

Himanta Biswa Sarma supports Amit Shah’s remarks on infiltration in West Bengal

Guwahati, Dec 30: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma today backed Union Home Minister Amit Shah’s remarks on infiltration in West Bengal and called them a reflection of the “factual position” and urging strong steps to secure the border with Bangladesh. Sarma said that while states like Assam and Tripura were taking firm measures to stop illegal entry, the situation in West Bengal remained a concern. “While Assam and Tripura are fighting against infiltration, Bengal is opening its doors to infiltrators. We must take strong action on the West Bengal–Bangladesh border. The Home Minister has proposed a national grid, and we welcome it,” he said. His statement came a day after Amit Shah sharply criticised the Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal, accusing it of allowing infiltration from Bangladesh for political benefit. Shah



claimed that the West Bengal government had not been cooperating with the Centre on border fencing and land allotment. “Can the Chief Minister answer why infiltration has stopped at the borders of Tripura, Assam, Rajasthan, Punjab, Kashmir and

Gujarat? It is because in West Bengal, infiltration occurs under your watch to bring about demographic change and strengthen your votes,” Shah said, linking the issue directly to national security and electoral politics. He added that the 2026 Assembly

elections in West Bengal would focus strongly on the promise of stopping infiltration and removing infiltrators from the state. Shah further alleged that fear, corruption and misgovernance had become the identity of the state under Trinamool rule. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee rejected the allegations, saying the BJP was spreading misinformation. She strongly denied claims that her government had refused land for border fencing. “They say I did not give land. If I hadn’t given land, how would coal mining and other development have happened in Bengal?” Banerjee said. She also said that infiltration was not a problem limited to one state. Meanwhile, the Assam Chief Minister has appealed to Hindu families living in areas where they are already a minority or are close to becoming one to have more than one child.

Sarma said the appeal was driven by concerns over changing population patterns. He stated that in several places, the birth rate among Muslims was higher, while the birth rate among Hindus was slowly declining. According to him, this difference could have long-term social effects. “In areas where the Hindu community is already a minority or is on the verge of becoming one, families should not stop at one child,” he said. He suggested that Hindu families should have at least two children, and if possible three, adding that otherwise there might not be enough people to support family structures in the future. The Chief Minister also said that his government regularly advises Muslim families not to have very large families. “We tell Muslim people not to have eight or seven children,” he said, stressing that his message was about “balance” and not targeting any religion.

In Brief

Assam CM supports Amit Shah’s remarks

Guwahati: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma supported Union Home Minister Amit Shah’s comments on infiltrations from Bangladesh into West Bengal, emphasizing the need for stronger border security. Sarma contrasted the efforts in Assam and Tripura with the situation in West Bengal, which he claimed was failing to curb illegal entries. Shah accused the Trinamool Congress government of allowing infiltrations for political advantage and asserted that the upcoming 2026 elections would address these issues. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee refuted these allegations, asserting that her government cooperates on border issues.

Amit Shah inaugurates Northeast’s largest auditorium

Guwahati: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on December 29 opened the Jyoti-Bishnu Antarjati Kala Mandir in Guwahati, the largest auditorium in the Northeast. This was a significant development for Assam’s civic and cultural infrastructure. The auditorium complex, which was constructed at a cost of Rs 291 crore and spans 45 bighas, or roughly 14.85 acres, in the city’s Khanapara neighborhood, can accommodate 5,000 people, according to officials.

Tensions Rise Over Reservation Policy

Shillong: Meghalaya’s political discourse regarding the Expert Committee Report on the State Reservation Policy is heating up, with the United Democratic Party (UDP) advocating for moderation. UDP General Secretary Titosstarwell Chyne stated the government should be allowed time to complete its work, contrasting with the Voice of the People’s Party (VPP) which threatens statewide agitation if the report remains undisclosed. Chyne highlighted the report’s extensive content (4,000–5,000 pages) and the need for thorough review as reasons for the delay, emphasizing the importance of not rushing the process.

Assam STF busts suspected IMK module

Guwahati: Security and intelligence agencies in India have been closely tracking suspected jihadi activity in the North East, particularly in Assam. Acting on inputs from central intelligence units, the Assam Police Special Task Force (STF) has carried out a major crackdown on an alleged module linked to Imam Mahmuder Kafila (IMK) said to be an offshoot of the banned Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

Meghalaya select 15 girls’ for BCCI U-19 one-day tournament

Shillong, Dec 30: Meghalaya Cricket Association’s junior women’s selection committee, on December 29, announced a 15-member squad along with five standbys for the BCCI Under-19 Girls’ One Day Trophy 2025–26 (plate group), setting the stage for the state’s national campaign. The team will open its tournament on January 2 against Arunachal Pradesh, with all plate group matches scheduled to be played in Guwahati. Meghalaya have been drawn alongside Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland and Sikkim. Laviola Mary L Mawlong has been appointed captain, while Onasa M Sangma will serve as vice-captain.

The side will be coached by Laxman Chettri as Me-

ghalaya look to make a strong impression in the national competition organised by the Board of Control for Cricket in India. The squad selection, announced by the Meghalaya Cricket Association, brings together a mix of emerging talent and experienced age-group players as the state aims to build depth in women’s cricket. Meghalaya squad: Aniesha Arengh, Aviana Myrthong, Badphishirta L Nonglait, Idatyngkai Marngar, Laviola Mary L Mawlong (C), Meaikyntiaka Warjri, Mebalapynkmen Syiemlieh, Onasa M Sangma (VC), Prisceca Nongpiur (WK), Ribahun Mawlong, Nokgam N Marak, Anuradha Gurung, Rima Sunar, Haphilahun Makri, Asorphi R Wankhar.

HITO demands Himanta Biswa Sarma to push ILP extension in Assam, Meghalaya

Guwahati, Dec 30: The Hynniewtrep Integrated Territorial Organization (HITO) has urged Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, in his capacity as Chairman of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), to take the lead in demanding the extension of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) regime to the entire Northeast, including Assam and Meghalaya, citing rising security, demographic, and sovereignty concerns. In a memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister, HITO expressed strong concern over recent remarks made by Bangladesh’s interim head Muhammad Yunus during a visit to China, where he reportedly referred to Bangladesh as the “only guardian of the ocean” for India’s landlocked



Northeastern states and repeatedly mentioned the strategic Siliguri Corridor, often called the “Chicken Neck.” The organisation described the remarks as misleading, objectionable, and inimical to India’s national interest, particularly in the context of the Northeast. It said such statements, when viewed alongside the unstable political situation in Bangladesh and frequent detection of illegal Bangladeshi nationals across Northeastern states, raise serious security and demo-

graphic concerns for the region. HITO said it agreed with the firm response issued earlier by Chief Minister Sarma, noting that it resonated strongly with public sentiment in the Northeast. The organisation pointed out that Bangladesh itself has two narrow and vulnerable corridors, making such commentary strategically imprudent. In the memorandum, HITO called for the extension of the Inner Line Permit under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, to the entire Northeast. At present, ILP is applicable in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, and Sikkim, the latter in the form of a Protected Area Permit. Given the prevailing circumstances, the organisation said it has become imperative to

extend ILP to Meghalaya and Assam and strengthen its implementation across the region to protect indigenous land, identity, and cultural heritage. While acknowledging that ILP is not a complete solution to infiltration and illegal immigration, HITO maintained that it would serve as an important regulatory mechanism to monitor and restrict the movement of illegal foreigners. The organisation urged the Assam government and the BJP-led dispensation at the Centre to take up the issue in the larger interest of national security, demographic balance, and the constitutional rights of indigenous communities in the Northeast. HITO also sought an opportunity to meet the Chief Minister to further elaborate on its concerns.

Assam STF busts suspected IMK module

Guwahati, Dec 30: Security and intelligence agencies in India have been closely tracking suspected jihadi activity in the North East, particularly in Assam. Acting on inputs from central intelligence units, the Assam Police Special Task Force (STF) has carried out a major crackdown on an alleged module linked to Imam Mahmuder Kafila (IMK) said to be an offshoot of the banned Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). A total of 11 persons have been arrested in connection with the case. IMK was reportedly formed in 2018 by Jewel Mahmud alias Imam Mahmud Habibullah alias Sohail, a former JMB member who claims to lead the outfit and promotes the ideology of “Ghazwatul Hind”. After the change of government in Bangladesh in August 2024, leaders of banned extremist organisations allegedly instructed IMK to expand its presence in India, including in Assam. Two Bangladeshi nationals, identified as Umar and Khalid, were believed to be coordinating the group’s activities, while Nasim Uddin alias Tamim of Barpeta Road is suspected to have headed the Assam cell. Investigators say the outfit functioned mainly through encrypted social me-



dia groups. One such channel, titled “Purva Akash”, reportedly served as a communication and recruitment hub. Youths from Assam, Tripura and West Bengal were allegedly exposed to extremist propaganda and encouraged to take a formal oath of allegiance to the IMK leader. Authorities say members were radicalised using online literature and religious-themed content advocating violent jihad.

Police suspect that small gatherings were held at local religious spaces since December 2024, where participants were exposed to extremist messaging. Some members allegedly travelled to Bangladesh on valid passports to meet IMK leadership and explore possible training opportunities. IMK is also believed to have relied on informal financial channels and digital transfers to fund its activities. Investigators say

money collected locally was routed to Bangladesh through hawala. Taking note of the security risk, the STF launched coordinated raids in the intervening night of December 29 and 30 across Barpeta, Chirang, Baksa, Darrang and Tripura. During this single operation, police apprehended 11 accused persons linked to the suspected IMK network. The police arrested a total of 11 persons during the operation.

150 products from North East identified for GI Tagging

Aizawl, Dec 30: This Ministry of DoNER is spearheading Geographical Indication (GI) tagging of unique, local products of agri-horti, handloom, and handicraft sectors from the North East region to promote and preserve the unique identity of these products.

A statement issued by the Ministry informed that 150 such distinctive products have been identified for GI Tagging in the next two years.

The statement added that the Ministry is also implementing a comprehensive bamboo value-chain development programme across the North Eastern region. The initiative adopts an end-to-end approach encompassing skill development, cluster strengthening, infrastructure creation, engineered bamboo product development, and market-linkage interventions to unlock the full economic potential of the sector.

Meghalaya gets Govt model degree college under PM-USA Scheme

Shillong, Dec 30: The Central Government has sanctioned funds under the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan) scheme, for the construction of a Government Model Degree College at Mawthengkut village, Mawshynrut in West Khasi Hills District. The college is expected to benefit students from Mawshynrut and nearby areas, including Rambrai-Jymgam. Notably, Meghalaya has received approval for two such colleges, to be set up at Mawshynrut and Jalaphet in East Jaintia Hills District. Cabinet Minister and Mawshynrut MLA Methodius Dkhar, along with engineers and local leaders, inspected the proposed site for the college and hostel buildings, estimated to cost around Rs 15 crore. Speaking to the media, Dkhar said the college will reduce the financial burden on parents, as students will no longer need to go outside for higher education. The MLA thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, and the Education Minister for their support. Residents expressed gratitude to the State Government and Methodius Dkhar for fulfilling a long-standing demand of the people.

Unknown miscreants set ablaze forest created by Padma Shri awardee in Assam

Guwahati, Dec 30: A massive fire ignited by unidentified miscreants engulfed a man-made forest created by Padma Shri awardee Jadav Payeng, known as ‘Forest Man of India’, in Assam. The blaze destroyed over 5,00 plants and saplings, destroyed nests of birds with eggs besides killing insects and other small animals, while no human casualty was reported. An investigation has been ordered. The forest on the bank

of river Brahmaputra in Jorhat-Majuli forest division, known as Molai Katoni 2.0, was set afire on Sunday evening. The blaze spread rapidly and damaged a large stretch of green cover. The fire destroyed more than 5,000 plants and saplings that were planted in 2022 by Payeng and his daughter. Several organizations and political parties have condemned the incident and demanded punishment to the guilty.

‘Sarathi’ Students Distribute Winter Clothes in Guwahati

Guwahati, Dec 31: With a winter relief effort in Guwahati, the student-run social service organization Sarathi, founded by Pragjyotish College students, once again shown compassion and social responsibility. In an effort to offer some solace during the bitter weather, Sarathi members gave warm clothing to the homeless and impoverished in the Fatasil region on December 30. Sarathi has been actively engaged in a number of social welfare initiatives for a number of years with the aim of helping those in need. The organization’s ongoing efforts, which go beyond academic life to solve actual societal challenges, have reflected the

humanitarian values and sense of duty among young people. Student volunteers visited several areas of the Fatasil neighborhood during the winter relief drive and personally gave winter clothing to families and people who were having difficulty with the cold. The volunteers executed the task with commitment, consideration, and zeal in spite of the severe weather. Numerous recipients conveyed their appreciation, stating that the assistance provided them with much-needed respite throughout the winter. Students’ enthusiastic involvement in the program demonstrated the value of compassion, empathy, and community service

among youth. It is crucial to occasionally leave classrooms in order to comprehend the struggles endured by marginalized groups in society. The pupils gave an example of how young people may contribute significantly to societal development. Sarathi has previously organized a number of different social events, such as blood drives, awareness campaigns, and blood donation camps, all of which have constantly transmitted a positive message throughout society. These initiatives have demonstrated that student organizations may make a substantial contribution to social change and humanitarian work.

Manipur student bodie demand measures Protect NE students

Imphal, Dec 30: Chennai, Dec 30: Manipur based student bodies on Monday demanded immediate decisive action to address racism while joining the chorus condemning the recent killing of MBA student from Tripura in Uttarakhand. The student bodies also urged the Central government to ensure safety of students and individuals from Northeast India who study or live in other parts of the country. Angel Chakma, a 24-year-old MBA student from Tripura, who was assaulted in Dehradun, Uttarakhand on December 9, 2025, and succumbed to his injuries on December 26, 2025. The incident was a grave assault on the dignity, identity, and safety of students from Northeast India across the country, Manipuri Students' Federation (MSF) and All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU), alleged in separate statements issued on Monday. Citing reports, the two prominent student bodies alleged that Chakma was attacked by a group of assailants who used racial slurs and stabbed him multiple times, leading to his tragic demise. The victim's brother alleged that the attackers were intoxicated and targeted them due to their appearance, the MSF stated. "This heinous act of racial violence is shameful and has been condemned by the Manipuri student community, the MSF said, in a statement. The statement by MSF cited that racism, discrimination, and hatred against people from Northeast India were unacceptable and should be condemned by all.

The MSF also said that the people from the northeast often faced racial discrimination, stereotyping, and social exclusion



in other parts of India due to their distinct physical appearance. Derogatory terms like "chinky," "momo," "chowmein," and "Chinese" are frequently used to mock people from the northeast. "This kind of discrimination can escalate to physical assault and hate crimes, and it's unacceptable that such systems have persisted for far too long," the student body pointed out. It also urged the Prime Minister, Union home minister, Uttarakhand chief minister, and other government authorities to intervene in this issue, arrest the perpetrators, and take strict legal action against them. The student body further requested the Central government to implement special measures to safeguard students and individuals from Northeast India who study or live in other parts of the country. "It is the responsibility of the government to ensure their safety and well-being," the MSF said, while seeking Centre's immediate measures for the safety and security of all the students from the northeast region. It expressed hope that concrete steps would be taken to prevent similar incidents and to ensure a safe and secure environment for students from northeast India across the country.

AMSU, in a separate

statement, demanded immediate arrest of all those involved in the killing and strict punishment under relevant provisions of law. The body further called for a time-bound and transparent investigation to ensure that justice is delivered without delay while alleging that Chakma was allegedly racially abused, mocked, and dehumanised through derogatory slurs related to his physical appearance and identity as a northeastern student. "Such acts reflect a deeply entrenched pattern of racism, racial profiling, and discrimination faced by people from the Northeast in different parts of the country," it added. AMSU asserted that the incident was not an isolated case, recalling earlier instances of racial violence and harassment, including the killing of Nido Tania and several other reported and unreported cases. It said repeated failures in ensuring accountability have emboldened perpetrators and allowed racial violence to persist, the AMSU alleged. "Racism has no place in a democratic and multicultural country," it said while pointing out that continued targeting of Northeastern people violated the constitutional guarantees of equality, non-discrimination, and the right to life and dignity.

The President returns the Madras University Bill, which is a blow to the TN government

Chennai, Dec 30: President Droupadi Murmu has returned the University of Madras (Amendment) Bill to the Tamil Nadu government, dealing a fresh blow to the DMK government's efforts to assert greater control over the administration of state-run universities. The decision brings back into focus the long-running tussle between the state government and Governor RN Ravi over the appointment of vice-chancellors in TN universities. The Bill, passed by the state Assembly in April 2022, sought to amend the University of Madras Act by transferring the power to appoint and remove the vice-chancellor, from the governor — who serves as the ex-officio chancellor of the university — to the state government. By replacing the term "chancellor" with "government" in the Act, the state aimed to make the elected government the final authority in matters of academic leadership. However, Governor Ravi reserved the Bill for the President's consideration, citing concerns that the proposed changes could be at odds with University Grants Commission regulations and established norms governing V-C appointments. "With the President re-

turning the Bill without granting assent, as per rules, the state will again have to reconsider the legislation," said an official from the higher education department. Higher education department officials were tight-lipped over the explanation given by the President's office for returning the Bill. This comes amid a leadership vacuum in 14 out of the 22 state universities. Several institutions, including the University of Madras, one of India's oldest universities, are functioning without regular V-Cs and are being run by convenor committees. "University of Madras has been functioning without a V-C since August 2023. Absence of permanent leadership has affected academic planning, research approvals and administrative functioning," said a professor in the varsity. The DMK government has repeatedly blamed the governor for this situation, accusing him of delaying assent to legislation and V-C appointments. This dispute earlier reached the Supreme Court which, in April this year, delivered a landmark verdict on the governor's role in dealing with state legislation. Invoking its extraordinary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution,



the court granted "deemed assent" to 10 amendment bills passed by the TN Assembly in 2022, including those related to V-C appointments in 18 state universities.

Following the ruling, the state government proceeded to appoint V-Cs to these universities. However, petitions were filed challenging the verdict and the matter got entangled in

the Madras High Court and SC. The University of Madras Bill, which remained outside the scope of court intervention, continued to await the President's decision. While the TN government did not issue an official response to this matter on Monday, a higher education department official said, "We will examine all legal and legislative options."

Five women and four Mizoram constables were detained for phony narcotics fraud

Aizawl, Dec 30: Four police constables were among nine people arrested for their alleged involvement in a series of frauds in Mizoram in which fake drugs were used to dupe buyers, police said on Tuesday. The arrests were made by personnel of the Special Narcotics Police Station in Aizawl following a tip-off. Five women were also taken into custody in connection with the case.

Superintendent of Police Zosangliana said the women would identify potential buyers for drugs or other contraband items that were later found to be fake. After fixing the deal, a time and venue were finalised for the transaction. "When the buyers arrived at the designated location, the constables, posing as CID officers, would arrest them. The victims were usually released after handing over the money, which was then shared among the accused," he said. According to police, the gang had carried out such frauds on more than six occasions. Three of the constables were arrested on December 15 at the New Capital Complex while waiting to receive a consignment of methamphetamine tablets, based on intelligence inputs. During the operation, one of the accused received a call



stating that the drugs would instead be delivered at Khatla. When the police team reached Khatla, they seized methamphetamine tablets from a woman, later identified as the mastermind of

the racket. Subsequent examination revealed that the seized drugs were fake. Further investigation led to the arrest of another constable and four more women, police added.

ILP across Northeast

Meghalaya organisation seeks CM Himanta Biswa's intervention



Guwahati, Dec 30: Citing the prevailing unstable political situation in Bangladesh and the frequent arrests and detection of illegal Bangladeshi migrants in the Northeast, a Meghalaya-based organisation has urged Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to take the lead in demanding the extension of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) to the entire region. The Hynniewtrep Integrated Territorial Organisation (HITO), in a letter addressed to Sarma, appealed to him in his capacity as Chairman of the North East Democratic Alliance to spearhead the demand for extending the ILP regime beyond the states where it is currently in force. ILP is a travel document under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, which every Indian citizen is required to carry while visiting a "protected" state for a limited stay. At present, it has been implemented in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. In its letter, HITO stated that recent remarks by Bangladeshi leaders, including statements that Bangladesh is the "only guardian of the ocean" and references to the "chicken's neck" (Siliguri corridor), have assumed significance and raised serious security, demographic and socio-political concerns for the Northeast. "We urge you, in your capacity as the

Chairman of the North East Democratic Alliance, to take the lead in demanding the extension of ILP to the entire Northeast region," the organisation said in the letter.

The organisation categorically stated that the current situation demands the extension of the ILP regime to Meghalaya and Assam, along with the strengthening of its framework across the region, in order to protect indigenous communities, their land, identity and cultural heritage. According to HITO, while ILP is not a complete solution to infiltration and illegal immigration, it would act as an important regulatory mechanism to partially control, monitor and check the movement of illegal migrants. "We sincerely hope that this collective call from the region will be taken forward by your government and your party at the Centre, in the larger interest of national security, demographic balance, and the constitutional rights of indigenous communities of the northeastern states," the letter further stated. Meghalaya has been demanding the implementation of ILP for a long time. A few years ago, the state Assembly had unanimously passed a resolution seeking the introduction of the ILP regime in the state.

Manipur maps over 1,000 springs, 173 critical springs identified for revival

Imphal, Dec 30: Manipur's Directorate of Environment and Climate Change (DoECC) has mapped more than 1,000 springs across the state, of which 173 critical springs in Ukhrul and Noney districts have been identified for revival under a priority scheme. This was informed by Principal Secretary (Forest, Environment and Climate Change) Arun Kumar Sinha during the release of the Environment Calendar 2026 at Porompat in Imphal East district on Saturday. Sinha said that springshed management is important in hill areas, as many springs are drying up due to deforestation and the unscientific use of land. "Being the state nodal agency, the directorate has also delineated and mapped 71 wetlands in Manipur and three wetlands have been notified and four wetlands are under rejuvenation work," the principal secretary said, while emphasising that collective re-



sponsibility is essential to ensure that natural resources are preserved and conserved for future generations.

He added that the Central government has allocated a budget of Rs 2,700 crore for springshed management nationwide, and several such projects are underway in different

regions.

He stated that the Environment Calendar 2026 of the directorate is also a part of the environment information and dissemination programme about environmental events and observations around the globe, national and state as well.

Tripura over alleged links Bangladesh based extremist groups 11 arrested in Assam

Guwahati, Dec 30: Eleven people were arrested in Assam and Tripura for their alleged links with Bangladesh-based fundamentalist groups, police said on Tuesday. Addressing a press conference, Guwahati Police Commissioner Parthasarathi Mahanta said the arrests were carried out by the Special Task Force (STF) based on intelligence inputs provided by central

agencies. According to Mahanta, coordinated operations were conducted late Monday night in Assam's Barpeta, Chirang and Darang districts, as well as in Tripura. "We have arrested a total of 11 jihadi elements who were working under the direct instructions of Bangladesh-based groups," he said. He added that the arrested individuals were members of a newly

formed outfit identified as Indian Mujahideen-K. Of the total arrests, 10 were made in Assam and one in Tripura. Mahanta claimed that the group's objective was to destabilise Assam and other parts of the Northeast. "Their aim was to disturb peace in the region and establish what they described as 'Muslim supremacy'," he said. Police said further in-



vestigation is underway to ascertain the group's network, funding sources and possible links to other extremist organisations.

CoMSO demand anti-racism law after Anjel Chakma’s murder

Shillong, Dec 30: The Confederation of Meghalaya Social Organisations (CoMSO) has sought the enactment of a national anti-racism law and fast-track justice following the brutal murder of a 24-year-old MBA student from Tripura.

According to it, the incident shows a recurring pattern of racial violence against people from the Northeast in other parts of the country.

In a statement, CoMSO expressed deep condolences and anger over the death of Anjel Chakma and stated that such crimes were not

isolated and reflected systemic prejudice faced by people from the region in cities such as Bengaluru, Delhi and Dehradun.

It further called on the Centre to direct all state governments to establish dedicated 24/7 ‘North East Helpline’ and specialised police cells in major cities to ensure the safety of students and working professionals from the region.

Educational institutions and local administrations must also be held accountable for failing to provide a safe and inclusive environment, the statement said.

Jaiñtia National Council calls for unity to defend land and traditions on Kiang Nangbah anniversary

Shillong, Dec 30: The Jaiñtia National Council (JNC) on Tuesday observed the 163rd martyrdom anniversary of freedom fighter U Woh Kiang Nangbah and called for a united effort to protect Jaiñtia land, customs and traditional institutions.

The programme was held at the memorial stone in Khliehriat, the site linked to his execution in 1862 during British rule. Members of the JNC Central Executive Committee, along with representatives from different zones, units and circles, gathered to pay floral tributes and remember his contribution to the Jaiñtia community. Leaders said that the occasion was not only about honouring history but also about reflecting on present-day challenges.

JNC President Sambornii Lyngdoh, who

addressed the gathering, said the struggle led by Kiang Nangbah continues to remain relevant even today.

He said the freedom fighter had stood up against outside control and interference in local customs, and similar concerns are once again being felt by the people. Lyngdoh said that during the colonial period, the British authorities had approached village leaders and Dollois in a manner that slowly weakened traditional governance. He recalled the historic meeting of Ka Ri ki Khat-ar Dolloi at Nartiang Elaka, which later became an important point in the movement that was led by Kiang Nangbah. He also referred to a well-known story connected to the freedom fighter, where he is said to have emerged from

the Myntdu River holding a sacred leaf. Lyngdoh described this as a symbolic message asking the people to stay united and to move forward together with the same purpose and values. According to the JNC president, the community is again facing pressures from various directions. He alleged that certain outside groups and authorities are trying to take over ancestral land in the name of development, industrial activities and mining projects.

He said these moves could weaken the protections that exist under the Sixth Schedule. Lyngdoh stated that the organisation is concerned about what he described as attempts to create divisions among the local people.

Hunger strike marks 100 days of protest in Tezpur University

Tezpur, Dec 30: Students, teachers, and non-teaching staff of Tezpur University observed a 24-hour hunger strike on Monday to mark completion of 100 days of their protest against alleged irregularities involving Vice Chancellor Shambhu Nath Singh.

The protesters under the banner of Tezpur University United Forum (TUUF) rued that despite their continuous agitation, their demand for action has been ignored by the authorities concerned.

TUUF is a joint platform of students, teachers and non-teaching staffers.

“The Tezpur University Teachers’ Association (TUTA), Tezpur University Non-Teaching Employees’ Association (TUNTEA) and the student community observed a 24-hour-long hunger strike from 12 am on Monday, which ended at 11.59 pm.

This collective action marks 100 days of continuous democratic struggle -- a period defined not by resolution, but by silence, delay and deepening disappointment,” a TUUF member said.

SBI General Insurance promotes cyber cover to protect families online

Guwahati, Dec 30: India is going through a major digital shift as more people use smartphones, online payments, and internet services in their daily lives. Today, most households in the country have access to the internet and digital banking, especially through platforms like UPI. This fast digital growth has made life easier, but it has also created new risks for users, families, and businesses across India. At the same time, cyber threats have become more frequent and serious. Recent studies show that many companies in India have suffered major financial losses because of cyber incidents, including hacking, fraud, and data theft. Some large companies have even reported losses running into millions of dollars. With such risks becoming more common, cyber security and financial protection have emerged as key priorities. This growing concern



has encouraged many organisations and individuals to look at cyber insurance as an important safety net, not only for data protection but also for managing financial and emotional stress after an incident. In this backdrop, SBI General Insurance has positioned itself as an important player in providing cyber risk solutions for India’s digital users. The company is promoting cyber insurance as a basic part of digital safety, much like seatbelts in cars. Its cyber protection product, Cyber VaultEdge, is designed for individuals and families who are active online. The plan covers a wide range of problems such as fraud in online transactions, identity

theft, harassment on social media, stalking, extortion, and damage to one’s online reputation. The product also aims to make the process simple by offering flexible coverage limits, no deductibles, and minimal paperwork, making it easier for people to sign up and use the service when needed. SBI General Insurance says the need for this type of cover has grown sharply because cyber risks are no longer limited to corporate data breaches. Today, everyday users are equally exposed. From online shopping and banking to social media and work-from-home platforms, personal data is constantly moving through digital networks. The company

believes that cyber protection has now become essential for every digital user, rather than being seen as an extra or optional cost. The aim is to help people feel safer and more confident while using online services in their daily lives. One of the key features highlighted by the insurer is the wide support it promises during and after a cyber incident. Apart from financial compensation, the policy covers legal expenses, the cost of restoring lost or corrupted data through IT experts, and psychological counselling for victims who face stress or trauma because of cybercrime. According to the company, this approach ensures that affected individuals do not feel alone during recovery and receive help at every stage of the process. It believes such support is important as digital crimes often cause emotional distress along with financial loss.

Akhil Gogoi questions BJP’s deportation claims, cites assembly data to challenge Amit Shah’s 2026 remarks

Guwahati, Dec 30: Sibsagar MLA and Rajior Dai president Akhil Gogoi today criticised the BJP-led governments at the Centre and in Assam, saying that the promise of deporting illegal migrants “one by one” is nothing more than a political slogan ahead of the 2026 Assam Assembly elections. Gogoi was reacting to remarks made by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who said that if the BJP is re-elected in Assam, the government would ensure that illegal foreigners are deported from the state. Speaking to the media, Gogoi said that these claims were similar to statements made during previous elections and were not reflected in actual government action. To support his stand, Gogoi referred to official replies placed in the Assam Legislative Assembly over the past few years. He said the data shows a large difference between the number of people identified as foreigners and the number who were eventually deported. During the Congress rule between 2001 and 2015, he pointed out that around 37,311 people were declared foreigners, while 2,719 were deported. Under the BJP’s first term between 2016 and 2020, 76,024 people were identified, but only 260 were deported. In the second BJP term from



2021 to 2025 (up to October 2025), 28,724 people were identified, and 1,416 were deported. Altogether, in ten years of BJP rule, over 1 lakh people were identified as foreigners, while fewer than 1,700 were deported. Gogoi said this shows that the gap between announcements and real action remains wide. Gogoi said that the BJP had made many promises in 2016, including identifying illegal migrants, making Assam flood-free and removing corruption. He said the party had now been in power in Assam for nearly a decade, while also ruling at the Centre for more than 12 years. “Now again they are asking people for more time,” he said. He added that some of the speeches made recently may also create tension in the state. He also referred to earlier statements claiming that there were around 40

lakh illegal foreigners in Assam and said that such claims were not supported by the pace of deportation. Gogoi also criticised the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), saying that the law goes against earlier promises made to the people of Assam. According to him, the BJP spoke about protecting Assam before elections, but later took steps that people had opposed. He alleged that the party behaved differently before and after elections and urged voters not to depend only on the image of top national leaders. Gogoi also raised concerns over the functioning of the opposition alliance in Assam. He expressed his dissatisfaction with certain public statements made by Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Gaurav Gogoi. He said he did not appreciate remarks made about seat-sharing and added that such discussions should ideally take place privately rather than in the media. He also said that some Congress leaders appeared more active than others. However, Gogoi said that the opposition would continue discussions in a democratic manner and final decisions would be taken collectively. He called for unity and discipline among all parties working together for the 2026 Assembly elections.

CRPF jawan dies after sudden cardiac arrest while playing badminton in Mizoram

Aizawl, Dec 30: A Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawan posted at the Vairengte camp in Mizoram passed away after suffering a sudden cardiac arrest while playing badminton with his colleagues. The incident has brought shock and grief to his family, friends, fellow personnel, and people in his home district in Assam. The deceased jawan has been identified as Ranjit

Singh, a resident of Laothai Basti in the Udharbond area of Cachar district, Assam. He had been serving at the CRPF camp in Vairengte for quite some time and was known among his colleagues as a disciplined and sincere member of the force. According to information received, the incident took place late on Sunday night inside the camp premises. Ranjit Singh was playing badminton with other

CRPF personnel when he suddenly complained of uneasiness and collapsed on the court. His colleagues immediately rushed him to a nearby hospital for emergency treatment. However, doctors declared him dead on arrival. The cause of death was confirmed as sudden cardiac arrest. Following the incident, his mortal remains were taken to Silchar Medical College and Hospital

(SMCH) for post-mortem examination as part of the legal procedure. After the completion of formalities, the body was handed over to his family members and transported to his native place in Cachar district. The last rites were performed with full state honours, in the presence of family members, colleagues, local residents, and representatives of the security forces.

35 acres of illegal poppy fields cleared in major operation in Manipur’s Kangpokpi district

Kangpokpi, Dec 30: A large joint operation led by security and enforcement agencies has destroyed nearly 35 acres of illegal poppy cultivation in the hill areas of Langkhong (Saisijang) under Kangpokpi district in Manipur. The operation took place on December 29 and is being seen as one of the biggest actions against illegal drug-related farming in the state this year. According to officials, the action was carried out by a joint task force that included the Manipur Police, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Forest Department, and the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB). The team located a widespread area of poppy fields spread along the hill slopes and carried out a carefully coordinated effort to destroy the plants on site. Officers involved in the operation said the cultivation area was large

and well-organised, indicating that the illegal farming had been taking place for some time. The team also came across temporary structures and equipment used during farming. During the crackdown, security personnel destroyed 12 makeshift huts that were believed to have been used by cultivators for shelter and storage. Large amounts of materials used in the farming process were also recovered and burnt at the site. These included 13 bags of fertilisers, 19 bottles of Round-up herbicide, and 16 bags of salt. Authorities also seized and destroyed spray pumps, irrigation pipes, and other agricultural tools used to maintain the fields. Officers said the immediate destruction of both crops and equipment was important to prevent any future reuse of the site for illegal cultivation.

Officials described the operation as a major step in ongoing efforts to curb poppy farming and drug-related activities in Manipur. The region has seen continued attempts by groups and individuals to cultivate poppy, which is later processed for opium and other narcotic substances. These drugs are then trafficked across different parts of northeastern India and beyond. Police sources said that although the operation was successful in clearing the plantation, no arrests were made during the raid. It is believed that the cultivators abandoned the area before the arrival of the joint task force. Investigations have been launched to trace those involved in organising and carrying out the cultivation. Authorities are trying to identify land owners, organisers, and workers who may have been linked to the illegal activity.

Sunrise Festival begins at India’s eastern-most village Dong

Itanagar, Dec 30: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on December 29 inaugurated the first-ever Sunrise Festival at Dong village in Anjaw district. Dong is known as the eastern-most inhabited location in India and is the first place in the country to see the sunrise each day. The Chief Minister travelled to the remote valley along with Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein, Arunachal East MP Tapir Gao, and local MLA and Women and Child Development Minister Dasanglu Pul. Dong village lies close to the India-China border and is often highlighted for its unique geographical identity. In his address, Khandu said the festival has been planned to celebrate this special location and to introduce more people to the natural beauty and culture of the region. He said the event aims to bring attention to the landscape, the local communities, and the adventure tourism opportunities that the area offers. According to him, the festival will also serve as a reminder of Dong’s symbolic importance as the first point in the country to welcome daylight. The Chief Minister added that the government wants to promote responsible and sustainable tourism through the festival. He said that by encouraging visitors to experience the local way of life, the initiative could help create new livelihood opportunities for residents while protecting the environment and traditions. He also expressed hope that



Dong would gain more recognition nationally and internationally as a landmark of both geography and culture. The Sunrise Festival will continue for five days and will include traditional performances, local food, nature-based activities and community-led tourism programmes. Officials said the idea is to bring more visibility to one of India’s most remote regions, while ensuring that development remains people-centred and respectful of local heritage.

₹10,000 Seed Fund Given to Women Entrepreneurs in Baksa, Bhawanipur-Sorbhog

Guwahati, Dec 30: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma distributed seed money under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan (MMUA) in Baksa district and the Bhawanipur-Sorbhog area on Tuesday, carrying on the state government’s initiative to empower women. Following Manas, the MMUA caravan arrived in Bhawanipur-Sorbhog, where 25,157 women entrepreneurs were ceremoniously given Rs 10,000 apiece by the Chief Minister. More than 30,700 female entrepreneurs in Salbari, which is part of the Manas Legislative Assembly Constituency, received Rs 10,000 in seed money earlier in the day. Over 55,000 women from Baksa and Bhawanipur-Sorbhog benefited from these distributions in a single day, which was a significant

step toward the government’s objective of establishing 40 lakh “Lakhpati Baideus” throughout Assam. The program seeks to increase household incomes, assist women in establishing or growing small businesses, and help them become financially independent. Chief Minister Sarma told the recipients that women are Assam’s greatest asset. The MMUA program, he continued, is intended to provide women with the self-assurance and financial assistance they need to become independent business owners. The women beneficiaries’ eagerness and grins conveyed their aspiration for a better, more respectable future. With thousands of women entrepreneurs seizing the chance to become independent, the MMUA program has been gaining traction throughout



the state. Asserting that empowering women is essential to creating an Atmanirbhar Assam, the administra-

tion has reaffirmed its commitment to women-led development. The event ended with a message from the bene-

ficiaries thanking the government for the prompt assistance and stating that the seed grant would enable them to

grow their small businesses and make significant contributions to their families and communities.

Paddington and A Christmas Carol reboots

Not even the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come could have foreseen a Bollywood-inspired film or a hip-hop fantasy performance of A Christmas Carol. But these are the latest takes on Dickens’s much-adapted classic: Christmas Karma from Gurinder Chadha, the Bend It Like Beckham director, brings us Mr Sood, a Ugandan Asian refugee (played by Kunal Nayyar), who came to Britain in 1972; Ebony Scrooge transforms the old miser into a Dominican fashion diva at the recently opened Sadler’s Wells East, London. We may think of Scrooge McDuck and the Mup-

pets, but there was deep moral seriousness behind A Christmas Carol. Dickens had intended to write a political pamphlet entitled An Appeal on Behalf of the Poor Man’s Child, but instead decided to bury “the ghost of an idea” in a festive story. A Christmas Carol was written in six weeks and published on 19 December 1843, when Dickens was just 31. By Christmas Eve it had sold all 6,000 copies. By February 1844 there had been eight stage adaptations. Now this 182-year-old novel is being retold as 21st-century migrant stories. It is not hard to see why: Scrooge’s Malthu-

sian fears about “surplus population” and the Victorian belief that the poor should be punished are echoed in today’s anti-immigration rhetoric. This Christmas has also brought the latest incarnation of the UK’s favourite furry asylum seeker – Paddington. The new musical knowingly updates Michael Bond’s 1958 original, inspired by child evacuees during the second world war. Here is multicultural London – albeit a wholesome Mary Poppins version with a carnival vibe, rather than the harsh reality experienced by most immigrants. A Peruvian bear who loves a cuppa,

Paddington is unfailingly polite and eager to fit in. Embodying liberal and traditional values, he appeals to both sides of the culture wars. Only Paddington could have been invited to tea with the late Queen to celebrate the Platinum jubilee. It is tempting to be cynical about such reboots, messing around with national treasures and promoting a tourist vision of London. Do we need a breakdancing Bob Cratchit or a performing Paddington? Chadha has defended her right to take on a classic in Christmas Karma. “We all did Dickens at school. We must find ways to own art

and tell stories from our unique perspective,” she told Radio 4. Updating these stories keeps them alive. The spirit of Dickens endures, and not just in adaptations. Former children’s laureate Michael Rosen and illustrator Helen Oxenbury (the duo behind We’re Going on a Bear Hunt) have created a Christmas short story, Pax, about a modern family struggling to make ends meet. It is to be published in the Big Issue. With record levels of child poverty in the UK, rising homelessness, extreme inequality and hostility towards immigrants, Christmas isn’t looking cheery for many. Theirs

are the stories we need to hear. As the Ghost of Christmas Present is fading in Dickens’s novel, Scrooge spies two wretched children huddled in the spirit’s robe – a boy and a girl, Ignorance and Want. If society doesn’t look after its children (from darkest Peru or anywhere else) we cannot expect a better future. In our secular, consumerist times, A Christmas Carol and Paddington deliver messages of tolerance and compassion, as well as the possibility of redemption and change, delightfully wrapped up in heartwarming stories. No wonder we keep coming back for more.

Ministers need to keep their audacious pledge to reduce violence against women

Labour set itself a mammoth task when it pledged, before last year’s election, to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) in 10 years. While many forms of crime have decreased over the past decade, sexual assault has not. In the year to March 2025, 1.9% of people in England and Wales experienced it, and 82% of victims were female. The prevalence of image-related offences has risen sharply. So has concern about the impact on young men of violent pornography and influencers. Given this grim backdrop, and the fiscal constraints under which the government has chosen to operate, it is no wonder that the promised VAWG strategy was delayed. This is a societal issue that does not sit neatly in one government department. Jess Phillips is the minister responsible at the Home Office. But education and justice reforms are also essential if aims are to be met. The hope is that this can be a successful example of cross-government working. The risk is that a complicated range of issues are bundled together in such a way that no one has ownership and can be held to account. David Lammy, the justice secretary, wrote in the Guardian this week that “toxic masculinity and violence” are connected. Prevention is prominent in the strategy, with plans for new “healthy relationships” content in the schools curriculum and a referral pathway for boys with attitudes that are deemed harmful. Next year, a national summit on challenges facing men and boys is planned. Such initiatives could be worthwhile if they are well executed and are followed through. The sexualised aggression faced by female

pupils and teachers is appalling, and Ofcom also has a role in ensuring that online harms are reduced. But this must not become a distraction from policing and prosecuting offenders, the vast majority of whom are adult men who will be untouched by such schemes. One thing that clearly had to be in place before the strategy’s launch was a chair for the national inquiry into grooming gangs. The appointment last week of Anne Longfield means that this process should soon begin. The attitudes of offenders, and public authorities, will be a focus here too. The national rollout of domestic abuse protection orders is welcome. So is the pledge of more specialist officers. But the lack of a budget is concerning, and ministers need to explain how existing resources will be stretched or redirected. Also dismaying is feedback from the women’s sector that points to a lack of consultation. The £550m funding increase for victim support services is a tangible gain. But arguably what victims need more than anything else is for the criminal and family justice systems to work better. At the moment, the huge backlogs in crown court cases mean that some women who have experienced sexual violence wait years for a trial date. If delays become too long and victims, or witnesses, drop out, justice is denied. Issues specific to the family courts, where many allegations of domestic and sexual abuse are examined, include the lack of legal aid and use of unregulated experts. All these problems were never going to be solved in one fell swoop. But having promised radical change in their manifesto, Labour ministers must deliver it.

The ermine armaments race will benefit further from Labour’s new peerages

In opposition, Sir Keir Starmer called the unelected House of Lords “indefensible”. This week, barely 18 months into his prime ministership, Sir Keir took the total of unelected peers he has appointed since July 2024 to 96. Remarkably, Wednesday’s 34 new life peerages, mainly Labour supporters, take his appointment total above those of each of his four most recent Conservative predecessors.

You must go back to David Cameron to find a prime minister who did more to stuff the Lords than Sir Keir. At the last election, Labour presented itself to the voters as a party of Lords reform. The party manifesto promised to remove the remaining hereditary peers, to reform the appointments process, to impose a peers’ retirement age, and to consult on proposals for replacing the Lords with an alternative second chamber. The House of Lords, the manifesto flatly declared, was “too big”. In office, Labour’s record on Lords reform has been dismal. True, the bill removing the hereditaries is finally close to completing its parliamentary passage (it has taken nearly 16 months already, and it is not yet over the finishing line). But there is nothing to show for the other manifesto pledges, which were not included in the current bill.



Nor are we likely to see them any time soon. The Starmer government missed its best Lords reform moment last year. Today, authority diminished, there seems little appetite for more. Instead, Labour’s main preoccupation in the Lords is not reform but party advantage. Though Labour has its large Commons majority, there are currently 282 Conservatives in the Lords, compared with 209 Labour peers. The government has lost over 100 divisions in the Lords since 2024, most recently on the employment

rights bill on Wednesday. Peers have also dug in against the private member’s bill on assisted dying. Labour leaders in the Lords want more Labour appointments, so they can push such opposition back. That may sound reasonable, but it merely feeds an ermine arms race which has made both main parties enemies of reform for years. The result is that the upper house, which Labour once deemed too big, is getting even bigger. Sir Keir has already appointed more new life peers than the 85 remaining

hereditaries who will lose their places when the reform bill finally becomes law. The wish for a more even balance with the Tories means there will be more to come. After the Blair-era reforms, Lords membership stood at 666. Today, the figure is 850, with this week’s new appointees waiting in the wings. With 650 MPs in the Commons, the UK parliament may soon have more than 1,500 members. This is a ludicrous, unnecessary and, to many, corrupt total. There is nothing like it in any other parliament. Yet unless and until Sir Keir gets a grip on the appointments system, these figures will only mount, feeding even greater public anger.

In the absence of the root-and-branch reform that Labour once supported, the best way to reduce numbers in the Lords is the one proposed by Meg Russell of the UCL Constitution Unit and others: to cap membership at no higher than that of the Commons (and ideally lower). Labour could achieve this by adopting new rules and formulas that limit a prime minister’s scope to appoint. Such changes would be popular and rational. They also need making now, if only to prevent Nigel Farage from flooding the Lords with even larger numbers of new peers in a few years’ time.

Labour could oust Starmer, he could elegantly step aside – but without a plan, it will all be for nothing



from the Sunday Times: “Labour still does not have a good reason to dump its elected prime minister.” Failure is a good reason. Peter Kellner, pollster and analyst, chooses from history the example of John Major’s success. Replacing Margaret Thatcher in 1990 after she had sunk to her lowest, his ratings soared to 61% and he scored a fourth consecutive Tory victory in 1992. Major was remarkable only in his insignificance, but Thatcher’s unpopularity had become an albatross. That’s what Labour’s would-be defenestrators say of Starmer: voters on the doorstep detest him. The venom against a man who is serious and decent, with an impressive tally of good done, is a mystery to me. He might lack oratory and charisma, he might waver in direction – but after

the prime ministers we have just suffered, this sinister detestation springs from a deeper fury against governments and ruling politicians. How long would a new leader’s bounce last? However, if May’s elections return cataclysmic results, with backbench and cabinet in foment and no light on the horizon, Labour may do what it has never done. To avoid being the first formally ousted Labour PM, Starmer could with elegance and dignity stand down, saying: “I have done my best – time now for someone else.” That never happens, but we live in unprecedented times. When it became undeniable that the 2010 election would be lost, Gordon Brown should have stood aside, enhancing his reputation. A self-effacing Starmer resignation would make selecting the next

leader a less damaging drama. The obvious candidates are good – Wes Streeting, Angela Rayner and Andy Burnham are all clever and practised – but they all have to prove what “change” means. Don’t bother swapping leader for the optics and oracy. Labour MPs need a united reason why, with neither the dismal dirge of Blue Labour nor a fanciful Corbynite reprise. “Change” has to mean escape from the ill-conceived manifesto by openly declaring: “Since that was written, the world has changed beyond recognition: Donald Trump is president, tearing up alliances; Europe is at war; the global economy is threatened by a gigantic AI bubble; the far right is on the march.” Discard tax pledges that distort budget priorities. Abandon Brexit red lines, free us to get as close

as Europe will agree. Bring in proportional representation immediately to rescue democracy for five-party politics. Cleanse donations from Westminster. The government has been overwhelmed by lack of money, and that won’t change. Considering the Resolution Foundation’s grim assessment of its constrictions, a new leader has to say how they would do any better. What new bellows could ignite the embers of growth? Admit the magnitude of the problem with honesty to call out Nigel Farage and Green fantasy accounting. Tell us what government is for – it’s not just a matter of better words. It may be impossible for Labour MPs to agree on either the person or the policies of a new leader. Putsch attempts against Brown failed due to strife over a successor. Cabinet resignations calling publicly for him to “stand aside”, several plots, a rebellious letter to all Labour MPs from two former cabinet ministers and a likely challenger disappearing in the crucial plotting hours made good stories: all Labour coverage became about possible assassination. That’s the risk of rumbling, indecisive insurrection. If enough Labour MPs have the nerve, the plan, the organisation and the clarity of purpose, then “twere well it were done quickly”. Why wait for certain election calamity in May? With no crystal ball, so far it looks to me by no means sure that enough of them will summon the mutual forbearance across factions to agree a new way forward. The measure of successful “change” would be raising Labour’s ratings, seeing off Farage and doing those most difficult things the country needs. If that doesn’t happen, Labour might look back on the achievements of the Starmer era and wonder why they did it.

Enforcing tobacco law is the real challenge

The government’s move to approve a relatively comprehensive anti-tobacco ordinance deserves to be acknowledged at a time when tobacco consumption has visibly increased in the country. Against this backdrop, the ordinance appears to signal a renewed intent to prioritise public health and to respond to long-standing demands for tighter controls. Several of its provisions are undoubtedly positive. Expanding the definition of tobacco products to include newer forms such as nicotine pouches and banning e-cigarettes and vaping are necessary steps, although one must note the apparent double standard in not extending the same blanket ban to smoking in general. That said, the decision to prohibit all forms of tobacco advertising, including online promotions, deserves to be acknowledged, as does removing the provision for so-called “smoking zones,” or banning the consumption of tobacco products in public places alongside smoking. These should strengthen the message that public spaces must be protected from tobacco exposure. However, we must also acknowledge the omissions of the ordinance that can weaken its impact. The exclusion of several draft sections from the approved version—such as banning the sale of loose or unpackaged tobacco, hawking or unregistered sale of tobacco products, or flavouring them—has raised concerns among anti-tobacco campaigners. Loose cigarettes and flavoured products are among the most common entry points for young and low-income users, while hawking and unregistered sales allow tobacco to circulate with minimal oversight. The question is, why would the government allow this to happen? Admittedly, revenue consideration is a big factor. According to our report, the omission proposals came from the National Board of Revenue and the finance ministry as the draft prohibitions could reduce revenue generation. Thus opposition from the health ministry was ignored. That revenue considerations can override public health concerns is deeply alarming. Tobacco-related illnesses already impose an enormous economic burden on us through healthcare costs, lost productivity, and premature deaths. So while we agree with public health experts who welcomed the ordinance as being comprehensive, we must urge a reconsideration of the omission decisions and also stricter enforcement of anti-tobacco provisions, since new regulation will mean nothing without proper enforcement.



Silver retreats after record intraday high of over \$84 per ounce

New Delhi: Silver prices in global markets retreated sharply after touching fresh intraday records of \$84 per ounce in the spot market on Monday. The white metal slipped as much as 8 per cent from its peak due to strong profit booking, snapping what could have been a seventh consecutive day of gains. March silver futures on MCX was trading up 4.22 per cent intraday (as of 10.10 am), at Rs 2,49,282 per kilogram. Globally, the futures had surged to an intraday high of \$82.67 an ounce in early trade, up 7 per cent on top of the 11 per cent jump on Friday — the strongest single-day gain since 2008. At those price levels, silver was extending a rally that has eclipsed even the historic supply squeeze seen in October. Analysts said that thin holiday trading amplified the sharp moves as subdued volumes exaggerated price swings. Tighter inventories and liquidity that can evaporate quickly is supporting the rally. Silver doesn't have a reserve like gold as the London gold market is underpinned by around \$700 bil-



lion of bullion that can be lent out in the event of a liquidity squeeze, they reminded.

Even as silver is up about 180 per cent so far in 2025, three trading sessions remain, putting it on track for its best annual performance since 1979 when gains exceeded 200 per cent. “A weaker dollar index, Fed rate-cut expectations, and rising geopolitical tensions supported the rally. The dollar index fell for the fifth consecutive week on hopes of further

US monetary easing. Renewed US–Venezuela tensions have also boosted safe-haven buying,” said Rahul Kalantri, VP Commodities, Mehta Equities Ltd. China’s proposed silver export restrictions from January 2026 sparked a sharp rally in silver, while global uncertainties continue to drive investment flows toward precious metals.

“Silver has support at Rs 2,38,810-Rs 2,37,170 while resistance at Rs 2,41,810- Rs 2,43,470,” he added.

Ola Electric’s flagship Roadster X+ gets CMVR certification

New Delhi: Ola Electric Mobility Ltd on Tuesday announced that its flagship electric motorcycle, the Roadster X+ (9.1 kWh), powered by the company’s indigenously developed 4680 Bharat Cell battery pack, has received approval under the Central Motor Vehicle Rules (CMVR), 1989. The certification was granted by the International Centre for Automotive Technology (iCAT), Manesar, a government testing agency.



With this approval, the company will now begin deliveries of the Roadster X+ (9.1 kWh). The Roadster X+ is the first electric motorcycle in India to be certified with a completely in-house developed 4680 Bharat Cell battery pack, marking a significant milestone for Ola Electric’s manufacturing capabilities. The model offers a range of up to 500 km on a single charge, enabled by the high energy density and thermal efficiency of the 4680 technology. The company said this range

major cities, expanding accessibility to Tier 2 and Tier 3 regions. ment, Ola Electric shares rose 1.21 per cent to touch a day’s high of Rs 35.86. The Roadster X+ is the first electric motorcycle in India to be certified with a completely in-house developed 4680 Bharat Cell battery pack, marking a significant milestone for Ola Electric’s manufacturing capabilities. The model offers a range of up to 500 km on a single charge, enabled by the high energy density and thermal efficiency of the 4680 technology. The company said this range

is aimed at making long-distance travel more practical for riders outside major cities, expanding accessibility to Tier 2 and Tier 3 regions. A spokesperson for Ola Electric said, “The government certification of the Roadster X+ is a major milestone in Ola Electric’s journey towards building end-to-end EV technology in India. With the Roadster X+ (9.1 kWh), we are delivering an unmatched range along with superior performance, safety, and reliability, powered entirely by our own cell and battery technology.”

GRSE, MTAR Tech, Paras Defence: 18 defence stocks add Rs 1.5L cr in 2025for 2026

New Delhi: Eighteen constituents of the Nifty India Defence index together witnessed nearly a Rs 1.5 lakh crore increase in market capitalisation (m-cap) in 2025, with stocks such as Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL), Solar Industries Ltd, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL), Bharat Dynamics Ltd (BDL) and Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd contributing the most to the market value gains. Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd (GRSE), MTAR Technologies Ltd, and Paras Defence and Space Technologies Ltd led the gainers’ list in percentage terms, data compiled from corporate database Ace-Equality showed. The m-cap of these 18 defence stocks climbed by Rs 1,46,807.40 crore to Rs 10,74,851 crore from Rs 9,28,043 crore at the end of December 2024. BEL climbed 34 per cent and added Rs 73,354 crore to its m-cap. It was followed by Solar Industries India Ltd (Rs 22,893 crore), HAL (Rs 13,409 crore), BDL, and Mazagon Dock (Rs 12,508.81 crore). Over the past few months, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has accorded acceptance of necessity (AoN) aggregating Rs 3.3 lakh crore across the Army, Navy and



Air Force, spanning missiles and air defence, electronic warfare and sensors, unmanned and autonomous systems, naval platforms, mobility solutions, and lifecycle upgrades. PL Capital said the steady cadence of approvals underscored a structural defence capex upcycle and the government’s continued push towards indigenisation under Atmanirbhar Bharat. “We believe these AoNs provide strong multi-year order visibility, support higher localisation and private-sector participation, and improve ex-

ecution and earnings visibility for domestic defence manufacturers, particularly across missiles, electronics, unmanned systems, naval shipbuilding and sustainment services,” PL Capital said. MOFSL said the AoN approvals did not immediately translate into order inflows, but the breadth and scale of the approvals materially de-risked order inflows for key defence PSUs and select private players over the next two to four years. “With project approvals worth Rs 3.3 lakh crore in YTD FY26, we believe

defence PSUs have strong growth opportunities in the foreseeable timeframe. Hence, we maintained a BUY rating on these stocks: PTC Industries with a target price of Rs 23,005, BEL at Rs 502, BDL at Rs 1,667, HAL at Rs 6,346, BEML at Rs 2,453, Solar Industries at Rs 16,600, ZEN at Rs 1,745, and Mazagon Dock at Rs 3,858,” Antique Stock Broking said. PL Capital added that its defence coverage included HAL, BEL and BEML, with HAL being its current top pick. Meanwhile, Zen Technologies Ltd, Unimech Aerospace and Manufacturing Ltd and BEML Ltd gave negative returns, falling 8-43 per cent this Calendar. The defence budget for FY25-26 is pegged at Rs 6.8 lakh crore, accounting for 14 per cent of the Union Budget, marking a 10 per cent YoY increase. Of this, Rs 1.8 lakh crore (28 per cent) is allocated for capital acquisitions and 45 per cent towards revenue expenditure. Antique Stock Broking said its interactions with industry indicate that budget will not be a constraint for acquisition of weapon systems and double-digit growth in defence capex can be expected in the coming year

AI vs airlines: Techie explains how she used Grok prompts to expose flight pricing tactic

Mumbai: A viral post by a Peru-based tech professional has reignited debate over airline pricing transparency, claiming that artificial intelligence tools can uncover steeply discounted fares hidden from regular searches. In a post on X, Peru-based AI expert Gina Acosta said she used Grok to slash the cost of a flight from \$1,200 to \$340 by deploying a series of targeted prompts designed to analyse airline pricing behaviour. “AIRLINES DON’T WANT YOU TO KNOW THIS. Grok found me a \$1,200 flight for \$340,” Costag wrote, adding that the savings came from understanding pricing loopholes rather than relying on standard fare comparison searches. She outlined six specific prompts that, according to her, expose how airlines price tickets dynamically and how travellers can work around those systems. The first prompt focuses on route-level pricing intelligence. “I need to fly from [departure city] to [destination city] between [date range]. Analyse the typical pricing patterns for this route,” the prompt asks, seeking insights into the cheapest days to fly, ideal booking windows, and seasonal trends. Another strategy involves expanding the search beyond primary airports. Costag suggested asking AI tools to identify “ALL nearby alternative airports within 100 miles of each location” and to factor in ground transportation costs to calculate real savings. She also highlighted hidden city ticketing — a controversial tactic where passengers book flights with layovers at their intended destination because they are cheaper than direct tickets. Her prompt asks AI to “Find flights where [destination] is a layover city on a longer route that costs less,” while also spelling out “the risks, rules, and how much could I save.” Mistake fares and pricing errors formed another pillar of her approach. One prompt asks for a structured strategy to track such anomalies, including which “websites, tools, and alert systems” to monitor and how to distinguish genuine errors from promotional sales. Costag also pointed to airline points arbitrage, urging travellers to compare whether it is cheaper to buy miles, use credit card bonuses, transfer loyalty points, or book



positioning flights to cheaper hubs. “Show me the math for each option,” the prompt states. Her sixth prompt targets airline dynamic pricing itself. “Explain how airline dynamic pricing works and how to beat it,” it asks, questioning whether clearing cookies, using a VPN, switching devices, or booking at specific times can help avoid price hikes. She added a seventh “bonus” prompt that combines all these strategies into a single booking plan, asking AI to generate a step-by-step approach within a fixed budget. “These prompts help you uncover pricing strategies, reflecting growing interest in using generative AI tools not just for planning trips, but for actively interrogating how prices are set in the global aviation industry. In an age when AI is good enough to replace you at your job, how about using it to exploit the complex system of airline ticket booking and price tracking? A data analyst and content creator, Gina Acosta, grew tired of paying more for airline tickets and, hence, figured out a hack to exploit AI for getting around unbearable ticket prices. Acosta took to X (formerly Twitter) to share a series of AI prompts that have been cleverly constructed to uncover hidden airline pricing strategies. Acosta, a Google Women Techmakers Ambassador with over

200,000 LinkedIn followers, claims these prompts helped her use xAI’s Grok to find a \$1,200 flight for just \$340. Acosta’s post begins with a bold declaration, stating “AIRLINES DON’T WANT YOU TO KNOW THIS.” She credits Grok for exposing “hidden airline pricing tricks” through six targeted prompts, plus a bonus seventh for a comprehensive strategy. Prompt: “I need to fly from [departure city] to [destination city] between [date range]. Analyse the typical pricing patterns for this route. What are the cheapest days to fly, best times to book, and any seasonal price variations I should know about?” This prompt focuses on data-driven patterns, helping users identify optimal booking windows and avoid peak pricing periods. Alternative airport strategy

Prompt: “For my trip from [city A] to [city B], what are ALL nearby alternative airports within 100 miles of each location? Calculate potential savings if I use these alternatives, including ground transportation costs. Show me the total cost comparison.” By exploring nearby airports, travellers can often find cheaper flights with minimal added hassle, as this prompt accounts for real-world logistics like taxis or rideshares.

Orient Technologies shares zoom 15% 1:10 bonus issue approval

Mumbai: Shares of Orient Technologies Ltd surged 15.01 per cent in Tuesday’s session, hitting a high of Rs 380, after the company announced shareholder approval for a bonus issue. The smallcap IT services company said that shareholders have cleared a 1:10 bonus issue of equity shares. The management noted that the voting outcome reflects strong investor participation and confidence in the firm’s financial approach, operating performance, and presence in fast-growing technology segments. According to the company filing, the bonus issue will be executed through the capitalisation of Rs 4.16 crore from the Securities Premium Account, in compliance with the Companies Act, 2013 and Sebi regulations. The company further stated that the record date for determining el-

igible shareholders will be announced later. It has already received in-principle approvals from stock exchanges for the proposed bonus allotment. Technically, the stock is trading above the 5-day, 10-, 20-, 30-, 100-, 150-day and 200-day simple moving averages (SMAs) but below the 50-day simple moving average (SMA). Its 14-day relative strength index (RSI) came at 46.71. A level below 30 is defined as oversold while a value above 70 is considered overbought. The scrip has a standalone price-to-earnings (P/E) ratio of 31.26 against a price-to-book (P/B) value of 5.11. Earnings per share (EPS) stood at 12.08 with a return on equity (RoE) of 16.35. According to Trendlyne data, Orient Tech has a one-year beta of 1.2, indicating high volatility.

Tata Power’s renewable arm executes largest project

Mumbai: Tata Power Renewable Energy (TPREL), a subsidiary of Tata Power, has commissioned SJVN’s 1 GW domestic content requirement (DCR)-compliant solar power project, marking the largest solar project executed by the company so far. The project will supply renewable electricity to utilities in Rajasthan, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand. The project comprises 1,000 MW of alternating current (AC) capacity, equivalent to 1,400 MWp of direct current (DC) capacity. All the solar modules deployed, around

2.4 million units, were manufactured at TP Solar Limited’s facility in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, aligning the project with India’s domestic manufacturing and ‘Make in India’ objectives, as per the exchange filing. According to the company, the facility integrates advanced DCR-compliant solar cells, mono bifacial modules and high-performance inverters to optimise power generation efficiency. As per the company’s statement in the exchange filing, the project spreads across the Bandarwala and Karni-

sar Bhatiyar sites in Bikaner, Rajasthan. Power from the project will be allocated to multiple states. 500 MW will be given to Rajasthan Urja Vikas and IT Services Limited, 300 MW will be given to Jammu & Kashmir Power limited and 200 MW will be given to Uttarakhand Power Corporation Limited. Furthermore, the first year of operation is expected to generate over 2,454.84 million units of green electricity and stands to offset as much as 1.74 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions, the company noted.

Swedish workers trial ‘friendship hour’ to combat loneliness

New York: Staff at a major Swedish pharmacy chain are being given paid time off to spend with friends, as Sweden’s government calls on businesses to help play a role in tackling loneliness.Yasmine Lindberg, 45, is one of 11 participants taking part in the pilot “friendcare” scheme for the pharmacy group Apotek Hjärtat.She works shifts at the company’s outlet at a retail park in Kalmar, a small seaside city in southern Sweden.“I’m really tired when I go home. I don’t have time or energy to meet my friends,” she explains, before restocking a shelf of paracetamol.Yasmine spends a lot of her free time with her teenage children who live with her every other week. But she admits feeling “quite lonely” since separating from her partner four years ago, which led to fewer social invitations with couples in their network. Now, thanks to the Apotek Hjärtat pilot scheme, which started in April, she’s granted 15 minutes a week, or an hour a month during working hours to focus on strengthening her friendships or making new connections. She can use this allotted friendcare time to chat on the phone, make plans over text, or meet up with someone in person.“I wanted to make it better for myself... like, kick myself in the back to do stuff,” says Yasmine.“I feel

happier. You can’t live through the internet like most people do thes Like all participants in the pilot project, she has been given 1,000 kronor (\$100; £80) by Apotek Hjärtat to help pay for friendship-based activities during the year-long trial.The volunteers have also received online training in how to recognise and tackle loneliness, which the pharmacy chain has made available for all its 4,000 employees across Sweden.

Monica Magnusson, Apotek Hjärtat’s CEO, says the inspiration for the company’s friendcare project comes partly from a previous collaboration with the mental health charity Mind. She says that helped demonstrate how short meaningful conversations between pharmacists and customers could help the latter group feel less isolated.The company wanted to test if providing a short amount of ring-fenced friendship time for its employees could also impact their wellbeing. Volunteers could also sign up if they weren’t lonely, but wanted to spend more time with isolated people in their network. “We try and see what the effects are from having the opportunity to spend a bit of time every week on safeguarding your relationships,” explains Ms Magnusson.The project’s title, friendcare or “vänvård” in Swed-



ish is also a wordplay on “friskvård”, a benefit already offered by many Swedish businesses, who give employees a tax-free annual wellness allowance to spend on fitness activities or massages. Some Swedish companies also offer staff a weekly wellness hour called “friskvårdstimme”“This is a reflection on that, but targeting loneliness and relationships instead,” explains Ms Magnusson. Apotek Hjärtat’s project comes as Sweden’s right-wing coalition government is putting the spotlight on loneliness. In July, Sweden’s Public Health Agency released Swe-

den’s first national strategy aimed at minimising loneliness, commissioned by the government.A core part of the strategy is increased collaboration between the business community, municipalities, researchers and civil society. Health Minister Jakob Forssmed has described loneliness as major public health concern, citing global research linking the problem to an increased risk of illnesses including coronary heart disease and strokes, and a greater likelihood of early mortality. Businesses should be worried about it, he suggests.

UK Health Regulator Warns Against Buying Weight-Loss Drugs Unregulated Sources

New York: New Year is the time for many people to pledge reforms in habits and lifestyle, something resorting to drastic measures, but UK’s Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has urged the people to make sure any weight-loss medicines they use are safe, effective and legitimate.The MHRA has warned about the serious risks linked to buying weight-loss products from unregulated websites or through social media, where products sold illegally may be fake, contaminated, incorrectly dosed, or contain powerful ingredients not listed on the packaging, Britain’s Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency said in a press statement on Monday.These can lead to dangerous side effects, including heart problems, psychological effects and dangerously low blood sugar, it added.Safe, appropriate, licensed obesity drugs can greatly benefit those with a clinical need but should be obtained from a registered pharmacy against a valid prescription,” the statement quoted UK’s Health Minister Zubir Ahmed, himself a practising doctor. The MHRA has advised to not buy prescription-only medicines without a prescription and procure medicines from registered pharmacies or legitimate retailers.It also urged people to avoid weight-loss products



promoted on social media, especially those promising “quick fixes”, “miracle results”, or unusually low prices, which it ascribed as being common signs of illegal sellers.If considering weight-loss treatment, one should talk to the general practitioner or qualified medical doctor, pharmacist, or other qualified healthcare professional.”People often look for ways to support their health at this time of year, but buying medi-

cines from illegal online sellers can put your health at real risk. Always make sure you are using authorised products from legitimate sources and speak to a healthcare professional for advice on safe, evidence-based options,” the statement added, quoting Jenn Matthissen from the MHRA’s Safety and Surveillance team.The MHRA, an executive agency of UK’s Department of Health and Social Care, is responsible for reg-

ulating all medicines and medical devices in the country by ensuring they work and are acceptably safe. Earlier, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had also warned about unapproved versions of certain drugs as an option for weight loss.It termed such drugs risky for patients, as unapproved versions do not undergo FDA’s review for safety, effectiveness and quality before they are marketed.

Between the Begums, and their parties, a bitter rivalry and vengeful past

New York: In the years that their public rivalry was most bitter, few could have predicted such an end to the “Battle of the Begums” in Bangladesh. With former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia’s passing, her decades-long feud with former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, now in exile in India, will also be put to rest (1991-2025). During that time, the two women alternated tenures in power, taking turns to prosecute the other, and accusing each other of orchestrating violent attacks on the other. Condoling her death on Tuesday (December 30, 2025), Ms. Hasina issued a statement extolling Ms. Zia’s contribution to establishing democracy in Bangladesh. Those words hark back to the late 1980s where the two “Begums” had last worked together- one the daughter of the slain founder of the country Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the other -the widow of his successor Gen Ziaur Rehman, who was also assassinated, six years after Mujib. Both Mujib and Zia had fought on the same side during Bangladesh’s war of liberation Hasina and Khaleda, the leaders of the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) respectively, fought on the same side just once, to oust the autocratic President, Gen. Muhammad Ershad (1982-1990) from power. They both boycotted the 1988 elections, when Gen Ershad’s party, the Jatiya Party (JP), won a whopping and obviously manufactured mandate of 251 out of 300 seats. As women, the two leaders were powerful orators



could not be more different- Ms. Hasina lived with the grief of losing her entire family including her parents and little brother, and was a scrappy politician, not afraid of taking her battle to the streets. Khaleda, who also lived with the grief of her

husband’s assassination at their home, described herself as a “shy housewife” of a military officer, ruled more from her living room, while her party men hit the streets. Both engendered the undying loyalty of her followers.

Bangladesh burns again



New York: A year and a half since the students’ uprising in Bangladesh, which ousted former President Sheikh Hasina, the country faces more uncertainty, as the latest round of violence unfolding on the streets makes clear.The pent-up resistance, widespread disillusionment, and frustration among scores of young citizens is manifesting in varied, dangerous forms, even as Chief Administrator Muhammad Yunus struggles to respond to the agitations and rein in hardline elements. Last week, angry mobs set fire to offices of Prothom Alo and Daily Star – the country’s best-known Bengali and English newspapers – signalling that more turbulence is in store. Bangladesh is on the edge yet again. On December 11, 2025, Mr. Yunus announced that elections — there is serious concern over credibility of polls — would be held on February 12, 2026. Ms. Hasina’s Awami League has been banned from the contest, and Khaleda Zia’s (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) self-exiled son Tarique Rahman has announced plans return to Bangladesh after 17 years, as Kallol Bhattacharjee reported. The Jamaat-e-Islami party, too, is preparing to run. However, no political party is favoured, nor is any under pressure, Mr. Yunus’s press adviser Shafiqul Alam told Kallol Bhattacharjee.

In another, unexpected escalation days after the polls were announced, Bangladesh youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi, who played a key role in turning the July 2024 uprising into a movement against what he called ‘cultural fascism’, was shot by unknown assailants. Days later, he passed way in Singapore. Read Kallol Bhattacharjee’s profile of the youth leader, whose killing has set off violent reactions. India on Sunday described the killing of a minority Hindu youth in Bangladesh as a “horrendous act” and expressed “strong concern” about the safety of minority communities in the neighbouring country. . Soon after the return of the mortal remains of Sharif Osman Hadi, UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk called for a “transparent investigation” into the killing and urged “everyone to refrain from violence”.Don’t miss the latest episode of Worldview, in which our Diplomatic Affairs Editor Suhasini Haidar breaks down what led to the current turmoil, that will not only impact Bangladesh’s immediate political trajectory significantly, but also further affect the country’s India ties, already under enormous strain.Also check out The Hindu’s recently published e-book, in which experts give context to the tumultuous political landscape and fragile administrative arrangement in Bangladesh.Last week, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and discussed ways to enhance cooperation in technology, economy, connectivity and security, expressing confidence that the bilateral strategic partnership will “grow from strength to strength”. “Valued his perspectives on regional and global developments. Confident that our Strategic Partnership will grow from strength to strength,” he added.While some foreign policy wonks see it as “strategic autonomy” and “realpolitik”, the pressing moral questions that arise on India’s questionable position on Gaza remain. . The death toll in Gaza has gone past 70,000, as Israeli aggression continues despite a “ceasefire”.

Coups, elections and protests a difficult year for democracy

New York: October’s shocking events in Tanzania offer a snapshot of some of the tensions which have shaped a difficult year for African politics.Demonstrators were shot dead by police while protesting against what they saw as a rigged election - condemned by regional and continental bodies - shattering the country’s reputation for peace and stability.

With opposition candidates either imprisoned or barred from running, President Samia Suluhu Hassan was elected with 98% of the votes.Any moves towards Tanzania becoming a more open democracy had been seemingly reversed.Arguably what happened there highlighted a broader breakdown in many African nations between the people and those who govern them. Several countries saw protests and election disputes in 2025, while military leaders cemented their power in others, with analysts believing next year could bring more upheaval.“If we look at the overall picture across the continent, the trend is worrying,” said Mo Ibrahim, whose foundation analyses data to assess the state of African governance.

Its most recent report suggests that in its measure of governance, which includes things like security, participation in decision-making and the state of health and education, progress has stalled when compared to the decade up to 2022.“The increase in coups [in recent years], the return of military governments and the closing of democratic space all point to the same problem: a failure of governance.”The spike in the cost of living has been the spark that lit the fire of dissatisfaction in many places. This was not unique to the continent but, as Mr Ibrahim told the BBC, “the risk for Africa is that these negative patterns spread unchecked, much of the hard-won progress achieved over recent decades could be reversed”. For those who believe that democracy is the best way to channel the demands of the population, there have been some points of positivity in 2025 with peaceful transfers of power and free and fair elections.In Malawi the country’s former leader, Peter Mutharika, won back the presidency after a period in opposition.

Seychelles saw long-term ruling party United Seychelles returned to office, five years after losing power.Both incumbents lost in part because of a perceived failure to mitigate the impact of inflation.These results followed other setbacks for ruling



parties in 2024.In South Africa, the African National Congress lost its overall majority for the first time since 1994 and entered a power-sharing government with its main opposition.

In Senegal, a combination of street protests and the courts prevented apparent attempts by the president to extend his time in office and a relative unknown was elected president after the main opposition leader was barred.But analysts point to shifts elsewhere as evidence that democracy on the continent is being challenged.Perhaps no more so than through the consolidation of the power of military-led governments across West Africa’s Sahel region.Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso all split from the regional bloc, Ecowas, forming a new alliance of governments which seized power through Where democracy does still exist, analysts point to demographics as a driver of tension.Africa is the continent with the youngest population but it has the world’s oldest leaders. In many places social media is helping to inform a younger generation which increasingly demands to be heard.In Cameroon the average age, according to the UN, is just over 18. Yet the country this year saw the consolidation in power of Paul Biya - the planet’s most aged president.The 92-year-old, who has held office for 43 years, was sworn in for an eighth term, which could see him rule until he is almost 100.This followed a round of divisive elections in October, condemned by critics as neither free nor fair - a charge rejected by the authorities.The response from the security forces was not as deadly but, as in Tanzania, anger about the result turned into days of demonstrations - the clearest sign yet of a youthful population prepared to openly challenge Cameroon’s long-term leader.

Turkey’s ancient, caffeine-free coffee alternative

A cold front chased me into Gaziantep, a city in south-east Turkey not far from the Syrian border. It was late autumn and snow already blanketed the higher summits of the nearby Taurus Mountains. So when I opened the front doors of Tahmis Kahvesi – a cafe founded in 1635 and among the world’s oldest coffee shops – I quickly joined the cluster of locals by the wood stove pulsing heat at the centre of the room.Light poured through stained-glass windows. Around me, customers sipped from tiny cups decorated with ornate geometric motifs. Some drank the thick, foam-topped Turkish coffee that’s beloved across the country. But the cafe’s specialty is something rarely seen outside the region, and one I’d crossed an ocean to taste once more: menengiç kahvesi (menengiç coffee), an ancient brew that’s nutrient-rich, caffeine-free and not actually coffee at all.Made from the roasted, ground fruit of the terebinth tree, a kind of wild pistachio, menengiç tastes nutty and slightly bitter. The drink is so central to Gaziantep’s culinary identity that in 2024, it received EU geographical indication status. Though popular across south-east Turkey – and widely consumed in Iraqi Kurdistan, where it’s known as qazwan – for Gaziantep residents, the traditional brew is more than a coffee alternative; it’s a time-honoured home remedy.

From home remedy to modern science

“In winter if I ever had a cough or a sniffle, my family would say, ‘please drink this’ and hand me a cup of menengiç,” recalled Filiz Hösükoğlu, a gastronomy expert who grew up in Gaziantep. “When we come together as a community, or a family, we typically drink Turkish coffee or tea. But if somebody is ill, they serve menengiç.”I wasn’t in Gaziantep seeking a cure. I’d first tasted menengiç on a prior visit to south-east Turkey, when I’d spent a few days touring the region’s Neolithic sites, Roman ruins and Syriac monasteries. After ordering a cup in the hilltop city of Mardin, I was intrigued by the idea of a coffee-like drink harvested from trees growing wild at the northern cusp of the Fertile Crescent.At Tahmis Kahvesi, my order arrived in a cup covered by a tiny metal dome to keep the heat in. A thick layer of foam cushioned the top, like



crema on a well-pulled espresso. Before coming to Turkey, I’d had a brief cold and still had a ticklish throat. The drink was decadent with milk and the fatty wild pistachios. As a panacea, it seemed promising.Tahmis Kahvesi may be the city’s most storied menengiç purveyor, but in Gaziantep the drink is everywhere. The sound of grinders crushing menengiç into an inky paste provides the clattering soundtrack to the city’s centuries-old covered bazaars. In narrow lanes, baskets piled high with shiny pearls of blue-green menengiç spill onto the cobblestones. Around the corner from Tahmis Kahvesi, I met Mustafa Zor, an 86-year-old who started producing menengiçin the 1970s. Decades later, Zor still presides over a tiny storefront lined with jars of ground menengiç ready to be boiled with milk or water. He explained that when he was growing up in a nearby village and one of seven brothers prone to catching colds, his female relatives would incorporate the healthy ingredient into drinks and other dishes for him. “My grandmother was my doctor,” Zor recalled. “She and all the old women of the village knew the recipes for menengiç, which were given to them by their own grandmothers.” Science is still catching up to the tradi-

tional medicines used in south-eastern Turkey. While human clinical trials on the benefits of consuming menengiç are few, research does point to the benefits of consuming the protein- and mineral-rich terebinth fruit. Preliminary research has also explored its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, lending some support to menengiç’s longstanding reputation as a winter tonic.

Ancient origins

As with so much culinary heritage, the story of menengiç coffee has largely been passed down orally – like when Zor’s grandmother taught him to brew the drink in the family’s village home. Yet, its story hints at ancient roots. Local legend has it that the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet IV tried the drink when passing through Gaziantep in the 17th Century; a sign in front of Tahmis Kahvesi claims he stopped at the cafe while on a military campaign. Archaeobotanical findings suggest that menengiç – or something resembling it – may have even deeper roots. At the Neolithic site of Göbekli Tepe, a Unesco-listed site two hours east of Gaziantep, researchers have found the remains of wild pistachios amid its art-inscribed megalithic structures erected nearly 12,000 years ago.Today, the landscape surrounding the site is dry



and sparsely treed. But researchers believe that in the early Neolithic period, it was far more temperate – a forest where resident hunter-gatherers could harvest the fruits of wild pistachio and almond trees. When Zor explained how his family harvests menengiç, I found it easy to picture the region’s ancient people gathering wild pistachios in much the same way. “We just roll out a curtain under the tree, and we shake it until the menengiç falls to the ground,” he’d said. Archaeologists have found thousands of grinding stones at Göbekli Tepe – the largest such collection from Neolithic Mesopotamia



a thick, sticky sweet. Such dishes are “about to be forgotten”, wrote Abdullah Badem, a researcher at Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, in a 2021 paper on menengiç’s traditional uses. But the drink brewed from menengiç is here to stay. Across Gaziantep, I found cafes full of locals chatting across their foamy cups of menengiç coffee– in smoky, late-night hangouts; inside hipster shops; and within the courtyards of converted konaks (mansions).Before leaving town, I made one last stop at another coffee shop – Menengiç Kafe, in an elegant home built in 1900 among the cobbled streets of Gaziantep’s historic centre. After showing me around the gracious courtyard and upper rooms, owner Zeynel Abidin Tahtaçi joined me for a glass of menengiç by the cafe’s small wood stove.“For a person from Gaziantep, it’s impossible to think of life without menengiç coffee,” he said, warming his hands. “We could never forget it. It’s who we are.”

Medicare costs: 3 key changes in 2026

Experts are urging Medicare recipients to carefully research their options for next year during the open enrollment period that is now under way.They say changes in premiums and other Medicare components as well as the government shutdown could affect what they pay for medical care as well as what services are available to them.“Millions of Medicare beneficiaries will face higher out-of-pockets costs and reduced benefits in 2026, so comparing Medicare coverage options is especially crucial this year,” Whitney Stidom, vice president of consumer enablement at eHealth, told Medical News Today.“Beneficiaries should be proactive during the Medicare annual enrollment period, as comparing plans from multiple insurers can help people save money and find the right option for them,” Stidom added. The open enrollment period for Medicare began on October 15 and lasts until December 7.This eligibility window is for people 65 years and older who want to sign up for the federally funded health program or make changes to their current plans.In addition to the usual considerations, there also may be some uncertainties added this year if the federal government shutdown lasts for an extended period of time.One is that the processing of claims by recipients and payments to medical providers could be delayed.Another is that telehealth services could be reduced. Some telehealth programs that were offered over the past several years expired on October 1 and Congress did not take action to renew them.“Converting patients accustomed to telehealth back



to in-person visits will incur costs for transportation, lost work, and time,” Kelley told MNT. “Patients with mobility issues, rural travel barriers, or caregiver constraints — who benefited most from telehealth — may face greater costs and logistical hurdles to get needed care, and delayed or avoided care can increase downstream costs and worse outcomes.”

The basic facts about Medicare

About 69 million people in the United States get health coverage under the Medicare system.About 90% of those covered are 65 years or older. Most of those under 65 are people with specific disabilities.Basic Medicare coverage includes what is known as Part A and Part B.Part A covers inpatient care at hospitals, critical access hospitals, and skilled nursing facilities. It also helps cover hospice care and some home healthcare. It is estimated that only 1% of people on Part A pay a monthly premium.Part B covers necessary medical services such as doctor’s vis-

its,

out-patient care, and ambulance services. Premiums are usually deducted from a person’s monthly Social Security check.An estimated 51% of Medicare recipients have supplemental health insurance such as a Medicare Advantage plan. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) estimate there will be about 5,600 Medicare Advantage Plans available nationwide in 2026. That is close to the numbers from 2025, when the amount of options decreased from the previous year.The number of plans available to an individual

recipient varies from state to state.In addition, some Medicare Advantage providers, including UnitedHealthcare, have said they plan to scale back their service areas and/or coverage options.

Monthly insurance premiums may change

The average Part B premium is expected to rise from \$185 in 2025 to \$206 in 2026. That 12% increase would be twice as high as the 2025 hike.It would also more than offset the projected 2.7% increase in Social Security

monthly benefits paid to individuals.One reason given for these increases is that people are utilizing Part B coverage more often, resulting in lower profits for health insurance firms. In addition, more people are enrolling in Part B plans. There are also higher costs in general for hospitalization and outpatient care.

will be significant as prices are rising for other goods and services. In the end, it means less money in consumers’ pockets,” said Kelley.

Out-of-pocket costs and deductibles

The annual out-of-pocket limit for in-network services for Medicare Advantage recipients will decrease

2025 to \$615 in 2026.Experts say any increases in deductibles or out-of-pocket costs will be felt. Prescription drug pricelt is estimated that about 81% of Medicare recipients are also enrolled in Part D, which covers prescription drug expenses.The number of standalone Part D plans is forecasted to decrease from



At the same time, it is projected that the average monthly premium for Medicare Advantage plans with prescription drug coverage will decrease from \$16 in 2025 to \$14 in 2026.In addition, the CMS estimates that monthly premiums for standalone Part D plans will drop from \$38 in 2025 to \$34 in 2026. Premiums for Part D that are part of Medicare Advantage plans will dip slightly from \$13 to \$11 per month.However, insurance companies will be allowed to raise Part D premiums as much as \$50 per month, higher than the current \$35 monthly maximum.Experts say Medicare recipients will feel the effects of any premium increases.“Any cost increase to medical premiums

slightly from \$9,350 in 2025 to \$9,250 in 2026.The annual cap on out-of-pocket expenses for Part D drugs will increase slightly from \$2,000 in 2025 to \$2,100 in 2026. The maximum out-of-pocket cost for insulin will remain at \$35 per month and most vaccines will still be covered under Part D.However, earlier this year the Trump administration decided against Medicare covering the cost of GLP-1 weight-loss drugs such as Ozempic.At the same time, the annual deductible for Part B medical coverage is projected to rise 12% in 2026 to \$288.The annual deductibles for Part D coverage are also expected to increase. Those amounts can vary, but the maximum any plan can charge will rise from \$590 in

464 nationwide in 2025 to 360 in 2026. Medicare officials are expected to continue to negotiate prices for drugs covered under Part D.Experts say that could result in discounts of 38% to 79% on list prices on 10 widely used prescriptions, including blood thinners Eliquis and Xarelto, as well as diabetes medications Januvia, Jardiance, and Farxiga.People with Part D plans will also continue to be able to utilize an automatic prescription payment plan that spreads out drug costs over the year. People who currently have this plan will be automatically re-enrolled for 2026 unless they opt out.Despite these price reductions, experts say some Medicare recipients could still pay more for prescription

drugs.“Although the price of Part D (drug benefits) may reduce overall, the reduction in options and changes to covered medications could result in higher costs for consumers of certain specialty medications,” Kelley noted.

Advice for Medicare recipients for 2026

An estimated 70% of Medicare recipients do not currently compare plan options.Experts say it is important for Medicare recipients to research options and study different plans during the open enrollment period to see what is best for them financially as well as which medical services are covered. Stidom noted that consumers should have recently received an annual “notice of change” letter from their Medicare Advantage and Part D providers, informing what will be different in 2026.She said using a licensed insurance agency such as eHealth can save consumers as much as \$1,800 a year.“For help finding coverage, Medicare beneficiaries can start online with a private marketplace, which can help people compare plans side by side from multiple insurers,” she said. “Some websites make it convenient to compare Medicare Advantage plans based on various factors, including personal health needs, locations, prescribed drugs, and more.”Stidom also recommended Medicare recipients closely check their Part D plans “because these plans are offered through private insurers, the year-over-year premium changes can vary.”“Some enrollees may also see changes to their list of covered drugs or to the drug tiers that determine what patients pay for them out of pocket,” she noted.

Suma Kanakala discloses that Prabhas donates monthly to a senior living facility

Mumbai: TV personality and anchor Suma Kanakala recently disclosed Prabhas’ charitable contributions to a Khammam senior living facility. Suma commended the Tollywood star’s “kind heart” and said it was “rare” to see such continuous contributions from an actor when a fan asked her to discuss him in one of her videos. In the comments, Suma disclosed that she had built an elderly home in Khammam with the assistance of Tollywood celebrities. Prabhas and Pawan Kalyan were among those who offered assistance. “I assisted in building the Khammam Old Age Home a few years ago.” The completion of the old age home was kindly aided by Pavan Kalyan Garu, Prabhas Garu, and numerous other celebrities, she wrote. Suma went on to write about how uncommon it is that Prabhas has subsequently made monthly donations for the maintenance of the house. However, Prabhas Garu has continuously sent a monthly payment to the elderly residents of the old age home ever



since. She also acknowledged Lakshmi Manchu’s assistance with the Memu Saitham show, writing, “Meemu saitham show, thanks to laxmi manchu garu too. I really acknowledge his kind heart, it is very rarely that we get to see such a contribution since years.” Rajeev, Suma’s husband, lauded Prabhas on the podcast two months ago and disclosed that SS Rajamouli had also contributed to it. “The wonderful thing about Prabhas is

that he still donates money to run the old age home,” he remarked. Bravo to him. Prabhas most recently acted in the movies Kalki 2898 AD (2024) and Adipurush and Salaar: Part 1-Ceasefire (2023). The Raja Saab, his upcoming film, will be released during Sankranthi on January 9, 2026. Additionally, he is working on Spirit, which is being directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga, and Fauzi, which is being directed by Hanu Raghavapudi.

Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika Mandanna will tie the knot in Udaipur on February 26

Mumbai: On February 26, actor couple Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda will tie the knot in Udaipur. The performers, who were engaged in October in front of close relatives, will have a private wedding. After that, Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda will host a reception in Hyderabad for the film industry. Months after getting engaged on October 3, 2025, in Hyderabad, Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda will wed on February 26 at a palace in Udaipur. The actors’ engagement and wedding have not yet been made public. Rashmika Mandanna recently modestly responded to rumors that she was getting married in an interview with



The Hollywood Reporter, saying, “I wouldn’t like to confirm or deny the marriage.” I’ll just say that we will talk about it when it’s appropriate. Although Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika

Mandanna have never discussed their relationship in public, they have publicly praised each other’s movies on social media. Additionally, when they were Grand Marshals for the 43rd India

Day Parade in New York in August, they were unable to look away from one another. In Telugu movies like Geetha Govindam and Dear Comrade, Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika Mandanna have appeared together. They are supposedly going to work together again on the next movie directed by Rahul Sankrityan. In terms of work, Rashmika Mandanna acted in the Telugu movie The Girlfriend this year and co-starred with Ayushmann Khurrana in Thamma, while Vijay Deverakonda last appeared in Gowtam Tinnanuri’s Kingdom. Mysaa and Cocktail 2 are two of Rashmika Mandanna’s next movies. Rowdy Janardhana is Vijay Deverakonda’s upcoming film.

On Twinkle Khanna’s 52nd birthday, Akshay Kumar shares an unseen photo

Mumbai: One of Bollywood’s most attractive couples is Akshay Kumar and Twinkle Khanna. On December 29, Twinkle’s 52nd birthday, Akshay sent her a humorous text and an unseen photo. In the photo, Twinkle was seen pulling a practical joke on Akshay Kumar. Twinkle looked serious as she raised her leg to Akshay, who laughed and grasped her foot in return. Twinkle accessorized her black outfit with a beige sweater. “Behind every action hero is a wife who can knock him out with one look or one kick,” Akshay wrote as the caption for the photo. No stunt has ever hit me as hard as you, Mrs. Funnybones. I adore you and happy birthday. Aarav and Nitara are the two children of Akshay Kumar and Twinkle Khanna, who were wed on January 17, 2001. In terms of his career, Akshay is working on several projects, such as Welcome 3, Haiwaan, Hera Pheri 3, and Bhoot Bangla. He recently released a trailer for Welcome 3, which is officially called Welcome to the Jungle. The ensemble group is introduced in the video with a theatrical entrance synced to a Christmas song. The movie is slated for release in 2026, according to Akshay, who shared the preview on social media and called it one of the largest projects he has ever worked on. “From the enormous cast of Welcome to the Jungle, we wish everyone a very Merry Christmas,” he wrote, in theaters in 2026. “None of us have ever been a part of anything so significant. We are eager to give you our gift. That’s it, folks! Fantastic work, team. Everyone that was involved in making this happen put forth such a tremendous effort. We wish you all the best for 2026, from our large family to yours at home,” the star continued. Actors Raveena Tandon, Suniel Shetty, Arshad Warsi, Tusshar Kapoor, Johny Lever, Disha Patani, Jacqueline Fernandez, Aftab Shivdasani, and Rajpal Yadav are among those who appear with Akshay in the teaser. The cast walks in formation while wearing combat gear and carrying weapons. Akshay has a beard and long white hair, giving him a tough appearance. The third entry in the well-known Welcome series is called Welcome to the Jungle. Akshay Kumar, Katrina Kaif, Anil Kapoor, Nana Patekar, and Paresh Rawal starred in the first movie, while John Abraham and Shruti Haasan starred in the second, Welcome Back (2015). Anees Bazmee was the director of the first two movies. Ahmed Khan is the director of the next installment.



Konkona Sensharma on how it’s “bold” for female stars to date younger male actors



Mumbai: Over the years, Konkona Sensharma has made a name for herself as a dependable director and actor. In terms of performing, Konkona starred opposite actor Pankaj Tripathi in Metro... In Dino this year. She is also shown in the movie dating actor Rohan Gurbaxani, who is younger than her. In an episode of their chat show, Kajol and Twinkle Khanna questioned Salman Khan and Aamir Khan about why it’s called cinema magic when older male actors romance younger female actors, but bold when it happens the other way around. Ranveer Singh was recently coupled with 20-year-old Sara Arjun in Dhurandhar. Konkona Sensharma offers her perspective on the issue,

having been in their position. The audience has the right and the prerogative to do so. It may be daring to one person but not to another. Since there are so many diverse couples of all ages in real life, I don’t think it’s a brave idea. Why do we need to keep talking about all of this when we see it even among celebrities and it’s gradually becoming more commonplace? Konkona, who last appeared in the web series Search: The Naina Murder Case, says, “It is not interesting for me personally, but I have no objection to other people discussing it.” The actor maintains that it is unjust to try to shoehorn women into certain categories. “Being a woman can take many different forms. Durga is a prime example of this, demonstrating the variety of roles and identities that women can have. There isn’t a single way that things must be. She concludes, “It is good to have that lens open up so that we can see the complexities and nuances of human beings.” “The age gap served a different purpose in both of my films,” she continues. I find it a little dull to view it through the prism of romanticizing a younger man and being daring. It was done in a very funny way in Metro, which really highlighted Pankaj’s predicament. Nobody discusses Pankaj meeting another young woman at a hotel. I’m not sure why that isn’t referred to as “bold.” Even in Dolly Kitty, it was a critique of my character’s challenging marriage. She had an affair with a younger man, which was a major step toward her self-realization.

Madhuri Dixit Explains Why She Refused a Body Double and Performed Her Stunts

Mumbai, Dec 30: The 58-year-old Madhuri Dixit has never been one to be cautious. The performer continues to defy expectations even after forty years in the film industry, this time by acting out her own action scenes in the new series Mrs. Deshpande. The Israeli self-defense martial technique Krav Maga is taught to Madhuri’s character in Mrs. Deshpande. She talked candidly about why, while doing the stunts in the show, she declined a body double. “It should look real; it should look believable to a woman who is so petite and looks like a normal housewife can do something like that,” the actress stated. It must appear genuine. That has a hint of surprise about it. She also performed in action sequences



with a man twice her size. It is still uncommon for a famous celebrity to play a vicious, unredeemable murderer, despite the fact that female actresses have previously experimented with negative shades. According to Madhuri, the change stems from the way audiences have changed over time. Both the audience and the

times have changed. People watched a lot of international television shows and films during the lockdown. They started to comprehend what layers are and how characters function. They’ve begun to enjoy those items. Because of their exposure, the audience has significantly matured,” she stated. The performer

went on to say that violating the law has always been a part of her career. Having said that, my career began with Abodh. Even though I had supporting roles in a few movies, I was still able to get to this point. Therefore, I believe that rules are meant to be broken. We have to do that somewhere. The fact that women are receiving these kinds of roles is revolutionary, and directors like Nagesh share this viewpoint. And more filmmakers with that kind of mindset are needed.” Mrs. Deshpande, which is directed by Nagesh Kukunoor, features Madhuri Dixit in important roles with Priyanshu Chatterjee and Siddharth Chandelkar. On December 19, Mrs. Deshpande will be available on JioHotstar.

The poster Agastya Nanda receives a flying kiss from Rekha



Mumbai: At the screening of Agastya Nanda’s upcoming film Ikkis, veteran actress Rekha publicly showed her love and admiration for the grandson of Amitabh and Jaya Bachchan. Rekha stood in silent adoration for a short while on the red carpet, folding her hands and bowing her head as she looked at a poster of the late actor Dharmendra. She then proceeded to Agastya’s picture, lightly touching it with her palm and blessing it with a flying kiss. Ikkis, a war biography directed by Sriram Raghavan, centers on Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal, the youngest Param Vir Chakra recipient. Rahul Dev, Sikander Kher, Suhasini Mulay, and Jaideep Ahlawat are also featured in the movie. On January 1, 2026, it will be made available. Big B wrote a poignant statement on his blog after seeing the impending war film in a previous viewing. Amitabh Bachchan writes, revisiting some uncommon moments from Agastya’s birth to seeing him on the big screen: “Emotions flow.. As do they tonight when you wit-

ness the grandson excel in IKKIS .. the time when his Mother, Shweta is being rushed to Breach Candy Hospital as she encounters final labour pains .. his birth .. holding him barely a few hours later, and discussing whether his eyes were blue .. to the time when he grew a bit and holding him in my arms, and he fiddles with my beard .. to his growth .. to the final personal decision of his to be an actor, and tonight to see him in frame, unable to take my eyes off each time he fills the frames of the film.” Big B praised Agastya’s performance in the movie, saying that he showed “unfiltered honesty” in his role as Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal. “You only watch him while he’s in the frame.

This isn’t a granddad talking; this is a seasoned moviegoer. Additionally, the film’s presentation, script, and direction are all perfect. And after it’s all over, the eyes are full of happy, proud tears, but they can’t say anything. “The silence that is mine, my comprehension, nothing else,” he said in closing.

“Vegetarians are racist”: Kunal Kapoor’s comment sparks criticism on the internet

Mumbai: After making controversial remarks regarding vegetarianism, actor and filmmaker Kunal Kapoor—son of the late Shashi Kapoor and uncle to Ranbir Kapoor—found himself at the center of a social media maelstrom. Many social media users have called his comments, which he made during a discussion on Pooja Bhatt’s podcast, offensive and entitled. “I think vegetarians are racist,” Kunal said simply during the conversation. “So, I’m a racist?” Pooja Bhatt asked, chuckling. He reiterated that, as a non-vegetarian, he feels left out. He claims that while he provides both vegetarian and non-vegetarian cuisine to his visitors at home, he is not treated equally when he visits vegetarian homes, which he considers to be unjust. Reddit commenters attacked Kunal for what they saw as entitlement and a contemptuous attitude toward other people’s dietary views shortly after stories from the podcast became public. “Okay, Karen, calm down. The world doesn’t revolve around your needs,” a commenter commented. It’s crucial to adapt when visiting someone’s house or nation rather than always claiming to be superior and aggrieved. It’s a Kapoor,



I see. I refuse to waste my breath. “Racism is not the same as discriminatory or exclusionary,” said a different user. These folks should get a dictionary because they pretend to be smart when they’re truly foolish.

The highest-grossing Hindi movie in India is Ranveer Singh’s Dhurandhar

Mumbai: Dhurandhar is chasing the next trophy while racing past previous records. After surpassing Shah Rukh Khan’s Pathaan lifetime haul (Rs1,069.85 crore) in just 24 days, Ranveer Singh’s spy spectacular formally entered the exclusive Rs 1,000 crore club on Day 25. Right now? Since Dhurandhar is obviously not done taking scalps, all eyes are on Jawan (Rs1,163.62 crore). Early estimates from Sacnilk indicate that the movie made about Rs 10.5 crore on its fourth Monday alone, increasing its domestic total to Rs 701 crore. The figures are much better on a global scale, where Dhurandhar has already earned a staggering Rs 1,081 crore. Even though occupancy has dropped into “weekday reality,” the movie is still strong. Overall occupancy on Monday was



21.27%, with evenings accounting for the majority at 26.67%. Mumbai came in second with 20.67% occupancy across 851 shows, and Delhi NCR reported 21% occupancy across 1,059 shows. Additionally, the movie has already made over Rs 20 crore domestically in just its fourth week—a noteworthy accomplishment thus late in the game.

Dense fog slammed Delhi airport once more, delaying nearly 200 flights and canceling 118



New Delhi, Dec 30: Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport experienced numerous aircraft cancellations and delays on Tuesday as a result of the dense fog that continued to interfere with air travel in Delhi. Officials told HT that as at approximately 9.30 am, nearly 200 flights were delayed and 118 planes had been canceled. According to officials, at least eighteen flights were also rerouted. The

India Meteorological Department (IMD) reports that at 9.30 am IST on December 30, visibility at IGI airport was 350 meters, indicating heavy fog over Delhi. For the second day in a row, transport around the city was disrupted due to the foggy weather, which also had an impact on train services. Due to poor visibility, the Airport Authority of India (AAI) warned on Tuesday that certain

airports in Northern India may experience flight delays. The AAI advised travelers to stay in contact with airlines for the most recent information and to allow extra time for airport procedures in a post on X. Today, December 30, 2025, visibility has decreased at some airports in Northern India due to the current fog conditions. Flight operations, including potential delays, may be impacted by this. For the most recent flight information, travelers are urged to keep in regular contact with their individual airlines via official channels. Additionally, travelers should budget extra time for airport arrival and check-in processes while planning their travels, according to AAI. In order to assist travelers on the ground, the statutory authority added that assistance teams had been sent to the impacted airports. Due to the current fog conditions, IndiGo issued a travel advice late last night that warned of potential disruptions at major airports around north India. "Early-morning fog is expected to affect visibility across Delhi, Amritsar, Chandigarh, Jammu, Kolkata, Ranchi, Guwahati, and Hindon (Airport)," the airline stated in a post on X. Flight operations may be impacted by abrupt decreases in visibility during these hours. Throughout the night, our teams will stay well-prepared and keep a close eye on the weather. On Monday, there were also reports of flight operations at IGI Airport experiencing delays and cancellations. Passengers had received advisories from airlines such as IndiGo and Air India. Over 200 flights were delayed before noon on Monday, and 128 planes were cancelled at Delhi airport. According to officials, IndiGo alone canceled 80 flights throughout its network. Due to the ongoing fog in the area, airlines have recommended travelers to keep a close eye on the status of their flights.

IGNOU Launches a New MSc in Analytics and Data Science



New Delhi, Dec 30: The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has launched an Open Distance Learning (ODL) Master of Science (MSc) program in Data Science and Analytics (DSA). The program's goal is to teach students statistical and computational abilities so they can solve problems using data. The goal of the M.Sc. (Data Science and Analytics) program is to educate graduate students for lucrative positions in academia and the software industry. Through the Open Distance Learning (ODL) framework, the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has launched a new Master of Science (MSc) in Data Science and Analytics program. The School of Computer and Information Sciences (SOCIS) has introduced the program, which will be offered as a two-year degree program. The initiative's official goal is to address the increasing need for data scientists in a variety of businesses. The goal of the MSc in Data Science and Analytics is to improve the statistical and

computational abilities necessary for problem-solving and data analysis. According to IGNOU, students from a variety of academic backgrounds can enroll in the program, including those looking to advance their careers or acquire new skills. The curriculum has a strong emphasis on using data science methods and technologies to address practical issues in fields like engineering, business, healthcare, and social sciences. Candidates must have a minimum three-year bachelor's degree from an accredited university in order to be admitted to the program. According to the official website, the course tuition is set at Rs 13,000 per semester, excluding registration and development fees. The two-year curriculum is available in English and uses the ODL format, which enables online learning. According to official information, students who earn 40 credits in their first two semesters will be qualified to graduate with a Post Graduate Diploma in Data Science and Analytics.

Vrindavan Temple Management advises against going to Banke Bihari until January 5

Mathura, Dec 30: The Shri Banke Bihari Ji Temple Management Committee has asked devotees to refrain from visiting the temple in Vrindavan between December 29 and January 5, as advised by the Goswami (priest) community.

According to a statement released by the committee on Sunday, there is a lot of traffic in and around the temple, which is generating a lot of problems. The devotees were urged to stay away from Vrindavan between these dates if at all possible. In order to celebrate the end of the year and the beginning of the new one and to seek Lord Krishna's blessings, many couples travel to Vrindavan, Mathura, and other temples and ashrams in the Braj region with their family. Crowds therefore increase significantly on certain days. According to the committee, Vrindavan's narrow alleyways get so packed that there is little room to move. Given the high number of visitors, it noted, one



can imagine the tremendous pressure of the crowd on each devotee in the small Bihari Ji temple. The statement went on to say that there is a good chance that something bad may happen in such a circumstance. The administration of the temple asked devotees not to bring small children, the elderly, ladies, those with impairments, or sick people. They suggested that these people wait to attend the temple when the crowds had subsided. People

were advised to wait until at least January 5 to travel to Vrindavan. It stated that they should then evaluate the crowd situation before organizing their visit. In an effort to lessen traffic congestion on the roads and temples in Vrindavan, the Mathura district administration has also placed limitations on the admission of outside vehicles. Every vehicle entering the city is being sent to designated parking places, and barricades have been put up on all entry routes.

Sachin Tendulkar's world record is about to be broken by Virat Kohli

New Delhi: Virat Kohli, the stand-out batsman for the Indian cricket team, is only 25 runs away from surpassing Sachin Tendulkar's incredible global record. In international cricket, Kohli needs 25 runs to reach 28,000, making him the fastest player to do it. Starting on January 11, the top batsman will play for India in the forthcoming ODI series against New Zealand. After Sachin and renowned Sri Lankan batsman Kumar Sangakkara, Kohli will only be the third batter to accomplish the feat. Kohli has now amassed 27,975 runs in just 623 innings, compared to Sachin's 644 innings and Sangakkara's 666th. He therefore has plenty of chances to break Sachin's record, and it is anticipated that the Indian sensation would do so during the ODI series against New Zealand. DDCA President Rohan Jaitley told PTI on Monday that Kohli will play in Delhi's Vijay Hazare Trophy match against the Railways on January 6 at the BCCI Centre of Excellence (COE) in Bengaluru. All centrally contracted players were required by the BCCI to participate in at least two Vijay Hazare games, but Kohli wants to play a third game as he prepares for this month's home series against New Zealand. "He's playing right now. Rohan Jaitley,



President of the Delhi and Districts Cricket Association (DDCA), informed PTI that Virat had indicated his availability for three games. In the first two games for Delhi, Kohli was playing well, scoring 131 and 77, respectively. In the process, he

surpassed the legendary Sachin Tendulkar, who reached the milestone in 391 innings, and became the fastest to score 16,000 List A runs in 330 innings. The Indian ODI team for the New Zealand series is expected to gather

in Vadodara by January 8, although it's possible that Kohli will arrive a day early and train, according to a BCCI source. On January 11, the three-match ODI series against the Black Caps will start at the same location.

Ravichandran Ashwin selects the two teammates of the Indian captain



New Delhi: Mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthi has been praised by former Indian cricketer Ravichandran Ashwin as India's best bowler of the year. Ashwin has called Chakravarthi a tremendous MVP whose impact has been noticeable each time the team has used him. "Varun Chakravarthi is my choice for India's bowler of the year. He was a great MVP. He shown that X-factor every time the team used him. On his YouTube channel Ash ki Baat, Ashwin stated, "People have found it difficult to pick him." "India's chances at the 2026 T20 World Cup would also be greatly influenced by his fortunes. He is a T20 bowler, he added. Ashwin also considered Chakravarthi's incredible comeback after being sidelined earlier in his career. "After leaving the team, he remade himself, returned, and is currently leading the T20I standings. Cricket was not his first career; he was an architect. He began mystery bowling, bowled in Chennai's fifth division, requested a chance to bowl in net bowling, returned with a strong performance, and demonstrated his bowling skills to all of the scouts in the Tamil Nadu Premier League. "It has been an unforgettable journey," he remarked. "From an Indian perspective, Varun Chakravarthi is the bowler of the year for me," he stated.

Hardik Pandya is expected to return to the test

New Delhi: Hardik Pandya, the outstanding all-rounder for India, should return to Test cricket, according to former Indian cricketer Robin Uthappa, who said it would be "wonderful" if he returned to the No. 7 position. If Uthappa is fit and eager to play, he thinks the BCCI won't stop him. 2018 was Pandya's most recent Test cricket match. He hasn't played the red-ball formats since because of a back problem. India has experimented more with fast-bowling all-round possibilities while Pandya is not playing Test cricket; Nitish Reddy and Shardul Thakur are the front-runners. In 11 Test matches for India, Pandya has amassed 532 runs at an average of 31.29, including a century and four fifties, and 17 wickets at an average of 31.05. "It would be fantastic if Hardik Pandya could get back to the seventh position in Test cricket. The manner in which he plays. It's cricket, so anything can happen. Don't ever say nev-



er. Will the BCCI request that Hardik refrain from playing if he chooses to play Test cricket? I doubt they would refuse him if he expressed a desire to play and win the World Test Championship (WTC). I believe they want him to demonstrate his level of fitness. Do all-rounders bowl 20 overs? There isn't much bowling by Nitish Kumar. He is bowling twelve overs. I believe he can bowl 12-15 overs per innings given his current level of fitness and his batting and bowling abilities. On his YouTube channel, Robin Uthappa stated, "It's his own decision."

On the sidelines of the Vijay Hazare Trophy, Jasprit Bumrah makes an unexpected appearance

New Delhi: One of the most important members of the Indian cricket team is Jasprit Bumrah. The fitness of pacers is a major concern as the 2026 T20 World Cup approaches. Bumrah's inclusion in the starting lineup is the only thing that really improves the team. The club management has also begun to take things seriously because his fitness has been a major problem lately. We are taking care of his workload management. Bumrah has been chosen in the squad for the five-match T20I series against the Blackcaps, but it has been reported that he would be rested for the next three-match ODI series against New Zealand. The bowling star has already begun getting ready for the next games. According to Sportstar, Bumrah made an unexpected net appearance on Monday at the Gujarat College Ground during a Vijay Hazare Trophy 2025-26 match between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. According to the report, Bumrah did not bowl at full velocity after warming up and then beginning with a slight run-up before returning to his normal one. In Twenty20 Internationals, Bumrah has always been a game-changer, successfully sealing one end and turning the match into a 16-over match for the opposition. In 83 games, he has claimed 103 wickets with a remarkable economy rate of 6.39 and an average of 18.17. In 52 Test matches, the right-arm bowler has taken 234 wickets at a remarkable average of 19.79. Additionally, he has amassed 16 five-wicket hauls, 13 of which were against formidable opponents like South Africa, Australia, and England. With 149 wickets at an average of 23.55 and an economy rate of 4.59 in 89 games, Bumrah has also been a formidable force in ODIs. With 20 wickets during the competition, he was instrumental in India's journey to the 2023 ICC World Cup final. Jasprit Bumrah, an Indian bowler, made an unexpected trip to the Gujarat College Ground on Monday to train away from the Vijay Hazare Trophy. Sportstar



reports that the 32-year-old was seen practicing at the location where Tamil Nadu was facing Karnataka in the top domestic 50-over championship. The speedster was going about his business in a low-key manner, with neither admirers nor people pursuing him for autographs. According to the Sportstar article, Bumrah chose to work under former Gujarat Ranji coach Hitesh Majumdar for a brief yet beneficial tenure. The top-ranked Test bowler progressively increased his run-up and was observed delivering from two steps.

Last-Ball Agony: England Edges India in Thrilling T20 Series Decider!

The Indian women’s cricket team lost to England by five wickets in the fifth and final game of the ENG-W vs IND-W T20 2025 series at Edgbaston, Birmingham, on Saturday. Despite the loss, India will head back home with a 3-2 series win, having come into the final game with an unassailable 3-1 lead. This also caps off India’s first-ever bilateral T20 series win against England in women’s cricket history. They had lost all six of their previous multi-game bilateral series’ in the format against the English. India did win a one-off T20 against England at Derby back in 2006, which was also the first-ever meeting between the two teams in the format.

The match also saw Indian T20 captain Harmanpreet Kaur play her 334th international match for India, taking her past former skipper Mithali Raj as the most-capped Indian woman in cricket history. Sent in to bat first by the hosts, India lost opener Smriti Mandhana and Jemimah Rodrigues early with the scoreboard reading 19/2 midway through the third over. However, Shafali Verma and Harmanpreet Kaur steadied the ship with a 66-run stand for the third wicket before the Indian captain’s stumps were rattled by Charlie Dean. Shafali, meanwhile, scored her 11th T20I half-century in just 23 balls, making it the sec-



ond-quickest ever in the format by any Indian on the heels of Richa Ghosh’s 18-ball fifty against the West Indies last year. Dean played spoilsport again

as she dismissed the Indian opener for 75 after Maia Bouchier took a brilliant catch in the deep to affect the dismissal.

Shafali’s exit derailed the Indian innings for a bit but cameos by Richa (20 off 14), Radha Yadav and Arundhati Reddy saw India post a very credible

167/7 in their 20 overs. England openers Sophia Dunkley and Danni Wyatt-Hodge got the hosts’ chase to a flying start and put up 57/0 on the board in the powerplay overs. Wyatt-Hodge, making her 300th international appearance for England, raced to her 21st T20I fifty in just 32 deliveries. Radha Yadav gave India the breakthrough in the 11th over after castling Dunkley four short of her fifty. England were at 101/1 at the time. Deepti Sharma sent back Wyatt-Hodge for 56 in the very next over to open up a narrow window for India to get back into the match. Deepti struck again in the 16th over to dismiss Boucher as England needed 28 off the final four. Shree Charani bowled a tight 17th over to put the hosts under pressure but with England captain Tammy Beaumont registering timely boundaries, England seemed to be on course for a victory with six left to get off the final over. However, with Arundhati Reddy dismissing Beaumont and Amy Jones off the first and third ball of the last over, it was a rocky path over the finish line for England. Sophie Ecclestone and Paige Scholfield ensured their victory off the final ball of the match. India had started the series with a record-breaking 97-run win in the opener at Trent Bridge and followed it up with a 24-run win in Bristol. Following a narrow

five-run loss in the third T20I at The Oval, Harmanpreet and Co. had secured the series with a six-wicket victory at Old Trafford. Shafali brought up India’s 100 with an emphatic four back over Arlott’s head and it took a brilliant catch from Maia Bouchier to remove her - and dim the memory of Bouchier sitting on her haunches with her head bowed as one of the many culprits in England’s poor fielding display against West Indies that saw them exit the T20 World Cup before the knockouts. Shafali skied a Dean delivery towards cow corner and Bouchier ran round to her right, timing her dive to perfection to take the ball cleanly just inside the rope. Dean had already bowled Harmanpreet Kaur for 15 and she picked up her third when she trapped Deepti Sharma lbw. Bouchier took another calm catch in the deep to remove Richa and give Ecclestone a second wicket after she had pinned Harleen Deol’s back leg directly in front, attempting to sweep. It was a welcome return for Bouchier, who was dropped after the Ashes in January and only recalled partway through India’s visit as injury cover for captain Nat Sciver-Brunt. Opening partner Dunkley smoked a six over long-on off Arundhati, followed immediately by four down the ground.

Mithali Raj

India’s greatest female batter

Mithali Raj, the Indian Women Cricket team’s Captain has retired from the world of cricket today. In her recent announcement, she thanked all her supporters for their love. She is the highest run-scorer in the Indian Women’s Cricket team. Now she has announced retirement from all forms of International Cricket. She took to her social media handle to make this announcement. Mithali Raj was an Indian cricketer and the woman with the most runs in the game. She was also the only Indian captain (male or female) to have led the side to two 50-over World Cup finals. She was a right-handed upper middle-order batter and a right-arm leg-break bowler. She will be considered one of the greatest female cricketers ever and the highest run-scorer in women’s international cricket. She holds various records in international cricket. In Women’s One Day International matches, she is the only female cricketer to surpass the 7,000 run mark. Taapsee Pannu has been acting the role of Mithali Raj in her upcoming project, titled “Shabaash Mithu”. The project is a biopic on cricketer Mithali Raj, who is the women’s cricket team captain of India and has various cricketing achievements to her name. The film ‘Shabaash Mithu’ is directed

by Srijit Mukherji, produced by Viacom18 Studios, and the creative producer is Ajit Andhare.

Mithali became the first player from India to score 2000 runs in June 2018 during the 2018 Women’s Twenty20 Asia Cup. She was also the first female cricketer to score 2000 WT20I runs. She is a personality who has achieved a lot in her career and life. We are all proud of her. Scroll down to learn more about her. She was born on December 3, 1982, into a Tamil family in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. Her father’s name is Dorai Raj, and her mother’s name is Leela Raj. Her father was an airman (warrant officer) in the Indian Air Force. When she was 10 years old, she started to play the game. She took admission at Keyes High School for Girls in Hyderabad. And for her intermediate studies, she went to Kasturba Gandhi Junior College for Women in Secunderabad. When she was in the school itself, she started doing cricket coaching with her elder brother. She is not married yet. She is a Bharatanatyam dancer.

Cricketer Career and Records

In 1999, she made her One-Day International debut against Ireland and scored an unbeaten 114 runs. In 2001-02, she made her Test debut against South Africa at Lucknow.

At the age of 19, she broke the record of Karen Rolton’s World’s highest individual Test score of 209* in her Third Test on August 17, 2002. She scored 214 against England in the second and final Test at the Country Ground, Taunton. In March 2004, the record was surpassed by Kiran Baluch of Pakistan by scoring 242 against the West Indies. The World Cup made her stronger and more determined. In 2005, she led the Indian cricket team in the first World Cup Final, which was against Australia in South Africa. Under her captaincy, the team went to the final of the World Cup. She led the side to their first-ever Test and Series victory in England in 2006, and the year was wrapped by winning the Asia Cup, which was the second time in 12 months, that too without losing a single game. Under her captaincy, the Indian team reached the finals of the 2005 Women’s Cricket World Cup, where they lost to Australia. She also received the Arjuna Award for

2003 year. She topped the charts among the 2013 World Cup. World Cup surpassed gland captain Edwards to the highest er in ODIs woman to runs in the Also, her 409-run tally in the tournament was second only to England opener Tammy Beaumont’s. Her three fifties and a century were vital to India’s runner-up finish. At the age of 36,



she became the first woman to complete two decades in ODI cricket in October 2019. In September 2019, she announced her retirement from T20I cricket. She was named as the captain of India’s Test squad in May 2021 for their one-off match against the England women’s cricket team. She was also named as the captain of India’s team in January 2022 for the 2022 Women’s Cricket World Cup in New Zealand. She broke the world record for the matches captained in the ICC Women’s World Cup on March 12, 2022. She has surpassed former Australian Skipper Belinda Clark who captained her side in 23 matches. Her relationship with the T20 team’s captain Harmanpreet Kaur is also said to be strained. However after

reappointment of Ramesh Powar as Head coach of Indian womens’ cricket team in May 2021 , the two have reconciled. After the 2017 Women’s Cricket World Cup, Viacom 18 Motion Pictures acquired the rights to make a feature film on Raj’s life. She said “Hoping that this movie inspires more people, especially young girls to take up sports as a career.” The biopic is in planning and the shoot is scheduled to start in 2019. Raj said “I think Priyanka Chopra will be a great choice (to play me in the biopic). Our personalities match a lot. I am not a movie buff, so I’d love the experts to do their job.” However, it was decided that Taapsee Pannu will play the role of Mithali Raj in the biopic named Shabaash Mithu.

Harmanpreet Kaur (born 8 March 1989) is an Indian cricketer who captains the India women’s national team in all formats. She plays as an all-rounder. In 2018, she became the first woman for India to score a century in a T20 International match. Kaur is the only Indian woman cricketer with more than 3,000 runs in T20Is. She is one of the only three Indian women to score more than 3,000 runs in Women’s ODI. In 2019, during the series against South Africa, she became the first Indian cricketer to play in 100th international Twenty20 matches. She plays for and captains Mumbai Indians in the Women’s Premier League. Under her captainship, the Mumbai Indians made history as the first team to secure multiple Women’s Premier League (WPL) titles. She was awarded the Arjuna Award in 2017 by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. Kaur was born on 8 March 1989 in Moga, Punjab, to Harmandar Singh Bhullar,



a volleyball and basketball player and Satwinder Kaur, a homemaker. Her parents are baptised Sikhs. Her younger sister Hemjeet, is post-graduate in English and works as an assistant professor at Guru Nanak College in Moga. Her father, who now is a clerk at a judicial court, was once an aspiring cricketer. He was the first coach of Harman when she had begun playing the sport. She took to cricket after joining the Gian Jyoti School Academy, 30 kilometres (19 mi) away from her residence in Moga, where she trained under Kamaldeep Singh Sodhi. Harman used to play with men in the formative days of her career. She moved to Mumbai in 2014 where she began working for the Indian Railways. Harmanpreet was inspired by Virender Sehwag. She has claimed to have obtained a Bachelor of Arts from Chaudhary Charan Singh University in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh; though an investigation by university officials found no records of her enrollment and the claims to be fabricated. This was during a request for verification by the Punjab Police, after her honorary appointment there as a deputy superintendent of police. Other reports indicate that she actually studied at the Hans Raj Mahila Maha

Vidyalaya college (of the Guru Nanak Dev University) in Jalandhar, Punjab.

In March 2009, she made her ODI debut aged 20 in a match against Pakistan women’s team played at Bradman Oval during the World Cup. In the match, she bowled 4 overs conceding 10 runs and also caught Armaan Khan off Amita Sharma. In June 2009, she made her Twenty20 International debut in the ICC Women’s World Twenty20 against England women’s team at County Ground, Taunton, where she scored 8 runs off 7 balls. Her ability to hit the ball a long way was seen when she played quick-fire innings of 33 against England women’s in a T20I game played in Mumbai in 2010. She was named as Indian women’s captain for the 2012 Women’s Twenty20 Asia Cup final, as captain Mithali Raj and vice-captain Jhulan Goswami were out because of injuries. She made her debut as captain against Pakistan women’s as India defended 81 runs thus won Asia Cup. In March 2013, she was named ODI captain of India women’s when Bangladesh women’s team toured in India. In the series, Kaur scored her second ODI century in the 2nd ODI. Kaur finished the series 195 runs at average

of 97.50 with a century and a fifty along with 2 wickets. In August 2014, she one of the eight debut that played against England women cricket team in a Test match at Sir Paul Getty’s Ground, Wormsley in which she scored 9 and a duck in a match. In November 2014, she took 9 wickets in a Test match South Africa women cricket team played at Gangotri Glades Cricket Ground, Mysore and helped India to win the match by an innings and 34 runs. In January 2016, she helped India to win series in Australia as well as scored a 31-ball 46 runs in India’s highest ever chase in T20 internationals. She continued her form in the 2016 ICC Women’s World Twenty20 where she scored 89 runs and took seven wickets in four matches. In June 2016, she became the first Indian cricketer to be signed by an overseas Twenty20 franchise. Sydney Thunder, the Women’s Big Bash League champions, signed

her for the 2016–17 season. On 20 July 2017 she scored 171*(115) against Australia in the 2017 Women’s Cricket World Cup semi-final in Derby. Kaur’s 171* is currently the second-highest score by an Indian batter in women’s one-day internationals, behind Deepti Sharma’s 188 runs. Kaur also holds the record for the highest individual score for India in Women’s cricket World Cup history. Kaur now holds the record for registering the highest ever individual score in a knockout stage of a Women’s World Cup match (171*) surpassing the previous record of 107* by Karen Rolton. Kaur was part of the Indian team to reach the final of the 2017 Women’s Cricket World Cup where the team lost to England by nine runs. In July 2017, Harman became second India batter to feature in the top-10 of ICC Women’s ODI Player Rankings after Mithali Raj. In December 2017, she was named as one of the players in the ICC Women’s T20I Team of the Year. In October 2018, she was named as the captain of India’s squad for the 2018 ICC Women’s World Twenty20 tournament in the West Indies. Ahead of the tournament, she was named as one of the players to watch. In the opening match of the tournament, against New Zealand, she became the first woman for India to score a century in WT20Is, when she made 103 runs from 51 balls. She was the leading run-scorer for India in the tournament, with 183 runs in five matches. In November 2018, she was named in Sydney Thunder’s squad for the 2018–19 Women’s Big Bash League season. In January 2020, she was named as the captain of India’s squad for the 2020 ICC Women’s T20 World Cup in Australia. In 2021, she was drafted by Manchester Originals for the inaugural season of The Hundred. She played for them in 3 games, scoring 104 runs before withdrawing herself from the tournament due to injury. In March 2021, in a match against South Africa, she became fifth Indian woman cricketer to represent the country in 100 ODIs. In May 2021, she was named as the vice-captain of India’s Test squad for their one-off match against the England women’s cricket team. In September 2021, she was signed by Melbourne Renegades for 2021–22 Women’s Big Bash League season. In January 2022, she was named in India’s team for the 2022 Women’s Cricket World Cup in New Zealand. In July 2022, she was named as the captain of India’s team for the cricket tournament at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, England. In February 2023, in the inaugural WPL auction, she was bought by Mumbai Indians (WPL) for ₹1.80 crores. The Mumbai Indians, captained by her, went on to win the inaugural WPL.

Harmanpreet Kaur

In July 2023, Kaur was fined 75% of her match fee, received four demerit points, and was suspended for two matches by the International Cricket Council (ICC) for breaching the code of conduct for her outbursts during the final ODI of the Bangladesh series. She pleaded guilty to two separate charges pressed by Akhtar Ahmed, the match referee. Kaur received three demerit points and fined 50% of her match fee relating to “showing dissent at an umpire’s decision”. Thus, she became the first women’s player to be given a Level 2 sanction since the ICC began listing code of conduct breaches publicly in 2016. She was also awarded one demerit point for a separate Level 1 penalty along with a fine of 25% of her match fee for “public criticism” of match officials. Kaur found herself in the controversy after hitting the stumps with her bat when she was declared out. In the post-match presentation, she publicly criticised the umpires and disrespected the opposing team during the photo session, leading the Bangladeshi players to walkout. She was named captain of the India squad for the 2024 ICC Women’s T20 World Cup and for their home ODI series against New Zealand in October 2024. In March 2025, Harmanpreet created history and became the first captain to win multiple WPL trophies. She led Mumbai Indians (WPL) to clinch their title for the second time.

