

## Chief minister Pema Khandu launches Swachhata Hi Seva 2026

**Itanagar, Sept 17:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu officially launched the month-long Swachhata Hi Seva (SHS) 2026 campaign across the state, alongside the rollout of the “Swachh Paathshala – Yuva for Swachhata” initiative. The inaugural state-level event took place at the Mallo Tarin Government Higher Secondary School in Itanagar, where the Chief Minister personally joined students and youth in a rigorous cleanliness drive.

This year’s campaign is be-



ing conducted under the guiding theme “Swachhata Mein Sahbhag; Swachh Bharat, Viksit Bharat,” emphasizing individual accountability, civic responsibility, and com-

munity-driven waste management. By placing young people at the center of the mission, the state government aims to cultivate a long-term cultural shift toward hygiene,

ecological preservation, and sustainable sanitation practices that extend far beyond institutional boundaries.

Addressing the gathering of students, civic leaders, and government officials, Chief Minister Khandu highlighted that maintaining clean surroundings requires continuous collective action rather than sporadic efforts. He urged young citizens to spearhead behavioral changes within their local neighborhoods, acting as active ambassadors for environmental cleanliness and resourcefulness.

## Kohima Exhibition showcases Japanese photographer Yuzo Morita’s work

**Kohima, Sept 17:** A special photography exhibition opened in Kohima, showcasing the extensive documentary works of renowned Japanese photographer Yuzo Morita. The exhibition presents a rare visual journey capturing the traditional lifestyles, indigenous textiles, and landscapes of Nagaland through decades of meticulous documentation.

The showcase highlights Morita’s deep fascination with Naga culture, featuring archival prints that trace community practices, tra-

ditional architecture, and generational changes across various villages. Cultural enthusiasts, historians, and local residents gathered at the inaugural event to appreciate the poignant visual storytelling and the enduring cross-cultural connections preserved through the photographer’s lens.

Organizers noted that the exhibition serves as a significant educational platform for younger generations to reconnect with their roots. The display will remain open to the public for two weeks, offering

visitors an intimate look into the region’s rich heritage through an external yet deeply respectful perspective. Furthermore, several panel discussions and interactive sessions featuring local historians and visiting art critics have been scheduled alongside the main exhibition. These sessions aim to foster deeper dialogues regarding indigenous preservation, the evolution of visual arts in the Northeast, and the invaluable role of archival photography in safeguarding historical memory for posterity.

## Manipur security meet escalates operations

**Imphal, Sept 17:** Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh chaired a high-level security coordination meeting at the Secretariat in Imphal to review the prevailing law and order situation across the state. The high-level review comes as joint security forces actively escalate operations, including intensive counter-offensive sweeps in vulnerable sectors such as Jiribam and strategic arms recovery operations in districts like Thoubal.

During the comprehensive briefing, attended by top civil and military brass including the Home Minister, Security Advisor, Chief Secretary, and Director General of Police, officials evaluated newly identified security flashpoints. The administration emphasized safeguarding vital developmental projects, particularly ensuring that infrastructure works undertaken by agencies like the NHIDCL proceed without external disruption. Security forces have been instructed to maintain heightened vigilance, reinforce deployment along sensitive transit routes, and crack down heavily on subversive elements attempting to destabilize regional peace. During the comprehensive briefing, attended by top civil and military brass including the Home Minister, Security Advisor, Chief Secretary, and Director General of Police, officials evaluated newly identified security flashpoints.

## Zeliangrong Baudi urges immediate peace after civilian deaths

**Imphal, Sept 17:** The Zeliangrong Baudi has issued a strong public appeal for absolute restraint following a distressing surge of civilian killings and arson incidents across the hill districts of Manipur. Expressing deep anguish over the recent spiral of violence, the organization emphasized that human life is invaluable and that political grievances or community differences can never justify targeted attacks on innocent non-combatants.

Recent clashes in parts of Tamenglong and adjoining areas have heightened fear and ruptured inter-community trust, drawing widespread concern from regional leaders. The Baudi explicitly condemned all acts of violence, including recent



fatalities and property destructions reported from vulnerable settlements, urging armed groups and stakeholders to step back from retaliatory actions that deepen displacement.

Furthermore, the organization called upon both the central and state governments to reinforce security arrangements in remote sectors, focusing heavily

on proactive prevention rather than reactive measures. Stressing that collective punishment and vengeance only serve to perpetuate cycles of trauma, the association appealed to community elders, youth bodies, and local leaders to counter inflammatory rumors and work collectively toward lasting peace and reconciliation.

## Assam cooling demand to more than double by 2040

**Guwahati, Sept 17:** Assam’s cooling demand is projected to more than double by the year 2040 as regional temperatures consistently touch 40 degrees Celsius, according to the latest findings released by the Assam Cooling Action Plan (ACAP). The comprehensive assessment highlights that rapid urbanization, changing architectural styles, and intensifying heatwaves are driving an unprecedented reliance on mechanical cooling solutions across the state.

The ACAP report emphasizes that the dramatic surge in air conditioning and refrigeration will place severe pressure on local power grids and



significantly increase carbon emissions unless sustainable interventions are prioritized. Experts suggest transitioning toward energy-efficient building designs, expanding urban green covers, and adopting passive cooling techniques to

mitigate the escalating thermal stress in residential and commercial spaces.

Furthermore, the study underscores the urgent need for state-level policy frameworks that promote climate-resilient infrastructure. Without

proactive measures to curb unchecked energy consumption, vulnerable communities may face severe health and economic challenges as extreme weather events become more frequent in the coming decades. In addition to infrastructural upgrades, the action plan recommends launching comprehensive public awareness campaigns to educate citizens on energy conservation and sustainable thermal comfort practices. Policymakers and industry stakeholders are urged to collaborate closely on implementing stringent energy-performance standards for commercial appliances.

## Academics and journalists express solidarity over nagaland house incident

**Kohima, Sept 17:** A collective of over thirty academics, researchers, and journalists has issued a strong statement expressing deep solidarity with prominent professors Dolly Kikon and Sanjay Barbora following an unsettling confrontation at Nagaland House in New Delhi. The incident, which unfolded at the state guest facility, has triggered widespread concern and condemnation across intellectual and civil society circles.

According to reports, the tense episode occurred when the scholars and fellow Naga researchers faced unwarranted hostility, administrative high-handedness, and



restrictions while attempting to utilize the premises. Signatories to the solidarity statement emphasized that regional guest houses funded by public exchequers are meant to serve as safe, welcoming spaces for citizens, particularly visiting

academics, students, and cultural delegates from the Northeast. Treating respected intellectuals with disrespect undermines the dignity of the community they represent.

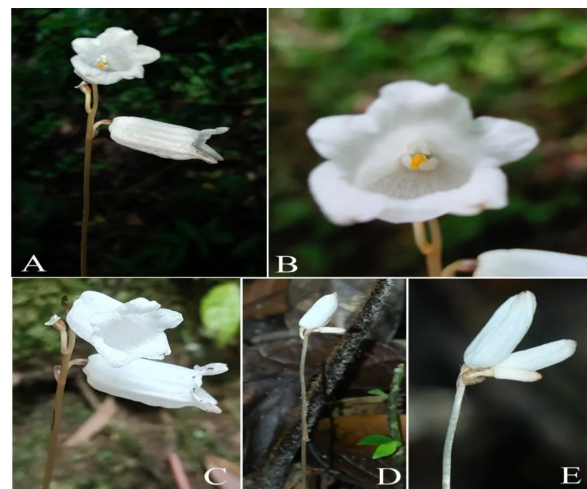
Professor Dolly Kikon is a globally recognized anthro-

pologist and writer, while Professor Sanjay Barbora is a widely respected sociologist known for his extensive work on human rights, conflict, and migration in Northeast India. The joint statement called upon the competent authorities and the Nagaland government to thoroughly investigate the protocol breakdown, fix accountability on the personnel involved, and ensure that institutional spaces in the national capital remain respectful and accessible to the public. Observers note that the incident highlights persistent systemic insensitivity faced by marginalized scholars and professionals away from home.

## Rare ghost flower Orchid species discovered in Arunachal

**Itanagar, Sept 17:** A team of researchers has discovered a new species of orchid, scientifically named *Gastrodia keyiensis* and locally referred to as a “ghost flower,” in the remote Keyi Panyor district of Arunachal Pradesh. The remarkable finding adds significant value to the rich botanical diversity of the Eastern Himalaya region.

The newly identified plant was documented during a scientific expedition along a river gorge in the bamboo groves of the Keyi River basin. Unlike conventional green plants, this subterranean orchid is entirely leafless and does not rely on photosynthesis. Instead, it survives as a holomycotrophic



organism, drawing its essential nutrients through complex symbiotic associations with underground fungi. Because it spends the majority of its life cycle

hidden beneath thick layers of decaying leaf litter, observing it requires rare timing coinciding with its brief flowering phase.

Formally described in the

international taxonomic journal Phytotaxa, the study was spearheaded by a collaborative team of scientists from various prominent research institutes and regional universities. The distinctive white-to-pale-bluish blossoms feature prominent longitudinal ridges on the labellum, separating it from related species. Researchers have initially classified the fragile species as Data Deficient due to its elusive nature and restricted known habitat range. Conservationists have emphasized the urgent need for extended field studies and habitat protection measures to safeguard the unique subterranean flora inhabiting the fragile forest ecosystems of northeastern India.

## Manipur handloom employees protest in Imphal raising questions over administration

**Imphal, Sept 17:** A massive wave of discontent swept through the handloom sector in Manipur as a large group of handloom and textile department employees staged a vociferous protest demonstration in Imphal. The agitated workers gathered outside the Directorate of Handloom and Textiles office, raising sharp questions and mounting concerns over administrative mismanagement, delayed welfare disbursements, and systemic irregularities within the department’s top brass.

Demonstrators chanted slogans criticizing the current administrative setup, alleging prolonged apathy toward the genuine grievances of grassroots workers. According to protesting employee representatives, staff members have been grappling with irregular salary disbursements, stalled promotional channels, and the unexplained withholding of crucial operational



funds meant for traditional weaver welfare schemes. They argued that such bureaucratic bottlenecks severely demoralize the workforce and directly cripple the de-

velopment of the state’s indigenous handloom industry, which serves as a vital economic lifeline for thousands of rural artisans. The protest also drew attention to allega-

tions of fund misappropriation and lack of transparency in the implementation of central and state-sponsored handloom promotion schemes. Protesters demanded an im-

mediate high-level administrative audit into the department’s financial accounts and policy decisions over the past three years. They urged the state government to intervene decisively, restructure the leadership framework, and ensure that developmental resources reach actual beneficiaries and frontline workers without bureaucratic diversion. Senior police personnel deployed at the scene intervened to maintain law and order as protesters attempted to march toward the directorate building’s main entrance. Following brief negotiations, a delegation of employee leaders was permitted to submit a detailed memorandum outlining their grievances to senior departmental authorities. Officials assured the representatives that their demands would be formally reviewed and forwarded to the competent ministry for necessary redressal.

## Tripura High Court orders strict CCTV compliance in stations

**Agartala, Sept 17:** The High Court of Tripura has issued a stern directive instructing all police stations across the state to ensure the uninterrupted operational compliance and round-the-clock recording of Close-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras. The judicial intervention comes in the wake of a disturbing custodial assault case that sparked widespread public outrage and triggered severe concerns regarding human rights violations within law enforcement facilities.

The division bench emphasized that installing electronic surveillance systems is no longer optional but a mandatory institutional requirement to safeguard detainees from abuse and ensure absolute transparency in police interrogations. Citing established Supreme Court guidelines, the court noted that lapses in maintaining video archives or intentional equipment tampering will invite immediate



contempt proceedings against the responsible station officers. Furthermore, district superintendents have been tasked with conducting surprise monthly audits of footage storage drives. Legal experts and civil rights organizations have welcomed the high court’s proactive stance, pointing out that robust monitoring acts as an essential deterrent against police brutality. The ruling mandates that all footage must be securely archived for a minimum period of eighteen months, ensuring that victims of custodial excesses have reliable evidentiary recourse.

As the state administration moves to implement these upgraded technical protocols, the judiciary remains firm on holding law enforcement agencies accountable to the highest standards of constitutional protection and professional integrity. As the state administration moves to implement these upgraded technical protocols, the judiciary remains firm on holding law enforcement agencies accountable to the highest standards of constitutional protection, institutional transparency, and professional integrity across all district jurisdictions.

## Assam suggests sending another five year old elephant to Tamil Nadu following Durga



**Dispur , Sep 17:** An official Forest Department document dated September 4, 2026, states that a five-year-old female elephant from Bijuli, Assam, has been suggested for transfer to Shri Kamakoti Gajashala in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu.

The paper, which was digitally signed by Chief Wildlife Warden and Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Rakesh Kumar Dogra, mentions five Assamese captive elephants that are being considered for relocation to various locations in Tamil Nadu. An official Forest Department document dated September 4, 2026, states that a five-year-old female elephant from Bijuli, Assam, has been suggested for transfer to Shri Kamakoti Gajashala in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu. The paper, which was digitally signed by Chief Wildlife Warden and Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Rakesh Kumar Dogra, mentions five

Assamese captive elephants that are being considered for relocation to various locations in Tamil Nadu. Hiteswar Moran, the late Pena Moran's son from Assam, is named as the owner of Bijuli. Her microchip number is noted as The list also includes Rupsing, a 13-year-old male owned by Piyal Moran, proposed for the Sri Vaidyanatha Swamy Temple in Vaaitheeswaran Koil, Nagapattinam; Hiralal, an eight-year-old male owned by Samsul Hoque, and Shiva, a six-year-old male owned by Mukheswar Moran, proposed for the Arulnigu Arunachaleswarar Temple in Tiruvannamalai.

The five elephants have not yet been transported, according to the document. It states that the applications have been sent to the relevant District Level Captive Elephant Welfare Committees for in-depth investigation and on-site facility verification at the suggested locations.

The committees have been instructed to evaluate the proposed facilities in compliance with the Tamil Nadu Captive Elephants (Management and Maintenance) Rules, 2011. In accordance with the Captive Elephant (Transfer or Transport) Rules, 2024, recommendations in Form III have also been requested from the relevant District Forest Officer, Deputy Director of Wildlife Warden. The government has set a 15-day limit for submitting the reports after receiving the letter. Days after Durga's relocation, which caught the attention of wildlife organizations, Bijuli is being recommended to be transferred. Durga is mentioned as being suggested for the Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai in the same document from the Forest Department. In accordance with the Captive Elephant (Transfer or Transport) Rules, 2024, recommendations in Form III have also been requested from the relevant District Forest Officer, Deputy Director, or Wildlife Warden.

The government has set a 15-day limit for submitting the reports after receiving the letter. Days after Durga's relocation, which caught the attention of wildlife organizations, Bijuli is being recommended to be transferred. Durga is mentioned as being suggested for the Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai in the same document from the Forest Department. The recent capture of another five-year-old elephant, Gayatri, in the Golaghat area has raised concerns about the transit of captive elephants out of Assam. The elephant was allegedly being transferred to Uttar Pradesh when she was stopped by locals and turned over to the Forest Department. The government has set a 15-day limit for submitting the reports after receiving the letter.

## The Chief Secretary's response is requested by the Supreme Court shocked by the deaths relief camps



**Imphal, Sep 17:** On September 17, the Supreme Court expressed shock over the deaths of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Manipur's relief camps and ordered the Chief Secretary of the state to submit an affidavit outlining the actions taken to look into the deaths, start criminal proceedings in cases of unnatural deaths, and guaranty the security and dignity of camp residents. The Manipur government was questioned by a bench made up of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana, regarding the lack of

substantial action taken in spite of information presented to it by the Justice Gita Mittal committee regarding deaths, including alleged unnatural deaths, among IDPs residing in relief camps. On September 17, the Supreme Court voiced dismay with the humanitarian efforts for internally displaced people (IDPs). "We direct the Chief Secretary of Manipur to file an affidavit on deaths, especially unnatural deaths, at relief camps in Manipur," the bench said in its order.

The court also questioned why postmortems had been conducted in only 20 of 34

reported death cases. The bench further sought an explanation from the state government over the payment of only Rs 20,000-30,000 in compensation to IDPs who allegedly died unnatural deaths while staying in relief camps.

The Manipur State Legal Services Authority (MSLSA) was directed to file a separate status report on the issue.

The Chief Justice also directed the MSLSA to ensure that FIRs are registered in all cases involving unnatural deaths and that investigations are conducted expe-

ditiously. The bench issued the directives after reviewing reports from an IAS officer and the Justice Gita Mittal committee showing that over thirty people had died in Manipur's relief camps. According to reports, one of the incidents featured an alleged sexual assault before to the death. The investigations into crimes resulting from the ethnic violence that broke out in Manipur in May 2023 were also reviewed by the Supreme Court.

Speaking on behalf of the CBI and the Manipur government, Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati informed the court that the CBI has looked into 31 cases, with final reports submitted in 28 of them. According to her, three CBI cases are still being looked at. Apart from the CBI cases, the state government has constituted 42 Special Investigation Teams (SITs) comprising local police officers across eight districts. According to Bhati, the SITs have registered 3,020 cases.

Chargesheets have been filed in 302 cases, while closure reports have been submitted in 1,583 cases. Investigations remain underway in 1,135 cases, while trials have commenced in 33 cases investigated by the state SITs, she said.

## CM Neiphiu Rio and NSCN IM discuss the proposed apex panel and the delay

**Kohima , Sep 17:** On September 16, Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio stated that the NSCN-IM and the state government's Political Affairs Committee (PAC) discussed the planned creation of an apex committee to assist the discussion as well as the delay in the resumption of Naga political negotiations. The NSCN-IM and PAC met behind closed doors at Chumoukedima.

Neiphiu Rio, the chief minister of Nagaland, said on September 16 that the NSCN-IM and the state government's Political Affairs Committee (PAC) talked about the postponement of the beginning of Naga political negotiations as well as the proposed establishment of an apex committee to support the debate. At Chumoukedima, the NSCN-IM and PAC had a private meeting. Rh Raising, the leader of NSCN-IM, characterized the meeting on Wednesday as a consultation rather than a negotiation between the two parties.

When asked how the decades-long political discussion would proceed, Raising responded that the other side will choose the result. "It doesn't depend on us. They have the advantage," he declared. Since signing a cease-fire deal with

the Center in 1997, the NSCN-IM has engaged in talks to find a political solution to the Naga problem.

In August 2015, the Framework Agreement was signed by both parties. There are still disagreements over a number of important issues, including as the merger of Naga-inhabited areas and the NSCN-IM's demand for a distinct Naga flag and constitution. A final resolution has been delayed by the unsolved difficulties. In the meantime, the NSCN-IM has disassociated itself from the recent meeting between RSS president Mohan Bhagwat and former Nagaland chief minister SC Jamir, when the Naga political issue was purportedly discussed. "Jamir is not the advocate of the Naga people, and he does not have the right to talk on the issue of the Nagas," he said. Another NSCN-IM leader, VS Atem, also dismissed the comments, saying those involved were not authorised or mandated to represent the Naga people in the political negotiations. "We have no comment. They are not authorised people, mandated people. They are just talking for the sake of the party," Atem said.

## Sarma Himanta Biswa Wishes PM Narendra Modi a happy birthday

**Guwahati , Sep 17:** Himanta Biswa Sarma shared a video greeting from the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu in Guwahati today to wish Prime Minister Narendra Modi a happy birthday. In the social media video, Sarma greeted Prime Minister Modi on behalf of the Assamese people and commended his efforts on behalf of the nation.

"Today is the birthday of Narendra Modi ji, the esteemed Prime Minister of India and a symbol of our determination. I would like to greet Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji a very happy birthday on behalf of the people of Assam," Sarma added. He also wished the Prime Minister continued success in serving the nation and said that the people of

India stand with his vision for the country's future. "Continue working for the country in the same way and move ahead with the resolve you have taken to make India a Vishwaguru. The people of the country are with you," the Assam Chief Minister said. Sarma also posted a separate message on Twitter, highlighting what he described as Modi's commitment to public service, good governance and nation-building. "Heartfelt birthday greetings and best wishes to the illustrious Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, who, with his resolve for service, good governance, and nation-building, is taking India to new heights," Sarma wrote.

## Thoubal district, Manipur Police the BSF retrieve ammunition weapons

**Imphal, Sep 17:** A combined team of Heirok Police Station and troops of the 10th Battalion of the Border Security Force (BSF) recovered a cache of arms and ammunition during an operation at Heirok Part-III Uyok Ching Mamang in Thoubal district on September 16. According to the security forces, the operation resulted in the recovery of one double-barrelled breech-loading (DBBL) gun, one country-made rifle along with a magazine, and 20 live rounds of 5.56 mm ammunition. The joint team conducted the operation in the Heirok area as part of ongoing efforts by security forces to detect and recover illegally held weapons and ammunition in the district. The recovery of the country-made rifle and live ammunition has prompted further scrutiny into the source and possible ownership of the seized arms.

## Meghalaya releases the counseling SOP for 138 MBBS seats in 2026-2027



**Shillong, Sep 17:** For the 2026-2027 academic year, Meghalaya has published the Combined Counseling Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for MBBS admissions, which covers 138 seats under the Central Pool, various quotas, and the State Quota of Shillong Medical College (SMC). The Meghalaya State Counseling Authority for Medical

Education (MSCAMA) will administer the counseling. To the greatest extent possible, the state is preparing a common and coordinated approach based on a single merit list derived from candidates' NEET-UG 2026 All India Rank. Of the 138 seats, 42 are State Quota seats at Shillong Medical College, and 96 are allotted to Meghalaya via the Central Pool

and other quotas. There are 53 seats in the Central Pool, 14 at NEIGRIHMS, 16 at RIMS Imphal, 10 in government medical colleges in Assam, and three in Tripura out of the total 96 seats.

Meghalaya's reservation policy will determine how the 42 State Quota seats at SMC are allocated, with 40% going to the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo categories,

15% going to unreserved candidates, and 5% going to SC/ST applicants. For 2026-2027, the National Medical Commission has approved 50 MBBS seats for SMC, eight of which fall under the All-India Quota. Acceptance will be based on the NEET-UG 2026 results as well as the relevant reservation and qualifying standards. By December 31, 2026, candidates must be at least 17 years old and have finished Class XII or an equivalent exam in English, Physics, Chemistry, and Biology/Biotechnology. There will be four rounds of counseling, one of which will be a Stray Vacancy Round. Applicants must register online and have their identity, NEET qualification, category certificates, Permanent Residential Certificate, educational background, and other papers verified.

## The Assam chief minister gives 82,219 young business owners more than Rs 278 crore



**Dispur , Sep 17:** On September 17, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma reaffirmed the government's emphasis on youth entrepreneurship and self-reliance by providing financial aid totaling more than Rs 278 crore to young entrepreneurs under the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhijan (CMAAA) 1.0 and 2.0. Speaking at the financial aid distribution ceremony at Jyoti-Bishnu Antartatik Kala Mandir in Khanapara, Sarma stated that the initiative's goal was to inspire young people

to become independent and prosperous business owners in addition to offering financial aid. Entrepreneurs in the General Category earn Rs 2 lakh each under the initiative, which consists of a 50% grant and a 50% interest-free loan. A 50% grant and a 50% interest-free loan make up the Rs 5 lakh awarded to those in the Professional Category. CMAAA 1.0 and 2.0 cover 82,219 entrepreneurs in total. CMAAA 1.0 covers 9,552 general-category and 26 professional-category entrepreneurs, whereas CMAAA

2.0 covers 72,447 general-category and 194 professional-category entrepreneurs. The program specifics show that CMAAA 1.0 is allocating more than Rs 196 crore, whereas CMAAA 2.0 is allocating more than Rs 182 crore.

According to Sarma, the government has previously given young recipients Rs 75,000 in the first phase and Rs 25,000 in a second phase for entrepreneurship. However, he stated that some beneficiaries were unable to meet the eligibility conditions, making them ineligible for the future help.

According to the Chief Minister, the government was bringing together recipients of the Rs 1 lakh and Rs 25,000 subsidies in order to motivate them to take entrepreneurship seriously. The program, he said, was also meant to encourage the recipients of the lower grant to strive for eligibility for Rs 1 lakh in the following phase, which may happen in the next nine to ten months. In addition to financial aid, the program offers entrepreneurs marketing support and skill development training as part of the government's larger initiative to encourage youth entrepreneurship in Assam. Along with officials and participating business owners, Assam Industries, Commerce, and Public Enterprises Minister Bimal Borah attended the event.

## Vacuum could aid VPP Paul UDP rift a seismic shift



**Shillong, Sep 17:** With reports pouring in that eight or nine of the UDP's 12 MLAs are moving towards the BJP, the party's working president and West Shillong MLA Paul Lyngdoh on Wednesday called the reported switch a "major tectonic shift" in Meghalaya's political landscape, saying its impact would travel beyond the legislators involved and into the electorate as it would potentially play into the hands of the VPP. The 12 UDP MLAs, he noted, represent one-third of the Assembly constituencies in eastern Meghalaya — the Khasi and Jaintia Hills — making the realignment significant for regional representation. Lyngdoh said a section of traditional regional-party voters could embrace the BJP if they believed it would rally a regional front. Another section, he said, would ask why so many leaders of an established regional party were leaving. "Nature abhors a vacuum. Now a vacuum has been created. Who fills in that vacuum?" he asked. He identified two likely consequences: the VPP rising as a stronger regional force, and a national party that had only two MLAs in previous Assemblies expanding into double figures. The HSPDP, he added, already has a historic regional presence that could also grow. He cautioned against writing the UDP off. Parties can suffer major setbacks and recover, he said. "Nobody can write off a political party. He recalled the BJP's own journey from two Lok Sabha MPs in 1984 to more than two hundred and three consecutive terms in government, and cited a Meghalaya Chief Minister (F.A. Khonglam) who began as the lone MLA of his "formation". Lyngdoh reiterated that he had pressed for "course correction" inside the UDP while there was still time. The present developments, he said, had gone beyond that stage.

## The Supreme Court requests the CBSE think about postponing the Class 6 3-Language Policy



**New Delhi, Sep 17:** On Thursday, the Supreme Court requested that the CBSE take into consideration enforcing its policy requiring Class 6 students to study three languages, including two native Indian languages, beginning with the 2027 academic year. The bench, which included Chief Justice Surya Kant, justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana, was informed by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), represented by Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, that the proposal would be taken into consideration.

At the beginning, Justice Bagchi stated that the CBSE might think about delaying the implementation of the three-language policy till the following academic year in

order to console the kids. According to Justice Bagchi, pupils who are now in Class 6 may also be permitted to study three languages starting this year.

The law officer said that the CBSE would consider the suggestion and come back with a fresh note on the issue. The bench said its suggestions were without prejudice to the rights and contentions of the parties and the real issues may be decided later. Earlier, the Centre and the CBSE told the bench that they were working on its suggestions on implementing the policy mandating the study of three languages, including two native Indian languages, for Class 6 students. On May 27, the top court agreed to examine a plea challenging the policy

and issued notices to the Centre, the CBSE and the NCERT seeking their responses. According to a circular issued by the CBSE, the study of three languages, including at least two native Indian languages, has been made compulsory for Class 9 students beginning July 1. "In Class 9, each student would learn three languages. At least two of the three languages would be Bhartiya Bhashas, such as Hindi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati, Odia, Assamese, etc. Non-native languages include English, French, German, Arabic, Spanish, and so on, according to the CBSE's statement. For children in Classes 7, 8, and 9 who were studying two non-native languages,

two Indian languages have been made mandatory. This action is part of the CBSE's efforts to align its curriculum with the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2023) and the National Education Policy (2020). According to the circular issued on May 15, students opting for a foreign language may do so only as the third language after studying two native Indian languages, or as an additional fourth language.

"With effect from July 1, 2026, for Class 9, the study of three languages (R1, R2, R3) shall be compulsory, with at least two languages being native Indian languages," the circular said.

The board said till the dedicated R3 textbooks are available, Class 9 students shall use Class 6 R3 textbooks (2026-27 edition) of the chosen language. According to the CBSE, no board exam for R3 at the Class 10 level would be held in order to maintain the emphasis on learning and lessen any unnecessary pressure on pupils. Additionally, it requested that schools update their R3 language offerings on the OASIS site for Grades 6 through 9 by June 30.

## During the DUSU poll campaign, Delhi High Court chastises student unions for violence and vandalism

**New Delhi, Sep 17:** In response to claims of violence and vandalism during campaigns for the forthcoming Delhi University Student Union elections, the Delhi High Court chastised authorities and student unions on Thursday. According to the information presented to the court, the high court noted during its hearing that it is "unacceptable at any cost" to permit student union elections to take on such a color. The Delhi Police and the University of Delhi were ordered by the court to submit reports by Friday that described the steps taken in relation to the alleged incidences. The court cautioned that

if it is not satisfied with the reports, it may issue strict instructions, such as halting the vote counting and delaying the results announcement, even though it did not postpone the DUSU polls that were set for Friday, September 18. The Delhi University student unions polls are scheduled for Friday. Major student organisations such as the RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), Congress-backed National Students' Union of India (NSUI) and the Left alliance of the All India Students' Association (AISA) and Students' Federation of India (SFI), are expected to be engaged in an in-

tense battle in one of the most closely watched contests in student politics. Prior to the elections, the university has placed restrictions on vehicle traffic on major thoroughfares, such as Chhatra Marg, Probyn Road, and University Road. Meanwhile, student organizations are using social media, classrooms, and college campuses for their campaigns.

Additionally, traffic restrictions will be in effect on Friday and Saturday until the results are announced. The University Sports Stadium's Multipurpose Hall on North Campus will host the vote counting on Saturday starting at 8 a.m.

## A lecturer at Kannur University faces a six-year prison sentence for a fraudulent appointment

**Thiruvananthapuram, Sep 16:** A Kannur University assistant professor was fined and sentenced to six years in prison by a Kerala court on Thursday for allegedly engaging in financial irregularities by fabricating paperwork purporting to demonstrate the employment of a professional assistant. Judge K Ramakrishnan of the Kannur Vigilance Court found Dr. N K Deepak (54), an assistant professor at the Swami Anandatheertha Campus in Payyanur and a native of Chirakkal in Kannur, guilty under several sections. He was sentenced to six years in prison and fined ₹80,000, according to officials. The prosecution claims that in 2008, the registrar of Kannur University issued an order to hire a professional assistant on a daily basis for the Swami Anandatheertha Campus



Physics Department. According to officials, Deepak, who oversaw the Physics Department, was given the responsibility of choosing the professional assistant. He is accused of obtaining a duplicate of another professional assistant's friend's qualification certificate on campus, adding a fictitious address, and creating a falsified qualification certificate. Then, by claiming that the money was paid as remuneration to the alleged employee, he allegedly deceived university authorities into

thinking that a professional assistant had been hired and embezzled university funds.

After conducting an investigation and filing a chargesheet with the Kannur Vigilance Court, the Vigilance Kannur Unit filed a case against Deepak. The prosecution was represented by Vigilance Public Prosecutor Anoop K. B. The investigation was carried out by current unit head DySP Babu Peringeth and former Vigilance Kannur Unit DySP V Madhusoodanan.

## Unsatisfactory meeting at the Umling Facilitation Center: KSU

**Shillong, Sep 17:** According to former KSU general secretary Donald V. Thabah, the discussion between the Meghalaya government and the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) on Wednesday regarding the proposed Facilitation Center at Umling in Ri-Bhoi was unsatisfactory.

Thabah, who was present at the meeting, claimed that although representatives from the Tourism Department outlined the planned arrangements for the center, the KSU believed that a number of its issues went unanswered. The facility's designated space was a major problem. According to Thabah, the KSU had previously complained that the planned space was too small and that the proposed food court would take up a large amount of it. According to him, the union was notified by the Tourism De-

partment that the previously suggested area of approximately 1,000 square meters will be expanded to approximately 4,000 square meters. According to Thabah, the KSU was unsure if the enlarged area would be adequate because its leaders who are currently detained would also need to be contacted before a final decision is made. According to him, the union wants the center to serve all types of visitors to Meghalaya, including laborers, students, government officials, and business travelers. Thabah claims that rooms or facilities for the Home Department, the Tourism Department, and infiltration-related issues were included in the suggested arrangement that was addressed at the conference. The KSU believed that the center should feature facilities specifically for other departments, such as Education and



Health. Because not everyone visiting the state would necessarily finish the procedure online and some would still need offline assistance, he claimed that restricting the service to a single tourism counter could result in lines. According to Thabah, the KSU was notified by the Tourism Department that it was unable to speak on behalf of other departments. He claimed that the lack of representatives from the other relevant departments made

it impossible to address the more general issues, which was one of the reasons the union was unhappy with the meeting. Additionally, the KSU requested information regarding the projected Ratacherra Facilitation Center. According to Thabah, they were notified by the Tourism Department that the land purchase process has advanced to roughly 50%. He said, however, that the union was not informed about the precise location of the building or if it would eventually serve as an entry and exit facilitation center.

According to Thabah, the implementation of the Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act (MRSSA) was also a factor in the KSU's worries. He suggested that discussions about facilitation centers should take place in tandem with broader discussions about the Act.

## Punjab Farmers' Statewide Blockade Affects Rail Traffic, Causing Shatabdi Express to Stop

**Chandigarh, Sep 17:** On Thursday, the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha began a statewide "Rail Roko" agitation throughout Punjab, stopping train traffic in several areas as farmers and farm laborers blocked railroad tracks in protest of a number of unfulfilled requests.

The Shatabdi Express was halted at the Beas railroad station amid the unrest, while demonstrators in Amritsar held a sit-in at Devidaspura. Protesters blocked tracks at various areas in Gurdaspur, Moga, Ferozepur, and Sangrur, which also affected rail operations. Farmers in Ferozepur started their sit-in at noon when the Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee stopped the Feroze-



pur-Jalandhar railroad line at Malawala railroad station. Meanwhile, talks were underway in Amritsar between senior Kisan Mazdoor Morcha leader Sarwan Singh Pandher, other farmer representatives, IG Border Range and the

Deputy Commissioner, as the administration sought to engage with the protesters over their demands. Sukhwinder Singh Sabhra, the president of the Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee's Punjab chapter, stated that the movement

was intended to put pressure on the Punjab and federal governments to address concerns pertaining to farmers and agricultural laborers.

Farmers are demanding clarity on the India-US trade deal, the government's stance on the Electricity Amendment Act, and the proposed Seed Act, as well as the status of co-operative centres. They are also seeking compensation for losses of Rs 3.77 crore from previous protests, which they claim remains unpaid. The unresolved issues have intensified during a statewide rail blockade impacting rail services in Punjab, coinciding with ongoing negotiations in Amritsar.

## The Covert Diplomacy That Caused Activist Manoj Jarange to End His 20-Day Fast



**New Delhi, Sep 17:** Manoj Jarange Patil, a Maratha quota campaigner, called off his 20-day fast on Thursday and threatened to take the protest to Mumbai, the state capital, if his demands about Maratha reservation were not met within three months.

The 44-year-old activist was persuaded to break his fast after a nearly three-and-a-half-hour conversation and behind-the-scenes political scheming. The Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister, and Jarange Patil's colleagues communicated with each other thanks to Maharashtra Industries Minister Uday Samant, who

was in Paris for an international space conference.

The projected march to Mumbai and the hunger strike presented a tricky situation. Uday Samant coordinated from Paris during several rounds of discussions. According to sources, the Maharashtra Minister had seven conversations with Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and his deputy, Eknath Shinde. The Minister then called a crucial conference call with the Chief Minister, his deputy, Minister Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil, and BJP leader Prasad Lad. Jarange Patil's impending demands, the future plan to thwart such a demonstration, and how to resolve the current situation amicably were the main topics of discussion. The government also established direct contact with Jarange Patil's close associates. During these conversations, assurances were given that positive decisions would be taken regarding the pending demands, sources said. The challenge for the government was twofold: keeping the

door open for dialogue regarding Jarange Patil's agitation while ensuring the situation did not escalate further due to the proposed Mumbai march. Emphasis was placed on finding a solution through dialogue, particularly given the large influx of people in Mumbai during the ongoing Ganeshotsav celebrations, sources said.

The immediate challenge facing the government was averted, and a path was cleared to ease tensions surrounding the proposed Mumbai march. Uday Samant had already intervened in matters pertaining to Jarange Patil's Mumbai march. His actions also enabled continuous communication between Jarange Patil's camp and the government this time. The immediate conflict has been put on hold by Jarange Patil's hunger strike, but the choices made about the movement's unfulfilled demands will now be vital. Now, the focus will be on how soon and how the promises made during these discussions become choices.

## To commemorate PM Modi's 25 years in public life, Amit Shah leads a motorbike rally

**New Delhi, Sep 17:** As part of the Seva Sankalp Abhiyaan, a campaign commemorating Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 25 years in public life, Union Home Minister Amit Shah launched a motorbike ride from Vadnagar to Varanasi on Thursday. Parallel yatras are scheduled to conclude on October 7. On Modi's 76th birthday, Shah started the nationwide campaign in Vadnagar, where Modi was born, comparing him to a lotus undisturbed by mud and water. PM Modi was born in Vadnagar on September 17, 1950, and on October 7, 2001, he was appointed chief minister of Gujarat. On October 7, he will have served in public office for 25 years.

"In his 25 years in public life, Modi has maintained a spotless record. Even the opposition has not been able to level corruption charges against him. Like a lotus in the middle of a swamp that remains untouched by water and mud, he has lived a clean and cor-



ruption-free life," Shah said. Hundreds of bikers will go through numerous states as part of the Seva Sankalp Abhiyaan, bringing the message of Modi's 25 years of labor to the villages along the way. Defense Minister Rajnath Singh

launched the parallel demonstration from Varanasi to Vadnagar. On October 7, when Modi completes 25 years in public office, the two yatras are supposed to come to an end. From Hatkeshwar Mahadev's courtyard to Kashi Vishwanath's

feet, this voyage will go from Vadnagar to Varanasi, from Modiji's janmabhoomi to his karmabhoomi. With 300 motorcycles from here and another 300 from Varanasi covering the route and delivering the message of Modiji's 25 years of labor to numerous villages, this trip will cross seven states, Shah stated. According to Shah, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have made the decision to share the milestone's significance with citizens across.

He added that younger generations were to be introduced to Modi's life and work through this exercise. Some people with skewed perspectives said, "What is the need for this?" Shah stated, "I want to tell them that Modiji's life is such that it is necessary to introduce every child, every adolescent, and every youth of India to it so that in the coming days hundreds of Narendra Modis emerge and take India to its rightful place."

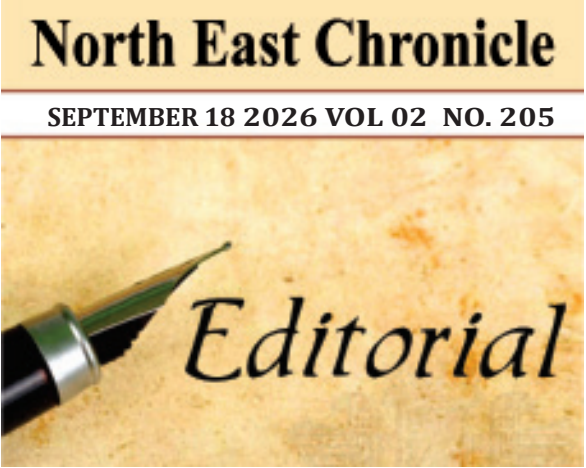
## Members of Congress on a House subcommittee deny supporting MDR

**New Delhi, Sep 17:** As members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance, Congress MPs Gaurav Gogoi and Manish Tewari have denied that they backed the move to impose a tax on UPI payments.

Tewari criticized the government for allegedly manipulating the "proceedings of Parliamentary Standing Committees to score brownie points," even though Gogoi stated that the panel did not address the "UPI tax proposal." Gogoi stated, "The Department of Finance did not have any specific proposal on UPI tax when they met the members of the Finance Committee," just hours after a senior government official allegedly stated that the Parliamentary panel had pushed for a tiered Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) framework for Unified Payments Interface (UPI). Gogoi said that questions were raised on the need for MDR, but the "representatives of the government did not have any specific or satisfac-

tory answers at that point". According to the government functionary, five Congress MPs, including P Chidambaram, Manish Tewari, Gaurav Gogoi, Kishori Lal and K Gopinath were present on August 12 when the report was adopted and no dissent was recorded in the published minutes.

Tewari, who supported his party colleague, stated that there was no explicit plan to impose MDR on UPI transactions starting on October 15. He said that no proposal "was ever brought before the Parliamentary standing of Finance-rate, quantum, amount of fee to be charged, ceiling and exemption slabs etc". Tewari reaffirmed Gogoi's assertion and stated that questions were raised conceptually regarding the necessity and effectiveness of the MDR. Following Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's criticism of the move to charge merchants on UPI payments above ₹2,000, the government official made these comments.



## Fast-tracking electric mobility across Assam

Assam moving three ranks up the India Electric Mobility Index (IEMI), 2025, released by NITI Aayog, marks a decisive moment in transformation in the state’s transportation sector. As the index is a critical benchmark for states to assess the status of Electric Vehicle (EV) adoption, the state can refer to it to undertake necessary policy measures and intensify EV adoption to achieve its goals. Increasing EV adoption in the states is crucial for India to achieve its ambitious target of 30% EV sales by 2030, which is essential for promoting green mobility. NITI Aayog’s report emphasises that since states govern three critical pillars of the EV transition—road transport, power distribution, and manufacturing—the success of e-mobility depends on how effectively they design local policies, build the necessary infrastructure, and establish a durable governance structure. While the high upfront cost of EVs continues to pose a major roadblock in the adoption of private four-wheeler segments, charging infrastructure for long-distance travel is yet to be free from range anxieties among vehicle owners. A significant increase in the number of electric auto-rickshaws and e-rickshaws in Guwahati and other places reflects a surge in commercial EV adoption driven by substantial savings on fuel costs compared to petrol-run auto rickshaws. Far lower fares compared to petrol-run auto rickshaws and app-based cabs have further boosted their demand and have now become a preferred option for many. Nevertheless, the move to enforce the regulatory norm of valid driving licences and permits for EV autos is a timely and laudable step by the Transport Department to ensure passenger safety.

Enforcing the regulation is also essential to curb unchecked growth and prevent the worsening of traffic congestion in the capital city. Ironically, the continued operation of e-rickshaws on highways across the state, despite rising fatal accidents involving them, is a cause for grave concern and highlights serious enforcement gaps as well as a lack of awareness among both the owners of these electric vehicles and commuters regarding the risks of using highways. Assam has been ranked third among 12 Northeastern and Himalayan states, while Manipur and Tripura have occupied the first and second ranks, respectively, in IEMI 2025, which reflects that the state needs to accelerate its efforts in EV promotion and adoption, especially in strengthening public infrastructure to close the gaps. The report highlighted that Manipur, Tripura and Assam performed comparatively well on commercial EV adoption but lagged behind in private EV adoption. “Dispersed settlements and limited charging networks continue to constrain

# Broken systems and public despair: the rising allure of vigilante justice

Sometimes people on X, which I still call Twitter, post the strangest things. Amid all the angst and outrage that has dominated my timeline over the past few days, one post stood out: we need Batman here, it said. The fictional Batman is an avenger who takes the law into his own hands and goes to places where the justice system does not reach. He knows that the law-and-order machinery is largely corrupt, compromised, incompetent, and ineffectual. So he doles out his own kind of justice, dispensing with the need for due process. At a desperate time, when nothing else works, he is the answer to the prayers of a frustrated citizenry.

Judging by the people I speak to and those whose social media posts reach me: yes, we have. Things are worse here than they are in Batman’s Gotham City.

Faith in the police is at an all-time low. People believe that involving the cops in any matter may be a mistake because they will just make money from every side and go with what the highest bidder wants. Sadly, this cynicism has now extended to include the judiciary, once regarded as the last hope for justice. Even on routine matters like bail, there is so much cynicism among the public that many judicial decisions nowadays are treated with scepticism. The discontent and frustration have been building up for years, but the current wave of anger and disgust is due to several recent incidents. One is the Gurugram hit-and-run case. As can be seen in the now-viral video, a gang of over-muscled rowdy youth in a speeding car deliberately attempts to run over (or, at the very least, hurt and harm) a young woman on a bike. What the video captured is indisputable, but the woman, identified as Shivani Chauhan aka Sia, says she had been subjected to heckling and intimidation by the men in the car even before they banged into her bike. What is also indisputable is that, after hitting her bike, the men sped off. A public uproar forced the police to take action, but they arrested the driver only after the alcohol (the woman says the men were drunk) had left his bloodstream. Since then, the driver’s lawyer has criticised the woman, and a campaign of vilification aimed at impugning her character has been launched.

All this is bad enough, but what is more disheartening is the consensus among citizens that nothing will come of the case. Once the headlines have faded, some deal will be struck and the youths will be let off, free

to run over other women. There is a recent precedent. A Hindutva ‘activist’ (a word that TV anchors seem to prefer to ‘goonda’) bragged on a podcast about the assault he had committed at the Jantar Mantar protests. He said he could admit it because he was so politically well-connected that nobody could touch him. The uproar forced the Delhi Police to arrest him. But the ‘activist’ may not have been entirely wrong. Within days, a court granted him bail. The judge rejected the plea that letting free a man who brags about committing violence could lead to witness intimidation. “In today’s era, intimidation of a victim no longer requires physical proximity,” the judge said. This may or may not be true, but it does make you wonder about the number of people who have been denied bail on the grounds

that they could intimidate witnesses. Clearly, the judicial view on the granting of bail varies dramatically from court to court. Unfortunately for Umar Khalid, who has been denied bail for six years without a trial even beginning, he did not get an enlightened judge like the one this politically well-connected ‘activist’ did. The cynicism about the system mounts each day as more and more revelations emerge. For instance, a pharmacy owner in Bengaluru has been arrested for supplying fake or expired cancer drugs to over 90 pharmacies. The racket has been going on for years, so it is unlikely that a single pharmacy owner was the mastermind. It could not have happened without the connivance of hospital staff and regulators. When a system allows crooks to profit from cancer patients

in a manner that can lead to deaths, it tells you how deep the rot runs. Is it any wonder that people long for vigilantes like Batman? Nobody has any faith in most politicians. They distrust the police. They are disappointed by the judiciary. And they live in a society where even the drugs given by hospitals to critically ill patients are fake. What is worse is that we are convinced that justice will never be done. People who are arrested, often only after public outrage and uproar, can buy their way out of criminal charges. Within weeks or a few months, they are back to doing whatever it was that got them arrested. All talk of justice is momentary and transient. Arrests are no more than photo opportunities. As long as the cops are in the politicians’ good books, their jobs are safe. And their fortunes keep growing.

# Shared drug threat drives new Tamil Nadu–Sri Lanka cooperation

The waters of the Palk Strait have long connected India and Sri Lanka, but they have also been a source of tension. Today, they could provide an opportunity for a different kind of cooperation. India and Sri Lanka have a good relationship and maintain a regular political dialogue. Defence, maritime, and economic cooperation have expanded in recent years. The more complicated dimension has historically been the relationship between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. The legacy of the separatist conflict continues to influence that relationship, while the fisheries dispute has periodically created tensions between communities on both sides of the Palk Strait. These are sensitive matters that require patience and political understanding.

There is, however, another issue that crosses the Palk Strait and affects both societies: drugs. The growing narcotics problem in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu is a serious challenge. It could also provide an opportunity for cooperation in an area where their interests are fundamentally aligned. Sri Lanka’s drug problem is no longer simply an urban phenomenon. It has spread into communities across the country, including rural areas. Jaffna and the Northern Province, which have had to contend with the long social consequences of the war, are also facing serious concerns about drug use among young people. The emergence of synthetic drugs, particularly crystal methamphetamine, or ice, has added a new dimension to a problem previously more closely associated with heroin and cannabis. Tamil Nadu faces its own substantial

challenge. Its large population, transport networks, ports, and proximity to Sri Lanka create vulnerabilities to international trafficking, while the state is also dealing with consumption and addiction within its own communities. The two situations are not identical. But their geography means they cannot be looked at entirely separately.

The issue is already receiving attention at the highest political levels on both sides of the Palk Strait. Sri Lanka has made combating the drug menace a national priority, while Tamil Nadu has also intensified its campaign against narcotics. During the recent visit of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to Colombo, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake sought India’s support for Sri Lanka’s efforts against drug trafficking. This creates an opening for a practical initiative. At the highest political levels, Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu could begin a direct dialogue on the narcotics challenge, with the involvement of the Indian central government. A joint mechanism could then bring together relevant authorities from both sides. Its agenda need not be prescribed in advance. Each side could bring its own experience and identify where cooperation would be most useful. There is considerable scope for exchanging knowledge on trafficking networks and routes, enforcement, maritime surveillance, tracing the proceeds of organised crime, and prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. The purpose would not be for one side to prescribe how the other should deal with its domestic drug problem. This is particularly relevant to the Palk Strait. The waters be-

tween Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu are already closely watched because of fishing and maritime security. The same geography can also be exploited by criminal networks.

Information available to authorities on one side may not reach those on the other. Closer communication between relevant agencies could help close some of these gaps and provide a clearer picture of the networks operating across the region. The Indian government has an important role to play. Tamil Nadu’s geographical proximity and direct connection to the Palk Strait make its participation essential. But narcotics trafficking also has wider national and international security implications. The central government’s involvement could connect state-level cooperation with India’s capabilities in intelligence, narcotics control, maritime security, and international law enforcement. For Sri Lanka, the mechanism could bring together relevant national authorities without requiring elaborate bureaucracy. What matters initially is the political commitment behind it. The value of such cooperation would extend beyond narcotics.

The India-Sri Lanka relationship itself does not need a reset. It is already on a good footing. But the Tamil Nadu dimension has accumulated its own history and sensitivities. The legacy of the separatist conflict and the fisheries dispute have sometimes made dialogue more difficult than it should be. Practical cooperation on a shared problem could help change that dynamic. The narcotics issue is particularly suited to this purpose. Neither side wants criminal networks to use its waters

or territory as a conduit for drugs, nor does either want young people to become victims of addiction. There is no territorial claim to dispute and no historical grievance that must first be resolved. There is simply a common problem. The timing is significant. Synthetic drugs and increasingly sophisticated trafficking networks are changing the narcotics environment. Criminal organisations can move information and money across borders with increasing ease. Governments, therefore, need to understand these networks collectively rather than responding only to individual seizures and arrests. The proposal need not be ambitious. A high-level political dialogue between Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu supported by the Indian government, followed by a joint mechanism for cooperation, would be a useful first step. The priorities could then be determined by those directly confronting the problem. If successful, it could create new channels of communication and practical cooperation between institutions on either side of the Palk Strait. More importantly, it could build confidence in dealing with an issue that affects both societies, without requiring agreement on the more difficult questions that have shaped their relationship. The Palk Strait has often been viewed through the lens of what divides Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. The civil war and fisheries dispute will remain part of the relationship. But relationships are also shaped by new experiences. The drug menace is a serious threat to both societies. It could also become an unexpected bridge across the Palk Strait.

# Global realignment: examining the multi-vector ambitions of BRICS nations

Nearly 50 pages of the Delhi Declaration were adopted at the New Delhi BRICS summit last week, while the Houthi advance in the Red Sea and its seizure of major positions around a critical maritime chokepoint were pulling the world’s supply chains towards another dangerous rupture. The Trump administration’s military intervention in Iran, carried out with Israeli support, has demonstrated how rapidly the language of sovereignty can collide with military power, while the Houthi advance towards Bab el-Mandeb has given Tehran-aligned forces greater leverage over one of the world’s most consequential maritime passages. Globalisation has created prosperity by concentrating dependence along a handful of geographical, technological and financial arteries. Once those arteries become instruments of power, economics and geopolitics become inseparable.

The more important question is what kind of multipolarity BRICS is actually trying to construct. The declaration calls for reform of global institutions, condemns unilateral sanctions, demands greater representation for developing countries and promotes resilient supply chains and technological cooperation. But the central weakness of BRICS remains obvious. It is much easier to agree that the existing system is unfair than to agree on what should replace it. Its members can unite against sanctions, Western dominance and technological exclusion, but become considerably less comfortable when the question turns to whose technology, capital, markets and security interests will define the alternative. BRICS invokes strategic autonomy as though it were an established reality, yet its continuing dependence on external markets, technologies, finance and security structures exposes the concept, for now, as more a rhetorical aspiration than genuine collective autonomy. In that sense, BRICS increasingly

embodies Broken Rhetoric, incomplete Collective Strategy, projecting an ambition for strategic autonomy that its members have yet to acquire the collective capacity to realise. The organisation does not function because its members agree. It functions because they have discovered that disagreement need not prevent them from sitting in the same room.

Xi’s offer of cooperation in open-source artificial intelligence, smart manufacturing and advanced technological training was an unmistakable statement about where Beijing believes future influence will come from. Modi’s warning about the weaponisation of technology and critical minerals was equally significant. A country can escape dependence on Western finance and still become dependent upon Chinese manufacturing. It can embrace artificial intelligence while remaining dependent on foreign computing infrastructure, semiconductors

and technical standards. An alternative order cannot be built on dependence merely because the identity of the dominant supplier has changed. Developing countries deserve greater representation in institutions such as the United Nations Security Council and the international financial system, but replacing Western predominance with a more dispersed distribution of power does not automatically produce justice. China can challenge Western technological dominance while creating dependencies of its own. Russia can challenge the Western security order while pursuing its own interests. India can advocate for the Global South while protecting its own priorities. Iran and the UAE can sit inside the same organisation while pursuing sharply different regional strategies. That is why the Iran-UAE contradiction at New Delhi was so revealing. Both had to find language sufficiently broad to coexist within the same declaration, with the call for

maximum restraint in the Middle East reflecting the limits of what the organisation could agree upon. BRICS has therefore discovered that its value may lie less in forcing countries to agree than in giving adversaries an institutional space in which they can disagree without walking away.

The same tension is visible in India’s own regional position. New Delhi wants to speak for the Global South while China is steadily increasing the economic, technological and strategic choices available to India’s neighbours. South Asian states increasingly have more than one external partner from which to seek infrastructure, finance, technology, trade and defence cooperation. India’s traditional predominance is therefore being challenged, not necessarily destroyed. The uncomfortable consequence is that the philosophy giving India greater room to manoeuvre internationally also gives its neighbours greater room to manoeuvre around India.

# India’s ₹ 2,000 crore EV charging campaign might not meet the 2030 goal

**Mumbai:** India’s demand for electric vehicles is expanding quickly, but the nation’s infrastructure for charging them might not be able to keep up. Less than 2% of the public chargers anticipated to be needed by 2030 could be supported by the ₹2,000 crore allotted for public EV charging under the PM E-DRIVE plan, according to a recent analysis by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA). The discovery coincides with an increase in both public charging facilities and EV sales. Adding more chargers won’t be sufficient, according to IEEFA’s September 2026 paper, Improving the EV charging experience in India: Beyond charger rollout. The rate at which electric mobility grows in India will also depend on factors including price, grid capacity, home charging accessibility, and convenience of payment. According to the IEEFA research, assuming a 100% subsidy for both upstream infrastructure and charger equipment, the ₹2,000-crore PM E-DRIVE budget could sustain roughly 18,811 charging sites within the policy goal mix.

Less than 2% of the 1.32 million public chargers required to achieve the government’s 30% EV adoption target for 2030 would be covered by that. The expense of connecting chargers to the electrical grid is another factor contributing to the funding issue. Upstream grid modifications may be up to 50% of the entire cost of establishing a public charging station, according to IEEFA estimates. This puts further strain



on charging point owners who are already struggling with low charger utilization. The report therefore calls for grid upgrade costs to be financed separately through infrastructure or development financing, rather than leaving charging operators to absorb the entire burden. India’s annual EV sales have risen from around 50,000 vehicles in 2016 to about 2.5 million in FY 2025-26. Meanwhile, public charging stations increased more than tenfold from 5,151 in 2022 to 52,718 by July 2026. However, EV adoption remains in the single or low double digits across most vehicle segments. In July 2026, electric two-wheelers accounted for 11.2 per cent of sales, while electric cars had a 7.9 per cent share. Across all vehicle categories, EV adoption stood at 12.7 per cent. This makes charging infrastructure

an important part of the next phase of EV adoption because drivers need access to charging that is not only available but also reliable and affordable. IEEFA also highlights a major gap between charger deployment and actual charger availability. A 2024 IEEFA case study found that nearly 84 per cent of EV chargers examined across South, Central, West, and East Delhi were not functional. For EV users, the problem extends beyond whether a charger exists.

Different charging networks often require separate apps and wallets, which can make public charging cumbersome. Although charging hardware and software protocols have become more standardised, IEEFA says gaps remain in how users access chargers and make payments. It recommends moving towards a uni-

fied payment system across charging networks. Home charging is another challenge, particularly for residents of high-rise and multi-household buildings. While updated Model Building Bylaws recommend that new residential and commercial buildings have at least 20 per cent of parking spaces EV-ready, these provisions remain guidelines rather than enforceable mandates. The report suggests considering a “right to charge” for residents with designated parking spaces, while still requiring compliance with safety and technical standards. Public charging can also make EV ownership more expensive for users who cannot charge at home. Public EV charging currently attracts 18 per cent GST, and IEEFA recommends reducing it to 5 per cent, in line with the GST rate applied to EV purchases. The report also recommends reducing GST on battery-swapping services from 18 per cent to 5 per cent and introducing well-structured time-of-use tariffs. Such tariffs could encourage users to charge during off-peak or renewable-rich hours, which would reduce pressure on the grid and make better use of clean electricity. IEEFA’s central argument is that India’s next stage of EV infrastructure development cannot focus solely on the number of chargers installed. The report calls for simultaneous action on convenience, cost, and ecosystem readiness, including reliable public chargers, easier payments, better home-charging access, lower public charging costs, grid-readiness planning, battery swapping, and time-of-use tariffs.

## Shares of IFCL, New India Assurance, and GIC RE increase by 9% Impact of the NSE IPO

**New Delhi:** As the massive ₹22,569-crore issue opened for bidding today, shares of a number of shareholders wishing to sell a position in the National Stock Exchange’s (NSE) public offer saw a steep increase on Thursday. The public subscription period for the NSE IPO began on September 17 and will continue until September 21. A staggering ₹16,500 crore profit on their investments is the goal of the initial public offer (IPO), which is essentially an offer for sale (OFS) by current shareholders. One of the largest beneficiaries of the NSE IPO, the New India Assurance Company (NIACL), is seeking to sell 10.50 million shares. The stake was purchased by the corporation at a weighted average cost of ₹0.32 each. Compared to the upper end of the NSE IPO’s price band of ₹1,785, it is looking to rake in a 557,713 per cent return or a ₹1873.91 crore gain. Against this backdrop, New India Assurance Company shares hit the day’s high of ₹201.15 on the BSE, rising as much as 9.3 per cent over the last closing price of ₹183.95 apiece. As of 2.05 PM, the stock was up 6.55 per cent at ₹196 as against a flattish stock mar-



ket trend. BSE Sensex was trading 0.06 per cent higher at 74,393. Meanwhile, IFCL shares gained a whopping 7.8 per cent to hit the day’s high of ₹80.95 on the BSE. It was last trading at ₹76.54, up 1.95 per cent. The company has indirect exposure to the NSE through its investment in Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited (SHCIL), which is selling 6.18 million shares in the offer. Its gain on investment is 3,87,943 per cent or ₹1104 crore. IFCL holds 52.86 per cent equity shareholding in Stock Holding Corporation, making it a subsidiary company. According to NSE’s shareholding pattern as on March 31, 2026, Stock Holding Corporation owns a 4.44 per cent stake in the exchange. General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC RE) stock, meanwhile, rose as much as 2.59 per cent to

₹346.50 today. It is offloading similar shares as SHCIL, but its return on investment is 33,835 per cent or ₹1101 crore. However, other sellers like SBI and Bank of Baroda saw marginal cuts in their share prices.

NSE IPO price band is set at ₹1,700-1,785 per share. Since the IPO is entirely an OFS, no proceeds will be received by the company. The minimum lot size for retail investors is 8 shares, requiring a minimum amount of ₹14,280 at the upper price band. Most brokerages assigned a positive rating to the offer as they believe the company is well poised to capture the long-term growth opportunity in India’s financial markets. Choice Broking, in a note, said that there is no other way to own Indian market infrastructure at this scale, and a first listing rarely comes cheap.

## Siemens invites applications for 14th scholarship programme for meritorious engineering students

**New Delhi:** Siemens Limited has announced the launch of the 14th edition of its Siemens Scholarship Program, inviting applications from deserving and meritorious first-year engineering students enrolled in government engineering colleges across India. The programme will provide financial assistance to eligible students who lack the economic means to pursue engineering education, with support continuing throughout all four years of graduation. In addition, 50% of the

scholarships are reserved for girls to promote equal opportunity in technical education.

Based on the German Dual Education model, the programme focuses on holistic development and industry readiness, providing students with exposure to industry dynamics and supporting sustainable career pathways in engineering, research and development and manufacturing. Siemens said the initiative aims to promote technical education by leveraging its technological expertise

and industry know-how. In Kohima, the programme provides an opportunity for eligible engineering students in Nagaland to access financial support and industry-oriented development.

Students from government engineering colleges who meet the eligibility criteria can use the programme to reduce the financial challenges associated with technical education. Students from Mechanical/Production, Electrical, Electronics/Instrumentation, Elec-

tronics and Telecommunication, and Computer/Information Technology streams can apply. Applicants must be up to 20 years old, have minimum 60% in SSC, 50% in HSC or equivalent and 60% in PCM, while annual family income must not exceed Rs. 2 lakh.

Applications close on October 10, 2026. As of 2026, more than 2,300 students from 176 government engineering colleges across 28 states have participated in the programme.

## Tata AIA Life Insurance launches Shubh SIP to align wealth, protection and retirement planning

**Aizawl:** Tata AIA Life Insurance has launched Tata AIA Shubh SIP, a unit-linked insurance plan (ULIP) aimed at combining market-linked wealth creation, family protection and retirement planning within a single long-term financial solution. The plan offers market-linked investment opportunities along with Loyalty Additions and Maturity Boosters, subject to applicable policy terms and conditions. Its Waiver of Premium feature includes 1X, 2X and 3X options, while a Family Income Continuation Benefit provides additional monthly income to dependents. The Retirement/Whole Life option enables policyholders to build a retirement corpus and opt for an automatic



Systematic Withdrawal Plan (SWP) from age 60, either through a fixed amount or a percentage of the fund value. Commenting on the launch, Jeelani Basha, Chief Business Officer – Partnership Distribution and Group Business, Tata AIA Life Insurance, said, “Financial priorities do not remain constant throughout life... With Tata AIA Shubh SIP, our aim was to bring these evolving needs together

within one flexible solution.” The plan also provides partial withdrawals, an Automatic Partial Withdrawal Facility, Nominee Continuation Rights and settlement options over 15, 20, 25 or 30 years.

Tata AIA has partnered with Policybazaar to offer the product digitally. Vivek Jain, Chief Business Officer – Life Insurance, Policybazaar.com, said the proposition addresses diverse financial needs across life stages. In Aizawl, the product could add another digital option for consumers seeking long-term insurance and investment solutions, particularly as awareness of structured retirement and family financial planning expands in Mizoram.

## EPFO wage ceiling raised to Rs. 25,000 for better social security net

**New Delhi:** The required Employees’ Provident Fund (EPF) coverage wage ceiling was raised by the government on Wednesday from ₹15,000 to ₹25,000 per month, bringing over 5.1 million more workers inside the statutory social security framework. The decision to make provident fund coverage mandatory for individuals making up to ₹25,000 per month also increases employers’ payment obligations. Mansukh Mandaviya, the minister of labor and employment, stated at a news briefing that the new cap will go into force on September 17.

A greater number of workers in the ₹15,000–25,000 monthly income range who are now not automatically insured when they start working at earnings over the current cap would now have mandated coverage thanks to the ruling. The higher ceiling will bring these employees within the framework of provident fund savings, pension eligibility under the Employees’ Pension Scheme (EPS) and insurance protection under the Employees’ Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme (EDLI), subject to the applicable scheme provisions.

The government estimated annual outgo on the measure at ₹11,339 crore, compared with the existing annual budgetary support of about ₹10,250 crore.

The estimated expenditure over five years was pegged at ₹56,696 crore. The wage ceiling had remained unchanged since September 2014, when it was raised to ₹15,000. The government said the latest revision reflected sustained wage growth, rising incomes and the expansion of formal employment since then.

Mandaviya said the average income of a regular salaried employee was now



around ₹23,000 a month, while minimum wages for even unskilled workers had crossed ₹15,000 in several states. The government said the existing threshold therefore no longer reflected prevailing wage levels. EPFO currently has around 79.8 million contributing members across about 768,000 contributing establishments, according to the latest data cited by the government. The Employees’ Pension Scheme provides pension benefits to around 8.2 million pensioners, while EDLI provides insurance protection linked to EPF membership.

The government said the revision would also strengthen the portability of social-security benefits for workers as a larger number of employees entered mandatory EPFO coverage. It said wider coverage could support worker retention, workforce stability and formalisation. The decision followed detailed inter-ministerial consultations and was recommended by the Expenditure Finance Committee at its meeting on June 16, 2026.

The move will also increase the number of employees for whom statutory contributions have to be made. A senior government official said the employer contribution could increase by around ₹600 per

employee per month on average, while the compulsory pension contribution for employees could rise from ₹1,250 to roughly ₹2,000.

“Costs for employers will definitely go up significantly,” the official said, adding that the voluntary route had not resulted in significant additional enrolment because many establishments had maintained that they did not have employees below the existing wage ceiling. The revised threshold would instead make coverage compulsory for a substantially larger pool of workers, the official said. Puneet Gupta, partner, People Advisory Services-Tax, EY India, said the EPF wage ceiling serves multiple purposes beyond determining mandatory coverage, including determining eligibility for membership of the Employees’ Pension Scheme (EPS) and the basis for contributions under the Employees’ Deposit Linked Insurance (EDLI) Scheme. He said the increase would therefore expand both the scope and quantum of social-security benefits available to employees. “It will also have a direct cost implication for employers through higher PF, pension and EDLI contributions, particularly for employees currently drawing wages between ₹15,000 and ₹25,000 where contributions are restricted to the statutory ceiling. Employees in the affected salary bracket are also likely to witness a reduction in take-home pay due to the higher employee PF contribution,” Gupta added. Debjani Aich, partner, CMS INDUSLAW, said employers would need to make changes to HR and payroll systems and employee documentation to electronically handle PF filings under the expanded coverage.

## Emami rises 7% as the board authorizes a ₹ 282 crore share buyback

**Mumbai:** Following its board’s approval of a buyback at a price not to exceed ₹475 per share via the open market, Emami’s share price increased by 7% to ₹396.30 on the BSE during Thursday’s intra-day transactions amid significant activity. At 12:22 PM, Emami’s price increased by 4% to ₹384.90, while the BSE Sensex increased by 0.38%. With a total of 8.6 million shares exchanging hands on the NSE and BSE, the counter’s trading volume nearly tripled in comparison to the two-week average. In the meantime, Emami’s stock has recently underperformed the market, falling 8% over the last six months compared to the BSE Sensex’s 2% loss. In the past year, the stock slipped 36 per cent, compared to 10 per cent decline in the benchmark index. The market price of Emami corrected 35 per cent from its 52-week high of ₹612.40 touched

on September 18, 2025. The Board of Emami, on Thursday, September 17, 2026, approved the buyback of the company’s equity shares for an aggregate amount not exceeding ₹282 crore at a price not exceeding ₹475 per equity share, payable in cash, from its shareholders / beneficial owners (other than promoters, the promoter group and persons in control (and their associates)), from the open market through the stock exchange mechanism. The indicative maximum number of equity shares proposed to be bought back at the maximum buyback size and maximum buyback price would be 5.94 million shares at ₹475 per share representing 1.36 per cent which is less than 25 per cent of the existing paid up equity capital of the company as of March 31, 2026 and approximately 1.36 per cent of the total paid-up equity share capital of the company as on

the date of the Board Meeting, Emami said.

Share buyback or repurchase is the practice where companies decide to purchase their own shares from existing shareholders either through a tender offer or through an open market. In such a situation, the price of the shares concerned is higher than the prevailing market price. When companies decide to opt for the open market mechanism to repurchase shares, they can do so through the secondary market. Alternatively, it can be looked at as a means to reward existing shareholders other than offering timely dividends. However, company owners may have several reasons for repurchasing their stocks. According to ICICI Securities, individuals should make a point to find out the underlying causes to make the most of such decisions and benefit from them accordingly. When a com-

pany decides to buy back its shares, it may also indicate that the company considers its shares to be undervalued. Besides serving as a remedy for the situation, it also helps to project a positive picture of the company’s prospects and its current valuation. Other than these, stock buybacks may be prompted to improve companies’ overall valuation or to reward their existing shareholders. The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector is expected to maintain steady growth over the medium term, supported by structural drivers, such as rising income levels, improving rural consumption and increasing adoption of digital commerce. The market is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16.64 per cent during 2026-2034 to reach approximately \$1,150.21 billion by 2034. Demand conditions are likely to see gradual

normalisation as pricing adjustments across the value chain stabilise. Rural markets are expected to remain an important source of incremental growth, supported by income stability, infrastructure development and policy impetus.

Input cost trends may remain subject to periodic fluctuations due to global developments, including geopolitical tensions affecting crude oil-linked inputs, along with movements in commodity prices and climate-related factors. While these factors may introduce near-term volatility, the sector’s inherent resilience and adaptability are expected to support long-term growth, Emami said in its FY26 annual report. Meanwhile, in the April to June 2026 quarter (Q1FY27), Emami’s gross margin contracted sharply by 360bp year-on-year (YoY) to 65.8 per cent, impacted by high crude-linked input



costs, a 200bp impact from the West Asia conflict and a 160bp drag from the changing business mix following acquisitions. Consequently, earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA) margin declined 190bp YoY to 21.8 per cent despite healthy revenue growth, as the company continued to invest in brands while absorbing near-term cost pressure. Analysts at Motilal Oswal Financial Services expect a 26 per cent EBITDA margin for FY27 and FY28.

# Do whales grieve? Rare footage of humpback alongside stillborn calf suggests they might

**Australia:** One day last July, a newborn humpback whale calf lay motionless on the seafloor, just a kilometre off Australia’s Gold Coast. The encounter was captured through underwater video.

For more than an hour, the mother repeatedly returned to the same spot, gently touching the calf with her head and pectoral fin and resting beside it eye-to-eye. Our new research suggests this is the first described case of a humpback whale mother caring for her deceased newborn calf.

The encounter offers a rare window into one of the least understood aspects of whale behaviour: how these highly social animals respond to death.

And it raises the question: do whales, and other highly social animals such as elephants, grieve?

## Caring creatures

Humpback whales are known for their spectacular migrations and acrobatic breaches. However, they are equally remarkable for the way they respond to other animals in distress.

Humpback whales often defend their calves from killer whales. Researchers have also observed them remaining alongside whales that are injured or entangled in nets, circling them, resting nearby and attempting to assist.

Humpback whales may even intervene when killer whales attack seals, sea lions and grey whale calves.

These responses of care and attention are known as epimeletic behaviour and are common among cetaceans, a group of marine mammals including whales, dolphins and porpoises. Dolphins and killer whales often remain close to distressed companions, evidence of their strong social bonds. These animals may even risk their own lives for others. This happened in April off Scotland’s north-west coast, when multiple pilot whales became stranded after following a birthing female.

## When a whale loses a calf

Killer whale mothers have repeatedly been observed carrying their dead calves for hours, days and, in exceptional cases, weeks. The most famous example is the killer whale Tahlequah, who in 2018 carried her dead calf for 17 days over more than 1,500 kilometres. Scientists have observed similar behaviour in pilot whales and dolphins.

Such prolonged responses illustrate the strength of the bond between mother and calf. Maternal instincts and hormonal changes after birth may contribute to mothers remaining with their deceased offspring. But exact-



ly what the animals understand about death remains unknown.

Until now, scientists have almost exclusively documented these epimeletic behaviours towards deceased calves in toothed whales. The research on baleen whales, including humpback whales, is scarce. This is likely because dead newborn baleen whales often sink quickly, mak-

ing it extremely difficult to observe such cases.

Humpback whale mothers give birth after almost a year of pregnancy and spend the next few months feeding their calf with nutrient-rich milk. Right after the delivery, mothers often lift their calf to the surface to help it take its first breath. During the first months of its life, a calf relies

entirely on its mother for nourishment, protection and guidance during migration.

Tragically, some calves don’t survive. This may be due to disease, pollutants or a mother’s lack of fat reserves that help female whales cope better with pregnancy and better care for their calves.

## A first for humpback whales

We observed two adult whales off the Gold Coast of north-east Australia. The two whales stayed in the same area for several hours, after what appeared to have been a stillbirth. The female humpback whale released an ammoniac membrane shortly after the birth, but a placenta was not seen.

Underwater footage revealed the calf resting motionless on the seafloor while the presumed mother repeatedly approached it. She remained close to the calf, continuing to touch it with her head and pectoral fin. A second adult whale, likely an escort, also stayed nearby.

The humpback mother did not try to lift the calf to the ocean’s surface. This may indicate that she recognised the calf had died or was unable to carry it up from the seabed.

Members of the public reported two adult humpback whales remaining in the area over the next two days. However, our research team could not confirm they were the same animals.

## Do whales grieve?

To our knowledge, this is the first detailed scientific study of a humpback whale mother attending her deceased newborn calf. It provides crucial insight into how baleen whales cope with death.

Many of the behaviours we observed – including remaining

close to the calf and suspending normal behaviours such as travelling or socialising with other whales – resemble how other species respond to death. Elephants, great apes and some toothed whale species care for dead offspring in similar ways.

However, we can’t directly measure the emotional state of whales. The behaviours we observed could represent grief, but they could also reflect maternal attachment, confusion or instinctive caregiving. For this reason, researchers use broader terms – such as postmortem attentive behaviour – rather than concluding that whales grieve in the human sense.

Nevertheless, these behaviours reveal that humpback whales maintain strong maternal bonds even after the death of a calf. Our study suggests similar cases may have gone unnoticed because scientists rarely observe whale births at sea.

In good news, researchers are increasingly able to observe these animals as whale populations recover and scientific equipment makes at-sea studies more feasible.

So while there’s much more to learn about whales, their emotional lives may be infinitely more complex than we once imagined.

# Drone kills Russian commander just decorated after fake victory claim

**Russia:** Ukrainian drone forces have killed a Russian general who had just been made a Hero of Russia after false claims that Moscow’s forces had captured the Donetsk city of Kostiantynivka. Maj Gen Anton Grunis died in eastern Ukraine on Saturday. “General Grunis was eliminated on September 12,” said Ukrainian drone commander Robert Brovdi, adding that the general was the seventh Russian military commander killed by his drone forces. Another Russian commander, Apti Alaudinov, posted confirmation that Grunis had died.

The battle for Kostiantynivka is gruelling for Ukraine but war analysts say it remains contested. Grunis reported personally to Vladimir Putin earlier this year that his troops helped capture Kostiantynivka and was praised by the Russian president for “doing the work”. The territorial claim remains heavily disputed – the US-based Institute for the Study of War said Russian forces had infiltrated but not fully seized the city, and Russia’s claim was part of a wider information campaign to “portray the Ukrainian frontlines as collapsing”. Grunis received the Gold Star Hero of Russia award at a ceremony in late August.

Russian airstrikes damaged buildings in Kyiv and injured



three in the Black Sea port city of Odesa in the early hours of Thursday, officials said. In Kyiv, debris fell on warehouses and near a petrol station, among other locations, said the mayor, Vitali Klitschko. Three people, including a child, were injured as Russia hit a 19-storey apartment building in Odesa, authorities said.

Russian drones struck a passenger bus, killing five people, as well as attacking a train in southern Ukraine on Wednesday, Ukrainian officials said. “There is no military logic to this, just another act of brutality,” said the Ukrainian president,

Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The bus was hit near the frontline city of Nikopol. Seven more people were wounded, said the Dnipropetrovsk region’s governor.

Russian drones attacked a passenger train three times in Ukraine’s southern Mykolaiv region, the acting regional governor said. Passengers and crew were evacuated and no one was hurt. Zelenskyy said that in addition, a locomotive was struck in Kovel near the border with Poland.

Russian shelling on Wednesday killed one person in the southern Kherson region, and in the port of

Odesa one death was reported. Russian attacks injured more than a dozen people in Sumy in the north and Kropyvnytskyi in central Ukraine.

The Russia-installed head of areas of Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk region held by Moscow said a Ukrainian drone strike killed one person. Officials in Russia’s border Belgorod region said six people were injured in Ukrainian attacks.

The Russian Gerbera-2 drone found in the Baltic Sea off Poland was armed with explosives, officials said on Wednesday. Polish defence minister Wladyslaw

Kosiniak-Kamysz said on Monday that the military had located the drone near the village of Rusinowo in north-western Poland and recovered it from the sea. The drone was thought to have been lost by Russia during test manoeuvres over the Baltic. Polish military prosecutors are investigating whether legal proceedings can be launched, presumably against Russia, for “causing an incident that endangers the life or health of many people and property of great value”.

The Russian government has extended a ban on diesel exports until the end of October. The ban had been due to end this month. Russia introduced restrictions on exports of gasoline, jet fuel and diesel because of domestic fuel shortages driven by Ukrainian strikes on oil refineries.

Reuters reported that fuel market data indicates three of Russia’s six largest diesel-producing refineries were forced to significantly cut output or halt production altogether in September because of damage caused by drone attacks. Russia’s Rosneft-owned oil refineries in the Volga river cities of Syzran and Saratov have stopped processing after Ukrainian drone attacks this month, Reuters reported on Wednesday citing three industry sources.

# Expect even more potholes on UK roads after summer heatwaves

**UK:** The UK’s dilapidated roads are expected to get even worse, with motorists warned to expect a jump in the number of potholes as result of the country’s hottest summer on record.

Potholes are commonly assumed to be caused by cold or wet weather, but long periods of heat can also create long-lasting damage on the roads, according to the RAC. “Intense UV exposure and heat gradually oxidise the bitumen that binds asphalt together, making surfaces more brittle and prone to cracking. Once cracks develop, traffic and later rainfall can quickly turn them into serious defects,” said the company’s head of policy, Simon Williams. The roads were already in a terrible state after last winter, with only half the network in England and Wales in a good condition after months of rain, the Asphalt Industry Alliance reported earlier this year. They have been further damaged by the summer’s run of back-to-back heatwaves, with temperatures rising above 38C in some parts of the country.

Mike Hansford, the chief executive of the Road Surface Treatments Association, said: “Extremes in the UK’s weather, including increased summer UV radiation, combined with colder, wetter winter conditions, can accelerate deterioration.”

The extreme heat has been attributed to the climate



crisis, with scientists from the Met Office finding that the high temperatures experienced in the UK were 130 times more likely to occur owing to human-induced climate change. An increase in the number of potholes is just one of several ways in which climate chaos is putting the UK’s infrastructure under strain. Hot, dry weather shrank soil in railway embankments, forcing timetable changes and slower services on some routes. High temperatures even risk making rails buckle, something being looked at as a possible cause for two derailments last month. UK insurance companies have reported an increase in the number of subsidence claims over July and August as a result of the abnormally hot weather, with the insurer Hastings Direct saying it expects claim volumes “to remain higher than normal through to around October unless sustained rainfall helps restore soil moisture levels”.

According to an RAC report earlier this year, 51% of motorists describe the sorry state of Britain’s roads as their biggest anxiety related to driving, with 83% saying

they encounter potholes on most car trips.

Williams said these fears were “a reflection both of a long-term lack of investment in road maintenance and repair by local authorities, and of the road surface issues exacerbated by a particularly wet winter, and now an extremely hot summer”. However, he also expressed optimism about the government’s newly increased response to the pothole problem. He said: “Council highway budgets in England have been increased to a record £1.6bn for 2025-26, and in November’s budget, £7.3bn was allocated for road improvement works between now and the end of the decade, which will allow councils to make long-term maintenance plans.”

The Department for Transport has also released new requirements for English councils in June that will push them to prove they are doing more to find long-term solutions to fixing potholes and roads. Under the requirements, local authorities could lose up to a third of their road maintenance funding if they fail to demonstrate they are working to build these solutions.

# Bristol becomes first British city to ban advertisements for fast fashion

**UK:** Bristol has become the first British city to impose a ban on the advertising of fast fashion, in new restrictions that will also curb ads for SUVs and airlines.

The ban is part of moves by the West Country city, known for its radical political scene, to impose sweeping bans on advertising for polluting industries.

Restrictions have also been placed on advertising SUVs, airlines, cruises and

fossil fuels on advertising sites owned by the Green-run council. “We don’t want Bristol to be a billboard for polluters while we’re working hard to improve health, air quality and nature in the city,” said Heather Macky, Bristol city council’s deputy leader.

“We’re proud to be thinking holistically about the changes we need to keep Bristol green and thriving.”

Bristol council’s strategy and resources committee

passed the new advertising and sponsorship policy by an eight to one vote on Monday. It updates a policy passed in 2021 which made Bristol the first council outside London to ban junk food ads. The policy will apply to all council-owned advertising space, including billboards, bus stop shelters, print and online.

Bristol joins more than 20 UK councils that already have restrictions on ads for polluting products and ser-

vices. But none has previously banned advertising for fast fashion products.

The change in policy reflects political trends in the city, which elected the Green party’s Carla Denyer as MP in 2024, the same year that voters made the Green party the largest party in the council chamber. In Bristol, 83% of residents are concerned about climate change, according to a recent council survey.

Denyer said: “I am so

pleased that the council has now taken this much-needed next step and added high-carbon products and services to the list of things that will not be advertised on council-owned space.

“Our Green-led council is making huge strides on Bristol’s climate and sustainability commitments, working on public transport infrastructure, home heating and community energy.

“It makes no sense for these efforts to be running

alongside advertisements for things like oil and gas companies, SUVs or fast fashion which do not align with our community values.” Cardiff, Edinburgh, Portsmouth and Sheffield are among the cities that have imposed restrictions on climate-harming products.

The restrictions came after campaigning by Adfree Cities, a network of campaign groups, which is calling for local bans on climate-harm-

ing promotions to be made national. The group has also lobbied London’s mayor, Sadiq Khan, to curb ads for fossil fuels and other polluting products on Transport for London, which has one of the largest advertising estates in the world.

Nicola Wilks, co-founder and co-director at Adfree Cities, said: “We know ad bans are a catalyst for healthy change. Removing tobacco ads saved lives by reducing levels of smok-

ing. “As a Bristol resident who cares deeply about climate change and air pollution, I am proud that Bristol has gone even further than other UK councils in curbing polluting ads; it feels like common sense.

“Now we need to scale up bold local action to national tobacco-style bans on polluter advertising, to break the toxic influence of polluting companies, and support meaningful action for climate and clean air.”

# How to travel to Kashmir on a budget in the fall: a five-day schedule and actual local expenses



Kashmir experiences a remarkably brief period during which the valley undergoes a dramatic chromatic transformation. The Chinar trees commence their transition to golden hues beginning in late September. Throughout October and November, Srinagar acquires that distinctive autumnal character that compels travelers to pause their vehicles at frequent intervals. However, autumn in Kashmir encompasses more than aesthetically pleasing foliage and invigorating mornings. Climatic conditions necessitate thoughtful preparation. Daytime temperatures typically range from 18°C to 22°C when sunlight is present, whereas early mornings and evenings may descend to approximately 2°C to 5°C. Consequently, an extensive collection of winter garments is unnecessary. Rather, strategic layering of clothing is essential.

This is also a good season for a five-day Kashmir trip if you want to keep things fairly simple. I would plan around Srinagar, Gulmarg,

Pahalgam and one quieter valley, rather than trying to squeeze every famous stop into five days. And then there is the practical stuff. Local taxi rules can add to your bill if you do not know about them in advance. Gondola tickets need planning. Some remote areas are still very cash-dependent. Your phone connection can also become a problem if you arrive with the wrong SIM. Here is how I would plan it.

Before you leave. Buy the right things and skip the unnecessary ones

Autumn is not snow boot season in most of the lower Kashmir valleys. You can leave the giant rubber boots at home unless your specific route has a very different weather forecast. A pair of trail or hiking shoes with proper rubber lug traction makes much more sense. Something along the lines of Decathlon's MH100 works well for walks, damp paths and uneven ground. I would rather travel with shoes that fit properly than rent a pair of rubber boots that may have spent the day getting damp inside.

A few other things deserve space in the bag.

UV protection sunglasses. The sun can feel surprisingly strong at altitude.

A lightweight windproof poncho or compact umbrella. Autumn showers can appear without much warning.

A power bank. Cold weather can affect battery performance, so do not rely on your phone lasting all day for maps, tickets and photographs.

A small luggage scale if you are flying. It weighs almost nothing and saves the airport surprise.

Pick your Kashmir based on what you enjoy

Five days is not enough to do everything, and trying usually means spending half the holiday inside a taxi. If photography and nature are your thing, spend more time around Nishat Bagh, Naseem Bagh and Dal Lake. Naseem Bagh is particularly worth adding during Chinar season.

If you want quieter landscapes, look at Doodhpathri or Sinthan Top instead of adding yet another busy tourist stop. If food and

local culture interest you more, start early. Kandur bakeries are already working in the morning, and 7 AM is a good time to look for fresh tsot and kahwa. Add an Old Srinagar walk and a visit to Pampore if saffron interests you.

The point is not to see everything. It is to give yourself enough time to actually be somewhere.

A five-day Kashmir itinerary with realistic costs

Day 1. Srinagar, Chinar trees and a sunset Shikara

Keep your first day easy. Check into your Srinagar hotel, have lunch and head towards Naseem Bagh in the afternoon. Depending on the time of year, the Chinars can be anywhere from green to deep gold. Come back towards Dal Lake for a sunset Shikara ride. The Department of Tourism regulates Shikara fares and requires registered boats to display rate information. A current 2026 reference lists ₹770 for a standard one-hour tourist Shikara, with ₹440 for each additional hour.

The useful trick is to agree on the duration, route and total price before you get into the boat. Do not simply ask for a “Shikara ride” and then start discussing the price after boarding. A one-hour standard ride is very different from a longer route covering Char Chinar or the floating market. For a budget trip, keep around ₹800 to ₹1,200 aside for the evening ride, depending on the route and current rate.

Day 2. Gulmarg and the Gondola

Leave Srinagar early and head to Gulmarg. If the weather is clear, take the Gondola. Phase 1 and Phase 2 are separate ticketed sections. Online book-

ing is the sensible option, particularly during busy periods. Current travel information advises booking around 15 to 20 days ahead during peak demand, so I would not leave it until the night before. There is another reason to book the Gondola yourself. You know exactly what you have paid for.

If someone approaches you with a package that suddenly includes a pony, guide, transfer and several other extras, stop and check what you actually need. You do not need to buy a pony ride simply because someone tells you that you need one to reach the Gondola. Keep some extra money for food, local transport and entry charges. Gulmarg prices can rise quickly once you start adding small activities.

Day 3. Pahalgam, Aru and Betaab Valley

Pahalgam is where the taxi system catches many first-time visitors by surprise. Your Srinagar taxi can take you to Pahalgam, but sightseeing towards Aru Valley, Betaab Valley and Chandanwari is handled by local union taxis. Published 2026 fare lists show that the exact cost varies by vehicle. For Aru and Betaab together, current listed rates range from around ₹1,600 to ₹2,400 depending on the vehicle, while the three-valley circuit can range from around ₹2,000 to ₹3,000.

So I would budget roughly ₹2,500 to ₹3,200 for a comfortable local sightseeing vehicle, while checking the current rate card at the stand before paying. This is one place where bargaining is not the main strategy. Ask for the rate card, choose your vehicle and confirm exactly which

valleys are included. Also keep cash handy.

Day 4. Choose one quieter Kashmir

This is the day I would protect from overplanning. Pick Doodhpathri if you want open meadows and a slower day. Pick Sonamarg if you want mountain scenery and a more established tourist route. Sonamarg has its own local transport arrangements for certain sightseeing routes, including places such as Zero Point. Published local taxi rates show fares varying by vehicle and route, so confirm the current rate at the local stand before setting off. If you choose Doodhpathri, carry cash and do not assume that every payment point will accept a card or UPI. This is also the day when comfortable shoes matter most.

Day 5. Old Srinagar, shopping and an easy finish

Keep your last morning for the city. Start with the Old Srinagar area and visit Jamia Masjid if it fits your plans and timings. Then spend some time shopping rather than rushing from one shop to another.

For saffron, look for properly labelled Kashmiri saffron and ask where it has been sourced. For dry fruits, compare prices between shops instead of buying from the first person who approaches you.

Pashmina needs even more care. Ask about the fibre, look at the certification and buy from a seller who can provide proper documentation. A cheap “pure pashmina” is not automatically a bargain.

Keep the final afternoon light. You do not want to be dragging six shopping bags through the airport because you decided Kashmir shopping needed its own expedition.

dition.

Three things you really need to know before going

Your SIM may stop working

The J&K telecom rules have historically restricted national roaming for prepaid connections. TRAI documentation states that national roaming in J&K was allowed only for postpaid customers under the earlier regulatory framework. So if you normally use a prepaid SIM from another state, check with your operator before flying. A postpaid connection is the safer choice. Do not assume that your phone will simply connect after landing.

Your Srinagar taxi may not take you everywhere

This is one of the biggest things to factor into your Kashmir budget. Local taxi systems operate at major tourist destinations, and Pahalgam has particularly clear restrictions for sightseeing towards Aru, Betaab and Chandanwari. Outside taxis drop visitors in Pahalgam, and the local union vehicle handles the sightseeing. Ask your taxi operator this question before booking.

“Is the local union taxi included in my package?”

If the answer is no, add that cost to your budget rather than treating it as an unexpected expense later.

Carry cash

Srinagar itself is fairly easy for digital payments, but remote valleys are another story. Keep enough cash for taxis, small cafés, local purchases and entry charges.

I would also keep a little emergency cash separately from the main wallet. Mountain trips have a funny way of producing small expenses at exactly the

point where you have no signal, no ATM and no patience left.

What should a five-day Kashmir budget look like?

When planning a trip, determining the exact financial requirement depends heavily on the specific tier and character of your chosen hotel accommodations, alongside whether you are navigating the destination as a solo adventurer, part of a romantic couple, or alongside an entire family with varying needs. For two people sharing a single room and utilizing a private taxi for all their transit needs, the bulk of your travel budget will inevitably be consumed by three major expenditure categories: accommodation, intercity transport, and local sightseeing excursions. Lodging costs can fluctuate wildly depending on whether you opt for budget guesthouses, mid-range boutique hotels, or luxury resorts, directly dictating a substantial portion of your daily outflow. Simultaneously, securing a private taxi for comfortable, door-to-door transit between cities eliminates the unpredictability and stress of public transportation networks like trains or buses, though it introduces higher fuel and driver-hire fees that accumulate significantly over extended itineraries.

Furthermore, local sightseeing—encompassing entry tickets to historical monuments, guided tours, adventure activities, and curated cultural experiences—adds another layer of consistent cost that must be carefully calculated alongside daily dining and miscellaneous pocket expenses to ensure a financially seamless and deeply rewarding journey.

# The world's top ten walkable cities in 2026

The recently established Sky-scanner index has meticulously evaluated and ranked the world's most pedestrian-friendly emerging cities anticipated for travelers in 2026, shining a well-deserved spotlight on urban gems that represent refreshingly unconventional selections for contemporary vacations while deliberately bypassing more prominent, heavily saturated tourist alternatives such as Berlin and Dubrovnik. By shifting focus toward lesser-known or uniquely compact destinations, this forward-looking index empowers modern explorers to ditch crowded public transit networks and congested tourist traps in favor of discovering rich cultural tapestries entirely on foot. Whether it is navigating centuries-old bazaars, wandering through serene alpine trails, or strolling along historic harbors and sun-drenched medieval alleys, these carefully curated cities prioritize walkability, safety, and immersive local charm. Ultimately, this pioneering ranking redefines the modern city break by proving that the most deeply rewarding travel experiences often lie off the beaten path, waiting to be uncovered step by unhurried step.

Córdoba, Spain, proudly claiming the top spot on the list, is a magnificent destination that lets visitors effortlessly walk between its major historic sights, including the legendary and awe-inspiring Mezquita and the labyrinthine, charm-filled Jewish Quarter, in just 26 minutes of delightful exploration. With 29 scenic trails winding through its sun-drenched landscapes and an extraordinarily compact network of medieval streets, this UNESCO World Heritage city feels as though it was meticulously built entirely for strolling and deep historical discovery. Every turn through its whitewashed alleys reveals hidden, flower-festooned patios bursting with vibrant geraniums, ancient Roman

ruins whispering tales of antiquity, and stunning reminders of the city's golden age as a beacon of medieval culture, science, and religious harmony. This seamless blend of architectural masterpieces, intimate scale, and an unhurried Andalusian pace makes Córdoba an absolute paradise for travelers who prefer to experience the soul of a destination on foot, absorbing the rich scents of orange blossoms and the echoes of centuries past with every single step.

Nagasaki, Japan: Ranking second, Nagasaki features low crime rates and gentle terrain for walking. Exploring its historic harbour streets, Peace Park, and waterfront developments offers an unhurried, rich cultural experience where major attractions sit seamlessly within reach on foot.

Hiroshima, Japan: Combining high safety scores with well-planned urban layouts, Hiroshima's key landmarks such as the Peace Memorial Park and riverfront paths take roughly 41 minutes to walk between. It provides a serene, comfortable, and highly accessible environment for solo walkers.

Reggio Calabria, Italy: Perched along the Strait of Messina, this southern Italian jewel connects top highlights in roughly 25 minutes (around 2,321 steps). Walkers enjoy sea breeze, views of Mount Etna, coastal promenades, and world-class archaeological museums on foot.

Monte Carlo, Monaco: Despite its reputation for supercars, Monte Carlo covers under half a square kilometer. Its compact footprint allows tourists to walk between the famous casino, harbors, and gardens in 36 minutes, assisted by urban public elevators for hill climbs.

Tartu, Estonia: Estonia's cultural capital boasts the lowest air pollution among all cities indexed. Its compact 39-square-kilometer footprint features historic wooden-house districts,

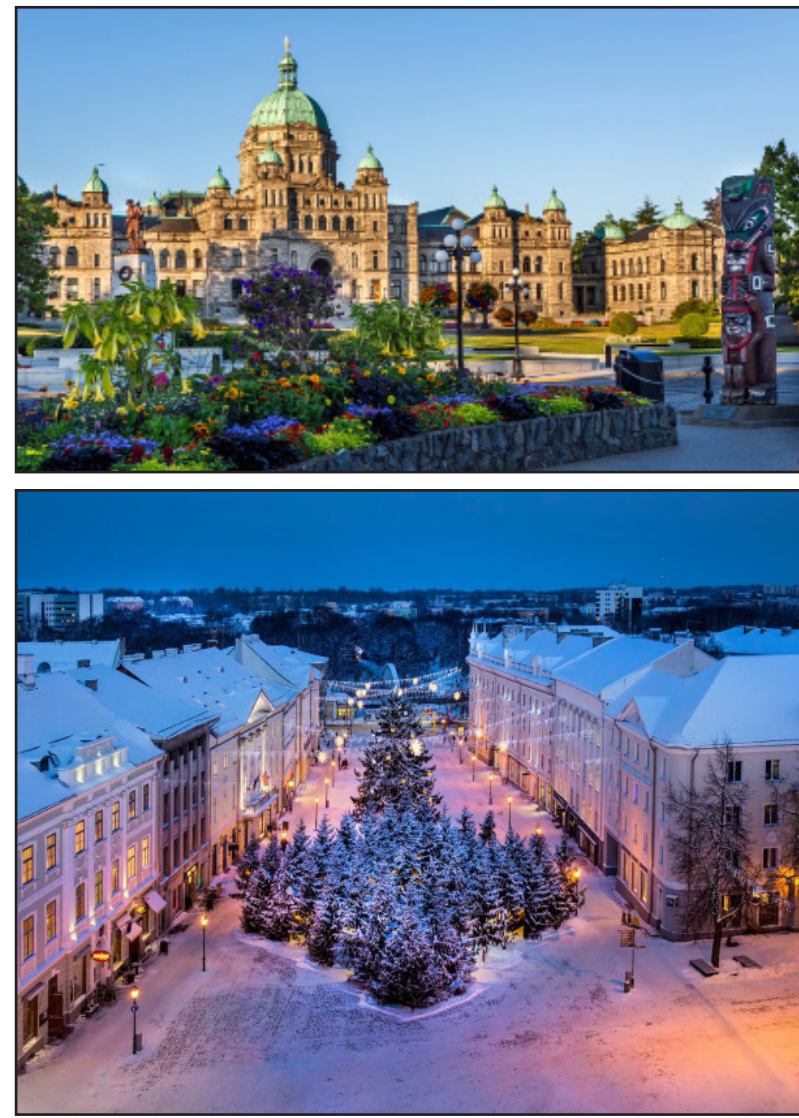
riverfront paths, vibrant street art, and scenic park trails centered around its historic university town.

Bursa, Türkiye, renowned historically as the magnificent original capital of the Ottoman Empire, offers travelers a deeply immersive journey through time that allows them to conveniently cover its entire historic center in about an hour of leisurely exploration. A captivating walk through the heart of Bursa seamlessly connects bustling ancient silk bazaars—where merchants have traded precious textiles along the historic Silk Road for centuries—with grand, awe-inspiring imperial mosques adorned with exquisite tilework and majestic domes. Along the way, visitors encounter serene historic tombs of early Ottoman sultans and vibrant thermal bath districts fed by natural mineral-rich hot springs that have been utilized for relaxation and healing since Roman antiquity. This harmonious blend of imperial heritage, bustling local commerce, and restorative natural wellness creates a uniquely rich urban tapestry that invites deep cultural discovery within a remarkably walkable and intimate setting.

Bolzano, Italy, serves as the breathtaking gateway to the majestic peaks of the Dolomites and proudly secured the top position as the safest overall city in the ranking, offering travelers an extraordinary combination of alpine adventure and urban tranquility. Boasting an impressive network of 505 walking trails that weave through lush valleys and rugged mountain terrain, the city seamlessly bridges the gap between wild nature and civilized comfort. Its charming South Tyrolean historic center is a delightful cultural melting pot where Italian and Austrian influences blend harmoniously in language, architecture, and cuisine, creating a unique atmosphere unlike anywhere else in Europe. Visitors can easily immerse themselves in

this rich alpine heritage by strolling through colourful, vibrant piazzas lined with outdoor cafes, exploring fascinating local museums that house famous ancient artifacts like Ötzi the Iceman, or stepping straight from the cobblestone streets onto scenic mountain paths—all of which can be effortlessly explored in under an hour due to the city's remarkably compact and pedestrian-friendly layout. Sarajevo, the culturally rich and historically resonant capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, features a remarkably compact center that takes just 22 minutes to navigate completely on foot between its major landmarks, offering travelers an exceptionally immersive and easily walkable urban experience. A short, effortless stroll transports visitors across multiple centuries of dramatic history, allowing them to witness a seamless transition from the vibrant, bustling Ottoman-era bazaars and traditional copper-smith alleys along the Miljacka River straight into the grand, elegant Austro-Hungarian architecture that defines the city's European-influenced boulevards. This stunning architectural juxtaposition is further enriched by the harmonious presence of mosques, orthodox churches, catholic cathedrals, and synagogues standing side by side within shouting distance of one another, earning Sarajevo its enduring nickname of the “European Jerusalem.” Ultimately, the city's intimate scale, combined with its deeply layered heritage, warm local hospitality, and famous culinary staples like ćevapi, creates a uniquely captivating destination where every step forward is a fascinating journey backward through time.

Victoria, British Columbia, as the charming capital of Canada's westernmost province, brilliantly rounds out premier travel lists by earning the absolute top score for pristine air quality while simultaneously offering an as-



tonishing collection of 457 walking trails that invite outdoor enthusiasts and casual strollers alike to immerse themselves in nature. Its breathtaking and scenic Inner Harbour serves as a vibrant maritime hub where floatplanes land gracefully alongside historic whale-watching vessels, beautifully complementing a historic downtown area defined by magnificent 19th-century architecture, eclectic local boutiques, and world-class

culinary hotspots. Beyond the bustling waterfront, the city's meticulously garden-lined streets burst with vibrant seasonal blooms—earning its cherished reputation as the “Garden City”—and create a tranquil, visually stunning atmosphere that collectively solidifies Victoria's status as North America's premier pedestrian-friendly city break for travelers seeking both relaxation and urban exploration.

Director Pa Ranjith’s Vettuvam team teases upcoming major glimpse

**Chennai :** Pa Ranjith’s Vettuvam is finally ready to reveal more of what lies at the heart of the much-awaited film. The makers have announced that audiences will get their first in-depth look at the film’s world on September 18. The update comes nearly four years after the project was first unveiled at the Cannes Film Festival in 2022.

Vettuvam marks Ranjith’s eighth feature as a director and follows Thangalaan (2024), his most recent directorial outing. While the filmmaker has continued to explore different periods, characters and social landscapes through his films, Vettuvam has remained relatively guarded since its announcement, with only glimpses of its world making their way to audiences. The first such glimpse arrived last September, when the makers released a promotional video on the occasion of actor VR Dinesh’s birthday. The video offered some clues about the film and introduced the actor in a martial arts-based avatar.

Vettuvam brings Ranjith together with actors from different points in his career. Arya, who leads the film, previously collaborated with the filmmaker on Sar-

patta Parambarai (2021), the boxing drama that became one of the most discussed Tamil films of its time. Arya is rumoured to play a gangster in Vettuvam, although the makers have not officially revealed the full details of his character. VR Dinesh, meanwhile, reunites with Ranjith more than a decade after their work on Attakathi (2012), the filmmaker’s debut feature. The actor is

said to portray a martial arts practitioner in Vettuvam, making his role one of the intriguing elements of the film. The cast also includes Sobhita Dhulipala, who made her Tamil debut with Mani Ratnam’s Ponniyin Selvan films. The extensive ensemble features Kalaiyarasan, Mime Gopi, Guru Somasundaram, Shabeer Kallarakkal, John Vijay, Sai Dheena, Anand Saami, Harish Uthaman, Lizzy, Lingesh Prem Kumar, Kavitha Bharathi, Arjun, Santha Kumar, Melody, Manisha, Nimmy Raphael, Vikram, Naveen and Prakash.

Vettuvam also continues Ranjith’s association with several members of his creative circle. GV Prakash Kumar is composing the music for the film, marking another collaboration with Ranjith after Thangalaan.

Their partnership on the 2024 film brought together Ranjith’s visual approach and Prakash’s musical sensibilities, and the composer now returns for another ambitious project from the director. The technical crew includes cinematographer Roopesh Shaji, editor Selva RK, art director SS Murthi and action choreographer Dhilip Subbarayan. With the film expected to have a

strong action component, Subbarayan’s involvement adds another layer of interest to the upcoming glimpse. Santhosh Narayanan Chentilkumar has served as a co-writer on Vettuvam, while Franklin Jacob has penned the dialogues. The writing collaboration brings together different creative voices for a film that has been in development for several years.

Alex Warren joins yasalam after-race concert lineup for Abu Dhabi grand prix

**Mumbai :** GRAMMY-nominated singer-songwriter Alex Warren has been announced as part of the star-studded Yasalam presented by e& entertainment programme of the Formula 1 Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, organised by Ethara Live.

Beyond the racing, Abu Dhabi Grand Prix week transforms Yas Island into a destination-wide celebration, with a packed programme of live music, dining and entertainment complementing the action at Yas Marina Circuit. For international visitors, the weekend also provides a gateway to discover more of Abu Dhabi, from its cultural landmarks and beaches to world-class attractions and experiences. The rising global star behind smash hits such as Ordinary and Bloodline, is set to light up Etihad Live, formerly known as Etihad Park, on Friday, 4 December, with another artist to headline Friday night



to be announced soon. David Powell, Chief Portfolio & Strategy Officer at Ethara Live, said: “We are delighted to bring Alex Warren to the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. He’s one of the most talked-about voices in music today, and his warmth and stage presence make him a perfect addition to our week-long entertainment offering for fans. Yasalam has a proud track record of bringing chart-topping global talent to Abu Dhabi, and Alex is a brilliant addition to that legacy. He will form part of

an exciting double-bill, with another global superstar still to be revealed, giving fans even more to look forward to this December.”

Warren’s announcement follows the confirmation of Lewis Capaldi and Zara Larsson’s performances on Thursday 3 December, Imagine Dragons on Saturday, 5 December, and Chainsmokers and the Script as double headliners on Sunday, 6 December. In addition to the After-Race concerts at Etihad Live, Yasalam 2026 features maestro Andrea Bo-

celli bringing his global Romanza tour to Etihad Arena on December 2 and Anyma headlining the Official After Party at Yas Gateway Park on December 4.

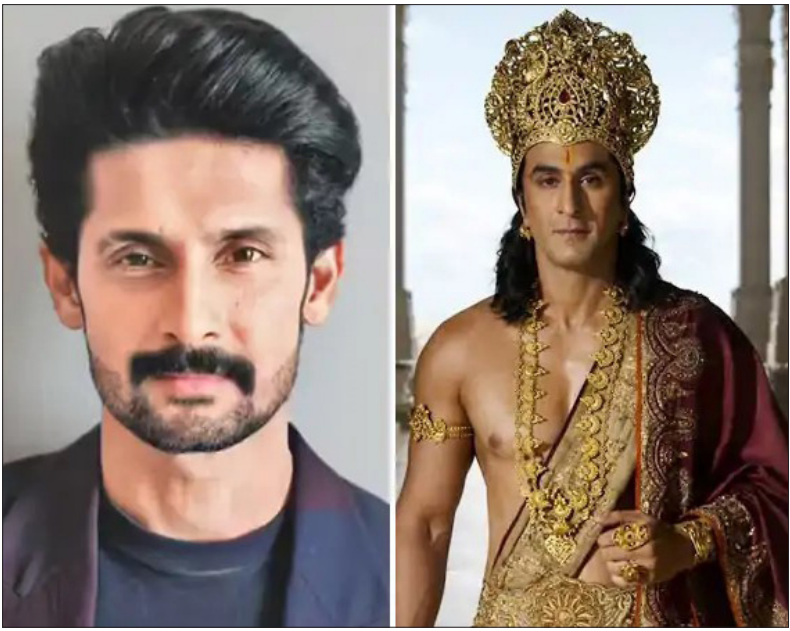
Warren’s global rise has been remarkable. With billions of streams, record-breaking hits, a sold-out world tour and a GRAMMY nomination for Best New Artist, he is one of pop’s most compelling success stories. His passionate vocals and lyrical candour have won him a devoted global following and widespread critical acclaim. In 2025, his breakout hit Ordinary spent ten weeks atop Billboard Hot 100 in the US and thirteen weeks at number one of the UK Singles Chart, establishing Warren as the defining new artist of his generation. His debut studio album, You’ll Be Alright, Kid, re-released on the heels of the success of Ordinary in July 2025, reached the top five in the US, earning platinum certification.

Actor Ravie Dubey defends Ranbir Kapoor’s casting in Nitesh Tiwari’s Ramayana

**Mumbai :** Ravie Dubey is one of the big names associated with the ambitious project of Ramayana. But with all the hype surrounding the film, its stellar casting and huge collaborations with international names and teams, the viewers are not entirely confident about certain things.

One major concern lingering on everyone’s mind is whether Ranbir Kapoor was the right pick for Ramayana. There was never a shroud of doubt regarding his ability to do justice to the avatar he picks up. Even the grandson of Ramanand Sagar, Shiv Sagar, expressed a similar feeling, mentioning, “He is a very good actor. Personally, I don’t have anything against him. But I personally believe that for such characters, it’s better to take a new face.” In a recent interview with Variety, Ravie Dubey, who plays Lakshman, came forward with support for his fellow co-star, Ranbir Kapoor, in Ramayana. When asked about him, Ravie said, “I think Ranbir is simply the best we have. He is a superstar of epic proportions, but what has stayed with me even more is the human being and the artiste I have witnessed at close range.”

He further goes on to elaborate on Ranbir Kapoor’s worth ethics and the dedication he pours into any role



he plays, and how it proved to be a learning experience for him. He continued, “The sincerity with which he comes onto a set is unparalleled. His work ethic, etiquette, intensity, and preparation. I had heard so much about these things, but I had the privilege of witnessing them firsthand.” He finished his quote weighing on how his nature has remained untouched by his industrial background or success. He added,

“Alongside all of that is his incredibly grounded, warm, and inclusive nature. There is no weight of his stardom in the way he interacts with people. I find that enormously inspiring. It is my great good fortune to be a part of this journey alongside Ranbir, Namit (Malhotra), Nitesh (Tiwari), Yash, Sai Pallavi, and every single person associated with Ramayana.” Ramayana is scheduled to release on November 8, 2026.

Ajay Bijli releases official music video for ‘Dil Kare Haaye Haaye’

**Mumbai :** Ajay Bijli has embarked on a new creative chapter with the launch of his debut EP, On Another Note..., in Aug 2026, marking his official foray into music as an independent artist. A project born out of a personal passion for music and a desire to explore a new form of creative expression, the three-song EP has music by Amit Trivedi and lyrics by Shellee. Distributed by Warner Music India, On Another Note... explores three distinct emotions through its songs—hope, gratitude and celebration. The EP was introduced in August with the release of “Rab Rakhda,” video—a song rooted in faith, hope and the belief that even when the road ahead is uncertain, one can continue to move forward with optimism.

The next video of the EP unfolds with “Dil Kare Haaye Haaye,” releasing on September 4. A joyous, high-energy celebration of the way Indians come together, the song captures the uninhibited spirit, warmth and beautiful chaos of an Indian celebration. At its heart, it is a quintessential Indian wedding song. Bringing this celebratory spirit to the screen is filmmaker Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, who directs the music video, with choreography by acclaimed choreographer Ganesh Acharya. Together, they have created a vibrant visual world that mirrors the infectious energy



of the song while presenting Ajay Bijli in a fresh, playful and contemporary avatar. Ajay Bijli said: “Dil Kare Haaye Haaye is a song about the wonderful way we celebrate. It is a quintessential Indian wedding song, the kind that makes you want to sing, dance, and then sing a little louder. The song is very special to me, and bringing it to life with Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra and Ganesh Acharya has been an incredible experience. Rakeysh has brought such a distinct visual imagination to the video, while Ganesh’s choreography gives it an infectious energy that I think audiences will really enjoy. For me, the video is a celebration in every sense, of music, togetherness, and the sheer joy of being alive. I hope people watch it, dance to it, and make it a part of their own celebrations.”

Rakeysh Om Prakash Mehra said: “Ajay is a natural and gifted singer. His voice

takes you deep within yourself, like a bridge between your soul and the whole world.” Ganesh Acharya said: “Dil Kare Haaye Haaye” is a song that naturally makes you want to move. It has the energy, warmth, and beautiful chaos of our fun, larger-than-life Indian weddings, and that made choreographing it such a wonderful experience. What I really enjoyed was creating movements that felt spontaneous and rooted in the way we actually celebrate, especially at our weddings. The idea was not just to make people dance, but to make them feel like they are a part of the celebration. Working with Mr. Ajay Bijli was a lovely experience. There is an ease and sincerity to him, and it was important for us to retain that while bringing out a more playful and celebratory side of him on screen. The way he has sung the song also adds a very personal and effortless charm to it. There is a certain youthfulness and charm in his voice. And working with Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra is always great; he has a very distinctive way of looking at music and movement, and together we tried to create something that feels fresh, colorful, and full of life. I hope Dil Kare Haaye Haaye becomes one of those songs that finds its way into weddings, celebrations, and happy moments.”

**Mumbai :** Actress and BJP MP Kangana Ranaut extended heartfelt birthday wishes to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. She praised his leadership and highlighted India’s growth journey.

Taking to Instagram, the ‘Queen’ shared a special message for PM Modi and described his 25 years in public life as an inspiring chapter of “service to the nation, dedication, and commitment to public welfare.” She also prayed for the Prime Minister’s good health, long life, and continued strength to serve the nation. Sharing her video, Kangana wrote, “Heartfelt birthday wishes to Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji. Your 25 years of public life have been an inspiring chapter of service to the nation, dedication, and commitment to public welfare. I pray to God for your good



health, long life, and continued strength to serve the nation. May the resolve to build a developed and self-reliant India continue to receive new energy under your leadership. Heartiest birthday wishes, Modi Ji! #HappyBdayPMModi.”

In a video message, Kangana spoke about the current global situation and said India was fortunate to have a “stable and re-

formed government” since 2014. She credited the people of India and PM Modi for the country’s progress. “Today is the Prime Minister’s birthday. We are very fortunate to have his excellent and stable leadership,” she said. Reflecting on India’s economic journey, she spoke about the country’s position before 2014 and its subsequent growth, saying India had moved

from being described as part of the “Fragile 5” to becoming one of the world’s fastest-growing economies.

The ‘Tanu Weds Manu’ actress said, “Remember the time before 2014, when like a filmy dramatic plot point, the whole country was struggling with hunger, poverty and filth. The world called us Fragile 5. We were the 11th most struggling economy. Today, we are the fastest growing economy in the world. And we are becoming the 3rd largest economy in the world.” “Friends, his resolution of 2047, Jant Seva to Rashtra Seva, become a part of it. Today, we light a candle for the long life of our Prime Minister. And for that, we pray. Jai Hind. Jai Bharat,” she added. PM Modi received warm wishes from celebrities, political leaders, and fans on his 76th birthday.

Prithvi Shaw and Akriti Agarwal announce separation, call off engagement

**Mumbai :** Akriti Agarwal has announced that she and Indian cricketer Prithvi Shaw have called off their engagement, months after the couple publicly confirmed their relationship. Taking to Instagram, Akriti shared an emotional statement revealing that the two had mutually decided to part ways because of different goals and circumstances concerning their future.

Akriti said that despite continuing to love and care for each other, they have accepted that their paths are no longer meant to be together. She also requested people to respect their privacy and refrain from speculating about the rea-



sons behind their separation. Confirming the development on Instagram, Akriti wrote, “With a heavy heart, I would like to share that my fiancé and I have decided to part ways due to different goals and circumstances for our future.”

She further explained that their responsibilities and the circumstances they are currently facing had led them to mutually decide to go their separate ways. Akriti did not disclose any further details about what led to the decision. She, however, said that

the two continue to love and care for each other despite ending their engagement. She also wished both of them “the best, peace, and happiness” as they move forward separately.

Along with announcing the breakup, Akriti appealed to people to respect their privacy during what she described as a difficult time. She specifically requested that people refrain from speculating or making assumptions about the reasons behind their decision. While Akriti mentioned that their different goals, responsibilities and circumstances for the future had contributed to the separation, she chose not to elaborate any further. Her

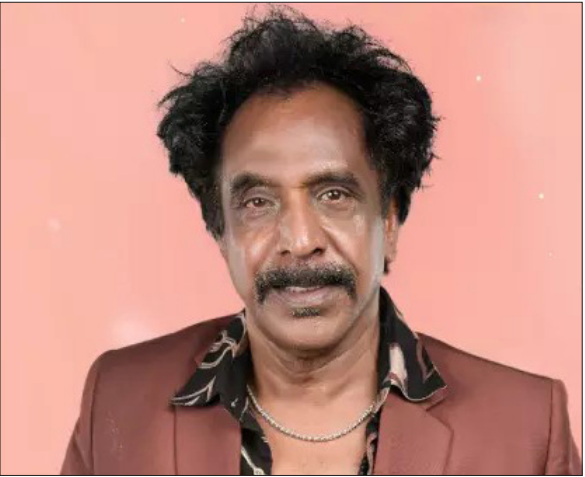
latest statement officially confirms that she and Prithvi have mutually decided to end their relationship.

Prithvi and Akriti had announced their engagement in March 2026. At the time, the Indian cricketer shared photographs from their engagement ceremony on social media. Their relationship later came under public attention in July after Akriti shared cryptic posts on social media. The posts sparked speculation about whether there was trouble between the couple. However, there was no official confirmation at the time linking those posts to Prithvi or their relationship.

Om Prakash Rao exits Bigg Boss Kannada, issues statement

**Bengaluru :** Bigg Boss Kannada contestant Om Prakash Rao has exited the show due to health complications. Om Prakash’s journey on Bigg Boss came to an end less than 10 days after the season began.

In a recent interaction with the media, Om Prakash said, “I faced several health issues due to the food provided in the house. My sugar levels increased, and my blood pressure also went up. I already had an issue with my leg, but I never expected it to become this serious. I found it difficult to adjust to the food served in the house.” He further added, “I informed the Bigg Boss



team about my health issues before entering the show.” Om Prakash really wanted to continue on the show, but he unfortunately had to leave the house

mid-game due to these health issues. Bigg Boss Kannada is hosted by Kiccha Sudeep and airs every day at 9:30 PM on Colors Kannada.

## League Cup Nightmare: Manchester United Misery Mounts After Shock Collapse Against Brighton

**Manchester:** Manchester United’s early-season problems deepened dramatically as they crashed out of the League Cup following a stunning 3-2 defeat against Brighton at Old Trafford on Wednesday. Michael Carrick’s side slumped to their second successive home defeat after blowing a comfortable two-goal advantage in a wretched defensive collapse.

United had looked to be cruising early on, taking control through goals from Shea Lacey and Mason Mount in the opening 10 minutes. However, a spirited Brighton fightback spearheaded by Charalampos Kostoulas, Pascal Gross, and Maxim De Cuyper left Carrick shell-shocked as his team trudged off the pitch to a chorus of boos. It marks another brutal blow for United, coming just days after a controversial 1-0 home defeat against Manchester City in the Premier League. Although the referees’ governing body subsequently admitted that VAR officials erred in allowing Erling Haaland’s winner, that result left United with only a single victory from their opening four league matches. Having guided United to a third-place



finish last season during his stint as interim manager, Carrick was expected to spearhead a genuine title challenge after being handed the job permanently. Instead, United have already suffered three defeats in six games across all competitions, intensifying the pressure on Carrick ahead of a tricky Premier League trip to face Fulham in west London on Sunday. Another defeat would plunge the club into a full-blown crisis barely a month into the new campaign. Squad Depth Examined Amid mounting scrutiny over United’s summer transfer window recruitment, Carrick’s decision to make eight changes for the cup tie ruthlessly exposed the limitations and lack of depth within his squad.

Yet, amidst the gloom, 19-year-old midfielder Shea Lacey offered a glimpse of hope for the future. Showing precisely why Carrick has placed faith in him, Lacey took possession inside the Brighton penalty area in the eighth minute and lashed a clinical finish into the bottom corner for his maiden senior goal for the club. Mason Mount doubled the advantage just two minutes later, pouncing to rifle into the roof of the net after Jason Steele could only parry Marcus Rashford’s initial effort. A Stunning Collapse Despite the bright start, United’s defensive vulnerabilities quickly resurfaced. In first-half stoppage-time, poor marking from Ayden Heaven allowed Kostoulas time and

space to drill past goalkeeper Karl Darlow, cutting the deficit.

That setback thoroughly unnerved the hosts. Brighton leveled the score in the 65th minute when Gross controlled Luka Vuskovic’s downward header and slotted home from close range. United were visibly in disarray, and the visitors completed the turnaround in the 70th minute. Sloppy defending allowed Kostoulas to pick out De Cuyper, who swept home from six yards out. Carrick threw on Bruno Fernandes and Matheus Cunha in search of a late rescue act, but United lacked the cohesion to find an equalizer. The result means Brighton have now knocked United out of domestic cup competitions twice in the space of nine months, following their FA Cup triumph at Old Trafford in January.

Compounding the misery, it marked the first time in 50 years that Manchester United had lost a home match after holding a 2-0 lead. Elsewhere in domestic cup action, Tammy Abraham starred to help Aston Villa secure a much-needed 3-1 victory over Coventry City at the CBS Arena.

## India’s Fertility Rate Has Fallen Below Replacement Level, Notes EAC-PM Member Sanjeev Sanyal

**New Delhi, Sept. 17:** India must decisively move away from population control as a primary state policy objective, recalibrating its family planning framework to reflect a rapidly shifting national demographic profile, according to Sanjeev Sanyal, a member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM). Sanyal unveiled an insightful new report titled “The Ghost of Population Past: How Population Control Persists in India,” which he co-authored alongside Aakanksha Arora, a director, and Virat Singh, a consultant with the EAC-PM. The comprehensive document issues a clear warning: fertility rates across multiple regions of the country have fallen well below the critical replacement level, raising growing concerns about long-term population ageing and structural demographic changes.

According to the findings, annual live births in India peaked at approximately 29 million in 2001 but have since sharply declined to below 23 million. Despite this drop in births, the overall population continues to grow—a phenomenon driven primarily by “demographic momentum” stemming from India’s relatively young population, alongside rising life expectancy, better healthcare, and improved living standards. “India’s fertility rate is well below the replacement rate and some parts of the country now have East Asian and European fertility levels,” Sanyal emphasized during the report’s release. Regional Disparities and Ageing Economies The report draws on extensive data from



the Sample Registration System (SRS) and the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) to highlight stark regional disparities in fertility across various states and union territories.

The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has dropped significantly in several southern and western states, registering at 1.4 in Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, and Maharashtra; 1.5 in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka; 1.3 in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal; 1.6 in Goa; and a low of 1.2 in the national capital, Delhi. Together, these regions boast a median age of roughly 35 years and an average TFR hovering around 1.4. This puts their demographic profile much closer to ageing developed economies like China, South Korea, and the United States rather than India’s broader national median age of 30. Policy Mismatch and Historical Parallels The authors caution that population-control measures remain deeply embedded across various bureaucratic and govern-

ment policies, creating an ironic policy disconnect as certain states now grapple with low fertility and begin looking for ways to encourage population growth. Drawing international comparisons, the report points to China as a cautionary tale, where strict population-control measures remained legally and structurally enforced long after their negative demographic consequences became apparent.

The EAC-PM report warns that India risks walking into similar pressures if policy frameworks tailored for an era of unchecked population expansion remain unchanged. Sanyal carefully clarified that the report does not advocate against family planning initiatives centered on maternal health, safe birth spacing, or personal reproductive choice. “Its central argument is that population control should no longer be treated as an objective of state policy, given the country’s declining fertility,” he noted.

## Seven-Goal Masterclass: Clinical Barcelona Thrash Racing Santander



**Barcelona:** Raphinha starred with a magnificent hat-trick as Barcelona ripped Racing Santander to shreds in a sensational 7-2 demolition in La Liga on Wednesday. Under Hansi Flick, the unstoppable league leaders preserved their 100 percent record with a thumping victory over the promoted visitors, pulling three points clear of arch-rivals Real Madrid at the summit.

Alongside Raphinha’s treble, Joao Cancelo, Gabriel Jesus, and Lamine Yamal also found the back of the net, underlining an electric

fying start to the campaign that has seen the Catalan giants net a staggering 33 goals in just seven games across all competitions. “It’s always important to think you need to improve in some way,” Raphinha told DAZN after the match. “So I’ll never tell you I’m at my best level, because I always try to improve as much as I can and give more to the team... I’m happy for the goals and the win, but we have to keep improving, not just individually, but as a team too.” A Lightning Start in the Rain With dramatic lightning

flashing above the Camp Nou, Barcelona kicked off at a blistering pace. Defender Joao Cancelo broke the deadlock in the eighth minute with a stunning long-range thunderbolt that crashed in off the crossbar to set the tone for the evening.

Dani Olmo came close to doubling the lead before Raphinha was clumsily brought down in the box by Pedro Felipe. The Brazilian forward stepped up and rifled the resulting penalty into the bottom right corner. Though Racing Santander briefly replied when

Maguette Gueye muscled his way through to score a neat finish past goalkeeper Joan Garcia, it offered only temporary relief. Barcelona restored their two-goal cushion when another fierce long-range strike from Cancelo deflected off Asier Villalibre and into the net. Thriving in an advanced role as Barcelona’s central forward, Raphinha soon bagged his second and Barca’s fourth after being neatly played in on goal by Olmo. Teen sensation Lamine Yamal had a chance to add a fifth from the penalty spot after Karim Adeyemi was brought down, but Racing goalkeeper Julien Agirrezabala pulled off a smart save.

Second-Half Fireworks As the rain lashed down heavily at half-time, Barcelona was forced into a change, with reserve goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny replacing Garcia, who appeared to injure himself slipping on the wet turf. Yamal endured a frustrating night despite his best efforts, hitting the post and having a goal disallowed for offside. Racing capitalized briefly when a defensive error by

Szczesny—who was caught trying to dribble out from the back—allowed Yassir Zabiri to tackle him and walk the ball into an empty net. However, Barcelona responded almost instantly. Adeyemi was once again upended in the area, allowing Raphinha to complete his hat-trick from the penalty spot. The treble marked Raphinha’s ninth league goal of the season, extending his lead at the top of the scoring charts. Substituted shortly after, Raphinha watched as his compatriot Gabriel Jesus came off the bench to score the sixth with a sharp, blistering finish into the top corner following a precise assist from Yamal. Yamal finally got the goal his performance deserved late in the match, capping off the 7-2 rout by sweeping home after Adeyemi tore down the left wing. “We knew that when we best managed to get out from the back with the ball we gave it away, and they did us a lot of damage,” conceded Racing’s Aaron Martin. “We know the level they have... we have to continue and forget about this game.”

## Bangladesh Reach Asiad Cricket Semis After Abandoned Quarter-Final



**Nagoya:** The Bangladesh women’s cricket team secured a direct passage to the semifinals of the Asian Games after their quarter-final clash against China was abandoned due to a wet outfield on Thursday. Persistent weather issues and unplayable ground conditions meant the crucial T20 fixture at the Karogi Sports Park in Aichi prefecture’s Nissin city had to be called off without a single ball being bowled, preventing even the toss from taking place. With the knockout fixture washed out, tournament regulations dictated that the higher-ranked side

would progress. Bangladesh, currently positioned 10th in the International Cricket Council’s (ICC) T20I standings, advanced at the expense of China, who sit significantly lower at the 36th spot.

Looking Ahead to the Semifinals With their spot in the final four confirmed, Bangladesh will now turn their attention to the upcoming semifinal showdown scheduled for September 20. They will face the winner of the remaining quarterfinal fixture between defending champions India and hosts Japan, which is set to be played on

Friday. The Harmanpreet Kaur-led Indian side enters the tournament as firm favorites to defend their title in a compact, highly competitive eight-team bracket. For Bangladesh, reaching the semifinals provides a golden opportunity to push for a podium finish, though overcoming the winner of Friday’s match will present a rigorous test of their white-ball credentials. As the weather continues to be monitored across venues in Aichi-Nagoya, teams will be hoping for clear skies as the tournament enters its decisive medal stages over the weekend.

## Diversionsary Tactic”: Congress Hits Back Over UPI Fee Row, Blames Centre for Shifting Focus

**New Delhi, Sept. 17:** The Congress on Thursday fiercely rejected claims that its MPs on the Parliament Standing Committee on Finance supported a fee on high-value UPI payments, accusing the Modi government of making “pathetic” attempts to divert attention from a “gigantic backlash.”

The controversy erupted after government sources claimed Rahul Gandhi’s criticism of the new levy on UPI transactions above Rs 2,000 was unfounded, pointing out that panel members—including Congress MPs P Chidambaram, Manish Tewari, Gaurav Gogoi, Kishori Lal, and K Gopinath—raised no dissent when the report was adopted on August 12. A senior official noted the panel had pressed for a tiered Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) framework. Hitting



back, Gaurav Gogoi asserted that the committee never discussed the specific “UPI tax” proposal announced by the government. “The Department of Finance did not have any specific proposal on ‘UPI tax’ when they met the members,” Gogoi said on X, adding that the policy hurts small merchants while benefiting major American corporations.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh echoed

the sentiment, alleging that the government was attempting to deflect public anger generated by a decision aimed at appeasing US companies. Fellow panel member Manish Tewari also criticized the administration for weaponizing confidential committee proceedings. He clarified that no specific parameters—such as the exact MDR rate, fee amount, or exemption slabs set for the October 15

rollout—were ever brought before the committee. While conceptual debates on funding gaps occurred, characterizing it as explicit support for the current measure is “inaccurate and fallacious,” Tewari stated. According to the standing committee report headed by BJP MP Bhartruhari Mahtab, the panel acknowledged a massive structural gap, noting that the Rs 2,000-crore budgetary allocation for 2026-27 covers a fraction of the industry’s estimated Rs 20,700-crore operational cost. While the committee recognized the need for statutory enablement for calibrated MDR to protect cybersecurity and network infrastructure amid soaring transaction volumes, the Congress has doubled down on demanding a complete rollback of the fee.

## Supreme Court Expresses Shock Over 25 Unnatural Deaths in Manipur Relief Camps, Seeks Chief Secretary Report

**New Delhi, Sept. 17:** Expressing profound shock and serious displeasure over 25 reported unnatural deaths in relief camps housing internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Manipur, the Supreme Court on Thursday directed the state’s Chief Secretary to submit a comprehensive status report. “We direct the Chief Secretary of Manipur to submit a report about all the 25 unnatural deaths reported in the newspapers... along with a post-mortem report identifying the cause and what preventive steps have been taken to avoid the same,” a Bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana stated.

The directive was issued during the hearing of a batch of petitions addressing the ongoing investigation, protection, and rehabilitation of victims affected by the ethnic clashes that broke out in May 2023. The conflict, triggered by opposition to Scheduled Tribes status demands, has claimed over 260 lives and displaced thousands belonging to the Meitei and Kuki communities. During the proceedings, the Central Bureau of Investigation (Investigating Agency/CBI) and Special Investigation



Teams (SITs) updated the court on their probe status. The CBI reported filing chargesheets in 21 cases, with investigations continuing into others, while SITs handling over 3,000 cases across eight districts have filed chargesheets in 301 cases, with trials underway in ten. The apex court has consistently emphasized the need to expedite trials to alleviate the suffering of victims. Previously, the court proposed establishing special fast-track courts in consultation with the High Courts of Manipur and Guwahati to fast-track criminal cases stemming from the ethnic violence. The Supreme

Court directed the Manipur government to extend full cooperation to all investigating agencies and ordered the Union government to compile data on pending investigations.

This information will help the bench precisely determine the number and location of special courts required to deliver justice efficiently. The Chief Secretary’s upcoming report on the relief camp fatalities is expected to shed light on safety protocols, medical care, and accountability measures implemented for displaced citizens residing in state-run shelters.

# Lionel Messi Guides Inter Miami to Campeones Cup Triumph, Reaching Forty-Nine Trophies



**New Delhi:** Lionel Messi added another trophy to his remarkable collection as Inter Miami defeated Cruz Azul 2-0 to win the 2026 Campeones Cup. The Argentine scored his 100th goal for the club and then turned provider, putting his fingerprints all over another Inter Miami trophy. Inter Miami made the breakthrough in the 24th minute through a rather unexpected Suarez-Messi combination. Luis Suarez found himself out on the right and sent a cross into the box, with Messi rising brilliantly to beat his marker and head the ball into the net. The goal was Messi's 100th for Inter Miami in 115 appearances since arriving in 2023. There was something fitting about the milestone too, as the Argentine once again found a way to make himself the centre of attention when a trophy was up for grabs. Messi was

not finished after getting on the score-sheet. In the 81st minute, he whipped in a corner that found Casemiro in space, with the Brazilian making no mistake with his header to double Inter Miami's advantage and put the result beyond doubt. The victory means Inter Miami have now picked up four trophies since Messi's arrival in South Florida. The Leagues Cup came first in 2023, followed by the Supporters' Shield in 2024 and MLS Cup in 2025, before Messi added another winner's medal to the collection with the Campeones Cup. Messi's latest piece of silverware takes his career tally to 49, adding yet another trophy to a collection that has become almost impossible to keep up with. The Campeones Cup may not carry the same weight as a World Cup or Champions League, but it is still another winner's

medal for the Argentine. The trophy came from a competition between the reigning MLS Cup champions and the Liga MX Campeón de Campeones winners. Inter Miami came out on top against Cruz Azul, giving Messi another reason to celebrate in what has already been a trophy-filled spell in South Florida.

Messi remains at the top of the all-time list, with some of the game's biggest names behind him. And the fun part for Miami fans is that Messi's trophy collection with the club is growing too. Since arriving in 2023, he has now helped Inter Miami win the Leagues Cup, Supporters' Shield, MLS Cup and Campeones Cup. Inter Miami may not be running away with MLS at the moment, but their trophy cabinet certainly is not complaining. They sit second in the Eastern Conference with 45 points, nine behind leaders Nashville SC, and now have another cup to show for their campaign. Messi's influence was all over the latest triumph. He scored the opener with a superb header for his 100th Inter Miami goal before setting up Casemiro from a corner for the second, putting his stamp on another final. It has been quite the transformation for Inter Miami since Messi walked through the door. Four trophies later, the Argentine is still finding ways to make the big moments feel rather familiar.

# Asian Games Boxing Medallists Earn Direct Entry Into 2027 World Championships



**New Delhi:** Indian boxers who win medals at the 2026 Asian Games will earn a direct route to next year's World Boxing Championships, which will serve as the first qualifying event for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) announced the selection framework on Wednesday. The federation has drawn up a detailed qualification plan aimed at ensuring India sends the

largest possible contingent to the LA Games. The system consists of four stages and has been designed in line with the qualification pathway formulated by World Boxing and approved by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The 2027 World Boxing Championships will open the qualification process, with the Asian Qualifier in China and two further World Qualifying Tournaments in

2028 completing the pathway. The latter events are scheduled to take place in Italy and Hungary. "Asian Games 2026 medallists will be selected as the main entry in their respective weight categories. The gold medallists of the 10th Elite National Championships shall serve as the reserve entry in that weight category," said the circular issued by BFI this week. Under the BFI's selection criteria,

the gold medallist from the 10th Elite National Championships will be the primary entrant in weight divisions where India does not secure an Asian Games medal. The same rule will apply to Olympic weight categories that are not contested at the Asian Games. There is also a provision for boxers who reach the quota bout stage at the World Championships but fall short of securing an Olympic quota. They will be granted direct access to the Asian Qualifiers. Any remaining places will be decided through ranking-based selection trials involving members of the national camp. Boxers will first have to earn entry into the camp through the specified qualification routes before becoming eligible for the trials. The same selection mechanism will subsequently be used to determine India's entries for the two World Qualifying Tournaments in 2028.

# Raphinha Inspires Barcelona to Historic Seven-Goal Routing of Racing Santander

## Hansi Flick's side seals historic victory

**New Delhi:** Raphinha continued his sensational start to the season with a hat-trick as Barcelona thrashed Racing Santander 7-2 on Wednesday. The Brazilian's latest masterclass helped Barcelona make it seven wins from seven games for the first time in the club's history. Barcelona restored their three-point lead over Real Madrid at the top of LaLiga, with Raphinha once again at the centre of their attacking display. Speaking after the victory, Hansi Flick praised the team's intensity and collective work while stressing that their impressive start will only matter if they can maintain it until the end of the season. "It's always good to start well, but what matters is how you finish. It gives us confidence, and I like the momentum and the intensity," Flick said. "Everyone presses, everyone is involved. How we work as a team is crucial," the Barcelona manager added. Raphinha was substituted after 67 minutes having scored twice from the penalty spot and once from open play. The treble took his tally to 11 goals in all competitions this season, while he had already registered six goals and three assists in his first five LaLiga appearances before Wednesday's game. Barcelona had entered the season with questions over their centre-forward options after Robert Lewandowski and Ferran Torres left, while their pursuit of Julin Alvarez did not materialise. Raphinha has instead flourished in a central role and has become one of the main driving forces behind Flick's prolific attack. The Brazilian had already scored in four of Barcelona's first five league games, including braces against Rayo Vallecano and Valencia, before producing another two-goal display against Feyenoord in the Champions



League. He also provided two assists in the 4-2 win over Levante before his latest hat-trick. Lamine Yamal added a goal and two assists against Santander despite missing a first-half penalty, while Gabriel Jesus also scored after replacing Raphinha. Karim Adeyemi provided an assist, giving Flick another option in an attack that has scored 33 goals across seven matches. Barcelona's attacking numbers have been extraordinary, but their defensive vulnerabilities remain a potential concern. They have conceded five goals across their last three matches, while goalkeeper Joan Garcia was forced off against Santander and Wojciech Szczesny was punished after being caught in possession. Flick, however, continues to trust an aggressive system built around

pressing, a high defensive line and constant attacking pressure. The next test comes against Sevilla on Saturday, with Barcelona looking to extend their perfect LaLiga start. Raphinha starred with a hat-trick as Barcelona defeated Racing Santander 7-2, securing their seventh consecutive win in LaLiga for the first time in club history. His 11 goals this season have been crucial amid center-forward departures. Manager Hansi Flick praised the team's intensity and pressing system but acknowledged defensive concerns after conceding five goals in three games. Lamine Yamal and Gabriel Jesus also contributed, highlighting Barcelona's potent attack as they prepare to face Sevilla, aiming to maintain their perfect start.

# Mohammad Rizwan Challenges Cyber Crime Summons Over Troubled Test Series Tour of England



**New Delhi:** Pakistan wicketkeeper-batter Mohammad Rizwan has moved the Lahore High Court, challenging a summons issued to him by the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) in the aftermath of Pakistan's troubled Test tour of England, according to a report by ESPNcricinfo. Rizwan, who appeared

before the NCCIA in Lahore last week along with fellow batter Imam-ul-Haq, has questioned the basis of the investigation and the agency's jurisdiction to summon him. Both players were reportedly handed multi-page questionnaires seeking information about their travel, financial history and personal and professional details.

Rizwan's petition is understood to have argued that no specific allegation had been made against him. He also sought a halt to the proceedings until the court reaches a decision on his petition. Reports have suggested that the NCCIA inquiry is examining alleged dressing-room leaks and other information connected with Pakistan's England tour, although the precise relationship between that investigation and a separate PCB disciplinary inquiry remains unclear. The controversy follows an extraordinary period for Pakistan cricket in England. Pakistan lost the first Test by an innings and 103 runs before suffering a 194-run defeat at Lord's in the second match. With the team 2-0 down, the PCB made sweeping changes, sending seven players, including

Rizwan and Imam, home and replacing head coach Sarfraz Ahmed ahead of the third Test. Five uncapped players were brought into the squad for the final Test, while Mike Hesson took charge for the match. Pakistan subsequently lost the Edgbaston Test by eight wickets to complete a 3-0 series defeat. Rizwan's own batting returns on the tour were modest, with scores of 12, 41, 7 and 1 across his four innings, although his wicketkeeping continued to be viewed positively. The PCB also launched an internal disciplinary inquiry following reports concerning player discipline and conduct. The board had separately sought explanations from its selection committee over the inclusion of Rizwan and Imam in the West Indies and England squads.

# Hockey India Rejects Pakistan Request For Asian Champions Trophy Venue Change



**New Delhi:** Hockey India secretary general Bhola Nath Singh has claimed that Pakistan's request of changing the venue for the Asian Champions Trophy will not be entertained. Pakistan have approached the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) seeking changes to the arrangements for the 2026 Men's Asian Champions Trophy, which is scheduled to be held in Mohali from October 27. The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) has asked the continental body to either shift the tournament out of India or move all of Pakistan's matches to a neutral venue.

PHF president Mohyuddin Ahmed Wani confirmed the request in an official statement, saying the federation had taken the step after considering the current sensitive relations between

India and Pakistan. The federation also cited concerns over the safety of the Pakistan contingent, with the request aimed at ensuring a secure environment for the players and support staff during the tournament. Speaking to PTI, Bhola Nath said that there will be no change in venue and the Pakistan team will have to travel to India to play in the tournament. "No such request would be entertained.

There will be no change in venue. In the past also Pakistan did this, if they want to play in Asian Champions Trophy they will have to come to India," Bhola Nath told PTI. With Bangladesh and Oman being lined up as the back-up sides, Bhola Nath said one of them will take Pakistan's spot if they refuse to travel to India. "We have two teams in Bangladesh and Oman who can take

Pakistan's place," said Bhola Nath. The latest development comes just hours after a senior Pakistan Hockey Federation official told PTI that the national team had not yet received government clearance to travel to India, contrary to an earlier claim made by Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. Mann had previously announced that Pakistan would participate in the Asian Champions Trophy alongside Hockey India secretary general Bhola Nath Singh. He had also maintained that India's sports policy permitted Pakistani teams to compete in multinational sporting events hosted in the country. Pakistan have previously pulled out of tournaments hosted in India over security concerns.

The team withdrew from the FIH Junior World Cup in Tamil Nadu last year and also opted out of the Asia Cup, citing similar concerns. The 2026 Asian Champions Trophy is set to feature six teams: India, Pakistan, Malaysia, China, Japan and Korea. The Pakistan Hockey Federation requested the Asian Hockey Federation to move or neutralize Pakistan's matches in the 2026 Men's Asian Champions Trophy scheduled in Mohali, citing security concerns amid sensitive India-Pakistan relations. Hockey India secretary general Bhola Nath Singh rejected the request, stating the venue will not change and Pakistan must participate in India or be replaced by Bangladesh or Oman. Pakistan has a history of withdrawing from Indian-hosted tournaments over safety issues. The event will include six teams: India, Pakistan, Malaysia, China, Japan, and Korea.

# At 35, Trap Shooter Kynan Chenai Refuses to Slow Down and Keeps Going

**New Delhi:** Alexander Zverev had just the US Open final, but for a few seconds, he did not know it. The German had been so absorbed in the match against Ben Shelton, so deep into the process of playing the final point, that the result had not quite registered. It was a moment that went viral. Kynan Chenai remembers it for a different reason. For a trap shooter, that is the place you want to be. "You're just numb. You're just going through your process, you're going through what you need to do," Chenai tells IndiaToday.in. In shooting, he explains, the hardest moments are when the mental game begins. One target. One chance. No room for the mind to wander. "When that one target comes, you have to be mentally so strong that you feel nothing." Chenai will be looking for that feeling when he arrives in Japan for the Asian Games. At 35, he is the oldest member of India's men's trap team. Ahvar Rizvi is 26. Shapath Bharadwaj is 23. The previous Asian Games team had included Zoravar Singh Sandhu, who was 46 in 2023, and Prithviraj Tondaiman, who was 36.



Chenai has moved into the senior bracket almost without noticing it. He does not particularly like the idea. "I like to be in my head one of the young ones with them," he says. "So I try to keep up with them as much as I can and try to beat them most of the time." The younger shooters, he says, make sure he cannot take anything for granted. "They're good, so they keep me on my toes also." Then he laughs. "This new generation is coming into the shooting team. I am saying 'new generation', but I'm not that old yet!" Chenai will compete in the men's individual trap, men's team event and mixed team event in Japan. He and Nee-

ru Dhandha will form India's mixed trap pair, while Ahvar and Shapath join him in the men's team. The men's trap team will be defending its Asian Games title. Chenai will also return as the individual bronze medallist from the previous Games. His year has had its share of ups and downs. He shot 119 in qualification at the World Cup in Tangier to finish 13th, just outside the final field. At Lonato, he finished 71st in the individual event after shooting 116. He and Neeru finished 18th in the mixed team event. There has been enough competition around him to make the selection difficult. Chenai knows that as well as anyone.