

NE/EAST

Because KSU refuses to observe the Behdienkhlam holiday, the ICAR Director's office is locked



Shillong, July 12: The Director of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Umiam, was locked out of his office on Thursday by the Khasi Students' Union (KSU), North Khasi Hills District, on the grounds

that the official acted haughtily and disrespectfully toward a union delegation that had requested a holiday for workers to celebrate the native Behdienkhlam festival. The union claims that representatives from its Eastern

Border Area and Umiam Circle went to the Director's office to ask that all ICAR employees be given a holiday in observance of the customary Behdienkhlam celebration. The KSU claimed that the Director responded haughtily and disregarded the delegation's request, which resulted in a furious verbal altercation. Leaders of KSU North Khasi Hills District, including Organizing Secretary Baiashanlang Kharshonlor and Assistant Secretary Stevenson Kharkhrang, went

to the office to step in and have conversations as the situation worsened. The union asserted, however, that the Director continued to ignore its request and remained unresponsive. Before shutting the director's office in protest, KSU members demanded that staff leave the building due to alleged ongoing contempt for the organization. At the time this report was filed, the ICAR officials had not addressed the accusations, and their account of the occurrence was still pending.

Raju Mesh, a Boko-Chaygaon MLA, brings up illegal logging and border issues in the Assam Assembly

Boko, July 12: Raju Mesh, a newly elected MLA from Boko-Chaygaon, exposed the alleged negligence of Assam's Forest Department on Wednesday during the first budget session of the 16th Assam Legislative Assembly, which began on July 6. Mesh brought up the problem of widespread illicit logging in the Lampi region near the Assam-Meghalaya border and provided proof of extensive forest degradation that is still going unchecked in the West Kamrup Forest Division area. According to the MLA, on July 2, Lampi Village Headman Krishna Chetry told him about trucks with Meghalaya registration numbers that were illegally moving timber with the assistance of dishonest businessmen. In response to this information, Mesh visited Lampi on July 3 with a num-

ber of officials, including Co-District Commissioner Priyanshu Bharadwaj, Boko Revenue Circle Officer Krishna Arjun Barman, RHAC Executive Member Arjun Chetry, and others. They were horrified to see trees being hacked down and smuggled across the border by vehicles and unidentified persons from Meghalaya. When questioned, the head of the Lampi police outpost acknowledged that these actions had been carried out in the name of the contested interstate border region for a considerable amount of time. He stated that the main cause of police inaction was a shortage of patrolling cars. Mesh called on the minister of forests to act quickly to stop the threat. Locals have long accused the Forest Department of being careless, pointing out that illegal log-



ging persists on a regular basis even though the West Kamrup Forest Division has several forest offices, battalions, and protection areas. For years, valuable timber like teak and sal has been smuggled out with no effective protections in place. The Meghalaya government has also been urged by conscious groups to preserve the forests. The locals in the Lampi area claimed that forest destroyers are criminals and cannot be affiliat-

ed with any state, and that only by taking appropriate action against these criminal groups will future generations be able to exist. Mesh also expressed concern that the lack of land records was preventing Lampi locals from participating in government programs. He urged the Assam government to offer mobile towers for improved connection, safe drinking water, land pattas, and transportation services like a bus service.

Tibetan organizations in Shillong condemn Chinese policies and call for UN intervention on Tibet

Shillong, July 12: Shillong-based Tibetan organizations have demanded that the world community and the UN step in to address the human rights situation in Tibet, claiming that Chinese government continues to restrict Tibetan identity, language, religion, and culture. The Regional Tibetan Women's Association and the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress made the call in a combined press release on July 9. The organizations also honored Pawo Lobga Rangzen, a Tibetan man who allegedly committed self-immolation on July 2

close to the UN offices in New York. The organizations claim that the act was meant to raise awareness of the situation in Tibet on a global scale. The statement alleged that Tibetans continue to face curbs on their political freedoms and human rights, claiming that decades of Chinese policies have placed the region's cultural heritage under growing pressure. The organizations also criticised China's Ethnic Unity and Progress Law, alleging that its implementation could further undermine Tibetan identity, language and cul-

tural traditions. They called on the UN, democratic countries, and international human rights organizations to keep a careful eye on Tibet's situation and take necessary action. The statement also urged the international community and the Indian government to support initiatives to protect Tibetan culture, language, and religion. The report is predicated on assertions made in the Tibetan organizations' press release. At the time of publication, China has not yet responded to the accusations with an official statement.

EDP training program for recipients of the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhijan (CMAAA) 2.0

Kokrajhar, July 12: At Bineswar Brahma Engineering College (BBEC), Kokrajhar, Kokrajhar District Commissioner Pankaj Chakravarty launched a month-long Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) under the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhijan (CMAAA) 2.0. The initiative was also launched at the District Industries and Commerce Center (DICC), Kokrajhar, by Assistant Commissioner Subham Sinha. The District Administration, Kokrajhar, is working with the District Industries and Commerce Centre (DICC) to conduct the Entrepreneurship Development Programme, with BBEC acting as the Training Partner. Building on its successful implementation of CMAAA 1.0, BBEC will collaborate with SeSTA, SELCO Foundation, and other partner organizations through the Sproutup Incu-



bation Council (SIC) to enhance the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the BTC. Over the course of the month-long program, 3,196 recipients from the Veterinary, Fisheries, Agriculture and Horticulture, Services, and other sectors will receive training in many batches.

8-year-old girl abducted, raped, murdered in Assam

Guwahati, July 12: A teenage boy allegedly abducted, raped, and killed an eight-year-old girl at Madanmohan in Assam's Sribhum district on Wednesday, police said on Thursday, adding that locals thrashed the accused before handing him over to them. Additional police superintendent Tribhuvan Bhuyan said the accused went around looking for the girl when she was missing, pretending that he did not know anything about the incident. "He was seen pillion riding with the victim's father when the family was searching for her. Later, he said that the girl's father allegedly tortured him, and to avenge, he did it," Bhuyan said the accused initially managed to flee, but the police nabbed him. He has confessed to killing the girl but denied the rape allegations. "The body has been sent for a postmortem, and once we get the report, things will be clearer," Bhuyan said the girl's family told the police that she had stepped out to play when the accused, who was known to her, took her to a jungle. Her body was later found at the same place. "He strangled her first by hand



and later used her frock. The girl's family said that he raped her before killing, but it has to be ascertained with a medical examination yet," he said. Police said the boy has been booked under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita's sections 103(1) (murder), 141 (abduction), 65(2) (raping a girl under 12) and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. Police said that the accused claims to be under 18 and that the claim was being examined. "Once we ascertain the age, we will produce him before the court," said a second officer. Hundreds took to the streets and blocked roads in protest against the incident. The roads were cleared after top police officers intervened. The protesters said that the incident raised questions over the safety of children and demanded exemplary punishment.

Fresh Floods, Landslides Batter Arunachal; Over 94,000 People Affected Across 26 Districts

Guwahati, July 12: Fresh floods and landslides triggered by incessant rainfall have caused widespread damage to houses, roads, agricultural land and public infrastructure across several districts of Arunachal Pradesh, even as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast a gradual decline in rainfall from July 10. According to the State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC), fresh incidents were reported during the past 24 hours from Keyi Panyor, Upper Siang, Tirap, Changlang, Papum Pare and Upper Subansiri districts. The IMD has issued an Orange Alert for Shi Yomi, Siang, East Siang, Lower Dibang Valley, Lohit and Longding districts, warning of heavy to very heavy rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning. From Friday, the weather is expected to improve gradually, with Orange Alerts remaining only for Papum Pare, Lower Dibang Valley and Tirap districts. Most parts of the state are likely to be

free from weather warnings by Saturday, although eastern and foothill districts will remain under Yellow Alert until Monday. The latest spell of rain affected several villages, including Yingkiong in Upper Siang, Khonsa and Kheti in Tirap, numerous villages in Changlang, Papum Pare and Upper Subansiri districts, causing fresh damage to homes, roads and agricultural fields. Over the past two weeks, Arunachal Pradesh has witnessed extensive destruction due to floods and landslides. Six people have lost their lives in rain-related incidents. On Wednesday, two labourers from Bihar were killed after a landslide hit a construction site in Lohit district. Two women who were swept away by flash floods in Keyi Panyor on June 24 remain missing despite ongoing search operations. Earlier, three people died in flash floods at Possa in Keyi Panyor, while another person was killed in a landslide at Sarti village in Anjaw district. According

Six people have died as a result of recent floods and landslides in Arunachal Pradesh



Itanagar, July 12: In the last 24 hours, six districts in Arunachal Pradesh experienced fresh floods, landslides, and storms that damaged homes, roads, crops, and public infrastructure. The State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC) reported that the

state's flood toll had increased to six. Twenty occurrences, including flash floods, floods, landslides, storms, and heavy rainfall, were recorded by the SEOC in the districts of Keyi Panyor, Upper Siang, Tirap, Changlang, Papum Pare, and Upper Suban-

siri. A landslide at a construction site in the Lohit district on Wednesday claimed the lives of two Bihar laborers and injured four more, while two ladies who were washed away in Keyi Panyor on June 24 are still unaccounted for. 94,201 individuals in 333

villages spread across 26 districts were still impacted, according to the report. Crops, forests, roads, bridges, water supply systems, electricity infrastructure, schools, hospitals, and hundreds of homes were all affected by floods and landslides. 252 people were still being housed in two relief camps in Keyi Panyor while rescue and relief efforts continued. On Thursday, the India Meteorological Department issued orange advisories for six districts, warning of thunderstorms, lightning, and severe to extremely heavy rains. It predicted that the weather would start to improve on Friday and continue to improve over the weekend.

The chief minister of Tripura praises timely taxpayers and introduces new digital systems to increase transparency

Agartala, July 12: Dr. Manik Saha, the chief minister of Tripura, praised taxpayers who pay their taxes on time as responsible citizens and stated that they are essential to the state's economic growth. He made this statement at Pragya Bhavan in Agartala, where the Tripura State Tax Department was celebrating its golden jubilee.

By pressing a button, he also publicly introduced the TRUESIP App, the Excise Connect digital systems, and the Tripura Integrated Network for Enforcement Tracking and Risk Analytics (TRINETRA). He described the day as a "historic" turning point in the State Tax Department's illustrious 50-year history and stated that the state government is committed to creating a more technologically advanced, transparent, and responsible tax system in the days ahead.



He said it is really admirable that five apps have been released to use digital technology to make the tax system more straightforward, clear, and user-friendly. He expressed the hope that this will make it easier and faster for taxpayers to pay their taxes.

According to him, the primary driver of

the state's economic growth is the prompt collaboration of taxpayers. He recalled the last 50 years, saying that in addition to collecting taxes, the Tax Department has been crucial in carrying out a number of public welfare programs, such as development, infrastructure building, education, and health initiatives.

CSC Warns Against False Claims Over Scholarship Applications

Dimapur, July 12: The Common Service Centre (CSC) District Village Level Entrepreneur Cooperative Society Ltd. for Dimapur, Nuland and Chümoukedima has cautioned students, parents and educational institutions against misinformation and unethical practices in the submission of National Scholarship Portal (NSP) applications. In a public notice, the society said it had received complaints that some individuals were falsely claiming NSP applications must be submitted only through specific persons or offices, warning that applications filed elsewhere would be rejected or delayed.

The society clarified that, according to the District Education Office (DEO), no private individual has been authorised to exclusively collect or process scholarship applications. It

said the district nodal office is responsible only for verifying applications as per government guidelines, while students are free to apply through any authorised CSC or other legitimate service provider. CSC also advised applicants to obtain genuine income certificates from the competent authority and warned that submission of forged documents could result in rejection of applications and legal action.

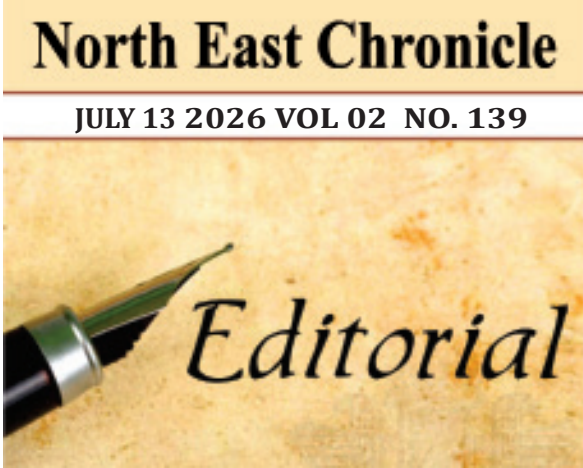
The society further stated that strict action would be taken against anyone found falsely claiming government authorisation, misusing the names of the DEO or district nodal office, or coercing students and institutions during the scholarship application process. It urged the public to remain vigilant and ensure the process remains transparent and free from misinformation.

Tovihoto, DC Review Dimapur Railway Station Works, Assure Solution to Road Connectivity Issues

Dimapur, July 12: Advisor for Tribal Affairs and Elections Tovihoto H. Ayemi, accompanied by Dimapur Deputy Commissioner Dr. Tinjongshi Chang, inspected the ongoing redevelopment of Dimapur Railway Station on Thursday amid growing concerns from residents over disrupted road connectivity caused by the project. The visit followed representations from several colonies affected by the construction work under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS). Addressing the media after the inspection, Ayemi said the purpose of the visit was to assess the progress of the project and address public grievances arising from the redevelopment. While expressing satisfaction that Dimapur Railway Station had been selected for modernisation under the ABSS, Ayemi acknowledged that construction activities had inconvenienced nearby residents. He said the issue had been taken

up with railway authorities and assured that discussions with the district administration would continue to find a practical solution. Several residential areas, including SM Colony, KK Colony, Vilhume Colony, Netaji Colony and Medical Colony, have been affected after their existing access roads were blocked or disconnected during the construction. Residents have demanded a permanent alternative route, saying the earlier road had served the area for decades. Ayemi said the district administration and railway authorities had jointly inspected the affected locations after receiving petitions from residents. He assured that the matter would be resolved through consultations with all stakeholders and expressed hope that the redevelopment project would be completed at the earliest. He also stated that the administration and police would maintain close surveillance around the station to prevent il-

legal activities. Deputy Commissioner Dr. Chang said a temporary road had already been opened to facilitate movement, but stressed that a permanent and technically viable solution was necessary, particularly in view of recurring monsoon flooding. He said railway authorities had not opposed the construction of an alternative road and that discussions were continuing regarding its alignment and measurements. The Deputy Commissioner also informed that land-related issues involving patta holders were being examined by a High-Powered Committee, after which appropriate action would be taken. Referring to reports of alleged extortion or obstruction at the project site, he said no formal complaints had been received and construction work was progressing without interruption. Residents reiterated their demand for permanent connectivity during the inspection.



The Strength of an Informed Citizen

Democracy relies not only on elections but also on informed citizens. People who understand public policies, local issues, and civic responsibilities are better equipped to participate in decision-making and hold institutions accountable. In an age of misinformation and information overload, verifying facts has become as important as accessing them. An informed citizen asks questions, evaluates evidence, and engages constructively rather than reacting impulsively. The quality of public debate ultimately depends on the quality of public understanding. A well-informed society is one of democracy’s greatest strengths.

A haven of hope

The only Indian city that frequently shows up on Chinese maps for the Belt and Road Initiative is Calcutta. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a transnational transportation and associated investment network backed by China that aims to link China with nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. BRI marine maps link Calcutta to Nairobi and Colombo in India. The Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar Economic Corridor would link Calcutta with northern Myanmar and thereafter southern China via land and air. The Singapore port handled 44.5 million twenty-foot equivalent shipping containers, the global norm, in 2025, which makes the concept seem fantastical. Singapore’s position as a transshipment hub to several major ports is cemented by its unmatched infrastructure, political stability, and geographic location. However, in 2024–2025, the Calcutta Port System—which includes the port of Calcutta and the Haldia Dock System—handled 804,579 TEUs, which was an increase of 6.87% from 2023–2024. Therefore, the function of the Calcutta Port System in international trade and international relations is more important than the volume of products. Because of its position and function as a transportation hub, Calcutta is essential to trade in northern South Asia and Southeast Asia. In the maritime sector, Calcutta’s transportation dominance is particularly noticeable. As a result, improving the Calcutta Port System will enable India to accomplish its northeastern development goals and promote advantageous commerce with its neighbors, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar. The port system’s proximity to India’s Northeast makes it critical for international trade with the region. However, the narrowness of the land corridor from eastern India via northern Bengal hinders overland transportation and makes it vulnerable to potentially hostile neighbouring countries. Thus, India has sought to develop the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, a road network in the Northeast that culminates in the Sittwe port in Myanmar’s Rakhine province. Doing so would provide India a maritime link between the Calcutta Port System and the Northeast, thereby removing the necessity of relying on Bangladesh for access to land and on the Chittagong port to gain access to India’s Northeast while also embedding northern Myanmar in developmental projects that would reduce that country’s dependence on China. Additionally, the Calcutta Port System offers marine access to Nepal and Bhutan, two Himalayan nations whose territorial integrity and sovereignty are under assault from China. These nations depend on this port infrastructure for everything from technology to foodgrains. Through Calcutta, the current Indi-

A state of uncertainty

The article addresses the increasing concerns of Indian citizens regarding the documentation required to prove their citizenship, particularly highlighted by the case of a former editor denied a passport renewal due to removal from electoral lists. This situation raises essential questions about the trustworthiness of various official documents, such as Aadhaar, voter ID cards, and birth certificates, which are increasingly seen as inadequate proofs of citizenship. Traditionally, Indian democracy was founded on a moral assumption of belonging, where the burden of suspicion rested with the state rather than the individual. However, a growing pattern of suspicion now permeates the relationship between citizens and the State, transforming the latter into an entity that routinely interrogates its citizens’ identities. The text asserts that this shift reflects a profound philosophical change in the character of the Indian nation, underlining that the Constitution views citizenship as inherent to all individuals rather than a privilege granted at the state’s discretion. The author invokes B.R. Ambedkar, noting

an government has attempted to promote trade with these countries. India and Bhutan reached an agreement in 2016 to eliminate all taxes on commodities imported into Bhutan and goods exported from Bhutan to third nations through the Port System in Calcutta. Nepal’s utilization of this port system should be supported by the transit pact that India and Nepal signed in November 2025, which covers all kinds of cargo. The port system also undergirds trade with one of Asia’s tiger cub economies — Vietnam. Calcutta has the shortest transit route between the two major Vietnamese ports of Ho Chi Minh City and Haiphong — 11 and 13 days, respectively. Bilateral trade exceeded \$15 billion in 2024 and covers the full extent of goods, from agricultural products, rubber and textiles, to iron and steel, electronics, and industrial equipment. In July 2022, Vietnam inaugurated a shipping route that links Vietnam’s central region to Calcutta: the expanded Chu Lai International Port in the province of Quang Nam began coordinating operations with the Calcutta port in 2025. However, the Calcutta Port System’s ability to provide these advantages is threatened by such challenges as infrastructure, geography and international competition. Each of these problems is more difficult to resolve than the last in terms of financial wherewithal and political will for the state and the Central governments. The easiest issue to resolve is the upgradation of the infrastructure of the Calcutta Port System so that it can handle larger numbers of containers at a faster pace. The Haldia port can handle 300,000 TEUs per year at present. A contract for modernisation and capacity expansion for Berth Number 5 at the Haldia port under a public-private-partnership arrangement had been signed between Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port and Ganges Bulk Terminal in December 2024. Another PPP project to modernise both outer terminals and the five berths at the Calcutta port was awarded to JSW Infra in June 2026. JSW’s goal is to increase their Calcutta port throughput to 1.4 million TEUs. The Ganges’ silting presents a geographical difficulty. As of right now, neither the Haldia port nor the Calcutta port have the minimum draft of 14 meters needed for Post-Panamax containerhips; Haldia has a draft of 9.1 meters, while Calcutta has a draft of 8.5 meters. A draft of eighteen meters is necessary for the biggest ships, which are used to transport raw resources like coal and metal ores. In 2025, the Center promised to fund the dredging projects at the ports of Calcutta and Haldia with Rs 1,839 crore until 2031. In 2022, the Adani Corporation was awarded a contract to construct the Tajpur port, which would have attained a 16-meter draft.

that constitutional morality is built upon trust and is fostered by democratic practices, which are essential for effective governance. The piece argues that when citizens are subjected to an endless cycle of documentation demands, it not only undermines their confidence but also hinders their development into assured democrats.Despite the Indian State’s comprehensive data-gathering capabilities, citizens still face an ongoing requirement to authenticate their identities, echoing the feelings of frustration depicted in Franz Kafka’s works—where bureaucratic processes render life itself a form of punishment. While some argue for rigorous verification to maintain institutional integrity, the article posits that documentation should reinforce rather than undermine democratic legitimacy by creating certainty, asserting the necessity for the State to cultivate trust in its citizenship rather than fear. The overarching theme suggests that the relationship between the citizen and the Republic needs to be reinvigorated with the fundamental recognition of identity that the Constitution promises.

India’s handling of the energy situation amid the US-Iran conflict

The prime minister, Narendra Modi, recently lauded his government’s handling of the energy crisis caused by the Iran war. This appears to indicate increasing confidence among Indian leaders that the worst repercussions of the still-simmering conflict have passed. If this is the case, the current situation calls for a thorough evaluation of how successfully or poorly the Modi government handled the recent upheaval. The answer, predictably, is not black and white. While it may look unseemly to brag, the prime minister is correct in asserting that India fared better than most other countries during the energy shortages caused by the United States and Israel’s war on Iran. It successfully obtained waivers for the purchase of Russian oil,

purchased some Iranian oil that was also exempt from otherwise strict US sanctions, and quickly turned to sources of crude that it had either ignored for years or never seriously considered — importing massive amounts of oil from Venezuela and Brazil. To be sure, all of this still left India well short of the supplies it needed, and Indian customers have had to pay significantly more than they previously did for petrol and LPG cylinders. Nevertheless, India was nimble in searching for and securing whatever alternative sources it could find, and credit must be given where it is due. However, scrutiny must be accepted where it is due. By refusing to condemn Iran’s Supreme Leader’s assassination in a joint US-Israel strike on February 28 and then sending a relatively

low-profile delegation to his funeral last week, the Indian government reinforced perceptions in the Middle East and beyond that it is firmly in Israel’s camp. Furthermore, when US Vice President J.D. Vance cautioned Israeli authorities that their country is becoming increasingly isolated abroad, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cited India as a source of assistance. By enabling the US to kill Indian sailors in the Strait of Hormuz with only a verbal rebuke, India has undermined its position in a world where might makes right. This is critical for both the Iran war, which is currently paused, and Indian diplomacy in general. The administration must learn from its successes and failures if India is to be better prepared for the next crisis.

Beyond the Dalai Lama: The hidden battle for Buddhism’s essence in Asia

The forthcoming succession of the 14th Dalai Lama is set to be a watershed moment in modern geopolitics. What appears to be the selection of a spiritual leader has evolved into a struggle for legitimacy, sovereignty, and influence throughout Asia. Monasteries and theological discussions are no longer limited to the issue of who has the power to recognise the next Dalai Lama. It has entered the arena of international diplomacy, where history, religion, and statecraft meet in ways that have the potential to transform Asia’s political and spiritual landscape for decades.

At the heart of the issue lies a fundamental divergence of perspectives. The Dalai Lama has consistently maintained that the authority to identify his reincarnation rests solely with the established traditions and institutions of Tibetan Buddhism. He has even indicated that his successor may be born outside territories under Chinese control to ensure the continuity of an independent spiritual lineage. Beijing, however, asserts that the recognition of all Tibetan Buddhist reincarnations falls within the sovereign jurisdiction of the Chinese state under its legal framework governing religious affairs.

To China, a viable succession solution does not exist in competing with China on its own terms. It is not merely a religious event; it is also a matter of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. To many followers of Tibetan Buddhism, it remains a sacred spiritual process beyond the reach of political authority. This debate has turned Buddhism into an unanticipated arena of strategic competition between Asia’s two great civilizational powers, China and India.

However, simplifying the matter to a mere geopolitical competition ignores a more nuanced reality. Both countries have strong historical ties to Buddhism, but they have taken very different approaches to the religion.Rather than being portrayed as an ideological caricature, China’s approach needs thorough and objective evaluation. Over the last two decades, Beijing has developed a comprehensive model of Buddhist statecraft. Instead of viewing Buddhism primarily as a matter of religious administration, China has

integrated it into its overall national policy, which includes internal government, cultural diplomacy, and regional influence. Internally, Beijing’s policy is driven by the concept of the “Sinicisation of religion”—an effort to harmonise religious traditions with Chinese national identity, socialist values and political stability. The leadership believes that economic development and modernisation are essential for maintaining long-term stability in Tibet, viewing Tibetan Buddhism through the lens of national integration. Massive investments in roads, railways, airports, healthcare, education and urban infrastructure across the Tibet Autonomous Region are intended not only to improve living standards but also to strengthen the integration of the region with the rest of China. The state’s objective is to ensure that religious practice flourishes within a framework aligned with national priorities, thereby reducing the possibility of political separatism.

Whether one agrees with this strategy or not, it demonstrates a cohesive strategic vision rather than an impromptu response. Buddhism is more than just a spiritual heritage in Beijing; it also represents government, social harmony, and national security. China has been as rigorous in spreading this concept outside its borders. Recognizing Buddhism as one of Asia’s common civilizational inheritances, it has made significant investments in cultural diplomacy. China has attempted to position itself as a main supporter of Asian civilisation through forums such as the World Buddhist Forum, the restoration of old monasteries, sponsorship for Buddhist study, and the incorporation of Buddhist history into the Belt and Road Initiative. Investments in Nepal’s Lumbini, support for cultural conservation in Sri Lanka, and collaborations with Buddhist organizations throughout Southeast Asia highlight how infrastructure, culture, and diplomacy have been weaved together to form a sophisticated soft power instrument.This method has achieved substantial results. Many poor countries have benefited from Chinese assistance in preserving religious monuments, improving connectivity, and promoting tourism.

Buddhism has become

A cashless economy is not yet ready for India

Policymakers anxious to announce the arrival of a cashless economy should learn from the one rupee coin’s prolonged supremacy in India. Despite the remarkable expansion of UPI and other digital payment services, the one rupee coin still makes up about two-fifths of all coins in circulation, according to the Reserve Bank of India’s most recent annual report. This is neither coincidental nor illogical; rather, it is a reflection of the practical needs of an economy where cash continues to be the most widely available medium of exchange and precise change is still necessary for millions of transactions. Because the expense of minting low-value coins exceeds their face value—it costs Rs 1.11 to mint a one rupee coin—and because digital payments have eliminated the need for physical currency, governments in many parts of the world are eliminating low-value currencies. A number of Eurozone nations have done away with one and two cent coins, Australia, New Zealand, and other nations have eliminated their smallest denominations, while the United States and Canada have ceased producing pennies. India offers a unique and fascinating reality. A sizable informal sector, inconsistent internet connection, spotty digital

infrastructure, and a range of financial literacy levels coexist with an expanding digital economy. Thus, money continues to be both a cultural and an economic necessity. Digital systems lack the familiarity, predictability, and general acceptance that physical current possesses. Wider economic ramifications result from cash’s ongoing popularity. Large cash transactions decrease transparency and impede the formalization of economic activity, while currency imposes expenses through printing, minting, shipping, and security. Cash also sustains livelihoods in industries that are still beyond the purview of formal banking, safeguards economic participation in areas where digital access is restricted, and offers resilience during network outages. Therefore, the goal shouldn’t be to withdraw money too soon. It should be the gradual elimination of the obstacles that render money essential. Public priorities must be set for dependable digital infrastructure, reasonably priced cellphones, widespread internet access, improved cybersecurity, financial literacy, and increased digital inclusion. The one rupee coin’s popularity shows that equal access to technology is more important for the shift to a digital economy than technology itself.

infrastructure investments. Instead, it should focus on its own distinct capabilities. First, India must consistently uphold the principle that religious succession belongs to religious institutions. Such a position is not directed against any particular country but flows naturally from India’s own constitutional commitment to freedom of religion and pluralism. By remaining a principled defender of spiritual autonomy rather than a partisan participant in religious disputes, India enhances both its credibility and its moral standing. Second, the Buddhist Circuit should become one of the world’s best models of heritage-based international collaboration. Modern airports, high-speed train links, bilingual tourist facilities, digital archives, international universities, monastic exchange programs, and worldwide research centers have the potential to convert India’s sacred terrain into a thriving ecosystem of pilgrimage, study, and cultural diplomacy. Third, India should actively widen the area of Buddhist participation beyond geopolitics. Conferences on Buddhist ethics, climate resilience, mental health, conflict resolution, artificial intelligence, and environmental stewardship would illustrate Buddhist philosophy’s continued relevance in solving modern world concerns. Such activities would naturally draw researchers, monks, and practitioners from all Buddhist traditions, bolstering India’s reputation as a true guardian of the Dharma.

The wider Buddhist world offers an instructive example. Countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar have largely resisted the temptation to view India and China through an either-or prism. Thailand draws spiritual inspiration from India’s sacred sites while welcoming Chinese investment. Vietnam maintains historical Mahayana links with China even as it deepens cultural cooperation with India. Cambodia and Laos similarly distinguish between economic engagement and spiritual identity. Rather than choosing sides, these nations have adopted a pragmatic policy of strategic hedging, preserving their autonomy while benefiting from engagement with both powers. This balancing act teaches a valuable lesson. Buddhism has historically thrived not via

political dominance, but rather through cultural exchange, intellectual openness, and mutual respect. Southeast Asian countries realize that infrastructure and investment can coexist with autonomous spiritual traditions. They perceive no contradiction in receiving Chinese economic aid while yet viewing India as the spiritual cradle of the Dharma.As the Dalai Lama’s succession approaches, the future of Buddhism will undoubtedly be influenced by political circumstances. The Dalai Lama’s upcoming succession will undoubtedly have an impact on the future of Buddhism in light of political realities. By political realities. However, the more profound question goes beyond the identification of a single spiritual authority. It addresses the very nature of Buddhism in the twenty-first century. Will it remain a global moral philosophy that transcends borders, or will it get increasingly embroiled in power struggles and geopolitical rivalries? The answer depends not only on Beijing or New Delhi but also on the collective wisdom of the international Buddhist community. If China demonstrates the power of institutions, planning and investment, India embodies the timeless authority of sacred geography, pluralism and civilisational continuity.

The future of Buddhism does not require competition between these strengths; instead, collaboration can enhance its development. The future of Buddhism can thrive without competition between these strengths. when determining the future of Buddhism. Competing between these strengths is unnecessary. Rather, it should be guided by the recognition that one of humanity’s greatest spiritual traditions is best served when political ambition yields to the universal values of compassion, wisdom and peace that the Buddha himself preached over twenty-five centuries ago. The accession of the 14th Dalai Lama will surely bring an end to one historical period.

It also provides Asia with a unique opportunity to ensure that Buddhism continues to unite rather than divide civilizations, functioning not as a tool for geopolitical rivalry but as a bridge of understanding across a rapidly changing world.

Titan rises 4% and reaches a new high following the Q1 business report

Mumbai: After the company announced a strong business performance for the April to June 2026 quarter (Q1FY27), the share price of Titan Company reached a record high of ₹4,643.70, up 4% on the BSE in Tuesday's intraday trade in an otherwise quiet market. The previous high of ₹4,601.10 reached on May 8, 2026, was surpassed by the stock. Titan was up 3% at ₹4,629.10 at 09:51 AM, while the BSE Sensex had increased by 0.12%. So far in 2026, Titan has surpassed the market by 14%, while the benchmark index has declined by 8%. Titan had a great overall performance in Q1FY27, with domestic business expanding by 37% thanks to 39% growth in the jewelry business, 23% growth in the watches business, and 23% growth in the eyecare business, while overseas business increased by 128%. Healthy festivities and Akshay Tritiya were the main drivers of the jewelry industry's strong success during the quarter. The average ticket size increased in high double digits while portfolio buyer growth occurred in early double digits amid (relatively) stable gold prices. According to Titan, the two main categories of jewelry—plain and studded clocks—grew (individually) in the mid-thirties, while coins maintained their high double-digit growth pace driven by investments. Strong performance drove a 23% growth in the watch business despite the low teens fall in smart watch sales. Analog watches. Both domestically and internationally, the eyecare industry saw broad-based growth.

Tanishq, Mia, and Carat-Lane's joint jewelry business had robust growth in North America and attractive double-digit growth in the GCC. The company stated that despite the unstable geopolitical environment, the core Damas business is gradually recovering across important metrics.

Following Sebi's approval, the NSE plans to undertake a Rs 30,000-crore IPO in September

Mumbai: According to persons acquainted with the situation, the National Stock Exchange (NSE) plans to begin its much anticipated initial public offering (IPO), which is expected to cost about Rs 30,000 crore, in September. The largest stock exchange in the nation is anticipated to be worth more than Rs 5 trillion after the massive IPO. Roadshows for the IPO will soon start on the exchange. The issue will surpass Hyundai Motor India's October 2024 Rs 27,870-crore public offering if it is successful. The draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) submitted in June states that the planned public issue will be a full offer for sale (OFS) of 14.89 crore equity shares, with current owners jointly divesting

approximately 6% of the exchange's equity. There are about 1.8 lakh shareholders in the NSE. State Bank of India would sell up to 2.48 crore shares, with MS Strategic (Mauritius) Ltd. coming in second with 1.60 crore shares. The Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, Aranda Investments (Mauritius) Pte Ltd, Bank of Baroda, Stock Holding Corporation of India Ltd, General Insurance Corporation of India, The New India Assurance Company, National Insurance Company, and United India Insurance Company are among the other shareholders who have expressed a desire to sell shares. The largest stakeholder in the exchange, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), with a 10.72 percent stake, would



not take part in the share sale. After receiving the Securities and Exchange Board of India's (Sebi) no-objection certificate (NOC), the NSE's board authorized the proposed IPO on February 6. In order to raise about Rs 10,000 crore through an OFS, NSE first submitted draft documents for its IPO in 2016. However, because

to concerns over co-location and governance, Sebi did not approve the plan at that time. Since then, the exchange has implemented a number of governance and compliance initiatives and submitted numerous requests for permission to the regulator. In addition to legal counsel and other intermediaries, the NSE has designated 20

merchant bankers to oversee the IPO. Financially speaking, the exchange reported a 15% drop in earnings after tax to Rs 10,302 crore in FY26 from Rs 12,188 crore in FY25.

Additionally, the fiscal year's total income decreased from Rs 19,177 crore to Rs 18,713 crore. However, during the March quarter, overall income jumped 22% to Rs 5,360 crore from Rs 4,397 crore, while profit after tax increased 8% to Rs 2,871 crore from Rs 2,650 crore in the same period of the prior fiscal year. Reliance Industries-backed Jio Platforms filed its draft papers with Sebi in June, shortly after the NSE announcement. This is anticipated to be the biggest public offering in Indian stock market history.

Tata Stock: As Q1 revenue growth fails, Trent plummets 11% Street estimates



Mumbai: On Tuesday, July 7, 2026, shares of Trent, the retail division of the Tata Group that operates the well-known Zudio brand, were under pressure when the firm released its business report for the first quarter of 2026–2027 (Q1FY27). During early trading on Tuesday, Trent's share price fell as much as 11.28 percent to ₹2966 per share on the BSE.

The counter is still under pressure. Trent shares were trading at ₹2979.50 a share at 10:10 AM on Tuesday, down 10.88 percent from the previous closing of ₹3,343.4 per share. The benchmark BSE Sensex was up 218 points, or 0.28 percent, at 78,504 at the same time. The company's entire market capitalization was ₹1,59,127.15 crore at the prevailing market pricing. Trent reported standalone revenue of ₹5,666 crore for Q1FY27, up over 19% year over year from ₹4,781 crore, according to the company's exchange filing. However, the growth did not meet Street's 22–23% estimates.

Additionally, revenue from product sales (net of GST) increased by almost 19% annually. A 26% year-over-year rise in the number of stores contributed to the revenue growth. In contrast to a 4% fall in the March quarter (Q4FY26), sales per store fell by about 5% year over year, indicating either a slower ramp-up of new stores or ongoing cannibalization across several locations. Trent added 26 locations during the quarter, increasing its total number of fashion format stores to 1,312—a 26% increase from the previous year. Westside increased its overall store count

to 301, up 21% year over year, with the addition of one net shop during the quarter. With the opening of 19 net new locations, Zudio's network now stands at 982 locations, up 28% over the previous year. In order to achieve 29 locations, the company's other fashion formats added six outlets in a row, but the number stayed constant from year to year. Although the company's 19% sales growth fell short of its projected 22%, Motilal Oswal Financial Services maintained its "Buy" rating on the stock. The brokerage noted that expectations of an acceleration in sales growth from about 20% in Q4FY26 had caused Trent shares to rise 23% over the previous month and over 50% from their March 2026 lows. According to Motilal Oswal, "the 19% Y-o-Y revenue growth is weaker in this context and would likely lead to a correction in the stock." Although it fell short of more general Street predictions of 22–23%, ICICI Securities stated that the sales growth was generally in line with their expectation of 20%. In Q1FY27, the brokerage anticipates like-for-like (LFL) growth to stay steady or in the low single digits. Revenue growth is predicted to remain in the high teens to low twenties in the near future, improving to the mid-twenties as a greater percentage of stores mature and revenue per square foot rises. Additionally, ICICI Securities stated that the management maintains its long-term revenue growth projection of a 25% CAGR while anticipating LFL growth to revert to low double digits over the medium to long term.

SBI Funds Management attracts top sovereign funds in its \$1.2 billion IPO

Mumbai: SBI Funds Management, India's largest asset manager, would get investments from the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) and Singapore's GIC as part of its \$1.2 billion IPO, according to two persons with direct knowledge of the situation.



SBI Funds Management, a joint venture between State Bank of India and Amundi, manages assets valued at ₹12.5 trillion (\$131.1 billion) as of March 2026. According to sources, the joint venture is likely to be valued at roughly \$12.3 billion. SBI and Amundi will sell 10% of their shares as part of the issue. PRIME Database reports that 251 companies are preparing to raise ₹4.93 trillion (\$51.7 billion) before going public. According to sources, SBI Funds Management's IPO is in high demand among significant domestic institutional investors as well as top foreign investors from Singapore and the Middle East. According to one of two sources, the sale includes commitments worth roughly five times the amount earmarked for institutional investors. Despite considerable institutional demand, the fund house intends to reserve 50% of the offering for private investors, according to the source. SBI Funds Management's public offering will be India's largest since early 2026, after the Iran conflict caused an increase in oil prices, lowering investor confidence in the South Asian economy, which is heavily reliant on imported fuel. Other IPOs scheduled for this month include Manipal Health

Enterprises' \$1.2 billion offering and Indo-MIM's \$471 million offering, according to two separate merchant banking sources. The National Stock Exchange of India (NSE) and Reliance Jio are planning IPOs for \$3.3 billion and \$3.8 billion, respectively, which are anticipated to launch later this year. According to Suraj Krishnaswamy, managing director and head of investment banking coverage at Axis Capital, the success of the big-name IPOs scheduled for this month will determine the fate of other upcoming issues. In 2025, Indian companies raised \$21.8 billion through IPOs. So far in 2026, they have raised \$3.8 billion. Reviving international investor interest in Indian equities is crucial for the successful comeback of large IPOs. Investors have sold shares worth \$29 billion in the secondary markets this year, but selling pressure has abated and investors are giving India a second look, Reuters reported last month. "Despite a lackluster first half, we remain hopeful about this year's \$20 billion IPO fundraising. Equirus' managing director and head of investment banking, Bhavesh Shah, stated that three to four large IPOs in the pipeline will handle a significant portion of the \$8 billion to \$9 billion workload.

Heavy Mumbai rains increase India's first RainMumbai weather contract by 30%

Mumbai: Heavy rains in Mumbai is not only changing the weather, but also increasing investment earnings. RainMumbai, the country's first weather derivative contract, is gaining momentum. It rallied alongside the rains in the first week of July, and has risen sharply since its inception.

The July RainMumbai contract on NCDEX closed at ₹2,330 on July 1. As of Tuesday (July 7), it was trading at ₹2,638. This means that the contract has gained approximately 12.50 percent so far this month. Looking at its performance since introduction, the contract has seen a significant climb. The July contract debuted on May 29 at ₹2,020 and is now trading at ₹2,638. This indicates a roughly 30% increase since debut. According to Indrajeet Paul, head of research at AgriCorp International and a commodities expert, the RainMumbai contract is based on rainfall levels. Its movement is thus determined by rainfall. Mumbai has seen considerable rainfall this month, which has caused the contract to rise sharply.

Last month, the contract remained modest because to a weak monsoon. However, as the monsoon improved, it began to gain traction around the end of the month. On June 19, the contract reached a low of

₹1,905. Since then, it has increased steadily, reaching a record high of ₹2,765 on Tuesday. Ajay Kedia, director of Kedia Advisory, stated that the contract's prognosis will stay good in the coming days. According to weather forecasts, rainfall in Mumbai is expected to continue until mid-July, with daily rainfall rates ranging from 60% to 75%. This is anticipated to strengthen the Mumbai rainfall contract. According to NCDEX data, the contract has traded a total of 22,560 lots between its inception on May 29 and July 6. The total traded value was ₹23,505 lakh, or approximately ₹235 crore. The biggest daily trading volume was observed on June 15, with 2,039 lots traded. On May 29, NCDEX launched the country's first exchange-traded weather derivative contract. The contract is based on rainfall data from Mumbai and is connected to the city's long-period average (LPA) rainfall of 2,206.7 millimetres (mm).

The contract contains a multiplier of ₹50 per mm, which means the contract value changes by ₹50 for every 1 mm of rain. It was created with technical assistance from IIT Bombay and is based on official data from the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD).

Foreign investors reduce their betson India's rate hike and boost record five-year swaps trade

Mumbai: Turnover in India's five-year overnight index swap market has reached a record high due to a rush by foreign investors to unwind bets on interest rate hikes, indicating a return of market confidence. A crucial indicator of policy rate expectations, turnover in the five-year swap surged to a record ₹25300 crore (\$2.65 billion) on Wednesday, surpassing the ₹23,600 crore notional contracts recorded on Tuesday. The volume is about three times more than this year's average daily volume. According to Mandar Pitale, head of treasury at SBM Bank (India), some market participants had built up sizable positions for a slew of "front-loaded" rate increases



es in quick succession due to worries about inflation and the weakening currency. According to him, those positions are being unwound violently. India's five-year OIS dropped to a four-month low of 6.1% on Tuesday, just ten basis

points higher than it was prior to the start of the Iran war. In April, the benchmark rate had risen to roughly 6.9%, and investors had factored in rate increases of up to 125 basis points. Since the Reserve Bank of India announced

a number of initiatives to increase inflows and strengthen the rupee last month, wagers that it will tighten monetary policy to preserve the currency have dramatically decreased. The rupee has increased 1.5% from May 20, when it hit a record low of 96.96 per dollar. However, the US President Donald Trump's declaration that the ceasefire with Iran was "over" has put additional pressure on the currency. Duncan Tan, an APAC rates strategist at HSBC, stated in a note on Wednesday that expectations of significant foreign-exchange inflows have strengthened sentiment toward the rupee, reducing the chance that currency volatility could push offshore OIS rates higher.

Sebi approves new contracts linked to the Nifty index intended for FPI

Mumbai: Derivatives on an index created especially for international investors have been approved by India's market regulator. According to persons familiar with the situation who asked not to be named discussing private information, the Securities and Exchange Board of India has given the National Stock Exchange of India Ltd. permission to launch futures and options linked to the Nifty India FPI 150 Index. Launched in August of last year, the gauge measures 150 equities chosen for their accessibility to overseas investors, a factor that international benchmark providers like MSCI Inc. usually consider when choosing their index members. A spokesperson of the NSE declined to comment, citing the company's upcoming IPO. An email requesting comment was not answered by SEBI. In preparation for its September debut, NSE, which received over two-thirds of its revenue from derivatives in the previous fiscal year, is looking to expand its products. In the meanwhile, following months of withdrawals due to an equities downturn, India hopes to entice back international investors. Although there were no contracts existing as of the most recent date available, the FPI 150 gauge already has dollar-denominated derivatives connected to it in GIFT City, an offshore venue with tax advantages. The rupee contracts would be listed in Mumbai and complement the range of futures and options that the NSE provides on a number of major gauges, such as the benchmark NSE Nifty 50 Index and the NSE Nifty Bank Index.

Australia’s social media ban fails to clear the first hurdle in age checks for Under-16



Canberra: Australia’s on-line platforms are fumbling at the very first stage of establishing age checks for users, rendering a world-first teen social media ban ineffective, according to a research conducted by a team that advised the government on the limitations’ implementation.Since December, Australia’s new social media law has required that services such as Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube prohibit persons under the age of 16 from creating an account.Operators must take “reasonable steps” to comply, with the government recommending numerous checks to determine users’ ages.

The restriction, however, has been widely criticised, with research indicating that most people under the age of 16 continue to have access to the platforms, prompting Australia to in-

crease the maximum fine last month and warning of legal action against internet companies for noncompliance.A team of software testers, who tested age-assurance software on more than 1,000 Australians last year, discovered that platforms did not request age evidence on any of the 50 accounts they made after the law went into effect and listed the age as 16, according to Reuters. The previously unreported finding reveals a largely overlooked flaw: while the process has so far focused on the accuracy of photo-based age-assurance software, the initial vetting stage - which guesses a person’s age range based on their general online activity - does not appear to be picking up young users for further checks.“You should be asked to demonstrate how old you are, and not once have we been asked to veri-

fy our age or use age-assurance measures,” said Andrew Hammond, director at testing firm KJR, which ran the original trial in 2025. All 50 test accounts are active and have been distributed among nine of the 10 platforms that are subject to the age restrictions, including Meta’s Instagram, Snap’s Snapchat, TikTok and Alphabet’s YouTube, Hammond said. Some dummy accounts received advertisements for youth banking products, an indication the platform registered the person’s age range, Hammond said. He stated that one account that claimed to be 16 when signing up for Elon Musk’s X was offered pornographic information. None of the platforms allowed users who claimed to be under the age of 16 to register. However, only one live-streaming platform, Australia-based Kick,

refused to allow users to register an account without evidence of age, according to the follow-up study. Snap and TikTok declined to comment, and Google and X, which SpaceX owns, did not reply to calls for comment. A Meta spokesperson said Hammond’s shadow trial appeared inconsistent with the regulator’s guidance of escalating “to formal age verification when behavioural indicators suggest they may be underage, or when an account is reported”.The spokesperson added that the dummy accounts were declared as over the minimum age and it was unclear if they had “posted content or engaged in a way a true under-16-year-old user would”.

A Kick spokeswoman stated that relying on age inference was not practicable because the platform was young and lacked sufficient data to guess user ages. A spokesman for the eSafety Commissioner stated that the authority “remains confident that age-restricted platforms have the technology and resources they need to prevent Australian children under 16 from having accounts”. According to the spokesman, the recommended technique of increasing strong checks “if implemented correctly ensures there is no single point of failure”.

Trump renews push for US to take over Greenland as he travels for NATO meeting

Washington DC: Donald Trump has renewed his call for the United States to acquire Greenland, threatening to withdraw all American armed forces from Europe when the continent consistently resisted.Arriving to the NATO summit in Ankara on Tuesday, the US president implied that his commitment to defending Europe had been tempered by leaders’ political decisions on immigration and energy.Keir Starmer and European allies are determined to avoid another public spat with Trump over defense expenditure following a grueling year for Nato, during which the Iran conflict exposed new flaws in the alliance. The UK has previously responded to accusations from the US that some partners are “lagging behind” on financing, with Trump anticipated to chastise countries, including the UK, for failing to meet the aim of spending 3.5% of GDP by 2035. As Trump landed in Turkey, he claimed that Starmer’s decision to stay out of the war with Iran had led to his demise, despite the fact that the prime minister’s stance had been popular with the British population.“I was very disappointed in Nato.” We were treated poorly because of anything we did in Iran. We don’t need anyone’s assistance, but before I asked, they said they wouldn’t be present,” the



US president told reporters. Reviving a previous argument, Trump also claimed that the conflict over sovereignty of Greenland, which is part of Denmark, another NATO member, had “harmed” his relationship with the military alliance. Denmark does not invest in Greenland, despite its importance to the US. The island is surrounded by Chinese and Russian ships and should be managed by the US rather than Denmark. And when they wouldn’t go along with it, despite all the money we spent to assist them with Russia,” he said.” “We don’t have to spend any money; we could remove all of our soldiers from Europe because, as you probably noticed, Europe is a very different place than it was 20 years ago. They should be careful with immigration and

energy.” If they aren’t cautious with those two things, Europe will cease to exist.” In response, UK Chancellor Rachel Reeves told reporters that “the future of Greenland is up to the people of Greenland and Denmark, not the US president.” I’ve been pretty clear about this since it was first suggested.” Trump also reinforced his complaint that NATO partners do not spend enough on defense and are overly reliant on the United States, an accusation European countries are striving to counter by launching multibillion-pound defense agreements. “Why are we investing hundreds of billions of dollars if they aren’t there for us? We’ve always been there for them,” he continued, despite the fact that NATO’s mutual defense clause has only been invoked once, following the September 11 attacks on New York, when allies joined US troops in Afghanistan.As part of efforts to reduce NATO’s reliance on the United States, the United Kingdom will spearhead a £37 billion European project to create a long-range missile capable of striking thousands of miles behind Russia’s frontline in Ukraine.Amid persistent concern about Trump’s commitment to the alliance, the UK will collaborate with France, Germany, and the Baltic states to develop its own deep-precision attack capacity.

Days after Turkey rejected it, an LGBTQ+ cruise ship was denied admission into Egypt

Cairo: This week, an LGBTQ+ cruise ship that was barred from Turkish waters was denied access into Egypt.On Thursday morning, the 2,000 guests on board the Scarlet Lady, including Broadway star Patti LuPone, discovered a message under their cabin doors alerting them to the ship’s urgent search for alternate ports. “Early this morning, we were informed that Scarlet Lady has been denied entry into Egyptian waters, and, as a result, will no longer be able to call in Alexandria today,” Rich Campbell, the chief executive of Atlantis Events, the tour group that chartered the Virgin Voyages ship, told passengers.“I know how much this visit meant to so many of you. We successfully sailed a similar itinerary last year without issue. So we were surprised by this unfortunate decision,” he wrote.The note concluded: “Please know that both the Atlantis and Virgin Voyages teams worked tire-

lessly to make this call in Alexandria a possibility. This news came as a surprise to all of us, and we’re just as disappointed as you are.”The visit to Egypt was already a change to the planned tour, hastily arranged after the ship was refused entry to Turkey. No official reason has yet been given for the decision of the Egyptian government.The 10-day Athens to Venice cruise was blocked from Turkey after authorities published a statement online saying the cruise was chartered “by groups known for behaviours that do not align with the structure of our society and our moral values”. The ship’s arrival had been cancelled after it “sparked significant public concern”, they added. “There is absolutely no possibility of the group in question visiting our province for an event of this nature.”Randy Slovacek, who is on the cruise, wrote on his blog: “In the company’s 36-year history, Atlantis had never had a ship denied



entry to dock. And now it’s happened in two countries in one week.

“Trust and believe, me and my fellow passengers will be fine: if they don’t want our tourism, we will sparkle and spend elsewhere. As my fellow blogger Joe Jervis once wrote: ‘They wish we were in-

visible. We’re not. Let’s dance.’”Kyle Olsen, the owner of Hermes Holidays, another LGBTQ+ tour company, said he believed that if Turkey had not refused entry to the ship this week, Egypt would not have issued its ban. “I worry that other countries are going to be emboldened

Khamenei Will Be Regarded As The Second Imam Hussain In 100 Years

Tehran: Iran’s late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei would be considered as the second Imam Hussain in a hundred years, Tehran announced on Tuesday, as thousands gathered around the country to pay their respects to him at a lavish funeral and sing revenge chants against the United States and Israel.An Iranian top official briefed a group of foreign journalists during the funeral ceremonies for Ayatollah Khamenei, his family, and other officials killed in the US and Israel strike on Iran on February 28, saying that people have compared the leader’s assassination to Imam Hussain’s. “Ayatollah Khamenei will be regarded as the second Imam Hussain in 100 years,” the official stated, adding that his death marks a “turning point in Islam, Shi’ism, and Iran.”Imam Hussain, Prophet Muhammad’s grandson, was killed during the Battle of Karbala. The war is viewed as a fight for resistance, and Imam Hussain is especially revered among Shia Muslims.In response to a question, the official stated that the call for



revenge against the US and Israel for their atrocities is a want for justice, and there is nothing wrong with that.

“What’s wrong with demanding justice?” the official said, as protests against the United States and Israel became louder. Hundreds of thousands of people have gathered in Iran as Khamenei’s final rituals are performed amid an overwhelming sense of grief and loss, with many seeking vengeance on the US and Israel for the murderous strikes on February 28. The attack murdered Khamenei and four of his family members, including his 14-month-old granddaughter Zahra.The child’s tiny casket has become the defining image of the

days-long funeral procession, sparking a desire for vengeance from Iranians. Mourners have gathered for the funeral procession, holding scarlet flags symbolizing “blood debt” and printed with messages stating “Ya Latharat al-Khamenei”.

This slogan is commonly repeated during Muharram processions, and its use at Khamenei’s burial rites signifies that his death is being linked to Imam Hussain’s martyrdom.

Iran has converted the recent war into a moral struggle between justice and oppression by regularly referencing the martyrdom of Imam Hussain and battle of Karbala, where he was martyred.

Twelve people are killed by wildfires in southern Spain as temperatures climb



Madrid : A wildfire in Almeria, southern Spain, reportedly claimed the lives of twelve people.

Approximately 150 firemen fought the fire, which started amid extreme heat. According to a statement from the Andalusian regional administration, “the number of people who died in the fire in Los Gallardos has risen to 12 after the confirmation of six more deaths.”According to a statement from the regional government, at least six people were hurt in the incident, including a woman who sustained burns and another who was transported to the hospital due to smoke inhalation. The deaths occurred in the Bedar hamlet. Four others were treated at the scene for minor burns and respiratory problems caused by heavy smoke.Record wildfires in

Europe show failure to adapt carries a mounting costAuthorities have not confirmed the cause of the fire, but witnesses told officials the blaze may have started after a power line fell, igniting dry vegetation before spreading rapidly through surrounding woodland.Roads were closed and residents evacuated as the fire spread, with about 50 people housed in a cultural centre.Spain’s military emergency unit, which is deployed in major emergencies, was due to join firefighting efforts in the coming hours.

The head of the regional government of Andalusia, Juanma Moreno, expressed his condolences to the families of the people who died, calling it “a tragedy”.“Our hearts are heavy and we are devastated by grief,” he wrote on X.The wild-

fire comes as Spain suffers a heatwave, with scorching temperatures triggering orange weather warnings – the second highest level – across parts of Andalusia in recent days.Prime minister Pedro Sánchez said in May that Spain would deploy its largest-ever summer wildfire response this year.Fire weather – a combination of heat, drought and strong wind – is increasing in some parts of all continents. Human-caused climate breakdown is responsible for a higher likelihood of fire and bigger burned areas in southern Europe, northern Eurasia, the US and Australia, with some scientific evidence of increases in southern China. Climate breakdown has increased the wildfire season by about two weeks on average across the globe.Spain has experienced increasingly frequent and prolonged heatwaves in recent years, with temperatures often exceeding 40C, creating conditions for major wildfires. According to the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS), Spain saw its worst wildfire year in recent memory in 2025, with over 393,000 hectares (971,000 acres) burning.

The target of the ICE shooting that killed a Mexican immigrant was not

Mexico City: Federal authorities had not been targeting a Mexican man living in the United States who was shot and killed by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent in a Houston operation, according to US Rep. Sylvia Garcia stated on Thursday.Acting ICE Director David Venturrella informed the Democratic lawmaker, whose district includes the Houston neighborhood where the killing took place, that Lorenzo Salgado Araujo “was not a target.”According to his family, Salgado Araujo was a homebuilder who had been in the United States for over 35 years, had no criminal history, and was almost done with the lengthy process of gaining legal status when he was assassinated early on Tuesday morning.“We must take action. In an interview with MS Now, Garcia stated, “This is just one more death too many.” “And if we’ve got to bring outside, independent folks to come in and look at it, we should do that.”An email requesting response late Thursday was not immediately answered by a Department of Homeland Security spokeswoman. DHS, which is in charge of ICE, previously claimed that when federal agents tried to pull over a car driven by Salgado Araujo, they were carrying out a targeted operation to apprehend a person in the nation without legal status. According to the organization, a federal officer shot a gun in self-defense after Salgado Araujo crashed an ICE car. DHS responded earlier on Thursday that police had been monitoring a location where they had previously seen two white vans when asked if ICE agents had been deliberately targeting Salgado Araujo.Officers were nearly to the target’s residence on July 7 when they noticed a white van carrying a person who looked like the target. The car stop was then started by officers, according to the agency.Unlike earlier deaths involving federal immigration officials, the federal agents were not carrying body-worn cameras, according to DHS, and few images or recordings related to the shooting have surfaced in the days following the confrontation. In a statement, DHS said the agents at the scene in Houston had not yet been issued body cameras, which it blamed on Democrats and a record government shutdown that was fueled by President Donald Trump’s immigration crackdown.US Rep. Christian Menefee, a Democrat who also represents Houston, said if the agents didn’t have the devices, it was because Trump and Republican lawmakers did not want them to be carrying them.“Houston is done accepting excuses from an agency that has more money than it knows what to do with and still can’t manage basic accountability,” he said in a statement. The shooting will be investigated, according to the Harris County District Attorney’s office. According to spokesperson Rafael Lemaitre, the agency is speaking with local prosecutors in Minneapolis, where two US citizens were shot and killed by federal agents, to find out how they handled investigations involving federal immigration officials.In an email statement, Lemaitre stated, “We are pursuing investigative avenues available to us and will conduct a review of any information we collect within our reach, even though access to key evidence remains under federal control.”

Four great frozen treats, from fruit splits to semifreddos

Blackcurrant and white peach splits from Kitty Travers: During a recent traffic congestion, on a day so hot it

felt stagnant and almost interminable, I found myself in a little daydream of superiority. A homemade blackcurrant and white peach ice lolly, sharp and fruity with a subtle almond flavor (from using slightly underripe peaches), was taken from the freezer in a rare moment of foresight while my fellow drivers, slumped in their baking metal shells, watched. Between Elephant and Castle and Acton Central in London, I licked it with the certainty that it was the only thing I wanted. Ice lollipops are awesome! Wooden sticks and silicone molds are required. In a small skillet, add the sugar, water, and blackcurrants. Simmer over low heat until the sugar melts and the fruit bursts.

Use a stick blender or food processor to purée the blackcurrant mixture until completely smooth — if you’re using a stick blender it’s easiest to do this in a small jug. After passing the puree through a fine sieve and placing it in a sanitized basin, let it cool. After washing the peaches, cut them into a clean container and remove as much meat from the pit as you can. Puree the sugar, water, and lemon juice until it’s completely smooth. Pour the white peach puree through a strainer into a small, readily pourable basin or jug. To make your lolly more stable, lay some silicone lolly molds flat on a tray and insert the wooden sticks, leaving about a third of the stick visible outside the mold. Fill each mold halfway with the peach puree; this should be sufficient — up to the stick’s level. Freeze for two hours, or until the peach layer is sufficiently frozen to allow the blackcurrant puree to be added without blending the two flavors. Pour the Black Curr. To design the lollies with edible petals (lilac, pansy, marigold, say), line a sheet tray (or anything similar that will fit in the freezer) with parchment paper. Carefully and swiftly remove the lollipops from their silicone molds, drop each one into a cup of apple juice, and then “stick” the petals to the lolly’s surface. Return to serve the free. Consume within a week.

Matthew Adlard’s refreshing mint semifreddo: Fresh mint is an underappreciated baking ingredient, but it provides a cleaner,

more lively flavor than artificial extracts. I’ve mixed it with chocolate to pay homage to the fa-

mixture reaches 118C on a digital thermometer, gradually

panna cotta with olive oil and salt. Yes, I did say pistachio, which I have been avoiding due to the Dubai chocolate craze, but bear with me. Pistachios are delightful small green nuts, and the flavor combination has stuck with me ever since. As

the past 30 years. This variation retains the spirit of the original but adds fennel and pistachio to match the flavours of the ice cream. Gently heat the olive oil in a pan until it reaches 120-130 degrees Celsius on a kitchen thermometer; if you don’t have one, add a fennel seed and watch whether it sizzles. Turn off the heat and stir in the fennel seeds and powdered pistachios. Leave to cool.

Meanwhile, in a separate bowl, add the yeast, warm water,

the dough is still hot, stamp out 20 biscuits with a 9cm cutter and set aside to cool. Whisk the pistachio paste, evaporated milk, and whole milk until smooth; set aside. Whisk the double cream in a stand mixer or with a handheld mixer until firm peaks form. Scrape down the sides, then add the condensed milk and salt, whipping quickly to bring the mixture back to soft peaks. Whip the pistachio milk mixture into stiff peaks. Line a flat tray with baking paper. Once the tortas have cooled, place

tiful to look at, and refreshing to consume. In short, they embody everything I enjoy about summer. Double cream will be steeped with powdered hojicha, a nutty, toasty-tasting Japanese green tea that dissolves in liquid with some constant whisking. Salty, buttery crackers taste even better folded and collapsed into the soft whip, as does the satisfying caramel crunch of candied peanuts. Best of all, the crisp inclusions aren’t piled into a tin like a classic icebox cake; instead, they’re folded into the dough in a few fast strokes, resulting in gorgeous slabs as speckled as an Italian terrazzo floor. Serve with additional fudge sauce and candied cherries spooned all over. Line a 23cm loaf tin with clingfilm or parchment paper, leaving plenty of overhang; set aside. Whisk the hojicha into the double cream, then leave to steep in the fridge for at least two to three hours. Pour a small amount of water into a saucepan — so it’s about knuckle deep — and bring to a low simmer over a low heat. Put the egg yolks, sugar, vanilla extract and salt in a small, heatproof bowl, whisking well to combine. Put the bowl snugly on to the simmering pan and, whisking continuously, cook until the sugar has dissolved and the mix has emulsified and lightened in colour — about three to four minutes. Remove the bowl from the heat and continue whisking until the mix is room temperature and has noticeably thickened — another three to four minutes. Add the cream cheese and whisk until thick, glossy, and completely smooth; no lumps should remain. Strain the infused double cream to remove any gritty tea residue, then pour the cream into a medium-sized bowl and whisk, either by hand or with

a hand mixer, until stiff peaks form (about five minutes by hand, or two minutes with a mixer). Add the yolk mixture to the whipped cream and gently fold until fully smooth and bubbly. Spread the candied peanuts and Ritz crackers on top, followed by the fudge sauce. Using a spatula, carefully fold everything together in a few passes to keep the fudge streaky. Pour the mixture into the prepared loaf tin and spread evenly. Bring up the overhanging clingfilm wings to wrap it up, then freeze for three to four hours. When ready to eat, flip the loaf tin onto a dish or chopping board and carefully remove it. Peel back and remove the clingfilm to uncover the cake underneath, then serve in 2cm-thick chunks with extra fudge sauce.

mous mint chocolate chip ice cream. A semifreddo is traditionally made with either a pâte à bombe or an Italian meringue base, but I favor the former since the extra fat from the egg yolks results in a richer, more luxurious texture. Making sugar syrup involves some accuracy, but the end result is definitely worth it. I prepared this in a loaf tin, but

pour it over the whisking egg yolks. It will appear thin at first, but continue whisking until the bowl is cool to the touch and the mixture forms a ribbon, which should take approximately three to five minutes. Place the infused cream in a mixing dish and whisk until it forms medium-soft peaks. Fold the cream in two parts through the pâte

would also work well in individual silicone moulds. Lightly butter a 900g loaf tin and line it with clingfilm (or baking paper for a smoother finish). Set aside. Gently crush the mint leaves to liberate their oils, then transfer them to a saucepan with the cream. Cook, stirring regularly, until the cream is steaming, then remove from the heat and cover with a lid. Allow to infuse for 30 minutes. Pass the infused cream through a sieve on a tared scale, then top with 400g of fresh cream. Place this in the refrigerator to chill. Heat the water, honey, and sugar in a small saucepan over medium heat. Meanwhile, place the egg yolks in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment and whisk on medium until thickened. When the sugar

à bombe base. Finally, add the chocolate curls and a pinch of flaked salt, folding until combined. Pour the mixture into the lined tin and freeze for at least six hours, preferably overnight. For the chocolate shell, combine the chocolate and oil in a small bowl and heat over a pan of slowly simmering water until melted. Remove from the heat and let cool for a minute. Working quickly, pour it over the semifreddo, drizzling it down the edges with the back of a spoon, and gently ripple the surface. Allow the chocolate shell to set for 1 minute before serving.

Terri Mercieca’s salted pistachio no-churn icecream and olive oil biscuits: My fiancée Ellie and I just went on a weekend break to Cadiz in Andalusia, southern Spain. El Faro had a noteworthy dessert: pistachio

went home through the cobbled alleys in the warm air, I imagined tortas de aceite (olive oil biscuits) with salted pistachio ice cream, drizzled with Spanish olive oil, and topped with sea salt. Tortas de aceite are a traditional Andalusian morning pastry that originated in Seville. The name “oil cakes” refers to the original recipe, which includes olive oil, anise, and sesame. We used to prepare this at The Bennelong in Sydney in the 1990s, so I’ve had this recipe for

and 5g sugar. Allow to sit for 10 minutes until foamy. Add the white wine and remaining sugar to the cooled oil, then stir in the flour and activated yeast. Knead lightly until a dough forms, then cover and let rest for an hour, or until somewhat puffy. Preheat the oven to 200C (180C fan)/390F/ Gas 6. Divide the dough in half and roll out thinly between two pieces of baking paper to

half of them flat on the tray and freeze for 10 minutes. Remove and place around 40g of the ice cream mixture in the center of each biscuit, allowing it to spread naturally to the edges. Gently add a second torta on top without pressing down. Return to the freezer for 20 minutes. Remove and roll the exposed ice cream edges in finely powdered pistachios before freezing again until

ready

create two 40cm x 30cm sheets that are about 3mm thick. Place each dough sheet on a flat baking surface, equally sprinkle with demerara sugar, and bake for five minutes. Turn the tray and bake for another five minutes, or until the biscuits are evenly brown and puff up to about 4-5mm. While

to serve. You will have leftover ice cream, so freeze it in a container and serve in scoops with fried biscuit offcuts, a drizzle of olive oil, and sea salt flakes.

Natasha Pickowicz’s salty hojicha icebox cake: Icebox cakes are simple to make, beau-

Sitting for more than half an hour at a time is associated with an increased chance of dying from cancer

Sitting for longer than half an hour at a time each day raises the risk of dying from cancer, a study finds. Sitting or lying down when awake for more than 30 minutes in a single period each day was linked to an elevated chance of cancer death, according to researchers who followed over 90,000 individuals over a ten-year period. The results indicate that the risk rises with each additional hour of continuous inactivity. But the researchers also discovered that interspersing spurts of physical activity with longer than 30-minute intervals of inactivity could help lower the risk. They said that getting up every 30 minutes, even for a little stroll around the office, could have a positive impact on your health. Dr Frederick Ho, the lead author of the study at the University of Glasgow, said: “What our data shows is that sitting



for more than 30 minutes at a time is particularly linked to a higher risk of cancer. Fortunately, it may be protective to mix up your

sitting time with something as easy as a quick stroll. Our research indicates that light movement should not be disregarded, despite

the fact that current health recommendations place a strong emphasis on moderate or intense exercise. Moving forward, scientific

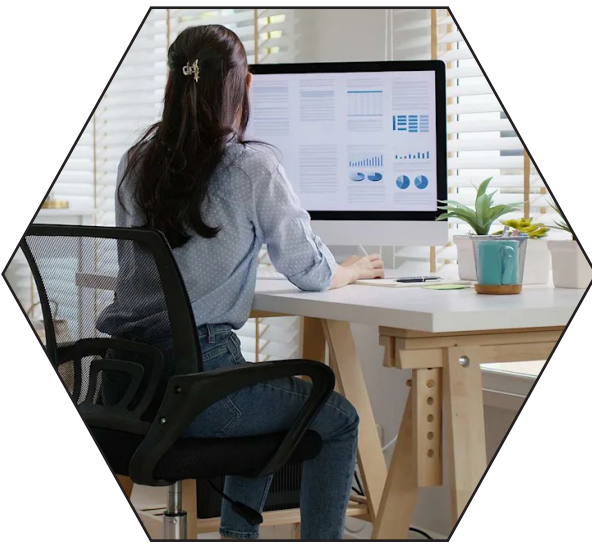
trials will help us move beyond boilerplate advice and establish tailored techniques for breaking up sitting time.” The results,

which were published in Plos Medicine, concentrated on the everyday health consequences of extended periods of inactivity. Long stretches of time spent sitting or lying down when awake have long been linked to a higher risk of cardiovascular disease and several types of cancer, but the researchers note that little is known about whether the accumulation of sedentary time also affects health. They could find moments of physical activity. Housework and leisurely walking were beneficial hobbies. However, it seemed to lower that risk when prolonged periods of inactivity were replaced with movement. A 12% lower chance of dying from cancer was linked to replacing one hour of daily sedentary behavior with mild physical exercise, including ironing or cleaning. An 8% decreased risk was linked to substituting

30 minutes of moderate physical exercise, like walking at an average pace, for 30 minutes of inactivity each day. The risk was 22% reduced when five minutes of idleness was substitut-

statistical analysis of an observational study, which prevented them from establishing causation.

The results were intriguing, but more research would be required, accord-



ed with five minutes of strenuous physical activity each day, the study showed. The study’s weaknesses included the researchers’

ing to Prof. Kevin McConway, an emeritus professor of applied statistics at the Open University who was not involved in the study.

PM Modi shares breathtaking aerial image of Prambanan Temple during his Indonesia tour

New Delhi, July 12: On Wednesday, while en route from Yogyakarta to the nearly 1,000-year-old Prambanan Temple complex, Prime Minister Narendra Modi shared a spectacular aerial view from his helicopter, describing the monument as majestic. Prime Minister Modi took to X to share a stunning aerial view from his helicopter, tweeting, “The majestic Prambanan Temple!” as they reached the historic site. The aerial flight comes ahead of the formal opening of an India-backed conservation and restoration program at the huge site, which represents a significant milestone in New Delhi’s cultural diplomacy under the Act East strategy. The foundation for this heritage partnership was solidified on Tuesday, following extensive bilateral discussions between Prime Minister Modi and President Prabowo. The two leaders exchanged a Letter of Intent for the preservation project while reaffirming their commitment to deepening the India-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership to foster a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Indo-Pacific. Situated on the island of Java, the Prambanan



Temple Complex stands as the largest hindu temple site in Indonesia and the second largest across Southeast Asia, behind Cambodia’s Angkor Wat. Spanning nearly 40 hectares, the ancient compound originally comprised around 240 temples, remaining today as one of Indonesia’s most prominent cultural landmarks and a testament to deep-rooted subcontinental links. The Hindu Mataram Kingdom oversaw the construction of the architectural

masterpiece in the ninth century CE. According to historical records, king Rakai Pikatan initiated the monumental project, which was completed by his successor, Lokapala, to signal the empire’s devotion to Shaivite Hinduism, as an architectural counterpoint to the Buddhist Borobudur Temple built nearby by the rival Sailendra dynasty. At the center of the compound are three towering temples dedicated to the Hindu Trimurti: Lord Shi-

va, Lord Vishnu, and Lord Brahma. The central Shiva Temple, built of volcanic stone, dominates the terrain at a height of around 47 metres, displaying ancient Hindu architectural design with its soaring spires, symmetrical layouts, and beautiful gates. The external walls have extremely intricate reliefs depicting scenes from the Ramayana and other great Hindu epics. These carvings depict the tremendous religious and cultural interchange that occurred centuries ago across Southeast Asia via marine trade channels, academic networks, and historic commercial routes. The court highlighted serious concerns regarding custodial violence, noting the absence of explanations for injuries sustained by the accused in the custody of the CBI. The judge condemned the use of physical coercion, asserting that the legitimacy of investigations lies in fairness, not fear. The court directed a medical examination for the accused and mandated an impartial inquiry to identify responsible officers, emphasizing that dismissing such allegations would undermine constitutional rights and the integrity of criminal justice.

TMC vs BJP: New Political Narrative Emerges in Battle Over Bengal's Future

New Delhi, July 12: Three former Trinamool Congress MPs are ready to return to the Rajya Sabha, although in different colors, weeks after resigning. Sushmita Dev, Sukhendu Shekhar Roy, and Prakash Chik Baraik, who had just resigned Mamata Banerjee’s party and their Rajya Sabha seats, formally joined the BJP on Thursday. Within hours, the BJP nominated them as candidates for the byelections to the three seats left vacant by the same leaders. The elections for these seats will take place on July 24. The BJP’s quest to dismantle the Trinamool Congress is far from complete. Rukmini Mallick, another MP, has also sent the Rajya Sabha Chairman her resignation and will meet with him in person shortly to give it over. According to reports, two of the remaining nine TMC Rajya Sabha MPs may join the



BJP soon. Bhalo Trinamool Leaders The inclusion of former Trinamool officials in the BJP contradicts the party’s public statements that it will not induct TMC politicians due to charges of corruption and goondaism. However, on Tuesday, state BJP president Samik Bhattacharya called it an “exception” while inducting Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, Sushmita Dev and Prakash Chik Baraik into the BJP. He had earlier also propounded the theory of “good TMC and bad TMC”, under which there would be no hesitation in taking along “bhalo” (good)

TMC leaders. Before the split, TMC had 13 MPs in the Rajya Sabha. A split and merge with the BJP or any other party, requires 9 MPs. Since that number could not be managed, the BJP has adopted a strategy of getting MPs to resign and then fielding them on its symbol to send them back to the House. The strategy weakens the Trinamool while shoring up BJP’s numbers in the Rajya Sabha. After July 24, the BJP’s strength in the Rajya Sabha will rise to 117, its highest ever. The BJP will now be six votes shy of a simple majority of 123 on its own.

Death Toll in Wayanad Tunnel Collapse Rises to Seven, One Worker Still Missing

New Delhi, July 12: The death toll in the collapse of an excavation debris mound at the under-construction Anakkampoyil-Kalladi-Meppadi twin-tube tunnel project has risen to seven after rescue teams recovered another body during search operations on Friday. One worker remains missing as multi-agency rescue efforts continue for the fourth consecutive day. The latest body was recovered from a river near the accident site, where rescue personnel have been conducting an extensive search despite persistent rainfall and difficult terrain. Authorities said efforts are continuing to trace the missing worker. The accident occurred on July 7 near the Meenakshi Bridge at Kalladi, close to the tunnel’s entry portal linking Kozhikode and Wayanad districts. Continuous heavy rain triggered a massive collapse of excavated soil and rock that had been stored near the construction site. The debris swept through the area, burying workers, construction vehicles and heavy machinery. Teams from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Kerala Fire and Rescue Services, police and other emergency agencies have been using excavators, earthmovers and other heavy equipment to

remove large quantities of mud and debris while continuing the search operation. The incident has prompted a high-level investigation into the safety measures adopted at the project site. State government officials said earlier warnings had been issued regarding the accumulation of excavated material on the hillside near the tunnel entrance. According to official records, local authorities and the Public Works Department had directed the executing agency on June 20 to remove the debris, citing safety concerns and the risk posed by the monsoon season. Following the collapse, the Kerala government ordered separate departmental inquiries to examine whether safety guidelines and regulatory directions had been ignored. Police have also registered a case of unnatural death, and the findings of the investigations will determine whether further legal action is warranted. Seven workers injured in the incident remain under treatment at hospitals, while authorities have assured that rescue operations will continue until the missing worker is located. The tunnel project is considered a key infrastructure initiative aimed at improving connectivity between Wayanad and Kozhikode districts.

Centre Seeks Clarifications from Messaging Platforms on Username-Based Identity Features



New Delhi, July 12: The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has received detailed responses from WhatsApp and Telegram regarding their username-based messaging features as the Centre examines whether the proposed systems provide adequate safeguards against cyber fraud, impersonation and identity theft. Signal has also been asked to explain the security measures built into its existing username framework. The Centre had earlier issued notices to the three encrypted messaging platforms after expressing concerns that allowing users to communicate without sharing their phone numbers could make it easier for fraudsters to carry out phishing attacks, digital arrest scams and impersonation of individuals, businesses and government agencies. As part of the con-

sultation process, the government extended the deadline for WhatsApp’s response after the company sought additional time to furnish technical details. According to officials, WhatsApp has informed the government that the proposed feature incorporates several safeguards to prevent misuse. These include automated systems to detect suspicious account creation, limits on frequent username changes and restrictions on the number of first-time conversations that can be initiated using usernames alone. The company has also assured the Centre that the feature will not be rolled out in India until consultations with the government are completed. Meta has also stated that usernames already verified on its Facebook and Instagram platforms will be reserved for their legitimate owners to

reduce the risk of impersonation. Additional protections will prevent the creation of deceptive usernames resembling those of public figures, government departments and recognised organisations. The platform further said users receiving messages from newly created or unfamiliar accounts would be shown additional contextual information to help identify potential fraudulent activity. The government has widened its scrutiny beyond WhatsApp by seeking similar explanations from Telegram and Signal, saying that the same standards on user safety and fraud prevention should apply uniformly to all messaging platforms offering username-based communication. Officials have indicated that the objective is to ensure privacy-enhancing features do not compromise public safety or hinder efforts to combat cybercrime. The responses submitted by the companies are currently being examined by MeitY, following which the government is expected to decide whether additional safeguards or regulatory measures are required before such features are introduced or expanded in India.

Maharashtra Unveils Rs 13,000-Crore Plan to Strengthen Mumbai's Flood Management

New Delhi, July 12: The Maharashtra government has announced a ₹13,000-crore integrated flood mitigation plan aimed at strengthening Mumbai’s resilience against urban flooding through a combination of conventional drainage infrastructure and nature-based solutions. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis informed the State Legislative Assembly that the proposed master plan has received in-principle approval from the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). A detailed project report (DPR) is being prepared to identify priority locations and finalise the scope of the works before implementation begins. The project is proposed to be funded through a shared financial model under which the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) will contribute 40 per cent of the cost, while the Maharashtra government and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) will bear 30 per cent each. According to BMC officials, the plan has been developed after nearly

a year of consultations with the NDMA and the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, including technical assessments and site inspections. The objective is to reduce the impact of intense rainfall and recurring waterlogging by modernising the city’s stormwater management system. Additional Municipal Commissioner Abhijit Bangar said the project will combine conventional engineering measures with ecological interventions to improve rainwater absorption and drainage. The proposed works include expanding pumping stations in flood-prone areas such as Mahul and Mogra, accelerating the next phase of the Mithi River rejuvenation project and upgrading the city’s stormwater drainage network to handle rainfall exceeding 55 millimetres per hour. The master plan also proposes several nature-based solutions, including the development of sponge parks, bio-retention areas and underground detention and infiltration tanks designed to temporarily store rainwater and gradually release it into

the ground. Officials said these measures are intended to reduce surface runoff and improve groundwater recharge during heavy rainfall. To further minimise waterlogging, the BMC plans to introduce permeable pavements in selected areas, allowing rainwater to seep into the soil instead of flowing directly into drains. The project also includes the installation of interception systems in major drains and nullahs to capture floating plastic waste and other debris before they obstruct stormwater channels. Officials said the initiative is expected to enhance Mumbai’s long-term climate resilience by integrating environmental restoration with modern drainage infrastructure. While acknowledging that no system can completely eliminate flooding during exceptionally heavy monsoon events, they said the proposed interventions are expected to substantially reduce the frequency and severity of urban inundation in vulnerable parts of the city.

Messi's World Cup Message Takes Centre Stage During Argentina's Independence Day Mass Celebration



Buenos Aires: Lionel Messi’s influence on Argentina has long stretched beyond football. On the country’s 210th Independence Day, it reached one of its most symbolic stages yet, as the national captain’s words were read aloud inside Buenos Aires Cathedral during a special Mass attended by President Javier Milei. With Argentina preparing for a FIFA World Cup quarter-final against Switzerland, Archbishop Jorge Garcia Cuerva invoked Messi’s message from the 2022 World Cup triumph in Qatar, using it as a call for national unity on one of the country’s most important public holidays. “Let us keep our shirts on, and with pas-

sion, let us bring to life the message that Lionel Messi once posted on his social media,” Garcia Cuerva told the congregation before reading the captain’s now-famous words. “When we Argentines fight together and stand united, we are capable of achieving whatever we set our minds to.” It was a fitting tribute to a footballer who, more than four years after leading Argentina to World Cup glory in Qatar, continues to embody much more than sporting success. At 39, Messi continues to write new chapters in an international career that has already delivered almost everything imaginable. The captain is featuring in his sixth

consecutive World Cup and has scored in each of Argentina’s five matches at the tournament, leading the Golden Boot race with eight goals. His performances have once again placed Argentina among the favourites to retain the trophy they lifted in Qatar, although a quarter-final against Switzerland now stands between the defending champions and another step towards history. Whether or not Argentina ultimately go all the way, Thursday served as another reminder of Messi’s unique place in the country’s identity. Argentina’s World Cup journey resumes against Switzerland, with Messi once again expected to lead from the front.

PM Announces Big Bash League's Opening Match Will Be Played in India During Australia Visit Together

New Delhi: Australia’s Big Bash League (BBL) will begin its 2026-27 season in India, with the opening match set to be played in Chennai in December, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced on Friday. Albanese made the announcement alongside Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the final day of his three-day visit to Australia, describing it as part of the expanding sporting relationship between the two countries. The BBL is one of the world’s leading franchise T20 competitions and the decision to stage its season opener in Chennai will mark the first time an official BBL match is played outside Australia. While India has hosted international cricket and the Indian Premier League, no overseas domestic cricket league has previously staged an official fixture in the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday visited the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), where he said the venue evokes two emotions for every Indian: the excitement of an India-Australia cricket match and the recognition that cricket is much more than just a sport for both nations. “Stepping into the MCG evokes two simultaneous emotions for any Indian. First, the thrill of an India-Australia match and second, the realisation that, in both our nations, cricket is not merely a sport but a shared passion,” he said. Yet, today, there is no pressure of a ‘last-over finish.’ Instead, there is only the joy of the game, the warmth of our friendship, and the energy of future champions.” Further details, including the teams involved, the venue and the schedule for the cultural festival, are expected to be announced in the coming weeks. Cricket Australia later confirmed



that the season opener would feature the Melbourne Renegades and Perth Scorchers, with the match forming part of a broader effort to expand the league’s presence in one of the world’s biggest cricket markets. The BBL is already broadcast in India through a media rights agreement with JioStar that runs until 2030. Cricket Australia has also explored the possibility of attracting external investment from the region as part of wider discussions around the future of the competition. Alistair Dobson, executive general manager of the

Big Bash Leagues, said taking the competition overseas was aimed at introducing the BBL to new audiences. “The popularity of the BBL extends far beyond our shores,” Dobson told AFR Weekend. “Continuing to build our game in new markets and connect with fans in really powerful ways is about the long-term growth of our league. That shows up in the value of our media rights, the opportunity for sponsors to connect with bigger and growing audiences, and for our players and our clubs to uncover new opportunities.”

