

Heroin seized

Aizawl, Feb 05: Acting on an intelligence input, a team from Gorchuk Police Station a consignment of 360 grams of heroin packed in 30 soap boxes during a raid at Ananda Nagar area in Guwahati.

Two accused — identified as Shahrukh Ahmed of Amariya, Barpeta and Jainul Khan of Rahampur, Barpeta — have been arrested in this connection.

Three mobile phones, including an iPhone, were also seized from them.

Police said the drugs were smuggled from Champai in Mizoram and its value is estimated to be more than Rs 2 crore in the black market.

CM Khemchand seeks cooperation from Meiteis, Kukis for development

Imphal, Feb 05: Hours after taking oath as the chief minister of Manipur, Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Wednesday night sought the cooperation of the Kuki and Meitei communities, who have been at loggerheads since May 2023, saying development in the state would be delayed if there is no peace. Addressing party members at the BJP office after the swearing in, he also appealed to all to forgive their adversaries and forget what had happened. Khemchand said, “For a land to develop and prosper, there has to be peace. The state is inhabited and defended by 36 communities. If the communities forget this, Manipur cannot develop.” “The conflict has brought the most hardships to IDPs of both sides. Recently, when I went to a relief camp of Kuki brothers at Litan (in Ukhrul district), small children and inmates said they want to return home. This feeling was also shared by Meitei IDPs in relief camps in valley areas,” Khemchand said. “When both sides want to return to their respective homes, who are the ones obstructing them? We need to find out and engage in peace talks,” he said. Khemchand said if the two sides do not cooperate, there will be a delay in Viksit (developed) Manipur. “There has been angst in both hills and the valley for whatever has happened. (But) we must forgive each other and forget all, and focus on developing Manipur,” he added. The chief minister also reaffirmed his commitment to work with diligence to advance development and prosperity in the state. In a social media post, he said he was grateful to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for congratulating him on being the CM. “I reaffirm my commitment to work with utmost diligence to advance development and prosperity in Manipur, aligning our collective efforts with the vision of #ViksitBharat,” Singh said. “Our journey ahead will focus on inclusive economic growth, while preserving and strengthening Manipur’s rich cultural heritage. I shall discharge this solemn responsibility with sincerity and dedication, fully mindful of the trust and honour bestowed upon me,” he said.

Poppy plantation destroyed, opium seized

Imphal, Feb 05: A combined team of security forces and forest department on Wednesday destroyed a total of 180 acres of illegal poppy plantation at Leingangching hill range (Mapithel hill range) under Litan-PS, Ukhrul district. 20 huts found at the plantation sites were also destroyed. Security forces also destroyed a total of 38 acres of illegal poppy plantation at Thawai Kuki hill range (Mapithel hill range) under Litan-PS, Ukhrul district. Ten huts found at the plantation sites were also destroyed. On the other hand, security forces intercepted a bus at Tuileluon village, under Sangaikot-PS, Churachandpur district and arrested one Thangminl ian Zou (30) of Teisaijang village, from whose possession, contraband raw opium weighing approximately 57.7 kgs, and a mobile phone were seized. Following further investigation, one Melody Lambu (36) of Pallel Bazaar, presently living at T. Khonomphai village, Koite area, Churachandpur district was arrested.

Bharat Rang Mahotsav held in Aizawl

Aizawl, Feb 05:The theatre-based cultural presentation ‘25th Bharat Rang Mahotsav 2026’ was held at Vanapa Hall, Aizawl, on Wednesday.

It was jointly organised by the National School of Drama, New Delhi and the Art & Culture Department, Government of Mizoram. Carol V.L.M.S. Dawngkimi, Director, Art & Culture Department, attended the programme as the Chief Guest.

Dawngkimi welcomed the gathering and expressed her appreciation for the good collaboration with the National School of Drama (NSD). She stated that the Art & Culture Department, Mizoram intends to continue strengthening training programmes in Drama, Folk Arts, and Music under the Institute of Music & Fine Arts (IMFA), and noted that many people have already benefited from these courses. She further expressed hope that more people would become aware of these train-

ing programmes and make good use of them. She also encouraged school students who are interested to enrol under IMFA. Dawngkimi also expressed hope for continued and stronger co-operation with the National School of Drama in the future.

On the occasion, Shantanu Bose, Dean, National School of Drama, delivered a speech in which he highlighted that Mizoram possesses a rich cultural heritage with many valuable traditions worthy of wider presentation. He expressed hope that through this Theatre Festival, many cultural assets would be preserved and promoted. He also stated that the National School of Drama, New Delhi, is keen to continue collaborating with Mizoram in this field.

The ‘25th Bharat Rang Mahotsav 2026’ was first inaugurated in Delhi on 28 January 2026. It is being taken to various parts of India and will be



organised across all States and Union Territories. The festival is also planned to be held internationally across five continents. Bharat Rang Mahotsav is the largest theatre festival in the world, and through this festival, the National School of Drama aims to promote the-

atre culture.

At the ‘25th Bharat Rang Mahotsav 2026’ event held at Vanapa Hall, Aizawl, the National School of Drama presented ‘Macbeth – Flesh’, written by William Shakespeare. From Mizoram, performances were also presented by

Chawngmawii and Hrangchhuana, based on a script written by M.S. Ralte, Drama Instructor, IMFA. Apart from school students and teachers, former trainees under the Institute of Music & Fine Arts (IMFA) also participated in the programme.

Mizoram bags nine medals at North-East Ju-Jitsu Championship

Aizawl, Feb 05: Mizoram delivered an impressive performance at the 1st North-East Ju-Jitsu Championship held in Guwahati, Assam, from January 31 to February 2, winning a total of nine medals — six gold and three bronze.

The state was represented by a six-member contingent comprising five athletes and one coach, deputised by the Ju-Jitsu Association of Mizoram (JAM). JAM covered the team’s travel, accommodation, food and local logistics expenses.

Mizoram’s athletes competed across multiple formats of the sport and emerged as one of the most successful teams at the championship.

Ju-Jitsu as a martial art includes three major competitive disciplines: Ne-Waza (Brazilian



Jiu-Jitsu), Contact Fighting (under MMA rules), and the Fighting Sys-

tem, which combines striking and grappling techniques. The sport is

widely regarded as one of the fastest-growing martial arts globally and is valued for its effectiveness in self-defence and mixed martial arts (MMA).

The championship brought together athletes from across the North-East, highlighting the growing popularity of the sport in the region.

In Mizoram, Ju-Jitsu has been steadily gaining ground due to the sustained efforts of trainers and organisers, enabling athletes to compete at regional and national-level tournaments. The discipline is recognised by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, acknowledged by the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), and has already been included as a medal event at the Asian Games.

Sikkim’s Pakyong PHC receives new ambulance via NHIDCL CSR initiative

Pakyong, Feb 05: Pakyong Primary Health Centre (PHC) received a new Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulance on Thursday through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative of the National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd. (NHIDCL). The ambulance was formally handed over by NHIDCL Executive Director Ashok Kumar Saha to District Collector Rohan Agawane at the District Administrative Centre, Pakyong. The District Collector subsequently handed it over to the Chief Medical Officer of Pakyong PHC. The initiative aims to strengthen emergency healthcare services and enhance medical outreach in the district. Under its CSR programme for 2025–26, NHIDCL focuses on promoting sustainable development in North-Eastern regions, with key interventions in healthcare, sanitation, child nutrition, and skill development through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) scheme.

District Collector Rohan Agawane expressed gratitude to NHIDCL, noting that the ambulance addresses an important healthcare need in Pakyong



and will particularly benefit residents of rural and remote areas. Chief Medical Officer Dr. Madanmani Dhakal also appreciated the support, highlighting its role in improving healthcare delivery in the district. DPO Pakyong TR Chettri and officials from Pakyong PHC were also present at the handover ceremony. Director, Directorate of Social Welfare and Social Education.

In the beginning Prof. (Dr.) Yogesh Pratap Singh, Vice-Chancellor, National Law University, Tripura in his welcome speech stressed on the concern about human trafficking in Tripura as it is surrounded by Bangladesh on three sides. He also emphasised the importance of education and policy making to stop human trafficking in Tripura.

Governor summons Manipur Legislative Assembly session

Imphal, Feb 05: Hours after Y Khemchand was sworn in as the Chief Minister, Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla summoned the seventh session of the Twelfth Manipur Legislative Assembly to meet at 4 pm on February 5, at the Assembly Hall in Imphal. “In exercise of the powers conferred by Clause (1) of Article 174 of the Constitution of India, I, Ajay Kumar Bhalla, Governor of Manipur, hereby summon the 7th Session of the Twelfth Manipur Legislative Assembly to meet at 1600 hours on Thursday, the 5th February, 2026,” said an order issued by the Manipur Legislative Assembly Secretariat late on Wednesday night. Ahead of the Assembly session, a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) is likely to be held at 3 pm. “The first Cabinet meeting of the Government of Manipur under the new leadership was held today at the Chief Minister’s Bungalow” an official statement said.

Khemchand chairs first cabinet meeting

Imphal, Feb 05: Shortly after being sworn in as the Chief Minister of the State at the Lok Bhavan, Y Khemchand chaired the first Cabinet meeting of the newly formed Manipur government at the Chief Minister’s bungalow on Wednesday night. The meeting was held about an hour after Khemchand was sworn in as the Chief Minister. Chief secretary Dr Puneet Kumar Goel also attended the meeting along with



deputy chief minister L Dikho and newly sworn-in ministers Govindas Konthoujam and K Loken Singh. “The first Cabinet meeting of the Government of Manipur under the new leadership was held today at the Chief Minister’s Bungalow” an official statement said. “The meeting also marked the beginning of collective decision-making and governance for the newly constituted State Cabinet” it said. Meanwhile, the Lok Bhavan has informed that four political parties have extended unconditional support to the BJP. In a statement, it said, “Four political parties, viz. National People’s Party (6 Members), Naga People’s Front (5 Members), Janata Dal-United (1 Member), and two Independent Members have extended their unconditional support to BJP.”

Witnesses tell Singapore court Zubeen Garg did not appear drunk before fatal swim

Guwahati, Feb 05: Seven witnesses who testified during the second hearing of the Singapore Coroner’s Court inquiry into the death of noted Assamese singer Zubeen Garg said he did not appear to be under the influence of alcohol when he arrived at Capo Bay Marina on the day of the incident.

According to a report by Singapore-based broadcaster Channel News Asia, six of the seven witnesses who gave in-person statements on Tuesday were aboard the yacht with Garg on September 19, 2025, the day he drowned.

While their accounts largely aligned on the sequence of events before Garg entered the water, there were differing views on whether he had

consumed alcohol prior to boarding. One witness told the court that Garg “did not appear intoxicated” and was only taking small sips of a drink. Another said a whisky order had been placed at a bar before boarding, but could not confirm if Garg consumed any. Only one witness claimed the singer appeared tipsy. Video footage presented in court reportedly showed Garg entering the sea for the first time wearing a life jacket. Some witnesses said the jacket appeared too large and that he later removed it while in the water. After swimming, Garg returned to a kayak near the yacht and was described by several witnesses as looking tired. A witness who had organised the outing testified that he tried to get Garg to wear a life jack-

et before a second swim, but Garg declined, allegedly saying, “I have never worn it before. I don’t like it.” Witnesses said Garg then swam quickly towards the shore, prompting others to follow. He was also said to have mentioned that he had taught two members of the group how to swim. The inquiry is ongoing, with additional evidence expected. Garg’s uncle Manoj Borthakur and nephew Rahul Gautam Sharma attended the February 3 hearing. The testimonies presented during the second hearing differ from earlier evidence provided by investigators. Singapore Police previously told the court that toxicology analysis indicated Garg’s blood alcohol level was above the legal limit at the time he entered the water.

During the first hearing on January 14, police testimony suggested the 53-year-old singer was heavily intoxicated and not wearing a life jacket when he drowned. Assistant Superintendent of Police David Lim of the Police Coast Guard had told the court that Garg had consumed alcohol and had refused to wear a life vest.

Meanwhile, Garg’s wife, Garima Saikia Garg, visited Peerless Hospital on Wednesday, which coincided with their wedding anniversary. Doctors said she was not ill but had come for a routine check-up after feeling slightly weak. Hospital officials added that she has been under emotional strain following her personal loss. The Coroner’s Court is expected to deliver its findings on February 13.

Meghalaya HC panel orders crackdown on illegal coal mining in East Jaintia Hills

Shillong, Feb 05: The Justice BP Katakey Committee has instructed authorities in Meghalaya’s East Jaintia Hills to tighten action against illegal coal mining by identifying vulnerable zones and increasing field surveillance. Unlawful coal extraction remains widespread in East Jaintia Hills, the most affected district, the committee said in its latest interim report to the Meghalaya High Court. It asked the Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police to pinpoint villages where illegal mining continues and ensure regular police presence in these areas. The panel also called for stricter monitoring of roads and entry points to stop the transport of illegally sourced coal.

The committee made district officials directly answerable for enforcement. It directed the Deputy

Commissioner and Superintendent of Police to personally monitor operations and submit monthly reports to the Chief Secretary or a nominated Additional Chief Secretary. These reports must outline steps taken to prevent illegal mining and detail cases registered against offenders. Attention was also drawn to coal already lying in storage. The panel recommended immediate auction of re-verified coal stocks kept at Coal India Limited depots. At the same time, it ordered the Mining and Geology Department to complete a time-bound probe into the reported disappearance of 40,554.72 metric tonnes of coal from designated depots in East Jaintia Hills. In a separate directive, district officials in South West Khasi Hills were told to clear pending coal transportation re-



quests within 15 days of auctions, provided environmental approvals are in place and conditions under the Revised Comprehensive Plan, 2022, are met. The panel also asked the Mining and Geology Department to immediately move ahead with plans to spend the Rs 100 crore held by the Central Pollution Control Board for regulatory enforcement and environmental restoration.

Mizoram to mark 39th Statehood Day with three-day mass prayer and fasting

Aizawl, Feb 05: Mizoram is set to observe its 39th Statehood Day with a focus on spiritual devotion, scheduled from February 18 to 20, an official said on Wednesday.

While no traditional official functions have been planned, the occasion will be marked by statewide mass prayers and fasting, he said. According to the official, these gatherings are intended to offer thanks and seek divine intervention for the reformation of the state. The three-day observance is being organized by the State Day of Prayer Organizing Committee, led by Power Minister F. Rodingliana.

During a meeting on Tuesday, the committee reviewed the logistics for the event, which include the mobilization of a grand choir and a dedicated praise team, the official said. The committee also selected “Let Us Rise Up and Build” as the official theme for this year’s celebrations, he added. The main event is slated to take place at Lammual Ground in Aizawl. This spiritual approach mirrors last year’s observance, when Chief Minister



Lalduhoma, his cabinet colleagues, and various MLAs joined a mass prayer service at Lammual. That event saw participation across more than a hundred locations within Mizoram, as well as sev-

eral sites outside the state. This year’s milestone carries added historical significance, as it coincides with the 120th anniversary of the Gospel Revival in Mizoram, the official said.

Traffic SI killed, 15 injured after speeding vehicle hits crowd

Guwahati, Feb 05: A routine traffic duty turned fatal on Wednesday evening after a speeding vehicle rammed into on-duty police personnel and civilians at Chamdang (Samdang T.E.) Bypass Chariali under the Doomdooa Police Station limits in Upper Assam’s Tinsukia district, leaving Traffic Sub-Inspector Bubul Sonowal dead and at least 15 others injured, including two police personnel. “Today, a road accident occurred at Chamdang Bypass Chariali, injuring five policemen and several others. I visited the injured at Doomdooa Civil Hospital and Rupai DC Bora Hospital to assess their condition and understand the situation,” the Doomdooa legislator wrote on X on Wednesday evening. Police confirmed that the driver of the offending vehicle, Sokailolum Yun, son of late Ratso Yun, a resident of Pirah Manchal in Arunachal Pradesh’s Anjaw district, has been apprehended. A case has been registered, and further investigation is underway to ascertain the exact cause of the accident, including possible speeding and negligence. According to police sources, the incident occurred when SI Bubul Sonowal, In-charge, Traffic, Doomdooa PS, along with other police personnel, was managing traffic in connection with an earlier road accident at the Doomdooa Bypass involving vehicle No. AS-23-G-3375 and a Splendor motorcycle. A group of civilians had gathered at the spot following the initial collision. During this time, a speeding Mahindra KUV 100 bearing registration No. AR-11A-5334, coming from the Tinsukia side, reportedly lost control and crashed into the on-duty police personnel and civilians standing nearby,



triggering panic and chaos at the busy bypass junction. The injured police personnel were identified as SI Bubul Sonowal, L/Nk 836 Ubrajyoti Sonowal of the 2nd APBn, and HC Dulendra Dohotiya. At least 12 civilians also sustained injuries in the impact. All the injured were immediately rushed to Doomdooa FRU for treatment. SI Bubul Sonowal was referred to Apeksha Hospital in critical condition and later succumbed to his injuries.

Rajib Bhattacharjee Flags Tripura Highway Potholes in Rajya Sabha

Guwahati, Feb 05: Tripura’s road infrastructure came under intense national scrutiny on Tuesday after BJP state president and Member of Parliament Rajib Bhattacharjee raised serious concerns in the Rajya Sabha over the deteriorating condition of several key national highways in the state. While acknowledging the massive expansion of road connectivity in Tripura over the last decade, Bhattacharjee warned that poor maintenance and growing potholes are now threatening safety, mobility, and economic activity. Speaking during the session, Bhattacharjee referred specifically to National Highway-8 (Mungiakami-Ambassa stretch), NH-108B, NH-208B, and NH-208A, stating that large potholes and damaged surfaces have become a recurring problem across these routes. These highways are vital lifelines for Tripura, connecting remote interior regions with district headquar-

ters, markets, healthcare facilities, and interstate trade corridors. Bhattacharjee credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s leadership for transforming the road map of the northeastern region since 2014. He highlighted that Tripura earlier had only one national highway but now has eight national highways, out of which six have already been completed, while two remain under construction. This expansion, he said, has significantly improved connectivity, trade prospects, and integration with the rest of the country.

However, the BJP leader cautioned that infrastructure growth must be matched with timely maintenance and quality control. He pointed out that deep potholes and damaged road stretches are causing severe hardship to daily commuters, farmers transporting agricultural produce, emergency ambulance services, and pedestrians. In several ar-

reas, vehicular movement slows down drastically, increasing travel time and accident risks. “This situation has created serious difficulties in communication and mobility across the state,” Bhattacharjee told the House, stressing that neglected road conditions undermine the very purpose of infrastructure development. Urging swift intervention, he called upon the concerned Union ministry to take immediate corrective measures under the Prime Minister’s structural flaws and maintenance gaps. Bhattacharjee also sought enhanced financial allocation to accelerate repair, resurfacing, and long-term maintenance work. Experts note that Tripura’s heavy monsoon rainfall, combined with increased traffic load, has contributed to rapid road damage in recent years. Without timely repairs, potholes can expand quickly, leading to higher maintenance costs and safety hazards.

Tripura to set up international skill centre, language school: CM

Dibrugarh, Feb 05: Tripura plans international skill centre and foreign language school to boost global jobs for youth, CM Manik Saha said at NITI Aayog’s State Support Mission workshop in Agartala, highlighting governance reforms, institutional transformation, and investment-driven development.

Tripura Chief Minister Dr. Manik Saha on Tuesday announced that the state government is in the process of establishing an international skill centre along with a foreign language school, aimed at equipping the youth of Tripura with globally relevant skills and expanding overseas employment opportunities. “In January 2026, the Bihar government, along with several other states, invited our officers to study the Tripura model of ease of doing business,” he said, highlighting Tripura’s growing recognition at the national level.

The Chief Minister made the announcement while addressing the 3rd Regional Workshop under the State Support Mission (SSM) of NITI Aayog, held at a hotel in Agartala. The high-level workshop witnessed participation from senior officials, policymakers, and representatives of Eastern and North-Eastern States and Union Territories. Dr. Saha emphasised that governance is not merely about institutions, rules, or administrative procedures, but about improving the quality of life of citizens and ensuring that development reaches the last mile, in line with the vision repeatedly articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Turning to youth empowerment, the Chief Minister reiterated that the proposed international skill centre and foreign language school would significantly enhance employability among young people, especially in overseas job markets. The Chief Minister also pointed to significant industrial and educational investments in the state. The Jindal Group has commenced steel sheet manufacturing operations in Tripura, while several private universities, as well as medical and paramedical colleges, have been established to strengthen higher education and healthcare infrastructure. The 3rd Regional Workshop under the State Support Mission, organised in collaboration with TIFT, focused on strengthening governance frameworks, promoting transparency, accountability, efficiency, and citizen-centric administration. Experts and senior officials engaged in detailed discussions aimed at ensuring inclusive and sustainable development



across the eastern and northeastern regions. “Earlier, our youth had to migrate outside the state for work with limited skills. Knowledge of foreign languages and internationally recognised skills will enable them to access global opportunities and communicate effectively in international work environments,” Dr. Saha said. He further stated that the state government is actively promoting modern governance tools and investment-friendly reforms. A Public-Private Partnership (PPP) cell has been established under the Good Governance Department to facilitate private investment while ensuring optimal risk-sharing between the government and private stakeholders. Dr. Saha informed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had recently appreciated Tripura’s reform initiatives during an interaction in New Delhi. The state’s business reform strategy was also shared with all states during the 5th Chief Secretaries’ Conference held in December 2025. “Governance, after all, is fundamentally about improving the quality of life for every citizen and ensuring that development reaches the last mile. The State Support Mission represents a defining evolution in India’s federal governance architecture,” the Chief Minister said. Highlighting the importance of cooperative federalism, Dr. Saha stated that the State Support Mission reflects a partnership-based model of Centre-State collaboration. Under this framework, states are not viewed merely as implementing agencies but as equal partners in shaping India’s development trajectory.

He noted that through the State Support Mission, NITI Aayog has empowered

states to strengthen their State Institutes of Transformation, institutions designed to support evidence-based policymaking, outcome monitoring, and inter-sectoral convergence. “The mission recognises that sustainable socio-economic transformation is rooted in strong institutions. It also helps align the long-term visions of states with the national aspiration of Viksit Bharat 2047,” Dr. Saha added. The Chief Minister observed that states and Union Territories are currently at different stages of institutional and socio-economic development, reflecting their unique governance contexts. Acknowledging this diversity, NITI Aayog has conceptualised regional workshops as platforms for peer learning, exchange of best practices, and collaborative problem-solving. “The decision to host the third regional workshop for eastern and northeastern states in Tripura reflects NITI Aayog’s confidence in the region’s growing policy capacity and Tripura’s readiness to contribute meaningfully to the national reform discourse,” he said.

Institute for Transformation (TIFT), which has emerged as a catalyst for reform and a vital bridge between policy intent and ground-level execution. “TIFT works closely with leading knowledge institutions to identify Tripura’s core strengths, set realistic development targets, and prepare sector-specific roadmaps. Over the last two years, it has played a critical role in addressing governance challenges and supporting government departments in policy formulation and business reforms,” he said.

Gauhati University signs MoU to preserve Jyoti Prasad Agarwala’s creations



Guwahati, Feb 05: Gauhati University today signed a memorandum of understanding with the family of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala to preserve Agarwala’s timeless creations for the posterity. Jyoti Prasad Agarwala remains an eternal source of inspiration for Assamese art and culture. His contributions transcend generations, and his songs and films still continue to shape Assamese cultural identity. The multifaceted filmmaker and playwright, known as ‘Rupkonwar,’ composed nearly 300 songs before his death on January 17, 1951, at the age of 47.

The MoU, which was signed at the Vice Chancellor’s Conference Room in the university, marks the formal beginning of a collaborative effort to preserve, document, and digitise original manuscripts, film scripts, letters, architectural sketches, and other rare works of Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, currently held by his family.

These materials will be conserved at the Krishna Kanta Handiqui Library, Gauhati University, and made accessible for academic study and public knowledge, following established archival practices .

Vice Chancellor of Gauhati University, Prof Nani Gopal Mahanta, was present during the signing of the MoU.

The daughters of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Gyanashree Pathak and Satyashree Das, also attend the programme.

This occasion reflects a shared commitment between the university and the family to safeguard an important part of Assam’s cultural and intellectual history, and to ensure that these works continue to speak to future generations through research, teaching, and public engagement.

5th orang nature camp introduces fringe area students to region’s rich biodiversity

Guwahati, Feb 05: A large group high school students from fringe areas participated in the fifth consecutive annual Orang Nature Camp organised during January 30 to February 2, 2026 in Orang National Park and Tiger Reserve (ONP&TR) under the aegis of Aaranyak and Orang Tiger Reserve Authority in collaboration with local organisation Wild Wings and with support from the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation (DSWF).

The four-day residential awareness programme held amid the natural setting of (ONP&TR) acquainted the participating students with importance and significance of nature conservation.

This platform also facilitated the students to interact with experts working in the field of nature and wildlife conservation who, through their presentations and talks strived to encourage students to make it a part of their life to work for the betterment of Orang Tiger Reserve in their vicinity and the nature as a whole. The programme was inaugurated on January 30 by Pradipta Baruah, Director of Orang Tiger Reserve in presence of Dr. Debo Kumar Dutta, Senior scientist and Deputy Director of Rhino Research



and Conservation Division (RRCD) of Aaranyak; Bijay Sankar Bora, Publicity Secretary of Aaranyak; Swapan Nath, conservationist from Kaziranga; Nejb Ahmed of Wild Wings and Arif Hussain, Senior Manager of RRCD, Aaranyak.

Pradipta Baruah during his interaction with the students, highlighted importance of Orang’s rich biodiversity and emphasised the role of future generation in preservation of these resources.

Dr. Debo Kumar Dutta and Bijay Sankar Bora spoke about the significant roles the students can play to compliment the conservation efforts. Arif Hussain, the key official from Aaranyak behind this camp,

stated the goal and objective of the nature camp elaborately in the inaugural programme.

Thirty-three students and three teachers from seven schools namely, Sialmari High School, Bechimari ME School, Keramot Ali, ME School, Dokhin Borsola High School, Ballav Bhai Higher Secondary, Fatasimolu ME School and Royal Brilliant Academy, participated in this awareness programme.

The resource persons attending the programme included Pradipta Baruah, Dr. Bibhab Kumar Talukdar, Executive Director and Secretary General, Aaranyak’s senior scientists Abdul Wakid and Dr. Deba Kumar Dutta; Swapan Nath, Nejb Ahmed,

Arif Hussain, senior Aaranyak officials Dr. Dipankar Lahkar and Arup Kumar Das; researchers of Aaranyak Rabiya Daimari, Gayatri Dutta, Kaushik Rajbongshi, Hirak Jyoti Das and Pranjit Deka, Forester Grade delivered valuable lectures on various awareness and conservation topics that have benefitted the students.

The programme was enriched by enlightening power point presentations, environmental games, group presentation, nature trail and park safari and conservation drama.

All the student participants were given kits, education materials and certificates on conclusion of the nature camp.

Baharul Islam, President, Fatasimolu EDC, Khairul Basher, local conservationist, and Aaranyak staff Gaura Baidya, Aaranyak members Samim Sultana, Sayanika Phukan, Akash Morang were present and extended their expertise towards the success of the event.

The student participants were accompanied by Bimal Chandra Das, Khojasing Teron, Basitan Nessa, teachers of Borsola High School, Ballav Bhai Higher Secondary and Royal Brilliant Academy in the programme.

DPR prepared for two proposed new railway lines in Assam, says Rly Minister in Parliament

Guwahati, Feb 05: Union Minister of Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw said that the detailed project reports (DPR) have been prepared for two proposed new railway lines in Assam, the Aghthori (Guwahati)–Dekargaon (Tezpur) line of 129 km and the Dekargaon (Tezpur)–Silghat line of 25 km.

Replying to a question in Lok Sabha, the minister said the sanctioning of

these projects requires consultations with stakeholders and approvals from agencies such as NITI Aayog and the Ministry of Finance, and therefore, timelines for implementation will depend on the outcome of these processes. Tezpur is currently served by Dekargaon railway station, which is connected by six pairs of passenger train services, including express, intercity and passenger trains linking

the region with Guwahati and other parts of Assam.

To improve passenger amenities and rail infrastructure, the Ministry has launched the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme with a long-term approach to station redevelopment. The scheme focuses on improving station access, buildings, waiting areas, platforms, foot overbridges, lifts, escalators, passenger information systems, facil-

ities for Divyangjans, parking, multimodal integration and promotion of local products.

So far, out of 1,337 stations identified nationwide for development, 50 stations are located in Assam. Redevelopment works are progressing well, with Haibargaon station already completed and major works underway at stations such as Rangapara North Junction, Majbat, Viswanath

Chariali and Fakiragram Junction.

The station redevelopment on Indian Railways is a continuous process, involving safety considerations and statutory clearances, and completion timelines depend on site-specific challenges and availability of funds.

Further, development / upgradation / modernization of stations including Amrit Bharat Station Scheme is generally funded under Plan Head-53

‘Customer Amenities’. The details of allocation and expenditure under Plan Head-53 are maintained Zonal Railway-wise and not work-wise or station-wise or state-wise. Under Plan Head-53 for Customer Amenities, Rs 435 crore has been allocated for the Northeast Frontier Railway in the current year, with Rs 365 crore spent up to December 2025, the minister said.

ECI briefs Central Observers for Assembly polls in Assam and four other states

Guwahati, Feb 05: Election Commission of India (ECI) today organised briefing meetings for General, Police and Expenditure Observers to be deployed as Central Observers for the forthcoming General Elections to the Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. A total of 1,444 Officers, including 477 General Observers, 451 Police Observers and 516 Expenditure Observers have been called for the briefing meetings. The briefing meetings are being held in three batches over two days, i.e., February 5 and 6, 2026 at IIIDEM, New Delhi.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar along with Election Commissioners Dr. Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Dr. Vivek Joshi briefed the Central Observers. Addressing

the Observers, CEC Gyanesh Kumar said they have been selected to serve as the beacons of ECI. He added that the Observers should ensure free, fair and transparent elections and said that their presence will energise the entire election machinery across 824 constituencies where elections are going to be held. Addressing the Observers, Election Commissioner Dr. SS Sandhu said they should serve as a friend, philosopher, and guide to election officials on the field. Their arrival must be well publicized, and they should remain accessible, ensuring grievances of the electors are swiftly redressed to avoid even perceptions of favouritism.

Election Commissioner Dr. Vivek Joshi said that the Observers must ensure ECI instructions are implemented in letter and spirit, upholding impar-

tiality and democratic values. Dr. Joshi also instructed that Voter Information Slips (VIS) be distributed well in time to the voters so that they are not inconvenienced on poll day.

The Commission also interacted with the Observers in a doubt-clearing session. Senior officials of the Commission also briefed the Observers on various aspects of preparation of Electoral Rolls and the Conduct of Elections in the five poll-bound States/UTs. The Observers were also briefed on the IT applications and platforms, and media-related matters during the sessions. As the Commission’s eyes and ears, the Central Observers were asked to familiarise themselves with all the election laws, rules, guidelines and provide inputs from the directly to the Commission ensure their strict and

impartial compliance. Observers were instructed to remain fully accessible to political parties, candidates, and the grievances of voters are redressed in a timely manner. The Observers were also instructed to visit polling stations and ensure the implementation of the recent initiatives taken by the Commission for the convenience of the voters, especially ensuring the provision of Assured Minimum Facilities (AMFs). The Commission appoints Central Observers under the plenary powers conferred on it by Article 324 of the Constitution and Section 20B of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 to assist the Commission in the conduct of free and fair polls. They also oversee the efficient and effective management of the electoral process at the field level.

Manipur Assembly convenes, focuses on peace and governance

Imphal, Feb 05: The 7th Session of the 12th Manipur Legislative Assembly commenced on a politically significant note on Thursday, a day after President’s Rule under Article 356 was revoked, coinciding with the 356th day since its imposition. The development marked the restoration of the Assembly’s functioning, with the Governor delivering an inaugural address that lasted over an hour.

In his address, the Governor said Manipur continues to face an extraordinary situation following prolonged ethnic violence that has affected both hill and valley districts. While noting a gradual improvement in

the law-and-order situation due to sustained deployment of security forces, he cautioned that peace remains fragile and requires constant vigilance and coordinated action. Restoration of peace and normalcy, he said, remains the government’s highest priority. The Governor emphasized close coordination between state and central security forces to prevent fresh violence, curb armed activities, and ensure public safety. He also referred to ongoing efforts to recover looted weapons and stabilize sensitive areas across the state. A major portion of the address focused on the rehabilitation of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The Governor informed the House that thousands displaced by the conflict are still living in relief camps. He said the government is pursuing phased rehabilitation, including temporary housing, essential amenities, healthcare services, and livelihood support, with special attention to women, children, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities. He also highlighted the severe impact of the unrest on healthcare and education, noting disruptions in access to hospitals and schools in many areas. Measures are being taken, he said, to restore health infrastructure and ensure continuity of education.

NEIR strengthens call for peace and dialogue amid Manipur crisis

Imphal, Feb 05: The North East Integration Rally (NEIR) has steadily emerged as an important platform for peace, dialogue, and regional unity in the Northeast. As Manipur continues to grapple with prolonged unrest and social tension, the relevance of such initiatives has grown significantly. Recent NEIR engagements have consistently highlighted one shared objective: the restoration of peace and harmony in Manipur. During this period, the Governor of Manipur has repeatedly emphasised the need for calm, unity, and constructive engagement among communities. These priorities closely align with NEIR’s approach, which focuses on dialogue-driven solutions rather than confrontation. NEIR’s meetings are characterised by steady, serious discussions aimed at fostering understanding and trust. As part of NEIR’s outreach, Meghalaya MLA, A L Hek visited Manipur and held a meeting with the Governor A. K Bhalla, during which the prevailing situation in the state and the urgent need for peace were discussed. The interaction highlighted the importance of regional cooperation and collective responsibility in addressing challenges faced by Manipur. NEIR’s foundational emphasis on inclusive dialogue has been shaped by sustained efforts from those associated with the initiative since its inception. Biswadeep Gupta has played a key role in conceptualising and strengthening NEIR’s peace-oriented framework, with a consistent focus on dialogue, community participation, and regional integration. The platform has brought together social workers, community elders, youth representatives, civil society members, and lawmakers, enabling open conversations on loss, mistrust, and fear, while also fostering hope for reconciliation and coexistence. In addition to institutional engagement, A L Hek, through



his continued involvement in NEIR activities, has supported calls for restraint, trust-building, and rejection of violence. His participation has reinforced the message that peace in Manipur is a shared concern across the Northeast. A recent NEIR appeal placed particular emphasis on Manipur, calling for an immediate end to violence and urging all stakeholders to prioritise the protection of lives and respect for all communities. The appeal was humanitarian in nature, underscoring the belief that peace must come before political or ideological differences. NEIR’s continued engagement through follow-up meetings, local-level interactions, and public appeals reflects its belief that peace-building is a long-term effort. Acting as a bridge between people and institutions, the platform promotes unity and understanding through sustained dialogue. While the road to lasting peace in Manipur remains complex, initiatives like NEIR play a vital role in keeping dialogue alive during times of deep division. Through collective effort and regional solidarity, NEIR continues to reinforce a clear message: peace is essential, and without it, progress cannot take root.

Reject Kuki ideology, uphold Thadou identity: TIM to Dy CM Nemcha Kipgen

Imphal, Feb 05: Thadou Inpi Manipur (TIM) congratulated Nemcha Kipgen on her appointment as Deputy Chief Minister of Manipur, marking a historic milestone as the first member of the Thadou tribe to hold this constitutional office. While acknowledging her earlier support for the Thadou community, Thadou Inpi Manipur unequivocally stated that there is no “Kuki” in Manipur, except for the controversial and unconstitutional Any Kuki Tribes (AKT), which recorded a population of 28,324 in the 2011 Census. Since May 3, 2023, Kipgen’s visible alignment with Kuki-centric narratives has raised serious concerns, particularly where such narratives verge on Kuki separatist and supremacist ideology. As a Thadou Tribe certificate holder, elected from a General (50–Kangpokpi) seat and not from “Any Kuki tribes (AKT),” Nemcha Kipgen must immediately and unequivocally disassociate herself from Kuki organizations, social bodies, and separatist political movements. Any continued association is incompatible with her constitutional role as Deputy Chief Minister, TIM stated in a press release. The Suspension of Operations (SoO) Agreement clearly safeguards the territorial integrity of Manipur. Given her personal association with the



Kuki National Front (KNF)—a UPF group and SoO signatory—she bears an enhanced responsibility to uphold the agreement in both letter and spirit. Any action or statement promoting disunity, separatism, or Kuki exclusivist politics would constitute a serious breach of public trust, it stated. There must be no intimidation, targeting, or obstruction of her presence in Imphal. A Thadou–Meitei community understanding has been established, and Thadous have been able to move freely and fearlessly in Imphal and other parts of the valley. Peace must not be disturbed through misidentification or misrepresentation of identity, it stated. Deputy Chief Minister Nemcha’s identity must be stated with clarity: she is Thadou, not Kuki, nor a political representative of Kuki ideology. Nemcha Kipgen must fearlessly and unequivocally reject Kuki ideology and separatist agendas and fully embrace

her distinct Thadou identity within the framework of a united and inclusive, multi-ethnic Manipur. As Deputy Chief Minister, she is expected to function from Imphal and discharge her duties without ambiguity or parallel political loyalties, it stated. Thadou Inpi Manipur firmly called upon Nemcha Kipgen to reject Kuki political identity and commit to defending Thadou human rights, particularly against Kuki supremacist forces; and strict and full adherence to the SoO Agreement, rejecting any interpretation that seeks the fragmentation of Manipur through demands for Separate Administration (SA) or Union Territory (UT). The phrase “negotiated political settlement within the framework of the Constitution of India” must not be misinterpreted as a provision for the possible disintegration of Manipur state through SA or UT demands. The SoO Agreement within the clause “to abide by the Constitution of India, the laws of the land, and the territorial integrity of Manipur” specifically stipulates that the territorial integrity of Manipur State shall not be disturbed; therefore, any negotiated political settlement must remain fully within this clause of the SoO agreement, it stated. Her office is constitutional. Her responsibility is public. Her accountability is non-negotiable, TIM stated.

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The Increasing Emotional Distance in Families

Families, once the strongest emotional support systems, are experiencing growing emotional distance. Busy schedules, digital distractions, and communication gaps have weakened family bonds.Shared time is often replaced by parallel routines. Conversations become functional rather than emotional. Without emotional connection, misunderstandings grow.Children may feel unheard, while adults feel misunderstood. Emotional needs remain unmet, creating isolation within households Technology contributes to this distance. While devices connect people globally, they often disconnect families locally. Physical presence does not guarantee emotional presence.Strong families require communication, patience, and empathy. Emotional availability builds trust and security.Reviving family bonds strengthens society. Emotional connection at home creates confident and balanced individuals.

The last US-Russia nuclear arms control treaty is expiring. We must stop a new arms race

Let’s be honest: America needs another nuclear weapon about as much as Donald Trump deserves a Nobel peace prize.Yet on Thursday, the last remaining nuclear arms control treaty between the U S and Russia will expire. When the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty – New Start – goes away, there will be no limits on US and Russian nuclear arsenals for the first time in more than 50 years.That is very bad news.Agreements like New Start helped end the cold war nuclear arms race. Many Americans are too young to remember that era. If you missed it the first time, I have news for you: it’s back. During Arms Race 1.0, Washington and Moscow conducted more than 1,700 nuclear tests, contaminating the environment and making our own people sick. Now the US president wants to resume nuclear testing. We also built grotesquely large nuclear arsenals – more than 30,000 weapons each. Today we are down to about 4,000 apiece – still far too many. We spent approximately \$10tn in

taxpayer money building these weapons – then paid again to dismantle most of them. For \$10tn, you could buy Google, Apple and most of Microsoft. But the true cost wasn’t just financial. The arms race made the world vastly more dangerous: more weapons, more tension, more chances for miscalculation, more warheads that could be stolen or misused. Anyone who has studied the Cuban missile crisis knows the truth – we survived not because we were wise, but because we were lucky.No one should want to repeat that history. Yet Arms Race 2.0 is exactly where we are headed.I was recently struck by Kathryn Bigelow’s thriller A House of Dynamite. It’s a gripping film – and a wake-up call. The movie exposes a truth few in Washington will admit: despite hopes that long-range missile defense will protect us, it won’t. The only reliable way to escape nuclear catastrophe is to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the world. The US has spent hundreds of billions of dollars chasing long-

range missile defense, yet it has never delivered dependable protection. The bloated contracts persist and the lobbyists prosper, but the logic is fatally flawed. Long-range defenses don’t work – and they make arms reductions harder. Our adversaries know exactly how to defeat them: build more offensive missiles.Rather than doubling down on the fool’s gold of missile defense – such as wasting trillions on Trump’s delusional “Golden Dome” – we should focus on what actually works: arms control and arms reductions. Treaties like New Start have cut nuclear arsenals by about 90%, reducing the nuclear threat far more effectively than missile defense ever could. I would take New Start over “Golden Dome” any day. (Trump said he needed to control Greenland in order to build “Golden Dome”. Well, we don’t need “Golden Dome” at all, and we sure don’t need to take over Greenland.)Today, our decades-long arms-reduction effort is on life support. As A House of Dynamite bluntly observes: “At

the end of the cold war, nations reached consensus that we should have fewer nuclear weapons. That era is now over.”New arms control agreements take years to negotiate. Yet Washington and Moscow have not even begun talks on a replacement for New Start. Vladimir Putin has offered to continue adhering to New Start limits for one year after it expires if the US does the same. That is a good idea, and an overwhelming majority of Americans (91%) say the US should negotiate a new agreement with Russia to maintain current limits or further reduce arsenals. But Trump has been noncommittal, saying, “If it expires, it expires.”That is unacceptable. We are out of time. If New Start ends with no commitment to respect its limits, both the US and Russia will be free to expand their strategic nuclear arsenals. A new arms race will officially be under way.The central lesson of A House of Dynamite – and of history itself – is simple: more nuclear weapons do not make us safer. Nuclear

deterrence is not a shield; it is an existential gamble. One mistake, one malfunction, one miscalculation could end everything.A new nuclear arms race is not the answer. Fewer weapons are.I have long pushed for deep, verifiable reductions in nuclear arsenals. We must re-engage on arms control not only with Russia, but also with China, and revive diplomacy with North Korea, Iran and other nuclear aspirants. Every warhead removed is one less catastrophe waiting to happen.If we truly care about future generations, we must have the courage to say: not one more dollar wasted on weapons of mass annihilation. The only nuclear defense worth believing in is disarmament – rooted in treaties, inspections and verification.As we say goodbye to New Start, we must commit to replacing it – and reject a new arms race. If we abandon nuclear arms control, a new arms build-up will rush in to fill the void. As history teaches us, the only way to win a nuclear arms race is to refuse to run.

A manifesto misread: A rejoinder to ‘bold on youth, silent on inclusion’

Kamal Ahmed recently wrote an opinion piece in The Daily Star titled “The NCP manifesto: Bold on youth, silent on inclusion.” Public scrutiny of any electoral manifesto is both legitimate and essential in a democracy. However, critique must begin with an honest reading of the content in question. Unfortunately, Ahmed’s article suggests that he might not have read the National Citizen Party manifesto, an 84-page document, and more worryingly, may not even have read the 36-point priority pledges carefully. The column’s headline and concluding paragraph claim that NCP’s manifesto is silent on inclusion, which Ahmed identifies as “the most glaring disappointment.” He makes a particularly bold assertion: “None of the NCP’s 36 pledges address the concerns of religious minorities or ethnic communities, including Adivasis.” This claim is factually incorrect. The third point of the NCP’s 36-point manifesto proposes the formation of a special cell under the Human Rights Commission authority to conduct independent investigations into incidents of violence, oppression, and persecution

against minorities. This is an explicit and actionable pledge, not a vague commitment to “harmony,” as is often the case in political rhetoric. The detailed version of the manifesto includes plans for the Chitragong Hill Tracts (CHT) and its communities (page 19), historically marginalised groups including Dalit, Harijan, and Scheduled Castes (SCs) (page 25), and pledge on access to learning mother tongue in primary education (page 51). Even if we put aside the full version, missing the third point of the 36-point manifesto is not a minor oversight; it seriously undermines the credibility of the entire critique, especially when the author goes on to accuse the party of a “troubling lack of empathy and understanding.” Ahmed also questions NCP’s commitment to lowering the voting age to 16, suggesting ambiguity about whether it applies only to youth councils or to all elections. NCP clearly states that the voting age will be reduced to 16 for all elections (page 46). The rationale is explained, and comparative references are provided, including examples from the United Kingdom, Austria, Brazil, and



Argentina. In fact, this has been NCP’s position for a long time, as reflected in formal proposals to reform commissions and in public speeches by the party

leadership.The article further compares NCP’s pledge to create one crore jobs in five years with BNP’s commitment of creating one crore jobs in 18

months, arguing that the emphasis on “decent jobs” makes NCP’s target more ambitious. However, BNP’s proposal translates to roughly 9.5 per-

cent annual job growth, which has never occurred in modern economic history. Historical instances of high job growth, such as post-war reconstruction or recovery from major crises, typically range from 4 to 6 percent annually. By contrast, NCP’s promise requires approximately 2.7 percent annual job growth, modestly above the average 2.2 percent job growth Bangladesh saw between 2010 and 2023. Yet Ahmed considers NCP’s pledge more ambitious. But ambition is not the issue; clarity and planning are. And this is precisely where his critique seems to fall short again, as the manifesto provides a sector-wise breakdown of job creation, detailing how employment will be generated across industries. Pages 48–50 of the manifesto outline the job-creation plan, its structure, and implementation logic.Perhaps the most surprising claim in the article is that NCP provides no timeline for reaching a 12 percent tax-to-GDP ratio and that the proposal is “vague and inconsistent” because it lacks interim benchmarks. This is demonstrably untrue. Pages 29–32 of the manifesto address

tax-to-GDP reform in detail. The document includes a table specifying which sectors will be reformed, what measures will be taken, and how much revenue is expected to be raised in each year as a result of these reforms. If anything, this section is among the most quantified parts of the manifesto.All these create an unavoidable impression: the author either did not consult the full document or did so superficially. Such a lack of diligence is especially disappointing when it comes from an experienced journalist who previously led the Media Reform Commission.A manifesto is ultimately a public pledge that is open to scrutiny, debate, and improvement. NCP welcomes rigorous and fair-minded engagement, including on its pledges about inclusion, youth participation, employment, taxation, and governance reform. However, such engagement must be anchored in an accurate reading of the manifesto. We remain ready to participate in any constructive public discussion in the spirit of strengthening democratic accountability and advancing a more just and inclusive Bangladesh.

The Green surge shows UK politics has reached a turning point – and it has surprisingly little to do with Zack Polanski

“How many?”On the end of the phone is a nice press officer for the Greens, head full from a long day in Gorton, Manchester, showing off their would-be MP. And now, as Friday’s sky turns indigo, I’m calling about reports from Lewisham, south London, that tomorrow they’re expecting a flood of 500 Green activists. This comes as a surprise to the party’s own news machine.“Are you sure?”My figures turn out to be wrong. It’s nearer 600.On a dreary Saturday morning, they stream in from all over London, here along Kent’s A-roads, pour off Suffolk and Surrey trains, to converge on this primary school. It’s the largest venue the volunteers could hire and the corridors, the loos, even the little library with its impressive range of Julia Donaldsons, are all heaving with grownups.We cram into the assembly hall, where the crowd is declared as the biggest turnout in Green history. The sole exception, I find later, is polling day of the last general election; yet today’s draw is not some short, sharp fight for Westminster, but a campaign for the council, where ballots are months away. In normal times, this stuff is about as pedestrian as politics gets, drawing a handful or two of diarchs to trudge door to door, begging old customers to put their X in the usual spot.Yet the size of today’s crowd tells you these aren’t normal times. This winter is a hinge moment in British politics, the point at which the default choice of leftwing voters is no longer Labour. In Wales, it will be Plaid Cymru; in Scotland, the SNP.

And in this corner of inner London, as in many English cities, it will be the Greens.For this position, the party owes much to its opponents, among them Jeremy Corbyn, Zarah Sultana and their genius advisers for so swiftly turning Your Party into a sparsely attended wake. But its biggest bouquet must go to Keir Starmer’s Labour. Look up “one-party state” in a political dictionary and alongside Pyongyang there will feature Lewisham. At the last council elections in 2022, Labour scooped every single seat, plus the mayoralty. The local Green party, on the other hand, shrank so drastically it came close to shutting down.Then: lift-off. Lewisham began 2025 with about 500 Green party members; by autumn, almost as many were signing up in just one week. At the start of 2026, the local party stands at about 2,500, putting it just behind the Green “fortress” of Hackney. At the school’s entrance I meet Ed, whose job it is to call up local newbies and welcome them to the party. Last January, the task was his alone. Today, he heads a team of nearly 25. “Six months ago, I wouldn’t have believed we could fight Lewisham,” says the Green party CEO, Harriet Lamb, sipping tea in the hall and looking around with undisguised astonishment. “Now I look across Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle and I think: this is a social movement.”From the stage booms another announcement: later in the day, Zack Polanski will address volunteers. Ah, Zack. In Westminster, they are wowed by the Greens’

new leader, who is energetic, likable and fluent enough in the media to trouble Nigel Farage. Yet what’s striking today is how little activists or potential voters talk about Polanski.Drop his name and praise flows, but ask why they’ve gone Green and you hear condemnation of the Labour party. Lamb was a Labour member; Lewisham’s two Green councillors defected from Labour, claiming they were “bullied out” for opposing the brutal destruction of Gaza. And every single non-white voter names Palestine as the reason they can no longer back Labour. While SW1 theorises that the Green surge is down to Polanski, SE4 reality says it’s 99% Starmer.One resident comes to the door having just read about Shabana Mahmood giving the police facial recognition technology. “As a black man, I don’t feel safe.” A dad pushing a pram talks of how the Labour council has approved a giant block of flats to go up at Lewisham market, of which only a fraction will be for social rent. “They ought to be doing more for the common man.” I am recounting conversations from just before the latest Epstein file releases, which can only sharpen that sense of disconnect. Because what they show is how at the height of the banking crisis, with Wall Street and the City on public-sector life support, the class of financiers who brought about this disaster were eyeing up billion-dollar deals and fresh assets, whether superyachts or young women. While the rest of us headed into years of immiseration, the filthy rich carried on regardless – and they did



so with the willing aid of the centre-left elite, whether Peter Mandelson or the French Socialists or the US Democrats. In these semi-detached houses, with freshly painted doors and big burglar alarms and new shutter blinds, voters don’t kvetch about rising prices. Instead, they spurn Labour’s values. For all that our prime minister claims Harold Wilson as an inspiration, he has roundly ignored his hero’s maxim that Labour is “a moral crusade or it is nothing”.All this is

a gift for Polanski, and a potential headache. He heads a party that was fringe, yet can now claim to be mainstream. At the same time, many if not most of his members are embarking on their second political marriage after Corbyn. Every second marriage is a triumph of hope over experience, of trusting the new guy won’t let you down, while on alert for all the warning signs. The optimism of these activists is duly tempered.One prospective councillor warns of the dan-

gers of “building a project around just one guy”. A campaigner estimates that he has sunk a week of unpaid work into simply pulling off today’s meeting. Yet another notes: “We have an infrastructure for a party of 50,000 members when we’ll soon be at 200,000. It’s not sustainable.”An hour after getting off the Pendolino from Manchester, Polanski pitches up. When I voice his members’ criticisms, he accepts them all. “It’s like being a startup that’s been around a long time, but suddenly we’re really getting going,” he says. “We’re having to run and catch the ball at the same time.”While he spent the first few months of his leadership making a noise, getting the attention of journalists and voters and donors, he will now focus more on policy. Last night, he spoke with Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel laureate in economics and campaigner against inequality. Next month, he’ll set out his platform on tax and spend. The big question is how he will find the time and space to do all this, when there are so many audiences for whom he needs to perform. In Gorton, he says, he had five lapel mics pinned to him at all times. He could not even go to the loo in peace.But now he has to gear up the troops and make a speech, while running on empty. He heads towards the assembly hall, where a great mass of expectation awaits.A video shows what happens next: he bounds on to the little stage, looks out over the wall of bodies. As he takes in the crowd, his eyes grow wide.

Medanta Q3 FY26 income rises 19 percent as volumes grow

Aizawl/Kohima: Global Health Limited reported a strong operating performance in Q3 FY26, with consolidated total income rising 19.1% year-on-year to ₹11,428 million, reflecting robust patient volumes, improved realizations and steady execution across its hospital network.

EBITDA excluding the newly commissioned Noida hospital grew 10.9% to ₹2,814 million, with healthy margins of 25.4%. However, consolidated EBITDA including Noida declined 1.7% to ₹2,494 million, as the Noida facility—operational since September 2025—posted revenue of ₹343 million and an EBITDA loss of ₹320 million during the quarter. Consolidated margins stood at 21.8%. Profit after tax for the quarter came in at ₹950 million, impacted by depreciation and finance costs related to Noida, initial operating losses, and a non-recurring exceptional expense of ₹366 million due to the statutory implementation of new Labour Codes. Operational metrics remained firm, with inpatient volumes rising 14.3% and outpatient volumes up 19.5% year-on-year. Average length of stay improved 6.6% to 3.02 days, ARPOB increased 9.9% to ₹67,361, and occupancy stood at around 59% on expanded capacity. The company added 144 beds during the quarter. For 9M FY26, total income rose 17.6% to ₹33,131 million, EBITDA (including Noida) increased 8% to ₹7,654 million, and PAT grew 8.5% to ₹4,124 million, supported by strong growth in developing hospitals, international patient revenue, and OPD pharmacy sales.

NFO for multi-asset fund

New Delhi: DSP Mutual Fund has launched the new fund offer (NFO) for the DSP Multi Asset Omni Fund of Funds today. The NFO will close on February 19. It is an open-ended fund-of-fund scheme that invests across equity, debt and commodity-oriented mutual funds and exchange-traded funds (ETFs). The fund uses DSP Mutual Fund’s internal market framework, DSP Netra for analysing market data, valuations and historical trends to assess risk and adjust allocations across asset classes. DSP Multi Asset Omni Fund of Funds will invest in a mix of equity-oriented schemes, debt-oriented schemes, and gold and silver ETFs. DSP Mutual Fund said this composition aims to balance growth and risk by diversifying across multiple asset classes instead of relying on a single source of returns. The fund will also invest in funds and ETFs managed by multiple asset management companies (AMCs), enabling flexibility for the portfolio to adjust as relative opportunities change. The fund will rebalance allocations within its structure rather than requiring investors to make frequent portfolio changes themselves. The fund house stated that during elevated market volatility, the fund can trim its equity exposure to as low as 25%, 25–75% to equity-oriented schemes, 15–50% to debt-oriented schemes, and 10–50% to gold and silver ETFs. However, DSP Mutual Fund clarified that final allocations will remain at the fund manager’s discretion and will adhere to the ranges specified in the Scheme Information Document (SID), which permits: Equity-oriented schemes: 25–80%, Debt-oriented schemes: 10–60%, Gold and silver as one input in the investment process and does not constitute investment advice, with portfolio decisions ultimately resting with the fund manager, according to DSP Mutual Fund. The fund house also noted that investors in this fund of funds will bear both its recurring expenses and those of the underlying schemes in which it invests.

What’s affecting markets as the Sensex and Nifty decline following a three-day surge

Mumbai: Indian equity benchmarks snapped their three-session winning streak in Thursday’s afternoon trade, slipping sharply amid profit booking and weak global cues. The 30-share BSE Sensex pack and the NSE Nifty 50 barometer were down 0.59 per cent and 0.61 per cent, respectively, at the last check. The broader market underperformed the frontline indices, with the Nifty Midcap index declining 0.71 per cent and the Nifty Smallcap index tumbling 1.58 per cent. Market participants attributed the pullback to a mix of global uncertainty, lack of clarity on trade-related developments and continued pressure on IT stocks.

Abhishek Basumallick, Co-founder & Fund Manager at Shree Rama Managers, said multiple uncertainties are weighing on sentiment. “The details of the India–US deal are not very clear. There is also some fear stemming from the US side or pronouncements from the US side, with statements suggesting that India may import agricultural goods, which remains a grey area for now. In addition, overall sentiment is at risk as people are uncertain about what is happening in the US economy. This uncertainty is an overhang, especially after the sharp correction seen in IT stocks over the last one to two days. The key concern is how this impacts US markets and whether there could be a spillover effect on global markets. Several factors are making the situation murky,” Kranthi Bathini, Equity Strategist at WealthMills Securities, said the decline largely reflects near-term profit booking. “We are witnessing some kind of profit booking following a three-session strong upmove. For now, markets are in a ‘buy-on-dip’ and ‘sell-on-rally’ mode,” he said.

VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Investments, pointed to sharp internal churn within the indices, particularly due to weakness in technology stocks. “There are a few near-term market trends that are significant. The Nifty appears to be in a consolidation phase without big moves at the index level. However, there are big changes within the Nifty stocks with big declines in IT stocks consequent to the IT sell off in the



US spreading to India, too. The sell off has been triggered by Anthropic’s new automation tools that the market fears may replace IT services that are presently outsourced. The market fears significant margin pressure for Indian IT companies. What the real impact will be remains to be seen,” he said. He added, “In contrast to the weakness in IT stocks, the large domestic consumption-driven segments are doing well and this is reflected in the resilience of leaders like RIL, Bharti, the banking majors and some auto stocks. After the growth-oriented Budget and trade deals with the EU and US, India’s growth will remain strong facilitating strong domestic consumption. The low-interest rate regime continues to support the growth of the auto sector and is likely to spill over into segments like air conditioners as summer approaches. Therefore, the strong domestic consumption story is likely to sustain the

resilience of the domestic consumption-driven stocks. If the cessation of selling and marginal buying by FIIs becomes a trend, the market will gain strength. This is the data point to watch for.” Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, said markets are entering a phase of cautious consolidation after recent gains. “Weak follow-through at higher levels and continued pressure on IT stocks -- driven by global technology weakness, AI-related concerns, and lingering uncertainty over the outcome of the US–Iran talks -- are weighing on sentiment. Selective profit booking and range-bound trade appear natural after the recent advance. That said, improving trade relations, a recovery in the Indian rupee against the US dollar from its all-time low, and recent foreign portfolio investor activity are offering some near-term support to market sentiment,” he further stated.

RBI likely to keep policy rates unchanged deal reduces

New Delhi: India’s central bank is expected to keep policy rates unchanged on Friday, while focusing on improving the pass-through of the previous year’s rate cuts, with a US-India trade deal alleviating the need for more immediate support to the economy. A large majority of economists polled by Reuters before the deal was announced on Monday - 59 of 70 - had expected a status quo in rates, but a minority had called for another cut as inflation remained low and US tariffs threatened to disrupt India’s strong run of economic growth. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has already cut rates by 125 basis points since last February, bringing the policy repo rate down to 5.25 per cent. “The US-India trade deal further bolsters the case for the RBI keeping rates unchanged this week,” Dhiraj Nim, an economist at ANZ Bank, said. India’s growth is running near its potential while inflation is expected to move back towards the central bank’s target, underpinning the case for a policy pause, he said. India’s GDP growth is expected to hit 7.4 per cent in the current financial year and the government’s economic adviser has forecast growth at 6.8-7.2 per cent for next year. The Indian economy is in a “Goldilocks phase”, Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra said at the last policy meeting in December. It had forecast growth for the fiscal year ending March 31 at 7.3 per cent and CPI inflation at 2 per cent. India’s GDP growth is expected to hit 7.4 per cent in the current financial year and the government’s economic adviser has forecast growth at 6.8-7.2 per cent for next year. The Indian economy is in a “Goldilocks phase”, Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra said at the last policy meeting in December. It had forecast growth for the fiscal year ending March 31 at 7.3 per cent and CPI inflation at 2 per cent. While the economy has been strong, the central bank has had to intervene across forex and bond markets amid large foreign outflows from the Indian equity markets up until the trade deal was announced. The RBI sold \$30



billion from its foreign exchange reserves between September and November - according to the latest data available - in turn withdrawing rupee liquidity and adding to pain for the bond markets already under pressure from record government borrowings. The benchmark 10-year yield has barely fallen over the past year, despite the large rate cuts, keeping funding costs high and limiting the economic benefits of easier monetary policy for borrowers. The benchmark 10-year yield acts as a signal for pricing of borrowings for banks and corporates. “The challenge now is to ensure that transmission of previous rate cuts is not hampered, while the central bank remains on an extended pause,” Kaushik Das, chief economist - India, Malaysia, and South Asia at Deutsche Bank, said in a note. Analysts expect the central bank to step up open market bond purchases by at least ₹1 trillion (\$10.92 billion) to support liquidity and reduce strains in the bond market. The urgency for RBI support for the bond market has increased following the higher-than-expected gross borrowing programme for the next fiscal year. “Higher market borrowing numbers mean concerns around bond supply will remain a challenge for policy transmission,” economists at Nomura said in a note.

JSW Cement shares jump 9% after Q3 turnaround from loss to profit

New Delhi: Shares of JSW Cement surged as much as 9% in Thursday’s trade following its turnaround financial performance for Q3 FY26, where the company reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 130.62 crore, reversing a loss in the corresponding quarter last fiscal. At 12:18 pm, JSW Cement shares were trading up 8.61% at Rs 126.15. The stock rallied 9.34% to touch the day’s high of Rs 127 against its previous close of Rs 116.15 on the BSE. As per the stock exchange filing, JSW Cement reported a consolidated net profit attributed to the owners of the company of Rs 130.62 crore for quarter ended December 31, 2025, from the consolidated net loss of Rs 80.22 crore recorded in the same period last year.

The company’s consolidated revenue from operations for the quarter stood at Rs 1,621.22 crore, from Rs 1,432.74 crore in the same period last year. The company reported an operating EBITDA of Rs 285.1 crore, marking a robust 32% jump compared to the previous year. The company attributed this growth primarily to operating leverage, noting that its operating EBITDA margin improved to 17.6% versus 15.1% in Q3 FY25. The total volume sold climbed 14% YoY to 3.56 million tonnes (MT). This growth was driven by a 7% rise in cement volumes and a substantial 17% increase in Ground Granulated Blast Furnace Slag (GGBS) sales. The company’s board approved the incorporation of a wholly-owned subsidiary in



Fujairah, UAE. The new entity will set up a cement grinding unit with a capacity of 1.65 million tonnes per annum (MTPA), the company informed exchanges.

The project entails a capital expenditure of approximately USD 39 million, which will be funded

through a mix of debt and equity, it said. The company also greenlit a corporate guarantee of up to USD 29.25 million to secure foreign currency term loans for the new subsidiary. The company also confirmed that the first phase of its Nagaur Integrated Unit in Ra-

jasthan, comprising 3.30 MTPA clinker and 2.50 MTPA grinding capacity, is on track for commissioning in the current quarter (Q4 FY26). Additionally, regulatory approvals are currently in progress for its proposed 2.75 MTPA split grinding unit in Mansa, Punjab.

PF trusts must meet EPF Section 17 norms to qualify for tax exemption

New Delhi: The Union Budget has proposed a major clean-up of the rules governing provident fund (PF) taxation by aligning income tax provisions with the Employees’ Provident Fund (EPF) framework. The move addresses long-standing inconsistencies between the Income Tax Act and EPF regulations that had created confusion for employers, PF trusts and employees, often leading to compliance difficulties and avoidable disputes. A labour ministry statement said The Union Budget (2026-2027) has aligned the income tax framework governing recognised provident funds with the statutory and administrative provisions of the Employees’ Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 and the Employees’ Provident Funds Scheme, 1952. Until now, investment norms, eligibility for tax exemptions and limits on employer contributions were governed by overlapping and sometimes contradictory provisions under tax law and labour law. This lack of alignment made it unclear which private PF trusts qualified for tax benefits and how their funds should be invested. The government has now proposed to harmonise the two regimes so that PF taxation follows the same logic and standards as EPF regulations. A key change relates to

eligibility for tax exemption. Under the new framework, recognition under the Income Tax Act, 2025 will be available only to PF trusts that are exempt under Section 17 of the EPF Act, 1952. Section 17 allows employers to manage their own PF trusts and seek exemption from filing monthly EPF returns, provided they follow EPF norms on contributions, investments and administration. By linking tax recognition directly to EPF exemption, the Budget removes ambiguity around which PF trusts qualify for tax benefits.

The Budget also aligns investment norms for PF trusts with EPF rules. Earlier, income tax provisions imposed a rigid cap that limited investments in government securities to 50 per cent. This restriction has now been removed. Going forward, PF trust investments will be governed entirely by the EPF framework and related regulations. This brings consistency between tax and labour laws and offers greater flexibility in managing retirement funds, while remaining within the EPF’s risk and safety guidelines. PF employer contributions—another important clarification relates to employer contributions. The Budget clearly sets a monetary ceiling of Rs 7.5 lakh per year for tax-efficient employer contributions to re-

irement funds. Contributions up to this limit will continue to remain tax-free, while any amount above Rs 7.5 lakh will be taxed as a perquisite in the hands of the employee. This replaces earlier percentage-based limits and parity rules that often caused uncertainty, particularly for high-salaried employees. The rationalisation also simplifies how employer contributions are treated. The requirement that employer and employee contribution rates must be equal has been removed, as has the provision that automatically taxed employer PF contributions exceeding 12 per cent of salary. Employers can now contribute more than 12 per cent of salary to a provident fund without triggering an immediate tax liability, as long as the overall Rs 7.5 lakh annual cap across PF, NPS and superannuation funds is not breached. The Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has welcomed the changes, noting that they bring much-needed convergence between tax law and EPF regulations. By clearly linking tax exemptions to EPF approval, aligning investment rules, and standardising contribution limits, the reforms are expected to reduce litigation, simplify compliance for employers, and provide greater certainty for employees.

Ten important lessons learned from recently revealed Jeffrey Epstein files

London: A new trove of about 3m files related to the financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein was released on Friday, offering new details about his network and interactions with wealthy and powerful figures and the federal investigations into his crimes.

7. Files show emails between head of LA Olympics committee and Ghislaine Maxwell. Emails from 2003 between Casey Wasserman, head of the Los Angeles Olympics organizing committee, and Ghislaine Maxwell – who is serving a 20-year prison sentence for sex-trafficking crimes – appeared in the files. The exchanges include a message from Wasserman telling Maxwell: “I think of you all the time. So, what do I have to do to see you in a tight leather outfit?” In an April 2003 email, sent to Wasserman, who was married at the time, Maxwell offered to give him a massage that can “drive a man wild.” Wasserman said on Saturday he “deeply regrets” his “correspondence with Ghislaine Maxwell,” which he said took place “long before her horrific crimes came to light.” “I never had a personal or business relationship with Jeffrey Epstein,” he added. “As is well documented, I went on a humanitarian trip as part of a delegation with the Clinton Foundation in 2002 on the Epstein plane. I am terribly sorry for having any association with either of them.”

8. New York Giants co-owner Steve Tisch exchanged emails with Epstein. Tisch was mentioned several hundred times in files released on Friday, and in some emails exchanged from 2013 it appears that Epstein connected Tisch to several women. In a statement, Tisch he said that he and Epstein had “a brief association where we exchanged emails about adult women, and in addition we discussed movies, philanthropy and investments.” “I did not take him up on any of his invitations and never went to his island,” he added. “As we all know now, he was a terrible person and someone I deeply regret associating with.”

9. Files shed new light on relationship between Epstein and Peter Mandelson. Bank records appear to show three separate payments of \$25,000 from Epstein’s JP Morgan bank accounts referencing Mandelson, and separate documents appear to indicate that Epstein sent thousands of pounds to Mandelson’s husband after Epstein’s release from prison in 2009. Contacted about the bank statements, Mandelson said: “I have no record and no recollection of receiving these sums and do not know if the documents are authentic.” The files also include an image of

Mandelson in his underwear standing next to a woman whose face is redacted. In response, Mandelson has said that he “cannot place the location or the woman and I cannot think what the circumstances were.” Mandelson was fired in September over his links to Epstein. On Sunday, he resigned from the Labour party. In a statement, Mandelson reiterated that he had been wrong to believe Epstein and continue his association with him, adding: “I deeply regret doing so and apologise unequivocally to the women and girls who suffered.”

10. Hollywood film-maker Brett Ratner appears in image with Epstein and two women. A newly released photo from the files shows Ratner, who directed the recently released Melania Trump documentary, sitting on a sofa hugging a woman, next to Epstein, who is sitting with another woman. Both women’s faces have been redacted. According to the Wall Street Journal, the undated photo appears to have been taken in Epstein’s New York townhouse. Ratner reportedly told the Journal in 2023 he did not know Epstein and had never met him. On Saturday, a spokeswoman for Ratner declined to comment to the Journal. The release follows legislation passed in November by US lawmakers that mandated the disclosure of all Epstein-related documents.

1. Epstein lawyers discussed possibility of cooperation days before his death. Less than two weeks before Epstein died in jail in 2019, the files show that his attorneys met with Manhattan federal prosecutors and discussed Epstein’s potential cooperation. An FBI document titled “Epstein Investigation Summary & Timeline” states: “On July 29, 2019, FBI and [prosecutors] met with Epstein’s attorneys, who, in very general terms, discussed the possibility of a resolution of the case, and the possibility of the defendant’s cooperation.” Another document titled “Jeffrey Epstein Significant Case Notification”, which closely resembles the FBI memo but is not attributed to a specific agency, notes that “defense counsel did not make a specific proposal, and they did not indicate what the nature of Epstein’s cooperation might be, if any.” It was suggested that defense counsel contact SDNY [southern district of New York] if Epstein was prepared to accept responsibility for his conduct and/or they had a specific proposal for a resolution of this case,” it added.

2. FBI received allegations about Trump. One document in the newly released tranche is a summary that FBI officials appear to have compiled last summer, of more than a dozen tips received



by the agency involving Trump and Epstein. It is unclear why the investigators put together the summary, and it does not say when the tips, which include unsubstantiated claims of sexual abuse, were received. The document also does not include any corroborating evidence or indication that the tips were verified. Trump has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing in connection with Epstein. In response to a request for comment from the New York Times, the White House referred to a statement from the justice department on Friday, which stated that the new tranche of documents “may include fake or falsely submitted images, documents or videos.” “Some of the documents contain untrue and sensationalist claims against President Trump that were submitted to the FBI right before the 2020 election,” the DoJ statement added. “To be clear, the claims are unfounded and false, and if they have a shred of credibility, they certainly would have been weaponized against President Trump already. email exchange between Epstein and “the Duke” – believed to be Mountbatten-Windsor, then the Duke of York – Epstein said he was in London and requested “private time”. Mountbatten-Windsor appears to have replied: “We could have dinner at Buckingham Palace and lots of privacy.” Two days later, he followed up by saying: “Delighted for you to come here to BP [Buckingham Palace]. Come with whomever and I’ll be here free from 1600ish.” It is unclear if the meeting took place. But three months later, the pair were pictured walking together in New York’s Central Park. Mount-

batten-Windsor has previously claimed he had travelled to the US to end his friendship with Epstein in light of his conviction. The documents also show that days after Epstein’s house arrest ended, Epstein offered to arrange for Mountbatten-Windsor to have dinner with a “clever [sic], beautiful and trustworthy” 26-year-old Russian woman. Mountbatten-Windsor apparently responded that he would be “delighted” to meet the woman. In that email exchange, he also asked Epstein if it was “good to be free?” Additional files include photos showing Andrew appearing to be crouching over an unidentified woman who is lying on the floor.

6. Richard Branson and Epstein exchanged emails. The files show an email exchange from 2013 between Branson, the British billionaire and founder of the Virgin Group, and Epstein. In an email on 11 September 2013, Branson wrote to Epstein, “It was really nice seeing you yesterday” and added: “Any time you’re in the area would love to see you. As long as you bring your harem!” A representative for Virgin group told the New York Times that Branson had sent the email shortly after hosting Epstein at a group business meeting on the private island Branson owns in the British Virgin Islands. Branson had with Epstein took place on only a few occasions more than 12 years ago, and was limited to group or business settings,” the representative said in a statement. “Richard believes that Epstein’s actions were abhorrent and supports the right to justice for his many victims.”

Newly released files shed new light on Chomsky and Epstein relationship

Paris: The close friendship that Noam Chomsky maintained with Jeffrey Epstein continued being detailed extensively among millions of investigative records pertaining to the late convicted sex offender recently released by the US justice department, including Chomsky “fantasizing about the Caribbean island”. In Friday’s tranche of the so-called Epstein files, which built upon earlier disclosures of their close social ties, there is no indication that the famed academic and linguist was referring to his friend’s private Caribbean island where children were sexually abused. But the personal familiarity between the two men in that exchange is palpable, as it is in numerous other emails between Chomsky and Epstein aimed at planning more mundane social gatherings. There additionally was an exchange in which Chomsky wrote to Steve Bannon, the rightwing chief White House strategist during Donald Trump’s first presidency, requesting an introductory meeting. “Lots to talk about,” Chomsky wrote, adding that he had been provided Bannon’s contact information by Epstein, a former friend of Trump. Former Epstein girlfriend Karyna Shuliak at one point emailed a third party whose identity was redacted that she and her boyfriend wanted to send the Chomsky and his wife two genetic testing kits. Perhaps most strikingly, in late February 2019, Epstein represented to an associate that he had gotten advice from Chomsky over how to navigate “the horrible way you are being treated in the press and public”. That was 11 years after Epstein had pleaded guilty to soliciting prostitution from a minor – and months before he would reportedly die by suicide while in federal custody awaiting sex-trafficking charges. The best way to proceed is to ignore it,” Chomsky wrote, according to text signed under his first name that Epstein sent to a lawyer and publicist. “That’s particularly true now with the hysteria that has developed about abuse of women, which has reached the point that even questioning a charge is a crime worse than murder.” Neither Chomsky nor his second wife and spokesperson, Valeria Chomsky, immediately responded to inquiries about the Epstein-related emails in question – including whether they disputed the authenticity of the 2019 advice attributed to the scholar. “Fantasizing about the Caribbean” Nonetheless, collectively, the latest communications To be sure, that regular contact did involve finances, including Chomsky communicating with Epstein for advice throughout a complex fight pitting him against his children from his first marriage that revolved around money and the purchase of an apartment. Chomsky’s estate attorney at one point suggested sending a pointed email to a financial adviser over discrepancies surrounding a \$187,000 payment. The attorney had a draft ready to go. But Chomsky – one of the world’s brightest intellectuals – made sure to get Epstein’s thoughts on whether it was a good idea for her to send the missive. “You should OK her sending but admonish [her] for being unwilling to ask tough questions,” Epstein wrote, in part. “NONSENSE.”

Bill and Hillary Clinton agree to in House Epstein investigation

London: Bill and Hillary Clinton agreed on Monday to testify in a House investigation into the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, days before the chamber was expected to vote to hold them in contempt of Congress. The concession follows a tense back-and-forth between the Clintons and the Republican James Comer, chair of the House oversight committee, who on Monday said that he would insist both Clintons sit for a sworn deposition before the committee in order to fulfill the panel’s subpoenas. “They negotiated in good faith. You did not,” Angel Ureña, a spokesman for the Clintons, replied to Comer, in a post on social media. “They told you under oath what they know, but you don’t care. But the former president and former

secretary of state will be there. They look forward to setting a precedent that applies to everyone.” The House was headed towards potential votes this week on criminal contempt of Congress charges against the Clintons. If passed, the charges threatened the Clintons with substantial fines and even incarceration if they were convicted. “The Clintons do not get to dictate the terms of lawful subpoenas,” Comer said. For months, the Clintons had refused



to appear before the Republican-led panel, arguing that the subpoenas were legally “invalid” and “unenforceable” and accusing Comer of targeting them as part of Donald Trump’s retribution campaign against his political enemies. A committee letter to the Clintons’ attorneys indicates the pair had offered for Bill Clinton to conduct a transcribed interview on “matters related to the investigations and prosecutions of Jeffrey Epstein” and for Hillary Clinton to submit a sworn declaration. The Republican-controlled oversight panel had advanced criminal contempt of Congress charges last month, in response to the Clintons’ refusal to testify in Congress. On 12 January, attorneys for the Clintons had issued a letter to Comer on why they would not be testifying. They called the subpoenas “invalid and legally unenforceable, untethered to a valid legislative purpose, unwarranted because they do not seek pertinent information, and an unprecedented infringement on the separation of powers”. The demand for testimony “runs afoul of the clearly defined limitations on Congress’s investigative power propounded by the supreme court of the United States”, they wrote, adding:

“It is clear the subpoenas themselves – and any subsequent attempt to enforce them – are nothing more than a ploy to attempt to embarrass political rivals, as President Trump has directed.” Nine of the committee’s 21 Democrats joined Republicans in support of the charges against Bill Clinton as they argued for full transparency in the Epstein investigation. Three Democrats also supported the charges against Hillary Clinton. Bill Clinton’s relationship with Epstein has re-emerged as a focal point for Republicans amid the push for a reckoning over Epstein, who killed himself in 2019 in a New York jail cell as he faced sex-trafficking charges. Clinton, like a bevy of other high-powered men, including Trump, had a well-documented

sexual relationship with Epstein in the late 1990s and early 2000s. He has not been accused of wrongdoing in his interactions with the late financier. On Friday, more than 3m files related to Jeffrey Epstein were released by the Department of Justice, including more than 2,000 videos and 180,000 images. The files included a series of emails between the billionaire Elon Musk and Epstein, indicating a friendlier relationship than was previously known. Following the drop of the latest batch of files, Democrats have promised to fight what they are calling a “full-blown cover-up” of the Epstein files after the Trump administration on Sunday effectively declared its investigation into the disgraced late financier and sex trafficker was closed. Many senior Democrats, as well as the Republican congressman Thomas Massie of Kentucky, say that millions more pages of information are being withheld by the justice department. After Bill and Hillary Clinton were subpoenaed in August by the House oversight committee, their attorney had tried to argue against the validity of the subpoena. However, as Comer threatened to begin contempt of Congress proceedings, they started negotiating towards a compromise. Still, the Clintons remained highly critical of Comer’s decision, saying that he was bringing politics into the investigation while failing to hold the Trump administration accountable for delays in producing the Department of Justice’s case files on Epstein.

Elon Musk merges SpaceX with xAI at \$1.25tn valuation

London: Elon Musk’s aerospace company SpaceX has acquired his artificial intelligence business xAI, in a \$1.25tn (£910bn) merger that consolidates part of Musk’s empire as SpaceX prepares to go public later this year. The two companies announced the deal on Monday in a statement on SpaceX’s website, saying the merger would form “the most ambitious, vertically-integrated innovation engine on (and off) Earth, with AI, rockets, space-based internet, direct-to-mobile device communications and the world’s foremost real-time information and free speech platform”. SpaceX, one of the world’s most valuable private companies, will gain xAI properties such as its Grok chatbot and the social media platform X. The acquisition comes as Musk has pursued plans to put datacenters and solar-powered satellites in space as a means of powering artificial intelligence, an immense and exorbitantly expensive undertaking. The deal reportedly valued SpaceX at \$1tn and xAI at \$250bn, putting the combined business on course for a stock market float valuing it well in excess of \$1tn. The float is expected to be timed for early summer to coincide with a planetary alignment and Musk’s birthday. Musk turns 55 on 28 June, around the same time as Jupiter and Venus appear in close proximity to each other. The announcement of the deal specifically cited Musk’s plans for space-based datacenters as a rationale for the deal. “Current advances in AI are dependent on large terrestrial datacenters, which require immense amounts of power and cooling. Global electricity demand for AI simply cannot be met with terrestrial solutions, even in the near term, without imposing hardship on communities and the environment,” the announcement said. In the long term, space-based AI is obviously the only way to scale.” Musk has been increasingly intertwining parts of his businesses in recent months through deals and acquisitions. xAI acquired the platform X in an all-stock transaction in



early 2025, and last month Tesla revealed that it planned to invest \$2bn in xAI. Both SpaceX and xAI have received staggering valuations in the past year. As SpaceX continues to dominate satellite launches and secure extensive contracts with the US federal government, it sent a letter to investors in December that revealed an expected value of \$800bn for the company. Despite widespread backlash to xAI’s Grok AI tool over its promotion of racist ideology and spread of nonconsensual sexualized deepfake images of women and children, the artificial intelligence company has also grown its valuation amid the AI boom. It announced a \$20bn Series E fundraise last month from major investors, which valued the company at \$230bn. Speculation and leaks about the deal, first reported by Reuters, have proliferated in recent days. Musk appeared to give vague confirmation of the acquisition earlier on Monday, writing simply “yes” in reply to a post on X that referenced reports of the merger. The news is a positive diversion for Musk after Tesla released an earnings

report last week that showed declining revenues and a struggling car business. A few days later, a Department of Justice release of 3m files related to sex offender Jeffrey Epstein showed Musk exchanging numerous friendly emails with the disgraced financier and making plans to visit his private island. Musk has not responded to Guardian inquiries about the latest Epstein emails. He called the release of the emails a “distraction” on X and claimed that he was “well aware that some email correspondence with him could be misinterpreted and used by detractors to smear my name”. is needed to meet basic needs,” Hakizimana says. “There is also a significant risk of disease outbreaks due to overcrowding.” For Muka, there is one small consolation. “I have my family,” he says, as his children play in the background. “We only have two sets of clothes for them we managed to keep, and some cash left from selling the goats.” Still, pangs of homesickness linger. “Everything I have reminds me of home,” Muka says. “It reminds us of everything we lost.”

‘Everything carries a hint of myth and magic’: six great island escapes in Europe

Islas Cíes, Galicia, Spain

Gaze west from one of the crownest hilltops on Monteagudo (“Sharp Mount”) island, and you can just about imagine the rooftops of Atlantis beneath the Atlantic swell. One of the three islands that comprise the Islas Cíes archipelago, about nine miles off the Galician coast, it is where Captain Nemo, hero of Jules Verne’s 1871 novel Twenty-Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, salvaged the treasure that funded his adventures. Verne’s choice of location makes sense. Everything about this collection of islands carries a hint of myth and magic, from its coastal caves and high cliffs to its secret coves and squally seas. It was designated a nature reserve in 1980 and later a maritime park, and humans play a distant second fiddle to the permanent residents, which include such delights as the sea-pink “love plant” (herba de namorar) and an underwater algae forest a stone’s throw from the shore. For all their Treasure Island-like wilderness (the other islands, south of Monteagudo, are Isla del Faro and uninhabited San Martiño), the big lure of the Islas Cíes is how close their crystalline waters and pale sandy beaches are to the mainland. In less than an hour by boat from Vigo (about €23pp), you can be sunbathing on Praia de Rodas, a Colgate-white strip of fine sand that links the two northern islands and can compete with any in the Caribbean. Children will enjoy snorkelling close to shore or rooting in rock pools in the main bay. But the best thing about the Islas Cíes is that visitor numbers are capped, so there’s no scrum for space on the beach or long queues at the handful of eateries. Though the islands cover only about 1½ square miles, you can head off on any of four walking routes and soon be in splendid isolation. Except for the yellow-legged gulls that is: these squawking dive-bombers guard their nests with a gusto worthy of Verne’s swashbuckling hero. The protective net thrown over the islands means accommodation and eating options are minimal. For a snack, grab some raya frita (fried stingray) or salmonetes (red mullet) at Bar Seafin. If you go for a day trip (as many do), enjoy an evening back in Vigo with a taste of classic Galician seafood at Casa Marco.

Île Sainte-Marguerite, near Cannes, France

A 15-minute boat-ride from Cannes, Sainte-Marguerite is a nature-filled island great for swimming, picnics and watching cormorants. A few years ago, we ditched the laser tag and paintball, and took our son and his friends there for his “alternative” 11th birthday. As we cut his cake in a glade among the umbrella pines and eucalyptus trees, none of the youngsters even glanced at their smartphone. We usually head for the south side, with its rocky inlets, pebble beaches and clear water. At both ends of the island are the remains of a fours à boulets (cannonball oven). Built on the orders of a young Napoleon Bonaparte, they have a groove at the top in which the balls were placed ready to roll slowly down through the furnace until they came out cherry-red hot and ready for launching at enemy ships. This explanation provided the only moments of quiet at the birthday party, before the children scattered into the forest to hang upside down from twisted pines, play rounders beside the huge lagoon and stick-fight on the picnic tables. On other trips, we’ve eaten at La Guérîte (expensive, high-quality Greek-style seafood) and L’Escale (good for pizzas, salads and fried fish).

There’s also a kiosk by the jetty called Le Leroños, selling pan bagnat, sandwiches and waffles. Aside from the grounds of a few private homes, visitors are free to wander the trails that crisscross the island: there are no bikes or cars on Sainte-Marguerite. A pentagon-shaped fort, built in the 1620s, houses a slightly dusty maritime museum and a youth hostel (see below). The narrow strait between Sainte-Marguerite and smaller Île Saint-Honorat can get so full of boats in the summer that you could almost walk across the decks from one island to the other. But 100 metres off this southern shore of Sainte-Marguerite is a protected zone, with an underwater eco-museum. It comprises six two-metre-high heads installed by British sculptor and diver Jason deCaires Taylor a few metres below the surface, that act as a refuge for marine life. Snorkellers can dive among the split-mask-like sculptures. Stay The Centre International de Séjour is a hostel and activity centre within the Royal Fort, with family rooms and dorms in the former garrison. There’s a volleyball court, frisbee-golf and a climbing wall – better

facilities than when the Man in the Iron Mask was incarcerated there for 11 years in the 17th century. Stays from €80 full-board for adults and over-nines, €68 half-board, plus one-off family membership fee of €26.

Ustica, north of Sicily, Italy

A short ferry ride from Palermo, the volcanic island of Ustica couldn’t feel further away from the messy, chaotic and colourful Sicilian capital. As soon as you dock in the main town’s pretty bay, it’s obvious how different island life is from the city. Ustica is quiet, clean and sparsely populated. Most international visitors to Sicily don’t even know it exists. And because the island is only four square miles – a quarter of it protected nature reserve – it’s easy to get around on foot or by bike. It takes about half an hour to cycle from one side to the other, and you can circumnavigate the island in little over an hour. There’s also a bus if you don’t fancy the exercise. The Greeks knew the island as Osteodes before the Romans renamed it Ustica – from the Latin for burnt, after its black rocks. History lovers will find much to investigate because it has been home at various times to Phoenician and Carthaginian settlers, Barbary pirates, and fascist-era political prisoners. But it’s the incredible natural beauty that draws most visitors, with divers flocking (or shoaling?) to its many inlets and grottos to enjoy some of the most pristine sea in the Mediterranean. The waters around Ustica were made a protected marine reserve in the 1980s, the first of its kind in Italy. Experienced divers can explore shipwrecks, underwater caves and lava formations deep beneath the waves, but even casual swimmers will find lots to marvel at, and boat tours of the coast are deservedly popular. Ustica also has a network of marked trails running inland, and the views from Monte Guardia dei Turchi, the highest accessible point on the island, can be breathtaking. Gorgeous tracks along the western and southern shores mean anyone with half-decent shoes and a bit of time can navigate the island’s coastline on foot. Winding through farm terraces and clifftop scrub at walking pace allows you to properly appreciate the island’s beauty, and more often than not you’ll be the only one on the trail. To make the trek a little extra special, go after sunset, when you may find yourself under a tapestry of stars, with only the flickering of the mainland across the water to remind you that sooner or later, you’ll have to leave this paradise. Ignore them, and stroll back to the harbour for a glass of wine, or a meal at Il Faraglione, overlooking the water and run by two brothers who are passionate about modern Sicilian cooking and really fresh fish.

Tilos, Dodecanese Islands, Greece

The sea is rose and gold, waves surging to shore in the wild north of Tilos, where I sit in a taverna enjoying the sunset breeze. On the headland to the west, above Plaka beach, where peacocks roam, a wind turbine spins. This, along with a small solar farm, supplies all the island’s winter energy needs. Beyond, the road winds up precipitous cliffs to the monastery, with its flowing spring. An island of 25 square miles in the southern Aegean, Tilos is peaceful, welcoming and down to earth. A hunting ban protects wildlife such as Eleonora’s falcons and Bonelli’s eagles, which swoop and circle overhead; monk seals find refuge on the rugged, undeveloped coast. Road hazards include cats, owls and goats.

When I came for a week in 2008 and walked through a valley of thyme and sage to a dazzling bay with watermelon-red sand, I was smitten. I discovered more footpaths to beaches with verdigris- and salmon-hued rocks, and stargazed from the abandoned hill village of Mikro Horio. Eventually I boosted the 500-strong population by one, moving to live here in 2011. After a two- to three-hour ferry trip from Rhodes or Kos, you arrive in Livadia, which is encircled by green slopes and craggy peaks. Lining the pebbly beach are simple hotels, family-run tavernas (for a twist on traditional fare, try Almyriki or Gorgona), bars and Zafirís’ outdoor gym. Families with buggies, children on scooters and strolling couples enjoy the prom. The bus follows an oleander-fringed road through the empty middle of the island to Harkadio cave, whose museum displays the bones of the last elephants in Europe. Ahead, the small white houses of Megalo Horio appear below the castle. From the new archaeological museum, we ascend to the ancient village, where one cafe-bar spreads under trees, while another overlooks the arched roofs and pebble-mo-

saic courtyard of the church. The bus turns south towards to Eristos, where I walk its kilometre of sand between wild rocky headlands. At the kantina, my beer can goes into recycling: Tilos went zero waste a few years ago. At dusk there’s a hushed calm, despite scores of tents under the tamarisks. Tilos has allowed wild camping on part of this beach for decades, and many campers return year after year. People sit watching the waves roll in; teenagers play traditional music on guitar and violin. After the summer festivals, we walk the hills to chapels with frescoes, and wait for rain to bring wildflowers.

Rab, northern Croatia

Rab and revelry go hand in hand, especially in summer. The island in Croatia’s Kvamer Gulf is only 35 square miles, but it simply fizzles with joy and music and the scents of freshly grilled fish by the water’s edge. Having timed my visit to be there for Rabska Fjera (Croatia’s biggest and oldest medieval festival, held every July), I sat by the huge makeshift barbecue on Rab Town’s beach and devoured grilled mackerel (only €5 a portion). There’s more feasting to come this summer, with Saturday fish festivals in August alternating between the villages of Kampor and Supetarska Draga. Then the Rab Jazz festival takes over (29 August-1 September), giving a spirited soundtrack to Rab Town’s Venetian splendour. Climbing a staircase near pine-covered Komrčar Park, I enjoyed the best view of the town’s distinctive skyline: four medieval and Renaissance belfries above a sea of terracotta rooftops stretching along a narrow peninsula.

Down a nearby lane is the Ljetno Kino, the outdoor summer cinema that hosts the Rab film festival (23-27 August), as well as blockbusters and concerts, including the jazz festival. Nearby are the fifth-century ruins of the basilica of St John the Evangelist, whose 13th-century belltower is one of Rab’s fab four belfries. Wandering through Rab Town’s labyrinth of marble alleyways, I found Konoba Rab, and gave the customary 24 hours’ notice for dinner the next night – succulent lamb cooked for hours under a cast-iron peka (a domed lid). It was worth the wait. Šanpjer restaurant along the harbour front has a no-reservations policy and lengthy queues for dinner; I settled for an €8 lunch of grilled sardines next day instead. The hands-down winner for setting is Restaurant Kamenjak in the foothills of Rab’s highest point – a great spot to watch the sunset. Tiny Rab has nearly two dozen sandy beaches – a rarity along Croatia’s predominantly pebbly and rocky shores. Most, including two of the biggest, Rajska and Livačina, are on the Lopar peninsula. But some of us prefer pebbles, and that’s where the heavily indented Kalifront peninsula comes in, with sheltered coves at Gožinka, Dundo and Jelenovica, among many others. Even Rab Town’s mainly concrete beach, beneath the 11th-century monastery of St Andrew, became a favourite spot for a cocktail as the sun went down on this little slice of heaven.

Hallig Hooge, north-west

Germany I have many happy memories of European islands: Mont Saint-Michel glowing in the sunset; a quiet beach on Paros; Scillonian St Helen’s in a sea twinkling like diamonds. But the island that pops most readily to mind is in an unfashionable corner of the continent scoured by North Sea winds.

Hallig Hooge is the second-largest of the 10 Fenland-flat isles that make up



the Halligen archipelago off north-west Germany. They are extremely low-lying, so whenever a storm tide breaches the protective dykes, they all but disappear beneath the waves. On Hooge, Landunter (literally “land under”) happens between two and six times a year. Yet, despite this, a mostly farming population of about 100 live what appear to be wholly contented lives. In the main, that’s because their attractive barn-like houses sit safely on nine separate Warften, mounds that become islets when the sea bursts in. The floods are less frequent in summer, which makes this the best time for visitors to

take the 75-minute ferry ride from the mainland. Several summers ago, I disembarked with a few others at Hooge’s little jetty and soon found myself alone beneath a huge sunny sky.

Looking out over seemingly endless saltmarshes flecked with purple and yellow wildflowers, breathing in silence and sea air, I felt my spirit lift. The feeling stayed with me for the four days I spent in this otherworldly place. I picked up a hire bike and began swanning about the two-square-mile, virtually motor-vehicle-free island. I visited the tiny museum and church; watched a chilling film of a win-

ter flooding at the Sturmflutkino (Storm Flood Cinema); and greeted horse-cart drivers with the customary cheery Moin! (pronounced mo-een). I bought food and Flensburger beer in Hooge’s supermarket and enjoyed languorous picnics in Strandkorben – canopied wicker benches – gazing at seals basking on sandbanks and seabirds drifting on thermals. But it was impossible to ignore the sense of impermanence that clings to the isle. With sea levels rising, there’s a real danger that one day not too far off, Hooge and its merry Warft-living inhabitants may simply disappear or be forced to leave.



ENTERTAINMENT

Mirzapur, starring Pankaj Tripathi and Ali Fazal, will be released on September 4



Mumbai: Mirzapur, one of the first big-screen hits in Indian streaming, will come to an end. The producers said on Thursday morning that Mirzapur the Movie, which continues the tale after season 3, will be released in theaters on September 4 of this year. The

movie's poster, which revealed its September 4 release date, was released by Amazon MGM Studios and Excel Entertainment on Thursday. The movie's title and release date are clearly displayed on the poster, which depicts a cavalcade of SUVs navigating a winding

road. "Bhaukaal bade parde par ab dekhiye." Watch #MirzapurTheMovie, which opens in theaters near you on September 4th," the caption said. In addition to reviving Divyendu's Munna Tripathi from the grave, Mirzapur the Movie revives the beloved characters of

Kaleen Bhaiya (Pankaj Tripathi) and Guddu Bhaiya (Ali Fazal). Ravi Kishan, Abhishek Banerjee, Rasika Duggal, Shweta Tripathi, Shriya Pilgaonkar, Harshita Gaur, Sushant Singh, Mohit Malik, Sheeba Chadha, Rajesh Tailang, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Sonal Chauhan, Pramod Pathak, and Anangsha Biswas are also members of the ensemble cast. Jitendra Kumar has apparently taken over for Vikrant Massey, who portrayed Babloo Pandit in season 1.

Post-production is going underway for the movie, which just finished filming. One of the most well-liked OTT franchises in India is Mirzapur, a tale of gang rivalry, retaliation, and power that takes place in the town of the same name in Uttar Pradesh. The movie was written by Puneet Krishna, directed by Gurmmeet Singh, and produced by Amazon MGM Studios and Excel Entertainment.

Siddhant Chaturvedi teases Mrunal Thakur about her "Chennai connection"

Mumbai: Since the two were seen together at the Son of Sardaar 2 premiere in August of last year, Bollywood actor Mrunal Thakur has been the subject of rumors that he is dating actor Dhanush. Siddhant Chaturvedi, Mrunal's co-star, was recently spotted making fun of her purported "Chennai connection" amid these rumors, causing her to blush. Mrunal and Siddhant went out to publicize Do Deewane Seher Mein, their next movie. A reporter said, "Voh Chennai waale kuch sawaal pooch rahe the aapse" (They were asking you some Chennai-related questions) during the promotional event. Pointing to Mrunal, Siddhant shot back, "Inse tha voh Chennai waala yaa mujhse tha? (Was that Chennai inquiry directed at me or at her?) Mrunal quickly stated that he was the intended recipient of the question. Siddhant and the reporters kept making fun

of Mrunal for the Chennai allusion while they busted out laughing. As the reporters continued, "Hum samajh rahe hain (We are understanding)," she continued to smile and flush. This occurs in the midst of persistent rumors that Mrunal and Dhanush, who is currently living in Chennai, are dating. When the two were spotted together at the Son of Sardaar 2 premiere, rumors began to circulate.

When Dhanush wrote, "Looks and sounds good," in response to the teaser for Mrunal and Siddhant's movie Do Deewane Seher Mein, he fueled the rumors even more. Mrunal used sunflower and heart emojis in response.

According to more recent rumors, Mrunal and Dhanush were getting married on Valentine's Day. But according to a source, "Mrunal will not be getting married next month." This is merely a rumor that has

gained popularity. The insider added that the reports are dubious because Do Deewane Seher Mein, which stars Mrunal and Siddhant Chaturvedi, is set to be released around the same time as the purported wedding date.

Why would she get married so soon before the debut of her movie, which is scheduled for February? She also has a Telugu movie scheduled for March, the person continued. Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Prema Singh, Umesh Kumar Bansal, and Bharat Kumar Ranga are the producers of the film, which is directed by Ravi Udyawar and distributed by Zee Studios, Rancorp Media, and Bhansali Productions. In addition to Ila Arun, Joy Sengupta, and Ayesha Raza playing important roles, Siddhant Chaturvedi and Mrunal Thakur play the main roles. The movie is slated to hit theaters on February 20.

One Requirement for Priyanka Chopra in SS Rajamouli's Varanasi



Mumbai: Varanasi, directed by SS Rajamouli, will mark Priyanka Chopra's return to Indian film. Mahesh Babu and Prithviraj Sukumaran play important parts in the movie as well. Prior to formally joining the production, Priyanka explicitly requested a dance scene for her character in the movie from the director. "So, I haven't done an Indian film in, like, six years," Priyanka stated in an interview. I said, "I have one request: will you make me dance?" Then he called and said, "Oh, you know, this female character's really cool, and you have to do it and whatever." I haven't danced in a long time, so please. Whoa, since we're dancing, I shouldn't have asked. There are so many, my goodness. And poor Mahesh said, "You're to blame." I have to do it too because of you." Mahesh Babu talked about his experience filming those dance

scenes, saying, "It's amazing. And I believe there's a song we've already filmed for that just keeps coming to mind. And [Priyanka] never stops singing it. She wanted to dance, which is why she chose that song. He also got her to dance. The actual title of the movie was revealed by the producers at the Globetrotter event in Hyderabad in November of last year. An amazing aerial view of the historic city opens the Varanasi teaser. The action then shifts to a dramatic and emotional scene in which a huge asteroid is seen rushing toward Earth. The trailer concludes with a striking picture of Mahesh Babu as Rudhra, brandishing a trishul while mounted on a bull. Priyanka plays the action-packed role of Mandakini in Varanasi, while Prithviraj Sukumaran plays the adversary. The premiere date of the fantasy drama is set for April 7, 2027.

At a Dubai event, Dhoom actor Rimi Sen shares a "bitter life truth"



Mumbai: After becoming well-known in the early 2000s thanks to roles in Johnny Gaddar, Hungama, Dhoom, Golmaal, and Phir Hera Pheri, Rimi Sen progressively disappeared from the Hindi cinema business. After changing her job to real estate in Dubai, Rimi is already making headlines again. She recently gave a guest speech at an event hosted by the Dubai-based real estate company Mytra Official, discussing how she has come to the realization that nothing is more important in life than money. "I've learned just one thing in life, Babu Bhaiya: everything is a game of money," Rimi Sen remarked. Nothing is more important

than money. Forget about dreams if you want to make money in life; just do what you have to do. Adhere to your principles, values, and morals with conviction. And make as much money as you can, since money is the most important thing. "Money comes before honor, money comes before relationships," she went on. We are all aware of this harsh reality. And now here we are, abandoning our nation and people in order to make money. For improved chances. So, give it your all. If necessary, change careers. If something doesn't work for you, stop doing it right away, since time is something that never returns. After changing her job to real estate in Dubai,

Rimi is already making headlines again. She clarified that she felt women in Bollywood had a short career lifespan, which is why she decided to leave the industry. "I feel like the career timeline in the film industry isn't long, especially for women," Rimi stated. Because it's a male-dominated industry, men typically control it. Salman Khan and Shah Rukh Khan are still in power today, as evidenced by their raj karte hain wahan pe itne saalon se. It has been twenty-five to thirty years. "And the same females who collaborated with them are now either portraying their mothers or supporting roles. Therefore, I had made plans in advance to work in the field, perform events and movies, earn as much money as I could, and then go into production," Rimi continued. "I produced Budhia Singh (2016), which won a National Award," she continued. However, I soon started my own business. I no longer have to worry about wasting time or being in front of the camera, and I feel safer. You ultimately seek freedom and financial stability.

Rasha Thadani makes her singing debut alongside Chaap Tilak

Mumbai: Rasha Thadani, who has only been in the business for one movie, just made her singing debut with the song Chaap Tilak from her upcoming movie Laikey Laikaa, which also stars Abhay Verma. She refers to the chance as a "dream come true." "I've always loved performing arts as a whole, whether it was acting, dancing, singing, or music," she explains. "I was five years old when I started training in Hindustani classical music with Qadir Mustafa Khan, Ghulam Mustafa Khan's son," says Rasha Thadani, who has received professional training in the art form.

I have been schooled by him since I was five years old, and I have also studied jazz. When you have an hour to yourself while performing your riyaz, music is like an escape. Singing has always been my passion. I have an obsession with singing in the shower. I'm really appreciative that I can now enter the music



business. The song is an homage to Shiva, according to Rasha. "I have completed my twelve-tyrting journey, and Shiva is more than just a religion—he is a part of life. No matter what, he is by my side every single day.

According to my understanding of the song, I can picture Natraj dancing when they discuss the damru, which is more than just dancing. He dances to the sounds of the damru with such grandeur. The

rhythms represent Natraj's damru. The song is an homage to the deity of art and dancing.

He owns my artwork. "He is someone that inspires me so much and I'm so grateful for the support he's given me," the actor says after receiving compliments for her singing from actor Prabhas. He's such a big star, but he's also incredibly kind and encouraging, so it's very moving. It gives me a boost to have him inspire me just a little bit.

In 2027, Ranbir Kapoor's Animal Park will be built on floors

Mumbai: Ahead of its theatrical premiere, Animal is creating a lot of anticipation ahead of its February 13 release in Japan. Sandeep Reddy Vanga and Ranbir Kapoor engaged with spectators after a special screening for a restricted group of Japanese audiences. They talked about the action-packed world of the movie and offered new perspectives on Animal Park. Although Animal Park has been in development for a while, Vanga provided important information about how the tale would be expanded in the second volume and the anticipated release date. "After I finish my current project, Animal Park will begin, and there will be more animals. Keeping that in mind, it's a conflict between two identical-looking brothers. I therefore believed that Animal Park would be a fitting title. We'll start filming in the middle of 2027," the director stated. Ranvijay's actor, Ranbir Kapoor,



expressed his eagerness to reprise the role and delve into the next stage of the narrative. "I'm eager to return to the set with Sandeep and take on this role, as well as another. Sandeep added, "Even while filming part one, he had part two very clear in his mind because it's a continuing sto-

ry." "It's very exciting and inspiring for me as an actor," Ranbir continued, describing the partnership as creatively stimulating. Throughout the week and month, Sandeep and I continue to talk about other concepts, and I am eager to resume portraying Ranvijay and Aziz."

Regarding the intense action in the movie, Ranbir stated that the set pieces were one of the best parts of filming. Because the action scenes were so fresh and unique, I thoroughly loved them. He remarked, "I had never done so much action before, and I really enjoyed it." But the last battle with Bobby Deol's Abrar was the most difficult scene. "I recall spending almost ten days without a shirt when filming on an airplane tarmac in England. We were covered in prostheses and blood, freezing, and beating each other. But Ranbir said, "It was a really memorable experience." Additionally, he emphasized the motorbike machine-gun scene and the interval axe fight, describing them as "what action films are truly made for." The film's global voyage continues to pick up steam as Animal prepares for its debut in Japan and Animal Park plans to further grow the series.

When filming the action scene for O'Romeo, Nana Patekar had a fever of 102 degrees



Mumbai: Nana Patekar, a seasoned actor, keeps his word. The actor, who is anticipating the release of his next movie, "O'Romeo," filmed a scene for the movie while suffering from a high temperature of 102 degrees. Vishal Bhardwaj is the film's director, and the scene in question is a fast-paced action sequence that was

filmed on a train set. "Suddenly, while we were shooting this action sequence in the train, I got to know that Nana Sir was unwell and had a 102-degree fever," the director recalled the incident. We called the doctor right away, and he indicated that while he would administer an injection, Nana Sir shouldn't shoot. "But Nana Sir, being

Nana Patekar, said, 'No, I am not going back,'" he went on. I'd like to shoot. I'd like to finish this sequence. He continued filming with us for the following four hours.

"I can't take this on my head ki mere wajah se shooting cancel hui, location cancel ho." "We could feel the heat from his body as we touched his forehead. It felt

like jaise bimaari thi hi nahi when he stood up to perform after lying down on the train set in between shoots. "A great artist is dedicated to this," he continued.

Inspired by real-life occurrences, "O'Romeo" promises a compelling cinematic experience that combines strong action, emotion, and captivating performances. The movie's song "Ishq Ka Fever" was already released. Superstar singer Arijit Singh has crooned the tune. Vishal Bhardwaj composed and Gulzar wrote the film's heartfelt romantic song. With a searing phrase from Farida Jalal at the beginning and a melody that is intimate, painful, and subtly addicting, the song, which stars Shahid Kapoor and Tripti Dimri, creates an impressive first impression. "O'Romeo," directed by Vishal Bhardwaj and produced by Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment, is presented by Sajid Nadiadwala. The movie is scheduled to open in theaters on February 13, 2026.

After 32 hours of mayhem, the Mumbai-Pune Expressway traffic gridlock is over

New Delhi, Feb 05: Nearly 32 hours after a tanker carrying highly flammable propylene gas overturned close to the Adoshi tunnel in the Khandala ghat section, causing a congestion that left thousands of commuters trapped for more than a day, traffic on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway resumed early on Thursday.

Before traffic resumed at roughly two in the morning, authorities finished transferring the gas and removing the overturned tanker. Due to a truck breakdown close to Malavli and traffic jams from large vehicles that were parked close to Kamsket, the traffic was initially slow. Hours later, with a strong police presence and aggressive management at critical choke points, the traffic stabilized. There were fewer cars than usual, according to officials, and many people decided to postpone or change their plans.

According to a highway police official, “traffic has returned to normal, but there are fewer vehicles than on a typical day as several people postponed their journeys.”The 94.5-kilometer Mumbai-Pune Expressway had one of the longest traffic jams in its history. On Wednesday, it continued into a second day, trapping commuters without access to food, drinking water, or restrooms. Around 5:15 p.m. on Tuesday, traffic started to build up when the tanker, traveling from Kochi, Kerala, to Surat, Gujarat, flipped and caused a significant gas leak. As a precaution, authorities closed the entire carriageway heading to Mumbai.

The tanker went downhill and lost control. Because of the nature of the gas, Highway Police Superintendent Tanaji Chikhale stated that the operation was quite delicate. “Our first priority



was public safety. Every action was done with the highest care and coordination, including stopping traffic, transferring gas, and removing tankers, he said. A number of bus services between Pune and Mumbai were canceled as a result of the protracted interruption, leaving passengers stranded at terminals and along the highway. Among those stranded was Nilay Oza, a native of Pune, who claimed that the confusion made matters worse.

When the road would reopen was unknown to us. Although it was exhausting, we were aware of the danger. Things could have turned out far worse. Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation was instructed by Chief Minister

Devendra Fadnavis to conduct an investigation and provide a report and suggestions for handling such crises. A specialized chemical response team from Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited and emergency response teams were dispatched to the scene.

The tanker’s high gas pressure and valve breakage caused a delay in containment. Between Mumbai and Pune, 100,000 cars use the expressway every day on average. The gridlock was 10 to 12 kilometers long and headed for Mumbai. A number of drivers reported rationing water, skipping meals, and spending hours in their cars. Older travelers complained of worry, physical aches, and dehydration.

Cristiano Ronaldo is scheduled to skip one more game



New Delhi: Due to his dissatisfaction with the Saudi Arabia Public Investment Fund (PIF) over the club’s management and investment, football legend Cristiano Ronaldo is scheduled to miss his second consecutive Saudi Pro League game, according to reports. In protest of PIF’s purported lack of investment in Al Nassr and to give their bitter rivals, Al Hilal, an advantage and more effort, the Al-Nassr star did not play in the team’s 1-0 victory over Al Riyadh on Monday. According to sources who spoke to ESPN, Ronaldo may be leaving the team as early as June of this year without finishing his new contract, which is valid until 2027, if nothing changes in the upcoming weeks. According to insiders, Ronaldo attempted to stop the transfer of French football legend Karim Ben-

zema from Al Ittihad to Al Hilal on Monday because he thought it was unjust and that PIF intended to help Al Hilal win the championship. This week, Ronaldo practiced with his team, and on Wednesday, he shared photos of himself sporting Al Nassr colors on social media. However, Cristiano was not featured on the club’s official X; instead, it featured images of coach Jorge Jesus and other teammates working out. The football veteran has stated unequivocally that his comeback is contingent upon the prompt reactivation of the team’s management authority and, of course, that the interference it experienced during the just closed transfer window does not recur in the middle of the season. Al Ittihad, the sixth-place team, will play Al Nassr on Friday. Al Nassr is now one point behind Al Hilal in

second place with 46 points. Jose Semedo, the CEO of Al Nassr, and Simao Coutinho, the sporting director, were both suspended from their positions in recent months. This action infuriated Cristiano, prevented the squad from acquiring elite players, and reduced the club’s spending. However, according to insiders, the Saudi prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Al Saud, a billionaire and one of the club’s main donors, gave them a large financial boost to strengthen their team. According to sources who spoke to ESPN, Waleed, who owns 25% of the club, paid for all of Al Hilal’s acquisitions during this window, including Benzema. Sources claim that Cristiano has yet to win a significant championship with the team and is dissatisfied with the circumstances in Saudi Arabia. He has received offers from clubs in the USA and Europe, but he does not wish to accept them in order to protect his FIFA World Cup preparation. According to insiders, Al Nassr and PIF have promised Cristiano significant investments in the summer, including Manchester United player and Portugal teammate Bruno Fernandes, since the Saudi Pro League is reluctant to lose one of its top names.

Manchester City defeats Newcastle United

New Delhi: Manchester City’s 3-1 victory over Newcastle on Wednesday ended their reign as holders, and they will now play Arsenal in the League Cup final. After winning the first leg of the semi-final on Tyneside in January, Pep Guardiola’s team was already in the lead, and they completed the task mercifully at the Etihad Stadium. Tijjani Reijnders sealed the victory after Omar Marmoush scored twice in the first half of the second leg. After the break, Anthony Elanga cut the deficit, but City’s 5-1 aggregate victory returned them to the League Cup final for the first time since 2021. After the Premier League leaders eliminated Chelsea on Tuesday, City’s final matchup with Arsenal is scheduled for March 22 at Wembley. After losing a two-goal lead in a 2-2 draw at Tottenham on Sunday, which dealt a serious blow to their title challenge, Guardiola was relieved to make it to the final. City is six points behind Arsenal in the Premier League title battle, and they will have to go to Liverpool this weekend. When City defeated Arsenal in the 2018 final, they won the League Cup, the first trophy of Guardiola’s reign. Mikel Arteta, the current manager of the Gunners, was the Spaniard’s assistant at the time. Although City won the League Cup for

the next three years, they haven’t done so since 2021. “They will be waiting for us when we return to London. They never come to the north for finals, but I’m glad to be back. “Having five (League Cup) finals in a decade is a significant accomplishment,” Guardiola remarked. It will be beneficial. This is an experience you must have. We won the League Cup as our first championship here. Winning something makes it easier to win more. Playing against Arsenal, the top team in Europe and possibly the world at the moment, is enjoyable. Eddie Howe, the manager of Newcastle, added: “The first half performance really irritated me. We take great satisfaction in being extremely well-organized, and strategically, we want to be prepared to deal with any issue the adversary presents. “That first half we weren’t good enough individually and our duels were off and it gave us huge problems.” This week, Guardiola defended City against accusations that the club’s success has been attributed to the financial might of its Abu Dhabi-based owners by using statistics and sarcasm. The City manager acknowledged that during the last five years, six English clubs have spent more than his team, but he is aware that he will never be able to appease his detractors.

‘Force Majeure’ Will Be Used by Pakistan in the T20 World Cup ‘Boycott’ Row

New Delhi : If Pakistan boycotts upcoming Twenty26 T20 World Cup match against India, they may try to invoke the ‘Force Majeure’ clause to escape harsh penalties from the International Cricket Council (ICC), according to a report. India would receive two points and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) may be subject to financial penalties if Pakistan decides to boycott the match on February 15. Nonetheless, “unforeseeable circumstances that can prevent a contract from being fulfilled” are included in the clause. According to the report, the PCB might try to defend its choice by pointing to the Pakistani government’s social media post about the “boycott” and claiming that they were given the order to make the choice.

According to sources, Pakistan will probably claim that this is a “extraordinary” circumstance. An official stated, “They have no other excuse for not playing India, so this is their last resort.” In the meantime, the PCB’s position is deemed weak by the BCCI. This wouldn’t cut ice when Pakistan had



no trouble playing India in the Under-19 World Cup on the same day that their leadership announced that they would boycott the T20 World Cup match. Furthermore, there aren’t many differences between the Pakistani government and the Pakistan Cricket Board. The head of the PCB is a minister, and the prime minister of Pakistan is the board’s patron, according to a BCCI source. “The boards in Bangladesh and Pakistan are combining cricket and politics.” In spite of the Indian government’s repeated assurances that their squad would be safe, the Bangladeshi team chose not to visit India. Pakistan is now acting ir-

rationally as well. In ICC events, it has been agreed that India and Pakistan will play at a neutral location. The official went on, “Boycotting the game is just mischief.” Shehbaz Sharif, the prime minister of Pakistan, earlier on Wednesday reaffirmed the nation’s intention to boycott its match against India in the T20 World Cup, stating that the nation has made a “clear stand” for the match in Sri Lanka on February 15.

The prime minister of Pakistan declared, “We have taken a clear stand regarding the T20 World Cup that we will not play the match against India,” in front of the federal cabinet in Islamabad.

Bangladesh draws attention to Pakistan’s boycott of India’s T20 World Cup match



New Delhi: Global cricket has reached a breaking point due to the controversy surrounding Pakistan’s boycott of their group-stage T20 World Cup match against India. Aside from politics, history, and longstanding enmity, India vs. Pakistan is the most lucrative cricket match. When broadcast rights, advertising premiums, sponsorship activations, ticketing, and downstream commercial activity like legal betting are combined, the estimated value of the India-Pakistan T20 match is USD 500 million (Rs 4,500 crore). Additionally, the game benefits more than only Pakistan and India. The world organization receives the majority of the money made because the two teams only face one another in ICC and continental competitions. The ICC then distributes its total earnings to its member associations. It’s interesting to note that Pakistan’s boycott of the India match has angered some members of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB). In response to Bangladesh’s elimination from the T20 World Cup, there was nearly overwhelming agreement that Pakistan should boycott the India match. The ICC rejected Bangladesh’s request

to shift its matches out of India and substituted Scotland. Speaking on condition of anonymity to prominent Bangladeshi newspaper Prothom Alo, a top BCB director stated: “The entire cricketing world will suffer financial losses if the India-Pakistan match does not take place.” Our dividend will also decline. Such losses were not what we wanted. Pakistan’s motivation for the action was clearly visible, the official continued. “Pakistan intended to make a big statement to cricket in India. They want to subvert India’s hegemony.

The choice might make sense from that angle. According to the same article, another person who was closely involved in the circumstances leading up to Bangladesh’s expulsion was worried about the ICC’s diminishing revenue as a result of the axing. “The core revenue pool of the ICC will be directly impacted by this. We are stakeholders in that fund, just like everyone else. Consider Uganda or Kenya. They would be content with between \$100,000 and \$200,000. However, how will we endure if ICC revenues fall given our infrastructure? The director of BCB stated.

Bengal’s consequences and Political Optics in Mamata Banerjee’s Supreme Court Case



New Delhi, Feb 05: Mamata Banerjee criticized the Election Commission, claiming it operates like a “WhatsApp commission,” during a Supreme Court appearance to contest the removal of 56 lakh voters from Bengal’s electoral rolls. She argued that the Commission is neglecting Bengal’s interests and focus-

ing on anti-incumbency issues ahead of the upcoming elections. Despite Banerjee’s strong stand, political analysts emphasize that challenges such as governance and women’s safety may hinder her efforts. Banerjee’s legal actions have attracted mixed reactions, with some viewing it as a distraction from her

party’s alleged corruption. As she stepped into the legal arena, she reminded the public of her past as a law practitioner, although her recent legal involvement has been stagnant since 2003-04.

Political dynamics in Bengal remain complex as the ruling Trinamool faces tough opposition from the BJP.

Eight More Cheetahs from Botswana Will Arrive in Madhya Pradesh February 28

New Delhi, Feb 05: With the arrival of eight cheetahs from Botswana on February 28, Madhya Pradesh is poised to make yet another significant contribution to global animal conservation, bolstering India’s ambitious cheetah reintroduction program. The Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change has promised complete logistical and procedural support for the action, which is being carried out in close collaboration between the state and the Center. At a high-level meeting between Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav and Union Minister for Environment, Forests, and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav, the cheetah transfer plan was finalized. Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav stated in a statement following the meeting that the talks included topics other than cheetahs, such as the state’s extensive reserve forest belt, which is vital to livelihoods, tourism, and biodiversity. “We talked about Madhya Pradesh’s extensive reserve forest belt, which is crucial to our travel and tourist sector. We also asked for help with procedural issues and talked about importing wild buffaloes from other states, especially Assam. Around February 28, cheetahs from Botswana will also arrive. “We are confident



that the Madhya Pradesh government will take all necessary actions to further improve our wildlife resources, working closely with the Government of India,” the Chief Minister stated.

According to forest officials, plans are already in place to guarantee the incoming cheetahs’ seamless monitoring, quarantine, and integration into India’s growing cheetah population. The arrival

from Botswana adds to the momentum of Project Cheetah, which has already elevated India to the forefront of international conservation discussions. In 2022–2023, 20 cheetahs from Namibia and South Africa were successfully transported to India, marking the first transcontinental transfer of a big carnivore in history. On September 17, 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally released the first eight cheetahs at Kuno National Park. There are 30 cheetahs in India: 12 adults, 9 subadults, and 9 cubs, 19 of which were born there.

In a significant milestone for the second generation, Mukhi, the first cheetah cub born in India, has given birth to five healthy cubs. Phase-wise expansion is the next step in what started out as a highly monitored conservation experiment. India is gradually increasing the genetic variety required to create a self-sustaining cheetah metapopulation, with Botswana joining Namibia and South Africa as supply nations. Madhya Pradesh is crucial to this objective, according to wildlife experts, with Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary scheduled for the next stage and Kuno National Park already sustaining an expanding cheetah population.

Hockey India unveils 24-member squad for FIH Men’s Pro League 2025-26 Rourkela leg

New Delhi: Hockey India on Saturday announced a 24-member Indian Men’s Hockey Team for the FIH Men’s Pro League 2025-26 for the Rourkela leg of the tournament, scheduled to take place from February 10-15, 2026, at the Birs Munda International Hockey Stadium in Rourkela, Odisha. The Rourkela leg will feature hosts India, alongside international heavyweights Argentina and Belgium, promising high-intensity encounters against some of the world’s top hockey nations, as per a press release from Hockey India.

The Indian squad features a strong blend of experienced players and young talent across all departments as the team looks to make a strong start to its Pro League campaign on home soil. The goalkeeping duties will be handled by Suraj Karkera and Pawan, while the defensive unit includes Amit Rohidas, Captain Harmanpreet Singh, Jarnanpreet Singh, Jugraj Singh, Sumit, Sanjay, and Nilam Sanjeev Xess, providing solidity and leadership at the back. Also, the defenders’ list includes Amandeep Lakra, comes into the squad on the back of an impressive outing in the recently concluded Men’s Hero Hockey India League 2025-26, where he was adjudged the Hero Player of the Tournament, underlining his growing influence at the senior level. The midfield will be anchored by Rajinder Singh, Manmeet Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Hardik Singh, Moirangthem Rabichandra Singh, Nilakanta Sharma, and Rosan Kujur, offering a blend of experience, control, and creativity.

Among the notable inclusions is 21-year-old Rosan Kujur from Odisha, who has earned his maiden call-up to



The senior national squad. Kujur was a member of the Indian Junior Team that secured the Bronze medal at the FIH Junior World Cup 2025 in Chennai. He also enjoyed a breakthrough domestic season, playing a key role for Vedanta Kalinga Lancers, who went on to lift the Hero Hockey India League 2025-26 title. Manmeet Singh of Punjab has also been added to the squad following a string of impressive performances. Manmeet, too, was part of the Indian Junior Team that claimed Bronze at the FIH Junior World Cup 2025 in Chennai, and further showcased his credentials while representing HIL GC during the Hero Hockey India League 2025-26. India’s forward line comprises Abhishek, Sukhjeet Singh, Shilan and Lakra, Selvam Karthi, Mandeep Singh, Arajeet Singh Hundal, and Aditya Arjun Lalage, who will be tasked

With leading the attacking charge and converting opportunities. Speaking on the squad, Indian Men’s Hockey Team Chief Coach Craig Fulton said, “It’s an exciting mix of youth and experience. We have young talents like Rosan, Manmeet and Amandeep coming through, while the presence of senior players, including those from the India A setup, adds valuable experience. That balance is important for us. Belgium and Argentina are quality sides, but we believe in our abilities and are focused on delivering our best performances.” With passionate home support expected at the Birs Munda Hockey Stadium, the Indian team will aim to deliver strong performances against Argentina and Belgium in what promises to be an exciting leg of the FIH Men’s Pro League 2025-26. Speaking on the squad, Indian Men’s Hockey.

Australia remain upbeat at T20 World Cup despite injury concerns threatening team performance

Starc retires, Cummins out injured for tournament

Colombo: Australia remain confident of a strong showing at the upcoming Twenty20 World Cup despite the absence of several frontline fast bowlers, captain Mitchell Marsh said on Thursday. Pace spearhead Mitchell Starc has retired from T20 internationals, while his new-ball partner Pat Cummins has been ruled out of the 20-nation tournament with a back injury. Josh Hazlewood is also doubtful for the first round after suffering a hamstring injury. We are well prepared for the World Cup and, yes, we will miss some of our key players, but we are confident that we have all bases covered,” Marsh told reporters at the captains’ briefing in Colombo. Australia arrived in Sri Lanka after a 3-0 series drubbing in Pakistan, but Marsh dismissed concerns over their form. We have a few guys available here who didn’t play in Pakistan and it’s all about adapting to conditions,” he said. We are confident that we will put up a good show in the World Cup.”

The former world champions boast an impressive record since the last World Cup in the Caribbean and United States in 2024, winning 17 of their 21 T20 internationals. The tournament,



Co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka, begins on Saturday. “We have taken a very clear stand on the T20 World Cup that we won’t play the match against India because there should be no politics on the sports field,” Sharif stated after a government meeting here. We have taken a very considered stance, and we should completely stand by Bangladesh, and I think this is a very appropriate decision. We are with Bangladesh,” he added. A livid ICC has warned the Pakistan Cricket Board of serious consequences if it fails to show up for the high-profile match, which is a money magnet at the big event for sponsors, broadcasters and advertisers. Australia skipper Mitchell Marsh fielded queries on Pakistan’s boycott of its T20 World

Cup match against India and Bangladesh’s removal from the tournament but refused to comment on both the controversies, insisting that his sole focus is on winning the showpiece.

Marsh was facing the Pakistani media after his team was handed a 0-3 T20 series whitewash by the home side here last night. Aside from trying to explain the performance, he was also asked about his views on the off-field drama that has overshadowed the build-up to the big event which will be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka starting February 7. I don’t have any comment on that at this point. We are going to the World Cup to just focus on what we are doing, we will let that stuff take care of itself,” he responded when

asked about his thoughts on Pakistan’s boycott of the India game on February 15 in Colombo.

The journalists then pressed him on Bangladesh being ousted from the event for refusing to travel to India on account of “security concerns.” He offered a dead bat to that query as well. The same goes for my previous answer. We are going to the World Cup to try and win it and we are solely focussed on that. As the Australian team, we trust the people there to keep us safe and that’s all I would say,” he said. Australia would be based in Sri Lanka during the preliminary stage and have games against the hosts, Ireland, Zimbabwe, and Oman beginning February 11. Marsh downplayed the setback against Pakistan and the apparent weak handling of spinners here. In their three losses, the visiting batters were bamboozled by the spin troika of Mohammad Nawaz, Shadab Khan and Abrar Ahmed, who combined to snare 17 wickets. In isolation, this series, we struggled,” Marsh admitted when asked about the performance that would cause concern given that the World Cup is also scheduled in spin-friendly venues.

Zagreb Open: Sujeet wins gold, Aman silver as India begin campaign successfully with three medals

Zagreb: Sujeet Kalkal started India’s campaign at the Zagreb Open 2026 with a gold medal in the 65 kg division, with the men’s freestyle wrestlers capturing three medals on the opening day on Wednesday. Paris 2024 Olympic bronze medalist Aman Sehrawat and Abhimanyu settled for silver (61 kg) and bronze (70 kg), respectively, according to Olympics.com. Sujeet is a world champion at the under-23 level and had an unforgettable run towards the title, without dropping a single point. The 23-year-old secured a 3-0 win over Iran’s Peyman Ali Nemat in the final.



He also outclassed Khamzat Arsamerzouev of France via technical superiority in the quarter-finals and in the semi-finals, eliminating two-time Pan American champion Joseph McKenna of the USA by 11-0. Aman’s silver was his third medal at Zagreb in his career. The youngest Indian Olympic medalist got victories over Reza Hossein Momenijoujadeh (12-2) and Georgia’s Giorgi Goniashvili (10-0) and had received a walkover from Palestine’s Ali Aburmaila. In the title clash against the USA’s Austin DeSanto, he lost 8-0 and had to settle for a silver. Coming to the 70kg competition, Abhimanyu started off with an incredible 10-pointer-to-none

win over USA’s Tyler Kasak in the quarter-finals but fell 10-0 in the semis to Iran’s Sina Khalili. But he came back to form just in time for the bronze medal clash, outclassing USA’s Ian Parker 6-3. Coming to the men’s 57 kg division, Ankush reached the bronze bout through repechage, but lost to Iran’s Milad Valizadeh by 10-0 and also Atish Todkar exited in the qualification round in the same weight category. In 86 kg, Mukul Dahiya lost to Iran’s Ali Savadkouhi 6-5 in the bronze medal playoff, denying India another prize. Sandeep Singh Mann (86kg), Deepak (74kg) and Chandermohan (74kg) failed to make a mark. Olympian and two-time World Championships bronze medalist Antim Panghal will be in action on Saturday. Making waves on the badminton court, Lakshay has secured a silver medal at the All-India Senior Ranking Tournament, a bronze at Cameroon International Challenge and another silver in the APACS International Badminton Series at Shymkent in Kazakhstan. Lakshay has represented India at several other international tournaments, including the Czech International Series and the Polish International Badminton Tournament. currently working towards his goal to win an Olympic medal for India.

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Harmeet Singh rejects team pedestal

Mumbai: His life has come a full circle having represented Mumbai in the Indian domestic circuit but USA all-rounder Harmeet Singh doesn’t want his side to put any team “on a pedestal”, urging them to showcase same brand of cricket that they displayed two years ago in the T20 World Cup. USA will take on T20 World Cup co-hosts India in their tournament-opener here on Saturday. The USA side had shocked former champions Pakistan and put up an impressive show against India while making it to Super Eight in the last edition and Harmeet said his team aims to carry on playing the same style of cricket. “They (India) are a formidable side. Last year (edition), the brand of cricket that we played, we plan to come out and showcase it again. We don’t want Netherlands apart from India.

BOXAM Elite 2026: Lovlina, Hitesh shine as Indian boxers impress on Day Two



Madrid: India continued its strong run at the BOXAM Elite International 2026 with another assured showing on Day 2 on Thursday, led by Olympic medallist Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) and World Boxing Cup Finals champion Hitesh Gulia (70kg), both registering emphatic victories as the Indian contingent stacked up wins across multiple weight divisions. Lovlina made a confident start to her campaign, producing a composed and commanding display to defeat Ukraine’s Olha Pylypchuk 5:0. The

Olympic bronze medallist controlled the bout throughout, combining sharp combinations with disciplined movement to ease into the next round. In the men’s draw, Hitesh continued his impressive form, shutting out Canada’s Vincent Santoriello with a dominant 5:0 verdict, once again underlining his authority and credentials in the 70kg division, as per a press release from the Boxing Federation of India (BFI). India’s women delivered a series of convincing performances earlier in

the day. Manju Rani (48kg) cruised past France’s Gloria d’Almeida 5:0, while Nitu (51kg) made quick work of Spain’s Laura Calderon, forcing an RSC in Round 1. Kusum (51kg) edged Spain’s Claudia Alcaniz 4:1, and Arundhati Choudhary (70kg) continued her fine run with a clean 5:0 win over Kazakhstan’s Aziza Issina. Sanamacha Chanu (75kg) added another victory with a controlled 4:1 decision against Canada’s Viktoria Penney.

In the men’s bouts, Pawan Bartwal (55kg) advanced after Thailand’s Thanarat Saengphet retired in Round 2, while Jadumani Singh (55kg) secured a solid 4:1 win over Ukraine’s Siiovush Mukhammediiev. Deepak (70kg) dominated Spain’s David Edenel Rosalen 5:0, and Ankush (80kg) edged past Kazakhstan’s Yerassyl Zhakpekov Bryan Colwell.

Hockey India announces 24-member squad for FIH Men’s Pro League, preparing for Rourkela leg

League runs February 10-15 at Rourkela stadium

New Delhi: Hockey India on Thursday announced a 24-member Indian men’s team for the opening leg of the FIH Pro League to be held from February 10 to 15 at the Birs Munda International Hockey Stadium in Rourkela, Odisha. Hockey India had announced a list of 33 probables last month for the coaching camp ahead of the season, which has now been pruned to a 24-member squad for the Rourkela leg of the event. The home leg will feature international heavyweights Argentina and Belgium, besides India.



For us. Belgium and Argentina are quality sides, but we believe in our abilities and are focused on delivering our best performances.” The Indian squad features a blend of experienced players and young talent across departments as the team looks to make a strong start to its Pro League campaign On home soil. Goalkeeping

Duties will be handled by Suraj Karkera and Pawan. The defensive unit includes captain Harmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Jarnanpreet Singh, Jugraj Singh, Sumit, Sanjay and Nilam Sanjeev Xess. Defender Amandeep Lakra also finds a place in the squad following an impressive outing in the recently concluded Hockey

India League, where he was adjudged the Player of the Tournament. The midfield will be anchored by Rajinder Singh, Manmeet Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Hardik Singh, Moirangthem Rabichandra Singh, Nilakanta Sharma and Rosan Kujur. Among the notable inclusions is 21-year-old Rosan Kujur from Odisha.

BATC: Defending champions India fall 2-3 to Thailand yet secure spot in quarterfinals

Qingdao: Young Tanvi Sharma produced a stunning win, but defending champions India suffered a narrow 2-3 loss to Thailand in their second Group Y match of the Badminton Asia Team Championships here on Thursday. However, despite the defeat, India qualified for the quarterfinals. India, who had beaten Myanmar 5-0 in their opening tie on Wednesday, finished second in Group Y behind Thailand after the five-match rubber. World No. 42 Tanvi, a member of India’s historic gold medal-winning team at the 2024 edition, stunned world No. 16 Busanan Ongbamrunphan 21-14, 17-21, 21-18 in a gripping contest lasting one hour and three minutes to give India a superb start. The doubles pair of Gayatri Gopichand and Treesa Jolly then battled past world No. 65 Tidapron Kleebyeessun and Nattamon Laisuan 21-14, 20-22, 21-11 to hand India a 2-0 lead at the Qingdao Conson Gymnasium.

However, Rakshitha Ramraj failed to get past 19-year-old Pitchamon Opatniputh -- the 2023 World Junior champion and 2026 Indonesia Masters runner-up -- going down 19-21, 17-21 as Thailand pulled one back to trail 1-2. In the second doubles, Tanisha Crasto and Shruti Mishra fought gallantly but went down 21-19, 14-21, 15-21 to Hathaithip Mijad and Napapakorn Tungkasatan, ranked 57th in the world, allowing Thailand to level the tie and force a deciding fifth match. Entrusted with the responsibility of taking India home, Malvika



game. In the second game, Tanvi led 5-2 and later 11-7, but Busanan mounted a strong comeback, edging ahead at 16-15 and reeling off four points from 17-17 to force a decider.

Regaining her bearings in the third game, Tanvi jumped to an 11-6 lead at the interval. Busanan continued to fight and narrowed the gap to 16-18, but the Indian showed composure to shut the door and seal the match without much ado. Currently ranked 63rd in the Badminton World Federation (BWF) standings and 57th on the World Tour, Devika is set to compete in the Azerbaijan International 2026 from February 3 to 8. She will face Czech Republic’s Tereza Švábíková in her opening match. The 30-year-old had also withdrawn from the 2025 Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championships after sustaining a hamstring injury during a training camp in Guwahati. Since her recent comeback, she reached the semifinals of the Malaysia Open, exited in the first round of the India Open and made the quarterfinals of the Indonesia Masters. clinched gold at the 2024 edition in Malaysia, the country’s first medal in the women’s team competition.