

Census 2027 self-enumeration begins in Assam, CM urges people to participate in the exercise

Guwahati, Agu 02: Barring two flood-hit districts, self-enumeration for Census 2027 began in Assam on Sunday.

Officials said census preparatory work has been suspended in Sivasagar and Charaideo districts, which are yet to recover from the floods, among the worst the State has witnessed. Registering his details through the online self-enumeration facility, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma urged the people to participate in the exercise.

“Today marks the beginning of online self-enumeration for Census 2027 in



Assam wherein you can sit in the comfort of your home and fill in your details,” Sarma said. “I just did mine; requesting everyone to fill

their details correctly and be a part of this exercise,” he added.

The self-enumeration facility allows citizens to pro-

vide their household and individual information online through the dedicated portal, se.census.gov.in. The facility will remain available till August 16 ahead of the Houselisting Operation and Housing Census scheduled to begin in the state on August 17. The self-enumeration process has been introduced to make the Census more participatory and citizen-friendly by enabling people to furnish information online from their homes. Citizens can register on the portal, enter household and individual details, and submit the information digitally during the 15-day

window.

One of the key features of the facility is that it allows households to complete their Census details in advance before the visit of enumerators. After the self-enumeration period ends, trained enumerators will conduct the Houselisting Operation and Housing Census from August 17 to September 15, during which the submitted information will be verified and confirmed. The online platform includes provisions for registration, secure submission of household data, and generation of a unique reference number for future verification.

Postal Department Suspends Three Major Mail Routes in Manipur Amid Security Concerns

Imphal, Agu 02: The Department of Posts has temporarily suspended operations on three major mail routes in Manipur amid the prevailing security situation and recent incidents involving the burning of postal mail.

According to an order issued by the Office of the Superintendent of Post Offices, Manipur Division, the Imphal-Dimapur, Imphal-Mao and Imphal-Ukhrul mail lines have been suspended with immediate effect. As a result, the booking of all surface mail services has also been suspended until further orders.

The order stated that the



decision was taken following instructions from the Chief Postmaster General, North-East Circle, in view of the prevailing security situation and recent incidents affecting the movement of postal mail. The directive has been circulated among postal officials across the Manipur Division, including

Assistant Superintendents of Post Offices, Sub-Divisional Inspectors, the Assistant Postmaster (Mails), the Transit Mail Office at Imphal Head Post Office and all Sub-Postmasters for immediate implementation. The postal department said the suspension will remain in force until further orders.

Nagaland Bamboo Artisan Invited to Rashtrapati Bhavan

Kohima, Agu 02: Khrolo Naro, proprietor of Khrolo Creative Craft from Naharbari, Dimapur, has been invited by the President of India to attend the ‘At Home’ ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan on August 15, marking the Eightieth Independence Day celebrations.

A bamboo artisan, Khrolo was inspired by his father to pursue the craft and has been promoting traditional bamboo furniture and handicrafts by blending indigenous craftsmanship with modern designs. His work received national recognition from Prime Minister Narendra Modi who highlighted his bamboo creations in an edition of Mann Ki Baat. Expressing happiness over the invitation, Khrolo Naro thanked President Droupadi Murmu for the honour and said the invitation was a proud moment for him, his family and the people of Nagaland.

IIT-Guwahati student dies after falling into Brahmaputra

Guwahati, Agu 02: A B.Tech student of IIT-Guwahati died after falling into the Brahmaputra river. A police official said the incident took place on Saturday when two students of the institute were walking along the riverbank near the institute.

“Suddenly, both of them fell into the river. After being informed, an SDRF team from a nearby camp reached the spot and rescued one student. She was admitted

to a hospital,” the official said. The victim’s body was recovered after about three hours.

The IIT Guwahati said the victim was a 3rd-year student of the Department of Electronics and Communication Engineering (ECE). “It is with profound grief and deep sorrow that IIT Guwahati informs of the untimely demise of a BTech 3rd-year student of the Department of Electronics and Communication Engineering (ECE), who

tragically lost her life in a drowning incident near Lathia Bagicha Ghat yesterday evening,” the institute said in a statement on Sunday.

“This is an irreparable loss to the Institute community. IIT Guwahati extends its heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and loved ones during this moment of immense sorrow and stands in solidarity with them, offering all possible support during this difficult time,” it added.

State-level “Nasha Mukta Bharat Nasha Mukta Arunachal” mega campaign launched

Itanagar, Agu 02: A state-level launch event for the 10 Crore Addiction-Free Pledge Mega Campaign under the banner of “Nasha Mukta Bharat Nasha Mukta Arunachal” was held at the Brahma Kumaris RajYoga Centre in Jollang, Itanagar.

Arunachal Pradesh Minister for Home, Inter-State Border Affairs, PHE, and Water Supply, Mama Natung, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest, along-



side Director General of Police Shiv Darshan Singh Jamwal as the Guest of Honour. Addressing the

gathering as part of the collective movement for freedom from addiction, healthy living, and social

transformation, Mama Natung strongly urged the youth to stay away from substance abuse, emphasising the importance of taking the pledge to build an addiction-free state.

Organised by the Brahma Kumaris, RajYoga Meditation and De-addiction Centre, in collaboration with national ministries, the campaign aims to inspire citizens to say “NO to Addiction” and embrace a healthy lifestyle.

Deputy CM Nemcha Kipgen Honors Kangpokpi Youth, Highlights Sports in Nation-Building

Imphal, Agu 02: Manipur Deputy Chief Minister Nemcha Kipgen on Saturday said young athletes are symbols of hope, resilience and national pride, describing sports as a powerful force for nation-building, while felicitating four outstanding sportspersons from conflict-affected Kangpokpi district.

Speaking at a felicitation ceremony organised by the Kuki Students’ Organisation (KSO) Sadar Hills at El-Shaddai in Kangpok-

pi Town, Kipgen said the achievements of the young athletes offer inspiration to a generation growing up amid the ethnic conflict that has affected the state since May 2023. Kangpokpi district has remained one of the worst-affected areas in the ongoing crisis, witnessing recurring ethnic tensions, highway blockades and security challenges.

The athletes honoured included footballers Thangsanglen Kipgen,



Lalvanghao Haokip and Seiminsang Khongsai, along with badminton

player Kimkim Khongsai. The three footballers, who are members of Minerva

Academy FC, played a key role in helping the club win the Under-12 titles at the Gothia Cup and the Helsinki Cup. Kimkim Khongsai was recognised for winning the gold medal at the All India Under-15 National Badminton Championship held in Hyderabad earlier this year.

Each of the four athletes received a cash award of Rs 50,000 and a Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of their achievements. Addressing the gathering,

Kipgen urged the young sportspersons to continue serving the nation with discipline, dedication and humility. She said true patriotism is reflected through excellence that enhances India’s reputation on the global stage.

She stressed that nation-building begins with strong values at home and is strengthened through education, discipline and sports. According to her, the success of these young athletes sends a message

of hope to children living in relief camps and conflict-affected villages, demonstrating that determination can overcome adversity. The event, fully sponsored by the KSO Sadar Hills, celebrated local youth who have excelled in sports at the national and international levels. Community leaders, students, and residents attended the programme, applauding the athletes for bringing recognition to both Kangpokpi district and the country.

IMD reports 28% rainfall shortfall in Assam despite ongoing flood crisis



Agartala, Agu 02: Despite battling devastating floods through much of July, Assam has received 28% below-normal monsoon rainfall so far this season, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The rainfall shortfall comes even as Assam witnessed one of its worst flood spells this season, underscoring the uneven distribution of monsoon rainfall across the state. The IMD’s latest rainfall data showed that five of the eight Northeastern states recorded below-normal rainfall during June and July despite weather-related disasters across the region.

Officials attributed the erratic rainfall to weak rain-bearing systems over the Bay of Bengal, the absence of active monsoon troughs and the influence of El Niño. Among the five states with deficient rainfall, Meghalaya recorded the highest shortfall at 58% during June and July, followed by Arunachal Pradesh (41%), Manipur (40%), Assam (28%) and Mizoram (24%). Sikkim, Tripura and Nagaland recorded normal rainfall during the two-month period.

The rainfall deficit was even more pronounced in June, when Assam recorded a 37% shortfall. Nagaland registered a 56%

deficiency, followed by Arunachal Pradesh (44%), Mizoram (37%) and Tripura (36%). Meghalaya and Manipur were categorised under the IMD’s “Large Deficient” rainfall category, recording deficits of 74% and 71%, respectively.

The broader East and Northeast Meteorological Sub-Division, which comprises the eight Northeastern states along with West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand, recorded an overall rainfall deficiency of more than 30% during June and July, the first half of the four-month southwest monsoon season. The southwest monsoon reached substantial parts

of the Northeast on June 7, two days later than its normal onset, and covered the entire region by June 10, according to IMD officials in Guwahati and Agartala.

Looking ahead, the IMD has forecast below-normal rainfall across the country during the second half of the southwest monsoon season.

However, it said East and Northeast India are likely to receive normal to above-normal rainfall in many areas during the period, offering some relief to the region. Meteorologists said the erratic rainfall pattern has been influenced by El Niño conditions, weak Bay of Bengal weather systems and the absence of active monsoon troughs. The southwest monsoon, which accounts for nearly 70% of India’s annual rainfall, is critical for the agrarian economy of the Northeast, where a large proportion of the population depends on rain-fed agriculture.

Adequate rainfall during the remaining months of the season will be crucial for Kharif cultivation as well as replenishing rivers, reservoirs and groundwater resources across the region.

NHIDCL distances itself from Brahmaputra express highway project

Dibrugarh, Agu 02: The National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) has clarified that the proposed Brahmaputra Express Highway is not part of its mandate, casting fresh uncertainty over a project that was announced nearly a decade ago.

The clarification came in response to a representation submitted by Parag Dutta, a resident of Udaypur in Assam’s Dibrugarh district, who had sought an update from the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) on the status of the project. Dutta wrote to the PMO on June 26, 2026, recalling that the preliminary survey for the Brahmaputra Express Highway was inaugurated by then Assam Chief Minister and current Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal at the DTP dyke in Dibrugarh on January 24, 2017.

The proposed highway was planned to run along the southern bank of the Brahmaputra from Sadiya to Dhubri, with the stated objectives of improving connectivity, promoting tourism and addressing riverbank erosion. In his representation, Dutta noted that more than nine years had passed since the survey was launched, but there had been no visible progress on the project. He sought clarification on whether the proposal was still under consideration or had been abandoned. He also pointed out that several other infrastructure projects announced around the same time, including the proposed underwater road-cum-rail tunnel between Gohpur and Numaligarh, had moved forward, while there had been no of-



ficial update on the express highway.

The PMO registered the representation on July 3, 2026, and forwarded it through the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS). In its reply dated July 31, 2026, NHIDCL’s Regional Office in Guwahati stated that it had examined the grievance and clarified that the Brahmaputra Express Highway “is not envisaged” under the corporation’s mandate.

The response, signed by General Manager Binayak Kumar, did not indicate whether the project had been formally shelved, renamed or merged with any other infrastructure initiative. The clarification has reinforced long-standing doubts among residents of Upper Assam over the future of the project, which was announced with much publicity in 2017 but has seen no visible progress beyond the preliminary survey stage.

Jaintia students union moves human rights commission over violence during proposed mining project hearing



Shillong, Agu 02: Pressure groups in Jaintia Hills have moved the Human Rights Commission and police

against Shree Cement Limited and the East Jaintia Hills administration. The groups alleged that a mandatory

environmental consultation was transformed into a 'state-sponsored farce' through police brutality and the physical blocking of roads. The Jaintia Students' Union (JSU) on Saturday filed multiple FIRs and lodged complaints before the Meghalaya Human Rights Commission (MHRC) over alleged violence reported during the July 31 public hearing for the proposed Shree Cement Limited mining project at Lum Syрман, Elaka Nongkhlieh.

JSU central body president Jer-som Shylla and education secretary Bocheru Mi Pohsnem lodged a complaint with the Superintendent of Police of East Jaintia Hills, levelling charges of attempted murder, grievous assault on civilians, sabotage of public infrastructure at Lad Tongseng and Saipung, illegal detention and criminal conspiracy in connection with the public hearing. The complaint alleged the involvement of unidentified armed assailants, the management of Shree Cement Limited and certain police personnel, and sought the registration of a case and an impartial investigation into the alleged incidents of violence.

Mizoram MLA donates 90-month salary for welfare of poor

Aizawl, Agu 02: In a heartwarming gesture, Mizoram MLA and former state minister Robert Romawia Royte has donated 100 per cent of his salary for 90 consecutive months, contributing a total of Rs 1.25 crore towards the welfare of the poor and underprivileged.

According to a statement, Royte deposited his entire official salary into a dedicated charitable account from December 2018 to June 2026. The donations covered his tenure as a Cabinet Minister for 60 months and as an MLA for 30 months, with every expenditure reportedly documented and used exclusively for social welfare initiatives.

Royte said the decision was made before the 2018



Mizoram Assembly elections. "I made two decisions together just before the 2018 MLA election — to contest from the MNF and to donate my entire salary to the poor if elected. I did so and will continue," he said. The statement

noted that Royte's gesture mirrors the example of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who donated his personal savings accumulated during his tenure as Gujarat Chief Minister to a welfare fund for the education of daughters of state

secretariat staff. It also compared his move with international leaders such as former US President Donald Trump, who donated his presidential salary, and former Uruguayan President José Mujica, who donated most of his earnings while in office.

Royte, a successful entrepreneur and founder of North East Consultancy Services (NECS), Royte Fisheries and Royte Brick Industries, said his financial independence enabled him to dedicate his official salary entirely to charitable causes. The statement said his initiative aims to redefine political accountability and encourage a culture of selfless public service by directing public earnings towards those in need. (EOM)

Actor Randeep Hooda joins flood relief efforts in Assam

Guwahati, Agu 02: Bollywood actor Randeep Hooda has arrived in Assam to extend a helping hand to the flood-affected communities, joining The Global Sikhs Foundation in their ongoing relief efforts.

From distributing essential supplies to standing beside families in need, the initiative aims to bring timely assistance and hope to those struggling in the aftermath of the devastating floods. Landing at Mohanbari Airport in Dibrugarh, Hooda told reporters that he was deeply saddened by the scale of destruction caused by floods.

"There has been a heavy loss of life and property. We have come here to extend our help. The Global Sikhs Foundation is already here and is working to assist the flood victims. We will also extend our support by providing relief materials and other neces-



sary assistance," the actor said. Soon after his arrival, Hooda left for Sivasagar to meet flood-affected residents, assess the damage firsthand and support the distribution of relief materials. The actor has been closely associated with the Global Sikhs Foundation, a

humanitarian organisation known for its disaster relief and rehabilitation work across India. The foundation has been actively engaged in relief operations in Upper Assam, providing essential supplies to families displaced by the floods. Hooda's visit comes as

relief and rehabilitation efforts continue in parts of Upper Assam that have been battered by one of the worst flood spells this monsoon, with volunteers, government agencies and civil society organisations working to assist affected communities.

Nagaland teams up with forestry institute to boost environmental research

Dimapur, Agu 02: Nagaland's Environment, Forest and Climate Change Department on Saturday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education—Rain Forest Research Institute (ICFRE-RFRI), Jorhat, to strengthen forestry research in the state.

Following the signing of the MoU at the Forest Office Complex in Dimapur, Director of ICFRE-RFRI, Jorhat, Nitin Kulkarni described the agreement as the beginning of a stronger partnership between the institute and the Nagaland government for the sustainable management of forest resources. He said RFRI, which functions under the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, has been conducting research on agroforestry, bamboo, agarwood and other forest resources across the Northeast.

Kulkarni said research should ultimately benefit people through technology transfer, extension activities and capacity-building programmes for farmers and other stakeholders. He noted that the Northeast is one of India's richest regions in terms of biodiversity and stressed the need for the judicious and sustainable use of



natural resources while conserving them for future generations. Kulkarni expressed confidence that the collaboration with Nagaland would promote scientific research, sustainable livelihoods and value addition to the state's forest and plantation resources.

Principal Secretary of the Environment, Forest and Climate Change Department and Development Commissioner Y Kikheto Sema underscored the importance of strengthening forestry research and sustainable forest

management through institutional collaboration. Sema said Nagaland is looking towards sustainable development after nearly two decades of peace, with plantation-based livelihoods such as agarwood and coffee offering significant opportunities for economic growth while protecting the environment. Describing the MoU as the beginning of a long-term partnership, Sema urged the department and RFRI to work closely on research, farmer training, technology dissemination and market development.

ED attaches ₹2.17 cr in dual money laundering probe; suspended IAS officer named



Agartala, Agu 02: The Directorate of Enforcement (ED) has provisionally attached assets worth about Rs 2.17 crore in two separate money laundering cases linked to an alleged investment fraud involving impersonation of government officials and an illegal IPL betting syndicate in Tripura, officials said.

In the first case, the ED's Agartala Sub Zonal Office attached bank balances worth about Rs 1.12 crore under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, through a provisional attachment order issued on July 31. Ac-

cording to the agency, the attached assets include bank balances held in the names of shell entities allegedly controlled by Utpal Kumar Chowdhury, suspended IAS officer Abhishek Chandra and a private housing company. The ED claimed these assets represented proceeds of crime.

The agency said it initiated the investigation based on multiple FIRs registered by police in West Bengal and Tripura against Chowdhury and his associates for offences including cheating, forgery, criminal breach of trust and imperson-

ation under the Indian Penal Code and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. The ED alleged that Chowdhury posed as a senior officer of the Union Home Ministry using fake identity cards and created entities with names similar to government departments and public sector undertakings, including "Directorate of Higher Education, Tripura" and "M/s Bridge & Roof Co." It also alleged that he took control of a registered trust, Chaltakhali Swamiji Seva Sangha.

According to the agency, businessmen and investors were allegedly induced to invest money on promises of government tenders, mid-day meal supply contracts and profits from the rubber trade, with the funds being routed through bank accounts of these entities. The ED alleged that the money was later transferred through a network of shell firms, largely withdrawn in cash and partly invested in immovable properties, vehicles and other assets in the names of the accused and their family members. The agency further alleged that suspended IAS officer Abhishek Chandra received proceeds of crime directly in his personal bank accounts and indirectly through payments made by scheme entities to a private housing company for booking a flat in his name.

ISKCON mid-day meal rolled out in Kolkata; CM assures job safety for cooks

Kolkata, Agu 02: Chief minister Suwendu Adhikari announced on Saturday that cooks attached to self-help groups, who feared losing their jobs after the mid-day meal programme was outsourced to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Iskcon) in Calcutta, would be engaged by the organisation.

Suwendu launched the delivery of mid-day meals through Iskcon at Taratala and said the organisation would retain those associated with self-help groups for cooking and distribution. "I saw a protest march about a month ago. The protesters alleged that the sisters working as cooks in the mid-day meal programme would lose their jobs because Iskcon was being engaged and that the Hindu government was snatching their jobs... I want to tell those protesters that no one will lose their jobs," Suwendu



du said. "Iskcon will engage them in cooking and distributing the mid-day meals. The state government has also decided to increase their honorarium to ₹3,000 from ₹2,000. The hike will take effect from August. Although it is a modest increase, considering the financial condition of the government, this is all that we could do," he added.

Finance minister Swapan Dasgupta had announced in

his budget speech on June 23 that Iskcon would be engaged to provide cooked mid-day meals in schools under the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC). The announcement had triggered concerns among women working as cooks through self-help groups during the Trinamool Congress government's tenure.

Through its charitable trust, Annamrita, Iskcon runs mid-day meal pro-

grammes in several states, including Maharashtra and Haryana. On July 9, Calcutta High Court sought an affidavit from the state government in response to a PIL alleging that outsourcing the programme would deprive thousands of self-help group workers of their livelihood. Senior advocate Kalyan Bandyopadhyay had said that the move would affect the livelihoods of 2.5 lakh self-help group workers.

On Saturday, Suwendu ate lunch with students after inaugurating the programme. Some school heads alleged that meals did not reach schools on time on the first day, leaving students and guardians disappointed. Reshmi Das, headmistress of Nut Behari Das Higher Secondary School in Garden Reach, said students in the upper primary section could not eat the meal because of delayed delivery.

Police ignored warnings before Pravas Mondal's custodial death, claims PIL in Baruipur case

Kolkata, Agu 02: Police had been warned of a threat to the life of Pravas Mondal, an accused in the rape and murder of the 11-year-old girl in Baruipur, while he was still alive, a PIL filed by a rights activist in Calcutta High Court said on Friday.

Mondal was killed in the early hours of July 8 while in police custody. He was taken to the crime scene to reconstruct the sequence of events. He allegedly snatched a police officer's service gun and opened fire, prompting the po-

lice to retaliate. Mondal sustained two bullet injuries and was declared dead at a hospital. The PIL, filed by veteran rights activist Sujata Bhadra, said the Baruipur unit of the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) had written to Baruipur police a day before Mondal's death.

Bhadra claimed chief minister Suwendu Adhikari's comments gave the police a licence to resort to extra-judicial means. "We had also written an open letter to the chief minister in

the third week of May, urging him to refrain from comments that can encourage the police to break the law," Bhadra said. Appearing for Bhadra, advocate Raghunath Chakrabarty told the court on Friday: "Members of an organisation working for the protection of human rights had written a letter to Baruipur police as well as the South 24-Parganas district administration, apprehending the custodial death of Mondal."

The petition demanded a judicial probe into the encounter killing. A division bench headed

by Acting Chief Justice Tapabrata Chakrabarty admitted Bhadra's petition and clubbed it with another PIL seeking an independent probe into the incident. Hearing the matter on Thursday, the high court sought a report from the state government. Both cases will now be taken up on August 6. Appearing for the first petitioner, senior advocate Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya said that as Mondal was in police custody, it was the police's responsibility to ensure adequate security during the reconstruction. Had proper se-

curity arrangements been in place, the accused would not have been able to snatch a service revolver, as claimed by the police, he said.



Raj Thackeray alleges ₹18 crore annual scam at Siddhivinayak temple



Mumbai, Agu 02: Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) president Raj Thackeray has claimed that do-

nations of Rs 18 crore were being siphoned off every year at the famous Siddhivinayak Temple in Mumbai. He also alleged that Rs 1,400 crore had been stolen at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Even temples are not safe these days, Thackeray said and demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi speak on this issue. The MNS chief was speaking at a programme organised by his party's student wing on Saturday. Frustrated youths visit temples, but even temples are not safe from corruption, he said. Some employees who stole money from the donation box at the Siddhivinayak Temple were caught due to the alertness of the trustees, Thackeray said, reading out a letter written by eight trustees to Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

The temple's weekly earnings from donations were less than Rs 50 lakh before this theft was caught, and afterwards the collection rose to Rs 1.5 crore, he said. "Every year, Rs 18 crore was being stolen," Thackeray alleged. Sada Sarvankar, chairman of the Siddhivinayak Temple Trust and a leader of the Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde, said that nine employees were arrested in this connection. "We have filed cases wherever required," he told reporters.

The rise in donations was due to the efforts taken by the trust, Sarvankar said, adding that the temple's income has increased from Rs 114 crore two years ago to Rs 182 crore. Notably, police have arrested multiple accused in the case of alleged theft of donations at the Ram Temple and the investigation is underway.

Meghalaya Records 58% Rainfall Deficit in June-July, Sohra and Mawsynram Also Face Dry Spell



Shillong, Agu 02: Meghalaya experienced an unusually dry July this year, with all districts except South West Khasi Hills recording deficient or largely deficient rainfall, according to India Meteorological Department (IMD) data.

Five of the state's 11 districts recorded rainfall deficits of 50 to 80 per cent below normal. South West Khasi Hills was the only exception, registering an 83 per cent surplus. Even East Khasi Hills, home to the famously rain-rich areas of Sohra (Cherrapunji) and Mawsynram, recorded a deficit of nearly 50 per cent. The district normally receives around 2,796 mm of rainfall

in July, but recorded only 1,403 mm this year. West Jaintia Hills recorded the sharpest decline, with a 78 per cent deficit, followed by West Garo Hills, which registered a 69 per cent shortfall.

The dry conditions in Meghalaya mirror a wider rainfall deficit across the Northeast. Despite flash floods and landslides in some areas, five of the region's eight states recorded below-normal monsoon rainfall during June and July. According to IMD data, Meghalaya recorded the highest combined rainfall deficiency in June and July at 58 per cent, followed by Arunachal Pradesh at 41 per cent, Manipur at 40 per cent, Assam at 28 per cent and

Mizoram at 24 per cent. Sikkim, Tripura and Nagaland received rainfall within the normal range. Meteorologists have attributed the deficit to weak rain-bearing systems over the Bay of Bengal, the absence of active monsoon troughs and the influence of El Niño.

The IMD has forecast below-normal rainfall across the country in August. Meteorological conditions associated with a strong El Niño are also expected to persist into the second half of 2026, raising the possibility of hotter and drier conditions across parts of Asia. The prolonged dry spell has raised concerns over the Kharif cropping season. Agricultural scientists have warned that inadequate rainfall could affect soil moisture, groundwater recharge and river flows.

In Manipur, officials said the rainfall deficit, coupled with the ongoing ethnic conflict, has placed additional pressure on agriculture. Although the state government has introduced security and support measures to facilitate farming, inadequate irrigation remains a major challenge. The four-month Southwest Monsoon, which contributes nearly 70 per cent of India's annual rainfall, remains crucial for the Northeast's largely rain-fed agrarian economy.

Indo-China border trade via Nathula reopens after six years

Shillong, Agu 02: The inaugural ceremony marking the reopening of the Indo-China Border Trade through Nathula was held at No Man's Land, where the 2026 trade season was formally declared open.

The occasion was marked by an exchange of gifts between officials of the Government of Sikkim and the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) at No Man's Land between the border gates of India and China. Following the formal reopening, the inaugural function was held at the Sherathang Trade Mart.

The ceremony was graced by the Minister for Commerce and Industries, Tourism and Civil Aviation Departments, TT Bhutia, as the chief guest, while Area MLA-cum-Advisor for Social Welfare Department and the Women, Child, Senior Citizen and Divyangjan Welfare Departments, Pamin Lepcha, attended the event as the Guest of Honour. Addressing the gathering, Bhutia described the resumption of the Nathula Border Trade as a historic milestone that will strengthen Sikkim's economy, generate employment and create greater livelihood opportunities for its people. The Minister said the reopening of the historic trade route aligns with the



Government of India's vision under the Act East Policy, PM Gati Shakti and Viksit Bharat, further reinforcing Sikkim's role as a strategic gateway for trade, tourism and regional connectivity.

He said the resumption of border trade, alongside the successful revival of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through the Nathula route, reflects the growing significance of the border pass as a hub for trade, tourism, cultural exchange and spiritual connectivity.

Bhutia further said that the Government of Sikkim, under the leadership of Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, remains committed to strengthening infrastructure, promoting entrepreneurship and creating sustainable economic opportunities for the people. Highlighting the benefits of the trade route, Bhutia said it would provide registered traders with a valuable platform to market Sikkim's handloom products, handicrafts, organic produce and other notified commodities.

Centre sanctions ₹500 cr for Odisha flood relief & rescue operations

Bhubaneswar, Agu 02: Even as swollen rivers continue to recede gradually across parts of Odisha, the scale of devastation left behind by one of the season's worst floods is becoming increasingly evident. More than 8 lakh people across several districts have been affected, thousands of houses have been damaged, vast stretches of agricultural land have been inundated, and entire villages have been left struggling to rebuild shattered lives.

In a major relief measure, the Union Government on Saturday approved Rs 2,117.85 crore as advance financial assistance to seven flood-affected states. Odisha received Rs 500 crore as the second instalment of the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) for 2026-27 to strengthen relief, rescue and rehabilitation efforts. The Ministry of Home Affairs said the Centre remained fully committed to supporting states battling floods and had been closely monitoring the evolving situation while deploying National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams and extending logistical assistance wherever required. The flood crisis was triggered by incessant rainfall across the Mahanadi basin and neighbouring catchments, forcing the Hirakud Dam authorities to release water through all 22 sluice gates. The swelling Mahanadi and its tributaries, along with the Kansabansa, Gamei, Mantei, Baitarani, Brahmani and Subarnarekha rivers,



inundated hundreds of villages in districts including Bhubaneswar, Balasore, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack and Jagatsinghpur. While river levels have started declining in some places, authorities remain on high alert as enormous volumes of water continue to flow downstream.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, accompanied by Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari, conducted an aerial survey of the flood-ravaged districts to assess the extent of the damage and monitor relief operations. During the review, the Chief Minister directed officials to ensure an uninterrupted supply of food, drinking water, medicines and other essentials to marooned villages, expedite rescue operations wherever required, and begin damage assessments for early compensation. The government also assured farmers and families whose houses and crops had been damaged that assistance would be provided after detailed surveys.

HCG Cancer Centre, Expands Cancer Care Access in Meghalaya with the Launch of Expert Cancer OPD Services in Shillong

Shillong, Agu 02: Reinforcing its commitment to making specialised cancer care more accessible across Northeast India, Healthcare Global Enterprises Ltd. (HCG), India's largest dedicated cancer hospital network, today launched its Expert Cancer OPD services in Shillong in collaboration with Woodland Hospitals, Shillong.

The press conference was addressed by Ms. Manisha Kumar, Chief Operating Officer, Karnataka HCG Cancer Hospitals; Dr. Kirithi Koushik A.S., Consultant – Radiation Oncology, HCG Cancer Centre, Bengaluru;

and Dr. K.S. Nataraj, Senior Consultant – BMT Hemato-Oncology & Stem Cell Transplant Physician, HCG Cancer Hospital, Bengaluru. The speakers highlighted HCG's commitment to expanding access to advanced cancer care and bringing world-class oncology expertise closer to patients in Meghalaya through regular specialist consultations. As part of this initiative, the HCG Expert Cancer OPD will be conducted at Woodland Hospitals, Shillong, every 15 days from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. The service will enable patients to consult HCG's multidisciplinary team of



oncology specialists without having to travel outside the state. The initiative is designed to facilitate early diagnosis, timely referrals, personalised treatment planning, and seamless continuity of

cancer care, significantly improving access to specialised oncology services for patients across Meghalaya. The Expert Cancer OPD will also provide specialist consultation for blood cancers such

as leukemia, lymphoma and multiple myeloma, including assessment for stem cell transplantation where appropriate.

HCG team also shared a successful treatment journey of a 66-year-old woman from Meghalaya diagnosed with Vestibular Schwannoma (Koos Grade III)—a rare, benign brain tumour that develops on the vestibulocochlear nerve connecting the inner ear to the brain. For nearly a year, she experienced progressive hearing loss in her right ear, persistent dizziness, and difficulty maintaining balance while walking, symptoms that significantly

impacted her daily life and quality of living. After detailed evaluation at HCG Cancer Centre, Bengaluru, Dr. Kirithi Koushik A.S. and her team treated the tumour using the CyberKnife Robotic Radiosurgery System, delivering Stereotactic Body Radiotherapy (SBRT) with advanced 6D Skull Tracking technology. The highly precise treatment enabled accurate radiation delivery while protecting the surrounding healthy brain tissue and critical neurological structures. The patient completed the treatment without significant side effects and has since experienced considerable im-

provement in her symptoms.

Dr. Kirithi Koushik A.S. Senior Consultant - Radiation Oncology, HCG Cancer Centre, Bengaluru, said, "Vestibular Schwannoma is a rare tumour located in one of the most delicate areas of the brain, making precision the cornerstone of treatment. CyberKnife allowed us to deliver highly targeted radiation with sub-millimetre accuracy while continuously tracking the patient's movement in real time. This enabled us to effectively treat the tumour, preserve surrounding critical structures and help the patient recover without undergoing open surgery."

West Bengal police bust honeytrap network run by jem suspect

Kolkata, Agu 02: A day after arresting a suspected linkman of terror outfit, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), from Burdwan East in West Bengal, the special task force (STF) of the state police arrested his female friend for allegedly plotting honeytrap to target heavyweight politicians for extortion.

Arpita Sarkar, the accused, was caught by the STF from Sahebganj in Jharkhand early Saturday. She is a close friend of suspected JeM operative, Hamim Mondal, arrested by the STF from a housing complex near Durgapur Expressway in Burdwan on Friday. Hamim, originally from Kusumgram at Monteshwar in Burdwan East, was working at a garments factory in Pilkhana of Howrah for the last couple of years. He was remanded in 14-day police custody by Burdwan Court on Saturday. Arpita was also brought to the state meanwhile and was remanded by the same district court in 14-day police custody. The two accused, who knew each other for the last four years and have been active on social media to spread radical thoughts among youth, are being interrogated by the STF in Kolkata. They came under the radar after state minister and North Howrah BJP MLA Umesh Rai's son received a threat call about his abduction for extortion.

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Legal limits restrain foreigner deportations, says govt

New Delhi, Agu 02: The Centre has told the Supreme Court that a foreign national whose nationality remains unverified cannot be deported unless the person's home country confirms the nationality and agrees to accept them.

In an affidavit filed before the apex court, the Union home ministry said the deportation process cannot begin until the individual's nationality is verified and the required travel documents are issued by the country concerned. "A foreign national whose nationality is

unknown or unverified can be deported to their home country only upon confirmation of their nationality, possession of a valid travel document or acceptance by the home country concerned. The deportation procedure cannot be initiated without nationality verification," the affidavit said.

The Centre filed the affidavit in response to a petition challenging the indefinite detention of persons declared foreigners in Assam despite there being no immediate prospect of their deportation. The ministry said

a foreign national may be deported by the concerned state, Union Territory or the Foreigners Regional Registration Office after completion of the sentence or court proceedings, provided no other criminal case is pending and the individual possesses a valid passport or travel document.

It added that the required travel document has to be obtained from the embassy or high commission of the country concerned through the nationality verification process before deportation can take place.



EDITORIAL

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Pakistan bombs Afghanistan to cover for its own failures

The story is terrifying. Pakistan’s Air Force bombed villages along the border, killing more than 28 people and injuring twice that number, according to the United Nations mission in Afghanistan. The strikes, as is usual Pakistani practice, were launched near midnight on Sunday, when women, children and, presumably, alleged terrorists were asleep in their beds. Areas hit by these strikes and ground operations included Paktia, Paktika and Kunar, for decades the stamping grounds for the hundreds of Pakistan-trained fighters who fought first the Soviets, then the Najibullah government and now, ironically, its own supposed protégés, the Taliban. It’s been a long haul. And it looks like all of this could get rapidly worse. The Strikes The air strikes, using American F-16s and Chinese JF17s, were in retaliation for an attack against the paramilitary Pakistan Rangers headquarters in Karachi, using an explosive-laden vehicle, and another blast at a nearby facility. Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) claimed the attack, while army officials blamed India, without pausing for breath, just hours later. An Afghan has been arrested, and ‘confessions’ from him blaming Delhi can be expected soon, without an iota of credible evidence. Meanwhile, although the army has admitted to four casualties, the total could be far higher, given that witnesses said the blast felt like an earthquake. The JuA has certainly been responsible for some of the worst attacks in Pakistan, including one on a children’s park in Lahore in 2015 that killed at least 72 people and injured hundreds more. The JuA was said to be closely aligned with Al Qaeda, with strong sympathies for the Uighur cause, among others. Its leader, Omar Khalid Khorasani, was mysteriously assassinated while travelling for talks with the Pakistanis, arranged by Kabul. His death hit the group hard, and it now has diffused leadership, with

small groups operating independently. The UN sanctions committee page tellingly notes that “Most of JuA commanders and operatives hail from Mohmand Agency... (who) dispersed after Pakistan’s military operation Zarb-e-Azb.” In other words, they are all Pakistanis. That reality is why the Taliban have long begged the Pakistanis to put their own house in order before blaming – and targeting – their neighbours. Consider that the Karachi attack would not have been possible without some local support in the city, where the explosive-laden truck was probably assembled. Remember also that when Pakistan started its operations in February 2025, thousands of local residents were driven out of the Tirah Valley in the freezing cold, leading to huge protests. The JuA has certainly been responsible for some of the worst attacks in Pakistan, including one on a children’s park in Lahore in 2015 that killed at least 72 people and injured hundreds more. The JuA was said to be closely aligned with Al Qaeda, with strong sympathies for the Uighur cause, among others. Its leader, Omar Khalid Khorasani, was mysteriously assassinated while travelling for talks with the Pakistanis, arranged by Kabul. His death hit the group hard, and it now has diffused leadership, with

The unforgiving rituals of British power handovers

The British are widely admired for their sense of humour. They have the unique capacity to laugh at themselves. Even their most cherished and beloved are often the butt of jokes. The King and before that, his mother, the Queen is frequently mocked in good-natured humour. Their accent, their dress, their mannerisms and even their appearance are joked about. Not for a moment would they object. They know that the jests are proof of their popularity. It’s customarily held on a Thursday. By the early hours of Friday, the results are known. Around midday that morning, the defeated PM drives to Buckingham Palace to resign. He travels in the PM’s official car and enters by the main gate. Twenty minutes later, he departs. This time, he’s in a car offered by the Palace. Usually, he exits by a side gate. He’s now history, and the television cameras no longer follow him. Shortly afterwards, the leader of the Opposition travels to Buckingham Palace. He does so in his official car. Having been asked to form a government and kiss the King’s hands as the tradition maintains he leaves in the PM’s official limousine. The whole thing takes about an hour or so. In that short time, one chapter has closed, and another opened. One man’s tenure is over. Another’s has begun. During this period, removal vans arrive at Downing Street, and the outgoing PM’s belongings are moved out. The night before, the flat above was his home. The next day, by lunch time, it no



longer is. Something very similar happened last month when Keir Starmer ceased to be PM, and Andy Burnham took his place. Starmer drove to Buckingham Palace in his official car escorted by outriders. After submitting his resignation, he left by the back entrance, ignored by the TV channels. The sun had set on his day. Minutes later, Burnham arrived, accompanied by his Dutch wife. When he left, he was PM and

seated in his official car. Now, the outriders escorted him to Downing Street. Television filmed every moment of the three-minute journey as the country eagerly waited for his first address to the nation as chief executive. Contrast that with what happens in India. Days can go by after the election results are known before the defeated PM steps aside and the new man is sworn in. That’s even the case when the incumbent has won a second term with a full majority.

In America, the newly elected president has to wait two and a half months before his inauguration. The outgoing president continues as a lame duck during that period. On the one occasion I remember, when Edward Heath, in 1974, did not resign immediately but sought to form a coalition with the Liberals, there was public anger. The Brits did not like his attempt to cling to office. Last month, there were a few quaint touches to the Starmer-Burnham transition. Because Buckingham Palace is undergoing extensive maintenance, both Starmer and Burnham entered through the luggage door. The monarch’s private secretary and an equerry were waiting for them in the adjacent courtyard. King Charles received them in the Chinese Dining Room. It looked quite exotic. On arrival at Downing Street, the new PM dispensed with the customary lectern, which is usually placed in the middle of the road, opposite the media, and in front of the new premier’s staff, who stand on the pavement. Instead, he spoke extempore. BBC anchors assumed he’d learnt his speech by heart. So traditional had the presence of the lectern become, its disappearance was widely commented upon. That alone ensured Starmer got off to a new start! The almost cold-blooded, unsentimental, matter-of-fact way PMs change office in Britain can seem cruel, but it’s clinical, clear-cut and carefully choreographed. How different it is to the scenes played out last week in Delhi.

India’s domestic transition is the world’s real disruption

It is the best of times. It is the worst of times. Dickens wrote in the past tense, about revolutionary France. India’s paradox is in the present tense. Context defines and designs the prospects of prosperity. India is witnessing five transitions running at once. Family businesses are transferring control and wealth. Business models are migrating from distribution to platforms rearranging who owns the fruits of work. There is a toll-booth model of business—wealth management, wellness coaching, wishful tourism—thriving on public savings. Governments are forced to expand welfare as consumption is bifurcating into a K-shape on rising prices. And artificial intelligence is wrenching the human interface from a sector that absorbed two decades of graduates. None of this is accidental or contradictory. Different transitions are landing on different people. Each acts on its own. Together they compound. Viewed through GDP, India is resilient, still among the fastest-growing major economies. Viewed through employment, ownership or

consumption, the K-shaped economy appears. Beneath the reassuring aggregates, almost every mechanism by which India created wealth over three decades is changing at once. Big business is morphing as the baton passes across houses—Ambani, Adani, Birla, Goenka, Mittal. The founding generation built for scarcity—ports, power plants, refineries, telecom towers. Most of it built with the State, or sold to it. Their prime asset was political proximity and the craft of extracting clearances, spectrum, land and bank capital. That asset is personal and not passed. What passes on is capital, a portfolio of businesses and, presumably, risk appetite. The transfer is significant. EY and Julius Baer put India on the cusp of an unprecedented inter-generational wealth transfer, with an estimated \$1.5 trillion changing hands over the next decade. Some inheritors would rather run a family office than a plant. The economic payoff is immediate: professional management trims the conglomerate discount, improves capital efficiency and accelerates

creative destruction. Secession from the family philosophy often follows succession. The inheritors are not hooked on knowing the sarkar or managing regulatory whimsy. Educated globally and reared on tech ecosystems, they are betting on platforms and the personalisation of experience. Unlike the Japanese and Korean houses, they are not going global. They are betting on the Indian consumer. Schumpeterian ‘creative destruction’ is manifest. The old corporate modelown assets, control supply chains, scale linearly—is fading. Firms once grew by adding factories, warehouses and branches. They now grow by adding networks. Asset-light platforms asset managers, fintech aggregators, quick-commerce apps, digital exchanges—scale exponentially deploying minimal manpower. Success is visible in market valuations. Appreciate the arithmetic. Eternal, a food service platform, is worth as much as Nestlé, an admired packaged foods enterprise in the country. Swiggy, perpetually in the red, has a market cap of around Rs 78,600 crore

and sits on brokerage buy lists. HDFC Bank runs 9,689 branches across 4,175 cities and employs 2.11 lakh people. Investors pay 14 times earnings for the bank and 38 times for its sibling HDFC AMC, which employs 1,738. Much has been written about the confidence of the Indian retail investor; the truth is more prosaic. Equity is a Hobson’s choice for a middle class struggling to preserve purchasing power against the cost of education, healthcare and aspiration. In the first six months of the year, domestic funds absorbed Rs 4.5 lakh crore even as foreign investors sold. Unsurprisingly, asset managers are hot, as are the wealth outfits and companies running market infrastructure like the NSE readying the largest IPO of them all. Information technology built India’s middle class. For 30 years, Indian software trained engineers and billed clients for hours. AI is rewriting that script; tomorrow’s contracts will price outcomes, not man-hours. The sector faces challenges as generative systems dissolve the forms, functions

and structures that generated the jobs. Yes, the global capability centres are hiring. That is the thin edge or end of the wedge. Salaries are drawn in India while value migrates, with the margin, to a multinational balance sheet. The profits migrating from retailer to platform is real; so is the retrenchment of human interface. A dark store replaces the working capital and the shopkeeper simultaneously. This is formalisation that raises measured output and GST buoyancy while thinning the informal middle. The gainers are listed. The losers are not. The macro implication is stark. GDP grows, but employment does not keep pace. The paradox of platform boom: soaring corporate profitability alongside a shrinking wage share. Consumption data tagged as ‘premiumisation’ reflects K-shaped divergence. The aggregate is healthy. The household is trading down. India is changing not merely how wealth is created, but who captures it. The toll-booth economy is expanding. Earnings and jobs are also challenged by the transition in consum-

er behaviour. Parents who expected to create wealth postponed consumption and children who expect to inherit it consume differently. To define is to limit, Wilde wrote. Every generation redefines prosperity; this one defines it by where it has been rather than by what it holds. Every one of these transitions arrives at the same destination. Ownership of capital takes a larger share of growth and labour is left with a smaller one. The formalisation of consumption has widened the tax base, but the narrowing of the wage base has implications for the political economy. The political class has adopted a mechanism where it uses taxpayer money to compensate and preserve its market share. India’s social contract is being rewritten alongside its economic model. The disruption is not any one technology, but the convergence of transitions happening at once. Dickens understood that contradictory truths can hold at the same moment. It is the best of times for those who own. It is the worst for those stranded in the transitions.

Jawaharlal Nehru on the dilemma of cops trapped by mob agitations

I do not want to pass judgement about any matter without the fullest enquiry. But it seems to me quite obvious that it does not require any further enquiry that, firstly, the several incidents that had happened there were peculiarly horrible, and I am not for the moment referring to firing nor have I referred to the student agitation. I have no views about it, I have not referred to it as such. I did know of student agitation, this strike everywhere, regardless of the merits of the agitation. And I dislike firing intensely on anybody except when one is absolutely compelled to. I have even suggested, and some people have criticised me for it, that it would be a good thing that normally the civil police did not possess fire arms at all, while the armed police possessed them that too in an emergency. Some people have told me and even newspapers have said this man goes about venting his private opinions in public irresponsibly. I think that criticism is to some extent justified. But, I cannot function with the Indian public except on the basis of frankness. Naturally I do not speak out everything I feel but I still say much more than perhaps I ought to. I am entirely opposed to this type of demonstration which is becoming rather common; I think it is very wrong. This demonstration which leads to violence, destruction of property, injury to human beings and firing; then after firing a great deal of protest against the firing, further agitation on the basis of the firing, enquiry committees it is all a vicious circle and go round and round and it creates ill will

and actually encourages the very wrong tendency that we want to discourage. Of course I cannot, and nobody can, say that whatever happens this will not take place; obviously no, no responsible person can say that. But, broadly speaking I have come to the opinion that the civil police should not have fire arms. I think it is unfair, mind you, I am not blaming the police I am saying that the poor police are put in a very difficult position again and again. What is the poor policeman to do, half a dozen policemen or 10 policemen surrounded by thousands of excited people throwing stones at them; what is the poor policeman to do? Well, I cannot say, any average man retaliates and tries self-protection. It may be a wrong thing to do, I would say it may be an unwise thing to do. But, therefore, my sympathy is, in such a position with the poor policeman who is surrounded on all sides by this kind of thing. But, the fact is that the action taken does not end the trouble; it makes it increase, it makes it even worse. So to come back to the Kerala situation. I have not referred to the student agitation or what the government did to it. I have not referred to the firing on the students and enquiries taking place; let an enquiry decide. But, I was referring to various other incidents and to something else the whole background there, a background of violence, etc., and the fact that as a result of all this, as I have said, a very considerable number of people in Kerala have a feeling of insecurity, have a feeling that they are not being impartially and fairly dealt



with. I have no doubt about that. You may discuss with me what the proportion is; well I cannot say what the proportion is, whether it is 40% or 50% or 45 or 35% that is immaterial. It is an adequate, big proportion, whatever that is. And it is a proportion which includes not party men, not political people, but non-political people also, considerable numbers. It is a bad thing, that kind of thing; that is what I have said. And I think all this requires a thorough probe, an impartial, independent probe. To that some of the leaders of the Communist Party have said that I got one-sided versions and was swept away and that I should not have done that. Well, I admit that many of the versions I have

received were one-sided in the sense that party men gave them, whether they were Congress men or PSP men or RSP men or other party men. But plenty of them came from people who were not politicians at all, who have nothing to do with politics. We, therefore, said it is a development which is a dangerous development. I said in Calcutta somewhere that the people of Kerala have been among the most peaceful of India. I do believe that. But, they are no longer so. I said that look at these people who have been the most peaceful in India, indulging in this kind of thing. That is the merit of the criticism of the change. But, that is used as a kind of a testimonial to the Government: see how

peaceful the people of Kerala are. You see what we are seeing in Kerala, what I fear is developing, is this violent technique of action, which is not even Communism but something it may be allied to Communism some way thoroughly bad I think. But, it is a destructive thing; it is terrorising people to do this or that, well, there it is. We do not wish to interfere in a State Government and we have not thought of interfering in that way, constitutional way. Of course, I cannot guarantee what will happen in the future; we have not thought of that. But, because States have autonomy as they have and we respect that autonomy of States, that does not mean that the Government of India, whatever the Government of India might be, can ignore everything that happens in the State. That is everything pertaining to the freedom and security of the individual. After all, there is a Supreme Court here. The Supreme Court spreads out all over India and is meant to give its protection to an individual in any part of India if it is approached in the proper way. So apart from the Supreme Court, the Central Government cannot be oblivious of or ignore where fundamental inroads into the security, of freedom of individuals, in any parts of India are concerned. I am not clear in my mind, as to what the Government of India should do. But, I am quite clear that we cannot ignore such a situation. So far as we are concerned we shall pursue, proceed constitutionally and with an attempt to be absolutely impartial and not be governed by party considerations or the like.

Vedanta targets \$10B EBITDA, big debt cut in FY27



Mumbai: Metals and mining conglomerate Vedanta expects to post around \$10 billion in group earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (Ebitda) in FY27 and reduce its overall debt by more than ₹20,000 crore during the financial year, the company’s top leadership told Business Standard in an interview, signalling confidence in sustaining the momentum after reporting record earnings across most of its businesses in the June quarter.

“We are looking at, as a group, Ebitda for the current financial year at about \$10 billion. We are also looking at reducing our debt at the overall group level by more than ₹20,000 crore,” said Ajay Goel, chief financial officer of the Vedanta group, following the company’s first quarterly earnings after completing its demerger. Goel said the deleveraging exercise had already gathered pace. Vedanta Resources Ltd (VRL), the group’s parent entity, reduced debt by \$1.1 billion during the June quarter. The company also refinanced its borrowings, reducing funding costs by 280 basis points, which is

expected to lower annual interest expenses by more than ₹1,000 crore, strengthening the group’s balance sheet.

The guidance comes after Vedanta reported record quarterly earnings across its businesses. According to Goel, the performance was driven by factors within the company’s control, such as higher production volumes, lower operating costs and a richer mix of value-added products, as well as supportive macroeconomic conditions, including stronger Brent crude and London Metal Exchange (LME) prices and the depreciation of the rupee, which benefited the group’s export-oriented businesses. While most of Vedanta’s businesses reported improved profitability, Vedanta Power posted a quarterly loss despite higher revenue. Explaining the divergence, Vedanta Power Chief Executive Officer Rajinder Singh Ahuja said the loss was primarily due to a one-time impact of ₹487 crore arising from legal proceedings before the Supreme Court over the acquisition of the insolvent Athena Chhattisgarh Power Ltd.

Vedanta’s top leadership also offered insight into the company’s position on the ongoing policy debate over import duties on aluminium and aluminium scrap. Last month, Business Standard reported that the Ministry of Mines had recommended the removal of the 2.5 per cent basic customs duty on imported aluminium scrap. Downstream manufacturers have been seeking lower tariffs to reduce input costs, while primary producers such as Vedanta Aluminium, represented by the Aluminium Association of India, have sought to retain the duty.

In FY27, Indian steel exports could drop by 30% as the EU tightens quotas



New Delhi: According to a Crisil Intelligence research, stronger European Union (EU) safeguard measures limit India’s duty-free access to its largest overseas market, resulting in a 25–30% year-over-year fall in completed steel exports in FY27. After exporting over 6.6 million tonnes (MT) of completed steel in the previous fiscal year, the research stated that the drop in exports could cause India to lose its position as a net exporter of finished steel this fiscal year. With important markets including Italy, Belgium, Spain, Vietnam, and the United Arab Emirates, the EU was India’s top export destination. The expected decline follows the EU’s revised steel safeguard

regime, which came into effect on July 1. Under the new framework, the bloc has substantially reduced volume-based import quotas and tightened market access for exporters.

Although India’s overall quota allocation has been lowered significantly, the introduction of new free trade agreement (FTA)-linked quota categories could partly offset the impact, the report said. According to Crisil, India’s overall product-specific quota has been reduced by around 30 per cent, from about 2.8 MT under the earlier framework to nearly 1.9 MT under the revised regime. However, Indian exporters may be able to compete for around 1.2 MT

under the newly created FTA country-specific quota (FTA-CSQ) pool and another 0.4 MT under the FTA-others category, taking the overall export opportunity to around 3.5 MT. These additional quota pools are competitive and do not represent guaranteed allocations for India. The report said that despite these new channels, lower quota allocations and intense competition in global markets, particularly amid weak steel prices outside the EU, are expected to weigh on India’s exports this financial year.

As export realisations come under pressure, domestic steelmakers are likely to focus more on the domestic market. The report noted that the EU has tightened its protection measures against a backdrop of global steel overcapacity and rising import penetration. Effective July 1, the bloc reduced annual duty-free import quotas by 47 per cent to 18.3 MT and doubled the out-of-quota tariff from 25 per cent to 50 per cent.

Bajaj Finance Propels Top-10 Pack to ₹2.51 Lakh Crore Market Value Boost

New Delhi: The combined market valuation of nine of the top-10 most-valued firms jumped Rs 2.51 lakh crore last week, with Bajaj Finance emerging as the biggest winner, in tandem with a positive trend in equities. Last week, the BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 2,034.87 points, or 2.67 per cent, and the NSE Nifty surged 616.15 points, or 2.59 per cent.

“Markets staged a strong rebound during the week, snapping their recent losing streak as easing crude oil prices, improving geopolitical sentiment, encouraging Q1 FY27 earnings, and renewed foreign institutional

investor (FI) buying lifted risk appetite,” Ajit Mishra SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. were the gainers from the top-10 pack, Hindustan Unilever emerged as the only laggard.

The market valuation of Bajaj Finance surged Rs 80,345.97 crore to Rs 7,10,817.51 crore, the most among the top-10 firms. Shares of NBFC Bajaj Finance on Friday ended over 8 per cent higher after the firm reported a 28 per cent year-on-year rise in consolidated profit after tax (PAT) for the June quarter of FY27. Bharti Airtel’s valuation soared Rs 44,959.5 crore to reach



Rs 12,30,005.63 crore. The market valuation of TCS jumped Rs 40,414.03 crore to Rs 8,55,894.78 crore and that of Reliance Industries climbed Rs 39,447.35 crore to Rs 17,69,108.79 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of Larsen & Toubro rallied Rs 21,096.8 crore to Rs 5,41,844.69 crore and that of State Bank of India edged higher by Rs 10,845.97 crore

to Rs 9,47,799.81 crore. HDFC Bank’s mcap advanced Rs 8,164.73 crore to Rs 11,52,150.63 crore. The valuation of LIC went up Rs 4,427.49 crore to Rs 5,37,435.05 crore and that of ICICI Bank climbed Rs 1,660.37 crore to Rs 10,29,878.30 crore. However, the mcap of Hindustan Unilever declined Rs 10,326.46 crore to Rs 4,93,602.13 crore. Reliance Industries remained the most valued firm, followed by Bharti Airtel, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, TCS, Bajaj Finance, Larsen & Toubro, LIC, and Hindustan Unilever.

TCS, Infosys, HCLTech fall up to 4%

New Delhi: Friday marked the end of a five-session winning streak for IT stocks as investors booked profits following the sector’s dramatic rally this month and a shift in global sentiment toward AI-related chip-makers following a robust overnight comeback on Wall Street and throughout Asian markets. Dalal Street’s worst-performing sector was the Nifty IT index, which dropped by about 3% in early trading. TCS saw a 3.5% decline, followed by Infosys (3.4%), Persistent Systems (3.2%), Mphasis (2.5%), Wipro (2.4%), LTIMindtree (2.1%), and HCLTech (2.1%). Coforge, which had seen a significant increase in value over the previous week, also saw a decline.

Muthoot Finance Q1 profit up 25%; AUM hits record ₹1.72L Cr



New Delhi: Gold loan-focused NBFC Muthoot Finance on Saturday reported a 25% year-on-year rise in standalone net profit to ₹2,550 crore for the quarter ended June 2026 (Q1FY27), driven by robust gold loan disbursements and higher interest income. Sequentially, however, profit declined from ₹3,086 crore in the March quarter, which is typically a seasonally strong period for lenders.

hit an all-time high of ₹1.72 lakh crore. With in that, gold loan AUM rose 44% to ₹1.63 lakh crore, while the non-gold loan portfolio expanded 28% to ₹8,755 crore.

Standalone revenue from operations grew 33% year-on-year to ₹7,589 crore, primarily on the back of higher interest income, which increased to ₹7,506 crore from ₹5,592 crore a year earlier. Standalone loan assets under management (AUM) surged 43% to

“Standalone loan AUM reached a historic high of ₹1.72 lakh crore, driven by robust 44% year-on-year growth in gold loan AUM of ₹50,104 crore,” said George Alexander Muthoot,

Managing Director. He attributed the growth to the company’s three-pronged strategy of accelerating disbursements, improving operational efficiency and maintaining healthy margins. Standalone gold loan disbursements to new customers stood at ₹8,937 crore, with the company adding 4.82 lakh new customers during the quarter. Average gold loan outstanding

per branch increased 40% year-on-year to ₹32.47 crore. In the previous quarter, Muthoot Finance had guided for 15% AUM growth in FY27, consistent with its practice of issuing conservative guidance at the beginning of the financial year, with the possibility of upward revisions in subsequent quarters.

On a consolidated basis, the company reported a 43% year-on-year

increase in net profit to ₹2,825 crore, while consolidated AUM grew 43% to ₹1.92 lakh crore. The consolidated numbers include Muthoot Homefin, Belstar Microfinance and Muthoot Insurance Brokers. Among subsidiaries, Belstar Microfinance’s loan AUM edged up 2% year-on-year to ₹7,842 crore. Muthoot Money, the company’s new gold loan subsidiary, more than doubled its AUM to ₹10,550 crore, while Muthoot Homefin’s loan book grew 13% to ₹3,496 crore. Muthoot Finance accounted for 88% of the group’s consolidated AUM as of June-end. Shares of Muthoot Finance closed 4% higher at ₹3,119.60 on Friday, ahead of the results announcement on Saturday.

M&M Q1 PAT rises 34% to Rs.5,455 crore

New Delhi: In the quarter ending June 30, 2026, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries’ consolidated net profit attributable to owners increased 27% year over year to ₹2,894.79 crore from ₹2,278.63 crore. Lower extraordinary costs compared to the same quarter last year were partially responsible for the reported increase. From ₹2,996.10 crore to ₹3,089.40 crore, adjusted net profit increased by 3.1%. Operational revenue rose from ₹13,851.40 crore to ₹15,299.88 crore, a 10.5% rise. Sales increased by 10.1% to ₹15,183.55

crore, excluding other operating revenue. The EBITDA margin decreases by 220 basis points. EBITDA, or earnings before interest, tax, depreciation, and amortization, increased by 2.7% to ₹4,417.70 crore from ₹4,301.70 crore. The performance was driven by volume growth in the automobile and farm businesses, alongside improved profitability at M&M Financial Services (MMFSL) and margin expansion at Tech Mahindra. The automobile and farm businesses reported an 18 per cent increase in combined

profit, while consolidated PAT from the services businesses rose 80 per cent. M&M’s stock rose 2 per cent on the BSE in afternoon trade.

“We are delighted to report a strong start to F27 despite a quarter marked by macroeconomic headwinds,” said Anish Shah, group chief executive officer (CEO) and managing director, M&M. The automobile segment’s consolidated revenue grew 32 per cent to ₹34,387 crore, while PAT increased 21 per cent to ₹2,129 crore.

India’s UPI Transactions Soar 19% to Cross ₹29.88 lakh Crore mark in July

UPI transactions reached a record Rs 29.88 lakh crore in July

Mumbai: Transactions made through the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) reached a record Rs 29.88 lakh crore in July 2026, according to data released by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

The value of UPI transactions made in July 2026 rose 19 per cent year-on-year from Rs 25.08 lakh crore recorded in July 2025. In volume terms, as many as 23.66 billion transactions were processed through UPI in July. The volume was significantly higher than the 23.2 billion transactions recorded in May, and 22.72 billion in June.

In May, the value of transactions processed through UPI stood at Rs 29.9 lakh crore. Data for the month of July, shows that the value of transactions crossed Rs 29 lakh crore for the second month in the year. The data

showed that UPI handled a higher number of transactions in July compared to the previous two months. In May, the platform processed 23.2 billion transactions, while the figure stood at 22.72 billion in June before rising to 23.66 billion in July.

UPI is used for many types of digital payments. These include sending money from one bank account to another, paying merchants and making purchases through QR codes and other payment methods supported by banks and payment applications. UPI has also moved into international markets, with the payment system available in around 10 countries. These include Bhutan, Singapore, the UAE, France, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Qatar, Greece and Cambodia.

The services available



through UPI differ from one country to another, depending on the arrangements between payment networks and financial institutions. In some markets, the system is used to facilitate payments by Indian travellers, while other arrangements focus on cross-border transactions. Notably, the international presence of UPI has also brought the Indian payment system into discussions

around cross-border digital payments and remittances. India and the Maldives have launched the Favara-UPI cross-border payment corridor, allowing users in the Maldives to send real-time person-to-person transfers to UPI-enabled bank accounts in India through mobile banking applications.

NPCI operates UPI as part of India’s retail payments infrastructure. It was es-

tablished as an initiative of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Indian Banks’ Association (IBA). The July data also shows that the total value of transactions remained close to the Rs 30 lakh crore mark. A recent news report by the Economic Times has stated that the government is considering an MDR of 5-7 basis points, or 0.05-0.07 per cent, for large merchants with annual turnover of around Rs 1-1.5 crore or more, raising questions over whether charges could eventually be introduced for usual, non-merchant UPI transactions. But, at present there is no official confirmation that UPI payments will remain free for users forever. However, the government currently provides incentives to banks and payment service providers to support low-value UPI transactions.

RBI Swap Window mobilizes \$40.8B in overseas capital

New Delhi: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Saturday said its concessional foreign exchange swap facility has attracted \$40.816 billion in overseas currency inflows since June when it was launched.

Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) deposits account for the bulk of the mobilisation, according to data received from authorised dealer banks. Total inflows under the facility stood at \$40.816 billion as of July 31. FCNR (B) deposits contributed \$36.725 billion to the total, while Overseas Foreign Currency Borrowings (OFCBs) accounted for \$2.575 billion. External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs) brought in a further \$1.516 billion.



The swap facility has seen avid interest and attracted steady forex inflows since June 8, 2026, the RBI said in a statement. “RBI had announced a facility for offering concessional swaps for fresh FCNR (B) deposits, OFCB and ECB inflows, on June 5, 2026 and the same was operationalised on June 8, 2026, which is available up to September 30, 2026, for the FCNR (B) deposits and up to December 31, 2026, for the OFCBs and ECBs,” said Central Bank.

According to a latest report, India may receive FCNR (B) deposits in the range of \$65-70 billion by the end of the RBI scheme on September 30, and, overall, \$80-\$85 billion. An SBI Research report said that “We now estimate that FCNR (B) since then has already crossed 2013 level

of \$26 billion in just 45 days”. The earlier RBI data indicated that FCNR (B) deposits worth \$17.4 billion have been mobilised till July 17, 2026 and trend suggests that PSBs are major drivers of this mobilisation.

“We also believe that significant majority of existing FCNR deposits which are going to mature in August/September 2026 will be renewed under the new scheme (gravitated by higher interest rates) and will boost the FCNR (B) inflows,” the report mentioned. Public Sector Banks, front led by larger banks, are apparently anchoring the drive, ensuring incremental flows by leveraging not only the deposits, but also the trust built with materially significant clientele (credit worthiness and risk profile duly factored) spread across various geographies and remaining tacitly agile by shifting their strategy to an optimally blended Onshore-Offshore game plan.

Iran warns of wider regional fallout should US launch new attacks

Washington: Iran on Saturday cautioned the United States against any “adventurous action”, declaring that it would respond decisively should American forces launch fresh strikes on Iranian targets, thereby heightening tensions across the Middle East. The warning followed remarks by US President Donald Trump on Friday, in which he said he was losing faith in talks with Tehran and threatened additional attacks, stating the US would be “hitting them” if required.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi delivered the message in separate telephone conversations with Pakistan Army chief Asim Munir, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan. According to Araghchi’s Telegram account, he informed the Pakistani and Turkish officials that Iran would respond decisively to any “aggression” and reviewed the implications of what he termed destabilising moves by the US, along with the rising threat of regional instability. During his discussion with the Saudi foreign minister, Araghchi stated that any assault by the US or Israel, or in-



volvement by regional nations in such operations, would meet a “proportionate response” from Tehran. The warnings were issued hours after Kuwait’s army reported that it had intercepted and destroyed hostile drones launched by Iran against several critical sites. Falling debris damaged a government building in northern Kuwait and civilian prop-

erty on Bubiyan Island, though no injuries were reported.

Separately, a media outlet affiliated with Iran’s top security body cautioned that any US strike on Iran’s energy infrastructure would trigger Iranian attacks on oil installations in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as gas fields in Qatar and Israel, claiming

“all will be burned to ashes.” At a Cabinet meeting held at Camp David on Friday, Trump said he still believed US negotiators, including Jared Kushner, special envoy Steve Witkoff and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, could reach an agreement with Iran. He nonetheless voiced frustration with Tehran, accusing it of repeatedly violating its pledges. The ongoing conflict has continued to unsettle global energy markets. Brent crude futures rose 24 per cent in July, while doubts over security in the Strait of Hormuz have deterred commercial shipping along one of the world’s busiest oil transit corridors. Anxiety has also extended to the Red Sea after Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen issued threats against shipping through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, another vital channel for global energy shipments. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations stated on Saturday that it had received reports of two maritime incidents off the Omani coast. One tanker was hit by an unidentified projectile that damaged its engine room, while another reported an explosion near the vessel without sustaining damage.

China stages military drills near disputed Scarborough shoal

The Chinese military and coast guard carried out joint air and naval combat exercises around the contested Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea, Beijing announced, in a clear show of force following escalated maritime altercations with the Philippines. The drills, conducted in the waters and airspace surrounding the coral reef—known locally as Huangyan Island in China and Bajo de Masinloc in the Philippines—were aimed at testing combat readiness, joint operational coordination, and rapid reinforcement capabilities.

In an official statement, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Southern Theater Command stated that the maneuvers were a “necessary action” taken to counter regional actions that Beijing claims threaten maritime peace and stability. The high-stakes exercises follow weeks of friction between Beijing and Manila over sovereignty rights in the resource-rich waterway. The dispute recently intensified after the Philippines officially submitted a nautical chart of Scarborough Shoal and its surrounding maritime zones to the United Nations Secretariat to affirm its continental shelf claims. The PLA Southern Theater Command rejected Manila’s submission, calling the Philippine territorial baselines “illegal and invalid”. Alongside the military maneuvers, state media reported that the China Coast Guard simultaneously conducted rights-protection



enforcement exercises, focusing on search-and-seizure protocols and interdiction tactics. Beijing also unveiled new administrative regulations for the Huangyan Island National Nature Reserve, prohibiting unauthorized fishing, mining, and coral harvesting within the reserve’s boundaries.

Scarborough Shoal, located well within the Philippines’ 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), has remained under Beijing’s effective de facto control since a 2012 standoff. Despite a 2016 Hague arbitral tribunal ruling that invalidates China’s expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea, Beijing maintains sweeping sovereign claims over nearly the entire strategic waterway. Regional security analysts view the latest military deployment as a direct assertion of power intended to signal resistance against Manila’s legal and diplomatic maneuvers at the United Nations.

Nolan Wells update: Following the conclusion of the state autopsy, mother Christine Wonsley makes a significant pledge

Nolan Wells’ mother, Christine Wonsley, made a big promise on Facebook amid reports of the state autopsy being completed. The state medical examiner reportedly finished Wells’ autopsy on July 7 at 8:30am. Notably, the findings of the autopsy will first go the grand jury before being made public. Notably, Wells’ family has sought transparency and publicly criticized the investigation as questions surrounding the circumstances of his death remain. The family has expressed fears that Wells’ death will be written off as an accidental drowning and to that end, they’ve started an independent investigation and an independent autopsy.

Wells, 18, was a football player from Mississippi who was out on the Fourth of July with his three friends. He was reported missing on the same day when they were in Horn Island, and his body was found two days later on July 6. Given that Wells was a Black teen out with his white friends, race became a talking point in the case though initial findings did not point to foul play. Now, with the state autopsy results out, Wells’ mother has vowed to keep fighting for the truth in her son’s case. What Nolan Wells’ mother said Wells’ mother put out a Facebook video where lyrics of a song appeared and a road flashed by. “I thank you for it all, the good, bad, ugly, great, and small,” the singer could be heard crooning. The overlay text on the video read “Just trying to make it through life minute by minute,” and added “We will continue to fight for you and the truth.” The message was followed by a blue colored heart emoticon and a dove sign. Wonsley further wrote in the caption - “Nolan Wells your father and I will always fight for you. Your life matters to us. There’s not a moment that goes by that we aren’t thinking of you.”

It added “We are truly blessed to have you as a son. We all love you so much.” Nolan Wells second autopsy results

Wells’ second autopsy was carried out by forensic pathologist Dr. Roger Mitchell and paid for by NFL player Colin Kaepernick. However, the cause of death could not be determined due to several reasons. The doctor said parts of Wells’ neck could not be examined as they were not shipped with the body. Some of it might have been kept with the pathologist who performed the initial autopsy, which is common practice. Wells’ lungs also could not be examined to check for water, or the contents of his stomach could not be studied as they were ‘rightfully removed and dissected’ as part of the first autopsy. As per Mitchell other key information is needed to make a determination in Wells’ case. This includes the toxicology report and how he entered the water. One significant finding Mitchell flagged was a red discoloration on the tissue at the back of Wells’ head by the occipital bone. “It is important to reiterate that this finding could not have been observed in the first autopsy because the posterior head and neck dissections were not performed,” he noted. According to Wells’ family attorney, Ben Crump, a legal team is working to give access to Dr Mitchell to parts of the body he could not examine, and furnish him with ‘photos and observations’ made when Wells was found.

Compounding the family’s grief, Wonsley a family medicine nurse practitioner and her husband have endured targeted online harassment, including fake negative reviews aimed at her practice and hostile messages sent to their home. Addressing the hostility directly, Wonsley reaffirmed her commitment: “Please understand that all of these distractions, these other questions, attacks that people have sent our way, just know, we will not be distracted.” As local authorities continue analyzing evidence including distress call recordings from the boating outing civil rights organizations and local community members continue to demand full transparency regarding the teenager’s final hours.



US passport drops to decade low behind over 30 countries

The US passport has slipped to its lowest position in a decade, ranking 10th in the 2026 Henley Passport Index as countries across Asia and Europe continue to widen visa-free travel access for their citizens. Singapore retained the top spot, while according to the latest rankings, more than 30 countries now offer greater travel freedom than the United States. The Henley Passport Index, one of the world’s most closely watched passport rankings, evaluates travel freedom by measuring how many destinations passport holders can enter without obtaining a visa before departure. The 2026 edition compares 199 passports across 227 travel destinations, making it a widely used benchmark for assessing the strength of passports based on visa-free or visa-on-arrival access. A decade-long slide The latest ranking continues a gradual decline for the US passport over the past decade. After holding fourth place in 2016, it slipped to fifth in both 2017 and 2018, dropped to sixth in 2019 and then remained in seventh place through 2024. The passport fell to ninth last year before dropping another place to 10th in the latest index, where it is now tied with Iceland. The ranking, however, does not suggest that the US passport has become significantly weaker. Instead, it highlights how other countries have expanded visa-free access for their citizens through new bilateral agreements and diplo-

matic arrangements. As more nations open their borders to one another, the number of destinations that can be visited without securing a visa in advance has increased, allowing several countries to overtake the United States in the rankings. For American travelers, the shift means that passport holders now require visas or prior travel authorizations for a greater number of destinations than citizens of many higher-ranked countries. The index reflects relative travel freedom rather than overall diplomatic or economic influence, making changes in rankings a result of evolving visa policies across the world. Where does India stand? India is ranked 81st in the 2026 Henley Passport Index, giving Indian passport holders access to 55 destinations without needing a prior visa. Although India has improved from its 85th position in 2025, the number of visa-free destinations has declined from 57 to 55, reflecting changes in visa policies by some countries rather than a significant expansion in travel access. The latest rankings underline the changing dynamics of international travel, where visa-free mobility has become an increasingly important measure of global connectivity. While the US passport remains one of the world’s strongest travel documents, the 2026 index shows that other countries have been expanding travel access at a faster pace, reshaping the global passport rankings.

EU convenes crisis meeting following mass migration wave into Ceuta



The European Union will hold an emergency meeting of interior ministers on Tuesday after a massive migrant influx into Spain’s North African enclave of Ceuta triggered political tensions

within the bloc and renewed debate over border controls and migration policy. The meeting will be convened by Ireland, which currently holds the rotating presidency of the EU Council.

The decision followed urgent consultations among EU officials and Frontex experts after an estimated 50,000-60,000 migrants crossed from Morocco into Ceuta within about 24 hours.

Spanish authorities said at least 67 people died during attempted crossings by sea and along border barriers. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez requested the emergency talks after accusing some EU partners of responding with “prejudice” and “fake news” rather than solidarity. He said nearly all migrants had already been returned to Morocco and argued that Spain was defending one of the EU’s least porous external borders.

The crisis has exposed sharp divisions among member states. Italy and Denmark were among the countries that criticized Spain’s handling of the situation, while France rejected calls for Spain’s suspension from the Schengen free-movement area. Twenty-two EU leaders also backed urgent discussions on a coordinated response. European Com-

mission President Ursula von der Leyen welcomed the Tuesday meeting and said the EU had offered support to Spain “from the first moment,” stressing that no migrants had reached mainland Spain or other EU countries.

Spain has since reinforced security in Ceuta, including the installation of a 500-metre floating sea barrier aimed at preventing further crossings. Officials said the situation had become calmer, though several thousand migrants were still believed to remain in the enclave awaiting processing or return. Tuesday’s talks are expected to focus on emergency coordination, external border protection, returns to Morocco, and broader EU migration policy, as leaders seek to restore a united position after one of the bloc’s most serious border crises in years.

The great vitamin myth: why your daily supplements might be useless

Multivitamins are one of the most commonly used supplements worldwide – but for most people, there isn’t evidence of a huge benefit. One of the largest trials to date found a small improvement in memory among older adults taking a daily multivitamin. But the difference was tiny, amounting to roughly a quarter of a word in a 20-word recall test. Other outcomes such as mood, immune function and overall wellbeing have generally shown little to no improvement in people who are already meeting their nutritional needs through food. That doesn’t mean multivitamins are pointless. They may be helpful during life stages with higher nutrient requirements, such as pregnancy, or when intake or absorption is lower. But multivitamins are not standardised, so check with your doctor or dietitian what’s best for you.

Your best return on investment will always come from real food. Aim to include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds, dairy (or fortified alternatives) and protein-rich foods every day in order to give your body a good blend of the vitamins, minerals, fibre and plant compounds that supplements can’t fully replicate.

Creatine has been getting a lot of hype lately, even though it’s been around for years. It’s a compound that your body naturally produces, though you can also get very small amounts from red meat and fish. Creatine is stored in your muscles, where it helps provide energy during short bursts of high-intensity exercise. The effects of taking extra creatine are not dramatic, but when combined with training well, eating enough protein and prioritising recovery, it may help you modestly lift heavier weights or sprint better. Unlike many nutrients, where dietary changes can often achieve similar results to supplementation, there isn’t a practical food-first way to maximise creatine stores.

Collagen is the main structural protein in skin, tendons and connective tissue, and production starts to gradually decline from your mid-20s. Most collagen supplements come in the form of hydrolysed collagen peptides, meaning the protein has been broken down into smaller fragments that are easier to dissolve and digest. They are typically sold as powders that can be mixed into drinks or foods. Several randomised controlled trials suggest that taking these supplements daily for about three months may lead to small improvements in skin hydration and elasticity, particularly in women in their 40s and 50s. Collagen supplements are also being studied for tendon and joint health, with some trials suggesting modest improvements. However, these are best seen as a potential edge for very specific groups, such as people with exercise-related joint injuries or those with higher training loads, rather than a magic fix or a replacement for food-first strategies. Before thinking about supplements, it’s crucial to make sure you are eating enough protein overall, which for most people is about 30g per meal, to provide the amino acids needed for tissue repair and collagen production, including glycine and proline, alongside adequate vitamin C from fruit and vegetables, which is required for collagen synthesis.

Our skin makes vitamin D from sunlight, but in the UK this only really works between late March and early October, when UVB is strong enough. Outside these months, even on bright or warm days, our exposure to the sun is too weak. This is why low vitamin D is more common in winter, and also more likely year-round in people with darker skin, older adults, those who cover their skin, and people who spend most of their time in-



doors. There are food sources, but they’re limited and usually not enough on their own, which is why it’s recommended to supplement 10 micrograms (400 IU) daily during autumn and winter. This is mainly for bone health, supporting calcium absorption and reducing the risk of conditions such as rickets and osteomalacia. But more is not better – vitamin D is fat soluble and stored in the body, so avoid very high intakes as these can build up and may cause harm.

Magnesium supplements are getting a lot of attention for improving everything from sleep and muscle cramps to blood pressure and brain health, but the evidence is more underwhelming than the marketing. Most benefits are seen in people with low magnesium intake. This is relevant because the National Diet and Nutrition Survey shows that many people in the UK fall below recommended intakes, largely due to low consumption of nuts, seeds, legumes, whole grains and leafy green vegetables. These foods, which are naturally high in magnesium, also contain other key nutrients from which we can benefit: fibre, healthy fats, vitamin E, or minerals such as iron. Meeting your recommended allowance is easier than it might seem. For example, a bowl of porridge with pumpkin seeds or wholewheat pasta with chickpeas and spinach can provide almost half of your daily magnesium needs. Electrolyte supplements contain minerals such as sodium, chloride and potassium that help regulate fluid balance. They’re often marketed as a daily hydration essential, but for most people this isn’t supported by science. In reality, our body tightly regulates electrolytes, particularly sodium, which

we lose when we sweat. Outside situations involving significant fluid loss, such as long endurance exercise, heavy sweating or illness, most people maintain electrolyte balance through food and simply drinking enough water. When sweating a lot, sodium and chloride are the main electrolytes we lose, and these can usually be replaced by adding salt to meals or drinks, which is far cheaper than supplements. As a rough guide, during heavy sweating, sodium losses are around the equivalent of 1g to 3g of salt per hour, which is roughly equivalent to between a couple of pinches and half a teaspoon.

In the UK, most people don’t meet the recommendation of at least one portion of oily fish per week, which contains vital omega-3s, including eicosapentaenoic Acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic Acid (DHA), alongside protein, iodine, selenium and vitamin D. Good sources include mackerel, salmon, trout, sardines and anchovies. We can also get omega-3s from plant sources, known as alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), but this is a less efficient way of meeting our needs, as conversion to EPA and DHA is limited. For people who don’t eat fish, algae-based omega-3 supplements can be a practical alternative. Check the label for adequate levels of EPA and DHA, aiming for about 250-500mg combined. Ashwagandha is a herbal supplement with a long history in Ayurvedic medicine. The strongest evidence of any effectiveness relates to stress. People taking ashwagandha often report improvements in stress and sleep quality, alongside reductions in cortisol levels of about 10-30%. But most people in these studies don’t have high cortisol levels to begin with. And

because cortisol naturally rises and falls throughout the day and plays an important role in the body, it’s not clear whether lowering it when it’s already within a normal range has any meaningful long-term health benefit. Before turning to supplements, it’s worth remembering that eating regular meals with enough protein and fibre helps provide steady fuel for the brain and body and supports more stable blood sugar levels, which can help combat energy dips, irritability and sudden pangs of “hanger”.

Fibre supplements can be useful in specific contexts, particularly for symptom management, with psyllium husk having good evidence for both constipation and diarrhoea, and modest improvements in cholesterol levels linked to heart health. Outside these targeted uses, we tend to benefit more when we get fibre from a wide range of plant foods. Large observational studies, including data from the American Gut Project, have found eating 30 or more different plant foods a week is associated with greater gut microbiome diversity. This is probably because whole plant foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and whole grains provide fibre alongside a range of other compounds, including polyphenols, that aren’t present in isolated supplements. You don’t need to obsess over eating 30, as more research is needed to confirm this number. Just focus on eating as many plants as possible. Iron is an essential mineral that’s most often low in menstruating women, endurance athletes and people following plant-based diets. It plays a key role in oxygen transport, energy production and cognitive function, so when levels are low, you can feel it.

That said, symptoms such as fatigue can be down to many different factors, so a blood test is essential, as more iron is not better. Higher intakes can cause gastrointestinal side effects such as constipation, nausea and abdominal discomfort, and in rare cases can contribute to iron overload. Reduce your risk of deficiency by eating red meat, fish and poultry, and plant-based iron found in lentils, beans, tofu and fortified cereals. Iron from plants is less readily absorbed, but smart pairings with vitamin C-rich foods such as red peppers and kiwis can increase absorption by up to 300%. Think beans on toast with tomatoes, or overnight quinoa with strawberries. Most of your needs over time can be covered by a simple repeating structure: one protein (for maintenance and repair); two different-coloured plants (for micronutrients and fibre); one fibre-rich starchy carb (for energy); two flavour boosters such as herbs and spices (for polyphenols); and one source of fat (for vitamin absorption). This framework helps you quickly sense-check whether a meal is broadly balanced, without needing to track, measure or optimise every detail.

Aim for protein variety across the week by rotating three to five sources – such as eggs, yoghurt or kefir, chicken or turkey, tofu or tempeh, fish, and beans or lentils – in your weekly shop. This also provides a balance of different vitamins, minerals and compounds. Curate a colourful freezer because frozen fruit, vegetables and herbs are often cheaper, just as nutrient-dense and require zero prep. Think mango chunks stirred into yoghurt, edamame added to salads or rice bowls, raspberries on porridge, spinach blended into sauces, or mixed veg folded into egg fried grains. Aim to try one new ingredient, recipe or meal combination each week. Small, repeated exposures to different foods is one of the simplest ways to naturally increase diversity in your diet and broaden your intake of micronutrients.

Up to 5 Cups of Coffee a Day Safe For Heart Health, According to AHA

There was a time when the blueprint for healthy living in India was refreshingly simple: eat nourishing home-cooked meals, stay physically active and perhaps begin the day with a yoga session. While those rituals remain foundational, they are no longer enough to define wellness in a world where emotional resilience has become just as vital as physical fitness.

Today, wellbeing is being reimagined through a more holistic lens, one that recognises that the mind and body are not separate systems but deeply interconnected. Sleep quality, immunity, digestion, focus and even recovery from illness are profoundly influenced by our emotional state. Modern science continues to reinforce what many have intuitively known: chronic stress and unresolved emotional struggles quietly shape long-term health outcomes just as much as diet or exercise. “For a generation, healthy living in India meant three things: eat homemade food, go for a walk and do some yoga. That definition is now incomplete,” says Dinakara Nagalla, Founder and CEO of Menthra. “The missing piece, and increasingly the central one, is emotional wellbeing.”

While conversations around mental health have become significantly more mainstream in recent years, access to meaningful support continues to lag behind awareness. India has made undeniable progress in reducing stigma, but barriers such as affordability, geography and uncertainty around finding trustworthy care still prevent many people from seeking timely help. Nagalla believes this gap deserves urgent attention. “We talk about stress now. We share the posts. But between knowing something is off and sitting with someone who can help, there is still a canyon,” he says, pointing to the country’s limited mental healthcare infrastructure. “Awareness moved. Access did not.” That evolving understanding is also reshaping the very definition of wellness. Mental health is no longer viewed simply as the absence of illness but as the



presence of emotional strength, self-awareness and the ability to navigate life’s inevitable challenges with resilience.

Lalit Taneja, Anxiety & Confidence Coach and Founder, Happy Mind, believes this marks an important cultural shift. “Mental health has moved from being a personal issue to a public health priority,” he says. “People are increasingly recognising that success without inner stability often leads to stress. Mental wellness isn’t only about treating anxiety or stress, it is about building emotional strength, self-awareness and healthier relationships.” His perspective reflects a broader global reality. The World Health Organization estimates that nearly one in eight people worldwide lives with a mental health condition, reinforcing why emotional wellbeing can no longer remain a secondary conversation in healthcare or everyday life.

Experts also agree that caring for mental health begins long before a crisis emerges. Sometimes it starts with something deceptively simple: identifying what you’re feeling, having one honest conversation or asking for support before emotional strain becomes overwhelming. “Closing that gap does not begin with grand gestures,” explains Nagalla. “It begins with naming what you feel instead of carrying it unnamed. One honest conversation instead of a hundred rehearsed ones.” Technology, too, is quietly changing the landscape. Digital mental health platforms are making emotional support more immediate, personalised and accessible, particularly for those who may hesitate to seek conventional care. Yet experts caution that technology should complement, rather than replace, human expertise. “Support can be there at 2 AM, in your own language, holding your story instead of resetting it every time,” says Nagalla. “It can hand you to a real, verified professional when you are ready. It is a bridge to human care. It does not stand in for it.” Ultimately, the future of healthy living may depend less on adding another wellness trend and more on recognising that emotional fitness deserves the same consistency and preventive care as physical health. Annual health check-ups have become routine; emotional check-ins deserve to become just as normal.

Vitamin that helps blood clot

Vitamin K is one of the lesser-known micronutrients. Yet it is an essential fat-soluble vitamin that is best known for its role in blood clotting. Without it, even a minor injury can result in prolonged bleeding because the liver cannot produce several of the clotting factors required. It does not readily cross the placenta. As a result, babies are born with very low stores of this vitamin. Breast milk also contains only small amounts, leaving newborns particularly vulnerable to Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding (VKDB) until the age of six months when weaning starts. This rare but potentially life-threatening condition can occur anytime during the first six months of life, although it is most common during the first few weeks. VKDB may cause bleeding into the brain or intestines or skin. Bleeding into the brain can lead to permanent brain damage, seizures, coma or even death. The government recommends that every baby receive a single intramuscular injection of 1mg of Vitamin K within the first six hours after birth. This is why deliveries attended by trained healthcare professionals are strongly recommended. Although oral Vitamin K preparations are available, they are less reliable because absorption is variable, parental compliance is poor and several doses are required. Babies receiving oral Vitamin K need repeated doses: 2mg at birth, with additional doses at two and six weeks. Vitamin K is obtained from green leafy vegetables such as spinach, broccoli and cabbage, as well as from liver, cheese and egg yolk. It is also produced in the body by “good gut bacteria” living in the intestine. Vitamin K activates a protein called osteocalcin, which helps bind calcium to bone. This reduces the risk of fractures in older adults. It also prevents calcium from being deposited in arterial walls and lowers the risk of cardiovascular disease. The recommended daily intake is approximately 90 micrograms for women and 120 micrograms for men. Healthy adults rarely develop Vitamin K deficiency because it is widely available in food and also produced by healthy gut bacteria. Deficiency of Vitamin K presents with easy bruising, frequent nosebleeds, bleeding gums or prolonged bleeding after cuts or surgery. In severe cases, internal bleeding can occur. People with chronic liver disease may have reduced storage and impaired utilisation of Vitamin K. Those with intestinal disorders such as coeliac disease, Crohn’s disease, ulcerative colitis, or chronic pancreatitis may absorb less Vitamin K. Individuals who have undergone bariatric surgery or removal of part of the intestine are also susceptible. Long-term use of broad-spectrum antibiotics may destroy the beneficial gut bacteria that produce Vitamin K. Excessive alcohol consumption interferes with both absorption and liver function, increasing the likelihood of deficiency. Certain medications like the anticoagulant warfarin block the action of Vitamin K.



ENTERTAINMENT

Hrithik Roshan renting out Mumbai office for ₹17 lakh a month in 5-year deal

Mumbai: Hrithik Roshan has reportedly leased out a commercial property in Mumbai's Andheri West, adding another high-value deal to his growing real-estate portfolio. According to property registration documents accessed by CRE Matrix, the actor will earn a starting monthly rent of Rs 17 lakh from the office space under a five-year agreement.

The property has been leased to Clearsynth Labs Limited and is located at Lotus Nilkamal Business Park on New Link Road. The commercial space measures nearly 6,000 sq. ft. and comprises seven office units on a higher floor of the business complex. The deal also includes seven dedicated car parking spaces.

The lease was registered on June 29, 2026, though the tenancy officially began on April 1. The agreement will remain valid until March 31, 2031. As per the documents, Hrithik will receive Rs 17 lakh per month for the first three years, covering the period from April 1, 2026, to March 31, 2029. The rent will then rise to Rs 19.55 lakh a month for the remaining two years. The tenant has also reportedly paid a security de-



posit of Rs 68 lakh.

Hrithik has steadily increased his presence in the commercial property market over the past few years. The actor has invested in office spaces across Mumbai and Pune, with several properties leased to corporate tenants. In another major transaction, Hrithik, along with his father Rakesh Roshan's HRX Digitech LLP and his mother Pramila Roshan's Filmkunj (Bombay) Pvt Ltd, purchased 10 office units in

Andheri West for Rs 28 crore. The deal was previously reported on the basis of registration documents accessed by Propstack.

The Roshan family has made other substantial investments in the same neighbourhood. Rakesh Roshan and his wife, Pinkie Roshan, reportedly acquired five commercial office units in Andheri for Rs 19.68 crore. Hrithik's residential property dealings have also attracted attention. Last year, he

reportedly leased his sea-facing luxury apartment in Mumbai's Juhu to his girlfriend, actor-singer Saba Azad, for Rs 75,000 per month.

The agreement was said to be valid for one year, according to documents accessed by Zapkey. With the latest Andheri deal, Hrithik continues to build a diversified property portfolio beyond films and brand ventures, using premium commercial assets to generate long-term rental income.

Kangana takes a dig at Hrithik Roshan and partner Saba Azad

New Delhi: Actor Kangana Ranaut slammed Hrithik Roshan for making "unreasonable comments" and called him out for encouraging online trolling. Roshan recently reacted to a post on Instagram, which read "We need to apologise to Hrithik Roshan". The post was shared following Ranaut's recent remarks on student protests. The actor responded by stating people should not be swayed by online narratives and that he would wait for the right context and facts before taking any position.

"My friend, siding with 'A' just cause you don't like 'B' anymore is a small part of the larger systemic issue plaguing our society. I'll wait, for when the context to it is the right one, and motivated by facts. That would be fair. But then again, who cares anymore right," he wrote in the comment. Re-sharing the article about his response on her Instagram story on Saturday, Ranaut said the actor should rather condemn all those who are harassing and bullying her using Roshan's name. "Dear Hrithik I am happy that you have found your perfect match, Saba Azad, and you both look great together, you are in a committed relationship and it doesn't suit you to tease a woman like this," she wrote.

"Instead, you should condemn all those who are harassing and bullying me using your name, stop adding fuel to fire and embarrassing your partner, hope better sense



prevails and you stop making unreasonable comments," she added. Roshan hasn't responded to the comments. The feud between both the actors dates back to 2016 when both had a dispute over whether they shared a romantic relationship, escalating into legal battles, leaked emails, and periodic public clashes. Ranaut claimed they were together for a brief period, with Roshan denying all the claims.

'Spider-Man: brand new day' full plot details leak online



Los Angeles: "Spider-Man: Brand New Day", featuring Tom Holland and Zendaya, was leaked online and reached thousands of users before it was pulled down from the platforms. The film, which is directed by Destin Daniel Cretton, released on Friday and has already earned over USD 168 million at the global box office.

The leaked version of the film was shared on X with several users copying the

content and posting it on their handles, according to the entertainment news outlet Variety. Earlier, Christopher Nolan's recently released "The Odyssey" was also circulated online, following which the studio Universal Pictures issued takedowns. "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" picks up four years after the events of 2021's "No Way Home", with Peter Parker living in isolation, having erased himself from the memories

of everyone he loves.

The film follows him as he faces a new and powerful threat while grappling with a surprising physical evolution triggered by the demands of his crime-fighting life. "Brand New Day" is the 38th film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and is produced by Kevin Feige and Amy Pascal. It also features Mark Ruffalo as Bruce aka The Hulk, Jon Bernthal as the Punisher, and Michael Mando as Scorpion.

Alia Bhatt calls for assistance for flood victims in Assam

Mumbai: Actor Alia Bhatt has urged her fans to donate to relief efforts in Assam, which has been devastated by flooding. The star urged "immediate relief" for those impacted in a letter posted on Instagram Stories on Tuesday, adding that she will be discussing methods to support local organizations.

Monsoon rains have hit Assam once more, causing extensive destruction in a number of districts. 75 people have died as a result of the floods, which have also forced thousands of people to flee their homes, farms, and means of subsistence. In her note, Alia highlighted the scale of the humanitarian crisis and urged people to extend support to those affected.

"Right now, floods are affecting so many parts of our country, with Assam being among the hardest hit, facing an incredibly challenging time. More than 60 lives have been lost. Lakhs of people have been displaced. Entire families have lost their homes, their land, their livestock, and for some, even the people they love," she wrote. The actor also pointed out that the floods happen every year but still catches everyone

off-guard. She emphasised that nothing should lessen the urgency of relief efforts.

"It happens every year, and it still catches us off guard. Assam needs immediate relief right now, and it'll need support for the long road to recovery. If you've been wondering how you can help, I'll be sharing a few ways we can support relief efforts over the next few days, through organisations working on the ground," she added. Alia is among several celebrities who have spoken up about the crisis. Recently, Salman Khan joined hands with one of his fan clubs in Assam to launch a relief campaign for those affected. Assam remains one of India's most flood-prone states due to the Brahmaputra river and its extensive network of tributaries.

Heavy monsoon rains have once again triggered widespread flooding and riverbank erosion, damaging homes, roads, agricultural land and public infrastructure across multiple districts. The situation marginally improved on Tuesday but 3.32 lakh people remain affected. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said in a



social media post that power is being restored in phases. He wrote, "Since this morning, the number of families without power has declined by another 25 per cent. As floodwaters continue to recede, power supply is being restored across more affected areas. I will continue to share regular updates and keep you posted until power is restored to every affected household (sic). Government agencies are continuing rescue, relief and rehabilitation efforts in the affected areas. Prime Minister Na-

rendra Modi recently assured Assam MPs of the government's full support in tackling the crisis and appreciated the state government's response. A central team is already in Assam assessing the damage, and the Prime Minister also said that a senior Union minister would be deputed to the state to strengthen coordination of relief operations. Officials said floodwaters continued to affect six districts, with relief, rescue and restoration operations still under way.

Anupama Parameswaran reacts to Dhruv Vikram dating and breakup rumors



Chennai: Actress Anupama Parameswaran finally addressed public speculation surrounding her social media activity while participating in a promotional event of her upcoming film in Hyderabad on Saturday. Media reports and fan discussions had previously linked her posts to rumours regarding her personal life (that she recently broke up with Tamil actor Dhruv Vikram, also her co-star).

Addressing the media, the Premam actress stated that her social media posts are a personal choice. She explained that her content was a broader narrative

about a woman's transition rather than personal grievances. When Anupama was asked whether her tweets reflected only her side of the story and looked like she was venting it out and blaming, she replied, "I decide what to post on social media. I was not venting out. I was just talking about the transition of a woman," Anupama shared, suggesting that others shouldn't assume anything. The Karthikeya 2 and 18 Pages star acknowledged she experienced and went through a difficult year in the past. However, Anupama is currently in a strong

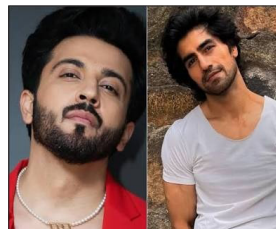
and positive state of mind, adding that she wishes she had reached this stage of personal clarity earlier. Anupama's posts on Instagram last month sparked the speculations. Many assumed her emotional posts hinted at a breakup with her rumoured boyfriend and Bison Kaalamaadan co-star Dhruv Vikram.

"Oooops!!!!!! Sorry for the photo dump. Turns out, when you don't have to wait for approvals, a song selection, or someone else's caption... posting becomes a lot more fun," the actress wrote. Adding, "Sometimes, you have to

let go of the dead ends to finally find your peace. And today, peace found me." This was another intriguing post that left many giving in to speculations. In another post, the Tilu Square actress wrote, "From today, I choose my voice. I choose my life. No more permissions. No more fear. Just me, finding my way back to myself and falling in love with the life I almost forgot was mine. And there's something I've wanted to say for a very long time... Something I wasn't allowed to say for far too long. I love you all."

Lock Upp's Dheeraj Dhoopar takes a dig at Harshad Chopra

Mumbai: Actor Dheeraj Dhoopar criticized fellow "Lock Upp" contestant Harshad Chopra, labeling him as "the most insecure" following his own controversial eviction from the reality show. In an interview with India Today, Dhoopar expressed disappointment over his elimination, calling it "very much unfair," particularly after the return of previously evicted contestants. He noted that these contestants had an advantage as they had observed the game from the outside. Dheeraj understood Yogesh's anger due to their past interactions but questioned Harshad's aggressive behavior. He commented on the skewed dynamics of the final task, where returning contestants had support from their partners while he had none. Despite criticisms, Dheeraj maintained respect for senior contestant Ram Kapoor, acknowledging the strategic gameplay involved in reality television.



Samay Raina takes a dig at box office collection of Alia Bhatt and Sharvari's Alpha



Mumbai: Alia Bhatt and Sharvari were the first guests on comedian Samay Raina's India's Got Latent Season 2. To promote their movie, Alpha, the two made an appearance on the program. However, Samay made a subtle jab at Alpha's box office performance in the most recent episode of India's Got Latent. Raghav Juyal and Niharika NM were on the panel in the most recent members-only edition to promote their movie, Bhai Tera Star Hai. Samay joked, "Kitni baar khudh hi btaana padega," pointing out that Raghav had repeated the movie's title twice while discussing it. Kaisa star hai tu? (How many times will you have to promote your own movie? Which type of star are you? In response, Raghav said, "Alia Bhatt ne bhi khudh hi btaya tha (Alia Bhatt also promoted her own film)." Samay then

replied, "Uski bhi nahi chali fir (That didn't work for her film either)." Samay had also booked an entire theatre to watch Alpha and distributed tickets to fans.

Later, after the screening ended, he video-called Alia and told her that the audience had enjoyed the film. Alpha underperformed at the box office, collecting ₹98.83 crore worldwide and ₹58.62 crore in India. Helmed by Aditya Rawal, Alpha is the YRF Spy Universe's first female-led film. It stars Alia Bhatt, Sharvari, Anil Kapoor and Bobby Deol in lead roles. The film follows two elite agents on a high-stakes mission involving national security, blending large-scale action sequences with espionage. The film opened to mixed-to-negative reviews from both critics and audiences. It also features a cameo by Hrithik Roshan,

which received a mixed response. While some viewers called it the best part of the film, others felt it was unnecessary. Alia and Sharvari's performances also received criticism. Alpha is the seventh instalment in the YRF Spy Universe after Ek Tha Tiger, Tiger Zinda Hai, War, Pathaan, Tiger 3 and War 2. Apart from Alpha, the franchise has enjoyed a successful run at the box office. India's Got Latent became embroiled in controversy after Ranveer Allahbadia's remarks about parents and sex sparked widespread backlash on social media. As a result, Samay was forced to delete all the episodes from YouTube. In 2026, he announced Season 2 of the show during his stand-up comedy special, Still Alive, leaving fans excited. The new season now streams on both YouTube and Netflix.

Indian football icon Sunil Chhetri fights to keep Jamshedpur FC alive



New Delhi, Agu 02: Former India captain Sunil Chhetri has made an emotional appeal to the Tata Group to reconsider its decision to shut down Jamshedpur FC's first-team operations, describing the development as "a punch to the gut" and warning that Indian football cannot afford to lose one of its strongest institutional supporters. Reacting to the club's decision in a post on X on Sunday, Chhetri reflected on the difficult state of Indian football and the importance of long-term stakeholders.

"It takes a lot to be a stakeholder in Indian football. It has been like that for some

time now. But when everything around looks like it will crumble, you bank on family to hold on to each other. And more often than not, it is the elders in the house that you turn to for assurance," Chhetri wrote. Paying tribute to the Tata Group's contribution to the sport through the Tata Football Academy and later Jamshedpur FC, the veteran striker added, "All of you at the TATA Group, through TFA first, and then @JamshedpurFC, have been one of our pillars."

Expressing his disappointment over the club's withdrawal, Chhetri said, "To know that Jamshedpur has folded first team operations is a punch to the gut." He also highlighted the immediate impact of the decision on players and staff, noting that while many may eventually find new opportunities, Indian football stands to lose much more. "The players and staff will be without clubs, and they might find one by the end of it all. The League will have a team less, but the season will go

on. However, not having the TATA group involved in the top tier of Indian football - that would be a disaster with no alternative," he said.

Acknowledging that sporting decisions are often influenced by commercial realities, Chhetri nevertheless appealed to the Tata Group to reconsider. "I understand that some tough decisions in sport are down to what makes sense in the board room. But I can only request and hope that the think tank at TATA picks their heart over head and reconsiders this call. It might be a poor business decision, but it will be the one Indian football needs the most at this hour," he added.Jamshedpur FC had announced on Friday that it would withdraw from the Indian Super League (ISL) from the 2026-27 season onwards. The decision was confirmed by Jamshedpur Football and Sporting Private Limited (JFSPL), the Tata Steel-owned entity that operates the club. While confirming its exit from the ISL, JFSPL said it would continue contributing to Indian football through grassroots development and youth programmes, reiterating its commitment to identifying and nurturing young talent across the country. Founded ahead of the 2017-18 ISL season, Jamshedpur FC spent nine seasons in India's top-flight league.

Police file case over fake ai video shared by congress leader

Mumbai, Aug 02 : An FIR has been registered by the Maharashtra Cyber Police against an unknown person in connection with Congress leader Bhai Jagtap's posting of a fake AI-generated video on social media platform X. The clip falsely depicted Delhi Police DCP Sumit Jha resigning over the Jantar Mantar protests. Police have verified the video as fake and launched an investigation.

Maharashtra BJP chief spokesperson Navnath Ban demanded that the Cyber Police take strict action against the Congress leader. Meanwhile, Mr. Jagtap expressed regret over posting the video from his X handle and tendered an apology. According to the police, the case has been registered at the Maharashtra Cyber Police's Nodal Cyber Police Station. Sections 353(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and 66D of the Information Technology Act have been invoked. The FIR was registered following



a complaint by Maharashtra BJP Social Media Co-convenor Nikhil Bhamre.

According to the complaint, the AI-generated video was shared from the X handle @Bhaijagtap1, creating the false impression that it was an official statement by a senior Delhi Police officer. A senior police officer said the FIR has been registered against an unknown person. Prima facie, the video appears to be fabricated and was allegedly circu-

lated with the intent to mislead the public and create confusion. "We have registered an offence under the IT Act, and further investigation is under way," the officer said.

Reacting to the development, Mr. Ban said that since an FIR had been registered in connection with the post shared by Mr. Jagtap, the Cyber Police should take stern action. "The Cyber Police should invoke stringent provisions against the Congress

leader for spreading fake information among the public. Bhai Jagtap's act has exposed the Congress's fake narrative," the Maharashtra BJP spokesperson said.

Speaking to this newspaper, Mr. Jagtap said he was unaware that the video was AI-generated and had deleted it from his X handle. "If anybody's feelings have been hurt by my post, I apologise to all of them," the senior Congress legislator said.

Judge presiding over paper leak fast-track court transferred by Delhi HC

New Delhi, Agu 02: The Delhi High Court has transferred the special judge of the designated fast-track court dealing with paper leak cases, Anu Grover Baliga, along with 137 other judges.

Special judge Baliga had barely completed a week in the designated court after taking charge on July 25. Special Judge Ajay Gupta, who was initially hearing the paper leak case, including the NEET matter, will

replace Judge Baliga. Judge Baliga has been transferred to a special court under the National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act to try terror cases, according to a high court order issued on Saturday. Other new NIA judges who will deal with terror cases are Vikas Dhull, Prashant Sharma, Pulastya Pramachala, Kiran Bansal and Amit Bansal.

Judge Baliga was appointed after the high court notified a designated court

to deal with criminal cases arising from paper leaks as well as the use of other unfair means in public examinations on July 23. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced setting up of fast-track courts to swiftly deal with cases of paper leaks. The first hearing in the NEET paper leak case was conducted on July 27, with the proceedings adjourned at the request of the defence counsel. The judge then posted the matter for

Monday to consider the CBI chargesheet and the bail pleas of two accused.

The agency has chargesheeted 13 accused in the case, all of whom are in judicial custody. On May 12, the National Testing Agency (NTA) had cancelled the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate), or NEET-UG, held on May 3 for medical admissions amid allegations of paper leak.A re-exam was then held on June 21.

Days after leaving Team India, Ryan Ten Doeschate joins KKR, the three-time IPL winners

New Delhi, Agu 02: Ryan Ten Doeschate joined the three-time Indian Premier League (IPL) winners Kolkata Knight Riders just one day after leaving his position as Team India's assistant coach under head coach Gautam Gambhir. Doeschate has returned to the Knight Riders family as the team's Head of Cricket Strategy, where he will be in charge of talent acquisition, development, and cricket strategy for all of its international franchises. "Ryan will lead the strategic direction for scouting, player recruitment, squad planning, and performance evaluation across the Knight Riders network," the team stated in a news statement. He will collaborate

closely with the coaching staff to develop a uniform cricket philosophy and strategy for all Knight Riders squads. As part of his role, he will also serve as Assistant Coach for Trinbago Knight Riders in the CPL, Abu Dhabi Knight Riders in the ILT20 and Los Angeles Knight Riders in the MLC." Venky Mysore, CEO, Knight Riders Sports, said on the appointment of Ten Doeschate: "We are delighted to welcome Tendo back to the Knight Riders family. His deep understanding of our philosophy, combined with his experience across franchise and international cricket, makes him ideally suited for this role. He will help shape the next phase of growth across the

Knight Riders ecosystem."Speaking of his decision to join the Knight Riders, Ten Doeschate said: "I'm excited to be back with the Knight Riders in this role. This is a unique opportunity to work with the coaching & analytics teams across our global franchises to strengthen our scouting/player development systems, and to build a long-term cricket strategy."Ryan's journey with the Knight Riders family started first as a player for KKR in 2011 & he was a key member of the title-winning squads in IPL 2012 and 2014. He later became an important part of the coaching group in 2022 and during their third IPL championship title in 2024.

Financial probe demanded into Abhijeet Dipke and family by RTI activist



Surat, Aug 02: A Surat-based RTI activist, Amit Tiwari, has sought a formal investigation into the finances of Bhagwanrao Dipke, father of Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet

Dipke, questioning how a Junior Engineer's (JE) salary could have funded his son's higher education in the United States.

The activist has also approached the Election Commission of India (ECI)

and the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) over the legal status of the CJP and the tax liability on a Rs 1 crore fund pledged by Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal. Speaking to ANI, Tiwari on Thursday said he has filed complaints at three different locations. "I have filed a complaint at three different locations. I have complained against CJP at ECI. Regarding the Rs 1 Crore fund by Kapil Sibal, I have complained to CBIC (Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs) that 18% GST be levied on it," Tiwari said.

He also said a complaint has been submitted to the Maharashtra government seeking an inquiry into the financial assets of Bhagwanrao Dipke, who he

claimed was a Junior Engineer with the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC). "So, if he received a salary of Rs 60,000-65,000, how was he able to afford the education of his children in the US?" he said. "We have complained to the Maharashtra Government that this should be investigated and strict action should be taken if this is a case of disproportionate assets," Tiwari added.

On his complaint against CJP, Tiwari alleged that the organisation was accepting donations despite not being registered as a political party. "As far as the complaint against CJP is concerned, if they are acting like a political party, if they take in donations but are non-registered,

they will have to register under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. We have demanded that action be taken against them as they are non-registered but are accepting a fund of Rs 1 crore," he said.

Tiwari also criticised the CJP-led protests, saying the movement had crossed a line after initially being centred on the NEET paper leak issue. "We respect our elders. It was fine until you were carrying out the CJP movement and protesting over NEET. But in the middle of the agitation, you started abusing PM Modi and his late mother. You also spoke foul on his ties to foreign leaders. We have complained against all of this. It is all wrong," he said.

Lorena Wiebes storms to victory in women's tour de France opener

Lausanne: Lorena Wiebes won the opening stage of the Women's Tour de France. The Dutch cyclist, who represents the SD Worx-Protime team, claimed the flat 137-kilometer (85-mile) ride that started and finished in the city of Lausanne and took the competitors past two lakes locked in the Swiss Alps on Saturday.

Kim Le Court crossed the finish line second, ahead of Demi Vollerling, who has won multiple races this year including the Giro d'Italia. "I can't believe it," Wiebes said. "The SD Worx-Protime team worked super-hard. Demi attacked, I



thought, I need to follow'. It was a super-long sprint." French rider Pauline Ferrand-Prevot, who won the race last year, finished eighth while Vuelta winner Paula Blasi was 12th. This edi-

tion, the fifth of the Women's Tour, will cover 1,175 kilometers (730 miles) over nine days.

Sunday's 149km stage goes from Aigle to Geneva before the route heads into France. It features a

climb of Mont Ventoux in its toughest ascent on Friday before finishing in Nice on the French Riviera two days later. Tadej Pogacar won his fifth men's Tour de France title last weekend.

One Officer, One Car: To reduce expenses, the center stops providing additional official vehicles for bureaucrats

New Delhi, Aug 02: The Ministry of Finance has implemented a stringent "One Officer, One Official Car" policy in an effort to reduce unnecessary spending and stop the abuse of official resources. Even if qualified officials are managing extra tasks in another ministry, department, public sector undertaking (PSU), or autonomous body, they cannot be assigned more than one government vehicle, according to the updated regulations. The Department of Expenditure has released the updated guidelines via an Office Memorandum. They are designed to guarantee that government cars are used only for official reasons and serve to reinforce the staff car requirements that were first established in 2022. Even if they take over another office or organization, an officer who is currently eligible for a government staff automobile will keep using it under the updated regulations. In certain situations, ministries and agencies are instructed not to approve an extra official vehicle. Additionally, the government has prohibited Central government employees from utilizing automobiles owned by PSUs, autonomous bodies, or quasi-government organizations unless they are



traveling on authorized official duties or trips. The order does more than just restrict the quantity of vehicles. Departments have been instructed to make sure that excess or unneeded cars are kept in secure custody rather than being utilized improperly. Enhancing administrative effectiveness, preventing redundancy, and encouraging better government resource management are the goals. The Department of Expenditure has requested that all departments and ministries adhere closely to the updated guidelines. The full staff car instructions published in September 2022 are supplemented by the most recent directive. Strengthening fiscal discipline and ensuring that taxpayer-funded resources are used appropriately across the Central government are the goals of the renewed emphasis.

President Droupadi Murmu praises Harjinder Kaur and Gulveer Singh for winning silver medals in the CWG 2026

Glasgow: Indian athletes Gulveer Singh and Harjinder Kaur won silver medals in the 2026 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. President Droupadi Murmu praised their accomplishments and said they had made the country proud. President Murmu congratulated Gulveer Singh on his silver medal in the men's 10,000-meter race, underlining his historic accomplishment of winning India's first-ever Commonwealth Games medal in the discipline, in a post published by Rashtrapati Bhavan on X.

"Gulveer Singh, congrats on your amazing accomplishment! You have given India its first-ever Commonwealth Games medal in the men's 10,000-meter race by taking home the silver medal at the 2026 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. The country is pleased with you. The post said, "I hope you have many more accolades in the future." President Murmu also congratulated Harjinder Kaur for clinching silver in the women's 69kg weightlifting event at the Games."

Heartiest congratulations to Harjinder Kaur

on clinching the Silver Medal in the Women's 69kg weightlifting event at the Glasgow Commonwealth Games 2026. You have made India proud with your spirited performance. May you continue to scale new heights of success," it wrote.India enjoyed another productive day at the Commonwealth Games 2026 in Glasgow on Tuesday, with Gulveer Singh creating history by winning the country's first-ever medal in the men's 10,000m and Harjinder Kaur clinching silver in weightlifting, while three Indian boxers stormed into the semifinals to assure the nation of at least three more medals.Gulveer emerged as the star of the day, producing a remarkable performance to claim silver in the men's 10,000m. The Army athlete clocked 27:49.78, staying with the lead pack throughout before producing a blistering final-lap sprint to finish behind Australia's Ky Robinson. His silver ended India's long wait for a medal in the event, marking the country's first-ever podium finish in the men's 10,000m at the Commonwealth Games. Harjinder Kaur opened India's



account on Day 6 with a silver medal in the women's 69kg weightlifting event. The Punjab lifter finished with a career-best total of 227kg, including 101kg in the snatch and 126kg in the clean and jerk, to finish behind Canada's Charlotte Simoneau.Harjinder also enjoyed a memorable outing by rewriting the Commonwealth Games snatch record twice before eventually improving on the bronze medal she had won at the Birmingham 2022 Games.

Ace Shuttler
Lakshya Sen
Defeats Julien
Carraggi



Paris: In the group rounds of the Men's Badminton event at the Olympics in Paris on Monday, Indian badminton star Lakshya Sen defeated Belgium's Julien Carraggi in two straight sets to record another victory. Sen appears to be in excellent form right now. Sen's opponent put up a strong fight and produced a few standout moments, so it was not an easy outing for him. Carraggi's attempt was unsuccessful, though, as the unranked Belgian was easily thrashed by the Indian badminton sensation in straight sets, 21-19, 21-14. Sen had a strong start to the match, but Carraggi was able to make a comeback.

In the second-set, it looked like the Belgian's playing level dipped as Carraggi appeared to have lost his focus and composure quickly. Sensing vulnerability, Sen pounced on the opportunity to race to a decisive lead of 11-4 at the halfway break.

HS Prannoy and Unnati Hooda advance
to the Taipei Open's second round

New Delhi: Seasoned shuttler HS Prannoy and Unnati Hooda, the spearheads of India's campaign, advanced to the second round of their respective singles events at the Taipei Open Super 300 on Wednesday. Seeded seventh, Prannoy defeated Minoru Koga of Japan 21-11 21-14 in his opening round men's singles match that lasted just 35 minutes. He will next take on Hong Kong's Jason Gunawan, who beat another Indian Mithun Manjunath 21-18 21-4 in another first round tie. Among other Indian men's singles players to progress to the second round were Kiran George and Tharun Mannepilli. While George defeated Wang Po-Wei of Chinese Taipei 21-10 21-18, Mannepilli stunned eight seed Jeon Hyeok Jin of Korea 21-12 21-15.

George and Mannepilli will play each other in the next round. But it was curtains for the likes of rising Rounak Chauhan, who progressed through men's singles qualifiers, as he



was shown the door by Richie Duta Richardo of Indonesia 14-21 16-21. Third seed Unnati started her women's singles campaign on a positive note by registering a 21- 12 21-18 win Pei Yu Wang of Chinese Taipei.

The Indian will next play compatriot Tanya Hemanth, who defeated another Taipei shuttler Wen Chi Hsu 21-16 14-21 21-16 in a tough three-game opener. Young Devika Sihag, seeded eighth here, Tanvi Sharma and Anmol Kharb

also progressed to the next round of women's singles.

While Devika beat Korea's Ga Eun Park 14-21 21-7 21-15, Tanvi got the better of compatriot Tasnim Mir 21-16 22-20 and Anmol defeated Ishika Jaiswal of USA 21-15 11-21 21-19. Devika will next face Indonesia's Ni Kadek Dhinda Amartya Pratiwi, who beat India's Rakshitha Sree Santhosh Ramraj 21-10 20-22 21-14. Tanvi will next take on Indonesia's Thalita Ramadhani Wiryawan, while Anmol will up against second seed Hsiang Ti Lin of Chinese Taipei. Lin defeated India's Ashmita Chaliha 16-21 21-14 21-15 in another opening round match. Shriyanshi Valishetty is the other Indian women shuttler to bow out of the competition after losing 11-21 12-21 against fourth seed Supanida Katethong of Thailand. Isharani Baruah will take on local favourite and top seed Pin-Chian Chiu of later in the day.

Indian girls go
down to Belgium



Santiago: In their third and last preliminary league game in the FIH Hockey Women's Junior World Cup 2023 on Saturday, the Indian women's team narrowly lost 3-2 to Belgium despite rallying from a two-goal deficit. After Belgium had taken the lead thanks to goals from Noa Schreurs (5') and France De Mot (42'), Annu (47', 51') scored two goals for India. In the hard-fought match, Belgium withstood multiple powerful attempts from the Indian ladies before Astrid Bonami scored the game-winning goal in the 52nd minute. In order to put pressure on Belgium, India swiftly developed a passing rhythm and used a pressing approach. India had an early penalty corner, but they were unable to

turn it into a goal. Belgium, however, not only defended solidly to deny India an early advantage but also initiated counter-attacks. This strategy paid off when Noa Schreurs (5') scored a remarkable field goal, granting Belgium an early lead. With the score in their favour, Belgium intensified pressure by frequently penetrating the circle, restricting India's chances of equalising in the opening quarter, which concluded with Belgium leading 1-0.

China Is Captured by Taiwan's Chou Tien-chen Open Title at Thirty-Six

New Delhi: Ben Stokes has "a lot of good cricket left in him," according to Australian coach Andrew McDonald, who thinks England's new Test coach should entice him to come out of retirement for the Ashes. In a stunning move, the all-rounder announced his retirement on the fourth afternoon of the third Test match against New Zealand at Trent Bridge in late June. Following the fallout from a London nightclub incident earlier that month that also involved col-

league Gus Atkinson, he returned to duty and made the shocking statement. Soon after, Brendon McCullum was fired as England's red-ball coach. According to British media this week, Stephen Fleming, another New Zealander, is set to take over. McDonald, whose side travels to England for the latest instalment of the Ashes next year, said Stokes still had plenty to offer and his return would be an ideal storyline for the series. "The fairytale would be that he comes back

out of retirement and takes on one more Ashes and builds a lot of hype on the way in," McDonald told Australian radio station SEN late Wednesday. "If you're looking at promoting that series, that's probably the angle that you would want, that he comes out of retirement. "To me, he's still got a lot of good cricket left in him," he added. "It'll be a fascinating watch. I think that whoever the new head coach that comes in potentially has a conversation with him."Stokes,



who is still playing at domestic level for Durham, is only 35.

No Indian captain could match
Ajinkya Rahane's perfect record



New Delhi: Team India's Australia "jinx" was broken by Ajinkya Rahane, also known as "Jinks," who guided the team to a historic Border-Gavaskar Trophy victory in Australia. Despite being the official captain at the beginning of the series, Virat Kohli left for home following the '36 all-out' disaster in Adelaide. After that, Rahane took the helm for the final three games of the four-Test series. India emerged victorious

in the series, winning 2-1. This series will always be regarded as the height of Rahane's leadership skills as he wraps off his career. Rahane, who was part of the Indian team's leadership group for most of his career, never had the opportunity to be the full-time skipper. However, the absence of the primary captain on multiple occasions saw him step up to lead. In fact, he went on to lead India in a total of six Test matches.

With the curtain now down on his career, Rahane's CV will have 'unbeaten' written next to his captaincy record in the longest format forever. In the six matches he led the Indian team, Rahane did not face a single defeat, recording four wins and two draws. This gives him the highest win percentage for any Indian Test captain who has led in at least five matches.

Rahane also captained the Indian team to a crucial Test win against Australia in Dharamshala in 2017 and guided the side to victory over Afghanistan in 2018. The 38-year-old also led the Indian team in three ODIs against Zimbabwe, winning all of them. He had the opportunity to captain the T20 team as well, where India won one and lost one of the two matches against Zimbabwe. In total, Rahane led the Indian team in 11 matches, losing just once. In Tests and ODIs, he didn't suffer a single defeat. In fact, of all the captains to have led India in 5 or more Test matches, Rahane's record stood at the absolute top. Even the likes of Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and MS Dhoni couldn't do what Rahane managed to.

Hockey India announces a 20-man
team led by Harmanpreet

New Delhi: The 20-man Indian men's hockey team for the 20th Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, was announced by Hockey India on Wednesday. Star defender Harmanpreet Singh will skipper the reigning champions at the continental tournament, which takes place from September 19 to October 4. As India looks to hold onto the gold medal it earned at the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023 under Harmanpreet's leadership, veteran midfielder Manpreet Singh, the country's most-capped player, has been added to give experience to a roster that blends established internationals with up-and-coming talent. Suraj Karkera and Mohith HS will share goalkeeping duties.

The defensive unit contains Jarmanpreet Singh, Harmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Jugraj Singh, Sanjay, Sumit and Yashdeep Siwach. India's midfield will comprise Rajinder Singh, Raj Kumar Pal, Hardik Singh, Manpreet Singh, Nilakanta Sharma and Vivek Sagar Prasad, while the forward line includes Dilpreet Singh, Shilanand Lakra, Sukhjeet Singh, Mandeep Singh and Abhishek. India



have been drawn in Pool A alongside hosts Japan, Korea, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

The tournament winner will secure direct qualification for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games. Announcing the squad, chief coach Craig Fulton stressed the significance of the tournament and the team's objective, stating, "The Indian squad selected for the Asian Games is very experienced.

We look forward to the challenge of playing in Japan where the winner

qualifies for the LA 2028 Olympics and that is the ultimate goal for us as a team and as a nation."Captain Harmanpreet expressed confidence in the team's depth and urged his teammates to play with freedom while embracing their responsibilities.

"Be it the youngsters or the senior players, I have complete faith in all the players to make good use of the opportunities they get. The main target is to not take pressure, enjoy the game and understand your responsibilities," he shared.

Zinedine Zidane becomes France's head coach
following Didier Deschamps' departure

New Delhi: Zinedine Zidane, a 1998 World Cup hero who returned to the national team tasked with turning recent near-misses into trophies, will take charge of France with the weight of history behind him and one of the most talented squads in world football in front of him. The announcement on Tuesday confirmed that France were handing the reins to a man whose managerial pedigree was proven by winning the biggest prizes at Real Madrid, and whose calm authority, man-management skills, and ability to give elite players the freedom to decide games.

At Real, he built a side that could move the ball swiftly in transition, switch shape quickly and remain composed under pressure in the biggest games. He led Real Madrid to three successive Champions League titles, and that will be the level demanded by France as they build towards the 2028 European Championship.

"When I met Zinedine in February 2025, he said to me, 'President, I know how to win.' I sensed someone who had the drive and the



confidence to lead Les Bleus to victory," France Football Federation President Philippe Diallo said. For a French squad featuring forwards Kylian Mbappe, Ousmane Dembele, Michael Olise and Desire Doue in their prime, Zidane's appointment offers the possibility of an even sharper attacking identity. France have rarely lacked talent, but their recent failures at decisive moments

have raised questions over whether they need more freedom, invention and unpredictability when the stakes are highest.

Zidane's Real Madrid were balanced and pragmatic when necessary, but what gave them their edge was the latitude afforded to elite players like Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Luka Modric to take ownership on the pitch, im-

provise and bend matches to their will. Deschamps' steady leadership helped France reclaim their place at the summit of international football after the chaos of the 2010 World Cup, when a winless side were eliminated in the group stage and by 2018 they were world champions again. But his final chapter was marked by frustration on the biggest stages, with France losing to Argentina in the 2022 World Cup final before bowing out of three successive tournaments after knockout defeats by Spain, including this month's World Cup semi-final. Spain controlled the tempo, denied France space in transition and blunted their attacking threat in a comfortable 2-0 victory before beating an equally toothless Argentina in the final.

Deschamps' structured, chess-like approach was exactly what France needed to rebuild after the 2010 debacle, but now may be the moment for Zidane to loosen the shackles and set his team free. "It is something different compared to managing a club. But it does not scare me. It is what I wanted to do," Zidane said.

Aryna Sabalenka and Novak Djokovic Form
an All-Star US Open Mixed Doubles Pairing

New Delhi: The top combinations entered for the US Open mixed doubles are Serbian tennis icon Novak Djokovic and women's number one Aryna Sabalenka. The competition was significantly redesigned last year, although neither men's world number one Jannik Sinner nor second-ranked Carlos Alcaraz have entered. In an effort to entice the best players to compete, reforms included a shorter scoring style in the earlier rounds and a new scheduling slot that was played over two days prior to the singles draws. Sara Errani and Andrea Vavassori, two Italian doubles experts who criticized the modifications, will defend the title they won the previous year, which came with a \$1 million winners' check.

When the time for submissions ends on August 17, Djokovic, 39, and Sabalenka, 28, will undoubtedly be included in the first six pairings chosen based on global rankings. According to Craig Tiley, CEO of the US Tennis Association,



"you showcase tennis at its best whenever you can bring women and men together on the same team."The mixed doubles championship accomplishes precisely this. We are thrilled to once more bring together the best players in the globe in a format that will thrill our fans."

In addition to "prioritising" his health ahead of the year's final Grand Slam, Wimbledon winner Sinner is skipping the Canadian Open, which takes place from August 2-13. Sinner did not participate in the mixed

doubles last year. Alcaraz, who did play last year with Emma Raducanu, is recovering from a wrist injury that ruled him out of both the French Open and Wimbledon. Eight teams will be determined via wild card and announced on a date to follow. Two teams will earn a main draw spot by advancing through the eight-team qualifying draw played on August 24. The two-day tournament gets underway on August 25, five days before the men's and women's singles competitions begin.