

Mizoram Assembly Passes Bill Amending Mizo Marriage, Divorce, Property Laws

Bill bans polygamy, strengthens women’s property rights

Aizawl, Feb 24: The Mizoram Legislative Assembly on February 24 unanimously passed a bill amending the Mizo Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance of Property Act, 2014, introducing major reforms to customary marriage practices in the state. The amendment was introduced by Chief Minister Lalduhoma in his capacity as Minister for Law and Judicial Affairs. The revised law formally bans polygamy and bigamy, stating that no person may enter into a second marriage while a previous marriage remains legally valid. Under the new provisions, individuals seeking remarriage must submit a valid divorce certificate issued by the competent separation authority. The amendments bring the state law in line with the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which criminalises bigamy and polygamy.



A significant clause in the amended Act states that if a Mizo woman marries a non-Mizo man, she will forfeit her Mizo status and related entitlements. This includes her children’s ineligibility

for Scheduled Tribe status under the state’s jurisdiction. Strengthening women’s financial security, the law ensures that in cases of divorce or separation—traditionally referred to as ‘Sum Ch-

huah’—women will retain rights over jointly acquired property and assets. The amendment also removes “leprosy” as a ground for divorce, acknowledging it as a treatable medical condition.

NFR extends holi special train operations for hassle-free travel

Guwahati, Feb 24: North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) has extended services of four pairs of Holi special trains during February-March 2026 with an aim to clear the additional rush of passengers during the festive season.

Train numbers 07046/07047 (Secunderabad - Naharlagun - Secunderabad) and 03129/03130 (Kolkata Terminal - New Jalpaiguri -Kolkata Terminal) will be operating one additional trip each in both directions.

Train numbers 09189/09190 (Mumbai Central - Katihar - Mumbai Central) will be operating six additional trips each in both directions and the weekly special train numbers 04614/04613 (Amritsar - Katihar - Amritsar) will be operating three additional trips



each in both directions.

These trains will operate with the existing schedule of service, timings, composition and stoppages.

Train number 07046 (Secunderabad - Naharlagun) weekly special has been extended to run on February 27, 2026, while in the return direction, train number 07047 (Naharlagun - Secunderabad) weekly special has been extended to run on March 2, 2026. Similarly, train number 03129 (Kolkata Terminal

-New Jalpaiguri) weekly special has been extended to run on February 28, 2026.

In return direction, train number 03130 (New Jalpaiguri - Kolkata Terminal) weekly special has been extended to run on March 1, 2026. On the other hand, Train Number 09189 (Mumbai Central-Katihar) will continue to operate on every Saturday till March 28, 2026. In the return direction, train number 09190 (Katihar - Mumbai Central) weekly special has been ex-

tended to run from February 24 till March 31, 2026 on every Tuesday.

Similarly, train number 04614 (Amritsar - Katihar) weekly has been extended to run from February 25 till March 5, 2026 on every Wednesday. In the return direction, train number 04613 (Katihar-Amritsar) weekly special has been extended to run from February 27 to March 7, 2026 on every Friday. “The extension of these train services will benefit waitlisted passengers on other trains operating along these routes. It will further improve connectivity between the Northeast, Eastern and Northern regions, ensuring smoother passenger movement and supporting regional integration and development,” an NFR official said.

Forest Staff Trained To Protect India’s Ape

Guwahati, Feb 24: Leading biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak, in collaboration with Namdapha National Park and Tiger Reserve and with support from the Arcus Foundation, organised a Hoolock Gibbon conservation training programme at the headquarters of the Namsai Forest Division in Arunachal Pradesh on February 23, 2026. The training programme aimed to familiarise forest personnel with the Western Hoolock Gibbon (Hoolock hoolock), India’s only ape species, and to strengthen their capacity and motivation for its conservation. The Western Hoolock Gibbon is classified as endangered and is found across seven northeastern states of India, except Sikkim. Its distribution is largely confined to the south bank of the Brahmaputra River and areas east of the Dibang river system. The Namsai Forest Division is considered a potential habitat for the species. Notably, this was the first such workshop held in both Namsai Forest Division and Namsai district. The programme was inaugurated by Tabang Jamoh, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Namsai Forest Division, and co-ordinated by Nandita Medhi, Consultant with the Primate Research and Conservation Division of Aaranyak. In his address,

Jamoh welcomed participants and appreciated Aaranyak’s initiative to promote Western Hoolock Gibbon conservation in the region. Highlighting that the Hoolock Gibbon is the state animal of Arunachal Pradesh, he emphasised the shared responsibility to safeguard the species. He also encouraged forest personnel to develop practical skills in using Global Positioning System (GPS) and Geographic Information System (GIS) tools for wildlife conservation and biodiversity management. Dr. Dilip Chetry, Senior Primatologist, Director and Head of the Primate Research and Conservation Division at Aaranyak, and Vice Chair of the IUCN Primate Specialist Group (South Asia), led the first technical session. He outlined the current conservation status of the Western Hoolock Gibbon, key threats to its survival, and priority conservation strategies. Dr. Chetry also discussed various scientific methods for population estimation and urged the Arunachal Pradesh Forest Department to consider the species as a flagship for regional biodiversity conservation. An interactive session on Hoolock Gibbon conservation was initiated and coordinated by Alok Kumar, Range Officer of Tengapani Range.

Governor visits HQ 26 Sector Assam Rifles

Imphal, Feb 24: Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, along with the First Lady, visited the Headquarters 26 Sector, Assam Rifles at Pallel in Kakching district and flagged in the team who participated the National Integration Tour 2025–2026. The 23-member team comprising of the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) leaders and members of Self-Help Groups during the 15-day tour, visited Ahmedabad, Delhi, Guwahati and Shillong. Maj. Gen. Gaurav Sharma, IG AR (S), Brigd. Robben Chatterjee, Commander, 26 Sector, AR, welcomed the Governor upon his arrival at the garrison premises. The 23 participants, comprising 13 men and 10 women, undertook the journey which provided them with first-hand exposure to India’s cultural heritage, democratic institutions and developmental milestones. Their itinerary included visits to the Kohima War Memorial, the Statue of Unity, Atal Bridge, Dandi Kutir and the Sabarnati Riverfront in Ahmedabad, where they also interacted with REACHA participants. In New Delhi, the delegation visited India Gate and other prominent national institutions, while engaging with distinguished dignitaries includ-

ing Droupadi Murmu, President of India; Nityanand Rai, Minister of State for Home Affairs; Lt Gen Bhavnish Kumar, General Officer Commanding, Delhi Area; Acharya Devvrat, Governor of Gujarat; Maj Gen Gaurav Bagga, General Officer Commanding, 11 Infantry Division, Ahmedabad; Maj Gen Jai Singh Bainsla, Additional Director General, Assam Rifles; and Chandrashekar H. Vijayashankar, Governor of Meghalaya. While interacting with the team members, the Governor appreciated the initiative taken up by the Assam Rifles.

The Governor stated that such tours help people understand the country’s diversity, pluralism and cultural unity, and foster a stronger sense of national integration. Referring to the vision of the Prime Minister for “Viksit Bharat 2047”, he emphasised that citizens should strive to connect with every nook and corner of the nation. He appealed to the participants to carry forward the message of national unity and harmony across the State. The participants also shared their experiences and expressed gratitude to the Assam Rifles for organising such an exposure visit.

RIMS sets record straight on fake staff selection

Imphal, Feb 24: The Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Imphal, has come to notice that a fake and fabricated notification is being circulated on social media platforms and other channels claiming that Lourembam Jessica Devi has been selected for appointment to the post of Staff Nurse at RIMS, Imphal. Another notification dated February 12, purportedly signed by Deputy Director

(Admin) announcing “personal interaction” for the posts have also been observed. RIMS categorically clarified that these notifications are false, unauthorized, and not issued by the institute and do not carry any official validity. The institute further clarified that the recruitment process for Staff Nurse at RIMS, Imphal, is done through NORCET, which is a centralized recruiting



examination conducted by AIIMS, New Delhi only. The institute strongly condemned such irresponsible and misleading acts, intended to create confusion

among candidates and the general public. It advised the citizens not to believe, share, or circulate such fake documents. RIMS further cautioned that creation and

circulation of forged official documents is a serious offence and may attract strict legal action under the relevant laws, against individuals involved in such activities. All recruitment-related information and official notifications of RIMS are published only through the institute’s authorised website: <https://www.rims.edu.in>, email: director@rims.edu.in and notice board at its campus.

Sand and stone extraction degrades Sengmai River

Imphal, Feb 24: Water is one of the most essential natural resources for human survival and forms the backbone of civilization. Among natural resources, rivers play a vital role not only in sustaining human life but also in maintaining ecological balance. In Manipur, due to the prolonged dry season and inadequate rainfall, many people are already facing acute water scarcity. In Kakching, the Sengmai River, which serves as a major source of water for the local population, is re-

portedly being subjected to excessive sand and stone extraction using heavy machinery, causing serious environmental and public concerns. In connection with this issue, a team led by the President of the Joint Non-Government Voluntary Organisation (JNGVO), Kakching, Kshetrimayum Chhatradhari, along with the caretaker Chairperson of the Kakching Municipal Council, Naorem Sanjitkumar, conducted an inspection at various points along the riverbank.

Khongnangthaba University hosts workshop with world renowned Homoeopathic physician

Imphal, Feb 24: Khongnangthaba University today hosted a one-day workshop on “Clinical Efficacy of Homoeopathy in Acute and Chronic Diseases – Evidence-Based Case Analysis,” including free consultation and practical demonstration. The programme was jointly organised by Khongnangthaba University, the Homoeopathic Medical Association of India (HMAI), Manipur State Branch, Northeast Nutraceuticals LLP (Palace Compound, near Harikhagok Makhong, Imphal East) and LDD Bioscience Pvt. Ltd. (Gurugram, India). Dr. Kh. Jayanta Meetei, Chairman, Khongnangthaba University; Prof. N. Joykumar Singh, Vice-Chancellor, Khongnangthaba University; and Dr. Jawahar J. Shah, world renowned homoeopathic physician, were the Presidium Members of the programme. The inaugural session commenced with a welcome and keynote address by Dr. A. Guneshwor Sharma, who introduced the resource person. The workshop was formally declared open by the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. N. Joykumar Singh, who underlined the value of structured clinical learning and case-based discussion. The technical sessions were conducted by Dr. Jawahar J. Shah, beginning with “Efficacy of Homoeopathy Treatment in Acute and Chronic Diseases with Evidence-Based Case Analysis,” followed by case demonstration and clinical analysis as part of the practical component. An HMAI Lucky Draw was also held. The programme concluded with the valedictory session and vote of thanks by Dr. N. Santakumar Singh.



IIT Guwahati Calls for Strict Depth Compliance in Maa Kamakhya Access Corridor Project

Guwahati, Feb 24: The Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (IIT Guwahati) has recommended that depth-related precautions identified by the National Institute of Hydrology (NIH) be strictly followed during construction of the ₹500-crore Maa Kamakhya Access Corridor Project to prevent disturbance to critical fracture-controlled groundwater pathways. Following two petitions in the Gauhati High Court, the government engaged the Roorkee-based NIH to conduct a detailed geophysical and hydrological survey to assess the possible environmental impact of the project. The NIH report was later vetted by IIT Guwahati. The analysis of the proposed construction layout, when superimposed on mapped fracture systems, revealed interconnected fractures at depths ranging from 1.9 metres

to 10.5 metres along the stretch between the upstream of the Kamakhya Temple and in front of the Chinnamasta Temple. Within the premises of the Siddheshwar Temple, fractures were detected between depths of 3.9 metres and 8.1 metres. Based on these findings, the report recommended that the foundation in the section from Maa Kamakhya Temple to Chinnamasta Temple should not exceed 1.9 metres. In front of Siddheshwar Temple, the foundation depth should be restricted to 3.9 metres or the actual depth of the nearest fracture, whichever is shallower. The researchers stressed that compliance with these limits is essential to prevent disruption of the natural subsurface flow regime. In the playground area, the subsurface consists of approximately 3.2 to 3.5 metres of soil-fill composed of coarse-grained sand, peb-

bles and clay, underlain by weathered or compacted rock. Fractures were observed at depths of 6.4 to 7.6 metres, with geophysical data indicating a transition from soil-fill to weathered rock and subsequently to hard rock. IIT Guwahati recommended that foundation depths in this area be limited to a maximum of 6.4 metres to ensure that construction activities do not intersect or disturb fracture-controlled groundwater pathways. The researchers stated that these recommendations are critical to safeguarding the integrity of the natural hydrogeological system while enabling the planned development to proceed responsibly. Based on the recommendations, the project consultant has prepared fresh drawings keeping the foundation depth within the prescribed limits across all four blocks. The Public Works Department in-

formed the Gauhati High Court that after a detailed study of the area, it was consciously decided to locate all proposed pilgrim facilities and utility buildings largely over the footprint of existing houses and structures, with the intention of using land that has been compacted over many decades. On February 12, the High Court granted permission to execute the project after being assured that the precautions recommended by the research institutes would be adhered to. The project is being developed over approximately 15,000 square metres atop the Nilachal Hills to provide state-of-the-art access to the revered Kamakhya Temple, which attracts lakhs of devotees every year. It comprises five components, including a three-level corridor of around 350 metres connecting the parking area to the temple entrance.

Hand grenade explodes at Wangjing New Market

Imphal, Feb 24: A hand grenade hurled by unidentified miscreants exploded in front of a betel leaf shop located at Wangjing Heirok crossing New Market under Thoubal Police Station in Thoubal district. According to reports, unidentified miscreants lobbed the bomb on February 22 at around 10:40 pm in the intervening night of Sunday and Monday.

Fortunately, as the incident occurred late at night, no casualties were reported. However, the impact of the explosion caused damage to the shop’s shutter, roofing sheets, and the door of an adjacent shop. The shop targeted in the attack belongs to Ningthoujam Roben alias Bijenkumar (41), son of (Late) Angang of Heirok Part-III, Tourangbam area. A team of Thoubal district police arrived at the scene yesterday morning and conducted a detailed inspection.

Further investigation into the incident is underway. Speaking to media persons, shop owner Ningthoujam Roben stated that this was not the first attack on his establishment.

He alleged that on August 10, 2025, in the early hour, unidentified individuals had earlier fired two rounds at his shop and demanded ₹5 lakh from him, which he refused to pay. He further said that in January 2026, an underground group warned him to close down his shop. However, as the shop is his family’s only source of livelihood, he continued operating it. He also mentioned that after certain allegations linking him with Kuki narco-terrorists were circulated on social media, both he and local residents strongly refuted the claims.

NE/EAST

Farmers, Infrastructure in Focus as Assam Unveils Multi-Crore Development Push

Guwahati, Feb 24: During the programme, grants along with agricultural machinery and tools were distributed to Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs). An amount of ₹120 crore was also disbursed under the Samabeshit Aajeevika Yojana and DAD-NRLM. The event was attended by Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who handed over approval letters for roads and bridges under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana-IV. The Centre approved 528 roads and 62 bridges worth approximately ₹1,817 crore. In addition, approvals and releases included an additional three crore person-days mandate and ₹1,100 crore under MGNREGA, ₹42 crore under the Pulses Mission, ₹40.5 crore for power tillers, ₹4.5 crore for the Digital Mission, and procurement approval for 62,500 metric tonnes of mustard. The new building of Assam Seed Corporation Limited was inaugurated, and the Kisan Sarathi mobile app was launched to support farmers with digital access to agricultural services.Praising Assam’s development trajectory, Chouhan said the state is writing a new



chapter of progress, noting that Assam has constructed an average of 14 kilometres of roads daily over the past five years.The announce-

ments mark a significant push toward rural infrastructure, agricultural support, and inclusive economic growth in the state.

Shrinking habitats fuel rising human-elephant conflict along Assam-Arunachal border

Shillong, Feb 24: The fragile coexistence between humans and elephants along the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh state border has once again turned tragic. A 65-year-old man was trampled to death by a wild elephant in Balipukhuri village, near the inter-state border in Dorpang under Narayanpur Police Station of Lakhimpur district in the early hours of February 3. Tea garden workers and forest-dependent communities are among the most vulnerable. On January 22, 2022, Kesari Bhuyan, a temporary worker at Koil-amari Tea Estate, was trampled to death inside Kakoi Reserve Forest while collecting firewood. She had reportedly encountered a herd of elephants inside the forest and was chased before being killed. Every year, several tea plantation workers in Lakhimpur lose their lives in similar encounters. Families of victims frequently demand compensation, but long-term preventive strategies remain elusive. The roots of the crisis lie in decades of habitat degradation. In 2015, the electrocution of an adult male elephant in Gopalpur village near Kakoi-Rajgarh Forest beat highlighted the growing desperation of both villagers and wildlife. The elephant died after coming into contact with live electric wires connected to a bamboo barricade meant to protect paddy fields. Residents of Lakhimpur’s border villages are demanding coordinated inter-state efforts between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to restore elephant corridors, regulate encroachments and strengthen rapid response systems. They argue that sporadic interventions cannot address a crisis rooted in ecological imbalance. Wildlife experts have previously recommended creation and expansion of protected areas in Lakhimpur and better management of elephant corridors. Yet, villagers say, meaningful implementation has lagged behind the mounting toll.

As Dharmeswar Das’s family mourns his loss, the tragedy in Dorpang stands as a grim reminder of a conflict that has simmered for years. Without comprehensive planning that balances conservation with community safety, both humans and elephants will continue to pay the price along the Assam-Arunachal

frontier.Experts point to encroachment on reserved forests, deforestation, expansion of tea plantations and infrastructure projects as major factors disrupting traditional elephant migration routes. Historically, elephants moved from Poba Reserve Forest in Dhema-ji district to Ranga Reserve Forest in Lakhimpur, traversing riverine corridors along the Brahmaputra and its tributaries such as Subansiri and Ranganadi

However, destruction of forests in Dirpai and Joypur inside Arunachal Pradesh and the construction of infrastructure linked to hydroelectric projects have severely narrowed these passages. As a result, elephants now encounter human settlements blocking their traditional paths to riverine grasslands rich in “elephant grass,” their preferred post-monsoon food

On June 19, 2024 a male wild jumbo was found dead in Sonowalgaon of No. 1 Dhemagarh on Assam-Arunachal Pradesh boundary. The elephant met its end following consuming pesticides sprayed on standing paddy crops in the village. According to conservation groups , fragmentation has split elephant populations into smaller, stressed units. Poaching for ivory and illegal killing for meat have further diminished their numbers. Wildlife experts note that elephants are protected under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and are listed as “Endangered” by the IUCN, underscoring the urgency of conservation.During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, elephant movement intensified in rural Lakhimpur. A lone elephant roamed villages near Bogoli Reserve Forest and Shimaluguri for days, repeatedly returning to the area due to the presence of a domesticated female elephant and her calf. Despite joint operations by police and forest officials to push the animal back toward the Arunachal hills, it returned and even damaged a tractor used to transport food for the captive elephants.In April 2020, more than a hundred elephants crossed Bhitiripam Nepali village en route to Bogoli Reserve Forest, triggering panic among residents who recalled earlier destruction of homes.

The victim, Dharmeswar Das, reportedly stepped out of his house after learning that a wild elephant was rampaging through the village. In an attempt to drive the animal away from the settlement, he confronted it but was fatally trampled. Police later sent his body to Lakhimpur Medical College and Hospital for post-mortem This was followed by ransacking of the house of Maya Karki (45) on the early morning of February 20, by a wild jumbo in Rampur Kachajuli under Laluki Police Station of Lakhimpur district. Maya, a differently abled woman lost her entire house and stocks of rice to the jumbo that came down from the neighbouring hills of Arunachal Pradesh in search of food. Villagers allege that local forest offices, including Kachajuli Forest Beat under Harmutty Forest Range, often respond with temporary measures such as firecrackers to scare the animals away, without offering lasting solutions.Schools and public spaces on the receiving endEducational institutions have also fallen victim to the escalating conflict. On December 9, 2024, a wild elephant emerging from Dulung Reserve Forest entered Rupahi Line LP School in Ukhamati near Ananda Tea Estate. The elephant broke through brick walls and damaged the mid-day meal kitchen in search of food, destroying classroom furniture and playground equipment.

The Dulung Reserve Forest contains the crucial Dulung-Subansiri elephant corridor, which experts say is increasingly threatened by roads, commercial establishments and hydroelectric activity, including the Subansiri Lower Hydroelectric Project at Gerukamukh. Conservationists warn that disruption of these corridors heightens the likelihood of elephants straying into settlements.These incidents add to a growing list of fatalities and destruction caused by wild elephants in the border villages of Lakhimpur district, where human settlements increasingly overlap with traditional elephant corridors. The Dorpang tragedy mirrors a similar incident that occurred nearly two years ago. On March 15, 2024, Dimbeswar Phukan (50) was trampled to death in Drupang village, also under Narayanpur Police Station. A herd of wild el-

ephants had entered the village at midnight, smashing houses and granaries. As villagers attempted to chase them away, Phukan was caught and killed. Villagers alleged that despite frantic calls, forest officials failed to respond during the attack. Their anger intensified the next morning when forest personnel arrived only after the damage had been done. Residents have repeatedly accused authorities of failing to implement effective measures to mitigate the elephant menace in the region.Many locals claim that electric fencing erected on the Arunachal Pradesh side has redirected elephant movement toward Assam’s villages. Others blame rampant deforestation and large-scale extraction of earth from hills, which have destroyed natural habitats and forced elephants to seek food in human settlements.Sleepless nights in Bhitiripam

In Bhitiripam village under Nowboicha Revenue Circle, sleepless nights have become routine. For years, residents of this inter-state border village have endured near-daily incursions by wild elephants, primarily from the nearby Ranga Reserve Forest. On October 22, 2025, a herd of elephants ravaged the plantation of Keshab Nirola, uprooting areca nut, banana and pineapple crops during an hour-long rampage. Nirola, who had earlier shifted from paddy cultivation to areca nut farming to reduce losses, said elephant disturbances have worsened since the massive Ranganadi floods triggered by the hydroelectric dam in Arunachal Pradesh in 2008. Repeated elephant attacks have forced him to relocate his house several times.Bhitiripam has witnessed a series of destructive episodes. On January 31, 2020, elephants destroyed several houses barely 100 meters from a forest camp. In July 2023, homes belonging to Tika Upadhyaya and Bogy Maya Rai were demolished. On New Year’s Day 2023, a herd destroyed the house of daily wage labourer Loka Maya Chet-ry. Even public infrastructure has not been spared — the kitchen of Rajgarh Gabhoru Tunijan ME School in nearby Kachajuli was wrecked in May 2024 after elephants feasted on rice meant for mid-day meals

Meghalaya hands over 66 acres



Guwahati, Feb 24: The Meghalaya government has formally handed over 66 acres of prime land by the Umi-am Lake in Ri-Bhoi district to the Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), the Tata Group’s hospitality arm, for the development of a five-star Taj Resort and Spa. The financial details of the agreement, as outlined by Tourism Minister Timothy D. Shira, indicate that the state exchequer is poised to receive substantial returns over the long term. The annual revenue share and lease rent are scheduled to begin at Rs 4.47 crore in the first year of operation, escalating to Rs 7.42 crore by the fifth year and reaching Rs 9.46 crore by the tenth year.Over the course of the 60-year lease period, the cumulative revenue to the state is estimated to reach Rs 1,981.65 crore. Additionally, IHCL will remit a one-time upfront premium of Rs 8 crore to the state government upon the project’s implementation. This fiscal arrangement is part of a larger strategy to monetize state assets while ensuring long-term recurring income for the regional economy.Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma confirmed the transaction in the State Assembly on Monday, responding to a starred question by MLA Adelbert Nongrum, who sought clarity on the land transfer and the fiscal framework governing the agreement. The Chief Minister described the project as a cornerstone of the state’s “Tourism Mission,” noting that the presence of the iconic Taj brand would position Meghalaya as a premium destination on the global tourism map. Situated approximately 17 km from the state capital, Shillong, and 14 km from Umroi Airport, the Taj Umi-am Resort & Spa is intended to serve as a gateway for the state’s highlands. This development is part of a broader Rs 500 crore vision for the Umi-am region, which includes waterfront redevelopment, a convention centre, and luxury cottage clusters under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model.

Two arrested, 24 Ibex rescued in wildlife smuggling bust

Imphal, Feb 24: Security forces arrested two alleged cattle smugglers and rescued 24 Ibex—wild mountain goats, illegally transported from Myanmar into Manipur through Tengnoupal district.Acting on intelligence about cross-border smuggling, central security forces and Manipur police maintained heightened vigilance along the porous border areas of Tengnoupal district. During a special operation, a vehicle (MN-02B-8290) transporting the exotic species toward Pallel in Kachhing district was intercepted, leading to the arrest of two individuals and seizure of the vehicle. The accused have been identified as Md Kalim (35) of Mayai Leikai, Kakching district, and Md Sabir Khan (19) of Phundrei, Thoubal district. The arrested persons, along



with the rescued wildlife and the vehicle, were handed over to the Forest Department.

Officials noted that Ibex are protected under the Wildlife Protection Act, and offences involving

hunting or illegal trade carry penalties of up to seven years in prison and substantial fines.

Ibex (Capra sibirica) are wild mountain goats known for their long, backward-curved horns and ex-

ceptional agility in scaling steep, rocky, and snowy terrains. Native to Europe, Asia, and Africa, they are herbivorous and social, often using high-altitude, rugged landscapes to evade predators.

Pradyot Debbarma slams racial abuse against Arunachali women in Delhi

Dimapur, Feb 24: The accused, Harsh Singh and his wife Ruby Jain of Malviya Nagar, reportedly confronted the tenants on February 20 around 3:30 pm. The dispute arose while the women were supervising electrical repairs in their flat, which allegedly caused dust to enter the apartment below. The victims reported emotional distress and embarrassment, but there were no injuries.Authorities stated that legal proceedings will continue, and the matter will be followed up to ensure accountability. Leader of the Tipra Motha Party, Pradyot Manikya Debbarma, condemned the racial insults directed at three women from the Northeast while in Delhi, saying their devotion to the nation deserves acknowledgment, not mockery.Debbarma shared on social media that despite the contributions of people from Arunachal Pradesh in safeguarding the country, these women faced unwarranted racial attacks. He added that such behavior disrespects the victims and promised that authorities would ensure justice is served. Debbarma said on X, “It’s because of the patriotism of Arunachalis that not one Chinese soldier can enter our



country, yet they have to be subjected to racism and ridicule. This not only hurts but humiliates the very essence of where our country is headed. Will see that these women are given due justice”.

Police in South Delhi’s Malviya Nagar area confirmed that a complaint has been filed against two res-

idents for harassing and threatening the women. The FIR references several sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) related to offenses against women’s dignity, intimidation, incitement of hostility between communities based on origin, and actions carried out jointly by multiple individuals.

Assam MP Gaurav Gogoi to head India-Philippines Parliamentary Friendship Group

Guwahati, Feb 24: Lok Speaker Om Birla has nominated Jorhat MP and Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi as the President of the India-Philippines Parliamentary Friendship Group.

The group has been constituted for the period of the 18th Lok Sabha.

The Lok Sabha Speaker has constituted Parliamentary Friendship Groups with more than 60 countries to widen India's inter-parliamentary engagement with the world.

The move reflects a conscious effort by the Indian Parliament to deepen dialogue and exchanges with legislatures across continents and to complement traditional diplomacy with sustained parliamentary interaction.

The Friendship Groups bring together Members of Parliament from across the political spectrum.

Some of the other countries with whom Parliamentary Friendship Groups have been constituted include Sri Lanka, Germany, New Zealand, Switzerland, South Africa, Bhutan, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Maldives, USA, Russia, EU Parliament, South Korea, Nepal, United Kingdom, France, Japan, Italy, Oman, Australia, Greece,

Singapore, Brazil, Vietnam, Mexico, Iran and UAE.

The idea behind the initiative is to allow lawmakers to speak directly to their counterparts abroad, share legislative experience, and build trust through regular engagement and exchange best practices to further strengthen bilateral relations and promote greater mutual understanding. Beyond parliamentary procedure, the groups are expected to facilitate conversations on trade, technology, social policy, culture, and global challenges that democracies face today.

Speaker Om Birla has consistently emphasized the role of parliamentary diplomacy in strengthening India's global standing. Under his stewardship, Parliament has taken a more active role in international forums, projecting India not only as a political power but as a confident and mature democracy willing to engage, listen, and collaborate.

By prioritizing Parliament-to-Parliament and people-to-people connections, this initiative signals a more participatory approach to foreign engagement. The Friendship Groups will enable structured exchanges

through dialogues, study visits, and joint discussions, helping to sustain long-term cooperation rooted in democratic values. In doing so, the Indian Parliament reinforces its role as a bridge between nations and as a living reflection of the world's largest democracy.

It is important to recall that Post-Operation Sindoor, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, took the initiative to send multi-party delegations to various countries to convey India's point of view. By bringing together leaders from different political parties and ideologies to represent India on the global stage, the initiative rose above partisan boundaries and underscored a powerful message: when it comes to the nation's security and interests, India stands united.

The move demonstrated faith in dialogue, inclusiveness, and collective responsibility - core strengths of India's democracy. It showed that on matters of national interest, India speaks in one voice. The decision of the Lok Sabha Speaker to form friendship groups with more than 60 countries is an important step in this direction.

Four communities to celebrate Sajibu Nongma Panba Kumhei Festival



Imphal, Feb 24: In a significant cultural development aimed at fostering unity and preserving indigenous traditions, four communities of the state — Meetei, Kabui, Chothe and Maring — have resolved to celebrate the Sajibu Nongma Panba Kumhei Festival collectively from this year onward, marking the first day of Sajibu (Sajibu Nongma Panba Cheiraoba) under a unified platform. In this connection, a joint committee named Apunba Kanglei Yelhou Phurup Sajibu Nongma Panba Kumhei Festival Committee was formed on February 19, comprising representatives and leaders from the four communities who worship Lainingthou Sanamahi. The newly constituted body has appointed Shanglakpa of Kabui Loishang and member of the Lainingthou Sanamahi Temple Board, Kamson Gangmumei Kabui, as Chairman. Thao Jatra Chothe and Meisnam Iboba have been appointed as Vice Chairmen among other office bearers.

Addressing a press conference held on Monday at the Lainingthou Sanamahi Temple, Haying Khongban of the newly formed committee appealed to the State Government to recognise the festival as a state-level event and allocate funds for it in the State Budget. The committee further urged all devotees of Lainingthou Sanamahi across the state to unite and uphold the spirit of togetherness, especially during challenging times. Recalling the strong bond of unity practiced in earlier days, the leaders called upon the people to worship the deity for lasting peace, harmony and prosperity in the state. The first edition of the Sajibu Nongma Panba Kumhei Festival under the united platform will be held on March 19 this year in Bishnupur district. The initiative is being seen as a significant step towards strengthening communal harmony through shared cultural and spiritual heritage.

₹15.59 Crore Disbursed to 5,436 Families in Mizoram as ASF Compensation

Aizawl, Feb 24: A total of ₹15.59 crore has been disbursed to 5,436 families across Mizoram as compensation for pigs culled due to African Swine Fever (ASF). The formal launch of the “Distribution & Launching of ASF Compensation” programme was held today at the MINECO Office Chamber of the Animal Husbandry & Veterinary (AH&Vety) Department.

AH&Vety Minister C. Lalsawivunga stated that since the first detection of ASF at Lungsen in Lunglei district on March 21, 2021, recurring outbreaks have severely impacted the state's economy, with pig deaths and culling reported annually.

As per Government of India guidelines, compensation is provided only for culled pigs at prescribed rates under a 50 per cent Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) and 50 per cent State Matching Share (SMS). However, during 2022-23 and 2023-24, the state received only 25 per cent of the required CSS and SMS funds, resulting in beneficiaries receiving just 25 per cent of their eligible compensation.

Considering the heavy losses faced by pig farmers, the Mizoram government declared ASF a State Disaster in 2024. Under this provision, compensation was extended for pig deaths (excluding culled pigs) at ₹4,000 per pig, limited to six pigs per beneficiary.

For 2024, compensation for culled pigs amounted to ₹15,59,34,001 against a total required fund of ₹24,50,05,600, to be shared between the Centre and the State under CSS and SMS. The Minister in-

A total of ₹15.59 crore has been disbursed to 5,436 families in Mizoram as compensation for pigs culled due to African Swine Fever (ASF), following the launch of the “Distribution & Launching of ASF Compensation” programme. The Minister of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, C. Lalsawivunga, noted that since ASF was first detected in March 2021, it has significantly harmed the state's economy.

formed that funds have been released to District Officers, and disbursement to beneficiaries commenced today through cheque or Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

A total of 26,179 animals across 11 districts were covered under the scheme. Aizawl recorded the highest number of beneficiaries with 1,302 families and 10,926 animals, followed by Serchhip (2,382 families; 7,119 animals) and Lunglei (611 families; 3,287 animals). Other districts including Kolasib, Mamit, Saitual, Khawzawl, Hnahthial, Siaha, Champhai, and Lawngtlai also received compensation.

The revised compensation rates for pigs culled due to ASF range from ₹2,200 for pigs below 15 kg to ₹15,000 for pigs above 100 kg.

The Minister added that funds required for 2025 have been proposed under the 2026-27 Action Plan, and efforts are underway to secure full funding, reiterating the government's commitment to supporting pig farmers and mitigating the impact of ASF on the rural economy.

Mizoram Govt Sacks 29 Employees Over Proxy Hiring



Aizawl, Feb 24: The Mizoram government has terminated 29 employees across various departments for illegally engaging “proxies” to perform their official duties. Personnel and Administrative Reforms Minister K. Sapdanga informed the Assembly on Tuesday.

The crackdown follows Chief Minister Lalduhoma's directive to end the decades-old practice of government staffers paying substitutes to work in their place. Sapdanga revealed that disciplinary action was initiated against 37 employees found violating service norms. Of them, 29 were dismissed from service, while eight others received minor penalties. Officials said the move reflects the government's commitment to restoring accountability and efficiency in public administration. The minister emphasized that proxy hiring undermines governance and erodes public trust, and assured that strict monitoring mechanisms will be put in place

to prevent recurrence. The decision has been widely noted as a significant step in reforming Mizoram's bureaucratic culture, sending a clear message that malpractice will not be tolerated. Proxy hiring, where government employees pay substitutes to work in their place, has been criticized for undermining efficiency, accountability, and public trust. Minister Sapdanga emphasized that such malpractice weakens governance and deprives citizens of quality service delivery. He assured that strict monitoring mechanisms, including surprise inspections and departmental audits, will be implemented to prevent recurrence. The crackdown has been widely welcomed by civil society groups and reform advocates, who view it as a landmark step toward restoring integrity in Mizoram's administration. Observers noted that the decision sends a strong message that malpractice will not be tolerated under the new government.

Mamata Banerjee hails BAFTA honour for Manipuri film ‘Boong’

Imphal, Feb 24: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has congratulated the cast and crew of Manipuri film ‘Boong’ for winning a BAFTA award, saying the film had created history “against all odds”. Directed by debutant Lakshmi Priya Devi in her debut, the coming-of-age story set in Manipur won the Best Children's & Family Film award at the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) ceremony held in London on Sunday. The film, which became the first Indian production to win in the Best Children and Family Film category, triumphed against strong international competition, marking a significant milestone for Indian cinema on the global stage. Congratulating the team, Banerjee said in a post on X, said, “I am very happy to know that the Manipuri film ‘Boong’ has scripted history at the 2026 BAFTA Awards.” “Against all odds, this film was crowned Best Children



and Family Film, becoming the first ever Indian production to win in this prestigious category,” she said. “My heartiest congratulations to the entire cast and crew of Boong! You have made the whole nation proud,” she said. Earlier, filmmakers Karan Johar, Shekhar Kapur and Kangana Ranaut, among others, congratulated Devi on the achieve-

ment, which is being seen as a breakthrough moment for regional cinema from the Northeast. Backed by Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwan under the banner of Excel Entertainment, the film was nominated alongside ‘Arco’, ‘Lilo & Stitch’ and ‘Zootropolis 2’. It had earlier premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival.

DAE Joint Secretary inspects PM SHRI schools in Kakching

Imphal, Feb 24: Sandeep Raj, Joint Secretary and Financial Adviser, Department of Atomic Energy, visited schools covered under the PM SHRI (Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India) scheme in Kakching district. During the visit, Sandeep Raj conducted inspections at Kakching Higher Secondary School and Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Umathel. He was accompanied by Ng. Bhogendra Meitei, MCS, Director of Education (S); Renuka Khumukcham, MCS, Additional State Project Director, Samagra Shiksha (Secondary); P. Shantikumar, MCS, Additional District Magistrate, Kakching; along with officials of the District Administration, Kakching.

Later on, Sandeep Raj witnessed cultural performances presented by the students of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Umathel. Under the PM SHRI scheme, a total of seven State Government schools and one Central Government school have been selected in Kakching district. It may be mentioned that PM SHRI School is a centrally sponsored scheme by the Centre. This initiative is intended to develop more than 14500 PM SHRI Schools managed by Central Government/State/UT Government/local bodies including KVS and NVS in which every student feels welcomed and cared for, where a safe and stimulating learning environment exists.

Assam Govt constitutes eighth pay commission

Guwahati, Feb 24: The Assam government has constituted the Eighth Assam Pay Commission, initiating a comprehensive review of the structure of emoluments and service conditions of state government employees. The Commission, chaired by retired IAS officer Subhash Chandra Das, also comprises senior-most secretaries from the Personnel; Administrative Reforms, Training, Pension and Public Grievances (ARTPPG) and Finance Departments, along with the LR-cum-Commissioner and Special Secretary of the Judicial Department and the Special Director (Budget), Finance Department. The eight-member Commission has been given a reform-oriented mandate going beyond

a conventional pay revision exercise. “The Commission shall adopt a reform-oriented and holistic approach linking pay revision with structural reforms, fiscal sustainability, digital transformation, manpower optimisation and outcome-based governance,” an order issued by the state finance department stated. According to the terms of reference, the Commission will examine the principles governing the structure of emoluments and service conditions of state government employees, excluding officers of the All-India Services, employees drawing UGC/AICTE or technical pay scales in specified higher and technical institutions, and judicial service officers governed by separate national recommendations.

Two Arrested for Alleged Racial Assault on Nagaland Doctor at AIIMS Gorakhpur

Gorakhpur, Feb 24: Two persons have been arrested in connection with an alleged racial attack on a woman doctor from Nagaland posted at All India Institute of Medical Sciences Gorakhpur, an incident that has raised fresh concerns over the safety of healthcare professionals and recurring discrimination against people from Northeast India. Police identified the accused as Suraj Gupta and Amrit Vishwakarma, residents of Deoria district. They were arrested after the doctor lodged a complaint alleging stalking, racial slurs and physical assault near the institute's Gate No. 2 on Sunday evening.

According to the complaint, the victim, a third-year resident specialising in obstetrics and gynaecology, was returning to the campus from a mall at around 8 pm when three men allegedly

followed her for over a kilometre. The accused reportedly passed obscene remarks and racially discriminatory comments, and one of them allegedly touched her inappropriately.

The National Federation of Resident Doctors of AIIMS and INIs (NAFORD) highlighted the incident on social media, describing it as deeply traumatic and expressing concern about the safety of resident doctors. The federation alleged that the attackers used stereotypes related to the doctor's North Eastern origin while harassing her.

In its post, NAFORD claimed that when the doctor attempted to confront the men, they continued to stalk her towards AIIMS Gate No. 2, hurling abuses and slang. One of the accused allegedly removed his shirt in an attempt to intimidate her, and near the army camp at Gate

No. 2, one of them allegedly slapped her on the buttocks. “This left deep shock, humiliation and trauma on our resident doctor. As a doctor dedicated to women's health and bringing new life, she was violated near her own institution,” the federation stated. Police said a case has been registered under multiple provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including sections related to assault with intent to outrage modesty, obscene acts, criminal intimidation and intentional insult likely to provoke a breach of peace. Authorities added that the doctor raised an alarm during the incident, forcing the accused to flee. Though she did not suffer physical injuries, the episode has reignited debate over the vulnerability of professionals from the Northeast working in institutions across mainland India.

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*Editorial*

The Significance of Judicial Efficiency

Judicial systems uphold rule of law and constitutional governance. However, case backlogs and procedural delays pose significant challenges. Judicial efficiency directly influences public trust and economic stability. Delayed justice undermines credibility. Timely resolution ensures fairness and deterrence. Modernisation of court procedures through digital filing and virtual hearings enhances accessibility.Increasing judicial capacity, including appointment of judges and administrative staff, reduces backlog. Specialised tribunals address sector-specific disputes more efficiently.Transparency in case management systems allows public monitoring. Legal aid services support equitable access to justice. Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, such as mediation and arbitration, ease burden on courts. Encouraging settlement outside formal litigation accelerates resolution.Judicial reform must balance speed with due process.Safeguarding rights remains paramount.An efficient judiciary strengthens democracy and investment climate. Rule of law ensures stability and predictability. Reforming judicial systems is not merely administrative improvement; it is reinforcement of democratic integrity.

When extortion is sanitised, rights become negotiable

A recent remark by a government minister—that a mutually agreed or negotiated transaction is not extortion—cannot be seen as a casual misuse of words. Although the minister was talking about the transport sector, the logic could as easily be applied to any other sector, and as such, it can be seen as an attempt to redefine the nature of the state. When official language sanitises extortion or corruption, the rule of law is placed on the negotiating table. True, at first hearing, such a claim may sound reasonable. If both sides of a “transaction” agree, where is the coercion? This argument borrows the vocabulary of markets but removes the institutional conditions that make markets legitimate. In doing so, it confuses a transaction with a distortion. Consider an ordinary citizen seeking a passport, a hospital bed, a utility connection, police assistance, or a business licence. The law already grants these as rights, subject to clear rules. But in reality, the process often stalls: a file does not move, a signature does not appear, a bed is suddenly unavailable, or an inspection is delayed. A “mutual understanding” at this juncture, followed by extra payment (read: bribe), could expedite the delivery or resumption of services, but would this be a voluntary exchange?

The service seeker, it should be pointed out, did not enter a negotiation as an equal party. One side of the deal controlled time, approval, and enforcement, while the other faced delay, denial, or exclusion.



What is presented as reciprocity is actually a price imposed on vulnerability. Calling such an exchange “mutual” would be analytically no different from calling a ransom a market transaction.

In economics, a voluntary exchange takes place within a framework of rights, rules, and enforceable contracts. A price is legitimate because the state guarantees that access does not depend on personal discretion. A bribe is paid precisely because the rule-based system has been suspended. It is a payment to bypass or manipulate a process that should operate automatically. The critical question here is not whether two individuals agree. The real question is: why would the payment be necessary in the first place?

From the standpoint of political economy, the answer is clear. The official who can delay an approval creates an artificial scarcity and then sells the relief from that scarcity. Nothing is produced here; income is merely transferred. This is the textbook definition of rent-seeking. Once such practices become normal, the structure of the economy changes. Investment flows not to the most efficient firms but to the most connected. Credit is allocated not by risk but by influence. Public projects are valued not for their social return but for their commission potential. Growth slows not because resources are scarce but because institutions are not credible. The minister’s argument is therefore not only economically flawed

but also constitutionally dangerous. It converts rights into commodities. In a republic, a public office is a source of trust. The citizen pays taxes so that services are delivered impersonally. A bribe or “mutually negotiated” transaction is a second, privatised payment for the same right. To legitimise this as a negotiated exchange is to legitimise the sale of sovereignty in small administrative instalments.

Game theory explains why citizens still participate. They are not choosing between paying and not paying; they are choosing between paying and losing. In a system where officials cannot be credibly punished, and services cannot be obtained by rules, compliance becomes the rational survival strategy. What is described as “mutual” is therefore the behavioural outcome of a coercive structure. The most damaging effect of such a statement lies in the signal it sends. When a private citizen pays, it is often an act of compulsion within a broken system. When a public official justifies the payment, it becomes an institutional endorsement. It tells the bureaucracy that extraction or extortion is acceptable. It tells citizens that integrity is irrational. It tells investors that formal rules are irrelevant. That is how adverse selection enters governance: the honest withdraw and the connected advance.

Beyond the immediate economic drain, the “negotiation” model inflicts a deeper wound on the social contract. High-performing societies

rely on generalised trust, the belief that the system works the same for everyone. When a state official validates bribery as a mutual transaction, they signal the death of this trust. The individual no longer looks to the law for protection but to a patron for a favour. The result is a low-trust trap where the machinery of the state turns only because it is being “greased” by those it was built to serve.

No country has achieved sustained development by redefining corruption as consensual exchange. Rebranding a bribe as a negotiated payment does not change its nature. A tax is legal because it is authorised by law and enters the public treasury. A fee is legal because it is publicly notified and uniformly applied. A bribe is illegal because it converts public authority into private income. No amount of semantic innovation can erase that distinction.

At its core, the minister’s argument asks the country to accept a transformation from a rights-based state to a bargaining-based state. But a state in which citizens must negotiate for what the law guarantees is not a republic. It is a marketplace of power.

A bribe is not defined by the presence of agreement. It is defined by the abuse of public authority. When the powerholder sells what the law requires him to provide, the transaction is neither mutual nor voluntary. It is corruption—economically, institutionally, and constitutionally.

Women must be included in Bangladesh’s renewable energy initiative

As Bangladesh slowly advances towards clean and sustainable energy, the transition is not only about cutting carbon emissions. It is also about exploring new avenues for job creation, economic growth, and a fairer and more equal society. And for this to be successful, women must be at the centre of it. Women play a crucial role in managing domestic energy—through daily decision-making regarding cooking fuels, electricity use, and energy conservation—and when energy prices go up or energy shortages occur, women are the first to feel the pinch. But in the renewable energy sector, women’s role is still largely confined to being users, not designers, technologists, entrepreneurs, or decision-makers. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), women constitute only about 32 percent of the total global workforce in the renewable energy sector, with even lower representation in technical and decision-making positions. Bangladesh, despite its positive growth in the energy sector, has fallen short in ensuring maximum women’s participation. According to the Sustainable



and Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA), the contribution of renewable energy to the country’s total electricity generation is about 5.4 percent; however, the country has made great strides in solar energy. Some six million solar home systems have already been installed, providing electricity to over 18 million people. And failing to utilise women in this rapidly expanding industry is a serious economic oversight, especially when the country is doing its best to strike a balance between economic

development and climate obligations. Lessons can be learned from other nations in this regard. In Nepal, government-backed schemes for renewable energy have opened doors for women entrepreneurs in solar and micro-hydro power. In India, women-led self-help groups (SHGs) are now skilled at setting up and looking after solar pumps to provide affordable clean energy for irrigation, gaining both income and respect within their communities. Meanwhile, Germany’s Energiewende initiative has been instrumental in getting young

women to consider careers in renewable energy research and engineering. These instances demonstrate that real change can happen when policies are robust and investment in training is prioritised. For Bangladesh, the key starting point is capacity building. More young women need to be encouraged to pursue science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) in their higher education journey. Scholarships, internships, and partnerships between universities and renewable energy companies can help create a bridge between academic education and employment. Technical and vocational education and training institutions can also offer short courses in solar power installation, maintenance, and green entrepreneurship to build a skilled labour group in the renewable energy sector. At the community level, rural women need to be provided with training that is practical and accessible. The training should be designed in such a way that it takes into consideration the realities of social life, such as mobility restrictions and caregiving responsibilities. Policy reform is another crucial step. To institutionalise women’s involvement, gender-responsive budgeting in the energy sector is essential, along with support for businesses hiring and training women and the establishment of gender targets within the national energy strategy. Furthermore, civil society, development partners, and the private sector must work together to track progress and ensure accountability. The renewable energy sector is a technical area, and it is also a rapidly growing market. Women-owned businesses can provide, install, and

maintain solar home systems, biogas plants, and mini-grids. With microfinance and business skills, these businesses can provide jobs and boost local economies while helping to address climate change. Bangladesh has pledged to meet the sustainable development goals (SDGs), including SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 7 on universal and clean energy, SDG 8 on decent work, SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, and SDG 13 on climate action. All these goals are interlinked, and achieving one goal helps to advance another. It is important to remember that the country’s renewable energy transition is not just about megawatts and technology, but also the people. If women are trained, supported, and given leadership opportunities across the renewable energy value chain, Bangladesh will not only move faster towards clean energy; it will also move closer to a more equal and resilient future. The shift to renewable energy is already underway. Now is the time to ensure that women are not standing on the sidelines but rather helping lead the way.

academic education and employment. Technical and vocational education and training institutions can also offer short courses in solar power installation, maintenance, and green entrepreneurship to build a skilled labour group in the renewable energy sector. At the community level, rural women need to be provided with training that is practical and accessible. The training should be designed in such a way that it takes into consideration the realities of social life, such as mobility restrictions and caregiving responsibilities. Policy reform is another crucial step. To institutionalise women’s involvement, gender-responsive budgeting in the energy sector is essential, along with support for businesses hiring and training women and the establishment of gender targets within the national energy strategy. Furthermore, civil society, development partners, and the private sector must work together to track progress and ensure accountability. The renewable energy sector is a technical area, and it is also a rapidly growing market. Women-owned businesses can provide, install, and

FedEx sues US government, seeking ‘full refund’ over Trump tariffs

FedEx sued the US government on Monday, seeking a refund for the tariffs imposed by Donald Trump that were deemed illegal by the US supreme court last week.

The lawsuit marks the first attempt by a major company to receive reimbursement of their share of an estimated \$175bn in levies after the highest court found Trump had overstepped his authority in issuing the tariffs. Other companies are expected to follow.

The FedEx lawsuit named as defendants US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), which collects tariffs; the agency’s commissioner Rodney Scott; and the United States of America. The suit was filed in the US court of international trade. The company did not specify an amount in its complaint but said it was seeking a “full refund” for duties paid to the US.

“While the supreme court did not address the issue of refunds, FedEx has taken necessary action to protect the company’s rights as an importer of record to seek duty refunds from US Customs and Border Protection,” the company said in a written statement.

Trump has made tariffs a key component of his economic policy during his second term, imposing import duties on goods from nearly every country on earth using a novel interpretation of emergency powers law as justification.

In a 6-3 ruling last Friday, the court made clear that Congress retains the sole authority to levy taxes under the constitution and that the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), cited by the administration, could not be used to supersede that authority during peacetime.

The decision marked the first time the supreme court has overruled Trump’s policies in his second term, and undercut his claims to executive authority, and the assertions he has relied upon to reshape US trade policy. But it did not make clear whether businesses would be entitled to refunds.

In a dissenting opinion, Justice Brett Kavanaugh addressed the issue, claiming: “The court says nothing today about whether, and if so how, the government should go about returning the billions of dollars that it has collected from importers.” He added that “refunds of billions of dollars would have significant consequences for the US treasury”.

The president swiftly and sharply rebuked the supreme court after the ruling, and claimed it would do little to slow him down. Trump said he would move forward with new global tariffs issued under different statutes. He then announced a 10% global tariff which he increased to 15% less than 24 hours later.

“The policy hasn’t changed. The legal tools that implement that may change but the policy hasn’t changed,” top US trade negotiator Jamieson Greer told the ABC News Sunday politics show This Week, arguing that it gives US business “a lot of leverage” in world trade.

Meanwhile, a group of Senate Democrats have called for refunds from the illegally collected tariffs to go to small businesses, and have pushed larger companies to pass any amount returned to them on to their customers.

In 2025, the tariffs amounted to a \$1,000 tax increase on US households, according to an estimate from the Tax Foundation, a nonprofit conservative thinktank.

“Historical evidence and recent studies show that tariffs are taxes that raise prices and reduce available quantities of goods and services for US businesses and consumers,” the organization wrote in its analysis, “resulting in lower income, reduced employment, and lower economic output.”



Send reforms: ministers need to show how inclusion will work



With its education white paper, the key section of which concerns support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (Send), the government is returning to a more holistic view of schools. High standards and inclusion should be “two sides of the same coin”, the docu-

ment states. The narrowing of the Department for Education’s focus under Michael Gove is being reversed – even if the New Labour name for the Department for Children, Schools and Families is not coming back.

Ambitious targets on attendance and a halving of the attainment gap between richer and poorer pupils are meant to boost wellbeing as well as standards. But the overall package’s success or failure will depend on whether Bridget Phillipson, the education secretary, can win support for her Send reforms and implement them so that children do not lose out. Stricter criteria for the education, health and care plans (EHCPs) that oblige councils to provide individual support are dreaded by some parents and charities. The processes surrounding the new individual support plans, which will address less complex needs in future, must be robust and open to challenge. Schools must be resourced to play the bigger role that ministers envision for them – not handed extra responsibilities with no means of carrying them out.

By winning new funding from the Trea-

sury, Ms Phillipson and her colleagues have allayed fears of a disguised exercise in cost-cutting – although the fiscal envelope remains too tight. The £1.8bn to be spent on rebuilding local services including speech and language therapy and educational psychology should boost councils and communities. The emphasis on inclusion as a principle should also be welcomed. The huge increase in children being educated separately from peers – from 1.1% to 1.9% of the school population in 20 years – is concerning on grounds other than rising costs. New national standards should increase confidence, as long as they do not lead to existing good practice being squashed. The goal of reducing dependence on the private sector, including a growing number of private-equity-backed special schools, is in line with a social democratic view of education as a public good.

Concerns include the criteria that will determine eligibility for an EHCP, reduced access to tribunals and the plan to reassess pupils when they move to secondary school – given the stresses already in-

volved in this transition. Another is around staffing and whether the £200m pledged for teacher training will deliver the desired result. Understanding of mental health and illness, and the differences between people’s brains and minds, is constantly evolving. The white paper rightly recognises that rising need may be linked to “new pressures” on children in a changing world, with social media and the pandemic both linked to adverse experiences. There is also a link between Send and socioeconomic disadvantage. Currently, around a third of pupils with Send support are eligible for free school meals. One in nine have a social worker, while 70% of those with an EHCP are boys.

Given such complexities, and the range of needs to be met, a gradualist approach makes sense. Specialist providers must be recognised as part of the system, even as it is reshaped. Existing arrangements must not be torn up. It is welcome to see education as a shared public responsibility, not one left to markets or families. But the plans will only work if ministers back them with real money and skilled staff.

IT industry likely to hire 135,000 employees in FY26

New Delhi: Despite rapid growth of artificial intelligence (AI), India's software services sector continues to hire more people, according to executives at industry body Nasscom. The industry is estimated to have added around 135,000 people in the current financial year ending March 2026, compared with around 133,000 people in the previous fi-

nanacial year, said Rajesh Nambiar the president of Nasscom. A large portion of this growth, though, is estimated to have driven by the continued rise in Global Capability Centres in India. The hiring figure comes at a time there is a lot of debate on how AI is going to impact the software services industry, with some predicting it will be wiped out in the next few years.

The overall hiring from campuses has come down significantly than what it was earlier, say officials, but point out that the industry as such has evolved over time. "Bringing those domain knowledge skills combined with technology skills is something we are doubling down on," said Sindhu Gangadharan, the chairperson of Nasscom.

BHIM launches 'UPI Circle' to simplify delegated digital payments with built-in controls

Aizawl/Kohima: In a move aimed at strengthening secure and shared digital transactions, the BHIM Payments App has introduced UPI Circle, a feature that allows users to authorise trusted individuals to make payments from their bank account within defined limits. The initiative addresses growing demand for structured payment delegation in households and small businesses.

UPI Circle enables a primary user to add up to five secondary users,



allowing them to transact from the primary user's UPI-linked bank account. The feature allows a monthly spending limit of up to ₹15,000

and an authorisation validity ranging from one month to five years. Secondary users can also generate their own UPI ID under the circle.

All transactions remain fully visible to the primary user, ensuring transparency and a clear audit trail. The primary user retains the ability to monitor, adjust permissions or revoke access at any time, eliminating the need to share UPI PINs or passwords.

The feature is positioned as a practical solution for senior citizens, students, working families and small businesses that require shared payment access without compromising security.

Adani Power unit wins 558 MW supply contract in Tamil Nadu

New Delhi: Gautam Adani-led Adani Power said its subsidiary Moxie Power Generation received a Letter of Award (LoA) from Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation for supplying 558 MW of electricity for five years. The company, in its regulatory filing, said that the supply will begin from April 1. Adani Power's subsidiary wins bid at competitive tariff. The new agreement is expected to strengthen Tamil Nadu's power availability by adding 558 MW of reliable supply to the grid. The company said the contract will help improve grid stability and support uninterrupted electricity supply to households, businesses, and industries across the state. "By securing power at a competitive tariff, consumers are expected to benefit from more affordable and dependable energy in the years ahead," the company highlighted in the press release. The share price of Adani Power opened in red at Rs 142.80, down 0.87% from the previous close. The stock has gained 20.8% in past six months. Adani Power is the largest private thermal power producer in India. The Company has an installed thermal power capacity of 18,110 MW spread across twelve



power plants in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Tamil Nadu, apart from a 40 MW solar power plant in Gujarat. Moxie Power emerged as the lowest bidder in a tightly contested bidding process by quoting a tariff of Rs 5.910 per unit. Adani Power steps into nuclear energy sector with new atomic unit. The power will be supplied from its 1,200 MW thermal power plant in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu, which operates two units of 600 MW each. Adani Power moves closer to 100% PPA

tie-up. With this contract, both units of the Tuticorin plant are now covered under power supply agreements. As a result, more than 95% of Adani Power's total operational capacity is secured through medium- to long-term contracts. The company said this improves long-term revenue visibility and reduces its exposure to short-term volatility in the power market. Adani Power added that it is targeting close to 100% power purchase agreement (PPA) tie-up for all its operational and under-construction plants over the coming years.

Gold Rate 24th February 2026: Gold is down by 0.62% prices in Mumbai

New Delhi: On 24 February 2026, the price of 24K gold at ₹160,800 per 10 grams, reflecting a loss of ₹1,010 compared to its previous close. Meanwhile, 22K gold is at ₹147,400 per 10 grams. Gold prices in India are largely influenced by international spot gold rates, US dollar fluctuations, and import duties on Gold among other things. Gold prices in India continue to remain higher than in Dubai. On 24 February 2026 the price of 24K gold in India is at ₹160,800 per 10 grams, while in Dubai it is ₹152,758, reflecting a difference of ₹8,042 or 5.26%. Similarly, 22K and 18K gold prices in India were also about 5.26% costlier compared to the price of gold in Dubai, not accounting for fees, duties, and taxes. Gold prices are trending sideways on the back of profit booking by investors. A firm dollar also weighed on sentiment, as it makes precious assets like gold more expensive for overseas currency holders, thereby softening demand. However, gold continues to trade at high levels amid escalated economic tensions pertaining to tariffs. US President Donald Trump has warned of steeper tariffs against countries with an existing trade deal with the US if they reassess their positions after the US Supreme Court's ruling. On the



geopolitical front, talks between the US and Iran are set to resume from supported by recent capacity additions and disciplined pricing. Motilal Oswal Financial Services expects the company to post 10% volume CAGR over FY25-FY28, supported by a healthy pipeline that includes new variants of

existing models such as Brezza. base in Africa remains underutilised, offering scope for rapid expansion with limited additional capital expenditure. It also pointed out that the company is exploring localisation of other beverage categories across its African markets.

H-1B exemption at risk Attorney explains secret 'brake-pumping' strategy used to trigger

New Delhi: The US government in September last year imposed a massive \$100,000 fee on certain new H-1B visa applications. At the same time, visa stamping appointments and interviews at US consulates, especially in India, are facing long delays. Now, an immigration lawyer says something even more confusing is happening behind the scenes. Immigration attorney Kevin J. Andrews says he is seeing unusual delays in H-1B premium processing cases. Premium processing is supposed to give a decision within 15 business days. But that is not happening in some cases.

For workers whose visa stamps expire soon, this creates serious anxiety. If their petition is not approved in time, and interview appointments are months away, they may be forced into the new fee system. What this means for H-1B workers

For workers abroad with valid H-1B visa stamps, time has become critical. If their petition approval is delayed beyond their stamp's expiry date, they may need a new visa interview. By then, their exemption from the \$100,000 fee could be gone.

Andrews says lawyers must carefully track visa stamp expiry dates and document every delay. He also suggests that congressional inquiries and reporting to legal groups like AILA may help bring clarity.

At this point Andrew says that there is no public proof that the government is deliberately delaying cases to collect the \$100,000 fee. But Andrews says the "policy ambiguity exists," the "processing anomalies exist," and DHS has openly spoken about closing "loopholes." Because USCIS does not publish detailed data separating these types of cases, the only way to know what is happening is for lawyers to document patterns themselves. For thousands of H-1B workers and their families, the uncertainty is real. The rules may look clear on paper. But in practice, delays can change everything. I stopped betting on H-1B to beat the rejection loop: Saloni Thakkar found a new immigration pathway. He describes one example of a worker outside the United States, who has a valid, unexpired H-1B visa stamp and the employer filed a new petition with premium processing. No Request for Evidence (RFE) was issued. Yet the case is not moving. "Suspended indefinitely," Andrews wrote. USCIS clearly said some people are exempt. These include workers who are changing status inside the US, extensions or amendments for people already working in the country, and anyone holding a "previously issued and currently valid H-1B visa." If a worker is outside the US but still has a valid H-1B visa



stamp in their passport, they do not need a new visa interview. They just need their new petition approved. That means no \$100,000 fee. Andrews says this exemption is not a mistake. It is clearly written. The fear of a delay strategy. The problem, according to Andrews, is timing. If USCIS delays approving a petition until after the worker's visa stamp expires, that worker will need a new visa interview at a US consulate. And at that stage, the \$100,000 fee could apply. In simple words, the rule does not change. But if your visa expires while waiting, you may lose your exemption. "That's not immigrants exploiting a loophole," Andrews wrote. "That's a government agency exploiting its own bureaucracy to eliminate exemptions it can't lawfully revoke." He says he cannot prove this is intentional. But he believes the "incentive structure exists" and the "processing anomalies exist." Questions that still have no answers. The American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) sent questions to the government on October 1, 2025. One key question was about timing. If someone is outside the US and a new H-1B petition is filed for them, does the \$100,000 fee apply or not? AILA asked clearly, at what point does the government decide whether someone is "currently outside the United States," when the rule took effect or when the petition is filed? Three months later, Andrews says there has been no clear response.

Meanwhile, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has publicly said it wants to close what it calls "loopholes" in the H-1B system. It has increased site visits, audits, and investigations of employers. According to Andrews and other lawyers, some cases that may be exempt from the \$100,000 fee are simply being held. They are not denied. They are not sent an RFE. They are just not moving. He says practitioner discussions suggest these cases are being held until USCIS headquarters gives more guidance. This has happened before. In 2017, internal emails showed that USCIS service centers held H-1B cases while waiting for training materials and instructions. "When USCIS doesn't know how to adjudicate something, they sit on it until they get further guidance," Andrews said. More problems at consulates

The situation is made worse by changes at US consulates. Third-country visa processing has been eliminated. Many applicants must now attend interviews in their home country. Interview waiver or "dropbox" options have mostly ended. New policies have also increased security checks and social media vetting. This has caused appointment delays of three to six months in many places. In India, some H-1B interview slots are being pushed to March-June 2026. In some cases, appointments are being rescheduled to October 2026.

India braces for Hormuz shock, oil costs may rise

New Delhi: Rising tensions between Iran and the United States are once again sending tremors through global oil markets, putting the Strait of Hormuz firmly back in focus — and sharply raising India's exposure to one of the world's most fragile energy arteries. Fresh shipping data highlights the speed at which India's dependence on the narrow Gulf corridor has intensified. Crude volumes routed through Hormuz jumped to 2,911 thousand barrels per day in February 2026 (month till date), up from 1,860 thousand barrels per day in September 2025, marking a surge of over 56% in just five months. As a result, more than 52% of India's total monthly crude imports now pass through the strait, compared with roughly 40% through October and November. India's overall crude inflows climbed from 4,696 thousand barrels per day in September to 5,594 thousand barrels per day in February (month till date), with almost the entire incremental increase linked to Hormuz shipments — effectively tying more than half of the country's oil lifeline to a single geopolitical flashpoint.

With geopolitical risks escalating across the Middle East, Indian refiners are quietly revisiting contingency sourcing strategies, including the possibility of turning back to higher volumes of Russia crude if Gulf supplies are disrupted. India's crude imports through the Strait of Hormuz have increased over the past two to three months as refiners trimmed purchases of Russian barrels following US and EU sanctions and turned back to Gulf producers. Until October-November, around 40% of India's total crude imports moved through the Strait of Hormuz. That share has since risen to roughly 50% over the past three months. 147 levels with the expected upside of 167-170 levels with stop loss below Rs 130 levels. In the event of any disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, Indian refiners may increase purchases of Russian crude to safeguard energy security and maintain supply stability," said Nikhil Dubey, Senior Refining Analyst at Kpler. The rising exposure comes as New Delhi has issued a fresh advisory asking all Indian citizens currently in Iran to leave the country by any available means, amid fears that the simmering standoff between Tehran and Washington could tip into a broader conflict. The move has sharpened anxieties in energy circles about the vulnerability of shipping routes across the Gulf. Explainer: How section 122 changes the India-US trade equation. The Strait of Hormuz remains the world's most critical oil chokepoint, carrying close to one-fifth of global seaborne crude trade every day.



For India, the stakes are particularly high. The country imports nearly 85% of its oil needs, and the bulk of its top suppliers depend almost entirely on Hormuz to reach global markets. Major producers such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait ship most of their crude exports through the strait — collectively forming the backbone of India's import basket. Globally, crude volumes moving through Hormuz rose to 14,825 thousand barrels per day in February (month till date), from 13,325 thousand barrels in September, underscoring how the world continues to lean heavily on the narrow passage even as geopolitical risk premiums climb. Energy market participants warn that even a temporary disruption, whether from military escalation, shipping restrictions or heightened security threats could trigger immediate spikes in crude prices, freight rates and insurance premiums. For India, such a shock would translate into a sharply higher import bill, pressure on inflation and stress across refining margins. Russian oil had earlier emerged as a crucial shock absorber for India after the Ukraine conflict reshaped global energy flows. Deep discounts on Russian barrels helped Indian refiners manage costs through 2023 and 2024, with Moscow briefly becoming India's largest crude supplier. That flow, however, slowed in late 2025 as fresh Western sanctions complicated financing, insurance and shipping logistics, prompting Indian buyers to pivot back towards Middle Eastern grades, a shift now clearly reflected in the sharp rise in Hormuz-linked imports. With tensions in the Gulf once again escalating, analysts say Russian crude could re-emerge as a fallback option if supply risks intensify — not as a preferred source, but as a strategic buffer in crisis scenarios.

The world’s largest tropical and sparks controversy



London: In the city of Brugellette, Belgium, what is now billed as the world’s largest tropical greenhouse has opened its doors. Located within the grounds of Pairi Daiza zoo and botanical garden, ‘Edenya’ promises to transport visitors straight into the heart of the equatorial belt the moment they step inside. The vast four-hectare glass structure shelters more than 200 different species. “While you explore, a vibrant jungle unfolds, framed by crystal-clear rivers, a golden-sand tropical beach and unforgettable encounters with captivating exotic animals: jaguars, manatees, tapirs, sharks, monkeys and more,” the center explains. The space also features a 17-meter waterfall – about 56 feet – and one of Europe’s largest butterfly sanctuaries. A project of that scale has inevitably drawn attention, but in Belgium it has also prompted debate. The issue centers on the additional fee required to access Edenya. Beyond purchasing a ticket to Pairi Daiza’s botanical garden, visitors must pay an extra €7 – roughly \$8 at current exchange rates – for entry to the greenhouse. That ticket cannot be purchased on its own. In an email sent by the park’s founder, Eric Domb, he explained the decision to introduce the surcharge. “Edenya is, above all, the first world to which we cannot guarantee access for everyone. For this reason, and this reason alone, we have chosen, for the first time in the history of Pairi Daiza, a different option: for all visitors, access to Edenya

is by prior reservation and through a specific fee, applied only when access is confirmed. I did not want a member to pay for something they could not experience.” The email was soon circulated on social media, where some users voiced their dissatisfaction with the additional charge for that section of the park. “A money-making trap,” wrote one critic. For larger families, paying about \$8 per person can be enough to reconsider the visit altogether. Facing the backlash, a park spokesperson sought to clarify the situation. “Many questions, many concerns, sometimes a lot of anger. We owe you objective, complete and transparent explanations,” the statement begins. The spokesperson argued that not charging for the new attraction would have sparked frustration as well. “

This is an enclosed space with limited capacity, where visitor comfort and respect for living beings are paramount. We know that on some days demand will exceed the number of available places.” Two options, the park said, were considered: raising the membership card price for everyone – including those who do not wish to visit Edenya – or keeping the base price unchanged and charging the extra fee only to those who choose to enter. Management opted for the latter. According to the park, it is the fairest way to satisfy the greatest number of visitors while ensuring calm inside the greenhouse.

Iran defies US threats to insist on right to enrich uranium

London: Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi ruled out Tehran ever giving up uranium enrichment in its negotiations with Washington, insisting it will not be intimidated by the threat of war with the United States. Araghchi told a forum in Tehran attended by AFP that Iran had little trust in Washington and doubted that the US side was taking renewed negotiations seriously. He later said Iran was consulting with its “strategic partners” China and Russia about the talks. “Why do we insist so much on enrichment and refuse to give it up, even if a war is imposed on us? Because no one has the right to dictate our behaviour,” Araghchi said at the forum. “Their military deployment in the region does not scare us,” he added, referring to the arrival of an aircraft carrier, the USS Abraham Lincoln, in the Arabian Sea. The United States and Iran reopened negotiations on Friday in Oman for the first time since Israel’s 12-day war with the Islamic Republic in June of last year, which the US briefly joined. Iran is seeking to have US economic sanctions on the country lifted, in exchange for what Araghchi said at the forum could be “a series of confidence-building measures concerning the nuclear programme”. Western countries and Israel, thought to be the Middle East’s only country with nuclear weapons, say Iran is seeking to acquire an atomic bomb, which the Islamic Republic denies. “They fear our atomic bomb, while we are not looking for one. Our atomic bomb is the power to say ‘no’ to the great powers,” Araghchi said. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar on Sunday denounced “the attempt by the most extreme regime in the world to obtain the most dangerous weapon in the world”, calling it “a clear danger to peace”. The US and Israel additionally want the negotiations to go beyond the nuclear issue and include Iran’s ballistic missiles and support for armed groups in the region, issues Iran refuses to include in the talks. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – who is scheduled to meet US President Donald Trump in Washington on Wednesday



day – insists these two components be included in any negotiation, his office said Saturday. “PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH” Araghchi’s comments came after US lead negotiators Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner visited the nuclear-powered USS Abraham Lincoln Saturday, the US military’s Central Command (CENTCOM) said. In a social media post, Witkoff said the aircraft carrier and its strike group was “keeping us safe and upholding President Trump’s message of peace through strength”. The threat of war continues to hover over the negotiations, even as Trump called the talks “very good” and Iran’s President, Masoud Pezeshkian, said they “constitute a step forward”. Following Friday’s first round in Oman, Trump signed an executive order calling for the “imposition of tariffs” on countries still doing business with Iran despite US sanctions. The United States also announced new sanctions against numerous shipping entities and vessels, aimed at curbing Iran’s oil exports. At the Tehran forum on Sunday, Araghchi called into question the United States’

commitment to diplomacy. “The continuation of certain sanctions and military actions raises doubts about the seriousness and readiness of the other side to conduct genuine negotiations,” he said. “We are monitoring the situation closely, assessing all the signals and will decide on the continuation of the negotiations.” PROTESTS TOLL – The talks between the two foes and the US military buildup in the region follow Iran’s crackdown on anti-government protests that began in late December, sparked by economic grievances. The authorities in Iran have acknowledged that 3,117 people were killed in the recent protests, publishing on Sunday a list of 2,986 names, most of whom they say were members of the security forces and innocent bystanders. International organisations have put the toll far higher. The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), which has kept a running toll since the onset of the protests, says it has verified 6,961 deaths, mostly protesters, and has another 11,630 cases under investigation. It has also counted more than 51,000 arrests.

Iran deepens crackdown mass protests

London: Iran arrested a prominent reformist, local media reported on Monday (Feb 9), deepening a crackdown on dissent following mass protests that posed one of the greatest challenges to the Islamic Republic since its inception. The arrest of Javad Emam, the spokesperson for the main reformist coalition, came days after Iranian and US officials held talks in Oman that both sides painted as positive. The United States had threatened military action against Iran during the peak of the protest movement that swept the nation earlier this year, which saw authorities launch a deadly crackdown to quell dissent. President Donald Trump later said he believed Iran would be open to a deal, and there was no immediate indication that the two sides discussed the protests during Friday’s Omani-mediated talks. Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, the ideological arm of the military, arrested Emam, the spokesperson for the Reformist Front coalition, local media reported on Monday. Emam was at least the fourth Reformist Front figure to be arrested, and his arrest came alongside those of several activists and filmmakers for co-signing a statement critical of authorities. Iran has branded the protests as riots fuelled by its arch-foes Israel and the United States, and on Monday, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called on the nation to show “resolve” against foreign pressure

“National power is less about missiles and aircraft and



more about the will and resolve of the people,” Khamenei said, adding: “Show it again and frustrate the enemy.” At the talks in Oman, the US and Iran had agreed to discuss Tehran’s nuclear programme, though Washington and Is-

rael also want to put the Islamic republic’s ballistic missiles and its support for regional militant groups on the agenda. Iran insists its nuclear programme is for civilian purposes but Western powers and Israel believe it is seek-

ing a nuclear weapon

On Sunday, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Iran could envision “a series of confidence-building measures concerning the nuclear programme” in exchange for the United States lifting sanctions on the country. But Araghchi insisted on Iran’s right to continue enriching uranium. Meanwhile, the secretary of Iran’s top security body, Ali Larjani, said he will visit Oman on Tuesday for meetings with Omani authorities. “PROPAGANDA”

With the US giving no indication that the protest crackdown is still a potential issue in the negotiations, Iranian authorities appear to be tightening their grip.

On Saturday, Iranian Nobel Peace Prize winner Narges Mohammadi was sentenced to six years in prison on charges of harming national security and was also given a one-and-a-half-year prison sentence for “propaganda” against Iran’s Islamic system, her foundation said in a statement.

Mohammadi was arrested in December before nationwide protests erupted later that month. Already incarcerated for much of the past decade as a result of her campaigning against Iran’s use of capital punishment and mandatory dress code for women, she now faces 17 more years behind bars with the addition of these new sentences. She also faces 154 lashes carried over from previous sentencing.

India US advancing talks for mutually beneficial trade agreement: EAM

London: The Ministry of External Affairs has stated that India and the United States are actively working towards finalising a mutually beneficial trade agreement in line with the recently adopted Joint Statement, reflecting the continued momentum in bilateral economic engagement and strategic cooperation between the two countries, with Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal confirming during a media briefing in New Delhi that an Indian delegation led by the chief negotiator will visit the United States next week to advance discussions and accelerate the process of reaching a comprehensive and balanced trade framework that supports growth, market access and long-term economic partnership; the development underscores the deepening India-US economic ties, which have steadily expanded across sectors such as trade, investment, technology, energy, supply chains, defence cooperation and digital innovation, and officials indicated that both sides remain committed to ensuring that the proposed agreement reflects the interests of busi-

nesses, industries and consumers in both nations while maintaining fairness, reciprocity and strategic alignment in an evolving global trade environment; addressing the media, the spokesperson emphasised that the ongoing negotiations are guided by the shared objective of enhancing bilateral trade volumes, removing barriers, facilitating smoother market access and creating a predictable policy framework that can further strengthen the already robust economic partnership between the two democracies, which has witnessed consistent growth over the past decade driven by policy coordination, high-level diplomatic engagement and expanding commercial collaboration; the forthcoming visit of the Indian negotiating delegation is expected to focus on sector-specific discussions including goods, services, digital trade, supply chain resilience, technology cooperation, and investment facilitation, with both sides aiming to identify areas of convergence that can deliver tangible benefits to industries and exporters while safeguarding

domestic priorities and economic interests; diplomatic observers noted that the Joint Statement adopted recently reflects a shared commitment to advancing trade dialogue in a constructive and forward-looking manner, indicating that negotiations are being conducted in a spirit of partnership rather than confrontation, with emphasis on building a sustainable and mutually advantageous trade architecture that aligns with the broader strategic partnership between India and the United States; experts highlighted that bilateral trade between the two countries has grown significantly in recent years, making the United States one of India’s top trading partners, and the agreement is seen as a pillar of their broader strategic engagement, nations are exploring mechanisms to ensure that the agreement remains flexible and adaptive to emerging economic challenges, including supply chain disruptions, technological shifts and evolving global trade norms, while also promoting transparency and regulatory cooperation to facilitate easier business operations and investment.

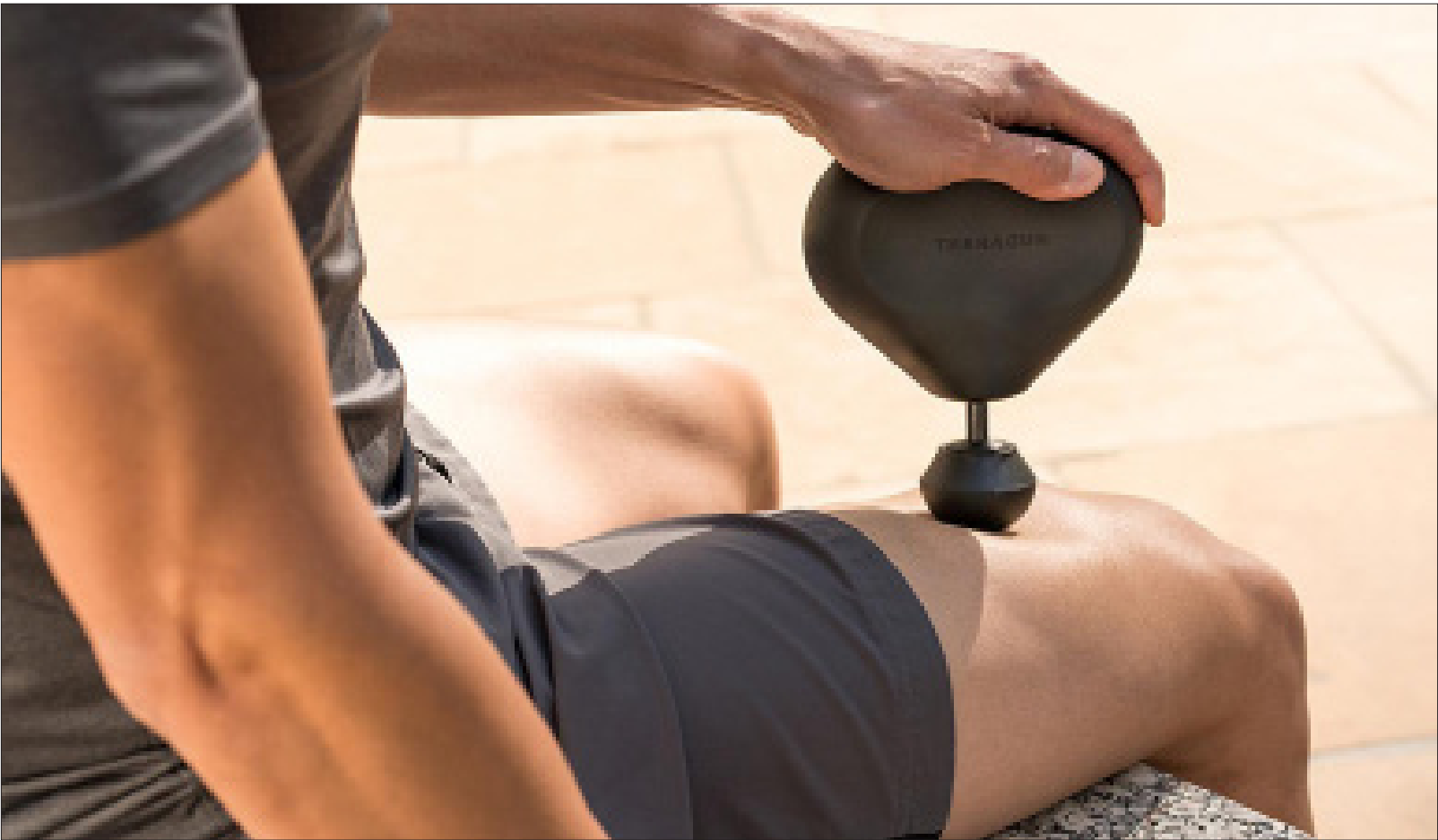
Trump warns of ‘consequences’ unless

Germany: Barack Obama and UN ambassador and White House adviser under Joe Biden – as a “political hack” and accused her of having “no talent or skills”. Trump’s comments herald a fresh intervention in the takeover battle between Netflix and Paramount Skydance for the studios and streaming businesses of WBD only weeks after promising not to get involved. He said in an interview with NBC News in early February that the justice department would handle the takeover of WBD, having insisted previously he would be involved in reviewing the deal. Any takeover of WBD will have to be approved by federal regulators. On Saturday, however, would be held accountable if the Democrats returned to power. As part of his intervention, Trump reposted a post on X by the rightwing influencer Laura Loomer, who called Rice and Netflix “anti-American”

and accused her of “threatening half of the country with weaponised government and political retribution for choosing who they wanted to vote for as president?”

Under the Netflix deal, the streaming company’s vast library would take control of WBD’s prize assets including Warner Bros, the studio behind franchises including Harry Potter, Superman and Batman, as well as HBO, home to shows including Game of Thrones. An incredible self-own In 1936, John Scott, son of the late Guardian owner and legendary editor CP Scott, did something unheard of for a media heir: he gave up his stake for the greater good. After inheriting the newspaper, Scott renounced all financial benefit – bar his salary – in the Guardian (worth £1m at the time and around £62m today) and passed ownership over to the newly formed Scott Trust.

The best massage guns in the UK to relieve sore, tired muscles



Massage guns are often pitched at the highly active. They can help you warm up for workouts, accelerate recovery and generally keep things loose and injury-free. However, you don't have to be training for an Ironman triathlon to benefit from a percussive pummelling. A good session can also alleviate the general soreness, stiffness and pain that comes from desk-bound days and the daily grind – all without having to cough up for a spell on a masseuse's table or be handled by a stranger. These personal-care power tools use rapid, repetitive pressure and vibrations to penetrate tired muscles, with a selection of heads, variable speeds and even automated routines to tailor treatments towards tight trouble spots. Dozens of massage guns are available from various brands, and you can spend anything from £50 to £500. But not all muscle massage guns are made equal.

To find out which gun massagers give the best bang for your buck, I spent two solid months giving myself DIY myofascial manipulation four times a day, over two testing periods. I tested the latest massage guns from the top brands while training two to four times a week. A good test to see if they could soothe my tired muscles and help me recover stronger.

Why you should trust me

I've spent two decades testing the latest fitness gear and the best home exercise kit – including the first massage guns on the market – while also running more than 50 marathons and ultramarathons. I train most days, sometimes twice, regularly racking up more than 50 miles a week and occasionally running solo marathons. And I do it all in the name of testing running shoes and watches.

When I'm not working out, I sit hunched over a desk for hours on end, tapping out articles like this one. At almost 47, that's the perfect recipe for full-body tightness. If anyone can benefit from percussive massage, it's me. In addition to the nine massage guns I tested for the previous incarnation of this roundup, I've now put another nine through an intensive two-day test. This page has now been updated with the results from both testing periods, and my top picks from the 18 massagers I've tested.

Testing included a brief full-body, wake-up going over in the early morning, a pre-run or pre-training activation, and a short post-workout recovery session (and yes, you can use massage guns on your own – see below for more detail). I ended each day with a short wind-down rubdown, about an hour before bed. I am now officially the most massaged human on the planet.

I tried all the different head attachments, speed settings, heat and cold options, and I worked on my weak spots. As a daily runner, I suffer from all sorts of tightness: tight calves, quads, glutes and adductors – not to mention fatigued feet. I had plenty to work on. Anyone who came to my house over either testing period also got massaged.

I downloaded any available apps and followed the guided plans, checked whether the battery life largely lived up to the listed times, and used a decibel sound app to compare the loudness of each gun. After all that, I rated the gun massagers based on performance, ease of use, quietness, portability, staying power and overall value for money. Here are my top picks.

The best massage guns you can buy in 2026 Therabody's Theragun Sense 2 is a compact massage gun with easy-to-follow guided routines. These target tension and stress relief as much as soothing post-workout sore spots.

Why we love itThe midweight gun comes at a premium but takes top spot for its all-round quality. It's well built, plenty powerful for tension-busting and brilliantly easy to use, taking the guesswork out of using it to the best effect. It doesn't quite have the pummel power of the biggest, hardest hitters like the Theragun Prime Plus below, but the depth is good enough for most, and you get the convenience and control of a smaller gun. I'm a big fan of Theragun's familiar triangular grip, and the Sense 2's skinnier handle makes it even easier to switch holds to hit hard-to-reach spots. What really stands out are the guided routines. There are four expert-guided protocols built in to the gun (sleep prep, back pain, tension relief and lower leg recovery). A small LCD screen shows you exactly where to massage, for how long and with how much pressure. Alternatively, you can fire up the app to access dozens of set routines with vid-

eo guidance and live pressure feedback. This makes it a doddle to use, although it lacks the automated speed changes you find on Therabody's pricier guns. More dedicated fitness enthusiasts can also connect to Apple Health and Strava to get personalised recovery routines based on recent activity. The five-speed Sense 2 matches the top speeds of the Prime Plus, but it won't quite hit with the depth of those higher-amplitude, more recovery-focused guns. It's still effective but won't work big muscle groups with quite as much force. It comes with two heads: a dampener and a standard ball. I'd expect more for the price, although they're a decent size. I also loved that it's quieter than the bigger guns. I got fewer side-eyes for using it while on the sofa watching TV.

Best budget massage gun:

Renpho Active Thermacool 2

Renpho makes affordable massage guns that pummel above their price tag. The Thermacool 2 adds a hot and cold edge to its midweight massage powers. It might not have the AI smarts and app guidance of a Theragun or the slick aesthetics of a Hyperice, but Renpho's mid-weight, pistol-grip massage gun delivers a lot for its sub-£100 price. Why we love itIt ships with a competitive selection of five heads, including a flat heated/cooling attachment that flips rapidly from warming to 45C or cooling to 8C. The heat setting penetrates more effectively than the slightly weaker cold, offering some extra soothing to sore muscles when you use it on bare skin. One warning: the heads are somewhat fiddly to change. For the size and power, it's relatively light and easy to grip, with a soft silicone handle that's pretty standard for these types of massage guns. It's not as powerful as the top-tier guns, though. The 8mm amplitude means it can't hit the muscles to the same depth as some of the more pro-level massage guns, but I could apply all the pressure I needed without causing it to stall. I eased tired quads, calves and back without any issues. The big colour display makes it easy to keep tabs on the essential speed and temperature settings: no squinting at tiny fonts here. The three-hour battery life is right up there with the leading guns, and while it's not the quietest device I tested, it's not any noisier than many more expensive rivals. The carry case is too bulky to stick in a gym bag and that, along with the bigger gun size, means it's definitely a better at-home option. But for less than £100, it's enough to help most of us bounce back quicker.

Best mini massage gun:

Therabody Theragun Mini

Theragun's most compact pummeller is small but still mighty, with the connected smarts of pricier guns. This is the one to choose if you want to unleash percussive massage powers anywhere – at your desk, on a plane or at the marathon finish line. Why we love itFor a mini massage gun, the second-generation Theragun Mini is pricey. But while it may empty your bank account as rapidly as it relieves your muscles, there is value here. This powerful Bluetooth-connected compact gun is pleasingly simple and impressively powerful for its size. What stands out from rival cheaper mini guns is the guidance. If you're unsure about how best to

use your knot buster, you get the same access to dozens of preset, guided routines that come with Theragun's pricier models. These routines cover everything from alleviating hip pain to walks and parkrun warm-ups. There are recovery drills to fend off post-workout muscle soreness after an upper/lower body session and if, like me, you suffer late-night leg cramps, there's one for that, too. The triangular shape bucks the standard design in a bid to improve the grip, but I had mixed success with it. It's not the easiest to hold for some areas or for applying more pressure. However, I was impressed by the depth and strength of the massage. The 12mm amplitude is good for a mini gun, while the three preset speeds offer a good range. I also loved being able to fine-tune the percussions a minute in the app, unlocking speeds between those fixed presets. You get only three head attachments – a standard ball, a dampener and a thumb. Some minis offer up to five, but these covered most of what I needed – from foot-soothing plantar to the calves and tighter spots on my back. A fork attachment for working deep around the spine and neck was the only thing I missed. Overall, you're getting excellent portability in a travel-friendly package that's great for sticking in a gym bag, post-marathon drop bag or your carry-on. I loved having this by my desk for some forearm and hand massage.

Best massage gun for portability and power:

Hyperice Hypervolt 2

The Hyperice Hypervolt 2 is a sleek, mid-weight all-rounder with a big library of app-guided massage routines, competitive battery life and enough pummel power for most home users. Why we love itThere's a happy simplicity and a competent swagger to the Hyperice Hypervolt 2. It combines a sleek, durable build with plenty of practicality and smarts, including automated speed control, real-time guided routines, a pressure sensor and a long battery life. That all adds up to one of the best-value mid-range guns, hitting the sweet spot for most casual users. The compact Hypervolt 2 is more portable than the pro guns, but it still gave a deep massage thanks to a brushless, high-torque 60W motor. There's plenty of quiet power at your disposal, and I had no trouble working my bigger muscle groups. There's a good selection of easy-to-swap attachments, too – five in total – including fork, ball, cushion, flat and bullet. They happily come in their own carry case, although strangely, there's no case for the main gun. If you find some girthy guns hard to grip, the thinner but wider, rubberised handle is more natural. And though the Hypervolt 2 is heavier than mini guns, it's no harder to use. An excellent option for mostly home use with the occasional trip in a travel bag.

The best of the rest

Therabody Theragun Prime Plus

The midweight Prime Plus is a powerful top-tier gun with an excellent partner app, four heads (including hot/cold heads) and five speed levels. This brilliant deep tissue massage gun works muscles with a bit more pummel power and depth than the Sense 2, and there's no better option for bringing heat to your

rub downs. But those nice-to-have extras come at a significant premium. The Prime Plus has a robust, durable design that's well thought out and makes it a doddle to wield the gun to the best effect. The tactile, triangle multi-grip handle makes it effortless to change the angle to hit hard-to-reach spots with plenty of knot-breaking power. Meanwhile, the app-controlled treatments are excellent, with dozens of set video-guided routines, real-time pressure sensing and automated speed controls. You can also connect to Apple Health or Strava and get personalised routines recommended based on your activity. The clue is in the name, but the Renpho Reach's clever killer USP is a detachable handle extender that makes it much easier to reach tougher spots like shoulders and back. I wish all the other guns offered the same. In terms of power, the Reach feels more like a mid-weight gun. It lacks the depth and penetration of the biggest hitters. Though automatic speed adjustments – that react to the pressure you apply – help to hit the sweet spot. The four massage attachments (ball head, U-shaped head for spine, neck and achilles; flat head and bullet head for joint trigger points) are all quite hard and plastic. I prefer the softer coated heads on other guns. I also wanted a better grip-enhancing coating on handles. It's all a bit shiny and slippery.

Hyperice Hypervolt Go 2

Punchy and portable, the Hypervolt Go 2 is a gym-bag-friendly smooth operator with an angled handle for better control. Despite its size, I was impressed by the strength and staying power of this three-speed gun. It's a step up from the mini guns, giving plenty of soothing pressure. You can really work the toughest, most resistant areas without stalling. It only ships with two interchangeable heads – a larger flat and a bullet head. There's no pressure sensor, and it lacks connected app smarts, although you can still follow guided massage routines in the app. The routine library isn't as well organised or as comprehensive as Theragun's, though, with some odd esoteric names such as "Cooldown glide flush".

Renpho Mini Thermal Massage Gun 2026

This update to Renpho's mini thermal massage gun shoots for portability and value, and its improved grip makes it even easier to wield. You'll struggle to find a cheaper heated-head gun, even if that warmth from the smaller heads is quite mild – think a cup of tea that's cooling down rather than a fresh mug. It's solid for a smaller gun, though. It offers four speeds with a decent top speed and 50lb of stall force, but it won't take heavy pressure. The four smaller cover-style heads are light and easy to transport: great for more sensitive areas, but not as powerful or penetrating on your big muscle groups as the Theragun Mini. It's light even for a mini gun, slimmer and easier to hold than the Bob & Brad Q2 Ultra and the Theragun Mini. I loved how easy it was to use, with a soft, grid-textured silicone casing that's really grippy. You can swap between two different colour sleeves to personalise your gun, which I found handy for cleaning and durability.

ReviewThe best massage guns in the

UK to relieve sore, tired musclesAdd percussive therapy to your post-workout routine with our expert picks, including mini and deep-tissue models. Plus, a brand new frontrunner now in top spot The best running shoes, tested

Kieran Alger

Prefer the Guardian on Google

The Guardian's journalism is independent. We will earn a commission if you buy something through an affiliate link. Learn more. Massage guns are often pitched at the highly active. They can help you warm up for workouts, accelerate recovery and generally keep things loose and injury-free. However, you don't have to be training for an Ironman triathlon to benefit from a percussive pummelling. A good session can also alleviate the general soreness, stiffness and pain that comes from desk-bound days and the daily grind – all without having to cough up for a spell on a masseuse's table or be handled by a stranger. These personal-care power tools use rapid, repetitive pressure and vibrations to penetrate tired muscles, with a selection of heads, variable speeds and even automated routines to tailor treatments towards tight trouble spots. Dozens of massage guns are available from various brands, and you can spend anything from £50 to £500. But not all muscle massage guns are made equal. To find out which gun massagers give the best bang for your buck, I spent two solid months giving myself DIY myofascial manipulation four times a day, over two testing periods. I tested the latest massage guns from the top brands while training two to four times a week. A good test to see if they could soothe my tired muscles and help me recover stronger. Here's my pick of the best massage guns you can buy right now. At a glance Best massage gun overall:

Therabody Theragun Sense 2

Renpho Active Thermacool 2

I've spent two decades testing the latest fitness gear and the best home exercise kit – including the first massage guns on the market – while also running more than 50 marathons and ultramarathons. I train most days, sometimes twice, regularly racking up more than 50 miles a week and occasionally running solo marathons. And I do it all in the name of testing running shoes and watches. When I'm not working out, I sit hunched over a desk for hours on end, tapping out articles like this one. At almost 47, that's the perfect recipe for full-body tightness. If anyone can benefit from percussive massage, it's me. How I testedThe writer wearing training gear holding a massage gun to his left calfView image in fullscreenI am now officially the most massaged human on the planet.' Photograph: Kieran Alger/The GuardianIn addition to the nine massage guns I tested for the previous incarnation of this roundup, I've now put another nine through an intensive two-day test. This page has now been updated with the results from both testing periods, and my top picks from the 18 massagers I've tested. Testing included a brief full-body, wake-up going over in the early morning, a pre-run or pre-training activation, and a short post-workout recovery session (and yes, you can use massage guns on your own – see below

for more detail). I ended each day with a short wind-down rubdown, about an hour before bed. I am now officially the most massaged human on the planet. I tried all the different head attachments, speed settings, heat and cold options, and I worked on my weak spots. As a daily runner, I suffer from all sorts of tightness: tight calves, quads, glutes and adductors – not to mention fatigued feet. I had plenty to work on. Anyone who came to my house over either testing period also got massaged. I downloaded any available apps and followed the guided plans, checked whether the battery life largely lived up to the listed times, and used a decibel sound app to compare the loudness of each gun. After all that, I rated the gun massagers based on performance, ease of use, quietness, portability, staying power and overall value for money. Here are my top picks. The best massage guns you can buy in 2026Nine massage guns in their boxes on a wooden floorView image in fullscreenA lineup of some of the massage guns I tested. Photograph: Kieran AlgerTherabody's Theragun Sense 2 is a compact massage gun with easy-to-follow guided routines. These target tension and stress relief as much as soothing post-workout sore spots. Why we love itThe midweight gun comes at a premium but takes top spot for its all-round quality. It's well built, plenty powerful for tension-busting and brilliantly easy to use, taking the guesswork out of using it to the best effect. It doesn't quite have the pummel power of the biggest, hardest hitters like the Theragun Prime Plus below, but the depth is good enough for most, and you get the convenience and control of a smaller gun. I'm a big fan of Theragun's familiar triangular grip, and the Sense 2's skinnier handle makes it even easier to switch holds to hit hard-to-reach spots. What really stands out are the guided routines. There are four expert-guided protocols built in to the gun (sleep prep, back pain, tension relief and lower leg recovery). A small LCD screen shows you exactly where to massage, for how long and with how much pressure. Alternatively, you can fire up the app to access dozens of set routines with video guidance and live pressure feedback. This makes it a doddle to use, although it lacks the automated speed changes you find on Therabody's pricier guns. More dedicated fitness enthusiasts can also connect to Apple Health and Strava to get personalised recovery routines based on recent activity. The five-speed Sense 2 matches the top speeds of the Prime Plus, but it won't quite hit with the depth of those higher-amplitude, more recovery-focused guns. It's still effective but won't work big muscle groups with quite as much force. It comes with two heads: a dampener and a standard ball. I'd expect more for the price, although they're a decent size. I also loved that it's quieter than the bigger guns. Renpho makes affordable massage guns that pummel above their price tag. The Thermacool 2 adds a hot and cold edge to its midweight massage powers. It might not have the AI smarts and app guidance of a Theragun or the slick aesthetics of a Hyperice, but Renpho's mid-weight, pistol-grip massage gun delivers a lot for its sub-£100 price. Why we love it

It ships with a competitive selection of five heads, including a flat heated/cooling attachment that flips rapidly from warming to 45C or cooling to 8C. The heat setting penetrates more effectively than the slightly weaker cold, offering some extra soothing to sore muscles when you use it on bare skin. One warning: the heads are somewhat fiddly to change. For the size and power, it's relatively light and easy to grip, with a soft silicone handle that's pretty standard for these types of massage guns. It's not as powerful as the top-tier guns, though. The 8mm amplitude means it can't hit the muscles to the same depth as some of the more pro-level massage guns, but I could apply all the pressure I needed without causing it to stall. I eased tired quads, calves and back without any issues. The big colour display makes it easy to keep tabs on the essential speed and temperature settings: no squinting at tiny fonts here. The three-hour battery life is right up there with the leading guns, and while it's not the quietest device I tested, it's not any noisier than many more expensive rivals. The carry case is too bulky to stick in a gym bag and that, along with the bigger gun size, means it's definitely a better at-home option. But for less than £100, it's enough to help most of us bounce back quicker.

ENTERTAINMENT

Aamir Khan's remarks to Arijit Singh regarding his choice to stop playback singing

Mumbai: Aamir Khan, who traveled to Arijit Singh's hometown of Murshidabad to record the title track Ek Din, seemed surprised to hear that the singer's hiatus from playback singing is permanent in a unique behind-the-scenes film that was made public on Monday. The video shows Arijit and Aamir sitting on the floor of the singer's house and having a normal conversation. "You are not taking on any projects," the actor inquires. Do you want to sing in Hindi movies or do you want to take a short break? Aamir responds in Hindi, "Aisa mat kar yaar, hum logon ka kya hoga (Don't do this, what will happen to us?)" as soon as he hears Arijit's statement. In the BTS video, Arijit can



also be seen recording the song, showing Aamir his home, flying kites with him, and riding his bike around town. Later, Aamir posted a poster and expressed gratitude to Arijit for providing the voiceover for his next

movie, which is supported by Aamir Khan Productions and stars Sai Pallavi and his son Junaid Khan. Fans were taken aback when Arijit announced his retirement from playback singing on January 27. In order to

be one of the most popular singers in the nation, has the kind of heartfelt voice that Aamir needed for this love tale. The soulful tune was released as a result of the two's close collaboration on the film's opening music. After a long break, Ek Din brings Aamir Khan and director Mansoor Khan back together, recreating one of Hindi cinema's most treasured creative collaborations. In the past, they have worked together on movies like Jaane Tu... Ya Jaane Na, Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar, Akele Hum Akele Tum, and Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak. The pair returns to the romance genre with Ek Din, with Junaid taking the lead role. The Sunil Pandey-directed movie is scheduled to hit theaters on May 1.

convince Arijit to reconsider his purported retirement and to personally ask him to sing for the movie, Aamir traveled to Murshidabad and spent four days there with his family. Arijit, who is widely considered to

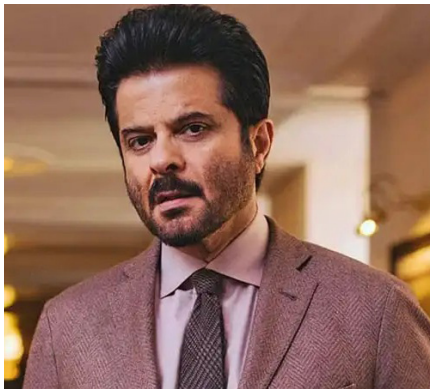
The singing show's brand ambassador Neil Nitin Mukesh resigns

Mumbai: The reason behind actor Neil Nitin Mukesh's departure from his position as brand ambassador for the singing reality show The Universal Idol is everything but cordial. The actor has claimed that he was not paid because multiple checks that were sent to him bounced. Neil stated in a forceful statement that he is currently investigating his legal options and that he is entitled to pursue "appropriate remedies available to me under law" in relation to the payment dispute. Neil announced his decision to leave the reality show in a message posted on X, the platform that was once known as Twitter, on Monday. The program was connected to HMC Events. He said there was a "breach of trust" because three checks that the organizers sent him bounced. He also disclosed that his and his team's repeated attempts to address the issue were unsuccessful. "To All, I am publicly announcing my departure from my position as Brand Ambassador for 'The Universal Idol' in association with HMC Events," he said. Neil Nitin Mukesh publicly expressed his grievances regarding unpaid payments from Universal Idol and affiliates, indicating a breach



of trust after three cheques bounced. He announced his withdrawal from all current and future associations with them and urged fellow artists to be cautious about financial commitments. Neil's note emphasized transparency and his intent to pursue legal remedies if necessary. He also highlighted his professional journey, including his latest ventures in film and web series, with a forthcoming debut in Malayalam cinema.

Anil Kapoor declares war against the illegal sand mining mafia



Mumbai: A compelling first look at a drama centered on power battles, wounded pride, and personal redemption can be seen in the recently released trailer for Subedaar. The film, which stars Anil Kapoor, takes place in the Indian heartland, where dread has been stoked by illegal sand mining. Anil Kapoor plays Subedaar Arjun Maurya, a retired army veteran who returns home to discover that intimidation and unbridled power had taken over his surroundings. Because of the illegal sand mining operations in the area, there is a culture where resistance is costly and silence is necessary for life. Prince, played by Aditya Rawal, crosses Arjun's path as he tries to accept a society that

is different from the one he once served. The conflict revolves around their clash. "Fauji hai, seene mein goli jhel sakte hai, beizzati nahi," Anil Kapoor says in a strong scene from the trailer, highlighting his character's unwavering sense of dignity. Determined to bring order back to a place where terror and hooliganism have taken over, Arjun decides to step in as things get out of hand. The tense relationship between Arjun and his daughter Shyama is also examined in Subedaar. Radhikka Madan, Saurabh Shukla, Aditya Rawal, Mona Singh, and Faisal Malik are also part of the cast of Subedaar. Prajwal Chandrashekar and Suresh Triveni wrote the script for the movie. It is jointly produced under the banners of Opening Image Films Production and Anil Kapoor Film & Communication Network. "Set in the Indian heartland, the powerful masala action-drama follows Subedaar Arjun Maurya as he grapples with the challenges of leading a civilian life, navigates a strained relationship with his daughter, and confronts societal dysfunction," is the official synopsis of the movie. Subedaar, a former soldier who served his country, must now fight internal foes to defend his family and home. On March 5, 2026, the movie will be available for viewing on Prime Video.

Katrina Kaif handled parenthood and pregnancy like a warrior: Vicky Kaushal



Mumbai: Recently, actor Vicky Kaushal acknowledged that he is completely amazed by Katrina Kaif, referring to her as a great "warrior" for overcoming her pregnancy and embracing motherhood. She has been an absolute "superhero" in raising their three-month-old kid, Vihaan, he continued. Vicky was recently seen in Mumbai at an awards ceremony organized by The Hollywood Reporter India. "How is it being a brand new dad?" the actor and his close friend Neha Dhupia questioned him while he was on stage. Vicky then talked about his three-month-old son, Vihaan, and gave Katrina a big shoutout, referring to her as a true "warrior" for her bravery during her pregnancy and her embrace of motherhood. "It feels great to be a dad," Vicky remarked. He is currently three months old, and a father has very little to do at that age. I'm simply trying to support the mother and the child, and I'm wait-

ing for him to become older so I can do more." "The mother is currently being the superhero and she has been a warrior through her pregnancy and she has been a warrior as a mother as well," Vicky said in reference to Katrina. I love her so much, and I'm so proud of her. "In November of last year, Vicky and Katrina Kaif welcomed their baby son. They shared the happy news on social media with the adorable message, "Our bundle of joy has arrived." We welcome our baby boy with the utmost love and appreciation. Ayushmann Khurrana, Karan Johar, Priyanka Chopra, and others congratulated the couple on their new parenthood. The couple announced the name of their son, Vihaan Kaushal, on January 7.

On December 9, 2021, Vicky and Katrina were married in a small ceremony at the Six Senses Fort Barwara in Rajasthan. Until they got married and made their relationship official,

they kept it a secret. Vicky recently talked about fatherhood in an interview with GQ India, stating that "every day, a new emotion hits." He responded, "It's too early for me to analyze," when asked how he felt about becoming a father. There is a fresh emotion every day. You give yourself over to something in a manner that you have never done before. He described it as "a grounding experience" as well. "It's a feeling I can't put into words, and wasn't prepared for," the actor continued. Regarding her career, Vicky produced Chhaava, one of the highest-grossing movies in India in 2025. The epic historical drama, which was directed by Laxman Utekar, brought in ₹807 crore at the box office globally.

The next movie starring Vicky is Love & War, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor are also featured in the movie. Merry Christmas was the last time we saw Katrina.

In the Bhooth Bangla movie poster, Akshay Kumar presents a frightening persona

Mumbai: After 16 years apart, Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar and director Priyadarshan are getting back together with Bhooth Bangla. In the midst of the excitement around the pair, the film's makers have released Akshay's motion poster. Fans, however, are unable to ignore the resemblances to Bhool Bhulaiyaa. Akshay posted the Bhooth Bangla motion poster on Tuesday. It shows him sitting on a throne, dressed in a dhoti, with a rudraksha mala around his neck and in his palm. He also sports sunglasses for extra swagger. The motion poster sparked a rapid response from fans. "Yeh ameeron ka Bhool Bhulaiyaa lag raha hain" was one comment that said, "This looks like Bhool Bhulaiyaa of the rich." "So Bhool Bhulaiyaa (2007) coded," said another. "Why does this poster give Bhool Bhulaiyaa vibes?" said another. Another user commented, "authentic Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2." "Akshay Kumar back to this genre with the OG Priyadarshan," commented another. It reminds me of how this combo provided in the 2000s. According to another comment, "OG Bhool Bhulaiyaa vibes." I



hope they do a fantastic job. Priyadarshan's 2007 psychological horror-comedy was a remake of the 1993 Malayalam movie Manichitrathazhu. Akshay Kumar, Vidya Balan, Shiney Ahuja, Ameesha Patel, Paresh Rawal, Rajpal Yadav, Manoj Joshi, Asrani, and Vikram Gokhale were among the actors in the movie. Despite having a

₹32 crore budget, the movie made ₹82.84 crore globally at the box office, making it a success. It gained cult status over time, with Akshay and Vidya's performances receiving special recognition. Later, the movie became a franchise, although Kartik Aaryan played the lead in Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2 and Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3 instead of Akshay. Bhooth Bangla is a horror-comedy directed by Priyadarshan and produced by Shobha Kapoor, Ektaa Kapoor, and Akshay Kumar. Alongside Paresh Rawal, Tabu, Wamiqa Gabbi, and Rajpal Yadav, Akshay plays the film's protagonist. On April 10, 2026, it will be released in theaters, marking the reunification of Priyadarshan, Akshay, and Paresh Rawal. In addition, Priyadarshan and Akshay are working on Haiwaan, which will have Saif Ali Khan in the starring role. Although production is complete, the movie's release date has not yet been disclosed. The legendary combination of Paresh Rawal, Suniel Shetty, and Akshay Kumar will return to the big screen with Hera Pheri 3, which is now in development.

Shah Rukh Khan works tirelessly in spite of severe health problems: Govind Namdev

Mumbai: Star Shah Rukh Khan has received a lot of accolades from veteran actor Govind Namdev, who recalled the actor's unwavering work ethic in spite of recurring health issues. Namdev recently talked about his experience working with Shah Rukh in the 2000 movie Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani and expressed how amazed he was by the actor's unparalleled commitment. Namdev informed The Lallantop about Shah Rukh's routine: "Ek hi hai banda jo 24 ghante kaam karta hai, sona bhi 3-4 ghante, ussi mei dand bhaitak bhi hai, udghatan bhi karna hai, dialogue bhi yaad karna hai, kahin perform kame bhi jaana hai, main hairaan ho gaya ki ye kaisa aadmi hai. One man works all day and all night. In addition to managing workouts, event inaugurations, studying dialogues, and traveling for performances, he only gets three to four hours of sleep per night. I was taken aback; what sort of person is he? He also disclosed that the celebrity has struggled with a number of health problems, especially those pertaining to his spine.

In terms of his physical condition, he has a number of health issues, including severe back problems, problems with his backbone, and kaafi and reedh ki haddi

ki troubles. But even we learned something from observing him. Namdev said, "He never lets it show)." Shah Rukh Khan has been transparent about his love of being active and dedicated to his work. He previously stated in an interview that he "can't sit at home" doing nothing, even in between movies, and that he can't wait since he prefers to continue working. Long breaks, according to Shah Rukh, have an impact on his "state of mind," thus he would rather be actively involved in his job, taking on a variety of projects and challenging himself creatively than sit about doing nothing. His frank comments highlight his dedication to constant work and output, a mentality that has enabled him to succeed in his more than three-decade career. Regarding his career, Shah Rukh Khan is preparing for his upcoming major motion picture, King, which is helmed by Siddharth Anand. Abhishek Bachchan, Deepika Padukone, and his daughter Suhana Khan are all featured in the movie. Supported by Red Chillies Entertainment and Marflix Pictures, King is already one of the year's most anticipated movies and is scheduled for premiere in theaters on December 24, 2026.

The characters of Ranveer and Yash in Dhurandhar 2 and Toxic are similar but distinct

New Delhi: For ages, there has been a persistent hum of excitement whenever two blockbuster movies clash at the box office on the same day. But this time, there are a lot more similarities to look at, with South superstar Yash's Toxic and Aditya Dhar's mega-blockbuster Dhurandhar sequel in the forefront. First off, Dhurandhar: The Revenge is a follow-up to Dhurandhar, the highest-grossing Hindi film ever with over Rs 1,300 crore at the global box office. After ten weeks in theaters, the film brought in Rs 838.32 crore, according to a Sacnilk report. In contrast, the fervor that the Aditya Dhar-directed film has already generated is advancing in tandem with the heated hype around Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups, which is driven by the cult stardom of Yash from the KGF world. Another perspective on this "Dhuroxic" moment is emerging as March 19, when the fate of the two films is revealed, draws closer. Toxic, with a twist, is similar to Dhurandhar, which showed the opposing characters of the emotionally troubled agent Jaskirat and the vicious infiltrator Hamza in the end. Yash will play two different roles in this Geetu Mohandas film, Raya and Ticket, as revealed in the just released Toxic teaser. The duality of characters and personalities that appears appropriate for the release's nature is what draws attention, not two "supposed" blockbusters fighting at the box office. After the producers of Toxic revealed a glimpse of the actor's "clean-shaven" appearance in the newly released trailer, speculation over Yash's part in the film exploded. The characters being examined are Ticket's more refined avatar and Raya's rough-looking persona. The slogan "Your 'Ticket' to Hell" reinforces the idea that it could be the movie's antagonist. A possible confrontation between the



hero and the villain was also hinted at in the teaser, which was explained away as a father-son rivalry. The dramatic revelation also showed the characters' carefully chosen appearances in addition to their variances in dispositions. In contrast, Yash's long hair and heavy beard, which he sports as Raya, symbolize his raw, primordial, and potentially dangerous nature. In dramatic contrast to Yash's appearance as Raya, the other personality's behind-the-scenes photos, which are being presented as a "clean-shaven look," reveal a more fashionable and svelte character. The one-minute-56-second teaser sparked a lot of interest, particularly because it deftly interspersed Yash's dual nature as a character and his aesthetic personas. In "Dhurandhar," the evolution of Ranveer Singh's character, Jaskirat Singh, into Hamza

Ali Mazari, sets the stage for the sequel, "Dhurandhar: The Revenge." The film contrasts dual-identity characters, emphasizing the physical and emotional transformations Singh undergoes. He loses 15 kg to portray a leaner, vengeful Jaskirat and gains 15 kg of muscle for the intimidating Hamza, showcasing distinct styles: traditional attire and a turban for Jaskirat versus untamed hair and robust outfits for Hamza. Singh's transformation reflects a journey from vulnerability to becoming a manipulative agent, with his emotional struggles hinting at complex story developments in the sequel.

This narrative parallels another anticipated 2026 film, creating a competitive landscape where character arcs in both movies are intriguingly similar yet distinct.

After its launch, the Meerut Rapid Train crosses one lakh riders in its first full day



New Delhi, Feb 24: As commuters flocked to the Namoo Bharat Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) on its first full day of operation, the song “Bharat Mata ki Jai” reverberated within the coaches. On Monday, the NCRTC had its highest-ever ridership, surpassing one lakh. This occurred one day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi officially opened the new Meerut Metro

connection and the entire 82-kilometer Delhi-Meerut corridor, signaling the start of full-day commercial operations along the entire route. On Monday, with the last train scheduled to depart at 10 pm, NCRTC expects the total ridership to surpass 1 lakh commuters,” the National Capital Region Transport Corporation had previously stated. According to the company, this was the largest rider-

ship on the route to date. Passengers at Meerut’s Begumpul station were shown in a video excited to try the new service.

Early in the morning, large groups of people were observed congregating on the roomy concourse, with numerous families and young individuals snapping pictures and selfies inside the train and station. Another video captured the joyous atmo-

sphere among travelers as they chanted “Bharat Mata ki Jai” during their inaugural journey on the Meerut Rapid train. As the RRTS train drew near, commuters were also observed waving enthusiastically and showering flower petals on the platform. The images displayed well-organized lines at ticket booths and platform entrances, with station employees helping newcomers and outlining safety procedures. The remaining RRTS segments, which include the 21-km extension from Meerut South to Modipuram in Uttar Pradesh and the 5-km segment between Sarai Kale Khan and New Ashok Nagar in Delhi, were officially opened by PM Modi on Sunday.

The Namoo Bharat system, which can reach speeds of up to 180 kmph, aims to drastically cut down on travel time between Delhi and important cities like Sahibabad, Ghaziabad, Modinagar, and Meerut.

Haryana’s chief minister vows to take strong action after recovering Rs 556 crore in IDFC bank fraud



New Delhi, Feb 24: Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini announced on Tuesday that the state had recovered the full cash associated with the crime and promised harsh punishment against those involved, a day after a suspected multi-crore scam involving IDFC First Bank and Haryana government accounts caused political outcry. Saini addressed the matter by stating that the government

has been reimbursed Rs 556 crore, which includes Rs 22 crore in interest. Investigations are underway to discover everyone involved in the alleged fraud, he continued, adding that preliminary findings point to the involvement of three to four bank workers. “We’ll make sure that no government worker, bank official, or other participant is spared. The Chief Minister declared that no one

would be permitted to cast a bad spell on public funds. The controversy started when IDFC First Bank revealed in a regulatory filing that fraudulent and unauthorized activity had been found in accounts connected to Haryana government entities at its Chandigarh branch. Disparities between recorded balances and the real cash available were discovered when a state department wanted to transfer funds to another bank and began closing its account, revealing irregularities. Similar irregularities in several government-affiliated accounts managed by the same branch were discovered by subsequent investigations; the initial estimate of the potential theft was around Rs 590 crore. According to Saini, a high-level committee has been established to look into the situation as a whole, and investigating organizations are still looking into the involvement of bank employees and any outside partners. The chief

minister had earlier told the Assembly that the state Anti-Corruption Bureau and vigilance authorities were looking into the matter, emphasizing that the government will seek accountability regardless of one’s status. “Corruption is not something that our administration overlooks. “The issue is being thoroughly investigated,” he stated. The bank has reported the suspected fraud to the regulator and filed a police complaint, claiming that some workers at the Chandigarh branch allegedly carried out unauthorized transactions in cooperation with other companies.

The Haryana government immediately de-paneled IDFC First Bank for government business in response to the disclosures. Now that recoveries have been made, the investigation’s main goals are to identify who is responsible and how the transactions were executed within accounts connected to the government.

Kerala is no longer Kerala, Now, it will be known as Keralam

New Delhi, Feb 24: The Kerala government’s request to rename the southern state “Keralam” has been approved by the Union Cabinet. The action was taken just months before the state’s assembly elections. At a Union Cabinet meeting today at Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s new office at Delhi’s Seva Teerth, the new PMO building, the plan is anticipated to have been approved. Since its last meeting at the South Block on February 13, this was



the first Cabinet session held at the location. On June 25, 2024, the Kerala assembly passed the resolution unani-

mously for the second time, calling on the federal government to formally rename the state Keralam. It took place after the Center assessed the previous solution and suggested a few technical adjustments for compliance and clarity. The resolution’s proposer, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, urged the Union government to change the state’s name to Keralam in all of the languages listed in the Constitution’s Eighth Schedule.

The father of a doctor who perished in a Jharkhand plane crash breaks down

New Delhi, Feb 24: A catastrophic plane crash in the Chatra district of Jharkhand on Monday night claimed the lives of seven persons, including a doctor. A doctor named Vikas Kumar Gupta was one of the passengers on the charter jet, which was an air ambulance transporting a 41-year-old patient named Sanjay Kumar. According to a notice from the Directorate of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the Beechcraft C90 air ambulance bound for Delhi lost communication and RADAR contact with Kolkata shortly after taking off from the Birsu Munda Airport in Ranchi. The doctor was one of the seven people died on the plane.

After the tragedy, his distraught father addressed the media, lamenting the death of his son. “My son practiced medicine. He informed me that he was traveling to Delhi with patients, but I later found out that my son had died in the plane tragedy. In order to educate him, I sold my farmland,” Vikas Kumar Gupta’s father said. The CEO of Ranchi’s Devkamal Hospital and Research Centre also responded to the doctor’s death in the aircraft accident. Dr. Anant Sinha said, “Unfortunately, we learned

that a plane had crashed... Dr. Vikas Gupta was nearby, and he too passed away.” According to the hospital’s chief executive officer, Sanjay Kumar, the patient aboard the aircraft, had 60% burns and was receiving treatment in the intensive care unit. “We kept him in the ICU... Some family members hinted that they could want him transported overseas for better care. An air ambulance was negotiated and set up by them,” Sinha continued. Sanjay Kumar, Sachin Kumar Mishra, Archana Devi, Dhuru Kumar, Captain Vivek Vikas Bhagat, and Captain Savrajdeep Singh were among the other individuals who perished in the collision. Although the cause of the crash has not yet been officially confirmed, several officials have speculated that a rainstorm and bad meteorological conditions may have played a role. Redbird Airways, based in Delhi, flew the air ambulance, which had the tail number VT-AJV.

About 100 NM southeast of Varanasi, it lost communication with the RADAR in Kolkata, and it crashed shortly after in a Simaria forest in Jharkhand.

Sesko gives Man United a victory over Everton as Supersub scores once more

New Delhi: LIVERPOOL, England — Manchester United defeated Everton 1-0 in the Premier League on Monday thanks to a goal from supersub Benjamin Sesko 13 minutes after he entered the pitch. Sesko scored after coming off the bench to give United points for the third time in four games. “The other players and I both believe in ourselves,” Sesko said to Sky Sports. “When I enter the game, they are aware of what they will receive. Naturally, it is my responsibility to deliver. He completed the most elegant move of an otherwise stodgy game with his goal with 19 minutes left. Sesko skillfully directed the ball past Jordan Pickford after Bryan Mbeumo controlled Matheus Cunha’s incredible long ball and threw a perfectly weighted pass to his feet. Michael Carrick, United’s interim coach, remarked, “It was a great finish.” It was a brutal conclusion. I appreciated how confidently he put it away. Cunha and Mbeumo played brilliantly to put it up, and



we are dangerous when we break.

Defenses had dominated up until that point, and a thick pitch that seemed to slow down both teams did little to assist the lack of attacking fluency. United, in fourth position, now leads Chelsea and Liverpool by three points as a result of the outcome. Aston Villa was three points ahead of United. Additionally, it increased Carrick’s winning streak to six games since taking Ruben Amorim’s place on January 13. Everton’s chances of qualifying for the European tourna-

ments the following year were severely damaged by the loss, which placed the team in ninth place, eight points behind Chelsea and Liverpool and behind Brentford and Bournemouth. At their new Hill Dickinson Stadium, David Moyes’ team has lost seven straight games.

In general, we performed admirably in several areas, according to Moyes. “After we completed the counter-attack, they fled and scored the goal. We worked really hard to achieve the goal, but we weren’t good enough to make it matter.

What can India do to resurrect dreams of making the semifinals against Zimbabwe

New Delhi: For Suryakumar Yadav and the thousands of people who crowded the Narendra Modi Stadium on Sunday, a heartbreak in Ahmedabad felt like déjà vu. Before Keshav Maharaj’s triple strike in the fifteenth over put the last nail in the coffin, his dejected expression following his dismissal to Corbin Bosch off the first ball of the tenth over told it all. The feeling of déjà vu was more profound for the skipper of India. He had lost to Australia in the ODI World Cup final on November 19, 2023, at the same location, by the same score of 18.

The Indian team’s introspection following that defeat led to an undefeated run in the 2024 T20 World Cup and the 2025 Champions Trophy. Now that the run has over and India faces the prospect of elimination, it’s time to reflect once more. All is not lost, though. India’s two remaining Super 8 games are against Zimbabwe in Chennai on February 26. The team has already

reached Chennai and is scheduled to start training again on Tuesday. However, do they have to make drastic adjustments and hit the panic button? If they learned anything from the disastrous 2021 campaign, it’s to steer clear of a total structural change. Tactical recalibration is necessary instead. By beginning with off-spin, opponents have achieved early success. India is aware of this, yet in their last three games, they have lost two wickets to spin in the first over—Ishan Kishan once and Abhishek Sharma twice—all for ducks. If India continues to use two left-handed openers, Zimbabwe will probably do the same with Sikandar Raza or Brian Bennett. Sanju Samson is the right-hander that India needs to upset that strategy. In the group stage, he made his lone debut against Namibia, scoring a quick 22 off eight balls when Abhishek was out. Samson might go on strike if Zimbabwe starts out with spin. Abhishek might respond with his innate fe-



rocity if they change tactics and give the ball to Blessing Muzarabani. Tilak Varma, who has amassed 107 runs off 90 balls with a strike rate of 119 and a top score of 31 off 27 deliveries, will have a difficult time being selected at No. 3. Ishan recently scored a century and a 32-ball 76 while batting at No.

3 in the home series against New Zealand. In the IPL, he performs the same function for Sunrisers Hyderabad. To ensure that India sticks to the right-left combination, Ishan’s elevation should be contingent on which opener is dropped first. Suryakumar must anchor the innings in the face of repeated early

collapses, even if he needs come in earlier than normal.

He will have to deal with Brad Evans and Muzarabani, Zimbabwe’s pace pair, who can challenge him with slower variations and hard lengths. Shivam Dube could be moved to No. 5 to increase his potency against spin if Chennai offers turn.

Will West Indies target India’s spin weakness? Captain Hope keeps everyone guessing still

New Delhi: Will the West Indies unleash their potent spin attack on an Indian team that is reeling at the moment? This was the question Shai Hope was asked during the press conference right after the Zimbabwe win and the Windies skipper decided to keep everyone guessing. The question was raised after Roston Chase was missing from the playing XI during the victory against Zimbabwe at the Wankhede Stadium as Akeal Hosein and Gudakesh Motie ran through the lineup, picking up a total of seven wickets between them. In fact, Motie, Hosein, and Chase combined to provide West Indies with 19 wickets during the tournament. India’s struggle against spin, especially off-spin, has been laid bare during all their matches so far, with Aryan Dutt, Salman Ali Agha, and Aiden Markram, enjoying success in the very first over against the Indian batters. Saim Ayub and Gerhard Erasmus picked up three and four wickets respectively during the matches against India.

The rest of the spinners haven’t allowed India’s star-studded getaway to explosive starts with Kes-hav Maharaj picking up three wickets in the recent loss to South Africa. Speaking to reporters, Hope was asked if Chase was being kept under wraps for the India clash, and Hope decided to remain coy on his return. “Got to wait and see, who knows,” said Hope. When pressed further, the Windies captain told everyone to stay tuned for the match against India in Kolkata on March 1, which could turn out to be a do-or-die fixture for both teams. “Like I said, when I flick the toss and hand in my team, then we all know who is playing on that day – so stay tuned,” said Hope. West Indies have remained unbeaten alongside South Africa in the ongoing tournament, with them putting on 254 against Zimbabwe, the second-highest score in T20 World Cups. The Windies skipper said his side aren’t chasing records, but just aiming to get better by playing their best cricket.



“We’ve got South Africa next, and then India after. So we’ve got to keep playing our best cricket. If we can get better, continue getting better. If we’re doing well, continue doing it,” said Hope. West Indies will face South Africa in their next Group 8 game in Ahmedabad on Thursday, February 26. West Indies captain Shai Hope has kept the availability of Roston Chase uncertain for the upcoming Super 8 clash against India in Kolkata. While Chase was left out of the playing XI during the recent victory over Zimbabwe, Hope has remained coy about whether the all-rounder is being specifically reserved for the match on March 1.

The decision regarding the final lineup will only be revealed at the toss, as the West Indies consider their strategy to exploit India’s noted struggles against off-spin. West Indies spinners, including Gudakesh Motie and Akeal Hosein, have been in excellent form, and the potential return of Chase

could further bolster a spin attack that has collectively taken 19 wickets during the T20 World Cup 2026. India’s vulnerability to off-spin has become a significant structural flaw in their T20 World Cup 2026 campaign, stalling their scoring rates and leading to frequent top-order collapses. Despite an unbeaten group stage, the team is scoring at just 6.23 runs per over against off-spin, a rate better only than associate nations Nepal and Oman. The struggle is intensified by a top-heavy lineup featuring six left-handers in the top eight, which opposition captains have exploited by using off-spinners early and persistently. This weakness was exposed by Namibia’s Gerhard Erasmus and further punished in the Super 8s by South Africa and the Netherlands, where openers like Abhishek Sharma have repeatedly fallen to spin in the powerplay. “Like I said, when I flick the toss and hand in my team, then we all know who is playing on that day. Hope.

ICC Announces Complete Schedule and Fixtures For Women’s T20 World Cup 2026 Tournament



New Delhi: The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday unveiled the complete schedule for the ICC Women’s T20 World Cup 2026, featuring all 12 participating teams. Hosts England will square off against Sri Lanka in the opening fixture on June 12. The 10th edition of the competition will take place from June 12 to July 5 this year, with 12 teams vying for the title in what is the biggest field in

the tournament’s history so far, as per the ICC website. Bangladesh, Ireland, Scotland and the Netherlands were the final four teams to book their spot at the event, progressing via the ICC Women’s T20 World Cup Qualifier in Nepal last month.

The four qualifying sides now join the likes of defending champions New Zealand, hosts and winners of the inaugural Edition in 2009, England, 2016 winners,

West Indies, current ODI World Cup winners in India, and six-time tournament winners Australia. Hosts England take on Sri Lanka in the tournament opener on June 12, while Ireland and Scotland begin their campaign against each other in an all-European clash at Old Trafford on June 13. When England face off against Scotland at Headingley on June 20, it will mark the first time that the two teams meet at an ICC event on English turf. Ireland and Scotland are placed in Group B, along with England, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and the West Indies. Meanwhile, Group A features Australia, India, Pakistan, South Africa, Bangladesh and the Netherlands. The Dutch side will be making their ICC Women’s T20 World Cup debut and open their campaign against Bangladesh, who remained unbeaten in the qualifying tournament. “The release of the schedule for the ICC Women’s T20 World Cup 2026 is an important milestone in the run-up to the global, premier sporting event,” ICC CEO Sanjog Gupta said. “This event is in continuation of ICC’s sustained investment in women’s Cricket – across expanded participation and high-performance pathways, event and production Gupta said. This event is in continuation of ICC’s Sustained investment in women’s.

Tilak Varma Receives Advice From Former India Batter, Encouraged to Play Like Virat Kohli Amid Poor Form

Kaif Urges Tilak Varma Stick to Original Anchor Gameplan

New Delhi: Former India batter Mohammed Kaif has told Tilak Varma to play the Virat Kohli role in T20Is as the southpaw continues to struggle in the ongoing T20 World Cup 2026. Tilak’s approach has been more of an anchor in the ICC event, as he has scored 107 runs in five matches at a strike rate of 118. However, during the South Africa Super 8 clash, the Indian batter tried to tweak his batting and ended up failing. Tilak tried to take on Marco Jansen and ended up nicking the ball straight to Quinton de Kock. He was criticised by Sunil Gavaskar for his approach in the match and Kaif echoed the same comments on his YouTube channel. The former cricketer said that the team management should tell Tilak to stick to his role of being the anchor for the team.

Tilak Varma has his own way of playing. He can afford to play with a slow strike rate. However, he got out while playing a big shot. There was pressure building on him for the strike rate. As



a player, you do keep track of what is being said. But it is the job of the management to ask the player to stick to his role. He should play Virat Kohli’s role. He moved away from his gameplan by stepping out and going for a big shot. You’ll never be able to play if you listen to what others are saying,” said Kaif. Kaif also pointed out that India has an abundance of attacking options, making it vital for Tilak to anchor the innings and take it deep. To become a chase master, you will have to first bat till the 20th over. Tilak Varma got out early, trying to hit. What is your role? Abhishek Shar-

ma, Ishan Kishan, Washington Sundar, Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, and Rinku Singh play attacking cricket. There should be at least one player who takes the game deep,” said Kaif. Tilak is expected to be in action during India’s must-win clash against Zimbabwe in Chennai on Thursday, February 26. Mohammed Kaif advised Tilak Varma to embrace an anchoring role similar to Virat Kohli, urging him to ignore external pressure regarding his strike rate. Kaif suggested that with several attacking players in the lineup, Varma should focus on taking the game deep and

sticking to his natural game-play.

The advice followed Varma’s dismissal against South African the Super 8 stage, where he was out for one run after attempting an aggressive shot. Kaif and Sunil Gavaskar both noted that Varma’s shift away from his usual steady approach contributed to his poor form during the T20 World Cup 2026. In the T20 World Cup 2026, attacking players like Suryakumar Yadav serve as the aggressive “heartbeat” of India’s T20 strategy, tasked with disrupting opposition bowlers through a high-impact, 360-degree range of strokes. As both captain and a premier batter, Yadav is expected to maintain white-ball aggression while providing a calming influence that allows the team to execute Gautam Gambhir’s tactical vision. Under Gambhir’s leadership, India has utilized a flexible batting order where most players—aside from the openers—are expected to adapt their roles based on the match situa-

Rajasthan Sisters Reject Ghoonghat, Football Inspires Village Girls to Resist Child Marriage

Chandigarh: In Padampur village of Rajasthan, sisters Nisha Vaishnav, 14, and Munna, 18, noticed a family photographing them, during football practice. They were scouting a bride for their son. Despite India’s legal marriage age of 18 for women, about 23 per cent were married before turning 18, according to the latest National Family Health Survey. In Rajasthan, these figures often sit well above the national average. The family later visited the sisters’ home to finalise a proposal. “My mother asked me to touch their feet as a mark of respect,” Nisha told BBC. “I refused.”

The sisters’ ability to say ‘no’ in a conservative environment was powered by the purpose instilled in them by Football for Freedom. It is an initiative by the Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti, which uses football as a transformative tool to empower girl child in rural Rajasthan. Since 2016, the programme has trained



800 girls across 13 villages in Rajasthan. It is claimed that child marriage of 72 girls were prevented under this programme. For the sisters, the sport became a way to escape social pressures. Munna joined the programme first, later introducing Nisha to the game

In 2022. Initially, Munna had to challenge norms just to wear shorts on field instead of conservative clothing, facing criticism from local women for “exposing their legs”.

Nisha soon earned a spot on the Rajasthan women’s football team at the 2024 National

Football Championship. She even cut her hair short, defying local expectations to keep the hair long and cover faces with a ‘ghoonghat’ in the presence of men. Child marriage remains a stubborn reality despite being illegal. “In our community,

CCI Brabourne Stadium Set to Host Indian Open Squash Championship 2026 from March 18 to 22



New Delhi: The iconic CCI Brabourne Stadium will host the second edition of the Indian Open, a PSA Copper event, from March 18 to 22, 2026, with tickets for the tournament now live. Recognised by the Professional Squash Association, the Indian Open has rapidly established itself on the international calendar. Its 2025 edition was named among the Top 10 Iconic PSA Events of the year, underlining the tournament’s growing stature and organisational standards. The 2026 edition will be headlined by

defending women’s champion Anahat Singh, who returns to lead a strong Indian contingent. The home challenge will feature some of the country’s top professionals, including Ramit Tandon, Abhay Singh, Veer Chotrani, Velavan Senthilkumar and Joshna Chinappa.

They will be joined by international contenders such as Yahya Elnawasany, Hana Moataz and Mazen Hesham, promising a fiercely competitive week of world-class squash in Mumbai. In a significant milestone, the 2026 tournament will

carry a prize purse of USD 44,500 each for both the men’s and women’s events, marking the first time an Indian squash tournament has offered equal prize money at this level. As a PSA Copper event, the competition continues to enhance its standing on the professional circuit. Cyrus Poncha, Secretary General of the Squash Rackets Federation of India, said the event has become an important platform for domestic players. The Indian Open has quickly become a key stop on the PSA calendar, giving Indian play-

brought together top Indian and international players and highlighted the rising standards of Indian squash. With squash set to make its Olympic debut at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games, this is a pivotal moment for the sport in India. Platforms like the JSW Indian Open become even more significant, giving our players the opportunity to compete at the highest level on home soil as they build towards that global stage. With tickets now live, we look forward to welcoming fans to CCI Brabourne Stadium, building on the success of last season at Bombay Gymkhana, as they witness top-level squash and support the next generation of Indian talent. Manisha Malhotra, President of the Inspire Institute of Sport, said, “Last year reaffirmed the importance of Indian players competing against top international talent on home soil, with the tournament emerging as a key platform for rising athletes to test themselves at the highest level. This year, we look forward to packed stands, high-intensity matches, and celebrating the continued rise of squash in India as more players make their mark globally.”



Mumbai: The Indian Open has announced the dates for its upcoming 2026 edition, with the tournament set to take place from 18-22 March in Mumbai. Following last year’s success at the iconic Bombay Gymkhana, the event will now move to the historic CCI Brabourne Stadium for its second edition, as per a release from Indian Open. Recognised by the Professional Squash Association (PSA), the tournament builds on the momentum of its 2025 edition, which was recognised among the Top 10 Iconic PSA Events of the year, a significant milestone for professional squash in India and a reflection of the event’s growing stature on the international calendar. The 2026 edition will see defending women’s champion

Anahat Singh return to headline the draw. Also featuring in the 2026 line-up are India’s top professionals Ramit Tandon, Abhay Singh, Veer Chotrani, Velavan Senthilkumar and Joshna Chinappa, in addition to international contenders Yahya Elnawasany, Hana Moataz, Mazen Hesham and others, setting the stage for a highly competitive week of world-class squash. This year’s edition will also carry a prize purse of \$44,500 each for both the men’s and women’s events, another first for a tournament in India. As a PSA Copper event, it further underscores the tournament’s stature on the professional squash circuit. Divyanshu Singh, CEO of JSW Sports, said, “We are very happy with the response to last year’s edition, which