

Meghalaya clears plan for Greater Shillong waste management agency

Shillong, Apr 19: Concerned about disjointed systems and inconsistent service delivery, the Meghalaya Cabinet has authorized the establishment of a specialized agency to simplify garbage management throughout the growing urban area of Shillong. It is anticipated that the proposed Greater Shillong Waste Management Agency, which will be registered as a society, will oversee the collection and disposal of waste in several currently autonomous jurisdictions.

The action is intended to address “gaps in coordination and inefficiencies” that have impacted the city’s overall trash management efficacy, according to officials. According to Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, the decision is a reaction to the demands of fast urbanization and population expansion. “With Shillong witnessing rapid growth and increasing urbanisation, waste collection and management are currently being handled by multiple agencies across different jurisdictions,” he noted, adding that this fragmentation has impacted efficiency. The agency will cover the Greater Shillong Planning Area,



which spans around 288.5 square kilometres. The government said consultations were held with localities within this region before finalis-

ing the proposal, reflecting what it described as a “clear and growing need to enhance the efficiency of garbage collection and waste management”. Authorities clarified that

the agency’s services will not be compulsory. Localities will retain the option to decide whether to use the centralised system or continue with existing arrangements. The

initiative is part of broader efforts by the state government to improve urban infrastructure and service delivery in Shillong, which has seen steady expansion in recent years.

Protest Turns Violent In Assam’s Chirang Along



Guwahati, Apr 19: Along the India-Bhutan border in Assam’s Chirang district, a protest outside the Runikhta Forest Range Office on Thursday night descended into violence, injuring multiple persons and creating tension in the area. Locals, mostly women, gheraoed the forest office late at night to seek the release of those jailed for allegedly encroaching on restricted forest territory, sparking the start of the disturbance. When forest workers used a lathi charge to scatter the crowd, things quickly got out of control. The lathi charge apparently caused serious injuries to a young woman, which increased public outrage. One of the demonstrators claimed, “We were

peacefully protesting for the release of our people, but force was used against us.” Tensions increased the next day as new demonstrations broke out. Demonstrators and security personnel clashed, and there have been allegations of stones being thrown by the crowd, injuring multiple police officers. Security personnel are said to have responded by firing in order to contain the situation. Officials stated that force was used to maintain law and order. With multiple injuries reported on both sides, the situation in the region remains highly volatile. Security has been tightened in and around the area as authorities continue efforts to bring the situation under control.

Assam CM asks Pawan Khera to surrender after Supreme Court denies bail extension

Guwahati, Apr 19: After the Supreme Court of India refused to grant Congressman Pawan Khera transit anticipatory bail in a case involving the Chief Minister’s wife, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma declared on April 17 that Khera should come in Guwahati and surrender to the law. Speaking in Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal, Sarma said that Khera should appear before the

proper Assamese court and pursue the proper legal procedure. “He ought to travel to Guwahati and turn himself in there,” he declared. Khera’s request for an extension of transit anticipatory bail, which had been approved by the Telangana High Court, was denied by the Supreme Court earlier in the day. The matter stems from allegations made by Khera regarding multiple passports



and overseas assets linked to Sarma’s wife, Riniki Bhuyan Sharma. The Sarma family has strongly denied the claims, calling them fabricated and misleading. Meanwhile, Sarma also commented on the

upcoming West Bengal Assembly elections, expressing confidence that the state would witness a political change. Polling is scheduled to be held in two phases on April 23 and April 29, with results to be declared on May 4.

94% of voters cast ballots at home in the Aizawl civic elections prior to the polling on April 21

Aizawl, Apr 12: The Mizoram State Election Commission announced on Thursday that about 94% of eligible voters under the home voting facility—including senior citizens, people with disabilities (PWDs), and those with chronic illnesses—had cast ballots in the upcoming civic polls. Officials report that 2,594 of the 2,768 registered voters in the special category used their right to vote during the four-day home voting process, which ended on Thursday.



General voting for the 19-member urban local body in Aizawl is sched-

uled to be held on April 21, while counting of votes will take place on

April 27. A total of 68 candidates, including 28 women, are contesting the elections. The Zoram People’s Movement (ZPM), Mizo National Front (MNF), and Congress have fielded 19 candidates each, while the BJP has nominated 11 candidates. The home voting initiative is aimed at ensuring inclusive participation by enabling vulnerable sections of voters to exercise their democratic rights from their residences.

The Speaker of the Arunachal Assembly self-enumerates for the 2027 Census



Itanagar, Apr 19: Speaker of the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly, Tesam Pongte, has completed his self-enumeration for the upcoming Population Census 2027 to encourage citizen participation. This initiative aims to raise awareness about the Census’s importance for policy-making, resource allocation, and development planning. The

Speaker emphasized the role of accurate data in addressing diverse needs and urged citizens to participate by completing their self-enumeration and co-operating with enumerators. He highlighted that collective participation is crucial for the Census’s success, enhancing data reliability and supporting inclusive national development strategies.

Tripura CM declares it a “Black Day” for democracy and accuses the opposition of having a “anti-women mindset”

Agartala, Apr 19: The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, which called for an increase of Lok Sabha seats to 816 and a 33 percent reservation for women in legislatures, was defeated in the Lok Sabha on Friday after failing to obtain the necessary two-thirds majority. 298 of the 528 members that cast ballots supported the bill, while 230 opposed it. A minimum of 352 votes were needed to enact the law. Manik Saha, the chief minister of Tripura, responded to the event by calling it a “Black Day” for Indian democracy and accusing opposition parties of having a “anti-women mindset.” Saha claimed in a statement that opposition parties’ lack of commitment to women’s political empowerment was the reason the measure failed to pass. Additionally, he said that the Congress, Trinamool Congress (TMC), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Samajwadi Party (SP), and other members of

the INDIA alliance had united to block a bill intended to increase the presence of women in government. In advance of the 2029 general elections, the proposed amendment aimed to operationalize a 33 percent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative legislatures. Following a delimitation process based on the 2011 Census, it also contained provisions to expand the Lok Sabha’s strength from the current 543 MPs to 816. To accommodate reserved seats, a similar enlargement was suggested for state and Union Territory assemblies. Saha saw the bill’s failure as a blow to initiatives to increase the number of women in legislative bodies. He claimed that the result might have political ramifications for upcoming elections, especially for female voters. The government’s efforts to increase women’s representation in elected bodies, a topic that has been debated for decades, have suffered a major parlia-



mentary defeat with the bill’s rejection. Whether the administration would rein-

roduce the law in a revised version has not yet been made clear.

In Brief

Over Rs 7 crore drugs seized

Guwahati: In a significant operation against drug trafficking, Mizoram Police have seized heroin and methamphetamine worth over Rs 7 crore across two districts in a series of raids conducted between April 10 and 16. Eight individuals, including four Myanmar nationals, were arrested during these operations. The most recent seizure occurred on April 13 in Champhai district, where police recovered 8 kg of methamphetamine valued at Rs 6.4 crore from three suspects, among them two Myanmar nationals. On the same day, authorities also confiscated 71 grams of heroin, worth over Rs 14 lakh, from a vehicle driven by another Myanmar national. Previous operations included the recovery of 104 grams of heroin from a 25-year-old man in Khawzawl district and additional heroin amounts from various suspects at different locations.

Flood relief drill ‘Exercise Jal Rahat’ in Guwahati

Guwahati: The Indian Army conducted a large-scale joint flood relief exercise, “Exercise Jal Rahat,” at IIT Guwahati to enhance disaster response capabilities. Organized by the Red Horns Division, the drill involved collaboration between the Army, NDRF, SDRF, and SSB, focusing on evacuation protocols and operational modalities during floods. It simulated real-life scenarios with stranded civilians, showcasing rescue operations using boats, advanced technology, and drones for aerial surveillance. The event underscored the importance of inter-agency cooperation for effective disaster response and aligning procedures among stakeholders. The exercise was witnessed by senior Army officials, representatives of state administration, Central Armed Police Forces, and disaster management organisations, along with nearly 800 attendees, including cadets from NCC and NSS and students from various educational institutions in Guwahati.

Internet services restored in five Manipur districts

Imphal: Manipur government has lifted the temporary suspension of mobile internet and data services in five districts—Imphal West, Imphal East, Thoubal, Kakching, and Bishnupur—following a review of the law and order situation. The initial suspension, imposed on April 7 amid security concerns, affected various services, including courts, healthcare, education, and essential utilities. The decision to restore services, made under Rule 3 of the Temporary Suspension of Telecommunication Services Rules, 2024, is aimed at addressing public inconvenience. Citizens are urged to use these services responsibly to prevent future restrictions. The state government has urged citizens to exercise restraint and responsibility while using internet services and social media platforms, cautioning that misuse could lead to future restrictions.

TMC filed a complaint against Himanta Biswa, the chief minister of Assam

The All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) has filed a complaint with the Election Commission of India (ECI) against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, alleging that he made “communally charged, inciteful and divisive” remarks during an election rally in West Bengal.

Guwahati, Apr 19: Himanta Biswa Sarma, the chief minister of Assam, has been the subject of a complaint by the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) to the electoral Commission of India (ECI). The TMC claims that Sarma made “communally charged, inciteful and divisive” remarks during an electoral rally in West Bengal. TMC leader Derek O’Brien accused Sarma of making provocative and defamatory remarks about West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on April 16 while campaigning in Cooch Behar in a letter to the poll authority. Sarma also implied that Banerjee fears the establishment of a BJP government in the state because of a potential beef ban, according to the complaint. Additionally, he allegedly made assertions about smuggling and the opening of beef shops in particular places, as well as connecting the consumption of beef to particular populations. These comments were described by the TMC as “baseless, vexatious, and motivated.” The party contended

that such remarks encourage religious enmity and communal discord in addition to political criticism. The TMC claimed in their submission that the comments would incite animosity and mistrust toward a specific community and possibly interfere with the peaceful conduct of elections. The complaint further accused Sarma of criminal intimidation and making unverified allegations, stating that his comments violate provisions of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). It also cited legal provisions related to promoting enmity between groups, outraging religious sentiments, and undue influence during elections under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Representation of the People Act. Seeking immediate intervention, the TMC urged the ECI to issue a show-cause notice to Sarma and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), initiate strict action, and direct authorities to register an FIR. The party also called for preventive measures to ensure that such statements are not repeated during the ongoing election campaign. Responding to the allegations, Sarma said he was not concerned about the complaint. “Mamata didi has filed a complaint against me, but I am not scared,” he said. West Bengal is set to go to polls in two phases on April 21 and April 29, with results scheduled to be announced on May 4.

TMC falsely asserting that if the BJP wins the Bengal elections, fish eating will cease: Himanta



Guwahati, Apr 19: Himanta Biswa Sarma, the chief minister of Assam, accused the TMC on Thursday of fabricating assertions that if the BJP wins the West Bengal assembly elections, it will cease eating meat and fish. Speaking at an election

rally here in north Bengal to promote BJP candidates, Sarma claimed that in Assam, which is ruled by the saffron party, one can consume as much non-vegetarian cuisine as they like. According to him, eating beef is the sole restriction in

Assam. There are no restrictions when it comes to eating fish and pork in Dhubri or Goalpara,” Sarma stated. “(CM) Mamata Banerjee is worried that once a BJP government is formed in West Bengal, the beef trade here will stop,” he

alleged. The Assam chief minister also claimed that the Trinamool Congress (TMC) wants cattle smuggling to Bangladesh to “continue so that they can fill their pockets”. Central investigating agencies, including the CBI and

the Enforcement Directorate, have been probing alleged cattle smuggling from West Bengal to Bangladesh. Sarma said West Bengal requires a government capable of providing proper “treatment” to Bangladeshi immigrants, who entered the state illegally. “We have to make the BJP victorious in West Bengal in this election to ensure this,” he said. Sarma said that the BJP government in Assam has ensured that Bangladeshi Muslims do not illegally occupy land in the northeastern state. “We evicted them from illegally occupied land,” he said. Noting that Assam government employees get 50 per cent dearness allowance, Sarma also said despite West Bengal being a much bigger state, government employees here receive “only 22 per cent DA”. Elections to the 294-member West Bengal assembly will be held in two phases - on April 23 and April 29. Votes will be counted on May 4.

Manipur CM starts reaching out to Ukhrul, and the villagers report problems with the roads and water

Imphal, Apr 19: Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh set off on a road trip to Ukhrul district as part of ongoing outreach initiatives to address major infrastructural issues and enhance collaboration with distant villages. He spoke with locals in Shangkai village, which is located along the Imphal–Ukhrul road. The village’s Kuki women voiced their concerns about the unreliability of the drinking water and demanded quick action. Singh gave them his word that the matter would be prioritized and resolved once he returned to Imphal. Later, a sizable crowd gathered in Thawai Kuki village to greet the Chief Minister, who was accompanied by MLAs and top officials. Villagers brought up issues with water supply, road connectivity, and access to medical care during talks.



Singh reaffirmed the government’s dedication to enhancing basic infrastructure and promised to give priority to the

issues brought up. Singh stated in a message posted on social media that the government is still committed

to making sure that all areas of the state receive necessary services. “Efforts will continue to ensure equitable development

across villages,” he continued. As part of a larger effort to increase participation at the local level, the Ukhrul tour comes after comparable car trips over important national routes to Jiribam and Senapati districts. Officials said Singh will halt at Ramva to review progress on a National Highway project before proceeding to Ukhrul. He is scheduled to hold meetings with Tangkhul community leaders and district officials, including the Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police, at the DRDA conference hall. The visit also includes inspection of an ongoing rigid pavement construction project and the inauguration of the Shirui Heritage Project at Shirui village. Singh and his team are expected to conclude the visit after a lunch meeting at Shirui.

Gaurav Gogoi calls for an urgent women’s quota



Guwahati, Apr 19: On April 16, Gaurav Gogoi presented the Congress party’s position on important electoral reforms, advocating for the prompt adoption of women’s reservation without tying it to delimitation or census procedures. The proposal put forth by the Congress and other opposition parties, according to Gogoi in a statement posted on his X handle, was “simple” and called for the unconditional enforcement of women’s reservation while also accelerating the national census to guarantee accurate representation of communities, including OBCs, SCs, and STs. Additionally, he emphasized the necessity of developing a broad national consensus on delimitation, saying that this process must protect the nation’s unity and federal system. Gogoi took aim at the BJP, accusing the ruling party of “mixing up” several problems and trying to impose what he called a “unfair delimitation” while postponing the caste census under the guise of enacting women’s reservation. The comments are made in the midst of a political controversy concerning the order of women’s reservations, changes to the census, and the process of delimitation in advance of upcoming elections.

In Imphal West, a Manipur torch rally was stopped following a fight

Imphal, Apr 19: On April 16, tensions in Imphal West, Manipur, increased as police troops at Singjamei halted a sizable Meira rally that was planned in relation to the Tronglaobi incident. The attack in Tronglaobi village, Bishnupur district, on April 7, where a suspected militant strike killed two young siblings and gravely injured their mother, served as the impetus for the rally. A strong explosion was reportedly caused by a projectile, thought to be a rocket, striking a civilian home in Moirang Tronglaobi. A five-year-old boy and his five-month-old sister were recognized as the victims. The projectile, which highlighted persistent tensions along the hill-valley boundary abutting Churachandpur district, was allegedly fired from neighboring hill slopes more than three kilometers distant, according to locals. The rally began from Lilong and moved towards Singjamei, drawing a significant number of participants under the aegis of the All Manipur United Clubs’ Organisation (AMUCO), with support from several other groups. Protesters raised slogans including “Go back Central Force” and “Long live Manipur”, while demanding the arrest of suspected Kuki militants linked to the Tronglaobi bomb attack. Security had been tightened earlier in the day in sensitive areas such as Kakwa and Singjamei, with police and central forces deployed in anticipation of unrest. The rally was halted at Singjamei, leading to a confrontation between demonstrators and security personnel. Officials used tear gas shells to disperse the crowd after the situation turned volatile. Several protesters reportedly sustained



injuries during the clash. The agitation continued into the night before authorities brought it under control. The protest followed an earlier round of talks between the government and a Joint Action Committee (JAC) formed after the Tronglaobi incident, which ended without a final agreement. The meeting, held at the official residence of Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh, was attended by senior ministers, MLAs, JAC members and families of the victims. According to JAC representatives, the delegation presented a charter of demands, including a military crackdown on suspected Kuki militant groups, redeployment of central forces from valley areas to the hills, and a judicial inquiry into the role of security personnel at the time of the incident. The committee also sought compensation and protection for the victims’ families.

JAC member Moirangthem Gouro said the government “responded very well and listened patiently”, but noted that “in certain points, they couldn’t reach understanding”. Both sides agreed to continue discussions. The committee has also demanded the immediate arrest of those responsible for the killing of two children and injuries to their mother. It stated that the families would not claim the bodies of the deceased and would continue a blockade along Tiddim Road until their demands are met. In a statement issued later, the chief minister expressed “profound grief” over the incident and assured that the investigation is being carried out with “utmost seriousness”. He said those responsible would face strict action in accordance with the law and reaffirmed the government’s commitment to delivering justice.

Pawan Khera is asked to attend the Assam court after the Supreme Court denies him temporary respite

Guwahati, Apr 19: On April 17, the Supreme Court denied Congressman Pawan Khera temporary protection from potential coercion in a case involving accusations against the wife of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. Khera was instructed by the judge to apply for anticipatory bail in an Assamese court. After hearing arguments from prominent attorney Abhishek Singhvi, who was representing Khera, a panel of Justices J K Maheshwari and Atul S Chandurkar declared that Assamese courts should handle the case. Additionally, it requested that the court in question consider the case as soon as possible and not be swayed by any unfavorable remarks already made by the Telangana High Court or the Supreme Court. The complaint is based on statements made by Khera at a news conference on April 5 in which he claimed that Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, the Chief Minister’s wife, has foreign property and held numerous



passports that were not included in Sarma’s election affidavit prior to the Assembly elections on April 9. Sarma and his spouse have rejected the allegations as untrue and made up. The Telangana High Court’s ruling granting Khera one-week transit anticipatory bail was previously halted by the Supreme Court on April 15. The Assam government’s Solicitor General Tushar Mehta contended

that the Telangana High Court lacked territorial jurisdiction and that Khera’s case did not warrant going to that court. An FIR against Khera was registered at the Guwahati Crime Branch police station under provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, including Section 175 (false statement in connection with an election), Section 35, and Section 318 (cheating).

Government workers in Arunachal protest pension uncertainty by taking to the streets

Itanagar, Apr 19: On April 17, the Confederation of Service Associations of Arunachal Pradesh (CoSAAP) and its wing, the National Movement for Old Pension Scheme, organized a sizable demonstration in Itanagar to call for the reinstatement of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) for state government workers. Participants in the “Itanagar Chalo Maha Rally” argued that the New Pension Scheme (NPS) should be discontinued because it does not guarantee retirement income. Gov-



ernment workers and their families participated in the protest in large numbers. Speaking to the media, CoSAAP president Likha Tech stated that despite numerous memorandums and

arguments made to the state government over the years, the demand for the reinstatement of OPS has not been met. He criticised the NPS as being dependent on market-linked returns, warning

that it exposes employees to financial uncertainty. “The future of employees and their families is tied to market fluctuations under NPS,” he said. Tech added that similar demands to roll back NPS and restore OPS have been raised in several other states and Union Territories, reflecting wider dissatisfaction among government employees. The rally began from the RK Mission Hospital compound and concluded at IG Park, passing through key routes in the capital.

The Supreme Court rejects Anil Ambani’s argument on the classification of loans as “fraud ”

New Delhi, Apr 19: Industrialist Anil Ambani’s appeal against a group of banks’ designation of his loan accounts as “fraudulent” was rejected by the Supreme Court on Thursday. IDBI, Indian Overseas Bank, and Bank of Baroda have all been accused of embezzling more than ₹30,000 crore in public funds. The Bombay High Court’s unfavorable remarks against the billionaire will not affect the proceedings before a Mumbai civil court, the Supreme Court stated, adding that it was not offering a view on Ambani’s request to resolve the conflict with the banks.

Chief Justice Surya Kant, Justice Joymalya Bagchi, and Justice Vipul M. Pancholi’s bench issued the verdict while rejecting Ambani’s appeal contesting a Bombay High Court division bench’s February 23, 2026, ruling that refused to overturn the banks’ decision. Enraged, Ambani launched the current appeal after the division bench issued the ruling while lifting the stay put in place by a high court single-judge panel that had halted the accounts’ designation as “fraudulent.” Led by a team of senior lawyers Kapil Sibal, Shyam Divan and Narender Hooda, the industrialist sought to challenge the banks’



decision on the ground that the auditing was done by a person who was neither a qualified chartered accountant nor a competent auditor. However, the apex court said the division bench of the high court had gone into the same averments raised before it on the technical qualifications of the forensic auditor who conducted the audit.

Locals in Margherita, Assam, express concern about the potential for tourism being neglected

Guwahati, Apr 19: Despite the area’s abundant natural and cultural riches, the residents of Margherita in Assam’s Tinsukia district have expressed deep discontent about the region’s ongoing disregard for its enormous tourism potential. The 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly Constituency, which is frequently referred to as a “Mini India” because of its rich natural resources and different ethnic people, has not yet seen substantial growth in the tourism industry. Locals claim that the expansion of tourism in the area has been hampered by a lack of initiative and concerted efforts from the

state government, local authorities, and relevant agencies.

Margherita is a great place for eco and cultural tourism because of its beautiful tea gardens, the verdant Patkai Hills, the powerful Buridehing River, and its distinctive mix of micro-tribes and civilizations. But these resources These resources are still mostly unexplored, though.

Social worker Debojit Baruah highlighted particular locales, including the Tipong Colliery under Coal India Limited as one of the area’s most scenic. He claimed that because of its natural beauty, hills, and streams, it resembles a

“Mini Darjeeling” and has enormous potential to draw tourists if properly developed. Additionally, Baruah urged local resident Pabitra Margherita, the Union Minister of State for External Affairs and Textiles, to bring up the matter in Parliament and advocate for investments and legislation that would improve Margherita’s tourism infrastructure. Residents believe that with proper planning, promotion, and infrastructure development, Margherita could emerge as a major tourism hub in Upper Assam, contributing significantly to the local economy and employment generation.

In Wokha, Nagaland establishes the Doyang Wildlife Division



Kohima, Apr 19: The Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in Nagaland inaugurated the Doyang Wildlife Division on April 16, alongside a control room to tackle the rising human-elephant conflicts (HEC) in the area. The event in Wokha, attended by Minister C L John, highlighted the importance of translating environmental awareness into action. John emphasized the need for a balance between forests, wildlife, and human needs, expressing optimism for a future shift in public attitudes towards conservation. John urged communities to cooperate in minimizing wildlife damage and assured that response mechanisms will be established. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Vedpal Singh indicated that the new division’s formation was a necessary response to increasing HEC incidents, viewing it as a significant step toward immediate interventions. Principal Secretary Y. Kikheto Sema stressed the importance of awareness and long-term planning, confirming efforts to secure external funding for comprehensive solutions. The Doyang Wildlife Division, derived from the former Doyang Plantation Division, will encompass Wokha, Mokokchung, and Zunheboto forest divisions, aiming to enhance conservation efforts and provide a dedicated framework for managing wildlife conflicts.

In Lucknow and Ghaziabad, twin fires destroy 700 shanties and kill two children

Lucknow, Apr 19: In a tragic incident in Lucknow, two children died, and eight individuals are missing following a devastating fire that ravaged over 400 shanties late Wednesday night. This fire broke out in the Vikas Nagar area, where most residents are women employed as house helps. According to eyewitness accounts, at the time of the blaze, over 1,000 women, 300 children, and 200 men were asleep in their homes. Sadly, the fire claimed the lives of two-year-old twins, Swati Kumari and Ayushi Kumari, along with the deaths of over 40 goats within the vicinity. The Lucknow fire was accompanied by another

blaze in Ghaziabad, which occurred around noon on Thursday and destroyed approximately 300 shanties; however, there were no reported casualties there.

After the disaster in Lucknow, affected residents clashed with a builder, claiming he is the owner of the land they have occupied for the past 25 years without permission. Residents believed the land to be government property until pressure from the builder intensified in the days leading up to the fire. They alleged that he had been visiting frequently, urging them to vacate the premises.

Meghalaya’s chief minister praises the women’s quota bill and anticipates more state seats

Shillong, Apr 19: Conrad K. Sangma, the chief minister of Meghalaya, has praised the Women’s Reservation Bill as an important step toward improved democratic representation and anticipated benefits for the state in Parliament following delimitation. On April 16, the Center presented three measures to the Lok Sabha that would create a delimitation commission and modify the women’s quota law.

The Bill, according to Sangma, is a “very welcome step” that satisfies a long-standing desire. Sangma, the chief of the matrilineal state where women play important social responsibilities, said, “This is something that should have been done a long time back, but we must give credit to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for this bold decision.” He highlighted low female participation in Parliament and state assemblies, arguing the Bill would bridge this gap. “This will be a very important democratic reform and will allow greater representation of women at the top level, enabling them to take decisions that will benefit society at large,” he added. Sangma anticipates



more seats for Meghalaya, based on its population and terrain challenges. “I expect that seats will increase in Meghalaya, and I feel that the Government of India and the delimitation commission will positively look into this aspect,” he stated. The CM urged caution in linking delimitation with the Bill’s rollout.

“Both need to go hand in hand. Discussions will take place, and we hope the process will be managed in a way that any disruption is minimised,” he noted. He ruled out seat cuts for any state, expecting Parliament’s total strength to rise.

Rahul Gandhi’s dual citizenship case is ordered by the Allahabad High Court

New Delhi, Apr 19: The Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court ruled today that the accusation that Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, has dual citizenship calls for an investigation. The Uttar Pradesh government is instructed to either carry out the investigation on its own or refer it to a central agency.

The ruling followed a petition filed by BJP employee S Vignesh Shishir contesting a special MP/MLA court in Lucknow’s January 28 ruling that had denied his request to register a formal complaint against the Congress leader.

The lower court had ruled that it lacked the authority to make decisions about citizenship. In accordance with the terms of

the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the Official Secrets Act, the Foreigners Act, and the Passport Act, the petitioner, a resident of Karnataka, has requested the registration of a FIR and a thorough investigation. According to the petitioner, Rahul Gandhi is unqualified to run for office in India and cannot serve as a member of the Lok Sabha since he possesses documentation and emails from the British government proving his British citizenship.

The complaint was first brought before a Rae Bareilly special MP/MLA court. The case was moved to Lucknow by the high court on December 17, 2025. After the Lucknow court rejected his plea, the petitioner moved to the high court.



Raghav Chadha’s jab at the Rajya Sabha’s AAP

Leader not present, deputy missing

New Delhi, Apr 19: Raghav Chadha, an MP for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), took a jab at his party’s leadership in the Rajya Sabha on Friday, pointing out his own presence while highlighting the lack of important leaders in the Upper House.

Speaking during the proceedings, Chadha noted that despite his recent removal from the position of deputy leader, neither the party’s leader nor its recently selected deputy leader were present in the House. “My party’s leader isn’t in the House.

My party’s recently chosen deputy leader is also absent from the House. I am in the House as the recently deposed



deputy leader. Chadha was recently removed as AAP’s deputy leader in the Rajya Sabha, with the party also allegedly curtailing his speaking time in the House.

The development had sparked speculation about differences within the party over the decision.

Sanjay Singh is the leader of the AAP in the Rajya Sabha and MP from Punjab Ashok Kumar Mittal has replaced Chadha as the deputy leader in the Upper House.

NCB advocates for a network-based campaign against drug trafficking in Tripura

Agartala, Apr 19: On April 17, Anurag Garg, Director General of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), reviewed Tripura’s anti-drug strategy, advocating for a network-centric approach to combat drug trafficking. During a high-level meeting with the state’s Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF), Garg emphasized the importance of dismantling organized drug syndicates instead of focusing solely on isolated arrests. He called for increased action against illegal cannabis cultivation and stressed the need to target major traffickers while ensuring robust prosecution of kingpins. Garg suggested invoking

the provisions of the PITNDPS Act to deter habitual offenders legally. He also highlighted the importance of leveraging technology in investigations, proposing the use of NATGRID for comprehensive inquiries, including financial tracking to disrupt the economic foundation of drug networks. The meeting aimed to enhance the efficacy of the ANTF in leading anti-drug operations, urging officials to make NCORD meetings outcome-oriented and to utilize State-level Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) platforms for better inter-agency cooperation.

PM’s last-minute plea to lawmakers to support the women’s quota before a crucial vote

New Delhi, Apr 19: Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a last-minute plea on Friday to all MPs to support the Women’s Reservation Bill as the special session of Parliament on the three proposed bills continues and Lok Sabha MPs assemble in the Lower House to cast their votes. He claimed that “crores of women are watching us” as the lawmakers get ready to vote on the important legislation later in the evening. PM Modi stated in a post on X that Parliament is currently debating revising the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam and that all “logical responses” have been provided to clear up any misunderstandings and all issues brought up throughout the discussion. Notably, the BJP-led NDA government lacks the two-thirds majority needed to approve the constitutional modification on its own. It has connected the reservation to a scheduled delimitation operation intended to increase Lok Sabha seats. PM Modi made what appeared to be a last-minute plea, stating that the subject of women’s reservation had been postponed for decades for political reasons and emphasizing that it was now time for women, who comprise half of the nation’s population, to have their proper representation in decision-making. Following a lengthy debate that started on Thursday, the Lok Sabha will vote on the measure this evening. A defective and unfair delimitation bill is allegedly being pushed through while using the women’s quota as a “smokescreen,” according to the Congress-led opposition, especially parties from southern states.



However, PM Modi contended in his post that “it is not right that women in India have such limited representation in this area, even after so many decades of independence.” He urged all political parties to support the amendment sensitively and refrain from doing any measures that would offend women. PM Modi continued, urging universal support for the law, saying, “Crores of women are watching us, our intent and our decisions.” In another post minutes after his first, the Prime Minister urged MPs to reflect on their conscience and consider the women in their own families, saying they should not deprive India’s “Nari Shakti” of new opportunities. He added that if the amendment is passed unanimously, it would further empower women and strengthen democracy, calling on lawmakers to “come together today to create history.” The Women’s Reservation Act 2023, which provides a 33 per cent quota for women in legislatures, was enacted on Thursday to facilitate the proposed amendment being discussed in Parliament.

The 2023 Act was notified effective from April 16, amid parliamentary debates to amend the law for implementation in 2029. An official cited “technicalities” for enforcing the law, although the reservation cannot be implemented in the current House. Although the Constitution amendment Bill became law, it did not become part of the Constitution as it was not enforced by the government. The notification specified April 16, 2026, as the date for the Act’s provisions to

come into force. In September 2023, Parliament passed the ‘Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam’, commonly known as the Women’s Reservation Act, to enhance women’s representation in legislative bodies. The Act reserves one-third of the seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative Assemblies.

Under the 2023 law, the reservation will not be enforceable before 2034, as it is contingent upon the completion of the delimitation exercise post-2027 Census. The government has introduced three bills: The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirty-First Amendment) Bill, 2026, The Delimitation Bill, 2026 and The Union Territories Laws (Amendment Bill), 2026, to ensure the women quota can be implemented in 2029.

EDITORIAL

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Editorial

A tenuous truce

The talks between the US and Ukraine on November 23, 2025, in Geneva resulted in an updated version of the original Trump 28-point peace plan, aimed at addressing Ukrainian and European concerns regarding bias toward Russia in the initial draft. The discussions indicate a strong diplomatic effort by Washington to resolve the ongoing war, while ensuring Ukraine’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security guarantees remain intact. The original plan was deemed unlikely to succeed due to its alignment with Russia’s demands, prompting the US to develop a more balanced framework. The US delegation, led by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, engaged with Ukraine’s delegation headed by Chief of Staff Andrii Yermak. Both sides reported productive exchanges and agreed to continue intensive discussions. Ukrainian officials also consulted with UK, France, and Germany national security advisers, which led to the formulation of a European counter-proposal that emphasized Ukrainian sovereignty and security commitments, especially against the backdrop of initial American proposals perceived as favorable to Russia. Key issues with the original plan included demands for Ukraine to relinquish control over Crimea, Luhansk, and Donetsk, as well as a constitutional pledge against NATO membership and significant troop reductions. These elements were seen as harmful to Ukraine’s sovereignty and security. A push for amnesty for wartime actions and gradual lifting of sanctions on Russia further strained acceptance among Ukraine and its allies, who prioritized accountability for war crimes. Following the Geneva talks, the US modified its proposal, reducing the points and eliminating several contentious demands.

For those who are frantic to reduce benefits in order to pay for defense, have a question: who specifically are you willing to deprive?

These days, the benefits budget is a magical money tree. When asked how they would pay for their extravagant promises, such as tax cuts, increased police presence, harsher penalties, and greater marriage incentives, Conservatives and Faragists consistently respond with “welfare.” The amounts are huge. The party is adamant that “only the Conservatives will cut welfare spending by £23 billion and get Britain working again.”The Labour peer George Robertson’s klaxon this week, which demanded a reduction in benefits to fund defense, was more surprising. The former head of NATO stated, “We cannot defend Britain with an ever-expanding welfare budget,” hoping to use this lucrative opportunity to finance defense. James Murray, the chancellor’s deputy, stated that there is no “zero-sum game” between these two budgets, therefore it’s good to see the government give him a hard slap.“The benefit budget is out of control” runs the risk of becoming a widely known truth that TV interviewers casually toss at any minister who happens to walk by. Ruth Curtice, the chief executive of the Resolution Foundation, is the source of factual information. Her predecessor, Torsten Bell, is currently the minister of pensions and claims that his opinions have not changed since entering the government. Benefits as a percentage of GDP have consistently remained between 10% and 11%, according to



Bell. Curtice reiterates, “It’s not out of control.” “When you look at working-age benefits, it’s pretty flat.” The triple lock, which is intended to raise pensions independent of an individual’s income or demands, and demographics—an growth in the number of retirees—are the main causes of rising pension expenditures. As the pension age rises, the expenditure for working-age benefits increases as more elderly people who are unable to work and are awaiting their pension begin to receive sick benefits. Are they scavengers? Curtice reminds us of the impact of George Osborne’s £15 billion cuts in 2015 for those who are enjoying Kemi Badenoch’s promise

of £23 billion in cuts. 450,000 children fell into poverty as a result of his two-child rule, and many more were added by his overall benefit cap. They criticize Labour for failing to achieve a £5bn cut last year, but this was a poorly considered proposal aimed at addressing the increase in young people claiming mental health-related sickness benefits. Comparative data from other countries indicate higher spending on health benefits. Politicians should be challenged to specify what cuts they would implement to finance new spending initiatives. Stephen Timms, the minister overseeing social security, emphasizes that his review of disability benefits will not involve

cuts, though reform is necessary. He highlights the positive impact of abolishing the two-child limit on 7,000 of his constituents. Timms seeks reform supported by various groups, mirroring the successful subtle reforms by education secretary Bridget Phillipson. In light of bleak employment prospects, they aim to assist more young people into jobs through upcoming reviews by former health secretary Alan Milburn. Robertson’s recent criticisms of defence spending were intended to pressure the government, citing an underprepared national security situation. He pointed out treasury mismanagement, although these military critiques overlook

the general inefficiencies within defence spending. The National Audit Office has repeatedly failed to validate Ministry of Defence accounts, revealing substantial overspending on various major projects, including the delayed and likely scrapped £6bn Ajax vehicles. Robertson himself contributed to past procurement failures while serving as defence minister. His complaints about leadership complacency could reflect a deeper issue with the defence establishment’s traditional approaches. The need for cautious defence investment has become more critical amidst new threats. Moreover, the International Monetary Fund has challenged the notion that defence spending fosters economic growth, indicating it actually contributes to inflation and deteriorates public finances with limited economic benefits. Effective spending is vital, with most welfare funds reaching their intended beneficiaries compared to defence allocations. One frequently used case for defence spending is that it spurs growth. But that myth was blown out of the water this week by the International Monetary Fund’s latest World Economic Outlook, which warned that it raises inflation and worsens public finances, with only a “modest” rise in output. Spending more on defence is no use unless it is spent well. At least nearly everything dispersed by the Department for Work and Pensions arrives in the pockets of its intended targets.

Western nations require more cunning strategies, whether they are against Iran or Russia

The IMF and the Chancellor of the Exchequer concur. The biggest blow to the British economy in decades is about to occur. Sanctions on Gulf oil exports will exacerbate this collateral damage caused by the US war on Iran and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Four years of sanctions against Russia over Ukraine have already crippled Britain. Its prime minister may be removed, its government’s popularity is collapsing, and its economic growth is about to be stifled. Sanctions were meant to have this effect on the enemy, not the UK. Vladimir Putin was taught the mistake of his ways by their extraordinary severity. His friends were supposed to beg him to quit. However, in the years following punishments. His friends were supposed to beg him to quit. However, Russia’s economic development outpaced Britain’s in the years following the imposition of sanctions. In the meantime, the goal of the 2010s sanctions against Iran was to stop its nuclear development. They seemed to support it. They are now intended to overthrow the ayatollahs and weaken the Tehrani government. That doesn’t appear to be very likely. Currently, the US and other western governments frequently impose economic sanctions on over 30 nations worldwide. They include Afghanistan, North Korea, Myanmar, and Belarus in addition to Iran. The one thing that many of these governments have in common is that they are still governed by the same regimes that were in place at the time of the sanctions; in other words, the sanctions have failed to destabilize them. Additionally, the anti-Western Sino-Russian trade alliance has been reinforced by sanctions. They have led many nations to support the developing world’s Brics (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa)



alliance in opposition to the G7 of the West. They have been remarkably ineffective. The Economic Weapon, by Nicholas Mulder, one of the few academic studies of sanctions, charts the historical futility of using trade to threaten an enemy. Except in the case of tiny states, trade always finds its own way out. Sanctions also have little impact on countries immune to internal democracy. They were ineffective against the fascist powers before the second world war, merely pushing them towards self-sufficiency. “The history of sanctions,” says Mulder, “is a history of disappointments.” Enthusiasts always reply that “this time it will be different”. It never is. Defence thinktanks steer strangely clear of this subject. The reason is that, to the military mind, sanctions are an aggression that sounds tough but conveniently avoids actual force. Liberals like them as they seem a macho alternative to pacifism. Conservatives like them as they can be dressed in tough talk as “savage, swingeing,

crippling” without sounding too bloodcurdlingly violent. Above all, strategists espouse sanctions as preferable to bombing as a means of demonstrating power. They exhibit destruction and damage, while avoiding any need to show actual results. For decades, they have enabled the wealthy west to exert some sort of post-imperial reach, to look as if it cares, but not too much. If anyone gets hurt, it is mostly the silent poor. In truth, sanctions have a far more serious consequence, and one that acts directly against the supposed objective of regime change. The impediments to trade and the freezing of contacts with target nations inevitably promote the exodus of their mercantile and professional classes. This is beyond any repression exerted by the regime. The flight of academics, engineers, scientists and the commercial community in general from Iran has been devastating. Since Iran’s 1979 revolution, the country has lost millions of its citizens to emigration.

As of 2021, more than four million Iranians were living abroad, and reports suggest that a large proportion of these are from the educated middle classes. This has immeasurably weakened the forces that might conceivably have replaced the existing regime. It may have sustained Europe and the US’s medical and other services and created a lively diaspora of expatriates, but sanctions have hollowed out the educated class, and the money that could bolster dissent and result in a refreshed democracy. These were the people who responded to Iran’s eight-year liberalising regime of Mohammad Khatami. In Russia, similar groups came out of their shell in the 1990s, after the fall of the iron curtain. They welcomed outsiders to Moscow. They had the confidence to argue with them and with each other about their country’s future, and it was briefly exhilarating. All countries need such groups to help stir debate and challenge the seats of power. Those who did not flee Putin must suffer both him and the west’s ostracism – and now the fanatical Russophobia. We are like McCarthyites, demanding Russian performers denounce Putin before going on stage. Both Russia and Iran have seen dissent stifled due to emigration and sanctions. For effective regime change without military intervention, the West should utilize soft power, fostering political opposition through support, trade, academic, and cultural exchanges. Sanctions are counterproductive, as they lead to isolation and repression. Change in authoritarian regimes often occurs when internal elite power structures weaken. Historically, Britain has had a natural affinity with Russia and Iran, which should be restored through friendship rather than sanctions.

Assam Delimitation 2023

The political landscape of Assam is experiencing significant transformation in anticipation of the 2026 Assembly elections, driven by the delimitation exercise completed in 2023 by the Election Commission of India. This exercise has redrawn electoral boundaries and aimed to rectify historical disparities in representation that have existed for decades, marking a critical institutional intervention since the previous revision in 1976. The total number of Assembly constituencies remains at 126 with 14 Lok Sabha seats; however, internal reconfigurations have altered electoral dynamics by redistributing political influence across different regions, communities, and demographic groups, ensuring a more accurate representation based on the 2001 Census data. At its essence, the delimitation seeks to realign equal representation by addressing imbalances in voter distribution, exacerbated by uneven population growth and shifting settlement patterns. As the number of districts in Assam grew from 10 to 31, inconsistencies in constituency sizes and voter densities emerged. The Election Commission applied a structured methodology that clustered districts according to population density with a permissible variation margin, striving to construct a more balanced electoral framework that reduces overrepresentation of densely populated areas while safeguarding the interests of sparsely populated regions. This effort aims to actualize the democratic principle of “one person, one vote.” One of the foremost changes is the enhanced representation for tribal and indigenous communities, particularly in the Bodoland Territorial Region, where Assembly seats increased from 11 to 15. This adjustment acknowledges long-standing demands for greater political involvement and aligns governance with local aspirations. Furthermore, the increase in reserved constituencies for Scheduled Tribes from 16 to 19 and for Scheduled Castes from 8 to 9 demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity, strengthening the voices of marginalized communities in legislative discussions. However, this delimitation has sparked debate regarding its effects on political balances, especially in areas previously dominated by certain demographic groups. The revised boundaries may lead to a decrease in minority-concentrated seats, prompting political parties to engage in more inclusive, issue-focused strategies instead of relying solely on concentrated voter bases, potentially resulting in a more competitive political atmosphere. The implementation process of the delimitation is notable, characterized by extensive consultations and public hearings involving varied stakeholders, reflecting transparency and participatory engagement essential for the legitimacy of such an exercise. While criticism is inevitable in any delimitation process, the inclusive approach and adherence to legal frameworks under the Representation of the People Act emphasize the process’s institutional integrity. From a governance perspective, the newly drawn constituencies are expected to enhance administrative efficiency by aligning electoral boundaries with current administrative divisions, facilitating better coordination during elections and allowing elected representatives to address local concerns more effectively. The clarity of the new constituencies aims to alleviate logistical challenges and foster accountability, empowering voters to connect directly with their representatives amid a backdrop of geographical and infrastructural complexities. As the political ramifications of the delimitation become apparent, parties are recalibrating their tactics for the 2026 elections, with candidate selection and campaign strategies increasingly influenced by the new electoral map. The focus on indigenous representation corresponds with the state government’s broader goals, led by Himanta Biswa Sarma, to protect local identities while promoting balanced development. The delimitation is framed as part of an overarching vision to ensure that governance is inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of the populace. Ultimately, while the structural modifications resulting from the delimitation are significant, their success will hinge on translating these changes into effective governance outcomes, as mere boundary adjustments cannot solve deeper issues such as economic inequality, unemployment, and social cohesion that demand sustained policy efforts and political commitment.

Israel and India open the next stage of their cooperation, a strategic goldmine

Last week, a notable advancement occurred in Israel-India relations with the arrival of a major Indian business delegation, led by Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal, signifying renewed high-level engagements aimed at strengthening their strategic friendship with a focus on innovation and co-creation. This visit reflects a return to normalcy post-conflict and underscores confidence in Israel’s resilient economy and the longstanding partnership, which is now expanding into new business domains. However, there is a pressing need to transform this renewed engagement into actionable partnerships rather than mere memoranda of understanding (MoUs). India’s unwavering support for Israel during recent conflicts exemplifies their robust ties, with India backing Israel’s right to self-defense amidst various criticisms. Similarly, Israeli officials have made substantial efforts to uphold this partnership, alongside significant visits from Indian leaders that communicated mutual support during challenging times. Over decades, security collaboration has been foundational, with Israel acting as a dependable ally during India’s modern wars and establishing successful

joint ventures, knowledge sharing, and local production, reflective of the strategic cooperation that has paved the way for recent multi-billion dollar defense deals. The current wave of cooperation, particularly in the defense sector, is seen as a model for broader collaboration across sectors like technology, agriculture, renewable energy, and AI, driven by the infrastructural agreements fostered by visits from both nations’ leaders. Notably, Israel and India recently formalized a historic investment-protection agreement, augmenting business climates and mutual investments. Ongoing discussions surrounding a free-trade agreement, coupled with initiatives such as I2U2 and IMEC, further highlight the potential for growth in various sectors. Recent dialogues also produced new frameworks for collaboration in advanced technologies and defense systems, indicating a strategic shift towards integrating more diverse defense entities, including emerging startups that can collaborate on Indian soil. This evolving synergy between Israel’s innovative capabilities and India’s manufacturing prowess, if capitalized upon with urgency, has



the potential to redefine not just the business landscape but also their strategic partnership in the context of shared democratic values and common security threats. The groundwork has been laid for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s upcoming visit to India, raising expectations for an intensified strategic engagement.

ISMA is against the CAFE-3 standards' reduction of flex fuel car incentives

Mumbai: In the most recent draft of the corporate average fuel efficiency (CAFE-3) standards, the Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) has voiced concerns about a significant reduction in incentives for flex fuel vehicles (FFVs), cautioning that the move could slow the adoption of ethanol-based mobility at a time when the nation is struggling with excess production. ISMA Director General Deepak Ballani stated in a letter dated April 13 to Power Secretary Pankaj Agarwal that the most recent draft has lowered the volume derogation factor (VDF) for FFVs to 1.1 from the 1.5 previously suggested. Ballani described this as a “unexpected development” that might deter automakers from introducing such vehicles. An FFV is a car built to run on ethanol blends between E85 and E100, with E85 being 85% ethanol and 15% gasoline and E100 being almost pure ethanol. So far, no company in India has introduced a mass-market FFV. The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) is in charge of CAFE standards, which mandate that automakers maintain their fleet’s average annual carbon emissions within a certain range. Cleaner technologies receive “super credits” through VDFs to aid in achieving these goals. A vehicle’s average emissions can be reduced by using a VDF, which enables a vehicle to be counted as several units in a company’s sales mix. One such vehicle is considered as 1.5 vehicles in compliance, for instance, if the VDF is 1.5. For example, a VDF of 1.5 means one such vehicle is counted as 1.5 vehicles in compliance calculations, improving a carmaker’s overall score. CAFE-2 norms are currently in



force. CAFE-3 norms will come into effect from April 2027 onwards for a period of five years. The latest CAFE-3 draft — shared with stakeholders earlier this month — marks a clear shift in policy stance. In this draft, the BEE has proposed reducing VDFs not just for FFVs but also for strong hybrid vehicles, while retaining higher incentives for electric vehicles. This signals a stronger push towards zero-emission technologies. Ballani, however, argued in his letter that such a move overlooks the immediate challenges facing the ethanol industry. According to him, India currently has excess ethanol production capacity beyond the projected demand for E20 fuel, which is petrol blended with 20 per cent ethanol. This surplus has put financial pressure on distilleries. FFVs are seen as a quick way to increase ethanol consumption. ISMA said there is broad agreement across stakeholders, including the auto industry body SIAM, that enabling FFVs is the most practical near-term solution to absorb surplus ethanol. The association has urged the government to restore the earlier VDF of 1.5 for FFVs and introduce higher incentives for advanced variants such as plug-in hybrid flex fuel vehicles. It also flagged the absence of such technologies in the current draft.

As FPIs withdraw, domestic mutual funds purchase banking stocks

New Delhi: While foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) completed a record selloff in March, domestic mutual funds (MFs) rapidly accumulated blue-chip banking equities. Nuvama Alternative & Quantitative Research’s analysis shows that the banking pack accounted for all five of the top stock acquisitions made by MFs during the month. MFs invested a total of ₹34,800 crore in these names, with a net purchase of ₹15,800 crore in HDFC Bank and ₹6,800 crore in ICI- CI Bank. In the midst of a broader risk-off mood brought on by geopolitical concerns in West Asia, FPIs withdrew approximately ₹60,000 crore



from financial stocks. In March, FPIs sold stocks totaling ₹1.12 trillion, which was their largest monthly outflow to date. On the other hand, domestic MFs made their second-highest monthly purchase of stocks, investing close to ₹90,000 crore. In addition to banks, the most frequently purchased

equities included Shriram Finance, Reliance Industries, Infosys, and Larsen & Toubro. MFs reduced their exposure to Apollo Hospitals, Grasim Industries, and Power Grid Corporation of India on the selling side. The benchmark Nifty saw its biggest decrease in six years during the month,

falling 11%. With a 17% drop, the Bank Nifty index underperformed. The Bank Nifty index has increased by more than 10% so far this month. Equity-oriented MF schemes saw a sharp rise in fresh investments in March with net inflows reaching an eight-month high of ₹40,450 crore.

SpiceJet is getting ready for layoffs as its financial problems worsen

New Delhi: The Economic Times reported on Saturday that SpiceJet, an Indian low-cost carrier, is once again experiencing a severe financial crisis, leading to rumors that it may lay off more employees despite salary delays and the need for an immediate infusion of new funding to maintain operations. The airline’s problems coincide with the ongoing volatility of aviation fuel prices. Although Chairman Ajay Singh recently recognized that the government was helping to moderate sharp increases in jet fuel prices, the alleviation doesn’t seem to be enough to make up for the carrier’s more serious financial issues. SpiceJet still struggles with low liquidity and operational limitations, in contrast to competitors IndiGo, Air India, and Akasa Air, who are supported by robust balance sheets or big conglomerates. Additionally, the airline recently told a court that it could not pay Kalanithi Maran of Sun TV Network approximately ₹144 crore. In an effort to match costs with its scaled-back operations, SpiceJet has implemented severe cost-cutting measures, such as furloughs and possible layoffs. The allegation, which cites internal communications, claims that beginning in April 2026, employees will be put on unpaid leave for up to six months. The airline’s fleet has shrunk from roughly 50 aircraft to only 13,



drastically reducing its operational capacity. The airline still uses wet-leased aircraft, but its smaller operations have led to a mismatch between staffing numbers and operational requirements. Industry estimates indicate that about 500 workers may be affected during the first phase of furloughs, with additional reductions possible if financial conditions do not improve. The company employs over 6,800 people. Employee discomfot has increased due to worsening salary delays in recent months. According to reports, payments that were previously delayed by around a month are now waiting for as long as three months. Particularly impacted are lower-paid employees, such as housekeeping and ground handling personnel, some of whom have not yet received their salaries for previous months. The financial strain has also disrupted

employee transitions. In several cases, engineers serving notice periods before joining other airlines have had their notice periods waived abruptly, leaving them without income during the transition. SpiceJet has also revised pilot contracts, particularly for its Q400 aircraft fleet. Under the new structure, pilots are required to operate for 21 days followed by nine days off. While the airline has positioned the change as an effort to improve work-life balance, pilots say it effectively reduces their earnings by nearly 20 per cent, further impacting morale. The airline’s financial obligations continue to mount despite raising over ₹3,000 crore in 2024. Industry estimates suggest total dues may now exceed ₹4,500 crore. Pending liabilities reportedly include statutory obligations such as tax deducted at source

(TDS), provident fund contributions and goods and services tax (GST), with dues spanning several months and potentially crossing ₹100 crore. Former employees have also raised concerns over delayed settlements and unpaid benefits. Amid the mounting pressure, SpiceJet is exploring fresh funding options, including seeking support under the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme. The airline had previously availed funds under the scheme during the pandemic and is now reportedly seeking an additional ₹2,000 crore. The scheme offers collateral-free loans with a moratorium on principal repayment for two years, making it a critical potential lifeline for the airline. However, it remains uncertain whether further support will be extended and under what conditions. SpiceJet has been rationalising its network in response to reduced capacity, shutting down multiple routes including Ayodhya, Port Blair, Bangkok, Phuket, and Udaipur. The airline has indicated that further route adjustments may follow. At the same time, competition in India’s aviation market is intensifying. Rival carriers are expanding fleets and increasing capacity, while domestic passenger demand has softened, from around 520,000 passengers daily to nearly 440,000, putting pressure on fares and yields.

Wipro’s stock rises as the board proposes a three-year repurchase

New Delhi: Wipro Ltd.’s stock increased by as much as 3% in early trading on the Bombay Stock Exchange following the company’s announcement that its board would discuss a share repurchase proposal at its meeting on April 16. The price had initially soared on the repurchase trigger, but after Tata Consultancy Services’ earnings, sentiment was affected by weakness across IT equities, causing the stock to lose most of its gains. The stock was up Rs 1.25, or 0.62%, at 9:52 am, trading at Rs 204.15. In an effort to refocus attention on shareholder returns, Wipro has notified exchanges that its board will consider a share buyback in conjunction with its fourth-quarter results on April 16. The buyback is undoubtedly a sentiment enhancer



given that the news follows a poor run for IT companies and a drop in Wipro’s share price this year. According to market expectations, the buyback might be substantial and provided at a

price higher than the going rate, which usually piques investor interest. Repurchasing its own shares from shareholders through a tender process or the open market is known as a buyback. It can

sustain prices and increase earnings per share by lowering the number of outstanding shares. In Wipro’s case, the move signals management confidence at a time when growth visibility in the IT sector remains moderate. It also reflects the company’s strategy of returning excess cash to shareholders, backed by a strong balance sheet. At the same time, the partial reversal in gains highlights the broader pressure on IT stocks after TCS results, suggesting that while the buyback offers near-term support, sector-wide sentiment will continue to influence the stock’s trajectory. There is no final decision yet on the size or pricing of the buyback. Those details will be announced after the board meeting, keeping the stock in focus in the near term.

The credit portfolio of Indian banks is robust notwithstanding the conflict in West Asia

Mumbai: The credit portfolios of Indian banks are anticipated to be robust in the fiscal year 2026–2027 (FY27), even if the conflict in West Asia is almost two months old. Gross non-performing assets (GNPAs) could settle at 2-2.2% for domestic lenders, compared to 2% as of March 2026, according to rating agency Crisil. This is mostly because of India Inc.’s strong balance sheets, which are expected to support asset quality. However, Crisil has warned that there may be some pressure on loans to micro, small, and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs).

Indeed, government actions are anticipated to mitigate the effects, it continued. Gross NPAs of banks have declined from around 11 per cent in FY18 to 2.3 per cent in FY25 and are expected to moderate further to about 2 per cent in FY26, the rating agency said. “The corporate segment’s sound balance sheets will support resilience in credit quality amid the conflict in West Asia.” However, the impact of the war on underlying borrowers and the seasoning of the portfolio during a period of rapid development would have a greater impact on loans to the MSME



group. However, government actions are anticipated to lessen the strain on MSMEs and, consequently, the cascading effect on bank non-performing assets (NPAs), according to a note from Crisil. Additionally, it stated that the unsecured book’s performance will stabilize in comparison to recent trends, and asset quality in the retail lending segment would continue to be manageable. Seasoning, as used in finance, is a measure of a portfolio’s age and has an impact on its risk profile. According to the note, the corporate loan segment, which ac-

counted for nearly 36 per cent of bank credit as of March 2026, is expected to see stable GNPAs of 1.2-1.3 per cent by March 2027, broadly in line with an estimated 1.2 per cent as of March 2026. This is despite pressure on revenues and operating profits across sectors due to gas supply shock, crude oil-linked price rise, direct trade exposure, and rupee depreciation. The MSME segment, which accounted for about 19 per cent of bank credit, is likely to see a relatively higher impact. In the base case, GNPAs in the segment could rise modestly to 3.4-3.6 per

cent in FY27 from around 3.2 per cent in FY26. “MSMEs typically have limited financial muscle to absorb higher input costs, supply-chain disruptions, and working capital elongation resulting from the ongoing West Asia conflict,” said Subha Sri Narayanan, director at Crisil. However, government and regulatory relief measures, including the recently announced RELIEF (Resilience & Logistics Intervention for Export Facilitation) framework, are expected to support the segment. The likely introduction of additional measures — such as credit guarantee schemes for affected sectors, similar to those seen during the Covid-19 pandemic — could further cushion asset quality. As a result, any uptick in MSMEs’ GNPAs is expected to be driven largely by seasoning of the portfolio, which has grown at a compound annual rate of around 20 per cent over the past three fiscals. In the retail portfolio, which accounted for about 33 per cent of bank credit as of March 2026, GNPAs are expected to remain stable at 1.1-1.3 per cent in FY27, supported by steady asset quality in secured segments and some stabilisation in unsecured loans.

Fireside Ventures provides investment to FruBon parent company Dev Milk Foods



New Delhi: Dev Milk Foods, the company behind the consumer dairy and ice cream brand FruBon, announced on Monday that it had raised money from a group of angel investors, Fireside Ventures, and the Narotam Sekhsaria Family Office. However, the company did not specify the amount of money raised.

The money raised would be used to develop the value-added dairy and ice cream portfolio and increase distribution. In both north and west India,

it will spur product innovation, increase production capacity, and quicken market expansion. Announcing the funding from Fireside Ventures, Narotam Sekhsaria Family Office and a group of angel investors, Dev Milk Foods, in a release, said the investment marks a significant milestone in the growth journey as the company continues to strengthen its presence in the ice cream and value-added dairy segment across north India. “The company plans to utilise the newly raised capital

to expand its retail footprint, enhance production and cold chain infrastructure, and accelerate innovation across its portfolio of dairy and ice cream products,” the press announcement stated. Dairy technologist D D Verma founded FruBon, which is now run by Rahul and Rohit Verma. The company’s portfolio includes ice cream, flavored milk, paneer, ghee, lassi, chaach, and conventional dairy goods. FruBon has a manufacturing facility in Mahindra World City, Jaipur, and milk collection centers around Rajasthan to support its integrated supply chain. Since its commercial launch in 2017, the company has expanded its presence to 75-plus cities and towns across north India through general trade, modern retail, partnerships and quick commerce platforms, the release further added.

Passenger car dispatches increased 16% to 442,460 units

New Delhi: Industry group Siam said on Tuesday that domestic passenger car deliveries from businesses to dealers increased 16% year over year to 442,460 units in March of this year. In March 2025, there were 381,358 passenger vehicle dispatches. According to a statement from Siam, two-wheeler sales increased 19.3% to 19,76,128 units last month from 16,56,939 units in March of last year. It further stated that three-wheeler dispatches to dealers increased by 21.4% last month to 76,273 units from 62,813



units during the same period last year.

African experts applaud the growing interest in fungal conservation around the world



Madagascar: Madagascar has long been praised for its incredible fauna, with the great majority of its species—from ring-tailed lemurs to some baobab tree species—found nowhere else on Earth. However, fungus are frequently overlooked while talking about the island nation’s indigenous gems. However, according to Malagasy scientist Anna Ralaiveloarisoa, “fungi are some of the most important things in the world.” Ninety percent of terrestrial plants are fed by them. Life on Earth wouldn’t exist without them. Less than 1% of the estimated 100,000 species of fungi in Madagascar have been scientifically documented, according to Ralaiveloarisoa, the country’s first native mycologist, who hopes to raise awareness of the significance of this understudied kingdom of life. Ralaiveloarisoa is currently attempting to classify each of the 200 new species she has discovered thus far, despite numerous obstacles in her path: attempting to preserve mushrooms without adequate infrastructure; traveling to isolated areas of the jungle without dependable roads or electricity; and lacking other experts in the nation with whom to collaborate.

Even if the challenges are substantial, Ralaiveloarisoa shares them with many mycologists in neighboring countries. She is a member of a growing group of African scientists who are leading the way in the research and preservation of fungi in their native nations. The International Congress on Fungal Conservation, which took place in Cotonou, Benin, in November, brought many people together for the first time. Mycologists from 27 countries in Africa, Europe, the Americas, and Asia attended the conference; many of them were from African nations where they are either the only or very few mycologists in their respective countries. The increased worldwide impetus for fungal conservation and the expanding role that African scientists perceive for themselves within it were both reflected

in their congress. “What an exciting time: from almost nothing 20 years ago, fungal conservation has evolved from a little-known field into a dynamic global movement,” mycologist Nourou Yorou, who was recently appointed general director of the Benin Agency for Science and Innovation, told attendees during the opening ceremony.

“The challenge is now to plan a future where fungi are firmly placed in the conservation mainstream.” Across the globe, protecting fungi has lagged significantly behind the conservation of plants and animals. While the first organisations dedicated to protecting birds were established in the 19th century, fungi had to wait until the 21st century, when mycologists from more than 40 countries established the International Society for Fungal Conservation (ISFC) in 2010, and the first conservation nonprofit organisation, the Fungi Foundation, was only created in 2012. David Minter, president of the ISFC, says: “Fungal conservation up to the early 2000s was really just a few disjointed, separate voices of scientists expressing concern about the results they were observing.” Since those groups were established, though, a global movement has emerged. The first conservation legislation to include fungi was passed in Chile in 2013.

The Fungi Foundation, which helped get the law passed, began to champion the phrase “fauna, flora, fungi” to encourage fungi’s inclusion in more conservation frameworks. Other organisations began to form: in 2017, North America’s first fungal conservation nonprofit group, Fundis, was created; in 2021, the research organisation SPUN (Society for the Protection of Underground Networks) was co-founded by the evolutionary biologist Toby Kiers, who went on to win the Tyler prize for environmental achievement and a MacArthur “genius grant” for her work in fungal research and conservation. Later this year, the “fungal conservation pledge”

first proposed at the UN biodiversity meeting of Cop16 in Colombia in 2024 will be discussed again at the forthcoming biodiversity Cop in Armenia. This interest in conserving fungi has been spurred in part by increasing evidence that they play a far larger role in how ecosystems function than was previously understood: 90% of plants on Earth rely on fungi to supply them with crucial nutrients, and newer evidence is increasingly pointing to the key role that fungi play in helping maintain a stable climate. A recent study found that as much as 36% of annual CO2 emissions from fossil fuels are stored in the underground mycelium of mycorrhizal fungi. Minter compares fungi to waste collectors performing basic but crucial services that allows the rest of society to function – and who everyone tends to overlook until they are gone. He says: “But if [waste collectors] go on strike, we sure know that they’re needed. It’s exactly the same with fungi.” Fungi need protection, Minter adds, because they perform crucial functions in all ecosystems, and are just as susceptible to the climate crisis, habitat destruction and pollution as other living things. And it cannot be assumed that fungi automatically benefit from conservation efforts aimed at animals and plants. A 2025 study published in Nature found that less than 10% of predicted hotspots of mycorrhizal fungal richness – the kind that form symbioses with plants – are protected. “In 2010, it was absolutely normal not to mention fungi at all in conservation,” Minter says.

“At some point in the future it will look strange if fungi don’t get a mention. And the very exciting thing is that, right now, we are at that tipping point.” At the Benin congress, African mycologists made it clear that they have the expertise, commitment and interest to back this movement in their own countries and globally. In a workshop designed to help local mycologists evaluate the risk of extinction, Sydney Ndolo Ebika, the Republic of the Congo’s first mycologist, offered useful insights about Termitomyces, a genus of fungi that is “farmed” by termites. Prized as an edible fungi throughout much of Africa, some species grow to be as large as an umbrella. Ndolo Ebika’s expertise has been hard won: when he first decided he wanted to study fungi, there was no one in Congo-Brazzaville to teach him, so he speculatively began emailing mycologists abroad to ask if he could join their laboratories. When he eventually did begin studying on a graduate programme in Germany, about the same time that the ISFC was formed, he sometimes photocopied entire books on fungi, because he knew no one in the Congo had access to these resources. He has now established the Republic of the Congo’s first fungarium, where type specimens are preserved to allow mycologists to establish the existence of new species and hold on to them for future study.

US partners’ interceptor stockpiles are strained by Iranian missile and drone threats



Washington: According to the Emirati Ministry of Defense, Iran has launched 2,141 drones, 498 ballistic missiles, and 23 cruise missiles at the United Arab Emirates since the beginning of the conflict in West Asia. However, there have been few fatalities and the gleaming skyscrapers of places like Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah remain mostly intact. That demonstrates the efficacy of contemporary military air defense systems, which track and target missiles that are moving faster than sound and use another missile to blow them out of the sky, sparing houses and property and saving many lives. The importance of interceptors in safeguarding cities like Kyiv, Tel Aviv, or Riyadh, as well as US bases in Bahrain, Kuwait, and other Gulf states, has been brought to light by the conflicts in Ukraine and now the Persian Gulf. However, the supply line for those interceptors has been under stress for years due to the conflict in Ukraine, previous encounters with Houthi rebels in the Red Sea, and the 12-day conflict with Iran last year. Experts in missile defense are issuing increasingly urgent warnings that stocks may run dangerously low if the war with Iran continues, leaving allies everywhere at risk of attack. According to Tom Karako, director of the Missile Defense Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, “we started this conflict with a big hole.” Before the current battle even began, in December, the center released a study on the diminishing stock of interceptors. Regarding the interceptors, Karako remarked, “The hole got a lot bigger over the last month as we keep shooting these things off.” Iran’s persistent capacity to shoot drones and missiles against Israel, American bases, and civilian sites in the Gulf is partly responsible for the US and its allies’ declining supply of interceptors. Further, defence doctrine calls for two interceptors fired for each incoming missile, referred to as “shoot — shoot — look”. That means defensive stockpiles are depleted twice as fast as the offensive weapons they are shooting down. In the current war, the US military coordinates air-defence systems with Israel, Saudi Arabia, the

Gulf states and others. They rely on a variety of launch systems — including Patriot and Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) batteries, both fired from land, or Standard Missiles launched from Navy warships at sea. The number of interceptors in a nation’s arsenal is a closely guarded secret. No country wants its enemy to know just when it might run out. But analysis of Gulf state defences suggest the waves of missile and drone attacks by Iran have sorely depleted the interceptor inventories in countries like the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain. Intercepting missiles has become a routine part of warfare for the US and its allies, especially Israel, for whom it is a daily part of domestic defence. The interceptor systems provide a security blanket but are not foolproof. Israel’s vaunted, three-tier missile defence system came under growing scrutiny after two Iranian ballistic missiles evaded air defences near Israel’s main nuclear research facility and reactor last month. Even when missiles are intercepted, civilians and property are not necessarily out of harm’s way. Falling wreckage from the collision of two missiles can rain down on towns and cities; debris from an intercepted missile killed two people in Abu Dhabi last month. The rise of cheap drones has complicated the math for militaries using expensive interceptors. An adversary can attack with one-way drones that cost tens of thousands of dollars, forcing its enemy to deploy multimillion-dollar air-defence systems to repel them. And the drones are much more easily and rapidly replaced. A ceasefire with Iran would not completely solve the interceptor shortage, experts said. Shortages in interceptor inventories are a global challenge. That was most acutely obvious in Ukraine after Russia invaded four years ago, launching large volleys of missiles, and later drones, at Ukrainian towns and cities, bombardments that continue to this day. The complexity of the interceptor systems makes them hard to mass produce quickly, said Tal Inbar, an Israeli senior research fellow at the Missile Defence Advocacy Alliance, a non-profit based in Virginia.

JD Vance claims that Iran’s refusal to abandon its nuclear program is the reason why negotiations failed



Washington: The recent negotiations between the US and Iran, led by US Vice President JD Vance, have failed to yield an agreement due to significant differences, primarily centered around Iran’s nuclear weapons program. Vance expressed disappointment over the lack of progress during the 21-hour talks in Islamabad, emphasizing the US’s firm position on Iran’s need to commit to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. He reiterated that achieving this goal is a fundamental priority for the US and that the failure of the talks is more detrimental to Iran than to the US. Iranian negotiators, including parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, countered that the US has yet to establish trust with their delegation. Ghalibaf mentioned that despite presenting constructive pro-

posals, the US’s excessive demands have hindered the negotiation process. Iran’s foreign ministry provided a tempered view of the situation, suggesting that expectations for an immediate agreement had been unrealistic. Meanwhile, the semi-official Tasnim news agency criticized US demands as excessive. The conflict, which escalated after US and Israeli strikes on Iran approximately six weeks prior, has resulted in significant casualties and infrastructural damage across multiple Middle Eastern countries. The ongoing war has reportedly killed over 3,000 people in Iran alone, and fatalities have also occurred in Lebanon, Israel, and Gulf states. As the negotiations unfolded, the city of Islamabad was heavily secured,

reflecting the sensitive nature of the discussions that marked the first direct engagement between the US and Iran in over a decade. The importance of these talks lies in their potential impact on establishing a fragile ceasefire and reopening the strategic Strait of Hormuz, crucial for global energy supply. The discussions also touched on other critical issues, including the US’s potential agreement to release frozen Iranian assets and Iran’s demands for control over the Strait of Hormuz and reparations. The US seeks to ensure the passage of shipping through this vital route while addressing concerns regarding Iran’s nuclear program. As talks concluded without resolution, Pakistani mediators have called for continued dialogue to prevent further hostilities.

Trump’s Hormuz Arsenal: 15 Warships, MV-22 Ospreys, and F-35B Lightning II Jets

Washington: The amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli (LHA 7) is using MV-22 Ospreys and F-35B Lightning II stealth aircraft in the Arabian Sea as part of the United States’ deployment of over 15 warships to enforce a naval blockade on Iranian ports and coastal areas. The blockade, which started at 1400 GMT and would be impartially applied to all vessels entering or leaving Iranian ports and coastal areas, including those on the Arabian and Gulf of Oman, was confirmed today by US Central Command (CENTCOM). It stated that US forces will not obstruct ships traveling to and from non-Iranian ports across the Strait of Hormuz. “While traveling in the Arabian Sea, USS Tripoli (LHA 7) performs night flight operations. Because Tripoli lacks a conventional well deck, it can accommodate more helicopters, MV-22 Ospreys, F-35B Lightning II stealth aircraft, and additional maintenance space. The ship can surge to support up to 20+ F-35Bs during peak operations, according to a statement from CENTCOM. On Monday, US President Donald Trump threatened to destroy any Iranian fast-attack vessels that approached the barrier.



He asserted on social media that the majority of Iran’s fleet had already been destroyed in the conflict. “Iran’s Navy is laying at the bottom of the sea, completely obliterated - 158 ships. What we have not hit are their small number of, what they call, “fast attack ships,” because we did not consider them much of a threat. Warning: If any of these ships come anywhere close to our BLOCKADE, they will be immediately ELIMINATED, using the same system of kill that we use against the drug deal-

ers on boats at Sea. It is quick and brutal. P.S. 98.2% of Drugs coming into the U.S. by Ocean or Sea have STOPPED! Thank you for your attention to this matter. President DJT,” Trump posted. The blockade follows the return of a US delegation from talks in Pakistan. The delegation, led by Vice President JD Vance and including special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, failed to secure a deal to end the war that began on February 28 with US and Israeli strikes on Teh-

ran. Trump announced the blockade on Sunday. The US military had earlier said the measure would apply to all ships leaving or seeking to dock at Iranian harbours. As the 1400 GMT deadline passed, however, there was no immediate announcement from Washington that the blockade had taken effect and no reports of any interceptions. The move comes despite a two-week truce agreed last Wednesday between the United States and Iran to allow negotiations to proceed.

The new leader of Hungary said he would request that Putin put an end to the violence in Ukraine

Budapest: Péter Magyar, the newly elected leader of Hungary, expressed his intention to communicate with Russian President Vladimir Putin regarding the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. He stated he would ask Putin to put an end to the violence if they were to speak, while also indicating that he would not initiate the conversation himself. Magyar remarked, “If Vladimir Putin calls, I’ll pick up the phone,” during his first press conference following his significant victory over Viktor Orbán, a known ally of Putin. He commented

that even if they talked, he doubted Putin would heed his advice to cease hostilities, highlighting the grim reality of the prolonged conflict. The election results were positively received by Ukraine, which viewed Orbán as a staunch opponent, paving the way for essential financial support amounting to €90 billion (\$105 billion) that Kyiv needs for its ongoing war efforts against Russia. In economic news, rising oil prices from the ongoing conflict in the Middle East are projected to inflate inflation rates in Ukraine by 1.5 to

2.8 percentage points, according to Andriy Pyshnyi, the Governor of the National Bank of Ukraine. He affirmed the bank’s commitment to its goal of reducing inflation to 5% over the next three years, pledging to utilize all available measures to achieve this target despite already rising prices. On the military front, Ukrainian forces successfully struck a Russian chemical facility in Cherepovets, located within the Vologda region. The facility is known to produce vital materials for explosives, including TNT and hex-

ogen, as noted by Robert Brovdi, the commander of Kyiv’s drone forces. Additionally, the governing body of World Aquatics announced that athletes from Russia and Belarus will be allowed to compete in international events, donning their national uniforms and anthems, which was supported by Belarusian territory. In a related vein, former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson criticized the sluggish response and lack of decisive action in assisting Ukraine during his recent 72-hour visit to the country for a documentary.

Favorite hidden spots in Wales

“A scramble down to a gorgeous expanse of beach”

Readers highlight their top discoveries in Wales, ranging from enchanting swimming locations to cultural venues like museums and pizzerias. A particular favorite among fans is the lesser-known beaches along the Glamorgan Heritage coastline, including Wick, Monkash, and Nash Point. One recommended route involves a scenic hike through picturesque fields, culminating in a challenging descent down Cwm Bach ladder.

This effort leads to a stunning rocky beach, often inhabited only by a few distant naturalists. Along this remarkable shoreline, steep cliffs abound, showcasing an array of fossils, notably large ammonites. Additionally, the nearby Plough & Harrow pub evokes a nostalgic atmosphere, giving visitors the impression of being served drinks in a cozy living room setting, reminiscent of a bygone era.

A magical swimming spot in Pembrokeshire

Last July on the hottest day of the year my friend took me to the slightly hidden Witches’ Cauldron in Moylegrove. This is a collapsed cave where you can swim in water that glows magical emerald green in the sun. You can swim straight from the cave out to sea. It’s a bit of a scramble down on foot from the Pembrokeshire Coast Path, or you can access it by sea kayak through tunnels from the sea. Check that it’s accessible though, as sometimes it’s closed to protect local seals.

Eryri’s most enchanting castle

North Wales is famous for its castles: Conwy, Caernarfon and Harlech are lauded and filled with visitors, year-round. But forget these Anglo-Saxon fleshpots and seek out Castell y Bere. Located near Tywyn, in the south of Gwynedd, this stronghold of medieval Welsh ruler Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (Llywelyn the Great) stands on an impressive, windswept crag, surrounded by flat, fertile estuarine pastures. Looking over this land you can sense the herds of cattle that once roamed here and fed the people. The atmosphere of history is pervasive, almost crushing. If you go there, tread lightly and don’t stay too long, lest its magic be ruined for others.

A petrified forest in Ceredigion

The submerged forest of tree stumps between Ynyslas and Borth is incredible. The stumps of oak, pine, birch, willow and hazel are up to 5,000 years old and were preserved in peat.

I like to walk down the beach to



the medieval castle’s walls, which snake



around the town. A north coast cycle

to Llandudno Not considering myself a serious cyclist, I found the 18-mile Prestatyn to Llandudno route to be a brilliant entry-level cycle ride. It’s almost all off-road, along national cycle network paths by the coast, so you can just focus on the beautiful north Wales coastline without worrying about cars or maps or anything else.

There are plenty of lovely places to stop along the way to refuel and admire the view. Towards the end it gets pretty steep but you’re rewarded with beautiful views and the best chippy supper from Barnacles, which has a dedicated vegan menu. You can either cycle back again or take your bike on the train.

touch them and imagine how the world was all those years ago. A slice of Bangor Returning to Gwynedd where my dad grew up feels like a homecoming of sorts. A trip to Jones’ Pizzeria in Bangor after a journey on the marvellous North Wales mainline train fills hungry stomachs. It’s good value, bustling, and a pillar of community and student life. I like to take a scenic walk along the Menai Strait and wonder at both Thomas Telford’s Menai Bridge, built in 1826, and Britannia Bridge, before meandering around Caernarfon’s monthly Saturday craft fair and dried flower shop Herbariwm, and following

Research reveals a connection between stroke and heart rhythm at night

Even in those without apparent sleep issues, new research has shown a strong correlation between heart rhythm at night and future health issues. Heart rate variability (HRV) during sleep can be a potent early warning sign of future health conditions like stroke, depression, and cognitive dysfunction, according to a 13-year study conducted at the Department of Neurology, Inselspital, University Hospital of Bern, which looked at 4,170 participants. The variation in the intervals between heartbeats is reflected in HRV.2 HRV continuously adapts to the body’s emotional and physical needs.

HRV is physiologically high during the day, which is indicative of high activity levels. HRV usually decreases at night, particularly during deep sleep, indicating a transition into a rest and repair mode when the body concentrates on recuperation and replenishment for the following day. The study discovered a connection between future health issues and specific HRV patterns. HRV was frequently abnormally high and unpredictable in participants who subsequently experienced a stroke. On the other hand, people who continued to experience depression frequently had low HRV. People who subsequently developed metabolic illnesses also showed high HRV with changed frequency patterns. High HRV was also linked to endocrine and cardiovascular disorders. “HRV matters for brain and overall health because it reflects how well the body regulates itself – primarily through the activity of the autonomic nervous system”, explained the lead author of the study, Irina Filchenko, MD, PhD. “This system controls vital unconscious processes such as breathing, digestion and muscle tone, helping the body maintain balance and adapt to internal and external demands.” “While many people are familiar with tracking sleep stages or total sleep time, nocturnal HRV provides a unique window into how the body functions during sleep. This is especially important because sleep is a critical time for many physiological processes underlying long-term health, such as cellular repair, memory consolidation, and the clearance of metabolic waste from the brain.” Importantly, researchers believe that HRV could act as an early physiological marker, demonstrating subtle changes in body functioning before traditional symptoms or diagnoses appear. This could open the door to prevention and early intervention for diseases like Alzheimer’s or stroke, where timely action can improve patient outcomes. Dr Filchenko noted, “Some participants had ‘normal’ sleep according to traditional criteria, with little sleep fragmentation and the expected balance of sleep stages. However, HRV told a different story, picking up risks that the common sleep metrics missed. This suggests we need to rethink how we define and measure optimal sleep.” The findings of the study also raise the possibility of using wearable technology to monitor HRV patterns over time. While current consumer devices vary in accuracy and interpretability, experts believe future improvements could allow people to track changes in HRV as part of regular health monitoring. The research adds to growing evidence that sleep is a critical pillar of long-term health, and that subtle patterns could offer a window of opportunity to prevent serious disease. “The broader message is that sleep is not just a passive state of rest -- it is an active, dynamic process that plays a vital role in maintaining long-term health, especially brain health. Our findings reinforce the idea that primary prevention matters, and that health problems start long before the clinical symptoms appear”, concluded Dr Filchenko.

From the stone age to Sartre via the ‘prettiest town in Spain’



The exploration of the area west of Santander, located on Spain’s northern coast, offers a vibrant experience that merges prehistoric history, medieval charm, and modern leisure within a short drive. The journey begins at the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Cave of Altamira, renowned for its prehistoric cave art. Although access to the original cave is restricted to preserve its delicate paintings, visitors can enter the Neocueva, a replica that captures the original artwork’s essence. The intricate paintings of bison and deer, created by hunter-gatherers between 13,000 to 36,000 years ago, are strikingly lifelike, showcasing the artistic capabilities of ancient humans. As the day progresses, travelers venture to Santillana del Mar, a picturesque medieval town filled with historical architecture, cobblestone streets, and a rich heritage dating back to the ninth century. Initially founded by monks and flourish-

ishing during the middle ages as part of the Astur-Leonese kingdom, Santillana served as a significant pilgrimage stop on the Camino de Santiago, indicative of its historical importance. The town was even mentioned by Jean-Paul Sartre, who portrayed it as idyllic in his novel “Nausea,” linking it to themes of adventure and existential reflection. The exploration continues in Suances, a lively seaside town characterized by its pastel-colored buildings and vibrant beach activities. Visitors can enjoy the local cuisine, featuring specialties like rabas (fried calamari) and especially noted for its sushi offerings. The natural beauty of the area is complemented by its recreational opportunities, including surfing against the backdrop of the Picos de Europa mountains. The trip concludes with a reflective moment on the cliffs of Playa de Los Locos, where the tranquility and stunning views provide a serene end to the journey. The

narrative highlights that true adventures are often realized in retrospect, shaped by the stories we tell after they unfold, bridging the joy of experience with the art of storytelling. Santillana traces its origins back to the ninth century, when monks carrying the relics of Saint Juliana settled here and built a small hermitage. Around it grew a monastery, then homes, farms and workshops, forming a settlement that gradually evolved into Santillana. During the middle ages, the town flourished as part of the Astur-Leonese kingdom and became an important stop for pilgrims travelling along the Camino de Santiago. The flow of travellers brought trade and wealth, hence the grand stone houses and palaces. In 1209, King Alfonso VIII granted the town a charter, the height of its medieval prosperity. The town sits close to the start of the Camino Lebaniego, a less well-known pilgrimage route that winds inland to the monastery

of Santo Toribio de Liébana in the Picos de Europa mountains. Cantabria is the only region in the world crossed by two Christian pilgrimage routes recognised as Unesco world heritage sites. For a town deeply tied to Christian pilgrimage, it is perhaps unexpected that Santillana is also linked to existential philosophy. In 1935, Jean-Paul Sartre visited the town with Simone de Beauvoir. A few years later, Santillana appeared in Nausea, Sartre’s first novel, as the narrator points to a photograph and describes it as “the prettiest town in Spain” during a conversation about the nature of adventure. “Getting on the wrong train. Stopping in an unknown city. Losing your briefcase, being arrested by mistake, spending the night in prison,” says the Self-Taught Man. “Monsieur, I believed the word adventure could be defined: an event out of the ordinary without being necessarily extraordinary.”

Varun Dhawan’s comeback to romance and the teaser for Hai Jawani Toh Ishq Hona Hai



New Delhi: Actor Varun Dhawan returns to his favorite genre—romantic comedy—in his latest film, Hai Jawani Toh Ishq

Hona Hai, following his patriotic performance in Border 2. The teaser, which debuted on Tuesday, presents a “double trouble

love story” with Dhawan, Pooja Hegde, and Mrunal Thakur. Additionally, the project brings Dhawan and his father, director David Dhawan, back together. A love triangle involving two heroines and one hero is hinted at in the teaser, which begins with AI-generated babies discussing their parents.

It is backed by a reworked version of Ishq Sona Hai, which was originally from David Dhawan’s 1999 movie Biwi No. 1 and is now the movie’s title track. This is David Dhawan’s 46th directorial venture. Hai Jawani Toh Ishq Hona Hai is produced by Ramesh Taurani and Tips Films Ltd, with co-production by Maximillian Films (UK). It is set to release in cinemas on May 22.

Dhurandhar’s Shirani, Bimal Oberoi, responds to the viral festival



New Delhi: Actor Bimal Oberoi’s character Shirani from the film Dhurandhar has unexpectedly become a viral sensation, captivating audiences with his deadpan efficiency and one-liners. The character, referred to as the “Blinkit of Balochistan,” has inspired a flood of humorous memes and requests from fans, blurring the lines between fiction and reality. Oberoi recounts entertaining messages, including students asking for exam help and bodybuilders requesting money for protein. The character has even been humorously integrated into global political scenarios, further amplifying Oberoi’s newfound fame. He reflects on the amusing impact of the memes, highlighting modern audiences’ deep engagement with fictional characters, and expresses delight in the ongoing phenomenon surrounding his role.

Kritika Kamra acknowledges that she doesn’t get commercial roles



Mumbai: Since her TV days, actor Kritika Kamra has advanced significantly. She has made a name for herself in the OTT market over the past several years while working on some of the most talked-about web series and movies. Kritika discusses collaborating with director Nagraj Manjule, the state of female characters in Indian literature, and her upcoming film, Matka King, with Hindustan Times as it approaches its premiere. Ratan Khatri and Kalyanji Bhagat, two real-life matka barons of Mumbai (then Bombay), served as the inspiration for the fictional tale Matka King. However, the show discusses the ascent of Vijay Varma’s fictional matka monarch, Brij Bhatti.. Talking about her introduction to this world, Kritika says, “The world is fascinating. I did not know about matka, before I was offered the show. I did my research. I did not know about this because I didn’t grow up in Bombay, and it was fascinating. I usually judge things by seeing if I’m interested as an audience, then I feel that there will be more people like me who would also be interested in it.” The show has been directed by National Award winner Nagraj Manjule, making his long-form debut. “He’s been on every actor’s wish list,” says Kritika, emphasising that the filmmaker is one of the reasons she signed on. “Consciously, over the last few years, I’ve been trying to work with filmmakers really known for their craft because I think that’s how I am going to become better at what I do.” In Matka King, Kritika plays Gulrukh Dibash, a young Parsi widow from south Bombay who becomes Brij’s unlikely partner in crime. The 37-year-old admits that this makes her seem more selective, particularly in the eyes of the so-called commercial cinema. But it is something she has made her peace with.

Yash responds to criticism of Ramayana’s visual effects

Mumbai: The KGF actress also revealed that Ramayana: Part I will be released in the final week of October, during Diwali. “We are planning to release this year on Diwali which is in October last week,” he stated. Yash’s comments about Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups, another upcoming movie, also made headlines. “Toxic is also a very ambitious film,” he said in an interview with Fandango, describing it as “layered,” suggesting that it has more depth than a standard action movie. We also shot that movie in English for the first time. Thus, the film’s theme is multi-layered. Again, it’s not your average action-gangster tale. On the surface, it would appear to be an action-packed gangster film, but it includes profound psychology and fascinating aspects of human existence that you can relate to,” Yash clarified. “And it’s a very unique way to present a dark character, which is what I feel,” he added, praising director Geetu Mohandas for creating a movie that examines psychological concerns. It was incredibly thrilling, with some of the best professionals. My



director, Geetu Mohandas, truly brought a fresh perspective to a mafia movie, and I liked it. In addition to being a visual feast, it will have a significant psychological influence on the audience. At CinemaCon 2026, Yash was joined by producer Namit Malhotra to introduce Ramayana to an international audience, marking the film’s second major promotional event following the release of the first look of Lord Rama earlier this month. In Ramayana, Yash portrays Ravana, with Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Rama, Sai Pallavi as goddess Sita, and Ravie Dubey as Lakshmana. The film, directed by Nitesh Tiwari and enhanced by DNEG’s VFX, is expected to be a major highlight of this year’s Diwali celebrations.

Mohit Suri, the director of Saiyaara, will rejoin with Ahaan Panday

Mumbai: Following the enormous success of Saiyaara, Ahaan Panday and director Mohit Suri are getting back together to work on a new romantic drama supported by Yash Raj Films. The project follows Ahaan’s highly regarded debut, which launched him to stardom and made him a potential new face in Bollywood. Variety India reports that Mohit Suri’s upcoming romance project under the YRF label will include Ahaan. “Mohit finished writing the plot for his new film, a romcom with an older guy and a younger girl,” the report said, providing insight into the film’s development. However, with the actor he had in mind, that didn’t work out.

It was Aditya Chopra who suggested he make another rom-com with Ahaan. Since his second film is an action film in which he plays a gangster, the producer felt that the duo returning with romance is something the audiences would lap up.” Expectations are high for Mohit Suri’s next film after Saiyaara’s incredible success.

It has now been revealed that Ahaan has been selected for the project, despite a number of names being floated for the



starring part. Mohit is currently reworking the script to make it more suitable for Ahaan. According to the source, the movie is anticipated to begin production before the end of this year. Ahaan is now filming an action romance under the direction of Ali Abbas Zafar. Sharvari, Aaishvarya Thackeray, Bobby Deol, and Jimmy Shergill also play significant parts in the movie, with Ahaan delving into the action-romance subge-

nre. Saiyaara emerged as a major box office phenomenon following its release in July last year. The romantic drama grossed Rs 577 crore worldwide, becoming the second-highest-grossing Indian film of 2025 and the highest-grossing romantic film in Indian cinema history. The film marked Ahaan Panday’s Bollywood debut and also featured Aneet Padda in her first leading role, after appearing in Salaam

Venky alongside Kajol. Backed by Yash Raj Films, the film is currently available to stream on Netflix. The story follows Krish, a struggling musician, who falls in love with Vaani Batra, an aspiring journalist and poet. Their journey through love, challenges, and personal struggles forms the emotional core of the film, which was widely praised for its performances and chemistry between the lead pair.

Daisy Shah reveals that a filmmaker inappropriately touched her

New Delhi: Actor Daisy Shah, who debuted in Bollywood alongside Salman Khan in Jai Ho (2014), has talked candidly about an awkward situation that happened in Mumbai when a filmmaker visited the city to hold auditions. In an interview with The Free Press Journal, the actor recounted how the director’s actions made her uneasy. “I was deeply moved by one of the filmmakers in South,” she remarked. He was in Mumbai for a casting. We went to meet him as a group of six or seven girls. He was getting to know everyone of us on an individual basis. However, I didn’t like that he held my hand

and caressed me. “I’ve always been nervous about people touching me,” she continued. I don’t get massages because I dislike being touched, even by women. It’s a whole other thing when it comes to men. That simply turned me off. I promised to get back to him, but I never did. Before going into acting, Daisy worked as a choreographer. Ganesh Acharya’s assistant and performed as a background dancer in a number of Bollywood songs. She first starred in Kannada films with Bhadra and Bodyguard before becoming well-known in Bollywood with Salman Khan’s Jai Ho (2014). She went on to par-

ticipate in dancing reality programs, television appearances, and movies including Hate Story 3 (2015). Daisy most recently appeared in Amjad Khan’s online series Red Room, which also starred Reeva Chaudhary, Amit Gaur, Anuj Sachdeva, and Reena Aggarwal. In addition to acting, Daisy is highly active on YouTube, where she uses vlogs to share her everyday activities with her followers. At the moment, she has about 50,000 subscribers. On the work front, Daisy is set to star as the female lead in an upcoming, yet-to-be-titled thriller directed by Palash Muchhal. The film also stars Shreyas Talpade.



John Abraham and Harshvardhan Rane will be filming Force 3

Mumbai: Filming on Force 3, the most recent entry in the well-liked action series, has officially begun, according to actor John Abraham. On Wednesday, the actor posted a teaser video to social media that revealed the film’s cast, crew, and release date. A storm is created when the immovable and the unstoppable collide.

The Force is on its way! He tagged members of the cast and crew, including director Bhav Dhulia, Harshvardhan Rane, Tanya Maniktala, and Surya Sharma, in his tweet, “#Force3 releasing in cinemas on 19th March 2027.”

Harshvardhan Rane said in November of last year that he will be replacing John Abraham as the main character in the well-known action franchise. Rane made this announcement by sharing a picture of himself praying while dressed traditionally at the Trimbakeshwar Temple in Maharashtra. He thanked the older actor for his support



at the time and tweeted, “John Abraham locks Harshvardhan Rane for taking ‘Force’ franchise forward, under him.” Force (2011), which was produced by Vipul Amrutlal Shah and directed by Nishikant Kamat, marked the start of the Force franchise. The

film, which was a remake of the Tamil hit Kaakha Kaakha, starred John Abraham alongside Genelia Deshmukh. Its sequel, Force 2, released in 2016 and was directed by Abhinay Deo. The film saw Abraham reprise his role, with Sonakshi Sinha and Tahir

Raj Bhasin joining the cast. With Force 3 now officially underway, the franchise looks set to expand its action-packed universe, bringing together a fresh cast while continuing the legacy of one of Bollywood’s most recognised cop-action series.

Mrunal Thakur claims that she was surprised to have a “Very Senior Actor” as her spouse in Son of Sardaar 2

Mumbai: Speaking candidly about her experience working on Son of Sardaar 2, Mrunal Thakur revealed that she was saddened by a few unforeseen events that occurred throughout the movie. In an interview, the actor—who is now promoting her most recent film, Dacoit: A Love Story openly discussed how her expectations for the project fell short of what really happened on screen. Mrunal revealed that she was not aware of a crucial casting aspect that had a big influence on how she felt about the movie. “I didn’t know a very senior actor was going to play my husband,” she stated in conversation with Premia. Because that simply alters my perspective—this is not what I anticipated from the film. I failed, then, because a small amount of confidence was compromised. You know what, though? I have no regrets.

Mrunal played Rabia in Son of Sardaar 2, while Chunky Panday played Danish, her estranged husband. Neeru Bajwa played Jaswinder Singh Randhawa’s



wife, Dimple, while Ajay Devgn played Jassi. The narrative tracks Rabia and Jassi, who are both coping with difficult marriages, as they progressively come to love one another. Apart from the casting surprise, Mrunal also expressed disap-

pointment over some of her important scenes being removed during editing. She explained, “I did not know two important scenes of mine would be edited on the table. Like, there’s this beautiful scene with Roshni and me. She’s actually my sister’s child, and my sister dies in the movie, it’s just a narrative. And I give up my personal life for her betterment. She says, it’s better I don’t have a mother, I have you. And I pray that every girl gets a mother like you, even if you’ve not given birth to me. But the way you’ve taken care... that narrative was missing.” Despite her concerns, Mrunal maintained that she holds no regrets and continues to share a warm equation with the film’s team. Son of Sardaar 2 is the sequel to the 2012 film Son of Sardaar. The second instalment features Ajay Devgn as Jaswinder Singh Randhawa (AKA Jassi), Mrunal Thakur as Rabia, Ravi Kishan as Raja, Neeru Bajwa as Dimple, Deepak Dobriyal as Gul, Kubbra Sait as Mehwish, and Chunky Panday as Danish.

Hansika Motwani Files a Defamation Case for Rs. 2 Crore

New Delhi: Actor Hansika Motwani has filed a defamation lawsuit against her estranged sister-in-law, television actor Muskan Nancy James, at a Mumbai sessions court. Hansika Motwani has pleaded for Rs 2 crore in damages and asked the court to prevent James from speaking negatively about her in the future. She has also asked for an apology in public. According to the lawsuit, which was brought by attorney Adnan Shaikh, James falsely and defamatorily accused Motwani and her brother Prashant Motwani of domestic abuse on social media. The suit claims that the accusations were concocted in order to avoid paying back a Rs 27 lakh loan. According to Hansika Motwani, Muskan Nancy James borrowed the money during her marriage to Prashant Motwani, and despite numerous demands, it has not been paid back. Motwani has insisted that she did not live with her brother and had little involvement in their marriage. She claimed that as their relationship worsened over time, she was mainly oblivious of their personal conflicts. The lawsuit comes when Muskan Nancy James filed a formal complaint against Hansika Motwani and her husband. James said in her lawsuit that she was subjected to mistreatment, harassment, interference in her marriage, and demands for costly gifts during the wedding ceremony. Motwani has denied all allegations, stating that she was not part of any shared household arrangement and cannot be held responsible for the claims made against her. Apart from the civil defamation suit, Hansika Motwani has also filed a criminal defamation case against James before a magistrate’s court in Andheri under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

Days after losing the top spot, Carlos Alcaraz withdraws from the Barcelona Open



New Delhi: Due to a right wrist injury, Carlos Alcaraz has withdrawn from the Barcelona Open, ending what was anticipated to be a pivotal week in his attempt to regain the top spot in the world rankings. After defeating Otto Virtanen in straight sets to start his campaign, the Spaniard needed medical treatment during the match and skipped training before his next round.

Alcaraz decided to withdraw because of worries about exacerbating the injury, which effectively ended his run early and eliminated any immediate possibility of rising back to the top of the ATP rankings. The timing is especially important because, after leaving Barcelona, the 22-year-old had a real chance to reclaim No. 1. “After the tests, we’ve realised that the injury is

more serious than any of us expected, and I need to listen to my body to ensure it doesn’t affect me in the future,” Alcaraz said to reporters. “I prefer not to drop out of a tournament, especially this one. I regret having to go back home in order to start my recuperation as soon as possible with my team, the physicians, and the physiotherapist, and to attempt to be as fit as possible for the upcoming events.” Only a few days have passed since Alcaraz lost his top spot to Jannik Sinner.

The pivotal moment came in the Monte Carlo Masters final, where Sinner defeated Alcaraz in straight sets to win the championship and take back the top spot. With the ATP No. 1 ranking at stake, it was essentially a winner-take-all match, and Sinner’s triumph guaranteed him an advantage over his Spanish opponent. Sinner’s incredible season-long consistency has been the foundation of his ascent.

The Italian is the first player to win three straight ATP Masters 1000 events without dropping a set thanks to his incredible run that includes victories at Indian Wells, Miami, and Monte Carlo. At one stage, Alcaraz trailed Sinner by nearly 390 points in the live rankings, meaning he needed a deep run—or even the title—in Barcelona to reclaim the summit. With the clay-court season now in full swing, attention shifts to upcoming tournaments in Madrid and Rome, where Alcaraz is expected to return. His withdrawal from Barcelona may prove a precautionary move aimed at preserving fitness for the bigger challenges ahead, including the defence of his French Open crown.

Pinarayi Vijayan, Kerala’s trailblazer, hopes to serve a historic third term



Thiruvananthapuram, Apr 19: Currently serving as Kerala’s chief minister, Pinarayi Vijayan is a well-known Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader who represents the Dharmadam constituency. He was born in Pinarayi village in 1944 and rose through the party ranks to become the state’s 12th chief minister, a role he has held since May 25, 2016. Vijayan led the Left Democratic Front to a second term in power when he was re-elected on May 2, 2021, in the Kerala Assembly elections. According to niyamasabha.nic.in and score.kerala.gov.in, he is in charge of a wide range of portfolios as the head of the 15th Kerala

Legislative Assembly, including Home, Vigilance, General Administration, and Planning and Economic Affairs. According to a previous HT report, Vijayan, an eighty-year-old, is making history by running for an unprecedented third consecutive term in the 2026 Assembly elections—a feat no Kerala politician has accomplished since 1957. He removed the party’s traditional two-term limit for lawmakers in order to preserve continuity, enabling seasoned incumbents to run once more. But this election cycle has its own set of challenges, such as a revolt by former party leaders in strongholds like Payyannur and Taliparamba, who are now running as independents supported by the UDF, blaming “neglect” within the CPI(M). Vijayan remains a fierce critic of the BJP, positioning the Left as the “only force” capable of resisting the RSS’s ideological agenda in Kerala. While he maintains a broad secular alliance with the Congress at the national level, he insists that in Kerala, the two fronts represent a “genuine ideological battle” between neoliberal policies and social welfare.

A multimillion-dollar lawsuit is pending against Lionel Messi



New Delhi: Argentina and Inter Miami CF star Lionel Messi faces a multi-million dollar lawsuit from Vid Music Group for allegedly breaching a \$7 million contract tied to his participation in two friendly matches against Venezuela and Puerto Rico. The lawsuit claims Messi did not fulfill his obligations during the first match, where he watched from the stands, despite playing the next day for Inter Miami.

Due to his absence, there were logistical changes and lower ticket demand for the events, leading to significant financial losses for the promoter. Neither Messi nor the Argentine Football Association has responded yet, and the case will proceed through legal channels.

Sindarov rules the field, and Vaishali finds her moment

A defining Candidates tournament sees Vaishali step out of the shadows and Sindarov stamp his authority before the World Championship.

New Delhi: In a remarkable achievement, Indian chess Grandmaster R. Vaishali overcame years of overshadowing by her brother, R. Praggnanandhaa, and other prominent players to capture the FIDE Women’s Candidates title, becoming the first Indian woman to qualify for the World Championship final. Starting as the lowest-ranked participant, Vaishali initially struggled with four draws and a defeat before turning the tide in the tournament’s latter half by winning four games, ultimately finishing strong despite a challenging performance from her competitor Zhu Jiner.

Her victory came after defeating Kateryna Lagno in the final round, propelled by her hard work and determination. In contrast, Uzbek Grandmaster Javokhir Sindarov dominated the open section of the Candidates tournament with exceptional



opening preparation and decisive victories, culminating in a total of 10 points. His performance was characterized by his ability to maintain an advantage over seasoned players like Hikaru Nakamura, despite a mid-tournament disruption. Sindarov’s victory set the stage for a historic World Chess Championship final against India’s

D. Gukesh, notable for being the youngest ever, with both players under 21, marking a significant shift in the chess landscape towards Asian players. While Sindarov has emerged as a favorite, he acknowledges Gukesh’s experience and expressed cautious respect for his opponent ahead of their championship match.

Stalin leads a black flag demonstration against the Center and burns a copy of the delimitation bill

Chennai, Apr 19: MK Stalin, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, formally started a statewide movement on Thursday by burning a copy of the bill and raising a black flag in protest of the Center’s proposed delimitation exercise. In order to submit three significant measures that potentially alter India’s electoral architecture and representation system, the administration will call a special three-day session of Parliament starting on Thursday. This meeting is anticipated to be turbulent. In protest of The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirty-First Amendment) Bill, 2026, which calls for a delimitation exercise to change the number and makeup of state legislative assemblies and the Lok Sabha, Stalin raised the black flag while dressed in black. Additionally, he set fire to a copy of what he called a “black law.” Stalin urged broad resistance throughout Tamil Nadu in a post on X. “May the arrogance of the fascist BJP collapse! May the resistance spread throughout Tamil Nadu,” he declared. He continued by drawing comparisons to previous anti-Hindi protests, saying that Tamil Nadu’s earlier opposition had compelled Delhi to back down and



that a similar campaign would undermine the current plan. He asserted that the bill would “turn Tamils into refugees in their own land” and that in order to overcome the BJP’s “arrogance,” the agitation will expand throughout the “Dravidian land.” The demonstration coincides with growing opposition to the proposed delimitation, which is connected to a 2011 Census-based population-based adjustment of constituencies. After the Center adopted draft amendment bills to operationalize the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023, the problem has gotten worse. Concerns about the hastiness of calling a special Parliamentary session during election season have also been voiced by opposition parties. Stalin

also urged residents of the state to display black flags at their residences as a sign of defiance. As part of the protest, black flags were hung at Tamil Nadu Minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozi’s home in Thennur, Tiruchirappalli. Mahesh earlier alleged that the Centre plans to increase Lok Sabha seats to 850, claiming it would undermine state rights. He said the number of seats in states like Uttar Pradesh could rise significantly and noted that the draft report had not been shared with opposition parties. He argued that federalism should be debated collectively and accused the Centre of turning the issue into a conflict rather than consulting states. He also questioned the timing of the move, stating

that parties are currently engaged in election work in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu and suggesting that the exercise appeared to be driven by ulterior motives. The Centre has proposed increasing the Lok Sabha strength from 543 to 850 seats, with 815 seats for states and 35 for Union Territories. It is also planning to implement women’s reservation ahead of the 2029 General Elections by amending the 2023 Act and delinking delimitation from the 2027 Census through a constitutional amendment. Meanwhile, the Centre has convened a special sitting of Parliament from April 16 to 18 to take up key legislative business, including matters related to the proposed changes.

Tejasvi Surya criticizes the opposition to delimitation



New Delhi, Apr 19: In the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, there was a heated debate about the proposed delimitation exercise. BJP MP Tejasvi Surya attacked the opposition and questioned the reasoning behind their complaints. “How would you like this delimitation exercise to be carried out? Will the wealthy receive more votes while the impoverished receive none? Surya inquired. “If you continue this argument, Mukesh Ambani would receive one lakh votes, while we will receive just one. He dismissed the opposition’s arguments as faulty and politically driven, asking, “Is this the kind of logic the Congress wants to build?” Surya charged that the DMK and other southern regional players, as well as the opposition parties, were engaged in a “misleading propaganda” campaign. Why are some Southern re-

gional parties and opposition parties creating such a commotion? “They are crying crocodile tears,” he remarked. He further stated that the BJP-led Center would implement delimitation in 2026 as required and accused the opposition of using “systematic misleading” to try to impede the process. Surya framed delimitation as a constitutional requirement rather than a political decision, citing Articles 81 and 82, which require redrawing constituencies and balancing the population-to-seat ratio. According to him, the ongoing freeze based on the 1971 Census has resulted in significant inequities, with certain constituencies now having populations that are disproportionately big. Surya denied accusations of imbalance and responded to worries that delimitation may hurt southern states by

saying, “the south could not have got a better deal than this.” Nonetheless, many still contend that population-based redistribution would skew representation in favor of northern states, casting doubt on the federal balance. Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, who supports the government’s stance, has stated that the exercise will take place after the census and will not decrease any state’s representation, even though it is anticipated that the Lok Sabha will become more powerful. The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, the Delimitation Bill and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill were introduced after a division, with 251 votes in favour and 185 against. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said the House will hold 15-18 hours of discussion, with voting scheduled for 4 pm on Friday.

Khaleel Ahmed of CSK will not play in the 2026 IPL because of an injury

New Delhi: Khaleel Ahmed, a bowler for the Chennai Super Kings, will not play in the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026 due to a serious injury he sustained during the team’s match against the Kolkata Knight Riders on April 14. For CSK, who had relied on the left-arm pacer for early successes this season, the setback is a severe one. The injury happened during a pivotal part of the KKR match in Chepauk, and the CSK camp was instantly concerned. According to India Today’s sources, Khaleel would need to miss a significant amount of time due to a serious quadriceps injury.

Khaleel has been diagnosed with a Grade 2 tear, confirming the depth of the injury. The injury has been described as a full tear of the direct head of the muscle and a high-grade partial tear with a stretch injury of the right rectus femoris tendon. The pacemaker has been recommended long-term therapy due to the severity, with a recovery period of ten to twelve weeks. As a result, he is essentially out for the rest of the 2026 Indian Premier League. Given that Khaleel had

been a vital component of CSK’s fast bowling unit and had appeared in all five of the team’s games this season, the timing of the injury is especially regrettable for CSK. CSK will now need to fill the void left by his withdrawal as soon as possible, particularly because the tournament is about to enter a period where consistency becomes essential. In the 17th over of the innings against KKR, Khaleel sustained an injury.

The pacer experienced pain in his right thigh as he ran in to deliver the last ball of the over. He tried to go on, but the anguish made him halt in the middle and get help. When he left the field, unable to finish his over, the situation became clear. CSK’s preparations were derailed when Gurjapneet Singh was sent in to finish the over, giving away a boundary in the process. Before the injury, Khaleel had been one of CSK’s standout bowlers in the match. He had delivered a disciplined spell in the powerplay, conceding just 17 runs in three overs and removing Sunil Narine, a key wicket given the all-rounder’s aggressive approach at the top.



Arsenal narrowly defeats Sporting to go to the Champions League semifinals

New Delhi: After a 0-0 home draw on Wednesday, Arsenal defeated Sporting 1-0 on aggregate to go to the Champions League semi-finals for the second consecutive season. Mikel Arteta's team held onto the advantage that Kai Havertz's goal in stoppage time in Lisbon last week gave them, but it was far from convincing. The well-organized visitors were a threat at times, particularly in the first half. Geny Catamo's volley shortly before halftime nearly gave them the lead. Sporting ran out of ideas and was unable to stop the hosts from maintaining an eighth clean sheet in 12 Champions League games this season to set up a semi-final matchup with Atletico Madrid. Arsenal substitute Leandro Trossard also struck the woodwork in the anxious closing moments of a dull encounter. Ahead of Sunday's important Premier League match at Manchester City, Arsenal once again lacked attacking flare and experienced an injury worry when Noni Madueke was forced off owing to a bang to the knee, even though the outcome was ultimately all that mattered. "We are delighted, it was a really tough test over two games," Arsenal captain Declan Rice said of the result. "To get to back-to-back semi-finals is an amazing achievement and now we want to go one step further." Arsenal bowed out in the semi-finals last season to eventual winners Paris St Germain and they will have to improve against a dangerous



Atletico side if they are to reach the final for only the second time, having lost to Barcelona in 2006. As huge as Wednesday's match was, the looming clash with City which could make or break Arsenal's hopes of a first Premier League title for 22 years was impossible to ignore. A 2-1 defeat against Bournemouth last weekend, which has opened the door for City, was Arsenal's third defeat in four games in all competitions and prompted suggestions that Arteta's side were running out of steam with the finish line in sight. Another setback would have eroded confidence ahead of Sunday's Etihad Stadium showdown but Arsenal stood firm and showed plenty of grit to progress, despite managing only one attempt on target. Arteta was especially pleased with the control his side showed, although he was relieved when Sporting's Joao Simoes flashed a shot ago-

nizingly wide with the last kick of the game. "The last 15 to 20 minutes we controlled the game really well and controlled the transitions," said Arteta, the first manager to lead Arsenal to back-to-back semi-finals in Europe's elite club competition. "It's a great night. I'm very happy for all our people. We are making steps that haven't been done at this club for 140 years. Now we will have two magical nights, one in Madrid and one here." For Sporting manager Rui Borges and the visiting fans it was a case of nearly but not quite after the Portuguese side matched the Premier League leaders over both legs. "I think we deserved more and potentially deserved to play extra time; in both games the best opportunities were Sporting's," Borges said. "Arsenal didn't create many opportunities. There can't be any frustration, there can only be pride."

Bernardo Silva, the captain of Manchester City, will depart the team at the end of the current campaign

New Delhi: Bernardo Silva, a Portuguese playmaker and captain of Manchester City, has declared that he will leave the team at the end of the current campaign. After joining City from AS Monaco in 2017, Silva has made 451 appearances over the course of nine years, scoring 77 goals and dishing out 76 assists. With City, Silva has won 19 major awards, including six Premier League crowns, a UEFA Champions League title, two FA Cups, five Carabao Cups, three Community Shields, and triumphs in the UEFA Super Cup and FIFA Club World Cup. He just led City to victory against Arsenal in the Carabao Cup final. Silva played a pivotal role in City's 100-point Premier League triumph in 2017-18, their domestic clean

sweep in 2018-19, and their run of four successive league titles from 2021 to 2024. City confirmed Silva's exit in an official statement. The 31-year-old aims to help City secure the Premier League title again as they face Arsenal this weekend. Silva conveyed an emotional message to the City fans via social media, emphasising his passion to make supporters proud. "To the fans, your unconditional support throughout the years is something that I will never forget. My main goal as a player was to always play with passion so you guys could feel proud and well represented on the pitch. I hope you felt that every single game. I arrived as a Man City player, I leave as one more of you, a Man City supporter for life. Keep supporting this young

team and I'm pretty sure they will bring you a lot of new fantastic memories in the future," said Silva. The Portuguese midfielder also expressed gratitude to Pep Guardiola, the staff, and his teammates. "To the club, Pep, the staff and all my teammates these 9 years, thank you for all the memories and for letting me be a part of this journey for so long. The atmosphere we created every day in the training ground made me feel at home and a part of a big family. Let's enjoy together these last weeks and fight for what this season still brings us," said Silva. City are currently six points behind Arsenal ahead of their clash on Sunday, April 19, with a game in hand.

FIFA World Cup 2026

France will finish preparing for their match against Northern Ireland



New Delhi: Days after starting its warm-up campaign against the Ivory Coast, France will finish preparing for the World Cup against Northern Ireland in Lille on June 8, the French federation announced on Thursday. In their final match before traveling to the June 11-July 19 World Cup, Didier Deschamps' team will visit Northern Ireland at the Stade Pierre-Mauroy. On June 16, Les Bleus will begin their Group I campaign in New York against Senegal before moving on to Iraq and Norway. Hugo Ekitike, a renowned forward, was ruled out of the quadrennial event earlier this week due to an ankle injury, dealing a serious blow to the 2022 runner-up.

Prabhsimran Singh's promise is getting closer to being fulfilled at Punjab Kings

New Delhi: After Yuvraj Singh's undefeated 80 off 39 helped Punjab Kings defeat Mumbai Indians by seven wickets while chasing down 196 with 21 balls remaining, Prabhsimran Singh gave him credit. "I worked a lot with Yuvi Paaji throughout the off-season. Prabhsimran remarked following Punjab Kings' fourth victory of the tournament, "Every time I speak with him, he says you have a lot of time, and you can play long." The 25-year-old Punjab opener, who is already in his ninth season with the team, has shaped his game around the former India international's instruction and made a name for himself as a key member of the Punjab Kings team, which appears more likely than ever to end its title drought. Prabhsimran has demonstrated significant growth as a cricketer, accumulating 549 runs at a strike rate of 160 last season,



which reflects the confidence Punjab Kings management, including coach Ricky Ponting and captain Shreyas Iyer, has in him. He emphasizes playing longer innings, moving away from earlier tendencies to get out in the 30s or 40s, and is grateful for the support he has received from the team. The partnership with opening partner Priyansh Arya has contributed to Punjab Kings achieving a

run rate of 10.37, situating them among the top teams in terms of tempo in the current league. Since 2025, Prabhsimran has emerged as a match-winner, particularly in successful run chases, scoring 366 runs, second only to renowned players like Iyer and Kohli. This season, he has been instrumental in Punjab's successful chases, scoring two fifties and holding the team's top run-scoring position after five

games with a remarkable average of 70.33. He recognizes the evolving landscape of T20 cricket, where achieving scores over 200 has become common, and stresses the importance of an aggressive playing approach from the outset. His impressive IPL performances earned him a place in the India A team, where he scored a century against Australia A, bringing him closer to his ambition of representing the senior Indian team. However, he acknowledges the increasing competition and the need for consistent performance, particularly after struggling in crucial playoff matches last season. Despite these challenges, Prabhsimran remains committed to improving and is determined to embrace the competitive spirit of the league as he aims to establish himself further in the sport.

Ashwin raises serious concerns about the Mumbai Indians' IPL campaign

New Delhi: The Mumbai Indians (MI) are in a challenging position, sitting ninth in the IPL 2026 standings following several defeats, including a recent seven-wicket loss to the Punjab Kings on April 17. Veteran spinner Ravichandran Ashwin attributes this decline to a post-T20 World Cup hangover affecting MI's star players, many of whom were part of India's victorious World Cup squad. Ashwin highlights that the extensive transition from the World Cup's high-pressure environment to the demanding IPL schedule has left players like Hardik Pandya, Jasprit Bumrah, and Suryakumar Yadav fatigued. Despite a strong performance by Quinton de Kock, who scored 112 runs, the bowling unit's struggles persisted, with MI failing to defend a score of 195. Hardik Pandya ex-



pressed that the team is at a critical juncture, needing to make tough decisions to revive their campaign.

Sindarov of Uzbekistan prepares to face Gukesh for the World Championship title



New Delhi: With one round remaining, Uzbekistan's Javokhir Sindarov won the 2026 Candidates Chess Tournament on Tuesday, securing a World Championship matchup with defending champion D Gukesh later this year. After a controlled tie with Anish Giri in Round 13, the 20-year-old sealed his victory and made sure he couldn't be caught at the top of the standings. Sindarov demonstrated both his consistency and his capacity to handle crucial situations during the two-week competition by finishing the tournament undefeated. Sindarov

developed his campaign gradually rather than depending on a late comeback, gaining significant victories in the middle rounds before turning his attention to control and consolidation. By the closing stages, he held a clear lead and navigated the final stretch without taking unnecessary risks. India's R Praggnanandhaa, the lone Indian participant in the Candidates Open section after qualifying through the 2025 FIDE Circuit, was unable to stay in contention for the top spot despite a promising start. Sindarov's victory sets up a high-profile World

Championship match against D Gukesh, who made history in December 2024 by becoming the youngest world champion. Gukesh defeated Ding Liren 7.5-6.5 in Singapore, breaking a 39-year record held by Garry Kasparov, who had won the title at 22 in 1985. The upcoming contest is expected to be the youngest World Championship match in history, signalling a clear generational shift at the top of the sport. The venue and dates for the match are yet to be finalised, with the showdown scheduled for later in 2026. Recent encounters between the two underline how evenly matched they are. At Tata Steel Chess 2026, Gukesh reached a winning position after a striking queen sacrifice, but Sindarov defended with precision to secure a 78-move draw. Sindarov's only classical victory over Gukesh came in May 2022, and their games since have largely been closely fought. Sindarov heads into the title clash on the back of a 50-game unbeaten run in classical chess, a streak built on discipline and defensive resilience as much as attacking clarity. Gukesh, meanwhile, has endured a mixed start to the year, finishing ninth in Prague and fourth in Menorca, where he lost both games to compatriot Nihal Sarin. Despite that dip in results, Gukesh's pedigree at the highest level and his ability to rise in major events ensure that the World Championship match remains finely balanced. With both players known for their deep preparation and composure under pressure, the contest later this year is expected to be a closely contested battle for the title.

Coco Gauff and Elena Rybakina easily advance to the Stuttgart quarterfinals



New Delhi: Top seed Elena Rybakina secured her place in the quarter-finals of the WTA clay-court event in Stuttgart by defeating Diana Shnaider in straight sets, 6-2, 6-4, in a match lasting one hour and 12 minutes. Rybakina capitalized on her strong service game, marking her ninth ace at the end of the match. She will face Canada's Leylah Fernandez, who triumphed over Zeynep Sonmez in a hard-fought three-set match. Meanwhile, world number

three Coco Gauff commenced her Stuttgart campaign with a straight sets victory against Liudmila Samsonova, winning 7-5, 6-1, and is set to clash with Czech Karolina Muchova next. Gauff noted that she models her clay court game on Rafael Nadal, although she humorously referred to herself as the "Walmart version" of the legend. Earlier on Thursday, Muchova came from a set down to beat Elise Mertens 1-6, 6-3, 6-0 to book a clash with Gauff. Muchova advanced

by overcoming Elise Mertens after losing the first set 1-6 and winning the next two sets 6-3, 6-0. In another matchup, ninth-ranked Mirra Andreeva defeated Alycia Parks in straight sets, extending her winning streak to six matches, and will take on Iga Swiatek, a two-time Stuttgart winner. Lastly, Linda Noskova dominated Ekaterina Alexandrova with a 6-1, 6-1 score, setting up a quarter-final meeting with Elena Svitolina, who breezed past Eva Lys 6-1, 6-0.