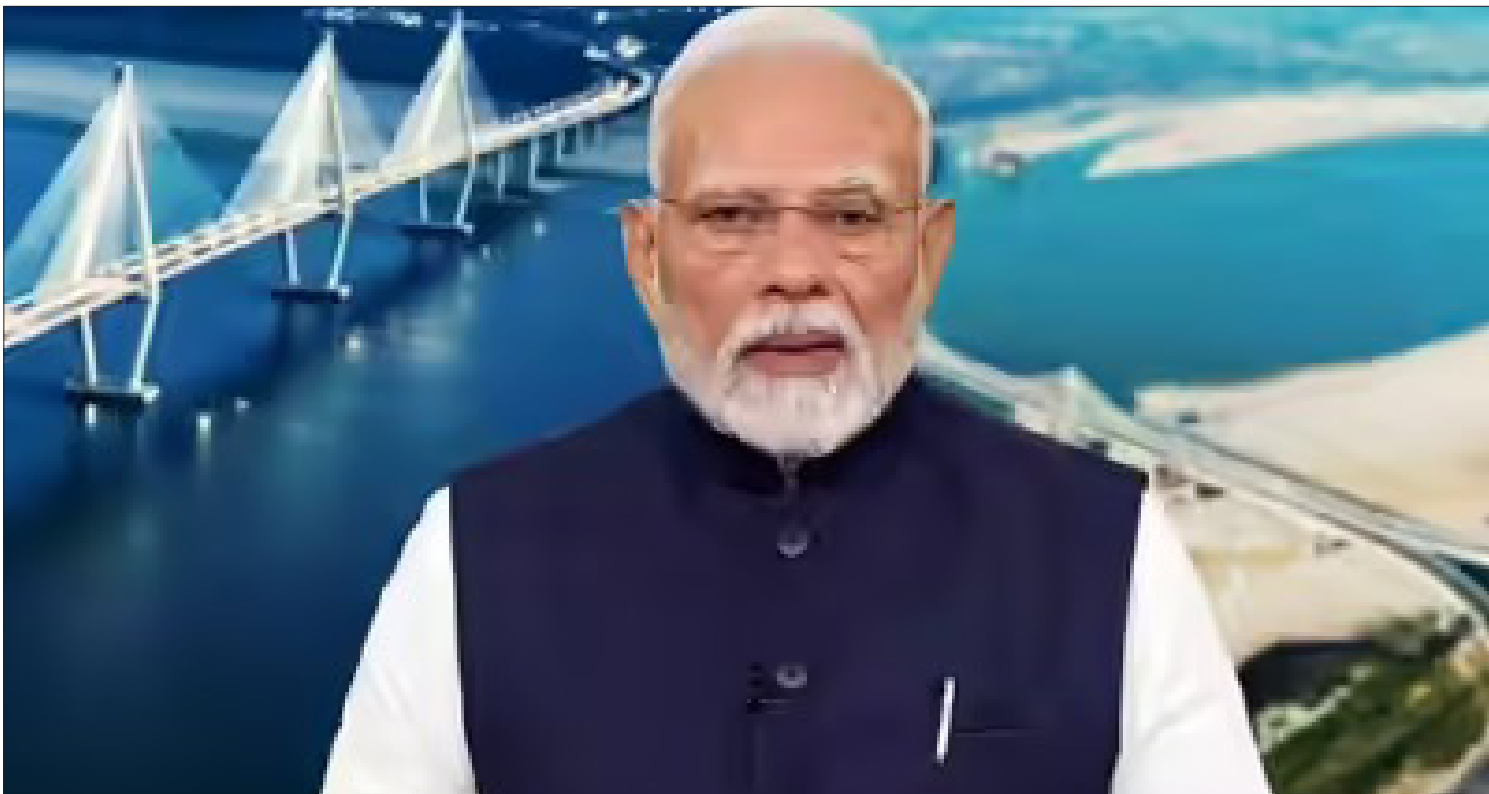


PM Modi opens the first extradosed bridge across the Brahmaputra in the Northeast, Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu

Guwahati, Feb 15: On February 14, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu, a significant six-lane extradosed bridge that connects Guwahati with North Guwahati, enhancing urban connectivity in Assam.

Constructed at an estimated cost of ₹3,030 crore, this bridge is notable for being the first extradosed bridge in Northeast India and aims to alleviate congestion while significantly reducing travel time across the Brahmaputra to approximately seven minutes. Considering the region's susceptibility to seismic activity, the bridge has been engineered with advanced base isolation technology, including friction pendulum bearings, to enhance its resilience against earthquakes.

Additionally, the use of high-performance stay cables ensures the bridge's long-term durability and structural integrity. To facilitate smart infrastructure management, the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu is outfitted with a Bridge Health Monitoring System (BHMS),



which allows for real-time assessments of the bridge's condition, early identification of structural

stress or damage, and overall improved operational safety throughout its lifespan. The inauguration

of this bridge is anticipated to boost economic growth, enhance regional connectivity, and fortify

Guwahati's position as a gateway city to the Northeast region of India.

Before the Assam Rifles, an NSCN-K (Khango) cadre surrenders



Kohima, Feb 15: On February 13, authorities said that a self-described lieutenant of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (Khango Konyak faction) had turned himself in to security personnel in the Tirap region of Arunachal Pradesh. The Khonsa Battalion of the Assam Rifles conducted a targeted operation earlier this week in response to specific intelligence inputs about the existence of a hard-core anti-national element in the Muktowa area.

The cadre was inspired to give up weapons and reintegrate into society after persistent pressure and concerted attempts. The surrendered individual, Wangkhu Lowang (32) from Muktowa village, surrendered at Battal-

ion Headquarters in Khonsa, depositing a 7.65 mm pistol and six rounds of ammunition. This reflects successful intelligence-based operations as security forces work to persuade insurgents to abandon violence. From February 1 to 7, Indian Army and Assam Rifles, in collaboration with Manipur Police, conducted operations in several districts of Manipur, resulting in the apprehension of seven insurgents and the recovery of 18 weapons and explosives.

Notable operations included the arrest of a cadre from Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup and the discovery of an insurgent hideout containing significant weaponry and explosives, all of which were safely destroyed.

Launching the Second Tawangchu Tides International Kayaking Championship in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh

Itanagar, Feb 15: On February 12, near the picturesque Tawangchu River, Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu officially opened the second Tawangchu Tides International Kayaking Championship. This high-altitude competition, which attracted over 100 competitors from India and elsewhere, demonstrated Arunachal Pradesh's expanding prominence in adventure sports.

In his address, Chief Minister Khandu expressed gratitude to the Arunachal Olympic Association, Arunachal Kayaking & Canoeing Association (AKCA), and the Indian Kayaking & Canoeing Association (IKCA) for organizing the kayaking event, highlighting the inspiring presence of Bilquis Mir, India's first female Olympic jury member in the sport. Khandu asserted that her journey serves as a motivation for young athletes, suggesting

that such events will cultivate future Olympians from the region. Khandu emphasized Arunachal Pradesh's favorable natural rivers for kayaking and canoeing, referencing AKCA's initiative to develop five river basins as training hubs, with a memorandum already submitted. He assured that the state government, in collaboration with technical experts and IKCA, would establish additional training facilities to further encourage the sport.

The Chief Minister noted the recent establishment of kayaking associations at both the state and Tawang district levels, acknowledging improvements in Arunachal Pradesh's sports performance over the last decade. Citing significant progress, Khandu mentioned that the state ranked second in the Northeast according to the 38th National Games rankings and expressed optimism for con-



tinued success in the upcoming 39th National Games. He attributed these advancements to effective national leadership and ongoing investments in youth development, sports policy, and infrastructure, which have resulted in over 1,000 medals won at national and international competitions over the last ten years. He pointed to progress in various sports disciplines, such as taekwondo, boxing, weightlifting, judo, and wushu, highlighting a top-ranked state athlete in wushu within Asia. Celebrating kay-

aking athlete Devi Dada's bronze medal achievement in the Kayak Cross event at the 38th National Games, Khandu reiterated the region's potential for adventure sports, referencing the successful Mechukha Adventure Festival, which attracts participants nationally and internationally. Additionally, Khandu announced government support for the Tawangchu Tides International Kayaking Championship, now officially an annual event sponsored by the Youth Affairs and Sports Department.

Himanta Biswa Sarma enables 31,952 women businesses in Majuli

Rs 2,218-crore development blitz

Guwahati, Feb 15: In a significant step forward for the river island district of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday laid the groundwork for projects totaling Rs 2,218 crore in Majuli and gave seed money checks to 31,952 female entrepreneurs. Speaking to the public, the chief minister claimed that Majuli had never seen such a large-scale development before and that the projects would change the administrative, educational, and cultural environment of the district. The academic building and ladies' dorm of Majuli Cultural University, which were built at a cost of Rs 51 crore, were among the major projects that were launched.

The Registrar's and Vice Chancellor's offices, staff rooms, and related facilities are all located within the three-story academic building, which has space for 1,880 students. There is enough for 178 students in the four-story hostel. The District Transport Officer's Office between Garmur and Kamalabari was finished at a cost of Rs 3.57 crore, while the Integrated District Com-



missioner's Office in Garamur was constructed for Rs 24.83 crore.

Established at a cost of Rs 33.17 crore, this government model degree college spans 30 bighas and consists of three academic blocks, a girls' hostel, faculty quarters, staff

housing for Grade III and IV, and official apartments for the principal and warden. The opening of the Rs 3.64 crore Dakshinpat Satra Museum, which has study areas, exhibition halls, audio-visual rooms, and a strong room, also improved cultur-

al infrastructure. The Jyoti Bishnu Cultural Complex auditorium and a three-story office for the Senior Superintendent of Police were built at Garamur for Rs 1.25 crore and Rs 4.20 crore, respectively. The state government built two bridges

In a major development push for Assam's river island district, Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for projects worth Rs 2,218 crore in Majuli, while also distributing seed capital cheques to 31,952 women entrepreneurs.

across the Lohit and Subansiri rivers and improved the road from Bali-chapori in Majuli to Bongaonmara in Lakhimpur to improve connectivity. On Thursday, the 702.30-meter bridge that spans the Lohit River near Selekghat was officially opened. Additionally, Sarma started the Majuli-Jorhat bridge project's renovation, which had been put on hold since September 2024. In a significant outreach to grassroots entrepreneurs, the Chief Minister distributed Rs 10,000 each as seed capital to 31,952 women beneficiaries. He said the assistance marked only the beginning of a larger initiative aimed at supporting women until they achieve "Lakhpati" status, underscoring the government's focus on women-led economic empowerment.

In Brief

Boosting tea sector productivity

Guwahati: Experts emphasize the necessity of capacity building for small tea growers and Bought Leaf Factories (BLFs) to enhance productivity, quality, and sustainability within the tea sector. At a Guwahati event, industry leaders discussed the significance of improving green leaf quality, overcoming maximum residue limits (MRL) issues, and adopting regenerative agricultural practices for enhanced resilience. Approximately 256 small growers and BLF management representatives attended the second edition of The Tea Next initiative by Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) in Assam's Golaghat district, which aims to bolster sustainability and compliance in a stringent global trade context.

Meghalaya invites STEM proposals

Shillong: The State Council of Science, Technology and Environment (SCSTE), Meghalaya, has opened applications for short-term projects aimed at providing socio-economic benefits in the state. Proposals are invited under the theme "Science and Technology for Socio-Economic Benefit in Meghalaya," focusing on practical solutions to local challenges through STEM applications. Funding varies by category, with school students eligible for up to Rs 20,000, college students up to Rs 1.5 lakh, research scholars up to Rs 2 lakh, and others up to Rs 1 lakh. Eligible participants include students, researchers, and individual citizens proposing viable projects.

Mizoram to shift CMO, build new auditorium

Aizawl: The Mizoram government has approved several urban redevelopment projects on land vacated by the Assam Rifles, including plans to construct a new Vanapa Hall near the Assam Rifles Ground and relocate the Chief Minister's Office closer to the state secretariat. This decision, made during a meeting on February 11, aims to enhance administrative efficiency and reduce travel time. The redevelopment also includes restoring the historic Loch House and relocating the Hari Mandir and two war memorials at the request of the Assam Rifles. Officials said more than 52 per cent of the vacated land will be retained as green cover. Road widening and improvement works within the redeveloped sectors are expected to begin soon, with funds already sanctioned. The Public Works Department will implement the infrastructure projects.

TRLM indicators Memorandum of Understanding with IIM Kolkata to support female entrepreneurs



Agartala, Feb 15: The Tripura Rural Livelihood Mission (TRLM) has made history by launching a large initiative worth Rs 10.60 crore with the goal of turning female entrepreneurs become "Millionaire Didis" and "Crorepati Didis" over the course of three years. TRLM will work with IIM Kolkata Innovation Park to carry out the ambitious project. In the presence of Abhishek Singh, IAS, Secretary, Rural Development, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed today in Agartala.

Tarit Kanti Chakma, CEO of TRLM, IAS, and Dr. Vivek Kumar Rai, CEO of IIM Kolkata Innovation Park, formally signed the Memorandum of Understanding. Under the project, both individual and group enterprises will be identified and selected for intensive support. TRLM, with technical and strategic guidance from IIM Kolkata Innovation Park, will assist these enterprises in scaling up their businesses, enhancing profitability, and building sustainable models aimed at creating high-income women entrepreneurs across the state. Officials described the initiative as a historic step toward women's economic empowerment in Tripura, strengthening livelihoods and fostering entrepreneurship at the grassroots level.

NE/EAST

New suit alleging Assam CM inciting enmity is expected to be heard by the Supreme Court



Guwahati, Feb 15: On February 11, the Supreme Court announced that it would take into consideration filing a new case to take action against Himanta Biswa Sarma, the chief minister of Assam, for allegedly making hateful remarks against Muslims in the state. It was suggested that a bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant link the fresh plea to a different case that had previously been approved to be heard. Annie Raja was among the leaders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India who submitted the

previous petition. Action against the chief minister is sought in that petition due to a widely shared video that reportedly shows him aiming and shooting a gun while making comments regarding Muslims. Senior attorneys representing the new petitioners asked that the two cases be considered concurrently on Wednesday. The Chief Justice replied, “We shall see.” distinguished journalist Paresh Chandra Malakar, former Assam Director General of Police Harekrishna Deka, former professor Hiren Gohain, and distinguished barrister Santanu

Borthakur have all filed the most recent petition. It claims that the chief minister has made statements encouraging violence, social and economic boycotts, and discrimination against Muslims of Bengali descent in Assam on several occasions. The plea claims that during public speeches and media engagements, the words fostered animosity based on religion, language, place of birth, and residence. The petition also refers to the alleged use of terms such as “Miya” and “Bangladeshi” in reference to Bengali-origin Muslims in the state.

Manipur’s chief minister meets with leaders of Kuki-Zo

Imphal, Feb 15: On February 11, Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand visited Jiribam as part of a peace-building initiative, making him the first Chief Minister to visit since the ethnic clashes erupted in the state. His visit was aimed at restoring peace and normalcy, which he emphasized as the government’s top priority. During his time in Jiribam, Khemchand engaged with leaders and residents from both the Kuki-Zo and Hmar communities, stressing the importance of reconciliation. He urged the public to embrace a mindset of “forgive and forget,” highlighting their shared identity as Indians. Khemchand’s itinerary included a visit to Kalinagar, where he met with internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the Kuki-Zo and Hmar groups, and also interacted with Meitei IDPs at Jiribam Higher Secondary School. Additionally, he visited Jairalpokpi, a village affected by significant violence and arson during the 2023 unrest, reinforcing the government’s commitment to fostering dialogue and rebuilding trust among the communities impacted by the unrest. This outreach is seen as a crucial step in the broader efforts to promote peace and coexistence in the region.



Ex-CM of Manipur Biren Singh calls on Rajnath Singh to stop the “destruction” of the Koirengei airstrip

Imphal, Feb 15: Former Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh has urged Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to intervene and protect the Koirengei airfield, a significant World War II heritage site, amidst ongoing alterations that have caused public discomfort. Singh articulated that during his tenure from 2017 to 2025, he made repeated appeals to various Defence Ministers for the preservation of the airfield, which served as a crucial Allied base during the war. He underscored that despite multiple discussions



between Defence Ministry officials and the Manipur government, destructive developments continue at the site. Singh expressed his distress over the ongoing changes and highlighted that over 300 acres have been allocated to the Assam Rifles and 100

acres to the Border Security Force near the airfield. He emphasized that the airfield is a part of the nation’s shared heritage and called on the Defence Minister to take action to protect it for the greater good of Manipur and India as a whole.

Meghalaya CM Conrad K. Sangma inaugurates Tura’s Nokrek Skate Park

Shillong, Feb 15: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma inaugurated the Nokrek Skate Park at Tura Government College, part of the state’s Sports Infrastructure Development initiative aimed at enhancing the sports ecosystem. Developed by Decathlon as a CSR initiative and implemented by OneStage



for youth infrastructure, noting its use by students as a positive outcome.

with Global Himalayan Expedition, the skate park aims to foster alternative sports culture in West Garo Hills. Sangma expressed satisfaction with the project’s completion and emphasized the importance of tangible development

FNTA accord is linked to a larger Naga political issue by the NNPGs’ WC



Kohima, Feb 15: While applauding the February 5 tripartite agreement that opens the door for the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA) for eastern Nagaland, the Working Committee of the Naga National Political Groups (WC-NNPG) has emphasized that the agreement must be seen in the larger context of the unresolved Indo-Naga political issue. The agreement between the Government of India, the Eastern Nagaland Peoples’ Organization (ENPO), and the Government of Nagaland has “rekindled hope” in eastern Nagaland and represents a “timely correction of the historical injustice” that the people of

the region have endured, according to a press statement released by the WC-NNPG on February 10. “A powerful reminder that the will of the people is supreme” was how it characterized the development. The new system must “realign and calibrate” long-neglected administrative and economic inadequacies in eastern Nagaland, according to the Working Committee. It also emphasized that eastern Nagas must develop a “genious, independent, and transparent mechanism” to guarantee that promises made in writing result in real advancements on the ground. The entire Naga ancestral region is still at the center of a big-

ger and unresolved Indo-Naga political dispute, the WC-NNPG warned while acknowledging the FNTA announcement. It stated that “clear negotiated charters” are presently in front of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, recalling that talks had “officially concluded” on October 31, 2019.

The statement noted that the “Status Paper” emerging from the talks is inclusive of Nagas in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and maintained that “New Delhi and Kohima are on the same page.” However, it added that if the Nagaland state government seeks to pursue a separate agenda with the Centre or appoint a new interlocutor, “that is a different matter.” Reiterating its position as a negotiating entity, the WC-NNPG declared that the Indo-Naga talks have concluded and that all core political matters have been thoroughly deliberated. It described any attempt to downgrade the “Agreed Position” as “inconceivable.” The Working Committee maintained that the Naga people have moved beyond the interlocutory phase and that the “only rational and practical path” forward is the announcement and signing of a final political agreement in line with the negotiated terms, which it said is essential for enduring and peaceful coexistence.

VB-G RAM G will improve rural lifestyles by providing 125 days of guaranteed work

Tripura CM



Agartala, Feb 15: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha stated on February 11 that the VB-G RAM G program is a major step in bolstering rural India and that village development is essential to the state’s and the country’s overall success. The Chief Minister outlined the salient elements of the new legislation while speaking at the Representative Conference at Swami Vivekananda Maidan in Agartala, which was attended by Union Minister for Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and Rural Development Shivraj Singh Chouhan. Saha stated that the law guarantees 125 days of employment, with work schedules to be determined through Gram Sabha meetings based on

local needs. He also underscored provisions such as regular wage payments and several structural improvements, asserting that the legislation is more effective and comprehensive than previous rural employment frameworks. The Chief Minister said the initiative reflects the government’s firm commitment to empowering rural communities, generating sustainable livelihoods and ensuring inclusive development across the state. Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who was present at the event, also interacted with representatives and discussed various aspects of rural development and employment generation under the new framework.

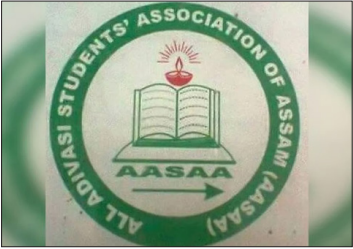
AASAA steps up its protests against the federal and state administrations

Dhekiajuli, Feb 15: The All Adivasi Students’ Association of Assam (AASAA) escalated its protests with a demonstration in Dhekiajuli, where activists burned effigies of the Prime Minister and the Assam Chief Minister while voicing opposition to the ruling BJP government. This protest, organized by local AASAA committees, took place on National Highway 15, spotlighting

several unresolved demands related to tea tribe and Adivasi communities.

Key demands include the grant of Scheduled Tribe status, an increase in the daily wage for tea garden workers to Rs 551, and land patta for eligible families. AASAA leaders, including District President Amarjit Kerketta and Working President Narayan Singh Gourh,

criticized the government for failing to deliver on previous assurances and labeled the government’s approach as ‘scheme-centric politics.’ They stressed the necessity for permanent solutions addressing identity, land, and livelihood issues. Furthermore, in a political warning to the BJP ahead of the 2026 Assam Assembly elections, the organization threatened to impede BJP cam-



paign efforts in tea garden regions if their demands remain unmet.

When a mine explosion in Meghalaya kills nine citizens, the Nepali embassy releases an advisory

Shillong, Feb 15: Days after nine Nepali nationals were murdered in a coal mine explosion in Meghalaya, the Nepali Embassy in New Delhi on Friday advised its countrymen to use caution before accepting jobs abroad. The explosion at an allegedly illegal rat-hole coal mine in the Thangskai neighborhood of the East Jaintia Hills district on February 5 claimed 31 lives. Nine people from Nepal were among the migrant workers that perished. A nearby hospital is treating seven additional Nepali nationals who were hurt. Expressing its “deepest condolences to the bereaved families”, the embassy said it prayed for the eternal peace of the departed souls and wished the injured a speedy recovery. “The embassy is continuously in touch and coordinating with the Ministry of External Affairs of India, the local administration and the police on issues including treatment of the injured, other necessary services and compensation to the families of the deceased and injured,” the statement said. Families seeking information or assistance have been asked to contact the mission through a

Nine Nepalese nationals died in a coal mine blast in Meghalaya, prompting the Nepal embassy to issue a safety advisory. Authorities are investigating and providing support to the victims’ families

dedicated helpline. Flagging concerns over the status of the mine, the embassy noted that it was allegedly being operated illegally, making it difficult to secure rescue services, compensation and other facilities in the event of accidents at unauthorised workplaces. “Therefore, before engaging in any employment, the embassy sincerely requests all concerned to take up jobs only after obtaining sufficient information about the employing company, the salary and other services and facilities, and completing the necessary formal procedures,” it said. The advisory also urged citizens not to fall prey to strangers or intermediaries offering work without proper documentation. The incident has once again drawn attention to safety standards and regulatory oversight in Meghalaya’s coal mining sec-



tor, particularly the persistence of banned rat-hole mining practices in remote areas.

1,600 kg of rubbish were removed during the Koloriang cleanliness campaign

Itanagar, Feb 15: On February 11, a voluntary social service cleanliness drive was organized in Koloriang town, Kurung Kumey district, Arunachal Pradesh, spearheaded by District Tourism Promotion Chairman and journalist Nangram Kayang. The initiative saw participation from around 10 youths who collectively cleared over 1,600 kilograms of waste from various locations within the district headquarters, thereby enhancing the sanitation and overall aesthetic of the town. During the event, Kayang highlighted the significance of communi-



ty involvement in promoting cleanliness and environmental sustainability. He stressed that such initiatives play a crucial role in raising awareness and fostering a sense of civic responsibility among residents. Furthermore, he an-

nounced the establishment of a recurring self-social service cleanliness drive, which will take place on every second Saturday, aimed at the ongoing transformation of Koloriang into a cleaner and greener municipality.

Upper Subansiri Buddhist monastery inaugurated by Arunachal CM

Itanagar, Feb 15: On February 10, Chief Minister Pema Khandu of Arunachal Pradesh inaugurated a new Buddhist monastery in Taksing, Upper Subansiri district, emphasizing the area’s rich spiritual and cultural legacy.

The ceremony coincided with the enthronement of Aka Tulku Tsering Chaijee Rinpoche as the abbot of the newly opened Tsari Taksing Gajang Shedup Dargeyling Gonpa. Khandu characterized Taksing as a site of “profound spiritual heritage,” expressing the expectation that the gonpa would become a beacon of faith and values for future generations. In a social media post on X, he shared that

he performed rituals including offering a Mandala and ceremonial khadas to a sacred portrait of the Dalai Lama, praying for compassion, wisdom, and universal brotherhood to guide humanity. He expressed hope that the monastery would “illuminate lives with faith and values” and took part in the solemn enthronement ceremony, requesting blessings for “peace, harmony, and the well-being of all beings.”

Khandu also extended his best wishes to the newly enthroned abbot, wishing him long life, good health, and the wisdom to guide devotees toward compassion and enlightenment.

A BJP MP proposes to remove Rahul Gandhi from the Lok Sabha and permanently prevent him from voting

Nishikant Dubey thunders: ‘I have mentioned how he allegedly engages with the Soros Foundation, Ford Foundation, USAID and travels to places like Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and the US, and how he is linked with anti-India forces’

New Delhi, Feb 15: On Thursday, BJP MP Nishikant Dubey submitted a substantive motion calling for Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, to have his membership revoked and to be permanently disqualified from running for office. Union minister Kiren Rijiju had earlier on Wednesday stated that the government would file a privilege motion against Rahul for remarks he made during the Union budget discussion in which the Congress leader criticized the trade agreement between the United States and India and claimed that Washington had a “chokehold” on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. “There isn’t a privilege motion,” Jharkhand MP Dubey of Godda told PTI Videos. “I have filed a substantive motion in which I have alleged that he travels to Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and the United States, interacts with the Ford Foundation, US-AID, and the Soros Foundation, and is as-



sociated with anti-Indian forces.” I have insisted that his membership be revoked and that he be permanently prohibited from running for office. The Lok Sabha website defines a substantive motion as an independent, self-contained proposal that is submitted to the House for approval and is written in a way that allows it to communicate a House judgment. The House will discuss whether the motion is admissible. In this instance, Dubey will need to provide evidence to support the

accusations and charges made against Rahul.The Speaker may present the motion to the House for a vote in accordance with Rule 342. A formal notice against another member for omitting facts, giving false information, or disrespecting the House’s dignity is known as a privilege motion. With the approval of the Rajya Sabha chairman or the speaker of the Lok Sabha, a member may introduce a privilege motion. The motion is sent to the committee of privileges for review

after being approved by the speaker or chairman. A member if found guilty of breaching privilege can be reprimanded, admonished and in rare cases, sentenced to imprisonment. On his X (formerly Twitter) handle, Rijiju on Friday shared a video claiming a group of Congress MPs had entered the chamber of Speaker Om Birla and abused him and PM Modi. “Our party believes in debate and discussion and never encourage MPs to threaten physically,” Rijiju wrote.

Ad hoc teachers in Nagaland’s 2015 class go on an indefinite hunger strike

Kohima, Feb 15: On February 11, a portion of Nagaland’s 2015 adhoc school teachers went on an indefinite hunger strike, claiming the state government was taking too long to regularize their employment. The demonstration is a component of the All Nagaland Adhoc Teachers Group (ANATG)-2015 agitation, which is now on its seventh day. Before intensifying the action, the teachers had been staging quiet, everyday protests in Naga Solidarity Park since February 4. The group wants 1,166 ad hoc instructors who were hired by the School Education Department between the late 1990s and 2012 to be regularized. A suitability test was carried out in May 2017 in accordance with the 2008 and 2016 Personnel and Administrative Reforms Office Memorandums, according to an official statement. According to the memorandums, regularization would follow three years of continuous service, provided the exam was passed and the cabinet gave its assent. On October 26, 2017, a cabinet memorandum was submitted, recommending regularization for all 1,166 instructors who passed the test. However, in July 2017 and August 2018, the Kohima Bench of the Gauhati High Court issued decisions prohibiting the government from regularizing contract and ad hoc work-



ers, which caused the process to stall. The state cabinet authorized tripling the teachers’ fixed pay in August 2018, but postponed the action until the court case was resolved. In 2022, a High-Powered Committee was established to investigate the matter, and the following year, the committee turned in its report. The Assembly passed a resolution in February 2024 after the cabinet approved a policy for regularizing contract and ad hoc workers. On March 16, 2024, a Screening Committee was established and a one-time regularization policy was announced, which would apply to workers hired for sanctioned positions before June 6, 2016. The School Education Department has forwarded details of 2,487 contract and adhoc employees to the Screening Committee, with verification and scrutiny of documents currently underway, the statement said.

Jairam Ramesh’s appeal about retroactive green clearances is dismissed by the Supreme Court



New Delhi, Feb 15:The Supreme Court has declined to entertain a writ petition brought by Congress Rajya Sabha MP Jairam Ramesh, which questioned the practice of granting retrospective environmental clearances to construction projects. During the proceedings, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant remarked

that Ramesh’s actions seemed aimed at garnering media attention rather than legal merit. Ramesh initially filed his petition in January, arguing that allowing clearances post-construction was illegal and posed risks to public health and governance. However, the Chief Justice’s bench, which included Justice Joy-

malya Bagchi, challenged Ramesh’s choice of a writ petition over a review petition, emphasizing that the writ did not provide the basis to contest past judgments effectively. Ramesh’s legal team ultimately sought to withdraw the petition, which the Court permitted.The petition contested a previous Supreme

Court ruling from November regarding the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) rules established in 2006, which mandate acquiring environmental clearances prior to commencing any ground-work. Notably, the government had previously allowed some projects to seek these clearances retroactively, specifically in 2017 and 2021. In a landmark decision in May 2025, the Supreme Court concluded that such retrospective clearances breached environmental and constitutional regulations, rendering any construction without prior clearances illegal. Furthermore, during a subsequent review petition led by the Confederation of Real Estate Developers of India (Credai), the Court maintained that demolitions resulting from these rulings would exacerbate pollution issues.

Supreme Court gives the Center three weeks to submit a report on the Air India tragedy investigation

New Delhi, Feb 15: On Wednesday, the Supreme Court gave the Center three weeks to present the fact-finding report on the June 12 disaster of Air India’s Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner in Ahmedabad, which claimed 260 lives, along with the “procedural protocol” that has been followed thus far. Solicitor-general Tushar Mehta, speaking on behalf of the Center and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, assured a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi that the Aircraft Accident Investigation Board’s investigation into the crash was nearing its “fag end” and would likely be finished in three weeks. Mehta said that the deceased pilots were being blamed, thus he asked for the PIL filed by the NGO Safety Matters Foundation to be adjourned in order to allow for an independent investigation into the disaster. “The probe is at its fag end. For testing, some aircraft components must be



transported to other nations. We must research the practices used in other nations,” Mehta informed the court. The NGO’s advocate, Prashant Bhushan, emphasized worries about the general safety of Boeing 787s. He claimed that the Center had not responded to the petitions and that three other Boeing 787s had experienced same situations. It was reported last week that there was an issue with the fuel switch on the Dreamliner traveling from London to Delhi. Later, the airline’s official account said that everything was alright,” the CJI

stated. “Let’s use extreme caution and refrain from discussing any specific aircraft. He noted that the Dreamliners were formerly regarded as among of the greatest airplanes. The bench expressed sympathy for the families of the pilots who perished in the Ahmedabad disaster, among other casualties. The bench said, “It is not a small tragedy for any nation,” and adjourned the hearing for three weeks. On January 28, the top court agreed to hear the pleas that alleged that the official probe into the crash had violated the citizens’ fundamental rights to life, equality and access to truthful information. On November 7 last year, the bench told 91-year-old Pushkar Raj Sabharwal, father of deceased pilot Sumeet Sabharwal, not to carry the burden or blame for the crash and issued notices to the Centre and the DGCA on his separate petition for an independent court-monitored probe.

A court summons Jitendra Singh, Bhupesh Baghel, and Gaurav Gogoi about the Assam chief minister’s property claims

Guwahati, Feb 15: Congress leaders Jitendra Singh, Bhupesh Baghel, and Gaurav Gogoi have been ordered to appear in court on March 9 in relation to claims that Himanta Biswa Sarma, the chief minister of Assam, unlawfully holds 12,000 bighas of land. Assam Advocate General Devajit Lon Saikia reported the development, saying that the Chief Minister had asked the three leaders to prove their claims and demanded Rs 500 crore in damages if they did not.

The Chief Minister was accused of illegally owning land property, according to a news article published on February 5. Sarma responded by going to court and calling the allegations unfounded and defamatory. Hon. Justice Nayan Jyoti Sarma



issued an ad interim stay order in favor of the Chief Minister after examining and confirming the records that were filed. Until additional orders are issued, the court has barred the three leaders from making any more claims or statements about

Sarma and his property.The owner of the newspaper that published the report, Jayanta Barua, the publisher, and the staff reporter in question have also received notices. They have also been ordered to show up in court on March 9 and provide proof

of the charges that have been made public. Until the case is decided, the court has also prohibited the publication of any more stories that claim the Chief Minister owns land illegally. The case will be taken up for further hearing on March 9.

Rs 100 cr is set aside for Ayodhya in the UP budget for 2026

Lucknow , Feb 15: In its final complete budget before next year’s Assembly elections, the Uttar Pradesh government on Wednesday allocated ₹100 crore for the construction of infrastructure in Ayodhya in addition to providing a range of social benefits to women students and brides. Road enlargement, drinking water provision, and temple renovations are among the initiatives for Ayodhya.

Locals claim that little tangible was done despite the Yogi Adityanath administration allocating ₹400 crore in last year’s budget to enhance the holy sites of Ayodhya, Chitrakoot, Mathura, and Naimisharanya (Sitapur).Sumit Shukla, a merchant in Ayodhya who sells beads and other puja accessories, stated that “nothing was done in 2025-26, but a few roads were built between the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the town’s airport and railway station in 2024-25.”

The recent budget presentation highlighted continued neglect of infrastructure around a temple, with no government plans for repairs. Financial provisions include a scooter scheme for meritorious girl students, a marriage allowance increase for poor women, and commitments for hostels for working women and sports universities.

Horror hit-and-run on NH-127B

Guwahati, Feb 15: A pall of grief has fallen over Moterjhar in Dhubri district following a tragic hit-and-run accident on National Highway 127B that occurred in the early hours of February 12. A speeding dumper truck, loaded with stones, collided forcefully with an e-rickshaw, resulting in one fatality and leaving another man critically injured. Eyewitness accounts describe the dumper traveling at an alarming speed before the collision, which caused catastrophic damage to the smaller vehicle and left the occupants severely injured.The deceased, Anil Malakar of Amtola, succumbed to his injuries shortly after the crash, sparking mourning among residents who viewed him as a humble and hard-working individual. The second victim, Khaybar Ali, known as “Bheku,” sustained serious injuries and remains in critical condition, undergoing emergency medical treatment that has raised concerns among his family and community.In a distressing development, the dumper driver fled the scene immediately after the accident, igniting widespread anger among local residents who have expressed longstanding worries about reckless driving and the



rising incidence of accidents on the highway. This anger culminated in a protest where hundreds of locals blocked NH-127B, demanding the immediate arrest of the driver and stricter enforcement of traffic regulations concerning overloaded and speeding vehicles. Golokganj Police responded promptly to the protests, dispersing the crowd and restoring traffic flow while assuring the demonstrators that a thorough investigation into the incident was underway. Authorities are actively working to trace the dumper’s route using available leads, expressing confidence that the driver will soon be apprehended.The body of Anil Malakar has been sent for a post-mortem examination, adhering to legal procedures as the investigation progresses.

Massive damage from fire Arunachal Walong: Minister Issues Warning

Itanagar, Feb 15: On the night of February 13, a massive fire engulfed Walong town in Anjaw district, Arunachal Pradesh, causing panic among residents and prompting immediate safety measures. Local MLA and Minister Dasanglu Pul expressed deep concern regarding the scale of the blaze and urged residents and travelers to adhere strictly to safety advisories put forth by authorities. Emphasizing the importance of community safety, Pul highlighted the need for responsible behavior to prevent any risks to lives, properties, and the environment. She described Walong as a shared natural asset and appealed to the community to support efforts to mitigate the damage. Furthermore, she warned that anyone who deliberately causes harm or disturbs the peace would face strict legal consequences. Pul called for unity among citizens, encouraging cooperation with frontline responders to ensure the safety and well-being of Anjaw district and the state as a whole. Meanwhile, authorities are currently assessing the



damage, and emergency teams are actively engaged in operations in the impacted areas.

The head of Meghalaya’s North Garo Hills requests an investigation into 400 “outside” workers at Mendipathar Rail Yard

Shillong, Feb 15: A public figure from the North Garo Hills District of Meghalaya, Timjim Momin, has formally sought the Deputy Commissioner to request an investigation regarding the hiring of over 400 non-State workers for rake loading duties at the Mendipathar railway station on December 28, 2025. The matter has been brought to the attention of state lawmakers and local authorities by the leader, who has emphasized the consequences for local jobs and wider societal concerns.

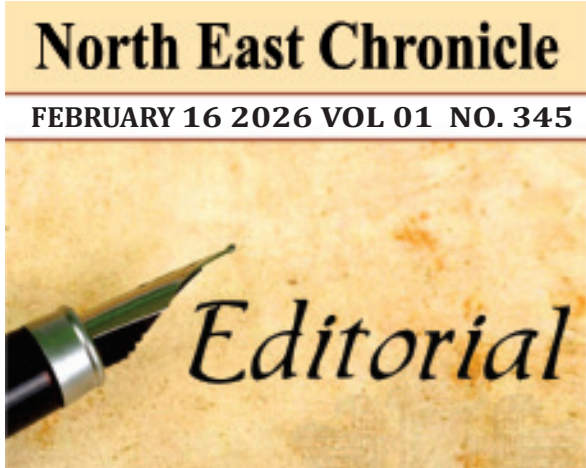
According to Momin, workers from outside Meghalaya were allegedly brought in for

the work despite the availability of indigenous tribal laborers, hence depriving local youth and daily wage earners of employment possibilities. The issue was identified as an urgent danger to local communities’ means of subsistence. He underlined that such actions could make the indigenous population feel alienated and lower the morale of the local workforce. He called on the district government to find the contractors or agencies in question and take legal action. This request emphasizes the need for responsibility and conformity to regional employment standards. Momin



also emphasized the importance of openness in the employment process, proposing that all organizations that hire workers be required to reveal their hiring procedures and guarantee adherence to local regulations. Momin also insisted that rake loading operations

at the railway station guarantee the complete participation of qualified local tribe laborers, citing the constitutional protections found in the Sixth Schedule. Reaffirming indigenous groups’ rights in employment matters is the goal of using constitutional protections.



India Mauritius Talks

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a telephonic conversation with his Mauritian counterpart, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, reaffirming the depth and vitality of the special, historic and people-centric ties between India and Mauritius, with both leaders underscoring their shared commitment to further strengthening bilateral cooperation across a wide spectrum of areas while working together to promote peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean Region, a priority of growing strategic significance amid evolving regional and global dynamics, as Mr Modi noted in a social media post that the discussion, held, provided an opportunity to review progress in ongoing collaborations and to chart the way forward for achieving common objectives rooted in mutual trust, shared democratic values and longstanding cultural linkages that have bound the two nations for centuries, with India and Mauritius enjoying a uniquely close relationship shaped by history, diaspora connections and sustained political engagement, and during the conversation the two leaders reflected on the robust momentum in bilateral ties encompassing development partnership, capacity building, maritime security cooperation, economic and trade engagement, healthcare, education, renewable energy and digital transformation, areas that have collectively contributed to Mauritius’s socio-economic development while reinforcing India’s role as a reliable and responsive partner in the region, as Prime Minister Modi reiterated India’s unwavering support for Mauritius’s development priorities, highlighting New Delhi’s continued assistance in infrastructure projects, human resource development and institutional capacity building, including flagship initiatives that have enhanced connectivity, improved public services and strengthened governance frameworks in the island nation, while Dr Ramgoolam acknowledged India’s consistent support and emphasised the importance of maintaining close coordination to address shared challenges such as climate change, sustainable development and maritime safety, particularly as small island developing states face heightened vulnerabilities from rising sea levels and extreme weather events, with both leaders agreeing that closer cooperation in disaster preparedness, climate resilience and renewable energy would be critical for ensuring long-term sustainability and economic resilience in the Indian Ocean region, and the conversation also touched upon maritime security cooperation, with India and Mauritius reaffirming their resolve to collaborate closely in safeguarding sea lanes of communication, combating piracy, trafficking and other transnational threats, and promoting a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indian Ocean Region, which aligns with India’s broader vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region, or SAGAR, a policy framework that places Mauritius at the heart of India’s engagement with its maritime neighbourhood, given its strategic location and role as a key partner in regional forums, while the leaders reviewed progress in defence and security cooperation, including capacity building of Mauritian security forces, joint surveillance initiatives and information sharing mechanisms that have enhanced maritime domain awareness and strengthened Mauritius’s ability to monitor and protect its vast exclusive economic zone, and both sides expressed satisfaction with the steady advancement of economic ties, noting the importance of further expanding trade and investment flows, leveraging the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership.

Agreement to unlock new opportunities for businesses, startups and entrepreneurs, and encouraging greater collaboration in emerging sectors such as fintech, artificial intelligence, biotechnology and blue economy, which hold significant potential for job creation and sustainable growth, as Prime Minister Modi highlighted India’s technological capabilities and its willingness to share expertise and best practices to support Mauritius’s aspirations to become a regional hub for innovation and digital services, and Dr Ramgoolam welcomed these initiatives, stressing the value of people-to-people exchanges, academic collaboration and skill development programmes in nurturing future-ready talent and deepening societal bonds, with both leaders recognising the vital role played by the Indian diaspora in Mauritius in acting as a bridge between the two countries and contributing to Mauritius’s multicultural fabric and economic progress, and in this context, they discussed avenues to further strengthen cultural cooperation, heritage preservation and tourism ties, including initiatives to promote shared history and traditions that resonate strongly with people on both sides, while also reviewing cooperation in healthcare, with India’s support during the COVID-19 pandemic serving as a powerful example of solidarity and partnership, and both leaders agreed to continue collaboration in public health, pharmaceutical supply chains and medical training to enhance healthcare resilience, and the conversation also took note of cooperation in education and capacity building, with India’s scholarships, training programmes and technical assistance continuing to play a crucial role in empowering Mauritian youth and professionals, and Dr. Ramgoolam praised these efforts, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal interactions, scholarly cooperation, and expertise. Prime Minister Modi reiterated India’s commitment to expanding such opportunities in line with Mauritius’s development priorities, as both leaders expressed confidence that sustained high-level political engagement would further energise bilateral ties, and Mr Modi conveyed his anticipation of welcoming Dr Ramgoolam to India for the AI Impact Summit scheduled next week, which is expected to bring together global leaders, policymakers, industry experts and innovators to discuss the transformative potential of artificial intelligence and its role in driving inclusive and sustainable development.

The education sector and the Union Budget

A much larger allocation of Rs 1,39,289.48 crore, or 2.60 percent of the entire budget estimates (Rs 53.5 lakh crore), has been provided for the education sector in the Union Budget 2026–2027, which Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman delivered. This is in contrast to the previous fiscal year. Compared to the budget forecasts of Rs 1,28,650 crore for the fiscal year 2025–2026, this is an 8.27% increase. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has received a separate allocation of Rs 9,885.80 crore, which will also support the education sector. In keeping with the Viksit Bharat@2047 goal, the government’s increased investment in the education budget demonstrates its dedication to fostering student and institutional development and, consequently, the nation’s education-led development. The Department of Higher Education has been given Rs 55,727.22 crore of the overall education sector expenditure for the fiscal year 2026–2027 (of which Rs 10,142.40 crore is allocated under the program and Rs 45,584.82 crore is allocated outside of it). The following funds are allocated to the government’s main higher education programs: Pradhan Mantri One Nation One Subscription (PM-ONOS) — Rs 2,200 crore; Pradhan Mantri Research Chair (PMRC) — Rs 200 crore; Centre of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence for Education - EAP (MERITE) — Rs 300 crore; Pradhan Mantri Uchhatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA) — Rs 1,850 crore; Pradhan Mantri Uchhatar Shiksha Protsahan Yojana (PM-USP) — Rs 1,560 crore; National Apprenticeships Training Scheme (NATS) — Rs 1,250 crore; Pradhan Mantri Research Fellowship (PMRF) — Rs 600 crore; and National Mission in Education through ICT — Rs 650 crore. Separately, the budget has set aside Rs 250 crore for the creation of three Centers of Excellence (CoE) in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Rs 900 crore for top-tier uni-



versities. Central Universities (Rs 17,440 crore), University Grant Commission (UGC) (Rs 3,709 crore), Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) (Rs 12,123 crore), National Institutes of Technology (NITs) (Rs 6,260 crore), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) (Rs 292), and Deemed Universities (Rs 650 crore) are the autonomous bodies under Higher Education that have been allocated funds.

It is hoped that the higher education sector’s enhanced funding will support the provision of high-quality instruction and skill development in academic institutions. In the digital age, the misuse of artificial intelligence (AI) to create non-consensual intimate imagery (NCII) poses significant privacy violations, as outlined in the recent Information Technology Amendment Rules, 2026 by India’s Supreme Court. These

amendments respond to the alarming use of Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) for manipulating images, often humiliating victims who must prove their dignity against widespread digital lies. Notably, the new regulations demand the labeling of “Synthetically Generated Information” to differentiate AI-generated content from reality, serving as a necessary acknowledgment of the digital deception. Additionally, the “3-hour takedown” rule drastically reduces response time for flagged content, shifting responsibility for managing harmful material from victims to platforms. Moreover, the requirement for digital fingerprints enhances accountability for creators of deepfakes. While these legal advances are significant, concerns about the rapid evolution of the technology underscore the ongoing challenge of protecting digital dignity.

The conclusion of Green Zone reveals Iraq’s postwar disarray and American hubris

The Green Zone, a fact-based war thriller directed by the well-known Paul Greengrass, ends with a look at the devastated and turbulent future of Iraq. The film, which centers on the Western intelligence services’ fabrication of WMD intelligence from Iraqi defector Rafid Ahmed Alwan al-Janabi, dubbed “Curveball” (the new “Deep Throat”), culminates in a heated political dispute between Iraqi factions, marking a foreboding beginning to 2003, the year of the US invasion. In the Green Zone, Greg Kinnear, who portrays Clark Poundstone, a Department of Defense Special Intelligence official based on Paul Bremer, the dishonest and divisive commander of the American puppet Coalition Provisional Authority, observes a meeting held to choose Iraq’s leader devolve into anarchy. The groups reject Ahmed Zubaidi, a politician supported by the United States and actually Ayad Allawi, a former Ba’athist who now supports the CIA, as the future leader of Iraq. The conclusion of Green Zone demonstrates how and why the US was unable to comprehend the intricate dynamics of Iraqi groups and ethnic conflict. The most difficult obstacle is never overthrowing a dictator, especially when international forces are involved. The main barriers to peace and reconstruction are the ensuing instability, power struggles, and bloodshed. Afghanistan and Iraq are prime examples of how the United States has a notorious history of leaving countries following direct or indirect military operations in the pretense of reestablishing democracy, combating terrorism, or gaining military and strategic advantages. There is no “Mission Accomplished” in Gaza or Iraq: The war-torn Gaza region might experience a similar circumstance. George W. Bush said that the United States had defeated the dictator Saddam Hussein in Iraq on May 1, 2003, aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln. “Iraq’s major combat operations are over. After a highly criticized arrest landing in the nuclear-capable anti-submarine S-3 Viking, he declared, “The United States and our allies have prevailed in the battle of Iraq ... because the regime is no more.” In the backdrop, a banner fabricat-

ed by the White House that said “MISSION ACCOMPLISHED” hung as Bush announced a phony American victory from the platform. Although it is ongoing, the War on Terror is not unending. We have witnessed the tide shifting, but we do not yet know when the final victory will occur,” he remarked. Iraq’s situation never changed. . A bloody insurgency rocked Iraq the same year, transformed into a sectarian war and continued till the US ended combat operations, leaving the country ruined and devastated. Despite Bush claiming that the US had won, troops remained in Iraq for eight more years. The US spent around \$728 billion, 4,492 US service-members were killed and another 32,292 were wounded. Around 200,000 Iraqi civilians were killed. Though then-secretary of state Donald Rumsfeld removed the words “Mission Accomplished” from Bush’s speech, the president delivered a similar speech with the words included to US troops Camp As Sayliyah in Afghanistan on June 5 the same year. Both Iraq and Afghanistan were destroyed never to recover again. Bush’s “Mission Accomplished” catchphrase was back to haunt the US 15 years later during Donald Trump’s first term. After the US, the UK and France struck Syria with a volley of Storm Shadow and Tomahawk missiles on April 14, 2018, in response to the Douma chemical attack by the then-Bashar al-Assad regime, Trump prematurely tweeted: “Mission Accomplished!” Nothing was accomplished as the Syrian Civil War continued till December 2024 with a former al-Qaeda member, Ahmed Hussein al-Sharaa—who fought American troops in Iraq and Syria—now leading a highly destabilised nation riven by a sectarian conflict, humanitarian crisis and economic turmoil. On October 12, Trump did a Bush. Before departing for Israel, where he got a standing ovation for ending the war following his 20- point Gaza Peace Plan, and Egypt for the Gaza Peace Summit and ceasefire signing, Trump, in his much-loathed pomposity, said that the Gaza War was “over”. “This is not only the end of a war ... This is the historic dawn of a new Middle East,”

Trump told the Knesset on October 13 amid applause. “It’ll be the new beginning for an entirely beautiful Middle East,” the US president said during the signing of a joint declaration on Gaza, ‘Trump Declaration for Enduring Peace and Prosperity’, in Egypt’s Red Sea resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh on the same day. Leaders and representatives from 30 nations gathered as Trump painted a rosy future for the region. “This is a monumental moment in the history of the world beyond the Middle East,” he said on a stage adorned with the theme “PEACE 2025” in big, bold and white. Trump’s two speeches bear an uncanny resemblance to Bush’s speech. Ironically, the words emblazoned before the Sharm elSheikh stage and on the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier bore the usual American show-off—spectacular on the surface but hollow underneath. Similarly, no mission has been accomplished in Gaza—the enclave is on the precipice of another round of bloodshed. In his rambunctious and deranged self at the Knesset, Trump even praised Benjamin Netanyahu for using powerful American weapons “very well” in Gaza—which have killed civilians in thousands—because “that’s what led to peace”. The Egypt peace summit was a nauseating tableau of power play in which participating nations did their cameos as protagonist Trump towered above the obsequious lot. It was a pageant, not a peace summit—organised by a reckless man, a maverick whose USP is chaos. Implementing Trump’s peace plan—lacking in specifics and planning—fully is a mirage. But for now, he’s basking in the fake glory of having ended the Gaza War and monetising every moment of it. Gaza’s precarious reality hit hard barely a week after Trump’s two spells of boisterousness. On October 19, Israel killed 45 Gazans in air and artillery strikes after Hamas ambushed and killed 2 Israeli soldiers in Rafah. Later, Israel announced that the ceasefire, under phase one of the peace plan, and aid delivery would resume the next day. The Gaza Government Media Office alleged that Israel has killed around 97 Palestinians and wounded 230 since the start of the cease-

fire, and violated the truce agreement 80 times. As of October 20, 68,159 Gazans have been killed and 170,203 wounded since October 2023. Even the first phase hasn’t been completely implemented. Hamas was supposed to return all living hostages and the remains of the dead. Subsequently, Israel was to release 250 life sentence prisoners and 1,700 Gazans detained after the October 7 Hamas terrorist attack. However, Hamas hasn’t returned the remains of 13 dead hostages. Bloody Insurgency, Fight for Supremacy: The US was responsible for the Iraqi insurgency (2003-11). Despite the CIA’s warning about the high risk of a political and ethnic conflict after Hussein’s overthrow, Bush appointed the inexperienced Bremer without consulting secretary of state Colin Powell and NSA Condoleezza Rice. Bremer’s CPA orders to exclude members of the Ba’ath Party from the new government and disband the Iraqi Army, under vice-president Dick Cheney’s instructions and against the advice of senior military and CIA officers, triggered a violent insurgency. The Ba’athists were angry. Almost 400,000 soldiers were immediately jobless. A vast pool of frustrated, angry and jobless youths, several of them armed, was an easy source of recruitment for jihadist organisations. The insurgents, numbering 3,000-7,000, comprised Ba’athists (Army and intelligence officers), nationalists, Salafists, Shias (Badr Organisation, Mahdi Army and Muqtada al-Sadr followers) and al-Qaida members, and were mainly active in and around Fallujah, Samarra and Baghdad. Pitted against the superior multinational coalition force, the insurgents resorted to IEDs, car bombs, suicide attacks, ambushes, sniper attacks and guerrilla warfare. Gaza could turn out to be another stage for the battle of supremacy between Hamas and other armed factions. In fact, Trump has turned Gaza into a more dangerous place. Trump’s recklessness, juvenility and flip-flop in dealing with Hamas have all the ingredients of turning Gaza into an Iraq-like cauldron. One of the most contentious points in his peace plan is that Hamas should disarm.

The Digital Revolution’s Cyberattacks: A Test of Order, Security, and Trust



The digital age has imparted unprecedented momentum to India’s economy and social life. Mobile banking, UPI, e-com-

merce, and online services have made transactions simpler, faster, and more transparent. Today, an ordinary citizen can transfer money

across the country, pay bills, or invest within seconds. This digital revolution is regarded as the foundation of a “New India” and a “Developed India.” Yet alongside this transformation, a deep irony has emerged—the alarming rise of digital fraud and cybercrime. Online scams amounting to thousands of crores of rupees are not only inflicting financial losses on individuals but also raising serious questions about the credibility of the nation’s economic security and financial system. The core spirit of the digital ecosystem is trust. When a person scans a QR code or clicks on a payment link, they place faith not only in technology but also in the entire system that promises secure transactions. However, when this trust is shattered by fraud, fake calls, phishing attacks, investment scams, and identity theft, the very concept of digital progress weakens. Just as an influx of counterfeit currency erodes faith in physical money, wide-

spread digital fraud undermines confidence in online transactions. When fraud becomes a common experience, citizens begin to distance themselves from digital platforms. This is not merely a matter of individual loss—it is a warning signal for the national economic framework. A comparison between traditional and digital crimes highlights significant differences, notably in visibility, geographical limitations, and the risk-reward ratio for criminals. Traditional crimes involve traceable identities and local investigations, whereas digital crimes render offenders largely invisible and allow them to target numerous victims quickly with minimal risk. Victims of digital crimes often feel powerless, facing complex complaint processes that erode their trust in law enforcement. While the government recognizes online fraud’s impact on economic security, there is a disconnect between policy and effective implementation.

WealthApp Group eliminates prejudice by implementing AI-powered portfolio management solutions



New Delhi: An increasingly competitive advice market is driving WealthApp Group, a city-based wealth management platform, to increase its usage of artificial intelligence (AI) to improve investment decision-making and portfolio design. Even as it expands its global operations and product offerings, the firm has established

an internal AI team to combat behavioral biases in fund selection and enhance forward-looking outcomes for customers. “The group’s strategy still revolves around technology. With the help of the very positive findings from its yearly client satisfaction survey, WealthApp established an internal AI team in 2025 to assess client portfolios and improve decision-making, according to co-founder and group CEO Anindya Paulchaudhuri. He said the AI framework is designed to address a long-standing challenge in wealth management — over-reliance on recent performance and market popularity in fund recommendations. “Instead

of extrapolating the past, WealthApp deploys AI-driven analytics combined with mean-reversion principles to identify funds and strategies with superior forward-looking potential,” he said. Unlike traditional models that rely on headline returns or assets under management rankings, the system evaluates variables such as valuation dispersion, rolling return cycles and fund manager behaviour across market regimes, Paulchaudhuri explained. The model also flags instances where excessive optimism or pessimism has distorted outcomes, helping clients enter strategies at more favourable points in the cycle. The international busi-

ness vertical of WealthApp has gained traction, generating over \$1 million in new business through cross-border partnerships, foreign exchange solutions and global diversification strategies. As of December 2025, the WealthApp group manages wealth for over 1,500 client families, reflecting a 40 per cent year-on-year growth over the last 12 years. With opportunities emerging from India’s GIFT City, algorithm-based models and the new Structured Investment Funds, the firm remains focused on delivering transparent, research-driven and bespoke wealth solutions, founder Soumyajit Ghosh said.

Reliance Industries obtains a US license to purchase crude oil from Venezuela

New Delhi: According to an industry executive who wished to remain anonymous, the US government granted Reliance Industries (RIL), a private sector oil refiner in India, a general license last week to buy Venezuelan crude. The largest and most intricate single-site refinery in the world, the Jamnagar complex in Gujarat, is run by RIL, a company controlled by billionaire Mukesh Ambani. It can process heavy and diversified crude oil. RIL did not respond to an email requesting comment. Following his capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro last month, US President Donald Trump declared that US oil firms would “rebuild the oil infrastructure” of the South American country. The first US licenses to load and export Venezuelan oil were acquired by international trading firms Vitol and Trafigura. Since the US government loosened sanctions against Venezuela, refiners from around the world are now interested in the country’s crude. RIL

and Russia-backed Nayara Energy were the leading Indian purchasers of Venezuelan crude before the United States placed sanctions on Caracas in 2019. Despite possessing 18% of the world’s oil reserves, Venezuela only produces 0.8% of the world’s crude output, which is a result of years of underinvestment and limited infrastructure. Up until today, the biggest consumers of Venezuelan oil were the US and China. Venezuelan oil has not previously been processed by Indian state-run refineries; instead, Indian Oil Corporation (IOCL) has received relatively small amounts of it. Oil marketing organizations like Hindustan Petroleum (HPCL) and Bharat Petroleum (BPCL) can now process heavy Venezuelan crude thanks to modifications that have increased the complexity of refineries. While HPCL may refine the heavy crude at its Visakhapatnam refinery and the forthcoming greenfield refinery in Rajasthan’s Barmer, BPCL might process Venezu-



elan crude at its Kochi refinery in Kerala and Bina plant in Madhya Pradesh. Venezuelan oil has long been processed at Indian Oil’s refinery in Panipat. Indian refiners are seeking steeper discounts on Venezuelan oil as its highly viscous and acidic nature makes it difficult to process. BPCL is looking at \$10-12 per barrel discounts on Venezuelan oil, Business Standard had reported earlier.

Final approval of the NSE IPO after nine years



New Delhi: The National Stock Exchange of India (NSE) is now one step closer to going public after over ten years of uncertainty. According to those with knowledge of the situation, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has granted a no-objection certificate (NoC) for the NSE’s IPO. Since NSE first filed IPO papers in 2016 only to later withdraw them due to legal and regulatory obstacles, the clearance ends the company’s protracted wait. On condition of anonymity, an NSE official stated that the NoC was issued on Friday. Existing shareholders will sell a portion of their interest to the public as part of the proposed IPO, which will be an offer-for-sale (OFS). Through the listing, NSE will not raise new funds on its own. Now that Sebi has given its approval, NSE is able to legally designate merchant bankers and legal counsel to construct the DRHP. The exchange may issue the IPO in eight to nine months, according to market forecasts. The NSE is anticipated to be valued at around Rs 5 lakh crore based on current unlisted market pricing, making it one of the biggest listings in

India’s capital markets. NSE Chairperson Shri Srinivas Injeti praised the decision, calling it a significant step forward. “A major milestone in our growth journey, we are thrilled to receive SEBI approval for our IPO,” Injeti stated. “This approval further strengthens trust in the NSE as a key component of the Indian economy and a leader in the country’s capital markets.” The listing will usher in a new era of value creation for all parties involved, he continued. The dark fiber issue, which contained claims of special access granted to specific high-frequency traders between 2010 and 2014, had already put a stop to NSE’s IPO ambitions. In 2019, Sebi ordered NSE to disgorge Rs 62.58 crore and barred some former senior officials from market-related roles. A separate Rs 7 crore penalty imposed in 2022 was later set aside by the Securities Appellate Tribunal, though SEBI has challenged that ruling before the Supreme Court. Unlike regular companies, market infrastructure institutions such as stock exchanges must receive a specific no-objection certificate from SEBI before filing IPO documents.

Kalyan Jewellers’ stock price rises 12% following a 90% YoY increase

New Delhi: After Kalyan Jewellers India’s third-quarter (Q3FY26) net profit nearly doubled, the company’s share price increased by almost 12% during Monday’s trading session. The National Stock Exchange (NSE) saw an 11.7% increase in the share price, reaching a high of ₹424.7 for the day. The price of Kalyan Jewellers India’s shares was up 10.8% at ₹421.4 per share as of 10:27 AM. So far, almost 23.5 million shares have been traded on the NSE. The share price of Kalyan Jewellers India dropped 21.84 percent during the past 12 months, while the Nifty 50 index increased by 9.5%. Following the company’s announcement of a notable increase in net profit for the October–December quarter (Q3Y26), Kalyan Jewellers India’s share price increased on Monday. From ₹219 crore in the same quarter last year to ₹416.3 crore, the bottom line increased 90 percent year over year. According to an exchange statement, revenue climbed 42% year over year to ₹10,343.4 crore in the third quarter (Q3FY26) from ₹7,278.1 crore the previous year. The goal of Kalyan Jewellers India is



to raise the proportion of income generated by non-South Indian markets. With strong commercial traction over the past two years, the company will execute a well-balanced expansion in the Middle East and the global markets. Going forward, Kalyan Jewellers India hopes to achieve the same store sales growth (SSSG) of mid to high single digits. The capital-efficient franchise store approach may accelerate the return on capital employed (ROCE) from its current levels, according to the company’s expectations. The new showroom openings will also be driven by the capital-light franchise store model. The growing momentum of Kalyan Jewellers India persisted in the December quarter (Q3FY26), according to Motilal Oswal Finan-

cial Services. The jeweler has outperformed the brokerage’s projections. According to Motilal Oswal Financial Services, Kalyan Jewellers India has become a prominent brand through the expansion of its franchise business and consistent performance in non-southern areas. The brokerage continued to have a positive opinion on Kalyan Jewellers India, pointing out its steady client acquisition, increased operating margin, and balance sheet deleveraging. For the fiscal years 2026, 2027, and 2028, Motilal Oswal Financial Services projects compound annual growth rates (CAGRs) of 21% for revenue, 18% for earnings before interest, tax, depreciation, and amortisation (Ebitda), and 22% for profit after tax (PAT).

Vodafone Idea shares increase 4% as Emkay doubles the target and KM Birla purchases shares

Mumbai: Following promoter Kumar Mangalam Birla’s purchase of an additional 40.9 million equity shares of the business through the open market, Vodafone Idea’s (Vi) share price increased 4% to ₹11.62 on the BSE during Monday’s intraday trading, despite high volumes. The Vi stock was trading 3.8% higher at ₹11.55 at 11:49 AM, while the BSE Sensex was up 0.53%. So far in the day, the NSE and BSE have seen the exchange of about 380 million equity shares. On December 31, 2025, the telecom services provider’s stock price reached a 52-week high of ₹12.80. Vi’s stock exchange statement states that between January 30 and February 1, the company’s promoter, Kumar Mangalam Birla, paid ₹45.18 crore to purchase 40.9 million shares, or 0.04 percent of the business, on the open market. On January 30, Kumar Mangalam Birla bought 22.1 million shares at an average price of ₹10.95 per share. On February 1, he bought an additional 18.8 million shares at ₹11.13 per share. Kumar Mangalam Birla owned 19.46 million shares, or 0.02 percent of Vi, as of December 31, 2025. According to shareholder pattern data, the total promoter holding in Vi at the time was 25.57 percent. The outlook for Vi’s “long-term bank facilities” has been updated from “Stable” to “Positive” by CARE Ratings (CareEdge Ratings), which has also reaffirmed its rating at “CARE BBB-.” The ratings change comes after the Department of Telecommunication (DoT) announced adjusted gross revenue (AGR) relief, which improves ViL’s operating per-

formance by strengthening its long-term debt tie-up prospects and expediting network capital expenditures. Government of India’s decision, the rating agency said, to defer payment of AGR dues by an additional 10 years, without interest accrual on the frozen amount of ₹87,695 crore, has eased near-term liquidity pressure. “The previous regulatory support measures encompassing the conversion of spectrum dues aggregating ₹36,950 crore into equity in March 2025, combined with the recent AGR relief, underscore the strategic importance of the telecom sector and Vi, in particular, for GoI and the philosophy of promoting healthy competition. Post conversion of spectrum dues, GoI holds a 49 per cent stake in Vi as on December 31, 2025, while operational control continues to rest with promoters- Vodafone Group Plc (VGP) and Aditya Birla Group (ABG),” it said. With improved funding visibility, CARE Ratings added, Vi plans to undertake capex investments, with total outlay of ~₹45,000 crore over FY27-FY29. Timely scaling up of the capex programme remains critical for improving network competitiveness, growing subscriber base, and supporting average revenue per user (Arpu) expansion. Going forward, achieving envisaged growth in subscriber base on sustained basis is a key rating sensitivity, the rating agency said in its rationale. Vi’s blended Arpu (average revenue per user) reportedly expanded from ₹164 in FY25 to ₹172 in Q3FY26 led by plan upgrades besides improvement in the subscriber base mix. The Indi-



an telecom sector is likely to witness another tariff hike in FY27, which with better subscriber mix and robust demand outlook is expected to contribute to substantial improvement in ARPU of all players, including Vi. Going forward, sustained improvement in subscriber trends, ARPU, and consequent profit before interest, depreciation, lease rentals and tax (PBILDT) constitute key rating monitorable, CareEdge Ratings said. Meanwhile, domestic brokerage Emkay Global Financial Services has upgraded Vi stock to ‘Add’ from ‘Sell’ and has doubled its share price target to ₹12 from ₹6 as it believes the government’s decision to provide a major moratorium for Vi’s AGR liabilities, with minimal annual payments until FY35, will provide significant cash flow relief and a turnaround opportunity. “The relief reduces the net present value (NPV) of the burden by 60-80 per cent, easing immediate survival pressure, along with the possibility of further reduction on reassessment of AGR dues. This

will enable Vi to access bank funding for 4G/5G expansion, helping the company arrest subscriber churn and market-share loss. We raise our target to ₹12 (from ₹6),” it said in a report. Continued migration to data, rising usage, and tariff repair provide scope for Arpu-led Ebitda expansion even without aggressive subscriber additions, Emkay Global said. Factoring in these changes, the brokerage has raised its FY27/FY28 revenue estimates by 5 per cent/4.9 per cent and Ebitda estimates by 5.4 per cent/4.2 per cent. “While the long-term sustainability of the company is no more a concern, we believe that Vi will have to execute well to gain subscriber market share and migrate the subscriber base from 2G to 4G/5G,” it said, valuing the stock at 12.5x/11.5x FY27/FY28 EV/Ebitda. Inability to increase subscriber market share; significantly increase Arpu with tariff repair, and upgrade the subscriber base from 2G to 4G/5G will remain key risks/monitorables for the Vodafone Idea, it added.

Maruti records record rail dispatches in 2025, up 18% from the previous year Here’s why and if you should buy

New Delhi: In 2025, Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL) shipped more than 585,000 vehicles via rail, which was an 18% increase over the previous year and its greatest rail movement to date. According to the corporation, rail accounted for almost 26% of its outbound vehicle dispatches in 2025, up from 23.5% in 2024 and a significant increase from 5.1% in 2016. This helped reduce oil usage, carbon emissions, and highway congestion. According to Hisashi Takeuchi, Managing Director and CEO of MSIL, 2025 was noteworthy for both volumes and milestones in rail-based transportation. He pointed to the commissioning of India’s largest automobile in-plant railway siding at its Manesar facility and the dispatch of vehicles by rail to the Kashmir Valley via the Chenab rail bridge, the world’s highest railway arch bridge, a first for an automobile manufacturer. In order to match its logistics strategy with India’s net-zero carbon emissions objective for 2070, Takeuchi stated that the company’s mid-term goal is to increase the percentage of rail-based vehicle dispatches to 35% by 2030-31 (FY31).



In order to reduce carbon emissions across the vehicle lifetime, including design, production, logistics, and end-of-life vehicle management, MSIL has used a “circular mobility” approach to sustainability, he continued. MSIL has been among the earliest movers in using railways for finished vehicle transportation in India. It became the first carmaker to obtain an Automobile Freight Train Operator (AFTO) licence in 2013. Since FY15, the company has transported more than 2.8 million vehicles by rail from 22 dispatch points, supplying over 600 cities across the country

through a hub-and-spoke model. At present, Maruti Suzuki operates more than 45 flexi-deck rakes, each capable of carrying around 260 vehicles per trip, allowing it to move large volumes efficiently over long distances. The company said that in 2025, dispatches from its in-plant railway sidings at Gujarat and Manesar together accounted for 53 per cent of its total rail-based vehicle movements. The expansion of rail logistics comes at a time when automakers are under growing pressure to lower their supply-chain emissions, even as vehicle volumes rise.

Ceigall India has secured a Rs. 1,700 cr 220 MW solar project with BESS

New Delhi: On Tuesday, Ceigall India announced that it has acquired a 220 MW solar project with a battery energy storage system from Rewa Ultra Mega Solar Ltd. for ₹1,700 crore. According to a statement from the corporation, a tariff-based competitive bidding process was used to award the job. Rewa Ultra Mega Solar Limited (RUMSL) has granted Ceigall India Ltd a Letter of Award (LOA) dated February 9, 2026, for the construction of Unit 1 (220 MW) at the Morena Solar Park in Madhya Pradesh, the company said. The project is estimated to be worth ₹1,700 crore (including GST), with a pricing of ₹2.70 per kWh. The construction period for the project is 24



months, followed by an operational period of 25 years. The project is anticipated to serve India’s larger clean energy transition objectives and greatly increase Madhya Pradesh’s potential for renewable energy. A major renewable energy project in the state, the Morena Solar Park aims to improve grid stability by integrating energy storage technologies. Adding a BESS in conjunc-

tion with solar power will increase dispatch dependability and allow for effective peak power control. “This project enhances our presence in the clean energy sector, and we are dedicated to carrying it out effectively while supporting India’s energy transition and decarbonization goals,” stated Ramneek Sehgal, Chairman & Managing Director, Ceigall India Limited.

Thousands of Malawi businesses close in protest over tax changes



Malawi: Over the past week, protests in Malawi’s four major towns have succeeded in delaying the implementation of a new tax system that company owners say will severely impair their ability to make a living. Tens of thousands of people signed petitions, which were sent to tax authorities this week. On Monday, hundreds of small business owners closed their establishments to participate in protest marches in Blantyre, Lilongwe, Zomba, and Mzuzu. The Malawi Revenue Authority’s electronic invoicing system (EIS), a more comprehensive tax structure than was previously in place, has been delayed in its introduction as a result of the measures. The system’s introduction, which was scheduled for this week, has been rescheduled for April. In a nation that is struggling to deal with aid cuts, foreign exchange shortages, and the ensuing increases in the cost of necessities, it was the most recent indication of dissatisfaction. In September and November, political parties took control of protests over the cost of food and fuel, causing violence to break out. Fuel, power, and VAT costs have increased by 41% and 12%, respectively, under President Peter Mutharika, who was elected last year on a pledge to revive the economy. Those who closed their shops and walked to tax offices, dressed in black and carrying placards criticising the revenue authority for prioritising “hitting the target” of revenue collection and “celebrating” while vendors are having to shutter their businesses, are especially struggling over import and export of goods. A shortage of foreign currency, they say, is pushing them to buy the dollar for imports at almost three times the bank rate. “Our businesses are under threat because of the economy,” said Robert Nachamba, a representative of small business owners, after a group of 1,000 protesters delivered their petition at the Blantyre revenue authority offices. “The country does not have foreign currency in the

banks and now the Malawi Revenue Authority is coming with issues that threaten our businesses even further. Nigeria’s great ‘reset’ is a gamble: great in theory but people are bracing for the impact in their pockets. “When we think about how tough things are in the country, our pain is that there is a lack of foreign exchange which forces us to buy it on the black market because it is not available in the banks. Now we have already got it at an abnormally high rate and now we need to declare the prices of goods to the tax authorities? This will make the prices of our commodities higher even compared with our neighbouring countries and we don’t need that system,” he said. “We closed our shops and travelled to submit our petitions. That is why they were peaceful because we can’t destroy our own shops.” Malawi’s minister of finance, Joseph Mwanamvekha, has told citizens to “remain resilient” as the government implements tough economic measures to stabilise the economy, cut expenditure and “improve revenue collection”.But economists warn that while the measures are technically rational – including the introduction of the electronic invoicing system to improve administration and combat tax evasion – businesses in the informal sector need to survive. Malawian economist Bertha Bangara-Chikadza told the Guardian: “The [policies] are being implemented under extreme macro-economic challenges. If the government can use the resulting revenue to stabilise the economy and improve public services, it may indeed be a good step. However, if the increased tax burden fails to translate into improved infrastructure and energy, it risks further straining an economy.”Malawi is the latest in a string of African economies, including Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt and Uganda, to implement mandatory electronic invoicing and “real-time tax reporting system s” as part of a trend to improve revenue collection and reduce fraud.

Italian reporters will object to their boss’s clumsy Olympic commentary

Rome: The sports director’s errors during his commentary on the Milano Cortina Winter Olympics opening ceremony have prompted protests from sports journalists at the Italian national network. Paolo Petrecca, who took over the position at Rai Sport in 2025, first greeted spectators at Rome’s Stadio Olimpico rather than Milan’s San Siro, where Friday’s ceremony took place. He then mistook Italian actress Matilda De Angelis for Mariah Carey and International Olympic Committee President Kirsty Coventry for the Italian president’s daughter Laura Mattarella. Because of Petrecca’s alleged strong loyalty to Giorgia Meloni’s far-right government, the gaffes were swiftly ridiculed by social media users and seized upon by Italian opposition members. In response to the sports director’s “disastrous coverage” of the opening ceremony, the internal union for Rai journalists, CDR, announced Monday that the broadcaster’s sports journalists would go on strike for three days after the Games are over and withhold their bylines from their coverage of the Games.Officials from

the Winter Olympics will look into why medals keep shattering. In a statement, the CDR added, “We’ve all been embarrassed for three days.” And not because of anything we did. We need to speak up since Rai Sport is giving us their worst performance ever at the Milano Cortina Winter Olympics, one of the most anticipated events in history. The CDR said the flawed commentary was damaging to Rai, its licence fee payers and to journalists who work for the public service. The statement added: “This is not a political issue, as some would have us believe, but a question of respect and dignity for public service.”The journalists’ union, Usigrai, called the commentary “inadequate”.Opposition politicians claimed the incident was the latest example of alleged rightwing bias at Rai. Sandro Ruotolo from the Democratic party said it represented a further sign of “political occupation and amateurism” at what he called “TeleMeloni”.In an unprecedented action in 2024, news anchors on Rai’s three main TV channels read a statement from Usigrai condemning Meloni’s administration



for “turning Rai into a government megaphone”. Before coming to power in October 2022, Meloni often accused Rai of leftwing bias.

Trump’s latest outburst against Canada includes threatening to block a major bridge

Washington: Donald Trump posted a long tirade on his social media platform, threatening to block a bridge connecting the US and Canada and making the bizarre false claim that increased trade between Canada and China would include a ban on Canadians playing ice hockey, as Democrats get ready to force a vote on his tariffs on Canada in the US House this week. Trump said that “everyone knows, the Country of Canada has treated the United States very unfairly for decades” at the start of his most recent tirade against the US’s second-largest trading partner.

The \$4.6 billion Gordie Howe International Bridge, which would connect Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit, Michigan, was constructed through a binational partnership that received approval during the Obama administration but started construction in 2018 under Trump. The president also threatened to halt the bridge’s planned opening. Trump wrote on Monday, “Until the United States receives full compensation for all that we have given them and, more importantly, until Canada treats the United States with the fairness and respect that we deserve, I will not allow this bridge to open.” Trump blamed his predecessor Barack Obama for “stupidly” approving the bridge project, but made no mention of the fact that he had endorsed it himself in 2017 in a joint statement with Canada’s then prime minister, Justin Trudeau.



“In particular, we look forward to the expeditious completion of the Gordie Howe international bridge, which will serve as a vital economic link between our two countries,” Trump and Trudeau said.In 2012, Michigan’s then governor Rick Snyder accepted a Canadian government offer to fund most of the new bridge’s costs, and took the unusual step of using executive authority to bypass the legislature. Construction began in 2018 and the bridge is nearing completion. The US Homeland Security Department on 30 January published a rule declaring the bridge as an official port of entry.The Canadian embassy in Washington, the office of Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer and the bridge authority did not immediately comment. The cause of Trump’s rage appears to be a closer trading relationship with China negotiated by the Canadian prime min-

ister, Mark Carney, after Trump raised tariffs on Canadian imports. “China ... will eat Canada alive,” Trump wrote. To illustrate his point, Trump then added a particularly wild claim with no factual basis at all: “The first thing China will do is terminate ALL Ice Hockey being played in Canada, and permanently eliminate The Stanley Cup.”

Trump’s bizarre claim that China would force Canada to give up its national pastime as part of a trade deal stunned many observers when they saw it in black and white on Monday, but Canadians have heard it before.“Canada’s not doing well, they’re doing very poorly,” Trump said last month at the opening of his wife’s documentary about herself, in comments broadcast by Canada’s CTV. “You can’t look at China as the answer,” Trump added.Senator Elissa Slotkin, a Michigan Democrat,

said “canceling this project will have serious repercussions. Higher costs for Michigan businesses, less secure supply chains, and ultimately, fewer jobs.”She added Trump is “punishing Michiganders for a trade war he started. The only reason Canada is on the verge of a trade deal with China is because President Trump has kicked them in the teeth for a year.”Trump has made a number of threats against Canada in his second term and drastically hiked tariffs on the US northern neighbor. Last month, he said he would impose a 100% tariff on Canada if it follows through on a trade deal with China. In 1936, John Scott, son of the late Guardian owner and legendary editor CP Scott, did something unheard of for a media heir: he gave up his stake for the greater good. After inheriting the newspaper, Scott renounced all financial benefit – bar his salary – in the Guardian (worth £1m at the time and around £62m today) and passed ownership over to the newly formed Scott Trust. The Trust would evolve to have one key mission: to secure the financial and editorial independence of the Guardian in perpetuity. That means the Guardian can’t be bought. Not by private equity, not by a conglomerate, and definitely not by a billionaire looking for a political mouthpiece.Our independence means we can say what we want, report on who we want, challenge who we want, and stand up at a time when others are sitting down.

Separatism is nothing new in Canada, but the drive for Alberta to join the US is a new threat

Canada: A vote on independence from Canada is being pushed by separatists. encounters with foreign leaders who are thought to support their cause. charges of sedition and treason. Leaders of the Quebec independence movement launched a series of aggressive approaches to other countries prior to a 1995 vote, including sending the premier of the province to France. The mayor of Paris welcomed Quebec’s Jacques Parizeau with the respect of a national leader, a move that infuriated Anglophone Canada. Reports of a far more secret trip to the United States by a group of would-be separatists from the western province of Alberta have sparked a similar reaction thirty years later, reigniting long-standing concerns about foreign participation in internal unification discussions. David Eby, the premier of British Columbia, told reporters, “There’s an old-fashioned word for going to a foreign country and asking for assistance in breaking up Canada.” “And that word is treason.” Proto-diplomacy – the act of courting sympathetic countries for support – has often been undertaken by separatist movements around the world, said André Lecours, a professor of political science at the University of Ottawa. “There have been criticisms of this for sure, but when actively preparing a referendum on independence, leaders often look abroad in an attempt to secure sympathy or support. They want some signs or assurances that foreign states would be ready to recognize their independence.” But the recently revealed contacts with the Trump administration by members of Alberta’s nascent independence movement had few substantive parallels with Quebec’s attempts in the 1990s, he said. “What makes this movement so different is that none of these people associated with Alber-



ta’s push for independence are democratically elected. They don’t hold any public office,” Lecours said. “While I am very reluctant to use words such as ‘treason’, I find it strange that the Trump administration would meet with non-elected officials. They have no formal democratic legitimacy.” Within the province’s legislative assembly, there are no pro-independence parties that hold seats. Only one Alberta separatist has ever managed to get elected – in a 1982 byelection victory – but lost in a general election soon afterwards. None of the members of the Alberta secession efforts are elected officials. And support for independence is muted in the province: a recent poll of Albertans showed roughly 18% supported leaving Canada. Prominent politicians from Alberta, including former prime minister Stephen Harper and two former Alberta premiers have rejected the idea of independence, instead calling for national unity at a time of diplomatic upheaval with the US. Alberta’s current rightwing premier, Danielle Smith, has also come out against separation, although critics say that her call

for “a strong and sovereign Alberta within a united Canada” merely confuses the issue.Conversely, in Quebec, five premiers have campaigned on – and won – provincial elections on an explicit separatist platform.

The independence-oriented Parti Québécois is widely expected to win the next provincial election this October and has pledged to bring a third referendum.Canada’s laws permit groups to advocate and campaign in support of a province or territory leaving the country. In Alberta, members of the pro-independence campaign have been travelling across the province in an attempt to collect nearly 178,000 signatures by May. But the recent allegations that independence activists have repeatedly met officials from a government which has become increasingly hostile to Canadian sovereignty have prompted suggestions that the movement could constitute a threat to Canada’s national security.While pro-independence politicians in Quebec courted the French, the country’s position on the province was “non-ingérence, non-indifférence” – an official

policy of neutrality.But Donald Trump has threatened to annex Canada and turn it into the 51st state – an effort seemingly welcomed by a leader of the Alberta independence movement. Lawyer Jeffrey Rath, part of the delegation that met secretly with state department officials, said last year he and others wanted to “petition” for Alberta to gain US statehood.And influential figures in the White House have signalled support for the separatists.“Albertans are a very independent people,” the US treasury secretary, Scott Bessent, told the conservative website Real America’s Voice. “Rumour [is] that they may have a referendum on whether they want to stay in Canada or not ... People are talking. People want sovereignty. They want what the US has got.” Mark Carney has said he “expects the US administration to respect Canadian sovereignty”. But there is a growing sense of unease among senior officials in Ottawa that the US could use secession movements as a political wedge to meddle in Canadian domestic affairs. “It seems now that if there were to be a referendum on independence in Alberta – or in Quebec for that matter – the US would not stay silent and/or support Canadian unity,” Lecours said. “You’d likely hear another, far different message.” In 1936, John Scott, son of the late Guardian owner and legendary editor CP Scott, did something unheard of for a media heir: he gave up his stake for the greater good.After inheriting the newspaper, Scott renounced all financial benefit – bar his salary – in the Guardian (worth £1m at the time and around £62m today) and passed ownership over to the newly formed Scott Trust. The Trust would evolve to have one key mission: to secure the financial and editorial independence of the Guardian in perpetuity.

Cuba is willing to speak with the US “without pressure” following months of threats from Trump

Cuba: Miguel Diaz-Canel, the president of Cuba, has stated that his administration is open to speaking with the United States, provided that it is done “without pressure” following months of threats from Donald Trump. President Fidel Castro, 65, claimed Thursday that his island nation has been the target of “intense media campaigns of slander, hatred, and psychological warfare” while standing in front of a life-sized photo of Castro brandishing a gun during the 1959 revolution. The nation was, nevertheless, “willing to engage in dialogue with the United States, a dialogue on any topic, but without pressure or preconditions,” he stated. The address was aired on YouTube, radio, and television. Since Nicolás Maduro, the president of Venezuela and the island’s longtime friend, was captured by US forces on January 3, the Cuban government has been confronted with increasing threats of regime change from US authorities. On Sunday, Trump suggested that talks were already under way, telling reporters: “Cuba is a failing nation. It has been for a long time but now it doesn’t have Venezuela to prop it up. To find out what occurs, we are speaking with the Cuban government and its highest officials. Last month, Trump signed an executive order threatening to impose additional tariffs on countries that sell oil to Cuba, and he later claimed that Mexico had agreed to halt shipments of oil at his request – a claim the Mexican president, Claudia Sheinbaum, has rejected.On Thursday Reuters reported that an oil tanker that has previously transported Venezuelan fuel to Cuba had finished loading a 150,000-barrel cargo of gasoline, in a possible sign that the South American country could be preparing to send supplies to the island.a woman checks her phone while seated a table with a lit candle on itCuba on the brink as



Trump turns up the pressure: ‘There is going to be a real blockade’.But Cuba’s government is preparing the population for hardships beyond those already apparent. The island is already amid an economic slump that has seen people begging on the streets and rooting through bins for food. In recent years, hyper-inflation has slashed state salaries and pensions. Widespread power outages continued on Thursday, with reports that the whole east region of the island was offline. Diaz-Canel said he had received messages from the presidents of China and Russia, along with many others from all over the world. “They expressed their support, commitment and determination to continue collaboration and co-operation with Cuba and Venezuela,” he said. However, a Havana-based businessman who has worked with the Cuban government for more than 25 years, said: “They are out of options. There are strong rumours of talks already under way in Mexico.” In his speech, Diaz-Canel said: “The energy persecution, the financial persecution, the intensification of the blockade with these coercive measures is such that we know we have to do a very strong, very creative, very intelligent job to overcome all these obstacles. We are going to take measures that, while not permanent, will require effort.” And in interviews preceding the statement, other government ministers made it clear what that meant.

LIFESTYLE & HEALTH

Deepika Padukone looking stunning in black jacket and skirt at Dubai event



Deepika Padukone has once again proven why she remains the ultimate fashion chameleon. On February 7, the actor took to Instagram to share a series of breathtaking images of her all-black look from a high-profile Cartier gala in Dubai, sparking an immediate social media ‘meltdown’ among her millions of followers. Dressed in a custom creation by fashion designer Gaurav Gupta, Deepika Padukone looked every bit the celestial queen in a structured black ensemble that merged futuristic tailoring with timeless elegance. The outfit – a sharply tailored black jacket paired with a sleek, floor-length skirt – was a reimagined version of the designer’s ‘Starfall’ silhouette. First debuted as part of Gaurav Gupta’s The Divine Androgyne Spring Summer ‘26 collection in Paris, the look was customised specifically for Deepika. In his February 8 Instagram post, Gaurav shared the intricate details behind the look: “Deepika Padukone in custom Gaurav Gupta Couture for the Cartier Gala in Dubai. A structured black ensemble reimagined from the ‘Starfall’ silhouette, first presented as part of The Divine Androgyne Spring Summer ‘26 couture collection in Paris. Engineered tailoring meets the house’s signature metal-burst embroidery featuring deconstructed watch parts, intricately hand-applied across the jacket and skirt. The sculptural precision of the shoulders and the fluid movement of the skirt created a powerful, polished presence that dominated the gala.” As a global brand ambassador for Cartier, Deepika elevated the look with extravagant high jewellery. She sported a massive diamond-encrusted necklace and matching studs, ensuring the whimsical theme of her clothing matched perfectly with the shine of the Cartier gems. Within minutes of the post, fans and celebrities flooded the comments section of Deepika’s post. Socialite and businesswoman Natasha Poonawalla and actor Neha Dhupia led the charge, dropping fire emojis. The designer, Gaurav Gupta, himself commented, “A moment...” fans left comments like ‘Goddess’, ‘gorgeous’ and ‘stunning’.

Indians continue to choose Singapore, although flying there has become more difficult

Travel is popular all the time. The ease with which international travel can currently be done has altered. Instant vacations are as simple for travelers to organize as any other domestic destination. Singapore, often known as the “City in a Garden,” is one of the places that Indian tourists still want to visit. However, there is now an additional layer of security and pre-departure procedures for visitors to Singapore. Beginning January 30, 2026, the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) implemented No-Boarding Directives (NBDs). Airlines operating at Changi and Seletar Airports are subject to this rule, which prohibits some passengers from boarding Singapore-bound planes before they ever take off. The con-

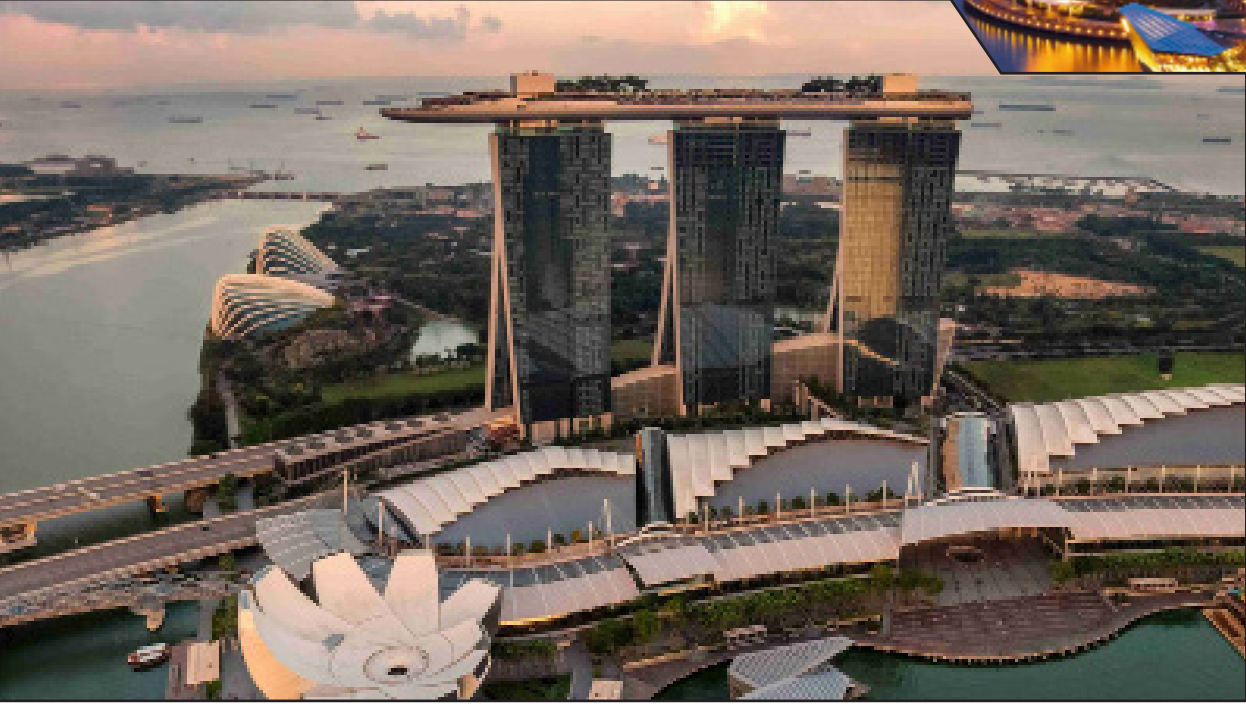
cept is straightforward: instead of being screened out after landing, travelers who are prohibited from entering Singapore or who don’t fulfill the minimum standards for entry will be filtered out prior to takeoff. Thus, perhaps less haste at immigration? In order to evaluate risk before arrival, ICA already makes extensive use of advance traveler information. This comprises information provided by airline flight manifests, the SG Arrival Card (SGAC), and other data sources. Up-

until now, high-risk travelers were only separated for further screening after landing. That screening has now advanced in time. ICA can now direct airlines to refuse boarding to certain passengers based on advance data. The concept is straightforward: instead of being screened out after landing, travelers who are prohibited from entering Singapore or who don’t fulfill the minimum standards for entry will be filtered out prior to takeoff. Thus, perhaps less haste at immigration? In order to evaluate risk before arrival, ICA already makes extensive use of advance traveler information. This comprises information provided by airline flight manifests, the SG Arrival Card (SGAC), and other data sources. Up-



airlines submit advance passenger information, ICA will screen travellers scheduled to fly to Singapore. In some cases, airlines may also be required to conduct additional verifications, such as confirming visa approval or SGAC submission, before allowing a passenger or crew member to board. Travellers who are turned away but still wish to enter Singapore won’t be left guessing.

They will be required to write to ICA (via the ICA Feedback Channel) to seek approval for entry before arranging a new flight to Singapore. Non-compliance comes with serious consequences. Airline operators that fail to adhere to an NBD will be committing a strict liability offence under the Immigration Act 1959 and may face fines of up to \$10,000. Individual pilots or airline staff who knowingly—or unknowingly—allow a traveller under an NBD to board could face fines, up to six months’ imprisonment, or both. That said, Singapore continues to remain a strong draw for Indian travellers. The data speaks. “Indian travellers continue to be one of the island’s most commercially significant markets, and they are among the tourists helping to lift luxury spending in Singapore,” said Mark Shaw, Chairman of the Orchard Road Business Association (ORBA), as quoted by PTI. Indian visitor arrivals in Singapore reached 1.03 million in the first 10 months of the year, up 2.6 per cent year-on-year, Singapore Tourism Board data showed. Overall, Singapore attracted 14.25 million visitors between January and October 2025, a growth of 2.5 per cent.



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until now, high-risk travelers were only separated for further screening after landing. That screening has now advanced in time. ICA can now direct airlines to refuse boarding to certain passengers based on advance data. “From January 2026, ICA will issue NBD notices to airlines against identified prohibited or undesirable travellers. Airlines that receive an NBD notice must not allow these travellers to board the flight for Singapore. ICA may also issue NBDs against travel-

pore’s entry requirements, such as possessing a valid visa or a travel document with at least six months’ validity,” read an ICA statement issued in November 2025. The aim of the NBD regime is simply to strengthen Singapore’s border security by keeping potential threats from reaching the shores in the first place. Boarding will be denied at the check-in counter if an NBD has been issued to an airline. ICA has been working closely with airline operators to ensure a smooth rollout. Once

A city break in Metz, northeastern France, featuring crazy art and cool design

As I stand and look at a six-metre skeleton of a domestic cat named Felix, the words of Alice in Wonderland spring to mind: “Curiouser and curiouser.” The sculpture is part of a thought-provoking and enchanting exhibition at the Centre Pompidou-Metz, and this isn’t the first time I’ve felt a sense of wonder during my weekend in this lesser-known city in north-eastern France. While most of us know what to expect from a city break in, say, Paris, Lyon or Bordeaux, Metz throws up surprises at every turn. The giant feline sculpture is the work of Italian visual artist Maurizio Cattelan (of banana-duct-taped-to-a-wall fame), whose works form part of Dimanche Sans Fin (Endless Sunday), an exhibition he has curated that brings together more than 400 works from Paris’s Centre Pompidou, which closed for a five-year renovation last October. Each piece depicts a different way the “day of rest” could be interpreted, whether it’s the innocent play of Picasso’s sculpture Little Girl Jumping Rope (1950-1954) or Max Ernst’s figure playing chess in the King Playing with the Queen (1944). In a room dedicated to artists’ portraits of their mothers, Cattelan’s Shadow (2023) shows his mum hiding in a fridge (the thought of cooking a Sunday roast might drive many of us to take such action). I’m being shown around by Cattelan’s co-curator, Zoé Stillpass. “It was amazing to have all the pieces from the Paris Pompidou to play with,” she says. “The banana exhibit, which makes you question the idea of ‘the masterpiece’ and why we give value to something, has a room to itself here.” But my jaw had dropped before I’d even set foot in the exhibition, when I set eyes on the Pompidou-Metz itself. It opened in 2010 and is an extraordinary feat of design. Japanese architect Shigeru Ban took inspiration from a Chinese bamboo-woven hat to create hexagonal lat-

tice of laminated wood and draped white fibreglass roof. The building fills a wide open space that was once occupied by a Roman amphitheatre. Metz was something of a playground for architecture long before the Pompidou arrived. Before I’d left the station, I’d had an introduction to the city’s Germanic Imperial Quarter. Built between 1905 and 1908 during Kaiser Wilhelm II’s occupation of Alsace-Lorraine, the station is more akin to a church than a transport hub, with a striking stained-glass window depicting Charlemagne, the eighth-century Frankish king, carved pillars, mosaics and a beautiful glass-roofed arcade. Outside is a stately water tower that once serviced the steam engines. Architects designed the Imperial Quarter to feel old, with winding streets, leafy squares and the stately Avenue Foch with its ornate mansions. Elsewhere, in Place Saint-Louis in the real old town, the stone arcades occupied by money-changers in the 14th century are now home to cafes and restaurants, with terraces sprawling into the square. Renaissance architecture also gets a look in with the Maison des Têtes on En Fournirue, which dates f r o m



round the city centre. Later, a solar-powered boat trip along the River Moselle gives a view of the city’s monuments from the water, including a Japanese Torii gate and Protestant church the Temple Neuf, with its steel-grey roof tiles shimmering in the sun. The city’s most imposing monument is the Cathédral Saint-Étienne. Built in yellow Jaumont limestone, it dates from the 13th century, but some of its most striking features are much more modern. Among its 6,500 sq metres of stained-glass windows – one of the world’s largest expanses – are works from the 1960s by Marc Chagall. Vivienne Rudd from the city’s tourist office is showing me around. She explains how Chagall tells the story of Adam and Eve in his intricate design, with its abstract lines and ethereal figures: “You can see how Eve is in front of the tree of knowledge, holding a snake, and you can see Adam’s face hiding in the blue panes.” In the windows in the north transept, she shows me where to spot Jesus’s head and his crown of thorns. It takes some concentrating, but then I spy it. “If you can’t see it, you have to go and drink a shot of mirabelle eau-de-vie [the local plum-based spirit] and then come back and look,” she laughs. Even without drinking Alice’s elixir, the sight of Metz’s new design hotel soaring into the sky makes me

feel like I’ve shrunk. Celebrated Parisian designer Philippe Starck’s Maison Heler took 10 years to complete but finally opened last March, just a few minutes’ walk from the Pompidou-Metz. Its design is extraordinary: a turreted mansion house atop a rather nondescript nine-floor tower block. Its backstory is equally fantastical. Starck devised a novella, titled The Meticulous Life of Manfred Heler, in which the house, belonging to the eponymous main character, a lonely postwar inventor, is dramatically pushed upwards during an earthquake – hence the house on top of the tower block. The story also involves his love interest, a milkmaid named Rose, whose part in the story inspired the gentle pink decor of the bistro restaurant on the ground floor. Bedrooms and corridors have an industrial vibe, with neutral tones and concrete walls, and Manfred’s bizarre scientific experiments are depicted in black-and-white photos. Light and colour come from the stained-glass windows – the work of the designer’s daughter, Ara Starck – which cast a beautiful glow across the wood-panelled restaurant and cocktail bar, set in Manfred’s house at the top. As carefully designed as it is, it’s also affordable, and the food in both restaurants (mains from €23) is excellent. I tuck into white asparagus with hollandaise and cod with a light pea broth and saffron beurre blanc. When I try to read the novella, though, to get a better understanding, it proves utterly baffling – in keeping, perhaps, with this wonderfully curious city.

ENTERTAINMENT

Raj and DK tease the second season of “Farzi,” starring Shahid Kapoor

Mumbai: A poster for Farzi Season 2 was released on Tuesday by filmmakers Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK, popularly known as Raj & DK, hinting at the forthcoming production of the Shahid Kapoor-starring thriller series on Prime Video. “Round 2 in progress” and “#Farzi” were scribbled over the poster when the director-duo posted it to their Instagram stories. The update was released precisely three years after the first season premiered on February 10, 2023. The directors posted a vintage video with snippets from the first season on Instagram earlier in the day. Sharing a picture with the filmmakers on his Instagram story, Shahid wrote, “The fakers are back at it



@rajanddk.” The first season of Farzi revolves around Shahid’s Sunny, a disillusioned artist dealing with income inequality, and Sethupathi’s Michael Vedanayagam, a Special Task Force officer. The eight-episode show marked

Shahid’s web series debut. Released on Prime Video, the series also starred Raashii Khanna, Vijay Sethupathi, Kay Kay Menon, Bhuvan Arora and Raashii Khan- na in pivotal roles. Farzi marked the OTT debut for Shahid.

In Tier-2 cities, Taapsee Pannu’s ASSI will have six special premieres

New Delhi: In order to implement an audience-first marketing strategy, the producers of the upcoming film ASSI, which stars Taapsee Pannu, plan to tour the country before its premiere. The filmmakers hope to start the correct discussions with viewers by holding six special screenings in Patna, Ahmedabad, Indore, Lucknow, Delhi, and Kolkata one week before to the movie’s release.

The strategy indicates an attempt to give large urban centers and cities outside of metro areas similar weight in the film’s marketing. This further demonstrates the team’s high level of confidence in the movie. The ASSI team has made the deliberate decision to bypass the typical promotional channels in order to establish a direct connection with viewers who are still interested in films that are relevant and content-driven. These cities are examples of communities of moviegoers that enjoy movies as a shared cultural experience as well as a kind of entertainment. The filmmakers intend to start discussions at the grassroots level by distributing the movie directly to viewers

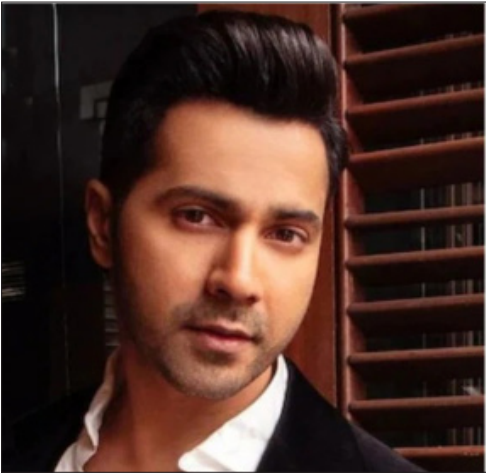


before its theatrical debut, letting the topics of the film naturally come to life. This approach mirrors the core intent of ASSI, an investigative courtroom drama that dares to question uncomfortable realities and provoke dialogue beyond the screen. Starring Taapsee Pannu in the lead, ASSI features Kani Kusruti, Revathy, Manoj Pahwa,

Kumud Mishra, and Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub, with special appearances by Naseeruddin Shah, Supriya Pathak, and Seema Pahwa, further elevating the film’s thrilling depth. Directed by Anubhav Sinha, the film is produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, and Anubhav Sinha. It will release in theatres on February 20, 2026.

Psychology and mathematics underlying Bollywood’s negative PR spike

Mumbai: Bollywood controversies used to come with advance notice. Just before a release, a leaked romance would come to light, a dramatic fallout would take over glossy covers for a week, and even the outcry against it felt staged. Not only did the internet alter that rhythm, it has obliterated it entirely. Controversy doesn’t wait for magazine print cycles or publicist clearance these days. A meme first surfaces in the morning, develops into conversation by the afternoon, and solidifies into popular opinion by the evening. In the midst of fan battles, anonymous troll accounts, rage-bait tweets, and suspiciously timed meme drops, Bollywood found a new language for publicity: negativity spreads more quickly than even well-cut trailers. Actors like Kartik Aaryan, Varun Dhawan, Tara Sutaria, and even Arjun Kapoor have been caught in a never-ending cycle of trolling in recent months. The business has been forced to face an awkward question as a result of the widespread meme-ification: is this chaos natural or is someone covertly creating the noise? India Today made the decision to examine the negative PR mechanism in great detail. Monk Entertainment’s talent manager, Aayush Tiwari, sees a pattern rather than a conspiracy. He depicts negative PR as the newest social media trend cycle, intense, fleeting, and constantly in need of replacement, rather than as a nefarious invention. He does this while sitting with the phenomenon as an industry observer and as a regular audience member scanning the same timelines as everyone else. “A new trend emerges, people move on, and they seek for fresh rumors about the world. He nearly shrugs at the predictability of it all as he informs us, “I see it like short episodes of that, whatever is happening.” But what feels routine is also radically different from the past. Earlier, narratives took time to build; now they are assembled in real time. Aayush highlights how seamlessly campaigns, organic or not, now blend into everyday scrolling. He says, “Because social media has become a tight platform. So, a lot of narratives are pushed through memes, people plan their campaigns around it.” That planning is precisely what makes the present moment unsettling. Because for the average viewer, the line between genuine backlash and manufactured outrage has almost disappeared. By the time anyone pauses to question authenticity, the narrative has already



done its damage. “You don’t know what part or what PR is actually true or fabricated because once it goes out on the internet, the damage is done by it,” Aayush adds. And damage, in this ecosystem, doesn’t necessarily require massive budgets. In fact, one of the most startling truths insiders quietly acknowledge is just how little money it can take to push something into visibility. Industry experts mention that even a few hundred rupees per post can begin the chain reaction. It sounds absurd in an industry where film promotions burn through crores, but scale on the internet isn’t bought through single grand gestures. It’s pushed into motion through repetition: small nudges that trigger much larger organic waves. Cultural researcher Balram Vishwakarma describes an intricate web of agencies, sub-agencies and what he casually calls “distribution managers” — people whose job is less about publicity in the traditional sense and more about the circulation of narrative. “From bots that inflate visibility to meme pages willing to post for astonishingly small sums, the infrastructure of amplification is both organised and inexpensive. Twitter trends can be nudged into existence for just a few thousand rupees. Fan clubs can be mobilised with modest payments. Entire online fights, especially in the reality-show ecosystem, may not be as spontaneous as they look,” he says. He also straight away dismantles the obvious assumption — that all publicity is good publicity. The digital medium expert also mentions how one negative trend could lead actors



and content creators to lose brand and work, especially on the digital medium. He says that in the new economics of fame, the celebrity ecosystem runs as much on endorsements and brand safety as it does on box office: “Sustained negativity doesn’t just hurt feelings; it threatens revenue. Casting rooms grow cautious. Campaigns quietly move elsewhere. The algorithm may reward outrage, but advertisers never do.”However, Balram believes certain meme waves, including those that recently engulfed Varun Dhawan, feel less like planted narratives and more like the unpredictable humour of online culture colliding with celebrity image. Actors at the very top, he notes, often accumulate not just fans but dedicated haters, communities built as much on opposition as admiration. In that environment, negativity can sustain itself without a single rupee being spent. The conversation, also at times, shifts from strategy to psychology. Because while audiences debate authenticity, the people at the centre of these storms are still human. Aayush doesn’t hesitate when asked about the mental toll. “100% it does affect them. Even when you know that, maybe it’s fabricated, it still takes a toll. After a 5% inorganic push, there’s 95% of the organic pull. On a normal day, a hate comment can sometimes wrecks minds. So if something that is becoming sort of a national news, it really takes a toll.”Which circles back to the most unsettling truth both professionals, in very different ways, hint at: negative PR today is not a single phenomenon. It is a spectrum.

Salman and Chitrangda’s latest song, “Battle of Galwan,” explores love beyond duty



New Delhi: Main Hoon, the recently released romantic song from the upcoming movie Battle of Galwan, is all about love and longing. The song, which was released throughout Valentine’s Week, provides a subdued yet poignant look into the life of a soldier and the family he leaves behind. Featuring Salman Khan and Chitrangda Singh, Main Hoon explores themes of love, sacrifice and separation, which form a key emotional layer of the film’s narrative. “This Valentine’s, let love take over with #MainHoon,” the creators said on social media to announce the release. The song is now available. The song

alternates between moments of warmth at home and the solitude that follows a soldier’s call of duty. Salman Khan is shown cherishing time with his family, while Chitrangda Singh portrays quiet strength and emotional resilience. The contrast creates a sincere and grounded atmosphere, reflecting the realities faced by many families connected to the armed forces. The track has been composed and directed by Ayaan Lall, whose understated melody allows the emotion to unfold organically. Vocals by Shreya Ghoshal and Ayaan Lall lend warmth and depth, while lyrics by Ayaan Lall and Shabbir Ahmed fo-

cus on the unseen sacrifices made by those waiting at home. Battle of Galwan is produced by Salma Khan under the banner of Salman Khan Films and directed by Apoorva Lakhia. The film aims to highlight courage, resilience and emotional endurance, with Chitrangda Singh playing a significant role alongside Salman Khan. The release of Main Hoon follows the success of the song Matrubhumi, which crossed 50 million views, signalling strong audience interest in the film’s music. With its latest track, Battle of Galwan shifts the focus from the battlefield to the emotional cost borne by those left behind.

Dhurandhar effect
Ranveer Singh and Sara Arjun dominate IMDb’s list of popular celebrities



Mumbai: Officially, the Dhurandhar influence is dominating IMDb. Stars from Aditya Dhar’s action thriller are dominating this week’s IMDb Popular Indian Celebrities list, with Sara Arjun and Ranveer Singh leading the chart as interest around the film hits a new high. The spike occurs a few days after Dhurandhar’s March 19 Netflix launch, which immediately sparked discussion on social media and search engines. Twenty-year-old Sara Arjun, who

this week became the most searched Indian star on IMDb, is at the top of the list. The score, which is based on the behavior of more than 200 million monthly users globally, shows how well viewers have reacted to Dhurandhar. Arjun’s ascent to fame signifies the film’s expanding cultural influence and is a major turning point in her career. One of the most talked-about elements of Dhurandhar is Sara Arjun’s performance. Her emotional range and on-screen

persona have been lauded by viewers, propelling her over a number of well-known celebrities, including her co-star Ranveer Singh, on the popularity chart. The increase in searches demonstrates how eagerly people are reacting to new talent supported by high-profile enterprises. Arjun is closely followed by Ranveer Singh, who takes the second position on the list. Both fans and critics have been analyzing his performance in Dhurandhar, which has put

him firmly in the public eye. Singh’s regular participation in online debates is evidence of both his ongoing popularity and the movie’s capacity to maintain interest weeks after its premiere. Beyond Dhurandhar, the rankings also feature Zoya Afroz at number four, buoyed by strong reactions to her OTT series Taskaree: The Smuggler’s Web. Samara Tijori has also gained traction for her work in Daldal, driven by steady word-of-mouth on streaming platforms. Veteran star Sunny Deol’s appearance on the list has fuelled excitement around Border 2, while director Aditya Dhar’s sixth-place ranking underlines the creative buzz surrounding Dhurandhar. Akshaye Khanna, another key cast member, continues to draw attention for his understated performance, further cementing the film’s dominance. With fans declaring “Dhurandhar forever” online, the IMDb list makes one thing clear: the film isn’t just trending -- it’s shaping the conversation.

Ranbir Kapoor disapproves of the distant father type



Mumbai: As a parent and a part of the Kapoor family’s history, Ranbir Kapoor has talked about how parenthood has shaped him and how he is paving his own way. Following the birth of his daughter Raha, he discussed how his methods are different from those of earlier generations. When Kapoor was introduced as the new brand ambassador for a heritage jewelry company, she talked about these subjects. The actor likened his relationship with his late father, Rishi Kapoor, to

his own relationship with his daughter in a video posted on the YouTube account Ranbir Kapoor Kingdom. There was a glass wall between my father and me, so our relationship was a little bit distant and not like a friendship since that was the way that generation was. But now that I have a child, I want to burst through that glass wall. He declared, “I want to be her friend and give her the freedom to go in any direction she desires.” He also addressed the Kapoor legacy, stressing the importance of an

individualistic approach: “Once you know you have come from a family of achievers, the next generation doesn’t succeed on past laurels. You have to take an individualistic approach, your own thought process, bringing something new to the table. If you are doing the same copy-paste of what your forefathers have done, somewhere there would be a saturation point. So I think it’s the intention—you have to really carry a feeling, a feeling of legacy and emotion forward. If you have that in the true sense, then nothing can stop you.” Alia Bhatt, actor and Ranbir’s wife, earlier shared her perspective on his transformation as a father. Speaking to Esquire India, she described him as more sensitive than he lets on: “He’s shy, so he holds a lot back. But with her, he’s incredibly expressive. His eyes, his face, everything lights up. He almost becomes a child himself.” Alia highlighted Ranbir’s eagerness to spend time with their daughter. “He would go for a shoot and literally run home. He’d run straight into the room to see her. His love is very obvious. He can’t help himself,” she said. On the professional front, Ranbir and Alia are set to share the screen in Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s upcoming film Love and War, which also features Vicky Kaushal. Ranbir is also gearing up for the release of Ramayana Part 1 and will soon begin filming Animal Park.

Stalin told his ally Congress before the polls that the DMK would create its own government



New Delhi, Feb 15: Despite rumors of a fracture among the allies, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin expressed confidence that the DMK would form the government on its own and declared that it will run in the 2026 elections in coalition with the Congress. Stalin, who is aiming for a second consecutive term as chief minister, discussed the difficulties facing the DMK, the role of the NDA, and his relationship with Rahul Gandhi in an interview with India Today’s Tamil Nadu Roundtable. Although he did not specify whether the Dravidian party will share power

with its ally, the cool-headed DMK chairman denied rumors of a rupture with the Congress and claimed to have a “brotherly attachment” to Rahul Gandhi. Stalin declared, “The DMK will form its own government,” and the party was certain it would make “even greater inroads” than it had in 2021. “In Tamil Nadu, the DMK-Congress coalition is powerful. will work together to win the election. He added, “At this time, the issue of power sharing in government does not come up. The DMK was able to establish the government on its own after winning 133 of the 234

seats in the 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. 18 of the 25 seats were won by the Congress, which ran as an ally.

It did not, however, receive any ministerial slot. But this time, the Congress is pushing a hard deal, which has caused tension between the allies. Amid simmering tensions in the alliance, Rahul Gandhi met DMK MP Kanimozhi last month. Cabinet posts, a larger share of seats, and a Rajya Sabha berth figured in the discussions. The DMK on Wednesday said seat-sharing talks would formally start from February 22. Stalin, however, reserved his best for the NDA. Launching a sharp attack against the BJP, Stalin called it not a “double engine”, but a “dabba engine” or an empty vessel. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, who has framed the polls as another battle in the Aryan-Dravidian war, accused the NDA of spreading “falsehoods, hate and communal tension” ahead of elections. “The so-called double engine is an empty vessel. It is not a double engine, but a dabba engine,” Stalin said.

Ritu Tawde of the BJP was elected mayor of Mumbai, and Sanjay Ghadi of the Shiv Sena was her deputy

Mumbai, Feb 15: After a crucial leadership decision at the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), BJP corporator Ritu Tawde was chosen Mumbai’s mayor on Wednesday, while Sanjay Ghadi of the Shiv Sena will be the city’s deputy mayor. Unopposed, both were elected. Ritu Tawde succeeds Prabhakar Pai, who held the position from 1982 to 1983, as the BJP’s second-ever mayor of Mumbai.

At a gathering of BJP corporators on Friday night at the BMC headquarters, Tawde’s name was revealed. Following discussions with the highest leadership of the party, BJP leader Satam publicly announced her candidacy.

The BJP took into consideration seasoned female leaders after the position of mayor was set aside for a woman from the general category.

Tawde, a former chairperson of the BMC’s Education Committee and a three-time corporator from Ghatkopar, is recognized for his expertise in civic administration. Sanjay Ghadi, a corporator, was previously proposed by the Shiv Sena as the Mahayuti alliance’s nominee for deputy mayor. Since the Shiv Sena plans to divide the term in order to give four of its corporators a chance, his term is anticipated to



be 1.25 years. The ruling alliance secured a historic mandate in the recently concluded civic elections, strengthening its position in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

Emmanuel Macron, the president of France, will go to India from February 17 to 19

New Delhi, Feb 15: The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Tuesday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has invited Emmanuel Macron to make an official visit to India from February 17 to 19. In order to further solidify bilateral collaboration under the Horizon 2047 Roadmap, which delineates the long-term vision for the India–France Strategic Partnership, Macron will engage in extensive discussions with Modi during the three-day visit. The MEA stated that a wide range of topics will be discussed. Macron will attend the AI Impact Summit in the nation’s capital as part of the trip. The summit marks the first global AI summit to be hosted in the Global South and underscores the importance both countries attach to cooperation in emerging and critical technologies, including artificial intelligence. From February 16 to 20, the India AI Impact Summit will take place in New Delhi’s Bharat Mandapam. The summit is centered around three fundamental pillars, or “Sutras,” which are People, Planet, and Progress. It is a five-day event that covers policy, research, industry, and public engagement. Global leaders, legislators, tech firms, innovators, and specialists are anticipated to convene to discuss the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in innovation, governance, and sustainable development. Alongside the summit, the



India AI Impact Expo, spread across over 70,000 square metres, is expected to feature more than 300 exhibitors from 30 countries across 10 thematic pavilions, showcasing the transition of AI from research and pilot projects to large-scale deployment. The MEA said the summit builds on India’s development-focused approach to artificial intelligence, aligns with the IndiaAI Mission and the Digital India Initiative, and emphasises translating global AI discussions into practical, people-centric outcomes. During the visit, Modi and Macron will also travel to Mumbai to jointly inaugurate the India–France Year of Innovation 2026. The initiative will be celebrated throughout the year in both countries

and aims to deepen collaboration in innovation, technology, research and people-to-people exchanges. The two leaders will also exchange views on key regional and global issues of mutual interest, including cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, reflecting the growing strategic convergence between the two countries, the MEA said. “This visit follows Prime Minister Modi’s visit to France in February 2025 and reflects the mutual trust and depth of the India–France Strategic Partnership, as well as the shared commitment of the two countries to deepen it further,” the MEA stated. In February last year, Modi co-chaired the AI Action Summit with President Macron in Paris.

Om Birla resigns as Speaker following a no-trust action by the opposition

New Delhi, Feb 15: According to sources who spoke to India Today, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla made the choice on Tuesday to stay out of the House till the no-confidence vote put up by Opposition MPs to remove him is discussed and decided. He has decided not to attend the House even though the rules do not impose such a requirement. He will not depart, regardless of efforts by the opposition or the government to convince him otherwise. On March 9, which is the opening day of the second part of the Budget Session, there is a chance that the motion to remove the Speaker would be discussed. Fifty MPs will have to raise their hands for this. The Chair may then permit a discussion of the motion. A Speaker cannot chair a meeting while a resolution calling for their removal is being considered, even if they are present, according to Article 96(1) of the Constitution. Nonetheless, the Speaker has the right to speak and



take part in the proceedings, which allows them to refute the accusations. The Speaker may be on the Lok Sabha floor during these sessions, but he or she must step down from the chair. Congress MP Manickam Tagore commented on X, “The Opposition has trusted constitutional propriety.” We hold the Hon.

Speaker in high regard, but we are hurt and distressed by the way opposition MPs are routinely denied the chance to bring up matters of public concern. A no-confidence notice against the Speaker has been moved after many years; this is an unprecedented measure brought about by extraordinary circumstances.

ED on how cryptocurrency channels and mule accounts fueled a cybercrime worth Rs 12,000 crore

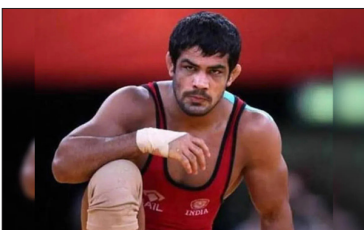
New Delhi, Feb 15: According to Joint Director Robin Gupta, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has so far attached assets valued at Rs12,229 crore and discovered a massive network of mule accounts, dummy corporations, and cryptocurrency channels used to launder the profits of financial scams enabled by cyberspace. Speaking at the CBI and I4C-organized National Conference on Tackling Cyber-Enabled Frauds and Dismantling the Ecosystem, Gupta defined cyber fraud as “organized crime structured like a corporation,” with distinct verticals managing crypto conversions to avoid detection, mule accounts, SIM supply, and human trafficking. The ED is looking into a multinational cyber investment scam that operates out of compounds in the Golden Triangle region of Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar. The case, which was based on several FIRs filed around India, has resulted in eight arrests and a complaint from the prosecution. Phishing IPO allotments and stock investment apps that promised large profits were used to entice victims; this practice is known as “pig-butcherings” worldwide.

Evidence of Indian teenagers being trafficked and coerced into taking part in cyber fraud schemes was also discovered by investigators. Gupta described the laundering procedure in three steps. Rs159 crore has been transferred through mule and shell business accounts, which are where fraud gains are initially put. The

second step is layering, in which money is transferred into hundreds of accounts in a single day in smaller transactions of Rs 1–5 lakh, including Rs 7 crore into 91 accounts and Rs 9 crore over more than 200 mule accounts. Lastly, the funds are siphoned abroad and transformed into cryptocurrency using peer-to-peer platforms like Binance, while local operators take out cash. More than 1,000 mule accounts and sham companies were located by investigators, who also frozen Rs 2.81 crore associated with the network.

These accounts are remotely managed by handlers and are frequently obtained via Telegram or from students, low-income people, and closed businesses. Gupta outlined significant enforcement efforts, such as the attachment of cryptocurrency assets valued at Rs 2,385 crore offshore in the OctaFX forex scam and the seizure of cryptocurrencies valued at Rs 2,057 crore in the Bitconnect Ponzi case, along with 21 foreign properties. The 2025 Best Egmont Case Award went to the OctaFX probe. Home Minister Amit Shah, addressing the conference, said multiple agencies are working in coordination to prevent cybercrime, including I4C, state police forces, the CBI, NIA, ED, Department of Telecommunications, RBI, MeitY, the banking sector and the judiciary. He stressed that each institution has a critical role and closer coordination is essential to curb the growing threat of cyber-enabled financial crimes.

Olympian Sushil Kumar denied bail



New Delhi: In the murder case of former junior national wrestling champion Sagar Dhankhar, an Olympian named Sushil Kumar was denied bail by a Delhi judge on Friday, stating that it “cannot be ruled out” that the accused will influence witnesses.

While considering the bail motion, Additional Sessions Judge Sushil Kumar pointed out that a number of important witnesses in the case have not yet been questioned. “It is important to mention that many other material witnesses are yet to be examined and the possibility of influencing such material witnesses by applicant/accused Sushil Kumar cannot be ruled out,” the court stated in its ruling. The judge emphasized the gravity of the accusations made against the wrestler and noted that the Supreme Court had denied Kumar’s request for bail the previous year.

Due to the Supreme Court’s August 13, 2025, judgment canceling the applicant’s bail application, this court is not inclined to grant the applicant’s bail request. Accordingly, the same is dismissed,” the court declared. The trial court further observed that the apex court, while denying bail earlier, had made several observations, including on the possible societal impact of Kumar’s release.

Zafar Iqbal’s thoughts on hockey as a live link between Malaysia and India

Mumbai: For India and Malaysia, hockey has always been more than just a sport. For many years, it has served as a strong cultural and athletic link between our two countries.

As an Olympic gold medalist and former captain of the Indian hockey team, I have had the honor of witnessing this link firsthand—not from the stands, but from the field—through tense games, mutual respect, and memorable athletic moments that forged closer bonds between our peoples. As a member of the Indian national team, I had the privilege of par-



ticipating in multiple Test matches against Malaysia during a time when this Asian hockey was at its most active and competitive. Both sides had a great deal of respect for each other’s traditions and playing styles, which was evident in the heated yet respectful nature of those encounters. One of my most memorable experi-

ences was participating in the inaugural Sultan Azlan Shah international hockey tournament in 1983, held at Ipoh.

The tournament was named in honour of the sitting sultan of Malaysia’s province Parek, who is considered “Father of Malaysian Hockey”. It further underlined Malaysia’s growing stature as a global hockey hub. The Sultan Azlan Shah tournament stands as a symbol of Malaysia’s unwavering commitment to the sport, nurturing international camaraderie while maintaining the highest competitive standards.

Anish Bhanwala takes home the bronze in the men’s 25-meter rapid-fire pistol event Asian Championship 2026

New Delhi: In the men’s 25-meter rapid fire pistol competition at the current Asian Championship in New Delhi on Wednesday, Anish Bhanwala took home the bronze. With 23 hits, the 23-year-old Anish came in third. Nikita Chiryukin of Kazakhstan won silver with a score of 28, while Yoshioka Dai of Japan won gold with a World Record of 31 hits. The three medalists were tied at 21 prior to the penultimate series. Chiryukin’s four hits out of five put his opponents under pressure. Dai delivered a flawless sequence to grab solo lead in a stylish response. The gold medalist from the 2018 Commonwealth Games, Anish, was knocked out after he was only able to manage two hits. Dai had to just match the Kazakh’s performance to secure the top spot after qualification topper Chiryukin struck the target three times in the final series. But to establish his dominance, the 40-year-old Japanese produced his second consecutive flawless series. The top Indian shooter in the qualification stage, Bhavesh Shekhawat (577), placed third, however he didn’t make it to the finals because he was just vying for ranking points (RPO). Seventh and eighth place went to Anish (574) and Adarsh (573). In an 18-shooter event, Neeraj Kumar (561) finished 16th, while another Indian who



is interested in RPO, Rajkanwar Singh Sandhu (567), finished 10th.

Giada D’Antonio, an Italian teenager, debuts at the Olympics



New Delhi: Growing up between the Mediterranean Sea and Mount Vesuvius, Italian youngster Giada D’Antonio looked up to American skiers Mikaela Shiffrin and Lindsey Vonn. At the Milan Cortina Games on Tuesday, D’Antonio made her Olympic debut in the same race as Shiffrin. D’Antonio received a memento from her hero when Shiffrin gave her a pair of her gloves, despite the fact that it ended in heartbreak when she skied out of the women’s team combined’s slalom phase. Shiffrin’s performance also didn’t go as planned; he finished fourth overall and 15th in the slalom portion of the race, with teammate Breezy Johnson winning the downhill race. She had almost no chance of a medal anyway after teammate Nadia Delago finished almost three seconds behind Johnson. But the youngster started her run aggressively — and was actually faster than Shiffrin at the first time check — but moments later D’Antonio straddled a gate, with her left ski coming off. “I started off trying to attack because I thought I could have a beautiful race on this slope,” D’Antonio was quoted as saying in Gazzetta dello Sport. “It happens in the slalom, it takes just a moment to straddle a gate. D’Antonio, who fires herself up before every race by listening to American rap, is the youngest member of the Italy team at the Milan Cortina Games and also the athlete that comes from the southernmost part of the country. The daughter of an Italian father and a Colombian-Ecuadorian mother, D’Antonio is from the small town of San Sebastiano al Vesuvio in the Naples area, at the foot of the volcano.

Steve Smith is now the most expensive player in the history of the Pakistan Super League

New Delhi: In the re-designed 11th season of the Pakistan Super League, veteran Australian batsman Steve Smith became the most expensive player in the league's history when he signed a straight contract of PKR 14 crore. Smith, who will soon take Mitchell Marsh's position in Australia's World T20 Cup squad due to injury, was acquired for almost USD 500,000 by the new Sialkot Stallions team.

The Pakistan Cricket Board replaced the draft method that had been used for the past ten years with a players' auction system, increasing the number of PSL teams from six to eight. David Warner, Adam Zampa, Daryl Mitchell, Mark Chapman, Mustafizur Rahman, Devon Conway, Rilee Rossouw, Tabraiz Shamsi, Dasun Shanaka, Kusal Mendis, and Marnus Labuschagne were among the prominent foreign players who attended the auction



Steve Smith fetched PKR 14 crore as a direct signing in the revamped 11th edition of PSL, making him the most expensive player in the league's history.

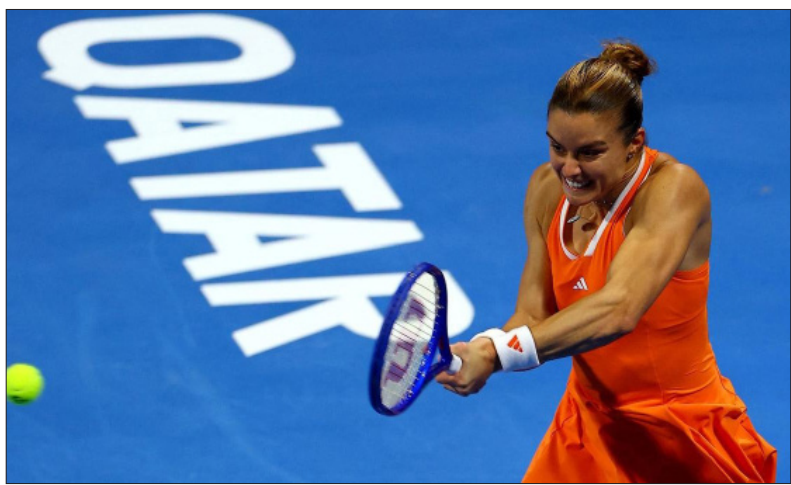
on Wednesday in Lahore. The eight franchises signed 103 players in all. After Islamabad United paid PKR 8.65 crore for fast bowler Naseem Shah, he became the most costly Pakistani acquisition. For PKR 8.5 crore, all-rounder Faheem Ashraf also joined the same team. Babar Azam was retained

by Peshawar Zalmi for PKR 7 crore, while the most expensive retention was Saim Ayub, who was retained by the same franchise for PKR 12.2 crore. The PSL is due to be held from March 26 to 3 May and will clash directly with the more lucrative and prominent Indian Premier League. Two new franchises

-- Sialkot and Hyderabad -- have been added after their rights were purchased by overseas Pakistani businessmen for PKR 185,000 crore and PKR 175,000 crore respectively. Multan Sultans was also sold and rebranded as Rawalpindi after new owners acquired the franchise rights.

Rybakina and Swiatek Struggle Back to Make It to the Qatar Open Quarterfinals

New Delhi: Elena Rybakina also advanced to the quarterfinals, while Iga Swiatek overcame a set deficit to overcome Daria Kasatkina on Wednesday, preserving her hopes of winning a fourth Qatar Open championship. The world number two bounced back to defeat Australian Kasatkina, who was born in Russia, 5-7, 6-1, 6-1, setting up a matchup with Maria Sakkari of Greece. After winning the WTA 1000 competition in 2022, 2023, and 2024, Swiatek had swept through her previous six encounters with Kasatkina without dropping a set, but she lost the opening set after blowing a 5-3 lead. However, the six-time Grand Slam champion recovered fast and dominated the following two sets with six serve breaks. "The match wasn't easy," Swiatek remarked. In contrast to (our) previous matches, she was going for it more and used the slower surface here. However, you can never tell if she did that on purpose from the start or if I gave her more opportunities. However, I felt like I could have done more in the first set at times. Following the Kazakh's victory in their quarterfinal encounter at Melbourne Park last month, Swiatek is still on track for a potential rematch with Australian Open champion Rybakina in the



championship match.

In addition, Rybakina had to fight back to terminate the former world number four's first tournament of the year by defeating Zheng Qinwen of China 4-6, 6-2, 7-5. The 2024 Australian Open runner-up, Zheng, was competing in just her second tournament since having elbow surgery in July of last year, but she demonstrated her fitness by defeating Alycia Parks and Sofia Kenin in three sets in the first two rounds. She won the first set with a single break in the fifth game after dropping just four games on serve. However, Rybakina

much improved in the second set, forcing a decider by breaking serve twice. The world number three accelerated into a 5-2 lead in the third set, maintaining her momentum. After missing a match point in the subsequent game, Rybakina—who hasn't won a WTA 1000 championship since the 2023 Italian Open—was broken when serving to end the match. However, Rybakina's rasping backhand against Victoria Mboko secured a quarterfinal match on Thursday as Zheng failed after leading 40-0 when serving to force the set into a tie-break.

Bayern Munich defeats RB Leipzig to advance to the German Cup semifinals



New Delhi: Bayern Munich defeated RB Leipzig 2-0 on Wednesday to go to the German Cup semi-finals for the first time since 2020 thanks to goals from Harry Kane and Luis Diaz. Leipzig, who had already lost to Bayern twice this season, looked considerably better, but the home team took control of the game with two goals in four minutes of the second half. In

the competition's final four, Bayern joins defending champions Stuttgart, Bayer Leverkusen, and Freiburg. Diaz's goal was his sixth in his last three games, while Kane's penalty was his 39th goal for Bayern this season across all competitions. "He has skill and has worked hard to develop it; I'm not sure if that's how he was born. Regarding Kane, Bayern coach Vincent Kom-

pany remarked, "And we're enjoying these moments with Harry." Bayern, who have won this tournament a record 20 times—14 more than any other team—had not advanced past the quarterfinals since 2020. Leipzig captain David Raum told ARD, "To win here, you need a little bit of the game's luck and maybe a referee's call or two, but that luck wasn't on our side today." I believe there was more for us, but we gave up two stupid goals. Bayern has dominated the visitors this season, winning both of their Bundesliga meetings by a total score of 11-1, but Leipzig has won two German Cups since the Bavarians' last final appearance. After just four minutes, Leipzig had already put pressure on the hosts and were celebrating a score when Christoph Baumgartner's acrobatic effort was rejected for a tight offside. With Leipzig goalkeeper Maarten Vandevoordt lying on the ground and Kane forcing a last-ditch clearance from Ridle Baku, Bayern took advantage of the break almost immediately. After gaining control of the game over time, the home team was unfortunate not to take the lead when Vandevoordt made a spectacular stop to deny Serge Gnabry with 57 minutes remaining. Bayern were in front just five minutes later, Kane converting from the spot after Vandevoordt felled an advancing Josip Stanisic in the box. Kane's spot-kick, his fifth goal versus Leipzig this season, was his 12th penalty in all competitions this campaign.

Neeraj Chopra's South Africa training is prolonged



New Delhi: Javelin throw star Neeraj Chopra's training in South Africa has been extended till April by the Sports Ministry's Mission Olympic Cell (MOC), which will provide him with full financial support for his preseason training in front of the 2026 competitive season. The MOC approved the prolonged camp during its 168th meeting on Wednesday, guaranteeing Chopra more time and resources to address fitness issues and technical improvements that surfaced during his difficult 2025 season. The government first approved a 32-day program for Chopra, a two-time Olympic medallist, to start his preseason training in Potchefstroom in January. Before beginning his competitive season at the Doha Diamond League in May, he will now train in Pretoria. Additionally, Chopra's support system is changing significantly as a result of the stint. The 28-year-old recently broke off his relationship with Czech great Jan Zelezny and reconnected with coach Jai Chaudhary, who helped shape him in Panipat. Chopra's preseason block will be supervised by Chaudhary as the top thrower works to resolve fitness and technical concerns that have surfaced in recent months. Chopra is receiving assistance from his longstanding physiotherapist Ishaan Marwaha in addition to Chaudhary, highlighting his emphasis on a comprehensive approach to preparation. Because of its cutting-edge facilities and specialized training atmosphere, the Potchefstroom facility is recognized as one of the world's top javelin throwing centers and frequently draws top athletes.

President Joan Laporta of FC Barcelona resigns, but she might return soon

New Delhi: Joan Laporta's resignation as FC Barcelona's president came as a great shock to the team's supporters on Monday. However, the resignation was a formality that permits Laporta to run for reelection in the presidential election scheduled for March 15. According to Barcelona, Laporta's decision has set off a 35-day electoral countdown, with the lawyer-president being the clear favorite.

Laporta, who won 54% of the vote to return to office in March 2021, plans to return on July 1 and recover the position. Despite its spectacular appearance, this Barcelona moment is founded in club laws. One of the club's most tumultuous yet pivotal periods has been covered by Laporta's most recent tenure as manager. Following Lionel Messi's departure to Paris Saint-Germain, the team has undergone structural and financial changes, is currently defending its La Liga and Copa del Rey championships, and is attempting to reestablish itself in Europe after making it to the Champions League semifinals the previous season. For now, vice-president Rafa Yuste will serve as interim president until June 30, ensuring continuity as Barcelona head into election season. The club currently sit top of La Liga, with Real Madrid just one point behind, meaning the tension is not limited to the boardroom. Laporta's resignation is tied to Article 42.f of the club's statutes, which states that a sitting president must step down in order to be



eligible for re-election. By formally resigning, Laporta cleared the only legal obstacle preventing him from running again.

The resignation was formalised at an ordinary meeting of the board of directors. As per club regulations, Laporta's decision also triggered the automatic departure of eight members of his executive board. This is procedural rather than political, and if Laporta wins again, those same figures could return after ratification by the Assembly of Delegates, since board members are not elected individually. Rafa Yuste, a trusted Laporta ally and key figure in the sporting department, has stepped in as interim president, a move de-

signed to keep things steady during the transition.

Laporta's return could come quickly if the vote goes his way. He is aiming to reclaim the role through the March 15 election and resume office from July 1. He is widely viewed as the frontrunner, though he will face opposition from long-time rival Victor Font. Former club executive Xavier Vilajoana and economist Marc Ciria have also confirmed their intention to stand. The election will be the 15th presidential vote in Barcelona's history since the first in 1953. Around 100,000 club members of legal age, with at least one year of membership, are eligible to vote.

Carrick raises United, Frank is fired at Spurs, and mayhem breaks out



New Delhi: There is never much quiet in the Premier League, and this week has been dramatic on several levels. Manchester United's temporary comeback under Michael Carrick is providing fans with a completely different kind of plot, while Tottenham's most recent managerial move has created new controversy around dressing-room influence. In other news, Nottingham Forest is still unstable, Chelsea's Cole Palmer has put a stop to transfer rumors, and Liverpool is once again bearing the consequences of injuries at the worst possible moment. Meanwhile, Arsenal hopes that under Mikel Arteta's tutelage, Viktor Gyokeres will find his scoring touch again. There is also movement in the market, with Tottenham eyeing German midfielder Felix Nmecha, Bournemouth celebrating another smart piece of recruitment in teenage Brazilian Rayan, and West Ham slowly finding hope under Nuno Espirito Santo. Even with the window shut, a list of notable free agents remains

available for clubs looking to strengthen. When chants of "You're getting sacked in the morning" come from your own fans, you know as a coach that your job is in serious jeopardy. The problem for Thomas Frank was that many players wanted him gone too. Several senior players held dressing-room discussions and voiced their frustration, annoyance and, in one or two cases, anger that Frank had continually praised bitter rivals Arsenal for their performances. He often used Mikel Arteta's tactics as an example. The level of dissatisfaction with their own coach reached senior management and eventually the owners. Players felt that instead of pointing out Arsenal's superiority, Frank should have concentrated on improving the Spurs set-up tactically. He also had both public and private disagreements with Micky van de Ven, Djed Spence, Yves Bissouma and Mathys Tel. One player said, "We just wanted him to shut up about Arsenal!"

Pramod Bhagat won the sixth-ever BWF Para World Championships championship

New Delhi: Pramod Bhagat of India won the gold medal in the men's SL3 at the BWF Para global Championships on Saturday, continuing his incredible run in para badminton and earning a record sixth global title. The 37-year-old won his fourth straight singles gold at the championships after defeating Muhammad Al Imran of Indonesia 21-12, 21-18 in a decisive final. With the win, he now has six world titles in the SL3 level, demonstrating his continued supremacy in the field. Players who are standing and have severe lower-limb disability are

classified as SL3. After contracting polio at the age of five, Bhagat has been a reliable force at the top level, winning gold medals in the world championship singles competitions in 2009, 2015, 2019, 2022, and 2024. With his latest triumph, Bhagat moved past China's five-time able-bodied world champion Lin Dan to become the most decorated singles champion in world championships' history across formats. The gold also marked a significant comeback for the reigning Tokyo Paralympics champion. Bhagat had

served an 18-month suspension for violating the Badminton World Federation's anti-doping whereabouts clause, a setback that ruled him out of the Paris Paralympics. Since returning to competition in September, Bhagat has regained form quickly, claiming 10 gold medals across singles, men's doubles and mixed doubles events in tournaments held in China, Nigeria, Australia and Japan. Saturday's result reinforced his status as one of India's most accomplished para athletes and a dominant figure in the SL3 category.

