

Manipur CM appeals for talks instead of bandhs amid continuing unrest

Imphal, May 24: Y Khemchand Singh on May 22 appealed to people in Manipur to avoid bandhs and blockades, saying such protests create additional hardship for ordinary citizens, especially daily wage earners already affected by the ongoing unrest in the state. The chief minister made the appeal while inaugurating an RCC bridge over the Nambul River at Akham Mayai Leikai in Imphal West district. During his address, Singh urged people to resolve their grievances through dialogue and mutual understanding rather than disruptive protests. “Enforcing bandhs and blockades out of anger toward the government only leads to hardship, particularly for the daily wage earners,” Singh said. He said prolonged shutdowns affect economic activities across the state and make life difficult for people dependent on daily income for survival. According to him, discussions and



peaceful engagement remain the best way to address public concerns. Referring to his recent visits to violence-affected Jiribam district, the chief minister said he had travelled

there twice — once by helicopter and later by road — to assess the situation and interact directly with local communities. During the visits, Singh said he met members of dif-

ferent communities, including Kuki, Paite, Hmar and Meitei groups. “All are having cordial relations,” he said, adding that people at the grassroots level had shown willingness to

maintain peace and coexistence despite the difficult situation. The chief minister also spoke about the bomb attack at Tronglaobi in Bishnupur district in April, where two children lost their lives. He said the incident deeply affected people across the state and also triggered economic disruptions because of subsequent shutdowns and bandhs. “The incident caused disruptions to the economy of the state due to shutdowns and bandhs,” Singh said. He appealed to people not to allow anger or frustration against the government to turn into actions that affect normal public life and economic activities. Later, in a social media post, Singh highlighted the importance of the newly inaugurated bridge in the Lamsang Assembly Constituency. He said the infrastructure project would improve connectivity, support local trade and make transportation easier for residents in the area.

Amit Shah calls meeting with Assam, Tripura and Bengal CMs on anti-infiltration measures



Guwahati, May 24: Union Home Minister Amit Shah today said the Centre is preparing to strengthen anti-infiltration measures along India’s eastern borders and announced that a meeting with the Chief Ministers of Assam, Tripura and West Bengal will be held soon to create a stronger security mechanism. Addressing a gather-

ing on May 22, Shah said the governments in the three states now share a common policy position that illegal infiltration into the country should not be allowed. He said coordination between the Centre and the state governments would play an important role in improving border security and identifying illegal entrants. “Now,

in Tripura, Assam, and West Bengal, there are governments that, as a matter of policy, believe that there should be no infiltration into the country,” Shah said during his address. The Union Home Minister said the Ministry of Home Affairs would soon convene a joint meeting with the Chief Ministers of the three states to develop

what he described as a “strong security layer” to prevent infiltration along the eastern border regions, particularly areas bordering Bangladesh. Shah also called upon the Border Security Force to widen its coordination network beyond regular border guarding duties and involve district-level administrative and police officials more actively in intelligence sharing and detection efforts. “But I also urge the Border Security Force that instead of just the border, we should now communicate with everyone from the District Collector to the Patwari, from the Superintendent of Police to the Police Station Incharge, and using all the information received from them, we should also create a smooth system to expel infiltrators,” he said.

The new flyover in Guwahati pays tribute to Syama Prasad Mookerjee’s legacy in Assam

Guwahati, May 24: On Friday, May 22, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced that a recently built flyover in Guwahati



would be dedicated in Syama Prasad Mookerjee’s honor, citing the leader’s contribution to keeping Assam a part of India during Partition. The Chief Minister stated in a post on X prior to the inauguration that many people might wonder why a flyover in Guwahati was named after Mookerjee, and that the answer could be found in a little-known period of Assamese history.

According to Sarma, the Muslim League had intended to incorporate the Northeast and all of Bengal, including Calcutta, into East Pakistan during the 1947 Partition period. He asserted that Gopinath Bordoloi, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, and others spearheaded the intellectual and political opposition to the proposal and

fought to keep Assam in India. The Chief Minister said, “If they had been successful, Assam would not exist in India today.” According to Sarma, the flyover was a symbolic homage to Mookerjee’s role in maintaining Assam’s geographic and cultural identity in addition to being an infrastructure project. He further said that Mookerjee’s contribution to Assam extended beyond politics and geography, noting that during his tenure as Vice-Chancellor, he advocated for Assamese as a medium of instruction in schools in Assam. The Chief Minister also acknowledged the role of Birinchi Kumar Barua in strengthening Assamese language studies and higher education during that period. “Today, commuters driving over the flyover will not just be crossing a bridge, but travelling over a piece of history,” Sarma said.

A BJP MLA from Tripura suggests that government workers work four days a week

Agartala, May 25: On May 22, Kalyani Roy, the chief whip of the BJP in the Tripura Assembly, urged the state government to extend daily office hours in order to implement a four-day weekly work schedule for government employees. Roy proposed the action, pointing to ongoing fuel-saving initiatives in response to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s call for fuel conservation in light of the ongoing conflict in West Asia. Speaking at a press conference, Roy stated that 50% of Group C and Group D employees are physically attending workplaces as a result of the state government’s current austerity measures, with the remaining employees working from home starting on May 14.

“Following the Prime Minister’s appeal amidst the West Asia conflict, the state government has ordered 50 per cent of Group C and D employees to work from home while the remaining workforce is attending offices,” Roy said. She stressed the need for public participation in fuel-saving initiatives, saying uncertainty over the duration of the geopolitical situation makes conservation efforts important. Roy said Chief Minister Manik Saha, cabinet ministers and MLAs have already reduced the number of es-



cort vehicles and official transport as part of austerity measures. She also appealed to citizens to adopt fuel-saving habits by using public transport, e-rickshaws or bicycles for short-distance travel. Highlight-

ing the state’s digital administrative infrastructure, Roy said Tripura has already implemented an e-office system from the civil secretariat level down to gram panchayats, but continued support from Group C

and D employees remains necessary for smooth functioning. “Therefore, I appealed to the government to introduce a four-day work week for employees by increasing office working hours from the existing

eight hours to nine hours or so,” Roy said. The proposal comes as the state government continues implementing measures aimed at reducing fuel consumption and administrative expenditure.

In Brief

Rare Himalayan flowering plant rediscovered

Itanagar: A rare plant species, *Geum macrosepalum*, thought to have vanished from India for over a century, has been rediscovered in Arunachal Pradesh’s alpine region. Found at approximately 4,200 meters between Tawang and West Kameng districts during a Botanical Survey of India study, it was last recorded in 1905 in Sikkim.

This pale yellow to ivory-yellow flower, with characteristics suitable for high-altitude environments, highlights the ecological significance of the eastern Himalaya. Classified as “vulnerable” by IUCN, threats to its habitat include developmental activities and ecological disturbances. This rediscovery underscores the need for enhanced conservation efforts in this biodiversity hotspot.

Meghalaya launches urban development projects

Shillong: Tura is set for a significant urban transformation with over Rs 150 crore in development projects focusing on infrastructure, tourism, and civic amenities, particularly in preparation for the 2027 National Games. Key projects include the redevelopment of Najing Bazar into a modern commercial hub and a Rs 51.21 crore multi-level car parking and cinema complex at Dakopgre, which will accommodate around 200 vehicles and offer entertainment options. Additionally, the refurbishment of the SMLC Complex will feature cultural and recreational facilities. Authorities also launched the Tura Municipal Board Mobile App for better civic service access and introduced locality-wise waste management grading to enhance sanitation. Measures such as installing LED streetlights and CCTV will further improve urban security. Overall, these initiatives aim to elevate Tura’s infrastructure and quality of life, positioning it as a center for tourism, sports, and economic activities in Meghalaya.

Police constable dies in road mishap

Guwahati: A police constable named Navjit Patowary was killed in a road accident on May 22 in the Boitamari area of Bongaigaon district, Assam. The incident occurred at Raghunandanpur while he was traveling towards his duty station at the Boitamari Police Outpost from Bongaigaon. Patowary sustained critical injuries and was taken to a hospital, where he ultimately succumbed to his injuries despite medical efforts. As of the time of reporting, details concerning the circumstances of the accident had not been officially confirmed. Further details regarding the circumstances leading to the accident were yet to be officially confirmed at the time of reporting.

Mizoram clears 52 schools for provincialisation



Itanagar, May 17: On May 22, the Mizoram government declared that, following a review of the specified criteria, only 52 of the 340 schools that had previously been approved for upgrading were found to be eligible for provincialization. Speaking at a press conference in Aizawl, School Education Minister Vanlalhlana stated that the previous Mizo National Front (MNF) government’s September 27, 2023, decision was made without consulting a number of important departments, including finance, law, and personnel and administrative reforms. Following the formation of the Zoram People’s Movement (ZPM) government in December 2023, the matter was revisited by the Council of Ministers, which decided that only schools fulfilling the criteria specified in a July 2023 government notification would qualify. According to the minister, the previous administration had approved 340 schools under different categories for upgradation. “However, after scrutiny based on the official eligibility norms, the Council of Ministers’ meeting held on May 18 approved only 52 schools for provincialisation,” Vanlalhlana said. Provincialisation refers to bringing educational institutions under direct government management and funding. The minister stated that all 52 schools fulfilled the eligibility conditions laid down in the 2023 notification, except the Special Blind School at Durtlang, which was approved despite not fully meeting all prescribed norms. Vanlalhlana, who also holds the Higher and Technical Education portfolio, said the May 18 Cabinet meeting additionally approved the regularisation of college teachers recruited under the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA). The decision marks a major review of education-related approvals issued by the previous administration and could impact school administration and staffing patterns across Mizoram.

NE/EAST

Tripura CM evaluates water and urban electricity projects

Agartala, May 24: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha emphasized increasing solar energy generation and usage throughout Agartala and other urban areas of Tripura and instructed officials to ensure timely completion of all ongoing infrastructure projects while maintaining quality standards. At the TIFT Conference Hall, the Chief Minister presided over a high-level review meeting of the Power, Drinking Water, and Sanitation Departments that addressed projects under the Agartala Municipal Corporation and other urban areas. In order to enhance public safety and security, Saha also gave officials instructions to locate locations susceptible to antisocial activity and install solar-powered high mast lights. Power Minister Ratan Lal Nath, Secretary Abhishek Singh, Chief Secretary J K Sinha, and senior representatives from the relevant departments were present at the meeting. The Asian Development Bank provided financial support for the installation of 27 new 33 kV substations and 11 kV ring main units between 2023 and March 2026, according to Tripura State Electricity Corporation Limited (TSECL) officials. They added that at a cost of Rs 264.75 crore, work on 347 kilometers of LT AB cables, 540 kilometers of covered conductors, and 156 kilometers of subterranean transmission lines is almost finished. Underground power transmission lines, a



smart grid control center, and substations have also started construction in Agartala, according to TSECL officials. The project is estimated to cost about Rs 1,500 crore. The meeting was informed that installation of 1.2 lakh smart meters in AMC areas and 30,000 smart meters in the Mohanpur Municipal Council area is underway under ADB-funded projects, with nearly 70 per cent work completed. Another 1.8 lakh smart meters are being installed across urban areas under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS). Officials also said solar panels have been installed at District Magistrate offices in all eight districts under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana. Power Minister

Ratan Lal Nath said 2,845 solar units have already been installed in urban areas under the scheme and subsidies worth Rs 53.61 crore have been distributed so far. He added that the government aims to install solar panels in nearly 1.5 lakh houses across urban Tripura. Representatives of Tripura Power Transmission Limited (TPTL) informed the meeting that under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment Scheme, steps are being taken to ensure uninterrupted power supply through live-line maintenance systems and drone monitoring technology. The Chief Minister also directed officials to examine the feasibility of providing alternative solar-based power supply in Matabari.

Congress leader Randeep Singh Surjewala is summoned to appear before the Crime Branch

Assam passport controversy

Agartala, May 24: Congressman Randeep Singh Surjewala was ordered to appear before the Crime Branch on Saturday, May 23, in relation to the case filed against Pawan Khera over the controversy surrounding accusations connected to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife, Riniki Bhuyan Sharma. However, Surjewala did not show up. The Congress leader was reportedly asked to appear before investigators as part of the ongoing investigation into alleged remarks made by Pawan Khera about Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife. Sources said that during questioning by the Crime Branch, Pawan Khera had reportedly mentioned the name of Randeep Singh Surjewala in relation to the matter. The case against Pawan Khera was registered over allegations of making false accusations against the Assam Chief Minister's wife. The Crime Branch is continuing its investigation into the matter.



Dalgaon Eviction Drive Along NH-15: Illegal Roadside Stores Demolished

Mangaldai, May 24: The Darrang district administration conducted a significant eviction campaign in Balugaon Bazar under Dalgaon LAC. Some encroachers had been operating shops and stalls on public land along NH-15 for a long time. Road accidents had become common as a result. The authorities responded to locals' repeated complaints. After arriving in Balugaon, a sizable administrative team under the command of Dalgaon Revenue Circle Officer Manas Jyoti Bora used excavators to destroy all of the illicit roadside stores and buildings. The administration's prompt and decisive action was praised by the locals.

Kuki-Zo body wants PM Modi to step in to address the Manipur crisis

Imphal, May 24: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention was requested by the Kuki-Zo Council, the highest authority of the Kuki-Zo tribal community in Manipur, in order to end the ongoing ethnic conflict and guarantee safety, security, and a political resolution to the community's problems. In a jointly signed memo sent to the Prime Minister, General Secretary Thangzangam and Chairman Henlianthang Thanglet of the Kuki-Zo Council restated their eight-point charter of demands, which included a political resolution to the ethnic conflict through a separate administrative arrangement or Union Territory for the Kuki-Zo tribal people.

The memorandum stated that the continuing conflict in Manipur has deeply fractured relations among the Meitei, Naga, and Kuki-Zo communities. "The wounds inflicted by prolonged violence, killings, displacement, and destruction have created an environment where peaceful coexistence under the present administrative arrangement has become increasingly difficult," the memorandum said. "The Kuki-Zo people firmly believe that a lasting and peaceful solution to the Manipur crisis lies in the creation of separate administrative arrangements for the three major communities, the Meitei, the Naga, and the Kuki-Zo," it added.

Arunachal Pradesh Governor Parnaik Encourages MSME Development to Advance Socio-Economic Development

Itanagar, May 24: Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) can become a powerful pillar of the state's socio-economic development, according to Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) K T Parnaik, who emphasized the need for greater expansion of MSMEs in the state on Tuesday.

In an interview with Santanu Srivastava, Managing Director and CEO of Ishan International in New Delhi, the governor emphasized Arunachal Pradesh's enormous potential for local business development and entrepreneurship because of its abundant natural resources, tribal crafts, organic farming potential, forest produce, tourism op-

portunities, and distinctive cultural heritage. According to an official statement released here, Parnaik stated that MSMEs can generate sustainable livelihood opportunities for young people, women, artisans, farmers, and self-help groups throughout the state. He noted that Arunachal Pradesh has a lot of potential in industries like food processing, bamboo and cane products, handlooms and handicrafts, ecotourism, horticulture, herbal products, organic agriculture, and small-scale manufacturing. MSMEs can boost self-reliance, lower unemployment, and deter young people from moving to cities in pursuit of employment, Parnaik continued.

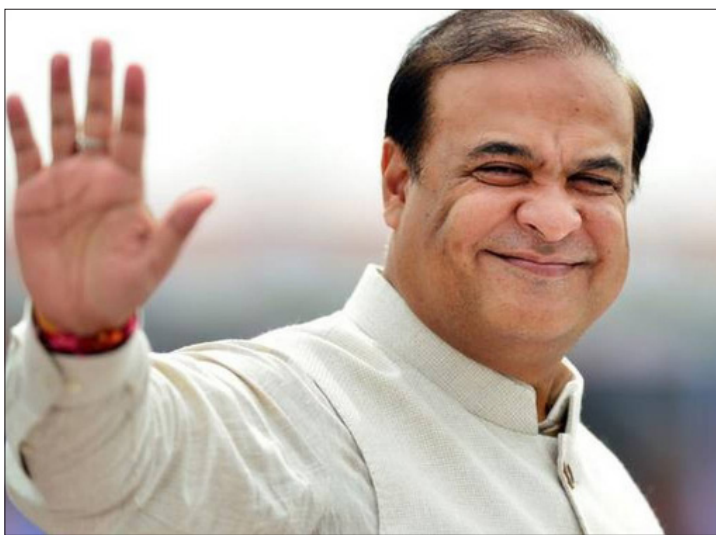


Assam chief minister makes his first trip to Zubeen Kshetra after taking oath

Guwahati, May 24: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma made his inaugural visit to Zubeen Kshetra at Hatimura in Sonapur, near Guwahati, shortly after being sworn in for a second term.

The visit, which carried both symbolic and personal significance, involved paying tribute to music icon Zubeen Garg, whose contributions to Assam's cultural and musical heritage were acknowledged by the Chief Minister.

During this visit, Sarma reviewed the ongoing construction of 'Zubeen Kshetra,' a dedicated cultural space and permanent memorial honoring Zubeen Garg. This project is designed to celebrate and preserve the singer's impactful contributions to Assamese music and society. Officials provided updates on the current status and future development plans of the project, highlighting the infra-



structure and facilities proposed for the memorial site. Sarma emphasized that this initiative aims to establish a cultural space reflective of Zubeen Garg's artistic legacy and to promote

Assamese cultural identity. Located on the outskirts of Guwahati, Zubeen Kshetra is being developed as a tribute to one of Assam's most prominent contemporary cultural figures.

Thirteen countries participate in a military drill in Meghalaya to combat terrorism

Shillong, May 24: With an emphasis on counterterrorism operations in jungle and semi-mountainous terrain, a two-week multinational military exercise involving defense personnel from 13 countries got underway on Wednesday at the Umroi Military Station in Meghalaya. The exercise, known as "PRAGATI 2026," has brought together soldiers from 12 partner countries, including Vietnam, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka. Through tactical drills, joint planning exercises, and simulated counterterrorism operations in challenging terrain, the joint exercise seeks to improve interoperability and coordination among participating armies, according to Defense PRO Lieutenant Colonel Mahender Rawat. During the exercise, training sessions will focus on operational coordination in demanding environments, endurance, flexibility, and discipline.

According to officials, the program's goal is to assist troops in sharing their operational experiences and developing shared strategies for addressing regional security threats. Additionally, as part of the Center's Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative, the Indian Army will display domestic defense innovations and equipment. In addition to showcasing India's expanding defense production capabilities, the exhibition is anticipated to offer a



forum for communication between foreign contingents and Indian defense manufacturers. According to military officials, the exercise aims to create long-term cooperation among participating nations, enhance intelligence-sharing mechanisms, and fortify regional defense ties. The program to strengthen military-to-military engagement has also included professional interactions and cultural exchanges. PRAGATI stands for 'Partnership of Regional Armies for Growth and Transformation in the Indian Ocean Region'. Officials described the exercise as an effort to promote cooperation based on mutual respect, equality and shared security interests.

There is an urgent need to disarm gun owners throughout Manipur: CM

Imphal, May 24: According to an official statement, Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh stated on May 20 that it was urgently necessary to disarm gun owners throughout the state. In light of the tense situation in the area, a delegation from the Tangkhul Naga community from Sinakeithei Village in Ukhrul district urged Singh to send state police officers to the village. Singh made these comments during their meeting.

Along with village representatives who voiced concerns about security ar-

rangements, the delegation was accompanied by Naga People's Front (NPF) MLA Ram Muivah from Ukhrul. Locals called for improved security, sufficient staffing at the Sinakeithei police station, and the smooth operation of the Sinakeithei sub-divisional collector (SDC) offices.

Following conflicts between Kuki and Tangkhul Naga groups earlier this year, the village has seen numerous attacks purportedly carried out by suspected militants. In response to the demands, Singh informed the delegation that

it is legally impossible to disarm people who own firearms and reaffirmed that the only way to end the conflict is through communication and reconciliation. He also appealed to community leaders across Manipur to guide young people away from violence and work collectively towards restoring peace. The chief minister further said the government is focusing on generating employment opportunities in non-government sectors by providing skill development and training programmes for the youth.

Mizoram prioritizes grassroots sports development while aiming for Olympic glory

Aizawl, May 24: According to Mizoram Sports Minister Lalthinglova Hmar, the state government is promoting sports at the local level with the long-term goal of developing athletes who can compete for India in the Olympics. Speaking at the opening of the P C Gabriel Lalliansanga Memorial MBA Junior Official Badminton Championship in Aizawl, Hmar stated that the government is reorganizing Mizoram's sports system to find and develop talent early on, especially in

Olympic sports where the state's athletes have demonstrated great promise. He stated that in order to create a methodical framework for talent development and competitive excellence, the state is concentrating on eight major Olympic sports: archery, badminton, boxing, hockey, judo, taekwondo, weightlifting, and wrestling. Encouraging young athletes to pursue ambitious goals, the minister urged them to cultivate an "Olympic vision" and aspire to represent the country on the global stage.

Highlighting Mizoram's achievements in badminton, Hmar noted that the state has made significant strides in junior and sub-junior categories, producing several talented players and champions over the years. He stressed that with proper coaching, infrastructure and structured training programmes, Mizoram can scale greater heights in badminton and other sporting disciplines.

The minister also underlined the broader role of sports in society, describing it as a powerful tool for im-



proving both physical and mental well-being among young people. The Mizoram government's renewed emphasis on grassroots sports

development is aimed at creating a sustainable pathway for future athletes while strengthening the state's sporting culture.

“Godman” Nashik Sent To Investigate Agency Custody



Mumbai, May 24: A special court in Mumbai has remanded self-styled godman Ashok Kharat to Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody until May 26 for alleged involvement in a multi-crore money laundering and extortion case. The ED accused Kharat of extorting Rs 5.62 crore from a complainant, using the funds for foreign trips, vehicle purchases, and medical treatments in the U.S. Investigators noted that Kharat operated around 60 bank accounts, many opened without proper documentation, and withdrew Rs 23.87 crore in cash. His lawyers contested the necessity of custody, claiming the authorities already had sufficient documentation. Kharat explained he deposited money for higher interest rates, while the court granted custody for further investigation.

BJP attacks Rahul Gandhi over Modi ‘traitor’ remark

New Delhi, May 24: Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, came under fire from the ruling BJP on Wednesday for his “gaddar (traitor)” jab at Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The party accused Gandhi of having a “divisive and anarchic mindset” and demanded an apology to the country. Rahul was accused by Union ministers and party leaders, led by newly elected BJP president Nitin Nabin, of speaking out of “frustration” over the Congress’s repeated electoral failures. “Rahul Gandhi’s criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is very regrettable and reveals his chaotic and polarizing outlook. Such offensive language is unacceptable in Indian politics, where honesty and respect for one another have long been prized, Nabin said in a video statement. Nabin intensified the assault, calling Rahul the “Rahu of Indian politics” and charging him with “polluting and dirtying” the nation’s political discourse.



He declared, “You have insulted 140 crore Indians in addition to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.” The BJP chief warned of political repercussions, claiming Rahul had not learned from his mistakes. “The people of this country make Narendra Modi the winner every time you disparage him. “They will teach you a lesson again if you don’t apologize to 140 crore Indians,” he declared. Union commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal also hit out at Rahul, accusing him of being unable to accept India’s rise under Modi. “Why does Rahul Gandhi hate India and everything made in India so much?” Goyal asked, asserting that India has emerged as the world’s “trusted destination” through the government’s “Made in India” and “Local Goes Global” push.

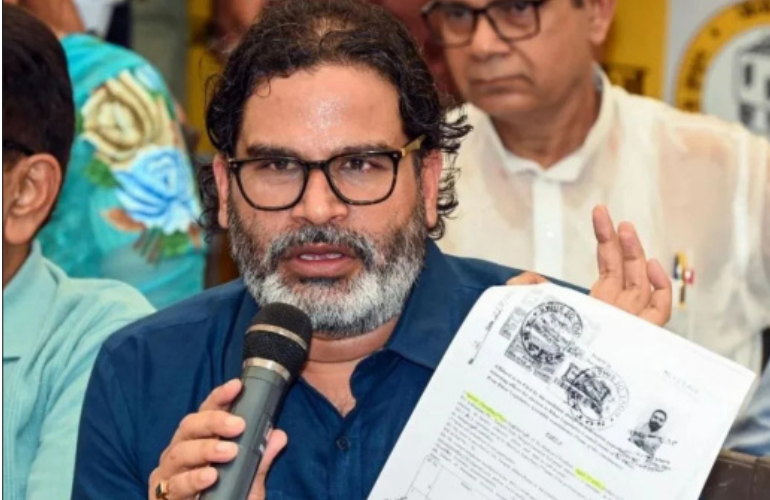
In Arunachal Pradesh, two hydroelectric stations are synchronized in local grid mode



Itanagar, May 24: The Subbung and Yembung small hydroelectric projects (SHEPs) in East Siang district have been successfully synchronized and are currently operating in local grid mode, according to an announcement made by Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Wednesday, May 20. This is a significant step towards bolstering the state’s power infrastructure. Mein, who also owns the hydropower and power portfolios, called the development a “significant step forward” in boosting the state’s electricity network’s efficiency and energy management. In a social media post, the deputy chief minister said the synchronisation of the two hydel stations would enable them to function in a coor-

dated grid mode, allowing better load sharing, improved plant load factor (PLF) and enhanced overall utilisation of the plants. He further stated that the Mabung Mini Hydel Station (MHS), currently under development in East Siang district, is expected to further boost the region’s power infrastructure once commissioned. According to Mein, all three hydel stations, Subbung, Yembung and Mabung — will eventually be integrated into a common grid system aimed at improving efficiency, reliability and energy management across the region. The move is expected to strengthen local power distribution and support Arunachal Pradesh’s efforts to expand its hydropower capabilities.

Prashant Kishor moves to an ashram on the outskirts of Patna and promises to remain there until the next Bihar elections



Patna, May 24: Prashant Kishor, the founder of the Jan Suraj Party, stated that he has relocated to an ashram outside of Patna, where he will carry out his political activities until his party gains traction in the upcoming assembly elections. The 48-year-old political strategist-turned-politician told report-

ers in Darbhanga on Wednesday that he left his Patna home on Tuesday night. “I moved out of my Patna apartment last night. Until the next assembly elections, when the Jan Suraj Party will hopefully have an impact, I will remain at the Bihar Navnirman Ashram, which is located near IIT-Patna,” he declared. Up until

now, the I-PAC co-founder operated out of “Sheikhpura House,” a large bungalow close to Patna airport owned by the family of party national president and former BJP MP Uday Singh. He left political consulting to found the Jan Suraj Party in 2024. Singh comes from a well-known political family.

Their late mother, Madhuri Singh, was a senior Congress leader and multiple-term MP from Purnea; his older brother, N K Singh, is a former Rajya Sabha MP and former chairman of the 15th Finance Commission. Former JD(U) vice-president Kishor also took aim at former chief minister Nitish Kumar, who resigned last month to join the Rajya Sabha. “The one who got elected as chief minister after the elections was unable to stop migration caused by economic distress. Instead, he chose to migrate himself, but not before ensuring that his son gets a foothold,” he said, referring to Kumar’s son Nishant Kumar, who has joined the BJP-led government headed by Chief Minister Samrat

Choudhary. He urged voters in Bihar to prioritise their own interests rather than vote on the basis of caste, religion, or monetary inducements. “The people of Bihar must think about the future of their own children while casting votes. They should not get swayed by leaders like Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Nitish Kumar or Lalu Prasad, nor should they sell their votes for Rs 10,000,” he said. The remark was seen as a reference to the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana launched ahead of the assembly elections, under which over 1.5 crore women received Rs 10,000 each. Kishor also warned of possible economic challenges arising from the situation in West Asia, claiming that fuel prices could rise sharply and fertiliser shortages may worsen. “People may witness an increase in petrol and diesel prices by up to Rs 10 per litre. We may also face a major fertiliser crisis. Till now, farmers complained of black marketing; now they may face outright unavailability,” he said.

Mizoram introduces an online medical referral system for care received outside of the state

Aizawl, May 24:

In order to expedite treatment referral processes for patients in need of medical care outside the state, the Mizoram government on May 20 introduced an online medical referral system under the Mizoram Universal Health Care Scheme (MUHCS). Health Minister Lalrinpuui launched the digital platform, which was created mainly for government workers, in Aizawl. Speaking at the launch, the minister stated that the initiative is a significant step toward strengthening public healthcare delivery through technology-driven solutions and enhancing healthcare governance. She emphasized that the system must be implemented effectively, especially in emergency referral cas-



es, and she urged medical officers and health officials to make sure it runs smoothly. The minister stated, “The Online Medical Referral System must be implemented sincerely and efficiently so that it serves its intended purpose.” Lalrinpuui also highlighted Mizoram’s growing digital healthcare ecosystem, noting that over 46,000 families have already registered under the MUHCS online registration platform. Officials said the portal was jointly developed by the Directorate of Hospital and Medical Education (DHIME) and the Mizoram State e-Governance Society (MSeGS) to reduce delays faced by government employees seeking referral approvals for treatment outside Mizoram.

The Mizoram government examines how the demands of the HPC(D) peace accord are being implemented

Aizawl, May 24: On May 19, the Mizoram government convened a high-level meeting to discuss the implementation of the demands made by the Democratic faction of the Hmar People’s Convention, led by Lalthmingthanga Sanate, in accordance with the Memorandum of Settlement that was signed with the state government. The goal of the meeting, which was presided over by K Sapdanga, was to expedite development projects in northern and northeastern Mizoram that are home to Hmar. The review meeting was attended by senior officials, including officers from CID (Special Branch), Home Department

officials, the Home Secretary, and Lalmuanpuia Punte, the Chief Minister’s Political Advisor. Officials claim that the meeting covered a number of topics from the HPC’s charter of demands (D).

The demands included suggestions for infrastructure and socioeconomic development in Hmar-dominated areas in addition to rehabilitation programs for cadres who had turned themselves in. Key proposals discussed included improvement of road connectivity, establishment of educational institutions and additional government offices, support for farmers and land-based livelihoods, and pro-

motion of agro-based industries. Officials noted that many of the demands involved coordination among multiple government departments. It was decided that all concerned departments would be informed immediately for prompt follow-up action and asked to submit progress reports for further review. The development comes weeks after the Mizoram government signed a peace accord with the Sanate-led HPC(D) faction on April 14, ending the last remaining insurgency movement in the state. On April 30, a total of 43 HPC(D) cadres, including Sanate, laid down arms during a homecoming ceremony held at Sesawng near Aizawl.

Gaurav Gogoi meets central leadership

Guwahati, May 24: senior Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi stated that after consulting with party MLAs, the party high command will make the final decision regarding the appointment of the Congress Legislature Party leader in Assam. After returning from talks with the Congress central leadership about choosing the Assam Legislative Assembly’s Leader of the Opposition, Gogoi made the statements. Speaking to reporters, Gogoi stated that the All India Congress Committee (AICC) would choose the head of the state’s Congress legislative wing. “Who will be the party leader will be decided by the All India Congress Committee,”



Gogoi stated. A meeting of opposition lawmakers is planned for Thursday night, he added. According to Gogoi, the party high command will arrive at a decision regarding the Leader of the Opposition after discussions with Congress legislators. He further stated that Congress MLAs would jointly visit the Assam Assembly on Thursday, signalling efforts to maintain unity within the party ahead of the Assembly proceedings. The development comes amid growing political interest over the Congress leadership structure in Assam following the formation of the new Assembly.

Meghalaya Assembly construction is on schedule following a review meeting

Shillong, May 24: Speaker of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Thomas A. Sangma stated after presiding over a review meeting on May 20 that construction of the new Meghalaya Legislative Assembly building at Mawdiangdiang is proceeding satisfactorily and is anticipated to be finished within the allotted time.

The upcoming Assembly complex’s construction and related projects were evaluated during the meeting. Along with consultants, Project Management Consultants (PMC), and representatives from various departments, including the Public Works Department

(PWD), the IT Cell, and the National Informatics Centre (NIC), Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong, who also oversees Parliamentary Affairs, attended the review. Secretary of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Malthus S. Sangma and Adviser (Legislation) Dr Andrew Simons were also present during the discussions. Officials reviewed the pace of work and infrastructure-related preparations linked to the project. Speaking after the meeting, the Speaker expressed satisfaction with the progress made so far and said the government remained confident of meeting the construction deadline.

The government is preparing a white paper on Kerala’s “empty” coffers as welfare promises are under pressure

Thiruvananthapuram, May 24: Due to its “empty treasury,” which threatens to impede the implementation of its pre-election welfare promises, the new United Democratic Front government is preparing a white paper on the condition of Kerala’s finances. A panel led by K.M. Chandrasekhar, who served as cabinet secretary during Manmohan Singh’s tenure as prime minister, has been tasked by the government led by V.D. Satheesan, who also oversees the

finance portfolio, with producing a white paper within ten days that suggests ways to generate new revenue streams. Veteran Congressman A.K. Antony and the departing finance minister of the previous Left government, K.N. Balagopal, got into a heated argument a few days ago over Antony’s claim to the “empty treasury.” When Antony took over as chief minister from the Left in 2001, he said the situation was ten times worse. According to Balagopal

of the CPM, the Pinarayi Vijayan government was leaving behind a stable treasury with a ₹6,000 crore cash balance.

“It will be extremely difficult for the Satheesan administration to fulfill the commitments he made during the election campaign. Irshad claimed that Balagopal’s assertion that he left behind a ₹6,000 crore cash balance was a ploy. Irshad claims that the Left government claimed to have paid ₹9,000 crore in project dues when its term

ended on March 24 but failed to submit any bills. It also falsely claimed that the state coffers had a balance of ₹6,000 crore, he added. Jiji Thomson, who was chief secretary during the Oommen Chandy-led UDF government, told this newspaper that there were “unique” ways to generate revenue. “The state government can raise funds by printing ads on the back of bus tickets. Also, the Kerala State Transport Corporation can privatise inter-state bus services.



• *NESTS directs EMRS students to promote tribal schemes and document local traditions as educators flag poor school infrastructure concerns*

New Delhi, May 24: The Center has requested that Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) students who have returned home for the summer write letters to Prime Minister Narendra Modi detailing the advantages these institutions have provided for them. The government organization led by Union tribal affairs minister Jual Oram, the National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS), instructed EMRS schools last week to participate in “Janjatiya Garima Utsav” for five weeks, beginning with letters to the Prime Minister on May 10. In a letter to principals of EMRS schools, NESTS said, “The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is planning to organize Janjatiya Garima Utsav tentatively from May 10 to June 9, 2026, to showcase the transformative impact of various schemes and initiatives undertaken for tribal communities across India.” In

order to document tribal heroes, legends, and traditional medicine, among other things, the Center also wants students to visit local communities and raise awareness about EMRS.

According to educationist Ashok Agrawal, these initiatives were meant to support the idea that these schools were succeeding with gov-

ernment funding. However, he continued, the quality of instruction is inadequate and these schools lack basic facilities.

“Such activities would shift the focus of teachers and students from learning activities. They should not be conducted during vacation. If everybody has to work, what is the mean-

ing of vacation? This is discouraging for both teachers and students,” Agrawal said. He said the standard of EMRS schools was very poor compared to that of the Navodaya Vidyalayas. “There is a dearth of infrastructure, and hostels are overcrowded. Such deficiencies should be addressed first,” Agrawal said.

EDITORIAL

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Asom Mala 2.0

The Assam Government is advancing its infrastructure development through the Asom Mala 2.0 initiative, aiming to construct nearly 1,000 kilometres of roads across various villages and towns to enhance connectivity, trade opportunities, and overall ease of living. This ambitious project, integral to the Assam Road Network Master Plan, targets the development of 996.7 kilometres of roadways spanning over 27 districts, underscoring the government’s vision for a modern and interconnected state that supports economic and social progress.Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has highlighted that these infrastructure projects are pivotal in connecting remote areas to urban centres, narrowing regional disparities, and ensuring that development benefits reach all parts of Assam. The government asserts that stronger road infrastructure is essential for inclusive growth and economic expansion, especially in a state characterized by significant geographical diversity and historical connectivity challenges.Asom Mala 2.0 emphasizes the creation of a robust road network, facilitating reduced travel time and enhanced transportation efficiency. This initiative encompasses both rural and urban areas, ensuring that different regions are integrated into the broader economic framework. The Chief Minister has reiterated the commitment to disconnecting any region from mainstream development, positing that improved roads will foster economic activity, enhance public services, and significantly improve citizens’ quality of life across Assam. This initiative is viewed as a transformative step, crucial for strengthening Assam’s long-term economic resilience. Enhanced road connectivity is expected to catalyze trade and commerce, allowing for the faster movement of goods between production centres and markets, thus benefitting farmers by enabling them to transport their agricultural produce more efficiently and affordably. Officials have indicated that improved transportation will reduce delays and post-harvest losses, allowing farmers access to larger markets where they can achieve better prices for their products. Furthermore, small businesses and local entrepreneurs are projected to benefit from enhanced connectivity, paving the way for new trade and commercial opportunities. The Assam Government considers road infrastructure a key driver of economic growth, capable of creating sustainable employment opportunities and attracting investments across multiple sectors, including tourism, logistics, agriculture, manufacturing, and services.

Alarm over rapid spread of Ebola in DRC

The Democratic Republic of Congo is facing a serious Ebola outbreak, with aid groups urging immediate international support to address the situation. Healthcare workers report that the fragile system is overwhelmed, having recorded nearly 750 suspected cases and 177 suspected deaths since the outbreak began. Rose Tchwenko from Mercy Corps and Hama Amado from Alima emphasize the urgency and need for mobilization, as the virus spreads rapidly. Hospitals are full, as highlighted by Trish Newport from Médecins Sans Frontières, who noted that no isolation wards are available at local healthcare facilities. The current circumstances are dire, indicating the need for coordinated action. Several factors are impeding the aid response, including the strain of the virus, for which there is no approved treatment or vaccine, the remote and conflict-scarred location of the outbreak, and local funeral customs at odds with strict disease-control practice. All this is set against the backdrop of big shortfalls in aid budgets, driven in large part by the Trump administration’s decision to slash foreign aid. According to a study by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) earlier this year, more than half of health facilities surveyed in North and South Kivu provinces – where cases have also been reported – suffered physical damage or destruction and nearly half had reported significant staff departures since January 2025 due to conflict and insecurity.

The Supreme Court’s position on relief for UAPA inmates awaiting trial

The Delhi Police has urged the Supreme Court to convene a larger bench to determine whether prolonged detention and trial delays can override statutory bail restrictions under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) of 1967. This request stems from confusion generated by conflicting Supreme Court judgments. Recently, a two-member bench granted bail in a narco-terrorism case while expressing significant concerns regarding another bench’s decision that denied bail to Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in January, which contradicted principles laid out in the landmark K.A. Najeeb case that emphasized bail as the default rather than the exception. Khalid and Imam have been held without trial since 2020, with their bail rights curtailed for a year.



The inconsistency in the Supreme Court’s approach to bail raises concerns, given the fundamental legal principle of presumption of innocence. The divergent opinions within the court on matters affecting individual liberty exemplify troubling judicial contradictions. The ongoing trials of Khalid and Imam may evolve positively, but the Supreme Court is urged to address the pervasive issue of denying liberty to dissenters, including activists, journalists, and academics, through prolonged pretrial incarceration. Additionally, the discourse on reforming Indian law must consider maintaining stringent legislations’ alignment with bail provisions, fostering a legal environment that respects individual rights while addressing societal safety.

Protecting the NE and securing the Bengal border

Good news for Assam and other Northeastern states: the newly elected West Bengal government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has begun transferring land to the Border Security Force (BSF) in the vital Chicken Neck Corridor for the construction of a border fence. By delaying the transfer of the necessary land to the BSF, the previous Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress government prevented the border from being sealed. As a result, a large portion of the international border remained open, allowing infiltrators to enter West Bengal and then Assam to settle. Expeditious erection of the border fence, after the land is handed over to BSF, will be critical to strengthening border security to curb infiltration from Bangladesh. Strengthening border surveillance along riverine areas along the India-Bangladesh border in Assam, in which fencing is not feasible, also remains vital for securing the entire international border against illegal border crossing, smuggling, trafficking and movement of terrorists and criminals. India and Bangladesh share the world’s fifth longest border, with a total length of 4096 km, of which 3232 km has been fenced so far, while in about a 175 km stretch, mostly comprising riverine areas, fencing is not possible, but about 689 km of the border where it is feasible remains unfenced, making it vulnerable to illegal border crossing and other criminal activities. The previous TMC government delayed handing over even those areas of land along the unfenced stretch, against which the central government had already paid compensation for land acquired by the state government and despite repeated reminders. For the remaining stretch of land, the TMC government adopted the policy of purchasing land under a policy called the direct purchase policy instead of



acquiring land under the Land Acquisition Act, 1894, or the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013. As the acquisition/purchase proceedings have been commenced under the direct purchase policy, they were stuck up at different stages and pending approval before the state government, the purchase proceedings in respect of a major portion of borderland were inordinately delayed, while for some stretches the purchase proceedings were not even started, jeopardising the entire plan of the central government to fence the strategic border stretches. The Calcutta High Court issued a directive to the West Bengal government in January to hand over land already acquired with funds provided by the central government in nine border districts to the BSF by March 31 for the erection of the barbed wire fence. The need for court involvement showed a troubling situation caused by unnecessary delays from the TMC government, which worsened the risk of demographic changes in West Bengal and Assam due to its focus on narrow vote-bank politics. This created obstacles in securing the border, allowing infiltrators to cross the weak border, settle in both states, and eventually

become voters. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma brought the underlying issue into sharp focus by emphasising the mere sealing of the Assam-Bangladesh border cannot protect Assam from the existential demographic invasion by Bangladeshis if the India-Bangladesh border remains porous in West Bengal and Tripura. The Ministry of External Affairs, while apprising the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the issues of border security in March 2025, explained that India felt an increasing need for bolstering the security of the shared border in view of the deteriorating internal security situation in the neighbouring country (during the interim Yunus regime) and that border fencing has become an even more important area for India and, therefore, committed to completing the border fencing with Bangladesh. Growing Chinese presence in Bangladesh, especially through infrastructure and military cooperation, has precipitated India’s concern over security along the narrow Chicken Neck Corridor that connects India’s northeast region to the rest of the country. Even though Bangladesh officials clarified that there are currently no plans to upgrade the Lalmonirhat airbase with

Chinese assistance to upgrade the World War II-era airstrip close to the Chicken Neck corridor, India maintaining a constant vigil on the developments around the strategic corridor is critical to safeguarding its strategic interests. Complete sealing of the India-Bangladesh border, therefore, has assumed greater urgency to ensure that no elements inimical to India’s strategic interests are able to exploit the existing gaps. Securing the international border against illegal crossings and cross-border crime is in the interest of both neighbouring countries, as it aids the border-guarding forces to effectively manage border vigil. Neutralising criminal networks through strengthening of border security helps secure cross-border supply chains, curb smuggling and trafficking and facilitate the creation of infrastructure like integrated checkpoints for a smooth flow of goods. Bangladesh extending cooperation in the expeditious completion of the installation of a barbed-wire fence along the shared border is also crucial for strengthening mutual security. For Assam and the rest of the northeast, securing the entire border is critical to stave off the demographic threat which has precipitated the anxiety of indigenous communities.

SC backs ECI

In a significant judicial development that reinforces institutional autonomy and clarifies administrative jurisdiction in electoral processes, the Supreme Court of India has declined to interfere with the decision of the Election Commission of India to appoint only central government employees as counting supervisors, thereby delivering a ruling that carries far-reaching implications for the conduct of elections and the balance of authority between constitutional bodies and political stakeholders, with a bench comprising Justice P. S. Narasimha and Justice Joymalya Bagchi firmly directing that the Commission’s guidelines must be followed strictly and without deviation, while also underscoring that the integrity of the electoral process depends on adherence to established protocols rather than subjective apprehensions raised by contesting parties, and the judgment has been widely interpreted as a setback for the Trinamool Congress, which had approached the apex court challenging the Commission’s move on the grounds that the exclusive use of central government personnel might compromise neutrality or raise concerns about fairness, although the court’s observations during the hearing reflected a clear inclination to defer to the constitutional authority vested in the Election Commission, with Justice Bagchi explicitly noting that the choice of officials involved in election-related duties falls squarely within the Commission’s domain and does not ordinarily warrant judicial intervention unless there is a demonstrable violation of law or constitutional principles, and this stance was reinforced through a detailed examination of the existing electoral framework wherein each counting table is already equipped with multiple layers of oversight including counting agents representing candidates, supervisors tasked with managing the process, and independent observers appointed to ensure compliance with rules, thereby creating a system of checks and balances that the bench suggested was sufficient to address concerns regarding transparency and impartiality, while also questioning the basis of objections raised against the deployment of central government employees by asking why their presence should inherently be viewed with suspicion when they are bound by service rules and accountability mechanisms similar to those governing state officials, and during the proceedings counsel representing the Election Commission clarified that the structure of election management remains fundamentally rooted in the involvement of state machinery, as returning officers—who play a crucial role in supervising the counting process and ensuring its legality—are themselves state government employees, and it is these officers who are responsible for appointing additional personnel including counting supervisors in accordance with the Commission’s guidelines, thereby indicating that the decision to involve central government employees does not displace state participation but rather complements it within a standardised framework designed to enhance efficiency and uniformity across constituencies, and this clarification appeared to address one of the central concerns raised by the petitioners regarding the potential marginalisation of state authorities, while at the same time reinforcing the Commission’s argument that the use of central government personnel can contribute to reducing local biases and ensuring a more neutral administrative environment, especially in politically sensitive regions, and another key aspect of the hearing revolved around the issue of transparency, where senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the petitioners, emphasised the importance of preserving CCTV footage from counting centres as a safeguard against potential disputes and as a means of ensuring public confidence in the electoral process, arguing that such measures are essential in an era where electoral integrity is subject to intense scrutiny and where technological tools can play a vital role in maintaining accountability, to which the Election Commission responded by informing the court that CCTV footage from counting centres is already preserved for a period of 45 days, a duration that it considers adequate for addressing any complaints or legal challenges that may arise in the immediate aftermath of counting, and the bench appeared satisfied with this assurance, noting that the existence of such protocols further strengthens the transparency framework and reduces the likelihood of malpractice going undetected, and in its final order the Supreme Court reiterated that the Commission’s circular must be implemented “in letter and spirit,” a phrase that carries significant legal weight as it implies not only strict compliance with the text of the guidelines but also adherence to their underlying intent, thereby leaving little room for selective interpretation or deviation by administrative authorities, and this directive is expected to have a cascading effect on election management practices across the country, as it reinforces the principle that the Election Commission’s decisions, when made within the bounds of its constitutional mandate, are entitled to a high degree of deference from both the judiciary and political actors, and the ruling also highlights the broader theme of institutional trust, as the court’s refusal to intervene signals confidence in the Commission’s ability to design and implement procedures that safeguard the democratic process.

Reversing Brexit and electoral reform are more closely related than you might imagine

Newspapers are the best place to celebrate an anniversary. In any case, countless column inches would have been set aside for this purpose as we get closer to the 10-year anniversary of Britain’s Brexit vote. However, the possibility of a Labour leadership contest at a time when polls indicate that four-fifths of the party’s voters in the most recent election and an even greater percentage of its members wish to overturn that June 2016 referendum decision is turning what could have been merely somber contemplation into a more lively discussion. Even though it was still unclear exactly what he meant, Keir Starmer last week gave a belated nod to one of his party’s core goals by stating that he also wants to return the UK to “the heart of Europe.” Then, Wes Streeting called for full re-entry into the EU in an attempt to revive waning hopes of becoming the next prime minister, though he was similarly evasive about when that might occur. Andy Burnham, meanwhile, was busy pulling back from a previously stated hope of returning at an undisclosed point in his life. This could be because he won’t have a chance at Downing Street unless he first wins the byelection in Makerfield next month, where a majority supported Brexit ten years ago. Given that the lingering effects

of Brexit have burned through five prime ministers over the past ten years, including the much-anticipated sixth, any reluctance to rekindle the fires of 2016 is understandable. However, current and prospective Labour leaders cannot repeat the mistake made by the Conservatives following the referendum if they are sincere about repairing the harm caused by exiting the EU. All too frequently, they seemed to think that Britain had the final say over the terms of any agreement, but in reality, the EU was much more successful in achieving its goals. It is also true that when people are informed that rejoining would probably require the UK to accept unrestricted freedom of movement across borders or replace the pound with the euro, support for rejoining starts to decline in polls. Nevertheless, it might be incorrect to believe that the unyielding position adopted by EU negotiators—especially the French—will last forever or that they will now just dismiss any discussion of Britain’s re-entry. Some argue that Ukraine should be given more consideration if the UK government established a clear path for re-entry, perhaps by demonstrating some of the enthusiasm for Europe that led to its tentative offer of “associate membership.” Roberta Metsola, the president of the European

parliament, told the EU-UK Forum last month that Britain is not just another pleading supplicant but a former member that “needs to be treated as such”. Paul Adamson, who chaired that event, told me: “A negotiation to rejoin would have its difficulties but none of us knows what’s possible because no one has really tried.” The real obstacle to the EU offering much in the way of concessions is not innate hostility towards Britain so much as the absence of any sign we can find lasting consensus and stability on this issue – or anything else. Not only is Downing Street’s front door revolving between elections, Brussels knows there is a genuine risk that Nigel Farage, one of the architects of Brexit, will walk through it after the next one and then rip up any painstakingly negotiated deal. This is a story not only about the volatility of public opinion but also a structural flaw in our democracy. What was always a narrow majority for leaving the EU in 2016 disappeared years ago through a combination of older people dying, younger pro-European ones reaching voting age, and still more changing their minds. According to a December 2025 estimate, if the referendum were held again then, leave would have been defeated by a margin of 8m votes. The pollster Luke Tryl, from More in

Common, says his modelling suggests (and Burnham should perhaps take note) that even northern working-class seats such as Makerfield would now back remain. Instead the bigger difficulty is about how Britain determines who has power at Westminster. Although first-past-the-post elections have long since been regarded as a bit unfair, it used to be argued they at least provided for strong government and kept extremists out of parliament. The splintering of the old Labour-Tory duopoly into five or even six different parties bunched quite close in overall support, however, means this same system is now a force for instability that could allow Farage to become prime minister with barely a quarter-share of the national vote. The spread of votes in Britain now resembles that of European multiparty democracies, but in contrast to the proportional representation used by just about every EU member state, we maintain an eccentric and antediluvian system that is no longer fit for any sort of purpose except bad ones. Electoral reform has been consistently backed by Burnham, too, even though he knows this would probably mean Labour would never again secure the kind of victory Starmer’s party won just two years ago.

State-run oil firms report 41% jump in Q4 net profit

New Delhi: Despite the effects of disruptions in the global energy supply in March, the three state-run oil companies, which control over 90% of the domestic fuel retail market, recorded a combined net profit of ₹19,470 crore in the January-March 2026 quarter, a 40.74% increase over the same period last year. While two oil marketing companies (OMCs), Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), posted handsome profits after tax in the fourth quarter of 2025-26 (Q4 FY26), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd's (BPCL) net profit remained flat. Prior to the start of the war on February 28, international oil prices were about \$72 per barrel; by March 9, they had risen over 66.7% to roughly \$120 per barrel. But after staying high in April, they somewhat softened in May. Cumulatively, the three companies saw a 130% jump in their combined net profit in 2025-26, to ₹77,280.65 crore as compared to ₹33,601.57 crore in 2024-25, according to their standalone financial results declared this week. The performance was largely on account of stable oil prices for much of the year (till the US-Israel attack on Iran in February roiled the market). With raw material prices relatively low, and finished product prices stable, these companies enjoyed higher refining and marketing margins. HPCL, which declared its Q4 and full year financial results on May 13, posted a 46% jump in its net profit for Q4 o ₹4,901.50 crore as compared to ₹3,355 crore in Q4 of FY25. In the full fiscal year (FY26), HPCL 's net profit was ₹17,175.23 crore, a 133.2% jump as compared to ₹7,365 crore in FY25.

JSW Cement's revenue increased 11 YoY, and its shares surged 9% on a solid Q4 performance

Mumbai: On the BSE, JSW Cement shares increased by 8.9%, reaching an intraday high of ₹131.7 per share. At 11:58 AM, JSW Cement's share price had lost some of its gains, but it was still up 7.56% at ₹130. By contrast, the BSE Sensex was up 0.13 percent at 75,414.93. Following the release of the company's Q4FY26 results, the stock was in high demand. JSW Cement reported a net profit of ₹371.33 crore in the March quarter (Q4FY26), up 985% from ₹95 crore in the same period last year. Its operating revenue was ₹1,894.99 crore, up 10.8% from ₹1,709.39 crore year over year (Yo-Y). For the fiscal year ending on March 31, 2026,

the board of directors has suggested a dividend of ₹0.50 (5%) per equity share of ₹10. Furthermore, the board of JSW Cement has authorized the installation of an extra 2.5 MTPA cement grinding capacity at its Rajasthani plant in Nagaur. With an additional 1 MTPA being implemented, the Nagaur plant presently has an operational grinding capacity of 2.5 MTPA. Increasing the use of the Nagaur clinker line and making the facility mostly self-sufficient in terms of cement grinding capacity are the goals of the most recent expansion. One of India's top multinational conglomerates, JSW Cement is a part of



the JSW Group, which operates a variety of industries, including steel, energy, maritime, infrastructure, defense, paints, real estate,

and venture capital. By utilizing the well-known JSW brand and sourcing essential raw materials like power from JSW Energy and

blast furnace slag from JSW Steel, the company gains from strong intra-group synergies. In terms of installed grinding capacity and sales volume, JSW Cement, which was established in 2009 with a single grinding unit in Vijayanagar, Karnataka, has developed into one of the fastest-growing cement companies in India. In addition to Ordinary Portland Cement, clinker, ground granulated blast furnace slag, ready-mix concrete, construction chemicals, and waterproofing compounds, JSW Cement's product line includes blended cements like Portland Slag Cement, Portland Composite Cement, and Portland Pozzolana Cement.

TCS increases employee salaries by an average of 6–8%



New Delhi: According to people familiar with the situation, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has given its Indian employees salary increases of an average of 6-8% despite difficult times in the IT industry. According to the sources, hikes of more than 10% have been given to high performers, or workers in the top-rated A+ category. For TCS, it marked a return to the regular cycle of wage increases following a postponement to September last year due to macroeconomic uncertainties. However, it had announced in April that all workers would once more get raises starting that month. At India's largest IT services company, employees are categorised in bands A+, A, B, and C. "We have implemented yearly raises for qualified employees in accordance with the an-

nouncement made during our Q4 earnings. In order to comply with the new labor codes, we have also finished restructuring the pay for all of our employees in India. Three fundamental ideas serve as the foundation for the updated compensation plan that the employees were given. They include protecting employees' take-home pay while allowing flexibility for tax efficiency, standardizing wage structures across our Indian workforce, and adhering to the new labor codes. According to a statement from the company, "TCS has continuously maintained a track record of awarding annual increments to its associates year-over-year (Y-o-Y), reinforcing its commitment to employee growth and long-term value creation." Employees, who were rated the lowest, also received

about 2-3 per cent hikes, while overseas employees got between 2-4 per cent. In its latest annual report published last week, the company said the average annual increase for junior and mid-level employees for 2025-2026 (FY26) was in the range of 4.5-7 per cent, with top performers in India receiving double-digit increments. "However, during the course of the year, the total increase is in the range of 5-8 per cent, after accounting for promotions and other event-based compensation revisions. Junior and mid-level employees outside India received a wage increase between 1 and 6 per cent," it added. Chief human resource officer Sudeep Kunnumal had said in April that the hikes this year would be similar to last year's figures. Last July, TCS laid off 12,000 employees.

Reliance looks to CATL as Chinese tech restrictions affect battery aspirations

Mumbai: According to people familiar with the situation, Reliance Industries Ltd. is in discussions with Chinese battery giant CATL and other international suppliers to acquire parts for battery energy storage systems as the biggest company in India looks to further its renewable energy goals in the face of China's tech restrictions. According to the people, who asked not to be named because the discussions are confidential, the talks may open the door for Reliance to have a second significant source of battery components at its future facility in Jamnagar, a city in the state of Gujarat. Under a partnership that has encountered difficulties recently, that could augment supplies from Xiamen Hithium Energy Storage Technology Co.

The action was taken after Reliance encountered difficulties gaining complete access to the technological know-how required to manufacture lithium-ion battery cells. As Beijing tightens controls on core battery technology exports, the Indian conglomerate has been forced to concentrate more on packaging pre-made cells into large battery systems. A key component of Chairman Mukesh Ambani's plans to establish Reliance as a leading player in the nation's clean energy transition is the Jamnagar energy storage complex, which is expected to be the largest in India. As India quickly increases the capacity of renewable energy sources in order to reach a 500-gigawatt target by 2030, the facility and others like it are anticipated to be crucial in supporting the country's electrical grid. In an



email response, a Reliance representative stated, "Our company evaluates various opportunities on an ongoing basis." The spokesperson added that the company will make the required stock exchange disclosures as needed and does not comment "on media speculation and rumors." Requests for comment from Contemporary Amperex Technology Co. Ltd., or CATL, the biggest battery manufacturer in the world, were not answered.

According to a May 6 note from BloombergNEF, the Indian energy storage market is expected to grow significantly to 336.7 GWh by the end of 2035, which is 115 times the total installations in 2025. This long-term growth forecast explains why battery manufacturers from around the world,

especially Chinese companies like CATL, are fiercely vying for market share in India's developing storage sector. Reliance and CATL previously discussed a potential technology transfer arrangement that would have allowed Reliance to manufacture cells domestically using CATL's proprietary technology, the people familiar said. Those talks ultimately collapsed without an agreement, prompting Reliance to pivot to Xiamen Hithium as its primary BESS partner, they said. There is no certainty if the talks this time will result in a partnership. Instead of seeking deep access to technology, Reliance is now looking at sourcing products to tap China's scale as a battery producer. Other Indian conglomerates are also looking to tap Chinese battery

expertise. Gautam Adani, chairman of India's Adani Group, visited CATL's headquarters in China last year and toured its automated energy storage production lines. Ningde-based CATL, meanwhile, is accelerating its global expansion, building out manufacturing in Europe with plants in Germany, Hungary and Spain, while navigating US barriers through technology licensing partnerships with Ford Motor Co. and Tesla Inc. The Chinese company is also pushing into energy storage systems to diversify beyond electric vehicle batteries. After targeting Europe and maintaining a foothold in the US, CATL is now also looking to tap new markets, including seeking a share of the fast-growing opportunity in big battery systems in India.

Amid the spike in oil prices, the IMF supports targeted relief over general subsidies

New Delhi: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has warned governments against using widespread subsidies to protect households from price shocks brought on by the West Asian conflict, arguing that doing so could put additional strain on their already limited public finances. To address the issues, the IMF has recommended implementing "temporary, targeted, timely and tailored fiscal measures." Price caps and general subsidies are examples of policies that governments should save for truly extraordinary shocks. In a blog post, the multilateral financial institution stated that "measures not designed thoughtfully can be fiscally costly and difficult to unwind." "They can also exacerbate fiscal fragilities, fuel further inflation, or raise global energy prices." The recommendations are important for the Indian central government, which faces a tight budget in FY27 as a result of both an expected revenue shortfall and an excess of spending. The IMF stated on Wednesday, "Let domestic energy prices reflect international costs." In order to protect oil marketing companies (OMCs) from rising crude oil prices without increasing retail prices, the Indian government reduced the excise tax on gasoline and diesel in late March. However, OMCs ultimately increased pump prices by almost Rs 4 per litre this month due to growing under-recoveries. Since the start of the US-Iran war on February 28, the price of Brent crude has increased by more than 60% and has largely remained above \$100 per barrel. The Centre's recent cut in excise duty on petrol and diesel is expected to weigh on indirect tax collections in FY27, while possible slower growth may constrain direct tax buoyancy. Also, the government has already missed its direct tax collection target in FY26 and requires an ambitious



15 per cent growth in direct tax receipts in FY27 to meet the Budget target. On the expenditure side, the government is already anticipating an overshoot in fertiliser subsidy. High crude petroleum prices are also likely to raise the oil subsidy bill in FY27. According to the IMF, governments can adopt targeted cash transfers to people through existing social assistance systems. This can preserve price signals while limiting fiscal costs. "If coverage is insufficient, governments can temporarily top up payments or widen eligibility, including to lower- and middle-income households that are at risk of falling into poverty," the IMF said. Last week, speaking to the Indian diaspora in the Netherlands, Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned that decades of hard-won progress against poverty stood at risk of reversal if the war in West Asia is not quickly stopped. For very large but temporary shocks, additional measures may include one-time rebates or spreading price increases over time, helping house-

holds cope without freezing prices outright, the IMF suggested. As a last resort, if food security is at risk and safety nets are not sufficient, temporary reduction in taxes or subsidies for essential food items may be appropriate if accompanied by a clear and credible timeline for ending them. For businesses, governments should address short-term liquidity problems through sovereign-guaranteed loans, credit lines, or short-term tax and social-security deferrals. India has already moved towards this recommendation. The government has rolled out the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS 5.0) with an outlay of Rs 18,100 crore to support micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), airlines and other businesses in meeting working capital needs. Under the scheme, banks can extend government-guaranteed loans, covering 100 per cent of losses for MSMEs and 90 per cent for larger firms and airlines through the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited.

India's 2026 GDP forecast is lowered by the UN to 6.4% due to worldwide uncertainty

New Delhi: Due to global uncertainties and economic shocks resulting from the ongoing West Asia crisis, the United Nations has lowered India's economic growth forecast for 2026 from 6.6% to 6.4%. However, India's economy continues to grow at one of the fastest rates among major economies, according to a report published on Tuesday by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

It claimed that the West Asia crisis had caused yet another shock to the world economy, slowing growth, rekindling inflationary pressures, and increasing uncertainty.

India is "not immune" to the problems facing the world today, according to Ingo Pitterle, Senior Economist and Officer-in-charge of the Global Economic Monitoring Branch, Economic Analysis and Policy Division, UN DESA. It imports a lot of energy and is vulnerable due to its exposure to other channels, like remittances. Additionally, a tightening of the global financial system will complicate monetary policy," he continued. Pitterle noted that the "shock" to West Asia is affecting growth in all countries in two ways: it is reducing growth while simultaneously raising inflation, which limits the range of possible policies. "India will likewise experience this. Therefore, the question still stands: How will the fiscal authorities and central bank react to that? The report, however, noted that India re-



mains one of the fastest-growing major economies, with output still expected to expand by 6.4 per cent, though the step-down from 7.5 per cent in 2025 "underscores the drag from higher energy import costs and tighter financial conditions." "We have seen structurally very robust growth in India, which has been driven by consumer demand, by public investment, but also by strong performance in services exports. These main drivers will largely remain intact, so India will clearly remain one of the fastest growing economies in the world," Pitterle said in response to a question by PTI. The report projects that the country could grow at 6.6 per cent in 2027. Responding to a question on India's growth forecast, Shantanu Mukherjee, Director of Economic Analysis and Policy Division, UN DESA said that for many

countries that rely on exports, it is important to keep in mind that when import costs go up, exports could also suffer. "This is a longer term structural issue that you may begin to see play out when things like freight costs, logistics costs, industrial petrochemicals like diesel fuel start increasing the cost for businesses," he said. "Having said that, like many other large economies, India has some space to manage these, which is why I think we've been saying all along that a lot depends on whether you can manage these shocks without existing buffers before your inventories, fiscal space run out. That's crucial," Mukherjee said. Global GDP growth is now forecast at 2.5 per cent in 2026-0.2 percentage points below the January projection and well below pre-pandemic norms, the report said.

The appearance of a Libyan militia commander accused of torture at the ICC is a “huge milestone”

Washington: On Tuesday, a former militia commander accused of supervising rape, torture, enslavement, and murder in Libyan detention facilities will appear before the international criminal court for a hearing that activists claim is a significant step toward “justice, truth, reparation, and deterrence” of mistreatment of refugees fleeing Africa for Europe. The ICC’s investigation into crimes in Libya following the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 led to the first prosecution of Khaled Mohamed Ali El Hishri on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The hearing, where judges will determine whether there is enough evidence against Hishri for a trial, is expected to be a “huge milestone,” according to legal experts. According to Allison West, a senior legal adviser at the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, “it is a really important development.” This is the first case in the [ICC’s] more than 15-year-old Libya investigation. We’ve never taken someone into custody before. According to David Yambio, who was detained in Mitiga prison between 2019 and 2020 and accuses Hishri of beating him, the court hearing will be a moment that victims and survivors of abuse in Libya “never thought would happen.” “Now that [Hishri] is in front of the court, it sends a strong message to perpetrators wherever they are that justice will be delivered, even if it takes a long time,” Yambio stated.

It is believed that Hishri sought medical care for a family member when he was detained in Germany last year. The 47-year-old, a senior officer in the Special Deterrence Force, a formidable armed organization that controlled detention facilities in western Libya, is charged with enforcing a cruel regime at the Mitiga prison in Tripoli from February 2014 until at least mid-2020. Such sites became infamous after Gaddafi’s fall as they filled with refugees detained in Libya or intercepted by the Libyan coastguard, which has been supported by the EU and member states since 2017, as they tried to reach Europe.Amnesty International and other human rights groups have described “harrowing violations” that were “the horrifying consequences of Europe’s ongoing cooperation with Libya on migration and border control”.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) said thousands of detainees were held in Mitiga in overcrowded, unhygienic cells and were systematically subjected to violent assaults.At a hearing in December, prosecutors said there were reasonable grounds to believe Hishri personally killed one detainee, while a “significant number” of people died during his time at the prison, either from torture, being left outside in winter, untreated injuries or starvation.Hishri is also accused of “personally torturing, mistreating, sexually abusing and killing detainees” and imposing “prison conditions aimed at increasing ... suffering”. Detainees were variously shot, confined in small metal boxes and beaten with cables “sometimes for the entertainment and amusement of guards”, it is alleged. Defence lawyers are expected to challenge the jurisdiction of the ICC and have called for Hithri’s release. West said the case against Hithri would shine a new light on serious crimes against people in Libyan detention centres but that many alleged perpetrators remained at liberty. Eight ICC arrest warrants are still pending in connection with the violence in Libya that followed the fall of Gaddafi. “One of the most significant things about this case, other than actually Hithri being in the dock, is that there are a lot of people who aren’t,” West said.While some countries in Europe have investigated and prosecuted individuals for human smuggling and trafficking of people in Libya, these cases have not included charges of war crimes or crimes against humanity.That Germany arrested Hishri was important, campaigners said. “One state finally ... cooperated, in that they actually arrested and surrendered the suspect to the court, because there’s been many instances in the past where that hasn’t happened,” said Alice Autin, a HRW researcher. One of Hishri’s alleged co-perpetrators at Mitiga prison was arrested in February last year in Italy but then released on a technicality and returned to Libya, prompting controversy in Italy and dismay at The Hague. “This case [with Hishri] is not against the most senior person of that prison but is ... the first step in getting sort of to the perpetrators of that system,” Autin said. Libya’s warring factions agreed a ceasefire in 2020 but the country remains divided between the administration of the military leader Khalifa Haftar in the east and the Tripoli-based government of national accord (GNA) led by the prime minister, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, in the west. The case of Hishri is politically sensitive. The Special Deterrence Force is allied to the internationally recognised GNA in Tripoli and nominally under the interior ministry. The ICC, set up to be an independent international “court of last resort” for grave crimes that could not be dealt with locally, has been under immense pressure in recent years. The US has imposed sanctions on four judges for what it has called its “illegitimate actions” targeting the US and Israel, while the court’s chief prosecutor is being investigated over alleged sexual misconduct, which he denies. Yambio called for an end to European programmes that support the Libyan militias. “The EU is complicit in these crimes,” he said.

Iran claims that the peace plan calls for US troop withdrawal and compensation for war-related damages

Tehran: According to state media on Tuesday, Tehran’s most recent peace proposal to the US includes reparations for the damage caused by the US-Israeli war, the withdrawal of US forces from areas near Iran, and the cessation of hostilities on all fronts, including Lebanon. According to IRNA news agency, Tehran also wanted the lifting of sanctions, the release of frozen funds, and an end to the US marine blockade on the nation, according to Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi’s initial remarks on the proposal. Iran’s prior offer, which US President Donald Trump dismissed as “garbage” last week, seemed to have little changed from the terms outlined in the Iranian reports. Trump stated on Monday that there was now a “very good chance” of reaching an agreement restricting Iran’s nuclear program and that he had postponed a planned resumption of attacks on Iran after Tehran sent Washington a new peace proposal. Reuters was unable to ascertain whether plans had been made for strikes that would signal a resumption of the conflict that Trump began in late February. Under pressure to reach a deal that would reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a vital supply route for the world’s supply of oil and other commodities, Trump has previously expressed optimism that an

agreement to end the conflict was near and threatened to launch severe strikes against Iran if Tehran failed to do so. In a social media post, Trump said the leaders of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had requested that he hold off on the attack because “a Deal will be made, which will be very acceptable to the United States of America, as well as all Countries in the Middle East, and beyond.” Speaking to reporters later on Monday, he said the United States would be satisfied if it could reach an agreement with Iran that prevented Tehran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

“There seems to be a very good chance that they can work something out. If we can do that without bombing the hell out of them, I would be very happy,” Trump told reporters. A Pakistani source confirmed that Islamabad, which has conveyed messages between the sides since hosting the only round of peace talks last month, had shared the Iranian proposal with Washington. The sides “keep changing their goalposts,” the Pakistani source said, adding: “We don’t have much time.” Although neither side has publicly disclosed any concessions in negotiations that have been stalled for a month, a senior Iranian official suggested on Monday that Washington may be softening some of its de-



mands. The source said the U.S. had agreed to release a quarter of Iran’s frozen funds - totaling tens of billions of dollars - held in foreign banks. Iran wants all the assets released. And the source said Washington had shown more flexibility in agreeing to let Iran continue some peaceful nuclear activity under supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The US has not confirmed that it has agreed to anything in the talks. A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, denied a report by Iran’s Tasnim news agency that Washington had agreed to waive oil sanctions on Iran

while negotiations were under way. The US-Israeli bombing killed thousands of people in Iran before it was suspended in a ceasefire in early April. Israel has killed thousands more and driven hundreds of thousands from their homes in Lebanon, which it invaded in pursuit of the Iran-backed Hezbollah militia. Iranian strikes on Israel and neighbouring Gulf states have killed dozens of people. The Iran ceasefire has mostly held, although drones have lately been launched from Iraq towards Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, apparently by Iran and its allies.

WHO warns of rapid spread in the DRC as suspected Ebola cases triple in a week

The World Health Organization updated its threat assessment on Friday, stating that the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo poses a “very high” risk to the nation. According to WHO leaders, the outbreak is spreading quickly, with nearly 750 suspected cases and 177 suspected deaths, compared to 246 cases and 65 deaths when it was first reported a week ago. The director-general of WHO, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, described the situation as “deeply worrisome.” On Thursday, tents and medical supplies outside a hospital in Rwampara, Ituri province, were set on fire as medics tried to set up an Ebola treatment centre. A crowd was reportedly angry at not being allowed to retrieve the body of a local man who had died at the hospital. The bodies of Ebola patients must be buried according to strict infection control protocols to prevent further spread. Tedros warned that “significant distrust of outside authorities among the local population” was causing issues for the response to the outbreak. “Building trust in the affected communities is critical to a successful response, and is one of our highest priorities,” Tedros said. The WHO’s

representative in the DRC, Dr Anne Ancia, said the incident in Rwampara would “significantly jeopardise” the response operation there. The treatment centre that was attacked was designed to separate Ebola patients from others being treated in the same hospital. Ancia said she was hopeful that it would be able to be up and running again within 24 hours. The outbreak has been caused by the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola, for which no vaccines or treatments exist. Most cases are in the DRC’s Ituri province, with a handful reported elsewhere in the country, and two in neighbouring Uganda. Rising case numbers may paradoxically be a “good sign”, indicating better detection, officials said. A slight fall in the number of samples testing positive suggests more people with potential symptoms are being picked up. However, Ancia said: “We are running behind, we are not yet under control.” She was confident, however, that the response would be successful. “I can guarantee you that together, we will manage to get over this outbreak as soon as we can,” she said. While the WHO raised its risk assessment for the DRC, it maintained its earlier assessment that there was a high risk at



the regional level and low risk at the global level. Representatives of humanitarian organisations working in Ituri said they did not yet have enough resources to mount an adequate response. Dr Amadou Bocoum, country director for Care International in the DRC, said aid cuts last year meant “the system was not able to work properly because of lack of equipment”, while lower staff levels also made the labour-intensive work of informing cases and contact tracing harder.

Israel-UAE relations are strained as Abu Dhabi minimizes the alliance while Netanyahu exaggerates it

Jerusalem: Israel and the United Arab Emirates have a close relationship that is usually handled covertly. But as the Iran war engulfs the entire region, it was thrust into the open this week, revealing tensions beneath the alliance. The UAE’s growing relationship with Israel was first highlighted by US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, who disclosed that Israel had sent Iron Dome air-defense weapons and personnel to operate them in order to help defend the UAE from Iranian attacks. The Gulf country quickly denied in public that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had secretly visited the UAE during the conflict. The Gulf states choose to minimize their alliances while Netanyahu and the Trump administration boast about them in an attempt to support the anti-Iranian factions in the region.

This indicates how contentious public ties to Israel are in the region. The revelation of Netanyahu’s trip to Abu Dhabi during the war caused a stir, especially after Huckabee affirmed the two nations’ military cooperation. Reports swirled that



Israel’s security chiefs had also visited.The UAE’s official WAM news agency posted an article denying “reports circulating” about the visit. The agency wrote that the country’s relations with Israel “are public and conducted within the framework of the well-known and officially declared Abraham Accords, and are not based on non-transparent or unofficial arrangements.”

The report also denied any Israeli military delegation was received in the UAE.“It complicates Abu Dhabi’s wartime-frame posture by forcing it into the open - which is why the denial was issued so quickly and worded so carefully,” said Hesham Alghannam, a Saudi

Arabia-based scholar at the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center.

Though the UAE normalised relations with Israel in 2020, its rulers like to keep the alliance somewhat quiet. Antipathy toward the Jewish state runs high in Arab and Muslim countries across the Middle East. The negative feelings were magnified by the war in Gaza, which began after Hamas, a militant group backed by Iran, attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people and taking 251 hostages.Israel’s ensuing offensive in Gaza flattened much of the territory and has killed over 72,700 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not dis-

tinguish between civilian and militant deaths.

That conflict spilled across the region, with Israel waging deadly and damaging campaigns against Iran-backed militants in Lebanon and Yemen, and striking militant targets in Qatar and Syria. “We are the ugly duckling of the Middle East,” said Dan Diker, the president of the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, a conservative Israeli think tank. Diker, who has had extensive talks and relationships with Abraham Accord countries in the region, said the regional officials with whom he often negotiated always asked to keep things under the radar. Israel and the UAE collaborated

militarily during the war with Iran.

Israel benefited from having a defence foothold in a country geographically closer to its archenemy. The UAE, meanwhile, gained access to Israeli military technology, like the Iron Dome air-defence system.

The alliance has also been a boon for both countries’ economies, with trade between them rising steadily since 2020. Israel, long isolated in the Middle East, gains legitimacy by partnering with an Arab country. And the UAE gains power in Washington.The UAE was the third Arab country, after Egypt and Jordan, to establish full diplomatic ties with Israel.

Putin promises revenge after blaming Kyiv for Luhansk attack he says killed six

Moscow: Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Ukraine of a drone attack on a student dorm in Luhansk that resulted in six fatalities and numerous injuries. He vowed retaliation and asserted that Ukraine’s military must have been aware of their target. Ukraine denied the allegations, with its military claiming to have engaged an elite Russian drone command unit. During a UN security council meeting, Ukrainian ambassador Melnyk Andrii dismissed Russian claims of war crimes as mere propaganda, asserting that Ukraine’s operations specifically targeted military assets, including an oil refinery fueling Russian forces. Czech President Petr Pavel urged NATO to respond assertively to Russia’s provocations, suggesting options like cybersecurity measures, financial sanctions, and military action against aerial violations. The situation escalated after Ukrainian authorities reported a fire at the Dniprovskaya electrical substation caused by military activity, which partially disconnected a nuclear power station from off-site power. Meanwhile, a drone attack in Russia’s Black Sea port of Novorossiysk led to injuries and damage, while Ukrainian forces targeted an oil refinery in Yaroslavl, claiming to have hit 11 oil facilities since mid-May. In Kyiv, citizens protested against Bill No. 13646, which would potentially declare missing soldiers deceased, a sensitive issue given over 90,000 individuals are listed as missing. On the military front, U.S. troop levels in Europe are projected to decrease from 80,000 due to broader commitments elsewhere. Secretary of State Marco Rubio acknowledged these adjustments while a bipartisan group of U.S. senators expressed concern over delayed security aid to Ukraine, calling



for the swift release of \$600 million that had been allocated. Tensions have risen as lawmakers press for clarity on previous aid amounts, highlighting a growing rift between Congress and the Trump administration. US troop numbers in Europe are expected to drop from 80,000 after a review reflecting wider commitments, US secretary of state Marco Rubio said on Friday. In Helsingborg, Sweden for a Nato foreign ministers meeting, Rubio said it was “well understood

in the alliance that the United States’ troop presence in Europe is going to be adjusted ... you know, we have obligations in the Indo-Pacific, we have obligations in the Middle East, we have obligations in the western hemisphere”. Last week, the Pentagon said it would halt the rotation of 4,000 more into Poland, only for Trump to apparently reverse that on Thursday night on social media, in a hasty announcement that appeared to catch the Pentagon by surprise.

Where to go in England this summer if you want to skip London



England in summer is sweetly intoxicating. During these long, languid days, London’s parks buzz with picnickers and festivalgoers, the honey-hued architecture of Oxford, Bath and the Cotswolds glows in the afternoon sun, and the solstice casts its annual spell on Stonehenge. But beyond these perennial favourites, England’s variety is far stranger and richer than many visitors realise. This is a land shaped by Celtic, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Norman histories. It’s the birthplace of Shakespeare and the Stones, soccer and lawn tennis, the Industrial Revolution and the Romantic poets. It’s cheese and cider, surf-sculpted cliffs and ruined castles, white-sand beaches and haunting moors. And all this packed into a compact nation measuring around 400 miles, as the crow flies, from Land’s End to the Scottish border.

These six destinations encapsulate all that’s best about England, from island beaches and lively cities to wild moors, castle-studded border country and endlessly dark skies.

Best for traditional seaside delights: Isles of Scilly
Chand Mera Dil, starring Ananya Panday and Lakshya, is set for theatrical release on May 22 after a certification process with the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). The film received a U/A 16+ certificate, with modifications including the removal of a 10-second kissing scene and trimming 1 minute and 26 seconds of kissing visuals. The official runtime is 135.36 minutes. Directed by Vivek Soni and backed by Dharma Productions, advance bookings will open on May 18, featuring special pricing: Rs. 149 for shows before 5 pm and Rs. 199 afterward. Despite growing buzz, the lead actors have opted out of media promotions, favoring online campaigns and music releases instead.

Best for a history-lover’s road trip: Welsh Marches
The border between England and Wales has a rich history, marked since the late 8th Century by Offa’s Dyke and later by numerous stone bastions established by the Normans, especially in the Welsh Marches known for its medieval castles. During summer, this region is ideal for exploring its picturesque landscape, featuring notable ruins like Clun, Goodrich, and Ludlow, as well as charming Tudor villages. Ludlow, in particular, is recognized as the culinary capital of the Marches, attracting visitors with its food festival and local specialties



such as beef, asparagus, and Herefordshire’s renowned ciders. Summer, with its vibrant gardens and orchards, provides an excellent opportunity for outdoor exploration by foot or bike.

Best for walking and wild coastlines: Exmoor National Park
Exmoor, located in the counties of Devon and Somerset, is renowned as England’s most romantically wild area. This national park features a diverse landscape composed of craggy coastlines, rugged uplands, wooded combs, and picturesque thatched villages, making it one of the country’s premier walking destinations. Notable writers like William Wordsworth, Robert Southey, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge have drawn inspiration from its dramatic scenery, with Coleridge famously describing it as “holy and enchanted.” A vast network of over 600 miles of trails weaves through the park, allowing walkers to traverse babbling streams and ascend to Dunkery Beacon, the park’s highest point at 519 meters (1,702 feet). Exmoor also boasts England’s most remote shoreline and Britain’s highest sea cliffs, with segments of the South West Coast Path offering stunning views along its edge. The park is steeped in history, featuring prehistoric standing stones, burial mounds, Iron Age

and Roman forts, a medieval castle, and the Jacobean Yarn Market in Dunster. It supports a rich wildlife population, including red deer, the largest land animals in Britain, and the endemic Exmoor ponies, which are rarer than wild tigers or giant pandas. From this summer, visitors can expect to see the return of white-tailed eagles soaring over its cliffs and coves.

Best for an alternative cultural city break: Norwich
Norfolk has long been the butt of jokes, with its capital city belittled as a sleepy backwater adrift in England’s secluded east. But over the past couple of decades, hip independent boutiques, bars and restaurants have sprung up in Norwich’s historic streets and squares, while districts such as the Silver Triangle, north of the centre, have quietly blossomed. In 2012, Norwich was designated England’s first Unesco City of Literature. This year, the city was named the best place to live in the UK by the Sunday Times, with its medieval Lanes, 900-year-old open-air market, leafy parks and

waterways were bustling with trade – till the spread of the railways sent canals into decline. What’s left today is a network of liquid byways lacing England, populated by narrowboats and barges, swans and kingfishers, herons and water voles. One of the loveliest, the 87-mile Kennet and Avon Canal, moves at a deliberately unhurried pace – the speed limit is 4mph – with stops at historic market towns such as Newbury and Hungerford. In summer, swans lead their fluffy cygnets on first outings, and waterside pub beer gardens thrum with happy chatter on balmy evenings.

There’s engineering heritage to admire, too, including soaring aqueducts at Avoncliff and Dundas, and historic pumping stations at Claverton and Crofton – where the world’s oldest working beam engine chugs away. Near Devizes, the Caen Hill Locks never fails to amaze: a sequence of 29 locks designed to carry boats up and down a two-mile-long slope.



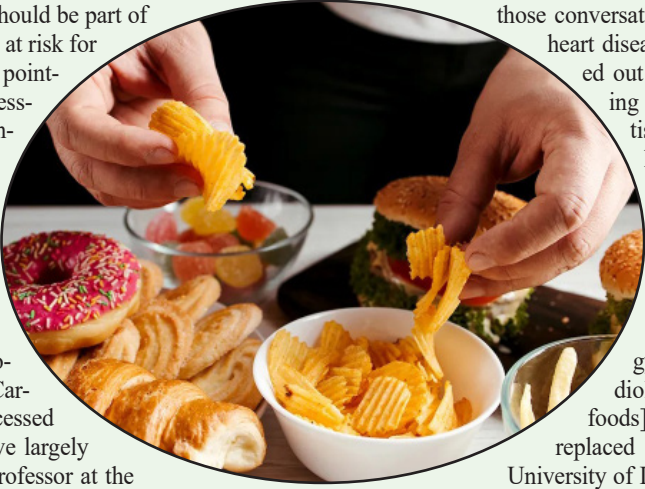
welcoming pub gardens begging to be discovered on foot over long summer days and warm evenings. For centuries after the Norman invasion, Norwich was one of England’s largest and most prosperous towns, second only to London. That status is reflected in its outstanding medieval monuments, particularly its Romanesque cathedral, founded in 1096; and William the Conqueror’s square-shaped, highly decorated castle, which was recently revamped and short-listed for the Museum of the Year award. For more medieval and Tudor relics, head up cobbled Elm Hill, pausing for refreshments in 13th-Century Britons Arms. Norwich is far from all old hat, though. The extraordinary Sainsbury Centre, designed by Sir Norman Foster, houses one of the UK’s greatest modern art collections. Elsewhere, the South Asian Collection provides a deep dive into art, crafts and living traditions, plus a dangerously tempting shop.

Best for slow travel: Kennet and Avon Canal
For a few brief decades, the UK was the canal capital of the world. By the mid-19th Century, some 4,800 miles of

Best for celestial solitude: Northumberland
For travellers who want space as much as scenery, Northumberland is one of England’s great summer escapes. The country’s northernmost county is its least densely populated, with wide skies, big horizons and not a single city. Few tourists make it this far, and those who do tend to stick close to the coast, drawn by its windswept walking trails, dramatically perched castles and the Holy Island of Lindisfarne – all best explored on long summer days. Inland, you’ll likely have just wildlife for company. Spot black grouse, hear the curlew’s haunting calls in the uplands and watch for osprey arriving each summer to nest in Kielder Water & Forest Park. But the real sky jewels emerge after sundown: spanning nearly 580 square miles and with negligible light pollution, Northumberland International Dark Sky Park offers superlative stargazing, with numerous observatories and other places to admire constellations, meteor showers, planets, nebulae and the Milky Way. In summer, darkness comes late – but clearer skies and long, quiet evenings are part of the appeal.

Ultra-Processed Foods Linked to Heart Disease, but Healthy Swaps May Lower Risk

Scientists in Europe claim that doctors aren’t doing enough to alert the public to the health risks associated with highly processed foods. The scientists are advising physicians to discuss with their patients how to cut back on ultra-processed foods in their daily diets. The explanation that many foods marketed as “healthier” are frequently extremely processed should be part of those conversations, they said. According to the scientists, those who are at risk for heart disease should pay special attention to this advice. They also point out that the majority of dietary guidelines ignore food processing recommendations. The scientists suggested that health care providers educate the public about updated guidelines, and food recommendations. The scientists reached their conclusions by reviewing all published research on ultra-processed foods and cardiovascular health. The findings were published in a clinical consensus statement in the European Heart Journal on May 6. The scientists are from the European Society of Cardiology’s Council for Cardiology Practice and the European Association of Preventive Cardiology, along with a group of experts. “[Ultra-processed foods], made from industrial ingredients and additives, have largely replaced traditional diets,” Luigina Guasti, MD, an associate professor at the University of Insubria in Italy and a co-author of the statement, said in a press release. “Research suggests these foods are linked to several risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure, and to the risk of developing and dying from heart disease. However, this evidence has not yet made its way into the advice we give to patients on healthy eating,” Guasti continued. Ultra-processed foods are foods that have been altered from their original form and contain additives such as sugar and salt, as well as substances that aren’t typically used in culinary preparations. Those additional substances add flavor and texture to foods but can also increase the risk of several diseases. A 2023 research review and analysis reported that there are associations between ultra-processed foods and an increased risk of several diseases. A 2025 study concluded that ultra-processed foods are tied to more than 120,000 preventable deaths in the United States every year. Recent research has also linked ultra-processed foods to worse muscle health, weakened bones, and fertility issues in females. Further, research has linked ultra-processed foods to an increased risk of cancer mortality as well as a higher risk of cognitive decline. The European scientists reported that adults with a high consumption of ultra-processed foods have a 19% higher risk of coronary artery disease, a 13% higher risk of atrial fibrillation (AFib), and as much as a 65% higher risk of cardiovascular-related death compared with adults with a lower consumption of ultra-processed foods. They added that ultra-processed foods also worsen key risk factors for conditions such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and the buildup of unhealthy fats in the bloodstream. They reported that the risk from ultra-processed foods seems to be consistent across large, diverse populations. Cheng-Han Chen, MD, an interventional cardiologist and medical director of the Structural Heart Program at MemorialCare Saddleback Medical Center in Laguna Hills, CA, wasn’t involved in the study, but agreed with the scientists’ recommendations. “This review of the current evidence regarding the health effects of ultra-processed foods makes it clear that consumption of ultra-processed foods is associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease,” Chen told Healthline. “We need to better educate the public on the risks of these foods and on the need to prioritize eating whole foods.” Jennifer Wong, MD, a cardiologist and medical director of Non-Invasive Cardiology at MemorialCare Heart and Vascular Institute at Orange Coast Medical Center in Fountain Valley, CA, echoed this sentiment. Wong wasn’t involved in the study. “This [paper] highlights an important and increasingly relevant issue — the impact of ultra-processed foods on cardiovascular health,” she told Healthline. “Bringing attention to this topic is critical given how prevalent these foods are in modern diets.”



Chasing the rare ‘lunar rainbow’ at Victoria Falls

In a compelling narrative that intertwines sensory experiences with personal reflection, the author describes a visit to Victoria Falls during a unique lunar event. The journey begins with the initial recognition of a deep, primal sound as the waterfall’s roar fills the air, culminating in the breathtaking sight of a moonbow—a rare phenomenon occurring under specific conditions when the full Moon casts its muted light on the misty spray of the falls. As darkness envelops the landscape, aided only by the Moon’s glow, the splendor of Victoria Falls, known locally as Mosi-oa-Tunya or “The Smoke That Thunders,” transforms.

The narrative unfolds against a backdrop of personal exhaustion and unexpected discovery after a lengthy solo drive across southern Africa, leading to a serendipitous opportunity to witness the moonbow. The day is marked by a visit to various viewpoints, where the author experiences the cascading water through a veil of mist, each vista revealing fleeting glimpses of the falls’ grandeur.

After a day filled with anticipation, the waiting crowd is rewarded under the night sky as the moonbow finally emerges, evoking a shared sense of awe among onlookers, accentuated by the soft hues and the ethereal nature of the light. The moonbow stands in contrast to daytime rainbows, being fainter and more elusive, yet it casts a spell that feels almost spiritual to those present. The narrative captures the essence of this extraordinary encounter, illustrating the beauty of natural phenomena



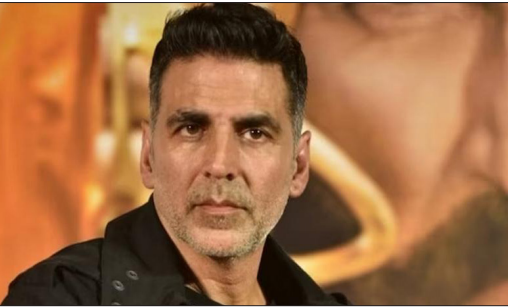
and the way they resonate on a personal level—transforming a seemingly simple observation into a profound experience that lingers in memory long after the moment has passed.

By 22:30, the cold had begun to settle in. My clothes, long since soaked through, clung heavily to my skin as the arc started to dissolve back into the cloudy spray, leaving nothing but darkness and the constant rush of water in its wake. Back at camp, under the same full Moon, the world felt unusually still. I cooked in the dark, piecing together a makeshift meal, still damp and slightly disoriented from the experience.

Later, lying awake, I thought about how easily I could have missed it. A different turn at the border. A longer delay. A decision to skip the night visit altogether. “Optical phenomena like moonbows are captivating because they are so beautiful but also so fleeting,” Strong said. “You have to be in the right place at exactly the right time, making it a magical experience when you do see them.” The moonbow is not usually something most travellers simply stumble upon. It requires timing, patience and a willingness to wait without certainty – qualities that today feel almost as rare as the phenomenon itself.

ENTERTAINMENT

Akshay Kumar’s fake film leads to total madness



Mumbai: On May 15, the teaser for Akshay Kumar’s Welcome to the Jungle, the third movie in the Welcome franchise, was released. It revealed that the comedy is about a fake movie gone wrong. The video suggests a disorganized, ensemble-driven narrative centered on excessive humor, perplexity, and the kind of comic disorder connected to the show. The movie, also known as Welcome 3, is the continuation of the slapstick series that started with the 2007 movie Welcome. The disclaimer that opens the teaser reads, “No animals were used in the production of this film.” “Sivaay kuchh ghodon ke aur hum gadhon ke.” Welcome to the Jungle shifts the setting away from urban chaos and into a large-scale jungle adventure, with the makers combining action, comedy and survival-style situations while retaining the familiar comic tone from Welcome series. The one-minute, 30-second teaser showcases a chaotic plot where the making of a “fake film” by Akshay Kumar and the ensemble cast goes hilariously wrong. Everything from staged gunshots to accidental killings hints at a classic comedy of errors that forms the film’s premise. Akshay Kumar returns to the franchise after missing the second instalment, heading an ensemble cast that includes Sanjay Dutt, Suniel Shetty, Arshad Warsi, Paresh Rawal, Raveena Tandon, Lara Dutta, Jacqueline Fernandez, Disha Patani and Tusshar Kapoor. The cast also includes Johnny Lever, Rajpal Yadav, Krushna Abhishek and Kiku Sharda.

Raveena Tandon remembers terrifying details from the “crazy” mob incident in 2024

Mumbai: Actor Raveena Tandon gained notoriety in 2024 after a family accused her and her driver of physically abusing a woman. A group of about thirty men allegedly assembled outside her home shortly after the incident. Raveena talked candidly about the terrifying experience in a recent interview with



ETimes, describing how she physically threw an intruder out of her home during the mayhem. Raveena claimed that the accusations made against her and her driver were untrue, adding that the building’s CCTV footage later proved the truth. She added that the police told her it seemed like a “extortion plan.” She recalled the terrifying event, saying, “I would have definitely stood up and fought, but the point here is that they were trying to scare us and settle it for money.” Despite the fact that nothing had happened, they were unfairly blaming him. I decided to go apologize on the driver’s behalf if the women wearing the burqas were a guest of someone. But Raveena claims that as soon as she left her home, things got worse. She clarified that the woman was attempting to record inside the property, so her driver had simply lowered her phone. The woman allegedly became combative after that and threatened to make a “rape com-

plaint” against him. Concerned about the serious consequences such accusations could have for her driver, Raveena decided to intervene personally. She said she stepped out to speak to the woman but was shocked to see a mob of nearly 30 men waiting outside the gate. According to the actor, her driver managed to pull her back inside the gate, but he himself was left stranded outside and was allegedly assaulted by the crowd. “So, they decided to beat him up. I opened the gate, and dragged him inside. They beat up another watchman. They’d beat up whenever a man would block their way. It was three women — me and two domestic helps — blocking 30 men. It was crazy! A man even got into my house, and I’ve actually caught him by his shirt and thrown him out,” she revealed. Raveena is currently awaiting the release of her upcoming film, Welcome To The Jungle. Directed by Ahmed Khan, the film features a large ensemble cast including Akshay Kumar, Arshad Warsi, Tusshar Kapoor, Lara Dutta, Paresh Rawal, Rajpal Yadav, Suniel Shetty, Sanjay Dutt, Disha Patani and Johnny Lever, among others. The film is the third instalment in the Welcome franchise and is scheduled to release in theatres on June 26.

Scenes in Lakshya and Ananya Panday’s Chand Mera Dil are cut by CBFC

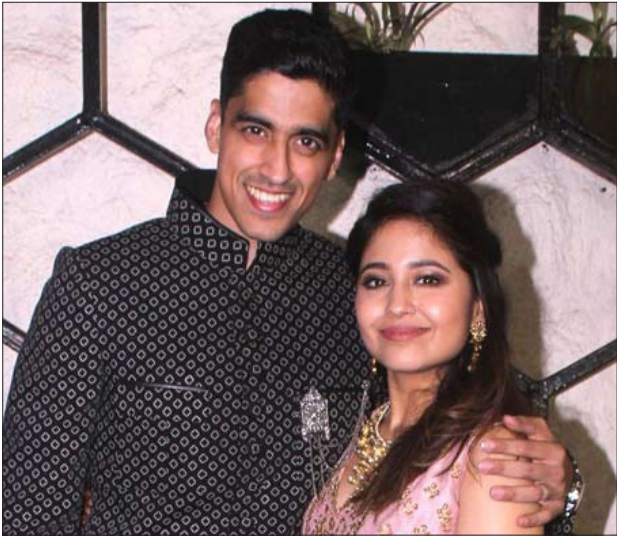


New work: Chand Mera Dil, a romantic drama starring Ananya Panday and Lakshya, is set for theatrical release on May 22. The film has undergone several modifications during its certification process with the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), eventually receiving a U/A 16+ rating. Notably, approximately 96 seconds of intimate scenes were cut, including a 10-second kissing sequence replaced with alternate visuals and additional lip-lock scenes trimmed. The required consent paperwork for

child actors was also submitted before the film received its censor certificate on May 8. Directed by Vivek Soni, who also co-wrote the screenplay with Tusshar Paranjape, the film is produced by Dharma Productions and has a runtime of 135.36 minutes. Advance ticket bookings are set to begin on May 18, with special pricing: Rs. 149 for shows before 5 pm and Rs. 199 for later screenings, aimed at maximizing first-day audience turnout. Although Ananya and Lakshya have shared screen space in advertisements before, this marks their first feature film collaboration. The film’s promotional strategy has largely focused on songs and social media rather than traditional media appearances.

Shweta Tripathi and her husband Chaitanya Sharma get back together

New work: Nearly 13 years after first meeting while performing in theater together in 2013, actor-producer Shweta Tripathi and her husband, actor-rapper Chaitanya Sharma, are scheduled to reunite on stage with External Affairs. For the couple, who met during rehearsals years ago and fell in love, the play represents a full circle moment. They will now play a romantic couple on stage as husband and wife for the first time. Speaking candidly about the experience, Shweta claims that going back to the theater with Chaitanya has reminded her of their early relationship.



“We clicked right away when we first met. After performing in our first show together, I recall that we were flying back from Delhi, and I couldn’t stop laughing the whole way. I knew I wanted this person in my life by the end of that flight,” she remembers. I wasn’t sure if I wanted him around as a boyfriend or best friend at the time, but I knew I wanted him. And what a wise choice that proved to be. The two portray a couple navigating the early phases of a relationship in External Affairs, which Shweta claims has unintentionally caused them to revisit feelings from their own dating days. She laughs and says, “We don’t even remember our own first date anymore because our love today is another level of soulmate love.” “Now, while rehearsing for scenes where our characters are going on first dates, we are trying to tap back into that energy. I’ve actually been speaking to friends who are currently going on first dates, asking them

about the butterflies and excitement.” For the actor, sharing the rehearsal room with her husband (35) has also become a deeply collaborative process. “We are each other’s biggest cheerleaders and fans. There are so many things we discuss — acting techniques, storytelling, music, films. I feel lucky that our profession is the same because I get to learn so much from him every day,” says the 40-year-old. Describing Chaitanya as “one of the most hardworking and disciplined people” she knows, Shweta says his work ethic has influenced her over the years: “He’s very serious and disciplined, while I’m more instinctive. But I think I’ve become a better student because he’s my co-actor now.”She adds that performing together comes with a comfort and trust that allows them to push each other creatively. “Theatre is already a very safe space, and when your life partner and best friend is with you, you can really play

and explore. There’s absolutely no judgment,” shares Shweta, adding: “We both genuinely want to make each other’s performances better. The feedback he gives me has helped me improve a lot.” Even outside rehearsals, conversations around the play continue at home. “A few days ago, I was exhausted and coughing in bed, and before sleeping he still said, ‘Let’s run the scene lines once.’ It feels like the grown-up version of parents asking you tables before an exam,” she jokes. “But honestly, thanks to him, my homework is going very well.” Despite her extensive work across films and streaming platforms, Shweta says theatre continues to remain closest to her heart. “I wanted to become an actor because of theatre, which is why I will always keep returning to it. Live performances are special because the audience is breathing with you. Every show has a different energy, and that’s something I crave as an actor,” she ends.

Hardik Gajjar, the director of Krishnavataram, says he was hesitant to play Raas Leela



Mumbai: Filmmaker Hardik Gajjar knew he was treading carefully when he set out to tell a love story with a divine foundation. He had no idea that the Radha-Krishna Raas Leela, his most delicate scene, would end up being the movie’s biggest hit. Despite lacking big stars or a major production banner, Krishnavataram Part 1: The Heart (Hridayam) has subtly become a talking point among moviegoers. The movie’s depiction of Lord Krishna’s relationships with Radha, Rukmini, and Satyabhama—especially the Raas Leela, which has connected with viewers—has generated discussions and positive word-of-mouth. Director Hardik Gajjar acknowledged in an exclusive interview with AajTak that the hardest part of the movie was portraying Raas Leela.

He emphasized the delicate balance he sought to attain by saying, “While showing love, dignity was also maintained.” According to Gajjar, he was hesitant because of the cultural sensitivity of mythological stories as well as the criticism directed at recent works in the genre. He admitted that viewers are now more wary, particularly in light of the controversy surrounding

movies like Adipurush. He said, “It was a very dangerous task to portray Lord Krishna in a romantic avatar.” The filmmaker clarified that his interpretation did not attempt to reinvent mythology but remained rooted in existing texts. Referring to the Raas Leela in Nidhivan, he said, “Everything we showed is already written in books. We didn’t try to present anything new.” Instead, his focus was on capturing the emotional essence of divine love. “Our scriptures say love begins with the eyes — eyes meet, eyes communicate. Physical touch isn’t necessary. Even in our parents’ time, holding hands was significant. The love stories of our gods teach us to feel presence, not materiality,” Gajjar explained. “That’s what we tried to portray — the emotion within Krishna’s love.” Interestingly, the director also drew inspiration from the poetry of Bhakti-era poet Vidyapati while conceptualising the sequence. However, he consciously toned down its intensity for the screen. “It was so captivating that we felt it needed to be softened. Even if it exists in literature, the audience might not fully absorb it,” he said.

Gajjar’s cautious approach is shaped by past experience. His debut film Bhavai, which explored the romance between two Ramlila actors — one playing Ravana and the other Sita — had faced criticism for hurting sentiments. “I had already experienced how sensitive such subjects can be,” he recalled. “But by the time I wrote Krishnavataram, I was in a different spiritual space. I understood the line I needed to tread.” Krishnavataram Part 1: The Heart (Hridayam), is currently in cinemas. Apart from Sanskruti, the lead cast includes Siddharth Gupta as Lord Krishna, Sushmitha Bhat as Radha and Nivaashyini Krishnan as Rukmini.

Salman Khan clarifies the widely shared “alone and lonely” statement

Mumbai: Salman Khan, a Bollywood actor, has clarified that his recent social media post about feeling “alone and lonely” was not about his personal life after fans expressed concern over the cryptic message. On Tuesday, the actor used social media to refute rumors about the post, claiming he was misinterpreted and maintaining that he wasn’t lonely. “Arre yaar Mai apne bare mai nahi baat kar raha tha” (I wasn’t referring to myself). Salman wrote on X, “I would be the biggest na shukra ever. How can I be alone when I have such a large amazing family and friends? How can I be lonely when I have you guys, your wishes, and Duas.” He also disclosed that his mother, Salma Khan, was concerned about the post’s viral response. The explanation was made a day after the actor posted a shirtless photo of himself on social media, flaunting his body, with the caption, “By me myself, 2 ways to be by yourself, Alone and Lonely, Alone is by choice n lonely when nobody wants to be with u...” You figure out what you need to do, Ab iske aage. While some fans complimented the actor’s physical fitness, others



voiced concerns about the caption’s wording, which led to conjecture on social media regarding his personal life and emotional health. On the work front, Salman will next be seen in Maatrubhumi, directed by Apoorva Lakhia. The

project was earlier titled Battle of Galwan and was reportedly inspired by the clash between Indian and Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley. Reports suggest the film has since undergone changes, including a new title and revised

storyline. The makers are yet to announce a release date. The actor is also reportedly set to headline another project with Nayanathara. Tentatively titled SVC63, the film will be directed by Vamshi Paidipally and produced by Dil Raju.

At Cannes 2026, Mouni Roy dazzles in a stylish monochromatic look

New Delhi: Actor Mouni Roy arrived at the French Riviera for the premiere of her upcoming film Bombay Stories at the esteemed Marche du Film at the 2026 Cannes Film Festival, looking chic. Days after announcing her divorce from husband Suraj Nambiar, she made her appearance. Co-star Anupria Goenka attended the event with her. Online fashion enthusiasts were immediately drawn to Mouni’s sophisticated monochromatic style. Mouni chose a chic black minidress with a striking white halter-style collar detail for her Cannes appearance this year. The fitted silhouette preserved a minimalist aesthetic while giving her overall appearance a crisp, polished touch. She paired the outfit with an oversized black coat casually draped over her shoulders, adding a layer of glamour to the ensemble. The actor completed her look with sheer black stockings and pointed leather boots. Later, Mouni shared pictures from her Cannes outing on Instagram and captioned the post, “Cannes & Chaos ! Bonjour x.” Directed by Rahhat Shah Kazmi, Bombay Stories is inspired by Hatak, one of the most celebrated short stories written by Saadat Hasan Manto. The independent film explores the lives of sex workers



through a satirical and humane lens. Along with Mouni Roy and Anupria Goenka, the film also stars Sushmita Singh in a key role. Mouni’s Cannes appearance comes days after she and husband Suraj Nambiar officially announced their separation after four years of marriage. In a joint statement shared on Instagram on May 14, the former couple requested privacy and urged people not to spread false narratives about their relationship.

With its presentation at Cannes’ Marche du Film, the makers are aiming to introduce the project to international audiences and the global film market. “We note with dismay the unnecessary and intrusive attention into our personal lives by certain quarters of the media,” the statement read. The actor further added, “We would like to state that we have decided to part ways and are taking the necessary time to address matters privately and amicably.”

Salah should be benched from Liverpool’s farewell match for disrespecting Slot: Rooney

New Delhi: Mohamed Salah’s public criticism of Liverpool’s direction under Arne Slot has drawn criticism from Wayne Rooney, who believes the forward should be benched for the team’s season-ending match after displaying “disrespect” for his manager. The former captain of Manchester United F.C. responded angrily to Salah’s recent remarks that he wanted Liverpool to resume playing “heavy metal” football under former manager Jurgen Klopp during an appearance on The Wayne Rooney Show.According to Rooney, the comments were unfair to a manager getting ready for his first full season in charge and amounted to yet another public jab at Slot. Rooney remarked, “I find it sad at the end of what he’s done and what he’s achieved at Liverpool.” “He shouldn’t come out and make another jab at Slot. He is essentially saying that he wants Jurgen Klopp football because he wants to play heavy metal football. Additionally, Rooney questioned Salah’s ability to handle the demands of Klopp’s intense style. “I don’t think Mo Salah can handle that kind of football anymore. He remarked, “I believe his legs have gone to play at that high tempo and high intensity.”As he left Liverpool’s dressing room to handle the fallout before the upcoming season, the former England captain claimed that Salah’s remarks had damaged Slot. “He’s almost just dropped the grenade and said he doesn’t trust and believe in Arne Slot and almost thrown his teammates who are going to be there next season and let them have to deal



with that as well,” Rooney said. Salah and Slot have endured a difficult relationship during the season. Earlier in the campaign, Salah accused Liverpool of throwing him “under the bus” amid frustration over a lack of regular starts. Despite Salah’s record of 257 goals for Liverpool and his role in the club’s recent successes, Rooney believes the forward’s latest comments have shifted attention away from a disappointing season on the pitch.After scoring 29 league goals during Liverpool’s title-winning campaign last season, Salah has managed 12 goals in 40 appearances across all competitions this year as the club battles to secure a top-five finish.“I think Salah’s trying to vindicate himself and make himself feel better because he’s had a very poor season,” Rooney said. “So I think he’s been very

selfish in what he’s done in the two occasions.”Rooney also recalled his own fallout with former Alex Ferguson manager, saying he was dropped for Ferguson’s final home game after a disagreement. He believes Slot should take the same approach for Liverpool’s final match against Brentford F.C.. “If I was Arne Slot, I’d have him nowhere near the stadium in the last game,” Rooney said. “That’s your manager. You can’t publicly disrespect him twice the way he has and get away with it.”Rooney added that while Salah deserves recognition for his achievements at Liverpool, the manner of his exit has damaged what should have been a fitting farewell.“It’s just a shame to see one of the great icons of Premier League players leave the Premier League probably in this situation,” Rooney said.

Pep Guardiola sidesteps Manchester City’s exit rumors

New Delhi: After a 1-1 draw at Bournemouth ended his team’s chances of winning the Premier League, Pep Guardiola said he would discuss his future with Manchester City’s management. After a 22-year wait, the outcome at the Vitality Stadium solidified Arsenal’s title as English champions. With one game left, City is four points behind their rivals and will never be able to catch them. Guardiola would step down following Sunday’s final Premier League match against Aston Villa, according to widespread reports on Monday. The club has not yet addressed the rumors in public. Guardiola said, “Allow me to talk with my chairman,” to the BBC. “I have one more year (of my) contract.”Every time we discuss the season, I finish it. I never converse with anyone. I speak with my chairman and my superiors first. “In my experience, when the manager or boss is expecting to leave, the players stop following you,” he continued. You must take the lead. It’s time to speak with him. During his post-match press conference, the Catalan was once again asked for clarification, but he opted to



congratulate Arsenal and their manager, Mikel Arteta, who had previously worked under him at City. Guardiola said his team had suffered from tiredness, three days after beating Chelsea in the FA Cup final to complete a domestic cup double.“I would have loved to have arrived in the last moment, you know... but today the fatigue was there,” he added. The departure of the City boss would bring to an end

one of the most successful managerial reigns in English football history. Since the 55-year-old’s appointment in 2016, City have won 20 trophies including six Premier League titles and the Champions League. Guardiola’s former assistant Enzo Maresca is understood to have been lined up to replace him, having been out of work since leaving Chelsea at the start of the year.

Vijay Honors Former LTTE Leader, BJP Targets Rahul Gandhi

Chennai, May 24: A huge controversy has been sparked by Tamil Nadu’s superstar-turned-Chief Minister Vijay honoring the founder of the outlawed Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), V Prabhakaran. In an attempt to remind Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi that the LTTE was behind the murder of his father, former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, the BJP took aim at the Congress over this. Sources in Vijay’s party, Tamila-ga Vетtri Kazhagam, defended him by emphasizing that he was referring to the slaughter of thousands of Tamils in Sri Lanka rather than just Prabhakaran’s demise. The LTTE was outlawed in India due to its involvement in the high-profile murder of a prime minister, and Prabhakaran was named as the primary suspect in the 1991 assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. Vijay’s minority government in Tamil Nadu is currently supported by the Congress, which has been led by the Gandhi family for a long time. On May 18, 2009, Prabhakar was shot and killed by the Lankan army in Mullivaikkal, Sri Lanka. Vijay mentioned the location yesterday on the anniversary of his passing and wrote on X, “We will carry the memories of Mullivaikkal in our hearts! For the rights of our Tamil relatives



who live abroad, we will never waver. “Tamil Nadu’s new Chief Minister Velupillai Prabhakaran, whose outfit assassinated former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Of course, Rahul Gandhi would have no problem with it, as long as the Congress gets a slice of power. After all, the DMK too was an LTTE apologist, yet Congress remained perfectly comfortable in alliance with it,” he said. TVK sources say that the reference of ‘Mullivaikkal’ is also about the massacre of thousands of Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka, and not just about the death of former LTTE chief Prabhakaran. It’s the duty of any right-thinking leader to remember the loss of

innocent lives, the sources said.The Lankan Tamil population across the world and a section of Tamils in India observe May 18 as the Mullivaikal Remembrance Day (or Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day). It remembers the tens of thousands of Tamil civilians who were killed, injured, or disappeared during the final, brutal offensive in the coastal village of Mullivaikkal, which marked the tragic end of the Sri Lankan Civil War in 2009. The ethnic war lasting nearly 30 years had begun with a demand for a separate homeland for Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka but turned into a full-fledged armed war in its final phase.

A golfer of Indian descent ends Britain’s 100-year PGA title drought

New Delhi: Aaron Rai, an English golfer, had the best moment of his career on Sunday when he defeated Jon Rahm and Alex Smalley by three shots to win the PGA Championship. The golfer of Indian descent ended a drought that began with Jim Barnes’ victory in 1919 by becoming the first Englishman to win the event in 107 years. After a calm final-round 65, Rai ended the week at nine under par. With four birdies on the back nine, including an incredible 68-foot putt on the 17th hole that virtually guaranteed the title, he pulled away from the field. Additionally, the 31-year-old became the first player in PGA Championship history to raise his score in each round. Rai’s celebrations were cool and collected even after the winning putt fell. “Very, very proud,” Rai remarked following the victory. “Over those 100 years, there have been many amazing and historic English players who have gone on to accomplish amazing things and have had phenomenal careers.” Rai, who was raised in the



nearby town of Wombourne after being born in Wolverhampton, followed a very different path than many contemporary golfers. After talking with his family and mentors, he decided to become a professional golfer at the age of 17 rather than travel to the US for college. “I turned pro when I was 17,” Rai told Golf Digest. “We believed turning pro was the best way to learn, even though I probably wasn’t ready.” Rai started out on the PGA EuroPro Tour in 2014 before gradually climbing through

the professional ranks. He made his major debut at the 2017 US Open, though success at golf’s biggest events did not come immediately. Before this victory, his best major finishes were tied for 19th at the 2024 US Open and the 2025 PGA Championship. The Wolverhampton-born golfer entered the final round two shots behind overnight leader Alex Smalley and was one over through eight holes after mixing three bogeys with two birdies. His challenge gathered momentum at the

par-five ninth, where he drained a 40-foot eagle putt that changed the course of the round.Rai continued to build pressure on the chasing pack with birdies at the 13th and 16th before producing the defining moment of the championship at the 17th. His long birdie putt sent the crowd into celebration and effectively secured the Wanamaker Trophy. “Very surreal,” Rai said after the victory. “It’s been a bit of a frustrating season so to be standing here is definitely outside of my wildest imagination.”

Yogi’s “fall in line” directive cautions Muslims against breaking the law and performing road namaz

Lucknow, May 24: Yogi Adityanath, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, cautioned Muslims on Monday to obey government directives or face the repercussions. “Learn to follow the rules if you want to live within the system,” Adityanath said at an event here, referring to a long-standing demand of some Muslim organizations to allow them to offer namaz outside of mosques. Everyone is subject to the same rule of law. If it’s necessary, you can offer namaz in shifts. Don’t do it on the roads, but we won’t stop you. We won’t allow you to obstruct roads for the general public, sick people, workers, or business owners. According to Adityanath, he had made it apparent that he would not allow chaos to rule the roads. “If they accept it with love, that’s okay, but if they don’t follow the rules, we’ll take a different approach. It is my responsibility to start conversations. If you are prepared for a conversation, that is good. However, if you’re not prepared, you can choose the path of conflict and observe the outcomes. In Bareilly, people attempted to overthrow the government after realizing its power, he said. Bareilly is an important centre of learning for the Bareilvi sect of the Sunni community, which dominates the Muslim population in India and many other Islamic countries. Adityanath had banned Friday prayers on roads after taking over as chief minister



in 2017. The district magistrates were directed to enforce the administrative order. Although the community had accepted the diktat, the state has witnessed isolated cases of its violation in Bareilly, Sambhal and Moradabad. Maulana Tauqeer Raza, founder of the Ittehad-e-Millat Council and an important cleric from the Bareilvi sect, was arrested on September 26 last year for taking out a procession after of-

fering Friday prayers to support the “I Love Mohammed” campaign launched by some Muslims across the state. He is currently out on bail. “People (in other states) ask me whether it is true that namaz is not offered on the roads in Uttar Pradesh and I say: ‘You go and see for yourself. Roads are for the movement of the people and not for any tamasha (spectacle),’” Adityanath said.

After Kerala, the Congress will face Karnataka Kasauti

New Delhi, May 24: The political landscape in Karnataka is tumultuous for the Congress party, particularly with CM Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM DK Shivakumar in a power struggle as the party gears up for the 2026 elections. Following a recent deadlock in Kerala’s leadership, Congress is now facing renewed internal conflicts in Karnataka, with calls for a Cabinet reshuffle from both lawmakers and the CM. Siddaramaiah has approached Congress leadership for discussions regarding this reshuffle, while Shivakumar’s supporters are adamant that any decisions reflect a “2.5-year promise” made to them. The rivalry began with Siddaramaiah’s ascent to power in 2023 and has been marked by intermittent truces. After state elections in April saw a temporary easing of tensions, the focus has shifted back to leadership disputes. As the Siddaramaiah administration celebrates its third anniversary, discussions surrounding a Cabinet reshuffle are intensifying. Since Siddaramaiah’s rise to power in 2023, the rivalry has been characterized by sporadic truces. Analysts suggest that Siddaramaiah’s push for changes is a tactic to consolidate power amidst rising pressure from Shivakumar’s faction, who demand clarity on what they perceive to be an impending leadership transition. Recent statements from Karnataka minister Satish Jarkiholi hinted at developments regarding leadership changes. In a complex turn, senior Congress MLA KN Rajanna has proposed G Parameshwara as a potential successor to Siddaramaiah should a change occur.While the Congress party managed to maintain a semblance of unity in Kerala, Karnataka’s internal conflict showcases the heightened factionalism within its ranks. As the high command navigates leadership challenges in Karnataka, the outcome remains uncertain, further complicating the party’s political strategies in the region.

ED arrests Goa AAP leader Deepak Singla



New Delhi, May 24: AAP Goa leader Deepak Singla was taken into custody by the Enforcement Directorate on Monday after searches were conducted at his home in relation to an alleged bank fraud connected to a money laundering case. The BJP was charged by the AAP with attempting to “acquire organizational data” of the party via central agencies. AAP Goa leader and former chief minister of Delhi Atishi wrote on X: “BJP’s devoted foot soldier, ED, has been sent here as well, with Aam Aadmi Party’s popularity growing in Goa! Deepak Singla, the co-in-charge of AAP Goa, and a few volunteers in Goa are the targets of an ED raid that began this morning. This is an attempt to obtain all of our organizational data in addition to frightening our volunteers. Citing the raids on poll consultant I-PAC, Atishi claimed that the BJP used the ED against the Trinamool Congress to win the Bengal elections. She claimed that the raids had given the BJP access to Trinamool’s organizational data and that the same politics were now being played in Punjab and Goa in preparation for the elections. “It has been gathered that Deepak is handling the hawala operations for funds movement for the AAP between Delhi and Goa,” an ED official stated. Singla, his brothers Raman and Harish Singla, and his uncle Ashok Kumar Mittal defrauded Oriental Bank of Commerce out of over ₹150 crore. Singla contested the Delhi elections from Vishwas Nagar on an AAP ticket in 2025 and 2020.

Deepika Kumari, a four-time Olympian, does not make it to the Asian Games

New Delhi : Following a rigorous three-day selection trial in Sonapat, Haryana, India’s archery team for the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, was finalized on Monday. Four-time Olympian Deepika Kumari’s exclusion from the women’s recurve team for the continental event made headlines during the trials. Following subpar results in the selection trials held at the SAI Center, former India No. 1 Atanu Das and renowned compound archer Abhishek Verma were also left off of the Asian Games team.

The trials, held in difficult windy conditions, were used to select India’s teams for the Asian Games as well as the upcoming third and fourth stages of the Archery World Cup. As the fourth-ranked recurve archer, Deepika was able to maintain her spot in the Indian team for the World Cup stages despite missing the Asian Games cut. In the women’s recurve category, teenagers Kirti Sharma and Kumkum Mohod were the biggest winners from the trials. With 13.5 points, 19-year-old Kirti led the standings, followed by Kumkum of Maharashtra.

Olympian Ankita Bhakat defeated Deepika Kumari in a shoot-off to secure the third and final Asian Games berth. Before Ankita maintained her composure in the final round, both archers had finished tied on 10.75 points after three rounds spread over three days.

This will be the second consecutive Asian Games that Deepika will miss after also failing to make the squad for the Hangzhou Games in 2022 following the birth of her daughter. Despite being one of India’s most decorated archers with



multiple World Cup medals and a Commonwealth Games title, Deepika is yet to win an individual medal at the Asian Games. Her best finish remains the women’s team bronze medal from the 2010 Guangzhou Games. Kirti Sharma’s rise through the ranks has been one of the standout stories from the trials.

The young archer from Haryana’s Jind district is the daughter of an iron gate welder and was picked during talent scouting trials conducted by coach Udham Singh in 2022 before being inducted into the SAI Hazaribagh centre in Jharkhand. Kirti made her India debut earlier this year at the Asia Cup in Bangkok and has since represented the country in three Asia Cup events. Earlier this season, she won a team bronze medal alongside Ridhi Phor and Ruma Biswas. She also impressed throughout the elim-

ination rounds in Sonapat, defeating experienced names like Ankita Bhakat and Ridhi Phor on her way to topping the trials. “We had given out an advertisement and she came all the way from Haryana for the trials. She has been training with us for the last five years,” coach Udham Singh told PTI after the trials.

By virtue of Kirti finishing on top, Singh will travel with the Indian women’s recurve team as coach for the Asian Games. Backing the young squad, Singh said India needed to trust the next generation after years of relying on experienced names. “We have seen what India achieved with experienced archers at the Olympics. Now youngsters should get their chance. They have come through an extreme grind and defeated big names in tough windy conditions. I’m confident they will do well,” he said.

Sabalenka shortens her media appearances in opposition to French Open prize funds

World number one Aryna Sabalenka, along with other leading players, limited her media obligations to 15 minutes as a protest against the prize money distribution at the French Open. The players demand a larger share of overall revenue for prize money and benefits, voicing concerns over their limited share of tournament profits. The protest, which

included Sabalenka’s brief interactions, highlighted that the French Open allocates only 15% of its revenue to prize money.

Notable figures like Jannik Sinner and Iga Swiatek also participated in this action, emphasizing the need for better revenue sharing in professional tennis. Despite not formally participating,

Novak Djokovic expressed support for the underlying principles of the protest. Sabalenka had previously warned that players could eventually consider a boycott of a Grand Slam event if negotiations over revenue distribution fail to progress, underlining the seriousness of the dispute as tensions continue to build ahead of the French Open.

India’s first call-up was greatly influenced by domestic cricket: Harsh Dubey

New Delhi: Harsh Dubey’s only concern at the busy Chennai airport on Tuesday afternoon was a delayed flight to Hyderabad. His phone rang after an hour-long wait with his Sunrisers Hyderabad teammates. A sports content creator from Dubey’s hometown of Nagpur called to inquire about his thoughts on his India selection. Except, the 23-year-old had absolutely no clue what he was talking about. Dubey laughed as he recalled, “I told him I was one step closer because I thought he was asking about the India A one-day series in Sri Lanka.” The confusion was exacerbated by the inadequate network surrounding the boarding gate. “I told him I would call back later because I couldn’t hear him clearly.” Before he could settle into his seat, more congratulatory messages began pouring in from journalists and cricket acquaintances. Confused, Dubey turned to fellow spin-bowling allrounder Shivang Kumar and quickly searched his name online. That was when reality struck. For the first time in his life, his name featured in India’s senior national squad — both Tests and ODIs — for the forthcoming home series against Afghanistan national cricket team. “The first thing I saw was my name. I didn’t even see the rest of the team,” Dubey said. “I didn’t know how to react.”

In no time, it turned into a celebratory moment. SRH teammates gathered around him, handshakes turned into hugs, and phone calls home became increasingly emotional. His mother, he admitted, “struggled to process the news”. Even Muttiah Muralitharan, the legendary Sri Lankan spinner who works with SRH, was curious about the composition of the squad and whether Dubey would make the playing XI. Dubey’s rise has been swift but hardly ac-



cidental. Since his breakthrough 2024-25 domestic season for Vidarbha — where he claimed a record 69 Ranji Trophy wickets while also scoring 476 runs — he has steadily climbed the ladder through India A cricket and the IPL. Yet, Dubey insists the IPL was merely an extension of the groundwork laid in domestic cricket. “I feel if you are doing well anywhere, it doesn’t go unnoticed,” he said. “Sometimes it takes more time, sometimes less. But domestic cricket has played a huge role behind this India call-up.”

That sentiment perhaps carries extra weight in an era where IPL visibility often overshadows red-ball consistency, at least in public perception. Dubey’s journey, however, has been built almost entirely on long-form performance before the IPL spotlight

arrived. The selectors first noticed him through Ranji Trophy cricket, rewarded him with India A opportunities in England, Australia and South Africa, and only then did the IPL become a launchpad. For Vidarbha cricket too, the moment carries significance beyond individual achievement. Despite winning the Ranji Trophy thrice, the central Indian side has produced only one Test cricketer in Umesh Yadav.

“When one of my childhood coaches called, he told me I could become the first Vidarbha player after Umesh bhai to get a Test cap. That’s when I realised how big this is,” Dubey said. “I feel a lot of young players will now believe they can play for India through domestic cricket and not only through the IPL.” For all the excitement, Dubey sounds determined not to romanticise the

moment too much. His self-analysis remains brutally honest. He speaks more about fitness, diet and self-improvement than wickets or records. “Over the last couple of years, more than skill improvement, I have realised I need to maintain my fitness levels in order to be focussed and perform at the higher levels, so I have been extremely particular about fitness and nutrition aspects,” he said. Satisfaction, he says, doesn’t come easily. “Even if I perform well, I move on quickly and focus on the next game,” he said. “That mindset has helped me the most.” Working alongside Muralitharan at SRH has naturally helped too, although Dubey prefers keeping technical conversations simple during tournaments. “I don’t want to complicate my bowling too much in between matches,” he explained.

Comprehending Jyothi Surekha: At ease under duress

New Delhi: Even though Jyothi Surekha Vennam has won over 90 medals at the Asian Games, Asian and World Championships, World Cups, and other events, her accomplishments are insufficient to fully convey who she has become. She belongs to a unique class of athletes in Indian sports: those who are predicted to win before the first arrow is even drawn. They refer to it as a sure shot. A burden that passes for praise. As compound archery gets ready to make its Olympic debut at the 2028 Los Angeles Games, that certainty is expected to grow into something more promising, significant, and difficult to ignore.

In order to meet one of the nation’s most formidable athletes, she traveled to Vijayawada in this gathering light, crossing a river she once mastered as a five-year-old (which propelled her into the Limca Book of Records). The world of Surekha doesn’t make an announcement. It conceals itself in plain sight. A community with gates. A door just like the others. A house that could belong to anyone—until it doesn’t. Shimmer replaces the silence inside. Like pieces of a protracted, unrelenting dialogue with time, medals catch the light. What was once a bedroom has surrendered itself to memory, becoming a walk-in archive of effort and repetition, of early mornings, missed shots, and moments of precision. Even now, it overflows — trophies resting where there is no space left for them. It is here that the 29-year-old sat down, surrounded by the evidence of everything she had done, to speak not just of winning, but of carrying what winning leaves behind and what lies ahead. Long before the plethora of medals, before the expectation that she would never return home “empty-handed,” before compound archery finally found its place at the Olympics, Surekha was an eight-year-old crying because she did not want to take up archery after getting used to the



routine of swimming.

Sports ran in the family. Her grandfather was a physical education teacher who trained athletes for kabaddi. Her father, Vennam Surendra Kumar, played the sport himself at the college level before moving on to a career in veterinary science. Surendra and his wife, Sri Durga, made every major decision regarding their daughter’s involvement in sports. “My parents chose archery mostly because it’s an individual game and involves more concentration and focus,” Surekha explained. The idea to pick the compound vertical was to allow her the space to also balance her academics. “We heard then that to shoot a recurve bow, I would have to give a lot of time. It might affect my studies. My parents were very clear that even if I’m into sports, I should not neglect my education. They wanted me to have a plan B if a life in sports did not pan out.” It was not love at first sight for Surekha with archery. The affection arrived gradually.

When she struck six gold medals at her first nationals, at the Under-13 level in 2008, the sport latched on to her, permanently now. Unsurprisingly, the narration of one of the most

consequential moments of her life comes with restraint: “I was like... okay, I am happy with it.” International archery wasn’t as instantly rewarding. Silvers and bronzes kept getting collected, but golds were elusive at first. “It took me 12 World Cups to win a medal, and there were situations where people were coming into the team for the first time and they won one. I often asked myself, ‘Why am I not able to win a medal in the World Cup?’ I was really upset about it for a long time.” “That year was really great because in all four stages of the World Cup, we won bronze in the mixed team event, and I also got to win two silvers in the women’s team category as well.” Each year of the nearly two decades she has spent in archery has seen a generous sprinkling of medals across tiers of competition. But a few moments stand out. The 2023 Archery World Cup is one of them, where she shot 713 out of a possible 720 in the first stage in Antalya to match the erstwhile world record. Her first individual medal was another memorable milestone, coming at the 2019 World Championships. Her first individual World Cup medal came in Paris in 2022.

Tensions at the French Open increase as players prepare to protest the prize money structure in the media

New Delhi: French Open players are organizing a media protest over prize-money distribution, with several top athletes, including Novak Djokovic and Coco Gauff, set to limit their press interactions during Roland Garros. This coordinated ‘work-to-rule’ protest involves keeping media sessions to approximately 15 minutes as frustration grows over perceived inequities in Grand Slam revenues.

Players are particularly dissatisfied with Roland Garros reducing their share of tournament revenues, which reportedly exceed 400 million euros this year.

The planned protest will not constitute a full boycott, as players aim to comply with media



2026 to €61.7 million, players argue that this does not match the increase in tournament revenues, which reportedly exceed 400 million euros this year.

The planned protest will not constitute a full boycott, as players aim to comply with media

obligations to avoid penalties.

The French Tennis Federation (FFT) expressed disappointment and indicated readiness for discussions on governance and value distribution to enhance player welfare. Other Grand Slam events, like

the Australian Open and US Open, have recently increased their player compensation significantly. The French Open main draw begins on May 24, with the finals on June 7, featuring champions Gauff and Carlos Alcaraz defending their titles.

East Bengal fans paint stadium red and gold after ISL win

New Delhi: A tifo from one of the galleries of the Kishore Bharati Stadium read, “A Thousand Scars, One Immortal Crown.” On Thursday night, the only colors visible were red and gold.

The days of insults, jabs, and sarcastic memes are finally over. East Bengal has finally vanquished their demons after years of suffering and disappointment as well as the wounds they sustained in earlier ISL seasons.

They painted the city red and gold as they overcame a tough Inter Kashi 2-1 to win the ISL for the first time ever.

The fact that the red-and-gold brigade has won the national championship after 22 arduous years, however, is more significant. The last time East Bengal were national champions was in the 2003-04 season, when they emerged winners of the then National Football League. Their arch-rivals Mohun Bagan Super Giant, too, were in the title race, though they had to beat Sporting Club Delhi by a

big margin. Bagan, too, registered a come-from-behind win with Manvir Singh (89th minute) and Jamie Maclaren (90+8) scoring two late goals after Clarence Fernandes had put the visitors ahead at the Salt Lake Stadium. Both East Bengal and Bagan finished with 26 points each. But East Bengal sealed the title by virtue of a superior goal difference (19) than that of Bagan (14).

The fans’ joy knew no bounds as soon as the referee blew the final whistle. In a matter of a few minutes, almost the entire turnout swarmed the field, as the presentation ceremony had to be delayed. The start, though, was far from what East Bengal and their fans had expected. Although Brazilian Miguel Figueira was doing his best to try and break the tight Inter Kashi defence and even tried a bicycle kick that was blocked by rival defender Sandip Mandi early in the sixth minute, East Bengal got a rude shock soon after. Anwar sent in a long pass for Ezzejjari, who tried to beat the rival goalkeeper.