


OM NAMO VENKATESAYA




06-02-2026  
Total pilgrims: 67,085  
Tonsures: 24,832  
Hundi kanukulu: 378 CR  
Waiting Compartments: 23

Approx. Darsan Time for Sarvadarshanam (with out SSD Tokens) - 12 H

TO BOOK YOUR ADS CALL

99484 80279, 73307 78889



## Pappu Yadav admitted to PMCH after arrest amid health concerns

**Patna, Feb 7:** Independent MP from Purnia, Rajesh Ranjan (Pappu Yadav), was admitted to Patna Medical College and Hospital (PMCH) on Saturday after developing health complications following his arrest late Friday night in connection with a 1995 case.



## Trump Says He 'Didn't See' Part Of Video With Racist Clip Depicting Obamas As Apes

## Vaibhav Suryavanshi Won't Play Next U-19 World Cup Despite Being Eligible To Play Till 2030



### INBRIFS

#### India, US aim for \$500 bln annual trade: Goyal



**NEW DELHI:** Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said the government objective is to achieve bilateral trade of USD 500 billion between India and the United States annually. Addressing a presser on India-US joint statement on Saturday, he said, "India-US joint statement will significantly widen access for Indian exporters to the US market under the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) framework, opening up major new trade opportunities."

"The US market will open wider for Indian exporters with MFN status, which will greatly enhance our trade prospects," Goyal said.

"Most-Favoured Nation" is a principle requiring countries to treat all trade partners equally, ensuring lowering tariffs and fewest barriers for all members.

#### Senior IPS officer booked for unauthorised raids & extortion

**New Delhi:** The Vigilance Unit of Delhi Police has registered a case against senior IPS officer Shankar Choudhary of the AGMUT cadre for alleged illegal raids, unlawful detention of a foreign national, and misappropriation of authority in a 2023 case. According to the FIR, Choudhary, while posted as Superintendent of Police (Narcotics) in Mizoram, conducted several unauthorised raids in Delhi between November 26 and 29, 2023. He allegedly detained a foreign national, Harrison, and attempted to extort Rs 55 lakh. The raids, conducted in the Dabri area, also involved the seizure of a locker and two bags from Harrison's residence without proper documentation such as a seizure memo, inventory list, or panchnama. Harrison was later confined at Mizoram Bhawan in Vasant Vihar before being released on November 29, coinciding with a reported extortion call.

## CM Revanth Slams BRS BJP at Parigi Rally

Promises Irrigation Civic Development Push...

**HYDERABAD TSIT BUREAU:** Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Saturday launched a strong political attack on BRS chief and former CM K. Chandrashekar Rao, alleging that cases, controversies and "unfulfilled promises" associated with the previous regime would remain permanently recorded in the state's history. Addressing a public meeting in Parigi, the Chief Minister said no one could erase what he described as ten years of misrule and financial damage under the BRS government. He defended the serving of notices in the phone-tapping case, stating that following legal procedure against any individual is not wrong and that the law would take its own course. He criticized BRS leaders for objecting to the investigation and said the present government was committed to transparency and accountability.

**ALLEGATIONS OF BRS-BJP UNDERSTANDING**

Revanth Reddy alleged that BRS and BJP had entered into a covert understanding in the municipal elections to defeat Congress candidates. He urged voters to be cautious and said national leaders would not resolve local civic problems if BJP was supported in municipal bodies.



#### IRRIGATION AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSURANCES

The Chief Minister accused the previous regime of deliberately shelving the Pranahita-Chevella project, which he said hurt the irrigation prospects of Rangareddy and nearby regions. He promised that the Congress government would prioritise bringing Godavari water to Parigi, Tandur and Vikarabad areas.

He said land acquisition for pending reservoir works would be completed and new plans were being executed to expand irrigation coverage. Diversion of Krishna waters to drought-prone constituencies in the region was also being planned.

#### ROADS, JOBS AND WELFARE SCHEMES

Highlighting development measures, the CM said stalled road projects — including the Appa Junction-Manneguda stretch and Tandur road — were being accelerated after resolving legal hurdles.

Regional Ring Road and radical road connectivity would also be strengthened, he added. Listing welfare initiatives, Revanth Reddy cited farm loan waivers, ration card expansion, supply of fine rice, free bus travel for women, 200 units of free power for the poor, and filling of about 70,000 government jobs. He expressed confidence that the Congress government would continue in power and deliver sustained development across Telangana.

In Malaysia....

## Trust has become India's strongest currency: Modi

**KUALA LUMPUR (TSIT):** Spotting the recent trade deals signed by India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that India is seen as a trusted partner for growth and trust has become the country's "strongest currency".

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim also attended the event after both leaders travelled together in the same car from the airport. Prime Minister Modi stated that IMPACT - which he described as India Malaysia Partnership for Advancing Collective Transformation - remains the guiding word of relationship between both countries as India's success also translates into success for Malaysia and Asia.

"India's success is Malaysia's success, it is Asia's success. That is why I say the guiding word of our relationship is IMPACT. IMPACT means India-Malaysia Partnership for Advancing Collective Transformation," said PM Modi. In a special gesture, Prime Minister Modi, on his arrival in Kuala Lumpur, was warmly received by his Malaysian counterpart at the airport along with Malaysian Minister of Human Resources Ramanan Ramakrishnan and Deputy Foreign Minister of Malaysia, Lukanisman bin Awang Sauni. This was followed by a colour-



India is seen as a trusted partner for growth. Whether it is the UK, UAE, Australia, New Zealand, Oman, the EU or USA, countries have trade deals with India. Trust has become India's strongest currency."

**PM Modi**

Delhi's Act East Policy, Indo-Pacific vision and Vision MAHASAGAR.

Prime Minister Modi is visiting Malaysia on February 7-8 at the invitation of Malaysian PM Anwar Ibrahim. This is the third visit of the Prime Minister to Malaysia since 2015. In his address, PM Modi mentioned that Malaysia has the second-largest Indian-origin community in the world and the diaspora continues to serve as a strong bridge between both countries. "Recently, I spoke in my monthly radio conversation, Mann Ki Baat, about you.

#### India-US interim agreement to boost MSME global integration: Nirmala



**NEW DELHI: (FEB 7)** The India-US Interim Agreement framework will support Indian MSMEs in integrating into global value chains and lower costs for businesses and consumers, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Saturday.

As part of the framework announced last night, both countries will reduce import duties on a number of goods to boost two-way trade. While the US will reduce tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from the present 50 per cent, India will eliminate or cut down import duties on all US industrial goods and a wide range of American food and agricultural products, including dried distillers' grains, red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits.

According to a joint statement, India has expressed its intention to purchase USD 500 billion of US energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products and coking coal over the next five years. "India has safeguarded the sensitivities of its agriculture and animal husbandry sectors. The framework protects key farm and dairy products, spices, and staples, strengthening farmer incomes," the office of Sitharaman said in a post on X.

## Rahul, Priyanka target NDA over Pappu Yadav's arrest,

Allege systemic collusion in NEET aspirant death case



**Patna, Feb 7 :** A day after Purnea Lok Sabha MP Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav was arrested in a 31-year-old case, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and his sister MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra launched an attack on the Nitish Kumar-led NDA government. They alleged deep-rooted systemic collusion in

the handling of the NEET aspirant death case in Bihar.

In a post on X, Rahul Gandhi said the suspicious death of the NEET aspirant in Patna and the subsequent investigation had laid bare entrenched collusion within the system. "When the victim's family demanded an impartial investigation and justice, the familiar BJP-NDA model resurfaced - divert the case, harass the family and shield the perpetrators," Gandhi wrote. Defending Pappu Yadav, Rahul Gandhi said the MP had consistently stood for justice and described his arrest as an act of political vendetta. "Fellow MP Pappu Yadav stood firmly as a voice for justice for this young woman.

#### Sonia Gandhi terms plea over voter list inclusion 'politically motivated'

**NEW DELHI (TSIT):** Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi has informed the Rouse Avenue Court that allegations regarding the purported fraudulent inclusion of her name in the voter list before obtaining Indian citizenship are "politically motivated" and devoid of merit. A detailed reply has been submitted on her behalf before the Rouse Avenue Court opposing a revision petition that accuses her of securing entry into the electoral rolls through fraudulent means before acquiring Indian citizenship. In her response, Gandhi has strongly challenged the claims made in the petition, asserting that they are based on incorrect, misleading, and unsubstantiated facts.



## India unveils 2-Nanometer chip design, advances AI and semicon ambitions



**BENGALURU (TSIT)** India on Saturday signalled what the Central government described as a defining moment in its artificial intelligence and semiconductor journey, with the unveiling of a 2-nanometer chip design at Qualcomm highlighting the country's growing role in advanced chip design alongside a rapid expansion of AI and data centre infrastructure.

Speaking at the Qualcomm event, union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw said India is steadily moving beyond its longstanding identity as a software services and back-end chip development hub

towards higher-value semiconductor design and AI-driven technologies.

The 2-nanometer wafer unveiled by Qualcomm contains dies with around 20 billion transistors each and integrates CPU and GPU capabilities. The minister said such advanced chips are critical for enabling AI computing at the edge,

including applications in cameras, networking equipment, industrial systems and automobiles.

He clarified that while semiconductor manufacturing remains a complex, long-term journey, India's design capabilities have advanced significantly, with companies now undertaking end-to-end chip design work in the country, from product definition to silicon validation. Linking semiconductor progress with AI infrastructure, Vaishnaw said India has already seen committed investments of around \$70 billion in data centres, rising to nearly \$90 billion when recent announcements are included.

## Congress claims Modi skipped Malaysia visit to avoid Trump

**NEW DELHI: (FEB 7)** As Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day trip to Malaysia began on Saturday, the Congress claimed that he had called off his last visit to Kuala Lumpur in October as he did not want to be face-to-face with US President Donald Trump.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said as the prime minister meets his Malaysian counterpart, Anwar Ibrahim, it is worth recalling the latter's words while paying tributes to former prime minister Manmohan Singh on December 27, 2024. "In late October 2025, the Prime Minister was expected to visit Kuala Lumpur. It had been announced but at the last minute Mr Modi called it off because he did not want to come face-to-face with President



Trump who was also to be there at the same time. So Mr Modi settled for a virtual summit meeting with ASEAN leaders. "Now the Prime Minister is off to Kuala Lumpur to see another good friend of his - the Prime Minister of Malaysia. It is worth recalling what Mr Anwar Ibrahim had

said in his tribute to Dr Manmohan Singh on Dec 27, 2024," Ramesh said in a post on X. Ibrahim had then said that Singh, "slightly awkward as a politician but undeniably upright, steadfast and resolute as a statesman, leaves behind a legacy that will inspire generations to come".

## Indian markets to remain closed to genetically modified crops, staple foods: Union Commerce Minister

**Goyal said Indian markets have been opened only where there is import reliance and a need for growth, such as in the energy, nuclear power, and IT product sectors..**

**NEW DELHI (TSIT)** Indian markets will remain closed to genetically modified crops, meats, dairy products, poultry, and major crops like wheat, rice, maize, and soyabean, said Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. The India-US trade deal does not harm farmers' interests, he added. "The Opposition's claims have been fully exposed as the deal grants no relief on



sectors that are sensitive to India," Goyal said. Indian markets for millets like jowar, bajra, and amaranth, as well as fruits like bananas, strawberries, cherries, citrus fruits, green peas, kabuli chana,

moong, and oilseeds, will not be opened to American exporters. No concessions have been granted to the US in animal feed, groundnut, honey, malt and malt extracts, non-alcoholic beverages, flowers and

meals, essential oils, and tobacco. Goyal said several Indian exports to the US will now have zero duty, including gems and diamonds, generic pharmaceuticals, smartphones, spices, tea, coffee, coconut, venerable wax, Areca nuts, cashew nuts, Brazil nuts; fruits like guava, avocado, bananas, mangoes, kiwis, papaya, mushrooms; sesame and poppy seeds.

Zero-duty product exports will include aircraft parts, machine parts, coins, platinum products, clocks, chandeliers, precious metals, and other sectors. Further duty reductions in leather, footwear, sports goods, home decor, textiles, and apparel segments, especially silk, will benefit labour-intensive sectors in India.



Comedian Kamra moves HC against Sahyog portal

Mumbai, Feb 7: Stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra has moved the Bombay High Court against the government's 'Sahyog' portal, calling it an "unconstitutional and unreasonable" assault on freedom of speech, as it allows officials to take down social media content.

The comedian, in his petition filed Wednesday, has primarily challenged the IT rules, which were amended in October 2025, along with the Sahyog portal.

He had claimed that these tools "unlawfully" empower the Central and state government officials "to peremptorily issue takedown or blocking orders, without following the procedure mandated under the Information Technology Act".

According to the government, Sahyog was developed to automate the process of sending notices to intermediaries by the appropriate government or its agency under the IT Act, 2000, to facilitate the removal or disabling of access to any information, data or communication link being used to commit an unlawful act. The portal aims to bring together all authorised agencies and intermediaries on one platform to ensure immediate action against the unlawful online information.

"Rule 3(1)(d) of the IT Rules and the Sahyog Portal are also ex facie unconstitutional, as they enable the blocking or takedown of information on internet platforms on wholly vague grounds," the petition, filed through advocate Meenaz Kakalia.

The plea emphasised that such powers "amount to an unconstitutional and unreasonable restriction on the freedom of speech". The comedian claimed that such powers "go beyond the constitutionally permissible grounds that have been exhaustively enumerated under Article 19(2) of the Constitution".

SC: Police can't arrest to 'simply ask questions'

A bench of Justices MM Sundresh and NK Singh said the power of arrest under provisions of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023 must be interpreted as a strict objective necessity and not as a subjective convenience for the police officer

New Delhi, Feb 7: The Supreme Court has said the arrest of a person cannot be for simply asking questions, holding that arrest by a police officer is a mere statutory discretion which cannot be termed as mandatory.

A bench of Justices MM Sundresh and NK Singh said the power of arrest under provisions of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023 must be interpreted as a strict objective necessity and not as a subjective convenience for the police officer.

"It does not mean the police officer can arrest to simply ask questions. However, it means that the police officer must satisfy himself that the investigation, qua an offence punishable with imprisonment up to seven years, cannot proceed effectively without taking the concerned individual into custody. Any interpretation to the contrary would clearly frustrate the purpose and legislative intent of Sections 35(1) (b) and Sections 35(3) to 35(6) of the BNSS, 2023," it said.

The bench has passed the order while hearing an appeal against the order of the



Allahabad High Court and was deciding a question whether notices under Section 35(3) of the BNSS, 2023 are to be mandatorily issued in all cases related to an offence punishable with imprisonment up to seven years.

The top court said the power of arrest under the provisions pursuant to a notice issued under Section 35(3) of the BNSS, 2023 is not a matter of routine but an exception, and the police officer is expected to be circumspect and slow in exercising the said power.

"An arrest by a police officer is a mere statutory discretion which facilitates him to conduct proper investigation in the form of collection of evidence and, therefore, shall not be termed as mandatory," it said.

The top court said the police officer shall ask himself the question as to whether an arrest is a necessity or not before undertaking the said exercise.

"For effecting an arrest, qua an offence punishable with imprisonment up to seven years, the mandate of Section 35(1) (b)(i) of the BNSS, 2023 along with any one of the conditions mentioned in Section 35(1)(b) (ii) of the BNSS, 2023 must be in existence," it said.

The bench in its order passed in January but uploaded re-

cently said even if the circumstances warranting an arrest of a person are available in terms of the conditions mentioned under Section 35(1)(b) of the BNSS, 2023, the arrest shall not be undertaken unless it is absolutely warranted.

"Suffice it is to state that an investigation can go on even without an arrest. While undertaking the exercise of collecting the evidence for the purpose of forming his opinion over the commission of a cognisable offence, a police officer shall pose a question to himself on the necessity of an arrest. This safeguard is provided as, in any case, the power to arrest an accused person is always available with a police officer even after he records his reasons, in writing, for not doing so at an earlier stage," the bench held.

The top court noted that an investigation by a police officer generally begins with the recording of information regarding an offence and it is a process which is primarily aimed at the ascertainment of facts and circumstances surrounding an alleged crime and involves the police officer proceeding to the spot of occurrence to collect evidence and ends with the formation of an opinion for filing of chargesheet.

BLO suffers cardiac arrest in West Bengal

FAMILY BLAMES SIR WORK PRESSURE, POLITICAL SPARRING ERUPTS

Kolkata, Feb 7: A 58-year-old booth level officer (BLO) died of cardiac arrest in West Bengal's Murshidabad district, triggering a political slugfest with the ruling TMC blaming work pressure linked to the ongoing SIR of electoral rolls, while the BJP accused the state government of politicising a personal tragedy.

The deceased, Maya Mukhopadhyay, was a primary school teacher at the Shripur Namupada Shishu Shiksha Kendra under Hariharpara block and was recently assigned BLO duties for Booth No. 251 amid the ongoing SIR exercise. She collapsed at home Thursday night and was declared dead after being taken to a hospital, family members said.

Her family alleged that Mukhopadhyay was under severe mental stress after being entrusted with BLO responsibilities and feared backlash from villagers if their names were deleted from the voter list during the revision process.

"After being made a BLO, my mother was unable to cope with the mental pressure. She had been unwell and was even admitted to the ICU at Murshidabad Medical College and Hos-

pital earlier," her younger son Rubel Mondal told reporters.

He claimed that the booth under her charge had around 830 voters and over 320 hearing notices had been issued as part of the SIR process. "She kept saying that if names were deleted, villagers might come and attack our house. She lived in constant fear," Mondal said.

Her family members also said Mukhopadhyay had age-related ailments and was reluctant to take up BLO duties but had no option but to comply with administrative orders.

Hariharpara BDO Sering Jam Bhutia confirmed the death and said the administration was looking into the matter. "She died of a cardiac arrest. We have been informed that she was unwell. A representative has been sent to gather details," he said.

Trinamool Congress MLA from Hariharpara, Niyamat Sheikh, alleged that the manner in which the SIR process was being implemented had created panic among BLOs. "She was fine earlier, but after getting the BLO assignment, she remained terrified. Several BLOs have approached us saying they cannot handle the pressure but are continuing out of fear of losing their jobs," he claimed.



Civic apathy claims life

BIKER DIES AFTER PLUNGING INTO 15-FOOT UNCOVERED DJB PIT IN WEST DELHI

New Delhi, Feb 7: In a chilling instance of civic negligence, a 25-year-old biker lost his life after falling into an uncovered 15-foot pit dug by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) for a sewage project in west Delhi's Janakpuri area, police said Friday.

The incident occurred on the intervening night of Thursday and Friday when Kamal Dhyani, an assistant manager at the call centre of a private bank in Rohini, was returning home. The pit, dug just a day earlier, was allegedly inadequately secured, leading to the fatal fall. The family alleged gross police inaction, claiming that despite visiting several police stations throughout the night, no timely search operation was launched - a delay they believe could have saved his life.

Kamal's body, with his helmet still on, was found lying beside his mud-smeared mo-



torcycle at the bottom of the pit after a woman called the police control room at 8.03 am Friday.

What was supposed to be a day of celebration for the family turned into tragedy as Kamal's parents were preparing to celebrate their 28th wedding anniversary Friday, but instead were left to perform their son's last rites the same day.

A case under section 105 (culpable homicide) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita has been registered at the Janakpuri Police Station against the contractor and concerned officials. The Delhi government has suspended three DJB engineers and or-

dered a probe into the incident.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Darade Sharad Bhaskar said that around 1.35 am, Kamal's brother, Karan, along with some friends, approached the Vikaspuri Police Station while searching for him.

He added that since Kamal had made his last phone call from the District Centre area, the family went to Janakpuri.

"At 2.50 am, complainant Karan Dhyani walked into Janakpuri Police Station and reported his brother missing," the DCP said. Police then traced the missing man's mobile phone location, which showed near Possangipur Park in Janakpuri.

"We are investigating all aspects of the incident. This road has been closed for the past few days, and the pit was dug on Thursday. It is possible that the person used to take this route every day for commuting and was unaware of the pit," he said.



PM receives warm welcome by Indian Community at Kuala Lumpur, in Malaysia on Saturday.....

UPSC revamps exam centre allocation for PwBD candidates

The redesigned portal aims to reinforce integrity across various stages of the examination process while simplifying the application experience for candidates

New Delhi, Feb 7: In a significant reform aimed at supporting persons with benchmark disabilities (PwBD), the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has overhauled its examination centre allocation framework.

The Commission has launched a series of technological interventions for the civil services examination-2026 and the Indian Forest Service examination 2026, with a focus on enhancing candidate accessibility and strengthening examination security.

Under the revised mechanism, there will be no capping

on examination centre capacity for PwBD candidates. Initially, the existing capacity of each centre will be utilised by both PwBD and non-PwBD candidates.

However, once a centre reaches full capacity, it will no longer be available for selection by non-PwBD candidates, while PwBD candidates will continue to have the option to select the same centre, a statement issued by the UPSC said.

Additional capacity will be created wherever required to ensure that no PwBD candidate is denied their preferred examination centre, it said.

Explaining the rationale behind the move, UPSC chairman



Ajay Kumar said, "An analysis of examination centre data over the past five years revealed

that certain centres - including Delhi, Cuttack, Patna, and Lucknow - reach capacity at a

very early stage due to high application volumes, creating difficulties for PwBD candidates."

"With the revised mechanism, every PwBD candidate will be assured of their preferred examination centre, ensuring greater ease and convenience while appearing for UPSC examinations," he said.

Kumar said that the Commission has adopted the use of the latest technology to ensure a free, fair, inclusive, and accessible examination process, with a strong focus on enhancing candidate convenience and ease of participation, while ensuring that selections are made strictly on the basis of merit.

As part of its ongoing ef-

forts to improve efficiency, transparency and candidate convenience, the UPSC has introduced a revamped Online Application Portal for the submission of applications and conduct of examinations.

The redesigned portal aims to reinforce integrity across various stages of the examination process while simplifying the application experience for candidates, the statement said.

The Commission had Wednesday issued a notification for the civil services examination. As many as 933 vacancies, including 33 posts reserved for PwBD candidates, will be filled through the test.



CM SIDDARAMAIAH LAUNCHES MSIL CHITS NEW SOFTWARE & MOBILE APP, ASSURES GOVERNMENT GUARANTEE PROTECTS PUBLIC SAVINGS



BENGALURU: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday launched the new MSIL Chits software and mobile application, reaffirming the government's commitment to safeguarding citizens' savings through secure, state-backed investment channels.

Speaking at the launch event organized by Mysore Sales International Limited (MSIL), the Chief Minister emphasized that investments made through the government institution carry an official guarantee, ensuring complete security for depositors' hard-earned money.

"MSIL has earned the trust of people over many decades," Siddaramaiah said. "The chit fund system, operational since 2005, promotes a vital culture of saving—money that proves invaluable during emergencies."

The CM encouraged citizens, particularly women,

to channel their savings from government welfare schemes such as Shakti, Gruhalakshmi, Yuvanidhi, and Annabhagya into MSIL chit funds. He highlighted that these welfare programs are implemented without any discrimination based on caste or class.

**Security Over Returns**  
While acknowledging that MSIL offers approximately 5% profit on investments—lower than market alternatives—the Chief Minister stressed that security remains paramount. "There is always a risk of fraud in privately run chit transactions. MSIL, as a government institution, provides the assurance that people's investments remain protected," he explained.

**Ambitious Expansion Goals**  
The government has set an ambitious target to scale up chit fund transactions from the current

Rs.500 crore to Rs.10,000 crore in the coming years. For context, neighboring Kerala records chit fund transactions worth Rs.47,000 crore annually.

"Whether saving for education, health emergencies, marriage, or housing—citizens need absolute certainty that their money is secure," Siddaramaiah stated. "Earning money is important, but investing it safely is equally crucial."

**Digital Transformation & Consumer Protection**

The newly launched software and mobile app aim to modernize customer experience in MSIL's chit fund operations. Additionally, the Chief Minister referenced the Small and Micro Loan Ordinance 2025, recently enacted to protect borrowers from predatory micro-finance practices.

"Many people fall into debt traps created by microfinance companies. This ordinance has been implemented specifically to shield citizens from harassment and exploitation," he added.

The digital initiative marks a significant step toward expanding secure, government-backed financial services while protecting vulnerable populations from unregulated lending practices.



EDITORIAL

Perils of Opening India's Agricultural Market to United States Business

'Uttam Kheti, Madhyam Vaan, Nirghin Seva, Bheekh Nidaan.'

These words in Bhojpurī, from a folk song popular in the faraway fields and villages of Purvanchal distil a code of life in a few words. Sung in the purvanchal region spanning eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar, they roughly mean 'agriculture is the worthiest pursuit, trade a middling profession and service is the worst – even begging is better than that'. This folk wisdom may sound harsh to urban ears, but it captures an agrarian worldview shaped by generations of lived experience. It also offers a telling lens from which to view the current talk about opening India's agricultural market to the United States.

Usually, this debate is framed in the language of global integration, trade efficiency, market access and consumer choice. Rarely is it viewed from the vantage point of Indian fields and farmers, for whom agriculture is not merely an occupation but a way of living, remembering, asserting dignity and freedom – and surviving against the odds. So, let it be clear: your writer is no expert on international trade or business. He speaks, instead, as one who has spent a significant part of his life as an agriculturist, or listening closely to farming communities, and ultimately anchoring his stories in the folklore and lived realities of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The contrast

In India, agriculture is not an "abstract" sector, waiting to be liberalised. It is an emotionally-connected and fragile ecosystem sustained by collective memory, social bonds and narrow margins of hope. For farmers, their fields are as precious as the birth of a son. Oxen, cows and buffaloes are not merely sources of sustenance; they are symbols of dignity, continuity and pride.

This stands in sharp contrast to American agriculture, which is built on scale, heavy subsidies, advanced technology and corporate modes of organisation. Indian agriculture, in contrast, rests on small landholdings, unpaid family labour, seasonal uncertainty and cultural continuity. More than 85% of Indian farmers are small or marginal. Yet their homes, cattle wealth and farm fields remain the ultimate fallback for families – especially for children who lose jobs, fall ill or suffer business losses in the unfarily competitive urban ecosystem. Recall the lakhs of migrant labourers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, who, during the COVID-19 catastrophe of 2020-22, had to walk hundreds if not thousands of kilometres from Delhi, Punjab, Maharashtra and elsewhere to reach their homes. To them, memories of that long march to their villages are still fresh. They trudged home, carrying on their tired backs or in carts their babies and belongings. In those moments of profound distress, they instinctively chose their villages over cities, despite official claims that they would be provided food, medicine, oxygen and care. So, the fact that both India and America have vast farmlands does not make them similar. No such long march occurred in the United States of America during the pandemic. Nor do Indian farmers compete with American farmers. They merely coexist with them – as they do with nature and as they must do with policy – often an uneasy coexistence.

Opening India's market to farm produce from the United States, without robust safeguards for domestic farmers, is not 'competition'. It is an uneven contest between an industrial system and a survival economy. And it could well signal the beginning of the end of India's cultural and civilisational threads, woven around agriculture.

In the United States, agriculture is primarily a source of income and profit for large corporations and business houses that enjoy heavy clout within the governance system. In India, agriculture denotes identity, culture and social continuity. In the United States, it is largely another means to generate income and maximise profit.

Unlike Indian farmers, American farmers do not worship their oxen and cows, nor do they celebrate harvest as a civilisational ritual. Their cattle wealth is destined to become steak, meatball and bacon – commodities that join the global supply chains, but little else. Seen purely through an Indian agriculturist's lens, powerful corporations and business houses appear to have inspired US President Donald Trump's decision to push for an agricultural trade deal with an India still mired in rural poverty, inequality and stark disparities.

When subsidised American produce enters Indian markets, price signals are bound to collapse. For a small farmer, even a modest price dip can determine whether a daughter or son goes to school, or whether a loan is rolled over once again.

US-India Trade: Why the Interim Agreement Is A Vital Reset



After months of escalating tensions and ongoing negotiations, the United States and India announced an interim trade agreement, with a final comprehensive accord expected in March. The agreement is a welcome and long-overdue development, representing a deliberate effort by both governments to step back from an increasingly untenable trajectory and to restore a degree of stability to an economic relationship that had come under sustained strain. The US-India strategic partnership has weathered one of its most difficult periods in over 25 years. While other arenas of the bilateral relationship continued to advance, economic tensions steadily accumulated. The Trump administration's decision to impose punishing 50 per cent tariffs on India plunged the bilateral relationship into crisis and uncertainty, with many questioning the longstanding bipartisan consensus surrounding the relationship as well as its underlying strategic logic. Half of the tariff rate was purportedly the result of India's imports of Russian oil, underscoring the far-reaching geopolitical dimension to the trade tensions. For months, a resolution to arrest the downward trajectory of the trade relationship appeared elusive. Both sides, however, recognised that the status quo was unsustainable. The finalisation of a comprehensive trade deal between the EU and India, following more than two decades of stalled negotiations, injected new urgency in the US-India negotiations. Allowing trade disputes to persist without a clear path forward risked undermining confidence in the broader relationship and limiting the effectiveness of cooperation in other areas.

The interim framework reflects a mutual recognition that the ongoing dispute could not persist unaddressed. At the most fundamental level, the framework succeeds in stabilising the trade relationship. The establishment of a reciprocal tariff baseline and the removal of the additional duties imposed last year reduce uncertainty for exporters, importers, and investors. While the resulting tariff levels remain meaningful, the restoration of improved predictability itself is a material improvement. Equally important is the way the framework reconnects economic engagement with strategic alignment. The United States has made clear that trade treatment is being evaluated alongside energy, defense, and geopolitical considerations. India appears willing to situate trade discussions within that broader strategic context. This reflects the reality of contemporary trade policy where economic outcomes are increasingly shaped by national security and foreign policy considerations. Unsurprisingly, this is one of the key themes that runs throughout the joint statement between the two countries. Perhaps the most encouraging element of the framework is its emphasis on technology. The explicit focus on advanced technology products, data center infrastructure, and high-end compute signals a shared understanding that the future of the bilateral relationship will be defined in large part by digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence, and secure supply chains. This is a meaningful shift from earlier trade dialogues that were often dominated by traditional market access disputes. There are additional signs that suggest a more pragmatic approach by both sides. The attention to non-tariff barriers, including standards conformity assessment and licensing practices, acknowledges that many of the most significant trade frictions today operate outside formal tariff schedules. Progress in these areas could yield practical benefits if implemented with discipline. The reintroduction of digital trade principles is also notable. Embedding this discussion within a broader trade framework may provide a more durable foundation, particularly as data-driven services and cross-border digital activity become central to both economies. At the same time, caution is warranted given how many questions remain unanswered. Many of the most consequential details remain unclarified. Questions remain about the durability of the new tariff structure, the scope of rules of origin, the mechanisms for enforcement and dispute resolution, and the treatment of sensitive sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and digital services. Moreover, questions persist around the role of India's Russian oil imports, the singular factor that prompted Trump to impose an additional 25% punitive tariff on India last year.

When Leaders Threaten and Civil Servants Look Away, Democracy Crumbles

L'affaire Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chief Minister of Assam, suggests the land where the Brahmaputra flows is becoming a rogue state. The term, normally used in international affairs, refers to a ruling entity that is keen to deliberately and purposefully commit transgressions and break laws and policies meant to ensure peace and amity. The chief minister's actions – he launched a tirade against Harsh Mander, a former civil servant and highly regarded peace activist – fit this definition. How else does one interpret Sarma's brazen threat, made in a media interview: "Who is Harsh Mander? I have seen many such people in my life. He damaged the NRC [National Register of Citizens] in Assam and if I had been in a position then, I would have taught him a lesson. Now that he has filed a case against me, just watch how many cases will be filed against him ... At least 100 cases will be filed against him. I have material to initiate cases. Since he has targeted Himanta Biswa Sarma, he will get a response. He will know when I target him." What is the provocation for this statement from a constitutional functionary heading a government in the Union of India? According to Mander, he had filed a police complaint against Sarma over the latter's public statements made on January 27, 2026, that "promote hatred, harassment and discrimination against Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam". Mander has sought prompt action and the registration of an FIR under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Samhita, 2023, including sections 196 (promoting enmity between groups and doing acts prejudicial to harmony), 197 (making assertions prejudicial to national integration), 299 (malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings), 302 (uttering words intending to wound religious feelings) and 353 (statements conducing to public mischief). On that day in January, at an official event in Digboi in Tinsukia district, Sarma had termed Bengali-speaking Muslims "Miya" and made statements encouraging their harassment and discrimination – including deleting their names from the voter rolls. Mander has requested a



proper investigation and immediate steps to prevent such statements in the future as the special revision of electoral rolls proceeds in Assam. The complaint has been filed at the Hauz Khas Police Station in New Delhi and there is no word that the police have taken further steps in the matter. Besides, Sarma's heavy-handed tactics are not limited to Mander. His statements related to the Election Commission of India (ECI) are equally plain and blunt, and he appears to have commandeered the institution itself. At the same official event, he said his job was to "make the Miya people suffer", and then he declared that Muslims would not be allowed to vote in Assam. According to him, the special revision was a preliminary step – when the SIR [Special Intensive Revision] will be conducted, "four to five lakh" Muslim votes would be deleted in the state. The ECI has not responded to the chief minister who has openly declared he was working to take away the voting rights of a section of Indian citizens. The three eminent former civil servants who occupy the exalted position of Chief Election Commissioner and election commissioners seem to have allowed politicians to take the lead instead of them. It looks as if the civil servants of Assam have also let go of their responsibilities in favour of their political bosses. How else could a person occupying a transient

political position, who has no legal, executive or judicial authority to launch criminal proceedings, intimidate a citizen with "100 cases" for providing legal human rights assistance to [Muslim] victims in search of justice? Possibly emboldened by past victories, this politician appears to treat Assam's IAS and IPS officers as little more than instruments to be directed. Something similar happened a quarter-century ago in another state, and its thunderous reverberations are still being felt throughout the country. Mander was the first to call out the Gujarat massacre of 2002 as a pogrom and to say that the bureaucracy and the police (civil servants) had been complicit in the targeted violence against Muslims in the state. He then left the IAS for good, saying, "My heart is sickened, my soul wearied, my shoulders aching with the burdens of guilt and shame." I experienced a similar moment while at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie, sometime in March 2002. I had been invited by Wajahat Habibullah, director of the academy at the time, to deliver a few lectures to the IAS probationers on government and civil society. Believing that the Gujarat tragedy would still be fresh in the minds of the young probationers, I briefly explained the horrid events to them and sought their reaction.

NOT THE WHOLE COURSE, THIS IS AUTHORITARIANISM A LA CARTE

India and the US are operating under a similar form of authoritarianism that has emerged from substantially similar reasons, while being distinctly different from that found in other countries. Last week the director of the FBI, Kash Patel, announced an investigation into Signal groups monitoring the activity of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) personnel in Minnesota. It is no coincidence that this sounds very much like the rationale behind which the Indian government has gone after Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, and others protesting the National Register of Citizens and Citizenship Amendment Act in the 2020 Delhi riots case. In both cases, the government seeks to criminalise group conversations about dissent that is central to democratic politics. The anti-democratic regimes in India and the United States have deep similarities, and those similarities deserve specific focus. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. For example, John Burn-Murdoch wrote recently in the Financial Times comparing Trump's assault on democratic institutions, and how this compares with democratic backsliding in Hungary, Venezuela, Russia, and Turkey. Don Moynihan, Professor of Public Policy at the University of Michigan, reads the data differently, but does not quibble with Burn-Murdoch's choice of comparative countries. But it is worthwhile to note that none of the countries being compared have a long or deep history of democracy. All the countries – unlike the US – have very centralised govern-



nance structures, with little in the way of federation. Burn-Murdoch's 10 metrics – Electoral integrity, judicial independence, media freedom, central bank independence, civil service & bureaucratic autonomy, toleration/encouragement of political violence, use of state force against civilians, legislative constraints on executive, targeting political opponents, and civil liberties & human rights – are important, but wouldn't it be wise to compare how they are faring in a country similar to the US? It is not just the long and deep history of democracy in the countries that is important, or just the (weak) federalism, but also deep structural similarities of the Modi/Trump anti-democratic project. Critical to both these regimes have been a long-fought 'culture war' – one that pits 'True Americans/True Indians' against perfidious minorities (and also women). In the US the cleavage has been over race and religion, in India, it has been over caste and religion. In both cases, important legal and constitutional provisions have been used to stoke tensions. In the US this was the end of racial segregation in schools, as well as the autonomy of women to decide over abortion in the 60s and 70s, and in India over separate legal provisions for Muslims (and Kashmiris) as well as reservations in public administration for suppressed caste groups. In both countries, the support for the most reactionary politics has come from states within the Union which have the lowest human development indicators. In both countries, the Supreme Court has played an extremely partisan role, refusing to confront the executive on issues of substance, often finding a way to green flag executive impropriety, so much so that the lawyer and legal commentator Gautam Bhatia has spoken of an "Executive Judiciary." In both cases, the prime executive has surrounded himself with oligarchs, who have – often after 'helpful' state action – taken over media organisations that were mainstream and known for investigative journalism. And it is worth noting that in both cases, the current avatar of macho nationalism came to power after a visible minority became the chief executive of the country for the first time in its history. Nor do the list of similarities end there. There is the attack on verifiable statistics – particularly on the economy, the pressure on the independence of the central bank, the use of federal forces (the Enforcement Directorate and the Election Commission in India, and others) to pressurise Opposition states and politicians, the elimination of important public institutions – such as the Planning Commission, the elevation of sycophants to positions of authority, handpicking and extending the term of key bureaucrats, and the relentless projection of one man with his name plastered over everything, the relentless bragging about how they are perceived by the world.



# US tariff decreased as India stopped importing Russian oil: White House doc

A document from the White House showed that the US agreed to bring down the tariffs on Indian goods because New Delhi decided to stop importing oil from Russia. The development came in the backdrop of India and the US signing a trade deal that lowers Washington's tariff on India to 18 per cent from the previous 50 per cent. According to a formal White House presidential executive order, titled, "Modifying duties to the United States by the government of the Russian Federation," President Donald Trump said, "India has committed to stop directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil, has represented that it will purchase United States energy products from the United States, and has recently committed to a framework with the United States to expand defense cooperation over the next 10 years." Initial tariff on India due to national emergency in the US The order said that the United States had already declared a national emergency due to the "continued Russian Federation Efforts to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of



Ukraine." The Biden administration, in 2022, issued an order banning the import of Russian oil and petroleum products to "protect its national security." Later in 2025, the US determined that the emergency was ongoing and that Russia posed a serious threat. In response, it imposed a 25 per cent tariff on Indian goods because it was importing Russian oil at the time. President Trump declared that upon receiving information and recommendations from top

officials, India stopped directly or indirectly importing Russian oil to address the US' national emergency. "I have determined that India has taken significant steps to address the national emergency," the document read, adding that in recognition of the act, the President decided to "eliminate" the additional tariff. Effective from 12:01 am EST on February 7, "products of India imported into the United States shall no longer be subject to the

additional ad valorem rate of duty of 25 percent," the President confirmed. Will continue to monitor India: Trump The President stated that the White House will monitor "whether India resumes directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil." Trump also said that if the US Secretary of Commerce finds that India has resumed the import of Russian oil, multiple departments of the state will come together to advise the President on the action

to be taken against India, "including whether I should reimpose the additional ad valorem rate of duty of 25 percent on imports of articles of India." Naam Narendar, Kaam Surrender: Congress The Congress on Saturday, Friday 7, took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the interim trade agreement with the US, claiming the deal is against India's interests, and that all the "hugomacy and photo-ops" have not amounted to much.

# S Korean crypto firm accidentally pays out \$40bn in bitcoin



A South Korean cryptocurrency exchange accidentally gave away more than \$40bn (£32bn) worth of bitcoin to customers, briefly making them multi-millionaires. It had planned to give customers a small cash reward of 2,000 won - \$1.37 - but instead gave them 2,000 bitcoins on Friday. The platform, Bithumb, apologised for the error, adding that it quickly had realised its mistake and recovered almost all the missing tokens. It said it had restricted trading and withdrawals for the 695 affected customers within 35 minutes of the glitch. The company said it had recovered 99.7% of the 620,000 bitcoins mistakenly sent. "We want to make it

clear that this matter has nothing to do with external hacking or security breaches, and there is no problem with system security or customer asset management," Bithumb said in a statement on Friday. In an emergency meeting on Saturday, South Korea's financial regulator said it would look into the incident. Any sign of illegal activity would prompt formal investigations, the Financial Supervisory Service (FSS). Bithumb vowed to co-operate with regulators. "[We] will take this accident as a lesson and prioritise 'customer trust and peace of mind' rather than external growth," CEO Lee Jae-won said. The company plans to pay 20,000 won

(\$13,66) in compensation to all customers who were using the platform at the time, and will waive trading fees, among other measures. Bithumb said it would improve verification systems and introduce AI to detect abnormal transactions. The incident is likely to spark discussion around tighter regulatory controls in finance. In April 2024 Citigroup, a US bank, mistakenly credited \$81 trillion, instead of \$280, to a customer's account. Two employees failed to spot the error before it was processed, but the bank reversed the transaction within hours after a third employee caught the mistake, the Financial Times reported.

# INDIAN GEM JEWELLERY INDUSTRY WELCOMES ZERO-DUTY US ACCESS

**Mumbai:** The Indian gem jewellery industry on Saturday, February 7, welcomed the announcement of zero-duty access for diamonds and coloured gemstones to the US under the Interim Agreement framework, saying it is a turning point that will give a fresh boost to the sector. "We are elated by the Interim Agreement framework announcing zero-duty access for diamonds and coloured gemstones to the US, especially after a difficult year in which India's cut and polished diamond exports to our largest market fell by over 60 per cent, from USD 3.64 billion to USD 1.45 billion, due to tariff-driven loss of competitiveness," GJEPC Chairman Kirit Bhansali said in a statement. India and the US on Saturday announced they have reached a framework for an interim trade agreement under which both sides will reduce import duties on a number of goods to boost two-way trade. Tariffs will go down to zero on a wide range of goods, including generic pharmaceuticals, gems and



diamonds, and aircraft parts, thereby further enhancing India's export competitiveness and Make in India. Under the framework, Bhansali said, jewellery duties have been reduced to 18 per cent, providing immediate relief, and GJEPC expects full zero-duty treatment for diamonds and coloured gemstones once the agreement is concluded, which will help revive exports and restore competitiveness. "The Council has also taken up with the government the inclusion of laboratory-grown diamonds and synthetic gemstones in the exemption list of US tariffs," he added. All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic

Council (GJC) chairman Rajesh Rokde said, with tariffs on gems and diamonds now reduced to zero, Indian exporters gain unprecedented access to the US market. "This breakthrough strengthens our global competitiveness, boosts margins, and ensures our artisans' creations reach international audiences at fair prices. While jewellery continues under an 18 per cent tariff, the gains in gems and diamonds are a powerful step forward, positioning Indian craftsmanship as a global symbol of excellence," he stated. GJC vice chairman Avinash Gupta thanked the government for its relentless efforts in achieving this his-

toric zero-duty milestone. The removal of tariffs on gems and diamonds is a game-changer, especially for small and medium enterprises that form the backbone of our sector, he said. "SMEs and family-run businesses will now access the US market on equal terms, leading to higher exports, stronger revenues, and significant job creation. While finished jewellery remains at 18 per cent duty, this agreement lays the foundation for broader opportunities and creates a multiplier effect across allied industries such as logistics, design, and retail. It is both an economic and social victory, empowering communities nationwide," he added. Kama Jewelry MD Colin Shah said, the announcement of zero tariff on gems and diamonds is a momentous one and well-rejoiced by the Indian gems and jewellery sector. "India being the global hub for diamond processing was impacted severely due to the trade tariffs, where trade had dropped over 60 per cent when it comes to cut and polished diamonds.

# Seagram's Royal Stag BoomBox is Back with the Original Sound of Generation Large. Bigger Than Ever Before

**Highlights**  
■ Seagram's Royal Stag BoomBox, the iconic experiential music festival that blends Bollywood's timeless melodies with the pulsating beats of hip-hop, is back with its much-anticipated Season Four.



**February 2026:** In its Season 4, the celebrated IP travels to Kolkata, Vizag, Mumbai and Mohali uniting fans for a one-of-a-kind live music experience. Seagram's Royal Stag BoomBox, the iconic experiential music festival that blends Bollywood's timeless melodies with the pulsating beats of hip-hop, is back with its much-anticipated Season Four. Building on the phenomenal success of previous editions, this year's Royal Stag BoomBox is set to be the most ambitious, with an extraordinary line-up of the most cel-

ebrated Indian and International musical talents and a multi-city tour across four vibrant youth hubs - Vizag, Kolkata, Mumbai and Mohali Royal Stag BoomBox is known for offering audiences with a unique experience that combines subcultural elements that straddle across the passion points of today's youth. The Generation Large- Music, Fashion, Food and Gaming. Season 4 kicks off on 21st February, 2026 in Kolkata followed by Vizag (March 7), Mumbai (March 14) and Mohali (March 28). Since

this inception, the festival has redefined India's live music landscape through electrifying collaborations between iconic Bollywood voices and dynamic hip-hop acts. This year's power-packed line-up features rap superstar Badshah, chart-toppers Armaan Malik and Divine, along with the melodious Neeti Mohan, Nikhita Gandhi, Rashmeet Kaur and Sreerama Chandra, and the legendary band Fossils. Adding to the excitement are hip-hop heavyweights Raftaar and Dino James, and DJ Sahil

Gulati, promising an unforgettable journey of chart-topping hits and pulsating performances. And that's not all—fans can also gear up for an adrenaline-pumping gaming face-off with the gaming sensation, Payal Dhare, making this season a truly immersive cultural extravaganza. Royal Stag BoomBox is renowned for creating immersive, multi-sensory experiences that blend spectacular sound and lighting with interactive fan zones and vibrant cultural showcases, each capturing the unique essence of its host city.

# EPSTEIN ASKED ANIL AMBANI HIS PREFERENCE IN WOMEN, OFFERED 'TALL SWEDISH BLONDE'

Newly released Epstein files have exposed exchanges between disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein and businessman Anil Ambani, revealing that Epstein "arranged" meetings with women for the once-influential tycoon. The conversations, spanning from 2017 to 2019, just months before Epstein was charged by US prosecutors for sex trafficking minors, paint a picture of how the convicted sex offender leveraged his connections to procure women for wealthy associates, Bloomberg reported. 'Arrange that' In a March 9, 2017, text exchange, Anil Ambani asked Epstein: "K. Who do u suggest?" Epstein's response was immediate: "a tall swedish blonde woman, to make it fun to visit." Within 20 seconds, Anil texted back: "arrange that." The conversation didn't stop there. Epstein pressed further, asking, "is there an actress or model that represents your proclivity? I hope not Meryl Streep. I will be of



no help." Anil Ambani's reply was telling: "better taste my friend, Our next movie is with Scarlett Johansson." Epstein's response carried an undertone: "I am glad you prefer young blondes to old ones." At the time, Reliance Entertainment had co-produced the 2017 science fiction film "Ghost in the Shell" starring Johansson, making Anil's reference particularly pointed. When Anil Ambani told Epstein he'd be visiting New York in May 2019, Epstein dangled an offer: "And if there are some people you would like to meet quietly. Let me know." They met at

Epstein's Upper East Side Manhattan home, the same townhouse that's now infamous for what went on behind closed doors. These messages show how Epstein operated even after his 2008 guilty plea for soliciting prostitution from a minor. Epstein bought books on Ambanis The more than 3 million pages released in the past week have made one thing clear: Epstein's web stretched far beyond American shores. His ties to Anil Ambani show he was cultivating relationships with global elites and women were currency in that world."

# AGRICULTURE, DAIRY FULLY PROTECTED IN INDIA-US TRADE DEAL: PIYUSH GOYAL

**New Delhi:** India has completely protected its agriculture and dairy sectors in the trade agreement with the US, Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said on Saturday, February 7, adding that the trade pact will open a USD 30 trillion market for Indian exporters, especially Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME), farmers and fishermen. "The agreement reflects India's commitment to safeguarding farmers' interests and sustaining rural livelihoods by completely protecting sensitive agricultural and dairy products," Goyal said during a press conference. No genetically-modified products will be allowed into India, he said, adding that staples like maize, rice, wheat, millets, and ragi will not see any impact. Fruits grown in abundance in India, including banana and citrus, will remain protected. Meat,



poultry, dairy products, soya bean, sugar, and cereals will not be affected by the deal. There will be significant benefits for the textile and leather sectors. Silk products have also been brought under zero duty, said the minister. In the agriculture sector, several Indian products will now be exported to the US with zero duty. These include tea, spices, coconut oil, vegetable wax, areca

nut, Brazil nuts, chestnuts and a variety of fruits and vegetables, he said. According to the minister, vegetable roots, cereals, barley, bakery products, cocoa products, sesame seeds, poppy seeds and citrus juice will also face no reciprocal tariffs and will now enter the US market duty-free. Gems and jewellery, as well as pharmaceutical products, will also enjoy duty-free access,

boosting India's export competitiveness. Key sectors that will benefit are aircraft parts, machinery parts, generic drugs and pharmaceuticals. Other items covered under zero duty include coins, platinum, clocks and watches, essential oils, some home decor items like chandeliers, seeds and inorganic chemicals and compounds. Lower tariffs than China, Bangladesh: Goyal The

Union Minister also pointed that India now has the lowest US tariffs among its neighbours as well as competitors. "China has been imposed with over 35 per cent tariffs, while Bangladesh and Vietnam have been slapped with 25 per cent tariffs. India has a much lesser tariff now," he said. In a post on X earlier in the day, Goyal said the trade agreement framework will help India and the US remain focused on working together to further deepen economic cooperation, reflecting shared commitment to sustainable growth for our people and businesses. "This will open a \$30 trillion market for Indian exporters, especially MSMEs, farmers and fishermen. The increase in exports will create lakhs of new job opportunities for our women and youth," he said. He said the increase in exports will create lakhs of new job opportunities for the country's women and youth.



# US WANTS RUSSIA AND UKRAINE TO END WAR BY JUNE, SAYS ZELENSKY

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky says the US wants the war with Russia to end by June, adding that both sides had been invited to the US for talks next week. "America proposed for the first time that the two negotiating teams – Ukraine and Russia – meet in the United States of America, probably in Miami, in a week. We confirmed our participation," he said. There was no immediate comment from Washington or Moscow, but US President Donald Trump has been pushing for an end for the conflict since he took office again more than a year ago. Meanwhile, Russia has continued its attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure - causing further widespread blackouts during freezing conditions. In comments released on Saturday, Zelensky told reporters about what had taken place during the second round of US-brokered peace talks in Abu



Dhabi, which ended on Friday with no reports of a breakthrough. Zelensky said "difficult issues remained difficult", including territorial concessions that Ukraine is under pressure to make. He said the parties discussed, for the first time, the possibility of a trilateral meeting between leaders, not simply representatives, but cautioned that "preparatory ele-

ments are needed for this". Asked whether a time frame had been given for an agreement, the Ukrainian leader replied: "The Americans say that they want to do everything by June. "Why before this summer?" he added. "We understand that their domestic issues in the US will have an impact." These issues include the November midterm elections, which

could affect the balance of power in the US government. As the diplomacy continues, so too are Russian strikes on Ukraine's energy facilities. "Russian criminals carried out another massive attack on Ukraine's energy facilities," Ukraine's energy minister, Denys Shmyhal, wrote on Telegram. Substations, which control the flow of electricity, and overhead

power lines that "form the backbone of Ukraine's power grid" were targeted, Shmyhal said. Power plants were also struck. Ukraine's state-owned energy operator, Ukrenergo, said "the power deficit in the power system of Ukraine significantly increased" as a result of the latest attacks. Shmyhal said neighbouring Poland had been asked for emergency power supplies. Zelensky wrote on social media that Friday night's attack involved more than 400 drones and 40 missiles. Air-defence systems intercepted most, but not all, of them, the Ukrainian military said. "The main targets were the energy grid, generation facilities, and distribution substations," he said, adding that damage had been reported in at least four regions. In the western region of Lviv, the Dobrotvir power plant came under attack, leaving thousands of people without electricity, according to the

regional head, Maksym Kozytskyi. At least 6,000 people were without power as a result of hourly power outage schedules, he added. The Burshtyn power plant was also struck in the nearby Ivano-Frankivsk region. DTEK, which runs both the Dobrotvir and Burshtyn plants said that it was the 10th "massive attack" on its power plants since October 2025. "In total, DTEK thermal power plants have been attacked by the enemy more than 220 times since the beginning of the full-scale invasion," the company added on Telegram. This was launched by Russia nearly four years ago. One person was reported dead in the Rivne regions and several were injured in the Zaporizhzhia. Rivne's head, Oleksandr Koval, said there was also damage to homes and "critical infrastructure". In Kyiv, residents once again took shelter in metro stations.

## Could Bad Bunny set off political fireworks at the Super Bowl half-time show?



Two American football teams - the Seattle Seahawks and New England Patriots - will vie for the championship title on Sunday during Super Bowl LIX. But mid-game there's a separate, equally high-profile battle brewing: a culture war. Puerto Rican superstar Bad Bunny, who has been tapped as the show's headliner, has attracted an unprecedented level of criticism for his outspoken opposition to US immigration policy - with some even calling for his deportation, even though he is a US citizen. It's not exactly new. Half-time performances have a history of sparking controversy - from Janet Jackson's infamous

wardrobe malfunction in 2004, to the live debut of Beyoncé's Black Lives Matter anthem Formation in 2016. But this year's show ignited debates before Bad Bunny - the most streamed artist in the world, who primarily performs in Spanish - even took the stage. Republicans balked at his politics, with an Alabama senator dubbing it the "woke bowl". US President Donald Trump called Bad Bunny's selection "absolutely ridiculous," and the Speaker of the House summed it up as a "terrible decision". The push-back even sparked a competing half-time event from conservative organisation Turning Point USA.

## Colorado funeral home director sentenced to 40 years for corpse abuse



The co-owner of a Colorado funeral home where nearly 200 decaying bodies were found has been sentenced to 40 years in prison for corpse abuse. Before Jon Hallford was sentenced, he apologised in court and listened to family members describe having nightmares about their loved ones decomposing in his care. They called him a "monster" who should rot in jail. His ex-wife and co-owner Carrie Hallford has pleaded guilty to similar charges and is awaiting sentencing. The Return to Nature home, in the town of Penrose, Colorado, had given fake ashes to grieving relatives instead of their loved-ones' remains. Prosecutors said 189 bodies were improperly stored in the building over four years. The courthouse was packed with family members on Friday, who asked the judge to impose the maximum 50-year sentence. "I'm a daughter whose mother was treated like yesterday's trash and dumped in a site left to rot with hundreds of others,"

Kelly Mackeen told the court. "I'm heartbroken, and I ask God every day for grace." The bodies were found in piles inside non-refrigerated areas of the funeral home. Victims included children and foetuses. "It is my personal belief that every one of us, every human being, is basically good at the core," Judge Eric Bentley said. "But we live in a world that tests that belief every day, and Mr Hallford, your crimes are testing that belief." Hallford, who had pleaded guilty in the hopes of a reduced sentence, apologised for his actions ahead of sentencing. "I had so many chances to put a stop to everything and walk away, but I did not," he said. "My mistakes will echo for a generation. Everything I did was wrong." Prosecutors say the couple was driven by "greed", and were earning enough money from the business to properly care for the bodies. Located about 30 miles (48km) south of Colorado Springs, the funeral home specialised in burials where no chemicals.

## THEY WERE DRAWN TO KOREA WITH DREAMS OF K-POP STARDOM - BUT THEN LET DOWN

As K-pop's popularity soars, South Korea has become a destination for young people around the world hoping to break into the industry. And many take that chance each year to enroll in programmes promising a path to stardom. That hope brought Miyu to South Korea in 2024. Her name has been changed to protect her identity. Armed with big dreams, the teen paid 3m yen (\$19,800; £14,500) to join a six-month programme at a K-pop training academy in Seoul. In return, she was to be given professional dance and vocal lessons and the opportunity to audition for major music agencies. "There were supposed to be weekly auditions, but that never happened," Miyu told the BBC on a street in Hongdae, a neighbourhood in Seoul known for its music scene. Lessons were



few and far between, she said, and she also alleged she was sexually harassed by a senior staff member. The company, which we have not named for legal reasons, has denied all allegations. Miyu's allegations - and those of others at the academy - shed light on an under-regulated industry where the promise of opportunity often comes with risk. The BBC spoke to two other trainees who attended the same academy.

## Will Sunday's snap election gamble pay off for Japan's first female premier?

Japan heads to the polls again on Sunday for its second general election in as many years. The snap vote has caught the ruling party, the opposition and much of the electorate off guard. Sanae Takaichi, Japan's first female prime minister, is betting on her personal popularity, hoping to succeed where her party failed just last year: delivering a clear public mandate for the long-ruling but deeply unpopular Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). It is a political gamble - one her predecessor, Shigeru Ishiba, made, and lost badly. Voters will now decide whether it will pay off. "The difference this time is that her approval across most media polls has been much, much higher than her predeces-



sors," says Rintaro Nishimura, an analyst and senior associate at The Asia Group's Japan Practice. "Conventional wisdom says: when approval is high, you call an election." Since taking office last October, Sanae Takaichi has dominated headlines, not through policy or legislation, but through political performance. The "work, work,

Washington in Yokosuka, the prime minister raised her fists in the air as President Trump lavished her with praise. And just two days before February's vote, President Trump endorsed Takaichi saying she has "already proven to be a strong, powerful, and wise leader... one that truly loves her country". There was also her surprise appearance playing the song Golden from the film K-Pop Demon Hunters on the drums alongside South Korea's president, and the selfie with Italy's prime minister. These were all viral moments projecting confidence and momentum, and distanced her from the traditionally stagnant and at times boring image of her predecessors.

# TRUMP SAYS HE 'DIDN'T SEE' PART OF VIDEO WITH RACIST CLIP DEPICTING OBAMAS AS APES

US President Donald Trump has said he "didn't see" the part of a social media video which showed a racist clip depicting Barack and Michelle Obama as apes. The clip - set to the song The Lion Sleeps Tonight - was at the end of a 62-second video he shared containing claims about voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election. The video was later removed. Speaking to reporters on Friday, Trump said "I didn't make a mistake" when asked whether he was going to apologise. He added he had only seen the beginning of the video before it was posted by a staff member and didn't know it contained that depiction of the Obamas.

Senator Tim Scott - who is black - described it as "the most racist thing I've seen out of this White House". The White House initially defended the clip as an "internet meme video" and told critics to "stop the fake outrage". But after fierce backlash, including from several Republican senators, the post was removed from Trump's Truth Social account and a White House official said that a staffer had "erroneously" made the post. The clip - which recalls racist caricatures comparing black people to monkeys - appears to be taken from an X post shared by conservative meme creator Xerias in October. That video also depicts several other high-



profile Democrats as animals, including New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Trump's predecessor in the White House, Joe Biden, is also depicted as an ape eating a banana. The

Obamas have yet to comment on the video. The video was one of dozens posted to Trump's Truth Social account overnight. "I look at a lot of thousands of things," the president said while aboard Air Force One on Friday, adding that after watching only part of the video he "gave it to the peo-

ple who generally, they look at the whole thing". He says he liked the video's message on voter fraud, but that if his staff had looked at the whole thing, "probably they would have had the sense to take it down". "We took it down as soon as we found out about it," he added. Some criticism came from within Trump's own party. Senator Scott, a South Carolina Republican and an ally of Trump, posted that he was "praying it was fake because it's the most racist thing I've seen out of this White House". "The President should remove it," he added. Another Republican, New York representative Mike Lawler, called the post "wrong and incredibly offensive -

whether intentional or a mistake" and said it "should be deleted immediately with an apology offered." The criticism continued even after the post was taken down. John Curtis, a Republican Senator from Utah, posted on social media that the video was "blatantly racist and inexcusable". "It should never have been posted or left published for so long," he wrote. According to CBS, the BBC's US partner, Florida representative Byron Donalds - a longtime supporter of Trump's who is running for governor - called the White House after the video was posted and was told that it was the work of a staffer who "let the president down".

## Police investigating new message in search for mother of Savannah Guthrie



Police are investigating a new message sent to a local TV news station that might be linked to the suspected abduction of the mother of US news presenter Savannah Guthrie. Authorities on Friday said they were "aware of a new message regarding Nancy Guthrie". They are "inspecting the information provided in the message for its accuracy". The new development comes amid public pleas from the Guthrie family for proof that their mother is still alive and after the first deadline in one of the alleged ransom letters passed on Thursday evening. The 84-year-old is believed to have been taken from her home in Tucson, Arizona, last weekend. Police are offering a reward of \$50,000 (£36,000) for information. The statement from the FBI and the Pima County Sheriff's Department did not specify who received the note, or any details that it may have contained. A presenter for a local affiliate of CBS News told the BBC that her channel received the "message". It is unclear if it was sent to other media outlets. On Thursday, Camron Guthrie - the son of the missing

woman - renewed the family's plea, and confirmed that the family had not had any direct contact with kidnappers. "We have to know that you have our mum," Camron said in the family's latest video message. "We want to talk to you." "We haven't heard anything directly," he said in the video, posted on Thursday just after 17:00 local time in Arizona (00:00 GMT). "We need you to reach out, and we need a way to communicate with you so we can move forward." The case has mystified the country and even US President Donald Trump has weighed in, ordering federal authorities to help investigate. On Friday, Trump said authorities had uncovered "some clues" and added that "we could have some answers" soon in the case. The new message is one of several that authorities say they are investigating. At a briefing on Thursday, FBI Special Agent Heith Janke said his agency was reviewing one of the notes, which he called a possible ransom note. It gave a deadline for payment of 17:00 on Thursday, he said, without specifying which time zone, and had a second deadline for Monday.

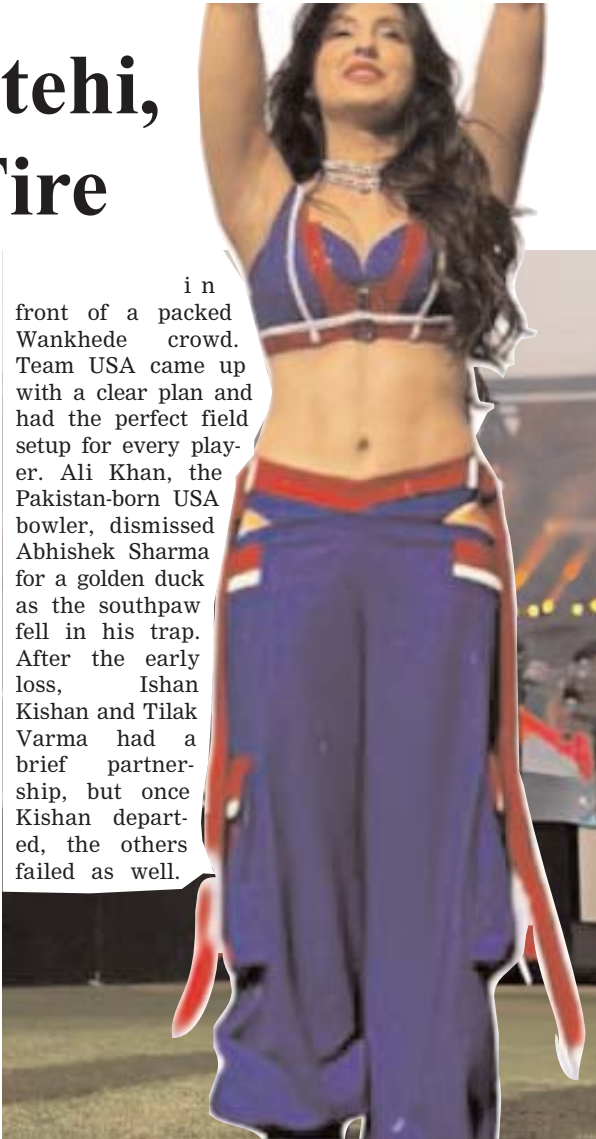


## T20 World Cup: Nora Fatehi, Badshah Set Stage On Fire

Fans at the Wankhede Stadium witnessed an energetic opening ceremony of the T20 World Cup on Friday. The full event was not televised live, with broadcasters showing only brief glimpses. India's 2024 T20 World Cup-winning captain Rohit Sharma and the ICC chairman Jay Shah presented the trophy at the stadium during the ceremony. Star performers Nora Fatehi, Badshah, Sivamani and Rishab Verma entertained the audience. Here are a few videos from the opening ceremony. Talking about the match, Captain Suryakumar Yadav scored a fighting half-century against the USA in India's first match in Group A in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, keeping alive the defending champion's hopes of posting a fighting total. Yadav came into the middle after opener Ishan Kishan had joined his partner Abhishek Sharma in the dugout with the score 45/2

in the sixth over. He saw the team slump to 46/4 at the end of the power play as Tilak Varma and Shivam Dube departed in quick succession. The 36-year-old explosive batter, playing at his home ground Wankhede Stadium, raced to his fifth off 36 balls, hitting seven boundaries and one six. In between, he saw Rinku Singh and Hardik Pandya return to the pavilion without adding many runs to the scoreboard. But Suryakumar did not lose hope and continued to fight, hitting boundaries whenever possible. He raised 41 runs for the seventh wicket partnership with Axar Patel as they blasted 21 runs off the sixth over bowled by Saurabh Netravalkar. Suryakumar Yadav put on display his usual 360-degree shot-making, hitting a four and six off Netravalkar and another four and six in the same over off Shadley van Schalkwyk, the bowler who troubled India by claiming

4-25 in his first spell. Yadav's brilliant knock kept alive India's hopes of reaching a defendable total in their opening match and avoid an upset. In the process, Suryakumar Yadav also reached 1000 runs as a T20 captain, thus adding to his unique records in the shortest format of the game. It was not only Nora Fatehi who dazzled with her performance, but singer and rapper, Badshah, also had an electrifying performance as the fans got their money's worth before the main contest began. He had a solo performance, and the artist also accompanied Nora Fatehi as the duo lit up the T20 World Cup stage in a show that would be remembered by everyone. India fails to delivery after electric performance 300 was on the cards as India was put into bat by the USA captain, but perhaps, India were a bit overconfident as the batting unit crumbled like a pack of cards



in front of a packed Wankhede crowd. Team USA came up with a clear plan and had the perfect field setup for every player. Ali Khan, the Pakistan-born USA bowler, dismissed Abhishek Sharma for a golden duck as the southpaw fell in his trap. After the early loss, Ishan Kishan and Tilak Varma had a brief partnership, but once Kishan departed, the others failed as well.

## Vonn disputes doctor's knee injury claim



Veteran skier Lindsey Vonn has disputed a doctor's claim that her anterior cruciate ligament injury is not a "fresh tear", saying her ACL is "100% gone". American Vonn has now completed two impressive Winter Olympics training runs at Olimpia delle Tofane in Cortina, only one week after rupturing her ACL in a crash at a World Cup race in Switzerland. Vonn, 41, clocked the third-fastest time of the day in another session disrupted by the weather, prompting speculation about what is considered to be a serious injury. The second practice run came after she responded to a social media post from sports medicine doctor Brian Sutterer in which he claimed the 2010 Olympic downhill champion may have already been functioning on a torn ACL before the crash, which saw her airlifted to hospital. "What was the state of her ACL before the crash last week?" Sutterer wrote. "What she is doing now would not be

nearly as surprising in an elite athlete whose knee was already functioning like the ACL was torn at baseline." Vonn replied: "Lol thanks doc. My ACL was fully functioning until last Friday. Just because it seems impossible to you doesn't mean it's not possible. And yes, my ACL is 100% ruptured. Not 80% or 50%. It's 100% gone." Sutterer suggested that "someone who had a prior tear/surgery may not be as swollen and painful with a repeat injury" and "the body has time to adapt and retrain muscles to support the knee"

if the injury is "chronic". Vonn was 1.39 seconds off the fastest time of the day in Friday's training session, which took place in difficult weather and surface conditions. On Saturday she improved on her time, completing the run in one minute 38.28 seconds, 0.37 seconds off compatriot Breezy Johnson, who clocked the fastest run, and more than six seconds faster than the first run. Vonn is due to compete in Sunday's downhill competition but remains uncertain as to whether she will compete in the super-G and team events.

## What Is 'Force Majeure' Clause That Pakistan Invoked To Justify India Boycott At T20 World Cup - Explained

A few days back, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) officially wrote to the International Cricket Council (ICC) about wanting to invoke the force majeure clause after it boycotted the February 15 group-stage match against India at the T20 World Cup. According to a report in news agency PTI, the PCB cited the government's stance, which barred the team from the February 15 clash in Colombo, as the reason. The ICC has now sought an explanation from Pakistan on how the force majeure clause can be invoked to justify the team's refusal to play the T20 World Cup match against India after the PCB attempted to wriggle out of the situation by placing the onus on its government. So,



what is force majeure? Force majeure is a contractual provision that excuses a party from fulfilling its obligations due to extraordinary events beyond its control-such as war, natural disasters, government actions, or public emergencies. For the clause to apply, the affected party must demonstrate that the event was

unforeseeable, unavoidable, and that it took all reasonable steps to mitigate the impact. Mere inconvenience or political preference does not ordinarily satisfy the test. Pakistan's justification The Pakistan government had announced that its team would boycott only the India fixture to support Bangladesh, who were

shown the door for refusing to play in India due to their "security concerns." Pakistan will play its remaining matches. The ICC has sent a series of queries, asking the PCB to demonstrate what efforts it made to mitigate the situation, explore alternative options, or seek exemptions before opting for non-participation. It is learnt that the global body also set out the conditions under which force majeure can legitimately be triggered, the evidence required for withdrawal from a scheduled match, and the wider sporting, commercial, and governance consequences of such a step. The ICC has also underlined the damages it could potentially claim if the invocation is found invalid.

## Who Is Shadley van Schalkwyk? Knight Riders And USA Pacer Who Dismissed Ishan Kishan, Tilak Varma To Stun India

USA pacer Shadley van Schalkwyk stunned Indian fans across the world on Saturday as he scalped three wickets in one over against India at the T20 World Cup. Courtesy of his exploits, the Suryakumar Yadav-led side was off to one of their worst starts in a T20 innings, reaching 46/4 in the Powerplay. Tournament favourites India would not have expected such a start to their campaign, once again highlighting how unpredictable the format can be. After Ali Khan drew first blood by dismissing Abhishek Sharma for a golden duck in the second over, van Schalkwyk produced a sensational sixth over, dismissing Ishan Kishan, Tilak Varma and Shivam Dube. Van Schalkwyk is a South African-born player who



studied at Wynberg Boys' High School, the same institution attended by Jacques Kallis. He played domestic cricket in South Africa and represented Western Province in 2008. In the 2020s, he moved to the USA and was part of their 2024 T20 World Cup squad as well. In Major League Cricket (MLC), he plays for the Los Angeles Knight

Riders, while he turns out for the Abu Dhabi Knight Riders in the ILT20. Van Schalkwyk has played 13 ODIs and 14 T20Is. USA skipper Monank Patel won the toss and elected to field first against defending champions India in their ICC T20 World Cup campaign opener at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium on Saturday. The Men in Blue begin their

quest to become the first team to defend the T20 World Cup title against a USA side that surprised everyone in the 2024 edition by reaching the Super 8s, including a win over Pakistan and close contests against India and South Africa. Monank, who spent his early cricketing years in India, said at the toss: "We are going to bowl first. Looks like a good surface. High-scoring ground, so we will look to chase it down. The World Cup is one of the biggest stages for us. A lot of expectations from the US, so we will look to do well. We played a couple of warm-up games at the DY Patil and we had a good run there. We have six batters, two all-rounders and three bowlers." Indian skipper Suryakumar Yadav said they were also looking to bat first.

## EX-NFL PLAYER LEE CHARGED WITH MURDERING GIRLFRIEND



Former NFL linebacker Darron Lee has been charged with murdering his girlfriend. Police officers were dispatched to a residence near Chattanooga in Tennessee on Thursday. Life-saving measures were attempted on a woman but she was already deceased. Lee, 31, was identified as the suspect and taken into custody, and on Friday was charged with first-degree murder and tampering with evidence. He is due to appear in court on 11 February. "Preliminary findings indicate the victim's death was the result of a homicide," read a statement from the Hamilton County sheriff's office. The name of the victim is being withheld until her next of kin has been informed. Lee, a

first-round draft pick for the New York Jets in 2016, last played in the NFL for the Buffalo Bills in 2020. His four-year deal with the Jets was cut short by a year in 2019, when he left the franchise because of disciplinary problems and poor form. Lee was part of the Kansas City Chiefs' roster that won the Super Bowl in 2020, although he did not feature in the match. He signed with the Las Vegas Raiders in June 2021 but did not play before his release two months later. Lee was arrested in 2023 for assault and domestic violence. The arrest report said he pushed a woman "against the wall, throwing her to the floor and striking her face and head eight to nine times with his closed fists".

## Vaibhav Suryavanshi Won't Play Next U-19 World Cup Despite Being Eligible To Play Till 2030

Vaibhav Suryavanshi once again showed the world why he is a special phenomenon on Friday night. The 14-year-old slammed 175 off 80 balls to guide India to 411/9 in 50 overs. Despite a late fightback, England were bowled out for 311. Suryavanshi earned both the Player of the Tournament and Player of the Final awards for his exploits. At 14 years and 317 days, he is still almost two months short of his 15th birthday. As the U-19 World Cup is played every two years, Suryavanshi is technically eligible to play in the next two editions - 2028 and 2030. However, he will not feature in those tournaments. In 2026, the BCCI working committee decided that players who enter



the U-19 system can participate in a maximum of two seasons of Under-19 cricket. This essentially means players who have represented India in one Under-19 World Cup cannot compete in another edition, even if they meet the age

criteria. No official reason was given, but several experts have pointed to observations made by former India coach Rahul Dravid. Before becoming India coach, Dravid was the head of the National Cricket Academy and also

travelled to several U-19 World Cups as coach. He had strongly opposed age-fudging in junior cricket. "I think of this overage business as dangerous and even toxic and to me, gives rise to a question: If a child sees his parents and coaches cheating and creating a fake birth certificate, will he not be encouraged to become a cheat? He is being taught to lie by his own elders," Dravid had said. "At 14, it may be in the matter of the age criteria; at 25 it may be fixing and corruption. How are the two different in any way? In both cases, is it not blatant cheating?" Earlier, there have been instances of several Indian players competing in multiple U-19 World Cups.

## 'Came Close To Boycotting Entire World Cup': Pakistan Trolled Over Struggles Against Netherlands

Pakistan produced yet another topsy-turvy match at the international stage, living up to their reputation as they nearly lost the T20 World Cup 2026 opener against minnows Netherlands. Chasing a target of 148 against the European side, Pakistan found themselves in a real spot of bother after losing 7 wickets, with 29 runs still to be scored in the final two overs. Though Faheem Ashraf's extraordinary finishing earned Pakistan 2 points from the contest, the team's performance couldn't prevent fans from going bonkers on social media. The likes of Saim Ayub, Salman Agha and even stalwart Babar Azam flopped with the bat as Pakistan found them-



selves struggling in the run-chase. If it wasn't for Faheem Ashraf's 11-ball 29, Pakistan would have suffered a defeat against the Dutch. Here's how fans reacted to Pakistan's roller-coaster-like performance: Pakistan was all ready to boycott this entire world cup had Rana Faheem not show up !! After

being put into bat, the Netherlands adopted a fearless approach as they raced to 50/2 within the Powerplay. Michael Levitt (24 off 15) provided the early fireworks, including a massive six, before falling to Mohammad Nawaz (2/38 in 4 overs). At the halfway mark, the Dutch were cruising at 79/3, and

later reached 123/4 in 15 overs. Skipper Scott Edwards (37) and Bas de Leede (30) appeared to be guiding the team toward a formidable 170 total. However, the Pakistani spinners, led by Abrar Ahmed (2/23) and Saim Ayub (2/7), triggered a catastrophic collapse. The Netherlands lost their final six wickets for just 20 runs, finishing 147 all out in 19.5 overs. Salman Mirza was the pick of the bowlers, cleaning up the tail to finish with 3/24. Pakistan's pursuit of 148 began with Saim Ayub (24) hammering a hat-trick of boundaries in the second over, and Sahibzada Farhan looked in sublime touch, blasting 47 off 31 balls.

## Ingebrigtsen has Achilles surgery



Two-time Olympic champion Jakob Ingebrigtsen has had surgery on an Achilles injury in the United States but has said "it's not as bad as it seems". In worst-case scenarios, recovery time from an Achilles operation can take up to 10 months, but the 25-year-old Norwegian said on his YouTube channel, external that he was looking at a rehabilitation plan for the "next couple of months". Ingebrigtsen said he first injured his left Achilles last April, but was determined to compete at the World Championships in September, where he failed to win a medal. The injury flared up again in January and he said it became "100% necessary" to have surgery to remove scar tissue surrounding the paratenon - a protective sheath that surrounds the Achilles tendon. "This is of course not something to be taken lightly but absolutely the right thing for the longevity of my career," Ingebrigtsen posted on

Instagram, along with a picture of him sitting in a wheelchair, wearing a protective boot. "The surgery went very smoothly and I'm relieved to have a clear path of recovery back to the start line after many months of uncertainty." Ingebrigtsen won 1500m gold at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 and took the 5,000m title at the Paris Games in 2024. But he failed to make the 1500m final at the 2025 World Championships in Tokyo and went on to finish 10th in the 5,000m final. Ingebrigtsen added: "My Achilles tendon is absolutely fine and has been for many months - it is the sheath around it that has been causing the issue and unfortunately it has not been able to recover properly," he said. "The sheath has been ruined and covered in scar tissue, which is what we have gone in and removed. "So the surgery by itself is not that big, which is why the recovery time is somewhat short.



## Celebration Mode On! Dum Dum Diyyala Song from Amaravathiki Aahwanam Hits the Audience



As part of the ongoing promotions for Amaravathiki Aahwanam, the celebration song 'Dum Dum Diyyala' was launched on a specially arranged event on a boat in Lumbini Park, Hyderabad. The film is gearing up for a grand worldwide theatrical release on February 13th. Produced by K. Shankar Rao and R. Venkateswara Rao under the banner of Light House Cine Magic, the film is presented by G. Rambabu Yadav with production supervision by veteran producer Muppa Venkaiah Chowdary. Directed by GVK, the movie stars Siva Kantamneni, Dhanya Balakrishna, Esther, Supritha, and Harish in lead roles, supported by senior actors Ashok Kumar, Bhadram, Gemini Suresh, and Nagendra Prasad. On this occasion ..Gemini Suresh: "I played a different character

for the first time in this film. I will be seen as a madman, and while it is a full-length entertainer, it carries a strong emotional touch at the end. The audience will definitely enjoy my role." DOP Prabhakar Reddy: "After Premakatha Chitram, this is the next horror film I am working on. Director GVK has a clear vision, and I wish him a big success with this project." Music Director Padmanabh Bhardwaj: "Dum Dum Diyyala' is a celebratory song with wonderful lyrics by Uma Vanguri. The energy of this track will surely make it go viral" Actor Shiva Harish: "I was given a role with all shades of emotion. It was a pleasure working with Supritha. Please watch the film in theatres on February 13th and enjoy it. Heroine Esther: "I realized Director GVK's true passion for cinema when He narrated the script of this film.

'Amaravathiki Aahwanam is a good title. The film also came out very well.. Acting alongside Dhanya and Supritha was delightful, and our characters have been given strong importance. Dancing after a long time in this film was refreshing, and I'm sure audiences will love it. Heroine Supritha: "I play a vision, and I wish him a big success." Hero Siva Kantamneni: "This is the sixth film under our Lighthouse banner. We completed the project within the planned budget and schedule, which is already half the success. With strong performances from Esther, Dhanya, Supritha, and senior actors, we are confident the film will entertain audiences.

## Action King Arjun's Directorial Venture Seetha Payanam Trailer Unveiled, Promises Love, Action & Drama



Action King Arjun returns to the director's chair with Seetha Payanam, produced under his banner Shree Raam Films International. The film marks the debut of his daughter Aishwarya Arjun, leading an impressive ensemble that includes Niranjana, Sathyaraj, Prakash Raj, and Kovai Sarala. Arjun himself appears in a key cameo, while his nephew, Action Prince Dhruva Sarja, boosts the excitement with a special appearance. The film hits theatres on February 14th, and the makers have just dropped the theatrical trailer. The story revolves around a young chef raised by her overprotective father. During a long drive, she reluctantly offers a lift to a stranger on the condition that every phone call he receives is on loudspeaker. What starts off as a breezy journey gradually takes a darker turn, leading to an unexpected twist. Arjun's experience is evi-

dent in both his writing and direction. The fresh narrative, clean storytelling, and his impactful special appearance stand out. Niranjana makes an impressive debut as the male lead, while Aishwarya Arjun looks charming and delivers a confident, mature performance. Sathyaraj shines as the protective father, and Prakash Raj brings emotional weight, particularly in a poignant sequence about the real meaning of marriage. Dhruva Sarja's action-packed cameo adds extra punch. G Balamurugan's cinematography offers vibrant visuals, while Melody King Anup Rubens elevates the mood with a soulful score. Sai Madhav Burra's dialogues land effectively. Ayub Khan handles the editing, and Kick Ass Kali amps up the action with dynamic stunt choreography. With just a week to go for its Valentine's Day release, the trailer has set high expectations for Seetha Payanam.

## Vishwak Sen & Anudeep KV Bring Comic Chaos Back With FUNKY



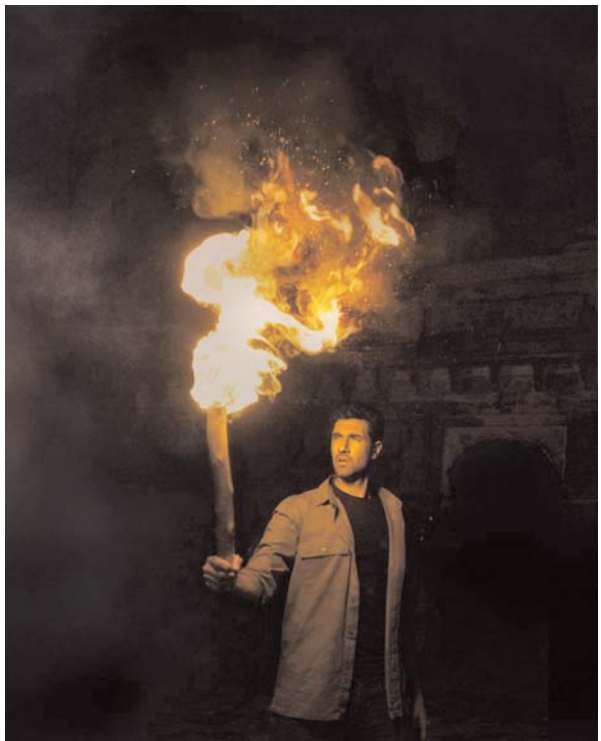
The FUNKY trailer strikes the right chord instantly, packed with riotous slapstick humour and the unmistakable trademark comedy of KV Anudeep. Bursting with fun in every frame, the trailer feels like a blockbuster add-on that amplifies excitement for what promises to be a complete theatrical entertainer. Vishwak Sen and Kayadu Lohar look refreshingly vibrant and effortlessly charming together. Their chemistry is a delightful highlight, adding a fresh spark and youthful energy to the film's narrative. Supported by an ensemble cast loaded with full-on comedy, FUNKY is shaping up to be the ultimate laugh-out-loud entertainer. Bringing together a power-packed team synonymous with humour,

**THE FUNKY TRAILER STRIKES THE RIGHT CHORD INSTANTLY, PACKED WITH RIOTOUS SLAPSTICK HUMOUR AND THE UNMISTAKABLE TRADE-MARK COMEDY OF KV ANUDEEP.**

chaos and pure entertainment, director KV Anudeep, known for the blockbuster Jathi Ratnalu, returns to his signature comic universe aiming to deliver an even bigger, louder, and crazier cinematic experience with his quirky storytelling and infectious humour. Music director Bheems Ceciroleo

once again proves his flair for foot-tapping compositions, infusing the film with vibrant rhythms and catchy tunes. The film is produced by Naga Vamsi S and Sai Soujanya under the banners of Sithara Entertainments, Fortune Four Cinemas and Srihara Studios. Known for their rich production values and stylish presentation, the makers promise a grand, wholesome entertainer made for the big-screen experience. With quirky characters, a refreshing lead pair, peppy music, and a director celebrated for comic chaos, FUNKY is all set to deliver unlimited entertainment in theatres. FUNKY is scheduled for a grand theatrical release on February 13, 2026, making it the perfect entertainer for the Valentine's Day weekend.

## Sangeet Shoban - Producer Niharika Konidela's 'Raakaasaa' Set for a Worldwide Theatrical Release on April 3, 2026



The makers of Raakaasaa have officially announced that the film will release in theatres worldwide on April 3, 2026. Presented by Z Studios and produced under the banners of Pink Elephant Pictures, the film is written and directed by Manasa Sharma, with Niharika Konidela and Umesh Kumar Bansal serving as producers. The release date announcement marks a significant milestone for the project, which has now completed its entire shoot and is currently in post-production. With principal photography fully wrapped, the team is focused on finalising the film's edit, music, sound design, and overall visual treatment, aligning the post-production process toward its planned theatrical release in 3rd April 2026. The release date was unveiled alongside a new poster, which reflects the film's imaginative tone and

genre positioning. Complementing this, the teaser—released earlier on YouTube—offered audiences their first glimpse into the world of Raakaasaa. Rather than revealing narrative specifics, the teaser established the film's tonal space, blending humour, fantasy elements, and moments of tension, setting expectations for a theatrical experience designed for the big screen. Since its announcement, Raakaasaa has generated steady interest within the Telugu film fraternity, driven by its genre blend and measured promotional approach. The makers opted for a gradual reveal strategy, allowing anticipation to build organically through selective updates. With the release date now locked, the film enters a more defined phase in its promotional journey, giving audiences and trade circles a clear timeline to look forward to.

## “Cockroach” Completes Censor Formalities

Set against the backdrop of a society that shuns and stigmatizes the so-called “dirty” people, Cockroach is a beautiful love story that unfolds in the margins. It narrates the pure friendship between a street-side sex worker and a contract killer—an unlikely bond that questions the moral decay of a corrupt and rotten social system. Cockroach is a hard-hitting film that introduces audiences to the dense darkness of a morally bankrupt society. While people applaud the killing of a cockroach and write poetry about butterflies, the film questions this hypocrisy through its characters. Directed by P. Suneel Kumar Reddy and



produced by B. Bapiraju under the banner Sri Lakshmi Pictures, Cockroach has successfully completed its censor formalities. The Central Board of Film Certification has

awarded the film an “A” (Adults Only) certificate. The director and producers have respectfully requested, through the press, that sensitive viewers and children refrain from watching the

film. The makers have announced that preparations are underway to release the film in theatres in the first week of March. To portray the violent confrontations in the film with authenticity, real fighters were cast as actors. Abhilash Sunkara, Premasan, and Naveen appear as contract killers inspired by real life. Award winning actress Teertha (for Sontha Ooru) plays a key role. Other important roles are played by Meenakshi, Raman, Bugutha, Anji Gagan, Pradeep, Samudram Venkatesh, Mallika, FM Babai, Raju, Balaji, LB Ramana, RK Singh, Pooja, Potti Murthy, Prasad, Relare Raghu troupe, Johnny, and others.

## Introducing Fighter Fame Rishabh Sawhney Looks Powerful As The Dreaded Abdali From The Much-Awaited Pan India Film Nagabandham



Abhishek Nama's much-awaited mythological action drama Nagabandham, starring Virat Karina, is gearing up for a grand Pan-India release this summer. The film's teaser is set to drop on the 15th of this month, marking the auspicious occasion of Maha Shivaratri. Ahead of it, the makers have unveiled the first look of another key character from the epic narrative. In Rishabh Sawhney, known for his commanding presence in Bollywood's Fighter, has delivered a remarkable performance in Nagabandham, where he takes on the role of the infamous Afghan Sultan Abdali. Set in 1750, the film recounts Abdali's conquest in India, detailing his notorious acts of looting temples and his relentless pursuit of vast wealth. The first-look poster is a striking visual set against a storm-lashed, snow-covered battlefield. Rishabh appears in mid-charge, brand-

ishing a giant, blood-soaked battle axe with fierce resolve. Behind him surges a massive army, green war flags tearing through the icy winds, accompanied by archers, warriors, and towering war elephants—building an intense, high-voltage war canvas. Adding to the menace, a pack of wolves with glowing eyes closes in around him, amplifying the aura of danger, power, and impending doom. In "Nagabandham," Abdali is depicted as a figure driven by ambition and cruelty, willing to sacrifice the lives of many, including Brahmins and children, in his quest to uncover the mythical Naga Bandham hidden in the Himalayas. The character remains a significant and dark part of history, known for his extreme ruthlessness. Director Abhishek Nama praised Rishabh's portrayal, noting that his performance is so convincing that it feels as if the historical figure of Abdali has come to life on screen.

## 120 CRORE AP-TG DEAL: YASH & KVN'S TOXIC SEALS HISTORIC ACQUISITION WITH DIL RAJU'S SVC



Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups has stormed into the record books, rewriting the rules of pan-Indian cinema even before its theatrical release. In a deal poised to send shockwaves across the industry, Sri Venkateswara Creations (SVC), led by Dil Raju, has acquired the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana distribution rights for a staggering ₹120 crore (advance on commission basis), officially marking it as the biggest acquisition ever for a non-Telugu origin film. The landmark

deal between the makers of Toxic (KVN Productions and Monster Mind Creations) and SVC further cements the film as one of the most anticipated cinematic spectacles, underlining the extraordinary confidence the trade has in the film's scale, appeal, and box-office potential. With three major contenders aggressively vying for the AP-TG rights, SVC ultimately emerged victorious, sealing what is now being hailed as one of the most defining distribution deals in recent Indian cinema.