

## Mizoram halts India–Myanmar border trade after driver’s death

**Aizawl, Feb 19:** The Mizoram government has ordered a temporary two-month closure of the India–Myanmar border trade route starting 16 February, citing significant security concerns. The decision, issued by the Lawngtlai District magistrate, follows the death of Lalramsanga, a 37-year-old driver from Mizoram who was found dead in Shin Letwa village, located in Myanmar’s Paletwa Township. The suspension halts all border crossings and cargo transportation, effectively cutting off a vital supply line for essential goods. “There is nothing we can do when the road is closed. We can only sit and wait,” a trader in Mizoram told Mizzima, urging authorities to reopen the route as soon



as possible. “If the road reopens sooner rather than later, it will be convenient for everyone,” he said. Local traders have voiced immediate concern over the impact of the closure, warning of imminent supply shortages and price hikes

in Myanmar’s Chin and Rakhine States. Perishable goods, including potatoes, onions, and tomatoes, are already at risk of spoilage, while shipments of dry goods, fuel, and rice remain stranded at the border. “Both sides will be affected,” a

trader in Mizoram told Mizzima. Goods are transported by road from Lawngtlai in Mizoram directly to Shinletwa, while during the rainy season they are shipped by waterways, including through Khaki, before continuing on to Kyauktaw in Rakhine State. The order states that all cross-border movement and the import of goods are prohibited, warning that violations will be prosecuted under Section 233 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Mizoram police said an investigation into the death is underway and that action will be taken against those responsible. Similar incidents in previous years have also prompted the temporary suspension of cross-border trade routes.

## Mizoram Celebrates 39th Statehood Day; Governor Urges Unity

**Aizawl, Feb 19:** Mizoram today marked its 39th Statehood Day with statewide observances centered on prayer, fasting, and reflection. The commemorations, organized by the State Day of Prayer Committee under Power Minister F. Rodingliana, ran from February 18 to 20, with mass gatherings held across churches and community halls. The focus was on thanksgiving and seeking divine guidance for the state’s continued peace and progress.

Governor General (Dr) Vijay Kumar Singh extended warm greetings to the people of Mizoram, describing the day as a celebration of peace, unity, and shared progress. In his message, he recalled



Mizoram’s journey since becoming the 23rd state of the Indian Union on February 20, 1987, following the signing of the historic Mizoram Peace Accord in 1986. He emphasized that the milestone stands as a testament to the

resilience of the Mizo people and the success of dialogue and reconciliation. The Governor urged citizens to uphold unity and harmony, noting that Mizoram’s identity is deeply rooted in its culture, tradition, and peaceful spirit.

## Hakshel Consultancy Pvt Ltd launched with eye on healthcare services

**Imphal, Feb 19:** In a significant move to enhance healthcare accessibility in the State, Hakshel Consultancy Services Pvt. Ltd. was formally inaugurated at Uripok Bachaspati Leikai, Imphal West district. The consultancy aims to bridge the gap between patients and private medical facilities by providing comprehensive and real-time information on healthcare services across the state. Alongside its inauguration, the consultancy launched the Care Health Card Membership Program, a new initiative designed to make private healthcare services more affordable and accessible for the people of Manipur. Recognising the challenges faced by citizens in navigating complex hospital systems, Hakshel Consultancy will function as a dedicated healthcare information hub. The consultancy will offer real-time data on specialty services, doctor availability, OPD bookings, and infrastructure across various private hospitals in Manipur. The newly introduced Care Health Card aims to reduce the financial burden of medical expenses.

The card provides access to real-time information about private hospitals and offers substantial discounts on essential healthcare services. Members of the Care Health Card program will be eligible for special concessions in multiple categories, including reduced fees for OPD consultations, lower charges for laboratory tests, imaging, and other diagnostic services, concessions on Operation Theatre (OT) charges for surgical procedures and discounts on medicines and pharmacy purchases. By centralizing and simplifying access to healthcare information, the consultancy empowers citizens to make informed decisions regarding treatment options based on cost, location, and medical expertise. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, the Director of the organisation stated, “Our mission is to ensure that quality healthcare is not just a privilege but an accessible reality for every person in Manipur. The Care Health Card is our first step in making private healthcare more affordable for the common man,



especially residents of the hill districts.” The inauguration event was attended by the President of United Club and Library, community leaders, mobilizers, hill district coordinators, and local citizens, who lauded the initiative as a timely and much-needed intervention in the state’s healthcare sector. For enrollment in the Care Health Card Membership Program, citizens may visit the office of Hakshel Consultancy Services Pvt. Ltd. at Uripok Bachaspati Leikai near United Club and Library, or contact 8415934236 for further details.

## Aid extended to IDPs across Churachandpur relief centers

**Imphal, Feb 19:** Churachandpur witnessed a significant outreach effort today as the District Administration organized the distribution of benefits to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) across multiple relief centers. The initiative, guided by the vision of Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand, aimed to provide timely support and strengthen welfare measures for displaced families. At Sadbhavna Mandap, Khominthang, Deputy Commissioner Dharun Kumar S, IAS, and SDO Churachandpur Anunay Anand, IAS, attended the program. Two IDPs, Biakkim and Niangngaihlun, interacted with the Chief Minister via video conference, expressing satisfaction with the relief centre’s management and requesting timely monthly DBT deposits. Selected inmates also received cheques in a symbolic gesture and PMAY-G benefits. MLALMKhaute joined the interaction virtually. In another programme at Sadbhavna Mandap, Tuibong, MLA Paolienlal Haokip of Saikot AC, along with Additional Deputy Commissioner Lalrobul Fimate and SDO Jangminlen Lupho, oversaw the distribution. To mark the occasion, Paolienlal Haokip, MLA handed over cheques in a symbolic gesture as financial assistance was credited directly to the bank accounts of IDPs. Essential items such as mattresses, blankets, torchlights, infant formula, and chocolates were also distributed to the IDPs. At the Torbung Prefabricated Relief Centre, Letzamang Haokip, MLA, Henglep AC, Seiminthang Lenthang, ADM Churachandpur, and Mangminthang Gangte, SDO Kangvai attended the event. Benefits were transferred directly to IDPs’ bank accounts to support the purchase of personal items and bedding.

## Moirang-Wangoo road construction to begin soon: CM

**Imphal, Feb 19:** Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh has announced that construction work of Moirang to Wangoo road via Kumbi will commence within 15 days. The announcement was made during a reception held at the residence of Sanasam Premchandra Singh, MLA of the Kumbi Assembly Constituency, in Bishnupur district. Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister assured the public of the government’s unwavering commitment to the state’s development. He further stated that work on the Napat Bridge would begin tomorrow and is expected to be completed within five days. He also directed the Deputy Commissioner of Bishnupur, Pooja Elangbam, to submit a report on the progress of prefabricated housing construction for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the district. Upon his departure from Kumbi, the Chief Minister was accorded a warm welcome by the residents of the Thanga Assembly

Constituency, led by MLA T. Robindro Singh, at the latter’s residence in Kairenphabi, Bishnupur district. Speaking at the function, the Chief Minister stated that he would personally look into the grievances raised by the people of the Thanga AC and assured them that the government would extend all possible support for the constituency’s development. The reception functions were attended by Superintendent of Police, Bishnupur, Th. Shangkar Deba, along with residents from both the Kumbi and Thanga Assembly Constituencies. Taking to X and Facebook, Chief Minister said, “Grateful for the warm reception and two meetings held with party leaders and Karyakartas in honour of my visit to Kumbi and Thanga Assembly Constituencies today. The first meeting was held at Salam Konjil, near the residence of Hon’ble MLA Shri S.Premchandra Singh, and the second at Keirenphabi Mamang Leikai, near the residence of Hon’ble

MLA Shri T. Robindro Singh. Both meetings emphasized strengthening the party’s grassroots connect and organizational unity”. “Spoke on the urgent need for systematic cleansing of phumdis in Loktak Lake to safeguard the lives and livelihoods of our fishermen and farmers, while ensuring ecological balance,” he said. “Reaffirmed my commitment to improving connectivity through the construction of bridges and strengthening road infrastructure, thereby accelerating our collective journey towards a #ViksitBharat and a #vikshitmanipur as envisioned by Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji,” the Chief Minister said. In another post, the Chief Minister said, “It is a matter of great satisfaction that many leaders have joined the party as Karyakartas. I warmly welcomed them and acknowledged their commitment as a source of strength and pride for our collective mission”.

## MPDF celebrates second foundation day

**Imphal, Feb 19:** The second foundation day of the Manipur People’s Development Foundation (MPDF) was celebrated at Salungfam Mamang Ching in Thoubal district. The foundation, which was established with the objective of nurturing responsible youth and building a self-reliant society, marked the occasion with various activities and speeches. The programme was attended by MPDF advisor Th. Manihar, MPDF President Pebam Bishambhor, Dr. K. Indrakumar Singh of the Political Science Department, Dhanamanjuri University, and Ima Keithel President Ema Memma Devi as presidium members. Delivering the keynote address, MPDF General Secretary Arunjit

Ningthouja stated that the foundation was formed with the aim of guiding and empowering youth who are facing challenges in society. He said MPDF is working to instill a sense of responsibility among young people so that they can love their motherland and lead a dignified life through unity and collective effort. As part of its ongoing initiatives, MPDF has begun cultivating dragon fruit at Salungfam Mamang Ching. Rearing of hens, ducks and pigs are also being taken up. In addition, vocational training programmes, including food processing and related skill development activities, are being provided to local residents. He further informed that MPDF units have been established in Salungfam, Langol, Tentha,

Heirolk, Charangpat, Khangabok, Jiribam, and Keithelmanbi. A major project is also being planned at Ningel in the near future. The organization appealed to all sections of society for support and cooperation in its mission. Speaking at the event, MPDF Advisor Th. Manihar said that we should find out who are the real friends and who are our enemies, it is the time to stand together in unity. He emphasized that all our Indigenous Tribes in Manipur must strengthen bonds of friendship and work collectively for peace and development. He added that MPDF’s mission is to guide youth towards becoming responsible citizens and to build a united and progressive Manipur.

Ema Memma Devi, President of Ima Keithel, also addressed the gathering. She stated that in the present situation prevailing in the state, mothers are deeply concerned about the future of their children. She stressed that it is not the time for division but for unity and collective action to safeguard the younger generation. The programme concluded with the distribution of gifts to MPDF leaders, representatives of various student bodies, Meira Paibi groups, local village leaders, and the Village Chief of Mariland village. Leaders of different civil society organizations, members of Meira Paibi groups from various areas, and numerous MPDF unit members attended the celebration.

## Army neutralises 9 IEDs along Indo-Myanmar border

**Imphal, Feb 19:** The Red Shield division of the Indian Army’s Spear Corps have sanitised a corridor of 2.6 km length along the Indo-Myanmar border in dense jungle terrain, destroying nine IEDs and two ordnance in Manipur, a Defence official said on Wednesday.



The sanitisation and demining operation in the area was undertaken on a requisition from government agencies to facilitate the resumption of stalled border fencing work following intelligence inputs regarding improvised explosive devices (IED) and unexploded ordnances owing to the presence of erstwhile insurgent camps, the official said in a statement. The Red Shield division carried out the operation along the Indo–Myanmar Border at Yangoubung, Manipur, between January 16 and 17, he said. “Operating in dense jungle terrain under challenging security conditions, the team cleared and sanitised a corridor measuring 2.6 km × 13 metres,” he said. During the operation, nine IEDs and two unexploded ordnance were destroyed, the official said. The operation has

enabled Survey of India teams and construction agencies to proceed with critical border infrastructure work, he added. Earlier on February 16, Lt Gen Abhijit S Pendharkar, General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Spear Corps, conducted a comprehensive visit to Manipur on Monday

to assess the security landscape amid ongoing challenges. Accompanied by senior commanders, Lt Gen Pendharkar toured critical zones in Ukhrul, Kangpokpi, Imphal East and Imphal West districts. He received detailed briefings from the GOC Red Shield Division, IGAR (South) and other formation leaders on operational dynamics. The Corps Commander also reviewed Army and Assam Rifles deployments, interacting directly with troops to evaluate their readiness for emerging threats. Praising the soldiers’ professionalism and steadfastness in upholding peace under trying conditions, Lt Gen Pendharkar emphasized unwavering mission readiness. He directed all formations to maintain high vigilance and agility, especially in volatile areas, to counter any rapid developments.

## Miscreants ambush, assault senior editor

**Imphal, Feb 19:** In a shocking incident, a senior editor of a leading daily newspaper in Imphal was reportedly ambushed and assaulted by armed miscreants yesterday night.

The assailants fired shots at his vehicle before physically attacking him. Khoirom Loyalakpa, editor of daily Naharolgi Thoudang newspaper, was reportedly attacked near the Hatta cemetery in Imphal East at around 10 pm.

The assailants fired two rounds at his car and thrashed him at the spot. Loyalakpa was admitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences, where he underwent treatment. A case has been registered at Porompat Police Station and investigation is underway.

The identities and motives of the attackers couldn’t be ascertained till the time of filing this report.

## Riyan Parag Headlines Special Captain’s Meet with Rajasthan Royals’ Young Talent

**Mumbai, Feb 19:** Rajasthan Royals today released a special and heartwarming press conference featuring newly appointed captain Riyan Parag led by the brightest young voices from the Rajasthan Royals Academy.

In a room filled with curiosity, courage, and candid questions, aspiring reporters, cricketers, and storytellers stepped up to the mic to interview their new captain. What followed was an interaction full of laughter, honest reflections, and moments that captured the spirit of youthful ambition. From asking what leadership feels like, to understanding how a captain handles pressure, the young Royals brought their own unique lens, one driven by inspiration and possibility. Parag, in turn, embraced the questions with warmth and openness, offering a glimpse into his journey and his excitement about leading the franchise into a new chapter.

The initiative reflects Rajasthan Royals’ enduring commitment to nurturing the next generation, not just of cricketers, but of thinkers, leaders, and dreamers. As a franchise that has consistently championed young talent, the Royals believe the future of the game lies in empowering fearless voices and fresh perspectives.

By placing young and curious minds at the heart of this announcement, the Royals celebrated a simple but powerful idea: today’s leaders inspire tomorrow’s.

Sharing the idea behind this, Alok Chitre, COO - Rajasthan Royals said, “Innovation isn’t limited to what happens on the field; it extends to how we connect with our fans. The captain’s press conference is a milestone moment each season, and we wanted to reimagine it in a way that reflects our fan-first philosophy. By handing the mic to young supporters, we put the future of the game front and centre.”

# Dibang hydel project achieves key diversion tunnel breakthrough



**Guwahati, Feb 19:** The under-construction 2,880 MW Dibang Hydroelectric Project in Arunachal Pradesh has achieved a major construction milestone with the successful daylighting of a diversion tunnel, officials said on February 18. According to a statement issued in Itanagar, the breakthrough of Diversion Tunnel-3 marks a significant step forward in the execution of the ambitious hydropower project being developed by NHPC Limited. The final blast for the tunnel breakthrough was initiated by NHPC Director (Projects) Sanjay Kumar Singh on Tuesday. Officials

said the achievement reflects steady progress in key construction activities and will facilitate smoother river diversion works, a critical component in dam construction. The daylighting of the tunnel is considered an important phase in the overall implementation plan of the project, which is being developed on the Dibang River in the Lower Dibang Valley district. The project will have an installed capacity of 2,880 MW, generated through 12 units of 240 MW each. Once completed, the project is expected to generate approximately 11,000 million units

of electricity annually. In addition to power generation, it is also envisaged to contribute to flood moderation and water storage management in the region. Officials further stated that the project will aid in regulating floods in the Brahmaputra River basin, strengthening downstream flood control measures while enhancing energy security in the northeastern region. The under-construction 2,880 MW Dibang Hydroelectric Project in Arunachal Pradesh has achieved a major construction milestone with the successful daylighting of a diversion tunnel, officials said on February 18.

# Assam Rajya Sabha elections terms of 3 MPs end in April

**Guwahati, Feb 19:** Biennial elections to 37 Rajya Sabha seats across 10 States, including Assam, which are falling vacant on different dates in April, will be held on March 16, the Election Commission said on Wednesday (February 18, 2026). The States where seats are falling vacant are Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Assam, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Bihar. In Assam, the term of three Rajya Sabha MPs — BJP’s Bhubaneswar Kalita and Rameswar Teli, and opposition-backed Ajit Kumar Bhuyan — will end on April 9, 2026. The notification for the election will be issued on February 26, and March 5 is the last date for filing nominations. The counting of votes will take place on the same day as polling.

March 16. Only elected members of the State Legislative Assemblies are eligible to vote in Rajya Sabha elections. Legislators elect members to the Upper House for a six-year term, with one-third of the members retiring every two years. The Rajya Sabha is a permanent House and is not subject to dissolution. Voting is conducted through the single transferable vote system, based on the principle of proportional representation. Candidates fielded by political parties must be proposed by at least 10 members of the Assembly or 10% of the party’s strength in the House, whichever is less. Independent candidates must have 10 proposers, all of whom must be members of the Assembly.

# Uber bike riders in Agartala announce indefinite strike over ‘Bike Saver’

**Agartala, Feb 19:** App-based bike taxi riders in Agartala have announced an indefinite suspension of services from February 18, demanding the complete withdrawal of Uber’s “Bike Saver” service, which they claim has severely impacted their earnings. More than 200 Uber bikers gathered near Heritage Park in the city to stage a protest and press for their demands. The riders voiced concerns over falling incomes, rising operational costs, and what they described as a lack of support from the company’s local office at Banamalipur on BK Road. Speaking to the media, protesting riders alleged that their earnings have dropped sharply since the introduction of the lower-fare “Bike Saver” option. They argued that the reduced pricing mod-

el has made it difficult to sustain daily expenses, particularly amid increasing fuel prices and vehicle maintenance costs. Turkey, as part of a coordinated organisational review. She is scheduled to arrive at Guwahati airport around 10 am on February 19. Upon arrival, she will proceed directly to the revered Kamakhya Temple, where she will offer prayers. The bikers also highlighted the deteriorating road conditions in several parts of the city due to ongoing Smart City project works. Despite these challenges, they said they have continued to provide services but have not received adequate cooperation or assistance from the company. Additionally, the riders claimed that Uber drivers in Tripura are paid sig-

nificantly less compared to their counterparts in neighbouring states, further compounding their financial strain. Stating that repeated appeals to the authorities have yielded no concrete response, the bikers declared that services would remain suspended until the “Bike Saver” service is completely withdrawn. The suspension is likely to affect daily commuters who rely on app-based bike taxis for affordable and quick transportation across the city. App-based bike taxi riders in Agartala have announced an indefinite suspension of services from February 18, demanding the complete withdrawal of Uber’s “Bike Saver” service, which they claim has severely impacted their earnings.

# Nagaland govt meets protesting adhoc teachers

**Guwahati, Feb 19:** The Nagaland government on February 17 held a meeting with representatives of the All Nagaland Adhoc Teachers’ Group (ANATG)-2015 as their agitation demanding regularisation of services entered its 11th day. The meeting, which lasted nearly three hours, was described as inconclusive by ANATG members. It was convened around 11 am and attended by the Adviser for School Education, the Principal Director and Joint Mission Director of Samagra Shiksha, officials from the Directorate of School Education and the Secretariat, along with representatives of the ANATG. During the discussions, the ANATG-2015 reiterated its core demands, including the segregation of teachers and the formulation of a targeted timeframe for service regularisation. Officials provided detailed inputs on the issues raised, but no final decision was reached. Following the meeting, ANATG members dispersed in compliance with directions issued by district authorities regarding the protest timing.



The ANATG core committee announced that it would convene a general meeting with all members on Wednesday to deliberate on the deliberations and decide the future course of action. The group has been staging a sustained agitation seeking regularisation of 1,166 adhoc teachers, alleging prolonged delays in resolving their service status.

# Priyanka Gandhi to visit Assam on February 19, lead major organisational review

**Guwahati, Feb 19:** Senior Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will be visiting Assam on February 19, as confirmed by Congress in-charge for Assam, Bhanwar Jitendra Singh on February 18. Priyanka Gandhi, a member of the party’s screening committee, will be accompanied by three senior observers, Shiv Kumar, Bhupesh Baghel, and Bandhu Turkey, as part of a coordinated organisational review. She is scheduled to arrive at Guwahati airport around 10 am on February 19. Upon arrival, she will proceed directly to the revered Kamakhya Temple, where she will offer prayers and seek blessings for peace, unity and prosperity in Assam. Following her temple visit, Priyanka Gandhi will head to the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) headquarters in Guwahati. From 11 am onwards, she will chair a marathon series of meetings expected to continue until midnight. The interactions will include detailed consultations with leaders and representatives of the Block Congress Committees (BCCs), Zila Congress Committees (ZCCs), Village Congress



Committees (VCCs), NSUI members, and representatives from SC, ST and Adivasi wings of the party. Singh said that this will be the first time all three screening committee observers will directly engage with grassroots workers

during their visit. The delegation is expected to hold in-depth discussions to evaluate the organisational structure, assess political challenges and gather first-hand feedback on ground-level dynamics.

# Hydropower in Eastern Himalayas fuels climate maladaptation risks

**Sikkim, Feb 19:** Over the past two decades, hydropower has reshaped development pathways in the Himalayas. It has been aggressively promoted as clean energy that can meet climate goals, while also driving economic growth. The Hindu Kush Himalaya is widely recognised as a storehouse of untapped green energy, with estimates exceeding 3.5 terawatts (TW) of renewable potential, including nearly 882 gigawatts (GW) of hydropower. One visible consequence is the rapid expansion of glacial lakes. The latest Central Water Commission (CWC) data show a 20.7% increase in lake area across India between 2011 and 2024. In the Eastern Himalayas, the report further reveals that 26–52 lakes in Sikkim and 245–254 in Arunachal Pradesh have increased in water spread, among the highest numbers in the country. These changes reflect ongoing glacier melt and accelerated high-altitude warming, prompting the CWC to flag both states for priority monitoring and early-warning systems due to the elevated risk of GLOFs. The 2023 Teesta glacial lake outburst flood was a stark demonstration of how climate hazards and infrastructure interact. A 2025 study confirmed climate change as a significant catalyst, triggering a 20-metre-high, tsunami-like flood wave that sent the equivalent of 20,000 Olympic swimming pools of water downstream, making it one of the most catastrophic events recorded in the Himalayas. At the same time, hydropower has already reshaped river flows in the region by trapping sediment and altering natural regimes. Now, glacier melt, unstable moraines, and extreme rainfall are changing the timing, volume, and sediment loads of rivers in ways that dams — designed around historical baselines — are ill-equipped to handle. Instead, they are turning infrastructure intended to provide energy into a source of ecological and social vulnerability. Therefore, hydropower in this context ceases to be a climate solution and instead functions more as a maladaptation. However, this expansion is unfolding in one of the world’s most geologically fragile mountain systems. Nowhere is this tension more visible than in the Eastern Himalayas, where climate risks are intensifying rapidly. Over time, these shifting risks have exposed how large hydropower projects can amplify, rather than absorb, environmental stress. The 2023 glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) from South Lhonak Lake in North Sikkim crystallised this contradiction. As the flood intersected with hydropower infrastructure along the Teesta, it revealed how vulnerability has been hard-wired into the landscape. The concept of maladaptation describes climate responses that ultimately increase vulnerability, shift risk across space or time, or undermine long-term resilience. It is particularly relevant in the Eastern Himalayas, where the physical foundations of large hydropower infrastructure are increasingly misaligned with climatic and geological realities. The Himalayas sit in a seismically active, high-hazard zone characterised by young geology, steep terrain, and dynamic, sediment-rich rivers. Even without considering the impacts of climate change, large, static infrastructure in such set-



tings carries an inherent risk of inadvertently altering the flow regime and, in turn, affecting ecosystem structure and function as a whole, ultimately impacting ecosystem services, particularly for downstream communities. While many projects are presented as run-of-the-river, in practice, many rely on pondages that store water for hours during the day or across dry periods and release it in pulses. These artificial surges intensify erosion, destabilise riverbanks, and raise downstream risk. A conspicuous feature of building hydropower projects is the flooding of extensive areas, where these ecological costs very quickly translate to high social costs. Reservoirs submerge extensive areas, displacing communities and cutting off access to critical ecosystem services, including fisheries, forest resources, and culturally significant river landscapes. These losses are difficult to quantify or restore through rehabilitation. When these processes of fair compensation, rehabilitation, livelihood restoration, and participatory decision-making are weak or incomplete, displacement becomes structural, and social conflict intensifies. Within this broader trend, the Eastern Himalayas exhibit a distinct climatic asymmetry, with glaciers here fed by the monsoon rather than winter accumulation. As accumulation occurs during warmer months, rising temperatures more readily shift precipitation from snow to rain, reducing solid ice formation and also extending the melt season, making them more sensitive to rising temperatures. Furthermore, reduced summer snow cover can further intensify melting through albedo effects. Glaciers here are therefore smaller, monsoon-fed, and less stable, and are retreating significantly faster than those in the Western Himalayas.

# ‘Bhupen Borah surrendered to Himanta’ day after quitting Congress amid land row

**Guwahati, Feb 19:** Fresh political tensions erupted on February 18 after Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi accused Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma of engineering former state Congress chief Bhupen Kumar Borah’s defection to the Bharatiya Janata Party, alleging the move was meant to deflect attention from questions surrounding land ownership. Addressing a press conference, Gogoi claimed that Borah’s decision to join the BJP had confirmed long-standing suspicions within political circles. He said rumours about a “close relationship” between Sarma and Borah had circulated for some time. “There were many rumours regarding the close relationship between Himanta Biswa Sarma and Bhupen Borah. We tried our best not to believe these rumours and speculation,” Gogoi said. He added that party members had often questioned how details of “confidential meetings came to a particular journalist close to Himanta Biswa Sarma”. Gogoi alleged that Borah’s swift move to the BJP, a day after resigning from the Congress, raised serious concerns. “A day after resigning from Congress, Bhupen Borah had no qualms about joining the BJP and surrendering to Himanta Biswa Sarma,” he said. Linking the defection to a broader controversy, Gogoi claimed the development reflected “desperation” on the part of the Chief Minister. “Today the entire state is wondering as to how state empire of Himanta Biswa Sarma” through its political programmes. He suggested that Borah’s entry into the BJP was intended to divert public attention from these claims. “This will not affect the Congress party’s campaign. We will go on and continue the fight and remove Himanta Biswa Sarma from the seat of power,” BJP on February 22, following his resignation from the Congress. The move is being seen as a significant shift in Assam’s political landscape ahead of the Assembly elections later this year.



## ESM interaction programme held in Ukhrul



**Imphal, Feb 19:** The Somsai Battalion of Assam Rifles, under Headquarters Inspector General Assam Rifles (South), organised an Army Ex-Servicemen (ESM) interaction programme at Headquarters 10 Sector Assam Rifles, Somsai, Ukhrul. The initiative brought together 39 veterans from Ukhrul and Kamjong districts, reaffirming the enduring connection between serving troops and the veteran community in Manipur’s hill regions. Deputy Inspector General, Headquarters 10 Sector Assam Rifles, led the interaction and engaged directly with the veterans. The Sector Commander extended a warm welcome, setting the tone for constructive dialogue. Discussions centred on pension matters, medical assistance, documentation support, ECHS facilities, and grievance redressal mechanisms. All concerns raised were carefully noted, with assurance of timely action for resolution, said a press release of IGAR(S). Among the attendees was Hony Capt James Shimrah, (Retired), 14 Assam Regiment, aged 82, the senior-most veteran present. His participation symbolised the legacy of service and the inspiration it continues to provide to younger generations. The programme fostered trust, camaraderie, and institutional bonds, while also highlighting the importance of veteran welfare in strengthening community ties during a crucial period for Manipur. The event drew together veterans and serving personnel in one collective effort to reinforce unity and mutual support, it added.

## GOC 41 Sub Area flags off Eastern Edge Expedition Jorhat–Shillong

**Meghalaya, Feb 19:** On the second day of “The Eastern Edge Expedition,” the General Officer Commanding, 41 Sub Area, ceremonially flagged off a bike rally from Jorhat to Shillong, marking the commencement of the next leg of the journey. The expedition is being conducted under Operation Sadbhavana 2025-26 by the Assam Rifles in partnership with Hero MotoCorp, reflecting a unique blend of military discipline and corporate collaboration.

The rally features a contingent of 24 bikers — 12 representatives from the Assam Rifles and 12 from Hero MotoCorp — sym-



bolizing strong teamwork and civil-military synergy. The initiative celebrates resilience, camaraderie,

and the indomitable spirit of the Northeast, while also promoting adventure tourism, youth engagement, and regional connectivity. As riders traverse diverse and challenging terrains en route to Shillong, the expedition embodies discipline, perseverance, and the shared pride of carrying the Tiranga across the eastern frontier of the nation. The journey is not only a test of endurance but also a tribute to the unity and spirit of the region. Officials emphasized that the expedition reinforces the Assam Rifles’ commitment to fostering harmony, outreach, and national integration.

## NIA chargesheets 3 accused in Myanmar based human trafficking & cyber fraud case

**New Delhi, Feb 19:** The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday filed charges against three accused persons, including an absconding suspected Chinese national, in a human trafficking and cyber fraud racket, operated by Indian and foreign agents from Myanmar.

The accused, identified as Ankit Kumar @ Ankit Bhardwaj, Ishtikhar Ali @ Ali and Lisa have been charged under Sections 61(2), 127(4), 143(3),308(2), 318(4) and 62 r/w 143(3) of BNS and Section 24 of Emigration Act in

the chargesheet filed before the NIA special court in Panchkula, Haryana.

NIA, which had taken over the case from Haryana Police, had found during investigation that the three, along with known and unknown associates, were involved in trafficking vulnerable Indian youth to the Myawaddy region of Myanmar.

The agency, during investigation, uncovered a well-organised network of traffickers and touts engaged in illegal activities - ranging from unlicensed recruitment of Indian citizens abroad, to the illicit transfer of

victims for criminal operations in Southeast Asia.

Ankit Kumar & Ishtikhar Ali, who have been arrested, were engaged in luring Indian youth by offering legitimate jobs in Thailand, and further coordinated online interviews with Lisa (believed to be a Chinese national based in Myanmar), investigations in the case RC-23/2025/NIA/DLI revealed. The duo deceived the victims by presenting Lisa as a genuine recruiter into believing that they would be provided secure jobs in Thailand. The accused arranged transportation for the

victims from India to Myanmar, illegally via Thailand.

On reaching Myanmar, the trafficked victims were forced to work in cyber scam companies, creating fake social media profiles and engaging with people in the USA, UK, and Canada to convince them to invest in fraudulent cryptocurrency apps, NIA investigations further revealed. On refusal, the victims were confined and coerced by the scammers to continue. The accused also forced the victims to pay hefty amounts for their release. Investigation in the case is continuing.

## Appoint TA&H Minister from tribal MLAs stationed in Imphal: TYCM

**Imphal, Feb 19:** The Tribal Youth Council Manipur (TYCM), Council Headquarters, submitted a memorandum to Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh, urging the appointment of a Minister-in-Charge of Tribal Affairs & Hills from among tribal MLAs able to be stationed in Imphal. According to a press release of TYCM, as mandated by Article 164 of the Constitution of India, it is stated that the Chief Minister shall be appointed by the Governor and the other Ministers shall be appointed by the Governor

on the advice of the Chief Minister, and the Ministers shall hold office during the pleasure of the Governor. It may be recalled that for more than the past two years, the tribal people of the State have had no opportunity to meet or interact with the Minister of Tribal Affairs & Hills, as the Minister has not been stationed in Imphal since the outbreak of ethnic clashes in the State on May 3, 2023. In this regard, the Tribal Youth Council Manipur (TYCM) has repeatedly appealed to the previous Government; however, these appeals have

not been addressed, it said. The Tribal Affairs & Hills Department serves as the backbone for ensuring the welfare and development of tribal areas in Manipur. However, since the outbreak of ethnic clashes in the State, this vital Department has remained in a state of paralysis due to the prolonged absence of the Minister of Tribal Affairs & Hills, it lamented. As a result, the release of funds and the implementation of various schemes and work programs have been stalled for over a year, causing significant hardship and injustice to

the communities not involved in the ethnic conflict.

This state of limbo has severely impeded the development process in the tribal and hill areas, exacerbating the existing disparities and backwardness, it said. If the post of Minister-in-Charge of Tribal Affairs & Hills is once again assigned to an MLA who is unable to be stationed in Imphal, development activities in the tribal areas of Manipur will not progress, and the losses and gaps of previous years will remain unaddressed, it observed.

## AMGSU deplores student rampage at exam centre

**Imphal, Feb 19:** The All Manipur Gorkha Students’ Union (AMGSU) expressed strong dissatisfaction over the unfortunate incident that occurred on the first day of the Higher Secondary Examination (HSE) conducted by the Council of Higher Secondary Education Manipur. In a press release, AMGSU deeply regretted the inconvenience and distress caused during such a crucial academic examination, saying the examination period is a decisive stage in the academic journey of students, and any disruption or mismanagement severely affects their mental preparedness and overall performance. The union urged the concerned authorities to conduct a thorough inquiry into the matter and take necessary corrective measures to ensure that such incidents do not recur in the future. At the same time, AMGSU appealed to all students to strictly adhere to the norms and guidelines laid down

by the concerned authorities to maintain the fairness and integrity of the examinations. Students are expected to uphold discipline, follow examination rules sincerely, and cooperate fully at the examination centres. They must show due respect to teachers, invigilators, the Officer-in-Charge (OC), and all officials deployed at the examination venues, it said. Furthermore, as the Higher Secondary Examinations are ongoing and the Board Examinations are scheduled to commence from 23rd February, AMGSU appealed to all villages, local clubs, religious institutions, and event organizers to refrain from using loudspeakers and high-volume sound systems during this examination period. A peaceful and conducive environment is essential for students to concentrate and perform well, it said. The union sought the cooperation and understanding of the public in maintaining silence, especially during



study hours and examination days. AMGSU said it remains committed to safeguarding the academic interests of students while promoting discipline, mutual respect, transparency, and fairness in all academic matters. Mention may be made that on the first day of the examination, tension erupted at Wabagai Higher Secondary School examination centre in Kakching district following reports that some students allegedly tore answer scripts, attendance sheets and admit cards and set them on fire.

## BJP candidates for 3 Rajya Sabha seats in Assam almost finalised: Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sharma

**Guwahati, Feb 19:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said that the ruling BJP will contest all three Rajya Sabha seats in Assam. “Candidates for the three Rajya Sabha seats from Assam have been almost finalised,” the Chief Minister informed mediapersons.

The Election Commission of India on Wednesday announced that the biennial elections to the Rajya Sabha will be held across 10 states, including Assam, on

March 16.

The Rajya Sabha elections are scheduled to be held for the seats falling vacant from Assam, with political parties intensifying internal consultations ahead of the announcement of nominees. The members whose terms are ending include Rameswar Teli, Bhubaneswar Kalita, and Ajit Kumar Bhuyan.

The Chief Minister said the BJP is confident of securing a clean sweep in the elections.

“BJP will contest all three seats, and we are hopeful of winning all of them,” Sarma said.

The biennial Rajya Sabha elections are conducted through an indirect voting system, where elected MLAs cast their votes using the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote.

The counting of votes will be conducted on the same day (March 16) from 5pm onwards. The entire election process is slated to conclude by March 20.

## National conference on MedEngage commences at RIMS

**Imphal, Feb 19:** The National Conference on MedEngage: Uniting Clinicians and Engineers for Biomedical Innovation (MedEngage: UCE-BI-2026) commenced on Wednesday at Banting Hall, Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Imphal. Envisioned as a two-day academic congregation on February 18 and 19, the conference stands as a significant stride toward nurturing meaningful collaboration between clinicians and engineers, with the shared goal of advancing innovation in biomedical research and healthcare technology. The inaugural ceremony was graced by Prof. G. Sunil Kumar Sharma, Director, RIMS, as Chief Guest; Prof. D.V.L.N. Somayajulu, Director, National Institute of Technology Manipur, as Special Chief Guest; Prof. B.Praveen Reddy, Principal, Dental College, RIMS, as President; and Prof. N.Sanjib Singh, Medical



Superintendent, RIMS Hospital, and Prof. L.Rajesh Singh, Dean (Academics), RIMS, as Guests of Honour. Prof. G. Sunil Kumar Sharma, Director of RIMS, Imphal, said the

conference, jointly organised by NIT Manipur, NIT Haryana, and General College, launches an annual biomedical innovation platform uniting clinicians and engineers to

address infectious diseases, NCDs, trauma, and rural health through AI-driven, affordable solutions and student collaboration. Prof. D.V.L.N. Somayajulu, Director of NIT Manipur, said the ANRF-sponsored two-day MedEngage 2026 conference, organised by two NITs and RIMS, advances clinician-engineer collaboration in AI-driven biomedical innovation, aligned with national missions and ₹500 crore healthcare AI funding, emphasizing skills, joint degrees, projects, partnerships, and the ANRF Prime Minister Professorship award. The programme was attended by clinicians, engineers, researchers, academicians, distinguished guests, faculty members, students, and representatives from healthcare, reflecting strong interdisciplinary participation and a shared commitment to advancing biomedical innovation.

## Conrad-Ardent ‘clash’ on ILP issue leads to 10-min adjournment

**Shillong, Feb 19:** The Meghalaya Legislative Assembly descended into pandemonium on Wednesday as a heated exchange over the Inner Line Permit (ILP) erupted into full-blown chaos, forcing Speaker Thomas A. Sangma to adjourn the House for ten minutes to quell the uproar. The storm broke during supplementary questions when VPP chief and Nongkrem MLA Ardent M. Basaiawmoit accused the government of lacking seriousness on ILP implementation. He contended that based on the government’s explanations, “one could conclude that it was not serious about implementing ILP.” He remarked that the repeated assertion that the government was “examining” the matter suggested it had become “a continuous process with no clear timeline,” and questioned “how long it would take since the House resolution was passed.” He stressed that “till date, there had been no tangible outcome.” He maintained that ILP remained

“the best mechanism to address influx, regardless of differing views,” and argued that Meghalaya faced “a peculiar situation where influx was not only from foreign countries but also from other Indian states.” Referring to the Immigration and Foreigners Act 2025, he stated that the law was “not new but a modernisation consolidating four colonial-era laws adopted by India,” and was “not designed specifically to prevent influx into Meghalaya but to deal with foreigners entering the country.”

He also observed that while some argued ILP would violate Article 19 of the Constitution guaranteeing freedom of movement, “the state’s unique circumstances warranted serious consideration.” He sought “a sincere reply from the government” and questioned whether it was “playing with the sentiments of the people on the ILP issue.” His sharp demand ignited the spark. Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma responded in a raised tone.

## Warder Arrested Over Illegal Mobile Access in Jail

**Imphal, Feb 19:** Manipur Police arrested one Sahid Shah (35) of Kairang Mayai Leikai, Imphal East district, a Warder in Manipur Central Jail, Sajiwa who was illegally facilitating unauthorized use of mobile phones to inmates, including those imprisoned under UAP (Act) to make and receive phone calls. Multiple mobile phones and SIM cards have been seized. Investigation so far has established financial transactions from within the jail premises by inmates through the UPI account of the arrestee. Further investigation is in progress to ascertain the full extent of involvement and to identify other persons connected with the FIR case registered at Heingang-PS, Imphal East district.



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Editorial

The Need for Balanced Media Consumption

The modern citizen encounters an unprecedented volume of information daily. News, commentary, and analysis circulate continuously. While access empowers informed participation, unbalanced consumption creates distortion. Selective exposure reinforces existing beliefs. Individuals gravitate toward sources aligned with personal perspectives, limiting exposure to alternative viewpoints. This pattern narrows understanding. Excessive consumption also induces fatigue. Constant updates may generate anxiety without enhancing comprehension. Depth of analysis declines when headlines replace sustained reading. Balanced media consumption requires intentional selection of credible sources. Cross-verification strengthens accuracy. Allocating time for reflective reading enhances understanding. Media institutions bear responsibility for maintaining editorial standards. Fact-checking, context provision, and balanced representation support informed discourse. Educational frameworks must integrate media literacy to equip citizens with analytical tools. Responsible consumption strengthens democratic participation. Information abundance is an opportunity, not a guarantee of wisdom. Balanced engagement transforms data into knowledge. A society that consumes media thoughtfully cultivates discernment and resilience in public life.

Bangladesh has become “an over-regulated country”, and serious deregulation is now essential, Finance and Planning Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said on his first day in office at the Secretariat yesterday. “We have to liberalise and create a level playing field for every citizen to participate in the economy and reap the benefits,” he said.

The minister said that rebuilding public institutions would top his agenda, describing them as being in a “very bad shape”. “We must address the decay of state institutions. We must ensure professionalism, transparency, and efficiency in the institutions. This is very important. In the absence of institutions, no programme will work properly,” said the new minister.

The BNP-led alliance formed the government on Tuesday after a landslide victory in the recent national election. Before taking up office, ministers visited the National Martyrs’ Monument in Savar to pay tribute to the heroes of the 1971 Liberation War. They later went to the Secretariat,



at, met officials and briefed reporters.

Chowdhury said the July uprising in 2024 has reshaped public expectations, and economic policies must reflect that shift. The immediate task, he said, is to restore the health of state bodies. “Our key priority is to recover institutions and bring professionalism, transparency and efficiency into them,” he said.

He added that the existing patronage-based economy must be transformed into a democratic one. “To do this successfully, we need deregulation and liberalisation. We should not remain solely dependent on

a manufacturing-driven economy; rather, we must diversify it.”

“Sports, culture and various professional groups must be brought into the economic mainstream,” he said. He pointed to the example of the shital pati, a traditional woven mat from Barisal that sells for Tk 600 to Tk 700. With proper craft training, access to credit and online marketing, he said artisans could broaden their product range and tap into larger markets. Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur, Finance Division Secretary Md Khairuzzaman Mozumder and Financial

Institutions Division Secretary Md Abdur Rahman were present. “We have to build an economy that ensures the participation of all citizens. If people from all levels and professions are engaged in economic activities, it will be possible to bring overall change to the national economy,” Chowdhury said. At the event, Zanaayed Saki, state minister for finance and planning, said the economic system should be shaped in line with the implementation of the 31-point reform agenda announced by Tarique Rahman. He called for establishing a democratic economic order.

UK-EU defense: progressing, but far too slowly

For Vladimir Putin, peace talks with Ukraine are war pursued by other means. That is why progress has been so slow in negotiations, which resumed in Geneva this week. The Russian president demands the surrender of territory that his army has failed so far to win in combat. Since Mr Putin cannot be trusted to honour any agreement, Volodymyr Zelenskyy rightly insists on robust security guarantees.

The Kremlin remains committed to restoring national pride through territorial expansion. Mr Putin might accept a lull in the Ukraine conflict, but only to regroup. He must be deterred from resuming a campaign aimed at extinguishing Ukraine’s sovereignty. His country’s economy and propaganda apparatus are increasingly oriented towards sustaining a long war. He has shown little sign of abandoning efforts to weaken Nato and punish European democracies for backing Kyiv. The intent is signalled by a campaign of constant provocations: sabotage, maritime and air incursions, cyber-attacks and on-line disinformation.

Sir Keir Starmer addressed the dangers in a speech last week at the Munich security conference, urging fellow European nations to accelerate defence and security cooperation. The prime minister rejected the Brexit ethos of detachment from Britain’s



continental allies. “There is no British security without Europe, and no European security without Britain,” he said. The speech was an important clarification of the UK’s geopolitical interests at a time when domestic politics is too often addled with Brexit delusions. But there is a gap between Sir Keir’s ambition and its

realisation. Defence and security cooperation was a foundational pillar of the “reset” in UK-EU relations agreed in a summit last May. Britain was supposed to join the Security Action for Europe (Safe) programme – a €140bn (£122bn) investment fund to accelerate continental defence spending. In November,

negotiations broke down over the size of the UK’s financial contribution. Failure to reach agreement on a matter of such obvious mutual interest was humiliating for both sides.

There is also a domestic mismatch between the prime minister’s rhetorical urgency on security matters and the rate of

government action. Last June, Sir Keir committed to raise defence spending to 5% of GDP – a collective Nato target – by 2035. Last week, he said Britain would have to “go faster”, although he did not specify sums and dates. In this context, national security is broadly defined to include civil resilience. It is not simply a matter of diverting resources from peacetime public services into rearmament.

Defence investment should itself expand economic capacity, generating growth that reshapes the fiscal arithmetic. But such investments take time to bear fruit, while the chancellor remains preoccupied with self-imposed metrics. Budget wrangling is the reason why a defence investment plan, due last year, has yet to materialise. It is a familiar story: a prime minister sounding purposeful in speeches without confronting the difficult trade-offs required to turn bold pledges into action.

Sir Keir deserves credit for articulating the geopolitical challenge posed by Russia and the obvious response – stepping up cooperation with our continental allies. Since taking office, the prime minister has been slowly grappling with the strategic blunder of Brexit, only recently daring to describe it in those terms. He must now act with the urgency implied by his own rhetoric.

The BBC’s Lord of the Flies shows why diverse casting doesn’t always work

Adolescence creator Jack Thorne’s new BBC series sees him return to the subject of masculinity, this time turning to William Golding’s Lord of the Flies. The novel, which remains a GCSE set text, has been a staple of secondary school English departments almost since its publication in 1954. The decision to include a diverse cast, including the excellent Winston Sawyers who plays Ralph, will probably be viewed by many as a progressive move, ensuring that not only white actors are offered roles and not only white people are represented on screen. But for all its progressive aspirations, an adaptation like this obscures some of the most interesting themes discernible in the book.

It’s important to state at the outset that I am certainly not suggesting there are too many Black and Asian people on television. The opposite is often true. Instead, I’m questioning what aspects of Golding’s original story are obscured by the inclusion of Black and Asian actors in the series. A key trope of the “Robinsonade” genre, that takes its name from Daniel Defoe’s 1719 novel Robinson Crusoe, is white English men finding themselves on an island where they encounter non-European Others. If you’re not thinking about this, it is hard to understand Piggy’s declaration in Golding’s text: “We’ve got to have rules and obey them. After all we’re not savages. We’re English; and the English are best at everything.”

The colour-blind approach to casting at the expense of story is not new, nor is the issue undiagnosed. Writing about Bridgerton in 2022, Gary Younge described the decision to employ a diverse cast as offering “the depiction of racial difference in the absence of racial inequality”. In the US, Ishmael Reed wrote the play The Haunting of Lin-Manuel Miranda in response to Hamilton, drawing attention to how an inclusive cast obscured a racist past. The same might be said of another of Thorne’s projects, his 2020 film The Secret Garden. What is lost by this approach to adaptation and storytelling? For one thing, Golding’s tale loses some of its original potency, and meaning, when abstracted away from the context of British colonialism and racism.

Golding envisaged Lord of the Flies as something of a response to RM Ballantyne’s The Coral Island, a Robinsonade boys’ ad-

venture story that glorified British civilisation and treated racial hierarchies as natural. Robinsonades, which also include films such as Swiss Family Robinson, The Admirable Crichton, Lost in Space and The Martian, depict people (men, in the main) finding themselves in inhospitable climates, remote islands, where they are forced to survive by dint of their ingenuity and sure moral compass. Often, these survivors have their humanity brought into sharper focus through encounters with racialised others. This is the vision conjured up by Piggy’s reference to savages, a trope that can be traced right back to Defoe’s book and which even finds its way into the US Declaration of Independence in uneasy tension with the claim that “all men are created equal”, and suggesting that those labelled savages are not in fact to be regarded as fully human.

The original edition of Golding’s book contained usage of the N-word, which was replaced in subsequent editions with the word “Indians”. These terms are used to indicate a racial hierarchy and in the traditional Robinsonade, this racial hierarchy is usually, and unapologetically, endorsed (spoiler: white European men are always at the top). Golding’s novel is certainly not unproblematic, but through irony and self-reflection, it opens itself up to be read as an anticolonial text.

Informed by the events of the second world war, he departs from the Robinsonade tradition in suggesting that the “savagery” in fact lies within these upper-class white English boys. Is the same true for Thorne’s adaptation? It has clearly provided opportunities for actors of colour, which is important – but in rehabilitating a monocultural “classic” through diverse casting, it has also obscured important readings.

Thorne has taken characters that are classed, gendered and raced in Golding’s book and decided that only two of those three identities are of consequence in his series. A story often viewed as dystopian becomes a racial utopia. At a time when so much racism is articulated through patriarchal notions of asserting dominance and protecting “our women” from those not like us, this feels like a curious retreat – a white flight, if you will – from how notions of masculinity are deeply entangled with both gender and racial hierarchies. A

To fulfill education commitments, decisive action is required

The overwhelming support of voters received by the BNP thrusts upon the new government a special responsibility and a challenge to meet people’s expectations. The party’s election pledges include a good number of education objectives and targets. Whether these promises reflect what is needed for essential education reform and how they can be turned into action and results are burning questions on people’s minds. Listed under the general tag line of “Achieving Equitable Socioeconomic Development and Sustainable State Capacity,” with the heading “Education and Human Resource Development,” the education objectives cover budget and infrastructure, primary and secondary education, higher education and research, madrasa and technical education, and teachers and overall reform. Regarding the education budget, BNP has pledged to raise the allocation to five percent of GDP (from the current allocation of less than two percent) as well as to promote digital technology (free Wi-Fi, multimedia classrooms, a tab for each teacher) and provide free school lunch and sanitation facilities for girls. Presumably the increased budget will pay for these items. On school education, the items mentioned include providing students with school uniforms, expanding pre-primary education, a compulsory third language instruction (beyond Bangla and English), and focusing on ex-

tracurricular and “creative talent development.” The “one child, one tree” initiative is aimed at raising environmental awareness. In higher education, key items include introducing student loans and support for higher education abroad, tax exemption for private universities, and upgrading the National University which regulates (very poorly) the academic quality of more than 2,200 colleges. Industry-academia collaboration and internship for students will be promoted. Madrasa education and technical education are bracketed (in line with the current education ministry administrative structure). Modernisation of madrasas is a goal. The certificates of Qawmi madrasas are to be recognised and priority to be given on jobs. “Technical and vocational education for all” is promised. In the “Teachers and Reform” section, an education reform commission for overall quality improvement is promised. Curriculum reform, recruitment of meritorious teachers, and simplifying the payment of retirement benefits for teachers and granting them state honours are mentioned. Special assistance will be provided to students injured in the July mass uprising. An election manifesto, by its very nature, consists of pledges made to the public based on a general perception of key problems and popular demands. It is not expected to be a well-developed action plan and strategy for a

sector, especially one as complex and critical as education. Nonetheless, the pledges made by the newly elected governing party deserve scrutiny for what is included and excluded, and the feasibility of fulfilling them. In Bangladesh, raising the budget allocation for education, which is one of the lowest in the world in terms of GDP ratio, has been a long-held demand. Increasing it to five percent has to be a long-term commitment, which can be met as the tax-GDP ratio grows from the current level (6.8 percent). However, to signal the government’s sincerity, public investment in education must be increased in real terms year to year. Equally urgent is to direct funds to activities that demonstrably impact classroom learning, reduce inequity, and ensure better efficiency and accountability. The spending on digital technology emphasised in the pledge will be helpful only if it produces the outcome in better student learning. So far, the track record has been far from satisfactory. Regarding school education, one would have liked to see a commitment to a time-bound plan for universal secondary education of acceptable quality, which is a 2030 SDG goal and essential to realise Bangladesh’s aspiration for reaching an upper-middle-income status. Is compulsory third language instruction in schools a sensible priority when we are doing a very poor job of teaching English and even Bangla? Also,

in tertiary education, expansion of institutions without ensuring quality and necessary resources is a major concern. Vocational-technical education challenges are obviously not only a madrasa-related issue. Teachers—their recruitment and performance—are a central concern in bringing about a transformative change in the sector. The aim has to be more basic rethinking than salaries and awards within the present structure. Civil society discourse on education and consultations held across the country with parents, teachers, students, and education activists, conducted by the Campaign for Popular Education and its partner organisations, have brought out some key education decisions that the new government should address to make a head start towards reform. Among these are three early actions recommended for the new government: Appoint a high-level education development task force to guide the formulation of a five-year education sector development plan and a 10-year education perspective plan. Bring all school education, from pre-primary to pre-university, under a single ministry to promote universal, inclusive and high quality education for all children. Launch a comprehensive early childhood care and development (ECCD) programme to progressively serve all children from birth to pre-primary, ensuring their healthy growth, development,

and school readiness; this programme can be implemented through community-based organisations and NGOs with government support. The education manifesto responds, as expected, to populist demands and perceptions, some of which may be difficult to implement or may not produce the intended outcome. It is necessary to examine if and how the sundry list becomes part of an education philosophy, vision, and a comprehensive plan for educational development. A total action plan with priorities, phasing, resource planning, implementing mechanism, designation of responsibilities, and the means of assessing progress has to be developed. The two advisers of the interim government for the primary and mass education and education ministries, before their eventual departure, belatedly asked two consultation committees to provide recommendations on necessary reform in primary and secondary education. Another committee prepared a “vision” statement on future school education in the country. The reform ideas emanating from these committees do provide a reform agenda for the newly elected government. These can be regarded as the necessary groundwork for shaping the government’s education development agenda. Education advocates and the civil society expect to make education an urgent topic for discourse with the new government.

# Anthropic and Infosys collaborate to create

**Mumbai:** Information technology (IT) giant Infosys on Tuesday announced a strategic collaboration with artificial intelligence (AI) firm Anthropic to build and deliver advanced AI solutions to enterprises across industries, including telecom, financial services, manufacturing and software development. Shares of the IT major closed nearly 2% higher on the BSE after the announcement.The latest partnership comes days after the stocks of domestic IT services firms took a beating on investor concerns over AI tools disrupting their traditional business models. The sell-off was partly triggered by the release of an AI tool by Anthropic.Telecom first as Infosys, Anthropic plan AI agents via new CoE

The collaboration of Infosys and the AI firm will start with the telecom segment, with a dedicated Anthropic Center of Excellence being launched to build and deploy specialised AI agents. The tie-up aims to refresh the evolving enterprise operating models for clients by combining deep industry expertise, frontier AI and engineering scale in a single approach.“There’s a big gap between

an AI model that works in a demo and one that works in a regulated industry – and if you want to close that gap, you need domain expertise. Infosys has exactly that kind of expertise across important industries. Their developers are already using Claude Code to accelerate their work and create AI agents for industries that demand precision, compliance and deep domain knowledge,” Anthropic CEO and co-founder Dario Amodei said. “From modernising financial services with intelligent risk management and compliance to enabling engineering businesses to lead with AI-driven design and manufacturing, the goal is to leverage the joint expertise of Infosys and Anthropic to accelerate AI value realisation for global enterprises,” Infosys CEO Salil Parekh said.

# Tech Mahindra unveils service tokens for AI-led engagements

**New Delhi:** As artificial intelligence moves from pilot projects to the core of enterprise technology stacks, it is not just client workflows that are changing. Tech Mahindra is reshaping its operating model, shifting towards outcome-linked delivery structures and deeper consulting-led engagements as AI becomes central to customer demand. Tech Mahindra is also deploying AI internally before scaling solutions externally, treating itself as the first customer for several initiatives. Proving Agentic AI in HR and Finance“For Orion, the agentic enterprise, the customer zero is TechM. And we are doing it (building use cases) in two areas – HR and finance as well (where TechM will be client zero),” Malhotra said.At the centre of this shift is the company’s use of “service tokens” — an internal unit that represents the scope of services delivered across the full AI stack rather than just traditional billing based on man-hours. “The tokens function as a form of service currency, mapping the effort required across design, automation, model work, infrastructure, and application development within a project,” Nikhil Malhotra, chief innovation officer and head of AI and emerging technologies at Tech Mahindra, said on the sidelines of the India AI Impact Summit. Instead of approaching engagements horizontally — such as handling only infrastructure or application layers — the company now structures projects vertically around a client’s business problem. The required services across the stack are broken into measurable components, and tokens are assigned based on how much de-



sign work, manual effort, automation, or model integration is needed. This framework allows the company to define scope, estimate effort and structure billing in terms of delivered services rather than time spent. Across industries, the company sees AI implementations typically built on a common core architecture with significant customisation for each client’s processes, data environment and compliance requirements. As enterprises push towards personalised, domain-specific AI systems, this combination of vertical delivery, consulting-led engagement and token-based service measurement is increasingly shaping how Tech Mahindra structures its next phase of growth. The company follows a multi-stage workflow for AI projects. The first phase focuses on understanding the client’s problem statement and defining ex-

pected outcomes, including productivity targets or functional goals such as accuracy or response speed. This is followed by ROI assessment and feasibility analysis, after which the company provides a structured implementation plan outlining investment needs and expected returns.AI adoption is also strengthening Tech Mahindra’s consulting business. As enterprises explore agentic AI and automation initiatives, many approach the company with broadly defined use cases. “This has increased demand for advisory work covering ROI evaluation, process mapping, data readiness and implementation strategy. Consulting teams now often engage before any deployment begins, helping customers determine whether AI is necessary, what outcomes are achievable, and how investments should be structured,” Malhotra said.

# DGCA toughens up with new rules: Zero tolerance policy, immediate 30-day ban

**New Delhi:** India’s aviation regulator, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), has proposed stricter rules to deal with unruly passengers. The new draft allows airlines to directly impose a flying ban of up to 30 days on disruptive flyers. The draft revised Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR) has been placed in the public domain for stakeholder comments till March 16.As per a report by PTI, the DGCA stated a “No/Zero Tolerance Policy” has been adopted “to ensure the safety of the aircraft/persons/property and to maintain good order and discipline on board an aircraft.” The draft also distinguishes between “unruly” and “disruptive” passengers. While disruptive flyers may face a short-term airline-imposed ban, those who are placed on the official no-fly list after a committee decision may face longer restrictions.Under the existing norms, airlines can impose a temporary ban of up to 45 days pending a committee decision, a provision that remains in the proposed framework. What is changing under the new draft?

Under the new proposal, airlines can directly impose a ban of up to 30 days on passengers found committing specific disruptive acts, without first referring the issue to an independent committee. These acts will include smoking on board, misuse of emergency exits, consuming alcohol on domestic flights and unauthorised use of life-saving equipment such as life jackets, PTI reported. The draft also asks airlines to form a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to handle such incidents and report them to the regulator. As per a report by Hindustan Times, the draft introduces a new “Level 4” category for attempted or actual breach of the cockpit, considering it as a more serious offence. Level 3 and 4 violations can attract a minimum ban of two years or more. The offences are divided into levels. Level 1 includes verbal



abuse or unruly behaviour and can attract a ban of up to three months.Level 2 deals with physical abuse and may result to a six-month ban.Level 3 covers life-threatening acts such as damaging aircraft systems, whereas Level 4 relates to cockpit breaches.

# Andhra Pradesh clears 601 acres for Adani Infra in Google-linked AI data centre project

**New Delhi:** The Andhra Pradesh government has approved a large land parcel to be allotted to Adani Infra (India) for developing advanced AI data centre campuses tied to Raiden Infotech India, a Google company, as the state pushes ahead with a project valued at nearly Rs 90,000 crore.The government order, issued on Wednesday by N Yuvaraj, secretary in the IT, Electronics & Communications (ITEC) department, clears the allotment of 601.4 acres, up from the earlier approval of 480 acres, through the Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (APIIC).Land expanded across three locations in Vizag region

Under the revised plan, the land will be spread across three sites in Visakhapatnam and Anakapalli districts. The government has allocated 266.6 acres in Tarluvada, 160 acres at Adavivaram and Mudasarlova, and 175 acres at Rambili. Earlier, the state had approved a total of 480 acres, with 160 acres at Rambilli, 200 acres at Adavivaram and Mudasarlova, and 200 acres at Tarluvada. Raiden Infotech had recently requested that all three land parcels be allotted in the name of Adani Infra (India), which has submitted detailed project reports (DPRs) for the three locations.In its communication to the state, the company said it is also in the process of incorporating three special purpose vehicles (SPVs), fully owned by Raiden Infotech, to ensure smoother execution and compliance with state and local regulations

According to the government order, the SPVs are Vizag Hyperscale Data Centre Park Limited for the Adavi-



varam–Mudasarlova lands, Vizag Mega Data Centre Park Limited for the Tarluvada lands, and Vizag Mega Data Centre Park Limited for the Tarluvada lands.

Dr Reddy’s enters hormone therapy market with \$32.15 million Prodynova dealIncentives sought; Adani Infra, AdaniConneX to handle transactions

Adani has requested APIIC to issue the land allotment letters in the names of these SPVs and extend applicable

incentives, subsidies and financial benefits

Raiden Infotech has also confirmed that Adani Infra and AdaniConneX will act as the authorised points of contact for finalising land transactions and developing the data centre campuses and associated infrastructure.The company has asked the ITEC department to coordinate directly with Adani Infra and AdaniConneX to speed up the allotment process, the order said.

# NCC shares reach a 52-week high What is the cause of the steep sell-off

**New Delhi:** The share price of NCC came under heavy selling pressure in the early trading session today, February 19, dragging the stock to down to hit a 52-week low. The sharp decline in the stock price was due to the regulatory action by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) against the company and one of its subsidiaries. According to NCC, the delays in the project were caused by NHAI’s failure to hand over land on time and other contractual issues. However, NHAI challenged the award in the Delhi High Court, where the matter is currently pending. NCC in the exchange filing also noted “The impact, if any, on future tenders will depend on business opportunities arising during the debarment period. At present, no quantifiable financial impact can be ascertained.”

The company also noted that additional disputes related to the same project are under arbitration. OBIL has argued that the debarment was initiated while arbitration proceedings are ongoing and after the concession period had already ended. Moreover, the company in the exchange filing added that it was not given an opportunity to be heard and plans to challenge the order as per applicable law.Concerns over future order inflowsWhile NCC



clarified that the debarment does not impact its existing projects or current order book, the restriction could affect future opportunities linked specifically to NHAI.The company in the regulatory filing added that OBIL initiated arbitration proceedings against NHAI. It also has received a favourable award in November 2024.

During intraday trade, NCC shares fell as much as 10% before trimming some losses later in the

session. The stock dropped nearly 10% to Rs 135 per share.At the time of writing, the company’s share price had partially recovered from the day’s bottom. Let’s take a look at the key reasons behind this steep fall –NHAI debars step-down subsidiaryThe key reason behind this sharp plunge in the share price of the company was an order issued by NHAI debarring NCC and its step-down subsidiary, O B Infrastructure (OBIL), from participating in

future tenders for two years. The order come into effect from February 17, 2026In a regulatory filing, the company stated, “NHAI, vide its communication dated 17th February 2026, has issued an order of debarment to the Concessionaire i.e., O B Infrastructure Limited (OBIL) (step-down Subsidiary) and Promoter of the Concessionaire i.e., NCC Limited restraining them from participating in any tender/bid/RFP issued by NHAI, whether acting as Concessionaire, Contractor, EPC Contractor, O&M Contractor, O&M Agency, or Consortium Member, for a period of two (2) years with effect from 17th February 2026.”This effectively means that for two years, NCC and OBIL will not be eligible to bid for projects floated by NHAI. Since highway projects form an important part of infrastructure companies’ growth pipelines, the restriction has raised concerns about order inflows during the debarment period.Dispute over Uttar Pradesh highway projectThe debarment is linked to a long-running dispute over the Orai-Bhognipur section of National Highway 25 in Uttar Pradesh. The project was executed by OBIL under a concession agreement signed in April 2006 on a Build-Operate-Transfer (Annuity) basis.

# Anthropic and Infosys collaborate to create

**Mumbai:** Information technology (IT) giant Infosys on Tuesday announced a strategic collaboration with artificial intelligence (AI) firm Anthropic to build and deliver advanced AI solutions to enterprises across industries, including telecom, financial services, manufacturing and software development. Shares of the IT major closed nearly 2% higher on the BSE after the announcement.The latest partnership comes

days after the stocks of domestic IT services firms took a beating on investor concerns over AI tools disrupting their traditional business models. The sell-off was partly triggered by the release of an AI tool by Anthropic.Telecom first as Infosys, Anthropic plan AI agents via new CoE

Infosys and Anthropic to accelerate AI value realisation for global enterprises,” Infosys CEO Salil Parekh said.

# Nissan launches all-new GRAVITE at Rs 5.65 lakh, targets India’s value-focused family car market

**Aizawl:** Nissan Motor India has introduced the all-new GRAVITE, a seven-seater MPV launched at an introductory price of ₹5.65 lakh (ex-showroom), marking the first product under the company’s renewed product offensive and signalling a stronger push into India’s value-driven consumer mobility market. Manufactured locally at Nissan’s Chennai facility, the GRAVITE reflects the company’s “Made in India, Made for India” strategy aimed at meeting the evolving needs of modern Indian families.Designed



for versatility and everyday practicality, the MPV offers flexible seating configurations ranging from two to seven occupants and luggage capacity of up to 625 litres, along with more than 30 standard safety features including six airbags, Electronic Stability Control, Traction Control, Hill-Start Assist and Brake Assist. The vehicle features Nissan’s signature ‘C’ design language, LED lighting

systems, modular interiors with premium upholstery, wireless Android Auto and Apple CarPlay connectivity, digital instrument cluster and wireless charging. Powered by a 1.0-litre petrol engine paired with manual and AMT transmission options, the GRAVITE delivers fuel efficiency of up to 19.6 km/l and is available in five colour options along with a limited launch edition offering enhanced comfort and technology features. Nissan is also expanding its dealer network across Tier I and Tier II cities to improve customer accessibility nationwide.

# Iran partially closes Strait of Hormuz, a vital oil choke point, as Tehran holds talks with U.S.

**Garmany:** Iran partially closed the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz on Tuesday, state media reported, citing “security precautions” as Tehran’s Revolutionary Guard conducts military drills in the waterway. It comes as the U.S. and Iran hold talks in the Swiss city of Geneva, seeking to resolve an ongoing dispute over Tehran’s nuclear program.

It marks the first time Iran has shut parts of the Strait of Hormuz, a major international waterway that links crude producers in the Middle East with key markets across the globe, since U.S. President Donald Trump threatened Tehran with military action in January.

Located in the gulf between Oman and Iran, the strait is recognized as one of the world’s most important oil choke points. About 13 million barrels per day of crude oil transited the Strait of Hormuz in 2025, accounting for roughly 31% of global sea-borne crude flows, data provided by market intelligence firm Kpler showed.

Tuesday’s temporary closure of the waterway was aimed at ensuring shipping safety as part of the Revolutionary Guard’s “Smart Control of the Strait of Hormuz” drill. The



exercise is designed to improve Iran’s operational readiness and bolster its deterrence, among other objectives. Iran and the U.S. reached an understanding of the “guiding

principles” during the talks, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told reporters after they concluded, Reuters reported. The progress does not mean an agreement

will be reached soon and more work still needs to be done, he added. Energy market participants had been closely watching the outcome of the U.S.-Iran talks, particularly as both sides have increased their military presence in the region. Oil prices were last seen trading lower, erasing earlier gains. International benchmark Brent crude futures with April delivery fell 1.8% to \$67.48 a barrel, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate futures with March delivery stood 0.4% lower at \$62.65. Jakob Larsen, chief safety and security officer at Bimco, which represents global shipowners, said the temporary closure of the Strait of Hormuz was likely to cause “minor nuisance and delays” to inbound shipping headed for the Persian Gulf — but no major disruptions.

“The exercise establishes a live firing exercise area overlapping the inbound part of Strait of Hormuz’s Traffic Separation Scheme, and requests that shipping keeps clear of the area for the duration of a few hours,” Larsen said. “Given the level of tension in the area, it is expected that commercial shipping will comply with the Iranian request to keep clear of the exercise area,” he added.

# Europe has ‘failed’ in the face of Trump and Putin’s ‘wrecking ball’ politics, top security

**Garmany:** Europe is “totally on the sidelines” on the global stage as “wrecking ball” politics has become the norm, the head of the continent’s biggest security forum has said. Speaking to CNBC’s Annette Weisbach ahead of the Munich Security Conference (MSC), Wolfgang Ischinger, the organization’s chairman, said it was Europe’s “own fault” that its power on the global stage has been diminished. Earlier this week, the MSC published its 2026 report, for which Ischinger wrote the foreword. It warned that “the world has entered a period of wrecking-ball politics,” where “sweeping destruction ... is the order of the day.” “Why the hell do we not have a place at the table? This is our continent. It’s our future,” Ischinger said on Friday. “The answer, of course, is not that Donald Trump is making a mistake. The answer ... is that we have failed to speak with one voice.” Ischinger added that he rejected “the blame game regarding the United States,” but for areas where Europe “clearly failed” to adopt a strategic position. Delegates from all over the world are gathering for the Munich Security Conference on Friday. The event runs through Sunday. Ischinger told CNBC that the “wrecking ball” was “being used

by many” in addition to Trump, including right-wing extremist parties across Europe and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

But he called Trump “the single most prominent example” of someone who “questions existing arrangements and tries to replace them.” “That is for countries like Germany, which have been so dependent on the existing international rules ... a worrisome development,” he added. The report said that U.S. President Donald Trump was “at the forefront of those who promise to free their countries from the existing order’s constraints and rebuild stronger, more prosperous nations,” arguing he was just one movement “driven by resentment and regret over the liberal trajectory their societies have embarked on.” Ischinger told CNBC that Europeans were “totally on the sidelines” on negotiations around Gaza and Ukraine. “We have no role. Things have been decided by others,” he said. “When I look at the war in Ukraine, Europe has no place,” he said, adding the U.S. and Russia were leading discussions. U.S. delegates have been helping peace talks with officials from Ukraine and Russia since late 2025, with European officials scrambling to maintain a say on how to end the four-year war

between the two countries. “Europe has failed to speak with one voice to China and about China, Europe has failed with one voice, to come up with a clear concept about the future of the Middle East, including about how to deal or not to deal with the Iranian nuclear question,” said Ischinger, who is a former German ambassador to the U.S. Transatlantic trust had also been damaged by Trump’s push for the U.S. to annex Greenland, Ischinger said. After weeks of rhetoric on bringing the Arctic island — a Danish territory — under Washington’s control, Trump threatened to impose tariffs on European allies who stood in his way, before announcing a “deal” on Greenland had been reached. Since Trump’s return to the White House, European leaders have been making commitments to drastically increase security spending. Last summer, European members of NATO agreed to raise defense spending to 5% of their individual national GDP — a move Trump had been pushing for for some time.

Ischinger told CNBC that Europe needed “to create a more consolidated, a more competitive, a more unified defense industry.”

# India-U.S.-Russia love-hate triangle

**Garmany:** A couple of weeks ago, I interviewed India’s Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri at Energy Week in Goa, India. I was probing, trying to get a former diplomat of 50 years to give me a straight answer on why a U.S.-India trade deal was proving so elusive. It removed “pulses” from a list of products it said India would reduce or remove tariffs on, and replaced the word “committed” to say that India “intends” to make \$500 billion worth of purchases from the U.S. over five years in the agreement. Talk about collaborative narrative management. It’s this audacity of opacity — that a straight answer isn’t needed — that has seen observers suggest this is a decision to remain “strategically ambiguous.” “This is the best way for India,” said the former Indian trade negotiator and founder of Global Trade Research Initiative, Ajay Srivastava. Shastri goes one step further. He believes India and the U.S. have together made the trade-off: let us be labelled opaque rather than losing face. “There was an urgency in Washington since India concluded the mother of all deals [with the EU]. The real question is what is the actual understanding between the U.S. and India,” he said.

“I’m not trying to dodge you,” said Puri, repeating once again that discussions were “at a very advanced stage.” Six days later, U.S. President Donald Trump announced a truce. On Feb. 2, Trump removed the 25% additional penalty imposed for buying Russian oil, claiming that India had committed to stop these purchases. This claim wasn’t reiterated by India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his post on X, however, and nor was it mentioned in the joint statement issued by the two nations. But it marked a much-needed reset. The relationship had hit a low point, said Vasuki Shastri, a senior advisor to geostrategic advisory firm Gatehouse. “They’re trying to desperately reset. India wants stability, the U.S. doesn’t want to lose India. This is the halfway house solution, the off-ramp for both.” Audacity of opacity In all the months since Trump shocked India by imposing the penalty for purchasing Russian oil, the nation didn’t stop buying, nor did it say it would. India imports 85-90% of its crude oil. Pre-Covid, India wasn’t importing much from Russia, but the purchases ramped up nearly 40% following the Ukraine war, primarily due to the discount on offer. Post Trump’s 25% penalty, particularly in the past two months, that number has been inching downwards toward the 20% mark, according to data and analytics firm Kpler. In the nine days since Trump’s claim, neither India’s Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal nor the Foreign Ministry has confirmed it. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said India’s energy policy would be determined as always by availability and pricing considerations. Shastri told me that energy is a national security issue and the Foreign Ministry statement was “absolutely on target.” And then came another reveal: the U.S. revising its fact sheet on the trade deal. It’s notable that India and the U.S. have only struck an interim deal so far. The negotiations for the full bilateral trade agreement are yet to be completed. Goyal told Indian reporters: “A formal agreement on this deal will take 30-45 days and will be signed in March.” It’s unclear, however, what India’s silence on buying Russian oil means for these negotiations. Will it be the elephant in the room with the potential to crush the negotiating table? There must be some understanding on this, an internal decision that is not being conveyed,” Srivastava said.

# The U.S. calls for trade bloc to counter China’s



**Garmany:** The U.S. on Wednesday unveiled new initiatives to mobilize allies into a preferential trade bloc for critical minerals, including coordinated price floors as Washington works to counter China’s dominance in the market vital for technology and defense. The plans were discussed at a “Critical Minerals Ministerial” in Washington this week that included representatives from 54 countries, the European Union and senior Trump administration officials. Following the event, Washington announced that it had signed bilateral critical minerals agreements with 11 countries, building on 10 similar pacts inked over the past five months. Negotiations were also completed with an additional 17 nations. The goals of the agreements are to address pricing challenges, spur development, create fairer markets, and expand access to financing in the critical minerals sector. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who hosted the Ministerial, also announced the formation of the “Forum on Resource Geostategic Engagement (FORGE),” on Wednesday, a partnership to coordinate critical mineral policy and projects. “We have a number of countries that have signed on to that, and many more that we hope will do so... the purpose of FORGE is to foster collaboration and to build a network of partners

across the world,” “We will establish reference prices for critical minerals at each stage of production,” Vance said. In recent years, Beijing has wielded its market dominance in the mining and refining of most critical minerals as a geopolitical tool, selectively restricting exports. Rubio also criticized “unfair practices” such as state subsidies that have undercut competitors, making projects economically unviable. In separate remarks, Vice President JD Vance said the U.S. aims “to eliminate that problem of people flooding into our markets with cheap critical minerals to undercut our domestic manufacturers.” “For members of the preferential zone, these reference prices will operate as a floor maintained through adjustable tariffs to uphold pricing integrity.” The developments come amid broader efforts by the Trump Administration to build stronger critical mineral supply chains. Rubio said. FORGE will complement an earlier effort between the U.S. and nine partners, known as “Pax Silica.” While warned of risks tied to the concentration of critical minerals in “one country,” in an apparent reference to China, including geopolitical leverage and potential disruptions from pandemics or instability. On Monday, President Donald Trump unveiled Project.

# European governments on how they’re accelerating sovereignty as geopolitical

**Garmany:** Digital sovereignty is a “matter of national survival,” a European minister has told CNBC, as the continent scrambles to undo the dominance of U.S. digital services in its infrastructure amid geopolitical tensions. The region’s dependence on U.S. tech and military protection has come into sharp focus, as its relationship with President Donald Trump’s administration has deteriorated amid challenges from China and Russia.

Trump alarmed Europe by imposing tariffs last year after returning to the White House. This year, he caused further alarm with his provocative refusal to rule out military action to acquire Greenland, a semi-autonomous Danish territory, before eventually ruling it out.

U.S. cloud providers dominate the European market with an 85% share, according to data from Synergy Research Group. Critics warn that this dependency on non-sovereign providers is a risk amid reports of increasing cyberattacks by Russia and growing geopolitical tensions with the U.S. administration. Under the 2018 Cloud Act, the country’s law enforcement can request user data from American companies, regardless of where the data is stored. Estonia told CNBC it was accelerating its “open-source first” principle because of “heightened security threats on Europe’s eastern flank.” Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine raised fears it could target the Baltic states, including Estonia. “This has made digital sovereignty a matter of national survival, not just IT policy,” Liisa Pakosta, the country’s minister of justice and digital affairs, said.

Other European governments told CNBC how they were exploring homegrown and open-source alternatives to U.S. tech platforms and upping budgets for digital sovereignty. “Strengthening digital sovereignty is one of the central goals” of the current German government, a spokesperson for its federal ministry for digital transformation and government modernization told CNBC, pointing to “geopolitical developments” of recent years. But a spokesperson for the department played down the move when approached by CNBC. Describing the pilot as “minor,” they added it was intended to “increase our understanding of alternative technologies” and that no decision to move away from Microsoft and Windows had been made. Europe’s reliance on U.S. tech solutions

In November, all 27 European Union member states signed a declaration stating their “shared ambition to strengthen Europe’s digital sovereignty”



and reduce “strategic dependencies.” Spending on sovereign cloud infrastructure-as-a-service platforms in European countries will more than triple to \$23 billion in Europe in 2027, compared to 2025 levels, a recent report by research firm Gartner predicted — a much bigger increase than in North America and China.

“The current situation is characterized by high volatility and ongoing conflicts,” they said, adding that multilateral structures are being called into question by “strained” relations between the U.S. and Europe. But Amazon, Microsoft and Google control more than 70% of the cloud market in the region, with U.S. companies holding at least 59% of the enterprise software market. In January, France announced it would roll out Visio — a video conferencing tool developed by the government — which it said would be available to all state services by 2027, in place of U.S. tools like Microsoft Teams and Zoom. The same month, the EU said it faced a “significant problem of dependence on non-EU countries in the digital sphere... potentially creating vulnerabilities, including in critical sectors. The Belgian federal administration is “reassessing its dependencies in the digital domain, starting with the most critical areas,” a spokesperson for the minister for digitalization told CNBC. “In this context, a Belgian cloud computing strategy for the federal administration is being examined, alongside

an analysis of the federal data center landscape,” they added. “This approach aims to address issues related to data sovereignty, resilience, and security, including the storage of the most sensitive data.”

Numerous European nations have said they have been subjected to Russian state-sponsored cyber attacks in recent years. The EU said it had observed a “deliberate and systematic pattern of malicious behaviour attributed to Russia,” in a statement in July. Estonia’s Pakosta said: “While we value our technological partnerships, relying solely on closed, proprietary ‘black box’ solutions creates a strategic vulnerability.” “Open source ensures that even if global connections are severed or external vendor policies change, we retain full control over the code and can keep the Estonian digital state running locally,” she added. The country is increasing investments in strengthening sovereign digital capabilities in its 2026 state budget, Pakosta added. Open-source alternatives to U.S. tech systems are increasingly being explored by European governments. Denmark said it would launch a pilot of an open-source alternative to Microsoft Office for some government employees in June. “Too much public digital infrastructure is currently tied up with very few foreign suppliers,” Minister for Digital Affairs Caroline Stage Olsen said in a translated LinkedIn post at the time. “This makes us vulnerable.”

Two books bestrode my childhood, and made me the man I am: The Magic Bridle, a collection of British and Irish myths retold by the folklorist Forbes Stuart, which ignited my six-year-old imagination in 1974, and Mysterious Britain by Janet and Colin Bord, published two years earlier, and part of a then burgeoning bookseller phenomenon of often unreliable Earth mysteries compendiums. Nonetheless, they set this particular boy off, seeking out ancient sites whenever possible. Now everything has wilted but I still have calves of iron, and I can identify the outline of a hilltop earthwork from a moving car on a motorway as surely as a falcon seeing a field mouse 500 feet below. Through childhood and adolescence I worked towards my targets, assembling my own apostolic archive of similar but unrelated 70s texts, light on detail and heavy on conjecture. Where were these places of power? I would see them! “You and your old ruins!” my gran would cluck dismissively, as I politely requested we broke our Morris Marina journey southwest to the caravan site, at Stanton Drew or Glastonbury. And when I stumbled in my cubscout shorts to find the Longstone Barrow, which I had only seen in a blurred pamphlet picture, my divorcee dad waited patiently in a car at the bottom of Challacombe Common, counting down the functional alcoholic hours to opening time. God bless him! Today I feel his pain. But we were all weird walking blind back then, confused men with their hands on the shoulders of the equally confused man in front, seeking silhouettes of standing stones in the mists of imaginary moors. And then, in the closing hours of the 20th century, came Julian Cope’s The Modern Antiquarian, a landmark practical tome for the would-be site-seeker, served up in its own mud-proof slipcase, synthesising archaeology, folklore, grid references, helpful full-colour maps, parking advice and a small smidgeon of Cope’s own eccentric interpretations, often later validated by reluctantly admiring academics. The stones were stages! Rock and roll! It was a game-changer, and Cope opened up the crack in the Devil’s Grave of our folkloric landscape to all, like the wizard of Alderley Edge. But Weird Walk is not The Modern Antiquarian. If anything, the three Weird Walkers, whoever they may be, have returned the love of folk tales, ancient sites and the perambulations that lead one to their locations even more defiantly to the realm of the gentleman and gentleman amateurs who first documented them. The sensibly shod 17th-century parson, mapping the megaliths between funerals and marriages, and the aristocratic antiquary, pleading with some Cornish farmer to spare the collapsed burial chamber whose capstone he had earmarked for a pigsty, would recognise the Weird Walkers as kindred spirits. No one knows who they are, or what they are doing. And yet, in their costly boots and cagoules, they seem to have stumbled into something. They walk the landscape in the shadows of the seasons as we used to experience them before they blurred, reminding us of how we once measured out the increments of our humanity, and etched it into rock and earth, in the annual cycles of rotting and rebirth. When we lose this knowledge, we are lost. We’re probably lost anyway to be honest, but fuck it, let’s go down drunk and walking weird.

**Fernworthy Forest, Dartmoor, Devon**  
Dartmoor is a weird place; temporal dislocation comes

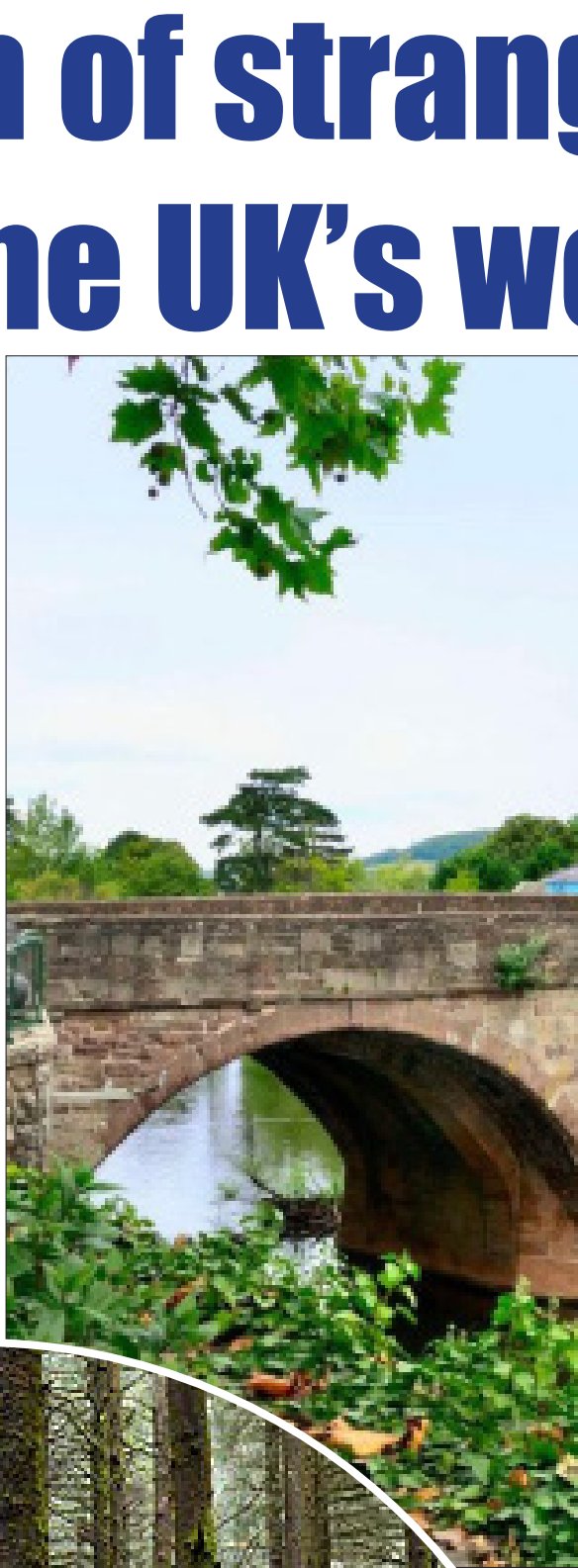
with the territory. Wayfinding is not easy among this gorse, these rambling tors and secluded brooks. And when an autumn mist descends, you can be transported: a bronze age farmer to your left, a medieval tin miner to your right, and up ahead the lord of the manor has antiquarian ambitions. He’s just repositioned those stones. The earth gnomes don’t approve. The stretch of moor between the storied Warren House Inn and the foreboding interwar plantation of Fernworthy Forest is classic Dartmoor; the grasses are thick underfoot and marshy ground emerges without warning, saturated by the capricious weather. Long ago, the moorland here would have rolled uninterrupted and Fernworthy’s ancient monuments would have been as exposed as their neighbours at Merrivale or the Grey Wethers. Now, the break with the moor is absolute, and dark evergreens offer up an entrance out of a Grimm’s tale. Once inside, the silent monoculture can provide even the warmest October day with an eerie chill. Near the edge of the forest sits Assyscombe double stone row, Fernworthy’s planters helpfully leaving a gap between the saplings for the stones to

breathe. Although little known, it is a remarkable monument that seems to tumble down its grassy hill, the irregular miniliths descending like a dragon’s spine from an initial menhir to a large blocking stone at the foot of the slope. Assyscombe is one of the many stone rows on Dartmoor thought by early antiquarians, such as Richard Polwhele, to be “Druid ways”. They are scattered across the landscape, sometimes barely discernible, but always potent in their imaginative value. Walking these ancient lines creates an access point, a connection to those who walked them long ago. Following the track from Assyscombe, deeper into the plantation, will eventually bring you to the reservoir that dominates the area. Built during the second world war, its construction was not without incident. Fernworthy Farm, which could trace its ancestry back to the Middle Ages, was among the buildings demolished to make way for the dam and reservoir. When it was standing, locals told of a curse laid upon the farm by the earth gnomes who dwell beneath the moor. So infuriated were the gnomes by the quarrying of their finest granite to rebuild the farmhouse at Fernworthy that they stole the firstborn child of the farmer who had committed

the sin. On Dartmoor, “don’t upset the gnomes” seems to come pretty high on the list of folk rules. Working around the body of water as it lies today, it’s an easy stroll to the mysterious stone circle of Froggy-mead, its name nodding to its marshy location. A bronze age circle of some 29 stones, it is a wonderfully meditative place. Stone rows, albeit damaged by all that tree planting, can be seen to the north and south of the site. Froggy-mead (also known as Fernworthy stone circle) makes a vibe-laden picnic spot and, from here, there’s the option to continue out of the forest to the Grey Wethers. Consisting of two stunning stone circles, the Grey Wethers are one of the megalithic highlights of this part of the world. Their position makes them even more appealing – you’re likely to be sharing the circles with relatively few visitors or perhaps only the skylarks that dance overhead. From the Grey Wethers, you can head back through the forest for a pint at the Warren House Inn: a fine place to wind

up after a day’s yomping. Its fire has been burning solidly since the current building was put up in 1845 and, as one of the highest and most isolated pubs in England, visitors have often welcomed the warmth, especially when autumn arrives. The inn has its share of tales told around the fire, a favourite being “The Salted Corpse”. This yarn tells of a traveller staying overnight who opens up an intriguing chest in his room. To his horror, he finds himself gazing upon the face of a dead man. Suspecting murder, he rushes to the landlord, who casually informs him that “tis only father”, the old man having been salted down and stored until the trip can be made from the remote inn to Lydford for burial. Dartmoor is not as out of the way as it once was, and we would hope that there is less need to reach for the salt cellar these days. However, this land has somehow managed to retain a peculiar flavour of isolation well into the 21st century, and, especially away from its most-frequented spots, it still holds almost limitless possibilities for exploration.

**Tigh nam Bodach, Perth**



ity. From here, a rough track climbs around the loch through a towering landscape of mountains and waterfalls for around six miles to the shrine. In its eastern section, near the dam itself, the loch has an unusually industrial aspect; the many waterfalls that tumble down from on high are occasionally directed by steel outflow pipes beneath the track. Thankfully, no structures other than a handy wooden bridge interfere with the magnificent Eos Eoghannan waterfall that soon crosses your path, its ravine populated with rowan and birch. Running through modern Scottish and Irish mythology, the legend of the Cailleach may well have begun life in literature before tumbling into the world of folklore. The goddess is a shaper of mountains and wild places, a bringer of storms and winter. Although it is unclear how old the animistic practices associated with Tigh nam Bodach actually are (some say they were developed in the 18th or 19th centuries by shepherds), the place names in this landscape certainly suggest a venerable association with the goddess. Turning away from the loch, the track leads you up towards even more impressive mountains, speckled with snow. Here there are streams to cross that can feel more like rivers following a downpour. After the stepping stone crossing of Allt

Meurain stream, you climb into Glen Cailliche. This is very much the goddess’s territory, with the powerful Allt na Cailliche running alongside the track. When the shrine is finally spied, it is hard not to run over the marshy ground in excitement, greeting (but not handling, of course) the sacred stones like old friends. The family’s modest home is modelled on a shieling, the simple house once used by farmers in the summer months up in the glens. Sitting in front of Tigh nam Bodach is a moving experience. The stones themselves seem genuinely imbued with life, appearing at once vulnerable and impervious to the whims of time. Pilgrims have left items around the shrine – a wooden star, a ram’s horn, a piece of shining quartz. Few sites tell of our connection to the seasons and the land like this. In its simple, localised ritual practice, Tigh nam Bodach encapsulates an ancient relationship. The Celtic scholar Anne Ross noted that when the land was flooded, extending the loch for the new dam, there were fewer folk to carry out the ritual. Happily, it has been maintained by Glen Lyon’s shepherds, and, if anything, attachment to the custom has grown even stronger in these parts. When further hydroelectric work threatened to encroach upon the Cailleach’s hidden glen, the plans were soon nixed by concerned locals and academics. Here, the stones still matter.

**Trellech, Monmouthshire**  
Trellech is, in some respects, an uncertain place. The village’s very name is contested – you’ll encounter signs for Tryleg, Trellech, Trellech and Trelech, depending on the angle of your approach. There is, however, one thing that Trellech is very definite about: a deep affection for its ancient sites and layers of lore. Trellech’s Rosetta Stone lies inside the church of St Nicholas. Here, the sculpted side panels of a 17th-century sundial bear witness to the village’s mysteries: its mound, its stones and its Virtuous Well. Once standing proud in the village centre, the sundial was moved indoors to protect it from the elements. Observing the venerable, chiselled image of

three pagan standing stones within this medieval church is a remarkable thing, and it is certainly worth pretending you can read Latin and donning the attitude of a Jamesian academic as you decipher the inscription, mumbling, “MAIOR SAXIS – greater in its stones; MAXIMA FONTE – greatest in its well”, as though unravelling some ancient riddle. The mound commemorated on the sundial is known as Tump Terret. Its associated inscription laments “Oh! How many are buried here!” – a reference to the legend that the mound is the resting place of those slain in a conflict between the last crowned Anglo-Saxon English king, Harold Godwinson, and the Welsh. The site has now been identified as the remnants of a small Norman castle which belonged to the De Clare family. Tump Terret itself emerges ziggurat-like, past swanky barn conversions and their attendant SUVs. This is the remaining motte of the motte and bailey castle, and today its sides ripple with possible paths to the summit, an undulating inverted bowl of green. A summer house was once built on the top of the mound, with flagrant disregard for the supposed curse that befalls those who disturb it. The view over the surrounding landscape perhaps warranted tempting fate. Not far from Tump Terret, and accessed by tracking the route of a stream across a sheep field, lie the three megaliths of Harold’s Stones, a monument that definitely deserves to be more widely known. The stones have a similar feel to Avebury’s menhirs, whose ancient sacred alignments are juxtaposed with layers of subsequent history within the bounds of an idyllic village. Unlike Avebury’s stones, however, these three are composed of a conglomerate rock called pudding stone, which holds vivid quartz pebbles and lends the megaliths an almost brutalist concrete quality. Sunrise is the perfect time to visit Harold’s Stones. The early bird is rewarded with a slow reveal of colour, as the stones morph from deep blacks to a complex collection of hues drawn from lichen, shadowed grooves and the unusual con-

glomerate rock itself. The folklore, as ever, has had its say on the stones. In one tale, they are said to have arrived in the village when flung from the Black Mountains by the wizard Jack o’ Kent during one of his regular chucking competitions with the devil, although their current name derives from the idea that they mark the site of the defeat of three Welsh elders by King Harold. Their true origins lie much earlier, in the bronze age, but perhaps talk of Harold preserves a folk memory of the stones’ use as an assembly point for those fighting the English king, or even as a site of conflict with the invaders from beyond Offa’s Dyke. However, Trellech’s most important venue may be the well that is found a short walk from Harold’s Stones. The village is powerfully linked to natural springs and deep wells, and the current Virtuous Well is the last of many ancient springs to be in use here. It is sited next to a stream which flows energetically beneath its footbridge, while nearby trees offer up the colourful tied rags that accompany so many holy springs. Also known as St Anne’s Well, it was once a big draw for pilgrims, the water said to ease ailments of the eyes in particular. On stepping down into the sunken stone horseshoe of the well, the great age of the place is apparent. Water seeps across ancient flagstones that lead to an arched recess within the far wall. Here, a basin collects the water that bubbles from the underworld, while further recesses provide space for offerings or perhaps cups for those who would have drunk the iron-rich water, the mineral evident in a reddish build-up of sediment between the paving and the wall. The well is captured beautifully on a striking modern interpretation of Trellech’s sundial at the village crossroads. Cut from the trunk of a single tree, it incorporates all of the nearby sites of interest. The sculpture is the latest entry in a long tradition of Trellech acknowledging its sites and stories. This is cherished land. And if history is a wondrous palimpsest on these islands, perhaps it is nowhere more so than in this small Monmouthshire village.

## Alia Bhatt presents gifts for Vihaan, the son of Vicky Kaushal and Katrina Kaif



**Mumbai:** Alia Bhatt frequently sends presents from her eco-friendly children’s brand, Ed-a-Mamma, to mothers in Bollywood. Katrina Kaif and Vicky Kaushal, who welcomed their first child, a boy, on November 7, are the most recent winners.Katrina Kaif posted a gift basket from Ed-a-Mamma on her Instagram Story on

Thursday. She wrote, “Thank you, Ed-a-Mamma, for these adorable cuddlies.”Along with other presents, the hamper includes a blue bunny rabbit for Vihaan to play with. Alia revealed the source of inspiration for her brand back in 2023. “I was really anxious about how my style would change over the next few months during my

pregnancy,” she stated. I therefore began making minor adjustments to my clothes before the pregnancy collection arrived. I didn’t plan it, I didn’t anticipate it. After that, came baby clothes and everything else.The actress also mentioned, “So, now we have a collection ranging from 0-14 years, and my plan going forward is to include personal care, sustainable diapers, sustainable toys, and, of course, storytelling at the centre of it, which will start soon.” Alia has given cute presents to Bollywood parents throughout the years, including Parineeti Chopra, Kiara Advani, and Karan Johar, to mention a few.Katrina Kaif and Vicky Kaushal revealed their newborn’s name and first photo earlier this year. Katrina and Vicky announced that they had named their baby child Vihaan Kaushal while posting a photo of themselves holding his hands.

## Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan claims that The Kerala Story 2 poses a “threat to secularism”

**Mumbai:** Hours after its release, the trailer for the next Hindi movie, The Kerala Story 2, has generated conflicting opinions. The film depicts the predicament of females caught in forced conversion instances and is allegedly based on actual events. However, a number of political figures and people have criticized the movie, labeling it “propaganda.” In a statement, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan denounced the movie.Concerned about the film’s impending release, Chief Minister Vijayan stated on Wednesday that the first installment was produced with the “intent to spread hatred against the state and undermine its secular tradition.” Vijayan questioned how “poisonous works produced to spread division and hatred in society” could be broadcast but a movie like Beef was disqualified from a film festival, according to a statement released by his office.The CM claimed that by depicting even marriages consummated by mutual consent as instances of communalism and coerced religious conversion, they are disseminating misleading propaganda. He continued by saying that Kerala, a state free of intercommunal rioting and with a custom of intercommunal respect, is the target of “such forces.” He called them “enemies of the state” and claimed that they were using these kinds of movies to try to ruin the tranquility and serenity of the area. We must all



work to dispel the myth that Kerala is a hotbed of terrorism. Kerala is a place of religious unity, a leader in sustainable development, and a model for upholding law and order. Each of us has a duty to prevent misleading propaganda from undermining Kerala’s secular foundation and to oppose it by defending the principles of secularism and fraternity,” Vijayan continued. Vipul Amrutlal Shah is the producer and Kamakhya Narayan Singh is the director of The Kerala Story 2: Goes Beyond. The movie is based on actual cases from the Indian legal system, the producer claimed in a statement. “We wanted a movie like The Kerala Story: Goes Beyond to better reflect the state of affairs throughout India.

As a result, we were unable to simply narrate the three stories we chose. We have incorporated other episodes from the lives of other girls into their narratives. Therefore, it is a story about three girls, but it also reflects many other stories,” Shah had stated. Sudipto Sen directed the first movie, The Kerala Story, which starred Adah Sharma, Sonia Balani, Yogita Bihani, and Siddhi Idnani. The movie was a box office triumph, earning over ₹300 crore globally on a ₹20 crore budget, despite being banned and causing controversy due to its content. Additionally, the movie took home two National Film Awards: one for Best Cinematography (Prasantanu Mohapatra) and another for Best Director (Sudipto Sen).

## The Supreme Court rejects the argument against Ghoskhor Pandat

**Mumbai:** In accordance with the Supreme Court’s directive, Neeraj Pandey, the producer and director of the upcoming movie Ghoskhor Pandat, which stars Manoj Bajpai, has withdrawn the title of the film along with any trailers and other promotional materials that were previously distributed under it.Pandey further argued in his affidavit, which was presented to the Supreme Court on Thursday, that even if the movie’s new title isn’t yet decided, it won’t be comparable to the previous one. “With all due respect, I submit that the previous title, Ghoskhor Pandat, is hereby withdrawn and will not be used in any way.

Even though the new title hasn’t been decided upon yet, I promise that any title that is chosen in the future won’t resemble or be reminiscent of the previous title that was the subject of criticism and will accurately convey the story and purpose of the movie



without leading to unexpected interpretations.According to Pandey’s declaration, “I further declare that all promotional materials, posters, trailers, and publicity content under the previous title have already been withdrawn, prior to the listing of the present petition.”

The Indian Supreme Court stated that it expects the matter to now be put to a quietus after accepting the “positive” response from filmmaker Neeraj Pandey, who agreed to remove the title of the movie

Ghoskhor Pandat.A Bench of Justices B. V. Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan also advised YouTubers to put a stop to the debate, noting the arguments presented by the parties that appeared before it. “They have now responded positively,” the Court observed. The Supreme Court had previously ordered the filmmakers to alter the title of the film because it was deemed disparaging of a specific community. Additionally, it mandated that any content in the upcoming movie that disparages

or offends any community be removed.Justice Nagarathna made forceful oral statements during the February 12 hearing that emphasized the constitutional restrictions on free expression. “Why should you disparage anyone? It is against public order and morality. It’s one thing to be woke, but inciting such turmoil at a time when the nation is already experiencing unrest. We believed that journalists, filmmakers, and others are responsible individuals who understand the legitimate limitations and exceptions of Article 19(1)(a) (Fundamental Right of Speech and Expression),” she said. Advocate Vinod Kumar Tiwari stated following the hearing that the bench reached important findings about freedom of expression.Manoj Bajpayee plays the lead in Neeraj Pandey’s film Ghoskhor Pandat. During the 2026 Netflix India slate reveal, the movie was revealed.

## Kartik Aaryan-Ananya Panday movie is now available on OTT

**Mumbai:** Ananya Panday and Kartik Aaryan’s Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri has officially debuted on OTT following a lackluster run at the box office. Some fans are eager to watch the movie from the comfort of their homes after Prime Video announced its digital release on Thursday. Ananya Panday and Kartik Aaryan posed together in a number of photos that Prime Video posted on Instagram. “Popcorn toh taiyaar hai, bas aapka intezaar hai” (Popcorn is ready, just waiting for you) was written by the streaming platform alongside the post. Watch now, Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri. Fans responded to the announcement in a hurry. According to one fan, “Finally it’s here.” The comment “Watch it again & again!!” was made by someone. They wrote, “Excited to see this again.” Kartik and Ananya play the main characters in this romantic comedy, which was directed by Sameer Vidwans and written by Karan Shrikant Sharma. Jackie Shroff, Neena Gupta, and Chandni Bhabhda play important supporting roles. The movie centers on Ray, a self-described “mumma’s boy” and wedding planner who, while visiting Croatia, meets Rumi, a published author who is having trouble finding readers for her book.The two eventually fall in love while traveling. But things get complicated when Rumi refuses to move to the US with Ray and her aging father (played by Jackie Shroff). The central theme of the story is the emotional struggle between family responsibilities and personal ambition. The movie got mixed to unfavorable reviews from reviewers when it came out, and it didn’t do well at the box office, earning only ₹49.5 crore globally. A number of people criticized the plot, calling it cliched and predictable, while Ananya Panday was subjected to criticism on social media for her performance.

The movie has received criticism for re-creating old songs like Saat Samundar Paar. Following Pati Patni Aur Woh, Kartik and Ananya reunited for the project. Their on-screen connection did not, however, strike a deep chord with viewers this time, despite the excitement surrounding their pairing. We must evaluate a picture based on its actual qualities rather than its potential, according to a quote from the Hindustan Times review. Technically speaking, Vishal-Sheykhar’s music lacks the required briskness. For example, Lucky Ali’s song has no effect and just drags the first half, which is already slow, when the story really needs to be lively. All things considered, TMMTMTM is just a beautiful postcard with no text on the reverse. You will still be looking for the love that the headline promised, even if you stay for the veterans’ warmth.



### Saina Nehwal says Shraddha Kapoor was her first choice for the biopic



**Mumbai:** Saina Nehwal, the badminton star, has once again responded to the continuous rumors about her 2021 film Saina, which stars Parineeti Chopra. Amol Gupte’s film did poorly at the box office, but this month it gained attention online when fans saw that Parineeti had unfollowed the athlete on Instagram.Saina had previously played it down, claiming she was unaware of it and that she thought Parineeti had “moved on” following the release of the movie. She reaffirmed her position and stated that she has no resentment in a recent interview with journalist Vicky Lalwani. She unfollowed me, although I was unaware of it. Perhaps she was preoccupied with her job, and after the movie was over, she went on to her next endeavor,” she remarked. Despite their lack of friendship, Saina commended Parineeti’s commitment and acknowledged the actor’s meticulous attention to detail. Spending a lot of time together is necessary for friendship, but because the movie needed to be released swiftly, there wasn’t enough time. She stated, “We weren’t meeting every day.”I gave her

advice on how to serve, move around the court, and use the forehand and backhand. She might have also watched my actions and speech patterns to depict them on screen. She put forth a lot of effort and did a fantastic job. I even started crying while watching the movie,” Saina continued. Shraddha Kapoor was the first person Saina mentioned when asked who she would choose if her biography were ever made again. Prior to Saina’s sickness forcing her to leave the production, the actor was actually her first option.Saina spoke kindly of Shraddha, saying, “I’ve met her a lot, and we are still in contact. She’s a really kind girl. She had consented to star in the movie but had to decline because of dengue.Saina insists that both performers put up a lot of effort in their respective roles, with Parineeti bringing her story to life on film and Shraddha continuing to be her particular favorite despite the resurgent rumors. Parineeti Chopra, who recently gave birth to her first child with husband Raghav Chadha, has refrained from continuing to respond to the social media craze.

## Speaking candidly about portraying a rape survivor in Assi, Kani Kusruti

**Mumbai:** In her next movie, Assi, actress Kani Kusruti plays a rape survivor named Parima. Though she has attempted to give it authenticity based on the collective reality that Indian women experience, Kani stated that she thinks it is impossible to understand the agony of a rape survivor.“I don’t think one can tap into the trauma (of a survivor) exactly,” the speaker stated. As actors, we attempted to get as close to it as possible, and there may be times when you feel as though this has actually occurred to you. However, I’m not an actor who would go all in like that, as it would have an impact on you. That’s not something I usually do.” According to the actor, it’s a reality that people frequently face. Do I feel like I’ve experienced any assaults or traumas as a woman growing up in this nation from childhood to the present? Yes, given that some of my close friends and family have experienced it, I might. Therefore, even though you don’t want it to be that way, this is occasionally one of the things that you are strongly connected to,” she continued. The 40-year-old actor stated that the movie helped her comprehend the nature of the Indian legal system in these situations and noted that court



sessions frequently bring up painful memories.”There is an absurdity and irony within the system, but that’s how you get justice, you cannot forget it,” she recalled, recalling her discussions

## In an unseen love photo, Hardik Pandya holds “princess” Mahieka Sharma close

**Mumbai:** Indian cricketer Hardik Pandya has been in the news for his personal life as much as his on-field exploits. The famous all-rounder has been transparent about his relationship with model Mahieka Sharma over the past year, frequently posting pictures of their time together on social media. Through public appearances and romantic vacations, the couple has progressively increased the visibility of their love. Most recently, Hardik shared a touching post that gave fans a glimpse into their unique friendship, making sure Mahieka’s birthday was one to remember. Hardik posted a cozy photo

of himself and Mahieka on Instagram on Thursday. The duo is seen in the picture holding hands while standing in an infinity pool. Their interaction was exquisitely captured in the lovely photo. Hardik commented, “Happy Birthday my princess,” next to the photo. Mahieka added an evil eye and diamond emojis to the post when she reposted it on her Instagram Stories. She also shared a photo of herself posing in front of a heart-shaped birthday cake while wearing all black for her birthday party. Hardik also recently talked on how Mahieka rekindled his love for cricket. “Mahieka helped me redis-

cover that excitement for the game that I always had,” he remarked in an interview with JioHotstar. I put in a lot of effort behind the scenes and had a fair number of batting sessions. On some days, I spent six or seven hours on the ground. Hardik got Mahieka’s initial tattooed on his back on Valentine’s Day as an additional way of expressing his love. In October 2025, Hardik confirmed his relationship with Mahieka by sharing a series of holiday pictures featuring the two of them. He described her as his “11:11 wish,” making their romance official on social media.The couple hasn’t hesitated to publicly

show their love since. Additionally, once an image of Mahieka with a ring appeared online, there were rumors that they were engaged. She later refuted the engagement rumors, though. At a recent celebration honoring the men’s, women’s, and women’s blind teams—the three World Cup-winning teams—Hardik and Mahieka attracted attention. It was one of their most well-known joint public performances. They were spotted going hand in hand and twinning in black clothing. Hardik also presented Amitabh Bachchan to Mahieka on the occasion. Hardik was wed to actor Natasa



Stankovic before to dating Mahieka. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the couple got married, and on July 30, 2020, their son Agastya was born. After months of conjecture, they officially announced their split in July of last year.

# Macron of France praises UPI and claims that India has created something that no other nation has

New Delhi, Feb 19: India has created a digital identity for 1.4 billion people, something no other country has been able to accomplish, according to French President Emmanuel Macron, who complimented the country's digital payments system, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), on Wednesday.During his speech at the India AI Impact Summit 2026 in Delhi, Macron emphasized how technology has changed the way that regular Indians live their lives. "Ten years ago, a street vendor in Mumbai could not open a bank account—no address, no papers, no access," he added, opening his speech with a personal story. Today, anyone in the nation can instantaneously and for free pay the



same vendor via his phone. The audience applauded when the French president stated, "India built something no other country has built — a digital identity for 1.4 billion people."Macron said it was "great to be back here" for the AI Summit, which he described as a platform

influencing the global future of artificial intelligence, and thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for inviting him to India.The appreciation that Macron has shown for UPI is not new.Macron was pleased by UPI during his state visit to India in 2024 after PM Modi used his phone to pay

the bill at a Jaipur local store. Outside a store close to Hawa Mahal, PM Modi and Macron enjoyed tea in traditional kulhads, or earthen cups. Macron looked pleasantly delighted when PM Modi finished the transaction on his phone and the merchant got immediate confirmation. The Prime Minister went on to describe how UPI operates, emphasizing its reach, speed, and ease of use in regular transactions.With UPI, users can easily link several bank accounts to a single mobile app, facilitating peer-to-peer collection requests, merchant payments, and quick financial transfers.PM Modi declared in July 2023 that Indian tourists would soon be able to use UPI in France. When France became the

first European nation to use India's digital payments system in February 2024, that plan came to fruition. This came after a collaboration between Lyra and NPCI International Payments Limited, India's digital payments organization, which allowed UPI to be accepted at merchant locations throughout France.Indian visitors and students studying in France can now easily make digital payments with their current UPI apps thanks to the move, which signifies UPI's entry into the European payments ecosystem.Macron's frequent compliments on UPI highlight how India's digital public infrastructure is becoming known throughout the world as an example of inclusive innovation.

# The 'MANAV' vision of India is highlighted by PM Modi at the Mega AI Impact Summit

New Delhi, Feb 19: Speaking to world leaders at the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi today, Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented India's "MANAV" vision for artificial intelligence.MANAV, which means "human" in Hindi, is an acronym for five fundamental principles: a Moral and Ethical System; Accountable Governance; National Sovereignty, especially the right to data; Accessible and Inclusive technology; and Valid and Legitimate systems, according to PM Modi, who spoke at the event.

He compared the development of AI to the introduction of wireless communication as a historic shift. "When signals were first transmitted wirelessly, no one imagined that the entire world would one day be connected in real time," PM Modi said. "Artificial intelligence has com-



pletely changed the course of human history. The impact of what we are witnessing and forecasting now is only the beginning.Instead than only making computers smarter, PM Modi described AI's importance in enhancing human skills. "AI is mak-

ing machines intelligent, but more than that, it is increasing human capabilities manifold," he said. "There is only one difference: this time the speed is unprecedented and the scale is also unexpected." The shift from machine learning to "learn-

ing machines" is happening faster, deeper, and wider than ever before, he continued, adding that technical effects that formerly took decades to manifest are now happening far more swiftly. "We are entering an era where humans and intelligence systems co-create, co-work and co-evolve," PM Modi said.

PM Modi invited foreign leaders to the Bharat Mandapam site on Thursday, including International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. More than 500 international AI leaders, 150 scholars and researchers, and 400 chief technology officers, vice presidents, and philanthropists have been invited to the five-day AI Impact Summit, which will take place at Bharat Mandapam from February 16 to 20.

## Does India have a problem with offspin at the World Cup

New Delhi: India's performance in the T20 World Cup raises concerns, particularly due to their struggle against offspin. With a top order featuring six left-handed batsmen, opponents are encouraged to employ offspinners, as India's batting has been significantly affected. They faced a staggering 102 balls of offspin during the group stage, a figure unmatched by any other team, leading to a dismal scoring rate of 6.23 per over, only better than Nepal and Oman. Additionally, India's average of 13.25 reflects a high number of lost wickets to offspinners, indicating a vulnerability that is exacerbated by tactical decisions in their batting order. The detailed bowling strategies deployed against India have highlighted this issue. Bowlers like Aryan Dutt and Colin Ackermann have effectively exploited India's weaknesses, with Dutt's exceptional performance showcasing the critical role of skilled bowling in shaping the match outcome. India's recent tactical adjustments, such as promoting Tilak Varma to No. 3, have further complicated their situation, as Varma has struggled against offspin, compounding their vulnerability in the top order.Moreover, the transition between playing surface conditions from Colombo to Ahmedabad has added to India's challenges, as they faced differing pitch characteristics that have hindered their adaptability. The peculiar dismissal of Abhishek Sharma, alongside the challenges faced by other left-handed batsmen against various bowling styles, especially offspin, suggests a need for India to reassess their strategy moving forward into the Super Eight matches.

# On Friday, Amit Shah will introduce the second phase of the Vibrant Village Program in Assam

New Delhi, Feb 19: Delhi, The second phase of the Vibrant Villages Program, which will involve 1,954 border villages across 15 states and 2 UTs, will be launched on Friday by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in an effort to ensure watchful citizens in border areas, officials said.According to a government statement released on Thursday, the second phase of the VVP, which is intended to guarantee the comprehensive and sustainable development of border villages, will be a centrally financed program with an expenditure of ₹6,839 crore through the fiscal year 2028–2029.The initiative will be introduced by the Union minister from Nethanpur in Cachar, Assam. The VVP initiative, which was approved by the national government on February 15, 2023, covers 19 districts in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, and Ladakh, as well as 662 selected villages in 46 blocks that border the north.Over 8,500 activities, such as awareness campaigns, health and veterinary camps,



fairs and festivals, and tourism promotion, have been carried out under the VVP-I, with 2,558 projects and works totaling ₹3,431 crore approved by the MHA.In a written response to the Lok Sabha on February 3, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai stated that the government approved the second phase on April 2, 2025, identifying 1,954 villages that bordered the inter-

national land borders of 15 states and 2 UTs for complete development. "By strengthening these villages, the programme also enables residents to act as the eyes and ears of the nation, thereby contributing significantly to border security, the prevention of cross-border crimes and the strengthening of internal security," a statement issued on Thursday said.

# The 'Powerful' Indian Robodog, Param, was created by a Bengaluru startup



New Delhi, Feb 19: General Autonomy, a robotics business located in Bengaluru, has drawn notice on social media with a video of its domestic quadruped robot during the ongoing India AI Impact Expo 2026 in Delhi. The business emphasized that 'Param' was "India's most powerful indigenous robot dog," stating that Indian engineers had created the robodog from the ground up rather than having it constructed domestically.So enough of this bull-shit! Introducing PARAM, the strongest domestic robot dog in India. BUILT IN INDIA, by INDIANS, not assembled or purchased. In an X (formerly Twitter), the business declared, "For our country, for our century, for our world." A 'rugged' Param is seen navigating

through traffic in Bengaluru, spotting obstacles automatically, climbing steps up to 30 cm, and crab walking for low-height entrances in the now-viral video. The startup also demonstrated Param's ability to track and navigate on its own and recover from falls automatically. When asked about the robot's development process, the startup disclosed that it had been in progress for the previous seven months.It's difficult to measure time because we learned a lot from our humanoid in order to construct this, but the project has been underway for roughly seven months, and we keep improving it every two weeks." During a function last month commemorating the tenth anniversary of the business India initiative, the business displayed the robodog in front of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.When traditional wheeled vehicles fail, quadruped robots, also referred to as "robodogs," can climb obstacles and carry payloads because of their better mobility over uneven terrain.These four-legged, nimble systems are being used more and more all over the world. They are essential for research projects, dangerous search and rescue missions, industrial inspections, and defense logistics.

# The child of a single mother is entitled to her name and caste at school: Bombay HC

Mumbai, Feb 19: The Bombay high court's Aurangabad bench ruled that a minor kid raised solely by a single mother is allowed to use her mother's name and caste in school records, noting that the child's welfare and best interests must always come first. According to the court, it would be unfair and against social reality to force a minor to include in her academic records the caste identification of someone who has cut all ties with her. It further noted that acknowledging a single mother as a full parent for the sake of a child's civic identity is a statement of constitutional commitment rather than altruism. The decision was made in response to a petition that a 12-year-old girl and her single mother filed in 2025, contesting a June 2, 2025, message from the education officer that denied their request to have the minor student's name and caste corrected in school records.The petitions demonstrated that the father's

name was initially recorded in the child's birth certificate and then transferred to school records at the time of birth and initial documentation. But subsequently, things took a significant turn for the worse. The child remained in the sole custody of her mother following the father's accusation in a criminal case stemming from a sexual offense against her. The petitioners argued that the father's name and last name remaining in the school records did more than just constitute an error; it also put a child at avoidable social risk as she must mature, learn, and develop her identity in a culture where names are frequently used to denote ancestry and family history.

Using the Secondary School Code as support, the state administration rejected the request, claiming that the corrections were unlawful. However, it also recognized that administrative registers are not intended to preserve identity regardless of changing cir-

cumstances or to force the continuance of an entry just because a specific format was previously followed, but rather to document facts for the sake of welfare and government. A division bench of justices Vibha Kankanwadi and Hiten S. Venegavkar cited a government resolution dated March 14, 2024, holding that the relief sought was meant to prevent official documents from becoming tools of coercive and stigmatic attachment rather than to express personal preference. The court pointed out that the resolution specifies a policy justification based on equality and dignity and requires the mother's identity to be required in government records, including school and educational documents.

The court reiterated that recognizing maternal identity in official documents aligns with constitutional values and acknowledges that a child's identity should reflect their lived reality rather than traditional patriarchal norms.

# The Ganga Expressway is scheduled to open



New Delhi, Feb 19: The construction of the 594-kilometer Ganga Expressway is finished, and it is ready for inauguration. According to the Uttar Pradesh Expressways Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA), the state government is getting ready to approach the Prime Minister's Office to invite Narendra Modi to the inauguration ceremony, and the official launch is anticipated to take place between March 25 and March 31.PM Modi lay the foundation stone for the road in December 2021, and development then picked up speed. The highway, which was constructed at a cost of more than Rs 36,200 crore, is thought to be among Uttar Pradesh's most ambitious infrastructure projects. In order to increase income generation, officials indicate

that trial runs and toll management testing have already been completed successfully. They plan to start full vehicular movement and toll operations by April 1, 2026, which corresponds with the beginning of the 2026–2027 fiscal year.The Ganga Expressway establishes a direct high-speed connection between eastern and western Uttar Pradesh, beginning close to the Bijauli hamlet in Meerut and ending at Judapur Dandu village in Prayagraj. It is anticipated that the highway, which runs through 12 districts—Meredut, Hapur, Bulandshahr, Amroha, Sambhal, Badaun, Shahjahanpur, Hardoi, Unnao, Raebareli, Pratapgarh, and Prayagraj—will spur regional growth. The expressway is anticipated to drastically cut the current 12-hour travel time be-

tween Meerut and Prayagraj to six or seven hours once it is operational.According to sources, cars may be charged approximately Rs 2.55 per kilometer, or Rs 1,515 for a one-way trip, even though the official toll rates have not yet been released. While buses and trucks could have to pay about Rs 4,840, small business vehicles might have to pay Rs 2,405 instead.

Additionally, a 3.5-kilometer air strip has been built on the Shahjahanpur Expressway to facilitate the emergency takeoff and landing of Indian Air Force aircraft. Rafale, SU-30 MKI, Mirage-2000, MiG-29, Jaguar, C-130J Super Hercules, AN-32, and the MI-17 V5 helicopter were among the IAF aircraft that took part in the "land and go" exercises last year.

This expressway segment is unique in that it is the only airstrip of its kind in the nation to allow fighter aircraft landings both during the day and at night. Similar emergency landing exercises have so far only been conducted during the day on the Purvanchal and Lucknow-Agra expressways.

# There was no 'aura' about Australia during the T20 World Cup 2026

New Delhi: Australia's catastrophic T20 World Cup was the result of too many form and fitness difficulties, according to Ricky Ponting, who also thinks Glenn Maxwell has played his final international tournament.After suffering crushing losses to Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka, Australia was eliminated from the tournament with one game left in the group round, against Oman on Friday. Despite dominating bilateral cricket for a large portion of 2025, the team entered the World Cup with a roster plagued by injury issues and five straight losses to India and Pakistan. Because Mitchell Starc departed from the format last year and Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood were unable to travel to Sri Lanka, the bowling attack lacked strike strength. Following a hamstring ailment that prevented him from playing cricket since Boxing Day till he faced Zimbabwe, Tim David was helped through the early going. Additionally, there were form issues, particularly with Maxwell and Cooper Connolly, and Cameron Green has been under increased scrutiny. Ponting told the ICC Review, "It's been a really poor campaign, it has to be said."Hazlewood and Cummins were ruled out at



the beginning, while Tim David was also unavailable at the beginning, raising some injury concerns. However, I believe that simply losing to Zimbabwe as they did will be the game that people look back on and conclude that our World Cup is over. "You look at that Australian team on paper, it just doesn't look to have that sort of aura around it that a lot of other Australian teams have going into ICC events and World Cups," Ponting added. "If you want to win these championships, you need your best players and most seasoned players to step up and win crucial moments for you, and Australia hasn't got that. "With Tim David entering at No. 4 for the next two games and Cameron Green at No. 3, they most likely haven't gotten enough out of their top order batting.

The previous night [against Sri Lanka], they got off to a fantastic start before losing six for twenty and losing all

momentum going into the second half of the match." Ponting did not draw a line through many players about the team's future as they start a new two-year cycle into 2028, which includes the Olympics and the upcoming T20 World Cup, which Australia and New Zealand will co-host. However, he does not see Maxwell playing again and believes that Steven Smith, who was called into the squad after Mitchell Marsh was injured and later added as Hazlewood's substitute, has a chance to play in the format. "Glenn Maxwell, I don't think will be there," he said. "It appears to me that his career is nearing its conclusion. Marcus Stoinis would likely be a question mark as well, but he now primarily participates in T20 cricket competitions worldwide. plays the BBL and doesn't play much state cricket, therefore he might be there because of his versatility.

# India Women win toss, choose bowling first Against Australia Women in Canberra T20I



**Canberra:** Indian women's cricket team captain Harmanpreet Kaur won the toss and chose to bowl first against the Sophie Molineux-led Australia Women in the second T20I of the three-match series, on Thursday at the Manuka Oval in Canberra. Team India are 1-0 up in the series after winning the series opener by 21 runs (DLS Method). The Harmanpreet Kaur and

Co. will look to clinch the second T20I as well and seal the three-match series. India Women playing 11 vs Australia: Smriti Mandhana, Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Harmanpreet Kaur(c), Richa Ghosh(w), Deepti Sharma, Amanjot Kaur, Arundhati Reddy, Kranti Gaud, Shree Charani, Renuka Singh Thakur

Australia Women playing 11 vs India: Beth Mooney(w), Georgia Voll, Phoebe Litchfield, Ellyse Perry, Ashleigh Gardner, Georgia Wareham, Nicola Carey, Annabel Sutherland, Sophie Molineux(c), Kim Garth, Darcie Brown

After winning the toss and opting to bowl, Harmanpreet Kaur said the decision was based on the conditions and expressed confidence in her

bowlers to repeat their strong performance from the last match. Looking at the conditions, we just thought that bowling first is a better option for us. Our bowlers did a great job for us in the last game and hopefully today also they'll come with the same positive mindset," the Indian captain said. In the series opener, Arundhati Reddy starred with a career-best 4/22, dismantling Australia's batting lineup after India chose to field. Renuka Singh struck early, and despite other contributions from Phoebe Litchfield (26) and Georgia Wareham (30), Australia collapsed late to be bowled out for 133 in 18 overs. In reply, Shafali Verma's quick 21 off 11 balls gave India strong momentum before rain halted play at 50/1 in 5.1 overs. With the DLS par score at 29, India were declared winners by 21 runs. T20I of the three-match series against Australia in Australia.

# Benfica, Prestianni face trouble, possible punishments if Vinicius racism claim true UEFA investigates Prestianni racism allegations

**New Delhi:** Benfica and Gianluca Prestianni are facing the possibility of serious disciplinary action after UEFA opened an investigation into allegations of racist abuse aimed at Real Madrid winger Vinicius Jr during Tuesday's Champions League clash in Lisbon.

The first leg at the Stadium of Light was stopped for close to 10 minutes after Vinicius alerted referee Francois Letexier to an alleged discriminatory remark. UEFA's anti-racism protocol was triggered, and Real Madrid players briefly stepped away from the field before play eventually continued. For Vinicius, it was another disturbing episode in a career that has too often been marred by incidents of abuse. The Brazilian, one of football's most high-profile stars,



Has repeatedly been forced into confronting racism on and off the pitch. Racists are, above all, cowards," Vinicius posted later on Instagram, as the incident reignited anger and debate across European football. Prestianni has rejected the accusation, maintaining that no racist insult was directed at Vinicius and that the situation has been misinterpreted. Benfica have also rallied behind their young forward, claiming he

is being targeted through what they described as a "defamation campaign." On Wednesday, the Portuguese club shared footage of the exchange on X and insisted the claims made by Madrid players did not add up. As the images show, given the distance, the Real Madrid players couldn't have heard what they have been saying that they heard," Benfica said, while reiterating that they "fully support" Presti

anni's account of events. The tension around the incident unfolded in an already heated atmosphere in Lisbon. Benfica supporters reacted angrily to Vinicius celebrating his second-half goal with a dance near the corner flag, with bottles and other objects reportedly thrown toward the Madrid players before Real held on for a 1-0 win. With UEFA now stepping in, both the player and the club could be dealing with major repercussions if the allegations are upheld. The controversy erupted soon after Vinicius struck in the 50th minute, giving Real Madrid the advantage in the first leg of the Champions League play-off tie. During his celebration near the corner, Vinicius was approached by Prestianni, who appeared to speak while covering shirt

# Arsenal blow two-goal lead at Wolves, boosting Manchester City's Premier League title hopes

**Wolverhampton:** Arsenal blew a two-goal lead at last-place Wolves on Wednesday to give a huge boost to Manchester City in the race for the Premier League title. The league leader was held to a surprise 2-2 draw at Molineux, having led 2-0 in the second half. Teenage debutant Tom Edozie scored in the fourth minute of added time to complete Wolves' comeback. "There was a big difference in how we played in the first half and the second half. We dropped our standards and we got punished for it," Arsenal forward Bukayo Saka told the BBC. The draw means Arsenal has dropped points in back-to-back games and leaves it just five ahead of second-place City, having played a game more. With the top two still to play each other at City's Etihad Stadium, the title race is too close to call. (It's) time to focus on ourselves, improve our



Standards and improve our performances and it is in our control," Saka said. Arsenal has led the way for the majority of the season and one bookmaker paid out on Mikel Arteta's team winning the title after it opened up a nine-point lead earlier this month. But Wednesday's result was the latest sign that it is feeling the pressure, having finished runner-up in each of the last three seasons. It has won just two of its last seven league games. Having blown A lead against Brentford last week, it was even worse at a Wolves team

That has won just one game all season. Victory looked all but secured after Saka gave Arsenal the lead with a header in the fifth minute and Piero Hincapie ran through to blast in the second in the 56th. But Wolves' fightback began with Hugo Bueno's curling shot into the top corner in the 61st. The 19-year-old Edozie was sent on as a substitute in the 84th and his effort earned the home team only its 10th point of a campaign that looks certain to end in relegation. While it did little for Wolves' chances of

survival, it may have had a major impact at the top of the standings. Incredibly disappointed that we gave two points away," Arteta said. "I think we need to fault ourselves and give credit to Wolves. But what we did in the second half was nowhere near our standards that we have to play in order to win a game in the Premier League. When you don't perform you can get punished, and we got punished and we have to accept the hits because that can happen when you are on top." Arsenal plays Tottenham on Sunday. Its lead could be cut to two points before it kicks off if City wins against Newcastle on Saturday. Mikel Arteta's side went ahead in the 42nd minute at the Emirates Stadium as Martin Zubimendi fired past Sunderland goalkeeper Robin Roefs at his near post, before the Swede netted again in stoppage time Liverpool at Anfield on Sunday.

# Arsenal falter again with Wolves draw

**New Delhi:** Arsenal's Premier League title charge suffered another blow on Saturday as they threw away a two-goal advantage to draw 2-2 with bottom-placed Wolves at Molineux, handing Manchester City fresh hope in the race. The Gunners looked in complete control after Bukayo Saka's early opener and a second-half strike from Piero Hincapie put them firmly in command. But a stunning effort from Hugo Bueno reignited Wolves' belief before substitute Tom Edozie marked his debut with a late equaliser to stun the visitors. The slip-up leaves Arsenal only five points clear of second-placed Manchester City, despite having played a game more. More worryingly for Mikel Arteta's side, it was another reminder of their recent inconsistency, with just two wins in their last seven league matches.

# Angad Bir Singh vows big difference As he rejoins Indian national team

**New Delhi:** Indian men's hockey forward Angad Bir Singh has been named in the 24-member Indian squad for the Hobart leg of the FIH Pro League 2025-26, marking his return to international action after nearly a year as he didn't play for the senior team since making his international debut against Ireland during the FIH Pro League 2024-25 season in Bhubaneswar. The upcoming matches will also serve as Angad's first overseas assignment with the India Men's Hockey team, as the 23-year-old attacker looks to make a strong impact following months of consistent training and preparation, according to a release. Calling the opportunity special, the young forward expressed excitement about representing India again on the global stage. "I am very excited for this opportunity because I have been training for a



long time and waiting for my chance. When the opportunity finally came, it made me very happy. Now I just want to prove myself and play well for India." Reflecting on wearing the national jersey again, he described the comeback as an emotional moment. "Coming back to the national team after a year is a completely different feeling. Going straight into an international assignment makes it even more special and motivating." Focused preparation for tough challenge,

India will face strong opponents including Australia and Spain during the Hobart leg, and Angad believes the team's preparations have been tailored specifically for the challenge ahead. "Our preparation has been very good since the national camp in India. Training sessions have been designed keeping Australia and Spain in mind because they play a strong man-to-man style. The intensity has been high, and we are focusing a lot on fitness and match readiness," he explained.

# Ladakh Marathon 2026 registrations open as iconic Himalayan endurance test returns for 13th edition

**New Delhi:** The world's highest AIMS-certified marathon, the Ladakh Marathon, is set to return for its 13th edition in 2026, to be held amid the stark and rugged terrain of Ladakh from September 10 to 13, according to an official release. Widely regarded as one of the most demanding endurance events in the world, registrations for all six races of the Ladakh Marathon opened on Thursday through the official website. The lineup includes the curated Silk Route Ultra (122km) and the Khardung La Challenger (72km), both of which are among the toughest ultra races staged at extreme altitude. Apart from the two ultras, the event will feature the full Marathon (42km), Half Marathon (21km), 11.2km Run, and the 5km Run for Fun. Age eligibility begins at 12 years for the 5km category and extends up to a minimum of 24 years for the Silk Route Ultra, calculated as of September 13, 2026. All timed races require qualifying performances achieved within the prescribed window to match the rigour demanded by racing at over 11,500 feet in thin air. Acclimatisation is compulsory for all runners, with ultra runners required to arrive in Leh at least 10 days before race day in order to participate. The Khardung La Challenge and Silk Route Ultra remain application-based and strictly capped. Climbing to 17,618 feet at Khardung La,



These races are reserved for runners with proven marathon and ultra-distance credentials, subject to document verification and mandatory medical clearance. Detailed eligibility pathways are available on the official Ladakh Marathon website. Speaking on the announcement, Mr Chewang Motup Goba, Chairperson of the High Altitude Sports Foundation and founder of the Ladakh Marathon, said, "Running in Ladakh is not defined by distance alone. At this altitude, every Step is Shaped by terrain, thin air, and the mountain's terms. It demands preparation, discipline, and respect for conditions that are far beyond the ordinary. The

eligibility criteria are therefore not procedural, they are protective. They ensure that every runner who stands on that start line has proven capability, understands the risks, and is ready for one of the toughest endurance challenges in the world." Following its largest field in history last year, the Ladakh Marathon continues to grow in stature and global resonance. Conceived in the aftermath of the 2010 flash floods and formally launched in 2012 as a statement of resilience, it has evolved into one of India's most distinctive sporting events. Today, it draws thousands from across the country and overseas to Test themselves against alti

tude, terrain, and self. In 2025, the Ladakh Marathon, including the ultras, saw participation from at least one runner representing each of India's 36 States and Union Territories for the first Time, underlining its place as a truly Na Tional endurance platform set in the Himalayas. Equally central to the event is its partnership with the local community and its sustained focus on responsible racing. What began as small measures to reduce race-day waste has grown into a structured sustainability model. Guided by the motto "Leave Only Footprints Behind," the Ladakh Marathon has steadily phased out single-use plastics Since 2019.

# KIWG 2026: Gulmarg prepares to showcase real-life manifestation of Khelo Bharat Niti

**Gulmarg:** The Khelo India Winter Games 2026 in Gulmarg will witness a real-life manifestation of the Khelo Bharat Niti (sports policy) that was launched by the Union sports ministry in July last year. The Gulmarg leg of Khelo India Winter Games (KIWG) will be held from February 23-26, with India's top skiers, including Winter Olympians, participating, according to a release. Apart from enhancing infrastructure, talent identification and international competitiveness, the Khelo Bharat Niti is aimed at leveraging sports for economic development and boosting industries such as tourism, manufacturing and sports technology. If the surge in tourist interest during the third week of February is any indication, the Games have come as a big cheer to one of Jammu & Kashmir's biggest breadwinners for the region's economy - sports tourism, the release read. Local businesses are preparing too for the Winter Games extravaganza. Abeed, a hotelier at Sheen Woods Tangmarg, said that bookings surged weeks ago. For us, this is more than just tourism. It is our identity. When the Games happen, Gulmarg feels like the heart of the country," he said while pointing to a lobby filled with athletes from Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Kerala, Telangana, and J&K. You hear different languages at breakfast," he said, adding, "It feels like a country in one room." The Khelo India Winter Games journey in Gulmarg so far tells its own story. In the first edition in March 2020, 1123 athletes competed in 13 disciplines. J&K led the medal count, showing their strength. In 2021, 1208 athletes took part, and J&K won 18 gold medals. By 2023, participation peaked at 1395 athletes, with J&K taking home 26 gold, 25 silver, and 25 bronze medals.



Although the 2024 and 2025 editions had fewer disciplines and participants, the competition became more intense with Army, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka producing great performances. Gulmarg did not lose energy; it increased it. Now, as the sixth edition of KIWG approaches, the focus has shifted from trying new things to building a legacy. Following the April 22, 2025, terror attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir hosted only around 10.47 lakh domestic tourists in 2025 compared to around 26 lakh tourists in 2024, an official of the tourism department said. However, he said that the tourists' arrivals picked up this year following the New Year rush and in the run-up to the Khelo India Winter Games 2026. Though the official figures of the tourists visiting Kashmir would be released after the first quarter ending on March 31, an official of the tourism department said that the tourist arrivals to the Valley this year had already crossed the 2025 numbers. According to the tourism department,

Gulmarg has 2300 beds in hotels and huts. An official said the hoteliers and guest house owners are getting advance bookings ahead of the Games, with over 50 per cent already booked during the event days. Gulmarg will see four medal events: Ski mountaineering, Alpine skiing, Nordic skiing (cross-country) and snowboarding, the release read. There is so much happiness on the slopes of Kongdoori. Sledge pullers Altaf Hussain and Muhammad Rafiq carry equipment up slopes that would challenge most tourists. Their boots leave deep prints in the packed snow as they climb. "This is our season," Hussain said, adjusting the ropes over his shoulders. "When the games start, Gulmarg comes alive." Hussain and Rafiq charge between Rs 500 and Rs 1500 from every tourist, depending on the distance to be covered and the time it takes. They say on a good day they make anything between Rs 1500 and Rs 3000 compared to nothing when the tourist destination remains desolate.