

Bipin Debbarma of the BJP criticizes Tipra Motha and asserts growing support Tripura ADC Polls

Agartala, Mar 29: In the Damcherra-Kachucherra constituency, Bipin Debbarma, the general secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Tripura and its candidate for the next Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) elections, has intensified his campaign by drawing attention to local development issues and soliciting public support. Debbarma visited Nepaltilla and Kukicharra as part of his door-to-door outreach, where he spoke with locals and assessed problems with civic facilities and infrastructure. He attacked the autonomous district council's existing leadership throughout the campaign, claiming that a number of fundamental development challenges had not been addressed in the previous five years. He accused incumbent MDC Dhirendra Debbarma in particular of not sufficiently addressing public complaints. "Several basic

issues in this constituency still require urgent attention. Residents continue to face difficulties related to road connectivity and drinking water supply," Debbarma said. Expressing confidence ahead of the polls, he claimed that the BJP is witnessing growing support among voters, attributing it to faith in the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha. "There is visible support for the BJP among the people. We are hopeful of forming the next council, and priority will be given to addressing key public issues within a definite time frame," he added. Debbarma outlined that road connectivity, drinking water supply, electricity, and communication infrastructure would remain key focus areas if the BJP comes to power in the council. He further said that voters in the region, having experienced different phases of governance, are now



expecting more effective service delivery and faster development in the ADC areas.

Shivraj Singh Chouhan emphasizes the state's rate of growth

Guwahati, Mar 29: Assam has clearly changed over the years, according to Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who highlighted advancements in infrastructure, security, and new economic potential, particularly its potential as a hub for semiconductors. Speaking while in the state, Chouhan remembered that a previous visit by a parliamentary committee had left major parts of Assam inaccessible because of ongoing security concerns. He claimed that the "atmosphere of fear" that previously limited mobility had now considerably diminished, indicating what he called a more general shift in the state's circumstances. The Union Minister highlighted the quick advancements in connectivity, pointing out that Assam's infrastructure



has advanced significantly in recent years. He emphasized what he described as a new stage of economic and technical development by adding that the state's rise as a possible semiconductor hub represents a change that "no one could have imagined" in the past. Chouhan also launched a political assault on the Congress, claiming that Assam had been negatively impacted by previous choices and methods of governing. He asserted that there had been a plan to transfer

Assam to Pakistan during the time surrounding the Partition, but Gopinath Bordoloi, the state's first chief minister, intervened to stop it. He also attacked former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, claiming that Assam's issues were not sufficiently taken care of at the time. The Union Minister also raised the issue of illegal infiltration, claiming that it had contributed to insecurity and posed challenges to the state's identity and social fabric.

Manipur police catch rebels and confiscate weapons and heroin

Imphal, Mar 29: On March 25 and 26, Manipur Police conducted a number of operations in numerous districts, leading to the arrest of two people connected to narcotics trafficking, an alleged extortionist, and several rebel cadres.

According to police, a sizable cache of weapons, ammo, and drugs was also found. On March 26, Seram Chingloiba Meitei, also known as Tomei or Tom, a 27-year-old active member of the proscribed RPF/PLA, was taken into custody from his home in Khurai Angom Maning Leikai under the Lamlai police station in the Imphal East district. Naorem Johnson Singh, a 20-year-old RPF/PLA cadre from Kakching Wairi Thongam Leikai, was detained by authorities that same day at the Kakching police station.



He is charged with engaging in extortion. During the operation, a cell phone was confiscated. Security forces arrested Jaminlen Haoikip, a member of the Kuki National Front, in Churachandpur, recovering a 9 mm pistol from him.

Additional search operations uncovered numerous arms, including rifles and pistols, in various locations. Notably, from Gamdai village, three

bolt-action rifles and two 9 mm pistols were seized. Further recoveries in Imphal East included a .22 pistol, a mortar bomb, and other military items. On March 26, two individuals were apprehended in Bishnupur, with 1.7 kg of heroin and several mobile phones seized. These actions are part of a broader initiative to combat insurgency and drug trafficking in the region.

In Brief

52 bunkers razed in Ukhrul

Imphal: Security personnel in Manipur engaged in a brief firefight with suspected Kuki militants in Churachandpur district, resulting in the recovery of various weapons, including a 4 kg IED bomb, rifles, and grenades. The encounter began around 11:40 pm when militants opened fire, prompting an immediate response from security forces. No casualties were reported. Searches on March 26 yielded additional munitions in areas under the Churachandpur police station. Concurrently, forces dismantled 52 illegal bunkers in Ukhrul district as part of ongoing operations against militant positions amid ongoing ethnic conflicts. Authorities have urged civilians to verify information and avoid spreading rumors, highlighting the continued threats in the region as intelligence-led sweeps are intensified against insurgent hideouts.

Assam Rifles Seizes Heroin Worth Rs 6.5 Lakh in Mizoram

Aizawl: Assam Rifles troops conducted a coordinated operation with the Excise & Narcotics Department in Zuangtui, Aizawl, on March 15, 2026, resulting in the seizure of 82 grams of suspected Heroin No. 4, valued at approximately ₹ 6.50 lakhs. One individual, Mr. Lal-lungmuana, was apprehended and taken into custody. The narcotics and the arrested individual have been handed over to the Excise and Narcotics Department for further investigation and legal action. Authorities stated that such operations are part of ongoing efforts to combat drug trafficking in the region.

Arrest Three in Separate Child Sexual Assault Cases

Itanagar: Police in Arunachal Pradesh arrested three suspects in two sexual assault cases involving minor girls. One arrest occurred in East Kameng district following a complaint on March 19, which led to the apprehension of a suspect who had been evading police. In Tawang district, two individuals were arrested for assaulting a nine-year-old girl in 2024, with their arrests made within two hours of a report filed by the victim's parents on March 23. Tawang officials emphasized the importance of public cooperation and assured protection of victim identities under the law.

Life imprisonment for wife's murder

Kohima: A court in Tripura sentenced Mithu Das to life imprisonment for murdering his wife, Sabita, during a domestic dispute. The Additional District and Sessions Judge, P.P. Paul, convicted Das on March 26, 2023, after determining he had subjected his wife to prolonged harassment over their 13-year marriage. The murder occurred on October 19, 2017, when Das allegedly doused Sabita in kerosene and ignited her after an argument at home. She suffered severe burn injuries and died while treated at GBP Hospital. The court concluded the prosecution had proven the charges beyond reasonable doubt and imposed a fine of Rs 20,000, with an additional two months of simple imprisonment if the fine is unpaid.

Meghalaya CM praises PM Modi's fuel duty reduction as crucial comfort amid the situation in West Asia

Shillong, Mar 29: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma expressed gratitude towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Government of India for reducing the central excise duty on petrol and diesel by ₹10 per litre for domestic use, a decision influenced by the escalating situation in West Asia. This initiative aims to provide immediate relief to households and businesses facing rising fuel costs. In a quote retweet of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement, Sangma highlighted the significance of this timely measure for citizens nationwide. Sitharaman elaborated on this step via X (formerly Twitter), emphasizing its role in consumer protection amidst the crisis. Alongside the duty reduction,



the government has introduced export duties of ₹21.5 per litre on diesel and ₹29.5 per litre on aviation turbine fuel (ATF) to support domestic stocks. Analysts project that this duty cut will help alleviate inflationary pressures, potentially leading to a decrease in petrol prices at retail outlets, contingent on state taxes.

No lockdown proposal is being considered, and the rumors are untrue: Center

New Delhi, Mar 29: Hardeep Singh Puri, the Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, refuted reports of a potential nationwide lockdown on Friday, saying that the Indian government is not considering such a proposal. The minister stated on the microblogging platform X that rumors of a lockdown are "completely false" and advised people to ignore false information spreading in the wake of world unrest. "There are no lockdown rumors in India. Let me be clear: the Indian government is not considering any such idea," he continued. He added that the government is keeping a careful eye on events pertaining to energy, supply chains, and critical



commodities in real time, even if the world scenario is still unstable. The minister emphasized readiness, stating that all required steps are being made under Narendra Modi's leadership to guarantee the continuous supply of fuel, energy, and other essential supplies throughout the nation. "The global situation remains in flux... we are fully prepared to handle emerging challenges," he added, emphasising India's resilience in dealing with international crises. Calling for public cooperation, the minister urged people to remain calm and responsible, warning that attempts to spread rumours and create panic are harmful and irresponsible.

AIUDF loses ground in Bongaigaon, Assam Over 500 leaders join Congress



Guwahati, Mar 29: Assam's Bongaigaon district is experiencing a significant decline in the organizational strength of the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), particularly in the Srijangram Gaon Panchayat, traditionally a stronghold for the party. In a notable political shift, over 500 AIUDF leaders and workers from Merer Char Panchayat have defected to the Congress, indicating a drastic change in local political dynamics ahead of elections. Reports suggest that Merer Char is approaching a state of "zero-AIUDF presence," with numerous grassroots workers changing their allegiance recently. This discontent within the AIUDF is reportedly fueled by allegations of a covert agreement between AIUDF leader Badruddin Ajmal and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, with several defectors citing a betrayal of political trust as a primary reason for their departure. In contrast, Congress officials claim to be benefiting from their outreach strategies and assert that workers from various political backgrounds are increasingly joining their ranks across the region. The mass joining event occurred on March 26 during the launch of Congress candidate Nurul Islam's election campaign office in Kushbari, attracting a large audience and being presented by party leaders as an indication of growing grassroots support.

The opposition is "completely destroyed," and the BJP is expected to achieve a "historic result"

Guwahati, Mar 29: The Bharatiya Janata Party is feeling quite confident after Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma predicted the party would win the forthcoming Assembly elections handily, citing organizational momentum and strong public support. In an interview with reporters, Sarma cited the reaction to the party's outreach initiative, stating that "a large number of people came and blessed us during the Vijay Sankalp Yatra." The BJP anticipates a "historic result" in its favor, he continued. Additionally, the Chief Minister

intensified his criticism of political rivals, especially Badruddin Ajmal of the All India United Democratic Front. Sarma added that the BJP has "completely destroyed the power of the enemies of Assam" and that "next time, I will end the remaining as well" in a harsh statement. Additionally, the Chief Minister intensified his criticism of political rivals, especially Badruddin Ajmal of the All India United Democratic Front. Sarma added that the BJP has "completely destroyed the power of the enemies of Assam" and that "next time, I will

end the remaining as well" in a harsh statement. Sarma asserted a day earlier that support for the party is widespread among indigenous people and that the state has had a "complete turnaround" during BJP leadership. According to him, "people are seeing a new Assam today, based on our strong culture and heritage." He went on to say that "no local indigenous Indian people will vote for Congress" and that "people, except Bangladeshi infiltrators, are with the BJP." In another pointed remark targeting the opposition, Sarma

said, "Congress can't form its government in India; it can form it in Pakistan." The comments come amid intensifying political exchanges ahead of the high-stakes election, which will see the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance take on the Indian National Congress for control of the 126-member Assembly. Sarma, who will contest from the Jalukbari constituency, is seeking to lead the BJP to a third consecutive term in the state. The Congress, meanwhile, is aiming to regain power after years in opposition. Polling for all 126 constituencies



is scheduled for 9 April, with counting of votes set for 4 May, according to the Election Commission of India.

NE/EAST

Prior to the TTAADC elections, Bipin Debbarma submits a nomination and targets Tipra Motha

Agartala, Mar 29: Bipin Debbarma, the general secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Tripura, filed his nomination from the Damcherra-Kachucherra constituency in Dhalai district in a major political move ahead of the April 12 elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council. He outlined a campaign centered on employment, digital governance, and political change. Speaking at a sizable gathering, Debbarma presented himself as a grassroots leader and asked voters to elect him as a dedicated public servant and to view him as a “son, brother, and family member.” He called the impending elections a “historic opportunity” to reshape the area. Debbarma launched a scathing attack on the Tipra Motha Party,



claiming that during the previous five years, the constituency had seen a “reign of terror and conspiracy” and that the current administration was trying to sabotage communal harmony. He also noted that people are “aware and educated,” demonstrating a willingness to change, and he commended the electorate for keeping

the peace.

He outlined the BJP’s agenda, stating that within five years, a “triple-engine” administration would prioritize young employment and seek to enact the 125th Constitutional Amendment in the TTAADC.

He also proposed the introduction of digital governance mechanisms to improve transparency

in key sectors such as water supply and education through zonal communication platforms. Positioning his candidacy around governance and service delivery, Debbarma is aiming to consolidate BJP’s traditional support base while reaching out to voters dissatisfied with the current leadership in the council.

Nagaland MP supports the foothills road project and explains compensation claims

Kohima, Mar 29: S. Supongmeren Jamir, the MP for Nagaland, has refuted social media claims about compensation for homes impacted by the proposed Foothills Road, calling them “baseless and misleading.” In response to reports casting doubt on the legitimacy of a No Objection Certificate (NOC) granted by 14 tribal Hohos, the MP stated that stakeholders were confused by the internet concerns.

Demands to declare the NOC “null and void” were being repeated without confirmed information, according to the statement. Concerning compensation, the MP clarified that stories implying that payments for “fully damaged property” would only be paid following Ministry of Road Transport and Highways approval were untrue. The statement rejected the allegations, calling them “totally baseless and misleading.” The Foothills Road has been positioned as a major infrastructure project with the goal of enhancing connectivity and boosting economic activity throughout the state. It is intended to be a



part of a Trans-Nagaland Highway network.

The statement claims that in order to get permission to upgrade the road into a National Highway, the Nagaland government has already submitted Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) to the Center. At an estimated cost of approximately ₹3,284 crore, the proposed project is anticipated to greatly enhance transportation connections throughout foothill districts, which presently struggle with connectivity. Emphasising the need to “restore the confidence of all stakeholders”, the statement urged authorities to initiate dialogue and build consensus.

Himanta Biswa Sarma targets Gaurav Gogoi and the Congress while campaigning in Sarthebari

Guwahati, Mar 29: Himanta Biswa Sarma, the chief minister of Assam, supported AGP candidate Dipak Kumar Das on Thursday by attending a Bijay Sankalp Sabha in Sarthebari, Barpeta district. Speaking to the crowd, the Chief Minister expressed optimism that the BJP-AGP combination would win the Barpeta seat. “We will undoubtedly win the Barpeta constituency.

Speaking to the media, Sarma stated, “The BJP’s victory in the past has demonstrated this, and either the BJP or the AGP will win this time too.” Sar-

ma expressed his “unhappiness” about the Congress candidate’s nomination being rejected. “Who will you compete with in a war if there is no competitor?” he said. Sarma attacked Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi sharply, criticizing Gogoi’s idea of a “Notun Bor Axom.” He claimed that the Congress leader was making false allusions to historical personalities and Vaishnavite saints, and that he was trying to “sacrifice Assam’s history and culture.” Barpeta residents, according to Sarma, were aware of these “facts” and would not be duped. The



Chief Minister also claimed that Gogoi’s remarks suggested a readiness to accept

illegal immigration, asserting that such a vision would endanger Assam’s people,

culture, temples, and satras. “This kind of ‘Bor Axom’ is not necessary,” he de-

clared. Referring to Barpeta Medical College, Sarma stated that its name had already been changed and claimed that Gogoi “would have to be born seven times” to change it again. He also asserted that more Congress leaders were willing to join the BJP in the coming days. Sarma urged people to work together for Assam, alleging that Congress policies could harm the state’s cultural identity. The campaign meeting witnessed participation from party workers and supporters from across Sarthebari and adjoining area.

AIUDF loses ground in Bongaigaon, Assam

Guwahati, Mar 29: Assam’s Bongaigaon district is experiencing a significant decline in the organizational strength of the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), particularly in the Srijangram Gaon Panchayat, traditionally a stronghold for the party. In a notable political shift, over 500 AIUDF leaders and workers from Merer Char Panchayat have defected to the Congress, indicating a drastic change in local political dynamics ahead of elections.

Reports suggest that Merer Char is approaching a state of “zero-AIUDF presence,” with numerous grassroots workers changing their allegiance recently. This discontent within the AIUDF is reportedly fueled

by allegations of a covert agreement between AIUDF leader Badruddin Ajmal and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, with several defectors citing a betrayal of political trust as a primary reason for their departure. In contrast, Congress officials claim to be benefiting from their outreach strategies and assert that workers from various political backgrounds are increasingly joining their ranks across the region. The mass joining event occurred on March 26 during the launch of Congress candidate Nurul Islam’s election campaign office in Kushbari, attracting a large audience and being presented by party leaders as an indication of growing grassroots support.

Tripura Assembly Passes Dhanvantari Skill University Bill

Agartala, Mar 29: Despite a joint walk-out by the opposition CPI(M) and Congress, who voiced serious concerns about



the legitimacy and experience of the organization behind the proposal, the Tripura Legislative Assembly on Monday approved a bill to create a new private university in the state.

On the House floor, the Treasury Benches and Opposition members engaged in intense debate before the Dhanvantari Skill University, Tripura Bill was approved. The NVK Skill Foundation Trust, based in New Delhi, has planned to establish a technologically advanced, knowledge-driven Dhanvantari Skill University in Agartala. According to the Bill’s statement of objects and reasons, the university is intended to offer programmes across a wide range of disci-

plines — including Science, Technology, Management, Social Sciences, Law, Nursing, Paramedical Sciences, Pharmacy, Hospitality and Tourism, Tribal Affairs, Sports, Skill Development, Fine Arts, Design, and Performing Arts. Leader of the Opposition Jitendra Chaudhury — who also serves as CPI(M)’s Tripura state secretary — and Congress MLA and former minister Sudip Roy Barman led the charge against the Bill. Both leaders criticized the NVK Skill Foundation Trust for lacking the necessary experience and strength to operate a higher educational institution. Chaudhury highlighted loopholes in the Bill, warning that inadequately regulated private universities could harm students.

Phase II of the Nagaland budget session begins; CM Rio will present the budget

Kohima, Mar 29: The Nagaland Assembly’s second phase of the budget session is slated to start on March 26. The presentation of the state budget and other important financial matters will take place across two days. The Assembly session is being held in two stages for the first time. The first phase took place between March 2 and 12. The Assembly secretariat notes that the activities on Thursday will feature a review of receipts and spending patterns, presentations of Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) reports, and discussions on pressing public issues. The House will also consider recommendations to regularize excess spending for 2018–19 and 2019–20, as well as supplemental grant



requests for 2025–26. Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, who also holds the finance portfolio, will present

the state budget for 2026–27 on the same day. On Friday, members will hold a general discussion on the

budget, followed by voting on supplementary demands and passage of appropriation bills. The Assembly will also deliberate and vote on demands for grants for 2026–27. Speaker Sharingain Longkumer is expected to announce the constitution of committees and the panel of chairpersons before adjourning the session sine die. The session assumes significance as it is the first after the tripartite agreement on the Frontier Nagaland Territory Authority (FNTA) involving the Centre, the state government, and the Eastern Nagaland People’s Organisation.

Earlier, on March 3, Rio had informed the House that the government would introduce the FNTA Bill during the ongoing session.

68 candidates submit candidacy for municipal elections in Aizawl

Aizawl, Mar 29: Officials reported on March 26 that 68 candidates, including 28 women, from four major political parties have submitted their nominations to the Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) for the next elections. The 19-member civic body will hold polling on April 21 and vote counting on April 27.

Election officials report that the Indian National Congress, the main opposition Mizo National Front (MNF), and the ruling Zoram People’s Movement (ZPM) have each fielded 19 candidates. Eleven candidates have been nominated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Wednesday marked the end of the nomination



process. On March 27, nomination papers will be scrutinized, and the deadline for withdrawing a candidacy is March 30. Officials said over 2.37 lakh voters, including 1.28 lakh women, are eligible to cast their votes in the AMC elections. The municipal corporation comprises 19 wards,

of which six are reserved for women. The remaining 13 wards are open to candidates of all genders. In the previous AMC elections held in February 2021, the MNF secured a majority by winning 11 seats, while the ZPM won six and the Congress secured two seats.

President Murmu meets with Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh



Imphal, Mar 29: At a meeting with President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi, Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh gave her an update on the current state of affairs in the northeastern state and the actions his administration is taking to bring stability back. Singh shared information on

the meeting on his official X account, saying he was honored to speak with the President and gave her an update on the state of affairs in Manipur and the coordinated response that is now in progress.

As his government strives to stabilize the state, the Chief Minister reaffirmed that unity, harmony, and peace continue to be its fundamental tenets.

Mizoram train development will increase NE connectivity by connecting with the Kaladan project : Governor

Aizawl, Mar 29: The ongoing railway project in the state includes plans to extend the railway line to southern Mizoram and connect it with the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP) in Myanmar, according to Mizoram Governor General V.K. Singh (retired) on Tuesday. This move is anticipated to drastically change the face of Northeast India. While speaking with a multidisciplinary team from the Ministry of External Affairs’ (MEA) Center for Contemporary China Studies (CCCS), which is currently touring the Northeast, the Governor expressed these statements. He characterized Mizoram as a calm, well-run state with good political stability and no significant intertribal disputes.

He pointed out that Aizawl is now shown on India’s railway map for the first time in its history. The 51.38-km Bairabi (near southern Assam)–Sairang (near Aizawl) rail section was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Aizawl on September 13, 2025. Highlighting devel-



opment initiatives, the Governor spoke about the Central government’s Vibrant Villages Programme, aimed at improving infrastructure in border villages across Northeast India, adding that the initiative is expected to bring substantial progress to these regions. He also commended the

CCCS team for its work and emphasised the importance of understanding local dynamics before making policy decisions, noting that knowing the people is essential to avoid errors in judgment. Describing Mizoram’s economic profile, Governor Singh said the state remains largely ag-

riculture-based and is currently facing a revenue deficit, but is steadily progressing with significant infrastructure development and focused efforts toward overall growth. A Mizoram government official said that the CCCS team, led by Aparna Ray, Joint Secretary (CCCS and PPR), arrived in Mizoram on Monday for a two-day visit. During their interaction at Lok Bhavan, the team shared observations, engaged in discussions, and addressed queries in what was described as a productive exchange. The Centre for Contemporary China Studies (CCCS), a think-tank under the Ministry of External Affairs, conducts research on contemporary China and provides policy inputs to government departments, the official said. A 12-member multidisciplinary team of officers and research analysts from CCCS is currently in Aizawl and other parts of Northeast India from March 9 to 18, to understand ground realities along the India-Myanmar border and gather perspectives from local civil and security administrations.

ECI encourages fearless voting as Assam prepares for elections on April 9

Guwahati, Mar 29:The Election Commission of India (ECI) has increased preparations for the April 9 election in Assam by conducting an online review and training session with senior officials around the state to gauge readiness. To discuss law and order plans and polling logistics, District Election Officers (DEOs), Superintendents of Police (SPs), senior police officials, and other important administrators convened. Elections must be “violence-free, intimidation-free, and inducement-free” in order for voters to participate “without fear or favor in a festive atmosphere,” according to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar’s previous assessment of the state. The ECI claims that district-level planning, including

the availability of guaranteed minimum amenities at polling places, EVM management, staff deployment, seizure actions, and voter awareness programs, was thoroughly evaluated by officials. A thorough examination of law and order readiness was also conducted. To guarantee openness in the voting procedure, explicit guidelines were provided. At the end of voting, Presiding Officers are required to give polling agents signed copies of Form 17C, which is the account of votes recorded. Additionally, they have been instructed to upload voter turnout data to the ECINET app at the conclusion of polling and every two hours. DEOs were instructed by the Commission to make sure that voter information slips and voter guides are delivered



to voters at least five days prior to election day. Voters with visual impairments will receive special accommodations, like as Braille-capable slips.

In order to ensure total neutrality, officials were also instructed to process campaign-related permissions submitted through the Suvidha module within 24 hours

on a “first come, first served” basis. Because of Assam’s topography, safety precautions at riverine polling places were given special attention, along with guidelines to guarantee sufficient rescue and emergency preparations. On April 9, there will be a single phase of voting for all 126 Assembly constituencies. On May 4, the votes will be counted.

IMC bounds will cover Jullang, Chimpu, and neighboring villages

Itanagar expansion plan

Itanagar, Mar 29: In an effort to enhance urban governance, planned development, and civic administration, the Arunachal Pradesh government has suggested a major extension of the Itanagar Municipal Corporation’s territorial authority. The move is being carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Arunachal Pradesh Municipal Corporation Act, 2019 and the Arunachal Pradesh Municipal Act, 2007, which give the state government the authority to change municipal boundaries and incorporate adjacent areas within municipal limits, according to a public notice released by the Commissioner. The notice states that a number of Itanagar’s periphery regions have been designated for inclusion. Chimpu, Lower Chimpu, IAS Colony, Ganga Village, Jullang, Paga Tara, Papu, Tok Village, Hormin Hospital stretch, Paching Village, Sulung Rakap, the Railway



Station Complex area up to Nyigam Colony, Kankar Nallah/Model Village, and Lekhi Village up to Dikrong Bridge are among them. Landowners, locals, and other interested parties in the impacted areas have been asked to express their arguments, concerns, or recommendations about the planned expansion. Within 30 days after the notice’s publication date, written submissions must be sent to the Itanagar Municipal Corporation

Commissioner. The government has clarified that objections received after the stipulated deadline may not be considered. Following the review of all submissions, a final decision will be taken, and a notification altering the municipal limits may be issued in accordance with the law. The notice was issued with the approval of the competent authority, as confirmed by Commissioner Vivek Pandey of the Department of Urban Affairs.

AAP criticizes the Center for the transgender bill



New Delhi, Mar 29: The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill was sharply criticized by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which declared that it will keep fighting for the rights of the transgender population. AAP leaders called the planned revisions a setback for the community and expressed their concerns both within and outside of Parliament. AAP MP Sanjay Singh told the Rajya Sabha that the bill is a “big let-down” for the transgender community and that the government is not doing enough to support them. Speaking at the House, AAP MP Sandeep Pathak declared, “Our voice will continue to rise in support of the transgender community.” Our goal is to create a society that is sensitive and inclusive. Every Indian citizen has the right to dignity, respect, and equal rights. “Does the BJP government now want to humiliate transgender persons by making them stand in queues to verify their identity?” he said, further challenging the government’s intentions. After consulting with the transgender community, Pathak insisted that the bill be referred to a select committee. In the meantime, the Rajya Sabha approved the bill to modify the legislation on the rights and protection of transgender people on Wednesday, following its adoption by the Lok Sabha on Tuesday. The amendment offers graduated penalties according to the degree of harm done to transgender people and suggests removing social orientations from the statute’s purview.

90 unapproved medication combinations are to be reviewed nationwide by India

New Delhi, Mar 29: Ninety fixed-dose combinations (FDCs) that are suspected of being unapproved have been the subject of a nationwide review by the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI), who has asked state and Union Territory regulators to confirm their legal status and take appropriate action. Multivitamins, folic acid preparations, cough syrups, paracetamol-based combos, clotrimazole and betamethasone creams, and diclofenac potassium with dicyclomine hydrochloride tablets are among the frequently used formulations on the list. The action comes after a study of data from the 2025 SUGAM portal revealed that many FDC samples were categorized as “new drugs” without the required central ap-



proval. Such goods cannot be produced or marketed without the Central Licensing Authority’s approval, according to the New Drugs and Clinical Trial Rules, 2019. Regulators have been asked to determine whether any approvals were granted at the state

or UT level and to initiate investigations against manufacturers and marketers found in violation. The presence of unapproved drug combinations in the supply chain has been flagged as a serious public health concern, with authorities pointing to risks arising

from non-compliance with the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. Officials have been instructed to prevent further manufacture, sale and distribution of such drugs and to submit action taken reports at the earliest, as the issue has been given top priority.

PM Modi is urged by Kannan Gopinathan to accept the IAS resignation

New Delhi, Mar 29: Kannan Gopinathan, a former IAS officer who campaigned against the Citizenship Amendment Act and left the civil service in 2019 due to “violation of fundamental rights of people in Jammu and Kashmir,” has asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to accept his resignation. Through an X post, Gopinathan told Modi that he was unable to run in the Kerala polls because the Center had rejected his resignation, even after six and a half years. In October 2025, Gopinathan was granted party membership by AICC general secre-

tary (organization) K.C. Venugopal. Since then, the 40-year-old former bureaucrat has been traveling to several states to voice concerns about fundamental rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir, democracy, and the “victim threat” among the majority. Gopinathan, a resident of Kottayam, was anticipated to compete in the April 9 Assembly elections in Kerala. However, the Congress changed its stance and gave him a ticket to run because the Center was hesitant to accept his resignation.

Gopinathan used X on Wednesday to draw attention to the “harassment”

the Center was subjecting him to.

“Dear PM @narendramodi, I just wanted to let you know that for the past 6.5 years, your administration has refused to accept my resignation. No pay and no release.

This has prevented me from advancing in my career. Additionally, it has kept me from running for office in Kerala. This is nothing more than harassment. “I’ve chosen not to raise my personal issue as I am very well aware the kind of hardships millions are going through under your governance. But blocking my right to resign and take



part in the democratic process is pathetic and petty, whatever my political position is. Stop this pettiness

and direct your lethargic government to process my resignation immediately,” Gopinathan wrote.

Congress attacks foreign policies and criticizes the Modi government



New Delhi, Mar 29: On Thursday, the Congress criticized the Modi government’s characterization of Pakistan as a “dalaal nation” amidst its mediation role in the West Asia conflict, claiming that this reflects failures in India’s diplomacy. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh accused External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar of trying to mask India’s embarrassment and noted Pakistan’s history of terrorism and instability. Ramesh stated that Pakistan, once isolated after the 26/11 attacks, has re-emerged as a relevant diplomatic actor, indicating the shortcomings of Modi’s approach. The Congress party called for a debate in Parliament regarding the West Asia situation, finding the government’s responses to be inadequate.

UP man is killed in a rocket assault in Riyadh, and his family wants compensation

Lucknow, Mar 29: The Government has been asked to provide compensation and a government position for the widow of a 26-year-old man from Uttar Pradesh who was killed in a suspected missile assault in Riyadh. With the help of the district government and the Ministry of External Affairs, Ravi Gopal’s lifeless remains were returned to his hometown of Baghain village in Sitapur on Wednesday from Saudi Arabia. Later in the evening, his final ceremonies were performed. Gopal, who had been employed as a driver in a plastic plant in the Saudi capital since last year, was given a final farewell by a sizable gathering of villagers. In front of family members and municipal authorities, Gopal’s older brother Manmohan Dayal conducted his final ceremonies. He is survived by his wife, parents and a four-year-old son. His wife Ritu remains inconsolable after the incident, family members said. Dayal told PTI that the family is in dire need of financial assistance and has sought a government job for Gopal’s wife to support their livelihood. Local BJP MLA Asha Maurya has assured them of taking prompt steps to address their demands, he said.

The government creates an Inter-Ministerial Group on Middle East Conflict under Rajnath Singh’s leadership

New Delhi, Mar 29: As New Delhi intensifies measures to protect energy supply and economic stability, the Center has established an Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG) headed by Defense Minister Rajnath Singh to keep an eye on developments resulting from the current Middle East crisis. Senior ministers like Home Minister Amit Shah, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, and Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri are among those in the meeting, according to government sources. As the crisis continues to affect international commerce and energy flows, the IMG will evaluate risks across sectors and coordinate actions.

The action comes after a high-level review led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi under the Cabinet Committee on Security, in which the government assessed how the conflict will affect vital industries like supply chains, agricultural, fertilizers, petroleum, power, and shipping. Officials also examined the broader macro-economic outlook and discussed both immediate and long-term mitigation strategies. The government has emphasized maintaining uninterrupted



supplies of essential commodities. Discussions included fertiliser availability for the upcoming kharif season, diversification of import sources for chemicals and petrochemicals, and expansion into new export markets. Coal stocks at power plants were also reviewed, with officials indicating there is no immediate risk of electric-

ity shortages. In parallel, the Centre has introduced a series of tax measures to manage fuel prices amid volatility in global markets. Excise duty on petrol in India has been reduced to Rs 3 per litre, and diesel duty has been cut to zero, while a windfall tax of Rs 21.5 per litre is now imposed on diesel exports.

Meghalaya panel identifies deficiencies at Pahamsyiem Tribal School

Shillong, Mar 29: Following an examination on Wednesday, a legislative panel identified infrastructure deficiencies at the Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) in Pahamsyiem, Nongpoh, raising questions about the facility’s preparedness to run at maximum capacity. The Meghalaya Legislative Assembly’s Committee on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes came to the campus to examine the amenities and gauge operational readiness. Committee chairman and Nongstoin MLA Gabriel Wahlang led the group, which also included member Ampareen Lyngdoh and Nongpoh MLA Mayralborn Syiem. The group was briefed by school officials about early-stage issues, including deficiencies in important facilities. With a number of necessary services still lacking, the girls’ hostel has become a major source of concern. Committee members stated that the visit’s results will be combined into a report and sent to the state government in an effort to prompt action. The panel emphasized that in order to guarantee that the school satisfies the necessary



requirements and operates efficiently, it is imperative to remedy inadequacies at this point.

With classes starting in December 2025, the Pahamsyiem campus is Meghalaya’s first fully operating EMRS, hence the inspection is especially important. Earlier this year, a second school under the program began operations in Samanda, East Garo Hills. The committee indicated that lessons from the Pahamsyiem experience

could shape the rollout of similar residential schools across the state, where expansion plans are underway. Eklavya Model Residential Schools are a central government initiative aimed at providing quality education to Scheduled Tribe students in remote areas. Meghalaya has 38 such schools sanctioned, with an estimated outlay of Rs 1,400 crore, as part of a broader push to improve access to residential schooling in tribal-dominated regions.

North East Chronicle

MARCH 30 2026 VOL 02 NO. 36

Editorial

Commercial LPGs

In response to evolving geopolitical conditions and long-term energy transition goals, the Government of India has announced an increase in the allocation of commercial LPG from 20% to 30% across states and union territories. This decision, outlined in a communication from Neeraj Mittal, Secretary of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, aims to enhance energy security and accelerate the adoption of more sustainable fuels like piped natural gas (PNG). The increase in allocation will manage supply-demand dynamics and drive structural reforms to reduce long-term dependence on LPG, aiming to expand City Gas Distribution (CGD) networks in urban areas. The framework encourages states to implement targeted reforms to qualify for the additional LPG allocation, which are performance-linked incentives promoting proactive policy measures. Key reforms include forming empowered district-level committees to streamline CGD applications and resolve grievances, thereby reducing bureaucratic delays. States can earn additional allocations by issuing deemed permissions for CGD applications within 24 hours and implementing a Dig and Re-store scheme, which allows CGD entities to manage excavation independently, thus minimizing excessive approvals and costs. Moreover, a reform linked to the abolition of annual rental charges for CGD networks aims to enhance the financial viability of gas infrastructure projects. This comprehensive policy approach combines the immediate need for commercial LPG with long-term sustainability goals, promoting the use of cleaner fuels in urban settings and aligning with India's climate action strategy. The initiative also acknowledges the interconnectedness of global energy markets, citing the West Asia situation, and emphasizes the necessity of domestic policy responses to external shocks, thereby aiming to create a resilient energy ecosystem that can better cope with global uncertainties.

Iranian citizens with valid tourist visas are prohibited from entering Australia

Due to worries that travelers might not be allowed to return to Iran, Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke enacted strict new immigration restrictions that will prohibit Iranian tourists from entering Australia for the next six months. About 6,800 Iranians with legitimate tourist visas will be prohibited from entering the country, while some may still be granted special permission. Humanitarian and refugee activists have been even more incensed by the action, criticizing the Albanese government for implementing the “appalling” measures so quickly in March. Burke declared on Wednesday night that all Iranians with tourist visas will be subject to the control determination order for the following six months. The government claimed that this action was in the country’s best interests given the quickly shifting international landscape. “Many visitor visas that were granted prior to the Iranian conflict might not have been granted if they had been applied for now,” Burke stated.

“The government should make thoughtful decisions about long-term stays in Australia rather than relying solely on who made the vacation reservation. “The Australian government is closely monitoring global developments and will adjust settings as required to ensure Australia’s migration system remains orderly, fair and sustainable.”The order only applies to people with a valid tourist visa outside the country. An order can only last for six months before the minister has to apply for it again. The



government said “sympathetic consideration” would be given to the Iranian parents of Australian citizens. Others on tourist visas needing to travel can apply for a permitted travel certificate. Officials for the home affairs department revealed earlier this month there were more than 7,200 temporary visa holders within Iran, with the number of temporary visa holders growing to more than 40,000 across the broader region affected by the conflict.

However, the temporary entry ban will only apply to holders of tourist visas – also known as subclass 600 visas – which totals around 6,800.

Nos Hosseini, spokesperson for the Iranian Women’s Association, said the decision was “disappointing” but not a surprise after

the bill was quickly passed last sitting fortnight. “I think, given the circumstances, it should really be a time of compassion,” she told Guardian Australia.

“As a community, we are grieving . We are under immense stress, and this was not the type of announcement we were expecting to hear.”

The Warringah MP, Zali Steggall, said the “sweeping, unchecked” powers posed serious risks that warranted a further look by parliament. “We are now seeing the real-world impact – thousands of people who followed the rules, paid fees, and made plans in good faith are being left in limbo,” she said. “Invalidating lawfully obtained visas undermines confidence in our entire migration system and

sets a dangerous precedent.”The Greens senator, David Shoebridge, accused the government of pretending to care about the plight of Iranians under the regime to justify support for the US-Israel war, only to later drop them.“Time and time again, it is the Labor party that passes the cruellest laws targeting refugees. One Nation and Liberals may cheer Labor on, but it is Labor pulling the trigger,” he said.“Today’s order puts the lie to the pretence that Labor is supporting the illegal US and Israeli war on Iran to help the Iranian people. They could not care less.”The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre said the government’s decision was a “massive betrayal” and a “breathhtaking moral failure”. “In the moment that people need

safety the most and their country is being torn apart, the Albanese government is slamming the door closed on people from Iran,” Jana Favero, the centre’s deputy chief executive, said.“

This is a cruel move that adds unnecessary trauma and harm.”The temporary visa bans were first revealed hours after Burke had facilitated asylum applications from members of the Iranian women’s football team.“They are welcome to stay in Australia,” Burke told an early morning press conference in Brisbane this month. “They are safe here, and they should feel at home here.”In the end, seven were offered and accepted asylum offers before five changed their minds and returned to Iran. Two remain in Australia.

A city gasping: When will Delhi demand clean air?

I sometimes wonder if the citizens of Delhi are unredeemable stoics. However critical or unsatisfactory the situation may be, and however many times it may recur with unerring regularity, seriously endangering health and the right to life, they largely live with it, merely hoping that next year will be better. I write this in the context of the deadly pollution that is asphyxiating the denizens of our capital city right now. It is an annual nightmare, and yet the threshold of protest of long-suffering citizens never reaches a level that can compel the powers that be to bring about institutional, systemic and enduring change. This is truly perplexing considering the high costs in health and well-being that pollution of this magnitude extracts. Consider the facts. According to the latest analysis, ambient particulate pollution accounted for approximately 17,188 deaths in Delhi in 2023—roughly one in every seven deaths. The numbers are alarming by themselves, but their inadequacy lies in their abstraction—they obscure the stories of individual lungs, of children awakened by coughing fits, of elders gasping

for air. The fine particles (PM2.5 particularly) penetrate deep into the lungs, enter the bloodstream, trigger inflammation, damage blood vessels. The consequence: higher incidence of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, cardiovascular disease, stroke, lung cancer—even digestive and neurological disorders. For children whose lungs are still growing, and brains still wiring, the degraded air means compromised futures.

Studies link pollution exposure to lower reading and maths scores, developmental delays, reduced white-matter brain integrity and earlier cognitive ageing. Scientists estimate that the air in Delhi reduces an average life by almost a decade. A survey found that in Delhi-NCR: 62 per cent of families had someone suffering from burning eyes, 46 per cent runny nose or congestion, 31 per cent breathing difficulties or asthma, and 15 per cent sleep problems—all attributable to pollution. In short, Delhi’s pollution is not an environmental badge of shame solely—it is a public health emergency. The

causes of this crisis are known. We know that as winter approaches, winds weaken, and the resulting inversion layer traps pollutants close to the ground. The city becomes a bowl of stagnation emissions released into the air have no escape route. We know too that emissions from diesel and petrol vehicles powered by ageing engines and weak regulatory enforcement, dust from unending construction, biomass and wasteburning in and around the city, industrial emissions, and the vast crop-residue burning in neighbouring states especially Punjab and Haryana—are all contributing factors. But if the causes are known, why aren’t lasting solutions the goal? Somehow, every year, after the crisis sets in, we have only a well-practised expertise in short-term reactive solutions, when what we need is a co-ordinated inter-state time-bound programme of action, involving measurable targets, periodic audits, penalties, sanctions, judicial oversight, and the full-time contribution of environmental experts. Above all, the realisation must dawn that this is a problem that cannot be tackled by only one state government.

Middle East conflict will damage UK’s economy ‘more than any other’

According to an estimate by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which issued a warning about increasing inflation, the Middle East crisis will harm the UK’s economy more than any other developed country. The OECD predicted that the UK economy would grow by just 0.7% this year, compared to its previous prediction of 1.2% for 2026, in the first significant evaluation of the economic consequences of the strike on Iran by a prominent international think tank. The OECD attributed the downgrading to a lack of momentum going into 2026 as well as the shock of increased oil and gas prices as a result of the US-Israel attacks on Iran. It also noted a weakening of the UK jobs market and a decrease in business investment towards the end of 2025. The OECD stated that it had reduced the UK’s growth in 2026 because it was likely to see more inflation than originally anticipated, highlighting the country’s reliance on foreign commerce and fuel imports. The forecast 0.5 percentage point cut in UK growth compares with expectations of a much more limited reduction in growth for France, Germany and Italy, which were more insulated from spiralling energy prices and are all expected to suffer a more modest hit to growth of 0.2 percentage points. The OECD said the evolving conflict in the Middle East would test the resilience of the global economy, which it said would be unaffected by the spike in oil prices if they began to moderate in the summer. Average global growth was still on track to be 2.9%, as predicted in the last OECD outlook in December. The after-shocks would cut a forecast for 2027



from 3.1% to 3%. “The breadth and duration of the conflict are very uncertain, but a prolonged period of higher energy prices will add markedly to business costs and raise consumer price inflation, with adverse consequences for growth,” it said. Despite concerns over the cost to US consumers of Donald Trump’s war on Iran, the Paris-based organisation said the American economy was likely to grow at a faster rate than previously thought after a ruling by the US supreme court reduced import tariffs and the Iran conflict increased the demand for US oil. The US is forecast to grow by 2% in 2026, up from the 1.7% forecast in December. However, the global economy is in peril from the uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the war, it said, which means there is “a significant downside risk to the outlook [from] persistent disruptions to exports from the Middle East that raise energy prices even further than assumed and aggravate shortages of key commodities.”Such a scenario, or lower than expected returns

from artificial intelligence (AI) investment, could also trigger more extensive repricing in financial markets, weakening demand and raising financial stability risks,” it added. The US and Israel began attacks on Iran almost four weeks ago, sending oil prices soaring from an average of about \$60 a barrel in January to about \$100 this week. Prices climbed sharply after Iran effectively closed the strait of Hormuz – the crucial shipping chokepoint through which travels about 20% of the world’s oil production.

The OECD said that, prior to the conflict, “global growth remained resilient, with activity boosted by strong AI-related investment and production, and supportive financial and fiscal conditions”.

Like the UK, Turkey, Brazil and Mexico, the US will be among the worst hit by rising fuel prices at the pumps, hitting household incomes and business profits, though the broader economy will be largely unscathed. But the decision by the US supreme court to cut US tariffs

and Washington’s status as a net exporter of oil and gas meant the US economy would improve overall this year, expanding by 2%, up from 1.7% in the December forecast. A decline in AI investments next year will be the main reason the US economy could lose momentum, the report said. The US economy will grow by just 1.7% in 2027, down 0.2 percentage points on the December forecast, while the UK and much of Europe will stage a recovery. Officials at the OECD said the projections were conditional “on a technical assumption that the current extent of energy market disruption moderates over time, with oil, gas and fertiliser prices declining gradually from mid-2026 onwards.”On the upside, a surprisingly resilient business sector, an earlier-than-assumed resolution of the conflict in the Middle East that lowers energy prices, or broadening investment in artificial intelligence technologies that yields stronger productivity gains could push growth higher,” it added. Rachel Reeves said the war in Iran meant she would need to go “further to build a stronger, more secure economy”.

The UK chancellor said: “The war in the Middle East is not one that we started, nor is it a war that we have joined. But it is a war that will have an impact on our country.”In response, the government plans to hand more powers to regional mayors, embrace AI and innovation, and establish a closer relationship with the EU to make the UK economy more resilient, she said. Economic growth in the UK last year was 1.3%, according to the OECD, compared with 0.9% in France and 0.4% in Germany.

Crude oil or the “slaughter” of Christians? Why is Trump discussing Nigeria?

On October 31, President Trump, aboard Air Force One heading to Palm Beach, Florida, reacted strongly to a Fox News story claiming an existential threat to Christianity in Nigeria, with thousands of Christians reportedly killed by radical Islamists. Following this, Trump redesignated Nigeria as a “country of particular concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), which mandates annual reviews of religious freedom. He emphasized the severity of the situation, stating the U.S. cannot ignore ongoing atrocities. A week later, Trump escalated his rhetoric, indicating potential military action against Nigerian terrorists, describing it with language that suggested swiftness and aggression. His Defense Secretary, Pete Hegseth, supported these views, asserting that either the Nigerian government acts to protect Christians, or the U.S. will take lethal measures against the perpetrators. While the U.S. has previously designated numerous countries for severe religious violations, Trump’s renewed CPC tagging of Nigeria raises critical questions about whether the Nigerian government, under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, is indeed complicit in the violations cited, particularly with respect to the systemic persecution of Christians.

Tinubu strongly refuted Trump’s claims, asserting Nigeria’s democratic principles and constitutional guarantees of religious liberty. Though Nigeria’s population is roughly split between Muslims and Christians, with significant religious freedoms enshrined in their constitution, Trump’s focus on Nigerian Christians starkly contrasts with the lack of U.S. intervention regarding the systematic targeting of Christians in Pakistan, particularly related to the blasphemy laws that have resulted in mob violence and persecution against Christians there.

This inconsistency highlights possible geopolitical biases influencing American religious freedom policies. Meanwhile, concerns arose regarding the criteria for Nigeria’s designation as a CPC, particularly questioning whether the Nigerian government, headed by Bola Ahmed Tinubu, was complicit in violating Christians’ religious freedoms amidst the violence. Tinubu countered Trump’s claims, asserting Nigeria’s commitment to democracy and religious liberty, and highlighted ongoing engagement with both Christian and Muslim leaders. The situation is further complicated by Nigeria’s multi-religious context, where both Islam and Christianity have significant followings. Trump’s attention to Nigeria sharply contrasts with the longstanding persecution of Christians in Pakistan, where blasphemy laws lead to violence against individuals accused of religious offenses. This discrepancy raises questions about the selective concern in U.S. foreign policy regarding religious freedom. The excerpt discusses two significant issues: Pakistan’s blasphemy laws and terrorism affecting Christians in Nigeria. It begins by addressing Pakistan’s blasphemy laws, particularly Section 295-B and Section 295-C, which enforce harsh penalties, including life imprisonment and death, for offenses against the Holy Quran and the Prophet Muhammad. A notable incident is the brutal mob attack on Lazar Masih, a 74-year-old Christian accused of blasphemy, which resulted in his death. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reported that these laws encourage vigilante justice and rampant violence against suspected blasphemers. They have urged the U.S. government to press Pakistani officials about these human rights violations while reiterating Pakistan’s designation as a “Country of Particular Concern” for egregious religious freedom violations.

The second part focuses on the alarming rise of terrorism in Nigeria, particularly actions by groups like Boko Haram and the Islamic State-West African Province (IS-WAP). Since 2002, terrorism has led to significant civilian casualties, with a reported increase in blasphemy-related violence. Republican representatives have highlighted the purported systematic persecution and killing of Christians, arguing that Nigeria has become one of the deadliest places for Christians globally. Allegations suggest over 7,000 Christians were killed in 2025 alone, with many more displaced.

However, a more comprehensive examination of the data indicates that both Muslims and Christians have suffered due to terrorism, challenging the claims of targeted slaughter of Christians made by some U.S. officials. The figures from independent monitors reveal a more complex reality, where the majority of victims have been Muslims, calling into question the narrative surrounding the persecution of Christians in Nigeria.

HC rejects a request for a CBI investigation into RIL’s illicit gas extraction

Mumbai: A petition for a CBI investigation into Reliance Industries Limited and its chairman and managing director, Mukesh Ambani, for allegedly extracting natural gas illegally from ONGC’s Krishna-Godavari basin fields was rejected by the Bombay High Court on Friday.Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhhar and Justice Suman Shyam’s bench denied relief to petitioner Jitendra Maru, who had requested the filing of a formal complaint alleging fraud, dishonesty, misappropriation, and criminal breach of trust.

There was not yet a copy of the order.According to Maru, RIL reportedly committed a “massive organised fraud” between 2004 and 2013 by illegally obtaining natural gas by drilling sideways from its contractual deep-sea wells into the nearby Oil and Nat-



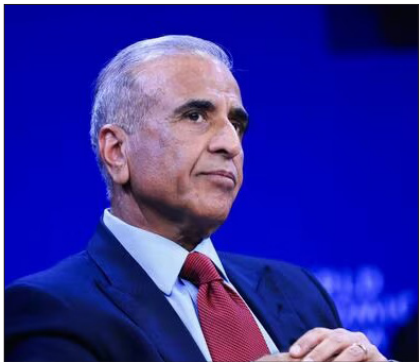
ural Gas Corporation (ONGC) wells. The petition claimed that the ONGC had discovered this alleged unauthorised extraction in 2013 and had reported it to the Government of India. Maru in his plea relied on an independent in-

vestigation conducted by consultants DeGolyer and MacNaughton and also a report submitted by the retired Justice A P Shah Committee which had concluded that RIL had tapped into ONGC’s reserves.

Gopal Vittal will succeed Sunil Bharti Mittal as chairman of Airtel Africa

Mumbai: Airtel Africa announced on Wednesday that Sunil Bharti Mittal will step down as chairman of the board following the company’s annual general meeting in July 2026, marking a change of leadership. With effect from the same date, Gopal Vittal, the executive vice-chairman of Bharti Airtel, has been named non-executive chairman. Sunil Mittal’s son, Shravin Bharti Mittal, will take over as deputy chairman.According to a statement from Airtel Africa, Shravin Mittal’s appointment as deputy chair will guarantee continuity with the founding family and major shareholder of the company, which offers mobile money and telecommunications services in 14 African nations. Since the listing in 2019, Sunil Mittal has been the chair. “As deputy chair, Mittal will ensure continuity with the founding family and significant shareholder, and will be the board’s conduit with the Airtel Money board, on which he serves, and with Airtel

Africa’s headquarters in Dubai, where he is based,” according to the statement. None of the Sunil Mittal’s children are yet on the board of Bharti Airtel, India’s second largest telecom operator.Airtel Africa also observed that Vittal’s appointment is by nomination of the controlling shareholder pursuant to the terms of the relationship agreement dated June 17, 2019 between the company, Bharti Airtel, Airtel Africa Mauritius, the majority shareholder and an indirect subsidiary of Airtel, and Bharti Telecom.Vittal is an established telecom leader who led Bharti Airtel to a life-time high revenue market share in an intensely competitive market and is the current board chair of the GSMA, it added. He was appointed a non-executive director of Airtel Africa in October 2024.“The board acknowledges that Vittal will not be independent on appointment for the purposes of the UK corporate governance code,” the statement added.Commenting on his jour-



ney, Sunil Mittal said, “So I am confident that now is the time for me to step aside as chair. It has been an honour to lead Airtel Africa in this capacity, and I know the company will continue to prosper and to advance the transformative power of connectivity to the millions of customers we serve across 14 African countries,” the telecom industry stalwart said.

Shreehas Tambe is named CEO and MD of Biocon, starting April 1

New Delhi: Shreehas Tambe was named CEO and Managing Director of Biocon Ltd. on Friday, with effect from April 1, 2026. He will oversee the unified platform that includes generics and biosimilars as the first CEO of the integrated Biocon, enhancing the business’s capacity to function at scale and successfully compete in international markets, according to a statement from the company. According to Biocon, Kedar Upadhye has also been named Chief Financial Officer.

As Biocon Biologics Ltd. fully integrates as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Bioc on Ltd., this leadership change contributes to the creation of a streamlined and cohesive organizational structure. The strengthened enterprise is well-positioned to lead in diabetes, obesity, oncology, and immunology through a differentiated portfolio of biosimilars, insulins, complex generics, and peptides, including GLP-1 therapies, the company said. Commenting on the

development, Biocon Ltd Executive Chairperson, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw said the company has consistently grown by anticipating patient needs and building ahead of the curve. “With the integration of our generics and biosimilars businesses, we are creating a uniquely positioned, globally scaled biopharma enterprise,” she said. This leadership transition helps to create a more efficient and unified organizational structure as Biocon Biologics Ltd. fully integrates as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Bioc on Ltd. Mazumdar-Shaw further said, “Shreehas has been at the forefront of this transformation, leading several strategic milestones, including the acquisition and integration of the Viartis biosimilars business and the expansion of our global footprint.” Siddharth Mittal, who was the CEO & Managing Director, will now transition to another leadership role within the Biocon Group, she said, adding that he played “a pivotal role in shaping the company’s growth trajectory”.



A \$20 billion deepwater drive is planned by ONGC

New Delhi: According to The Economic Times, which cited sources, state-run Oil and Natural Gas Corp. (ONGC) is anticipated to spend between \$18 and \$20 billion to rent deepwater drilling rigs for its oil exploration program. In the face of geopolitical unpredictability, India is attempting to boost domestic production and lessen its reliance on imported energy. The tender for the same was floated by the energy exploration and production major last month. The corporation is looking to hire a combination of drillships and semi-submersible rigs for a maximum of five years, according to the article, which cited a senior industry figure.



The official emphasized ONGC’s haste to increase deep-water activities by stating that the company wanted the rigs mobilized within 80 days. The move would be ONGC’s biggest hydrocarbon exploration programme. It comes as part of the Centre’s Samudra Manthan programme that aims to advance deep water exploration in India to enhance the country’s energy security. The pre-bidding meeting for the tender was attended by major domestic and international drilling companies on March 20, the report added. Last year, the company had also said that it had commenced drilling of an ultra-deepwater well in Andaman. “We believe eastern offshore of India hides untapped hydrocarbon potential and ONGC is on a mission to harness it,” it said. Earlier this year, it also floated a tender for a technical support partnership (TSP) with global oil majors for its blocks in the western offshore as a part of its efforts to boost production. Chevron, TotalEnergies, ExxonMobil, and Shell are among the interested players for the partnership. It also has a similar partnership with global oil major BP. The latest tender comes amid an ongoing conflict in West Asia, a region that serves as a major energy supplier to India. The country depends heavily on imports for about 88 per cent of its crude oil needs, 60 per cent of its LPG requirements, and nearly half of its natural gas consumption. Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the energy security concerns in Parliament, saying the country is working to procure crude oil and gas from all available sources. India’s push for deepwater exploration signals a strategic shift towards energy self-reliance in an increasingly volatile global environment.

Ceigall India and Maharashtra Discom MSEDCL enter into a PPA

Mumbai: On Wednesday, Ceigall India said that it and the Maharashtra state utility MSEDCL had inked power purchase agreements for two 337 MW solar projects that will be installed at a cost of ₹1,369 crore. According to an exchange filing from Ceigall India, Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Co. Ltd. (MSEDCL) and its two wholly-owned subsidiaries signed power purchase agreements (PPAs) on March 24.

Under the Mukhyamantri Saur Krushi Vahini Yojana 2.0 (MSKVY 2.0), the agreements cover the construction

of solar photovoltaic power-generating stations with a combined capacity of 337 MW. A 190 MW project would be built in four Maharashtra districts, while a 147 MW project will be built in two districts. The combined EPC value of the projects stands at approximately ₹1,369 crore (inclusive of GST). The execution timeline for the projects is 18 months. Rameek Sehgal, Chairman & Managing Director, Ceigall India Limited, said, “These PPAs mark a decisive step in building a scaled, long-duration renewable energy platform for us.

Cred makes Face ID and fingerprint verification possible for UPI transactions

Mumbai: Cred, a payment platform, announced on Wednesday that its users can now authorize Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transactions using biometric identification methods like Face ID or fingerprints. For UPI payments, this serves as a substitute for conventional PINs (personal identification numbers). According to the business, UPI biometric authentication is available for iOS and Android transactions up to ₹5,000.

According to legal requirements, this feature allows users to safely utilize the authentication mechanism that is enabled on their own devices (iOS and Android). According to a statement from the company, it improves transaction reliability by avoiding instances of erroneous or mistyped PIN and adds a higher layer of security against fraud through PIN exposure. The focus on biometrics comes at a time when multiple market participants have rolled out alternative forms of payment authentication. For instance, global card networks Mastercard and Visa are introducing



passkeys that will allow users to authenticate card payments with face scans or fingerprints, eliminating the need for one-time passwords (OTPs). Companies such as PhonePe and NPCI BHIM Services Limited’s (NBSL) Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) app have also rolled out the biometric method of authentication for users. Biometric authentication, as an alternative to PINs, is expected to enhance security, addressing issues such as forgotten PINs, repeated or weak patterns, and vulnerabilities to screen mirroring exposed through malware attacks. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) mandates that all digital payments should be authenticated by at least two distinct factors of authentication. In the case of UPI, at least one of the factors of authentication is required to be dynamically created or proven, paving the way for biometric authentication rollout. This implies that the proof of possession of the factor, being verified as part of the transaction, remains unique to that particular payment.

Reliance purchases five million barrels of Iranian oil following a US waiver

New Delhi: Days after the US temporarily lifted sanctions on Iranian oil, India’s Reliance Industries, which operates the largest refining facility in the world, bought five million barrels of the oil, according to three people familiar with the situation on Tuesday. According to two of the sources, the National Iranian Oil Co. sold the oil to the Indian refiner. One of them said the crude was priced at a premium of about \$7 a barrel to ICE Brent futures. When the oil will be delivered was not immediately apparent. Iranian oil, which has mostly been purchased by independent Chinese refiners in recent years, is frequently rebranded as coming from another nation. Emails for comment were not answered by Reliance. We were unable to contact NIOC for comment. A 30-day sanctions reprieve for the purchase of Iranian



oil that is already at sea was announced by the Trump administration on Friday. Oil loaded on any vessel, including sanctioned tankers, on or before March 20 and released by April 19 is covered by the waiver. The deal marks India’s first purchase of Iranian oil since the world’s third-biggest oil importer and consumer halted imports from Iran in May 2019, months after Washington reimposed sanctions on Tehran. The purchase comes

after Indian refiners snapped up more than 40 million barrels of Russian crude after the US announced a temporary sanctions waiver this month to ease supply shortages. Other Asian refiners, including Indian state firms, are making checks to see if they can purchase the oil, several sources have said. However, Asia’s top refiner, Sinopec, does not intend to buy Iranian oil, a senior executive at the Chinese state giant said on Monday.

APSEZ establishes the first Port of Refuge in India to improve maritime security

New Delhi: On Friday, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) announced the operationalization of India’s first Port of Refuge (PoR), establishing a formal framework to manage marine crises and assist distressed vessels. The action closes a long-standing vacuum in India’s infrastructure for maritime safety.According to the International Maritime Organization, a Point of Refuge (PoR) is a designated area where ships can seek shelter during emergencies in order to stabilize conditions, save lives, and lessen environmental damage. Major maritime nations frequently have such systems, but until recently, India lacked a formal framework. The nation is trying to improve its disaster response capabilities because it has more than 11,000 kilometers of coastline and is situated along important international shipping lanes.

Gopalpur Port on the east coast and Dighi Port on the west coast have been designated as PoR locations by APSEZ. While Gopalpur Port would service ships in the Bay of Bengal and routes to the Malacca Strait, Dighi Port will facilitate commerce in the Arabian Sea and routes to the Persian Gulf. These facilities will provide services like emergency coordination, firefighting, pollution control, and salvage and wreck disposal. To oversee such operations, skilled personnel and specialized equipment will be used. A tripartite memorandum of un-



derstanding (MoU) between the Maritime Emergency Response Center (MERC), SMIT Salvage, and Royal Boskalis Westminster NV (Boskalis) supports the effort. The collaboration offers coordinated response capabilities and global expertise. It will also support vessels insured under the International Group of Protection and Indemnity (P&I) Clubs.

“This milestone marks a significant step in strengthening India’s maritime safety ecosystem,” said Ashwani Gupta, whole-time director and chief executive officer (CEO) of APSEZ, in a statement. “Ports connect

economies but a Port of Refuge protects lives. By establishing dedicated PoR infrastructure, we are elevating India’s maritime preparedness and setting a new benchmark for world-class coastal safety.” “The adoption of a standardised Port of Refuge framework will enable more coordinated and timely action during maritime incidents, ensuring effective protection of life, cargo, and the coastal environment,” said Shri Shyam Jagannathan, director general (DG) of shipping in the Indian government. “We are strengthening maritime safety and care for the marine environment where it mat-

ters most, and in doing so jointly protect India’s coastline and society. Providing a Port of Refuge to a casualty is critical in a salvage operation to ensure that the vessel and her cargo are dealt with swiftly and professionally and that the affected cargo and fire-fighting water is treated and disposed of in accordance with the applicable legislation,” said Richard Janssen, managing director (MD), SMIT Salvage (Boskalis). On March 1, India granted refuge to the Iranian Navy ship IRIS Lavan at Kochi port after it reported technical issues amid rising Iran-US tensions and sought permission to dock at an Indian port. The vessel’s 183 crew members were given temporary living quarters at naval facilities after docking on March 4. The same day, a United States’ naval submarine sunk another Iranian vessel, IRIS Dena, in international waters near Sri Lanka.

Incidentally, Dena had also been granted refuge by India following a request to do so, but it is not clear why it did not avail of it. A third Iranian warship found refuge in Trincomalee in Sri Lanka. Later, at the Raisina Dialogues held in New Delhi, India’s External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said: “We approached the situation from the point of view of humanity, other than whatever the legal issues were, and I think we did the right thing.”

INTERNATIONAL

Elections in Slovenia are distinguished by allegations



Ljubljana: As Slovenia went to the polls on Sunday, protesters warned of an increase in anti-Romanian sentiment, and many were anticipating the results of a vote that has turned into a referendum on the nation’s treatment of its most marginalized citizens. The right-wing populist and Donald Trump ally Janez Janša squared off against prime minister Robert Golob of the center-left Freedom Movement party on Sunday. A time of political instability in the small EU nation was heralded by preliminary results on Sunday night, which indicated liberals and opposition right-wing populists were tied.

After tallying 97% of the votes, the state election commission reported that both Golob’s and Janša’s parties received slightly more than 28% of the vote.

Allegations of graft and access to public services, including as healthcare, have received a lot of attention in the months preceding the elections. Campaigners have accused both Golob and Janša of scapegoating the nation’s Romany minority, raising issues of social policy. Golob’s government was accused last year of treating Romany people as a security threat, while Janša, a three-time former prime min-

ister, has claimed they benefit from a double standard when it comes to rights and equality. “We Roma are facing two evils here in the election,” said Zvonko Golobič, who heads the Association for the Development of the Roma Community in the south-eastern town of Črnomelj. “So the question is: who is less evil?” Slovenia’s population of about 2.1 million includes an estimated 12,000 Roma. Many are singularly vulnerable: in 2020, Amnesty International said that life expectancy for Roma in Slovenia was 22 years lower than the rest of the population, and infant mortality more than four times higher. Several communities in the country continue to lack access to clean drinking water, electricity and sanitation as well as basic infrastructure and essential services. The election – and the discourse about Roma that has swirled in previous months – has left many worried that the community’s rights will be further eroded, said Haris Tahirović, the president of an umbrella group representing Romany communities across the country. “At this moment Roma are really afraid of who will come to power, what the political options will be, and what will happen after the elections,” he said.

Netanyahu believes his reputation will improve if the Iranian “axis of evil” is destroyed

Jerusalem: Iranian missiles have killed at least 15 people inside Israel during the course of the three-week conflict and injured numerous others, including roughly 200 in nocturnal attacks close to a nuclear facility in the south of the nation, but they have not affected public support for the conflict. According to two war-time polls conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute, over 90% of Jewish Israelis approve the choice to begin a new fight. More than half also wanted the US and Israel to continue attacking Iran until its government is overthrown, despite the frequent wail of air raid sirens, closed schools, cancelled flights, or warnings that the campaign could last weeks. The decision to assault was supported by opposition MPs who put aside their campaigning for the upcoming autumn parliamentary elections. Opposition politicians set aside campaigning for parliamentary elections due this autumn, backing the decision to attack Iran in an almost unanimous display of national unity. Enthusiasm for the war led to rumors within Israel that Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister, may dissolve parliament early in order to take advantage of the United States’ support for the war and the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran. This year’s election will be Israelis’ first opportunity to directly influence their administration since the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led strikes. Netanyahu’s ability to hold onto power following the bloodiest day in Israel’s history shocked both political rivals and allies. Even though nearly every other high-ranking political, military, and intelligence official in charge at the time apologized and resigned, he refused to accept per-

sonal accountability for security lapses that day. But even as he held a fractious coalition together, opinion polls showed that for most of the past two years, support stuck stubbornly below levels that would return him to power. Many Israelis believe that he saw toppling the Iranian regime, or pummelling its military capacities, as his best chance of persuading voters to reconsider his legacy – even though last year’s 12-day war on Iran had only a negligible impact on support. “As far as Netanyahu is concerned, the road to the polling stations runs through Washington and Tehran,” a minister close to Netanyahu told the Haaretz newspaper soon before the war began. “Destroying the Iranian axis of evil is the move that Netanyahu assumed, after 7 October, would rehabilitate his image.”

That consensus prompted questions about Netanyahu’s intentions soon after the first bombs fell on Tehran. In Yedioth Ahro-noth, the newspaper commentator Sima Kadmon asked if the war responded to “a security need or a coalition need”. Her scepticism was not shared by most Israelis, however. When Netanyahu told the country he had attacked Iran to remove an “existential threat”, most people believed him, even if they didn’t change their voting plans, said Dahlia Scheindlin, a Tel Aviv-based public opinion researcher. “One of the most important data points for me is that in June 2025, close to two-thirds of Israelis believed he had taken action for genuine security reasons,” she said. “That makes a difference, given that for two years in the wake of the 7 October attacks, people thought he was taking major strategic decisions



regarding the Gaza war for political reasons.” Political challenges to the war inside Israel have mostly come from Palestinian citizens of the country or outsiders such as Jonathan Shamriz, a first-time candidate. Shamriz’s brother was taken hostage on 7 October 2023, and later shot by Israeli forces in Gaza. He decided to enter politics after founding a grassroots movement for families bereaved in the Hamas-led attacks. “Bottom line, there isn’t an opposition,” he said in a social media post. “Does anyone know when the war will end? Does anyone know why we went into it in the first place? Does anyone ask questions?”

Israeli triumphalism provides a stark contrast with the view of the war from outside the country, where news reports are dominated by fears of regional escalation, spiralling energy prices and the paralysis of sections of the Gulf regional economy built around tourism and safety. In a week that brought an intense focus on the

bombing of a girls’ school in Iran, likely by US forces, that killed at least 175 people, the front page of the Jerusalem Post depicted a female Israeli fighter pilot hand-in-hand with an anonymous Iranian woman.

“Women, Life, Freedom. The Israeli way”, the print read, co-opting the slogan of anti-regime protests that began in 2022. Trump’s shift in stance on foreign intervention, especially regarding airstrikes seen as a campaign for women’s rights, faces skepticism from many Americans, including a majority of both parties. As he mixes threats of increased military involvement with a desire to swiftly conclude the conflict, concerns grow about potential political fallout ahead of the mid-terms. Notably, outgoing National Counterterrorism Center director Joe Kent criticized the war as being initiated under pressure from Israel, warning that declining bipartisan support for Israel could jeopardize its relationship with the

US. He emphasized that American casualties and rising fuel prices could further erode public support for Israel, a situation that could complicate Trump’s political strategy while benefiting Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. Trump’s visit to Israel in May for the Israel prize presents a chance to demonstrate ties with Netanyahu amid a high-stakes election. Netanyahu’s political future is uncertain due to ongoing corruption charges and a national commission investigating the October 7 attacks. Criticism of his leadership includes fears that personal interests may overshadow national security. Despite the war, public trust in Netanyahu’s government remains low, and Israeli voters may face a hung parliament, which could complicate political dynamics. Amid increasing global scrutiny of Israel’s actions in Gaza, the US remains a vital ally, and any conflict with Iran risks damaging this relationship, raising questions about Israel’s long-term survival in the region.

Stock markets fall on Trump’s Iran ultimatum



Washington: Following Donald Trump’s threat to “obliterate” Iran’s power plants unless the Strait of Hormuz is opened, global financial markets fell precipitously on Monday. At the beginning of the week, stock markets in Europe and Asia fell. China’s CSI 300 declined 2.8%, South Korea’s Kospi fell 6.5%, and Japan’s Nikkei index dropped 3.4%. In Europe, the FTSE 100 sank by about 1.5%, Germany’s Dax fell by 1.9%, France’s CAC 40 index fell by 1.5%, and Spain’s Ibex fell by 1.9%.

The US president announced on Saturday that he would give Iran 48 hours, until just before midnight GMT on Monday, to open the strait, which transports

around 25% of the world’s supplies of liquefied natural gas and oil. If the US carries out Trump’s warning, Tehran has threatened to “irreversibly destroy” crucial infrastructure throughout the Middle East, including water supplies. Iranian strikes have essentially closed the strait, causing a worldwide energy crisis that, according to Fatih Birol, chairman of the International Energy Agency, is comparable to the combined impact of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the twin oil shock of the 1970s. Due to the strait’s disruption, the world economy is now preparing for significantly higher oil costs. Goldman Sachs predicts that Brent crude, the worldwide

benchmark, will average \$85 per barrel this year, up from earlier projections of \$77. Oil increased 1.2% on Monday to \$113.34 a barrel, but below.

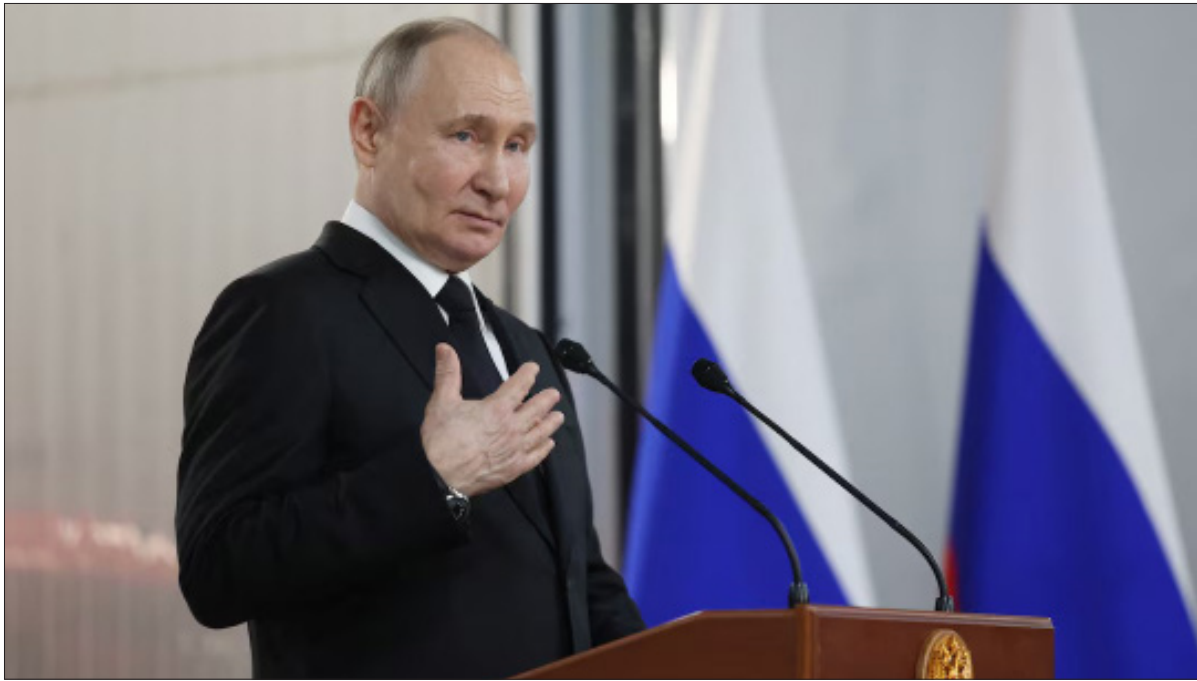
The UK month-ahead gas prices rose 3.1% at 155p a therm, nearly double their levels before the Iran conflict began. The rise in energy prices has spooked investors, with the price of gold also sliding on Monday. Its spot price fell 5.8% to \$4,226.16 an ounce, as the prospect of higher inflation feeds expectations of interest rate hikes.

Gold becomes relatively less appealing when interest rates are elevated, as the metal does not pay a yield. Keir Starmer will hold an emergency Cobra

meeting with his top ministers and the Bank of England governor, Andrew Bailey, on Monday, where they will discuss the economic impact of the crisis in Iran. They will also discuss energy security, supply chain resilience and the international response to the war, the Treasury said in a statement. The conflict in Iran is ramping up pressure on Starmer to announce a support package to help people with their energy bills, which are expected to rise by 20% when an existing price cap covering gas and electricity expires at the end of June. Investors will be watching the bond market closely on Monday, after the 10-year yield – the benchmark for Britain’s borrowing costs – hit 5% last week, the first time since the 2008 financial crisis.

The rise in the yield came after the Bank’s rate-setting committee voted to leave interest rates unchanged at 3.75% on Thursday. The US dollar, which is normally seen as a safe haven asset during volatile periods, rose slightly on Monday. The dollar index, which measures the greenback against a basket of leading currencies, was up 0.2%.

Russia is attempting to “intensify” attacks; US-Ukraine negotiations are over



Moscow: Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the president of Ukraine, stated on Sunday that although Ukraine has suffered significant casualties, the Russian army was trying to “intensify” attacks on the front. Zelenskyy posted on social media following a meeting with Oleksandr Syrsky, the leader of the Ukrainian army, saying, “This week, we have observed attempts by the Russians to intensify their offensive efforts, taking advantage of more favorable weather conditions.” However, Zelenskyy stated that “an increase in their losses has been the only tangible outcome for the Russian army.”

The Russian defense ministry declared earlier on Sunday that its troops had captured Potapivka, a small village in the northern Sumy area of Ukraine that is close to the

Russian border. The negotiations began in Florida on Saturday, but there were no Russian delegates there. For first, they were supposed to be present for the negotiations, which were scheduled to happen in Abu Dhabi. After envoys met in Florida on Sunday, Zelenskyy expressed optimism that the US will continue to work to stop the Russian invasion despite the US focus on attacking Iran. Following the United States’ easing of sanctions on Russian oil, Trump’s negotiator, Steve Witkoff, announced vague progress during the two days of talks. Zelenskyy stated, “It’s obvious that the American side’s main focus at this time is the situation around Iran and in that region, but this war that Russia is waging against Ukraine must also be brought to an end.” Zelenskyy stated in an evening speech that “it’s clear

that the American side’s primary focus at this time is the situation around Iran and in that region, but this war that Russia is waging against Ukraine must also be brought to an end.” Zelenskyy has stated that he has a “very bad feeling” about how the Middle East conflict would affect attempts to resolve the situation in Ukraine and to defend his nation while it is still going on. The president of Ukraine stated that the history between the two countries is “stronger than the emotions of two or three people” in response to the strain on the unique relationship between the US and the UK during the Iran War. He emphasized that Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia. He highlighted that Russian president Vladimir Putin “will want a long war” in the Middle East as it helps weaken Ukraine.

A long-awaited trial into the deadliest train catastrophe in Greece has begun

Athens: A long-awaited trial has commenced regarding Greece’s worst train tragedy, which resulted in 57 fatalities in 2023, shocking the nation. The trial began in Larissa, where 36 individuals face charges related to the collision of a freight and passenger train on February 28, 2023. Over 350 witnesses, including survivors and the victims’ families, are set to testify, highlighting the desperation for justice, as stated by Pavlos Aslanidis, head of the Association of Victims’ Families. The accused include individuals responsible for the management and

safety of the Greek railway, notably the station manager on duty at the time and former employees of the parent company, Ferrovie dello Stato. Critically, both trains operated on the same track for over 10 minutes without triggering alarms, underscoring the unsafe conditions of the railway system despite prior EU funding for safety enhancements.

The trial, anticipated to last several years, involves charges that could lead to life imprisonment for some defendants, although none are currently incarcerated, having been released

from pre-trial detention. Public backlash remains strong, with train workers organizing a 24-hour strike in remembrance and protest. Investigations revealed significant oversights, with no political figures held accountable, leading to additional public dissatisfaction toward the government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis. As the trial unfolds, the ongoing scrutiny emphasizes the systemic failures that led to the tragedy, amplified by media attention on lost evidence shortly after the accident when a bulldozer cleared the site.



Researchers cure spinal fractures by converting body fat into bone



Osaka researchers have discovered that adipose tissue stem cells can heal spinal fractures that resemble those brought on by osteoporosis. Rats were able to regain stronger, healthier spines by transforming these cells into bone-forming clusters and combining them with a substance that rebuilds bone. The method may offer a minimally invasive and safe substitute for treating human bone disorders. Using stem cells taken from adipose tissue, or body fat, researchers at Osaka Metropolitan University have created a potentially effective new technique for fixing spinal fractures. The therapy effectively treated spinal injuries in rats that resembled human fractures caused by osteoporosis. The method may offer a gentle, non-invasive alternative for treating bone problems because these cells are simple to obtain, even from older persons, and put little stress on the body. Bones

weakened by osteoporosis are more brittle and prone to fracture. It is anticipated that over 15 million people would be impacted as Japan’s population ages. Osteoporotic vertebral fractures, or compression fractures of the spine, are the most prevalent type of fracture brought on by osteoporosis. These injuries can result in long-term disability and severely reduce quality of life, highlighting the need for safer and more effective treatments. Researchers at Osaka Metropolitan University have developed a promising new method for repairing spinal fractures using stem cells extracted from adipose tissue, also known as body fat. In animal studies, the treatment successfully healed spinal injuries in rats that mimic osteoporosis-related fractures seen in humans. Because these cells are easy to collect, even from older adults, and cause minimal strain on the body, the technique

could provide a gentle, non-invasive alternative for treating bone diseases. How Fat-Derived Stem Cells Help Rebuild Bone. Stem cells derived from adipose tissue (ADSCs) show strong potential for repairing bone damage. These multipotent cells can develop into various types of tissue, including bone. When ADSCs are cultivated into three-dimensional spherical groups called spheroids, their ability to promote tissue repair increases. Pre-differentiating these spheroids toward bone-forming cells further enhances their effectiveness in stimulating bone regeneration. Led by Graduate School of Medicine student Yuta Sawada and Dr. Shinji Takahashi, the Osaka research team used ADSCs to create bone-differentiated spheroids and combined them with b-tricalcium phosphate, a material commonly used in bone reconstruction. The mixture was applied to rats with spinal fractures, resulting in significant improvements in bone healing and strength. The researchers also observed that genes responsible for bone formation and regeneration became more active after the treatment, suggesting that the approach stimulates the body’s natural healing processes.

Promising Outlook for Future Treatments

“This study has revealed the potential of bone differentiation spheroids using ADSCs for the development of new treatments for spinal fractures,” said Sawada. “Since the cells are obtained from fat, there is little burden on the body, ensuring patient safety.” Dr. Takahashi added, “This simple and effective method can treat even difficult fractures and may accelerate healing. This technique is expected to become a new treatment that helps extend the healthy life of patients.” The findings were published in Bone and Joint Research.

An all-expenses-paid trip to Finland

Don’t we all fantasize about the trips we haven’t planned yet? Most of us are always searching for a moment to relax in between those business calls and deadlines. Imagine spending a week in the happiest nation on earth



instead of that chaos—and for free. Finland, which bills itself as the “happiest country in the world,” invites visitors to experience a little bit of Finnish culture. Indeed, it is a complimentary week-long getaway. This is something you should bookmark if your summer trip plans are still up in the air. Imagine spending leisurely days by the lake, taking in sunsets, the allure of wooden cottages, and the indispensable warmth of a sauna. It sounds lovely but also a bit too wonderful to be true, doesn’t it? Finland is inviting six lucky pairs this June for a seven-day-long holiday to Lakeland for an experience centred on wellbeing, connection, and slowing down.



They are calling it the ‘seven-day challenge’. All you need is a travel partner, an open mind, and a readiness to unwind, and it’s all expenses paid. “In an increasingly hectic world that expects us to be constantly online, chilling like a Finn is about rediscovering balance that many Finns consider a core part of their life. It’s a mindset that’s deeply rooted in Finnish

life: unplugging, slowing down and allowing nature to do its work. We want to share this experience with travellers seeking meaningful, restorative travel and a gentler pace amidst a hectic modern life,” Heli Jimenez, senior director, International Marketing at Business Finland, said in a statement. Finnish Lakeland is Europe’s largest lake district, where you are surrounded by postcard-perfect views. From age-old recipes to lake-fresh bites, the food here is rooted in tradition. You can easily spend your days biking through soft landscapes or wandering through storybook wooden towns.



The itinerary will include spending time in nature, experiencing traditional Finnish saunas, local food, biking, paddleboarding, kayaking, and river rafting and more. Oh, did we mention it would be a road trip, too? Yes, you will have access to a rental car, so make sure at least one of you has a valid driving licence. First, you and your travel partner need to make a video where you introduce yourselves and answer the question: “What do you imagine a Finnish summer holiday in Lakeland looking like?” Next, simply fill out the form and attach your link once you’ve posted the video on Instagram or TikTok. The last date to apply is March 29, 2026. And if you are the lucky winner, the team will directly reach out.

A deep dive into the Greek island of Alonissos

Greek divers surface around me shouting about “megalo” groupers. I’m surrounded by enormous grins above the water and big fish below. A happy place to be. A bunch of us, divers and snorkellers, are hanging around Agios Petros reef off the island of Alonissos, and there’s a reason the groupers are big here. The National Marine Park of Alonissos Northern Sporades, established in 1992, is Greece’s largest working marine protected area (MPA) – two bigger MPAs have just been created, but are not yet operational. The protective measures appear to be working, judging by the size, abundance and diversity of marine life – glassy waters teeming with colourful fish and precious shells make swimming here an absolute dream.

For those who like to go deeper, Alonissos is the site of Greece’s first underwater archaeological park and museum – the impressive Peristera wreck, with its giant cargo of amphorae preserved from the 5th century BC. This one is for certified divers descending with accredited local dive centres. I’m with one of those schools, Ikion Diving, but today we’re doing something more accessible. We’re in the village of Steni Vala for the launch of a citizen science project, the Highly Protected Mediterranean Initiative (much more fun than it sounds). Ikion is partnering with the universities of Thessaloniki and the Aegean to offer free snorkelling and diving trips logging native and alien species. I’m worried about my fish ID skills, but the effervescent biologist Katerina Konsta runs a great briefing and we’re given dive slates with images to mark (imparting a childish delight at playing scientist). Everyone buddies up. I have come solo, so Katerina is stuck with me, and we complete two gentle transects of the reef. It’s a sea of colour: reds and blues, yellows, silver and gold. Friendly little wrasse, painted combers, sizeable parrotfish and 35 salemas accompany us as I try not to double-count them. No sign of invaders – lionfish, rabbitfish, redcoats or bluespotted cornetfish.

Back at the dive centre, we input the data, and I’m gratified to find that my card matches Katerina’s, give or take a grouper. It has been great fun – a very gentle introduction to fieldwork, in what I’m going to declare the best place in the Mediterranean to spot fish. I do not say this lightly. Over several years, I have sailed east to Greece from Gibraltar; my boyfriend, Wolfi, sailed west from Turkey. We both freedived. Neither of us has seen this much life underwater, though he is reminded of particular parts of the Turkish coastline where, as a teenager 20 years ago, he regularly found now-rare giant triton (Charonia tritonis) and giant tun snails (Tonna galea) – a great source of envy as I have never seen either in the wild. With the smug glow of having done something worthwhile, I wander down to the charming harbour, where I find Wolfi soaking up the atmosphere, and I boast about all the groupers I’ve seen. Fish tavernas line the front, but I have a local person’s recommendation, so we’re heading for Tassia’s Cooking (if you can’t get in, Sossinola is also good). Having made friends with so many fish today, I find I just can’t eat one, so I opt for creamy fava bean and vine leaves, followed by moussaka – all homemade, well priced and really good. A five-minute stroll from Steni Vala’s harbour, behind Glyfa beach, we find our night’s accommodation, Ilya Botanic Suites, by a shady olive grove. Calming and compact, these minimalist rooms reflect the landscape; fine-grained terrazzo softened with vertical wooden blinds and plants, and – the best bit – a small plunge pool to sink into after the hard work of counting fish. The next day we head north to Gerakas, where I’m in the water for under a minute when I find a beautiful grouper

snagged on the end of a tangled line. We get some pliers and release the distressed creature; it heads down to the safety of the rocks and we make for the tiny port of Kalamakia for the excellent Margarita fish taverna (owned by a fisher). Our meal of fresh Thunnus alalunga (Alonissos tuna), scorpion fish and lobster comes to about €180 for two with drinks – expensive by Greek standards, but all locally caught and the quality is excellent. Away from the water, Alonissos is surprisingly lush for an Aegean island – Aleppo pines and oaks, maples and olive trees stud the hills. It even boasts a mountain (just, at 475 metres), Kouvouli. At 20km long, the island’s interior is easy to cover over a couple of days (you’re more likely to meet handsome goats than other humans), but, be warned, some roads only loosely resemble that description, and a quad bike is preferable to a car if you don’t want to lose your deposit.

There are plenty of bike trails (and beautiful ravine hikes), but in the searing July heat we opt for shady forest walks and quick stops for clifftop views. And, let’s be honest, on a Greek island in summer, the best days start and finish in the sea. Happily, you can access a range of beaches on both sides of the island for sunrise and sunset views. On the eastern shore is the much-loved Agios Dimitrios, a sweeping triangular stretch of white pebble. It’s organised with cafes and sunbeds, great for families, but for me it’s most stunning from above, that tongue of white plunging like an arrow into turquoise sea. Kokkinokastro is another beautiful beach, and Gialos, with its old windmill perched on the cliffs, offers a wonderfully moody sunset. But my



favourite, hands down, is the small and secluded Kremisma beach. Absolutely beautiful. It’s a short walk from a car park and a slightly steep drop (ignore the frayed rope), and there are no sunbeds, no bars, nothing at all (perhaps literally – it’s said to be nudist-friendly, though personally I wouldn’t recommend stripping, which is not customary in Greece). Off the pebble beach is a rocky little coastline that’s perfect for spotting marine life. Wolfi and I by now are on one baby moray eel each, and I have swooned over a shiny brown cowrie, but he’s ahead on octopus. Competitive, me? The busy little port town of Patitiri, where you will arrive, is home to most residents and offers plenty of accommodation, shopping, beaches, tavernas and a museum (a steep climb makes a morning visit best). To get a sense of why Alonissos is important, visit the monk seal



information centre, run by MOm (the Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk Seal). The marine park was established to protect its population of monk seals (one of the most endangered marine mammals in the world). There are gifts, and footage of seals you won’t see up close (a sobering photo of someone with a nasty bite illustrates another reason you shouldn’t try).



For a night-life, don’t miss the tiny and eclectic Drunk Seal bar, at its best after midnight. Overlooking the port, you will find Kritamo restaurant, with great cocktails and a contemporary spin on Greek cuisine. Down among the throng of the town, the old-school taverna Archipelagos cooks Greek

classics – goat in tomato, stifado – very well. A few kilometres along the coastline, pretty Votsi and Rousoum Gialos harbours are also worth a stroll for dinner. Behind and above Patitiri sits Chora, the historic hill-top “old town”, where locals lived until it was devastated by an earthquake in 1965 (establishing the port as the new capital). Most of the stone houses have since been extensively restored, while several churches and the original Byzantine walls survived. It’s beyond charming – all cobbled alleys crowded with candlelit tavernas and flowering balconies. The views over both coastlines make it ideal for sunset and dinner (evening temperatures help with the steep streets). There’s also a museum where landlubbers can “dive” the Peristera shipwreck, using VR to navigate the piles of amphorae.

Great fun, but you don’t need scuba skills or simulation to find real treasures underwater in Alonissos. With Wolfi and I neck and neck in sightings, I end the week on an absolute high, spotting a stunning giant triton snail in the shallows, followed by a giant tun snail partly buried in the sand. Numbers of both have plummeted in the Mediterranean due to overfishing and shell collectors, so it’s a joy to see them alive and well in Alonissos’s practically pristine waters.

Ilya Botanic Suites in Steni Vala has double suites with a hot tub and garden view for £105 a night. Free scuba diving and snorkelling trips: to take part in a reef check in Alonissos, contact Kostas (info@ikiondiving.gr) or check the website (sporadesdiving.gr). Return ferry tickets to Alonissos from Skiathos, about €45; or from Volos, Thessaly (2.5 hours’ drive from Thessaloniki), or Mantoudi, Evia island (2 hours’ drive from Athens, connected by a bridge), about £80

ENTERTAINMENT

Shalini Pandey wants to work with Ranveer in an action movie

New Delhi: Actor Shalini Pandey stated that she is eager to enter the action genre and mentioned Ranveer Singh as a potential co-star. She also mentioned that Dhurandhar, Singh’s most recent film, is one of her favorites. The 32-year-old talked candidly about her goals as a performer, her wish to experiment with comedy and action, and the types of partners she wants to collaborate with. Shalini Pandey, who has worked in a variety of genres, discussed the kinds of parts she is eager to play in an exclusive interview with India Today. According to the actor, she wants to start acting. I’m telling you, I feel like I want to do a lot of things because I’m so ambitious. I suppose I’d like to be in an action movie because I’ve always loved sports. I do like being active. I do like the excitement of it. Therefore, I truly want to take action,” she stated. Then, since I like these things as an audience, humor is a field that I really want to investigate. Thus, I do believe in action and comedy. Fur-



thermore, it goes without saying that I want to collaborate with actors that inspire me and push me outside of my comfort zone. Because I do feel that if I become comfortable, not that I don’t try to not be too comfortable wherever I am, but I feel as an actor, I want to be pushed. I don’t want to be somewhere where I’m not grow-

ing at all. So, that’s a big portion of it,” the actor continued. “I also think Hrithik Roshan because I’ve grown up seeing him do these things. So, I think, on top of my head, these two are the ones,” she concluded. On the professional front, Shalini made her debut with the 2017 Telugu film Arjun Reddy.

Ektaa Kapoor remembers arguments in the family regarding daring material

New Delhi: Producer Ektaa Kapoor recently said that her parents, Shobha Kapoor and renowned actor Jeetendra Kapoor, disapproved of her participation in the OTT platform ALTT, formerly known as Alt-Balaji. Her father was particularly worried about how the family’s reputation in the industry may be impacted by the content’s audacity. She clarified that there were multiple arguments at home as a result of her choice to pursue a different style of storytelling. The streaming service, which gained notoriety for its daring content targeted at adult audiences, was eventually outlawed by the Indian government in 2025 for breaking obscenity laws. In a conversation at Usha Kakade Productions, Ektaa said that her parents didn’t want her to start ALTT. The producer shared that since she is a Padma Shri recipient and has an image in the industry, she shouldn’t start an app with bold content.

Indian OTT develops its star network Pankaj Tripathi, Jaideep Ahlawat, Vijay Varma

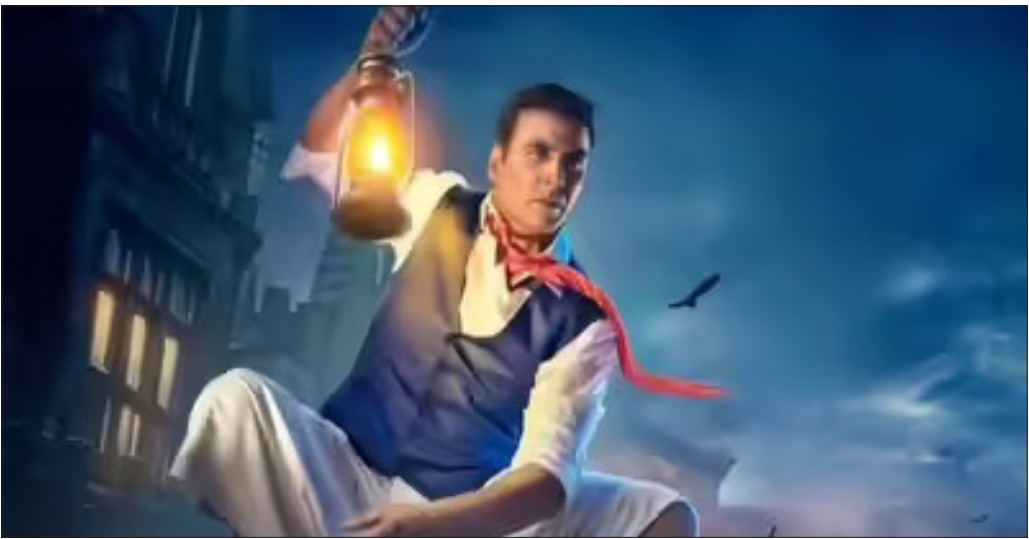
Mumbai: Indian home viewing felt innovative in 2018. With the advent of OTT, Bollywood’s fixation with stars and TV’s soap opera grind was abandoned by Netflix, Prime Video, and Hotstar. They wager on incisive tales about ordinary challenges, regional flavors, and taboos unraveled. The screen was suddenly possessed by actors who had never been successful in multiplexes. Vijay Varma gave Jaane Jaan and Darlings crisp layers, Jaideep Ahlawat brought quiet fire in Paatal Lok, and Pankaj Tripathi commanded the grim realm of Mirzapur. Prominent figures such as Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Manoj Bajpayee, Rajkumar Rao, and Bhumi Pednekar would shortly join what appeared to be an experiment in the absence of box office pressure. Instead of a well-known person, it was all about the narrative drawing in viewers. The atmosphere has changed by 2025–2026. In the face of subscriber at-



trition, platforms are now pursuing profitability while tightening their budgets. Big releases rely on familiar faces: Vijay Varma, Pankaj Tripathi, and Jaideep Ahlawat, who are now marketable stars of the medium, lead ensembles and frequently appear on many platforms. While Manoj Bajpayee and Nawazuddin Siddiqui dominate crime dramas, Bhumi Pednekar leads thrillers such as Daldal and Bhakshak. All these names are undoubtedly accomplished as actors. Importantly, they are now stars of the very system – streaming platforms – that largely created them. However, for every such name that has secured a stature as an actor, many still continue to struggle to crack OTT’s star system. Fresh talents like Zahan Kapoor or Rohit Saraf still break through occasionally, but algorithms and marketing prioritise “known quantities” for instant clicks and retention in a crowded field. Still, he insists OTT offers the most room for new talent: “Even if the main lead is famous, the scale allows for large ensembles... That discovery-driven vibe is still alive because the narrative environment demands new talent,” the actor adds.

Bhooth Bangla by Akshay Kumar has been deemed family-friendly

Mumbai: Actor Akshay Kumar’s horror-comedy Bhooth Bangla has received a UA 16 rating from the Central Board of Film Certification, guaranteeing its place as a mainstream summer release. This certification shows that the movie strikes a balance between its supernatural shocks and a tone that is suitable for a wider audience; yet, because of its eerie themes, viewers under the age of sixteen are encouraged to seek parental assistance. According to Bollywood Hungama, Bhooth Bangla emphasizes situational humor above intense scares by fusing comedy and fantasy with subtle supernatural aspects. This peculiar tone is reflected in the UA 16 rating, which guarantees that the movie will continue to be a viable choice for those looking for a fun cinema experience this summer. The eagerly awaited reunion of Akshay and filmmaker Priyadarshan after a 14-year separation is also marked by Bhooth Bangla. The two last worked together in the political satire Khatta Meetha in 2010. Additionally, they collaborated on comedies including Bhagam Bhag (2006), Garam Masala (2005), and Hera Pheri (2000).The action-thriller Haiwaan, directed by Priyadarshan, is where Akshay will



next be seen. Saif Ali Khan, Saiyami Kher, and other actors play key roles in this Hindi remake of Mohanlal’s 2016 Malayalam film Oppam. In Bhooth Bangla, which is based on black magic, Akshay portrays a magician. Additionally, Akshay and Priyadarshan collaborated on the horror-com-

edy Bhool Bhulaiyaa in 2007. Bhooth Bangla is co-produced by Ekta Kapoor’s Balaji Motion Pictures and Cape of Good Films, Kumar’s production house. The film features a star-studded cast including Paresh Rawal, Tabu, Rajpal Yadav, Wamiqa Gabbi, and Mithila Palkar.

YouTuber Anurag Dobhal, wife Ritika welcome first child

New Delhi: On the auspicious day of Ram Navami (March 27), YouTuber Anurag Dobhal and his wife Ritika Chauhan welcomed their first child. On Saturday, Ritika posted the information on her Instagram page. Ritika shared a picture of the baby’s small feet on her Instagram account, but the pair has not revealed the baby’s gender. “On the divine and auspicious occasion of Ram Navami, God has blessed us with our most precious gift,” the author said. The announcement comes after a challenging few weeks for the YouTuber. Earlier this month, he was involved in a car accident on the Delhi-Meerut Expressway, leading to major injuries. He is currently recovering at a friend’s farmhouse. The crash occurred amid Anurag Dobhal’s ongoing family disputes, with the YouTuber having blamed his family in the past for his current state of depression. Denying Anurag Dobhal’s charges against her and their families, Ritika expressed that the reality differs from what is being portrayed online. She emphasised that neither she nor her family deserved the misunderstanding circulating on social media. She also spoke about the stress and pain she and her unborn baby had endured owing to recent events. Ritika further said that despite the negative publicity, the truth remains unchanged and she promised to clarify her side soon.

Imran Khan denounces the Bollywood trend that promotes “toxic masculinity and misogyny”

Mumbai: With a surprisingly kind, sympathetic on-screen character, Imran Khan made a name for himself in Bollywood, an industry long dominated by hyper-masculine avatars and larger-than-life heroes. Imran, who first appeared in the late 2000s, symbolized a change in the way male heroes could be portrayed and written: they were less combative, more emotionally conscious, and firmly grounded in ordinary life. But soon after Imran stopped acting, that era came to an end. Male characters that flaunt their rage, are always willing to pick up a gun, and will stop at nothing to engage in a deadly fight have taken over movie screens in recent years. Fans of Imran Khan raced to the comments section of his



AMA session on Reddit to voice their grievances. “MANNNNN, where have you been????,” someone commented. I really missed your movies. Feel-good movies have been hard to come by in the mainstream for a long

time. It’s worse now; back then, when movies were truly experimental, there was uniqueness and a charming air to them. “These days, it’s just cash-grab sequels with little to no relevance from their predecessor and actioners

almost every other week, missing the good old genre,” the fan continued. I truly need more of this now; you were the master of this feel-good genre once. In response, Imran Khan said, “Thank you! I believe that there are some emotional themes that are mainly absent from films these days; our tales and characters clearly lack empathy, kindness, and accountability. Adhure Hum Adhure Tum was purposefully created to support these marginalized concepts. The movie is currently under post-production. We intend to release it later this year, but Netflix has the last say over that.”“You were one of the few actors who portrayed a ‘good man’ as calm, kind, and emotionally intelligent,” an admirer commented.

Aditi Rao, Barun Sobti lead Konkona Sensharma’s directorial Khoya Mahal

Mumbai: The creators of the new show are eccentric, enigmatic, and a little disturbing. The first teaser for Welcome to Khoya Mahal has been released, providing an insight into a world where nothing is quite as it seems. The forthcoming Prime Video series, starring Aditi Rao Hydari and Barun Sobti, promises an unusual blend of drama and mystery. Alongside Jaydeep Sarkar, actor-director Konkona Sensharma returns as co-creator and director. As part of Prime Video India’s 2026 slate announcement, the show was revealed. The



spooky charm of Khoya Mahal, a fading heritage hotel managed by estranged half-siblings, is introduced to viewers in the one-minute teaser. It opens with Aditi’s character welcoming guests with a calm, almost de-

ceptive assurance of “peace and tranquillity,” before quickly cutting to glimpses of eccentric characters and an increasingly strange atmosphere. According to the official synopsis, the story follows Kanishk and Kan-

upriya – ex-royals bound by a crumbling inheritance – who are forced to take over their family’s remote hotel. Hoping to escape their circumstances, they devise a risky plan, only to realise that the mansion may have plans of its own.The series also features Aparna Sen, Harish Khanna, Dhruv Sehgal and Master Luca Adhikari in key roles. It is written by Hussain Haidry, Jaydeep Sarkar, Konkona Sensharma and Genesis Alves, and produced by Smriti Jain, Gaurav Mishra, Sensharma and Sarkar under Dramsoc.

Shreya Ghoshal’s first live CD from the All Hearts globe tour will be released



Mumbai: Sony Music India announced on Tuesday that National Award-winning vocalist Shreya Ghoshal will release her debut live album using recordings from her most recent All Hearts tour. The effort, called the All Hearts Tour – Live Album, gathers performances that were captured during the 44-city tour in a number of locations, including Mumbai, London, New York, and Amsterdam. India, North America, the United Kingdom, the Middle

East, Australia, and Europe were all included in the tour. Major worldwide venues like Oakland Arena, Wolf Trap, and OVO Arena Wembley hosted performances as part of the tour. After Lata Mangeshkar, Ghoshal was just the second Indian performer at the Fox Theatre. She is still the only Indian performer to have performed as the main act at the Dolby Theatre. O Saathi Re from Omkara, Deewani Mastani from Bajirao Mastani, Chikni Chameli from Agneepath, and

Samjhawan from Humpty Sharma Ki Dulhania are among the songs on the album’s track list. For me, the All Hearts Tour Live Album holds great significance. I’m sharing concert recordings for the first time so that my audience can experience that feeling and intensity again. Shreya Ghoshal told Variety, “This album is my gift to everyone who has been a part of my journey over the years—my listeners, fans, everyone who attended the tour, and everyone who couldn’t.”“As the name implies, my fans are also All Heart, so I’m giving them something that’s theirs to keep,” she continued. Ghoshal began her musical journey with classical training at the age of four and rose to national prominence after winning the television competition Sa Re Ga Ma. She made her playback debut with Devdas, earning the National Film Award for Best Female Playback Singer. She has since won five National Film Awards. Internationally, Ghoshal has collaborated with artists including Tayc, Saad Lamjarred, Pentatonix and Afroto, with two collaborations featured on Grammy-nominated albums. She currently ranks 53rd on Spotify’s global artist chart. She is also the first Indian artist to be named Spotify’s EQUAL Global Ambassador, an initiative promoting gender equity in music.

Manav Gohil reveals he didn’t audition for movie: Dhurandhar 2

Mumbai: Manav Gohil, who portrayed Sushant Bansal in Dhurandhar and its follow-up Dhurandhar The Revenge, has disclosed that he was not required to try out for the part. Having a conversation with India Manav added today that he was unaware of the film or the director when he accepted the part. For Manav, it was different from Bollywood, where casting frequently necessitates several auditions. “In the first place, it was never really a choice. Mukesh [Chhabra] called to inquire if I had dates while I was on vacation in Mussoorie with my family. “Bangkok jaana hai” was his response when I said “yes.” That was all. No audition was held. “I had no idea what the movie



was or who the director was,” he remarked. “It was strange,” he continued. I was nearly brought in at the last minute. On one hand, I didn’t know if I was right for it, and on the other, they hadn’t seen me test for it. However, things come together in peculiar ways. I’m just counting

my blessings right now.” Aditya Dhar is the director of Dhurandhar The Revenge, which was released on March 19. Ranveer Singh, R Madhavan, Arjun Rampal, Sanjay Dutt, Sara Arjun, and Rakesh Bedi were among the performers. The first part of the film is set in Lyari town of Kara-

chi, an area known for its history of gang wars and violent turf battles, Dhurandhar revolved around covert intelligence operations against the backdrop of geopolitical and terror events like the Kandahar plane hijack, the 2001 Parliament Attack and the 26/11 Mumbai attacks.

Rahul Gandhi abstains from PM Modi’s call for an all-party meeting on the West Asia situation

New Delhi, Mar 29: A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged citizens to prepare for its long-term effects, the Center has convened an all-party conference on Wednesday to tackle the worsening West Asia problem, indicating urgency and an apparent attempt to win over the Opposition. The action comes after Modi made thorough remarks in both Houses of Parliament on Monday and Tuesday, emphasizing that “we must be prepared and united” and drawing comparisons between the consequences of the Covid-19 outbreak and the West Asia war. According to government management, Modi is probably going to chair the meeting. However, Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, harshly denounced the administration, calling the Prime Minister’s remarks in Parliament “irrelevant” and charging him with undermining India’s foreign policy. Rahul insisted that the damage could not be undone and claimed he would miss the all-party conference due to a prearranged program in Kerala, which is headed for elections.

“Our foreign policy is endangered if the PM is compromised. PM Modi’s personal foreign policy is our foreign policy.

Rahul told reporters on the grounds of Parliament, “You can see the results of this... everybody considers this a universal joke.” Rahul responded to the government’s outreach by saying that rather than what he called a “belated consultative exercise,” there should have been a thorough debate. “They have called an all-party meeting; there should be a debate, but you have made a structural mistake. You have destroyed the structure, and that cannot be corrected. The PM cannot do it; I can give it to you in writing. The PM will dowhat America and Israel say,” he said.He



also warned that the impact of the West Asia crisis on India would be far deeper than the government was indicating. Referring to the Prime Minister’s remarks, Rahul said the country should prepare for rising pressure on essential supplies.

“It is the beginning — LPG, petrol, fertiliser, all these would pose a problem. Modiji said a Covid-like time is coming. He has forgotten what had happened then, how many people had died and what kind of tragedies had unfolded,” he said. In a counter move, the Opposition has demanded an all-party meeting over the government’s push to pass a constitutional amendment bill to delink the 2023 Women’s Reservation Act from the forthcoming census.

The government has shown urgency in clearing the amendment in the current session and has sought Opposition support to enable early implementation of one-third reservation for women in legislatures. Union home minister Amit Shah on Monday held meetings in this regard with several Opposition leaders.At a meeting in Parliament on Tuesday morning, Opposition

leaders decided to press the government to first circulate a note detailing the proposed amendments and then hold an all-party meeting on the issue. Rajya Sabha Opposition leader and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge later wrote to the parliamentary affairs minister, urging that the bill should not be rushed through and instead be taken up after the coming round of Assembly elections.

“The all-party meeting on women’s reservation should be called after the Assembly elections are over. The government should not try to use everything to draw political mileage,” a Congress MP said.The government is planning to raise the strength of the Lok Sabha from the present 543 to 816 and reserve one-third of the seats for women, using the 2011 census as the basis. This would require amendments in Parliament because the 2023 Women’s Reservation Act had provided for implementation only after the next census and the subsequent delimitation of constituencies.There was no official word from the government, but sources said the Opposition’s request could be considered.

The cabinet approves a modified UDAN scheme of Rs 28,840 crore to improve regional air connectivity

New Delhi, Mar 29: In a significant effort to improve regional aviation connectivity throughout India, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Modified UDAN project, which will cost Rs 28,840 crore over ten years, from 2026–2027 to 2035–2036. Prime Minister Narendra Modi presided over a Cabinet meeting where the decision was made. The redesigned program, according to the Ministry of Civil Aviation, is to enhance last-mile air access, promote reasonably priced travel, and further integrate underserved and remote areas into the nation’s aviation network.Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told the reporters during the Cabinet meeting that the program will be crucial to carrying out the Prime Minister’s plan to use air connectivity to increase economic growth, tourism, trade, and inclusion in Tier-II and Tier-III cities. In addition to assisting in the development of tourism circuits and supporting the operation of regional aerodromes and airstrips, the Modified UDAN is anticipated to enhance connectivity in isolated, hilly, and

aspirational districts. A major component of the scheme is the development of 100 airports from existing underserved airstrips. Under the proposal, 29 such airstrips will be upgraded. This move is designed to align with the government’s broader aviation expansion plan under the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision. The government also announced support for helicopter services in hilly, remote, and island areas. To improve accessibility in regions with challenging terrain, Viability Gap Funding (VGF) will be provided for 50 helicopter routes over the next decade. In addition, the scheme includes dedicated support for seaplane services and the development of water aerodromes, with the government planning to revive 25 such routes to improve connectivity in difficult geographies. The Cabinet also approved a separate initiative under the modified scheme for the Northeast, under which the government will procure two HAL-built Dornier aircraft and two HAL Dhruv helicopters. These will be operated by Alliance Air to improve air access in the region.

Bayern Munich wins the opening leg of the quarterfinals 3-2 over Manchester United



Manchester: Manchester United lost to Bayern Munich 2-3 at Old Trafford on Wednesday to make its UEFA Women’s Champions League last-eight debut.

Two minutes into the game, Bayern took the lead thanks to a goal from Pernille Harder. Maya Le Tissier’s penalty kick in the twenty-fourth minute gave Unit-

ed an equalizer.

Harder scored her seventh goal in Bayern’s European campaign this season in the 71st. Hanna Lundkvist tied the score for the home team in the 76th minute, and Momoko Tanikawa gave Bayern the lead again in the 84th. After losing to Paris Saint-Germain in qualifying for the 2023–2024 season, United is experiencing Europe for the first time.

Bayern recovered from a 1-7 loss at Barcelona at the start of the league phase to finish fourth and qualify for the quarterfinals for the eighth time in 10 seasons. It is trying to reach its first semifinal since 2020-21.

The Lok Sabha introduced the FCRA Amendment Bill 2026

New Delhi, Mar 29: The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 was introduced in the Lok Sabha to enhance and streamline the FCRA framework for NGOs, trusts, and societies receiving foreign contributions. Key features include the establishment of a Designated Authority to manage foreign funds and assets when an orga-

nization’s registration is canceled or expired, with potential for these assets to shift under permanent government control. The bill enforces automatic cessation of FCRA registration for organizations failing to renew, prohibiting foreign fund access thereafter, and introduces time limits on holding foreign contributions. It also allows central over-



sight of investigations and reduces penalties for violations from five years’ imprisonment to a maximum of one year or fines. Accountability

extends to directors and other management individuals, with government vesting of funds should an organization cease operations.

The Supreme Court criticizes police for their mistakes in a minor rape case

New Delhi, Mar 29: The Gurugram Police and the Child Welfare Committee were criticized by the Supreme Court on Wednesday for their treatment of a rape case involving a four-year-old girl. The court claimed that the survivor was severely traumatized as a result of a “careless and insensitive” investigation. The police seemed “completely unaware” of the Pcoo Act’s restrictions, the court said, casting doubt on the tact of those entrusted with the child’s protection. According to news agency PTI, which cited police, the case involves a four-year-old girl who was allegedly raped at a society in Gurugram Sector 54 around two months ago by two female domestic assistants and their male accomplice. Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant led a bench that noted attempts to downplay the seriousness of the offense and declared that the actions of the police and child welfare



officials had made the kid’s suffering worse. The court issued show-cause notices to police officers and Child Welfare Committee members, established a Special Investigation Team (SIT) led by a female IPS officer, and mandated that all records be turned over. CJI Kant questioned, “Who appointed these CWC members?” after the Supreme Court chastised members of the committee for their callous treatment of the youngster. They pretending that the victim was a

chair or table. They ought to have visited her home. The court said the police made “all-out efforts to protect the accused,” adding that “the entire police force... made all attempts to prove that the child had no proof or that the parents did not make any sense,” even though an offence under the Pcoo Act was apparent. Pulling up investigators for diluting the charges, the bench said, “You say it’s not a case of rape but assault?” and criticised senior officers for attempting to bring the offence

down to a lesser section.“You’re disbelieving a 4-year-old child Shame on them!” the Chief Justice remarked, adding that the family faced “repeated victimisation” and harassment. Justice Joymalya Bagchi called it the “worst form of disrespect to a victim.”The court also flagged lapses by the Child Welfare Committee, saying members “should have gone to her house” instead of subjecting the child to further distress. It raised doubts over their qualifications and sought

explanations, while also questioning the role of the judicial magistrate, including recording the child’s statement in proximity to the accused. Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati informed the bench that the magistrate’s report was still awaited, even as the Gurugram Police Commissioner and investigating officer appeared in court. Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi highlighted inconsistencies, including a doctor changing the medical opinion after initially recording the child’s statement. Ordering a fresh probe, the court constituted a SIT headed by woman IPS officer Nazneen Bhasin and directed that all records be handed over immediately.It barred the existing Gurugram Police team from the investigation and issued show-cause notices to officials and Child Welfare Committee members. The trial will be conducted by a woman judicial officer in a Pcoo court.

Lok Sabha passes a law amending transgender rights despite the opposition’s walkout

New Delhi, Mar 29: The controversial Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha on Tuesday by a voice vote despite the opposition’s walkout. The opposition had requested



additional consultation to address concerns regarding the bill’s exclusionary nature. By delaying the debate on the financial bill until Wednesday, the administration shown exceptional speed in introducing the transgender law—which proposes medical determination of gender identity—for consideration.

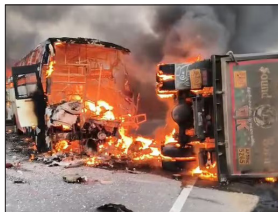
The Opposition had reaffirmed its demand that the transgender measure be referred to a standing committee for additional consultation, citing its hasty passing. “The finance bill is of great importance, and we wish for the finance minister to provide a comprehensive and thorough response to it,” stated Kiren Rijiju, the minister of parliamentary affairs. Despite many of them ironically applying the same rationale to different purposes, party lines were evident in the debate, with all opposition parties opposing the bill and NDA members supporting it. S. Jothimani of Congress began the con-

versation by claiming that the transgender bill was a “regression” rather than a change. “What the Supreme Court and the Constitution have already promised is taken away. The states, who have spent decades educating their own citizens and bureaucracy, will lose their rights as a result of this retrograde policy, she claimed. “It introduced provisions that criminalized so-called forcing someone to present as transgender,” she continued. These provisions are vague and dangerous and open to misuse... They risk targeting families, community networks and civil society organisations — the very spaces that often provide the only support a transgender person has.” Samajwadi Party’s Anand Bhadauria mentioned references to transgender people in the Ramayana and said: “However, the government led by the BJP has failed to uphold the maryada (moral standards) of Lord Ram. You claim that you are introducing this bill specifically for transgender persons. If this bill is indeed being brought forward for their benefit, then why are they out on the streets in protest against it?”

In Andhra, a bus collides with a truck, burning 14 people to death

Amaravathi, Mar 29:

In the Markapuram district of Andhra Pradesh on Thursday morning, a private bus carrying over 37 passengers collided head-on with a tipper truck filled with gravel, resulting in 14 fatalities and 23 injuries. The bus quickly caught fire following the collision, burning the victims to death. According to initial reports, the bus was traveling from Jagityal in Telangana to Kaligiri in the Nellore district when the tragedy occurred. Although the cause of the incident is still unknown, it is being looked into. After learning about the event, the administration moved swiftly, sending out multiple rescue teams. After the fire started, the rescue personnel were able to free a number of individuals who were trapped inside the bus with the assistance of the townspeople. Several passengers who were trapped inside the bus after the fire started were successfully removed by the rescue teams with the assistance of the townspeople, and they were taken to a nearby hospital where they are currently receiving treatment. “23 injured individuals have been brought to the hospital. “Every detail of the incident is being gathered,” Markapuram Superintendent of Police (SP) V Harshavardhan Raju told PTI. The tripper truck’s driver was also hurt and taken to the hospital. Additionally, the rescue crews are collecting information from the victims’ relatives.



Miami Open 2026

Sabalenka sets up another elimination match against Rybakina

New Delhi: World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka and second-ranked Elena Rybakina secured a thrilling Miami Open semifinal on Wednesday. Defending champion Sabalenka defeated powerful 45th-ranked American Hailey Baptiste 6-4, 6-4, while Rybakina defeated fifth-seeded American Jessica Pegula, who finished second to Sabalenka the previous year, 2-6, 6-3, 6-4. They will return on Thursday night to compete for a spot in the final of the prestigious ATP and WTA tournament at Hard Rock Stadium, home of the NFL’s Miami Dolphins.

In January, Rybakina defeated Sabalenka in a thrilling Australian Open final, which was the World No. 1’s sole loss in 2026. However, this month, the Belarusian exacted revenge by winning the Indian Wells final. “We’ve been playing a lot of matches, recently actually, and all of them have been a battle, all of them have been a show,” Sabalenka told the Tennis Channel. “I’m super-excited facing her.”Sabalenka is now two wins away from completing the “Sunshine Double” of Indian Wells and Miami. Baptiste, playing her first WTA 1000 quarterfinal, failed to convert three break points in Sa-



balenka’s first two service games. Sabalenka finally broke Baptiste when the American double-faulted on set point.

The Belarusian gained an early break in the second, but Baptiste broke back and held confidently to level at 4-4. But as she served at 4-5 to stay in the match, the American opened with three straight double faults. Sabalenka pounced, converting her second match point with a blistering return. “She really pushed me,” Sabalenka said. “The rhythm, the heaviness of her shots is incredible. I’m super happy that I was able to hold the pressure and to get the win.” She’ll now face a familiar foe in Rybakina, who shrugged off a slow start to post her fifth straight win over

Pegula — a streak that includes a semifinal victory at the Australian Open and a quarterfinal win at Indian Wells. Pegula, who won last month’s WTA title in Dubai, broke twice to jump to a 4-0 lead and took the opening set in 35 minutes. But Rybakina was finding her rhythm and broke for a 4-2 edge on the way to forcing a third set, gaining control of the decider with an opening break.

“It’s always very difficult matches with Jessica,” said Rybakina, who is seeded third despite rising to No. 2 in the world for the first time this week. “She started playing well, and I was a bit rushing and frustrated, but I’m happy that I managed to bounce back and turn it around in the second set.”In the

men’s draw, 21st-seeded Czech Jiri Lehecka ended the dream run of qualifier Martin Landaluce, beating the 151st-ranked Spaniard 7-6 (7/1), 7-5.Landaluce, 20, saved all four break points he faced in the first set before Lehecka dominated the tiebreaker.He saved two more in the second set before Lehecka finally notched the first break of the match in the final game to seal the win.“Today was super tough,” Lehecka said.“It’s never easy to play against an opponent who has nothing to lose. He played incredibly. He played some unbelievable shots in crucial moments.Lehecka will face either 22nd-seeded American Tommy Paul or 28th-seeded Arthur Fils of France for a place in the final.

How Naveen John’s improbable riding career began

New Delhi: “Every brilliant experiment, like every great work of art, starts with an act of imagination.” Jonah Lehrer. This is arguably the remark that best describes Naveen John’s bike experience. He spent a long time being unfamiliar with the sport of cycling while growing up in Kuwait and exploring shopping centers. In actuality, the motivation for taking up the sport while earning an engineering degree at Purdue University in Indiana was straightforward: to get healthy and enjoy the social side of it. “I discovered the sport of cycling while attending college in the United States. In the United States, collegiate cycling is a competitive, low-pressure sport. In addition to being really unhealthy—I weighed close to 100 kg when I started college—I started riding in the US primarily for social reasons. Naveen told India Today, “Cycling was a way for me to get in shape, get healthy, regain control over my health, and kind of for the social aspect.” And for Naveen, cycling was never his dream. Actually, it wasn’t at all. I never dreamed of riding a bike as a child. I never intended to participate in sports. It started off as a hobby and gradually developed into something more, according to Naveen. However, like many others, the hobby soon began to take over once he experienced the competitive side of riding. Nevertheless, he never considered becoming a national champion. His experience riding a bicycle in the United States pleased him. However, a modest wager—a innocent jest that was meant to stay in his head and never materialize—changed all of that. “The seed for that was planted by a friend of mine in college, who jokingly said it would be cool if I went back home to India and try to win a national title and see how good I am in a country of billion people,” Naveen recalled. Now, he

was left with a choice: pursue his master’s or go for his cycling side quest. The aim remained the same—win one national title and head back to the US. “And so, 2012, I was kind of faced with the decision of finishing my master’s in engineering versus going back home to chase this sort of side quest. I decided to go full in for the side quest and came back to India in 2012 to try and win my national title. Just one national title. It took me about two years to win that first one, but that was the start of my journey in Indian cycling,” said Naveen. Little did Naveen know that this bit of banter with his friend would end up shaping his whole life. Now, nearly 14 years after coming to India on his side quest, Naveen has become a legend of the sport in the country. Naveen became the first rider from the country to sign with a Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) Continental team. Known for his strength in time trials, he has claimed the national title nine times in the discipline. His most notable season came in 2017, when he secured double gold at the National Championships, both for time trial and racing, before adding international accolades with a strong showing at the 2019 South Asian Games. Yet, what truly cemented the legend of Naveen was a small clip titled ‘Naveen John Did The Double.’ It has since gained a cult following among cycling enthusiasts. The video is a simple one from the 2017 Road Nationals in Jamkandi, showing Naveen ramping up the pace during a race when another rider slips into his slipstream to take advantage. Spotting it, he twists around in the saddle and lets him have it, repeatedly shouting, “Kaam karo!” until the rider backs off. Just to make his point, Naveen then lightly ushers him forward, forcing him to take the lead. Naveen said this is exactly the work ethic needed



to succeed in the sport, where there is no margin for error or excuses. And he says, if you want things to happen, make it happen rather than hoping for destiny. “In racing, if you want the result, you have to put in the work, no excuses. There’s no sitting in. It’s a mantra that I’ve always followed while racing bikes, uh. And, in the Indian context, we often wait for things to happen, and so Kaam karo is a reminder to get the work done and make things happen,” said Naveen. Adding to this is something called the Belgian mindset he adopted during his time in Belgium. The rule on the track is simple: keep attacking till no one can follow you. But for him, the mindset is all about passion—something he saw within the sport in Belgium. The love for it, almost like how it is with cricket in India. “In Belgium, cycling isn’t even a sport where you make a lot of money. There’s a pureness to the passion for bike racing in Belgium. And so what Belgium taught me is love for the sport.”

Novak Djokovic’s record is broken by Jannik Sinner



New Delhi: Jannik Sinner achieved a historic milestone at the ATP Masters 1000 Miami Open, securing a convincing 6-1, 6-4 victory over Corentin Moutet. With

this win, Sinner set a new record for the most consecutive sets won at the Masters 1000 level, totaling 26, surpassing Novak Djokovic’s previous record of 24. This streak began at the Rolex Paris Masters last November, where he also won the title without dropping a set, and extended to 13 consecutive matches at the Masters 1000 level, showcasing his remarkable form and consistency. In the third-round match against Moutet, Sinner’s performance was dominant; he won 87% of his first-serve points and hit 23 winners compared to Moutet’s 11. The match lasted just over an hour, further emphasizing Sinner’s control and tactical prowess on the court. As a result of this victory, he improved his ATP Head2Head record against Moutet to 2-0 and stretched his unbeaten streak against left-handed players to 21. Sinner, currently ranked No. 2 in the PIF ATP Rankings, aims to complete the ‘Sunshine Double’, a feat achieved by Roger Federer in 2017, after having won the title in Indian Wells earlier in the month. Next, he faces Alex Michelsen after Michelsen’s victory over Alejandro Tabilo, promising an exciting matchup as Sinner continues his strong run in Miami.

Sourav Ganguly thought that young MS Dhoni was the best white-ball captain of India

New Delhi: Former captain Sourav Ganguly has identified MS Dhoni as the country’s best white-ball captain in an open assessment of the hierarchy of Indian cricket leadership. Speaking at the TV9 WITT Summit 2026, Ganguly put aside his own impressive legacy to offer a conclusive response to the contentious comparison between the two icons. Throughout the conversation, MS Dhoni was ranked higher than the other Indian leaders by Ganguly using silverware, the ultimate measure of success. Ganguly remarked, “MS Dhoni has won a World Cup, while I have been a runner-up,” contrasting India’s victory in 2011 with their defeat against Australia in the 2003 final. “He has led India in three World Cups. In our time, there was no T20I cricket – only the Champions Trophy and the World Cup. But MS Dhoni has won the World Cup, and I would say he was an outstanding white-ball captain.” Dhoni, who made his international debut under Ganguly’s captaincy in 2004, went on to lead India to T20 World Cup glory in 2007, the ODI World Cup in 2011 and the Champions Trophy in 2013, be-



coming the first and only captain to compete the white-ball treble. Ganguly, now serving as the Chair of the ICC Men’s Cricket Committee and Head Coach of Pretoria Capitals, also expressed particular pride in Dhoni’s roots. Coming from Jharkhand – a region then largely overlooked by national selectors – Dhoni’s rise served as a catalyst for a new generation of talent. I am proud that he came from a small place like Jharkhand. To come from there and become such a legend

is something to be proud of,” he said. He highlighted the “Dhoni effect” on current stars like Ishan Kishan and teenage prodigies like Vaibhav Suryavanshi, noting that Dhoni built the confidence for others to believe. “When someone from a state makes it big at the highest level, it creates an impact – it builds confidence. ‘If Mahi can do it, I can do it.’ Take Vaibhav Suryavanshi, for example. Yes, he is from Bihar, but he must have grown up watching Dhoni,” Ganguly said.

Mo Salah will depart Liverpool at the conclusion of the current campaign

New Delhi: When Mohamed Salah’s contract expires at the end of the current campaign, he will depart Liverpool. One of the most illustrious stints in the club’s history came to an end on Tuesday when the club confirmed the news. In a video message shared on social media, the 33-year-old Egyptian forward made the announcement himself. He stated that he wanted his followers to hear it straight from him. “Unfortunately, the time has arrived. “This is the first part of my farewell,” Salah remarked. “I will be leaving Liverpool at the end of the season.” Liverpool backed the announcement with an official statement. Salah made the decision to go public as soon as possible “due to his respect



and gratitude” for the fans, according to the club. In 2017, Salah paid over \$50 million to join Liverpool from AS Roma. Few could have foreseen the influence he would eventually have. With 255 goals in 435 games, he emerged as one of the team’s finest performers. With that total, he ranks third on Liverpool’s all-time scoring list,

behind Ian Rush (346) and Roger Hunt (285). He helped Anfield win eight major titles in his nine years there. Two Premier League titles, the Champions League, the FA Cup, two League Cups, the Club World Cup, and the UEFA Super Cup are among them. Mohamed Salah has won the Premier League Golden Boot four times, equaling Thier-

ry Henry’s record. His debut season at Liverpool was remarkable, scoring 44 goals. In his farewell, he expressed a deep connection to the club, highlighting the shared victories and struggles. At 33, Salah’s departure signifies the end of an era for Liverpool, although no information about his future or a replacement has been disclosed.

Carlos Alcaraz stunned by Sebastian Korda

New Delhi: Carlos Alcaraz, World No. 1, was unexpectedly knocked out of the Miami Open by World No. 36 Sebastian Korda, losing 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 in a match lasting over two hours. Korda took control early and, despite nearly dropping the second set, regained focus, breaking Alcaraz in the third to secure a historic victory. Korda, who recorded 12 aces, expressed satisfaction with his performance and resilience. Alcaraz, having recently won his seventh Grand Slam title, faced another early elimination at Miami, shifting his focus to the upcoming clay court season. Korda advances to the round of 16 against either Karen Khachanov or Martin Landaluce.



Rinku Singh was named Regional Sports Officer

New Delhi: Following his appointment as a Regional Sports Officer under the state’s sports quota program, Indian cricket player Rinku Singh praised the Uttar Pradesh government and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday. The left-handed batter thanked the government for the appointment and welcomed receiving Rs 3 crore in financial support in a video statement posted on social media. “I am grateful to the Uttar Pradesh government and Hon. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for giving me the position of Regional Sports Officer,” Rinku stated. The 26-year-old said that his obligations to his Indian Premier League team, the Kolkata Knight Riders, prevented him from attending the appointment letter distribution ceremony on Tuesday. He did, however, add that he will shortly travel to Lucknow to accept the letter and ask for the chief minister’s approval. The state government’s larger effort to provide international medal-winning athletes work includes Rinku’s appointment. Rajkumar Pal, who played hockey for India and won a bronze medal at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, is one of the others who will be appointed as a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP). Rajkumar, a Ghazipur native, is one of six athletes receiving recognition. Praveen Kumar, a gold medallist in the Paralympic high jump from Gautam Buddh Nagar, will also be recruited as a DSP. Ajit Singh, a silver medallist in the javelin throw from Etawah, and Simran, a bronze medallist in the 200 meters from Ghaziabad, will be appointed as District Panchayat Raj Officers. Despite being unable to attend the ceremony, Rinku had expressed his gratitude, Director of Sports R P Singh told PTI. When his schedule permits, he continued, the cricket player would report for duties at the sports directorate office in Lucknow. According to the official, Rinku would have administrative obligations in addition to his cricket career. Rinku, who was part of India’s title-winning campaign at the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup, has risen quickly in recent years. During the tournament, he lost his father and briefly returned home to Aligarh for the funeral before rejoining the squad. Off the field, Rinku is engaged to Priya Saroj, a Member of Parliament from Machhlishahr representing the Samajwadi Party. During Tuesday’s felicitation event at Lok Bhavan, Adityanath also noted that Rinku was expected to attend but could not make it due to prior commitments.



IPL 2026: Pat Cummins joins Bengaluru’s SRH team



New Delhi: Pat Cummins, an Australian fast bowler, attended the Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) practice on Wednesday at M. Chinnaswamy Stadium. Cummins, who struggles with fitness issues, didn’t put in a lot of effort. The 32-year-old participated in the fielding and catching drills after a brief warm-up. He continued by making a couple deliveries in an empty net with a reduced run-up. Under the close supervision of head coach Daniel Vettori and his staff, Cummins ran a few sprints while his colleagues went all out in the nets. Prior to Saturday’s IPL 2026 opener against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, SRH is in the city. Ishan Kishan was named temporary captain by SRH because full-time skipper Cummins is probably go-

ing to miss the opening few games of the season. As vice captain, Abhishek Sharma assumes command. Due to his attendance at the pre-season IPL captain’s meeting in Mumbai, Kishan was unable to attend the SRH practice. Cummins did not participate in Australia’s recent disappointing T20 World Cup campaign and last played in the third Ashes Test in December. After signing for Rs. 13 crore at the auction, England all-rounder Liam Livingstone got into the swing of things with a solid batting performance. Livingstone, who hasn’t played for England in a year, is looking for runs and form. Heinrich Klaasen, a South African, delivered the powerful punches that sent the bowlers reeling.