

SUNDAY 24 MAY 2026

The Directorate further requests all media houses and the public to disseminate only verified information issued by the Department in order to avoid misinformation and unnecessary panic.

The Department remains committed to safeguarding the livestock sector and protecting the livelihood of pig farmers across Nagaland through coordinated scientific and administrative interventions, an official statement stated.

Arunachal Pradesh to establish state-level policy think tank, says Pema Khandu

Itanagar, May 23: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu said the proposed Institute for Transforming Arunachal Pradesh (ITA) is steadily moving forward through active cooperation between the state government and NITI Aayog. Describing the initiative as an important step towards evidence-based policymaking and long-term planning, the Chief Minister said the institute would help shape development strategies suited to the unique needs of Arunachal Pradesh. In a post on X, Khandu said the proposed institute

would function as a dedicated state-level policy think tank that would provide strategic direction and support long-term developmental planning based on the geographical, cultural and economic realities of the frontier state.

“For long, we have strongly advocated the need for a dedicated state-level policy think tank that can provide strategic direction, evidence-based policymaking, and long-term developmental planning tailored to Arunachal Pradesh’ unique geographical, cultural, and economic realities,” the Chief Minister said.



Khandu also thanked NITI Aayog member Dr Joram Aniya, Chief Executive Officer Nidhi Chhibber and

other officials associated with the initiative for their support and commitment towards the state’s development journey.

Officials said the proposed ITA is expected to function as a specialised policy and research institution that will assist the state government in preparing data-driven policies, monitoring developmental indicators, strengthening governance systems and designing sustainable growth strategies.

The institute is also expected to support long-term planning in sectors such as infrastructure, tour-

ism, hydropower, entrepreneurship and border area development. Arunachal Pradesh has in recent years increased its focus on infrastructure expansion and economic growth, while also working closely with NITI Aayog on initiatives related to aspirational districts, innovation ecosystems and youth empowerment.

NITI Aayog, the Centre’s apex public policy think tank, plays a major role in supporting states in policy formulation and development planning through a cooperative and collaborative approach.

Cash and Gold Recovered as Senior ACS Officer Held in Corruption Case



Guwahati, May 22: Lachit Kumar Das, a senior Assam Civil Service (ACS) officer, was arrested from his office in Guwahati after allegedly being caught red-handed while accepting a bribe of Rs 45,000.

The Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption reportedly recovered a large amount of cash and valuables during a raid at Das’s residence in the Beltola area of the city following his arrest on corruption charges.

Authorities further claimed that Das possessed substantial assets in Guwahati, including land at multiple locations, luxury apartments and several high-end vehicles. The investigation is currently underway, and officials are trying to determine the full extent of the properties and assets linked to the accused officer.

Das, who was serving as the Additional Director in the Land Records Department, was allegedly caught accepting the bribe from a person seeking a land purchase permission document. Investigators also suspect that the officer may have violated government norms related to land transactions and allegedly extorted money in exchange for facilitating certain approvals.

Several life insurance certificates were also recovered during the operation, which continued till late at

Dialogue Is the Way Forward, Says Manipur CM While Opposing Bandhs and Blockades

Imphal, May 22: Y Khemchand Singh on May 22 appealed to the people of Manipur to refrain from enforcing bandhs and blockades, stating that such protests affect daily wage earners the most and further strain the state’s economy amid ongoing unrest. Speaking at the inauguration of an RCC bridge over the Nambul River at Akham Mayai Leikai in Imphal West district, the chief minister urged citi-

zens to resolve differences through dialogue rather than shutdowns.

“Enforcing bandhs and blockades out of anger toward the government only leads to hardship, particularly for daily wage earners,” Singh said while addressing the gathering. Referring to his visits to violence-affected Jiribam district, Singh said he had travelled there twice — first by helicopter and later by road — and

met members of different communities, including Kuki, Paite, Hmar and Meitei groups.

“All are having cordial relations,” he said, adding that people at the grassroots level had come together during his visit. The chief minister also recalled the bomb attack at Tronglaobi in Bishnupur district in April, where two children lost their lives. He said the incident caused widespread

grief and triggered economic disruptions due to shutdowns and bandhs across the state.

“The incident caused disruptions to the economy of the state due to shutdowns and bandhs,” he said. Appealing for restraint, Singh said anger or frustration against the government should be addressed through discussions and mutual understanding instead of disruptive protests. Later, in a social me-

dia post, the chief minister said the newly inaugurated bridge in the Lamsang Assembly Constituency would improve connectivity, facilitate movement of people and goods, and support local markets. He added that the government remained committed to strengthening road connectivity and developing quality infrastructure for the welfare and progress of the people of Manipur.

Nagaland Police appeal to people to maintain peace, social harmony



Kohima, May 23: In view of the prevailing law and order situation in the neighbouring Manipur and the possibility of disturbances spreading to Nagaland, the Nagaland Police appealed to all citizens to maintain utmost vigilance and responsibility in preserving peace and communal harmony in the State.

Nagaland Director General of Police Rupin Sharma appealed to the people to act responsibly and refrain from sharing or forwarding any unverified information, rumours or provocative social media content that could create panic, misunderstanding or communal tension. The police also cautioned against the spread of false and misleading narratives through social media, stating that in the age of artificially generated content, the creation and circulation of fake information has become easier and more dan-

gerous.

“Particular caution should be exercised against content that has the potential to disturb ethnic inter-community relations in Nagaland. While requesting restraint and patience, the Nagaland Police warns that mischievous elements indulging in the deliberate or irresponsible spread of fake news, rumours, or inflammatory content through social media or any other medium will be identified and dealt with as per the law. Such acts may invite legal action under relevant provisions of the BNS, IT Act and other applicable laws,” a statement from the State police said. “Citizens are further requested not to spread rumours or unverified information that can create panic or mistrust among communities.

The people of Nagaland are urged to remain alert and report any suspicious

individual or activity attempting to disturb the prevailing social harmony and peaceful coexistence among various communities in the State. Any such information should be immediately brought to the notice of the nearest Police Station or the Police Headquarters, Kohima. Nagaland has maintained normalcy and peace despite frayed tempers in the neighborhood,” it stated.

“We solicit everyone’s cooperation in keeping it that way. Insulating ourselves from developments in the neighborhood and not reacting to developments is desirable. Nagaland Police assures all citizens that the situation is being closely monitored and all necessary measures are in place to maintain peace and law and order in the State. The cooperation of the public is essential in this regard,” the statement added. (EOM)

Meghalaya Women’s Commission Summons MCA Officials Over Alleged Inaction on Sexual Harassment Complaints

Shillong, May 23: Meghalaya State Commission for Women (MSCW) has summoned four present and former officials of the Meghalaya Cricket Association (MCA) over alleged failure to act on complaints of sexual harassment lodged by members of the state Under-23 women’s cricket team.

The commission has directed MCA honorary secretary Rayonald Kharkamni, former MCA president Nababrata Bhattacharjee, former treasurer Dhrubajyoti Thakuria and former cricket operations manager Shining Star Lyngdoh to appear before the commission on May 26.

According to notices issued by the commission, the officials allegedly knew about complaints of sexual harassment involving members of the women’s Under-23 cricket team but failed to take appropriate action.

The allegations were reportedly made against the team’s head coach and team manager, both of whom had earlier appeared before the commission as part of the ongoing inquiry. Speaking to The Shillong Times, MSCW chairperson Iamomlang Syiem said the commission would refrain from commenting on the matter until the inquiry process is completed. “We will have the hearing on this case on May 26.

Maybe, after the hearing, I can comment,” she said. Sources alleged that the women cricketers had



earlier approached MCA office-bearers regarding their grievances, but no action was reportedly taken. According to sources, the team manager allegedly called members of the women’s cricket team to his room and forced them to consume alcohol. It was also alleged that inappropriate remarks were made against players during practice sessions, causing them mental distress.

The commission observed that the MCA did not initiate any internal inquiry after the complaints surfaced, and neither of the accused officials was reportedly suspended or removed from their positions. In notices issued on May 14, the commission stated that complaints had been registered before the MSCW alleging that the officials failed to respond

appropriately despite being aware of the allegations. “The Commission has taken cognisance of the matter in exercise of its powers and functions under the Meghalaya State Commission for Women Act, 2005,” the notice stated. The commission also directed the officials to produce all relevant records, internal correspondence, reports, complaints and other related documents during their appearance.

When contacted, MCA secretary Rayonald Kharkamni claimed that according to available records, a complaint was lodged on December 3, 2025, during the period when MCA elections were underway and a new executive body was being constituted. According to him, the complaint involved allegations that the team manager

had made uncomfortable remarks about a woman cricketer. Kharkamni said the newly elected MCA body, headed by president James P.K. Sangma, has held only one Apex Council meeting so far, and the complaint was not included in the agenda.

He also stated that the MCA had no official record of another complaint allegedly signed by 15 women cricketers regarding incidents said to have occurred during a cricket tournament in Agartala. “According to the information available to us, the 15 players claimed that they had sent a complaint through email regarding the incident, but we do not have any official record of receiving it,” he said.

The MCA secretary further claimed that following the December 3 com-

plaint, the team manager was removed from duty for the NECDC Under-23 Women’s Cricket Tournament held in Sikkim in April pending inquiry. However, he said he was later surprised to find that the same manager had been included in another list of officials issued separately by the MCA president for the Sikkim tournament. Kharkamni stated that he had initially appointed Baia Myliemngap as team manager to accompany the squad to Sikkim.

He also assured that the MCA would fully cooperate with the women’s commission to ascertain the truth and ensure that anyone found guilty is punished. Attempts to contact former MCA president Nababrata Bhattacharjee for comment were unsuccessful.

Major khul Kabui village residents protest for release of six abducted Naga civilians

Imphal, May 23: As part of the continuing protests against the alleged abduction of six Naga civilians, women and youths of Major khul Kabui village on Thursday staged a sit-in protest, demanding their immediate and unconditional release.

A large number of women and youths participated in the protest, raising slogans against the alleged abduction of the six Naga civilians by Kuki groups from Leilon Vei-

phei Kuki village in Kangpokpi district on May 13.

Speaking to ANI, Anemlu Kamei, a resident of the Major khul Kabui village, demanded the immediate release of the Naga civilians.

“We are demanding the release of six Naga civilians kidnapped by the Kuki groups. We have organised the sit-in protest,” she said.

They have urged the government to take strict action against those

involved in the incident.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Koubu Range Liangmai Women’s Union, along with civil society organisations of Kanglatongbi and nearby villages under the aegis of LPNR-M, organised a mass rally demanding the immediate and unconditional release of the Naga civilians.

The rally began from Makhon village and concluded at Namdilon village gate, with protesters

carrying placards and raising slogans seeking urgent intervention from both the Centre and the state government.

Speaking during the rally, a resident of Makhon village, Irish Tui-mai, appealed to the authorities to take immediate steps to rescue the hostages.

“We are here demanding the immediate release of the innocent civilians who were abducted on May 13 from Leilon Vei-phei village. It



has already been a week, yet the hostages have not been able to return home,” she said.

She further warned that any delay in rescuing the hostages could escalate tensions and endanger the lives of the abducted civilians.

“We urge both the state and central governments to take immediate action. Any further delay in rescuing the hostages will escalate the situation and put innocent lives in danger,” she added.

Manipur Youth Congress members protest outside CM's residence

Imphal, May 23: At least six members of the Manipur Youth Congress today banged the gates of the chief minister's bungalow in Imphal to symbolically "wake the CM up" and demanded the immediate release of civilians held hostage by militants.

Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh, however, was not inside the complex, which also houses the CM secretariat, when the incident happened.

The Youth Congress members banged the gates of the complex and raised slogans like "wake up, sleeping CM" and "we condemn killing of civilians, down down BJP".

Police have detained several protesters, including Youth Congress President W. Anand, after demon-



strators tried to advance towards the Secretariat and knocked on its gates, saying it was "high time to wake up the government."

The protesters accused the BJP-led government of failing to protect civilians even after three years of violence, demanding the resignation of the Chief Minister and Union Home Minister on "moral grounds."

Eest Khasi Hills wins state school athletics meet

Shillong, May 23: East Khasi Hills emerged overall champion at the State Level Inter-School Athletics Meet 2026, which concluded at the SAI STC Shillong, NEHU Campus, on Friday.

Addressing the closing ceremony, Sports and Youth Affairs Minister Wailadmiki Shylla lauded the athletes for their spirit and stressed that values matter more than medals. "While winning medals may be temporary, discipline, character and sportsmanship will remain with you throughout your lives," he told participants.

Shylla said he was encouraged by stronger performances from districts beyond East Khasi Hills. He noted that under Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, the government has "significantly expanded sports facilities across Meghalaya" despite past infrastructural gaps.

"Artificial athletic tracks have already been developed in Shillong and Wahi-ajer, while similar projects are under-way in Tura, Mawkyrwat, Baghmara and other districts," the minister said.



"The government's aim is to ensure that every district has proper sports infrastructure to help young athletes train and showcase their talents." Underscoring the scale of investment, Shylla said, "The annual budget of

the Sports Department, which stood at nearly Rs 40 crore seven years ago, has now increased to Rs 844 crore. This has enabled us to improve facilities, accommodation, sports gear and youth programmes across the state."

No official statement from UDP on party candidate for Lok Sabha By-election

Shillong, May 23: The United Democratic Party (UDP) President, who is also a State Cabinet Minister, has stated that the party has no official information regarding the reports suggesting prominent advocate VG Kynta will contest the upcoming Shillong Lok Sabha by-election on a UDP ticket.

Addressing the speculation, the party chief clarified that while the process to select a candidate for the MP by-poll is already underway, the party needs to engage in thorough consultations before making a final decision.

According to the UDP leader, two to three individuals have expressed interest in contesting the election on the party's ticket.

He reiterated that the party is currently deliberating on these proposals and has not rushed into a conclusion.

Regarding the regional coalition, the Regional Democratic Alliance (RDA), he mentioned that discussions are progressing steadily. A clearer picture is expected to emerge within the next day or two, after which the party will take its final call.

In selecting the ideal candidate, the UDP leadership emphasized that they will not make a hasty decision. The party intends to carefully assess the background of the aspirants to ensure they align with the party's principles and values.

NCC cadets safely evacuated from Imphal by Indian Air Force amid road closure

Imphal, May 23: In a display of commitment towards the safety and well-being of the nation's youth, 132 National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets attending the North Eastern Region (NER) Flying Camp at Imphal from May 11 to 20 are being safely evacuated to Guwahati and Jorhat by the Indian Air Force amidst the prevailing security situation and restrictions on road movement in the region.

The evacuation operation was meticulously planned and executed by NCC Directorate NER in consultation with the Directorate General NCC and in close coordination with Headquarters Eastern Air Command of the Indian Air Force. The swift response and seamless inter-agency coordination ensured the safe and timely movement of all cadets, enabling them to reach their destinations in time for their ongoing academic examinations.

The initiative has brought immense relief and reassurance to parents and guardians across the region, many of whom had expressed concern over the evolving situation and transpor-



tation challenges. The successful evacuation stands as a testament to the professionalism, preparedness and people-centric approach of the armed forces and NCC authorities. Despite the difficult circumstances,

the morale of the cadets remained high throughout the operation. The cadets expressed heartfelt gratitude towards the Indian Air Force, NCC authorities and all personnel involved in ensuring their safety, comfort and

timely assistance during the evacuation process. Many cadets acknowledged the extraordinary efforts taken to prioritise their academic commitments while maintaining the highest standards of safety and care.

IIM Shillong achieves prestigious AACSB accreditation, joins elite global business schools

Shillong, May 23: The Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Shillong has been awarded accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International, globally regarded as the gold standard in management education.

This landmark achievement places IIM Shillong among an elite group of business schools worldwide that have met AACSB's rigorous standards of excellence in teaching, research, curriculum, learner success, and societal impact.

AACSB accreditation is earned by less than 6 per cent of business schools globally, making it one of the most respected recognitions in the field of management education.

In India, only around 30 institutions hold the accreditation, with IIM Shillong becoming one of the few Indian Institutes of Management to



receive the distinction.

The accreditation was granted after an extensive peer-review evaluation process that accessed the Institute's academic framework, teaching standard, research output, curriculum, and societal impact.

Speaking on the achievement, Prof Naliniprava Tripathy said the recognition reflects the collective dedication and efforts of the entire IIM Shillong community. She added that the institute

would continue working towards its strategic goals and AACSB commitments over the coming years while further strengthening its global standard. According to the institute, the accreditation is expected to create new avenues for global academic collaborations, international partnerships and student exchange opportunities. Established in 2007, IIM Shillong has emerged as a prominent institution in sustainability-focused management education.

Scientific Camera Trap Survey Maps Leopard Presence Across Guwahati

Guwahati, Jan 10: A comprehensive scientific camera trap study has been conducted across Guwahati to assess leopard presence, habitat use, and movement patterns, marking the first grid-based leopard estimation exercise in eastern India, forest officials said.

As part of the study, camera traps were deployed across key forests, wildlife corridors, and fringe areas of the city. The initiative is expected to generate crucial data for mapping leopard habitats and movement routes, thereby strengthening science-based wildlife management and promoting human-leopard coexistence in the rapidly urbanising capital.

Survey teams covered all major hill

ranges in and around Guwahati, including Adingiri, Gotanagar, Nilachal, Kharghuli, Hengerabari, and Bhangagarh. Officials confirmed that multiple signs of leopard presence—such as pugmarks, scent markings, scat, scratch marks, and rake marks—were recorded across several locations in the city, indicating a healthy and widespread leopard movement pattern.

In addition to leopards, the presence of the clouded leopard has been established in the Garbhanga forest area, further underlining the region's ecological significance.

Officials said the camera traps were installed for a period of two months and are now being withdrawn. "It will take approximately one month to

compile and analyse the data," an official stated.

According to findings from an earlier study, Guwahati contains around 18.97 square kilometres of highly suitable leopard habitat. Areas identified as most suitable include Fatasil Hill, Japorigog Hill, and parts of the Amchang Reserve Forest. Additionally, nearly 67.67 square kilometres of land in and around the city has been categorised as suitable habitat where leopards can survive and thrive.

Notably, many of these suitable habitats are located within or close to densely built-up urban areas, increasing the likelihood of human-leopard interactions. Leopards typically maintain territories of around 35 square ki-

lometres, making habitat connectivity crucial for their survival.

The study is being carried out under the Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation-II, funded by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD).

The fieldwork has seen active participation from student volunteers of Gauhati University, Pragjyotish College, Dakshin Kamrup College, and Cotton University, particularly MSc students, who assisted survey teams in data collection.

Officials believe the findings will help authorities formulate informed conservation strategies while addressing human-wildlife conflict in the expanding urban landscape of Guwahati.

Meghalaya women cricketers' harrassment case, MCA president slams association

Shillong, May 23: The president of the Meghalaya Cricket Association (MCA) James PK Sangma on Saturday, May 23, condemned the deliberate cover-up of sexual harassment complaints filed by members of the state's Under-23 Women's Cricket Team, naming the association's current Secretary Rayonald Kharkamni — who also served as Secretary when the complaints were first filed last year — along with other officials, as ones who attempted to bury the matter for nearly six months.

In a strongly-worded public statement, Sangma said it was deeply concerning that even while Kharkamni had knowledge of the matter when the complaints were filed in December last year, there was no action taken, inquiry initiated, or response given to the complainants, and neither was there any communica-

tion made to the President after the handing over in January this year. The complaints, filed by members of the Under-23 Women's team in December last year, name the squad's head coach and team manager on charges of sexual harassment. "Feigning ignorance in the name of elections when a larger matter was at hand, misleading everyone when till date no inquiry was conducted or even a basic response given to complainants, tells the larger story of what the MCA has been and still continues to be for some people in it," Sangma said. What drew the sharpest criticism from Sangma was the decision to include the accused team manager in the nomination list for the NECDC Under-23 Women's T20 Trophy, held from April 6 to 11 this year — a list submitted to him for approval.

Climate activist Licypriya Kangujam's story included in CBSE curriculum

Imphal, May 23: The inspiring journey of 14-year-old climate activist Licypriya Kangujam from Manipur has now found a place in the CBSE English Literature curriculum for students across India.

Her life story has been included in the Grade 5 English textbook under the CBSE syllabus. Her journey is also featured in educational material for Grades 4 and 7, along with references in courses offered by several universities under the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

"Honoured and humbled that my life story is now being taught in the CBSE English Literature textbook for Grade 5



across India. My journey is already part of the curriculum for Grades 4 and 7 and various universities as well as per New Education Policy 2020," said Licypriya. "From a small village to classrooms across the nation — this is not just my story, but a message to every child that age is never a barrier to creating change," she added. Licypriya has earned

national and international recognition for her work in raising awareness about climate change, environmental protection and disaster preparedness at a very young age. Through campaigns, public speeches and participation in global platforms, she has become one of India's youngest and most prominent voices advocating climate action.

Meghalaya Women's Panel Summons MCA Officials

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The allegations were reportedly made against the team's head coach and team manager, both of whom had earlier appeared before the commission as part of the ongoing inquiry.

Speaking to The Shillong Times, MSCW chairperson Iamonlang Syiem

said the commission would refrain from commenting on the matter until the inquiry process is completed. "We will have the hearing on this case on May 26. Maybe, after the hearing, I can comment," she said.

Sources alleged that the women cricketers had earlier approached MCA office-bearers regarding their grievances, but no action was reportedly taken.

According to sources, the team manager allegedly called members of the women's cricket team to his room and forced them to consume alcohol. It was also alleged that inappropriate remarks were made against players during practice sessions, causing them mental distress. The commission observed that the MCA did not initiate any internal inquiry after the complaints surfaced, and neither of the accused officials was reportedly suspended or removed from their positions.

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allegations. "The Commission has taken cognisance of the matter in exercise of its powers and functions under the Meghalaya State Commission for Women Act, 2005," the notice stated.

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eters regarding incidents said to have occurred during a cricket tournament in Agartala. "According to the information available to us, the 15 players claimed that they had sent a complaint through email regarding the incident, but we do not have any official record of receiving it," he said. The MCA secretary further claimed that following the December 3 complaint, the team manager was removed from duty for the NECDC Under-23 Women's Cricket Tournament held in Sikkim in April pending inquiry.

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Kharkamni stated that he had initially appointed Baia Mylliemngap as team manager to accompany the squad to Sikkim. He also assured that the MCA would fully cooperate with the women's commission to ascertain the truth and ensure that anyone found guilty is punished. Attempts to contact former MCA president Nababrata Bhattacharjee for comment were unsuccessful.

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Editorial

The Future of AI Technology in India

India stands at a defining crossroads. With the world’s largest youth population, a thriving technology sector, and an ambitious digital infrastructure, the country is uniquely positioned to become a global leader in artificial intelligence — not merely as a consumer, but as an architect. The government’s push through initiatives like IndiaAI Mission and the National Data Governance Framework signals serious intent. Homegrown large language models trained on India’s extraordinary linguistic diversity — over 22 scheduled languages, hundreds of dialects — could democratise access to information in ways English-centric AI never can. Yet ambition must be tempered by honesty. India faces a widening

skills gap, underfunded research institutions, and fragmented data ecosystems. Without robust investment in foundational research and ethical governance, the nation risks becoming a back-office for foreign AI rather than its frontier. The real opportunity lies not in replicating Silicon Valley, but in solving distinctly Indian problems — precision agriculture for smallholder farmers, affordable diagnostics for overburdened hospitals, vernacular education tools for first-generation learners. India’s AI future will not be written in server farms alone.

It will be written in the villages, clinics, and classrooms where intelligent technology finally reaches those it has long overlooked.

Media independence declines in India under the BJP



Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s recent tour to Europe was dotted with many corny moments, including the one in Italy. But these were offset by a few sour moments as well. One of them occurred in Oslo, Norway.

There, a brave and diligent Norwegian woman journalist named Helle Lyng questioned Mr. Modi about why he was not interested in responding to questions from “the freest press in the world” as he was leaving a joint press conference without taking any questions. Apparently, this is the custom for the prime minister of one of the biggest democracies in the world. She is not lying when she says that the Norwegian press is independent. In Reporters without Borders’ World Press Freedom Index, Norway is ranked first. India, on the other hand, has fallen six spots to 157th place out of 180 countries this year. Interestingly, the journalist claimed that her social media accounts had been blocked due to internet backlash a day after Ms. Lyng’s query caused a stir. The country’s steady decline on the press freedom register over the past 10 or so years has frequently been used to debate the weakening of the Indian media’s spine. However, a deeper dilemma that has coincided with Mr. Modi’s and his Bharatiya Janata Party’s political supremacy is reflected in the shrinkage of press freedom, which is harmful for democracy. The problem is that India appears to be operating as an opaque government in this Age of Information. Examine the

following instances, which are frequently overshadowed by the contentious discussion over India’s inadequate press freedom. The Establishment, including members of the heroic armed forces, did have frequent briefings during Operation Sindoor. However, information gaps that were justified by operational sensitivity resulted in a deluge of false information that caused a great deal of concern. The erosion of India’s foundation for the freedom to information has been an even more subtle attack on transparency. The legislative approach, such as the exemption for “personal information” in the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, has also been investigated to defang the RTI ecosystem in addition to the ruling regime’s frugal RTI responses. These have been made worse by both well-known and cutting-edge methods of scaring a media that is already cringing.

The dangers of submissive media are widely recognized. Regimes, especially elected ones, become unaccountable due to dwindling leverage for transparency and inspection, two essential components of democracy that the Fourth Estate once upheld. However, there is a connected irony that needs to be addressed. These days, information is a commodity. However, given the deteriorating media fraternity, it cannot be a public good. The Age of Information must acknowledge this specific flaw: the turning of information into an entity with economic power but one devoid of moral force.

This is how Vladimir Putin can be defeated

A despot never lasts forever. Vladimir Putin will eventually leave office. It would be incorrect to assume that the end is nigh, notwithstanding recent reports indicating decreasing confidence inside his government, mounting economic difficulties in Russia, and social unrest. Putin can only be overthrown by Russia or death, and no one can predict when or how that will occur. Europe and other democracies can refine a plan to thwart his foreign aspirations. Eight components of such a plan are listed here, however they are not all-inclusive. Putin wants to subjugate Ukraine, reestablish a Russian sphere of influence over eastern Europe, undermine the European Union, erode NATO’s legitimacy, and restore as much of the Russian empire as possible. To stop him from accomplishing his objectives is to defeat him. Russia’s full-scale conflict with Ukraine will surpass the duration of the First World War on June 11. It’s incredible that Ukraine was able to repel a considerably bigger enemy. This conflict is unlikely to be won at the front due to the drone-enabled kill zone, but both sides are attacking each other from behind, damaging morale, the economy, and energy infrastructure. President Donald Trump’s withdrawal of US assistance has complicated, but not completely destroyed, Ukraine’s defense. The Ukrainian budget should last until the end of 2027 thanks to €90 billion in European economic assistance that was made possible by the overthrow of Viktor Orbán in Hungary. There are numerous possible outcomes, but the most likely is that this conflict will go on for a while. Even so, it won’t end when it does. We won’t know the winner as soon as the gunfire stops, unlike on VE Day in 1945. There will be further risk for Ukraine



when “peace” arrives, most likely in the shape of a truce that turns into a longer-lasting freezing of hostilities along the current frontline. An enraged presidential campaign and extremely polarizing post-war politics might be the result of all the societal divisions and traumas that have built up over years of conflict. After the Dayton peace accord in 1995, Europe’s focus quickly shifted away from Bosnia. Unfortunately, there is a very real possibility that the four-fifths of Ukraine that Russia does not control may eventually turn into a dysfunctional, internally divided, and depopulated state. That would be a win for Putin’s backup plan, which is to destroy Ukraine if he is unable to maintain control over it. We won’t be able to declare that Putin has been vanquished in Ukraine until it is a moderately prosperous, safe, stable, and democratic EU member. Russia’s oil and

gas earnings have increased as a result of Trump’s war of choice against Iran, and sanctions against them have been partially lifted. The opposite must occur in order to defeat Putin. Europe should take more aggressive action against Russia’s shadow fleet in addition to strengthening sanctions and backing Ukraine’s long-range attacks on Russian energy facilities. The Baltic Sea is where almost half of Russia’s oil exports travel, frequently in vessels that have already been sanctioned. Organizing a five- to ten-year shift from today’s US-dependent European security to a position where Europe can defend itself receives a lot of attention, which is understandable. However, the early years of that transition, particularly in 2027–2028, are likely to carry the biggest risk of a Russian strike on NATO and EU territory. As is often the case with long-term dic-

tators, Putin is an elderly man in a hurry who is fixated on reestablishing Russian glory and is becoming more and more disconnected from reality. He has a war economy and a sizable, battle-hardened army. He must contend with a Europe that is just starting to rearm and a US president who is unlikely to uphold NATO’s Article 5 pledge to defend an attacked member of East Europe. But Putin can only count on Trump holding the presidency through January 20, 2029. Thus, this is his greatest and possibly final opportunity to prove that NATO is a paper tiger. The capture of a few square kilometers in Estonia, Lithuania, a Baltic island, or another location on the eastern flank would suffice instead of a huge frontal attack. Even if there is little chance of such an attack, the risk involved is so great that reinforced deterrence is essential. The existing attitudes of the US-led NATO would

be sufficient if we could trust the US president. Since we are unable to do so, we must quickly devise a different plan that would allow European (especially German) forces currently serving in NATO commands, along with those in regional configurations like the British-Nordic-Baltic-Dutch joint expeditionary force, to credibly deter such an attack on their own. That is extremely difficult, but it is now necessary. Given the scope of Russia’s hybrid war against Europe, an outstanding recent report from the European Council on Foreign Relations makes the case that we must not just defend but also disrupt and, in carefully controlled ways, go on the offensive. There has been some talk about giving a senior European official the authority to speak with Putin. Even if he were listening, though, what would they say? Indeed, it is important to maintain open lines of com-

munication, especially back channels, with the Kremlin. However, Putin’s sole true language is economic and military might combined with political will. Speaking with three other Russian constituencies is more crucial: the entire Russian society; the business, professional, and even bureaucratic elites who are still in the nation; and the “Other Russia,” who now reside mostly outside of Russia and have a stronger desire than anyone to see Putin defeated. There would be a consistent concept, even though the precise statements would differ: “another relationship with Russia is possible, if...” In the short run, this won’t have much of an impact, but when the time for change arrives, it might pay off. As Russia’s veto player at the Brussels decision-making table, Putin has no immediate replacement for Orbán of Hungary. Robert Fico of Slovakia is not comparable. However, in other parts of Europe, nationalist, populist, and anti-liberal parties continue to gain ground. Putin would have more chances to turn Europe against itself if Jordan Bardella were elected president of France in 2027, let alone if the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) became the largest party in the Bundestag in 2029.

I studied Western politics toward the Soviet Union for more years than I would like to recall. One conclusion was evident: making our own societies safe, powerful, affluent, and appealing—and then “standing there”—was the most crucial thing we did to win the Cold War, not anything in our foreign policy. And now, too. Russia may see a major political shift tomorrow, or it may take ten more years. Strategic patience is the most crucial and challenging issue facing a diversified group of liberal democracies. Time will be on our side if we succeed.

This could be a witness for the police looking into Andrew

It is admirable that Thames Valley police have disclosed that their investigation into Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor’s misconduct in public service is taking into account possible offenses like corruption and sexual misconduct. It issued a public call on Friday for witnesses and possible victims to come forward. After Andrew’s close security detail of Metropolitan police officers drove him back from a London nightclub to a house with some other pals in their 40s and one attractive 17-year-old girl, it was obviously the ideal moment for the police to begin discreetly interrogating him. Then waited outside till he made the decision to return home. However, as they say, this is the second-best time. No wait, Andrew’s estimated £12 million out-of-court settlement with Virginia Giuffrè—despite his insistence that he had no memory of meeting her—was likely the second-best instance. (He disputes any misconduct.) The second-best moment, according to stolen emails, was when the former prince gave his Met close protection officer Giuffrè’s birthdate and US social security number and requested him to check on her. Sorry, I’m incorrect again. The second-best instance was a full 12 years ago, when Giuffrè

said that Andrew had sex trafficked her and abused her on the aforementioned night and two other occasions. Now, what should we say? Congratulations, officers? Is it better to be late than never? Please do me a favor. Unable to overcome her troubles, Virginia Giuffrè committed herself at a lonely Australian farmhouse a little more than a year ago. She was forty-one. However, she devoted about a third of her life to persuading people to take action regarding a man who was actually under the protection of active law enforcement. Her claims were never thoroughly investigated by the Met. You frequently hear about the strain on police numbers and the unavoidable consequences on the provision of services. Imagine, however, that there were at least two police officers on the scene, frequently inside the house, in a wide range of “odd” situations all over the world, with nothing to do but watch and wait for hours on end. These officers might have passed the time wondering what His Nibs might be up to, or, to give one example, why they were being asked to provide private security for a dinner party at the New York mansion of a man who had just been released from prison after serving time for soliciting prostitution from a minor. Did these

serving officers ever find anything about the duties they had to perform strange or even potentially illegal? It must have, of course. Did they take any significant action, or did their superiors? They didn’t, of course. It wasn’t until 2026 that Andrew’s several residences were searched, and it is said that during those investigations, relevant evidence was found. Only because it would now be more detrimental to them have some members of the British elite relaxed about handling this matter as they ought to have all along. However, they didn’t do so for the better part of fifteen years. This has never been about doing “the right thing”; rather, it has always been about safeguarding their own interests, which applies to both the police and the monarchy. This also applies to politicians who appear to have spent their entire careers accepting advice or winks and nods about how things simply must be, rather than making demands that, in reality, this was bullshit and things shouldn’t be like that at all. Regarding the police, it’s still a darkly intriguing possibility that they held off on taking action until Andrew’s mother passed away. They think there may be other witnesses or persons with useful information out there, according to a num-



ber of solicitous statements made on Friday. God, I’m not sure where you would begin after all this time. Employment records for Met police? We now know that the late queen was the one who worked so hard to gain Andrew the position of trade envoy, probably to keep him out of danger. Fantastic work, etc. I’ve been writing about this topic for a long time, and in a column I published in 2015, I said that I had always thought the job “was merely some sinecure designed to get the queen’s second son between golf courses without any boring little people making a fuss about who was paying for the helicopters.” However,

his people appear to have made a concerted effort to stop him from playing golf during his travels abroad, according to the Andrew documents made public this week. According to one brief, “Captain Blair [Andrew’s personal private secretary at the time] specifically requested that the Duke of York not be offered golfing functions abroad.” Oh no. Football managers, trophy wives, and, it seems, worried royal mothers love it when their stubborn charges are playing golf for a cause. And the reason for this is that they are not doing any other “things” when they are doing that. Captain Blair, what were you thinking? If Andrew

hadn’t been playing golf, there seems to have been a good chance that he might have been manipulating Britain’s interests, setting the stage for unbreakable private commercial transactions, or engaging in a number of other, even less noteworthy, activities. We will undoubtedly hear a lot more from the police regarding what is consistently described as a “unprecedented investigation.” What could be better than an unprecedented probe, though? Unprecedented. This should have been unprecedented, and doing it now for the equivalent of clout in public service is simply nothing to brag about.

MTAR soars 24% in 3 days, zooms 144% since April; what's driving stock

Mumbai: Share price of MTAR Technologies (MTAR) hit a new high of ₹8,447.95, soaring 6 per cent on the BSE in Friday's intra-day deal after the company said it secured purchase orders worth of ₹467 crore from an international entity. The management said the company can also look ahead with confidence in spite of geopolitical crisis as the company is now well prepared and in much stronger position now to achieve the required growth and the required margins as well. The closing order book for FY26 is at ₹2,580 crore, and the management had given a guidance of ₹2,800 crore. The marginal difference is due to some nuclear orders and the defense orders being deferred to the current quarter, which does not have any impact on business outlook for this year, the management said.

The company management is confident of receiving large orders across various sectors during FY27 and the estimated closing order book would be close to about ₹5,000 crore at the end of the year.

Motilal Oswal Financial Services view on MTAR

MTAR has a strong order book of ₹2,600 crore as of March 2026, driven by a healthy pipeline across the clean energy (fuel cells), A&D, nuclear sectors, products & others. Further, completion of the first articles and the shift to volume production for new customers across all segments will drive further growth. Motilal Oswal Financial Services anticipates these initiatives to translate into strong growth and margin expansion, led by operating leverage, as guided by the management. The stock was trading higher for the third straight day, surging 24 per cent during the period. Since April, the market price of MTAR has more-than-doubled or zoomed 144 per cent from a level of ₹3,469.30. Further, it zoomed 507 per cent from its 52-week low of ₹1,391 touched on August 29, 2025.

At 09:53 AM; MTAR Technologies share price was up 4.4 per cent at ₹8,299, as compared to 0.68 per cent rise in the BSE Sensex. A combined



1.98 million equity shares changed hands at the counter on the NSE and BSE. MTAR informed the stock exchanges that the company received a purchase orders valued at \$48.68 million at an exchange rate of ₹96 (₹467.30 crore) from an international entity. Earlier, on May 14, 2026, MTAR informed that the company received a purchase orders valued at \$238.76 million at an exchange rate of ₹95.50/- (₹2,278.96 crore) from the international entity. MTAR is a leading manufacturer engaged in manufacturing and development of mission critical precision engineered systems catering to clean energy – civil nuclear power, fuel cells, hydel & others, aerospace & defence (A&D) sectors. The company has a long-standing relationship of over four decades with leading Indian organisations and global OEMs. MTAR in Q4 earnings conference call said that the outlook for next financial looks very positive. And having confidence in the execution of orders on hand, the management raised revenue growth guidance for the financial year 2027 (FY27) from 50 per cent to 80 per cent plus, with clear EBITDA margins of around 24 per cent for the year, mainly due to the company's initial expansion of capacities in various sectors in

clean energy, which has already commissioned. Working capital concerns have been addressed with better payment terms and capital advances, leading to strong operating cash flow. Management indicated ongoing measures to sustain it at current levels. The brokerage firm estimates a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 67 per cent/86 per cent/105 per cent in revenue/EBIT-DA/adj. PAT over FY26-FY28. However, currently, MTAR quotes above the brokerage firm's target price of ₹8,000 (based on 60x FY28 EPS and translating into a ~0.6x PEG ratio on FY26-28E EPS CAGR).MTAR said the company cannot disclose the name of the customer on account of confidentiality. It is in continuation of regular business from existing customer, the company said. MTAR further said that the time period by which the order(s)/contract(s) is to be executed will be decided later. Apart from clean energy, the oil and gas plant will also be commissioned by September end and will be fully operational. The nuclear and aerospace sectors will contribute much larger numbers with nuclear projects being executed this year, having strong order book and volume production commenced in aerospace division with certain customers.

Medanta expands healthcare outreach as liver diseases rise across India



Aizawl: Gurugram-based Medanta has stepped up its healthcare outreach in the North East amid growing concerns over lifestyle-related liver diseases, with specialists stressing the need for early diagnosis, preventive healthcare and healthy living practices.Doctors at Medan-ta – The Medicity, recently named India's Best Hospital by Newsweek 2026, said liver diseases such as fatty liver, viral hepatitis, cirrhosis, alcohol-associated liver disease and liver cancer are witnessing a steady rise due to obesity, diabetes, sedentary lifestyles, unhealthy diets and excessive alcohol consumption.Dr. Swapnil Dhampalwar, Senior Consultant, Hepatology at Medanta Gurugram, said many liver conditions progress silently and are detected only after significant damage occurs. "Timely diagnosis through regular health check-ups and blood tests can help detect liver disease

early and prevent long-term complications," he said. He added that non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, also known as metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease, is increasingly affecting people with poor dietary habits and low physical activity. He advised people to avoid self-medication, smoking and unnecessary supplements while adopting balanced diets, regular exercise, hydration and proper sleep.In Aizawl, the expansion of specialised healthcare consultations and growing awareness campaigns indicate increasing demand for preventive and advanced medical services in Mizoram's urban healthcare sector. Health experts

believe rising lifestyle disorders are driving more residents towards organised multi-specialty healthcare providers.Medanta has signed an MoU with the Government of Mizoram for empanelment under the Mizoram Universal Health Care Scheme (MUHCS), enabling cashless treatment for registered beneficiaries. Residents of Aizawl and nearby areas can consult Dr. Dhampalwar on May 26 at Gastro and Liver Centre, Mission Vengthlang, Tlang Veng Road, Aizawl. The hospital group has also launched a dedicated North East helpline with multi-lingual support to improve access to care across the region.

Varun Beverages hits high, gains 3% on PepsiCo

New Delhi: Varun Beverages entered into a revised exclusive bottling appointment and trademark license agreement (EBA) with PepsiCo Inc. for India. The changes in the aforesaid agreement include extension of the EBA

for a term up to 30 April 2049, revised from earlier term up to 30 April 2039. bution rights for Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique and Madagascar. Looking ahead, the management of Varun Beverages remains confident The earlier

EBA restricted Varun Beverages from carrying out any activity other than to act as an SPV for PepsiCo business, now this requirement is deleted in the revised EBA, Varun Beverages said in beverages (NCBs).

Analysts are wary regarding growth of cigarette volumes

Mumbai: ITC share price target: Shares of ITC slipped 1 per cent in trade on Friday after the company reported its March quarter (Q4FY26) results, with the numbers failing to cheer investor sentiment. The stock opened lower at ₹305.90 on the National Stock Exchange (NSE) and touched an intraday low of ₹303.30 in morning deals. ITC's consolidated gross revenues in the reporting quarter stood at ₹23,821.48 crore, up 16.9 per cent Y-o-Y. Sequentially, net revenue was down 11.1 per cent, while net profit from continuing operations increased 9 per cent. ITC's non-cigarettes FMCG segment posted revenue of ₹6,352.41 crore in Q4FY26, up 15.4 per cent Y-o-Y. The paperboards, paper and packaging segment reported revenue of ₹2,228.61 crore in Q4FY26, up 1.8 per cent Y-o-Y. The firm said that its agri business performance was impacted by geopolitical disruptions as revenue fell by 14.3 per cent Y-o-Y to ₹3,166.65 crore. Analysts said that ITC's non-cigarette FMCG business continued to show strong momentum as the food business delivered healthy, broad-based growth across categories, with improved profitability. The agri business underperformed with both revenue and profitability declining, on account of order deferment and logistic challenges due to the West Asia conflict. The paper segment's revenue growth continued to be muted, however profitability improved on account of the imposition of MIP and lower input costs. ICICI Securities have maintained 'Add' rat-

ing on ITC after Q4 results, and raised the target price to ₹350 from ₹330, valuing the stock at ~19x P/E multiple on March 28E EPS. ICICI Securities said ITC's improving FMCG margins, recovery in the paper business and strong cash generation support its positive outlook on the stock. Also, the company's digital-first and organic portfolio recorded around 60 per cent Y-o-Y growth, with annual recurring revenue reaching ₹1,350 crore.The brokerage expects ITC's revenue, Ebitda, and PAT to grow at CAGR of 8.2 per cent, 6.5 per cent, and 7.9 per cent, respectively, over FY26-28.Analysts noted that ITC reported better-than-expected cigarette volumes in Q4 despite concerns over the sharp tax hike announced in February 2026 and that profitability improved across key businesses as well. Analysts believe that market fears around a steep decline in cigarette volumes are "overstated"."analysts said, adding that they estimate a 9.5 per cent and 6.8 per cent decline in cigarette volume and Ebit in FY27 at current pricesThe brokerage has maintained a target price of ₹399 on the stock, implying an upside of nearly 30 per cent from Thursday's closing price of ₹308For the entire fiscal year 2026, ITC's gross revenue stood at ₹89,913.33 crore, up 10.2 per cent Y-o-Y. Its net profit grew by 4.9 per cent Y-o-Y to ₹21,018.15 crore.During Q4FY26, ITC said that its revenue from the cigarettes segment increased to ₹11,951.72 crore in Q4, up 29.5 per cent from the year-ago period.

Course of three days and has surged by 144% since factors are influencing this stock's performance

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The stock was trading higher for the third straight day, surging 24 per cent during the period. Since April, the market price of MTAR has more-than-doubled or zoomed 144 per cent from a level of ₹3,469.30. Further, it zoomed 507 per cent from its 52-week low of ₹1,391 touched on August 29, 2025.

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company is now well prepared and in much stronger position now to achieve the required growth and the required margins as well. The closing order book for FY26 is at ₹2,580 crore, and the management had given a guidance of ₹2,800 crore. The marginal difference is due to some nuclear orders and the defense orders being deferred to the current quarter, which does not have any impact on business outlook for this year, the management said.

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Karur Vysya Bank, DCB, CUB: A trading guide for small-cap bank stocks by SAMCO

New Delhi: Banking shares have witnessed a tepid trend this May, with 2 out of every 3 private banking stocks on the NSE trading with losses as of date.According to ACE Equity data, Utkarsh Small Finance Bank is the top loser, down 8.5 per cent. Followed by IDBI Bank, Fino Payments Bank, Bandhan Bank, CSB Bank, AU Small Finance Bank, Tamilnad Mercantile Bank, City Union Bank and Ujjivan Small Finance Bank down 4-7 per cent each. In comparison, the Nifty has declined 1.4 per cent, and the Nifty Bank slipped 2.6 per cent

A closer look at the data shows the small-cap banks have underperformed compared to their mid- and large-cap peers. Given this background, here's a technical check on select smallcap banking stocks by Om Mehra of SAMCO Securities on the likely trend ahead. Karur Vysya Bank stock chart reflects a well-structured uptrend over the broader timeframe. However, the stock recently entered a corrective phase, with volumes well below the daily average, indicating a contin-



uation of the ongoing consolidation rather than any aggressive breakdown, says Om Mehra, Technical Research Analyst at SAMCO Securities."Among the key momentum oscillators, the Relative Strength Index (RSI) indicates a mild near-term weakness; while the Moving Average Convergence-Divergence (MACD) line has started to flatten, suggesting that upward momentum has moderated following the recent pullback,"

explains the analyst.

Mehra believes that ₹275 remains a key level to defend. A sustained close below ₹275 would indicate a more meaningful weakening in the overall setup and may attract additional selling pressure, cautions the analyst.On the upside, a move above ₹300 on a closing basis would signal the return of stronger momentum and reaffirm the broader uptrend, he adds. DCB Bank is attempting

a recovery after a swift pullback toward the ₹170-₹173 zone. The stock has been oscillating within a broad ₹160-₹200 range without establishing a clear directional trend, highlights Mehra.keeping the broader setup range-bound," explains the analyst.Among the key momentum oscillators, the analyst flags that the RSI indicator reflects a broadly neutral momentum setup without strong directional conviction. The MACD lines remain below the zero line, although they are positioned close to it, indicating that bearish momentum has moderated but not completely reversed.Mehra sees the ₹185-₹186 zone, which aligns with the horizontal band visible on the chart, as immediate support. He adds that a sustained hold above this region can keep the recovery attempt intact, with ₹190-₹195 emerging as the next resistance band. However, the analyst believes that a move above ₹200 on a closing basis would be required to indicate a breakout from the current range. On the downside, the ₹168-₹170 zone remains important support.

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INTERNATIONAL

Council has allowed for unfettered and ruthlessness safeguard peace



Afghanistan: Every breach of international law leads to the next. From Afghanistan to Iran, as well as Iraq, Libya, Syria, Ukraine, Gaza, and Venezuela, the UN Security Council's complicit passivity has increasingly blurred the boundary between what is authorized and what is banned. Using the veto as both a shield and a weapon, its permanent members frequently act without regard for the UN charter. They manipulate the fates of millions, creating a path of death and ruin. Until recently, there was at least an attempt to legitimize operations by UN endorsement. Today, unabashed use of power no longer attempts to maintain appearances. The boundaries of international organizations are becoming too small to

contain hegemonic rivalry. Without multilateralism, we risk substituting an inadequate system of collective security with the harsh reality of widespread insecurity. When all restrictions on the use of force are lifted, pandemonium ensues. The globe is seeing the largest number of military conflicts since the Second globe War. It's no surprise that this is happening at a critical juncture for democracy. Extremism is the beginning and conclusion of a destructive cycle. When governments allow themselves to be led into conflict by intolerance or arrogance of authority, they sow the seeds of anger, resulting in greater hatred and bloodshed. Technological improvements in both civilian and military uses raise ethical concerns.

Artificial intelligence is already selecting military targets without regard for legal or moral boundaries. The fundamentals of international humanitarian law, particularly the separation between civilians and combatants, are under severe attack. Women and children are the primary victims of this collective tragedy. We are living through an arms race that is pushing countries to devote ever larger shares of their budgets. Even more egregious is the recurring use of hunger as a weapon of war, and the impunity with which forced displacement is carried out. No bombs, drones or missiles can shield economies from the impact of armed conflict. Fluctuations in oil prices mean more expensive – or even inaccessible –

ble – energy and transport for businesses and consumers. Blockades constrain trade. Fertiliser shortages push up food prices and fuel inflation. Central banks raise interest rates, increasing public and private debt. Investment opportunities and jobs are lost. Unilateral actions, arbitrary measures, violations of sovereignty and summary executions are becoming the rule. A study published in the Lancet shows that sanctions imposed without UN backing – particularly economic ones – affect mortality rates in targeted countries, and have, on average, been responsible for about half a million deaths each year since the 1970s. Excessive power and instability go hand in hand.

A world without rules is an insecure world, where anyone can be the next victim. Violence cannot replace dialogue, nor can force prevail over diplomacy. The prerogatives of the permanent members of the security council are already unjustifiable in an international order grounded in the sovereign equality of nations. When exercised irresponsibly, they become intolerable. It is time to respond with resolve by restoring the capacity of a reformed United Nations to act, so that it no longer remains a mere spectator to events that affect us all.

IMF fears that Middle East unrest would lead to higher prices and weaker global growth



Iran: The International Monetary Fund has warned that “all roads lead to higher prices and slower growth worldwide” if the Middle East crisis continues to limit the quantity of oil, gas, and fertilizer that leaves the Gulf. In a stern warning to governments on all continents, the Washington-based organization stated that rising energy and food costs will hurt economic development this year and might have long-term consequences for the global economy. Coming only hours after Donald Trump threatened to destroy Iran's energy infrastructure unless it agreed to a peace settlement, the IMF's research

is likely to be interpreted as a warning to the White House about the war's long-term ramifications for struggling households. According to a weblog by the IMF's principal department heads, including the chief economist, Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, countries with high levels of borrowing would have restricted access to funds that may be used to mitigate the worst consequences of the crisis. “Although the war could shape the global economy in different ways, all roads lead to higher prices and slower growth,” the statement stated. While certain oil and gas exporting nations, such as the United States, would benefit from

increased fossil fuel costs, the research concluded that increases in petrol, diesel, and food prices will affect living standards.

Businesses are expected to face pressure to boost prices, perhaps compelling central banks to hike interest rates to battle inflation. “A short conflict might send oil and gas prices soaring before markets adjust, while a long one could keep energy expensive and strain countries that rely on imports,” the blogpost warned. “Or the world may settle somewhere in between – tensions linger, energy stays costly, and inflation proves hard to tame – with ongoing uncertainty and geopolitical

risk.” “Much depends on how long the conflict lasts, how far it spreads, and how much damage it inflicts on infrastructure and supply chains,” it said, adding: “Historically, sustained oil-price spikes have tended to push inflation higher and growth lower. About a third of fertiliser production travels through the strait of Hormuz, pushing up prices. UN Food and Agriculture Organisation projections indicate that global prices could average 15% to 20% higher in the first half of 2026 if the crisis persists. Natural gas prices have more than doubled in the UK since last December to about £140 a therm, while a barrel of Brent crude that cost about \$60 before the conflict hit more than \$116 on Monday before falling back to \$112. Forecasts for sharp rises in the cost of gas and electricity in Europe next winter are forcing governments to consider higher subsidies and welfare payments to the worst-affected households.

The IMF added: “In Europe, the shock is reviving the spectre of the 2021–22 gas crisis, with countries such as Italy and the UK especially exposed by their reliance on gas-fired power, while France and Spain are relatively protected by their greater nuclear and renewables capacity.”

US instructs American embassies to undertake campaign against



Washington: The United States has authorized all American embassies and consulates throughout the world to start coordinated efforts against foreign propaganda, and Elon Musk's X has been endorsed as a “innovative” instrument to aid with this effort. The cable, signed by Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Monday and seen by the Guardian, also advises that embassies and consulates collaborate with the US military's psychological operations section to address the issue of widespread misinformation. It outlines a comprehensive set of guidelines for how embassy workers should respond to what it defines as concerted foreign efforts to damage American interests abroad. It comes while the US is at war with Iran, whose government has long run one of the world's most sophisticated and prolific state misinformation networks, and as Russian and Chinese influence operations continue to target American allies in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. The letter directs those embassies and consulates to achieve five main objectives: combating hostile propaganda, extending access to information, exposing adversary activity, boosting local voices who support American interests, and supporting “telling America's story”. Embassies are instructed to recruit local influencers, scholars, and community leaders abroad to disseminate counter-propaganda messaging, a strategy intended to make American-funded narratives appear locally spontaneous rather

than centrally planned. “These campaigns seek to shift blame to the United States, sow division among allies, promote alternative worldviews antithetical to America's interests, and even undermine American economic interests and political freedoms,” the cable says. “Using digital platforms, state-controlled media, and influence operations, they pose a direct threat to US national security and fuel hostility toward American interests.” Notably, the cable tells diplomatic offices to coordinate their work with “the Department of War's Psychological Operations” – the military unit more commonly known as Miso, or Military Information Support Operations, formerly Psyop, which is part of the Pentagon. The state department did not immediately respond to a request for comment. It is not common for the state department to openly combine public diplomacy with military psychological operations. But attempts to counter foreign disinformation are not new, although previous administrations funded it through the Global Engagement Center, which lost its funding just before Donald Trump returned to office. Last year, the FBI had its foreign influence taskforce dissolved and the state department shuttered the Counter Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference hub. The cable also endorses Elon Musk's platform X by name – specifically its Community Notes feature – as an “innovative” and “crowdsourced” instrument to cull disinformation in “countering anti-American

propaganda operations without compromising free speech or privacy”. That endorsement comes as the European Union has already fined X €120m (\$137.5m) under its Digital Services Act for deceptive practices – the first such fine under the law – and has opened further investigations into the platform's AI tools and recommendation algorithms. Musk, who owns X, had an influential special advisory role in the Trump administration through the so-called department of government efficiency (Doge). The cable instructs embassy staff to ensure that US foreign assistance is visibly branded, directing consular posts to use “prominent, flag-forward branding” so that foreign audiences know when aid or programming is coming from the American government. Offices and embassies globally are also told to increase the availability of international news and independent analysis translated into local languages, in effect tasking embassies with becoming distribution hubs for foreign-language media in countries where, the cable notes, “anti-American propaganda is pervasive or where information is restricted”. More than 700 “American spaces” – the cultural centers, libraries and exchange hubs the US government funds in countries around the world – are to be repositioned under the guidance as platforms for uncensored information and promoted explicitly as free speech “zones.”

China would outlaw keeping remains of the dead in ‘bone ash dwellings’

China: China is enacting legislation to prohibit individuals from keeping the ashes of their deceased relatives in vacant high-rise apartments rather than paying exorbitant fees for increasingly rare cemetery spaces. China's new funeral management regulations would restrict the use of “residential housing specifically for the purpose of storing cremated remains,” as well as the burial or building of tombs in “areas other than public cemeteries.” The regulation will go into effect on Tuesday, ahead of Sunday's Qingming grave-sweeping festival, a traditional Chinese holiday in which people clean their ancestors' graves and make ceremonial

gifts. The practice of storing ashes in an apartment, known as a “guhui fang” or bone ash flats, has expanded as growing urbanization and an ageing population raise competition and expense for limited cemetery spaces in cities. The empty flat serves as a ceremonial hall, with people changing it into ancestral shrines with candles, red lights, and urns organized by generation. According to a 2020 worldwide funeral expenditure study performed by insurer SunLife, China has the second-highest funeral expenses in the world, after Japan. In contrast, home values decreased 40% between 2021 and 2025, owing in part to Xi Jinping's campaign -

“properties are for living in, not for speculation” - to prevent excessive speculation in the real estate market. China's cemetery plots also only come with a 20-year lease, while residential properties carry government-backed 70-year usage rights. Consequently, many Chinese citizens now view apartments as better value than cemeteries as a place to store the remains of their loved ones. A hashtag associated with the ban has been viewed more than 7m times on Weibo, China's equivalent of X, with social media users expressing scepticism about the measure. “Who's going to go in and check? Or are they planning to put a GPS tracker on every sin-

gle urn?” said one user. “Even at 90% off, cemetery plots are still too expensive,” another wrote. China has one of the world's fastest-growing ageing populations. It recorded 11.3m deaths in 2025, up from 9.8m in 2015, and far more than the country's 7.9m births the same year. Facing a rising number of burials and increasingly limited land supply, authorities in big cities such as Shanghai are subsidising costs for those who opt for “ecological burial methods”, including “deep-ground burial or sea burial of cremated remains”. In 2025, Shanghai's sea burials reached a record high, exceeding 10,000 cases for the first time.

Israel approves a bill granting the death sentence to Palestinians guilty of fatal assaults

Israel: Israel's parliament has enacted legislation imposing the death sentence on Palestinians guilty of lethal assaults, a move severely condemned as unfair by European nations and rights groups. The legislation establishes the death sentence as the default punishment for Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank proven guilty of knowingly carrying out lethal actions deemed acts of terrorism by a military court. According to the bill, prisoners condemned to death would be confined in a separate facility with no visitors save from authorized professionals, and legal consultations will only be performed by video connection. Executions shall be carried out within 90 days following sentence. Israel has seldom invoked the death sentence, only in extraordinary circumstances.

The last person executed was Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi war criminal, in 1962. Itamar Ben-Gvir, the national security minister and one of the bill's greatest supporters, has often worn a noose-shaped lapel button that represents executions under the plan. He listed hanging as “one of the options,” among the electric chair or “euthanasia,” and said that several physicians had volunteered to help. A security committee made some changes to the measure, which received its initial vote last week. KAN, Israel's state broadcaster, claimed that the executions will be carried out via hanging. The legislation will empower judges to impose the death penalty without a request from prosecutors and without requiring unanimity, instead allowing for a simple majority ruling. Military tribunals in the occupied West Bank will also have the authority to impose death sentences, with the defense minister authorized to provide an opinion. The measure eliminates possibilities for appeal or mercy for Palestinians under occupation, whereas Israeli convicts' sentences might be changed to life imprisonment. The measure, proposed by Ben-Gvir's far-right Otzma Yehudit party, has sparked outrage among opponents, who fear that it will signal



a substantial escalation in Israel's punitive policies. Military authorities and ministries have stated that the measure may violate international law and subject Israeli servicemen to detention overseas. Once enacted, the law formally enters into force but it can still be reviewed – and potentially struck down – by Israel's supreme court. Directly before voting began, Ben-Gvir made a bellowing speech from the podium, describing the law as long overdue and a sign of strength and national pride. “From today, every terrorist will know, and the whole world will know, that whoever takes a life, the state of Israel will take their life,” he said. When the measure passed, the chamber erupted into cheers and Ben-Gvir brandished a bottle in celebration. The Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who had come to the chamber to vote yes in person, sat motionless. Israel's leading rights groups decried the law as “an act of institutionalised discrimination and racist violence against Palestinians”. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel

said it filed an appeal against the law with Israel's supreme court. The Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, condemned the legislation as a breach of international law and a doomed bid meant to intimidate Palestinians. “Such laws and measures will not break the will of the Palestinian people or undermine their steadfastness,” his office said in a statement. “Nor will they deter them from continuing their legitimate struggle for freedom, independence, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.” They said hanging constituted torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment under international law. The EU's diplomatic service also condemned the proposal, saying capital punishment breached the right to life and risked violating the absolute prohibition on torture. In February, Britain, France, Germany and Italy expressed “deep concern” over the legislation, which they said risked “undermining Israel's commitments with regards to democratic principles”.

Sharara sets represent the pinnacle of festive fashion for Eid al-Adha



As Eid al-Adha is anticipated to be celebrated on Wednesday, May 27, 2026, the festive shopping season has officially commenced. Each year, during Bakra Eid, one particular silhouette re-emerges to take center stage in ethnic fashion feeds, celebrity appearances, family gatherings, and festive shopping carts: the sharara set.

There's a reason shararas continue surviving trend cycles. They carry the drama of lehengas without feeling as heavy, and they're significantly more comfortable for long festive days filled with family visits, prayers, dinners, and celebrations. The flare adds movement, the dupatta completes the festive aesthetic, and the overall silhouette photographs beautifully, which matters more than ever in the era of Instagram-ready ethnicwear.

This year's trending styles especially lean into softer pastels, delicate embroidery, Banarasi textures, lightweight georgettes, and fluid fabrics that feel festive without becoming uncomfortable in late-May heat.

Sharara sets worth considering this Eid season

1. Miss Ethnik Dual Tone Chinon Heavy Embroidered Sharara Suit Set with Dupatta: For people who prefer more statement-driven festive dressing, this heavily embroidered Chinon sharara set brings a richer and more dramatic aesthetic. The dual-tone effect gives the

outfit visual depth, while the embroidery helps it feel occasion-ready immediately. This is the kind of outfit that works best for larger Eid parties, wedding-adjacent festivities, or evening celebrations where slightly grander dressing feels appropriate.

2. TRENDMALLS Women's Net Embroidery Kurta Sharara Set with Dupatta: Soft pastel tones continue dominating festive fashion, and this sky-blue sharara set captures that aesthetic beautifully. The delicate embroidery adds subtle sparkle without overwhelming the outfit, while the net fabric creates movement and softness throughout the silhouette. It feels especially suitable for daytime Eid gatherings, family lunches, or intimate festive celebrations where lighter colours tend to stand out more elegantly than heavier jewel tones.
3. SIRIL Women's Cotton Blend Foil Printed Straight Kurta Sharara Set: Not everyone wants heavy festiwear during peak summer, which is exactly why lighter cotton-blend sharara sets are trending right now. This set balances festive detailing with practical comfort through breathable fabric and subtle foil printing that catches light without feeling excessive. A smart option for daytime celebrations, smaller gatherings, or people who prioritise comfort during long festive hours.
4. Elegant White Embroidered Sharara Set with Lace Details: White

Aishwarya Rai donned a stunning blush-pink gown

With a fitted waist, arms outstretched, and a departure from the side parting! It seems that Aishwarya Rai is at last fulfilling the wishes of her fans. As the Queen of Cannes made her comeback to the French Riviera, she adorned the red carpet in a stunning, sculptural blue gown crafted by Amit Aggarwal. Nevertheless, she did not stop there! The actress has made another remarkable appearance as she took part in a L'Oréal event. On May 23, Aishwarya Rai stepped out in the French Riviera late at night to attend an event hosted by L'Oréal with her daughter, Aaradhya Bachchan. For her look number 2, she wore a blush-hued gown with a cinched waist, some fine draping on the bodice and a long, sheer cape. Let's decode the look: Aishwarya Rai's look number 2 is a clear winner

Aishwarya wore a blush-pink gown with a cape and bejewelled flowers from the Azerbaijan-based luxury fashion house, Sophie Couture. According to the brand's official website, Aish's dress is available online and is worth a whopping USD 3700, which is approximately Es 3,54,163. Coming to the design elements, the romantic baby-pink look features a heart-shaped silhouette and is crafted from silk chiffon. The fitted dress is beautifully draped on the bodice and adorned with bejewelled flower brooches. It's complemented by a beautiful, romantic blush pink transparent chiffon cape, adding an extra touch of elegance and charm. The sweetheart neckline, a bejewelled brooch that holds the drape at the neck, the flowy pleated skirt, a floor-sweeping train at the back, and a figure-snatching silhouette round



out the design elements that give the gown a feminine beauty. The styling and the jewels

Celebrity stylist Mohit Rai dressed Aishwarya for the occasion. The actor and the stylist chose to keep the accessories minimal to let the blush-pink gown be the star of the show. They opted for statement diamond rings worn on both hands, dangling diamond-encrusted earrings, and heels. Meanwhile, leaving the centre parting far behind, this time, Aishwarya gave her tresses a fresh spin by dyeing them a burgundy shade and styling them in a side parting with soft blowout waves. Lastly, for the glam, she chose shimmery eye shadow, winged eyeliner, mascara-coated

lashes, feathered brows, glossy pink lip shade, rouge-tinted cheeks, and beaming highlighter. What does the internet have to say?

Fans loved Aish's second look at Cannes. Someone commented, "The Queen has finally arrived." One Instagram user praised her stylist and wrote, "Her stylist finally understood the assignment. This is the Aishwarya we've been waiting for." Internet fashion watchdog, Diet Sabya commented, "Here to save Cannes from becoming Chandivali Film Festival is a new and confident (we've prayed for days like these) ARB. Giving waist-snatched, arms out, and almost a hint of an ear. No, you aren't dreaming at all. The children are FED today."

A sense of relief permeates as Bad Bunny reintroduces regular-length shorts



This week, men can exhale with great relief, courtesy of Bad Bunny, whose inaugural collection for the fast fashion brand Zara features a pair of surprisingly conventional mid-thigh shorts.

In recent years, the trend of short-shorts has made it seem as though every day is dedicated to showcasing legs, but the image of the Puerto Rican artist donning shorts that extend comfortably to just a few inches above the knee will indicate a much-anticipated change for many. Bad Bunny, or Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, is not alone in his relatively modest hemline choice. As Hik-

mat Mohammed, beauty editor at Vogue Business, points out: "All the tennis players have been wearing longer shorts recently." Grigor Dimitrov suffered a shock loss at Roland Garros this week wearing shorts a similar length to Ocasio's.

"I don't really think anybody should be wearing long shorts," says Mohammed. "However there does seem to be a natural move for men." He thinks it has to do with "relaxation, feeling maybe more comfortable in your body; it's more slouchy."

A possible push factor emerged last week in the shape of Andy Burnham's

tiny running shorts, barely long enough to cover his tensor fasciae latae.

While opinion was divided, and Burnham isn't known for style that you would necessarily want to distance yourself from, it's not out of the question that it could have a similar effect to Rishi Sunak's Adidas Sambas, which many hailed as the final nail in the coffin for the popular trainer.

Longer shorts may also have something to do with the economy. While rarely applied to menswear, according to the hemline index, seams trend upwards during prosperous times.

The trend for short shorts

arguably began to gather steam in 2020, when Paul Mescal was photographed wearing quasi hotpants, a hemline preference that apparently dates back to his days playing Gaelic football. During a Saturday Night Live monologue, Mescal once joked: "A lot of people ask if we wear kilts. No, that's the Scottish. Traditionally, the Irish wear short-shorts."

What has been the tyranny of tiny shorts to some men has given licence to others. In 2021, US actor and star of This Is Us Milo Ventimiglia went for not much more than a 1in seam. In 2025, actor Alexander Skarsgård appeared on British breakfast TV in a pair of short-shorts, telling host Ranvir Singh: "I wanted to be sexy today." Even M&S launched a selection of thigh-skimmers last year; 3in seams had made their way into the mainstream.

But regardless of Bad Bunny wears, there will always be some who champion a tiny short. In a recent campaign for Peloton, Hudson Williams, the star of what this newspaper has called a "horny gay ice hockey drama", wears a cropped pair for strength training. Harry Styles, a short-shorts stalwart, appeared in tiny track-shorts in his latest video, which opens with a lingering shot of his legs.

However, for Mohammed, in 2026, "if you are wearing short-shorts, that may come across as rather performative." For those who have not been keeping up with the shorts trends akin to the FTSE 100, the shorts you have been wearing all this time are perfectly acceptable.

Chand Mera Dil opens slow; day 1 box office ₹2.90 cr

Mumbai: A new romantic drama has finally hit theatres, and it's already starting its box office journey with a very mixed vibe. Chand Mera Dil, starring Ananya Panday and Lakshya, opened this week, but the numbers on day one are more on the quieter side than the blockbuster kind.

The film released on May 22 after a few delays, and while there was some buzz around the fresh pairing and storyline, the opening day response hasn't really translated into big footfalls yet. According to trade website Sacnilk, Chand Mera Dil collected around ₹2.90 crore net in India on its first day. This came from nearly 4,944 shows across the country. For a Dharma Productions film, the start is fairly modest.



Still, it has managed to do better than Ek Din, starring Junaid Khan and Sai Pallavi. That film opened at ₹1.15 crore nett and has so far collected around ₹4 crore nett in total. So on a basic comparison, Chand Mera Dil is ahead. But when placed next to Ananya Panday's earlier release Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri, the difference is clear. That film opened much stronger

at ₹7.75 crore on day one, making this latest start look relatively soft. Trade experts feel the real test will come over the weekend. Romantic films usually depend a lot on word-of-mouth, so if audiences connect, the numbers could improve. If not, the slow start may continue.

The film is directed by Vivek Soni and follows Chandni (Ananya Panday) and Aarav (Lakshya). They

meet in college in Hyderabad, fall in love, and later their relationship moves into marriage after an unexpected pregnancy. Things start off emotional but soon get complicated. Pressure, misunderstandings, and frustration begin to creep in. At one point, a fight turns serious and becomes a turning point in their relationship. A review excerpt from CNN-News18 Showsha summed up the film's tone. It read, "Much like marriages and relationships themselves, the film thrives on chaos and contradiction. Watch out for the final stretch between the protagonists. The lighting feels turbulent, the backdrop restless and several shots intentionally drift out of focus, creating a visual texture that mirrors the emotional instability of the characters."

Richa Chadha, Ali Fazal to launch new Zealand's first Indian film festival

New Delhi: Indian cinema is set to get a major platform in New Zealand with the launch of the country's first dedicated Indian film festival later this year. Actors and producers Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal will attend the official launch of The Indian Film Festival of New Zealand (TIFFNZ) on June 2, 2026. The duo will also host a special screening of their debut production venture, Girls Will Be Girls, which has earned acclaim at the Sundance Film Festival and the Independent Spirit Awards.

Set to officially debut in October 2026, TIFFNZ has been founded by Petrina D'Rozario with the aim of strengthening cultural and creative ties between India and New Zealand through cinema. The festival is expected to shine a spotlight on Indian films and South Asian storytelling while fostering meaningful collaborations between artists and audiences from both countries. Speaking about their association with the festival, Richa and Ali said, "We're very happy to be part of the launch of TIFFNZ. Film festivals play an im-



portant role in building dialogue and creating space for diverse stories. The idea of bringing Indian cinema to New Zealand in a structured, celebratory way feels both timely and meaningful. We're looking forward to supporting this new chapter and engaging with audiences there."

The four day festival will be held across Auckland, Wellington and

Christchurch, featuring film screenings, workshops, cultural events and industry discussions. Organisers are planning to showcase nearly 30 feature and short films in the inaugural edition, with a focus on celebrating the diversity of Indian cinema and amplifying South Asian voices in Aotearoa, the Māori name for New Zealand.

Vijay's Jana Nayagan still stalled by censorship delays



Chennai: The upcoming Tamil movie Jana Nayagan is still waiting for its official certificate from the Central Board of Film Certification. The film was originally scheduled for a grand theatrical release in January for the Pongal festival. However, a complaint from an examining committee member pushed

the movie to a revising committee, causing a five-month delay. Despite legal efforts from the makers, no relief has been granted by the courts yet.

Producer Venkat K Narayana of KVN Productions has addressed the media regarding the status of the film. He stated that the team is waiting

for the censor certificate. He assured fans that the release date will be announced well in advance once the certificate is secured. The producer also mentioned that the movie will get a massive worldwide release. The film's lead actor Vijay has recently become the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, matching the movie's title. Reports state that Vijay even asked the producer to cut his Cannes visit short to manage the situation. Jana Nayagan is directed by H Vinoth and produced by Venkat K Narayana under KVN Productions. The film features music composed by Anirudh Ravichander. It stars Vijay, Mamitha Baiju, Pooja Hegde, and Bobby Deol in prominent roles.

Maa Behen trailer: Madhuri Dixit fronts crime comedy with Triptii Dimri, Dharna Durga

Mumbai: The trailer of Maa Behen was released today in presence of the cast and the crew. This crime-comedy follows a dysfunctional mother-daughter trio as they try to hide a dead body while dealing with unpredictable chaos, nosy neighbours, and their unconventional family dynamics. The film introduces unique characters like Rekha (Madhuri Dixit), Jaya (Triptii Dimri), Sushma (Dharna Durgaa), Guptaji (Ravi Kishan), Guptain (Geetanjali Kulkarni), Maheshwari (Arunoday Singh), and Manas (Sharad Bhardwaj).

The trailer showcases the madness surrounding Rekha, Jaya, and Sushma, who are already struggling to survive each other before the worst strikes. And one sudden night, she finds a dead body at her house. What follows is a complete rollercoaster of panic, cover-ups, emotional meltdowns, and



hilariously questionable decisions. Speaking about the film, director and producer Suresh Triveni shared, "With Maa Behen, we wanted to tell a story that feels both rooted and wildly entertaining, backed by terrific performance. Overall, the film is about a dysfunctional family that has the

mother, Rekha, and her two daughters Jaya, and Sushma who are constantly at loggerheads and now have to deal with a 'Kaand' that results in a lot of chaos, comedy, and bizarre situations that they have to cover up and navigate. Each character brings a completely different energy to the story, making

their dynamic messy, unpredictable, and deeply human."

Madhuri Dixit added, "Rekha is not your typical Hindi cinema mother, and that's exactly what made the character so exciting for me. As an actor, it's incredibly rewarding to explore layered, unpredictable roles that challenge the audience's expectations. Rekha may not be a perfect mother, but like any mother, she wants the best for her daughters and tries to hold her family together amidst all the chaos. Thanks to creators like Suresh Triveni and partners like Netflix and Abundantia Entertainment, trying to push the envelope, I got the opportunity to present audiences with this unexpected story and character. Maa Behen is an entertainer that will be most enjoyed with the full family - maa behen, bhai, dost." Maa Behen will be released on Netflix on June 4.

Drishyam 3 impresses yet misses the mark

Kochi: Drishyam 3 attempts to expand the beloved franchise by introducing a fresh mystery around who is targeting Georgekutty (Mohan Lal)'s family. While the idea initially sounds exciting, director Jeethu Joseph fails to recreate the gripping writing and smart screenplay that made the first two films memorable.

Unlike the earlier parts, where Georgekutty knew his enemies and strategically outplayed them, this time he senses danger without knowing where it comes from. That setup raises expectations of another masterclass in planning and twists. However, the film struggles to deliver on that promise. The first half moves slowly with several seemingly insignificant moments that appear to be setting up major payoffs, but most of the twists feel forced and predictable. The emotional connection audiences share with Mohanlal's Georgekutty and his family still works in the film's favor. The final 30-40 minutes generate applause in parts, but largely because of the franchise's goodwill rather than genuinely shocking or thrilling moments. Overall, Drishyam 3 remains watchable with a few engaging sequences, especially in the second half, but it falls well short of the sharp writing and tension of its predecessors. Loyal fans may still enjoy revisiting Georgekutty's world, but expectations should be kept in check. The ending also hints at a fourth installment, with hopes that the franchise returns stronger next time.

12 years of Heropanti: the launch that transformed Tiger Shroff, Kriti Sanon

Mumbai: It's been 12 years since Heropanti released in theatres, and it still feels like one of those films that perfectly captures a very specific Bollywood era. Everything about it was loud, dramatic, slightly over-the-top, and extremely confident in its "mass hero launch" energy. The film gave us slow-motion entries, intense fight sequences, and a romance that was as filmi as it gets.

And honestly, it also gave us dialogues that refused to leave pop culture. "Chhoti bacchi ho kya?" is still quoted even today, sometimes jokingly, sometimes seriously, but always with that nostalgic grin. Add to that songs like Whistle Baja, Raat Bhar, and Tabah Ho Gaye, which played everywhere back then, and you have a film that basically defined early 2010s Bollywood mood boards. Twelve years later, the real story of Heropanti is not just the film itself, but the two careers it quietly launched in completely different directions. Heropanti, which released in 2014, was introduced as a big launch vehicle for Tiger



Shroff, and the film made no effort to hide that intention. It was built around action, style, and hero moments that were designed to announce a new kind of Bollywood action star. Tiger arrived with his high-energy stunts, smooth dance moves, and a screen presence that felt very different from the usual debutant entry at the time. Kriti Sanon, on the other hand, entered the industry with a softer and more grounded presence. She wasn't positioned as an action star or an intense performer in the same way. Instead, she came across as fresh, natural, and easy to watch on screen, which helped her stand out in a film that was otherwise very loud and stylised.

Together, they formed a pairing that worked exactly for the kind of film Heropanti was meant to be: youthful, dramatic, and very much in the "commercial Bollywood romance with action" space. After Heropanti, Tiger Shroff quickly settled into a very clear identity in Bollywood, and that identity was action. He didn't slowly ease into it; he fully embraced it from the beginning. His next major step came with Baaghi in 2016, which cemented him as a full-fledged action star and led to the creation of a successful franchise built around his physical abilities. Over the years, Tiger became known for his acrobatic fight sequences, flips, kicks, and a level of

physical discipline that set him apart from many of his contemporaries. In many ways, his films were built around showcasing his fitness and action skills, and audiences began to associate him strongly with that space.

At the same time, dance remained a huge part of his appeal. Songs like Beat Pe Booty, Disco Disco, and Jai Jai Shivshankar kept him relevant in the performance space even when his films received mixed responses. His strength as a performer has always been tied to movement, whether it is action or dance, and that has remained consistent since his debut. However, like many actors who are strongly associated with a specific genre, Tiger's career has also gone through phases of experimentation. Some films worked better than others, and there has been a visible effort to move beyond just action-heavy roles. Even so, his core identity as a high-energy performer has stayed intact, and he continues to be one of Bollywood's most recognisable action-focused stars.

Abhimanyu Singh on playing transgender role Devi Trivedi in inspector Avinash 2

Mumbai: Jahn Studio, in collaboration with Amelie Films, has unveiled the poster and trailer of their upcoming Hindi mafia thriller 'Cocaine'. The film is designed for a global audience and will premiere at the Cannes Film Market in May 2026.

Written and directed by American-Indian filmmaker Shravan Tiwari, known for directing the web series Murshid and two Hollywood films, including one starring legendary actor Eric Roberts, the film marks a bold new step for an Indian-origin international crime thriller. Following its Cannes debut, the film is expected to roll out across major OTT platforms in Europe, the USA, Australia, and Canada, with its India release planned around Diwali 2026. Before sitting down for the rendezvous, Abhimanyu Singh, who plays the lead protagonist Jalal, a diligent and dedicated police inspector, spoke about the serious issue of drug abuse. He said, "Despite trying to remain on the right side of the law, Jalal gets pulled into a sinister



web when a ruthless drug cartel targets his brother. He is forced to take extreme measures to protect his family while navigating a dangerous game of survival. It's a must-watch film, especially for the youth, to understand how people get trapped in the drug network. It's authentic and also highlights a burning issue that needs to be addressed. It's going to be a global release." I feel extremely grateful that audiences are loving this character so much. I worked very hard on it, and we actually shot this project almost three to four years ago. There were times when I wondered why it was taking so long to release, but

now that it's finally out and people are appreciating my performance, it feels very satisfying. It was one of the most challenging transformations of my career. Every day, it took nearly two-and-a-half hours to get ready — from wearing the saree and applying makeup, lipstick, bindi, and nail polish to fully becoming Devi. Initially, I was sweating a lot and felt uncomfortable in the costume, especially wearing the saree and petticoat for long hours. But once I completely surrendered to the character, a completely different personality emerged within me. That's when Devi truly came alive.

Aaradhya Bachchan debuts at Cannes; Aishwarya shines in pink

Mumbai: Aaradhya Bachchan, who accompanies her mother Aishwarya Rai to the Cannes Film Festival every year, has finally made her own debut in 2026. Aaradhya accompanied Aishwarya to L'Oréal Paris' annual Lights on Women's Worth awards. Aaradhya looked radiant in a red gown as she posed with Aishwarya, who looked stunning in pink.

Aaradhya Bachchan wore a red gown with a match-

ing sparkly cape. She wore her hair down, framing her face perfectly. Meanwhile, for her second Cannes 2026 appearance, Aishwarya Rai opted for a pink dress with a similar cape. Aishwarya's outfit was adorned with flowers and ruching. The actress ditched her signature red lip and opted for a blush-toned makeup look. She wore her hair in loose waves and looked proud as she posed with her daughter at the event. Several videos



of the mother-daughter duo have gone viral across social media platforms, and fans have appreciated both

their looks. Previously, for her first Cannes appearance this year, Aishwarya had arrived

for the Histoires De La Nuit screening wearing a couture creation crafted by Amit Aggarwal. Styled by Mohit Rai, Aishwarya's ensemble was designed to interact dynamically with movement and light. The embroidery continuously refracted and transformed as Aishwarya moved on the red carpet, giving the garment an almost kinetic quality. Rendered in an abyss blue, Aishwarya's couture piece referenced cosmic depth and the infi-

nite nature of light traveling through space. Every surface of the garment had been constructed to respond to illumination, allowing the piece to visually evolve under different lighting conditions. This year, there had been much speculation about Aishwarya Rai's Cannes appearance. Aishwarya Rai is a regular at Cannes and is known for her iconic looks on the red carpet of the film festival. Over the years, the actress has built a

solid rapport at the fest and draws a huge reaction from the international media.

As such, fans couldn't wait for Aishwarya's Cannes 2026 arrival. While Aishwarya Rai had been absent from the red carpet till now, a report by MoneyControl stated that the actress would attend the closing ceremony of the festival. However, the reason behind her absence from the red carpet had not been revealed.

Why should they possess it?SC queries whether children from “well-placed” families ought to receive reservation benefits

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday grappled with a question that has increasingly occupied the centre of India’s reservation debate: should the benefits of affirmative action continue to flow, generation after generation, to families that have already achieved substantial social and economic advancement through reservations? A bench of justices BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan repeatedly questioned whether children of socially mobile, professionally accomplished and financially secure parents should continue to claim reservation benefits under the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category, indicating judicial concern over what the court saw as the perpetual continuation of quota benefits among already upwardly mobile sections.

“If both parents are IAS officers why should they have reservations? With education and economic empowerment, there is social mobility,” Justice Nagarathna observed during the hearing. “So then again to seek reservation for the children, we will never get out of it. That is a matter we have to be concerned about. Also, what

is the use then? You are giving reservation. The parents have studied, they are in good jobs, they are getting good income, and the children want reservation again. See, they should get out of reservation,” the bench added. The remarks came while the bench was hearing a petition challenging a Karnataka high court judgment that upheld the exclusion of a candidate from reservation benefits on the ground that he fell within the “creamy layer”. The case pertains to a candidate from the Kuruba community, classified under Category II(A) among Karnataka’s backward classes, who had secured selection as Assistant Engineer (Electrical) in the Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited under the reserved category. However, the District Caste and Income Verification Committee denied him a caste validity certificate after concluding that his family fell within the creamy layer.

Authorities found that the candidate’s family income stood at approximately ₹19.48 lakh annually and noted that both parents were government employees whose combined in-



come exceeded the prescribed threshold. During the Friday hearing, the bench stressed that reservation was intended as an instrument of social upliftment and that once families had attained significant educational and economic advancement,

the rationale for continuing reservation benefits to the next generation required scrutiny. “There has to be some balance. Socially and educationally backward, yes, but once the parents have attained a level because of taking advantage

of reservation, if they are both IAS officers, both are in government service, they are very well-placed, social mobility is there. Now they are questioning the exclusion. This also has to be kept in mind,” it remarked. The court’s remarks echo a

broader judicial conversation that has gained momentum in recent years over whether reservation benefits are increasingly being cornered by the more advanced sections within backward communities. That debate received perhaps its strongest articulation in August 2024 from a seven-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court, where Justice BR Gavai (who later took over as the CJI), in his separate opinion in the SC/ST sub-classification case, called for identification and exclusion of the “creamy layer” even among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to take them out of the fold of affirmative action or reservation. However, the Union government had later clarified that the Supreme Court’s opinion was a non-binding recommendation and that the creamy layer concept will not be applied to the SC, ST categories, as there was no provision for the same in the Constitution. In Friday’s hearing, advocate Shashank Ratnoo, appearing for the petitioner, argued that salary income alone could not determine creamy layer status for government servants. He con-

tended that the test under existing jurisprudence focused on the status of the parents, such as whether they belonged to Group A or Group B services, rather than their salary income. Ratnoo submitted that if salary income alone became determinative, even lower-ranking government employees such as clerks, drivers and peons could be excluded from reservation benefits merely because of inflationary salary structures.

The counsel also warned that if all forms of income were aggregated for creamy layer determination, the distinction between OBC reservation and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) reservation would effectively disappear.

However, the bench appeared unconvinced by the broader argument that social backwardness remained unaffected by educational and economic advancement. Justice Nagarathna specifically referred to the petitioner’s parents’ salaries, noting that the father drew a basic pay of ₹53,900 per month while the mother earned ₹52,650 per month, even as it agreed to consider the matter and issued notice.

Ballon d’Or dream, Real Madrid chaos and France’s hopes: Kylian Mbappe enters World Cup chasing football immortality



The 2026 FIFA World Cup will present a very different version of Kylian Mbappe. He is no longer the fearless teenager who stunned the world in 2018, announcing himself on the biggest stage with that breathtaking performance against Argentina built on raw pace and confidence. He is also no longer the superstar desperate to prove he belonged among football’s elite, as he did in 2022 when he produced a stunning hat-trick in the final but still walked away heartbroken. This time, the responsibility is entirely different. Mbappe heads into the tournament as the face and leader of France national football team. With experienced figures like Antoine Griezmann and Olivier Giroud no longer central to the setup, the spotlight naturally falls on him. Even with a Ballon d’Or winner like Ousmane Dembele in the squad, most conversations around France will still begin and end with Mbappe because of what he has already achieved in the last two World Cups.

One advantage for Mbappe is that he does not carry the burden that followed players like Neymar Jr or Cristiano Ronaldo for years. He has already won a World Cup. That removes one layer of pressure. But there is still another challenge in

front of him, proving beyond debate that he is the best player in the world. Despite everything he has achieved, questions remain because he has yet to win the Ballon d’Or. Another World Cup triumph could finally settle that conversation in his favour. The past few months at Real Madrid have also not been smooth. A trophyless season, criticism on social media and constant speculation about dressing-room tensions have created negativity around him. At times, he has even been portrayed as an overpowering figure within the squad.

In terms of goal-scoring, Mbappe has still enjoyed an outstanding season, scoring 41 goals in 43 matches. On paper, those numbers are elite, but they lose some shine when Real Madrid end the campaign without major trophies. Individual brilliance is often judged differently at a club like Madrid, where success is measured almost entirely through silverware.

Mbappe’s form also slowed slightly during the second half of the season, while the atmosphere around the club became increasingly chaotic. Reports of dressing-room tension only added to the pressure. The fallout around managerial changes involving Xabi Alonso, disagreements between Vinicius Junior and

the coaching staff, rumours of a confrontation involving Federico Valverde and Aurelien Tchouameni, and Mbappe’s own comments directed at Alvaro Arbeloa turned an already disappointing season into an exhausting one for Madrid. Now, the attention shifts back to the France national football team. For Mbappe, it is a chance to step away from the chaos surrounding his club season and return to an environment where he has consistently looked comfortable and confident. France has often brought out the best in him, both as a player and as a leader.

Under Didier Deschamps, Mbappe has thrived on the biggest stages, delivering performances that shaped entire tournaments. With the 2026 FIFA World Cup approaching, he now has another opportunity to strengthen his legacy and remind the football world why he remains the central figure in France’s ambitions. Mbappe truly arrived on the global stage during the 2018 FIFA World Cup with the France national football team. He opened his account in the tournament against Peru, but it was the round-of-16 clash against Argentina that changed everything. Mbappe ripped through the Argentine defence with frightening pace and confidence, scoring twice in

the space of four minutes and completely shifting the momentum of the contest.

It was a painful night for Lionel Messi and Argentina, but also the night the football world fully understood Mbappe’s potential. At just 19, he played with the fearlessness of a veteran on the biggest stage possible. He carried that momentum into the final against Croatia, where he scored France’s fourth goal in a 4-2 victory. By the end of the tournament, Mbappe had four goals and a World Cup winner’s medal. Then came the 2022 FIFA World Cup, where the France national football team entered with the pressure of defending their crown. The campaign was not as dominant or smooth as 2018, but France still found a way to reach the final. Waiting for them was Argentina and Lionel Messi, with much of the football world hoping to see the Argentine legend finally lift the one trophy missing from his career.

For nearly 80 minutes, the final looked completely one-sided. Argentina controlled the game and led 2-0, with Messi already on the scoresheet from the penalty spot. France looked out of ideas and the contest appeared over, but Kylian Mbappé suddenly changed everything. In the space of

two breathtaking minutes, he scored twice to drag France back into the match and turn the final into one of the greatest football spectacles ever seen. Even in extra time, the drama refused to stop. Messi scored again and seemed ready to complete his dream, only for Mbappe to respond once more with another penalty to complete a remarkable hat-trick. In doing so, he became the first player since Geoff Hurst to score three goals in a World Cup final. Argentina eventually triumphed in the penalty shootout, giving Messi his crowning moment, but Mbappe’s performance became one of the defining images of the final, with many viewing it as the symbolic passing of football’s global spotlight from Messi to the French superstar.

Now, the stage is once again set for Mbappe to deliver another defining World Cup campaign. Despite the rise of several young stars across world football, Mbappe remains the player many still view as the face of the next generation. The 2026 tournament gives him another opportunity to remind the world why he continues to sit at the centre of football’s biggest conversations while also taking a significant step towards the one major individual honour still missing from his career - the Ballon d’Or.

3 army officers survive chopper crash in Leh

New Delhi, May 23: Three army officers had a narrow escape after their Cheetah helicopter crashed in the mountainous Tangste region near Leh, officials familiar with the matter said on Friday. The incident occurred on Wednesday but was reported on Friday. A lieutenant colonel and a major were piloting the single-engine chopper and their passenger was Major General Sachin Mehta, General Officer Commanding of 3 Infantry Division, HT has learnt.

Officials said all three occupants of the chopper walked away with minor injuries, calling the incident no less than a miracle and adding that a probe into what caused the crash was underway. Meanwhile, officials said that the Indian Army will begin to phase out its ageing fleet of Cheetah and Chetak helicopters in a year or two, and replace them with new light utility helicopters over the next eight to 10 years, as part of the Army Aviation Corps’ drive to modernise its capabilities. The army’s planned two-pronged replacement approach involves inducting locally produced light utility choppers and leasing similar choppers as stopgaps to meet critical requirements. The army

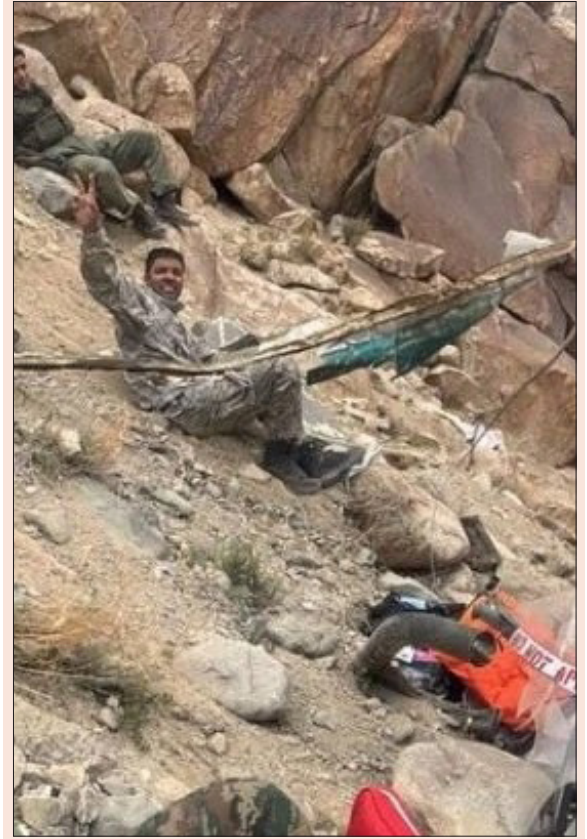
needs around 250 new helicopters.

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), which licence-produced 625 Cheetah and Chetak choppers for use across defence services, no longer builds them but is responsible for their maintenance and repair. In 1970, HAL signed an agreement with French aerospace firm Aerospatiale to produce Cheetahs, eight years after it tied up with another French firm, Sud-Aviation (now Airbus), to manufacture Chetaks.

HAL expects the army and Indian Air Force to place combined orders for at least 187 light helicopters. The army has already ordered six limited series production LUHs, with a top speed of 220 kmph, a service ceiling of 6.5 km, and an operational range of 350 km.

Currently, Cheetah and Chetak helicopters remain a critical lifeline for troops in high-altitude areas, including the Siachen glacier. A string of crashes has led to recent scrutiny of the choppers’ safety record. Over 15 Cheetahs and Chetaks have crashed in the last 10-12 years, killing several pilots.

Officials said the existing fleet is airworthy and has a few years of technical life left.



Fading Playoff Hopes: KKR And DC Seek Crucial Victory To Stay Alive

KKR Target Win But Punjab Hold Run-Rate Advantage

New Delhi: RCB head coach Andy Flower heaped praise on Venkatesh Iyer after Royal Challengers Bengaluru sealed their place in IPL 2026 Qualifier 1. Although RCB suffered a 55-run defeat to Sunrisers Hyderabad on Friday, they still secured a top-two finish in the points table. Opening the batting, Iyer played a valuable knock of 44 off 19 balls, smashing four fours and four sixes before Eshan Malinga dismissed him. Flower praised Iyer for his patience, professionalism and impact whenever given an opportunity this season. The RCB coach also lauded his attitude, hard work and commitment, saying the experienced all-rounder remained positive despite spending long periods on the sidelines waiting for his chance. “Look, I’ve got a lot of respect for Venkatesh Iyer (Venky). He’s had to wait for his chance, and every time he’s had a chance - either as an impact player when we’ve needed the extra batsman because we’ve got ourselves



into some trouble in the innings, or in the last two matches when he’s been given a chance, first at No.4 in Dharamsala and then today opening the batting - he’s taken all of those chances,” Flower said in the post-match press conference. “So, his attitude throughout the season has been outstanding. I’ve got a lot of respect for a man that’s played a lot of IPL cricket, played for India, and was sitting on the side-

lines waiting for his chance. He’s been in that dugout with a big smile on his face all the time. “He’s practised hard every single session. He’s worked hard at his bowling, his fielding, and his batting. He’s been exemplary, to be honest, so a lot of respect for him,” Flower added. Iyer has enjoyed a solid debut season with RCB after making the switch from Kolkata Knight Riders ahead of IPL 2026. Bought by RCB for Rs 7

crore in the mini-auction, the left-handed all-rounder arrived with plenty to prove after an underwhelming final season with KKR. Although he did not start the season as a regular in the playing XI, Iyer grabbed his opportunities whenever called upon. One of his standout performances came against Punjab Kings, where he smashed an unbeaten 73 off 40 balls at a strike rate above 180 and earned the Player of the

Match award. In five matches this season, Iyer has notched 158 runs at an average of 79 and a strike-rate of 177.52. Venkatesh Iyer has scored a total of 158 runs during the IPL 2026 season. Representing Royal Challengers Bengaluru, the left-handed all-rounder achieved this tally across various appearances, including matches where he served as an impact player. His season was highlighted by a top score of 73 off 40 balls against Punjab Kings and a quickfire 44 off 19 balls in a match against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

Head coach Andy Flower praised Iyer for his professionalism and patience, noting that he remained committed despite spending significant time on the sidelines. Iyer joined the franchise for Rs 7 crore in the auction after previously playing for Kolkata Knight Riders. Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) secured a top-two finish and a spot in Qualifier 1 of IPL 2026 primarily through strategic squad management, the leadership of Rajat Patidar,

Harry Kane Set To Captain England For Record-Equalling Third FIFA World Cup



London: England head coach Thomas Tuchel has named the 26-man squad for the FIFA World Cup 2026 in the United States, Canada and Mexico, with Harry Kane captaining the side at his third World Cup, equalling the record set by Billy Wright in 1950, 1954 and 1958. The squad selection was revealed in a live show broadcast from Wembley Stadium via the official England app. Tuchel has largely stuck with the group of players who guided England through qualifying with a 100 per cent record. Jordan Pickford, John Stones and Marcus Rashford will also be appearing at their third World Cup. Jordan Henderson will be making a Three Lions’ record-equalling fourth appearance in the finals alongside Sir Bobby Charlton. It will be his seventh major

tournament, equalling Lucy Bronze’s all-time England record of UEFA Euro and World Cup final appearances. Strikers Ivan Toney and Ollie Watkins as part of his 26-man squad. On the other hand, Cole Palmer, who inspired Chelsea to FIFA Club World Cup 2025 glory and was on target in England’s UEFA Euro 2024 final defeat by Spain, has not made the cut after an injury-hampered season which has disrupted his form. “It is truly exciting and a great privilege to be able to name an England squad for the World Cup,” said Tuchel. “It has been a tough process to decide on the nomination, but I have full belief in this group of players. They all deserve their place. The squad and everyone involved with the team will give all we can to make the country proud.

We know they are behind us and we hope for a very special summer.” Manchester City attacking midfielder Phil Foden is another to miss out on Tuchel’s final selection, along with Real Madrid right-back Trent Alexander-Arnold. Aside from the Arsenal and Crystal Palace contingent involved in two European club finals, who will arrive later, the squad will come together from June 1 at their prep camp in Palm Beach, Florida. After two warm-up fixtures, the whole group will then head to the team’s permanent tournament base in Kansas City on June 13. England are placed in Group L, along with Croatia, Ghana and Panama. They will kickstart their campaign against Croatia on June 17 at Dallas Stadium in Arlington, Texas.

Delhi High Court Orders Fair Process For Vinesh Phogat Before Asian Games Trials

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Friday questioned the Wrestling Federation of India’s (WFI) decision to declare wrestler Vinesh Phogat ineligible to participate in domestic competitions and asked the Centre to explore measures to facilitate her participation in the upcoming Asian Games selection trials. A division bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia, while hearing Phogat’s appeal against a single-judge order refusing interim relief, observed that the federation’s departure from its earlier selection framework required closer scrutiny, particularly in light of the wrestler’s maternity break and return to competition.

The CJ Upadhyaya-led Bench orally remarked that motherhood could not become a disadvantage for an athlete seeking to resume her sporting career and observed that Phogat was an internationally accomplished wrestler. Senior advocate Rajshekhar Rao, appearing for Phogat, submitted that the wrestler regained eligibility earlier this year and had completed registration formalities before being barred from participating at the last moment. He argued that the revised eligibility criteria introduced by the WFI effectively excluded Phogat by limiting participation in the Asian Games selection trials to medal winners from



select national tournaments held during 2025 and 2026, a period during which she remained away from the mat because of maternity and post-partum recovery. The Delhi High Court also expressed its reservations over portions of the WFI’s show-cause notice, which referred to Phogat’s disqualification from the Paris Olympics 2024 final after failing to make weight. It observed that the incident could not be viewed in isolation without considering the larger circumstances and questioned whether the federation’s approach advanced the interests of Indian wrestling. During the hearing, the bench

asked the Centre what steps had been taken after the issuance of the notice and whether the Union Sports Ministry had examined the WFI’s revised selection policy. Counsel appearing for the Union government submitted that the Centre had not independently barred Phogat from participating in the trials and said relaxation provisions available under the Sports Authority of India (SAI) framework could be considered in appropriate cases. The government also said it was willing to appoint an observer from the SAI to monitor the trials and make sure the process was video-recorded.

RCB Won Bigger Battle Before IPL Playoffs Despite Loss To SRH, Says Virender Sehwag

New Delhi: Former India opener Virender Sehwag believes that Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) won the bigger battle ahead of the IPL playoffs, despite losing their match against Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) by 55 runs. Speaking on Cricbuzz, Sehwag pointed out that by crossing the 200-run mark in their steep chase of 256, the team successfully locked down the number one spot on the points table. According to Sehwag, holding onto the top position is a massive advantage for RCB because it gives them a safety net in the knockouts.



batters likely knew early on that chasing down 256 with the necessary run-rate margin to win the match outright was unrealistic. However, he praised the team’s calculated approach to prioritize their tournament seeding. Addressing Virat Kohli’s knock, Sehwag explained that while the leader would definitely be upset with the loss, his batting strategy was entirely practical. Sehwag

noted that if RCB had started blindly swinging from the start and lost quick wickets, they might have collapsed for under 170 runs, completely risking their top position. Instead, the focus was on hitting the baseline targets of 160 and 170 first. Sehwag described it as a situation where “sometimes, even in defeat, you end up winning.” Sehwag firmly backed RCB as the undisputed favorites to

lift the trophy, stating that the playoff venues will suit their style perfectly. He praised the franchise for playing like champions throughout the league stage, adding that every single department—from batting and bowling to the dugout support staff—has synced together flawlessly. Beyond Sehwag’s praise for the team’s calculations, the match highlighted a vital selection silver lining for Bengaluru heading into the knockouts.

With England opener Phil Salt’s availability for the remainder of the tournament uncertain due to injury, and his replacement Jacob Bethell struggling to find form at the top of the order, RCB may have found their perfect playoff alternative in Venkatesh Iyer. Iyer has patiently waited for his opportunities on the sidelines this season, but he stepped up brilliantly against Hyderabad.

Manchester United’s Bruno Fernandes Named Premier League Player Of The Season After Historic Turnaround

New Delhi: Manchester United playmaker Bruno Fernandes has claimed the 2025/26 Premier League Player of the Season award, marking the very first time he has taken home the honour. The midfielder has enjoyed an extraordinary run of form throughout the year, serving as the definitive catalyst for a resurgent squad that successfully booked its ticket back to the UEFA Champions League. The Portuguese international was a constant threat, registering eight goals and a staggering 20 assists. This massive haul meant he directly accounted for 28 goals across 37 league outings, guiding the Red Devils to a secure third-place finish in the standings. His historic 20th assist of the domestic campaign occurred during a hard-fought 3-2 victory over Nottingham Forest, where he set up Bryan Mbeumo. That decisive pass saw Fernandes equal the long-standing all-time single-season assist record, putting him



level with legendary figures Thierry Henry and Kevin De Bruyne. The playmaker’s award-winning year began under incredibly difficult circumstances as Manchester United initially struggled during Ruben Amorim’s first full season at the helm. Under the former manager’s tactical setup, the captain was uncharacteristically pulled into a deeper midfield role. Instead of operating as a primary final-third creator, he was asked to sit deep and control the tempo of the game. However, the club parted ways with

Amorim following a disappointing string of results. The subsequent appointment of interim boss Michael Carrick completely transformed the team’s fortunes. Carrick immediately restored Fernandes to his preferred number ten role, a tactical adjustment that instantly unlocked his elite creative output and supercharged United’s frontline. “I’m very happy for the assist and for the win, and to finish the season on a high,” Fernandes remarked after matching the historic milestone. “I got to 20, let’s see—we have one

more game! It’s the highest I’ve done in the Premier League so I am very happy with it.” Fernandes now has the opportunity to claim the outright single-season assist crown if he sets up another goal during the final league fixture against Aston Villa. He has already eclipsed David Beckham’s previous club record of 15 assists, which had stood since the 1999/2000 season. Furthermore, his 132 goal-scoring opportunities created this term put him comfortably clear of Liverpool’s Dominik Szoboszlai, who sat a distant second with 43 fewer chances. This accolade follows his recent recognition as the Football Writers’ Association’s Men’s Footballer of the Year, making him the first United representative to win the FWA prize since Wayne Rooney in 2010. He is also the first player from Old Trafford to secure the Player of the Season trophy since Nemanja Vidic back in 2011.

Ashwin Backs MS Dhoni To Become The New Chennai Super Kings Head Coach

New Delhi: Should Chennai Super Kings (CSK) opt to move on from Stephen Fleming as the head coach, former player Ravichandran Ashwin believes that their search for a new man for the job might not be as difficult as it may seem. Ashwin in a post on X cheekily implied that MS Dhoni himself might be the man for the job. It comes as no surprise considering how he is the face of the franchise. He is the former captain that has led them to five titles.

He has yet to retire from playing in the IPL, but the current season has certainly sparked speculation considering how he was unable to play a single game this season due to injury. Fleming, a former New Zealand captain, was given the head coaching job back in 2009 where he took over from Kepler Wesels. While they did not win the title in their first year, the wait came to an end next



year to get them on a winning spree with two consecutive titles. But their best period was from the 2018-2023 period where they went on to win three titles in a six-year span. The CSK squads of late have seemed to be outdated. While teams are focusing on power-hitting and maximising the runs, Chennai have seemed to be living in the early years of the IPL. Whether that comes down to the current head coach is

a different concern altogether. Earlier, it was the likes of Rahul Tripathi, Deepak Hooda, and Daryl Mitchell to name a few who struggled to fit the explosive modern template. Now it is the captain, Ruturaj Gaikwad, who has looked well out of touch, adding to the team’s top-order scoring struggles. Within the bowling, they’ve had some quality with Noor Ahmad finishing second in the Purple Cap race and now Anshul Kamboj showing

clear potential. However, it never really felt like a proper, well-drilled bowling unit like the ones we saw for Gujarat Titans or even the Lucknow Super Giants. With tactical gaps appearing in both the batting and bowling units, the question of leadership transition is looming larger than ever, which has resulted in the franchise being unable to make it to the playoffs for three seasons in a row. If Chennai does decide to change direction in their coaching staff, Ashwin has made it clear that the most qualified candidate in world cricket is already sitting right in their dugout. Ravichandran Ashwin believes that if Chennai Super Kings (CSK) decides to replace Stephen Fleming as head coach, the franchise should look no further than MS Dhoni. Ashwin suggested that with Dhoni already present in the dugout and serving the role.