

Foundation Days of 4 states celebrated at Lok Bhavan, Aizawl

Aizawl, May 21: Under the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat initiative, Mizoram Governor General (Dr) Vijay Kumar Singh, (Retd), hosted a celebration to mark the Foundation Days of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Sikkim and Goa at the Durbar Hall, Lok Bhavan in Aizawl on Wednesday.

In his address, the Mizoram Governor spoke about the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat initiative, launched under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said the programme is regularly observed at Lok Bhavan and Lok Niwas to promote national integration. The Governor noted that India is a land of immense diversity and that even a single state contains a wide variety of cultures, traditions and lifestyles. The Governor described diversity as the country's unique strength and a source of national unity and pride. "Each part of our country has its own unique beauty," he added. The Governor commended the cultural performances presented during the event and congratulated all those involved for contributing to its success. He expressed hope that such programmes would help foster greater understanding and appreciation of India's rich cultural heritage.

The event featured messages from Gujarat Governor Acharya Devvrat, Maharashtra Governor Jishnu Dev Varma, Sikkim Governor Om Prakash Mathur and Goa Governor Pusapati Ashok Gajapathi Raju. It also included informative and visually captivating short videos showcasing the



cultural heritage and scenic landscapes of the respective states. Students from the College of Veterinary Sciences & Animal Husbandry and Government Mizo Higher Secondary School enthralled the audience

with their vibrant and impressive cultural performances, adding colour and energy to the programme. Following the main event, the Governor hosted the participants for a cordial gathering and refresh-

ments at the Upper Lawn of Lok Bhavan. Gujarat and Maharashtra attained statehood on May 1, 1960. Sikkim became a full-fledged state on May 16, 1975, while Goa achieved statehood on May 30, 1987.

Workshop on Nagaland Food & Feed Link 2.0 to be held in Kohima on May 29

Kohima, May 21: The Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN), in collaboration with the Customized Energy Solutions Foundation, will organise a daylong state-level workshop on Nagaland Food & Feed Link (N2FL) 2.0 at the Capital Convention Centre, Kohima on May 29 from 10 am.

According to an official communication issued by IDAN, the workshop aims to build on the foundation laid during the 2025 state-level workshop and strengthen enterprise development through clean energy-enabled interventions. The initiative seeks to promote local production, improve productivity, reduce dependence on external inputs, and create income opportunities for rural entrepreneurs and producer groups across Nagaland. The concept notes highlighted that the N2FL 2.0 initiative focuses on four major value chains -- fibre, food, feed, and credit linkage with enterprise scaling.

Under the fibre value chain, the programme will support local skills in garment stitching, bags, and daily-use products through community-based hubs. It is expected to generate jobs, strengthen local production capacity, and promote entrepreneurship. The food value chain component aims to help entrepreneurs improve product quality, packaging, sales, and market access. Solar-powered processing units and community-based training are expected to enhance value addition and improve farmer linkages.

The feed value chain will focus on promoting local feed production using locally available raw materials. Training and enterprise support for farmers and livestock rearers are expected to improve animal management practices while reducing dependence on externally sourced feed.

The workshop will also emphasise credit linkage and enterprise scaling by connecting entrepreneurs with financial institutions, development partners, and technology providers.

The initiative aims to strengthen repayment capacity, support sustainable rural enterprises, and improve access to finance.

Section 163 imposed in East Jaintia Hills following JNC protests

Shillong, May 21: Authorities in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills district have imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) within the premises of the Deputy Commissioner's office in Khliehri at following a protest that allegedly disrupted official functioning. The order, issued by District Magistrate Manish Kumar on May 20, stated that members and supporters of the JSU, JNC and villagers from the Daistong area staged a demonstration inside the Deputy Commissioner's office campus. According to the administration, protesters allegedly entered the office building during the agitation, creating tension and disturbance within the premises. Officials said the situation affected the normal functioning of government offices and raised concerns over public peace and safety. The administration further noted that such incidents could lead to obstruction, public disturbance, law and order problems, and possible damage to government property. Following the incident, the district magistrate prohibited the assembly of five or more persons within the boundary of the Deputy Commissioner's office with immediate effect. The order has been enforced ex parte and will remain in force until further instructions are issued.

KZC Lifts Social Boycott on Kuki-Zo MLAs

Imphal, May 21: The Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) has officially lifted the social boycott imposed on all Kuki-Zo MLAs who participated in the formation of the Manipur government, ending months of political and social isolation faced by the legislators.

KZC's Secretary of Information and Publicity said the decision was taken after reviewing the current situation and recognising the urgent need for unity and collective efforts among the Kuki-Zo people amid the ongoing crisis in Manipur.

The social boycott was originally imposed on February 5, 2026, following a resolution adopted by the KZC Cabinet. The move came amid strong resentment within sections of the Kuki-Zo community over the participation of certain MLAs in the formation of the Manipur government despite continuing ethnic tensions and ongoing demands for a separate administrative arrangement for the Kuki-Zo people. According to the Council, the decision to revoke the boycott was finalised during a meeting held on

April 29, 2026, after detailed discussions among its leadership.

With the latest resolution, the KZC announced that the boycott against the concerned Kuki-Zo legislators has been withdrawn with immediate effect.

The development is being seen as a significant political shift within the Kuki-Zo community at a time when various civil society organisations and community leaders have been calling for greater coordination and unity in addressing the prolonged conflict and humanitarian situation in the state.

Assam CLP Leader to Be Chosen by High Command: Gaurav Gogoi

Guwahati, May 21: Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi on Wednesday said a final decision on the appointment of the Congress Legislature Party leader in Assam would be taken by the party high command after consultations with party MLAs. "The All-India Congress Committee (AICC) will decide who will lead the Congress legislative wing in the state. In this regard, a meeting of Opposition legislators is scheduled to be held on Thursday evening," Gogoi said.

Gogoi made the remarks after returning

from discussions with the Congress central leadership regarding the selection of the Leader of the Opposition in the Assam Legislative Assembly.

He further stated the newly-elected Congress MLAs would jointly visit the Assam Assembly on Thursday, signalling efforts to maintain unity within the party ahead of the Assembly proceedings.

The development comes amid growing political interest over the Congress leadership structure in Assam following the formation of the new Assembly.

Ashmita Chaliha Continues Dream Run, Enters Malaysia Masters 2026 Quarterfinals

Kuala Lumpur, May 21: Indian shuttler Ashmita Chaliha continued her impressive run at the Malaysia Masters, storming into the women's singles quarterfinals with 21-13, 21-16 win over Malaysia's Goh Jin Wei at the Stadium Axiata Arena on Thursday.

Starting from the qualifiers, Ashmita, who hails from Assam, looked in complete control against the world No. 55,

dominating the opening game with a comfortable win.

Although Jin Wei attempted a fightback in the second game, the Indian shuttler never allowed her opponent to settle, wrapping up the contest in straight games in just 27 minutes.

With the victory, Ashmita reaches the quarterfinals of a Super 500 event for the third time in her career.

She will next take on eighth



seed Line Hojmark Kjaersfeldt of Denmark, who advanced after defeating two Indians Anmol Kharb and

Malvika Bansod in the earlier rounds. Rest of the Indian contingent bowed out in their respective matches.

Modi gifts stoles made of Assam's Muga silk and Manipur's Shirui Lily silk to Italian PM

Guwahati, May 21: Prime Minister Narendra Modi gifting a packet of 'Melody' chocolates to Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni may have stolen the entire media limelight, but the Indian PM has also gifted other items, including two from the Northeast, to his Italian counterparts. Among these items are stoles made of Assam's Muga silk and Manipur's Shirui Lily silk.

Muga silk, known as the "Golden Silk" of Assam, is a rare and prestigious textile from the Brahmaputra Valley. Celebrated for its natural golden hue and understated elegance, this exquisite silk is produced without artificial dyes, reflecting a deeply sustainable tradition.

Renowned as one of the world's strongest natural fibers, Muga silk is prized for its remarkable durability and longevity, often lasting for generations. Its natural luster deepens beautifully with time, while its moisture-absorbing and UV-resistant qualities enhance both comfort and versatility.

Italy's celebrated tradition of luxury textiles and timeless design finds a natural resonance in the elegance of Assam's "Golden Silk."

On the other hand, the Shirui Lily silk stole draws its inspiration from the misty heights of Shirui Kashong Peak in Manipur, India. It is inspired by the rare Shirui Lily, a delicate bell-shaped flower with pale pinkish-white petals that blooms nowhere else in the world. For the Tangkhul Naga community of Manipur, the Shirui Lily symbolizes purity, identity, and cultural pride.

The stole therefore carries not only the beauty of Himalayan craftsmanship, but also the spirit of indigenous tradition and folklore. The Lily also holds deep cultural resonance in Italy, where it has long symbolized purity, grace, and artistic refinement, frequently appearing in Renaissance art. In this shared symbolism lies a unique cultural connection between India and Italy.

Skillerate 2026 Drives Employment Push in Tura with Major Work Orders and Start-Up Tool Support

Tura, May 21: Meghalaya Chief Minister, Conrad K. Sangma on Thursday attended Skillerate 2026 at Holly Hocks near BAKDIL Training Centre in Tura, reaffirming the Government's commitment to strengthening skill development, employment generation and entrepreneurship opportunities for the youth of the State.

The programme was organised by the Department of Labour, Employment and Skill Development, Government of Meghalaya, in collaboration with the CM Skills Mission and the Meghalaya State Skill Development Society (MS-SDS).

The event was also attended by Labour, Employment and Skill Development Minister Methodius Dkhar, who graced the programme as the guest of honour, along with the Deputy Commissioner, West Garo Hills, Vibhor Aggarwal, senior officials, training partners, beneficiaries, and stakeholders

from the skill development ecosystem.

In his address to the gathering, Sangma said the programme reflected the larger vision of the Government's CM Connect initiative, through which citizens directly communicate their concerns, aspirations, and suggestions to the Government. He stated that one of the recurring concerns raised by youth through CM Connect was the need for better opportunities in skill development, self-employment, and livelihood support.

The Chief Minister said that while Meghalaya had invested more than ₹32 crore in various skill development programmes benefiting thousands of youths, the Government realised that training alone was not enough. "Many trained individuals told us that even after completing their courses, they lacked the basic tools and equipment required to begin working independently. An automobile

technician may complete training successfully, but without a toolkit, opening a workshop or servicing vehicles becomes extremely difficult," he said.

He added that the Government therefore decided to provide toolkits and start-up support so that trained youth could immediately become productive and self-employed. "This programme is not only about distributing toolkits. It is about creating dignity, confidence, and livelihood opportunities for our youth," he remarked.

Highlighting Meghalaya's economic progress, the Chief Minister said the State is today recognised as one of the fastest-growing economies in the country. However, he stressed that growth must remain inclusive and reach ordinary citizens.

"Economic growth alone is not enough if the benefits do not reach every household, every youth, every farmer, every worker, and every entrepre-

neur," he stated.

He further observed that one of the important lessons learned by the Government was that skill training without proper support systems remains incomplete. "Earlier, many programmes focused only on training, but we realised that unless there is hand-holding, tools, market linkage, and employment support, the impact remains limited. We identified this as the missing link, and today's initiative is aimed at addressing that gap," he said.

The Chief Minister also spoke about the Government's partnerships with private training institutions and stakeholders to strengthen the quality of skill development programmes. According to him, such collaborations have improved training infrastructure, introduced industry-oriented courses, and expanded opportunities for Meghalaya's youth.

Beneficiaries and training

partners also shared their testimonies during the programme, reflecting on the positive impact of various skill development interventions and employment-linked training programmes implemented under MSSDS and Skills Meghalaya.

A video presentation showcasing MSSDS's initiatives and achievements was screened during the event.

During the programme, 34 work orders were distributed under Skills Meghalaya and Supporting Human Capital Development in Meghalaya (SHCDM) for the training of 4,830 trainees, with a total work order value of Rs 16,59,56,334.

Under Skills Meghalaya, 28 work orders covering 3,930 trainees, amounting to Rs 12,04,35,044, were distributed, while under SHCDM, six work orders covering 900 trainees, amounting to Rs 4,55,21,290, were distributed.

NPF resolves DMC crisis; trust vote called off

Dimapur, May 21: The crisis within the Dimapur Municipal Council (DMC), which culminated in a no-confidence motion moved by 12 councillors-- six from the NPF and six from BJP, led by the deputy chairperson Imlinaro S Ezung-- against DMC chairperson Hukheto Yephthomi, has been resolved following the intervention by senior NPF leadership.

Following a series of discussions and intervention by senior party leaders, the chairperson and deputy chairperson of DMC issued a joint reconciliatory statement, announcing that all differences and misunderstandings had been resolved in the larger interest of party unity and public service.

A joint statement issued by DMC chairperson Hukheto Yephthomi and deputy chairperson Imlinaro S Ezung, on behalf of the elected NPF councillors of the DMC, stated that following the initiative of the NPF leadership, they had taken an unconditional decision to reconcile their differences and misunderstandings in the greater interest of party unity and their commitment to serve the people of Dimapur city.

They sincerely appreciated the inter-

vention of the party under the leadership of NPF president and chief minister Dr. Neiphiu Rio, and said they had accepted the guidance for unity, reconciliation and oneness.

They affirmed their commitment to serve the public and uphold the mandate entrusted to them.

Having resolved their differences, they reiterated their commitment to ensure good governance, accountability and transparency in the functioning of the DMC. Stating that all members had reconciled and agreed to work together as one united team, they informed that there was no longer any need to conduct the proposed trust vote, scheduled for May 22, and that the concerned authorities had been officially informed to call it off. They also appealed to all sections of the public and stakeholders to extend support and solidarity towards the all-round development of Dimapur city.

The two DMC leaders also met advisor for Urban Development and Municipal Affairs, Zhaleo Rio on Wednesday.

When contacted, a senior NPF leader said that the matter had been resolved amicably within the party fold after consultations with all concerned members.

BJP MLA Rupjyoti Kurmi Sparks Row Over Development Remarks

Guwahati, May 21: Re-elected BJP MLA Rupjyoti Kurmi has sparked fresh political controversy after publicly stating that areas which voted heavily in his favour in the recently concluded Assam Assembly elections would receive priority in development works. Kurmi made the remarks on Wednesday while addressing a felicitation programme organised by the Government Gaonburha Association along with BJP workers from the Mariani, Selenghat and Koliapani BJP mandals.

The six-time MLA, known for his outspoken and often controversial statements, said development projects in the constituency

would first focus on areas that strongly supported him electorally. “All those who voted for me or the areas with maximum votes for me will be prioritised for speedy development there. I will begin development work slowly and only after two years in the areas where I had scored low,” Kurmi said.

His remarks immediately drew attention as they appeared to link public development directly with electoral support, raising concerns over impartial governance and possible political discrimination in the distribution of public resources.

Kurmi, however, did not elaborate on the specific nature of the



proposed development projects or identify the areas that could face delays. The BJP legislator also made striking comments regarding his political future, claiming that an astrologer had predicted he would remain an MLA for the next three terms. “As per my astrologer, it’s in my horoscope that I will remain the sitting MLA for the next three terms and the next MLA after me will be someone whom I prefer or like,” he said.

Taking a swipe at opposition parties, Kurmi asserted that his political rivals had little chance of regaining power in the constituency. “This is bad news for the Opposition because they

are just dreaming. No one from them will be preferred by me. That means they will never be able to see power in the coming years,” he added. The remarks came only weeks after Rupjyoti Kurmi secured his sixth consecutive victory from the Mariani Assembly constituency in the 2026 Assam Assembly elections. The BJP leader defeated Gyanashree Bora of Rajgor Dal by a margin of 26,840 votes on May 4.

Kurmi first won the Mariani seat in 2006 as a Congress candidate before later joining the Bharatiya Janata Party, continuing his electoral dominance in the constituency despite changing political affiliations.

Nagaland chemists join nationwide strike against online medicine sales

Kohima, May 21: Chemists and druggists across Nagaland joined a nationwide one-day token strike called by the All India Organisation of Chemists & Druggists against online pharmacies and alleged violations of provisions under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

Under the banner of the Nagaland Medicine Dealers Association, medicine shops across the state remained closed in support of the protest. However, pharmacies attached to government and private hospitals as well as nursing homes were kept open and exempted from the bandh. In a press release, NMDA president Ato Yepthomi and joint secretary in-charge of press and media Arijit Sharma said the strike was peaceful and received strong support from chemists and druggists across Nagaland.

The association said a memorandum had been submitted to Prime Minister Narendra Modi raising concerns over what it described as illegal and unregulated online sale of medicines, home delivery



of medicines without valid prescriptions, and heavy discounting practices that were affecting licensed chemists. The memorandum also sought immediate withdrawal of GSR 817(E) and GSR 220(E), which the association alleged were being misused by online medicine platforms and quick commerce operators for uncontrolled medicine delivery services. Expressing concern over public health and patient safety, the NMDA stated that medicines should not be treated as ordinary commodities. It said online sale and delivery of medicines

without proper verification could pose serious risks and weaken the regulatory framework under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act. The association further claimed that despite repeated complaints and submission of evidence regarding alleged illegal online operations, authorities had not taken effective action so far. Seeking intervention from the Centre, the chemist body urged the government to take corrective steps to safeguard public health and protect small licensed chemists and their employees from unfair business practices.

Assam Assembly Speaker Ranjeet Kumar Dass was unanimously chosen

Guwahati, May 21: Four-time BJP MLA Ranjeet Kumar Dass was unanimously elected Speaker of the 16th Assam Legislative Assembly on May 21, marking his second term in the chair.

Pro tem Speaker Chandra Mohan Patowary announced in the House that three nominations had been submitted in favour of Dass and that no other candidate had entered the contest. “As there is no other nomination, I declare Ranjeet Kumar Dass as the Speaker of the 16th Assam Legislative Assembly,” Patowary said while formally announcing the decision.

Dass had earlier served as Speaker in 2016 when the BJP formed its first government in Assam. His return to the post comes after a long political stint that included serving as a cabinet minister during Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma’s first term between 2021 and 2026.

Representing the Bhowanipur-Sorbhog constituency, Dass has been elected to the Assam Assembly for four consecutive terms since 2011. He has also held key organisational responsibilities within the BJP, including serving as president of the party’s Assam unit.

Congratulating Dass on his election, Sarma said the House would



“benefit greatly from his insights and experience”. In a post on X, the chief minister described Dass’s journey as one that “rose from a humble background” and highlighted his career spanning public service, journalism and politics.

“He also adds another glorious chapter to his life as he becomes

the first person to be elected twice as Speaker of the august House,” Sarma wrote.

The chief minister further said he was confident Dass would “conduct the house seamlessly with his vast experience and uphold the rich values and legacy of the Vidhan Sabha”.

“As leader of the BJP Legislature Party, I assure our full cooperation in ensuring the house functions with 100% of its productivity level in each session,” Sarma added.

The unanimous election reflected broad support for the senior legislator across the House as the new Assembly begins its term.

Meghalaya High Court upholds a 15-year sentence for a father who molested his adolescent daughter

Shillong, May 21: The High Court of Meghalaya has dismissed the appeal of a man convicted of raping his own daughter, affirming a 15-year rigorous imprisonment sentence handed down by a special POCSO court in 2023.

The bench of Chief Justice Revati Mohite Dere and Justice W. Diengdoh, which pronounced the judgment on 20 May 2026, found no reason to interfere with the conviction of Shanborlang Thabab under Section 6 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act — one of its most serious provisions, covering aggravated penetrative sexual assault.

The survivor was between 14 and 15 years of age when the assaults took place at the family’s residence in West Khasi Hills. Her father carried out the abuse on multiple occasions, always when her mother was away from home.

The girl initially confided in her elder cousin sister, who then told her own mother, who in turn alerted the survivor’s uncle — identified in court as PW1 — along with other family members. It was PW1 who filed the complaint with the Mairang Police Station, leading to the registration of an FIR. A charge sheet was subsequently filed before the Special POCSO Judge at Nongstoin.

The survivor’s testimony was at the centre of the entire case. She described, in detail, how the first incident



occurred at night when her siblings were asleep and her mother was absent. The accused, she said, entered her bedroom and touched her inappropriately. The abuse escalated over time, occurring “three to four times a week,” before he eventually committed penetrative sexual assault on two separate occasions.

The survivor also told the court that her father had explicitly warned her not to tell her mother. The defence attempted to exploit what it called a discrepancy between her court testimony and her earlier statement recorded under Section 164 of the CrPC before a Magistrate. The appellant’s lawyer argued that in the 164 statement, the survivor had only referred to an attempt at sexual assault — not a completed act — and that her court testimony amounted to a false esca-

lation.

The court rejected this argument outright. During cross-examination, the survivor herself clarified the matter: “It is a fact that I have stated in my statement under Section 164 CrPC that the accused initially attempted to commit penetrative sexual assault upon me and was subsequently successful.”

The bench noted pointedly that the defence had not challenged the survivor’s answers to the two most critical questions put to her in examination-in-chief, and that no suggestion had been offered to her as to why she would falsely implicate her own father.

The medical officer attached to Tirot Singh Memorial Hospital, Mairang, who examined the survivor, found physical indicators consistent with sexual assault. The survivor had

also told the doctor that the appellant had attempted to buy her silence by offering her money, which she refused.

Multiple family members and relatives who appeared as witnesses testified that the survivor had directly disclosed the abuse to them. None of their accounts was successfully challenged in cross-examination.

The bench concluded that the prosecution had established its case beyond a reasonable doubt. On the question of delayed reporting — often raised in such cases — the court held that any delay must be assessed in light of the survivor’s young age and the fact that the perpetrator was her own father, a person she feared and depended upon.

The court observed that the appellant had “breached all norms of morality and decency” and had violated the fiduciary trust his daughter had placed in him.

The original sentence — 15 years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 50,000, with six months’ additional simple imprisonment in default — stands.

The trial court had earlier recommended a compensation of Rs 2 lakh to the survivor through the Meghalaya State Legal Services Authority. The High Court directed the Secretary of the District Legal Services Authority, West Khasi Hills, to submit a report within six weeks confirming whether the amount has actually been paid. The matter is listed for compliance on 1 July 2026.

To address public complaints, Tripura launches a virtual “Mukhyamantri Samipesu”

Agartala, May 21: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on May 20 launched the first virtual edition of the ‘Mukhyamantri Samipesu’ programme, aiming to connect directly with people from different districts and resolve their grievances through a coordinated administrative mechanism.

The programme was inaugurated virtually from Agartala, with the first district-level interaction held with residents of Dhalai district. Senior officials, including the District Magistrate, Chief Medical Officer, doctors and departmental representatives, joined the session to address issues raised by participants. Speaking during the launch, the Chief Minister said the initiative would now be organised district-wise to make grievance redressal more accessible for people living outside the state capital.

“Today, it is the 66th episode in which

we have seen people from Agartala or around the city coming here with their various problems. We have decided to start it district-wise,” Saha said.

He added that the administration plans to expand the virtual outreach programme to all districts and subdivisions of the state in the coming days.

According to the Chief Minister, 35 people participated in the first district-level virtual interaction, with 30 of them belonging to the Janajati community. The grievances raised covered a wide range of sectors, including land disputes, education, healthcare, higher education and financial assistance.

“People from Dhalai have appeared with multidimensional matters, including education, health, higher education and financial assistance,” he said, adding that officials were instructed to follow up on the complaints and ensure timely

assistance. Saha said the presence of district-level officials during the programme helped speed up responses and enabled immediate directions to be issued on several matters.

“Many people have land-related, education and health-related issues. However, I have noted them down and instructed officials to follow up on the matters, help them, provide proper treatment and resolve their problems properly,” he stated.

Calling the initiative “very innovative,” the Chief Minister said the programme was designed to improve administrative accessibility and strengthen communication between the government and citizens in remote areas.

Health Department Secretary Kiran Gitte, along with secretaries, directors and officers from various departments, attended the programme held in the presence of the Chief Minister.

Meghalaya does not currently have a fuel shortage, so ministers’ convoys do not need to be restricted. Dkhar Methodius

Shillong, May 21: Amid growing public concern over the global political situation and its possible impact on fuel supplies and commodity prices, Meghalaya Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister Methodius Dkhar on Wednesday asserted that the state is not facing any fuel shortage and that there is currently no proposal to further reduce the convoy size of Cabinet ministers.

Seeking to allay fears over disruptions in fuel availability and rising prices of essential commodities, Dkhar said Meghalaya remained in a “comfortable position” despite concerns triggered by the prevailing international situation. He maintained that ministers in the state were already

using minimal convoys and that the government had found no need to impose additional restrictions.

“As of now, though there is some apprehension and concern not only in our state but across the world, there is no shortage of fuel in Meghalaya at present. Therefore, there has been no discussion on reducing the convoy size of Cabinet ministers. Most ministers and many of our colleagues do not use large convoys, usually limiting them to one or two vehicles, and we mainly use convoys while travelling long distances when necessary,” Dkhar told reporters in Shillong.

Referring to the larger geopolitical situation, the minister said the state government was closely mon-

itoring developments but maintained that the matter remained beyond the control of the state administration. “Given the present political situation, we cannot comment much on issues beyond our control. However, as of now, our state is not facing any fuel shortage,” he said.

Dkhar acknowledged that petrol and diesel prices had increased in recent days along with the prices of several other commodities, but stressed that the hikes reflected a nationwide trend and were not decisions taken by the state government.

Stating that there was no reason for panic, he said, “I would like to appeal to the people through the media that the increase in petrol

and diesel prices, along with other commodities, is not a decision of the state government. These decisions are taken at the national level by the Centre and the Ministry of Petroleum.”

The minister said Conrad K. Sangma was in communication with the Centre, although the state had not reached a stage requiring special intervention or emergency support.

“The Chief Minister is in communication with the Centre, but the situation has not reached a level where we require special intervention or assistance. If there is an actual scarcity or severe shortage in future, we will certainly seek support from the Centre,” he added.

Essential Commodity Price Situation Reviewed by Assam Chief Secretary

Guwahati, May 21: Assam Chief Secretary Ravi Kota on Wednesday chaired a video conference with District Commissioners to review price monitoring of essential commodities and market stability.

The meeting was held in continuation of the review by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma earlier.

The Chief Secretary emphasised strengthening district level mechanisms through regular reviews, field inspections and strict enforcement to prevent hoarding, artificial scarcity and price escalation.

He directed the District Commissioners for immediate holding of District Level Task Force meetings and sharing of minutes; similar monitoring at Co-district, Circle and Block levels with all stakeholders; intensification of field-level

monitoring of stock and prices of essential commodities, and market inspections.

He further directed the DCs to mobilise Enforcement Squads comprising officers from concerned departments.

Kota also asked the DCs to ensure mandatory display of wholesale and retail prices at shops/markets for transparency of consumers; issuance of cash memos by wholesalers to retailers; regular review meetings with trader bodies, including Chambers of Commerce; proper reporting of price ranges (maximum/minimum/most consumed) through designated platforms; strict action to prevent hoarding, artificial scarcity and price escalation by unscrupulous traders; cancellation of trade licences of defaulting traders; me-



dia management and public awareness to prevent rumour mongering besides cross-checking of price data reported by PMCs

The Chief Secretary directed strict compliance of all advisories to ensure market stability and consumer protection.

Centre invites applications for appointment of new NEHU

Shillong, May 21: The Centre has initiated the process for appointing a new vice-chancellor for North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) in Shillong, amid continuing uncertainty over the functioning of the institution.

The Ministry of Education invited online applications from eligible candidates for the post. The application process will continue till June 18, according to an official notification.

The vice-chancellor, as the academic and administrative head of the university, should possess “the highest level of competence, integrity, morals and institutional commitment”, it said. The move comes ahead of the completion of the tenure of the incumbent VC Prof. Prabha Shankar Shukla, whose term is scheduled to end on July 26.

According to the advertisement, the candidate should be a distinguished academician with a minimum of 10 years’ experience as Professor in a university or 10 years’ experience in a reputed research and/or academic administrative organisation with proof of having demonstrated academic leadership. The Ministry has also stated that the applicant

should preferably not be more than 65 years of age as on the closing date for receipt of applications.

The post carries a fixed pay of Rs 2,10,000 per month along with a special allowance of Rs. 11,250 and other usual allowances as admissible under university rules. It was informed that the appointment will be made from a panel of names recommended by a committee constituted under the provisions of the University Act. The advertisement has been made available on the websites of education.gov.in and nehu.ac.in. Candidates have been asked to apply online through the Ministry of Education SAMARTH (vrec.smarth.ac.in/index.php/). The online application portal became active from 10 am on May 20 and will remain open till 5 pm on June 18, 2026.

The advertisement comes against the backdrop of a prolonged leadership vacuum at NEHU after the VC’s continued absence since November 2024. Faculty and administrative staff described the absence as having created measurable operational challenges across academic and administrative functions.

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Imphal, May 21: Re-elected BJP MLA Rupjyoti Kurmi has sparked fresh political controversy after publicly stating that areas which voted heavily in his favour in the recently concluded Assam Assembly elections would receive priority in development works. Kurmi made the remarks on Wednesday while addressing a felicitation programme organised by the Government Gaonburha Association along with BJP workers from the Mariani, Selenghat and Koliapani BJP mandals. The six-time MLA, known for his outspoken and often controversial statements, said development projects in the constituency would first focus on areas that strongly supported him electorally. “All those who voted for me or the areas with maximum votes for me will be prioritised for speedy development there. I will begin development work slowly and only after two years in the areas where I had scored low,” Kurmi said. His remarks immediately drew attention as they appeared to link public development directly with electoral support, raising concerns over impartial governance and possible political discrimination in the distribution of public resources. Kurmi, however, did not elaborate on the specific nature of the proposed development projects or identify the areas that could face delays.

The BJP legislator also made striking comments regarding his political future, claiming that an astrologer had predicted he would remain an MLA for the next three terms. “As per my astrologer, it’s in my horoscope that I will remain the sitting MLA for the next three terms and the next MLA after me will be someone whom I prefer or like,” he said. Taking a swipe at opposition parties, Kurmi asserted that his political rivals had little chance of regaining power in the constituency. “This is bad news for the Opposition because they are just dreaming. No one from them will be preferred by me. That means they will never be able to see power in the coming years,” he added.

The remarks came only weeks after Rupjyoti Kurmi secured his sixth consecutive victory from the Mariani Assembly constituency in the 2026 Assam Assembly elections. The BJP leader defeated Gyanashree Bora of Rajior Dal by a margin of 26,840 votes on May 4. Kurmi first won the Mariani seat in 2006 as a Congress candidate before later joining the Bharatiya Janata Party, continuing his electoral dominance in the constituency despite changing political affiliations.

Ranjeet Kumar Dass Chosen as Speaker of Assam Assembly

Guwahati, May 21: Former Cabinet Minister and four-time BJP MLA Ranjeet Kumar Dass was on Thursday unanimously elected as the Speaker of the 16th Assam Legislative Assembly.

Notably, Dass is the first person to hold the Assam Legislative Assembly Speaker’s post for a second term.

“I would like to congratulate Shri Ranjeet Kumar Dass on being elected unanimously as the Speaker of the 16th Assam Legislative Assembly. The House will benefit greatly from his insights and experience,” Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said in his congratulatory message.

“Rising from a humble background, he has travelled a long way in an illustrious career spanning decades, from an IIS officer to a journalist to public service, he has always made Assam proud,” Sarma said.

“Associated with the RSS since his early days and then in the BJP, he has imbibed the Sewa Bhav since his childhood. He also adds another glorious chapter to his life as he becomes the first person to be elected twice as Speaker of the august House,” the Chief Minister said.

“As I wish him good luck for his tenure, I am confident that he will conduct the house seamlessly with his vast experience and uphold the rich values and legacy of the Vidhan Sabha. As leader of the BJP Legislature Party, I assure our full cooperation in ensuring the house functions with 100% of its productivity level in each session,” he said.



The NDA had filed the nomination papers of BJP MLA Ranjeet Kumar Dass as the Speaker of the Assembly.

Ministers Atul Bora and Charan Boro, MLA Pijush Hazarika and other MLAs of the BJP, AGP and the BPF had earlier submitted the nomination

papers of MLA Dass, who was a Cabinet minister in the last Himanta Biswa Sarma-led government in the state.

Dass was elected to the Assembly from Bhowanipur-Sorbhog LAC in recently-concluded Assam Assembly election.

Medical Emergency at Bumla Pass Ends Safely Thanks to Ex-Army Driver

Tawang, May 21: A tourist taxi driver and former Army personnel, Urgen Norbu, saved the life of a woman tourist after she suffered severe breathing difficulties at Bumla Pass on Tuesday in Tawang district. Norbu, who now drives tourists to various sightseeing destinations in Tawang after taking voluntary retirement from the Indian Army in 2023, said he had taken three couples from West Bengal to Bumla Pass, located at an altitude of around 15,200 feet.

According to Norbu, shortly after reaching the snow-covered destination, one of the women tourists, believed to be around 42 years old, started experiencing breathing difficulties. While the other tourists continued taking photographs and enjoying the snow, Norbu sensed that the woman’s condition could worsen because of the extreme altitude. He repeatedly advised the group to descend immediately, warning them that staying longer at such a high altitude could be dangerous for the woman. However, the tourists initially ignored his advice and continued sightseeing. As the woman’s condition deteriorated further, Norbu insisted that everyone return to a lower altitude without delay. Suspecting high-altitude sickness, he immediately began driving downhill. After descending nearly a kilometre, the woman suddenly lost consciousness inside the vehicle. “She stopped breathing and everyone inside the vehicle panicked,” Norbu recalled. Drawing on the experience he gained during his years in the Indian Army, Norbu quickly stopped the vehicle by



the roadside and started administering CPR to the unconscious tourist. After performing nearly 30 to 40 chest compressions, the woman responded and began breathing again. A portable oxygen facility was then used to stabilise her condition. Norbu said the tourists were asked to keep talking to the woman and massage her hands while he focused on safely evacuating her to a lower altitude. By the time they reached PT Tso Lake, the woman had regained full consciousness and was able to speak normally with her companions. The tourists later emotionally thanked Norbu and hugged him for saving her life. Norbu said this was not the first such rescue he had carried out, recalling that he had also saved another female tourist facing a similar medical emergency in 2025.

Meghalaya Minister Assures Adequate Fuel Supply Amid Panic Buying

Shillong, May 21: Meghalaya Food and Civil Supplies Minister Methodius Dkhar allayed concerns regarding fuel availability in the State while clarifying that the recent hike in fuel rates was a decision taken by the Centre and not by the state government.

“There is no shortage of petrol and diesel in Meghalaya at present,” Dkhar said, while urging people not to panic, but be cautious about the global situation. “The US-Iran war has affected not only petroleum products but also several other commodities linked to transportation and supply chains,” the Minister said.

Petrol price in Shillong has gone up to Rs 99.63 per litre while diesel is priced at Rs 90.94.

He warned of another increase in the prices of petrol and diesel in the coming days if the war con-

tinued.

According to him, any rise in fuel prices also leads to a slight increase in the prices of essential commodities.

The minister, however, assured that the State is currently in a comfortable position with regard to LPG supplies. He informed that the government has regulations in place whereby an LPG card holder cannot refill a domestic cylinder before 25 days.

On the supply of commercial LPG, Dkhar admitted that there was some shortage, but stated that Meghalaya had been receiving around 60 to 65 per cent of its requirement.

He reiterated that the government was closely monitoring the situation and appealed to the consumers to refrain from panic-buying.

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma takes oath as MLA

Guwahati, May 21: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma today took oath as an MLA on the first day of the new assembly. Protem Speaker Chandra Mohan Patowary administered the oath to Sarma for the 16th Assam Legislative Assembly. “Truly humbled to take oath as a Member of the Assam Legislative Assembly for the 6th consecutive term as a representative of the people of Jalukbari,” Sarma said. “It is an honour to serve in this august House. I look forward to healthy deliberations with my fellow MLAs,” he added. Sarma took his oath in the Assamese language. Patowary said, “All the members can take an oath in any recognised language they wish to. They can submit their oath copies to the assembly office.”

Gadkari reviews NH projects in Assam

Guwahati, May 21: Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari reviewed the progress and maintenance quality of National Highway projects covering 4,178 kilometres in Assam during a high-level meeting.

According to an official statement, the review was initiated following inputs received through media reports and social media feedback regarding highway conditions and project implementation.

The meeting was attended by Union Ministers of State Ajay Tamta and Harsh Malhotra, along with officials from NHAI, NHIDCL, MoRTH, and project contractors. Gadkari emphasised the need to accelerate on-ground execution, strengthen quality monitoring mechanisms, and adopt modern con-



struction practices to enhance asset durability and riding quality. He also directed officials to undertake advanced monsoon preparedness, including robust

drainage systems, slope protection, and rapid response mechanisms to minimize disruptions and ensure commuter safety across key corridors.

Four UNLF (P) Members Arrested as Security Forces Recover Weapons in Manipur

Imphal, May 21: Manipur Police launched a special operation in the Lamshang area under Lamsang police station on Wednesday and apprehended two active cadres of UNLF (P) with arms and ammunition, including one INSAS LMG, three INSAS LMG magazines and 14 live rounds.

The apprehended cadres have been identified as Heishnam Thomas Singh (29) of Mayang Imphal Kokchhai and Arambam Tomtom Singh (29) of Lamshang Heibongpokpi Mayai Leikai. The operation was launched on the basis of credible information regarding the sale of looted arms and ammunition in the Lamshang area. “While the arrest process was going on, associates of the cadres opened fire at the security forces, resulting in a brief exchange of fire. Further, two



more cadres, involved in firing upon security forces, namely Ningthoujam Rakesh Singh and Chingakham Mahesh Singh, were apprehended,” a statement issued by Manipur Police on Thursday said.

On preliminary interrogation of the arrested cadres, they disclosed that they had come

to sell the seized weapons on the instruction of self-styled Lance Corporal Naorem Bijoy alias Macha of UNLF (P).

They further admitted involvement in earlier sale of looted arms and ammunition.

Subsequently, based on the follow-up operation, joint security forces comprising of

Manipur Police, Assam Rifles and CRPF conducted cordon and search operation at an unauthorised UNLF (P) camp located at Lamdeng, in which security forces recovered and secured a large cache of arms and war-like stores consisting of 29 weapons comprising AK series rifles, M-series rifles, pistols and other firearms.

Further, the joint security forces on Thursday recovered 38 additional weapons and heavy stores, comprising AK series rifles, M-series rifles, sniper rifle, carbine, shotguns, mortars, RPG-7 launcher, anti-drone jammer and a huge cache of explosives.

Meanwhile, the police have urged people to immediately report any information regarding looted or illegally possessed weapons to the nearest police station.

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Editorial

Keep Campus Unions Free from Political Clutches

Student unions were conceived as spaces where young minds could learn leadership, voice grievances, and champion campus welfare. That founding purpose is increasingly being hollowed out by political parties that treat student bodies as fertile recruiting grounds and election rehearsal stages. When student unions become extensions of political organisations, the consequences are predictable and damaging. Union agendas shift from academic concerns — library hours, mental health support, faculty accountability — to ideological battles imported from outside the campus. Elected student leaders answer not to their peers but to party handlers. Those who resist find themselves marginalised; those who

comply are rewarded with mentorship that demands loyalty over integrity. The argument that political exposure grooms future leaders confuses two very different things: civic consciousness, which education must cultivate, and partisan affiliation, which parties must earn on their own terms. A student union engaged with policy debates, public issues, and social justice is entirely compatible with institutional independence. A student union answering to a party whip is not. Educational institutions exist to nurture critical thinking. Student unions, at their best, practise it. Political capture smotherers that instinct before it has a chance to breathe. Autonomy is not naivety. It is the precondition for genuine democratic learning.

The takeaway from John Travolta’s striking new appearance is to always dress for the job you want

Like the majority of today’s greatest fashion moments, it took place at Cannes. I’m not referring to Demi Moore sporting a dog-sized pink bow or Jane Fonda dazzling in Gucci to the point of blindness, but rather John Travolta, who made an appearance at the festival this week to unveil a new movie and a new look, the focal point of which was a beret. In reality, he had three in rotation: cream, brown, and black. He wore them with wire-frame spectacles and what looked like a felt-tip pen beard on the coastal street La Croisette. You say a beard, a beret, and specs? For a 72-year-old celebrity, this is hardly a radical makeover. Nevertheless, pictures of Travolta went viral, igniting some animated internet discussions that likened him to a barista, a Bond villain, and a Guess Who character, in that order. Fortunately, the man was thrilled to share his inspiration in a delightful CNN interview. Travolta had chosen to dress like cinema directors from the past because this was his first attempt at directing. He had persuaded himself, “You’re an actor,” as he scrolled through pictures of Roberto Rossellini and Ingmar Bergman dressed similarly. “Take on the role of a director.” Put differently: manifest. The shocking effect of Travolta’s statement was to temper the harsh opinions. All he had done was dress for the role he desired, or at the very least, wanted to be recognized for. Even though his attire was ridiculous,



especially when he was flaunting his honorary Palme d’Or, there was a tiny part of me—possibly all of us—that felt really noticed. Who among us hasn’t tried to influence a result with clothing? Maybe to establish a new persona following a breakup or to indicate an attempt to change careers. Alternatively, I wear Birkenstocks to partially defang the fashion sector I work in (though it helps that they’re comfy too). Regardless of your opinion on clothing, our attire has an impact on our emotions. Additionally, how we dress has an impact on how other

people see us. This isn’t cosplay. Cognition is enveloped. Travolta’s over-commitment to the bit was his single error. It’s important to note that red carpets are inherently strange locations. Celebrities must suffer greatly from excessive attention, but their lack of it is far worse. No matter how educational the dress code is or how well-known its members are, celebrities might go overboard when the main focus is on the movies rather than the attire, as is the case at Cannes. Directors, on the other hand, find it more difficult because they must balance

the need for publicity with their wish to be recognized as auteurs. In addition, Hollywood can be ruthless, erratic, and blatantly ageist—even to men—especially when it comes to reinvention. Even if Travolta’s new headgear make him appear more like a mime, who can blame him for trying to change the invisible lever of relevance? Is it any different from Kim Kardashian wearing Marilyn Monroe’s 1962 “naked” dress to the Met Gala in 2022—not to honor the original wearer, but to invite comparison—or Taylor Swift donning

Elizabeth Taylor’s jewelry this week in the hopes that some of the latter’s star power might rub off? However, this kind of method dressing is most prevalent in politics, where attire functions as a practice for aspiring leaders and eventually conveys the type of politician one aspires to be. Andy Burnham is now dressing for Keir Starmer’s position. He wears bomber jackets and t-shirts, which are purposefully anti-Whitehall dress rules at odds with his embattled adversary, or retro Everton shirts and running shorts, the go-to soft launch outfit of choice (I’ve got stamina!), to demonstrate that he is a man of the people. Wes Streeting, on the other hand, has long been a supporter of the underlying philosophy of the centrist blue suit. He’s dressing for the big job, as he always has, but he’s also taking a cue from Barack Obama’s easygoing leadership style by periodically removing his tie. Alternatively, Angela Rayner is just wearing more red, as evidenced by her latest sit-down interview with ITV. The issue is that you can only go so far by dressing the role. You don’t necessarily have to be skilled at your work just because you dress for it. You run the risk of straying into parody or even Halloween if you go too far. Even yet, Travolta deserved the privilege because he had directed a movie, albeit a mediocre one. What about the others? A pair of shorts can only influence public opinion so much.

The effort to fire Misan Harriman is a component of a campaign against prominent Black people

Once, I met Tommy Robinson. That was precisely ten years ago, during one of his numerous unsuccessful attempts to mainstream Islamophobia in British politics with a brand-new “movement” named Pegida, which was modeled after the far-right Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West in Germany. This “launch,” which I was assigned to cover as a social affairs journalist for Sky News, was not very noteworthy. Instead, I found a sad assembly of a few men at a pub close to Luton. What really sticks in my memory is what Robinson—real name Stephen Yaxley-Lennon—said to me. “The Muslims are the issue,” he declared. However, you’re OK. You can communicate in English. We are similar to you. Something that was meant to be a compliment has never been so completely hurtful. Pegida passed away rapidly. However, the thought that right-wing men decide whether or not black and brown British people are acceptable in our own nation stuck with me. This idea has only grown stronger over the past ten years, culminating this past weekend when Robinson and his supporters assembled to launch an unprecedentedly violent onslaught against British Muslims, advocating for “re-mi-

gration,” often known as ethnic cleansing. Meanwhile, a gentrified version of the same attack is being launched by a more rarefied, ostensibly respectable outfit. Their preferred weapon is the right-wing media, and Misan Harriman is currently their target. They are unlikely to be spotted hanging out with Robinson supporters dressed in union jack. Harriman is well-known in British culture and on social media. He was the first black man to photograph the cover of British Vogue and was nominated for an Oscar for his film The After. His photographs of the Black Lives Matter demonstrations went viral and eventually worldwide, serving as the inspiration for the documentary Shoot the People. His pictures of Jews, particularly Holocaust survivors, are among his most poignant. Many of them see their trauma—especially the ongoing trauma of an increase in antisemitism—as an obligation to unite with everyone who opposes hate, including that which is directed at Muslims in Britain, Palestinians in Gaza, and members of their own Jewish community in Britain. Harriman’s images would serve as a visual representation of what it means to reject division and pursue togetherness in 2026. Harriman has served as head

of the Southbank Centre, one of the biggest cultural hubs in Europe, since 2021. The role’s primary responsibility is to safeguard inclusive places for free speech and innovation. His own love of free speech is used with extreme caution because of his high profile. In a coordinated effort to remove Harriman from this position, a small group of right-wing white men have launched an incredible array of attacks against the mainstream media. Similar to Robinson, they appear more concerned with whether he is the appropriate ethnic minority to be allowed in their community than with his past performance. He is being attacked in a variety of ways and from numerous angles. For instance, Richard Morrison, chief culture writer for the Times, notes that although he was “educated at English private schools,” he “seems to have developed little interest or expertise in classical music or any other performing art form—something of a hindrance, one may think, for a man chairing an organization with three concert halls and six resident orchestras.” His inability to play the cello seems to outweigh his Oscar nomination as a filmmaker. The Telegraph arts journalist Craig Simpson bemoans the fact that he “has a well-documented friendship with

the Duke and Duchess of Sussex,” which is undoubtedly a disqualifying characteristic in and of itself. The Telegraph describes him as a “pro Palestinian arts boss” and a “British photographer born in Nigeria.” These commenters often remind us that Harriman is also the son of a billionaire. The historian and infamously underprivileged grandee of right-wing life, Lord Roberts of Belgravia, was one of the signatories to a letter to the Times endorsing Morrison’s piece and stating that Morrison was correct to express “growing concerns for the Southbank Center,” which particularly delighted me. Roberts’ intervention may be a sign of a darker agenda: the larger effort to punish cultural institutions that represent various viewpoints and ideals in British public life. Roberts has been an outspoken critic of the National Trust’s attempts to acknowledge the effects of colonialism and slavery on all of its historic properties, calling this action “foul.” In addition to defunding empire as “a noble endeavour that for the vast majority of time brought great benefits for most of its native inhabitants,” he is, however, a harsh critic of cancel culture. The unsettling specter of those “native inhabitants” entering the major and

prominent institutions of British life is undoubtedly presented by Harriman. The coordinated effort against Harriman is centered on the fact that his critics detest his criticism of Israel and have continuously tried to conflate it with antisemitism. Some have alleged that comments by Harriman compared Reform UK’s electoral success to the Holocaust. In reality, however, Harriman cited philosopher Susan Sontag, who used the pre-war German background to explain how most people are susceptible to persuasion and can be moved toward or away from extreme. Another false accusation made by the campaign against Harriman is that he had a “conspiracy theory” regarding the Golders Green attacks that occurred last month. In actuality, Harriman’s initial reaction to the assault was a clear post that expressed “solidarity to the Jewish community.” Like many of us, Harriman questioned why the Metropolitan police and numerous news outlets, such as HuffPost and Sky, did not immediately give this victim the same status and prominence when he correctly learned that there had been a third Muslim victim of the same attacker on the same day. This appears to address an unspoken

norm in the British media: there is a zero-sum game between acknowledging Muslim and Jewish victims, as well as between acknowledging Islamophobia and antisemitism. Amnesty International, which also blogged condemning these smear-like attempts against Harriman, rightly characterized this toxic notion: “when we allow one community’s trauma to be played off against another’s, we weaken the foundation of safety for everyone.” Over 100,000 people have signed a campaign endorsing a complaint regarding the Telegraph’s coverage to the Independent Press Standards Organization (Ipso). Anyone affected by the Tommy Robinson march will learn that violent Islamophobia is not a priority for the British establishment, including our political leaders, law enforcement, and right-wing media. It is required of all Black British citizens to pay attention, lest they also cross the line. The Voice, the oldest black newspaper in Britain, expressed worry that “this is not accountability culture, it’s more reputational warfare.” The message’s impact is quite clear: if we dare to fall out of line, the experiment of “allowing” black persons to occupy positions similar to Harriman’s might end in an instant.

The declining educational culture in Anundoram Borooah and Assam

Assam will commemorate Anundoram Borooah, the first Assamese to join the Indian Civil Service under British rule, on May 21. Beyond the ceremonial honors and textbook allusions, his name continues to evoke pride throughout the state. However, there is a more significant question that Assamese society must address today: are we really maintaining the culture of learning and intellectual superiority that Borooah represented? Anundoram Borooah is still regarded as one of Assam’s best thinkers over a century after his passing. However, his legacy is sometimes summed up in a single sentence about passing the ICS exam. He was much more than just an accomplished administrator. He was an exceptionally deep scholar whose accomplishments were acknowledged by European intellectuals of his era as well as in India. Borooah was born in colonial Assam in 1850 and grew up during a period when there were very few options for further education. Under British administration, travel was challenging, resources were limited, and Indians experienced institutionalized discrimination. Despite these difficulties, he stood out for his discipline and academic prowess. Many people are still unaware of Borooah’s extraordinary proficiency in a number of languages, including Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit. Orientalist scholars in Europe were impressed by his research on Sanskrit. He maintained a strong commitment to classical education and Indian knowledge traditions even while working for the colonial government. Today, that facet of his personality becomes very important. Borooah struck a unique equilibrium during a time when many educated Indians were



urged to mindlessly emulate Western culture. He accepted contemporary education without losing touch with his heritage. He demonstrated that it was possible to interact with the outside world without compromising one’s cultural identity. His story has a significant lesson for Assam today. Concerns about the state’s declining educational system, unemployment, and the constant exodus of students from Assam are becoming more pressing. Parents in many Assamese households today believe that possibilities and high-quality education are limited to ar-

eas beyond the state. At the same time, Assamese society seems to be fast losing its reading culture. The contemporary status of education is characterized by neglected libraries in many towns, seldom meaningful literary discussions, and a growing emphasis on exams and coaching-center rivalry. Anundoram Borooah’s life seems more pertinent than ever in light of this. He was part of a generation that viewed education as a lifetime obligation rather than just a means of obtaining a job. He had a legendary level of study discipline. According to historical reports, he maintained rigorous reading habits and dedicated many hours to study even during his strenuous administrative work. Such engagement demonstrated exceptional dedication during a period of limited resources and few distractions. The simplicity of Borooah’s life may be what makes him even more admirable. Despite his achievements and widespread exposure, he never fostered a sense of superiority or haughtiness. He continued to prioritize learning and personal development over public recognition. This trait alone sets him apart in the modern world, where visibility frequently takes precedence over content. The preservation of identity, language, and culture is a topic of intense discussion in Assamese society. However, history shows us that slogans alone cannot sustain an identity. When a society cherishes education, promotes study, and makes room for intellectual development, it safeguards its legacy. Long before contemporary discussions about cultural identity arose, Borooah recognized this reality. His narrative serves as a reminder to young people in Assam’s rural and smaller towns. Even in

the nineteenth century, a young Assamese scholar attained the greatest levels of academic and administrative performance through tenacity alone, despite the lack of contemporary facilities and institutional support. The idea that students from the Northeast are destined to stay on the periphery is nevertheless called into question by his life. Anundoram Borooah’s life was tragically brief. At the tender age of 39, he died in 1889. However, he accomplished what many people are unable to do in a lifetime in those few years. Historians continue to question how much more he could have contributed if he had lived longer due to his incomplete scholastic achievements. His memory is still being preserved today by organizations like the Anundoram Borooah Institute of Language, Art, and Culture. But the real homage to Borooah cannot be limited to ceremonial speeches and yearly events. The true task is to create an Assam where teachers are respected, books are appreciated, libraries continue to operate, and intellectual achievement is given the same respect as financial or political success. This year marks Anundoram Borooah’s birth anniversary in Assam, and honoring him should be more than just a sentimental exercise. His life serves as a mirror for society today. It compels us to consider if we are fostering the intellectual culture required for the world we hope to create. Anundoram Borooah continues to serve as a reminder to Assam more than 130 years after his passing of a straightforward but timeless truth: a society that gradually loses its focus when it ceases appreciating knowledge.

Tata AIA launches dividend leaders pension fund to tap retirement investment demand

Aizawl: Tata AIA Life Insurance has launched the Tata AIA Dividend Leaders Index Pension Fund, a new retirement-focused investment solution aimed at helping customers build long-term wealth through exposure to India’s leading dividend-paying companies. Announcing the launch, the insurer said the fund follows a passive investment strategy and tracks the BSE 500 Dividend Leaders 50 Index in line with IRDAI regulations. The fund will invest in 50 financially resilient companies with a strong dividend payment history across multiple market cycles, while combining market-linked growth opportunities with life insurance protection.

The company said dividends generated by portfolio companies will be reinvested into the fund to support long-term compounding and retirement corpus creation. The fund will maintain an equity allocation between 70 and 100 per cent, while up to 30 per cent may be allocated to cash and money market instruments for portfolio flexibility. The New Fund Offer (NFO) will remain open from May 20 to May

27, 2026, with policies issued during the period priced at a Net Asset Value (NAV) of ₹10. The fund is available through Tata AIA Smart Pension Secure and Tata AIA Premier Pension Secure plans.

Company officials said the offering is designed to provide diversified sector exposure, a rules-based investment approach, and access to stable businesses capable of delivering long-term value for retirement planning.

In Mizoram, awareness around retirement-linked financial products has been steadily rising among salaried employees, young professionals, and small business owners in Aizawl and other towns. Market observers believe dividend-focused pension products could gain traction among conservative investors in Mizoram seeking stable long-term wealth creation backed by insurance protection.

Tata AIA reported a total premium income of ₹31,484 crore in FY25, registering a 23 per cent rise over FY24, while continuing to rank among the top private insurers in Individual Weighted New Business Premium (IWNBP).

Is it possible to withdraw PF through UPI in near future This is what it signifies for employees

Mumbai: Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) subscribers could soon get faster access to their retirement savings as the government moves toward enabling EPF withdrawals through the Unified Payments Interface (UPI). The proposed feature aims to simplify the fund withdrawal process and reduce waiting time for millions of salaried employees across India. The development was recently confirmed by Labour Minister Manukh Mandaviya, who said testing for the facility has already been completed. The move is part of a wider effort by EPFO to modernize services, improve digital access, and enhance the user experience for more than seven crore EPFO members. The messaging platform is expected to support services such as balance checks, viewing recent transactions, tracking claim status, and receiving updates. Regional language support may also be introduced.

5. EPFO’s efficiency

The organisation also highlighted a reduction in pending legal and consumer-related disputes through targeted campaigns and faster disposal efforts. According to the ministry, litigation pendency has fallen sharply over the last two years. For millions of salaried employees, the proposed UPI withdrawal system could represent another step toward faster and more accessible retirement fund management. If implemented smoothly, it may significantly reduce waiting periods and bring EPFO services closer to the instant digital experience users have come to expect. “We have completed the testing of the facility where members can withdraw EPF through the use of the UPI payment gateway. The withdrawn amount will be directly transferred into the bank account of the member,” Mandaviya said on Tuesday.

Once introduced, the new system could mark a significant change in how employees access their provident fund savings, especially during emergencies or immediate financial needs.

Here are the top things EPFO members should know: Under the proposed facility, EPFO subscribers will be able to directly transfer eligible EPF balances into their linked bank accounts through UPI. Members will first be



able to see the amount available for withdrawal and initiate the transaction using a UPI-based process. Apart from UPI integration, EPFO plans to use WhatsApp to improve communication and member support. Users will be able to start interactions by sending “Hello” to EPFO’s verified WhatsApp account, identified through a green verification tick. To complete the transaction securely, subscribers will need to authenticate using their linked UPI PIN. This is expected to provide a simpler and faster alternative compared to traditional claim procedures. After funds are credited to bank accounts, users can spend them through digital payment apps or withdraw cash through debit cards and ATMs. At present, EPFO members are required to submit withdrawal claims before accessing their EPF balances. While the process has become more digitized over time, it still involves application filing and processing timelines.

To reduce delays, EPFO introduced an auto-settlement mechanism where eligible claims are processed electronically without manual intervention. Claims under this system are usually settled within three days.

The organisation has also increased the auto-settlement limit from ₹1 lakh to ₹5 lakh, allowing members to access larger sums more quickly

3. When withdrawals are allowed

Currently, EPF advances can be accessed for approved purposes such as illness, education expenses, marriage, and housing-related needs. The quicker UPI-based mechanism could make access to such funds more efficient. The Labour Ministry is also reportedly working on a structure where a part of EPF savings remains protected while a larger portion becomes available for quick withdrawal through linked accounts.

Medanta doctors stress lifestyle changes to curb rising heart disease cases

Dimapur: Medanta – The Medicity has highlighted the growing burden of heart-related diseases in India and stressed that nearly 90 per cent of such deaths can be prevented through timely lifestyle changes and awareness. The hospital’s specialists said rising stress, sedentary work culture, unhealthy eating habits and lack of physical activity are increasingly affecting younger people.

Padma Shri awardee Dr. Praveen Chandra said conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity and stress-related heart disorders are now common among younger adults. He stated that regular exercise, balanced diets, avoiding

smoking and stress management can significantly reduce cardiovascular risks. Dr. C Manpa Phom said simple activities such as walking for 45 minutes at least four to five times a week, along with proper sleep and healthy food habits, can help improve long-term heart health. The hospital also underlined India’s growing strength in advanced cardiac treatment and healthcare technology. Medanta has signed an MoU with the Government of Nagaland for accreditation under the Chief Minister’s Health Insurance Scheme and partnered with IDAN to promote public health awareness in the state. In Kohima, healthcare

and wellness services are witnessing increased demand as awareness about lifestyle diseases grows among urban consumers. Hospitals, diagnostic centres and preventive healthcare providers in Kohima are seeing higher interest in regular health screenings, specialised consultations and cardiac wellness services. Nagaland residents can consult Dr. C Manpa Phom from Dr. Praveen Chandra’s team at Faith Hospital, Dimapur, on May 23, 2026, from 9 am to 1 pm. Medanta has also launched a dedicated North East helpline to assist patients in Assamese, Bengali, Nagamese, English and Hindi.

Why a 5% rate shock won’t kill this bull market

Mumbai: Consider where global markets sit in May 2026. The US 30-year Treasury yield is hovering at 5.20 per cent, its highest level since the months before the 2007 financial crisis. Brent crude is sticky in the \$107–\$114 range as the conflict in West Asia grinds through its third month. In Mumbai, India’s 10-year G-Sec yield has pushed up to 7.13 per cent, blowing out the term premium over a 5.25 per cent repo rate. The overnight indexed swap curve is now pricing a hawkish reversal by the Reserve Bank of India before year-end equities should be retreating. They are not. The S&P 500 sits within striking distance of its all-time high. The Nifty 50 is consolidating on a high base. The standard framework — high yields equal falling equities — is failing because the world has split into two speeds at once, and a single-speed framework can only see one of them. The K-shape has gone macro. The upper limb is a technology-driven deflationary shock in services. The cost of producing an artificial intelligence query has fallen by more than ninety per cent over the last eighteen months, per public OpenAI and Anthropic pricing disclosures. White-collar wage growth in the United States is decelerating sharply, per

recent BLS and Atlanta Fed wage-tracker data. Software development, customer service, legal research, financial analysis, accounting — entire categories of services are being delivered for a fraction of their cost two years ago. Productivity gains of the kind not seen since the late 1990s are showing up in real corporate margins. Globally, the picture rhymes: the American fiscal deficit is structural, the 30-year UK gilt has hit its highest level since 1998, and the April 2026 Bank of America Global Fund Manager Survey shows sixty-two per cent of investors expect the US 30-year yield to touch six per cent. The closest historical analogue is the 1994 Bond Massacre, when the US Federal Reserve doubled rates from three to six per cent in twelve months. That shock coincided with the corporate internet rollout, and the productivity wave overwhelmed the rate shock so completely that the Nasdaq compounded several times over by the millennium. When productivity rises faster than prices, the cost line falls faster than the revenue line. Margins expand. The discount rate matters less than the rate at which productivity outruns it. The death of the middle in a 7.13 per cent G-Sec environment, the K-shape triggers aggressive intra-sector

consolidation. The upper limb demands continuous capital expenditure in technology infrastructure, data architecture, and AI capability — investments only deep-pocketed market leaders can afford. For half a decade, fund managers have tracked the K-shaped consumer economy — the widening divergence between premium real estate, luxury cars, and high-end hospitality at the top, and languishing entry-level retail and rural FMCG volumes at the bottom. In 2026, that observation has graduated into something structural.

The K-shape has spread to the entire macro economy, with two structural forces moving in opposite directions, both at full intensity, in the same calendar quarter. The lower limb is a supply-side inflationary shock in physical goods. Oil is sticky above \$100, gold sits near all-time highs, and copper, silver, and global freight rates remain elevated. For India, the transmission is direct: the rupee is at record lows, foreign portfolio flows have turned decisively negative, and a Bernstein note this week flags another 11 rupees per litre of fuel-price hikes may be required if crude averages \$100. Interest rate cuts have been priced out for 2026.

Lenskart: The Reason Jefferies Anticipates a 22% Increase in Value

Mumbai: This upgrade in the rating came after Lenskart delivered another standout quarter, with strong growth & smart margin gains across India & international markets. Also, the company’s management commentary remained positive, with excessive focus on compounding growth, which should further filter out into better profitability. Moving forward, the company is heavily integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is impacting all aspects of the business. From this, Lenskart’s control over the value chain benefits, with a series of initiatives underway that should further improve speed & agility. Peyush Bansal-led Lenskart Solutions reported a strong operational performance in Q4FY26, which led the stock price to surge over 6% in today’s trade. Following the results, Jefferies raised the target price on Lenskart Solutions to Rs



600 from Rs 575, implying an upside of over 22% from the current market price. It has maintained a ‘Buy’ rating on the stock. On the outlook front, Jefferies said that store additions in FY27 will be similar to FY26, and sustaining growth continues to be the key priority – AI to be the driving force. Lastly, the Hyderabad facility will be commissioned in 18 months, with the bulk of capex to be incurred in FY27. Lenskart Solutions Q4FY26

The company reported a fall of 9% year-on-year in

its consolidated net profit for the fourth quarter of FY26, which came in at Rs 200 crore, compared with Rs 219 crore in the same quarter last year. However, the company recorded a strong surge in revenue from operations, which jumped 46% YoY to Rs 2,516 crore. For the whole of FY26, its revenue increased 32% YoY to Rs 9,002 crore. EBITDA rocketed 55.3% YoY to Rs 1,789 crore, while adjusted net profit surged 148% year-on-year to Rs 530 crore. The domestic like-for-like revenue grew 44%,

with over 23% volumes, and more than 18% rise in ASP, off a low base driven by a better mix (promotions in the base quarter). Gross Margin remained flat YoY despite some cost pressure (INR depreciation), which was offset by premiumisation & supply chain efficiencies. Adjusted EBITDA margin was up 40 basis points QoQ to 15.3%. Same store sales growth was best in class at 24%, with the same pincode sales even higher at more than 30%. Adjusted EBITDA was up 2.4x YoY. Lenskart share price performance

The share price of Lenskart has risen over 5% in the last five trading sessions (including today’s gains). The stock price has moved down 7.5% in the past one month. However, the stock has surged 20% in the last six months. Lenskart Solutions’ stock price has given a return of more than 24% over the previous one year.

IRB Infra, Erson shares rally up to 13% post Q4 shows

Mumbai: Shares of IRB Infrastructure Developers Ltd and Samvardhana Motherson International Ltd rallied up to 13 per cent during the trading session on Thursday as both the companies announced a strong set of numbers in the March 2025 quarter. Shares of IRB Infrastructure surged nearly 13.25 per cent to Rs 23.94 on Thursday, commanding a total market capitalization of more than Rs 28,000 crore. The stock has surged nearly 29 per cent from its 52-week low at Rs 18.50, hit in early March 2026. However the stock has dropped more than 10 per cent in the last one year. IRB Infra reported a 37.97 per cent growth in the net profit at Rs 296.26 crore, even as the revenue dropped 10.34 per cent YoY to Rs 2,149.24 crore for the quarter ended on March 31, 2026. Its Ebitda increased 8.5 per cent YoY to Rs 1,083 crore, while margins expanded sharply to 56.2 per cent for the reported quarter.

Gamble working Jefferies slashed Jubilant FoodWorks’ target Is Domino’s Rs 99 free-delivery

Mumbai: Food delivery major Jubilant Foodworks is in focus today. The global brokerage house Jefferies retained its ‘Buy’ rating on the stock, even as the company reported muted Same-Store Sales Growth (SSSG) in the March quarter. The brokerage has sharply cut its target price to Rs 600 from Rs 850 earlier. However, it still sees around 27% upside from current levels. The brokerage stated, “Flat SSS & cautious ST margin commentary suggest wait for a turnaround continues.” Jefferies believes the company’s calibrated pricing strategy and improving delivery business could support long-term growth. The report added, “Retain ‘Buy’, but upside is subject to pick up in earnings growth.” The QSR performance dashboard

According to the brokerage report, the company delivered a modest operational beat in the fourth quarter despite pressure from inflation and weak dine-in demand. Adjusted standalone Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation and Amortisation (EBITDA) rose 5% year-on-year to around Rs 200 crore, while revenue increased 6% year-on-year. The report highlighted that gross margins improved by nearly 100 basis points due to operational efficiencies and product mix improvements. However, rising wage costs and energy inflation continued to pressure operating margins during the quarter. One of the biggest talking points in the quarter was Domino’s aggressive pricing and customer acquisition strategy.

24% over the previous one year. As per Jefferies report, the company reduced the free-delivery threshold to Rs 99 from Rs 149 to compete more aggressively with rivals and attract new customers.

The report stated, “The co. also reduced free-delivery threshold to Rs 99 (vs Rs 149 earlier) to match competition.” Alongside this, the company increased cashback offers and removed packaging charges in select markets.



While these measures helped increase order volumes, they also impacted Average Order Value (AOV). As per the brokerage report, Domino’s India revenue grew around 5% year-on-year, while total order volumes jumped nearly 10%. However, same-store sales growth remained almost flat, the weakest trend seen over the last two years. Management attributed part of this weakness to a higher base and supply disruptions caused by Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) shortages during March. Jefferies noted, “SSS growth moderated and was just near-flat, lowest in the last two years.” The brokerage further highlighted that Domino’s continued to gain market share within the pizza segment and among the top Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) chains in India.

Keir Starmer makes a late push to people who are switching to Reform and the Greens



London: In Thursday’s English local elections, which might be crucial to Keir Starmer’s future as prime minister, Labour is expected to suffer record-breaking defeats. In a letter to electors on Thursday, Starmer said that only Labour was prioritizing the interests of the country and that Nigel Farage of Reform and Zack Polanski of the Greens were “not fit to meet this moment of great global instability.” “You have a clear choice when you cast your ballot today,” he declared. “A Labour council working with a Labour government will bring about progress and a better future for the community you call home.” In contrast, Reform offers divisiveness and rage, while the Greens make hollow promises. “You need politicians that will constantly defend you and your family during difficult times. Nigel Farage and Zack Polanski have repeatedly demonstrated that they are unfit to handle this period of extreme global upheaval. I firmly promise you now that Labour will support you and your family no matter what, and we will never compromise on acting in the best interests of the British people. Any outcome in which the party lost more than 1,500 council seats would be existential, MPs warned the Guardian. However, polling experts have warned that even worse out-

comes might occur. Stephen Fisher of the University of Oxford, for example, has forecast that the party will lose more than 75% of its seats, or over 1,900. Labour hopes to be able to point to early holds in London, including Westminster and Wandsworth, which were traditionally Tory councils, to set the narrative that results have not been as bad as predicted. But that message is unlikely to endure given that Reform is expected to take historically Labour councils such as Barnsley and Sunderland, while the SNP looks set for a fifth victory in the Scottish parliament elections, where Labour is also likely to lose ground, having once been on course to take power. YouGov’s final MRP model of the 2026 Holyrood election suggests the SNP will fall just short of the 65 seats needed for a majority in the 129-member Scottish parliament, probably needing a coalition with the independence-backing Scottish Greens. Labour is tied for second place with Reform and the Greens in most polling and predicted to lose five of its MSPs. In elections to the Welsh Senedd, Labour is on course to lose power to Plaid Cymru and record its worst ever result. Peril for Starmer could come if the Welsh first minister, Eluned Morgan, who may lose her seat, calls for him to quit

on the back of the election, following Scottish Labour’s Anas Sarwar who did so in February. MPs hoping to see a change of leadership believe that regional mayors and council leaders – among them Greater Manchester’s Andy Burnham and even the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan – may join calls for a change of prime minister. Allies of the mayors said an immediate call for resignation was unlikely. But Starmer’s position may be safeguarded by leftwing MPs who want to see Burnham return to the Commons before a challenge. Other potential leadership contenders – Wes Streeting and Angela Rayner – are said to be unwilling to be the first to challenge Starmer. Starmer is said to be weighing up setting out the next step in the government’s direction before the king’s speech next Wednesday. Over the coming days, MPs from across the party will hope to shape the narrative for the coming months, with some expected to call for a more radical economic vision. On Tuesday, MPs from the centrist Labour Growth Group will launch a report, An Honest Day – A New Economic Settlement for Britain, calling for stronger government action on living standards and housing, as well as proposals on regulation, investment and state capacity. Public research for the report will show that high numbers of those leaving Labour for the Greens and Reform favour a more radical approach to what they view as deeper structural problems than the government has identified. “The message tomorrow will be the same one the country has been sending for years,” a source from the group said. “People keep working harder for less, watching the basics of a decent life slip out of reach and thinking ‘this system isn’t built for me’. The scale of the results will show how impatient voters are now. “The question afterwards is whether we are finally prepared to face up to it and confront what’s gone wrong. If we aren’t, we will lose this country to the populists for a generation.”

Environmentalists worry that the climate ocean are at risk due to a newly permitted



Australia: Environmental organizations have cautioned that a new gas drilling project planned for Victoria’s Otway basin will make “the path to a safe climate harder” and jeopardize a “pristine ocean environment.” The production license for Amplitude Energy’s Annie gasfield project in the Otway basin, which anticipates beginning gas production by 2028, was approved by the federal and Victorian governments on Thursday. The project is situated on the Great Ocean Road, approximately 12km west of the Twelve Apostles, a well-known tourist destination, and 9km off the coasts of Peterborough and Port Campbell. The state’s energy and resources minister, Lily D’Ambrosio, said the project had the potential to provide up to 65 petajoules of gas – or more than a third of Victoria’s annual gas use. She said while demand for the fossil fuel is “decreasing as people move towards electrification”, the gasfield would ensure there was “enough gas in the system for those industries that can’t electrify”.

It is the second major gas project Labor has approved this term and follows the 2022 election

where then-premier Daniel Andrews campaigned heavily on reviving the State Electricity Commission to accelerate the renewable energy transition and achieve a target of 95% renewable energy by 2035. Greenpeace Australia Pacific’s head of climate and energy, Joe Rafalowicz, said the Otway project “risks our pristine ocean environment and climate”, while Environment Victoria’s climate campaign manager, Joy Toose said it would “only set back progress on the clean energy transition under way” in the state. “Projected emissions from existing and planned fossil fuel developments have already used up the carbon budget to limit global heating to 2C,” Toose said. “Every new gasfield approved makes the path to a safe climate harder and more expensive.” Alison Reeve, energy and climate program director at the Grattan Institute, said shifting away from gas made sense, but that there was “also an industrial base in Victoria that will have a harder job moving away from gas”. Victoria is Australia’s largest user of gas, which is used heavily in the manufacturing sector and for heat generation in industrial processes. The

Australian Energy Market Operator in March pushed back its peak-day gas shortfall forecast a year to 2029, citing new infrastructure, increased supply and reduced consumption had helped to bolster supplies. Thursday’s announcement comes as the Victorian Coalition said that if elected in November it would pause and review all major transmission line projects – which connect renewable energy to the grid – as well as the state’s renewable energy zones – six areas identified as ideal for hosting projects. The opposition’s pause would include both the VNI West, a proposed 240km transmission line linking Victoria to New South Wales, and the Western Renewables Link it will eventually connect to, which links Bulgana in western Victoria to Sydneyham in Melbourne’s northwest. Nationals leader Danny O’Brien told reporters on Thursday VNI west had “completely lost social licence”, thanks in part to “draconian laws” passed by the government last year to allow government agency VicGrid and its contractors access to private land – without a landholder’s consent. Instead, the opposition are proposing creating “urban

solar parks” to encourage solar and battery installations on commercial and industrial rooftops in greater Melbourne. “There are thousands of hectares of roof space on warehouses, factories, buildings in urban areas where we can be putting up solar farms with battery power and using the energy closer to where it’s stored. That also reduces the need for additional transmission lines,” O’Brien said. But Reeve said increasing rooftop solar wasn’t a viable replacement for building transmission lines and that adding solar to commercial buildings and warehouses was often impractical because “a lot of the time those buildings were not engineered to have a lot of weight on the roof.” “A system that is resilient has a mix of everything – you have wind, you have large-scale solar, you have small-scale solar, you have batteries, you have pumped hydro, you have a little bit of gas as well,” she said.

“The thing that hooks all of those things together is transmission.” Building new transmission lines from renewable energy sources – the cheapest electricity generation alternative to ageing coal-fired power stations – were critical “so that electricity can get to where the users actually are,” Reeve said. Toose criticised the opposition’s plan, saying it would “strangle Victoria’s renewable energy industry and drive up power bills for every household and business in the state.” Victorian Greens leader Ellen Sandell, commenting on both Labor’s new gas field and the Coalition’s transmission lines plan, accused the major parties of choosing “their fossil fuel corporation mates over the future of Victorian people and our environment”.

Trump issues a new ultimatum to Tehran while the US guns on an oil vessel flying the Iranian flag



Iran: Shortly after Donald Trump gave Tehran a new ultimatum to accept a deal to end the conflict or face a new round of US bombing “at a much higher level and intensity than it was before,” the US military opened fire on an oil ship flying the Iranian flag on Wednesday. In an effort to break the US blockade of Iranian ports, the US fighter fired multiple rounds and “disabled the tanker’s rudder,” according to a social media statement from US Central Command. The strike followed the US president’s social media statement, which was the most recent in a swift string of drastic and sometimes conflicting policy shifts amid unverified rumors of advancement in the stalled negotiations between Washington and Tehran. In reference to the military campaign he and Israel initiated against Iran in February, the US president said on his Truth Social platform, “Assuming Iran agrees to give what has been agreed to, which is perhaps a big assumption, the already legendary Epic Fury will be at an end.” “If they disagree, the bombing will begin, and regrettably, it will be at a much higher level and intensity than it was previously.” Benjamin Netanyahu, who was scheduled to talk to Trump on Wednesday evening, said in a video released by his office that Israel was “prepared for all scenarios”. Iran’s most senior negotiator, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, remained defiant on Wednesday, saying Washington was seeking Tehran’s surrender through various means including a naval blockade. “The enemy, in its new design, is seeking, through a naval blockade, economic pressure and media manipulation, to destroy the country’s cohesion in order to force us to surrender,” Ghalibaf, the speaker of the Iranian parliament, said in a voice message published on his official Telegram channel. Earlier on

Wednesday, Axios reported that Washington and Tehran were close to agreeing on a one-page memorandum of understanding to end the war. The US-based news outlet reported that the US expected Iran to respond to several key points in the next 48 hours and that while nothing had yet been agreed, this was the closest the parties had been to a deal. Officials in Pakistan told the Guardian that an initial framework could possibly be agreed within 48 hours but that nothing was certain and that talks remained “difficult”. Late on Tuesday, Trump had abruptly ordered an indefinite pause to a naval effort to guide stranded commercial ships through the strait of Hormuz. More than 800 ships and roughly 20,000 crew members remain stranded west of the narrow waterway. Iran has threatened to deploy mines, drones, missiles and fast-attack craft, making passage through the strait too risky for commercial shipping and raising fuel prices around the world. Trump wrote on social media that the decision to halt the new naval effort, called Project Freedom, just a day after it began came after requests from “mediator Pakistan and other countries”. He posted: “Great Progress has been made toward a Complete and Final Agreement.” He said Washington’s blockade of Iranian ports, which is aimed at forcing Iran to make concessions in negotiations to end the war, would remain in place. Citing two unnamed US officials, NBC reported Project Freedom’s abrupt pause was the result of Saudi Arabian opposition to the US plan, with the kingdom telling Washington it would stop US planes using its Prince Sultan airbase or flying through its airspace. Meanwhile, France’s aircraft carrier strike group is moving south of the Suez Canal and into the Red Sea in preparation for a potential French-British mission

in the strait of Hormuz, the French president, Emmanuel Macron, said on Wednesday. Trump, who is due to visit Beijing next week, has threatened in recent weeks to restart the joint US-Israeli air offensive against Iran, but has also repeatedly indicated his desire for a negotiated end to the conflict. Analysts suggested the US president may be seeking something that could be portrayed as a breakthrough before arriving in Beijing. China called on Monday for a comprehensive ceasefire in the Iran war. Beijing has close economic and political ties to Tehran but has failed to exert significant leverage over the radical Islamist Iranian regime since the war began. The Trump administration may want China to exploit that relationship to convince Iran to open the strait. Trump’s trip will be his first visit to China during his second term and the first by a US president since his previous visit, in 2017. A senior Pakistani political source described “things ... moving forward” with a focus in talks on obtaining a permanent ceasefire and “opening of the strait of Hormuz by both, at least for 60 days”. The source added: “That gives a chance for both parties to talk out all important matters, including uranium enrichment. But nothing is finalised yet. Things are under discussion. We expect something to come out before the US president visits China.”. Another Pakistani official said there was still a lack of trust between Iran and the US. “There is still ambiguity in talks and nothing is completely decided.

It is still 50/50 and things can go either way,” they said. “The moment the US ends the blockade and the strait of Hormuz remains open, that will be the beginning of real talks.” As long as there is a blockade from both sides, talks remain difficult. That’s why a framework of understanding to end the blockade for at

least 30 to 60 days for further negotiations is important. It can be a trust-building measure.” Analysts say an external guarantor of any deal is essential. The official said: “Pakistan and Iran both want China to become a guarantor but ... does China even have that power over both parties? Everyone has their doubts.” The news of a possible deal sent the price of oil tumbling, after it had jumped as much as 6% earlier in the week. Many observers believe wide gaps remain between Iran and the US, making a durable ceasefire unlikely in the short term. The Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said on Wednesday that Tehran would convey its position to Pakistan after “finalising its views”. Elsewhere, Israel hit Beirut on Wednesday for the first time since agreeing to a ceasefire with Hezbollah last month, with Israel saying it targeted a commander of the militant group’s elite Radwan force in the city’s southern suburbs. Israeli media reported that the commander – who Agency France-Presse identified as Malek Ballout – was killed in the strike, but there was no immediate confirmation from the Israeli military or Hezbollah. At least 11 other people were killed in strikes across the south and east, according to the Lebanese health ministry. Later on Wednesday, Trump said in an interview with PBS he was optimistic about reaching an agreement with Iran before his trip to China. “I think it’s got a very good chance of ending, and if it doesn’t end, we have to go back to bombing the hell out of them,” Trump told the broadcaster. Trump insisted that under any deal Tehran would “export” its highly enriched uranium – necessary for making a nuclear weapon – to the US, a demand that experts say Iran cannot accept. The Iran war, which began with an Israeli strike that killed Ali Khamenei, Iran’s supreme leader, appears to have reached a stalemate. Iran is taking huge economic losses, which may escalate if it begins to run out of storage capacity for its oil, while Trump is under pressure domestically and internationally as fuel prices surge in the US and globally. Control of the strait and the threat to restart attacks on nearby countries’ oil and other infrastructure in the Gulf are the two main cards Iran can play in negotiations.

A French professor who created a Nobel-style prize is accused of a “gigantic hoax”

France: All eyes were on a little-known literature professor during a ceremony in the French national parliament that was attended by Nobel Prize winners, former government ministers, MPs, renowned scientists, and academics. The 46-year-old balding, bespectacled Florent Montclair was receiving the 2016 Gold Medal of Philology, the study of languages, from the same-named international association. He was dressed in an ill-fitting suit and a rosé shirt. Those present were informed that Montclair was the first French winner of the medal, which had previously been given to Umberto Eco, an Italian writer and linguist. Although it was a glamorous occasion and a noteworthy accomplishment, police assert that the prize itself was completely fraudulent and a part of a sophisticated multinational scam fit for a screenplay. There was no International Society of Philology, despite the fact that the event did occur. Its purported affiliation with an American institution was only known online, and its location was linked to a jewelry business in Lewes, Delaware. Montclair created the award, which is comparable to a Nobel Prize. The scholar purchased the medal for €250 from a Parisian jeweler to give to himself. The professor is currently being investigated for alleged fraud, impersonation, forgery, and use of counterfeit papers. He disputes any criminal activity. The public prosecutor Paul-Édouard Lallois, based in Montbéliard in eastern France, said detectives had spent months trying to unpick what he described as a “tissue of lies”. He said he found “all roads lead back to Monsieur Montclair”. “It was all a gigantic hoax. It could be made into a film or television series,” Lallois told the Guardian.

The labyrinthine investigation now centres on whether Montclair, employed at the Marie and Louis Pasteur University, a teacher training college in Besançon, used the fake medal and a “doctorate” from the University of Philology and Education in the US to obtain a promotion and pay rise. Until 2015, when an article appeared in his local newspaper claiming he was about to win the equivalent of a Nobel prize or Fields medal, Montclair was an unremarkable teaching instructor who liked to write fantasy books, many about vampires, in his spare time. After the national assembly ceremony, Montclair, who gave a Tedx Talk titled the Galilean Challenge, decided the next recipient should be the American intellectual Noam Chomsky, then 87, who travelled to Paris to collect the award in front of 200 people. But in 2018, Montclair designated the Romanian academic Eugen Simion, then 85, as winner and the complex alleged hoax began to fall apart. Romanian journalists from the online publication Scena9, intrigued by the honour bestowed on one of their compatriots, dug deeper and discovered that the University of Philology and Education and the International Society of Philology existed solely through websites created and hosted in France. Their article was headlined: “The fake Nobel prize that duped the Romanian Academy.” The alleged hoax might still never have been discovered but for Montclair’s ambition. In 2018 he had applied to the French ministry of higher education for promotion, allegedly backing up his request by submitting a “state doctorate” awarded by the same American university. Although the qualification was not recognised in France, he was subsequently promoted and made an associate professor.

Sanjay Dutt’s daughter Trishala is now a licensed psychotherapist based in New York



In a time when discussions regarding mental health are finally losing their ‘taboo’ status, Trishala Dutt, the daughter of Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt, has emerged into the limelight with a significant professional achievement. ‘Grounded in culturally sensitive psychotherapy’ While many star kids gravitate toward the silver screen, Trishala Dutt has carved a distinct path, focusing on the complexities of the human psyche and the systemic pressures that shape it. Trishala’s announcement isn’t just a career update; it is a manifesto for a more nuanced approach to therapy. Her practice focuses on several critical areas: from anxiety, depression and

OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder) to substance abuse and relational health. She wrote in her caption, “I am a licensed psychotherapist specialising in anxiety, depression, substance abuse, OCD, and relationship/marital/family issues. I help clients break unhealthy emotional and relational cycles, strengthen self-understanding, and help move them beyond survival mode.” Trishala shared that her dedicated focus is on south Asian communities, addressing the unspoken generational pressures and survival mode often ingrained in these cultures. “My work is grounded in culturally sensitive psychotherapy, with a particular focus on

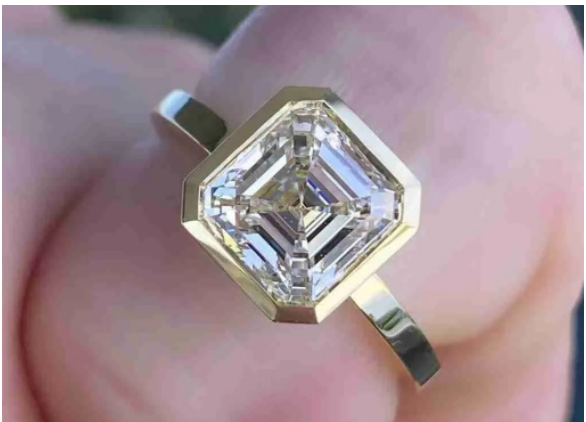
the often unspoken emotional, familial, and generational pressures experienced within South Asian communities and the lasting impact they can have on our identity, relationships, and mental health,” Trishala shared in her Instagram post. Trishala’s career choice carries significant weight for several reasons. As mental health remains a sensitive topic in south Asian households, having a high-profile figure advocate for ‘culturally sensitive’ therapy can help normalise seeking professional help for identity and familial trauma. Given her own family’s highly public history with substance abuse — most notably her father Sanjay Dutt’s

well-documented recovery journey — Trishala’s specialisation in this field brings a unique, empathetic depth to her clinical work. Trishala isn’t stopping at clinical therapy. In her post, she expressed a growing interest in investigative psychology and criminal behaviour, aiming to explore how interpersonal trauma and coercive dynamics contribute to violence and behavioural patterns. She wrote, “In addition to clinical psychotherapy, I hold a developing interest in investigative psychology, trauma, and criminal behaviour, exploring the psychological patterns, trauma histories, behavioural dynamics, and environmental influences that contribute to criminal behaviour and violence. I am particularly passionate about exploring the psychological impact of bullying, emotional abuse, interpersonal trauma, and coercive relational dynamics, with a growing interest in how these experiences can shape identity, behaviour, resilience, and long-term psychological functioning.”

3 essential points that every first-time diamond purchaser ought to be aware of

Purchasing a diamond for oneself, whether to commemorate a professional milestone or to present to a cherished individual on an anniversary or birthday, is truly significant. However, as you start exploring diamond jewelry online or enter a retail establishment, it is quite common to feel inundated by the multitude of choices, the technical language of certifications, and the perplexing pricing system. After all, buying a diamond is definitely not a casual purchase. It carries significant emotional and financial value. But with right knowledge and few practical checks, first time buyers can be confident, avoid expensive mistakes and make a correct decision. “After ten years in this industry, the one thing I tell every first-time buyer is simple: demand transparency before you buy, not explanations after. Get the certificate verified online yourself,” Priyanka Padhye said, highlighting how buying diamond today has become a big financial decision. Rohit Hudke agreed and further added, “Ask for making charges in writing. Know your budget, including GST. And always, always ask about the buy-back policy. If a jeweller

hesitates on any of these, they’re not the right fit.” Here’s a detailed and extensive guide from the jewellery experts covering 8 different vital aspects, from understanding diamond certifications and distinguishing between natural and lab-grown diamonds to decoding pricing structures, resale value and common red flag buyers should watch out for: 1. Natural vs. lab-grown One cannot tell the difference between a natural and a lab-grown diamond with the naked eye. Both are chemically identical, pure carbon, real diamonds in every scientific sense. The only difference is the origin. Natural diamonds formed over billions of years beneath the Earth. Lab-grown ones are created in weeks in a controlled environment. Lab-grown diamonds typically cost 70-90% less than natural diamonds. A buyer who could previously afford a 0.5-carat natural stone can now own a 1.5-carat lab-grown diamond for the same budget. It is not either or, it is purpose driven. Always test the diamond. 2. How to distinguish between lab and natural diamonds



To the most experienced eyes and even under a standard jeweller’s loupe, natural and lab-grown diamonds look identical. The most practical tip: always check the certificate and look for the girdle inscription. Most lab-grown diamonds are laser-inscribed with terms like “lab-grown,” while mined diamonds typically do not carry such origin disclosures. If a jeweller cannot show you a grading certificate or won’t let you verify the report number online, walk away. Lab diamond testers are also available in the market. Always check before you buy. 3. Understand beyond 4C’s The 4Cs are Cut, Colour, Clarity, and Carat. Cut determines how brilliantly a diamond sparkles and should never be compromised. Colour grades run from D (colourless) to Z (yellowish). G or H colour is a smart sweet spot, visually near-identical to D but considerably more affordable. Clarity refers to internal flaws. VS1 or VS2 is a safe, practical grade for most buyers. Carat is weight, not size. A 0.90-carat diamond looks almost the same as a 1-carat once set, but costs noticeably less. Most of the times this is general information, however in case of natural solitaires, please ask for parameters like BGM, Fluorescence which significantly impact the price of the diamond. These parameters are mentioned on the GIA certificate. A ‘NO BGM’ and ‘None’ Fluorescence is preferred.

Chic sneakers priced below ₹2,000 that appear high-quality and provide comfort

A quality pair of sneakers has subtly emerged as the most frequently worn item in many wardrobes. They are no longer limited to gym sessions or travel attire; nowadays, women are pairing sneakers with a variety of outfits, including casual denim, oversized shirts, slip dresses, coordinated sets, kurtas, sarees, and festive ensembles. The appropriate pair can instantly elevate an outfit, making it feel more contemporary, effortless, and suitable for daily wear. The real challenge, however, is finding sneakers that don’t look “budget” while still staying under ₹2,000. Many affordable options tend to fall into two extremes: either they’re too bulky and aggressively sporty for daily styling, or they compromise on comfort and start hurting after a few hours of walking. Poor cushioning, stiff soles, and heavy materials are still common issues in lower price ranges. But the category has evolved significantly over the last couple of years. Several newer sneaker releases are now balancing comfort, versatility, and trend-driven design far better than before. Brands are paying closer attention to softer cushioning, lightweight soles, neutral colour palettes, and silhouettes that work beyond activewear. Instead of flashy neon training shoes, there’s now a visible shift towards cleaner court sneakers, retro-inspired designs, pastel tones, gum soles, and minimal everyday pairs that can blend seamlessly into both casual and semi-dressed outfits. How to choose comfortable and attractive sneakers in a budget? When shopping for sneakers under ₹2,000, it helps to focus on a few practical details beyond just aesthetics: Opt for versatile colours like white, beige, tan, grey, black, or muted pastels. These pair more easily with Indian and Western outfits alike. Low-top silhouettes usually feel more wearable for everyday styling than chunky high-performance running shoes. Lightweight soles matter more than people realise, especially if you walk a lot, commute daily, or spend long hours outside. Cushioning around the heel and ankle can completely change comfort levels during extended wear. Minimal branding often makes affordable sneakers look more elevated

and premium. Slightly retro or court-style sneakers tend to age better trend-wise than overly futuristic designs. Another thing many people overlook is proportion. Chunkier sneakers may look stylish online, but they can visually overwhelm petite frames or clash with softer outfits like cotton dresses, linen sets, or ethnic wear. Sleeker sneakers are often easier to style repeatedly and give outfits a cleaner finish. For Indian summers and monsoon dressing, breathable materials also make a difference. Mesh panels, softer uppers, and easy-to-clean surfaces tend to work better for everyday practicality than heavy faux leather pairs that trap heat. Sneaker picks under ₹2,000 for women 1. Bacca Bucci Women RANGRE-ZA Ethnic Sneakers: This pair stands out because it blends sneaker comfort with ethnic-inspired detailing, making it easier to style with kurtas, co-ord sets, and fusion outfits. Unlike regular white sneakers that can sometimes clash with traditional wear, these feel intentionally designed for Indo-western styling. Styling tip: Pair with straight kurtas, flared palazzos, or cotton sarees for a modern ethnic look that still feels comfortable. 2. ASIAN Stella-02 Women’s Sneakers: These lightweight sneakers focus more on all-day wearability. The cushioning and steady grip make them practical for college, errands, travel, or long commute days where comfort matters more than trend-heavy design. The silhouette stays clean and versatile enough to work with most casual outfits. Styling tip: Style with joggers, oversized shirts, or relaxed denim for an easy everyday off-duty look. 3. Lotto Women Mavin Court Sneakers: Court-style sneakers continue trending because they feel cleaner and more elevated than chunky sports shoes. This pair from Lotto leans into that minimal aesthetic while still remaining wearable enough for daily styling. The low-profile design makes it easy to pair with both fitted and oversized outfits. Styling tip: These work especially well with straight-leg jeans, tank tops, and oversized blazers for a clean “cool-girl casual” outfit. 4. YOHO CAS 105 Sneakers for Women: The sock-like fit is what

makes this pair stand out. Instead of feeling stiff or restrictive, the shoe adapts more naturally to movement, making it useful for long wear hours. The lightweight build also helps prevent the heavy-foot feeling common in budget sneakers. Styling tip: Pair with leggings, co-ord sets, or airport looks for a sporty minimal aesthetic. 5. Boldfit DripWave Faux Leather Sneakers for Women: This pair leans more fashion-forward with its faux leather finish and chunkier silhouette. It gives a slightly streetwear-inspired look while still staying wearable for everyday styling. The design works particularly well for people who want sneakers that feel more statement-making than basic running shoes. Styling tip: Style with baggy jeans, cargos, or oversized graphic tees for a more trend-led streetwear look. 6. Campus Women’s Fawn Sneakers: Campus has become increasingly popular for affordable everyday sneakers because their pairs tend to balance comfort and lightweight construction well. This sneaker keeps things simple, versatile, and easy to wear repeatedly without feeling outdated quickly. Styling tip: Pair with wide-leg denims, summer dresses, or casual kurtis for an easy everyday wardrobe staple. 7. Puma Women Carina Slim Perf Sneaker: This is one of the more polished-looking options on the list. The slimmer silhouette makes it feel more elevated and less bulky than traditional sports sneakers, which helps it transition better into casual everyday fashion. It also works well for people who prefer cleaner, minimalist styling over chunky sneaker trends. Styling tip: Wear with monochrome outfits, linen trousers, or fitted basics for a sleek casual aesthetic. 8. YOHO Quoi Sneakers for Women: This pair focuses more on playful styling through colour and softer cushioning. The design feels youthful without becoming overly flashy, making it suitable for daily casual wear. The cushioned insole also makes it a practical option for people prioritising comfort during long wear hours. Styling tip: Pair with flared denims, oversized sweatshirts, or casual dresses for a relaxed Gen-Z inspired outfit. Good sneakers under ₹2,000 no longer have to look purely functional. The best affordable pairs now com-



bine comfort, styling versatility, and trend-conscious design in ways that actually feel wearable beyond workouts. Whether you prefer minimalist court sneakers, sporty lightweight pairs, or chunkier street-style silhouettes, the key is choosing something you’ll realistically wear multiple times a week, because the best sneakers are always the ones that become part of your everyday wardrobe rotation.

ENTERTAINMENT

Anupam Kher recalls calling Mahesh Bhatt ‘fraud’ after Saaransh exit

Mumbai: Over four decades ago, Anupam Kher made an unforgettable big-screen debut with Mahesh Bhatt’s Saaransh. His portrayal of B.V. Pradhan, a grieving 65-year-old man, remains one of the most defining performances of his career. What made it even more remarkable was the fact that Anupam was only 27 when the film was first narrated to him. The role not only earned him immense recognition but also firmly established him as one of Hindi cinema’s most powerful actors.

However, before Saaransh became a turning point in his life, Anupam was almost removed from the film. At an event, the veteran actor had recalled how he was replaced shortly before the shoot, his deci-



sion to leave Mumbai, and the emotional confrontation with Mahesh Bhatt that eventually got him the role back. Speaking at the Jagran Film Festival last year, Anupam remembered how he was dropped from Saaransh just ten days before filming was scheduled to begin. He said, “I was 27 when Mahesh Bhatt sahab narrated the story to me for my first film. When

I turned 28, I rehearsed for around 6 months for the film. I was going to play the role of a 65-year-old, aged man. But, I was removed from the film 10 days before the shoot, because they wanted to cast a big actor, Sanjeev Kumar ji. They thought it would be a more viable choice commercially.”

The actor shared that the decision left him shattered,

especially because he had spent months preparing for the part. He continued, “I packed all my things and decided to leave the city. I was being told by Mahesh Bhatt since six months that I am playing the main role, I had rehearsed so much. And I was kicked 10 days before the shoot! I packed all my stuff and headed towards VT station. But before leaving, I thought that I should tell Bhatt sahab what I think of him. There’s nothing left anyway, what can he do to me now?” Heartbroken and angry, Anupam decided to visit Mahesh Bhatt’s house before leaving Mumbai. Recalling the incident, he said the lift in Bhatt’s building was not working, but his anger gave him enough energy to climb six floors.

NTR charms fans with heartwarming post featuring pet parrots Asahi and Yuuhi

Hyderabad: On the occasion of his birthday, Jr NTR received a flood of wishes from fans, celebrities, and movie lovers across social media. Amid the excitement surrounding the glimpse of his upcoming film Dragon, the actor surprised everyone with a sweet and personal post that quickly went viral.

NTR shared adorable pictures with two colorful parrots on his social media pages. He also posted individual photos of the birds and introduced them to his followers. In the caption, he revealed that the parrots are named “Asahi” and “Yuuhi,” explaining that the names reflect his love for Japan, a country that has become very special to him over the years. The charming pictures instantly grabbed attention online, with fans enjoying this softer and more personal side of the actor. Social media was flooded with



birthday wishes, heart emojis, and affectionate comments. Some fans even described the birds as the “cutest birthday surprise” from NTR.

Following the massive success of RRR, NTR gained huge popularity in Japan, where the film helped him build a strong fan base. The actor visited the country several times after the film’s release and received a grand welcome from Japanese fans,

creating a connection that clearly left a lasting impression on him.

Fans feel the Japanese names given to his pet birds carry a special meaning. “Asahi” and “Yuuhi” not only sound unique but also reflect NTR’s admiration for Japanese culture. Many followers appreciated the thoughtful gesture and praised him for sharing a joyful moment from his personal life.

Dobhal alleges complaint, recalls humiliation



Dehradun: YouTuber Anurag Dobhal recently grabbed headlines after a purported near-fatal car crash during an Instagram Live session, along with the serious allegations he levelled against his family. Popularly known as UK Rider 07, the influencer has now claimed that his family is once again plotting against him. He alleged that fresh complaints have been filed against him by his own family members.

In his new vlog, Anurag Dobhal, who is still recovering from injuries sustained in a car crash, revealed that his father filed a complaint against him on the same night his accident took place. He said, “At the very moment when my accident happened, that same night, my father went to the police station and filed a complaint against me. He had written many things in that complaint letter. I didn’t know about it at the time, and as time passed, the investigation continued. My family has again filed a 50-60 page complaint against me, and when I read the things written in it, my mind was blown.” Anurag shared that all he ever sought from his family was love, but claimed that they instead are determined to seek revenge against him. He added, “Only I know how I got through that one month. I’ll tell you... For an entire month, I was confined to bed and had to use diapers to relieve myself. That was the most shameful and humiliating thing for me. It was the worst phase of my life.”

Alleging that his family has filed false complaints against him, the Bigg Boss fame added, “What hurts me is that false things were written in them. The whole point of view was shifted just to make me look bad. If I don’t defend myself against these allegations, I will end up in jail. I never lied like this or plotted a conspiracy of this magnitude against you.”

Speaking about portions of the complaint, Anurag claimed that his parents alleged his mother felt intimidated by the friends who visited their home. They also accused him of coercing them into signing property-related documents through threats. Denying the allegations, the content creator maintained that he has evidence to support his side of the story. It all started after Anurag shared a long video on his YouTube channel in March, alleging mental harassment by his family over his marriage to Ritika. He said that his parents refused to accept the interfaith marriage and did not allow her into their home.

Tejasswi Prakash talks baby plans with Karan Kundrra on Neha Dhupia’s show

Mumbai: Karan Kundrra and Tejasswi Prakash are the cutest TV couple in the industry. The two often grab attention for their cute posts and lovey-dovey moments. Fondly known as “TejRan,” the duo is currently seen in the spin-off of Dubai Bling, Desi Bling. Amid this, reports suggest that the two graced Neha Dhupia and Angad Bedi’s chat show, Double Date, where the actress opened up about having babies with beau Karan.

As per Pinkvilla, the light-hearted conversation between the two couples had an unexpectedly hilarious moment, with Neha questioning Tejasswi Prakash about the couple’s baby plans, saying, “When are you guys planning kids? Give us a year!” Listening to Neha’s question, Tejasswi didn’t even blink before



hilariously answering, “Plan karke bachhe hone hote toh aapke hote plan karke? (If kids had to be planned, then would you have planned too?)” Her spontaneous reply left both Neha and Angad amused. Reacting to her reply, Angad cheekily said, “I like this question!” while Neha responded, “Kuch logon ke plan karke bhi hote hain. (Some people

plan their kids.)” “Unplanned karke hum bhi wahi karenge lagta hai mujhe... lagta hai aisa hi hona hai. (I think we will also unplan kids and do the same thing.)” Tejasswi further continued, keeping the joke going.

Karan and Tejasswi’s love story is no secret. They first met while participating in the reality show Bigg Boss. Du-

ring their time on the show, their chemistry quickly became one of the most talked-about aspects of the season. After the show ended, the couple confirmed that their bond continued outside the house. They began appearing together at public events, vacations, and in social media posts. Over time, their pairing earned a loyal fanbase, often referred to as “TejRan.” Karan and Tejasswi have now been together for nearly five years. Currently, they are seen together on Laughter Chefs.

In a recent episode of Desi Bling, Karan Kundrra proposed to Tejasswi Prakash, leaving the actress emotional as she broke down in tears. Reacting to Karan’s proposal, Tejasswi said, “I am shivering. My hands are not going to stop.”

Puri Jagannadh’s charvaka, god remarks spark heated debate

Hyderabad: Director Puri Jagannadh has once again grabbed attention after his latest “Musings” audio clip went viral across social media platforms. In the speech, the filmmaker openly discussed God, atheism, Hindu philosophy, and the importance of respecting different beliefs, triggering widespread debate online.

Puri Jagannadh said, “If someone says there is no God, many people become angry. But what many people do not know is that Hinduism sees both belief and atheism equally.” He explained that Hindu philosophy has historically encouraged diverse schools of thought and allowed space for questioning and debate. Speaking about ancient Indian philosophy, he said, “There were schools called Charvaka schools

where children were taught that there is no God. They did not believe in soul, karma, rebirth, or heaven.” According to him, the Charvaka philosophy focused on direct experience, logical thinking, and physical reality. He also stated that followers of the school rejected rituals, temples, and religious ceremonies. The director further highlighted that debates and differing viewpoints were never entirely rejected in Hindu traditions. “Even though many Hindu philosophers opposed Charvaka philosophy, they still preserved those discussions and arguments,” he said. He also pointed out that ancient texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads contain deep discussions and questions surrounding life, truth, and God.



Kiara Advani delights fans with adorable in flight glimpse of baby Saraayah



Mumbai: Kiara Advani and Sidharth Malhotra recently jetted off for an intimate family vacation. Giving fans a glimpse into their travel diaries, Kiara shared an adorable moment featuring their daughter, Saraayah, from inside the flight: The actress posted a cute picture on her Instagram Stories that showed Saraayah’s tiny hand pointing towards a colourful suction toy stuck to the



airplane window.

Kiara Advani and her actor-husband Sidharth Malhotra welcomed their daughter last year in July. Quite recently, the actress opened up about her motherhood journey and postpartum. Talking to Raj Shamani, she said, “Nobody talks about postpartum, and it should be spoken about more.... It (motherhood) is such an identity shift. It is such a new world, and

in that moment, it is difficult for the woman going through it to give herself grace. It takes time. It has taken me six months... In the past six months, I have just told myself: Just give yourself grace. Because you are doing so much for everyone else that you forget about the relationship that you need to have with yourself. The things you need to tell yourself. For me, my whole life, I have been so other-centric that what’s changed since my baby was born is that I finally found time to nurture that relationship that I need to have with myself. And it is probably the best thing that I have done for myself. After 34 years, I have learnt to set boundaries. I have learnt not to do critical conversations with myself, because sometimes you are over-critical about everything that you are doing. I have learnt not to focus on fear. I had to teach myself all of these things in these six months.”

Amitabh Bachchan quashes hospitalisation rumours with cryptic social media post

Mumbai: Social media was recently flooded with worrying reports suggesting that veteran superstar Amitabh Bachchan had been hospitalised. However, he has subtly put all those rumours to rest by sharing a metaphorical and cryptic note on his official blog, leaving his fans completely relieved.

The panic began after a report claimed that Amitabh Bachchan had been hospitalised since May 16. The report stated that the actor was admitted to the VIP wing of a Mumbai hospital due to stomach-related issues, adding that his son, Abhishek Bachchan, had also visited him. This news left fans deeply puzzled and anxious, especially since Amitabh had just greeted his well-wishers outside his home on Sunday, looking perfectly healthy. In the wee hours of Wednesday, Amitabh took to his blog to address the situation in his signature style. Writing a metaphorical note in Hindi, he expressed, “Cheel jab howe



shant to bhaiya, tote bolan suru karen ir bir fatte, kahan, chal hamau, pilave suru karen!!!! bajre di roti kha di, fu padiyon da, saag re munh mein dalan lagai jaise , bolan lage kaag re!!!!!!” When translated, his note reads, “When the eagles calm down/ are quiet, the parrots start talking. Hey Veer Fateh, let’s start feeding you! I’ve eaten the millet bread and the fried vegetables. As soon as I put it in my mouth, the crows start

talking!” Fans quickly deciphered the message as a direct swipe at the false reports circulating about his health, breathing a collective sigh of relief that the actor is doing well and enjoying his meals at home.

Further clarifying the situation, a report by ETimes on Wednesday morning confirmed that the actor’s visit to the hospital was nothing more than a routine medical appointment. The source

told, “Mr Bachchan did visit Nanavati Hospital on Saturday; however, it was a regular check-up, which he goes for every month, and he returned home after that.” The source shut down the hospitalisation claims, stating, “The news is absolutely false. He is absolutely fine, and after his regular hospital visit on Saturday, he was back home and was also seen driving his car from Jalsa to Janak the next day. He is currently at home.”

Sonu Nigam sells karjat property worth ₹95 lakhs, marks second big real-estate move

Mumbai: Playback singer Sonu Nigam has reportedly sold a large piece of his land in Karjat in a whopping deal worth Rs 95 lakhs. As per reports, there were five adjoining land parcels located in Savele village in Karjat that Sonu sold. Multiple deals took place, involving a stamp duty of about Rs 5.7 lakhs.

The deal, as per the CRE Matrix reported by Hindustan Times, was registered on May 12, 2026. The report states that one land parcel measuring 0.21 hectares was purchased by a group of four individuals

for Rs 20 lakhs. Another land parcel measuring 0.215 hectares was bought by two homebuyers for the same amount. A 0.225-hectare parcel was bought by an individual for Rs 20 lakhs, while a 0.20-hectare plot was sold to two individuals for Rs 17 lakhs. The fifth parcel, measuring 0.217 hectares, was sold for Rs 18 lakhs. While the report claimed that the major transaction had taken place, neither the singer nor the buyers has made an official statement about it. Reportedly, this isn’t the first deal that Sonu Nigam has made in



Karjat. In April 2026, he sold 1.9 hectares for Rs 1.95 crore.

Those transactions were registered on April 7, 2026.

Singer Sonu Nigam recently turned a chaotic concert

moment into an unexpected highlight. While performing on stage, the singer was taken aback when a fan suddenly jumped on stage and tried to touch his feet. Instead of reacting harshly, Sonu Nigam calmly acknowledged the moment, saying, “Waah, shabaash,” leaving the audience both surprised and amused. Sonu Nigam is one of India’s most celebrated and versatile playback singers, with a career spanning more than three decades across multiple music industries. Known for his extraordinary vocal range and

emotive style, he has earned numerous accolades, including National Film Awards, Filmfare Awards, and international honours. With iconic songs such as Suraj Hua Maddham, Kal Ho Naa Ho, and Abhi Mujh Mein Kahin, he has delivered timeless melodies across genres. Beyond playback singing, he has excelled as a live performer, composer, television judge, and independent music artist, continuing to captivate global audiences through concerts, collaborations, and new projects.

Supreme Court refuses to pause proceedings in KG Basin gas migration dispute

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday declined to pause proceedings in the high-stakes Krishna-Godavari (KG) basin gas migration dispute between the Centre and a Reliance Industries Limited (RIL)-led consortium, even as the consortium informed the court that it intends to approach the Union government seeking conciliation or mediation of the matter. After the RIL’s legal team mentioned the matter before Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, the CJI said that the hearing would continue unless both sides jointly informed the court that a resolution had been reached.

The development came a day after the Centre accused the consortium of having “virtually committed a theft” of natural gas belonging to state-run the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd (ONGC) from adjoining offshore fields in the KG basin off the Andhra Pradesh coast. The hearing had on Tuesday commenced before the bench comprising the CJI and justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi. “Petitioners will today to approach the government... petitioners will write to the central government to attempt reconciliation or mediation. This is an ongoing contract and we are still in a contractual relationship with them,” counsel for the consortium, including advocates Sameer Parekh and Mahesh Agarwal, told the court. Attorney General R Venkataramani, appearing for the Centre, opposed any halt in the proceedings and



urged the court to continue hearing the appeals. “Let us complete the hearing, my lords. If there is any other development in the meantime, we can always bring it to the notice of the court. Why should the hearing be discontinued?” the attorney general submitted. The bench agreed with the Centre’s position. “Both parties have to agree,” the CJI observed initially, before adding: “Both parties have to come to us and say that there is a resolution, then we will immediately dispose of the matter. The petitioners have already begun. We can stop the hearing once both sides tell us it has been resolved...let us hear and we can record that mediation has been attempted.” The dispute centres on allegations that natural gas from ONGC’s offshore blocks migrated into the adjoining KG-D6 block operated by the RIL-led consortium and was subsequently extracted between 2009 and 2013. On Tuesday, the Centre alleged before the court that the consortium unlawfully benefited from gas originating in ONGC’s fields. Addressing

the bench, Venkataramani argued that the consortium was accountable for extracting gas that had naturally migrated across reservoir boundaries beneath the seabed. “There were two blocks. ONGC had a block, they had a block. Gas migrated. You virtually committed a theft of my gas and you are accountable for that,” the attorney general submitted. The consortium, however, strongly denied the allegation, contending that migration of hydrocarbons across underground reservoirs was a natural geological phenomenon incapable of being prevented by artificial means. Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for the consortium, argued that the extraction could not be characterised as deliberate siphoning or theft. “When you extract by a natural process of pressure, from the nearby sea block, some oil will always flow and migrate. That has nothing to do with voluntariness, deliberation, intent. That becomes a bugbear with them to add it to what they call stolen gas. There is nothing, it is a pressure movement,” Singhvi ar-

gued. The litigation arises out of a production sharing contract executed in 2000 between the Centre and the RIL-led consortium for exploration and extraction of natural gas in the KG basin. Commercial production from the KG-D6 block adjoining ONGC’s fields began in April 2009. At the relevant time, RIL held a 60% participating interest in the block, while BP Plc and Niko Resources held 30% and 10% stakes respectively. The controversy surfaced in 2013 when ONGC alleged that the consortium had drilled wells close to the boundary areas and extracted gas migrating from ONGC’s adjoining blocks, leading to what it described as “unjust enrichment”. The Union government subsequently sought disgorgement of gains from the consortium, claiming nearly \$1.5 billion along with approximately \$174 million in interest. The consortium invoked arbitration under the production sharing contract. In July 2018, an arbitral tribunal ruled in favour of the consortium, holding that the contract did not prohibit extraction and sale of gas that had naturally migrated from adjoining reservoirs. While a single judge of the Delhi High Court upheld the arbitral award in May 2024, a division bench on February 14, 2025 reversed the ruling and set aside the award, holding it contrary to settled principles of law. The consortium challenged that judgment before the Supreme Court.

Tielemans starts party as Aston Villa outclass Freiburg to claim Europa League glory

Agency: Where would you like your statue, Mr Emery? Even before this emphatic Europa League triumph, Aston Villa supporters could hardly have held their manager in greater esteem. But now Emery, in winning the competition for a record fifth time, has delivered the thing he always wanted, a trophy to show for his transformative body of work. Those who were not around for Rotterdam in 1982 will always cherish Istanbul in 2026. Thomas Tuchel had it right a few years ago when he suggested Uefa might as well rename the Europa League the Unai Emery trophy. Was there a better image on an unforgettable night than the sight of Emiliano Martínez giving his manager a piggyback as Villa got the celebrations under way? Villa’s squad formed a guard of honour for Freiburg, game but ultimately overpowered opponents, and then set about giving Emery the bumps as he walked on to the podium erected on the pitch. John McGinn, Villa’s superb captain, was the last to collect his medal from Uefa’s president, Aleksander Ceferin, before lifting the handleless trophy. Before long McGinn was darting towards the sea of delirious Villa fans crooning to We Are the Champions, showcasing the prize in all its glory, the engraving still raw. Villa’s players took it in turns to hoist the trophy overhead. So, too, did Villa’s co-owners, Nassef Sawiris, wearing a claret and blue scarf, and Wes Edens. Up in the VIP seats the Prince of Wales, an avid Villa supporter who admits to perusing Villa forums under a pseudonym, wanted to capture the moment just like everybody else, filming the trophy lift on his iPhone. “Huge congratulations to all the players, team, staff and everyone connected to the club,” William posted on social media. Just like 1982, it was Villa in white against German opponents in red; this time Youri Tielemans, Emiliano Buendia and Morgan Rogers the scorers. All three goals were sparkling, Tielemans and Buendia scoring beauties to put Villa in the box seat within seven minutes of each other at the end of the first half, before Rogers got in on the act approaching the hour. It felt like a procession once Bu-



endia curled a left-foot peach into the top corner with the final kick of the first half and, as a contest, it was a non-event from the moment Rogers’s smart movement at the front post was rewarded. Mind you, try telling that to the Villa faithful who came in their numbers. Villa’s official allocation was 10,758 but about double that figure travelled. There was a Brummie takeover on Taksim Square, the supporters determined to savour a first continental final for 44 years. For Freiburg, this comfortably represented the biggest occasion in their 121-year history and they were always planning to celebrate a groundbreaking season on their return to south-west Germany. While a generation of Villa supporters arrived in Turkey desperate to see their team lift their first silverware since the League Cup in 1996, Freiburg arrived without a single trophy in their cabinet. Villa, guaranteed a place in the Champions League next season, entered as heavy favourites and soon assumed control. Supporters proudly sang of 1982 and nine of that team were present. One of those, Nigel Spink, came on after nine minutes when Jimmy Rimmer was forced off through injury and there was a whiff of déjà vu here. Martínez required treatment in the warm-up, with the goalkeeper coach, Javi García, taping his hand.. Martínez later revealed that he had broken his finger, but concerns he would be unable to play were short-lived. The keeper charged out before kick-off, fist pumping with his right hand towards the Villa fans behind the goal. Any wider

nerves had evaporated by the interval. Tielemans gave Villa a leg up on 41 minutes with a pure volley from Rogers’s expertly weighted cross from a short-corner routine. The ball seemed to drop in slow motion but Tielemans read it all the way, smashing it home with his laces. Then Buendia controlled McGinn’s pass on the edge of the box with his right foot and, with his next touch, sent a stunning left-foot shot into the top corner. It was the final flick of the half and it felt like the goal that killed their opponents. Until the first goal, Villa had been the better team but there were a couple of anxious moments, none more so than Matty Cash’s high challenge on Vincenzo Grifo. The defender got away with a booking but the replays showed that after taking the ball he followed through on the midfielder’s shin with his studs. Johan Manzambi was lively and Nicolas Höfler had the game’s first real chance, dragging wide after Pau Torres headed clear a free-kick. Villa extended their lead approaching the hour. Lucas Digne released Buendia down the left and the midfielder faced up Lukas Kübler then sent a teasing cross towards the front post. Rogers expertly traded places with Ollie Watkins to squeeze the ball in. Amadou Onana, introduced midway through the second half, headed against a post and Buendia rattled the side netting when his second and a Villa fourth felt inevitable. Emery, the author of this story, bounced on the touchline. For the fans here, in Birmingham and beyond, the wait is over, the party just getting started.

Julian Schuster’s aggressive Freiburg aim for Europa League immortality

It’s about the journey, perhaps even more than the destination. That is the feeling of SC Freiburg before the biggest match in their history. Regardless of the result in Wednesday’s Europa League final against Aston Villa in Istanbul, the club will be present at a reception in the city on their Thursday return to acknowledge the moment and the compelling season that has taken them there. There are many extraordinary elements to a club that have never won a major trophy – the closest they came was losing on penalties to RB Leipzig in the 2022 DFB Pokal final – arriving at such a showpiece, but for most in Germany the true wonder is that they have managed it without Christian Streich. The longest-serving coach in the Bundesliga stood down in 2024 having served Freiburg continuously in several roles for almost three decades, including as the first team’s head coach for the final 12 and a half. Streich was an iconic coach who had led the club from the 2. Bundesliga to become top-flight regulars, from survival to European qualification, from the Dreisamstadion to the bigger, new Europa-Park Stadion. Freiburg were guided into a different dimension, like a provincial version of Arsène Wenger’s Arsenal or Atlético Madrid in the Diego Simeone era. Streich was not even just part of the furniture, someone nationally synonymous with and representative of the club, a Jürgen Klopp-like figure in terms of his totemic qualities. He was a spiritual leader, engaging media and fans not only talking tactics but offering his philosophies on life in a down-to-earth, self-effacing manner uncommon in his profession. Throughout his tenure, he cycled to raining and to home matches (one of his first acts on retirement, to supplement his punditry, was to commit to a work placement at the local bike workshop Brody Bikeservice). In the context of Streich and Freiburg, it made sense that his successor – whom he helped choose – was Julian Schuster, who played 10 years for Streich as captain before retiring in 2018 and integrating into the club’s coaching structure while studying for his DFB pro licence. Logical, perhaps, for a club built on continuity, but fraught with potential difficulty in following a club legend. So what Schuster has done in his first two seasons in his first senior role is little short of sensational. Last term Freiburg missed out on Champions League football with defeat by Eintracht Frankfurt on the final day, having been in the top four every week in the final three-quarters of the season. Given that setback – and the loss of the influential forward Ritsu Doan to Frankfurt – this season has been even more impressive, not only because of the run to



the final but because they finished this Bundesliga campaign in fine style, beating third-placed Leipzig 4-1 in a scintillating display to guarantee seventh and some form of European football. Should they lose to Aston Villa, they will take part in the Conference League. Being able to focus on that objective so close to the final was no mean feat and is testament to Schuster’s emotional intelligence in managing his players. There has been a slight change in style under him; Freiburg still average comfortably below 50% possession but press and tackle more aggressively. If this can sometimes create vulnerabilities against high-class opponents they do have technical quality and old heads in players such as Matthias Ginter, who will surely go to the World Cup with Germany, and Vincenzo Grifo, who remains a deadly threat from set pieces, plus coveted youngsters such as Johan Manzambi and Igor Matanovic. One might say that Streich walked so Schuster could run, but run he has, and fast. Yet the Freiburg modesty endures – they haven’t forgotten where they’re from or how they got here. The head of scouting, Klemens Hartenbach, still famously cracks open a bottle of champagne with his staff when the team reach 40 points, underlining that Streich’s way of looking at things endures. If anything epitomised how far they have come it was the farewell to Nicolas Höfler, who waved a glassy-eyed goodbye to the home fans after making his 382nd appearance against Leipzig. He joined Freiburg at 15 and is 36, a squad member now but, as the banner behind the goal detailed in thanking him for his service, someone who has been on the whole journey from the second tier to Wednesday night’s final. When those supporters said: “Thank you for everything,” they really did mean everything. Should Freiburg prevail in Istanbul, a lifetime of thankyou’s await Schuster and his team.

Two people were detained after illegal alcohol was found in a tractor loaded with bricks in West Champaran

New Delhi: Around 5:30pm on May 21, 1996, Pinky Sood was going about her day at home — keeping her 12-year-old daughter and eight-year-old son busy, prepping for dinner—when a phone call from a relative shifted the ground beneath her feet. A blast had rocked Delhi’s Lajpat Nagar market, where her husband Rakesh Kumar Sood had a framing shop. “You should check, Pinky,” is all the relative said to her. She had been 30-years-old at time. “I rushed to the market. There was smoke, fire and chaos everywhere. I could see our entire shop was gutted but I had no idea where Sood sahab was,” said Pinky, now 60 years old, seated inside her Amar Colony home. It has been 30 years since the blast, in which 13 people were killed and 39 were injured. According to police and court documents accessed by HT, a Maruti car packed with RDX detonated near a park in Lajpat Nagar Central Market around 6:30pm. Hours after the blast, terror outfit Jammu Kashmir Islamic Front (JKIF) claimed responsibility for the attack on national television, said police. The blast had occurred five days after Atal Bihari Vajpayee began his first term as Prime Minister that lasted 13 days. A day later, another blast in a bus, also claimed by JKIF, in Rajasthan’s Dausa killed 14. For Pinky, a sleepless night lay ahead as she ran from one hospital to the other and then back to the market in search of her husband. Around 11 am the next day, Pinky was told that her husband had died. In these 30 years, Pinky has not once stepped inside court premises as the blast case went on – and doesn’t regret it. “I was suddenly the head of the family, both a mother and a father to my children, and I had to run his business. Who had the time to pursue justice? I had to make peace with what had happened... These are painful memories and I had a life to rebuild,” she said. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, the family received ₹1 lakh as compensation from the central government Beyond that financial

aid, rebuilding life was entirely left to the victims. “Two-three months after the incident, I took over the business because I had to feed my children... The first step was repairing the shop which took around two months. It was the staff that helped me navigate an unfamiliar world after Sood sahab’s death,” she said. For Kuldeep Kumar, 52, general secretary of the Federation of Lajpat Nagar Traders Association, the horror of that afternoon remains equally vivid. Kumar, who owns a fabric store in Lajpat Nagar, was near the blast site when the explosion occurred. “When the blast happened, I had just left my friend Umesh Makkad’s shop which was very close to where the blast happened,” he recalled. Initially, many believed a gas cylinder had exploded. “Within a minute, we realised that it was a blast in a car and a planned one,” he said. He immediately rushed back, towards the flames, to save his friend. “I saw the fire spread quickly so I pulled him out. ‘You can build everything again only if you remain

alive,’ I told him,” Kumar said. But not everyone escaped. Kumar still remembers a man who ran back into his burning shop to retrieve cash he had left behind. According to Kumar, the narrow, encroached market lanes also hampered rescue efforts. “I still remember how fire tenders could not reach the place early, while police arrived within minutes,” he said. Three decades later, the visuals remain impossible to erase. “The sight was horrific, dead bodies and people bleeding everywhere, the tears and people crying everywhere, a slipper here, a piece of cloth there. I can never forget,” he said. The market remained shut for several days after the attack, and traders say its psychological and economic impact lingered for months. “For 3-4 days, shops didn’t open and the impact could be felt for a year after,” Kumar said. Delhi Police registered FIR No. 517 in the case in 1996. Court documents showed that shopkeeper Subhash Chand Katar told police the blast occurred barely 10 feet from his

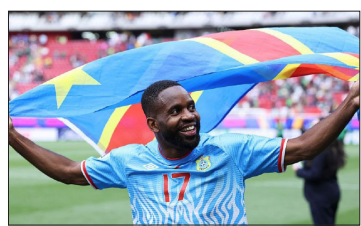
shop. Investigators later found the vehicle had been stolen from Nizamuddin East three days earlier. The Special Cell and Crime Branch discovered the accused had sourced explosive material from multiple places and had made an unsuccessful attempt to trigger a blast near Dulhan Dupatta Shop on May 19 before carrying out the fatal attack on May 21. Hours later, JKIF claimed responsibility on national television. Investigators traced calls made to TV channels from Kashmir and arrested suspects linked to the numbers. The probe later pointed to a larger network allegedly involving JKIF operatives, Pakistan’s ISI and D-company. Court records identified JKIF leaders Bilal Ahmed Baig and Tiger Memon as key conspirators. Police chargesheeted 17 accused, though only 11 were arrested. In 2023, the Supreme Court upheld convictions of four accused, calling the attack an “international conspiracy” aimed at destabilising India.

FIFA World Cup hit by Ebola scare as DR Congo cancel training camp amid US entry concerns

Belgium: The 2026 FIFA World Cup is less than a month away, and the tournament has already been hit with some controversies. The spotlight is on Iran’s participation and the high cost of World Cup tickets. Now, in the latest controversy, the Democratic Republic of Congo national football team have cancelled a planned pre-World Cup training camp at home after the country was hit by an Ebola outbreak, according to reports. The outbreak was declared in eastern DR Congo last Friday and has reportedly already caused 130 deaths from around 600 probable cases. The DR Congo training camp for the World Cup was set to begin in Kinshasa for

three days, but has now been relocated to Belgium, according to AFP. It is also reported that no domestic player has been selected for the national squad. The United States has banned non-Americans who have been in DR Congo, Uganda or South Sudan in the previous 21 days from visiting due to the outbreak. A US official informed AFP that the team will be allowed to travel to the country for the World Cup. The official claimed that the team had been training in Europe, so they are probably not subject to the ban. But if they were in the country over the last 21 days, they could be subjected to strict screening rather than a

complete ban. DR Congo will be based in Houston during the tournament and will also play their first Group K match against Portugal there, on June 17. Then they travel to Guadalajara to face Colombia on June 24, before returning to the US to play Uzbekistan in Atlanta on June 28. The WHO has already declared the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern. The latest outbreak is challenging because it involves a rare strain of Ebola for which there is no vaccine, and cases have been found in an area affected by conflict. Ebola is a rare but deadly disease. It is caused by a virus. Ebola viruses infect animals, typically fruit bats, but



among humans, it can sometimes start when people eat or handle infected animals. Symptoms appear within 2 to 21 days and come suddenly. The symptoms start like the flu, with fever and headache. As the symptoms progress, vomiting and diarrhoea develop and can lead to organ failure. Some patients also develop internal and external bleeding.

Pelé was 17 when Brazil discovered their World Cup spirit



Sweden: Every World Cup brings the promise of a new iconic image. The 2026 edition will be no exception. Across the United States, Mexico, and Canada, another adolescent may make his debut, another great team may reach its peak, and another final may generate a moment that will be remembered long after the scoreboard fades. That is why the old World Cup memories return before every new tournament. They are the standard against which the next generation is measured. Very few stories sit higher in that memory than Pelé’s journey with Brazil, which began with a 17-year-old changing the sport in 1958 and ended with the same player helping Brazil keep the Jules Rimet Trophy forever in 1970. Brazil arrived at the 1958 World Cup with talent, but not yet with the certainty that later became attached to the yellow shirt. The 1950 defeat to Uruguay at the Maracana still lived in the country’s football consciousness. Brazil had played beautiful football before, but the World Cup had not yet been won. Sweden changed that. Pelé, still only 17, did not begin the tournament as the centre of Brazil’s campaign. He was carrying an injury and had

to wait for his chance. Once he entered the side, Brazil’s tournament gained a new force. He scored the only goal against Wales in the quarter-final. He scored a hat-trick against France in the semi-final. Then, in the final against Sweden, he scored twice as Brazil won 5-2 and lifted the World Cup for the first time. His first goal in that final became one of the earliest great Pelé images. He controlled the ball, lifted it over a defender and finished with the composure of a player far older than 17. It was not only the goal of a prodigy. It was the moment Brazil’s football found a new public face. Pelé’s World Cup journey did not move in a clean line from one triumph to another. In 1962, he began Brazil’s title defence with a goal and an assist against Mexico, but a thigh injury in the next match ended his active role in the tournament. Brazil still won the World Cup. Garincha became the dominant figure, and the champions proved that the identity built in 1958 was not dependent on one player alone. Yet Pelé’s absence remained part of the story. The teenager who had delivered Brazil’s first title was now forced to watch as the country retained it without him. That made the next turn harsher. In 1966, Brazil went to England chasing a third straight World Cup. Pelé arrived as the most famous player in the game, but the tournament became a punishment. He was repeatedly fouled, physically targeted and denied any rhythm. Brazil went out in the group stage. For Pelé, the World Cup had now given him everything: glory, injury, absence and humiliation. He had entered the tournament as a boy king in 1958. By the end of 1966, he had been battered enough to question whether he wanted to return to that stage at all.

Is MS Dhoni to Blame for CSK’s Problems ‘Ruturaj Gaikwad’ Bombshell Dropped by an Ex-Indian Star



Chennai: S Badrinath, a former batter for the Indian cricket team, criticized the Chennai Super Kings for not knowing if MS Dhoni will play in the 2026 IPL. Due to a calf strain and a thumb ailment that occurred recently, Dhoni has not participated in any games this year. The senior cricket player did not even show up for the most of their games, despite persistent rumors about his fitness. Dhoni attended CSK’s most recent home match against Sunrisers Hyderabad, although he was simply there to mingle with the players and take a quick walk

around the field. “There has consistently been questions over whether he’ll play or not before every game. The whole Dhoni situation hasn’t been handled well. Nobody knows the reason. Is it just to create interest for the match or is it a business decision? Is this also part of the process?” He even questioned whether it was Dhoni’s choice to pick Ruturaj Gaikwad as his successor before suggesting that Ravindra Jadeja would have the veteran player’s pick. “Nobody knows whether it’s true that MS Dhoni wanted Ruturaj Gaikwad to become the cap-

tain. This decision cannot come on Dhoni in any way. It had to be the management’s decision. Dhoni could have only given a suggestion. So the management must only take responsibility for this. Knowing Dhoni, if at all he had any say in this, he would have suggested Ravindra Jadeja only as the next captain,” Badrinath said. It has not been a good season for CSK in 2026 with the team having a slim chance at qualifying for the Playoffs. Badrinath was extremely critical of CSK’s ‘process’ under Gaikwad’s captaincy and pointed out that their player signings were quite disappointing. “Even players like Brevis, Mhatre, and Urvil Patel were replacement players. CSK just got lucky with them. It’s not like they did some planning or process to land them. Even a good acquisition like Sanju Samson came through trade, where they had to give up Jadeja and Sam Curran. So there is no decision that they’ve made, which has worked in isolation,” he concluded.

Michael Vaughan tells MI, “Release Hardik Pandya”



New Delhi: The Mumbai Indians’ IPL 2026 season came to an early end. They were one among the first clubs out of the playoff race. And after all the scrutiny the team has received this season—including the fact that their star players aren’t playing well, that the players aren’t working together, and, of course, that Hardik Pandya’s captaincy has taken the brunt of the criticism—the conversation about Mumbai has finally turned to who they might keep or let go. Michael Vaughan, the former captain of England, made the Mumbai Indians an unexpected offer that may help the Kolkata Knight Riders as well. Speaking to Cricbuzz, Vaughan did not spare a second thought when asked about Hardik. “Release,” he said. But then, I added an outside-the-box suggestion. “Replace him with Cameron Green,” he said. The why of it came later, but Vaughan admitted he never saw the logic behind Hardik’s move back to Mumbai after two successful seasons at the Gujarat Titans, where he led the franchise to back-to-back finals, one of them even culminating in a title win. “No. I have seen enough. I didn’t really see the dynamic of bringing him back. He was doing well with the Gujarat Titans, won a title there with a different set of players and a different coach. I feel Mumbai have got too many chefs in the kitchen,” he added. Former KKR Team Director Joy Bhattacharjya agreed with Vaughan, saying Mumbai got to release him after the captaincy experiment failed to work. Hardik joined MI for his second stint before the 2024 season. Mumbai failed to qualify for the playoffs twice, including a bottom-place finish in his maiden year as skipper. However, he did lead MI to a Qualifier 2 finish last season.

Is Hardik Pandya’s Fitness Concerning the BCCI Big “World Cup” Details Revealed in a Report

New Delhi: According to a Times of India story, the BCCI is unsure about Hardik Pandya’s health, which might affect its preparations for the 2027 ODI World Cup. Chief selector Ajit Agarkar stated that the all-rounder’s availability will rely on fitness tests, despite his inclusion in the India team for the next ODI series against Afghanistan. The report claims that Hardik would soon need to demonstrate his fitness since the BCCI selectors are quite worried about his capacity to bowl ten overs in an ODI match. “Hardik was not communicated about fitness concerns till 48 hours before the selection meeting. He hasn’t played for Mumbai Indians since May 2.” “He complained of back spasms after the game in Chennai but he hasn’t played since. He has been reportedly training at the Reliance’s facility and at Wankhede stadium. While he has rejoined the team, it is not ascertained how he needs to prove his fitness. The selectors are only worried about him not bowling 10



overs,” a source told TOI. Back in January, Hardik was not cleared to bowl 10 overs and as a result, he was not picked for the three-match ODI series against New Zealand. If Hardik’s fitness continues to be a problem the selectors will look at Nitish Kumar Reddy and Harshit Rana as replacements. The BCCI is also not confident about Rohit Sharma being fit enough to play in the ODI World Cup 2027, ac-

cording to the report. The report claimed that BCCI remains apprehensive about Rohit’s ability to play the 50-over format at an ‘optimum level’. Rohit missed multiple IPL 2026 matches for Mumbai Indians due to a hamstring injury and the BCCI reportedly asked for his fitness reports ahead of selecting the squad for the Afghanistan series. The selectors have also reportedly expressed concern regarding his body

taking the load of fielding for 50 overs. “Rohit didn’t report to the BCCI’s centre of excellence (CoE) for those three weeks. He has become lean but there are concerns about his body being able to take the load of high-performance sport. He has to field for 50 overs. ODI cricket doesn’t have the option of an Impact Player like IPL. Body takes time to heal when you are so close to turning 40,” a BCCI source said.

Why Elliot Anderson Can Enter Old Trafford After Pep Guardiola Leaves Man City



New Delhi: Elliot Anderson has appeared destined for Manchester City for some months. Another technically proficient midfielder player who was nearly ideal for the Pep Guardiola machine. However, accolades and pedigree are rarely the only factors in transfers these days. They may have to do with timing. Suddenly, the time has shifted. Uncertainty currently envelops Manchester’s blue half as Pep Guardiola is anticipated to depart City at the end

of the current campaign. Plans for recruitment that were unavoidable now appear precarious. The team still has a strong core of players with lofty goals and top-notch facilities, but for the first time in almost ten years, there are identity concerns. What exactly is Manchester City after Guardiola? Enzo Maresca, the name almost certain to succeed Pep, is exciting. But surely isn’t as ‘exciting’ as Pep once was to the City fans. And that seemingly un-

certain wind could open the door for the other side of Manchester. Because while City face the challenge of replacing the most influential coach of the modern era, Manchester United may finally have something they have lacked for years: a clear footballing vision. And at the centre of that vision is Michael Carrick. For a midfielder like Anderson, Carrick represents something uniquely attractive. Few coaches in English football understand tempo,

positioning and midfield intelligence the way the former United playmaker does. Carrick’s reputation among young English players continues to grow quietly inside football circles, not as a celebrity manager, but as a developer of players. Take Kobbie Mainoo for instance, for whom the only term that comes to mind is ‘reborn’. At City, Anderson could become another elite component in a system still searching for its next architect. At United, he could become the face of an entirely new era. The symbolism would be impossible to ignore. One club entering uncertainty after the end of a dynasty. The other attempting a rebuild around youth, identity and English talent. In many ways, Guardiola leaving may not simply reshape City’s future. It could reshape United’s as well. And if Elliot Anderson ultimately walks into Old Trafford instead of the Etihad, the moment people look back on may not be the transfer itself.

Fans demand that the BCCI take action after KKR is criticized for fielding an injured Indian star

Kolkata: Despite having a hairline fracture on his toe some time ago, Varun Chakravarthy has continued to play for the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) in their last several IPL 2026 games. The mysterious spinner has become more crucial throughout the middle overs as the team mounts an unprecedented playoff push in the second part of the competition. Abhishek Nayar, the head coach of KKR, even disclosed that Chakravarthy had received injections to prepare for games. On social media, several fans have expressed disapproval of Chakravarthy’s decision to play despite injury during the IPL, pointing out that this might hurt the Indian team going forward. During KKR’s most recent games, Chakravarthy has been clearly limping and hobbling, playing fielding positions where the ball is less likely to fly. Given that Chakravarthy is a player under a central contract, some supporters have demanded that the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) intervene. He ended as the joint-leading wicket-taker in the T20 World Cup 2026 and was the world’s top-ranked T20I bowler until very recently. However, BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia had mentioned recently that the board cannot interfere into IPL teams when it comes to fielding injured players. However, he had also clarified that franchises take care of injury concerns in cooperation with physios from BCCI’s Centre of Excellence (CoE). “So far as IPL is concerned,



franchises take care of the injuries and fitness of the players. Of course physios from CoE are also monitoring them, workload as well as plan on how to keep them fit,” Saikia had said. “The monitoring is there but when IPL is going on, we cannot interfere too much, had it been Indian team situation, our control would have been more. Now we are giving freedom to franchises

to take call on the players.

We will definitely look at their fitness level when it comes to selecting the national team,” he had added. Chakravarthy has taken 10 wickets in 10 games in IPL 2026, winning the ‘Player of the Match’ award twice. Incidentally, KKR’s only loss in their last seven games came when he did not feature.

Deac Bogdan vs R Praggnanandhaa Daniel on the Day of Rest

Bucharest: Romania’s Deac Bogdan will face second-place Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa. Daniel is trying to end his streak of draws in Bucharest in the sixth round of the Grand Chess Tour’s Super Chess Classic. After five rounds, top-seeded American Fabiano Caruana and Praggnanandhaa, as well as the Dutch combination of Anish Giri and Jorden van Foreest, are all chasing after Germany’s Vincent Keymer (3.5 points). After beating Alireza Firouzja of France in his fourth round match, which was postponed to the rest day due to the latter’s ankle ailment, Caruana moved up to the joint second slot. Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France and Wesley share the sixth spot on 2.5 points each while World Championship challenger Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan are right behind on two points. Romanian Bogdan-Daniel is in ninth spot on 1.5 points, half point ahead of Firouzja. After a lone victory over Sindarov in the second round besides four draws, the pressure is now on Praggnanandhaa as he has a few tough matches left in the second half of the tournament. The Indian will have black in the next round against Bogdan-Daniel, but thereafter, he has to take on Caruana and Vachier-Lagrave in succession before Anish Giri in the finale. Keymer has been clearly the pick of the players thus far and his world ranking has now gone to number four in live



ratings. The German has white against Firouzja in the sixth round and a victory could pretty much secure the title for him. Caruana is one player who has increased his chances considerably in the tournament thanks to a victory over Firouzja, and the American faces Sindarov in his next game. It will come down to Caruana’s deep preparation against Sindarov’s sharp, concrete play wherein error could decide the contest. The 10-player nine-rounds event carries a total prize pool of USD 375000 with USD 100000 reserved for the winner. This is the second event of the GCT this year after the Warsaw rapid and the top four finishers will also qualify for the Grand finale slated later this year.