

In Brief

Manipur police arrest UPPK cadre

Imphal: Manipur Police arrested Chungkham Kiran Meitei, an active cadre of the proscribed United People’s Party of Kangleipak (UPPK), in Imphal East on March 19. The arrest is part of efforts against insurgent networks. On the same day, security forces recovered a cache of arms and ammunition in Chandel district, which included an AK-47, a 9mm carbine, grenades, and radio equipment. This incident raises concerns about weapon trafficking and insurgent re-grouping. An investigation is ongoing to determine connections between the arrested individual and the recovered arms.

Heavy storm damages over 2,300 houses

Agartala: A severe storm in Tripura has damaged 2,346 houses, displacing 808 people who are sheltered in 13 relief camps. The worst affected districts are Unakoti and North Tripura, with 16 houses fully destroyed, 68 severely damaged, and 2,262 partially damaged. Significant impacts were noted in Dharmanagar, Kanchanpur, and Kumarghat. Additional damages occurred in Dhalai, Sepahijala, West Tripura, and Khowai districts, including damage to 17 electrical poles, which have been cleared by emergency response teams.

NDA candidate Biswajit Daimary files nomination

Guwahati: Biswajit Daimary, an NDA candidate, filed his nomination for the Assam Assembly elections 2026 on March 20 at the Tamulpur District Autonomous Council office, supported by thousands during a roadshow from Motanga Chariali. He was accompanied by BPF and BJP leaders, including BPF executive member Ganesh Kachari and BTC Deputy Speaker Bijit Gaurava Narzary. Daimary expressed gratitude for the public support and emphasized the importance of democratic participation. He commented on cultural traditions following a gesture from Pramod Boro, asserting that leadership roles arise from capability and opportunity across various governance levels.

Naga Students Federation submits list of alleged illegal appointments

Kohima: The Naga Students’ Federation (NSF) has submitted a memorandum to the Chief Secretary of Nagaland, alleging illegal appointments across multiple government departments. In a letter dated April 10, 2025, the NSF claims that about 109 posts in 16 departments were filled without proper recruitment procedures and outside the Nagaland Staff Selection Board and Nagaland Public Service Commission’s jurisdiction. The federation demands the termination of these appointments within 45 days, asserting that this issue undermines fairness and transparency in public employment. The memorandum includes detailed lists of the appointments and calls for immediate action from the state government to address these recruitment concerns.

Gunfight at multiple locations

Imphal: A gunfight erupted in Manipur’s Ukhrul district on March 19, heightening tensions in the area. The violence began when suspected Kuki militants attempted to enter Sirarakhong village, resulting in a 10-minute exchange of fire with local volunteers. This conflict later spread to the Lungter hill range and Mongket Chepu village, indicating a possible coordinated attack. Reports suggested the use of automatic rifles, though the exact groups involved were not confirmed. No casualties were reported, but security forces are on high alert due to ongoing intermittent firing in the region. The incidents are part of a broader context of escalating tensions between the Kuki and Tangkhul Naga communities, which have been fraught since clashes in February.

Arunachal Deputy Chief Minister underlines the potential of hydropower and asks for policy help

Itanagar, Feb 22: Chow-na Mein, the deputy chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh, emphasized the state’s critical role in India’s clean energy transition, pointing out that its hydropower potential makes up more than 38% of the country’s total. Mein emphasized the necessity of strategic interventions to unlock the state’s estimated 58 GW hydropower capacity during his speech at the Power Ministerial Meet and India Electricity Summit 2026, which was hosted at the Yashobhoomi Convention Centre. Key sectoral issues like financial viability, the Electricity Amendment Bill, the National Electricity Policy, and a plan for increasing nuclear capacity by 2047 were discussed at the meeting, which was attended by Union Power

and Housing Affairs Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and other senior officials. He also underlined the urgent need to strengthen both intra-state and inter-state transmission infrastructure, proposing the development of 220 kV and higher voltage networks to ensure efficient power evacuation. Seeking policy support, Mein urged the extension of the Inter-State Transmission System (ISTS) charge waiver beyond June 2028 up to 2035 to maintain project viability. Highlighting infrastructure challenges, he stressed the importance of improving roads, bridges, and enabling systems to support project execution. Reaffirming Arunachal Pradesh’s commitment to the ‘Viksit Bharat 2047’ vision, Mein called for stronger collaboration, timely



policy backing, and strategic investments to fully harness the state’s hydropower potential.

Clean drinking water is guaranteed in Agartala’s 51 wards

Manik Saha

Agartala, Feb 22: Chief Minister Manik Saha stated before the Assembly that all 51 wards of the Agartala Municipal Corporation (AMC) receive clean drinking water, and that distribution in urban areas is supported by 31 iron removal units. On the fifth day of the Tripura Legislative Assembly session, Saha addressed issues regarding water quality and said that the city’s supply network has grown considerably in recent years. “Pure drinking water is distributed in all 51 wards of Agartala Municipal Corporation,” he stated. He cited improvements made to the infrastructure after 2018, such as a 3 MLD plant at College Tilla and a 5.50 MLD treatment facility at Master Para. The city’s ability to handle growing demand has been reinforced by these additions. Saha explained that continuous building work is a major contributing factor to the persistent complaints of muddy or tainted water. “When road restoration is underway, or during the laying of

cable lines, gas lines, or drainage works, that is the main reason behind the dirty, muddy water that we sometimes face,” he stated. During such activities, pipelines may inadvertently sustain damage, allowing toxins to enter. “We maintain the system and fix it right away,” he continued. At present, AMC has 13 surface water treatment plants. Water supply is supplemented through 31 modified iron removal plants and six packaged iron removal plants, which operate daily. Saha said 25 per cent of the city’s water supply comes from surface sources, primarily the Howrah river, while 75 per cent is drawn from groundwater, which typically contains iron. Despite this reliance, extraction levels remain within permissible limits. “Of the 60.60 per cent groundwater that can be extracted, only 10.06 per cent is currently utilised,” he said, citing data from the Central Ground Water Board. With a population of around 5.79 lakh, Agartala requires an estimated



78.22 million litres of water per day, based on AMRUT norms of 135 litres per person. Alongside municipal supply, many households depend on deep tube wells and pumps.

Mizoram plans to build a ropeway at Vantawng Falls

Aizawl, Feb 22: To improve the state’s tourism infrastructure, the Mizoram government plans to build a ropeway at Vantawng Falls, close to Thenzawl town in Serchhip district, an official stated on March 19. According to her, the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI) program would provide funding for the project, which will let tourists see Mizoram’s tallest waterfall from above. The official claims that administrative approval has already been given and that Rs 34.50 crore has been approved for the project under the scheme.

While financial and administrative clearances have been completed, the selection of a contractor for executing the project is still pending, she added. Vantawng Falls, located about 92 km from Aizawl, is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the state.

Arunachal CM congratulates Tingong Wangpan on his gold medal and national record

Itanagar, Feb 22: Tingong Wangpan, a para-athlete from Longding district, has received congratulations from Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu for winning the gold medal in the men’s 100-meter T35 category at the 24th Senior National Para Athletics Championships, which took place in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Wangpan’s accomplishment was made even more noteworthy by the fact that he broke the national record in the competition, making his home district of Longding and the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh proud. The Chief Minister hailed Wangpan’s commitment, self-control, and diligence in a post on X, calling the accomplishment a significant and motivating occasion for the state’s athletic community. He added that the achievement reflects

worthy by the fact that he broke the national record in the competition, making his home district of Longding and the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh proud. The Chief Minister hailed Wangpan’s commitment, self-control, and diligence in a post on X, calling the accomplishment a significant and motivating occasion for the state’s athletic community. He added that the achievement reflects



the growing talent of athletes from remote districts like Longding and extended his best wishes to Wangpan for continued success in future national and international.

UNICEF backs Meghalaya’s youth action

Shillong, Feb 22: Meghalaya has initiated the Young People’s Action Group (YPAG), a youth-engagement platform aimed at enhancing young people’s involvement in policymaking and governance, focusing on climate action, health, education, and community wellbeing. Launched in March 2026 in collaboration with UNICEF India and the Centre for Policy, YPAG aligns with the Meghalaya Youth Policy 2021, serving as a structured mechanism for integrating youth perspectives into state planning. The initiative emphasizes capacity building in research, leadership, and advocacy, particularly for rural, tribal, and climate-affected communities. Supported under the Meghalaya Multisectoral Programme for Adolescent Wellbeing (MPOWER) funded by the World



Bank, YPAG seeks to foster participatory governance. A youth consultation on March 11, 2026, preceded its official launch on March 19, which included discussions on youth engagement in policymaking. UNICEF expressed its commitment to supporting this initiative as it scales up.

Bank, YPAG seeks to foster participatory governance. A youth consultation on March 11, 2026, preceded its official launch on March 19, which included discussions on youth engagement in policymaking. UNICEF expressed its commitment to supporting this initiative as it scales up.

Important opposition figures, including Himanta Biswa Sarma, will submit nominations

Guwahati, Feb 22: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and a number of prominent figures from the BJP and opposition parties will submit their papers on Friday, March 20, marking a high-profile beginning to the nomination process for the Assam Assembly elections. Sarma will submit his nomination at the Kamrup (Metropolitan) District Election Office. Sarma is running from Jalukbari. Prior to this, he will lead a 5.6-kilometer rally from Khanapara’s Veterinary Field to Hengrabari’s DC Office. “As

I submit my nomination for #AssamElections2026, I’m inviting everyone to join the rally from Khanapara Veterinary Field to DC Office, Kamrup (M).” Sarma wrote on X, “Your blessings will power up my journey.” Sarma is running for a sixth consecutive term in the Jalukbari seat, which has been his stronghold since 2001. After losing to AGP leader Bhriгу Kumar Phukan in his first election from the constituency in 1996, he went on to win it five years later. Head of the Opposition Additionally, Debabrata Saikia,

who has represented Nazira since 2011, will submit his nomination. His mother, Hemoprava Saikia, and father, former chief minister Hiteswar Saikia, had already held the position, hence it has a long history with his family. Ripun Bora, a former Rajya Sabha MP and senior Congress politician, is scheduled to run from Barchalla in north Assam. Among regional players, Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) president Luringjyoti Gogoi is expected to file from Khowang, while Rajior Dal chief Akhil Gogoi will contest



from Sivasagar. The AJP is part of the Congress-led alliance, though talks between the Congress and Rajior Dal failed to result in a pre-poll tie-up. Friday’s filings are being seen as a key political moment, with major contenders formally entering the fray and signalling the start of an intense campaign period. The last date for filing nominations is March 23. Scrutiny will take place on March 24, while candidates can withdraw their nominations until March 26. Voting for the 126-member Assam Assembly is scheduled for April 9, with counting set for May 4.

tense campaign period. The last date for filing nominations is March 23. Scrutiny will take place on March 24, while candidates can withdraw their nominations until March 26. Voting for the 126-member Assam Assembly is scheduled for April 9, with counting set for May 4.

Travelers heading to Assam are warned by Nagaland police during poll inspections

Kohima, Feb 22: Nagaland Police issued a public advisory on March 19 urging citizens traveling to Assam to exercise caution due to the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections. Authorities have intensified surveillance and checks at inter-state borders and key locations to ensure elections are conducted freely, fairly, and transparently. The advisory highlights that many law-abiding citizens have experienced inconvenience due to unawareness of election restrictions. To prevent legal issues, travelers are advised to adhere strictly to guidelines while crossing the border. Key warnings include prohibitions against carrying large sums of cash without valid proof, which may lead to detention or seizure, and transporting valuables like gold or silver without proper documentation, risking scrutiny or confiscation. The advisory also cautions against moving political campaign



materials such as pamphlets and posters without authorization, as this may result in legal consequences. Travelers should anticipate thorough vehicle checks at various locations and are encouraged to cooperate with officials by holding valid identification and supporting documents. Additionally, carrying arms and ammunition without a valid license is strictly forbidden. Nagaland borders Assam over a distance of 512 kilometers and the polling for the 126-member Assam Assembly is scheduled for April 9, with vote counting set for May 4.

NE/EAST

A shortened Tripura Assembly session concludes on March 23



Agartala, Feb 22: The schedule for the Tripura Legislative Assembly's current Budget session has been modified. The session will end on March 23 instead of March 25 as originally planned. It was decided that the assembly session will start on March 13 and end on March 25 during the inaugural Business Advisory Committee (BAC) meeting on March 6. But yesterday, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ratan Lal Nath's proposal led to a new development. He suggested that, in view of the Tripura Tribal Areas Auton-

omous District Council (TTA-ADC) elections announced by the State Election Commission, the number of sitting days in the assembly should be reduced. Following the minister's recommendation, all political parties expressed their agreement.

Subsequently, the minister requested the Speaker Rampada Jamatia to convene a Business Advisory Committee meeting, where it was unanimously decided yesterday to shorten the session by two days. As a result, the final day of the assembly session will now be March 23.

Mizoram rail expansion to link with Kaladan project : Governor

Aizawl, Feb 22: Governor V.K. Singh of Mizoram stated that ongoing railway projects aim to connect southern Mizoram with the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project in Myanmar, which could significantly impact Northeast India. He highlighted the recent inclusion of Aizawl in India's railway network, with the 51.38-km Bairabi to Sairang line inaugurated by Prime Minister Modi. Singh also discussed the Vibrant Villages Programme, aimed at



enhancing infrastructure in Northeast border villages, and emphasized the need for understanding local dynamics for effective policymaking. The Centre for Contemporary China Studies is visiting Mizoram to gather insights on the India-Myanmar border region.

The Sissiborgaon Assembly seat will shortly have a final candidate

Himanta Biswa Sarma

Guwahati, Feb 22: The BJP Central Parliamentary Board has selected candidates for 88 of the 89 Assembly seats for the forthcoming Assam Assembly elections, according to Himanta Biswa Sarma on March 19. The Sissiborgaon seat would be revealed soon. Speaking to the media, Sarma said that the party has worked hard to make sure that women, young people, Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC), and members of the Nath community are all fairly represented in the selection of its candidates. He continued by saying that party members throughout the state were pleased with the list and seemed confident that the BJP will win this election. The Chief Minister add-

Himanta Biswa Sarma on March 19 said that the BJP Central Parliamentary Board has finalised candidates for 88 out of the 89 Assembly constituencies for the upcoming Assam Assembly elections, with the remaining seat of Sissiborgaon to be announced shortly.

ed that the BJP has given its ally Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) 26 seats as part of the NDA alliance arrangement. He said that he met with the AGP leadership earlier in the day and that the party will soon release its list of candidates. The Bodoland People's Front (BPF) will shortly publish its list of candidates, he added. Sarma also confirmed that Tankeswar Rabha, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Rabha Ha-song Autonomous Council, will



be contesting in the elections. Highlighting the next phase of the electoral process, the Chief

Minister said that he will file his nomination on March 20, along with several other BJP candi-

dates who are also scheduled to submit their nomination papers the same day.

Nihar Ranjan Das, an Assam BJP MLA, resigns over a ticket snub

Guwahati, Feb 22: On Thursday, March 19, Dholai MLA Nihar Ranjan Das resigned from the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) primary membership, citing his alleged lack of acknowledgment for his work and the refusal of a party ticket. Das claimed to have served the party "honestly and most sincerely" and to have worked quickly to improve the party's reputation among the residents of the Dholai Legislative Assembly Constituency in a formal resignation letter submitted to the president of the Assam Pradesh BJP. He was disappointed, though, that the party leadership had "not rec-



ognised" his achievements and denied him a ticket for the upcoming elections. "Therefore, I kindly ask that you accept my resignation from the BJP's primary membership and release me from all obligations," Das.

Escalating his criticism, the legislator made a controversial allegation, claiming that his exclusion from the party's candidate list was linked to internal favouritism. In a sharp remark, Das said he could not "offer

rasgullas" to senior party leader Parimal Suklabaidya, suggesting that those who extend such gestures receive political backing.

The statement has triggered a fresh debate within political circles in Assam, with opposition parties likely to seize on the allegation to question transparency in ticket distribution. Despite quitting the BJP, Das made it clear that he intends to remain politically active and will contest the upcoming elections. However, he stopped short of revealing whether he would join another political party or enter the fray as an independent candidate.

Shillong will host its first international film festival



Shillong, Feb 22: From March 25 to 27, 2026, Meghalaya will hold the first-ever Shillong International Film Festival, a significant effort to put the state on the international film map. The State Convention Center in Shillong will host the three-day event, which is being organized by the Directorate of Information and Public Relations. In an effort to draw in foreign filmmakers and strengthen its creative economy, the location will work as the focal point for film screenings, talks, and industry exchanges.

The festival's goal is to bring together local talent and international knowledge. To give budding filmmakers the technical know-how and real-world experience they need to explore prospects in the state, masterclasses and seminars taught by professionals in the field will be presented. There is a good balance of local and regional movies in the first lineup. Pradip Kurbah's Ha Lyngkha Bneng, Romi Meitei's Our Home (Eikhoigi Yum), Surya Balakrishnan's Deepa Didi (The Housekeeper), and Maharshi Tuhin Kashyap's Kok Kok Kokook

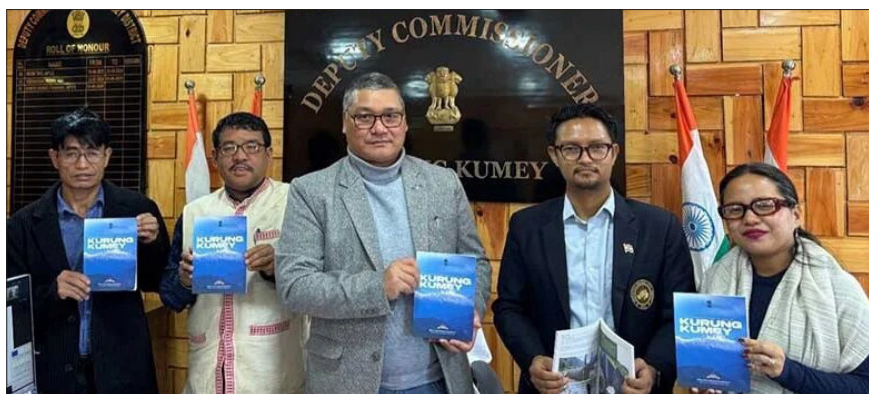
are among the films chosen for showing. Filmmakers from all across the Northeast are represented by other entries, which include Jingshemphang, Chanchisoa, Maimizial, Ade, Shape of Momo, Ka Chithi, By the Home, Nongshun, Roots Renewed, Ahor, Tang Shiteng Por, and Kñi. International films such as "Impermanent Residents" and "Agent of Happiness" will be screened at a festival aimed at promoting Meghalaya as a filming destination and fostering cross-cultural exchange. Information and Public Relations Minister Lakhmen Rymbui highlighted the event's potential to create opportunities for filmmakers and support emerging talent through training sessions. The festival will feature a masterclass by Dominic Sangma on screenplay writing and a cinematography session by Arnab Gayan. Additionally, a "Film Shooting Promotion" initiative will enhance tourism and local employment. A Student Short Film Competition with the theme "Beyond Borders" will encourage young filmmakers to present their work, with selected entries screened during the festival.

Kurung Kumey Receives the 2026–2027 NABARD Credit Plan and District Handbook

Itanagar, Feb 22: Two important development documents, a District Handbook and the Potential Linked Credit Plan (PLP) for the fiscal year 2026–2027, were formally launched on Wednesday at Koloriang, the headquarters of Kurung Kumey district in Arunachal Pradesh. Both documents were unveiled by Deputy Commissioner Cheechung Chukhu during a formal event at the district office. In collaboration with Kurung Kumey's District Information and Public Relations Office (DIPRO), the District Handbook was created. It is intended to be a useful reference for government officials, visiting dignitaries, and tourists. It includes important details about

the district, such as administrative centers, tourism attractions, and cultural highlights. The handbook also sheds light on Kurung Kumey's cultural heritage and places of interest, helping build wider awareness about the district's administrative structure, tourism potential, and demographic diversity. Alongside the handbook, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) launched its Potential Linked Credit Plan for 2026-27, outlining a roadmap for structured credit flow across priority sectors in the district.

The plan estimates total priority sector credit potential at Rs 20.77 crore for Kurung Kumey. Officials said the PLP is



intended to act as a strategic roadmap to strengthen credit access and support inclu-

sive, sustainable economic development across the district.

In Nagaland, the BJP runs a Ghaspani I and II Mandal training program

Kohima, Feb 22: Party leaders and employees participated in the Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Prashikshan Mahabhiyan's Ghaspani I and II Mandal-level training program on March 19. Attending the event, Nagaland Minister Jacob Zhi-momi stated that the Bharatiya Janata Party is the biggest political party in the world and that India has improved its standing abroad under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said that while bolstering grassroots outreach for inclusive growth, the NDA administration is concentrated on closing developmental

gaps and realizing the goal of "Viksit Bharat" by 2047. Zhi-momi emphasized the idea of "Nation First" and stated that the goal of these training programs is to improve public participation and guarantee the efficient implementation of government initiatives.

Highlighting the need for self-reliance, he encouraged youth to utilise initiatives like Start-Up India. He also stressed the importance of human resource development, entrepreneurship, and sustainable livelihoods in Nagaland's largely agriculture-dependent economy.



The training programme featured inaugural, technical, and valedictory sessions, focusing

on organisational strengthening, leadership skills, and public outreach strategies.

Tipra Motha is expected to join the BJP for the TTAADC elections

Agartala, Feb 22: Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, the founder of the Tipra Motha Party, has held important talks with the central leadership of the saffron party, suggesting that the party may run in the next Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) elections in coalition with the BJP. Tipra Motha MLA Ranjit Debbarma stated that high-level negotiations are in progress and a final decision is anticipated shortly, indicating a substantial likelihood of an alliance. He affirmed that Pradyot is presently in talks with prominent BJP figures, such as Sambit Patra and BL Santosh. "For the upcoming TTAADC election, a high-level meeting is being held with our founder Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma. We are hopeful that the meeting will conclude soon and that we will contest the election together. Through these discussions, we aim to fulfill our demands," Ranjit Debbarma said. He added that once the talks are concluded, Pradyot is expected to convene a meeting of all Tipra Motha leaders to communicate the outcome. "We are hopeful that seat-sharing in the



alliance will be finalised soon. Our alliance is with BJP, not with IPFT. IPFT is our partner, but seat-sharing is only with BJP," he clarified. Ranjit further noted that given the evolving political scenario, an alliance appears to be the most viable strategy. "There is a strong chance of contesting

the election together. Senior BJP leaders are involved in the discussions, and we expect the talks to be completed within the next two days," he said. The development signals a potentially significant realignment in Tripura's tribal politics ahead of the crucial TTAADC polls.

Manipur MP is among Rajya Sabha's poorest members : ADR Report

Imphal, Feb 22: A report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) has highlighted significant disparities in wealth and criminal backgrounds among members of India's Rajya Sabha. The analysis revealed that Maharaja Sanajaoba Leishemba, a ceremonial monarch representing BJP, is the second-poorest member with declared assets of about Rs 5 lakh, while AAP's Sant Balbir Singh and TMC's Prakash Chik Baraik follow with Rs 3 lakh and Rs 9 lakh, respectively. Conversely, BRS's Bandi Partha Saradhi leads with assets over Rs 5,300 crore. Over-



all, 31 MPs, or 14%, have declared assets in the billions. The average net worth for Rajya Sabha MPs is Rs 120.69 crore, with notable

variation across parties: AAP MPs average Rs 574.09 crore due to billionaire members, while TMC's average is only Rs 17.70 crore. Additionally, the report indicates that 73 MPs, representing 32% of those analyzed, have disclosed criminal cases, including serious charges such as murder and attempts to murder. The BJP has the highest number, with 27 of 99 MPs declaring such cases, followed by Congress, TMC, and AAP. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the financial and legal profiles of India's upper house, including 37 recently elected members.

Congress fractures are revealed during Rajya Sabha polls, as MLAs in three states reject the party

New Delhi, Feb 22: The Indian National Congress has been severely embarrassed by the recent Rajya Sabha elections, as a number of lawmakers in three states—Bihar, Odisha, and Haryana—have either abstained from voting or cast ballots in favor of opposing candidates. The events have spurred new discussion inside the party over the central leadership’s limited authority over state units, especially in states where Congress is not in charge. Congress was criticized in Bihar for what many leaders called inadequate election administration and coordination. State chief Krishna Allavaru did not visit Patna to supervise the voting procedure, according to party sources. While five MLAs of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIM-IM) — not formally part of the opposition alliance — supported Mahagathabandhan candidate A.D. Singh, three of the six Con-

gress MLAs stayed away from voting. The absence proved costly, enabling the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to secure a fifth Rajya Sabha seat from Bihar. A Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader described the outcome as a “betrayal” by Congress legislators, intensifying tensions within the opposition bloc. In Odisha, the episode highlighted deeper organisational challenges for Congress. The controversy arose after the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) announced Hota as a joint opposition candidate, reportedly without broad consensus. Even as Sofia Firdaus, the Congress MLA from Cuttack, publicly voiced reservations about the candidate ahead of voting, the party leadership failed to contain internal dissent. During the election, three Congress MLAs cross-voted in favour of a BJP-backed candidate, ultimately helping secure his victory. In response, the party later suspended the



three legislators for defying the party line.

The only relief for Congress came from Haryana, though even there the result exposed cracks in party discipline. Congress nominee Karamvir Singh Boudh required 31 votes to win, while the party had 37 MLAs in the assembly. However, Boudh managed to secure only 28 votes and ultimately won by just one vote, turning what should have been a comfortable victory into a nail-biting contest.

According to party sources, five votes were declared invalid, while four Congress MLAs allegedly cross-voted in favour of the BJP candidate. The leadership is expected to identify the legislators involved and initiate disciplinary action.

The developments across the three states have renewed questions about the Congress high command’s grip over state units, particularly in regions where the party lacks organisational strength or governmental power. Some party leaders argue that the situation reflects the absence of strong state-level machinery. They also cite past Rajya Sabha elections in Rajasthan and Karnataka, where Congress was in power and successfully managed cross-voting by opposition MLAs. For now, however, the latest Rajya Sabha polls have exposed organisational weaknesses within Congress, raising concerns about internal discipline and coordination as the party prepares for upcoming electoral battles.

Gaurav Gogoi backs son Prateek amid political stor

Guwahati, Feb 22: After his father Pradyut Bordoloi joined the Bharatiya Janata Party, senior Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi showed sympathy and support for the young man, shifting the political focus to Prateek Bordoloi. In response, Gogoi called Pradyut Bordoloi’s decision to change sides “very unfortunate,” pointing out that the Indian National Congress had supported him during the Lok Sabha elections and had even granted a member of his family an Assembly ticket this time. “In spite of that, he left for personal reasons,” Gogoi stated. Gogoi stated that he will personally contact Prateek Bordoloi, who is scheduled to run from Margherita, amid the political unrest. “He has my deepest sympathies. I never imagined that he would be in this predicament. The party is eager to support the young candidate amid the crisis, as seen by his statement, “I will call him and let him decide what he wants to do further.” Gogoi also emphasized the significance of the next Assembly elections for Assam’s future, portraying the race as a wider struggle against Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma’s leadership. Although he conceded that Bordoloi’s decision to support Sarma is still a personal one, he asserted that people from all walks of life,



including women, youth, and tea tribes, do not want Sarma to return as Chief Minister. On possible alliances, Gogoi revealed that he had held a telephonic conversation with Akhil Gogoi regarding a tie-up with the Rajior Dal, adding that the next move now rests with them. “The rest is already in the media,” he noted. Referring to a recent visit to Pradyut Bordoloi’s residence, Gogoi said the election is not about individuals but about “freeing the state” from what he described as fear, corruption, and divisive politics. He further alleged irregularities in land distribution, claiming that while many poor people were denied land pattas and faced rising revenue burdens,

a single family allegedly controlled thousands of bighas of land through multiple members—an apparent reference to the Chief Minister. Asserting that the Congress remains strong, particularly in regions like Lakhimpur, Gogoi said the party is gearing up for a tough electoral fight. “This election is important for the youth and the new generation. I have pulled up my socks to defeat Himanta Biswa Sarma,” he said. With Prateek Bordoloi now at the centre of a political storm triggered by his father’s defection, the coming days will be crucial in determining both his electoral prospects and the Congress party’s strategy in Margherita.

A large-scale demonstration breaks out in Tawang, Arunachal

Itanagar, Feb 22: On March 17, thousands of residents from the 2-Tawang Assembly Constituency participated in a peaceful protest against alleged corruption, procedural irregularities, and lack of transparency in the Public Works Department’s tendering processes. The protest began at the Buddha Statue in Tawang, ending at the PWD and Deputy Commissioner’s offices, where demonstrators expressed frustration over opaque operations and arbitrary decisions within the department. The protest was sparked by concerns over tenders worth crores issued under various schemes without following established protocols, raising issues of potential misuse of public funds. Protesters criticized the lack of

communication with the area’s MLA regarding ongoing projects and proposals, claiming this undermines democratic accountability.

Demands included the transfer of Executive Engineer Er. Tadar Nyakpu and Assistant Engineer Er. Jumpe Ete, a departmental inquiry into the alleged irregularities, cancellation of recent Notices Inviting Tender (NITs), and a call for transparent tendering procedures for projects over ₹50 lakh. A memorandum outlining these demands was submitted to the Deputy Commissioner, who was given a one-week ultimatum to act. The organizers affirmed their commitment to non-violent protests, emphasizing the need for accountability and governance transparency.



Rahul Gandhi’s actions are criticized by Kangana Ranaut

BJP MP Kangana Ranaut alleged that Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi behaves in a manner that makes women MPs uncomfortable in Parliament.

New Delhi, Feb 22: Kangana Ranaut, a BJP MP and prominent actor-turned-politician, ignited political controversy on Wednesday by criticizing Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition, for his behavior towards women MPs in Parliament. During a press interaction outside Parliament, Ranaut highlighted her discomfort with Gandhi’s conduct, urging him to learn from his sister, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, whom she praised for her commendable behavior. Her remarks escalated the ongoing political tensions between the ruling BJP and the opposition Con-



gress, with Ranaut labeling Rahul Gandhi as “a shame.” Following her statements, there was no immediate reaction from Gandhi or the Congress party representatives, amidst a backdrop of frequent verbal exchanges between the two political factions in the current parliamentary session.

PM Modi will speak at three rallies in April as the BJP finalizes its plan for seats in Assam



New Delhi, Feb 22: In Assam, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has solidified its electoral strategy, securing a seat-sharing deal with its NDA allies

and getting ready for Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s aggressive final campaign. As per the agreement, the BJP would run for 89 seats, while its partners

Bodoland People’s Front and Asom Gana Parishad will run for 11 and 26 seats, respectively. According to party sources, the distribution has been

finalized following internal deliberations, and the emphasis is now on candidate announcements and campaign rollout. During the final stage of the

campaign, Prime Minister Modi is scheduled to speak at three rallies in Assam on April 1, 3, and 6. These rallies are likely to be concentrated in politically significant regions as the BJP looks to consolidate its position. Union Home Minister Amit Shah is also set to lead an aggressive campaign push across Assam through March, covering multiple regions to energise the cadre and bolster outreach efforts. The BJP’s Central Election Committee is meeting to finalise candidates, and sources say approvals for most seats are expected shortly. The party is likely to release its full list of

candidates within the next two days. Sources indicate that ticket distribution remains a sensitive exercise, with its outcome expected to influence local dynamics significantly. Internal discussions have also touched upon the proposed delimitation exercise in 2027, which party leaders believe could have long-term political implications in the state. With seat-sharing sealed and top leadership stepping in, the BJP is moving swiftly to shift gears from strategy to execution in Assam. Voting for all 126 seats in Assam will be held on April 9, and the voted will be counted on May 4.

Shashi Tharoor supports the government’s position on the war with Iran



New Delhi, Feb 22: Congress MP Shashi Tharoor defied his party once more by supporting the Modi government’s stance on the US-Israel-Iran battle, referring to it as “responsible statecraft” as opposed to a moral retreat. Tharoor admitted in an opinion piece published in the Indian Express that the fight is unjustifiable under international law and goes against values that India has historically maintained, such as non-aggression and sovereignty. However, he said that New Delhi’s moderation is a sign of strategic caution. “Silence, in this context, is not cowardice,” he stated. “It is a sober recognition of the interconnectedness of our national interests with the realities of the region.” His position did not align with that of his party. The Congress criticized the government for failing to publicly condemn the war since the US and Israel attacked Iran last month, killing numerous people as well as prominent figures like Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Former Congress leader Sonia Gandhi denounced the government’s silence on Khamenei’s murder as “not a neutral position but its abdication,” while LoP

Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi stated that India must be “morally clear” in denouncing unilateral military action. Tharoor himself pointed out that India’s delayed condolences for Khamenei’s death were a poor response. He did, however, contend that the government should not be held accountable for opting for silence over conflict. India’s silence on ongoing conflicts is portrayed as a necessity for national prudence rather than moral cowardice, according to senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor. He criticizes liberal counterparts for their lack of responsibility and cautions against taking moralistic stances that could jeopardize strategic relationships, particularly with Russia, the US, and the Gulf nations. Tharoor emphasizes the necessity of maintaining stable international ties for economic and security reasons, arguing that restraint is essential for safeguarding India’s interests while allowing for open communication with all sides. His comments may further strain relations within the Congress party, reflecting his previous alignment with government positions on national security matters.

Arunachal CM welcomes Union Cabinet approval



Itanagar, Feb 22: On March 18, Pema Khandu, the chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh, praised the Union Cabinet’s approval of the Small Hydro Power (SHP) growth Scheme for 2026–31, calling it a major boost to the northeast’s rural economic growth and clean energy production. Khandu said in a post on X that the program will speed up sustainable development in isolated and bordering areas and help unleash the state’s enormous hydropower potential. He wrote, “The approval of the Small Hydro Power Development

Scheme for 2026-31 by the Union Cabinet led by Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji is a very welcome decision.” Khandu underlined that the program will especially help frontier and hilly areas like Arunachal Pradesh, where a number of rivers are still unused for electricity production. The northeast, particularly Arunachal Pradesh, where our rivers have enormous unrealized potential, will greatly benefit from this. “Clean, decentralized energy in remote areas will be made possible by the increased financial support for hilly and border areas,” he stated. The Chief Minister also highlighted the broader socio-economic benefits of small hydro projects, noting that they could create local employment, strengthen infrastructure, and improve livelihoods in rural areas without causing large-scale displacement. “With the right planning and execution, this scheme can transform rural economies, empower local communities, and position our region as a leader in sustainable hydropower,” he added.

A man’s plea was rejected after he brought a fetus to court

Bhopal, Feb 22: A man presented a fetus in front of the High Court dais last week, appealing for justice for his family, setting off a tragic and unnerving spectacle in a



Madhya Pradesh courtroom, according to Live Law. The startling action was meant to elicit sympathy, but Justice Himanshu Joshi’s bench deemed it “highly objectionable” and rejected the petition.

The petitioner said that because of his allegations of corruption and fraud surpassing Rs 200 crore at Maruti Suzuki Ltd., his family had been subjected to years of persecution.

He said that no action was taken in spite of his concerns and appeals to the President of India and other government

officials. The man added that a car attacked him and his spouse, resulting in a miscarriage. He took the fetus into court, first requesting euthanasia, in a last-ditch effort to win the court’s sympathy.

According to Live Law, he later changed his plea to want recompense for the extreme financial, emotional, and bodily anguish his family had gone through. Justice Joshi noted that although the petition contained numerous grave accusations, there was no proof to back them up. The petitioner was free to seek the proper venues after withdrawing two writ petitions that had been filed in relation to the incidents.

Manipur farmer pioneers Napier Grass cultivation

Imphal, Feb 22: A young farmer from Thoubal district, Manipur, named Sapam Milan, has successfully cultivated Napier grass as a sustainable alternative to imported livestock feed since 2020. His initiative has inspired hundreds of local farmers, reducing dependence on external supplies amidst economic challenges faced during

disruptions, such as highway blockades.

Milan sourced planting materials from Gujarat and Rajasthan despite initial logistical hurdles and has developed a successful model, cultivating five varieties suited for different livestock. His efforts have resulted in reduced feed costs and improved productivity among adopting farmers.

Milan plans to expand his cultivation but seeks financial support and further research on Napier grass’s adaptability in Manipur. He also encourages youth to pursue entrepreneurship rather than solely relying on government jobs, highlighting the potential for local innovations to transform the livestock sector and strengthen self-reliance in the community.

North East Chronicle

MARCH 23 2026 VOL 02 NO. 29



Amid the US economic embargo, a Russian oil tanker is en route to Cuba

According to naval tracking data, hundreds of thousands of barrels of Russian oil are on their way to Cuba as Donald Trump threatens to seize power and the communist island experiences outages due to a US economic boycott. According to maritime analytics firm Kpler, the sanctioned Russian tanker Anatoly Kolodkin loaded 730,000 barrels of petroleum in the Russian port of Primorsk on March 8 and was in the eastern Atlantic on Wednesday at 1600 GMT, headed for Cuba.

According to its records, the Russian-flagged ship, which belonged to the Russian state shipping corporation Sovcomflot, was supposed to discharge on March 23 at the oil port in Matanzas, which is located in the northern part of the island. In the midst of US-Havana negotiations about Cuba's future, Trump said on Monday that he anticipates having "the honor of taking Cuba" and that he could do "anything I want."

Since taking control of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in January, the United States has attempted to increase pressure on Cuba, its longstanding adversary.

Since then, Trump has threatened to slap tariffs on any nation that sells oil to Cuba, cutting off Venezuelan oil shipments to the island nation and declaring that Cuba would get "no more oil or money" as a result of his actions. Another tanker, the Hong Kong-flagged Sea Horse, loaded nearly 200,000 barrels of diesel in late January off Cyprus from another tanker, according to Kpler data. It exited the Mediterranean on 13 February and has since been sailing west across the Atlantic, slowing down between late February and early March and following an erratic course, the tracker indicated. At 1630 GMT on Wednesday it was in the northwestern Caribbean, about 1,500 km (932 miles) from the Cuban coast.

The inflation brought on by the US conflict with Iran cannot be resolved by interest rates

In light of the worldwide inflation shock brought on by the unlawful US-Israeli assault on Iran, the Bank of England's interest-rate committee convenes on Thursday. The Iranian military's successful blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, a worldwide chokepoint through which 20% to 30% of the world's oil, gas, and fertilizer inputs are typically carried from the Gulf states, is the primary cause of inflation. The benchmark prices of gas and oil have increased by more than 50% and 40%, respectively. Given that we are net gas importers and have an energy sector where the price of gas globally directly affects the cost of providing power, the UK is extremely vulnerable. Most homes will be protected by the energy price ceiling until the summer, but diesel and gasoline prices in the UK have already increased by roughly 12% and 6%, respectively. The government has stepped in with a £53 million scheme to assist rural residents that use oil to heat their houses. Analysts have cautioned that the lack of fertilizer might lead to a worldwide food crisis that is more severe than the one that occurred in 2022 as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, endangering food production across several continents. In contrast to nations like the US, France, and Australia, who are all food self-sufficient—that is, they grow enough food to sustain their populations without the need for imports—the UK is once again extremely sus-



ceptible, with only 54% food self-sufficiency. The Bank has been progressively reducing interest rates from a peak of 5.25% in the summer of 2024 to 3.75% in response to slow growth and gradually dropping inflation since last summer. It is anticipated that these cuts will now cease. Mortgage interest rates have already increased as a result of financial markets pricing in the Bank hiking interest rates back to 4% by the middle of next year. During the most recent inflation rise brought on by the Covid shutdown and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, central banks—including the Bank of England—were heavily criticized for hiking rates too slowly. But as the cost-of-living crisis threatens to worsen further for UK households, the Bank should hold its nerve and continue on the path of lowering rates. This is clearly another supply-side shock for which raising interest rates will have little impact on price pressures but further dampen growth and investment. In fact, there is lit-

tle evidence that the rapid rate hikes of 2022 made a significant difference to inflation. The clearest driver of reduced price growth was the decline in energy and food prices that eventually materialised in late 2022. A 2025 International Monetary Fund study found that inflation-targeting central banks that rapidly raised interest rates in 2022 fared no better than non-inflation targeting central banks in dealing with the price rises of 2021-2022.

The unfortunate truth is that the current monetary policy framework – not only in the UK but also the US and euro-zone – remains shaped by the scars of the last time a major inflation crisis emerged from a war in the Middle East: the early 1970s. Back then, the rise in energy prices set off "wage-price spirals", as firms raised prices to maintain profits and powerful trade unions responded by pushing up wages. By ramping up interest rates to very high levels in the early 1980s, central banks, led by the US, eventually helped crush

lingering inflation, but only at the cost of severe recessions and decades long higher unemployment. Since then, central banks have become convinced that inflation is driven by the expectations of future price rises of both firms and households. Their key job was to "anchor" such expectations via snuffing out any sign of wage-price spirals with interest rate hikes. Today, we are in a very different situation. Labour is much weaker due to declining trade unions and a global labour force. Meanwhile, firms in the energy and food sectors in particular have huge market power to set prices as they wish.

There was virtually no evidence of "wage-price spirals" during the 2021-23 inflation period, but rather more of "profit-price" inflation, as firms maintained profits by ramping up prices, causing initial supply side shocks to energy and food to ripple through to general inflation. Furthermore, surveys show that household inflation expectations are largely driven by short-term changes in actual prices of the goods they most often purchase, such as groceries and gas prices, rather than their beliefs in the central banks' ability to control long-term prices. The Bank of England must recognize the irrelevance of its primary policy tool in addressing geopolitical supply shocks and should instead collaborate with the government to implement price controls on essential services.

This is India's clever route to economic supremacy in the event that America's debt bubble explodes

A recent analysis reveals a notable economic disparity between the United States and India, where the US is burdened with a national debt exceeding \$38 trillion, while India experiences steady growth. The US faces escalating interest payments that threaten fiscal stability, with net interest costs projected to surpass defense spending this fiscal year. This rising debt is a consequence of overspending, underscored by significant budget deficits and increased financial commitments, akin to the alarming \$1 trillion debt increase observed in just 71 days earlier this year. In contrast, India boasts a trade-to-GDP ratio of approximately 46%, mirroring that of Japan, and is seen as a strategic alternative to China within the global economic landscape. The Indian economy benefits from a demographic advantage, attracting multinationals that seek not only cost-effective labor but also a stable, regulatory environment. The current shift from hyperglobalization to "friend-shoring" emphasizes India's favorable position as a rule-of-law democracy with open markets. US economic policy, characterized by recent tariff implementations intended to revitalize domestic manufacturing, risks distorting markets and increasing consumer prices while promoting inefficiencies. The pursuit of economic dynamism through deregulation is seen as essential for the US to regain its competitive edge. Projected debt trends indicate that without significant reforms, the public debt may soar to unprecedented levels, diminishing financial credibility. Furthermore, the report contrasts export and consumption models between the two nations. For the fiscal year 2024-25, India is expected to reach around \$821 billion in exports, significant in supporting its strong economic fundamentals compared to the US's reliance on imports. India's service sector has been particularly resilient, with substantial flows to the US bolstered by \$700 billion in foreign exchange reserves, while US tariffs are viewed as counterproductive to free trade principles. Finally, the perception of the US as a model of small government is challenged, revealing expenditure levels that exceed those of India.

At the EU summit, Orbán will be under pressure about Ukraine's loan veto

Other EU leaders will put pressure on Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary, to cease obstructing a crucial €90 billion loan for Ukraine due to a political disagreement over an oil pipeline. Orbán, who is up for election next month, showed no signs of rescinding his rejection of the loan ahead of an EU summit on Thursday. He declared that he would not permit it unless the damaged Druzhba pipeline from the Soviet era, which supplies Russian oil to Hungary through Ukraine, was fixed. In a video statement released on Tuesday following the release of a letter from Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the president of Ukraine, stating that "all possible efforts" were being made to repair the Druzhba pipeline, Orbán stated, "If there is no oil, there is no money." Orbán claimed to have informed António Costa, the president of the European Council, that Hungary's stance remained unaltered. He declared, "President Zelenskyy must reopen the Friendship [Druzhba] oil pipeline if he wants to receive his money from Brussels."

Zelenskyy expressed his confidence on Wednesday that EU leaders would honor their pledge to provide Ukraine with €90 billion in funding for both general budget support and urgently needed military supplies. During a visit to Madrid, he stated, "We are really counting on the countries and the EU to find ways to resolve this issue." Ukraine is "undertaking all possible efforts to repair the damage and restore operations" to the pipeline, which Kyiv claims was

damaged by a Russian airstrike, Zelenskyy informed EU leaders earlier this week. Hungary and Slovakia are the only two EU countries that benefit from Druzhba, having secured a temporary exemption from the EU's import ban on Russian oil, which was introduced after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Hungary's last-minute blockade of the €90bn loan has infuriated other EU leaders as Orbán agreed to the funding deal last December as long as Budapest did not have to take part. Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic pledged they would not block a decision by 24 EU member states to take out the loan.

The loan offer was a hard-fought plan B agreement after an initial proposal to tap Russian assets as the basis of a loan was rejected by Belgium and a handful of other countries. EU diplomats insisted there was no alternative to what Hungary had already agreed to. "A deal is a deal," a senior EU diplomat said. "So no plan B, no plan C, no plan D. This [€90bn loan] is what needs to happen." A second senior diplomat said: "We cannot talk about plan B, because if we talk about plan B we give in to blackmail." Criticism of the Hungarian government was becoming more and more open, the person said. "The fact that the €90bn loan is blocked after Prime Minister Orbán had explicitly approved it with his colleagues is a turning point and that [criticism] it is clearly expressed now in a way I had not heard or seen before." An EU official said Costa, who will chair the EU summit, held a long phone call with Orbán on Tuesday morning.



"The message was very clear: 'I expect from you that you respect the commitments you have taken at the European Council and that this decision on the €90bn loan is respected,'" the official said, reporting Costa's words. While some diplomats voiced scepticism that Orbán would back down before elections, a leaked draft of the post-summit communique states that EU leaders look forward "to the first disbursement [of the €90bn loan] by the beginning of April". Hungary, along with Slovakia, is also blocking the EU's 20th round of sanctions against Russia, which were meant to be passed last month to mark the fourth anniversary of the full-scale invasion.

Why there has been a significant increase in attacks on gasfields like South Pars

Operations at the Shah gasfield in Abu Dhabi were paused following a successful Iranian drone attack. About 20% of the gas supply in the United Arab Emirates and 5% of the world's granulated sulfur used in phosphate fertilizers come from the site, which can produce 1.28 billion standard cubic feet of gas each day. An Iranian production facility for the South Pars gasfield, which it shares with Qatar across the Gulf, was hit on Wednesday. In Iran, which occasionally finds it difficult to generate enough electricity, the field is the largest in the world and the greatest source of domestic energy. Although neither nation immediately acknowledged credit, the strike, which led to Tehran threatening more reprisal against energy facilities, was widely reported in Israeli media as being carried out by Israel with US approval. In an effort to prevent Iranian reprisal against its neighbors' oil and gas industries, the US and Israel had previously refrained from attacking Iran's energy production facilities in the Gulf. The strikes are significant because they signal a potential deepening of the war, with longer-term consequences for the global economy. While a cessation of hostilities could result in suspended gas and oil shipments returning within months, experts assess that any significant damage to production itself could have a years-long impact. Warning of the impact of possible further escalations, Saul Kavonic, an analyst at MST Financial, told the

Financial Times: "Something that takes out a few million barrels of production would have a bigger impact because it means there is no way to refill stocks even after the war ends." Hitting a liquefied natural gas facility would be the worst, he added, because it could take several years to repair. Oil prices shot up after the South Pars attack on the back of fears that disruption to global energy supplies would worsen.

The disruption raises the political stakes for Donald Trump in the run-up to the US mid-term elections. Diesel prices in the US have already risen above \$5 a gallon for the first time since the 2022 inflation surge that eroded support for his predecessor Joe Biden. After the South Pars attack, Iran listed an array of prominent regional oil and gas sites belonging to Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar that it said were now "direct and legitimate targets" and should be evacuated at once. Loud explosions were heard in Riyadh a few hours later. Qatar, a close US ally which hosts the largest American airbase in the region, blamed the attack on Israel without mentioning any US role. The Qatari foreign ministry spokesperson called it a "dangerous and irresponsible" escalation that put global energy security at risk. The UAE said the South Pars attack posed a threat to global energy and to the security and stability of the region. One lesson from the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq was that it took



much longer than expected to repair damaged energy production infrastructure. The Bush administration had promised that reconstruction would be funded by oil revenues, but even though contractors were able to access Iraqi plants and \$2bn was spent on oil projects, production took more than two years to return to prewar levels. Attempts to repair Ukrainian power infrastructure hit by Russia has highlighted issues around equipment logistics. Energy production in the Gulf has long had a social, political and diplomatic importance far beyond the economic top line. Social settlements with citizens living under often repres-

sive monarchies are based on the sharing of energy wealth, and it is key to living standards and the ability of states to attract foreign workers. Energy is also integral to the way countries in the region interact with each other. The brief detente between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which just survived Israel's attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities last year, was a priority for Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Mohammed bin Salman, as part of his moves to diversify the Saudi economy. He assessed that tensions with Iran were a drain on resources. On the Iranian side the detente was driven by an economy slowly imploding under US-led sanctions.

Sunset over the Red Corridor

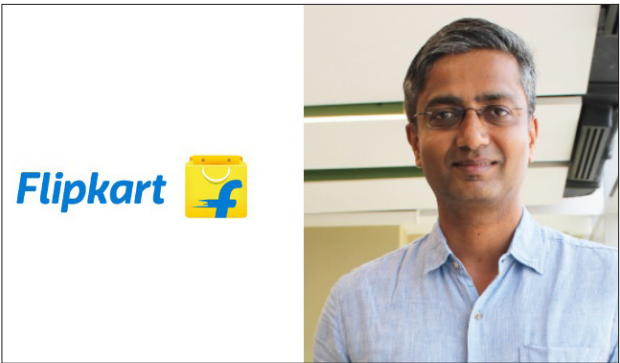
The Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) insurgency, once labeled India's "greatest internal security threat," has reached a critical juncture with the surrender of Thippari Tirupati, also known as Devji, on February 22, 2026. As the general secretary and strategist of the CPI-Maoist, his capitulation, alongside the surrender of Malla Raji Reddy and 21 cadres, represents a significant blow to the organization, symbolizing the collapse of its central command structure.

This event is notably timed just before the Union Home Ministry's deadline to eliminate Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), indicating a possible turning point in the protracted conflict. Devji, who took over leadership after the death of Nambala Keshava Rao, had been instrumental in military planning and operations. His exit has been characterized by officials as a "deadly blow" to the insurgent group, suggesting degradation of leadership capabilities and an erosion of operational momentum across core territories like Bastar and Abujmahar. This decline follows extensive security force operations aimed at dismantling insurgents' operational bases and disrupting their command structures, reflecting the government's dual strategy of applying military pressure while offering socio-economic rehabilitation to encourage surrenders. The implications of Devji's surrender may catalyze further defections among remaining Maoist members due to diminishing morale and organizational cohesion, potentially leading to internal disputes over the pursuit of armed struggle. However, declaring an end to the insurgency remains premature, as significant armed factions persist in remote areas and the fundamental socio-economic issues that fuel the conflict remain unaddressed. While the loss of leaders undermines operational capacity, the movement's ideological appeal could sustain a degree of insurgency, indicating that the battle against the CPI-Maoist is far from over.

Ravi Iyer will oversee the transition after Flipkart CFO Sriram Venkataraman steps away

Bengaluru: Flipkart Group announced on Friday that its chief financial officer, Sriram Venkataraman, is leaving. Venkataraman will stay for a while as Flipkart’s CFO, Ravi Iyer, manages the company’s larger finance division in order to facilitate a seamless transfer. Over the years, Sriram has been a valuable part of the leadership team and has contributed significantly to the development of our financial organization.

Flipkart Group CEO Kalyan Krishnamurthy stated, “We appreciate his contributions and wish him the best for the future. “It has been a privilege to be a part of Flipkart’s journey and to work alongside such a talented team,” stated Venkataraman. Flipkart appointed Nishant Verman as senior vice-president,



corporate development and partnerships. Verman returns to Flipkart after founding Bazaar, a cross-border exports platform. He has previously worked in Microsoft’s corporate development team and in technology investment banking at Morgan Stanley.

The Walmart-owned ecommerce firm has been strengthening its leadership and operations as it prepares

for a public listing. Recent appointments include Jason Chappel as vice-president and group controller, Amer Hussain as vice-president of supply chain for grocery and Flipkart Minutes, Jane Duke as chief ethics and compliance officer, and Vipin Kapooria and Yogita Shanbhag in senior roles.

Former Meta executive Dan Neary joined Flipkart’s board

in December. Flipkart recently completed moving the domicile of its holding company from Singapore to India, a key step towards a potential domestic listing. People familiar with the matter said the company could target an initial public offering (IPO) by the end of 2026 or next year, depending on market conditions and business readiness. The firm is aiming for a valuation between \$36 billion and \$50 billion and may raise \$1 billion to \$2 billion in a pre-IPO funding round to establish a valuation benchmark. India’s ecommerce market is expected to reach \$325 billion by 2030, growing at a compound annual growth rate of 21 per cent, according to a report by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Deloitte.

Godrej Properties purchases a 20-acre Bengaluru land lot

Mumbai: Godrej Properties Limited (GPL), a Mumbai-based real estate developer, has strengthened its position in India’s technology hub by acquiring a 20-acre plot of land in Whitefield, East Bengaluru, where it intends to build a high-end residential project with an estimated revenue potential of around Rs 1,350 crore. “Homebuyers in Bengaluru continue to prioritize thoughtfully designed communities that offer convenience and holistic amenities,” stated Gaurav Pandey, managing director and chief executive officer of Godrej Properties, in response to the acquisition. This piece of land enables us to design a residential



project that meets these standards in an area with consistent and varied housing demand. We will work to build a development that offers our clients superior living conditions, practicality, and high-quality design. The project is located near NH-648 Main Road within the Whitefield growth corridor, a well-established residential and commercial hub

that has emerged as a key centre for technology firms and service-driven employment.

Over the past decade, the company said the micro-market has matured, supported by the development of social infrastructure such as schools, healthcare facilities, retail centres and leisure avenues, enabling it to evolve into a self-sus-

tained urban ecosystem. Residential demand in the area has remained stable, driven by consistent end-user interest across both mid and premium housing segments. In November 2025, the company announced the acquisition of an additional 3.8-acre land parcel in south Bengaluru with an estimated incremental revenue potential of Rs 2,400 crore and about 2 million square feet of development potential. With this addition, GPL plans to develop a large premium residential community with an estimated total revenue potential of Rs 3,500 crore and a developable area of about 3 million square feet across a 30-acre township.

NSE reportedly set a low cost of around 0.65% for its \$2.5 billion IPO



New Delhi: According to persons familiar with the situation, the National Stock Exchange of India has set advisory fees at roughly 0.65% of the issue size for its impending IPO. The entire fee pool might be around \$16.25 million (~ ₹150 crore) based on an anticipated deal size of roughly \$2.5 billion (~ ₹22,750 crore),

with the majority likely to be divided among the six lead banks, according to the persons who spoke on condition of anonymity because the information is confidential. According to data from LSEG, 417 firms paid an average of 1.86% last year, while 350 issuers paid an average of 1.67% in 2024. NSE last week appointed about 20 banks to work on the NSE IPO. Of those, Kotak Mahindra Capital Co. Ltd., JM Financial Ltd., Morgan Stanley, HSBC Holdings Plc, Citigroup Inc. and JPMorgan Chase & Co. have been given key roles, with Kotak acting as left lead, the people said. Representatives for the National Stock Exchange of India and the banks didn’t immediately respond to requests for comment. The relatively modest fee

underscores a broader pattern in India, especially in government-linked or quasi-sovereign transactions, where issuers keep tight control over costs. In some cases, banks accept token fees in exchange for the prestige and league table positioning that comes with marquee mandates. When State Bank of India (SBI) raised ₹25,000 crore in July, it paid six banks a symbolic ₹1 each, according to local media. “Compared with large state-owned or public institutions, NSE’s fee payout appears relatively fair,” said Raghuram Kavisiwanathan, head of IPO advisory at Uniquis Consultech. “With the excitement at the heart of the country’s capital markets, securing a role of fers not just immediate revenue, but a longer-term strategic foothold.”

Earlier this year, State Bank of India and France’s Amundi SA offered fees of about 0.01% for the planned \$1.4 billion IPO of SBI Fund Management Ltd., a level some bankers described as rock-bottom, prompting a few global firms to opt out. Life Insurance Corporation of India paid about 0.58% of the issue size as fee in 2021 while NTPC Green Energy paid around 0.54%, according to IPO prospectus. By contrast, private-sector deals have tended to be more lucrative. Hyundai Motor India’s record IPO in 2024 paid about ₹493 crore, or 1.77% of the IPO size, in fees and commissions—the largest such payout in India. LG Electronics Inc. paid about ₹226 crore or 1.94% to five banks for its \$1.3 billion India listing.

Himanshu Verma is named head of BharatPe’s POS business section

New Delhi: Himanshu Verma has been appointed Head of BharatPe’s POS Business, with immediate effect, the fintech company announced on Thursday. He will concentrate on expanding the company’s offline payments environment, bolstering distribution, and encouraging merchant use.

Verma has more than 20 years of experience in go-to-market strategy, UPI payments, POS/EDC acquisitions, merchant acquisition, channel sales and distribution, and the larger digital payments ecosystem. At Pine Labs, Freecharge, Indepay Networks, Bharti Airtel, Samsung India, Uninor, and Vodafone, he has held important



leadership positions. Himanshu supervised the company’s incubation, launch, and expansion in his most recent position at Pine Labs as Senior Director and National Business Head -- Soundbox. Verma will report to BharatPe CEO Nalin Negi. “His deep experience in scaling large

payment businesses and driving disciplined execution will be key as we continue to strengthen our POS portfolio and expand our merchant footprint. We believe his leadership will help us accelerate our next phase of growth in the offline payments space,” Negi said.

Shares of HDFC Bank fell 7.4% in two days

Mumbai: The stock fell on Friday after a turbulent day in which the board and management of HDFC firm attempted to reassure investors after Atanu Chakraborty’s sudden departure from the firm. It underperformed the overall market, which increased by 0.44 percent, falling 2.41 percent. The bank’s shares ended the day on the BSE at ₹780.45. Nearly ₹1 trillion in market capitalization (mcap) has been lost as a result of the bank’s shares falling nearly 7.5% during the past two days. The bank notified the exchanges late on Wednesday that Chakraborty had resigned from his position as part-time chairman, citing some bank policies that did not align with his morals and principles. Following that, Keki Mistry was appointed interim part-

time chairman of the bank with Reserve Bank of India (RBI) approval. Mistry, on Thursday, tried to assuage investor concerns and reiterated that there are no material matters at this point in time, with respect to the bank. “The bank operates with strong governance standards, robust internal controls and an extremely experienced management team. Our strategic direction, business priorities and execution capabilities continue to remain as always,” he said. “I would not have taken on this responsibility at the age of 71 if it did not align with my principles and my level of integrity that I would expect from the bank,” Mistry emphasised on a call with analysts and press on Thursday. According to a Motilal Oswal note, the development (with HDFC Bank) has

dampened investor sentiment and comes at a time when the markets are already grappling with lot of macro-uncertainty. However, assurances from the management, Mistry’s appointment as interim chairman, and RBI’s endorsement of the bank’s corporate governance and compliance standards have helped assuage some concerns. “Going ahead, we believe appointment of the new chairman and the submission of Shashidhar Jagdishan’s name for the next chief executive officer (CEO) term (term due in October 2026) will help restore investor trust,” the report said. It added that the improved operating performance in the coming year will be critical to stock performance. “There is a period of uncertainty till we get RBI approval for the CEO which is

coming up for renewal in October 2026,” said Suresh Ganapathy, managing director (MD), head of Financial Services Research, Macquarie Capital, in a note on Friday. In a report on Thursday, Ganapathy had stated that Macquarie had removed HDFC Bank from its “marquee” buy list. “Near-term underperformance may remain, while fundamentals are strong with good return on assets (ROA). At this point in time, governance concerns will weigh down heavily on the stock. Investors would want more comfort from the board. Also, now the uncertainty surrounding Sashi’s reappointment will weigh down on the stock,” he said in his report. Ganapathy added that key risks include slowdown in growth and further governance issues. “Though the



management and the board assured of no governance, operational, regulatory or power struggles, we believe the bank must curb management exits and rebuild leadership strength either internally or

externally. It should also swiftly clarify on the current MD and CEO’s term extension beyond October 2026 or place a succession plan to reduce management uncertainty,” Emkay said in a note.

Flipkart indicates consistent performance by setting the bonus multiplier at 105%

Bengaluru: As the firm continues to concentrate on execution and growth and gets ready for an IPO by the following year, Flipkart has set its yearly bonus multiplier at 105% for 2025, indicating consistent performance. “Our collective resilience and sharp focus on execution in 2025 have paid off,” Chief Human Resources Officer Seema Nair said in an internal message to staff, noting that the award represents “progress across key business, operational, financial, and people metrics.” “We maintained strong growth momentum while making significant progress in our journey toward sustainable profitability,” she stated. The bonus will be paid in March for employees at senior director level and below, while payouts for vice presidents and senior vice presidents will follow the close of the annual performance cycle, according to the note. Flipkart employs about 20,000 people. The internal communication highlighted continued progress in strengthening core categories and scaling new growth areas. “We have made significant strides in strengthening our core categories and scaling new engines of growth,” Nair said, adding that the company remains focused on



execution. “The momentum we’ve built is strong, and we must stay agile to capture the opportunities ahead,” she said.

The payout indicates a year of measured progress, with the company pointing to gains across key metrics while continuing its journey toward sustainable profitability. The company, competing with Amazon, Reliance JioMart and Tata’s e-commerce business, has been bolstering its board and streamlining operations in recent months as it prepares for a

public debut. The Indian e-commerce market is expected to reach \$325 billion by 2030, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 21 per cent, according to a Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci)-Deloitte report. The Flipkart group recently named two senior executives — Jason Chappel joined as vice president and group controller, while Amer Hussain was appointed vice president of supply chain for grocery and Flipkart Minutes.

PhysicsWallah will contest the order after receiving a Rs.263 crore tax notice

New Delhi: An income tax demand notice of ₹263.34 crore for the assessment year 2023–2024 has been sent to the edtech company PhysicsWallah. PhysicsWallah stated in a regulatory filing that the claim was made after the Income Tax Department classified investments the firm received from investors during that time, including money from SEBI-registered Category II Alternative Investment Funds (AIF), as taxable income. The assessment order will be contested by the corporation. PhysicsWallah stated, “The company feels it has strong legal and factual grounds to file an appeal before the appropriate appellate authority based on its preliminary assessment.” In the December quarter, PhysicsWallah reported a roughly 33% increase in consolidated earnings to ₹102.27 crore. Its revenue from operations also grew about 33 per cent to ₹1,082.41 crore during the quarter from ₹809.67 crore a year earlier. Shares of PhysicsWallah settled 7.87 per cent higher



at ₹86.81 crore on the BSE on Wednesday. The statutory filing was made post-market hours.

Artal Asia leads a fundraising round for Burger Singh that receives Rs. 82 crore



New Delhi: In a funding round headed by venture capital firm Artal Asia Pte Ltd, Burger Singh raised Rs 82 crore at a

valuation of Rs 520 crore. According to a statement from the company, both new and existing investors, such as Negen Undiscovered Value Fund and Aurum Rising India Fund, participated in the Series B investment round.

The business will use the additional funding to bolster the infrastructure, procedures, and systems needed to create India’s most scalable franchise-first restaurant expansion platform. In order to make restaurant entrepreneurship in India more organized, scalable, and repeatable, the new funding will

be utilized to expand the company’s franchise engine across store design, training systems, operating manuals, supply chain integration, technology, and on-ground market support, according to the company. Burger Singh recorded a revenue of Rs 117 crore in FY25. Founded in 2014 in Gurugram, the company has grown to 200+ outlets across 100+ cities, including Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Shillong, Jaipur, Dehradun, Jammu, Nagpur, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, and Amritsar, among others.

Afghanistan claims that Pakistan’s attack on a hospital in Kabul killed 400 people

Kabul: Afghan officials blamed the Pakistani military for a strike on a hospital treating drug users in Kabul, the country’s capital, which resulted in hundreds of deaths. Hamdullah Fitrat, the deputy government spokesperson for Afghanistan, stated that approximately 250 people had been reported injured and that the death toll had “so far” reached 400. He claimed that patients receiving care at the clinic made up the majority of those slain and injured. Pakistan said it “precisely targeted military installations and terrorist support infrastructure” on Monday night, refuting claims it had struck a civilian target and rejecting the assertion as untrue and deceptive. The state-run Omid hospital had roughly 3,000 patients at the time of the strike, according to Sharafat Zaman, a spokesman for the Taliban’s health ministry. Videos of firefighters battling to put out flames among a building’s wreckage were broadcast by local television stations.“The whole place caught fire. Ahmad, a 50-year-old hospital security guard, stated, “It was like doomsday.” He was the lone survivor among the twenty-five residents of the hospital’s staff housing. According to reports, the strikes started on Monday night at around nine o’clock. The attack started with anti-aircraft gunfire, according to Omid Stanikzai, 31, a security guard at the drug treatment facility, who spoke to AFP. “We were surrounded by military units,” he remarked. “The jet dropped bombs and a fire started when these military units opened fire on it.”Sections of the building collapsed after the strike, according to witnesses who reported significant damage. Rescue crews looked through the debris for survivors on Tuesday morning, but all that was left were scorched walls and heaps of debris. Haji Fahim, an ambulance driver, reported that “everything was burning, people were burning” when he got to the hospital. He told Reuters, “They called me again early in the morning and told me to come back because there are still bodies under the rubble.” “We were inside the wards when the explosion



happened,” said Yousaf Rahim, a patient. “My bed was in the corner, and I suffered injuries to my leg and thigh. It was a horrific scene. Patients fell from their beds, screaming and running as fire and smoke filled the wards and rooms.”Thick smoke and dust spread throughout the hospital,” he added. “Many people lay on the ground. Dozens died instantly, and the critically injured were pleading for help. I didn’t know what to do. I stepped over bodies and managed to escape outside.”Dejan Panic, Afghan director of the Italian NGO Emergency, said it had received three bodies after the strike on Monday night and was treating

27 wounded.The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, said he was “dismayed” by reports of the air strikes and civilian casualties.

“I urge parties to de-escalate, exercise maximum restraint and respect international law, including the protection of civilians and civilian objects such as hospitals.”The alleged attack came hours after Afghan officials said the two sides had exchanged fire along their common border, killing four people in Afghanistan, as deadly fighting between the neighbouring countries continued to worsen.

This is the third time that Pakistan has targeted Kabul with missile strikes in recent weeks. In a post on X, Pakistan’s ministry of information said Monday night’s strikes “precisely targeted military installations and terrorist support infrastructure including technical equipment storage and ammunition storage of Afghan Taliban” as well as Afghanistan-based Pakistani militants in Kabul.“This misreporting of facts as drug rehabilitation facility seeks to stir sentiments, covering illegitimate support to cross-border terrorism,” they added. Islamabad has described the situation with Afghanistan as an “open war”. The fighting began in late February after Afghanistan launched cross-border attacks in response to Pakistani airstrikes inside Afghanistan.

The clashes disrupted a ceasefire brokered by Qatar in October.The conflict is the worst to break out between the former allies.

Relations began to fray over the Afghan Taliban’s alleged role in giving a safe haven and sponsorship to radical militants, particularly the Pakistan Taliban, that have been responsible for a surge in deadly terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Afghanistan’s Taliban government have denied any involvement in cross-border terrorism in Pakistan. China has attempted to play a mediating role in the conflict.

Last week, they dispatched a special envoy to the region to try to ease tensions and bring the two parties back to the negotiating table, but without success.The deadly fighting also continued along the volatile border areas. Afghan officials said four people, including two children, were killed and 10 other people were wounded in south-eastern Afghanistan in an exchange of fire on Monday.On Sunday, Pakistan said a mortar fired from Afghanistan hit a house in north-western Bajaur district, killing four members of a family and wounding two others, including a five-year-old.

Trump calls on seven countries to send warships to guard Iran’s Strait of Hormuz

Washington: As oil prices surge amid the Iran war, President Donald Trump said on Sunday that he has asked roughly seven nations to send warships to maintain the Strait of Hormuz open, but his requests have not resulted in any pledges. The president declined to identify the nations that the administration is negotiating



with to join a coalition to police the waterway, which typically carries around one-fifth of the world’s traded oil. These nations are largely dependent on Middle Eastern crude. Regarding the strait, Trump stated, “I’m demanding that these countries come in and protect their own territory, because it is their own territory,” asserting that the US does not require the shipping lane due to its own access to oil. Trump spoke while answering reporters’ questions as he flew back to Washington from Florida aboard Air Force One. According to Trump, the United States receives very little oil from the strait, while China receives over 90%. He refused to talk about China’s potential membership in the alliance. “We’ll assist; it would be good to have other nations police it with us. “We’ll cooperate with them,” Trump declared. He has already made appeals to Britain, China, France, Japan, and South Korea. Earlier, Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told CBS that Tehran has been “approached by a number of countries” looking for safe passage for their ships, “and this is up to our military to decide.”Without giving specifics, he said that a number of ships from “different countries” had been permitted to pass. Iran has said the strait is open to all except the United States and its allies. Araghchi added that “we don’t see any reason why we should talk with Americans” about finding a way to end the war, noting that Israel and the U.S. started the fighting with coordinated attacks on Feb. 28 during indirect U.S.-Iran talks on Iran’s nuclear program. He also said Tehran had “no plan to recover” the enriched uranium that is under rubble following U.S. and Israeli attacks last year. U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright told NBC earlier Sunday that he has been “in dialogue” with some of the countries Trump had mentioned previously, and said he expected China “will be a constructive partner” in reopening the strait. Britain said Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Sunday discussed with Trump the importance

of reopening the strait “to end the disruption to global shipping,” and spoke with Canada’s prime minister about it separately. Aboard Air Force One, Trump specifically named Starmer, who he said initially declined to put British aircraft carriers “into harm’s way.” “Whether we get support or not, but I can say this, and I said to them: We will remember,” Trump said. A spokesperson for China’s embassy to the U.S., Liu Pengyu, said previously that “all parties have the responsibility to ensure stable and unimpeded energy supply” and that China would “strengthen communication with relevant parties” for de-escalation. South Korea’s Foreign Ministry said it “takes note” of Trump’s call and that it “will closely coordinate and carefully review” the situation with the U.S. Expectations are high that Trump will ask Japan directly when Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi meets him on Thursday at the White House. France previously said it is working with countries - President Emmanuel Macron mentioned partners in Europe, India and Asia - on a possible international mission to escort ships through the strait but has stressed it must be when “the circumstances permit,” when fighting has subsided. Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul of Germany, which was not mentioned in Trump’s call, told ARD television: “Will we soon be an active part of this conflict? No.” Meanwhile, emergency oil stocks “will soon start flowing to global markets,” the International Energy Agency said Sunday, describing the collective action to lower prices “by far the largest ever.” It updated last week’s announcement of 400 million barrels to nearly 412 million. Asian member countries plan to release stocks “immediately,” and reserves from Europe and the Americas will be released “from the end of March.” Trump didn’t directly answer whether his administration is talking about selling oil futures as a way to cap surging oil prices. “The prices are going to come tumbling down as soon as it’s over. And it’s going to be over pretty quickly,” he told reporters. Dubai temporarily suspended flights at its international airport - the world’s busiest - after a drone hit a fuel tank and caused a fire. Civil defense crews contained the blaze and no injuries were reported, authorities said.

Prior to the final round of local elections, French political groups look to form alliances

Paris: Following a good performance by the radical left and far right, French political groups are rushing to forge strategic partnerships ahead of this weekend’s last round of local elections. The last round of voting for mayors and local council members in big cities including Marseille, Lyon, and Paris is anticipated to be tight on Sunday. Before the presidential election the following year, the local election runoffs are viewed as a critical test of political strategy and coalitions. In spring 2027, Emmanuel Macron’s two terms in office will come to an end, and it is unclear who will take over as head of the second-largest economy in the EU. The former culture minister, Rachida Dati, stated that she still wanted to take control of the city for the right despite the left’s 25 years in power, but Emmanuel Grégoire, a socialist, was clearly ahead of her following the first round of voting in Paris over the weekend. Despite their acrimonious campaign exchanges, Dati spent Monday attempting to forge an alliance with Pierre-Yves Bournazel, the moderate contender, in order to increase her prospects. Dati was “inebriated with narcissism” when she served as justice minister, according to Bournazel’s book The Battle for Paris, which was released during the campaign. He was the “physical incarnation of the stupidest right in the world,” according to her. He later said he was against the “brutalisation” of politics. On Monday night, Bournazel told Agence France-Presse that he and Dati would join forces.FILE PHOTO: Posters of Paris mayoral election candidates on electoral billboards for upcoming municipal elections in ParisFILE PHOTO: A man looks at posters of Paris mayoral election candidates Emmanuel Gregoire, Socialist party candidate and head of the “left-wing coalition” list (La Gauche unie) and Rachida Dati, supported by Les Republicains (LR) and the MoDem parties, are seen on electoral campaign panel boards in Paris, France, March 6, 2026. In September, Dati will go on trial in Paris for alleged corruption and abuse of power. She is accused of lobbying for the Renault-Nissan carmaking group when she was a member of the European parliament. She has denied all wrongdoing. Grégoire on Monday highlighted the trial and warned that Dati represented the “Trumpisation” of political life, saying an alliance between her and Bournazel “made no sense”.

Inside Mojtaba Khamenei’s ascent to the position of supreme leader of Iran



Paris: The rise to power of Mojtaba Khamenei as Iran’s new supreme leader may have seemed simple, even predetermined. Actually, it wasn’t either. Only after a fierce struggle for succession did he ascend to prominence. With an empty throne, a council of clerics, and two rival dynasties—Khamenei and Khomeini—the high-stakes process turned into the Islamic Republic’s version of Game of Thrones. Military leaders guarded their territories, political figures competed, and a former spy master with a reputation for masterminding assassinations weighed in. Finding Iran’s third Supreme Leader, a man who would not only represent God on earth but also have power over politics and the military, would have been difficult even in the best of circumstances. After all, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had been in power since 1989 despite decades of unrest in the nation. However, choosing a successor with a lifetime appointment turned into a full-fledged test of theocracy’s ability to endure during a war with the US and Israel, as bombs descended from the sky and explosions shook the land. This recounting of the inner deliberations, power plays and rivalries that thrust the ayatollah’s reclusive 56-year-old son into the leadership role is based on interviews

with five senior Iranian officials, two clerics, two Iranians affiliated with the supreme leader’s office and three members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps with knowledge of the selection process. They all asked for anonymity because they were not authorised to speak publicly about internal government deliberations. By all accounts, Mojtaba most likely would not have risen if his father had died a natural death. Ayatollah Khamenei, who ruled Iran since 1989, had given his close advisers three names as potential successors. His son was not among them. On March 3, the Assembly of Experts, 88 senior clerics constitutionally in charge of appointing a Supreme Leader, held a virtual secret meeting to begin a process that would end when one of the candidates achieved a two-thirds majority. Earlier that day, Israel had bombed the assembly’s headquarters in the city of Qum, where many of the clerics lived and taught at Shia seminaries, killing some of its administrative staff. Since Ayatollah Khamenei was killed on February 28, in airstrikes on the first day of the war, rival political factions and Guards Corps generals had been scheming to elevate their candidates and secure their own power bases, senior officials, clerics and Guards mem-

bers said in interviews.

The hard-liners preferred defiance against the internal and external calls for regime change. They wanted continuity, and a doubling down on the ayatollah’s domestic and foreign policies. The moderate faction argued for a new face, a new style of governance and an end to hostilities with the US.Mojtaba had powerful allies backing him: The Revolutionary Guards and their newly appointed commander in chief, Gen. Ahmad Vahidi; Gen. Mohammad Ali Aziz Jaffari, a Guards strategist in the current war; and Gen. Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the speaker of the Parliament and a former commander of the Guards. Hossein Taeb, the former head of the Guards intelligence unit and the mastermind of cross-border assassination plots, was also in his camp. Opposition to Mojtaba Khamenei’s leadership surfaced from various influential figures in Iran, notably Ali Larijani, currently the de facto ruler, who expressed concerns about Mojtaba being a polarizing leader during discussions with the Assembly of Experts. Voices from the moderate camp, including President Masoud Pezeshkian, a former President Hassan Rouhani, and Hassan Khomeini, the grandson of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, sought alternative candidates.

Rouhani, recognized for his role in the 2015 nuclear deal, and Hassan Khomeini, aligned with reformist parties, were highlighted for their potential to unify. Alireza Aarafi emerged as a compromise candidate due to his solid religious credentials without significant policy influence, making him manageable. Despite these efforts, the Assembly of Experts was increasingly influenced by resentment towards US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which shifted focus from finding a unifying leader to selecting a successor reminiscent of their “martyred” leader to avenge his death. Ayatollah Mahmoud Rajabi mentioned that the assembly had established seven criteria for candidate selection, indicating various strengths in social, political, and religious domains. However, meetings to finalize decisions were frequently canceled for security reasons. Ultimately, Mojtaba Khamenei secured the necessary two-thirds majority during an initial vote on March 3, indicating a decisive influence from the Guards Corps generals, prompting preparations for his succession announcement on March 4. Larijani postponed the announcement of Mojtaba’s ascension to leadership, citing threats to his life from Trump

and Israel’s defense minister. On March 6, Israel attacked the Supreme Leader’s compound, but Mojtaba was not present. This delay allowed the moderate faction to push the Assembly of Experts to reconsider their decision. Larijani challenged the validity of a virtual vote for Mojtaba, stating it contradicted constitutional requirements for in-person voting. Communication with Mojtaba was hindered due to security concerns; however, it was suggested that his dismissal of the role was merely ceremonial. The moderates claimed a directive from Ayatollah Khamenei indicated he opposed hereditary succession for Mojtaba. At a crucial meeting, Khamenei’s aides supported this, revealing his written will against family succession. This unexpected move shocked assembly members and triggered a backlash from Mojtaba’s supporters, leading to accusations of a coup from some assembly members against the moderates. President Pezeshkian announced Iran’s decision to cease attacks on Arab nations in the Persian Gulf and offered an apology, attributing this de-escalation to a transition council’s decision. In response, Revolutionary Guards generals expressed outrage, particularly General Vahidi and General Jaffari, who called for an urgent Assembly of Experts meeting to vote on Mojtaba as the new leader. Former spy chief Taeb urged Assembly members to support Mojtaba, framing it as a moral duty. The Assembly convened on March 8, debated the legitimacy of following Ayatollah Khamenei’s wishes, and ultimately conducted a legitimate virtual vote, resulting in Mojtaba receiving 59 out of 88 votes. Shortly after, state media confirmed him as the new Supreme Leader, with expressions of loyalty pouring in from the establishment.

Experience the magic of cherry blossoms across India this season



For almost as long as we can remember, Japan has proudly held the status of blooming the most beautiful sakura (cherry blossom) anyone can ever witness in the whole world. While that is true, India is not far behind either. If viewing cherry blossom has been on your wishlist for a long time, but you couldn't travel to the land of the rising sun, fret not, India has a lot in store. From the white florals of Almora in Uttarakhand to a tiny village in Kullu, Himachal Pradesh and even in Surat, Gujarat, you can experience the beauty of viewing them without ever leaving the country. The best part? This is the perfect time to visit, as they are in full bloom.

Dobhi village, Kullu Valley, Himachal Pradesh

Right around the house of travel blogger Shubham Mansingka lie sporadic cherry trees in their fruit orchards. You will find apricot or peach blossoms (pink) and plum blossoms (white), and they last for a very brief time, and the full bloom is hardly for 3-4 days, so you have to be very lucky to time it right. According to Shubham, the feeling of viewing them is "magical and cannot really be described in words."

"For years, I have been trying to tell everyone we don't need to go to Japan to experience cherry blossoms; we can experience them everywhere in the hill states. It is the most delirious sight when these white plum blossoms appear after months of winter slumber on the bare trees. There's not a speck of life anywhere else, and suddenly the valley is awash with these white blossoms, and then the pink ones continue. Next will be apple blossoms in another 5-7 days, then pear, if memory serves me right," he says.

Kasar Devi, Almora, Uttarakhand

This place experiences a lesser-known cherry

blossom season, often featuring wild Himalayan cherry or peach blossoms that bloom against the backdrop of snow-capped peaks. These flowers typically bloom between late February and March. Shubham describes the plum blossoms as the standout feature of the landscape during this period. He says that "the pearly white plum blossoms juxtaposed against the dark blue afternoon sky" is his favourite sight. He notes that the blossoms were so abundant it felt like it was "raining plum blossoms." While plum blossoms seem more dominant, cherry blossoms are also present. "I remember while sitting on rustic wooden chairs at Tranquillity Guest House, the cherry blossoms were shedding their flowers, and one fell on my cheek. I would call that nature's way of kissing," he recalls. Other blooms, according to him, include bright red Rhododendron flowers.

Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir

Here, the cherry blossom season occurs from late March to early April, transforming the valley with shades of pink and white, often accompanied by early-blooming almond trees. The season transforms historic gardens such as Badamwari Garden and Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden into pastel landscapes. "I usually walk through the gardens near Dal Lake to witness



them. One time, an old shikara boatman told me that locals wait for this moment every year because it means spring, tourists, and life are returning to the valley. Many residents share small traditions tied to the bloom. A common local story is that families take evening walks under the flowering trees around Dal Lake, where children try to catch falling petals before they touch the ground, believing it brings good luck for the year. Garden caretakers in Mughal-era sites like Shalimar Bagh also speak about how the blossoms remind them of the valley's long history of spring gardens built during the Mughal period," says Sambhav Chopra, a local from the city.

Ladakh

Another hilly region which blooms in mid-April to early May is this. Areas such as Leh town, Nubra Valley and Sham Valley come alive with beautiful pink flowers during the famous Apricot Blossom Festival. According to photographer and travel creator, Laksh Puri, these apricot and apple blossoms are "a photographer's paradise during bloom." He also says that Turtuk and Nubra's microclimate makes them bloom a bit earlier than central Leh.

Shillong, Meghalaya

Shillong is unique because its cherry blossoms bloom in autumn, unlike the rest of the world, which sees them in spring. The Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival, a premier attraction featuring music, art, and scenic views of the flowering trees, is known as India's only autumn cherry blossom festival. The peak beauty usually lasts about two weeks before the petals begin to fall. "It is a surreal sight with the rugged, pine-covered Khasi Hills suddenly softening into clouds of candy-floss pink. To walk through the Upper Shillong lanes during the bloom is to witness a fleeting, pink autumn that feels less like a secret the mountains are finally sharing," shares travel creator Aarti Singh.

An oncologist describes aplastic anemia, an uncommon but dangerous blood condition

While most people are familiar with common anaemia caused by iron deficiency, a much rarer and more perilous form of the disease exists: aplastic anemia. Also described as 'bone marrow failure', this condition represents a critical breakdown in the body's internal blood-production factory. In an interview with HT Lifestyle, Dr Sandip Shah of the Hemato-Oncology Clinic at the Vedanta Institute of Medical Sciences, provided a detailed roadmap for understanding, diagnosing, and treating aplastic anemia. Characterised by Dr Shah as a 'rare but serious blood disorder', the condition remains a critical challenge in modern internal medicine. At its core, aplastic anemia is a functional shutdown of the body's blood production. According to Dr Shah, it is a condition 'in which the bone marrow fails to produce enough red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. He added that this leads to a state of 'bone marrow failure,' warning: "Without adequate blood cell production, patients become severely anemic and remain at high risk of life-threatening infections and bleeding." While the disease does not discriminate by age, Dr Shah observed that it is 'more commonly seen in younger adults'. Pinpointing a single origin is often difficult, as 'in many cases the exact cause remains unknown'.

The oncologist identified several specific environmental and biological triggers:

- Genetic causes
- Certain drugs
- Exposure to chemicals such as benzene
- Radiation
- Viral infections
- Autoimmune attacks on the body's stem cells

Identifying the warning signs

Dr Shah urged the public to be vigilant regarding physical changes, noting that 'patients may experi-

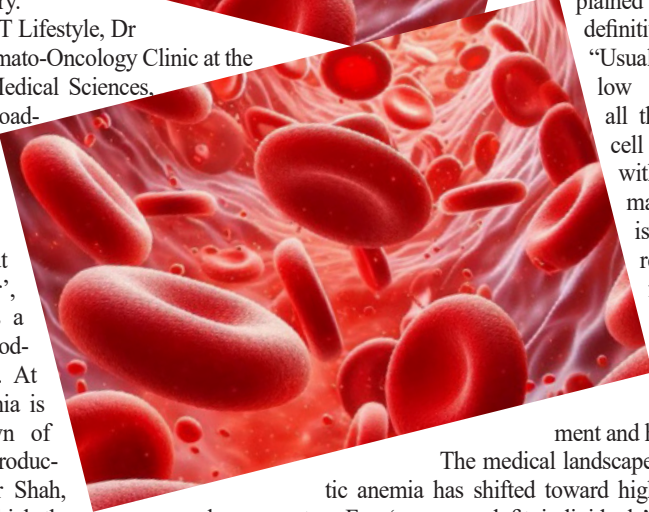
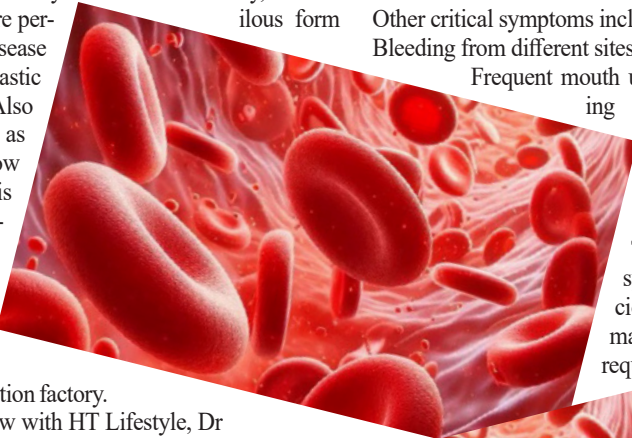
ence persistent fatigue and shortness of breath due to low red blood cell levels'. Other critical symptoms include: Bleeding from different sites in the body Frequent mouth ulcers and easy bruising Recurrent fever or infections because of reduced white blood cells To move beyond symptomatic suspicion, a clinical 'bone marrow biopsy' is required. Dr Shah explained that this definitive test: "Usually shows low counts in all three blood cell lines along with bone marrow that is largely replaced by fat." The path to recovery: treatment and hope

The medical landscape for aplastic anemia has shifted toward high recovery rates. For 'young and fit individuals', Dr Shah stated that the 'definitive treatment is early referral for a hematopoietic stem cell transplant'. This can come from a 'fully matched sibling donor' or donors found through 'national or international registries'.

He said, "With improvements in transplant techniques and growing medical expertise, the cure rate in young patients can now reach as high as 90 percent." For 'elderly or unfit patients', Dr Shah recommended a 'triple immunosuppressive therapy consisting of antithymocyte globulin, cyclosporine, and eltrombopag'. This regimen can 'help the bone marrow recover and improve survival in nearly 60 percent of patients'.

The challenge in India

Despite the high cure rates in clinical settings, Dr Shah highlighted systemic barriers in India, noting, "Many patients face delays in treatment because of limited access to specialised care and socioeconomic constraints." Furthermore, he pointed to a 'lack of awareness and willingness among the public to register as stem cell donors'.



Favourite early spring trips to southern Europe

Saint-Jorioz in Haute-Savoie will provide a springtime lift for your spirits. On the shore of Lake Annecy, it's a short bus ride from the city of Annecy, but less busy and with superior lake and mountain views. Hike to the surrounding peaks, towards the lesser-known Col de l'Arpettaz, or cycle on the excellent greenways. Relax by the cool blue alpine water. Behind you lies the underrated Les Bauges Unesco Geopark. The department only joined France in 1860, and has its own Italian-influenced regional cuisine.

Naples is best in early spring

Although not the most traditionally beautiful city in Italy, Naples offers a glimpse of warmth in early spring. A world apart from Florence or Turin, Naples is a fascinating, lived-in city with a long history and a rich culinary tradition. The Spaccanapoli, which runs right through the core of the city, is a bustling place to walk along and experience Neapolitan life. The world-class sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum are nearby, as are Mount Vesuvius, Sorrento and the wonderful islands of Capri, Ischia and Procida. You can get to Naples by train from London via Paris and Turin or Milan in about 15 hours. Take the ferry to Corsica Eurostar from London via an easy connection at Lille or a change in Paris takes between six and eight hours to arrive in Marseille. After a shower at the station, refresh in Vieux Port before arriving for breakfast in Bastia, Corsica, via a comfortable night-ferry. From Bastia, catch the scenic mountain railway into this remarkably unspoiled island to explore its wild interior and coastal regions. Mid to late spring is best for southern Europe, when snow-melt replenishes streams and waterfalls that dry up in summer. The weather is sunny yet exceedingly pleasant, hill-sides blanketed with wildflowers, wild animals nurturing their young and locals refreshed in mood.

Germany's greenest, sunniest city

Take the Eurostar to Paris and continue east via Strasbourg by high-speed train through the rolling hills and vineyards of

Alsace to Freiburg – Germany's warmest, sunniest and greenest city. (Some routes go via Brussels and Cologne.) Feast on Swabian classics such as käsespätzle (cheesy egg noodles with caramelised onion), enjoy tacos at YepaYepa or drop into Hausbrauerei Feierling's lively beer garden for a drink. From Freiburg, explore the Black Forest's highlights, from Triberg's cuckoo clocks and waterfalls to the treetop walk in Bad Wildbad. Opt to stay at a participating town and you'll receive a Konus guest card, giving you free transport around the region for your entire stay.

Tiny beaches near Nice

I've spent many happy spring breaks in Villefranche-sur-Mer, just a few miles east of Nice. The charm of its historic heart, the beauty of its deepwater bay, the proximity to spectacular coast and mountains, plus excellent cafes and restaurants make it hard to beat. Take the TGV to Nice, then it's just a few minutes on the local train (easy for day trips to Cannes and Menton, too). It should be warm enough for a dip at the tiny, secluded Plage de la Darse, or Plage de la Fosse on swanky Cap Ferrat ...

Lemons and light on the Côte d'Azur

My sister and I spent a beautiful sunny few days in Menton on the Côte d'Azur in early April. We spent our time meandering the cobbled streets with their pastel-coloured buildings, eating a mix of French and Italian meals (it's the last French town before the Italian border) and paddling in the calm blue bay. We trekked in the hills north of the town, past stunning houses, pine trees and spring flowers to explore Maison Gannac, a citrus farm that grows the Menton lemon, which is renowned for its flavour and aroma.

A boat trip along the Moselle in Germany

The Moselle valley in April was stunning. Starting in the old Roman city of Trier, with its amazing Porta Nigra gate, we followed the river 30 miles north-west to enjoy the panoramic views from Burg Landshut. We took boat trips, including to

Cochem, to take the chairlift opposite the castle up to the Pinnerkreuz viewpoint. Early April means wildflower-strewn meadows and fewer visitors. Castles, boats and cable cars kept the children entertained; the fresh Moselle valley rieslings kept the adults happy. We finished our trip in Koblenz, with its selection of traditional breweries where spätzle and schnitzel pair well with any beer.

Coastal paths near Perpignan

Go south by train and resist the rush. Take the Eurostar to Paris, then a fast TGV to Perpignan in six hours, before a final 25-minute local train to Port-Vendres – about nine hours from London, end to end. Early spring suits this working harbour: many places are shut, the fish market is not. Lunch at its no-nonsense restaurant, then walk the coastal paths to Collioure, brighter and busier by comparison. The Pyrénées-Orientales coast is one of France's sunniest areas, and even out of season the light does much of the work.

The hazily golden city of Avignon

En route to Sicily via ferry from Genoa, we stopped in Avignon. We got off the train in the early evening to find a hazily golden city with winding medieval streets full of small independent



shops, the amazing Palais des Papes (Popes' Palace), a beautiful shining Rhône river – and we explored the remaining four arches and gatehouse of the 12th-century Pont Saint-Bénézet. Everywhere was walkable, from the very comfortable and reasonably-priced Bristol Hotel. Warm in the evening, plenty of traditional restaurants, no crowds. In the off-season, Avignon relaxed us, warmed our bones and fed our souls.

ENTERTAINMENT

Sneha Ullal Remembers Getting Together Rai Aishwarya

New Delhi: Sneha Ullal, who debuted in Bollywood in 2005, has talked about her early days in the business and her collaboration with Salman Khan. With the film *Lucky: No Time for Love*, which was directed by Vinay Sapru and Radhika Rao, Salman introduced her to Hindi cinema. At the time, Sneha stood out from other newbies due to her striking similarity to actor Aishwarya Rai Bachchan. Arpita Khan Sharma, the sister of Salman Khan, saw her and suggested that she be placed in *Lucky*. In a recent interview, Sneha discussed Salman Khan's actions on set and recalled meeting Aishwarya Rai Bachchan. She claimed that Salman helped her get used to her new role in the profession by being understanding and encouraging during the *Lucky* filming. AlphaNeon Studioz was informed by Sneha that "Salman Khan supported me a lot during *Lucky* shoot." Sneha responded, "Not even once," when asked if Salman ever lost patience while filming the film. He was really un-



derstanding and encouraging to me. I didn't see Salman Khan's well-known attitude. Talking about her debut, Sneha shared, "I never wanted to come in acting. I was in college. When Aishwarya Rai became Miss World at that time, I was becoming Miss World in my own world because when she got recognised globally, I became famous in my small world because a lot of people used to tell me that I look like her." Recalling the only meeting with Aishwarya Rai, Sneha said, "I met Aishwarya once, and she said 'Welcome to the family. Welcome to Bollywood', something like that. I told her 'I'm sorry, please don't hate me'. There was so much comparison in the media at that time, I didn't know if she took offence." After *Lucky*, Sneha appeared alongside Sohail Khan in the Hindi film *Aryan* in 2006. She later made her Telugu cinema debut with Ullasamga Utsahamga in 2008. Her most recent on-screen appearance was in the Telugu drama *Nilakanta*.

Hrithik Roshan and his cousin Eshaan Roshan collaborate for upcoming film Mess

Mumbai: Actor Hrithik Roshan has recently unveiled a new project. *Mess* is a new comedy film that the actor and Prime Video have collaborated on. Together with his brother Eshaan Roshan, the film will be produced under his company, HRX Films. Hrithik discussed the partnership and said that the movie project expands on the work the team has already begun with the platform, according to a press statement. Producer Hrithik Roshan stated, "Mess feels like a natural next step for us at HRX Films, and Storm marked the beginning of something special with Prime Video. Our partnership with Prime Video has allowed us to explore bold, innovative storytelling, and this project embodies that spirit perfectly." The film follows the story of a group of robbers who break into the house of a man with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). As the night goes on, the robbers slowly realise that the situation inside the house is not what they expected, and they may be the ones who need to survive the night. The screenplay for the film was originally written by American writer Paul Soter.



The adapted screenplay and dialogue have been written by Kapil Sawant. More details about the cast and release timeline are expected to be announced later.

Diljit Dosanjh's Dil-Luminati Tour generated Rs. 943 crore revenue



Mumbai: Diljit Dosanjh's Dil-Luminati Tour solidified its status as one of the most popular and well-attended musical tours by an Indian performer. Over 3.2 lakh people attended Diljit's 14 shows in 13 Indian cities; the Delhi show set an Indian record with 55,000 spectators. According to an audit company Ernst & Young (EY) report, the concert tour brought in ₹943 crore, of which ₹114 crore came from taxes alone. According to EY's analysis on the socioeconomic impact of Diljit Dosanjh's Dil-Luminati Tour, which was prepared in December 2025, over 3.2 lakh people attended the 14 events, with over half (49%) coming from tier-2 and tier-3 cities. The fact that up to 38% of fans traveled from other locations to attend concerts is a good indicator of the tour's success. The tourism and hospitality industries benefited greatly from the fact that more than half of them prolonged their travels by up to five days. One of the biggest tours by an Indian singer, according to the EY report, brought in ₹943 crore. Of this, ₹33 crore came from sponsorship and ₹221 crore from ticket sales alone. The government received ₹114 crore in taxes from the trip, including ₹111 crore in GST and other taxes and more than ₹2.5 crore in fees for different local permits. But the biggest impact of the tour has been the ₹553 crore generated indirectly through a boost to tourism, hospitality, travel, shopping, self-care, food and beverage, and other miscellaneous expenditures by attendees. The report notes "indirect revenue generated due to the tour is based on extrapolation of data obtained through an online survey of over 5,000 attendees". The bulk of the revenue came from North India (42%), followed by West India (23%). The India leg of the tour comprised 14 shows in 13 cities, with Diljit performing in Delhi, Jaipur, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Pune, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Indore, Chandigarh and Guwahati. All the India shows were sold out well in advance.

The Quiet Revolution of Aditi Rao Hydari, Arvind Swami, and Vijay Sethupathi Gandhi Talks



Mumbai: A desire for silence may seem unrealistic in a time when dialogue-driven movies and rich soundscapes are the norm. However, when a movie uses silence to communicate, it appears to be doing more than just amusing viewers. *Gandhi Talks*, directed by Kishor Pandurang Belekar and starring Vijay Sethupathi, Arvind Swami, Aditi Rao Hydari, and Siddharth Jadhav, promises to revive the "silent era" of cinema. The movie's trailer was released. On January 30, it will be released in theaters. Three main characters—Vijay Sethupathi, Aditi Rao Hydari, and Arvind Swami—are introduced in the teaser. The character played by Vijay Sethupathi seems to be living in poverty and hardship

with his mother. Sethupathi's character is very different from Arvind Swami's. Swami, a civil engineer by trade, is the driving force behind numerous skyscrapers. However, an unexpected disaster appears to have destroyed his mansion of dreams. Sethupathi's romantic interest is portrayed by Aditi Rao Hydari. Money, power, machinery, and uncontrollable forces seem to have destroyed their lives. How these intertwined lives navigate the unforeseen drives the plot toward a climax. The concluding spectacle—featuring images of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, and Bhagat Singh—speaks volumes. Their lives appear to have been ruined by money, power, machinery, and uncontrollable forces. The music has been composed by A.R. Rahman. Produced by Zee Studios, Kyoorius, and Moviemill, the film premiered at the International Film Festival of India in 2023. It will release in Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, and Marathi.

In Ramayana, Panchayat's Faisal Malik plays Kumbhakaran

Mumbai: The casting for Nitesh Tiwari's *Ramayana* is still causing a stir. The most recent information contradicts earlier rumors that Bobby Deol would play Kumbhakaran. Actor Faisal Malik, better known as Panchayat's Prahlad Cha, has been hired as Kumbhakaran, the brother of Ravan, who is portrayed by Yash, according to a report by Hindustan Times. According to reports, the actor has already completed the first filming session for the production, which is scheduled to open in theaters this Diwali. "He joined Yash for the introductory Kumbhakaran scene at Prime Focus studio in Mumbai, shot with an international action crew," a source told the publication. The scenes have a lot of visuals, much like *Avatar*. The report further states that major action portions involving the character, which are part of the film's second instalment, are yet to be shot. The source added that Malik's physicality makes



him a strong fit for the role. However, the makers have not officially confirmed the casting, and Malik declined to comment. There is also speculation around Raghav Juyal being considered for the role of Meghnad, though this has not been confirmed either. The film's first look was reportedly planned for Ram Navami at the Gateway of India but has been delayed due to the ongoing Middle East crisis. For now, the makers are keeping the cast details under wraps. *Ramayana* stars Ranbir Kapoor and Sai Pallavi in lead roles, alongside Sunny Deol as Hanuman and Ravi Dubey as Lakshman. The ensemble cast also includes Arun Govil, Indira Krishnan, Lara Dutta, Sheeba Chaddha, Vivek Oberoi, and Kajal Aggarwal in pivotal roles.

Rashmika Mandanna returns to work Mysaa shoot following wedding



Mumbai: After being married to actor Vijay Deverakonda, actress Rashmika Mandaana started filming her next movie, *Mysaa*. She gave a behind-the-scenes look at the Unformula Films action-thriller that is now in development. Rashmika has formally returned to filming the movie after her nuptials and the celebrations that followed. On Instagram, the actor reposted a narrative that director Rawindra Pulle had posted. The team was seen recording over a wide area in the image,

which immediately established the mood for what appears to be a gripping drama. The first glimpse of *Mysaa*, which features Rashmika in a startling and unpolished new look, was just published by the developers. A bleak and merciless world motivated by suffering, survival, and boiling rage is seen in the movie's teaser. A voice-over by a mother speaks of a daughter who refuses to bow to death, setting the emotional core of the narrative. Rashmika appears with fierce energy, physical pres-

ence and sharp gaze, portraying a character forged through struggle. Her growing anger points toward an inevitable and violent clash, suggesting a narrative defined by a refusal to back down. Sharing the teaser on Instagram, the actor wrote, "Mysaa. This is just the tip of the tip of the iceberg. We just wanted to do something fun for an evening to show you the world now and the serious stuff? Ohhhhhohohooio you'll see it in a couple of months. So have funny (sic)!" Directed

by debutant Rawindra Pulle and produced by Unformula Films, *Mysaa* is described as an emotional action thriller set against the culturally rich backdrop of the Gond tribes. Rashmika headlines the film as a Gond woman, a role being positioned as a bold departure from her previous performances. The actor also featured in the Hindi horror-comedy *Thamma* (2025), featuring actors Ayushmann Khurrana, Nawazuddin Siddiqui and Paresh Rawal in key roles.

Deepika Padukone's defense of her demand for an 8-hour work schedule, her departure from Spirit, and the Kalki sequel

Mumbai: In 2025, actor Deepika Padukone reportedly left Sandeep Reddy Vanga's *Spirit* and the *Kalki* 2898 AD sequel, sparking a discussion regarding actors' eight-hour work shifts. Several prominent figures in the industry, including Rana Daggubati and Kareena Kapoor, responded in a variety of ways. After a digital media portal published an opinion piece about the actor's requests, the conversation reappeared on social media. On Instagram, the actor "liked" the article. Debiparna Chakraborty's piece on *The Quint*, which highlighted the actor's decision to withdraw from two high-profile movies and sparked a discussion about her professionalism, was liked by Deepika. The article noted that Deepika



herself called out the industry's hypocrisy: male actors have been working on fixed-hour shifts for years, but when a female actor demands the same, it becomes a 'tantrum.' A social media user

shared the same post on Reddit, where many on the platform came to Deepika's support. One wrote, "The sexism surely exists. If actresses came late to sets like SRK or Salman. They would be thrown

out and called names." Another said, "I support Deepika here. Movies have been shot in 8 hours shift a day even in 80's and 90's, but now they are targeting Deepika when she also has a main reason that she recently gave birth! Misogyny in film industry is so high man." A comment read, "First 8 hour shift can't be labelled as a demand. An actor is putting in the 8 hours to finish the work. Male actors do the same - some of them have no decency but show up late. Why should women just keep sitting around for this? She was being brand unprofessional by a section of industry." Deepika will be next seen in *King* with Shah Rukh Khan. Deepika is also slated to star alongside Allu Arjun in an upcoming film directed by Atlee.

Neymar concentrated on his FIFA World Cup aspirations

New Delhi: After being left out of Brazil’s squad for the forthcoming friendlies against France and Croatia in the United States, Neymar has acknowledged that he was sad. But the forward from Santos said that he still has a strong desire to compete in the FIFA World Cup. As the team gets ready for its final games before the World Cup roster is finalized, Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti once again left out the 34-year-old attacker when he unveiled his selection for the March friendlies on Monday. Neymar expressed his disappointment with the choice, but he is still committed to competing for a spot in the final team. “I’m going to talk about it, because I can’t just let it slide. Of course, I’m upset and sad about not being called up,” Neymar said. The Brazil forward added that he remains focused on improving his fitness and performances in the coming weeks. “But the focus remains day after day, training after training, game after game. We’re going to achieve our goal. There’s still one final call-up left for the World Cup, and my dream lives on. We’re in this together,” he said. Brazil will face France on March 26 in Boston and Croatia on March 31 in Orlando, with the matches expected to be the final opportunities for players to impress before Ancelotti announces his World Cup squad on May 18. Neymar’s omission from the squad is largely due to concerns over his physical condition after returning from a serious knee injury. The forward has struggled



to maintain consistent playing time since recovering from a torn ACL and meniscus injury suffered in October 2023 while playing for Brazil. Although Neymar recently completed a full 90 minutes in a 1-1 draw against Corinthians, he has had limited minutes overall and was rested for a match against Mirassol that Ancelotti attended in person. Brazil’s coaching staff are prioritising players who can cope with the physical demands of a World Cup campaign, where teams may play up to seven matches within a few weeks. Despite the setbacks, Neymar remains Brazil’s all-time leading scorer with 79 international goals and is hoping to prove his fitness in the Brazilian league before the final squad announcement. The Brazil squad for the friendlies includes attacking players such as Vinicius Junior, Raphinha, Joao Pedro and Matheus Cunha, while youngster Endrick also received a call-up. Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti made it clear that Neymar’s absence from the squad was purely based on

fitness concerns. “Neymar is not at 100 percent, and therefore he is not on the list,” Ancelotti said. The Italian manager emphasised that Neymar does not need to prove his ability with the ball but must be physically ready to compete at the highest level. “Neymar is not at 100 percent of his capability. If he can be at 100 percent physically, he can be there,” Ancelotti added. He also suggested that Neymar still has a chance of being part of Brazil’s plans for the World Cup. “Neymar could be at the World Cup. Neymar has to keep working, playing, showcasing his qualities and maintaining good physical condition,” he said. With Brazil’s final World Cup squad set to be announced on May 18, Neymar now faces a crucial period to prove his fitness. The next two months could determine whether the veteran forward earns a place in what could be his final World Cup appearance. For now, the Brazilian star remains focused on working his way back and keeping his World Cup dream alive.

Students from the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad’s Dubai campus are transferred to India

New Delhi, Mar 22: Due to the current unrest in West Asia, all 35 students from the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad’s Dubai campus have been moved to this campus, according to IIMA sources on Tuesday. When the war started, these students, who were enrolled in the one-year MBA program that was introduced in September of last year, were interning in Spain. “Due to escalating tensions in the Middle East, the institute authorities decided to move the students directly to the institute’s Ahmedabad cam-



pus rather than take them back to Dubai,” according to a source. The decision was made to guarantee

the students’ uninterrupted academic timetable. At the IIMA campus in Ahmedabad, these stu-

dents would continue their course through in-person classes until the situation in Dubai stabilises, the

source said. Dubai Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum inaugurated the IIMA’s first overseas campus in the UAE city in the presence of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in September 2025. The IIMA expanded its global presence in management education, with the new campus aiming to deliver world-class learning opportunities to aspiring leaders across the Middle East and neighbouring regions, while fostering rich cross-cultural exchange and academic collaboration.

Three Odisha MLAs are suspended by the Congress for supporting a Rajya Sabha candidate endorsed by the BJP

New Delh, Mar 22: According to a party statement, the opposition Congress in Odisha banned three of its MLAs on Tuesday for supporting Independent candidate Dilip Ray, who was backed by the BJP and helped him win the Rajya Sabha elections. These MLAs are Sofia Firdous of Barabati-Cuttack, Dasarathi Gomango of Mohana, and Ramesh Chandra Jena of Sanakhemundi. The party claims that during Monday’s Rajya Sabha elections, they cast their votes for Ray. The state Congress posted on social media to announce their suspension, saying, “Those who betray Congress are betraying the nation.” Arabinda Das, the head of the State Congress media cell, stated that the decision was made following a thorough analysis of their acts, which were seen to be

harmful to the party’s objectives. He stated that the speaker will be informed of the party’s decision to disqualify them from the assembly. “This act of betrayal was unexpected from these MLAs,” stated Bhakta Charan Das, head of the State Congress. We’ll see to it that the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution disqualifies them from the assembly.” He stated that the decision has been communicated to the party’s national leadership. The opposition “common candidate” Dattaswar Hota lost because eight BJD MLAs, in addition to the three Congress MLAs, supported Ray. Congress had decided to back BJD candidate Hota in a strategic understanding. The Congress media cell chairperson said Gomango was the party’s Gajapati



district president twice. “The party did not expect this from him. Jena was a strong leader, but he destroyed himself. Sofia Firdous had a very bright future. She has ended her chances of winning in Cuttack. We will go ahead with the disqualification

process,” he said. Ahead of the polling, the Congress had moved eight of its MLAs to Karnataka to “shield them from inducements”. Elections were held for four Rajya Sabha seats in the state. BJP bagged two of them, the BJD secured one, besides Ray’s victory.

Two Iranian female football players who were granted asylum in Australia work out with the Brisbane Roar

New Delhi: The two Iranian women’s soccer players who decided to stay in Australia after applying for asylum have been seen training with a local A-League team as they start their new lives there. Seven members of Iran’s delegation, including midfielder Fatemeh Pasandideh and defender Atefeh Ramezanizadeh, were granted humanitarian visas due to concerns about potential persecution if they went home following their participation in the women’s Asian Cup in Australia. The players’ failure to sing the national anthem prior to their first game on the Gold Coast in Queensland raised questions about their safety. They were called “wartime traitors” by Iranian official media, and the team’s campaign started when Israel and the United States attacked Iran. Five members of the group, however, subsequently changed their



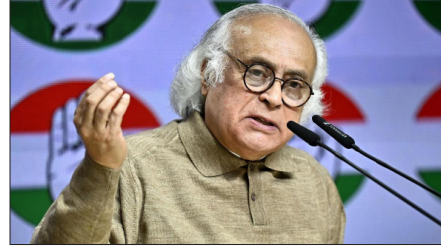
minds about Australia’s asylum offer and decided to return home. Queensland-based A-League club Brisbane Roar announced on social media the remaining two players, Pasandideh and Ramezanizadeh, had joined a training session with its women’s team on Monday. “Brisbane Roar officially welcomed both Fatemeh Pasandideh and Atefeh Ramezanizadeh to the club’s training facili-

ties...and remain committed to providing a supportive environment for them whilst they navigate the next stages,” CEO Kaz Patafta said. Photos posted by the club showed the two players meeting the Brisbane Roar squad and taking part in shooting drills. “Thank you for everything,” wrote Ramezanizadeh, 33, under the post on Instagram. Pasandideh, 21, also posted on her Instagram story on Monday

a photo with FIFA Chief Football Officer Jill Ellis in Brisbane with a caption saying “everything will be fine”. While the pair began their new lives in Australia, their former teammates made their way home to Iran from Malaysia. The team was seen at Kuala Lumpur International Airport on Monday evening checking in on an Oman Air flight, although their destination was unclear.

Jairam Ramesh likens the Hormuz conflict to the Suez conflict of 1956

New Delh, Mar 22:As the Strait of Hormuz crisis unfolds, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh drew parallels with the Suez crisis of 1956, highlighting the pivotal role of Indian envoy VK Krishna Menon in diplomatic efforts that initially succeeded. Ramesh recounted the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Egyptian President Nasser on July 26, 1956, which escalated tensions leading to a UK, France, and Israel invasion later that year. This invasion was ultimately halted due to US intervention by President Eisenhower. Ramesh noted the deployment of a UN Emergency Force along the Egypt-Israel border after the invasion was called off, which included contingents from ten countries, including India, and lasted until 1967. These reflections come as fears of a global energy crisis arise due to Iranian strikes affecting shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, leading to increased oil prices and pressure on the US government to address these challenges.



Maharashtra approves the Freedom of Religion Act



Mumbai, Mar 22: The Maharashtra assembly has passed the Freedom of Religion Bill 2026, which enforces strict penalties against religious conversions through coercion, fraud, or inducement, particularly linked to marriage. Offenders could face seven years of imprisonment and fines up to Rs 5 lakh, especially if the victim is a minor or from marginalized communities. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis stated the law is not directed against any religion but aims to protect individuals from unlawful conversions. The bill requires individuals to notify authorities 60 days prior to converting and to report conversions within 21 days to prevent legal disputes. Despite opposition calls for further discussion, the law is viewed by supporters, including the Shiv Sena (UBT), as necessary to guard against coercive practices while ensuring constitutional rights are upheld. Bhoir stated that children born from marriages resulting from illegal conversions will follow the mother’s original religion. BJP’s Atul Bhatkalkar warned against altering Maharashtra’s demographics through religious conversion. The bill was declared passed by presiding officer Sanjay Kelkar, despite Opposition MLAs, including Congress’s Aslam Shaikh, expressing concerns about potential “vigilantism” and arguing that the bill infringes upon constitutional rights, specifically Articles 14, 15, and 21. Samajwadi Party MLAs also opposed the bill.

Vaishnavi Adkar is getting closer to India’s top WTA ranking

New Delhi, Mar 22: For the first time in her career, Vaishnavi Adkar entered the WTA top 400, continuing her incredible journey. The Pune-born player shot up 71 spots to a career-high No. 397 in the most recent rankings after winning the ITF W35 Kalaburagi title. More importantly, Sahaja Yamalappalli was only six spots ahead of her at No. 391, putting her within touching distance of India’s top rank. After her impressive performances in Bengaluru and Kalaburagi, the 21-year-old, who began the year ranked No. 643, has had an incredible ascent. She advanced to the W100 final in Bengaluru, becoming the first Indian woman to do so since Sania Mirza in 2009. In Kalaburagi, she went one step further, winning the title and receiving USD 4,860 in prize money. Vaishnavi delivered a breakthrough performance in Kalaburagi, capping off a superb week by winning both the singles and doubles titles. Seeded third, the youngster claimed the singles crown after beating compatriot Ankita Raina 7-6(3), 6-4 in an all-Indian final on March 8. It was a composed display from Vaishnavi, especially in the tightly contested opening set, before she took control in the second. In the semifinals, Vaishnavi stunned top seed Jasmijn Gimbre, ranked No. 399 in the world, with a commanding 6-3, 6-2 win to book her place in the final. She also completed a



memorable double in Kalaburagi, partnering Ankita Raina to win the doubles title with a convincing 6-2, 6-2 victory over Soha Sadiq and Akanksha Nitture. Born on December 14, 2004, Vaishnavi is regarded as one of the country’s brightest young prospects. Trained by Kedar Shah at Bounce Tennis Academy, she began playing at seven and climbed to an ITF junior ranking of No. 115, while also becoming India’s No. 1 Under-14 player. In 2024, she

won her maiden professional singles title at the ITF W15 Ahmedabad, where she also claimed the doubles crown. Her breakthrough came in 2025 when she won bronze in women’s singles at the Summer World University Games in Germany, becoming the first Indian woman to medal in tennis at the event. With her performances in Bengaluru and Kalaburagi, Vaishnavi has shown her potential to make a lasting impact on the international circuit.

A panel established to investigate the implementation of UCC in Gujarat publishes a report

UCC refers to a common set of laws for personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and succession for all citizens

Gandhinagar, Mar 22: Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel received a report from the high-level committee established to investigate the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in Gujarat on Tuesday. The report proposed a common legal framework for marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption for all religions and communities. The study emphasizes equal rights for women, according to officials. The committee, led by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, conducted a thorough investigation and conducted public consultation tours around the districts before preparing its findings.



The report was filed one week after the Supreme Court hinted that gender discrimination in personal laws would be addressed through UCC. The first state to enact a UCC law was Uttarakhand, which is headed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in February 2024. The Uttarakhand High Court has heard challenges to the law

from Muslim organizations. The other significant unfulfilled ideological promise of the ruling party is the implementation of UCC, which has been pledged by other BJP-ruled states like Gujarat and Assam. Since the BJP took power at the national level in 2014, two more significant ideological objectives have been accomplished: the building of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir’s semi-autonomous status under Article 370 of the Constitution. UCC, a contentious and polarising issue, refers to a common set of laws for personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and succession for all citizens. Constitution’s Article 44, one of the directive principles of state policy, advocates UCC. But respective religion-based civil codes have governed personal matters since independence.

French wildcard Moise Kouame reacts



New Delhi: French wildcard Moise Kouame expressed his excitement after receiving a congratulatory message from Novak Djokovic following his victory over Zachary Svajda at the Miami Open. At 17, Kouame became the youngest man to win an ATP Masters 1000 match since Rafael Nadal in 2003. He described the moment as surreal and a dream come true, noting it brought him tremendous confidence. Kouame acknowledged the importance of the win, calling it a significant milestone in his career. He is set to face World No. 22 Jiri Lehecka in the second round, continuing his rise in the ATP rankings, where he is currently ranked No. 385. Kouame called it a huge milestone, saying the win in his first Masters 1000 main draw in Miami gave him a major confidence boost and confirmed he is on the right path.

Novak Djokovic's rating is expected to decline following Miami's withdrawal



New Delhi: Despite winning the Miami Open six times, Novak Djokovic pulled out of the second leg of the "Sunshine Double" owing to a right shoulder ailment. The 24-time Grand Slam champion fell to Jack Draper in the Indian Wells fourth round. His standings are expected to be significantly impacted by the withdrawal. It is certain that Djokovic will fall out of the top three and fall to No. 4 in the world, behind Alexander Zverev. Depending on the Miami Open results, there's also a chance for a greater decline. Indian Wells made his tour comeback earlier this year, and despite losing in the fourth round, he has a 7-2 win-loss record thus far. The Monte Carlo Masters, which usually signifies the beginning of the clay-court season, presently has Djokovic on the entrance list. He has only made one semifinal appearance in the last few years, therefore his recent per-

formance at the tournament has been lackluster. The Serbian has actually cut back on his clay-court duty in recent seasons, carefully planning his calendar with a distinct emphasis on Grand Slams. As he prepares for the French Open, where he will once more pursue a record-extending 25th major vic-

tory, that strategy is anticipated to continue. Djokovic, a three-time champion at Roland Garros, last won the title in 2023. He exited in the quarterfinals in 2024 and the semifinals in 2025, underlining a slight dip in dominance on the surface compared to his peak years. With Djokovic out, the spot-

light in Miami will firmly shift to Jannik Sinner, who arrives in red-hot form after winning Indian Wells, and Carlos Alcaraz, a perennial title contender. Daniil Medvedev will also be one to watch, especially after his strong run to the Indian Wells final, where he defeated Alcaraz en route.

Saptak Talwar Wins the 2026 Indorama Ventures Open Championship



New Delhi: At the US\$300,000 Indorama Ventures Open Golf Championship on Sunday, Saptak Talwar won handily. The 27-year-old won the championship at the Kalhaar Blues & Greens Golf Club with a tournament total of 10-under 278 after finishing the last round with a solid two-under 70. Talwar, who went into the last day as a co-leader, has already won twice in his professional career. He went from 44th place to the top of the DP World PGTI Order of Merit after winning a top award of US\$48,000 (about ₹43.20 lakh). Christoph Bleier of Austria, who shot a final-round 69 to finish second at 8-under 280, was two strokes behind Talwar.

Talwar's consistency was the hallmark of his week. Despite a setback on the 9th hole where his ball found the water resulting in a bogey, he recovered with a clinical "up-and-down" birdie on the par-5 14th. Talwar said, "I felt a massive boost in confidence after the birdie on the 14th and the par on the 15th," Talwar said following his win. "The best part of my game was limiting mistakes. I

only made four bogeys across the entire tournament despite the challenging course conditions." The Greater Noida resident attributed his recent form to his experience playing abroad on the HotelPlanner Tour, noting that the international exposure significantly improved his ball control and mental toughness.

With this win, Talwar's total season earnings have reached ₹46,00,200, making him the current leader in the DP World PGTI rankings. Nikhil Chopra - It was great event. We need more infrastructure boost for golf courses in India. It is great that Indian won the championship. Stuart Kelly - It is good that Indian won the championship even if foreign players were less due to ongoing tension. Next year the tournament will be bigger.

Emma Raducanu pulls out of Miami Open



Tour, with her only significant win coming against World No. 86 Anastasia Zakharova. With her Miami withdrawal, she will miss

New Delhi: British tennis player Emma Raducanu has withdrawn from the 2026 Miami Open due to illness and ongoing postviral symptoms,

marking another challenge in an already difficult season. The 2021 US Open champion was set to participate in the WTA 1000 tournament in Miami, where she had earned a bye into the second round as the 24th seed. However, after contracting a virus during her Middle East tour in February, she opted to withdraw to focus on recovery.

This season has been particularly tumultuous for Raducanu, featuring a foot injury in the offseason, a coaching split with Francisco Roig after the Australian Open, and early tournament exits in Doha and Dubai. In 2026, Raducanu has struggled with consistency, posting a 7-7 win-loss record on the WTA

out on defending 215 ranking points from her 2025 quarter-final appearance, which could affect her fluctuating position outside the top 30 in the WTA rankings.

Last year's performance was a highlight for her, as she reached the quarterfinals in Miami before losing to fourth seed Jessica Pegula.

Raducanu's absence, alongside other injured players like Sonay Kartal, impacts Great Britain's representation at the tournament. Her team indicates that she plans to fully rest and rehabilitate before returning to competition for the clay court season in April, with the Linz Open anticipated to be part of her upcoming schedule.

Senegal's AFCON championship was revoked, and Morocco emerged victorious



New Delhi: The Confederation of African Football (CAF) proclaimed Morocco the winners of the Africa Cup of Nations on Tuesday, shockingly depriving Senegal of the championship. When the host country was given a penalty late in second-half stoppage time on January 18, a number of Senegalese players controversially left the field in Rabat. Pape Gueye scored the goal in extra time to give his team a 1-0 victory after Morocco missed the penalty after Senegal's players were eventually persuaded back onto the field by captain Sadio Mane. According to CAF, "the Senegal national team is declared to have forfeited the match," and the outcome

was "officially recorded as 3-0" in Morocco's favor after reviewing their appeal. Articles 82 and 84 of the AFCON Regulations, which stipulate that a team "refuses to play or leaves the ground before the regular end of the match without the authorisation of the referee, it shall be considered (loser) and shall be eliminated for good from the current competition," were used by the CAF Appeals Committee to support its ruling. The team that violates the rules "will lose its match by 3-0," according to the articles.

The appeal "was never intended to contest the sporting performance of the teams participating in this competition, but solely to request the

application of the competition regulations," according to a statement from the Royal Moroccan Football Federation (FRMF). "The Federation reaffirms its commitment to respecting the rules, to the clarity of the competitive framework, and to the stability of African competitions," the statement added. Minutes before the end of the match, some Senegalese supporters attempted a pitch invasion, while Senegal's players halted the game for nearly 20 minutes to protest the late penalty awarded to Morocco. The controversial spot-kick was awarded by Congolese referee Jean-Jacques Ndiella right at the end of the allotted eight added minutes in normal time following a

VAR check for a challenge on Braham Diaz by El Hadji Malick Diouf. The game was goalless at the time and Diaz could have won the trophy for Morocco with the spot-kick in the 24th minute of added time at the end of normal time.

But Senegal goalkeeper Edouard Mendy easily saved the weak attempted 'Panenka' chip by the Real Madrid winger, who was clearly distracted by the long delay that followed the penalty award. The game at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium then went to extra time, and Gueye's brilliant 94th-minute strike won it for Senegal. They can appeal the decisions of the CAF Appeals Committee at the Switzerland-based Court of Arbitration for Sport within 10 days. The Senegalese football federation made no immediate reaction but several of the team's players posted on social media. Defender Moussa Niakhate, who plays for French club Lyon, posted a picture of himself lifting the Africa Cup of Nations trophy with a message that said "they're mad", in an apparent reference to CAF.

Sam Billings claims that Dhoni has a personal "Shisha Man"

New Delhi: MS Dhoni has a side that doesn't often make news. This week, former England wicketkeeper Sam Billings provided a glimpse into the CSK veteran's personal life. He is a supporter of Manchester United. Since you can't leave the room and head downstairs to the hotel bar, we watched every United game. He does not close his hotel room. Billings stated, "He has a small shisha man who takes care of the shisha. Those who have shared a dressing room with Dhoni will recognize the situation. Michael Hussey, a former batting coach for Australia, had a similar opinion earlier on The Overlap. "His room is available, open 24 hours a day. Anyone can go up there and just sit. Players just sit around, they start talking cricket, some of them like the shisha.

That is their way of socialising," Hussey recalled. For someone who has been in the public eye for two decades, Dhoni's way of unwinding is straightforward enough. An open door, a United match and good company. Off the field, the shisha and football. On it, another IPL season beckons. Chennai Super Kings CEO Kasi Viswanathan confirmed ahead of IPL 2026 that Dhoni will be available for the full campaign. "He will play the matches, all matches," Viswanathan told reporters in Chennai. On the question of his exact role, the CEO left it to the coaching staff. "That's a cricketer's decision which will be taken by the cricketing staff. They will decide whether he is going to play as a batter, a wicketkeeper-batter or as an Impact Player," he added. Dhoni has been training in Chennai alongside his teammates after earlier net sessions in Ranchi. At 44, questions about how long he will continue have become a fixture of every IPL build-up. He has not given much away. But then, he rarely does.

Clinical PSG defeats Chelsea to advance to the quarterfinals of the Champions League

New Delhi: Khvicha Kvaratskhelia was one of the scorers in Paris Saint-Germain's clinical 3-0 victory at Stamford Bridge on Tuesday, which eliminated any possibility of a Chelsea comeback and advanced the holders to the Champions League quarterfinals 8-2 on aggregate. Chelsea's hopes of overcoming their 5-2 lead from the first leg of the last-16 match last week were swiftly dashed after the Georgian's early opening was followed by a magnificent Bradley Barcola goal. PSG's third goal in the second half was subsequently scored by substitute Senny Mayulu, as Luis Enrique's team advances to a last-eight match against either Liverpool or Galatasaray next month. The Turkish team will travel to Anfield on Wednesday with a 1-0 first-leg advantage. A year after winning the trophy for the first time in their history, PSG's ambition of winning the Champions League again is still very much alive.

In addition to exacting revenge for their defeat to the Blues in the Club World Cup final last July, the Qatar-backed team's convincing victory in this match suggests that they may be regaining their peak performance at the ideal moment. It's incredible. Kvaratskhelia told broadcaster Canal Plus, "To score



three goals away against Chelsea is good, and the important thing is that we continue to play very well, so we have to keep going like this." This was their fourth win in a two-legged knockout tie against Premier League opposition since the start of last year, but while that record is impressive, Chelsea looked a long way short of the level required in Europe's elite club competition. Liam Rosenior's team never really appeared to believe they could come back from their collapse six days ago at the Parc des Princes, when they conced-

ed three late goals to go from 2-2 to 5-2 down. "A tough night. We knew it was a tough ask and then we started the game in the manner that we did," Rosenior told TNT Sports. Their attention will now turn back to the fight to qualify for the Champions League again next season, after a miserable week in which two defeats against PSG have come either side of a loss at home to Newcastle United in the Premier League. "When you go through a difficult run, you have to make sure your habits are right," Rosenior added. "We have a re-

ally difficult game at Everton (on Saturday) and we have to be at our best to get a result there." Robert Sanchez started in goal here, as he had done at the weekend, after Filip Jorgensen replaced the Spaniard and was at fault for PSG's crucial third goal in the first leg. Within six minutes here they were ahead as Mamadou Sarr -- making his Champions League debut -- misjudged a long kick downfield from PSG goalkeeper Matvey Safonov and Kvaratskhelia outmuscled the young Chelsea defender before beating Sanchez.

Kimi Antonelli is aiming for more Formula One glory

Kimi Antonelli said Monday that he is eyeing further Formula 1 success after the teenage Italian announced himself on the world stage with victory in the Chinese Grand Prix.

Hyderabad: Kimi Antonelli, a teenage Italian who made a name for himself on the international scene by winning the Chinese Grand Prix, stated on Monday that he is looking for further Formula 1 success. When the 19-year-old arrived in his hometown of Bologna on Sunday, he was welcomed by the media and fervent supporters after winning his first Grand Prix from pole position.

"I'm so happy for the win and to have brought the Italian flag back onto the highest step of the podium," Antonelli stated to reporters. "It's a starting point and I hope I can keep going because we're on the right track. It won't be easy.

"The first Italian to win an F1 Grand Prix since Giancarlo Fisichella twenty years ago is Antonelli, who replaced Lewis Hamilton at Mercedes at the beginning of the 2025 season. He became the youngest pole sitter in Formula One history and finished ahead of Ferrari's Hamilton and Mercedes colleague George Russell. Additionally, Antonelli made it clear that his goal was to become the first Italian driver to win the championship since Alberto Ascari in 1953. "I feel a little lighter and more at ease. It's the kind of outcome that makes you stronger and more conscious



of your abilities," he remarked. The most challenging step is the next, larger one. If I do everything correctly, I'm confident we can make it." Tennis player Jannik Sinner dedicated his Indian Wells victory to F1's emerging star after Antonelli's victory made headlines in Italy. I was rather taken aback by Sinner's tribute, and I sent him a message since I thought it was quite kind of him," he remarked. With the Japanese Grand Prix scheduled on March 29, Antonelli is currently four points behind Russell in the world championship standings.