

In Brief

Eight killed in road mishap at Assam's Dhekiajuli

Guwahati: Eight people were killed when an ambulance collided a head-on collision with a truck, at Dhekiajuli in Assam on Sunday night. The incident reportedly occurred near Rubbertola, Dhekiajuli on the National Highway-15. The ambulance was taking a patient to hospital along with hos relatives from Tulip tea estate when it met with the accident with a six-wheeler truck travelling from Tezpur to Mangaldoi.As per reports, there is an infant among the casualties.The impact has turned the ambulances into a mangled heap of metal.

RPF tightens vigilance across NFR cracks down

Guwahati: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Northeast Frontier Railway has stepped up its efforts to ensure passenger safety and prevent crime across its network, carrying out a series of operations in recent days that led to multiple arrests and timely assistance to passengers in distress. According to officials, RPF teams have been maintaining strict vigil at major railway stations, leading to the arrest of several individuals involved in theft cases. On March 7, at Guwahati railway station, two persons were apprehended with a stolen mobile phone worth around Rs 10,000. They were later handed over to the Government Railway Police (GRP) in Guwahati for further legal action. In separate incidents at Lumding railway station on March 13 and 15, two offenders were caught with stolen mobile phones valued at approximately Rs 5,000 and Rs 6,000 respectively. Both were handed over to GRP Lumding.

LoP Debabrata Saikia denies 'Burn Congress Office' remark

Guwahati: Assam Leader of Opposition Debabrata Saikia today rejected claims that he had asked party workers to “burn down the Congress office,” saying his remarks were being misinterpreted after an audio clip went viral and triggered political controversy. Clarifying his position, Saikia said he had only stated “burn me or my effigy” in response to criticism directed at him and had not encouraged any form of damage to party property. “I did not say anything about burning the Congress office. I clearly said ‘burn me or my effigy.’ Anyone can listen to the recording carefully,” he said. The controversy surfaced after an unverified audio clip began circulating widely, allegedly capturing a phone conversation linked to internal party discussions in Dhubri. The clip has added to tensions within the Congress unit in the district, where dissatisfaction has been building over candidate selection.

CM Sarma condemns Jagun attack

Guwahati: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma today strongly condemned the grenade attack on an Assam Police commando camp in Jagun area of Tinsukia district and said those involved will be brought to justice. Reacting to the early morning attack, the Chief Minister termed the incident “highly condemnable” and said that both the Army and Assam Police have already launched a counter-insurgency operation in the area. “The Army and the Police have launched a counter-insurgency operation. Those who have done this will certainly be nabbed,” he said.

Mizoram Youth Congress alleges CM Lalduhoma acquired land near key development zones

Aizawl, Mar 23: The Mizoram Pradesh Youth Congress Committee (MPYCC) has leveled serious allegations against Chief Minister Lalduhoma, accusing him of accumulating wealth at the fastest rate in the state’s political history through the strategic acquisition of vast tracts of land near key development zones. The opposition youth wing alleged that the Chief Minister purchased large tracts of land around the Vantawng Falls viewpoint and in the Kanghmun South area of Serchhip district, describing it as an act of self-enrichment. MPYCC presi-

dent Laltawnliana said on Sunday that youth wing members conducted a site inspection near the Vantawng Falls viewpoint and Kanghmun South on Saturday. He noted that despite Lalduhoma portraying himself as a man of modest means during the 2021 Serchhip by-election, his actions since becoming Chief Minister indicate that he has rapidly become one of the wealthiest figures in the state. “The Chief Minister’s actions confirm a trajectory of rapid enrichment that is unprecedented among those who have held the Chief Minister’s office,” Laltawnliana

said.

He alleged that in early 2024, the CM reportedly acquired 25 to 30 acres of land in the Buangpui area near Vantawng Falls from five different owners. This land is strategically located to potentially claim compensation from the Rs 34.50 crore earmarked for the installation of a ropeway at Vantawng Falls under the Development of Iconic Tourist Centres to Global Scale component of the Special Assistance to State for Capital Investment (SASCI) scheme, Laltawnliana said. He further alleged that the Chief Minister also

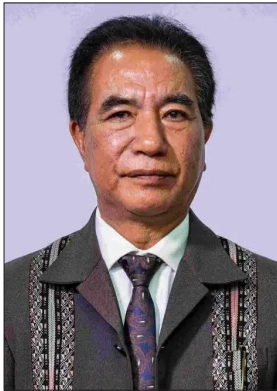
bought land from four different owners in the Kanghmun South area, and some of this land was cleared for shifting cultivation or farming in late February this year.

“Land purchased in Kanghmun South is situated within the proposed footprint of the Thenzawl Peace City project, raising concerns over potential conflicts of interest,” Laltawnliana said. According to the Congress leader, these acquisitions are not merely personal investments but are allegedly positioned to capitalize on multi-crore government infrastructure projects.

Youth Congress Chief Alleges CM Lalduhoma Bought Land Near Strategic Project Sites

Aizawl, Mar 23: Laltawnliana, president of the Mizoram Youth Congress, on Sunday alleged that Chief Minister Lalduhoma had acquired significant land holdings near major government development zones in the state. Online Newspaper Subscription According to Laltawnliana, the chief minister purchased around 25–30 acres of land in Buangpui near Vantawng Falls from five landowners in early 2024. He claimed that the land is located in an area linked to a proposed ropeway project valued at Rs 34.50 crore under the Centre’s Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment scheme.

He further alleged that additional land parcels were



acquired from four owners in Kanghmun South in Serchhip district, including areas reportedly cleared for farming in late February. The location falls within the proposed Thenzawl Peace City project area. Laltawnliana stated that the purchases were linked to ongoing and planned infrastructure

projects and alleged that the lands may be transferred to a government department associated with these developments. Lalduhoma highlighted that the ILP system, which restricts the entry of outsiders into Mizoram, was established under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) of 1873 to safeguard tribal communities and their land.

Under the BEFR, a colonial-era law retained after Independence, non-tribal residents are prohibited from purchasing land in Mizoram. The chief minister added that the state has launched an online ILP system, which is being upgraded to prevent illegal influx. He appealed for the support of the YMA, local councils.

CM Khemchand attends valedictory function of Agrivision Agri Youth Parliament

Imphal, Mar 23: Chief Minister Y Khemchand on Monday attended the valedictory function of Agrivision Agri Youth Parliament 2026 (North East Bharat) held at the Central Agricultural College (CAU), Imphal. The Agrivision Agri-Youth Parliament – 2026 was inaugurated by Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the college on March 21. Organised under the theme ‘Futuristic Agriculture for North East Bharat: Sustainability, Innovations and Opportunities,’ the three-day event focused on emerging research, technological advancements, and innovative solutions in agriculture and allied sectors. In a social media post, Chief Minis-

ter Khemchand said, “Honoured to attend as the Chief Guest at the Valedictory Function of AGRIVISION Agri Youth Parliament 2026 (North East Bharat) held at the Central Agricultural College (CAU), Imphal, in the esteemed presence of distinguished dignitaries and officials. The session concluded on a high note, marked by insightful deliberations and meaningful discussions on the future of agriculture in the region”. The Chief Minister commended the dedicated efforts of the faculty and students in advancing agricultural knowledge and innovation for the benefit of our farmers. Strengthening such initiatives is vital to



enhancing productivity and ensuring food security, in line with the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

“Together, we move forward towards a resilient, self-reliant, and farmer-centric future,” the Chief Minister said.

Mizoram Records 1,845 Live Births and 720 Deaths Throughout the Month of January

Aizawl, March 23: Mizoram recorded 1,845 live births and 720 deaths in January 2026, according to data from the state’s Economics and Statistics Department. The statistics showed a higher number of female births, with 949 girls compared to 896 boys. Among districts, Aizawl had the highest number of live births at 732, followed by Lunglei with 292 and Lawngtlai at 170. Of the total births, 1,127 occurred in urban areas and 718 in rural areas, alongside five stillbirths. Deaths in January showed a higher male count, with 456 males and 264 females reported. Urban areas accounted for 479 deaths, while



rural areas recorded 241. The report also recorded 15 infant deaths under one year and five deaths among children aged one to five. For comparison, 2025 recorded 21,873 births in Mizoram, including 11,076 boys and 10,797 girls. Total deaths last year reached 8,080, with 5,183 males and 2,897 fe-

males a difference of 2,286 that continued into January 2026. Mizoram recorded a total of 1,845 live births and 720 deaths during the month of January 2026, according to the latest demographic data released by the state’s Directorate of Economics and Statistics. The report provides a comprehensive.

RPF tightens vigilance across NFR, cracks down on theft and aids ailing passengers

Guwahati, Mar 23: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Northeast Frontier Railway has stepped up its efforts to ensure passenger safety and prevent crime across its network, carrying out a series of operations in recent days that led to multiple arrests and timely assistance to passengers in distress. According to officials, RPF teams have been maintaining strict vigil at major railway stations, leading to the arrest of several individuals involved in theft cases. On March 7, at Guwahati railway station, two persons were apprehended with a stolen mobile phone worth around Rs 10,000.

They were later handed over to the Government Railway Police (GRP) in Guwahati for further legal action. In separate incidents at Lumding railway station on March 13 and 15, two offenders were caught with stolen mobile phones valued at approximately Rs 5,000 and Rs 6,000 respectively. Both were handed over to GRP Lumding.

Earlier, on March 14, another person was

detained at Guwahati railway station with a stolen mobile phone worth about Rs 15,000. Cases have been registered in all these instances under relevant legal provisions. Apart from preventing crime, the RPF also responded promptly to several cases involving passengers in need of medical help. On March 9, at New Jalpaiguri railway station, a passenger who was found sick and unable to walk was immediately shifted to Sadar Hospital in Siliguri for treatment. On March 14, an unidentified man found in an injured condition in the yard area of New Jalpaiguri was rescued and taken to the District Hospital in Siliguri. On the same day, a passenger suffering from breathing problems on board Train No. 15961 UP was given immediate assistance and shifted to the Railway Hospital at New Jalpaiguri. In another case on March 17, an unidentified woman found in a semi-conscious condition at New Jalpaiguri railway station was attended to and shifted to the Railway Hospital for further treatment.

JMM Releases First List of 21 Candidates for Assam Assembly Elections 2026

Guwahati, Mar 23: The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) on Monday, March 23, released its first list of 21 candidates for the upcoming Assam Assembly Elections 2026, signalling an ambitious effort to expand beyond its traditional base in Jharkhand.

The list, issued by the party’s central committee and signed by General Secretary and spokesperson Vinod Kumar Pandey, includes candidates from several constituencies across Upper Assam and other key regions.

This move reflects JMM’s strategy to establish itself as a contender in Assam’s multi-cornered electoral landscape.

Among the candidates, Priti Rekha Barla has been fielded from Mazbat, while Teharu Gour will contest from Biswanath. Amit Nag has been nominated from Khumtai, and Bhubem Murari from Chabua. Other notable candidates include Phedircson Hasda (Gossaigaon), Baldev Teli (Sonari), Peter Minj (Duliajan), and Paban Sautal (Rangonadi).

The party has also named Bharat Nayak from Digboi, Prabhat Das Panika from Bhergaon, Mahabir Baske from Tingkhong, Abdul Mazan from Barchalla, and Mathew

Topno from Rangapara. Additional candidates include Jernail Minj (Margherita), Sanjay Bagh (Naharkatia), Muna Karmakar (Makum), Ratnakar Tati (Doomdooma), Sahil Munda (Sapekhati), and Sonia from Titabor.

In the reserved Bokaijan (ST) constituency, the party has nominated Pratapchandra Rangphar, while Prabhakar Das will contest from Khowang.

Political observers note that JMM’s decision to contest 21 seats highlights a calculated attempt to connect with tribal and tea garden communities in Assam—groups where the party may find ideological alignment.

The diverse selection of candidates also reflects an effort to broaden its voter base. Although JMM has traditionally remained a regional force centred in Jharkhand, its entry into Assam could impact local electoral dynamics, especially in constituencies with significant Adivasi and tribal populations.

However, the party is likely to face strong competition from established players such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian National Congress, and other regional parties.

‘Burn me or my effigy’: LoP Debabrata Saikia denies ‘Burn Congress Office’ remark amid audio row

Guwahati, Mar 23: Assam Leader of Opposition Debabrata Saikia today rejected claims that he had asked party workers to “burn down the Congress office,” saying his remarks were being misinterpreted after an audio clip went viral and triggered political controversy. Clarifying his position, Saikia said he had only stated “burn me or my effigy” in response to criticism directed at him and had not encouraged any form of damage to party property. “I did not say anything about burning the Congress office. I clearly said ‘burn me or my effigy.’ Anyone can listen to the recording carefully,” he said. The controversy surfaced after an unverified audio clip began circulating widely, allegedly capturing a phone conversation linked to internal party discussions in Dhubri. The clip has added to tensions within the Congress unit in the district, where dissatisfaction has been building over candidate selection.

Saikia said the situation arose during discussions with multiple aspirants seeking party tickets. “We had many candidature aspirants. I told them that our party is democratic and everyone has the freedom to express their views unlike the BJP,” he said. He said that he had only shared his “logical opinion” during the discussion, while other party members had supported different candidates. He stressed that the final decision on candidate selection rests with the party leadership and not with any individual leader. “Ultimately, the high command, election committee and screening committee consider all opinions before taking a final call. I cannot ensure anyone’s selection based on my personal choice,” Saikia added. The issue is centred around Dhubri, where party workers and aspirants have expressed dissatisfaction after Kazi Mahmudul Hasan was denied a ticket, with the party choosing Baby Begum instead.



The development has led to visible unrest within the local unit ahead of the Assembly elections. Saikia also accused some aspirants of creating “unnecessary chaos”

during internal discussions and said his remarks were made in that context. He said that the comments were directed at personal criticism and not at party infrastructure.

AJP's Gen Z candidate Kunki Chowdhury files nomination from Guwahati Central

Guwahati, Mar 23: Kunki Choudhury, the “Gen Z” Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP) candidate for Guwahati Central (36), filed her nomination on Monday, March 23, for the 2026 Assam Assembly elections. Choudhury is contesting under a broader opposition alliance that includes the Indian National Congress, Rajior Dal, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), and the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC), signalling a coordinated effort to consolidate opposition strength in key constituencies. Earlier on Sunday, 22 March, Choudhury spoke about the significance of the day: “I am entering this battle for the very first time, and I do so with the hope of bringing a



new vision to the Guwahati Central Constituency. Tomorrow, as I head to the District Commissioner’s office, I carry with me the aspirations of every resident who seeks change.” She added, “I have spent the last few days seeking the bless-

ings of our elders and the support of our youth. On this journey, I humbly request my mothers, sisters, and young friends to stand by me.” Choudhury chose not to hold a large rally, explaining that her decision follows instructions

from the Election Commission and Kamrup Metropolitan administration to prevent overcrowding on the final day of nominations. She told reporters, “I will follow the rules set by the authorities and seek the support of the people as I file my nomination,” breaking from the usual noisy campaign gatherings. The administration had imposed crowd-control measures under Section 163 of the BNSS, 2023, near key areas, including the District Commissioner’s office on Hengrabari Road, to manage traffic and ensure smooth election procedures. By following the advisory, Choudhury demonstrated her commitment to disciplined campaigning amid rising election activity across Assam.

Raijor Dal’s Abdur Rashid Mandal files East Goalpara nomination, cites eviction

Guwahati, Mar 23: Abdur Rashid Mandal, representing Raijor Dal, officially filed his nomination for the East Goalpara Assembly seat on Monday, March 23, in the presence of a large group of party supporters. After completing the submission process, Mandal identified eviction as the central focus of his campaign, framing it as the main concern for voters in the 2026 Assam Assembly elections. “Eviction will be the dominant issue in East Goalpara this time,” he said, noting how displacement affects local communities. He also criticised the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a BJP ally, for staying silent on the matter. “Even as part of the ruling coalition, the AGP has not addressed eviction or responded to the Chief Minister’s remarks. It will

be interesting to see the constituency’s reaction,” Mandal added. His statements suggest a strategy to mobilise voters around local grievances, particularly among those impacted by eviction drives. A large turnout of Raijor Dal supporters was observed during the nomination filing in East Goalpara. Raijor Dal candidate Abdur Rashid Mandal on Monday, March 23, filed his nomination papers from the East Goalpara Assembly constituency, accompanied by several hundred party workers. Addressing the media after filing his nomination, Mandal placed the issue of eviction at the centre of his campaign, declaring it to be the defining electoral issue in the constituency for the upcoming 2026 Assam Assembly elections

Assam Police camp attacked by ULFA (I) militants; 4 injured

Tinsukia, Mar 23: At least four security personnel were injured in a militant attack on an Assam Police Commando camp in Tinsukia district early Sunday, a senior officer said. Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said counter operations have been launched to nab those behind the attack. The attack comes ahead of the state Assembly elections scheduled on April 9. The police officer said the incident took place around 2.30 am in Jagun area. Militants fired multiple rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) shells at the camp, of which five exploded. Security personnel stationed at the camp immediately retaliated, leading to a brief exchange of gunfire. The officer said the attack is suspected to have been carried out by a seven-member group, which escaped across the



inter-state border with Arunachal Pradesh under the cover of darkness. The four injured personnel were taken to Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH) in Dibrugarh for treatment. AMCH superintendent Dhruvajyoti Bhuyan said all the injured were out of danger and in stable condition. Confirming

the attack, Sarma termed the incident “highly condemnable” and said counter operations have been launched by Assam Police and the Army. He expressed confidence that those responsible would be nabbed. However, the chief minister refused to comment on the claim made by ULFA (Independent) (ULFA-I),

which has taken responsibility for the attack. In a statement, ULFA (I) said the strike was carried out under its “Operation Bujoni” in retaliation against repeated action by Assam Police against the outfit. The group maintained that it had refrained from targeting the state police as a gesture towards peace overtures by the government since 2021. However, it alleged that its leaders, cadres and sympathisers were targeted by security agencies, and many of them were killed. ULFA (I) also blamed the Indian Armed Forces for conducting drone and missile attacks on its mobile camps along the India-Myanmar border in July last year. The outfit further asked the state police force to refrain from “subversive activities” against it, warning of retaliatory action.

Neighbour pleaded, police and CISF did nothing ‘no one helped us rescue

Kolkata, Mar 23: Arup Banerjee’s friend, Sandip Deb, had accompanied the family to RG Kar Medical College and Hospital after Arup’s son Ayush fractured an arm on Thursday night and needed urgent attention. Arup, 41, was crushed to death after he was trapped in an elevator in the trauma building of the hospital. On Saturday, Deb, a neighbour of the Banerjees, recalled how he ran from pillar to post seeking help from hospital staff, police and the CISF, only to be told it was “not our duty”, even as his friend screamed for help. One of my friends and I were standing near the lift on the ground floor of the trauma care building early on Friday morning when I heard Arup’s voice from the basement. He was screaming for help. A few minutes earlier, he, his wife and son had taken the lift to the fourth floor for the washroom. But now his voice was coming from the basement. We rushed downstairs through a flight of stairs. At the bottom, there was a door that opened into the basement — but it was locked. We ran upstairs and alerted a security guard on the ground floor. He came with us to the basement door but

could not open it with any of the keys he had. We ran upstairs again to get help from several other hospital staff. We were told that when there was a problem with the lift, a key could access it. When we asked where the key was, we were told it was in a different building and would take time to bring. Meanwhile, our friend was screaming for help. There was a Kolkata Police officer who did not react when we asked him to break the lock downstairs. A few minutes after the lift operator went with the key, Arup’s voice fell silent. Instead, now we heard his wife screaming: ‘Keu Buchu-ke banchao (someone save Buchu).’ Buchu is Arup’s nickname. We did not hear Arup after that. We had no idea what was going on in the basement. Around 30 minutes later, we learned that Arup’s wife and son had been rescued, and the child admitted to the emergency ward. When we asked how they got out of the lift, we were told they had managed to come out on their own. It sounded impossible. We also requested two CISF personnel to break the lock with their heavy boots. They said: ‘Yeh hamara kaam nahi

hai (this is not our job).’ When I asked what their job was, one of them said: ‘Agar hum ye tala todenge to hum par action hoga (if we break this lock, action will be taken against us).’ By the time we returned to the ground floor, desperate because no one had helped us, we found the key to the lift had finally been brought from the other building. A liftman went to access the lift. I could still hear Arup’s voice screaming urgently: ‘Amader taratari tol... amader bancha (rescue us from here).’ Some time later, someone from the hospital took us to the basement through a completely different entry. This meant there was an alternative way to access the basement, which no one had mentioned. We were told that a security guard had accessed the basement through this door and opened the grille gate through which Arup and his family were brought out. why this hadn’t been done earlier. Had we reached the basement sooner, we might have been able to access the grille gate where the family was stuck. Perhaps then we could have rescued all three alive.

Reports of a BJP split in the Hills and Dooars are denied by Bista

Siliguri, Mar 23: Darjeeling MP Raju Bista on Sunday dismissed reports of internal rifts within the BJP following the announcement of candidate names for the Hills and Dooars Assembly seats. Speaking on the issue of disgruntled leaders threatening to resign, he said, “If people have joined the party only to acquire election tickets, they can resign. Such selfish individuals will not affect party activities.” So far, no mass resignations have been reported from any part of the Hills or Dooars, even after the 24-hour deadline given by some dissatisfied leaders following a meeting in Siliguri. Meanwhile, Manoj Dewan, BJP national member and former president of Darjeeling District, said that after the ultimatum, BJP national spokesperson Manoj Bhandari



contacted him by phone and asked him to attend a meeting in Siliguri. Dewan said Bhandari requested that disgruntled leaders meet with the BJP

top brass to resolve the matter. Bista emphasized party unity and called reports of infighting a tactical attempt by the opposition to weak-

en the BJP. He noted that all party members are ‘Karyakartas’ with equal rights to contest, and individual grievances should not override the collective goal of winning the elections. He added that any leader with genuine concerns is welcome to discuss them within the party forum rather than approaching the media. Bista also criticized the ruling Trinamool Congress, claiming that stories of BJP infighting are often “manufactured” to distract from governance issues in the state. Bista confirmed that the campaign has already begun with the newly selected candidates in the Hills and Dooars, and no further changes will be made. He urged disgruntled leaders not to escalate the issue, as it could aid opposition propaganda.

BJP appoints Amiya Kumar Bhuyan as Vice President amid Bihpuria ticket row

Guwahati, Mar 23: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has promoted sitting MLA Amiya Kumar Bhuyan to the position of State Vice President in Assam, a move announced amid rising disagreements over candidate selections in key constituencies. “I will submit my nomination papers on Monday and contest as an Independent candidate,” Bhuyan told reporters, reaffirming his commitment to serve the people of Bihpuria. He urged his supporters to stay committed, stressing that his dedication to the people of Bihpuria remains steadfast, regardless of party affiliation. By promoting Bhuyan while simultaneously replacing him as the BJP candidate,

the party appears to be balancing internal pressures with electoral strategy. Meanwhile, Borah’s induction reflects ongoing changes in alliances and loyalties within Assam’s political landscape. Assam BJP chief Dilip Saikia confirmed the appointment, wishing Bhuyan success in his new leadership role. The announcement comes as the party manages candidate selections and preparations ahead of the upcoming Assembly polls. The promotion gains further attention following the BJP’s Borah, who recently joined the BJP, has been granted the party ticket, reflecting a tactical effort to strengthen its position in crucial constituencies.

Assam’s film Collage and Manipur’s Toy Gun win top honors at 3rd NEIFF

Guwahati, Mar 23: The award for Best Feature Film at the 3rd North East India Film Festival (NEIFF) 2026, held in Manipur, was presented to Collage, produced by Sumitra Hazarika and directed by Amar Deep Gogoi (Assam). The Best Non-Feature Film award went to Toy Gun, produced by Khumanllambam Omeshwori and directed by Thingnam Parshuram (Manipur). The Best Director award was conferred upon Monjul Baruah for Romantic Affairs (Assam); Best Cinematographer to Pradip Daimary for Ha Lyngkha Bneng (Meghalaya); Best Editor to Sanjib Gogoi for Noi Kotha (Assam); Best Sound Designer to Debajit Gayan for Kangbo Aloti (Assam); Best Screenwriter to Doren Naorem for The Check Post (Manipur); and the Jury Special Award to Phouoibee,



produced by Suraj Khongbantabam and directed by Rakesh Moirangthem (Manipur), also earned a Special Mention. A total of nine films from three Northeastern states—Assam, Manipur, and Meghalaya—were screened during the

festival, which began at Tantha Polaris Cinema in Imphal on March 21, 2026, and concluded successfully on Sunday. The festival showcased both feature and non-feature films, with a lineup including Collage, Kangbo Aloti, Ha Lyngkha Bneng, Noi Kotha, Romantic Affairs, Toy Gun, The Check Post, Phouoibee, and Laininghal Naoria Phullo. Eight awards were presented, each carrying a citation, statuette, and cash prize. The festival was jointly organized by THOUNA, the Directorate of Information & Public Relations (DIPR), Government of Manipur, and the All Manipur Film Producers Association, under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, and the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC).

Garo Hills groups protest in Delhi over ‘land grabs’



Guwahati, Mar 23: Multiple groups from Meghalaya’s Garo Hills gathered at Jantar Mantar to protest alleged land grabs and other issues caused by unauthorized settlers in the region on Sunday, March 22. The protest was led by the Nangriming A’chik Dol (NAD), which drew attention to intimidation and disturbances impacting Meghalaya’s indigenous communities. Protesters claimed that illegal settlers have occupied tribal land and resources, increasing tensions and threatening constitutional safeguards under the Sixth Schedule. The NAD, in its statement, accused certain recent conflicts of being intentional efforts to unsettle local communities. The organisation also faulted officials for not stopping unautho-

rising settlements and denounced the targeting and temporary detention of human rights defenders supporting indigenous populations. The NAD urged a full and independent inquiry into illegal settlements, called for the removal of unauthorised occupants from tribal territories following GHADC regulations, requested tighter oversight along the borders, sought an NIA investigation into Dilseng M. Sangma’s killing, and demanded proper follow-up on recent crimes reported in the Chibinang locality. The activists also demanded compensation for the victim’s family and called on both state and central officials to ensure that the A’chik community’s land, cultural heritage, and legal entitlements are safeguarded.

Nomination filing for Assam polls enters final day; candidates gear up for last rush

Guwahati, Mar 23: The process of filing nomination papers for the Assam Legislative Assembly elections will come to a close on Monday with candidates across political parties preparing for a busy final day. As per the schedule, candidates can submit their nomination papers till 3 pm on the last day. With the deadline approaching, political activity has intensified, especially in key urban constituencies under Kamrup Metropolitan district. Candidates from different parties are set to file their nominations before the Returning Officer

at the office of the Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup Metropolitan. In the five Assembly constituencies of the district, major political parties have lined up their candidates for filing on the final day. From the BJP, Lok Sabha MP Pradyut Bordoloi is expected to file nomination from the Dispur constituency. Bijoy Gupta will file from Jalukbari, while Diplu Ranjan Sarma is set to contest from New Guwahati. The BJP's ally, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), has fielded Dr. Tapan Das for the newly created Dimoria constituency. Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa

Sarma has already submitted his nomination from Jalukbari earlier. The Congress party has also finalised its candidates for the constituencies. Mira Borthakur will file nomination from Dispur, Shantanu Bora from New Guwahati, Kishore Kumar Barua from Dimoria, and Bidisha Neog from Jalukbari. Party leaders and workers are expected to accompany the candidates during the filing process. The Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) will see its candidate Kunki Choudhury filing nomination from the Jalukbari constituency. Apart from

these, candidates from other regional parties as well as several independent candidates are also expected to submit their papers on the last day. All arrangements have been put in place at the Deputy Commissioner's office to manage the expected rush of candidates and supporters. Security has also been tightened to ensure a smooth and orderly process. As per the Election Commission's schedule, the scrutiny of nomination papers will take place on March 24. The last date for withdrawal of candidature has been fixed as March 26.

Amid ticket row, Assam BJP names MLA as party vice-president

Guwahati, Mar 23: The Assam has appointed senior leader and sitting MLA Amiya Kumar Bhuyan from Bihpuria constituency in Lakhimpur district as the vice president of its Assam unit with immediate effect amid internal tensions over candidate selection in key constituencies ahead of the state Assembly elections.

Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia, while announcing the appointment in a statement, also wished Bhuyan for a "bright political future."

The development comes in the backdrop of BJP fielding former state Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah from the Bihpuria constituency.

Borah, who recently defected to the

BJP, has been given the party ticket for the seat, signalling a strategic recalibration by the ruling party to consolidate its electoral prospects.

However, the decision triggered discontent within the party ranks, with the sitting MLA expressing dissatisfaction and announcing his resignation from the BJP. Miffed at not being renominated to the constituency, Bhuyan declared that he would contest the upcoming Assembly elections as an Independent candidate.

"I will file my nomination papers on Monday and contest as an Independent," Bhuyan told reporters, underlining his resolve to stay in the electoral fray despite the setback.

CM Lalduhoma Accused by Mizoram Youth Congress of Acquiring Land Near Key Development Zones

Aizawl, Mar 23: The Mizoram Pradesh Youth Congress Committee (MPYCC) has leveled serious allegations against Chief Minister Lalduhoma, accusing him of accumulating wealth at the fastest rate in the state's political history through the strategic acquisition of vast tracts of land near key development zones. The opposition youth wing alleged that the Chief Minister purchased large tracts of land around the Vantawng Falls viewpoint and in the Kanghmun South area of Serchhip district, describing it as an act of self-enrichment.



Chief Minister indicate that he has rapidly become one of the wealthiest figures in the state. "The Chief Minister's actions confirm a trajectory of rapid enrichment that is unprecedented among those who have held the Chief Minister's office," Laltawnliana said. He alleged that in early 2024, the CM reportedly acquired 25 to 30 acres of land in the Buangpui area near Vantawng Falls from five different owners. This land is strategically located to potentially claim compensation

from the Rs 34.50 crore earmarked for the installation of a ropeway at Vantawng Falls under the Development of Iconic Tourist Centres to Global Scale component of the Special Assistance to State for Capital Investment (SASCI) scheme, Laltawnliana said. He further alleged that the Chief Minister also bought land from four different owners in the Kanghmun South area, and some of this land was cleared for shifting cultivation or farming in late February this year. "Land purchased in Kangh-

mun South is situated within the proposed footprint of the Thenzawl Peace City project, raising concerns over potential conflicts of interest," Laltawnliana said. According to the Congress leader, these acquisitions are not merely personal investments but are allegedly positioned to capitalize on multi-crore government infrastructure projects. He claimed that despite being private acquisitions, there are plans to hand over the management of these lands to a specific government department, tying them to major upcoming development projects. Laltawnliana alleged that despite being in office for a short time, Lalduhoma has become the fastest-enriching Chief Minister in the history of the state. Speaking at the Young Mizo Association (YMA) general conference in Sakawrdai, Aizawl district near the Manipur border, Lalduhoma said the matter.

CM Sarma condemns Jagun attack, assures strong action as security forces launch operation

Guwahati, Mar 23: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma today strongly condemned the grenade attack on an Assam Police commando camp in Jagun area of Tinsukia district and said those involved will be brought to justice. Reacting to the early morning attack, the Chief Minister termed the incident "highly condemnable" and said that both the Army and Assam Police have already launched a counter-insurgency operation in the area. "The Army and the Police have launched a counter-insurgency operation. Those who have done this will certainly be nabbed," he said. The attack took place around 2 am at Jagun 10 Mile, a sensitive tea garden belt located near the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border.

According to police sources, unidentified attackers hurled at least five grenades at the commando camp and opened heavy fire soon after. Security personnel stationed at the camp retaliated immediately, leading to a gunfight that lasted for nearly 30 minutes.

Officials said the swift response



from the commandos helped prevent further casualties and forced the attackers to flee the area. Four police personnel were injured in the incident. Three of them sustained minor injuries, while one was seriously injured and shifted to a nearby hospital for treatment. The injured have

been identified as Chitrangian Milli from Jorhat, Devashis Bora, and Ravi Gar from Gowala Para in Chabua. The banned insurgent outfit ULFA (Independent) has claimed responsibility for the attack. Investigation is underway and all angles are being examined.

Army promptly disposes of UXOs after standoff attack in Assam

Tinsukia, Mar 23: In the early hours of 22 March 2026, a standoff attack by ULFA(I) was reported at approximately 0200 hours near an Assam Police Commando camp at Jagun, Tinsukia district, Assam. The incident left behind unexploded ordnance, including RPG and UBGL rounds, posing a serious threat to the local population.

Responding promptly, Red Shield Sappers, in coordination with Assam Rifles, mobilised a Bomb Disposal team to the site. The area was swiftly cordoned off and all safety protocols were meticulously enforced to ensure full control of the situation.

The unexploded ordnance was subsequently neutralised in a controlled manner at a secure location away from civilian habitation, eliminating any risk to life and property. The operation was carried out with a high degree of professionalism, precision and adherence to established procedures.

The swift and coordinated response ensured the safety of the local pop-



ulation and prevented any collateral damage. The Indian Army remains

committed to maintaining peace, security and stability in the region and

continues to remain vigilant against emerging threats.

Nandita Gorlosa Joins Congress Amid BJP Rift in Assam Ahead of Elections

Guwahati, Mar 23: In a major setback for the BJP ahead of the Assam Assembly elections, minister Nandita Gorlosa joined the Congress on Sunday.

She is expected to contest from the Haflong constituency in the Dima Hasao hill district. The Congress candidate, Nirmal Langthasa, stepped aside voluntarily to make way for her. Meanwhile, the BJP has fielded Rupali Langthasa from the same seat. In a statement, the Congress welcomed her entry, highlighting her role as a strong voice for the people of Dima Hasao over the past five years. The party also criticized Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sharma, accusing him of favoring corporate interests over the rights of tribal communities.

The party is likely to officially announce her candidature on Monday. Nandita joined the Congress in the presence of Nirmal Langthasa, who is also the party's state general secretary.

A commerce graduate and former lecturer, Nandita Gorlosa became an MLA for

the first time in 2021. She initially served as Power Minister and was later given charge of the Sports and Youth Welfare department.

As an attempt to manage internal tensions within the BJP's Dima Hasao unit, even Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sharma had arrived in Haflong on Sunday.

The unrest reportedly began after the BJP nominated Rupali Langthasa, who is considered close to Debolal Gorlosa, the Chief Executive Member of the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council. The decision has led to divisions within the district unit of the party. Observers note that differences between Debolal Gorlosa and Nandita Gorlosa had been intensifying for some time, and the ticket decision has brought the conflict into the open. The rift has now split the local BJP unit into two factions, raising concerns ahead of the elections.

With the situation becoming increasingly sensitive, the Chief Minister's visit is being viewed as a damage-control effort to restore unity within the party.

Civilian Employee at Chabua Air Force Station Arrested for Alleged Espionage

Dibrugarh, Mar 23: In a major counter-espionage breakthrough, the Rajasthan Police has arrested a civilian employee posted at the Chabua Air Force Station in Assam for allegedly spying for Pakistan and leaking sensitive defence information. The accused, identified as Sumit Kumar (36), was working as a Multi-Tasking Staff (MTS) at the strategically important air base in Dibrugarh district. Officials said he is suspected of sharing classified Indian Air Force information with Pakistani handlers through social media in exchange for money. The investigation began in January this year when Rajasthan Intelligence arrested Jhabaram in Jaisalmer. His interrogation led authorities to uncover a wider espionage network, eventually pointing to Sumit Kumar, who was allegedly in regular contact with operatives linked to Pakistani intelligence agencies. Additional

Director General of Police (Intelligence) Prafulla Kumar stated that the accused misused his access within the Air Force Station to collect and transmit confidential information. Officials added that he exploited his position to share sensitive inputs related to defence installations. Acting on intelligence inputs, Rajasthan Police, in coordination with Indian Air Force intelligence units in New Delhi, carried out a joint operation and detained Kumar from Chabua. He was later taken to the Central Interrogation Centre in Jaipur, where multiple agencies conducted a detailed investigation. Preliminary findings indicate that Kumar had been in contact with Pakistani intelligence operatives since 2023. During this time, he allegedly shared crucial information related to the Chabua Air Force Station as well as other key military bases, including the Air Force Station in Nal, Bikan-

er. The leaked data reportedly included details about fighter aircraft deployment, missile systems, and confidential information about officers and personnel. Investigators also found that he helped facilitate the espionage network by assisting handlers in creating social media accounts using mobile numbers registered in his name, enabling covert communication. Kumar was formally arrested on March 22 by the Special Police Station in Jaipur under the Official Secrets Act, 1923, and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023. Officials described the case as a major exposure of a Pakistan-linked espionage network operating within India. Further investigations are ongoing to identify other possible operatives and assess the full extent of the intelligence breach, raising serious concerns about internal security and vulnerabilities in critical defence establishments.

RSS general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale addresses Yuva Sammelan in Guwahati to mark the organisation's centenary

Guwahati, Mar 23: To mark the centenary year celebrations of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a 'Yuva Sammelan' at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati. The programme witnessed enthusiastic participation from hundreds of students representing premier institutions of the city, including IIT Guwahati, AIIMS Guwahati, National Law University (NLU), National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER-G), Gauhati University, Cotton University, NIT, IIIT and other higher educational institutions.

RSS Sarkaryavah (General Secretary) Dattatreya Hosabale delivered the keynote address, describing the Youth Conclave as a "mini Bharat," representing the country's diversity and unity through youth drawn from varied academic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the country.

In his address, Hosabale emphasised that every Indian language is a national language, while certain languages function as contact Indian languages facilitating communication. He noted that Sanskrit represents the cultural foundation of Bharatiya languages and high-



lighted the civilisational orientation of Sangh traditions, explaining that RSS prayers, commands and band compositions are inspired by Sanskrit literature, Bharatiya ragas and indigenous cultural heritage. Quoting the Vedic ideal "Aano bhadra kratavo yantu vishwatah", he said Bharat welcomes noble ideas from all directions while remaining rooted in its own values.

Speaking on modernity, he observed that modernisation should not be confused with westernisation only. True modernity, he said, lies in embracing innovation without abandoning timeless civilisational values, describing Sanatan thought as "eternal yet ever-renewing." He added that the RSS was founded with the objective of revitalising these en-

during cultural principles and overcoming the colonial mindset that continues to influence institutions and intellectual frameworks even decades after independence.

Referring to Bharat's civilisational unity, Hosabale cited thinkers such as Kalidasa, Adi Shankaracharya and Ram Manohar Lohia, who emphasised cultural interconnectedness across regions despite diversity. Quoting Lohia, he remarked that Lord Rama symbolically connected North and South India, Lord Krishna linked the East and West, while the philosophy of Shiva represents a unifying civilisational force across the nation. Highlighting the Northeast, he noted that during the Assam Movement against illegal infiltration, Sangh swayamsevaks partici-

pated constructively, reflecting their engagement with national concerns. Diversity in language, customs and traditions, he said, should strengthen rather than divide society, as a shared cultural consciousness binds the nation together.

He underlined the importance of selfless patriotism, social organisation and character building, stressing that both individual character and national character are essential for balanced progress.

Speaking about the Northeast, he observed that tribal traditions of the region demonstrate unity within diversity and reflect a shared cultural ethos. Unity, not uniformity, he said, makes diversity a source of strength. He also recalled youth movements in Assam that contributed to national consciousness and emphasised the role of young people in nation-building through service and social initiatives. The programme was attended by RSS Assam Kshetra Sanghchalak Dr. Umesh Chakravarty, Guwahati Mahanagar Sanghchalak Shri Guru Prasad Medhi, heads of educational institutions, faculty members and distinguished citizens, among others.

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Editorial

The Importance of Social Responsibility

Social responsibility refers to the duty of individuals and organisations to act in the best interests of society. It involves considering the impact of actions on others and contributing to the well-being of the community. In everyday life, social responsibility can be seen in simple actions such as following laws, respecting others, and participating in community activities. These behaviours help maintain order and harmony. Businesses also have a significant role in social responsibility. Ethical practices, fair treatment of employees, and environmental sustainability contribute to responsible corporate behaviour. Education systems should emphasise social responsibility by encouraging students to engage in community service and understand social issues. Such experiences help develop empathy and awareness. Governments can promote social responsibility through policies and initiatives that encourage public participation and cooperation. Individuals who recognise their social responsibilities are more likely to act thoughtfully and contribute positively to their surroundings. This creates stronger communities and more inclusive societies. Ultimately, social responsibility strengthens the connection between individuals and society. By acting with awareness and consideration, people can help create a more just and balanced world.

Eid celebrations: Three hugs that span a millennium

As the crescent moon marks the end of Ramadan every year, more than two billion Muslims worldwide convene with grace. Households fill with the scent of roasted meat and vermicelli, we wear our finest panjabi and salwar kameez, and the city empties in a matter of days as millions rush home to their villages. These rituals feel deeply familiar, almost instinctive. Yet few who celebrate, pause to ask where they truly come from. The practices that turned into our customs have travelled a thousand years to reach us. The very essence of how Eid is observed in Bangladesh has undoubtedly been hewed by the courts of Baghdad, Cairo, Córdoba, and Constantinople. When the Abbasid Caliphate reached its height under Harun al-Rashid in late 8th-century Baghdad, Iraq, Eid was already a grand, state-sponsored spectacle. The court celebrated with large marches, grandiose public feasts, and the deliberate distribution of gifts to the poor.

Sweets made from semolina, honey, vermicelli (semai), and rosewater—great ancestors of basbousa and mamounia—closely resemble Bangladeshi firni. They were distributed freely among households and at the courts of viziers. But beneath the pageantry, two customs endured the test of time: charitable giving as a prerequisite to celebration, and the communal nature of the Eid meal. The Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt ruled from the 10th to the 12th centuries, having refined this festive culture further. Fatimid garb was closely documented through descriptions of their ceremonial processions. Historians often describe royal marchers as being enrobed in dignified garments, a display meant to maintain the morale of a prosperous sultanate. Taking white and green as their dynastic colours, which connoted the glad tidings of the heavens and symbolised purity. This tradition of wearing white or new, fine clothing for Eid prayer has endured ever since. Zakat al-Fitr, the obligatory charity given before the prayer, was institutionalised precisely to ensure that no community member observed Eid in hunger. This marked a redistributive impulse, as the courts understood that a visible, well-fed populace celebrating Eid was, put simply, a statement of caliphal legitimacy. As trade routes carried Islamic culture westward into Al-Andalus (modern-day Andalusia, Spain) and northward toward Byzantine (Mediterranean) territories,

Eid traditions were absorbed in equal measure. In Spain, the Caliphate of Córdoba surpassed Constantinople (Istanbul) as Europe's largest multicultural city, blending Catalan, Berber (North African indigenous), and Levantine customs into its fiestas. Byzantine Rome maintained commercial contact with the Islamic world throughout this period, and accounts from both civilisations document the mutual exchange of festival foods and textiles. Gift exchanges between Byzantium and the Islamic Near East (Persia and Mesopotamia) were used as promotional items to increase demand for the item in question. Items seen gifted between the two courts were effectively a ploy to make luxury goods a tool of statecraft, in contrast to the democratised markets of today. The silk robes, ornate kaftans, embroidered silk thobes, and head garments thus crossed into our traditions through the emigrating Mughals half a millennium later. In 1610, when the Mughal rulers declared Dhaka as the provincial capital, subedars (high officials) arrived to manage the administration. However, along with tantrums, they brought Biryani, Korma, Kebabs, Borhani, and most famously, saffron. The recitation of naats and

Sufi devotional poetry during Eid, arrived through Persian and Central Asian Sufi networks and entrenched its existence in the subcontinent. The use of henna (mehndi) as part of Eid cosmetics for women was common practice across Arab and North African cultures. And so is visiting ancestral graves on Eid, reflecting Sufi reverence in South Asia, distinct entirely from its Middle Eastern counterparts, where no such custom exists. Finally, consider the crisp notes slipped into a child's palm on Eid morning—the ritual of Eidi. Its roots predate Islam itself. Originating in Persian Nowruz celebrations during the reign of the Sasanian King Hormoz II around 300 AD, the custom of giving coins became widespread in Persia. New coins symbolised renewal and fresh beginnings, a custom that bled into the following generations. The Delhi Sultanate retained much of its Persianate and Ottoman influence in the subcontinent. Emperor Jahangir allocated lakhs of provisions to dervishes as well as the poor during Eid al-Fitr. Shah Jahan would disburse huge amounts to set a precedent of embellished imperial generosity, with robes of honour in richly decorated fabrics of muslin, silk, brocade,

and velvet to royal ladies, princes, and nobles. He also distributed precious stones to his cosmopolitan political subordinates. Though behind every year's Eid lies a question that receives too little attention: how does one determine when Ramadan ends? The 9th-century Caliph al-Ma'mun established the House of Wisdom in Baghdad in 832, where mathematicians, scholars, and astronomers collaborated using star charts and sextants to bring scientific rigour to the Islamic lunar calendar. Under the Abbasids, astronomers built upon Greek and Indian knowledge to develop the most sophisticated celestial tools of the time. Al-Khwarizmi, who produced the first major Muslim astronomical work, the Zij al-Sindhind, wrote tables for the movements of the sun, the moon, and the five known planets. Al-Farghani, a court astronomer, wrote Elements of Astronomy on the Celestial Motions, a work so comprehensive it became widely accepted in Europe, leading to the development of calculus. Meanwhile, Al-Battani, hailing from what is now Syria, calculated the solar year to within a few minutes and was later cited by Copernicus himself. At the centre of all this, from

timekeeping to determining the position of stars and the direction of Mecca, came the most crucial innovation—the Astrolabe. The Astrolabe was used to determine the moon phase. One of the earliest scholars drawn to Andalusia was Abbas Ibn Firnas, who constructed a famous mechanised planetarium that simulated celestial phenomena, including thunder and lightning. His daughter Fatima continued the tradition, writing a significant treatise on the use of the Astrolabe. This led scholars from across Christian lands to flock to translate Muslim or "Saracen" science, kickstarting the scientific awakening of Europe. The line from Ibn Firnas' observatory to Galileo's telescope is not merely metaphorical, but inspired. Today, Bangladesh uses a national moon-sighting committee and telescopic confirmation to officially declare Eid—a practice that is, in spirit, a continuation of Abbasid meritocratic governance. There is something extraordinary about traditions that have stood the test of time. Any fears of cultural erosion with the advent of globalisation are quieted by the knowledge that Eid, the holiest of festivities, has always been a hodgepodge of cultures, customs, and rituals.

Bangladesh never had a Habermas, but it desperately needs one

Germany had a Jürgen Habermas, who died on March 14, 2026. He was not just a philosopher writing for academics; he was a public intellectual, someone who used ideas to help society understand itself, confront its own mistakes, and imagine a better future. He believed a country cannot move forward unless its people openly discuss the past, debate their values, and reason together. Habermas helped Germany face the horrors of Nazism and the Holocaust. He argued that societies must address historical atrocities not only with laws or politics but also through open, honest conversations among citizens. He emphasised the importance of a public sphere—an independent space where people could debate freely and influence decisions. Democracy, he believed, thrives when citizens can deliberate collectively about what is just, ethical, and fair. Habermas also developed the idea of communicative rationality, which means that understanding comes not from authority or propaganda, but from dialogue aimed at mutual comprehension. Through discussion, societies can confront moral failures, challenge dominant narratives, and make reasoned collective judgements. Habermas did not confine himself to abstract philosophy. His writing, including The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, examined how public debate could shape politics and hold authority accountable.

Beyond books, he wrote essays, gave interviews, and participated in public debates, engaging directly in discussions about Germany's past, the Cold War, European integration, and global conflicts. By connecting theory to public life, he encouraged newspapers, educators, and civic institutions to foster spaces for discussion, gradually creating a culture where confronting history became a shared responsibility rather than a partisan or taboo topic. Bangladesh, by contrast, has never had a figure like Habermas. From its beginning, the country needed someone who could combine intellectual insight with public engagement to help the nation make peace with its past. But no such figure emerged. In 1971, Bangladesh gained independence after a brutal war that killed millions. Some groups, including Jamaat-e-Islami, collaborated with the Pakistani army in committing atrocities. Yet after independence, the nation did not engage in sustained public discussion to process these events. Unlike Germany, where intellectuals guided citizens in reflecting on Nazi crimes, Bangladesh largely avoided confronting the moral and structural questions of its own history. Today, some of the same political actors involved in the 1971 genocide receive a posthumous condolence motion in parliament, leaving ordinary citizens frustrated that the wounds of history have been sidelined.

Habermas would argue that this lack of public deliberation is the core problem. Without spaces for citizens to reason together, discuss past wrongs, or critically examine governance, society cannot form a shared understanding of its values or history. Memory becomes partisan, debates polarised, and historical wounds lie festering beneath the surface. Democracy remains like a half-built bridge spanning only part of the river, with legitimacy suspended over citizens' reasoned judgement. The need for a Habermas in Bangladesh is as urgent today as it was 55 years ago. Recent crises, especially the government-led brutalities during the 2024 July uprising and the 15 years of Awami League rule preceding it, have left behind deep political and social fractures. Efforts to reshape narratives or rehabilitate despised outfits through some "refined" actors are neither enough nor effective. What is needed are spaces where citizens can reason together, debate openly, and reflect on mistakes, accountability, and ethics. Symbolic gestures, slogans, or partisan narratives cannot replace this kind of public discussion. South Africa engaged in debates about apartheid even as Archbishop Desmond Tutu led the formal Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In Argentina, intellectuals guided discussions about the "Dirty War" and its moral consequences. Rwanda, after the 1994 genocide, demon-

strates the power of collective deliberation as community-based Gacaca courts let ordinary citizens testify, discuss, and reckon with atrocities under the guidance of local leaders, journalists, and civic intellectuals. In each case, progress depended not only on formal tribunals but on reasoned public discussion that helped societies confront structural failures and restore moral balance. Bangladesh, while home to a sea of intellectuals, policy analysts, commentators, subject-matter experts, and so-called senior journalists, has rarely fostered spaces for the kind of inclusive public discussion Habermas envisioned. Even in the post-2024 context, debates remain polarised, performative, or politically controlled. Possibilities of victims-led truth commissions—bodies that investigate past injustices, document experiences, and promote accountability while fostering dialogue and healing—fell through. There is also no genuine public sphere where citizens can collectively reflect on history or evaluate contemporary politics critically. Without it, unresolved history and political tensions persist, leaving society like a ship adrift in turbulent waters, vulnerable to repeating past mistakes.

For Habermas, reflecting on history was more than just about assigning blame. It was about understanding systemic causes, recognising ethical failures, and learning lessons to prevent repetition. In Bangladesh, citizens feel injustice deeply, yet few forums allow them to examine why events happened, which structural problems persist, or what lessons can be learned. Indeed, why did certain political forces dominate for decades? Why were the atrocities of 1971 left unaddressed? How can citizens reason together about accountability today? These are precisely the conversations Habermas would urge, grounded in reason, ethics, and inclusivity. Today, Bangladesh desperately needs a Habermas—not to dictate what people should think, but to cultivate a culture of engaging in public reasoning, discussion, and reflection. This should not mean the emergence of a single individual of Habermas' stature. What Bangladesh needs, in a very practical sense, is a collective force: a network of civic institutions, independent media forums, grassroots dialogue initiatives, and civic education programmes that nurture deliberation. Independent media can host reasoned debates free from political control, civic education can teach young citizens critical reflection and ethical responsibility, and community dialogue initiatives can give victims and marginalised voices a meaningful role in engaging with history and governance. In short, if Bangladesh truly wants to strengthen its democracy, it had better learn to listen to itself.

Sentencing reform has not eased the sense of crisis

Given the frayed and depleted state of the public sector, it is not surprising that prisons in England and Wales are struggling to escape from a sense of perpetual crisis. Recent days saw the latest in a series of urgent notifications. These put a prison in special measures, and require ministers to produce an action plan within a month. Inspectors found that Woodhill in Milton Keynes is unsafe while a report on another failing prison, Swaleside in Kent, pointed to high levels of violence, staff shortages and education cuts.

David Lammy, who was shuffled into the role of justice secretary as a result of Angela Rayner's hasty exit from government, is busy with the alarming push to remove most defendants' right to a jury trial. So the implementation of recent sentencing reforms, and problems inside jails, have largely been left to the prisons minister, James Timpson. While there is no doubting his personal commitment, good intentions will not be enough.

The first report from the reformed women's justice board included some welcome proposals. One is that there should be a strong presumption against imprisoning pregnant women. But previous pledges to improve the way that mothers are treated have not been honoured. Earlier this month the Guardian reported scandalous details of women being shackled to guards while giving birth. While the women's board has been compared to the youth justice body set up by New Labour, its role is advisory and it lacks the commissioning budget which was one of the youth board's key features.

Lord Timpson also announced a big expansion of the use of electronic tags. The poor state of prisons, particularly the lack of education and work opportunities, means that supervising people in the community would be preferable in many cases. If done well, an overall rebalancing away from prisons and towards community punishment could be a big step forward. But tagging must not be mistaken for a cheap alternative to case work. The probation service has still not recovered from the disastrous cuts and failed privatisation inflicted on it under the Tories. It needs to invest in staff as well as devices. While the role of AI is sure to be talked up by tech companies trying to win contracts, rehabilitation relies on relationships. Electronic notifications are not a short cut.

The England and Wales prison population of 87,751 is close to the all-time record (Scotland hit its own record of 8,452 this month). But this is not because more people are being sent down. The total number of those jailed is around 15,000 lower than in 2010. The change is in the length of sentences, and the number of prisoners who are recalled after release. This is a problem which 20 years ago hardly existed.

Another issue, raised by the Prison Governors' Association following the killing of Ian Huntley, is the difficulty of managing inmates on extremely long or whole-life tariffs who have "nothing to lose". As well as self-harm incidents, which fell slightly last year, and violence between prisoners, there were a record 10,568 attacks on staff. This level of threat inevitably undermines morale and affects recruitment and retention. As the reforms in the sentencing act are phased in, the workforce must be closely monitored alongside the impact on prisoners and the public.



Why are memorial benches so popular? Because they keep the dead part of the flow of everyday life

When Hartlepool council announced last week that it wouldn't be accepting any new applications for memorial benches as it had too many already, it joined a growing list of towns and parks that are increasingly unable to cope with the demand. In an era when social media memorial pages are commonplace and potentially infinite, what is driving this desire to commemorate a loved one in a physical space? The popularity of memorial benches certainly gives the lie to the assumption that we live in a post-material world. It also signals a change in the way that we grieve. Memorial benches speak of a need to mourn not just behind closed doors but also in public—a shift to which digital culture has

probably contributed, and which manifests particularly strongly in secular countries where mourning isn't mediated through the church. What's especially interesting is the way that the benches frame death. In contrast to the cemetery—a place cordoned off from the living, where remains are interred and which exists solely to mark the end of a life—the memorial bench evokes the vitality of the body and a person's physical existence. Placed in a park, square or seafront, it returns the memory of them to the hurly-burly of daily life. Friends and relatives gather on the benches on the anniversary of a loved one's death to celebrate their life and toast their memory. Unlike other

forms of public memorial, such as a plaque or a tree, it's a way-station for the living. Benches are spaces where contact between passing strangers can take place; where someone can sit silently alone or read a book, usually without incurring disapproval or shame; where we can be alone together. They're a free public space where no action or consumption is required. Benches are sites of new lives and experiences: where we eat, meet, phone, argue, cry and laugh, but also where we can slow down, rest weary legs and drop heavy loads and watch the world. Our backs abrade the inscription over time and superimpose our own bodies, like a palimpsest, on to that of the dedicatee. Memorial benches

celebrate lives that often look unremarkable from the outside, summoning up their specialness through a telling inscription; implicitly, they suggest that everyone's story matters. They're micro-narratives, whose silences—sometimes just a name and a date—can speak. They make us do the maths: how long was this life? Sometimes, they shock us with its brevity. Because the inscription is written by the bench sponsor, they often tell a story about the relationship between sponsor and dedicatee. I particularly like one outside St Paul's church in Covent Garden, London: "Christopher Hackett, actor 1963–2010. To the world he was just one, to us he was the world." This takes Hackett outside the dis-

course of fame and celebrity—especially defining for an actor—and places him squarely in the domain of intimate relationships. In my research on memorial benches over the years, I've noticed their increasing appearance as playful street art. My favourite: "This bench is dedicated to the men who lost the will to live while following their partners around the shoe shops of Chester." Most memorial benches are site-specific, celebrating both a person and a place meaningful to them. They're not only in public space but also about it: a reminder ("She loved this park") of the ways in which public spaces are stitched into our daily routines, and of the quiet value, meaning and conviviality attached

to local squares and parks, which are increasingly encroached on by that grotesque, nonsensical phenomenon, the "privately owned public space". On the seafront in Seaford, East Sussex, a relative of mine and her children, aged 10 and 12, came upon a memorial bench dedicated to: "Glad and Ron Wellden. Now dancing together, always in the hearts of those who love you." Her children spontaneously started to dance around it, when a woman in her 60s walked by and exclaimed with delight. The bench was dedicated to her parents, who met at a dance during the war and continued to dance together throughout their lives. Now, a new generation was dancing around it.

Sensex slips below73,000, Nifty tests 22,600

Mumbai: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty fell on Monday, losing psychological marks as the West Asia crisis sent Brent oil prices higher for sixth straight session, raising inflationary concerns. The fresh trigger comes after the US President Donald Trump gave a 48-hour ultimatum to Iran to "fully open" the crucial waterway, which carries about 20 per cent of the global crude oil supply. Also, Iran suggested that would hit region's energy sites if the US and Israel target its power plants. Brent oil futures for June delivery were up 1.58 per cent at \$108.08 a barrel. This sent Asian markets tumbling today. Japan's Nikkei plummeted 3.9 per cent, China's Shanghai Composite declined 2.5 per cent while Hong Kong's Hang Seng tanked 3.4 per cent. India's benchmarks fared relatively well. "With the war in West Asia getting into the fourth week, there is no clarity on when the war will end. Unfortunately, the war is escalating with President Trump giving ultimatum to Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz in 48 hours. Iranian president's response that "the Strait of Hormuz is open to all except those who violate our soil" has prevented panic in the oil market. However, the uncertainty is huge and markets will be waiting and watching the outcome. Sensex slipped over 1,550 points to

sub-73,000 level. It was later trading 1,430.45 points or 1.91 per cent at 73,102.51. Nifty hit a low of 22,582.30. It was later quoting at 22,651.85, down 462.65 points or 2 per cent. Weakness in banking names such as HDFC Bank Ltd, State Bank of India and ICICI Bank Ltd also weighed heavy on indices. Investors were also concerned over rupee that hit a fresh low, as foreign outflows for March mounted to Rs 88,180 crore. "Going ahead, to pause the ongoing corrective phase, Nifty needs to decisively close above previous sessions high (23,345). A failure to do so would result into extended correction wherein key support is placed in the zone of 22,700-22,500 being 80 per cent retracement of the April 2025-February 2026 up move (21,743-26,373)coincided with support trend line drawn adjoining 2024-25 lows (21,137-21,743). ICICI Direct said earlier today. ECB inflows have risen meaningfully, though they cannot replace domestic deposits. In the first 10 months of FY26, companies raised \$33 billion via ECBs, compared with \$47.3 billion in the same period of FY25. A private sector bank treasury head stated that while draft guidelines now allow 100% of capital to be borrowed overseas, concerns persist about hedging costs and the impact of disruptions on base liabilities. "FCNR(B)

Silver crashes 42%, gold drops 17% from the top Now what's your plan

Mumbai: Silver is currently priced at roughly \$70, down 42% from its all-time high of \$121. Gold too has taken a hit, now trading at around \$4,666 — down 17% from its peak of \$5,602. The recent free-fall in both metals has left many investors perplexed. Those who joined the party late now find their gold and silver portfolios in the red. But how could that be? Gold, after all, was up 65% in 2025 and over 20% in each of the years since 2023. The Missing Plan

If you are sitting on losses right now, it's possibly because you did not have a plan in place — a proper asset allocation plan. For retail investors, the biggest mistake is buying or selling based on emotion, or what's popularly called the FOMO factor: the fear of missing out. Recent data shows exactly how FOMO played out in the Indian context. In December 2025, gold ETFs saw net inflows of Rs 11,646 crore, over three times the Rs 3,741 crore in November. And if that sounds large, January 2026 numbers were even more striking. Indian investors poured more money into gold ETFs than into equity funds — the first time, according to AMFI data. Two things are worth noting here. Whether it was FOMO or genuine conviction, Indians have at least started investing in gold ETFs — and that's a good thing. Gold ETFs

are a far better way to own gold than physical jewellery or coins, which come with making charges as high as 20%, wastage, and security concerns. Gold ETFs also track physical gold prices far more closely than jewellery ever can. So, What's the Plan?

portfolio in gold, alongside equities and debt, depending on your financial goals, risk appetite, and investment horizon. When gold prices correct, your allocation naturally falls — and that's often a good buying opportunity. When prices surge, trimming your position helps restore the original allocation. Is this, in fact, what the RBI has been doing? Data suggests so. Central banks, including the RBI, have been consistent buyers of gold every month since 2022. In 2024, the RBI purchased 72.6 tonnes. In 2025, that dropped sharply to just 4.02 tonnes. Why the pause? Possibly because the RBI hit that 10–15% allocation target. By 2025, gold's share of India's foreign exchange reserves had climbed from around 10% to 16% within a single year. As of December 2025, India holds 880.18 metric tonnes of gold — the 2026 figures are yet to be released. The takeaway: start with a plan. Buy at regular intervals until you reach 10–15% of your total portfolio. A staggered approach — much like a mutual fund SIP — keeps your

average purchase price in check. Gold doesn't move on a single factor. Multiple economic data points pull it in different directions at once. Right now, oil is the anchor — shaping inflation, interest rates, and the dollar simultaneously. A strengthening dollar signals a real energy crisis, which is bad news for gold. Higher interest rates, driven by rising inflation, add further headwinds.

If keeping track of all these moving parts feels overwhelming, you're not alone. Disclaimer: This article provides factual analysis only and is not, and should not be construed as, an offer, solicitation, or recommendation to buy or sell securities. Investors must conduct their own independent due diligence and seek advice from a SEBI-registered financial advisor. But here's the thing: if you have an asset allocation plan in place and are buying in a staggered, disciplined way, none of it — not the dips, not the crashes, not even the oil-dollar-inflation equation — will unsettle you by the time you reach your goals a few years down the road. Gold tends to shine during troubled times — when geopolitics dominates headlines, global economies weaken and currencies lose value. Today, much depends on how the Iran conflict resolves and where oil prices eventually settle.

Air India, IndiGo, SpiceJet on 60% rule: 'All passenger will end up paying

Mumbai: Air India, IndiGo and SpiceJet have raised strong concerns to the government's directive mandating free seat selection for at least 60% of seats on flights, warning that the decision could push up ticket prices. The Federation of Indian Airlines (FIA), which represents the three carriers, has appealed to the Civil Ministry to withdraw the decision. In a communication to Civil Aviation Secretary Samir Kumar Sinha, the industry body warned that the directive could have unintended consequences for the aviation sector. According to FIA, the financial impact of the move would be "significant," forcing airlines to compensate for lost revenue by increasing fares. "As a result, all passengers, including those who may not wish to preselect seats, will end up paying higher fares," the body stated, as quoted by PTI. Airlines asked to allocate 60% of seats free of charge. Airlines raise concerns about revenue loss and operational pressure. Airlines argue that seat selection fees are a key part of their ancillary



revenue, especially in a high-cost operating environment. Rising expenses such as fuel, maintenance and airport charges have already put pressure on margins, making such income streams crucial for financial sustainability. The FIA also stated that restricting ancillary revenue could weaken market-driven pricing and limit airlines' flexibility. It also cautioned that the decision may end up hurting affordability, particularly for price-sensitive travellers, as cost get passed on through higher base

fares, as reported by DNA. The industry body further highlighted that broader challenges, including rising aviation turbine fuel prices and operational disruptions linked to geopolitical tensions in West Asia. Industry calls for rollback, flags lack of consultation. The airline grouping has also slammed the absence of stakeholder consultation before the announcement. It also warned that such regulatory intervention could set a precedent for increased control over airline pricing struc-

tures. "If applied, this measure will set a precedent for extensive intervention in ancillary pricing... creating uncertainty for airlines regarding future regulatory constraints," FIA stated, urging the government to reconsider the directive, as reported by PTI. According to the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the move is part of a broader push to enhance passenger convenience and transparency in air travel. As per the statement released by PIB, airlines have been directed through the DGCA to ensure that at least 60% seats on every flight are available for selection free of charge. The policy aims to provide fair access to flyers and address concerns over high seat selection charges, which typically range from Rs 2,00 to 2,100 depending on the seat type. The government has said that the directive is part of a wider passenger-centric measure, including ensuring families on the same PNR are seated together. Another aim is to enhance transparency in airline services and strengthen passengers' rights in cases of delays and cancellations.

Stock market crash: Tata Steel, Vedanta, Hind Zinc

Mumbai: Metal stocks were under severe selling pressure as the Monday blues returned to haunt Dalal Street following a warning from US President Donald Trump, who ordered Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz within 48 hours or face the destruction of its energy infrastructure. The risk-off sentiments is denting the appeal of all commodities and assets. BSE Metal index cracked nearly 4 per cent to 36,224.33 on Monday, compared to its previous close at 37,708.20. The index has tumbled nearly 12 per cent in less than a month from its 52-week high at 41,101.11, hit on February 26, before the war kicked off. All the constituents of index were trading in red. Hindustan Copper Ltd plunged 6.18 per cent to Rs 458.50 in the early session, commanding a market capitalization close to Rs 44,000 crore. It had settled at Rs 488.70 on Friday. The stock has nosedived nearly 40 per cent from its 52-week high at Rs 759.20, hit nearly two months ago.

Shares of Hindustan Zinc Ltd crashed nearly 5.75 per cent to Rs 485.20 on Monday, compared to its previous close at Rs 514.80. The stock is down nearly 34 per cent from its 52-week high at Rs 732.60, hit just two months ago. Its parent company, Vedanta Ltd was second in line, falling 5.30 per cent to Rs 637 for the day. The stock has corrected nearly 18 per cent from its recent peak. Shares of National Aluminium Company



Ltd (Nalco) tanked nearly 5 per cent to Rs 350.25, while Tata Steel tumbled Ltd nearly 4.5 per cent to Rs 188 in the early session. NDMC, Jindal Stainless, Jindal Steel & Power and JSW Steel, Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) were also down 4-5 per cent each in the early trade. Hindalco Industries Ltd declined more than 3 per cent, while Lloyds Metals and Energy and APL Apollo Tubes retreated in the similar fashion. Other small metal-related counters included KIOCL, MOIL, Shyam Metalics and Energy and others were down 3-6 per cent each on Monday. Meanwhile, BSE Sensex plunged more than 1,550 points, or 2.08 per cent to hit lows at 72,977.34, while NSE's Nifty50 index shed nearly 515 points to tell 22,600 levels during the first week of the session. Benchmark indices have cracked more than 15 per cent from their respective peak amid the rising concerns in West Asia.

Most of L&T's West Asia sites operating as usual

Mumbai: It's almost as usual for engineering major Larsen & Toubro (L&T) with 95% of its sites in West Asia operational, Subramanian Sarma, deputy managing director & president of the company has confirmed.

While the conflict has posed supply and logistics challenges at its sites, alternative channels like road transport are being explored to resolve the problem, Sarma said, adding that the situation is not critical. Speaking to the media, he said L&T has opted to shut down the remaining 5% of the sites as these are in close proximity of military bases. Order inflows from the region accounted for 37% of the construction and engineering firm's order book in 9MFY26. The war in the region has disrupted supplies to L&T's sites from China and Europe in the last 2-3 weeks though there has been some resumption of materials supplies over the past few days. Supplies from local vendors, however, have not been disrupted. "Whether in Saudi Arabia or within GCC countries, transportation by road continues, although the process is slower," Sarma said. Moreover, some materials are being dropped off at ports that are relatively safe.

In fact, Sarma expects new opportunities to emerge in the region following a push by countries there for faster project execution and diversification of energy supply routes. "Maybe there will be alternative routes for energy evacuation as every country may build some cross-country pipelines and have evacuation points in Oman, in the Red Sea or even in the Mediterranean. Given that it will be a major supplier, the focus will shift to diversifying evacuation routes. This is good news for us, because it will open up new opportunities," he said.



Sarma noted that the company's clients in the region appeared to be urgently looking to commission capacity, while exploring new capacities. L&T expects to cash in on orders as these nations start rebuilding after the war ends. West Asia, which Sarma calls a "second home" has about 100 sites across the region. L&T is present in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Kuwait, among others and across verticals such as renewables, transmission and infrastructure. Green Pivot L&T will utilise electrolyzers for the hydrogen project in alliance with IOCL in Panipat. "We will utilise our own electrolyzers. We are also in discussions with international players who are also keen to utilise our electrolyzers, he said. In about a year's time, L&T hopes to have a very definitive agreement for green ammonia offtake. Sarma said he expects good traction in green hydrogen too adding, the company has expanded into the renewables EPC space. Renewable projects for solar and wind has been explored in Uzbekistan and opportunities are being looked at in Indonesia. Meanwhile, L&T is accelerating its green hydrogen ammonia project with Itochu Corporation of Japan. It plans to set up a first train of 3,00,000 tonnes per annum of green ammonia with \$1.5-2 billion investment. The company is also working on an electrolyzers project having developed 1.4 megawatt cells.

As cash becomes more scarce, banks demand tax relief and an NRI deposit window

New Delhi: India's financial markets are turning up the heat on policymakers, seeking tax relief for foreign investors and a revival of NRI-focused deposit schemes to ease a tightening liquidity environment. But the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) appears unwilling to return to the crisis-era tools that helped stabilise the rupee and attract over \$30 billion during the 2013 taper tantrum. Sengupta added that FCNR(B) deposits bring in only dollars and form a very small share of bank liabilities. A more durable solution, she said, lies in maintaining banking system liquidity at around 1% of NDTL to support deposit creation. While the RBI has infused durable liquidity, deposit growth remains uneven. "Corporate deposits are rising, while household deposits are declining. These are more interest-rate sensitive and less sticky," she said. Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at Bank of Baroda, agreed that today's environment differs fundamentally from 2013. "Back then, India had low forex reserves. Second, the 2013 episode was largely India-specific, whereas the pressures today are global. So there is no compelling need for a similar response," he said. He added that global uncertainty is also weighing on remittances and NRI deposits, limiting potential inflows. Sabnavis pointed out that the RBI has already renewed its currency swap arrangement with Japan, which allows India to draw Yen if required. "Such agreements act as effective contingency buffers," he said. The central bank appears more inclined



toward structural liberalisation, particularly easing frictions around FDI. Chandok agrees that ECB inflows have risen meaningfully, though they cannot replace domestic deposits. In the first 10 months of FY26, companies raised \$33 billion via ECBs, compared with \$47.3 billion in the same period of FY25. A private sector bank treasury head stated that while draft guidelines now allow 100% of capital to be borrowed overseas, concerns persist about hedging costs and the impact of disruptions on base liabilities. "FCNR(B) deposits, on the other hand, are considered a better alternative as they don't create external hedging liabilities," he said. Market participants are also pushing for tax relief. Equity investors want the removal of capital gains tax on foreign portfolio investors (FPIs). "India must reduce friction if it wants to attract long-term capital," said Nitin Jain, CEO & Director, Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Singapore. Even a modest shift, he argued, could

strengthen the currency and boost risk capital. "India must improve post-tax, hedged returns for foreign investors. What matters is what they finally take home," says Venkatakrishnan Srinivasan, Founder & Managing Partner at Rockfort Fincap LLP. "Stable, predictable policies and better after-tax returns will naturally draw more foreign flows." However, regulators remain cautious. On capital gains taxation, the decision lies with the government, which is unlikely to revisit the issue mid-term. For now, tax breaks, NRI deposit windows, and faster liberalisation remain on the market's wishlist. Policymakers appear focused on structural reforms rather than short-term fixes, even as liquidity tightens and global volatility rises. As Chandok put it, "Deposit creation has been a challenge, and this is a good window to use the opportunity till flows come back." "India cannot afford to ignore global capital. We require hard currency, and we should not disincentivise it,"

Jain added. Liquidity stress is evident across the system. Deposit growth continues to lag credit expansion, forcing banks to sharply raise bulk deposit and certificate of deposit (CD) rates. "The real challenge is liquidity, not rates or pricing. If liquidity were comfortable, CD rates wouldn't be where they are," said Anshul Chandok, Head of Treasury at RBL Bank. Several smaller banks are offering more than 8% on bulk deposits, a level last seen before the rate-cut cycle began. This has prompted renewed calls for policy intervention, particularly the revival of the NRI deposit windows used in 2013. "We probably need to go back and see what we did in 2013 and maybe launch an India Deposit Scheme or NRI Deposit Scheme. It worked beautifully," said a senior private sector banker. Such a window, he argued, would help banks raise deposits while supporting demand for SLR securities as the government's borrowing programme expands. But the RBI is signalling a different stance. Officials indicate the central bank does not see the current situation as warranting a crisis-style response. Gaura Sengupta, chief economist at IDFC First Bank, stated that India's forex reserve cover remains strong at 9.8 months, including spot and forward reserves. "FCNR(B) is a crisis management tool and is not expected to be used. The focus will be on bolstering other capital inflows, such as FDI and ECBs, through liberalisation of norms," she said.

The Theories Behind Pakistan’s Rumoured Ballistic Missile Worries US



Washington: The Shaheen 3 is Pakistan’s longest-range operational missile, capable of hitting targets as far as 2,750 kilometers away. This range includes both major Indian cities and remote locations such as Port Blair in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. However, Shaheen 3 is not an intercontinental ballistic missile.

To be classified as an ICBM, a ballistic missile must have a minimum range of more than 5,500 kilometers. The distance between the United States and Pakistan is more than 11,000 kilometers. The United States? Why? This 11,000-kilometer gap is

now the focus of a hardening American intelligence assessment. Tulsi Gabbard, Director of US National Intelligence, has identified Pakistan, Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran as countries building missiles capable of hitting the continental United States. She made the statement during a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on the 2026 Annual Threat Assessment. Though she did not provide a clear timescale for Pakistan’s missile project, US officials have stated independently that Pakistan’s ability to manufacture and deploy a viable long-range ballistic missile is still many years to a de-

cade away. Islamabad’s official position has not changed from its consistently maintained narrative that its nuclear and missile programmes are aimed at India.

Following India’s Operation Sindoor in 2025, Pakistan had announced the formation of an Army Rocket Force Command, which is consistent with regional deterrence plans of other smaller nations. Pakistan’s existing arsenal is already sufficient to deter a regional nuclear or conventional attack, so an ICBM would serve a different purpose - deterring the US from launching preventive strikes against

Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal, or from intervening militarily on India’s side in a future conflict, top analysts Vipin Narang and Pranay Vaddi said in June 2025. North Korea, which the US sees as a threat, has nuclear weapons, while Iran is being pounded with American bombs and missiles because it does not have a functional nuclear platform yet. Pakistan must have seen this. But Pakistani analysts have contested the claim. Gabbard’s statement has a persistent flaw in American threat assessments by substituting worst-case speculation for grounded analysis, nuclear security scholar Rabia Akhtar told Al Jazeera. The US assessment still insisted that Pakistan’s declared doctrine of credible minimum deterrence has an element of global power projection. This is because Islamabad has neither confirmed nor denied running a programme to develop an ICBM that can reach the US. Pakistan currently fields no missile that comes close to intercontinental range. Its most advanced MIRV-capable (multiple warheads) system, the Ababeel, has a claimed range of 2,200 km, which means the Shaheen 3 is the longest-reach operation missile with them.

How Trump’s stated reasons, goals, and timeline for the Iran war have shifted

Washington: President Donald Trump and his senior officials have presented shifting aims and reasons for the US-Israeli attack on Iran, which critics argue demonstrates a lack of preparedness for the confrontation and its aftermath. The stated aims and estimated timescale have fluctuated, including overthrowing Iran’s government, undermining Iran’s military, security, and nuclear capabilities, as well as its regional influence, and supporting Israeli interests. Here’s how Trump explained his war aims and timeline: The Iranian people should “take over” their country’s administration, Trump urged in a social media video as the US and Israel started their assault. “It will be yours to take,” he continued. “This will be probably your only chance for generations.” Trump referred to the assaults as “major combat operations.” Trump stated that Washington will deny Iran the capacity to develop a nuclear bomb, notwithstanding Tehran’s insistence that its nuclear program is for peaceful reasons. Iran does not have nuclear weapons, but the United States does. Israel is also often thought to be the sole Middle Eastern country having nuclear weapons. Trump pressed on ending what he called Tehran’s ballistic missile threat.

“We’re going to destroy their missiles and raze their missile industry to the ground,” according to him. “We’re going to annihilate their navy.” Trump asserted that Iran’s long-range missiles “can now threaten our very good friends and allies in Europe, our troops stationed overseas, and could soon reach the American homeland.” His words resembled Presi-

dent George W. Bush’s rationale for the Iraq war, which included misleading assertions. Neither academics nor US intelligence accept Trump’s claims, and both believe that Iran’s ballistic missile program is years away from attacking the US mainland. Trump said the war was projected to last four to five weeks but could go on longer. “We’re already substantially ahead of our time projections. But whatever the time is, it’s okay. Whatever it takes,” Trump said at the White House. In a social media post, Trump said there was a “virtually unlimited supply” of U.S. munitions and that “wars can be fought ‘forever,’ and very successfully, using just these supplies.” In a notification to Congress, Trump provided no timeline. Trump earlier told the Daily Mail the war could take “four weeks, or less,” then told The New York Times four to five weeks and subsequently said it could take longer. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters Israel’s determination to attack Iran forced Washington to strike.

“We knew that there was going to be an Israeli action, we knew that that would precipitate an attack against American forces, and we knew that if we didn’t preemptively go after them before they launched those attacks, we would suffer higher casualties,” Rubio said. Trump authorized US soldiers to join Israel’s attack on Iran, citing his belief that Iran will strike first. “I might have forced their (Israel’s) hand,” Trump said. “If we didn’t do it, they (Iran) were going to attack first.” March 4: Call to ‘Destroy’ Security Infrastructure Pentagon director Pete

Hegseth stated that the aim was to “destroy Iranian offensive missiles, destroy Iranian missile production, and destroy their navy and other security infrastructure.” Hegseth told CBS News in an interview aired on March 8 that the strikes on Iran were “only the beginning.” A day later, Trump told the same network, “I believe the war is pretty much over.” “We’ve already won in many ways, but we haven’t won enough,” Trump said to reporters later that day.

When asked if the conflict had begun or ended, he said, “Well, I think you could say both.” On March 11, Trump reiterated his belief that the United States had won, but added, “We’ve got to finish the job.” In a March 13 interview with Fox News, Trump stated that the war will end “when I feel it in my bones.” Trump tempered his appeal for Iranians to overthrow their government. “So I really think that’s a big hurdle to climb for people that don’t have weapons,” Trump told reporters. Hegseth said Washington was not setting a time frame for the war and Trump would decide when to stop. “We wouldn’t want to set a definitive time frame,” the Pentagon chief said. “It will be at the president’s choosing, ultimately, where we say, ‘Hey, we’ve achieved what we need to.’”

MARCH 20: TRUMP CONSIDERS WINDING DOWN BUT NO CEASEFIRE Trump posted on Truth Social that “we are getting very close to meeting our objectives as we consider winding down our great Military efforts” in the Iran war. Earlier in the day, Trump told reporters “I don’t want to do a ceasefire” when asked about the war.

Pakistan has nurtured terror for decades It Has Now Come Home to Roost

Pakistan: For decades, Pakistan has fostered terror networks as a tool of foreign policy. The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2026 accurately captures the results of that calculation. Pakistan has risen to top place on the GTI for the first time, becoming the world’s most terror-affected country by 2025, with 1,139 deaths, 1,045 assaults, 1,595 people injured, and 655 hostages. Its score of 8.574 places it ahead of all other countries on the ranking. This is Pakistan’s bloodiest year since 2013, and the sixth straight year that terrorist casualties have increased. In South Asia, it is the only country where the situation worsened in 2025; every other country in the area saw an improvement. The two provinces doing most of the dying are Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, with 74 per cent of attacks and 67 per cent of deaths. The dominant group is the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. In 2025, the TTP conducted 595 attacks and was responsible for 637 deaths, or 56 per cent of all terrorism fatalities in the country. Targeted assassinations increased by 450 percent. Police fatalities rose. The gang has included drones in its operations toolbox. Between 6,000 and 6,500 TTP terrorists are currently operating from within Afghanistan, utilizing the country as a staging ground for cross-border raids, with 85 percent of TTP attacks occurring within 10 to 50 kilometers of the Afghan border. The GTI’s borderlands research tracks the topography of Pakistan’s tribal belt, which for decades served as a semi-governed haven for the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, al-Qaeda, and, finally, the TTP itself. The ethnic Pashtun continuity across the Durand Line allowed terrorists to migrate freely. Many of the people who would become the Taliban, and subsequently the TTP, were ideologically nurtured in Pakistani madrassas within Afghan refugee camps. The Afghan Taliban’s return to power in 2021 provided the TTP a friendly



safe haven. Islamabad has demanded Kabul restrain the TTP. The Afghan Taliban has declined. This is the return leg of a transaction that began in the 1990s, when Pakistan’s security establishment distinguished between what it internally categorised as good Taliban, useful against India and Afghanistan, and bad Taliban, meaning groups that turned their guns inward. That distinction has now ceased to function. In March 2025, the Balochistan Liberation Army seized a passenger train and took 442 hostages, in the largest single terrorist attack recorded globally in the GTI’s 2025 data. The BLA’s campaign has evolved from a separatist insurgency into something the report classifies as anti-state terrorism, with Chinese nationals and CPEC infrastructure now explicit targets alongside Pakistani security forces. The GTI records this as domestic blowback for decades of militarised governance in the province, without political accommodation, producing the conditions for sustained organised violence. The GTI does not address Lashkar-e-Tai-

ba or Jaish-e-Mohammed. It makes no claims concerning Pakistan’s deployment of terrorist proxies against India. However, it identified sanctuary politics, permissive borderland space, and the transition from state-backed terror to a self-sustaining terror ecosystem as variables that precisely correspond to a pattern India has been highlighting in international forums for two decades. The article also discusses the worsening of Pakistan-India ties following the Pahalgam terror assault and India’s reaction, Operation Sindoor. The structural variables identified by the GTI as causing Pakistan’s crises are the result of policy choices taken across several administrations and military tenures, rather than geography or misfortune. Pakistan’s score on the GTI is 8.574. In 2013, when it last recorded comparable casualties, the score reflected a crisis that the state then responded to with military operations, eventually pushing violence down. Six years of consecutive increases suggest the operational logic of those campaigns has run its course.

Russia Prepared to Assist Crisis-Hit Cuba During Energy Crisis



Cuba: Cuba’s economic condition, which was already severe due to the US fuel boycott, has been exacerbated by the abrupt halt of oil deliveries. Russia said Friday it was ready to assist its crisis-hit friend Cuba, but

would not comment on whether it had sent much-needed oil to the Caribbean island. Cuba has been under US gasoline boycott since January 3, when Washington removed Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, a crucial friend

of Havana. The embargo has triggered a severe economic crisis, and blackouts have been exacerbated by the abrupt halt of oil supply. According to marine monitors, a tanker carrying Russian fuel is expected to arrive in Cuba

“in several days” after adopting deceptive tactics to get there. When asked if Russia was delivering gasoline to Cuba, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov responded: “We are in constant contact with the Cuban leadership, with our Cuban friends, and we are indeed discussing possible options for providing assistance.”

He remarked: “That is all I can say on this subject.” Windward stated online that a Hong Kong-flagged vessel, the Sea Horse, was its route to Cuba with around 190,000 barrels of Russian diesel. “If and when the tanker arrives, it will be the first confirmed arrival of a refined products cargo on the island since early January,” it stated. The United States on Thursday amended its sanctions to offer relief to Russian oil tankers already at sea, but said shipments bound for Cuba and North Korea were still subject to restrictions.

Washington’s present relationship with Britain is more like contempt

Europe: A buddy who bullies us is no longer our friend. And, because bullies only respond to strength, I want to become considerably stronger from now on. And the president should be ready for that.” Hugh Grant said this when portraying the British prime minister confronting the US president in a famous scene from the romcom Love Actually. Real-life British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has sought to stand up to the present bully in the White House over the latest US military intervention in the Middle East. Despite the British government’s right-royal attempts to impress Donald Trump since he was elected US president, his reaction to Starmer’s modest attempt has been a torrent of disdain. So the reality isn’t Love Actually. It is actually contempt. When asked about the British government’s delicate distinction between defensive attacks in the Gulf, which it now supports, and aggressive strikes, which it does not, Maga ideologue Steve Bannon tells the New Statesman’s Freddie Hayward: “That’s diplomatic bullshit.” Fuck you. You are either an ally or not. Fuck you. “The special relationship has ended.” Ah, “special relationship”? Former West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt once said, “The special relationship is so special that only one side knows it exists.” It’s been at least 40 years. An American critic of Trump recently asked me the obvious follow-up question: “Why does your government keep grovelling?” More fundamentally, we must ask why so much

of official Britain, and especially its security establishment, keeps clinging for dear life to the United States, behaving for all the world like someone stuck in an abusive personal relationship. To be fair, a lot of other European leaders have spent much of the past year sacrificing their dignity as they suck up to Trump, condoning his trashing of everything that liberal Europe has stood for since 1945. Mark Rutte, the secretary general of Nato, would beat Starmer to win Private Eye’s premier satirical medal, the OBN (Order of the Brown Nose). The reasons for this sycophancy are obvious: Europe’s dependence on the US for supporting Ukraine, for our own security in Nato and, to a significant degree, for our prosperity. But there’s a particular, rather pathetic desperation about the way the British cling to Uncle Sam. The explanation? History, of course. The US founding fathers grew up thinking of themselves as Englishmen. From 1776 to 1917, when the US entered the first world war, this was, as the historian Robert Saunders nicely puts it, not so much a special as a peculiar relationship. The US defined itself historically against Britain, but there was a mutual fascination. Following the brief but important military alliance in 1917-18, and the subsequent peacemaking in Paris, the US withdrew from Europe. A special relationship really did exist between 1941, when Winston Churchill managed – with a little help from the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor – to bring the US into

the war against Adolf Hitler, and 1956, when the US humiliatedly stopped Britain and France from retaking the Suez canal. The UK and the US were not equals, but this was still a real power partnership, jointly shaping Europe, if not the world. France and Britain drew starkly different conclusions from their loss at Suez. France, under President Charles de Gaulle, created its own independent nuclear deterrent and had previously recognized the aim that the current French president, Emmanuel Macron, refers to as European strategic autonomy. After a brief moment of bitter separation from Washington, Britain reaffirmed its commitment to its partnership with the United States. If we were no longer a big power, we would be “Athens to America’s Rome”. Unlike France, Britain built a nuclear deterrent that was and remains technologically dependent on the US, and always put Nato before European construction. In many ways, the British-American relationship did get closer: in intelligence and military cooperation, in academia and media, in finance and the economy (today the UK is the top destination of US direct investment, just ahead of the Netherlands). But at the same time, Britain’s political influence in Washington was steadily diminishing. It clung to it all the more. The late British Labour politician Robin Cook reported in his memoirs how, in a crucial cabinet debate in the run-up to the Iraq war, then prime minister Tony

Blair said: “I tell you that we must steer close to America. If we don’t, we will lose our influence to shape what they do.” But how much influence was there really? Today, Blair’s former chief of staff Jonathan Powell sits at Starmer’s right hand in 10 Downing Street, trying to do the same with the Trumpians. “We have those relationships so we can have those difficult conversations,” says an anonymous Whitehall source. But the conversations are not difficult for Washington. They are for London, because it has so little clout left. This trend has been compounded by two further developments. The first is the fall of the British armed forces. American troops who spent years fighting with the British now tell me, with empathy rather than scorn, “You barely have an army anymore.” In the present crisis, France sent a navy ship to Cyprus first, despite the fact that Iran assaulted a British military station on the island. This shortcoming is also reflected in popular culture. In the new season of the Netflix political soap The Diplomat, the saturnine US vice-president (brilliantly portrayed by Rufus Sewell) uses the children’s book The Small Engine That Could to depict Britain as “the little island that couldn’t”. Ouch. The second is Brexit. It’s just evident that the UK is less relevant to the US than it once was since it is no longer a member of a larger bloc. Despite its long-term decline in power, Britain had two reasonably strong legs throughout.

A winter’s trail: seasonal UK walks from Somerset to Scotland

Derwent Edge, Peak DistrictYou can concertina this walk into a couple of hours, or else pack a lunch, take all day and let it breathe. Its centrepiece is Derwent Edge, a line in the sky running south to north, the preferred direction of travel, past a series of rocks and outcrops with down-to-earth names, like the Wheel Stones, the Salt Celar and the Cakes of Bread, that don’t do justice to their sculptural mystery.To the east there are grouse moors. But west and north are what we’ve come for, a wide panorama of wildness and space. Below, the upper Derwent valley is filled with a reservoir, and on its far side rolling moors and hidden valleys stretch into the desolate distance. This is a landscape that was for centuries cropped and burned and emptied of nature but is now taking steps towards recovery, with deciduous trees emerging to offset some boring spruce plantations that in places smother the hillside. Things may be getting better, nature-wise. For now, though, the main attraction is elemental: wind and light that cleanse the soul, cloudscapes and showers of stinging rain. I love Derwent Edge for all those things, and across four decades have walked it every so often, on hot summer days and in the depths of winter when the northern sky was turquoise and pink, and hard snow squeaked with cold. But it’s most special for one Christmas Day many years ago.A dusting of snow had lightened the moors, the sky was blue above our heads but the valley at our feet was buried in cloud. Trotting north, we saw another small group hurrying south towards us, the only people we would see all day. As they grew closer, we realised we knew them. It was our good friend Sue with her husband and one of their daughters. Amazed at the coincidence, we stopped to talk. Sue was fizzing, as she almost always was, and greeted us with her usual warm smile, excited to be exactly where she was. You couldn’t help but smile back.It was typical also that she pulled from her rucksack a flask of mulled wine and mince pies to share. The day was made. When she died a few years ago, much, much too soon, the sudden absence of her energy robbed us all. I meet the River Avon where I know it best, underneath the arches of the aqueduct in Muiravonside. The grey structure and swooping curves cradle the Union Canal on to Edinburgh. I aim to walk upstream, following the River Avon, walking part of the 10-mile heritage trail that runs from Avonbridge to Linlithgow.I have only ever walked sections of the full trail and today I plan to walk part of the route to another feat of engineering, the Westfield railway viaduct, built in 1854 to carry coal. The sycamore trees have all but shaken off their leaves and the earth is thick with a bed of yellow matter. The winter sun lights up the highest points of the aqueduct but down here on the well-worn path, there is only shade. I follow the track along the river, the sound of the water drowning out the birds. I think of the place I grew up, a tied house on a private country estate in Cumbria. As kids, we had the run of the gardens and woods. Now Muiravonside is my local estate and I love to wander it too. It plots changes in history: lime kilns for building the New Town in



Edinburgh, a mill for timber, a ruined Big House. Farther upstream there is even a cave where they say 13th-century Scottish knight William Wallace hid from the English. Out of the heart of the estate, farmers’ fields flank the banks of the river. There is a kerfuffle of hoof marks at the low points, a sure sign of cattle crossings.As the path skirts away from the river and up into a field, I struggle up the gradient. Then at the top, I enter a wood. A series of steps meanders back down to the riverbed, covered in a thick layer of beech leaves. I worry about slipping, then I worry about climbing back up, as I know I will soon need to retrace my steps.My wanderings of the estate 30 years ago always had a deadline – a split shift or sunset – and now it is no different. At the foot of the hill, a burn runs into the Avon and I cross an old wooden bridge, its timber as light as a wasp’s nest. I stop to watch the river then turn back. Next time, I’ll start from the viaduct and walk to the end of the trail where a decent pub meal is promised in Linlithgow. But for now, it’s the staircase of leaves and school pick up for me. Tiny Culbone church sits in a clearing in the woods, a couple of miles’ walk from the nearest road. Although the vicar and a few parishioners can bounce and slither down a muddy track in the ecclesiastical Land Rover, visitors must walk there along the South West Coast Path. The church, dedicated to Welsh saint Beuno, is so utterly enchanting and the walk so varied that it is no hardship to make this a there-and-back walk; it’s little more than 3½ miles from its nearest car park at Porlock Weir. Enthusiastic walkers can lengthen it to make a circular trip of around six miles or even complete the entire 29-mile Porlock Pilgrim’s Trail which links nine of Exmoor’s chapels and churches.Culbone was one of the first places that my friend and co-author Janice and I sought out when commissioned to write the first Slow Guide to Devon and Exmoor. We both loved little churches and here was the smallest working one in England, and in a region spilling over with interest. Not far from the church Samuel Taylor Coleridge was interrupted mid-opium dream, mid-poem by a Person from Porlock; and the Countess of Lovelace, bet-



ter known as early 19th-century “computer” pioneer Ada Lovelace, lived in a mansion near Porlock Weir. Below her now-ruined house, Ashley Combe, the path passes rather surprisingly through two tunnels. These routed tradesmen to the back entrance of the manor to spare her the unpleasantness of meeting any of the lower orders as she made her way to her bathing hut. The up-and-down trail passes through oak and beech woods with good views of the sea in winter and occasional benches where you can catch your breath and maybe enjoy a flask of mulled wine. Although you have been looking out for the church for a while – it seems a long mile and a half – you round a corner and suddenly there it is below you, its little spire, set slightly askew, reaching hopefully towards the treetops.It looked so vulnerable that a lump rose to my throat and my eyes filled with tears, and it’s had the same effect each time I have walked there; I can’t easily explain why. I’m not religious, but there’s something about its isolation and its walls “saturated with centuries of worship”, as the church booklet so elegantly puts it, that tugs at the heartstrings. Inside the simple interior, the harmonium is spattered

with candle wax, there is a box pew for the Lovelace family, and the rough stone font, showing the chisel marks of its creator, has baptised babies since Norman times.Janice died last year, and of all the walks we have done together, this is the most special, the most poignant. And the most repeated. At some point in 1977, between punk gigs and O-level exams, I went to the public library and pulled out a new book called In Patagonia. I was already obsessed with plans for worldwide adventure, and Bruce Chatwin’s first book supercharged my dreams. By the time his novel On The Black Hill came out in 1982, I was living in Sudan. No matter, a copy eventually reached me in Darfur. To my horror, however, the Black Hill in question was not set deep in the Andes, nor even a month’s ride by camel from Timbuktu. It was in the Bannau Brycheiniog (formerly the Brecon Beacons). Had Chatwin lost the plot? How could the scene of my childhood camping holidays ever be interesting? I soon learned, of course, that it could.The location had been carefully chosen: close to the wrinkled lip of Offa’s Dyke, lying in the borderlands of England and Wales where echoes of religion and

strife still resonated. Change has come to the area since Chatwin was here: Hay-on-Wye is now a vibrant book town, the Bull’s Head at the foot of the hill is a fine upmarket gastropub, and the narrow winding lanes are even less passable now that cars have grown so fat. And yet the medieval churches and neolithic monuments remain, and the walk up the Black Hill is as inspiring as ever. Start at the car park near Black Darren crags, north-west of Longtown. Walk up the road then take the path up on to Little Black Hill then up the increasingly bleak ridge to the Black Hill itself. Panoramas can be magnificent, but it can also be mistily mysterious, with wind-battered ancient rowan trees clinging to the rocks and hardy sheep giving baffled stares. From the summit of the Black Hill you may cut short back down the Olchon valley or continue to Hay Bluff, which is in Wales. From here there’s a choice which could depend on weather conditions: either loop westwards or east. The former takes you on to Offa’s Dyke Path and a great high level route south along another ridge. Just before the Black Darren crags, drop down and return to your car. Alternatively, if things are getting a bit spicy (and they can),

drop east from the Bluff and find the low level path that follows the contours south. It is a lovely summer walk, but winter is best, when the gnarled trees are dripping with rain and the last few berries glow like embers. Then you can drop into the Bull’s Head for refreshments and read a few pages of Chatwin’s classic tale of the two brothers who extracted quietly heroic lives from these spartan hills.The Offa’s Dyke version is 15 miles and takes six to seven hours. The lower level path to the east of the Black Hill is about the same. The short version via Olchon Valley is 9½ miles. Norfolk is so dull! So flat! Just water, sky and churches! Or so bemoaned my younger self. I grew up on the edge of the Broads, wishing I was in the middle of somewhere else. How times change. My parents still live in Acle, the village I thought so bland. Now, when I return, it’s with different eyes and different feet.Maybe it’s because I go home at Christmas, but winter is when this landscape seems most right. Stark fields of mud and stubble; waterways, empty of holiday cruisers, left to the ducks; a crisper rattle through the reed beds. Plus, somehow, in these darker days, the space between past and present feels especially thin.In the past, I

didn’t know I liked walking. Or that I had this fine loop on my doorstep. Handily, Acle has a railway station, so you can start it from there. After traversing the village, you’re soon crossing the fields past lonely St Mary’s Church in Fishley, which sits far from any congregation. The path continues to Upton, where there’s a community-run pub, the White Horse (you’ll have to fight my parents for the chairs by the fire). Next, skirt Upton Broad nature reserve where, in winter, hen harrier and even common crane hang out. Ahead lies South Walsham Broad, where you can pick up the Fleet Dyke. Tracing this channel, then the River Bure is – to my mind – about as Norfolk as it gets: an exposed sloshy land pressed flat by enormous skies. Before long St Benet’s Abbey appears on the bank opposite, frustratingly near but far. I was once taken over by tin boat on a youth trip. Without one, such is the bridge-less sogginess of this place, that getting there from here requires another 12-mile walk.It’s fascinating though: founded in 1019, St Benet’s was the only English monastery Henry VIII didn’t dissolve; the Bishop of Norwich still holds a service at the ruins once a year. The abbey isn’t the only stranded relic. As you follow the river, you can see to the windmill at Thurne (which still works), and you’ll pass close to sail-less Oby and Clippesby mills. Just three of the 300-odd drainage pumps once stationed across the county to keep the marshes dry.The river path leads back to Upton, cuts across fields, rejoins the Bure and reaches Acle Bridge. I did a project on it once: long ago, two murders were committed here; it’s said a pool of fresh blood appears on the anniversary every year.There’s a pub at the bridge, if you’re thirsty. Then it’s a mile or so along the river back to Acle village. Teen me would hang out at the bus stop. Middle-aged me would recommend St Edmund’s Church instead. Round-towered and part-thatched, its 15th-century font is remarkable. As my young self never said. The first time I stumble across Stockbury, I feel as though I have discovered a secret. The village centre emerges from a warren of wooded lanes, kids are playing on the streets and horses are tethered on the village

green while their owners lunch at the Harrow, a community-owned pub.From the pub I follow the path to St Mary Magdalene church, which overlooks the Stockbury valley. The flint tower sits behind a yew tree with a 10-metre girth. Its branches have grown and twisted into forms resembling coral groves. There is a whisper of something ancient, an older, indigenous religion whose rules we have forgotten. The remains of the old motte-and-bailey castle next door is guarded now only by drowsy sheep, grazing under the cherry trees.From the church I head across newly ploughed wheat fields. Fieldfares call overhead and then tumble into the hedgerow to seek shelter from the cold wind blowing in across the North Sea. The Medway estuary sweeps across the horizon. One of the country’s great migration routes for thousands of waders, ducks and geese that are pouring in to feed on the mud flats and roost on the islands. I imagine the icy water of the river sizzling as it merges on the skyline with the fiery tongues of beech trees descending from the chalk downs. Each tree is burnished, the deep reds and golds of copper kettles polished to perfection.I head through a kissing gate into Quendown Warren, a Kent Wildlife Trust reserve. Flocks of herdwick sheep, like fluffy teddy bears in dusty pink and chocolate coats, raise their heads to watch me. The Warren is where I found sanctuary during the first Covid lockdown of 2020 while my elderly father was in hospital. Its mixture of rolling hills, woods and pasture gave me strength and clarity to make seemingly impossible decisions on his behalf. I am grateful to this landscape, those words not doing justice to my feelings for this place.I head to the skeletal beech tree beneath which I made those decisions and sit under its boughs with my coffee flask. I touch its roots and feel the echo of the person I was, forever changed by the events of that year.Life moves on and so do I across the downs and then back up through the lanes to Stockbury, the bright colours of the hazels casting sunshine into the gathering dusk. I’ve now moved to the Stockbury valley and this circular walk – about four miles in total – remains one of my favourites.

ENTERTAINMENT

In a 1998 letter, Gaurav Gera discusses the hardships that led to Dhurandhar 2

New Delhi: Many people are praising actor Gaurav Gera for his portrayal of Mohammad Aalam in Dhurandhar: The Revenge. The Aditya Dhar-directed movie, which stars Ranveer Singh, is still doing well at the box office. As a young actor in Mumbai for more than 20 years, Gaurav has now spoken up about his early troubles and the obstacles he encountered to get here.

Gera posted pictures of a handwritten letter he wrote to his parents in 1998, soon after relocating from Delhi to Mumbai to pursue an acting career, on Sunday. He said on social media that it had been 28 years since he had sent those letters, reflecting on the passing of time and his career. The caption read: “This letter to my parents - 3rd Dec 1998 .. less than a month that I moved to Mumbai .. this is 28 years ago .. so no emails, Letters .. of course after that lots tv, some films, ad films, musical play, Radio, TikTok, Reels .. been a lovely journey with ups and downs .. God has been kind .. but this Dhurandhared .. dunno what



future holds .. but I wanna thank my 23 year old self for staying hopeful and Ma Pa for endless support #DhurandharTheRevenge” The letters shed light on Gaurav’s early struggles and goals. He wrote to his parents in one of them, saying, “Dear Mumma and Papa, How are all of you doing? I’m doing great over here. My financial situation has not improved, but I am optimistic about the future. Compared to Delhi, there is a lot more job here.

He also talked about his daily schedule, which included practicing in the evenings for the musical Man of La Mancha, which he called a famous production. In the letters,

Gaurav described his humble living situation, mentioning that he shared a small cottage with a buddy, which helped keep costs under control. “Phone, electricity, gas, water, and food bills are additional costs.” He wrote, “Mumma and Papa, the future is bright but I still have a lot to learn,” emphasizing the endurance and patience needed to make a name for himself in the field. Both fans and coworkers responded to the message. “Aur tab pata na tha ki aapki kahani itni khuubsoorat ho jayegi ek din (And back then, we didn’t know that your story would turn out to be so beautiful one day),” wrote Dhurandhar co-star Naveen Kaushik. “Bhai yar (brother), it got me teary man @gauravgera,” remarked co-star Aditya Uppal. Others, such as Harshdeep Kaur and Karan V. Grover, expressed admiration and support for his lengthy career in entertainment. Gaurav’s commitment was commended by social media users; one said, “Finally your work is getting its due credit,” while another described the letters as “priceless.”

Aditya Dhar’s “Dhurandhar” is praised by Kajal Aggarwal



Mumbai: Kajal Aggarwal has praised Aditya Dhar’s film “Dhurandhar: The Revenge,” calling it a “cinematic ecstasy” and highlighting the performances of Ranveer Singh and R. Madhavan. Released on March 19, the film, a sequel to 2025’s

“Dhurandhar,” also features Arjun Rampal, Sanjay Dutt, Sara Arjun, and Rakesh Bedi reprising their roles. It earned over ₹43 crore from paid previews on March 18, reaching a total of ₹102.55 crore on its opening day, with worldwide box office earnings exceed-

ing ₹600 crore. Aggarwal expressed her admiration on Instagram, particularly praising Singh’s emotional performance and Madhavan’s calming authority. She commended their co-stars, including Yami Gautam and music composer Shashwat Sachdev, for their contributions to the film. She concluded her note by congratulating the entire team, stating that the experience of watching the film is what truly remains. “Dhurandhar: The Revenge” was produced by Jyoti Deshpande and Lokesh Dhar and is available in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam languages.

Arjun Rampal says Dhurandhar was his “revenge” after remembering the atrocities of 26/11 on his birthday



Mumbai: The film Dhurandhar, directed by Aditya Dhar and premiered in December of last year, left viewers horrified as it portrayed the terrifying night of the 2008 Mumbai bombings. He recently made his appearance at the HEL-

LO! Hall of Fame Awards, Arjun Rampal described how working on Dhurandhar felt like a kind of personal retaliation and recalled seeing the atrocities of the attacks firsthand. Arjun revealed that he was in a hotel to pick up his pals during

the 2008 attacks. He disclosed that the first explosion happened close to Mahim when they were traveling to the Taj Hotel to celebrate his birthday. “I heard that sound and the whole glass kind of shook and rattled, and we were like, ‘What the hell was that?’” the actor recalled the incident. Our phones were ringing within ten minutes, and everyone reported that a gang fight had broken out in Colaba. The entire Four Seasons hotel was cordoned off in twenty to thirty minutes. “You can stay here for the night, but we can’t let anybody go out, it’s not safe,” said Adarsh Jatia, who gladly offered me a suite. “I witnessed the horrors of 26/11 unfold on my birthday,” he continued. I felt like I was about to get ill, so I had to stop at least three times on my way home in the morning. I knew I was going to exact revenge after Aditya Dhar told me about the 26/11 sequence, and I did just that with Dhurandhar.

Bharat Mata Ki Jai is all I have

to say. One of the main handlers behind the attack, ISI Major Iqbal, was portrayed by Arjun Rampal in Dhurandhar. While in real time communicating with the terrorists at the hotel, his character is seen having fun and celebrating. After a violent altercation, Ranveer Singh’s character Hamza exacts revenge by killing Iqbal in the follow-up Dhurandhar: The Revenge. In addition, Rakesh Bedi, Sanjay Dutt, Sara Arjun, and R. Madhavan play important roles in the movie. Aditya Dhar’s film’s first installment brought in ₹1,300 crore at the box office worldwide. Fans eagerly anticipated Dhurandhar: The Revenge after its enormous popularity. It launched to favorable reviews and a booming start, earning ₹145 crore on its first day. The movie reportedly made over ₹450 crore at the domestic box office and ₹750 crore worldwide in just four days. The movie is still having a great run in theaters.

Fans are asked by Rakesh Bedi not to share Aditya Dhar movie spoilers

Mumbai: Actor Rakesh Bedi is enjoying the accolades for his role in Dhurandhar: The Revenge, which many have referred to as Aditya Dhar’s “surprise package.” The seasoned actor portrays the cunning politician Jameel Jamali, who is essential to revealing the film’s startling conclusion. The star asked fans on Monday not to reveal movie spoilers on social media. The seasoned actor said, “I am proud to be a part of Dhurandhar 2,” in a video that he uploaded to his Instagram. I have to admit that Dhurandhar has destroyed numerous box office records in addition to shattering them. It has been deeply ingrained in people’s hearts both in India and elsewhere. In addition to being a commercial success, the movie is having an effect on the large number of Indians who have seen it. The responses



and collections are unheard of, unprecedented, and unmatched. This movie has a lot of “un-s.” “But I have one request to make,” he went on. While watching the movie, please refrain from filming scenes and sharing them on social media. since they include spoilers! Additionally, avoid posting spoilers on social media, especially for the movie’s final scene or finale, as this is improper and constitutes spoilsport. Thank you. “Aap ne mazy le liye film

ka (You enjoyed the film) let the others enjoy now.” Aditya Dhar has already made a plea to viewers, asking them to keep the viewing experience intact by not disclosing spoilers. “That’s how movies should be experienced,” he said. Not in a fuzzy picture on someone’s phone. Therefore, I would like to make one sincere request: PLEASE DO NOT SHARE SPOILERS! “Let each and every fan in with no idea except curiosity and leave with

their own intensely personal interpretation of their emotions. You made Dhurandhar what it is. In closing, Aditya wrote, “Now I’m trusting you to protect what this becomes.” Dhurnadhar 2 had paid premieres on March 18 and opened in theaters on March 19 in Hindi and all other South Indian languages. In the first movie, Ranveer Singh played an Indian spy who climbs the ranks of Pakistan’s underworld while infiltrating gangs in Lyari to destroy a terror network that targets India. His training to become Hamza Ali Mazari was depicted in the sequel. Arjun Rampal and Ranveer will engage in a fierce battle. Danish Pandor, Sanjay Dutt, Sara Arjun, and R. Madhavan are also featured in Dhurandhar 2. So far, the movie has made around ₹400 crore net locally and ₹700 crore worldwide.

Alia Bhatt congratulates the Dhurandhar 2 crew on their remarkable run

Mumbai: Dhurandhar The Revenge has exceeded all expectations and is shattering box office records. Ranveer Singh plays Hamza Ali Mazari and Jaskirat Singh Rangi in Aditya Dhar’s spy thriller. The origins of his character and how he turned into an Indian spy in Pakistan are explored in greater detail in the sequel. Ranveer’s performance has been praised as his career-best by a number of actors and spectators. Actor Alia Bhatt has now seen the movie and given it a review, praising Ranveer’s performance. Alia posted a still from the movie with Ranveer on her Instagram Stories, writing, “Jaskirat Singh Rangi and this moment... is everything” (red heart emoticon). The actor’s and director’s magic in perfect harmony! The sequence in question occurs at the very end of the movie, when Ranveer’s character travels back to India to reunite with his family after a long absence. As he realizes what he needs to do for his family’s welfare, the camera remains on his face while he starts to cry.”- Congratulations Team Dhurandhar for this historic run at the movies,” she continued. Eternal Sunshine Productions, Alia’s producing company, had already praised Dhurandhar, the first movie, for making scripting history. “It is the voice of today’s India,” the post stated. Today’s India has made this decision. It is based on a historical period. It is now the most important chapter in the history of Indian cinema. To Dhurandhar, cheers. And to the entire team, three cheers. You brought the high tide back to the theaters in addition to making waves. Imagine what part two will bring in the spring if this is what part one accomplished in the winter! Gully Boy and Rocky Aur Rani kii Prem Kahani are the two movies in which Alia and Ranveer co-starred. With paid premieres on March 18 and a release date on March 19, the film has already made over ₹450 crore. In the first movie, Ranveer Singh played an Indian spy who climbs the ranks of Pakistan’s underworld while infiltrating gangs in Lyari to destroy a terror network that targets India.

Under the direction of Aditya Dhar, the follow-up explores the beginnings of Ranveer’s character, Jaskirat Singh Rangi, or Hamza Ali Mazari. Additionally, it carries on the plot from the first section by demonstrating how the Indian spy succeeds in destroying the terror network in Pakistan that poses a threat to India.

While Aruna Irani, 79, dances on Indian Idol 16, Shreya Ghoshal applauds

New Delhi: An forthcoming episode of Indian Idol 16 is expected to be filled with charm and nostalgia thanks to veteran actors Aruna Irani and Farida Jalal.

The two legendary stars appear on stage as special guests in a brand-new trailer that the producers recently released, offering fans a sneak peek at the exciting episode. The judges are ecstatic as Aruna Irani and Farida Jalal make their grand entrance. Shreya Ghoshal excitedly celebrates and hoots while Vishal Dadlani whistles. Aruna Irani is seen dancing to her well-known song Kaliyan Ka Chaman, which instantly transports everyone back in time and adds to the nostalgia. The actors are introduced in the promo by a voice that says, “Indian television par dikhengi, bade parde ki do iconic legends (Two legends of the big screen will be seen



on Indian television).” “Mujhe yahan aakar bahut bahut khushi hui, thank you and love you all (I am very, very happy to be here),” adds Aruna. This Saturday and Sunday at 8 p.m., Sony TV will broadcast the episode. One of the most recognizable faces in Bollywood, Aruna Irani started her career as a young artist. She has starred in more than 500 movies and is renowned for her vibrant comedic and character performances. An-

daz, Jaani Dushman, Gol Maal, Judaai, Hum Paanch, Beta, Dil To Pagal Hai, and more are just a few of the successful movies in which Aruna has appeared. Her most recent appearance was in the movie Kesari Veer. Suniel Shetty, Vivek Oberoi, Sooraj Pancholi, and others played important roles in the 2025 movie, but it did not win over viewers. Conversely, Farida Jalal is adored by many for her charming and cozy

on-screen persona. She has starred in more than 200 movies during the course of her more than 50-year career. She played a number of main and supporting parts after starting her career with Taqdeer in 1967. Her roles in Aradhana, Paras, Henna, Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge, Kuch Kuch Hota Hai, and other films are well known. In addition to her work in movies, she is well-known for her parts in television series like Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi, Dekh Bhai Dekh, and Shararat. The most recent film in which Farida appeared was O Romeo, directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. The movie, which also starred Avinash Tiwary, Shahid Kapoor, and Triptii Dimri, had mixed reviews from reviewers and barely made ₹110 crore at the box office globally. Audiences were both impressed and taken aback by Farida’s performance.

Producer Vijay Kumar and Firoz Nadiadwala’s legal battle for Hera Pheri 3

Upcoming film *Hera Pheri 3*, featuring Akshay Kumar, Paresh Rawal, and Suniel Shetty, is embroiled in a legal dispute over copyright ownership between producer Firoz Nadiadwala and rival producer Vijay Kumar. Kumar claims that Nadiadwala has been delaying legal proceedings related to the franchise rights, asserting that they hold “complete and unambiguous rights” to the *Hera Pheri* franchise. He alleges that Nadiadwala made the second installment without permission and proceeded to work on a third film, all while disregarding their communications. Despite a court’s initial affirmation of their rights, Kumar expresses frustration over Nadiadwala’s attempts to stall the judicial process and his efforts to transfer ownership elsewhere. The Madras High Court



had previously questioned Nadiadwala’s legitimacy in producing *Hera Pheri 3*, given that Seven Arts International claims copyright ownership. The original film, released in 2000, quickly gained popularity, leading to a sequel in 2006. In the latest updates, Rawal expressed optimism

about filming resuming soon after the producer and actor’s disputes are resolved, highlighting that the ongoing legal challenges are unrelated to his role in the film. He noted that once agreements are finalized between Nadiadwala and Kumar, production can move forward.

In Dhurandhar 2, Saumya Tandon acknowledges that she misses Akshaye Khanna

Mumbai: In Aditya Dhar’s eagerly awaited follow-up, actor Saumya Tandon returns to the gritty Dhurandhar universe, but the trip hasn’t been without its emotional detours. While filming the second installment, the actor, who is reprising her part in the franchise, acknowledges that she missed spending time on screen with her on-screen spouse, Akshaye Khanna. Saumya talked candidly about her brief part in Aditya Dhar’s Dhurandhar 2 in an interview with Variety India. She stated, “I actually do not have much to do in Dhurandhar 2,” in reference to the role. One of my scenes has gone viral, but I don’t want to talk about it since I think they should watch the film first. It is essentially at Rehman Dakaith’s maiyyat

(funeral), and I would describe it as a really dramatic event. She’s furious once more, and she’s kind of in a scenario where she’s questioning, which makes the scene quite complex. She is also in a dire situation. I would just state that there were a lot of sequences in this specific project, Dhurandhar, where your eyes had to convey everything. According to Saumya, delving into Ulfath Rehman’s emotional depth was the hardest part of working on the Dhurandhar movies. She appeared as Akshaye Khanna’s character, Rehman Dakaith’s wife. Here, Saumya also revealed how much she missed her co-star during filming the second installment, describing his absence as one of the most difficult aspects of the process.

Naturally, I missed him a much as a viewer. In the first movie, he was excellent. However, there is a story that continues beyond his passing, she added. She thinks the movie would encourage India to produce more quality material. The setting of Dhurandhar was Lyari, a Karachi suburb notorious for its deadly turf fights and gang conflicts. It focused on clandestine intelligence operations against the backdrop of terror and geopolitical events such as the 26/11 Mumbai assaults, the 2001 Parliament Attack, and the hijacking of the Kandahar airliner. The follow-up, Dhurandhar: The Revenge, explores the beginnings of Ranveer Singh’s character, Hamza Ali Mazari, as Jaskirat Singh Rangi and follows the young man’s development



into a clandestine agent. The aftermath of mobster Rehman Dakaith’s death in Lyari is also depicted in the movie. R. Madhavan, Arjun Rampal, Sanjay Dutt,

Rakesh Bedi, Sara Arjun, and Arjun Rampal are also included. The movie was released on March 19 and made ₹454 crore in its first weekend in India.

PM Modi’s Lok Sabha speech: domestic LPG and Indian safety in Iran and the Gulf were given top priority



New Delhi, Mar 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the parliament for the first time since the US-Iran war began in West Asia. He stated that India is addressing a number of economic, security, and humanitarian issues brought on by the conflict while making sure that its people and vital supplies are kept safe. Modi expressed alarm about disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, stating that attacks on commercial shipping are “unacceptable” and that the government is keeping a careful eye on routes to guarantee continuous supply of fertilizer, gas,

and crude oil. PM Modi addressed the Lok Sabha, saying, “The entire world is affected, and we are making efforts that India feels the effect the least.” “The strong fundamentals of the Indian economy have helped,” he continued. Since the start of the war, almost 3.75 lakh Indians have returned home, including 1,000 who were evacuated from Iran, including 700 medical students, according to Modi, who said the government has prioritized the safety of Indians amid the violence in West Asia. He admitted that some Indians had died and others had been hurt, but he also said that afflicted families are receiving medical care and financial support. With the use of emergency help-lines and round-the-clock control centers, Indian missions are helping workers and visitors around the Gulf. Additionally, Modi claimed to have had two rounds of negotiations with West Asian leaders who guaranteed Indian nationals’ safety. Modi raised concerns about disruptions

in the Strait of Hormuz and stated that attacks on commercial vessels are “not acceptable,” highlighting the dangers to international trade. He stated that in order to guarantee that vital supplies like gas, crude oil, and fertilizers continue to reach India without significant interruption, the government is keeping a careful eye on shipping lanes in the Gulf. In response to worries about agriculture, Modi reassured farmers that the government will support them in spite of worldwide uncertainties. He recounted how farmers were safeguarded even during supply delays during the Covid-19 outbreak and stated that India presently has adequate food grain stocks. Given their reliance on routes impacted by the fighting, the government is likewise closely monitoring fertilizer supply. In view of the violence in West Asia, Prime Minister Modi stated, “I want to tell farmers that the government will continue to make every effort to help them.” He assured them that

there would be no disruptions to the electricity supply, saying, “At present, we have enough coal stocks.” Regarding energy, Modi stated that the government is working to guarantee that gasoline, diesel, and LPG are always available. Given the circumstances, domestic LPG usage has been given priority, and efforts are being made to keep fuel costs from rising sharply.

He emphasized that India today imports gas, LPG, and crude oil from 41 nations after diversifying its energy imports over time. Additionally, he guaranteed that there would be no disruptions to the electricity supply and that coal supplies would be sufficient. “The government has given residential LPG consumers priority due to supply uncertainties. At the same time, more LPG is being produced domestically. Additionally, ongoing efforts have been made to guarantee a steady supply of gasoline and diesel throughout the nation, he stated.

The Reasons Behind the Gurugram strike by Ola and Uber taxi drivers

New Delhi, Mar 23: Citing mounting worries over driver safety, app-based taxi drivers announced a strike in Gurugram on Monday, demanding that ride-hailing companies mandate Know Your Customer (KYC) authentication for passengers. On Saturday, drivers gathered outside Sector 46 to relate several incidents of threats, intimidation, and attacks that they claim have left them feeling exposed and unprotected at work. The protest focuses on the January 2026 murder of Suraj Singh, a 25-year-old driver who was allegedly killed by passengers during a robbery attempt in Gurugram’s Sector 37C. Uber and Ola services have been severely disrupted around the city as a result of the protest, which was spearheaded by driver unions and backed by sizable segments of the gig economy. The strike has severely impacted commuters in important residential and commercial areas. Ride reservations now take an average of 10 to 15 minutes instead of the usual 1-2 minutes, according to user reports of noticeably lengthier wait times. In high-demand areas like Sector 46, DLF Phase, and Sohna Road, where app-based mobility is crucial for everyday commuting,

availability has also drastically decreased, with numerous cancellations being reported. To prevent attacks and threats, drivers are requesting that passengers be validated using Aadhaar or another legitimate form of identification. They contend that riders remain anonymous despite undergoing stringent background checks, making drivers vulnerable in remote locations or on late-night excursions. Driver representatives claim that the absence of required KYC for riders allows people with evil intent or those using fictitious identities or unreliable phone numbers to access services without being held accountable. Concerns about an increase in verbal abuse, nonpayment, threats, and, in certain situations, violent attacks during rides have been voiced by a number of drivers. Many drivers assert that current app safety features, such as SOS buttons, frequently fall short of offering prompt aid in an emergency. Drivers lack a route for reporting rider misconduct or harassment because there is no specific mechanism in place. In order to combat growing operating expenses and declining profits, some organizations have also called for a minimal base fare.

Revenues from IPL team sponsorship surpass Rs 1,000 crore

New Delhi: The Indian Premier League (IPL) has solidified its position as the nation’s and possibly the world’s most effective marketing weapon. According to a WPP Media “Sporting Nation” report for 2025, team sponsorship revenues have reportedly surpassed the Rs 1,000 crore milestone. This historic accomplishment reflects both the league’s enormous popularity and the growing confidence of Indian corporates in cricket as a premier marketing vehicle. This increase in sponsorship gives franchises a crucial financial buffer, guaranteeing stability outside of traditional ticket sales and media rights. The diversity of brand categories is one of the main forces behind this commercial development. Although fantasy gaming companies used to dominate the market, legislative changes have caused the balance to shift in favor of industries including technology, aviation, finance, and renewable energy. These businesses see the IPL as the main entry point



to India’s sizable consumer base, increasing the league’s commercial appeal. worldwide brands are becoming more and more prevalent, and many deals now include activation rights outside of India, indicating their growing significance on a worldwide scale. However, the ten franchises do not split the 1000 crore number equally. The top three teams are the Chennai Super Kings, Royal Challengers Bengaluru, and Mumbai Indians. These three clubs set the standard for the remainder of the league with their combined sponsorship earnings of almost Rs 150 crore, according to a report. The Gujarat Titans and Kolkata Knight Riders are in the second tier of commercial worth, followed by the other teams, which add

up to a total of Rs 1,033 crore. “IPL is not just big, it is the backbone of Indian sports commerce,” the paper was informed by Vinit Karnik, MD of WPP Media. “It goes to show that if there is an aggregated audience for an impact property, the traditional sponsors or new sponsors are ready to step up.” The IPL’s business trajectory is impressive when compared to other worldwide titans. With yearly revenues of more than GBP 6 billion, the English Premier League is still the richest football league in the world, but the IPL has already overtaken it in terms of the value of media rights per game, only surpassed by the NFL worldwide. The IPL’s enormous financial footprint is compressed into a two-month period, resulting in a high-intensity “sprint” for brand engagement as opposed to the “marathon” strategy of European and American sporting leagues, whereas Formula One and the Premier League enjoy year-round global visibility.

The RCB star doesn’t agree with AB de Villiers that Vaibhav Sooryavanshi would ever be a professional



New Delhi: Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is a player that fans are eager to see when the Indian Premier League 2026 gets underway in six days. A year after igniting the IPL with a daring 35-ball century, the adolescent, who turns 15 on Friday, is back with the Rajasthan Royals. Sooryavanshi has swept the globe in the last year, winning the Under-19 World Cup and busting hundreds in Australia, South Africa, and England.

However, a number of bowlers are thought to have identified his weakness and figured him out, so his real test will start in a few days. A promising future is promised by Sooryavanshi. He has the potential to be a trailblazer, a maverick, and possibly a future legend. But according to Jitesh Sharma, he might never be a “professional.” The RCB batsman and wicketkeeper, who led Sooryavanshi in the India A Asia Cup the previous year, declared that he would gladly spend a million dollars on the adolescent. However, Jitesh disagreed with the legendary South African player when AB de Villiers questioned him about Sooryavanshi’s accomplishments, claiming that the young player might never be completely professional in his off-field manner. “Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, right now. He has the potential to rule world cricket, in my opinion.

When asked which young person he would invest a million dollars in, Jitesh responded, “He has gear No. 6 and a very good set of skills.” After witnessing the young player destroy South Africa in the Under-19 World Cup final, where Sooryavanshi hammered 175 to help India win, De Villiers stated he is a fan of the young player. The way he built on his IPL 2025 form and handled each tournament with the same intensity was what most pleased AB de Villiers. Sooryavanshi, who frequently appears in India’s Under-19 squad, also amazed de Villiers with the openness and fluidity with which he plays. “He’s an excellent player. In the Under-19s, I observed him. It’s not always simple to maintain the same level of performance while tasting the big cricket and IPL. His performance in that World Cup really pleased me. incredibly competent. The previous captain of South Africa remarked, “He’s very mature for his age.” “I’m referring to his style of play. He continued to follow his strategy. He performed in the same manner as he did in the IPL. didn’t make an effort to be someone else. He didn’t act haughtily toward the bowlers. However, he will become a professional. However, Jitesh offered an alternative viewpoint of ABD’s “professional” posture. “He lacks professionalism. That’s what I can tell you. I don’t think he will ever become professional, despite everyone’s best efforts. He might be on the field, but he won’t be off it. I’m making an effort. He said, “I ask him not to have ice cream at night.

PM, 8,931 days and counting The leader of India with the longest tenure is Narendra Modi



New Delhi, Mar 23: After serving as prime minister and chief minister for 8,931 days, Narendra Modi is now the longest-standing head of an elected government in India. With the accomplishment, PM Modi overtook Pawan Kumar Chamling, who held the position of Chief Minister of Sikkim for 8,930 days. Before resigning on May 21, 2014, to pursue a career in national politics, Prime Minister Modi led the western state of Gujarat for over 13 years after taking office as Chief Minister on Oc-

tober 7, 2001. On May 26, 2014, he took the oath of office as India’s fourteenth prime minister. He has won three straight general elections in 2014, 2019, and 2024, making him the first non-Congress leader to obtain a complete majority in the Lok Sabha. Throughout his political career, he has also served as Gujarat’s longest-serving chief minister and the prime minister with the most preceding state chief ministerial experience.

Leaders of the ruling BJP and its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) allies poured in congratulations. “Modi Ji’s decades of Seva have shaped an era of his own,” said Union Home Minister Amit Shah on social media. The Modi administration has completely changed India, whether it is by granting the impoverished their rights, establishing new developmental milestones, or boosting the country’s pride on international stages.” PM Modi’s decades of public service, according to Union Minister and former BJP chief JP Nadda, has always been about prioritizing the country and implementing significant change on

the ground. Under his direction, people-centric policies that have given the poor, young people, women, and farmers more authority are propelling India toward the vision of Viksit Bharat. India is now more powerful and self-assured on the international scene,” Nadda wrote on X. PM Modi’s voyage, according to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, illustrates the deep popular trust and abiding connection with the Indian people. Yogi Adityanath, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, greeted the prime minister and referred to him as the “ceaselessly devoted to the means for the happiness, prosperity, and contentment of 1.45 billion Indians” and the “steadfast charioteer” of India’s Amrit Kaal. PM Modi’s completion of 8,931 days in office, according to Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, demonstrated commitment, visionary leadership, and unwavering dedication to the advancement and prosperity of the nation. As he guides the country to even higher heights, he wished the Prime Minister continued health, vigor, and success.

SC consents to take into account the National Emblem plea on the administrative side of the courtroom

New Delhi, Mar 23: Even though the Supreme Court rejected to hear the matter within its judicial jurisdiction, Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant on Monday consented to review, on the administrative side, a plea seeking the exhibition of the Indian national emblem on the main dome of the court. A bench made up of CJI Kant, justices Joymalya Bagchi, and Vipul M. Pancholi noted that the case was clearly within the Chief Justice and companion judges’ administrative purview and did not call for a court decision. “Avoid submitting such petitions. On the administrative side, such a problem may be taken into consideration. The petitioner, Badaravada Venugopal, who personally pleaded the case, was informed by the bench that he might write to the CJI on the administrative side. Venugopal told the court that although he had previously written to the CJI last year, the registry had told him that the Supreme Court uses its own emblem.

In response, CJI Kant stated that the previous statement was made before he was appointed. He expressed a willingness to reexamine the matter administratively by saying, “That was before November 24, 2025... that was also a view but we can look at this again.” The petition was then dismissed by the bench, which instructed that it be regarded as a representation. It requested that the Supreme Court’s secretary general draft a memorandum and present it to the Chief Justice of India, who is the appropriate authority. The court noted in its ruling that “the issue needs to be dealt with on the administrative side.” The Ashoka Lion Capital and the Sanskrit phrase “Yato Dharmastato Jayah” (where there is dharma, there is triumph) are positioned beneath the Ashoka Chakra in the Supreme Court’s official insignia. Adopted on January 26, 1950, the day the Supreme Court of India was established, the symbol is a modification of the Samath Lion Capital, which stands

for justice, righteousness, and the power of India’s top court.

A slightly different image of four Asiatic lions standing back-to-back (three visible) on a circular abacus with sculptures of a lion, bull, horse, and elephant, the Ashoka Chakra in the center, and the motto “Satyameva Jayate” (truth alone triumphs) inscribed below is the National Emblem, which appears on currency and official documents. In his appeal, Venugopal had asked the Supreme Court administration and the Union government to guarantee “statutory and constitutional compliance” in the National Emblem’s exhibition atop the court building’s main architectural element, the central dome. In accordance with the Constitution and the legal framework governing the use of the State Emblem, the appeal contended that adequate institutional and technical measures should be adopted to enable such display if any architectural or structural provision was needed.

Virat Kohli Talks About His IPL 2026 Title Win and Shares the Hardest Part of the Final

New Delhi: Virat Kohli, the batting legend of India and Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), talked about the team’s first Indian Premier League (IPL) victory last season. He said that he felt a “sense of calm confidence” after making it to the finals and that the “toughest part” of the evening was waiting for the game to end after winning the title. As ‘King Kohli’ finished his collection of white-ball trophies by winning the elusive prize last year, which also marked his 18th season with the team, the man in the number 18 shirt will finally be entering an IPL season without feeling heavy in his chest and desperate in his bat swing to win that trophy. TV cameras caught Virat crying during the game’s last moments as the emotional burden of years of not winning a trophy despite his massive run total was finally lifted ball by ball during the innings’ last over. “I have been here since day one, and so has Mane (Team’s masseur Ramesh Mane) Kaka,” Virat stated in a video released by RCB. Since we are perhaps the oldest team in the RCB group, I must admit that I felt relaxed and confident when we advanced

to the finals (versus Punjab Kings). Virat added that he was aware that it would not be a “cakewalk” despite his confidence. It’s a final, and there’s another team that’s played quite well to get there and has clearly defeated many strong teams, so they’re also extremely confident about what they want to do,” he continued. Virat claimed that his team had “extra motivation to hold their nerve” because of their previous near-misses, including close defeats to Sunrisers Hyderabad and Deccan Chargers in the 2009 and 2016 finals. We have to play excellent cricket to reach the finals because the league has grown so much more tough. It is not a coincidence or an accident. We are an incredible squad that has earned the right to be here today after defeating some very strong teams. Overall, we all had a fantastic evening,” he remarked. “To be honest, I found it extremely odd and unreal when everything was finally coming together. There are a lot of things that flash before your eyes. The entire 18-year journey—all the highs and lows, the good and horrible times—seems to be building up in front of you, and it will happen within



the next ten minutes. It is an experience that is incredibly challenging to describe. “And I shall always remember that event. In particular, you hope that Josh (Hazlewood) does not bowl a no-ball in the final over, when you know the game is finished, but he never does. As I mentioned earlier, you are still hoping for the ideal outcome, but there was a quiet assurance. The hardest part of the evening was definitely waiting for those final three balls after realizing that the game was over for them,” he said. Virat finished as the team’s top run scorer and third overall last season with 657 runs in 15 innings at an average of 54.75 and a strike rate of 144.71, including eight fifties.

Shah Amit To Present the Bill for Central Armed Police Forces In the Rajya Sabha

New Delhi, Mar 23: Union Home Minister Amit Shah is set to introduce the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026, in the Rajya Sabha, aiming to establish an “umbrella law” governing the recruitment, deputation, promotion, and service conditions of officers in Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), including the CRPF, BSF, ITBP, and SSB. This proposal follows a Supreme Court ruling in October 2025 that instructed a reduction in the deputation of Indian Police Service (IPS) officers and mandated a cadre review within six months. The Bill specifies that 50% of Inspector General positions and 67% of Additional Director General roles will be filled by deputation, while higher ranks will only be appointed this way. The legislation seeks to clarify and consolidate service provisions to avoid litigations arising from fragmented regulations, which have historically hindered operational efficiency. Notably, retired CAPF officers have filed a contempt plea against the Home Secretary for not adhering to the Supreme Court’s order regarding these rulings.

The Bill articulates the critical role of IPS officers within CAPFs and aims to enhance coordination between central and state authorities essential for national security.

The proposed law emphasizes legislative clarity and the need for a unified law to facilitate recruitment and service conditions in CAPFs, reflecting their unique operational requirements.

Sebastian Korda Stuns World Number One Carlos Alcaraz In Miami Open Third Round



New Delhi: World No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz suffered a shock exit from the Miami Open after going down to World No. 36 Sebastian Korda in the third round on Sunday, as the American clinched the biggest win of his career with a 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 victory in a match that lasted two hours and 14 minutes.

Korda looked in complete control early on and even stood on the brink of victory in the second set, serving for the match at 5-3. However, the moment slipped away as he was broken at love, allowing Alcaraz to force a decider and briefly swing the momentum in his favour. Despite the setback, Korda showed remarkable composure under pres-

sure. The 25-year-old broke Alcaraz for 4-3 in the third set and held his nerve from there, eventually sealing the match with an unreturnable serve on his second match point. "It feels great. I took the scenic route, that's for sure," Korda said in his on-court interview after the match. "It was a little more stress than I would want, but I'm happy with how I played and how I stayed with it. I got myself into some nasty situations, but I kept going, kept believing, and I played really well at the end," he added. Korda had earlier taken the first set with authority, firing down 12 aces in the match and consistently keeping Alcaraz under pressure with an aggressive

Virat Kohli Hits Rapid Twenty Nine While Tim David And Venkatesh Iyer Both Shine

RCB Batters Show Intense Aggressive Intenttice Game

New Delhi: Virat Kohli, Jitesh Sharma, Tim David, and Venkatesh Iyer were on song in Royal Challengers Bengaluru's first practice game at the Chinnaswamy Stadium on Sunday, March 22. Divided into two teams, captained by Krunal Pandya and Venkatesh Iyer, the batters had a good outing as they participated in a friendly game ahead of RCB's opener against Sunrisers Hyderabad on March 28. The defending champions will play the opening match of the Indian Premier League 2026 season, hoping to begin their title defence on a positive note. The members of the squad have assembled in Bengaluru and have already begun their preparations in full flow.

RCB posted a video of their practice session on social media on Monday morning, capturing key moments from the game. In the video, all-rounder Krunal Pandya shared his takeaways, stating that several batters in the team looked in great touch on Sunday. "It was a good practice game. Everyone had a good hit. Bhuvneshwar Kumar bowled really well, Abhinandan (Singh) bowled really well, Mangesh (Yadav) bowled really well. Among the batters, Jitesh played really well — some of his shots were amazing. Tim David played really well. Ven-



katesh and Virat batted well. The intent shown and some of the shots from Virat were amazing today. He is looking good, which is a great sign for us," Krunal Pandya said. Jitesh Sharma was the standout batter, smashing 81 runs off just 37 balls.

He is expected to shoulder the finisher's role once again and will be hoping for a stronger campaign with the bat this season. Alongside Jitesh, Australian Tim David (36 off 14) and Venkatesh Iyer (30 off 16) also

impressed with the bat. RCB are still working on finding the right role for the Indian all-rounder, who has the ability to play a dynamic role in any T20 setup. Krunal added that one of the highlights of the day was Virat Kohli's quickfire 29 off 12 balls, where the RCB opener looked in good rhythm from the outset. RCB will be hoping for yet another strong campaign from their talisman as they aim to prove that last season's title win was no fluke. RCB beat Punjab

Kings in a one-sided final in IPL 2025. They will open their campaign at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium on Saturday, playing their first two games at home before travelling to face Rajasthan Royals and Mumbai Indians in Guwahati and Mumbai respectively. Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) are planning to defend their IPL 2026 title with a strategy focused on Preparations M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

Hockey India Reveals Thirty Two Nominees For The Eighth Annual Awards Ceremony In New Delhi Today



New Delhi: Hockey India on Monday revealed the nominees for the Hockey India 8th Annual Awards 2025, which will be held on March 27 in New Delhi. The awards will recognise outstanding performances and contributions to Indi-

An hockey during the 2025 season. Among the most prestigious honours of the evening will be the Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr Award for 'Player of the Year', presented to the top male and female players. The awards will also highlight emerging

Talent through the Hockey India 'Jugraj Singh Award' for Upcoming Player of the Year (Men - Under 21) and the Hockey India 'Asunta Lakra Award' for Upcoming Player of the Year (Women - Under 21). Excellence Across playing positions

will be recognised through the Hockey India Baljit Singh Award for Goalkeeper of the Year, the Hockey India 'Pargat Singh Award' for Defender of the Year, the Hockey India 'Ajit Pal Singh Award' for Midfielder of the Year, and the Hockey India 'Dhanraj Pillay Award' for Forward of the Year, as per a Hockey India press release. A total of 32 nominees across these eight categories have made the final shortlist. In addition to these categories, the ceremony will include special recognitions such as the 'Hockey India President Award' for Outstanding Achievement and the Hockey India 'Jaman Lal Sharma Award' for Invaluable Contribution. Officials will also be acknowledged through the 'Hockey India President Award' for Umpire/Umpire Manager of the Year, the 'Hockey India President Award' for Technical Official of the Year, and the 'Best Member Unit Award.

Jaipur Optiemus Achievers Beat Jindal Panther To Clinch The Indian Open Polo Championship

New Delhi: Jaipur Polo Team delivered yet another commanding performance to defeat Jindal Panther 12-9 in a thrilling final of the Indian Open Polo Championship, securing their 11th title of an extraordinary season. Powered by a sensational eight-goal performance from Alejo Aramburu and strong contributions across the lineup, Jaipur combined attacking precision with composure under pressure to seal a hard-fought victory, according to a press release. Jaipur started on the front foot, asserting early dominance in the opening chukker. Alejo Aramburu struck decisively to set the tone, while HH Maharaja Sawai Padmanabh Singh of Jaipur added to the tally with a well-executed field goal. Pratap Singh Kanota and Daniel Otamendi also found the posts, ensuring Jaipur raced to a 4-2 lead by the end of the first chukker, despite resistance from Jindal Panther led by Juan Gris Zavaletta.

The second chukker saw Jaipur tighten its control over the game. Their defensive organisation kept Jindal Panther at bay, while Aramburu continued his impressive form to extend Jaipur's advantage. With



Another goal added to their tally and no reply from the opposition, Jaipur moved to a comfortable 5-2 lead at halftime. Jindal Panther mounted a strong comeback in the third chukker, with Juan Gris Zavaletta leading the charge. Converting key opportunities, he helped his side close the gap significantly, while Siddhant Sharma also contributed to the scoreboard. Jaipur managed to respond through Aramburu to maintain their lead, but

The momentum had shifted, with the score tightening to 6-5 by the end of the third chukker. The fourth chukker turned into a closely contested battle, with both teams exchanging goals in quick succession. Jaipur held their nerve, with HH Maharaja Sawai Padmanabh Singh of Jaipur stepping up at a crucial moment to keep the scoreboard ticking. Jindal Panther, however, continued to press hard through Zavaletta

Vinicius Junior Brace Powers Real Madrid To Thrilling Comeback Against Atletico Madrid

New Delhi: Vinicius Jr scored a brilliant brace as Real Madrid came from behind to beat Atletico Madrid 3-2 in a pulsating derby at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday, keeping Alvaro Arbeloa's side within four points of LaLiga leaders Barcelona. What was billed as a relatively low-key Madrid derby - with Atletico sitting a distant fourth - turned into a five-goal thriller packed with drama, stunning strikes and a late red card that nearly swung the game again.

Real responded strongly after the break. Vinicius brought them level in the 52nd minute from the penalty spot after David Hanco clumsily tripped Brahim Diaz inside the area. Just three minutes later, Federico Valverde turned the game on its head, capitalising on a costly mistake from Jose Maria Gimenez to fire Real into the lead. However, Atletico refused to back down. Nahuel Molina stunned the Bernabeu in the 66th minute with a thunderous 30-metre strike that flew into the top corner, bringing Diego Simeone's side right back into the contest. But Vinicius once again stepped up when it mattered. The Brazilian restored Real's lead six minutes later with a sensational solo effort, cutting in from



The left, beating two defenders and unleashing an unstoppable shot into the far corner. The drama did not end there. Valverde was shown a straight red card late in the game for a reckless challenge on Alex Baena, reducing Real to 10 men and setting up a nervy finish. Julian Alvarez came closest to an equaliser for Atletico, striking the post in the closing stages, but Real held firm to seal a Cru-

Cial victory. "Real Madrid always come out on top," Vinicius said after the match. "I'm very pleased with the performance we put in today. We were in control from the start; we conceded a goal, but we kept our cool and did what we had to do so our fans could go home happy," he added. Real had started brightly and could have taken the lead early on, with Vinicius denied by a sharp save

From Juan Musso, while Valverde struck the post soon after. Vinicius was again at the heart of the action in the first half, only to be denied twice from close range by a brilliant goal-line clearance from Giuliano SimeOne. Those missed chances proved costly as Atletico punished Real on the counter through Lookman, but the hosts showed resilience after the break to wrest control of the contest.

Hardik Pandya Targets A Sixth IPL Title And Lasting Mumbai Indians Leadership Legacy



New Delhi: Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya wants to win the sixth Indian Premier League title for his team this season. Pandya, who returns to captain MI after a successful title defence in the T20 World Cup, has spoken about building his legacy and how he wants MI to play their best-ever cricket this season. After a quiet 2024 season, where Hardik returned to the franchise, MI put in a strong performance last season, reaching the playoffs. However, the campaign

Ended in heartbreak as the franchise was torn apart in Qualifier 2 of the tournament by Shreyas Iyer's Punjab Kings. The ultimate dream is to win the IPL for the sixth time," the Mumbai Indians captain said in the interview. "At the same time, it's about building a legacy. Mumbai Indians already have an incredible legacy, but I still remember when I was a new kid - the passion, the hard work, and how the team backed me and helped me grow," he added. Hardik Pandya, much like

Jasprit Bumrah, is a product of Mumbai's incredible scouting system - a setup that has consistently identified young talent and nurtured them into world-beaters who go on to dominate international cricket. Going forward, I want that culture to continue - where players step up, work hard and play the best kind of cricket. I want us to represent the best cricket Mumbai Indians have ever played, and the best cricket I've ever played. That's the legacy I want to leave - for myself the India.