

Scindia launches projects of Rs 540 crore in Tripura

Over 12 years, Rs 6.5 lakh crore was invested in the northeast

Guwahati, Jan 25: During his visit to Tripura on January 23, Union Minister for Development of the North Eastern Region (DoNER) Jyotiraditya Scindia stated that the Center would invest Rs 6.5 lakh crore in the Northeast over the next 12 years under the Gross Budgetary Support (GBS). During his visit to Tripura, the Minister made the statement while laying the groundwork for important infrastructure projects. In addition to officially launching and laying the groundwork for eight significant development projects totaling Rs 365 crore, Scindia came to the state to launch projects worth Rs 540 crore. The projects are intended to improve energy availability, increase tourism, improve road connectivity, and hasten the overall development of Tripura's trib-

al areas. Speaking to the crowd, the Union Minister stated that the Northeast is now regarded as an engine of India's development rather than a peripheral area under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Ashtalakshmi" vision.

According to him, the region is on an exceptional development trajectory thanks to targeted investments and well-coordinated planning. The Jatanbari-Mandirghat via Tirathmukh Road, which spans 13.775 km, and the renovation of the KA Road from Erarpar to Ambassa, which spans 28.90 km, are two of the five completed projects totaling Rs 270 crore. According to Scindia, new roads will boost the local economy and greatly facilitate movement between villages, marketplaces, schools, and hospitals. He emphasized the importance of the

Gandacherra-Raishyabari-Narikel Kunja Road, an 8 km project aimed at enhancing connectivity for tribal areas to district headquarters and vital services, thereby improving social inclusion. Improved connectivity from Amarpur to Chabimura in Gomati district was noted as a boost for Tripura's tourism, creating livelihood opportunities for local guides and artisans. Under the PM-DevINE scheme, the Solar Micro Grid project aims to provide clean electricity in remote areas, strengthening education and healthcare. The Minister also laid the groundwork for three new road projects worth Rs 95 crore, ensuring connectivity for hilly regions. He highlighted that each Central Ministry is allocating 10% of its budget to the Northeastern states, aiding infrastruc-



ture and social development, and praised the coordination between the Central and Tripura state governments. Additionally, the Union

Minister plans to inspect various development sites and pray at the Mata Tripura Sundari Temple for the state's prosperity.

In Brief

Kamakhya ropeway project

Guwahati: The Assam government is advancing pilgrimage infrastructure through the Rs 213.24 crore Kamakhya Ropeway Project, aimed at improving access to the Maa Kamakhya Temple while safeguarding spiritual heritage. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma described it as enhancing "sacred journeys." The 1.43-kilometre ropeway will connect Kamakhya Railway Station to the shrine, reducing travel time from 20 minutes to six. Designed to handle over 16,500 passengers with 18 gondolas, it promises to ease traffic and boost local employment and tourism, reinforcing Assam's integration of modern infrastructure with its spiritual traditions.

Temple idols vandalised

Guwahati: Unidentified individuals vandalized idols at several temples in and around Mangaldai, including Mowamari and Gerimari, raising concerns among local residents. Reports indicate that multiple temples were targeted, with the heads of Goddess Kali idols found severed, suggesting a coordinated pattern of vandalism. Residents suspect that the act might have been premeditated and executed by an organized group, as it would be challenging for a small number of people to carry out such widespread damage in a single night. There are fears that this incident could be aimed at inciting communal discord and unrest. Local police responded promptly, initiating an investigation, and have increased security in sensitive areas while working to identify the perpetrators.

Stranded rhino calf rescued

Guwahati: A male rhinoceros calf was rescued from Kaziranga National Park in Assam on January 22 after being stranded. Detected on January 21 in the Buraphar range, forest personnel, aided by elephants, thermal drones, and staff, searched for the mother for over 24 hours but were unsuccessful. Due to concerns for the calf's welfare, it was decided to rescue it, and the calf was transported to the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation for specialized care and rehabilitation.

Visa-free movement

Itanagar: A rare instance of cross-border travel at the Pangsau Pass International Festival in Arunachal Pradesh allowed Indian visitors to enter Myanmar without travel documents, emphasizing cultural ties in the region. The three-day event attracted thousands and featured local performances and cuisine, fostering community exchange. Arunachal Pradesh Tourism Minister PD Sona highlighted the importance of hospitality in tourism growth, stating personal experiences are crucial for promotion over conventional advertising.

24x7 drinking water supply

Aizawl: The Mizoram government will soon start a pilot project to provide continuous drinking water supply to approximately 300 households in Aizawl, funded by the Rs 5.24 crore Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0 scheme. Public Health Engineering Minister Lalnilawma announced this on January 22, with the project expected to be completed within four to six months. The initiative includes the installation of smart water meters and a new pipeline network, utilizing IoT and SCADA for monitoring and efficient distribution. Ultrasonic indicators and automated valves will also be used to manage water levels and flow. The minister urged residents to conserve water and mentioned the launch of an Android app, 'Tui Leak,' for reporting leaks, while also noting that proposals for additional projects have faced delays due to land and environmental issues.

Centre committed to northeast's holistic growth

Kohima, Jan 25: Union Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Social Justice and Empowerment, B L Verma, reaffirmed the government's commitment to the Northeast's development during his visit to Nagaland on January 21. He noted significant transformation in the region over the past decade, highlighting advancements in infrastructure, social welfare, and healthcare since 2014. His inspections included reviews of fair price shops, Anganwadi centers focused on child nutrition and maternal health, and the Centre for Disease Control and Cancer Treatment at the Christian Institute of Health Sciences and Research. Verma emphasized that improvements in road connectivity, healthcare infrastructure, and welfare service delivery have enhanced access to essential services for citizens. He reiterated the Union government's dedication to inclusive and sustainable development, particularly in remote and border areas, and stressed the importance of strengthening institutional capacity and accelerating project execution to ensure development benefits reach grassroots levels.

50,000 hectares of rubber can be grown in Mizoram : CM Lalduhoma

Aizawl, Jan 25: On January 24, Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma stated that the state had around 50,000 hectares of land ideal for rubber cultivation, highlighting the government's strategy to expand rubber plantations and establish Mizoram as a significant rubber-producing state. He said this while touring rubber fields in the north-west Mamit district's

Chungtlang hamlet. According to the Chief Minister, rubber is native to Mizoram and was first organized in 1982 thanks to a government initiative. He pointed out that rubber was grown on roughly 3,025 hectares under various government programs prior to the Zoram People's Movement administration taking power in December 2023. Lalduhoma said the state

government has now set an ambitious target under the Chief Minister's Rubber Mission, aiming to bring 11,500 hectares under rubber plantations over the next five years. As part of the initiative, the government has already sanctioned the purchase of 100 rubber roller machines along with tapping tools to support farmers and plantation workers.

Meghalaya CM denounces the attack on an Odisha Christian preacher

Shillong, Jan 25: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma has condemned the assault on Pastor Bipin Bihari Naik in Odisha, deeming it a "grave violation of the constitutional rights" of Indian citizens. The incident, which occurred in early January, involved the pastor being forced to eat cow dung and chant slogans, with police detaining nine suspects on January 21 after a complaint was filed by the victim's wife due to inaction at the local police station.

Reports indicated that the pastor was paraded publicly, garlanded with slippers, before being handed over to the police.

Bhatka Charan Das, president of the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee, criticized the attack as a shameful act against constitutional rights and highlighted the government's inaction as indicative of a leniency towards hate crimes. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India characterized the violence as a significant breach of human dignity and religious freedom.



They expressed deep concern over such violence, emphasizing that it undermines individual dignity and faith. The CBCI criticized the delay in action and urged authorities to ensure justice and protect citizens' rights regardless of their religious beliefs, while calling for a collective rejection of violence and a commitment to peace and harmony in the society.

Debabrata Saikia speaks up about the accusations made by the BJP “We all follow party ideology”

Guwahati, Jan 25 : Debabrata Saikia, the leader of the opposition in the Assam Legislative Assembly, denied allegations that he was prevented from speaking to the media without first receiving permission from high-ranking members of the Congress. Saikia dismissed the BJP's story as a calculated attempt to cause confusion ahead of significant political developments, claiming that all Congress officials adhere closely to the party's internal policies and beliefs. On January 23, BJP spokesperson Sanjib Sarma asserted that Saikia had been told not to speak to the media without written consent from Dhubri MP Rokibul Hussain, which sparked the dispute.

Over the past few days, the accusation has gone viral, es-

pecially after prominent Assam Congress officials met Rahul Gandhi in New Delhi. Breaking his silence, Saikia clarified that adherence to party discipline is a collective responsibility and not a sign of internal discord. "We speak in accordance with the party's ideology and principles. This applies equally to me and to Rokibul Hussain."

Everyone in the party follows the same guidelines," Saikia told reporters. Launching a counterattack, the Congress leader accused the BJP of indulging in vote-centric politics by targeting minority communities. He alleged that BJP leaders were attempting to influence electoral outcomes by questioning the citizenship of minorities and pushing for the deletion of names from electoral rolls. "B-



JP leaders are trying to delete names from the voter list by branding minority communities as foreigners," Saikia said, while

asserting the historical roots of these communities. He added that the descendants of Azan Pir have been residing in his constituency

since well before India attained Independence, calling the BJP's claims both misleading and divisive.

NE/EAST

Tripura Congress denounces the purported assault on Shankaracharya

Agartala, Jan 25: On January 21, the Tripura Pradesh Congress organized a protest march in Agartala to denounce the Uttar Pradesh police administration’s alleged attack on holy monks and Jagatguru Shankaracharya. Congressmen set fire to effigies of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the protest near Orient Chowmuni. Sudip Roy Barman, a Tripura MLA and senior Congress politician, led the demonstration and spoke to the media. The Uttar Pradesh government’s dedication to preserving religious customs was questioned by Sudip Roy Barman. “Those in charge of this Uttar Pradesh episode cannot claim to be defenders of traditional religion. He claimed that this episode has shown them to be political merchants and hypocrites. The Congress MLA launched a scathing attack on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the federal government, claiming that the current government had destroyed or damaged several old temples. He said that idols of Lord Ram and Lord Hanuman were dragged by bulldozers and that a 1,300–1,400-year-old Ram temple in Delhi was destroyed. Barman also claimed that holy buildings in Kashi had been damaged, including an idol of Lord Ganesh and a Shivling. He accused the central government of permitting widespread destruction of religious heritage over the previous 11 years, saying, “Even Aurangzeb did not destroy so many temples.” Additionally, he charged that the government in power was deceiving the people. “In the last



11 years, this government has turned some fools into blind devotees and blind devotees into fools. This is how they want to rule the country,” Barman claimed. Criticising organisations such as the RSS and Bajrang Dal, he alleged that they benefit from and help sustain the current government.

Protesters block IndoMyanmar Sugnu road



Imphal, Jan 25: Tensions rose in Manipur on January 22 as residents of Kakching Khunou blocked the Indo–Myanmar Sugnu Road to protest the alleged kidnapping and murder of Meitei civilian Mayanglambam Rishikanta Singh. His family reported that he was abducted on January 21 in Churachandpur by suspected Kuki militants. The blockade was enacted immediately following the news, with demands for justice and enhanced civilian security amidst ongoing ethnic conflict. Rishikanta, who had recently returned from Nepal, was married to a Kuki woman. His wife claimed he was forcibly taken by armed men and later shot. A formal police complaint has prompted an investigation into the incident, while authorities called for public calm during the process.

“Nagaland–Japan Connect 2026” will take place in Nagaland

Kohima, Jan 25: Nagaland–Japan Connect 2026 is an initiative organized by the Government of Nagaland, through the Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN) and the Centre of Excellence for Foreign Languages (CoEFL), aimed at enhancing investment and promoting cooperation between Nagaland and Japan. This initiative arises from a delegation led by Chief Minister Dr. Neiphiu Rio to Japan, where key agreements with Japanese officials and companies were established. It marks the beginning of a Government-to-Government partnership formalized in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with Kochi Prefecture, focusing on human resource exchange, agricultural technology collaboration, and strategic partnerships. Nagaland–Japan Connect 2026 emphasizes human capital development as pivotal for employability and economic participation, integrating skill development, foreign language training, recruitment facilitation, and cultural exchange. The CoEFL, which launched the Japanese

The Government of Nagaland, through the Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN), in collaboration with the Centre of Excellence for Foreign Languages (CoEFL) and key institutional partners, will organise Nagaland–Japan Connect 2026, an initiative aimed at promoting investment by strengthening people-to-people ties, shared opportunities and long-term cooperation between Nagaland and Japan.

language program in collaboration with ARMS Incorporation, plays a crucial role in equipping Naga youth with language skills and fostering links for overseas employment. The initiative has already positively impacted income generation and remittance inflows for the state, enhancing local economic welfare. The event will include career opportunity sessions in various sectors, job interviews with Japanese companies, testimonials, cultural programs, and business-to-government interactions. The goal is to provide Nagaland’s youth with pathways to global careers and professional development.

Arunachal festival opens rare visa-free crossing Into Myanmar through Pangsau Pass

Imphal, Jan 25: A rare and unusual moment of cross-border movement was witnessed in eastern Arunachal Pradesh during the recent Pangsau Pass International Festival, where Indian visitors were allowed to walk a short distance into neighbouring Myanmar without passports or visas. The temporary arrangement drew wide attention and highlighted the long-standing cultural links between communities living along the India–Myanmar border. The three-day festival was held at Nampong in Changlang district and attracted thousands of visitors from different parts of Arunachal Pradesh and neighbouring states. The main attraction of the event was Pangsau Pass, a high-altitude mountain corridor located along the international boundary. During the festival, special local permissions allowed visitors to cross the border briefly, under supervision, without formal travel documents. Officials said the arrangement was symbolic in nature and was meant to showcase people-to-people ties that have



existed in the region for generations. Communities on both sides of the border share common traditions, food habits and cultural practices, much older than modern political boundaries. Addressing the gathering, PD Sona, the Tourism Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, said tourism does not grow only through buildings and roads. He said the behaviour and warmth of local people play the biggest role in attracting visitors. “Tourism grows with people, not just infrastructure. If hospitality fails, everything collapses,” he said, comparing tourism to a balloon that bursts with a single pin.

Odisha and Meghalaya sign a Memorandum Boost early childhood care and development

Shillong, Jan 25: The governments of Odisha and Meghalaya signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on Tuesday aimed at enhancing early childhood care, education, and development through mutual collaboration and learning. The agreement was enacted by Sampath Kumar, Principal Secretary of Meghalaya’s Community and Rural Development Department, and Ananta Narayan Singh Laguri, Additional Secretary of Odisha’s Women and Child Development Department. The MoU focuses on improving comprehensive early childhood interventions that address nutrition, health, early learning, responsive caregiving, community involvement, and institu-



tional capacity building. It establishes a structured framework for knowledge exchange, joint research initiatives, exposure visits, and the documentation of best practices. Furthermore, it emphasizes the capacity development of officials and frontline workers across different levels. This partnership aims to leverage Odisha’s experiences with commu-

nity-based and culturally adept programs while also integrating Meghalaya’s innovative strategies for delivering social sector services, especially in tribal and difficult geographical areas. Officials anticipate that this collaboration will foster a reciprocal learning process that bolsters early childhood developmental outcomes in both states.

At WEF Davos, Assam obtains investment commitments worth Rs 1 lakh crore

Guwahati, Jan 25: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced on Wednesday that Assam had received investment commitments of Rs 1 lakh crore during its inaugural attendance at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos. He described the accomplishment as a significant turning point for the state’s international economic involvement. The Chief Minister told PTI that Assam’s attendance at Davos has been eye-opening and has helped establish the state as a rising investment destination, especially for the Northeast. He said that just a few hours after the state’s participation in the international event, the investment promises were obtained. Assam is currently the fastest-growing state in the nation, according to Sarma, who highlighted the state’s economic trajectory.

The state has consistently grown at a pace of 13% during the previous five years, and forecasts point to similar performance in the near future. Although our economy is still modest, it is currently expanding more quickly. He stated, “The Prime Minister has been advocating for Assam and the Northeastern area as a whole. The Chief Minister revealed that Tata Semiconductor is anticipated to start chip production at its Assam facility within the next two to three months



and mentioned that Assam has built the groundwork for a greenfield chemical complex and a bio-gas factory. According to him, these changes highlight the state’s expanding industrial base. Sarma went on to say that the Assam administration spoke with a number of international leaders during the Davos summit and that the state’s potential is highly sought after in a number of areas. He emphasized that in order to turn international interest into long-term investments, continued participation over the next three to four years will be essential. The Chief Minister claims that high-value industries that complement the state’s

advantages—such as energy, green energy, solar storage, hydrocarbons, semiconductors, and electronics—are the emphasis of Assam’s investment strategy. He pointed out that because of Assam’s distinct topography and resource profile, energy is especially important. Reflecting on changing perceptions, Sarma said that earlier Assam was largely known for products such as tea and the one-horned rhinoceros, but is now being increasingly recognised as a viable investment destination. “People are listening and want to understand the potential and how they can invest here,” he said. Terming Assam a very important

destination in the national economic landscape, Sarma said the Prime Minister’s consistent advocacy for the state has helped bring it to the global spotlight. He expressed confidence about Assam’s future and said the ₹1 lakh crore investment commitment marks a strong foundation for long-term economic growth. Asked whether such global exposure would have been possible during earlier regimes, Sarma remarked that projecting Assam on the global stage in this manner was unthinkable in the past. He credited the Prime Minister’s vision and commitment towards the Northeastern region for making Assam’s debut at WEF Davos possible.

Voter list under scrutiny after Form 7 abuse is reported by the BLO in Sribhumi, Assam

Guwahati, Jan 25: The integrity of the voter list updating process has been called into question by a shocking revelation made by a Booth Level Officer (BLO), sparking a new discussion about electoral accountability and transparency. An alleged pattern of bogus complaints being used to remove names from electoral records, frequently without the knowledge or approval of the voters in question, has been revealed by the comments made by a government school teacher assigned to election duties. Chumna Rahman Choudhury, a primary school teacher at Choudhuribazar



Primary School and currently a BLO, has claimed that dubious methods are being used to file complaints requesting the removal of voter names in the names of alleged “bogus voters.” She claims that a number of these com-

plaints had signatures that seem to be both handwritten and partially printed, casting doubt on their veracity. Even more concerning, she asserted that the people in whose names these complaints are filed frequently have no idea that such statements have been made. Choudhury emphasized the seriousness of the situation and warned that improper use of Form 7, the legitimate procedure for removing names from the electoral roll, might have dire and far-reaching repercussions. Voters whose names are erased may hold election officials personally accountable, she cautioned, and BLOs

who respond to such questionable accusations may suffer public outrage. The statement, which has been widely circulated on social media, has sparked intense reactions in Sribhumi, with political observers, civil society members, and local residents expressing concern over the credibility of the electoral revision process. The revelations have renewed calls for stricter scrutiny, greater transparency, and safeguards to prevent misuse of electoral procedures, especially in a politically sensitive climate where voter lists play a decisive role in democratic outcomes.

NGT takes suo motu cognisance of alleged illegal road construction

The eastern zonal bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in Kolkata has taken suo motu cognisance of an alleged illegal road construction in environmentally sensitive catchment areas of Papum Pare district in Arunachal Pradesh, following a report published in a local daily last year.



Itanagar, Jan 25: In response to a report that appeared in a local daily last year, the National Green Tribunal’s (NGT) eastern zonal court in Kolkata has taken suo motu cognisance of an alleged unlawful road building in environmentally sensitive catchment areas of Papum Pare district in Arunachal Pradesh. The bench, which was made up of expert member Dr. Afroz Ahmad and judicial member Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi, looked into the April 22 news report that claimed road construction was taking place in sensitive catchment areas between Ganga-Taipu and Ganga-Tago without sufficient environmental protections. Given the gravity of the accusations, the tribunal determined that effective adjudication

required the presence of the Public Works Department through its secretary and commissioner, as well as the state of Arunachal Pradesh through the principal secretary of the Environment, Forest, and Climate Change Department. As a result, both departments have been included in the case as responders. In response to SD Loda and Techit Kumar Tyagi, looked into the April 22 news report that claimed road construction was taking place in sensitive catchment areas between Ganga-Taipu and Ganga-Tago without sufficient environmental protections. Given the gravity of the accusations, the tribunal determined that effective adjudication

ings. The matter has been posted for further consideration on March 27. According to the news report, the alleged road construction has raised concerns among environmental observers and local residents due to the fragile nature of the catchment areas involved. The report highlighted fears of landslides, disruption of natural water flow, and long-term ecological damage if such activities continue without statutory clearances. The publication also underscored the need for strict compliance with environmental norms in hill districts such as Papum Pare, where unregulated infrastructure projects can have serious environmental consequences.

BJP national president Nitin Nabin is invited to visit the state by the chief minister of Tripura

Agartala, Jan 25: Dr. Manik Saha, the chief minister of Tripura, has extended an invitation to Nitin Nabin, the recently elected national president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), to visit the state and discuss ways to bolster the party. Regarding the meeting, Dr. Saha said he invited Nabin on behalf of Tripura and congratulated him on taking over the party’s top position. He pointed out that although the BJP president’s term is

typically three years, no extension was given this time, making the change noteworthy. “Nitin Nabin has assumed the role of national president after a protracted absence. I congratulated him and invited him to Tripura. He has earlier visited the North East, including Tripura, several times for party work. Now, as the All India president, I am confident he will visit the state,” Dr Saha said. The chief minister said their discussions



focused on key organisational issues, with an emphasis on strengthening the BJP’s presence and functioning in Tripura. “Although my visit to his residence was brief, the discussion was meaningful. He provided guidance

on several fronts. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasised, under his leadership, the party and the government will work together to realise the vision of a ‘Viksit Bharat’,” Dr Saha added.

UP government seizes the Sambhal home of a businessman from Dubai



Lucknow, Jan 25: The Sambhal home of a Dubai-based businessman, whom the Uttar Pradesh government accused of being the mastermind of the November 24, 2024, violence that claimed four lives, was seized on Wednesday. According to the local government, Shakir Satha, a used vehicle dealer from the Gulf nation, was the mastermind behind the plot, and his Deepa Sarai home was attached per court orders. “He was the mastermind of the violence,” stated Dharendra Kumar, a local tehsildar who oversaw a group of police and tax department officials that seized Satha’s home.

Despite living in Dubai, he devised a plan to start a communal fire in Sambhal. “He was the mastermind of the violence,” stated Dharendra Kumar, a local tehsildar who oversaw a group of police and tax department officials that seized Satha’s home. Despite living in Dubai, he devised a plan to start a communal fire in Sambhal. Because he ignored our numerous summonses, we had petitioned the court for permission to seize his home. According to local sources, Satha has lived in Dubai with his family for ten years and travels to India every two to three years. He is last reported to have visited India in 2022. Tension had been brewing in Sambhal since November 19, 2024, when a court-ordered survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid was carried out following claims that a Harihar temple previously stood at the site before it was demolished during Aurangzeb’s rule. On November 24, during a second round of the survey, protesting locals clashed with security personnel, which led to the death of four per-

sons and injuries to dozens. Muslims had claimed that some people accompanying the surveyors had chanted “Jai Sri Ram” to provoke the minority community. Krishan Kumar Bishnoi, the superintendent of police of Sambhal, said after the process of attachment was completed on Wednesday: “We had identified Mullah Afroz, Mohammad Ghulam and Mohammad Waris for firing at the crowd.

They belong to a group of criminals run by Satha from Dubai. He had provided them with weapons. During interrogation, the trio spoke about Satha’s role in the violence. He did not respond to the summons, fearing arrest. Finally, we declared him an absconder.” Bishnoi said Satha was a vehicle thief and a gold smuggler, adding that cases were pending against him in Delhi as well. “We had recovered cartridges made in Pakistan and the US from the street behind the mosque after the violence. Our inquiry suggests that Satha had smuggled them to India,” the SP added.

This is the first attachment of property in connection with the November 2024 violence. Rajendra Pensiya, the district magistrate of Sambhal, said: “The bulldozer action and confiscation of properties will continue in the district.” Over 50 lawyers staged a demonstration on the Chandausi district court premises in Sambhal on Wednesday in protest against the transfer of chief judicial magistrate Vibhanshu Sudheer. He had ordered the police on January 9 to file an FIR against 22 policemen for firing at a crowd during the violence near Shahi Jama Masjid on November 24, 2024.

Assam government would return a state development loan of Rs 6.21 percent

Guwahati, Jan 25: For its 6.21 percent Assam State Development Loan (SDL) 2026, the Assam government has proposed a structured repayment plan that guarantees investors complete redemption at face value plus interest. A significant financial milestone for the state will be reached when the payback is due on February 17 and interest is due until February 16, 2026. The government verified that the loan, which was first raised in February 2021, will be fully redeemed upon maturity in an official press release published by the Finance (Budget) Department on January 20. After the payback date, no interest will be charged. If February 17, 2026, is designated as a holiday under the Negotiable Instruments Act, the repay-

ment will be advanced to the working day that comes right before. Depending on the banking details that are available with the authorities, the maturity proceeds will be distributed either by pay order or direct credit to the holders’ registered bank accounts. Investors have been advised to make sure that the State Bank of India (SBI) branch, the relevant bank, or the treasury office that currently handles their interest payments has the most recent information on their bank account. To enable prompt settlement, the government has mandated that securities be delivered to the Public Debt Office at least 20 days before the repayment date for holders whose bank account information is not on file. For redemption, all securities must

be duly signed and endorsed. The notification further clarified that in locations where treasury operations are handled by SBI branches, investors must submit their securities directly to the respective SBI branch rather than the treasury. Those seeking repayment at a location different from where their securities are registered have been instructed to forward the required documents to the Public Debt Office by registered and insured post. Reiterating its commitment to a smooth and timely repayment process, the Assam government has urged all holders of the 6.21 per cent Assam SDL 2026 to complete the necessary formalities well in advance to avoid delays in receiving their maturity proceeds.

Maharashtra government property is seized by a court

Mumbai, Jan 25: A court in Aurangabad has ordered the seizure of state government properties after the Maharashtra government failed to pay Rs 2.22 crore in compensation stemming from a land acquisition dispute that began in 2006. The Aurangabad Civil Court issued a directive on August 6, 2022, for the payment of Rs 2,22,61,019, but the compensation remains unpaid. The court has indicated that if the government does not immediately deposit the amount, it may confiscate vehicles and office furniture from the Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar Collector’s office. This decision follows several missed opportunities for the government to comply voluntarily with the court order. Officials



from the Minor Irrigation Department have acknowledged the court’s directive and have promised that the increased compensation will be paid to the affected farmers within eight weeks. They have also appealed for a pause in the seizure order to secure the necessary funds. However, the court stated that unless a stay order is obtained from a higher authority, the confiscation process of government assets should continue without delay.

Chandigarh mayoral race

Congress and AAP want to stop the BJP as open voting changes

Chandigarh, Jan 25:

The main difference this year in the Chandigarh mayoral race between the Congress and Aam Aadmi Party is not the political math, but rather the voting procedure. The mayor will be chosen by an open “show of hands” rather than a secret ballot for the first time in the city’s history. This change was implemented following years of controversy and accusations of manipulation. A sharply divided Municipal Corporation House and recollections of the tumultuous 2024 mayoral elections surround the one-time agree-

ment between the AAP and Congress. Although both sides maintain that this is not a formal alliance, coordination is necessary since the stakes are so high. The contest is looking to be a cliffhanger because the numbers are evenly matched.

With less than a week until the mayoral elections, all political groups are once again in a huddle. HS Lucky, the president of the Chandigarh Congress, described the connection with AAP as a “strategic understanding” rather than an alliance, acknowledging its complexities. He claimed

that cooperation was the only option available to the Congress. “The media will only accuse us of working hand in hand with the BJP if we don’t do this today,” Lucky stated. Congress is making sacrifices while questioning the BJP’s mandate. AAP councillor Kuldeep Kumar confirmed an understanding for the mayoral election, though final candidate decisions remain. He noted tight numbers, with both parties having 18 votes after recent defections. Kumar briefly served as mayor from February 20, 2024, to January 30, 2025, after



the Supreme Court overturned initial results due to ballot tampering by the returning officer, ending his term with the 2025 election. In the recent mayoral poll, BJP’s Harpreet Babla won with 19 votes, despite the BJP’s

lower numbers compared to the AAP and Congress coalition. Lucky criticized the BJP’s tactics, citing past governance issues and a controversial vote invalidation incident in 2024. To enhance transparency and prevent

fraud, new voting procedures will involve open ballots and media scrutiny for the upcoming election on January 29, which will be contested under tight conditions as AAP’s strength has diminished to 11 votes.

NITI Aayog recommends a five percent yearly increase in seats for international students at IITs and IIMs

New Delhi, Jan 25: According to a working paper by the government policy think tank NITI Aayog, institutions of national importance such as IITs, IIMs, NITs, and the Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs) should expand their seats by 5% annually in order to accept more international students. The recommendation, according to experts researching students’ international mobility, was more ceremonial in nature and unlikely to alter the trend of international students declining to study in India, which they attributed to “poor quality of education imparted by institutions in the country”. India’s student mobility trends between 2016 and 2022 show a more outward trajectory, according to the report Internationalization of Higher Education in India. While the number of international students visiting India stayed relatively constant, from 45,424 in 2016 to 46,878 in 2022, the number of Indians pursuing higher education overseas surged from 6.84 lakh in 2016 to 11.58 lakh in 2021. The proposal advocated for assigning teaching, research, or planning tasks to alumni of esteemed Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) who have achieved success in their fields. It claimed that domestic policy and funding cuts in top host nations for overseas students, such



the US, were causing a global reverse brain drain. Scholars and scientists are now seeking opportunities in other parts of the world. France has introduced the “Choose France for Science” initiative, and the Netherlands has established targeted funds to recruit foreign researchers. To capitalise on these geopolitical opportunities and for addressing the significant imbalance between outbound and inbound students, the paper suggested that India should aim to increase international student enrolment to at least 1.5 lakh by 2030 by focusing on key source regions such as the Southeast, Central and West Asia, Anglophone

Africa, Europe and Oceania. “Annual growth targets of 10% for high-potential states and 5% for INIs (top 100 NIRF) to increase international student enrolment may be provided. In addition, bilateral agreements that include provisions for reciprocal student exchange quotas with at least 15 countries may be initiated by 2027,” the paper said.

INIs refer to Institutions of National Importance and the NIRF is the National Institutional Ranking Framework. Internationally benchmarked academic programmes may be introduced across leading HEIs, particularly in fields of science, technology,

Policy paper flags widening out-bound trend and proposes alumni outreach global fellowships and international academic programmes to raise foreign enrolment to 1.5 lakh by 2030

engineering and mathematics, the paper proposed. India may also launch a prestigious international fellowship programme to attract high-quality talent and strengthen academic diplomacy, the paper suggested. The paper advocated a branding and outreach strategy to inform foreign academic institutions, professors, researchers and students about “affordable education, interdisciplinary curricula, cultural diversity, innovation and entrepreneurship potential, and low-cost high-impact research experience” in India. It suggested the creation of a network of leading alumni of Indian HEIs who could share practical knowledge with their respective alma mater on various aspects of institutional capacity that would help them attract international students. According to the existing government policy, the HEIs in India are allowed to create 15 per cent supernumerary seats to accommodate foreign students. In May 2025, the UGC asked universities to increase the number of supernumerary seats to 25 per cent of the total intake.

COCOMI condemns killing of Rishikanta, questions centre's handling of armed militants

Imphal, Jan 25: The Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) on Thursday strongly condemned the killing of Mayanglam-bam Rishikanta Singh and alleged that the Central government has failed to effectively control armed militant groups operating in Manipur, which continues to witness prolonged violence and unrest. Addressing a press conference at the COCOMI office, senior member Y. K. Dhiren described the killing as a brutal and tragic incident that has further shaken public confidence in the prevailing security system. He said the incident occurred at a time when several civil society organisations and peace groups have been making continuous efforts to restore normalcy in the state. “Despite sincere initiatives by civil society and peace groups, such a tragic and brutal incident has taken place. This is deeply unfortunate and reflects the worsening security situation,” Dhiren said while



addressing the media. COCOMI alleged that the Central government’s continued inaction has pushed the situation in Manipur beyond acceptable limits. Dhiren pointed out that more than 60,000 security personnel, including central and paramilitary forces, have been deployed across the state since the outbreak of violence. However, he questioned the effectiveness of this deployment in protecting civilians. “Even after such a massive deployment, armed militants are allegedly moving freely and using sophisticated weapons. The government appears to be a mute spectator instead of taking firm and decisive action,” he said, adding that civilian lives continue to be lost despite the heavy presence of security forces. The organi-

sation also raised concerns over the safety of ordinary people and questioned whether the existing security arrangement is serving its intended purpose. “If these forces are unable to safeguard innocent civilians, then their presence has little meaning,” Dhiren remarked, controversially suggesting that forces should withdraw and return only after conditions of peace and normalcy are ensured. COCOMI reiterated its demand for immediate and concrete steps by the Government of India to restore law and order, fix accountability, and ensure that those responsible for the killing are brought to justice. The organisation stressed that failure to act decisively could further deepen public anger and mistrust.

Arunachal’s Keyi Panyor district goes fully digital

Itanagar, Jan 25: Arunachal Pradesh’s newly established Keyi Panyor district has set a precedent for digital governance by fully digitizing government services, allowing citizens to access them directly via smartphones. Led by Deputy Commissioner Shweta Nagarkoti Mehta, IAS, the district has launched the Keyi Panyor Suvidha outreach campaign, which enables residents to utilize essential government services through WhatsApp. This initiative represents a transformational shift towards 100% digital and contactless service delivery, removing the necessity for physical visits to government offices, even for verification and signatures. Residents can apply for certificates and official documents online and obtain digitally signed copies immediately post-verification, a crucial feature for emergencies. Notably, this digital transition is cost-free for the public, with all applications and forms provided at no charge, emphasizing the district’s focus on inclusive and citizen-friendly governance. The platform is user-friendly by utilizing WhatsApp, ensuring ease of access for both first-time users and individuals in remote regions. The campaign was showcased in Yachuli, where community representatives and frontline workers observed its functionality. Deputy Commissioner Meh-



ta acknowledged the contributions of ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers, and local market associations in the campaign’s initial demonstration and reiterated the administration’s commitment to broaden this initiative to every village, particularly focusing on Self Help Groups (SHGs) in the next phase. Keyi Panyor’s actions not only enhance its administrative efficiency but also position it as a leader in digital governance among aspirational districts throughout the country.

The accused is back in the custody of DGGI Northeast Zone after the Supreme Court revokes the bail of an alleged fake GST kingpin

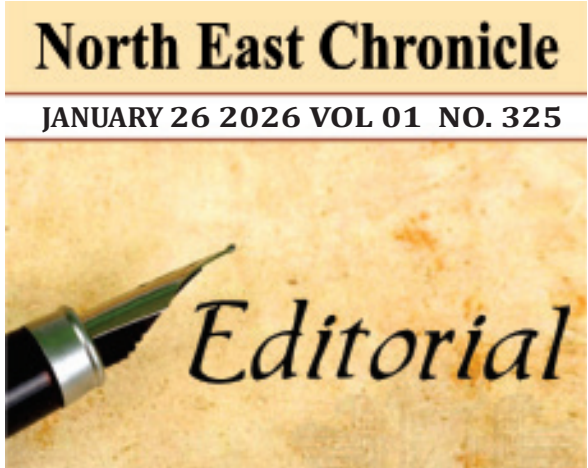
Guwahati, Jan 25: The Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI), Northeast Zone, has achieved a major legal win when the Supreme Court revoked the bail granted to alleged fake GST invoice mastermind Shashi Kumar Choudhary. The continuing investigation into one of the largest GST fraud cases in the region has been strengthened by DGGI Guwahati’s successful return of the accused to jail following the apex court’s intervention. Official sources claim that Choudhary was involved in a large-scale fraudulent invoicing scheme connected to the betel nut trade, which allegedly resulted in hundreds of crores of rupees in

GST evasion. According to investigators, the scam was carried out by methodically creating fictitious and dummy invoices without any real movement of commodities, enabling unlawful input tax credit claims and tax cheating in several jurisdictions. According to further sources, Choudhary allegedly worked closely with Sushil Kumar Daga of Bikaner Assam Roadlines India Limited in Guwahati, who is said to be the operation’s main mastermind. Daga is said to have collected and controlled the commission and revenues from the illegal activity, while Choudhary was responsible for the operational execution of producing fictitious



GST invoices. The Supreme Court’s decision to cancel the bail is being viewed as a strong endorsement of the enforcement agency’s case and a critical step in dismantling organised tax evasion networks operating across state boundaries. It has been learnt that Shashi Kumar Choudhary is scheduled to

surrender before DGGI Guwahati on January 28, after which he will be subjected to intensive interrogation. Officials expect the questioning to yield crucial information related to the racket’s modus operandi, beneficiary firms, financial trails, and the broader network involved in the fraud.



Bangladesh needs to be prevented from turning into the Pakistan

Bangladesh currently faces a grave crisis, as the ideals of sovereignty and freedom, which shaped its independence 54 years ago, are under threat. The events of July-August 2024 began as a student-led movement but evolved into a calculated attack on the nation’s foundational principles. Extremist forces are attempting to reverse the secular republic established post-1971 Liberation War, mirroring Pakistan’s theocratic model. The war aimed not just at freedom but at forming a state based on secularism, democracy, and national unity, rejecting religious-based governance reflective of past hardships under Pakistani rule. The 1972 Constitution enshrined these ideals, with secularism as pivotal to ensuring equality and fostering a Bengali humanist society, where all citizens could coexist regardless of faith. However, after the assassination of key leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, Bangladesh’s political trajectory shifted with the introduction of “Bangladeshi nationalism” that compromised these key tenets. Successive political regimes have since leveraged religion for power, culminating in the 1988 constitutional declaration of Islam as the state religion, which has led to the erosion of secular principles. Although democracy returned in 1990, the ideological conflict between secular humanism and burgeoning religious nationalism persisted, with parties like the Awami League retaining Islam as the state religion despite being rooted in secularism. Bangladesh currently faces a grave crisis, as the ideals of sovereignty and freedom, which shaped its independence 54 years ago, are under threat. The events of July-August 2024 began as a student-led movement but evolved into a calculated attack on the nation’s foundational principles. Extremist forces are attempting to reverse the secular republic established post-1971 Liberation War, mirroring Pakistan’s theocratic model. The war aimed not just at freedom but at forming a state based on secularism, democracy, and national unity, rejecting religious-based governance reflective of past hardships under Pakistani rule. The 1972 Constitution enshrined these ideals, with secularism as pivotal to ensuring equality and fostering a Bengali humanist society, where all citizens could coexist regardless of faith.

How Indian Ocean Region has become a ring of instability

The reported exfiltration of Madagascar’s once-reformist President Andry Rajoelina— which Paris is yet to confirm—following a coup by elite commandos of the nation’s military should raise concerns for India’s extended neighbourhood. The coup was preceded or followed—again, there is no clarity—by a nationwide Gen Z youth uprising protesting allegedly poor governance and corruption, which by now has a pattern to it in the region. Thus, in India’s immediate neighbourhood, which is some distance from Madagascar, and is in the strategically important western Indian Ocean, seven of 13 nations have faced mass protests that have led to a ‘regime change’. In the very immediate neighbourhood, four nations faced such a transition in as many years— Sri Lanka (2022), Pakistan (2023), Bangladesh (2024) and Nepal (2025). In the relatively extended neighbourhood, Indonesia and the Philippines also faced youth protests, almost on near-similar grounds, but the movements did die down. If ‘democracy’ is going to be the yardstick, Afghanistan and Myanmar have autocratic governments.

Myanmar has had a military junta ruling the nation for most of the past 60-plus years. In Afghanistan, the hyper-fundamentalist Taliban returned to power after a 20-yearlong break, during which time the US-led Nato forces were supposed to have ‘cleansed’ the nation (by killing hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children?). Today’s Taliban rulers are more confident than they were pre-9/11, which incident alone caused the US-led military intervention. No Clarity Looked at from Madagascar’s own perspective, interestingly around the time of the youth uprising and coup, Kenya, not far away in mainland Africa, across the Mozambique Channel, did face people’s protests this year, but they did not overflow to topple the government. Right now, Gen Z protests are rocking Morocco in North Africa, not very close to Madagascar, which too is an African nation, located in the western Indian Ocean. The fact that Morocco is located in the broad area where the ‘Arab Spring’ and later-day people’s protests, like in Gaddafi’s Libya, occurred could mean that the unin-

ished job from the past is returning, but possibly less violent and less gruesome. But coups and violence have not always been the case in the neighbourhood— and that should be welcome. For instance, Seychelles, which is not a faraway neighbour of Madagascar, went through the periodic presidential poll without any hiccup. In the second, run-off round of the election, incumbent Wewak Ramkalawan lost to opponent and predecessor Patrick Herminie, polling 52.7 per cent vote share.

The transition too was smooth, as always. Consumerist World Where is it all headed? Or, where is the world headed? Did the world and global governments and polity miss something in the post-war and/or post-colonial socio-economic reconstruction? While a common, invisible external hand has been suspected ever since the ‘Arab Spring’ and ‘Orange Revolution’ elsewhere a decade and more ago, and the modus too has pointed towards one, there is no denying the frustrations of youth in each one of these ‘chosen’ countries. The pattern is uniform. The Gen Z in each of these countries is frustrated over lack of employment, and at times even adequate educational opportunities, and individual incomes and the social status that come with it, especially in an increasingly evolving consumerist world. While protestors have been deploying social media to amass people, they have also been ‘exposed’ to the ways of their political leaders, constitutional institutions and worse.

Traditionally, it is said that where 20 per cent of the nation’s population comprises youth, that’s a boiling pot for revolution of some kind or the other. If the leadership is alive and active, they can direct them into constructive channels by evolving into a better place for their people to live in and their children to grow into entrepreneurs and engineers, doctors and other well-paying professionals. In the case of Africa as a whole, the median age is said to be 19. Hence, not just one nation or the other, but the continent as a whole may be ripe for some kind of a revolution, though in stages and in one nation after another. Thus, you had a change of elected government in Botswana last year, and the iconic African

National Congress (ANC) lost vote share, falling below the halfway mark for the first time since the end of the apartheid. Demand for Change Simply put, they want ‘change’, a change from the status quo, a change for the better. Beyond that, most of them do not know anything about the kind of change that they are aspiring for and how to achieve the same. Hence, in nations like Sri Lanka and even Pakistan, where the constitutional system took over, despite the protest and limited violence, the established scheme took over. Hence, there was no talk of a military coup or anarchy, which is what was anticipated in both countries. Why, even in the US, the world’s ‘oldest functioning democracy’, the emergence of President Trump as the ‘disruptor par excellence’ twice within a decade is an expression of the people’s angst for change, which remained, or continues to remain, unfulfilled. The early signs became available when, in the presidential poll of 1992, billionaire-Independent Ross Perot polled a high 20 per cent vote share without adequate organisation at the grassroots level in most states. The American people, starting with the youth, wanted change, but like every other American, after casting their vote, they went away to their daily chores. It thus became easy for Establishment America—call it the ‘Deep State’, if you please—to carry out their post- ‘92 vow that they ‘won’t allow this to happen’. What America has since gotten is possibly worse than what the nation was prepared for, and the so-called Deep State was capable of facilitating—or was/is it what they wanted, at least as far as Trump 2.0 was/ is concerned? Where the constitutional scheme is inherently weak and the established political system is unable to stand up, or both, then there is a coup, anarchy, and/ or the kind of hard wall that yesterday’s protest leaders are forced to stare at, with no idea about the future— theirs and that of their nation. In the evolving situation, Bangladesh may be a good example. Pakistan may still not be out of it. Thus the question is not only about Madagascar or other nations in Asia and Africa but across the world.

Trump handling: How to address India’s foreign policy issue

All Indian exports will receive duty-free access in the Australian market from today under the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA), marking a significant milestone in the bilateral trade relationship between the two countries and reflecting a decade-long effort to deepen economic engagement, expand market access, and promote mutually beneficial trade flows, as under the terms of the agreement, 100 percent of Indian tariff lines will now enjoy duty-free access to Australia, thereby benefitting a wide spectrum of sectors including gems and jewellery, textiles, leather, footwear, furniture, food products, engineering goods, medical devices, and automobiles, which together constitute a substantial portion of India’s export basket and have historically faced tariffs and other trade barriers that limited their competitiveness in foreign markets, while India, in turn, has agreed to offer preferential access on over 70 percent of tariff lines to Australia, mainly covering raw materials and intermediates such as coal, mineral ores, and wine, reflecting a calibrated approach aimed at balancing domestic industrial interests with strategic trade partnerships, and Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal had announced this development on the third anniversary of the ECTA on December 29 last year, describing it as a transformative step that will strengthen trade, promote investment, and create opportunities for small and medium enterprises, while enhancing supply chain integration and technological collaboration between the two countries, with officials noting that the agreement is expected to significantly boost India’s exports to Australia by reducing tariff burdens, improving market predictability, and providing Indian businesses with a competitive edge in key sectors where India has global competence, such as pharmaceuticals, textiles, automotive components, and engineering goods, thereby enabling Indian companies to expand their presence in a market known for high standards and stringent

regulatory requirements, while also encouraging Australian businesses to participate more actively in India’s growing economy, which continues to demonstrate resilience, market potential, and a favourable investment climate, and trade analysts have highlighted that the duty-free access will enhance India’s strategic export orientation, diversify its trade portfolio, and strengthen the country’s position in the Asia-Pacific region, while providing new avenues for trade in high-value goods, raw materials, and intermediate products, with the agreement also encompassing provisions to facilitate trade through reduced non-tariff barriers, streamlined customs procedures, and enhanced regulatory cooperation, thereby ensuring that goods flow smoothly across borders and that exporters and importers benefit from predictable, transparent and efficient processes, while the ECTA is expected to promote broader economic collaboration beyond trade, including technology sharing, skill development, joint ventures, innovation, and investment in sectors such as renewable energy, infrastructure, and digital services, thereby creating a multi-dimensional partnership between India and Australia, as the Commerce Ministry has emphasised that sectors such as gems and jewellery and textiles, which employ millions of workers across India, will particularly benefit from expanded market access, with reduced duties improving profit margins, stimulating production, creating jobs, and fostering sustainable economic growth in both urban and rural regions, while sectors like medical devices and automobiles are expected to benefit from improved competitiveness and enhanced export volumes, as India continues to position itself as a reliable supplier in global value chains, and officials have pointed out that the preferential treatment for Australian exports to India, covering raw materials and intermediates, is carefully designed to support India’s industrial ecosystem, ensure availability of essential inputs at competitive prices, and encourage

mutually beneficial trade dynamics, while fostering integration of supply chains, technological adoption, and quality standards that meet international benchmarks, with analysts noting that the India-Australia ECTA is a model for modern trade agreements, combining liberalisation with strategic safeguards, and promoting economic resilience, innovation, and sustainable development, and the agreement is expected to contribute to long-term growth in bilateral trade, with projections suggesting substantial increases in export volumes, export revenues, and employment generation in sectors benefiting from dutyfree access, while enhancing India’s competitiveness in the Asia-Pacific region and reinforcing Australia’s position as a key economic partner in South Asia, and the government has reiterated its commitment to leveraging trade agreements like ECTA to strengthen India’s global trade presence, support domestic industries, empower exporters, and provide consumers with high-quality, affordable products, as the full implementation of duty-free access is expected to result in immediate gains for Indian exporters while laying the foundation for deeper economic collaboration, knowledge sharing, and technology transfer, which together will promote innovation, entrepreneurship, and long-term economic growth in both countries, with officials underscoring that the move will also encourage further bilateral investments, joint research and development, industrial collaborations, and partnerships in areas such as renewable energy, digital economy, and advanced manufacturing, thereby creating a comprehensive framework for sustained economic engagement, while also reinforcing the broader strategic partnership between India and Australia, which encompasses shared values, security cooperation, and regional development initiatives, as trade experts have highlighted that by eliminating tariffs on all Indian exports, the agreement addresses historical barriers, strengthens competitiveness, improves market access.

Gaza peace summit: How PM Modi’s absence was a power move

The 2025 Gaza Peace Summit held in Sharm el-Sheikh, co-hosted by Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and US President Donald Trump, aimed to transform the fragile ceasefire into a durable peace framework. The agenda included key topics like reconstruction, humanitarian corridors, and governance post-conflict, attended by around 30 nations including France, the U.K., Italy, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Notably, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu withdrew at the last moment, officially citing a Jewish holiday but reportedly due to Turkey’s opposition and internal pressure. President Trump, characterized by his theatrical style, proclaimed the event as “the dawn of peace,” highlighting India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a “very good friend,” despite Modi’s absence from the summit. This significant absence drew analysis, suggesting it was a strategic choice rather than a misstep. While Modi’s absence raised questions domestically about India potentially missing out on in-

fluencing outcomes, it seemingly provided several advantages for New Delhi. Firstly, it avoided unwelcome optics from a potential Modi-Sharif photo-op that would dominate headlines with narratives of a Trump-mediated India-Pakistan peace. Secondly, India maintained its position, avoiding being a prop in the Trump–Sisi spectacle that primarily served others’ ambitions rather than its own. Moreover, Modi’s absence underscored a message of quiet confidence, demonstrating that India defines its global engagement rather than passively accepting invitations. Although physically absent, Modi remained central to discussions, particularly through Trump’s references, which highlighted India’s significant role as a trusted mediator and rebuilder in global affairs, especially in contentious regions like Gaza. India’s delegation, led by Minister of State for External Affairs K.V. Singh, effectively navigated the summit, with a formal statement reinforcing support for dialogue and a two-state solution.

Lahore protests, rise of Tehreek-e-Labbaik reveal Pakistan’s deeper malaise

Pakistan witnessed another violent confrontation in early October 2025 between the state and the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a farright religious party capable of mobilising thousands. What began as a pro-Palestinian rally in Lahore quickly spiralled into one of the most serious internal security crises of the year. The government’s claim of restoring order through legitimate force stands sharply at odds with reports from eyewitnesses, independent media, and human rights observers who point to excessive violence, opaque casualty reporting, and systematic suppression of information. The protests began as a march ostensibly aimed at expressing solidarity with Palestinians amid Israel’s ongoing offensive in Gaza. TLP, led by Saad Rizvi, called on supporters to converge in Lahore and begin a long march to Islamabad. The Punjab government, wary of the party’s history of paralysing urban centres and challenging state authority, moved preemptively to block the rally. Containers sealed roads, internet access was throttled across major routes, and paramilitary forces were deployed in and around Muridke, the small industrial town north of Lahore that served as the focal point of the protest. Numbers Behind the Crackdown The situation deteriorated on October 12 when police and Rangers tried to disperse the gathering. Witnesses describe a chaotic escalation: police fired tear gas shells, rubber bullets, and, according to some accounts, live rounds into crowds that refused to disperse. Protesters responded by pelting stones, torching vehicles, and blocking highways. Within hours, Lahore’s peripheries turned into a zone of urban combat. Footage shared on social media showed streets littered with debris, injured protesters carried on makeshift stretchers, and plumes of smoke rising from burnt police vehicles. The government initially described the event as an “anti-Israel protest gone violent”, but numbers emerging from different sources tell a more complex story. The Punjab Police reported five fatalities, including one of their own officers, and around 110 injured law-enforcement personnel. Yet TLP officials insisted that the death toll among their cadres exceeded a dozen, later revising that number upward to several dozen. While these figures could not be independently verified, the disparity between official and partisan accounts highlights the chronic opacity in Pakistan’s handling of internal unrest. Over the following days, the Punjab Home Department claimed to have detained more than 2,700 TLP activists. Lahore alone accounted for over 100 arrests. FIRs were lodged against Saad Rizvi and nearly 3,500 unnamed supporters, invoking sections related to terrorism, murder, and sedition.

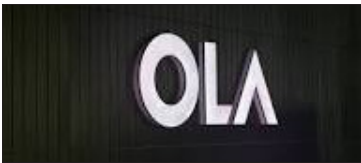
around Lahore, including contingents of the Rangers, an auxiliary paramilitary force technically under the Interior Ministry but often operating in coordination with the military’s corps commands. The Punjab government justified this deployment by citing intelligence assessments of potential violence. Yet the use of paramilitary units in civilian spaces has raised renewed concerns about the blurring of civil-military boundaries in Pakistan’s governance structure. The human toll in these deadly clashes remains contested. Hospitals in Lahore and Sheikhupura reported receiving dozens of injured protesters between October 12 and 13. A surgeon at Mayo Hospital described a “steady stream” of patients with gunshot and rubber-bullet wounds, some critical. Yet access to these medical facilities was restricted, with police posted at entrances and journalists denied entry. The Punjab government insisted that only “a few” civilians had been seriously injured, but local rights monitors accused authorities of downplaying numbers and quietly transferring bodies to undisclosed mortuaries.

The data on arrests and injuries also reveal the asymmetry of power in this confrontation. The Punjab Police’s own figures show that more than 110 officers were injured, compared with 11 confirmed civilian fatalities. But the TLP’s claim that dozens of its workers were shot dead—unsubstantiated though it may be—cannot be dismissed outright given Pakistan’s historical record of suppressing casualty data during operations against political movements. The 2021 and 2022 crackdowns on similar TLP marches saw comparable discrepancies between official and independent tallies, often resolved only after months of investigation. Underlying these events is a structural problem of accountability. Pakistan’s lawenforcement architecture lacks an independent oversight mechanism to review police conduct during protests. Investigations are typically internal and opaque. The provincial government’s announcement of a “judicial inquiry” into the Lahore violence was received with scepticism, given that similar enquiries in the past have yielded little more than bureaucratic reports. The absence of transparent, verifiable data on casualties and the use of force allows the state to maintain control over the narrative—framing unrest as terrorism rather than as a symptom of political or social alienation. This control of information is reinforced by the suppression of digital communication. Internet blackouts, a recurring feature of Pakistan’s crisis management, were imposed across parts of Punjab during the protests. This not only hampered real-time reporting but also prevented citizens from documenting potential abuses. According to data from NetBlocks, network connectivity in parts of Lahore dropped to less than 30 per cent of normal levels during the peak of clashes. Such shutdowns, justified by the government as necessary for public safety, effectively remove independent verification at the moments when it is most needed. Silencing Dissent through Control The broader political context cannot be ignored. TLP’s mobilisation capacity is significant: its support base cuts across Punjab’s urban working class, and its religious messaging resonates with segments of the population disenchanted with mainstream parties.

A senior police official, speaking to local media under condition of anonymity, admitted that the crackdown was “comprehensive and preplanned”, with lists of activists circulated to district intelligence branches weeks before the march. The state’s swift invocation of anti-terrorism laws suggests that it continues to view TLP not as a political force to be negotiated with, but as an internal security threat to be managed through coercion. The numbers tell a story of militarisation of civilian law enforcement. According to police data released between October 14 and 16, over 4,500 personnel were deployed

Ola Electric's CFO resigns, and shares fall 7%

Mumbai: Ola Electric Mobility Ltd.'s stock dropped more than 7% on Tuesday following the announcement of the resignation of its chief financial officer (CFO), Harish Abichandani. Ola Electric announced Deepak Rastogi's appointment as the new CFO in a different filing. The largest intraday decline since December 16 of last year occurred when the electric vehicle manufacturer's stock dropped as much as 7.6% during the day to ₹33 per share. In contrast to the Nifty 50's 0.64% decrease as of 11:35 AM, the stock limited losses to trade 6.4% down at ₹33.4 per share. According to Bloomberg, the company's shares dropped 24% for the tenth consecutive session and are currently trading at 1.3 times the normal 30-day trading volume. The benchmark Nifty 50 has dropped 2.3% this year, while the counter has dropped 7.8%. The market capitalization of Ola Electric is ₹14,736.58 crore. According to



the statement, Harish Abichandani left the organization for personal reasons. "I am resigning from my position as Ola Electric Mobility Limited's chief financial officer. In a resignation letter referenced by Ola Electric, Abichandani stated, "This decision has been taken due to personal reasons." The EV maker later announced the appointment of Deepak Rastogi as its chief financial officer, effective January 20, 2026. The company stated that Rastogi is a veteran finance and business leader with over 30 years of experience across large, complex and capital-intensive organisations in automotive, manufacturing, chemicals, fertilisers, mining, industrial products and real estate.

Despite margin pressure, PNB Q3 shows gains in asset quality

Mumbai: The December quarter (Q3FY26) performance of Punjab National Bank highlighted a common theme for state-run lenders: sustained credit growth and balance sheet repair, counterbalanced by margin pressure. Brokerages generally concur that although core profitability is still low, the bank's medium-term outlook has been boosted by one-time gains and careful provisioning, maintaining the investment case. Due in major part to a strong increase in non-interest income, PNB recorded a net profit of approximately ₹5,100 crore for the quarter, up in low double digits year over year (YoY). Higher



recoveries from written-off accounts and a one-time gain of ₹910 crore from the sale of its share in Canara HSBC Life Insurance were significant contributors. Emkay Global noted that these gains were not allowed to flow entirely to the bottom line, as the bank chose to shore up its buffers ahead of the transition to the expected credit loss (ECL) framework.

However, net interest margins (NIMs) fell short of expectations. Due to lower loan and investment rates and quicker asset-side repricing, Emkay and Motilal Oswal both reported an 8 basis point (bps) sequential decrease in margins to roughly 2.5-2.52 percent. As a result, despite strong loan growth of roughly 12% year over year, net inter-

est income (NII) remained muted and fell short of certain brokerage projections. On the balance sheet, credit expansion proceeded steadily, with deposits increasing in high single digits and the loan book increasing by about 12% year over year. A multi-quarter high of 72% was reached by the credit-deposit ratio, indicating increased lending traction. Motilal Oswal highlighted that total revenues still managed to grow at a mid-single-digit pace due to the surge in other income, cushioning the impact of weaker margins. Asset quality remained a clear positive, analysts said.

Strong Q3 growth has analysts optimistic about L&T Finance



New Delhi: L&T Finance Holdings is gaining attention in retail lending, prompting brokerages like Emkay Global to upgrade its stock rating to 'Buy' based on improved asset quality and profitability prospects. Emkay has set a target price of ₹350 for December 2026, predicting a 16% upside and a 32% EPS CAGR from FY26-28. The recent stock performance showed a rise of up to 3.03% to ₹309.30. Key growth drivers include strong loan growth, rising net interest income, and improving asset quality, despite some costs related to the new labor code impacting profits. JM Financial also maintains a positive outlook, anticipating continued retail growth with digital investments, while noting the challenges posed by rising operating expenses in gold loan operations.

Capital gains tax was meant to be simpler



New Delhi: The goal was to simplify long-term capital gains taxation. Rather, it has caused a lot of investors to reconsider their choices. Redeeming gold, selling a home, or ending a long-term investment should all be considered significant decisions. It now causes fear for a lot of investors. Long-term capital gains taxes continues to be one of the most misunderstood aspects of India's tax system as Budget 2026 draws near. In the past, selling a long-held asset was a reasonably predictable process. The final cost was rarely unexpected, the tax rate was predictable, and inflation was taken into account through indexation. That feeling of assurance has diminished. Financial advisors claim that because they are unsure about the tax implications, investors are postponing choices, questioning computations, and, in certain situations, abandoning sales. The creator of Sahaj Money and Sebi-registered financial advisor Abhishek Kumar claims that the uncertainty extends beyond a single asset type. According to him, "the main areas of confusion are real estate, gold, debt mutual funds, and bonds, as these were historically the categories where indexation gave a clear and often substantial tax advantage over time." He continues by saying that investors are having trouble figuring out when the new 12.5% long-term capital gains rate without indexation applies, when they may still select 20% with indexation for older property, and how to compare post-tax results across various holding periods and purchase dates. The uncertainty is affecting real decisions. Kumar says many clients are holding back sales simply because they do not want to make a costly mistake. "Many clients are indeed postponing sales of property and gold because they worry about making an irreversible decision without fully understanding the tax cost," he says. One example he cites is of homeowners who bought property decades ago. "For example, a client with an apartment bought in the early 2000s often assumes the new 12.5% rate is automatically better, but only after running both calculations do they realise indexation plus 20% can still lead to a lower tax bill in their specific case," Kumar explains.

Ikea increases its presence in South India by offering online delivery in Tamil Nadu

New Delhi: Ikea, a Swedish furniture store, declared that it will begin online deliveries in Tamil Nadu on Thursday, January 22. EV-powered doorstep deliveries will begin in Chennai, Madurai, Coimbatore, and Salem, giving clients access to more than 6,400 options for home furnishings. The company's Bengaluru distribution network would be used to fulfill all orders in Tamil Nadu. "With over 25,000 customers already enrolled in the Ikea loyalty program, Tamil Nadu has demonstrated a strong affinity for Ikea's home furnishing solutions," the firm stated in a press release. "As we continue to fortify and expand our presence in South India, starting 2026 with our online launch in Tamil Nadu is particularly significant." "Every market and every home teaches us something new, and this launch is another important step in that journey," stated Patrik Antoni, chief executive officer of Ikea India. "We are excited because this allows us to meet customers where they are, support everyday life at home, and build long-term relationships in a market that has already shown strong love for Ikea." The lessons learned here will assist determine the best locations and impact future shopping



models. This opening marks the start of our long-term omnichannel adventure in Chennai, and our future stores and offers here will be shaped by insights from e-commerce and planning services," he continued. Ikea India's country e-commerce manager, Bhavana Jaiswal, told Business Standard when the business launched online operations in Delhi-NCR in February of last year that the online channel accounts for more than 30% of the company's overall sales and continues to expand in double digits. "We are delighted to welcome Ikea to Chennai and anticipate the opening of its first retail location there soon. We are certain that the establishment of Ikea's online store in Chennai will improve last-

mile logistics and supply chains in the area. Under the leadership of Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Thiru M K Stalin, we seek to enable technology-led, inclusive growth, where global companies deepen their engagement with Tamil Nadu and grow alongside our economy," said T R B Rajaa, minister for industries, investment promotion and commerce, Government of Tamil Nadu. Ikea currently operates physical stores in Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Mumbai and New Delhi, and offers e-commerce deliveries across Maharashtra (including Pune), Andhra Pradesh-Telangana, Gujarat, Karnataka, Delhi-NCR, Agra, Prayagraj, Amritsar, Chandigarh, Jaipur, Kanpur, Lucknow, Ludhiana, Varanasi and Goa.

Lodha Developers will increase their investment in the Maharashtra data center park

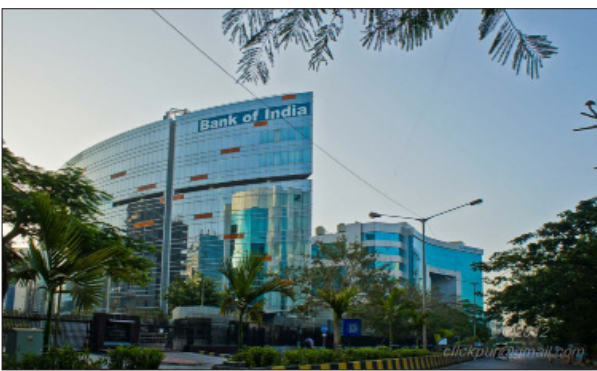
New Delhi: The Maharashtra government and real estate company Lodha Developers Ltd. have reached an initial agreement for an extra ₹1 trillion investment to construct a data center park. Four months ago, the business and the state government inked a ₹30,000 crore memorandum of understanding (MoU) to build a data center. The business stated that it had committed to an additional ₹1 trillion in a regulatory filing on Tuesday. In front of the World Economic Forum in Davos on January 19, Abhishek Lodha, MD and CEO of Lodha Developers, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Maharashtra government. The entire commitment now stands at ₹1.3 trillion with the extra ₹1 trillion. "With the total investment of ₹1.3 trillion on approximately 2.5 gigawatt data centre park, it is slated to be the largest in the country," said Lodha Developers. Lodha Developers and the Maharashtra government signed a ₹30,000 crore contract in September of last year to build a data center in



accordance with the government's Green Integrated Data Center Park strategy. The group's commitment to the development of Maharashtra would be strengthened by the most recent agreement of an additional ₹1 trillion. "The data centre park with a total investment of ₹1.3 trillion will create over 16,000 direct and indirect jobs," the business stated. With a capacity of about 2.5 gigawatts, the park will host a number of significant domestic and international players. In addition to making plans for its power needs for the next 15 years, Amazon has already purchased a piece of land

for its data center. A piece of property in the park has also been purchased by Singapore-based STT Global Data Centers. For a number of companies interested in establishing data centers, Lodha Developers will act as a developer. "We have another agreement with the Maharashtra government to invest a further ₹1 trillion, on top of the ₹30,000 crore commitment made last year to create the data center park. Under the direction of Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, the state has already reached unprecedented heights, according to Abhishek Lodha.

Bank of India rises 7% and reaches an 8-year high due to large volume



Mumbai: After the bank announced a solid performance for the quarter ended December 2025 (Q3FY26), shares of Bank of India (BOI) jumped 7% on the BSE in Thursday's intraday trade amid heavy volumes, reaching an eight-year high of ₹168.25. The public sector

bank's (PSB) stock price has increased by 40% in the last four months. It is now trading at its highest level since January 2018. According to statistics, it reached a record high of ₹588 on October 7, 2010. The Bank of India stock was up 5% at ₹165 at 10:18 AM, while the BSE Sensex had

increased by 0.77%. The average trading volumes at the counter jumped nearly two-fold, with a combined 21.18 million equity shares changing hands on the NSE and BSE. Healthy business growth, increasing profitability, and ongoing asset quality strengthening all contributed to BOI's steady and rising Q3FY26 performance.

Thanks to an increase in non-interest income, the state-owned lender's net profit increased 7.47 percent year over year (YoY) to ₹2,705 crore in the October-December period of FY26 (Q3FY26) from ₹2,517 crore in the same period last year. Sequentially, the profit increased from ₹2,555 crore

by 5.9% year over year. Its net interest income increased 6.43 percent year over year to ₹6,461 crore in Q3FY26 from ₹6,070 crore in Q3FY25. A significant increase in profit from the sale and revaluation of investments at ₹473 crore and greater other non-interest revenue at ₹788 crore contributed to the 30% YoY growth in non-interest income to ₹2,279 crore. NIM improved sequentially to 2.57 percent, aided by lower cost of funds and improving yield dynamics along with CRR benefits. Asset quality of the lender improved, with gross non-performing assets (NPAs) improving by 28 bps to 2.26 percent in the December quarter.

Jute stocks are capped by the government after raw fiber prices more than double



New Delhi: After prices hit a high of ₹13,500 per quintal on January 18, a 2.38-fold increase from the government-approved minimum support price (MSP) of ₹5,650 per quintal for the jute season 2025-2026, the Union Textile Ministry imposed stringent jute stock limitations. Concerns over the availability of raw jute and speculative tactics in the raw jute trade have prompted the Center to take this action. The stock limits are 1200 quintals under the new restrictions set by the office of the jute commissioner via a notification dated January 19. 25 quintals and 5 quintals, respectively, for unregistered raw jute traders, other stockists, and raw jute balers with an on-site bailing press. The maximum time restriction for jute mills is 45 days. Giriraj Singh, the union minister of textiles, has assessed the state of the market and stated that the government intends to periodically review the stock limitations in order to preserve market stability.

The jute sector may be threatened by price instability and speculative rises, which could also affect employment and output. The textiles ministry stated

that these actions are meant to serve the interests of farmers, manufacturers, and consumers across the country, stabilize the jute supply, and avoid market manipulation. Industry sources told The Telegraph on Wednesday that raw jute prices have eased to around ₹12,600 per quintal since the January 18 high, but volatility in prices is expected to persist, with potential for prices to harden again after clarity emerges on stock limits and enforcement. In their representation to the textile ministry, jute balers and traders said that the increased consumption at mills, along with reduced interest for farmers after prices fell below MSP to ₹4,200 last season, has contributed to the price rise. Trade sources claimed cash-rich jute mills, with stronger balance sheets and easier access to credit, have been aggressively cornering available fibre to secure future production, intensifying price volatility, while smaller and financially stressed mills are unable to match and are largely sidelined. Mills said that around 25-30 lakhs of the raw jute crop of 2025-26 is still available with upcountry traders and middlemen.

IIFCL and Bank of Baroda work together to increase infrastructure funding

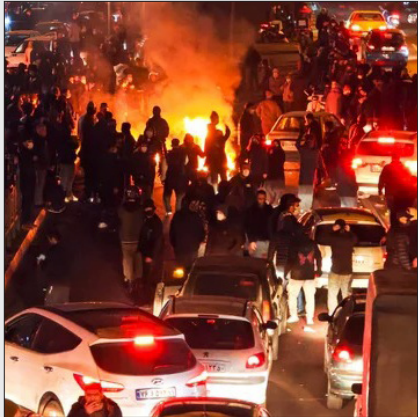
New Delhi: A deal between Bank of Baroda and India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd (IIFCL) to enable joint lending and loan syndication for a variety of infrastructure projects was announced on Wednesday. According to a statement from the bank, this collaboration will speed up the development of important infrastructure projects being established in India. IIFCL and Bank of Baroda have agreed to work together to jointly fund a variety of infrastructure projects. By facilitating long-term and sustainable financing for infrastructure, with a particular emphasis on green finance, MSMEs, and rural infrastructure, IIFCL is actively supporting national objectives, according to Palash Srivastava, Deputy Managing Director of IIFCL. This promotes inclusive and resilient economic growth. "Bank of Baroda has an extensive nationwide presence and this collaboration with IIFCL positions us well to extend our reach and deliver innovative financing solutions that will support India's infrastructure ambitions," Lalit Tyagi, Executive Director, Bank of Baroda said.



General Atlantic makes a firm agreement to purchase of Balaji Wafers

New Delhi: General Atlantic has entered a definitive agreement to acquire a stake in Balaji Wafers, reportedly selling 7%. The investment aims to enhance corporate functions and innovation, leveraging General Atlantic's expertise to expand Balaji Wafers throughout India. Founded in 1981 by the Virani family, Balaji Wafers has evolved into a major snack brand in India, exporting to 25 countries. Chandubhai Virani emphasized that this partnership aligns with their vision for growth. The transaction awaits customary regulatory approvals and is anticipated to conclude in 2026. Keyur Virani of Balaji Wafers highlighted that General Atlantic's investment will aid in establishing world-class facilities, fostering innovation, and building a professional team.

Iran-related issues Protesters accused of rioting are given a 72-hour deadline to surrender



Tehran: The head of Iran’s national police has given demonstrators engaged in what the government refers to as “riots” a stern deadline of three days to turn themselves in or risk harsh punishment. Participants in the protests must turn themselves in within 72 hours or face “the full force of the law,” according to national police commander Ahmad-Reza Radan’s statement on Monday, as reported by news agency AFP. The protests have presented Iran’s government with the great-

est challenge in years, and the extent of the violence is still unknown due to a prolonged internet outage that is about to reach its eleventh day. Rights organizations claim that the crackdown has killed much more people than the government admits. An Iranian official claims that the turmoil has resulted in at least 5,000 fatalities. Radan attempted to distinguish between those who were allegedly misinformed and those who were charged with planning acts of violence. “Young people who became unwittingly involved in the riots are considered deceived individuals, not enemy soldiers,” he stated on national television. “They will be treated with leniency” if they turn themselves up before the deadline. Iranian officials assert that the demonstrations started out peacefully before becoming violent, reportedly at the behest of foreign adversaries like Israel and the United States. According to AFP, senior leaders from Iran’s legislative, executive, and judicial institutions released a joint statement promising to work nonstop to resolve the economic issues that caused the turmoil.

Trump links his Greenland greed to the Nobel Prize rejection in a letter to the prime minister of Norway

Washington, D.C. According to the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), US President Donald Trump acknowledged in a startling letter to Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store that his desire to annex Greenland is related to his dissatisfaction over not being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Trump claimed in the letter that his perspective on international affairs had altered as a result of being turned down for the prize. “I no longer feel obligated to think only about peace, especially since your nation chose not to award me the Nobel Peace Prize for having prevented more than eight conflicts. I can now consider what is right and beneficial for the United States of America, even if it



will always be dominant,” Trump tweeted. He rejected Denmark’s claim to the independent territory and used the Nobel Prize rejection as justification for a drastic shift toward American colonization of Greenland. Additionally, Trump questioned Copenhagen’s sovereignty, claiming that Denmark was unable to protect the island from China or Russia. “Why do China and Russia have a “right of possession” while

Denmark is unable to defend that area against them? It’s only that a boat landed there hundreds of years ago, but we also had boats landing there,” Trump stated. “There are no written records.” Notably, an independent committee awards the Nobel Peace Prize rather than the Norwegian government. Prime Minister Store confirmed to Norwegian daily Aftenposten that he did receive Trump’s message.

In Bangladesh, a paramilitary officer was battered to death amid an increase in mob lynchings



Dhaka: A member of Bangladesh’s elite paramilitary unit Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) was beaten to death in Chittagong by a group of alleged criminals in yet another instance of mob lynching. The attack on Monday happened when the paramilitary unit arrived to conduct an operation, and local media reports state that three further RAB officers were also hurt. Several officers were allegedly taken hostage by an angry mob during the incident. Abdul Motaleb, a deputy assistant director of RAB, has been identified as the officer who was killed in the group attack.

The event is the most recent in an increasing spate of mob lynchings that have been reported in Bangladesh since the middle of December. Members of religious minorities, especially Hindus, have been the target of almost all such attacks that have been documented to far. On December 18, a furious mob in Bangladesh’s Mymensingh district killed and burned 27-year-old Hindu garment industry worker Dipu Chandra Das after he was accused of blasphemy. In relation to the horrific murder, at least 21 persons

have been taken into custody thus far. Yasin Arafat, a former Islamic religious instructor who is the primary culprit, was taken into custody earlier this month. Officials think he was instrumental in organizing and carrying out the lynching. In the month following Das’s killing, at least five other Hindu men were murdered by mobs or in targeted attacks in Bangladesh. While Amrit Mondal was beaten to death by a group of villagers in Rajbari district over allegations of extortion, Bajendra Biswas was shot dead in Mymensingh. Khokon Chandra Das, a Hindu businessman, was stabbed and set on fire by a mob on New Year’s Eve in Shariatpur. He died while undergoing treatment in Dhaka. In Naogaon district, a 25-year-old Hindu man died of drowning as he jumped into a pond while trying to escape a group of locals chasing him on suspicion of theft. Last week, a trader named Liton Chandra Das was beaten to death in the country’s Kaliganj area. He was a hotel and sweet shop owner. Das died after a small argument escalated into a serious physical altercation, and a group of customers attacked him.

Bats At Kolkata’s Alipore Zoo Tested For Nipah After Two Cases In Bengal

The National Institute of Medical Research (NIMR) has begun conducting random RT-PCR tests on bats at the Alipore Zoological Garden in south Kolkata to determine whether the animals could be carriers of the Nipah virus, officials said on Saturday.

A specialised NIMR team collected blood and swab samples from bats at the zoo during early morning operations on Thursday and

Friday. The team carried out the sampling at dawn and completed the exercise before the zoo opened to visitors.

Officials said bat surveillance is a key part of efforts to trace the possible source of Nipah virus in the state. Similar RT-PCR testing has recently been carried out in bat-inhabited areas of Madhyamgram, Barasat and Basirhat. In Kolkata, officials said the Alipore Zoological

Garden is the only location with a sizeable bat population.

The collected samples have been sent for RT-PCR testing, which is being conducted by the National Institute of Virology (NIV) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in coordination with the West Bengal health department. The state forest department is also assisting in the surveillance exercise.

Tighter gun laws are approved by Australia’s lower house following the Bondi mass shooting



Sydney: In reaction to the nation’s worst mass shooting in decades at a Jewish festival last month, Australia’s lower house of Parliament backed legislation on Tuesday that would allow

a nationwide gun buyback and strengthen background checks for firearms licenses. By a vote of 96 to 45, the bill—which was opposed by conservative lawmakers—passed the

House of Representatives and is now headed to the Senate. Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke stated at the introduction of the new rules that the perpetrators of the December 14 massacre at Bondi Beach, which claimed 15 lives, had “hate in their hearts and guns in their hands.” “The tragic events at Bondi demand a comprehensive response from government,” Burke stated. “As a government, we must do everything we can to counter both the motivation and the method.”

A nationwide gun buyback program to repur-

chase excess and recently prohibited firearms would be established by the new legislation. Using data from the Australian Security Intelligence Organization, they would also implement stricter background checks for handgun licenses granted by Australian states. Australia had a record 4.1 million weapons last year, including over 1.1 million in New South Wales, the nation’s most populous state and the scene of the Bondi incident, according to a government statement released on Sunday. New South Wales also passed

new laws last month that limit the number of guns per individual to four and 10 for farmers, and mandate firearm owners to renew their licences every two years instead of five years. “The sheer number of firearms currently circulating within the Australian community is unsustainable,” Burke said. The bill passed without the support of the conservative Liberal-National opposition coalition, who accuse Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s Labor government of failing to adequately address rising antisemitism.

Two officers were shot in the vicinity of Lloyd Center in Northeast Portland

Alberta: After being shot while responding to a suspected firearms threat in Northeast Portland, two Portland police officers were admitted to the hospital on Monday, local time, according to authorities.

While tactical teams continue to investigate the area, the suspect fled the scene and is still at large. The Portland Police Bureau reports that the shooting took place in the Sullivan’s Gulch neighborhood, which is close to Lloyd Center. Both officers were taken to the hospital by ambulance, police confirmed to KGW. As of the most recent update, their

conditions have not been made public. Over 60 law enforcement units were sent to the location as a result of the event, which sparked a massive police response. Officers were initially summoned to a report of a threat with a firearm at around 8:22 p.m. local time between Northeast 17th Avenue and Northeast Clackamas Street, according to dispatch data reported by KGW.

The suspect opened fire on the officers during that response before fleeing. Details regarding the culprit and the kind of weapon used have not been made public by the police. As

part of what police called a “active tactical situation,” the Portland Police Bureau announced that it had engaged both its Crisis Negotiation Team and Special Emergency Reaction Team (SERT), according to KGW.

While looking for the culprit, law officials sealed off a large area. Roads were closed between Northeast Broadway and Northeast Multnomah Street, and from Northeast 15th Avenue to Northeast 21st Avenue. Authorities urged people inside the secured perimeter to remain indoors, keeping doors and windows closed and



locked. No vehicle or pedestrian traffic was allowed in the area as officers conducted the search. Police also asked residents and businesses to report anything suspicious and encouraged anyone with

information about the suspect’s whereabouts to call 911 immediately, KGW reported. Officials said the investigation is ongoing and additional updates will be released as more information becomes available.

Trump promises 200% wine taxes following Macron’s rejection by the Peace Board

Washington: Following his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron’s refusal to join the Washington-led Board of Peace, a program aimed at resolving international problems, US President Donald Trump recently threatened to slap a 200% tariff on French wines and champagnes. The French leader retorted that “tariff threats aimed at influencing France’s foreign policy are unacceptable and ineffective.” Speaking to reporters on Monday night, Trump was asked about Macron’s declaration that he would not serve on the Board of Peace. The US commander replied, “Did he say that? He will soon leave office, thus no one wants him. He is not required to join, but he will if I impose a 200% levy on his wines and champagnes.” Trump even posted a screenshot of Macron’s private conversation on Truth Social, in which the French president suggested that he “set up a G7 meeting on Thursday in Paris with the Ukrainians, Danish and



Syrians,” adding, “Let us try to build better things.” A person close to Macron revealed earlier on Monday that “France intends to decline the invitation to join the initiative at this stage.” “Its charter is not limited to Gaza. The insider was cited as adding, “(It) raises major questions, particularly regarding respect for the principles and structure of the UN.” The French Foreign Ministry reaffirmed its support for the UN earlier on Monday, referring to it as “the keystone of effective

multilateralism.” In the midst of escalating tensions between Washington and the European Union, France publicly ridiculed the US over the President’s desire to seize control of Greenland only hours before Trump threatened to impose tariffs. The official French Foreign Ministry reaction account mocked US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent’s defense in a caustic post on X, criticizing Trump’s fixation on Danish territory with inflated parallels. “It’s prefer-

able to burn the house now since firefighters would interfere if there was a fire someday. There would be intervention if a shark attacked one day, so you’d better eat the lifeguard now. It said, “It’s better to ram the car now because damage would happen if there were a crash someday.” The Board of Peace initiative was first announced by Trump in September 2025 as part of a strategy to resolve the conflict in Gaza. Since then, the administration has expanded the

initiative’s scope, inviting world leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to join efforts to address a range of global conflicts. According to a draft charter circulated to about 60 countries by the US administration, prospective members of the Board of Peace would be required to contribute \$1 billion in cash if they seek to maintain their membership for more than three years. The financial commitment is designed to fund peace-keeping and conflict resolution activities worldwide. The US invitation to join the Board of Peace outlines broad roles for member countries in ending global conflicts and supporting diplomatic resolutions. Governments have, however, reacted cautiously to Trump’s invitation, a plan that diplomats said could harm the work of the UN. On Monday, Trump also said he has invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to be a member of the peace board. “He’s been invited,” Trump said.

How millions of Americans could be impacted by Trump’s H-1B fee, which could exacerbate medical deserts in the US

Washington, D.C.: The healthcare crisis that the United States, or more precisely rural America, is currently experiencing might only get worse. Hospitals in rural US communities are either closing or substantially reducing healthcare services due to a severe scarcity of medical experts, depriving hundreds of thousands of Americans of vital medical help. The lack of qualified workers willing to work in remote locations is the root cause of this dilemma, which is made worse by a persistent drop in government financing. In recent

years, rural hospitals have discovered a solution. To alleviate the severe lack of physicians, nurses, and laboratory personnel, they had resorted to hiring H-1B visa holders.

“This talent is otherwise not available to come to rural parts of the country,” said Brian Thomas, CEO of Jefferson Regional Medical Centre to local news outlet, Arkansas Business. However, US President Donald Trump’s proclamation sharply raising the H-1B visa fee to \$100,000 risks cutting off one of the few lifelines rural hospitals rely on to hire

skilled professionals without overwhelming their finances. “We’re all struggling to get by, so paying \$100,000 to acquire one of any kind of professional would pose an impossibility,” said Glenda Harper, CEO of Ouachita County Medical Centre to Arkansas Business. So what exactly is driving the healthcare crisis in rural America? How did one of the world’s most developed countries reach a point where potentially millions risk losing access to timely medical care? And how is Trump’s H-1B policy worsening an already fragile situation? According

to a database published by the Cecil G Sheps Centre for Health Services Research at the University of North Carolina in December last year, since 2005, at least 195 hospitals in rural US have either closed, or been converted, ie only offering outpatient and emergency care services. This figure includes at least six hospitals that closed their doors or shifted to only emergency care in 2025. Additionally, according to a report by the Centre for Healthcare Quality and Patient Reform, more than 700 rural hospitals, or about one-third of all rural

hospitals in the country, are at risk of closing because of the serious financial problems they are experiencing. Of those 700, over 300 hospitals are at an immediate risk of closing because of the severity of their financial problems. According to Chartis, a medical consultancy, 293 rural hospitals stopped offering obstetrics services between 2011 and 2023, while 424 ceased chemotherapy services in the same period. Unsustainable financial burden, as well as a crippling shortage of trained personnel in rural areas willing to staff those hospitals.

Vitamin D supplements effective choices to support bone health, immunity, and overall wellness

Vitamin D supplements support bone strength and overall immunity. They help your body absorb calcium better. Many people face deficiency due to limited sunlight or indoor lifestyles. These supplements offer a simple way to maintain healthy levels. They are available in tablets, capsules, and drops. Each form is easy to take. Boost bones and immunity with top Vitamin D supplements daily. (Pexels) Boost bones and immunity with top Vitamin D supplements daily. (Pexels) Vitamin D also supports muscle health and mood balance. It is important for children, adults, and older people. Always take the recommended dose. Avoid taking more than needed. Consistency matters. Regular intake can help you stay healthy through the year. If unsure about your levels, check with a doctor. This ensures you choose the right supplement and dosage. The Carbamide Forte Vitamin D3 K2 supplement supports strong bones and better calcium absorption. It contains vegan D3 from lichen and K2 MK7 for improved heart health. The formula helps your body use calcium effectively. It is ideal for those with low sunlight exposure. The tablets are small and easy to swallow. They suit daily use. The bottle offers 120 tablets for long-term support. It is a convenient and reliable choice. This Carbamide Forte Vitamin D3 10000 IU supplement helps support bone strength and immunity. The chewable tablets are easy to take. They come in an orange flavour. Each tablet offers a high-strength dose for those with low vitamin D levels. It is suitable for both men and women. The formula helps improve calcium absorption. The bottle includes 60 tablets. It is a simple and effective daily option. This Tata 1mg Vitamin D3 + K2 supplement supports stronger bones and better immunity. It helps improve calcium absorption. The blend includes 600 IU of vitamin D3 and 55 mcg of K2. It is sourced from lichen and is fully vegetarian. The tablets are easy to take. Regular use may help maintain healthy bone density. The pack contains 60 tablets. It is a simple daily wellness option. The HealthyHey Nutrition Vitamin D3 K2 supplement supports bone and heart health. It uses naturally derived D3 and high-quality K2 MK-7. The formula is non-GMO and non-synthetic. It is also fully vegetarian. Each capsule is easy to swallow. Regular use may help improve calcium absorption. It also supports immunity. The pack includes 120 capsules. It is a simple



choice for daily wellness. HK Vitals Vitamin D3 offers 600 IU per capsule. It supports calcium absorption. It also helps improve bone health. The formula uses sunflower oil for better absorption. It may aid muscle strength. It also supports immunity. The capsules are easy to take. They are suitable for daily use. Each pack contains 60 capsules. It is a simple and reliable supplement for maintaining your Vitamin D levels. Carbamide Forte Vitamin D3 2000 IU helps support bone and immune health. It provides cholecalciferol in an easy-to-absorb form. The tablets come in a pleasant raspberry flavour. They are suitable for both women and men. Each pack contains 90 tablets. They are simple to chew. The supplement helps maintain healthy Vitamin D levels. It is a convenient option for daily wellness. The Body Reserve Vitamin D3 K2 MK7 supplement offers a plant-based way to support bone and heart health. It provides Vitamin D3 from lichen, making it suitable for vegetarians. The formula also includes Vitamin K2 MK7, which helps direct calcium to the bones. Each tablet meets 100% of the RDA. It is easy to take. They suit both men and women. They fit well into a simple daily wellness routine. Swisse Vitamin D provides the full daily requirement of Vitamin D3. It is made in Australia and follows an internationally proven formula. The tablets support strong bones, better immunity, and healthy muscles. They are designed for high absorption. This helps your body use vitamin D more effectively. The supplement is easy to add to your routine. It suits adults looking for a simple way to maintain overall bone and muscle health.

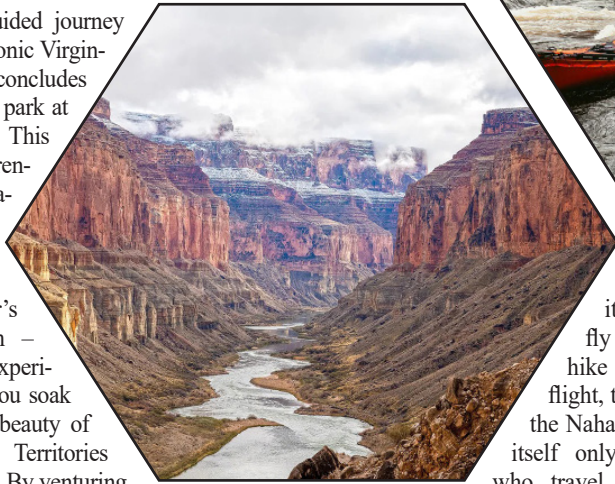
TRAVEL & HEALTH

Paddling the dramatic ‘Grand Canyon of Canada’

Pop these earmuffs on – you’ll need them,” says the co-pilot of our vintage 1967 Twin Otter floatplane, his voice barely cutting through the roar of the engines. Soaring above endless boreal forest, dramatic canyons and the mist-shrouded cascades of the thundering Virginia Falls, the plane delivers us into the wild heart of the Nahanni National Park Reserve in Canada’s Northwest Territories, setting the stage for an unforgettable journey downstream. My partner and I are here to embark on a bucket list adventure down the iconic Nahanni River. Our 11-day, 217km guided journey begins at the iconic Virginia Falls and concludes just outside the park at Nahanni Butte. This isn’t a high-adrenaline whitewater journey, but rather a leisurely float down the river’s winding length – an immersive experience that lets you soak in the pristine beauty of the Northwest Territories at a gentle pace. By venturing deep into the park’s five lower canyons and listening as our guides share the area’s Indigenous and Gold Rush-era history, each stop becomes an invitation to connect more deeply with the Nahanni’s winding path and its storied past.

Ever since RM Patterson’s seminal 1954 book *The Dangerous River*, chronicling the year the writer and explorer spent canoeing these waters, the Nahanni River has held near-mythical status among Canadian paddlers. Towering cliffs, carved over millennia, rise on either side of the water, forming canyons so breathtaking they’re frequently

dubbed “the Grand Canyon of Canada”. For many, journeying down the Nahanni is a kind of national pilgrimage, offering a glimpse into a remote and untouched side of the country that few travellers ever experience. It’s not just the dramatic canyons and thundering waterfalls, but the sense of profound wilderness and solitude. As such, getting here is no simple feat. While a hand-



ful of visitors might fly in for a day hike or a scenic flight, the heart of the Nahanni reveals itself only to those who travel by water.

The trip can be self-guided or guided, and most outfitters offer multi-day rafting or canoe expeditions, ranging from a week to nearly two weeks. For us, the lengthy travel time and cost make the 11-day itinerary more worthwhile than the shorter seven-day trip that travels the same stretch of river. This gives us more time to relax at campsites, hike scenic trails and enjoy the river’s tranquility. For seasoned paddlers, there are even more ambitious routes: experienced canoeists can begin their journey with whitewater paddling and hiking at the world-renowned Cirque of the Unclimb-



able, combining hikes among towering granite spires and camping on the shores of Rabbitkettle Lake. The upper reaches of the Nahanni before Virginia Falls are accessible only by canoe, and contain stretches of flat, calm water and require a vessel that glides swiftly – unlike the bulky rafts we use for our float trip further downstream. The South Nahanni is more famous for its dramatic canyons, but no matter the section,

travelling the river is a journey through some of the most remote parts of Canada, where solitude isn’t just a possibility but a defining feature. Fewer than 900 overnight visitors explore the park each year, and the chances of encountering anyone outside your own group are slim. Upon landing, we’re greeted by our three guides from Nahanni River Adventures who are in the midst of portaging all of the gear, including deflated rafts, down to the base of the falls. We soon meet Parks Canada Interpretation Officer Jaclyn Paddison, who leads us on an interpretive journey along a boardwalk above Virginia Falls. The elevated wooden path winds through stunted boreal forest to a lookout, where two Parks Canada Red Chairs offer the perfect spot to relax and take in the awe-inspiring view. Across from us, Mason’s Rock – a towering spire – stands defiantly as Virginia Falls thunders around it in a spectacular whitewater display.

A guide to Whistler, Canada, from the godfather of freeskiing



Cradled in British Columbia’s magnificent Coast Mountains 120km north of Vancouver, the town of Whistler is a snow-sports haven. It’s also home to Whistler Blackcomb, North America’s largest ski resort. Biggest isn’t always best, of course. But Whistler Blackcomb’s terrain – more than 8,000 acres of endless cruisers, adventurous glades, steep bowls and back-country possibilities – is revered for good reason. The diversity at the bottom of the hill is similarly impressive. Boosted by its role in hosting the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics, Whistler boasts an array of restaurants, cultural experiences and high-profile events.

Named after the twin peaks looming above, Whistler Blackcomb has long been a bucket-list destination and stomping ground for the planet’s best skiers – including freeskiing legend Mike Douglas. Douglas – aka: “the godfather of freeskiing” – arrived from Vancouver Island at just 18 years old, back when Whistler’s ski scene was dominated by the Whistler and Blackcomb resorts (they merged in 1997) and the population was just around 3,000.

Within two years Douglas made both the BC and Canadian freestyle teams. He has stood at the vanguard of Whistler and wider ski culture ever since. Does he long for those early days? “I actually don’t think I’d want to go back,” he says, explaining that Whistler is now a much more holistic community, with excellent amenities and cultural programming. Unlike other famous ski towns, Whistler still feels like a thriving hometown. From daycares to gymnastics programmes, “raising a family here has made me appreciate the community even more.” Ultimately, Douglas reflects, “how this [amazing] community is what kept me here. People are really progressive and forward thinking. Everything is possible.”

Not that paradise is perfect; even Whistler’s hallowed powder is vulnerable to climate change. Douglas remembers how “thick and full” Horstman Glacier on Blackcomb peak once was. “It was hard to imagine that in my lifetime I would see that essentially completely disappear,” he says. Observing these changes first-hand helps motivate his work with Protect Our Winters to mobilise the snow-sports community and get climate-positive policies on the national agenda. “Outdoors people who participate in these sports have an obligation to try and protect these environments.” Here are Douglas’ favourite ways to enjoy Whistler.

1. Best for a pre-ski coffee: Rockit Coffee Co
Skiers seeking a shot of energy before hitting the slopes will

find Rockit Coffee Co by the base of the Creekside Gondola (one of the resort’s original lifts) at the end of Peak to Creek; one of Douglas’ favourite runs. Rockit is actually in Whistler Creekside, 4.2km south of Whistler; you can travel between the two by ski and ski lifts. “[It’s] my go-to coffee shop these days,” he says. Rockit’s big draw is its ambience. “It’s got a fully committed retro-music vibe and feels warm and cosy inside,” says Douglas. “Always good tunes, great coffee and tasty food.” The walls are festooned with ’70s-style posters, art, gadgets and curios; one wall is simply a Tetris jumble of old-school speakers and subwoofers. Visitors can warm up by the wood stove, hang out on window stools or get comfy in an egg-shaped capsule chair. Given most tourists stay in the main village, Creekside is a great spot to soak up the local atmosphere, says Douglas. He doesn’t live far away himself. “Now that I’ve got an e-bike, I’ve been using that to go skiing sometimes,” he says. “I’ll ride over to Rockit and just lock it up, riding wearing my ski boots!”

2. Best signature ski run: Peak to Creek
Descending 1,529 vertical metres over seven miles, Peak to Creek is one of North America’s longest continuous ski runs – without a single flat section requiring ski-pole pushing or binding unclipping. It starts on Whistler Peak, offering a sensational 180-degree view of the southern Coast Mountains, and winds all the way down (with diversions aplenty) to the base of the Creekside Gondola. “[It’s] a classic,” says Douglas. The run is a leg-burner in the best snow conditions, but a particular challenge when it hasn’t been groomed all the way – which is often. “It can get pretty gnarly down at the bottom there!” Douglas says. “It’s a good all-rounder, a big challenge – and something that people often come here and want to try and do by the end of the week.” Thankfully it finishes next to Dusty’s, a beloved pitstop serving beers and massive BBQ plates on the terrace or by the fireplace. “The pulled-pork sandwich is always a fave there,” says Douglas. Douglas also recommends Whistler’s Harmony Ridge and Blackcomb’s Cloud Nine as similar runs offering sweeping vistas and epic curve potential.

3. Best for a post-ski surprise: Vallea Lumina
Vallea Lumina Night Walk is an immersive, after-dark, multimedia forest adventure. Following clues and cryptic radio transmissions in search of two lost hikers, participants proceed through a mystical storyline rendered with holograms, lasers, music and more. It’s designed in collaboration with Moment Factory, which has staged Cirque Du Soleil events. “Honestly, I remember that when I first heard about it, I thought it sound-

ed cheesy as hell,” Douglas admits. “I didn’t really have much interest – until I started hearing from people that went to it.” The reviews were so good that he had to check it out, and “it’s world class!” he says. “I’ve probably been six or eight times. If I have friends here from out of town for a week, it’s always a recommendation.” If visiting with children or people with access requirements, note that Vallea Lumina requires a kilometre of self-guided walking along snow-cleared but uneven winter terrain.

4. Best for dinner: Sushi Village
“Sushi Village – all time fave!” Douglas says when asked to name a Whistler culinary highlight. The Japanese Hawaiian fusion menu at this local mainstay is full of delights: “way ahead of the whole poke craze,” says Douglas. He recommends the Tangy Agedashi Tofu (deep-fried tofu on a bed of bean sprouts with a soy-based sauce) and the Ahi Poke. The atmosphere – always fun, sometimes raucous – is also key. Sushi Village is also a sentimental place for Douglas, given he worked there for four years shortly after moving to Whistler. “One of my local claims to fame is inventing the modern recipe for the Strawberry Sake Margarita on a hilarious drunken night with owner Miki Homma when I worked there in the early ’90s,” he reminisces. But the true magic of Sushi Village lies in its legendary role in Whistler’s history. “It is the cultural heart of Whistler, in my opin-



been to Whistler, or haven’t been exposed to our Indigenous cul-



ion,” Douglas says. And, when asked whether his friends would agree, he says he “can’t think of a single one that wouldn’t”. Sushi Village was Whistler’s sixth-ever restaurant, opened in December 1985 by three Vancouver friends who simply wanted to ski every day. It soon became a storied hangout for the outdoor community. “It seems most of the celebs that roll through Whistler make a stop,” says Douglas. “Check out the ‘Wall of Fame’ on the ‘five-mile’ walk to the restroom.”

5. Best for a rest day: Squamish Lil’wat Cultural Centre

The area today known as Whistler is located on the unceded territories of the Lil’wat and Squamish First Nations. European colonists – mostly prospectors and fur trappers – only started settling there in the late 19th Century as part of a long process of displacement and oppression of Indigenous communities. Engaging with and learning about this Indigenous heritage is essential for an authentic experience of Whistler – or anywhere in modern-day Canada. And the Squamish Lil’wat Cultural Centre is the perfect place for it. “Especially for people that haven’t

ture, I think it’s pretty well done and a really cool thing to check out,” says Douglas. “There are thousands of years of human history in this region that were never properly acknowledged until this century. It’s nice to see the record finally being set straight.” The centre is a museum, art gallery and event space promoting and exploring First Nations culture and history through diverse and ever-changing exhibitions, activities and events. Visitors can connect with Cultural Ambassadors, join an interpretive forest walk, participate in Indigenous craft workshops and more.

6. Best for sore legs: ScandinaVe Spa
ScandinaVe is a sumptuous spa on the north edge of town, surrounded by old-growth forest. With dry saunas, hot pools, thermal waterfalls, cold plunges and massage therapies available, there is no more luxurious way to recuperate after hard days of skiing. “I’ll go into an hour-and-a-half rotation of hot tub, cold plunge, sauna, relaxation room,” says Douglas. “I prefer it in winter, and I prefer it when the weather isn’t good... when the skiing is crappy.” He recommends either booking ahead or going early in the day to ensure a spot and avoid the crowds.

ENTERTAINMENT

Emraan is entirely different both on and off screen

Taskaree co-star Zoya Afroz

Mumbai: The release of Neeraj Pandey’s Taskaree: The Smugglers Web last Friday has already caused a stir because it highlights the lives and jobs of customs inspectors. Zoya Afroz is one actor who stood out among the white-uniformed officials. Without giving away any plot points, she plays a crucial part in the show’s climax and other significant turns. Zoya discussed how she got the job and acknowledged that, prior to meeting her co-star Emraan Hashmi, she had a very different impression of him in an exclusive interview with India Today before to the release. She also reflected on her happy recollections of Hum Saath Saath Hain, in which she portrayed Neelam Kothari and Mahesh Thakur’s daughter. Zoya blushed and said she was too young to recall much from the event as we talked about how images and footage from the Rajshri movie appear whenever someone Googles her name. She does, however, remember being spoiled on site. Actually, I don’t recall much because I was only three years old. I have those memories or those pictures since my mother used to tell me stories. However, I do recall being incredibly pampered on set, and being a young artist on set was a very different experience. And all the stars were there while Sooraj sir was on site. Additionally, you are exclusively cared for and treated as a three-year-old. Everyone attends and imparts knowledge. And as a three-year-old, you are only like, taken care of, pampered. Everyone comes and teaches you lines, I remember Karisma and everyone,” she said. Before she could complete her



statement, Emraan Hashmi, who was part of the conversation, jumped in to say, “I would never get cast in a Sooraj Barjatya film. I would contaminate it completely. I am the most misplaced person [to be] in a Sooraj Barjatya film.” His co-star, Sharad Kelkar, dismissed the statement and added that he would happily cast him in a “nice family film”.Zoya took over and shared that she presumed Emraan to be something very different from what he is, thanks to his past work. “Honestly, for me, I think the on-screen image of Emraan and the off-screen, I felt like those were like [so very different]. You have preconceived notions. It’s two very different sides; this is why I was actually nervous when I met him the first time. The on-screen charisma and charm, that is, of course, there, but he’s such a gentle-

man off-screen. I was really amazed, and it was such a great experience.,” she added. Zoya also traced her association with Taskaree and Neeraj Pandey back to her brief role in Sikandar Ka Muqaddar. She admitted she’s still at a stage where she isn’t choosing projects but feels validated being repeatedly cast by a filmmaker of his calibre. She added that what stood out most was the professionalism on his sets, where all the drama was reserved strictly for the screen. “Firstly, he’s a brilliant, brilliant storyteller. His production house is the best production house I’ve ever worked on. I mean, they’re on point; they’re so professional. Whatever drama he has, it’s for the screen. Behind the screen, it’s calm, it’s on point. Everything is like, to the T, absolutely meticulously planned.”

Love and War by Sanjay Leela Bhansali will now be released in early 2027

Mumbai: Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s film Love and War, which stars Ranbir Kapoor, Alia Bhatt, and Vicky Kaushal, is now expected to hit theaters in 2027 rather than this year as originally planned. According to a Pinkvilla article, the reason for the delay is that the film’s development and post-production took longer than anticipated. The magazine was informed by those close to the production that a large chunk of the shot is still unfinished. The film’s timeframe has been altered, and its anticipated release date has been rescheduled. Nevertheless, the filmmakers have not yet re-



leased an official statement. The team intends to finish principal photography by June, according to the article. The movie will next enter a lengthy post-production stage. Love and War’s

size is reportedly a major contributing factor to the project’s delay because it has intricate aerial action scenes that need for a lot of visual effects work. The producers have apparently cho-

sen not to expedite the post-production process, recognizing the technical demands of the picture, given Bhansali’s emphasis on visual detail and production quality. Another factor influencing the revised release plan is Ranbir Kapoor’s other major project, Ramayana: Part One, which is slated for a November 2026 release. With the shoot expected to wrap up by June and post-production likely to continue till the end of the year, a release around January 2027 (Republic Day) or February 2027 (Valentine’s Day) is now being reportedly considered.

O Romeo, starring Shahid Kapoor, is in legal trouble

New Delhi: One of the most anticipated films of 2026, “O Romeo,” starring Shahid Kapoor, faces a legal dispute before its February 13 release. Hus-sain Ustara, the man believed to have inspired the film, is at the center of the controversy initiated by his daughter, Sanober Sheikh, who claims that the movie distorts her father’s history and demands ₹2 crore in compensation. She asserts that the film inaccurately portrays her father as a criminal, while she insists he was a protector against crime. Sanober emphasizes the familial bond with Sapna Didi, whom her father helped, contrary to suggestions of a romantic relationship in the film. Despite tensions escalating, including accusations directed at Sanober of making threats, she maintains that her concerns are about her father’s image, not financial gain, and prepares for further legal action as the release date approaches.



Preity Zinta got personal’ KJo reveals on Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna

New Delhi: Karan Johar talks candidly about the emotional upheaval he experienced while filming Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna (KANK) in 2006. Karan Johar’s 2006 film Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna received mixed reviews from the audience on release, but it went on to become a cult classic. This was because the musical romantic drama, which explored themes of marital infidelity, emotional dissatisfaction and dysfunctional relationships was way ahead of its time. It followed the story of Shah Rukh Khan and Rani Mukerji’s characters, who begin an extramarital affair after years of unhappy marriages with their respective onscreen spouses, played by Preity Zinta and Abhishek Bachchan. Well, in a new interview, KJo has revealed how



the emotional turmoil we witnessed onscreen affected the actors behind the scenes. During a recent event with Rani Mukerji, Karan Johar shared how difficult it was for Preity Zinta to understand why Shah Rukh Khan’s character cheated in Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna. KJo remembered, “She was getting very personal... I had taken her aside, and we went for a walk. I said, ‘It’s not Preity Zinta. This is Rhea. It’s happening to her’.” Well, Preity was not the only one. Talking about Rani’s onscreen husband Abhishek Bachchan, Karan shared, “I remember, at one point, Abhishek broke down... remember there was an emotional scene? I remember he broke down.

Aamir Khan and GF Gauri Spratt to move in together, actor says: ‘I’m already married to her, whether we formalise...’

New Delhi: Aamir Khan opens up about marriage plans with girlfriend Gauri Spratt On his 60th birthday last year, Bollywood’s Mr Perfectionist Aamir Khan introduced the media to his girlfriend Gauri Spratt, after dating for 18 months. Soon an old video of the couple along with Aamir’s ex-wives Reena Dutta and Kiran Rao from Irfan Pathan’s anniversary party went viral, suggesting that Aamir’s family and Gauri had already become friends. Well, Aamir and Gauri have now been dating for over 2 long years and according

to latest reports, they are ready to take the next step in their relationship. The couple are moving in together, into a new house which is reportedly not too far from where the rest of Aamir’s family lives. In a chat with Bollywood Hungama, Aamir Khan opened up about moving in with Gauri Spratt and stated, “This is happening right in the middle of my production Happy Patel being released. So, it’s madness.” Talking about commitment and marriage plans, the actor shared, “Gauri and I are really serious



about each other and we are in a very committed space. And we are, you know, we are partners.

We are together. Marriage is something, I mean, in my heart, I’m already married to her. So

whether we formalise it or not is something that, you know, I will decide as we go along.”

Sara Arjun speaks forth about her 20-year age difference with Ranveer Singh In Dhurandhar

Mumbai: The casting of Ranveer Singh and Sara Arjun as the main couple in Dhurandhar sparked a wave of social media responses, much of which focused on the two actors’ 20-year age difference. Sara has now responded to the talk by stating that she appreciates other points of view and that everyone is free to hold their own opinions. Sara, who costarred alongside Ranveer Singh in the movie, talked about the controversy around the age difference in an interview with NDTV. She defended the casting, claiming that she always knew it was appropriate given the plot. Prior to the movie’s premiere, Sara revealed that she had entirely cut herself off from social media, thus the online discussions around her and Ranveer’s age difference never truly affected her. She continued by saying that avoiding social media helped her focus and block out the “noise” around her. “Social media is where all the hubbub is? I also don’t do much. I wasn’t very involved in it. Everyone, in my perspective, has an opin-



ion. “Live and let live” is something I firmly believe in. It’s their view... It has no effect on my way of thinking. Sara stated, “I knew the story and I knew it was justified, and that’s all.” Ranveer’s character in Dhurandhar was in his midlife, whereas Sara’s character was an adolescent. The actor praised Ranveer, saying she couldn’t have asked for a better co-star than him in Dhurandhar. “No matter who I work with in the future, I don’t think anybody can top Ranveer,

he has set the bar so high. As an actor, he’s so involved in his own craft, but he also takes care of the whole set. He looks at it (filmmaking) as teamwork. He’s equally involved in what you are doing, and equally involved in what the person on set was designing, the set is doing. So those things really matter. He carries all of us together,” she added. Dhurandhar has been a blockbuster at the box office since it released in theatres on December 5 last year.

Why Karan Johar broke down while working with Salman Khan

Mumbai: In a recent interview, director Karan Johar talked about his first experience working with Salman Khan on Kuch Kuch Hota Hai, a movie that still has a sizable fan base over 28 years after it was released. The filmmaker gave an insight into the working environment that went into making one of the most acclaimed films in Hindi cinema. Johar talked on the difficulties he encountered when collaborating with Salman Khan, a well-known celebrity at the time. He described how he was nervous about controlling expectations on set, especially when he first met Khan. “Why he ‘ended up crying.’” the director said. This scene demonstrates the difficulties of directing well-known actors, particularly when making a directing debut. Johar talked about the stress and uncertainty he experienced after their first encounter on site. Johar states, “I was... what should I say? It was my first time working with Salman Khan. He was a famous star, so he was all wound up. I entered his van on his first day of work. He was dressed in pants and a T-shirt. “Salman, you know it’s a big set,” I said. “Yes, but it will be a new style if a groom wears jeans and a T-shirt for the first time,” he retorted. “I’ll bring the swag.” The resolution of this situation came when Salman Khan responded to Johar’s visible distress.

Javed Akhtar says he refused Border 2

Mumbai: Fans have been split ever since Border 2’s songs were released. Listeners who grew up with the music from the first movie (1997) felt a little disgusted because the majority of the tunes were reworked versions of the originals. IndiaToday spoke with the seasoned lyricist on the backlash as social media erupted with calls for the return of Anu Malik and Javed Akhtar.We were shocked to learn that he was asked to write for the movie by the producers, but he turned them down, calling it “a kind of intellectual and creative bankruptcy.” “They did ask me to write for the film but I refused,” Akhtar stated in an exclusive discussion, addressing the internet talk and viewers’ perception that the picture lacked an emotional core. This strikes me as a form of creative and intellectual bank-



ruptcy. You want to add something to an old song that went well and release it again. Create new songs or acknowledge that you are unable to perform at the same caliber. The well-known author questioned the increasing practice of recreating parts of classic songs, claiming that each movie has a unique enchantment that cannot be rekindled. “Whatever is by-gone, let that be. What is the need to recreate it? We had a film before us also, which was Haqeeqat (1964). And its songs were not ordinary ones. Be it ‘Kar chale hum fida’

or ‘Main yeh sochkar uske dar se utha tha’. Those were such brilliant songs, but we didn’t use them. We wrote new ones, we made absolutely different songs, and people liked them too. You are making a movie again, so create new songs. Why are you depending on the past? You have accepted that we can’t do it. We will live with the past glory.” When we pointed out that many believe rehashing could simply be a marketing tactic to stir nostalgia, he dismissed the idea with a sharp reply. “You create new nostalgia then,” he added.

Hollywood’s largest animated feature ever is Zootopia 2



Mumbai: According to Variety, Disney’s sequel Zootopia 2 has become Hollywood’s highest-grossing animated film ever, setting a new record at the box office worldwide. With a global box office total of USD 1.7 billion, the movie only missed Disney’s 2024 feature Inside Out 2, which came in at USD 1.69 billion. According to Deadline, the accomplishment ranks Zootopia 2 as the ninth highest-grossing movie in cinema history, surpassing hits like Jurassic World and The Lion King. However, China’s Ne Zha 2, which has gathered USD 2.25 billion, continues to hold the global animation record. Reacting to the milestone, Disney Entertainment co-chairman Alan Bergman credited audiences worldwide for the film’s success. He praised directors

Jared Bush and Byron Howard, producer Yvett Merino, and the team at Walt Disney Animation Studios for delivering a story that resonated across markets. Released during the Thanksgiving holiday period, Zootopia 2 recorded a USD 156 million opening in North America and USD 559.5 million globally within five days. The performance marked the largest global opening ever for an animated film and the biggest worldwide debut of the year. The sequel reunites audiences with rabbit police officer Judy Hopps, voiced by Ginnifer Goodwin, and con-artist fox Nick Wilde, voiced by Jason Bateman, as they investigate a case linked to a mysterious new reptilian resident, voiced by Ke Huy Quan. Disney has not yet announced plans for a third instalment in the franchise.

Sharp remarks made by the Supreme Court at the Aravalli hearing



New Delhi, Jan 25: While hearing the Aravalli Hills case on Wednesday, the Supreme Court raised worries over illegal building due to the drying up of Chandigarh’s famous Sukhna Lake. A Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant declared that the Sukhna Lake had been “completely damaged” as a result of officials’ and the building mafia’s collusion, cautioning the Haryana government against making the same mistakes twice. “Kitna sukhaoge Sukna Lake ko (How much will you dry up Sukhna Lake) since the building mafia is working and state authorities are complicit... The CJI-led bench declared, “You have completely damaged the lake.” Rain-fed One of Chandigarh’s most popular tourist destinations, Sukhna Lake, has long suffered from declining water

levels. In actuality, the lake has changed significantly from the lovely body of water that formerly drew thousands of visitors each day. While considering the matter pertaining to the revised definition of the Aravalli range, the Supreme Court made some pointed comments. The court suspended its own order last year in response to public outcry over the new definition and established an expert committee (CEC) to conduct a thorough investigation of the matter. Previously, the top court had accepted the definition of the Aravallis proposed by the government – hills with a 100-metre height would be considered as ‘Aravalli hills’. Two or more such hills within 500 metres of each other, along with the land between them, will be considered an Aravalli range. The hills span Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan,

and Gujarat, the CJI asked the amicus curiae, senior advocate K Parameshwar, who is assisting the court, to file a detailed note within four weeks by incorporating suggestions from all parties and stakeholders. The top court made it clear that the definition of “forests” and “Aravallis” would be kept separate in its new order.

“What defines a forest will be examined separately. We will consider it as a wider term. The Aravalli issue will be kept narrower,” the Supreme Court said. It also directed the Rajasthan government to ensure that illegal mining is stopped “immediately”. On the proposed Aravalli Zoo Safari project, the CJI-led bench clarified that no work would be allowed unless the central panel submitted its opinion and all environmental clearances were obtained.

BJP’s mayoral ambition in Kalyan-Dombivli is derailed by the Shinde Sena-MNS alliance



Mumbai, Jan 25: There are always shocks in Maharashtra politics. The state has become a labyrinth of shifting coalitions as a result of the recently concluded municipal corporation elections. This situation occurred in Kalyan-Dombivli, where Raj Thackeray’s Maharashtra Navnirman Sena and the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena put aside their acrimonious rivalry to form an alliance in order to keep the BJP from winning the mayoral position. The BJP performed admirably in the 122-member Kalyan-Dombivli Municipal Corporation elections, capturing 50 seats in what is thought to be Shinde’s stronghold.

The MNS won five seats, while the Shinde Sena got fifty-three. Eleven seats were gained by the Sena faction led by Uddhav Thackeray. A party or alliance must have the magic number of 62 in order to rule the KDMC. However, despite being members of Maharashtra’s ruling Mahayuti, the BJP and the Shiv Sena have clashed over Kalyan-Dombivli’s mayoral position. Shrikant, the son of Sena MP and Eknath Shinde, confirmed the merger with Raj Thackeray’s party at a high-level meeting at Konk- an Bhavan on Wednesday.

Their combined strength now stands at 58, just short of the 62-seat majority. Shri- kant alluded to the possibility of four corporators from the Uddhav faction joining the coalition during the discussion. The coalition would easily surpass the majority threshold with the support of a few Sena (UBT) corporators. Then, a power-sharing agreement with the BJP might not be

In Kalyan-Dombivli, the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena kept aside its bitter rivalry with Raj Thackeray’s Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) to stitch up an alliance to prevent the BJP from securing the mayor’s post.

necessary. The BJP, which has insisted on a power-sharing deal with a 2.5-year split mayoral term, has seen this post-election twist as a setback. The Shinde Sena, however, is eager to keep the mayor’s position for the entire term.

The undivided Shiv Sena won 52 seats in the most recent elections in Kalyan-Dombivli. Similar circumstances occurred earlier this month in the municipal councils of Ambernath and Akola, which held elections in December 2025. The BJP joined forces with the Congress in Ambernath and Asaduddin Owaisi’s AIMIM in Akola. Later on, though, the BJP leadership clamped down on the coalitions. Twelve of the Congress’s corporators in Ambernath were also suspended. The development comes even as suspense continues over Mumbai’s Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), where the BJP-Shinde Sena combine ended the Thackeray family’s nearly three-decade dominance over India’s richest civic body. Even though the BJP-Sena alliance have enough numbers to install its mayor, consensus has eluded. The Mahayuti bagged 118 wards, surpassing the majority mark of 114 in the 227-member BMC. The high-stakes municipal corporation election has laid bare the faultlines within the Mahayuti.

India will deploy more than 50 spy satellites after learning from Operation Sindoor

New Delhi, Jan 25: According to a recent report, India intends to launch over fifty additional spy satellites with nighttime imaging capability after surveillance blind spots were discovered during Operation Sindoor and the four-day confrontation with Pakistan last year. Satellites were widely employed to identify and track targets during last year’s four-day standoff with Pakistan, which took place from May 7 to May 10. According to the Bloomberg report, India’s satellites were essentially useless at night or in overcast situations. China, whose satellites already have the capability, provided assistance to Pakistan, which has much fewer satellites in orbit than India. According to Bloomberg, Delhi has to purchase satellite imagery from US-based businesses in order to organize strikes because India’s surveillance gaps over a particular area can last for days.



A technological advancement is at the core of the satellite strategy. According to Bloomberg, India plans to switch from electro-optical imaging to synthetic aperture radar, which enables satellites to take better pictures at night and through cloud cover. Additionally, efforts are being made to enhance satellite-to-satellite data exchanges, which will lessen the need for ground stations and expedite information flow in times of conflict. The Space-Based Surveillance-3 program’s

initial phase entails accelerating the launch of over fifty satellites. “To protect our borders, we need a significant number of satellites. In April of last year, Isro chairman V. Narayanan was cited as saying, “The current fleet is insufficient.” Within the next three years, we want to add between 100 and 150 satellites. This will allow us to keep a close eye on the entire nation,” he had stated. According to the Bloomberg report, the anticipated cost of deploying 150 satellites is approximately Rs 260

billion (\$2.8 billion). The Rs 26,968-crore Phase 3 of the Space-Based Surveillance (SBS) programme, which was cleared by the prime minister-led Cabinet Committee on Security in October last year, includes the launch of more than 50 satellites — some to be built and launched by Isro and some by three private Indian companies. Bloomberg had reported in September last year that India is also developing “bodyguard satellites” to detect and counter threats to its spacecraft in orbit. The Narendra Modi government is also exploring the creation of overseas ground stations to relay intelligence faster and with wider coverage, the Bloomberg report said quoting unnamed sources. The proposed locations of these ground stations could be in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Scandinavia – subject to approval from host governments – according to the report.

A trial run of a Rs 21-crore Surat water tank falls prior to its inauguration

Surat, Jan 25: The project to give drinking water to 33 villages in the Surat district of Gujarat suffered a significant setback when a water tank built at a cost of Rs 21 crore collapsed even before it was inaugurated. The incident has raised major concerns about the quality of the building materials used to construct the water tank and sparked a corruption controversy. Under the state’s “Gaypagla Group Water Supply Scheme,” the incident took place at Tadkeshwar village in Mandvi taluka. On January 19, the 15-meter-tall, 11-lakh-liter water tank collapsed during a test run, causing panic and indignation among the locals. Officials said that at around noon, the entire structure fell way and collapsed like a house of cards after about 9 lakh liters of water had been added to the tank for testing. Three laborers, including a lady, were hurt in the mishap. Fortunately, the tank had not yet been inaugurated or con-



nected to household water supply lines, preventing a significant disaster.

The project to provide drinking water to 33 communities in the Surat district has suffered a significant setback as a result of the collapse. Locals claim that inferior materials were utilized despite spending Rs 21 crore of public funds, indicating widespread wrongdoing. A reality check at the site revealed alarming signs of poor construction quality. Layers of cement were seen peeling off from the debris, strength-

ening suspicions of irregularities in the use of cement and iron. Villagers accused the contractor of compromising on material quality to cut costs and siphon off funds. Deputy Engineer of the Surat Water Supply Department, Jay Somabhai Chaudhary, confirmed that the project was awarded to “Jayanti Swaroop” agency at a cost of Rs 21 crore. He said the tank was still under trial when the collapse occurred and assured that a detailed technical investigation would be conducted. Executive En-

gineer Jay Chaudhary stated that a team of structural engineers from SVNIT (Sardar Vallabhbhai National Institute of Technology), Surat, has been assigned to probe the incident. “Strict action will be taken against the contractor once the investigation report is submitted,” he said. However, local residents remain unconvinced. Abu Bakar, a resident of Tadkeshwar village, said villagers had waited for nearly three years with hopes of getting clean drinking water. “The tank collapsed even before water could reach our homes. This is clear corruption. If this had happened after inauguration, many lives could have been lost,” he said. Residents are now demanding not just an inquiry but criminal action against corrupt officials and contractors responsible for the misuse of public funds. They insist that only high-quality materials be used so that villages receive safe and reliable drinking water.

ED’s extensive action in several states against the fraudulent Input Tax Credit scheme

New Delhi, Jan 25: In relation to a large fraudulent Input Tax Credit (ITC) scam worth an estimated Rs 658 crore, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is undertaking significant search operations throughout Jharkhand, Manipur, Kolkata, and other states. The locations of people and businesses thought to be connected to the fraud are being searched.

In collaboration with state police forces, the ED’s Itanagar section is leading the operation. Investigators claim that the case involves creating and using fictitious invoices to obtain



illegal ITC without actually supplying any goods or services. In addition to causing the exchequer a large loss, such fraudulent ITC applications are frequently linked to networks of shell corporations and money laundering. The case

originates from an FIR registered at Itanagar Police Station, Arunachal Pradesh, against Rakesh Sharma and Ashutosh Kumar Jha, along with other unidentified persons.

They are accused of criminal conspiracy involving

cheating and forgery of documents. As per the complaint, fraudulent activities were carried out by M/s Siddhi Vinayak Trade Merchants (GSTIN: 12OZYP-S8590C1ZC), a non-existent entity, which allegedly availed ITC amounting to Rs 99.31 crore on the basis of bogus invoices valued at Rs 658.55 crore. The transactions involved as many as 58 shell entities spread across multiple states. The ED is further probing the layering of fake ITC and tracing the proceeds of crime generated through this mechanism.

Delhi HC Issues Notice To Salman Khan

New Delhi, Jan 25: Anisha Singh and Nalini Sharma talk about a big case involving Bollywood star Salman Khan at the Delhi High Court. The actor received a warning from the court after a Chinese AI voice platform filed an application. A prior injunction order from December 12, 2025, which safeguarded Khan’s personality rights, is being contested by the platform. According to Nalini Sharma, the AI platform claims that their content is obviously AI-generated and is attempting to get the ban lifted so it may carry on with its business operations. Justice Jyoti Singh asked Khan, who was represented by Advocate Nizam Pasha, to respond during the brief hearing. The conversation focuses on the escalating legal conflict between the financial goals of generative AI platforms and the rights of celebrity personalities. The High Court has granted four weeks for a response, with the next hearing scheduled for February 27, 2026. This case marks a pivotal moment as it is the first instance of an AI platform seeking to reverse such a personality rights ruling in India



Bangladesh is adamant about not attending the T20 World Cup in India

New Delhi: Bangladesh has reaffirmed that they are not prepared to modify their position over their participation in the ICC T20 World Cup in India. The government’s sports adviser, Asif Nazrul, added that he was unaware that Scotland would be taking their place in the World Cup. Citing security concerns, Bangladesh has declined to participate in India. Asif stated in Dhaka on Tuesday, “I am not aware that Scotland will be included in our place.” “We won’t accept ridiculous conditions if the ICC gives in to pressure from the Indian Cricket Board and tries to put pressure on us. “We have asked to change the venue on logical grounds and we cannot be forced to play in India by putting illogical pressure.” Bangladesh T20 captain Litton Das said players’ consent had not been sought regarding participation in the World Cup beginning on February 7. “I don’t know but there has been no communication with me. Many things in life are not ideal, but you have to accept them according to the situation,” Das said. “We’re not even sure whether we’ll go to the World Cup.”



Gael Monfils says goodbye to the Australian Open with emotion

New Delhi: After losing to youthful Dane Sweeny in the first round of his final match at Melbourne Park before retiring, Gael Monfils was clearly upset as he said goodbye to the Australian Open. Against the Queenslander, rated world No. 182, Monfils, who made his debut at the Australian Open as a youngster in 2003, displayed glimpses of his signature flare and threatened a comeback with some striking shot-making.

The Frenchman got off to a strong start by winning the first set, but with home support at Kia Arena, Sweeny rallied to win the next three sets and end the match 6-7 (3-7), 7-5, 6-4, 7-5. It marked the end of Monfils’ 20th Australian Open campaign. Hampered by injury, the 39-year-old still produced moments of brilliance before being honoured in a special presentation ceremony following the match.

The Frenchman, who made his main-draw debut in 2005, took time to thank the crowd, which included his wife and world No.12 Elina Svitolina, for what he described as an “amazing ride.” “My journey started in 2003 with you guys. Now we are in 2026 and

somehow it is the finish line, but wow, thank you so much,” Monfils told the crowd. “I’ve got a lot of great memories here, a couple of big battles, quarterfinals, fourth rounds. Even today was almost four hours. You guys did an amazing job.” Monfils had become the oldest man to reach the fourth round of the Australian Open since Roger Federer last year after defeating fourth seed Taylor Fritz.

Paris-born Monfils has never won a Grand Slam, but he has often gone deep at the biggest tournaments, including quarter-final runs in Melbourne in 2016 and 2022. “I told him at the net, I read his story. This kid got hurt, so I really wish you good luck for the next one because, wow, he’s been very good. So good luck,” he said. “Again, a big thanks. I’ve been very grateful. I’ve been very lucky to play here for many years. So thank you very much, merci beaucoup.” Despite being hampered by movement issues, Monfils still thrilled the crowd at Kia Arena with moments of his trademark flamboyance. For Sweeny, the 24-year-old claimed the biggest win of his career, registering his first-ever main-draw victory at a Grand Slam to reach the second round of the Australian Open.



Nitish Kumar Reddy fails to impress in Rajkot

New Delhi: In the second ODI against New Zealand on Wednesday in Rajkot, Nitish Kumar Reddy was unable to capitalize on his opportunity. His attempts to establish himself as an all-rounder for the Indian side were hampered by his meager 20 off 21 balls when he came in to bat at No. 7 and went wicketless with the ball in the two overs he had to bowl. Is Nitish's time running out? Ryan ten Doeschate, the assistant coach for Team India, expressed his dissatisfaction with the 22-year-old to reporters following the game, which raises concerns. Doeschate remarked, "With Nitish, we keep



talking about developing him and getting him game time, but when you do get him game time, he often ends up not doing a heck of a lot in the games." "It was that ideal opportunity where you're walking in that situation and have the chance to spend 15 overs at the wicket for someone who's making their way, especially with the bat."

Suryakumar, a trailblazer seeking his legacy

New Delhi: Suryakumar Yadav will become the 53rd man to play 100 T20 internationals when he captains India in Nagpur; 44 of them have done it for Full Member countries. Not one of them is Mark Chapman, who has played 19 games for Hong Kong and 81 for New Zealand. Suryakumar will be the only player out of the 44 who has not participated in 40 ODIs or 10 Test matches. He is the longest-lasting T20I expert from a Full Member country. It's intriguing that Suryakumar is the first to reach this little milestone in the quickly changing world of professional cricket. The first person to play at such a volume never intended to be one of the many T20 specialists, a number that will only increase. He continues to play first-class and List A cricket for Mumbai whenever he has the opportunity. Being a T20 specialist wasn't even a dream when he first started, let alone a feasible career choice. He is now 35 years old. It illustrates how limited-overs cricket has evolved. India has only played 23 ODIs and up to 54 T20Is since the 2023 ODI World Cup final, which was also the final of Suryakumar's 37 ODIs. Suryakumar is India's fourth-most-capped player during this time, despite only participating in one format. Behind this rise of T20 specialists is a possible realisation that adjusting from ODIs to T20s is not quite the same as adjusting from Tests



to ODIs. That T20 is closer to being a different sport than just a different format of the sport. Suryakumar happened to work his way to a game that works in this format, youngsters are now training for it. Six of eight batters in India's regular T20I XI play only that format internationally: Sanju Samson, Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Shivam Dube and Rinku Singh, apart from Suryakumar. However, this sport called T20 doesn't have a different fanbase. It results in unique challenges for those who play only T20. In Indian players' case, it gets compounded because they can't play any league other than the IPL. Suryakumar has quickly gone from comparisons with AB de Vil-

liers to someone who hasn't scored a single international fifty in a year. Teams are bowling better at him, and the only competitive environment he gets to work his way back in is top-level cricket. When Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli went into the 2024 T20 World Cup, they were desperate for an ICC title, but their legacy as cricketers was secure. For Suryakumar, the World Cup starting in three weeks could mean it all. Yes, he was part of the winning side last year, and yes, he took a special catch in the last over of the final, but it seems like a distant memory given his recent struggles. The upcoming two months will bring a touch of desperation for Suryaku-

mar. In the wretched year that he has had with the bat, he has been getting out to full balls, something batters generally love when looking to hit. He has been saying that he knows what is going wrong, and that he has been working on it. There is a school of thought that wonders if a niggles is holding back his hitting ability. Being the captain, he can't sit out. He has to work his way back in amid the glare. It is unlikely Suryakumar will be around for the 2028 T20 World Cup. If he doesn't win this one as the captain, he will end his career with IPL titles but no instantly memorable big trophy in T20I cricket. The next two months could be legacy-defining for a pioneer of sorts.

Senegal's "Historic" AFCON Champions Receive Presidential Appreciation and a Parade

New Delhi: After tens of thousands of football supporters flocked to Dakar for a joyous homecoming parade, the president of Senegal praised the Lions of Teranga on Tuesday for their "historic" triumph over Morocco in the Africa Cup of Nations final. For over seven hours, the players and coaches waved their trophy from an open-top bus as they slowly made their way across the capital and past huge crowds of supporters before arriving at the presidential palace at twilight. President Bassirou Diomaye Faye informed the players they had "demonstrat-

ed exceptional fighting spirit, extraordinary resilience, and an iron will, and that is what makes your victory historic" during a celebration held on the premises. Downtown was overcome by a fever pitch of almost deafening noise -- revving engines, horns, vuvuzelas and shouting -- as the players arrived for the reception. All day throngs of especially younger fans crowded the streets with electric energy, chanting, whistling, waving flags, dancing and blowing vuvuzelas. Some walked or even ran alongside the bus, while multitudes lined the sidewalks, some-

times watching from buildings and bridges, or even climbing on top of cars and billboards to get a view. Senegal won the Africa Cup of Nations when they beat hosts Morocco 1-0 in a chaotic final in Rabat on Sunday that saw the eventual champions storm off the pitch late in the game. The team arrived back in Senegal on a special flight shortly before midnight on Monday, where they were greeted by President Faye, Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko and other members of the government. Fan Doudou Thiam told AFP from the parade's sidelines in the Bourguiba



neighbourhood that he "wouldn't have missed this moment for the world". "The Lions are our pride and they deserve all the honours", said the 26-year-old, who was wearing a Senegal jersey. After Senegal's victory, fans flooded the

streets, filling the air with honking, fireworks and the deafening roar of vuvuzelas. The win marked Senegal's second title, after their 2022 victory over Egypt in Cameroon. It was the team's third final in just the last four editions.

PV Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth advance to the second round

Indonesia Masters

New Delhi: At the Indonesia Masters badminton tournament on Wednesday, two-time Olympic champion PV Sindhu and former world No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth advanced to the second round of their respective competitions. In a 53-minute women's singles match, fifth-seeded Sindhu defeated Japan's Manami Suizu 22-20 21-18, while Srikanth, now ranked 33rd in the world, fought for one hour and twelve minutes to defeat world No. 22 Koki Watanabe 21-15 21-23 24-22. The fourth-seeded Chou



Tien Chen of Chinese Taipei, who overcame Nhat Nguyen of Ireland 21-14 21-15 in another first-round encounter, will next face Srikanth. But Kiran George made a first round exit after losing 17-21 14-21 to Moh Zaki Ubaidillah of Indonesia. In women's singles, Akarshi Kashyap too bowed out in the opening round, losing to Julie Dawall Jakobsen 21-8 20-22 17-21. India's campaign ended in mixed doubles with the pairs of Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Gadde and Dhruv Kapila and Tanish Crasto exiting in the very first round. While Kapoor and Gadde lost 9-21 20-22 to fourth seeds Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue of France, Kapila and Crasto were shown the door by another French pair of Julien Maio and Lea Palermo 23-21 20-22 6-21.

Morocco threaten to take legal action against Senegal

New Delhi: The Royal Moroccan Football Federation has threatened legal action against Senegal after Morocco's loss in the Africa Cup of Nations final on January 18, 0-1, with Senegal's Papa Gueye scoring in the 94th minute. Morocco criticized Senegal for unprofessional conduct, citing players' threats to leave the pitch in protest of a penalty awarded in the second half. Diaz later issued an apology to Moroccan fans, saying he would try to repay their trust in the future.

Saina Nehwal Retires From Competitive Badminton

New Delhi: Saina Nehwal, the prominent Indian badminton player and 2012 Olympic bronze medalist, has announced her retirement from competitive badminton after two years of battling a chronic knee condition. She revealed that her knee degeneration and arthritis made it impossible to sustain the physical training necessary for elite competition.

Although she last competed at the 2023 Singapore Open, she had de-

cided to stop playing two years ago, believing that her absence would clearly convey her retirement.

Saina reflected on the challenges posed by her condition and noted that rigorous training had become unattainable, leading to the conclusion that her active sports career was over. Despite past successes and a brief comeback following her 2016 injury, recurring knee issues ultimately ended her journey in badminton.

Real Madrid defeats Monaco in the Champions League thanks to Kylian Mbappe and Vinicius



New Delhi: Tensions within the club were reduced on Tuesday when Real Madrid easily defeated Monaco 6-1 in the Champions League thanks to two goals from Kylian Mbappe. During last weekend's home victory over Levante, Vinicius Junior, who was made fun of by his own supporters, also excelled and scored a fantastic goal as Madrid bolstered their chances of finishing in the top eight in the league phase. After taking over for Xabi Alonso last week, new coach Alvaro Arbeloa's players

put on a spectacular offensive show to help supporters forget previous setbacks and achieve a second victory. As Madrid put on what may have been their greatest performance of the year, Jude Bellingham and Franco Mastantuono were also on target for Los Blancos, and Thilo Kehrer fumbled a Vinicius cross into his own net. Arbeloa told Movistar, "The players won this game, with their effort and their quality," following the record 15-time winners' temporary leap to second place on the league phase ta-

ble. "I loved their attitude and their quality, this mentality and ambition is what all Madrid fans want to see." At first, there were still some jeers directed at Vinicius, but they subsided as he showed Madrid's supporters how talented he is. "The last few days have been very complicated, for all of us, but above all for me because of the whistles, and everyone speaking about me," Vinicius replied. "I try to give everything for this shirt and for the club who have given me so much." With his tenth and eleventh

goals, Mbappe extended his lead at the top of the European goalscoring lists and gave his club a commanding lead despite Madrid's struggles. Mbappe has scored in the last two games after missing the Copa del Rey humiliation by Albacete in Arbeloa's terrible opening game. It took just five minutes for the French superstar to open the scoring, slotting home from just inside the area after Fede Valverde knocked on Mastantuono's cut-back. After celebrating with his team-mates Mbappe apologised to the visiting supporters, having first emerged into the world's spotlight while at Monaco. Ansu Fati, on loan at Monaco from Madrid's rivals Barcelona, came close before Arbeloa's side struck again. They launched a devastating counter-attack, with Eduardo Camavinga's clever flick to Arda Guler sparking the move. Guler found Vinicius, who span the ball across for Mbappe, just inside, to tuck home. Despite being shredded defensively, Monaco offered some attacking threat and Jordan Teze hit the crossbar with a well-guided long range effort. Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois also made a couple of solid saves before the break, with Madrid's third coming shortly after the action resumed. Vinicius, heavily involved, unselfishly teed up former River Plate playmaker Mastantuono, who swept home.

Jannik Sinner advances to the Australian Open second round

Hyderabad: When his opponent withdrew, Jannik Sinner, the two-time defending champion, easily advanced to the second round of the Australian Open on Tuesday. After 68 minutes on Rod Laver Arena, Hugo Gaston of France withdrew due to what appeared to be an injury, leaving the Italian second seed leading 6-2, 6-1. Next up for Sinner is either Croatian Dino Prizmic or Australian qualifier James Duckworth. "I saw that he wasn't serving quickly. He's such a gifted player, but it's not how you want to win the game," Sinner remarked.

"I tried to be as aggressive as I could and understood from the start that I had to play at a very high level, which I have done. "I'm very happy to be back here, it's a very special place for me." In the first game of the match, Sinner had a rough start, losing 40-0 on his serve before hitting three aces to hold. The 24-year-old swiftly discovered his devastating range to establish his dominance against the 93rd-ranked



Frenchman, so it was essentially the only setback. Sinner cruised to the opening set in 37 minutes after defeating Alexander Zverev with ease in the final a year ago. Sinner increased his hold on the match after the trainer gave the 25-year-old Gaston a quick treatment in between sets. Gaston shook hands as Sinner easily won the second set. If Sinner wins three straight titles in Melbourne,

Five Twenty20 Internationals between South Africa and India are scheduled for April

New Delhi: A five-game home series against India in April will be South Africa's final Twenty20 International match before the 2026 Women's T20 World Cup. The first two games will take place in Durban on April 17 and 19, while the next two will take place

in Johannesburg on April 22 and 25. On April 27, Benoni will host the series' last game.

In a statement, Enoch Nkwe, CSA director of national teams and high performance, said, "The Proteas Women need to face a team of India's caliber so

close to a World Cup at this stage of preparation." This series will follow South Africa's T20I and ODI series against Pakistan in February-March. South Africa will also tour New Zealand in March-April before returning home for the T20Is against India.