

Himanta Biswa Sarma believes the BJP will win ‘We will reach a century in Assam’

Guwahati, Apr 26: Himanta Biswa Sarma, the chief minister of Assam, stated on April 25 that he is confident the Bharatiya Janata Party will do well in the state’s elections, citing the first round of voting in West Bengal as a crucial sign of the party’s wider momentum. Speaking at a news conference, Sarma said that the BJP had won “around 110 seats” in the first phase of the West Bengal elections, giving the party a sizable advantage. He projected advances elsewhere, including Assam, using this as a foundation. We’re going to win 100 seats in Assam this time.

Sarma outlined the party’s goal in the state, saying, “We will reach a century in Assam.” He continued by saying that the political climate in Assam is indicative of the BJP’s increasing popularity, with constituent input indicating a distinct advantage. Sarma added that following the first round of voting, West Bengal’s scenario has significantly changed. He claimed that voter opinion had shifted in favor of the BJP, with some who were previously unsure now publicly endorsing the party. “I can state with confidence that there is a no-



ticeable difference in the environment following the initial period. He stated, “People now firmly believe that the BJP is going to win,” adding that the level of support might even cause the party’s total in West Bengal to surpass predictions. He also described the current electoral mood as unprecedented based on his past

experience of campaigning in West Bengal, stating that public response this time is unlike previous elections. Meanwhile, Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar said West Bengal recorded one of the highest voter turnouts since Independence in the first phase.

According to the Election

Commission, polling concluded at 6 pm with a turnout of 91.91 per cent. The high participation was recorded across districts, with several regions crossing the 90 per cent mark. Dakshin Dinajpur reported 94.85 per cent turnout, followed by Cooch Behar at 94.54 per cent, Birbhum at 93.70 per cent, Jalpaiguri at

93.23 per cent, and Murshidabad at 92.93 per cent. Officials said the high turnout reflects active voter participation, with polling conducted under tight security arrangements. Remaining phases of polling in West Bengal are scheduled later, with counting of votes to follow as per the Election Commission’s timeline.

Nagaland Governor advises young people to look outside of government jobs

Kohima, Apr 26: On Saturday, Nagaland Governor Nand Kishore Yadav urged the young of the state to pursue professions in innovation, business, and the arts rather than the traditional objective of obtaining government jobs. During an interactive session with students from Eden Higher Secondary School in Dimapur who were on an educational tour to Kohima, the Governor said these things. Yadav admitted that Nagaland had a lot of unrealized potential, especially in industries like tourism, but he claimed that outdated and false ideas about the state still prevent it from reaching its full potential. He stressed the importance of changing that narrative as India works toward the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, saying Nagaland must progress in step with the rest of the nation and align itself with that broader national goal. Addressing the students directly, the

Governor encouraged them to study with dedication, build self-confidence, and understand that there is no substitute for hard work. He also underlined that technology, when used wisely, is a powerful asset — and urged young people to focus on its benefits rather than its pitfalls. Yadav emphasized that women are equal to men in capability and potential, and called on every individual to play a meaningful role in the development of the state. The Governor also shared a glimpse of his own journey into public life, saying he was inspired by veteran leader Jayaprakash Narayan to join the student movement and later enter public service. He reflected that the motivation to serve cannot be imposed from outside — it must come from within. And since society gives individuals their opportunities, he said, people carry an equal responsibility to give back.



Women’s Role in Viksit Bharat: Arunachal Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein

Itanagar, Apr 26: On Thursday, Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein emphasized the importance of women in India’s development narrative, claiming that Nari Shakti continues to be the impetus for the idea of a Viksit Bharat. Mein gave his thoughts on X, emphasizing a variety of national accomplishments across sectors, with reference to the most recent edition of MyGov’s Pulse newsletter. The strength, tenacity, and aspirations of India’s women—the real power of Nari Shakti—are driving the country’s growth story,” he stated. Mein highlighted the PM



Mudra Yojana’s 11-year completion as a sign of grassroots economic empowerment, pointing out that the program has made small companies and independence possible nationwide, especially for women. Numerous citizens, particularly women, are being empowered by such programs to become catalysts for eco-

omic progress, he said. Mein also emphasized India’s growing marine capabilities, characterizing the nation’s port-led growth as a reflection of its “rising global stature” in connectivity and trade. Regarding digital transformation, he cited the proliferation of payments based on QR codes as proof that India has

become a global leader in digital financial inclusion. He added that India’s efforts in the nuclear energy sector are an important step toward sustainable growth and long-term energy security. On internal security, Mein acknowledged steady progress in Naxal-affected regions, framing it as a commitment to stability, development, and inclusive governance in areas that have historically been left behind. “Each of these achievements reflects our journey towards a stronger, self-reliant, and inclusive nation — a truly Viksit Bharat powered by its people,” he concluded.

Meghalaya steps up SDG drive with district-level planning and outcome-based budgeting

Shillong, Apr 26: The Government of Meghalaya has intensified efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by strengthening district-level implementation, improving data systems and expanding outcome-based budgeting mechanisms.

The focus areas were discussed during a state-level workshop held at the State Convention Centre in Shillong on Thursday, where officials and development partners reviewed progress and challenges in SDG implementation. Commissioner and Secretary of the Planning Department, Vijay Kumar D, said the

state has created SDG cells across districts supported by research fellows and village-level data volunteers to strengthen monitoring and delivery systems. He added that the expansion of a catalytic fund would allow districts to receive up to ₹1.5 crore each for targeted development interventions.

The state government aims to place Meghalaya among the top 10 states in SDG performance rankings by 2030. Secretary of Planning, Investment Promotion and Sustainable Development, R. Nainamalai, said the state has linked SDG implementation with its long-term



economic goals and continues to use SDG-linked budgeting to measure outcomes.

Manipur CM Greets People on Panchayati Raj Day

Imphal, Apr 26: On Friday, Manipur Chief Minister Khemchand Yumnam greeted the populace on National Panchayati Raj Day.

The Chief Minister stressed the importance of bolstering grassroots government and rural development on the microblogging platform X. With an emphasis on creating water-sufficient villages and independent panchayats, he added, the event reinforces the dedication to good governance and empowering Panchayati Raj Institutions.

“With a focused vision of water-suffi-

cient villages and self-reliant panchayats, this occasion reaffirms our commitment to rural development, good governance, and empowered Panchayati Raj Institutions,” Yumnam wrote on X. Additionally, he urged cooperation in advancing regional sustainable development objectives and bolstering grassroots governance.

National Panchayati Raj Day is observed every year on April 24 to mark the implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, which accorded constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the country.



The Agartala Press Club wants more protection for reporters



Agartala, Apr 26: On April 24, the Agartala Press Club met with Director General of Police Anurag to advocate for enhanced security measures for journalists in the State, raising concerns over recent attacks and the misuse of press stickers. President Pranab Sarkar emphasized the need for the prompt arrest of offenders and requested specialized press jackets for photojournalists. The delegation also called for increased police patrols in Agartala and surrounding areas to ensure media safety and addressed the issue of misinformation spread by individuals posing as content creators. The DGP assured the delegation of necessary actions to be taken. The delegation included Vice President Chitra Roy and Joint Secretaries Kamal Chowdhury and Abhishek Dey.

Assam CM attacks the Bengali government

Guwahati, Apr 26: On April 20, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma stepped up his criticism of the All India Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal, calling it a “reign of goons and terror” and asserting that things would change following the May 4 election results. Sarma declared, “There is a reign of goons and terror throughout Bengal,” while speaking to a crowd in Tamulik.

This will come to an end on May 4. “After May 4, there will be no one to save them,” he continued, adding that anyone engaged in criminal activity would be invited “to come to the police station and surrender.” Mamata Banerjee, the chief minister of West Bengal, was also charged by the chief minister of Assam with demeaning women. The remarks come amid heightened political exchanges ahead of the Assembly elections, with leaders across parties trading allegations over governance, law and order, and corruption. Separately, Bharatiya Janata Party National President Nitin Nabin claimed that

a “BJP wave” was building across the state and signalled confidence in unseating the ruling party. “Today, there is a BJP wave across West Bengal, and now the time has come for the TMC to be ousted,” he said, adding that public anger over “corruption, appeasement, and the oppression of women” was visible on the ground. Nabin also said a “double-engine government” would be formed under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and accused Banerjee of “deceiving Maa, Mati and Manush”. West Bengal will vote in two phases on April 23 and April 29, with counting scheduled for May 4. The 294-member Assembly requires 148 seats for a majority. In the 2021 Assembly elections, the All India Trinamool Congress secured a decisive victory with 213 seats and a vote share of 48.5 per cent. The Bharatiya Janata Party emerged as the principal opposition with 77 seats and 38.5 per cent of the vote, while smaller parties and independents accounted for the remaining seats.

In Brief

Vehicle hits toddler

Guwahati: A two-and-a-half-year-old toddler, Rahela Khatun, was killed in a road accident in Guwahati on April 24 when a Mahindra Thar struck her. Despite immediate medical attention, she succumbed to her injuries. The unregistered vehicle was seized, and the driver, Mintu Ali, has been linked to a vehicle dealership. Locals gathered at the scene, leading to unrest and the mistaken targeting of a Swift car driver, Digambar Deka, who attempted to assist the child. The crowd vandalized his vehicle and attacked him before police arrived to manage the situation. An investigation is underway regarding the accident and the violence that followed.

Margherita youth goes missing into Buridehing river

Margherita: A tragic incident has occurred in Margherita where Rupam Chakraborty, a young man known for his work in stage decoration, reportedly jumped into the Buridehing River during a Facebook Live stream on April 24. Witnesses reported that he was quickly swept away by the current. His family filed a missing report, prompting a search by local police and the State Disaster Response Force, though no trace of him has been found. Relatives suggest work-related stress may have contributed to his actions, casting a shadow of grief over the family and community.

Longding in Arunachal Pradesh will increase milk output

Itanagar: On April 24, the Department of Animal Husbandry, Veterinary and Dairy Development of Arunachal Pradesh distributed 20 cattle, comprising 19 pregnant cows and a breeding bull, to Dairy Cooperative Societies in Senua village, Longding district. This initiative aims to enhance dairy output and was based on surveys that identified Senua’s experienced residents in cattle rearing. The cattle were sourced from Sahiwal district in Punjab, known for high-yield dairy breeds, with an additional note that ten calves were born during transit and quarantine, boosting the region’s dairy potential.

Mizoram board to declare Class 12 results

Aizawl: The Mizoram Board of School Education (MBSE) will announce the Class 12 HSSLC examination results on April 29, with access available at the MBSE office in Chaitlang, the Lunglei regional office, and through official websites. Printed result booklets can be purchased, and enquiries can be made via designated office numbers during working hours. This announcement has generated significant anticipation among students in Mizoram who took the exams. The announcement has brought anticipation among thousands of students across Mizoram who appeared for the Higher Secondary examinations this year.

Sand extraction is prohibited in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills due to environmental concerns

Shillong, Apr 26: With immediate effect, the District Magistrate of East Khasi Hills has issued a broad order that forbids unauthorized mining on hill slopes and illicit sand extraction from river beds throughout the district. In accordance with Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), HML Kynta, District Magistrate, Shillong, issued the order on April 23, 2026, citing growing environmental harm brought on by widespread sand removal along the Wahnianglen River near Myllem.

The National Green Tribunal's Principal Bench in New Delhi issued an order that prohibited "any person, company, authority to carry out any mining and quarrying activity or removal of sand from river beds anywhere in the country" without valid mining licenses, quarry permits, and clearances under the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change's EIA Notification 2006.

According to officials, there has been



significant damage on the ground. Uncontrolled sand mining has caused a constant discharge of stone, sand, and other minerals into nearby rivers, killing aquatic life, destroying slope flora, and making the water unfit for human use. Communities in surrounding and adjoining areas have already felt the impact on their water supply. The magistrate has now directed that no person, company or authority may carry out mining, quarrying or sand removal in the district without first obtaining the requisite licences and clearance certificates from competent authorities.

People who are furious and want change are voting against Mamata Banerjee: CM of Assam

Guwahati, Apr 26: On April 24, Himanta Biswa Sarma, the chief minister of Assam, claimed that voters in West Bengal are voting against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in huge numbers due to what he called "anger for change." Sarma stated, "It is evident that people are voting against Mamata Banerjee," during the campaign.

"People are voting with anger for change," the statement continued, "and the electoral mood reflects a strong desire for political transformation in the state." He expressed optimism about the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) chances of winning at least 110 seats and possibly as many as 200 in the assembly elections. He further stated that voters are participating "with energy and determination," indicating a shift in public sentiment.

Sarma also emphasised the importance of engaging directly with people to understand ground realities, remarking that



mere claims are not enough without public interaction. On related issues, the Assam Chief Minister reiterated his stance

on illegal immigration, stating that firm measures would be taken, a comment that is expected to trigger political reactions.

Polling in West Bengal is being closely watched as parties vie for a decisive mandate in the state.

BJP national spokesperson following the Gauhati High Court's denial of a bail request "No merit in Pawan Khera's argument"



Guwahati, Apr 26: Congressman Pawan Khera's request for anticipatory release in a case containing accusations against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and his spouse was denied by the Gauhati High Court. BJP National Spokesperson Nalin Kohli responded to the court's ruling by saying that Khera, a prominent political official, ought to have confirmed the veracity of papers before leveling accusations. According to him, Sarma and

his spouse filed a First Information Report (FIR) since the materials Khera presented did not satisfy the requirements for reliable proof. Kohli further claimed that the claims were "scandalous," especially considering that they were made during an ongoing election process, and that they were based on falsified papers.

He continued by saying that although Khera had used his legal right to request anticipatory bail, the court had re-

jected his claims after hearing the case.

"The judge dismissed the application after considering the case from a legal rather than a political standpoint," Kohli stated, adding that Khera must now assist the inquiry.

The Assam Chief Minister and his spouse were the targets of Khera's accusations, which were later refuted and resulted in court action and the filing of a formal complaint.

In Thoubal, Manipur, curfew violators are required to perform community service

Imphal, Apr 26: According to Manipur Police on Friday, a total of twelve people were detained in the Thoubal district for disrupting public order and breaking curfews. They were also had to conduct community service.

According to police, the people were brought before a magistrate, who ordered them to perform one week of community service as punishment for violating prohibitory regulations. In a statement on X, Manipur Police said,

"They have been penalized with one week community service by order of the Magistrate for violating prohibitory orders." The police said that after a state function was performed at the location earlier in the day, the violators were given cleaning duties at the Khongjom War Memorial. The police reiterated that strict action will be taken against those flouting curbs, while stressing that such measures are aimed at maintaining law and order in the district.

Ecological concerns are raised after an Indian roller was discovered dead on Bhupen Hazarika Setu

Guwahati, Apr 26: An Indian Roller's body was discovered on the Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Setu on Saturday morning, sparking worries about how infrastructure affects wildlife in Assamese ecologically sensitive areas. Early commuters in the vicinity of Sadiya saw the bird. The precise cause of death is still unknown, according to officials, and there was no apparent indication of a collision. The Indian Roller, which frequently inhabits wide fields and marshes throughout Assam's riverine plains, is well-known for its vivid blue plumage and soaring display. Its location on a high-speed transportation route has raised concerns about the dangers that birds in these areas face. Local residents expressed concern over the incident. "Seeing such a bird dead on the bridge is both



shocking and disheartening," a passerby said, while another highlighted the need to balance development with environmental protection. The bridge, spanning the Brahmaputra, cuts through a landscape of wetlands, grasslands and forest fringes that support diverse birdlife. Environmental observers pointed to factors such as speeding vehicles, wind turbulence and artificial lighting as potential threats to birds.

The Naga Students Federation accuses Nagas of violating human rights in a memorandum submitted to the UNHRC

Kohima, Apr 26: The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has received a memorandum from the Naga Students Federation (NSF) expressing concerns over alleged human rights violations against the Naga people and growing violence in Naga-inhabited areas. The letter, which was sent to UNHRC President Sidharto Reza Suryodipuro, focuses on the April 18 event at TM-Kasom village along

NH-202 in Manipur's Ukhrul district, where two Naga civilians were slain in an ambush. Citing several reports of suspected attacks, arson, and intimidation in Naga communities over the previous few years, the NSF claimed that the episode is part of a larger pattern of violence and insecurity in the area. The federation also raised concerns over issues such as land encroachment, illegal poppy cultivation, and the proliferation of

arms, which it claimed have contributed to tensions and conflict in the region. In its memorandum, the NSF urged the UNHRC to take cognisance of the situation, ensure accountability, advocate for the protection of indigenous rights, and support peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms. The submission coincides with a candlelight vigil organised at NSF Oking in Kohima on April 23 to mourn the victims and express solidarity with



affected communities. The memorandum was signed by NSF president Mteising and general secretary Kenilo Kent.

Assam Governor lauds BHARAT SCOUTS AND GUIDES for yeoman services

Guwahati, Apr 26: Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya attended the 24th Rajya Puraskar Award Ceremony of the Bharat Scouts and Guides, Assam chapter held at Bhogeswar Phukanani Indoor Stadium at Rudra Singha Sports Complex in Guwahati on Friday.

The Governor, in his speech, lauded the awardees for their commitment to the core values of service, character and leadership. Acharya also acknowledged the invaluable role played by parents, trainers, and officials in nurturing responsible and capable young citizens. He commended the Bharat Scouts and Guides for their yeoman services rendered during the last 75 years particular during natural disasters and emergencies, demonstrating exemplary commitment. The Governor noted that the organisation with over 6.3 million members, including a significant number of young women, is



among the largest youth organisations in the world and has been playing a vital role in nation-building. He also highlighted its contributions during natural disasters and its role in promoting national unity and leadership among youth. Referring to the motto "Be Prepared," the Governor urged

the youth to equip themselves with essential life skills and face future challenges with confidence and determination. It may be mentioned that the Rajya Puraskar Award for the year 2024 and 2025 was presented to 40 members and honourable charge to 20 adult leaders of the organisation.

Tripura CM Manik Saha says the results of the tribal council election are "not worrisome" for the BJP

Agartala, Apr 26: On April 23, Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha stated that the results of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) elections were "not worrisome" for the BJP, citing a significant increase in the party's vote share in spite of a small number of seats. With 24 of the 28 seats in the tribal council, the Tipra Motha Party won a resounding victory. Despite only winning four seats, the BJP's vote share rose dramatically from 18.72 percent in 2021 to 28.95 percent in 2026. During the same period, the TMP's vote share increased from 37.43% to 54.95%. Speaking during a press conference, Saha said that

the BJP ran on its own and that this was the first time a national party had done so in the state's tribal council elections. "The BJP, which ran the elections without an alliance, is not concerned about the tribal council election results," he stated. He emphasized that the number of votes cast for the party more than doubled, from about one lakh in 2021 to 2.18 lakh this year. "The poll defeat does not frustrate us. The party had visited 'every village in the tribal council area with saffron flags,'" he continued, adding, "we made attempts to win the hearts of the people." Saha also questioned the state's political system's long-standing reliance on regional

alliances. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) had earlier depended on its tribal wing, Gana Mukti Parishad, while the Indian National Congress had governed the council in alliance with the Tripura Upajati Yuba Samity (TUJS). Responding to Opposition criticism over the sanction of ₹64.50 lakh for victims of post-pol violence, Saha said the funds were released from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. He described the amount as "meagre" compared to the scale of damage reported across several areas. "The violence was pre-planned and unleashed to terrorise voters so that they don't dare to vote for a national party next time," he said.

A new species of "fanged frog" was found in the Namdapha Tiger Reserve in Arunachal

Itanagar, Apr 26: Researchers from the Wildlife Institute of India have discovered a new species of mud-nesting "fanged frog" named *Limnonectes motijheel* in the Namdapha Tiger Reserve. This new addition to India's amphibian diversity was recorded during surveys from 2022 to 2023 and is characterized by its fang-like jaw and unique nesting behavior, as it builds

cup-shaped mud nests on the forest floor instead of breeding in water. The species is known for its distinctive "woooooak" call heard in April and May, and its discovery highlights the region's biodiversity and the necessity for continued exploration. The study, led by Bitupan Boruah and colleagues, confirmed the species through genetic and morphological analyses.



Naga Village Guards member killed in ambush



Kohima, Apr 26: In the early hours of Friday, April 24, a 29-year-old member of the Naga Village Guards (NVTG) was slain in an ambush that was purged carried out by suspected Kuki armed cadres in the Ukhrul district of Manipur. Horshokmi Jamang, a native of Chatric Khullen hamlet in Kamjong district, has been identified as the deceased. The Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL) said in a statement that the event happened during a patrol operation close to Sinakeithi village. The attack happened amid ongoing tension and armed movement along the Sirarakhong-Sinakeithi line, according to TNL. Suspected Kuki militants operating under Suspension of Operations (SoO) arrangements, along with other armed groups, reportedly ambushed members of the Naga Village Guards stationed near Sirarakhong while they were on normal patrol. Jamang was killed at the spot during the attack. The organisation described the killing as part of ongoing disruptions in the area linked to the presence and movement of armed groups.

50-KM stretch of meghalaya's border with bangladesh remains unfenced: Tynsong

Shillong, Apr 26: A significant portion of Meghalaya's border with Bangladesh remains unfenced, Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong informed during a review meeting on Wednesday. "There is an approximately 50-kilometre stretch along the international border that has not yet been fenced.

This poses logistical and security challenges, and the State Government has taken up the matter with the Centre," Tynsong stated. Acknowledging the concerns raised by local communities residing in these areas, he assured that the Government was actively engaging with the Government of India to expedite necessary approvals and address infrastructural gaps. The crucial review meeting was held to assess the

progress and challenges surrounding the construction of roads under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) in the state's border areas. Addressing media persons after the meeting, Tynsong highlighted that the development of road infrastructure in sensitive border regions is facing procedural hurdles, particularly due to the requirement of obtaining No Objection Certificates (NOCs) from key central agencies such as the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Central Public Works Department (CPWD). He said that these clearances are mandatory before initiating construction activities in areas falling close to international borders, which has led to delays in several ongoing and proposed projects. "The Government is

committed to improving connectivity in border villages, but we need to follow due procedures.

NOCs from the BSF and CPWD are essential, and this meeting was convened to streamline the process and address bottlenecks," Tynsong said. During the meeting, detailed discussions were also held regarding specific stretches of roads that fall outside the international border fencing. Officials deliberated on the technical and administrative challenges posed by such alignments, especially in ensuring both accessibility for local residents and compliance with national security protocols. Tynsong informed that efforts are underway to find a balanced solution that would allow road construction without compromising security concerns.

The Rajya Sabha receives a removal notice from the opposition against CEC Gyanesh Kumar

New Delhi, Apr 26: In the Rajya Sabha, opposition parties filed a removal notice against Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar on Friday. 73 MPs, including 27 members of Congress, have signed the notification.India was informed by sources Today, the Opposition made the decision to file a notice against the Chief Election Commissioner, claiming that he has not altered his behavior and is still acting political. According to insiders, the united opposition also hopes to win over 200 MPs. The notice was filed in accordance with the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, Section 11(2) of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, and Articles 324(5) and 124(4) of the Indian Constitution. The Opposition has filed the notice on the grounds of “proven misbehaviour constituted by acts and omissions committed on and after 15 March 2026”—the day elections for four states and one Union Territory

were announced—according to Congress MP Jairam Ramesh, who confirmed the development on ‘X’.He stated, “There are currently nine specific charges against the CEC that have been thoroughly documented and that simply cannot be denied or whitewashed away.” The Chief Election Commissioner is accused of “discriminatory and biased conduct” during the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in Bihar and other states, according to sources, however Ramesh did not go into detail about the allegations. The Congress MP added that his continu- ation in office amounts to an assault on the Constitution, calling it an absolute disgrace that he remains in the post and allegedly acts at the behest of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister. The latest pushback against the Chief Election Commissioner comes days after the Opposition was able to stop the Women’s Reservation Amendment Bill from gaining two-thirds support in the Lok Sabha.

SC issues notice on plea challenging NIA Act over federal powers



New Delhi, Apr 26: On Tuesday, the Supreme Court sent a notice to the Center regarding a plea contesting the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008, claiming that it is “unconstitutional” because it gives a central agency “police” powers, which is against the federal struc- ture because states have the authority to enact laws on the matter.

While agreeing with senior advocate Siddharth Dave that the court must investigate Parliament’s

legislative authority to pass such a law, a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta stated that the matter was of “vital importance affecting the entire country” and re- quested that the Center’s additional solicitor general, Aishwarya Bhatti, respond within four weeks. In a writ petition, Mohammed Muubarak, an advocate, challenged the NIA’s de- cision to use IPC and Un- lawful Activities Preven- tion Act (UAPA) offenses against him and other PFI

activists for the murder of BJP leader Sreenivasan on April 15, 2022, allegedly in retaliation for the mur- der of PFI member Subair the day before. The court issued the directives.

The petitioner claims that “therefore Parliament lacks legislative competence to enact this legislation which is an incursion into mat- ters contained in List-II (state subject)” because the founders of the Constitu- tion never intended for the Center to have any policing authority over the states.

A pregnant minor’s 31-week abortion is approved by the Supreme Court

New Delhi, Apr 26: The Supreme Court per- mitted a 15-year-old girl to medically end her 31-week pregnancy in a landmark decision on Fri- day. A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan declared that a woman’s reproductive au- tonomy must be accorded the “highest importance” and that forcing the child to carry the pregnancy to term violated her funda- mental rights. Given that she had made two suicide attempts and was experi- encing psychological suf- fering, the court declared, “Forcing her to continue is a direct affront to her right to live with dignity.”

The court further stat- ed that, under Article 21, the freedom to make de- cisions about one’s body, particularly with regard to reproduction, is an essen- tial component of personal liberty and privacy. “Her (the minor in question) re- productive autonomy must be accorded the highest importance...” it stated. Unreasonable limits can- not make this right useless, particularly where minors and unintended pregnan-



cies are involved. Accord- ing to Justice Nagarathna, The court said that “no court ought to compel any woman, more especially a minor, to carry a preg- nancy to term against her will,” cautioning that do- ing so would cause “grave mental, emotional, and physical trauma.”

Appearing for the gov- ernment, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta flagged a medical report indicat- ing risks to the minor and foetus if the termination is carried out at this stage. He argued the case had come to court beyond the statu- tory 24-week limit for medi- cal terminations, and that late-stage abortions carry heightened risks. Mehta suggested the 15-year-old girl be made to go through

a life-changing physical, emotional, and hormonal roller-coaster and deliver the child, and then give it up for adoption. He also suggested money be paid to her family.

“Every time someone comes for MTP (medical termination of pregnan- cy), we cannot tell them to seek financial help,” Jus- tice Nagarathna remarked, observing also that girls sometimes don’t report pregnancies - either due to fear or a lack of awareness - till it crosses the 24-week mark. In its order, the court highlighted long-term con- sequences of forced preg- nancy on a minor, includ- ing impacts on her mental health, education, social standing, and overall de- velopment.

Delhi Kailash Hills rape murder accused addicted to online betting, lost Rs.7 lakh

New Delhi, Apr 26: The primary sus- pect in the rape and murder of a 22-year- old in Delhi’s Kailash Hills, Rahul Mee- na, 23, was allegedly hooked to online gambling and card games and frequently borrowed money to support his activities.

According to DCP (Southeast) Hemant Tiwari, who was reported by news agency PTI, Meena was addicted to internet gambling and card games like “teen patti” and had lost more than ₹7 lakh in recent months. According to the officer, he routinely borrowed money to support his debt and online betting addiction. Tiwari added that the accused was no-

torious in his home village for acting aggressively and had violent tendencies. Sharing details of his state of mind, the official added that he exhibited psycho- pathic tendencies and had a history of violent conduct. Hours before he arrived in Delhi and committed the crime, Mee- na reportedly raped another woman in Rajasthan’s Alwar. The husband of the accused was known to Meena as the two used to play ludo online together. CCTV footage revealed that Meena was seen in the locality around 6:30 am and leaving around 7:15 am, spending roughly 40 minutes inside. He entered the apart- ment at 6:39 am.

Amritpal Singh appears virtually in Dibrugarh Court, gets bail in jail device recovery case

Dibrugarh, Apr 26: Amritpal Singh, the Lok Sabha MP who is currently de- tained under the National Security Act (NSA), appeared virtually before a court in Dibrugarh today in connection with a case related to the alleged recovery of an electronic device from inside Dibrugarh Central Jail.The case, registered as Case No. 21/2024, was filed after jail authori- ties allegedly recovered an electronic de- vice from Singh’s room inside the prison. According to his lawyer, Jasbir Kaur, the complaint in the matter was lodged by Jail Superintendent Nipen Das.Speaking to reporters after the hearing, Kaur said the investigation in the case had already

been completed and a chargesheet had been filed before the court. Following this, a bail petition was submitted on be- half of Singh.She said the court granted bail in the matter, although the formal bail bond has not yet been submitted. The proceedings in the case are current- ly continuing before Judicial Magistrate First Class Chandan Saikia at the Dibru- garh court. Kaur said the trial process is still underway and further hearings will continue in the coming days.According to the defence counsel, some associates of Amritpal Singh who were also de- tained earlier have already been shifted to jails in Punjab. Singh, however, joined



Thursday’s court hearing virtually from Dibrugarh Police Station.Kaur further stated that Singh is expected to be taken back to Dibrugarh Central Jail on Satur- day.Amritpal Singh and several of his associates were detained in 2023 during a major crackdown launched by Punjab Police.

Rekha Gupta’s unexpected visit to the Delhi GST office, 162 officials were moved



New Delhi, Apr 26: The State GST Depart- ment has undergone one of the largest admin- istrative reorganizations in recent months, with 162 officers and employees being relocated as a result of a surprise inspection by Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta.The punishment comes after the Chief Minister unexpectedly visited the State GST office on April 8, raising concerns

about tardiness in taxpayer services, discipline problems, and absenteeism.The Chief Minister spoke with personnel and taxpayers and exam- ined the GST office’s functioning during the inspection. The Chief Minister’s Office claims that a number of officials, including senior staff, were discovered to be missing during busi- ness hours, raising grave concerns over disci-

pline and adherence to attendance regulations. Taxpayers present at the office complained of delayed services, repeated visits for routine work, and the limited availability of officers, indicating operational inefficiencies within the department.Following the inspection, the Chief Minister directed for strict enforcement of at- tendance and punctuality norms, verification of biometric attendance records and immediate strengthening of service delivery mechanisms. Acting on the findings, the government ordered a large-scale reshuffle across the department, transferring officials who had been posted in the same positions for extended periods.In to- tal, 162 officers and staff were transferred, who include 3 Assistant Commissioners, 58 Section Officers (Grade-I), 22 Assistant Section Officers (Grade-II), 74 Senior Assistants (Grade-III), and 5 Junior Assistants (Grade-IV).Officials said that the GST department action is part of a broader push by the Delhi government to tight- en administrative discipline through surprise inspections and compliance checks across de- partments. Earlier reviews had flagged issues such as absenteeism, procedural delays, and service inefficiencies, prompting corrective steps in multiple offices.The Chief Minister has reiterated that public service delivery standards cannot be compromised, and that accountability will apply uniformly across all levels of admin- istration.According to the government, the re- shuffle aims to reset the functioning of the GST department and reinforce discipline, efficiency, and responsiveness in taxpayer services.

Tripura strictly enforces the damage recovery law and takes action against post-election violence

Agartala, Apr 26: The state ad- ministration of Tripura has made the decision to strictly implement the Tri- pura Recovery of Damages to Public and Private Property Act, 2021 in or- der to establish accountability and re- cover compensation for losses caused during incidences of unrest. This de- cision is a forceful response to the re- cent post-election violence in the state. The action was taken in response to reports of violence that followed the announcement of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council election results on April 17. More than 200 individuals were left homeless as a result of the fighting, which also se- riously damaged homes, cars, stores, and other public and private property in a number of the impacted neighbor- hoods, according to officials. The law was passed in April 2021 to allow the state to recover damages resulting from riots, strikes, bandhs, protests, and other violent disturbances, according to



a senior police official who spoke on condition of anonymity. Authorities did admit, though, that the law had not yet been strictly enforced.Claims Tribunals must be established in accordance with the Act’s requirements in order to deter- mine damages and make compensation awards. The state government appoints a Claims Commissioner, who is at

least as senior as an Additional District Magistrate, to oversee the procedure. According to the law, damages are any loss, harm, or degradation brought on by violent people or organizations. The official said that after any such incident, police are required to submit a detailed report before the Claims Tribunal with- in three months. The tribunal will then

determine the extent of losses and de- cide the compensation to be recovered from those found responsible. Simulta- neously, criminal investigations into the incidents will continue under existing legal provisions.Chief Minister Manik Saha recently visited violence-hit ar- eas to assess the ground situation and interact with affected families. He has already sanctioned Rs 64.5 lakh from the Chief Minister’s Relief Fund for immediate assistance and rehabilitation of victims impacted by the unrest.Of- ficials said the government now intends to invoke the Act in full measure as a deterrent against future violence and to send a clear message that those in- volved in destruction of property will be held financially liable.The decision is being seen as a significant adminis- trative step by the BJP-led government as Tripura seeks to restore normalcy after the post-election disturbances and prevent recurrence of politically driven violence in the state.

Indrani Mukerjea’s New Request to Go Abroad Is Denied by the Supreme Court

New Delhi, Apr 26: On Friday, Indrani Mukerjea, who is accused of killing her daughter Sheena Bora, filed a new request to travel overseas, but the Supreme Court rejected it. Senior attorney Mahesh Jethmalani, who was represent- ing Mukerjea, was informed by a panel of Justices M M Sundresh and N Kotiswar Singh that the top court had already requested that she request any relief from the trial court, where the case against her is still pending. Jethmalani stated that there is now some urgency because the high court did not rule on her request to travel overseas last year. The bench stated that the judgment from the previous year was only meant to allow the petitioner to submit an application to the trial court rather than the highest court.

“In light of the aforementioned, we grant liberty to the petitioner to file an application before the trial court, which, if filed, shall be decid- ed in accordance with our order,”

the order stated. The application might be processed in four weeks given the urgency. The top court rejected Mukerjea’s request to travel overseas on February 12 of last year, noting that there was no as- surance she would return. Muker- jea was a former media execu- tive. It affirmed an order from the Bombay High Court rejecting her plea and instructed the trial court to proceed with the matter within a year. Noting that the trial against her was at an advanced stage, the top court had directed the lower court to expedite the hearing and conclude it within a year.The top court had given liberty to Mukerjea to approach the trial court for any relief concerning overseas travel. The travel restriction came before the Supreme Court last year after a special court on July 19, 2024, allowed Mukerjea’s plea to visit Spain and the United Kingdom for 10 days.The Bombay High Court, however, intervened in the matter

and set aside the order on Septem- ber 27, 2024, after the CBI filed an appeal.Mukerjea had then moved the top court challenging the high court order.This year, she has filed a fresh plea seeking permission to travel abroad.Mukerjea was arrest- ed in August 2015 after the murder of Bora came to light. The Supreme Court granted her bail in May 2022 after she spent more than six years in custody.Mukerjea has denied the allegations.Bora, 24, was strangled to death in a car in Mumbai in April 2012, allegedly by Mukerjea, her then-driver Shyamvar Rai and for- mer husband Sanjeev Khanna. Her mortal remains were then burnt in a forest in the neighbouring Raigad district, according to the prosecu- tion.Bora was Mukerjea’s daughter from her previous relationshipThe killing came to light when Rai re- portedly spilt the beans during his interrogation by police after his arrest in a separate case under the Arms Act.

Tripura advocates for credit changes to improve the startup environment

Agartala, Apr 26: The Government of Tripura is reaffirming its dedication to cultivating a strong startup ecosystem, prioritizing innovation, entre- preneurship, and better access to financing. A sig- nificant meeting chaired by IFS officer Jeya Ragul Geshan B focused on improving access to formal credit for startups as part of the District Business Reform Action Points (DBRAP) 2025 initiative, aimed at enhancing the business climate at the dis- trict level.

Key discussions involved strengthening ma- jor financial schemes such as the Credit Guaran- tee Scheme for Startups (CGSS), Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana, and the Prime Minister’s Em- ployment Generation Programme. Emphasis was placed on simplifying credit processes and improv- ing collaboration between financial institutions and entrepreneurs to expedite loan approvals and in- crease awareness of financial products available to startups. Officials highlighted that improving credit access is crucial for empowering entrepreneurs in emerging sectors and supporting sustainable eco- nomic growth in Tripura. The State aims to create a more dynamic environment for innovation-driv- en enterprises by aligning institutional efforts and streamlining processes.

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The Real Importance of Jihad

In contemporary discussions surrounding Islam, the concept of Jihad has often been misconstrued as synonymous with violent extremism and holy war. This misrepresentation has overshadowed its genuine meaning, which is rooted in ethical struggle and moral elevation. The Arabic term “jihad” translates to “to strive” and captures the essence of a continuous pursuit for self-improvement in alignment with divine guidance. Two categories of jihad are recognized: the greater jihad (Jihad al-Akbar), emphasizing inner struggle against personal vices, and the lesser jihad, which includes nonviolent efforts for societal betterment. Scholars delineate that physical combat is distinctively referred to as “Qital” in the Quran and should only be defensive.

The teachings of Prophet Muhammad highlight the importance of the greater jihad over the lesser, identifying the heart as the central battlefield against human vices. Historical Islamic thinkers, like Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, have extensively explored this internal struggle, asserting its primacy in genuine faith practice. In India, this restoration of jihad’s ethical framework is crucial, especially within a tradition influenced by Sufi thought and communal harmony. Contemporary Indian Muslims are encouraged to pursue jihad through intellectual and spiritual endeavors, focusing on education, social equity, and inter-religious understanding. The essence of a true mujahid is expressed through acts of service and social justice, with the narrative of jihad reframed as one of moral courage and societal contribution rather than violence. By reclaiming the concept of greater jihad, Muslims can transform their identity from one associated with conflict to one reflective of ethical resilience and spiritual commitment.

From Barcelona to Paris, cities thrive with women in charge

According to the UN, by mid-century, 68% of the global population will live in urban areas, leading to an unprecedented convergence of crises in cities. These issues include a shortage of affordable housing, increased traffic congestion, and a decline in safety and livability, all amplified by the climate emergency manifesting in severe weather events. The traditional design of cities prioritizes private vehicles, neglecting the needs of vulnerable groups such as children, women, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. In contrast, cities like Delft, Netherlands, have successfully balanced space for walking, cycling, and public transport, resulting in vibrant social spaces that enhance accessibility and safety. Despite challenges, some politicians are pushing for inclusive urban transformation. Female leaders, drawing on their experiences, often advocate for these changes.

For example, Ada Colau’s administration in Barcelona reclaimed pedestrian space and expanded cycling infrastructure, leading to significant reductions in car traffic and pollution. Similarly, Valérie Plante in Montréal implemented ambitious car-free initiatives and improved cycling networks, while also addressing urban flooding through innovative green designs.

Paris’s former mayor, Anne Hidalgo, faced criticism but garnered public support for substantial investments in cycling and pedestrian

infrastructure, showing positive outcomes. These initiatives reflect the need for diverse representation in leadership, as cities governed by representatives who understand the lived experiences of their residents create more inclusive and supportive public spaces. Yet, only 25 of the world’s 300 largest cities have female mayors, highlighting a critical gap in gender balance in urban leadership. The underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles in architecture and urban planning limits the perspectives necessary for creating inclusive urban environments, underscoring the importance of diversity in addressing the challenges cities face. Melissa Bruntlett and Chris Bruntlett are co-authors

of Women Changing Cities: Global Stories of Urban Transformation. Melissa Bruntlett is director of the mobility consultancy Modacity Creative. Chris Bruntlett is international relations manager at the Dutch Cycling Embassy. 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. Regardless, the need for more gender balance in leadership is indisputable. Only 25 of the world’s 300 largest cities have female mayors. Just 5% of municipal leadership positions and 10% of the highest-ranking roles in top architecture and urban planning firms are filled by women.

Muslims in India: Obstacles, Prospects, and Prospects

India’s diversity encompasses various religions and cultures, with Muslims being one of the largest minority groups. However, their socio-economic situation has raised concerns over the years, significantly highlighted by the Sachar Committee Report in 2005. The report revealed alarming issues, such as high dropout rates among Muslim children, lower literacy rates compared to the national average, and minimal representation in higher education. Many children leave school early to support their families, leading to limited opportunities and perpetuating cycles of poverty. The report noted that a significant portion of the Muslim workforce is engaged in informal employment, lacking stability and potential for growth, which further exacerbates their economic challenges. Additionally, financial illiteracy restricts their access to essential financial services, hindering small business growth. The communities also face inadequate hygiene, healthcare, and infrastructure, contributing to what the report termed a “development gap.”

In response to the Sachar findings, the Indian government implemented several measures, including enhancing the Ministry of Minority Affairs, which became central in formulating welfare programs aimed at education, skill enhancement, financial assistance, and infrastructure improvement for minorities. Scholarship schemes were expanded to increase literacy among Muslim youth, while initiatives like the Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship Schemes were introduced to address dropout rates and promote higher education. Skill Development

Programs, such as the Nai Manzil Scheme and Seekho Aur Kamao, were launched to align education with job readiness, ensuring youth acquire employable skills. To assist small businesses and unorganized sectors, the National Minorities Development & Finance Corporation offers loans at reduced interest rates, which are crucial for entrepreneurship among Muslims.

The government also initiated the Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram, aimed at multi-sectoral development in Muslim-majority areas, focusing on education, healthcare, infrastructure, and residential facilities. Women empowerment is emphasized through the Nai Roshni scheme, fostering leadership among minority women, which has positive ripple effects on communities. While these efforts have improved scholarship access and skill training opportunities, the execution of these initiatives requires enhancement. The socio-economic challenges faced by Muslims stem from a blend of historical disadvantages, economic factors, and social barriers. Nonetheless, positive narratives of minority students succeeding in academics, entrepreneurs thriving in business, and youth entering civil services highlight the possibility of change. Lasting improvements will necessitate collaborative efforts centered on professional education, active job market linkages for training programs, widespread awareness of governmental initiatives, and the cultivation of trust and cooperation among diverse communities, aiming for inclusive development where all citizens have equitable chances for success.

Census Phase

The Ministry of Home Affairs announced that field operations for the Houselisting and Housing Census (HLO), the first phase of Census 2027, commenced across multiple States and Union Territories, marking a crucial step in India’s decennial population enumeration exercise aimed at gathering comprehensive and reliable data for governance, planning, and development; according to an official statement issued by the Ministry, the large-scale exercise began simultaneously in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Goa, Karnataka, Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Odisha and Sikkim, along with the areas administered by the New Delhi Municipal Council and the Delhi Cantonment Board in the national capital territory of New Delhi, thereby covering a diverse geographic and demographic spectrum ranging from island territories and northeastern states to urban administrative zones; the Ministry stated that the exercise was carried out over a 30-day period, continuing until the 15th of the following month, during which trained Enumerators undertook extensive house-to-house visits to collect data directly from residents, ensuring both accuracy and inclusiveness in capturing household-level information; this phase of the Census, often considered foundational, focused on compiling crucial data related to housing stock, household composition, access to basic amenities, and ownership of assets, all of which form the bedrock for evidence-based policymaking and targeted welfare interventions by the government; significantly, the Ministry highlighted that for the first time in India’s Census history, a Self-Enumeration facility had been introduced as part of the digitisation drive, and this initiative witnessed an encouraging response from citizens, with approximately 12 lakh households successfully submitting their details online prior to the commencement of field operations, reflecting a growing acceptance of digital governance platforms among the population; residents who had completed the Self-Enumeration process were advised to keep their unique Self-Enumeration Identification number ready and share it with the visiting Enumerators during verification visits, while households that had not opted for the online facility were systematically covered through traditional physical enumeration methods, ensuring that no segment of the population was left out of the exercise; the Ministry underscored that the integration of digital tools into Census operations marked a transformative shift in the methodology of data collection, significantly enhancing efficiency, reducing manual errors, and enabling real-time monitoring and validation of information, thereby aligning the Census process with global best practices in statistical data gathering; during the Houselisting phase, Enumerators collected detailed information through a structured questionnaire consisting of 33 carefully designed questions that captured a wide range of indicators, including the condition and usage of houses, the availability of essential services such as drinking water, sanitation, electricity, and cooking fuel, as well as the possession of communication devices, vehicles, and other household assets, thereby providing a multidimensional profile of living standards across regions; the Ministry emphasised that the data collected through this phase would play a critical role in shaping developmental policies, enabling governments at the central and state levels to design targeted welfare schemes, allocate resources more efficiently, and monitor progress in key sectors such as housing, sanitation, infrastructure, and social welfare; in addition to the regions where field operations commenced immediately, the Ministry further informed that the Self-Enumeration facility was also rolled out concurrently in several other states and union territories, including Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Chandigarh, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, with field operations in these regions scheduled to take place from the 1st to the 30th of the following month, thereby ensuring a staggered yet comprehensive rollout of the Census activities across the country; meanwhile, in Bihar, a slightly different schedule was implemented, wherein the Self-Enumeration period commenced from the 17th of the current month and continued until May 1, after which house-to-house enumeration operations were carried out from May 2 to May 31, reflecting the logistical planning required to manage such a vast and complex national exercise across states with varying population densities and administrative challenges; the Ministry reiterated that all data collected under the provisions of the Census Act, 1948 remained strictly confidential and was used solely for statistical and developmental purposes, assuring citizens that individual information would not be disclosed or used for any non-official purposes, thereby addressing concerns related to data privacy and security in an era of increasing digitalisation; citizens were urged to extend full cooperation to Enumerators, provide accurate information, and participate actively in the Census process, as the quality and reliability of Census data directly influenced the effectiveness of governance and the equitable distribution of resources; the launch of field operations for the Houselisting and Housing Census phase thus represented not only the beginning of Census 2027 activities but also a significant milestone in India’s journey towards modernising its statistical systems, leveraging technology to enhance transparency, accuracy, and inclusivity, and strengthening the data-driven framework essential for achieving sustainable development goals and addressing the diverse socio-economic needs of its vast population, with officials expressing confidence that the combined approach of digital self-enumeration and traditional field verification would ensure a robust and comprehensive dataset capable of guiding policy decisions for years to come while reinforcing the importance of citizen participation in one of the largest administrative exercises undertaken by the government.

The real cost of the war in Iran is that while bombs kill people, the economic consequences also do

More than 3,300 Iranians, including 383 children, have died since the US and Israel initiated their military campaign, as reported by authorities. Donald Trump has indicated an extension of the ceasefire, although the outcome of the impending US-Iranian peace talks remains uncertain. Both sides acknowledge the need for peace but each seeks to compel the other into making substantial concessions. Iran effectively utilizes its drones and missiles, yet the primary leverage it holds is the economic impact it can impose, particularly via control of the Strait of Hormuz. The International Monetary Fund has cautioned that further escalation could lead to a global recession, with the crisis sustaining its threat to the global economy regardless of its immediate resolution. The economic burden is spreading unevenly, with poorer nations facing intensified hardship due to rising costs in energy, food, and fertilizers.

The Iranian economy was already in turmoil due to longstanding sanctions and systemic failures but has shown resilience against the ongoing military and strategic pressures. The Iranian economy was already in a desperate state, thanks to years of sanctions and state failure. But the system has been built to withstand coercion and so far, the regime has survived the military and strategic pressure piled on it. It also knows the US bill is eye-watering. The White House last week declined senators’ requests to provide a figure, but the Pentagon has reportedly briefed that military costs topped \$11.3bn in the first six days alone. That’s widely regarded as an underestimate. Prof Linda Bilmes, a Harvard public

finance expert, suggests that the war is ultimately likely to cost the US \$1tn when factors such as interest payments and long-term veteran-related expenses are included.

In contrast, the financial implications for the US military operations are striking, with costs surging past \$11.3 billion in the initial six days alone, as indicated by Pentagon briefings—an estimate likely to be conservative. Harvard expert Prof. Linda Bilmes forecasts the total costs for the US could reach \$1 trillion when factoring in interest payments and future obligations related to veterans.

Those direct costs are only the start. Ricocheting oil prices have enriched those wealthy enough to speculate on their movement with remarkably perfect timing. But the American Enterprise Institute estimates that the total cost to the average US household, including, for example, higher oil prices, is equivalent to \$410.

The Century Foundation suggests that these “economic poisons” are all the harder for US voters to swallow when the conflict is morally and strategically unwarranted. UK households will be an estimated £480 a year poorer. The UN development programme warned that Arab countries faced an economic contraction of between \$120bn and \$194bn after just one month of war. Even China, initially relatively sanguine, appears to be growing more concerned about the impact. But rising food prices hit the poorest – who spend more of their income on sustenance – the hardest. The World Food Programme warned last month that 45 million more people, primarily in Asia and Africa, could fall into acute



food insecurity. Need is rising as aid budgets have been slashed. It is obscene that the money squandered on taking lives could have saved so many – 87 million, according to the UN humanitarian chief, Tom Fletcher. It is equally so that more lives will be lost because of this conflict’s economic impact. Peace tomorrow wouldn’t fix the damage. But the longer that this war continues, the greater the devastation that will be wrought.

Nitya Bora: An Assamese Pillar Intellectual Thought and Journalism

Shri Nitya Bora, who passed away on April 22, 2026, at the age of 83, was a significant figure in Assamese journalism, literature, and intellectual discourse. His death left an irreplaceable void in Assam’s media and cultural landscape. A writer, editor, and thinker, Bora exemplified a steadfast commitment to truth and social responsibility. Born in Jamugurihat, Sonitpur district, he pursued education at various institutions, earning his bachelor’s degree in 1966 and master’s in 1970 from Gauhati University, with significant involvement in political and literary periodicals.

Bora’s journalistic journey, marked by the founding of his journal, Sampratik Samayiki, from 1976 to 1985, set a high standard for independent journalism. He dedicated himself fully to this field in 1984 and became a prominent columnist and editor, notably serving as editor of Asomiya Pratidin from 2011 for nearly a decade, where he balanced commercial success with intellectual integrity. Beyond journalism, Bora made substantial contributions to Assamese literature and academia, editing numerous critical volumes and mentoring aspiring writers who achieved acclaim. Despite personal health challenges, he remained active, participating in thoughtful discourse and community engagement until shortly before his passing. His life was characterized by a profound dedication to learning and public service, earning him various accolades such as the Lakshminath Phookan Journalism Award. Bora’s legacy is multifaceted: he championed independent thought, inspired critical inquiry, and fostered talent in Assamese literature. His editorial philosophy emphasized fairness and social responsibility, which resonated throughout his life and work. Bora’s influence reflects the evolution of Assamese journalism in the latter half of the 20th century, creating a foundation for critical thought and nurturing a discerning readership. His passing marks not just the loss of a skilled journalist and editor but a principled mentor whose integrity and ideals inspire future generations. Nitya Bora’s life serves as a testament to the power of responsible engagement in public discourse, and his contributions will forever resonate in the intellectual and cultural fabric of Assam and beyond. The Assamese community, as well as India’s broader literary and journalistic circles, have lost not only a skilled editor and writer but also a principled guide and mentor whose standards and ideals will continue to inspire generations. Today Shri Nitya Bora’s passing leaves a void in Assam’s intellectual and journalistic landscape. Yet, his legacy endures through his writings, edited volumes, and the countless individuals he mentored and inspired. His life exemplifies the power of thoughtful engagement, the responsibility of the written word, and the enduring influence of a committed public intellectual. The mark he left on Assamese society, journalism, and literature will remain indelible, serving as a reminder of what dedication, intellect, and courage can achieve. In remembering Nitya Bora, we honor a life lived with integrity, intellect, and a profound sense of duty, an enduring inspiration for Assam and beyond.

India’s taciturn approach: Wait it out and develop your strength

As a disruptor, US President Donald Trump is redefining international expectations and objectives, particularly illustrated by the decision to abstain from the G20 Summit in South Africa and the Cop 30 climate conference in Brazil. This departure leads to a perception that the outcomes are inconsequential without American participation, given that the US is historically regarded as a founding member of the G20 and is currently the highest global polluter. Despite Trump’s administration, the narrative surrounding climate responsibility has shifted, with critics arguing that Western climate NGOs have failed to adequately identify China and India as primary polluters. The document reflects on Trump’s marked divergence from previous Republican administrations, pointing out his lack of finesse relative to past leaders like President Bush, who persistently misled the world regarding Iraq’s alleged weapons of mass destruction, ultimately leading to military actions based on dubious premises. The US has historically oscillated in its engagement with UN institutions, boycotting entities like UNESCO and the UNHRC when their agendas conflicted with American interests, only

to subsequently rejoin under Democratic leadership.

This inconsistency raises questions about the reliability of the US as an ally or adversary in global governance. Examining the context of India’s self-reliance initiative, Atmanirbhar Bharat, launched by Prime Minister Modi in 2020, the narrative indicates a strategic pivot towards economic independence and military self-sufficiency. As India engages with Western nations to establish defense manufacturing and technology transfers, the approach is seen as not only economically beneficial but also strategically significant, particularly in the context of tensions with China. The document emphasizes that for India to emerge as a global power, it needs to develop its military capabilities autonomously, moving away from reliance on foreign technology. Furthermore, historical dependencies on Russian contributions to India’s military and civilian projects reveal past challenges, particularly when geopolitical pressures led to abandonment of commitments by Russia under US influence. Ultimately, these dynamics highlight a complex interplay of global power, dependency, and national strategy.

ICICI Bank increases by about 2% following Q4 earnings



Bengaluru: Following the private lender’s impressive March quarter performance, ICI-CI Bank shares increased by almost 2% in morning trading as investors reacted favorably to increased profit, robust loan growth, and a dividend announcement.ICICI Bank’s shares was up Rs 25.60 or 1.90% for the day at 10:10 am, trading at Rs 1,373.10 on the BSE. For the fourth quarter, the bank posted a net profit of almost Rs 13,702 crore, an increase of 8.5% over the same period last year. In order to boost investor confidence, it also announced a dividend of Rs 12 per share for FY26, which is more than the Rs 11 per share declared the previous year. Strong core income increase was one of the outcomes’ main advantages. The difference between interest paid on deposits and

interest gained on loans, or net interest income, increased 8.4% year over year to approximately Rs 22,980 crore. That demonstrated high lending demand and was stronger than many of its counterparts. Additionally, loan growth continued to be strong. ICICI Bank’s advances increased by 15.8% over the previous year, with commercial banking, retail loans, and mortgages leading the way. While CASA deposits improved, deposits increased by 11.4%, suggesting ongoing consumer traction. Following the results, brokerages were optimistic. Citing sector-leading loan growth, robust margin management, and sound asset quality, JM Financial described it as a “picture-perfect quarter” and reaffirmed ICICI Bank as its top choice in the banking industry.

Nestle hits 52-week high on posting Q4



Mumbai: Nestle’s stock increased 6.4% on the BSE, reaching a 52-week high of ₹1,369.85 per share. The price of Nestle shares was up 6.4% at ₹1,369 per share at 2:58 PM. By contrast, the BSE Sensex was up 0.92 percent at 79,244.12. Following the release of the company’s Q4FY26 results, the stock was in high demand. The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) company reported a net profit of ₹1,110.9 crore, up 27% year over year from ₹873.46 crore the previous year. Its operating revenue was ₹6,747.79 crore, up 22.6% from ₹5,503.88 crore year over year (Yo-Y). The report states that domestic sales and overall sales for the quarter climbed by 23.1% and 23.4%, respectively. Over ₹6,445 crore was sold domestically. The margin on earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (Ebitda) was 26.3%. “I’m happy to report that Nestlé India achieved its highest-ever domestic sales and double-digit growth this quarter. Manish Tiwary, chairman and managing director of Nestle India, stated that the company’s double-digit volume growth was fueled by an increase in advertising expenditures of more than 50%. He added: During the financial year ended 31st March 2026, we remained focused on the fundamentals and executed with resilience, delivering double-digit, volume-led growth alongside strong market share gains. Coffee prices continue to trend lower, supported by a favourable crop in Vietnam and the forthcoming crop in Brazil. Cocoa prices remain subdued, reflecting improved supply and moderated demand. Sugar prices remain stable. Edible oil prices are firm and have moved higher in line with global crude oil prices, supported by increased diversion to biodiesel. Wheat has been affected by unseasonal rains in April, resulting in a delayed harvest and lower quantity and quality. Milk prices have firmed and are expected to remain elevated through the summer lean season.

TVS and Hyundai have finalized their plans to jointly produce electric three-wheelers in India

Chennai: In order to promote the development and commercialization of cutting-edge electric three-wheeler (E3W) solutions created especially to meet India’s last-mile mobility needs, Hyundai Motor Company (Hyundai) and TVS Motor Company (TVS) have signed a joint development agreement (JDA).As per the agreement, Hyundai Motor will take the lead in designing and co-developing the E3W by utilizing its advanced mobility technologies, human-centric design approach, and research and development capabilities. “As a major market, Hyundai Motor Company has long looked for methods to improve India’s transportation environment, and our partnership with TVS Motor is a strategic choice based on that endeavor. Joongsun Ko, senior vice president of corporate strategy and planning at Hyundai Motor Company, stated, “We hope the co-developed E3W enables broader access to safer and more sustainable transportation for people across the country.” To speed up development schedules and

regulatory approval procedures, both businesses have formed specialized cross-functional teams. The collaboration, which was formalized after the E3W concept was successfully presented at the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025, is a major step toward providing Indian consumers with customized mobility solutions and demonstrates both organizations’ dedication to sustainable urban transportation. The E3W will be engineered to address India’s unique mobility challenges while delivering sustainable solutions aligned with local road conditions and urban infrastructure. TVS Motor will co-develop the product using its leading-edge electric platform, extensive three-wheeler engineering expertise, and deep local market knowledge. Leveraging its long legacy of trust and quality focus, TVS will also lead local sales, with its manufacturing operations in India catering to Indian market demand and future exports.”At TVS Motor Company, we aim to transform quality of life through sustainable and accessible



mobility. The joint development agreement marks an important step in our partnership with Hyundai Motor Company and advances our shared ambition to develop electric three-wheeler solutions,” said Sharad Mishra, president, group strategy, TVS Motor Company.The companies said they are committed to delivering the first vehicle in India — the world’s largest three-wheeler market — as part of the JDA, marking a significant milestone in sustainable last-mile mobility innovation. “By bringing together complementary strengths — including our electric three-wheeler platform, engineering expertise, and deep understanding of customer needs — we are

well-positioned to deliver purpose-built products for India and additional markets. This collaboration reinforces our commitment to scalable, sustainable last-mile mobility while setting new benchmarks in technology, quality, customer experience, and a legacy of trust,” Mishra added.A cornerstone of this partnership is the commitment to localise component manufacturing for the E3W model’s production. Major components will be sourced and manufactured locally within India. This strategic approach serves multiple objectives: it strengthens India’s automotive supply chain ecosystem, creates

employment opportunities, reduces overall vehicle costs, and ensures rapid after-sales support and spare parts availability for end customers. The E3W concept unveiled at the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 showcased innovative features tailored to Indian mobility challenges. These include adaptive ground clearance for monsoon-affected roads, enhanced safety features, ergonomic design for extended commutes, enhanced thermal management for tropical climates, and flexible interior configurations for multiple use cases — from passenger transport to goods delivery and emergency services.

CropLife India wants the Pesticides Management Bill to secure data for five years

Mumbai: CropLife India, which represents almost 70% of the domestic pesticide industry, has urged the government to include a five-year regulatory data protection provision in the draft Pesticides Management Bill, even as Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan stated on Friday that laws pertaining to seeds and pesticides are almost ready and likely to be tabled in the next Parliament session for passage.The group cautioned that businesses are deterred from using safer and more advanced crop protection methods in India by its absence. Speaking to reporters, CropLife India Chairman Ankur Aggarwal stated that the comprehensive safety, efficacy, residue, and environmental data that a business must produce prior to registering a new pesticide are not protected under the present framework, which is still based on the Insecticides Act, 1968. “In the absence of regulatory data protection (RDP), innovators are unable to recover their investments. Farmers, in turn, continue to depend on older and generic molecules, many of which are more



hazardous and less effective against evolving pest resistance,” he said. The association submitted formal recommendations to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare on the draft Bill, proposing a time-bound framework of five years from the first registration. The proposal would cover both patented new molecules and off-patent ones where a company has independently generated fresh registration data. Indian agriculture loses between 10 and 35 per cent of annual crop output to pests and diseases — translating to over ₹2 lakh crore in economic damage each year. Of the 338 molecules currently registered in India, a large share were introduced three to four decades ago. Meanwhile, China offers six years of data protection after first registration, while the EU, Brazil, and the United

States each provide 10 years.Aggarwal said newer chemistries are more targeted, require lower doses, and are better suited to mounting challenges — erratic pest pressures, growing resistance, and tightening residue requirements in key export markets such as the EU and the UK. Industry bodies in Assam have already flagged that nearly 40 million kilograms of premium tea exports face exposure to stricter European residue norms. The Satwant Reddy Committee (2007) recommended three years of data exclusivity to honour India’s TRIPS obligations, and the Dalwai Committee on Doubling Farmers’ Income (2018) endorsed regulatory data protection as a tool to attract investment in newer pesticides.The association also flagged the unregulated growth of online pesticide sales as a serious

loophole, noting that e-commerce platforms are currently not required to obtain licences, verify seller credentials, or enforce approved geographic restrictions — allowing spurious products to reach farmers unchecked. On corporate liability, CropLife India cautioned against the indiscriminate prosecution of directors and senior officials with no operational link to an alleged violation. Instead, it recommended holding only nominated responsible persons liable, following the model of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. The submission further raised alarms over emergency prohibition provisions in the draft Bill that could, in practice, convert a temporary measure into a de facto permanent ban without conclusive scientific findings — a significant departure from the 60-to-90-day ceiling under the 1968 Act.“The final law must keep regulation science-based and time-bound, act firmly against illegal trade, and create a credible pathway for newer, safer, and more effective crop protection technologies to reach farmers faster,” Aggarwal said.

The protein shift is giving India’s dairy sector much-needed margin

Mumbai: India produces more than 216-239 million tonnes of milk a year, making it the greatest milk producer in the world. However, because of government-controlled pricing, the sector has long relied on volume sales with low income. A change is now being brought about by an increasing emphasis on protein consumption. Companies are being forced to reconsider monetization due to the growing need for protein. Higher-margin goods like whey, cheese, and fortified dairy are replacing volume-driven sales.According to Akshali Shah, “the move toward protein-rich, value-added products structurally improves profitability by enabling higher value realization per litre of milk and stronger product differentiation.” The change is not about abandoning liquid milk, which is still the cornerstone of nutrition, according to Srideep Kesavan, CEO of Heritage Foods Ltd. “The opportunity to improve profitability lies in building on this base, not moving away from it,” he said. Diets continue to be heavy in cereals, according to a nationwide survey conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and published in Nature Medicine in October 2025. Pulses and other low-quality sources account for over half of total protein intake. Approximately 73-80% of Indians do not consume the required amounts of protein. “The rise in protein awareness in India is both significant and structural, particularly among urban and younger consumers,” Shah added. Dr K Rathnam, CEO and whole-time director, Milky Mist Dairy Food, told Business Standard, “Post-Covid, awareness around nutrition has increased significantly, and protein has become a mainstream requirement, not just for fitness but overall well-being.” For a largely vegetarian country, dairy sits at the centre of this shift. The National Dairy Development Board



(NDDB) highlights that population growth, rising disposable incomes and urbanisation, combined with India’s lacto-vegetarian culture, are steadily driving demand for milk and milk products.An October 2024 report by the US Department of Agriculture’s Foreign Agricultural Service notes that India’s middle-class growth, health awareness, and ecommerce are boosting dairy consumption. According to MarkNtel, India’s whey protein market was ₹795 crore in 2023. It is projected to reach ₹1,078 crore by 2030. “There is huge traction, particularly in the last year,” said Rathnam. “Protein was earlier limited to gym-goers, but now it has become a mainstream requirement for overall health.” In contrast, protein derivatives such as whey, casein, cheese, paneer, Greek yoghurt, and milk protein concentrates deliver higher returns. “Converting milk into products like protein derivatives can deliver approximately 1.5x to 3x higher value,” said Shah.She added that products such as cheese and whey deliver margins of around 25-45 per cent, far higher than fluid milk.Rathnam said: “In value-added products, margins can go up to around 40 per

cent, compared to significantly lower levels in liquid milk. That’s where the real expansion is happening.”Kesavan cautioned against viewing this purely as a product shift: “Dairy economics are best understood at a portfolio level. Milk builds trust and scale; value-added products build margins. The real opportunity lies in increasing consumption frequency across the day.” Companies such as Amul, Parag Milk Foods, Heritage Foods, and Milky Mist are positioning themselves as nutrition companies.“When managed through an integrated product mix, every dairy product contributes to overall value creation,” said Shah. “With Avvatar (whey protein), we are moving up the value chain, transforming whey into a consumer-facing protein brand.” Milky Mist has taken a sharper approach. “We are a 100 per cent value-added company, no liquid milk in the market,” Rathnam said. “We saw the protein opportunity early and built a portfolio around Greek yoghurt, high-protein paneer and cheese.” India’s position as the world’s largest milk producer gives domestic players an edge. Whey, once treated as a by-product, is now a high-value input. “Indian companies are no longer just competing on price, but building end-to-end capabilities,” Shah added. But structural bottlenecks remain. According to the Brickwork Ratings Dairy Sector Report 2025, less than 18 per cent of milk is handled by the organised sector. This limits value addition.“Scaling protein-led products requires advanced processing and strong cold-chain systems,” said Shah.Kesavan pointed to farm-level issues: “Milk quality, particularly protein levels, needs to improve. Standardisation is critical for scaling protein extraction.” Rathnam added: “You need high-end technology and strong cold-chain systems. Without that, scaling protein products across India becomes difficult.”

In China and India, renewable energy sources surpass the world’s need for electricity

New Delhi: According to a recent global power analysis, the world’s robust need for electricity in 2025 was surpassed by clean energy sources due to record growth in solar, particularly in China and India.According to a report published after midnight Tuesday London time by the energy think tank Ember, clean power generation increased by 887 terawatt hours last year, surpassing the growth of 849 terawatt hours in worldwide electricity demand.Ember examines data on power from 215 countries and 91 countries in 2025, which the company claims accounts for 93% of the world’s consumption. For the first time in modern history, renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, hydropower, and other clean energy sources, accounted for more than one-third of the global electricity mix last year, rising 33.8% to 10,730 terawatt hours. It’s encouraging news for a world plagued by climate change, which is caused by burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas to fulfill expanding demands from electrification, population increase, and economic expansion. The analysis is particularly pertinent in light of the world’s energy crisis, which has been made worse by the US war in Iran. Coal power’s proportion of worldwide generation fell below one-third in another historic milestone, falling 0.6% to 63 terawatt hours.Nicolas Fulghum, senior data analyst at Ember and the report’s principal author, stated, “We’re coming from a period over the last few decades where new electricity demand growth meant growth in fossil generation.” “We’re now moving into a world where that’s no longer the case.”Additionally: “Milestones like renewables overtaking coal mark an occasion, but they don’t tell us everything about the story in the power sector,” Fulghum said. “The big difference to 10, 15 years ago, where governments were pledging a build out of renewables, is that now those pledges are much more believable.” In 2025, so-



lar energy grew by 30%, meeting three-quarters of the previous year’s electricity demand rise and, along with wind power, fulfilling 99% of it. Solar overtook wind power globally for the first time, aiming to surpass nuclear power soon. Fossil fuel generation saw a modest decline of 0.2%, marking a rare year without an increase. The expansion of battery storage, which increased by 46% due to a 45% drop in costs, enabled the shift of 14% of solar generation to non-daytime hours. Expert Fulghum noted that clean energy is poised to meet rising demand from electric vehicles and industrial electrification, indicating a significant shift away from fossil fuels compared to previous decades. Last year marked a significant decline in fossil fuel generation in both China and India, with decreases of 0.9% (56 TWh) and 3.3% (56 TWh) respectively. Both countries are now diversifying their energy mix by increasing renewable sources. China led globally in solar capacity growth and accounted for most of the rise in wind generation, adding 138 TWh. India experienced record increases in solar and wind generation alongside strong hydropower output, alongside lower demand growth. The US and Europe also added significant solar capacity, with increases of 85 TWh and 60 TWh respectively, despite small increases in fossil fuel generation.

Xi Jinping Urges Hormuz Reopening In Rare Call With Saudi De Facto Ruler

Beijing: In a rare phone conversation with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Chinese President Xi Jinping broke his silence on the standoff over the Strait of Hormuz and called for the resumption of transit through the crucial waterway as well as an end to hostilities in the Middle East. According to a statement from the Chinese foreign ministry, Xi called the de facto ruler of the kingdom on Monday and said, “China calls for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, supports all efforts to restore peace and insists disputes be resolved through political and diplomatic means.” “The Strait of Hormuz should remain open to normal transit, which is in the common interest of regional countries and the international community.” After a tumultuous weekend in the Middle East that has clouded hopes for peace talks between the US and Iran, the Chinese leader made his most direct comments to yet on the crisis across the strait. Since the battle began on February 28, Iran has kept the strait virtually closed

to all but its own oil shipments, while the US has maintained a naval blockade over Hormuz, which connects the Persian Gulf to international markets. The most recent statements, which were made during Xi’s first phone conversation with the Saudi crown prince in more than three years, also expand on the Chinese president’s initial public words regarding the Iran War, which he made last week while meeting with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez. China, the world’s biggest importer of liquefied natural gas through Hormuz, has made restoring free transit in the strait a top priority.

Beijing used to rely on the Middle East for almost 40% of its oil imports, despite recent efforts to improve energy security and shield its economy from worldwide unrest. With the Middle East and North Africa making up over 7% of its total overseas sales, it is becoming increasingly important for the world’s largest exporter to unblock the flow of products through the Gulf. Chinese shipments to



the area fell 43% as a result of the March trade interruption. Oil prices fell after Iran declared on Friday that it will reopen the strait in response to a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. However, it swiftly changed its mind after the US refused to lift its own blockade and the US Navy attacked and boarded a cargo ship flying the Iranian flag in the Gulf of Oman.

The rules outlined in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea safeguard free movement of ves-

sels across choke places like the Strait of Malacca and Hormuz. Xi also told Prince Mohammed that China supports Middle Eastern countries “taking their future and destiny into their own hands” - a message that amounted to a call for nations in the region to reconsider their dependence on the US for security. The remarks employed language similar to that recently used by US President Donald Trump. At the onset of the war, he told the Iranian people that “now is the time to seize control of your destiny.”

Two Australian states are offering free public transportation as fuel prices rise

Canberra: As long-term wars in the Middle East raise supply risks, two Australian governments will temporarily provide free public transportation to mitigate the consequences of rising fuel prices. According to an email from the state administration, residents of Victoria will not be charged for public transportation for a month starting on March 31. According to a media announcement from Tasmania’s administration, bus and ferry charges will be eliminated from March 30 to July 1. With hundreds of service stations reporting shortages and delivery problems in the mining and agriculture industries, Australia is at high risk for gasoline shortages. In an effort to calm apprehensive households and



companies, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese stated on Friday that short-term supply is secure. The central bank’s forecast for inflation is also being complicated by rising fuel prices. Prior to the Middle East war’s supply shock, price pressures had al-

ready risen. At its most recent meeting, the Reserve Bank of Australia decided to raise the key cash rate to 4.1%, a move that caused controversy. Two more RBA rate increases this year are completely priced by traders as of Thursday. On Satur-

day, Australia unveiled plans for the government to guarantee private sector purchases from the global market as part of new measures to strengthen fuel security. On Monday, the most recent legislation is scheduled to be introduced into parliament.

Keir Starmer of the UK looks to the EU while ties with the US are strained by the Iran War



Washington: As the UK’s so-called special relationship with the United States deteriorates due to the Iran conflict, the government of Britain is scheduled to announce legislation next month to bring the nation closer to the European Union. Ten years after Britons narrowly decided to leave the EU, Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s effort to strengthen ties with the 27-nation group is gaining momentum due to President Donald Trump’s unpredictability and barrage of insults directed at America’s longtime friend. Evie Aspinall, director of the British Foreign Policy Group think tank, told AFP, “We have a government that is already eager to move closer towards the EU, and the events in Iran provide an opportunity to speed up that process.” The EU “reset” law that Starmer’s administration is drafting will grant ministers the authority to “dynamic align” UK standards with EU single market regulations as they change. According to a government official who spoke to AFP under condition of anonymity, King Charles III will make the announcement on May 13 when he reads out Starmer’s legislative objectives for the upcoming months. Since his Labour party defeated the Conservatives, who had carried out the 2016 Brexit

referendum, in the general election of 2024, Starmer has frequently urged for a closer economic and security partnership with Europe. Rob Jetten, the leader of the Netherlands, was informed by him on Tuesday that “he believed the partnership between the UK and the bloc needed to be fit for the challenges we were facing today” as he increased those calls in recent days. The EU is Britain’s biggest trading partner, while the International Monetary Fund warned this week that the UK will be the advanced economy hardest hit by the Iran conflict. “The UK official stated, “Iran has definitely made it (the reset) more prescient.” They continued, “We must strengthen economic resilience throughout the continent. Starmer refused to involve Britain in the US and Israel’s initial strikes on February 28, angering Trump, although he has since allowed American forces to use UK bases for a “limited defensive purpose”. Under pressure at home for his disastrous decision to appoint former Jeffrey Epstein associate Peter Mandelson as ambassador to Washington, Starmer has received plaudits for standing up to Trump in the face of repeated taunts from the US president. Days ago, Trump threatened in a phone interview with Sky News

to scrap a US-UK trade deal that limited the impact on Britain of his tariffs blitz.

“There’s no doubt that there is now momentum in the UK-EU relationship partly as a result of Trump’s unreliable behaviour,” David Henig, an expert on UK’s post-Brexit trade policy, told AFP. “Independent UK trade policy looks much harder, the prospects of working with the EU much brighter.” Starmer’s administration hopes to table the EU legislation in the next few months, meaning it could come around the time of the 10th anniversary of the Brexit referendum, held in June 2016. MPs will get to approve whether to provide the government with a mechanism to adopt EU rules -- sometimes without a full parliamentary vote -- in areas where it has already signed deals with the bloc. They include a trade agreement designed to ease red tape on food and plant exports and plans for an electricity deal that would integrate the UK into the EU’s internal electricity market. Britain and the EU are also aiming to finalise negotiations on a youth mobility scheme in time for a joint summit in Brussels expected in late June or early July. Starmer has ruled out rejoining the single market or returning to free movement. The Liberal Democrats, Britain’s traditional third party, wants him to cross one of his other red lines by negotiating a customs union with the EU. “We need to be doubling down on relations with reliable partners who share our interests and values,” the Liberal Democrats foreign affairs spokesman Calum Miller told AFP. But Brexit remains a toxic issue and the hard-right Reform UK party, leading opinion polls and headed by Eurosceptic firebrand Nigel Farage, have branded the legislation “a betrayal” of the referendum’s narrow result. Surveys regularly now show, however, that most Britons regret the vote to leave the EU, something Starmer hopes to capitalise on. Rising cost-of-living pressures on family households, which UK finance minister Rachel Reeves has blamed on Trump for starting the war “without a clear exit plan”, could also influence minds. “When the relationship with the United States is fracturing, it means there’s reduced opposition to a closer relationship with the EU among the public,” said Aspinall.

Lori Chavez-DeRemer, Trump’s labor secretary, resigns amid a misconduct inquiry



Washington: The administration stated on Monday that Lori Chavez-DeRemer, Donald Trump’s labor secretary, is resigning due to a number of misconduct claims, including drinking while at work and having an affair with a subordinate. Trump spokesperson Steven Cheung posted on social media that “Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer will be leaving the Administration to take a position in the private sector.” “By safeguarding American workers, implementing fair labor practices, and assisting Americans in acquiring new skills to improve their lives, she has done an outstanding job in her role.” After Attorney General Pam Bondi and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, Chavez-DeRemer is the third female cabinet member to leave during the president’s second term. She wrote on the X social media platform:

“It has been an honor and a privilege to serve in this historic Administration and work for the greatest President of my lifetime.” Chavez-DeRemer’s resignation follows her involvement in multiple political and personal controversies, which are under investigation by the department’s

inspector general for alleged professional misconduct. Allegations include an affair with a security detail member, maintaining a personal alcohol stash in her office, and misuse of government resources for personal travel. Additionally, her aides purportedly attempted to direct grants to politically connected individuals. Further scrutiny has emerged regarding personal communications between Chavez-DeRemer, her family, and young staffers, coupled with serious accusations against her husband, Shawn DeRemer, who faced allegations of sexual assault from female staff members at the department’s headquarters. Despite Chavez-DeRemer’s claims of progress during her tenure, including promoting new job pathways and initiatives related to artificial intelligence and prescription drug costs, her administration faced significant backlash for cancelling international grants aimed at combating child and slave labor, as well as for proposing rollbacks of over 60 workplace regulations, which drew heavy criticism from union leaders and safety experts. Following her resignation, Keith Sonderling is set to assume the role of acting secretary of labor.

Japan Ends Ban On Lethal Arms Exports

Tokyo: In a significant shift from its postwar pacifist policy, Japan lifted its ban on the sale of lethal weapons on Tuesday as it looks to expand its arms industry in response to concerns about North Korean and Chinese aggression. The new guideline’s ratification by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi’s Cabinet removes a last set of obstacles for the sale of numerous weapons, including combat drones and a next-generation fighter plane. China denounced the policy shift, but Southeast Asia and Europe have expressed interest in it, and Japan’s defense allies, including Australia, have generally embraced it. The change’s opponents claim it will raise international tensions, violate Japan’s pacifist constitution, and endanger the safety of the Japanese people. The new policy will “ensure safety for Japan and further contribute to the peace and stability in the region and the international society as the security environment around our country rapidly changes,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara told reporters. “The government will strategically promote defense equipment transfers to create a security environment that is desirable for Japan and to build up the industrial base that can support fighting resilience.” Japan has long prohibited most arms exports under its post-World War II pacifist constitution. It has made recent changes because of rising global and regional tensions, but exports were limited to five areas: rescue, transport, alerts, surveillance and mine-sweeping. The new guidelines scrap those limits and allows the export of equipment such as fighter jets, missiles and destroyers. That’s a major change from existing exports such as flak jackets, gas masks and civilian-use vehicles that Japan has sent to Ukraine and intelligence radars sold to the Philippines. For now, such exports will be limited to 17 countries that have signed defense equipment and technology transfer agreements with Japan. They also must be approved by the National Security Council, and the government will monitor how the weapons are managed afterward. In principle, Japan still will not export lethal weapons to countries that are at war. Japan has recently shifted its military export policies, allowing the sale of lethal weapons and components, including Patriot missiles to the US. This change supports a joint development initiative of a sixth-generation fighter jet with Britain and Italy, and marks Japan’s largest arms deal with Australia, featuring the delivery of three frigates. The defense industry, once seen as a poor investment, is gaining traction due to rising geopolitical tensions with China, North Korea, and Russia, prompting increased government support for military innovation and defense contracts.

The senior religious leader claims that there has been ongoing violence against Jews in the UK



Washington: The Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom stated on Sunday that British Jews are subject to “a sustained campaign of violence and intimidation” following an attempted arson at a synagogue in London, the most recent of several similar incidents. The incident that caused minor damage to Kenton United Synagogue on Saturday night comes after counter-terrorism police are looking into a number of fires at locations connected to the Jewish community and an Iranian opposition media. “A persistent campaign of

violence and intimidation against the Jewish community of the UK is gathering momentum,” Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis stated on X. “Thank God, no lives have been lost, but we cannot, and must not, wait for that to change before we understand just how dangerous this moment is for all of our society,” said he. The attacks “appalled” Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who promised that “those responsible will be found and brought to justice.” Following attacks on synagogues, Jewish charity ambulances,

and a Persian-language media organization critical of Iran’s government during the past month, London’s Metropolitan Police force announced it has dispatched additional uniformed and plainclothes police to northwest London. The arson attack on the Kenton synagogue occurred shortly after an attempt to ignite bottles of fluid outside a Jewish charity’s former offices. Fortunately, no injuries were reported, and several individuals aged from teens to 40s have been arrested in connection with these events. While police have not officially linked the incidents, Counter Terrorism Policing London is investigating due to similarities and online claims of responsibility. These claims have been made by the group Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamia, which Israel’s government identifies as a recently established entity with potential ties to Iranian proxy activities. This group has also released a video threatening an attack on Israel’s London embassy with drones carrying harmful substances. Although the embassy was not attacked, police conducted a search in Kensington Gardens after discovering suspicious items, including jars with powder, which later tested non-harmful. The UK government has accused Iran of employing criminal proxies to target both opposition media and Jewish communities on European soil. In a report, MI5 stated that over 20 serious Iran-backed plots had been averted in the year leading to October. Some experts express skepticism regarding the legitimacy of Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamia, suggesting it may not be a well-organized group, urging caution regarding its claims.

What we should know about both extrinsic and intrinsic asthma

Wheezing, coughing, and tightness in the chest are symptoms of asthma, a chronic lung disease that causes the airways to shrink and become inflamed. Extrinsic asthma, sometimes referred to as allergic asthma or atopic asthma, is characterized by symptoms that are triggered by allergens such as dust mites, pollen, and mold. It is the most prevalent type of asthma. Weather, activity, illnesses, and stress are some of the factors for intrinsic asthma, commonly referred to as nonallergic asthma or nonatopic asthma. The causes, signs, and therapies of both intrinsic and extrinsic asthma will be covered in this article. Intrinsic and extrinsic asthma are two subtypes of asthma, which people more commonly refer to as allergic and nonallergic asthma. Both types cause the same symptoms. The difference between the two subtypes is what causes and triggers asthma symptoms. The treatments are similar for each type, although the prevention strategies differ. In people with extrinsic asthma, allergens trigger respiratory symptoms. Common triggers for extrinsic asthma include: pollen mold



dust mites pet dander In some cases, a person is allergic to more than one substance, and several allergens trigger asthma symptoms. In people with intrinsic asthma, allergies are not responsible for the symptoms. Instead, the following triggers may cause symptoms: cold humidity stress exercise pollution irritants in the air, such as smoke respiratory infections, such as colds, the flu, and sinus infections In some cases, intrinsic asthma can occur with no known cause. Prevalence

Extrinsic or allergic asthma is the most common form of the disease. About 60-90% of people with asthma have allergic asthma. Intrinsic or nonallergic asthma is less common, occurring in anywhere from 10% to 40% of people with asthma. It occurs more often in females than males and typically develops later in life than extrinsic asthma. Causes In all types of asthma, a person has overly sensitive airways and airway inflammation, which produces asthma symptoms. Inflammation causes swelling in the airways that narrows the tubes and makes breathing difficult. The body also produces excess mucus, which further

impairs breathing. These factors decrease the amount of air that can get into the lungs. The inflammatory processes are similar in extrinsic and intrinsic asthma. Airway biopsies have demonstrated that inflammation in asthma generally involves the same cells that play prominent roles whether the individual is allergic or not. This supports the belief that the consequences of mast cell activation mediated by a variety of cells are key to the development of clinical asthma. Research has also found that there may be more similarities between the two types of asthma than researchers previously thought. Both types of asthma involve the production of IgE locally in the airways in response to the relevant triggers. Extrinsic asthma occurs when the immune system overreacts to a harmless substance, such as pollen or dust. The body releases an antibody called immunoglobulin E (IgE). The release of this antibody leads to inflammation and asthma symptoms. Intrinsic asthma occurs when something other than allergens triggers an immune system response. The body then releases IgE. People are not always able to identify the trigger.

Six of the world's most extraordinary places to dive

Years ago, I impulsively signed up for scuba diving as a university elective. I was heading on a round-the-world trip and thought it might be useful. I never imagined it would shape the way I travel for decades to come. I'm hardly alone. For a growing number of travellers, diving is not just an activity to add to the itinerary, but the reason for the trip itself. people travel and experience a destination chief brand and membership issues more than one million travel resumed post-pandemic a 50% increase in divers Open Water Certification. plunge, I've logged more world, in locations ranging around Svalbard to Indonesia's isolated marine lakes. however, the sport has conquered them for future generations Fiji's soft-coral gardens to shark-these are six of the world's most exhilarating experiences making them worth planning a trip around this year. I first understood why Fiji is called the soft coral capital of the world while snorkelling the Great Astrolabe Reef decades ago. Even from the shallows, the colours were astonishing, with oranges, purples, pinks and greens flashing from sponges, sea fans, crinoids and whips. According to the World Wildlife Fund, Fiji's waters contain more than three-quarters of the world's hard and soft coral species. I've returned many times since, most recently to Rainbow Reef in the Somosomo Strait between the islands of Taveuni and Vanua Levu, where fuchsia- and tangerine-hued soft corals blanket the reef. Migrating humpbacks also pass through the channel from July to October. At Great White Wall, the area's most famous dive site, operators time descents for slack tide, when luminous white soft corals are in full bloom about 65ft (19.8m) down. Surrounded on nearly all sides by the Sea of Cortez and Pacific Ocean, Mexico's Baja Peninsula is a marine migration corridor and its southernmost reaches offer some of the best diving in the country. In a single day here, I've had my fins nipped by cheeky sea lions, scuba dived shipwrecks and snorkelled with juvenile whale sharks. Photographer Jay Clue describes Baja's waters as a "bustling superhighway for migratory marine species, offering an incredible show that shifts with each season", from the world's largest aggregations of rays to powerful top predators and massive schools of fish. The seasonal line up is extraordinary. From mid-Dec to April, humpback whales migrate along the peninsula and it's common to see them spouting close to shore and hear their singing on dives. Free divers and snorkellers can mingle among mobula rays when they move through the Sea of Cortez in large schools between May and July. And from mid-October to December, striped marlin put on an underwater show for divers while hunting migrating sardines and mackerel in Magdalena Bay.



"Scuba diving fundamentally shifts how you see the world," says Kristin Valette Wirth, a PADI instructor and former PADI Worldwide, which has seen over 100 million certifications each year. Since 1959, she says, PADI has seen over 100 million Advanced Open Water certifications. In the years since my first dive in 1980, I've seen more than 500 dives around the world, from the Arctic waters to the Spice Islands and Palau. Perhaps more profoundly, it's taught me with the locals to do their very best to protect the reefs and the divers and snorkellers. From the French Polynesia, I've seen some of the best rated places to dive – and the new experiences making them worth planning a trip around this year. I first understood why Fiji is called the soft coral capital of the world while snorkelling the Great Astrolabe Reef decades ago. Even from the shallows, the colours were astonishing, with oranges, purples, pinks and greens flashing from sponges, sea fans, crinoids and whips. According to the World Wildlife Fund, Fiji's waters contain more than three-quarters of the world's hard and soft coral species. I've returned many times since, most recently to Rainbow Reef in the Somosomo Strait between the islands of Taveuni and Vanua Levu, where fuchsia- and tangerine-hued soft corals blanket the reef. Migrating humpbacks also pass through the channel from July to October. At Great White Wall, the area's most famous dive site, operators time descents for slack tide, when luminous white soft corals are in full bloom about 65ft (19.8m) down. Surrounded on nearly all sides by the Sea of Cortez and Pacific Ocean, Mexico's Baja Peninsula is a marine migration corridor and its southernmost reaches offer some of the best diving in the country. In a single day here, I've had my fins nipped by cheeky sea lions, scuba dived shipwrecks and snorkelled with juvenile whale sharks. Photographer Jay Clue describes Baja's waters as a "bustling superhighway for migratory marine species, offering an incredible show that shifts with each season", from the world's largest aggregations of rays to powerful top predators and massive schools of fish. The seasonal line up is extraordinary. From mid-Dec to April, humpback whales migrate along the peninsula and it's common to see them spouting close to shore and hear their singing on dives. Free divers and snorkellers can mingle among mobula rays when they move through the Sea of Cortez in large schools between May and July. And from mid-October to December, striped marlin put on an underwater show for divers while hunting migrating sardines and mackerel in Magdalena Bay.

20 fabulous family spring days out in the UK

Spring has arrived at Wicken Fen, one of Europe's most important wetlands, and with it the first summer migrants. Chiffchaffs are usually the earliest, with their rhythmic song ringing out across the fens. Then, if the weather is mild, blackcaps and willow warblers might join them. Listen closely, especially early morning or at dusk, for the foghorn-like calls of the booming bittern across the reedbeds. There's a pushchair- and wheelchair-friendly boardwalk around Sedge Fen, and wheelchair-accessible wildlife hides. Look out for the electric blue flash of a kingfisher, and male marsh harriers performing their dramatic sky-dancing flights as the breeding season gets under way, before the cuckoos arrive in late April. When Dan Pearson created the landscape design at Goodwood Art Foundation sculpture park, which opened last May, he planned 24 seasonal moments to complement the art-dotted trails through woodland, glades and meadows. This is the first spring visitors will see his graphic plantings of daffodils and bluebells, cherry blossoms and the katsura grove coming into copper-coloured leaf. Over the Easter holidays, children can pick up a free Art in Nature pack to create rubbings and collages inspired by the shapes and textures. There is artful nature of a different kind at nearby Petworth's spring festival, with more than 100 pots of spring bulbs in flower, willow foraging and basket making workshops, and other garden-themed kids' activities. From Italian small plates in Margate to Japanese ramen in Deal, the Kent coast has upped its foodie credentials. Dig in at the Broadstairs food festival, which pops up on the seafront over Easter (3-5 April). There's a delicious lineup of chefs, street food stalls and local artisan producers, plus food-themed arts and crafts workshops, from chocolate lollipop making to screen printing napkins with fig, oyster, crab or seaweed designs. Broadstairs is a treat to eat your way around anytime, with seafood at Kebbells, tapas at Bar Ingo and, of course, a sundae at Morelli's Formica-tastic ice-cream parlour. The deep dark woods at Grizedale Forest in the Lake District offer an action-packed day out for families, with Go Ape treetop thrills, adrenaline-pumping mountain biking and sculpture-filled walking trails (including a Gruffalo orienteering route and a Room on the Broom nature walk for Julia Donaldson fans). Now you can add stargazing to the list. The new Grizedale Observatory opened last May, the Lake District's first public observatory and planetarium. There are family sessions every Saturday at 4pm, where budding astronomers can touch real meteorites and watch a show in the planetarium. Easter holiday events include Jupiter viewings, aurora nights and afternoon planetarium shows. Sir John Vanbrugh was a playwright with no architectural experience when he was commissioned in 1699 to build a massive new house for a fellow Kit-Cat Club member, the Earl of Carlisle. It would be fair to say that Castle Howard was a decent first stab. In celebration of the tercentenary of its creator, there are new tours giving unprecedented access to areas of the house, follies and monuments not usually open to the public. Plus you can meet baby lambs born on the estate at the magical Skelf Island adventure playground (4 and 5 April). Each year, six champion Magnolia campbellii are eagerly watched in six of the Great Gardens of Cornwall,



flowers), spring is declared to have officially arrived in England. This year it happened on 27 February. The Gulf Stream helps hurry the start of the season along here, and means you may see a few bluebells popping their heads up in the Easter holidays. Tehidy woods is famous for its carpets of bluebells – the first were spotted in early April last year. That will be just in time for fantastical theatre company Rogue Otherworld's Wild Awake show, which weaves between the trees telling the story of the forest awakening, guided by the Wild Spring Hare. It's the 100th anniversary of AA Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh this year, so good reason to follow the honey-loving bear and his friends down to the real-life Hundred Acre Wood in Ashdown Forest. Milne wrote the children's classic at Cotchford Farm (now a holiday rental) on the edge of the forest, where he lived with his wife and his son, Christopher Robin. Follow the Pooh Walks (0.6 or 2 miles) from Gills Lap to trace out spots from the book, including The Enchanted Place, the Heffalump trap and Roo's sandy pit. Don't leave without playing a game of poohsticks on the Poohsticks Bridge. Pooh fans can plot a return trip for the summer holidays to catch The Big One Hundred celebration, which will include a giant puppet roaming through the woods, interactive performances and five new walking routes. The walkways, bridges and steps that make up the Gobbins cliff path cling to sheer basalt rock, the waves crashing below. This elemental trail was built by the railway engineer Berkeley Deane Wise in 1902, and now can only be followed on 2.5hr guided tours, which have been paused since last year due to rockfall. They are due to restart on 20 March, and it's a thrilling stop on the Causeway Coastal Route. Alternatively, the Blackhead Path is almost as dramatic and free, starting at nearby Whitehead. The route hugs the coast past smuggler's caves and rocky coves, before taking the steep steps up to the clifftop Blackhead Lighthouse. A Mauds ice-cream at Coastal Coffee back in Whitehead is just reward for the climb. Last year, BBC's Springwatch was based at the Peak District's Longshaw Estate. Over the weeks of live broadcasts, Chris Packham and Michaela Strachan spotted short-eared owls feeding voles to

their chicks, kept an eye on pied flycatcher nests, and tracked hares, deer and a host of other wildlife across the estate's habitats. The Padley Gorge and Burbage Brook walking route is particularly good in spring, winding past the pond to the ancient woodland of Padley Gorge, with its twisting oak trees and moss-covered boulders. Back out on the meadow, watch for birds of prey overhead – buzzards, red kites, peregrine and kestrels – and adders emerging from hibernation in the grass (so dogs need to stay on leads). For a hands-on dig into London's history, try one of the Thames Explorer Trust's In the Footsteps of Mudlarks tours. Normally anyone searching the river's foreshore needs a permit from the Port of London authority, which has a



waiting list running into the thousands. These two-hour guided tours give combbers the chance to temporarily jump the queue, with archaeology experts on hand to help find and identify surface artefacts – maybe smoking pipes, pottery or even bones. Children over eight can join regular scheduled tours, while during the school holidays there are special family sessions (aimed at ages 5-12) meeting at the Brunel Museum in Rotherhithe. Off the coast of North Berwick, the Bass Rock is home to the world's largest colony of northern gannets. After spending the winter in warmer seas, the birds, with their distinctive black wingtips and yellow heads, return in February. Boat trips from the Scottish Seabird Centre restart in late March, and range from exhilarating RIB "seafaris" to gentler catamaran cruises, which loop around Craigleith (home to almost 10,000 breeding puffins) and Bass Rock, sometimes accompanied by dolphins and seals. Back on dry land, the centre has live wildlife cameras, as well as exhibits, games and films, or join a spring beach clean (10 April) along the sand. "In the very middle ... on a low hill, rose the ruined castle," wrote Enid Blyton in the first Famous Five adventure, Five on a Treasure Island. Blyton holidayed for decades on Dorset's Isle of Purbeck, and the imposing remains of Corfe Castle are believed to be the inspiration for Kirrin Castle. The most storybook way to arrive is in the vintage carriages of the Swanage Railway, which the author herself took, chugging through the countryside in a plume of smoke and steam. Try to catch the new Magic Faraway Tree film (out now) at a cinema to complete the Blyton journey.



Back in the iron age, crannogs – roundhouse settlements built on artificial islands of stone and timber – would have been a common sight on lochs across Scotland. Their remnants have been remarkably preserved thanks to being buried beneath the cold, dark, peaty waters. The remains of 17 have been found in Loch Tay alone, and on its shores the Scottish Crannog Centre reconstructed these ancient structures in an immersive living museum, until it was destroyed by fire in 2021. It reopened nearby in 2024, and this spring will complete its first new crannog. To celebrate, join The Crannog is Hatching event on 4-5 April, exploring the traditions of birth and renewal, with springtime foods in the Feasting Hall. At the Scottish sculpture park Jupiter Artland, you can get a unique perspective on two of its works of art – by swimming in them. Joana Vasconcelos's wiggling, vibrantly coloured Gateway pool and Charles Jencks's Teletubbyland-like Cells of Life are open to bathers. Gateway is created from 11,366 hand-painted Portuguese tiles, and is bookable for half hour sessions from 2 April. Jencks's lakes, surrounded by undulating grassy landforms, are open for swimmers every Sunday from 11am to 12pm (both over-18s only). There are pieces by Tracey Emin, Antony Gormley, Anish Kapoor and Andy Goldsworthy elsewhere in the 120-acre park, which is a half-hour drive from Edinburgh. Budding artists can also give it a go in the Make Studio, filled with materials – an invitation to get messy with paint, clay and more. Wales's largest castle, Caerphilly, reopened last July after a two-year, £8m renovation by Cadw, the Welsh government's historic environment service. Built in the 13th century, the whole stronghold covers about 12 hectares (30 acres), with wide water defences, hulking great walls, stern-looking gatehouses and a leaning tower that's even more leaning than Pisa's (reputedly the result of gunpowder damage during the civil war). The most head-turning of the recent upgrades is the Great Hall dining room, now dressed for its medieval heyday. Elsewhere interactive exhibits bring the castle's long history to life, and a family of giant, smoke-snorting (animatronic) dragons live in a lair beside the moat. On Saturday 4 April the grounds of the Hawarden Estate will be filled with vintage fairground rides for its Great Easter Show – the ferris wheel spinning, the carousel cranking out the waltz and squeals coming from the red-and-white-striped helter-skelter. Alongside there are circus skills workshops, a dog show, craft sessions and an egg-and-spoon race. If you miss out on the fete do not fear – the fun continues all season with a kids' Explorer Club every Saturday and classes at the Walled Garden School (how to build a birdhouse on 7 April; a spring foraging walk on 11 April). There is also a self-guided explorer trail from the farm shop, with a 10-metre trumpet to blast and secret mirrors to spot among the trees. Standing 39 metres above the Dee valley in north Wales, the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct is the highest canal aqueduct in the world and, at 307 metres, the longest in Britain. It's described in its Unesco World Heritage listing as "a masterpiece of creative genius". See it up close on a 45-minute trip on board the Little Star, which departs from close to the Canal & River Trust's Trevor Basin Visitor Centre five times a day from 1 April. Alternatively, walk across the towpath for free (you will need a good head for heights, although there are railings) and continue along the Llangollen canal to Llangollen. There, hike up to the ruins of Castell Dinas Brân overlooking the town, then pick up some homemade butter fudge at Cottage Cream 'n' Candy. West Wales has plenty of stunning walks, and these will be joined in April by a new waymarked route: the 83-mile (134km) source-to-sea Teifi Valley Trail.

ENTERTAINMENT

Rihanna's 7-month-old daughter appears on her first magazine cover

New work: That cover job is already being done by Rihanna's 7-month-old baby,Rocki, the third child of Rihanna and A\$AP Rocky, made her public debut by co-starring with her mother on the cover of W Magazine's Pop Issue. Rihanna posted on Instagram, "Baby Rocki served summ serious on her first cover." "Came on set and shut her mother down!" For Rocki's major reveal, Rihanna went all out, asking for a unique headpiece and diaper from Dior

Haute Couture.According to designer Jonathan Anderson, "the Haute Couture diaper is definitely a first for Dior." "Rihanna anticipates events before they happen. She is using unconventional thinking. I always have faith in the process when she comes up with an idea. Rihanna and A\$AP Rocky previously welcomed two sons, and Rocki is their first daughter. "She has changed a lot because she became a mother in that time span,

and that certainly changes you," A\$AP Rocky said on Rihanna's development to W. However, this woman has always had a magical quality. She acts on a different level from a philosophical standpoint. She is the most endearing and sincere person on the planet. Her enthusiasm is unique and unparalleled. I simply adore her." Just over a month has passed since the family encountered a terrifying circumstance before Rihanna and Rocki's joint cover.

On March 8, Ivanna Li-sette Ortiz is suspected of firing multiple rounds at their home's gate while Rihanna, A\$AP Rocky, and their kids were inside. Ortiz is accused of three felonies of shooting at an inhabited habitation or camper, ten felonies of assault with a semiautomatic firearm, and one count of attempted murder. Rihanna, her family, two employees, and two residents of a nearby home were all charged with ten assaults. There is presently no



known motivation for the shooting, and Ortiz has entered a not guilty plea.

Atlee and Shah Rukh Khan to reunite, South star to play villain

Mumbai: Shah Rukh Khan returned to cinema in 2024 with the blockbuster film Pathaan, grossing ₹1055 crore globally, and followed it with Jawan, which also crossed ₹1000 crore and earned him his first National Award. Reports suggest that SRK will reunite with director Atlee for a sequel, Jawan 2, after completing his upcoming film, King. The sequel's script has been finalized, and Atlee aims to cast a prominent South Indian actor as the antagonist. Jawan, which debuted Atlee's directorial work in Bollywood, follows a police officer, Azad (SRK), fighting for justice alongside five female inmates. The film received acclaim and won two awards at the 71st National Film Awards, including Best Actor for SRK. The next installment, Jawan 2, continues the legacy as the original Jawan set to release in theaters on December 24, 2026.



Richard Madden and Priyanka Chopra collaborate on a new project Citadel Season 2

New Delhi: Citadel is finally making a comeback for its second season following a three-year break and the cancellation of two planned spinoffs. With Priyanka Chopra and Richard Madden returning to action, the trailer for the upcoming installment offers a glimpse inside the global spy saga, suggesting larger stakes and an even more thrilling trip. The second season's trailer, which was unveiled on Tuesday, hinted at a new mission that appears to be larger, darker, and far riskier. The video is full of heart-pounding scenes, fierce fighting, and a sense of impending

danger. The return date of the spy series was also revealed by the creators. Mason Kane (Richard Madden), Nadia Sinh (Priyanka Chopra), and Bernard Orlick (Stanley Tucci) are shown reuniting in the trailer. As the dark syndicate Manticore tightens its hold, the three former elite members of the now-defunct intelligence agency Citadel are drawn back into the conflict. After that, the video depicts them getting together for a dangerous, international operation.Beyond the action, the teaser also suggests a larger group of agents and a network of startling betrayals.



It makes it evident that no one can be trusted because the stakes are bigger than ever and the distinction between a friend and an enemy becomes more hazy. The trailer of Citadel Season 2 has got social media users excited. Viewers praised the high-octane action, sleek visuals, and the chemistry between

Priyanka and Richard. One wrote, "Seated for Priyanka", with one sharing, "There is nothing Stanley Tucci can't do."One excited social media user wrote, "That moment when you can't decide who is more attractive to you: Stanley Tucci and Richard Madden. It's me. I am having this moment."

Abhishek Bachchan calls Aishwarya Rai his soulmate

Mumbai: Bollywood couple Aishwarya Rai and Abhishek Bachchan recently celebrated their 19th wedding anniversary, sharing a photo with their daughter Aaradhya. Abhishek described Aishwarya as his soulmate in an interview, reminiscing about their initial meeting during the filming of Dhai Akshar Prem Ke in 2000, highlighting their love developed while working on Umrao Jaan. He praised her role as a mother to Aaradhya and shared his secret to a



successful marriage, advising to say 'sorry' three times each night. The couple married on April 20, 2007, and welcomed Aaradhya in 2011. They maintain a private life but frequently attend pub-

lic events. Abhishek is currently awaiting the release of his film Raja Shivaji, a historical action film, set for May 1, along with another film titled King, scheduled for December 24, 2026.

Deepika Padukone shoots with director Punit Malhotra

New Delhi: Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone are about to become parents once more. The pair recently revealed that they are expecting their second child after having their daughter Dua in 2024, throwing fans into a frenzy on the internet. Deepika is dedicated to her profession despite the excitement. For the first time since the pregnancy news, director Punit Malhotra posted a photo of the actor from a shoot on Instagram. In the photo, Deepika is seen glowing in a white outfit, keeping things simple yet elegant, while Punit opted for a casual look. The actor chose not to reveal her baby bump, leaving fans curious about the nature of the project. Sharing the picture on Instagram, Punit praised Deepika for her warmth and professionalism, calling the shoot a "10/10"



experience and expressing gratitude for working with her. Soon after he shared the picture, fans flooded the comments section. One fan wrote, "She's truly wonderful!!!" Another commented, "Mrs Dhurandhar is glowing." One of the comments also read, "Dhurandhar's real life Yalina," while another added, "Queen lady superstar," with several others dropping fire and heart emojis.

Neetu Kapoor Redefines 'Age Is Just A Number'

New Delhi: The gripping trailer for the upcoming family film Daadi Ki Shaadi, starring Neetu Kapoor and Kapil Sharma, was released on Tuesday. Along with Riddhima Kapoor Sahni, who makes her big-screen debut in Daadi Ki Shaadi, the production also has Sarath Kumar and Sadia Khateeb in significant roles.In the first scene in the trailer, Kapil's family expresses worry about his marriage. He quickly meets Sadia Khateeb, a lovely, smart, and cozy woman who seems to be his ideal match. Sadia's grandmother, portrayed by Neetu Kapoor, chooses to marry herself before Kapil can start this new adventure, endangering his marriage. Kapil uses his usual Delhi-style strategies to try to stop Neetu from getting married. In order to scare Neetu's groom, played by R. Sarathkumar, he even invites in goons. But the groom is not at all what Kapil had anticipated.

Another significant turn of events occurs when Riddhima Kapoor Sahni, who is also portrayed in the movie as Neetu's daughter, interferes with her mother's impending marriage. There is complete turmoil and uncertainty at the end of the tape when it is revealed that Sarathkumar's character may not be who he says he is. Sharing a glimpse of the laughter ride on social media, the makers wrote, "Shaadi hogi daadi ki, aur entertain honge aap sab! Trailer out now. #DaadiKiShaadi in cinemas on 8th May, 2026. Gen D to Gen Z — all are invited. (sic)."Recently, the makers unveiled the song from the drama, Senti. The feel-good dance sequence has been picturized on Kapil, Neetu, Riddhima, and Sadia. Produced by Rtake Studios, along with BeingU Studios and Shimla Talkies, Daadi Ki Shaadi has been written and directed by Ashish R Mohan. It is slated to release in theatres on May 8, 2026.

Parth Samthaan goes on a social media detox After his family is attacked by trolls

Mumbai: After allegedly being the target of personal assaults, television personality Parth Samthaan has made the decision to take a temporary break from social media. The actor posted a number of anecdotes on social media, expressing his profound disgust with phony accounts and online hate speech. He also said that the whole thing had a profound impact on him. Parth wrote in his social media remark that although he has always had a positive attitude and perspective, several recent instances in which "bot accounts" posted "rub-bish" about his personal life have wounded and infuriated him. Parth implied that he is likely aware of who might be responsible for the trolling without naming anyone, but he said he would prefer not to take the issue publicly. He also mentioned that instead of devoting time to filing complaints



with cybercrime authorities, he now would rather take a temporary sabbatical from social media and concentrate on his TV show. "I've always been a calm, upbeat person who concentrates on

the positive, but lately I've spotted someone purchasing bot accounts and utilizing those phony identities to make offensive remarks about my family, myself, and my personal life. It's shocking and really hurt-

ful. "I am furious," Parth wrote. "I'm guessing I know the person behind all this but it's pointless to take names ... due to which... To be continued... #DETOX."He further announcing his social media break, stated, "I have decided to take a break from social media for sometime can't drain more energy on complaining to cyber crime dept ..rather ..focus on my life and my role as Mahid. Love PS.Talking about Parth Samthaan, on the professional front, the actor is currently seen as Mahid in the show Seher Hone Ko Hai, which also stars Mahhi Vij Rishita Singh, Kanika Maheshwari, and others. He rose to fame with popular television projects including Kasautii Zindagii Kay 2, where he starred opposite Erica Fernandes. The actor had first gained popularity with the youth-centric show Kaisi Yeh Yaariyan, where he played Manik Malhotra alongside Niti Taylor.

Ranveer Singh moves to end Don 3 row with Farhan Akhtar

Mumbai: According to early reports, the continuing Don 3 controversy has taken a new turn, and this one comes with a dose of damage control. Actor Ranveer Singh has reportedly decided to return the Rs 10 crore he signed for the project, which is being directed by Farhan Akhtar under Excel Entertainment, according to a Free Press Journal article. If true, the action represents an effort to put an end to the highly publicized aftermath. That's not everything. According to the same source, Ranveer has also offered Excel Entertainment a share in his next film, which he has tentatively named Pralaay. The arrangement's specifics, such as the stake's size, are now unknown. For those who are unfamiliar with the story, it is said that the tension started when Ranveer left Don 3, a project that had already created a lot of excitement. Conflicts over the script and worries about the movie's direction were mentioned in industry rumors. According to reports, Excel Entertainment was requesting compensation of approximately Rs 40 crore, citing pre-production expenses and schedule in-



terruptions, while insisting that the film had proceeded with the actor's approval.There were rumors that the Producers Guild of India would intervene to mediate as the crisis worsened. Rumors even connected Aamir Khan to behind-the-scenes peace negotiations, which he has subsequently refuted, adding to the intrigue. Where does this leave Don

3, though? Still very much in limbo. With no official clarity, conflicting reports, and speculation ranging from recasting to Farhan Akhtar himself possibly stepping into the iconic role, the future of the franchise remains uncertain. One thing, however, is clear: in true Bollywood fashion, this story is far from its final act.

Ranbir Kapoor nailed Lord Rama's look in Ramayana : Anurag Basu

New Delhi: In response to a recent glimpse of Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Rama in director Nitesh Tiwari's Ramayana, director Anurag Basu praised Kapoor's performance. The ambitious scope and vision of producer Namit Malhotra's Ramayana have made it a hot topic of conversation in the film industry. Basu, who previously collaborated with Kapoor on movies including Jagga Jasoos and Barfi!, said in an interview with Variety that the actor had "amazingly nailed the look." When Ranbir initially joined the production, Basu remarked that the actor's appearance fulfilled his expectations. He emphasized how difficult it is to play a figure like Lord Rama, calling it a difficult part that calls for conviction. "It was very tough, and you need a lot of courage to get into that character," he replied. Basu went on to say that Ranbir's choice to play the part was a daring one, emphasizing how actors are sometimes typecast in the business. Choosing such a role, in Basu's opinion, shows confidence and a willingness to take chances. He went on to say that from what he has seen thus far, the actor has given a compelling performance and shown interest in seeing the movie. The film has also attracted international attention with its responses from CinemaCon 2026. Reports



suggest that a nine-minute footage was screened at CinemaCon in Las Vegas and received a positive response from a select audience, further raising expectations for the project. Directed by Nitesh Tiwari, Ramayana is reportedly produced on a budget of around Rs 4,000 crore. The film

features Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Rama, with Sai Pallavi as Sita, Yash as Ravana, Sunny Deol as Hanuman, and Ravi Dubey as Lakshman. Planned as a two-part saga, the film is scheduled for release during Diwali 2026 and Diwali 2027.

India needs to embrace modernity based on a civilizational ethos, according to the US general secretary of the RSS

New Delhi, Apr 26: At a community reception hosted by the Indo American Community of Greater DC in the Washington DC Metro Area on Thursday (local time), RSS General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale discussed India’s global position and civilizational vision. Themed “India’s Global Vision & Role in the Emerging World: Civilizational Foundations for Prospering Together,” the event brought together academics and community leaders, such as Walter Russell Mead (Hudson Institute) and Walter K. Anderson (Author & Former State Department). “Great to be here in the midst of you all and thanks are due to the Hudson Institute and also the organizers of this meet,” Hosabale remarked in response to the community reception. Sitting with these two wonderful Indian friends, as well as people who have made an effort to comprehend the RSS movement and its contributions, is a unique honor. It is truly a pleasure for me to speak to and engage with this amazing audience. “I thank Dr. Anderson for his understanding of the organization and its contribution, and also introducing the organization to a large section outside the RSS world,” he said, acknowledging Anderson’s work in defining the organization’s purpose. And we really appreciate what he said. “In the scheme of RSS organization network, all the organizations that he mentioned or even at the level of introduction, he said they are not wings or controlled by RSS per se,” he stated, elaborating on the organization’s structure.

They are all organizations, forums, and activities that draw inspiration from RSS. They are, in a sense, the RSS concept and vision put into practice in those domains. He went on to say, “The RSS volunteers, or swayam-sevaks, started these activities in the form of organizations in various fields of national life, which Dr. Anderson mentioned.” Additionally, those who are inclined to work in certain industries have been drawn to them.



Because of this, even if not every member of those organizations has an RSS background, they have all embraced their ideologies. And they are all undoubtedly influenced by the organization’s RSS philosophy and practice. On coordination among these organisations, he said, “There is a family coordination with these organisations.

They are independent, their policies are independent, their working is independent, they are all having their own constitutions and rules and regulations which they follow, they have framed.”Reflecting on contemporary global challenges, Hosabale cited what he described as the paradox of modern times, stating, “We have taller buildings but shorter tempers, wider freeways but narrower viewpoints. We spend more, but we have less. We have bigger houses, but smaller families, more conveniences, but less time. We have more degrees, but less sense, more knowledge, but less judgment, more experts, but more problems, more medicines, but less wellness.”He continued, “We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We have learned how to make a living,

but not a life. We have been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbour. We have conquered outer space, but not inner space. We want to clean up the air, but pollute our souls. We have split the atom, but not our prejudices. We have higher incomes, but lower morals. We have become long on quantity, but short on quality.”

Drawing on India’s historical experience, he highlighted examples of coexistence, noting, “Not a single Parsi has ever said that because of their minuscule minority they were ill-treated or persecuted. Not only that, they did not even claim minority rights when the Constitution was being framed. His Holiness Dalai Lama and his followers, his disciples, Tibetans, they have taken shelter in India for decades. And Tibetans have been given the land, and they have been living in India. In India, they have been living with peace, honour, and respect.”

Emphasising India’s global outlook, he said, “When India says that world is one family, it says with some experience, some practice. Wherever Indians have gone, they have

contributed to that land. They have contributed in nation building in that country. They have mingled with host society. And Indians, because of their cultural civilisation values, they have lived in peace and contributed to the welfare of that nation. So that is why these visions of India is not shallow words or emotional outburst, they are practised.” Calling for India’s rise in the global order, Hosabale stated, “India has to be a self-confident, prosperous society, and united, harmonious, people. The rise of India to that call of the world time is necessary so the RSS unit in India is engaged in this activity which Dr Walter Anderson explained.”He added, “To make India a self-confident, prosperous society, accepting modernity rooted in cultural ethos and civilizational values. And thereby India can play this role eminently and with sustained efforts and in cooperation with other nations and societies and civilisations.”Concluding on a forward-looking note, he said, “I hope the time will come sooner that India will be eminently capable of playing this role and the world is looking towards India on many issues. Particularly, the family values, the health, on the basis of yoga and pranayama, and on many other fronts, India can play this historic role with this vision of unity of mankind and world as one family.” The event was supported by a wide range of diaspora and community organisations, including the American Hindu Coalition, American Hindus for Engagement and Dialogue (AHEAD), India Israel Coalition, Indo American Community (IAC), Indian American Diaspora Association (IADA), Overseas Friends of BJP, Rajdhani Mandir of Virginia, Sikhs of America, United Hindu Jain Temples (UHJT), SV Lotus Temple, Vishwa Hindu Parishad Americas (VHPA), US India Security Council, and Samskrita Bharati, reflecting broad-based participation from the Indian diaspora in the United States.

Rai and Theegala have a modest start in the Zurich Classic



New Delhi: In the Zurich Classic, the only team tournament on the PGA Tour, Avondale, Sahith Theegala, and Aaron Rai, who are very good friends, had a slow start. On the opening day of the four-ball format, the pair, who are of Indian descent and have previously competed together in major competitions like the Majors and the Hero World Challenge, put together 10-under.

The highlight was that Theegala and Rai each created an eagle. On the par-4 13th, Rai made a 106-yard approach shot. On the par-5 second hole previously, Theegala made an eagle. However, they were tied for 13th place at 10-under, with English pair Alex Smalley and Hayden Springer leading at 14-under. With a score of 58, Smalley and Springer tied the tournament record. Sudarshan Yellamaraju, another player of Indian descent, was T-42 at 7-under while playing alongside Ryan Gerard. After winning the RBC Heritage, Matt Fitzpatrick and his younger brother Alex, who won the Hero Indian Open last month, fired an 8-under 64 in four-ball, putting the English pair six strokes behind the leaders. The most successful pair at the par-72 TPC Louisiana this week, Shane Lowry and Brooks Koepka, posted a 66, putting them outside the top 40 and potentially out of the cut. The most successful pair at the par-72 TPC Louisiana this week, Shane Lowry and Brooks Koepka, posted a 66, putting them outside the top 40 and potentially out of the cut. On a beautiful, windy, eighty-degree afternoon, the Fitzpatricks teed off in the same group as Lowry and Koepka. On Saturday, the format switches back to four-ball, and on Sunday, it switches back to foursomes. After a round in which they followed Eckroat’s eagle on the par-5 seventh hole with eight consecutive birdies, Davis Thompson and Austin Eckroat were one stroke behind in second place. Sam Stevens and Zach Bouchou, as well as Eric Cole and Hank Lebioda, were tied for third place at sixty. Smalley and Springer, both 29-year-old Americans, combined to birdie 10 of their final 14 holes.

Four overground workers are detained by Jammu and Kashmir police

LeT module bust

Srinagar, Apr 26: In relation to the recent disruption of an interstate militant module, Jammu and Kashmir police have detained a woman and three other suspected overground workers. Two Pakistani Lashkar terrorists who had been on the run for the previous sixteen years, together with their three alleged Kashmiri comrades, were reportedly apprehended by the authorities early this month. Following searches in Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Punjab, police forces claimed to have discovered a significant interstate Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) module and captured the five.

Abdullah, also known as Abu Huraira, and Usman, also known as Khubab, are Pakistani terrorists who are categorized as A+ category militants in Jammu and Kashmir, according to the government. In a statement on Thursday, the police said they arrested four overground workers from the Hazratbal area of the city here on Wednesday night.

They identified the overground workers



as Zahoor Ahmad Mir, Bashir Ahmad Bhat and Ghulam Mohammad Bhat, all residents of Hazratbal. The woman was identified as Shazia Mohammad, a resident of Hazratbal as well. The police said a hand grenade, 15 AK-47 rounds, four mobile phones and some cash were recovered from their possession. “A case has been filed against them under various sections of the UAPA and Arms Act,” the police said.

NCB alerts Indians to Maldivian drug laws, pointing out the death penalty and life sentence

New Delhi, Apr 26: Indian nationals visiting the Maldives were forewarned by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) on Thursday about the country’s recently tightened anti-drug laws, which now carry life in prison and even the death penalty for drug-related offenses. The Maldives has implemented some of the strictest penalties for drug-related offenses in the world under the modified Maldives Drugs Act, which went into effect last month. According to the NCB, “ignorance of the law is not a defense” under the new legal framework, and any infraction will have serious legal repercussions. Even for the possession of tiny amounts of illegal substances, the warning emphasizes far tougher sanctions. According to an NCB spokesman, “the law prescribes the death penalty in cases of large-scale trafficking, subject to confirmation by a competent Maldivian court.” The alert was released in response to a recent increase in drug-related arrests of foreign nationals, including Indian citizens, in the Maldives. According to the official, “the Indian high commission in Malé has echoed these concerns, urging nationals to strictly adhere to local regulations.” Indians have been “strongly” cautioned by the NCB



to use extra vigilance at all international ports and transit hubs. Officials explicitly cautioned against falling victim to the “good Samaritan” trap, advising travelers to never carry luggage or packages for strangers since they might con-

tain illicit narcotics. According to the official, “travelers are encouraged to maintain constant physical control over their belongings to avoid falling victim to smuggling schemes that could lead to life-threatening legal battles.”

Hungary will be hosted by the United States in the Billie Jean King Cup playoffs

London: In November, the United States will play host to Hungary in the Billie Jean King Cup playoffs as the record 18-time champion attempts to resume her career in women’s team tennis. In order to qualify for this year’s finals, the United States lost to Belgium 3-1 last month after making it to the final for the first time since 2018 last year. The first Hungarian woman to defeat a top-10 player since Timea Babos defeated Coco Vandeweghe in 2018 is Anna Bondár, a BJK Cup regular who defeated No. 7-ranked Elina Svitolina on Thursday at the Madrid Open. In the Cup playoff draw on Thursday, Brazil will host 2023 champion Canada, while France will host Australia for the first time since their victory in the 2019 final in Perth. Other games are Slovenia vs. Indonesia, Japan vs. Argentina, Thailand vs. Switzerland, and Poland vs. Sweden. The winning teams move on to the 2027 qualifiers, while the loser teams will compete in regional tournaments the following year. In addition to Belgium, the reigning champion Italy, Britain, Kazakhstan, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine are the other qualifiers for the finals. China, the host country, was automatically qualified.

“Ace,” a table tennis robot from Sony, outperforms players at the national level

New Delhi, In a development that researchers believe could represent a major advancement for robotics in activities requiring speed, accuracy, and real-time decision-making, Sony has developed a table tennis robot that has defeated elite human players. In controlled matches, the robot “Ace” outperformed a number of players at the national level, demonstrating its capacity to engage in fast-paced sports. Ace, created by Sony AI, goes well beyond conventional training robots. It is built to withstand the speed, spin, and unpredictability of actual matches thanks to its eight-jointed robotic arm and paddle.

Three out of five players who have participated in big events and national tournaments were defeated in official competitions. The International Table Tennis Federation-certified equipment, human referees, and regular rules governed the matches. Eleven points were scored in each game. Ace was unable to defeat two



players at the professional level, demonstrating that the highest level of the sport is still one step ahead. For machines, table tennis has always been a challenging task. The ball can reach speeds of more than 70 km/h, frequently with significant spin that modifies its trajectory and bounce. It takes perfect timing and keen anticipation to read that spin and respond on time. Ace tracks the ball’s position, speed, and spin using a high-speed vision system that combines 12 cameras with Sony sensors. Its movements have been trained using deep reinforcement learning, allowing it to execute a range of 15

serves and sustain rallies. During testing, rallies averaged five strokes, with the robot often returning shots quicker than its opponents expected. It showed the ability to deal with spin-heavy exchanges and awkward net-cord shots, areas where consistency is hard to maintain even for experienced players.

That consistency helped it gain an edge against national-level competitors, even as professional players exposed areas where it still needs improvement. The findings were published in Nature on April 23, placing Ace among the most advanced systems to perform at this level in a real sport setting. Earlier table tennis robots had not been able to consistently challenge skilled human players under official conditions. According to Sony AI chief scientist Peter Stone, the work could have applications beyond sport, particularly in environments where machines need to react quickly and operate with precision alongside humans.

No maintenance is ruled by the Supreme Court if a DNA test



New Delhi, Apr 26: According to a Supreme Court decision, if a DNA test shows that a man is not the biological father and the mother does not contest the results, the man is not required to provide maintenance to his estranged wife’s child. A woman’s request for ₹25,000 in monthly support for herself and the kid was denied by a district and sessions court as well as a family court. The man was not the biological father, according to a DNA test. The Delhi High Court changed previous rulings and permitted the wife to receive support, stating that the trial court would decide how much. But instead, the woman went to the Supreme Court. The high court ruling was maintained by a bench consisting of Justices Sanjay Karol and N. Kotiswar Singh. In this instance, the DNA test was performed, the appellant gave their consent, and they have never once contested the results. In other words, it has reached finality. We believe that the appellant could not point out any mistake in the high court’s ruling that denied her daughter support. The appeal is dismissed because it has no validity, according to Justice Karol, who wrote the ruling. The bench asked the women and child welfare department of Delhi to safeguard the child’s interest. “This court expresses concern about the child whose dispute of parentage had made its way up to us. Even though the high court has correctly remanded the matter of the appellant’s maintenance to be decided afresh by the trial court, we acknowledge that even if a revised amount is awarded as per law, the difficulties for the child will persist.

Lamine Yamal’s FIFA World Cup aspirations are still intact

New Delhi: Lamine Yamal will miss the rest of the season due to a hamstring injury, according to FC Barcelona, but there is increasing hope that the teenager could recover in time for the FIFA World Cup. With Yamal emerging as one of the most promising young players in international football, the news is a huge relief for Spain. Even if Barcelona will be without him for the remainder of the season, the choice to adhere to a cau-

tious treatment plan highlights a clear desire to make sure he is fully recovered prior to the world football championship. Yamal’s injury overshadowed Barcelona’s narrow victory to keep their lead at the top of the league. The teenager, who is regarded by many as one of the game’s best prospects, had just given his team the lead before being ejected in unsettling scenes.

Yamal won a penalty and went up to take

it himself late in the first half. He converted from the spot with composure, but as soon as he hit the ball, he drew up, gripping the back of his left thigh. Even as teammates came in to celebrate what should have been a crucial moment in the game, he collapsed to the ground in obvious distress. Medical staff rushed onto the field to assess him, but it quickly became evident that he would not be able to continue. Yamal managed to walk off

on his own, though he headed straight down the tunnel instead of joining the bench, a sign that raised further concern about the seriousness of the injury. Initial reports suggested a hamstring issue, with early assessments indicating a possible muscle tear in the biceps femoris of his left leg. Barcelona later confirmed the diagnosis and outlined a conservative recovery plan, effectively ruling him out for the rest of the season.

Srikanth calls on the BCCI to move quickly about Vaibhav Sooryavanshi

New Delhi: Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, a 15-year-old phenom, has received support from famous opener and former India captain Kris Srikanth, who has dubbed him the “next demi-god of cricket.” Srikanth has made a fervent request to Chief Selector Ajit Agarkar to expedite the adolescent into the senior national setup right away, drawing audacious comparisons to Sachin Tendulkar’s 1989 debut.

The support coincides with Sooryavanshi’s continued destruction of professional bowling attacks during the current IPL 2026 season, igniting a national discussion on whether age should be a barrier to international recognition. Srikanth didn’t hold back when discussing the child’s preparedness on The Week’s podcast. He maintained that Sooryavanshi ought to have been included in the plans for the T20 World Cup as well as the squad for the upcoming series. “I’m telling you to expedite him today. “He should be playing in the next series,” Srikanth pleaded. “He ought to be in the 15 for the T20 World Cup squad. Allow him to experience and comprehend what international cricket is all about.” The way Sooryavanshi manages world-class pace strikes a similar chord with Srikanth, who led Tendulkar during



his first tour of Pakistan. “Consider. Jasprit Bumrah, first ball, six. He pummels Josh Hazlewood. He is completely unconcerned. In a similar vein, this child might become the next cricket demi-god.

The hype surrounding the 15-year-old is backed by staggering numbers. Sooryavanshi is currently a front-runner for the Orange Cap, having amassed 246 runs in just six games this season. His performance is characterized by an extraordinary average of 41.00 and a strike rate of 236.53, a figure that has left even seasoned veterans in awe. This isn’t a flash-in-

the-pan performance. Sooryavanshi already has a maiden IPL century to his name from his debut season and was the architect of India’s U19 World Cup glory, where he smashed a mammoth 175 in the final against England. With reports suggesting the BCCI is considering him for the upcoming tour of Ireland, Sooryavanshi stands on the cusp of becoming the youngest player ever to represent the Indian senior team. For Srikanth, the decision is simple: “No question of giving him time or letting him be consistent. That guy can win matches for you like this, boss.”

Andy Murray considers his time spent tutoring Novak Djokovic

New Delhi: Despite his lackluster on-court performance, Andy Murray gave a frank evaluation of his brief coaching tenure with Novak Djokovic, acknowledging that it was both enlightening and humiliating. The former World No. 1 quipped that he had “probably learned nothing” in an interview with Sky Sports, but he soon clarified that the experience had been extremely instructive.

Murray clarified that taking on a coaching position allowed him to have a new understanding of the responsibilities and everyday routines of a professional athlete, particularly one at Djokovic’s caliber. It was intriguing to observe how his daily activities differed from what I may have been doing.

Murray remarked, “That was really insightful.” He added that coaching required a shift in mindset, particularly in how messages are communicated and how players are listened to, something he believes has been shaped by his own experiences off the court. Murray’s tenure started around the Australian Open, although the collaboration eventually failed to produce a championship. Djokovic advanced to the semi-finals of several major tournaments, including Wimbledon, Roland Garros, and the Australian



Open, but he was unable to turn those impressive performances into championships. At the same point, he left the US Open as well. Even though Djokovic won victories at minor events like the Geneva Open and Athens Open, losses to elite competitors like Jannik Sinner, Carlos Alcaraz, and Alexander Zverev highlighted the difficulties he had in reclaiming dominance. Reflecting on the experience, Murray acknowledged that working alongside one of the sport’s greatest players also exposed his own areas for improvement. “You’re thrown in at the deep end working with someone as great as he is, so it exposes areas you probably need to improve if you want to become a great coach,”

he said. The partnership eventually came to an end after the Serb’s poor showing at the French Open last year. Fitness concerns have also hampered Djokovic’s season; the 24-time Grand Slam champion has had to miss important competitions due to a shoulder condition. As he continues to heal, he has announced that he will not be attending the Madrid Open. Concerns regarding the Serbian’s readiness for Roland Garros, which starts in late May, were raised after he withdrew from events in Miami and Monte Carlo earlier. Despite the failures, Djokovic is still hopeful about getting back to his best in time for the clay-court major, when he will try to win a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam.

Iran is reviewing its participation in the 2026 FIFA World Cup due to security concerns



New Delhi: Iran’s participation in the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2026 remains uncertain, with the country’s Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali confirming that a final decision will depend on evolving security and political conditions in the ongoing tensions between US and Iran as per Iranian media. Addressing mediapersons on Tuesday, Donyamali said, “We had a discussion about the national team itself, the conditions of the national team, and we also formed a committee.

Today we also have a meeting in the framework of this discussion, and we are fulfilling our legal duty. We must be prepared. In any case, it might be decided not to go. And if it is decided to go, we should be prepared anyway, so that our presence, if it is to be, is a strong presence. But again, I emphasise, in this area, the decision-making is anyway based on the conditions that exist today, with the government and probably the National Security Council.” His remarks come amid growing uncertainty

over Iran’s participation in the tournament, which is set to be co-hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico from June 11 to July 19 this year.

Despite the concerns, FIFA president Gianni Infantino has publicly backed Iran’s involvement, reiterating that the team remains part of the competition. Infantino recently met the Iranian squad in Turkey and praised their determination to compete on the global stage. Iran has qualified for the expanded 48-team tournament and is placed in Group G, alongside Belgium, New Zealand, and Egypt.

As per the current schedule, their matches are slated to be held in Los Angeles and Seattle. However, geopolitical tensions have cast doubt over their participation on US soil. Comments from former US President Donald Trump intensified the situation after he expressed reservations about the team’s safety, suggesting it might not be appropriate for Iran to play in the United States. In response, Mehdi Taj, president of Iran’s football federation, indicated that discussions with FIFA are ongoing, including the possibility of relocating matches to Mexico if security guarantees are not met. The 2026 edition of the FIFA World Cup will be the largest in history, featuring 48 teams and 104 matches, with the opening game scheduled in Mexico City and the final to be held in New Jersey.

R Ashwin Forecasts Indian Cricket’s Next Big Thing

“Step Ahead Of Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Ayush Mhatre”

New Delhi: Priyansh Arya, a batter for Punjab Kings (PBKS), lit up the Indian Premier League (IPL) last week against Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) with a scorching 37-ball 93. The 24-year-old made his IPL debut last season, making 475 runs for PBKS in the lucrative competition. Ravichandran Ashwin lauded Priyansh’s capacity to play impactful knocks after his knock against LSG on Sunday, placing him marginally ahead of players like teenagers Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and Ayush Mhatre.

“Kisiko upar-neeche laane ka nahi hai, magar ye jo Priyansh Arya hai na. Jitna Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Jitna Ayush Mhatre, usse bhi thora ek kadam mujhe lag raha hain agey hain. Nahi kar raha hu, compare. Kyunki yeh bada run bana leta hain, inke paas range of shots zyada hain.” “Priyansh Arya appears to be a step ahead even of Ayush Mhatre and Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, but I’m not trying to put anyone



above or below anyone. Ashwin stated on his YouTube channel, “I am not comparing them because he goes on to make big scores and he has a wider range of shots.”

Priyansh has demonstrated that he is not a flash in the pan and does not carry the typical “headweight” after one successful season, as seen by his 11-ball 39, 20-ball 57, and 37-ball 93 this season. Priyansh has already scored 211 runs at an average

of 42.2 while striking at over 248 in five games. Meanwhile, Mhatre has been ruled out for the remainder of IPL 2026 owing to a hamstring injury. He has been CSK’s leading run-scorer this year, with 201 runs in six innings at an average of 33.50 and a strike rate of 177.87, including two fifties and a best of 73. Sooryavanshi, on the other hand, remains one of the top performers of the tournament, amassing 246 runs in six matches to date.

Enzo Fernandez, Chelsea’s vice captain, will miss two games due to comments he made about Madrid

New Delhi: Due to remarks he made during the international break, Chelsea player Enzo Fernandez has been benched for the team’s next two games. In response to rumors that he would join Real Madrid, the 25-year-old stated on a podcast this week that he would like to live in Madrid. Following Chelsea’s Champions League loss to Paris Saint-Germain last month, Fernandez had already stated that he was unsure if he would remain with Chelsea for the upcoming campaign. Coach Liam Rosenior of Chelsea said on Friday that the squad has decided to bench the Argentina international for the FA Cup quarterfinal match against Port Vale on Saturday and the Premier League match against Manchester City the following weekend. “I spoke with Enzo about an hour ago,” Rosenior said. “As a football club, with me as part of the decision, he won’t be available for tomorrow’s game or Manchester City next Sunday. It’s disappointing for Enzo to speak that way. I’ve got no bad words to say about him but a line was crossed in terms of our culture and what we build.” Fernandez joined Chelsea for a then-British record £107 million (\$142 million) in 2023 and was appointed vice-captain the following year. “Enzo, firstly, as a character, a person and a player, I have the utmost



respect,” said Rosenior. “He’s frustrated because he wants us to be successful. “In terms of the decision, it’s not all about me, or the sporting directors, the ownership, the players, we are aligned in our decision. The door is not closed on Enzo. It’s a sanction. You have to protect the culture, and in terms of that, a line was crossed.”

Laureus 2026 will be hosted by Djokovic and Eileen Gu

New Delhi: Tennis superstar Novak Djokovic and freestyle skiing phenom Eileen Gu will co-host the 2026 Laureus World Sports Awards, marking a historic first for the Oscars of Sport. The announcement paves the way for the India Women’s National Cricket Team to compete for the World Team of the Year award on April 20 at a historic ceremony at Madrid’s Palacio de Cibeles. The most prestigious awards event on the athletic calendar has never

had two active athletes co-host. Gu, the 2023 Laureus World Action Sportsperson of the Year, and Djokovic, a record-tying five-time Laureus World Sportsman of the Year, highlight the event’s standing as the Athletes Awards.

With a record 24 Grand Slam victories, Djokovic stated his enthusiasm for the new position. “The Laureus World Sports Awards honor the ability of sport to change the world. It’s a special chance to interact

with athletes from different sports, and I’m thrilled to be hosting alongside Eileen, a fantastic athlete who is aware of Laureus’ objective.”

Gu said: “To now be part of the show as a host, alongside Novak – someone whose journey I’ve admired for so long – is a real honour.” The 69 Laureus World Sports Academy legends will choose the winners, who will be announced at this Monday’s gala.

Jude Bellingham, a Real Madrid player, makes an investment in cricket

New Delhi: With a stake in Birmingham Phoenix, Jude Bellingham has entered the world of cricket, adding a new chapter to his expanding portfolio. The Real Madrid player’s acquisition of a 1.2% stake in the team is a unique intersection between franchise cricket and top football. Knighthead Capital Management and Warwickshire County Cricket Club both contributed equal shares to the over £1 million investment. Knighthead, the company that also owns Birmingham City, still has 48.4% of the vote, while Warwickshire maintains its 50.4% majority. The Hundred ecosystem, which has drawn more and more international investors and athletes, has even more star power with Bellingham’s arrival. The Edgbaston-based franchise was one of eight teams put up for sale last year, with Knighthead acquiring a significant stake for £40 million. Beyond the numbers, Bellingham’s long-standing relationship with cricket is reflected in this move. The 22-year-old, who played junior cricket as a child and is well-known for being an avid fan of the game, once stated that he would most like to trade professions with Ben Stokes. The Knighthead group’s seven-time NFL champion Tom Brady is also associated with the team, highlighting The Hundred’s increasing ap-



peal on a global scale. This investment is just as much about roots as it is about opportunities for Bellingham. The move has a strong personal touch because the player was raised in the West Midlands and rose through the ranks at Birmingham City. “I adore Birmingham.” I am really appreciative of all that Birmingham has done for me. I’m thrilled to be on board because I also enjoy cricket, so I didn’t really think twice about becoming involved when I had the chance,” Bellingham remarked. Additionally, he talked about giving back to the city that helped form him. “Birmingham City gave me the best upbringing in both life and football. I have a sense of obligation to the city,

It’s challenging right now because of how busy I am with football, but I want to help if I can, and this seems like a nice way to do it. The England international also emphasized how sports may influence young people. “I think it’s so important to get our kids in the city out there playing sports. I think it’s crucial. The opportunity of me being a part of Birmingham Phoenix is to try and help people realise there’s different avenues. Some people will enjoy football, some people enjoy cricket.” Bellingham’s involvement is expected to go beyond just ownership, with Warwickshire stating that he will play a role in community engagement and development initiatives in the region.