

## Purnima Devi Barman Wins Prestigious 2026 Wayfinder Award

**Guwahati, Jun 10:** Assam-based wildlife biologist and conservation-ist and founder of the Hargila Army, Dr. Purnima Devi Barman has been named one of 15 global recipients of the 2026 Wayfinder Award conferred by the National Geographic Society and Kia America .

The award recognises visionaries from six continents whose work in science, conservation, education, and storytelling is deepening the world’s commitment to protecting the planet.

Dr. Barman is renowned for leading the Hargila conservation movement consistently for last 25 years and pioneering, Hargila army grassroots movement of more than 20,000 women dedicated to the protection of the greater adjutant stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*), locally known as the hargila. Under her leadership, the initiative



has transformed the bird’s conserva-tion status through habitat protection, environmental education, sustainable

livelihood programs, and commu-nity-led nesting site preservation, making it one of the world’s most

celebrated community conservation success stories.

Dr Barman’s journey with the great-

er adjutant stork began two decades ago when she recognised that the en-dangered bird is often misunderstood as a bad omen and can only be saved by winning the hearts of the people and integrating the bird with tradi-tion, culture and pride.

She mobilised village women, trained them as conservation champi-ions, and built a movement that trans-formed 27 nests into over 300 nests, making Assam home to the largest breeding colony of greater adjutant storks in the world.

Under her stewardship, the stork population in Assam has quadrupled to over 1,800 birds, while thousands of women have gained financial in-dependence through weaving cooper-atives that produce textiles featuring hargila motifs.

Dr. Barman’s previous accolades in-

clude the UN Champions of the Earth Award (2022), the Whitley Gold Award (2024), and being named one of Time Magazine’s Women of the Year (2025).

The recognition however comes at a difficult time for Dr. Barman. On June 5, 2026, she lost her father, Subedar Major Bhabani Kanta Sarma, a patri-ot and a veteran of the Indian Army and 1971 Bangladesh liberation war, he served the nation with courage and dedication.

Dedicating the award to his mem-ory, Dr. Barman said: “Just days be-fore receiving this recognition, I lost my beloved father, Subedar Major Bhabani Kanta Sarma. He was my greatest source of strength, discipline, and inspiration. This honour carries a special message to my father and I made him proud at this moment.”

## Tripura Cracks Down on Child Marriage, Prevents Thousands of Cases

**Agartala, Jun 10:** Tripura’s Social Wel-fare and Social Edu-cation Minister Tinku Roy on Monday said coordinated efforts by government agencies and community stake-holders helped prevent 9,982 child marriages across the state during the 2025-26 finan-cial year.Addressing a press conference in Agartala, Roy said the number of child mar-riages prevented in the state has been steady-ly increasing due to effective cooperation among district admin-istrations, police, gram panchayats, Child Welfare Committees and other child protec-tion agencies.

“During 2025-26, as

many as 9,982 child marriages were pre-vented by all stake-holders in the state, al-though we do not have exact data regarding the number of child marriages that actually took place,” the min-ister said.He noted that child marriage con-tinues to be a signifi-cant social challenge in certain areas of the state, particularly in Sonamura subdivision of Sepahijala district and Kailashahar in Unakoti district.

Roy said various in-stitutions, including Child Welfare Com-mittees, non-govern-mental organisations and the Tripura Com-mission for Protec-tion of Child Rights,

are actively engaged in creating awareness and preventing child marriages.

Highlighting devel-opments in the state’s Anganwadi infrastruc-ture, the minister said electricity connections have been provided to more than 3,000 An-ganwadi centres out of nearly 10,000 op-erating across Tripura. The remaining centres are expected to receive power connections during the current fi-nancial year.

He also informed that around 100 An-ganwadi centres, which previously used Bengali-medium ed-ucational materials, have been converted to English-medium

instruction following requests from parents and guardians.

According to Roy, the move is expected to help children from Anganwadi centres secure admission to Vidyalay Schools without facing lan-guage-related chal-lenges and improve their educational pros-pects.Tripura remains among several Indian states, including As-sam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Telanga-na and West Bengal, where the prevalence of child marriage continues to be high-er than the national average, making sus-tained intervention and awareness efforts crucial.

## Tezpur litchi of Assam draws praise from High Commissioner of Singapore to India

**Tezpur, Jun 10:** The High Commissioner of Singapore to India, HC Wong, has heaped praise on Tezpur litchi of Assam and added that it is selling fast in his country.

“Enjoying very much my #Assam #tezpur #litchi. Many thanks to Hon CM @himant-abiswa for introducing Singapore to this variety of sweet litchi. It is selling fast in Sin-gapore. Export more please,” Wong posted on X.

Responding to his post, Assam Chief Min-ister Himanta Biswa Sarma wrote: “Thank you, HC Wong. I am delighted to know that Tezpur litchis are finding so many admirers in Singapore. We will make sure the next shipment arrives before they disappear from the shelves!”

During the Tezpur Litchi Festival, one tonne of various litchi varieties was exported to Dubai, while around 600 kilograms was shipped to Singapore.

The origins of Tezpur’s litchi legacy date back to 1923, when noted litterateur and former Tezpur Municipality chairman Pad-manath Gohain Baruah established litchi



orchards in the town. Today, according to the Agnigarh Agricultural Producers Group, more than 150 farmers cultivate litchis across over 400 bighas of land in the region.

## Northeast Rajya Sabha Polls: BJP, NPP Candidates Set for Easy Passage; Contest Likely Only in Mizoram

**Aizawl, Jun 10:** The political landscape surrounding the upcoming Rajya Sabha elec-tions in the Northeast has become largely clear, with BJP candidates in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh and the National People’s Party (NPP) nominee in Meghalaya heading towards unopposed victories. Mizoram re-mains the only state where a contest is like-ly to take place.In Manipur, BJP nominee Adhikarimayum Sarda Devi filed her nomina-tion papers for the lone Rajya Sabha seat at the Manipur Legislative Assembly Secretar-iat. As no other candidate submitted nomina-tion papers before the deadline, her election is expected to be uncontested after the com-pletion of statutory procedures. Following the filing of her nomination, Sarda Devi said that she would focus on issues related to women’s welfare and empowerment while also rais-ing concerns regarding Manipur’s territorial integrity in Parliament. She said the plight

of women affected by the ethnic violence in the state would remain one of her key priori-ties. The filing process was attended by Chief Minister Yumkham Khemchand Singh, BJP legislators, senior party leaders and represen-tatives of allied parties. Sarda Devi, who be-came the first woman president of the BJP’s Manipur unit, thanked Prime Minister Naren-dra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and the party leadership for reposing faith in her.In neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh, BJP candidate Tai Tagak moved a step closer to the Upper House after his nomination papers were found valid during scrutiny. Returning Officer and Assembly Secretary Tadar Meena confirmed that both nomination papers filed by Tagak were in order. With no rival candi-date in the race and the BJP enjoying a com-fortable majority in the 60-member Assembly, his election is now considered a mere formali-ty. The election has been necessitated by the

completion of the term of sitting Rajya Sabha MP Nabam Rebia on June 23. Tagak, a veteran BJP leader from Kurung Kumey district, has been associated with the party since 1995 and previously served as state BJP president. Re-flecting on his journey, he recalled working as a child labourer and daily wage worker during his early years before rising through the ranks of the party. He described his nomination as recognition of hard work, dedication and sac-rifice and thanked the party leadership for the opportunity.In Meghalaya, former legislator and National People’s Party candidate James Pangsang Kongkal Sangma is also set to enter the Rajya Sabha unopposed after no other candidate filed nominations before the dead-line. Sangma submitted his nomination papers in the presence of Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma and leaders of alliance partners in the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance government. Speaking after filing his papers, he said he

would work to ensure that Meghalaya’s voice is heard in Parliament and would strongly advocate for issues affecting the state. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma said the next Rajya Sabha member would play an important role in strengthening ties between the state and the Centre while pursuing matters such as the Inner Line Permit, the Meghalaya Resident Safety and Security Act, inclusion of Khasi and Garo languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, Sixth Schedule issues and concerns relating to illegal immigration.

Mizoram is expected to witness the only contest among the Northeastern states. The opposition Mizo National Front (MNF) has nominated lawyer and writer Zothansangi Hmar for the lone Rajya Sabha seat, mak-ing her the first woman ever nominated by a Mizoram-based party for Parliament. She will take on ruling Zoram People’s Movement (ZPM) candidate K. Laltluangkima, who had

filed his nomination earlier. Announcing her candidature, MNF leaders said the decision reflected the party’s commitment to encourag-ing greater participation of women and youth in public life. Zothansangi said she was hon-oured by the trust placed in her and pledged to work for women’s empowerment, youth employment, skill development, industrial growth and the protection of Mizoram’s in-terests. Political observers believe the ruling ZPM holds a clear advantage in the contest with 27 members in the 40-member Assem-bly, compared to the MNF’s 10 legislators.

The scrutiny of nomination papers is un-derway, while the deadline for withdrawal is June 11. Polling for the Rajya Sabha elections is scheduled for June 18, although in Mani-pur, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya, the candidates are expected to be declared elected unopposed once the formal process is com-pleted.

## PGI Ranking to Improve in Coming Years: Meghalaya Minister

**Shillong, Jun 10:** Meghalaya Education Minister Lahk-men Rymbui has exuded confidence that the State’s rank-ing in the Ministry of Education’s Performance Grading Index (PGI) would improve significantly in the coming years.

Notably, Meghalaya was the lowest-performing state in the country with a score of 417.9 points out of a possible 1,000 in PGI 2.0.

Speaking to the media, Rymbui said he was confident that Meghalaya’s performance in the PGI 2026-27 as-sessments would improve vastly owing to the extensive reforms undertaken by the government in the past eight years.

“The focus, besides the ranking, should also be on the efforts being made to strengthen the education sector,” the Education Minister said.

“The important question is whether the government has done anything to address the challenges in the education sector. The answer is yes. There has been a consistent im-provement in scores over the years,” he claimed.

The Minister further said that initiatives taken by the



government have not been aimed merely at improving PGI scores but at enhancing the overall quality of education, student and teacher welfare, accessibility and other key aspects of the education system.

“All stakeholders in the Education department, includ-ing officials, teachers, administrators, and all stakeholders have been working continuously to improve learning out-comes and educational standards,” Rymbui said.

## Tripura Seeks Education Boost in Talks with Pradhan

**Agartala, Jun 10:** Tripura Higher Education Minister Kishor Barman called on Union Minister for Educa-tion Dharmendra Pradhan to discuss several key issues relating to the de-velopment and strengthening of the higher education sector in the state.

The meeting, also attended by se-nior officials of the state education department and Union Education Ministry, highlighted the need for re-solving the affiliation related issue of newly established Government Gen-eral Degree Colleges under Maharaja Bir Bikram University to facilitate smooth academic administration and expand access to quality higher edu-cation across the State.

The Tripura delegation requested the nomination of a representative from the Ministry of Education for inclusion in the Search Committee for the appointment of the Chairman of the State Higher Education Coun-cil, in accordance with the applicable guidelines and statutory provisions.



Discussions were held on the pro-posal for introduction and expansion of Skill and Vocational Courses in Government Degree Colleges in col-laboration with Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur.

The initiative aims to enhance em-ployability, industry readiness, and skill development among students in alignment with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The Minister also raised the issue of the appointment of a regular Vice Chancellor for Tripura Univer-

sity and emphasised the importance of expediting the process to ensure effective academic leadership and in-stitutional development.

The Union Minster of Education as-sured that the process of appointment of new Vice-chancellor of Tripura University will be completed soon.

The Tripura delegation sought spe-cial financial assistance from the Centre for the development of two new Government Universities and four new General Degree Colleges in the state.

## Tripura Prevented Nearly 10,000 Child Marriages in 2025-26, Says Minister

Agartala, June 10: Tripura's Social Welfare and Social Education Minister Tinku Roy on Monday said coordinated efforts by government agencies and community stakeholders helped prevent 9,982 child marriages across the state during the 2025-26 financial year.

Addressing a press conference in Agartala, Roy said the number of child marriages prevented in the state has been steadily increasing due to effective cooperation among district administrations, police, gram panchayats, Child Welfare Committees and other child protection agencies.

"During 2025-26, as many as 9,982 child marriages were prevented by all stakeholders in the state, although we do not have exact data regarding the number of child marriages that actually took place," the minister said. He noted that child marriage continues to be a significant social challenge in certain areas of the state, particularly in Sonamura subdivision of Sepahijala district and Kailashahar in Unakoti



district.

Roy said various institutions, including Child Welfare Committees, non-governmental organisations and the Tripura Commission for Protection of Child Rights, are actively engaged in creating awareness and preventing child marriages.

Highlighting developments in the state's Anganwadi infrastructure, the minister said electricity connections have been provided to more than 3,000 Anganwadi centres out of nearly 10,000 operating across Tripura. The remaining centres are expected to receive power connections during the current financial year.

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centres, which previously used Bengali-medium educational materials, have been converted to English-medium instruction following requests from parents and guardians. According to Roy, the move is expected to help children from Anganwadi centres secure admission to Vidyajyoti Schools without facing language-related challenges and improve their educational prospects.

Tripura remains among several Indian states, including Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Telangana and West Bengal, where the prevalence of child marriage continues to be higher than the national average, making sustained intervention and awareness efforts crucial.

## Sushmita Dev Resigns from Rajya Sabha, Fuels Speculation Over Possible BJP Move

Guwahati, June 10: Former Silchar MP and senior Trinamool Congress leader Sushmita Dev resigned from the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday, setting off fresh political speculation about her future after reports emerged that she met Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in New Delhi shortly after stepping down from the Upper House.

Dev submitted her resignation to Rajya Sabha Chairman C. P. Radhakrishnan, requesting that it be accepted with immediate effect. While she has not publicly stated the reasons behind her decision, political circles are abuzz with speculation that she could be preparing to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). A former Congress leader and daughter of veteran politician Santosh Mohan Dev, Sushmita Dev represented the Silchar constituency in the Lok Sabha before leaving the Congress and joining the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) in 2021.

Following her induction into the party, she quickly emerged as one of its prominent national faces, serving as national spokesperson before



being nominated to the Rajya Sabha.

Her resignation comes amid reports of growing dissatisfaction within the Trinamool Congress and marks the second departure from the party's parliamentary ranks within a week. Earlier, senior TMC

Rajya Sabha MP Sukhendu Sekhar Roy also resigned from the Upper House, delivering a significant setback to the party leadership.

In his resignation letter addressed to TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, Roy alleged that widespread corruption,

oppression of women and governance failures in sectors such as education, healthcare, industry, employment and law and order had led to public disillusionment with the party.

Roy further praised the BJP's recent electoral performance in West Bengal, claim-

ing that voters had delivered the party a historic mandate and that the newly elected government had already begun implementing measures aimed at the state's development and reconstruction.

The back-to-back resignations have intensified political uncertainty within the Trinamool Congress and raised questions about the party's ability to retain influential leaders at a time of shifting political alignments.

Although neither Sushmita Dev nor the BJP has officially commented on reports of her possible induction into the saffron party, her reported meeting with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has added fuel to speculation that the former Assam Congress leader may be on the verge of another major political transition.

Political observers believe any move by Dev could have significant implications in Assam's Barak Valley region, where she continues to enjoy considerable political influence and recognition. As of now, however, her next political step remains officially unconfirmed.

## Tripura appoints IAS officer Shantanu as CEO of TTAADC

Agartala, June 10: The Tripura government has appointed senior IAS officer Shantanu as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), according to an official notification issued by the General Administration (Personnel and Training) Department.

The appointment follows Shantanu's repatriation from central deputation to the state. A 1997-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of the Tripura cadre, he has been posted as Principal Secretary to the Government of Tripura in the Higher Administrative Grade (HAG) at Level 15 of the Pay Matrix.

In addition to his responsibilities as Principal Secretary, Shantanu has been entrusted with the additional charge of the Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department. He will also serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the TTAADC, one of the state's key autonomous administrative bodies responsible for governance and development in tribal areas.

According to the June 8 notification, the appointment has been made with immediate effect in the interest of public service. The order further stated that senior officer Raval Hemendra Kumar, who was holding the additional charge of CEO of the TTAADC, will be relieved of the responsibility after Shantanu formally assumes charge of the post.



The government has also relieved K. Sasikumar from the charge of the Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department as part of the administrative reshuffle. The appointment is expected to strengthen the functioning of the TTAADC, which plays a crucial role in implementing development programmes and addressing governance issues in the tribal-dominated regions of Tripura.

Officials said Shantanu brings with him extensive administrative experience gained both in the state and during his tenure on central deputation. His appointment to multiple key positions reflects the government's confidence in his ability to oversee important administrative and developmental responsibilities.

The TTAADC covers nearly two-thirds of Tripura's geographical area and serves a significant tribal population. As CEO, Shantanu will be responsible for coordinating administrative functions, implementing development initiatives and ensuring effective delivery of public services within the autonomous council areas.

## NERIST students withdraw hunger strike after assurance on director's resignation

Itanagar, June 10: The Students' Union of NERIST (SUN) has withdrawn its indefinite hunger strike after receiving assurances that the resignation of NERIST Director Prof Narendranath S would not be accepted and steps would be taken for his continuation in office.

The hunger strike, which began on Monday, was launched in protest against the alleged forced resignation of the director of the North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST), one of Arunachal Pradesh's premier technical institutions. The issue has triggered significant unrest within the institute, with students demanding intervention from the authorities and seeking clarity over the circumstances that led to the director's resignation.

Speaking to reporters, SUN president Tadar Demo said the student body decided to call off



the strike after receiving a positive response regarding its demands. "We have been told that the resignation will be withdrawn and will not be accepted by the Education Ministry.

After getting this assurance, we have decided not to continue the hunger strike," Demo said. The students had earlier warned

of stronger agitation if their concerns were not addressed. In a letter addressed to the Chairman of the NERIST Board of Management (BoM) on June 8, the union stated that it had been compelled to launch the indefinite hunger strike as it had received no response from the Ministry of Education, the BoM chairman or the

state government regarding a representation submitted on June 3.

The student union has been demanding that the Ministry of Education reject Prof Narendranath's resignation and allow him to complete his full five-year tenure as director of the institute. Another key demand raised by the students is the release of

CCTV footage recorded on May 29 from the director's chamber. The footage is reportedly linked to the incident that allegedly led to the resignation of the director. According to allegations made by students and sections of the institute community, Prof Narendranath was forced to resign after a group of individuals allegedly entered his office and pressured him.

However, no official confirmation regarding the circumstances surrounding the resignation has been issued so far. The controversy emerged shortly after NERIST authorities issued suspension orders against Registrar Mai Kuru Camder and Assistant Registrar Boge Kamduk on May 29. The suspensions were linked to allegations of irregularities and manipulation in the Recruitment Rules 2022 concerning non-teaching staff appointments at the institute.

## Purnima Devi Barman, a wildlife conservationist from Assam, was named one of the 15 global winners of the 2026 Wayfinder Award

Guwahati, June 10: Assam-based wildlife biologist and conservationist and founder of the Hargila Army, Dr. Purnima Devi Barman has been named one of 15 global recipients of the 2026 Wayfinder Award conferred by the National Geographic Society and Kia America.

The award recognises visionaries from six continents whose work in science, conservation, education, and storytelling is deepening the world's commitment to protecting the planet. Dr. Barman

is renowned for leading the Hargila conservation movement consistently for last 25 years and pioneering, Hargila army grassroots movement of more than 20,000 women dedicated to the protection of the greater adjutant stork (Leptoptilos dubius), locally known as the hargila.

Under her leadership, the initiative has transformed the bird's conservation status through habitat protection, environmental education, sustainable livelihood programs, and community-led nesting

site preservation, making it one of the world's most celebrated community conservation success stories. Dr. Barman's journey with the greater adjutant stork began two decades ago when she recognised that the endangered bird is often misunderstood as a bad omen and can only be saved by winning the hearts of the people and integrating the bird with tradition, culture and pride. She mobilised village women, trained them as conservation champions, and built a movement that trans-

formed 27 nests into over 300 nests, making Assam home to the largest breeding colony of greater adjutant storks in the world.

Under her stewardship, the stork population in Assam has quadrupled to over 1,800 birds, while thousands of women have gained financial independence through weaving cooperatives that produce textiles featuring hargila motifs. Dr. Barman's previous accolades include the UN Champions of the Earth Award (2022), the Whitley

Gold Award (2024), and being named one of Time Magazine's Women of the Year (2025).

The recognition however comes at a difficult time for Dr. Barman. On June 5, 2026, she lost her father, Subedar Major Bhabani Kanta Sarma, a patriot and a veteran of the Indian Army and 1971 Bangladesh liberation war, he served the nation with courage and dedication. Dedicating the award to his memory, Dr. Barman said: "Just days before receiving this recogni-



tion, I lost my beloved father, Subedar Major Bhabani Kanta Sarma. He was my greatest source of strength, discipline, and inspiration. This honour carries a special message to my father and I made him proud at this moment."

## Assam Emerges as India's Next Concert Economy Hub; Report Projects 2,700 Crore Opportunity in Five Years

Guwahati, June 10: Assam is rapidly emerging as one of India's most promising live entertainment destinations, with a new report projecting that the state's concert economy could generate more than ₹2,700 crore in cumulative economic impact over the next five years. The report, titled "The Assam Blueprint: Turning Live Music Economy into a Tourism Multiplier", was jointly released by BookMyShow, Assam Tourism Development Corporation Ltd. (ATDC), and EY-Parthenon. It examines the economic, tourism, workforce, and cultural impact of live entertainment in Assam, using American rapper and singer Post Malone's first-ever India solo headline concert in Guwahati as a

case study. According to the report, Post Malone's December 2025 concert generated an estimated ₹243 crore in total economic impact, including ₹132 crore directly injected into Assam's economy through visitor spending and approximately ₹5 crore in GST revenue.

The event attracted around 20,000 attendees, with 53 percent travelling from outside Guwahati and representing more than 200 cities and towns across India. The report highlights the extensive benefits generated across multiple sectors. For every ₹100 spent on a concert ticket, attendees spent an additional ₹89 on accommodation, travel, dining, shopping, and local services. Hotels in Guwahati

reported a nearly 30 percent rise in occupancy during the concert weekend, while local transport operators experienced over 50 percent growth in ride demand. Restaurants and cafés recorded more than 33 percent higher footfall, and retail businesses witnessed over 30 percent increases in customer visits.

The concert also boosted tourism to destinations such as Kaziranga National Park, Majuli, Kamakhya Temple, and Sivasagar, strengthening Guwahati's position as the gateway to Northeast India. The report notes that Guwahati witnessed a remarkable 188 percent increase in live-event attendance in 2025 and hosted 55 ticketed live events during the year. Alongside Shill-



ong, the city is steadily establishing itself as a major destination for large-scale entertainment events. Beyond tourism and consumer spending, the Post Malone concert generated significant employment opportunities. Around 2,500 personnel were engaged across

security, hospitality, production, logistics, and venue management, while local vendors and businesses participated in staging, branding, infrastructure, food and beverage services, connectivity, payments, and sustainability operations. The report attributes Assam's growing

success to supportive policies, including the state's Concert Tourism Policy, single-window facilitation through ATDC, infrastructure development, hospitality expansion, and investments in local talent and vendor ecosystems.

ATDC Managing Director Shri Kumar Padmapani Bora said that the concert economy is not merely about entertainment but also about tourism, culture, youth engagement, and economic development working together. He emphasized the state's commitment to creating an ecosystem where major events generate recurring opportunities for employment, tourism, and economic growth. BookMyShow Chief Business Officer (Live Events) Naman Pugalia stated

that the North-East represents one of India's most exciting opportunities for live entertainment growth, combining a rich musical heritage with an enthusiastic audience and an evolving ecosystem. EY-Parthenon Partner and Media & Entertainment Leader Raghav Anand noted that Assam's success demonstrates how live entertainment can serve as economic infrastructure, generating sustained benefits across tourism, employment, and regional development. The momentum is expected to continue with legendary rock band Guns N' Roses scheduled to perform in Guwahati on November 17, 2026, further strengthening Assam's position on the global live entertainment map.

## Assam Likely to Receive ₹1,929.70 Cr for Rural Growth



**Guwahati, Jun 10:** Assam Panchayat and Rural Development Minister Atul Bora on Tuesday attended a video conference chaired by Union Minister for Rural Development, Shivraj Chouhan to discuss the allocation of funds under the VB-G RAM(G) Scheme and the preparedness for its nationwide rollout across rural India from July 1. After the meeting, Bora expressed his gratitude to the Prime Minister and Union Rural Development Minister for introducing the transformative initiative, which is poised to strengthen rural infrastructure, improve connectivity, enhance livelihood opportunities, and accelerate socio-economic development across rural India.

“Assam has been proposed an interim allocation of Rs 1,929.70 crore under the VB-G RAM(G) Scheme.

This will provide a major boost to rural development initiatives and contribute significantly to the welfare and prosperity of our villages,” the Minister stated.

During the meeting, Bora reaffirmed the commitment of the Government of Assam to ensure the effective and timely implementation of this and other flagship Central Government schemes for the holistic and rapid development of rural Assam.

The Video Conference was also attended by Ministers in charge of Rural Development from various States and Union Territories, senior officials of the Central Government, State Governments and UT administrations. Assam Panchayat and Rural Development Commissioner, Keerthi Jalli, also participated in the deliberations.

## Rajya Sabha Resignation by Sushmita Dev Sparks BJP Speculation

**Guwahati, Jun 10:** Former Silchar MP and senior Trinamool Congress leader Sushmita Dev resigned from the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday, setting off fresh political speculation about her future after reports emerged that she met Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in New Delhi shortly after stepping down from the Upper House.Dev submitted her resignation to Rajya Sabha Chairman C. P. Radhakrishnan, requesting that it be accepted with immediate effect. While she has not publicly stated the reasons behind her decision, political circles are abuzz with speculation that she could be preparing to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

A former Congress leader and daughter of veteran politician Santosh Mohan Dev, Sushmita Dev represented the Silchar constituency in the Lok Sabha before leaving the Congress and joining the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) in 2021. Following her induction into the party, she quickly emerged as one of its prominent national faces, serving as national spokesperson before being nominated to the Rajya Sabha.

Her resignation comes amid reports of growing dissatisfaction within the Trinamool Congress and marks the second departure from the party's parliamentary ranks within a week. Earlier, senior TMC Rajya Sabha MP Sukhendu Sekhar Roy also resigned from the Upper House, delivering a significant setback to the party leadership. In his resignation letter addressed to TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, Roy alleged that widespread corrup-



tion, oppression of women and governance failures in sectors such as education, healthcare, industry, employment and law and order had led to public disillusionment with the party.

Roy further praised the BJP's recent electoral performance in West Bengal, claiming that voters had delivered the party a historic mandate and that the newly elected government had already begun implementing measures aimed at the state's development and recon-

struction.

The back-to-back resignations have intensified political uncertainty within the Trinamool Congress and raised questions about the party's ability to retain influential leaders at a time of shifting political alignments.

Although neither Sushmita Dev nor the BJP has officially commented on reports of her possible induction into the saffron party, her reported meeting with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa

Sarma has added fuel to speculation that the former Assam Congress leader may be on the verge of another major political transition.

Political observers believe any move by Dev could have significant implications in Assam's Barak Valley region, where she continues to enjoy considerable political influence and recognition. As of now, however, her next political step remains officially unconfirmed.

## Assam Records Highest Japanese Encephalitis Deaths in India

**Guwahati, Jun 10:** Assam has recorded the highest number of deaths due to Japanese Encephalitis (JE) in India over the past nine years, accounting for nearly 62 per cent of all fatalities reported across the country during the period.

According to data from the National Centre for Vector Borne Diseases Control (NCVB-DC), Assam reported 3,767 positive JE cases between 2018 and March 2026. During the same period, the state recorded 609 deaths, while the rest of India reported 376 deaths, highlighting Assam's continued vulnerability to the mosquito-borne disease.

In 2018, Assam registered 509 JE cases and 94 deaths. The situation worsened in 2019, when the state reported 642 cases and 161 deaths. During the Covid-19 years, the number of infections declined, with 320 cases and 51 deaths in 2020, followed by 248 cases and 40 deaths in 2021. However, the disease resurged in 2022 with 456 cases and 96 deaths. In 2023, Assam recorded 525 cases and 34 deaths, while 2024 witnessed the highest number of infections during the review period, with 670 cases and 53 fatalities.

In 2025, the state reported 423 cases and 79 deaths. Between January and March 2026, four cases and one death have been reported.

Public health experts have stressed the need for intensified surveillance, vaccination drives in high-risk areas, improved pig management, and early referral systems to curb the disease. They noted that Assam alone accounted for 62 per cent of India's total JE deaths during the period under review.

Guwahati-based physician Dr. Raj Dutta attributed the state's vulnerability to extensive paddy cultivation, high rainfall, recurrent floods, and one of India's largest pig populations, all of which create favourable conditions for the transmission of the JE virus.

Although vaccination campaigns have reduced the overall disease burden, experts warn that environmental, climatic, and socio-economic factors continue to support mosquito breeding and periodic outbreaks across the state.

## NIA Seeks Voice Samples of US, Ukrainian Nationals in Myanmar Training Module Case

**New Delhi, Jun 10:** The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has approached a special court in Delhi seeking permission to collect specimen voice samples of seven foreign nationals arrested in connection with an alleged Myanmar training module case being investigated under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

The application was filed before Special NIA Judge Prashant Sharma at the Patiala House Courts under Section 349 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS). The agency has requested the court to allow experts from the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) to obtain and analyse the voice samples as part of its forensic examination of electronic evidence seized during the investigation.

According to the NIA, the case was registered on March 13, 2026, under Section 18 of the UAPA following directions from the Ministry of Home Affairs. The agency alleges that a group of foreign nationals entered India on tourist visas, travelled to Mizoram and later crossed into Myanmar without obtaining the required per-

mits.

Investigators claim the accused provided training in drone warfare, drone operations, drone assembly and anti-drone jamming technologies to ethnic armed groups engaged in conflict against Myanmar's military regime. The agency contends that these activities form part of a wider conspiracy with potential implications for regional security. The court has issued notices on the NIA's application. Lawyers representing the accused accepted the notices and informed the court that they would file their responses at the next hearing. The matter has been listed for July 2.

The development comes as the NIA has also sought an extension of the statutory investigation period from 90 days to 180 days under the provisions of the UAPA. The agency told the court that the case involves a "deep-rooted criminal conspiracy" with both national and international dimensions. Among those arrested are US citizen Matthew Aaron Van Dyke and six Ukrainian nationals — Hurba Petro, Slyviak Taras, Ivan Sukmanovskiy, Stefankiv Marian,

Honcharuk Maksim and Kaminskyi Viktor.

The NIA informed the court that the investigation is currently at a crucial stage, with multiple electronic devices undergoing forensic examination. Investigators are also scrutinising financial transactions, tracing funding sources and attempting to identify other individuals linked to the alleged conspiracy.

The agency further argued that releasing the accused at this stage could adversely affect the investigation, claiming they may flee the country or attempt to influence witnesses and evidence.

Special Public Prosecutors Rahul Tyagi and Amit Rohila appeared on behalf of the NIA, while Advocate Nitin Saluja represented the Ukrainian nationals. Advocates Rohit Dandriyal and Rohit Gour appeared for Van Dyke.

The accused remain in judicial custody as the investigation continues. The NIA maintains that the alleged training of ethnic armed groups in advanced drone-related military technologies raises significant concerns relating to national security and cross-border militant activities.

## Nagaland launches mentorship, skill development progs for athletes

**Kohima, Jun 10:** The Nagaland Department of Youth Resources and Sports has launched two initiatives aimed at equipping young athletes with life skills, career guidance and economic opportunities beyond their sporting careers.

The Mentorship Programme for Holistic Development of Student Athletes and the Skill-Based Economic Sustenance Programme for Athletes were launched at the Indira Gandhi Stadium Kohima by Youth Resources and Sports Secretary Anthony Ngullie.

The programmes, designed for athletes of the Indira Gandhi Academy, seek to address a long-standing challenge faced by



young sportspersons — preparing for life after sports while balancing education, personal growth and future employment prospects.

Speaking at the programme, Ngullie said that the initiatives were introduced with the aim of securing the future and overall well-being of athletes. He stated that the programmes consist of

two key components — mentorship Programme and skill-based economic sustenance.

Under the mentorship programme, 11 officers of the department, including the Secretary himself, will serve as mentors to approximately 140 athletes.

Each mentor will guide 12 to 13 athletes through regular in-

teractions focused on academics, physical and mental well-being, discipline, life skills and career planning.

The programme, which will run until March next year, is expected to create a structured support system where athletes can receive individual guidance beyond the training ground.

Alongside mentorship, the department also launched a skill development initiative aimed at strengthening the economic resilience of athletes.

Targeting athletes aged 15 years and above, the Skill-Based Economic Sustenance Programme will commence on Thursday and continue until October.

## New Transport Initiative Aims to Improve Education Access for Tea Garden Children

**Guwahati, Jun 10:** The Assam government has launched a special transport and escort facility for students residing in tea garden areas to ensure uninterrupted access to education and address last-mile connectivity challenges faced by children in these communities. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced the initiative on Wednesday, describing it as a significant

step towards improving educational access for students from tea garden families. “This is a very important initiative we’ve undertaken for our children in tea garden areas. The transport and escort facility will ensure that students face no obstacles in continuing their education,” Sarma said in a post on social media platform X. Education Minister Ranoj Pegu said the scheme has been

introduced under Samagra Shiksha Assam with the objective of ensuring that no child is forced to miss school due to transportation-related difficulties.

Under the programme, safe and free transport or escort services will be provided to students from Classes I to X belonging to deprived and marginalised communities living in tea garden areas. According to official estimates, the ini-

tiative will benefit 9,714 students studying in 198 schools across 11 districts of the state. The scheme will remain in operation from June 10, 2026, to March 31, 2027, excluding July 2026. Each beneficiary student will receive support worth ₹5,400 for the academic year. Local transportation arrangements will be managed through School Management Committees (SMCs)

and School Management and Development Committees (SMDCs), ensuring smooth implementation at the grassroots level.

Officials said the initiative is expected to significantly improve school attendance and reduce dropout rates among children from tea garden communities, which have historically faced socio-economic and infrastructural challenges.

## ED Conducts Raids Across Northeast, Bengal in Cross-Border Drug Money Laundering Probe



**Aizawl, Jun 10:** The Enforcement Directorate (ED) carried out coordinated search operations at four locations across Mizoram, Tripura and West Bengal on June 9 as part of an ongoing money laundering investigation linked to an interstate and transnational narcotics trafficking network.

Officials said teams from the ED's Aizawl Sub-Zonal Office conducted simultaneous raids under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, targeting premises associated with individuals suspected of laundering proceeds generated through illegal drug trafficking activities.

The investigation originates from a Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) case involving the seizure of 49.101 kilograms of methamphetamine and 40 grams of heroin in Tripura on August 21, 2025.

According to officials, the premises searched in Tripura were located close to the Bangladesh border, while those in Mizoram were situated near the Myanmar border. Investigators believe these border regions were used as key transit routes by a well-organised international drug trafficking syndicate.

Preliminary findings indicate that methamphet-

amine was allegedly smuggled from Myanmar through the Champhai and Zokhawthar sectors of Mizoram before being transported to recipients in Tripura and other locations.

The ED said proceeds generated from the narcotics trade were allegedly routed through multiple bank accounts and shell entities in an attempt to conceal the source and ownership of the funds. During the course of the investigation, the agency has identified suspected proceeds of crime exceeding ₹142 crore.

The searches were aimed at collecting evidence related to financial transactions, identifying additional beneficiaries linked to the syndicate and tracing the movement of illicit funds generated through cross-border drug trafficking.

The operation highlights growing concerns among enforcement agencies over the increasing use of India's northeastern border regions as corridors for the smuggling of synthetic drugs originating in Myanmar and entering domestic markets through organised criminal networks.

Officials said the investigation is continuing and further action is expected based on evidence gathered during the raids.

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## The Need for Better Pedestrian Infrastructure

Pedestrians form the foundation of every transport system, yet their needs are often overlooked in urban planning. Broken footpaths, encroachments, poor lighting, and unsafe crossings make walking difficult and dangerous. This disproportionately affects children, elderly citizens, and people with disabilities, who rely heavily on safe pedestrian infrastructure. Cities that neglect pedestrians often experience greater congestion, pollution, and reduced public mobility. Investing in walkable infrastructure is not merely a transport issue—it is a public health and accessibility issue. Cities should be designed for people, not just vehicles.

## The ice is cracking



The ongoing conversations between the Union Home Ministry and representatives of the Leh Apex Body and the Kargil Democratic Alliance may prove to be the most crucial political discourse in Ladakh since it became a Union territory in 2019. An proposal that appeared unthinkable barely a year ago is now being discussed: tailored constitutional protections for Ladakh based on Article 371 of the Constitution, as well as increased legislative, budgetary, and administrative autonomy within the present Union territory arrangement. Nothing has been agreed upon thus far. Differences continue, particularly regarding statehood and Sixth-Schedule status. However, New Delhi has demonstrated a willingness to explore a tailored constitutional package for Ladakh, which no administration has considered in years. The snow may have melted in Leh, but there is a sense that the ice is fracturing. This is about much more than tweaking administrative arrangements. This conversation is really about India's relationship with one of its most loyal borders. A land that has been too frequently discussed rather than addressed. For geopolitical strategists, it represents a frontier. Environmentalists see an increasingly precarious ecology. Tourists see an otherworldly scene. For politicians, a distant Union region on India's northern border. The people that live in Ladakh are often forgotten. They may live in an unusual setting, but they have a unique history, a strong sense of community, and an increasing desire to choose their own destiny. That need is most commonly conveyed in terms of administrative structures. It's about much more than that. Overwhelmingly, young people in Buddhist-majority Leh and Shia-majority Kargil demand constitutional guarantees for their land and jobs, environmental protection, and democratic empowerment; it was this shared vision that led to the formation of the LAB and the KDA as a joint platform: Kargil and Leh have rarely, if ever, spoken together. The challenge is how India should administer one of its most distinctive frontiers in the twenty-first century. Ladakh, formerly a major commercial outpost on the Silk Road that transported products and ideas between Tibet, Central Asia, and Kashmir, is now renegotiating its relationship with the Indian state. The governance of Ladakh should focus not merely on who leads, but on how it is administered. Since becoming a Union territory on August 5, 2019, many residents feel overpowered by decisions made in Delhi, longing for empowerment rather than subordination. The essence of Article 371 is not merely administrative, but a unique approach to federalism that recognizes the diverse needs of regions like Ladakh. This federalism is crucial to fostering India's strength through diverse arrangements tailored to each region's historical and contemporary context.

Any constitutional framework for Ladakh must safeguard local control over land and employment, while also preserving its cultural and ecological uniqueness. While suggestions to create more districts may enhance local representation and service delivery, they must not merely serve as a cosmetic change to centralized decision-making, which could undermine democracy. The origin of districts is often dictated by the Centre, thus a genuine constitutional agreement must empower local governance to enhance credibility and efficacy.

The broader historical significance of Ladakh as a cultural crossroads, now faced with modern challenges like climate change, unemployment, and geopolitical strife, calls for thoughtful engagement. Ladakhi leaders have opted for diplomacy after periods of hostility, recognizing the unsustainable nature of inaction. The urgency to act is underscored by environmental changes and geopolitical pressures, emphasizing the need for dialogue. Ladakh has long shown loyalty to India, proven through its sacrifices in historical conflicts. The central question is whether the Indian government can trust Ladakh with greater autonomy in its affairs. Successful discussions should transcend simple constitutional concerns, demonstrating that India can embrace diversity while maintaining unity. Ladakh's aspirations are not for secession, but for a partnership that respects its identity and heritage—a call for a responsive Republic to acknowledge that distinction.

# A Life Dedicated to India: PM Modi's Historic Democratic Milestone

On the morning of June 10, 2026, a new milestone is written into India's democratic history. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has completed 4,399 consecutive days in office, surpassing Jawaharlal Nehru to become India's longest-serving elected prime minister. Whatever honors are showered upon him on this historic day, he is likely to recognize them as he does every milestone: by returning to work and focusing on the next national objective. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's story has never been about power. It has been about purpose: a life committed to serving India and its 140 crore inhabitants. PM Modi has been governed by a basic conviction for more than a quarter century, first as the head of a state and then as the nation's leader: public service is a job that must be fulfilled, not a privilege to be enjoyed. That idea underpins the eighteen-hour workdays, constant travel, and strict personal discipline that have become part of political mythology. The importance of this milestone is not in the number itself. Records are kept in days, however leadership is evaluated in trust. In a democracy, no endorsement is more credible than the opinion of regular folks. Headlines change. Narratives rise and fall. Political styles come and go. Only the ballot box survives. Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought the people's mandate in 2014, reaffirmed it in 2019, and gained it again in 2024. Three times, the world's largest democracy has entrusted him with leadership.

At a time when incumbents in most of the democratic world, from Lon-

don to Washington, have battled to maintain public trust, this achievement is considerably more significant than electoral arithmetic. Despite becoming power in 1947, Nehru's elected term began in 1952 and continued until 1964. Modi's whole record is based on mandates gained at the ballot box. Each of his 4,399 days in office has been confirmed by the people's sovereign will. This is more than a political accomplishment.

It is a rare and continuous demonstration of popular trust, a national verdict reissued over three elections on a leadership style, governance model, and vision for India's future that millions have regularly chosen to support. A mandate is only worth what is built upon it. In 2014, India had the world's eleventh biggest economy. Today, it is on the verge of becoming the world's third fastest-growing major economy, having grown by about 90% while the rest of the world only achieved 35. Nearly 25 crore Indians have walked out of poverty, as verified by global organizations rather than just New Delhi, and have transformed from beneficiaries of the State to contributors to its growth. The GST, once deemed unachievable for a generation, was passed and subsequently simplified. Article 370 was absorbed by history. And the ordinary face of it: new highways and airports, a rebuilt railway, a vegetable vendor in a town accepting payment on her phone via a homegrown miracle that the world replicates. He has been a reformer with a remarkable hunger, tackling every industry at once. He has gone after the profound social and economic



ills that have afflicted the country for generations, meticulously releasing the potential of each individual Indian. Over 1,500 antiquated rules, many of which were colonial remnants, have been repealed, and over 40,000 unnecessary compliances have been removed off the backs of residents and businesses. Criminal codes, which were originally authored by rulers for subjects, have given place to laws made by Indians for themselves. The goal is consistent throughout: better living for the family, easier business for the enterprise, and easier justice for the aggrieved. A state that formerly stood in the citizen's way has learnt, legislation after statute, to back off. The deepest transformation cannot be quantified or tallied since it occurred within the average Indian's psyche. A country that once apologized for itself learned to assert, openly, "I can." A startup ecosystem has evolved from a few hundred to over 2.3 lakh enterprises, creating

24 to 25 lakh employment, half of which are in areas that large cities have forgotten, with a third led by women. The space and drone industries, formerly hidden behind a single official door, are today teeming with thousands of small businesses. And on the night Chandrayaan reached the dark south of the Moon, a girl in a tiny village realized, without being informed, that the ceiling she had been promised never existed. There is one Indian this era set out, above all, to find: the one always left at the very end of the line. He reached her through the largest digital public infrastructure on earth, the trinity of Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and mobile, which put a bank account, an identity and a payment gateway in the poorest hand. With it, the old leakage, where a rupee left Delhi and reached the poor as a few paise, ended; the whole rupee now reaches the hand it was meant for. A free sack of grain through the pandemic, a health card under Ayushman Bharat, a

tap in the courtyard, a clean flame, a roof of one's own. To the woman who finally received them, these are not statistics. They are the distance between fear and dignity. That confidence is now traveling with the nation abroad.

For decades, India entered the world seeking to be understood; today, it walks in bearing suggestions. Its G20 transformed a wealthy club into a powerful voice for the Global South, permanently establishing the African Union. A country that was once the world's greatest importer of weaponry is now producing them on its own land, as self-reliance transitions from a slogan to a supply chain. When terror hit, Operation Sindoor responded with the cool precision of a state that has ceased appealing and begun making decisions. The old powers no longer question what India will tolerate. They want to know what India proposes. To comprehend the Pradhan Sevak, first learn about his journey. Born in 1950 in a

tiny Gujarat town, as a boy who worked at his father's train platform tea business before leaving school.

As a young man, he did something few leaders would dare: he journeyed across India for years, from Himalayan temples to Bengal ashrams to the southern shores, sleeping rough and learning about the country not from books but from its dust and people. Long before he managed a state, he was more familiar with its regions and towns, religions, and destitute than nearly anybody who has ever held the job. When such a guy speaks of serving 140 crore Indians, he is not grasping for a word; he is naming the country in which he has spent his whole life and whose pulse he knows better than anybody else. No government in a vigorous democracy should be exempt from examination, and this one has never attempted to be. However, based on the criteria it chooses to use, such as economic strength, the dignity of the poor, the comfort of daily living, and India's global stature, the years since 2014 will be among the most significant in the Republic's history. Whereas Nehru's tenure ended in 1964 with a country still yearning for its voice, Modi is constructing the groundwork for a Viksit Bharat, brick by brick. These 4,399 days were never in one person's ownership.

They were a trust established by the people and held in their names. And the lesson these 4,399 days teach is that in the world's greatest democracy, power is a duty to be upheld, and the only way to keep the trust that comes with it is to never cease serving the people.

# Ignored by Rahul and haunted by the pilot: Inside Ashok Gehlot's Grand Meltdown

The leader of the pack is Ashok Gehlot, 75, frantic and all guns blazing. Is it the Delhi-Jaipur-Jodhpur heat, a denial of a Rajya Sabha seat, the Nehru-Gandhi family's refusal to honour him with a sit-down, long conversation for the past three years, or the prospect of losing key AICC posts, ranging from treasurer to general secretary in-charge of organization, that has turned Gehlot into a motormouth in recent days? In Jaipur, Gehlot attempted to turn a bad chapter around by refusing to hold a conference of the Rajasthan Congress parliamentary party. That was when Sonia urged Gehlot to go to Delhi to serve as the AICC's 88th president. Gehlot, suspecting that arch-rival Sachin Pilot would be his successor, persuaded 92 party MLAs to violate the party's high command decision. On June 7, 2026, Gehlot denied that he had revolted against the Congress high command, stating that the MLAs were operating within internal party dynamics rather than against central leadership. He said that media narratives influenced public perception, resulting in a misunderstanding of the issue. Ashok Gehlot said that the scenario was misinterpreted and seemed to be an organized plot. "The situation that unfolded... I believe it was a conspiracy." "AICC observers arrived unexpectedly, a spectacle ensued, and I ended up with a bad reputation," he explained.

Gehlot's reaction makes it unclear who he accuses of 'conspiring'. Was it Rahul Gandhi, party president Mallikarjun Kharge, AICC observer Ajay Maken, or AICC general secretary in charge of the party organization, KC Venugopal? According to informed sources, Ge-



hlot is concerned by Sachin Pilot's return as Rajasthan's state party chairman, in addition to his refusal of a meeting with Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi. If Pilot succeeds Govind Singh Datasra, who has been president of the Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee (RPCC) for nearly six years, the 49-year-old Pilot is expected to become Chief Minister in November-December 2028.. Gehlot's second concern is his growing irrelevance within the party. The seasoned campaigner has not been summoned for discussions, nor is he being considered for any significant role. His followers, like Kamal Nath, attempted to spread the myth that if the former Rajasthan Chief Minister is elected to the Rajya Sabha, he will try to acquire 24, Akbar Road, a Type VIII Lutyens Delhi house, and donate it to the party for the next six years. The Congress, which has taken possession of its new headquarters at Indira Bhawan on Rouse Avenue, is under pressure to relinquish 24, Akbar Road, which served as the party's office for decades, from January 1978 until February 2025.

However, Rahul Gandhi was allegedly unconcerned by the party's decision to 'gift' the mansion. Another prominent Congress politician whose narrative comes to mind is Digvijaya Singh. Digvijaya Singh, 79, a politician among politicians, has been unhappy since his Rajya Sabha term ended lately and faces an unclear political future, as has his longtime buddy for over 50 years since the Sanjay Gandhi period. Retirement, gardening, writing memoirs, and listening to music aren't exactly 'Diggy Raja's' notion of bliss. Rather of holding a grudge against the party or claimers, Digvijaya praised Rahul, Sonia, and the party leadership for providing him two terms in the Lok Sabha and two stints in the Rajya Sabha. He went on to claim that he will do 'everything' to guarantee that Meenakshi Natrajan, the party's Rajya Sabha nominee, wins the seat. On the political front, Digvijaya, like Gehlot, is running out of alternatives in state and national politics. His son, Jaivardhan Singh, is well-placed in Madhya Pradesh politics, which limits the

patriarch's influence in his native state. Similarly, there is no place or title in the AICC secretariat for the erstwhile Raja of Raghoagarh, a minor principality that has a history of opposing the famed Scindia family. Interestingly, a short summary of September-October 2022 reveals that Digvijaya was on the verge of becoming the 88th president of the AICC when Ashok Gehlot revolted against the Congress high command, paving the door for Kharge's candidacy for the coveted position. Digvijaya is widely respected by Congress leaders. They believe Rahul Gandhi should try to persuade Digvijaya not to hang up his boots. Rahul Gandhi has been advised, on an informal basis, to use Digvijaya's services to connect with seers, gurus, and Hindu religious leaders in order to woo the majority group. Digvijaya has been an outspoken advocate of 'Sanatana dharma' and an opponent of 'Hindutva', and has frequently challenged the BJP, VHP, RSS, and others to a 'shastra Artha' [argument] on the question of defining the spirit of 'real Hinduism'. Party sources claim that if Rahul Gandhi looked at Digvijaya's credentials, he would discover several 'milestones' of sorts. In February 2002, he organized a 'Dighauri conclave,' with the goal of shattering the VHP's monopoly on the Ram Janambhoomi temple campaign. When Atal Bihari Vajpayee was Prime Minister and Dr Murli Manohar Joshi was in charge of the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development, Digvijaya, as Congress Chief Minister, advocated the inclusion of astrology as a university subject.

The move astounded many in Congress. Between October 2017

and April 2018, Digvijaya embarked on a rigorous padyatra across Narmada, walking for 192 days and covered 3,325 kilometers spanning 166 of Madhya Pradesh's 230 assembly seats. The Congress won the state assembly elections in December 2018 against the BJP. Digvijaya Singh is also one of the rare politicians who has been elected to represent all three levels of government: nagar palika, state legislature, and parliament. He has served as the town corporation's chairman, MLA, state minister, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MP, and chief minister, among other positions.

During the 2012 Uttar Pradesh elections, he was the AICC general secretary in charge of the state and collaborated closely with Rahul to the point that many saw him as the latter's mentor. Old-timers recall that when Digvijaya initially became minister in 1980, a former state chief secretary advised him. "There are three techniques to raise funds in politics: harjana (taxation), jabrana (extortion), and nazrana (gift). If you ever need it, choose the third option. Gehlot, however, is not Digvijaya. Not for him, the magnanimity of allowing the party's top command to decide his fate. According to congressional sources, Gehlot's recent outburst was not well received. A party official even said that it may cost him his Sardarpura seat in 2028. Many in the grand old party are perplexed as to why Gehlot, who remained loyal to the Congress throughout the reigns of Indira, Sanjay, Rajiv, Narasimha Rao, Sitaram Kesri, Sonia, and Rahul, would abandon the party at the age of 75. "Ashok Gehlot ko gussa kyun aata hai?" they inquire.

# Equity Mutual Funds Draw Rs 22,908 Crore in May



**Mumbai:** Equity mutual funds continued to witness strong investor interest in May, attracting net inflows of Rs 22,907.77 crore, according to data released by the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI). The mutual fund industry’s assets under management (AUM) stood at Rs 81.58 lakh crore during the month, while the total number of folios rose to 27.65 crore, indicating sustained retail participation in financial markets. Among equity categories, flexi-cap funds emerged as the top contributors with net inflows of Rs 5,175.54 crore, followed by small-cap funds at Rs 4,945.57 crore and mid-cap funds at Rs 4,385.06 crore. Together, these three categories attracted more than Rs 14,500 crore, accounting for over 63 per cent of total equity inflows and reflecting investors’ continued preference for diversified and broader-market strategies. Large and mid-cap funds received net inflows of Rs 3,278.22 crore, while

multi-cap funds attracted Rs 2,291.01 crore. Hybrid schemes also remained popular among investors, recording net inflows of Rs 10,560.24 crore during the month. Within the category, arbitrage funds led with inflows of Rs 5,697.90 crore, followed by multi-asset allocation funds at Rs 3,928.51 crore. Among passive investment products, index funds registered net inflows of Rs 943.26 crore, while fund of funds investing overseas attracted Rs 763.99 crore. In contrast, Gold Exchange-Traded Funds (ETFs) witnessed net outflows of Rs 725.04 crore. The latest figures follow a strong April performance for the mutual fund industry, when overall inflows reached Rs 3.22 lakh crore and equity-oriented schemes attracted net investments of Rs 38,440.20 crore, highlighting continued investor confidence in mutual fund products despite evolving market conditions.

# Starlink Rejects Claims of India Approval Freeze

**New Delhi:** Elon Musk-led Starlink has denied reports claiming that India has frozen approvals for its satellite internet services, stating that it remains engaged in active and productive discussions with the government and continues to receive positive feedback regarding its plans for the country. The clarification came after a Bloomberg report suggested that India had effectively put on hold approvals for Starlink’s commercial operations due to concerns over the use of its satellite terminals in the Iran conflict. Responding to the report, Lauren Dreyer, Vice President of Starlink Business Operations, said the company has complied with all regulatory and security requirements and remains committed to launching its services in India. In a post on social media platform X, Dreyer described the reports as misleading and based on unsubstantiated claims from anonymous sources. Dreyer said Starlink has worked closely with the Indian government through all necessary regulatory and compliance processes in a transparent and responsible manner. She added that the company has developed a customised deployment model tailored to India’s sovereign technology,



regulatory and security requirements. According to Dreyer, Starlink has received encouraging feedback on its capabilities and potential to support connectivity in remote and underserved regions across the country. The company remains committed to bringing its services to India and is continuing its engagement with authorities to secure final approvals. Starlink has al-

ready applied for a licence to provide satellite communication services in India and has received a Letter of Intent (LoI) from the government, while awaiting final regulatory clearance before beginning commercial operations. The development comes as SpaceX is reportedly preparing for a potential Nasdaq listing that could value the company at around \$1.75 trillion.

# Apple Unveils Next-Generation Intelligence, Siri AI and more

**Mumbai:** Apple has announced its upcoming software releases featuring the next generation of Apple Intelligence and the introduction of Siri AI, a significantly more intelligent, knowledgeable and capable version of Siri. Unveiled during the Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC) 2026, the updates will be available across iOS 27, iPadOS 27, macOS 27, watchOS 27 and tvOS 27. According to Apple, the new software brings major improvements in design, performance and usability, along with advanced AI-powered features designed to make devices more responsive and intuitive. Craig Federighi, Apple’s Senior Vice President of Software Engineering, said the company is delivering the next generation of Apple Intelligence across its platforms while introducing Siri AI and expanding child safety features. Built on a privacy-focused architecture, Siri AI can answer questions related to on-screen content, search across apps using personal context, access up-to-date information from the web and generate relevant responses. The upgraded Apple Intelligence will also power new capabilities across apps including Photos, Safari, Image Playground, Messages and Mail. Apple also introduced a range of new parental control and child safety features aimed at creating safer digital experiences for children. Parents setting up child accounts will be



able to activate age-appropriate protections, control which apps are accessible and manage future app additions through the Setup Assistant. New communication safety tools will allow parents to approve new contacts and enable automatic interventions when explicit or violent content is shared. Additional updates include a redesigned dynamic app grid on Apple Watch featuring Siri-suggested apps, a new tap gesture for opening widgets in the Smart Stack and a consolidated Find My app that combines Find Devices, Find Items and Find People. Apple said the new features are available for testing through the Apple Developer Programme starting immediately, while a public beta release will be available through the Apple Beta Software Programme next month.

# GDP growth remains strong, necessity for further borrowing: Government

**Mumbai:** The Indian economy is facing headwinds from external sectors with rising fuel and fertiliser import bills due to West Asia crisis, but GDP growth momentum remains intact with domestic consumption holding up, government sources said on Tuesday. Sources said the FY27 Budget had taken into cognisance the uncertainties in the global economy around tariffs, and the government do not immediately need to account for additional borrowing or bring in supplementary demands for grants in the upcoming monsoon session of Parliament. On the fiscal deficit front, sources said the budgeted target of 4.3 per cent of GDP is still intact, and the government is actively tapping its non-tax revenue areas like disinvestment and asset monetisation in the current fiscal. “DIPAM and DPE have a year-long pipeline and also a medium-term outlook of disinvestment and asset monetisation. I would hope the budgeted Rs 80,000 crore under this head exceeds BE and both the departments are working on it,” a source said, adding IDBI



Bank disinvestment will happen going ahead. Once the data of the April-June quarter and the impact of El Nino on the monsoon is available, the government will reassess the macroeconomic data in July. Sources said the FY26 March quarter growth momentum is continuing in the first quarter of FY27, and there is no adverse impact on remittances so far. Besides, GST numbers are good, frequency data are also show-

ing up, and private investment is picking up pace, as shown in the data released by CII, sources said. Stressing that the reform express will continue, sources said more measures to increase FDI flows into the economy are in the offing, and there is no proposal to curb capital outflow. Sources further said that in view of rising fertiliser prices globally, the fertiliser ministry has sought a 100 per cent increase in subsidy for the current fiscal. The budget has

estimated a fertiliser subsidy of Rs 1.77 lakh crore for the current fiscal. Besides, the government has provided support of Rs 1.23 lakh crore to oil marketing companies (OMCs) to hold pump prices steady for 78 days since the West Asia crisis. After that, the OMCs have started increasing pump prices in a staggered manner, but are still incurring a loss of Rs 650 crore per day for selling fuel at a lower rate than the prevailing global crude price.

# Short-term capital gain tax: Rates, calculation methods, strategies

**Mumbai:** Learn how short-term capital gain tax works, how to calculate it, and how Bajaj Finance Home Loan can support smarter, tax-efficient financial planning in Indi Many people in India earn profits from shares, property, or mutual funds each year. Yet very few stop to check how the short-term capital gain tax can quietly reduce those returns. A gap in tax knowledge can cost more than most people expect. Poor tax planning can add to your financial burden at the end of the year. However, with the right information and a structured approach to borrowing and investing, you can protect your savings more effectively. This article covers tax rates, calculation methods, practical saving ideas, and how a Bajaj Finance Home Loan can support long-term financial stability. When you sell an asset and earn a profit, that profit is called a capital gain. If you sell the asset before a certain holding period ends, the profit is treated as a short-term capital gain. The government taxes these gains differently from long-

term ones, and the difference can be significant. Short-term capital gain tax applies to assets sold within a defined period. Different asset types have different holding-period rules. Understanding these rules can help you plan sales more carefully and avoid unexpected tax costs. Selling assets without checking holding periods is a common error. Many investors are surprised to find that capital gain tax applies to a sale they considered routine. Knowing the rules in advance puts you in a stronger position. Short-term capital gain tax rates in India The rate of short-term capital gain tax depends on the type of asset and whether the sale attracted Securities Transaction Tax (STT). Some assets are taxed at a fixed rate, while others are added to your total income and taxed at your applicable slab rate. Under Section 111A of the Income Tax Act, equity shares and equity-oriented mutual funds sold within 12 months attract a fixed short-term capital gain tax rate. This applies only where STT has been paid. For other assets such as property or gold,



the gains are added to your income and taxed at your regular rate. Consider this example: if you sell a property within two years of purchase and earn a profit, that profit is added to your annual income. This can push you into a higher tax slab and increase your total tax outgo. Planning the timing of a sale can reduce this risk. Planned borrowing decisions matter here, too. If you borrow to buy a property rather than sell existing investments early, you may avoid triggering capital gain tax altogether. Calculating short-term capital gain tax does not have to be complicated. The basic formula subtracts your purchase cost and any related expenses from your sale value. The result is

your taxable gain. Many first-time investors miss eligible deductions simply because they have not kept proper records. Brokerage fees, registration costs, and transfer charges can all reduce your taxable gain. Keeping organised financial records throughout the year makes this process much simpler. In this example, capital gain tax applies to Rs. 4.5 lakh at the applicable rate. If this is a listed equity sale, the rate is 20%. For property, the gain is added to total income and taxed accordingly. Keeping bills, purchase agreements, and brokerage statements helps you claim all valid deductions. A clear record also supports you in case of any tax assessment.

# Indian companies recorded \$11 billion in deal activity

**Mumbai:** Deal activity in India cooled in May 2026 from an exceptionally strong April, with 196 transactions worth \$11 billion, a report said on Monday. Excluding public market activity, the month witnessed 190 M&A and PE deals worth \$10.2 billion, marking an ease of 10 per cent in volumes and a 53 per cent ease in values compared to the previous month. Large-ticket deals continued to shape monthly totals despite a pullback in overall volumes and values. The month’s volume was supported by two billion-dollar transactions, one each in M&A and private equity, which together contributed \$4.6 billion and accounted for nearly 42 per cent of total deal value. “May deal activity was similar to April volume and values, indicating sustained momentum and resilience in the deal market in the backdrop of continued global uncertainty,” said Shanthi Vijetha, Partner, Deals Lifecycle, Grant Thornton Bharat. Overall, the deal



market continues to show consistency in participation as capital remains focused on strategic relevance and high value opportunities, she added. M&A activity remained steady during the month, with 76 deals worth \$6.3 billion. While domestic transactions continued to anchor deal volumes, cross-border activity drove value creation. Domestic M&A activity accounted for 61 per cent of overall deal volumes, reflecting continued strategic consolidation across sectors. Private equity activity recorded 114 deals worth \$3.9

billion, with aggregate deal values reaching their highest monthly level of the year. Public market activity remained subdued in May 2026, with two IPOs raising USD 214 million, reflecting a cautious primary market environment. QIP activity remained steady, with four issuances collectively raising \$568 million, indicating continued preference among listed companies for institutional fundraising amid evolving market conditions. Together, IPOs and QIPs contributed \$782 million to the overall transaction value

during the month. Retail & Consumer remained the most active PE sector by volume, recording 30 deals worth \$444 million, reflecting sustained investor interest in consumer-facing businesses and growth-stage brands. Banking & Financial Services continued to attract strong investor interest, ranking among the top sectors by both volume and value. Manufacturing maintained strong strategic momentum, emerging as the joint leader in M&A volumes with 14 deals alongside the pharma sector.

A coalition of nations talks about “every possible measure” to put pressure on Iran to reopen the Hormuz Strait



**Iran :** According to the UK foreign secretary, almost 40 nations convened to explore “every possible diplomatic, economic, and coordinated measure” to put pressure on Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.Yvette Cooper, who chaired a virtual conference on Thursday, stated that coordinated action was required because Iran’s “reckless strikes” on international trade and attempts to “hijack the global economy” were affecting countries “who played no part in this conflict.” ”That’s affecting petrol prices and mortgage rates here in the UK, but also jet fuel globally, fertilizer to Africa, and gas to Asia,” she stated. Because of the impact on nations all around the world, we are adamant that every diplomatic, economic, and coordinated effort be made to restore the strait.There were talks at the summit, according to Whitehall sources, about persuading additional global south nations to exert economic pressure on Iran to ensure that it does not profit from blocking the strait. They said it was remarkable how many nations that have previously refrained from imposing sanctions have denounced Iran’s behavior. One option being examined by the UN is whether a humanitarian shipping corridor can be opened to make sure fertiliser gets through to prevent food shortages in poorer countries.As well as this week’s meeting, there will be a further military discussion next week on whether it may be possible to clear sea mines and rescue trapped ships in the strait of Hormuz. The meeting will be convened by

Britain’s Permanent Joint Headquarters, where all its overseas military operations are planned, based in Northwood, north-west London, but some international leaders are expected to join virtually.The discussions took place without the US, which began the war on Iran. At the summit, the UK, France, Germany, Australia and some Gulf nations were exploring what could be done to restore access to the maritime route.The US president, Donald Trump, has suggested countries that rely on the strait should “build up some delayed courage” and “just grab it”.However, Keir Starmer has said unblocking the lane, which carries 10-25% of the world’s oil and gas supplies, would “not be easy”.Trump mocked the prime minister about Britain’s actions over the strait at an Easter lunch on Wednesday, saying: “I said ‘you have two, old broken-down aircraft carriers, do you think you could send them over?’” Impersonating Starmer, Trump added: “Ohhh I’ll have to ask my team. I said ‘you’re the prime minister, you don’t have to’.Highlighting the importance of the strait, Cooper pointed to World Bank predictions that a continued blockage could push 9 million people worldwide into food insecurity “alongside the unsustainable increases that we have seen in oil prices and food prices hitting households and businesses in every corner of the world”.Australia, which has faced soaring petrol prices and mounting concerns about shortages, was represented on the call by the foreign minister, Penny Wong. She said the

government in Canberra wanted to see coordinated diplomatic efforts to reopen the strait.“Iran’s de facto closure of the strait, coupled with its attacks on commercial vessels, civilian infrastructure, including oil and gas facilities, is causing unprecedented energy supply shocks and impacting oil and fuel prices. “Iran is deliberately inflicting economic pain on communities worldwide, including the Indo-Pacific, with the costs borne disproportionately by the most vulnerable.”Kemi Badenoch, the Conservative leader, said on Thursday that Trump must not abandon “a mess that he’s made” in the Middle East by leaving other countries to reopen the strait.Speaking during a visit to north-east England, she said: “If I was speaking to him, I’d be saying: ‘If you break it, you own it.’ That’s what Colin Powell, a former secretary of state in the US, had said. ‘If you break it, you own it.’“He started this war. We said that if he needed support against Iran ... use our airbases. That’s one of the things that Britain has done. He should now not be abandoning a mess that he’s made, if he thinks that it is a mess.”Nigel Farage, the Reform UK leader, told a press conference he was not “angry” with his ally, Trump, for entering the war, but said it was “difficult listening to the press conferences sometimes” to work out what the president’s motivation was.The Liberal Democrat leader, Ed Davey, meanwhile, urged Starmer to “step up” plans to reopen the oil and gas shipping route throttled by Iran, adding: “The prime minister needs to show an alternative.”

An Israeli strike that murdered parents in Lebanon prompts an artist to file a war crime lawsuit in Paris

**France:** A Lebanese-French artist has filed a lawsuit in a Paris court regarding an Israeli bombing of his family’s home in Lebanon that resulted in the deaths of his parents and a domestic servant. The artist claims the strike may be considered a war crime. The lawsuit, which was submitted on Tuesday to the French war crimes section, is an uncommon example of someone filing a war crimes complaint for an Israeli bombing. Additionally, this is the first occasion that a French court has heard a case involving Israel’s bombardment of Lebanon.No one in Israel has been held legally responsible for the multiple war crimes it has been accused of, including targeting civilians, public property, and medical personnel, as well as forcing people to flee their homes in Lebanon and Gaza. Additionally, it has been charged with genocide in Gaza.

“Our demand is that an investigation be opened so that we know for a fact what happened, to name this attack as a war crime against civilians, and hopefully being able to name the people responsible for this,” stated Ali Cherri, the artist who filed the lawsuit.A few hours before Hezbollah and Israel reached a truce on November 26, 2024, Israel struck Cherri’s family’s downtown Beirut home, which his grandparents had constructed decades earlier. Approximately 4,000 people were murdered in Lebanon by Israeli strikes during the 13-month conflict. Three storeys of the apartment building were damaged by the bombing, and there was no evacuation warning prior to the attack. Along with four other



people, Cherri’s parents, Mahmoud Naib Cherri, 86, and Nadira Hayek, 76, as well as their employee Birki Negesa, were slain.Cherri remarked, “We thought they were out of danger.” “We never imagined that we lived in a place where such a thing could occur.”My parents took every precaution to keep us safe. Despite not completing their education, they made every effort to improve our quality of life. Having them as parents makes me proud. In February, Amnesty International conducted an investigation into the strike.

It concluded there had been no evidence of a military target at the time of the attack and that the strike should be investigated as a war crime.Forensic Architecture, a UK-based investigative rights group that helped prepare the legal complaint, created a 3D model of the struck building and identified the munition used in the strike as a GBU-39. It is a 250lb (115kg) guided bomb produced by the US and com-

monly used by Israel in attacks on Gaza and Lebanon.The group said the analysis of the strike and the use of a guided munition highlighted the targeted nature of the attack and demonstrated the Israeli army’s responsibility for it. Amnesty International said the civil complaint in France was a “rare opportunity” to hold Israel to account.Heba Morayef, Amnesty International’s regional director for the Middle East and north Africa, said: “Amidst a longstanding pattern of serious violations of international humanitarian law by Israeli forces in Lebanon, and as Israel once again steps up its attacks, if war crimes unit prosecutors open an investigation into this complaint, this would offer a rare opportunity to examine Israel’s actions in a European court given the general impunity it usually enjoys.”To Cherri, the case was also of importance because of renewed fighting between Israel and Lebanon, where he sees similar cases to the bombing of

his parents’ home being repeated.On 2 March, Hezbollah launched rockets at Israel. Israel then launched an aerial campaign and ground invasion of Lebanon, which has killed 1,318 people so far.Mohammed Shehab, a photographer who worked with Forensic Architecture to film and model the Cherri family’s apartment building, was killed in an Israeli strike on his home on 11 March. The strike also killed his three-month-old daughter and critically injured his wife, in what Forensic Architecture called “circumstances similar” to the strike on the Cherri home.Cherri said that while he was not optimistic that anyone in Israel would be held criminally liable for the strike on his family’s building, he still felt that filing the case was important.“Either you accept that you’re a victim and accept your fate, like unfortunately a lot of Lebanese have to do. Or you take it as a responsibility for all the other people who can’t go through this legal process,” he said.

Trump dismisses Pam Bondi, a supporter and ally, as attorney general



**Australia :** Donald Trump has fired Pam Bondi, the US attorney general, dismissing a loyalist who reshaped the justice department but still failed to please a president fixated on prosecuting political enemies and frustrated with the politically explosive release of the Jeffrey Epstein files.Trump wrote in a post on Truth Social: “Pam Bondi is a Great American Patriot and a loyal friend, who faithfully served as my Attorney General over the past year. Pam did a tremendous job overseeing a massive crackdown in Crime across our Country, with Murders plummeting to their lowest level since 1900. We love Pam, and she will be transitioning to a much needed and important new job in the private sector, to be announced at a date in the near future.” The president added that Todd Blanche, the deputy attorney general, would serve as acting attorney general. Lee Zeldin, a former New York congressman who now leads the Environmental Protection Agency, is said to be a top contender to replace Bondi. Bondi said she was “thrilled” about “moving to an important private sector role” in a statement.“Leading President Trump’s historic and highly successful efforts to make America safer and more secure has been the honor of a lifetime, and easily the most consequential first year of the Department of

Justice in American history,” she posted on social media.Bondi stated that she “will continue fighting for President Trump and this Administration” in her new position. During her 14 months as attorney general, Bondi presided over a major purging of career justice department staff, shifted focus away from criminal prosecutions toward immigration cases, and spearheaded the defense of Trump’s towering stack of executive orders as they faced legal challenges. But she will be perhaps best remembered for complying with Trump’s public demand last year that federal prosecutors bring criminal charges against his personal enemies. Within three weeks, federal prosecutors had indicted James Comey, a former FBI director, and Letitia James, the New York attorney general.Federal prosecutors during Bondi’s tenure also indicted John Bolton, Trump’s former national security adviser, and tried unsuccessfully to convince a grand jury to bring criminal charges against six members of Congress after Trump publicly accused them of “seditious behavior”. The Department of Justice has continued to investigate other Trump foes.Bondi is also known for her contradictory statements about the Epstein files, which helped drive the push for their release in the name of transparency.Trump had

grown increasingly impatient in recent months with her handling of the Epstein documents, which have become a continuing liability to the White House. Democrats say Bondi cannot escape a congressional subpoena scheduled for later this month over her handling of the files, and will be expected to be back in front of lawmakers.“Pam Bondi and Donald Trump may think her firing gets her out of testifying to the oversight committee,” Robert Garcia, the ranking member of the House oversight committee, said in a statement after her firing. “They are wrong – and we look forward to hearing from her under oath.” Speaking to NBC, a House oversight committee spokesperson said: “Since Pam Bondi is no longer attorney general, Chairman Comer will speak with Republican members and the Department of Justice about the status of the deposition subpoena and confer on next steps.”The Senate minority leader, Chuck Schumer, responded to Bondi’s firing by saying “good riddance” and added in his statement that “the rot at the Department of Justice begins and ends with Donald Trump”.Blanche, now acting head of the justice department, defended Bondi in a statement on social media. “Pam Bondi led this Department with strength and conviction and I’m grateful for her leadership and friendship,” he said.“We will continue backing the blue, enforcing the law, and doing everything in our power to keep America safe.”Bondi is the second cabinet secretary, and woman, to be ousted in recent weeks. The president fired homeland security head Kristi Noem on 5 March after a disastrous hearing in the Senate, in which she refused to recant her past statements justifying the killings of Alex Pretti and Renee Good in Minneapolis for what Noem called their part in “domestic terrorism”.In that hearing, she faced harsh questioning about a \$220m ad campaign that she insisted Trump authorized.Bondi and Noem had articles of impeachment filed against them for “high crimes and misdemeanors” by Democratic members of Congress.

Pete Hegseth permits troops to carry their own guns on military bases



**Washington:** Pete Hegseth, the secretary of defense, signed a memo on Thursday allowing military personnel to request authorization to carry their personal firearms on military installations, including bases, naval yards, and recruitment centers. Hegseth claims the new policy will enable soldiers and other military personnel to defend themselves in the event of an attack.Although the memo’s complete wording has not yet been made public, it seems to relax the present policy, which permits employees to obtain authorization to carry their guns on base on a case-by-case basis and mandates that they be registered with the base’s authorities and kept in a secure device. Hegseth claimed in a social media video that existing regulations had effectively made US military sites “gun-free” zones, putting residents and employees at

risk. Fundamentalists of the second amendment and ardent supporters of gun rights have long held this opinion and have filed challenges against these laws in states all around the nation. The uniformed service members of the war department receive the most rigorous training possible. He declared, “These war fighters, entrusted with the security of our country, are no less entitled to exercise their God-given right to keep and bear arms than any other American.” The authorization to carry will comply with state gun regulations, he continued. For instance, local regulations like permission requirements and restrictions on the kinds of weapons and ammunition rounds that are permitted would still need to be followed. Additionally, a higher-up must provide a thorough explanation if they reject a service member’s

request to carry.He went on, “The assumption is that servicemembers will be able to have their second amendment right on post.”Hegseth gave examples of the kinds of risks faced by military personnel, citing shootings at Pensacola Naval Base in December 2019, Fort Stewart in Georgia in August 2025, and Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico on March 17. “In these instances minutes are a lifetime and our servicemembers have the courage and training to make those precious short minutes count,” Hegseth said. This isn’t the first time the federal government has taken up the issue. In November 2016, the Pentagon under Barack Obama issued a directive that created a pathway for people to get similar permissions to the ones Hegseth is enshrining. This directive followed the shooting deaths of four people at

a military recruitment center and a Naval Marine Reserve center in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 2015.For more than 20 years preceding that shooting, servicemembers and civilians were not allowed to carry their personal firearms while on their bases and camps unless they were security duty or participating in a law enforcement investigation. Hegseth’s directive goes further by making approval to carry easier, and requiring a thorough explanation for any carry request denials.Mayra Guillen, sister of Vanessa Guillen, a 20-year-old army specialist who was killed by two of her fellow service members in 2020, reposted Hegseth’s statement and showed support for the move, writing: “If my sister would’ve carried, she’d be here today. That monster attacked her inside the arms room, she didn’t stand a chance.”

# SPF 30 versus SPF 50: Is a higher SPF truly significant for safeguarding your skin against harmful UV rays

When selecting sunscreen, one of the most important factors to consider is the Sun Protection Factor (SPF). The two most frequently encountered options on product labels are SPF 30 and SPF 50. Whether this perception stems from social media trends or our own reasoning, it is widely believed that a higher SPF offers superior sun protection. While this notion holds true in many respects, comprehending the distinctions between SPF levels can assist you in choosing the most suitable sunscreen for your skin type and lifestyle. What does SPF mean?

As most of us know, SPF stands for Sun Protection Factor. It measures how well a sunscreen protects your skin from the UVB and UVA rays, which are the main cause of sunburn, skin cancer and premature skin ageing. So, the higher the SPF number, the more UVB and UVA protection the sunscreen provides. However, the difference is not as large as many people think.

SPF 30 blocks about 97% of UVB rays. SPF 50 blocks about 98% of UVB rays. While SPF 50 provides more protection, it only blocks about 1% more UVB rays than SPF 30. According to Dermatologist Dr Rinky Kapoor, Co-Founder and Director, The Esthetic Clinics, “In real-world conditions, most people apply significantly less sunscreen than the amount used during laboratory testing. As a result, they receive far less protection than what is stated on the label. This is one reason dermatologists often recommend SPF 50 for daily use, particularly in countries like India,

where UV exposure remains high throughout the year. A slightly higher SPF can provide a useful margin of protection when sunscreen is not applied perfectly”. She further states that consumers should not choose a sunscreen based on SPF alone. Broad-spectrum protection against both UVA and UVB rays is equally important, as UVA rays contribute significantly to pigmentation, premature ageing, and long-term skin damage. Water resistance, texture, skin compatibility, and regular reapplication are also key factors.

“The best sunscreen is ultimately the one that you are comfortable using consistently every day. Rather than chasing the highest SPF available, focus on deciding on a broad-spectrum sunscreen that suits your skin type and reapply it every two to three hours when outdoors. Consistency will always matter more than the SPF number alone”, she says.

**Benefits of SPF 30**  
SPF 30 is one of the most recommended sunscreen levels by dermatologists. It provides strong protection for everyday activities and is suitable for most people.1. Excellent daily protection: SPF 30 blocks about 97% of harmful UVB rays, making it effective for daily use. Whether you are walking, driving, or spending short periods outdoors, SPF 30 can help protect your skin.2. Lightweight feel: Many SPF 30 products feel lighter on the skin compared to higher-SPF formulas. This makes them comfortable for everyday wear, especially under makeup.3. Widely available: SPF 30



sunscreens are easy to find in stores and online. They come in various forms, including lotions, sprays, gels, and sticks.4. Suitable for most skin types: People with normal, oily, combination, or sensitive skin can often find SPF 30 products that work well without irritating.5. Cost-effective: SPF 30 sunscreens are usually more affordable than higher-SPF options, making them a practical choice for daily use. **Benefits of SPF 50**

SPF 50 offers a higher level of protection and can be especially useful in

certain situations.

1. More UVB protection: Although the difference seems small, SPF 50 blocks slightly more UVB rays than SPF 30. This extra protection can be beneficial during long periods of sun exposure.2. Better for fair skin: People with very fair or sensitive skin typically burn more easily. SPF 50 can provide an added layer of defence against sunburn.3. Helpful during outdoor activities: If you spend hours outdoors, such as hiking, swimming, playing sports, or going

to the beach, SPF 50 can offer extra protection against intense sunlight.4. Useful in high-UV areas: Places with strong sunlight, such as tropical destinations, high-altitude locations, or areas near the equator, may require higher SPF protection.5. Added safety margin: Many people do not apply enough sunscreen. Since most users apply less than the recommended amount, SPF 50 can provide a helpful safety cushion.

Does higher SPF last longer?  
SPF 50 undoubtedly provides more

sun protection than an SPF 30 sunscreen. However, a common myth is that SPF 50 lasts longer than SPF 30, which is not practically true. No matter which SPF you use, sunscreen should generally be reapplied every two hours when outdoors. You should also reapply after swimming, sweating, or towel drying. Proper application is just as important as the SPF number. When should you choose SPF 30?

SPF 30 may be a better choice if: You spend limited time outdoors

Whether you choose SPF 30 or SPF 50, correct application is the key to effective sun protection. Apply sunscreen generously to all exposed skin about 15 minutes before going outside. Reapply regularly, and please remember to include areas such as the ears, neck, hands, and feet.

You should also combine sunscreen with other protective measures, such as wearing hats, sunglasses, and protective clothing. The debate between SPF 30 and SPF 50 is not about choosing a good sunscreen versus a bad one. Both offer strong protection against harmful UV rays. SPF 30 blocks about 97% of UVB rays and is ideal for everyday use, while SPF 50 blocks about 98% and provides extra protection for people who spend more time in the sun or have sensitive skin. In the end, the best sunscreen is the one you use consistently and apply correctly. Whether you select SPF 30 or SPF 50, daily sun protection is one of the best ways to keep your skin healthy and reduce the risk of sun damage.

## Mary Jane Sneakers are currently the most popular shoe trend in fashion



The Mary Jane shoe boasts a surprisingly extensive history. Initially conceived as a straightforward and functional shoe design, it has evolved into one of the most recognizable silhouettes in fashion. The original Mary Jane gained popularity in the early 1900s, drawing inspiration from children’s footwear styles that featured a rounded toe and a single strap across the top of the foot. The name originates from a comic strip character named Mary Jane in Buster Brown, a well-known comic series from the early 20th century, where the character was frequently depicted wearing the iconic strapped shoes.

For decades, Mary Janes were associated with school uniforms, children’s shoes, and classic dressing. But fashion has a habit of bringing back the past—and the Mary Jane slowly evolved from a nostalgic style into a fashion statement. The first major comeback happened when designers began reimagining the silhouette for wom-

en’s wardrobes. The shoe moved beyond its school-girl image and became a symbol of playful, feminine style. From platform versions to patent leather styles, Mary Janes became a favourite among those who loved vintage-inspired dressing. Now, the trend has entered its newest chapter: Mary Jane sneakers. The rise of balletcore, nostalgic fashion, and the demand for comfortable everyday footwear has pushed this hybrid style into the spotlight. Instead of choosing between a pretty flat and a practical sneaker, fashion lovers are embracing shoes that combine both.

The current sneaker landscape is also moving away from oversized, chunky designs towards slimmer, more refined silhouettes. The popularity of retro sneakers like the Adidas Samba OG and Puma’s sleek lifestyle shoes has helped create space for this softer sneaker movement. Brands like Puma have tapped into the trend by blending sporty heritage with ballet-inspired details,

while Adidas Sambas have shown how a low-profile, vintage sneaker can become an everyday fashion essential. What makes Mary Jane sneakers stand out is their versatility. They bring the femininity of ballet flats, the nostalgia of vintage shoes, and the comfort of sneakers into one wearable style.

How to style Mary Jane Sneakers?  
These are versatile pairs. You can team them with straight-leg jeans and relaxed denim, mini skirts and dresses, wide-leg trousers, office-friendly co-ords and everyday casual outfits. The rise of Mary Jane sneakers is part of a larger shift in footwear, where fashion is moving towards styles that feel nostalgic, versatile, and wearable.

1. ADIDAS Originals Men Samba Og Leather Sneakers: The Adidas Samba OG keeps that classic football-inspired design alive with a low-profile shape, leather upper, and signature three-stripe detailing. Its minimal silhouette makes it easy to style

with relaxed denims, trousers, skirts, and even dresses. It represents the current sneaker mood perfectly: less bulky, more refined, and focused on timeless design. **Style tip:** Pair the Adidas Samba OG with relaxed-fit jeans, a fitted tee, and a leather jacket for that effortless street-style look. For a softer contrast, wear it with a midi skirt or a flowy dress; the slim silhouette keeps the outfit balanced and modern.

2. Skechers Women’s Seager Sneaker: Skechers is known for comfort, and the Seager brings that reputation into the Mary Jane-inspired category. The strap detail gives the sneaker a softer, more elegant appearance than traditional lace-up styles, while the brand’s signature cushioning keeps things comfortable throughout the day. It’s ideal for women who prioritise comfort but still want something that feels stylish and polished.

**Style tip:** Wear with midi dresses, linen co-ords, or relaxed tailoring for a chic everyday outfit.  
3. Puma Speedcat Ballet SD Sneakers: The ballet sneaker trend has exploded this year, and Puma’s Speedcat Ballet is one of the most talked-about versions. Inspired by the iconic Speedcat silhouette, it combines the sleek profile of a ballet flat with the sporty DNA of a sneaker. The result feels fashion-forward, playful, and very current.

This is the pair fashion insiders are styling with everything from baggy jeans to slip skirts. **Style tip:** Pair with barrel jeans and a fitted tank for an effortlessly cool off-duty look.4. Tigeridea Fashion Sneakers for Women Mary Jane Shoes Comfortable Flat Two Strap Flat Shoes: For those who love the Mary Jane trend but want something simple and everyday-friendly, this pair

captures the essence of the trend beautifully. The double-strap detail gives it that classic Mary Jane charm, while the sneaker-inspired sole makes it feel more relaxed and wearable than traditional flats. The flat construction makes it a practical choice for long days when you want your shoes to look stylish without compromising on comfort. The design sits perfectly between ballet flats and casual sneakers, making it easy to style across different aesthetics. **Style tip:** Wear it with straight-leg jeans and a tucked-in shirt for a casual chic look, or pair it with a flowy dress for a softer balletcore-inspired outfit.

5. KazarMax Premium Aurora Ballerina Mary Jane: Designed with comfort in mind, this pair features arch-support cushioning, an adjustable strap, and a wide toe box that makes all-day wear significantly easier. While many ballet-inspired shoes prioritise aesthetics over practicality, this one manages to balance both. The sporty sole gives it a modern edge while maintaining the elegance associated with traditional Mary Janes. **Style tip:** Pair with cotton dresses, pleated skirts, or monochrome co-ords for a refined daytime look.

6. Puma Speedcat Ballet Venus Sneakers: If you’re looking for a shoe that perfectly captures the balletcore trend, this might be it. The slim silhouette feels delicate and feminine, while the sneaker construction ensures far more comfort than a traditional ballet flat. It’s the kind of shoe that instantly makes an outfit feel fashion-conscious without looking like you’re trying too hard. Expect to see versions of this silhouette everywhere this year.

**Style tip:** Wear with mini dresses, oversized shirts, or relaxed denims to balance the feminine shape.

## The spirals memories of the Kachua Chaap mosquito coil



For many years, international brands have sought inspiration from India. Whether it is Prada introducing Kolhapuri chappals, the controversy surrounding Scandinavian scarves, or appropriating embroideries perfected by Indian artisans over centuries, these brands have consistently included India in their creative vision. However, the criticism arises when they, after appropriating these ideas, market them at inflated prices, despite the fact that similar items can be purchased for half the cost or even less.

The latest brand to give everyday Indians items a luxury makeover is the French luxury fragrance house Diptyque. The brand recently released a home incense spiral as part of its limited summer collection, and it has Indians in stitches. Is Diptyque selling mosquito coils?

We have all grown up using mosquito coils at night,

and they cost less than ₹50. But the version Diptyque is currently selling on its website is called “scented spirals”. The incense comes in citronnelle (Lemongrass) scent, and is worth USD 68 (approximately 6,479). If you buy with their accompanying incense holder, it will cost you USD 183 (approximately ₹17,438). According to the brand, the scented spirals release notes of lemongrass that evoke “the peaceful air of a water garden” and create an outdoor oasis. As for what you get for spending ₹6.4k? The brand says the package comes with a set of 6 scented spirals (3 pairs of 12g each). Each set includes an exclusive oval incense holder with a gold finish and the brand embossing. How did the internet react?

For many Indians, however, the product was quite similar to the Kachua Chaap mosquito coil. Desi social media users were quick to crack jokes on the

similarity, and even pointed out the absurdity of copying something so cheap and then selling it for such a high price. One Instagram user commented, “I am DECEASED seeing kachua chaap musquito coil sold as scented spirals.” Someone else pointed out, “Kachua chaap to scented spirals is a wild journey.”

Meanwhile, Diet Sabya, who had shared the bizarre product with their followers, asking, “Will y’all buy???? Y/N?,” joked, “Haters will say this is AI.”

An Instagram user joked about the situation, saying, “I am going to sell Roti Tawa to Germans and Beedis to the French. I need to pay my bills somehow.” They added, “I love Diptyque, but stay in the lane, babe. Even our mosquitoes won’t accept it.” Another user expressed their frustration and wrote, “You are joking! Not the bespoke mosquito coil.” Someone else wrote, “Raju Dukanwalla is SHOOKETH.”

Sharvari recalls first meeting with Imtiaz Ali

**Mumbai :** Sharvari is currently gearing up for the release of Main Vaapas Aaunga with Vedang Raina and Diljit Dosanjh. The film is releasing on June 12. Ahead of its release, the actress recently shared a candid memory from her first meeting with filmmaker Imtiaz Ali. She admitted that nervousness got the better of her, leading her to talk far more than she usually would today.

Main Vaapas Aaunga’s Sharvari on first meeting with Imtiaz Ali. In an exclusive conversation with Zoom, Sharvari recalled her first meeting with director Imtiaz Ali. She was quoted saying, “I remember meeting him for the first time and speaking way too much. Now I am comfortable sitting in silence, but then I tried to fill every silence my way and wanted to say anything and everything. I just couldn’t sit in a silent room because you never know what he is thinking, and I didn’t want



to give him the opportunity too much.” Imtiaz also shared how his calm energy co-existed with Sharvari’s vivaciousness. “There were various people in the room while I was working. Everybody’s energy mixes. It finds purpose also,” he shared before the actress added, “Between Imtiaz sir and Vedang, I think they appreciated the fact that I was chatty.”

Main Vaapas Aaunga Trailer: In Imtiaz Ali’s world, love is rarely just a feeling. It lives in fleeting moments, unfinished conversations, and memories that stay with people for years. In his up-

coming theatrical release, Main Vaapas Aaunga, the filmmaker explores one such story. Featuring Diljit Dosanjh, Naseeruddin Shah, Vedang Raina and Sharvari, the film promises an emotional and layered cinematic experience. Following the response to its teaser and music, the makers have now released the trailer, offering a glimpse into a world shaped by love, longing and belonging. The film also reunites the acclaimed trio of A. R. Rahman, Irshad Kamil and Imtiaz Ali, whose collaborations have produced several memorable soundtracks

over the years. Sharvari will be next seen in Alpha with Alia Bhatt. Today the makers released teaser. The teaser opens on Alia Bhatt’s character’s 18th birthday as she sits with her “baba”, played by Bobby Deol, at a restaurant. What seems to be a warm celebration takes a dramatic turn when he asks her to perform a high-stake mission on the 34th floor of the hotel. Later, the teaser sheds light on Alpha, a highly classified program created to train India’s next generation of elite soldiers. Designed to push recruits to their limits, the program subjects them to grueling physical and mental challenges in preparation for dangerous missions. The teaser then shifts into full action mode in the world of espionage, showing Alia Bhatt in a series of high-octane fight sequences. She is seen taking on multiple opponents at once, engaging in hand-to-hand combat and navigating perilous situations with ease.

Zahara Jolie-Pitt moves to drop father’s last name

**Agency :** Hollywood stars Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt’s daughter Zahara has officially filed to remove “Pitt” from her surname.

In documents obtained by people.com, the 21-year-old filed a petition for a change of name in the Superior Court of California. Zahara’s filing dates back to April 28 and came just days after her brother, 24-year-old Maddox Jolie, also filed to legally remove his father’s last name following their parents’ split in 2016 after two years of marriage and over 10 years as a couple. Their divorce was finalized in December 2024.

Jolie and Pitt have six children together, Maddox, Pax, Zahara, Shiloh, and twins Knox and Vivienne. Zahara is now the former couple’s third child to file to legally drop “Pitt” from their last name after Maddox and Shiloh. “It’s sad to see someone repeatedly publicize their successful alienation of their children from the other parent,” says a source close to Pitt. Zahara hinted at a possible name change on more than one occasion, most recently when



she walked the stage during her college graduation in Atlanta on May 17.

Her name was listed in the commencement program as “Zahara Marley Jolie-Pitt,” however, her name was read as “Zahara Marley Jolie” when she went up to get her diploma for her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. In an August 2024 video, Zahara introduced herself while becoming a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. “My name is Zahara Marley Jolie. And landed all the way

from the Golden State in the city full of angels: Los Angeles, California,” she said in the clip. Months earlier, the May 2024 Playbill for The Outsiders, the Broadway musical Vivienne helped her mom produce, credited Vivienne as Vivienne Jolie, instead of Vivienne Jolie-Pitt. It was not made clear at the time if Vivienne had legally changed her name. Additionally, Maddox recently dropped Pitt from his last name in the credits of his mother’s latest movie, Couture.

Anshula Kapoor shares glimpse of Sonam’s birthday brunch



sonamkapoor.”

The pictures captured a warm family celebration attended by close friends and loved ones. One picture featured Sonam Kapoor posing alongside Anshula Kapoor, Arjun Kapoor and friends. Another picture showcased a lavish dessert spread with around five birthday cakes arranged. Sonam as the birthday girl looked radiant in a striking red-and-white printed kaftan-style ensemble. The celebration also included candid family moments. One picture showed Sonam standing beside husband Anand Ahuja as he held their son Vayu just while cutting the cake. Other pictures displayed an elaborate platter filled with fruits, cheeses, chocolates and dips, highlighting the lavish brunch menu prepared for the occasion.

**Mumbai :** Bollywood actress Sonam Kapoor turned a year older on June 9 and her birthday celebration seemed to be a delightful mix of family bonding, delicious food and an impressive spread of cakes.

Giving fans a glimpse into the intimate yet fun birthday brunch, Sonam’s cousin and social media influencer Anshula Kapoor shared a series of cheerful pictures from the gathering. Sharing the pictures, Anshula captioned the post: “The amount of cake at this brunch suggests we were planning for a small village. No regrets though Happy birthday Sonam didi @

Salman Khan attends Kumud Rane’s funeral; Deepika’s baby bump photos trend



**Mumbai :** Salman Khan is one of those personalities who reaches out first to his close ones during times of difficulty. The Bollywood superstar today attended the funeral of his close family friend, Kumud Rane, along with his mother, Salma, and brother, Sohail Khan. The actor looked visibly moved by the loss, and videos and pictures that are circulating show Khan in tears.

Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh were photographed at their new residence in Mumbai posh Bandra area on Monday, with pictures from the visit going viral across social media. Shared by fan pages, the photos showed the couple checking on the progress of work at the

property and spending time on the balcony as construction and interior work continued. Ranveer Singh has found himself at the center of attention following the controversy surrounding his alleged exit from Farhan Akhtar’s Don 3. The discussion gained further momentum after the Federation of

Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) weighed in on the matter. Amid the ongoing buzz, comedian Tanmay Bhat appeared to make a playful yet pointed remark about the situation. Ram Charan and Janhvi Kapoor’s sports drama, Peddi, hit the theatres recently, and since then, the

film has been facing immense backlash over the sexualisation of Janhvi’s character. However, despite the criticism and mixed reactions, the Buchi Babu Sana directorial has been performing well at the box office. Amid the ongoing controversy, Allu Arjun has now shared his thoughts on his ‘brother’ Ram Charan’s film. For millions of television viewers, the arrival of a new season of Bigg Boss isn’t just about the contestants entering the house, it’s about that familiar voice, those weekend takedowns, and the unmistakable presence of Salman Khan. Now, if recent reports are anything to go by, fans may not have to imagine that scenario anytime soon.

Janhvi Kapoor in talks with Tumbbad director Rahi Anil Barve for creature horror comeback

**Mumbai :** Janhvi Kapoor may soon step into an entirely new genre, as she is reportedly in talks for a creature horror film. According to a Pinkvilla report, the actor is carefully charting her next move after Peddi and is in advanced discussions for the high-concept project. The film is reportedly being directed by Rahi Anil Barve, best known for the critically acclaimed horror-fantasy Tumbbad, which earned massive praise for its distinctive storytelling and immersive world-building. The upcoming film is being envisioned as a large-scale creature horror film and is backed by Jio Studios.

According to Pinkvilla, Janhvi has been evaluating



multiple scripts while planning her next film. Among the offers on the table, the horror film has emerged as a strong contender. “Janhvi Kapoor is currently reading scripts and discussing

potential projects for her next feature film. She has shown keen interest in the creature horror film to be directed by Rahi Anil Barve. The prep work is already underway, and the

makers are hoping to begin production later this year,” a source told the entertainment portal. The insider further revealed that the role will require extensive preparation from the actor.

If the project moves forward, Janhvi is expected to undergo intensive acting workshops and preparation sessions designed to help her immerse herself in the film’s world and character.

While Janhvi has not previously been part of a creature horror film, she has appeared in projects within the broader horror space, including Netflix’s anthology Ghost Stories and the horror-comedy Roohi. Janhvi Kapoor was recently seen in Buchi Babu Sana’s film ‘Peddi’ starring Ram Charan. The filmmakers have been facing criticism over the portrayal of Janhvi’s character Achiyamma. A section of viewers alleged that the actor has been oversexualised, point-

ing to what they describe as an unnecessary focus on her “waist, midriff and backside.” As debates over alleged “objectification” continue on social media, director Buchi Babu Sana issued a statement addressing the concerns raised by viewers and responding to the ongoing criticism.

Issuing a public statement, he said the concerns raised by audiences had been taken seriously and apologised to those who felt uncomfortable with certain scenes. The filmmaker maintained that there was never any intention to disrespect women and confirmed that changes would be made to the portions that had drawn criticism.

Karan Kundrra pens heartfelt birthday wish for Tejaswi Prakash

**Mumbai :** Television actor Karan Kundrra has penned a birthday note for his ladylove Tejaswi Prakash, whom he lovingly called his “fiercest most extraordinary little girl” as she turned 31 on Wednesday.

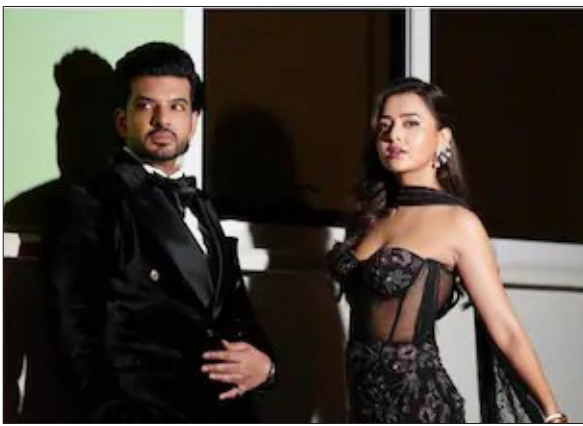
The 41-year-old actor shared a string of romantic pictures featuring him and the actress. For the caption, he wrote: “Happy Birthday to the fiercest most extraordinary little girl.. I’m proud to be your Man!! Keep shining.” Karan met Tejaswi during their stint on the 15th edition of the reality show “Bigg Boss” hosted by Salman Khan. After four years of dating, Karan proposed to Tejaswi in Desi Bling in Dubai.

On the professional front, the two were recently seen in the glossy Desi Bling, which follows the extravagant, ultra-luxurious lives of wealthy Indian expats living in Dubai. Tejaswi is best known for portraying Ragini Gadodia in Swargarini – Jodein Rishton Ke Sur and Pratha Gujral in Naagin 6. She was also seen in shows such as Fear Factor: Khatron Ke Khila-

di 10 and Bigg Boss 15. She made her Marathi film debut with Mann Kasturi Re.

Talking about Karan, the actor made his acting debut with Ekta Kapoor’s popular television show Kitani Mohabbat Hai in 2009. He went on to star in several TV shows like Kitani Mohabbat Hai 2, Yeh Kahan Aa Gaye Hum, Dil Hi Toh Hai, Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai and Tere Ishq Mein Ghayal. He has also hosted reality shows like MTV Roadies, MTV Love School, Dance Deewane Juniors and Temptation Island India, and featured in the Hindi films Mubarakan, 1921 and Tera Kya Hoga Lovely. He was last seen hosting the sixteenth season of Splitsvilla with Sunny Leone.

It follows young men and women as they compete to secure a place in Splitsvilla, a villa where they are cut off from the real world. Participants compete in tasks to remain in the competition and mingle with their fellow contestants to find love. In the end, a pair is crowned the winners of Splitsvilla.



Katrina Kaif eyes OTT comeback after son Vihaan’s birth

**Mumbai :** Bollywood actress Katrina Kaif is reportedly preparing for her return to acting and may be considering projects in the OTT space as part of her comeback after giving birth to son Vihaan Kaushal last year. According to a report in India Today, the actress has resumed reading scripts and is carefully assessing potential opportunities before committing to her next role.

India Today reports that Katrina, who embraced motherhood in November last year, is in no hurry to sign a project and is focused on finding a story that resonates with her current priorities. The actor is reportedly expected to return to film sets in the second half of 2027 and is explor-



ing a range of options, including OTT projects. “Katrina Kaif is back to reading scripts after embracing motherhood recently. The actress is reportedly planning to return to a film set by the second half of 2027 and is actively looking for the right script, something that is worth her time. For the same, she seems interested in exploring streaming projects that could pro-

vide better opportunities for actors,” a source told the publication. If a streaming project materialises, it would mark Katrina’s OTT debut. Despite the growing shift among Bollywood stars towards OTT content, Katrina has yet to explore the long-format storytelling format.

Katrina Kaif was last seen in Merry Christmas alongside Vijay Sethupathi,

which was released in theatres on January 12, 2024. The Hindi-Tamil bilingual received positive reviews, with Katrina Kaif and Vijay Sethupathi earning praise for their performances and on-screen chemistry. Since then, she has largely stayed out of the spotlight, leading to continued speculation about her next professional move. Before Merry Christmas, Katrina was seen in Tiger 3 (2023) with Salman Khan. Katrina married Vicky Kaushal in December 2021 in a traditional Hindu wedding ceremony in Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan, attended by their close friends and family members. The couple welcomed their first child, a son named Vihaan Kaushal, on November 7, 2025.

Veteran filmmaker Bharathiraja passes away

**Chennai :** Veteran Tamil cinema director, producer and screen writer Bharathiraja died on Wednesday due to age related complications here, family sources said. The actor-director, known as a trendsetter for his choice of stories and their treatment, died at his Chennai residence. He was 84.

A multiple national award winner known for his predominantly rural content, Bharathiraja shot to fame with his maiden directorial venture “16 Vayathinile” in 1977. Top actors Kamal Haasan and Sridevi were the lead pair, with superstar Rajinikanth playing the villain in a film that went on to rule the box office. The film is rated one among the best Tamil films even today. He was fondly addressed as “Iyakkunar Imayam,” which roughly translates as “peak of directors”.

Bharathiraja had a unique feature of introducing female leads whose names start with ‘R,’ such as Rad-



ha, in his films. The late director is Padmashri recipient. Though he had kept away from direction in the last many years, Bharathiraja took to

acting, starring along side top actors including Dhanush in his mega hit ‘Thiruchitrambalam.’ His son, actor Manoj had predeceased him.

# Football’s age curve is broken, and World Cup 2026 may be the cleanest proof yet

The FIFA World Cup has always been a tournament of footballing eras. The 2026 edition may be the first to stage two of them at once. This is already the biggest World Cup ever conceived: 48 teams, 104 matches and 1,248 players spread across Canada, Mexico and the United States. Expansion will stretch the tournament’s geography, calendar, and competitive depth. It is also stretching its age table.

At one end, eight players aged 40 or above have been selected, more than every previous World Cup combined. Cristiano Ronaldo, 41, arrives for a sixth World Cup. Lionel Messi, weeks short of 39, returns for a sixth of his own. Guillermo Ochoa completes that six-tournament club. Luka Modric, Manuel Neuer and Craig Gordon lend 2026 the air of a museum of footballing memory that refuses to close its doors.

At the other end sit the teenage class: Mexico’s Gilberto Mora, Spain’s Lamine Yamal, Brazil’s Endrick, Ecuador’s Kendry Paez, the faces of football’s accelerated future. Mora

will be 17 when the tournament kicks off. Endrick will still be 19. Yamal, already a senior star rather than a distant promise, will not yet have left his teens. Football’s age curve was once a simple drawing. Teenagers were prospects. Players between 25 and 29 were the core. Veterans were exceptions, tolerated mostly in goal. World Cup 2026 bends that curve out of shape.

The expanded format rewrites what a squad is worth. A 48-team, 104-match tournament does not reward only the best starting eleven. It rewards depth, role clarity and problem-solving. Teams need answers for every game state: someone to calm a frantic knockout spell, someone to run at tired full-backs, someone to take the penalty, someone to guard a lead, someone to break a rhythm.

This is where the age split turns tactical. The old are not surviving because they can still do everything. They are surviving because they can still do something rare. The young are not arriving because they



are complete. They are arriving because they offer something violent, fresh and impossible to fully prepare for. The player caught in the squeeze is the ordinary peak-age footballer: physically dependable, tactically sound, yet elite at no single tournament function. Ronaldo in 2026 is not Ronaldo in 2006.

That is precisely the point. Modern football no longer asks its ageing greats to impersonate their younger selves. It repackages them.

A 40-year-old goalkeeper endures because the position rewards reading, command and nerve. A veteran midfielder endures if his minutes are rationed and his brief is tempo rather than territory. A forward like Ronaldo still matters once a team accepts that his value lies in finishing, box presence, penalty authority and dressing-room gravity, not in the press.

None of this is sentiment. Tournament football is crowded

with low-event matches. One set piece, one penalty, one unhurried touch under suffocating pressure can decide everything. That is why veterans keep their seats at the table. Their bodies have surrendered range. Their decision-making has surrendered nothing. The teenage half of the story is the mirror image of decline management. It is acceleration.

Yamal, Endrick, Mora and Paez are not wonderkids of the old kind, stashed away for some distant future. They have grown up inside a football machine that identifies talent early, exposes it early and markets it early. Elite academies now produce players fluent in pressing structures, video analysis, nutrition and media scrutiny before they have fully grown into adulthood.

That matters because World Cup football fractures into moments more often than it settles into systems. A teenager may not control a tournament, but he can tilt a match. He can run at exhausted legs. He can turn a cagey contest into a duel. He can give a team the one thing peak-age balance rarely supplies: shock. The 2026 age divide is not evidence that football is growing older or younger. It is evidence that football is growing more specialised.

The veteran gives control. The teenager causes disruption. The veteran protects a match. The teenager attacks its shape. The veteran carries memory. The teenager carries velocity.

Caught between them are the players who must now prove they are more than safe selections. At a normal World Cup, safe is useful. At the biggest World Cup ever staged, with more matches, more travel and more squad places, useful may no longer be enough.

That is why this tournament’s age profile deserves attention. It reveals how managers have begun to think about international squads. They are no longer building only a team. They are assembling a toolbox.

And in 2026, the most valuable tools may come from football’s two extremes: the old who have learned how to last, and the young who have learned how to arrive before their time.

## Conspiracy charge, a Smriti Irani reminder: BJP under fire after sole Congress MP candidate’s RS nomination cancelled

**Bhopal:** Several Opposition leaders trained guns at the BJP on Tuesday amid an escalating controversy over Congress candidate Meenakshi Natarajan’s Rajya Sabha nomination rejection by the Election Commission. While some claimed “conspiracy” behind the move, others gave the poll panel a reminder of times when alleged discrepancies were overlooked. In a huge setback for Natarajan, who was Congress’s sole Rajya Sabha candidate in Madhya Pradesh, her nomination papers were rejected over allegedly failing to disclose a court summons issued to her in 2022.

However, the Congress rubbished claims of any error or non-disclosure as “humbug” and said that Natarajan’s Rajya Sabha setback was only an attempt to snatch the party’s seat. Reacting to Natarajan’s Rajya Sabha nomination cancellation, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra said that move was made on a “flimsy joke of an excuse”. “It shows how desperate Modi Shah are to control both Houses & amend the constitution. Else their time is up in 2029,” she said in a tweet.



Telangana chief minister Revanth Reddy called the move a “seat chori (theft)” attempt and alleged conspiracy by the BJP. “This is an assault on democracy. People’s voices are being stifled. This is a dark day for Indian democracy and needs to be condemned by all citizens,” Reddy said.

Notably, BJP minister Kailash Vijayvargiya on Tuesday claimed a rift within the Congress, suggesting that papers pointing to errors in Natarajan’s candidature were obtained from Telangana, a Congress-ruled state. He suggested that it was likely that someone from Congress gave out that information. Weighing in on the controversy, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi gave the Election Commission a reminder and alleged that former BJP MP Smriti Irani was allowed a Lok Sabha contest despite “three different educational qualifications” on her affidavit. “But Meenakshi Natarajan of the Congress has her RS nomination cancelled because her affidavit doesn’t mention some obscure complaint with no FIR & zero chance to explain to EC,” Chaturvedi said in an X post. BJP leader Rahul Kothari had filed a complaint, claiming Meenakshi Natarajan failed to mention

norms are sacrificed for partisan interests. Such actions weaken public faith in our institutions and must be unequivocally condemned,” he said in a tweet. In Madhya Pradesh, Congress leader Kamal Nath also alleged attempts to snatch the party’s seat by cancelling Natarajan’s nomination. He also said that a flight full of Congress MLAs was “deliberately denied permission” for take off for a long time. The legislators were leaving for Bengaluru amid concerns of cross-voting.

Meanwhile, Congress leader KC Venugopal also rejected claims regarding Natarajan’s nomination papers. “The allegation of any error or non-disclosure in her nomination is complete humbug and a desperate attempt to snatch a seat from the INC.

They stooped so low as to reject her nomination when they realised that their dirty tricks to compromise our INC MLAs is going to fail,” he posted on X.Venugopal, along with senior Congress leaders Jairam Ramesh, Sachin Pilot, and others, held a protest outside the EC’s Delhi office on Tuesday.

## Atletico Madrid mock Real Madrid after rejecting €150 million bid for Julian Alvarez



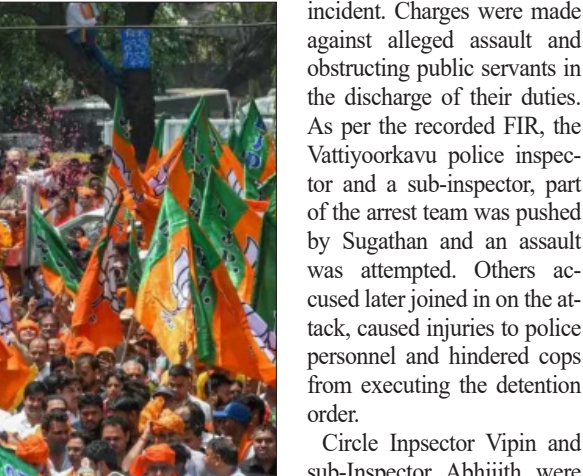
**Agency:** Julian Alvarez has become one of the most sought-after names in the transfer window, with both Barcelona and Real Madrid making moves to sign the Atletico Madrid striker. Despite the growing interest, Atletico have no intention of parting ways with one of their most important players. Reports claim the club even rejected a €150 million offer from Real Madrid, making it clear that Alvarez is not on the market at any price. The response did not stop with a simple rejection. Atletico also appeared to poke fun at their city rivals on social media, adding another chapter to their recent online antics. The club has developed a reputation for taking cheeky digs at teams linked with Alvarez, having previously mocked Barcelona amid transfer speculation. Now, Real Madrid have found themselves on the receiving end as Atletico continue to shut down rumours surrounding the Argentine forward’s future.

A World Cup winner with Argentina in 2022 and formerly of Manchester City, the 26-year-old Alvarez joined Atletico in 2024. He is under contract until June 2030, with a release clause estimated at

## Cops take into custody BJP councillor in Kerala’s Thiruvananthapuram after major drama

**Thiruvananthapuram:** A dramatic scene unfolded in Kerala’s Thiruvananthapuram as huge crowds gathered to resist the arrest of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) councillor Sugathan after facing preventive detention under the the Kerala Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act (KAAPA). The scene unfolded on Tuesday as police arrived to arrest Sugathan. A BJP councillor of the Vazhottukonam ward under the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, Sugathan, was taken into custody late at night after the Kerala high court denied him anticipatory bail in an alleged assault during a festival at the Vellaikkadavu temple in Vattiyurkavu.

The arrest created tension as unrest as huge crowds gathered around the accused’s house when a team of police officials reached his house to execute the detention order, according to details mentioned in a news agency Following the gun fire, Sugathan



was overpowered and taken into custody. A record of his arrest was made followed by a medical examination and shift to jail. The case pertains to an incident that reportedly happened on March 22 at the Vellaikkadavu temple during a music festival, when a 50-year-old man attacked a youth by trampling him and striking his head with an iron rod. When another young person tried to intervene in the situation, the accused attacked him as well, leading to his arrest by the Vattiyoor kavu police on May 3, according to the Times of India. Sugathan had reportedly been trying to evade arrest for over a month after being named an accused in this case.

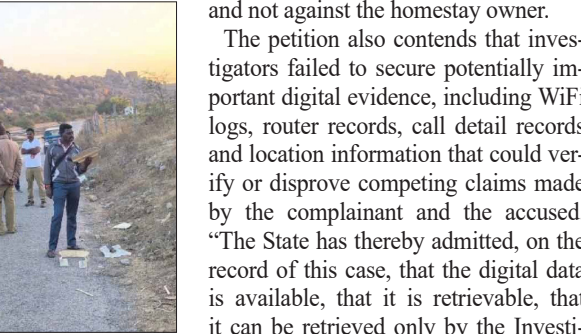
Due to the hostilities that surfaced on Tuesday night, a fresh case of assault has been registered against Sugathan and four others linked to the

## WhatsApp chats, phone calls cited to challenge arrest in US tourist’s ‘rape’ at Karnataka homestay

**Bengaluru:** The owner of a homestay in Karnataka’s Kodagu accused of preventing an American tourist from seeking help after she reported being raped at the homestay, has submitted a petition to the state high court questioning the legality of his arrest and the charges against him, claiming that the prosecution’s narrative differed from that suggested by the victim’s own messages, call records and travel history. The high court had on Monday denied to halt criminal proceedings against the accused, Palakanda Vishal Ponnappa, citing the need to examine investigation records before granting relief.

The case concerns the alleged rape of a 33-year-old American woman at the accused’s homestay in Kodagu. Investigators alleged that a staff member raped her after drugging her. The employee—identified as Vrajesh Kumar, was arrested after the complaint was filed and remains in custody. According to the case record presented in court, the alleged rape occurred on April 12.

Ponnappa was arrested on April 19 on allegations that he failed to report the matter to authorities and disabled Wi-Fi at the homestay to prevent the victim from doing so. He was granted bail on



May 2.

The petition claims to cite WhatsApp conversations between the victim and Ponnappa on the day of the alleged assault, two purported telephone calls allegedly made by the complainant later in the day, and a lengthy email purportedly sent to seven recipients the next morning, which allegedly did not refer to any incident of rape or sexual assault. Ponnappa has also challenged the legal basis of his arrest.

“Section 3(5) BNS appears, on the case file, only in the remand application of 19.04.2026,” the petition alleges. Section 3(5) deals with common intention. According to the filing, the rape allegation under Section 64(1) BNS was directed solely against the housekeeper and not against the homestay owner.

The petition also contends that investigators failed to secure potentially important digital evidence, including WiFi logs, router records, call detail records and location information that could verify or disprove competing claims made by the complainant and the accused. “The State has thereby admitted, on the record of this case, that the digital data is available, that it is retrievable, that it can be retrieved only by the Investigating Officer, and that it has not been retrieved,” the petition states. The filing further alleges that when Ponnappa was arrested and produced before a court, several investigative steps remained incomplete, including witness examinations, scientific evidence collection and the recording of statements required under criminal procedure law. Police have maintained that the investigation remains ongoing.

Officials previously said forensic examination and digital evidence collection are underway and that all aspects of the case were being examined. A senior police officer, when asked for a comment on the petition, said a detailed report would be submitted before the court in due course.

# Pooja Vastrakar Reveals How RCB Helped Her Regain Confidence Amid Her Injury Struggles

## RCB Backed Injured Pooja Vastrakar Through Recovery

**New Delhi:** India all-rounder Pooja Vastrakar has said that Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) backed her strongly during a difficult phase marked by injury concerns. Last year, RCB picked Vastrakar in the Women’s Premier League mega auction while she was still recovering from a shoulder injury. She sustained the injury during the Women’s T20 World Cup in 2024, after which she underwent surgery in March 2025. As a result, she missed the entire 2025 WPL season and was later released by Mumbai Indians despite being one of the leading pace-bowling all-rounders in the country.

RCB then acquired her in the auction for Rs 85 lakh, backing her potential despite her fitness struggles. Vastrakar revealed that the franchise did not put pressure on her to immediately resume bowling. Instead, they focused on utilising her batting abilities and allowed her time to ease back into full bowling workload, giving her confidence and space during her comeback phase.



“They spoke to me in very simple terms and told me that if my bowling wasn’t coming along as expected, that was okay. They said, ‘You are a batting all-rounder; we need your batting.’ That reassurance gave me a lot of confidence, and they continued to back me throughout the tournament,” Vastrakar told India Today in an interview facilitated by Madhya Pradesh Premier League. “They spoke to me in very simple terms and told me that if my bowling

wasn’t coming along as expected, that was okay. They said, ‘You are a batting all-rounder; we need your batting.’ That reassurance gave me a lot of confidence, and they continued to back me throughout the tournament,” Vastrakar told India Today in an interview facilitated by Madhya Pradesh Premier League. For Vastrakar, the shoulder injury was not the only setback that kept her away from the game. She also tweaked her hamstring just two days

before her release from the BCCI’s Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Bengaluru, which forced her to miss the first two weeks of the WPL 2026 for RCB. Even after returning, she neither bowled nor batted in two of the matches she featured in.

Reflecting on her journey, Vastrakar said challenges and frustrations are part of cricket and help players learn how to deal with ups and downs. She added that her current focus is on fitness, managing her body, and improving performance through consistent hard work and discipline. “There are always some challenges, and a bit of frustration too, but at the same time, you learn a lot from them. Cricket is a game that comes with plenty of ups and downs, and it makes you aware of how to deal with different challenges,” Vastrakar, who’s playing for the Chambal Ghariyals, said. “Right now, I am not particularly focused on any one specific thing. My main focus is on my body, my fitness, and my performances.”

# Mexico Striker Raul Jimenez Fixes Club Future By Signing For Wolves Again

**England:** Mexico striker Raul Jimenez sorted out his club future ahead of playing at the World Cup by signing for a second spell at English team Wolverhampton on Wednesday. Jimenez joined Wolves on an initial two-year deal after leaving Fulham, where his contract was due to expire at the end of the month. Wolves has just been relegated from the Premier League so will play in the second-tier Championship.

Jimenez’s first stint at Wolves was between 2018-23 after joining from Benfica. He scored 57 goals in 166 games. “Being able to bring Raul back to Wolves is a truly special moment for everyone connected with this football club,” Wolves executive chairman Nathan Shi said. Mexico opens the World Cup with a match against South Africa on Thursday. 1994: Ticket prices ranged from \$25 to \$75 for first-round games (\$40-\$120 for the opener), and from \$180 to \$475 for the final at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena,



California. 2026: When FIFA put individual game tickets on sale in December, prices ranged from \$140 to \$2,735 for first-round games and from \$4,185 to \$8,680 for the final. This was the first World Cup with so-called dynamic pricing, meaning the price reflects real or perceived demand. FIFA raised the top price for the final to \$10,990 in April. 1994: The tournament was the last World Cup with 24 teams. The field expanded to 32 in 1998. 2026: The tournament expanded again to 48 this year when a new round of 32 was established. The fi-

nalists will play eight games, up from seven. 1994: The 1994 tournament was played in nine stadiums, all in the US. The opener was played at Soldier Field in Chicago. 2026: This time, 16 stadiums are being used: 11 in the US, three in Mexico and two in Canada. All games from the quarterfinals on will be in the US. No Chicago this time: The city wasn’t interested, citing what it said was a lack of financial assurances by FIFA. 1994: The tournament used five NFL sites, including the since-demolished Giants Stadium, and RFK Stadium.

# Real Madrid Confirm Atletico Madrid Rejected 150 Million Euro Alvarez Bid

**Madrid:** Real Madrid have announced that they made a 150 million euros bid for Atletico de Madrid for star forward Julian Alvarez, but the latter rejected their proposal. In an official statement on Tuesday, Real Madrid confirmed that, following a Board of Directors meeting, the club had submitted a EUR150 million offer to Atletico Madrid for the federative rights of the Argentine footballer. However, Atletico Madrid said it appreciated the offer but rejected it after reviewing the proposal, pointing instead to the player’s release clause as the basis for its decision, said Real Madrid in their statement. “Real Madrid CF announces that, following today’s Board of Directors meeting, it has made an offer of 150 million euros to Club Atletico de Madrid for the federative rights of the player Julian Alvarez,” reads the statement. “After studying and evaluating it, Atletico de Madrid has thanked the club for the offer, made within the framework of the good relations existing between both clubs, and has rejected it, referring to the player’s release clause,” the Real Madrid statement reads further.



Notably, the announcement follows Florentino Perez’s victory in the Real Madrid presidential election on Monday, where he secured a further four-year term in the first contested vote in two decades. Ahead of the elections, Perez had indicated plans to spend EUR150 million on an unnamed player to be unveiled on Tuesday, which would set a new club record fee, according to Reuters. The Argentine footballer

scored 20 goals and had nine assists to his name in 49 appearances for Atletico Madrid in the 2025/26 season. For Rodri, Guardiola was a mentor who shaped him into one of the best defensive midfielders in the world, and with him leaving, the emotional and professional ties with the Premier League have weakened considerably, paving the way for a move to his home city.

# Breakout Test Spinner Manav Suthar Officially Signs A New County Championship Contract

**New Delhi:** Breakout India spinner Manav Suthar has signed a short-term deal with Warwickshire for the next two rounds of the County Championship, the English club announced on Wednesday. The 23-year-old left-arm spinner, who impressed on his Test debut against Afghanistan last week with wickets, is set to be available for Warwickshire’s fixtures against Yorkshire and Somerset. Suthar joins the county side after a rapid rise in the past few years. Before making his India debut, he had picked up 129 wickets in 29 first-class matches.

Warwickshire said Suthar would add a new dimension to their bowling attack as they continue their push for the County Championship title. Speaking after the signing via a press release,



Suthar said he was excited to join a side that has started the season strongly and hoped to contribute to their title challenge. Indian spinner Manav Suthar has signed a short-term contract with Warwickshire for the upcoming two County Championship matches against Yorkshire and Somerset. The 23-year-old left-arm spinner impressed on his Test debut against Afghanistan and has

taken 129 wickets in 29 first-class matches. Warwickshire aims to bolster their bowling attack with Suthar as they pursue the County Championship title. Suthar expressed excitement about joining a strong team and contributing to their campaign. According to recent reports by the likes of The Telegraph, ESPNcricinfo, and talkSPORT, what started as an internal inves-

tigation into a broken team curfew has rapidly snowballed into a major standoff, with insiders revealing that the 35-year-old leader is seriously weighing up walking away from the international stage for good. To stamp out these issues, team management recently introduced strict midnight curfews, but this latest high-profile lapse in judgment has completely shattered the governing body’s patience, leaving English cricket facing a sudden, massive leadership void. While at the venue, the cricketers crossed paths with academy rugby players from the Saracens club who were holding an end-of-season party. A physical confrontation broke out involving a 21-year-old, 125kg rugby forward named Totoa Auvaa.

# Celebrations Clash With Growing Social Tensions In Mexico Ahead Of World Cup

**Mexico City:** Celebrations have run into mounting social tensions in Mexico as the capital prepares to welcome the world in the opening ceremonies of the FIFA World Cup. Mexico, which is jointly hosting the soccer tournament with the US and Canada, is slated to kick off festivities with an inauguration and opening match Thursday in a star-studded event that will set the tone for the rest of the competition. The World Cup comes at a time when Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum is walking a political tightrope, navigating a deteriorating relationship with the US in the lead-up to July trade negotiations, political scandals and security concerns following a burst of violence in a host city in February. Pressure has only continued to mount as guests flood into Mexico City, and the government has faced a crescendo of criticisms by protesters and residents who say authorities have prioritized the competition over pressing social needs in the Latin American nation. “Mexico wants to project an image to the world that doesn’t exactly square with reality,” said Carlos Pérez Ricart, a Mexican political analyst at the Mexican Center for Research and Economic Education. “The World Cup is putting the president in a vulnerable situation ... The government



is under extreme pressure.” FIFA’s logo, bright orange Mexican marigold flowers, giant soccer balls and other sports decorations line streets across Mexico’s capital and the two other host cities, Guadalajara and Monterrey. Soccer fans buzzed with excitement as they strolled through Mexico City’s streets, snapping photos in front of the most famous monuments while donning their teams’ colors. The sporting competition is expected to bring in \$3 billion for hotels, restaurants and sports venues, according to the Mexican Soccer Federation. The Thursday inauguration and opening match, where Mexico will face off against South Africa, are expected to draw more eyes than much of the competition, with Colombian superstar Shakira and a slate of others scheduled to perform. If all goes off without a hitch, it will be a feather in Sheinbaum’s cap, said

Pérez Ricart, showing the world that Mexico is “modern and capable of organizing high impact events.” For months, Mexican authorities have fortified security in an effort to offset concerns, following several days of violence that paralyzed World Cup host city Guadalajara in February. More than 100,000 soldiers, sailors, National Guard members and police officers are expected to be deployed across the three cities holding matches, yet simmering social tensions that have been growing for weeks have posed the greatest obstacle, particularly in Mexico City. Critics in Mexico have said that the government has spent too much money and time catering to international visitors at the expense of residents. For more than a week, the country’s teacher’s union has blockaded roads and toppled World Cup statues in an annual push to win better working conditions.

# Shaheen Shah Afridi Unlikely To Join Test Squad For West Indies, England Tours

**Lahore:** Pakistan’s experienced fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi is unlikely to be picked for the forthcoming Tests in the West Indies and England this year to manage his workload and he is not pleased with the situation. Pakistan will play Tests in Tarouba (from July 25) and Port of Spain (from August 2) during the Caribbean tour before travelling to England where they are scheduled to play a three-Test series, starting August 19. Shaheen, 26, leads the national ODI squad. “The selectors and management believe that it is better if Shaheen’s workload is managed and he focusses more on white-ball cricket from here on,” one source said. The source also confirmed that the fast bowler himself was not happy with this thinking as he is still young and is keen to play more Test matches. Shaheen, who has played 34 Tests for his 126 wickets, has in contrast appeared in 77 ODIs and 103 T20 Internationals since his debut back in 2018.

But the selectors have already been keeping him out of the Test side for sometime now and since December, 2023 Shaheen has played in just 7 Tests although Pakistan during this period competed in 16 five-day games. Another source said that the white ball head coach, Mike Hesson had also backed the decision to manage the workload of Shaheen who recently led his team to a 2-1 win over Australia in the home ODI series. The source said that the selectors had decided to give other pace bowlers, who have been performing well in domestic cricket, more chances to play in Test matches notably Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Abbas, and Khurram Shehzad. Pakistan’s biggest problem in recent times has been a shortage of genuine pacers, who can clock 140kph and it has seen them struggle badly in Tests. It also forced them to prepare slow turning tracks at home. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) also named former Test captain, Sarfaraz Ahmed, as the new head coach of the red ball squad which includes uncapped batters Abdullah Fazal, Azan Awais, all-rounder Amad Butt and wicketkeeper Ghazi Ghouri. The four players have yet to play for the



national team in any format. The selectors recalled Abbas to the side after January 2025 when he played at Cape Town against South Africa and took three wickets. Pakistan’s last outing in Tests was a home series against South Africa last October which ended 1-1 and was their first outing in the current ICC World Test Championship cycle. The selectors have dropped spinners Asif Afridi and Abrar Ahmed, opener Abdullah Shafique, batter Kamran Ghulam and reserve keeper Rohail Nazir from the Test squad that was picked against South Africa. Pakistan will tour Bangladesh next month with the first of the two matches -- part of the ICC World Test Championship -- to be played at Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka from May 8 to 12, while the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium will host the second game, which will be played from May 16 to 20. The PCB retained Shan Masood as the captain of the side while confirming the appointment of Sarfaraz as head coach and former Test players Asad

Shafique and Umar Gul as the batting and bowling coaches of the Test squad. Sarfaraz and Shafiq are also national selectors. Naveed Akram Cheema, who attracted controversy after the T20 World Cup over whether he allegedly fined a player or not in Sri Lanka, also returns as manager after missing out on the recent white ball series in Bangladesh due to health issues. The source said the board was certainly looking at replacing Masood as Test captain although he had asked for more time to lead the team in the coming away series against West Indies and England. Hafeez, he said, was being considered to step in as chief selector and also head the international cricket department but only initial talks had been held between him and the board officials. “In Hafeez’s case, there is a feeling that since the former player has been pretty critical about the team and board in media roping him in might create an impression he has been offered a position to stop his criticism,” the source added.