thrust to distribution and transmission infrastructure are likely to be the key features of the upcoming Budget, as far as the energy sector is concerned. Sources said these proposals figured not only in the budget wish lists of the industry, but also in the respective recommendations from the ministries of power and renewable energy to the finance ministry, ahead of the Budget. “Given the success of PM Suryaghar scheme with almost 600,000 installations in just nine months since its launch, one could probably see additional allocation to target more households,” said Ashwin Jacob, partner at Deloitte India. “As far as evacuation of power from offshore wind projects is concerned, we would want to see the VGF or budgetary support to continue or get enhanced,” he added. “We hope to see a decisive increase in funding to accelerate the green energy transition. Priorities must include scaling renewable energy by addressing grid and transmission challenges, advancing Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) for grid stability and reliable power, doubling energy efficiency and digitalizing the energy sector through AI, smart meters, and data-driven solutions. Streamlining rooftop solar programs with simplified approvals, financing, and monitoring is equally vital,” said Saurabh Kumar, Vice President – India, Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP). Sharat Goyal, CEO of Impact Infracap also expects the government to remove restrictions on state wise caps on roof top capacity for net-metering for industrial establishments. “Further, adoption of batteries to substitute use of diesel generators for back-up power should receive incentives and policy support

given their role in reducing dependence on imports,” he said. While the government is increasingly working towards enhancing the country's RE capacity, the distribution and transmission infrastructure for its evacuation still needs to be strengthened. With the peak demand for power growing at a rate of 8-9% annually, the industry is looking forward to strengthening of climate resilient infrastructure augmentation. “One can expect new allocations towards augmentation of power distribution infrastructure, especially in high density/ urban load centres, in view of the sharp rise in peak demand over the last few years,” said Anujesh Dwivedi, Partner at Deloitte India. He noted that there may be some allocation towards supporting the preparatory work especially on the listing of power utilities, or some incentive mechanism for promoting initiatives on private sector participation or listing of utilities at the state level because they are increasingly being seen as the much needed structural reforms the sector needs. The industry is optimistic of a wider coverage of the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme by including smart metering in infrastructure definition.

“This would direct more financing for a sector which seeks to bring down India's transmission and distribution losses to 12% and improve recovery for state utilities,” Goyal said. Goyal also noted that power transmission despite significant potential has not seen any notable monetisation events which could address the latent investor demand. “Government should announce a time-bound privatisation programme for assets owned by PGCIL,” he said. The sector also sees the PLI scheme for solar value chain to continue with possible reduction in the duty structures for solar equipment. Jacob highlighted.

Privatized entities can employ Aadhar authentication

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

The 2020 rules allowed the Centre to

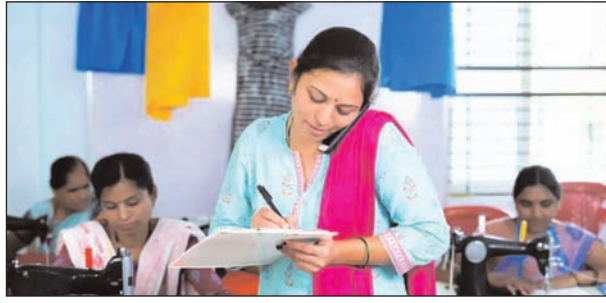


allow Aadhaar authentication only "in the interest of good governance, preventing leakage of public funds, promoting ease of living of residents and enabling better access to services for them" to use digital platforms for good governance, social welfare benefit dissipation prevention, and innovation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

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

Women own almost 50% of small manufacturing businesses

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



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

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

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

Health and wealth benefit from flexible work hours

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

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

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

IT panel to propose TV, print, online media umbrella

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



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

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

Foreign insurers gain ownership via 100% FDI

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

WhatsApp claims Israeli spyware Paragon targets users

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



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

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

Public infrastructure spending rises, but private sector participation falls

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



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

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

ing dropped to 0.60 lakh crore from 0.66 lakh crore in July-November 2024. Railway network expan-

sion remained constant at 2,000 kilometers, with 17 Vande Bharat train pairs and 228 carriages added.

Price pressure caps senior citizen health premium hikes at 10%

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



advised to standardize hospital empanelment and negoti-

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

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

Redesigning agri export policies

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



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

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

Norms to stop annoying calls and surrogate advertisements next month

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

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

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

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

Anupam Kher praises old generation

Veteran actor Anupam Kher hails people born in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, calling them resilient, adaptive and uniquely special

Veteran actor Anupam Kher explained why his generation, i.e., people born in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, is extremely 'special'. In his latest social media post, Kher pointed out that while their skills are considered redundant by the younger generation, which also includes their own kids, their experience in life makes them unique and special.

The *Khosla Ka Ghosla* actor was heard saying in a post, "We have seen 8 different decades. We have seen two different centuries. And in fact, we have also experienced two different millennia." The veteran actor also revealed how their generation has experienced the

massive technological shift from gramophone records to Spotify, from radio to 3D and HD TV, from handwritten letters to WhatsApp and from cassettes to OTT.

"We have traveled a long distance from telephone operators to our mobile to video calls. We have traveled from gramophone records to YouTube and Spotify and from handwritten letters and telegrams to e-mails and WhatsApp. We have enjoyed watching live matches on the radio, Black and White TV, Color TV and now 3D and HD TV. We used to watch movies from video store cassettes. And today we are watching everything at home, on mobile, on OTT platforms. We have also traveled from the first computer floppy disk CDs

to MBs and GBs. In our childhood, we wore shorts and then came Oxford flares and blue jeans, which we still wear proudly," he added.

Kher also stressed how they overcame numerous health challenges. He said, "Our generation has gone through paralysis, meningitis, polio, tuberculosis, swine flu and even defeated COVID-19." Kher claimed that "Our childhood may be analog, but our adulthood is completely digital. Yes, we have been through a lot, but what a great life we have had." Finally, he concluded by calling his generation extremely adaptive to change. "So, a big round of applause for all the members of a very special generation, who were unique and will always be," Kher concluded.



Photo: Instagram @anupamkher



Photos: Instagram @sabazad

Saba expresses love for Hrithik

Actress Saba Azad pens heartfelt birthday note for Hrithik Roshan, sharing unseen pictures and wishing him joy, peace and creative fulfilment

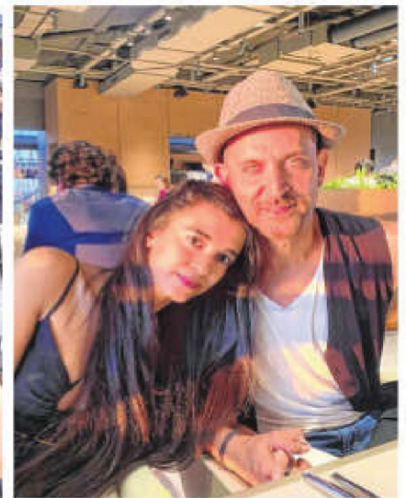


Photo: Instagram @hrithikroshan

"Nothing in the world makes me happier than seeing you happy", said actor Saba Azad as she penned a heartfelt note for Bollywood superstar and her partner Hrithik Roshan on his 52nd birthday.

Saba shared a series of pictures alongside the actor on her Instagram handle on Saturday. "Nothing in the world makes me happier than seeing you happy," she wrote in the caption.

"On the best day of the year I wish upon you joy and days of quiet, rest intercepted with days of fulfilling creation, work that deserves your talent, books that make you think, time with your friends and family and peace endless peace. Happy birthday my heart. I love

you @hrithikroshan," she added. Saba and Hrithik made their relationship official in 2022. Hrithik was previously married to interior designer and entrepreneur Sussanne Khan. The duo tied the knot in 2000 and got divorced in 2014. They share two children, Hrehaan Roshan, 19, and Hridaan Roshan, 17.

Hrithik's latest work is *War 2*, which released in August 2025. Directed by Ayan Mukerji, it also starred Jr NTR and Kiara Advani. It was a sequel to the 2019 release *War*, where the actor essayed the role of Kabir.

Saba's featured in *Songs of Paradise*, a musical drama inspired by Kashmiri singer Raj Begum's life. It released in August on Amazon Prime Video. It was directed by Danish Renu and also had Soni Razdan and Zain Khan Durrani in pivotal roles.

Muzaffar Ali donates Anjuman

Renowned filmmaker Muzaffar Ali has donated a rare 35mm release print of his award-winning film *Anjuman* (1986) to the NFDC-National Film Archive of India (NFAI), enriching the country's cinematic heritage.

The print was formally handed over by Ali to Prakash Magdum, Managing Director of the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), as part of the ongoing National Film Heritage Mission. Directed and produced by Ali, *Anjuman* was an official selection at the Indian Panorama in 1986 and screened at international festivals including Vancouver and Tehran, though it never received a theatrical release.

Speaking about the donation, Ali highlighted the fragility of celluloid and praised NFDC-NFAI's efforts in preservation, calling it essential for safeguarding the artistic legacy of Indian cinema. Magdum thanked the filmmaker and urged industry stakeholders to contribute to preserving film heritage for future generations.

Shot extensively in old Lucknow, *Anjuman* is noted for its sensitive portrayal of women artisans engaged in *chikan-kari* work. The film also stands out for Shabana Azmi singing her own playback songs, composed by Khayyam with lyrics by Shahryar and Faiz Ahmed Faiz.



Seeking blessings

Shilpa and Shamita Shetty attend Shayan Aarti at Ujjain's Mahakaleshwar temple



Photos: Instagram

Bollywood actor sisters Shilpa Shetty and Shamita Shetty visited the revered Mahakaleshwar Temple in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, where they participated in the sacred *Shayan Aarti* of the Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga.

The sisters arrived at the temple late on Saturday evening and performed rituals as per tradition, offering prayers and seeking blessings. They also had darshan of Lord Mahakal during the aarti ceremony. Shilpa and Shamita were deeply immersed in devotion as they witnessed the elaborate and spiritually charged aarti. For the occasion, they chose traditional ethnic outfits.

Speaking about her experience, *Dhadkan* star Shilpa Shetty expressed gratitude and described the visit as special, adding that she hopes to return soon. "People don't come here by themselves, but it is Mahakal himself who calls us upon. It seems like we have finally received our calling. It was a unique experience, and it was the first time I took part in the *Shayan Aarti*. It was well-organised. I would like to come back," Shilpa said, as quoted in a temple press release.

Echoing similar sentiments, Shamita Shetty, a devoted follower of Lord Shiva, said that the visit left her feeling calm and spiritually fulfilled. She said, "I am coming here for the first time, and as Shilpa said, I finally got my invitation. And I am feeling very peaceful right now. It has been beautifully organised for both of us and for everyone."

The Mahakaleshwar Temple, situated on the banks of the Shipra River in Ujjain, holds immense religious significance as one of the twelve Jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva.

In-Transit earns GLAAD nod

Directed by Ayesha Sood and produced by Tiger Baby, the series traces trans and non-binary lives across India



Views

In-Transit, the unscripted documentary series produced by Tiger Baby and streaming on Amazon Prime Video, has been nominated for Outstanding Documentary at the 37th Annual GLAAD Media Awards.

Directed by Ayesha Sood, the series chronicles the deeply personal journeys of nine trans and non-binary individuals across India as they navigate identity, love, family, and self-expression. Set across metropolitan cities like Mumbai and Delhi as well as smaller towns, *In-Transit* offers a nuanced and inclusive portrait of lives lived beyond gender binaries.

Being the only Indian documentary nominated in this category, the recognition highlights the importance of authentic LGBTQ+ representation in global storytelling. Producers Zoya Akhtar and Reema Kagti expressed gratitude to GLAAD and Amazon Prime Video for supporting stories that celebrate identity, diversity, and truth.



Photo: Instagram @mahhivij

Who is Nadim Nadz?

All about Mahhi Vij's best friend whom she said 'I Love You' after divorcing Jay Bhanushali

Television actress Mahhi Vij confirmed on January 4 that she has divorced her husband, actor Jay Bhanushali, after 15 years of marriage. Days after the announcement, she sparked relationship rumours with Nadim Nadz, whom she referred to as her 'best friend'.

In a heartfelt birthday post for him, Mahhi wrote, "I love you, Nadim- not just for who you are, but for how you make me feel, for how you stand with me, for how you are my heart, my home, my family." She even turned off comments on her

Instagram, adding more fuel to the romance rumours, especially after she recently shared a loved-up photo in which she was seen holding someone's hand, though the face was not shown.

Mahhi Vij's 'best friend' Nadim Nadz also shares a strong bond with actor Salman Khan. He is the founder and managing partner of SK TV, Salman Khan's television production company, which handles the superstar's ventures into television and web content, including several hit shows like *The Kapil Sharma Show*. Nadim and Salman have been childhood friends.

Lots of divine miracles your way. Sheetal Sapan Mhatre

Briefs

NAVI MUMBAI

Lizelle stars in Capitals win over UPW



Delhi Capitals produced a great all-round effort to beat UP Warriorz by seven wickets in their WPL match at the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai. Chasing 155 for victory, Delhi Capitals reached 158/3 in 20 overs with **Lizelle Lee's** 67 being the highlight of the innings. Earlier, the debatable move to retire out Harleen Deol on 47 did not work as Delhi Capitals limited UP Warriorz to 154 for eight in the Women's Premier League here on Wednesday. UP Warriorz troubles at the top of the order persisted with Kiran Navgire falling without adding to the scoreboard. Captain Meg Lanning (54 off 38) top-scored for Warriorz while number three Phoebe Litchfield (27 off 20) was stumped off Sneha Rana first ball after powerplay.

SURAT

Dalhor heroics steer Majhi Mumbai in ISPL



In a contest dominated by bowlers, Majhi Mumbai held their nerve to register a thrilling 2-run victory over Falcon Risers Hyderabad in the Indian Street Premier League (ISPL) Season 3 match at the Lalbhai Contractor Stadium here on Wednesday. Defending a modest total of 64, all-rounder **Abhishek Kumar Dalhor** delivered a masterclass in death bowling, successfully defending seven runs in the final over to deny Hyderabad a win that seemed within their grasp. The match reached its climax with Hyderabad needing seven runs from the final six balls. Dalhor, who had earlier struggled to find his rhythm with the bat, rose to the occasion with the ball in hand. He maintained an impeccable line, conceding just four runs and claiming the vital wicket of Sanskar Dhyani (3) on the penultimate delivery. Hyderabad finished their 10 overs at 62/6, falling agonizingly short of the target. Dalhor concluded with decisive figures of 1/11 from his two overs, while Vijay Pawle provided crucial support with 2/17.



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2ND ODI | New Zealand defeat India by seven wickets to keep the series alive

MITCHELL SPECIAL HUMBLER INDIA

RAJKOT

Indian spinners were out-bowled on home turf once again and KL Rahul's unbeaten ton was eclipsed by Daryl Mitchell's splendid 131 not out as New Zealand levelled the three-match series 1-1 with a seven-wicket win in the second ODI here on Wednesday.

New Zealand not only adapted but also executed better than India on a sluggish wicket here at the Niranjan Shah Stadium to keep the hosts to 284/7 despite Rahul's 91-ball 112 not out (9 fours, 1 six), and overhauled the target in 47.3 overs to end at 286 for three.

The series-deciding third ODI will be played in Indore on Sunday.

Young and Mitchell, among the architects of New Zealand's 3-0 Test series win over India on their previous visit, batted with poise and control even as the asking rate hovered over six an over.

They cruised at a little above five during their second-wicket association which consumed 152 balls for 162 runs, and there wasn't any late hiccup to prevent a turn-around.

Young's (87 from 98 balls; 7 fours) solidity in the middle was complemented by the adroitness of Mitchell, who brought out almost all kinds of sweep shots to notch up his third ton against India and

overall eighth, finishing at 131 not out from 117 balls (11 fours, 2 sixes).

New Zealand's triumph in a 50-overs match also took the spotlight back onto a problem which India have faced in Tests for about two years now, with the home team's spin attack being outmatched by that of the visitors, albeit that's been mostly in red-ball cricket.

Debutant left-arm spinner Jayden Lennox, summoned on this trip as replacement of Mitchell Santner, kept a tight leash on Indian batters returning 10-0-42-1 while Kuldeep Yadav (10-0-82-1) kept bowling short and failed to give the ball a flight despite repeated messages from Rahul behind the wickets.

And when Kuldeep did give it a flight and forced a mishit, Prasidh Krishna dropped a regulation chance at long-on in the 36th over to give Mitchell a lifeline on 80.

Kuldeep finally broke the third-wicket stand dismissing Young and Mohammed Siraj pinned Mitchell leg-before soon after, but the decision was overturned via DRS as there was an inside edge.

With Michael Bracewell also returning a tidy 1/34 from his 10 overs earlier, the collective return from visiting spinners was of 89 runs for two wickets in 23 overs including Glenn Phillips' 3-0-13-0. On their part, Kuldeep and Ravindra Jadeja gave away 1/126.



131

Daryl Mitchell's match-winning hundred that repulsed India

87

Will Young's half-century provided able support to Mitchell's innings

New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell plays a shot during the second ODI. PTI

SCOREBOARD

India: R Sharma c Young b Clarke 24, S Gill c Mitchell b Jamieson 56, V Kohli b Clarke 23, S Iyer c Bracewell b Clarke 8, KL Rahul (not out) 112, R Jadeja c & b Bracewell 27, N Kumar Reddy c Phillips b Foulkes 20, H Rana c Bracewell b Lennox 2, M Siraj (not out) 2. **Extras** (LB-2, NB-1, WD-7) 10. **Total** (For 7 wks, 50 overs) 284. **Fall of wickets:** 1-70, 2-99, 3-115, 4-118, 5-191, 6-248, 7-256. **Bowling:** K Jamieson 10-2-70-1, Z Foulkes 9-0-67-1, K

Clarke 8-0-56-3, J Lennox 10-0-42-1, M Bracewell 10-1-34-1, G Phillips 3-0-13-0. **New Zealand:** D Conway b H Rana 16, H Nicholls b P Krishna 10, W Young c N Kumar Reddy b K Yadav 87, D Mitchell (not out) 131, G Phillips (not out) 32. **Extras** (LB-5, W-5) 10. **Total** (For 3 wks, 47.3 overs) 286. **Fall of wickets:** 1-22, 2-46, 3-208. **Bowling:** M Siraj 9-0-41-0, H Rana 9.3-1-52-1, P Krishna 9-0-49-1, N Kumar Reddy 2-0-13-0, R Jadeja 8-0-44-0, K Yadav 10-0-82-1.

VHT: Padikkal to be key for K'taka against Vidarbha

He has scored 4 tons this season

BENGALURU

Devdutt Padikkal, who appears to have found a magic bat of sorts and is scoring runs at will, will hold the key to Karnataka's chances as they take on Vidarbha in the first semifinal of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Wednesday.

Padikkal is batting like a man possessed, and his latest display of fluency came against Mumbai in the semifinal, where his unbeaten half-century pushed the rivals out of the contest.

This season, the 25-year-old has scored four centuries, placing him at the top of the run charts in the tournament.

With skipper Mayank Agarwal, Karun Nair and Abhinav Manohar in their ranks, Karnataka's batting appears well settled. Complementing it perfectly, their pace quartet of Vidwath Kaverappa, Abhilash Shetty, Vidyadhar Patil and Vijaykumar Vyshak has delivered consistently this season, driving the team's impressive run.

However, they will need to guard against the law of averages, which could prove costly after such an assertive run.

Vidarbha have shown the intent to post multiple 300-plus totals this season and they are

equally adept at chasing big targets.

Their nine-wicket group-stage win against Baroda stands out, having chased down 293 with 50 balls to spare.

Young top-order batter Aman Mokade has also enjoyed a prolific season, scoring four centuries and a half-century.

Teams:

Karnataka: Mayank Agarwal (c), Karun Nair, Abhilash Shetty, Shreesha Achar, Harshil Dharmani, Shreyas Gopal, Abhinav Manohar, Manvanth Kumar, Devdutt Padikkal, Dhruv Prabhakar, Prasidh Krishna, KL Rahul, BR Sharath, Krishnan Shrijith, Ravichandran Smaran, Vijaykumar Vyshak.

Vidarbha: Harsh Dubey (c), Yash Thakur, Ganesh Bhosle, Nachiket Bhute, Shivam Deshmukh, Shubham Dubey, Praful Hinge, Yash Kadam, Aman Mokhade, Darshan Nalkande,

Dipesh Parwani, Yash Rathod, Parth Rekhade, Ravikumar Samarth, Dhruv Shorey, Atharva Taide, Akshay Wadkar.

Match starts at 1.30 P.M
Live on Star Sports



Srikanth defends India Open playing conditions

Ex-World No 1 said he didn't understand hue and cry

NEW DELHI

Former world No.1 Kidambi Srikanth on Wednesday defended the playing conditions at the ongoing India Open, asserting that he is yet to come across anything "bad" at the venue and that minor organisational challenges are not specific to one host nation.

Denmark's Mia Blichfeldt had on Tuesday caused a storm by criticising the conditions at the Indira Gandhi Stadium complex, calling the surroundings "unhealthy" and urging the Badminton World Federation (BWF) to intervene ahead of the World Championships later this year at the same venue.

Srikanth, who advanced to the second round with a hard-fought win over compatriot Tharun Manneppalli, said he did not understand the hue and cry. "I don't know, see every country has its own conditions," said Srikanth, the 2021 world championships silver-medallist.

"In Singapore, there is a lot of drift. In Malaysia, probably



In Singapore, there is a lot of drift. In Malaysia, probably a little less. Earlier in Indonesia, it used to be very compact

K Srikanth
Former World No 1

a little less. Earlier in Indonesia, it used to be very compact and fast before reno-

vation. Every country has its own challenge." Two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu, who lost in the very first round here, also said that the facilities are fine.

"See this is the first time we're playing here, I mean, right now I just finished the match. I mean, it is fine. I heard that the World Championships also are going to be held here," she said after her match here on Wednesday.

"So, I think it's a good trial in a way. And overall it's a very big stadium. So I mean the facilities are fine. On court I think when we are playing, I think it's fine," she added.

India Open: Sindhu out; Srikanth, Prannoy advance

Srikanth had to dig deep to outlast fellow Indian Tharun Manneppalli

NEW DELHI

Two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu was knocked out of India Open but Kidambi Srikanth and HS Prannoy progressed to the second round on a mixed day for the hosts at the USD 950,000 Super 750 badminton tournament, here Wednesday.

Sindhu, who reached the semifinals of Malaysia Super 1000 last week, couldn't maintain the pressure after narrowly pocketing the opening game to eventually go down 22-20 12-21 15-21 to Vietnam's Thuy Linh Nguyen in 68 minutes.

"I don't think it was my day, she isn't an easy opponent. At this level, everyone plays well and you can't expect easy points or easy wins. She has good strokes, you had to keep the tempo and keep the shuttle in play. Small mistakes in those moments become decisive," Sindhu said after her exit.

"I definitely need to be more consistent. Giving away easy or consecutive points is



India's P.V. Sindhu returns to Vietnam's Nguyen Thuy Linh during the women's singles match. PTI

something I have to stop. After losing one point, I need to reset immediately and be ready for the next rally. That's the main takeaway for me."

Earlier, former world No. 1 Srikanth had to dig deep to outlast fellow Indian Tharun Manneppalli 15-21, 21-6, 21-19, while Malvika Bansod, returning from an injury layoff, displayed patience and defensive solidity to beat Chinese Taipei's Pai Yu Po 21-18, 21-19.

Prannoy, who received a last-minute entry in the tour-

nament, made it count as he outwitted last year's runner-up Lee Cheuk Yiu 22-20 21-18 to advance to the second round. He will next face eighth seed and former world champion Loh Kean Yew of Singapore.

Tanvi Sharma, silver medallist at the BWF World Junior Championship, then played her heart out before going down fighting 20-22 21-18 13-21 to world number 2 Wang Zhi Yi.

Indian women's doubles

22-20, 12-21, 15-21
Sindhu-Nguyen match
scoreline

campaign also got off to a positive note with Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand cruising past Thailand's Ornnicha Jongsathapornpan and Sukitta Suwachai 21-15, 21-11.

The Indian pair, fresh from defending their Syed Modi International title, will next face seventh seeds Li Yi Jing and Luo Xu Min of China.

However, it was a disappointing day for India in mixed doubles, with three Indian pairs exiting the tournament at an early stage.

Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto went down 15-21, 14-21 to Thailand's Pakkapon Teeraratsakul and Sapsiree Taerattanachai, while Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadde lost 19-21, 14-21 to Germany's Marvin Seidel and Thuc Phuong Nguyen.

Ashith Surya and Amrutha Pramuthesh were also shown the door losing 15-21, 7-21 to Japan's Yuichi Shimogami and Sayaka Hobara.

resilience

GG stars draw inspiration from Dharavi's cricketers

MUMBAI

Women's Premier League (WPL) players from the Gujarat Giants on Tuesday spent time with cricket-playing schoolgirls, women's self-help groups and local entrepreneurs in Dharavi, drawing inspiration from the resilience and aspirations of residents in Asia's largest slum cluster.

England international Danni Wyatt Hodge and Indian players Happy

Kumari and Shivani Singh interacted with young girls who pursue cricket amid acute space constraints, women navigating livelihood challenges, and small business owners running large-scale operations from compact workspaces.

Cricket-playing schoolgirls spoke about practising wherever space is available, balancing academics with sport and aspiring to pursue cricket professionally despite limited infrastructure.

"Cricket gives us confi-

dence and hope for a better future," said one of the schoolgirls.

Women from self-help groups highlighted issues around livelihoods, household responsibilities and the need for improved social and physical infrastructure to support future generations.

Reacting to the interaction, Wyatt Hodge said the determination she witnessed was striking. "The passion we saw, especially among the young girls, was inspiring. Their challenges are real, but

so is their belief that they can overcome them. That mindset resonates strongly with a sportsperson," she said.

Happy Kumari said the visit left her deeply motivated. "You are facing many challenges, yet your resilience stands out. I'm not here to give advice, but I must say I feel inspired after meeting you all," she told Dharavi girls. The Gujarat Giants players also visited Dharavi's recycling, garmenting and leather units, interacting with small and medium

entrepreneurs who demonstrated how businesses adapt and scale operations within limited spaces. "Our businesses survive because of resilience and constant innovation."

Dharavi has always found ways to move forward," said an entrepreneur from the garment sector.

The visit was facilitated by Navbharat Mega Developers Pvt Ltd as part of community engagement efforts linked to Dharavi's redevelopment, aimed at fostering dialogue.

