

## Mizoram CM Reviews Universal Health Care Progress, Plans Strengthening Measures For Future Growth

**Aizawl, Feb 16:** The Governing Body of the Mizoram Universal Health Care Scheme met today at the Chief Minister's Conference Hall under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Lalduhoma to review the progress and future roadmap of the scheme. The Chief Minister expressed appreciation to Health Minister Ms. Lalrinpuii and MUHCS officials for their dedicated service, noting that their efforts have enhanced public confidence in government healthcare delivery.

The meeting was informed that over 2.88 lakh families, covering about 11.55 lakh beneficiaries including general families, pensioners, government employees, and beneficiaries under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana are currently enrolled in the scheme. During the current year, around 29% of enrolled families submitted

medical claims, representing about 7% of total beneficiaries. The average approved payout per patient stands at ₹15,106. A growing number of patients are availing treatment in government hospitals, which account for about 70% of processed claims. However, higher-value claims are more common in private hospitals due to treatment of critical conditions. The meeting emphasized strengthening government hospitals and ensuring that treatable cases are handled within government or empanelled facilities wherever possible. Referral norms for non-empanelled hospitals, especially in emergency or life-threatening situations, will be further clarified. Financially, approximately ₹154 crore has been received for the current year, while ₹48 crore is expected to be received. So far, 83,682 claims have been processed, amounting



to around ₹126 crore in payouts, while claims worth about ₹38 crore are under examination and will be cleared soon.

Although rules provide for payment to empanelled hospitals within 30 days, the government has been releasing

funds weekly to avoid inconvenience. To strengthen implementation in the coming financial year, the Governing Body approved streamlining measures, establishing a Pharma Depot to make medicines more affordable, and safeguards to prevent duplicate subscription benefits. The meeting was attended by Adviser to the Chief Minister TBC Lalvenchunga and other Governing Body members. Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma chaired a meeting of the governing body of the Mizoram Universal Health Care Scheme (MUHCS) to review its progress and outline measures for strengthening the program. The meeting, held at the Chief Minister's Conference Hall, brought together senior officials and health administrators to assess achievements and future priorities. Officials reported that more than 2.88 lakh families, covering over

11.55 lakh beneficiaries, have been enrolled under the MUHCS. This includes general families, pensioners, government employees, and beneficiaries under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana. The scheme has significantly expanded access to free and quality healthcare across the state, enhancing public confidence in government health services. The Chief Minister praised Health Minister Lalrinpuii and MUHCS officials for their dedicated service, noting that their efforts have revolutionized patient care. Data presented at the meeting showed that about 70 percent of processed claims came from government hospitals, with an average payout of ₹15,106 per patient. The scheme has already disbursed around ₹126 crore in claims, reflecting its impact on reducing financial burdens for families.

### Cleanliness drive conducted at Heirok Wangjing River

**Imphal, Feb 16:** A joint river cleaning was carried out by Palem Panthou Village Level Federation in collaboration with EcoNetwork Manipur to remove waste and plastic from the Heirok Wangjing River in Heirok Part-I area. Addressing the initiative, EcoNetwork Manipur President Shinthangamba Laishram urged the public to stop dumping household waste into the river and support proper waste collection for a cleaner environment. He appealed to the locals to collect waste properly and opt for household waste collection services instead of throwing waste products into water bodies. The drive, supported by Self Help Groups under the Manipur State Rural Livelihood Mission, aimed at restoring the river's cleanliness through continued community participation. Organisers urged citizens to be responsible and not dump waste materials into the river so as to preserve clean and safe water for future generations.

### Birth centenary of Laishram Samarendra observed

**Imphal, Feb 16:** The birth centenary celebration of renowned literary figure Laishram Samarendra was held at the Library and Information Centre, Kakching, located at Phoushupat Leikai. The programme was jointly organised by the Laishram Samarendra Birth Centenary Celebration Committee in collaboration with Sahitya Seva Samiti Kakching, Macha Chanu Kakching, and Eramdam Khorjei Apunba Lup, Hiyanglam Wabagai.

endra Birth Centenary Celebration Committee, Yengkhom Anilkumar. During the programme, Conventor of the Celebration Committee, Saratchand Thiyam, delivered the welcome address. Floral tributes were offered in honour of the late Laishram Samarendra.

Dr. Ningombam Nando spoke on the life and contributions of Laishram Samarendra, highlighting his literary achievements



Among those present at the function were Vice President of Sahitya Seva Samiti Kakching, Mayanglambam Kunjakesho; President of Macha Chanu Kakching, Dr. Nongmaithem Pramodini; and Chairman of the Laishram Samar-

and dedicated service to society. As part of the celebration, poets and students recited poems in tribute to the literary icon. The event concluded with the presentation of mementos to participants as a mark of appreciation.

### BBBP awareness programme conducted

**Imphal, Feb 16:** An awareness programme on the theme "Child Marriage Free Gram Panchayat" was held as part of the ongoing Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) awareness campaign at the Keirak Keithel Lampak Community Hall in Kakching district. The awareness programme was organised with an aim to strengthen grass-roots efforts to eliminate child marriages and protect children's rights by the Office of the District Programme Officer of the ICDS Cell led by N. Parango Singh, under the supervision of the District Administration Kakching. Resource person of the programme, Advocate Kshetrimayum Sarankumari Devi, Panel Lawyer of the Manipur State Legal Services Authority (MASLSA) spoke on the central theme "Child Marriage Free Gram Panchayat." In her address, she elaborated on the issue of child marriage, stating that it remains a social and legal concern with long-term consequences. She informed that under the law, the minimum legal age of marriage is 18 years for girls & 21 years for boys and any marriage conducted below the prescribed age is a punishable of-



fence under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA). She also highlighted detailed legal provisions which are available for such cases. She informed the gathering about CHILDLINE 1098, a toll-free 24-hour emergency helpline service for children in distress. She stated that complaints can be made anonymously and immediate intervention can be sought through the helpline to prevent child

marriage and protect children at risk. The advocate also highlighted the importance of reporting cases of child marriage and child rights violations. On the other hand, M. Bimola Devi, Supervisor of the ICDS project, briefed the gathering on the various services provided under the Integrated Child Development Services. Around 80 participants attended the awareness programme.

### Assam Cong ex-president Bhupen Borah resigns from the party

**Guwahati, Feb 16:** The Congress party in Assam suffered a major setback ahead of the Assembly polls as the former president of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) Bhupen Kumar Borah has resigned from the party. Borah has sent his resignation letter to AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge. Party sources said that Borah has quit the party owing to differences with state leadership, including APCC president Gaurav Gogoi, over the formation of alliance with other parties for the upcoming elections. However, efforts are on to persuade Borah to withdraw his resignation. Congress leader Mira Borthakur has rushed to Bhupen Borah's home to convince him to withdraw his resignation.

There have been reports that Borah is likely to join the BJP on February 20 or 21 along with other Congress leaders and workers from Lakhimpur district, but Borah is yet to make any official statement in this regard. Borah, a former MLA, had served as Assam Congress president from July 2021 till June 2025.

### Two women among six UG cadres arrested

**Imphal, Feb 16:** Six militants including two women cadres, belonging to different underground outfits were arrested by security forces on Saturday from various districts. According to a statement of Manipur Police, the arrested militants belonged to the proscribed People's Liberation Army (PLA) and its political wing, the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF), the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), and the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK). Security forces arrested two active women cadres of the PLA from the India-Myanmar border area between Sunrise Ground and Gate No. 2 at Moreh in Tengenoupal district, said the statement. During the operations, security forces also recovered arms and ammunition from the possession of the arrested extremists, the official said.

**Imphal, Feb 16:** Youth's Forum for Protection of Human Rights (YFPHR) has expressed deep concern over the "lack of accountability" by the state to protect the right holders of the state from being terrorised by the vested interest armed groups who are involved in displacing the innocent citizens. In a press release, YFPHR said that it is deeply shocking to learn about the outbreak of recent violence at Litan of Ukhrul district which have displaced thou-

sands of innocent civilians while their houses were burned down. The incident took place at the presence of the Central Armed Forces and the State armed forces and we consider it as a total lack of accountability and clear human rights violation of not being able to curb the violence right on time instead the violence was projected as a clash between the two communities being settled in Litan area, it said. It said that there were several inter community clashes which have occurred in

the state and not a single thorough investigation have covered to investigate the failure of the state mechanisms which are accountable to protect the rights of its citizens and as a result repeated violence are being witnessed since the 1990's till today. This concern seriously draw the attention and question arises whether the state mechanisms such as the Central Armed Forces and State Armed forces involved in designing the conflict being remoted from

the higher level. The present scenario cannot rule out the fact of state designs conflict as large number of central security forces have been deployed in the name to curb the violence, however, the violence and the disturbance of coexistence have increased to the level that the villages are left unprotected by its people, it said. YFPHR informed the Government of India and its mechanisms to stop terrorising the people of Manipur, stop militarisation and learn to protect its citizens.

## Diabetes emerging major health concern in Manipur: Prof Nodiyachand

**Imphal, Feb 16:** A one-day free diabetes detection camp was successfully conducted at Tentha Heibung Mamang Leikai, Thoubal district. The camp aimed at promoting early diagnosis and awareness cum treatment of diabetes among the locality. The camp was jointly organised by the TESRA Club, Tentha, the Lions Club Canchipur Palace, and the Department of Physical Education and Sports Science, Manipur University, in collaboration with TOTO Diagnostic Centre, Singjamei. Qualified medical staff and technicians carried out blood glucose tests, ECG, and Hypertension tests etc, and provided basic health consultation free of cost. The participants were also provided with information on the causes, symptoms, prevention, and management of diabetes, with special emphasis on regular physical activity, balanced diet, and lifestyle modification.

The dignitaries present were Prof. Maibam Nodiyachand Singh, Department of PESS, MU, and former HOD, Deptt. of Yoga, Manipur University, and the Research guide of the camp, Dr. Khwairakpam Hemanta Singh, M.O. Bashikhong, Lions Club Canchipur Palace Vice President - 1, Naorem Surchandra Singh, President TESRA Club. Ningombam Thoiba Singh Lions Club Canchipur Palace President and UE Manipur University, Dr. Kh. Mukta Singh, Faculty, Manipur International University, Asem Toto Singh, Proprietor TOTO Diagnostic Center, Singjamei. Speaking at the occasion, Prof. Maibam Nodiyachand Singh highlighted that diabetes is rapidly emerging as a major public health concern in Manipur and can be reduced through appropriate exercise. He stressed the use of proper lifestyle management for longevity, a happy life, and an accurate exercise prescription.



A team of the Research Department of Physical Education and Sports Science, Manipur University, under

the Guidance of Prof. M. Nodiyachand Singh was also present. Dr. Hemanta said that the benefit of

early detection of different diseases and different health information. Naorem Surchandra Singh, Presi-

dent of TESRA Club, Tentha Heibung, and Mamang Leikai expressed their views on Local Issues. Dr. Kh. Mukta Singh, Faculty at Manipur International University, gave a lecture on Yoga and Health based on the current situation. Ningombam Thoiba Singh, Lions Club Canchipur Palace President, and UE Manipur University gave a presidential address. Other dignitaries present at the occasion also discussed the symptoms and advised people to follow a healthy lifestyle and to eat a balanced diet. Volunteers from the organizing team actively assisted in registration and awareness activities, ensuring the smooth conduct of the camp. The organisers expressed their gratitude to the medical team from TOTO Diagnostic Center and the local community for their cooperation and support. There were 50 patients present in the camp.

# Shah is probably going to Onsamon for a two-day

**Guwahati, Feb 16:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah is likely to visit Assam on a two-day tour from February 20 to roll out a programme and take part in a CRPF parade, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday. Sarma said Shah will start his tour from Silchar in Cachar district of Barak valley, where he will launch the scheme under the second phase of the Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP).“He (Shah) will reach Guwahati the next day and take part in the annual day parade of the CRPF. There will be an arms display and presentations on CRPF’s operations in Chhattisgarh and Kashmir, among other things,” he said.Shah had last visited Assam, where assembly polls are due within two-three months, on January 30, to launch a series of

projects and address two public meetings.Sarma also said NCC cadets will be encouraged to witness the CRPF parade so that they are motivated to join the force. “Our youths give interviews for jobs in the Assam Police, but do not appear for the CRPF. We, therefore, plan to open a CRPF recruitment centre in Assam. We have already acquired land in Dhemaji district,” Sarma said.On the recent aerial shows of the Indian Air Force, he said, “Earlier, there were many Assamese in the IAF. However, that number dropped to almost zero during the last decade. The series of aerial shows in the state aim to motivate youths to join the forces.”The Union government had approved the Vibrant Villages Programme-II (VVP-II) in April 2025, as a Central Sector Scheme with



a total outlay of Rs 6,839 crore until 2028-29. The scheme was launched for the comprehensive development of select strategic villages located in blocks abutting international land

borders (ILB), excluding the northern border already covered under VVP-I.The VVP-II is being implemented in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, J&K, Ladakh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, The programme envisages focused areas of intervention in the selected villages for creating livelihood generation opportunities through the promotion of tourism and cultural heritage, skill development and entrepreneurship, development of cooperative societies, and cultivation of medicinal plants and herbs, they said. Based on recent reports from August and December 2025, Home Minister Amit Shah has made two-day visits to Assam to review preparations for the 2026 state assembly polls and inaugurate various projects.

## Projects worth Rs 55,000 cr approved in last 1 yr: Sarma



**Guwahati, Feb 16:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said that central projects worth around Rs 55,000 crore have been sanctioned for the state in the last one year.Addressing a press conference here, Sarma spoke about a range of approved and planned projects in Assam.“The Centre had assured infrastructure projects worth Rs 80,000 crore during the second Advantage Assam investment summit last year, and the state has already received approval for different projects worth Rs 55,000 crore,” he said.The ‘Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit’ was organised by the state government in February 2025. Sarma said that the government has already floated the tender for the Kamakhya Rope-way Project from Kamakhya rail station to Kamakhya temple.“

When the PM visits Assam next, he will lay the foundation for it,” he said.The Centre is likely to approve a Rs 1,500 crore project in a day or two to construct an elevated corridor from Guwahati airport to Jalukbari, the entry point of the state capital, Sarma said.“The Rs 14,000-crore project for four-laning of the national highway from Baihata Chariali to Tezpur is at last stages of approval. We hope for it very soon,” he added.The CM further said that work for the stalled Kamakhya corridor project is likely to resume soon after the expert committee report did not raise any adverse comments.“After some people opposed the corridor, the Gauhati High Court asked IIT Guwahati and the National Institute of Hydrology to study if the project would have any ecological impact. They said there would be no impact,” he claimed.Besides, various works are ongoing at Gauhati Medical College and Hospital for Rs 2,200 crore, and As-

sam Medical College and Hospital for Rs 600 crore, Sarma said.He also said that another highway project is being planned from the semiconductor plant at Jagiroad in Morigaon district to the Bhutan border via Udalguri by building another bridge over the Brahmaputra.The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the PM, on Friday approved the construction of India’s first 34-km-long twin-tube road-cum-rail tunnel underneath the Brahmaputra river between Gohpur and Numaligarh at Rs 18,662 crore. “When the PM visits Assam next, he will lay the foundation for it,” he said.The Centre is likely to approve a Rs 1,500 crore project in a day or two to construct an elevated corridor from Guwahati airport to Jalukbari, the entry point of the state capital, Sarma said.“The Rs 14,000-crore project for four-laning of the national highway from Baihata Chariali to Tezpur is at last stages of approval. We hope for it very soon,” he added.

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## Considers using gyrocopters for VIP disaster relief, air ambulance services

**Guwahati, Feb 16:** The Assam government is considering use of gyrocopters for public services such as air ambulance, disaster response, and VIP movement. Agyrocopter--also known as gyroplane--is an aircraft similar to a small helicopter. It requires a very short take-off distance (around 50 meters) and a near-vertical landing with a short run (about 10 meters). Assam Chief Secretary Dr Ravi Kota today reviewed a proposal for potential deployment of gyrocopter-based aerial platforms for select priority public service applications in a meeting with the representatives of Gyrox Aviation. “During the discussion, I emphasised the possible utilisation of such platforms for air ambulance services, disaster response and management, and secure VIP movement, particularly in remote, difficult and time-sensitive situations,” Dr Kota said. “I sought specific clarifications regarding operational ceiling, performance across varying elevations, and the aircraft’s capability to function under adverse and critical weather conditions. The company informed the Chief Secretary that the proposed ARGON GTL gyroplane has an indicative operational ceiling of approximately 10,000–12,000 feet above mean sea level, with optimal performance at lower and medium alti-



tudes, and is designed to operate in strong wind and turbulent conditions, subject to mission profile, pilot proficiency and regulatory approvals. Dr Kota also examined safety margins, auto-rotation-based emergency landing capability, system redundancy, and reliability in medical evacuation and disaster-response scenarios. He underlined that final decision for deployment

would be contingent upon validated performance data under local terrain and climatic conditions. The company mentioned that the platform is a certified aircraft designed for short take-off and landing operations with contemporary avionics, and that efforts are being made towards indigenous assembly and manufacturing in alignment with the “Make in India” and “Atmanirbhar Bharat” initiative

## Assam’s tax share up fivefold under BJP, says PM Modi; slams Congress era allocation

**Guwahati, Feb 16:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 14 delivered an emphatic address to party workers in Assam, crediting the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party entirely to its grassroots cadre and asserting that the power of organisation remains the foundation of national transformation.“If anyone deserves the credit for where the BJP has reached today, it goes solely to the workers of the BJP,” the Prime Minister said, describing party workers as the “lifeblood and oxygen” of the organisation. Calling himself first and foremost a BJP worker, he said his proudest qualification in life was his identity as a party karyakarta, and bowed in gratitude to workers and supporters across Assam. Invoking spiritual and cultural symbolism, Modi offered salutations to Maa Kamakhya, stating that the blessings of the revered deity have strengthened Assam and the nation. He paid tribute to Kabirendra Purkayastha for his lifelong service to society, noting that the BJP-NDA government had honoured him with a Padma Award. Highlighting broader recognition for the region, Modi said that since 2014, over 125 distinguished personalities from the Northeast have been conferred Padma Awards, underscoring the region’s growing national prominence.Turning to economic matters, the Prime Minister drew a sharp contrast between the current government and the Congress era, accusing the latter of neglecting the Northeast. Referring to the recently presented Union Budget, he said Assam would receive around ₹50,000 crore as its tax share this year—five times higher than the ₹10,000 crore it received during the Congress regime. Over the past eleven years, he added, Assam has received more than ₹5.5 lakh crore from the Centre for various development projects.Modi described the Northeast as “Ashtalakshmi” for the BJP-NDA and said the latest budget aims to make the region economically self-reliant. He highlighted major allocations for highways and road infrastructure, asserting that improved connectivity directly translates into increased employment and economic opportunity.In a symbolic moment, the Prime Minister referred to his recent landing on the Moran highway in an Air Force aircraft, calling it a historic event that showcased Assam’s rapidly modernising infrastructure. “Today, highways are being built here where not only vehicles move but airplanes also land,” he said.He



also emphasised tourism potential, recalling the recent Pariksha Pe Charcha interaction held in Guwahati, including discussions with students on a cruise along the Brahmaputra. He expressed confidence that river tourism on the Brahmaputra would expand further, projecting Assam as a premier tourism destination.Citing welfare achievements in the state, Modi said millions of homes have been built for the poor, toilets constructed, and clean drinking water delivered to households under the BJP government. He credited these gains to the dedication of booth-level workers and urged them to remain vigilant at every polling station, asserting that victory at the booth level ensures the party’s broader electoral success.With development, organisation, and cultural pride as recurring themes, the Prime Minister’s address sought to energise the party base while reinforcing the Centre’s narrative of accelerated growth in Assam and the Northeast.

## India’s first rail-cum-road underwater tunnel under Brahmaputra River in Assam has been approved

**Guwahati, Feb 16:** The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved construction of 4-Lane Access-Controlled Greenfield connectivity from Gohpur on NH-15 to Numaligarh on 715 section including 15.79 km of road-cum-rail tunnel under the river Brahmaputra in Assam. The project will be developed at a total capital cost of Rs.18,662 crore on Engineering procurement Construction (EPC). Currently, the distance between Numaligarh on NH715 and Gohpur on NH-15 is 240 km through the existing Kaliabhambhora road bridge near Silghat on NH-52 which takes 6 Hours passing through Numaligarh, Kaziranga National park and Biswanath Town. To address these challenges, the project is proposed to be developed as 4-Lane Access-Controlled Greenfield connectivity from Gohpur to Numaligarh with road-cum-rail tunnel below



the river Brahmaputra. This would be first underwater road-cum-rail tunnel in the India and second in the world. The project will provide significant benefit to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and other Northeastern states. This will enhance the

efficiency of freight movement, reducing logistics cost and driving socio-economic growth in the region. The project alignment integrates with two major National Highways (NH-15 and NH-715) and two railway lines, i.e. Rangia-Mukongselek Railway

Section under Rangia Division of NFR on Gohpur side and Furkating-Mariani loop line section under Tinsukia Division of NFR on Numaligarh side. The project providing seamless connectivity to key economic, social, and logistics nodes across Assam. Additionally, the project will enhance multi-modal integration by connecting with 11 economic nodes, 3 social nodes, 2 tourist nodes and 8 logistic nodes, providing enhanced connectivity with 4 major railway stations, 2 airports, and 2 inland waterways thereby facilitating faster movement of goods and passengers across the region. Upon completion, the project will play a pivotal role in strategic considerations, regional economic growth, strengthening connectivity between major economic centers and opening new avenues for trade and industrial development. of growth, development and prosperity in surrounding regions.

## Priyanka Gandhi to visit Assam on February 18

**Guwahati, Feb 16:** Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is scheduled to visit Assam on a two-day trip starting February 18 to take part in a series of party meetings ahead of state assembly elections, a state leader said on Sunday.Vadra, a Congress general secretary and parliamentarian, is the chairperson of the party’s screening committee for the upcoming Assam assembly elections.State Congress general secretary (organisation) Bipul Gogoi said in a statement that Vadra will hold a series of meetings with different office bearers of the Congress during the two days.She will be holding separate meetings with the political affairs committee, MLAs, district presidents, frontal group heads, legislature party leader, working presidents, MPs, different cell heads and booth committee chiefs, among others.Vadra will leave for Delhi on the evening of February 19, Gogoi said.The Assam Assembly elections for 126 constituencies are likely to take place in March-April this year, and the Congress is looking



to contest the polls in an alliance with several other opposition parties Imran Masood and Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka, both Lok Sabha MPs, along with Sirivella Prasad, are the members of the screening committee.

In the opposition camp, the Congress has 26 members, AIUDF 15 and CPI(M) has one MLA. There is one Independent legislator also.

## JAK fetes winner of Miss Grand Manipur title

**Imphal, Feb 16:** A felicitation ceremony was held in honour of Babina Thokchom, who recently won the title of Miss Grand Manipur 2026. She is set to represent Manipur at the upcoming Miss Grand National Beauty Pageant scheduled to be held in April this year in Jaipur. The event is being organised by Star Entertainment Production. The felicitation programme was organised by the Juvenile Association Kakching at the club's premises on Sunday. The event was attended by the President of the Juvenile Association Kakching, Kshetrimayum Ibobi, and the President of the Rajdhani Pareng Development Committee, Shougaijam Birlal, among others. Speaking at the programme, Babina shared her journey and experiences. She completed her MA from Manipur University and is currently



preparing as a UPSC aspirant while undergoing coaching at the Dr. Ambedkar Centre of Excellence for UPSC Coaching, Manipur University. She stated that beyond academics, she has always been motivated to contribute to society and use public platforms to spread awareness on important social issues, which inspired her to participate in beauty pageants.

Babina highlighted that her path was not easy. Coming from a humble background, she and her family faced several financial challenges. However, with determination and hard work, she overcame the obstacles and succeeded in winning the title. She expressed heartfelt gratitude to everyone who supported and encouraged

her throughout her journey. She further mentioned that in today's digital age, misinformation spreads rapidly on social media, often affecting individuals and society negatively. Emphasising the importance of responsible online behaviour, she stated that she would focus on raising awareness about cyberbullying and mental health issues through her participation in the pageant. Babina Thokchom is the daughter of Thokchom Noren and Thokchom Ongbi Sumita of Kakching Makha Leikai. Her parents earn their livelihood through pickle-making. She completed her Class X from Martin Grammar English School and Class XII from Comet School, Changlei. She graduated from Dhanamanjuri College. Previously, she won the titles of Miss Dhanamanjuri 2019 and Manfete Queen 1st Runner-Up 2019.

## MLA Rameshwar assures facelift of Kakching AC

**Imphal, Feb 16:** MLA of Kakching Constituency, M. Rameshwar stated that efforts are being made to transform Kakching into a leading constituency not only in Manipur but across India. The MLA made the statement during the inauguration programme of a newly constructed road built using paver block technology at the Ebudhou Sekmai Ningthou Pareng road in Moirangthem Leikai, Kakching. MLA Rameshwar continued that since being elected as the MLA of Kakching Constituency, significant developmental works have been undertaken in the fields of education, healthcare, road connectivity, and other infrastructure under the BJP-led NDA Government. He appealed to the public to extend cooperation in successfully implementing the various developmental initiatives taken up in the constituency. Speaking at the function, the MLA expressed happiness



over the commitment made by Chief Minister Y. Khemchand, who is leading the present government in Manipur, to allocate ₹5 crore each for road development in every constituency of the state. He stated that with such support, major road connectivity projects in the constituency can be completed successfully. He further mentioned that roads constructed using paver block technology are durable and are expected to last for more than 10 years. Apart from road infrastruc-

ture, several other development works are underway in the constituency. A new Ema Market has been constructed and opened for public use, expansion works of the District Hospital are in progress, and under AMRUT 2.0, work orders have been issued to provide potable water to the residents. Construction of a gallery at DSA Ground is ongoing, and a new project has been initiated at Kha Manipur College to upgrade and improve the institution. The MLA also expressed

confidence that the BJP-led NDA Government will launch several more development projects within the coming years. He urged the public to cooperate in ensuring the successful implementation of various development initiatives being undertaken in the constituency. The inauguration programme of the newly constructed road was attended by concerned Ward Caretaker Councillor Nongmaithem Narjit and several local residents.

## Budget session of Assam Assembly begins

**Guwahati, Feb 16:** The four-day Budget Session of Assam Legislative Assembly got underway today.

Assam Finance Minister Ajanta Neog will present the vote-on-account for the fiscal 2026-27 in the Assembly tomorrow.

Since assembly elections are due in the state this year, a vote-on-account or interim budget will be presented instead of a full-fledged budget. The new government to be formed after the polls will present a full-fledged budget later.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pijush Hazarika said that the Governor will give his speech today and there will be a discussion on his speech.

"Tomorrow, the proceedings will begin with Question Hour followed by the Finance Minister laying the vote-on-count and a discussion and debate on it," Hazarika said.

Today, the Governor's Address will be followed by obituary references. Speaker Biswajit Daimary will then announce the Report of the Business Advisory Committee setting the business for the session. After that, there will be laying of ordinances, reports, and rules, presentation of reports of Assembly Committees, motion for election of members to various committees and boards, introduction of Government Bills, Motion of Thanks on the Governor's Address, and presentation of Supplementary Demands for Grants and Supplementary Appropriation for 2025-26.

## Assam-Nagaland Border Row Escalates Again With Fresh Tensions At Merapani

**Guwahati, Feb 16:** Farmers under the banner of the Merapani Seed Farm Bhumi Adhikar Dabi Samiti have filed a complaint at the Merapani Police Station against the Nagaland Agriculture Department following a fresh confrontation along the Assam-Nagaland border in Golaghat. The latest tension erupted on Monday at the Seed Farm in Bheleguri, when a large contingent of Nagaland Police, accompanied by officials of the Nagaland administration and representatives of the Merapani Village Council (Nagaland), arrived at the site and appeared intent on resuming construction of permanent RCC structures on the disputed land. Villagers quickly assembled to oppose the move, forcing the Nagaland team to



retreat. Anil Bora, Secretary of the Samiti, alleged that previous attempts to build RCC structures had been halted by local residents, who had sent mason workers back. On noticing the officials' return, the villagers rushed to the site, confronting the Nagaland authorities and a CRPF camp commandant, who Bora claimed treated them with disrespect

and questioned whether their assembly had political motives. Bora insisted that the villagers were determined to prevent encroachment, emphasizing that the contested land belongs to Assam.

Prasanta Chutiya, Joint Secretary of the Samiti, expressed concern that the proposed structure in Sector D of the Seed Farm at Joypur village could eventually be

converted into a Nagaland Police camp. He alleged that Nyamo Odyuo, Chairman of the Merapani Village Council, accompanied by 20-30 police personnel and members of the Naga community, had visited the site to discuss construction plans, but the villagers intervened to remove them and assert Assam's claim over the land. The disputed area reportedly spans nearly 1,200 acres in Sector D. Residents pointed out that previous attempts by the Nagaland Agriculture Department to plant oil palm saplings on the land had also been opposed, with saplings later removed after protests to prevent displacement of Assamese farmers. Renewed preparations for permanent construction from Saturday triggered the latest resistance.

## CM assesses infrastructure requirements of Sainik School



**Imphal, Feb 16:** Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh visited Sainik School Imphal on Sunday. He was received by MLA Khurai Constituency L Susindro Meitei, Principal Col A Rajiv and senior officials of the institution. Col A Rajiv presented a detailed briefing on the functioning of the school and highlighted key grievances and challenges currently being faced. These included deteriorated infrastructures, issues relating to water supply, the need for perimeter wall strengthening, pending construction of the girls' hos-

tel and issues in sound clarity in the Vikram Batra auditorium, etc. He also outlined the school's recent achievements and academic activities, including notable performances in competitive examinations and participation of cadets in various national-level events. After the presentation, the Chief Minister stated that the concerns raised would be taken up with the concerned authorities for appropriate action. He emphasised that the issues would be looked into, as students are the pillars of society and must be given due importance.

## Sikkim CM Prem Singh Tamang Interacts With Students, Praises Their Academic Excellence

**Gangtok, Feb 16:** Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Saturday interacted with the outgoing 2021 batch of MBBS students and the 2022-2025 batches pursuing MBBS, BDS, BPT, MPT, Engineering, and other disciplines at Manipal Institute and various other universities, along with their guardians. During the interaction, the Chief Minister highlighted the role of the Chief Minister's Education Assistance Scheme (CMEAS) in providing financial support and encouragement to deserving and meritorious students. He said witnessing their dedication and academic performance reaffirmed the initiative's impact in empowering young minds to pursue their goals with confidence and determination. CM Tamang congratulated the students and extended his best wishes as they move forward in their professional careers dedicated to service and humanity. He also expressed gratitude to all who contributed to the programme's success, particularly Dr. Sandeep Kashyap of Manipal Hospital for facilitating coordination between the CM's Office and the Institute. The Chief



Minister reiterated the government's commitment to ensuring that financial constraints do not hinder access to quality education, professional excellence, and societal service. Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang (Golay) engaged in an interactive session with students pursuing diverse professional courses, praising their academic achievements and encouraging them to remain focused on their goals. The event, held in Gangtok, brought together students

from medical, engineering, and other professional streams, highlighting the government's commitment to education and skill development. The Chief Minister met students enrolled in MBBS, Nursing, Paramedical, Engineering, Veterinary Science, Dental, and allied health programs. He acknowledged their dedication and passion for learning, noting that their hard work reflects the aspirations of Sikkim's youth. Tamang emphasized that education

is the cornerstone of progress and urged students to continue striving for excellence.

"There's nothing more inspiring than witnessing our youth chase their dreams with determination," Tamang remarked, extending his best wishes for their future endeavors. During the session, Tamang encouraged students to remain disciplined and focused, stressing that perseverance is key to success. He reminded them that academic excellence is not only about grades but also about character, resilience, and the ability to contribute meaningfully to society. He urged them to make their families proud and to serve as role models for younger generations. The Chief Minister reaffirmed his government's commitment to strengthening education and skill development in Sikkim. He assured students that the state would continue to provide resources, scholarships, and infrastructure to support their academic journeys. Tamang highlighted ongoing initiatives aimed at improving access to quality education, particularly in rural and remote areas, left behind.

## NFR announces 4 pairs of special trains ahead of Holi

**Guwahati, Feb 16:** To handle the festive pressure, Northeast Frontier Railway would run four pairs of Holi Special Trains. From Katihar to Amritsar to Katihar, Dibrugarh to Jhanjharpur-Dibrugarh, and Dibrugarh to Kolkata-Dibrugarh, special trains will operate between Narangi and Gorakhpur-Narangi. From February 19 to March 26, 2026, Special Train Number 05633 (Narangi-Gorakhpur) will operate Thursdays with a departure time of 1.20 pm and a return time of 1 pm.

On the same note, Special Train Number 05634 (Gorakhpur-Narangi) will operate every Friday between February 20 and March 27, 2026, leaving Gorakhpur at 4:55 p.m. and reaching Narangi at 9:40 p.m. Each of the trains will make six journeys. Special Train Number 05736 (Katihar-Amritsar) will run every Wednesday from February 18 to March 25, 2026, departing from Katihar at 9pm and reaching Amritsar at 9.45am on Friday.

Similarly, Special Train Number 05735 (Amritsar -Katihar) will run every Friday from February 20 to March 27, departing Amritsar at 1.25pm and arriving at Katihar at 11.45 pm the next day. Both the trains will run for six trips each.

Special Train Number 05974 (Dibrugarh-Jhanjharpur) will run every Tuesday

■ To address the holiday demand, North-east Frontier Railway will operate four pairs of Holi Special Trains from February 17 to March 31, 2026.

■ Special Train Number 05633 will run from Narangi to Gorakhpur every Thursday, while Special Train 05634 will return from Gorakhpur to Narangi every Friday.

from February 17 to March 31, 2026, departing from Dibrugarh at 5.20am and reaching Jhanjharpur at 11:30 am the next day. Similarly, Special Train Number 05973 (Jhanjharpur-Dibrugarh) will run every Wednesday from February 18 to April 1, 2026, departing Jhanjharpur at 1pms and arriving at Dibrugarh at 8:20 pm the next day. Both the trains will run for seven trips each. Special Train Number 05932 (Dibrugarh-Kolkata) will run every Saturday from February 21 to March 7, 2026, departing from Dibrugarh at 5pm and reaching Kolkata at 12.30am on Monday. Similarly, Special Train Number 05931 (Kolkata-Dibrugarh) will run every Monday from February 23 to March 9, 2026, departing Kolkata at 2.30am and arriving at Dibrugarh at 6:30 am the next day. Both the trains will run for three trips each.

## Dy CM Dikho urges Nagas to advocate for peace

**Imphal, Feb 16:** Lui-Ngai-Ni 2026 which is a seed sowing festival of the naga community was celebrated on Sunday at Ukhrul Headquarters Ground, Ukhrul district. The festival was organised by the State Level Organising Committee under the aegis of the United Naga Council on the theme - "Cultural Renaissance." The event was hosted by the Tangkhul Naga Long. The celebration was graced

by the presence of Chief Minister of Nagaland and President of NPF, Central, Dr. Neiphiu Rio as the Chief Guest; and Deputy Chief Minister of Manipur, Losii Dikho as the Guest of Honour. He further added that the celebration of Lui-Ngai-Ni must also be marked as a reminder that before growth begins, there must be reflection; before progress, there must be unity; and before abundance, there must be faith.

## Governor celebrates milestones of Assamese cinema

**Guwahati, Feb 16:** Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya of Assam was present at the 9th Assam State Film Awards ceremony on Sunday, which took place at the Sri Sri Damodardeva International Auditorium in Guwahati. The Governor congratulated the recipients of the awards and said the event was a living representation of Assam's creative energy, artistic consciousness, and lively cultural celebration.

"Assam, a region renowned for its natural beauty and rich traditions, has always maintained its identity through language, folk arts, and storytelling. Cinema has given these traditions new dimensions by bringing them to a wider audience," he said. Recalling the glorious journey of

Assamese cinema, the Governor paid tribute to Rupkonwor Jyotiprasad Agarwala, whose historic film Joymati marked the beginning of Assamese cinema. "Despite limited resources, the film laid a strong foundation for the industry and reflected themes of sacrifice, history, and women's empowerment," Acharya said.

He also remembered Bharat Ratna Dr. Bhupen Hazarika whose music carried messages of humanity, harmony, and national unity, bringing global recognition to Assamese culture.

The Governor further acknowledged the immense contribution of the late Zubeen Garg in energizing contemporary Assamese music and cinema and connecting

*Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya attended the 9th Assam State Film Awards in Guwahati, celebrating Assam's cultural vibrancy and the contributions of key figures in Assamese cinema. He praised the legacy of Rupkonwor Jyotiprasad Agarwala and highlighted the impact of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika's music in promoting Assamese culture.*

the younger generation with their cultural roots.

Highlighting the role of the Central Government, Acharya noted that initiatives such as Digital India, Startup India, and Make in India have opened new avenues for the creative industries, benefiting re-

gional cinema including that of Assam.

Describing cinema as a mirror of society, the Governor said films inspire thought, promote social awareness, and drive positive change by addressing issues such as social justice, women's empowerment, and environmental protection.

He expressed happiness that despite limited resources, the Assamese film industry has achieved notable success at national and international platforms, especially in the digital era.

Reaffirming the State Government's commitment to strengthening film infrastructure and nurturing young talent, the Governor emphasised the vision of making Assam a vibrant film hub of the Northeast.

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Editorial

The Changing Nature of Work-Life Boundaries

Technological advancement has reshaped professional environments, blurring traditional work-life boundaries. Remote connectivity enables flexibility, yet it also erodes clear separation between professional and personal time. Emails and work-related communication extend beyond office hours. The expectation of constant availability reduces opportunities for mental rest. Over time, this continuous engagement leads to fatigue and reduced productivity. Flexible arrangements offer advantages, particularly for families and remote workers. However, flexibility must be structured. Without boundaries, work expands to fill available time.Organisational culture plays a decisive role. Leadership that respects personal time fosters healthier work environments. Clear communication policies regarding after-hours contact can reduce stress.Individuals must also cultivate discipline. Setting personal limits and prioritising downtime strengthens long-term efficiency.Healthy work-life integration supports emotional well-being and creativity. Burnout weakens both individual performance and institutional stability.Modern workplaces must redefine productivity beyond hours logged. Sustainable work culture balances professional ambition with personal renewal. Boundaries are not obstacles to success; they are safeguards for sustained contribution.

# Personal finance: Organizing and overseeing

Skills and wisdom in planning and managing personal finances are not acquired overnight; they develop gradually over time. The foundation of financial discipline is laid during one’s upbringing, where family values and prudent financial practices shape a child’s mindset. As individuals grow and enter professional or business life, these early influences strongly affect how they handle their own income. Unfortunately, many young people overlook the importance of personal financial planning in their pursuit of career growth, promotions, and higher pay with added perks. The reality often emerges in the late forties or early fifties when adaptability to new careers is limited and financial pressures rise due to children’s education and other financial commitments.Handling personal finance is more a question of the mindset and beliefs around money, the importance of developing a positive relationship with wealth and overcoming limiting beliefs, and taking control of financial destinies by seeking out opportunities, learning from mistakes, and continuous education about money. In this context, one is often reminded of the book “Rich Dad Poor Dad: What the Rich Teach Their Kids about Money That the Poor and Middle Class Do Not!” written by Robert T. Kiyosaki and Sharon Lechter. Authoritative studies highlight several recurring challenges in personal financial management. Risk vs. return profiles remain a concern as individuals often misalign investments with their true risk appetite, ranging from conservative (bank deposits) to moderate (mutual funds) and aggressive (equities). The “Consumption Wave” reflects a behavioral tendency to save what is left after spending, driven by instant gratification and excessive focus on wants over needs. Debt servicing and management pose technical and psychological challenges, as high EMIs, interest rate changes, and long loan tenures can strain long-term stability. Lack of emergency preparedness leaves many vul-



nerable during income disruptions. Inadequate provision for health and welfare, including insufficient insurance for medical emergencies or the loss of the primary breadwinner, undermines family security. Behavioral biases such as loss aversion, overconfidence, and herd mentality impair decision-making. Financial Literacy Gaps widen the knowledge-action divide, while inflation impact steadily erodes purchasing power, underscoring the importance of the Time Value of Money (TVM).Key issues in personal finance management focus on the balance between income, spending, savings, and long-term security. A few factors, like loss of income, uninsured losses, frequent or unplanned borrowings, poor tax planning, changes in life cycle needs, external economic changes, etc., are directly linked to financial vulnerability. Financial literacy is more like a life skill. Financial planning involves preparing for key milestones such as marriage of self, children’s education, home ownership, retirement, emergencies, and estate planning. Core elements include cash flow management, tax planning, investments, insurance, retirement planning, and debt management. Common mistakes include unnecessary spending, careless credit card use, ignoring regular savings, and making investment decisions based on incomplete knowledge or imitation rather than informed judgment.Financial

# In Bangladesh, he faces a lot of responsibility

The victory of the BNP-led alliance in the Bangladesh election has opened up several possibilities in Indo-Bangladesh relations. The most contentious issue will no doubt be the presence of Hasina Wazed in India. She has already been sentenced to the death penalty in absentia in Bangladesh, and the Mohammed Yunus-led interim government has officially asked for Hasina’s extradition. Will Tarique Rahman and his BNP follow the same policy? A big question mark hangs over here. Tariq Rahaman has said that he does not favour the proscription of any political party. That signifies a reasonably soft attitude towards the Awami League. But will he extend it to Hasina Wazed as a person too?Secondly, Tariq has said during electioneering that he will be neither pro-Delhi nor pro-Pindi (meaning Rawalpindi) but pro-Bangladesh. This is fine, and this should be the foreign policy of any country. In the same breath he had expressed that he wants good relations with India. If that is the case, then two knotty issues await his reaction – the Teesta water sharing controversy and the Ganges water sharing treaty, whose expiry is not far off. The Mohammed Yunus-led government had moved ahead to accommodate China in the Teesta River water augmentation and development plan. This is at present the most intricate issue between India and Bangladesh. If Tariq continues to involve China in the project implementation, then his relation with New Delhi is bound to turn sour. On the other hand, it is difficult for India to give the quantum of water as demanded by Bangladesh, as that would starve North Bengal of the much-needed water. A compromise formula has to be worked out. It is there. Will Tariq Rahaman be bold enough to adopt it?Tariq Rahaman’s public statements

indicate that he will follow his father Ziaur Rahman’s preferred theory of Bangladeshi nationalism, which is opposed to the Awami League’s idea of Bengali nationalism. Although the Awami League was absent in this election, the large number of seats captured by the Jamaat-i-Islami-led alliance indicates that Bangladeshi society has gone through a serious metamorphosis, one that has to be understood and deeply analysed by policymakers in New Delhi.What is now really expected from Tariq Rahaman? The most important task before him is to contain mob culture in his country, which is a typical phenomenon of Bangladeshi society. Tariq must strive to return to the civic society the position which it should enjoy. But there will be plenty of impediments before him in this task, as the lower rungs of his own party’s hierarchy are often accused of loot, plunder and extortion. This is a deep-rooted malaise in Bangladesh. The loot of Gana Bhavan, the official residence of Sheikh Hasina, after the former prime minister’s flight from Bangladesh is still fresh in public memory. Even in 1975, after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his ancestral house in Tungipara was looted. Imitating the American civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Tariq Rahaman had said that ‘he has a plan’. Surely he understands that it is now the time for him to unravel all the details of the plan for feedback from the civil society. So long as he commanded the BNP, sitting at a distance, distance gave him certain advantages for refurbishing his own image, which had previously been sullied by some controversies. However, it is undeniable that from 2001 to 2006, during the tenure of his mother, Khaleda Zia, as Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Hawa Bhavan—Tariq’s office—was the actual seat of power, and he

was alleged to have formed a coterie around himself that engaged in various excesses. This is the practice he must uproot this time. He must remember that Bangladesh is a land of extremes. Here popularity takes very little time to become extreme unpopularity. Only adherence to democratic principles can make Tariq’s position unassailable.This throws up the most important question: Will Tariq Rahaman facilitate the return of Hasina Wazed to Bangladesh? Here he has the example of his father, Ziaur Rahaman, before him. For a brief period after the murder of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, activities by the Awami League were practically banned in Bangladesh. After Ziaur Rahaman became the president of the country, he allowed the Awami League to resume normal activities. Even Hasina also returned to Bangladesh during the time of Zia. A healthy example was thus set. Will Tariq follow suit? International observers will watch this process. A disturbed Bangladesh is a threat to stability in South Asia as well. It will have wide repercussions in India and Myanmar. The nation is not just unquiet; it is still boiling. First of all, the next BNP-led government must address the issue of attacks on and torture of the minorities. The landslide victory of the BNP-led alliance confirms that the minorities did not put much faith in the soothing words and promises of security given by the Jamaat-i-Islami during electioneering, and they, with even a large number of committed Awami League sympathisers, voted largely for the BNP. In his first address to the nation after returning to Bangladesh, Tariq Rahaman had stressed peace and stability, the two things Bangladesh now needs most. Then he had articulated clearly that he visualises a country where the minorities comprising the Hindus, Buddhists and Christians will enjoy equal

status with others. Now he must redeem his pledge.Interestingly, many of the points contained in the constitutional reforms programmes referendum for which was also held along with the parliamentary election, have similarities with the BNP’s declared programmes. The two sets of programmes of the BNP—the 31-point programmes and the 19-point programmes—also speak in almost the same vein. The 19.1 is the BNP’s foundation. It speaks of sovereignty, social justice, self-reliance and national cohesion. The two most important points in the set of 31-point programs are limiting the executive’s overreach and rebalancing the relationship between the state and the citizen. The last one is the most important. Even fifty-three years after attaining independence from Pakistani rule, seeds of democracy are yet to take firm root in Bangladesh, and the country has had to go through several bouts of assassinations and military coups. Tariq will have to prove that he means his words and that he is not an autocrat in disguise. However, BNP rule during 2001-2006 when secessionist extremism was at its height in north-eastern India. It is widely believed on our side of the border that the northeastern ultras had received weaponry and logistical support from Bangladesh at that time. However, Tariq Rahaman has already expressed that he wants positive relations with India. To ensure this, he has to tighten up his law enforcement machinery all along Bangladesh’s borders with West Bengal. These are the areas where the Jamaat-i-Islami has done very well in the just-concluded election.However, Tariq’s public pronouncements indicate that he is giving considerable importance to steadying the tumultuous social conditions of his country, which has been torn asunder after the fall of the Awami League-led government.

## New signals from Dhaka

The outcome of the just-concluded general election in Bangladesh, which has resulted in a decisive victory for the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by Tarique Rahman, marks a significant, but complex to a certain extent, turning point in India-Bangladesh relations. Bilateral relations between New Delhi and Dhaka had plunged to a historic low in the wake of the unceremonious ouster of pro-India Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024. This election thus represents a forced reset, underlining the need for New Delhi to shift from a party-centric alliance to dealing with a traditional opponent in a volatile political landscape. A section of global political analysts consider the outcome as not only a political watershed for the South Asian nation but also a potential recalibration of regional power dynamics across India, Pakistan and China. Taking a closer look from Guwahati, one finds that the latest political transition in Bangladesh holds profound implications for the security, economy, and social fabric of Northeast India. With Bangladesh shifting away from the “golden era” of bilateral cooperation under the erstwhile Awami League regime, the Northeastern states—especially Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram, which share an international boundary with the neighbouring country—face a period of recalibration and potential volatility. The first and foremost concern for the Northeast is the potential weakening of security cooperation. During the Hasina government, Dhaka had actively clamped down on anti-India insurgent groups operating from the soil of that country. With the return of the BNP, there is every reason to fear a resurgence of some of these dormant militant groups. India’s focus is on capability and intent, specifically on the new Bangladesh government cooperating on issues like border control and infiltration and maintaining the balance of power in the South Asia region. Since such regimes have been in the past accused of harbouring insurgents and facilitating activities detrimental to India’s interests, one cannot refrain from raising fears of renewed instability in the region. Furthermore, during the instability in Bangladesh after the ouster of Hasina, there were as many as 1,000 infiltration attempts into the Northeast and West Bengal, a trend that poses a significant challenge to border security along the 4,000 km frontier. With Islamist fundamental forces gaining ground in Bangladesh in the past eighteen months, threats have been issued almost on a regular basis, causing disturbances in the Northeast, with at least one prominent person in Dhaka even threatening to disrupt communication between the region and the rest of India through the Siliguri Corridor. No wonder, New Delhi recently announced a plan to construct a strategic 35.76-km underground railway link through the Corridor in order to provide secure, all-weather, and non-visible connectivity. This project aims to fortify the vulnerable 22-kilometer-wide stretch—which is bordered by Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan—against security threats and ensure uninterrupted logistics for defence and economic purposes. Also, the Northeastern region is heavily dependent on several transit routes through Bangladesh to connect with the rest of India and Southeast Asia. Projects like the Akhaura-Agartala rail link, which had given a big boost to trade and connectivity, could face slowdowns or renegotiations under the new regime. The economic ties, including the supply of electric power from Tripura to Bangladesh, may call for a reassessment. If the new government prioritizes economic ties with China and Pakistan, it could alter the regional balance of power, forcing India to accelerate alternative infrastructure projects, such as those through Myanmar. Mention must also be made of the fact that unrest in Bangladesh had often led to migration, which historically caused demographic tensions in Assam, Tripura, and Meghalaya. Concerns about the safety of the Hindu community in Bangladesh have also resonated across the border, creating anxiety among ethnic communities about their cultural identity, land, and political representation. While the BNP has tried to reassure India about security, the transition marks a shift from a trusted ally to a more pragmatic, potentially challenging neighbour. For the Northeast, this means navigating heightened border risks, navigating potential economic hurdles, and maintaining strict vigilance, even as India attempts to build a new, stable relationship with the BNP-led government. Tarique Rahman is the 60-year-old son of former Bangladesh President Ziaur Rahman (assassinated in 1981) and former multiple-time Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

## Bharat Electronics approves JV Safran HAMMER weapon system

**New Delhi:** Bharat Electronics (BEL) announced a joint venture with France-based Safran Electronics and Defense (SED) for Project HAMMER. The joint venture company will operate a Centre of Excellence. It will act as a technology partner for the manufacturing, supply, maintenance, and repair of guidance kits used in the HAMMER weapon system. The primary end users of the system will be the Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy. Other Indian defence users may also be added later based on mutual agreement. The authorised capital may be increased up to Rs 10 crore or any other amount, depending on future business requirements.

The defence PSU in its regulatory filing said, “Board of Directors of Bharat Electronics at its meeting held on 15th February, 2026 has accorded approval for signing the Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) with Safran Electronics and Defence (SED), France for Project HAMMER.” The operationalisation of the joint venture is subject to regulatory and administrative approvals from authorities in both India and France. The joint venture will be split equally, with BEL and Safran holding a 50:50 stake each. The board of directors will have four members, with two nominees from BEL and two from Safran. The chairman will be appointed from among the nominees



but will not have a casting vote. Focus on guidance kits for HAMMER project The proposed joint venture will focus on the guidance kit of the HAMMER weapon system. BEL and Safran have also agreed to incorporate a private limited company. The registered office and principal place of business of the new company will be located in Pune or any other location mutually agreed by both partners. The share price of BEL is trading flat in the intraday trade on Monday. The stock has gained 12.81% in past six months.

## Shares of BSE, Angel One, Nuvama Wealth, and MCX are declining

**New Delhi:** Shares of BSE Ltd, Angel One Ltd, Nuvama Wealth Management Ltd and Multi Commodity Exchange of India Ltd (MCX) recorded a sharp drop in Monday’s early trade. At last check, BSE’s stock was trading 6.85 per cent lower at Rs 2,818, while Angel One fell 4.21 per cent to Rs 2,580. Nuvama Wealth and MCX were down 2.15 per cent and 2.74 per cent, respectively. The decline follows the Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI’s) move to tighten guidelines governing lending by banks to capital market intermediaries (CMI) such as brokers. The central bank has mandated that “all credit facilities to CMIs shall be provided on a fully secured basis.” This implies that for a bank to provide a Rs 100 loan to a broker, the broker must furnish collateral of an equivalent amount.

Sharing his view on the fall, market expert Avinash Gorakshakar said, “I believe this is largely a knee-jerk reaction, as the move to collect margins from brokers is intended to make the capital markets safer for investors. Any step that strengthens the capital market over the longer term is certainly welcome.” In an interaction with Business Today, he stated, “In the short term, however, smaller brokers or brokerage firms could find it more challenging, and we may see consolidation in the broking space, particularly in the financing segment that caters



to investors and traders. Larger players such as Nuvama or Angel One, and even other well-capitalised firms, could be better placed. If these stocks see a meaningful correction, it may present a good opportunity to consider them, as typically, the core business does not get materially impacted. Large clients generally understand

and adapt to new regulatory measures.” Gorakshakar added, “So this dip could be used to accumulate such companies. That said, there may be some near-term negativity since the move was largely unexpected by the market. Over the next two to three days, a bounce-back cannot be ruled out.

## IndiGo to hire over 1,000 pilots across ranks

**Mumbai:** IndiGo is preparing one of its biggest cockpit hiring drives, with plans to recruit more than 1,000 pilots across multiple categories, as per a report by the Economic Times. The airline is working to boost manpower and avoid a repeat of the disruption it faced after new rest norms came into force. The plan follows a period in December when the airline cancelled over 5,000 flights in seven days because of crew shortages linked to the implementation of the updated rule. The recruitment exercise covers trainee first officers, senior first officers, and captains. A senior officer stated to the Economic Times that IndiGo is building a pilot pipeline in line with its rapid aircraft induction. The airline, on average inducts around four aircraft a month and has an internal training system that upgrades about 20-25 first officers to captain each month, as mentioned in the report. Training is however time intensive, as trainee first officers usually require about six months before they become first officers, and first officers typically require at least 1,500 flying hours before they can be upgraded as captains. The hiring notice also indicates the airline is open to taking in pilots without prior Airbus A320 experience, even though the A320 family forms the backbone of IndiGo’s fleet, as reported by the Economic Times. The updated norms limited the number of landings a pilot can perform between 12 am and 6 am and raised weekly rest requirements. An investigation by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) found the airline had not recruited enough flights for the shift in rules and had not accelerated training sufficiently. As a result, pilots were stretched through frequent reassignment, extended “deadheading” and longer workdays traveling as passengers to operate flights from another location, as per the DGCA findings.

## Neysa gets fresh investment from Blackstone, TVS Capital and 3 key investors to scale up capacity

**New Delhi:** Mumbai-based AI infrastructure startup Neysa has attracted a major investment led by US private equity firm Blackstone, as it moves to rapidly expand GPU capacity in India amid rising demand for domestic AI computing. Blackstone, along with co-investors Teachers’ Venture Growth, TVS Capital, 360 ONE Assets and Nexus Venture Partners, will invest up to \$600 million as primary equity, as per the company. The funding will give Blackstone a majority stake in the company. Neysa is also planning to raise another \$600 million through debt, the company added. The combined fundraising marks a sharp step-up for the company, which had raised \$50 million earlier. This has created room for a new category of AI infrastructure providers, often called neo-clouds, that offer dedicated GPU capacity and faster rollout compared to hyperscalers. These platforms are particularly relevant for enterprises and AI labs that need local compute for reasons such as regulation, latency and customisation. Neysa operates in this space, positioning itself as a GPU-first infrastructure provider for enterprises, government bodies, and AI developers in India, where demand for local compute remains nascent but is scaling



quickly. Neysa co-founder and chief executive Sharad Sanghi said that the company is seeing strong demand from customers that want hands-on support, including rapid response and resolution times, an area where large hyperscalers may not always offer the same level of attention.

Blackstone sees steep GPU growth in In-

dia. Ganesh Mani, senior managing director at Blackstone Private Equity, said that India currently has fewer than 60,000 GPUs deployed, but the figure could rise nearly 30-fold to more than two million over the coming years. He attributed the expected growth to demand from the government, enterprises in regulated sectors such as

financial services and healthcare that require local data storage, and developers building AI models within India. Global AI labs, many of which count India among their biggest user markets, are increasingly exploring compute deployments closer to Indian users to reduce latency and comply with data requirements.

Neysa currently operates around 1,200 GPUs, and plans to scale significantly, with a long-term goal of deploying over 20,000 GPUs, as per the company. Sanghi said that the company expects to more than triple capacity next year, and that ongoing customer discussions could accelerate timelines, potentially leading to faster deployment over the next nine months. Where the capital will be deployed, the company plans to use most of the new capital to build out large GPU clusters, including investments in compute, networking and storage. A smaller share will be directed toward R&D and expanding Neysa’s software layer for orchestration, observability and security. Neysa is aiming to more than triple its revenue next year, and intends to explore expansion beyond India over time. Founded in 2023, the company has 110 employees and operates across Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai.

## Target price, key takeaways as RBI clears Bain Capital deal



**New Delhi:** ICICI Securities on Monday said Manappuram Finance Ltd’s future prospects appeared promising following the RBI’s approval for Bain Capital’s proposed acquisition, which it viewed as a structural turning point for the gold loan company. The broking firm said the new strategic direction, under the incoming investor, entails fresh management, a lower microfinance institution mix, improved asset quality management and a high-growth, lower-yield focus in the core gold loan business. It, however, acknowledged that the company’s

weak track record could be cited as a counter argument. ICICI Securities noted that Manappuram had attempted a lower-yield strategy in gold loans in FY22 and FY23, when yields declined about 457 basis points between FY20 and FY23. It also highlighted that the microfinance business had moved through a cycle, with mix peaking at 26 per cent in FY24 and falling to 16 per cent in FY25 and 9 per cent in 9MFY26.

Despite this, the brokerage said attractive valuations tilted the risk-reward in favour of the stock. It cited standalone valuations of about

1.7 times FY28E price to book and added that the worst appeared to be behind for the microfinance segment. It also pointed out that earnings compounded at 18.8 per cent over FY19–24, with average return on the transaction, Manappuram Finance received final approval from the Reserve Bank of India for the proposed acquisition of up to 41.7 per cent stake by Bain Capital through paid-up share capital and or convertible warrants. Under the proposal, Bain Capital will invest Rs 4,385 crore to acquire an 18 per cent stake on a fully diluted basis through preferential allotment of equity shares and warrants.

Manappuram Finance open offer The transaction will trigger a mandatory open offer to purchase an additional 26 per cent stake from public shareholders. Depending on the level of subscription to the open offer, Bain Capital’s post-investment stake may range between 18 per cent and 41.7 per cent on a fully diluted basis. Bain Capital will be classified as a promoter and will jointly control the company along with the existing promoters. The shareholding of existing promoters will decline from 35.3 per cent to 28.9 per cent following the capital infusion. Age return on assets and return on equity of about 5 per cent and 21.8 per cent, respectively. ICICI Securities noted that the RBI approval is subject to certain conditions. These include prior RBI approval if Bain Capital’s shareholding crosses 26 per cent of the paid-up capital, other than through warrant conversion, after one year as prescribed. Manappuram has also been directed to ensure that Bain Capital furnishes an action plan within the specified timeline to avoid having more than one non-banking financial company of the same category or housing finance company within its group with majority shareholding and control.

## FirstCry shares fell one year ‘Buy’ recommendation



**New Delhi:** Shares of Brainbees Solutions Ltd, the parent company of baby products retailer FirstCry, plunged 9.55 per cent in Monday’s trade to hit a 52-week low of Rs 244 after the company reported its third-quarter results. Brokerage JM Financial maintained its ‘Buy’ rating on the stock but sharply cut its target price to Rs 390 for March 2027, from Rs 460 earlier, citing near-term growth and margin pressures. In its note, JM Financial said FirstCry delivered India Multi-channel (IMC) revenue growth of 9 per cent year-on-year (YoY), which was impacted by heightened competitive intensity in the diapering category and procurement issues in third-party consumables brands. International business growth also slowed, rising 7 per cent YoY amid elevated promotional activity by horizontal players. On the other hand, GlobalBees remained relatively stable, posting revenue growth

of 22 per cent YoY, with its core categories sustaining a stronger 30 per cent growth.

At the consolidated level, gross margin declined 220 basis points (bps) YoY to 34.8 per cent, largely due to increased discounting in the IMC segment and a drag from non-core GlobalBees brands. However, operating leverage in employee and marketing expenses helped limit the compression in adjusted EBITDAM, which remained largely flat at 6.3 per cent. JM Financial noted that while near-term growth and margins are likely to remain under pressure, the management has reiterated confidence in a sequential recovery. The expected improvement is to be driven by structural initiatives such as RocketBees, FirstCry Qwik and portfolio realignment in offline stores. Despite trimming its target price, the brokerage said it continues to see value in the stock at current levels.

# INTERNATIONAL

## Who will police Gaza



**Paris:** On Oct. 30, 2023, just three weeks after the deadly Oct. 7 Hamas-led attack on Israel sparked Israel’s war in Gaza, U.S. security officials stationed in Jerusalem drew up a plan for what should be done when the war ends, according to a copy of the U.S. proposal obtained by NPR.

The memo, titled “Gaza Exit Strategy and the Morning After,” made two main recommendations to the Biden administration: to immediately set up Palestinian and international security forces to prevent Hamas from resurging in postwar Gaza, and to create a “dramatic change of Israel’s policy in the West Bank” that would rein in Israeli settlers and ensure a political horizon for creating a Palestinian state. Now, more than three months into a declared ceasefire, the Trump administration has not yet set up security forces in Gaza, though Trump in mid-February is expected to announce an international stabilization force with thousands of troops from several countries to deploy in Gaza, along with efforts to raise billions of dollars for reconstruction, a U.S. official with knowledge of the subject, but who was not authorized to speak to the media, told NPR. And the U.S. has tolerated Israeli settler violence and Israeli government measures that undermine prospects for Palestinian statehood. Under the ceasefire reached in October, Arab countries including Egypt as well as the European Union have agreed to train Palestinian civil police to be deployed alongside an “international stabilization force.” Indonesia on Tuesday said it was preparing thousands of troops for possible deployment, but their mandate is still unclear, other countries have not yet committed troops for that international force, and Israel’s prime minister has objected to the participation of some

countries, including Qatar and Turkey. The proposal would teach Palestinians in the West Bank the same tools for cyberdefense in order to protect critical infrastructure, like databases and police offices, according to the same two people

The initiative would also train Palestinians belonging to newly formed anti-Hamas militias in Gaza that Israel has been arming to counter Hamas through “network analysis to feed intel and targeting cycles,” according to one of the people familiar with the plans but who declined to be named, citing professional risk. Hamas supports handing over security responsibilities to a new Palestinian police force but insists that the force absorb thousands of police officers Hamas hired in Gaza in the years preceding the war. “The police that are there now cannot be forsaken because they are part of the Palestinian security apparatus,” said senior Hamas official Hossam Badran in an interview with NPR. In the absence of a new police force on the ground in Gaza, masked militants, presumably affiliated with Hamas, have fanned out throughout the part of Gaza they control, manning checkpoints and reinforcing their presence in Gaza — filling the very security vacuum that U.S. officials have wanted to prevent “Once the IDF departs, a power vacuum could ensue,” the 2023 U.S. memo warns, using the formal name for the Israeli military. “Left unaddressed, this vacuum could enable remaining Hamas/[Islamic Jihad] forces to regain control or other hostiles to exploit the vacuum.” Israel wants to incorporate Gaza clans it worked with into a future police force, according to the European diplomat. But the diplomat noted that the European Union, which would support the police training, opposes this, as “those types have criminal records.” For example, Yasser Abu Shabab, the now-deceased head of one of the gangs, reportedly escaped prison, where he was jailed for drug smuggling. The gang he once led has emerged as one of the main Israeli-backed militias in Gaza and has also been accused of the widespread looting of food aid. Instead of stabilizing the West Bank through strengthening the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority in the aftermath of the war, as the 2023 plan recommended, Israel took steps this week to strip some powers from the Palestinian Authority and increase Israel’s grip on the West Bank. Israeli settler violence and settlement expansion has grown, and daily Palestinian life has been choked by movement restrictions and military raids. Even before the war, in 2022, U.S. security advisers stationed in Jerusalem circulated a proposal to teach Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces digital policing and cyberdefense, according to two former U.S. officials involved in the proposal at the time. The proposal offered to train Palestinian forces in software sold by the Israeli digital forensics company Cellebrite to analyze data taken from confiscated electronic devices. It also proposed training them in network analysis tools like ArcGIS, which can build threat maps from digital data, and i2 Analyst’s Notebook, which detects patterns from vast volumes of information, according to two people who saw the proposal. The plan encountered pushback and was shelved. “If you give these tools to the PA, you’re giving them a tool that is very easily abused,” according to a former U.S. official who was critical of the idea. But in October 2025, with a new ceasefire in effect, the nixed cyberdefense proposal was dusted off, according to one of the people who saw the proposal and a former U.S. official. Even under the Biden administration, efforts to prepare a new Palestinian security force to replace Hamas in postwar Gaza ran into problems.

## Ukrainian Olympian disqualified over images of war dead

**Paris:** The International Olympic Committee has disqualified Ukrainian sled racer Vladyslav Heraskevych from the Milan Cortina Games. Heraskevych insisted on wearing a helmet painted with the faces of Ukrainian athletes killed by Russia since the full-scale invasion in 2022. Heraskevych, who races in the skeleton discipline, said on social media he believes the IOC was unfair in its ruling Monday that the “memorial” helmet violates a ban on political speech during the Games. “Hard to put into words, emptiness,” Heraskevych said on Thursday, after learning that he would be prevented from racing. He added that he believed Ukrainian athletes killed during Russia’s invasion deserved to be honored on the Olympic stage. “I believe they deserve this moment. Certainly, I do not get my moment at this Olympics, despite, I would say, pretty good results in the training runs. I really believe we could be among the medalists today and tomorrow, but we will not be able to race,” Heraskevych added.

Early Thursday, the IOC issued a statement saying Heraskevych would not be allowed to compete in skeleton races today in Cortina. “The decision followed his refusal to comply with the IOC’s guidelines on athlete expression,” the statement said. In a signal of how high-profile this dispute has become, the president of the IOC, Kirsty Coventry, also addressed the decision to ban Heraskevych. “I want to say thank you to Vladyslav and his dad, Mykhailo. They took the time to come in and talk with me this morning. I was not meant to be here, but felt that it was really important to come and talk to him face-to-face,” Coventry said. According to Coventry, athletes have signaled clearly that they want Olympians to be able to speak openly about political concerns, but not on the field of competition, where Heraskevych would have worn his helmet. “They also asked us to keep certain areas — so the field of play, the podium, and the Olympic village — safe ones,” she said. Posting on Instagram after he was excluded from competition, Heraskevych said, “This is the price of our dignity.” He has argued that the IOC has allowed other athletes to show demonstrations of grief during the Olympic Games. “I see big inconsistencies in decisions

# According to a spy service, Kim Jong Un’s daughter is almost certain to be named future leader

**South Korea:** South Korea’s spy agency told lawmakers on Thursday that it believes the teenage daughter of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is close to being designated as the country’s future leader as he moves to extend the family dynasty to a fourth generation. The assessment by the National Intelligence Service comes as North Korea is preparing to hold its biggest political conference later this month, where Kim is expected to outline his major policy goals for the next five years and take steps to tighten his authoritarian grip. In a closed-door briefing, NIS officials said they are closely monitoring whether Kim’s daughter — believed to be named Kim Ju Ae and around 13 years old — appears with him before thousands of delegates at the upcoming Workers’ Party Congress, said lawmaker Lee Seong Kweun, who attended the meeting. First appearing in public at a long-range missile test in November 2022, Kim Ju Ae has since accompanied her father to an increasing number of events, including weapons tests, military parades and factory openings. She traveled with him to Beijing last September for Kim’s first summit with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in six years on the sidelines of a World War II event.

Speculation about her political future intensified last month when she joined her parents on a New Year’s Day visit to Pyongyang’s Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, a sacred family mausoleum displaying the embalmed bodies of her late grandfather and great-grandfather, the



country’s first- and second-generation leaders. Some experts saw the visit as the clearest sign yet that she’s positioned to be the heir to her 42-year-old father. South Korean officials initially expressed doubt that she could be chosen as a North Korean leader, citing the country’s deeply conservative culture and tradition of male-dominated leadership. But her increasingly prominent appearances in state media have prompted a reassessment. The Workers’ Party congress in late February, last held in

2016 and 2021, could provide a stage for Kim Jong Un to formalize his succession plans, possibly by giving his daughter the party’s first secretary post, its No. 2 job, although such a decision might not be immediately disclosed to the outside world, Cheong said. Other analysts question whether she would receive such a high-profile post or any formal party role, given that party rules require members to be at least 18. If Kim Jong Un does use the party congress to cement his daughter as successor,

the signs would be more subtle, said Koh Yuhwan, former president of South Korea’s Institute of National Unification.

For example, the party may issue self-praise about how North Korea has survived longer than most other Communist states and credit that to how the country established a “successful inheritance of the revolution,” he said. “If you see comments like that, it would be reasonable to think that Ju Ae has been cemented,” as heir, Koh said. In its previous assessment of Kim Ju Ae’s status in September, the NIS told lawmakers that Kim Jong Un’s decision to bring her along on his trip to China was likely part of an effort to build a “narrative” possibly paving the way for her succession. “In the past, (NIS) described Kim Ju Ae as being in the midst of ‘successor training.’ What was notable today is that they used the term ‘successor-designate stage,’ a shift that’s quite significant,” Lee said. According to Lee, the agency cited her growing presence at high-profile military events, her inclusion in the family visit to Kumsusan, and signs that Kim Jong Un was beginning to seek her input on certain policy matters. Not much is known about Kim’s daughter. Despite her increased visibility in propaganda, North Korean state media have never published the name of Kim Jong Un’s daughter, only referring to her as his “respected” or “most beloved” child. The belief that she is named Kim Ju Ae is based on an account by former

NBA star Dennis Rodman, in which he recalled holding Kim Jong Un’s baby daughter during a trip to Pyongyang in 2013. South Korean intelligence officials believe she was born sometime that year. In 2023, South Korea’s spy agency told lawmakers that Kim Jong Un and his wife also likely have an older son and a younger third child whose gender is unknown. Since its foundation in 1948, North Korea has been ruled by male members of the Kim family, beginning with the country’s founder Kim Il Sung and followed by his son, Kim Jong Il. Kim Jong Un was just 26 when he was officially named heir during a 2010 party conference, two years after Kim Jong Il suffered a debilitating stroke. Following his father’s death in December 2011, he was abruptly thrust into the throne with relatively little preparation. Some analysts suggest that Kim Jong Un’s decision to debut his daughter early possibly reflects his own experience of being rushed into power. Party congress may offer hints toward succession plans. Kim Ju Ae’s first known visit to Kumsusan last month was also her father’s first visit to the site in three years. Given the palace’s status as a key symbol of the Kim family rule, the trip should be seen as a symbolic gesture by Kim Jong Un to present his daughter as his heir before his grandfather and father as he prepares for the major ruling party congress, said Cheong Seong-Chang, a senior analyst at South Korea’s Sejong Institute.

## DHS says immigration agents appear

**Paris:** Two federal immigration agents involved in the shooting of a Venezuelan immigrant in Minneapolis last month appear to have lied about the details of the incident, a spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security said Friday. The agents have been placed on administrative leave after “a joint review by ICE and the Department of Justice of video evidence has revealed that sworn testimony provided by two separate officers appears to have made untruthful statements,” the spokesperson, Tricia McLaughlin, said. The rare acknowledgment of potential missteps by ICE agents comes after the agency’s acting director, Todd Lyons, told Congress on Thursday that ICE has conducted 37 investigations into officers’ use of force over the past year. He didn’t say whether anyone has been fired. McLaughlin said the agency is investigating the January 14 shooting of the Venezuelan immigrant, and the officers involved could be fired or criminally prosecuted for any violations.

“The men and women of ICE are entrusted with upholding the rule of law and are held to the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, and ethical conduct,” McLaughlin said in Friday’s statement. “Violations of this sacred sworn oath will not be tolerated.”

DHS initially said the officer fired a shot to “save his life” after being “ambushed and attacked” by three immigrants with a snow shovel and a broom handle during a “targeted traffic stop.” Julio Cesar Sosa-Celis, the subject of the traffic stop, was injured after getting shot in the leg. Another Venezuelan man, Alfredo Aljorna, was also accused of attacking the officers.

# Britain’s High Court says government illegally banned Pro-Palestinian group



**Paris:** Britain’s High Court ruled Friday that the government’s decision to outlaw the protest group Palestine Action as a terrorist organization was unlawful, but it kept the ban in place pending an appeal.

Judges Victoria Sharp, Jonathan Swift and Karen Steyn said “the nature and scale of Palestine Action’s activities” did not meet the “level, scale and persistence” that would justify proscription. The judges said they

were “satisfied that the decision to proscribe Palestine Action was disproportionate.”

Palestine Action co-founder Huda Ammori said the decision “is a monumental victory both for our fundamental freedoms here in Britain and in the struggle for freedom for the Palestinian people, striking down a decision that will forever be remembered as one of the most extreme attacks on free speech in recent British history.”

Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood said she was “disappointed by the court’s decision and disagree with the notion that banning this terrorist organization is disproportionate. “I intend to fight this judgment in the Court of Appeal,” she said. Last year the U.K. government declared the pro-Palestinian group a terrorist organization alongside the likes of al-Qaida and Hamas, making membership in or support for Palestine Action a crime punishable by up to 14 years in prison. Since then, more than 2,000 people have been arrested for holding signs saying “I support Palestine Action.” Supporters of Palestine Action and civil liberties groups say the arrests for peaceful protest ride

roughshod over free speech and the right to protest. The government banned Palestine Action after activists broke into a Royal Air Force base in June to protest British military support for Israel’s war against Hamas in Gaza. The activists sprayed red paint into the engines of two tanker planes and caused further damage with crowbars. Palestine Action has carried out direct action protests at military and industrial sites in the U.K. since it formed in 2020, including breaking into facilities owned by Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems UK. Officials say the group’s actions have caused millions of pounds in damage that affect national security. J. J. O’Donoghue from the hip hop trio Kneecap performs during the Glastonbury Festival in Worthy Farm, Somerset, England, Saturday, June 28, 2025.

MusicNorthern Irish rap group Kneecap plays Glastonbury despite controversy

In their ruling, the judges said that while “a very small number of its actions have amounted to terrorist action ... regardless of proscription, the criminal law is available to prosecute those concerned.”

## Michael Kors celebrates 45-year career by toasting chic women of New York

Five years ago, Covid prevented Michael Kors celebrating 40 years as a fashion designer, so nothing was going to stop him partying when that figure reached 45. “It’s crazy, I’ve been in fashion 45 years, but I’m only 32,” said Kors, 66. The sweeping double staircase of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York became the catwalk for a fashion week show dedicated to the chic women of the city. On Kors’ best dressed list is the “amazing, remarkable” Rama Duwaji, the city’s first lady as wife of the mayor, Zohran Mamdani. “The way she dresses takes me back to the first term of the Obamas, so smart and so chic,” Kors said before the show. “Before that time, a first lady portrait meant a suit with puff sleeves and a bow and some pearls, and then all of a sudden there was Mrs Obama, wearing a simple jersey dress with her arms bare. It was modern.” Another “magical New York woman” on Kors’ list was Christy Turlington, who starred in the designer’s first advertisements as a teenage supermodel and, at 57, closed this show in caped, floor-length inky sequins. Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, back in the spotlight as the subject of a new Ryan Murphy drama, was on the mood board, along with Maria Callas – “the girl from Queens who became the greatest diva in the world”. One man made Kors’ list of muses: “ASAP Rocky, because he is just the most glamorous New Yorker right now.” Uma Thurman, Leslie Bibb, Mary J Blige and Dakota Fanning were on the front row. Backstage, Kors added another reason to celebrate. The Pride flag at the Stonewall Monument in Greenwich Village, which commemorates the 1969 Stonewall riot and the birth of the LGBTQ+ movement in the city, was taken down earlier this month under Trump administration orders. “That is criminal,” said Kors. Hours before his show, city officials raised the flag again. “In New York, we get back up and we push forward. That’s what we do. I am a born and bred New Yorker and proud. So let’s have a cheeseburger and a martini and listen to some piano music!” Kors likes to take a good hard swing when he steps up to the plate. There were opera gloves, cummerbund-wrapped tuxedos and gowns with diva-ish sweeping trains. The theme of a night at the opera was soundtracked by Prokofiev’s Romeo and Juliet mixed with Sia’s Chandelier, Tchaikovsky’s theme from Swan Lake spliced with the Rihanna song Diamonds. Kors took his bow to Native New Yorker by Odyssey. The Kors world is one that requires an “entrance maker” for evening. “It drives me crazy how boring people look when it’s cold. Ugly boots, a big nylon coat – ugh! In winter, your coat is your calling card,” the designer said before the show. His proposals:



a white shearling to shrug over your little black dress, perhaps, or a portrait-collared, wine-hued cashmere pea coat (“I love something that frames the face.”) There were more sober looks – grey tailored trousers with a simple red sweater looked almost Prada-licious – but this was a jazz-hands kind of night. But not everyone is in a party mood. New York fashion week is battling a challenging economic climate. Tariffs have wreaked havoc on global supply chains and consumer confidence. Saks Fifth Avenue filed for bankruptcy last month and on the first day of catwalk shows in the city, it announced the closure of eight Saks stores and one Neiman Marcus location. The largest single unsecured creditor is Chanel, which is owed \$136m (£100m), but it is smaller independent brands that are hardest hit, with many uncertain of being paid for orders that have been delivered, and facing a season with no new Saks orders. The bankruptcy has thrown into sharp relief the vulnerability of an industry structure built around the once mighty department store model. The bi-annual round of global fashion shows, which were devised primarily to serve the department stores who brought their chequebooks, are increasingly becoming a marketing opportunity for the megabrands who can afford them, and an unaffordable luxury for smaller designers. Steven Kolb, the chief executive of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, listed “the Saks bankruptcy, tariffs, inflation, geopolitical tension” as difficulties to be overcome. “Despite the cold, despite tariffs, despite bankruptcy, people are going to show up with their best creative ideas like we always have,” he told Vogue.

## Falling Sick Repeatedly Despite Normal Immunity Tests? Doctors Explain Why

Every now and then, we come across family members, friends, or colleagues who seem to fall sick multiple times a year despite having normal immune test results. It can be confusing, if the reports are normal, shouldn’t immunity be strong? “We often become overly dependent on routine tests and assume that if the reports are normal, everything is fine,” says Dr Ravi Kesari, MBBS, MD (General Medicine), Apollo Spectra, Bangalore – Koramangala. “But test results alone do not provide a complete assessment of immune system health.” According to Dr Kesari, the body’s ability to fight infections depends on multiple factors, including daily habits, environmental exposure, genetic predisposition, and overall health status. Laboratory values may appear normal, yet functional immunity can still be compromised.

### The Role of Nutrition and Vitamin Deficiencies

“The immune system depends heavily on proper nutrition,” explains Dr Ravi Kesari. “It requires a balanced intake of proteins, vitamins, minerals, and healthy fats to function optimally.” Diets high in sugar and processed foods can disrupt gut health and weaken immune responses. One of the most common deficiencies observed in clinical practice is vitamin D deficiency, which is associated with an increased risk of respiratory infections such as influenza and viral illnesses. “Low vitamin D levels can also worsen autoimmune conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis,” notes Dr Kesari.

### Sleep, Hydration, and Hygiene Matter

Sleep is not optional when it comes to immune resilience. “People who consistently sleep less than six



hours a night are at higher risk of infections,” says Dr. Ravi Kesari. “Their bodies also tend to produce fewer antibodies after vaccination.” Hydration plays an equally important role. Water helps transport nutrients, remove toxins, and maintain mucosal barriers that defend against pathogens. “Even simple measures like proper hand hygiene significantly reduce infection risk,” Dr. Kesari adds. “Basic preventive habits remain powerful tools.” Gut Health and Antibiotic Overuse Nearly 70 percent of immune activ-

ity originates in the gut. The balance of beneficial bacteria plays a crucial role in regulating immune responses. “Frequent antibiotic use, chronic stress, processed diets, and irregular eating patterns can disrupt gut microbiota,” explains Dr. Ravi Kesari. “While antibiotics are essential in certain medical conditions, their overuse or misuse can increase susceptibility to future infections.”

When gut health deteriorates, immune efficiency declines, even if standard blood tests appear normal.

Other Hidden Factors  
Recurrent infections may also stem from:

Genetic predisposition  
Structural defects in certain organs  
Underlying conditions such as multiple myeloma  
Chronic stress  
Obesity  
Prolonged exposure to air pollution  
“Immunity is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors,” says Dr Kesari. “It cannot be evaluated through a single test.” The Bigger Picture A strong immune system develops through a

holistic approach to health rather than focusing on one isolated factor. “Repeated sickness is often a signal that lifestyle adjustments are needed,” Dr Kesari emphasises. “Balanced nutrition, adequate sleep, stress management, and timely medical guidance can significantly strengthen the body’s natural defence mechanisms.” In other words, normal lab results do not always mean optimal immunity. True immune health is built daily through consistent, mindful choices that support the body from within.

## Natural Kitchen Fixes For Pimples And A Blemish-Free Face

Natural kitchen ingredients can be surprisingly effective in managing pimples and promoting clearer, blemish-free skin. While they may not replace medical treatments for severe acne, simple home remedies can help control excess oil, soothe inflammation, and support overall skin health. “Home remedies can be helpful for mild acne if used correctly and consistently,” says Dr Akanksha Agarwal, Founder-Director and Head of Aesthetic Services, Centre for Aesthetics (CFA). “However, they should complement not replace professional treatment in moderate to severe cases.”

### Honey: Nature’s Gentle Healer

One of the most trusted remedies is honey. Known for its natural antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties, raw honey can help reduce acne-causing bacteria while calming redness. “Applying a thin layer of raw honey as a 15–20 minute mask two to three times a week can soothe irritated skin and support healing,” explains Dr Agarwal. “It’s gentle and suitable for most skin types.”

### Turmeric: Anti-Inflammatory Power

Turmeric is another powerful kitchen ingredient. Its

active compound, curcumin, offers anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial benefits. “A small pinch of turmeric mixed with yogurt or honey can work as a spot treatment,” says Dr. Agarwal. “Over time, it may help reduce swelling and lighten post-acne marks.”

### She advises caution, however:

“Turmeric should be used sparingly, as it can temporarily stain the skin yellow if applied in excess.”

### Aloe Vera: Soothing and Hydrating

Fresh aloe vera gel is particularly effective for calming inflamed skin. It hydrates without clogging pores and can help accelerate the healing of pimples. “A thin layer of fresh aloe vera gel applied before bedtime can reduce redness and irritation,” notes Dr. Agarwal. “Rinse it off in the morning for best results.”

### Multani Mitti: Oil Control for Acne-Prone Skin

For oily and acne-prone skin, multani mitti (Fuller’s earth) mixed with rose water can help absorb excess oil and unclog pores. “Using a multani mitti face pack once a week can help manage oil production and reduce breakouts,” says Dr. Agarwal. “But overuse may lead to dryness, so moderation is key.”



### Green Tea: Antioxidant Support

Green tea, rich in antioxidants, can also benefit acne-prone skin. Cooled green tea can be gently dabbed onto the face using cotton to help reduce inflammation and regulate oil production. “It’s a sim-

ple and accessible remedy that supports overall skin balance,” Dr. Agarwal explains.

### A Word of Caution

While these remedies are natural, they are not risk-free. “Patch testing is essential before applying anything new to the face,”

emphasises Dr. Agarwal. “Natural does not always mean irritation-free.” She also highlights that skincare extends beyond topical applications. “Maintaining a balanced diet, staying hydrated, cleansing gently twice daily, and avoiding frequent touching of the

face are equally important for preventing breakouts.” Ultimately, kitchen remedies work best as part of a consistent skincare routine. “Patience and discipline are key,” concludes Dr. Agarwal. “Clear skin is the result of balanced care not overnight fixes.”

## Taking Protein Powder As A Supplement? Here’s 5 Things To Keep In Mind

If you are on a fitness regimen, protein intake is very important, and the easiest way to consume it is in powdered form. Protein powder has become a popular dietary supplement for people looking to build muscle, lose fat, or maintain a healthy body weight. But many wonder about the intake, safety and best time to consume the supplement. There are some things you need to keep in mind while having protein powder on a regular basis.

### Why Protein Powder Matters

Protein powder contains branched-chain amino acids (BCAAs) like leucine, isoleucine, and valine, which help build muscles. It repairs tissues, supports the immune system, and aids overall recovery.

### How Much Protein Do You Need?

Protein needs vary by body weight, muscle mass, and health status:

- Healthy adults: About 1 gram of protein per kilogram of body weight per day.
- High metabolic stress: Up to 1.5 g/kg.
- Renal patients on dialysis: Around 1.2 g/kg.
- Renal patients not on dialysis: Usually between 0.6 and 0.8 g/kg, depending on muscle health.

Protein powder is meant to bridge gaps in your diet, not replace whole foods entirely.

### Things To Avoid

Consuming protein powder is usually safe, but you should know the right amount. Most importantly, avoid supplements that have extra sugar, artificial sweeteners, or unknown herbs. Children and teens should only get their protein from natural foods like chickpeas, beans unless a doctor says otherwise.

### Ways to Include Protein Powder in Your Diet

- Smoothies: Blend a scoop with fruits, vegetables, and milk or plant-based milk.
- Breakfast: Mix into oatmeal, porridge, yoghurt, or overnight oats.
- Baking & Cooking: Add to pancakes, muffins, rotis, or homemade energy bars.
- Post-Workout or Snack: Mix with water or milk after exercise to aid recovery.

When to Take Protein Powder There is no single “best time.” Consistency matters more than timing. People can consume the supplement in the morning or evening, or before or after workouts, to improve muscle performance and recovery.

Protein powder is an easy way to help with your fitness and health goals. Focus on taking the right amount, using safe ingredients, and using it regularly, instead of worrying too much about the exact time to take it.

# On The Rejection That Forced Him To “Shave His Head,” Siddhant Chaturvedi

**Mumbai:** Former Gully Boy star Siddhant Chaturvedi recently talked about a rejection early in his career that had a profound effect on him.Siddhant discussed a personal incident in an interview that reflects the concept of his next movie, Do Deewane Seher Mein.His character gets rejected from an arranged marriage in the romantic drama due to a lisp. The actor recalled a difficult time in his life when asked if he had ever been rejected for an odd reason. "I had a lot of rejections while I was trying to break into the acting industry. However, I do recall one that stuck with me for a while. Only a year or two before that, I had left California. I was shortlisted after trying out for a major motion picture. I fit in with the character in each of the workshops. I was amazed



that I got in the lead role of a movie just a year after winning Fresh Face," he said. "It felt so easy," he continued. I was liked by both the director and the casting director. However, the producer rejected me after viewing the screen test following three to four months of workshops. The casting director told me

it was because of my curly hair when I asked. "Hero nahi bante curly baal wale." According to Siddhant, he was then told to straighten his hair and give it another go. After heeding the advice, he encountered yet another obstacle. "Gaye hain baal zyada straight ho. "What is this criterion to reject

someone?" I asked myself. Siddhant remembers being devastated and depressed following the rejection.I went home and shaved my head when I was ultimately turned down. I felt so depressed. I thought about that for a while," he added. His mother adored his natural curls, so the choice was very difficult. The actor claims that he eventually learned to accept them once more."Look at it now, it's on the poster in the center," Siddhant added, referring to the promotional materials for his latest movie. And I'm content with that. Ravi Udyawar is the director of Do Deewane Seher Mein, which also stars Mrunal Thakur. Sanjay Leela Bhansali is the film's producer, and it will hit theaters on February 20.

# India defeats Pakistan in the T20 World Cup, and Anupam Kher celebrates



**Mumbai:** Anupam Kher expressed his happiness and pleasure in a special post following India's triumph over Pakistan in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup.He posted a video of himself watching India's thrilling victory on his Instagram account. He wrote, "Har Har Mahadev. Jai Bholenath. #IND-vsPAK".India currently has an 8-1 head-to-head record after defeating their bitter rivals in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup match. Pakistan chose to field first after winning the toss prior

to the game. India achieved a competitive total of 175/7 on a difficult surface thanks to a brilliant performance by Ishan Kishan (77 off 40 balls), as well as vital contributions from captain Suryakumar Yadav (32 off 29 balls, with three fours) and Shivam Dube (27 off 17 balls, with three fours and a six).The best bowler for Pakistan was Saim Ayub (3/25 in four overs), with wickets also coming from Shaheen Shah Afridi (1/31 in two overs), Usman Tariq (1/24 in four overs), and Agha

Salman (1/10 in two overs). Pakistan got off to a terrible start in the run chase. Hardik Pandya removed Sahibzada Farhan for a four-ball duck, then Rinku Singh removed him with a deft catch. Jasprit Bumrah dismissed captain Salman Ali Agha for four in the following over and trapped Saim Ayub leg before wicket for just six. After two overs, Pakistan was at 13/3 and reeling.Usman Khan counterattacked with two consecutive boundaries off Axar Patel in the fifth over after Babar Azam started cautiously. Axar, however, had the final laugh as he reduced Pakistan to 34/4 after removing Babar for five off seven balls. Usman (43\*) and Shadab Khan (12\*) were at the crease as Pakistan reached 71/4 at the end of 10 overs. After an outstanding stumping by Ishan Kishan, Axar removed Usman for

44 off 34 balls, including six fours and a six, ending their 39-run partnership. In 10.4 overs, Pakistan was reduced to 73/5.Pakistan was at 78/6 in 11.4 overs after Kuldeep Yadav took out Mohammed Nawaz (4), who was caught by Shivam Dube. When Tilak Varma removed Shadab (14) after Dube made another catch, the collapse continued, reaching 78/7 in 12.1 overs. Faheem Ashraf was removed for a slow 10 off 14 balls by Varun Chakravathy, who took his first wicket thanks to Rinku Singh's careful handling. Abrar Ahmed was caught leg before wicket for a golden duck on the very next delivery after Pakistan collapsed to 97/8 in 15.3 overs.After clearing up the tail and dismissing Pakistan for 114 in 18 overs, Hardik Pandya completed the victory.

**'Jai Somnath' is announced by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, film to release in 2027**

**Mumbai:** The historical play Jai Somnath, which is based on the events of 1025–1026 CE, when the Mahmud of Ghazni stormed and pillaged the Somnath Temple in Gujarat, was co-directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali and Ketan Mehta.The attack on Ghazni, the temple's destruction, and its eventual resurrection all occurred 1,000 years ago this year. Somnath is a representation of India's unbreakable soul and the splendor of its civilization.In order to commemorate this momentous day, the movie seeks to tell a tale that embodies fortitude, faith, and India's unwavering spirit. "A temple can be broken, but not the faith," Bhansali Productions said as the caption for the Instagram post announcing the upgrade. Presenting Jai Somnath is Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Ketan Mehta is the director. 2027, in theaters around the world.The triumph of creation over destruction is told in the narrative of Somnath. There have been numerous attempts to demolish this center of faith, ranging from the onslaught by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni in 1026 to centuries of foreign invasions. Nevertheless, India's heroes have always sacrificed their lives to protect our land.Ketan Mehta will be the writer and director of Jai Somnath, which will be produced by Bhansali Productions and Maya Movies. In 2027, the movie is expected to be released.

# Mrunal Thakur Explains How Someone Leaked Her Address

**Mumbai:** Actor Mrunal Thakur has responded to the marriage rumors about her and Dhanush that have been circulating on social media for the past few weeks. Speculation grew when it was reported that the two were getting married on Valentine's Day, but it subsided when the day came and went without any announcement.Mrunal responded to the rumors in a humorous interview, saying she decided to laugh them off instead of allowing them to influence her.The actor made a joke in response to the belief on social media on her purported wedding: "Woh to shaadi ho rahi hai (The wedding is taking place) according to them." "I think I'll find my partner when the time is right," Mrunal continued. She dismissed the lingering rumors and declared, "When the time is right, I will find my partner." When she was spotted embracing the Tamil star at the launch of her movie Son of Sardaar 2, rumors about Mrunal and



Dhanush initially surfaced in August 2025. Online romance rumors were fueled by a video of the moment that went viral.Many social media users assumed that Mrunal and Dhanush had a strong relationship after he attended the wrap party for the movie Tere Ishk Mein. Aishwarya Rajinikanth and Dhanush were previously wed. After eighteen years of marriage, the pair announced their divorce in 2022. They have two kids, Linga and Yatra. Despite the rumors,

Mrunal is concentrating on her next movie, Do Deewane Seher Mein, which comes out on February 20.The movie follows two people as they navigate a changing emotional bond and learn who they are. Mrunal and Siddhant Chaturvedi play characters who struggle with incoherence, emotional detachment, and discreet familiarity.The film, which was written by Kaushal Shah, also stars Sandeepa Dhar, Viraj Gehlani, Joy Sengupta, and Ila Arun in important parts.

# Rajpal Yadav is scheduled to leave Tihar Jail

**Mumbai:** In the ₹9 crore check bounce case, actor Rajpal Yadav was granted temporary bail by the Delhi High Court on Monday. The actor, who spent more than a week incarcerated in Delhi's Tihar Jail, is now anticipated to leave the facility later today.The actor

was granted temporary bail by the Delhi High Court on Monday, valid until March 18. Rajpal was granted interim bail by Judge Swarna Kanta Sharma, provided he provided one surety and deposited ₹1 lakh as a bail bond. Rajpal was given an order by the court earlier

in the hearing to deposit ₹1.5 crore for interim bail by 3 PM. Bail was granted upon confirmation from the complainant's attorney, M/S Murli Project, that the actor had placed the money into the company's bank accounts in lieu of the amount of the returned check.

# Rashmika and Vijay were sighted at the Mumbai airport amid wedding rumors



**Mumbai:** There are persistent rumors that Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda are getting married. The rumored couple was recently spotted together at the Mumbai airport, which has further fueled the fires. The two were photographed departing in the same automobile, even though they were recorded arriving separately. Rashmika and Vijay were seen arriving in Mumbai on Sunday night amid circulating wedding rumors. The actors were later observed getting into the same automobile, despite the fact that they were photographed separately and

did not walk together. Rashmika avoided the cameras by dressing casually in a brown shirt, black pants, and boots. In order to finish the formalities, she moved stealthily through the terminal while holding a book. Without pausing to pose for the photographers, she hurried inside her car.Vijay, on the other hand, chose light brown pants and a black T-shirt. As he made his approach to the gate, he partially covered his face with a mask in an effort to blend in with the background. His quiet effort wasn't ignored, though. He was quickly recognized at the airport by a young fan. The

performer joyfully paused for a quick conversation, took off his mask to take a picture, and shook hands with his admirer.Soon after, a number of videos showing Rashmika and Vijay at the airport appeared on social media, immediately capturing everyone's interest. Heart emojis were used by fans to show their admiration and excitement for the stars in the comment sections.On October 3, 2025, Rashmika and Vijay exchanged rings in Hyderabad. Since the actors costarred in Geetha Govindam (2018) and Dear Comrade (2019), there have been rumors that they are dating. Rashmika and Vijay will wed on February 26 in a heritage palace in Udaipur, according to a source close to the pair revealed in December. When they return, they will also host a reception for their Hyderabad industry pals. However, the couple hasn't made any formal remarks regarding it.Rashmika and Vijay have been seen wearing rings since the announcement of their engagement in October 2025, although they have not yet discussed it. Last year, they participated in an event called Bharat Beyond Borders and led the 43rd India Day Parade in New York. In addition, the couple and their pals took a New Year's vacation together.

# Rajkummar Rao speaks out against rumors of hair loss

**Mumbai:** In response to the online commotion around his recent hairdo changes, Rajkummar Rao has now clarified that the shift is not the result of hair loss but rather the result of his intense preparation for his next movies, particularly the biography Nikam. The actor made his statement after images and videos of him from the Bolti Khidkiyaan Short Film Festival in Mumbai went viral online, causing social media users to speculate that he might be suffering from premature hair loss due to his altered appearance and thinning hairline. When Rajkummar showed up at the event wearing a plain black shirt, distressed jeans, and glasses, both fans and critics reacted to the footage on social media and other platforms. Many expressed surprise and worry over his new appearance. Others attempted to connect the appearance to his impending role as former Indian cricket captain Sourav Ganguly, while others openly conjectured about hair thinning or other changes. Rajkummar clarified the situation by sharing an open message on Instagram explaining the causes of his recent bodily change. He clarified that he likes to accomplish these changes organically rather than with prosthetics, as his most recent work entails performing parts that require actual physical alterations. Rajkummar wrote, "My being



is through my Art. Just finished shooting for my next Biopic #NIKAM and yes, it has demanded me to change physically which I love doing. I'm not a believer in prosthetic as long as I can achieve the look through my hardwork which I've achieved in Nikam be it gaining weight or looking old (to play a certain age)or to make my hair thin which my hair stylist was very much against but everyone told me to not go half bald for BOSE also and to gain that much weight or to Not stop eating and lose so much weight for TRAPPED or to not behave like a visually impaired person even when cameras weren't rolling during SRIKANTH."

"In order to look like the character, I had to put on about 9–10 kg for Nikam, eat two pizzas, a lot of sweets, and my favorite Aloo Parathas and Biryani, and not wear anything flashy. Hopefully, you will be able to witness all of that effort when you watch the soon-to-be released movie. Now that the transition phase has begun, it's important to shed these excess pounds and prepare to switch into Ganguly mode. He continued, "Our very own Dada will always do his best to engage you and entertain you through my work. Much Love." The life and career of famed public prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam, who has spearheaded a number of high-profile trials in India, are the subject of the Nikam movie. With Wamiqa Gabbi in the lead role, the film, which is directed by Avinash Arun and produced by Dinesh Vijan's Maddock Films, started production in late 2025 and is anticipated to be released later in 2026. It will examine the most important court cases in Nikam's history, such as the 2008 Mumbai train attacks and the 1993 Bombay explosions.Rajkummar is also preparing for his role as the legendary cricketer in Vikramaditya Motwane's movie on Sourav Ganguly. It is anticipated that production would start in early 2026, with a December 2026 release date.

# Claims of Taapsee Pannu OTT Has Rejected Unconventional Movies Like Assi

**Mumbai:** According to actress Tapsee Pannu, films with unusual and female leads are in danger of being "extinct" since there isn't enough interest in these kinds of tales. The actor claims that it is getting harder and harder to adapt unexpected stories for the big screen.Our species is in danger of being extinct. I refer to movies such as Assi. In an interview, Pannu stated, "We don't typically fit into the template that so-called commercial cinema follows."Assi, Pannu's next film with celebrated director Anubhav Sinha, is their third joint venture following Mulk (2018) and Thappad (2020).

The actor rejected the idea that these kinds of movies will always be able to find a place on the internet, claiming that streaming services have changed their approach to draw in "massy" audiences. In actuality, people believe that we will continue to watch these kinds of movies as long as they are available on over-the-top (OTT) platforms. However, these films are also not desired by OTT platforms. They have explicit rules stating that they can only choose movies that are successful in theaters. Their goal is to attract theatergoers to their stage.

They want the massy, potboiler audience to subscribe, yet they already have a specific type of following. Because of this, I believe that unless people realize how important these movies are, we are in danger of going extinct. "Watching reality TV can also be beneficial at times," she continued. The 38-year-old actor compared movies to various cuisines, stating that al-



though "Mughlai," which stands for commercial cinema, has its attraction, the business also needs its "dal chawal"—stories based in common life.Additionally, she thinks that it is "suicidal" for the future of important cinema to wait for a film's digital distribution. Only the audience can assist us by visiting theaters and viewing a wide variety of films, thus we should subscribe to all forms of cinema. Many people claim that we don't produce decent, rooted tales, but when did you support rooted stories? I hope they realize this before we lose it, otherwise we won't have the right to complain that our cinema can't compete with foreign cinema and that we only make one kind of film. You can't support good movies by viewing them on OTT while lounging at home. "If you enjoy a movie, tell others about it and encourage more

people to visit theaters," she advised. Reflecting on her experiences, actress Pannu described leading a film release as a "daily pain" and a continuous "battle," particularly noting the challenges for female actors following the COVID-19 pandemic. She expressed that the struggles to secure a film often overshadow victories, but highlighted the success of Rani Mukerji's Mardaani 3 as a hopeful sign for women in the industry. Pannu's upcoming film, Assi, which addresses rising sexual violence against women, showcases her as public prosecutor Raavi. To prepare, she observed real court proceedings, gaining insights into balancing "professional coldness" with "emotional depth." Assi, which features a strong cast, is set to release in theaters on February 20.

Mohun Bagan's  
2-0 victory over  
the Kerala  
Blasters in the  
season opener



**New Delhi:** At the Vivekananda Yuba Bharathi Krirangan in Kolkata on Saturday, the reigning champions Mohun Bagan Super Giants defeated Kerala Blasters 2-0 in the season opener to start their Indian Super League campaign. Jamie Maclaren's goal in the 36th minute of the first half and Tom Aldred's goal in injury time in the second half (90 6) gave the Mariners three points. For the Spaniard's debut game as Mariners manager, Mohun Bagan SG head coach Sergio Lobera selected a very strong line-up that included all of the team's familiar players, including Dimi Petratos, Jamie Maclaren, and Alberto Rodriguez. The new faces in the whole match-day squad were Amey Ranawade, Robson Da Silva, and Mehtab Singh. However, in his first ISL game, David Catala started a youthful side that included midfielders Y Ebendas and Rowllin Borges, as well as new international additions Oumar Ba and Victor Bertomeu. In the first half, Robson and Liston Colaco were able to find space to attack through the wings because Anirudh Thapa and Lalengmawia Ralte (Apuia) controlled the midfield, giving the reigning champions the greater possession. Behind Jamie Maclaren, Dimi Petratos resumed his preferred No. 10 position, and the Australian nearly gave his team the lead early on. Petratos was inside the box when Liston Colaco found him, but the forward grabbed his shot, but it missed the goal. Despite controlling the ball, the Mariners were having trouble getting past the Kerala Blasters' obstinate defense. Following Jamie Maclaren's water stop, they were able to take the lead. After Petratos discovered him inside the area, the Australian striker turned Aiban Dohling and scored the first goal of the ISL season with a calm left-footed finish. With ten shots on goal and six of them on target at the end of the first half, Mohun Bagan had a one-goal advantage. At the beginning of the second half, Catala made two substitutions: Amey Ranawade took Subhasish Bose's place for Mohun Bagan, and Naocha Singh and Marlon Trujillo were added. The second half featured the Mariners controlling possession, pressuring the Blasters to defend deep.

Every Detail of the Rafale Jets' Weapon, the Hammer Missile

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** During French President Emmanuel Macron's three-day official visit, India and France are anticipated to sign a Memorandum of Understanding for the development of HAMMER missiles together. On February 16, Macron will reach Mumbai. According to the External Affairs Ministry, he will meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 17. Rafale fighter aircraft now use the HAMMER (Highly Agile Modular Munition Extended Range) missile, which has been imported from France thus far. It is anticipated that manufacturing will move to India under the proposed arrangement.

The word "hammer" alludes to the idea that a hammer blow flattens a surface, symbolizing the weapon's capacity to eliminate its target. This intelligent precision-guided bomb is made for precise air-to-ground assaults. The weapon can hit targets between 60 and 70 kilometers away. It has proven successful against strongly fortified bunkers and in mountainous areas. It is anticipated that local manufacture will boost the Make in India movement, decrease dependency on imports, and increase Air Force supply speed.

The missile, known as AASM (Armement Air-



Sol Modulaire), had its public debut at the 2007 Paris Air Show. It was renamed HAMMER in 2011. It is classified as an air-to-ground weapon with a medium range. With a weight of about 330 kg, the missile is made to make accurate hits even at high altitudes. Because it works on the fire-and-forget concept, it doesn't need any more guidance after the target has been locked and the missile has been launched. The system employs cutting-edge navigation technology to reduce the likelihood of missing and can engage both fixed and moving targets.

There are various war-head possibilities, with weights ranging from 125 kg to 1,000 kg. The missile may be employed both during the day and at night and is capable of operating in any weather. Six 250-kilogram HAMMER missiles may be carried by a single

Rafale aircraft, enabling it to hit six different targets simultaneously. A 50/50 joint venture between Bharat Electronics Limited and its original French manufacturer, Safran Electronics & Defence, is anticipated to produce the HAMMER missile, according to a story.

The potential agreement for 114 Rafale aircraft is anticipated to be discussed in addition to the missiles between France and India. Ninety-six of them are anticipated to be produced in India, with the remaining aircraft being delivered in operational condition. Dassault Aviation will handle delivery. A helicopter assembly line in Vemagal, Karnataka, is anticipated to be inaugurated by PM Modi and Macron separately. The H-125 helicopter manufacturing project is a cooperative venture between Airbus and Tata Advanced Systems.

An UP Samajwadi Party Leader Perishes After a Car Is Crusted by a Fuel Pump Pole

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** In the Pratapgarh area of Uttar Pradesh, a 48-year-old Samajwadi Party politician lost his life when his car was crushed by a tall light pole. The high-mast pole was being installed when Lal Bahadur Yadav was passing a petrol pump. The huge pole suddenly fell, crushing Yadav's automobile and instantly killing him.

Yadav's Hyundai Creta's front end was destroyed by the massive pole, according to photos taken at the scene.



There was extensive damage to the front windshield, particularly on the driver's side. The blow was too powerful for Yadav to live, even though the airbags de-

ployed. Yadav's car was just behind a couple of bikes and an e-rickshaw, which narrowly avoided collisions by using their brakes in time. Yadav's family members and allies demonstrated against the gasoline pump management after the event, claiming that they were careless in setting up the pole. Yadav's body was found by police and sent for an autopsy. An investigation into the situation has been ordered by the district administration.

In Delhi's Inderlok Industrial sector, a plastic plant experiences a fire

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** On Monday, a huge fire started at a plastic factory in the Inderlok Industrial region of Delhi. After 23 fire trucks were dispatched to the scene, the situation was under control by 2:30 pm. According to the Delhi Fire Services, the cooling operation in the region is still in progress and there have been no casualties as of yet. According to a Delhi Fire Services (DFS) official quoted by news agency PTI, firemen raced to the scene after receiving a call about the fire at 11:37 a.m. "The procedure is still in progress. The official was cited as stating, "More vehicles will



be moved if necessary." The smoke from the fire was visible from a distance, according to locals, which alarmed them. According to reports, the DFS official stated that

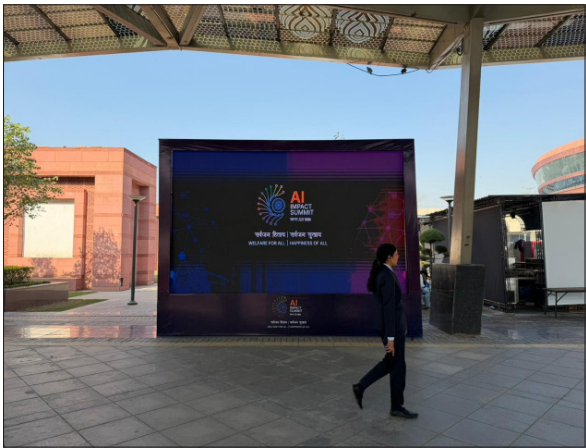
the cause of the fire has not yet been determined. A closed plant in Rajasthan's Alwar district's Khushkhara industrial region caught fire earlier in the day in a similar event.

The fire claimed the lives of seven persons. According to early accounts, the plant had been closed for months, and a sizable amount of cardboard had been discovered in storage. Around 10:00 in the morning, smoke was heard rising from inside the factory, and a few minutes later, the fire had grown into a huge conflagration. Witnesses reported hearing three or four large explosions, which caused panic.

The explosions are thought to have been caused by gas cylinders that were kept inside the factory. The cause of the fire has not yet been determined.

India Aims to Play a Significant Part in Developing AI Through the Mega Tech Chiefs Summit

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi is attempting to pave the way for India in a fierce competition to create frontier models as the country begins one of the biggest artificial intelligence summits in the world on Monday. The India AI Impact Summit, which could be the biggest assembly of AI luminaries to date, is anticipated to bring together world leaders, tech titans, AI startups, and investors in New Delhi. Researchers Yann LeCun and Arthur Mensch are among the guests, along with Sundar Pichai of Alphabet Inc., Sam Altman of OpenAI Inc., Dario Amodei of Anthropic PBC, and Alexandr Wang of Meta Platforms Inc. French President Emmanuel Macron will give the keynote address on the final two days of the summit, February 19 and 20, and PM Modi will then make his remarks. PM Modi sees the summit as an opportunity to highlight India's engineering prowess and large tech-savvy populace as factors that could help the country win the next stage of the global AI race. Data from more than a billion people, identified by the biometric ID system Aadhaar, powers the nation's digital infrastructure. Despite its late beginnings, it has a history of rapidly scaling technology; it missed the boom in personal computers but went on to become a dominant force in software services, going from a small number of landlines to about a billion smartphones in less than 20 years. "India is trying to compress decades of development into years by overlaying AI over existing digital identity, payment rails as well as health care, education, and governance stacks," stated Abhishek Singh, additional secretary at the Ministry of Electronics and IT. "And what gets built for India won't stay only in India." The nation's digital identity and payment system is already being exported. Aadhaar's architecture served as the inspiration for MOSIP, an open-source platform that is currently assisting nations including the Philippines, Morocco, and Uganda in creating national identification systems. On top of the same framework, other nations are developing digital payment platforms. According to Stanford University's Institute for Human-Centered AI, India is the third most competitive country in the world in terms of AI, after the United States and China. International tech companies are paying attention. In India, OpenAI and Anthropic are establishing their



businesses and pursuing government organizations, developers, and business clients. In order to cater to one of the fastest-growing markets for models like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude, Google and Meta are extending their data centers. Nvidia Corp. views India as a counterbalance to US export restrictions on high-end processors made in China, but its CEO abruptly withdrew from the summit, citing "unforeseen circumstances." However, industry observers warn that India's AI growth may be hampered by years of underinvestment in technology research and development.

The nation's true success, according to Aakrit Vaish, head of the AI-focused fund Activate, will come from bolstering its research environment so "we aren't just a testing lab for Silicon Valley's algorithms." Efforts are underway to develop voice-first AI models tailored to India's linguistic diversity, with notable initiatives set to debut at an upcoming summit. BharatGen will introduce Param2, a 17-billion parameter model supporting 22 Indian languages, while Sarvam AI will present an even larger model. These projects aim to provide affordable AI solutions across key sectors like education, healthcare, and agriculture.

Rishi Bal of BharatGen emphasizes the significance of cost in promoting technology adoption, while Himanshu Tyagi from Sentient AI suggests India's focus on advanced reasoning could help it advance in the global AI landscape.

Hardik Pandya, Kuldeep Yadav, and Suryakumar Yadav's heated post-match exchanges raise concerns

**New Delhi:** In the highly anticipated T20 World Cup 2026 match in Colombo, India easily defeated Pakistan, proving to be no match for the reigning champions. India trounced Pakistan by a resounding 61 runs for the eighth time in nine matches between the two teams in the history of the T20 World Cup. As Suryakumar Yadav's team decisively qualified for the Super Eight stage, it was the second-largest loss margin for Pakistan in the tournament's history. Nevertheless, a heated post-match incident

sparked discussions of conflict within the Indian camp despite the easy victory. As soon as the last wicket was taken, Hardik Pandya and captain Suryakumar Yadav were spotted yelling at teammate Kuldeep Yadav on the field. During the traditional handshakes, Hardik looked visibly agitated in a video that has gone viral on social media. Hardik made a strong gesture at Kuldeep as the players lined up following the India vs. Pakistan match. As the conversation progressed, Tilak Varma appeared worried, but Rinku



Singh intervened right away, perhaps in an effort to ease tensions between the teammates.

Suryakumar also seemed to give Kuldeep a hard talking-to shortly after he approached, which fueled rumors of tension after Pakistan's victory. In the last over of Pakistan's chase, Kuldeep fumbled a catch, which probably caused the frustration. In the same over that Pakistan ultimately lost their final wicket, the incident took place. Shaheen Afridi moved forward and pulled a short delivery in the

direction of long-on on the second ball of Hardik's over. Kuldeep sat down beneath the ball at the R Premadasa Stadium, close to the boundary rope, and reached for it with both hands. But Pakistan's innings was momentarily prolonged as the ball slid through his fingertips and across the boundary cushion for six.

Hardik responded right away, obviously annoyed by the lost chance, and was heard using a few Hindi profanities in a fit of rage. However, the all-rounder made sure that India closed

the over on a high note. He produced a longer delivery on the last ball, which Usman Tariq was unable to line up with. The ball struck the middle stump, ending Pakistan's innings and giving India a decisive victory.

In the history of the T20 World Cup, India defeated Pakistan eight times, which is the most any side has ever done against a single opponent. India will now focus on their last Group A match against the Netherlands in Ahmedabad on February 18 after securing their Super Eight qualification.

T20 World Cup 2026: India defeats Pakistan thanks to a brilliant knock from Ishan Kishan

**New Delhi:** At the R. Premadasa Stadium here on a thrilling Sunday, the Indian juggernaut continued to march on despite the predicted rains staying away. In the ICC T20 World Cup Group A match, the reigning champion defeated Pakistan by 61 runs thanks to Ishan Kishan's powerful attack and muscular 77. Suryakumar Yadav's team bowled out Pakistan for 114 in 18 overs after they had posted 175 for seven. When Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, and captain Salman Agha returned to the hut with just 13 on the board, the chase was in ruins. The first speed-breakers for the competitors were Bumrah, who had two wickets in his kitty, and Hardik, who had a wicket and a catch. Babar Azam discovered Axar Patel sneaking one into his stumps, adding to Pakistan's problems. Usman Khan, meanwhile, fought alone and hit the ground with a good blow. However, Pakistan was defeated when he fell to Axar, with Kishan whipping the bails. Salman had previously won the toss, chosen to field, and used his spinning arm to find the mark. As the first over, India was one for one as Abhishek Sharma, who had returned to the Indian playing eleven, made a poor pull. However, Kishan (77, 40b, 10x4, 3x6) hit pacer Shaheen Afridi's opening

ball for six, demonstrating that there were no early worries. Despite a couple edges racing past the ropes, the opener played his shots with determination and did not adopt a conservative stance. Since no area of the ground was out of his grasp, the southpaw continued to be active, dragging, gliding, hoisting, and driving past his 50. While Kishan's partner Tilak Varma remained on 10 for a while, a spin-heavy Pakistani onslaught found it difficult to contain him. Kishan had already established a solid basis for India when he attempted to force one off-side after reverse-hitting Saim and was caught. India cruised after a frantic Suryakumar struck a four off Usman Tariq and Tilak let out a six off Mohammad Nawaz.

When Tilak and Hardik tumbled off consecutive deliveries against Saim, there was a slight stutter. Avoiding the hat-trick, Shivam Dube and his boss gradually moved into a singles-based alliance that was boosted by the odd four and six. Dube continued to be active even after Suryakumar was dismissed by Tariq, and even though India lost two more batsmen in the closing stages, they still had enough to stay ahead of Pakistan for the remainder of the evening.

Shoaib Akhtar blows up at Mohsin Naqvi, the PCB chairman

**New Delhi:** The consequences of Pakistan's terrible performance in the rivalry match against India are starting to go out of control. Only one side really showed up for Sunday's match at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo, after all the hype, discussion, and drama in the weeks before. India's 61-run thumping of the opposition put the scoresheet 8-1 in their favor at the T20 World Cups. Shoaib Akhtar has long been a vocal opponent of the Pakistan team's frequently perplexing choices. As the finger-pointing started in record time for the PCB, he specifically targeted Mohsin Naqvi and other of the team's leaders, notably Babar Azam. "I'm not sure how this works if you put me in charge of this channel as chairman. After the game, Akhtar lamented on ABP News, "Now you've appointed someone chairman who doesn't understand cricket." "What are we able to do? How is this team going to function? Since the incidents during the Asia Cup where he ostensibly refused to give the trophy to the winning Indian team, Naqvi has grown to be a huge figure in the cricket world.

Although Naqvi has the position of interior minister in the Pakistani government, his qualifications to administer cricket are still unknown. Despite doubts about Naqvi's nomination, Akhtar continued to make fun of certain senior members who just weren't doing their jobs well. "You've made a superstar out of a guy, but he can't win you a single game. Akhtar said, "You've made a star of a guy who can't give you 10 overs," before quickly shifting the focus back to Naqvi's PCB. "Appointing an incompetent man to the most important position is the greatest crime in the world." "Any kind of chaos and damage can happen when an incompetent and jaahil [ignorant] person is given a big job," Akhtar stated. Overall, many Pakistani commentators and fans believe that the writing is on the wall because India is leading the group and simply appears to be a much better team than Pakistan. Until a determined effort is made to restore Pakistan cricket's reputation beyond the financial benefits of it all, this gap will not be closed." India has advanced significantly, whereas we have fallen far behind.

## Lyon Down Nice To Extend Winning Streak To Thirteen Strengthening Their Ambitious Ligue 1 Title Challenge

**Paris:** Corentin Tolisso scored as Lyon beat Nice 2-0 on Sunday to strengthen their grip on a top-three place in Ligue 1 and moved to within seven points of leaders Lens. Paulo Fonseca's side are now five points clear of fourth-placed Marseille in the race for the third and final automatic Champions League qualifying spot. A 13th straight win in all competitions also kept the seven-time French champions' slim title hopes alive. Lens reclaimed top spot on Saturday with a 5-0 thumping of Paris FC, after Paris Saint-Germain had opened the door by losing 3-1 at Rennes the previous day.

Lyon broke the deadlock against Nice in first-half added time with a superb counter-attack which was finished off at the back post by Tolisso for his 50th goal for the club. Both sides missed good chances ear-



ly in the second period, as Nice winger Tom Louchet had a low effort saved by goalkeeper Dominik Greif before Lyon forward Pavel Sulc curled narrowly wide. The hosts took total control in the 65th minute, just seconds after Nice had a huge penalty appeal waved away for an apparent foul on Kail Boudache. Sulc raced clear at the other end and teed up Noah Nartey, who jinked away from two defenders and slotted the ball home. Earlier, Auxerre, who oc-

cupy the relegation play-off place, boosted their hopes of avoiding the drop with a 3-1 win at bottom club Metz. Lorient, promoted from the second tier last season, moved to within three points of the European places by sealing their fourth victory in five matches with a 2-0 win over Angers. Jamaldeen Jimoh-Aloba's first-ever goal for Aston Villa was an 87th-minute winner in a 3-2 comeback victory over Salzburg to conclude the opening phase of the Europa League

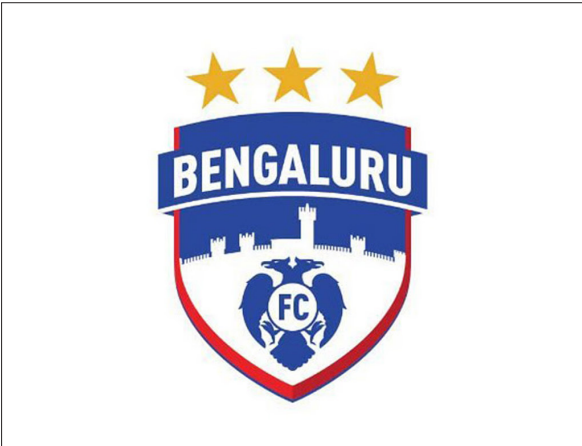
on Thursday. The 19-year-old Jimoh-Aloba's strike followed Tyrone Mings' equalizer at Villa Park. Morgan Rogers sparked the comeback in the 64th after the visitors built a 2-0 lead on own goal from Victor Lindelof and then Moussa Yeo's goal.

Villa wasn't able to overtake Lyon atop the 36-team standings, however, after the French team beat 10-man PAOK 4-2 to remain in front of Unai Emery's team on goal difference. Both Lyon and Villa had already secured a spot in the round of 16. Like in the Champions League, the top eight finishers advance automatically to the last 16. The teams placed from nine to 24 enter a two-leg playoff. The rest of the top eight are: third-place Midtjylland, Real Betis, Porto, Braga, Freiburg, and Roma. , two points back of Lyon and Villa.

## Neto Hat Trick Sends Chelsea Into Fifth

**Hull:** Pedro Neto scored a hat trick, including directly from a corner kick, as Chelsea beat Hull City 4-0 in the fourth round of the FA Cup on Friday. Also, Wrexham reached the fifth round for the first time in 29 years after beating Ipswich 1-0 in an all-Championship matchup. Hull and Chelsea had met eight times before in the FA Cup and Chelsea progressed every time. Host Hull never looked like halting that arresting run as the Premier League side took control from the off. Pedro Neto's drilled shot from just outside the box gave Chelsea the lead going into halftime, and his low corner squeaked through a throng of bodies straight into the goal six minutes into the second period. Young Brazilian Estêvão made it 3-0 minutes later when he side-footed home from 12 meters out, and Pedro Neto finished a nicely worked fourth. Pedro Neto is an incredible player," Liam Delap, who recorded three assists, told TNT Sports. "He is playing in a position he is not even used to but he showed his quality. Wrexham will discover in Monday's quarterfinals.

## ISL Return Sees Bengaluru FC Host United Delhi FC In Anticipated Home Encounter



**Bengaluru:** After a prolonged Indian Super League pause, Bengaluru FC are set to host United Delhi FC at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium on Sunday. The return to action has lifted the mood in the camp, with players and staff expressing renewed energy and focus. Forward Ryan Williams highlighted the positive atmosphere within the squad. "We have been waiting a long time to get back out there, especially in front of our fans at home. The environment is positive, and when you are happy and confident off the pitch, it reflects in performances. Everyone is motivated and

ready to give their best from the very first match," he said. Williams has emerged as a key attacking force for BFC. Last season, he featured in 22 matches, scoring seven goals and providing four assists, underlining his influence in the final third.

With home support behind them, the Blues will look to make their comeback count with an aggressive approach. Head coach Renedy Singh said, "The players have worked very hard over the past few weeks and are ready for the challenge. It is a 13-match season, but our focus is on taking it one game at a time, starting to-

morrow. We want to attack with intent but also defend as a unit. The whole team must contribute consistently in both phases." Singh, who joined the club as an assistant, took over as interim head coach following the exit of Gerard Zaragoza and was officially appointed head coach in January.

The forward line, led by Sunil Chhetri, was a potent force last season. Chhetri finished second in the ISL scoring charts with 14 goals and recorded 16 goal involvements in 28 matches. He registered 63 shots, 29 of them on target (46% accuracy), converting 22% into goals. At the back, goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, along with defenders Rahul Bheke, Nikhil Pojary, Naorem Roshan Singh and Chinglensana Singh, provides solidity at the back. Sporting Club Delhi, a new entity making its ISL debut this season following the re-branding and relocation of Hyderabad FC to the national capital, will be eager to make an immediate impact. Javi Siverio, Iker Guarrotxeana and Borja Herrera.

## Axar Says India-Pakistan Matches Bring Little More Pressure Than Any Other Normal Cricket Encounters

**Colombo:** All-rounder Axar Patel conceded that there is an extra layer of pressure around a cricket match between India and arch-foes Pakistan, but said the players try to remain steady-minded by staying away from outside talks about the intensity of the age-old rivalry. In the latest episode of the showdown between the two teams, India trounced Pakistan by 61 runs at the Premadasa Stadium here Sunday night to advance to the Super Eight stage of the ICC T20 World Cup.

Yes, there is pressure. People around you or your family or friends talk to you about it. So, yes, there is a little more pressure than a normal match," Axar said in the post-match press conference. As professional cricketers, we just focus on controlling our emotions. We don't think too much about the rivalry or put extra pressure on ourselves because of it," he added. We are see-



ing them as a team. So, we are not thinking about these rivalries etc. We are just focusing on cricket. So, whenever I am playing, I treat it as one match against an opponent." Ishan Kishan played a sensational 40-ball 77 to lift India a competitive 175 for seven, and Axar lauded the opener for playing a game-changing innings. Yeah, obviously the

way he batted, I think one of the great knocks, because it was not so easy, the ball was spinning, some were going straight under light, so it was not easy. It's just that the form he has had in domestic cricket - he has carried it forward to the New Zealand series and then in the last match also he scored 50. So, when your confidence is high you don't

think much about yourself or the wicket. Obviously, there is confidence also and a lot of skill also. He has not hit all his shots in one place, he has played shots all over, over the cover, slip - so he used the field well. So I think credit goes to him," he detailed. India's lopsided win did not do any justice to the match's We are How the wicket was.

## Kohli's Melbourne Solitude Echoed As Ishan Kishan Faces Cricket's Loneliest Place In Colombo With Determination

### Kishan Finds Colombo's Loneliest Place, Kohli-Like

**New Delhi:** There is a moment, rare and fleeting, when nothing else reaches you. Not the crowd, not the noise, not the decades of geopolitics pressing in from the boundary. Thirty thousand people could be screaming, the game balanced on the edge of history, but the outside world simply blurs into irrelevance. Time slows. The ball leaves the hand and feels larger, clearer, more obedient than it should. The pitch is turning square, but you see only straight lines. Decisions stop feeling like decisions. They become instinct. Batters call it being in the zone, but that phrase misses its profound isolation. It is a quiet severing from everything that is not leather and seam. Four years ago, Virat Kohli found that silence on a cold night at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. On Sunday, Ishan Kishan found it in Colombo, on a surface that resisted every certainty except his own, against Pakistan, who appeared to have a plan until he showed they did not. If Kohli's MCG special was a Shakespearean trage-



dy-turned triumph, Kishan's 77 was John Wick. Fast, clinical, and unapologetically violent. Both belonged to that transcendental space where the outside world ceases to matter. But while one felt like salvation, the other felt like execution. On a Colombo surface that gripped and turned, Kishan produced an innings that refused to acknowledge its difficulty. Pakistan had loaded their XI with spin. Off-spin, leg-spin, left-arm spin, and even a mystery spinner Suryakumar Yadav admitted was "out-of-the-syllabus" on the eve of the match. Yet none of it mattered to Kishan. He struck 77 off 40 deliveries, at 193, on a pitch where every-

one else seemed bound by its terms. Even India's best players of spin, Tilak Varma and Suryakumar Yadav, moved at nearly run-a-ball, respectful of its resistance. Kishan moved at nearly twice their speed, as if he alone had solved its resistance.

The dismissal of Abhishek Sharma in the first over should have set the tone. Salman Ali Agha, Pakistan's captain and off-spinner, showed immediately that the pitch was a bowler's ally. At that stage, there was tension. "When the match started, and Salman Agha got a wicket of Abhishek Sharma in the first over itself, I thought umm... this could be something dif-

ferent," Sunil Gavaskar told IndiaToday.in. You could feel it too, couldn't you? That brief flicker of doubt. That quiet, uneasy "umm" forming before the mind could articulate it. The next over. Shaheen Afridi, new ball in hand, Colombo heavy with expectation. Pakistan sensed vulnerability. The pitch seemed ready to enforce it. Kishan did not. The first ball he faced from Afridi disappeared into the stands over midwicket. A bouncer, met not with caution but certainty. The sound of clean contact was a sign of declaration. Kishan had already decided the terms of his innings.

From that point on, the match bent around him. He lifted the off-spinner over the infield, telling Salman that it was not going to be his day. When Abrar Ahmed, Pakistan's premier spinner, was introduced inside the power-play, Kishan swept him into the stands. Not a slog, but a calculated strike, balanced and precise. Later, when the field spread, he adapted just as easily, threading a late cut once lofted freedom was gone.

## Pakistan's commentariat warns one-sided India-Pakistan Contests could diminish future commercial value rapidly

### Experts warn one-sided clashes Hurt Marquee value

**Karachi:** With every one-sided India-Pakistan clash invariably dominated by India, the commercial value of this once marquee showdown is going down at least on this side of the border, according to former players and observers of the game. India's victory on Sunday has hit Pakistan harder than before as there were expectations that after the tough posturing by the country's administrators during the recent deadlock with the ICC, the players too would fire on all cylinders on the field.

The 61-run defeat was, however, a sobering reminder of the gulf that now exists. India has defeated Pakistan in eight out of nine matches in the T20 World Cup. This is in addition to the three straight defeats that Salman Ali Agha's men endured at last year's Asia Cup. India's domination over Pakistan in white-ball cricket has been such that since the 2017 Champions Trophy final win, Pakistan has not won a single ODI against the arch foes. Former Chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board, Lt General (rtd) Tauqir Zia noted that with every loss, the much-hyped games are



Losing commercial value in The ICC. The fact is Pakistan and India matches have become too one-sided. This time the hype built up because the PCB announced the boycott of the game against India then un-boycotted it. But sooner or later the Pakistan and India games will lose their value to the ICC and member boards," he cautioned. Pervaz Mir, who runs an advertising agency here, agreed that fans on this side are losing hope for a revival of the once equal rivalry. Now fans are also losing hope because no one wants to see one-sided encounters including sponsors, advertisers," Mir said. He noted that the bulk of the revenues that the ICC and its broadcaster earn from India-Pakistan matches comes

From the Indian consumer Market. But even there, the mis-match has not gone unnoticed. When the boycott decision was announced there were many Indians who said it doesn't matter as the matches have already become too predictable. The commercial value of these matches will diminish unless the matches become more close and competitive," he said. Nadeem Mandviwalla, a film distributor and owner of a cineplex in Karachi, said that during the screening of the match most of the assembled made a beeline for the exit when Pakistan lost four early wickets.

The thing is even if we qualify for the semi-finals we are likely to come up against India again and we all know What the result will be and

that hurts the most," cricket writer and analyst, Omair Alavi noted. Stalwarts like Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis, Shoaib Akhtar, Saqlain Mushtaq, Ramiz Raja, and Aamir Sohail, who were part of the Pakistan teams that won a number of matches against India in the '80s and '90s, are now commentators. According to Shoaib and Saqlain it is a painful experience for them to watch The current Pakistan and India matches. Where is that character and fire that we had when we played India? Yes, we lost some matches but everyone knew it was always going to be a tough match," Shoaib said. Saqlain also recalled how whenever Pakistan played against India captain Wasim Akram and other senior players would push players to not give up. I remember how we won that Test against India in Chennai in 1999. Sachin was (Tendulkar) batting and as India inched closer to victory, Wasim bhai kept on urging us that we just need Sachin's wicket and we will win. Where is that spirit in this team?" he asked. Yes, we lost some matches but everyone knew it was going To Match," Shoaib said.

## Bengaluru FC Start New Season Strong With Impressive Opening Victory Against Delhi



**Bengaluru:** Though Bengaluru FC has had to endure some tough times during the build-up to the delayed Indian Super League, they ensured there was no hiccup in their first match of the season on Sunday. At their home ground in Kanteerava Stadium, the Blues has had some interesting moments before securing a 2-0 win against Sporting Club Delhi. It couldn't have been sweeter for their fans as veteran striker Sunil Chhetri found the net in the season opener. A goal in each half from N Siwasakthi and Chhetri secured the win. After champions

Mohun Bagan Super Giant on Saturday and Jamshedpur FC earlier in the day, Bengaluru is the third team to win their opening encounter.

The hosts had a lively start to the match with both Ryan Williams and Ashique Kuruniyan coming close to score inside the first five minutes. Williams won the ball off Babovic in Delhi's half, and with a strong run towards the box, hit a low shot from outside, which went just wide of the post. In the next minute, Nikhil Pojary floated in a lovely cross from the right, which was met by Ashique at the far

Post. SC Delhi goalkeeper Vishal Yadav reacted quickly and flicked the ball to safety. Delhi grew into the game and made it more difficult for Bengaluru to create chances as they defended their own box well. But Bengaluru pressed on.

Jamshedpur FC began their Indian Super League 2025-26 campaign with a narrow 1-0 victory over Mohammedan Sporting Club, here at the JRD Tata Sports Complex on Sunday. An early strike from Madih Talal in the ninth minute proved decisive as Owen Coyle's side began their campaign

at the "Furnace" with a win. The 28-year-old was named Player of the Match for his efforts. Jamshedpur FC head coach Coyle named Albino Gomes between the sticks, with captain Stephen Eze marshalling the defence alongside Pratik Chowdhary, Nikhil Barla and Mark Zothanpuia. In midfield, Rei Tachikawa, Pronay Halder, and Talal were tasked with controlling the proceedings, while Sanan Mohammed and Ritwik Kumar Das supported Raphael Messi Bouli in attack. Mohammedan Sporting head coach Mehrajuddin Wadoo, overseeing the league's first all-Indian squad in ISL history, started with Subhajit Bhattacharjee in goal behind a backline of Pukhrambam Dinesh Meitei, captain Gaurav Bora, Sajad Hussain Parray and Hira Mondal. Amarjit Singh Kiyam, Lalthankima, Tangva Ragui and Mahitosh Roy featured in midfield, with Thokchom Adison Singh and F Lalremsanga leading the line. The hosts began with purpose and intensity. Inside three minutes, Messi Bouli fired over from the centre of the box after being set up by Talal. Moments later, Talal himself rose to meet a cross from Sanan, but headed just over the bar.