

In Brief

AABYSF seeks political representation

Bongaigaon: The All Assam Bengali Youth Students' Federation (AABYSF), specifically its Bongaigaon District Committee, has called for enhanced political representation for the Bengali community in the Brahmaputra Valley ahead of the forthcoming legislative assembly elections. They emphasized the significant Bengali voter demographic, which is not adequately represented in legislative and administrative frameworks. District General Secretary Kamal Ghosh articulated a demand for the reservation of at least 10 seats in the assembly elections for Bengali representatives. Although the federation identifies as a non-political entity, it pledged to persist in advocating for the community's democratic rights, warning of potential democratic protests if their requests are unmet.

Millet farming in Arunachal's Namsai

Itanagar: Union Minister Suresh Gopi chaired a review meeting of the Aspirational Districts Programme in Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh, urging officials to focus on women's health, teacher training, and millet cultivation for district development. He highlighted the Centre's 'Nari Shakti' initiative, promoting women's health and cervical cancer prevention through screening. Gopi directed the Health Department to track cervical and breast cancer patients for better monitoring. He also suggested placing a proposed medical college on the district periphery for better access and called for educational improvements through teacher assessments and capacity-building initiatives to enhance learning outcomes.

Manik Saha Slams 'Tipraland' Narrative

Agartala: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha criticized the long-standing demands for "Tipraland" and "Greater Tipraland," claiming that innocent Janajati people have been misled for years. Speaking in Dumdum, he noted that past leaders in the Autonomous District Council neglected development and ignored indigenous communities' aspirations. Saha emphasized his government's commitment to collaboration with the ADC for a "Viksit Tripura" focused on unity and inclusive growth. He also welcomed 215 new voters to the Bharatiya Janata Party, asserting the party's dedication to progress and transparency in administration. He stated that the aim is to ensure development reaches every section of society without discrimination. "We are trying to govern the state with complete transparency. Our priority is the socio-economic uplift of people from all communities. We want to build a new Tripura together," he added.

Arunachal Guv bestows the CM's Award and State Awards for outstanding public administration

The State Gold Medal was awarded to Havildar and Honorary Naib Subedar Lekhi Passang (Retd) of the 2nd Battalion, Arunachal Scouts; whistle-blower Late Gyamar Padang of the Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission and the Women Police Station, Pasighat, for their exceptional service and achievements.

Itanagar, Feb 22: In honor of their service and achievements to the state, Arunachal Pradesh Governor K. T. Parinaik awarded the State Gold and Silver Medals to notable people and organizations on February 20. At an event at Lok Bhavan, he also gave out the Chief Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration. Havildar and Honorary Naib Subedar Lekhi Passang (Retd) of the 2nd Battalion, Arunachal Scouts; whistle-blower Late Gyamar Padang of the Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission; and the Women Police Station, Pasighat received the State Gold



Medal for their outstanding service and accomplishments. The State Silver Medal was given to a number of politicians, social workers, and organizations in recognition of their services to public service, welfare, and governance in various areas. Administrative officers, law enforcement officers, physicians, forest officials, and community-based organizations were among the

recipients. Several departments and agencies received the 2025 Chief Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration in recognition of their creative projects. The West Siang district's Urban Development Department received recognition for its accomplishments under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) 2.0, the Nirmal Aalo Movement, and the

beautification of Aalo Town. The District Urban Development Agency, Namsai, was recognized for putting a septage management project in cluster towns into action, and the Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission was honored for institutional improvements. The office of the Deputy Commissioner, Longding, was awarded for developing a multi-purpose

sports hub and recreational park at Kanubari. The District Administration and Women & Child Development Department, West Kameng, was recognised for establishing a technology-enabled anganwadi centre in Bomdila. The award carries a cash prize of Rs 10 lakh and an honorary scroll. Chief Minister Pema Khandu lauded the Urban Development

Department, Aalo, noting that it had earlier been honoured by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) at the Urban Challenge Summit and Awards ceremony. The recognition marks the department's second major award for its urban initiatives. Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein and other dignitaries were present at the ceremony.

Meghalaya High Court maintains the infrastructure company's blacklisting due to bribery ledgers

Shillong, Feb 22: A Hyderabad-based infrastructure company, BSCPL Infrastructure Ltd, has lost its appeal against a five-year ban from government contracts in Meghalaya, upheld by the state's High Court. The court ruled that ledger entries indicating gifts and cash payments to public officials provided valid grounds for the company's blacklisting by the Public Works Department (PWD) on December 3, 2024. The controversy originated from a Rs 1,303.83 crore road construction contract from February 2011, which faced significant delays, ultimately costing Rs 2,406.46 crore by its completion in December 2017. During arbitration proceedings, a detailed ledger was discovered, revealing numerous payments made to government officials, in-



cluding cash for gifts, electronics, and donations. Despite BSCPL's argument that these entries represented routine business expenses rather than bribes, the court found the company had not adequately explained these payments. They rejected claims that the timing of the

complaint was intended to undermine arbitration, noting the court's mandate to prioritize public interest. The ruling reaffirmed the PWD's authority to blacklist contractors who engage in corrupt practices, iterating that procedural fairness is necessary yet subordinate to public interest.

Tripura demands that Hindi be promoted alongside regional languages

Agartala, Feb 22: On February 19, Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha emphasized the value of promoting Hindi in addition to regional languages in order to improve national unity and communication. According to him, Amit Shah has selected Agartala to host the Joint Regional Rajbhasha Sammelan at the International Indoor Exhibition Centre in Hapania for the Northern, Eastern, and North Eastern regions. Representatives from East and Northeast India are expected to attend the event, which will feature a keynote speech by the Union Home Minister. Speaking on the sidelines of the AI Summit, Saha also highlighted India's growing progress in artificial intelligence, noting that Narendra Modi has consistently emphasised the role of AI in governance and development. He said that artificial intelligence



will be increasingly integrated into government departments in the coming years and added that provisions for AI development have been included in the recent state budget. Saha expressed confidence that India is poised to emerge as a global platform for AI-driven innovation across sectors.

Gaurav Gogoi is defended by Priyanka Gandhi Vadra amid the dispute over Pakistan's ties

Guwahati, Feb 22: On February 20, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra came out firmly in support of Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, claiming that attacks on him are evidence that he is on the "right path" in the face of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's incendiary accusations of Pakistani ties. Speaking to reporters here, the senior member of Congress took a strong stance on politics. "There are two types of leaders - one, those with a positive mindset and others who believe in polarisation and attacking people," she stated. Because "he is walking on the right path," she said, Gogoi and his family were targeted. "It is like a badge of honor," she added. In Assam, the comments exacerbate a sour political dispute. Sarma has frequently



charged Gogoi and his spouse with having connections to Ali Taqueer Sheikh, a Pakistani national, and a conspiracy to impede India's progress. He declared that a central agency is now in charge of the investigation, which was previously managed by a state

Special Investigation Team. "We have sent the Central government this case along with the supporting documentation, and they will look into it," Sarma had previously said. Sarma was pushed to change his attention by Priyanka. She advocated for

governance over personal attacks, saying, "You should tell the CM to talk about the development of Assam and what he has done for the state." She went on to say that Assamese voters understand the BJP's discomfort with Gogoi's growing prominence.

'A region once neglected' now central to national landscape

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma on Barak Valley

Guwahati, Feb 22: As Union Home Minister Amit Shah gets ready to start the countrywide Vibrant Village Programme II from Cachar today, February 20, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma highlighted the growing importance of the Barak Valley in the state's development and India's Act East policy. Sarma made reference to the forthcoming Barak Valley Secretariat in an X post, writing: "Today, as Adarniya @AmitShah ji is set to launch the nationwide Vibrant Village Programme II from Cachar, it shows the region's importance in the national landscape." Previously disregarded, he defined the region as "an important area in Assam's development perspective

and in the national Act East vision." Ahead of the Assam Assembly elections, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi unveiled a 20-point "chargesheet" against Sarma's government on February 19 at Guwahati's Manvendra Sharma Complex. Sarma emphasized infrastructure initiatives, such as an expressway that will reduce travel time between Guwahati and Silchar to just five hours. "Our Double Engine Govt stands committed to do more and ensure the equitable development of both Barak and Brahmaputra valleys," he affirmed. Drawing from statewide consultations with grassroots organizations, indigenous communities, businesses,



and intellectuals, the document, which was prepared by a committee led by MP Pradyut Bordoloi, accuses the BJP regime of encouraging a "syndicate raj" in Dispur, protecting illegal rat-hole mining for illicit funds, and permitting Assam to serve as a transit hub for smuggled drugs and banned goods via porous borders. APCC president

Gaurav Gogoi noted Gandhi's direct engagement with public grievances through a Screening Committee, signalling Congress's election focus. Bordoloi added that five teams toured the state to compile the allegations. With polls looming, the BJP's development pitch clashes sharply with Congress's critique, intensifying Assam's campaign battle.

The new terminal at Guwahati airport is scheduled to open

Guwahati, Feb 22: The new terminal at Lokpriya Gopinath Bardoloi International Airport will open for business on February 22, according to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. On December 20 of last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi officially opened the Rs 4,000-crore Integrated Terminal-2 Building. The facility, which is intended to accommodate 13.1 million passengers a year, is a significant improvement for the airport that bears the name of Gopinath Bardoloi, the first chief minister of Assam. During the event, Modi also unveiled an 80-foot statue of Bardoloi outside the terminal. In just a few years, it went from being an open area to a world-class gateway. Sarma said on X, "This change reflects a clear vision for a more connected and self-assured Assam." He continued: "Inaugurated by Adarniya Shri @narendramodi ji, the @GuwahatiAirport opens its doors to the world from Feb 22."

Union MoS Ram Nath Thakur examines agricultural initiatives in Longleng, Nagaland

Kohima, Feb 22: Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Ram Nath Thakur visited ICAR-KVK, Longleng, Nagaland, on February 19, to assess agricultural development programs aimed at enhancing farmers' livelihoods. He advocated for the modernization of traditional jhum cultivation through scientific, location-specific technologies and a gradual shift towards low-input, resource-efficient, and climate-re-

silient farming systems, while valuing indigenous knowledge. Thakur reviewed the promotion of low-input crop varieties suited for hill agriculture and water harvesting structures to combat moisture stress and erratic rainfall. He emphasized developing technologies appropriate for the district's agro-ecological conditions and highlighted the importance of value addition and processing initiatives to

increase farmers' income. The Minister also stressed boosting entrepreneurship among women farmers and conserving local germplasm and indigenous crop diversity to protect farmers' rights. Thakur later inspected various development projects in Longleng, expressing dissatisfaction with the progress at the district hospital. He was accompanied by local officials and civil society representatives during his visit.

NE/EAST

The Arunachal Pradesh Congress wants more autonomy by amending Article 371(H)

Itanagar, Feb 22: Concerned about massive dam projects and the Forest Conservation (revision) Act, 2023, the Arunachal Pradesh Congress has called for a revision to Article 371(H) of the Constitution in order to guarantee stronger constitutional protections and increased state autonomy. On February 18, Mallikarjun Kharge, the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, received a memorandum from a delegation of the Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), led by its president Bosiram Siram, in New Delhi. The party asked him to weigh in on matters pertaining to environmental preservation and constitutional protections in the frontier state. The memorandum emphasized the socioeconomic, ecological, and environmental effects of major dam projects in the area, according to a party announcement. It also raised issues with environmental security, sustainable development, and the defense of indigenous rights, claiming that these call for Article 371(H) to be strengthened.

Given its strategic location, delicate international borders, and distinctive sociocultural makeup, Arunachal Pradesh is granted extraordinary administrative powers under Article 371(H), a special constitutional clause. According to the clause, the governor has a specific duty to maintain peace and order and is free to make decisions on his own after



contacting the council of ministers. Additionally, it gives the state Assembly the authority to choose its composition and number of seats.

The APCC, however, contended that Article 371(H) does not provide legal protection over ownership and transfer of land and natural resources, unlike Article 371A for Nagaland and Article 371G for Mizoram. The state Congress unit has demanded legislative autonomy on similar lines, stating that

stronger safeguards are required for tribal customary laws, religious and social practices. During the meeting, the delegation presented a detailed note outlining what it described as pressing concerns of the state and urged appropriate intervention. Responding to the memorandum, Kharge acknowledged the seriousness of the issues and assured the delegation of necessary support in pursuing them at appropriate forums, the party release said.

Mawsmail coal depot converted into fuel station, earning Rs 3.18 cr in rent Meghalaya CM

Shillong, Feb 22: During the February 19 budget session, the Chief Minister informed the assembly that a former coal storage facility constructed by the Meghalaya Mineral Development Corporation (MMDC) at Mawsmail on GS Road, close to Jorabat, had been turned into a petrol station and leased out for 30 years. The depot, which was built at a cost of Rs 425 lakh and covered about 12 acres, was leased to Rahul Khongsit after a competitive tender process that attracted 13 bidders. To date, a total of Rs 3,18,22,122 has been made in rental income. The entire 12-acre property is covered by the lease. VPP leader and Nongkrem MLA Ardent M. Basaiawmoit brought up the issue in the House, asking the Chief Minister if the MMDC had turned down the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department's request for land for a new cattle market. According to the Chief Minister, the assertion was untrue. The chief minister claims that although MMDC had actually given five acres for the project, the department moved the cattle market project to the Industrial Growth



Center in Mendipathar after determining that the site was inappropriate. The tender attracted bids from participants across Meghalaya and Assam, including individuals from Shillong, Garo Hills, Nongpoh, West Jaintia Hills, and Guwahati, as well as a corporate entity.

Tripura Tea Auction Center is scheduled to debut in April

Agartala, Feb 22: Tripura is set to launch its first tea auction centre at Gurkhabasti by April 2024, a milestone for the state's tea industry and revenue structure, as announced by Chief Minister Manik Saha during the foundation stone ceremony. This facility will make Tripura the eighth state in India to have a tea auction centre, complementing the existing seven. The Tripura Tea Development Corporation (TTDC) aims to subsidize transportation costs for buyers, offering Rs 4 per kilogram to ensure the centre's commercial viability. Currently, tea growers in Tripura must send their produce to distant auction centres in Guwahati and Kolkata, incurring significant expenses and delays. The establishment of a local auction centre is expected to enhance price realization for producers and eliminate the need for external auctions, as Tripura's tea is often undervalued outside the state. Financially, the move is strategic, as it could shift Tripura's classification from a tea-producing state to a tea-consuming state, enabling it to capture State GST revenues that are currently lost.

Workers in tea gardens will earn more starting on March 1 Himanta Biswa Sarma

Guwahati, Feb 22: Ahead of the Assam Assembly elections, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma made a number of significant policy announcements on February 19 at the Assam Legislative Assembly's ongoing Budget Session. These announcements included a range of employment pledges, investment projects, and welfare measures. The Chief Minister declared that starting on March 1, tea garden workers' wages would be raised. The action, which comes amid long-standing calls for greater daily earnings in the industry, is anticipated to help thousands of workers throughout Assam's tea estates. Sarma stated that 20 Japanese businesses will travel to Jageroad on February 28 to investigate prospects for establishing industries in the region, marking a major push for industrial investment. The projected visit is viewed as a component of the state's endeavors to bolster its manufacturing base and draw in international



investment. The Chief Minister made a compelling case for employment, promising to create 55,000 jobs in the first three years of the next term if his government wins back power. He clarified that the hiring process will only take place within the Department of Education. Before the elections, 5,000 new positions will be made in the Education Department, Sarma added. Projecting an ambitious economic vision, the Chief Minister said Assam aims to become a Rs 10 lakh crore economy

by 2028. He maintained that Assam is currently one of the fastest-growing states in the nation and that the state's GDP has expanded by 45% in the last five years. Regarding infrastructure, Sarma declared that the Kapili Hydro Power Project would be opened in the upcoming ten days. 150 megawatts of power are anticipated to be produced by the project. He added that Karbi Anglong's renewable energy potential has increased with the start of a 25 megawatt hydro power project.

CM Yumnam Khemchand Singh is praised by MLA Nishikanta

Imphal, Feb 22: Amid ongoing efforts to restore normalcy in conflict-affected Manipur, MLA Sapam Nishikanta praised Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh for his "sincere and determined efforts" towards achieving lasting peace and stability in the state. Speaking during a benefit distribution event at the Alternative Housing Complex in Langol, Nishikanta commended the Chief Minister's commendable approach to the Manipur crisis, highlighting the need for unity among the 36 communities in the state and their shared responsibility to uphold Manipur's integrity. In response to discussions regarding a proposed Cabinet meet-



ing in Senapati district, the MLA dismissed any controversy over the location, affirming that Senapati is a legitimate part of Manipur and governance should extend to all regions. He emphasized that ministers attending the meeting would pass through Kangpokpi, urging that administrative functions should not be disrupted by speculation or misinformation. Nishikanta further underscored the importance of reconciliation, stating that peace is achievable through collective harmony: "When every Manipuri is happy, Manipur will be happy," he said, calling for unity and mutual trust among all communities.

The Nagaland chief minister opens a women-focused BPO facility in Dimapur



Kohima, Feb 22: Neiphiu Rio opened a women-focused business process outsourcing (BPO) facility in Dimapur, calling it a significant step in creating jobs for women in Nagaland. The JSW Foundation and the Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN) are working together on the project. The center, which will initially employ 125 people and eventually ramp up operations in phases, is being hailed as the first women-centric BPO facility of its sort in the Northeast. Rio described the inauguration as "a new chapter in Nagaland's journey towards inclusive and technology-driven growth" while speaking to the crowd. According to him, the collaboration shows a common dedication to empowering women, developing their talents, and generating worthwhile job prospects in the state. The chief minister emphasized the potential of the state's youth, stating that the

young people of Nagaland are well-educated, flexible, and fluent in English, which positions them to compete in the global service economy. He restated that private investment, entrepreneurship, and skill development have been given top priority by the government as key pillars of sustainable growth. Rio emphasized the importance of women in Naga society, describing them as strong pillars of families and communities and important contributors to economic life. He claimed that organized job options like BPOs will help women become more financially independent and advance their careers. In order to create a workforce that is resilient and prepared for the future, IDAN and the JSW Foundation have formalized their partnership through a memorandum of understanding that focuses on skill development, technology adoption, and job creation. IDAN chairman and advisor to the chief minister, Abu Metha, said nearly ₹6 crore has been invested in the first phase by JSW Foundation and JSW Shakti. He added that while the centre will begin with around 125 employees, there are plans to expand capacity to 500 in the future. Conceptualised and completed within six months, the project underscores coordinated efforts between the Nagaland government and JSW, and is expected to attract further investments in IT-enabled services and knowledge-based industries in the state.

Lengpui land purchase is the subject of a contentious debate in the Mizoram Assembly

Chief minister announces a CBI investigation

Aizawl, Feb 22: The ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) and opposition parties engaged in a heated debate at the Mizoram Assembly on February 18 on a contentious land agreement with the Indian Air Force (IAF) for the establishment of a base close to Lengpui airport. In response to earlier demands from the opposition, Chief Minister Lalduhoma said in the House that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) would look into the case. When Lalduhoma claimed that the former Mizo National Front (MNF) government had finalized the agreement's framework during its time with the intention of an outright land purchase, the altercation broke out during a discussion on the governor's address. The chief minister claims that only the money transfer is still delayed because the previous administration had already finished important formalities including setting land rates and legal requirements before issuing the required preliminary announcement. "The MNF government finished the full procedure. The money was put under our government once the formalities were completed, Lalduhoma stated. According to him, his government decided that the previous strategy was wrong and decided to distribute the land on a lease ba-



sis instead of selling it altogether. However, if the procedure was deemed inappropriate, opposition members questioned the justification for moving forward with the agreement. Lalduhoma had personally criticized the strategy as being wrong in the Assembly in February of last year, MNF lawmaker Lalthangliana noted. Lalthandama Ralte, the leader of the opposition, and C Ngurlianchhunga, the only Congress MLA, asked why the administration went forward with the deal in spite of their concerns. "Why did the government move forward if they knew the procedure was flawed? Did they get commissions as well? Ralte inquired. Rejecting allegations of circumventing a mandatory Social Impact Assessment to hasten land acquisition, Lalduho-

ma contended that during its five-year rule, the MNF government had issued 120 No Objection Certificates to exempt strategic projects from such assessments, many of which were associated with the Home and Defence Ministries. He remarked that the current government felt obligated to continue the process since significant groundwork had already been established. Amid rising accusations of financial misconduct, the chief minister announced a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into the situation. The land, situated near Lengpui airport approximately 32 km from Aizawl, was earmarked for an Indian Air Force (IAF) base intended to accommodate fighter aircraft and refuelling facilities. This acquisition has incited political controversy, prompting both the MNF and the Indian National Congress to lodge separate complaints for a CBI investigation regarding alleged irregularities totaling Rs 187.90 crore. The opposition claims that standard procedures were overlooked and that compensation was disproportionately distributed, with two individuals who were not the original landowners receiving the majority of the payouts, while the rightful owners reportedly received little to nothing.

The center is dedicated to fostering all Indian languages, without imposition: Home Ministry official in Tripura

Agartala, Feb 22: The Central government is dedicated to the advancement of all Indian languages and cannot force any one language on its population, according to Asuli Arya, Secretary of the Department of Official Language under the Ministry of Home Affairs, on Thursday, February 20. Speaking at a news conference in Agartala, Tripura, prior to Union Home Minister Amit Shah's planned visit on Friday, February 20, Arya stated that there is no issue of language imposition and that people are free to voice their complaints in their home tongue. On February 20, at the International Indoor Exhibition Centre in Hapania, Agartala, the Home Minister

will speak at the North Eastern and Northern Regions Joint Regional Rajbhasha Sammelan. According to officials, Hindi is used in central government institutions, including public sector enterprises and banks, and has been designated as India's official language in the Devanagari script. According to Arya, the Center for the Development and Promotion of Hindi has taken a number of actions, such as setting up training facilities, facilities for translators, and translation projects. She added that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration is putting a strong focus on building an inclusive, heritage-based, and culturally rooted



India by 2047. Highlighting the role of technology, Arya said Artificial Intelligence is expected to play a key role in the future of language use, particularly in translation and speech applications. She informed that the Department of Official Language has introduced AI-based tools, including translation software "Bharti," which currently supports 15 languages and is expected to expand to 22 languages. More than 3,000 participants, including Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha, Members of Parliament, and other officials, are expected to attend the Sammelan.

Meetings with Bodo organizations are chaired by CM Sarma

Guwahati, Feb 22: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma held meetings on February 19 with 28 Bodo community organizations at the Assam Legislative Assembly, focusing on their welfare and challenges, particularly for those outside the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). Key issues discussed included access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and the preservation of cultural identity. Community leaders emphasized the need for targeted government interventions. The chief minister acknowl-



edged the diversity within the Bodo community and committed to inclusive development policies. Participants appreciated the government's willingness to listen and called for regular follow-up meetings. The meetings reinforced the im-

portance of ongoing collaboration between state authorities and indigenous groups to address immediate and long-term needs, with a mutual understanding of the need for sustained engagement for Assam's indigenous development agenda.

The governor claims that the rail link is driving Mizoram’s tourism boom

Mizoram is steadily emerging as one of the fastest-growing tourist destinations in the Northeast, driven by improved railway connectivity and major infrastructure investments, Governor Vijay Kumar Singh said on February 17.

Aizawl, Feb 22: Governor Vijay Kumar Singh stated on February 17 that Mizoram is gradually becoming one of the Northeast’s most rapidly expanding tourism attractions because to significant infrastructural developments and better railway connectivity. On the first day of the budget session, the governor spoke to the state assembly and referred to the Bairabi–Sairang railway line as a “historic milestone,” pointing out that it has greatly increased accessibility and created new opportunities for employment, trade, and tourism. According to him, the train link has helped Aizawl become part of the national railway network and has led to a significant increase in the number of visitors. Singh claims that during the nine months leading up to December 2025, more than 6.79 lakh tourists—including 9,606 foreign visitors—arrived in the state. The number represents a 29.50% rise in overall foot traffic compared to the prior year. “The momentum peaked in December, when over 1.33 lakh people visited, a 122.11 percent increase over the same month the previous year,” he said. The state has obtained Rs 34.5 crore under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI) plan for the construction of a ropeway at Vantawng Falls near Thenzawl in Mamit district, Singh said, highlighting efforts to boost eco-tourism. In order to build basic amenities at Vangchhia in Champhai district, which is well-known for its cluster of about 170 menhirs, the Union Tourism Ministry approved Rs 5.47 crore under the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage



Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD) initiative, he continued.He added that the development of a conference center at Thingsulthliah in the Saitual district has been sanctioned for a total of Rs 9.97 crore. The Governor further stated that during the first Mizoram Travel Fest in October 2025, the state Tourism Department and the Environment, Forests & Climate Change Department signed a Memorandum of Understanding to improve co-operation in promoting eco-tourism and ensuring sustainable tourism growth.

The Maharashtra government eliminates the 5% Muslim employment and education quota

New Delhi, Feb 22: The five percent reservation for Muslims in employment and education has been abolished by the Maharashtra government. Due to the lapse of the prior ordinance regarding the five percent reserve and the temporary court stay on that ruling, a Government Resolution (GR) was issued on Tuesday to this effect. An ordinance granting a 16 percent quota to Marathas and a 5 percent quota to Muslims was issued by the previous Congress-NCP government. When the Congress-NCP Democratic Front government was in power in 2014, the Muslim community was granted reservation in government jobs, semi-government positions, and educational institutions under the Socially and Educationally Backward Class (SEBC) category. Additionally, a government resolution (GR) was issued to facilitate an ordinance. On November 14, 2014, the Bombay High Court issued a stay in response to legal challenges against the ordinance.The ordinance immediately expired because the Maharashtra legislature failed to enact it by the deadline of December 23, 2014. Later, during the hearing of a Special Leave Petition challenging the Bombay High Court’s ruling, the Supreme Court declared the reservation to be unlawful by canceling



it. According to the new GR, all earlier rulings and the ordinance pertaining to the 5% reservation in government, semi-government, and educational institutions for the Muslim community that falls under the Special Backward Category (A) due to social and educational backwardness have been revoked. According to the new order, the government has revoked the previous rulings and circulars from 2014 and ceased granting Muslims in the Special Backward Category caste and non-creamy

layer certifications.

The Opposition has criticised the move, questioning the government’s ‘Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas’ slogan.“We strongly condemn this decision.

Instead of taking positive steps regarding the 5% reservation announced in 2014 for education and employment, the government has simply scrapped the old processes. Citing the High Court’s interim stay and the ordinance becoming outdated as reasons, the government has dealt a

severe blow to the rights of the Muslim community,” Congress MP Varsha Gaikwad said. “On one hand, they talk of ‘Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas’, and on the other, they close the avenues for obtaining necessary documents for reservation.

Isn’t this hypocrisy?” she asked. “Instead of bringing the backward sections of society into the mainstream, this government has pushed them back into darkness,” the Congress MP said in a post on X.

India is prepared to lead the world in AI and draw in major IT investments: Minister, Jitin Prasada

New Delhi, Feb 22: India is ready to influence the global conversation around artificial intelligence and become a top destination for significant technological investments, according to Union Minister of State for Electronics & IT Jitin Prasada. Speaking Wednesday at the India Today AI Summit 2026 in Delhi, which was part of the five-day AI Impact Summit at Bharat Mandapam, Prasada stated that India has the duty and the chance to shape the future of trade, technology, and artificial intelligence. Prasada referred to it as a “historic moment for Bharat” and stated that India has become the Global South’s voice in technology governance under Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s direction. While some nations made significant technological advancements, others fell behind. The Global South’s sensitivities, cultures, and limitations are being taken into consideration under India’s leadership to ensure that all countries gain equally from technology and artificial intelligence, he said. He compared the democratization of digital payments through UPI to the need to make AI inclusive and accessible. He stated that “India will decide



the discourse and the trajectory of AI,” citing scalable use cases, global cooperation, and an ecosystem that looks to the future as important results. India is giving practical, scalable AI applications that can have a quantifiable impact at the ground level priority over big language models, he continued.

According to Prasada, a number of significant international tech firms are establishing data centers in India, a sign of rising investor confidence. He declared that “India is becoming the destination for investment,” and that these expansions will give the country’s youth “endless opportunities” and jobs.He added that in order to ensure that researchers, startups, and academic institutions have the computational

capacity necessary to create domestic AI models, the government is making GPUs more accessible at reasonable prices. Prasada emphasized India’s depth of digitalization, saying that the country’s high internet and smartphone penetration rates offer a solid basis for change powered by AI. “We have speed and innovation in addition to scale,” he stated. Regarding regulation, Prasada stated that while the government acknowledges the responsibility that comes with AI, it will refrain from enforcing excessive regulations that would deter innovation and risk-taking. According to him, “innovators will be afraid to take risks if norms are extremely strict.”He also emphasized that innovation and accountabil-

ity must go hand in hand, saying that any harm done to people will prompt harsh action.He named disinformation and cybersecurity as the two main issues facing the AI era. The proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) and synthetic content has given citizens the right to recognize if a piece of material is authentic or a deepfake. He stated that while the government is consulting stakeholders, digital platforms and intermediaries also need to be held accountable. Responding to concerns about job losses, Prasada said every major technological disruption – including the advent of computers – has ultimately created more opportunities than it displaced.The government is undertaking mass-level skilling initiatives to prepare the workforce for an AI-driven economy, he said. The 2.5 lakh participants who registered and attended the summit represent the “real India” ready to embrace change.“Like we became the internet service provider of the world, India will emerge as the AI service provider of the world,” he said, reiterating that democratised technology remains the ultimate goal, with AI’s benefits reaching every citizen.

Gaurav Gogoi criticizes Bhupen Borah for switching to the BJP



Guwahati, Feb 22: On February 18, Gaurav Gogoi, the Congress MP and president of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), criticized former APCC chief Bhupen Borah following his resignation from the party on February 16. Gogoi accused Borah of betrayal, emphasizing that Borah’s previous commitments to not join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were inconsistent with his recent actions. He recalled Borah’s vow made at Kamakhya Temple to never join the BJP and highlighted the irony of Borah welcoming Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma into his home shortly after making such declarations.

Gogoi expressed disappointment that Borah’s political shift occurred early, stat-

ing, “I thought such developments would happen closer to elections,” suggesting that Borah’s credibility had diminished as a result. Gogoi also mocked Borah’s strategic abilities, referring to him sarcastically as the ‘real Dhurandhar’ in contrast to accusations levelled against himself.

Furthermore, Gogoi questioned the reliability of future statements made by Borah, arguing, “If someone can take an oath before Ma Kamakhya and not stand by it, what value should I attach to his statements?” In closing, Gogoi defended his religious credentials against attempts by others, particularly Sarma, to undermine them, asserting that there is no need for validation of his Hindu leadership from Sarma.

The Dibang Hydel project makes a significant diversion tunnel advancement

Itanagar , Feb 22: On February 18, officials announced that the successful daylighting of a diversion tunnel marked a significant construction milestone for the 2,880 MW Dibang Hydroelectric Project in Arunachal Pradesh, which is now under development. A statement released in Itanagar claims that the completion of Diversion Tunnel-3 represents a major advancement in the implementation of the enormous hydropower project that NHPC Limited is developing. NHPC Director (Projects) Sanjay Kumar Singh started the tunnel breakthrough’s last explosion on Tuesday. The accomplishment, according to officials, would en-



able more seamless river diversion work, a crucial part of dam building, and represents consistent progress in important construction tasks. The daylighting of the tunnel is considered an important phase in the overall implementation plan of the project, which is being developed on the Dibang River in the Lower Dibang Valley district. The project will have an installed capacity of 2,880 MW, generated through 12 units of 240 MW each. Officials further stated that the project will aid in regulating floods in the Brahmaputra River basin, strengthening downstream flood control measures while enhancing energy security in the northeastern region.

Agartala Uber bike riders declare an extended strike

Agartala, Feb 22: App-based bike taxi riders in Agartala are suspending services indefinitely starting February 18, protesting Uber’s “Bike Saver” service, which they argue has drastically reduced their earnings.



Over 200 riders gathered near Heritage Park to express concerns about decreased incomes, increased operational expenses, and inadequate support from Uber’s local office. They claim that the introduction of lower fares has hindered their ability to cover daily costs amidst rising fuel prices and maintenance. Additionally, they pointed out deteriorating road conditions due to ongoing city projects and the notably lower pay compared to riders in adjacent states. The suspension will impact commuters who depend on these services for affordable transportation.

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Agartala Government Medical College and GB Pant Hospital have started offering autologous blood transfusion services

Agartala, Feb 22: An autologous blood transfusion service has been launched by the blood transfusion departments of GB Pant Hospital and Agartala Government Medical College (AGMC), enabling patients to pre-store their own blood for upcoming operations or medical procedures.

The procedure entails drawing blood from a patient before to an operation and keeping it in accordance with established guidelines, according to hospital officials. In order to lessen dependency on donor blood, the



banked blood is subsequently transfused back to the same patient after surgery. Because patients receive their own blood, officials said the technique helps reduce the danger of immunological reactions and infections

connected to transfusions. Additionally, it guarantees compatibility and could be used as a substitute when blood supplies are scarce. Doctors pointed out that not everyone is a good candidate for the operation. Individuals with specific medical issues or low hemoglobin levels might not be eligible. Additionally, the approach necessitates prior planning and is typically impractical in emergency situations. According to the hospital administration, necessary procedures, equipment installation, and training have been implemented.

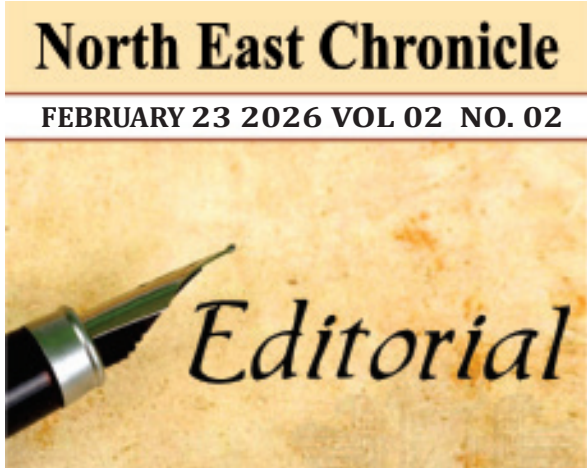
Gamini gave birth to three cheetah pups at Kuno, increasing India’s population to 38

Bijaipur, Feb 22: On February 18, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav revealed that South African cheetah Gamini had given birth to three cubs at Kuno National Park, marking a new milestone in India’s ambitious cheetah reintroduction program. According to the minister, the birth marks the end of three years since the cheetahs from South Africa arrived. There are now 38 cheetahs in the nation after Gamini, a second-time mother, gave birth to the cubs at Kuno National Park. “Kuno has more excellent news.



A roaring new chapter at Kuno on the occasion of the completion of three years of the arrival of cheetahs from South Africa is marked by the arrival of three fresh cubs, Yadav wrote on X. He continued by saying that Gamini “has brought 3 new cubs into the world,” and that the park was resounding with jubilation. This is the eighth successful cheetah litter to be born in India, according to the minister. He said that every birth fortifies the reintroduction effort. “This happy arrival marks the ninth successful cheetah litter on Indian soil and takes the number of surviving Indian-born cubs to 27,” he said. He credited the “passion, perseverance, and round-the-

clock dedication of the field staff and veterinary teams” involved in the project, writing, “With these newest additions, India’s total cheetah population has now reached 38 — a powerful symbol of the country’s determined and historic conservation effort.”The world’s first inter-continental translocation program, Project Cheetah, was introduced on September 17, 2022, with the goal of returning the cheetah to India. In 1952, the species was deemed extinct in the nation.As the initiative progresses beyond the original translocation to long-term conservation and breeding success, wildlife officials have characterized the subsequent litters as crucial to creating a stable, free-ranging population.



Peace in the Community: An Islamic Requirement

In contemporary India, the social fabric is challenged by polarization, often reducing communal harmony to political strategy. For Indian Muslims, coexistence is a theological obligation derived from Islamic teachings. The normalization of communal hostility contradicts the Quran’s assertion of human unity and the ethical necessity of neighborly peace. In Islam, the definition of a neighbor extends beyond shared beliefs, emphasizing territorial and humanitarian bonds. This historical integration in Indian neighborhoods presents communal peace as a continuous religious duty. The influx of rigid narratives threatens this peaceful tradition, labeling Indian Islam as imitative of Middle Eastern models, disregarding its indigenous roots shaped by Sufi spirituality and the concept of Sulh-e-Kul, or universal peace. This historical engagement allowed Islam to integrate into Indian social life, fostering a shared cultural heritage known as Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb. The challenge lies in reclaiming local spiritual heritage from literal interpretations that undermine its compassion. By embracing their rich history, Indian Muslims can shift from a defensive stance to one of proactive engagement, embodying the Quranic principle of kindness in response to hostility. This approach promotes a model of pluralism, essential for fostering coexistence, not only in India but globally. . The goal is not merely passive tolerance, which implies a begrudging acceptance of the other’s existence, but a proactive engagement rooted in the recognition of a shared humanity and a shared destiny.

The US is dragging Europe back to the days of white supremacy

George W. Bush convinced European leaders to support his “war on terror” twenty-five years ago. People from all over the Middle East were displaced in large numbers as a result of that catastrophic enterprise, which claimed millions of lives. In the US and Europe, it normalized bigotry and hostility toward Muslims, refugees, and racialized minorities. I worry that Marco Rubio’s address at the Munich Security Conference, which called for the defense of white, western, Christian civilization against allegedly infecting racialized migrants, and the standing ovation he received from European elites, could be a terrifying sequel. Unlike his employers, Donald Trump and JD Vance, Rubio speaks of a superior and shared American and European civilization. His outreach is clandestine, but his tone is more emollient. As opposed to Bush’s previous focus on terrorism and tangible security issues, Rubio discusses migration, identity, and civilizational anxiety. Rubio lied to Europeans about the continent’s colonial origins in his speech in Munich. He presented his appeal to protect national boundaries as completely honorable, obligatory, and a “fundamental act of sovereignty,” denying that he was spreading a message of bigotry or hatred. But the message of nativist exclusion did not change. As someone who experienced and covered the aftermath of 9/11, I am well aware of the Islamophobic dog whistles and racist undertones that can be found in such white supremacist rhetoric, as well as the resulting anxieties and even acts of violence. European Muslims are still plagued by the fearful discussions that were started so many years ago on Islam’s position in Europe, allegiance and belonging, and the idea that Muslims are an incompatible “other.” Alarmism is not what this is. It makes sense that European leaders



are concerned about not upsetting an already erratic US ally during a period of geopolitical instability, particularly with regard to Ukraine. However, racism must be exposed, no matter how it is disguised and presented as normal and moral. Based on the cheers Rubio got in Munich, I worry that too many European politicians have already indicated that they are willing to cooperate, either because they agree with Trump or because it seems like a good geopolitical move to do so. Yet, if we want to protect multiparty liberal democracy and push back against the far right, we should be far more wary not only of toxic speeches from across the Atlantic but of Trump’s close ties to Europe’s xenophobic parties and the many ways in which the US’s Maga politicians are legitimising far-right ideologies. The fact that the US state department may soon be funding policy-aligned European thinktanks and charities should be ringing alarm bells across the continent. When I hear Trump, Rubio and their

European acolytes, I wonder why so few of the EU’s political elite dare to say out loud that we have heard this stigmatising language of exclusion before – and we know where it can lead. That we are not going to follow the US’s lead. That colonialism was not a glorious enterprise but caused immense death and destruction. That once, Jews, too, were portrayed as a threat to white Christian Europe and accused of weakening nations from within. That today, the targets of what the British author Hanif Kureishi calls Europe’s “collective hallucination” about the power of unwanted outsiders to colonise and contaminate may be migrants, Muslims, and black and brown people. But the narrative about who belongs, and who does not, is dangerous and corrosive for all of us. It is difficult to swim against the tide. Spain’s prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, a rarity among European leaders in that he is trying to talk facts rather than fiction about migration, has run into strong opposition not only from the

far right but from senior EU policymakers who portray his decision to regularise 500,000 undocumented migrants and asylum seekers as undermining the EU’s deterrence message. The EU migration commissioner, Magnus Brunner, a conservative Austrian politician, has warned that Spain “must ensure [its] decisions do not have negative consequences in other parts of the union”, conveniently ignoring the fact that hundreds of thousands of undocumented migrants are already embedded in Europe’s labour markets, and that many EU states are signing labour-mobility agreements with countries in the global south even as they engage in migrant-bashing in public. Instead of recognising these uncomfortable facts, Brussels is focused on securing European parliament backing for Brunner’s “simpler and more effective return procedures” to step up and accelerate the deportations of undocumented people, including potentially sending them to offshore centres in non-EU countries.

The Kuala Lumpur Summit: An important turning point in the Indo-Asean century

Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated electronically at the 22nd Asean-India Summit, which was chaired by Malaysia and took place on October 26, 2025. It was a significant event in the development of India’s Act East Policy and strategic engagement with Southeast Asia. All Asean-India summits have featured Modi, with the exception of 2022, when the vice president headed the delegation. He did a good job of articulating India’s ongoing dedication to Asean centrality and to creating a peaceful, prosperous, and multipolar Indo-Pacific. With a combined population of one-fourth of the world’s population, India and Asean are more than just geographical neighbors; they are united by shared values, a shared strategic perspective, and ties to historical civilizations. “The 21st century is our century—the century of India and Asean,” Prime Minister Modi reiterated. The meeting emphasized that India and Asean are co-authors of the future of the new global order, not merely participants in it. This was significant since Modi did not refer to it as an Asian century, which China views as a Chinese century. This clarity provides the Global South with a framework for collaboration between India and Asean. Timor-Leste was congratulated by Prime Minister Modi on joining Asean as its eleventh member and attending its inaugural Asean-India Summit as a full member. He stated that Quick Impact Projects and capacity-building programs would continue to be extended as part of India’s assistance for its human development. Being the first accession to the grouping in the twenty-first century, this Asean expansion is a historic development and reflects a new, inclusive regional vision. The last to join was Cambodia. In 1999, Cambodia became the final member. Modi praised the adoption of the Community Vision 2045 and reaffirmed India’s unflinching support for Asean unity, centrality, and the Indo-Pacific Outlook. As a conversation partner, India participates in all three Asean pillars—the political-security community, the economic community, and the sociocultural community—reflecting a thorough and reliable collaboration. A manifestation of this varied engagement is the revised Action Plan 2026-2030. Developing Economic and Strategic Relationships Prime Minister Modi emphasized how urgently the Asean-India Free Trade Agreement (AITIGA) needs to be reviewed. He highlighted that a timely modernisation of the agreement is essential to unlock the full economic potential of the partnership, enhance supply chain resilience, and promote fair and mutually beneficial trade. This reform is

expected to boost digital trade, MSME integration, and sustainable investment flows. The summit also focused on the growing importance of critical technologies, fintech cooperation, semiconductor development, rare earths, and critical minerals, which are crucial to reducing dependence on singular supply chains and strengthening strategic autonomy in the Indo-Pacific. Maritime Cooperation Maritime security, blue economy development, and freedom of navigation emerged as central themes of the summit. The leaders jointly declared 2026 as the “Asean-India Year of Maritime Cooperation” to advance collaboration in the blue economy, maritime transport corridors, climate resilience, and marine resource management. In 2023 India and Asean had already issued a joint statement on maritime cooperation, which will now receive impetus. Prime Minister Modi also proposed: Hosting the Second Asean-India Defence Ministers’ Meeting Conducting the Second Asean-India Maritime Exercise Organising the East Asia Summit Maritime Heritage Festival at Lothal, Gujarat Convening a Conference on Maritime Security Cooperation These initiatives reflect India’s proactive role in promoting a rules-based maritime order, in sharp contrast to coercive regional behaviour that threatens Asean sovereignty. Asean’s maritime nations, including the Philippines, explicitly acknowledged India’s constructive stance in supporting international law in the South China Sea. Security, Resilience and India as First Responder Calling terrorism, a grave threat to global peace and security, Prime Minister Modi urged unity and resolute collective action. He reiterated India’s commitment to act as a “First Responder” in times of crisis, reinforcing cooperation in disaster preparedness, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief (HADR). India’s growing capacity and credibility in providing rapid assistance in times of natural disasters has significantly enhanced trust among Asean nations. India also announced the training of 400 renewable energy professionals to support the Asean Power Grid initiative and promote clean energy integration across the region. Socio-Cultural Bonds: A Civilisational Partnership Prime Minister Modi reminded leaders that India and Asean are not just strategic partners but civilisational companions.

“We are not only commercial partners but also cultural partners... Asean is a cornerstone of India’s Act East Policy,” he said. The Prime Minister welcomed the adoption of the Joint Leaders’ Statement on Sustainable Tourism, aligning with the Asean-India Year of Tourism and the emerging regional focus on na-

ture-based and heritage tourism. In 2025 India is now directly connected by air links to all Asean countries except Laos. Modi emphasised cooperation in education, health, science and technology, green energy, cyber security, cultural preservation, and youth development. A major announcement included the proposed establishment of a Centre for Southeast Asian Studies at Nalanda University, which will serve as a think tank and knowledge hub to build regional expertise. An India Asean Youth Summit has been held earlier this year. Ensuring Multipolarity in a Fragmenting World Asean today stands at a geopolitical crossroads. Increasing US-China competition and economic dependence on China are creating strategic discomfort. The bloc seeks to preserve its autonomy amidst external pressures, and India offers a viable multipolar alternative rooted in respect, partnership, and shared development rather than dominance or dependency.

As Philippine President Marcos said in his remarks at the summit, Asean looks to India and their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and the AEP to find solutions for Asean’s current problems. India’s vision aligns with Asean’s desire to shape the global agenda through the Global South, rather than merely reacting to superpower rivalries. Prime Minister Modi’s declaration that the Asean-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership is emerging as a “robust foundation for global stability and development” reflects this shared aspiration for a balanced, inclusive, and pluralistic order. Conclusion: The India–Asean Century Begins At the summit, Prime Minister Modi thanked Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim for successfully hosting the summit virtually and appreciated Philippine President Marcos Jr’s effective role as country coordinator. Both have made bilateral visits to India during this year. Asean leaders, in turn, lauded India’s consistent and principled engagement through its Act East Policy. The summit made it clear that Asean and India are not just navigating the future together but are shaping it. The deepening partnership spans maritime security, digital inclusion, sustainable development, critical technologies, cultural connectivity, and multipolar diplomacy. With Vision 2045 and Viksit Bharat 2047 aligned, India and Asean have embarked on a shared journey of prosperity, resilience, and stability. The Kuala Lumpur Summit will be remembered not simply as a diplomatic event, but as the moment the idea of an India–Asean Century moved from rhetoric to roadmap, anchoring Asia’s future in cooperation, inclusivity, and shared destiny

Dibrugarh ELF

In a landmark development that significantly strengthens India’s strategic and disaster-response infrastructure in the eastern frontier, the first Emergency Landing Facility (ELF) in the Northeast region has been established in Dibrugarh, Assam, marking a major milestone in enhancing the country’s air defence preparedness and civil emergency capabilities in the strategically sensitive region bordering China, Myanmar, and Bhutan. The facility, developed along a strengthened stretch of national highway near Dibrugarh, has been designed to enable fighter aircraft and other military planes of the Indian Air Force to conduct take-offs and landings during emergencies, wartime contingencies, or natural disasters when conventional airbases may be unavailable or compromised. Officials stated that the ELF has been constructed with reinforced pavement quality concrete, extended runway-grade specifications, and integrated support infrastructure such as aircraft parking bays, ground lighting systems, mobile air traffic control support, and rapid deployment logistics, making it fully capable of handling high-speed combat aircraft operations under demanding operational scenarios. The development of the Dibrugarh ELF assumes immense importance given Assam’s vulnerability to recurrent floods, earthquakes, and landslides, as well as the region’s complex terrain characterized by the mighty Brahmaputra river system and dense forest cover, which often hampers connectivity during disasters. By allowing military aircraft to land directly on a highway-based runway segment, the facility ensures swift deployment of relief materials, medical evacuation teams, and rescue equipment to remote and cut-off areas during calamities, significantly reducing response time and saving lives.

Defence analysts emphasize that the ELF also enhances India’s strategic posture in the eastern theatre by providing the Indian Air Force with operational flexibility, redundancy in airstrip availability, and forward staging options, thereby strengthening deterrence and rapid response capabilities in the event of regional security challenges. The project was executed through close coordination between the Ministry of Defence, the Indian Air Force, the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), and the Government of Assam, reflecting a whole-of-government approach toward infrastructure modernization in border and frontier states. Engineers involved in the project ensured that the highway stretch meets stringent aviation-grade standards, including precise surface leveling, load-bearing strength capable of supporting heavy fighter jets such as Sukhoi and Rafale class aircraft, and clear zones on both sides of the strip to maintain operational safety during landing and take-off maneuvers. Temporary removable structures and specially designed highway furniture allow the stretch to function as a regular roadway for civilian traffic under normal conditions, while it can be swiftly converted into a landing strip within hours when required, demonstrating

dual-use infrastructure innovation that maximizes resource efficiency. Senior officials highlighted that the Dibrugarh ELF is part of a broader national initiative to develop emergency landing facilities across strategic corridors in India, particularly in border states, in order to ensure uninterrupted air operations even if primary airbases face disruptions due to hostile action or natural disasters. In the context of the Northeast, where distances between major airbases are considerable and terrain complexity poses logistical challenges, the new ELF fills a critical operational gap and brings advanced aviation infrastructure closer to the easternmost districts. The inauguration ceremony witnessed participation from senior defence officials, state government representatives, and civil administration authorities, who underscored that the project symbolizes the Centre’s commitment to strengthening connectivity, security, and resilience in the Northeast region. The facility’s establishment is also expected to have indirect economic and developmental benefits for Dibrugarh and adjoining districts, as improved highway quality and infrastructure upgrades undertaken for the project enhance overall transport efficiency and could stimulate trade and tourism in Upper Assam. Security experts note that the Northeast has historically faced insurgency-related challenges, and the presence of such strategic infrastructure adds another layer of operational readiness to support internal security operations if required, while primarily serving as a defensive and humanitarian asset. During demonstration trials, fighter aircraft successfully conducted touch-and-go maneuvers and simulated emergency landings, validating the technical soundness of the runway design and support systems. Officials confirmed that rigorous safety audits, coordination protocols with civil traffic authorities, and emergency response drills have been instituted to ensure seamless transition between civilian highway use and military aviation operations. The ELF is equipped with night-landing capabilities, mobile refueling arrangements, and communication systems that can be rapidly deployed, allowing round-the-clock functionality in varied weather conditions, which is particularly vital in Assam where heavy rainfall and fog frequently impact visibility. Experts believe that such infrastructure significantly boosts India’s integrated air-land operational doctrine by creating distributed assets that complicate adversarial targeting strategies and enhance survivability of air operations during crises. The project also aligns with the broader push toward infrastructure modernization in the Northeast under national connectivity initiatives, recognizing the region’s strategic importance in India’s Act East policy framework and its proximity to key international borders. Local residents expressed pride in hosting a facility of national significance, noting that Dibrugarh’s emergence as a strategic hub further elevates Assam’s role in national security architecture.

Trump’s attempt to rename Penn Station in his honor appears to be a shakedown of the presidency

Donald Trump, a real estate developer, used lavish displays of wealth, significant tax incentives, and a ton of free press to build his business. The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the US Institute of Peace, a class of new military warships, and even investment accounts for millions of children are just a few examples of how he has used state power as president to build his own image. In his quest for self-aggrandizement, Trump is now aiming for even more ambitious ambitions. He wants Washington Dulles International Airport and New York’s Penn Station to be renamed in his honor by Congress. The hitch is that, according to reports, Trump promised Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer

that, in exchange for Schumer’s support in renaming the two locations, he would unfreeze billions of dollars in federal funds for a significant infrastructure project in the northeast. In his unrelenting campaign of self-promotion, the president appeared to threaten to withhold federal assistance that Congress had previously approved. Trading naming rights as a political favor is a new low, even by the standards Trump set after a year in the White House, when he has methodically undermined anti-corruption laws that have been put in place for decades and exploited the government to enrich himself and his family. Trump appears to exploit the \$16 billion Gateway transportation project for personal branding,

allegedly seeking naming rights to enhance his legacy amidst conflicting narratives. Despite previously suspending federal funding due to diversity practice reviews, his administration later attributed this to lack of cooperation from Democrats. A federal judge mandated the release of \$205 million for the project, allowing construction to potentially restart. Trump’s ambitions for naming rights—such as for the new NFL stadium and landmarks—raise concerns about his self-promotion while in office; polls indicate public disapproval of his actions, with many perceiving his moves as prioritizing personal gain over public interest.

Swiggy's Snacc quick delivery service is shut down

Mumbai: Platform for delivering groceries and food According to an internal business email obtained by Business Standard, Swiggy has made the decision to discontinue its rapid meal delivery service Snacc. In January of last year, the service was introduced through a stand-alone mobile application. Although the product-market fit was developing, scaling was difficult due to the larger economics. All of our efforts should be focused on innovation that has more long-term potential. We have made this decision in accordance with this," the email stated.

The service included private labeling and was offered in Bengaluru and Gurugram. It was based on a micro-kitchen premise. Swiggy made no formal announcement on the development. The company added that it remains committed to "invest in products and



categories which truly innovate and open uncontested market spaces." It also highlighted the success of Bolt, 99 Store, and the 'No Added Sugar' and 'Food on Train' categories. In the same email, Swiggy noted that as a segment, the food delivery business is growing at an 18-20 per cent rate. Swiggy, which is doing food deliveries at the India AI Impact Summit, said the platform successfully delivered more than 2,000 orders, which peaked during lunch hour (1-2 pm) on the second day on Tuesday. It said that Coke was the most ordered beverage, and veg snacker was the most ordered dish.

Airbus plans to increase the number of H125 helicopters produced in India to 10, By 2029

New Delhi: By 2029, aerospace giant Airbus, which is optimistic about the Indian market's future potential, intends to construct 10 H125 helicopters a year from the final assembly line that was set up in Karnataka in partnership with Tata Advanced Systems. Airbus Helicopters CEO Bruno Even stated that efforts would continue to support the growth of the Indian ecosystem, stating that helicopters can be a vehicle for "nation building" as well as public services. Even told PTI in an interview in the nation's capital, "We firmly believe in the potential of the helicopter market in India... we strongly believe that H125 helicopters can be a key enabler to boost this civil helicopter market in India."

The nation's first private sector helicopter Final Assembly Line (FAL) for the H125 has been established in Vemagal, Karnataka, by Airbus and Tata Advanced Systems Ltd (TASL). The facility was virtually opened on February 17 by French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Even estimates that the first FAL helicopter will be delivered in early 2027, and by 2029, the yearly output will have increased to 10 helicopters. Additionally,



the only helicopter in history to have landed on the summit of Mount Everest, according to Airbus. By building the civil H125 and potentially its military variant H125M in Vemagal, Tata and Airbus are ensuring that Indian operators have immediate access to world-class technology with localised maintenance and lifecycle support, maximising helicopter availability, a release said

which is predominant in the western world and the Middle East. An analysis of the global steel sector indicates that approximately 50 million tons of new Green field EAF capacities are likely to be operational in the next few years between now and end of 2027/28 while about 10 mmt has already been operational. From several other announcements made by some of the large steel companies, another 30 to 40 mmt of additional EAF are likely to be installed post 2028. This augurs well for the company, HEG said in its FY25 annual report. Meanwhile, currently,

on February 17. In response to a query regarding financing for helicopters, Even said Airbus would look to facilitate discussions around financial solutions for helicopter customers in India. "We are convinced that a helicopter is a tool for nation building... a helicopter can play a key role for the public services," he said, adding that they can also be used for regional connectivity, critical missions and disaster management. At present, the density is low in terms of helicopter use in the country. On the civil operations side, more than 100 Airbus helicopters, including H125, H130, H135, Dauphin and H145, are in service with operators in different sectors in India. Airbus Helicopters was the first foreign Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) to establish a dedicated customer centre for the Indian market in 2010, as per its website. Meanwhile, Airbus and Tata Advanced Systems Ltd already have an FAL for C295 military transport aircraft in Vadodara, Gujarat. Airbus has a significant presence in India and sources components and services worth over USD 1.5 billion annually from the country. These include complex aerostructures and systems.

Promoter shares purchased on the open market cause HEG to rise 7%

Mumbai: Following the promoter firm's acquisition of 190,000 shares of the company through open market transactions, the share price of HEG increased by 7% to ₹559.70 on the National Stock Exchange (NSE) during intraday trading on Wednesday. The price of HEG shares was trading 6% higher on the BSE at ₹555.85 at 12:24 PM. By contrast, the Nifty 50 stood at 25,708.60, flat or down 0.07 points. On the NSE (4.68 million) and BSE, a total of 5.02 million equity shares were exchanged. In the meantime, HEG has underperformed the market

thus far in 2026, declining 11% while the Nifty 50 has declined 2%.

On December 31, 2025, the price of HEG's stock reached a 52-week high of ₹672. Redrose Vanijya LLP, a member of promoter group, bought 190,000 equity shares representing 0.10 per cent of total equity of HEG via open market purchase, according to a disclosure made by the company to stock exchanges. Post acquisition, Redrose Vanijya LLP holding in HEG increased to 29.40 per cent from 29.30 per cent, data shows. Meanwhile, on February 12, 2026,

SBI Funds Management informed that SBI Mutual Fund, under its various schemes sold 2.45 million equity shares representing 1.27 per cent of the paid-up share capital of HEG. Post transaction, SBI MF holding in HEG declined to 3.516 per cent from 4.786 per cent. SBI Energy Opportunities Fund held 7.11 per cent holding in HEG at the end of December 31, 2025, the shareholding pattern data shows. HEG business is intrinsically linked to the steel industry, particularly in relation to the steel manufactured via the Electric Arc Furnace (EAF) method,

which is predominant in the western world and the Middle East. An analysis of the global steel sector indicates that approximately 50 million tons of new Green field EAF capacities are likely to be operational in the next few years between now and end of 2027/28 while about 10 mmt has already been operational. From several other announcements made by some of the large steel companies, another 30 to 40 mmt of additional EAF are likely to be installed post 2028. This augurs well for the company, HEG said in its FY25 annual report. Meanwhile, currently,

anode powder – a critical material for lithium-ion battery production is entirely imported from China. Credible research indicates that India's domestic demand for anode powder is projected to reach 100,000 to 140,000 tons annually by 2030, driven by the scaling up of local cell manufacturing. With commercial operations in place, the management said the company will be well-positioned to capture a share of this growing market and contribute to the development of a localised, resilient battery supply chain.

According to MD, 2026 will be Nissan's year of brand revival in India

New Delhi: As it positions 2026 as the year of the brand's revival in India, the Japanese automaker Nissan is lining up a number of vehicles and strengthening its sales infrastructure. The seven-seater MPV Gravite, the company's second offering, was introduced on Tuesday. Currently, it only distributes one model of Magnite in the nation. The year 2026 is crucial when discussing Nissan's commitment to India.

"This year will see Nissan's brand resurgence in India," Saurabh Vatsa, MD of Nissan Motor India, told reporters here. Later this year, the business intends to launch a larger seven-seater C sector SUV and a Tekton SUV in addition to Gravite, he said. "So in close succession, we are bringing in three new vehicles in almost 12 months from now. Therefore, the year of resurgence, which is going to be based on a product lineup which is broadly SUVs," Vatsa said. He noted Magnite will continue to play an important role in the company's product portfolio in



the country. Vatsa said the company is going to leverage high growth markets internationally to bring in additional sales volume. "As we go ahead, export remains one of our fundamental foundational pillars... In FY 2026-27 we are going to cross the 1 lakh unit export mark from India," he added.

Therefore, 2026 new approach, new products, new directions and this is going to be supported with the price coverage from six lakhs to almost up to Rs 20 lakhs, he said. "We are going to go from one segment of vehicles to four segments of vehicles and the potential of these four segments is almost 2.5 units, so that's a strong, robust number and a segment coverage," he added. The company said dealer network expansion is underway across Tier I and Tier II cities to enhance accessibility and customer experience.

Anthropic and Infosys predict AI opportunities will exceed revenue threats

New Delhi: On Tuesday, Infosys informed investors that the potential benefits of digital transformation driven by artificial intelligence (AI) are anticipated to surpass any potential reduction in IT service revenue as a result of productivity increases fueled by AI. Additionally, the IT bellwether established a strategic partnership with Anthropic to provide cutting-edge enterprise AI solutions for industries such as software development, financial services, manufacturing, and telecommunications. The company has identified six service opportunity areas, according to CEO Salil Parekh: AI strategy and engineering; preparing enterprise data for AI models; modernizing legacy operations; integrating AI into physical devices; upgrading core business processes with AI agents; and developing responsible and secure AI systems. Based on outside studies, we project that the opportunity in these six categories will be between \$300 and \$400 billion by 2030. Simultaneously, a number of organizations have proposed that AI productivity may reduce the revenue from IT services. But we are certain that the possibility is enormous and will propel our expansion in the upcoming years," Parekh stated. Infosys stated in a statement to the stock exchanges on Tuesday night that it has two goals for AI: to increase wallet share, it would use AI to enhance its current services and to meet the growing demand for AI-first services across six



value pools.

Regarding the collaboration with Anthropic, Parekh stated that the goal of the alliance is to hasten the realization of AI value for multinational corporations. "The goal is to leverage the joint expertise of Infosys and Anthropic, from modernizing financial services with intelligent risk management and compliance to enabling engineering businesses to lead with AI-driven design and manufacturing," he stated. Although IT services companies have always had to adjust to new paradigms as a result of technological advancements, Chairman Nandan Nilekani contended that the current AI wave offers an even greater potential. "My view is that there is no

opportunity gap. If anything, the opportunity is bigger than before," Nilekani said. He noted that advances powered by the ubiquity of the internet and smartphones have accelerated the pace of AI adoption compared with earlier technological shifts. "This is not a layer of technology; this is a fundamental shift in the way we do business," he said, adding that firms "cannot run businesses the old way" in the AI era. However, Nilekani flagged what he described as a "deployment gap" as a key risk. "Technology is moving faster than an organisation's ability to deploy," he said. While billions of dollars are being invested globally in AI models, enterprise adoption has lagged.

Bengaluru's 6.99-acre Purva Silversky premium project is launched by Puravankara

The 356-unit project in Hebbagodi, Electronic City, features large-format 3-5 BHK homes, a 17,700 sq ft clubhouse and over 45 lifestyle amenities across an elevated podium

Bengaluru: Purva Silversky, a 6.99-acre upscale residential development in Hebbagodi, Electronic City, off Hosur Road, Bengaluru, has been launched, according to Puravankara Limited, a company based in Bengaluru. About 356 upscale apartments are spread across three recognizable 32-story towers in the project. Additionally, the project offers spacious 3-, 4-, and 5-bedroom homes with unit sizes ranging from roughly 1,864 square feet to more than 5,300 square feet, in addition to a few larger-format homes. With statutory and other fees excluded, homes cost more than ₹12,100 per square foot. "Purva Silversky reflects our continued commitment to creating thoughtfully designed homes in locations that offer strong long-



term value," stated Ashish Puravankara, Managing Director, Puravankara Limited, in light of the launch. Electronic City is the perfect location for a high-end, low-density development since it has developed into a well-established residential area with strong employment drivers, a strong infrastructure, and consistent end-user demand. The project's 17,700-square-foot clubhouse and more than 45 carefully chosen lifestyle facilities are situated on a

1.7-acre raised podium, surrounded by landscaped open spaces and a forest walkway with more than 200 trees, Puravankara noted. Since Electronic City has grown into a reputable residential neighborhood with robust employment drivers, a robust infrastructure, and steady end-user demand, it is the ideal site for a high-end, low-density development. The facilities are focused on leisure, relaxation, and well-being. "With multiple big businesses in the

area, the project allows for shorter commutes, allowing residents to better balance their personal and professional lives while also offering strong connectivity to the larger parts of the city," said Mallanna Sasalu, CEO - South, Puravankara Limited. Everything has been carefully chosen to strike a balance between architecture and nature, seclusion and community, and practicality and beauty, from master planning and spatial design to facilities and materials.

MSEDCL will demerge the agricultural sector by April

Mumbai: According to a senior official, Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company intends to finalize the demerger of its farm division by April, a crucial step ahead of its anticipated December IPO. On the fringes of Mumbai Climate Week, its Chairman and Managing Director Lokesh Chandra told PTI, "We are aiming for an IPO by December for MSEDCL (Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company), and before that, we will demerge our agriculture business, which we aim to complete by April." According to Chandra, the agriculture division would be established as a distinct business rather than a subsidiary, guaranteeing that its debts will not be recorded on the main distribution utility's balance sheet. According to him, MSEDCL has outstanding debts totaling approximately Rs 96,000 crore, of which approximately Rs 76,000 crore are related to unpaid agricultural consumption. Even if the primary distribution business is operationally viable, the accumulation of these arrears has resulted in increased working capital borrowings and financial distress, Chandra continued. The residual corporation will have debt of about Rs 20,000 crore after the demerger in April, which the business believes is viable, he continued. Before beginning the IPO process, the company will clean up its balance sheet and restructure its debt after the carve-out. According to Chandra, the listing



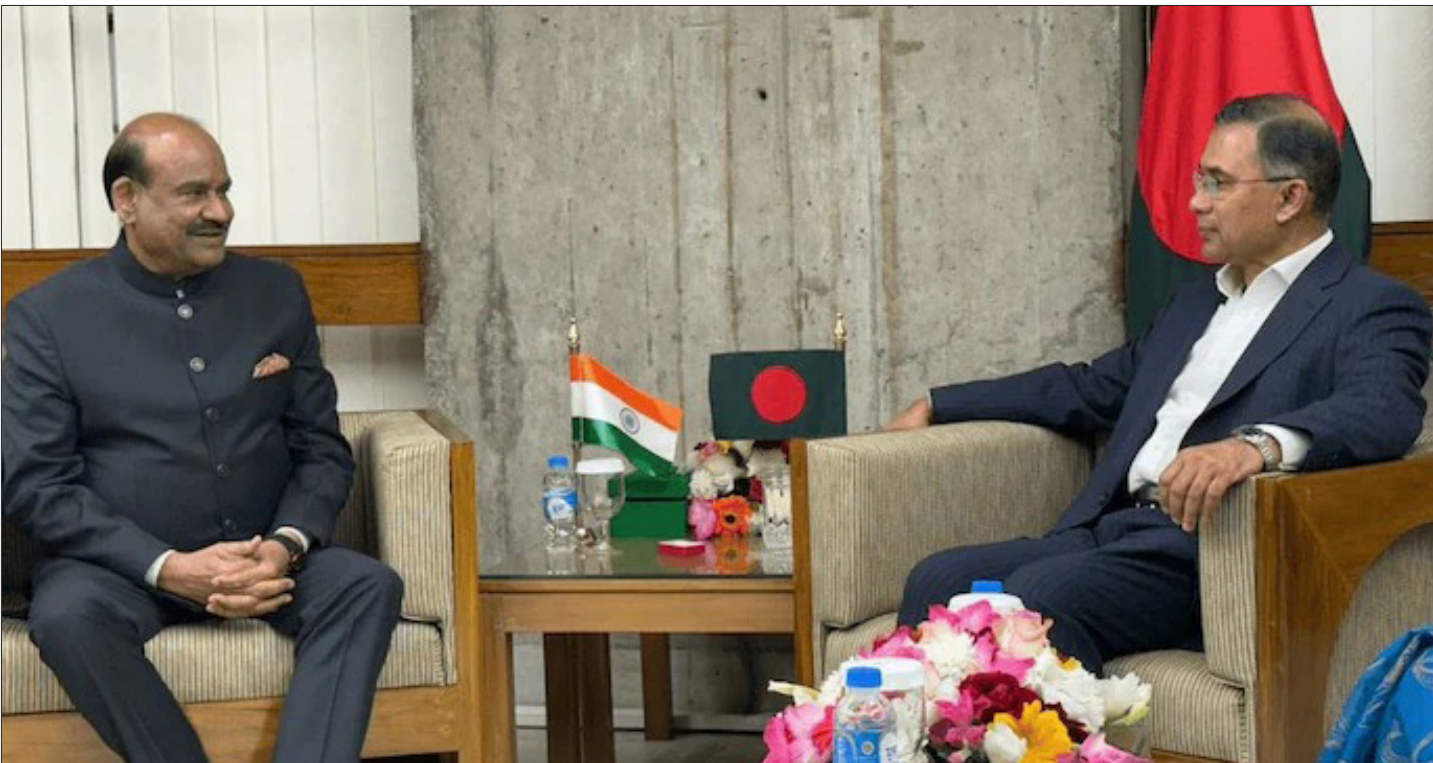
is expected to be finished by December of this year. The government is planning to dilute up to 10 per cent stake in the company through the IPO, he said, adding that IPO proceeds are likely to be deployed towards capital expenditure in transmission and distribution infrastructure. Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had announced that the state's intent to list the energy utilities, including MSEDCL and also the generation and transmission arms in December 2025. He hinted that the process will start with the listing of the transmission company in 2026. Chandra said that discussions with the state government are underway to address agriculture-related arrears. Once resolved, the restructuring is expected to strengthen financial metrics and improve valuation prospects at the time of listing. The company expects to save nearly Rs 66,000 crore in power procurement costs over the next five years through a strategic shift towards renewable energy backed by optimal storage planning.

INTERNATIONAL

Bangladesh PM Tarique Rahman takes the oath of office; Attending the swearing-in ceremony is Om Birla

Dhaka: Following his election as the head of the BNP parliamentary party, Tarique Rahman, the chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, took the oath of office as prime minister of Bangladesh on Tuesday. The right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami, which was previously their ally but is now their main opponent, won 68 seats in the February 12 elections, while the BNP secured 209 of 297 seats in the Bangladesh Parliament. The Awami League, led by former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, was prohibited from running for office. In addition to Rahman, 24 state ministers and 25 ministers took the oath of office. According to Prothom Alo, the 50-member BNP cabinet consists of three technocrats, twenty-four state ministers, and twenty-five ministers. Of the 25 ministers, 17 are new, and all of the state ministers are serving in their first capacity. PM Rahman is also a cabinet member for the first time. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla represented India at Rahman’s swearing-in ceremony. Birla reached Dhaka earlier today, and was accompanied by foreign secretary Vikram Misri and other officials, PTI news agency reported. Upon his arrival, Birla was received by Bangladesh foreign ministry secretary Nazrul Islam. The Lok Sabha speaker said this was an “important moment” which would strengthen people-to-people ties and shared democratic values between India and Bangladesh. An invitation had been extended to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was among the first leaders to congratulate Rah-

man on the victory. However, PM Modi had talks scheduled with French President Emmanuel Macron in Mumbai on Tuesday. Bangladesh’s interim government ‘s leader Muhammad Yunus resigned Monday. The interim government had been running the country after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina in July, 2024.“Today, the interim government is stepping down. But let the practice of democracy, freedom of speech, and fundamental rights that has begun not be halted,” Yunus said in his farewell address to the nation before handing over to an elected government. Bangladesh’s home ministry directed police personnel, as well as others concerned, to ensure maximum security at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, where Rahman took oath, the country’s state-owned news agency reported. The law enforcement agencies were asked to take all necessary measures to guarantee the safety of the Prime Minister and the cabinet ministers during the ceremony, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha reported.A comprehensive plan to ensure security at the venue and surrounding areas was finalised, BSS reported citing sources from police headquarters. Special security arrangements were centered on South Plaza, with the Special Security Force (SSF) to ensure tight security during the PM’s movement. The security convoy included police personnel, Presidential Guard Regiment (PGR), SSF, jammer systems, SSF security screening teams, along with ambulance and medical support, according to BSS. The BNP



and Jamaat-e-Islami faced disagreements on the ‘Constitution Reform Council’, formed to implement the July charter which was voted upon by the people of the country alongside the parliamentary elections. The July charter demands the Constitution to be massively rewritten. The 84-point complex proposal was

laid out in the referendum in a cognised but nearly esoteric form for voting.While the Jamaat-e-Islami’s newly elected MPs took oath as Members of Parliament and also took a second oath as members of the “Constitution Reform Council”, the BNP refused to do so, PTI reported. The election commission re-

ported that over 60 per cent of voters cast a “yes” vote in the referendum. “We have not been elected as members of the Constitution Reform Council; no provision of the council is yet to be incorporated in the Constitution,” PTI cited BNP MP Salahuddin Ahmed as saying.

Cuba is in dire need of food, fuel, and money as the US blockade increases pressure



Havana: As US President Donald Trump continues to increase pressure on Cuba, the Latin American country continues to plunge deeper into crisis. Amid the economic, fuel and health crisis in the country, Trump has called on the ‘failed nation’ to strike a deal with the United States. For the past 60 years, the US has maintained a strict embargo and limited diplomatic ties with Cuba, which has severely affected the Cuban economy. Following his recent calls for regime change in Iran and Venezuela, where the US ‘kidnapped’ sitting President

Nicolas Maduro, Trump declared the US’ intention to overthrow Cuba’s communist government as it reinstated its blockade.While Trump stated that the US would remove the communist government ‘one way or another’, the US president dismissed mounting a regime change operation. “Why would I answer that? If I was, it wouldn’t be a very tough operation, as you can figure, but I don’t think that’ll be necessary,” he told reporters aboard Air Force One, adding that the US is currently in talks with the nation amid the blockade. In January 2026,

Trump signed an executive order targeting countries trading with Cuba, threatening them with tariffs. Trump has issued similar orders with Venezuela and Russia. With these threats, the US imposed a fuel crisis in Cuba, which has now escalated into a waste and health crisis. Garbage and rubbish have started to pile up on the streets in Havana and other cities in Cuba. Due to this waste crisis, many residents have taken to social media to flag their concerns about public health in the capital city. According to a Reuters report citing Cuban media,

in Havana, only 44 of 106 rubbish trucks have been able to keep operating due to fuel shortages. Other trucks stay put with empty fuel tanks as the fuel crisis deepens.Drivers in Cuba currently are facing several months wait to refuel their cars after the Cuban government rolled out an app to avoid chaos at gas stations. “I have (appointment) number seven thousand and something,” Jorge Reyes, a 65-year-old who downloaded the app on Monday, told Associated Press.Cuba’s fuel crisis was triggered by the US cutting off crucial oil supplies, which were imported from Venezuela, after the US’ military raid in Caracas. Also Read | In fuel-starved Cuba, the e-tricycle is kingAfter the fall of Maduro, Cuba turned to Mexico for oil, making it Havana’s biggest oil supplier. However, Mexico also stopped its supply after Trump’s tariff threats escalated.Cuba’s deputy foreign minister has accused the US of imposing punishment on Cuba.“To be clear: a. Cuba requires importing fuel. b.The US is applying threats & coercive

measures to any country that provides it. c. Lack of fuel harms transportation, medical services, schooling, energy, production of food, the standard of living. d. Massive punishment is a crime,” he wrote on social media platform X. A group of United Nations human rights experts have also condemned the US oil siege, saying that it has “no basis on collective security and constitutes a unilateral act that is incompatible with international law.”The lack of fuel in Cuba is also hampering the UN World Food Programme’s operations across the Caribbean island. Due to a lack of fuel, the transport of food and its availability across the country are endangered.“We’re already seeing the impact in the availability of fresh produce in the cities,” Etienne Labande, the WFP’s country director, told The Guardian.The fuel crisis in Cuba has also impacted the energy industry, triggering long blackouts across the nation. A book fair and an annual cigar trade fair in Cuba have also been postponed due to the growing problems.

Geneva nuclear talks between the US and Iran agree on guiding principles for the deal’s course

Tehran: According to Iran’s foreign minister, indirect negotiations between U.S. and Iranian officials in Switzerland concluded Tuesday with an agreement on a “set of guiding principles.” The two parties also agreed to share drafts of a possible agreement. Abbas Araghchi, the foreign minister, was as optimistic as he was evasive, giving no indication of what had been discussed or when the next round of talks may take place. Public comments on the discussions were not immediately made by U.S. officials. The three-hour Geneva talks were “more constructive” and had made “good progress” compared to a prior round of negotiations in Oman earlier this month, Araghchi told Iranian state media. “I think it’s good that we have a clear path ahead now,” he stated.



quickly, but at least the path has begun,” he said. The negotiations were hosted at the Omani ambassador’s residence by Oman’s foreign minister, Bad Albusaidi, who mediated the previous round of talks. A spokesperson for Iran’s foreign ministry had

said ahead of the talks that Omani officials would shuttle between the two sides. Albusaidi said on social media after the talks that they had concluded “with good progress towards identifying common goals and relevant technical issues”. “Together we made serious efforts to define a number of guiding principles for a final deal,” he said. “Much work is yet to be done.” Steve Witkoff, the West Asia envoy, and Jared Kushner, President Trump’s son-in-law, had been expected to attend the negotiations, according to two US officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomacy.Trump, speaking on Monday on Air Force One, said he would be involved in the talks “indirectly” and that they’d be “very important”. He said Iran wanted to make a deal.Trump has ordered a buildup of US forces in the region — including two aircraft carriers — after vowing last month to aid antigovernment demonstrators in Iran. The Iranian government quelled those protests in a bloody crackdown that killed thousands, according to rights groups. Now, Trump is calling on Iran to reach a deal to limit its nuclear and military capabilities, or face the threat of a possible attack.

A recent book on China places its rise in the context of Southeast Asia

Beijing: For Southeast Asian nations that must maintain their economic and security interests in a changing political environment by striking a balance between China and the US, endless headlines about Chinese adventurism on land and at sea—whether it is Beijing’s aggression at the China-India border or its increased military activity in the Taiwan Strait—offer a glimpse of harsh realities. Sebastian Strangio, an author and journalist who covers the area, has written a new book titled “In the Dragon’s Shadow” that provides explanation for some of these stories. In the eleven-nation region (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, East Timor, and the Philippines), China wasn’t always as assertive. China started forging relationships with the nations it had cut off under Mao’s nearly three-decade dictatorship, which lasted from 1949 to 1976, in the late 1970s. China enacted a new nationality law in September 1980 that denied dual citizenship to Chinese nationals residing abroad. This aided in mending relations with nations that were dubious of China’s desire to normalize relations. Additionally, it resulted in foreign-born ethnic Chinese, primarily from Hong Kong and Taiwan, investing in China. However, a lot has changed since then. China is accused of both actively mobilizing the affections of its citizens abroad to support the Communist Party

and of employing questionable tactics to do so. So, are these worries all justified? That has a somewhat nuanced solution. Given that the Chinese government has given more attention to interacting with its residents abroad, some worries about the Chinese using their diaspora population for political purposes are valid. One year after Chinese President Xi Jinping declared a “new era” that would restore China’s standing in the international arena, China transferred control of its Overseas Chinese Affairs Office to the traditional wing of the Communist Party in March 2018 in order to foster relationships with non-communist groups, including foreign-born populations. But that does not mean that China has always succeeded in gathering the kind of support it has desired. Instead, a spate of instances, from anger against the Chinese building new roads or diverting water resources or asserting claims to resources across the South China Sea, have given rise to anti-China sentiments in Southeast Asian countries that have typically been cautious (like Laos or Cambodia) about inviting Chinese backlash. Some other concerns related to the Chinese infrastructure project, or the Belt and Road Initiative, may be partly misdiagnosed since it is not clear whether China really wants to displace all the US institutions and mechanisms from which it has itself benefited. Instead, there is clear evi-

dence—Xi had spoken of the Chinese dream after taking office in 2012—that it does want to regain some of the centrality it enjoyed in East Asia before being subjugated by foreign countries in the 19th and 20th century. This brings us to the number one concern that has been on the minds of both Western and Southeast Asian countries: China’s maritime disputes. Consider the dispute from the vantage point of the country at the frontlines of containing Beijing’s expansionism: Vietnam.The Chinese had invaded Vietnam for a month in 1979 after Vietnam overthrew the Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. The invasion brought the two former allies—the Chinese and the Vietnamese fought the French and the Americans in the Vietnam War—to war. Both countries later found a common interest in developing their economies after the end of Cold War.But, in 2014, China placed a massive deep-water oil rig in waters close to the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea. The rig was placed in waters that fell within Vietnam’s exclusive economic zone, sparking off anti-China protests in Vietnam. This is also why diplomatic forums like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are increasingly gaining clout since many of the countries prefer a middle course that suits the region best, instead of them having to choose between the US and China.

Kim Jong Un of North Korea establishes a housing district for the relatives of dead soldiers

North Korea: According to state media KCNA on Monday, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un presided over the opening of a new housing district in Pyongyang for relatives of soldiers who lost their lives in military operations abroad.The new district, according to Kim’s speech, represents the “spirit and sacrifice” of the fallen soldiers. The residences are designed to enable grieving families to “take pride in their sons and husbands and live happily.”He pushed to complete the project “even one day earlier” in the hopes that it would provide “some small comfort” to the families of the warriors, according to Kim.According to photos made public by KCNA, Kim and his daughter Ju Ae visited the recently finished homes of the dead troops and consoled their relatives. There has been growing speculation over whether the teenager is being groomed to be Kim’s successor. Ju Ae has appeared alongside her father in the past three years at an expanding range of events, including missile tests, military anniversaries and major national celebrations, in a sign that the state propaganda apparatus is gradually elevating her visibility. Under a mutual defence pact with Russia, in 2024 North Korea sent some 14,000 soldiers to fight alongside Russian troops against Ukraine, where more than 6,000 of them were killed, according to South Korean, Ukrainian and Western sources. North Korea has staged multiple public ceremonies in recent months to honour its war dead, including the unveiling of a new memorial complex in Pyongyang adorned with sculptures of troops. The opening comes ahead of the Ninth Congress of the ruling Workers’ Party, which is set to convene in late February and is expected to serve as a major political showcase for Kim’s achievements and policy priorities.



The secretive islands behind the US-UK row



On our third day sailing south from Addu City in the Maldives, thunderhead clouds rose around our boat, reducing visibility to near zero. With full sails, we raced the weather through a reef-strewn pass, weaving between coral mounds until the sea flattened and lush, uninhabited islands slid past on either side. Once we settled on a mooring off the island of Boddam, I realised we had arrived somewhere few people would ever see: the Chagos Archipelago, one of the most remote island groups on Earth. Chagos is made up of seven atolls and some 60 islands scattered across the Indian Ocean like a handful of shells flung across a vast blue sea. Salomon, its northernmost atoll, lies 286 nautical miles south of the Maldives. Little-known and isolated, it’s a place that demands self-reliance and a tolerance for being profoundly far from anywhere else. Six years into a world circumnavigation, my family and I had sailed halfway around the planet to get here, bringing everything we would need with us – just as the few who venture here must. Yet despite their apparent insignificance, these palm-studded islands have

been thrust into an unlikely international row. In recent weeks, Chagos has become the focus of renewed diplomatic tension between the UK, the United States and Mauritius, reopening questions about sovereignty and the legacy of colonial rule. The UK has controlled Chagos (officially known as the British Indian Ocean Territory), since 1814. In 1965, the islands were separated from Mauritius when Mauritius was still a British colony and Chagos became formally established as a British overseas territory. The UK purchased the archipelago for £3m, but Mauritius has argued that it was illegally forced to give Chagos away as part of a deal to gain independence.Beginning in 1967, the British government began forcibly removing Chagos’ residents to build a highly secretive joint military base with the United States on Diego Garcia, the archipelago’s largest island. Since gaining independence from the UK in 1968, Mauritius has claimed sovereignty over Chagos, maintaining that it’s an integral part of its territory. Amid growing diplomatic pressure, the UK signed a controversial agreement to hand control of the archipelago to Mauritius in 2025 – a

move that US President Donald Trump recently called “an act of

great stupidity.”But while world leaders grapple over Chagos’ future, evidence of its tangled past is everywhere in this mysterious, paradisiacal place. Pristine and haunted Chagos is among the most intact reef systems on the planet and has long held a near-mythical reputation among sailors. For decades, self-sufficient voyagers lingered for months, fishing the reef, harvesting coconuts and living slowly. That era ended in the late 1990s, when authorities tightened access. Today, these disputed tropical islands are closed to tourism and the only way for sailors, researchers and authorised visitors to explore the islands is to secure advanced per-

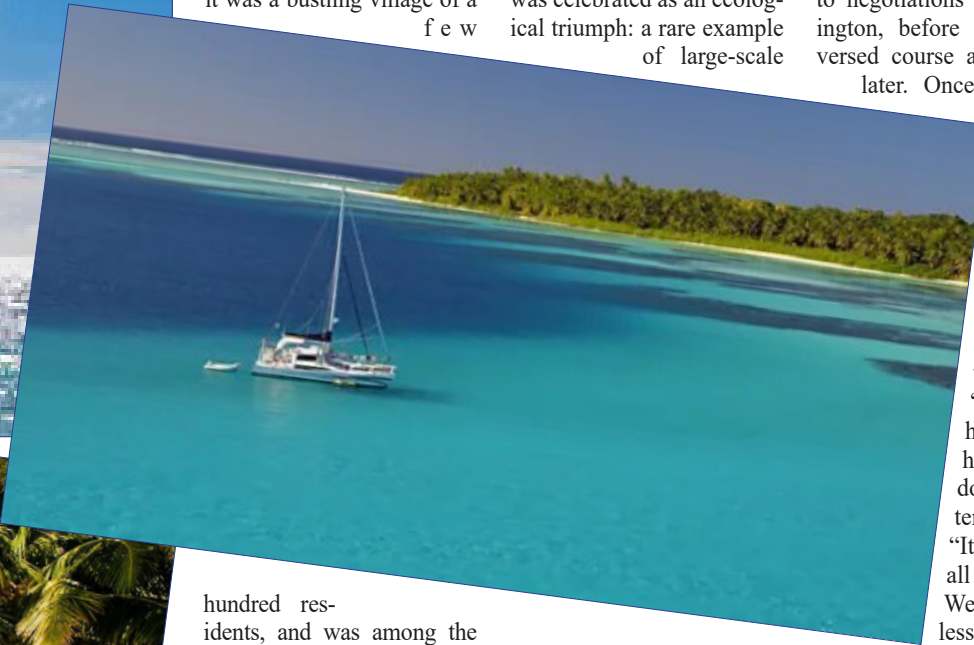
mits, receive a medical evaluation, obtain wreck-removal insurance and then sail to reach this far-flung place, just as we did.During our four-week stay (the maximum allowed), days fell into a rhythm shaped by the environment. We snorkelled reefs thick with life, spotting dozens of sharks, rays and turtles, and vast schools of wrasse, damselfish and parrotfish. We hiked shaded trails through old plantations, and caught jacks and snappers with ease, logging each one as required. Laundry water came from shallow wells, where rainwater floats above salt. Each day, the skies filled with red-footed boobies, noddies, sooty terns and trop-

birds nesting in astonishing numbers along the shoreline. Yet fragility was everywhere. The reefs showed patches of bleaching. Each evening, monstrous rats – introduced centuries earlier by European colonists and fat on seabird eggs – emerged from the jungle alongside enormous coconut crabs, pushing us off the beaches and back towards the boat.On Boddam – once one of Chagos’ three settled islands – we explored dense jungle threaded with old paths, stumbling across the remains of a church, jail and school built in the 1930s. In the graveyard, nearly every inscription had been erased

by time. Someone had lived here long enough to build, bury their dead and imagine a future.The islands felt both pristine and haunted. Hoping to understand more, I reached out to Anne-Marie Gendron, a Chagossian in the Seychelles and one of roughly 2,000 people forcibly removed from the archipelago in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She had lived with her parents on Boddam when it was a bustling village of a few

compensation, housing or even proof of nationality. Many fell into deep poverty. Some died, Gendron said, of sadness. The UK has since apologised for the nature of their removal.After the removals, most of the archipelago was abandoned. Villages collapsed into forest. Coconut plantations reverted to jungle. When a vast Marine Protected Area was declared in 2010, Chagos was celebrated as an ecological triumph: a rare example of large-scale

African and Malagasy. We lived there for five or six generations. We have our own language, culture, food, and music. We are not Mauritian.”An uncertain future In January 2026, momentum faltered. Days before the treaty was expected to pass through the UK House of Lords, the US administration raised objections. The British government paused the legislation and returned to negotiations with Washington, before the US reversed course again weeks later. Once more, decisions



about Chagos were being made without the people most affected in the room. “Everything has been behind closed doors,” Bontemps said. “It’s like 1965 all over again. We’re voiceless.” The UK Government

rewilding in the tropics.After years of negotiation, an agreement was announced in 2025 to transfer sovereignty of the islands to Mauritius. The UK – and by extension the United States – would retain operational control of Diego Garcia for 99 years. A £40m trust fund would be created, and the door would open, at least in principle, to some form of resettlement on the outer islands.For some, it sounded like progress. For others, it felt uncomfortably familiar. Frankie Bontemps, a Chagossian activist living in the UK, was born in Mauritius after his mother was exiled there. He says discrimination against Chagossians shaped his life and eventually forced him to leave. “If you look closely, nothing guarantees Chagossians will have priority,” he told me, referring to the UK’s plan to cede the islands. “Technically, the islands will belong to Mauritius.”He also rejects the way Chagossians are routinely described as Mauritian. “Our origins are

hundred residents, and was among the last to leave in 1973. ”They told us we had to go to make room for the US military,” she said. “But I was baptised in the church. Generations of my family were buried in the graveyard. We had no other home.”Some people didn’t even pack, she told me. “They couldn’t understand what was happening.”Chagos had been settled for centuries, after the Dutch and French brought enslaved Africans and Malagasy people to tend coconut plantations. Over generations, a distinct Creole culture emerged, with its own language, food and music.Before establishing the US-UK military base on Diego Garcia in 1971, the United States insisted the territory be cleared. British officials, eager to comply, dismissed the islands’ residents as transient labourers. Internal correspondence described them as “a few Tarzans or Man Fridays”, a reference to Robinson Crusoe’s servant. Families were put on ships and deposited in Mauritius and the Seychelles, often without

says that it has engaged with Chagossian communities and remains committed to listening to the range of views. For many Chagossians, the stakes are deeply personal. Elders continue to die without ever seeing their homeland again. Some cautiously welcome the possibility of returning to the outer islands, including Boddam, possibly to develop small eco-tourism ventures and artisanal fisheries; others reject the deal outright, objecting to the continued ban on resettling in Diego Garcia and the absence of direct consultation. Environmentalists, meanwhile, warn that any human return must be carefully managed. There are concerns that Mauritius may lack the resources to protect the marine reserve at its current scale. Rising seas add another layer of uncertainty: like the Maldives, Chagos is perilously low-lying, its future shaped as much by climate change as by diplomacy.

Exercise can be ‘frontline treatment’ for mild depression, researchers say

Aerobic exercise such as running, swimming or dancing can be considered a frontline treatment for mild depression and anxiety, according to research that suggests working out with others brings the most benefits.Scientists analysed published reviews on exercise and mental health and found that some of the greatest improvements were observed in young adults and new mothers – groups that are considered particularly vulnerable to mental health problems.While aerobic group exercise emerged as the most effective physical activity for reducing depression and anxiety, low-intensity programmes that lasted only a couple of months may be best for anxiety, the researchers said. “Exercise can have a similar effect, and sometimes a stronger impact, than traditional treatments,” said Neil Munro, a psychologist at James Cook University in Queensland, Australia. “Getting moving, in whatever shape or form works best for each person, can help mitigate depression and anxiety symptoms.” A barista pours milk

into a cappuccino at a coffee shop in Caracas, Venezuela. A couple of teas or coffees a day could lower risk of dementia, scientists say The researchers analysed data from 63 published reviews that looked at the impact of exercise on depression or anxiety in nearly 80,000 volunteers. The study aimed to identify the effect of exercise across all ages, and in pregnant women and new mothers. The exercises ranged from resistance training and aerobic workouts to mind-body activities such as yoga and tai chi.Forms of aerobic exercise that boosted the heart rate had the biggest impact on depression, with resistance training and yoga having a lesser effect. A similar trend was seen for anxiety but the impact was smaller, the study found. Further benefits were seen in people who took part in group exercise or supervised activities, the researchers write in the British Journal of Sports Medicine. This suggests socialising plays “a crucial role in the antidepressant effects of exercise”, Munro said. According to the World Health Organization,



more than 280 million people worldwide have depression and 301 million have anxiety disorders. In the UK and elsewhere, cases have risen sharply among 16- to 24-year-olds in the past decade. About 15 to 20% of new mothers experience depression and

anxiety in the first year after giving birth. Dr Brendon Stubbs, who studies exercise

and mental health at King’s College London, urged caution over the findings because they relied heavily on mild cases. “For people with mild or subclinical symptoms, exercise can reasonably be considered a frontline treatment option,” he said.

“However, there is no evidence from this study, or from the wider literature, to suggest that people should change or discontinue established treatments such as psychotherapy or medication.” For many people with severe depression, even

basic daily activities could be extremely challenging, he added, and their symptoms often needed to improve before they could attempt exercise. Prof Michael Bloomfield, a psychiatrist at UCL, said: “It’s good news that group exercise such as Zumba can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression for some people, likely through a mix of physical activity, social connection, fun, dance and routine, and the evidence supports it as a potential useful adjunct to care.” But he said for many people with more severe depression, taking part in energetic group activities was unrealistic. “For that reason, exercise should be seen as a complement to, not a replacement for, evidence-based treatments such as psychological therapies and medication where these are clinically indicated,” Bloomfield said.



ENTERTAINMENT

Priya Mani and Mohit Raina will star in an Indo-Hollywood movie based on the real story of an immigrant family

Mumbai: Actors Priya Mani and Mohit Raina will star in a forthcoming cross-border film based on a true story, marking the start of a new Indo-Hollywood partnership. Mumbai’s Azure Entertainment and the US-based production banner Red Bison Productions collaborated on the as-yet-untitled movie. The study will examine how an immigrant family navigates life outside of the traditional definition of the American Dream on an emotional and cultural level.

The film, which was written and directed by Harsh Mahadeshwar, offers a real story that is both intimate and expansive. The narrative seeks to represent changing international film trends, wherein intimate tales are widely relatable and transcend national boundaries. In addition to New York and New Jersey, parts of the movie will also be shot in Delhi and Jammu & Kashmir. In April 2026, principal photography is expected to start. “This project is very close to my heart because



it explores identity and belonging in a deeply honest way,” Mohit Raina stated, expressing his enthusiasm for the endeavor. It is even more noteworthy because it is a significant step toward global storytelling and is a part of Azure Entertainment and Red Bison Productions’ first Indo-Hollywood partnership. I can’t wait to make this adventure a reality and work with such an enthusiastic group of people to create a story that knows no boundaries.” Priya Mani echoed similar sentiments. “What drew me to this film instantly was the emotional truth of the story.

In the process, working

with the teams at Red Bison Productions and Azure Entertainment has been a truly enriching experience - there is a shared passion and sensitivity towards the story that reflects in every creative choice. I’m grateful to be part of a project that brings together such committed collaborators to tell a story that will connect with audiences across borders,” she said. The collaboration is being positioned as a landmark step toward globally resonant storytelling, with more details about the film’s title, additional cast members and release plans expected to be announced in the coming months.

Composer Anirudh starts a record label to release tunes from movies

New Delhi: A new chapter in composer Anirudh Ravichander’s career has begun with the official launch of his own audio label, Albuquerque Records. His recording studio, which was inspired by Breaking Bad, which is situated in the American town of Albuquerque, is the name of the label. This action is meant to give his original soundtracks as well as the creations of up-and-coming musicians a platform.

Anirudh hopes to expand the range of creative output in the local pop music sector by publishing music from both indie releases and his cinematic projects under Albuquerque Records. The label seeks to bridge the gap between mainstream film compositions and independent ventures, offering a dedicated space for a variety of musical styles and voices.

Anirudh described this audio label as a “significant step” in his career, both strategically and creatively, in a statement. According to him, Albuquerque

Records is his first attempt at establishing a music industry centered on originality, control, and cultural influence. “I had a strong interest in indie music prior to movies, and this label supports up-and-coming, gifted musicians who should be seen and heard while simultaneously providing a home for my film and non-film work.

Our goals are to create a powerful collection, feature unique voices, and support a brand that advances the local POP scene. Anirudh expressed his confidence in Kausik as they have known each other since (Why This) Kolaveri days. Albuquerque Records is preparing to release original soundtracks from Anirudh’s upcoming film projects and his independent works. This includes music for anticipated films such as Rajinikanth’s 173rd film, Shah Rukh Khan’s King, Vijay’s Jana Nayagan, Vetri Maaran’s Arasan, Nani’s The Paradise, and Arun Matheswaran’s DC.

Ektaa Kapoor and Imtiaz Ali unveil new love saga Heer Ranjha



Mumbai: Officially, the Laila Majnu franchise is growing. On Valentine’s Day, Ektaa Kapoor and Imtiaz Ali revealed that Sajid Ali would be directing Heer Ranjha, the next installment in their romantic world. The new project, which is posi-

tioned as a spiritual sequel to the 2018 movie Laila Majnu, intends to bring the renowned Punjabi love tale to a modern audience. The statement, which was purposefully made on February 14, represents a sustained commitment to timeless epic

romances. Under the Pi -- Films Pvt Ltd label, Shobha Kapoor, Ektaa Kapoor, and Preeti Ali will produce the movie. Production is anticipated to start shortly. Heer Ranjha seems prepared to join the discourse with far greater anticipation than Laila Majnu, who has subtly become a cult favorite over the years. Despite not doing well at the box office when it was first released, Laila Majnu gradually gained a devoted fan base thanks to its powerful, poetic narrative. The group now appears eager to develop a more expansive love realm based on mythology from the subcontinent.

Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan recreate vintage feelings KH X RK

Mumbai: On February 21, 2026, the announcement trailer for actor Rajinikanth’s upcoming movie, which is now titled KH X RK, was made public. He and Kamal Haasan last appeared together in the 1979 fantasy movie Allauddinum Albhutha Vilakkum, therefore this is their first time working together. Director Nelson, composer Anirudh Ravichander, Rajinikanth, and Kamal Haasan are shown having a good time in the first announcement video. Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan can be seen questioning their outfit choices in the video. Both performers are seen twinning in vintage looks when their presence is unveiled. Kamal Haasan, while sharing the announcement video on his X handle, wrote, “A Special reunion with my friend @Rajinikanth. Every great journey deserves another chapter! My best to



@NelsonDilpkumar and @AnirudhOfficial - and to @RedGiantMovies for powering this collaboration. #KHxRK #RedGiant17... (sic).” The film is produced by Red Giant Movies. Sharing their thoughts, a spokesperson from Red Giant Movies said: “Bringing together Kamal Haasan sir and Rajinikanth sir for this film is truly a dream come true for all of us at Red Giant Movies. We feel deeply honoured, grateful, and incredibly excited to facilitate this reunion after 47 years. This is a historic and emotional moment for Indian cinema, and we embark on this journey with immense gratitude and respon-

sibility. We are committed to creating a cinematic experience that celebrates their legacy in the most powerful way.” “Bringing together Kamal Haasan sir and Rajinikanth sir for this film is truly a dream come true for all of us at Red Giant Movies. We feel deeply honoured, grateful, and incredibly excited to facilitate this reunion after 47 years. This is a historic and emotional moment for Indian cinema, and we embark on this journey with immense gratitude and respon-

Movies had earlier shared a statement on its X handle, which read, “History rarely repeats itself.. But when it does, it becomes a celebration for generations. The reunion of two towering legends is a moment of immense pride and emotion for Red Giant Movies (sic).”“#KHxRK will be a celebration of the legends we’ve adored and grown up watching on screen. A special word of gratitude to director Nelson, whose conviction and craft have made this historic moment possible and who better than our own Rockstar Anirudh to fire up this celebration. Today’s the day. The time is 12:07 PM. #RedGiant17...(sic).”

Kangana Ranaut supports Sara Arjun following her breakthrough performance in Dhurandhar

Mumbai: Recently, Kangana Ranaut showed her love for Sara Arjun, who became well-known across the country for her performance in Aditya Dhar’s spy action thriller Dhurandhar. Kangana Ranaut praised Arjun on social media after the movie’s premiere, and her performance was much praised. The significance of Sara Arjun’s work was further highlighted by the BJP MP, who referred to her as a “remarkable young woman” and stated that she was “rooting” for her. The emotional depth and on-screen presence of Sara Arjun’s performance in Dhurandhar have garnered attention. The actor played the role of Rakesh Bedi’s disobedient daughter in the Aditya Dhar-directed movie, who develops feelings for Ranveer Singh’s character. Audiences and colleagues in the business have praised her transformation from child actor to leading woman for her nuanced performance. In her Instagram post, Kangana Ranaut praised Sara Arjun, calling her “authentic and rooted.” Ranaut said,

“Amazing young lady, authentic and rooted, do well kid, I am rooting for you. #dhurandhar #ishayogacenter #saraarjun. Ranaut’s recognition is notable as she has previously praised Dhurandhar for its cinematic execution and intent. In an earlier post, Ranaut stated, “I watched #dhurandhar and had a great time. Totally inspired by the art and craft of this masterpiece but honest huge admiration for the intent of the filmmaker. Dear Aadiya Dhar ji, border pe hamare defence forces, sarkar mein hamare Modi ji aur Bollywood cinema mein aap, khoob kambal kutayi karo in Pakistani terrorists ki, maza aa gaya (On our border, it is our defence forces; in the government, it’s Prime Minister Modi; and in our cinema, it’s you.

Beat up those Pakistani terrorists. Had so much fun), whistled and clapped all the way!! Superb work by everyone, lekin Dhurandhar of this show is the filmmaker himself @adityadharfilms. Congratulations Yami Gautam (sic).” Dhurandhar features a star-stud-



ded cast, including Ranveer Singh, Arjun Rampal, R Madhavan, Sanjay Dutt, and Akshaye Khanna. Sara Arjun, daughter of actor Raj Arjun, began her career at a young age, making her debut with a television commercial before appearing in notable films such as 404, Deiva Thirumagal, Ek Thi Daayan, Jai Ho, and Saivam. Her role in Dhurandhar marked her first as a leading actor, a transition that has been met with critical and popular approval.

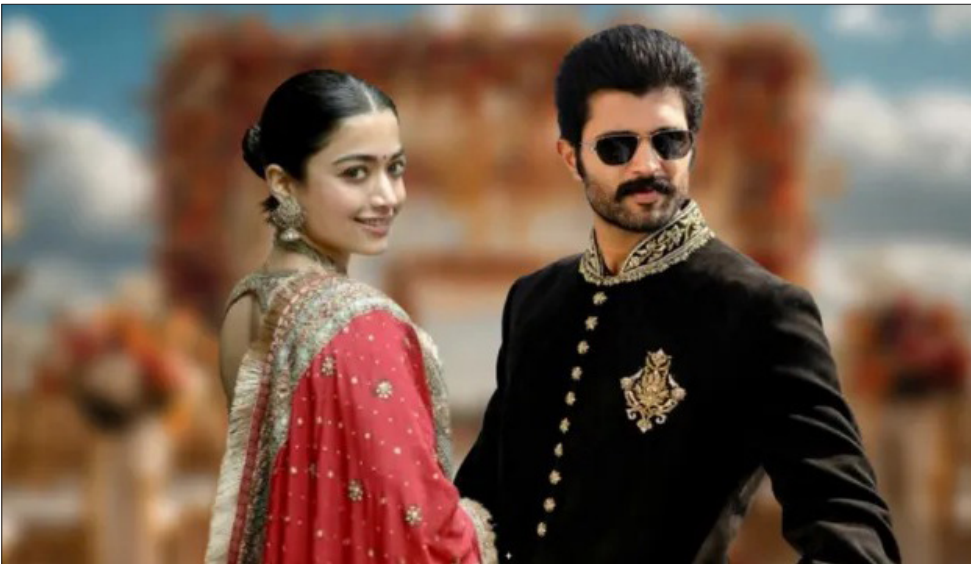
Recently, Sara celebrated Maha Shivratri at the Isha Foundation,

where she shared her experience with fans. In a video message, she said, “Namaskaram and a very happy Maha Shivratri to all of you. I had a very good time. I can’t really explain how grateful and blessed I feel to be here. We have witnessed so many brilliant performances so far. I can’t wait for all the dancing to start.”The sequel, Dhurandhar: The Revenge, is scheduled for release on March 19, with Sara Arjun, Ranveer Singh, Sanjay Dutt, and Arjun Rampal returning to reprise their roles.

Invitations to Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda’s February 26 wedding reception have surfaced

Mumbai: A poster for Farzi Season 2 was released on Tuesday by filmmakers Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK, popularly known as Raj & DK, hinting at the forthcoming production of the Shahid Kapoor-starring thriller series on Prime Video. “Round 2 in progress” and “#Farzi” were scribbled over the poster when the director-duo posted it to their Instagram stories. The update was released precisely three years after the first season premiered on February 10, 2023. The directors posted a vintage video with snippets from the first season on Instagram earlier in the day. Sharing a picture with the filmmakers on his Instagram story, Shahid wrote, “The fakers are back at it @rajanddk.” The first season of Farzi revolves around Shahid’s Sunny, a disillusioned artist dealing with income inequality, and Sethupathi’s Michael Vedanayagam, a Special Task Force officer.

The eight-episode show marked Shahid’s web series debut. Released on Prime Video, the series also starred Raashii Khanna, Vijay Sethupathi, Kay Kay Menon, Bhuvan Arora and Raashii Khanna in pivotal roles. Farzi marked the OTT debut for Shahid. “I’m writing to let you know about some exciting news and to extend an invitation to join us at a significant turning point in our life. On 26.02.26, Rashmika and I will tie the knot



in a small, private ceremony with the love and blessings of our families. As we start this new chapter—celebrating and making memories around our union—it would mean a lot to us to celebrate with those who have supported us along the way. We would be even more grateful for your blessings and presence on this important occasion. We cordially invite you to attend our wedding reception and bestow blessings upon us. We’re excited to celebrate with each other.

Mandanna and Deverakonda reportedly got engaged at a private ceremony in Hyderabad in October last year. While they didn’t announce the news of the engagement, the two also didn’t deny it at various events

they attended later. During the success bash of Rashmika’s The Girlfriend, Vijay was seen standing by her, supporting her and cheering for her. In a viral video, he was also seen kissing her hand.

The two first worked together in the Telugu film Geetha Govindam (2018), which became a massive hit and turned them into one of South cinema’s most loved on-screen pairs. Their chemistry was widely appreciated. They reunited in Dear Comrade (2019), further strengthening both their professional bond and fan speculation. Frequent holidays at similar locations around the same time, festive celebrations, social media posts and subtle public support for each other’s

films added to the rumours about their relationship. Vijay Deverakonda rose to nationwide fame with Sandeep Reddy Vanga’s Arjun Reddy (2017), a breakthrough performance that established him as one of Telugu cinema’s most intense and unconventional leading men. He followed it up with commercial successes like Geetha Govindam (2018) and experimented with pan-Indian appeal through projects such as Liger (2022). Meanwhile, Rashmika Mandanna built a strong career across Kannada, Telugu and Hindi cinema, earning widespread popularity with films like Kirik Party (2016) and later achieving pan-India stardom with the Pushpa (2021, 2024) series.

Toxic-Dhurandhar 2’s clash upsets Yash, who maintains the March 19 release date

Mumbai: After the makers of Dhurandhar: The Revenge revealed that their movie will be released on the same day as his next effort, Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Grown-ups, KGF star Yash found himself at the center of a box office battle. With both productions hoping for significant profits, the matchup is scheduled for Eid 2026, a time of heavy traffic. Long in advance, Yash announced the release date of his movie as March 19. This has now become a matter of controversy because Dhurandhar: The Revenge’s producers chose the same date without telling him. There had been rumors that Toxic could postpone its release, but Yash’s close associates swiftly refuted these claims. “Yash is not operating on ego, contrary to what many might think,” a source told Variety India, adding that the choice to stick with the release date is motivated by strategy rather than pride. “Yash is a very good businessman,” the person continued. He might have thought about delaying it if Dhurandhar:

The Revenge had made him feel threatened. But he is betting on a lengthy theatrical run rather than just an opening weekend because he has such faith in the film’s content.” The source went on to describe the background of Toxic’s release schedule. “Toxic was formally revealed in December 2023, three years ago. Since then, his admirers have eagerly anticipating his on-screen appearance. Yash is unwilling to back down and let his fans down. High expectations have been raised by this protracted wait, especially among Yash’s fans,



therefore the date selection is crucial to the movie’s momentum. However, it has been revealed that Yash is upset that the Dhurandhar team did not reach out before announcing a direct clash.

According to reports, Yash is believed to be irked that the makers of Dhurandhar: The Revenge did not inform him about their Eid release plan, knowing full well they had blocked the date last year. The lack of communication has highlighted differences in industry practices between the southern and Hindi film sectors.

A source close to the matter elaborated, “Toxic announced its date in March last year. If Dhurandhar: The Revenge was coming on that date, they should have at least given him

a courtesy call. Yash feels the Hindi film industry doesn’t have that culture of communication that is common in the southern industries,” suggesting that mutual respect and openness are more prevalent in the southern film markets. As both Toxic and Dhurandhar: The Revenge prepare to compete for a strong box office opening, the Eid 2026 weekend is now set for a closely watched contest. Early indications suggest that Dhurandhar: The Revenge has generated more buzz in the Hindi-speaking regions, while Yash continues to enjoy strong support in southern markets. The battle for audience attention is already underway, with both sides pushing their promotional activities in the lead-up to release.

India is supported by the EU Navy in the International Fleet Review as an Indo-Pacific maritime anchor

New Delhi, Feb 22: The International Fleet Review (IFR), which has become one of the biggest maritime meetings in recent years with warships and delegates from about 70 countries converging off the coast of Visakhapatnam, highlights India's increasing prominence in international naval diplomacy. In light of this, the European Union has made it clear that it wants India-EU collaboration to go beyond symbolic and result in tangible economic, defense, and maritime outcomes. Vice Admiral Ignacio Villanueva Serrano, Operation Commander of EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta, stated in an exclusive interview with India Today that the level of engagement at IFR is indicative of global trust in India's leadership position in the Indo-Pacific.

"India's credibility as a maritime partner and a net security provider is highlighted by the presence of nearly 70 countries," he said. The Indian Navy's operational maturity and capacity to interact with a wide range of navies were commended by him. According to him, IFR presents a unique chance for operational discussions, strategic discussions,



and initiatives to foster confidence to come together on one platform. The head of the EU Navy highlighted the increasing defense and commerce convergence between Europe and India in addition to naval cooperation.

According to him, technology alliances, safe supply chains, and larger defense-industrial collaboration are all becoming more and more intertwined with maritime security cooperation.

"Maritime security becomes a natural pillar supporting those ambitions as India and the EU move forward on defense cooperation and trade frameworks," he said. Villanueva emphasized the successful coordination between EU NAVFOR

and the Indian Navy in combating piracy, highlighting it as a model for multilateral cooperation. This collaboration fosters trust that can expand to joint exercises, defense manufacturing, and strategic trade routes. He described the IFR as a catalyst for aligning India and Europe's strategic priorities amidst growing challenges to sea lanes and global commerce, reinforcing the significance of a strong India-EU partnership for economic security and trade resilience. Additionally, the document provides a brief overview of Vice Admiral Villanueva's background and military career, detailing his achievements and roles within the Spanish Navy and Air Force.

The unmet rugby promise of Delhi



New Delhi: The land in Maidan Garhi, South Delhi, initially intended for the country's first dedicated rugby stadium, is now neglected and converted into a public park. Players report that despite a 2019 allotment of 3.25 acres by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), the space lacks essential facilities like goalposts, grass fields, drinking water, and toilets. Previously restricted by the DDA's policy against ball games in parks, players are now frustrated by the park's official status, which undermines the original stadium purpose. This situation raises safety and hygiene concerns, especially for female players, and hampers proper training for around 500 to 1,000 students and athletes who practice there, affecting their sports scholarships.

Governments are criticized by the Supreme Court for their "irresponsible" gifts

New Delhi, Feb 22:

While considering a case involving power subsidies, the Supreme Court of India has harshly criticized states for announcing "irresponsible" freebies that put a burden on public coffers, raising concerns about the timing and fiscal reasoning of such choices. The Tamil Nadu government was expressly urged by the court to provide an explanation for the last-minute announcement of a free electricity scheme, which left power distribution firms (DISCOMs) rushing to modify pricing and budgetary estimates. The court questioned how governments could afford significant subsidy promises without previous budgetary planning, noting that many states are currently experiencing revenue deficits. It cautioned that unbridled generosity might



impede the country's economic growth.

The Indian Supreme Court noted that it was aware of cases in a number of states where aid programs had been abruptly introduced prior to recent elections. The Court questioned whether people would continue to work if direct cash transfer plans were publicized. "If governments continue to provide free money, electricity, and other amenities, who will ultimately bear the cost?" the court said. According to the Court,

taxpayers will ultimately bear the cost of freebies. During the hearing of a writ suit filed by Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Company Ltd. contesting Rule 23 of the Electricity Amendment Rules, 2024, a bench consisting of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Justice Joymalya Bagchi, and Justice Vipul Pancholi made the statements. The court noted that had the subsidy been announced in advance, DISCOMs could have factored it into tariff planning and financial projections.

Ajit Pawar's son wants the "possible serious lapses" in the plane disaster to be investigated

New Delhi, Feb 22: On Wednesday, Jay Pawar called for a "fair, thorough," and open probe into the January 28 plane tragedy in Baramati that killed his father, former Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. Jay Pawar demanded accountability, questioned the incident's conditions, and demanded action against the aircraft operator in an Instagram story published on February 18. "Black boxes are difficult to destroy in an aircraft accident; The people of Maharashtra are entitled to the whole, unvarnished, and open facts of this tragic event. He stated, "VSR should be prohibited from flying right away, and a comprehensive and impartial investigation into potential serious malpractices in the maintenance of their aircraft should be conducted." Ajit Pawar and four other people were killed



in the incident, which happened while the plane was trying to land at Baramati airport in the Pune area. Nationalist Congress Party (SP) MP Supriya Sule, meanwhile, voiced her alarm over allegations of "foul play" and stated that she anticipates responses from the Civil Aviation Ministry. She stated during a press conference that Par-

liament should debate the issues brought up by party leaders and others. Rohit Pawar's uncle was Ajit Pawar. Rohit Pawar is worried about this issue, as are a number of other people. Questions have also been raised by Amol Mitkari. We have the complete support of the Indian National Congress and the Shiv Sena (UBT).

Dalit priest resigns from his position at a temple in Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 22: A Dalit priest, P.R. Vishnu, in Alangad, Kerala, has resigned due to alleged caste discrimination, threats, and false complaints from the CPM-affiliated Devaswom Employees Confederation. At 23 years old, Vishnu had been appointed as a part-time priest at the Malikampeedika Vathurakkavu Temple after being selected by the Travancore Devaswom Recruitment Board, but faced retaliatory actions for refusing to comply with unfair practices. He claims to have encountered false allegations of theft, including an incident where gold jewelry from the idol was replaced with fakes in an effort to discredit him. Vishnu expressed that his family's safety is also at risk, with pressure to withdraw a police complaint he had filed against a local individual. Following his resignation, he communicated his willingness to reconsider if action was taken against those who humiliated him.

Analyzing the effects of the US tariff decision and the actions Trump announced: Government

New Delhi, Feb 22: On Saturday, the Indian government stated that it is evaluating the ramifications of the recent tariff ruling by the US Supreme Court and the actions that US President Donald Trump has since announced. According to the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, the Indian government is researching the ramifications of the US tariff developments. It cited President Trump's news conference in this regard and mentioned the Supreme Court's ruling from Friday. "We have taken note of yesterday's (Friday) US Supreme Court ruling regarding tariffs. In this context, US President Donald Trump also spoke during a press conference, according to the ministry. "Some steps have been announced by the US administration. We are studying all these developments for their implications," it added. According to the government, all of these changes are being carefully examined to determine their possible effects. After the US Supreme Court declared President Donald Trump's broad tariffs "illegal" on Friday, the government released the statement. In a 6-3 decision au-



thored by Chief Justice John Roberts, the Supreme Court declared that the president had overreached himself in enforcing the broad levies and that the tariffs he had placed on countries worldwide were unlawful. "I impose, for a period of 150 days, a temporary import surcharge of 10 percent ad valorem on articles imported into the United States, effective February 24, 2026," Trump later said in his proclamation dated February 20. Thus, technically, the effective tariff for India should now stand at 3.5% plus the 10% imposed under Section 122 by Trump, taking the total levy to 13.5%. There is, however, no clarity on this yet from the White House.

Elections to the Rajya Sabha for 37 seats in ten states are scheduled for March 16, 2026

New Delhi, Feb 22: On March 16, soon before assembly elections are anticipated in three of these states, including Bengal, elections will be held for 37 Rajya Sabha seats from 10 states. One member, Mausam Noor, resigned last month and rejoined the Congress from Trinamool. Thirty-six members have served out their six-year tenure. Currently, the NDA has 14 seats and the INDIA bloc has 19. BJP majorities in six of these states, however, might tip the scales in the party's favor. The modifications will increase the NDA's Rajya Sabha majority. Saket Gokhale, Ritabrata Banerjee, and Subrata Bakshi of the Trinamool, as well as Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharyya and Noor of the CPM, are among the five seats from Bengal. The CPM's seat is anticipated to be won by the BJP, ending the. The BJP is expected to gain the CPM's seat, ending the Left party's electoral legislative representation from the state. Deputy Chairman Harivansh of the JDU, Union Minister Ramdas Athawale, Sharad Pawar of the NCP, M. Thambidurai of the AIADMK, Abhishek Manu Singhvi



of the Congress, Upendra Kushwaha of the Rastriya Lok Morcha, and Tiruchi Siva of the DMK are among the important Rajya Sabha members who are retiring. With the backing of the Congress, the NCP, and the Shiv Sena's Uddhav Thackeray faction, the INDIA alliance may be able to elect just one MP in Maharashtra, where it now has four outgoing MPs. If Pawar decides to run, he might be the candidate. The state has seven open positions. With five open seats in Bihar, the unified Opposition may require the backing of the BSP and AIMIM in order to elect even one MP. The JDU and the RJD each have two MPs among the departing MPs, with the

exception of Kushwaha, an ally of the NDA. Whether the JDU will field Harivansh again has not yet been announced. The DMK now controls four seats in Tamil Nadu, while the AIADMK and its ally, the Tamil Maanila Congress (Moppanar), each possess one seat. The DMK has slammed the brakes on seat sharing and rejected the Congress's request to join the state government. Regarding whether the Congress would be granted a Rajya Sabha seat, neither party has responded. It is unclear if G.K. Vasan, a member of the TMCM, will run again or if the AIADMK will support a candidate from the BJP, an ally. Given that the Pattali Makkal Katchi is a split house and the loyalty of its MLAs is in question, the second NDA seat is difficult. It is anticipated that the Congress will lose to the BJP in Chhattisgarh and win a seat in Himachal Pradesh. In Haryana, the Congress is predicted to defeat the BJP. The Congress will have to run joint candidates with the AIUDF and the BJD for a seat in Assam and one in Odisha, respectively, in order to win.

Mei Xing returns to mixed doubles in an attempt to start over



New Delhi: After Go Pei Kee, her partner in women's doubles, decided to leave the national set-up, shuttler Teoh Mei Xing will return to mixed doubles. The action was taken because Mei Xing's alternatives for a women's doubles partner are running low, according to the Malaysian BA. Before Anna

Cheong resigned because of a knee injury, Mei Xing, 29, was her partner. She then partnered with Pei Kee. According to national coach Nova Widianto, Mei Xing has promise in mixed doubles. She had played mixed doubles with Hoo Pang Ron and Tee Kai Wun prior to switching to women's

doubles, but their collaborations were brief. Tan Zhi Yang, 19, will now play mixed doubles with Mei Xing as her partner.

The new pair will be tested at the Singapore International Challenge from Feb 24 to March 1. "For now, she does not have a fixed partner yet," Nova said. "We will try pairing her with Tan Zhi Yang first and see how it goes." Nova said expectations are high for a senior player competing at that level. "For a senior competing in an IC tournament, the measure is not just to play well," he said. "They must reach the final or become champion, that is the minimum." The coach said if the results are good, they will become a permanent pair. "Although it is a new partnership, I expect results to be good as Mei Xing is a seasoned player," he added

Mbappé demands that Benfica's Prestianni be banned from the Champions League for allegedly using a racist insult on Vinicius Jr

Mumbai: After Gianluca Prestianni of Benfica was accused of making a racist remark to Vinicius Jr. during the Spanish team's 1-0 play-off first-leg victory on Tuesday, Real Madrid forward Kylian Mbappe stated that Prestianni should be barred from the Champions League. Prestianni denied the charge, claiming the Brazilian had misheard him. Vinicius had put Real Madrid ahead five minutes into the second half in Lisbon when the incident happened. Referee Francois Letexier stopped the game for eleven minutes after triggering FIFA's anti-racism procedures after watching television footage of the Argentine winger covering his mouth with his shirt before making a remark that Vinicius and other teammates in the vicinity took as a racial slur directed at the 25-year-old. In the video, Mbappe was seen angrily calling Prestianni "a bloody racist" in front of him. After play began, the atmosphere turned hostile, with the home crowd yelling at Vinicius and Mbappe every time they made contact with the ball. "I would like to make it clear that I never made racist remarks to Vini Jr., who



unfortunately misinterpreted what he believed he had heard," Prestianni posted on Instagram. I regret the threats I received from Real Madrid players, but I was never racist toward anyone.

Real Madrid's French midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni also made the same racial accusation against Vinicius, which Mbappe told reporters he witnessed Prestianni make multiple times. Mbappe claimed that Vinicius convinced him to stay on the field even though he had been

ready to quit. "Tonight, sports issues lost their significance. We cannot overlook what transpired since this is the Champions League, the most significant football tournament in the world," Mbappe told reporters, adding that we must serve as role models for all the kids who watch us at home. Because the world is watching us, we are unable to accept what happened today. We must speak up and condemn such behavior when it is exhibited by someone like Prestianni. Nothing about

Benfica, the team, its supporters, or its manager bothers me. However, action must be taken. It is unacceptable that a player in the premier football league in Europe acts in this manner. This man is no longer worthy of participating in the Champions League. That's my view, but I'm not the one who makes these kinds of decisions, so I have no idea what they'll do. UEFA is attempting to combat racism, and I believe they ought to take action in response to today's events."

Smith was formally named to the Australia T20 World Cup team to replace Hazlewood

New Delhi: In lieu of Josh Hazlewood, Steven Smith has been formally added to Australia's T20 World Cup roster. As a result, he is eligible to play against Sri Lanka on Monday night if necessary. Prior to Australia's opening match against Ireland, Mitchell Marsh was hit in the groin, resulting in testicular hemorrhage. Smith was flown over. He got there just in time to go to Pallekele with the team, where they will play their last two group games. Although his participation in the Sri Lanka match has not yet been confirmed, he trained on Sunday. Marcus Stoinis has been cleared of a major injury following a blow to his hand during his follow-through against Zimbabwe, while Marsh enjoyed a lengthy net session and is improving in his recuperation. Australia needs to defeat Sri Lanka after losing to Zimbabwe in order to have a genuine chance of making it to the Super Eights. Any roster alteration must be reported and activated at least one day before a match, according to ICC regula-



tions, according to selector Tony Dodemaide. "With Steve here, along with some uncertainty around Mitch and Marcus Stoinis, it made sense he [Smith] is activated and available for selection in time for the match, if required." Australia's selectors did not immediately announce a replacement for Hazlewood, who was ruled out prior to the tournament's start due to an Achilles ailment he acquired while recovering from a hamstring injury that limited his Ashes. Smith last played T20Is in February 2024 but was in outstanding form in the recent BBL

where he hammered 299 runs at 59.80 with a strike rate of 167.97. It led to a clamour for him to be included in the World Cup squad, but the selectors resisted while they still had time to freely amend the 15, opting instead to call-up Matt Renshaw in place of Matt Short with a specific middle-order role in mind. Overall in T20Is, Smith averages 24.86 with a strike rate of 125.45, but in leagues and franchises since last featuring for Australia, he has an average of 49.73 and a strike rate of 156.19. However, the form of a number of Australia's batters has

been unconvincing at the World Cup. Travis Head's lean run in T20Is has continued early into the tournament, pressure is growing on Cameron Green, and Glenn Maxwell's struggles from the BBL have followed him to Sri Lanka. Josh Inglis, meanwhile, has a top score of 42 in eight innings since the Ashes and Tim David made a duck against Zimbabwe in his first knock since a hamstring injury on Boxing Day. Sean Abbott is also with the squad as a traveling reserve but can get into the squad only if another player is injured.

India's team has added Pratika Rawal for the ODI series



New Delhi: As part of the ongoing multi-format tour of Australia, the Women's Selection Committee has appointed Pratika Rawal to India's team for the three-match ODI series against Australia Women. Pratika has fully healed from the ankle injury she suffered at the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2025 in October after completing her rehabilitation at the BCCI Centre of Excellence (COE). The all-rounder did not play in any of the WPL 2026 games despite being a member of the UP Warriorz roster. India's Test team for the tour already includes her. Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Shafali Verma, Renuka Thakur, Sree Chaurani, Vaishnavi Sharma, Kranti Gaud, Sneha Rana, Deepti Sharma, Richa Ghosh (WK), Uma Chetry (WK), Kashvee Gautam, Amanjot Kaur, Jemimah Rodrigues, Harleen Deol, Pratika Rawal.

Al-Nassr awaits Ronaldo's return and an Asian Champions League knockout

New Delhi: Cristiano Ronaldo has yet to secure a major trophy with Al-Nassr since joining the club and is anticipated to return for their match against Arkadag in the Asian Champions League Two quarterfinals. He has missed the last two Saudi Pro League matches amid reported dissatisfaction with the club's funding compared to rival Al-Hilal. The Saudi Pro League asserts that no player surpasses the club's authority. Despite Ronaldo's absence, Al-Nassr recently defeated champion Al-Ittihad 2-0. Al-Ittihad, despite losing Benzema to Al-Hilal, aims to secure a place in the next round of the AFC Champions League with a win against Al-Gharafa. The top eight in each of the tournament's two 12-team groups - divided geographically into East and West Asia - qualify for the second round. Al-Hilal leads the western zone and is the only team with a perfect record of six wins from six, meaning coach Simone Inzaghi can choose to rest players. Al-Ahli, which won its first Champions League title in May, is also guaranteed a spot in the knockout stage.

Gianluca Prestianni of Benfica acknowledges using an anti-gay insult on Vinicius

New Delhi: After Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior was involved in an explosive incident in Lisbon this week, Benfica winger Gianluca Prestianni gave UEFA his version of events. The 20-year-old has apparently denied racism while acknowledging that he used an anti-gay slur in place of racism, in what many have called an odd line of defense. A official investigation into the incident that marred Real Madrid's 1-0 victory at the Estadio da Luz has been launched by UEFA.

Vinicius went up to referee Francois Letexier shortly after he scored the game-winning goal and claimed to have been subjected to racial abuse. Due to the activation of UEFA's anti-discrimination mechanism, the game was stopped for about ten minutes. According to ESPN,



by Prestianni, rejecting accusations of racism and suggesting the situation has been misrepresented.

Smriti Mandhana won the World Cup and WPL, earning her the title of Indian sportswoman of the year

New Delhi: At the BBC's Indian Sportswoman of the Year awards, Smriti Mandhana was crowned Indian Sportswoman of the Year, capping off an incredible year in cricket. After leading the Royal Challengers Bengaluru to their second WPL championship and playing a key part in India's World Cup victory, the Indian opener deserved the recognition. One of the tournament's highlights, Mandhana, 29, was India's vice-captain during their successful 2025 ICC Women's World Cup campaign. She amassed 434 runs as India easily won the championship. She defeated fierce competition for the title, including hurdler Jyothi Yarraji, chess star Divya Deshmukh, shooter Suruchi Singh, and Harmanpreet Kaur. Smriti Mandhana had a successful year in women's cricket while going through a challenging time in her personal life. Mandhana reminisced on what had been a memorable year for the Indian women's cricket team as she accepted the prize. "I am grateful to the BBC for bestowing upon me the title of Best Sportswoman of the Year. In particular, the World Cup at the close of 2025 made it a memorable year for women's cricket, and I'm glad I was able to help India win games," she remarked. That's what the left-hander has been doing for a while. She debuted for India at the age of sixteen and has since



amassed 17 international hundreds, which she shares with the legendary Meg Lanning of Australia. Furthermore, it extends beyond the national arena.

Mandhana has also added more trophies to an already full cabinet by winning two Women's Premier League crowns with Royal Challengers Bengaluru. The award was chosen by a grand jury that included long-jump legend Anju Bobby George, Paralympic standout Deepa Malik, and ten-

nis veteran Leander Paes. The night also belonged to Divya Deshmukh, a chess prodigy who received Emerging Player of the Year for her incredible victory at the age of 20 in the FIDE Women's World Cup. Preethi Pal was named Para-Sportswoman of the Year for winning two bronze medals in athletics at the 2024 Paris Paralympics, while shooter Anjali Bhagwat received the Lifetime Achievement Award for her trailblazing career on the world stage.

Benfica, led by Jose Mourinho, is not counting on miracles against a wounded Real Madrid

New Delhi: After Real Madrid's shocking defeat to Benfica, Jose Mourinho thinks they will react strongly, cautioning that a "wounded king" is frequently the most deadly. In the last round of the league campaign, Benfica shocked the 15-time European champions 4-2, forcing them into the playoffs and denying Madrid automatic qualifying for the round of 16. The first leg of the two teams' knockout matchup is scheduled for Tuesday in Lisbon. Prior to the match, Mourinho stated that Madrid's advantage has only grown stron-



ger as a result of the loss. Mourinho declared, "They are wounded."

Additionally, a wounded king poses a threat. We will approach the first leg with confidence, ambition, and our heads up. We are aware of what we

did to the Champions League kings. Mourinho made it apparent that he recognizes the magnitude of the assignment, even in light of Benfica's recent triumph. He stated, "I don't think it takes a miracle for Benfica to defeat Real Madrid."

"I believe we must perform at our best. Not even 'high,' but 'maximum,' which verges on perfection—which doesn't exist. Not a miracle, though. He respected Madrid's position just as much. 'Real Madrid is Real Madrid, complete with ambition, history, and knowledge.'" The only similarity between us is that we are both enormous. There's nothing more than that. But we can win because football has this force. A veteran of European knockout football, Mourinho also dismissed the idea that the first leg would define the tie.

Real Madrid's deal with UEFA ends the European Super League ambition



New Delhi: The European Super League project officially collapsed as Real Madrid reached an agreement with UEFA, marking the end of the breakaway competition that originally included 12 top European clubs. Following Barcelona's withdrawal, a statement indicated that Madrid and UEFA settled their disputes after extensive discussions aimed at benefiting European football. Despite a favorable ruling from the European Court of Justice, Real Madrid's president Florentino Perez found the Super League increasingly isolated with no new clubs joining. The league's intention was to create a closed competitive system for greater prize money, but backlash, particularly in England, and timing coinciding with UEFA's Champions League reforms led to its rapid failure. Paris Saint-Germain and Bayern Munich's refusal to participate solidified the project's downfall. The agreement permits Madrid's potential re-entry into the European Football Clubs group, now influential with 800 members. This development reflects a significant change in European soccer's political landscape, emphasizing clubs' power through a joint venture with UEFA, ensuring that the Champions League remains accessible based on sporting merit and preserving its traditional format against the planned closed competition.

Rashid becomes first to 700 wickets in T20 cricket



New Delhi: When Rashid Khan dismissed Muhammad Arfan during Afghanistan's T20 World Cup match against the United Arab Emirates in Delhi on Monday, he became the first bowler to reach the 700-wicket milestone in T20 cricket. In the 16th over of the UAE innings, Rashid, who had taken 699 wickets before the match, took his historic wicket by hitting Arfan out.

This was Rashid's final over. After getting his 698th and 699th wickets against South Africa last week and then failing to deliver 3.2 overs in this match, the Afghanistan captain was forced to wait for his milestone. In

the 20 balls he delivered, he was hit for 17 runs until Arfan attempted to reverse-sweep Rashid by moving across his stumps, but he failed miserably and struck his own stumps instead. Afghanistan needs a victory and other outcomes to advance to the Super Eights, but Rashid hardly celebrated. In any event, Rashid had been far ahead of the group of wicket-takers for some time. Second on the standings with 631 wickets is the retired Dwayne Bravo. With 613 wickets, Sunil Narine sits in third place behind Bravo and behind Rashid among active cricket players. The 700th wicket was also Rashid's 191st

for Afghanistan in the T20 format, making him the top wicket-taker in the competition. Tim Southee (164 wickets) and Ish Sodhi (162 wickets), both from New Zealand, are behind him on the list. Every time Afghanistan skipper Rashid addressed the media in the run-up to the T20 World Cup and even after, the milestone was brought up. "700 wickets, whatever the achievement is, it will continue," he said in response to the query last Tuesday prior to the match against South Africa. I don't have a goal in mind to take 700 wickets and quit; instead, I give it my all when I play for my country in the World Cup. And I grab the wicket when the team needs it." Rashid, the most prolific wicket-taker in the history of the format, has actually been a little below his best since undergoing back surgery in 2023. However, in Afghanistan's recent series victory over the West Indies, he gave up just 51 runs in 12 overs over three matches, taking five wickets in otherwise high-scoring contests. He then returned 1 for 36 in Afghanistan's opening World Cup match, making him the country's second-most economical bowler after Mujeeb Ur Rahman, as New Zealand overcame Afghanistan's 182 with more than two overs remaining.

Girona stunned Barcelona 2-1, putting Real Madrid at the top of La Liga

New Delhi: In a thrilling Catalan derby on Monday, Barcelona was upset by Girona, who rallied to win 2-1 at home, leaving Real Madrid atop the standings after last season's champion failed to make it back to the La Liga summit. After Dani Olmo was fouled inside the box, Barcelona hit the woodwork twice in the first half, with Raphinha striking the post and Lamine Yamal scoring a penalty against the same upright in added time. After Vladyslav Vanat's cross caused confusion, Girona equalized three minutes later when Thomas Lemar scored from close range. Pau Cubarsi ultimately gave the visitors the lead in the 59th minute, rising to head home Jules Kounde's cross from a short corner. Fran Beltran sealed victory in the 87th minute, steering home from Joel Roca's pass as the Montilivi stadium erupted. Barcelona pushed for an equaliser



but could not break through, even after Roca was sent off in added time for a reckless foul on Lamine Yamal. Barca remain on 58 points, two behind Real Madrid, and have lost successive games in all competitions for the first time since October. "We lacked a bit of everything. We need to be self-crit-

ical. We need to improve things and get our act together," Cubarsi told DAZN. "After my goal, they scored very quickly to equalise. We got them back into the game too quickly. We need to improve on those goals they score right after we take the lead. Keep your head down and improve."