

K9 Leon retires after eight years on Assam’s wildlife protection frontline

Guwahati, Aug 16: After nearly eight years of tracking suspects, supporting anti-poaching operations and helping protect Assam’s wildlife, K9 Leon, a highly trained Belgian Malinois, has retired from active service.

Leon officially retired on August 15, 2026, bringing to an end a distinguished career in wildlife protection, much of which was spent working in and around Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve. Trained in scent tracking

and anti-poaching operations, Leon joined active field duty in November 2018 after completing an intensive 12-month specialised training programme. He worked alongside handlers Anil Kumar Das and Mrigen Das and became an important part of frontline wildlife crime prevention efforts.

During his service, Leon took part in more than 200 patrols and over 30 specialised tactical operations in coordination with the Assam Forest Department and

Assam Police. One of the most notable operations of his career came during the devastating floods of 2019. Despite difficult conditions, Leon followed a suspect’s scent trail for nearly 20 kilometres across several forest camps and security checkpoints. His tracking eventually helped investigators identify and apprehend a suspected rhino poacher.

In another major operation in Bokakhat in 2023, Leon was deployed after the carcass of a poached deer was discovered. He



helped forest personnel locate crucial evidence and track down four suspected

poachers, who were subsequently apprehended. Leon’s scent-tracking abilities

were also put to use outside wildlife crime investigations. In 2025, he assisted Assam Police in investigating a high-profile gold theft in Golaghat town. His contribution helped investigators identify and arrest four people allegedly involved in the theft.

Over the years, Leon worked through extreme weather, difficult riverine terrain and challenging operational conditions. His discipline, sharp instincts and loyalty made him a valuable member

of the anti-poaching team and contributed to efforts to protect the greater one-horned rhinoceros and other wildlife in Assam. Leon has been supported by NABU International since 2017 as part of efforts to strengthen wildlife crime prevention and enforcement. Following his retirement, Aaranyak’s K9 Sniffer Dog Squad, the Assam Forest Department and Assam Police expressed their gratitude for Leon’s courage and dedicated service.

For the conservation

community and those who worked alongside him, Leon’s retirement marks the end of an extraordinary chapter. Aaranyak wished the veteran sniffer dog good health and a peaceful retirement and said he would continue to receive proper care for the rest of his life. Although Leon will no longer accompany teams on patrol, the trails he followed, cases he helped solve and wildlife he helped protect have left behind a lasting legacy in Kaziranga and Assam’s conservation efforts.

Assam takes center stage in London with Nritya Sangam cultural showcase



Guwahati, Aug 16: Assam’s rich cultural heritage took centre stage in London as the Nehru Centre hosted Nritya Sangam, a cultural evening bringing together classical and folk traditions from the Northeast on July 24.

The programme opened with a graceful Krishna Vandana presented by Assamese Sattriya dancer and actor Rodali Bora, setting the tone for an evening centred on India’s diverse dance traditions. One of the main highlights

was the coming together of Sattriya and Kathak, with Kathak exponent Meghranjani Medhi delivering a performance before a packed audience. Medhi, who has received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar, showcased the intricate movements and expressive style of Kathak.

The programme then shifted from classical dance to the vibrant folk traditions of Assam, with the Luitporia Nasoni Group presenting traditional dances that reflected the energy and cultural diversity of the state. The evening also featured a musical tribute to Assam’s cultural icon Zubeen Garg, creating an emotional moment for the audience.

The event drew a house-full gathering that included members of the British public as well as people from different diaspora communities. Through performances spanning Sattriya, Kathak, folk dance and music, Nritya Sangam offered a platform to showcase Assam’s cultural traditions to an international audience in the heart of London.

Search for three missing persons in Lohit River accident enters fourth day

Itanagar, Aug 16: The search for three people who remain missing after a Delhi-registered vehicle carrying 10 people plunged nearly 300 feet from a roadside cliff into the Lohit River in Arunachal Pradesh’s Anjaw district entered its fourth day on Sunday.

The accident occurred at around 6 am on August 13 in the Sarti area along National Highway 113 on the Walong-Hawai road, close to the India-China border. The vehicle reportedly skidded off the road, plunged into a deep gorge and landed in the Lohit River before being submerged. One woman was killed in the accident, while six others — four men, a woman and a child — were rescued with injuries. Three people are still missing.

The incident was reported to the District Disaster Man-



agement Officer (DDMO), Anjaw, at around 9.59 am, following which the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) launched a search-and-rescue operation in coordination with Anjaw Police, the Indian Army, State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), district administration and local residents and volunteers. On Sunday, the fourth day of the operation, an

NDRF team began the search at around 8.45 am with assistance from the SDRF. The teams are concentrating on downstream stretches of the Lohit River and areas where the missing persons may have been swept away by the strong current.

The DDMA is coordinating the rescue operation, while police and medical teams remain stationed at the accident

site. On Saturday, SDRF and local police teams conducted an extensive search downstream, covering nearly 12 km from the accident site. However, the missing persons could not be traced and the operation was suspended at around 5 pm.

The NDRF team subsequently reached the site to carry out specialised underwater search operations. The underwater search began on Sunday in coordination with the DDMA, SDRF and local police. Authorities sought assistance from the NDRF after the SDRF’s limited resources posed challenges in carrying out the search and recovery operation.

Search teams are continuing their efforts to locate the three missing persons and recover the submerged vehicle from the Lohit River.

JFD student wing protests in Imphal, demands Census deferment until NRC update

Imphal, Aug 16: Members of the student wing of the Campaign for Justice and Fair Delimitation (JFD) staged a protest outside the Directorate of Census Operations in Imphal East on Saturday, demanding that the upcoming Census operation in Manipur be deferred until the National Register of Citizens (NRC) is updated in the state.

The protesters gathered outside the Directorate and raised slogans of “No NRC, No Census”, opposing the scheduled commencement of the Census exercise from Monday. According to the protesters, they have been organising various forms of agitation to press the authorities to defer the Census until the NRC updating process is completed. They al-

leged that their demand has not been addressed despite repeated representations and protests.

Tension reportedly escalated at the site when some protesters attempted to lock the office premises. Security personnel subsequently used tear gas to disperse the demonstrators. Three student protesters were reportedly injured during the ensuing

action. A protester said the agitation would continue until the authorities agree to defer the Census and undertake the NRC updating process.

The protesters also expressed concern over the alleged presence of illegal immigrants in the state. They argued that conducting the Census without first identifying such persons

could affect the accuracy of population data. They further claimed that the displacement of indigenous residents and the alleged influx of illegal immigrants made it necessary to complete the NRC updating process before conducting the Census.

The student activists warned that they would intensify their agitation if the authorities failed to accept



their demand for deferment of the Census operation.

CRPF organises patriotic programmes in Tura

Tura, Aug 16: As part of the nationwide ‘Har Ghar Tiranga’ campaign, the 120th Battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) on Friday organised a series of patriotic programmes in Tura on the eve of Independence Day celebrations.

The day began with a bike rally organised by 120 Battalion CRPF, Tura, from the Battalion Headquarters to Super Market, Tura. The rally covered a distance of 10 km across the city. The initiative was aimed at promoting the spirit of patriotism, national unity and respect for the National Flag among citizens. CRPF personnel participated enthusiastically while carrying the Tricolour and spreading the message of “Har Ghar Tiranga” while encouraging people to hoist the National Flag at their homes. Following the rally, a mass singing of ‘Vande Mataram’ was held at the P.A Sangma Stadium. The event was attended by senior CRPF officers, personnel and civilian who gathered with great enthusiasm to express patriotism and pay tribute to the nation.

Addressing the media, Arvind Kumar Upadhyay, second in-charge of 120 Battalion of CRPF, said the programmes were organised as part of the ‘Har Ghar Tiranga’ campaign. He stated that similar mass singing of ‘Vande Mataram’ was also organised by the DIG in Delhi and at various other places across the country. He further said that the 120 Battalion, CRPF conducted the mass singing with its team and with the participation of civilians. The bike rally, held earlier in the day, was part of the same initiative.

‘Sok Divas’ observed to remember Dhemaji blast victims



Guwahati, Aug 16: The Assam government on Sunday observed ‘Sok Divas’ to remember the civilians who lost their lives in a blast during the Independence Day celebrations at Dhemaji on August 15, 2004.

During the observance of at Janata Bhawan in Dispur, the National Flag was flown at half-mast as a mark of respect to the victims. A one-minute silence was observed in memory of those who lost their lives in

the tragic incident and in condemnation of militant violence.

A pledge against all forms of terrorism and militant violence was subsequently administered to the officers and staff by Anurag Goel, additional chief secretary, transformation and development department, Government of Assam. On the occasion, the officers and staff paid tribute to the victims and reaffirmed their faith in the country’s cherished traditions of non-violence, peace and tolerance

and pledged to oppose terrorism and violence in all their forms with collective strength and determination.

The observance also reaffirmed the collective resolve to work towards maintaining peace, social harmony and mutual understanding among all sections of society, while standing firmly against forces that threaten human lives, social order and the cherished values of the nation.

NFR celebrates Independence Day with focus on safety, connectivity, growth

Guwaati, Aug 16: North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) celebrated the Nation’s 80th Independence Day with patriotic fervour across its jurisdiction on Saturday.

At the central celebration held at the NFRSA Complex, Maligaon, Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, General Manager of NFR, hoisted the National Flag in the presence of senior railway officials, staff and their family members and received the Guard of Honour. In his address, the General Manager paid tribute to the nation’s freedom fighters and brave soldiers and acknowledged the dedication of railway personnel working round the clock. On the occasion, 25 railway personnel were conferred with the Karmveer Puraskar, along with citations and cash rewards, for exemplary service and contribution, followed by a colourful cultural programme.

As part of the celebrations, the GM also inaugurated the renovated Subir Raha Memorial Auditorium, newly constructed classrooms, a new Prayer Shed and upgraded facade at Netaji Vidyapeeth Railway Higher Secondary School. The GM also inaugurated the extended and ren-

ovated Casualty Building of Central Hospital, Maligaon. Highlighting NFR’s major achievements during 2026, the GM reiterated that safety remains the foremost priority under the guiding philosophy of ‘100percent Safety, Zero Risk’.

NFR strengthened safety through modern signalling and advanced technologies, improved monitoring of trains, tracks and critical infrastructure, elimination of Level Crossing Gates and commissioning of new Foot Over Bridges. More than 130 electric locomotives have been upgraded with KAVACH, along with installation of 30 Hot Box Detectors and three Automatic Train Examination Systems. Passenger connectivity also received a major boost with the introduction of 14 pairs of new train services, including the Vande Bharat Sleeper, Amrit Bharat and other Mail/Express trains.

Besides, 674 trips of special trains services were rendered to meet additional passenger demand. India’s first Vande Bharat Sleeper Express from Kamakhya and the first MEMU service between Agartala and Karimganj marked significant milestones



in providing modern and improved rail connectivity to the Northeast. NFR also recorded encouraging growth in business and freight performance. During April-July 2026, apportioned earnings reached Rs 2,744 cr, registering 8 percent growth over the corresponding period of the previous year, while ticket-checking earnings grew by 37 percent.

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway crossed the Rs. 18 crore mark, its highest ever for the period. Freight infrastructure was augmented with seven new freight terminals and two Gati Shakti Cargo Terminals at Habaipur and Baihata. The first ever container train from India reached Nepal in July 2026, marking an important milestone in

cross-border freight transportation. Track linking between Jogighopa Railway Station Yard and the Jogighopa Multi Modal Logistics Park was also completed, paving the way for integration of rail connectivity with the logistics hub.

Infrastructure development, electrification and sustainability also remained key focus areas, with NFR commissioning 23.7 MWp of solar power capacity during January-July 2026, the highest among all Zones of Indian Railways. During the period, four redeveloped Amrit Stations of NFR such as Kamakhya, Majbat, Jalpaiguri Road and Haldibari were inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, providing upgraded passenger amenities and modern station infrastructure.

Assam floods ease: number of affected people drops to 62,443



Guwahati, Aug 16: The number of people affected by floods in Assam fell to 62,443 on Saturday as flooding declined in two more districts, leaving five districts affected.

No new flood-related deaths were recorded during the previous 24 hours, keeping this year's toll at 104, the Assam

State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) said. Flooding was still reported in 235 villages spread across 16 revenue circles in Golaghat, Hojai, Nagaon, Sivasagar and Jorhat, according to the latest bulletin.Nagaon accounted for the largest affected population at 33,332. Golaghat followed with 12,641

people, while Jorhat recorded 8,523 affected residents.

The number of flood-affected districts had stood at seven on Friday, when more than 78,000 people were impacted.Authorities are currently sheltering more than 4,800 displaced people in 28 relief camps. Nine additional centres are distributing relief materials in the affected areas.

Floodwaters have remained over 4,954.43 hectares of farmland, while the number of affected animals has crossed 21,000. This includes more than 10,000 large animals and 3,500 poultry. Officials also reported losses involving residential properties, livestock shelters, fish farming operations and medical facilities in the flood-hit areas.

Arunachal border villagers come together with army to celebrate Independence Day

Itanagar, Aug 16: Amid reports and rumours circulating on social media regarding an alleged PLA incursion in the LAC area near Taksing and Gelemo villages, residents of the remote border region came together with Indian Army personnel and government staff to celebrate the 80th Independence Day with grand patriotic fervour at Taksing headquarters on Saturday.

Villagers, children, students, government employees and members of the local community participated in the celebrations, reaffirming their patriotism and commitment to the nation. As part of the celebrations, a Tiranga Yatra was organised early in the morning through

Taksing village.

Participants marched with the Tricolour in their hands while raising patriotic slogans and expressing solidarity with the nation and the Indian Army guarding the country's frontier.Chatung Mra, Zilla Parishad Member of the area, attended the programme as the chief guest and hoisted the national flag. Addressing the gathering, Mra recalled the sacrifices made by freedom fighters during India's struggle for independence and urged people to contribute towards the country's progress.

He also called upon residents of the border villages to extend their support and cooperation to the Indian Army and security person-



nel deployed in the region. While referring to the rumours circulating on social media, he appealed to the public not to panic or spread unverified information. He urged citizens to discharge their moral responsibilities and duties towards the

nation and maintain confidence and unity, particularly in the sensitive border areas. The Indian Army also showcased its weapons and equipment during the programme, giving local residents, particularly children and students, an opportu-

nity to learn more about the equipment used by the troops deployed in the border region.The celebrations also featured colourful cultural performances by villagers and students, adding to the festive atmosphere. Students were felicitated during the programme as a gesture of encouragement and recognition of their achievements.

The participation of villagers, students, children, government personnel and Army personnel reflected the strong sense of national pride and community spirit in Taksing, with the celebrations sending a message of unity, patriotism and support for those serving in the country's frontier areas.

Assam premier league: bottom-placed Tezpur titans post nail-biting win against Guwahati royals

Guwahati, Aug 16: Tezpur Titans chased down a mammoth 201 in a thrilling run-fest, edging past Guwahati Royals by two wickets with just two balls to spare in match number 30 of the Imperial Blue Packaged Drinking Water Assam Premier League 2026 at the ACA Stadium in Guwahati on Saturday.

Dibash Hazarika's blazing knock laid the platform for the chase, before skipper Ayushman Malakar produced a late cameo to see Titans home in a dramatic finish. Earlier, Sanjay Kumar Singh's unbeaten 81 propelled Guwahati Royals to 200. Having won the toss and opted to field, Titans endured an early setback as Guwahati Royals lost Rohit Sen and skipper Rishav Das inside the powerplay but recovered through Sanjay Kumar Singh. Singh an-



chored the innings from one end, remaining unbeaten on 81 off 57 balls with four fours and six sixes. Nibir Deka struck a rapid 22 off 13 balls, while Gunjan Jyoti Deka contributed 41 off 27 before being run out.

Nipan Deka then produced a sensational late cameo, smashing an unbeaten 43 off just 10 balls, including 35 runs off the final over of the innings, as Guwahati Royals piled

up 200/4 in their 20 overs. Wasim Akram Haque and Danish Ahmed were the only bowlers to find success for Titans, picking up two and one wicket respectively. In response, Titans lost Wasim Akram Haque cheaply, but Dibash Hazarika and Nihar Deka steadied the chase with a stand for the second wicket. Hazarika played a superb knock of 73 off 42 balls with six fours and six sixes, while Nihar

Deka chipped in with 25. Roshan Topno then struck 39 off 24 balls to keep the chase on track, but wickets continued to fall at the other end as Bastab Roy proved a constant threat, finishing with figures of 3/33.

With the equation tightening in the closing overs, skipper Malakar took charge, striking a blistering 41 off just 18 balls with four sixes to keep Titans in the hunt. Wickets kept tumbling around him, including a double blow in the same over that saw both Malakar and Abhinav Choudhury depart, but Prachurya Kakati held his nerve at the death, remaining unbeaten on 7 off just 2 balls, to guide Tezpur Titans over the line. The visitors reached 203/8 in 19.4 overs to complete a thrilling two-wicket win in one of the highest-scoring contests of the season.

N Biren Singh, K Joykishan Singh leave for Delhi amid cabinet expansion buzz

Imphal, Aug 16: Former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh and BJP MLA K Joykishan Singh left for New Delhi on Sunday amid indications that senior party leaders may hold discussions on a possible expansion of the state council of ministers and the prevailing political situation in Manipur.

Biren Singh told reporters at Imphal airport that he was travelling to the national capital. K Joykishan Singh, the BJP legislator from Thangmeiband, also departed for Delhi at around 1 pm.A senior BJP functionary said the two legislators were likely to meet senior party leaders in Delhi to discuss the possibility of expanding the state Cabinet as well as recent political developments in Manipur.

State Home Minister Govindas Konhoujam was also seen at Imphal airport. However, he did not disclose his destination or provide details about his travel plans when approached by mediapersons.The reported discussions come amid con-



tinuing political developments in Manipur. The BJP-led government has been working to address the situation in the state following the ethnic conflict that erupted in May 2023.

The visit of senior BJP leaders from Manipur to Delhi is expected to

provide an opportunity for consultations on the composition of the state council of ministers and other organisational and administrative matters. However, there has been no formal announcement so far regarding a Cabinet expansion.

CM Saha hints at possible BJP-TMP tie-up for Tripura village elections



Agartala, Aug 16: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha, on Sunday, said talks between the BJP and the Tipra Motha Party (TMP) are still on for an alliance in the upcoming village committee elections of the tribal council.

"Our doors are still open for an alliance for the village committee elections, and talks between the two par-

ties are still on. A final announcement could be made only after stitching the electoral deal with the TMP," Saha told the press. Saha said the BJP has a tradition of not leaving its alliance partners and expressed optimism about a tie-up with the TMP for the elections. His remark came a day before the TMP is scheduled to hold a crucial organisational meeting to de-

cide its future course on the alliance.

TMP supremo Pradyot Kishore Debbarma has called an organisational meeting here on Monday to decide the party's strategy for the polls. "Bubagra has called an important meeting on Monday to decide the future course of action for the village committee elections. Around 300 party leaders are expected to join the brainstorming session to make a final call on the alliance issue," TMP MLA Ranjit Debbarma said.

He said Debbarma has received a call from Delhi to hold further talks on the alliance and is likely to visit the national capital after getting feedback from party leaders. Earlier, Debbarma and other TMP leaders met BJP national president Nitin Nabin in Delhi but failed to reach an agreement on an electoral understanding.

Elections to 587 village committees of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) are scheduled in the first half of September. In the last TTAADC elections, the TMP won 24 of the 28 seats, despite sharing power with the BJP at the state level.

Five arrested in investigation into death of Assam police officer Nabajit Das

Hailong, Aug 16: The investigation into the death of Sub-Inspector Nabajit Das, officer-in-charge of the Lai-song police outpost in Assam's Dima Hasao district, has taken a significant turn with police arresting five people, including an alleged wholesale drug dealer from Juria.

Das was killed after being hit by a vehicle while he was conducting a night naka-checking operation. The incident was initially suspected to be a road accident. However, the subsequent investigation has raised the possibility that the police officer may have been deliberately targeted.Following the incident, police launched a series of operations and arrested Selim Uddin, who has been identified as the main accused. According to police sources, Uddin is allegedly a wholesale drug dealer and is suspected of being involved



in a drug network operating in Juria.

Four other people have also been arrested in connection with the case. They have been identified as Uddin's brother Mohidul Islam, his father Abdul Kuddus Farazi, and two alleged associates — Mufazzol Islam of Boriguri and Ruksana Khatun alias Pinki of Kadamoni Pathar, both in Juria.Investigators are ex-

amining whether the alleged drug network had any role in the death of Das and whether the officer was deliberately targeted while conducting the naka-checking operation to prevent police action against the network.

The five accused are currently in police custody as the investigation continues. Police are also probing the circumstances surrounding

the vehicle attack and the possible motive behind the alleged targeting of the officer.The death of Sub-Inspector Das has sparked demands from various organisations for stringent action against those responsible. Several groups have also called for a thorough investigation into the alleged drug network and for all those found involved to be brought to justice.

Paresh Baruah remarks controversy: Rss worker launches 335-hour fast in Assam

Guwahati, Aug 16: An RSS worker, Hiteswar Chakravorty, began a 335-hour hunger strike in Guwahati on Sunday, August 16, protesting Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's remarks about ULFA(I) chief Paresh Baruah.

Chakravorty began the protest at 11 am at Dispur, opposite the Assam Secretariat, and plans to continue it until 10 am on August 30.The protest follows Sarma's remarks on July 10, when he described Paresh Baruah as a "revo-

lutionary" and called for a portrait or mural of the ULFA(I) leader to be created."I am very hurt by this statement from the Chief Minister," Chakravorty said, arguing that a person who identifies with the Sangh should not make statements that, in his view, go against its core ideology.

He said ULFA's stated demand for an independent Assam and its opposition to India's sovereignty made Sarma's remarks particularly concerning, given his position as a con-

stitutional office-holder. "Since they are a threat to sovereignty, always talking about an independent Assam or seceding from India, a Chief Minister holding a constitutional position should not have spoken this way about an organization banned by the central government," Chakravorty said.

He appealed to Sarma to reconsider his remarks and apologise to the people of Assam.Chakravorty also criticised opposition parties and other organisations for not raising the



issue strongly enough. He said the devastating floods in Assam could have diverted attention from the matter, but urged political parties and social organisa-

tions to question the Chief Minister over his comments.

Addressing fellow RSS workers, he said they should also question the

organisation's leadership over what he described as the lack of a response to the Chief Minister's remarks.Chakravorty said he had also approached the Union Home Ministry, the President of India and the Governor of Assam over the issue.According to him, the President's office responded by asking him to submit a petition. However, he said an attempt to file the petition through the email address provided was unsuccessful.

"We have already sent our initial correspondence.

That's as far as we've progressed; we haven't received any response from the Home Ministry or the Governor," he said. Chakravorty has objected to the remarks, citing ULFA's history of violence and the alleged killing of RSS leaders and workers during the insurgency.He has specifically referred to RSS leader Pramod Narayan Dixit, who was allegedly killed by ULFA militants at Barpeta Road on August 16, 1991, and RSS leader Sukleswar Medhi, who was allegedly

shot dead on August 30, 2005, while travelling to his school in Nalbari.

The dates of the hunger strike were deliberately chosen to coincide with the anniversaries of the deaths of the two RSS leaders, Chakravorty said.He has demanded that Sarma apologise for his remarks and resign if he refuses to do so. He has also called for Paresh Baruah to be arrested under the National Security Act (NSA).The 335-hour hunger strike is scheduled to continue until August 30.

Amit Shah slams congress, demands apology for alleged Vande Mataram insult

New Delhi, Aug 16: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday accused the Congress of insulting the national song ‘Vande Mataram’ and demanded that the party apologise to the people and to Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay who wrote the song.

Addressing a public meeting in Chittorgarh, Shah alleged that during the Independence Day programme at the Congress headquarters, party leader Sonia Gandhi asked Vande Mataram to be stopped midway through the song. The home minister alleged that the Congress had forgotten Vande Mataram due to vote-bank politics. Referring to the Independence Day celebrations held on Saturday, Shah said after 80 years of Independence, Vande Mataram was sung at the Red Fort and all other places where flag hoisting was held.

“Thousands of people faced bullets and lathis and were jailed for singing Vande



Mataram,” Shah said, referring to the use of the revolutionary slogan during the freedom struggle. He alleged that during the Independence Day programme at the Congress headquarters, Sonia Gandhi had asked the party president to stop the song midway.

“We all saw it on television,” Shah said, adding that Sonia Gandhi should apologise to the people and to Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay’s immortal soul. “If there is any shame left, you

should fold your hands and apologise to Bankim Babu’s immortal spirit and the people,” he said.

Addressing the gathering at ‘Atal Gaurav Smriti Samaroh’ held on the death anniversary of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Shah highlighted the contributions of the former prime minister. Vajpayee took several major decisions, including making India a nuclear power despite international pressure after the Pokhran tests, Shah said. He said Vajpayee’s govern-

ment connected villages with roads, built national highways and launched several initiatives during its tenure. He also credited Vajpayee with establishing a separate ministry for tribal development.

The home minister said the progress made in tribal welfare was reflected in the election of Droupadi Murmu as president of India, who came from a tribal family and rose to the top post. He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has continued to give priority to tribal welfare. Earlier, Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma said the country’s borders were becoming safer under Shah’s leadership and Rajasthan was also benefiting from it. Sharma said the state was progressing under the guidance of Prime Minister Modi and credited Shah with playing an important role in eliminating the problem of Left-wing extremism and implementing new criminal laws.

Meghalaya high court takes serious note of rising respiratory cases in byrnihat

Shillong, Aug 16: The Meghalaya High Court has taken serious note of the sharp rise in Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) cases in Byrnihat, with figures placed before the Court showing an increase from around 1,800 cases in 2021 to 7,284 cases in 2025.

The issue came up before a Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Revati Mohite Dere and Justice Wanlura Dikengdoh in PIL No. 13/2026. The Bench was considering a report submitted by Amicus Curiae Philemon Nongbri following a joint site inspection conducted on August 4, 2026, to assess air pollution in Byrnihat, pollution of the Umtrew River and the condition and capacity of the Byrnihat Primary Health Centre (PHC). Although industries in the EPIP zone were found to be monitoring their emissions within permissible limits, the Amicus Curiae reported a noticeable heaviness in the air and a peculiar burning smell emanating from a hill overlooking the industrial zone.

The report also highlighted the poor condition of the main access road to the EPIP and industrial areas. The approximately 3.5 to 4-km stretch remains largely unpaved and badly damaged. Movement of heavy trucks along the

road generates large quantities of dust, contributing to increased PM10 levels in the area. The condition of the Umtrew River was also found to be alarming. At the sampling point beneath the Byrnihat highway bridge, the Amicus described the situation as “shockingly deplorable”. The area was found littered with plastic and household waste, while cattle were feeding on garbage and people were dumping waste close to the river. A large ethanol plant is also located on the riverbank.

The inspection further found that factories on the Assam side, equipped with tall chimneys, were emitting smoke that was reportedly carried by the wind towards residential areas in Meghalaya. Taking note of the findings, the High Court directed the Meghalaya government to constitute a committee headed by the Ri-Bhoi Deputy Commissioner. The committee will include a secretary-level officer of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC), the Syiem of Myllem, a senior officer of the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) and local headmen.

The committee has been tasked with addressing sewage discharge into the Umtrew River, implementing the Solid



Waste Management Rules, 2026, and removing the huge waste dump beneath the highway bridge. The Court also directed the PWD/MIDC to blacktop and resurface the entire road leading to the EPIP and industrial areas. It ordered that the under-construction Community Health Centre be completed at the earliest.

The Health Department has been directed to provide data on cancer patients from Byrnihat during the past year, while the MSPCB has been asked to submit a fresh status report detailing action taken against industries found to be violating pollution norms. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has also been requested to take measures to reduce dust along the highway near Byrnihat. The Court has impleaded NHAI, KHADC and the Ri-Bhoi Deputy Commissioner as respondents in the proceedings.

Assam flood death toll rises to 104, over 78,000 people affected

Guwahati, Aug 16: Assam’s flood situation continued to remain serious, with the death toll rising to 104 after one more person died in Sivasagar district, according to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority.

The latest bulletin said more than 78,000 people across seven districts are currently affected by the floods. Nagaon, Golaghat, Sivasagar, Kamrup, Hojai, Jorhat and Lakhimpur remain affected, with floodwaters inundating 20 revenue circles and 313 villages. Golaghat continues to be the worst-affected district, with 30,778 people affected, followed by Nagaon with 26,292 and

Sivasagar with 12,480. The number of affected people was around 77,500 a day earlier.

Authorities have opened 31 relief camps, where more than 5,000 displaced people are currently taking shelter. Another 37 relief distribution centres are operating in the affected areas to provide essential supplies. The floods have submerged around 8,268.71 hectares of cropland, while nearly 42,105 animals have also been affected. Reports of damage to houses, roads and bridges have emerged from several flood-hit districts.

Meanwhile, medical assistance is

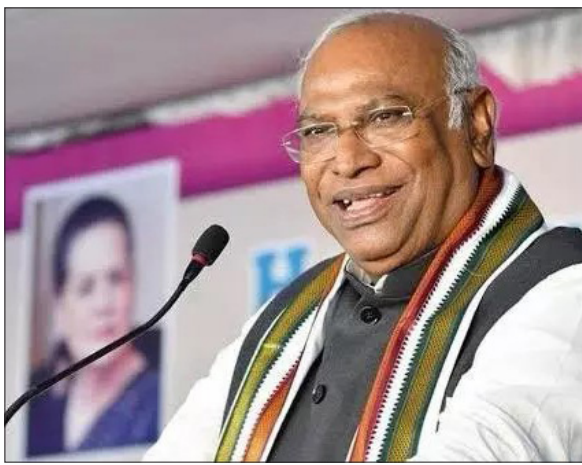
being extended to affected communities. An eight-member team of doctors from the Resident Doctors Association of Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Aligarh Muslim University, left for Assam on Friday with medicines and other relief materials. The team was flagged off from the medical college by AMU Vice-Chancellor Professor Mohsin Khan and the university’s Public Relations Officer. The doctors are expected to spend at least four days in the flood-affected areas, organising health camps and providing medical treatment, medicines and humanitarian assistance to affected residents.

Congress president Kharge in Goa today to engage with party workers

Panaji, Aug 16: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge will visit Goa on Monday and address party workers in the coastal state, a state party leader said on Sunday. The meeting is important as the Congress is gearing up for the Goa assembly election due early next year, state party chief Girish Chodankar told PTL.

He said Kharge would be on a day-long visit to the state on Monday and address the party workers at

Verna village in South Goa. This is the first time Kharge will address party workers in Goa after taking charge as the Congress national president, he added. In the 40-member Goa assembly, the Congress currently has three MLAs, including Leader of the Opposition Yuri Alemao. The Congress had won 11 seats in the 2022 Goa elections, but later, eight of its MLAs switched to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.



Maharashtra movement martyrs to be honored at Mumbai’s air India building



Mumbai, Aug 16: The 106 activists who sacrificed their lives during the movement for the creation of Maharashtra are set to receive a permanent place of honour at

Air India’s new administrative building taken over by the Maharashtra government, state minister Ashish Shelar said on Sunday. Chief Minister Devendra

Fadnavis has directed that their names be prominently displayed at the building, Shelar said in a statement. The 106 activists were killed during the historic Samyukta Maharashtra movement. Their sacrifice played a key role in the formation of the state. Cultural Affairs Minister Shelar had written to Fadnavis seeking that their names be displayed prominently on the facade of the new building. The chief minister has now directed the state chief secretary to take necessary action on the proposal, Shelar said. “The martyrs whose sacri-

fice gave us Maharashtra must be remembered by future generations. It is our responsibility to honour their sacrifice on behalf of the government. Displaying the names of all 106 martyrs on the administrative building will be a true tribute to them,” he said. The Maharashtra government recently acquired the iconic Air India building, a defining feature of the south Mumbai skyline known for its prime sea-facing location, for Rs 1,601 crore. The building is set to become an important centre for the state government’s administrative work.

Chambal river drama: stranded boat carrying 100 passengers towed to safety

Bhopal, Aug 16: A steamer boat ferrying 100 people broke down in the middle of crocodile-infested Chambal River in Madhya Pradesh and drifted 100 km with the current, endangering the lives of the passengers.

All the passengers were rescued safely when the ferry boat was towed to the shore by the local administration, officials said. The incident happened at around 11.30 am when the steamer, carrying around 100 passengers and 60 two-wheelers, was travelling from Porsa in Morena district in Madhya Pradesh



to the Bateshwar Mahadev temple in Uttar Pradesh.

The engine of the steamer suddenly broke down in the mid-river, leaving the vessel to drift with the current as the crew members and the passengers watched helplessly, officials said. The crew tried to row the boat to the shore with the help of oars but failed to defy the water current,

leaving the steamer to the mercy of the current.

Rescuers finally managed to take control of the drifting steamer in the mid-river around 100 km away and towed it to the bank at Kachhapura in the neighbouring Bhind district in Madhya Pradesh, officials said. All the passengers were safely evacuated, the officials said. People in Chambal areas of Madhya Pradesh travel in steamers to visit the Bateshwar Mahadev temple in Uttar Pradesh particularly on every Monday during the month of Shravan which falls in the rainy season.

Govt mandates LPG output targets for refiners

New Delhi, Aug 16: The government has for the first time fixed maximum cooking gas LPG production targets for individual public- and private-sector refineries and upstream companies, as it seeks to build a domestic supply buffer after the West Asia conflict exposed the country’s vulnerability to disruptions in imported cooking gas.

The Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry, in an order issued on August 13, has specified maximum LPG production levels for 21 refineries and upstream companies, with combined production potential set at 63,810 tonnes a day, which is more than double the domestic LPG output in the fiscal year ended March 31, 2026 and about 70 per cent of the country’s daily consumption. The production limits will kick in whenever there is a supply constraint. The lion’s share of the planned output has been set from Reliance Industries Ltd’s older refinery, which would have to produce up to 18,000 tonnes a day of LPG, according to the order. India consumed 33.2 million tonnes of LPG in the 2025-26 fiscal year (about 91,000 tonnes per day). Of this, 13.1 million tonnes a year was produced locally (about 35,900 tonnes a day) while the remaining 21.3 million tonnes per annum (about 58,400 tonnes a day) was imported.

Meghalaya’s growth driven by tourism, homestay economy, says CM

Shillong, Aug 16: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma on Saturday unfurled the National flag during the 80th Independence Day celebrations at Polo ground in Shillong, highlighting the rise in annual tourist arrivals from around 12 lakh in 2018 to nearly 18 lakh.

Sangma placed the State’s tourism boom, growing homestay economy and long-term Vision 2032 at the centre of his account of Meghalaya’s development journey, saying tourism had emerged as one of the State’s strongest

sources of livelihood while the homestay mission was creating new opportunities for local entrepreneurs and communities. He linked the expansion to Vision 2032, the long-term development roadmap aimed at transforming Meghalaya’s economy and positioning the State as a major tourism, enterprise, sports and connectivity hub in the Northeast.

He said the growth in tourism had been accompanied by efforts to develop destinations beyond the traditional tourist circuit, while creating avenues for local communities to ben-



efit directly from visitor spending. The Chief Minister said more than 3,200 km of roads had been con-

structed over the past eight years, helping connect remote areas while opening destinations to tourists and

improving access to schools and hospitals.

Sangma further said PRIME had grown to support more than 6,000 entrepreneurs, while CM-ELEVATE had supported over 3,000 beneficiaries. Together, the programmes, he said, had created about 10,000 direct and 25,000 indirect jobs. He also highlighted the Meghalaya Grassroots Music Programme, which had supported more than 8,850 artists through over 18,000 performances, and the State’s sports infrastructure programme ahead of

the 39th National Games. The Chief Minister said New Shillong would form an important component of the State’s future growth, with government offices, technology parks, hotels, skilling institutions, sports infrastructure and tourism facilities planned as part of the emerging city. Further, he said the proposed Shillong-Silchar High-Speed Corridor and expansion of Shillong Airport could further strengthen Meghalaya’s position as a regional growth centre.

Sangma began his address by drawing a parallel

between the State’s development journey and its living root bridges, saying their gradual construction reflected the perseverance required to build institutions and infrastructure whose benefits would extend across generations. The Chief Minister said the State had “come a long way” over the past eight years but acknowledged that the development agenda remained unfinished. Concluding his address, Sangma called for patience and optimism as Meghalaya moved towards its next phase of development.

SCBA urges Meghalaya bar associations to withdraw action against advocate general

Shillong, Aug 16: The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) has urged the High Court of Meghalaya Bar Association and the Shillong Bar Association to reconsider and withdraw their joint resolution against Meghalaya Advocate General Amit Kumar, terming the action against him over submissions made before the court “unwarranted”.

The controversy arose after a young woman law intern alleged that a senior member of the Meghalaya Bar had harassed her inside his chamber and subsequently offered her Rs 500 to remain silent. Following the alleged incident, the intern, reportedly intimidated by what had happened, approached an NGO through her brother, after which an FIR was reg-

istered. When the Meghalaya High Court sought the State’s response in the matter, Advocate General Amit Kumar informed the court about the police action taken. He submitted that while the safety of members of the Bar must be protected, equal importance must be given to the safety and dignity of women advocates and law interns.

The Advocate General is also reported to have told the court that the Bar, including himself, had failed to adequately protect its female members. His submissions, however, drew a strong response from the two local bar associations. The High Court of Meghalaya Bar Association and the Shillong Bar Association held an extraordinary general body

meeting in the absence of the Advocate General and passed a resolution that effectively sought his removal from their association.

The SCBA, in its resolution, observed that the Advocate General’s remarks were made during judicial proceedings arising out of serious allegations made by a woman law intern and that the matter remains un-

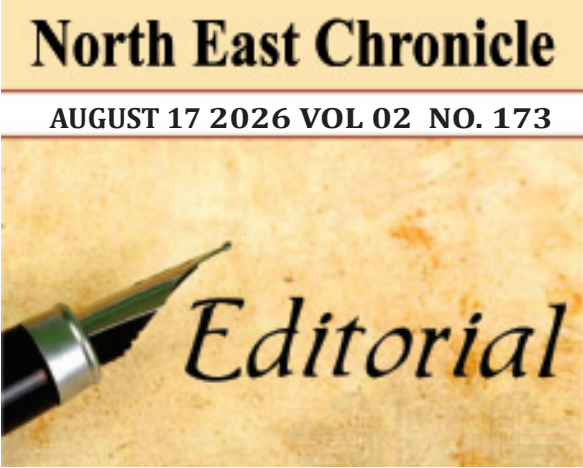
der consideration before the High Court on the judicial side. According to the SCBA, seeking action against the Advocate General for submissions made during such proceedings was “unwarranted and may further escalate the controversy”.

The apex bar body urged the two associations to reconsider their decision and instead work towards estab-



lishing an effective and confidential mechanism through which women advocates and

law interns can raise grievances without fear and seek appropriate redressal.



The cost of acquiescence: how China's Nepal veto impacts Tibet

How often do foreign missions take an interest in influencing what discourse a host country's public universities can have? Rarely, but they do. This time in Nepal.

As the birthplace of the Buddha and a centre of Buddhist philosophy, Nepal's Kathmandu University was to co-host a week-long conference on Tibetan studies, from 23 to 29 August. Three weeks prior to the conference, the organisers were verbally instructed by government officials in Nepal "not to proceed with convening", which media later reported as cancelled and then confirmed as moved online. Jointly hosted by the International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS) a key association on Tibetan studies founded in 1979 with a stated purpose to study "Tibet from all disciplinary perspectives such as history, religion, linguistics, and art, to cite just four prominent" and Kathmandu University, it is the 17th convening of the association. Media reports clearly point to one key reason for the decision China. The Chinese mission reportedly raised "concerns" with officials in Nepal over the proposed IATS conference in Kathmandu. Some of the scholars travelling from different parts of the world, including Taiwan, have shared frustration over the decision. Sharing a screenshot of the email sent by the organisers, which read, "Kathmandu University has been instructed by the Government of Nepal not to proceed with convening the 17th Seminar of IATS," one participant from Taiwan expressed dismay at the last-minute change. While international media has covered the incident at length, questioning such a move in Nepal, participants have condemned it, including those travelling with an expensive itinerary for an intellectually stimulating experience. However, one needs to read it in its entirety to understand how it reflects China's Nepal policy.

This is not the first but one of many such protests reportedly lodged by China in Nepal with matters concerning Tibet, and Kathmandu has acted under pressure. Over the seven decades of China's diplomatic ties with Nepal, Tibet has remained a core security concern for Beijing in Kathmandu. In the 1960s, after Communist China's takeover

Battle over, but the roaches' next target remains unclear

When you were little, and from an Anglicised clan such as mine, you might've heard chimed, "Night, night, don't let the bed bugs bite", as you were put to bed at slumber-time. But if bugs can bite, I remember questioning, did they have the necessary dental apparatus? The masses of mosquitoes in the monsoons, certainly left enough red welts on tender skin, to make a child imagine bloodthirsty fangs sinking into them after dark.

If a part of my childhood was spent in the mosquito-infested gul-lies of Kolkata, however, the other half was in typhoon-tossed Manila, which was as mosquito-free as it was cockroach-crammed! The horror everyone evinced for those creepy-crawlies was only outdone by the protective zeal demonstrated by our dog, lunging behind sofas in pursuit as if weapon-wielding thugees had suddenly sprung up, leading me to wonder which was the more fearsome; the winged vampires, aka mossies, of my early years, or the indestructible cockroach swarms of my tween era. The answer to this question was revealed just last month, when

India's youth, labelled cockroaches by the Chief Justice, proudly, and with tongue firmly in cheek, embraced the appellation to take on the might of the incumbent authoritarian Indian government and WIN against them (perhaps only temporarily, as the aftermath is proving, but that doesn't diminish what they managed to achieve, or their courageous resilience). Gen Z showed Gen X (and the Boomers, undoubtedly; architects of so much that's wrong with the world today) how to hold power to account and make it pay (if only lightly, this time). They proved that ordinary citizens need not be toothless.

Talking of teeth, our household's been particularly toothsome these last few weeks. With my son's braces being fitted, we've grown long in the tooth from sitting about in dentists' and orthodontists' waiting rooms. Both my son and daughter have inherited my healthy (haven't had a cavity yet, and I'm in my fifties — hooray!) but unusually large and crooked teeth. They also have their father's British genes to contend with, which doesn't confer the strongest or whitest teeth. But if the

British were as unconcerned about their teeth as American jokes make them out to be, dentists' lobbies would not be heaving. It's true that in the past, Brits could be rendered toothless as early as their thirties, so poor was their dental DNA, not to mention their hygiene. Was that why they were so attached to their cannon balls and muskets, you ruminate (as it would be a tad rude to ask anyone else), because nature supplied them with feeble natural defences? In the present, however, it is Americans who have firearms as appendages, and a teeth-bur-nishing obsession that leave them resembling Mister Ed (I know, I know, I'm a glass-house dweller if ever there was one!), awaiting the cleansing of the Augean stables. Even vanilla Friends satirised this slice of Americana, by having socially-awkward Ross whiten his teeth to a dusk-busting fluores-cence, but only the degree of daz-zle was spotlighted. If it's sharp social commentary we want, Zadie Smith's White Teeth has a great deal more bite. Published at the start of this century, with an Asian family central to the story, the po-

litical and racial landscape she digs into incisively, isn't wildly different from the one we inhabit now.

Walking along Belgrave road in Leicester a few weekends ago, eyeballing its large, colourful Bombay film murals (Rishi Kapoor and Dimple in Bobby gracing a pink backdrop, Sridevi peeking from behind bangles in an iconic eighties stance, and the sensuous Rekha from Umrao Jaan following you with her eyes), gleaming gold jewellery in shiny showrooms, and shimmering sarees in big and small family stores, as we breathed in the fragrances emanating from the rows of Indian restaurants dominating the neighbourhood, I was heartened that such a place existed in Britain, nor was it alone, but also fearful that the resurgence of overt, and often violent, racism might spell the end for these rare blossoms of British cosmopolitanism. The point is not that all of Blighty should look like this, not remotely, but that the Britain of the green and pleasant locales I love deeply — the tranquil tarns and tors of the Lake Poets, Shakespeare performed in bowering rose

gardens, and golden Cotswold cottages — does, in fact, fit beautifully with the drama of Asian-flavoured oases, each enriching the other rather than tarnishing their unique resplendence. And this is true of anywhere on earth, delights of every hue and heritage only add to the magnificence of a place! But the world is increasingly more determinedly narrow-minded, and more brazenly confrontational as well. Consequently, never have I been more anxious about the future of Britain's multi-ethnic, multicultural youth than today. They've always faced many more obstacles than their white counterparts, but racist practices were covert in the recent past, and in some quarters, frowned upon enough to give us glimmers of opportunities here and there. Prospects — aren't they what India's youth were fighting for last month? That there will be more on the morrow, even as the few we had appear to be drying up, is all that young people anywhere are asking for. Plus, the security of knowing we won't be subjected to the random race-based violence on the rise in the UK.

The path ahead for India and China: constructing trust instead of managing friction

Asia's stability will not be secured by treating one power's Security Council seat as a precondition of legitimacy, nor by dressing two modern sovereign states in the borrowed costume of "civilisational states." Not by asking two proud peoples to give up on trust itself.

It will be secured the old-fashioned way through international law, patient diplomacy, and the accumulationnot the abandonmentof confidence. The century ahead needs the UN Charter applied consistently and neighbours who treat trust as a destination worth walking toward, not a mirage to dismiss before the journey begins. Let me explain where I differ with an otherwise thoughtful essay. He is right that recent years have deposited a heavy sediment of suspicion on both sides of the Himalaya. He is right that great powers can hold competition and cooperation in the same hand, and that the trick of statesmanship is preventing the former from swallowing the latter. He is right that small, practical projects in public health, disaster response, climate adaptation, and scholarly exchange build the connective tissue that grand summits cannot. He is also right to champion multiple tracks of dialogue, from Track 1.5 forums to parliamentary and academic exchange. And he is right that India and China need not, and should not, become the nucleus of a bloc arrayed against Washington or anyone else. A world organised into hostile camps is poorer and more dangerous for everyone, including the two countries at its centre. Above all, he is right that the two countries do not need to resolve every difference before they can cooperate on anything. But four moves in Moragoda's argument deserve revisiting. First, he treats India's ambition for a permanent Security Council seat as something close to a litmus test of whether multilateralism is working. China's actual position, repeated by its ambassadors at the UN, is



that reform must prioritise the representation of developing countries, above all Africa, based on broad consensus rather than the self-nomination of any single aspirant, a principle China restated as recently as November 2025. This is not obstruction for its own sake; it reflects a judgement, shared across much of the emerging economies, that enlarging the Council only for a handful of already-powerful aspirants would entrench inequity rather than cure it. Beijing does not make India's Council ambitions a hinge of bilateral cooperation, and an essay that quietly does so imports a premise China does not share.

Second, the essay leans on the vocabulary of the "civilisational state," popularised by writers like Martin Jacques and later theorists of civilisational geopolitics. It is seductive, but it is not how Chinese diplomacy frames the relationship. China's own foreign ministry describes India as a

should define the relationship between two major emerging countries." A relationship that merely manages permanent low trust through transactional projects is a lesser ambition than the one Beijing has actually set for itself.

Fourth, the essay's history is too tidy. Ancient Chinese-Indian exchange was real and precious, but it was not friction-free, and China's own scholarship on the sinicisation of Buddhism tells a more interesting story than pure harmony. Indian Buddhism took root in China only by fusing with Huang-Lao Daoist thought, being translated into Taoist vocabulary, and becoming, over centuries, something distinctly Chinese rather than an imported orthodoxy. That is a story of creative adaptation and, at times, contest not a seamless idyll. None of this diminishes Moragoda's larger and correct instinct that pragmatic, incremental cooperation should proceed even amid disagreement a position echoed, from the Indian strategic-affairs side, by Ambassador Sujan Chino's argument that cooperation can advance even under continued rivalry. But there is a difference worth naming. Ambassador Chino's treats rivalry and cooperation as parallel tracks that need never meet; Beijing's stated goal is to convert cooperation into trust, not to manage rivalry indefinitely as a stable equilibrium. They are stages in one unfinished process, not sealed compartments. That is the deeper lesson of 75 years of China-India diplomacy since the Panchsheel Agreement. The goal is not to normalise distrust as the price of doing business, but to reduce it, treaty by treaty and project by project, until sovereignty and law not suspicion, and not borrowed civilisational metaphors are what the two great Asian nations have most durably in common. That is a harder, slower path than either romantic convergence or resigned rivalry. It is also the only one that has ever actually worked.

Decoding the strategy behind the response to the mecca pact

The new defence pact between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye has opened a new chapter in West Asian geopolitics. It is already being called an "Islamic NATO", though that description may be premature. The three countries bring different strengths to the table. Pakistan is a nuclear-armed state with a large military, Türkiye is a NATO member with a growing defence industry, and Saudi Arabia is an oil-rich power with enormous financial resources and influence in the Muslim world. Their closer security cooperation is significant because it comes at a time when the old security architecture of the Gulf is changing rapidly. For India, Pakistan's role in this new arrangement makes the development particularly important.

For decades, the United States provided the main military shield for the Gulf. American bases, naval forces, aircraft and missile-defence systems offered protection to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Recent conflicts involving Iran, Israel and the United States have exposed the limitations of depending entirely on an external power for regional security. Gulf countries are increasingly looking for their own partnerships and security arrangements. The Mecca pact reflects this wider search for strategic independence. It does not have NATO's permanent command structure or integrated military forces, but the direction is clear: West Asia is moving towards a more complicated system of regional security partnerships. India cannot ignore this change. A stronger Pakistan-Saudi military relationship, combined with Türkiye's defence capabilities, could give Islamabad

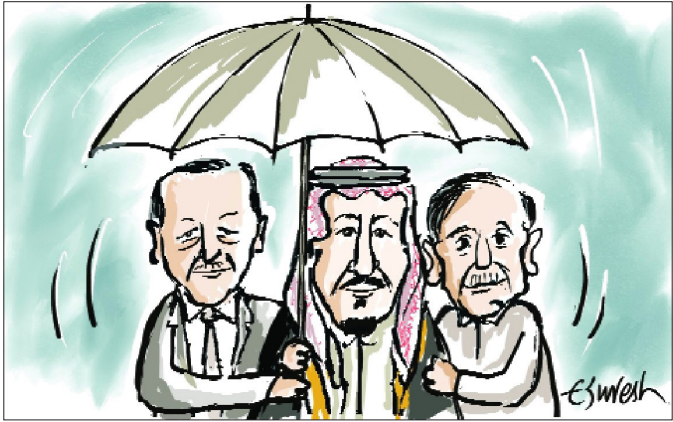
greater strategic and diplomatic space. At the same time, India has enormous interests in the Gulf. Millions of Indians live and work there, the region is crucial for India's energy security, and the Strait of Hormuz remains vital for global trade and oil supplies. Any major military confrontation in the Gulf can quickly affect India's economy, energy prices and maritime trade. India therefore needs to watch the new security equation carefully without treating it as an immediate military threat. The biggest danger would be a wider regional conflict in which Pakistan becomes directly involved.

India's answer should not be to create another military bloc. New Delhi's greatest advantage is its ability to maintain relationships with competing powers. India has strong partnerships with Saudi Ara-

bia and the Gulf countries, strategic relations with the United States and Israel, and important ties with Iran and other West Asian states. This diplomatic flexibility should become a strategic asset. The American experience also provides a lesson: decades of military protection did not eliminate instability in the Gulf. India should therefore strengthen its own capabilities rather than depend on another country's security umbrella. Dharma diplomacy, understood as responsible, balanced and dialogue-oriented statecraft, can complement India's traditional strategic autonomy. The most natural arena for India's growing influence is the Indian Ocean. India's movement from SAGAR-Security and Growth for All in the Region to MAHASAGAR-Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and

Growth Across Regions-should become the centre of its maritime strategy.

The Arabian Sea links India directly with the Gulf, while the wider Indian Ocean connects India with Africa, Southeast Asia and Europe. India can strengthen maritime surveillance, protect commercial shipping, expand naval cooperation, conduct humanitarian operations and help smaller countries build their maritime capabilities. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the idea that the world is one family, can give this strategy a wider diplomatic purpose: India's security need not depend on permanent confrontation with another country. India also has another strategic opportunity-artificial intelligence. The future balance of power will not be decided only by nuclear weapons, fighter aircraft and naval



fleets. AI, semiconductors, data, cyber technology and advanced computing will increasingly determine national power. India's MA-NAV approach, centred on moral and ethical systems, accountable governance, national sovereignty, accessibility, inclusion, validity and legitimacy, can provide a distinctly

Indian voice in the global AI race. Pakistan may have nuclear weapons, Türkiye may have advanced defence technology, and Saudi Arabia may possess immense financial power. India's answer can be a combination of technology, economic strength, maritime power and diplomacy.

El Niño drives India’s July power demand to a record high

New Delhi: According to a Crisil Intelligence study released on Tuesday, India’s electricity demand increased 10.9% year-over-year (Y-o-Y) in July to about 171 billion units (BU), the largest amount ever recorded for any month, as a rainfall shortfall caused by El Niño increased demand for cooling equipment. According to the data, India’s power demand climbed by just 2.6% in July of last year. According to Crisil Intelligence, the month also experienced the second-highest peak electricity consumption ever recorded at 270 gigawatts (GW). Compared to the peak of 221 GW recorded in the same month last year, it was around 22% higher. According to the research, India’s electricity demand for the April–July period rose by over 9.1% year over year this fiscal compared to -0.5% last fiscal. India received 15 per cent below-normal rainfall between June 1 and July 29, with the northwest, central and southern regions recording deficits of 10 per cent, 1 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively, the Crisil Intelligence report said.

The report highlighted that in states where the rainfall deficit was higher, power demand also saw a sharper increase. “Karnataka recorded a rainfall deficit of 27-29 per cent, which led to a 21 per cent on-year increase in power demand, while the rainfall deficit in Rajasthan was at 10-20 per cent, resulting in a 23 per cent rise in demand.” India’s power generation increased around 10 per cent Y-o-Y to 182 billion units (BU) in July, tracking the rise in power demand, the report said. “Except gas and hydro, all major fuels saw an on-year increase in power generation,” it added. While renewable energy (RE) generation increased around 10 per cent YoY in July, hydropower generation declined around 14 per cent, primarily due to weak rainfall, the report said.

Soft US economic data sparks demand, pushing gold prices up 0.86%

New Delhi: Gold prices surged 0.86 per cent on a weekly basis as a slew of weaker-than-expected US economic data reinforced expectations that the US Federal Reserve will hold interest rates unchanged.

On Friday, MCX gold futures (October) gained 0.73 per cent and stood at Rs 154,590. On the other hand, MCX silver futures (September) advanced 0.15 per cent and stood at Rs 2,36,272 per kg. Moreover, the price of 10 grams of 24-carat gold was at Rs 1,49,621 on Friday, up from Rs 1,42,863 seen at Monday’s market opening, according to data published by the India Bullion and Jewellers Association (IBJA). Gold and silver also benefited from crude oil staying volatile amid lingering Middle East tensions, lower Treasury yields and a weaker US dollar, market participants said.

The yellow metal climbed to its highest level in over two months before modest



profit-taking later in the week, finally posting a monthly gain of more than 10 per cent. Similarly, the white metal advanced and modestly outperformed gold, narrowing the gold-silver ratio. According to commodity market experts, immediate resistance is placed at \$4,470-\$4,500 for CO-MEX gold, while support lies at \$4,400-\$4,370. For MCX Gold, immediate resistance is placed at Rs 1,55,500-Rs 1,56,000, while the support lies at Rs 1,53,300-Rs 1,52,700, they added.

Crude oil rebounded sharply from the previous week’s sell-off as hopes for a near-

term resolution to the US-Iran standoff over the Strait of Hormuz faded. Although crude oil prices retreated from their mid-week highs, both WTI and Brent posted solid weekly gains. Investors remain keen on the minutes of the Federal Reserve’s July policy meeting, due on August 19, and developments surrounding the Strait of Hormuz. Additionally, July consumer inflation remained broadly contained, with core CPI easing to 2.5 per cent, reinforcing expectations that the Federal Reserve is likely to leave interest rates unchanged at its September meeting.

Bank of Baroda tests the waters in response to SBI's dollar debt sale

New Delhi: According to two merchant bankers on Thursday, India’s Bank of Baroda is contemplating dollar fundraising, one day after its rival State Bank of India, the nation’s biggest lender by assets, had robust demand for its foreign-currency bonds. The second-biggest state-run banking in India by assets, BOB, has given preliminary guidance and intends to raise money thru a dual-tranche bond offering that will mature in three and five years. The bankers added, asking anonymity because they are not permitted to speak to the media, that the bank has offered a spread of 120 basis points above US Treasury for the three-year option and 130 basis points on the five-year sale. BOB did not reply to a Reuters email seeking comment. “Ideally, they are eyeing \$500 million through each maturity, but

if the cutoffs are aggressive, they could choose to upsize one of the maturities,” one of the bankers quoted above said. Indian banks have been making a beeline for dollar issues after the Reserve Bank of India’s swap facility announced in June made overseas borrowing cheaper. State Bank of India on Wednesday raised \$500 million through a five-year issue at 5.25% coupon payable semi-annually.

The issue was sold at a spread of 88 bps over Treasuries, sharply lower from a guidance of 120 bps, with bidding nearly touching \$2.5 billion. Private peers such as HDFC Bank, Axis Bank and ICICI Bank also raised funds through dollar bonds in June and July. Bank of Baroda will issue these papers through its branch in the International Financial Services Centre Banking unit



at GIFT City. The proceeds will be used towards funding requirements of the bank’s head office as well as foreign branches, along with general corporate purposes.

The bonds will be rated BBB, BBB-, and BBB+ by S&P, Fitch Ratings, and CareEdge Ratings, in line with the issuer’s ratings.

Punjab & Sind Bank explores QIP to boost capital and reduce government holding



New Delhi: Public sector lender Punjab & Sind Bank is exploring raising funds through various means, including the QIP route to dilute the government’s stake to meet Sebi’s minimum public shareholding (MPS) norms.

As per the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), all listed companies must maintain an MPS of 25 per cent. “We have got board approval for fundraise through qualified institutional placement (QIP) and others means as part of effort to bring down the government holding in a phased manner,” Punjab & Sind Bank MD and CEO Swarup Kumar Saha told PTI in an interview. Besides, he

said, the bank has on boarded merchant bankers and legal advisors for the same.

The proposed fundraise may happen this financial year depending on market conditions, he added. Currently, the government holds a 93.85 per cent stake in Delhi-headquartered Punjab & Sind Bank. This is the highest stake of the Government of India in any public sector bank. Three other banks have a minimum public shareholding of less than 25 per cent -- Chennai-based Indian Overseas Bank where government holding is 92.44 per cent followed by Kolkata-based UCO Bank at 90.95 per cent, and Mumbai-based Central

Bank of India at 81.19 per cent.

Even the special dispensation deadline given by the government for meeting minimum public shareholding norms for central public sector enterprises and public sector financial institutions is ending in 2026. It would most likely be extended by another two years as government entities would not be able to meet the MPS norms during this month.

In a bid to establish an international banking business presence, Punjab & Sind Bank is planning to operationalise an IFSC Banking Unit (IBU) at GIFT City in Gandhinagar by November this year. The bank has received regulatory approvals from both the Reserve Bank of India and the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) to set up an IBU, Saha said.

“The IBU is going to act as a foreign branch, and this will provide a lot of scope for expanding business in terms of mobilisation of Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) and External Commercial Borrowings. This branch will help expand our balance sheet size and we also intend to bring in foreign exchange business,” he said. The public sector lender has already put the staff in place and an IT vendor has also been selected, he said, adding, “IT integration has also started. So, we intend to operationalise IBU by November.

Airtel set to see ARPU growth of ₹4–12 following prepaid plan updates

New Delhi: Bharti Airtel’s decision to scrap select prepaid packs could lead to a hike in average revenue per user (ARPU) in a broad range of Rs 4-12, brokerages have estimated as the telco turned to targeted plan changes to drive premiumisation and monetisation.

Some viewed the changes as selective plan rationalisation rather than an across-the-board or formal tariff hike, but said it would

aid Airtel’s premiumisation strategy by prompting customers to upgrade. Recently, Bharti Airtel withdrew four prepaid plans -- Rs 299, Rs 579, Rs 619 and Rs 649 -- leaving subscribers of the popular Rs 299 plan with pricier options to choose from.

The reshuffled prepaid offering deck leaves the entry-level Rs 199 and Rs 219 plans unchanged, but it means that subscribers of

the popular Rs 299 plan may now have to opt for the Rs 349 pack, translating into a price rise of about 16 per cent for them. The brokerages - Morgan Stanley, IIFL Capital, JM Financial, and Citi - in their recent notes, have modelled different scenarios to estimate the potential expansion of Airtel’s ARPU. Between the four brokerages, Airtel’s plan rationalisation is projected to drive monthly ARPU

up in a broad range of Rs 4 to Rs 12, as discontinued entry-level packs nudge subscribers to up-trade into higher-value data plans.

Morgan Stanley estimated that assuming 20-30 per cent of Airtel’s wireless subscribers were on plans below Rs 349 and are now pushed to upgrade to the Rs 349 offering, the changes could drive a gross ARPU increase of about Rs 8-12 at the company level.

Petronet LNG is awaiting clarification on September Qatar cargoes

New Delhi: India’s Petronet LNG Ltd (PLL), the largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) importer in the country, is seeking updates from QatarEnergy regarding LNG deliveries for September amid ongoing disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. Following Iranian attacks on QatarEnergy’s facilities, a force majeure was declared in March, affecting 56 contracted LNG cargoes destined for PLL.

QatarEnergy has extended the force majeure until August without providing a clear supply plan for September. Prior to the conflict, Qatar supplied nearly 50% of India’s LNG imports. To meet domestic demand, PLL is now sourcing LNG from the US, Oman, and Nigeria. Financially, PLL reported a 33% year-on-year increase in standalone net profit for Q1 2026-27,

amounting to Rs 1,132 crore, despite a 53% decline in revenue from operations to Rs 5,554 crore.

The company processed 192 trillion British thermal units (TBTU) of LNG at its Dahej terminal in the June quarter, down from 207 TBTU in the same period last year. Overall LNG volumes processed by PLL also decreased to 207 TBTU compared to 220 TBTU a year earlier. Capacity utilization at the Dahej terminal fell to 66%, attributed partly to an increase in terminal capacity from 17.5 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) to 22.5 MTPA following a regasification expansion project. Overall capacity utilization at the company level decreased to 58% in Q1 FY27, down from 76% in both the same quarter last year and the previous quarter.

Indian Bank eyeing \$400 million ECB fundraise this week: MD Binod Kumar



Chennai: To cash in on the RBI’s concessional swap window, Indian Bank plans to raise \$400 million through External Commercial Borrowings (ECB) this week to support its business growth.

In addition, the public sector lender may mop up another \$600 million via ECB before the Reserve Bank of India’s deadline of December 31, 2026. “The bank is considering raising \$ 400 million via the ECB route as early as this week...the overseas fund raise would come at a very competitive rate,” Indian Bank MD and CEO Binod Kumar told PTI in an interview. Post August, he said, the bank would consider garnering another \$600 million as the RBI window is available till the end of the calendar year.

Overall, the bank is planning to garner \$1 billion from the ECB and about \$2 billion via Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) or FCNR (B) deposits, he said. “Indian Bank has already raised \$1.5 billion from FCNR(B) deposits...we have seen good demand from NRIs. They are willing to put their money in such a product as it provides attractive returns...we hope it would touch \$2 billion,” he said, Bet-

ter than expected FCNR(B) flows have been there, which is why the RBI halted the concessional swap facility much ahead of the scheduled deadline of September 30, 2026, he said.

On Friday, Reserve Bank prematurely closed the window for mobilising FCNR(B) deposits under its special \$-INR forex swap facility citing the encouraging response and strong forex inflows generated through the scheme. As per the RBI data, FCNR(B) has attracted \$52.3 billion from overseas customers, while Overseas Foreign Currency Borrowings (OFCBs) contributed \$2.81 billion and ECBs \$1.74 billion till August 13.

The RBI introduced the special \$-INR forex swap facility on June 8, covering FCNR(B) deposits with a deadline of September 30, while December 31 for ECBs and Overseas Foreign Currency Borrowings (OFCBs). Indian Bank, which started its operation in 1907, celebrated its 120th Foundation Day on August 15. On the occasion, Kumar virtually inaugurated 15 branches across different parts of the country, reinforcing the bank’s commitment to taking

accessible and customer-centric banking services closer to communities across India. The bank also launched various customer-centric products as part of its digital journey. To strengthen cybersecurity awareness among customers and the general public, the bank unveiled its cybersecurity mascot ‘IB CYBER CAPTAIN’.

Besides, the bank also launched various digital initiatives, including voice banking with the help of registered mobile service in three languages. The celebrations were attended by Executive Directors Ashutosh Choudhury, Shiv Bajrang Singh and Mini T M, along with senior officials. “As we celebrate our Foundation Day alongside the 80th Independence Day, we reaffirm our commitment to strengthening financial inclusion, empowering communities and contributing meaningfully to India’s journey towards a stronger, more inclusive and prosperous future of Viksit Bharat,” he said. As India moves forward on its development journey, Indian Bank remains committed to playing a meaningful role in building a stronger and more prosperous nation, he added.

RBI monitoring supply-side inflation pressures, likely to maintain wait-and-watch approach



New Delhi: While a policy rate hike is surely not a zero probability event, the bar for the same appears high for now, with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) likely to look through the supply side induced increase in inflation, according to a new report.

Yes Bank’s own estimates indicate headline WPI averaging 9.0 per cent for the year while headline CPI is expected to be at 4.8 per cent (year-on-year). “As we had indicated in our CPI note, ‘Steady upward climb without rude surprises’, given that recent supply-side shocks have not yet translated into broad second-round effects, the case for the RBI to maintain a ‘wait-and-watch’ approach remains intact,” the note mentioned. The uncertainty bordering the resolution of the West Asia

crisis is the crucial risk for manufacturing input costs. With the gap between retail and wholesale inflation persisting, one cannot rule out pass-through from the WPI side to the CPI, “even as we think that the government will hesitate from further passing on under-recoveries of the OMC to pump head prices of petrol and diesel,” according to the note.

Headline WPI for July came in at 9.8 per cent YoY, in line with expectations (9.75 per cent), exhibiting a mild softening from 9.9 per cent YoY in June. “Even as input price concerns show some easing, the critical issue is its sustainability, given uncertainties on the West Asia crisis resolution. As we await for a sense of the extent of pass-through from the WPI to the CPI,

we reiterate our view for the RBI to stay on wait-and-watch and delay any rate action, despite expectations of Headline CPI rising,” Yes Bank said in its note. For July WPI print, core side price rise remains a concern with underlying price pressures in manufacturing categories continuing to firm.

On the producer-side, Output PPI remained broadly aligned with wholesale price trends, while the Input PPI provided some respite as input costs eased for the second consecutive month, partly driven by the cooling in petroleum and chemical-linked inputs. However, it needs to be noted that most global commodity prices remained firm in July, and similar trends are seen for August, said the note.

Balancing fronts: US carrier move to middle east stoking pacific security concerns

President Donald Trump’s war against Iran is stretching the limits of U.S. aircraft carriers and leaving the western Pacific without one of the key American warships as China shows more signs of aggression. The USS George Washington is departing the Pacific and expected to replace the USS Abraham Lincoln in the Middle East amid growing concerns about mental health and supply issues aboard the long-deployed carrier. The Lincoln has had its time at sea extended from its original May return date to support operations against Iran.

The lack of a U.S. carrier in the Pacific may be short-lived if the Navy deploys another in the next couple of months. But it shows how the open-ended operations with Iran are running some American sailors ragged, analysts say, while the Trump administration further retreats from the Asia-Pacific region and focuses on the Western Hemisphere. “The administration says that the Pacific is supposed to be the most important behind the Western Hemisphere,” said Greg Poling, director of the Southeast Asia Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Instead, the U.S. is

“doing the exact opposite” of its previously expressed goal of pulling out of the Middle East. American allies in the Pacific are unsettled over the unpredictability of the Republican administration, Poling said, while Beijing “is quite happy with U.S. distraction, with the frustration of U.S. allies and partners.” China may take advantage of US carrier’s absence Beijing sees the U.S. military presence in the region as a threat to China’s rise and an obstacle to its ambition to seize Taiwan, the self-governing island it claims as its own. But the United States has argued that the Pacific region is too important economically to lose.

No one expects China to invade Taiwan because an American aircraft carrier has left the region. But the carrier’s absence gives the Chinese another opportunity to show its strength, said Bryan Clark, a former Navy submariner who is a defense analyst at the Hudson Institute. “They’re using this as part of the narrative to demonstrate to the Philippines, to Japan, to Indonesia and others that the U.S. is not the big dog in the western Pacific anymore,” Clark said. “They would



just prefer that countries in the region decide that China is the bigger power and the U.S. is not able to guarantee their security anymore.” China conducted naval exercises this week with Indonesia and recently has shown signs of aggression toward Japan and the Philippines, two key U.S. allies that also have territorial disputes with Beijing. China carried out military drills this month near the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea. Both China and the Philippines have claims

over the shoal. Last month, a Chinese guided-missile destroyer conducted a live-fire exercise off Japan’s southernmost island of Okinotori. Adm. Frank Bradley, head of the U.S. Special Operations Command, has been trying to reassure regional allies of Washington’s commitment. He was in Manila on Thursday, telling his Filipino counterparts that U.S. special operations forces are ready to step up joint exercises to strengthen the countries’ alliance. He also is expected to

travel to Japan. “We have the ability to project force, the United States, anywhere on the globe,” Bradley told The Associated Press. “And when the threat in the region of the Middle East has been attended to, we will redeploy and reorient and be able to project that force wherever else it might be required.” “I also feel very confident in the Armed Forces of the Philippines’ ability to protect their sovereignty here and for us to remain close with them,” he said. Evan Sankey, a policy analyst at the Cato Institute who focuses on U.S. policy toward China, said aircraft carriers provide psychological assurance to U.S. allies. The absence of carriers in the region, he said, “adds to the general sense that the U.S. is distracted by events in the Middle East.” Trump has relied on aircraft carriers for military actions Trump has relied heavily on aircraft carriers to support military operations during his second term. For example, the USS Gerald R. Ford returned home in mid-May after an 11-month deployment, the longest since the Vietnam War, during which it supported the U.S. fight against Iran and the capture of Venezuela’s then-leader, Nicolás Maduro.

The Ford had experienced a fire in a laundry space that forced the carrier to turn around and return to the Mediterranean Sea for repairs and left hundreds of sailors without places to sleep. Meanwhile, the Lincoln has spent a record uninterrupted time at sea of more than 240 days. Democratic lawmakers have been calling for investigations and greater visibility into conditions

aboard the ship. Warships and their crews can only handle so much, said Robert Farley, who teaches national security and diplomacy at the University of Kentucky and often writes about aircraft carriers. “People don’t get enough rest. It’s psychologically exhausting. And R&R is part of keeping the crew healthy,” Farley said. “Sometimes it’s framed as, ‘These people haven’t had a vacation.’ But we are dealing with well-known limits on the capacity of a crew to operate at top efficiency over time. And that just declines.” Clark, of the Hudson Institute, said the squeeze on the nation’s aircraft carriers stems from the lack of preparation and planning for the Iran war. “If we were going to mobilize to do this kind of conflict, and we anticipated it might go this long, we might have done some changes to the carrier schedule to make sure more would be available,” Clark said.

Clark said the Navy has 11 aircraft carriers and typically deploys two or three at a time. But it could soon deploy four if the USS Theodore Roosevelt leaves San Diego for the Middle East, allowing the Washington to return to

Pacific. But the massive warships will need maintenance, likely causing a bottleneck at the nation’s only two carrier shipyards. “We’ll end up with a maintenance debt that needs to be paid for the next few years,” Clark said. “We’ll probably have less carrier presence than we’ve had in the previous years because carriers will be lined up to get into the shipyard.” There are questions about the use of aircraft carriers in modern warfare Michael Swaine, a senior research fellow in the Quincy Institute’s East Asia Program, questions the future need for aircraft carriers as warfare rapidly changes. Carriers can be more easily targeted with drones and missiles, particularly by an adversary such as China, Swaine said, while smaller ships and submarines can be as effective in striking targets as the fighter jets that launch off a carrier. Top Navy officials have indicated a desire to move away from a heavy reliance on carriers. Adm. Daryl Caudle, chief of naval operations, told The Associated Press in February that he wants to convince commanders to use smaller, newer ships and other assets instead of consistently turning to huge aircraft carriers.

Search for survivors: Indonesian earthquake death toll climbs to 47

Rescuers combed through debris for survivors on Saturday after a powerful earthquake struck off Indonesia’s eastern Flores island, killing at least 47 people, according to disaster officials. The national disaster management agency (BNPB) raised the death toll from 40 late Saturday, and rescue official Fathur Rahman said 50 people were injured in the 7.7-magnitude quake. Suharyanto, who leads the BNPB, said earlier that people were trapped in several buildings.

“These will be the initial targets of the disaster response teams,” said Suharyanto, who like many Indonesians uses one name. Nearly 160 houses, dozens of educational and health facilities and other public buildings were damaged when the earthquake struck the popular tourist island in Indonesia’s east, the BNPB reported. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said preparations were underway to bring aid to some 2,000 people in temporary shelters. The government sent 50,000 aid packages weighing a total of 275 tonnes to the area, and European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen offered help from the bloc’s Copernicus Earth observation satellites. “Europe stands ready to deploy Copernicus, our eyes in the sky, to support search and rescue efforts. Indonesia, we stand with you,” she wrote on X.

“I have never felt an earthquake this big,” Yulian Juita Ekalia, who lives in Ruteng city more than 100 kilome-

tres (60 miles) west of the epicentre, told AFP by telephone hours after the tremor. “It felt like we were on a trampoline; it was really scary,” said the 37-year-old university lecturer, who was jolted awake at around 5:30 am (2130 GMT on Friday). “As I rushed to get outside, everything in the house fell down: the television, my son’s trophies, the dish racks, suitcases on top of the wardrobes. When I got outside, my son and neighbours were already there, screaming in fear.” Rescue official Fathur told AFP the focus was on locating victims who may be buried under rubble, but rescue efforts have been complicated by landslides cutting off roads. Many Flores inhabitants were left without electricity and telecommunications. Residents in Nagekeo, an area close to the epicentre, raced for higher ground as the sea retreated early Saturday -- a possible sign of an approaching tsunami, AFP journalists witnessed. While a tsunami warning was lifted, authorities urged people not to return to damaged buildings for fear that aftershocks may bring them down.

Hundreds remained outside hours later as dozens of aftershocks shook the island, the strongest measured at a magnitude of 6.1. Waves of up to 1.6 metres (5.2 feet) were reported in some coastal regions of Flores, according to Indonesia’s BMKG geological agency. Yulian said she had dragged her stove outside and was cooking there, fearing further trem-

ors. She said she saw patients being treated under emergency tents outside a nearby hospital. Nagekeo resident Yohanes Babo, 56, said he was at a market when the earth started shaking in the early morning hours. “The shaking was strong. Thankfully, we were already outside the house,” he told AFP. “People were panicking, running here and there. We’re evacuating for the time being... and trying to get to the hills,” he said. The epicentre of the shallow quake was located just off the north coast of the island, US and Indonesian authorities said. The affected areas have few, if any, high-rise buildings.

A second, deep onland quake was measured at a magnitude of 6.9 near Pematangsiantar on Sumatra island -- thousands of kilometres away -- some 12 hours after the Flores tremor. There were no initial reports of damage or casualties, and no tsunami alert was issued. Indonesia experiences frequent earthquakes due to its location in the Pacific “Ring of Fire”, an arc of intense seismic activity stretching from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin. Flores was struck by a 7.7-magnitude earthquake in 1992, which triggered a tsunami and resulted in around 2,500 deaths. A devastating 9.1-magnitude tremor in 2004 struck off the coast of Sumatra and triggered a tsunami that killed 220,000 throughout the region, about 170,000 of them in Indonesia, in one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history.

Choosing sides: US to press partners to align in AI race with China



The U.S. is preparing to tell dozens of countries they must pick sides in the artificial intelligence race with China, warning they will be excluded from a U.S.-led AI coalition if they also sign up for Beijing’s competing framework, according to a U.S. official and an internal draft reviewed by Reuters. Washington last year launched the Pax Silica initiative aimed at securing supply chains for AI models, semiconductors and critical minerals, amid a fierce technology rivalry with Beijing.

About two dozen countries have joined, including Kazakhstan, a key potential source of critical minerals that has also joined China’s coalition, as well as close U.S. allies such as Japan, Australia and South Korea. The draft letter, prepared by the State Department, is addressed to the 35 signatories of a U.S. “AI Opportunity Statement” signed in June, which includes members of the non-binding Pax Silica framework and other countries that have expressed a desire to align cooperation on AI with Washington. By pressing countries to choose sides the U.S. hopes in a race to make the most

sophisticated AI, which could be used for military or economic dominance. In July, Chinese President Xi Jinping launched a rival “World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization”, promoting his country’s open-weight technology as a challenge to U.S. influence over the fast-moving sector.

Kazakhstan is the only country so far known to have joined both initiatives, setting off alarm bells in Washington. “To be part of everything is to be part of nothing. Signature of the Pax Silica Declaration is not merely a membership subscription, but a commitment,” the letter says, urging countries to “choose deliberately” on AI. “It cannot be held alongside membership in duplicative initiatives whose expectations conflict with our own,” the letter said, without specifically mentioning China.

Reuters could not determine when the U.S. intends to send the letter or whether it might be amended before sending. The draft was undated. The State Department told Reuters it would not comment on “purportedly leaked internal documents.” China’s embassy in Washington said the coun-

try opposes politicizing trade and technology issues. “Such actions will only stifle global AI advances and serve no one’s interests,” an embassy spokesperson said. The Kazakh embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment.

The Pax Silica agreement aims to push U.S. allies and partners toward joint projects and export controls, and ultimately reduce reliance on adversaries for critical minerals, AI models and the semiconductor chips that power them. The race between the U.S. and China for technological leadership has reached a pivotal moment, as Chinese open-weight AI models have made rapid gains against proprietary systems from U.S. companies such as OpenAI and Anthropic. The exponential growth of the technology’s capabilities, including the ability to hack autonomously, has forced a global reckoning over its power. Beijing is weighing restrictions on overseas access to some of China’s leading AI models, highlighting the growing tension with its stringent national security agenda. The U.S. touted Kazakhstan in June as the first country in Central Asia to join Pax

Silica, bringing significant reserves of critical minerals that fuel advanced technologies.

China has used its current near-monopolies over critical minerals as a retaliatory weapon in a tariff war launched last year by U.S. President Donald Trump, who has ramped up U.S. efforts to source the minerals domestically and from allies. Members of Pax Silica have access to shared investment opportunities in AI-related projects while those who sign the AI Opportunity Statement have symbolically agreed on a “common purpose” and “shared vision” with the U.S., according to the statement posted on the State Department’s website.

U.S. officials drafted the letter to make clear that “you can’t have it both ways,” the U.S. official told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity given ongoing internal discussions on the issue. “It’s difficult to see how a country can credibly position themselves as trusted partners in one technology ecosystem while simultaneously signing up for an initiative designed by China to advance a competing vision for AI,” the official said.



Teens need to press pause on late-night doomscrolling



Teens’ glued-to-their-phone habits are turning many of them into night owls on school nights — at a time when they need all the sleep they can get. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommend teenagers get eight to 10 hours of sleep every night. But more than half of teens in the United States are spending up to an hour or more on their phone between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. on school nights, new research has found. Additionally, more than half of teens were using their phones in the middle of the night, between 12 a.m. and 4 a.m., according to lead study author Jason M. Nagata, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco. Nagata and his colleagues analyzed data collected from the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study, which shows how teenage phone-use patterns and specific types of uses cut into sleep during nighttime hours. Although the research doesn’t directly link nighttime phone use to harmful outcomes for teenagers, previous research has shown sleep disruption does have negative impacts.

“By displacing the opportunity to sleep, it can be challenging for teens to get adequate sleep, and that has downstream impact on their waking behavior, as we’ve known for many, many years,” said Dr. Mary A. Carskadon, professor of psychiatry and human behavior at Brown University. She was not involved with the study. Getting inadequate sleep can affect people in numerous ways. For teens, who are at an age when the brain and body are developing, sleep loss has even greater consequences. Cognitive function is impaired when the body isn’t well rested. It becomes more difficult to consolidate and retain information acquired throughout the day. “One of the life tasks for teenagers is to learn,” Carskadon said. “Whether it’s school learning, learning their sports, how to behave with other people, social interactions, there’s a lot of learning building up across the adolescent age span.” Emotional regulation worsens with poor sleep. In a 2013 study, a group of healthy adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 participated in a three-week experiment that started with a typical week of sleep. Next came a week of sleep restriction with 6 ½ hours of shut-eye per night, followed by a final week of healthy sleep with 10 hours each night. The participants rated themselves as slightly more anxious, angry, confused and fatigued during the sleep-restriction period compared with the healthy sleep period. The adolescents and their parents also reported more irritability and poorer emotional regulation. “The less sleep a teenager has, the more irritable they become,” Carskadon said. “Parents will tell you that it’s one of those no-brainer kind of conclusions.” For certain more vulnerable youth, less sleep can pose risks to their mental health. Nagata noted that past research suggests sleep-deprived kids are at higher risk of depression and anxiety symptoms. Lack of sleep could also make teens vulnerable to suicidal ideation, self-harm and risk taking, Carskadon said. Adolescents focused their screen time on apps featuring social media, entertainment, games, communication and music, according to Nagata. Teens spent the most time — an average of 33 minutes every night — on apps such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok.

Your daily walk matters in more ways than you think

When people think about building strength, they likely picture lifting weights or taking a high-intensity exercise class. Walking is often dismissed as “just cardio” or something you do to reach your step count or get some fresh air. But walking acts as far more than a calorie-burning activity. It’s one of your body’s most fundamental movement patterns. How you walk affects pelvic alignment, core stability, hip mobility, balance, breathing and even how your nervous system regulates tension. In many ways, walking provides the basis for building and expressing strength. Although the act of walking is not a resistance exercise unless you add external load, without efficient gait mechanics, your strength training suffers. Think of walking as the daily foundational practice that sets the stage for how powerfully you can move in the gym and everyday life.

Walking is your body’s movement blueprint

Every step you take is part of a coordinated sequence involving your feet, ankles, knees, hips, pelvis, spine, rib cage and shoulders. During a healthy gait cycle, your pelvis rotates in sync with your legs while your rib cage counter-rotates with your arm swing. At the same time, your core muscles dynamically stabilize your spine to maintain upright posture as your weight transfers from one leg to the other. This alternating and reciprocal motion is not just about getting you from point A to point B. The pattern reinforces how your muscles fire in sequence and how your body transfers force during related movements. In fact, the American College of Sports Medicine identifies gait as neuromotor training — a key component of overall fitness because of its role in supporting functional movement and lowering injury risk.

Can walking serve as strength training?

On its own, walking is not a replacement for a comprehensive resistance training program, but it is a fundamental aspect. Think of gait as the necessary base for strengthening exercises that prepares your muscles and joints to handle greater loads more effectively. Nevertheless, wearing a properly fitted weighted vest while walking qualifies as a type of traditional resistance exercise because adding an external load creates greater demand on your lower body and core. You don’t need a lot of weight; start conservatively with just 3% to 5% of your body mass. Research on load carriage and weighted walking shows that trunk loading increases metabolic and musculoskeletal demand proportionally with added weight, so progress gradually, giving your body time to adapt before increasing the load. Because wearing a vest distributes the added weight through your torso — close to your center of

mass — it challenges postural stability without forcing you to alter mechanics in the way that placing weight on the limbs with ankle or wrist weights can. If you choose to use weights on your arms or legs, keep them light — only a pound or so per limb— and focus on maintaining a smooth arm swing and controlled foot strike without exaggerating your stride. If you notice your gait changing, your shoulders shrugging or your hips hiking, the load is too much. When walking with any type of weighted resistance, go at a pace that allows you to maintain good posture and breathing. Only increase the load if you can walk with proper form. The goal is added muscular demand without distorted movement.

What happens when your gait is off

Walking is a natural human movement pattern, but its coordination can easily break down. That’s why it’s important to pay attention to your form, just as you would with any exercise. If your walking pattern lacks hip extension, you may notice your stride feels short, your posture is forward-leaning and your glutes seem uninvolved. That missing activation to drive each step forward isn’t isolated to your walk; in the gym, it creates instability and compensations in many strength exercises, including squatting and deadlifting. Likewise, if your rib cage is stiff and rigid while you walk, it can alter skeletal alignment and compromise your diaphragm’s ability to function as a postural support — increasing the risk of a low-back injury during exercises that involve carrying or moving weight. When your pelvis dips or shifts excessively with each stride, it’s signaling instability from poor motor control or weakness. As one leg swings forward, the other needs to help stabilize your pelvis and trunk — requiring coordinated engagement from your deep core, glute, hip and leg muscles. Without this stabilizing coordination in your gait, movement is limited, and chronic issues can develop in the form of back pain, hip discomfort or knee strain.

Simple cues to improve your walking quality

Small adjustments can immediately improve walking mechanics: Maintain alignment with your rib cage stacked over your pelvis. Avoid leaning forward or arching your lower back. Push off the ground behind you with your back foot to take longer, stronger strides. Allow your arms to swing naturally in coordination with your legs. Keep your gaze forward and your jaw relaxed to reduce upper-body tension. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, extending your exhales slightly longer than your inhales.



Quick and Sweet: Make Delicious Coconut Halwa in 20 Minutes



Looking for something sweet to add to your Shravan vrat menu? Coconut halwa is an easy option that needs only a handful of ingredients and no complicated preparation. Made with fresh coconut, jaggery, ghee, cardamom and cashews, this rich and aromatic dessert comes together in

around 20 minutes. Coconut, nuts and ghee are commonly used in vrat preparations, although fasting rules can differ between families and regions. Jaggery, in particular, may not be consumed in some fasting traditions, so follow the rules observed in your household.

Ingredients For Coconut Halwa : 2 cups raw coconut, grated
1 cup jaggery, grated or finely chopped
3-4 tablespoons water
1/2 teaspoon cardamom powder
3 tablespoons ghee, plus 1 teaspoon for finishing
10-15 cashew nuts

How To Make Coconut Halwa : Add the grated raw coconut and jaggery to a blender. Pour in 3-4 tablespoons of water and blend until you get a relatively smooth, thick paste. Avoid adding too much water, as this will increase the cooking time. Heat 3 tablespoons of ghee in a heavy-bottomed pan. Add the cashews and roast them over low to medium heat until they turn golden. Remove the cashews and keep them aside. Add the coconut-jaggery mixture to the same pan containing the ghee. Cook over medium-low heat, stirring regularly so that the mixture doesn’t stick to the bottom or burn. As the coconut

cooks and the excess moisture evaporates, the mixture will gradually become thicker. Continue cooking for around 20 minutes, or until the mixture thickens and begins to come together like halwa. Cooking time can vary depending on how much moisture the fresh coconut contains, so use the texture rather than the clock as your main guide. Once the halwa reaches the desired consistency, add the cardamom powder, another teaspoon of ghee and the roasted cashews. Mix everything well and switch off the heat. Serve the coconut halwa warm for a comforting Shravan vrat treat. Use fresh coconut for a softer and more moist texture. Keep the flame moderate once you add the coconut-jaggery mixture, as jaggery can catch at the bottom if the heat is too high. Stir frequently towards the end when the halwa begins to thicken. You can also reserve a few roasted cashews for garnishing before serving.

Elevate your Onam Sadya with this quick beetroot Avial recipe



The festival of Onam is right around the corner. The celebrations will begin with Atham on August 16 and culminate in Thiruvonam on August 26. A time to give thanks for the rich harvest and also welcome the annual return of the legendary King Mahabali, Onam is a feast of food and festivities that cannot be contained to one day. Onam’s sadya meals are legendary. They have a minimum of 10-15 dishes, but can feature around 24 to 28 dishes that are served on a banana leaf. Out of all the dishes, the avial is one of the most loved items on the leaf.

Avial (or aviyal) is a traditional Kerala dish, which is a thick, mildly spiced stew of mixed vegetables cooked with grated coconut, curd, and coconut milk, then finished with coconut oil and curry leaves. It is a staple of the Onam Sadya and is often served early in the feast. Legend says it was created by a resourceful cook (sometimes linked to Bhima of the Mahabharata) who combined leftover vegetables into one dish, which is why it symbolises simplicity and abundance during Onam. While the classic version uses 10–13 seasonal vegetables like raw banana, beetroot, drumstick, yam, beans, and pumpkin, there are many variations: Kerala-style mixed-vegetable avial, Tamil Brahmin avial with a slightly sour, looser gravy, Cheera Avial (with amaranth leaves), Mutta Avial (with boiled eggs), and even non-vegetarian versions like Chicken Avial. This recipe for beetroot avial by Shilpa Kumar, in-house chef, Akshayakalpa Organic, pairs beautifully with rice, chapati, roti, or dosa. It is a refreshing twist on traditional avial, and has a vibrant pink colour

thanks to the beetroot. It combines the goodness of fresh greens, creamy curd, and the earthy aroma of coconut oil.

Beetroot Avial Recipe

Ingredients: Small beetroots – 2 (grated)
Yoghurt – 400g
Fresh Dill leaves – 1 tbsp
Moringa leaves – 1 tsp
Curry leaves (a few)
Chopped coriander leaves – 1sp
Cashews – 1 tbsp
Chana dal – 1 tsp
Urad dal – 1 tsp
Cumin – 1 tsp
Mustard seeds – 1 tsp
Asafoetida (hing) – a pinch
Coarsely crushed black pepper – 1 tsp
Coconut oil – 1 tbsp
Salt (to taste)

Method: Heat coconut oil in a pan. Add the mustard seeds and cumin, allowing them to splutter. Stir in the chana dal, urad dal, cashews, curry leaves, and a pinch of hing. Sauté until the dals turn light golden. Add the coarsely crushed pepper, grated beetroot, dill, moringa leaves, coriander leaves, and salt. Cook over medium heat until the beetroot is tender and the greens are wilted. Remove from the heat and allow the mixture to cool completely. Whisk the thick curd until smooth and creamy. Gently fold the cooled beetroot mixture into the curd. Adjust the seasoning if required. Serve chilled or at room temperature with hot steamed rice, chapati, roti, or dosa with a generous amount of organic ghee for a nourishing and colourful Onam meal/sadya.

Frosty glam: how to rock the cold girl makeup trend on Indian skin

With a new beauty trend popping up every other day, it takes something special to stick around. Cold girl makeup has managed to do just that. And as we move away from the bronzed, sun-kissed glow that feels just right for summer, the trend is back in its element, bringing rosy cheeks, a little colour on the nose, frosty eyes and glossy lips into the picture.

The first thing to change is your base. This isn’t quite the season for an all-over glazed, ultra-dewy finish. Instead, the cold girl look calls for skin that looks soft and slightly blurred while still feeling natural. A light-to-medium coverage matte or natural-finish foundation works well here, followed by a little loose powder on the areas that tend to get shiny, such as the T-zone, nose, chin, forehead and under the eyes. If you’re looking to invest in a foundation for this look, NARS Light Reflecting Foundation is a perfect high-end option, while Maybelline Fit Me Matte + setting, Huda Beauty Easy Bake Loose Powder is Kay Beauty HD Setting Loose Powder makes for where this entire look comes together. The idea is in chilly weather. You can even mix a pink and And if you have a deeper complexion. Cooler ber-Indian skin tones that same flushed effect while it, depending on how obvious you want the look and lightly over the bridge of the nose, or keep it little to the tip of the nose. For a luxury blush, Rare particularly if you want something highly pig-Out Freestyle Cream Blush is another option if side, Kay Beauty Matte Blush can be built up gradually and comes in shades that work across Indian skin tones. Then come the eyes. Opt for a little shimmery silver or icy pink eyeshadow on the lids and inner corners. If you want to push the trend further, a white or pale eyeliner on the waterline can give you that snowy finish. But for Indian skin tones, you don’t necessarily have to use stark silver or white. Icy rose, champagne and pale gold can give warmer undertones a softer version of the same look. You can also skip buying a whole new palette for one trend and simply pick a good neutral or shimmer palette that has one shade you can use for this look. Lakmé Absolute Spotlight Eye Shadow Palette is one option, while NYX Professional Makeup Jumbo Eye Pencil can be used to create a brighter inner-corner or eyeliner moment without needing a full palette. The lips should stay soft and juicy. A heavy matte lip doesn’t really fit the mood here, so reach for a rosy pink, light red, berry or mauve tint and finish it off with a good amount of gloss on top. If you have deeper skin, try raspberry, berry, wine or deeper rose shades instead of very pale pinks.



ENTERTAINMENT

Surrogate advertising crackdown: Maharashtra FDA issues notices to Bollywood trio



Mumbai : Shah Rukh Khan, Ajay Devgn and Tiger Shroff have been served show-cause notices from the Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) over their Vimal Elaichi advertisement. The regulator has alleged that the campaign could amount to surrogate advertising for Vimal Pan Masala, a product banned in Maharashtra.

The notices come as the state FDA steps up its action against gutka and pan masala

products containing tobacco or nicotine. The actors have now been asked to explain their involvement in the advertisement and its alleged connection to the prohibited pan masala brand. According to the notices, the FDA believes the advertisement creates an indirect association with Vimal Pan Masala. The regulator has raised concerns that promoting the Vimal brand through an elaichi product could effectively serve as indirect promotion of the pan

masala brand.

The notices were served at different locations. Ajay Devgn received his notice at his residence in Juhu, while Shah Rukh Khan was served at Mannat in Bandra. Tiger Shroff received the notice through his production company, Tiger Shroff Productions LLP. The FDA has referred to the Vimal brand's association with pan masala while explaining its action. The notice, according to a report in IANS, stated, "Upon examination of the said advertisement, it prima facie appears that the advertisement promotes the Vimal brand, which is mainly associated with Pan Masala, a product prohibited for manufacture, storage, transportation, distribution, and sale in the State of Maharashtra for a period of one year, with effect from the date specified in the Prohibition Order dated the 13th July, 2026, issued by the Commissioner of Food Safety, Maharashtra State, under Section 30(2)(a) of the FSS Act, 2006."

The FDA has cited Section 24 of the Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Act, 2006, which bans misleading or deceptive advertisements for food products. It has also referred to Section 53, under which those involved in misleading food ads can face a penalty of up to Rs 10 lakh. The notices are part of the Maharashtra FDA's wider action against food safety violations. The regulator has been checking food and milk adulteration, unhealthy food sold near schools and the sale of banned gutka and tobacco-based pan masala. In recent months, it has also stepped up inspections, seizures and action against those breaking food safety rules.

Awarapan 2 leaves Batwara 1947 behind as Emraan Hashmi delivers record-breaking opening

Mumbai : The Independence Day weekend box office clash between Awarapan 2 and Batwara 1947 has produced a decisive winner on opening day. Emraan Hashmi's action drama has registered a significantly stronger start than Sunny Deol's Partition drama, collecting over Rs 21 crore nett in India on August 14, according to industry tracker Sacnilk. Batwara 1947, meanwhile, opened at Rs 5.75 crore nett.

The numbers put Awarapan 2 at nearly four times the opening-day collection of Batwara 1947. The two films had almost the same number of shows across India, making the difference in their opening-day performance even more pronounced. Awarapan 2 also recorded substantially stronger occupancy, reaching around 75 per cent for its night shows. Batwara 1947, which saw occupancy in the 7-12 per cent range during the day, improved to around 25 per cent during its night screenings. The opening marks a new career high for Hashmi. Before Awarapan 2, his biggest first-day collection came with Baadshaho, which earned Rs 12.60 crore nett in 2017. Raaz 2 had



opened at Rs 10.35 crore nett in 2012. Awarapan 2 has therefore comfortably surpassed both figures to give the actor his biggest opening-day number.

The sequel has also crossed the entire theatrical collection of Awarapan within a single day. The 2007 original, which developed a cult following over the years, earned Rs 7.76 crore nett during its complete theatrical run. It had opened with Rs 79 lakh nett and collected Rs 2.88 crore nett over its opening weekend. Directed by Nitin Kakkar and produced by Vishesh Bhatt, Awarapan 2 brings Hashmi back as Shivam Pandit. The film also features Shabana Azmi, Disha

Patani and Suvinder Vicky. Its opening has given Hashmi a substantial lead in the Independence Day box office clash.

For Sunny Deol, Batwara 1947 has recorded his lowest opening for a solo Deol film since Bhaiaji Superhit, which opened at around Rs 1 crore nett in 2018. His recent patriotic releases had started considerably higher, with Gadar 2 opening at Rs 40 crore nett and Border 2 beginning its theatrical run with Rs 32 crore nett. Directed by Rajkumar Santoshi, Batwara 1947 is set during the Partition and follows Deol as a Muslim man who migrates to Pakistan. After discovering a Hindu woman, played by Shabana Azmi, living upstairs in his home, he takes responsibility for protecting her while trying to keep his family safe amid the violence.

The film also marks Preity Zinta's return to the big screen after nearly a decade and features the first on-screen collaboration between Sunny Deol and his son Karan Deol, who plays his son in the film. The cast also includes Ali Fazal, Abhimanyu Singh, Khushi Hajare and Kanikka Kapur.

Filmmaker and actor Mark Rydell dies

Agency : Director Mark Rydell, the Oscar-nominated director of 1981's 'On Golden Pond' and two of Bette Midler's popular films, 'The Rose' and 'The Boys', passed away on Friday at the age of 97.

Actor Bette Midler announced the demise of the director on her Instagram handle today. She paid tribute to the filmmaker by remembering her first movie, 'The Rose'. "Mark Rydell, the director of my first film, The Rose, died this morning. He was an actor of note before he became a director, and I was so lucky to have met him when I did; he taught me so much on The Rose and later on For The Boys. Two Oscar nominations, both because of him. He was the actor's whisperer; just a few words was all it took to understand what was needed," wrote Bette Midler. He started his directing career in television before graduating to film in the late '60s with an adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's 'The Fox'.

As a director, he elicited strong performances from his actors, guiding Henry Fonda and Katharine Hepburn to Oscars and Jane Fonda to a supporting actress nomination for 'On Golden Pond' in 1981. He had previously worked similar magic for Midler in her screen debut, 'The Rose', and later in her career in 'For The Boys'; Marsha Mason in 'Cinderella Liberty'; Sissy Spacek in 'The River'; and African-American actor Rupert Crosse, who drew a supporting nomination for 1969's 'The Reivers'. His greatest screen success was 'On Golden Pond', adapted from Ernest Thompson's stage drama about family relationships. It was nominated for Best Picture and brought Rydell a directing nomination. The seriously ill Henry Fonda won an Oscar in what would be his last starring role — and his only co-starring role with daughter Jane, who was also nominated. Hepburn won an unprecedented fourth acting Oscar for her work, and Thompson won for adapting his work to the screen, reported Variety. According to Variety, Mortimer H. Rydell was born in New York and attended the Juilliard School of Music, training as an actor at both the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Actors Studio. In the 1950s, he appeared on Broadway while working as a jazz pianist to earn extra money. For six years, he starred in 'As the World Turns' before his character was killed off. He also worked as an actor in television in episodes of series such as 'Wanted: Dead or Alive' before moving into directing for TV and then for the big screen.

Timeless stars: Trivikram calls Suriya and Mahesh Babu India's ever-young actors



Hyderabad : Suriya has once again won audiences' hearts with his performance as 'Sanjay Vishwanath' in the recently released film Vishwanath and Sons. Playing a 40-year-old businessman, the actor brought ease, maturity and balance to the character, and received huge applause from audiences. The film has been setting records with each passing day and continues to enjoy strong box-office response.

Speaking at the film's success meet on Saturday, director Trivikram Srinivas

showered praise on Suriya and Mahesh Babu, saying that they are two stars in the Indian film industry for whom age is merely a number. He said both actors continue to age gracefully and are enjoying a huge fan base. Trivikram revealed that he had approached Suriya for a film earlier, but the actor did not like the story. He added that he is keen to work with Suriya in the future. He said that his wife is a huge fan of Suriya and added that his wife usually does not visit film sets, but

made an exception this time. She visited the sets and even took a photograph with Suriya.

Speaking about the film, Trivikram described Suriya, Radhika, Mamita and Raveena as the four pillars of Vishwanath and Sons. Trivikram said Suriya's role was one of the most challenging characters in the film and praised the actor for delivering it with much ease. Trivikram also credited Venky for bringing back the much-loved Sanjay character from Ghajini. He said the character had left a lasting impression on audiences and that Venky made every effort to recreate the essence of Sanjay, a character that continues to be remembered. Trivikram also recalled hearing from Allu Aravind that Bollywood actor Aamir Khan had once said he could not match Suriya's performance in Ghajini.

Action begins: Ranveer Singh & Kalyani Priyadarshan start filming for pralay

Mumbai : Ranveer Singh's survival spectacle, Pralay, goes on floors. Ranveer Singh's one of the most anticipated films, for which audiences have been waiting, is finally going on floors after a long wait. Touted to be a zombie thriller, Pralay will mark Ranveer Singh's first major project following the grand success of his action thriller spy drama Dhurandhar: The Revenge.

The film is being shot at live locations in and around Mumbai, as the makers embrace the physicality and unpredictability of real-world environments. This approach brings heightened scale, texture and realism to a world on the brink of annihilation, creating an immersive theatrical experience. The cameras are now rolling on Pralay, which had

been in highly technical and intensive pre-production for several months. For the movie, Ranveer Singh will be joined by Kalyani Priyadarshan, who was recently seen in Lokah. The actress will make her Hindi film debut with the ambitious thriller. The project will be directed by Jai Mehta, son of filmmaker Hansal Mehta, marking his theatrical directorial debut. Jai previously co-directed Scam 1992: The Harshad Mehta Story and Lootere, and is known for his realistic storytelling style.

With Pralay, Ranveer Singh once again ventures into an unexplored cinematic landscape that is new and disruptive. Widely regarded as one of the greatest performers of his generation, Ranveer not only headlines the film but also serves as a



producer, taking on a story that demands both physical intensity and emotional conviction. Set against the unmistakable pulse and landscape of Mumbai, Pralay is an original story that seeks to marry breathtaking spectacle with a deeply human emotional core. At its heart is a journey of survival, courage and the instinct to fight for what matters most when the world as you know it begins to collapse.

Pralay is a post-apocalyptic zombie thriller set in a dystopian Mumbai ravaged by a deadly outbreak. The film follows a married couple as they fight to survive in a city overrun by chaos. Mounted on a reported budget of ₹300 crore, it is expected to be the most expensive standalone film of Ranveer's career. The actor is also co-producing the project under his banner, Ma Kasam Films.

Emotional moment: Aamir Khan & Kiran Rao's concerned reaction to son Azad goes viral

Mumbai : Aamir Khan was spotted outside a Mumbai pet clinic on Saturday with his former wife Kiran Rao and their son Azad Rao Khan. A video of the family leaving the clinic has since surfaced online, with Azad visibly emotional and Aamir carrying a pet carrier.

The clip has prompted concern among social media users, although neither Aamir nor Kiran has revealed why they visited the clinic or

shared any update about their pet. In the video circulating on social media, Aamir and Kiran can be seen walking out of the clinic with Azad. The 14-year-old appears to be crying, while his parents also look visibly concerned. Aamir is seen carrying what appears to be a cat carrier as the family makes its way out.

"His pet dog or cat is not well, I guess," one person commented. Another wrote,

"Might be some pet lost its life. Sad." A third user speculated that the family may have lost a pet and suggested that this was why Azad appeared upset. However, there is currently no confirmation about what happened. Aamir and Kiran have not issued a statement about the clinic visit, nor have they said that any of their pets has died. The claims circulating online remain speculation based solely on the



video.

The sighting comes shortly after the theatrical release

of Aamir's latest production, Batwara 1947. Directed by Rajkumar Santoshi, the Par-

tion drama is headlined by Sunny Deol and also stars Preity Zinta, Shabana Azmi, Ali Fazal, Karan Deol and Abhimanyu Singh. The film opened to mixed-to-positive reviews but registered a modest start at the box office, collecting Rs 5.75 crore on its opening day. Its performance over the weekend will now determine whether it can build momentum following the initial numbers.

Aamir, meanwhile, is yet to officially announce his next project as a leading man. Reports have suggested that he could headline a film titled Lalkaara. The reported project is said to revolve around the historic 1952 India-Pakistan Test series, with Aamir expected to portray legendary Indian cricketer Lala Amarnath. An official announcement regarding the film, however, is still awaited.

Actress Sreeleela seeks divine blessings at Durga temple amid industry return efforts



Hyderabad : Actress Sreeleela recently visited the Kanaka Durga Temple in Vijayawada and performed special poojas along with her mother and friends. She also received blessings from the priests and took prasadam.

Sreeleela is reportedly looking for a strong comeback in Tollywood after her last release, Ustaad Bhagat Singh,

failed to make an impact at the box office. "She is not in a hurry to sign her next film and is waiting for the right kind of role. She is also exploring opportunities in Tamil and Hindi cinema, but nothing has been finalised yet. She has been discussing projects with a few directors, but nothing is fixed as of now," says a source. With compe-

tion among young actresses intensifying, Sreeleela will need to be selective about her roles. Actresses such as Sri Gauri Priya, Kayadu Lohar and Meenakshi Chaudhary are steadily making their presence felt and giving established names tough competition. "Competition is part of an actor's job, so there is nothing to worry about,"

adds the source.

Sreeleela has already worked with leading stars including Mahesh Babu, Pawan Kalyan, Ram Pothineni and Nithin. Her pairing with Ravi Teja in Dhamaka turned out to be a sensational success and established her as one of the most sought-after young actresses in Telugu cinema.

Frozen 3 locks in November 2027 release date with original cast back

Los Angeles : Disney has offered the first substantial peek at Frozen 3, and Arendelle is preparing for a wedding, a fresh threat and another adventure for Anna and Elsa. The third instalment in the blockbuster animated franchise is set to arrive in theatres on November 24, 2027.

Kristen Bell and Idina Menzel will return to voice Anna and Elsa, respectively, while Jonathan Groff is back as Kristoff and Josh Gad will once again play Olaf. One of the biggest Frozen 3 reveals to emerge from Disney's D23 event concerns Anna and Kristoff. After their relationship evolved across the first two films, the couple is finally headed for the altar. Bell and Menzel teased the development by saying, "This royal wedding has been a long time coming."

But a peaceful wedding may be too much to expect in Arendelle. Bell also hinted that Anna and Elsa are about to embark on "their biggest journey



yet", indicating that the sisters will have much more to deal with than wedding preparations. Exactly what sends them on their next adventure has not been revealed. The upcoming film will bring a new antagonist into the story. Disney is keeping the villain's identity and motivations under wraps for now, but the character is expected to create trouble around Anna and Kristoff's wedding and propel the sisters towards another unexpected journey.

Further plot details re-

main closely guarded, leaving questions about what kind of danger awaits Arendelle this time. Anna and Kristoff apparently won't be the only characters finding romance. Olaf is also set to have a love interest in Frozen 3.

The snowman's romantic interest will reportedly be named Samantha, adding another new element to Olaf's story. Bell and Menzel teased that "love is in the air for everyone" while discussing what audiences can expect from the sequel.

Omar Abdullah is urged by a Jammu and Kashmir minister to take over as transport commissioner

Srinagar, Aug 16: A new conflict between the elected administration and the bureaucracy has been brought to light by Jammu-born transport minister Satish Sharma's request that chief minister Omar Abdullah replace his transport commissioner Vishesh Pal Mahajan due to alleged insubordination. In a letter to Omar, Sharma charged Mahajan of "persistent insubordination" and "continuous defiance of and disrespect toward the authority of this ministry." It has "reached a point where the orderly administration of the transport department is being seriously compromised," according to the minister.

The Omar Abdullah government has little say in the appointment of senior officers, with the chief minister locking horns with lieutenant governor Manoj Sinha's administration on multiple occasions in the past.

"Persistent insubordination by a senior officer not only undermines the authority and dignity of the elected office but also disrupts the chain of administrative accountability, adversely affects the morale of the department and ultimately impedes the delivery of public services to the citizens," the letter says. Sharma has requested Omar to "immediately move out" Mahajan and post in his place a suitable officer of appropriate seniority so that "the normal functioning of the department can be restored".



Responses to oral statements posted online are requested by the Supreme Court Courtroom memes poser

New Delhi, Aug 16: In response to a petition requesting an investigation into alleged commercial exploitation of court oral observations and their distortion on social media, especially by individuals affiliated with the Cockroach Janta Party, the Supreme Court has requested responses from the CBI, Bar Council, and the ministry of electronics and information technology. On Tuesday, a bench consisting of Chief Justice Surya Kant, Justice Joy-malya Bagchi, and Justice V. Mohana also issued a notice on the petition that attorney Raja Chowdhary submitted, requesting a probe into the entry of numerous fraudulent solicitors into the legal profession, which could lead to its criminalisation.

The bench listed the matter for further hearing to September 10, by which time the respondents are expected to file their responses.

According to Chowdhary, who appeared in person to argue the case, of late CJP-related activists and several others have been indulging in "commercial exploitation of oral observations" made by judges during judicial proceedings and using them as memes and satire on social media, which undermines public confidence in the judiciary and justice.

The petitioner clarified that while every citizen has the fundamental right to free speech, expression and democratic dissent, such rights can't be stretched to undermine the image of the judiciary through selective uploading of oral observations made by judges to ridicule the judiciary in public. Portions of oral exchanges by judges with the Bar are being selectively clipped, taken out of context, and converted into satire and memes denigrating the image of judges and the judiciary, the petitioner said. The CJP was formed as a satirical response by its founder Abhijeet Dipke to certain oral observations made by CJI Kant during a hearing in May.



Congress MP Shashi Tharoor expresses solidarity with Mahua Moitra, calls for state protection

New Delhi, Aug 16: Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Saturday expressed solidarity with TMC MP Mahua Moitra after the Nadia district administration allegedly attempted to force her to vacate a circuit house, and said it is the duty of the government to provide her security when a "mob is baying for her". Tharoor said all democrats must stand in solidarity with Moitra in her travails.

"If the price of her convictions is that a mob is baying for her, it is the duty of the government to provide her security, not to ask her to vacate government accommodation!" the MP from Thiruvananthapuram said. Such elementary considerations should not be spelt out in a democracy, least of all on the day that marks the culmination of our freedom struggle, Tharoor said on X, using the hashtag 'Stand With Mahua'. Moitra has written to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, seeking his intervention in the Nadia district administration's alleged attempt to force her to vacate a circuit house after she was initially allotted a room at the state-owned property.

The Krishnanagar MP has also threatened to move court over the alleged harassment, as she claimed that a large crowd had gathered outside the circuit house on Friday night, shouting 'Jai Shree Ram' slogans after she refused to leave the premises. "I kindly request you to urgently look into the matter and take necessary steps to set an example and ensure the dignity of women parliamentarians across the country."

"Any Women's Reservation Bill seeking to bring in more women is a matter of jest unless your august office can protect the 74 women who have battled great odds to enter this House," the MP wrote in her letter to Birla. Moitra, who moved into the circuit house in Krishnanagar for an overnight stay following a Parliament session,



asserted that as an MP she was entitled to stay there, but was being pressured by the district authorities to move out in the middle of the night with the intent to harass her.

"I went into the room of the Circuit House around 6.15 pm. The staff showed me to my usual room, which was made up and ready. Tea was served in my room at 7 pm, and dinner was served at 9.20 pm in the room. "At 9.47 pm, I received a call from the additional district magistrate of Nadia, who informed me that I needed to vacate the premises. When I asked him the reason, he said that the 'order had come from the top', and he was only conveying the message," she wrote. Moitra added that at 10:52 pm, she received a WhatsApp message from the district administration with a copy of an order which said no new reservations were to be honoured in the circuit house.

The MP had earlier posted the order she received from the Nezarath deputy collector of Nadia on her social media accounts. "In view of facilitating the annual maintenance cum upkeep and cleaning arrangements, the Nadia circuit house (at Krishnanagar) shall not be available for service from the evening of August 14, 2026, till further orders," the document stated. "Reservations already confirmed prior to 13th August, 2026, only shall be exempted from the general purview of this order," it added. Moitra claimed in her letter to the Lok Sabha speaker that nobody conveyed anything to her when she made the booking and no one informed her about the booking embargo when she checked in.

The Indian Table Tennis Federation requests that the Sports Ministry reevaluate the suspension

New Delhi : The Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) argued that its autonomy under the Olympic Charter must be respected and its administration must be kept free from outside intervention, and on Thursday it urged the Sports Ministry to reevaluate its decision to withdraw recognition from the national body. Citing governance shortcomings, the Ministry suspended the TTFI on Wednesday and requested that the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) establish an ad hoc committee to oversee the sport. It stated that among the reasons for the judgment were the federation's tardiness in holding elections and its "unsatisfactory response" to a show-cause notice. In a statement issued by TTFI president Meghna Ahlawat, the federation urged the Ministry to keep its August 12 order in abeyance and reconsider the matter afresh. "TTFI respectfully seeks the Ministry's kind consideration of the implications that any external or interim administrative arrangement may have in this regard, including the principles of autonomy recognised under Rules 27 and 28 of the Olympic Charter," the federation said. "The Olympic Charter and the Statutes of the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) recognise and expressly protect the autonomy of National Sports Federations and require their governance and administration to remain free from any third-party interference," it added. The federation, while expressing its regard for the Ministry, maintained that it is an autonomous society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, with its governance guided by its Constitution and General Body. TTFI also disputed the grounds cited in the Ministry's order, saying the concerns had either been addressed or required further clarification before the show-cause notice was issued on June 30. "TTFI submits that each of the deficiencies cited in the impugned Order was either factually incorrect or had already been remedied well before the Show Cause Notice dated 30.06.2026 was issued," it said. The federation said it had presented its position to the Ministry in its detailed reply dated July 7, supported by minutes, resolutions and audited records. TTFI has been embroiled in internal turmoil in recent months. In January, it suspended secretary general and former player Kamlesh Mehta over alleged financial irregularities. Mehta challenged the decision in the Delhi High Court, which later quashed his suspension. The federation also pointed to India's recent performances, highlighting five women and three men ranked in the ITTF world Top-100/Top-50 respectively, along with medal-winning performances at the 2022 Asian Games and 2026 Asian Youth Championships. "TTFI remains in close and constructive engagement with the Ministry and is fully committed to addressing any concerns," it said. "TTFI believes that concerns referred to in the Show Cause Notice have either been duly addressed or appropriately clarified. The Federation therefore proposes to request the Ministry to kindly keep the Order dated 12.08.2026 in abeyance and to consider the matter afresh." The TTFI also reaffirmed its commitment to good governance, transparency and accountability under the National Sports Development Code of India, 2011 and the National Sports Governance Act, 2025.



Champions league holders PSG strengthen attack with signing of Ferran Torres

Paris, Aug 16: Spain international Ferran Torres, who scored the only goal in last month's World Cup final, signed for two-time Champions League winners Paris Saint Germain from Barcelona on Saturday.

The 26-year-old striker cost the Ligue 1 champions a reported 50 million euros (\$58 million). "Paris Saint-Germain is delighted to announce it has secured the services of Ferran Torres. The Spanish World Cup-winning forward has signed with the Club until 2031," read the club statement. The former Valencia and Manchester City star is reunited with PSG coach Luis Enrique, who as Spain coach gave him his international debut in a Nations League match against Germany in 2020. Torres, who won three La Liga titles while at Barcelona, came on as a substitute in the World Cup final and the 65-times capped marksman scored in extra-time to dash Argentina's hopes of retaining their title.

Nicknamed 'The Shark', he joined Barcelona in the 2021/22 season transfer window and in 207 matches for FC Barcelona, he found the net 65 times, including in the Copa del Rey final victory against Real Madrid in 2025. "The Club would like to express its gratitude to Ferran Torres for his commitment over the last four and a half seasons as a blaugrana and wishes him all the best for the next stage of his professional career," said Barcelona in a statement on their website.

His arrival in the French capital may raise Premier League side Liverpool's hopes of signing PSG's 23-year-old livewire wing Bradley Barcola, who sparkled for France at the World Cup. The two clubs have been in discussions for weeks, with PSG's apparent asking price of around 150 million euros (\$173 million) proving the stumbling block.



Harry Brook performs a spectacular U-turn and says he may play in the IPL in the future



New Delhi: Harry Brook has made a dramatic change in his stance on the Indian Premier League, admitting that he could consider playing in the tournament in the future. The England batter had previously been clear about prioritising international cricket and had ruled out franchise leagues apart from The Hundred. "I've committed completely to England cricket. I've said that I don't want to play any franchise cricket barring the Hundred, and everything that I want to do is to play cricket for England," Brook had said before England's T20I series against India last month. "Hence the reason I don't play in the IPL and PSL and all the other franchise competitions." However, speaking to ESPNcricinfo on the sidelines of The Hundred at Headingley, Brook struck a different tone when asked about the IPL. "Yeah, definitely. The IPL is a great competition, and it's a great experience, and you go over there, you leave a better player. It's a very good competition to be a part of, and it's something that I'll definitely think about in the future," he said.

The comments mark a significant shift from his earlier stance. Brook's relationship with the IPL has been complicated. He was bought by Sunrisers Hyderabad for INR 13.25 crore in the 2023 auction and scored a century against Kolkata Knight Riders during his debut season. He was then bought by Delhi Capitals for INR 6.25 crore at the 2025 mega auction but withdrew from the tournament. He had also pulled out of the 2024 season following the death of his grandmother. Following his second withdrawal, Brook was handed a two-season ban under the IPL's revised overseas-player regulations. He was therefore unavailable for the 2026 IPL auction and is expected to become eligible again from 2027.

Bhaichung Bhutia slams AIFF for snubbing FIFA event



New Delhi: Former India captain Bhaichung Bhutia has criticised the All India Football Federation’s decision to prioritise the high-profile Brazil friendly, arguing that the reported cost could be better directed towards developing Indian football. He also accused AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey of misleading the government over the fixture. Bhutia’s comments come after the All India Football Federation confirmed that India had withdrawn from the inaugural FIFA ASEAN Cup, choosing instead to focus on the Brazil friendly scheduled for October 3 at Kolkata’s Salt Lake Stadium. The

AIFF had initially agreed to participate in the tournament, which was to feature India alongside Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. “Spending something between Rs 50 to 70 crores for one friendly against Brazil is uncalled-for...Especially when Indian football is currently going through so much of the financial crisis. Kalyan Chaubey is simply misleading the government.” “There wasn’t even one athlete from Bengal who figured among India’s medal winners in the recently concluded Commonwealth Games. The government should spend money on upcoming sportspersons and try

building infrastructure. We would all love to watch Brazil, but not by paying such a large sum.” The former India captain had also raised questions over the purpose of the Brazil fixture before the AIFF confirmed India’s withdrawal from the ASEAN Cup, pointing to the wider problems facing Indian football. Bhutia believes India’s current circumstances make the decision to spend heavily on a single friendly difficult to justify. The former forward also highlighted the broader challenges facing the national team, including India’s struggles in the FIFA rankings and the lack of stability in domestic football. “I’m not saying they should not come, but at this point, given the condition of Indian football, what are we looking to achieve out of this match?” Bhutia had said earlier. “Jamshedpur FC closed (opted out of ISL), the teams are not going to the Asian Games, and our FIFA (men’s) ranking is now almost 140.” The Brazil fixture was officially announced last month and is expected to be one of India’s biggest international matches in recent years. The AIFF is also understood to be exploring other friendlies around the same international window. India’s decision to withdraw from the ASEAN Cup came after the Brazil fixture created a scheduling clash. AIFF deputy secretary general M Satyanarayanan confirmed that the federation could not accommodate both commitments.

Harbhajan feels Virat and Rohit may participate in the 2027 World Cup regardless of their age



New Delhi: When discussing if Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma can participate in the 2027 ODI World Cup, former India tweaker Harbhajan Singh cited the legendary Argentine Lionel Messi. Nothing can stop the two Indian veterans from making an impact in the ODI World Cup, according to Harbhajan, if a 39-year-old Messi can lead Argentina to the 2026 final. “I think the marker should be performance rather than age, regardless of the athlete. Even though Virat is 39 years old, his age is irrelevant if he is still outperforming those 20-year-olds on the field. Take a look at Lionel Messi. Five men are un-

able to stop him at 40 (39). If a player has that kind of fitness and skill where even five opponents can’t keep him at bay, then we know that skill always takes precedence,” Harbhajan said in a PII podcast. “If I were the coach, my job would be to give them the platform as my expectations from Rohit and Virat would be much higher than what I expect from a Vaibhav Sooryavanshi. These two have that experience. They have experience of 300 games which Sooryavanshi won’t have. Yes, a Sooryavanshi can walk in and blast bowlers but Virat and Rohit have the experience. Fitness is a priority, and

your performance matters. Performance is the ultimate criterion. So if these two score runs and can match the fitness of a Shreyas (Iyer) or a Yashasvi (Jaiswal), then nothing else matters,” Harbhajan declared. The Jalandhar man, who accumulated 416 Test and 269 ODI wickets in his stellar career, said players usually know when to call time on their careers and recalled how his body told him to stop a good six years before he actually made the formal announcement. “Rohit and Virat will get their answer from within. You realise when you have reached that phase where you need to call time,” he said.

A rival gives Lionel Messi an unplanned hug upon his homecoming following the death of his father

New Delhi: During Inter Miami’s Leagues Cup match on Thursday, August 13, Club Leon defender Jhohan Romana stopped Lionel Messi for a tender hug, making his emotional return to sport even more memorable. The supporters at Miami’s Nu Stadium responded warmly to the heartfelt occasion, which occurred just four days after Messi’s father Jorge passed away. Later, Leon posted about the occasion on social media, dedicating the embrace to the Argentine celebrity. “This hug is from Leon, from everyone, from soccer, and it’s for you, dear Lionel,” the Mexican club wrote, ending its message with words of “respect and affection.” Messi had returned to the pitch for the first time since his father’s death, coming on at the start of the second half. The Argentine had been expected to take an extended break after travelling to his native Rosario to attend his father’s funeral. The return was particularly emotional after Messi admitted in a tribute to Jorge that he was unsure about continuing his football career. “I don’t know what I’m going to do without you. I don’t know how to keep going. All I ever did was play



soccer, and now I have serious doubts about whether I’ll keep doing it for much longer,” Messi wrote in a post on Instagram. Jorge Messi, who died aged 68, played a fundamental role in his son’s career. He served as Messi’s agent and managed his business affairs from the early stages of the footballer’s journey. Messi’s return, however, could not inspire Inter Miami to victory as León came from behind to win 3-2 and advance to the Leagues Cup knockout stage. Messi started the second half after being named on the bench and received a loud ovation from the home fans as he entered the

pitch. Inter Miami had taken the lead in the 42nd minute through Daniel Pinter, who finished after an assist from Ian Fray. But Leon produced a strong second-half comeback. Juan Pablo Domnguez levelled the score before Daniel Arcila scored twice, including the go-ahead goal in the 83rd minute. Arcila’s second goal was his fourth of the tournament. Yannick Bright scored for Inter Miami, but the Herons could not find another equaliser and were eliminated from the competition. The loss followed Inter Miami’s 2-1 loss to Monterrey in their prior encounter. With only the top four teams from Liga MX and MLS making it to the quarterfinals, their chances of moving forward were minimal going into the match. Leon took the lead in the Liga MX standings after winning their opening two games of the competition. However, Messi’s homecoming was more important to him than the outcome. He was back on the field, where an opponent’s hug sent a straightforward message of support, four days after the death of his father and only hours after he had questioned whether he wanted to play football.

Set up an Elena Rybakina title match in Toronto, Iga Swiatek defeats

Mumbai: Iga Swiatek outlasted Ukraine’s Elina Svitolina 6-3, 1-6, 6-3 on Wednesday to book a Toronto title showdown with world number two Elena Rybakina. Australian Open champion Rybakina delivered another gutsy comeback, beating fourth-seeded Coco Gauff 5-7, 6-2, 6-2 to reach Thursday’s final in the hard court warm-up for the US Open. Former world number one Swiatek, seeded seventh, is in her first final of the year, having last lifted a trophy in Seoul almost a year ago. She improved to 5-3 against Svitolina, who had narrowed their head-to-head record with two wins over the Polish star this year. In a match delayed more than an hour by rain, six-time major champion Swiatek raced to a 4-0 lead in the opening set. The Ukrainian made Swiatek work to serve it out, saving a pair of set points in the final game of the first Energized, she raced through the second set before Swiatek rebounded in the third, breaking Svitolina to love for a 5-3 lead before holding serve to secure the win. “Against Elina it’s always tough, so I’m happy that I won this one,” said Swiatek. “Especially that I came back in the third set playing better. So, yeah, that’s for sure a big improvement. I’m proud of myself.” Svitolina, who won the Canadian crown in 2017, was seeking her third 1000 level final of the season after winning at Rome and finishing runner-up in Dubai. But she couldn’t hang on as Swiatek upped her game again in the final set. Mostly I just wanted to adjust the quality,” Swiatek said. “Because tactics can’t do much if you’re just not hitting the ball right. I knew I can do it, because I did it in the first set. I’m happy that I was patient enough to do that and didn’t get disappointed or didn’t give up.” Rybakina, who also rallied from a set down to beat Naomi Osaka in the quarter-finals, is on the cusp of her third title of the season after her triumph in Melbourne and a trophy in Stuttgart.

Indian hockey’s arduous ascent back to the top of the World Cup



New Delhi: As the Netherlands and Belgium prepare to host the 2026 FIH Hockey World Cup, India arrives with a men’s team that finished ninth in 2023 and a women’s team that ranked ninth in 2022. For the nation of Dhyan Chand and eight men’s Olympic champions between 1928 and 1980, the most decorated side in the history of the Olympics, neither result is anything to celebrate on paper. Yet both mark a country climbing back from decades in the wilderness; for Indian hockey has enjoyed three distinct eras of success, failure, and hope. India’s men were there from the very beginning. At the inaugural World Cup in Barcelona in 1971, they went one step further, reaching the final against hosts Netherlands, leading twice through a Surjit Singh brace, only to lose on penalty strokes after the match finished 2-2. The women’s team, playing its first World Cup in France in 1974, beat eventual cham-

pions Netherlands in the group stage and reached the semi-finals before finishing fourth, a result that gave the sport a real boost back home. Then came Kuala Lumpur, 1975. The men’s team beat Pakistan 2-1 in the final, Surjit Singh equalising before Ashok Kumar struck the winner in the 51st minute to give India its first Hockey World Cup title. But that also remains India’s only World Cup title. That’s the paradox defining Indian hockey — for all their Olympic pedigree, they have never come close to replicating that at the World Cup. Three medals in the men’s competition, plus a fourth-place finish for the women, all within one decade, signalled a continuity of their Olympic dominance, but that false dawn quickly lapsed, and nothing since has come close. Pakistan, by contrast, have won the World Cup four times, while Australia, Germany and the Netherlands have three apiece.

Messi returns but Inter Miami knocked out of Leagues Cup

New Delhi: Daniel Arcila scored twice, including the winning goal in the 83rd minute, and Club León advanced to the Leagues Cup knockout stage with a 3-2 win over Inter Miami, which saw star Lionel Messi return following the death of his father. At Miami’s Nu Stadium, Messi began the second half to a thunderous applause from the crowd. It was his first game since his 68-year-old father. Jorge, passed away on Saturday. Earlier on Wednesday, Messi expressed uncertainty about his playing future in a social media homage to his father. Messi posted a Spanish message on Instagram that read, “I don’t know what I’m going to do without you.” “I have no idea how to continue. I’ve only ever played soccer, and I’m not sure if I’ll continue to do it for very long. Juan Pablo Domínguez also scored for León, which used a three-goal second half to overcome a 1-0 deficit after Pinter put Miami ahead in the 42nd on an assist from Ian Fray. It was the second straight



blown second-half. Arcila scored with a right-footed shot from the center of the box in the 50th, then whipped the go-ahead goal past Oscar Garcia for his fourth goal of the tournament. Yannick Bright also scored for Inter Miami, which was eliminated after winning the Leagues Cup in 2023 and reaching the final last year. The Herons’ chances of advancing were already bleak after entering the match 12th in the MLS standings following their loss to Monterrey. Only the top four clubs from the MLS standings and the top four from Liga MX will advance to the quarterfinals.

India travels to Sri Lanka for a crucial WTC match, putting Shubman Gill and Gautam Gambhir to the ultimate spin test

New Delhi: The Indian Test team is now drawn to a trip to Sri Lanka, which is frequently a high point in the lives of tourists from around the world. Shubman Gill’s men are looking for their fair share of fortunate mishaps that will bring them prosperity in the white shade on an island that was once known as Serendip and gave rise to the name serendipity. The Indian Test team is now drawn to a trip to Sri Lanka, which is frequently a high point in the lives of tourists from around the world. Shubman Gill’s men are looking for their fair share of fortunate mishaps that will bring them prosperity in the white shade on an island that was once known as Serendip and gave rise to the name serendipity. Stretching from August 15-27 in a tour that is short but bound to have a long-standing impact, the two Tests in Galle and Colombo would reveal the progress that India has made while coping with transition. After a slew of retirements, India’s batting core has moved on from Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane. The bowling will miss ace spinner R. Ashwin while Jasprit Bumrah’s injury



means Mohammed Siraj and company will have to step up on the slow, turgid pitches available in Sri Lanka. That the selectors have moved beyond Mohammed Shami reflects the winds of change coursing through India’s bowling flank. In the last four series against the men from the Emerald Isle, India held sway, with the most domineering effort being the 3-0 triumph during the 2017 tour. Yet that chequered past may not have a huge bearing as Gill’s troops walk in with their home fortress having been breached twice in the last two years, first by New Zealand and later by South Africa. Much would rest on Gill, coping with a niggle, and

K.L. Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal to keep the batting fires burning. In an era where quelling pace has been seen as a badge of macho honour, the subtle art of countering spin, offering both an obdurate and aggressive bat while revealing nimble footwork, has been on the wane. Most Indian batters are caught up with international fixtures and the IPL. There is hardly any time to play domestic cricket and finesse their approach against spin. It was a past luxury that men like V.V.S. Laxman enjoyed as he batted against Venkatapathy Raju and Kanwaljit Singh in the Hyderabad nets. Siraj and Prasidh Krishna are expected to soften up

the Sri Lankan top order, and Kuldeep Yadav and fellow spinners need to be sharp and wily. Veteran Ravindra Jadeja remains a link with the previous tour, having scalped 13 wickets in 2017. Kuldeep had played a lone Test on that visit. Like New Zealand, Sri Lanka is easy on the eye as a country. And in cricket, like the Black Caps, the teardrop island’s players combine well and often punch above their weight. Kapil Dev’s strong unit learnt it the hard way during the 1985 tour, and in many subsequent tours, Sri Lanka has proved to be a formidable unit in its backyard. That halo may be on the wane but, for an Indian unit searching for consistency in Tests under coach Gautam Gambhir, the leap across the Indian Ocean may not be easy. India and Sri Lanka are placed fifth and sixth in the ICC Test Championship rankings, an obvious dip for both sides in an era increasingly dominated by the glitz and thrills of limited-overs cricket. Over the last five years, Pakistan and Australia have shown that Sri Lanka can be humbled at home.

Aryna Sabalenka struggling with form crisis before US Open

New Delhi: Aryna Sabalenka, the world No. 1, is experiencing a troubling drop in form ahead of the US Open, raising concerns about her confidence. Rick Macci, former coach of Serena Williams, has noted that Sabalenka’s style has changed; she appears to be playing further behind the baseline and more defensively than before. After a strong start to 2026 with victories at Indian Wells and the Miami Open, she has not reached any finals since then, prompting questions about her mental resilience. Macci points out that Sabalenka’s ability to quickly regain her composure during matches seems compromised, and this has allowed her opponents to sense vulnerability, leading them to believe they can achieve upsets against her. Sabalenka’s results since Miami underline Macci’s assessment. In Madrid, she suffered a quarter-final defeat to Hailey Baptiste after letting slip six match points. She then crashed out in the third round in Rome, losing to Sorana Cirstea in a three-set battle. The biggest collapse came at Roland Garros.