

Assam Rifles Chief visits Kohima, stresses strong ties with local communities



Kohima, Mar 07: The Director General of the Assam Rifles, Lt Gen Vikas Lakhera, visited the Headquarters of Inspector General Assam Rifles (North) in Kohima on March 6 and reviewed the operational preparedness of troops as well as welfare measures for personnel deployed in the region. During the visit, the Director General was briefed by senior officers about the current security situation

in the area and the level of operational readiness maintained by the force. Officials also informed him about various initiatives being carried out to improve the welfare and living conditions of the troops posted in different locations. Lakhera interacted with officers and soldiers of different ranks and appreciated their work in maintaining peace and stability in the region. He praised the personnel for their discipline and commitment while serving in challenging conditions. Speaking during the visit, the Director General underlined the importance of cooperation between security forces and local communities. He said that such cooperation plays an important role in maintaining long-term peace and supporting development in the region. He also appreciated the various civic action programmes being carried out to strengthen trust and goodwill between the Assam Rifles and the local population. As part of the visit, Lakhera inaugurated a new sports complex at the Kohima Garrison. The facili-

ty has been developed for the use of troops of all ranks. Officials said the complex will encourage soldiers to take part in sports and maintain a healthy lifestyle while also promoting discipline, teamwork and sportsmanship. The Director General also inaugurated a newly constructed Sainik Institute and a modern cook house in the Dimapur sector of the Assam Rifles. The Sainik Institute has been created as a place where soldiers can spend their off-duty time in a comfortable environment. It offers space for relaxation, social interaction and meals. The modern cook house has been equipped with improved kitchen facilities and better storage arrangements. Officials said the upgraded infrastructure will help ensure better hygiene, efficiency and improved working conditions for the personnel involved in preparing food for the troops. During his interaction with the soldiers, Lakhera praised the efforts of the formation in maintaining good administrative standards.

In Brief

CM Khemchand offers prayers at Ima Chinga Lairembi Shanglen

Imphal: Chief Minister Y Khemchand today offered prayers at Ima Chinga Lairembi Shanglen at Assam Rifles Post, Singjamei Chinga Hill in Imphal West district to seek blessings for restoring lasting peace, strengthen harmony among all communities, and accelerate sustainable development in the State. In a post on X and Facebook, Chief Minister Khemchand said, “Offered prayers this morning at Ima Chinga Lairembi Shanglen at Assam Rifles Post, Singjamei Chinga Hill. I was warmly received by Maj Gen Gaurav Sharma, SC, SM, IGAR(S); Brig Pratyush Kumar, YSM, Cdr 9 Sector; Col Dushant Singh Lama, Commandant 31 Assam Rifles; and Maj Rajkumar Sanjeev, Coy Cdr, Chinga COB”. “With the blessings of Ima Chinga Lairembi, I reaffirmed my unwavering commitment to restore lasting peace, strengthen harmony among all communities, and accelerate sustainable development in Manipur.

Kidnap case

Dima Hasao: Police in Assam’s Dima Hasao district have arrested two persons allegedly involved in a kidnapping case and a firing incident reported in the region. According to police, Suresh Kherksha alias Harish Chandra (42), a resident of Harichandrapur under Maibang Police Station, was arrested on the morning of March 7 by a team led by Officer-in-Charge Himanshu Borgohain. Police said the accused was allegedly involved in the kidnapping of a truck driver from the Longkhor area on April 25, 2025. He was also reportedly linked to a firing incident that took place in Dikhakhor on February 16, 2026.

High alert in Guwahati

Guwahati: Following a bomb blast near Delhi’s Red Fort that resulted in 13 fatalities, security in Assam, particularly at Guwahati Railway Station, has been heightened. The Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Railway Police are conducting thorough searches using sniffer dogs and systematic checks of luggage and passenger belongings. Additionally, drone cameras have been deployed for aerial surveillance of the station and its surroundings, with operations continuing until further notice as part of the increased security measures.

Five-Star Hotel Project in Silchar

Silchar: In a major boost to hospitality infrastructure in Southern Assam, the Assam Cabinet has approved the development of Silchar’s first five-star hotel, to be built by Polo Hotels Group with an investment of approximately ₹103 crore. The announcement marks a significant step towards strengthening the tourism, business, and events ecosystem of the Barak Valley. Announcing the decision, Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, Hon’ble Chief Minister of Assam said, “Today, our cabinet has given a go ahead to construct a Five Star hotel in Silchar, to Polo Hotels Group. The Polo Hotels Group will be spending around 103 crore rupees on this project. This is going to be the first five-star hotel in Silchar.” The project will introduce international-standard luxury hospitality infrastructure to the Barak Valley for the first time, positioning Silchar, the commercial and administrative hub of Southern Assam, to host high-value travel, corporate engagements, and large-scale events.

Gorkha student leader joins Congress in Assam

Guwahati: All Assam Gorkha Students’ Union president Sunil Chhetri formally joined the Congress party in the presence of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Gaurav Gogoi. At a joining programme held in Guwahati, many of Chhetri’s associates including Rohan Limbu, Rajesh Bhuyan, Mukesh Thapa, Balaram Rai, and Subhash Limbu also joined the Congress party. Speaking on the occasion, Chhetri said that they have stepped forward to raise their voice against oppression and exploitation. He added that only the Congress party can ensure justice and dignity for all communities of Assam. The programme was attended by APCC senior vice president Praneshwar Basumatary, MLA Khaliluddin Mazumdar, and several other senior Congress leaders and workers. APCC President Gaurav Gogoi said that the support and goodwill of the Gorkha community are extremely important for building a new and inclusive Assam. He added that Sunil Chhetri’s joining would become a major strength in the fight against policies of oppression and suppression.

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and accelerate sustainable development in Manipur. Together, we remain dedicated to realising the vision of Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji for a #vikshitmanipur and a #ViksitBharatViksit,” the Chief Minister said. CM Khemchand also interacted with the senior members of Chinga Mathak Young Learners Club (CYLC) at their premises today. In another post, Khemchand said, “It was a pleasure to interact with the senior members of Chinga Mathak Young Learners Club (CYLC) at their premises today. I listened attentively to their concerns, suggestions and aspirations regarding the development of the club and the welfare of the locality.”

Vice President addresses 20th Convocation of Mizoram University

Aizawl, Mar 07: Vice President CP Radhakrishnan, addressed the 20th Convocation of Mizoram University in Aizawl today and congratulated the graduating students, urging them to play a key role in building a Viksit Bharat by 2047.

Highlighting the transformation of the Northeast over the past decade, the Vice President said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the region has been placed at the centre of India’s development narrative.

He noted that improved connectivity, including the recently inaugurated Bairabi-Sairang railway line, has transformed the Northeast, which is now defined by its closeness to opportunity rather than its distance from Delhi. Governor of Mizoram and Chief Rector of Mizoram University General Vijay Kumar



Singh (Retd.); Chief Minister of Mizoram Lalduhoma; and Vice Chancellor of Mizoram University Prof Dibakar Chandra Deka, and other dignitaries were present during the occasion. Upon his arrival at Lok Bhavan yesterday on his maiden visit to Mizoram,

Radhakrishnan was accorded a ceremonial welcome by the Governor, the Chief Minister, Home Minister K Sapdanga, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Minister C Lalsawivunga, and other dignitaries.

On Friday evening, the Government of Mizoram hosted

a special cultural programme followed by a dinner in honour of the Vice President at the Lok Bhavan, which saw a captivating rendition of ‘Bharat Ki Beti’ by Mizoram’s young prodigy and PM Rashtriya Bal Puraskar awardee Esther Lalduhawmi.

Five-Star Hotel Project in Silchar; Polo Hotels Group to Develop First Luxury Property in Barak Valley

Silchar, Mar 07: In a major boost to hospitality infrastructure in Southern Assam, the Assam Cabinet has approved the development of Silchar’s first five-star hotel, to be built by Polo Hotels Group with an investment of approximately ₹103 crore. The announcement marks a significant step towards strengthening the tourism, business, and events ecosystem of the Barak Valley.

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The project will introduce international-standard luxury hospitality infrastructure to the Barak Valley for the first time, positioning Silchar, the commercial and administrative hub of Southern Assam, to host high-value travel, corporate engagements, and large-scale events. The proposed luxury hotel will feature 100 premium rooms and suites, designed to meet global hospitality benchmarks while reflecting the cultural character of the Barak Valley.

Key facilities will include multiple specialty restaurants and bars, a resort-style swimming pool, a full-service spa and wellness centre, a modern fitness facility, and state-of-the-art banquet and conference infrastructure capable of hosting corporate summits, exhibitions, weddings, and government events. Industry analysts note that India’s hospitality sector has witnessed a strong rebound in recent years. According to tourism estimates, India recorded more than 2.3 billion domestic tourist visits in 2023, while demand for MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives,

Conferences and Exhibitions) has expanded rapidly across emerging regional cities. The Silchar project forms part of an ambitious expansion plan by Polo Hotels Group, one of Northeast India’s most established hospitality brands.

Alongside the Silchar development, the Group is currently building 10 additional hotels across Meghalaya, Tripura, West Bengal, and Nagaland, significantly expanding its footprint across Eastern and Northeastern India. This pipeline of projects is expected to position the company among the largest hospitality operators headquartered in Northeast India, reinforcing its long-term commitment to developing world-class tourism and hospitality infrastructure across the region. Mr. Deval Tibrewalla, Chief Executive Officer of Polo Hotels Group, said, “Silchar is one of the most important gateway cities in Northeast India, and requires hospitality infrastructure required to support its growing economic and institutional importance. This project is not just about building a hotel; it is about enabling the next phase of growth for the Barak Valley. As a company rooted in the Northeast, we see it as our responsibility to bring world-class experiences to emerging cities and unlock their full potential. The Silchar hotel, along with our expanding pipeline across the region, reflects our long-term commitment to building the largest and most trusted hospitality platform in Northeast India.” Hospitality infrastructure projects of this scale generate significant multiplier effects across local economies. Industry estimates suggest that each hotel room can generate around 2 direct jobs, along with additional employment across sectors such as food supply chains, transportation, event management, and local services.

Two Arrested in Dima Hasao Kidnapping and Firing Case

Dima Hasao, Mar 07: Police in Assam’s Dima Hasao district have arrested two persons allegedly involved in a kidnapping case and a firing incident reported in the region.

According to police, Suresh Kherksha alias Harish Chandra (42), a resident of Harichandrapur under Maibang Police Station, was arrested on the morning of March 7 by a team led by Officer-in-Charge Himanshu Borgohain.

Police said the accused was allegedly involved in the kidnapping of a truck driver

from the Longkhor area on April 25, 2025. He was also reportedly linked to a firing incident that took place in Dikhakhor on February 16, 2026.

Officials said the district police had been searching for the accused for nearly a year before finally apprehending him during the operation.

In a related development, police also arrested another suspect identified as Hamchen Dibragade (41), a resident of Faidin under Maibang Police Station, in connection with the case.

CM Khemchand briefed on progress of railway line construction

Imphal, Mar 07: Ashish Bansal, General Manager, NF Railway Construction (Maligaon), along with accompanying officials called on Chief Minister Y Khemchand and apprised him of the latest progress on the construction of the railway line connecting Imphal. “Called on by Shri Ashish Bansal, General Manager, NF Railway Construction (Maligaon), along with accompanying officials, today at the Secretariat. The delegation apprised

me of the latest progress on the construction of the railway line connecting Imphal, a landmark infrastructure project for the state,” Chief Minister Khemchand informed in a social media post. “Emphasised that the commissioning of this railway line will significantly strengthen Manipur’s transport infrastructure, enhance connectivity, and ensure a more efficient and secure supply chain. This transformative project

will greatly contribute to improving the ease of living for our people, in line with the vision of Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji,” the Chief Minister said. Executive Director & State Head, Indian Oil AOD, Nitin Bhatnagar, accompanied by officials, also called on Chief Minister Y Khemchand at the Secretariat office, to discuss matters concerning the supply and distribution of petroleum products in the state.

NE/EAST

Assembly introduces seven Bills across key sectors

Guwahati, Mar 07: Seven key Bills covering sectors such as fire safety, education, administration, taxation, urban planning and local governance were introduced in the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly on Thursday. The Bills seek to introduce new regulatory frameworks or amend existing laws in their respective sectors. They are expected to be taken up for detailed discussion in the Assembly in the coming days. Chief Minister Pema Khandu tabled the Arunachal Pradesh Fire and Emergency Services Bill, which seeks to strengthen the state's fire prevention and emergency response mechanisms while laying down provisions for improved fire safety standards in buildings and public premises. Education Minister Pasang Dorjee Sona introduced the Arunachal Pradesh Transfer and Posting of Employees of Education Department (Regulation and Management) Bill. The proposed legislation aims to establish a comprehensive framework to regulate the transfer and posting of both teaching and non-teaching staff in the education department. Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein, who holds the finance, planning and investment portfolios, presented two Bills — the Arunachal

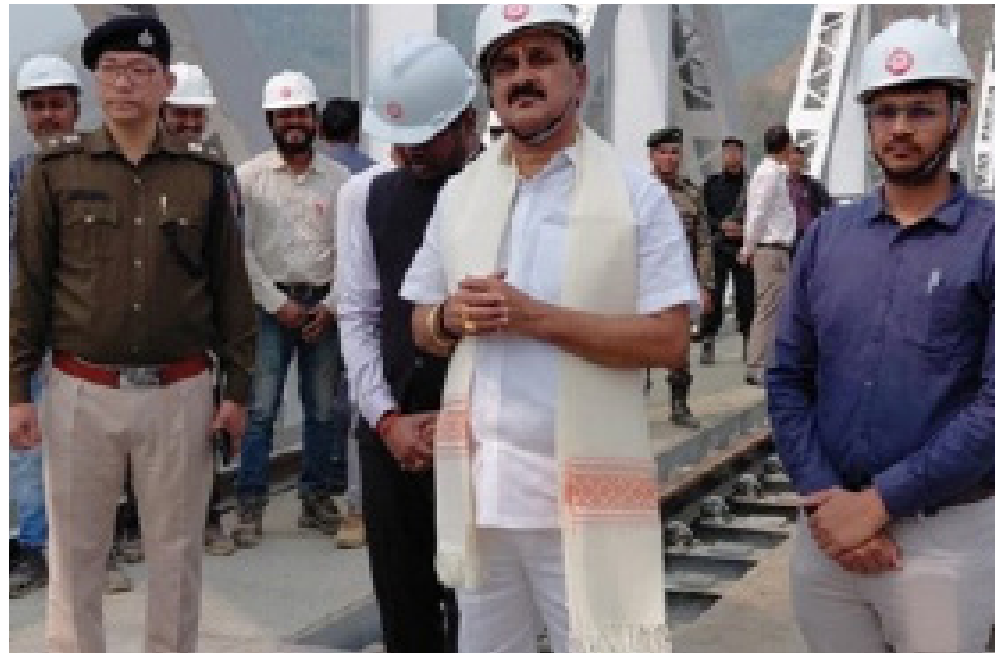
Pradesh Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill to amend the State GST Act of 2017, and the Arunachal Pradesh Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (Amendment) Bill, which seeks changes to the FRBM Act of 2006. Panchayati Raj Minister Ojing Tasing introduced the Arunachal Pradesh Local Authorities (Prohibition of Defection) (Amendment) Bill, proposing amendments to the existing law governing defections in local bodies. In the urban development sector, Urban Affairs Minister Balo Raja tabled the Arunachal Pradesh Urban and Country Planning (Amendment) Bill aimed at strengthening the state's planning framework. Additionally, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pasang Dorjee Sona introduced the Arunachal Pradesh Salaries, Allowances and Pension of Members of Legislative Assembly (Amendment) Bill. Education Minister Pasang Dorjee Sona tabled the Arunachal Pradesh Transfer and Posting of Employees of Education Department (Regulation and Management) Bill to create a comprehensive legal framework for regulating transfers and postings of both teaching and non-teaching staff in the education department.

Manipur government pledges support to fast-track Jiribam–Imphal railway by 2028

Imphal, Mar 07: Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh and Ashish Bansal, the newly appointed General Manager of the North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) Construction Organisation, Maligaon (Assam), held a detailed discussion regarding the ongoing railway project in Manipur at the Chief Minister's Secretariat on Friday night, officials reported on Saturday. Once completed, this project will firmly place Manipur on India's railway map, transforming connectivity and accessibility across the region, a reflection of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision to extend development to every corner of the nation, the Manipur Chief Minister stated.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister was informed that the project is crucial for connecting Imphal with Assam's Silchar, and the NFR plans to reach the capital by the end of 2028. In response, the Chief Minister assured that all possible assistance from the state government would be provided to ensure the early completion of the project.

The Noney Bridge, a 141-meter-high and 703-meter-long structure, is being built at a cost of Rs 650 crore as part of the Rs 21,885 crore Jiribam–Imphal railway line. The bridge is expected to be completed by March 2026, and the entire line by December 2028. Standing 141 meters high,



this engineering marvel surpasses the height of the Eiffel Tower and aims to boost connectivity in the Northeast. The project is targeted for completion by March 2028, which will reduce travel time between Jiribam and Imphal to 2.5 hours.

Additionally, on February 27, 2026, Bhupathiraju Srinivasa Varma, Union Minister of State for Heavy Industries and Steel, visited Noney to inspect the bridge, accompanied by the local district administration.

Former Bihar Assembly Speaker Nand Kishore Yadav named Nagaland Governor

Guwahati, Mar 07: Senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and former Bihar Assembly Speaker, Nand Kishore Yadav, has been named the new Governor of Nagaland. Responding to the development, Yadav thanked President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the responsibility and said he would work towards the state's growth while upholding constitutional principles. Yadav has had a long political journey in Bihar and represented the Patna Sahib constituency. Between 2024 and 2025, he held the post of Speaker of the Bihar Assembly. Over the years, he also handled key departments such as Road Construction and Health and earlier served



as Leader of the Opposition in the assembly. His selection comes amid a broader round of changes involving Governors and Lieutenant Gov-

ernors in several states and Union Territories. Retired Army officer Syed Ata Hasnain will assume the role of Governor in Bihar. Mean-

while, R. N. Ravi is shifting from Tamil Nadu to West Bengal after C. V. Ananda Bose stepped down from the post. Vinai Kumar Saxena will take charge as Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, while former diplomat Taranjit Singh Sandhu has been assigned the same role in Delhi. Shiv Pratap Shukla is moving from Himachal Pradesh to Telangana, and Jishnu Dev Varma will become the Governor of Maharashtra. Kavinder Gupta, who earlier served as Ladakh's Lieutenant Governor, has now been appointed Governor of Himachal Pradesh. In addition, Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar, who heads the Raj Bhavan in Kerala, has been assigned additional responsibility for Tamil Nadu.

Naduar Congress workers oppose ticket for new entrant Sunil Chetri ahead of 2026 Assembly election



Imphal, Mar 07: A group of Congress workers and aspirants from the 69–Naduar Assembly constituency in Assam has urged the leadership of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) to reconsider the possible candidature of newly joined leader Sunil Chetri for the upcoming assembly elections. In a representation submitted to the APCC president, the signatories—describing themselves as long-standing party workers—said that while they welcome Chetri's entry into the Indian National Congress, the prospect of granting him an immediate party ticket has raised serious concerns among grassroots members of the organisation. The letter states that local Congress workers have spent nearly a decade rebuilding the party structure in the Naduar constituency amid strong political competition from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. During this period, party cadres allegedly worked to maintain booth-, mandal-, and block-level networks despite limited resources. According to the representation, awarding a ticket to a recent entrant could demoralise long-time workers who have remained committed to the

party through difficult political conditions. The signatories argued that many aspirants have invested years of political effort and personal credibility to sustain the party's presence in the constituency. The workers also raised concerns about Chetri's previous association with the All Assam Gorkha Students' Union (AAGSU), claiming that several activities of the organisation in recent years appeared politically aligned with the ruling establishment. They said this has raised questions among party workers about the ideological clarity of a sudden shift to the Congress. The representation further referred to a recent general body meeting of AAGSU reportedly held in Duliagan, where senior Congress leaders from the Gorkha community were allegedly not invited, a development that some workers believe indicates the organisation's political proximity to the ruling dispensation. The signatories clarified that their intention is not to oppose any individual personally but to highlight the broader organisational and political implications. The Congress leadership has not yet issued any official response to the representation.

Govt closely monitoring West Asia war, steps up safeguards for seafarers: Sonowal

Guwahati, Mar 07: The Union government is closely monitoring the evolving war in West Asia and has activated precautionary mechanisms to safeguard Indian seafarers and maritime assets, Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal said on Tuesday.

Sonowal chaired a high-level review meeting to assess the security situation in the Persian Gulf and examine its implications for Indian vessels and maritime personnel amid the escalating war involving the United States, Israel and Iran. The region has been witnessing heightened military activity since the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in US-led strikes on February 28. Tensions have further escalated after Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz — a critical maritime corridor for global trade and energy shipments. During the meet-



ing, Sonowal said the government had activated monitoring, coordination and precautionary mechanisms to ensure the safety and welfare of Indian seafarers while protecting maritime as-

sets operating in the region. He added that authorities remain in constant coordination with national and international agencies to track developments closely and respond swiftly to any emerging threat. The minister said the government stands firmly with India's seafarers and maritime stakeholders and is prepared to extend operational, diplomatic and humanitarian assistance if required. The review comes amid growing concerns about maritime security in the Gulf. The Directorate General of Shipping on Tuesday said at least three Indian seafarers working on foreign-flagged vessels had been killed and another injured in incidents linked to the ongoing war. The Directorate has also issued an advisory asking maritime operators to carefully assess voyage-specific risks as escalating military action in the region threatens major international shipping routes.

Mizoram govt to stop hiring college teachers without UGC NET

Dimapur, Mar 06: The Mizoram government will no longer employ college teachers who have not cleared the UGC National Eligibility Test, Higher Education Minister Vanlalhlana said on Friday, March 6. Responding to a query in the state assembly, the minister said clearing the NET, a mandatory qualification prescribed by the University Grants Commission, will now be compulsory for recruitment as college teachers in the state. He said the decision was a difficult one and that the appointments of teachers who have not qualified NET will officially cease at the end of March. Defending the teachers, Vanlalhlana said they should not be held personally responsible for the situation, as NET was not mentioned as a requirement in the job advertisements at the time of their recruitment. The qualification was made mandatory by the government only later, after they had already been appointed.

The minister also spoke about teachers recruited through the Mizoram Public Service Commission under the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan in 2019. He said that after completing two years of service, these teachers are no longer classified under the central scheme and the previous state government had taken full responsibility for paying their



salaries

Vanlalhlana informed the House that the process for regularising these teachers is currently underway and has already been discussed by the Council of Ministers. While some administrative details remain to be finalised, he assured that a decision regarding their permanent status will be announced soon.

Tripura Congress seeks clarification from CM on jobs, alleged corruption, law and order

Agartala, Mar 07: Tripura Pradesh Congress on Friday sought clarifications from Chief Minister Manik Saha on several issues, including employment generation, alleged corruption, recruitment irregularities, and the law and order situation in the state. In a detailed letter addressed to the chief minister, Tripura Pradesh Congress spokesperson Prabir Chakraborty raised questions regarding the state government's employment record over the past eight years since the BJP assumed charge. Referring to a recent statement by the chief minister, Chakraborty said the government had admitted to providing slightly over 20,000 government jobs during this period. He asked the government to clarify how many posts remain vacant across departments, how many positions have been abolished, and how many people have been engaged through outsourcing, contractual appointments, fixed pay, and contingent arrangements. The Congress leader also questioned the cancellation or delay of several recruitment pro-



cesses. He cited the recent cancellation of the recruitment process for 6,067 executive police posts after four years, and alleged that many candidates waited even after years. Chakraborty further alleged that applicants had paid high applica-

tion fees for various recruitments conducted by both the state government and the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, but in many cases the recruitment process was later scrapped without refunding the fees. The letter also

raised concerns over the delay in the appointment of candidates who were issued offer letters for posts such as physical education teachers and graduate teachers, stating that several months have passed without formal appointments.

Uncertainty Over Opposition Alliance in Assam as Akhil Gogoi Expresses Disappointment

Guwahati, Mar 07: Uncertainty surrounding a possible opposition alliance ahead of the 2026 Assam Assembly elections intensified after Akhil Gogoi posted a cryptic message on social media on March 6, writing in Assamese The Final attempt also failed).

The remark sparked speculation in political circles about the status of discussions between Rajior Dal and the Indian National Congress regarding a possible alliance for the upcoming Assembly elections in Assam.

The post came at a time when the Congress and several opposition parties announced plans to begin joint campaign meetings across the state. Speaking at a press conference, Gaurav Gogoi, president of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, said the party is currently working with the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Assam Jatiya Parishad and the All Party Hill Leaders’ Conference to build a broader opposition front.

Gogoi said discussions are also ongoing with other parties, including Rajior Dal led by Akhil Gogoi, and expressed hope that the grouping would expand further in the coming days. “From now on, we will undertake joint campaign meetings across the state. Discussions on some probable locations in Upper Assam have already taken place, and we will discuss other parts as well,” he said.

The opposition alliance has not yet finalised its seat-sharing arrangement, though friendly contests in a few constituencies are considered likely. The Congress has already announced candidates for 42 seats.

Gaurav Gogoi said the Assembly elections are expected to be held before Bohag Bihu in mid-April, making the coming weeks crucial for opposition parties. He added that while discussions on a joint contest had taken place earlier, political parties had been busy with organisational work and the special revision of electoral rolls. “We felt that it was time we took our views together to the public. Hence, we will launch the joint campaign from now on,” said Gogoi, who has been named the Congress candidate from the Jorhat Assembly constituency.

Meanwhile, Lurinjyoti Gogoi said the four parties had joined hands to send a message that they are united in their effort to defeat the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. Suprakash Talukdar described the alliance as a “good beginning” that needs to be strengthened, while Jones

Ingti Kathar said the move was aimed at addressing issues faced by people, particularly in the hill areas.

Uncertainty deepened further on March 7 when Akhil Gogoi went live on Facebook from Kaziranga Orchid Park to express disappointment over the lack of progress in alliance talks with the Congress.

In the live video, the Rajior Dal leader spoke about his frustration over the ongoing political developments and the uncertainty regarding a broader opposition unity against the BJP. Gogoi had reportedly been waiting in the Kaziranga area in the hope of holding discussions with Congress leaders on a possible electoral understanding.

Speaking to reporters, he said it was “insulting” that the Congress held a press conference announcing an alliance with four parties while leaving out Rajior Dal. Despite the snub, Gogoi maintained that the possibility of an alliance was still open, stating that “the ball is now in Congress’s court.” He added that he would wait until midnight for any response from the Congress leadership regarding the alliance talks.

However, Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, who was travelling through the same region, did not meet the Rajior Dal chief and instead continued his journey towards Jorhat after stopping for lunch at a restaurant near the Orchid Park.Critics interpreted the stopover and the absence of any meeting between the two leaders as a signal that no discussion with Rajior Dal had been planned during the visit.The developments came a day after Gaurav Gogoi indicated that the Congress had finalised its alliance with four opposition parties in the state, though he did not clarify whether Rajior Dal would be part of the proposed alliance.

In the 126-member Assam Assembly, the BJP currently holds 64 seats, while its allies — Asom Gana Parishad, United People’s Party Liberal and Bodoland People’s Front — have nine, seven and three MLAs respectively. The Congress has 26 legislators, the All India United Democratic Front has 15, and the CPI(M) has one member along with one Independent.With the Assembly elections approaching, the developments have raised fresh questions about whether the opposition parties will be able to form a united front against the BJP and whether Rajior Dal will ultimately join the alliance or contest the polls independently.

Youth arrested with pistol, ammunition in Guwahati

Guwahati, Mar 07: A 29-year-old youth was arrested with a pistol and ammunition in Guwahati.

A police source said that a team from Dispur Police Station apprehended the accused, Krishna Das of Botahguli area, from near Bagharbari Chowk, Panjabari, and recovered a 7.65 mm pistol with one magazine and three live rounds of ammunition from his possession.

During interrogation, he revealed that the weapon was supplied to him by one Akhilesh Yadav (40), a native of Muzaffarpur in Bihar, who runs a salon at Hatigaon Chariali in Guwahati.

Police promptly detained the second accused, who admitted to bringing the pistol from Bihar and sold it over to Krishna Das about a month at an exorbitant price.

“Further investigation, including technical analysis and antecedent verification, is underway,” the source said.



The resignation of Hailakandi MLA Zakir Hussain Laskar has caused new unrest for the AIUDF

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and accused, who admitted to bringing the pistol from Bihar and sold it over to Krishna Das about a month at an exorbitant price.

“Further investigation, including technical analysis and antecedent verification, is underway,” the source said. Following the official resignation of Hailakandi MLA Zakir Hussain Laskar, the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) is experiencing a new wave of internal unrest in Assam. Ahead of the state’s impending elections, Laskar declared his intention to leave the AIUDF, adding to the party’s mounting political turmoil. The MLA’s departure coincides with the

party’s ongoing struggle with disciplinary proceedings against two of its lawmakers, however he has not publicly disclosed the reasons for his leaving.Karim Uddin Barbhuiya, the party’s vice president, and Abdul Aziz, an MLA from Badarpur, were previously suspended by the AIUDF central committee. Due to alleged anti-party activity, both leaders have been suspended from the party for six years. The directive stated that the party had been closely observing the two MLAs’ actions, which it characterized as contentious and harmful to the organization’s objectives. According to the AIUDF.

Mizoram Assembly adopts resolution for CBI probe into Lengpui land deal

Aizawl, Mar 07: The Mizoram Legislative Assembly has unanimously adopted a private member’s resolution, urging the state government to recommend CBI probe into the controversial Lengpui land acquisition deal.

The resolution was moved by Mizo National Front (MNF) legislator R Lalthangliana and was adopted with minor modifications in the wording as suggested by members of the treasury bench after an extended discussion in the House.

Moving the resolution, Lalthangliana said the land acquisition related to the proposed Indian Air Force project in the Lengpui area has generated widespread public concern and suspicion in the state. He alleged that the people of Mizoram have serious doubts about the manner in which the deal was carried out, particularly because a large sum of money was reportedly paid to

an individual who allegedly did not own land in the area.

According to him, the developments surrounding the transaction have led to speculation that large sums of money may have changed hands and that kickbacks could have been paid to politicians in power as well as influential officials in both the state and central governments.He informed the House that an amount exceeding Rs. 117.90 crore was paid to Henry Lalremsanga Hlawmual on July 25, 2025. On the same date, more than Rs. 32.41 crore was disbursed to Rohmingliana, who again received over Rs. 37.58 crore on August 26, 2025 in connection with the acquisition of land.

Lalthangliana also expressed concern over the special power of attorney signed between Rohmingliana and Hlawmual, alleging that the arrangement enabled backdoor dealings in the

transaction.

Chief Minister Lalduhoma rejected the allegations against the present government and instead blamed the previous MNF government for completing the main procedures related to the land acquisition.

He told the Assembly that most of the groundwork and procedural steps for the acquisition had already been carried out during the tenure of the former government, and that the present administration merely completed the remaining formalities.

After a lengthy debate in the House, members from both the ruling and opposition benches agreed to adopt the resolution with slight amendments in its wording. The Assembly subsequently passed the resolution unanimously, calling on the state government to hand over the matter to the CBI for investigation.

Assam BJP denounces the“non-existent” opposition

Guwahati, Mar 08:The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state unit declared that the state’s political scene had essentially become “opposition-less,” accusing opposing parties of withdrawing from the electoral battlefield during the most recent Rajya Sabha election for three Assamese seats. The much-discussed coalition amongst opposition parties, according to Assam BJP spokesperson Kamal Kumar Medhi, only exists in media narratives and has not resulted in any genuine political cooperation on the ground. Despite the state’s three recently empty Rajya Sabha seats, Medhi noted that the opposition parties did not even step forward to run in the election, demonstrating what he called their lack of unity and political resolve. He made a direct jab at the Indian National Congress, claiming that the party’s catchphrase, “There will be a fight,” has now shown to be meaningless.

Medhi stated that the Congress, along with other opposition forces, had essentially opted for “retreat and political escape” by refusing to run in the Rajya



Sabha election and staying hundreds of miles away from the battlefield. The BJP senior claimed that although it was clear from the numbers that the government alliance would win the first two Rajya Sabha seats, the third seat still presented a chance for opposition parties to unite and launch a symbolic challenge.

He added that running for the seat may have shown the public the power and seriousness of the opposition alliance, even though success was doubtful. Politics involves both winning and losing. However, the opposition has demonstrated that its promises of unity are purely rhetorical by not even trying to run for the third seat,

Medhi said. He further said the failure of opposition parties to even file nomination papers in the Rajya Sabha polls has laid bare the current state of opposition politics in Assam.

The development, he added, indicates that the opposition may struggle to forge a practical alliance in the run-up to the state’s upcoming Assembly elections. “The events surrounding the Rajya Sabha election have exposed the stark reality that opposition parties in Assam lack the ability to unite in practice,” Medhi said, asserting that the episode reflects the growing political dominance of the BJP in the state.

Gorkha student leader joins Congress in Assam

Guwahati, Mar 07: All Assam Gorkha Students’ Union president Sunil Chhetri formally joined the Congress party in the presence of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Gaurav Gogoi.

At a joining programme held in Guwahati, many of Chhetri’s associates including Rohan Limbu, Rajesh Bhuyan, Mukesh Thapa, Balaram Rai, and Subhash Limbu also joined the Congress party. Speaking on the occasion, Chhetri said that they have stepped forward to raise their voice against oppression and exploitation. He added that only the Congress party can ensure justice and dignity for all communities of Assam.

The programme was attended by APCC senior vice president Praneshwar Basumatary, MLA Khaliluddin Mazumdar, and several other senior Congress leaders and workers.

APCC President Gaurav Gogoi said



that the support and goodwill of the Gorkha community are extremely important for building a new and inclusive Assam. He added that Sunil Chhetri’s joining would become a major strength in the fight against policies of oppression and suppression. Gogoi also assured that the Congress

party would provide Sunil Chhetri the opportunity to work with dignity and respect.Among others present at the programme were APCC general secretary Pradyut Bhuyan, senior Congress leaders Rituparna Konwar, Shantanu Bora, Meghnath Chhetri, Udit Bhanu Das, Manoj Gautam and others

Purabi Dairy begins Upper Assam expansion; Bhumi Pujan for three dairy plants held at Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Dhemaji

Jorhat, Mar 07: In a significant step towards strengthening Assam’s cooperative dairy infrastructure, the Bhoomi Pujan and the foundation stone laying ceremony for three new dairy processing plants at Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Dhemaji was held today, marking the beginning of Purabi Dairy’s infrastructure expansion across Upper Assam.The main ceremony was held at Jorhat, where the Bhoomi Pujan and foundation stone laying ceremony was done by Shri Rajiv Ranjan Singh (alias Lalan Singh), Hon’ble Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Government of India, in the presence of Shri Krishnendu Paul, Minister, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department, Government of Assam, Dr Ranoj Pegu, Minister Education etc, Govt of Assam, Shri Prasanta Phukan, Minister Power, Govt of Assam, Shri Rupiyoti Kurmi, MLA Mariani Constituency, Dr Meenesh Shah, Chairman NDDB, Ms Varsha Jorhi IAS, Additional Secretary, DAHD, Govt of India, Shri M S Manivannan, Commissioner and Secretary, AH&V, Govt of Assam. The Bhumi Pujan for the Milk Processing Units (Purabi Dairy) plants at Dibrugarh and Dhemaji was done virtually

during the programme.Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh joined virtually from Delhi. While Dr. Ranoj Pegu, Minister Education etc, Govt of Assam, attended the program in Dhemaji, and Shri Prasanta Phukan, Minister Power, Govt of Assam, attended the program in Dibrugarh, both were connected to the main event via video conferencing.The proposed 100 TLPD capacity milk processing plant at Jorhat shall be established by ‘East Assam Milk Producers’ Cooperative Union Limited (EAMUL) under the Central Sector Scheme ‘National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD). The two plants at Dibrugarh and Dhemaji are being established by Government of Assam, Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary (AH&V) under RIDF-XXXI to be operated by North East Dairy and Foods Limited (NEDFL) as Purabi Dairy. NEDFL is a joint venture of the Government of Assam and the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) — to plan, implement and expand cooperative dairying activities across Assam. The projects will follow the same framework through which these processing plants including the one recently inaugurated at Silchar will work as Purabi Dairy

thus extending organised cooperative dairying to all regions of the state.The proposed dairy processing plant at Jorhat and Dibrugarh will have a capacity of One Lac litres per day each, while the plant in Dhemaji will have a capacity of 50 thousand litres per day.Milk procurement operations in the region are already being undertaken by East Assam Milk Union Limited (EAMUL) under the Purabi Dairy network. EAMUL has been managed by NDDB since 2023. Procurement activities under EAMUL operations are being carried out in districts such as Jorhat, Sibsagar, Golaghat, Dibrugarh, Darrang, Udalguri, Sonitpur, Charaideo, Biswanath, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji and Majuli enabling dairy farmers to become part of the organised cooperative dairy ecosystem. Till date, EAMUL has covered more than 1300 villages through 540 DCSs with more than 11000 farmers.Addressing the gathering, Shri Rajiv Ranjan Singh, Hon’ble Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, said, “The expansion of Purabi Dairy’s infrastructure into Upper Assam reflects the Government of India’s commitment to strengthening India’s cooperative dairy movement and empowering rural

producers. The new dairy plants at Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Dhemaji will help integrate local dairy farmers into organised procurement networks, create stable income opportunities and ensure the availability of hygienically processed milk for consumers. Through sustained collaboration between the Government of Assam, NDDB and farmer institutions, we are building a modern dairy ecosystem that supports both rural livelihoods and nutritional security.”

Speaking on the occasion, Shri Krishnendu Paul, Minister, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department, Government of Assam, said, “The Bhumi Pujan for the new dairy plants at Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Dhemaji marks another important milestone in the implementation of the Assam Dairy Development Plan under the visionary leadership of Hon’ble Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma. Our objective is to build a strong, farmer-centric dairy ecosystem across the state by expanding organised milk procurement and modern processing infrastructure. Just days after Purabi Dairy formally entered the Barak Valley with the commissioning of the Silchar dairy processing plant, today’s founda-

tion for new facilities in Upper Assam reflects the balanced regional expansion that is essential for achieving our goal of building a robust and self-reliant dairy sector in Assam.”

In his address, Dr Meenesh Shah, Chairman, National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), stated, “The foundation of these dairy plants marks another important step in strengthening Assam’s cooperative dairy value chain. NDDB, through its technical, managerial and financial support systems, remains committed to building robust milk procurement networks and modern processing infrastructure across the state. By linking dairy farmers in Upper Assam with organised procurement and processing systems, these facilities will help create sustainable livelihoods while expanding the reach of quality milk and dairy products under the Purabi brand.”

Once operational, the new plants will significantly strengthen milk procurement and processing infrastructure in Upper Assam, helping build a structured dairy value chain that links local farmers with organised procurement systems, scientific processing facilities, and assured market access.

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The Value of Public Libraries

Public libraries remain one of the most important institutions in any knowledge-based society. They provide free access to information, encourage lifelong learning, and serve as inclusive spaces where people from all backgrounds can expand their knowledge. Historically, libraries have played a crucial role in education and intellectual development. Students, researchers, and readers rely on libraries to access books, journals, and academic resources that may otherwise be expensive or difficult to obtain. In many communities, libraries are the only places where individuals can study in a quiet and supportive environment. In the digital age, some argue that libraries are becoming less relevant because information is widely available online. However, this perspective overlooks the important role libraries play in ensuring equal access to knowledge. Not everyone has reliable internet access or the ability to purchase books and digital subscriptions. Modern libraries are evolving to meet new demands. Many now provide digital resources, computer access, and educational programs for children and adults. Workshops, reading events, and community discussions make libraries active centers of learning rather than simply places to store books. Governments and local communities should therefore continue to support and invest in public libraries. Adequate funding ensures that libraries can expand their collections and services. A strong network of libraries contributes to an informed and educated population. By preserving knowledge and encouraging curiosity, libraries continue to play a vital role in shaping thoughtful and knowledgeable societies.

The silent burden of COPD in Dhaka: the slow suffocation of a city

The first thing you notice, on entering the lanes of Shyampur, is how little sky there is. Tin walls press close on both sides, laundry is strung overhead, and the air is filled with the dark fog of industrial smoke from the adjacent factories. When asked whether the smoke bothers them, residents simply shrug, calling it “Dhaka’r aboha” (Dhaka’s weather).

Across the city in Dakshinkhan, a woman in her mid-forties stands over a makeshift gas stove, boiling water for a cup of tea. She does so, punctuating the task with a heavy cough, which she explains is just part of her daily life. When prompted about the cough, she laughs: “Daktar ki bolbe? Dhaka-y toh eishob shobar e hoy” (What would the doctor say? It happens to everyone in Dhaka.) Bangladesh is home to one of the most densely populated megacities in the world. On top of that, Dhaka continues to record some of the worst air quality in the world. IQAir’s 2023 World Air Quality Report recorded Dhaka’s mean annual PM2.5 concentration at 80.2 micrograms per cubic metre, which is more than sixteen times the WHO’s recommended guideline of 5 µg/m³. Yet Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is probably unheard of by many. It is a progressive, irreversible inflammatory disease of the airways and one of the most underreported health crises in urban Bangladesh. The association between long-term PM2.5 exposure and COPD development is now well established in the literature: higher exposure leads to a higher disease burden. Which is why it is surprising that national

studies have estimated the prevalence of COPD at approximately 12.5% among Bangladeshi adults over 40, with slightly steeper rates in densely populated urban areas.

Dhaka’s residents are exposed to multiple sources of contaminants due to unregulated industries within the boundaries of the city corporation. Along with this, the increasing number of vehicles pushes nitrogen oxides and black carbon into dense residential lanes, while some households, particularly in informal settlements, rely on biomass-burning clay stoves that fill small, unventilated rooms with smoke that, by some estimates, carries health risks equivalent to smoking 400 cigarettes per hour. In Shyampur’s settlements, where workers bring factory overflow home, every family member is in danger of being exposed to the same chemical contaminants as a factory worker. While random coughing and sneezing may seem inconsequential to work productivity, if left untreated, over time they reduce lung function. Exposure to occupational dust directly impairs physical work capacity and endurance, which can leave daily wage earners, who have no sick leave or job protection, with a household that does not eat that day.

Diagnosing COPD uses spirometry as the clinical gold standard, a lung function test that measures airflow obstruction. Studies on respiratory health services have found spirometry available in fewer than 20% of Bangladesh’s public secondary-care facilities, suggesting a negligible presence at the primary care level,



where most patients first present. And why would it be otherwise when individuals themselves do not consider their consistent coughing an issue? As seen in peri-urban Dhaka among adults with symptoms consistent with COPD, the majority attributed their symptoms to dust, ageing, or tobacco use, citing these as reasons for not seeking immediate medical consultation. Even if a patient reaches an upazila-level care facility with respiratory symptoms, they are typically managed symptomatically, usually treated for a presumed acute infection, prescribed a short course of antihistamines, and discharged.

Moreover, Bangladesh’s national health reporting does not disaggregate COPD as a distinct diagnostic category in most institutional settings. While it is mandated that spirometry tests be available at the NCD corners at the Upazila Health Complex (UHC) level in Bangladesh, they are still not reaching enough people, as the national pro-

tolocol for COPD management at the primary health care level remains awaiting implementation. The national DHIS2 health information platform has not been updated to incorporate disaggregated NCD data, which results in an incomplete epidemiological record. This, coupled with a lack of community-based spirometry screening initiatives targeting high-risk populations such as informal settlement residents, and the absence of any systematic effort to equip community health workers with validated and low-cost screening tools such as CAPTURE (the COPD Assessment in Primary Care to Identify Undiagnosed Respiratory Disease and Exacerbation Risk), only exacerbates this knowledge gap. A disease that is not measured cannot generate the policy pressure required to fund treatment. The result is an unanswered burden in the health system, in which millions carry a diagnosable, manageable condition that eventually leads to deteriorating health and work capac-

ity. Women are generally disproportionately impacted, as research documents that non-smoking women with high biomass exposure develop COPD at rates comparable to male smokers. Yet women with respiratory symptoms face compounded barriers to care: restricted mobility, household responsibility, economic dependence, and the gendered expectation that physical suffering is part of the domestic role. At the policy level, COPD must be integrated explicitly into Bangladesh’s NCD surveillance framework, with standardised diagnostic coding, systematic prevalence estimation, and reporting requirements that make the burden legible to planners. At the community level, public health communication must actively discourage the normalisation of respiratory issues, clearly and repeatedly asserting that buke bhaar and morning cough are symptoms of diseases that can be identified and managed. But most importantly, while Bangladesh’s ambient air quality standards exist on paper, enforcement remains chronically weak, with PM2.5 concentrations persistently exceeding national standards for nearly half the year. Weak institutional capacity and political barriers to industrial compliance have been identified as key drivers of this phenomenon; industrial emission regulation in peri-urban Dhaka, specifically for unregistered factory discharge in areas like Shyampur, remains aspirational at best.

Whether it stays that way is in the hands of current policymakers, and in their commitment to a cleaner Dhaka city.

The Strategic Importance of the Chicken's Neck Corridor

If one looks at the geographical map of India, it becomes evident that the narrow strip of land that connects the eight states of the Northeast to the mainland is the Siliguri Corridor, popularly known as the Chicken's Neck. The partition of the country in 1947 placed us in a complex geographical situation, where the security and future of our entire Northeast came to depend upon a narrow passage barely 22 kilometers wide. This region is not merely a transit route; it is an extremely sensitive nerve center for safeguarding India's integrity. Centered around the city of Siliguri in West Bengal, this corridor is bordered by Nepal on one side, Bhutan on another, and Bangladesh on the other. Situated amidst these three foreign nations, this narrow tract of land has always remained a matter of deep concern for India's defense experts. If, during a war, an enemy were to strategically block or capture this narrow passage, the Northeast would be completely cut off from the mainland. As a result, not only military assistance but also the supply of essential commodities such as food, medicines, and fuel would come to a standstill. Because of this geographical vulnerability, it is called the Chicken's Neck, implying that if it were strangled, the entire Northeast's way of life would be endangered in an instant. This situation has compelled India to remain constantly vigilant about the security of this region and to formulate a long-term national strategy around it. The very existence of this landmass reminds us how fragile a nation's geographical integrity can be in the absence of proper defense mechanisms and infrastructure. Therefore, in India's military history, the Siliguri Corridor occupies a place of immense importance, and its protection is regarded as one of the greatest challenges to the nation's sovereignty.

The greatest threat to this strategic region comes from the north, particularly from the Chumbi Valley in Tibet, where China maintains a strong military presence. The Chumbi Valley is a triangular tract of land wedged between Sikkim and Bhutan and lies only a few kilometers away from the Chicken's Neck Corridor. The People's Liberation Army of China has been steadily expanding its military infrastructure in this area. They have constructed all-weather roads, tunnels, and air bases in the mountainous terrain to ensure that large numbers of troops and war equipment can be mobilized to the Indian border in a very short time. During the Doklam standoff, these concerns took on a more tangible form when China attempted to build a strategic road in Bhutanese territory. Had that road been completed, Chinese forces could have easily kept the Siliguri Corridor under surveillance and, if necessary, launched an attack on it. For the Indian Army, it remains a major concern that if China were ever to create an obstruction in this stretch, it would not take long for the Northeast to be severed from the rest of India. In response, India has strengthened its position along the borders of Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, yet due to geographical constraints, China's advantage cannot be entirely dismissed. The mountainous terrain and unpredictable weather of this region further complicate defense arrangements. From the perspective of internal security as well, the Chicken's Neck Corridor is considered an extremely sensitive zone. The international borders surrounding this area are not fully secured, making it a potential haven for illegal infiltrators, poachers, and terrorists. Taking



advantage of the open borders with Nepal and Bangladesh, various anti-national forces attempt to create instability within India. Crimes such as drug trafficking and human trafficking frequently occur in this region, disturbing the country's internal peace. Several insurgent groups from the Northeast have also used this passage as an escape route and for the transportation of arms and ammunition.

Moreover, demographic changes in this region have raised concerns about the possibility of future social and political crises. If any foreign power were to incite social divisions and trigger riots or rebellions here, the focus of the armed forces could shift away from the main border, thereby providing an opportunity to adversarial nations. Hence, ensuring the security of the Chicken's Neck is not merely about deploying troops at the border; it also requires strengthening the region's social stability and intel-

ligence network. Without proper coordination between the police and paramilitary forces, a major crisis could erupt in this narrow corridor at any time. The Chicken's Neck Corridor is the economic lifeline of the eight North-Eastern states. Assam's tea, crude oil, timber, and other natural resources pass through this route to reach the rest of the country. Likewise, from food supplies to clothing and industrial machinery, all goods enter the Northeast through this corridor. If this transportation system were to be disrupted even for a week, the entire region would plunge into chaos. Prices of commodities would skyrocket, and the lives of ordinary people would become miserable. We are in a vulnerable position due to our excessive reliance on this transportation system. Recognizing its importance, the Government of India has recently placed considerable emphasis on developing infrastructure within the Northeast.

Massive bridges such as Bogibeel and Bhupen Hazarika over the Brahmaputra have not only facilitated faster troop movement but also enhanced economic transactions. However, despite such developments, if the main connection through Siliguri were severed, all these advantages would become stagnant. Therefore, to ensure economic security, finding alternatives to this corridor has become the need of the hour. The government has realized that surviving solely on one route could pose a grave risk, and thus work on multiple alternative connections has commenced.

At present, India has achieved notable success on the diplomatic front in reducing pressure on the Chicken's Neck Corridor. Among the most significant steps is the transit agreement with Bangladesh. The facility of transporting goods from Kolkata to Agartala or Assam through Bangladesh by road and waterways has been a major

achievement for India. Access to the ports of Chattogram and Mongla has ensured that the Northeast is no longer entirely dependent on the Chicken's Neck. These alternative routes have also added a new dimension to India's military preparedness, as in times of war, even if the Siliguri route is blocked, assistance and troops can be dispatched through Bangladesh with relative ease. Additionally, the ongoing Kaladan Multi-Modal Project with Myanmar aims to connect Mizoram to sea routes. These new linkages have significantly reduced the risks associated with overdependence on the chicken's neck. However, all of this depends on maintaining friendly relations with neighboring countries. If an anti-India government were to assume power in Bangladesh, these advantages could once again be withdrawn. Therefore, India's foreign policy must ensure that these alternative routes remain active at all times. Security of the

chicken's neck cannot be ensured by military forces alone; it also requires comprehensive development of the region, including investments in education, healthcare, and infrastructure to improve the quality of life for the local population. When people in a region feel that the government is working for their welfare and that their lives are secure, they themselves become guardians of the nation. It is essential to strengthen national consciousness among the people of Siliguri and surrounding areas so that they are not misled by foreign provocations. Expanding educational and employment opportunities in this region is crucial to keep the youth integrated into the national mainstream, because a dissatisfied population can become a major vulnerability for any nation. Furthermore, modern technologies such as artificial intelligence and drones must be utilized to maintain round-the-clock surveillance over every inch of the border. In today's changing world, wars cannot be won by guns and ammunition alone; information and precise planning are the greatest weapons. The Chicken's Neck Corridor must be transformed from a vulnerable point into a strong connectivity hub. It should not only connect the Northeast but also serve as India's gateway for trade and cultural relations with Southeast Asian nations. According to defense experts, forming a dedicated security arrangement or command for Chicken's Neck is essential. Since the Army, Border Security Force, and police all have roles to play here, an integrated command structure among these three agencies would enable faster and more accurate action. In times of crisis, any confusion over decision-making could provide an opportunity for the enemy. Additionally, the capacity of the

railway lines and national highways passing through the corridor must be doubled to allow the movement of large military vehicles at any time. Newly constructed bridges must be capable of bearing the weight of tanks and heavy weaponry. All these preparations send a clear message to adversarial nations that India is no longer as vulnerable as before.

We have learned to transform our geographical weaknesses into strengths. It is this unshakable confidence and planning that will secure our Northeast and establish Chicken's Neck as a strong shield of the nation.

Beyond military and political dimensions, environmental challenges must also not be ignored. The Chicken's Neck region is ecologically sensitive and frequently experiences natural disasters. If earthquakes or landslides triggered by heavy rainfall were to disrupt our communication systems, our situation during wartime would become dire. Therefore, while constructing infrastructure, environmental considerations must be kept in mind to ensure durability and resilience. Climate change has already impacted the Himalayan foothills, potentially altering the course of the Brahmaputra and other rivers, thereby posing risks to our bridges and roads. Hence, a scientific and comprehensive plan must guide all future initiatives. In conclusion, the Chicken's Neck Corridor is a permanent and defining element of India's existence. It reminds us that security is never absolute; it is an ongoing process. To safeguard every citizen of the Northeast and preserve the nation's integrity, we must protect this narrow corridor with unwavering determination. It stands as a symbol of our pride and sovereignty, constantly urging us to remain vigilant.

Flipkart lays off 250 300 employees



Mumbai: Walmart-backed e-commerce major Flipkart is letting go of around 250-300 employees across business functions as part of its annual performance review, according to people close to the matter. These exits account for around 1.5% of its roughly 20,000-strong workforce.

“Flipkart conducts regular performance reviews aligned with clearly defined expectations. As part of this process, a small percentage of employees may transition from the organisation,” a company spokesperson said, without confirming the number of employees affected. Besides an annual performance review, it conducts a mid-year check-in. It had carried out similar performance-based job cuts in the past as well. Its last major round of layoffs was in January 2024, when it fired around 1,000 employees, or 5% of its workforce.Flipkart moves closer to India IPO

Flipkart is reportedly preparing for a long-awaited public listing, but no specific details are known yet. In December last, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) approved Flipkart’s long-pending proposal to shift its domicile from Singapore to India, clearing a critical regulatory hurdle for a domestic IPO.

E-comm giants widen zero-free strategy
In the run-up to a potential IPO, Flipkart has been focusing on reigning in losses and maintaining healthy top-line growth, even as India’s broader e-commerce growth slows. In FY25, Flipkart Internet, which operates the core marketplace business, reported a 14% year-on-year rise in revenue to Rs 20,493 crore while cutting losses by 37% to Rs 1,494 crore. In FY24, the company had managed to post a 26% rise in revenue. “Flipkart conducts regular performance reviews aligned with clearly defined expectations. As part of this process, a small percentage of employees may transition from the organisation,” a company spokesperson said.a

The NCLT approval allows the company to proceed with the consolidation of eight overseas entities into the Bengaluru-headquartered firm, effectively unwinding its complex foreign holding structure. As part of the process, Flipkart is now seeking clearance from the government under Press Note 3 norms, sources said, since Chinese technology major Tencent continues to hold around a 5% stake in the company. Among

the multiple entities through which Flipkart operates in India, revenue in Flipkart’s marketplace arm primarily includes seller commissions, advertising, and other seller fees. As competition with e-commerce rivals such as Amazon India and Meesho intensifies, Flipkart, in November, rolled out a zero commission model for all products priced below Rs 1,000. Commission fee is a percentage-based charge applied to the final selling price of a product and varies depending on the category. Earlier this month, Amazon also announced a similar move. E-commerce major Flipkart has trimmed its workforce by 250-300 employees following its annual performance review, sources familiar with the matter said on Friday (March 6, 2026).

The company is also heavily investing in its latest quick commerce venture, Flipkart Minutes. In an interview with FE in December, a senior executive noted that the company plans to grow its number of dark stores- micro-fulfillment centres- to about 1,000 by March–April. The network already spans roughly 3,000 pincodes across 32 cities, with ambitions to reach 75–80 cities as expansion accelerates. The job cuts, which span multiple departments and employee levels, come as the Walmart-backed firm continues senior-level hiring ahead of its planned initial public offering (IPO). At the same time, Flipkart has been strengthening its senior leadership bench, making several key appointments over the past months.These include the appointment of Somnath Das as VP, supply chain, Digbijay Mishra as VP, corporate communications, Vipin Kapoor as VP, business finance, Yogita Shanbhag as VP, human resources, and Amer Hussain as VP, supply chain, for its grocery and minutes (quick commerce) businesses.Financially, Flipkart India reported a wider consolidated loss of ₹5,189 crore in FY25, compared to ₹4,248.3 crore in the previous financial year, according to data from business intelligence platform To-Flter.“Flipkart conducts regular performance reviews aligned with clearly defined expectations. As part of this process, a small percentage of employees may transition from the organisation. We are supporting affected employees with transition support,” Flipkart said in a statement, without specifying the number of employees impacted in the exercise.

LPG price hiked by Rs 60

Domestic commercial cylinder costs up by more than Rs 300 this year

Mumbai: LPG prices were hiked sharply on Saturday amid rising energy costs linked to the Iran conflict gripping much of the Middle East. Domestic LPG cylinders increased by a whopping Rs 60 while commercial LPG gas faced a third consecutive hike — a cumulative increase of Rs 275 since January 1.According to the latest data from Indian Oil Corporation, non-subsidised LPG (the one that common household users other than the Ujjwala beneficiaries) will now cost Rs 913 per 14.2-kg cylinder in Delhi as against Rs 853 previously. In Mumbai, non-subsidised LPG now costs Rs 912.50, Rs 939 in Kolkata and Rs 928.50 in ChennaiThis is the second increase in prices in less than a year. This is the second increase in rates in 11 months. Prices were last hiked by Rs 50 in April last year.Industry officials told PTI that the increase follows a steep rise in global energy prices since the breakout of military conflict in West Asia. But they noted that cooking gas prices in India remained among the lowest when compared with neighbouring countries despite the price increase The price of commercial LPG, the one used by establishments such as hotels and restaurants, was increased by Rs 114.5 per 19-kg cylinder. It now costs Rs 1,883 in Delhi. This increase comes on top of the Rs 28 per 19-kg cylinder increase on March 1.Commercial LPG rates have risen by Rs 302.50 this year. This is the second increase in



rates in 11 months. Prices were last hiked by Rs 50 in April last year.In Mumbai, non-subsidised LPG now costs Rs 912.50, Rs 939 in Kolkata and Rs 928.50 in Chennai, according to the IOC website. Rates differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local sales tax or VAT.Ujjwala Yojana beneficiaries, the over 10 crore poor who have got free LPG connections since the scheme was launched in 2016, will continue to get a subsidy

of Rs 300 per 14.2 kg cylinder for up to 12 refills in a year.

The price of commercial LPG, the one used by establishments such as hotels and restaurants, was increased by Rs 114.5 per 19-kg cylinder. It now costs Rs 1,883 in Delhi. This increase comes on top of the Rs 28 per 19-kg cylinder increase on March 1.Commercial LPG rates have risen by Rs 302.50 this year.

Decrease in his net worth, Gautam Adani is still second richest Hurun Global Rich List 2026

Mumbai: India’s billionaire ranks are expanding rapidly, reshaping both domestic markets and India’s global economic footprint. According to the Hurun Global Rich List 2026, the country now counts 308 billionaires with a combined fortune of roughly Rs 112 lakh crore. This makes India world’s third-largest billionaire hub, behind the United States and China.

The makeup of India’s wealth creation is changing. While technology and pharmaceuticals were once the principal engines, new fortunes are emerging from automobiles, healthcare, energy and financial services. That diversification is producing a fresh cohort of high-net-worth entrants even as several established names continue to occupy the summit of the country’s wealth hierarchy. Roshni Nadar Malhotra of HCL Technologies ranked third with Rs 3.2 lakh crore, making her the only woman in India’s top 10 richest individuals. Cyrus S. Poonawalla of Serum Institute rose to fourth place after his wealth jumped 44% to Rs 3 lakh crore, emerging as the biggest wealth gainer in absolute terms among Indian billionaires. Other billionaires in India’s top 10 include Kumar Mangalam Birla, Dilip Shanghvi, Azim Premji, Niraj Bajaj, Ashok P. Hinduja and



Radhakishan Damani.Adani holds No. 2 spot despite wealth decline

Despite a challenging year that trimmed his fortune, Gautam Adani remains firmly among India’s wealth elite. His net worth declined about 14% to Rs 7.5 lakh crore, according to the Hurun rankings. The

63-year-old billionaire heads the Adani Group, a conglomerate with interests spanning ports, airports, renewable energy, logistics, power and infrastructure. Over the past decade, the group has built one of the country’s most expansive infrastructure networks, placing Adani

at the centre of India’s logistics and energy ecosystem. Even with the dip in wealth, Adani continues to wield significant economic influence, particularly as India accelerates investments in infrastructure, energy transition and trade connectivity.

Petrol, diesel prices Check rates in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and 12 other cities

Mumbai: Petrol-Diesel Price Today in India: Petrol and diesel prices remained unchanged across major Indian cities on Saturday, even as crude oil prices climbed sharply in the international market following the worsening conflict in West Asia. Retail fuel rates in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata and several other cities showed no day-on-day change, offering temporary relief to consumers despite rising global supply concerns.

Government officials have said India’s fuel supply remains secure and that the country continues to buy oil based on its own energy needs, not on the approval of any foreign nation. They also underlined that India currently has substantial crude and refined product reserves and has widened its sourcing basket over the years to reduce supply risks. The data shared for Saturday shows that there has been no change from the previous day in these cities. Prices, however, continue to vary widely across states because of differences in VAT, local levies and transportation costs.

Today’s price of Brent crude oil Global crude markets have turned volatile. Brent crude rose sharply



this week and was hovering near the \$90-a-barrel mark after posting its steepest weekly gain since 2020, according to Reuters. The rally has been driven by fears of prolonged disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world’s most critical oil transit routes. Reuters reported that Brent crude was up 24% for the week, while US benchmark WTI gained nearly 30%. Market nervousness intensified after supply flows through the Strait were

disrupted and concerns grew that energy exports from the Gulf could face deeper setbacks in the coming weeks. Fuel price concerns are rising mainly because international crude has jumped amid conflict-related supply fears. A key trigger was the expectation, cited in Reuters, that Gulf energy exports could face shutdowns if the crisis worsens. Kuwait’s move to begin shutting down production at some oilfields because of storage constraints also

added to the anxiety in energy markets. At the same time, India’s dependence on imported LNG has increased as domestic gas production has remained weak while demand from city gas networks, fertiliser units and industrial users has continued to grow. That is why India is also exploring additional LNG imports from Australia and Papua New Guinea, while remaining open to buying more energy from the United States. The war is pushing oil prices higher by increasing the risk of supply disruptions across major energy-producing regions. With the Strait of Hormuz effectively blocked for days, a large volume of crude that normally moves through the route has not been able to reach the market. This has fuelled expectations of tighter supplies and higher prices.

Indian officials have maintained that the country is better prepared than before, as per a report by PTI. They said India now sources oil from 40 countries, compared with 27 a decade ago, and holds more than 250 million barrels of crude and refined products, which is enough for seven to eight weeks of buffer.

RBI proposes to compensate for small-value digital frauds

New Delhi: The Reserve Bank of India on Friday released draft guidelines for a compensation scheme aimed at protecting individuals from digital frauds. According to the guidelines, individuals who have lodged a complaint involving a gross loss of up to Rs 50,000 on account of a fraudulent electronic banking transaction would be compensated 85% of the net loss amount, or Rs 25,000, whichever is less, once during their lifetime. The guidelines will be applicable for cases of electronic banking transactions undertaken by customers on or after July 1, 2026. In cases of third-party breach reported to the bank after five calendar days, the customer shall be compensated in eligible cases. If the third-party breach is not eligible for compensation as per these provisions, the customer’s liability shall be determined as per the bank’s policy. It also said loss arising from any unauthorised transaction occurring after reporting of the fraudulent electronic banking transaction by a customer shall be borne by the bank.The proposed compensation mechanism will be in force for one year from the effective date of these guidelines.

The guidelines would be reviewed on the basis of the experience gained with an objective of enhancing the share of the banks and reducing or eliminating the share of RBI in the compensation paid to the victims, the draft said.The RBI has specified that the victim will have to report the fraud on the

National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal or National Cyber Crime Helpline (1930) and to the bank within five calendar days from its occurrence. In the case of joint accounts, any one of the account holders may submit the claim for compensation. For banks, the RBI has proposed to put in place a suitable mechanism and structure for periodic reporting of complaints to the board or one of its committees.The bank will have to compensate the customer within five calendar days of receipt of the application, and would seek reimbursement of the applicable amount from the RBI on a quarterly basis.The bank’s board or its committee will have to periodically review the fraudulent electronic banking transactions reported by customers, the action taken thereon, functioning of the grievance redressal and compensation mechanism, and take appropriate measures to improve the systems and procedures.

“The customer availing (of) compensation as a joint account holder shall not be eligible for claiming compensation in his/her capacity as a single account holder in future and vice versa,” the draft said. If any money is recovered after the bank has already paid compensation for a fraudulent electronic transaction, it will recalculate the amount based on the customer’s actual loss. If excess compensation was paid earlier, the bank will adjust it from the recovered amount and pay the balance to the customer.

INTERNATIONAL

During the Iran-US war, Abu Dhabi intercepted a drone and reported six injuries from debris



Abu Dhabi: The incident involving falling debris took place at two locations in the ICAD 2 area following the successful interception of a drone by air defences Six people were injured in United Arab Emirates’ (UAE) Abu Dhabi by debris from an intercepted drone, its media office said, as the missile exchange involving US-Israel and Iran ripping through the Middle East region entered its sixth day. The incident involving falling debris took place at two locations in

the ICAD 2 area following the successful interception of a drone by air defences, the Abu Dhabi media office said. Track latest news from UAE amid Iran-US war here Pakistani and Nepalese nationals were among those injured in the incident.“Authorities in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi responded to an incident involving falling debris at two locations in the ICAD 2 area, following the successful interception of a drone by air defences. The incident resulted in six minor to moder-

ate injuries to Pakistani and Nepalese nationals,” the Abu Dhabi media office said in a statement. The fighting in the Middle East, triggered by the US-Israel strikes on Iran that killed Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and intensified by Tehran’s retaliation, entered the sixth day on Thursday.Tehran as well as US facilities continued to be targeted by rival sides with drones and missiles, with the most prominent latest attack attempts being intercepted drones over Doha in Qatar and the strike on Iranian naval ship Iris Dena off the Sri Lankan coast on Wednesday, an assault that killed dozens. The attacks on UAE’s Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the ongoing conflict have emerged as the some of the most noticeable developments given the reputation of the cities as being safe havens and immune to whatever is happening in the rest of the Middle East. Apart from Abu Dhabi, Iran’s retaliatory strikes across the Gulf reached Dubai’s airports, iconic landmarks such as Palm Jumeirah and Burj Al Arab hotel as well as ports last weekend.

Airstrikes target Iran-Iraq border as US-Israeli strategy to mobilize Kurds gains traction

Iran: Intense waves of airstrikes have hit dozens of military positions, frontier posts and police stations along northern parts of Iran’s border with Iraq in what appears to be preparation by US and Israel for a new front in their war.A US official with knowledge of the discussions between Washington and Kurdish officials said the US was ready to provide air support if Kurdish fighters crossed the border from northern Iraq.A spokesperson for Israel’s military said the air force had been “heavily operating in western Iran to degrade Iranian capabilities there and to open up a way to Tehran and create freedom of operations there”.With the remote border regions of Iran threatening to become a new front, Iran has warned “separatist groups” against joining the widening conflict. Tehran said on Thursday it had launched strikes against Iraq-based Kurdish groups “opposed to the revolution”. “Separatist groups should not think that a breeze has blown and try to take action,” said the secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larijani. Khalil Nadiri, an official with the Kurdistan Freedom party (PAK), based in northern Iraq’s semi-autonomous Kurdish region, said on Wednesday that Kurdish opposition group leaders had been contacted by US officials regarding a potential operation, and that some of their forces had moved to areas near the Iranian border in Sulaymaniyah province and were on standby. Meanwhile, Baloch militant groups opposed to the Tehran regime have also moved from remote mountain bases in Pakistan across the border into Iran, according to local officials. Experts predicted that backing armed groups from Iran’s ethnic communi-



ties would “open up a hornet’s nest”, aggravating divisions within the diverse country and increasing the risk of a chaotic civil war if the current regime collapses. Donald Trump called two leaders of Iranian Kurdish factions based in northern Iraq earlier this week and is open to supporting groups that are willing to take up arms to dislodge the regime, US media have reported.Clandestine operations in north-western parts of Iran where Kurdish communities are most numerous were “ramped up” after the brief war between Iran and Israel last summer, according to former intelligence and defence officials in Israel, the US and elsewhere in the region. There were reports in January of clashes between Iran’s Islamic Rev-

olutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and groups of Kurdish peshmerga fighters who had entered Iran from Turkey and Iraq.

The peshmerga are the traditional fighting forces of the Kurds. Motivated, mobile and disciplined, they have often proved effective against better armed enemies, especially when on terrain they know well. Two weeks ago, five rival Iranian Kurdish organisations led by the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI) formed a new coalition dedicated to overthrowing the regime in Tehran.“Getting your groups aligned and united is the first play in the playbook,” said one former US defence official with experience of clandestine operations.

Russia alleges that an LNG ship in the Mediterranean was targeted by drones



Russia: Vladimir Putin, the Russian president, has accused Ukraine of carrying out an attack on one of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) carriers, which exploded and sank into the Mediterranean Sea off Libya. Explosions were reported on the Arctic Metagaz, which had been carrying 61,000 tonnes of LNG, on Tuesday night when the ship was about 150 miles (240km) off the coast of Libya. Ukraine has not commented on the sinking on the ship, which

had been under US and EU sanctions. Russia’s transport ministry had claimed that the Arctic Metagaz had been hit by Ukrainian drones launched from the Libyan coast. Ukrainian drones damaged Russian civilian sites in the south-western region of Saratov, Roman Busgarin, the area’s governor said early on Thursday. Saratov airport and other airports in the southern and central regions were closed late on Wednesday and early on Thursday. Three injuries

were reported.A prolonged energy crisis caused by the widening war in the Middle East may offer the Russian war machine an economic lifeline just as it was beginning to show signs of strain over its war in Ukraine. Russia could receive a windfall if disruption in the Middle East pushes buyers towards its energy, while a possible slowdown in western arms supplies to Ukraine as the US military action in Iran continues could give Russia a further boost.

The House will vote on restricting Trump’s authority in the Iran conflict once the Senate plan fails



Washington: The Senate vote on a war powers resolution broke down along party lines on Wednesday, 47-53 – John Fetterman of Pennsylvania was the sole Democrat to vote against the measure, while Rand Paul of Kentucky was the only member of the Republican majority to support the resolution.On Wednesday, Fetterman went on CNN News Central to voice his support of the US-Israeli strikes on Iran and that this is a situation of “country over party”.“What I’m trying to establish is that every single senator in the Congress says we should never allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon. That now has made that possible after that. And now they’ve eliminated this leadership,” Fetterman said. “Now, do you really want those things? Does it really matter? Were you

really serious about that? Because if you were, why can’t we just acknowledge – I’m not with all of it – but this was a great development for the region.”

Anchor Kate Bolduan asked Fetterman if he thought the US and Israel were aligned in their war goals, specifically in regards to comments made by Israeli defense minister Israel Katz that “any leader appointed by the Iranian terror regime” would become “an unequivocal target for elimination”.“Yeah just keep killing them until they’re gone,” Fetterman said. “I mean, absolutely. I’ve read that they’re (Israel is) going to target who they (Iran) ever elect to be their next leader and kill them. Absolutely. I fully support it. So, that’s what’s entirely appropriate.”When Bolduan pushed further on the issue, asking Fetterman

who should decide the leader of Iran, “if you think the United State should take part in taking out every next leader going forward” if the leader doesn’t meet the right measure. “Hey, I’m sorry, I absolutely support killing, you know, the leadership of the Iranian. Absolutely. I absolutely support that,” Fetterman said. “I think that’s entirely appropriate until hopefully they’ll pick someone that realizes that they need to live and coexist in peace in the region and stop trying to destroy Israel and to stabilize the region.”

Welcome to our coverage of US politics today as the conflict as Iran continues to dominate the agenda.The House is preparing to vote on Thursday on a war powers resolution that would require Donald Trump to seek congressional permission before continuing.

Azerbaijan accused Iran of a drone attack on the airport, which injured two persons

Azerbaijan: Azerbaijan has accused Iran of a drone attack that struck the region of Nakhchivan, hitting an airport and injuring two civilians.The strike would be the first Iranian attack on a Caucasus state since the start of the US-Israel war on the country, and raises the prospect of the conflict spreading beyond the Middle East.Azerbaijan’s foreign ministry said the drone hit the terminal building at the only airport in Nakhchivan, an Azerbaijani exclave bordering Iran. A second drone fell close to a school in a nearby village, the ministry said.Baku said it reserved the right to take retaliatory measures.Iran later denied any connection to the drone attack on Nakhchivan airport. “The Islamic Republic of Iran has not targeted the Republic of Azerbaijan,” Iran’s deputy foreign minister, Kazem Gharibabadi, said in comments carried by Iran’s Tasnim news agency. “We do not target our bousing countries.” Footage circulating on social media appeared to show a drone directly striking the airport before a fire broke



out. “We demand that the Islamic Republic of Iran clarify the matter in the shortest possible time, provide an explanation and take the necessary urgent measures to prevent such incidents from recurring in the future,” the Azerbaijani foreign ministry said in a statement.Azerbaijan, an oil-rich authoritarian nation that

has adopted a neutral stance in the Middle East conflict, has recently developed closer ties with Israel and the Trump administration while gradually moving away from Moscow, the traditional power broker in the Caucasus.The country hosts no US military bases, a sign Iran may be expanding its strikes beyond nations di-

rectly linked to accommodating American forces.

Zaur Shiriyev, a non-resident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said it was still unclear whether Iran specifically intended to strike Nakhchivan airport. But he added that, if confirmed,

Breaking Social Review: Rutger Bregman leads an enticing rallying cry for global involvement



American: Bicycling Dutch historian Rutger Bregman does not identify as an optimist. He says that optimism makes people lazy, complacent that history is going in the right direction. Instead he describes himself as a “possibilist”, a believer in the possibility that things can be different. Bregman is interviewed in this film about corruption, kleptocracy and structural inequality. The director is documentary-maker Fredrik Gertten who travels the world meeting activists who have had enough.First, the cold hard facts. Journalist and corruption expert Sarah Chayes, a former adviser to the Obama administration,

does an impressive job summarising her analysis of global kleptocracy. In Malta, the son of the murdered journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, killed after exposing corruption at the highest levels of government, investigates the new scandal of “golden passports”.

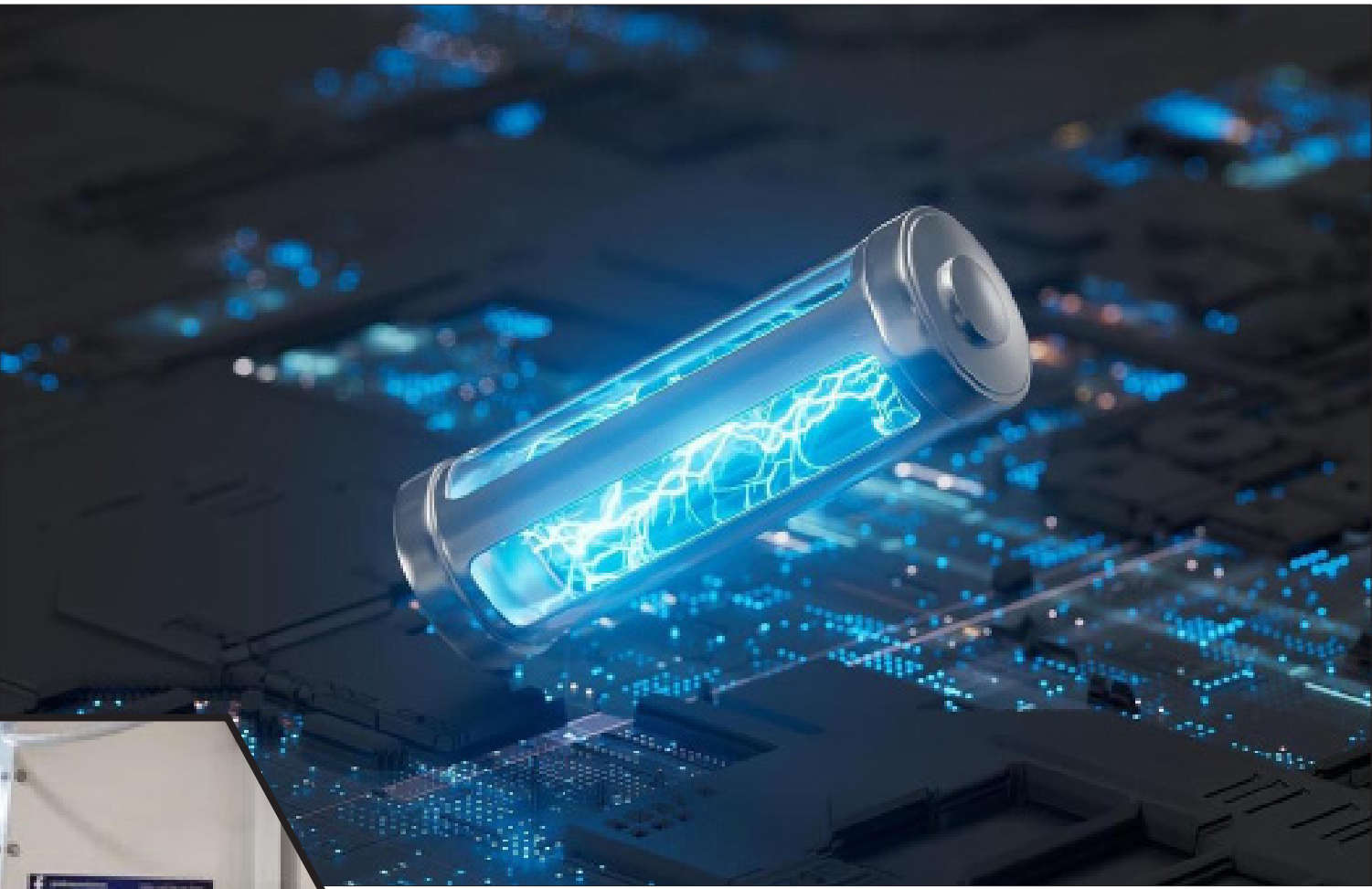
The film’s main focus is activism in Chile and the US. Amazon workers in New York unionise (and have a good laugh at their boss Jeff Bezos’s trip to space). In Chile, feminists march and climate activists go into battle against mining companies responsible for drought. The list goes on. An American school teacher organis-

es strikes; an indigenous 21-year-old becomes Chile’s youngest ever politician. If there is criticism of Breaking Social it is that it jams too many stories together; each one has enough material for a standalone film. But its energy and sense of possibilism is infectious – and historian Bregman is a joy, with his cuddly nuggets of wisdom. Take evolution: we need to rethink survival of the fittest, he says. The ice age was more about survival of the friendliest. Getting by was a struggle for survival. Without friends to keep you warm, you wouldn’t survive for long.

Sodium-ion batteries are getting ready for prime time. How can they improve EVs

Most of the rechargeable batteries used in today's technology, from electric cars to the phones in our pockets, are lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries. Since its inception in the early 1990s, Li-ion battery technology has been widely adopted for its high energy density, lightweight construction and ability to provide high voltage on demand for gadgets and vehicles alike. But scientists are working on a new contender that threatens to relegate Li-ion to the past — at least in specific applications. Sodium-ion (Na-ion) batteries (sometimes called NIBs as an abbreviation of Na-ion battery) are an emerging battery technology that stores charged sodium ions in batteries' electrodes, rather than lithium ions as in Li-ion batteries. This is a hot area of research because it could unlock battery abundance, with sodium far easier to source or produce than the critical mineral lithium, which is only found in small deposits around the world. Na-ion batteries also come with inherent safety benefits that could make them more palatable for large-scale, static battery setups, scientists that are working on the technology say. The main benefit of Na-ion batteries is that they are cheaper, easier and more sustainable to manufacture because of the sheer availability of sodium. "Particularly, sodium is cheaper, more abundant and less geographically concentrated than lithium," explained Dustin Bauer, an associate at intellectual property firm Reddie & Grose with doctoral experience studying the synthesis, composition, and use of Na-ion batteries and Li-ion batteries. With the past decade having made the potential pitfalls of the global supply chain plain to see, as well as climate targets requiring a mass switch to electrified grids and transport wherever possible, there's a clear benefit to adopting batteries that don't rely on hard-to-source critical minerals to function. Sign up for "For reference, Sodium is the sixth most common element on Earth, and has a natural abundance of 2,360 mg/L, whereas Lithium, at number 32 in the list, has a natural abundance of 20 mg/L," said Carmen M. López, principal scientist in the electrochemistry group at the National Physical

Laboratory (NPL). Once the supply chains for Na-ion batteries are operational at scale, they could help drive the costs far below Li-ion batteries, flooding the world market with more affordable energy storage options. For example CATL, the world's largest battery manufacturer, recently commenced commercial production of Na-ion batteries for heavy vehicles. Beyond the silicon used for the cathode in the battery, the chemistry of Na-ion batteries also circumvents the need for other costly components. "Because of the operating voltage of the batteries, Li-ion requires the use of copper for the negative current collector, but copper is more expensive and weighs more than aluminum," López said. She added that Na-ion batteries carry the potential for replacing organic electrolytes — used as the conducting medium for ions in Li-ion batteries — likely to cause a rapid spike in temperature. Lithium ions, on the other hand, can flow quickly, causing overheating, the release of oxygen and ignition. Finally, Na-ion batteries offer improved temperature resistance over Li-ion batteries, due to their low volatility and the reduced viscosity of the electrolyte. In short, this refers to the degradation of performance at low temperatures linked to the lower charge density of sodium ions compared to lithium ions, meaning that the ions continue to move freely even in low temperatures. In a recent study published Dec. 12 in the journal Chinese Chemical Letters, scientists at Hunan First Normal University and Central South University found that Li-ion batteries could retain



EV batteries, which currently combust at a rate similar to that of gasoline and diesel fuels, according to National Car

Charging data. First and foremost, Na-ion batteries have lower energy density than Li-ion batteries. This is for the same reason that they have lower viscosity — sodium ions are simply larger than lithium ions, reducing the overall movement that can occur within the Na-ion battery's electrolyte and translate to power. The mass of sodium is also three times that of lithium, per the American Physical Society, which means you get less charge held per gram of Na-ion battery. In practice, this adds up to Na-ion batteries being unable to compete with Li-ion for sheer quantity of energy held. The same data from the American Physical Society quoted the average energy density of Li-ion batteries as being in the range of 100-300 watt hours per

kilogram. CATL's first-generation Na-ion batteries, in contrast, achieved a figure of just 160 Wh/kg. The inherently lower energy density of Na-ion batteries compared to Li-ion is a major stumbling block to using them for EVs, despite the potential safety benefits of doing so. Bauer described the issue of energy density as the "main and possibly decisive" drawback for Na-ion batteries, and it's clear that researchers are working hard to overcome this challenge. "There is a lot of debate in the battery community about this," López told Live Science. "Due to the limitations in power and energy density, to power your typical electric vehicle, the size and weight of Na-ion batteries that will be needed will make them unsuitable for onboard deployment. The best chance in transportation would [be] in slow-charging infrastructure, and/or ultra-compact, short distance drive vehicles." The inherently lower energy density of Na-ion batteries compared to Li-ion is a major stumbling block to using them for EVs, despite the potential safety benefits of doing so. Bauer described the issue of energy density as the "main and possibly decisive" drawback for Na-ion batteries, and it's clear that researchers are working hard to overcome this challenge. "There is a lot of debate in the battery community about this," López told Live Science. "Due to the

limitations in power and energy density, to power your typical electric vehicle, the size and weight of Na-ion batteries that will be needed will make them unsuitable for onboard deployment. The best chance in transportation would [be] in slow-charging infrastructure, and/or ultra-compact, short distance drive vehicles." Indeed, one of the most promising use cases for Na-ion batteries, backed up by the experts to whom Live Science spoke, is grid-scale energy storage such as battery energy storage systems (BESS). These vast arrays of batteries are becoming increasingly important for the stability of national and regional grids, in particular for storing the intermittent energy production of renewables such as solar and wind farms for later use. For example, the U.K. Parliament has examined the risk of thermal runaway for grid-scale BESS, citing the examples of fires at BESS sites linked to the process in both Liverpool and Essex. But even with the lower upfront cost of Na-ion taken into account, energy density remains a downside for the technology when it comes to energy storage. For example, EV and battery giant BYD's MC Cube-SIB ESS, its Na-ion BESS product, delivers an energy storage capacity of just 2.3 MWh in its 20-foot size configuration, as reported by Energy Storage News. This compares to around 6.4 MWh for BYD's Li-ion offering

in the same lineup. Bauer pointed to the Baochi Storage Station in Yunnan as an example of both Li-ion and Na-ion being used to store renewable energy at scale. Some of the main reported benefits of the approach include faster discharge of batteries — six times faster than current battery models, according to the Global Times — and better resilience in weather conditions ranging from (-4 to 113 degrees F (-20 to 45 degrees C). While research into Na-ion is ongoing and new breakthroughs help improve the energy density of Na-ion batteries, this is a mature field of research with huge commercial potential. In fact, we're already seeing manufacturers turning out products powered by Na-ion batteries. "Commercial production is already happening, with early mass production capacity coming online," said Bauer. "CATL, who are the world's largest Li-ion battery manufacturer, and Freevoy, a mixed ion battery. More recently, CATL revealed Tianxing II, a 'mass-produced' NIB for light commercial vehicles." Despite this, López cautions that more real-world safety tests for Na-ion batteries must still be completed: "For example, will it be more desirable and practicable to deploy these batteries in urban vs remote environments? How do we adapt them to existing electricity infrastructure? Among other things to be considered," she said.

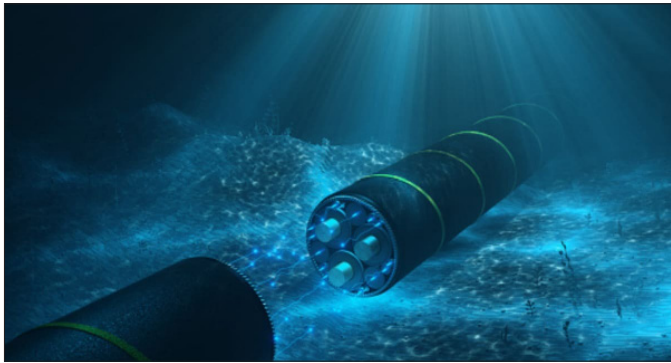
India's New Digital Chokepoint: The West Asia War Is Threatening Your Internet, Not Just Your Petrol

The Strait of Hormuz is often characterised as the world's most significant energy chokepoint, but in March 2026, it has emerged as an equally vital "digital chokepoint". For India, this narrow strip of water represents a double-edged vulnerability: it is the primary gateway for the fuel that powers its physical economy and the subsea cables that sustain its digital existence. As the West Asia war escalates, the shifts to India's normality have risked from theoretical to immediate. While 99% of international data is transmitted via subsea fibre-optic cables, approximately one-third of India's westward internet traffic traverses the Gulf region. Key cable systems such as SEA-ME-

WE 4 (SMW4), I-ME-WE, and Flag Telecom's FALCON are critical for connecting Mumbai and Chennai to Europe and West Asia. The deteriorating security situation has disrupted essential maintenance. Cable repair ships, which have been active since cuts occurred near Jeddah in late 2025, were forced to halt operations this week due to the risk of missile strikes and drone attacks. This "repair paralysis" means that if a cable is severed today — whether by a dragging anchor or deliberate sabotage — the resulting latency could cripple India's real-time financial trading and its burgeoning \$270 billion data centre industry. **The Energy Chokepoint: Crude and LNG Dependencies**

India's economic engine remains heavily reliant on the Strait for its physical survival. As of March 2026, roughly 50–55% of India's crude oil imports and over half of its Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) shipments must pass through this 33-kilometre-wide passage. With the war entering a critical phase, tanker traffic has plummeted by nearly 70%, with many vessels dropping anchor outside the Strait to avoid being targeted. The disruption to LNG is especially acute. With Qatar being India's largest supplier, any prolonged blockade effectively "freezes" the supply chain for India's fertiliser and power sectors. While the Indian government has assured the

public that it holds roughly 25 days of crude oil and another 25 days of fuel reserves, these are temporary buffers against a conflict that shows no signs of abating. The recent strike on the oil tanker Skylight, which killed two Indian crew members, has already forced a sharp spike in maritime insurance premiums, adding a "war premium" to every barrel that manages to get through. **Economic Cascades and the 'War Premium'** The economic fallout is not limited to the pump. The volatility in the Strait has triggered a surge in Brent crude towards \$90 per barrel. Analysts warn that a sustained crisis could push the Indian Rupee below



95 against the US dollar, further widening the current account deficit (CAD). For India's white-collar workforce, the risk is twofold. First, the potential disruption of data flows threatens the "remote-first" delivery models of IT giants. Second, the stability of the 9 million-strong

Indian diaspora in the Gulf is at stake. A structural dislocation in the regional economy would not only threaten their safety but also jeopardise the massive flow of remittances — a cornerstone of India's foreign exchange reserves. Strategic Realignment and Future-Proofing The 2026

crisis has forced New Delhi into a delicate balancing act. The US has granted India a 30-day waiver to ramp up Russian oil imports to mitigate price spikes, even as India attempts to diversify its energy basket with American and Venezuelan crude. Strategic projects like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic seen as a "peace-time" trade route, are now being re-evaluated as essential security alternatives to bypass traditional maritime flashpoints. Ultimately, the Strait of Hormuz serves as a stark reminder that in a globalised world, India's "strategic autonomy" is inextricably linked to the safety of deep-sea cables and the freedom of navigation in distant, turbulent waters.

ENTERTAINMENT

Nick Jonas Remembers His Lovely First Date With Priyanka Chopra



New Delhi: Recently, Nick Jonas talked about his first date with Priyanka Chopra. In case she wasn't feeling the "vibe," he described how he made it a "group date." But at the end, they gave each other a passionate kiss to seal the deal. Nick Jonas recounted inviting his now-wife Priyanka Chopra to the live performance of Beauty and the Beast at the Hollywood Bowl, which led to their first date.

He explained that Nick had invited his older brother Kevin Jonas and another couple, while Priyanka had asked her closest friend to accompany her. "We had the best time at

the show," Nick remarked. It was hilarious when Joe sent us shots of milk from wherever he was in the world after we went out for drinks and he saw how psyched I was about the date.

Priyanka informed Kevin, "She's like, 'Obviously, your brother is gassing you up.'" while Kevin attempted to excite Nick. That evening, we had a French kiss," Nick said. Recently, Priyanka Chopra was occupied with marketing The Bluff, her most recent film. During her recent appearance on the Jay Shetty Podcast, the actress received a sweet letter from her husband, Nick Jonas. The

message was addressed simply as "My jaan," and Priyanka was clearly moved by it. Nick said, "I am constantly in awe of the person you are. It's not the big titles, global icon, leader, force of nature. It's how you show up as a mother, a daughter, a sister and my wife.

The focus and thoughtfulness you bring every single day is something I try to live up to." The singer noted the sharp contrast between Priyanka Chopra's private life and her public persona. Everyone can see the public part of you, but what truly amazes me is who you are in private. People feel totally protected because of your amazing patience and listening skills. I've witnessed people who typically keep their guard up completely let go and find a form of healing they weren't aware they needed. You genuinely never pass judgment and always see the good in people, which is one of my favorite things about you," he continued. In 2018, Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas tied the knot.

Malti Marie Chopra Jonas, the couple's daughter, was born in January 2022.

Celina Jaitley shares a heartfelt Holi meditation

Mumbai: A day after Holi, actor Celina Jaitley posted an emotional social media reflection on why the festival that used to be colorful and joyful now feels so different. Celina spent the day reflecting on the past, while many in the film business celebrated the festival with exciting get-togethers and family celebrations. The performer was open about how much her life has altered since then. She wrote, "Homesick for a Place That No Longer Exists," in a very intimate statement.

After living abroad for as long as you were raised in your parents' house, who do you become? She talked on the lasting sense of displacement that followed years spent overseas, reflecting on life spent between nations and cultures. "You gradually embrace the advantages of a new country while leaving behind your family, friends, job, and culture." However, you eventually experience a sense of loss. You know you did everything you could to blend, but in essence, it's hard to integrate in a country where you weren't born," she wrote. Celina, who has spent a number of years in Austria, talked about how being surrounded by loved ones used to be what it meant to feel at home. "Home was only



where I felt the warmth of my mother and the deep love of my father and brother." "Where do I find that home now that they're gone, strangers abroad, strangers back home?" she said. The performer also considered the emotional burden of losing her parents. She added, "Sometimes we don't want to heal, because the pain is the last link we have to what we've lost." She also mentioned that she frequently questions her true place in the world. Jaitley had also mentioned last year's Holi festivities with her kids in a previous post. "Last year, I waited for my boys to get back from school while wearing Holi colors." This picture was taken during Holi last year. She added, "I had no idea that by the next Holi, everything would suddenly turn black and white and I would lose all the brilliant colors of my life." She added that it has frequently

been a quiet occasion to celebrate Indian holidays overseas. "Indian holidays were often extremely quiet in my marriage, and no meaningful attempt was made to comprehend how much they meant to me. Therefore, it was frequently my responsibility to teach the boys about our celebrations, customs, and culture in my own little ways. Jaitley accused her husband, Peter Haag, of domestic abuse in 2025.

The actor claimed custody of their children in addition to ₹50 crore in compensation for lost wages. She claims that she was subjected to severe verbal, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, which compelled her to flee her Austrian home and return to India. She states that while the legal proceedings are ongoing, the children are temporarily residing with Haag in Austria.

Kiara Advani will not play Madhubala in the biopic directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali

Mumbai: The biopic on Madhubala, one of the most famous actors in Indian movie history, is still being developed. But according to recent sources, Sanjay Leela Bhansali has joined the production team, and Kiara Advani has finally been cast in the starring role. However, an industry source has refuted this casting news. The industry source, who spoke to HT, vehemently denied the persistent rumors about the Madhubala biography. The rumors that Kiara Advani is being cast in a Madhubala biopic directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali are completely untrue. The source clarified, "The claims are entirely speculative and unsupported." Jasmeet K. Reen is reportedly directing the movie, while more specifics are still being kept under wraps. For those who don't know, Alia Bhatt, Shefali Shah, and Vijay Varma appeared in the black comedy drama

Darlings, which marked Jasmeet's directorial debut. Regarding her career, Kiara last appeared in the Second World War. The movie, which is directed by Ayan Mukerji, is the sixth entry in the YRF Spy Universe, following Tiger 3, War, Pathaan, Tiger Zinda Hai, and Ek Tha Tiger. In addition to Kiara, Ashutosh Rana, Jr. NTR, and Hrithik Roshan played the main parts in the movie.

The movie performed poorly at the box office and received mixed-to-negative reviews from critics, many of whom criticized its uninteresting writing and subpar visual effects. Kiara's upcoming film is Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Adults. At the age of eight, Madhubala started her acting career as a child artist. Madhubala debuted as a female lead with Neel Kamal in 1947 when she was just 14 years old. Due to the movie's success, the actress was able to



sign on to numerous other projects. The actor starred in popular films including Howrah Bridge, Raj Hath, Kala Pani, Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi, and Mr. & Mrs. '55. Only three male actors—Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor, and Dev Anand—charged more than her by the mid-50s, when she was barely 21 years old, making her

one of the highest-paid actors in India. After that, Madhubala starred in Mughal-e-Azam, her most popular movie, which came out in 1960.

The actor, however, had a congenital cardiac condition. After Mughal-e-Azam's success, this caused the actor to turn down a number of movies. Acting

was getting harder for her, so she only accepted parts with little screen time. But in the early 1960s, she starred in popular films like Half Ticket, Boy Friend, and Jhumroo. Her last movie, Sharabi, was released in 1964 when she was just 31 years old. In 1969, she passed away from her sickness. Her age was thirty-six.

Anurag Kashyap praises Anil Kapoor's Subedaar and believes it should have been released in theaters

Mumbai: On March 5, Bollywood actor Anil Kapoor's Subedaar debuted on Prime Video to mixed reviews, however the actor's performance was commended. Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap has now assessed the movie and stated that it ought to have been released in theaters. He complimented the film's minimalism, realistic action, and cast performances. Anurag posted a still of Anil Kapoor from the movie on Instagram on Saturday. "SUBEDAR on @primevideo should have been a theatrical," he remarked in his review of the film. I would have loved to see it in a theater; it was obviously shot in anamorphic for the big screen. An immersive universe of Bundelkhand/Chambal, complete with its



patriarchy and entitlement, is created by @sureshtriveni. In these male-dominated hinterlands of the beehad that once gave rise to Phoolan Devi, women who are not patriarchal fight like men. "The world has not changed since, in fact, it has gotten worse," he con-

tinued. And our SUBEDAR arrives in that realm. This former soldier is pitted against the completely primitive civilian society in the same world that gave birth to Paan Singh Tomar. It's completely made up, but it makes me want to believe. filled with roughness,

tension, silences, and a deliberate pace (when heard with noise-cancelling headphones). I had a great time, but I would have loved it much more if I had seen it in a crowded theater. The film, which was directed by Suresh Triveni, is about a retired soldier who finds it difficult to adjust to civilian life in a world that is changing quickly. The story, which is set in Madhya Pradesh, follows Arjun as he attempts to patch up a strained relationship with his daughter Shyama while battling societal dysfunction and local corruption. Alongside Radhikka Madan, Khushbu Sundar, Saurabh Shukla, Aditya Rawal, Mona Singh, and Faisal Malik, Anil Kapoor plays the key role in the movie. Right now, Prime Video is streaming it.

Dhurandhar 2, is preparing for advance bookings in India

Mumbai: Dhurandhar: The Revenge, starring Ranveer Singh, is scheduled to open in theaters on March 19. Earlier this week, advance reservations for the movie began in a few foreign countries.

As the excitement grows, the producers are now preparing to launch advance reservations in India as well. After the trailer is released at 11 a.m. on March 7, Dhurandhar 2 is anticipated to start selling tickets domestically. In an Instagram post, Ranveer Singh revealed the trailer's release.

Additionally, special paid preview performances for Dhurandhar 2 are scheduled for the evening of March 18, the day before the movie's global premiere on March 19. For the eagerly awaited movie, national chains are introducing "Super Blockbuster Plus," a new premium pricing tier. The current "Super Blockbuster" or "Blockbuster" designations, which already price 10–25% more than regular tickets, are anticipated to be more expensive than this new category. This choice was probably influenced by the movie's almost four-hour running length, which restricts the number of presentations that theaters can book in a given day, lowering capacity.

This loss will be partially compensated for by higher prices. The runtime is still anticipated to be on the longer side, but the developers are looking into ways to reduce it to about 3 hours and 30 minutes. Ranveer Singh, Sara Arjun, Sanjay Dutt, R. Madhavan, and Arjun Rampal play important roles in Aditya Dhar's film Dhurandhar: The Revenge. Following Hamza Ali Mazari's ascent in Pakistan's Lyari Town and his pursuit of Major Iqbal, the sequel picks up where the previous movie left off. Yash's Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups and Dhurandhar 2 were supposed to compete at the box office.

But the Ranveer-starring movie now has an indisputable advantage thanks to its June 4 postponement. Ryan Gosling's Project Hail Mary, which opens in theaters on March 20, may still pose a threat to the spy thriller.

Ananya Panday and Kareena Kapoor support Deepika Padukone's request for an eight-hour shift

New Delhi: Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone reportedly left Sandeep Reddy Vanga's Spirit and the Kalki 2898 AD sequel in 2025, sparking a discussion regarding actresses' eight-hour work shifts. Bollywood celebrities Ananya Panday and Kareena Kapoor Khan have now justified the actor's demand, saying it's OK to speak with producers before to the start of a movie. Kareena discussed her opinions on working while raising children in an interview with The Hollywood Reporter India. She stated that, in her perspective, everything needs to be well-planned and performers need to be transparent with producers from the start. She disclosed that she informed the

producers that she would have to go back to her kids while filming The Buckingham Murders. She added that while she was filming in London, Saif Ali Khan was with the kids. She went on to discuss Deepika's desire for an eight-hour shift and mentioned that married actors want an understanding partner because they cannot work and leave the kids alone. According to Kareena, sometimes it boils down to saying no to a movie or making minor time sacrifices. Therefore, I believe that if you are married and have kids, you should be allowed to declare that this is what you want if, as a woman, you do not want to provide that time. I am able to put in this many hours. It's quite OK,



in my opinion, to mention such prior to the start of a movie. You

must be truthful. Naturally, a few days could go crazy because there's no chance that something won't go wrong on some days. That openness is something you must possess. Not everything will go as to plan. Therefore, there should be a lot of flexibility; else, it would be quite challenging. The 16-hour work shift in the Malayalam film business has been shortened to 12 hours, according to actor Kalyani Priyadarshan. She went on to say that since a lot of things need to happen in a single day, movies cannot be limited to six hours. "I have worked with Deepika, and before she became a mother, there was no such thing like that," Ananya Panday added in defense of Deepika. She was

attending workshops, working, and making no requests or complaints. Now that she is a mother, she must spend the first two years of her child's development with her. To establish a balance, I believe it's acceptable to speak with your producer.

There are ways to get around it. According to reports, Deepika left Sandeep Reddy Vanga and Prabhas's movie Spirit in May 2025. The director reportedly did not agree with the actor's demands for an eight-hour work shift and a portion of the profits shortly after her departure. Triptii Dimri eventually took her place. The producers of Kalki 2898 AD announced in September that Deepika would not appear in the follow-up.

For the India-New Zealand final, a mixed-soil pitch is expected to provide good bounce and little turn



New Delhi: A “mixed soil” field, similar to the one used in the Mumbai semi-final, would be used for the T20 World Cup final between India and New Zealand at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, according to a report. Sanju Samson’s incredible knock of 89 helped India score a massive total of 253/7 in the high-scoring semi-final match against England. The Ahmedabad surface is also anticipated to be a batting haven with little turn for bowlers, according to the report. The summit match is expected

to take place on the center pitch, which will have a mixture of red and black soil. With a par score of about 200, it is anticipated to give bowlers good bounce. Only one T20 World Cup 2026 match has taken place on the field thus far. South Africa scored 213 points to overcome Canada in that match. India has played two games in Ahmedabad during the current tournament, the most recent of which ended in a defeat to South Africa, whereas New Zealand has only played one. According to a source in the Indian

Express, the final wicket will feature a mixed-soil surface with more red dirt than black. It is anticipated that a higher proportion of red soil will benefit hitters, who can expect even bounce in both innings. India’s history of losing two important games is said to have influenced the decision to select a wicket with a higher red soil concentration rather than black. The 2023 ODI World Cup final between Australia and India took place on a black dirt surface, which has a tendency to turn slow. The management saw India’s defeat by South Africa by more than 70 runs in the Super 8s of the current T20 World Cup as a wake-up call. However, things are anticipated to be different for the final, at least from the standpoint of the pitch. “A mixed-soil pitch will be provided to the Indian squad for the championship game at the Narendra Modi Stadium. There won’t be any unfair advantages on

the athletic field. There will be some bounce and batsmen will also have an advantage because there is more red soil on this track, a source informed the newspaper. The report also stated that several of the pitches provided during the league stage did not satisfy the management of the Indian squad led by Gautam Gambhir. The management sent staff representatives to talk about pitch preparation during the event in order to voice their concerns to the local curators. India’s aggressive opening partnership continues to be the main focus.

Throughout the competition, Suryakumar Yadav’s team has focused on a high-risk, high-reward plan, which paid off in the semifinal. Sanju Samson’s addition has given the middle order much-needed steadiness, and if the new ball moves under the lights, his capacity to counterattack against excellent pace will be crucial.

Citing marriage, the Supreme Court overturns a man’s rape conviction, but with a caveat

New Delhi, Mar 07: The Supreme Court overturned a man’s ten-year prison sentence after noting that he had since married the woman and that they were living happily together. However, it made it clear that the acquittal would only last as long as he does not desert her. The court, which included Justice Joymalya Bagchi and Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, stated that the relief was extraordinary and conditional but warned that the conviction would be reinstated if the man tried to leave his wife. “We believe it is appropriate to utilize our powers under Article 142 of the Constitution in light of the subsequent occurrences that the appellant and respondent No. 2 got married. In a recent ruling, the bench declared, “The appellant shall stand acquitted for all intents and purposes, subject to the condition that he will continue to maintain a cordial relationship and will not desert respondent No. 2—his wife.” The ac-



cused and the girl, who was a child at the time of the sexual interaction, had what the Supreme Court regarded as an affair, which gave rise to the criminal case. He was found guilty under Section 6 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) Act, which stipulates punishment for penetrative sexual assault on a juvenile, and Section 376(2)(n) of the Indian Penal Code, which deals with rape. In October 2023, the Orissa High Court denied the defendant regular bail following his conviction by a Jeypore trial court. In accordance with the IPC

and POCSO requirements, the trial court sentenced him to 10 years of harsh imprisonment and fines, ordering the sentences to be served concurrently. The conviction itself was upheld, and his criminal appeal was still pending, even though the high court granted him interim bail for brief periods of time based on his behavior and length of incarceration. The Supreme Court heard the case and granted him bail on February 10, 2025. At that point, the bench noted that the accused had wed the complainant in December 2019 and that the woman’s

attorney had told the court that he was “keeping the complainant well.” The Supreme Court noted the “subsequent events” in its final ruling, which included the appellant and complainant’s marriage, which was consummated with the help of elders, and their ongoing cohabitation. The court declared, “We believe it is appropriate to invoke our powers under Article 142 of the Constitution in light of the subsequent events.” The Supreme Court may issue any order required to provide “complete justice” in a case that is before it, according to Article 142. The court ruled, “The appellant shall stand acquitted for all intents and purposes,” but added a condition that he “will not desert” his wife and must continue to have a friendly connection. In addition, the court issued a severe warning that “all proceedings at each level will stand revived” if the appellant tries to abuse the conviction.

Greetings on the occasion of Jan Aushadhi Diwas today from PM Modi



New Delhi, Mar 07: Prime Minister Narendra Modi wished everyone involved in the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) and its beneficiaries a happy Jan Aushadhi Diwas 2026 on Saturday, emphasizing the program’s contribution to the nation’s access to high-quality, reasonably priced medications. The Prime Minister claimed on social media site X that the program demonstrates the government’s dedication to providing every citizen with access to inexpensive healthcare. “Happy Jan Aushadhi Diwas 2026 to everyone who has benefited from the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana. This program demonstrates our dedication to guaranteeing that all citizens have access to reasonably priced, high-quality medications. Numerous families are receiving appropriate care and saving money on medical bills because to Jan Aushadhi Kendras, according to PM Modi. The Prime Minister also published a MyGovIndia article that highlighted the successes and long-term effects of the Jan Aushadhi project. According to the post, high-quality medications have to be available and reasonably priced, particularly for those with chronic conditions.” A family should never have to bear the financial burden of a chronic disease. The Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana is revolutionizing healthcare by providing high-quality medications for chronic diseases both accessible and inexpensive, according to the article, which is driven by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s agenda.

It added that the project seeks to create a future in which everyone has the right to healthcare and dignity, rather than them being

privileges. The information provided in the essay indicates that Jan Aushadhi Kendras provide high-quality medications at 50–80% less than branded alternatives, greatly lowering healthcare costs for Indian families. By buying medications from Jan Aushadhi Kendras, the campaign has assisted consumers nationwide in saving over Rs 40,000 crore. These centers are a favored healthcare alternative for millions of people, with an average of 15 lakh clients purchasing medications from them every day. Over time, Jan Aushadhi Kendras’ network has grown significantly. From just 80 locations in 2014 to almost 18,000 in 2026, the number of outlets has grown 224 times over the past 12 years, increasing access to reasonably priced medications across the country.

Sales at Jan Aushadhi Kendras have also increased significantly, going from Rs 7.29 crore in 2014–15 to over Rs 2,000 crore by February 2025, a roughly 270-fold increase that reflects growing public confidence in the program.

As a one-stop shop for necessary medical supplies, the centers currently offer a broad variety of healthcare products, including more than 2,110 medications and 315 surgical items spanning 29 therapeutic categories. Additionally, the campaign has improved accessibility and understanding of menstruation hygiene.

The post claims that Jan Aushadhi Kendras has sold over 100 crore sanitary pads, with each pad costing just Rs 1. The scheme’s growth has also been greatly aided by female entrepreneurs. According to the post, women are in charge of nearly 60% of the new Jan Aushadhi establishments that have opened in the last three fiscal years.

Commercial cylinders will cost Rs 115 starting on March 7, while domestic LPG will cost Rs 60

New Delhi, Mar 07: According to sources, the price of residential LPG cylinders has increased as of Saturday, March 7. A 14.2-kg household cooking gas cylinder now costs Rs 60 nationwide. The cost of a 19 kilogram commercial LPG cylinder has also gone up by Rs 115 since the same date, which has an effect on facilities like hotels, restaurants, and small companies. According to the source, a 14.2 kg household LPG cylinder in Delhi now costs Rs 913 instead of Rs 853. The price of a household LPG cylinder in Mumbai has increased from Rs 852.50 to Rs 912.50.

The price has gone up from Rs 879 to Rs 930 in Kolkata and from Rs 868.50 to Rs 928.50 in Chennai. The updated tariffs will take effect right now. Businesses that use commercial LPG cylinders are also subject to the increase. A 19-kg commercial cylinder now costs Rs 1883 instead of Rs 1768.50 in Delhi. The price has increased from Rs 1720.50 to Rs 1835 in Mumbai. In a similar vein, the price climbed from Rs 1929 to Rs 2043.50 in Chennai and from Rs 1875.50 to Rs 1990 in Kolkata. Prior to April 2025, when the non-subsidized rate in Delhi was Rs 853, the cost of a home LPG cylinder had not increased. For both residential and business customers that depend on LPG for everyday operations, the most recent modification represents a substantial rise. The rise coincides with debates about fuel availability and India’s energy supply. Hardeep Singh Puri, the Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, had gave consumers assurances that



there is no energy deficit in the nation and that supply interruptions are not a concern. “Our top goal is to guarantee that our inhabitants have access to reasonably priced and environmentally friendly fuel, and we are doing so in a comfortable manner. In a post on X, the minister stated, “There is no energy shortage in India, and our energy consumers should not be concerned.”

Indian Oil Corporation, however, denied social media rumors that the nation was experiencing a gasoline and fuel shortage, calling them unfounded. India’s supply and distribution networks are operating normally, and the country has adequate fuel reserves. IndianOil is dedicated to ensuring a steady supply of gasoline throughout the nation. In a statement on X, the firm asked citizens to trust solely on official sources for reliable information and to avoid panicking or crowding gas stations. Despite worries about disruptions through the Strait of Hormuz, government sources stated earlier on Friday

ISRO Explains why Cloudburst Wasn’t the Cause of the Deadly Uttarkashi Flood



New Delhi, Mar 07: ISRO has discovered a new potential reason for the flooding that occurred in Dharali, Uttarkashi, last year. On August 5, 2025, a wall of water, mud, and rocks tore across the town, causing rapid and startling destruction. The busy marketplace beside the Khir Gad stream was buried beneath rubble, homes were destroyed, and hotels collapsed. The typical hypotheses quickly surfaced

in the immediate aftermath: was it an exceptional monsoon rainstorm, a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF), or a cloudburst? Scientists from the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) have now discovered a completely distinct and extremely uncommon trigger after conducting a thorough scientific research. They claim that the abrupt collapse of an exposed ice sheet high above the village—a concealed and little-known risk in a warming Himalaya—caused the Dharali disaster. Dharali is situated on the banks of the Bhagirathi River, directly below the Khir Gad, a smaller glacier-fed stream that flows down from the Srikanta Glacier. There is little margin for error when water rushes down from above because the community is situated on a narrow valley level. On August 5, locals recorded horrifying footage of an abrupt, forceful surge—a brief but incredibly strong flow of water mixed with boulders, dirt, and ice. Hours of sluggish, murky flow ensued.

There were concerns about the nature of the flood itself. Cloudbursts and glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) were ruled out as causes of flooding in Dharali, as rainfall was found to be light prior to the event. ISRO’s examination revealed no glacial lakes above the area. The flood originated from a sudden collapse of a fragile ice patch in a shaded “nivation zone” below the Srikanta Glacier. Rising temperatures had destabilized this ice, leading to a debris flow down a steep slope into the Khir Gad valley, which caused a rapid, destructive flood. Such ice patch failures, previously documented in polar regions but now observed in the Himalayas, pose significant risks to nearby communities. Improved satellite monitoring, especially using radar, could provide early warnings of these dangers. Dharali exemplifies the growing concern of climate-related disasters in the Himalayas, emphasizing the need for disaster science to consider unconventional risks.

Aryna Sabalenka Wins Dominantly to Open Indian Wells Bid

New Delhi: With a commanding 6-4, 6-2 victory over Japanese qualifier Hiromi Sakatsume in the second round on Friday, world number one Aryna Sabalenka began her quest for an elusive first Indian Wells title. After having first-round byes, seeded players went into action, with Sabalenka and men’s world number two Jannik Sinner leading the day’s action. In her first competition since finishing second to Elena Rybakina at the Australian Open, Sabalenka showed no signs of rust as she defeated Sakatsume, ranked 136th, who was facing a top-20 player for the

first time in her career. “I’m really happy with the way I was serving, with the way I was putting her on the back foot,” Sabalenka, who made it to the Indian Wells final twice but lost to Mirra Andrejeva last year and Elena Rybakina in 2023, said. Sakatsume lost her service in the first game due to anxiety, but she recovered to hold in the fifth after saving four break points. Nevertheless, she was unable to match the Belarusian’s strength, as Sabalenka won the first set with just one break. Sabalenka won five games in a row after Sakatsume maintained service to start the second,



ending the match after 72 minutes without encountering a break point. Alexander Zverev, ranked fourth in the men’s division, defeated Italian Matteo Berrettini 6-3, 6-4 to secure a third-round spot. Zverev completed the quick

victory without encountering a break point, breaking Berrettini’s service once in each set.

The German, who lost his first game in the California desert last year and has never advanced past the quar-

terfinals, had a positive start. Alexander Zverev expressed satisfaction with his aggressive performance, highlighting his effective forehand and serve in a match he felt he controlled. Victoria Mboko, a rising Canadian teenager, celebrated her first match win at Indian Wells against Kimberly Birrell, noting emotional growth in her journey.

Emma Raducanu won decisively over Anastasia Zakharova, showing resilience post-Australian Open. Marton Fucsovics upset fifth-seeded Lorenzo Musetti, who faced challenges after an injury in the prior tournament.

Brendon McCullum is expected to stay on as England’s coach

New Delhi: Despite a string of disappointments over the last winter, Brendon McCullum is expected to remain head coach of the England cricket team in all forms, according to reports in British media. McCullum’s role came under more scrutiny after England’s T20 World Cup 2026 semi-final loss to India in Mumbai. But while it considers previous outcomes and future plans, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) seems determined to keep him in charge. A difficult time for the team in both white-ball and red-ball formats culminated with England’s loss in the T20 World Cup semifinal. The team’s performance, especially a dismal Ashes campaign in Australia, raised questions about McCullum’s leadership. Reports of off-field issues throughout the tour placed pressure on the head coach and sparked conversations about possible changes to team management. Following the semi-final defeat to India, McCullum openly stated his intention to stay as head coach despite these obstacles. I adore my work. It’s a fantastic job. Of course, there are difficulties along the way, but that’s just part of it. We have accomplished a lot over the past several years, in my opinion, but there is still a ton of work to be done with the team in all formats. We’ll see what happens over the next few days, but I would want to continue. It’s all about getting home, watching some fast horses, and playing some surprising golf right now after spending a good amount of time on the road. “A bit of time to reflect, to let things land and objectively look at what is and isn’t working.” I would be thrilled to guide the group to the next phase. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) is reportedly still expecting him to stay in the position. Harry Brook, the captain of England’s white-ball team, also gave McCullum a lot of encouragement following the World Cup defeat. In an effort to determine the reasons behind the disappointing outcomes, the ECB has started a thorough study of England’s Ashes performance in Australia. McCullum continues to be in charge, overseeing preparations across forms and keeping in constant contact with team leadership while the investigation is ongoing.

Cristiano Ronaldo flies to Madrid for treatment as injury worries deepen

Ronaldo's hamstring injury worse than expected

New Delhi: Cristiano Ronaldo has travelled to Madrid to undergo treatment after tests revealed that the hamstring injury he sustained last weekend is more serious than initially expected, according to Al Nassr manager Jorge Jesus. The 41-year-old forward was substituted during Al-Nassr's 3-1 victory over Al-Fayha last weekend after appearing to suffer discomfort in his right hamstring. Ronaldo had earlier missed a penalty in the match before being forced off, raising immediate concerns about his fitness. Publicly available flight-tracking data later showed the Portugal captain's private jet landing in Madrid overnight on Monday. The development fuelled speculation that he had travelled to Spain to seek specialist medical care. Initial assessments suggested the forward could be sidelined for up to a month. However, further examinations have indicated that the injury may be



More complicated than first feared. Speaking at a press conference, Al-Nassr head coach Jorge Jesus confirmed that the latest medical tests had revealed a worrying development. "After tests, we see the injury suffered by Cristiano Ronaldo was more serious than expected," Jesus said. "Cristiano will now travel to Spain, like

Other players who went for treatment when they were injured. "His injury required treatment in Madrid with his personal therapist, and we hope he returns quickly and helps the team." The decision to send Ronaldo to Madrid reflects a common practice among elite footballers who often rely on trusted rehabilitation

Teams and specialised medical facilities to manage muscle injuries and speed up recovery. "Following the tests, we found that Cristiano Ronaldo's injury was more serious than expected," Jesus explained. Cristiano will now travel to Spain, as other players have done when sidelined. believed to be in doubt at this stage.

Bopanna Academy Marks Decade With Motilal Oswal Foundation's New Advantage Program

New Delhi: Rohan Bopanna Tennis Academy (RBTA) celebrates 10 years of developing tennis talent in India, according to a release. The academy is proud to announce the launch of the Motilal Oswal Foundation Advantage Program, a landmark partnership aimed at supporting India's next wave of elite tennis players. In collaboration with the Motilal Oswal Foundation, RBTA has initiated a three-year development pathway designed to nurture and accelerate emerging Indian talent, providing structured support, world-class coaching, and sports science expertise to help players compete on the global stage. As part of the program, RBTA has currently signed three promising players: Vaishnavi Adkar is currently No. 2 in India and No. 468 in the world singles rankings. Last month, while training at RBTA, Adkar became the first Indian woman in 17 years to reach the final of an ITF W100 or higher-level event at the KPB Trust ITF W100 Women's Open in Bengaluru 2) Dhakshinewar Suresh is currently No. 5 in India and No. 472 in the world singles rankings. Suresh played a critical role in India's recent Davis Cup triumph, winning both his singles matches and the doubles rubber to lead the nation to a 3-2 win over the Netherlands Prarthana Thombare is currently ranked No. 2 in doubles in India and No. 157 in the world doubles rankings. Thombare won a bronze medal in women's doubles at the 2014 Asian Games,



along With Sania Mirza, and also represented India at the 2016 Rio Olympics. The athletes under the Motilal Oswal Foundation Advantage Program will receive comprehensive support through coaching, physical conditioning, physiotherapy, and tournament planning. To guide the program, Balachandran Manikkath, a former national champion with over three decades of coaching experience at the highest level, will serve as the lead coach based in Bangalore, while also travelling with players during key tournament periods. Supporting the athletes' physical preparation and recovery, Isha Galgali will serve as the

program physiotherapist and will also travel with the players on tour. RBTA is also in the process of adding another coach to further strengthen the program, ensuring that players receive consistent, high-quality guidance both at home and on the international circuit. Speaking on the initiative, Rohan Bopanna, Founder of RBTA and two-time Grand Slam champion, said. As RBTA completes 10 years, it is incredibly meaningful to partner with the Motilal Oswal Foundation to create structured opportunities for Indian players. This program is about providing the right ecosystem -- coaching, support staff, and resources global stage.

Indian Women's Team Aims To Secure World Cup Berth During FIH Hockey WC Qualifiers

Hyderabad: The Indian Women's Hockey Team will aim to secure a coveted berth at the upcoming FIH Hockey Women's World Cup 2026 when they take the field in the FIH Hockey World Cup Qualifiers 2026, Hyderabad, Telangana, beginning on 8 March. According to a press release from Hockey India, the tournament will feature eight teams, hosts India, England, Scotland, Korea, Italy, Uruguay, Wales, and Austria, competing for three coveted qualification spots for the global showpiece.

At stake in Hyderabad will be three direct World Cup berths, with the teams finishing first, second and third in the tournament earning qualification for the 2026 edition. The upcoming World Cup will feature 16 teams in both the men's and women's competitions, with nine teams in each category already having secured qualification, setting the stage for a highly competitive qualification phase. The tournament format divides the field into two pools of four teams, with the top two teams from each pool progressing to the semifinals. The winners of both semifinals and the Bronze medal match will secure automatic qualification for the World Cup. Additionally, the highest world-ranked team finishing fourth in Hyderabad will also earn a place at the tournament. The teams are divided into two pools, with England, Korea, Italy, and Austria in Pool A, while hosts India, Scotland, Uruguay, and Wales form Pool B. The tournament serves as the final gateway to the World Cup and promises



high-intensity competition among some of the world's leading hockey nations. India will be keen to bank on strong home support in Hyderabad to produce a superb performance. The team will also be playing under the guidance of recently appointed Chief Coach Sjoerd Marijne, who returned to coach the side earlier this year. India are currently ranked ninth in the world and are the second-highest ranked team in the tournament behind England, who are ranked seventh globally. With a strong squad and the advantage of playing at home, the hosts will be determined

to make the most of the opportunity and secure qualification for the World Cup. Indian team will open their campaign against Uruguay on 8 March, followed by matches against Scotland and Wales on 9 March and 11 March, respectively. Notably, the Indian Women's Hockey Team have played in eight editions of the FIH Hockey Women's World Cup so far and are targeting their ninth appearance. Their best finish came in the inaugural edition of the tournament in 1974, when they finished fourth. Speaking ahead of the tournament, the Indian team Captain Salima

Tete, said, "We are really excited to play the qualifiers at home in front of our fans. The team has been preparing very hard for this tournament because we know what is at stake. Every team here is competing for a place in the World Cup, so we expect tough matches from the start." She added, "Playing in Hyderabad will be very special for us. The support from the home crowd always gives us extra motivation. Our focus is on taking one match at a time, staying disciplined, and giving our best so that we can deliver strong performances and secure our World Cup.

Russell claims Australian GP pole as Verstappen crashes out in qualifying



New Delhi: George Russell and Mercedes have laid down the early marker as the British driver stormed to pole for the season-opening Australian Grand Prix on Saturday, March 7. Russell's teammate Kimi Antonelli will start in the second spot to complete a lockdown at the top for the Silver Arrows, who will be looking to revive their championship credentials as F1 enters a new era in 2026. Max Verstappen had a day to forget in qualifying as he crashed out just minutes after Q1 got underway and in his very first lap of qualifying. The Dutch driver lost control of the rear of his car and crashed into the wall, forcing a red flag. Once the session restarted, there was some drama waiting to unfold as Mercedes led Antonelli on to the track with a cooler still attached to the car. It fell off on the track and was later hit by Lando Norris' car. This has Mercedes under investigation but it didn't stop their dominance

on the track. Russell claimed the top spot in all three sessions of qualifying. orringly, for the rest of the pack, Russell and Mercedes were completely dominant in terms of pure speed and using the new regulations. No driver could come close to Russell's benchmark lap. Antonelli moved up to second place but was still three-tenths slower than the Mercedes driver, while Isack Hadjar. t's been a strange off-season in Formula 1. Three pre-season tests stretched across six weeks, with much of it playing out behind closed doors, away from the prying eyes of journalists and content creators. Secrecy has muffled the screaming debut of the brand-new 1.6-liter V6 turbocharged hybrid engines, allowing some less-than-flattering headlines to emerge. The radically revamped regulations, called the most daring in the sport's 75-year history, have been slammed as 'ridiculously complex,' 'too focused on energy management,' and even 'not pure racing' by the likes of Max Verstappen.

temperature cooled, we tend to favour those conditions. Also, really happy to have Kimi here because it has been such a hard job from the team to deliver this car. They did an amazing job in the garage as well. "It's not easy to drive. I'm excited for the race toMorrow and it could bring some quite exciting racing. Worryingly, for the rest of the pack, Russell and Mercedes were completely dominant in terms of pure speed and using the new regulations. No driver could come close to Russell's benchmark lap. Antonelli moved up to second place but was still three-tenths slower than the Mercedes driver, while Isack Hadjar. t's been a strange off-season in Formula 1. Three pre-season tests stretched across six weeks, with much of it playing out behind closed doors, away from the prying eyes of journalists and content creators. Secrecy has muffled the screaming debut of the brand-new 1.6-liter V6 turbocharged hybrid engines, allowing some less-than-flattering headlines to emerge. The radically revamped regulations, called the most daring in the sport's 75-year history, have been slammed as 'ridiculously complex,' 'too focused on energy management,' and even 'not pure racing' by the likes of Max Verstappen.

Surya Uday: Plucky New Zealand block India's pursuit of historic cricket glory



Ahmedabad: An insanely talented and incredibly consistent Indian cricket team will carry the weight of a nation's hopes in its pursuit of history when it goes up against a tenacious New Zealand in a classic David versus Goliath final of

the T20 World Cup here on Sunday. On November 19, 2023, the expansive amphitheatre called the Narendra Modi Stadium witnessed a teary-eyed and emotionally spent Rohit Sharma drag himself up the dressing-room stairs after

Australia had silenced India in the ODI World Cup final. The distraught home side and a silent stadium, with 93,000 people, title under Rohit. Clarke's comments focus on Bumrah's consistent impact throughout the tournament.

Valverde's last-gasp deflected strike secures Real Madrid dramatic 2-1 victory at Celta Vigo

Madrid: Real Madrid scored with a deflected shot in the 94th minute to win 2-1 at Celta Vigo on Friday and close the gap on La Liga leader Barcelona to one point. Madrid was seeking to avoid a run of three successive losses for the first time since 2018 and needed a massive dose of luck to secure all three points. It went ahead after 11 minutes when Aurélien Tchouaméni's shot from just inside the penalty box left the Celta keeper flatfooted. Celta's experienced striker Borja Iglesias equalized for the home side with his third goal in four games after 25 minutes, and strike partner Iago Aspas was unfortunate to see his shot come back off the post with two minutes remaining as both sides pushed



for a winner. But a massive stroke of luck in the dying seconds Gave Madrid victory. Federico Valverde's shot

from outside the box took a wicked deflection that left keeper Ionut Radu with no chance. It hurts because it was

right at the death," Iglesias said. "It's a bit frustrating." BarCelona plays its game in hand against Athletic Bilbao

on Saturday. Madrid has 63 points while Barcelona has 64. Celta remains sixth with 40. Los Blancos cut Barcelona's lead back to one point at the top of the table after The Spanish champions beat Elche on Saturday. Vinicius Junior scored early on for Madrid after Jude Bellingham limped off with an apparent hamstring injury. Jorge de Frutos pulled Rayo level early in the second half as Madrid fans showed their anger at their team following the midweek Champions League defeat at Benfica. After Pathe Ciss's red card tilted the game in Madrid's favour, Mbappe netted from the spot at the death for his 22nd La Liga goal this season. who took a shaky Madrid to the wire before falling short.