

PM Modi says Congress neglected Northeast, calls region Ashtalakshmi of prosperity

Guwahati, Feb 14: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday accused the Congress of neglecting the Northeast during its rule, asserting that the BJP-led government considers the region as “Ashtalakshmi,” symbolizing eight forms of prosperity.

Speaking at a rally in Assam, his first visit to the Northeast since the recent Union Budget, Modi highlighted the government’s focus on infrastructure development, stating that the region is now a priority for economic growth. He cited ongoing projects, including advanced highways, as examples of the government’s



He contrasted this with the BJP-led NDA government’s approach, which he

said treats the Northeast as “Ashtalakshmi”—a symbol of prosperity and priority. His remarks underscored the political, cultural, and developmental significance of the region in India’s broader national vision. PM Modi accused Congress of sidelining the Northeast during its years in power, pointing out that the region received minimal financial support and infrastructural development. He cited figures to highlight the disparity: under Congress, Assam received only about ₹10,000 crore in tax share, Modi argued that this stark difference reflects the BJP’s commitment to neglect.

Pawan Khera urges PM Modi to visit Manipur during Assam trip

New Delhi, Feb 14: Amidst the recent cases of violence within Manipur, Congress leader Pawan Khera on Saturday stressed that PM Narendra Modi should visit the state while on a visit to Assam for other events today. In an ‘X’ post, Khera sarcastically shared air tickets booked for PM Modi, stating that Manipur, which has been “burning” since 2023, should not be abandoned, and added that the presence of Prime Minister would leave a long impact towards the people of the state. “Dear PM Narendra Modi, We understand that poll-bound states are always your top priority. But Manipur should not be abandoned. The state has been burning since 2023 - and it is burning again. You are already in Assam today. Manipur is just an hour away. Please go there as well. The presence of the Prime Minister can go a long way in reassuring our people in Manipur. To make it easier for you, we have even booked your flight from Guwahati to Imphal - you just have to get on the plane. As I do not have your number, I am sharing your flight ticket here. Kindly use it and show that the “PM CARES”,” Khera wrote on ‘X’.

On February 6, a protest against the swearing-in of Manipur’s new Deputy Chief Ministers, Nemcha Kipgen and Losii Dikho, turned violent as security forces clashed with the mob in Churachandpur district. The unrest reportedly began on Thursday at around 6 pm in the Tuibong Main Market area, where hundreds of young protesters attempted to push security forces back to their barracks. Earlier this week, miscreants set fire to several houses overnight in villages around Litan in Ukhrul district, Manipur Police said on Monday. According to the press note, while the situation in the affected areas remains tense, it has largely been brought under control. A Joint Control Room has been set up at Litan Police Station to coordinate urgent security measures, and senior officers are camping in the area to closely monitor the situation on the ground.



In Brief

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ED attaches properties worth Rs 8.94 cr

Guwahati, Feb 14: The Guwahati Zonal Office of Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached immovable properties worth Rs 8.90 crore in Guwahati and Goalpara, and movable properties worth Rs 3.71 lakh under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 in an investigation related to disproportionate assets case against Akhtar Hussain, the then Divisional Soil Conservation Officer, Cachar Soil Conservation Division, Silchar, and his wife Dr Jasmine Rahman, Senior Medical and Health Officer, Kamrup (Metro). ED initiated investigation on the basis of FIR registered by Chief Minister’s Special Vigilance Cell, Assam Police against Akhtar Hussain under Sections 13(1)(b)/13(2) of Prevention of Corruption Act. 1988 for possession of assets disproportionate to his known sources of income.

CM reviews National Highway projects in Mizoram

Aizawl: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma chaired a review meeting at the Chief Minister’s Conference Hall with officials working under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to assess the progress of National Highway projects in the state. The Chief Minister expressed appreciation to Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari for his continued support to Mizoram, noting that several state proposals have received positive consideration. He also highlighted ongoing discussions on adopting rigid pavement technology suited to Mizoram’s high rainfall conditions. The meeting reviewed the status of major highway projects being implemented by National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited and the state Public Works Department, including ongoing works, completed stretches, and challenges faced during execution.

Aaranyak Holds 4th Refresher Workshop on Applied Environmental Education in Guwahati

Guwahati, Feb 14: Aaranyak organised the 4th Refresher Workshop on Applied Environmental Education from February 11 to 13 in Guwahati through its Environment Education and Capacity Building Division (EECBD). The three-day workshop brought together educators and practitioners engaged in environmental education and conservation outreach to strengthen their understanding of applied environmental education approaches and practical conservation strategies.



and led by Jayanta Kumar Pathak, Assistant Director and In-charge Head of EECBD, who focused on conservation strategies, environmental education frameworks, the Planning-Implementation-Evaluation (PIE) approach, and community engagement methods. The programme also emphasised integrating environmental education into school

systems and promoting experiential learning. Prajyan Sarma presented a case study on classroom engagement for water conservation and introduced soil conservation activities. Tikendrajit Gogoi guided participants in developing environmental games and creative learning tools such as eco-printing and nature journaling. On the final day, sessions focused

on ethical communication and effective community engagement, highlighting the importance of cultural context, seasonal needs, and holistic approaches. Participants developed IEC materials and learned basic evaluation techniques to assess the impact of environmental education initiatives. Sharing her experience, Sanshumoi Basumatary from Kokrajhar said the workshop introduced new ideas that transformed her perspective on environmental education.

The workshop concluded with an interactive valedictory session encouraging participants to apply their learning in strengthening environmental education practices at institutional and community levels for the wellbeing of both people and nature.

CM Khemchand pays tribute to Pulwana martyrs

Imphal, Feb 14: Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Saturday said that the sacrifice of Pulwana attack will never be forgotten, and its legacy will continue to inspire generations to serve the nation with honor and devotion. Sharing a post on X, CM Khemchand said “On this solemn day, we bow our heads in profound respect and remembrance of the brave martyrs who made the supreme sacrifice in the tragic terror attack at Pulwana.” The Chief Minister said, “Their unparalleled courage, unwavering dedication, and love for the nation will forever remain etched in our hearts. The people of Manipur stand in complete solidarity with the families of our fallen heroes and reaffirm our collective resolve to uphold the unity, integrity, and sovereignty of our great nation.” “Their sacrifice will never be forgotten, and their legacy will continue to inspire generations

to serve the Nation with honor and devotion,” he added. Former Chief Minister N Biren Singh also offered his tributes to those who were killed in the attack. In a post on X, Biren said, “As the nation remembers the martyrs of Pulwana, I offer my humble tributes to those brave hearts who chose duty above life. Their sacrifice strengthened the soul of our nation. The nation shall forever remain indebted to our martyrs, whose legacy will continue to guide and inspire generations to come.” The Pulwana attack occurred on February 14, 2019 occurred when a convoy of vehicles carrying Indian security personnel on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway was attacked by a vehicle-borne suicide bomber at Lethapora in the Pulwana district of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. The attack killed 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

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The Chief Minister expressed appreciation to Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari for his continued support to Mizoram, noting that several state proposals have received positive consideration. He also highlighted ongoing discussions on adopting rigid pavement technology

Governor, Chief Minister extend Lui-Ngai-Ni greetings

Imphal, Feb 14: Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla extended his warm greetings and best wishes to the people of Manipur, particularly to the Naga community, on the auspicious occasion of the Lui-Ngai-Ni Festival, 2026. “Lui-Ngai-Ni, the seed-sowing festival celebrated by the Naga tribes of Manipur, marking the beginning of the new agricultural season and the new year reflects the community’s deep reverence for nature, tradition, and cultural heritage. The festival is an expression of thanksgiving for nature’s bounty and a prayerful invocation for peace, prosperity, and a fruitful year ahead,” the Governor said in his message. He said, “This vibrant celebration has grown into a symbol of unity and harmony, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and strengthening the bonds of social cohesion. It also highlights the rich cultural diversity of Manipur and reinforces the values of mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence”. The Governor expressed hope that the festival will be celebrated in its true spirit, inspiring collective goodwill, unity and progress. He prayed for peace, prosperity, and the continued well-being of the people and the State. On the auspicious occasion of Lui-Ngai-Ni 2026, Chief Minister Y Khemchand also extended his warm greetings to the people of the State, especially brothers and sisters of the Naga community. In his message, the Chief Minister said, “Celebrated annually on February 15, Lui-Ngai-Ni - the seed sowing festival reflects the rich cultural heritage, unity, and age-old traditions of the Naga people. Marked by traditional songs, dances, and rituals, the festival symbolises new beginnings, hope, and



the spirit of hard work as the agricultural season begins”. “This festival serves as a timely reminder of the essential values of harmony and mutual respect among all communities. Let us collectively uphold the values of brotherhood, coexistence, and compassion, and work together to build a peaceful, inclusive, and united Manipur,” he said. On this occasion, the Chief Minister called upon the people to pray for a bountiful harvest and seek the blessings of the Almighty for a peaceful and prosperous year ahead. May Lui-Ngai-Ni bring happiness and well-being to every home in the State, the Chief Minister wished.

ED attaches properties worth Rs 8.94 cr in Assam in disproportionate assets case

Guwahati, Feb 14: The Guwahati Zonal Office of Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached immovable properties worth Rs 8.90 crore in Guwahati and Goalpara, and movable properties worth Rs 3.71 lakh under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 in an investigation related to disproportionate assets case against Akhtar Hussain, the then Divisional Soil Conservation Officer, Cachar Soil Conservation Division, Silchar, and his wife Dr Jasmine Rahman, Senior Medical and Health Officer, Kamrup (Metro).

ED initiated investigation on the basis of FIR registered by Chief Min-

ister’s Special Vigilance Cell, Assam Police against Akhtar Hussain under Sections 13(1)(b)/13(2) of Prevention of Corruption Act. 1988 for possession of assets disproportionate to his known sources of income. The chargesheet filed by CM’S Special Vigilance Cell disclosed that during the check period from 09.04.2003 to 28.02.2023, Akhtar Hussain possessed assets disproportionate to his known sources of income to the tune of Rs. 8.97 crore. constituting 191.50 per cent of his known sources of income.

Financial investigations by ED revealed that Akhtar Hussain and his wife acquired multiple immovable proper-

ties during the check period by making payments substantially higher than the registered values shown in sale deeds, thereby concealing the actual deployment of Proceeds of Crime (POC). They could not satisfactorily explain the source of large cash amounts used for property purchases. Investigation also revealed that properties were strategically registered in the names of family members to create layers of concealment. Properties acquired through POC were used to generate monthly rental income. Cash deposits aggregating to Rs. 11.91 lakh were made in Akhtar Hussain’s accounts and Rs. 59.89 lakh in his wife’s accounts, according to ED.

sited to Mizoram’s high rainfall conditions.

The meeting reviewed the status of major highway projects being implemented by National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited and the state Public Works Department, including ongoing works, completed stretches, and challenges faced during execution. The meeting also revisited decisions from the previous review held in September last year.

Updates were also shared on highway improvement works across multiple districts and on proposals awaiting central approval.

The meeting was attended by PWD Minister Vanlalhlana, EF&CC Minister Lalthansanga, Revenue Minister B Lalthanzova, senior officials of the state government, and representatives of highway authorities.

Monastery living centres of culture, learning



Itanagar, Feb 14: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Friday described monasteries as living centres of culture, learning and compassion, while stressing on collective responsibility to support them. He made the remark while attending the consecration and inauguration of the new administrative block of Sera Jey Jamyang Choekhorling Monastery at the border district of Tawang. “Deeply humbled to be part of the consecration and inauguration of the new administrative block of Sera Jey Jamyang Choekhorling Monastery, in the august presence of Venerable Geshe Lob-sang Norbu la, chief administrator of Sera Jey

Monastery, Karnataka, His Eminence Dolhe Rinpoche Tenzin Kunkhyen la, Abbot of Sera Jey Jamyang Choekhorling Monastery and other dignitaries,” Khandu said in a post on X. Highlighting the importance of the newly developed infrastructure, the chief minister observed that it would significantly improve facilities and the academic environment for monks and students. “The newly inaugurated infrastructure will greatly enhance administrative efficiency, residential facilities, and the learning environment for monks and students,” he said. Khandu also appreciated the contribution made by the Tawang branch of State Bank of India, for supporting education and mobility. “The generous donation of a school bus by SBI is a commendable initiative that will directly benefit our children,” he said. Emphasising the spiritual and cultural significance of monasteries in society, the chief minister said, “Our monasteries are living centres of culture, discipline, learning, and compassion. Supporting them is a responsibility we all share.” Earlier in the day, Khandu also visited the historic spiritual leadership. “Visited Tawang Monastery this morning and had the profound privilege of receiving blessings from the Abbot, Venerable Phara Damey Tulku Rinpoche,” he said in another post.

The Cabinet of Tripura approves the college proposal: Tripura minister

Agartala, Feb 14: The Tripura Cabinet has approved the setting up of an ayurveda and a homeopathy medical college and hospital, a senior minister said on Friday. The northeastern state currently has three medical colleges, including the Agartala Govt Medical College, which offers PG courses in different disciplines.

“The Council of Ministers on Thursday cleared proposals for setting up two new medical colleges — an ayurvedic medical college and hospital and a homeopathy medical college and hospital. They will start functioning from the coming academic session (2026-27)”, Tourism Minister Susanta Chowdhury said at a press conference on Friday. He said the proposed ayurvedic medical college will initially function from Chandrapur in Gomati district until a full-fledged campus is ready at Tepania in the same district. “The homeopathy medical college will be established at Netaji Subhas ho-



meopathic hospital in West Tripura district.

Both the medical colleges will have 60 seats each”, he said. Chowdhury said the cabinet also approved a proposal for the appointment of 330 posts in the IT department and 110 veterinary of-

ficers in animal resources development department. “Out of the 330 posts in the IT department, 220 Assistant Technical Officer (ATO) posts will be filled through the Tripura Public Service Commission (TPSC). This is for the first time the IT department is going

to recruit such a large number of professionals,” he said. Chowdhury added that the cabinet also approved enhancement of stipend for boarders in tribal hostels from Rs 80 to Rs 100 per day. As many as 37,773 tribal students staying in hostels will benefit from the move.

Meghalaya police constitutes SIT to probe coal mine explosion

Shillong, Feb 14: Meghalaya police has constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the illegal coal mine explosion which led to the death of 30 mine workers in East Jaintia Hills district, officials said on Friday. The tragic mining accident occurred on February 5 morning at Mynsgat-Thangsko area. “In view of the recent coal mine accident that occurred at Thangsko, East Jaintia Hills District, Khliehriat and in order to ensure a fair, impartial and expeditious investigation into the circumstances leading to the incident, State Director General of Police Idashisha Nongrang stated in her order. The nine-member SIT will be headed by Deputy Inspector General of Police (Eastern Range) Vivekanand Singh Rathore. Nongrang directed the SIT to ascertain the cause and circumstances leading to the mining blast, to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the mining accident at Thangsko and to identify violations of Court’s order/NGT directions relating to illegal mining activities. “The SIT will also ensure that the investigation is carried out in a time-bound manner so as to bring the case to its logical conclusion and ensure delivery of justice in accordance with law,” Nongrang stated in her order. On February 9, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma announced to consti-



tute a judicial inquiry commission to probe the illegal coal mining tragedy at Mynsgat-Thangsko area. Moreover, the division bench of the Meghalaya High Court had on February 9 directed the state government to submit a detail report within ten days related to the illegal coal mining and arrest persons involved in connection with the Mynsgat-Thangsko blast. The bench comprising Justice Hamarsan Singh Thangkhiw and Justice Wanlura Dimgdoh warned that accountability

would be fixed, if necessary further orders would be passed for institution of a proper investigation and inquiry, by an independent or central agency. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has initiated suo motu of the dynamite explosion at an illegal coal mine, while the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued notices to the Meghalaya Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police, seeking a detailed report on the death of mine workers.

Modi will attend an airshow at ELF in Assam

Guwahati, Feb 14: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be in Assam on Saturday, beginning his visit at the Emergency Landing Facility (ELF) near Dibrugarh, the first of its kind in the Northeast. The aircraft carrying the prime minister will land at the ELF on Moran Bypass in Dibrugarh, where he will witness the aerial display of fighter jets, transport aircraft and helicopters. Later, Modi will travel to Guwahati, where he will visit the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu across the Brahmaputra River and inaugurate and flag off various projects worth more than Rs 5,450 crore at Lachit Ghat. The ELF has been specially designed and constructed in coordination with the Indian Air Force to support the landing and take-off of military and civil aircraft during emergencies. It will serve as a critical asset for emergency response, enabling quick deployment of rescue and relief operations during natural disasters or strategic requirements in the Northeast. Envisioned as dual-use infrastructure, the ELF is capable of handling fighter aircraft up to 40 tonnes and transport aircraft with a maximum take-off weight of up to 74 tonnes. The prime minister will inaugurate several key projects aimed at accelerating connectivity, strengthening digital infrastructure, promoting higher education, and enhancing public transport, thereby giving a significant boost to development in the northeastern region. Modi will inaugurate the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu across the Brahmaputra River, built at a cost of around Rs 3,030 crore. The six-lane extradosed prestressed concrete (PSC) bridge connects Guwahati with North Guwahati and is the first such bridge in the Northeast. It is expected to reduce travel time between the two areas to about seven minutes. Given the high seismic activity in the region, the bridge incorporates base isolation technology using friction pendulum bearings. High-performance stay cables have been used to ensure durability and long-term structural performance. A Bridge Health Monitoring System (BHMS) has also been incorporated for real-time con-



dition monitoring, early damage detection and improved safety and service life of the extradosed bridge. Modi will also inaugurate the National Data Centre for the northeastern region at Amingaon in Kamrup district of Assam. The state-of-the-art facility, with a total sanctioned load of 8.5 MW and an average rack capacity of 10 kW per rack, will host mission-critical applications of various government departments and also function as a Disaster Recovery centre for other National Data Centres. This will enable governments in the Northeast to digitally facilitate the delivery. Modi will inaugurate IIM-Guwahati, which will give a major fillip to higher education and management education in the northeastern region. He will also flag off 225 electric buses under the PM-eBus Sewa Scheme in Guwahati (100), Nagpur (50), Bhavnagar (50) and Chandigarh (25). With the launch of e-bus operations under the PM-eBus Sewa Scheme in these four cities, more than 50 lakh citizens are expected to benefit through access to clean, affordable and reliable public transport services, contributing to improved urban mobility and enhanced quality of life.

RBI Completes KYC Drive to End Financial Literacy Week 2026

Agartala, Feb 14: RBI concludes Financial Literacy Week 2026 in Tripura with strong focus on KYC compliance, digital banking safety, fraud prevention, and inclusive financial awareness programmes targeting senior citizens, students, and vulnerable communities to strengthen secure and responsible banking practices nationwide. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) successfully concluded Financial Literacy Week (FLW) 2026, observed from February 9 to 13, under the theme “KYC – Your First Step to Safe Banking.” The annual nationwide initiative, held every year since 2016, aims to promote financial awareness and responsible banking habits among citizens across India. State-Level Launch in Tripura

In Tripura, the week-long observance began with an inaugural ceremony organised by RBI Agartala on February 9. The programme marked the official launch of FLW 2026 activities across the state. Special outreach campaigns were carried out across all eight districts, ensuring that financial literacy messages reached remote and underserved communities. Lead District Officers from RBI Agartala conducted grassroots-level programmes focusing on essential financial concepts, digital banking safety, fraud prevention, and the



importance of Know Your Customer (KYC) compliance. The initiative reinforced RBI’s commitment to building an informed and financially secure society. A range of targeted activities were organised to ensure inclusive participation. Recognising the rising incidents of digital fraud, a dedicated financial and digital literacy session was conducted for senior citizens. The programme focused on safe digital banking practices, fraud detection, and grievance redressal mecha-

nisms. To engage younger audiences creatively, a meme-making competition on the theme of KYC was organised for college students. The competition encouraged youth participation and digital engagement, spreading awareness about safe banking practices in an innovative manner. In a significant move towards social inclusion, a community awareness drive was conducted for the Bru community. The initiative acknowledged their vulnerability to financial fraud and

emphasised the importance of integrating marginalised communities into mainstream financial systems. The observance concluded with a formal closing ceremony held in Agartala on February 13, 2026. The event was attended by senior officials, bankers, and representatives of financial institutions. Among the dignitaries present were Rakhi Biswas, IAS, Special Secretary (Finance) and Director, Department of Institutional Finance, Government of Tripura; Onsing Marchang, General Manager, RBI Agartala; Diganta Kumar Das, Deputy General Manager, NABARD; Sanjeev Roy, Regional Manager, UCO Bank; and Anup Kumar Saha, General Manager, Tripura Gramin Bank. Representatives from Centres for Financial Literacy (CFLs) and members of the public also participated. Building a Secure Financial Ecosystem achieved through coordinated efforts among regulators, banks, and customers. He stressed the importance of responsible usage of financial services and underscored the growing significance of KYC compliance amid rapid digitalisation in the banking sector. He also referenced the nationwide Gram Panchayat-level campaign aimed at saturating financial inclusion schemes and accelerating the settlement of unclaimed funds.

DCC Mkg replacement of MGNREGA Act



Dimapur, Feb 14: District Congress Committee (DCC) Mokkokchung, has strongly criticised the replacement of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025, approved in December last year. Addressing press conference at its office on Friday, DCC officials termed the move an “attack on the constitutional Right to Work,” alleging that the new scheme strips rural families of their legal guarantee to employment. They stated that under MGNREGA, work was available throughout the year at notified minimum wages, but under VB-G RAM G, wages would be set arbitrarily, with no guarantee of revisions, and work would be restricted during harvest seasons. DCC further alleged that the new Act undermines Gram Panchayats by transferring powers to contractors, reducing Panchayats to mere implementing agencies of centrally dictated projects. They claimed that this shift would erode

local decision-making and divert workers into contractor-driven labour supply. Highlighting financial implications, the officials pointed out that while MGNREGA was fully funded by the Union Government, the new scheme requires states to bear 40% of wage costs (10% for North-East and Himalayan states), thereby burdening state governments. DCC underscored MGNREGA’s role as a lifeline for rural workers over the past two decades, citing its impact during the COVID-19 pandemic when it provided employment to 4.6 crore families. They noted that since its inception in 2006, MGNREGA generated over 180 crore workdays and created nearly 10 crore rural assets, with multiple studies and audits affirming its effectiveness. Stating that the replacement of MGNREGA would have far-reaching consequences for rural communities, the DCC asserted its duty to sensitise people about the new Act and its implications, calling the change an “assault on rural livelihoods.”

Cabinet approves construction of India's first rail-cum-road underwater tunnel across Brahmaputra river in Assam

Guwahati, Feb 14: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved construction of 4-Lane Access-Controlled Greenfield connectivity from Gohpur on NH-15 to Numaligarh on 715 section including 15.79 km of road-cum-rail tunnel under the river Brahmaputra in Assam.

The project will be developed at a total capital cost of Rs.18,662 crore ion Engineering procurement Construction (EPC).

Currently, the distance between Numaligarh on NH715 and Gohpur on NH-15 is 240 km through the existing Kaliabham-bhora road bridge near Silghat on NH-52 which takes 6 Hours passing through Numaligarh, Kaziranga National park and Biswanath Town. To address these challenges, the project is proposed to be developed as 4-Lane Access-Controlled Greenfield connectivity from Gohpur to Numaligarh with road-cum-rail tunnel below the river Brahmaputra. This would be first underwater road-cum-rail tunnel in the India and second in the world. The project will provide significant benefit to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and other Northeastern states. This will enhance the efficiency of freight movement, reducing logistics cost and driving socio-economic

growth in the region.

The project alignment integrates with two major National Highways (NH-15 and NH-715) and two railway lines, i.e. Rangia-Mukongselek Railway Section under Rangia Division of NFR on Gohpur side and Furkating-Mariani loop line section under Tinsukia Division of NFR on Numaligarh side. The project providing seamless connectivity to key economic, social, and logistics nodes across Assam. Additionally, the project will enhance multi-modal integration by connecting with 11 economic nodes, 3 social nodes, 2 tourist nodes and 8 logistic nodes, providing enhanced connectivity with 4 major railway stations, 2 airports, and 2 inland waterways thereby facilitating faster movement of goods and passengers across the region.

Upon completion, the project will play a pivotal role in strategic considerations, regional economic growth, strengthening connectivity between major economic centers and opening new avenues for trade and industrial development. The project will also generate approximately 80 lakhs person-days of direct and indirect employment, and will open new avenues of growth, development and prosperity in surrounding regions.

PM Modi inaugurates Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu and other projects in Guwahati

Guwahati, Feb 14: Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu and a slew of other projects in Guwahati this afternoon. The Rs 3,030-crore six-lane bridge on the Brahmaputra river connects Guwahati with North Guwahati. Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma were also present on the occasion.

After the inauguration, PM Modi took a walk on the bridge. The bridge has been opened only for pedestrians today, and vehicles will be allowed to ply on it from March 1. This is the first extradosed bridge in Northeast India. It will cut travel time between Guwahati-North Guwahati to seven minutes. Considering the high seismicity of the region, the bridge incorporates base isolation technology using friction pendulum bearings. High-performance stay cables have been used to ensure durability and long-term structural performance. A Bridge Health Monitoring System (BHMS) has also been incorporated for real-time condition monitoring, early damage detection and improved safety and service life of the extradosed bridge.

Modi also inaugurated the National Data Centre for the Northeastern region at Amingaon and the temporary campus of inaugurate IIM Guwahati. The state-of-the-art Data Centre, with a total sanc-



tioned load of 8.5 MW and an average rack capacity of 10 kW per rack, will host mission-critical applications of various government departments and also function as a Disaster Recovery centre for other National Data Centres.

PM Modi will also flag off 225 electric buses under the PM-eBus Sewa Scheme. Of these buses, 100 are for Guwahati, 50 each for Nagpur and Bhavnagar, and 25 for Chandigarh. With the launch

of e-bus operations under the PM-eBus Sewa Scheme in these four cities, more than 50 lakh citizens are expected to benefit through access to clean, affordable and reliable public transport services, contributing to improved urban mobility and enhanced quality of life.

Modi will wrap up his daylong visit to Assam in the evening after addressing a BJP rally at Khanapara in Guwahati.

Mizoram Commissions Northeast's First Fish Canning Facility in Aizawl

Aizawl, Feb 14: Mizoram has achieved a major regional milestone by becoming the first state in Northeast India to commission a fish canning facility. The plant was inaugurated in Aizawl by the state's Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Resources Minister Lalruatkima. Built at a cost of ₹65 lakh at Zawnuam in Mamit district near the Tripura border, the project aims to strengthen Mizoram's "blue

economy" and promote sustainable fisheries.

The minister said the facility, developed under the Zawnuam Fishery Co-operative Society, will help local fish farmers by providing better market access and enabling value-addition of smaller fish into processed products. He stressed the importance of maintaining quality control and meeting consumer demand for the industry's

success.

The plant is also expected to boost employment and support the government's broader vision of strengthening rural infrastructure and economic growth in border and remote areas. Demonstrations and discussions during the inauguration highlighted modern processing, packaging, and emergency response capabilities within the fisheries sector.

Assam's Digboi bandh enters third day, inaction sparks sharp public criticism

Digboi, Feb 14: The indefinite bandh in Digboi entered its third straight day on Friday. The shutdown has brought the historic oil town to a grinding standstill. It has also exposed what many residents describe as a troubling vacuum of governance. With shutters down across commercial establishments, fear and uncertainty continue to grip the town. Sections of Adivasi organisations reportedly warned traders not to open their shops until justice is delivered in the Budheswar (Bhudesar) Gorh case. As a result, traders have chosen caution over confrontation.

The death of suspected fish thief Budheswar Gorh at Charali Bazar triggered the unrest. However, the blanket shutdown of the entire town has raised serious questions about proportionality and logic. From Charali to the main commercial hubs, Digboi now wears a deserted look. Daily wage earners and small business owners have borne the brunt of the economic freeze. What began as a localised incident has now snowballed into town-wide paralysis. Ordinary citizens remain caught

in the crossfire. Students appearing in the ongoing HSLC and Higher Secondary examinations have emerged as unintended victims of the prolonged shutdown. Guardians waiting outside examination centres found themselves stranded without access to drinking water or basic refreshments. They endured nearly three hours of anxious waiting in tense surroundings. At a time when students need calm and focus, the prevailing atmosphere has added avoidable psychological strain to an already critical academic phase. Public frustration has now turned towards the civil and police administration. Many accuse the authorities of failing to rise to the occasion. Despite three days of total closure, officials have taken no visible or assertive steps to restore normalcy. Traders allege that the administration issued no formal circular or assurance to guarantee security and build confidence among the business community. In a situation that demanded firm leadership, the response has appeared hesitant and ineffective. The earlier meeting between the Digboi Co-Dis-

trict Commissioner, police officials and representatives of Adivasi organisations has, in hindsight, yielded no breakthrough. The meeting failed to break the deadlock. Residents across the oil town are now questioning the administration's efficiency, diplomatic approach and ability to address grievances with tact and firmness. Public confidence has taken a visible hit.

Meanwhile, Adivasi organisations have maintained their stand. They continue to press for the fulfilment of their charter of demands. They have also reiterated that the agitation will continue until authorities address their concerns. Their firm position has further complicated efforts to restore normalcy. On the other hand, the Charali Bazar Association convened a crucial meeting to deliberate on the situation. However, authorities were still awaiting the outcome of the meeting at the time of filing this report. The uncertainty has kept the town on tenterhooks. The silence and perceived indifference of the Tinsukia district administration have deepened public dismay.

Many residents believe that stronger district-level intervention could have prevented the crisis from spiralling into a prolonged shutdown. The absence of firm measures has created what citizens describe as administrative drift at a time when clarity and command were most needed. The bandh has also disrupted preparations for Maha Shivratri on February 15. Devotees have struggled to procure essential puja items. The disruption has cast a shadow over preparations for one of the most significant Hindu festivals. For many in Digboi, the shutdown has affected livelihoods as well as religious sentiment. As tension continues and the town remains economically bruised, the prolonged closure has become a test of administrative will and governance. With livelihoods disrupted, students under stress and religious observances affected, residents are demanding swift and decisive action. If authorities fail to act without further delay, the crisis may deepen and erode public trust even further. On the other hand, the Charali Bazar Association.

Great Backyard Bird Count exercise conducted at Kangla Fort

Imphal, Feb 14: The Central Forest Division, Government of Manipur, in collaboration with Wildlife Explorers, Manipur and the Kangla Board, successfully conducted the Great Backyard Bird Count on the morning of 14 February 14, starting at 7 am, at the historic Kangla Fort area in Imphal. The bird count witnessed enthusiastic participation from forest officials, members of Wildlife Explorers, and several wildlife enthusiasts and volunteers. Vikram Suresh Nadhe, IFS, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Central Forest Division; Aquib Jamal, IFS Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF), Central Forest Division; K. Sashikanta Sharma, Superintendent of the Kangla Board; and office bearers of Wildlife Explorers, Manipur were present during the event and interacted with participants.

The activity aimed to promote awareness about urban biodiversity and encourage public participation in bird monitoring. The Great Backyard Bird Count is a global citizen-science initiative that helps generate valuable data on bird populations and distribution. Participants recorded a variety of bird species within the Kangla Fort premises, highlighting the ecological significance of the area as an important green space in the heart of Imphal. Speaking at the occasion, Vikram Suresh Nadhe, IFS, stated: "The Great Backyard Bird Count is not merely a birdwatching exercise, but a powerful citizen-science movement that connects people with nature. Urban green spaces like Kangla Fort serve as vital refuges for biodiversity. Through such initiatives, we aim to sensitize citizens—especially youth—about the importance of con-

serving habitats and documenting biodiversity.

Aquib Jamal, IFS added that public participation is the backbone of successful conservation, and every bird recorded today contributes to a larger global understanding of ecological health." Brajesh Khoyumthem of Wildlife Explorers, Manipur, also addressed the participants and said, "Citizen science initiatives like the Great Backyard Bird Count empower local communities to actively contribute to global biodiversity databases. Kangla Fort continues to prove its importance as a biodiversity hotspot within Imphal city. We are encouraged by the growing interest among young birdwatchers and volunteers, and we look forward to strengthening collaboration with the Forest Department in future conservation and awareness programs."

Cong neglected NE during its rule: Modi



Guwahati, Feb 14: Prime Minister Narendra Modi took a sharp jibe at Congress as he addressed a BJP rally in Guwahati during his daylong visit to the poll-bound Assam today. The PM, in his speech, alleged that while the Congress only brought problems to Assam, the BJP brought solutions. He accused the Congress of neglecting the Northeast and promoting insurgency in Assam during its rule. Addressing BJP workers at the Veterinary College ground at Khanapara, Modi alleged that the Congress always endangered the nation's security, with fear and insecurity prevailing during its tenure in Assam. "The Congress indulged in polarisation and vote bank politics, and took decisions that promoted these," he said. "The partition of the country took place due to the Muslim League, but now there is 'MMC' "Mao-

ist, Muslim, Congress" and people should be aware," Modi said. The PM accused the Congress of protecting infiltrators, but the BJP is "committed to end illegal immigration, and so the next five years are very important for the state". He also claimed that the Congress, being out of power in Assam for 10 years, is "more dangerous than when it was in power, and this is evident from the venomous statements made by its leaders". For seven decades, the Congress built only three bridges over the Brahmaputra, but the BJP government constructed five bridges in 10 years, he asserted. The PM said all-round development is taking place in Assam due to the efforts of the BJP government. After addressing the rally, the Prime Minister left for New Delhi in a special aircraft from Guwahati airport.

Aizawl International Half Marathon 2026 Elevates Mizoram onto Global Sporting Map

Aizawl, Feb 14: The 2nd edition of the Aizawl International Half Marathon (AIHM) 2026 concluded on a high note on Friday, drawing nearly 3,000 runners, including 16 elite international athletes, and firmly establishing Mizoram as one of India's fastest-rising distance running destinations. The AIHM 2026 was flagged off by General (Dr) Vijay Kumar Singh, PVSM, AVSM, YSM (Retd), Hon'ble Governor of Mizoram.

Held at the Rajiv Gandhi Stadium, the marathon witnessed participation from athletes representing Kenya, Ethiopia, Bahrain, the United Kingdom, France and several other countries, alongside elite and amateur runners from across India and the North Eastern Region. The strong international presence, coupled with an overwhelming domestic turnout, transformed Aizawl into a vibrant global sporting arena.

Organised jointly by the Government of Mizoram and Innovations India under the theme "Connecting India, Developing Mizoram, Empowering Sports," the event marked a significant leap from its debut edition last year, which had attracted around 1,500 participants, largely from the Northeast. Within a year, participation surged by almost 100 per cent, a growth that organisers described as a testament to the marathon's credibility and expanding appeal.

The event was held under the patronage of General (Dr) Vijay Kumar Singh, PVSM, AVSM, YSM (Retd), Hon'ble Governor of Mizoram, and Pu Lalduhoma, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Mizoram, with strong support from Pu Lalhnginglova Hmar, Hon'ble Minister for Sports & Tourism, Government of Mizoram. Senior dignitaries and institutional partners were present, reflecting the importance accorded to sports as a key pillar of the state's development narrative.

Speaking on the occasion, the Hon'ble Governor said, "The AQI is very good; the weather is very

good, and we are looking at this becoming an iconic event in the whole world." As Patron of the festival, he expressed confidence that the Aizawl International Half Marathon will continue to grow in stature and attract global attention in the years to come.

Speaking on the event, the Minister for Sports & Tourism said the scale and response to AIHM 2026 reflect Mizoram's growing sporting culture and its capacity to host international-standard events. "This marathon is becoming bigger and stronger with each edition. The participation of elite international athletes and thousands of runners from across India shows that Mizoram is ready to host global events. It is a proud moment for our state and a major boost for our tourism and sports ecosystem," he said.

He noted that events of this scale generate significant visibility for the state, strengthening its image as a safe, vibrant and welcoming destination in Northeast India.

Captain Rahul Bali, Curator of AIHM, described the second edition as a defining milestone. "In just one year, AIHM has grown immensely to a global sporting event. From 1,500 runners last year to almost 3,000 runners this year, the response has been phenomenal. We have runners from countries in Europe, Middle East, Africa. It reflects Mizoram's rising stature in the national and international running circuit. Our vision is to make Aizawl one of India's most iconic running destinations," he said.

The 21KM Open Male category was led by Kenya's Kemboi Kevin Kiprono, who secured first place with a chip time of 1:06:28, followed closely by Nafsen Ejeta Balcha (1:06:38) and Clinton Kibet Mutai (1:06:39). In the 21KM Open Female category, Renu Singh clinched the top position with a time of 1:21:22, with Tsigie Debay Tadesse (1:21:35) and Marta Hirpato Yota (1:21:36) finishing second



and third respectively. The certified timings further underscore the competitive depth and international standard of the Aizawl International Half Marathon 2026. The marathon route, set against Aizawl's scenic hills and energetic urban landscape, offered participants both a challenging course and a memorable experience. Enthusiastic local crowds lined parts of the route, cheering runners and adding to the celebratory atmosphere. Beyond competition, the event also underscored Mizoram's expanding sports infrastructure, improved event management capabilities and growing institutional coordination. Officials said the success of AIHM 2026 demonstrates the state's readiness to attract larger sporting events and sports tourism in the coming years. With increased participation, international representation and strong leadership backing, the Aizawl International Half Marathon 2026 has not only concluded successfully but has also strengthened Mizoram's position on India's sporting map. As the curtains fall on the second edition, AIHM stands not merely as a race completed, but as a bold statement of ambition, connectivity and progress from the heart of Northeast India.

North East Chronicle

FEBRUARY 15 2026 VOL 01 NO. 344



Editorial

Beyond the Price Tag: Reclaiming Consumer Power Against MRP Exploitation

Maximum Retail Price—three words printed boldly on every product—has become synonymous with the final price in consumers’ minds. This perception is fundamentally flawed and costs shoppers dearly.MRP represents the ceiling, not the standard. It’s the maximum a retailer can legally charge, designed to protect consumers from exploitation, not to dictate fair market value. Yet millions of Indians pay MRP without question, unaware they’re often overpaying significantly.Smart shopping means recognizing that competitive markets typically price products well below MRP. Grocery stores, electronics retailers, and online platforms routinely offer 10-30% discounts off MRP. These aren’t special deals—they’re normal market corrections where supply, demand, and competition determine real prices.The mindset that “MRP is the price” benefits only complacent retailers who exploit consumer ignorance. It stifles price competition and rewards laziness over value-seeking.Consumers must reclaim their power. Compare prices across stores. Question inflated MRPs. Support retailers offering genuine value. Remember: MRP is your protection from overcharging, not an invitation to accept overpricing.In today’s transparent marketplace, paying MRP isn’t being fair—it’s being uninformed. Know the difference, and your wallet will thank you. (DB)

The Crisis of Accountability in Public Life

Accountability remains one of the strongest pillars of democratic governance, yet its consistent application continues to be a challenge. Institutions thrive when responsibility is clearly defined and consequences are fairly implemented. However, public life often reflects selective accountability, where scrutiny is uneven and enforcement inconsistent. When accountability mechanisms weaken, public confidence declines. Citizens expect transparency not only in decision-making but also in execution. Announcements and assurances may generate optimism, but without measurable outcomes, trust erodes. A gap between commitment and delivery creates dissatisfaction that lingers beyond a single incident. Digital media has intensified the demand for accountability. Information spreads rapidly, and public reaction follows immediately. While this accelerates

scrutiny, it also risks turning accountability into spectacle rather than structured reform. True accountability is not about public shaming but about systemic correction.Administrative systems must emphasise internal checks and independent oversight. Clear timelines, transparent reporting, and open grievance mechanisms strengthen institutional credibility. Leaders must demonstrate responsibility not only during success but especially during failure.A society that normalises evasion of responsibility risks long-term instability. Accountability ensures fairness and discipline. It protects both citizens and institutions by reinforcing ethical standards.Ultimately, accountability is not punitive by nature; it is corrective. Its purpose is to strengthen governance, not weaken it. A culture rooted in responsibility safeguards democratic health and sustains public trust.

A representation of Assam’s unwavering, steadfast, and progressive nature is Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu

Kumar Bhaskar Varma, the last king of the Varman dynasty, ruled Kamarupa from 594 CE (some say 600 CE) to 650 CE. He is regarded as the most illustrious and influential ruler of Kamarupa. Although he was the king of Kamarupa, Kumar Bhaskar Varma possessed a vision that extended beyond regional boundaries, reflecting an all-India as well as international outlook.

During the reign of Kumar Bhaskar Varma, the famous Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang visited Assam—then known as ancient Kamarupa—between 640 and 643 CE, honouring the king’s invitation. In his travel accounts, he recorded several important observations about Kamarupa. He wrote about the fertility of the land and its suitability for agriculture, noting that the people were deeply engaged in farming. He described the irrigation systems of ancient Kamarupa, including the practice of drawing canals from rivers or embankments to supply water around towns. He also mentioned the region’s temperate climate, the simplicity of its people, their keen interest in learning and their strong memory and intellectual abilities. Hiuen Tsang further recorded the religious practices of the people and noted that scholars travelled from distant places to Kamarupa in pursuit of knowledge.

Through his travel accounts, the wider world came to know many of these significant details about ancient Kamarupa. In this sense, King Kumar Bhaskar Varma may be regarded as the visionary leader who first introduced Assam to the wider world. The travel accounts of Hiuen Tsang describe him as a learned and enlightened ruler, deeply respected by his subjects.

His observations remain among the earliest and most reliable written records of ancient Assam. Kumar Bhaskar Varma’s influence in North India With his broad all-India and global outlook, Kumar Bhaskar Varma forged close diplomatic and military ties with the great northern Indian Emperor Harshavardhana, whose reign marks a significant chapter in Indian history. The two rulers maintained warm diplo-

matic relations and treated one another with mutual respect and importance. Kumar Bhaskar Varma expanded the boundaries of Kamarupa westward into North Bengal after defeating Shashanka, the ruler of Gaur who had earlier assassinated Harshavardhana’s brother Rajyavardhana. According to the travel accounts of Hiuen Tsang, southeastern Bengal, Sylhet and Tripura also formed part of Kamarupa during Kumar Bhaskar Varma’s reign.

He further wrote that the sea routes to China were under the supervision of the King of Kamarupa. During Kumar Bhaskar Varma’s rule, Assam’s prestige spread across India, making this era widely regarded as the golden age of Assamese history. The Assamese calendar, known as Bhaskarabda, is traditionally calculated from his accession to the throne. Today we are officially using this calendar. He is also remembered as “Kumar Raja”, as he remained unmarried throughout his life. At the grand Dharma Sabha held at Kannauj in honour of Hiuen Tsang, Emperor Harshavardhana accorded exceptional respect to Kumar Bhaskar Varma by offering him the place of highest honour.

The event was further marked by a magnificent religious procession, in which Harshavardhana, dressed as Lord Indra, and Kumar Bhaskar Varma, dressed as Lord Brahma, walked side by side at the forefront, while all others followed behind. This included eighteen subordinate kings under Harshavardhana, forty princes, nearly three thousand Buddhist scholars and an equal number of Brahmins who had gathered for the occasion. The honour accorded to Kumar Bhaskar Varma at this imperial gathering makes it clear that the King of Kamarupa occupied a uniquely distinguished position in the political and cultural landscape of the time, reflecting the immense influence and prestige he commanded across the subcontinent. The copperplate inscriptions issued by Kumar Bhaskar Varma prove that ancient Kamarupa had a well-organised, robust and accountable system of governance. His kingdom maintained a formidable naval force, com-

prising nearly 30,000boats, along with a powerful army supported by around 20,000 elephants. As a responsible ruler, he took the security of Kamarupa seriously and did not compromise on this. The Glory of Kamarupa during the Reign of Kumar Bhaskar Varma The economic condition of ancient Kamarupa reached a remarkable level of prosperity during the reign of Kumar Bhaskar Varma. There were various industries in Kamarupa for the production of bamboo and cane products, paat and muga textiles, perfumes from agar, jaggery prepared from sugarcane and the manufacture of metal utensils and exquisite gold ornaments.

This prosperity is evident from the list of gifts sent by Kumar Bhaskar Varma to Emperor Harshavardhana through his envoy Hamsavega. Among the offerings were a remarkable ceremonial umbrella known as the Abhaga, bamboo and cane carpets, agarwood perfumes preserved in silk pouches, a variety of utensils, liquid jaggery stored in earthen pots and paat-muga textiles. The list of gifts also included sanchipaat manuscripts and paintings. This shows that Kamarupa was also a vibrant centre of literature, art and intellectual activity. In the political history of Assam,the resistance of external aggression led by Kumar Bhaskar Varma will always be remembered with pride by the people of Assam. This seventh-century king, who displayed unparalleled knowledge, military strength and rare strategic skill in warfare and alliances, continues to inspire us today with his courage and spirit of resistance. Kumar Bhaskar Varma’s irresistible struggle is a source of inspiration for us in waging a courageous resistance struggle at a time when the indigenous people of Assam are living day and night in fear of losing their language, culture and land due to continuous religious aggression by outsiders. The state government has already established a state university in Nalbari in the name of this great King of Kamarupa.

This year the state government has dedicated the newly constructed Guwahati-North Guwahati bridge over the Brahmaputra in the name of Kumar

Bhaskar Varma. The bridge will be named Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu. Context of Bridge Construction In 2016, for the first time in Assam, a BJP-led NDA government was formed, and I was entrusted with the responsibility of serving as the Minister of the Guwahati Development Department.

I invited the Singapore-based government enterprise Surbana Jurong to Guwahati and assigned it the task of preparing architectural designs for two proposed bridges over the Brahmaputra. These bridges were planned to connect Palashbari-Sualkuchi and Guwahati– North Guwahati. After Surbana Jurong confirmed the feasibility of the projects and prepared the designs, we began discussions and consultations on how to arrange the required funding. At that time, I was also holding the charge of Finance Minister of the Government of Assam. Through Ministry of Finance, we approached the New Development Bank (NDB), popularly known as the BRICS Development Bank, an international financial institution established by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The Bank agreed to provide funding for the Guwahati–North Guwahati bridge.

This was first ever NDB assisted project in North East and Assam. As per the agreed terms, the Bank financed 80 percent of the project cost, while the State Government contributed 20 percent. The loan component extended by the Bank to the State Government is to be repaid by the Government of India. In total, the bridge was constructed at a cost of approximately Rs. 3,000 crore, of which around Rs. 2,000 crore was borne by the Government of India and about Rs. 1,000 crore bythe Government of Assam. The bridge connects South and North Guwahati through the heart of the city, fulfilling a long-standing demand of residents on both banks of the river. It significantly reduces travel time and eases traffic congestion in Guwahati, especially as the Saraighat Bridge had long remained the only land route linking the two sides.

This new bridge also opens up the possibility of developing twin metropolitan hubs on thelines of Hy-

derabad-Secunderabad and Ahmedabad-Gandhinagar. With Guwahati facing mounting pressure from rapid population growth and a steadily declining carrying capacity, urban expansion has become inevitable. The new bridge will also help meet that need. Technical Specifications There are several new aspects to this bridge.

It is about 33 metres wide and has six lanes. Apart from vehicular traffic, the bridge also includes a dedicated sidewalk for pedestrians. Taken together, the old and new Saraighat Bridge have only five lanes, whereas this bridge alone has six - an important point to note. The bridge uses extradosed technology, enabling a 200- metre span that reduces the number of pillars in the middle of the Brahmaputra River. The cables attached to the structure further enhance its load-bearing capacity. The main bridge is 1.2 km long. Notably, this is the only extradosed bridge in the country to incorporate friction pendulum bearings for earthquake protection. Most importantly, the bridge has been constructed by the Public Works Department of Government of Assam, which is a matter of great pride for us.

Earlier, some bridges over the Brahmaputra were built by the Indian Railways, while others were executed by the National Highways Authority of India. For the first time, Assamese engineers, officers, employees and workers have together delivered such a worldclass bridge. The Public Works Department of Government of Assam is also constructing the 3.6 km four-lane extradosed bridge connecting Palashbari and Sualkuchi. Previously, this was unimaginable. This is the result of the confidence of a new and resurgent Assam. Arrival of the Prime Minister The foundation stone of the bridge was laid on 9 February 2019 by the country’s illustrious Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi. He will formally inaugurate the bridge on 14 February 2026. Following its official opening, the bridge will remain accessible exclusively to pedestrians until 28 February. Visitors will be able to enjoy panoramic views of Kamakhya Temple and the Nilachal Hills, along with the scenic beauty of Guwahati and

the majestic Brahmaputra River. Vehicular movement across the bridge will commence at a later date. On the same day as the inauguration, the Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone of the Indian Institute of Management Guwahati, marking another significant milestone in the region’s development. Progressive Assam This is undoubtedly a golden era for Assam. On behalf of the people of the state, I express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the Hon’ble Prime Minister, for his unwavering commitment to the rapid development of Assam and the North East. His genuine affection for the region and deep sense of responsibility towards its progress have ushered in a new phase of growth and transformation. I warmly welcome him to Assam.

The new modern, world-class terminal at Lokpriya Gopinath Bardoloi International Airport in Guwahati, already inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will become operational from 22 February. The Assam we see today is unlocking far greater potential, strengthened by the Prime Minister’s sincere commitment and affection for the region. In a few days, there will be a Ring Road in Guwahati. Beyond this, four more bridges are planned over the Brahmaputra, including the Narenghi-Kuruwa and Palashbari-Sualkuchi bridges. Moving further ahead, there is the Semiconductor project in Jagoirad and, then again, a bit further a 34-km elevated corridor in Kaziranga.

Then there is the two-lane tunnel between Numaligarh and Gohpur under the Brahmaputra with provision for both rail and vehicular traffic. Added to this are the expansion of the Numaligarh Oil Refinery and the revival of the Namrup Fertilizer Plant with its fourth unit, each representing milestones in Assam’s modern development journey. Together, these initiatives define the identity of a new Assam – steadfast (Atal), unwavering (Avichal) and forward-looking (Aragami). We must sustain this unstoppable momentum that we have built collectively and continue to carry Assam forward with the same global vision once demonstrated by great leaders like Kumar Bhaskar Varma.

Valentine’s lamps, Easter rugs: ‘seasonal decor’ has become a year-long tat-fest

It’s Valentine’s Day, which means you should have spent the last few weeks swapping all of the lamps in your house. If not, you still have a few hours: box up your beige lampshades (or better yet, throw them in the bin) and replace them with ones of red and pink hues. Then – if you want to feel mentally well – you must also change your lightbulbs, because “warm white lighting” is the best way to ensure your crimson decor doesn’t look “too harsh”.

This is according to online lighting company Pooky, which is selling 43 “lust-worthy lamps” (and shades) for Valentine’s Day. A press release sent on behalf of the brand in late January proudly declared that Google searches for “seasonal decor” have increased 70% year-on-year globally, while queries about “Valentine’s decor” have soared 2,584% since the start of 2026. “The beauty of seasonal lighting,” said Pooky’s chief creative officer, “is that it’s easy to rotate. Store one or two Valentine lampshades, a set of rose-tinted bulbs and a handful of candles in a labelled box, and you can

transform your home every February in minutes.” That’s all very well and good, but what if my “lust-y lighting” box won’t fit next to the plastic tubs holding my “autumn oven gloves”, “Halloween curtain rods” and “Easter rugs”? Wouldn’t it be faster – better, even – to join the 62% of Britons who simply throw perfectly good homeware in the bin? After all, how else will I find the time on 16 March to swap from my Mother’s Day to St Patrick’s Day decor?

Can I just ask: what are we doing? More than a quarter of Britons feel homeware trends are “changing at an increasingly fast pace”, and 70m items of home decor are thrown away every year. I’ll concede there are some things worth destroying the planet for (flying! We literally get to fly across the sky!), but surely not this? Surely we can all agree that the climate apocalypse isn’t a fair exchange for a “brown resin Valentines dog ornament” wearing heart-shaped glasses and a little pink bow? (It’s uglier than you think, please do not click.) It’s not that seasonal decor can never make sense. It’s the balm



we’ve sought during the cost of living crisis, when many people find it too expensive to go out, and home is where the heart-shaped frying pan is.

Socialising is costlier than ever, but novelty ceramics have

seemingly never been cheaper. And it’s understandable that we want our living spaces to be cosy and calm when the world outside is anything but. But leaving aside the harm to the planet – and how often we

do! – “fast homeware” is full of false promises. In the 41,000 TikTok videos tagged “seasonal decor” (plus countless others hashtagged #autumnaesthetic or #springvibes), influencers promise that swapping out

your homeware can boost your mood, spark joy and even “heal your soul”. For years, marketers and content creators have savvily used the names of happiness hormones to conflate shopping and personal wellbeing. TK Maxx has a page on its website called Dopamine Home Decor (under the umbrella of Home Seasonal Events).I hate to be the one to tell you this, but a spring-themed bath mat is not going to markedly improve your mental health. In reality, overconsumption has been repeatedly linked to lower wellbeing and even psychological distress. Personally, I know that the buzz of buying something is often quickly replaced with an empty sensation and a desire for more – the satisfaction somehow never seems to last. Plus, there are faster and cheaper ways to get a dose of dopamine (music, meditation and especially volunteering, for a start). And if you’re an aesthete, never fear! I actually know a fantastic little designer who redecorates seasonally, free of charge. Her name is mother nature, and she also swaps out the bulbs. Of course,

I’m fighting a losing battle: online content creators must create content and supermarkets must generate ever-increasing profits, so the year-round demand for novelty is not going anywhere any time soon. If I can’t beat them, maybe I should join them – and charge for my ideas (a jester’s-hat butter dish for April Fools’ Day; an Ash Wednesday kettle). Or maybe I have one last trick up my sleeve to make you reconsider: think of your grandma’s home.

She never swapped out the lamps – the things on her coffee table were the things on her coffee table, collected over the course of a lifetime, consistent while you grew and changed. That stained, stainless steel teapot spoke to you from a different era; it showed you the world existed before you existed, it promised that things could endure after you were gone. Isn’t there meaning and happiness to be found in consistent homeware, in a home that reflects your personality, and in a personality that’s unwavering in the face of marketing trends? Wait, no. I’ve got it: bank-holiday shoe rack.

Is the ESOP taxation structure in India out of date for employees working abroad

Mumbai: Employee Stock Option Plans (ESOPs) are increasingly facing scrutiny in India because existing tax rules are not well suited to today’s globally mobile workforce. Under current law, ESOPs are taxed as salary perquisites at the time of exercise, based on the difference between the fair market value of the shares and the exercise price. This framework works reasonably well when an employee’s services are rendered entirely in India during the grant-to-vesting period. However, it becomes problematic for expatriates and returning professionals who have worked across multiple countries during that time. In large multinational corporations, employee stock option plans (ESOPs) are usually rolled out as global compensation tools to recruit, reward and retain employees across regions. Such plans often cover staff working in different countries, including employees who relocate internationally. However, the tax treatment of ESOPs is far from uniform worldwide. While India levies tax on ESOPs as a perquisite at the stage of share allotment, jurisdictions such as Singapore tax employees at the point of grant, highlighting the sharp differences in cross-border ESOP taxation. This lack of clear allocation rules leads to uncertainty, disputes, and in some cases, double taxation. Many countries link ESOP taxation to where services were actually rendered. Introducing similar clarity through legislation or official guidance would make India’s ESOP regime fairer, more predictable, and better aligned with global employment realities.ESOPs are intended to reward long-term contribution, but India’s tax framework has not kept pace with today’s globally



mobile workforce. In India, ESOPs are taxed in two stages: First, when an employee exercises the option and receives shares, the difference between the market value of the shares and the price paid by the employee is taxed as salary income. This tax is payable even though no cash is received, and the employer must deduct tax at source.Second, when the employee later sells the shares, any further appreciation is taxed separately as capital gains. This second stage is relatively straightforward and well understood.

The real challenge lies in the first stage of taxation. ESOPs are typically earned over several years, from grant to vesting. For employees who have worked partly in India and partly overseas during this period, such as expatriates or returning Indians, the law does not clearly explain how much of the ESOP benefit should be taxed in India. In practice, the entire benefit often gets taxed in India simply because the exercise happens here, even if part of the value was earned abroad.

Silver Rate as of February 13



New Delhi: ₹242,950, reflecting a gain of 2.22% compared to its previous close. Meanwhile, the 10 gm silver rate is at ₹2,430.Silver prices in India are largely influenced by international spot silver rates, US dollar fluctuations, and import duties on silver among other things. Silver steadied near \$76 per troy ounce on Friday but remained on track for a third straight weekly loss after renewed volatility triggered a broad market selloff.Thursday’s decline coincided with

simultaneous weakness in equities and cryptocurrencies, suggesting cross-asset liquidation potentially amplified by systematic and algorithmic trading.Outlook for Silver Investors
Attention now shifts to upcoming US inflation data, which may influence Federal Reserve policy expectations. Following stronger-than-expected US jobs data, markets have pushed back expectations for the first rate cut to July from June, while still pricing roughly

BSE receives approval from Sebi to provide derivatives on BSE Focused Midcap Index

New Delhi: Stock exchange BSE has received regulatory approval from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to introduce derivative contracts on its newly created BSE Focused Midcap Index, marking an expansion of its limited derivatives portfolio beyond the Sensex and Bankex. The approval allows BSE to offer index futures and options on a concentrated midcap benchmark designed to track leading companies in the segment. The BSE Focused Midcap Index captures the performance of 20 mid-sized companies selected on the basis of free-float market capitalisation. Unlike broader midcap indices that provide diversified exposure across a large universe of stocks, this index is structured to offer a more focused and high-conviction view of the midcap space. By narrowing the constituent base, the benchmark aims to reflect the performance of relatively stronger and more liquid midcap names.According to BSE, the exchange will roll out cash-settled monthly index futures and monthly index options linked to the Focused Midcap Index. All contracts will follow the standard derivatives framework, with expiry scheduled for the last Thursday of the respective expiry

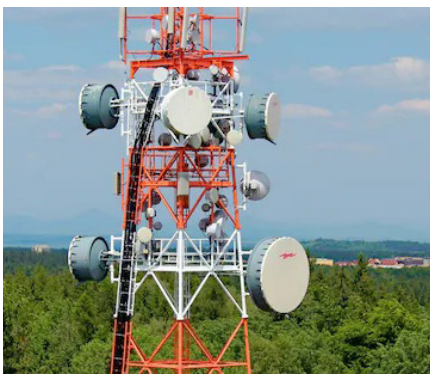


month. This aligns the new product with the existing monthly expiry cycle followed across Indian equity derivatives. With this addition, BSE’s derivatives basket will expand to three indices — Sensex, Bankex and the Focused Midcap Index. At present, derivatives trading activity on Indian exchanges is largely dominated by the National Stock Exchange (NSE), which offers index deriva-

Trai to add ‘appeals’ feature in DND app

Mumbai: The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) will introduce an appeals mechanism in its Do Not Disturb (DND) app, allowing users to escalate complaints if they are dissatisfied with telecom operators’ responses, Chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti said on Friday. Regulatory action is triggered when five unique complaints are received against a sender. In such cases, outgoing services are barred for 15 days across all numbers linked to the sender. Repeat violations lead to disconnection of all telecom resources for up to one year and blacklisting across operators.As part of enforcement action, Trai said over 730,000 notices have been issued to unregistered telemarketers, with 470,000 entities restricted for a month and nearly 90,000 repeat offenders faced six-month communication caps. In addition, 184,000 telecom resources have been disconnected, largely linked to UTMs.Trai is also set to launch a revamped MyCall app by March, which will allow users to report call drops, muting and voice distortion.Lahoti was speaking at an event to unveil revamped versions of the telecom regulator’s consumer-facing apps.

The appeals feature, currently under development, is aimed at strengthening accountability in spam complaint resolution. “We already have it in plan, it will be made available at the earliest,” Lahoti said. The DND and MySpeed apps have been



rebuilt nearly a decade after their initial launch in 2016-17, in line with evolving telecom technologies, user behaviour, and the growing scale of digital connectivity. To tighten enforcement, Trai has expanded the scope of complaints to include unregistered telemarketers (UTMs) — a key regulatory change introduced in 2025. Lahoti said this has improved traceability and action against spam sources. TRAI Chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti has announced a significant revamp of the Do Not Disturb (DND) and MySpeed apps to combat the growing menace of unsolicited calls.The revamp comes amid persistent concerns around unsolicited commercial communications. Trai data show that out of 3.1 million complaints received in 2025, over 1.7 million were registered through the DND app, making it the single-largest channel for spam reporting.

10 stocks with up to 42% upside Top brokerage Buys this week

New Delhi: The Indian markets fell over 1.5% this week as the tech stocks dragged benchmarks on the back of the tech rout across the globe.This week, several top research houses, including Jefferies, Motilal Oswal, Nuvama Wealth Management, Axis Securities, and Citi, shared their latest recommendations, and we shortlisted 10 stocks across sectors. Nuvama is positive on Apollo Hospitals Enterprise, with a target price of Rs 9,090. This suggests an upside potential of about 20% from current levels. According to the brokerage report, Apollo Hospitals is expected to deliver around 15% hospital revenue growth over FY25-28. This growth is likely to be driven by the addition of around 1,500 beds over FY26-28, along with 12–13% growth in existing hospitals.Axis Securities on Kotak Mahindra Bank Jefferies has retained a ‘Buy’ rating on Lenskart with a target price of Rs 575. This translates to an upside of around 21%. The firm stated that net interest income increased 12% quarter-on-quarter and 64% year-on-year. Pre-provision operating profit rose 79% year-on-year, and profit after tax climbed 95% year-on-year and 13% sequentially.Axis Securities on State Bank of India

(RoA) of over 1% through the 2028 fiscal year.According to the brokerage report, “Lenskart delivered an exceptional quarter, with strong growth and smart margin expansion across India & international markets.” The brokerage highlighted that management is focusing on long-term growth rather than short-term margin maximisation.Nuvama on Muthoot Finance Nuvama maintained a ‘Buy’ rating on Muthoot Finance with a revised target price of Rs 4,700. Based on Rs 3,610, this suggests an upside of about 30.2%. In its February 12 report, Nuvama said, “Muthoot reported a big beat on AUM growth, NIM and credit cost yet again.” It noted that gold assets under management expanded 12% sequentially and 50% year-on-year, while net interest margin improved by 11 basis points over the previous quarter. The brokerage also pointed out that the gross Stage 3 ratio fell by 67 basis points
Axis Securities has assigned a target price of Rs 515 for Kotak Mahindra Bank, indicating a potential upside of 19.9% from the current market levels. The firm notes that the bank is successfully managing sectoral challenges, particularly with the easing of stress in microfinance and personal loan portfolios. This improvement has allowed credit costs to start a downward trend, which the brokerage firm expects to persist through the first quarter of the 2027 fiscal year. While some retail commercial vehicle stress remains, Kotak Mahindra Bank has tightened its underwriting to protect the balance sheet.
Motilal Oswal has maintained a ‘Buy’ rating on Hindalco with a target price of Rs 1,110, implying 22.6% upside from Rs 905.75.The brokerage said consolidated net sales came in at Rs 66,500 crore, rising 14% year-on-year and remaining flat sequentially. Consolidated EBITDA stood at Rs 7,975 crore, broadly in line with its estimate. It said Hindal-

co Industries adjusted PAT stood at Rs 3,900 crore, down 20% quarter-on-quarter, largely led by weak earnings from the Novelis business. The global brokerage house Citi maintained Buy on Eicher Motors and increased the 12-month price target to Rs 8,300 from Rs 8,200, implying an upside of 13.5% from the current market price. The company’s outlook is very buoyant, and management noted that footfalls, bookings and conversions have seen a sharp increase post GST cuts. Eicher Motors’ management has announced a capacity expansion plan to increase capacity from 1.45 million currently to 2 million by FY28 (Rs 958 crore expected capex over two years). The management has indicated that profitability will remain sensitive to pricing trends, regulatory costs and product mix.Jefferies on Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M)Jefferies has maintained a ‘Buy’ on Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M), setting a target price of Rs 4,500. This implies an upside potential of about 22% from the current market price.According to the brokerage report, “Mahindra & Mahindra delivered 15th consecutive quarter of double-digit EBITDA growth, with Dec-Q up 27% YoY, in line with Jefferies estimates.”Motilal Oswal maintained ‘Buy’ rating on IHCL, with a target price of Rs 900, looking at an upside of more than 26%. The company’s higher Food & Beverage growth was led by increased Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) activity amid a wedding season and a higher number of events during the quarter:“We expect a similar momentum to continue in Q4, translating into double-digit revenue growth in Q4. This is in line with management’s medium-term guidance of double-digit revenue growth in FY26 and FY27,” 2026 target price of Rs 1,270.At the current market price, the stock of Whirlpool of India trades at 28 times its estimated earnings per share for FY26–FY27.

Why insurance stocks may see a profit squeeze under

New Delhi: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed tighter rules on how banks sell insurance products alongside loans, and that could pinch profits for several listed life insurers. According to a February 11 report by Jefferies, the impact may not be major at the top-line level, but certain high-margin segments, such as credit protect, could take a hit. Jefferies estimates that credit protection forms roughly 1–6% of annualised premium equivalent (APE) across major life insurers. On the surface, that does not look alarming. However, annualised premium equivalent (APE) alone does not tell the full story. Credit protect products typically carry better margins than many savings-linked policies. As a result, their share in value of new business (VNB) is higher than their share in annualised premium equivalent (APE), the report explained. The report states, “CP segments form 1-6% of APE and higher share of VNB.” That is the key pressure point. If these sales slow, profitability growth could moderate even if overall premium growth holds up.Jefferies shows credit protect as a visible slice for HDFC Life and ICICI Prudential Life, while it is lower for SBI Life and Axis-Max Life.Jefferies makes it clear that the effect is not uniform across the sector. Companies with greater reliance on bank channels and loan-linked sales face a higher risk to VNB margins.Banca channel, or bancassurance, is a strategic partnership where banks sell insurance products directly to their customer base, acting as an agent for insurance companies.Jefferies says credit protect products account for about 1–6% of annualised premium equivalent (APE), but form a higher share of value of new business (VNB). That means even a small dent in volumes can affect profitability more than

revenue.In life insurance, the value of new business (VNB) measures the present value of profits from policies sold during a specific period, usually a financial year.The brokerage believes the effect will vary across companies. ICICI Prudential Life and HDFC Life have higher exposure to this segment than Max Life and SBI Life. On the banking side, fee income pressure may be manageable overall, though smaller private banks could feel more strain. Jefferies says the RBI has proposed stricter norms around bundling insurance products with banking products such as loans. Banks will still be allowed to cross-sell insurance, but only with explicit customer consent.This means a loan cannot automatically carry an attached credit protection policy unless the customer clearly agrees. Credit protect policies are often sold along with home loans, personal loans and other retail credit products. Jefferies notes in its report, “RBI proposes to tighten norms on bundling of insurance products with banking products like loans. collapse in volumes, but it flags a meaningful slowdown risk. Jefferies values HDFC Life at 2.3x Mar-28E embedded value (EV) and assigns a price target of Rs 900. The brokerage expects embedded value to compound at 15% over FY25–FY28. At the same time, HDFC Life has relatively higher exposure to credit protect compared with some peers, as shown in Jefferies’ product mix chart.Jefferies notes that “ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company & HDFC Life have higher share than MAX & SBIL.” That places HDFC Life among those more sensitive to changes in loan-linked sales.If tighter norms reduce attachment rates, HDFC Life’s value of new business margins could see some compression, as per the report.

US immigration officials grilled by Congress over Trump crackdown



London: The heads of US immigration agencies faced heavy criticism in Congress Tuesday as they defended President Donald Trump’s mass deportation drive and fielded questions about the fatal shootings of two protesters in Minneapolis. Trump acknowledged in the wake of the Minneapolis killings that a “softer touch” may be needed on immigration, and his administration announced concessions including the withdrawal of hundreds of officers from the Midwestern city. But the issue remains far from resolved, with Democrats demanding changes to the way the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) conducts its immigration sweeps and threatening to block its funding, while Trump’s administration vows to maintain its deportation efforts, with backing from Republican lawmakers. “The president tasked us with mass deportation, and we are fulfilling that mandate,” Todd Lyons, the acting head of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), said in his opening remarks during the Tuesday hearing on DHS oversight. He testified alongside Rodney Scott, the head of US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and Citizenship and Immigration Services director Joseph Edlow. Scott hailed efforts on the southern US frontier, saying CBP “spent the last year rebuilding what was an intentionally broken border” and that “the United States... enjoys the most secure border in our nation’s history.” The Trump administration officials faced a barrage of criticism and tough questions from Democratic lawmakers over the major crackdown on migrants in multiple US cities, which Republican representatives largely defended. “This administration and the agencies represented before us have shown a complete and utter disregard for the law and the Constitution,” Democratic Representative Tim Kennedy said. Representative Eli Crane, a Republican, pushed back on criticism of immigration enforcement, accusing Democrats of seeking to “demonize ICE and Homeland Security.” In Minneapolis, thousands of

federal agents have in recent weeks conducted raids in what the administration claims are targeted operations against criminals. Minnesota Governor Tim Walz said Tuesday that he expects the crackdown -- which has seen detentions of broad categories of immigrants and sometimes citizens -- to end soon. “We’re very much in a ‘trust but verify’ mode. But it’s my expectation... that we are talking days, not weeks and months, of this occupation,” Walz said. The operations have sparked mass protests in Minneapolis, and the fatal shootings of US citizens Renee Good and Alex Pretti less than three weeks apart last month led to a wave of outrage. When Democratic Representative Eric Swalwell asked Tuesday if Lyons would apologize to Good and Pretti’s families over the Trump administration’s initial description of them as “domestic terrorists,” he declined, saying he would not comment on active investigations. Opposition Democrats have been calling for sweeping reforms to ICE operations, including ending mobile patrols, prohibiting agents from concealing their faces, and requiring warrants. Democratic leaders in Congress are also threatening to block the 2026 funding bill for DHS. The White House has indicated it is willing to negotiate, but its response has failed to satisfy opposition lawmakers so far. “Republicans shared an outline of a counterproposal, which included neither details nor legislative text,” House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement. They denounced the White House response as “incomplete and insufficient in terms of addressing the concerns Americans have about ICE’s lawless conduct,” and said they were awaiting further details. If negotiations fail, DHS could face a funding shortfall starting Saturday. CBP and ICE operations could continue using funds approved by Congress last year, but other sub-agencies such as federal disaster organization FEMA could be affected.

Walk for peace: Buddhist monks arrive in Washington after 2,300-mile

Paris: “People want this,” said Joan Donoghue, 59, from Silver Spring, Maryland, who had come out with four of her friends on Tuesday to see the monks. “I went on Sunday in Virginia and I waited outside for a long time and I talked to so many people and they all said the same thing: that our country needs this. We feel divided and people want more kindness and more compassion and more peace.” The monks began their walk in Texas more than three months ago, at times braving frigid winter temperatures, sometimes with bare feet, to raise “awareness of peace, loving kindness, and compassion across America and the world.” The marchers continued on despite a powerful winter storm that spread a paralyzing mix of heavy snow, sleet and freezing rain from the Ohio Valley and mid-South to New England, compounded by bitter, Arctic cold gripping much of the U.S. Accompanied by Aloka, a rescue dog from India who has gained a following on social media as “the Peace Dog,” their journey comes at a time of growing tensions in the U.S. President Donald Trump’s tough immigration policy has seen surges of immigration agents and National Guard troops deployed in some cities, with both American citizens and immigrants killed by federal agents. We walk not to protest, but to awaken the peace that already lives within each of us,” said Bhikkhu Pannakara, spiritual leader of the Walk for Peace. “The Walk for Peace is a simple yet meaningful reminder that unity and kindness begin within each of us and can radiate outward to families, communities, and society as a whole.” They will spend Tuesday and Wednesday in Washington and end their journey in nearby Annapolis, Maryland on Thursday. The walk has garnered support from millions of people

on social media, with many sharing messages of support for the monks. Supporters have braved snow and rain to meet and offer flowers to the monks as they passed through their cities. In Washington, hundreds of people came out to see the monks as they walked along a road informally known as Embassy Row because of the high number of embassies and diplomatic residences. Coleman O’Donoghue, 62, of Washington, caught the attention

ute, many of the spectators said the camaraderie and good energy made the experience worthwhile. Julie Segor, 58, of Washington, made friends with a couple she met while waiting. Carl, 61, and Christine Varner, 65, of Maryland, pooled their flowers and fruit with her to give to the monks as they passed. “It was a shared common interest (that brought us together) to see the monks on the peace walk and give them some fruit and

arriving in Washington. They also held an interfaith ceremony at the National Cathedral. During the ceremony at the cathedral, Kimberly Bassett, the District of Columbia’s secretary of state, presented the monks with a proclamation honoring them on behalf of the Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser. Today may mark the end of a 2,300-mile walk but it is not the end of our journey for peace. Your pilgrimage has brought people



of many of those onlookers as he carried a large flag with the peace symbol on a sea of blue. Tuesday was the fourth time he and his wife, Bonnie, had seen the monks. “They are beautiful distraction from the chaos that is taking place in the city, the country and in the world right now,” O’Donoghue said. “It gives everyone a second to pause and think about something that is not as stressful as what the chaos is creating.” While they waited hours just to see the monks for less than a min-

flowers,” Christine said. During their stop in North Carolina, the state’s governor, Josh Stein, thanked the monks for bringing hope to millions with their message of peace, equality, justice and compassion “You are inspiring people at a time when so many are in need of inspiration,” Stein said. The Walk for Peace has made stops in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia. The monks met with spiritual and other leaders after

ple together across cities, states and communities,” Bassett said. Although the walk has been positive, it has not been without obstacles. While walking through Dayton, Texas, a truck struck the monks’ escort vehicle, injuring several people, according to local media. Two monks sustained serious injuries and one had his leg amputated. Despite the accident, the group continued to trek across the U.S. to honor not only their original message of peace but also their brothers.

‘I saw the writing on the wall’: Austria offers safe haven for US academics as Trump wages war on universities

London: Wali Malik no longer has to worry that a right-wing bureaucrat – or influencer – will decide his research is “woke”. He doesn’t have to fear government retaliation for speaking his mind or following the science wherever it may lead. And like others who have left a polarized United States for the calmer pastures of Austria, he need not fear his lab being decimated because the president decided he wants to deport the people who work there. “There is a lot of excitement in Vienna,” said Malik, a specialist in lab robotics. Last Spring, then living in Boston and working as a consultant for biomedical research labs, he was recruited to lead the development of robotic infrastructure at Aithyra, a life sciences research institution, founded in 2024, that seeks to incorporate artificial intelligence in all aspects of scientific development. When he got the call about a position in Vienna, Malik had already begun to see the impact of Donald Trump’s assault on higher education and scientific research. He saw friends and family fall victim to mass layoffs at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation, while his own work slowed as federal grants were rescinded. He had never been to Austria, but the decision to leave the United States wasn’t hard. “I saw the writing on the wall,” Malik explained. “It took trust for the US to become a scientific powerhouse. It took 70 years – and was destroyed within six months,” he said. And if the American electorate is willing to do this, he asks, who’s to say it won’t do so again in the future? Austria is the not the only country seeking to benefit from dysfunction in America. Just weeks after Trump took office, three prominent anti-fascist historians at Yale University – Jason Stanley, Marci Shore and Timothy Snyder – were offered and accepted positions at the University of Toronto. Institutions across Europe also last year began offering “scientific asylum” to US-based researchers, with France’s Aix-Marseille University receiving more than 500 inquiries about its own campaign to lure American academics. Eva-Maria Holzleitner, Austria’s Minister of Women, Science and Research, described the US’s self-inflicted attack on academia as both “really shocking” and a setback to “the scientific community as a whole”. But it is also an opportunity for Austria to pitch itself as “a safe haven for science and research and innovation”. Her ministry has sought to lure at least 50 academics from the US within a year, half

through an initiative that fast-tracks hiring for professors and half through a fellowship program for early- and mid-career researchers. A ministry website targeting researchers in the US also advertises funds for students who “are formally or de facto denied the right to education” due to their ethnicity, gender or “civic engagement”. That comes after the Trump administration has arrested and sought to deport students, such as Mahmoud Khalil and Rümeyza Öztürk, who campaign against US support for Israel, and to restrict on-campus support and gender-affirming care for transgender people. The Trump administration has waged an all-out war on what it portrays as the liberal bastion of academia, including by rescinding grants previously authorized by Congress. All federally funded research must now reflect his rightwing ideology and avoid any mention of race or gender. Meanwhile, recent scenes of masked federal agents seizing immigrants and US citizens from the streets have also helped convince many foreign-born researchers that they are no longer welcome in America. On 4 July 2025, the Austrian Academy of Sciences announced its first-ever fellowship program targeting academics of all nationalities at US institutions using money originally seeded by the Marshall Plan. Two months later, it announced 25 recipients, each of whom receives €500,000. “Thank Trump for this brain gain,” the academy’s president, Heinz Fassmann, said in a statement at the time. Officials say that although it is modest, the program sends an important signal that Austria is a stable democracy affirming its commitment to science without ideological dictates. Even those who previously left Austria for often higher-paying opportunities in the US are considering a return to Europe, according to Alexandra Lieben, a professor of international relations at the University of California, Los Angeles, and president of Ascina, the association for Austrian scientists and scholars in North America. Most of Ascina’s roughly 1,400 members have been affected by funding cuts, she said. “There was a real shock among everybody, and a paralysis that went along with that. That has subsided,” she said. Even long-term residents are exploring exit plans, she said. Alexander Lex, who studies human-computer interaction and data visualization for biomedicine and other applications, moved to the US more than a decade ago as a post-doctoral fellow at Harvard



University and went on to lead the Visualization Design Lab at the University of Utah. Last summer, Lex announced that his lab was “entering a new chapter” and moving to the Graz University of Technology. An Austrian national, Lex said that he began searching for a job in his native country before Trump returned to power. The 2024 election and its aftermath affirmed his decision to look for work elsewhere. “I think there is a big contraction happening in the US academic environment, partially because of hard facts, partially because of self-censorship and being worried,” Lex said. “Especially if you’re in a more vulnerable position, people are taking less risks,” he said, “and that’s really bad for science”. Even before Trump’s return, Hussam Habib, who received his PhD at the University of Iowa, could feel the political pressures seeping into his work. He studies the impact of algorithms and platform governance on political polarization, his interest in the topic stemming from his undergraduate days in Pakistan. “I had met people at my school who were very fine, normal, decent human beings. But over the years,

you saw them become more and more radical. And you talk to them, and they start quoting Jordan Peterson, Ben Shapiro and a lot of these radical misogynists,” Habib said. The US is where a lot of this research into disinformation and online radicalization was happening; for someone thinking of building a career in the field, it “seemed like the right place to be,” he recalled. However, following the Covid-19 pandemic and Trump’s false claims about the 2020 election and January 6 insurrection, work that addresses online misinformation has been the subject of a concerted attack from the Republican party. Funding began to dry up, Habib said, and peers began suggesting that he focus less on the political impacts of social media. Then Habib, saw a post advertising a position at the University of Graz. He applied, having never been to Austria, and received one of the new fellowships designed for people leaving America. “Am I glad that I dodged a bullet? I want to say that no, I would have been fine,” Habib said. But, “deep down, I know that I would have been very, very stressed.”

The secretive islands behind the US-UK row

On our third day sailing south from Addu City in the Maldives, thunderhead clouds rose around our boat, reducing visibility to near zero. With full sails, we raced the weather through a reef-strewn pass, weaving between coral mounds until the sea flattened and lush, uninhabited islands slid past on either side. Once we settled on a mooring off the island of Boddam, I realised we had arrived somewhere few people would ever see: the Chagos Archipelago, one of the most remote island groups on Earth. Chagos is made up of seven atolls and some 60 islands scattered across the Indian Ocean like a handful of shells flung across a vast blue sea. Salomon, its northernmost atoll, lies 286 nautical miles south of the Maldives. Little-known and isolated, it's a place that demands self-reliance and a tolerance for being profoundly far from anywhere else. Six years into a world circumnavigation, my family and I had sailed halfway around the planet to get here, bringing everything we would need with us – just as the few who venture here must. Yet despite their apparent insignificance, these palm-studded islands have been thrust into an unlikely international row. In recent weeks, Chagos has become the focus of renewed diplomatic tension between the UK, the United States and Mauritius, reopening questions about sovereignty and the legacy of colonial rule. The UK has controlled Chagos (officially known as the British Indian Ocean Territory), since 1814. In 1965, the islands were separated from Mauritius when Mauritius was still a British colony and Chagos became formally established as a British overseas territory. The UK purchased the archipelago for £3m, but Mauritius has argued that it was illegally forced to give Chagos away as part of a deal to gain independence. Beginning in 1967, the British government began forcibly removing Chagos' residents to build a highly secretive joint military base with the United States on Diego Garcia, the archipelago's largest island. Since gaining independence from the UK in 1968, Mauritius has claimed sovereignty over Chagos, maintaining that it's an integral part of its



territory. Amid growing diplomatic pressure, the UK signed a controversial agreement to hand control of the archipelago to Mauritius in 2025 – a move that US President Donald Trump recently called “an act of great stupidity.” But while world leaders grapple over Chagos' future, evidence of its tangled past is everywhere in this mysterious, paradisiacal place.

Pristine and haunted
Chagos is among the most intact reef systems on the planet and has long held a near-mythical reputation among sailors. For decades, self-sufficient voyagers lingered for months, fishing the reef, harvesting coconuts and living slowly. That era ended in the late 1990s, when authorities tightened access. Today, these disputed tropical islands are closed to tourism and the only way for sailors, researchers and authorised visitors to explore the islands is to secure advanced permits, receive a medical evaluation, obtain wreck-removal insurance and then sail to reach this far-flung place,

just as we did. During our four-week stay (the maximum allowed), days fell into a rhythm shaped by the environment. We snorkelled reefs thick with life, spotting dozens of sharks, rays and turtles, and vast schools of wrasse, damselfish and parrotfish. We hiked shaded trails through old plantations, and caught jacks and snappers with ease, logging each one as required. Laundry water came from shallow wells, where rainwater floats above salt. Each day, the skies filled with red-footed boobies, noddies, sooty terns and tropicbirds nesting in astonishing numbers along the shoreline. Yet fragility was everywhere. The reefs showed patches of bleaching. Each evening, monstrous rats – introduced centuries earlier by European colonists and fat on seabird eggs – emerged from the jungle alongside enormous coconut crabs, pushing us off the beaches and back towards the boat. On Boddam – once one of Chagos' three settled islands – we explored dense jungle threaded with old paths, stumbling across the remains

of a church, jail and school built in the 1930s. In the graveyard, nearly every inscription had been erased by time. Someone had lived here long enough to build, bury their dead and imagine a future.

The islands felt both pristine and haunted.
Hoping to understand more, I reached out to Anne-Marie Gendron, a Chagossian in the Seychelles and one of roughly 2,000 people forcibly removed from the archipelago in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She had lived with her parents on Boddam when it was a bustling village of a few hundred residents, and was among the last to leave in 1973. “They told us we had to go to make room for the US military,” she said. “But I was baptised in the church. Generations of my family were buried in the graveyard. We had no other home.” Some people didn't even pack, she told me. “They couldn't understand what was happening.” Chagos had been settled for centuries, after the Dutch and French brought enslaved Africans and Malagasy people to tend

coconut plantations. Over generations, a distinct Creole culture emerged, with its own language, food and music. Before establishing the US-UK military base on Diego Garcia in 1971, the United States insisted the territory be cleared. British officials, eager to comply, dismissed the islands' residents as transient labourers. Internal correspondence described them as “a few Tarzans or Man Fridays”, a reference to Robinson Crusoe's servant. Families were put on ships and deposited in Mauritius and the Seychelles, often without compensation, housing or even proof of nationality. Many fell into deep poverty. Some died, Gendron said, of sadness. The UK has since apologised for the nature of their removal. After the removals, most of the archipelago was abandoned. Villages collapsed into forest. Coconut plantations reverted to jungle. When a vast Marine Protected Area was declared in 2010, Chagos was celebrated as an ecological triumph: a rare example of large-scale rewilding in the tropics. After years of

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

ture, food, and music. We are not Mauritian.”

An uncertain future
In January 2026, momentum faltered. Days before the treaty was expected to pass through the UK House of Lords, the US administration raised objections. The British government paused the legislation and returned to negotiations with Washington, before the US reversed course again weeks later. Once more, decisions about Chagos were being made without the people most affected in the room. “Everything has been behind closed doors,” Bontemps said. “It's like 1965 all over again. We're voiceless.” For many Chagossians, the stakes are deeply personal. Elders continue to die without ever seeing their homeland again. Some cautiously welcome the possibility of returning to the outer islands, including Boddam, possibly to develop small eco-tourism ventures and artisanal fisheries; others reject the deal outright, objecting to the continued ban on resettling in Diego Garcia and the absence of direct consultation. Environmentalists, meanwhile, warn that any human return must be carefully managed. There are concerns that Mauritius may lack the resources to protect the marine reserve at its current scale. Rising seas add another layer of uncertainty: like the Maldives, Chagos is perilously low-lying, its future shaped as much by climate change as by diplomacy. If true tourism comes at all, it's likely to remain limited. A 2015 feasibility study envisioned small-scale, yacht-based access rather than land-based resorts or large infrastructure. For sailors, scientists and a handful of intrepid travellers, Chagos could one day become a model of tightly controlled access to one of the world's most spectacular reef systems – managed, perhaps, by the descendants of those once expelled from it. Today, I still keep a photograph above my desk of the islands' white sand, leaning palms and blue water so luminous luminous it seems to glow. It captures what Chagos looks like from a distance: lush, untouched, serene. What it cannot show are the erased names in the graveyard, the voices missing from negotiations or the questions that remain about its future.

Haiti's Winter Olympics kit redesigned at last minute to fit IOC guidelines

The designer behind the Haitian team's uniform for the 2026 Winter Olympics has said she had to redesign their ski suits for the opening ceremony after being told they did not comply with the guidelines on athlete expression by the International Olympic Committee. The uniforms, designed by the Haitian-Italian designer Stella Jean, were based on a 2006 painting of the formerly enslaved revolutionary Toussaint Louverture riding a horse by the Haitian artist Edouard Duval-Carrié. Louverture, who led the successful revolt that established the world's first Black republic in 1804, had been central to Jean's initial design. It follows the skeleton racer Vladyslav Heraskevych being barred from the Games because of his “helmet of memory” in honour of Ukraine's war dead. The IOC guidelines stipulate: “No kind of demonstration or political, religious, or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic



sites, venues or other areas.” The two-man Haitian delegation only received their uniforms the night before the opening ceremony. The kit had arrived straight from a workshop, where Italian artisans had been working around the clock to hand-paint the design on to technical sports fabric.

“The uniforms are not just an exercise of style but an exercise of responsibility,” Jean said. “We had to concentrate positive messages about Haiti, our art, culture and history, within a few metres [of fabric].” The response to the ruling was swift and far-reaching. Images of the uniform spread

quickly online, prompting messages of pride from the Haitian diaspora. Rather than abandoning the concept, Jean and her team returned the uniforms to the workshop and quickly repainted the garments to reference the painting – minus Louverture. The IOC approved the revised

design just in time, featuring a riderless horse and a bright blue sky. “For 24 hours, I was in total despair – we had no budget, no time and this was our only chance to show Haiti in a positive light,” she says. “His absence spoke louder than his presence.” Jean refuses to be downbeat

about the IOC's decision to block her initial design. “The IOC did not lower the bar, it raised it and changed everything,” she says. “If it wasn't for the rules, we would not have applied a higher degree of creativity or resilience.” Other unique features of the kit's design include the tignon,

a women's headwrap originating in west Africa that references how enslaved women were forced by colonisers to cover their hair. Jewellery is based on Creole earrings, which were among the few personal items enslaved people were permitted to carry from Africa. Large pockets nodded to the merchant culture of Haiti, where markets are the backbone of the economy. The uniforms are believed to be the only fully hand-painted ensemble at this year's games. With rain forecast on the night of the ceremony, there were concerns about how the paint would hold. “We truly feared that during the ceremony, the paint might dissolve and reveal Toussaint's face beneath, which made us laugh, but also made us reflect on the idea of our ancestors making themselves heard,” Jean said. “When we talk about Haiti, it's immediately poverty,” Jean said. “We want to tell the world that we still exist, behind the earthquake, behind the disaster

and the crisis that we are living in. We are so much more than this.” Now, she said: “If you search Haiti on the internet, the first images are our athletes and art, not the violent images that we usually find.” The cross-country skier Steven-son Savart said this week: “I felt so proud that it is difficult to describe. Walking in these clothes in front of the world and representing my small country was so amazing.” Richardson Viano, an alpine skier, described the reference to Louverture as “a courageous message to send”. Adopted from an orphanage in Haiti, he said the uniform symbolised his “journey to the Olympic mountains”, would be remembered for “its strength, resilience and values”. For Jean, the symbolism of their presence outweighed the results. “In the Olympic arena, we were all equal,” she said. “Haiti was no longer the poorest nation. That night, we stood with our heads held high, side by side with the giants of the world.”

ENTERTAINMENT

Dhanush faces legal issues after his production company seeks rs. 20 crore for postponing a movie

Mumbai: A production company has put actor Dhanush in serious water. He allegedly received a legal warning from Thenandal Films regarding a protracted film project that was delayed. According to reports, the banner has demanded ₹20 crore in compensation, citing severe financial losses brought on by the protracted delay. According to the production company, the actor signed a contract with them in 2016 for the film Naan Rudran, but he never actually pursued it. Dhanush had initially agreed to both star in and direct the movie, according to the notice sent by the company's legal counsel. Even though the production company reportedly accepted later revisions to the plan, it is alleged that the actor neglected to submit the full screenplay, which caused the movie to stall for a long time. According to the allegation, the production company has already paid up to ₹20 crore. They assert that they also covered additional costs for actors who were supposed to co-star with Dha-



nush, such as SJ Suryah and Nagarjuna Akkineni. The production company claims in the notification that the manufacturers suffered large financial losses as a result of the delay and have thus demanded monetary compensation to recoup their early

production investments.

The production company has also issued a warning, stating that if its demands are not met within the allotted period, it will take further legal action. Advocate A Chidambaram said in the notice that "Dha-

nush gave call sheets to other films without completing work on this pending project," which is why the movie was put on hold halfway through. It is important to note that Dhanush has kept mute and has not yet released an official remark about the matter. In 2025, Dhanush last appeared in Tere Ishk Mein, Idli Kadaai, and Kuberaa.

Kriti Sanon played the lead part in the love drama Tere Ishk Mein. Audiences and critics gave it mixed reviews when it first came out, and it ended its run at the box office with ₹161.96 crore in total revenue. The film focuses on Shankar, a man whose life transforms following a traumatic breakup. His upcoming film is Kara, directed by Vignesh Raja. The film, which was produced by Dr. Ishari K. Ganesh, is expected to hit theaters this summer; the precise date has not yet been disclosed. Additionally, he is working on a project that he has tentatively named D55. Rajkumar Periasamy, an Amarant filmmaker, will helm the movie.

Anurag Kashyap condemns social media backlash to Dhurandhar's critics



Mumbai: The backlash against film critics following the release of Aditya Dhar's Dhurandhar was denounced by director Anurag Kashyap. In addition, he complimented Aditya Dhar's bravery in making the film, despite many challenging elements. In an interview with Sucharita Tyagi for her YouTube channel, Kahsyap emphasized the current discussion over the movie and made it clear that his appreciation for a project does not mean he ignores its flaws. He emphasized a balanced viewpoint and said that he had discussed "problematic things" himself. "What is right is right, and what is wrong is wrong," or "Jo cheez galat hai voh galat hai, jo sahi hai voh shi hai." "Merely liking

something does not imply that I will impose my viewpoint on others," he stated. Additionally, Kashyap responded to the online abuse that movie reviewers experienced following the premiere of Dhurandhar. He termed the attacks "uncalled for" and said that he was among the few people in the industry who agreed with the Film Critics Guild's statement against "targeted attacks, harassment, and hate directed toward film critics." "He went on to say he was even asked why he had given the movie such a high rating. Kashyap claimed that a large portion of the opposition was "all coordinated" and "not organic." "A lot of this backlash thing is not organic," he added, adding that it is a social media construct. The

53-year-old acknowledged a unique characteristic of the film—courage—while discussing its contentious elements. He said that while he would not overlook the bad aspects, he would instead highlight the creator's perseverance. "I'm not going to hide the issues, but I'm also noticing something else. I can appreciate the bravery as a filmmaker. When everyone gives up because the movie is too long, he continued, "someone who has to fight through a system to do a certain thing and the belief in it," he said. He cited the Arjun Rampal torture scene's technical execution as an especially noteworthy instance of accuracy. "As a filmmaker, I am aware of how much time it requires. "Let's do this in VFX," would be the thought of any director. The time and patience to be so exact and to accomplish it as a filmmaker. As a filmmaker, I am therefore amazed by that," the director remarked. Actors Ranveer Singh, Sara Arjun, R Madhavan, Akshaye Khanna, Sanjay Dutt, Rakesh Bedi, and others play important roles in Dhurandhar. Netflix offers the espionage-thriller for streaming. Kennedy, a noir-thriller by Kashyap, will debut on ZEE5 on February 20, 2026. Rahul Bhat, Sunny Leone, Mohit Takalkar, Abhilash Thapliyal, and other actors play important parts in the movie.

Rekha asked the makers to replace Aruna Irani in Mangalsutra



Mumbai: Veteran actor Aruna Irani talked candidly about being replaced in the 1981 movie Mangalsutra, recalling events from the early 1980s. Since they had previously collaborated on other projects and had a strong working relationship, Aruna and Rekha had initially signed on to the movie jointly. But Aruna was taken aback by what transpired during the creation of Mangalsutra. Aruna Irani stated that she was never told the shooting schedule after signing the film. "I was first cast in Mangalsutra with Rekha. Oddly, though, they never got in touch with me again. I had no knowledge, although I had read in the press that the shoot had started. I eventually discovered that I had been swapped out. I wasn't even informed," she stated. Aruna Irani questioned filmmaker Vijay about the choice after the movie came out. "Why did you replace me?" I asked him. I never got dates from you. I had total freedom." I got into a fight with him. At that point, he informed me, "Rekha didn't want you in the movie, which was the real issue." I was taken aback.

I brushed it off right away. "Don't be silly," I said. She is a wonderful friend. Why would she act in such way? "She's your friend—why don't you ask her?" he said. Later, according to Aruna Irani, she went straight up to Rekha. When confronted, Rekha said that she had asked the producers to replace the seasoned actress. Why? Aruna was given a very challenging role that would have made Rekha's character appear like a vamp if she had played it with heart. Eventually, Prema Narayan, who was well-known for her vamp personas and dance numbers, took Aruna Irani's place.

Anant Nag also starred in the movie, which focused on his character being haunted by Prema's ghost. In spite of its captivating concept, Mangalsutra's box office performance was subpar. Aruna Irani also claimed that a similar circumstance arose when Aurat Aurat Aurat was being made. The film took six years to complete, she said, but it was canceled for a number of reasons. For example, Aruna Irani said Rekha wouldn't permit that.

Hollywood has consistently portrayed Indians as victims, according to a Ramayana producer



Mumbai: Producer of Ramayana Namit Malhotra recently revealed that the movie was the result of his aggravation, aiming to present Indian films in a way that has never been done before.

He drew attention to how little Westerners value Indian history, culture, and cinema. The head of DNEG, a visual effects company that has produced multiple Oscar-winning movies, Namit Malhotra, spoke at an ET Recently, there has been a discussion regarding how Indian history and culture have never been represented in the West. "We had no real presence when I went to Hollywood," he stated. Our history and culture

were not represented in any way. They didn't understand our industry, our history, or our culture, in contrast to other American fields like finance and medicine where Indians have achieved success. I've been working hard for the past 20 years to have a foothold in Hollywood." Through the prism of a developing nation, it continued to irritate me, regardless of Slumdog Millionaire. We were always the victim, which always bothered me. I always felt that we needed to demonstrate our identity, origins, and the depth of our history in a way that the world had never seen before.

That was the main reason

why Ramayana is the ideal account of our history that can be proudly presented to the world, Namit Malhotra continued. One of India's most anticipated film extravaganzas is Nitesh Tiwari's Ramayana. The film features a stellar ensemble, which includes Yash as Ravana, Sai Pallavi as Goddess Sita, and Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Ram. Sunny Deol as Lord Hanuman, Ravi Dubey as Lakshman, Lara Dutta, Rakul Preet Singh, and Arun Govil are also part of the supporting cast.

Ancient Indian mythology served as the inspiration for the two-part live-action epic Ramayana. During Diwali 2026, the first installment will be released in theaters around the world, and the second part will follow in 2027. According to reports, Ramayana, which is supported by Namit Malhotra, has a budget of Rs 4,000 crore. Hans Zimmer and AR Rahman's music composition and spectacular visual effects are to be expected.

A New 'Sugar Daddy' Ad by Yuzvendra Chahal Starts an Online Discussion

Mumbai: The Indian international cricket player Yuzvendra Chahal has been in the news for all the wrong reasons.

At one point, his widely reported divorce with Dhanashree Verma was the talk of town. When Yuzi donned his divorce t-shirt, "Be Your Own Sugar Daddy," on the day of the last hearing, he quietly shattered the dignified silence that the former couple had attempted to preserve. Yuzi's recent advertisement featuring Shefali Bagga has now generated a fresh online discussion. Yuzvendra and Bigg Boss 13 star Shefali Bagga are featured in a recent web video. The leg spin bowler was chosen chief narrative officer of narrative TV, a micro-drama platform, according to the video. The

platform promoted them using the 'Be Your Own Sugar Daddy' issue, which did not sit well with internet users. Shefali announces herself as Story TV's star in the video. Yuzvendra responded by claiming that he is the one who creates stars and narrating a script that tells the tale of a Bollywood diva who endures a tragic divorce and battles for alimony. Shefali stated after reading the script that she believes she had heard this story before.

Despite the fact that Dhanashree's name was not mentioned in the advertisement, internet users quickly made the connection and criticized Yuzvendra for his actions. 'Zero Sugar (Daddy) Diet' was written in a screen grab of the video that was shared on Reddit shortly after it was posted

online. The comment section was quickly overrun by netizens. "The whole sugar daddy thing connected to Yuzi and Dhanashree for some petty marketing or advertising campaign is so below the line," one person commented. It's repulsive. I'm not sure what transpired between them, but I'm glad for her to watch him do all of this." "He is admitting that all he brings to a relationship is his net worth," said another person. To put it another way, he is displaying his lack of confidence. On December 20, 2020, Yuzvendra Chahal and Dhanashree Verma exchanged vows.

In Gurugram, they were married in secret. However, the pair was living apart after 18 months of marriage since there was a rumor that something was wrong in their marital paradise. The couple then filed for divorce by mutual consent on February 5, 2025. In 2024, a photo of Yuzvendra and RJ Mahvash together from Christmas went viral online, sparking relationship rumors. Their public appearances suggested they were dating, even though they did not confirm it.

They did, however, unfollow one another on Instagram in January 2026. At the time, RJ Mahvash also posted mysterious poetry.



The president of the Karnataka Film Chamber supports Yash's toxic



Mumbai: Even before its premiere, Yash's upcoming action movie Toxic has generated a number of problems. Reviews of the movie's teaser were mixed. A Christian organization has complained to the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) and others that the preview offends religious feelings after the Women's Commission criticized it for showing a sex scene. In response to the controversy, Dr. Jayamala, head of

the Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce, stated that people shouldn't make snap judgments based just on a teaser. Dr. Jayamala told reporters, "I don't know what's wrong with the Toxic teaser, but complaints have come in concerning it. A teaser is merely a sneak peek intended to draw people to theaters. It is premature to discuss the movie before the censor board has given it a review. Filmmakers spend hundreds of

crores on their productions, and before making a judgment, audiences should watch the entire movie. She continued by saying that the movie's creators have refuted claims of offensive or derogatory material. She reaffirmed that the concerns will be handled through a proper regulatory process because the movie has not yet been evaluated and certified before its release. Following a brutal gunfight in the cemetery and a sex scene in a car parked outside, the teaser caused a lot of criticism. Among the holy icons on the aforementioned property is a statue of the Archangel Michael. The National Christian Federation formally complained about Toxic to the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), the Chief Secretary, the Home Secretary, and the Film Chamber of Commerce. A complaint was also made against the creators for using a scene that outraged women's modesty. Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups, which was directed by Geethu Mohandas, also features important performances from Rukmini Vasanth, Nayanthara, Kiara Advani, Tara Sutaria, Huma Qureshi, Akshay Oberoi, and Sudev Nair. The movie was co-written by Yash and Geetu.

Tusshar Kapoor says he chose to be a single father without telling his father, Jeetendra

Mumbai: When Tusshar Kapoor used surrogacy to bring his son Lakshya into the world in 2016, he became a father. Now, the actor has admitted that he didn't tell his father, veteran actor Jeetendra, about the choice in advance. In a recent interview with Meri Saheli, Tusshar talked candidly about his choice to become a single father and recounted his family's reaction to the news. "I am very old school, similar to my father, but at the same time, we are extremely different from each other. After staying in the US for five years, I learnt to live independently. I haven't even married. I have a child as a single father. However, my father is not like this. He believes in marriage and having a family, he is very old school Indian," Tusshar said. Regarding marriage, Tusshar explained that while he respects the institution, he does not believe it is appropriate for everyone. Tusshar stated in the conversation that he had no need to ask his parents' permission before deciding to become a single father. He shared, "Marriage is an institution that I wholeheartedly support, but it wasn't for me. Being a father was my calling. My parents didn't put any pressure on me since I never considered asking them. My age was 39. On a flight to Tirupati, I got to know Prakash Jha. Despite not being friends, we were socially acquainted. We carpooled on the way back when our planes were canceled. "Why not consider being a single parent if you're not meant to be married?" he urged me on the way. Around the same age, a single woman in his household became a parent. Then I called the physicians. They gave me advice. I eventually became a father after we did things one step at a time. The brother of film and television producer Ektaa Kapoor and the son of famous



actor Jeetendra, Tusshar never married. In 2016, Tusshar became the father to Lakshya, a surrogate-born boy. Bachelor Dad: My Journey to Fatherhood and More is another book he published. After making his acting debut in 2001 with Mujhe Kuch Kehna Hai, Tusshar went on to work in films like Mastizaade, Gayab, Kyaa Kool Hai Hum, Golmaal, Shootout at Lokhandwala, and The Dirty Picture. With a variety of projects, such as Pop Kaun?, Booo Sabki Phategi, and Dus June Ki Raat Chapter 1, he has also dabbled in the OTT space in recent years. He also appeared in the Malayalam horror-comedy Romancha's adaptation, the horror comedy Kapkapiii. The actor is rumored to be working on Janadesh, the director Prakash Jha's upcoming political thriller.

Harbhajan Singh's Direct Warning To India Before A High-Profile Conflict With Pakistan



New Delhi: Former Indian spinner Harbhajan Singh expressed hope that the Men in Blue will “play without any pressure and wave the flag of victory” ahead of their match against Pakistan in the group round of the T20 World Cup. Singh also highlighted that the Men in Blue would need to play spinner Usman Tariq effectively. Only months after the

Men in Blue had dominated Pakistan in three thrilling Asia Cup matches, including the final, the India-Pakistan match is finally underway and is expected to captivate fans from Colombo on Sunday after much off-field controversy and the end of a boycott by the Pakistani government. “India will win the match,” Harbhajan told the reporters in Ranchi. Usman Tariq is a good spinner for Pakistan; we must play him carefully. The Indian team is really good and capable. We hope they perform as they always have, without pressure, and with a victorious wave.Usman has come under scrutiny for his sidearm motion, which involves delivering the ball after a brief pause. He has taken 11 wickets at an average of 7.90 in four Twenty20 Internationals, including a four-fer. The legality of this motion has been hotly debated; many claim the bowler is tossing or simply throwing the ball. Additionally, Nayan Mongia, a former Indian cricket

player from Vadodara, told ANI, “It will be fun.” We hope India wins and it’s a wonderful contest. Because Pakistan has lost seven or eight consecutive ICC tournaments, and because of the way India is playing, their batting, bowling, and captain leading from the front, this game is all about confidence. Since Pakistan will be under a lot of strain, I don’t think there will be many problems. Cricket has evolved significantly. Children in India are no longer afraid. A six, a four, or an over could alter the outcome of the match. All-rounder Hardik Pandya has high expectations from the former Indian wicketkeeper-batter “because of how he plays under pressure in big matches” and because they are both from Baroda. With 315 runs in 12 innings at an average of 35.00 and a strike rate of over 126.50, two fifties, and 25 wickets at an average of 18.60, Hardik, an all-rounder, has a strong all-format record against Pakistan. His best statistics are 3/8.

Cristiano Ronaldo will finish the strike in a dramatic return



attempts to stabilize its season and return to its on-field goals. Ronaldo has reportedly been frustrated with Al Nassr’s overall direction and financial structure, which has caused him to miss the team’s last two Saudi Pro League games. In the opening leg of the AFC Champions League Two round of 16, Al Nassr defeated Arkadag FC 1-0 on Wednesday, and the Portuguese star missed his third consecutive game. His absence has gen-

erated a lot of conversation regarding the team’s internal circumstances, and fans are still waiting to find out when the forward will be able to play competitively again. The SPL previously stated in a statement that no player is greater than the team or the league.The foundation of the Saudi Pro League is a straightforward idea: The league stated that each club functions autonomously while adhering to the same regulations.Clubs are run by their own football leadership, boards, and executives. These clubs make decisions about hiring, spending, and strategy within a budgetary framework intended to maintain sustainability and competitive equilibrium. That foundation is the same for all teams in the league. Ronaldo, who has been in outstanding goal-scoring form and hasn’t won a major prize since joining Al-Nassr in December 2022, is intent on reaching his 1000 goals in professional football.

Delhi Civic Body Monitors 17 Public Services With 333 CCTVs and Sensors

New Delhi, Feb 14:Through its Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC), which was established in 2020 as part of the Smart City initiative at a cost of Rs 65 crore, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has improved real-time governance and civic monitoring. Currently, the state-of-the-art facility monitors almost 17 vital public services, from environmental conditions to traffic flow and sanitation.The ICCC has been integrated with a network of 333 CCTV cameras that have been placed throughout NDMC districts. The Delhi police will be in charge of 183 CCTV, allowing officers to keep an eye on things, react to problems fast, and make sure that municipal activities run more smoothly. With Delhi Police officers stationed there, the center also helps with coordination with law enforcement organizations. The management of vehicles is one of the main areas of focus. Authorities can monitor routes, log daily



miles traveled, and get notifications if cars stray from authorized routes or exceed NDMC boundaries by using GPS and RFID-based devices. Water tankers, garbage trucks, mechanical road sweepers, anti-smog guns, and pressure jetting devices can all be tracked in real time.While

subterranean bins are equipped with systems to track fill levels and send out notifications for prompt lifting, the ICCC oversees the clearing status of over-ground bins in the solid waste management segment. To improve operations involving various trash vehicle types, such as

those transporting construction and municipal rubbish, radio frequency identification technology has been implemented. Smart environmental sensors that measure pollution and weather indicators in accordance with CPCB standards are also installed in the command center. Temperature, humidity, AQI, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, PM10, and PM2.5 are among the parameters monitored. Long-term patterns are examined for policy action, and automatic alarms are produced if measurements exceed allowable limits. The ICCC monitors traffic patterns, water-logging places, and other susceptible areas in addition to sanitation and the environment. To enable prompt intervention, field workers are connected to a dedicated control room hotline.According to officials, the system has greatly enhanced data-driven decision-making, accountability, and reaction time in the NDMC region.

PM Modi Makes a Significant Arrival Aboard an Assam Highway C-130J aircraft

New Delhi, Feb 14: Prime Minister Narendra Modi started his one-day tour of the state that will shortly hold elections by making a historic landing on a C-130J aircraft at the first emergency landing facility (ELF) in the northeast in Moran, Assam. Following his arrival, he had taken off from the Chabua airstrip and landed on a section of National Highway-37 at the ELF in Moran. PM Modi had stated in a previous post on X that the ELF will be essential for emergency response, allowing the prompt deployment of rescue and relief efforts in trying circumstances. In order to improve defense, logistics, and disaster response, the Rs 100-crore ELF, a 4.2-km reinforced section of the Moran Bypass, will serve as a strategic and multipurpose runway for IAF fighter jets and transport aircraft. The facility can



be used for both military and civilian purposes, and in an emergency, it can be used as a substitute for the Dibrugarh airport. The ELF can handle transport aircraft with a maximum take-off weight of 74 tonnes and fighter aircraft with a maximum take-off weight of 40 tonnes. In 2021, the Barmer area of Rajasthan saw the opening of India’s first ELF. PM Modi saw a

40-minute air display featuring Tejas, Sukhoi, Rafale, and other fighter jets after the aircraft touched down.PM Modi will dedicate and inaugurate a number of development projects. He will officially open the long-awaited bridge that will span the Brahmaputra River and connect Guwahati and North Guwahati. It is anticipated that this bridge will greatly reduce traffic, shorten travel times, and enhance communication between the river’s northern and southern banks. Additionally, he will open the Indian Institute of Management’s (IIM) Guwahati’s temporary campus in Bongaora.PM Modi will launch 100 more electric buses for Guwahati as part of initiatives to improve the city’s air quality, lower carbon emissions, and bolster public transportation. In Guwahati, he will also speak to BJP employees.

A lawyer advises families not to sign the settlement terms offered by Air India

New Delhi, Feb 14: The relatives of more than 105 people killed in the Air India Flight AI-171 tragedy were urged by attorney Chuck N. Chionuma to wait for the AIP data before making any judgments and to decline the airline’s proffered settlement offers.”My advice is not to sign this but to wait for the AIP data to be released so we know who the culprits are,” Chionuma told. Before you sign such a paper, you will then be able to determine the actual damages and what you are receiving.”Every jurisdiction where a claim is made is covered by the document. Regardless of where the claim is filed, it mandates that the families hold

these businesses blameless and provide indemnity,” he continued. Families must release Air India and its parties—including manufacturers, operators, and governmental organizations—from all present and future liability under the terms of the proposed settlement. Chionuma contend that giving up their rights before the probe is finished is unjust.The suggested settlement conditions have already been sent to some families, he continued, but they were told not to accept them. Three families were advised against accepting Air India’s proposed settlement terms regarding the crash of Flight AI-171. The settlement includes claus-

es that release Air India and related entities from future liabilities and require families to hold Air India harmless from future claims. As part of the compensation process, Air India has provided initial payments of Rs 25 lakh and is processing further ex gratia payments of Rs 1 crore per deceased family.The airline states that the offers are fair and compliant with legal standards, aiming to provide closure. Families are encouraged to seek legal advice before making decisions, and Air India emphasizes transparency and support throughout this process. The crash occurred on June 12 last year, resulting in 260 fatalities.

Despite the Grand Slam drought, Sania Mirza supports Novak Djokovic



New Delhi: Despite Novak Djokovic’s lack of Grand Slam titles since the end of 2023, Indian tennis star Sania Mirza has defended the Serbian tennis great, stating that it is too soon to write him off.

Mirza brushed aside rumors that the 24-time Grand Slam champion may be nearing the end of his career, emphasizing that players of Djokovic’s caliber should never be taken lightly. Novak Djokovic’s resilience in tennis remains undeniable, as demonstrated by his recent victory over Jannik Sinner in the 2026 Australian Open semifinals. Though he has lost two finals to Carlos Alcaraz since his last Grand Slam win in 2023, his perfor-

mances have sparked discussions about his longevity in the sport. Meanwhile, Sania Mirza reflected on the challenges of replicating Serena Williams’s unprecedented dominance, noting the rarity of such talent in tennis. She identified Aryna Sabalenka, Iga Swiatek, and Elena Rybakina as potential figures to lead a new era in women’s tennis, emphasizing their successes and youth as promising for the future.

Vaibhav Suryavanshi will take the class 10 exam a few days after winning the U19 World Cup

New Delhi: Rising Indian batsman Vaibhav Suryavanshi is ready to take his tenth grade board exams and leave the glitz and glamour of the cricket world behind after his historic ICC Under-19 World Cup 2026 tournament, where his explosive 175 helped lead the young Indian team to their sixth title. The star cricket player’s arrival on the “academic pitch” was confirmed by Neel Kishore, the principal of Podar International School in Samastipur. He emphasized that the 14-year-old would not be given any special treatment and that the facilities would not change. Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, a cricketer, will take the Class 10 board exams at our school. His admission card has arrived. Everyone is looking forward to his arrival, whether they are parents, instructors, or pupils. However, as he is still a student and will be taking his exam, we have made plans with that in mind. This isn’t a cricket pitch; it’s an academic one. We’ll make sure pupils don’t have any problems taking the tests. Everybody will have access to the same facilities, security, and safety. On February 17, exams will begin, Neel told. With his performance against England in the final at Harare, Suryavanshi had a triple treat



in store for himself. He scored 175 in just 80 balls, including 15 fours and 15 sixes—the most by a batsman in a single U19 World Cup innings.With 439 runs in seven games at an average of 62.71 and a strike rate of 169.49, a century, three fifties, and a top score of 175 runs, he finished as the second-highest run scorer. He broke the competition record with 30 sixes, far more than South Africa’s Dewald Brevis, who hit 18 sixes in the 2022 edition. He actually owns the record for the most sixes in the history of the U19 World Cup. With 1,412 runs in 25

innings at 56.48, a strike rate of over 165, four hundreds, seven fifties, and a highest score of 175 in U19 ODIs, he is also India’s top run scorer.This southpaw has been on the rise since October 2024, when he first made headlines for India U19 against Australia U19 in Chennai with the fastest century by an India U19 batsman in Youth Tests, which came off 58 balls. He became the youngest IPL player ever when he signed a contract worth Rs 1.1 crore with the Rajasthan Royals during the IPL mega auction held in advance of the 2025 season. At

the age of 14, Suryavanshi became the first Indian player to reach the fastest IPL fifty and the youngest T20 centurion in the match against the Gujarat Titans.He became one of the season’s young, rising stars after beginning his IPL career with a first-ball six. He amassed 252 runs in seven innings at an average of 36.00 and a strike rate of 206.55, including a century and fifty. Since then, it has been seen to accompany Suryavanshi around. Suryavanshi has dominated every format, whether it is his 52-ball century against July last year, which made him the youngest and fastest U19 centurion of all time, his 61-ball 108 against Maharashtra in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT) season last year, which made him the youngest centurion in the tournament’s history, or his 84-ball 190 against Arunachal Pradesh in the Vijay Hazare Trophy (VHT), which left him the youngest List A centurion and the second-fastest List A centurion among Indians. Even though he frequently has bad days due to his high-risk, high-reward technique, it is equally thrilling and profitable when the ball lands well on his bat and soars in many directions for fours and sixes when fate writes him a large score.

California Missing Indian Student, Fifth Day of Search

New Delhi, Feb 14: After an Indian student was reported missing in California, a citywide search began on Saturday and is now in its fifth day.Saketh Sreenivasaiah, a 22-year-old Karnataka student at the University of California Berkeley studying chemical and biomolecular engineering, vanished on February 9. According to authorities, he was last spotted around a kilometer from the university.Later, Sreenivasaiah’s laptop and passport were discovered in a backpack near a house near Tilden Regional Park, which is also close to the campus. The entire city was searched, with a particular emphasis on Lake Anza and the Berkeley Hills neighborhood.Concerned about the missing student, the Indian Consulate in San Francisco stated that it is in communication with the local police and his family. IIT Madras alumnus Sreenivasaiah

was attending Berkeley to earn a master’s degree. He attended the Sri Vani Education Centre in Bengaluru. He weighs roughly 160 pounds, stands six feet one inch tall, and has brown eyes and short black hair.A patent for a “microchannel cooling system for hyperloop and a method thereof” is held by Sreenivasaiah and five other people, according to his LinkedIn profile.According to two suggestions on the profile, he is a quick-witted, humble, brilliant, and loyal person. According to another, his “approach to challenges was really impressive” and he used in-depth research to come up with creative answers.Online, the community came together to support the hunt for Sreenivasaiah, with a Reddit thread detailing coordinated attempts to find him. One member on the thread stated that a “huge” search team with boats was at Lake Anza, while another offered to go on a search operation in the morning with his dogs. In response to a query about student safety overseas posed by Lok Sabha member Asaduddin Owaisi, the Ministry of External Affairs emphasized its efforts to ensure the safety of Indian students. “Indian Missions/Posts also take steps to maintain regular contact with Indian students enrolled in foreign universities in their jurisdictions and conduct pre-orientation sessions with them upon their arrival in foreign lands to brief them on potential challenges, risks, and precautions to be taken while studying overseas, including issue of advisories from time to time,” the statement read.



Smriti Mandhana

Smriti Mandhana (born 18 July 1996) is an Indian international cricketer and the vice-captain of the Indian women's national team. She was part of the Indian team that won the 2025 Women's Cricket World Cup, the Women's Asia Cup in 2016 and 2022. She also won a gold medal in the 2022 Asian Games, and a silver medal in the 2022 Commonwealth Games representing India. Mandhana has scored more than 10,000 runs in international cricket. She holds several records including the record for the most international centuries (shared with Meg Lanning) and the second most centuries in Women's One Day Internationals (WODI). She has scored the second most runs and the most half-centuries in Women's Twenty20 Internationals (WT20I). She is the first Indian to score a century in all three formats of women's international cricket—WTests, WODIs and WT20Is, and also holds the record for the fastest century in the ODI format by any Indian batter. In domestic cricket, Mandhana represents Maharashtra. She captains Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Women's Premier League (WPL), and had led them to WPL title in the 2024 season. She led the Trailblazers in the Women's T20 Challenge from 2019 to 2022, while winning the title in the 2020 season. In 2016, she was signed by Brisbane Heat in the Australian Women's Big Bash League (WBBL). She has also played for Hobart Hurricanes, Sydney Thunder, and Adelaide Strikers in the WBBL, Western Storm in the Women's Cricket Super League and Southern Brave in The Hundred. Mandhana has won four ICC Awards including Women's Cricketer of the Year in 2018 and 2021, and WODI Cricketer of the Year in 2018 and 2024. She was also nominated for the WT20I Player of the Year in 2021, and the Women's Cricketer of the Year in 2022. She received the Best International Cricketer award by the Board of Control for Cricket in India in 2018 and 2025. She was awarded the Arjuna Award by the Government of India in 2019. She was named as the Women's Leading Cricketer in the World for 2024 by Wisden.

Early life

Smriti Mandhana was born on 18 July 1996 in Mumbai, Maharashtra, to Smita and Shrinivas Mandhana, in a Marwari Hindu family. Her father worked as a chemical distributor, while her mother is a housewife. When she was two years old, her family moved to Madhavnagar, a suburb of Sangli in Maharashtra, where she completed her schooling. She attended Chintaman Rao College of Commerce in Sangli. Mandhana's father and brother had played cricket at the local level. Watching her brother compete in the junior state tournaments inspired Mandhana to take up the sport.



SMRITI MANDHANA

Domestic career

By the age of nine, Mandhana was selected for Maharashtra's under-15 team, and by eleven, she was picked for the Maharashtra under-19 team. Her breakthrough came in October 2013, when she became the first Indian woman to score a double-century in a List A match against Gujarat under-19 team in the West Zone under-19 tournament at the Alembic Cricket Ground in Vadodara. She scored an unbeaten 224 runs off 150 balls. In the 2016–17 edition of the Women's Challenger Trophy, Mandhana scored three half-centuries for India Red in as many games. She helped her team win the trophy by making an unbeaten 62 off 82 balls in the final against India Blue, and emerged as the tournament's top-scorer with 192 runs. o Smita and Shrinivas Mandhana, in a Marwari Hindu family. Her father worked as a chemical distributor, while her mother is a housewife. When she was two years old, her family moved to Madhavnagar, a suburb of Sangli in Maharashtra

International career

Mandhana made her Women's One Day International (WODI) and Women's Twenty20 International (WT20I) debut for the India women's national team in April 2013, when Bangladesh toured India.[1][10] She scored 48 runs across the two matches she played in the WODI series. She scored 39 runs while opening the batting in her debut and the only WT20I she played in the series. In August 2014, Mandhana was one of the eight players on debut in the Test match victory against England at Sir Paul Getty's Ground in Wormsley. She scored 22 and 51 in her first and second innings respectively and shared an opening-wicket partnership of 76 runs with Thrush Kamini in the second innings while chasing 182 runs for victory. During India's tour of Australia in 2016, Mandhana scored her first international century against Australia in the second WODI game of the series. Held at the Bellerive Oval in Hobart, she scored 102 off 109 balls in a losing cause. Later in the year, she was the only Indian player to be named in the ICC Women's Team of the Year for 2016.

World Cup final and formative years

Mandhana sustained an anterior cruciate ligament injury in January 2017, and missed the World Cup Qualifier and the Quadrangular Series in South Africa during her five-month recovery period. She returned to the Indian squad for the 2017 Women's Cricket World Cup. In the first match against England in Derby, she helped her team win by scoring 35 runs, and was named as the player of the match. She score her second career century in the match against West Indies in the group stage of the tournament. India reached the final of the World Cup where the team lost to England by nine runs. Mandhana scored the fastest fifty for India in WT20Is off 24 balls against New Zealand in February 2019. In March 2018, she scored a half-century off 30 balls against Australia in the 2017–18 India women's Tri-Nation Series. In the following month, she was named the player of the series in the three-match WODI series played during England's tour of India. In October 2018, she was named in India's squad for the Women's World Twenty20 tournament in the West Indies. Ahead of the tournament, the International Cricket Council named her as one of the key players to watch for in the tournament. During the tournament, she became the third Indian cricketer for score over a thousand runs in WT20I matches. She ended that year as the leading run-scorer in WODIs with 669 runs at a batting average of 66.90. She was awarded the ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year and the ICC Women's ODI Player of the Year in the 2018 ICC Awards. In February 2019, Mandhana was named as the captain of Indian squad for the three match WT20I series against England after regular captain Harmanpreet Kaur was ruled out with an ankle injury.



World Cup win and later

Mandhana was vice-captain of the Indian team that won the 2025 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup. India defeated South Africa by 52 runs in the final at the DY Patil Stadium on 2 November 2025, becoming World Cup champions for the first time. [61][62] During the tournament, she scored her 14th WODI century against New Zealand, which made her the joint record holder for the most centuries in international cricket along with Meg Lanning (17).[63][64][65] In December 2025, during the first match of the home series against Sri Lanka, she became the second woman batter after Suzie Bates to reach 4,000 runs in T20Is.[66] In the fourth match of the same series, she became the second Indian after Mithali Raj, and the fourth batter overall to complete 10,000 runs in women's international cricket

Statistics

By the close of 2025, Smriti Mandhana firmly established herself as a titan of world cricket. Surpassing the 10,000-run milestone in international play, she amassed 17 centuries, tying the legendary Meg Lanning for the most hundreds in women's international history. Her 2025 season was defined by historic breakthroughs. In June, she became the first Indian woman to score a century in all three international formats, silencing any doubts about her versatility. She followed this in September with a breathtaking display of power against Australia, smashing a 50-ball century—the fastest ODI hundred ever recorded by an Indian cricketer. With the second-highest century count in WODIs, Mandhana has evolved from a stylish opener into a dominant force. Her record-breaking year successfully blended technical elegance with an aggressive new gear, marking a transformative era for the Indian women's game.

Badminton

Badminton is a racquet sport played using racquets to hit a shuttlecock across a net. Although it may be played with larger teams, the most common forms of the game are “singles” (with one player per side) and “doubles” (with two players per side). Badminton is often played as a casual outdoor activity in a yard or on a beach; professional games are played on a rectangular indoor court. Points are scored by striking the shuttlecock with the racquet and landing it within the other team's half of the court, within the set boundaries. Each side may only strike the shuttlecock once before it passes over the net.

Play ends once the shuttlecock has struck the floor or ground, or if a fault has been called by the umpire, service judge, or (in their absence) the opposing side.[1]The shuttlecock is a feathered or (in informal matches) plastic projectile that flies differently from the balls used in many other sports. In particular, the feathers create much higher drag, causing the shuttlecock to decelerate more rapidly. Shuttlecocks also have a high top speed compared to the balls in other racquet sports, making badminton the fastest racquet sport in the world. The flight of the Games employing shuttlecocks have been played for centuries across Eurasia,[a] but the modern game of badminton developed in the mid-19th century among the expatriate officers of British India as a variant of the earlier game of battledore and shuttlecock (“battledore” was an older term for “racquet”).Its exact origin remains obscure. The name derives from the Duke of Beaufort's Badminton House in Gloucestershire, but why or when remains unclear.[citation needed] As early as 1860, a London toy dealer named Isaac Spratt published a booklet entitled Badminton Battledore – A New Game, but no copy is known to have survived. An 1863 article in The Cornhill Magazine describes badminton as “battledore and shuttlecock played with sides, across a string suspended some five feet from the ground”.The game originally developed in India among the British expatriates, where it was very popular by the 1870s. Ball badminton, a form of the game played with a wool ball instead of a shuttle-



shuttlecock gives the sport its distinctive nature, and in certain languages the sport is named by reference to this feature (e.g., German Federball, literally feather-ball). The game developed in British India from the earlier game of battledore and shuttlecock. European play came to be dominated by Denmark but the game has become very popular in Asia. In 1992, badminton debuted as a Summer Olympic sport with four events: men's singles, cock, was being played in Thanjavur as early as the 1850sand was at first played interchangeably with badminton by the British, the woollen ball being preferred in windy or wet weather. Early on, the game was also known as Poona or Poonah after the garrison town of Poona (Pune), where it was particularly popular and where the first rules for the game were drawn up in 1873. By 1875, officers returning home had started a badminton club in Folkestone. Initially, the sport was played with sides ranging from 1 to 4 players, but it was quickly established that games between two or four competitors worked the best.[4] The shuttlecocks were coated with India rubber and, in outdoor play, sometimes weighted with lead.[4] Although the depth of the net was of no consequence, it was preferred that it should reach the ground. Charles Gleyre, Odysseus and Nausicaa (with badminton rackets) The sport was played under the Pune rules until 1887, when J. H. E. Hart of the Bath Badminton Club drew up revised regu-

women's singles, men's doubles, and women's doubles; mixed doubles was added four years later. At high levels of play, the sport demands excellent fitness: players require aerobic stamina, agility, strength, speed, and precision. It is also a technical sport, requiring good motor coordination and the development of sophisticated racquet movements involving much greater flexibility in the wrist than some other racquet sports. lations. In 1890, Hart and Bagnel Wild again revised the rules. The Badminton Association of England (BAE) published these rules in 1893 and officially launched the sport at a house called “Dunbar” in Portsmouth on 13 September. The BAE started the first badminton competition, the All England Open Badminton Championships for gentlemen's doubles, ladies' doubles, and mixed doubles, in 1899. Singles competitions were added in 1900 and an England–Ireland championship match appeared in 1904. Scotland, Wales, Canada, Denmark, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, and New Zealand were the founding members of the International Badminton Federation in 1934, now known as the Badminton World Federation. India joined as an affiliate in 1936. The BWF now governs international badminton. Although initiated in England, competitive men's badminton has traditionally been dominated in Europe by Denmark. Worldwide, Asian nations have become dominant in international competition.

Badminton court, isometric view The court is rectangular and divided into halves by a net. Courts are usually marked for both singles and doubles play, although badminton rules permit a court to be marked for singles only. The doubles court is wider than the singles court, but both are of the same length. The exception, which often causes confusion to newer players, is that the doubles court has a shorter serve-length dimension. The full width of the court is 6.1 metres (20 feet), and in singles this width is reduced to 5.18 metres (17.0 feet). The full length of the court is 13.4 metres (44 feet). The service courts are marked by a centre line dividing the width of the court, by a short service line at a distance of 1.98 metres (6 feet 6 inches) from the net, and by the outer side and back boundaries. In doubles, the service court is also marked by a long service line, which is 0.76 metres (2 feet 6 inches) from the back boundary. The net is 1.55 metres (5 feet 1 inch) high at the edges and 1.524 metres (5.00 feet) high in the centre. The net posts are placed over the doubles sidelines, even when singles is played. The minimum height for the ceiling above the court is not mentioned in the Laws of Badminton. Nonetheless, a badminton court will not be suitable if the ceiling is likely to be hit on a high serve. Servin The legal bounds of a badminton court during various stages of a rally for singles and doubles games When the server serves, the shuttlecock must pass over the short service line on the opponents' court or it will

count as a fault. The server and receiver must remain within their service courts, without touching the boundary lines, until the server strikes the shuttlecock. The other two players may stand wherever they wish, so long as they do not block the vision of the server or receiver. At the start of the rally, the server and receiver stand in diagonally opposite service courts (see court dimensions). The server hits the shuttlecock so that it would land in the receiver's service court. This is similar to ten-



nis, except that in a badminton serve the whole shuttle must be below 1.15 metres from the surface of the court at the instant of being hit by the server's racket, the shuttlecock is not allowed to bounce and in badminton, the players stand inside their service courts, unlike tennis. When the serving side loses a rally, the server immediately passes to their opponent(s) (this differs from the old system where sometimes the serve passes to the doubles partner for what is known as a “second serve”). In singles, the server stands in their right service court when their score is even, and in their left service court when their score is odd. In

doubles, if the serving side wins a rally, the same player continues to serve, but he/she changes service courts so that she/he serves to a different opponent each time. If the opponents win the rally and their new score is even, the player in the right service court serves; if odd, the player in the left service court serves. The players' service courts are determined by their positions at the start of the previous rally, not by where they were standing at the end of the rally. A consequence of this system is that

start of a match, the shuttlecock is cast and the side towards which the shuttlecock is pointing serves first. Alternatively, a coin may be tossed, with the winners choosing whether to serve or receive first, or choosing which end of the court to occupy first, and their opponents making the remaining choice. In subsequent games, the winners of the previous game serve first. Matches are best out of three: a player or pair must win two games (of 21 points each) to win the match. For the first rally of any doubles game, the serving pair may decide who serves and the receiving pair may decide who receives. The players change ends at the start of the second game; if the match reaches a third game, they change ends both at the start of the game and when the leading player's or pair's score reaches 11 points. A new scoring system is being attempted by the BWF, in which the 21x3 scoring system may be replaced with The move itself has been very controversial amongst several badminton players. If a let is called, the rally is stopped and replayed with no change to the score. Lets may occur because of some unexpected disturbance such as a shuttlecock landing on a court (having been hit there by players playing on an adjacent court) or in small halls the shuttle may touch an overhead rail which can be classed as a let. If the receiver is not ready when the service is delivered, a let shall be called; yet, if the receiver attempts to return the shuttlecock, the receiver shall be judged to have been ready.