

## Manipur CM flags off 33 ambulances at JNIMS and attends the launch of the HPV vaccine

Manipur CM launched the HPV vaccine at JNIMS to promote cervical cancer prevention. He also flagged off 33 ambulances to enhance emergency healthcare services in the state.

**Imphal, Mar 01:** On February 28, Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh was present at the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS) auditorium in Imphal East for the national launch of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccination Campaign against cervical cancer.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who hails from Ajmer, Rajasthan, launched the campaign almost everywhere in the States and Union Territories.

The Chief Minister dispatched 33 ambulances for maternity services to various state regions prior to attending the program. In order to improve the delivery of healthcare for mothers and children, the North Eastern Council provided funding for the ambulances, which were then purchased by the Directorate of Health Services, Manipur. During the event, Singh visited the registration counter, vaccination



room and observation room at JNIMS. He interacted with doctors, nurses and beneficiaries and handed over a vaccination certificate to a girl who received the HPV vaccine. He also inspected the internal roads of the JNIMS campus and reviewed the condition of its infrastructure.

Addressing the gathering virtually, the Prime Minister said the government is making continuous efforts to ensure the health and well-being of girls across the country. He described the nationwide HPV vaccination drive as a major step in preventive healthcare to protect girls

from cervical cancer.

The HPV vaccine protects against infection caused by the Human Papillomavirus, which is the leading cause of cervical cancer, one of the most common cancers among women. The vaccine is being administered in campaign

mode to girls aged 14 to 15 years under a single-dose schedule.

Minister Khuraijam Loken Singh, Chief Secretary Dr Puneet Kumar Goel, senior administrative officials, the Director of Health Services, and medical staff were also present at the programme.

## 2293 mainstreamed teachers protest the pay budget head for an indeterminate period of time

**Kohima, Mar 01:** A protest was held in Kohima on February 26 by 2,293 members of the Nagaland Government Teachers' Association (NGTA), who demanded that their wages be deducted from the state's non-plan expenditure head rather than Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS). Teachers from the 2010 and 2013 batches protested outside the Directorate of School Education, claiming that their pay structure has not been in line with that of regular state government employees, even though they were mainstreamed into the State Education Cadre more than three years ago.

According to NGTA members who spoke to reporters, the teachers were officially mainstreamed when the state cabinet approved a government decree on September 2, 2022, which went



into force on April 21, 2022. Nevertheless, rather than the proper state account head, their salaries are still paid under CSS heads associated with the former Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan. According to the association, there has been no tangible reaction to their repeated requests for their wage component to be included under the state's non-development spending.

The latest protest is an extension

of the teachers' agitation following a two-day pen-down strike earlier this week and a seven-day ultimatum on February 16. Meanwhile, the School Education Department clarified that the teachers appointed in 2010 and 2013 were initially under the CSS scheme. They sought mainstreaming into the State School Education Cadre, which occurred on September 2, 2022, for 2,293 eligible teachers. The teachers are now entitled to benefits under the 7th Revision of Pay and are governed by state service rules. NGTA representatives asserted their status as regular appointees and called for their salaries to shift from the CSS to the state non-plan budget, highlighting delays linked to central fund releases. They requested prompt action to resolve these salary issues.

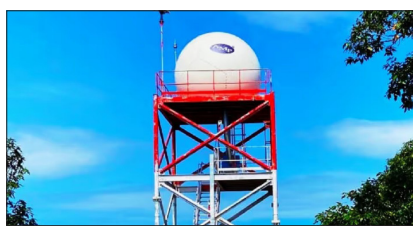
## Meghalaya's KIZUNA-6 conclave starts



**Shillong, Mar 01:** The sixth edition of the India-Japan Intellectual Conclave, "KIZUNA-6: Scaling up Partnerships," commenced on February 26 in Meghalaya, aimed at enhancing cooperation between the two nations in key sectors. Organized by Asian Confluence alongside various governmental and diplomatic bodies, the two-day event featured a welcome address by Executive Director Sabyasachi Dutta, who emphasized the Assam government's infrastructure development efforts to benefit the Northeast region.

## Nagaland signs 20-year MoU with IMD Doppler weather radar installation

**Kohima, Mar 01:** The Nagaland government's Department of Higher Education has signed a 20-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) to enhance weather forecasting, agrometeorological services, and atmospheric research in the state. As part of this agreement, an X-Band Polarimetric Doppler Weather Radar will be installed at Dimapur Government College to improve weather data accuracy for agriculture and disaster risk reduction. The collaboration will focus on advancing urban meteorol-



ogy research, understanding weather hazards unique to Nagaland, and developing training opportunities for faculty and students. The MoU became effective upon signing and can be amended through mutual consultation.

## Himanta advocates for enhancing research and innovation

**Guwahati, Mar 01:** On February 28, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma emphasized the crucial role of nurturing young scientific minds to enhance innovation and research both in Assam and across India. In a post commemorating National Science Day, he stated, "Curiosity fuels discovery, and discovery shapes tomorrow," highlighting the need for collective efforts to foster scientific thinking among students and the youth.

National Science Day, celebrated annually on February 28, marks the anniversary of the discovery of the Raman Effect by Indian physicist CV



Raman in 1928, a milestone that earned him the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930.

The observance of this day aims to promote a scientific temper and to

encourage interest in science and innovation among citizens, especially students, through various programs, seminars, and awareness campaigns nationwide.

## Tripura cabinet accepts the Nari Adalat pilot in ten panchayats and clears 48 government posts



**Agartala, Mar 01:** While updating the media on decisions made at the most recent cabinet meeting, Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury stated on Wednesday that the Tripura government has approved the creation and filling of 48 new government posts and decided to start Nari Adalats in 10 panchayats as a pilot project. The cabinet approved appointments for 32 Junior Drivers under the Health and Family Welfare Department, ten Revenue Inspectors under the Revenue Department, and six Assistant Survey Officers

under the Revenue Department, according to Chowdhury, who is also the cabinet spokesperson. Junior drivers would be hired directly by the Transport Department, he said, while Assistant Survey Officers and Revenue Inspectors will be hired through the Tripura Public Service Commission.

Additionally, the minister declared that students living in residential dormitories under the Scheduled Caste Welfare Department would now get a daily stipend of ₹100 instead of ₹80. According to him, 712 students from 33 hostels for boys, 22 hostels for females, and one hostel run by an NGO will benefit from the decision. According to Chowdhury, the cabinet has authorized the establishment of free government-run tutoring centers to assist Tripura students in competing in national-level exams, citing plans included in the 2025-2026 budget. Agartala, Ambassa in Dhalai district,

and Udaipur in Gomati district will all have coaching centers established. He stated that a 12-month curriculum will be offered by a specialized UPSC coaching center operating out of the new Birchandra State Central Library facility in Agartala. According to him, a special UPSC coaching center will operate out of the recently constructed Birchandra State Central Library in Agartala. It will provide a 12-month program with 20 hours of instruction every week. He further mentioned that Government Degree College in Ambassa and Netaji Subhash Government College in Udaipur would be offering tutoring for the SSC, RRB, and IBPS exams. The Higher Education Department will begin implementing these programs in the upcoming academic year, and they will run for six months with 24 hours of sessions per week. Merit-based selection will be used to choose pupils, and each center may

only accept up to 100 permanent residents. Chowdhury further said the cabinet has decided to implement the Nari Adalat scheme as a pilot project in 10 panchayats under the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The initiative aims to provide village-level justice mechanisms for women facing physical abuse, assault or harassment. The scheme will be implemented by the Social Welfare and Social Education Department. The Nari Adalats will be set up in Phulbari in North Tripura, Serampur in Unakoti, West Sonatala in Khowai, Lembuchhara in West Tripura, Khedachhara in Sepahijala, Tepania in Gomati, Vivekanandapalli panchayat in South Tripura, and Singinala and Halahali in Dhalai district. Chowdhury said each Nari Adalat will be run by a committee of up to nine members, which may include prominent local residents and political representatives of the concerned gram panchayat.

## Arunachal Pradesh's Ram temple initiative is explained by the founder of the Gangda Yarchum Trust

**Itanagar, Mar 01:** Ha Tatu, the founder of the Gangda Yarchum Trust, announced that the construction of the Ram temple and the consecration of Shree Ram Darbar and Nav Durga signify the start of a broader cultural and social initiative in Arunachal Pradesh. During the Pran Pratishtha ceremony at Girijapati Shiv Mandir on February 28,

Tatu emphasized that all rituals adhered strictly to Vedic vidhi-vidhan, noting the installation of the Ram Darbar and the Muri of Ram Raj as pivotal moments rooted in tradition. He regarded a hailstorm on the same day as a blessing for the initiative.

Tatu expressed that the trust's goals extend beyond merely building the tem-

ple; it aims to establish an indigenous healing centre and a Sanatani centre focused on social responsibility. Future projects include an old age support centre and a Yatri Niwas for pilgrims, designed in traditional Arunachal-style huts that represent all 27 tribes of the state. Furthermore, Tatu outlined a vision that incorporates the develop-

ment of a permanent tribal heritage village to celebrate the culture and legacy of Arunachal's communities. Plans also include a Gurukul-type learning centre combined with Ayurvedic facilities, fostering holistic health and the traditional knowledge systems of the region.

The ceremony was honored by Arunachal Pradesh

Chief Minister Pema Khandu and Alok Kumar, International President of the Vishva Hindu Parishad, who participated in the rituals. Tatu expressed gratitude towards the dignitaries and spiritual leaders for their support, highlighting that the initiative aspires to merge faith with indigenous identity and social welfare on a unified platform.

### In Brief

#### Buildings constructed under ONGC's CSR initiative

**Golaghat:** Minister Ajanta Neog inaugurated multiple buildings in Golaghat district on Thursday, part of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative by Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC). She began by inaugurating a new classroom at Doiyang Tea Tribe Primary School, expressing gratitude to ONGC for enhancing educational infrastructure. The assets manager, Ajay Kanchal, along with other senior officials from ONGC, attended the event. Additionally, Neog opened a new classroom at Golaghat Nagar New Basic School and an auditorium at Amlapatti Middle English School, which falls under the Golaghat Municipal Board, dedicating these facilities to the respective schools and communities.

#### SUMP in Upper Siang district

**Itanagar:** In a significant development for the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP), families from Simong and Halleng villages in Arunachal Pradesh have given consent for pre-feasibility report activities. At a ceremony in Yingkiang, 128 of 144 families in Simong (89%) and all nine families in Halleng signed memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with the state government. The MoUs, signed by Upper Siang Deputy Commissioner Talo Jerang and village representatives, indicate strong local support. The SUMP, proposed on the Siang river, aims to enhance energy security and promote infrastructure and socio-economic growth in the area.

#### 'Vikshit Bharat Vikshit Tripura' exhibition

**Agartala:** Tripura will host the 'Vikshit Bharat Vikshit Tripura' exhibition from February 26 to 28 at Children's Park in Agartala, showcasing developmental strategies aligning with Prime Minister Modi's vision of a developed India. Tripura State President Rajib Bhattacharjee emphasized the goals of 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 and 'Viksit Tripura' through this exhibition. Key organizations like DRDO and ISRO will participate to highlight advancements in defense and space. Chief Minister Manik Saha reaffirmed the government's commitment to transparent job distribution for unemployed youth in the state. Saha said this while offering TFS Grade-One Fishery Officer posts to 52 candidates at a function held at Pragya Bhavan. He said that the goal of every initiative of the government is public welfare. The Chief Minister said that in the past, it was difficult to get jobs in remote areas of the state due to terrorism and a poor communication system.

## Babatdor Dkhar of Shillong was designated an India UK Achiever 2026



**Shillong, Mar 01:** Shillong writer and entrepreneur Babatdor Dkhar has been recognized as an India UK Achiever 2026 in the Arts, Culture, Entertainment & Sports category, as announced at a Parliamentary Reception in London on February 24, 2026.

This accolade honors Indians educated in the UK who have made impactful contributions to their fields. Dkhar, an

alumnus of the University of Oxford and Charles Wallace Creative Writing Fellow, founded Half and One, a platform for global writers and artists. The India UK Achievers Honours celebrations, running from February 24 to 26, 2026, include various events aimed at strengthening ties between India and the UK through collaboration in education and the creative industries.

## Mizoram Assembly approves a bill to move the state university’s main office

**Aizawl, Mar 01:** A major change in the state’s plans for higher education was made on February 25 when the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram enacted a bill authorizing the projected relocation of the state university headquarters from Aizawl to Lunglei.

The goal of the Mizoram State University (Amendment) Bill, 2026, is to move the university’s main office. Aizawl was chosen as the prospective university’s headquarters by the original Act, which was passed in March 2025. State Higher and Technical Education Minister Vanlalhlana introduced the Bill, stating that the decision to move the headquarters was made in order to promote equal growth and correct regional imbalances. According to him, the institution would func-

tion in “cluster mode,” combining many already-existing colleges throughout the state. Administrative actions have already been taken by the government, such as the creation of search committees to pick a vice-chancellor and registrar. The temporary headquarters will be housed in the Geology and Mining Department’s office building in the Lunglawn neighborhood of Lunglei. Chief Minister Lalduhoma explained that although the university’s offices have moved, the cluster model structure has not. He continued by saying that a number of departments and related organizations would still operate out of Aizawl colleges as originally planned. The Chief Minister added that citizens in the districts of Mamit, Champhai, and Lunglei have made submissions



pleading with the government to establish the university’s headquarters there. Following consultations with NGOs, local stakeholders, and lawmakers, the Council of Ministers unanimously resolved in November last year to move the headquarters to Lunglei.

## T-NEST, Tripura’s premier innovation hub to support digital enterprise, will be unveiled

**Imphal, Mar 01:** The Government of Tripura has launched T-NEST, the state’s premier incubation and innovation hub, at the International Trade Centre in Agartala in a major step to institutionalize entrepreneurship and improve innovation governance. Tomorrow, February 26, Union Minister of State Dr. Jitendra Singh, State Information and Technology Minister Pranajit Singha Roy, and Tripura Chief Minister Dr. Manik Saha will formally inaugurate the program.

According to officials, T-NEST is intended to serve as the State Innovation Mission’s and Startup Tripura’s operational foundation. The hub, which is intended to serve as a single point of contact for entrepreneurs, mentors, investors, academic institutions, and government agencies, will establish an integrated ecosystem with the goal of turning concepts into



scalable businesses. Officials claim that the program represents a strategy change from digital enablement to digital enterprise, integrating innovation into frameworks for economic development and governance. The state’s economic profile and development objectives are in line with the priority sectors under T-NEST, which include agri and related technologies,

bamboo and forest-based industries, tourist innovation, health-tech, digital public services, and rural enterprise solutions. The framework’s “Government-as-First-Customer” paradigm is one of its unique features; it calls for government agencies to identify real-world issue statements that startups can address through pilot initiatives in public systems. Officials said

that by incorporating innovation into governance processes, this strategy will speed up product validation and scale-up while producing quantifiable public value. The inauguration programme highlighted the state’s growing innovation ecosystem. A start-up exhibition featured 25 emerging ventures showcasing products and solutions across sectors.

## Illegal sand mining at the Loharghat range is still going strong

**Azara, Mar 01:** There have been reports of widespread illicit sand mining in a number of agricultural regions under the Loharghat range of the West Kamrup forest division, where heavy machinery is allegedly being used for open excavation operations during the day. Local reports claim that the agricultural areas in the villages of Joji, Marabhitha, and Ghoramara under Palasbari LAC now resemble commercial sand mining operations. Despite the fact that these farmlands are under the forest division’s control, it is said that tractors and excavators, including JCB machines, are regularly operating there. The unrestrained sand extraction has caused residents to raise grave concerns, claiming that fertile agricultural lands are gradually degrading. According to reports, the extensive excavation has interfered with farming operations and sparked concerns about potential long-term environmental harm, such as soil erosion and decreased agricultural output.

The purported passivity of the relevant authorities has increased popular indignation even more. Locals say officials have done little to stop the acts, even though they are hap-



pening in public. As illicit mining operations go unchecked, concerns are now being raised about the participation of forest officials, such as Loharghat Range Forest Officer Nayanjyoti Das and West Kamrup Forest Division Officer (DFO) Subodh Talukdar. The operations seem to be operating without fear of enforcement, according to observers, raising questions about potential patronage or administrative carelessness. Environmental groups caution that uncontrolled sand extraction jeopardizes nearby groundwater stability and ecological balance in addition to harming farming. They have demanded a prompt investigation and severe punishment for those responsible.

## Arunachal MLA requests that the Center include chapters on the northeast in textbooks

**Itanagar, Mar 01:** In response to a recent incident of racial discrimination against three women from Arunachal Pradesh in Delhi, Doimukh MLA Nabam Vivek condemned the episode and urged the Union Government to include dedicated chapters on the culture, traditions, and demographics of Northeast India in school textbooks. He expressed that a significant level of ignorance about the Northeast exists among mainland Indians, contrasting this with the familiarity Northeasterners have with other regions of India. Vivek argued that education is cru-



cial to bridge this cultural gap and promote mutual respect, national integration, and cultural sensitivity from an early age. He highlighted the region’s vibrant cultural identity, emphasizing the need for equal representation in educational materials to combat

racial stereotyping and discrimination. The call for reform coincides with increasing discussions about racial sensitivity in Indian metropolitan areas, particularly regarding the experiences of Northeastern citizens. Arunachal Pradesh

Chief Minister Pema Khandu also condemned the alleged racial abuse of the women and engaged with the Delhi Police Commissioner to ensure prompt action. A case has been registered against two local residents, Harsh Singh and Ruby Jain, for criminal intimidation and racial abuse under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The incident occurred on February 20, during which the women faced racial remarks and humiliation from neighbors while supervising an electrical installation in their flat; no physical injuries were reported.

## Territorial Army Encourages Young Minds and Supports Education in Imphal West

**Imphal, Mar 01:** Imphal West: In a remarkable show of community support, the Territorial Army Battalion stationed in Kangkopki district conducted a distribution drive at the Government Junior High School in Kachikul Village, Imphal West on Wednesday. According to an official statement, the program, which had as its subject “Fuelling the Future,” gave kids daily necessities and necessary study materials. The goal of the drive was to promote a sense of community while meeting the educational demands of young kids. The gift was well received by the local kids, who were given books, stationery, and other study aids. The occasion demonstrates the Territorial Army’s continuous dedication to welfare and education in isolated re-



gions. By interacting with the community, the unit improved relations with locals and demonstrated the beneficial role that the military plays outside of its regular responsibilities,” the state-

ment continued. Initiatives like these not only enhance learning opportunities but also inspire young minds and build lasting bonds between the Army and the communities they serve.

## Gaurav Gogoi, the head of the Assam Congress, supports the alliance with Rajior Dal but says negotiations are still ongoing



**Guwahati, Mar 01:** While acknowledging that talks between the two parties are still in progress, Gaurav Gogoi, the president of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), stated on Wednesday, February 25, that he is still in favor of a potential alliance with Rajior Dal for the next Assembly elections. Speaking to the media, Gogoi said that negotiations with a number of parties are almost complete and that the only things left to do are official public announcements. He did clarify, though, that talks with Rajior Dal are still ongoing. It is accurate to say that talks with certain parties are practically finished. All that’s left are official announcements. However, negotiations with Rajior Dal are yet unfinished,” he

stated. Gogoi recently traveled to Delhi, where the central leadership of the party requested specific feedback from the Assam unit on possible coalition arrangements, according to a statement from the state Congress unit. He stated that reports on completed talks with other parties will be sent to the high command for review, and that in the days ahead, the central leadership would provide direction and advice. Gogoi reaffirmed that the Delhi party leadership has already been formally informed about the state of the unfinished talks with Rajior Dal.

The head of the APCC emphasized the Congress party’s custom of keeping information private during alliance negotiations in a sharp statement that

seemed to be aimed at public remarks made by Rajior Dal leaders, notably its president Akhil Gogoi. “Such a practice does not exist here. We don’t follow that custom. Before making any remarks, we have official conversations and uphold confidentiality. I still haven’t revealed which parties we’ve concluded our talks with.

That is the custom of our party. That is not how we are used to speaking in public,” he remarked. Concerns were also voiced by the Congress leader on recent political events surrounding Rajior Dal. He pointed out that a suspended Congress MLA who has reportedly already received an electoral ticket has been admitted into the regional party. Additionally, he said that another MLA, the subject of intense internal debates and accusations inside Congress, had joined Rajior Dal and might run as a candidate. “These developments have been observed for some time,” Gogoi said, hinting at ongoing internal deliberations within the Congress party regarding the implications of such moves. Despite expressing reservations, Gogoi maintained that he views an alliance as strategically beneficial in the larger political context of Assam. “An alliance is good. However, compared to earlier, my level of optimism has somewhat reduced. Nevertheless, I will try to convince my colleagues, senior leaders, workers and the central leadership why unity would be beneficial. Since the alliance has not yet been finalised, my optimism today is not the same as before,” he stated. With election season approaching, the evolving dynamics between Congress and Rajior Dal are expected to significantly shape the opposition landscape in Assam, where coalition arithmetic could prove decisive.

## A suspected bacterial illness claims the lives of Agniveer trainees

**Shillong, Mar 01:** According to officials on February 25, two young people undergoing Agniveer training at the Assam Regimental Centre in Shillong have passed away from a possible bacterial illness, while 28 other trainees are presently being monitored at the Military Hospital in Shillong. After being brought to the Military Hospital with symptoms compatible with a meningococcal bacterial infection, one trainee died last week, and another died on Monday, Army sources said. The impacted trainees have provided samples, and laboratory confirmation is pending. According to a senior Army officer, all required safeguards have been taken and medical teams are keeping a careful eye on the situation.

Prophylactic medications have been given to all close contacts as a preventive step in accordance with established medical standards, according to an official statement from the Defence PRO, Shillong. In order to prevent further transmission,



the statement also mentioned that preventative measures including required mask use and restricted movement within the training facility have been implemented. Authorities are keeping a careful eye on the situation. “There is no reason to be alarmed or frightened,” it continued. Meghalaya Health Minister W Shylla confirmed that the state health department is coordinating with military authorities. He said surveillance and

preparedness measures have been intensified and assured that necessary public health protocols are in place. He also urged citizens to remain vigilant about symptoms but not to panic. Meanwhile, medical teams continue to monitor the condition of the hospitalised trainees. As part of containment measures, the CSD canteen operated by the Ministry of Defence and other facilities frequented by the trainees have been sanitised.

# ACB raids Jammu and Kashmir deputy CM Surinder Choudhary's brother

**Srinagar, Mar 01:** In a disproportionate assets case, the Jammu and Kashmir police's Anti-Corruption Bureau raided several locations connected to deputy chief minister Surinder Choudhary's inspector brother on Wednesday. The NC leader claimed that the raids were motivated by retaliation and intended to prevent his relative's advancement. In September 2025, Inspector Vijay Singh, Choudhary's brother, was sent to Ladakh. Choudhary spoke to the media close to the Tawi bridge in Jammu to demonstrate how suspected illegal mining had damaged the riverbed and was endangering the bridge, a rebuke to the police and civilian government. He chastised some of the officials there, saying that unlawful mining was occurring right in front of them. Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha receives reports from the Jammu and Kashmir police. Choudhary has frequently criticized the police and been an outspoken opponent of Sinha's government. The deputy chief minister claimed that the raid was carried out to delay his long-awaited promotion and that his brother, who fought militancy during his service, was never rewarded. "We will fight this battle legally; it has



already started. We trust that justice will be served by the Indian judiciary and the many excellent officials in Jammu and Kashmir. The deputy chief minister declared, "Vijay Singh should be punished if he is in error." The NC leader said his brother was targeted as his son owns a stone crusher in the area, asking if this was a crime. He alleged a "politically connected" peon in Nowshera

runs four crushers. Choudhary said his brother fought militancy in Gursai, Thanamandi, Doda and Supwal, and built a reputation for taking on militants and criminals wherever he was posted. "His entire career, background and service record reflect a consistent fight against militancy and crime. Wherever he served, he earned a name for his courage and professionalism. But he was

never rewarded. Instead of being rewarded, this is how they are treating him.... Those sitting at the top who think that some hidden treasure will be found in this house will find nothing," Choudhary said. The ACB said it had registered a disproportionate assets case against the inspector following allegations that he had amassed "huge" wealth.

# Chief Justice's five major rulings as the Supreme Court prohibits the NCERT book's judiciary chapter

**New Delhi, Mar 01:** The Supreme Court has mandated immediate removal of the withdrawn Class 8 Social Science textbook by NCERT, requiring compliance from both Union and state education departments. The Chief Justice has emphasized that all copies, physical and digital, must be seized without delay, and a compliance report is to be filed with the court. Teachers are prohibited from using the textbook for instruction, ensuring no continued usage. A blanket ban on its production and distribution has been enforced, with serious legal repercussions for violations. The NCERT Director must report on the authors of the contentious chapter and provide meeting minutes from its deliberation. A show cause notice has been issued to relevant



officials regarding possible contempt actions, marking a significant judicial intervention in education. This situation has evolved from a curriculum issue to one involving strict compliance, accountability, and potential legal consequences.

# Over a lakh students will receive scholarships from Meghalaya's CM

**Shillong, Mar 01:** On February 26, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma announced that over one lakh students will receive scholarships on March 6 to celebrate the eighth anniversary of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government. This initiative aims to support students statewide and improve academic outcomes, especially in rural areas, through the introduction of guidebooks for better performance in the Secondary School Leaving Certificate examinations. Sangma emphasized the importance of government support in preventing dropouts and facilitating students' educational journeys, commending



the education department for this significant initiative that aligns with comparable support systems in other states.

# Amit Shah's crackdown in Seemanchal prior to the Bengal elections

**New Delhi, Mar 01:** Declaring that "every infiltrator from Indian soil will be removed by the Narendra Modi government," in advance of the crucial Assembly elections in West Bengal, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday began a high-stakes security and political outreach in the delicate Seemanchal region of Bihar. Removing infiltrators' names from the voter list is not the only way to be free from them. Speaking at a rally in Araria, Bihar, he declared, "We are committed to putting in place a program to eradicate every single infiltrator from Indian soil." "The Narendra Modi government is determined to free the entire country from infiltrators, and this initiative will soon begin in the entire Seemanchal region," Shah stated. Shah started a three-day tour to the Seemanchal region, which includes the districts of Kishanganj, Araria, Purnia, and Katihar in Bihar along the Bangladesh-Nepal border and is well-known for cross-border smuggling, illegal migration routes, and document fraud networks. He will meet behind closed doors with police



chiefs and district magistrates from seven border districts to gather information on population changes and infiltration routes. Security officials said that after entering Bihar, infiltrators usually proceed to West Bengal districts like Murshidabad, Malda, and North Dinajpur. To find suspected illegal migrants, the Center is getting ready to do a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls in the border regions. Mamata Banerjee, the chief minister of Bengal, has called the action "NRC in disguise," while the Center maintains that

it is necessary for border security and electoral integrity. During the visit, Shah is anticipated to examine SIR implementation procedures in sensitive districts, which could intensify the Center-state conflict between Delhi and Kolkata. Officials admit that the renewed attention on infiltration is a result of the significant population growth pockets and changes in settlement patterns in sections of Seemanchal and north Bengal. The ruling Trinamool Congress in Bengal argues that demographic rhetoric is being used to divide voters ahead of

elections, while the BJP views these changes as proof of ongoing cross-border migration. Seemanchal is located close to India's vital Siliguri Corridor, the slender "Chicken Neck" that connects the Northeast to mainland India. Security planners see any instability throughout north Bengal-Seemanchal as a possible threat to this vital connection. Shah's visit suggests that the Center is viewing the eastern border states as a single integrated security theater, following border and migration reviews in Assam and Tripura.

# Congress needs to win 24 Assam seats on its own in order to be considered for the LoP position Himanta Biswa Sarma

**Guwahati, Mar 01:** On February 26, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma stated that in order for the Congress to be elected Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Assam Legislative Assembly, it must win a minimum of 24 seats under its own party symbol. The Chief Minister told reporters that the party needs to win at least six indigenous seats in order to be eligible for the LoP position. He went on to say that it would be challenging for the Congress to reach that figure given the current political climate. Sarma added that it would be pointless for groups like the Rajior Dal or the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) to ask the Speaker to give Congress the LoP position on the grounds of alliance support. "The rule is clear. Congress must win 24 seats on its own symbol. Only then can they claim the LoP post," he said. He cautioned that if opposition parties continue seat-sharing arrangements among themselves, the LoP position may slip further out of their



reach. Commenting on possible alliances among opposition parties, the Chief Minister said such tie-ups may happen sooner or later. "There is nothing to be happy about it," he added.

# Mizoram opens the Lengtekai "Faith Bridge" across the Tlawng River

**Aizawl, Mar 01:** Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma inaugurated the Lengtekai Bridge over the Tlawng River on February 26, a significant infrastructure project costing Rs 43.83 crore, funded by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. The bridge, officially named Faith Bridge, is 100 metres



long and 7.5 metres wide, designed to carry loads of up to 385 metric tonnes, enhancing transport safety and capacity in the region. After initial challenges, its construction, including approach roads, was completed by September 2025. The need for further infrastructure development in the region.

# Supreme Court outrage over the NCERT textbook's judicial "graft" chapter

**New Delhi, Mar 01:** The insertion of a chapter on "Corruption in Judiciary" for Class VIII students by the school textbook organization NCERT angered the Supreme Court on Wednesday, labeling it a "calculated move" and declaring that the "law will take its course." "I will not permit anyone, no matter who they may be, to compromise the integrity of the judiciary and disparage the institution. Chief Justice Surya Kant declared, "The law will work itself out." According to government and NCERT sources, the National Council of Educational Research and Training swiftly withdrew the contentious textbook on Tuesday after receiving a direction from the Center. The controversial chapter highlighted the enormous backlog of court cases in the nation, discussed alleged corruption in the judiciary, and cited



the official code of behavior for judges. It described the parliamentary procedure for dismissing judges from the Supreme Court or lower courts for judicial misconduct and corruption. The issue upset both the bench and the bar during Wednesday's morning "mentioning time." The bench, which comprising Justices Joymalya Bagchi

and Vipul M. Pancholi, was made aware of the chapter by senior attorneys Kapil Sibal and Abhishek Manu Singhvi. Bar members were "deeply disturbed," according to Sibal, that students were being taught about "corruption in judiciary." "It is completely scandalous," Sibal remarked, offering to have copies of the book

placed before the court. It is covered in the NCERT curriculum. According to Justice Kant, he was aware of it and that many other judges were also "perturbed." "I can tell you all that I am completely aware of it. Hold off for a day. This affects the judiciary as a whole. Many judges on the high court are upset. He stated, "Every stakeholder

is disturbed." "I am getting a lot of messages and calls. I have already passed an order," he added, without elaborating. "I am taking the matter up suo motu." Singhvi told the court that the NCERT had been "selective" in the matter, underlining that the textbook made no reference to corruption in the bureaucracy, politics and public life in general. "As head of the institution, I have done my duty and taken cognisance," Justice Kant said. "This seems to be a calculated move; I won't say much." Justice Bagchi said the chapter went against the "basic structure" of the Constitution. No one from the Union government was present in the courtroom to respond. National school board CBSE and the boards of many states prescribe NCERT textbooks to their students.

# BJP uses Gandhi and Nehru's heritage to combat opposition to the India-US trade agreement



**New Delhi, Mar 01:** The BJP launched a scathing counterattack on the Congress on Wednesday, refuting the opposition's "PM compromised" campaign over the India-US trade deal with what its leaders dubbed the "Nehru-Gandhi family's compromise story." The attack was led by recently elected BJP president Nitin Nabin from Patna, while Piyush Goyal, the minister of commerce, spoke to the media in Delhi and charged that the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty has consistently sacrificed the interests of the country in order to further their own political and personal agendas. Additionally, the party ran an X campaign. From India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to current Lok Sabha Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi, Nabin claimed in a prepared address in Patna that the family

represented a "compromised legacy." Nehruji referred to the 450 million people who trusted him with leadership as a responsibility. Rahul Gandhi's actions and words now frequently fit the narratives of foreign powers. This is in line with the political tradition of the Congress, which has consistently compromised with the country by putting its own interests first, Nabin said. He charged that Jawaharlal Nehru had compromised India's sovereignty in his dealings with Tibet and China, and that his secretariat had been open to outside interference. Nehru's 1954 recognition of China's sovereignty over Tibet, his stance on Aksai Chin, and his endorsement of China's permanent membership in the UN Security Council, according to Nabin, amounted to "surrender."

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Editorial

PM-eBus Seva scheme

The PM-eBus Seva scheme introduced in Guwahati, which features the deployment of 100 electric buses, represents a pivotal advancement in the city’s urban transportation infrastructure. This initiative aims to provide residents with clean, affordable, and reliable public transport, while also aligning with India’s broader objectives of sustainable mobility and climate change mitigation. The scheme is designed to directly benefit a diverse range of daily commuters, including office workers, students, senior citizens, and economically disadvantaged groups who rely heavily on public transport. By addressing critical urban challenges such as traffic congestion, air pollution, and inconsistent last-mile connectivity, the introduction of electric buses seeks to alleviate the pressures of rapid urbanization and population growth.

The modern electric buses are outfitted with features that enhance accessibility and comfort—such as low-floor access, comfortable seating, real-time tracking, and safety measures—thereby improving the overall commuting experience and encouraging users to shift from private vehicles to public transport. From an environmental viewpoint, the expected reductions in carbon emissions and pollutants like particulate matter and nitrogen oxides are crucial for improving public health, particularly during peak traffic and more polluted months. Economically, lower operating costs of electric buses relative to diesel counterparts may allow for sustainable transport operations, thus promoting reinvestment into service improvements, route expansion, and fare stabilization, which is essential for maintaining affordability. The PM-eBus Seva scheme also aims to catalyze broader urban transport reforms by enhancing traffic management, integrating transport modes, and improving accessibility to services across the city. It is anticipated to boost job creation, spanning various roles from drivers to technicians specialized in electric vehicle systems. Enhanced public transport is likely to positively impact productivity and social inclusion, providing better access to education, healthcare, and employment. Selection of Guwahati for this scheme reflects its strategic significance as a gateway to Northeast India, where sustainable transport solutions could serve as models for other similar cities. It reinforces national goals of electric mobility, reduced fossil fuel dependence, and climate commitment adherence, while supporting local agendas for enhanced urban resilience and liveability. The public response has been generally optimistic, with users expressing hope for improved transport reliability and environmental benefits. However, experts warn that the initiative’s success hinges on effective route management, maintenance, charging infrastructure, and integration with existing services.

# Concerns are raised by observers of covert ballot violations at the Gorton and Denton byelection

Concerns about apparent voting collusion in the Gorton and Denton byelection have been voiced by an election observation group. Four certified election observers were sent throughout the constituency by Democracy Volunteers, an organization started by Dr. John Ault and backed by Prof. Robert Haywood, a psephologist and Conservative peer. Working in pairs, the team spent 30 to 45 minutes at each of the 45 polling places, visiting 22 of them throughout polling season. The organization said that its volunteers were examining the impact of requiring voters to present identification before receiving a ballot paper, as well as individuals who appeared to be colluding on votes in violation of secret ballot regulations, which it referred to as “family voting.”

Manchester city council said its staff had been trained to look for evidence of voter interference and that no concerns had been reported or raised with them while polls were open. Democracy Volunteers said that while the enactment of the Ballot Secrecy Act in 2023 made “family voting” more clearly a breach of the secret ballot, signage to discourage the practice was only seen in 45%



of the polling stations observed. The observing team said they saw family voting in 15 of the 22 polling stations observed, reporting 32 cases in total, nine cases in one polling station alone. They observed a sample of 545 voters casting their votes, of which they said 12% either directed or were affected by family voting. Ault, director of Democracy Volunteers, said: “Today we have seen concerningly high levels of family voting in Gorton and Denton. Based on our assessment of today’s observations, we have seen the highest levels of family voting at any election in our

10-year history of observing elections in the UK.” He added: “We rarely issue a report on the night of an election, but the data we have collected today on family voting, when compared to other recent byelections, is extremely high.

“In the other recent Westminster parliamentary byelection in Runcorn and Helsby we saw family voting in 12% of polling stations, affecting 1% of voters. In Gorton and Denton, we observed family voting in 68% of polling stations, affecting 12% of those voters observed.” Labour said the reports

were “extremely worrying and concerning”. Anna Turley, the Labour party chair, told BBC Newsnight: “That’s not what we want to see in our democracy. So obviously we need to see the evidence and the report, and then make due decision about what authorities should look into this.” The Green party leader, Zack Polanski, told the same programme he would back an investigation. “I think it’s important that there’s full transparency about the democratic process, and if the recommendation is that there should be an inquiry or further steps then yes I’d support that,” he said. The Reform UK chair, David Bull, said that “electoral fraud is a stain on democracy”. He added: “We would support reporting it and making sure that it’s done in the spirit and fairness with the law.” The volunteers also observed cases of voters being turned away, but they said in every case this was due to not being registered to vote in Westminster elections – for example, if they had EU citizenship and were eligible to vote only in local elections. “It is extremely disappointing that Democracy Volunteers have waited until after polls have closed to make such claims.”

# Second chance

The US Supreme Court ruling that the president exceeded his authority under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act has undermined Donald



Trump’s tariff policy, implemented since April. In response, Trump has enacted a 15% global tariff, excluding critical minerals and certain pharmaceuticals, valid for up to 150 days, and threatens further trade investigations and tariffs. This development raises uncertainties and opens renegotiation opportunities for bilateral trade agreements, particularly regarding India’s trade posture influenced by past punitive tariffs, including a 50% tariff on Indian exports due to purchases of Russian oil. The recent deferral of trade talks indicates both parties are reassessing legal implications, highlighting the need for legally anchored agreements over executive measures. The interim agreement includes a clause allowing tariff modifications,

which could prompt re-examination of past deals, especially given India’s competitive disadvantages. Despite potential leverage, Trump’s inclination towards tariffs remains, as evidenced by ongoing investigations under Section 301 targeting unfair trade practices, which further complicates negotiations. The need for strategic concessions from the US remains critical, particularly in tariff structures, while challenges persist in shifting crude oil sourcing and enforcing compliance. The political landscape within the US, with discontent from states and businesses affected by Trump’s tariffs, adds to the uncertainty regarding future trade directions. Overall, the Supreme Court ruling introduces an interlude to reassess and potentially reformulate key aspects of the interim trade agreements, but considerable uncertainty lingers until the legal framework for US trade policy solidifies.

# Argentina is preparing for a comprehensive reform of labor legislation



A comprehensive overhaul of labor rules intended to weaken trade unions and reduce labor expenses for companies is about to be approved by Argentina’s senate. Following the loss of 290,600 registered positions between December 2023, when he took office, and November 2025, the administration of President Javier Milei, who calls himself a “an-archo-capitalist,” claims the program will aid in the revival of official employment. Opponents contend that the proposal, which would raise the maximum working day from eight to twelve hours and reduce severance pay, will not boost employment or enhance the quality of jobs. Long-standing labor laws influenced by Peronism—the movement that drove Gen. Juan Perón to power in 1946—would be changed by the so-called “labour modernization act.” Informal employment is now at its highest level since 2008, affecting more than 43% of workers. “It is pro-business, pro-employment and pro-employee. It is anti-trade union and anti-labour lawyers,” said Francisco Paoltroni, a senator from Milei’s ruling party, La Libertad Avanza (LLA). Labor lawyer and scholar Juan Manuel Ottaviano called the bill “unconstitutional.” “It severely restricts individual rights in the workplace and undermines their protection through trade unions,” he said. Milei’s party gained support from Congress for the reform after winning the October midterm elections. Because of an amendment submitted in the lower house that eliminated a widely-resented provision that cut wages during sick breaks, even in cases when workers were suffering from life-threatening conditions, the law has already cleared both chambers and is now back in the senate. The law might supersede sector-wide collective bargaining agreements by enabling businesses to engage in direct negotiations with workers. In Argentina, unions often aim to standardize salaries and benefits across areas by representing workers statewide in each industry. By removing bonuses from compensation calculations and establishing a severance fund that is partially funded by the state, the change would also lower the cost of termination. It would

create a “hour bank” system that restricts overtime compensation and do away with specialized national labor courts. Daily shifts could be extended to 12 hours with a required 12-hour rest break, but the weekly working limit would still be 48 hours. The vote comes as manufacturing struggles amid import liberalisation and weak domestic demand. According to the national statistics institute, factories are operating at just 53% of installed capacity. On the eve of the bill’s debate in the lower house last week, the 86-year-old tyre manufacturer Fate announced it would shut down. “We are talking about lengthening working days while the most advanced countries are reducing them,” said Alejandro Assumma, a worker at the plant and representative of the tyre workers’ union, Sutna. “This reform means more exploitation and fewer rights,” said Assumma, adding that some of his fired former colleagues are now Uber drivers or resellers. Martin Rappallini, head of the Argentine Industrial Union (UIA), which represents manufacturers and helped draft the bill, said protests would be “very, very limited – they will not be able to occupy factories or block access”. Such actions, he added, had been common under “the previous regime, where excesses and far-left situations were allowed”. Rappallini acknowledged that the reform “won’t create jobs overnight” but said it would provide “predictability for labour relations in Argentina”. As Congress debated the legislation over the past two weeks, clashes broke out in the streets. Police fired rubber bullets at protesters and journalists, while some demonstrators threw a molotov cocktail near officers. Last week, the country’s main trade union confederation, the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), called a general strike. Carlos Alberto Dawlowfki, a 76-year-old retiree, was among dozens detained in the demonstrations in front of Congress. “It was very painful to see them shooting young people who were 18 or 20,” Dawlowfki said. “They grabbed them with rubber-bullet shotguns – boom, boom, boom – they shot them.” None of the bill’s more than 200 articles, he added, “are for the worker”.

# India-US defense agreement shows that strategic objectives take precedence over short-term conflicts

The signing of the ten-year Framework Agreement for Defence Cooperation between India and the United States in Kuala Lumpur on October 31, 2025, marks a significant development in the Indo-American relationship. While it may appear as yet another defense-related pact, the agreement serves a deeper purpose: reaffirming the partnership during a period of perceived drift due to various geopolitical tensions, including trade frictions and India’s ties with Russia. This signing emphasizes strategic reassurance, indicating that both nations value their partnership despite differing approaches to global issues. The pact embodies a recalibration of relations, signaling Washington’s commitment to the Indo-Pacific amid growing complexities in global politics and India’s desire to maintain its strategic autonomy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s decision to delegate the sign-

ing to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh reflects India’s intent to engage on equal terms rather than in a subordinate position, emphasizing a balanced relationship devoid of dependency. Despite lacking dramatic shifts in military co-operation, the framework aims to institutionalize collaboration across joint production, technology exchange, and interoperability. This aligns with India’s objectives of becoming a co-producer of defense technology as part of the “Make in India” initiative and embeds India further into the US-led architecture of Indo-Pacific deterrence against challenges like China’s maritime expansion. Nevertheless, the relationship today is characterized by alignment rather than alliance, highlighting mutual utility where both nations seek to maximize benefits while minimizing constraints. The recent agreement resets the tone of cooperation after past

transactional difficulties and recalibrates the scope to focus on technological and industrial collaboration. The context of the signing, occurring alongside the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting, suggests regional implications and a commitment to the Indo-Pacific framework, juxtaposed against the uncertainty regarding Pakistan’s role in US-India dynamics. India’s capacity to maintain its defense relationship with the US amid potential US engagement with Islamabad is indicative of its strategic resilience. In essence, the Kuala Lumpur pact signifies a maturity in the Indo-American relationship, evolving from dependency and distrust to pragmatism and shared ambitions. It affirms that despite complexities, the partnership remains essential in the contemporary geopolitical landscape, grounded in mutual respect and enduring interests, rather than transient tensions.

# China’s periphery diplomacy and the G2 chimera

China is trying to shape the region in its own version of a flying geese formation through a multitude of diplomatic, economic, infrastructure and cultural initiatives. China recognises the importance of a regional consensus to support its ‘great power’ status, now as part of the putative G-2 described in gushing tones by President Donald Trump both before and after his meeting with President Xi Jinping in Busan, South Korea, on October 30, on the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec). The periphery and the neighbourhood have therefore acquired a new salience as the core of China’s geopolitical vision. Trump’s innuendo in his interview with the CBS 60 Minutes programme on October 2, that China “would never do anything while President Donald Trump is President because they know the consequences”, further underscores the importance of a stable and supportive periphery for Beijing. The BRI’s future too is essentially predicated on its success on China’s periphery, given the intricate web of infrastructure and connectivity projects, continental and maritime, that radiate out of China to link it to global markets and strategic destinations. China’s focus on its neighbourhood is unmistakable and growing. Far from being limited to its immediate periphery, Beijing is expanding its reach and influence to redefine and reshape an extended neighbourhood in keeping with its economic rise and foreign policy priorities. In the recently convened Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Plus Meeting held in Tianjin on the margins of the SCO Summit, President Xi Jinping announced the Global Governance Initiative (GGI) to add to the slew of initiatives such as the Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI) and the Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI). Beijing views these as its contribution towards strengthening an alternative “Beijing

consensus” on a rules-based international order at a time when it regards US decline as inevitable. These, together with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and parallel China-supported global institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), are geared to project China’s leadership, particularly in the Global South. In April 2025. The aim of this conference was to deliberate on China’s neighbourhood work in “the new era”, which emphasises China’s ascent on the global stage as a leading power. At the same time, China’s periphery continues to remain central to its strategic outlook. More than a decade following the first “work conference” on “peripheral diplomacy” in October 2013, Beijing yet again convened a Central Conference on Work Related to Neighbouring Countries. In his speech at the conference, Xi Jinping outlined the importance of China’s neighbourhood, describing it as a vital foundation for China’s national development and prosperity, a crucial front for safeguarding national security and an important geopolitical space for building a “community with a shared future”. Implicit is an effort to mobilise support along its periphery and the extended neighbourhood to counter the pressure of US tariffs. In one of the earliest demonstrations of the importance of the periphery, China had constructed the Great Wall to keep at bay the “barbarians”, that is, the nomadic tribes of the steppes. Further, the Tianxia (All Under Heaven) concept, which formed the basis of China’s traditional worldview, also underscored the strategic importance of the neighbourhood whereby the countries on the periphery were viewed as vassals. The Wei Qi principle of encirclement and containment, including its own vulnerabilities, has historically tempered China’s view of its periphery. A multitude of foreign powers exploited the Qing’s weaknesses to extract concessions

along China’s periphery. China was never fully colonised only because of a modus vivendi among the colonial powers that denied any single power the right to take complete control. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, securing the immediate periphery and reunification of Taiwan with the mainland became one of the foremost national projects and remains so. One of the first actions was consolidation of communist rule over Xinjiang and Tibet to secure the country’s vulnerable western and southwestern flanks. A hostile regime in Taiwan, backed by the US, remains a security concern. In the 1960s, Mao Zedong advocated “continuous revolution”. He believed in exporting communist revolutions across the world, including along the periphery in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. In the next decade, as China went in for its modernisation in 1979, the Open Door Policy too began with the periphery. It is noteworthy that some of the earliest investments in China came from Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong. The overseas Chinese population in Southeast Asia was particularly instrumental in adding impetus to China’s modernisation programme and “open door policy”. Ironically, beginning in the 1990s, Taiwanese investors too have played a key role in China’s upward economic trajectory, just as Asean has done to emerge as China’s biggest trade partner, particularly as a source of primary goods and a market for manufactured products. In South Asia, China’s definition of its periphery impacts India’s strategic interests. China’s expanding influence is of considerable concern. Interestingly, Chanakya’s mandala concept of Chakravartin provides an analogous framework to analyse China’s “whole of government” approach towards shaping the regional order.

## SpiceJet targets a significant capacity ramp-up and enters an MOU for ten aircraft

**New Delhi:** SpiceJet's ongoing recovery and development plan has gained new impetus with the receipt of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the induction of 10 aircraft. Before formal contracts are signed, parties define their intentions in a preliminary agreement known as a Memorandum of Understanding, or MoU.

This comes days after the board authorized a staged return of previously grounded aircraft and a calibrated fleet ramp-up to 60 aircraft using a combination of wet and damp leases.. In recent months, the airline's operational turnaround has sped up. SpiceJet quadrupled its capacity just in the last quarter. A crucial industry indicator that gauges overall passenger carrying capacity,

available seat kilometers, increased from about 55 crore to 105 crore. Simply said, ASKMs are a measure of the amount of capacity an airline is providing and are calculated by multiplying the number of available seats by the distance flown. SpiceJet now intends to more than quadruple capacity throughout the year in order to build on this comeback. By the winter of 2026, it hopes to have almost 220 crore ASKMs and run more than 300 flights every day throughout its network. Debojo Maharshi, Chief Business Officer at SpiceJet, said the rapid increase in capacity reflects improving demand and renewed confidence in the business. "Doubling our capacity in the last quarter has been a significant milestone," he said.

# Dr. Reddy's is anticipated to introduce generic semaglutide Obeda in India

**Mumbai:** According to two people with knowledge of the situation and pictures Reuters examined, Indian pharmaceutical company Dr. Reddy's Laboratories is anticipated to introduce its generic semaglutide injection in the nation in March under the brand name Obeda. When semaglutide's Indian patent expires in March 2026, Indian pharmaceutical companies hurry to create less expensive equivalents.

Novo Nordisk, a Danish pharmaceutical company, uses

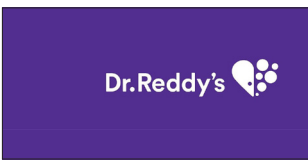
the chemical as the active ingredient in their popular diabetes medication Ozempic and their weight-loss medication Wegovy. According to a federal document, Dr. Reddy's, a company based in Hyderabad, has requested to trademark the Obeda name and logo.

A representative for Dr. Reddy's stated via email, "As semaglutide is yet to be officially launched, it would not be appropriate to refer to or publish any name as the brand name at this stage." Questions

concerning whether Obeda will be used to treat diabetes or weight loss were not answered by the firm.

According to the International Diabetes Federation, adults with diabetes are more common in India, the most populated country in the world, than in China. According to a report in The Lancet, by 2050, there may be more than 440 million overweight or obese people in the South Asian nation. Dr Reddy's plans to sell about 12 million inject-

able semaglutide pens in the first year and intends to price it competitively, potentially up to 60 per cent below the branded product, Dr Reddy's Co-Chairman and Managing Director G.V. Prasad told Reuters last week. The company has regulatory approval to manufacture and sell a generic version of Ozempic and is awaiting clearance for a generic Wegovy, the company said earlier. While Ozempic is approved for diabetes, it is widely used off-label for



weight-loss. Novo Nordisk and US rival Eli Lilly launched their diabetes and weight-loss drugs in India last year, with Lilly's Mounjaro becoming the country's top-selling drug by value. "Everybody is going to launch, so we'll have to figure out who will get market share," Prasad said last week.

# The FM says she will look, but Fino Payments Bank supports its MD

**New Delhi:** The alleged GST violations, which led to the arrest of its Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Rishi Gupta on Friday, are related to an investigation into certain program managers who have connections to several banks, including Fino Payments Bank, the bank said on Saturday. The bank made it clear that neither Gupta nor the bank were involved in these program managers' actions. "The actions of the program managers are not related to the Bank or its MD & CEO, Rishi Gupta," stated Ketan Merchant, chief financial officer of Fino Payments Bank, in a statement. "We have full faith in the country's judiciary and will continue to extend full cooperation and assistance to the authorities in the ongoing process," he said. He also sought to assure the bank's customers, investors and stakeholders that the bank's business operations will continue uninterrupted and there will be no impact on its services. "We stand committed to deliver on our customer-centricity," he further said.

Meanwhile, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman took note of the issue and said she will check on it. This comes after Mohandas Pai, chairman of Aarin Capital and Manipal Global Education Ser-



vices, posted on X questioning the arrest. "How can the CEO of a regulated bank be arrested for an issue involving a business partner? Is this not overreach? @FinMinIndia has given vast powers for GST. What safeguards exist for citizens against misuse? Please intervene," Pai said in the post.

Fino Payments Bank last month received regulatory approval from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

to reappoint Gupta as its MD and CEO for a further term of three years, effective May 2, 2026. Gupta is one of the founders of Fino PayTech Limited, the holding company of Fino Payments Bank. He joined the group in 2007 as chief operating officer and chief financial officer, later serving as managing director and chief executive officer of Fino PayTech until May 2017.

## Maruti Suzuki has inaugurated seven automated driving test tracks

**New Delhi:** On Friday, Maruti Suzuki India announced that company and the Tamil Nadu government had teamed up to open seven automated driving test tracks in the state.

The project is a component of the Memorandum of Agreement that Maruti Suzuki and the Tamil Nadu government's Transport Department inked, which calls for automating ten driving test tracks throughout the state. With the most recent addition, the business claimed to have automated all 10 of the state's automated driving test tracks (ADTTs).

These ADTTs provide for a thorough, effective, and transparent assessment procedure because they are outfitted with high-definition cameras and sophisticated analytics. It eliminates any human bias and ensures that only skilled drivers are awarded a license," Maruti Suzuki India Senior Executive Officer Corporate Af-



fairs Rahul Bharti said in a statement. According to data shared by the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, India witnessed 177,000 road accident deaths in 2024, he noted. Promoting disciplined driving practices and ensuring rigorous driver evaluation are vital to prevent road accidents and augment road safety across the country, he added. The ADTTs are equipped with high-definition cameras, RFID sensors, real-time analytics, and an integrated IT system to enable a technology-enabled, standardized, and objective driving license testing process. The ADTTs in Coimbatore (Central), Tiruvannamalai, Krishnagiri, Madurai (North), Sivagangai, Dindigul, Tiruchirappalli (West), Tirunelveli, Tuticorin and Marthandam will serve driving license applicants of two-wheeler and light motor vehicles.

## Pre-tax profit at HSBC India rises 10.5% to around \$1.9 billion

**New Delhi:** In calendar year 2025 (CY25), HSBC India's profit before tax (PBT) increased by 10.54 percent year over year (YoY) to almost \$1.9 billion from almost \$1.7 billion in CY24. After Hong Kong, which reported a PBT of \$13 billion, India became the second-largest contributor to the London-based bank's profit from Asia during the year. According to HSBC's annual report, of the \$1.9 billion pre-tax profit, around \$1.5 billion came from the corporate and institutional banking (CIB) sector, \$88 million from International Wealth and Premier Banking (IWPB), and \$266 million from the corporate center. In its annual report, the bank stated, "In India, we reported a profit before tax of \$1.9 billion and continued to be the largest foreign bank." It also stated that it is the top bank for multinational corporations in India, accounting for about 50% of all bank accounts. The biggest bank in Europe, HSBC, surpassed analyst predictions with a pre-tax profit of \$29.91 billion for the year. Nevertheless, the bank's pre-tax profit in CY25 was 7.4% less than the \$32.3 billion pre-tax profit from the previous year. Georges Elhedery, Group CEO of HSBC Holdings plc, claims that the bank's impressive success in 2025 is a

result of bold decision and quick execution. "We have strong momentum across the bank and each of our four businesses performed well," he said, adding that the bank is getting simpler, more focused, and more agile so that it can adapt with the speed that consumers need to navigate the modern world. Meanwhile, India continued to be the bank's largest employee base, with 47,423 staff at the end of 2025. While the London-headquartered HSBC saw its global headcount decline to 208,720 in 2025 from 220,861 in 2023, its India workforce rose to 47,423 from 42,287 over the same period. HSBC India's deposit base, or customer accounts, increased to \$28.73 billion in CY25 from \$27.20 billion in the previous year. "In corporate and institutional banking (CIB), customer accounts increased by \$10 billion, mainly driven by strong deposit momentum in Asia, including in mainland China and India," the bank said. In terms of assets, the London-headquartered bank's total assets stood at \$3.2 trillion in CY25, with loans and advances at \$988 billion. For the year, in CIB, the bank's customer lending increased by \$7bn, driven by term-lending growth in its main legal entities in Asia, including Australia, India and Hong Kong.

# Tata Sons postpones its decision about Chandrasekaran's third term due to board concerns

**New Delhi:** In an indication of possible divisions inside the parent company of the software, automobile, and coffee conglomerate, the Tata Sons board postponed deciding whether to re-appoint Natarajan Chandrasekaran for a third term as chairman. Sources claim that Noel Tata, the chairman of Tata Trusts, which controls two-thirds of the business grouping, imposed a number of requirements for Chandrasekaran's reappointment, ultimately causing the decision to be postponed. The Tata Sons board was debating extending Chandrasekaran's term, which expires in February 2027, when Noel Tata proposed a list of requirements on Tuesday.

According to them, Noel Tata expressed concerns on losses in specific group firms. One of the requirements is that Tata Sons refrain from taking on further debt, since this might lead to a scenario in which the group is compelled to list on stock exchanges. According to sources, Noel Tata also opposed Tata Sons' IPO and requested a formal pledge. The agenda item on reappointment was thoroughly reviewed at the lengthy discussion, which took place at the group headquarters in Bombay House. The four other directors, Venu Srinivasan, Harish Manwani, Anita George, and Saunabh Agrawal, reportedly had no problems with it. According to sources, Chandrasekaran explained the challenges in making a firm commitment on the listing, explaining that the regulations will have to take its own turn. Chandrasekaran, 62, received the backing of several board members who felt the losses at one group firm should not eclipse the group's overall performance



or the chair's contribution over the years. When Anita George, chairman of the nomination and remuneration committee, called for a vote, Chandrasekaran urged a deferral. "I recommended that it should be deferred because that was the request by one of the directors," Chandrasekaran told reporters while emerging from the building in the evening. Declining to specify what transpired at the board meeting, he said "nothing changes" for Tata Sons. Sources said Chandrasekaran wanted

a consensus in the board meeting on his reappointment and to avoid a voting. Moreover, board decisions are not sacrosanct, as the resolutions passed needed to be approved by the shareholders at the general meetings. If Tata Sons representative was to vote against a board resolution, it would fail to pass in the AGM/EGM. As a result, the backing of Tata Sons would be crucial to carry any board resolution to be effective, including the chairman's reappointment.

## TCS encourages staff members to use AI, even if it means eating into other sources of income

**Mumbai:** The largest IT services provider in India, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), is encouraging staff members to utilize AI proactively, even if it means "cannibalizing revenue streams." This comes at a time when the industry is concerned about how the technology may affect jobs and billing patterns. We don't worry that this technology will eliminate our means of subsistence. TCS CEO and managing director K Krithivasan stated, "We think it will open up more [opportunities], so the more you do and not by resisting the change, the more you enjoy the benefits." During a panel discussion at the 34th Nasscom Technology Leadership Forum in



Mumbai, he stated, "We are telling associates that if you find that you can do something faster, better, cheaper with AI, you should probably go and tell your customers, even if it cannibalizes revenue," referring to a term the company occasionally uses for its employees. TCS

stated in its FY26 second quarter results that it wants to become the biggest provider of AI-led technology services globally. According to Krithivasan, attaining that objective necessitates broad AI proficiency throughout the company. "Building AI fluency and making sure our

colleagues aren't afraid of this technology."

Every one of our employees has enough access to experiment with it. The change must start at the top, he continued. How senior management is trained is the most crucial issue. We discover that our junior-level

associates are more at ease and skilled with technology. Senior level employees hear a lot about technology, but they don't get their hands dirty. We are demanding that all senior citizens construct something. Asked about incentivising employees, Krithivasan said, "We don't have to really incentivise because everybody wants to learn this tech. We need to tell them that one, I am giving them enough opportunity to learn, two I am encouraging them to ensure that the solution you provide to your customer is AI first, as I said — even if it means that we are cannibalising the delivery. We are helping them to be staying correct in this new world."

## Seven mining dumps are identified for rare earth exploration by the Coal India arm of SECL

**Bengaluru:** According to a senior business official, South Eastern Coalfields Ltd (SECL), a division of Coal India Ltd, has identified seven mine dumps for possible rare earth element extraction. The government's effort to extract value from coal mine waste is in line with SECL's plan. Overburden dumps in large coalfields have been found to contain trace rare earth elements (REEs), which could lessen reliance on imports.

The exploration tendering process has already started, according to SECL Chairman and Managing Director Harish Duhan. Within the next year, the dumps will be scientifically evaluated to identify potential locations. "We have selected seven mine dumps for the extraction of rare earth elements, following the ministry of coal's instructions.

The tendering process has begun, and in about a year, we will determine whether mine dumps and overburden contain rare earth elements," Duhan told PTI. In order to ascertain the existence



and economic feasibility of REEs in these areas, he noted, the company would carry out comprehensive scientific investigations, concentrating on overburden materials that are often discarded during coal mining. Rare earth elements, critical for high-tech industries like electronics, renewable energy and defence, have emerged as a strategic priority for India amid global supply chain concerns dominated by China.

The identification process targets dumps in SECL's operational areas in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, with exploration expected to employ advanced geophysical and geochemical techniques. Duhan expressed confidence that within a year, SECL would finalise the most promising sites, paving the way for pilot extraction projects and possible commercial operations. India is aggressively advancing its rare earth elements strategy to achieve self-reliance in critical minerals essential for EVs, renewables, defense, and electronics, driven by global supply risks from China.

INTERNATIONAL

The anti-immigration party led by Nigel Farage promises a British equivalent of ICE

Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, announced plans to create a UK version of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency, aiming to deport approximately 288,000 migrants annually if elected. This initiative, revealed by home affairs spokesperson Zia Yusuf in Dover, includes the establishment of a “UK Deportation Command,” targeted at facilitating “Operation Restoring Justice.” The command is intended to deport over 600,000 individuals during the first government term and would operate under stringent measures including detaining 24,000 illegal migrants, conducting five deportation flights daily, and enforcing stricter immigration controls. Yusuf characterized illegal immigration as a “national security emergency,” criticizing the current immigration policies and pledging to eliminate welfare benefits for non-citizens. He cited a specific focus on migrants from six countries, including Pakistan and Somalia, due to high visa overstaying rates. The proposal entails an estimated annual cost of £2 billion, which Yusuf argues would be counterbalanced by cuts in migrant accommodation expenses. In addition to deportations, Reform UK plans to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights and introduce legislation to limit judicial reviews in deportation cases. Other proposals include replacing indefinite residency with finite work visas, expanding police powers, and implementing a public ban on face coverings. The party’s announcement faced backlash from Labour Party officials, emphasizing divisions within the UK concerning immigration issues.

A “Not Friendly” Showdown Between the US Defense Secretary and the Anthropic CEO



**North Korea:** Dario Amodei, CEO of AI firm Anthropic, is set to meet US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on Tuesday, amid rising tensions between the Pentagon and the artificial intelligence company over military use of technology. The meeting comes at a crucial time for both sides. Contract negotiations between Anthropic and the US Department of Defense have stalled over the company’s demand for strict safeguards on its AI systems, according to Axios. “Anthropic knows this is not a get-to-know-you meeting,” a senior Defense official told Axios. “This is not a friendly meeting. This is a sh\*t-or-get-off-the-pot meeting.” Anthropic wants strong guardrails such as clear limits on how its AI tools can be used in military operations and assurances that the technology will not be deployed in ways that violate the company’s safety and ethical standards. The Defense Department, however, has signaled that it wants the flexibility to use the company’s AI tools for “all lawful use cases,” without additional limitations imposed by the firm. Claude, the AI model built by Anthropic, is currently the only advanced AI system operating inside the US military’s classified networks. Because of this, the Pentagon does not want to lose access to Claude. It plays an important role in military and intelligence operations. “We are

having productive conversations, in good faith, with the Pentagon on how to continue that work and get these complex issues right,” the company’s spokesperson said, reported Bloomberg. Anthropic has built its reputation on promoting AI safety and ethics. One of the big principles the company sticks to is that Claude shouldn’t be used to create fully autonomous weapons or conduct mass surveillance of people. But now the Pentagon is pushing back. The tensions between the two sides became more visible after reports that Claude was used in a US military operation that helped capture Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. It’s not clear exactly how Claude was used in that mission, but the reports raised questions about whether Anthropic’s safety rules were followed and if the company fully supports its tools being involved in such operations. “Claude is used for a wide variety of intelligence-related use cases across the government, including by the Defence Department, in line with the company’s usage policy,” the company said. At the same time, the Pentagon has described Anthropic as a “supply chain risk” and said that the Defense Department could cancel Anthropic’s existing contracts. Last year, the company was awarded a contract worth up to \$200 million by the department.

PM Anthony Albanese of Australia was evacuated from his home following a bomb threat



**Canberra:** Due to a bomb threat on Tuesday, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese had to leave his official residence. For several hours, he was transported to a different place. Nothing unusual was found during a comprehensive check of a protection establishment, the Australian Federal Police

(AFP) said in a statement, adding that there was “no current threat to the community or public safety.” At 6 p.m., Albanese was removed from The Lodge, his official residence in Canberra, while an investigation was conducted. After the inspection, he was relocated back in at 9:00 p.m.

There was an explosive threat, according to a Guardian Australia story. The Prime Minister’s office told ABC that they “thank them for their work” and have faith in the police. Federal lawmakers and other Commonwealth structures, including Parliament House and The Lodge, are under the AFP’s

protection. Threats against Australian politicians, irrespective of their positions, have, nevertheless, increased. In 2024, the AFP verified that during the previous year, there had been 1,000 reports of offensive and threatening messages, harassment, and nuisance against lawmakers. Albanese announced on Tuesday that his administration is writing Commonwealth realms to express support for removing former Prince Andrew from the royal succession. Albanese said he had communicated with his British counterpart, Keir Starmer, about Andrew, who is being investigated for alleged misconduct in public office following revelations about his dealings with the late US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Britain would have to initiate any change to the line of royal succession -- but it would need the agreement of the 14 other Commonwealth realms that have King Charles III as head of state, he said. “Australia likes being first and we have made sure that everyone knows what our position is and we’ll be writing today to the other realm countries as well, informing them of our position,” Albanese told ABC.

The US is furious with Iran, but 5,000 sailors on the USS Ford have to deal with 650 broken restrooms

**Tehran:** The United States is undertaking the most extensive military build-up of warships and aircraft in the Middle East in decades, prompted by President Donald Trump’s warnings of possible military action against Iran. This conflict has compounded the issues faced by nearly 5,000 sailors aboard the USS Gerald R. Ford, the world’s most advanced aircraft carrier, currently undergoing an extended deployment since June of the previous year. The choice to prolong the USS Gerald R. Ford’s mission marks its second extension, leading to escalating concerns, particularly regarding the vessel’s plumbing systems, including blocked toilets and sewage issues.



The Ford played a crucial role in the capture of former Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro in January, with the crew subsequently informed that their deployment would be extended for potential military strikes against Iran, positioning them toward the Middle East to align with another carrier. Typically, aircraft carrier deployments are around six months during peacetime; however, sailors aboard the Ford are now facing a possible 11-month deployment, which would set a record for continuous service by a U.S. Navy ship. Sustaining a prolonged deployment inflicts considerable stress on the ship’s equipment, with ongoing

maintenance and upgrades delayed. Recent reports from NPR reveal that the carrier, having cost \$13 billion to construct, is grappling with significant plumbing system failures, affecting toiletry functionality. This vacuum system’s malfunction can lead to widespread issues throughout the ship, complicating maintenance efforts. Crews commonly contend with various foreign objects causing blockages, although a recurring issue seems to be a component at the back of the toilets becoming loose. The impact of the extended deployment is also deeply felt personally among the sailors. Many crew members, predominantly in their early twenties, express frustration and a desire to leave the Navy as soon as their tenure aboard the Ford concludes. They face isolation from family due to “ghost mode” communications, which arises from the confidential nature of carrier operations. As of now, the U.S. maintains an active fleet in the Middle East, which includes more than a dozen warships, comprising one aircraft carrier, the USS Abraham Lincoln, along with nine destroyers and three littoral combat ships. It is a rare circumstance to have two U.S. aircraft carriers, both capable of hosting numerous warplanes and staffed by thousands of sailors, concurrently positioned in the region.

Violence in Mexico after military kills notorious drug cartel boss

**Mexico:** Mexico is on high alert following a brutal retaliation by cartel gunmen after federal troops killed their leader, infamous crime boss “El Mencho.” On Sunday, authorities sought to apprehend Nemesio Rubén Oseguera Cervantes in the western state of Jalisco. However, the operation resulted in a battle that murdered six of his comrades and fatally wounded the notorious leader, according to officials. Omar García Harfuch, Mexico’s security minister, said that since the operation, retaliatory cartel attacks have killed one security guard and 25 members of the National Guard. According to him, one bystander and thirty cartel members were slain. One of the most sought drug traffickers in the world was El Mencho, 59. He was the leader of the heavily armed Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), which has grown to be the most potent criminal group in the nation. Ricardo Trevilla, the minister of defense, claimed that a romantic partner provided intelligence that led to the capture and execution of Mexico’s most wanted man. In the west of the country, cartel foot soldiers blocked roads by setting cars and buses on fire, closing schools and leaving foreign visitors stranded. Travel warnings were issued by a number of foreign governments. Claudia Sheinbaum, the president, called for composure, and officials reported that all 250 cartel barriers in 20 states had been removed. It is unclear if the violence will continue. Previous operations to kill or capture organized crime bosses have led to eruptions of bloodshed and chaos, as cartels retaliate against the government. Efforts to remove kingpins have also often left dangerous power vacuums which provoke more bloodshed as rival factions fight for control. David Mora, Mexico analyst for International Crisis Group, said he expected to see violence spike. “El Mencho was a very powerful figure who ran a very centralised organisation. There is no clear direct heir or successor,” he said. Authorities in Puerto Vallarta, a popular seaside tourist destination in Jalisco state, issued public advice to stay indoors when violence erupted.

Trump targets longtime enemies and boasts of numerous accomplishments in the longest State of the Union

**Havana:** At Tuesday night’s State of the Union speech, Donald Trump declared his first year in office a success, despite the fact that his presidency is plagued by poor public support ratings ahead of the November midterm elections, which might return control of Congress to his Democratic rivals. The Republican president’s yearly speech to a joint session of Congress followed months of tumult, including a crackdown on immigrant communities in Minneapolis that claimed the lives of two US citizens and stalled progress on his campaign pledge to reduce living expenses. Despite Democrats demonstrating, carrying placards, and shouting loudly in the chamber, Trump’s speech remained triumphant, claiming to have restored a nation that Joe Biden had destroyed. Trump frequently brought out surprise visitors to act as living examples of what he believed to be the grandeur of the nation during his speech, which lasted just under two hours and was the longest State of the Union ever given. “Tonight, after just one year, we can say with dignity and pride that we have accomplished a turnaround for the ages and a transformation like no one has ever seen before,” Trump stated. “We will never return to the state we were in a very short period of time. We will not return. Recent surveys have shown that many voters disagree. A Washington Post-ABC News-Ipsos poll released this week found a mere 39% of voters view his presidency positively, and others have found him underwater on key issues such as the economy and immigration. But Trump gave no acknowledgment to the bad

vibes, instead running through his administration’s accomplishments in a speech that was interspersed with falsehoods and exaggerations but light on new policy proposals. He announced that his vice-president, JD Vance, would lead a “war on fraud”, and that he had negotiated a “ratepayer protection pledge” to offset the impact of new data centers on households electricity costs. He alleged that a Ukrainian refugee was murdered in North Carolina by an immigrant, when the suspect is in fact a US citizen, while claiming that his administration “will always protect” Medicaid even though the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, the main domestic legislation he has signed in his second term, mandates cuts that are expected to cost millions of people their healthcare. Four supreme court justices were in attendance, three of whom – John Roberts, Amy Coney Barrett and Elena Kagan – had last week signed on to an opinion saying he could not use executive power to impose tariffs on US trading partners. As the three sat in the front row together with Brett Kavanaugh, who had not signed on to their opinion, Trump issued a relatively measured criticism of their decision, calling it “unfortunate” and “disappointing”. He was less restrained when it came to Democratic lawmakers, who he wrote off as “crazy”, or Somali immigrants, who he described as “pirates who ransacked Minnesota”, the site of a long-running and contentious immigration operations. And though he has ordered a major military buildup around Iran, he revealed little about what his intentions were for the

longtime US adversary. “My preference is to solve this problem through diplomacy. But one thing is certain, I will never allow the world’s number one sponsor of terror, which they are by far, to have a nuclear weapon,” Trump said. Much of the rest of his speech was dedicated to honoring a parade of US citizens who appeared in the galleries overlooking the floor of the House of Representatives, where the speech took place. These included the men’s hockey team that just won gold medals at the Winter Olympics, and a national guard soldier who survived a fatal shooting in downtown Washington DC. Trump also awarded the Medal of Honor, the highest military decoration, to a Korean war veteran and a helicopter pilot wounded during the January raid to capture Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro. “Our country is winning again. In fact, we’re winning so much that we really don’t know what to do about it,” Trump said. Democrats who attended staged what one party leader called “silent defiance”, refraining from applause during much of the speech and staying in their seats. Only occasionally did the rise to clap when Trump brought up subjects with bipartisan approval, such as the release of Israeli hostages taken by Hamas and a proposal to ban lawmakers from trading stocks. Several Democrats opted to skip the event, with some instead taking part in counter-programming held elsewhere, including a “People’s State of the Union” organized by liberal groups. At the start of the speech, Al Green, the Democratic representative from Texas who was ejected from the House chamber a year ago for heck-



ling the president and later censured, held up a sign reading “Black people aren’t apes!”, in reference to Trump sharing a racist video of Barack and Michelle Obama. After confrontations with Republicans, Green appeared to be escorted out of the chamber. At key moments,

lawmakers also shouted back to Trump’s onslaught of claims, with Ilhan Omar, the Democratic congresswoman from Minnesota, saying “you have killed Americans” in reference to the deaths of Alex Pretti and Renee Good in her state.



Armenia, situated between Türkiye, Georgia, and Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus, is a largely underrated travel destination with a wealth of attractions. Its landlocked, mountainous geography presents a blend of rich traditions, spectacular landscapes, and ancient historical sites. Key highlights include the world’s oldest winery and the longest nonstop reversible cable car. Travelers typically begin in Yerevan, the capital, known for its vibrant streets and art museums. Other must-see locations are the breathtaking canyon views in Debed, the UNESCO-designated monasteries in Alaverdi, and the scenic Lake Sevan. When planning a visit, it’s important to consider Armenia’s variable climate—winters in the mountains can be cold while summer in lowland areas can be hot. The ideal times for exploration are in late spring and early fall, with summer being particularly favorable for hiking in the mountains. This guide covers the best places to experience Armenia, whether for first-time visitors or returning travelers looking to delve deeper into the Caucasus region.

1. Yerevan

Yerevan, Armenia’s capital, is a city of striking contradictions, where luxury vehicles coexist with vintage models, and traditional taverns stand beside trendy bars. The vibrant Republic Square serves as the city’s center, highlighted by its stunning tuff-stone architecture. A visit to the nearby History Museum of Armenia is essential, showcasing notable Bronze Age artifacts, including a 5500-year-old leather shoe. Additionally, the Cafesjian Center for the Arts, also known as the Cascade Complex, features an impressive array of sculptures, steps, and fountains that represent Armenia’s provinces. For panoramic views of the city, one can ascend to Victory Park, where the prominent 22-meter tall Mother Armenia Monument is located.

2. Gyumri

Armenia’s second city, Gyumri is the nation’s historic and artistic hub. Dating back 2500 years, the town has many stunning 19th-century buildings constructed from volcanic tuff, with fine stone engravings and often colorful doors. It’s well worth a detour. Tragically affected by the devastating 1988 Spitak earthquake, Gyumri has been able to restore most of its architectural glory. On a walk through its historic streets, you can visit arty galleries, meet passionate locals and feel the excitement of a city undergoing a renaissance. The best example of Gyumri’s Art Nouveau style is the Surp Amenaprkich (All Saviours Church) on Vardanants Sq, adorned with a mixture of black- and apricot-colored tuff and featuring beautiful frescoes inside. Across the square, Surp Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother of God Church) buzzes with activity all day long and has paintings and sculptures inside and out. Another noteworthy building is the Museum of National Architecture and Urban Life, which has intricately carved wooden balconies.

3. Alaverdi

The closest Armenian city to the Georgian border, Alaverdi is a rather unremarkable industrial town at the bottom of the Debed River gorge. However, nearby are two UNESCO World Heritage-listed medieval monasteries that might just be the most visited sites in Armenia. Founded in the 10th century, Haghpat Monastery has some of the most spectacular views of any of Armenia’s medieval monasteries; it’s about 4km east of Alaverdi, above the village of the same name. Alaverdi’s second must-visit monastery is Sanahin Monastery on the south side of the Debed River. This spectacular religious complex is packed with ancient khachkars (carved memorial steles), darkened chapels and medieval study halls, and there’s a large cemetery behind. The town is also home to one of the country’s friendliest guesthouses, Iris Bed & Breakfast, whose owners share their wisdom of the Armenian kitchen through cooking masterclasses. Soviet history enthusiasts can visit the Mikoyan Museum, a shrine to the notorious Alaverdi-born Mikoyan brothers who shaped the history of the communist empire.

4. Dilijan

The mountains around the town of Dilijan and its eponymous national park are perfect hiking territory, even in the height of summer, except on days when the weather is particularly toasty. The highlight for walkers is tackling sections of the red-and-white marked Transcaucasian Trail, which stretches up to Georgia and down to Meghri. Con-

# Armenia’s top 12 tourist destinations



tact Hike Armenia in Yerevan before you come for trail advice and other hiking tips. On a rainy day in Dilijan, your best bet is the Dilijan Local Lore Museum and Art Gallery. The entry fee is pricey, but the museum has an eclectic collection of European and Armenian art from the 16th to 20th centuries, as well as an archaeology exhibition downstairs featuring axes and chainmail.

5. Jermuk

Around 170km southeast of Yerevan, a journey of around 4 hours by bus or marshrutky, Jermuk is famed for its natural hot springs. A spa day in Jermuk looks something like this: you’ll wake up in a luxurious resort and eat a healthy breakfast before a meeting with a doctor, who will recommend a line-up of treatments depending on your ailments and physical health, ranging from mineral baths to aromatherapy. After your treatment, you can have lunch and hang out by the pool or take a silent meander through this calm resort town to the Gallery of Waters, where you can sip mineral water credited with healing properties, emerging from pipes at temperatures of 30°C (86°F) to 55°C (131°F). After dinner and a restful night’s sleep, you’ll repeat the process for up to 18 days, or even longer, depending on what the doctor recommends. If you’re looking for a stylish place to stay, check out the 2019-built Jermuk Hotel & Spa; it has beautiful gardens that are ideal for post-spa relaxation. Grand Resort Jermuk is another fantastic accommodation choice with its own spa center.

6. Lake Sevan

Lake Sevan, located about 70 km northeast of Yerevan, is the largest lake in the South Caucasus and one of the world’s largest high-altitude freshwater lakes. Its colors can shift dramatically, indicating toxic algae blooms, so caution is advised for swimming. Year-round, the area offers dramatic scenery, particularly at Sevanavank, a historic monastic site with structures dating back to 305 CE. Moreover, the Noratus Cemetery on the western shore features the largest collection of khachkar stelae in Armenia, with some from the 10th century, highlighting its cultural significance.

7. Goris

Goris boasts an impressive collection of pre-Soviet 19th-century architecture, second only to Gyumri, featuring charming stone buildings and ornate wooden balconies along tranquil streets. Located 140km southeast of Yerevan, the town is accessible via marshrutky in about five hours. Visitors can explore Goris’s picturesque streets, take photos at a miniature Eiffel Tower, and hike from the town cemetery to volcanic pinnacles with caves offering stunning views. Nearby, less than 15km east, lies Khndzoresk, known for its cone-shaped cliffs, ancient cave dwellings, and churches, reachable via a 160m-long suspension bridge, with some caves inhabited until the 1950s.

8. Areni

The discovery of a 6100-year-old winery in Areni in 2008 highlighted Armenia’s wine industry, now featuring over 200 producers leveraging the region’s dry soils. Notable wineries include Momik WineCube, known for its scenic vineyard tastings, and Trinity Canyon Winery, offering four wine varieties. Visitors can explore the winery cave amidst ongoing archaeological excavations, and the stunning landscape of high-contrast cliffs and rock formations adds to the area’s appeal, making Areni a worthwhile destination even without its wines.

9. Khor Virap Monastery

Armenia is recognized as the world’s first Christian nation, having been converted by apostles in the 3rd century CE. Saint Gregory the Illuminator faced imprisonment for his refusal to engage in pagan rituals, but his survival in a pit of snakes impressed King Tiridates III, who converted to Christianity in 301 CE, bringing the nation with him. Visitors can explore this history at Khor Virap Monastery, where they can enter the former torture pit and enjoy views of Mt Ararat, alongside the picturesque Surp Astvatsatsin Church with its distinctive dome.

10. Tatev

The tiny village of Tatev, located on a 1600m-high plateau above the Vorotan River, features the Wings of Tatev Aerial Tramway, the world’s longest nonstop reversible



cable car, offering stunning gorge views with informative commentary. Visitors can explore the Tatev Monastery, founded in the 4th century, with its notable 9th-century main church, Surp Poghos-Petros. A remarkable 8m-high octagonal pillar, topped by a khachkar, is located in the courtyard, believed to predict seismic activity. Following major restorations in 2018, Tatev Monastery has become a popular pilgrimage site, inviting visitors to explore its intricate architecture and beautiful surroundings.

11. Noravank

Noravank, a monastery in Armenia founded by Bishop Hovhannes in 1205, is a must-visit site, especially during early morning or late afternoon when the reddish cliffs are illuminated by the sun. The complex features the Surp Astvatsatsin Church, crafted by architect Momik in 1339, notable for its circular balcony accessed by narrow steps—designed to enhance the spiritual experience and deter wildlife. Although climbing is restricted for safety, the main hall is open for exploration. Nearby, visitors can discover an ancient well and the Surp Karapet church, designed by Siranes, renowned for Momik’s remarkable door sculpture of God and Adam. The site also houses intricately carved khachkars and a museum dedicated to Momik, showcasing his design replicas, ancient coins, and materials for ceremonial healing oils, with guided tours available upon request.

12. Garni Temple and Geghard Monastery

Less than an hour east of Yerevan are two of Armenia’s most spectacular sites – the spectacular and handsomely restored Garni Temple and the historic Geghard Monastery. The easiest way to see both is by hiring a car and driver from Republic Square, or with your own vehicle. Garni Temple is an astonishing, 2000-year-old pillared temple in the classic Hellenistic style – the only such building in the former Soviet Union. First raised in 77 CE, it was rebuilt between 1969 and 1975 after being toppled by earthquakes and invasions during the medieval period.

On the drive to Garni, you’ll pass Charent’s Arch, a stone archway built by architect Rafael Israelyan in 1957 to frame the perfect hilltop view of Mt Ararat in the distance. In the Garni Gorge below the temple are outcrops made up of basalt columns that look like the tubes of an organ, known locally as the Symphony of Stones. Walk the cobblestone walkway near the Azat Bridge for the best close-up views. Your tour or drive will finish at the World Heritage-listed Geghard Monastery, founded in the earliest days of Christianity in Armenia. The main stone church, Surp Astvatsatsin, was built in 1215 and houses a chapel with holy spring water that locals line up to touch.

## An ophthalmologist discusses four early, silent indicators of vision loss, ranging from double vision to a chronic headache

Loss of vision is not necessarily abrupt or spectacular. It accumulates over time. Your body often offers you mild warning signs, yet you may question how it happened without you knowing. These symptoms are commonly confused with worry, stress, sleep deprivation, or screen weariness. But if they happen frequently, they can point to a deeper problem. Early detection can mean the difference between avoidable harm and irreversible visual loss. When HT Lifestyle spoke with Dr. Rajat Kapoor, a senior consultant ophthalmologist at Dr. Agarwals Eye Hospital in Rajouri Garden, he clarified that vision loss typically develops gradually rather than all at once. “Small, easily disregarded changes like a slight blur, frequent headaches, or trouble seeing at night are the first signs of vision loss,” he said. It suggests that vision loss is slow in its progression instead of being sudden, as many would presume. But there are many early symptoms which do indicate a vision problem, which, if left unchecked, may worsen and end up causing major complications, such as permanent vision loss.

**Here are the five signs which you should not ignore:**

- 1. Frequent headache or eye strain**  
Not always just fatigue.  
Persistent headache after reading or prolonged screen use may indicate uncorrected refractive error or eye accommodation anomalies.  
Frequent headache may indicate a brain tumour.

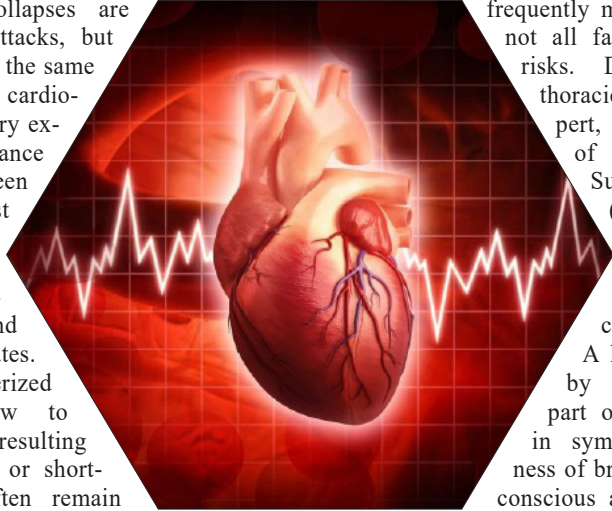


- 2. Difficulty driving at night**  
These signs are early indicators of cataract, refractive changes, or retinal condition:  
Glare from headlights  
Halos around lights  
Reduced clarity in dim settings
- 3. Intermittent blurred vision**  
Blur that comes and goes may reflect fluctuating blood sugar levels affecting the lens.  
Particularly in individuals with diabetes.
- 4. Double vision**  
These issues indicate muscle imbalance or,

rarely, neurological issues:  
Occasional double vision  
Eye drifting  
Difficulty focusing  
The ophthalmologist also cautioned about the rising cases of myopia, noting that many people hold their phone screens too close, which can increase eye strain and contribute to worsening eye power. He also warned that vision loss due to conditions like glaucoma or other retinal disorders can occur silently, as these diseases often show no obvious symptoms in their initial stages.

## How to distinguish between a heart attack and sudden cardiac arrest

Sudden collapses are frequently misidentified as heart attacks, but not all fainting incidents carry the same risks. Dr. Chiran Babu A, a cardiothoracic and vascular surgeon, emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) and heart attacks, as the appropriate response can impact survival rates. A heart attack is characterized by a blocked part of the heart muscle, resulting in symptoms like chest pain or shortness of breath, where victims often remain conscious and able to seek help. In contrast, SCA is an electrical issue where the heart abruptly ceases effective blood pumping due to an erratic rhythm, leading to an immediate loss of consciousness and normal breathing. Dr. Babu highlights that heart attacks develop gradually, whereas SCA happens suddenly without prior warning. The emergency protocols for these conditions also vary; heart attacks require urgent medical intervention to restore blood flow, while SCA necessitates immediate CPR and defibrillation with an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) to increase survival chances. It’s important to note that while heart attacks can lead to SCA, many SCA instances arise independent of a heart attack and may stem from heart muscle diseases, inherited rhythm disorders, or unknown factors. Dr. Babu encourages the public to learn CPR and become acquainted with AEDs, which are increasingly accessible in various public places. Understanding the indicators of these medical emergencies and how to respond effectively can significantly enhance survival outcomes for those affected.



## Javed Akhtar evaluations Anubhav Sinha’s movie



**Mumbai:** Anubhav Sinha’s Assi was recently reviewed by veteran poet, lyricist, and playwright Javed Akhtar. In a video that India exclusively obtained The 80-year-old is currently spotted discussing the film’s narrative, its message, and how it captivates viewers while provoking thought. Some images make you feel something. Additionally, some movies stimulate your mind and function on an intellectual level. However, very few movies are able to simultaneously affect your heart and mind. In the video, he stated, “I think Assi is one such movie.” The Taapsee Pannu film was praised by Akhtar, who is well-known for his critical view of movies, for the manner it tackles a difficult issue. “On one level, it’s a very touching tale that regular people can relate to. But on another level, it leaves behind some very serious questions. It does not hand out easy answers. Instead, it places those questions before society,” he said. According to Akhtar, Assi appeals to anyone willing to reflect on and understand the kind of society we are living in. “Anyone who thinks deeply, who pays attention to what is happening around us, will walk away from this film reflecting on it. It has been narrated in a very graceful and compelling manner. And ultimately, the film leaves you with both answers and questions,” he concluded. Assi, which also stars Kani Kusruti and Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub, follows the story of a woman who is sexually assaulted and left on train tracks to die. The film explores the inner battle of a survivor and interrogates the very idea of ‘justice’. It questions whether we can truly deliver justice to a woman who has been violated, dehumanised, and abandoned.

## Taapsee Pannu claims that she has questioned “top directors” for using the same actors

**Mumbai:** Taapsee Pannu received praise for her role in the movie Assi, which debuted in theaters last Friday. Anubhav Sinha, who has collaborated with her on Mulk and Thappad, is directing the social drama. In a recent interview with Galatta Plus, Taapsee revealed that she had questioned numerous “top directors” about the types of casting decisions they consistently use in their movies. Taapsee said, “It is challenging,” throughout the conversation. It’s hard, not for me, but for others to conceive, as we are so content in our imagination’s comfort zone. “All right, this will work since it’s this kind of role.” No one is eager to think creatively. I have discussed with top directors my desire to explore roles outside of leading films and lighter narratives. I challenge the idea of casting the same actors in similar roles, finding it unfair to both them and aspiring actors like myself who wish to diversify our craft. It reflects complacency in directing to limit character choices based on appearances, as I believe I can contribute something fresh to such roles.



## Akshay Kumar confirmed that Bhooth Bangla will be released in April

**Mumbai:** Fans are getting excited for the April 2026 release of Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar’s forthcoming flick Bhooth Bangla after he shared a new motion poster for it. Described as a horror-comedy, the movie has Akshay sitting on a throne adorned with demonic faces in a theatrical position. The spooky yet humorous tone that the film seeks to convey is hinted at in this image.

The caption for the motion poster, “Dus ko denge das-tak, intezar karo tab tak Let the fun begin!” was posted on social media on Tuesday. Viewers were immediately drawn to the post, which sparked a wave of comments on social media about Kumar’s distinctive appearance and the eerie mood of the movie. In addition, Kumar makes his fourteen-year comeback to filmmaker Priyadarshan’s film industry with Bhooth Bangla. The two have previously



collaborated on a number of popular comedies, such as Bhagam Bhag (2006), Hera Pheri (2000), Khatta Meetha (2010), and Bhool Bhulaiyaa (2007). Both moviegoers and the business have been eagerly

awaiting their reunion. Cape of Good Films, Kumar’s production company, and Balaji Motion Pictures, owned by Ekta Kapoor, collaborated on the project. Paresh Rawal, Tabu, Rajpal Yadav, Wa-

miqa Gabbi, and Mithila Palkar are among the film’s star-studded cast. Bhooth Bangla is set to arrive in cinemas on April 10, 2026 and will later be available on streaming platforms.

## Ramayana: Part I First cut screened nine months before to release in Los Angeles

**Mumbai:** An early look at the highly awaited epic before its planned Diwali release was provided on Monday when a small group of people in Los Angeles saw a rough version of Ramayana: Part I. Attendees ranged in age from 18 to 60 at the Cinemark Playa Vista theater. Initial audience responses have been overwhelmingly positive, with many complimenting the film’s scope, visual effects, and narrative, according to an article in The Week.

The version that was screened was merely a preliminary cut and was not meant to be the final version. It is anticipated that the film will continue to change as a result of the input from this showing. The difficulties of making a movie of this size were previously discussed by producer Namit Malhotra, who is said to have contributed almost Rs 4,000 crore to the project. On the Game Changers podcast, he stated, “Part 1 filming is almost over. We had a big idea when



I first started working on the movie. Everyone asked me if I had enough money to pull it off, even the performers. I haven’t borrowed a single rupee since finishing the first movie.”I’m not sure where the money is coming from,” Malhotra continued. Even I am unsure of how I managed to pull it off when people question me. This is not like anything else. It is simply taking place on its own. This goes beyond a project or a

business idea. The producer also commented on the unpredictability of the project’s budget. He said, “People ask me what my final budget is going to be. I don’t know. I don’t check that every day. I just see if we’re making the right product. There should be no compromise anywhere.”The project is being developed as a two-part film, with the second instalment planned for release during Diwali next year. An official

character launch event is scheduled to take place in April this year in Mumbai on the occasion of Ram Navami. The Ramayana series features Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Ram, Sai Pallavi as Goddess Sita, Ravi Dubey as Laxman, Sunny Deol as Lord Hanuman and Yash as Ravan. Directed by Nitesh Tiwari, the first of the series is slated to hit the screens in November this year, as the grand Diwali release.

## Deepika Padukone embraces 40 with Ross Geller enthusiasm



**Mumbai:** Turning 40 often triggers dramatic monologues about “milestones”. Instead, Deepika Padukone chose humour. The actor shared a playful nod to F.R.I.E.N.D.S., echoing Ross Geller’s iconic spiral over ageing -- and instantly set the internet

buzzing. The post, which quickly went viral, showed Padukone leaning into the joke rather than shying away from it. In an industry that scrutinises women over every birthday candle, her light-hearted take felt both refreshing and deliberate. Padukone cheekily applied

Ross Geller’s well-known dramatic response to turning thirty to her own big 4-0. Fans praised her for being realistic rather than romanticizing the milestone, flooding the comments with laughing emojis and nostalgic Friends references. Days after she appeared in public with her father Prakash Padukone and husband Ranveer Singh, she became the talk of the town on her birthday. Her reputation for maintaining her groundedness in the face of international prominence was strengthened by the family appearance, which garnered media attention. Industry chatter continues around her possible involvement in season four of The White Lotus. While neither Padukone nor the makers have confirmed the reports, speculation about her international expansion refuses to die down. For now, though, it’s her Ross-inspired birthday humour that has everyone talking.

## Priyanka Chopra becomes tearful while receiving a letter from Nick Jonas

**Mumbai:** Priyanka Chopra was in the midst of an unexpectedly emotional moment while promoting her next movie, The Bluff. The starlet was noticeably moved when she was surprised with a sweet letter from her husband, Nick Jonas, during a recent visit on Jay Shetty’s podcast. Priyanka was taken aback when Jay revealed the details of Nick’s letter on the show. after she inquired as to whether Nick had written the note after he had previously made an appearance on the program, Jay explained that he had spoken with Nick individually following that broadcast. Priyanka quietly acknowledged, “Oh gosh, I’m embarrassed,” as he started reading the letter, which he claimed he hadn’t read before, preparing herself for what lay ahead. Jay then read the entirety of Nick’s sincere statement. “My Jaan, I’m constantly in awe of the person you are,” Nick wrote in the letter. It goes beyond terms like “global icon,” “leader,” and “force of nature.” It’s the way you present yourself as my wife, a mother, a sister,

and a daughter. I make an effort to be as focused and considerate as you are every single day. Everyone sees the public part of you, but what truly amazes me is the person you are in private. People feel totally protected when you listen to them because of your extraordinary patience. I’ve seen people who usually keep their guards way up just let it go all around you, finding a kind of healing they didn’t know they needed. “One of my favorite qualities about you is that you truly never judge. You just meet people where they’re at and always find the good in people. That’s a rare thing. You’re a leader in every sense. In these last eight years, I’ve watched you take on challenges that would have broken most people. Whether it’s on a set or navigating the massive life change of moving countries and blending two very different worlds, you do it with a fire that honestly lights me up. You’ve stayed so true to your roots while adapting with a kindness that seems to never run out. I’m so incredibly proud of you. I know your

## Sargun Mehta denies rumors that she is pregnant

**New Delhi:** Recently, Sargun Mehta and Ravi Dubey, an actor couple, have been the subject of pregnancy rumors. According to multiple sources, they are expecting their first child. In response to the rumors, Sargun posted a statement outlining the allegations and asking people to stop disseminating erroneous information. Sargun Mehta expressed her annoyance at the unrelenting focus on her private life in an Instagram post. She added, “How do you know about a pregnancy that me and Ravi are unaware of?,” making it apparent that the rumors are untrue. Please stop it . She noted the enduring nature of these assertions in the same piece, saying, “News apparently knows before us about our ‘pregnancy for the last two years’.”“According to them, I have been pregnant,” she said, challenging the story to further address the problem. That pregnancy was quite lengthy. Simply stop disseminating false information and calm down. Asking our team or ourselves if the news is real before writing about it wouldn’t take much time. On her Instagram Story, Sargun Mehta expressed her exasperation: “Where are these children going, and how fast am I birthing them? Should that be the question I’m asking, or is it that I’ve apparently been pregnant for two years... or more? Do they know my doctors? Or does me visiting a salon or a caf now account for pregnancy?”



## Konkona Sen Sharma Attacks ‘Derogatory’ Gay Bollywood Characters

**Mumbai:** Konkona Sen Sharma is presently preparing for the Netflix series Accused, in which she will play Geetika, a doctor in London who is in a romantic connection with Meera (played by Pratibha Ranta). Konkona recently discussed how, unlike other projects in the past, Accused does not view homosexuality as a “problem.” The lesbian couple Geetika (Konkona Sen Sharma) and Meera (Pratibha Ranta), who are going through a difficult time in their relationship, are introduced in the teaser.

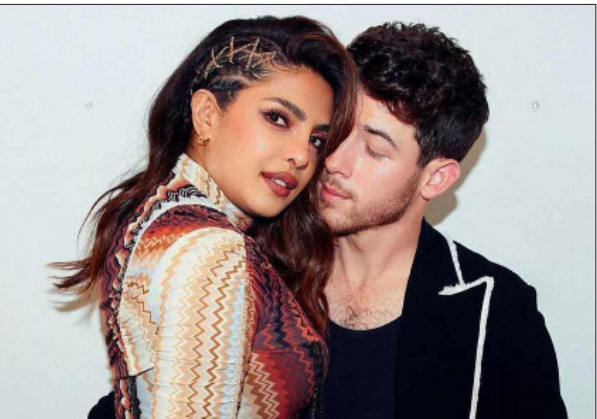
When Geetika is accused of sexual impropriety at work, the situation becomes even more tense. The logline for the trailer, which



Netflix released earlier this month, stated: “A well-known LGBTQ doctor in London has her life fall apart after being accused of sexual assault.

Now under a storm of suspicion and scrutiny, her marriage fractures and the truth blurs. Her wife must decide whether to walk away-

or fight for the woman the world is turning against. The cast features Konkona Sen Sharma and Pratibha Ranta.”As public scrutiny doubles, Geetika finds herself in a helpless scenario, watching the professional life she has worked on for years crumble around her.



dad is looking down with that same pride, seeing the woman you continue to be.”

## The Kerala Story 2 will be screened by the Kerala High Court before its release

**Mumbai:** Due to its portrayal of forced religious conversions in Kerala, the upcoming Hindi movie The Kerala Story 2 has become embroiled in controversy. According to the most recent information on Live Law, the Kerala High Court asked the Center’s position on Tuesday, February 24, on whether a showing of the movie could be scheduled prior to deciding the pleas contesting its censorship certificate for allegedly portraying the State negatively. “Kerala lives in total harmony,” said Justice Bechu Kurian Thomas during the hearing. However, you have shown this as occurring throughout Kerala. It can arouse



passion and is an incorrect indication. The censor board is used in this situation. Have you given that any thought? “Normally, I don’t interfere with any movie,” he continued. freedom of the arts. However, you claim that it is based on actual

events and that Kerala is the name provided, which may lead to some tension among the community. Tomorrow, I’ll watch the film. Tomorrow, you can set up a showing of the film. The Court has directed that the case be reopened at 1:45 p.m. The movie,

which is set in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Kerala, examines topics of compulsion and religious conversion. The movie, which stars Ulka Gupta, Aditi Bhatia, and Aishwarya Ojha, opens in theaters on February 27. The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) awarded the Kerala Story 2 a U/A certification. Pinarayi Vijayan, the chief minister of Kerala, also denounced the movie in a statement a few days ago. “We must all resist attempts to depict Kerala as a hub for terrorism, despite the fact that it is a land of religious harmony, a leader in sustainable development, and an example of upholding law and order.

## At Rashtrapati Bhavan, Shashi Tharoor greets the statue of Rajaji

New Delhi, Mar 01: Congress MP Shashi Tharoor has praised the inauguration of a bust of statesman and independence fighter C Rajagopalachari at Rashtrapati Bhavan, stating that although “very few” people still adhere to the former governor general’s liberal and constitutional beliefs, they are still extremely relevant. Sharing Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s post on X, in which he praised the action, Tharoor expressed his “sincere pleasure” at seeing Rajagopalachari honored at the presidential residence. He pointed out that Rajaji had been the first Indian to hold the position as the nation’s sole Indian governor general prior to India’s republican transition. Tharoor recalled that he had supported Rajaji’s Swatantra Party during his student years and said the leader’s ideological framework – combining liberal economics and free enterprise with social justice, strong civilisational roots without communal bias, and an unwavering commitment to constitutional freedoms – continued to shape his own beliefs. He continued by saying that Rajaji’s focus on upholding individual liberties—including preventing the government from intruding too much into citizens’ private lives—remains relevant in modern politics. As part of the ongoing Rajaji Utsav, President Droupadi Murmu inaugurated the bust of Rajagopalachari on Monday at



Rashtrapati Bhavan’s grand staircase close to Ashok Mandap. Modi praised the move, saying the homage reflected India’s determination to honor leaders who molded the country’s future while eradicating traces of a colonial mentality. He referred to Rajaji as a “towering scholar, freedom fighter, thinker, and administrator” whose life exemplified moral rectitude and a scholarly dedication to the advancement of the country. British architect Edwin Lutyens, who created a number of notable structures in current Delhi, such as Rashtrapati Bhavan, North Block, South Block, and India Gate, has had his bust replaced with the current one. Modi claimed in his most recent Mann Ki Baat speech that India was rapidly substituting personalities from the nation’s own history and cultural heritage for symbols from the colonial era. An exhibition highlighting Rajagopalachari’s life and contributions is also being held at Rashtrapati Bhavan

from February 24 to March 1 as part of the commemorative celebrations. This is not the first time Shashi Tharoor has publicly backed or praised an initiative associated with the Modi government. The Congress MP had earlier voiced support for Operation Sindoor, describing himself as “unapologetic” about endorsing India’s military action against Pakistan despite differences within his party, and maintaining that his position did not violate the Congress’s broader official stance. He has also endorsed India’s calibrated position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, observing that New Delhi’s ability to maintain dialogue with both sides reflected effective and pragmatic diplomacy. On another occasion, Tharoor described Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s energy and willingness to engage global leaders as an asset for India’s international outreach -- remarks that drew political attention given his affiliation with the Congress.

## With the approval of the Assembly, the Center is expected to approve renaming Kerala to Keralam

New Delhi, Mar 01: The core of India’s strengthened strategic alliance with France is the co-design, co-development, and co-production of sophisticated defense platforms. During high-level negotiations, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh pushed for more domestic manufacturing of Rafale fighter jets. Singh pushed for up to 50% indigenous manufacturing content in fighter jets that are anticipated to be made for India during talks with the French defense minister, urging them to expand Indian involvement in the production ecosystem of the Dassault Aviation-built Rafale aircraft. Dassault’s application for the Indian Air Force’s anticipated purchase of 114 multirole fighter planes is anticipated to include the concept.

The focus on domestic manufacturing forms the foundation of an expanding industrial collaboration between France and India and is consistent with the larger Make in India movement and France’s strategic autonomy objectives. After the Union Home Ministry examined the first resolution and recommended technical changes for compliance and clarity, the assembly passed the resolution a second time on June 25, 2024. Chief Minister Vijayan clarified that the term “Keralam” is used in Malayalam and has historical roots in the area, citing the national freedom struggle’s goal of creating a single Malayalam-speaking state. The state is re-



ferred to as Kerala in the First Schedule of the Constitution. The main focus of the assembly’s request is to update this official usage to conform to local nomenclature and guarantee uniformity across all languages included in the Indian Constitution’s Eighth Schedule. “But the name of our state is written as Kerala in the First Schedule of the Constitution. This Assembly requests the Centre to take immediate steps to amend it as ‘Keralam’ under Article 3 of the Constitution and have it renamed

as ‘Keralam’ in all the languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution,” Vijayan said. The Union Cabinet meeting takes place in the new office of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Seva Tirtha, marking the first session at this location after the previous meeting at South Block on February 13. No official date has been announced by the Election Commission of India for the assembly elections, though the state is expected to go to polls before May to elect 140 members.

## The spin threat from Pakistan prevents England from making it to the semifinals



New Delhi: When England plays Pakistan in their T20 World Cup 2026 Super Eight encounter at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy on Tuesday, they will be eager to maintain their winning streak and earn a quarterfinal spot. A second victory in Group 2 would guarantee Harry Brook’s team a spot in the top four after they easily defeated Sri Lanka in their

opening match. However, England won’t have an easy path until it overcomes Pakistan’s spin obstacle.

Maheesh Theekshana and Dunith Wellalage of Sri Lanka combined for five for 47 in eight overs on Sunday, making its batters sweat. Because they are more numerous and diverse, Pakistan’s spinners can test England even more. Opting for just one pacer in its last two games, Pakistan is likely to deploy its tweakers for at least three-fourths of the innings, including the death phase (16-20) where Usman Tariq has nabbed seven batters at an economy of just 6.27. Jacob Bethell and Harry Brook are particularly vulnerable through the middle. Bethell averages under 15 against spinners and has perished against them in all five games so far.

## India women eye T20 World Cup with focus

New Delhi: The India Women’s cricket team, following their Women’s ODI World Cup victory, aims for success in the upcoming T20 World Cup. Vice-captain Smriti Mandhana emphasizes a focus on consistency rather than past achievements or opposition. The team recently secured a T20 series win against Australia, marking their first triumph over the team in a decade. Mandhana describes the team as transitioning towards domination in world cricket, with the goal of maintaining consistent performance. She highlights a successful third T20I match, where she and Jemimah Rodrigues formed a crucial partnership. The women’s T20 World Cup will take place in England and Wales from June 12 to July 5, and Mandhana acknowledges the impact of the Women’s Premier League (WPL) on improving their T20 game.



## The Reasons Behind Wayanad’s Attention Before Kerala Elections



Thiruvananthapuram, Mar 01: The 2024 Wayanad landslides in Kerala were unprecedented in their severity, resulting in 298 confirmed deaths and the complete destruction of villages such as Mundaikkai and Chooralmala, along with significant property damage. Following the disaster, relief efforts have evolved into a political struggle, especially as political parties prepare for upcoming elections. The handover of new housing for victims is surrounded by claims of credit from various leaders, with a model township ini-

tiative promising 410 homes. However, only a fraction of the government’s disaster relief fund has been utilized, citing unavoidable delays due to land acquisition disputes and logistical challenges. Political tensions have escalated, with opposition parties criticizing the government for delays in establishing a clear beneficiary list and accusations of stalling central disaster funds by the BJP. The Left accused Congress of reducing their house-building commitments, while Congress leaders defended their rapid land procurement

efforts compared to government pace. Amidst this political conflict, smaller parties, notably the Muslim League, have successfully constructed homes more efficiently than the bigger parties. As the electoral landscape heats up, the focus on political maneuvering raises critical concerns for the disaster survivors about the fulfillment of housing promises and the rebuilding of their lives. The aftermath of the natural disaster reveals a complex interplay of governance and politics, overshadowing the immediate needs of the affected population.

## Vaishnavi Adkar becomes India’s No.2 with dream run in Bengaluru

Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 22: Indian tennis has a rising star in 21-year-old Vaishnavi Adkar, who made headlines at the ITF Women’s Open W100 Bengaluru by reaching the final as a wildcard ranked No. 690. This marks the first time an Indian woman has reached a W100 final since Sania Mirza in 2009. Adkar’s performance, which included victories over higher-ranked players, propelled her 224 spots to No. 466, making her WTA top-500 debut and moving her to No. 2 in India. Despite losing the final to Belgium’s Hanne Vandewinkel 6-0, 6-1, Adkar earned valuable ranking points. Her journey showcases resilience and skill, having previously faced a challenging start to the season. Born in Pune and trained at the Bounce Tennis Academy, she has made significant strides internationally, including winning a bronze medal at the World University Games in July 2025. Adkar’s achievements position her as a promising talent in Indian women’s tennis.



## Gukesh wants to win the Prague International Chess Festival in 2026



Mumbai: When he leads India’s challenge in the Prague International Chess tournament, which begins here on Wednesday, world champion D. Gukesh will be hoping for a comeback following an early elimination from the World Cup and a lackluster showing at the Tata Steel Masters. Gukesh, who is ranked second in a young, elite field, will face opponents like Uzbek Nodirbek Abdusattorov and

top-seeded German Vincent Keymer, who are both now outperforming him if results from the previous few events are any indication. Gukesh, ranked 10th, is the highest-rated Indian, whereas Keymer, ranked fourth globally in live ratings, is only ahead of Abdusattorov. Arjun Erigaisi and R. Praggnanandhaa have both recently declined, making Gukesh, who has been steady if not at his best, the new India No. 1

in live rankings. Not too long ago, there were as many as three Indians in the top ten. Aravindh Chithambaram, the reigning champion, will be Gukesh’s companion as an Indian. The player from Chennai made his first significant breakthrough at this event. Keymer can be counted on to give everyone a run for their money, while Abdusattorov, who just won his first title at the Tata Steel Masters, is the favorite to

add another one. Another player who can pull off a surprise is Hans Niemann of the United States of America. Parham Maghsoodloo of Iran will try to carve a niche for himself in top-level chess, while Dutch Grandmaster Jorden van Foreest would go in as Mr Consistent despite his low appearance in strong tournaments. Seeded seventh is Chithambaram, who will look forward to walking back to the 2700 rating club, after a sub-par performance in the Tata event. Chithambaram faces an uphill task for an encore here. Nodirbek Yakubboev of Uzbekistan, David Anton Gujaro of Spain and local star David Navarra complete the 10-player line-up for the nine-round Masters competition. In the Challengers section, Surya Shekhar Ganguly will spearhead the Indian challenge along with Women’s World Cup winner Divya Deshmukh. Benjamin Gledura of Hungary starts as the top seed in this section ahead of Jonas Buhl Bjerre of Denmark.

## For the ‘no-trust’ vote, Om Birla creates parliamentary friendship groups with 60 countries

New Delhi, Mar 01: In what was described as an attempt to “complement traditional diplomacy with sustained parliamentary interaction,” Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla announced Monday the creation of “Parliament Friendship Groups” with more than 60 nations. These organizations include a sizable portion of the Opposition Members of Parliament from both Houses. The idea comes at a politically delicate time and is reportedly motivated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s post-Operation Sindoor outreach, which saw multi-party delegations visiting numerous nations. The Speaker has previously been the target of a no-confidence vote from the opposition, which charges him with acting in a “blatantly partisan manner” and giving its leaders a fair chance to address the House. Opposition leaders’ presence in the groups seemed to be an attempt to



refute claims that the BJP was deliberately silencing its political rivals. The Treasury and opposition benches engaged in heated discussions during the first half of the budget session on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi’s inability to make reference to an unpublished biography written by former army chief Manoj Naravane. On March 9, the first day of the second half of the budget session, the Lok Sabha is expected to consider the motion of no-confidence calling for Birla’s dismissal. A source in the Speak-

er’s office stated, “Amid chaos and notices, the Speaker has nominated senior Opposition leaders to head the friendship panels – a move that could shift how cross-party dialogue works in Parliament.” This could cause division within the Opposition regarding the pursuit of the motion of no confidence. The friendship groups would unite MPs from “across the political spectrum,” according to a statement from the Lok Sabha secretariat, which also listed a number of important opposition leaders as group leaders and members. Manish Tewari, Gaurav Gogoi, and former finance minister P. Chidambaram are on the Congress list. Akhilesh Yadav, the leader of the Samajwadi, T.R. Bala of the DMK, and Abhishek Banerjee and Derek O’Brien of the Trinamool Congress are among the other leaders of the INDIA bloc appointed as group heads.

## Israeli diplomat says Israel may conclude a free trade agreement with India this year

New Delhi, Mar 01: Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s two-day visit to the Jewish country beginning February 25, Israeli Ambassador Reuven Azar stated Monday that Israel and India are working toward a Free Trade Agreement that could be finalized this year. Azar wrote on social media that Israel was thrilled to have PM Modi visit, characterizing the relationship between New Delhi and Tel Aviv as one based on trust and creativity. “Namaste. The relationship between Israel and India is intriguing right now. We are excited to have Prime Minister Narendra Modi visit Israel.

These days, India and Israel never just meet when they get together. It’s a partnership built on trust, powered by innovation, and guided by a clear understanding of the challenges of our time,” he said in a post on X. Additionally, the Israeli envoy stated that on PM Modi’s next visit, the two sides want to take a firm step forward. “We will take significant action during this visit. Let’s start with security and defense. We are proud of the long-standing close collaboration between Israel and India. However, the hazards are evolving along with the world. We will update our security accords and strengthen our defense relationship to fulfill them. This will enable us to work on more delicate topics and together come up with a sensible answer,” Azar stated. The ambassador announced that Israel and India are negotiating a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), with



an Israeli delegation set to arrive for discussions. The first phase of the trade pact may be finalized soon, followed by the resolution of pending issues. He highlighted the strengthening economic partnership, including a recent bilateral investment treaty and the potential FTA within the year. Furthermore, he noted the close relationship between Modi and Netanyahu, with upcoming agreements expected in the defence sector focused on co-production and counterterrorism technologies. Modi expressed enthusiasm for his upcoming visit to Israel, emphasizing the mutual trust and commitment to peace between the two nations.

# England is having batting issues as New Zealand attempts to secure a semifinal spot

## T20 World Cup 2026

**New Delhi:** By defeating England in their T20 World Cup 2026 Super Eight match at the R. Premadasa Stadium in Colombo on Friday, New Zealand hopes to avoid the headache of late qualifying scenarios and guarantee a spot in the semi-finals. Although defeating Sri Lanka by 61 runs greatly improved their spirits, it also cleared a clear path. The Kiwis can eliminate Pakistan from the race before it even plays its final match on Saturday if they defeat England and get four points. In a World Cup, a reverse would not end New Zealand's bidding; instead, it would rest on Pakistan's outcome, which is always a nerve-wracking prospect. That New Zealand turns up against England with its tail up is down to Mitchell Santner and Cole McConchie's doughty rearguard against Sri Lanka. The pair made the most of the lopsided ground dimensions to snatch the contest from the host's grasp. The other Kiwi batters will turn to this approach after departing in a procession against Sri Lanka, despite their favourable record against spin. With the same pitch in use on Friday, the short 62-metre fence will be the firing zone against Adil Rashid, Liam Dawson and Will Jacks. After his team's win, Rachin Ravindra had hinted at 150 being a par score, but New Zealand could get much more if Tim Seifert and Finn Allen grab hold of Jofra Archer – England's key disruptor in the PowerPlay. New Zealand has scored at 9.26 runs in the PowerPlay, the highest among the Super Eight teams. Allen and Seifert had begun to the same tune even on Wednesday until spin foiled their charge. England, already through to the semi-finals, has a batting crisis of its own to snap out of. Harry Brook produced an innings fitting the proverbial 'captain's knock' that had England scrape



past Pakistan, but its other batters have been mired in a slump. The faith in Jos Buttler has been reiterated umpteen times this World Cup, but it might be running thin after four consecutive single-digit scores. Others have not been too promising either. Against Pakistan, batter after batter was caught up in the idea of swinging hard and offered little support to Brook. In Colombo, they might be better off refraining from this where grip and turn have called for calculated approach. The New Zealand spinners combined for 18 overs against Sri Lanka and they will likely be put to similar use to strangle the England batters. The prospect of facing a daunting bowling lineup, of either South Africa, West Indies or India, up next, might bring England enough motivation to step up and head the knock-outs on firmer footing.

# Vinicuis exacts revenge as Real Madrid eliminates Benfica from the Champions League

**New Delhi:** Vinicius Jr. performed his best work. He brought up football once more. The Real Madrid forward came through with the game-winning goal that put an end to Benfica's resistance and sent Madrid to the Round of 16 just days after being embroiled in a racist altercation in Lisbon. The night's story was formed by Vinicius' late intervention, even though the team's 2-1 triumph at the Santiago Bernabeu guaranteed a 3-1 aggregate victory. The controversy surrounding the first encounter in Portugal, in which Vinicius accused Gianluca Prestianni of Benfica of using discriminatory language, had dominated the lead-up to the return leg. Jose Mourinho's red card and Prestianni's suspension meant that the attention was finally returned to the tactical struggle taking place on the field.

After Madrid failed to clear their lines inside the box, Benfica came out with purpose and took the lead through Rafa Silva in the fourteenth minute. Madrid's response was deliberate. Aurelien Tchouameni precisely timed his arrival and guided the finish from the edge of the area after Federico Valverde drove down the right and passed the ball into the half-space.

The second half of the match continued to be drawn out. While Madrid found it difficult to maintain



possession, Benfica kept finding space between the lines and even rattled the crossbar.

The breakthrough arrived in the 80th minute. Valverde pounced on a loose pass in midfield and released Vinicius into the channel. The Brazilian curved his run to beat the line, drove into the area and slotted a composed finish into the bottom corner to close the tie on Madrid's terms. The significance of Vinicius' goal extended beyond the score. This was his method of bringing the discussion back to the field, where it belongs, after all the com-

motion that followed the first leg. The celebration that had sparked problems in Lisbon was the Brazilian's corner flag dance, which he performed once more, although this time it felt more like a declaration than provocation.

Vinicius chose to let his football speak for itself rather than enter the theater. His goal came at a time when Madrid had not yet fully established control and Benfica was still probing. In the end, it gave Los Blancos the necessary advantage by shifting the tie's speed. Madrid may have sealed

progression, but the tie underlined a few defensive frailties that cannot be ignored. Benfica found pockets between the lines and asked uncomfortable questions of a backline already stretched by the absence of Eder Militao and Dean Huijsen. Up front, the lack of Kylian Mbappe meant Madrid were missing that usual cutting edge in transition. Still, the result is what matters at this stage. Real Madrid advance to the Round of 16, where a sterner tactical battle awaits against either Manchester City or Sporting CP.

# How Zimbabwe become relevant again in the 2026 T20 World Cup

**New Delhi:** Zimbabwe's victory over Australia and Sri Lanka to qualify for the Super Eight of the 2026 T20 World Cup has all the makings of the classic underdog tale that everyone enjoys. But it's also a tale of redemption, so it goes beyond that. PTIZimbabwe's victory over Australia and Sri Lanka to qualify for the Super Eight of the 2026 T20 World Cup has all the makings of the classic underdog tale that everyone enjoys. But it's also a tale of redemption, so it goes beyond that. Its 2026 World Cup campaign began in Nairobi in October of 2024. Zimbabwe was the only Full-Member country forced to endure the hardships of the Sub-Regional Qualifiers after failing to qualify for the 2024 edition in the United States and the West Indies. Eight teams compete in Africa, with 18 teams split among three Sub-Regional Qualifiers. The top two teams from each qualify to the Regional Finals, and two teams from the most recent T20 World Cup are also included. The top two teams advance to the following tournament. T20 World Cup associate teams: Looking up, Zimbabwe was at the bottom of the pack, competing in Regional Qualifier B against Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Seychelles, and Gambia. After losing to Uganda in the Regional Finals, which cost them a spot in 2024, Zimbabwe was well aware that any team may throw a curveball in these regional competitions. At the 2022 World Cup in Australia, Zimbabwe had reached the Super 12 stage, where it beat Pakistan. But the significance of that run diminished after the slip-up to Uganda, forcing it to start from scratch and chart a comeback. "I remember when we were told that we had to play the Sub-Regional Qualifier B in Kenya — sitting down with the squad and saying that either we feel sorry for ourselves and be ashamed or actually understand the reality," captain Sikandar Raza says. "It's because of us that we are in this mess, and it's only we who can get us out of it." From there, the Chevrons went on to go 11 games unbeaten, winning the Regional Final in the process to get to the World Cup. But the harder part was still ahead — facing the big guns. Through this qualification cycle, Zimbabwe was mindful of not losing ground to higher-ranked Full Member teams. It invited India, even if a depleted side, to Harare for a

five-match series and won the first match, before going down 4-1. South Africa and New Zealand also played a tri-series at the same venue in 2025. It also registered victories over Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Afghanistan during this World Cup cycle. The rigorous schedule helped broaden its talent pool. With Blessing Muzarabani and Richard Ngarava having already earned their reputations, the side settled in on other talents like Brian Bennett, Tadiwanashe Marumani and Tashinga Musekiwa through this period. The rewards for backing these players emerged at this World Cup. Bennett's half century (64 off 56) was what tilted the game against Australia in its favour, along with Muzarabani's four for 17. The opening batter starred in the 177-run chase against Sri Lanka too, scoring 63 off 48. "Over the last 12 to 18 months, while the results in terms of wins haven't quite been there, anyone who's been around has seen consistent improvement in small areas. What we see now is a culmination of those key areas," assistant coach Dion Ebrahim says.

The infusion of young blood created a blend of experience and youth. But the team remained centred around the charismatic figure of its leader, Raza. "I genuinely think we are in the presence of brilliance, and I don't say that lightly. Sikandar has been performing at this level for a while now and perhaps hasn't quite got the accolades others have. He is a global superstar, up there with the greats, and will go down as one of them." "What does he bring to the dressing room? All those superlatives — inspiration, motivation, passion. But what he does consistently is lead through his actions. He is vocal in the dressing room, yet people follow him because of the brilliance he produces. He is meticulous about constantly trying to improve, and I think that's what keeps him going," Ebrahim says. Another big factor in plugging the gap with the best teams has been franchise cricket. Raza is a franchise-cricket globetrotter, having played in every major league from the Indian Premier League to the SA20. Ryan Burl, Muzarabani and Ngarava have also enjoyed stints overseas. Explaining the significance of franchise cricket, Raza says: "Myself and all the other cricketers who have gone overseas for franchise cricket have always come back and spo-



ken to the boys — about what happens there, what works on those wickets, what works in certain situations. If the boys haven't got the experience, the least we can do is share the knowledge." Hence, it was not surprising that Zimbabwe felt it had a shot. It is no stranger to wins at global showpiece events. It had defeated Australia in the group stage of the 2007 T20 World Cup as well. The need to banish the demons of previous misses added extra motivation. "One of the goals we set was to bring more recognition and respect to our country. Whatever happened in the past has happened, but this group has been together for a long time and has gone about its business with utmost honesty and integrity. To now see everybody taking notice of Zimbabwe and viewing it in a respectable manner is certainly very

humbling and pleasing," Raza says. The pre-seeded Super Eight groups were an underwhelming confrontation for Zimbabwe eventually. It received no incentive for finishing first in Group B and was pitted against title contenders India and South Africa, as well as West Indies. But even if its fortunes turn for the worse in this World Cup, Zimbabwe has turned heads and earned itself a launchpad. The Super Eight qualification guarantees the team a place in the next World Cup, bringing with it freedom from the Regional Qualifiers. The momentum could not only thrust Zimbabwe further in T20 cricket but also revive its ODI fortunes, where it has not qualified for a World Cup since 2015. It now has the talent — and the belief — to emulate this year's feat in the longer white-ball format.

# Indian gunmen nearly struck the mark

## Asian Shooting Championships

**New Delhi:** Elavenil Valarivan may have stayed in the present a bit longer after her outstanding performance at the Asian Shooting Championships in New Delhi in February. In the prestigious 10m air rifle competition, the 26-year-old demonstrated her class and solidified her place as one of the mainstays of Indian rifle shooting. With a score of 633.7, she finished first in qualification and went on to win the final. In addition to being her third medal at the Continental Championships, the gold was particularly significant to her because it was her first international individual medal in India. However, Elavenil was already planning ahead when she left the finals range at the Karni Singh Shooting Range in New Delhi. "I'm really glad to have won my first international medal at home, but this is also a tournament that's part of my learning experience. Overall, this year is going to be about preparation," she says. Preparation, she explains, for the major competitions she hopes to peak at later this year. "We have the Asian Games in September and then the World Championships, which is an Olympic qualifying event, in November. Those are really important for us," she says. Much of the Indian shooting contingent looked beyond the medal tally at the Asian Championships, instead treating the event as an opportunity to tick boxes, adapt to new International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) rules and build confidence in a crucial season. One reason for this perspective is that India's performance cannot be judged solely by medal count. On the face of it, the host delivered its best-ever showing at the Asian Championships, winning 95 medals: 51 gold, 23 silver and 21 bronze across senior, junior



and youth categories. If the count is restricted to Olympic events, including the men's and women's 10m air rifle, 50m three positions, pistol disciplines and mixed team events, India's tally stands at five gold, five silver and six bronze medals. However, that result came with a caveat. The field at the Asian Championships was significantly depleted. China opted out of the competition, while South Korea did not send its top shooters. Iran, which fields a high-quality pistol team, also did not compete in New Delhi. In the absence of leading contenders, some shooters qualified for the final with scores that would likely not have made the cut at other major competitions. In the men's 10m air rifle event, for example, the last shooter to qualify did so with 624.6; at last year's World Championships, the qualifying mark was 632.4. India's Arjun Babuta, who went on to win silver, reached the final with 628.0. "I don't even recall the last time I made that score. I think it's partly because we didn't have the top shooters taking part, it was harder to push ourselves," he would later say.

# The Indian Open 2026 will take place at CCI Brabourne Stadium from March 18–22

**New Delhi:** When Rashid Khan dismissed Muhammad Arfan during Afghanistan's T20 World Cup match against the United Arab Emirates in Delhi on Monday, he became the first bowler to reach the 700-wicket milestone in T20 cricket. In the 16th over of the UAE innings, Rashid, who had taken 699 wickets before the match, took his historic wicket by hitting Arfan out. This was Rashid's final over. After getting his 698th and 699th wickets against South Africa last week and then failing to deliver 3.2 overs in this match, the Afghanistan captain was forced to wait for his milestone. In the 20 balls he delivered, he was hit for 17 runs until Arfan attempted to reverse-sweep Rashid by moving across his stumps, but he failed miserably and struck his own stumps instead. Afghanistan needs a victory and other outcomes to advance to the Super Eights, but Rashid hardly celebrated. In any event, Rashid had been far ahead of the group of wicket-takers for some time. Second on the standings with 631 wickets is the retired Dwayne Bravo. With 613 wickets, Sunil Narine sits in third place behind Bravo and behind Rashid among active cricket players.

The 700th wicket was also Rashid's 191st for Afghanistan in the T20 format, making him the top wicket-taker in the competition. Tim Southee (164 wickets) and Ish Sodhi



(162 wickets), both from New Zealand, are behind him on the list. Every time Afghanistan skipper Rashid addressed the media in the run-up to the T20 World Cup and even after, the milestone was brought up. "700 wickets, whatever the achievement is, it will continue," he said in response to the query last Tuesday prior to the match against South Africa. I don't have a goal in mind to take 700 wickets and quit; instead, I give it my all when I play for my country in the World Cup. And I grab the wicket when the team needs it." Rashid, the most prolific

wicket-taker in the history of the format, has actually been a little below his best since undergoing back surgery in 2023. However, in Afghanistan's recent series victory over the West Indies, he gave up just 51 runs in 12 overs over three matches, taking five wickets in otherwise high-scoring contests. He then returned 1 for 36 in Afghanistan's opening World Cup match, making him the country's second-most economical bowler after Mujeeb Ur Rahman, as New Zealand overcame Afghanistan's 182 with more than two overs remaining.