

Modern Police Complex Planned at Rongkhon

● *Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma chaired a meeting to launch the development of a modern police complex in Rongkhon.*
● *The initiative aims to improve administrative efficiency, upgrade police facilities, and focus on sustainable urban and citizen-centric planning in Meghalaya.*

TURA, May 22: Meghalaya Chief Minister, Conrad K. Sangma on Thursday chaired a joint meeting of the Police, Urban Affairs and Veterinary Departments in Tura to formally initiate the development of a modern police complex at Rongkhon, marking a significant step towards strengthening urban infrastructure, improving public service delivery and enhancing green spaces in Tura.

The proposed project is envisioned as a comprehensive infrastructure initiative that will consolidate police facilities at Rongkhon while simultaneously enabling the relocation of existing police infrastructure from Tura Bazar.

The move is expected to ease congestion in the town area and pave the way for the creation of much-needed public green spaces and improved urban aesthetics in the heart of Tura.

During the meeting, the Chief Min-

ister stressed the importance of integrated urban planning and the need to create infrastructure that balances development with environmental sustainability and public convenience.

Sangma noted that the project aligns with the Government's broader vision of transforming Tura into a cleaner, greener and better-planned urban centre.

The proposed redevelopment of the Tura Bazar area is expected to open up opportunities for beautification, pedestrian-friendly spaces, landscaping, and the creation of community-oriented green zones for residents and visitors alike.

Officials from the concerned departments deliberated on land requirements, planning modalities, coordination mechanisms, and the phased implementation of the project to ensure smooth execution. The initiative is also expected to improve administrative efficiency and provide upgraded facilities for police personnel and public services. The Government reiterated its commitment to sustainable urban development and citizen-centric planning, with special emphasis on improving quality of life, enhancing civic infrastructure and preserving environmental balance across growing urban centres in Meghalaya.



Foundation stone for new college laid in Tura

Tura, May 22: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma laid the foundation stone for the construction of the new building of PASF-Abong Noga College in Tura on Friday, while inaugurating a newly built conference hall.

The project signals another step in accelerating higher education infrastructure in the state.

The project which is being executed as a CSR backed program involves an investment of Rs 8 crore, with Rs 5 crore already being released, through a partnership involving Dorf Ketel Chemicals India Ltd., P. A. Sangma Foundation and Ira Gurukul Educational Trust.

"Education is very important to the development goals of our state, because in the final sense everything that we are trying to do must improve the lives of people," said Meghalaya CM, Conrad Sangma.

"The problem in the state's education sector now is to see not just to enhance the access but also the quality", Sangma further said at the program held in New Tura along with senior ministers and local representatives.



Tribal Heritage Must Be Preserved Amid Development, Says Nagaland Governor

Kohima, May 22: Nagaland Governor Nand Kishore Yadav on Friday graced the inaugural ceremony of the National Seminar on "Revisiting Tribal Heritage of Northeast India: Challenges and Opportunities," organised by the School of Humanities and Education, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus.

Addressing the seminar, the Governor emphasised the importance of preserving indigenous languages, traditions and knowledge systems while promoting culturally sensitive and sustainable development.

He also highlighted the valuable contributions of tribal communities towards environmental conservation, sustainable living and social harmony.

The seminar brought together scholars, academicians and researchers from across the country for meaningful discussions on the preservation and promotion of the rich tribal heritage of Northeast India.

Highlighting the role of Nagaland University, Yadav said the institution could contribute significantly through interdisciplinary studies and research initiatives.

He also underlined the importance of tribal wisdom in addressing global concerns, saying indigenous communities possess valuable knowledge on environmental conservation, sustainable living, community harmony and coexistence with nature.

The Governor further laud-



ed the participation of scholars and experts from different parts of the country, saying such exchanges promote deeper understanding and meaningful policy discussions on tribal heritage and development in Northeast India.

Extensive preparations underway for SIR in Mizoram: CEO

Aizawl, May 22: Mizoram Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Garima Gupta informed that extensive preparations are underway across all districts in Mizoram for Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls 2026. She said that enumeration forms have already been downloaded in all districts, making Mizoram the first among the 16 states undertaking SIR Phase-III to complete the downloading process. Printing of the forms has also begun and is expected to be completed on May 22. The CEO said that all existing voters, including those whose names already appear in the current electoral roll, will have to submit fresh enumeration forms. Booth Level Officers (BLOs) will conduct house-to-house visits from May 30 to June 28, 2026,

during which they will distribute enumeration forms to voters in their respective areas. After filling up the forms, voters may submit them to the BLOs or upload them online. BLOs will upload the received Enumeration Forms through the BLO App, while hard copies will be safely preserved by the CEO's office for official records. Highlighting various important aspects related to the exercise, the CEO stated that the main objective of SIR 2026 is to ensure that all eligible voters are included in the electoral roll while preventing the inclusion of ineligible persons. She said that maintaining a clean and accurate electoral roll is the most important part of the exercise and emphasized that it forms the foundation of democracy.

Developing global standard tourist destination in Mizoram discussed

Aizawl, May 22: A State Level Consultative Workshop on "Developing Global Standard Tourist Destinations" was held at the Economics and Statistics Department Conference Hall, MINECO, Khatla, under the aegis of the Mizoram Tourism Department. The workshop was attended by Lalngthinglova Hmar, Minister for Tourism, Government of Mizoram. This workshop was organized to discuss the roadmap for Mizoram, in line with the Central Government's plan to establish at least one world-class tourist destination capable of competing globally in every State and Union Territory across India. Speaking on the occasion, Minister Lalngthinglova Hmar stated that tourism has immense potential in Mizoram and can significantly contribute to the growth and development of the State and its economy. At the same time, the Minister pointed out that there are several important factors that need to be considered in order to attract tourists and further develop the sector. The Minister emphasized the need to properly inform tourists about various tourist destinations in Mizoram, and the best time and reasons for visiting those places. Commending the Tourism Department for creating the Mizoram Tourism Calendar for this purpose, he invited the attendees to freely share their opinions and suggestions for further development. Shri Lalngthinglova Hmar further highlighted that tourism benefits not only the destinations visited by tourists but also the surrounding areas and local communities.

Gauhati High Court Issues SOP to Promote Fuel Conservation and Administrative Efficiency

Guwahati, May 22: Gauhati High Court has issued a comprehensive Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for its Principal Seat, Outlying Benches, and subordinate courts across the Northeast in a significant move aimed at fuel conservation and improving administrative efficiency.

According to the new guidelines, matters listed before the courts on Mondays and Fridays will preferably be heard through video conferencing. Separate virtual hearing links will be provided for each matter, while Court Masters will coordinate proceedings to ensure smooth functioning.

The SOP introduces multiple measures to reduce fuel consumption and streamline court administration. Judges of the Gauhati High Court have been encouraged to adopt car-pooling arrangements wherever feasible, while the use of offi-

cial vehicles for administrative purposes has been restricted. Departments and sections have also been directed to combine multiple requirements into single trips whenever possible.

Under the new arrangement, up to 50 per cent of employees in administrative and judicial sections will attend office on alternate days, depending on administrative convenience. However, officials exempted under the SOP will continue full physical attendance.

The High Court has strongly emphasised the use of the e-Office platform, directing that all administrative file movement and official communication be processed digitally. Physical transfer of files has been discouraged unless absolutely necessary.

Staff members working under the roster system but not physically present in office have been instructed to remain

available through telephone, mobile phone and e-office during official working hours. They must also be prepared to report to office at short notice if required. Registrars have been directed to prepare weekly rosters in advance, while Administrative Officers (Judicial) will monitor the e-office dashboard to ensure timely disposal of official work.

The SOP further states that administrative meetings of various committees will now be conducted through video conferencing, with meeting briefs circulated via email.

At the same time, several key sections, including the Protocol Section, Filing Section, Copying Section, Bench Section, Computer Section and the e-Courts Division, have been exempted from work-from-home arrangements and fuel-saving restrictions. The court observed that these divisions are essential

for maintaining uninterrupted judicial proceedings, physical coordination, server management and stable video conferencing infrastructure.

The guidelines have also been extended to district courts across Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. District judges, Chief Judicial Magistrates, Sub-Divisional Judicial Magistrates and Presiding Officers of tribunals and special courts have been directed to issue separate notifications for implementation in their respective jurisdictions.

Additionally, all training programmes conducted by the Judicial Academy, Assam will now be held through virtual or online mode.

The SOP will come into force from May 25, 2026, and remain effective till June 26, 2026, after which the situation will be reviewed.

Tea Board India marks International Tea Day 2026 across Northeast

Aizawl, May 22: Tea Board India, Zonal Office, Guwahati commemorated International Tea Day 2026 with a series of programmes organized across the North Eastern region, highlighting the importance of sustainability, community welfare, and youth engagement in the tea sector. International Tea Day, observed annually on May 21, is a globally recognized occasion celebrating the cultural, economic, and social significance of tea. The United Nations General Assembly designated the day in 2019 following a proposal by the Government of India submitted in October 2015 at the Intergovernmental Group on Tea of the Food and Agriculture Organization. The first global observance took place in 2020. Marking the seventh year of the global observance, this year's celebrations were held under the theme "Sustaining Tea, Supporting Communities," reflecting the tea sector's vital role in promoting inclusive

growth and sustainable livelihoods. As part of a focused outreach strategy, Tea Board India emphasized youth participation this year by organizing programmes primarily in universities and colleges across the North East. In line with this a programme was held at the College of Agriculture in Agartala which was graced by the Governor of Tripura, Indra Sena Reddy Nallu. Addressing the gathering, the Governor highlighted the richness and diversity of Indian teas and stressed the importance of adopting Good Agricultural Practices for the sustainability of the tea ecosystem. He underlined that the welfare of tea workers remains non-negotiable and called for meaningful promotion and branding of Tripura teas through increased outreach activities. The event was attended by Samir Ranjan Ghosh, Chairman of Tripura Tea Development Corporation (TTDC), Arunita Phukan Yadav, IRS, Executive Di-

rector of Tea Board India, Rajesh Das, Managing Director of TTDC, along with dignitaries, stakeholders, workers, small tea growers, and students. At Royal Global University in Guwahati, several student-centric competitions were organized, drawing enthusiastic participation from students. Winners were awarded cash prizes, adding vibrancy to the celebrations. Similarly, North Eastern Hill University witnessed active participation from students in various competitions, reflecting the success of the youth-focused initiative. In Jorhat, the day began with a cycle rally flagged off by Deputy Commissioner Shri Jay Sivani, IAS, symbolizing community participation and awareness. This was followed by competitions at Assam Agricultural University. One of the highlights of the programme was the felicitation of Padmashree Jadav Payeng and other pioneers associated with the small tea growers' movement.

India-Africa Forum Summit 2026

Agency: As part of the 4th India-Africa Forum Summit 2026, a special Painting Campaign was organised on May 21 at Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam by the North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC) in collaboration with Lalit Kala Akademi under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, with support from the Ministry of External Affairs.

The programme was held under the theme "India through the Lens of Africa" and featured participation from international artists, including Mr. Ashley Munsamy from South Africa, Ms. Amel Benmohamed from Algeria, Mr. Salaheddine Bouanani from Morocco and Ms. Wanja Githua from Kenya. The art camp activities were coordinated by nationally acclaimed artist Ms. Kukima Kakati.

The event began at 9:30 AM with a Jeep Safari and exposure visit inside Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, where delegates explored Assam's rich biodiversity, including the famous One-Horned Rhinoceros, elephants, wild boars and wild buffaloes.

Following the safari, a live painting session was organised at Maibong Resort in Pobitora. During the session, artists created artworks inspired by India's wildlife, culture and natural beauty, reflecting African artistic perspectives. An interactive session with local media personnel, forest guards and wildlife workers was also held. The discussion focused on wildlife conservation, eco-cultural awareness and the role of art in promoting environmental consciousness. The programme team was led by Dr. Gayatri Mathur, Programme Officer of Lalit Kala Akademi and Team Leader, along with Shri Naba Kumar Bharali, Programme Executive of NEZCC, under the supervision of Shri Oliver T. Pongen, Deputy Director (Programme), NEZCC. Ms. Priyanka Gogoi (ACS), Circle Officer and representative of the Morigaon District Administration, attended the programme and welcomed the delegates and artists. Shri Ujjal Choudhury, Ranger and Forest Officer, also participated in the interaction session and shared insights into wildlife conservation efforts at Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary.

Amid opposition protests in the assembly, the Assam governor presents the BJP government's five-year plan

Guwahati, May 22: Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Friday, May 22, presented the BJP-led government's vision for Assam for the next five years during his inaugural address in the 16th Assam Legislative Assembly, amid protests and a walkout by Opposition parties. Barely five minutes into the Governor's speech on the second day of the Assembly session, MLAs from the Indian National Congress and Rajior Dal entered the Well of the House, demanding that the government focus on issues such as inflation and rising prices instead of highlighting its achievements. Congress legislators displayed placards, raised slogans and later staged a walkout from the Assembly. The two Rajior Dal legislators, led by Akhil Gogoi, initially remained inside the House and con-

tinued raising objections while the Governor delivered his address. They later walked out after submitting a memorandum containing their concerns. In his speech, Governor Acharya said the BJP-led NDA government's return to power for a third consecutive term, with 102 seats in the 126-member Assembly, reflected public support for its governance model centred on peace, economic stability and inclusive development. "This mandate reflects the people's endorsement of peace, economic stability and inclusive development pursued over the past ten years," he said, adding that the government's achievements in restoring peace had been "substantial and historic". Referring to various peace accords signed with insurgent groups in recent years, the Governor

appealed to ULFA (Independent), the only major militant outfit still outside the peace process, to join the mainstream. He also informed the Assembly that the Assam government was planning to establish an anti-radicalisation cell to counter radicalisation activities in the state. Acharya urged citizens to exercise restraint in discretionary spending in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal for austerity, saying prudent economic conduct was necessary during challenging times. Welcoming the government's decision to introduce the proposed Uniform Civil Code during the current Assembly session, the Governor said the law would strengthen social harmony, justice and gender equality while safeguarding the customary rights and traditions of tribal and indigenous

communities. The Governor further praised the West Bengal government for handing over land required for border fencing along the Bangladesh border, stating that it would help strengthen border management and curb infiltration. Highlighting the government's development agenda, Acharya said Assam's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) had recorded an annual compounded growth rate of nearly 16 per cent and that the State was moving towards becoming a ₹10 lakh crore economy by 2028-29. He also outlined the government's commitments to generating two lakh employment opportunities, making Assam power-surplus, addressing annual floods, strengthening agriculture, and improving healthcare, education and tourism infrastructure.

Cash and Gold Recovered as Senior ACS Officer Held in Corruption Case



Guwahati, May 22: Lachit Kumar Das, a senior Assam Civil Service (ACS) officer, was arrested from his office in Guwahati after allegedly being caught red-handed while accepting a bribe of Rs 45,000.

The Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption reportedly recovered a large amount of cash and valuables during a raid at Das's residence in the Beltola area of the city following his arrest on corruption charges.

Authorities further claimed that Das possessed substantial assets in Guwahati, including land at multiple locations, luxury apartments and several high-end vehicles. The investigation is currently underway, and officials are trying to determine the full extent of the properties and assets linked to the accused officer.

Das, who was serving as the Additional Director in the Land Records Department, was allegedly caught accepting the bribe from a person seeking a land purchase permission document. Investigators also suspect that the officer may have violated government norms related to land transactions and allegedly extorted money in exchange for facilitating certain approvals.

According to officials, investigators seized nearly Rs 50 lakh in cash, more than half a kilogram of gold ornaments, and fixed deposit receipts worth around Rs 70 lakh from the officer's flat.

Several life insurance certificates were also recovered during the operation, which continued till late at

Dialogue Is the Way Forward, Says Manipur CM While Opposing Bandhs and Blockades

Imphal, May 22: Y Khemchand Singh on May 22 appealed to the people of Manipur to refrain from enforcing bandhs and blockades, stating that such protests affect daily wage earners the most and further strain the state's economy amid ongoing unrest. Speaking at the inauguration of an RCC bridge over the Nambul River at Akham Mayai Leikai in Imphal West district, the chief minister urged citi-

zens to resolve differences through dialogue rather than shutdowns.

"Enforcing bandhs and blockades out of anger toward the government only leads to hardship, particularly for daily wage earners," Singh said while addressing the gathering. Referring to his visits to violence-affected Jiribam district, Singh said he had travelled there twice — first by helicopter and later by road — and

met members of different communities, including Kuki, Paite, Hmar and Meitei groups.

"All are having cordial relations," he said, adding that people at the grassroots level had come together during his visit. The chief minister also recalled the bomb attack at Tronglaobi in Bishnupur district in April, where two children lost their lives. He said the incident caused widespread

grief and triggered economic disruptions due to shutdowns and bandhs across the state.

"The incident caused disruptions to the economy of the state due to shutdowns and bandhs," he said. Appealing for restraint, Singh said anger or frustration against the government should be addressed through discussions and mutual understanding instead of disruptive protests. Later, in a social me-

dia post, the chief minister said the newly inaugurated bridge in the Lamsang Assembly Constituency would improve connectivity, facilitate movement of people and goods, and support local markets. He added that the government remained committed to strengthening road connectivity and developing quality infrastructure for the welfare and progress of the people of Manipur.

Meghalaya CM Initiates Foundation Work for Major Rs 150-Crore Tura Development Project

Shillong, May 22: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma on Friday laid the foundation for over Rs 150-crore development project for Tura town. The project includes redevelopment of Nazing Bazar area, which includes car parking, hotel and space for vendor, multi-level car parking and cinema at Dakopgre, which will accommodate 200 cars, cinema halls with three screens, a gaming zone and food court and refurbishment of SMELC building, including art and culture promenade with museum, kid zone park, youth centre and active aging centre.

The programme was attended by CEM, GHADC, MDCs, chairman of Tura Municipal Board J. D. Sangma, senior officials from the Department of Urban Affairs, representatives of local bodies, community leaders, artists and citizens from different localities. During the programme, the Chief Minister formally unveiled the foundation stones for three major urban infrastructure projects — the redevelopment of Nazing Bazar, the multi-level parking and cinema complex at Dakopgre, and the comprehensive renovation of the SMELC Complex.

He also distributed cheques to artists under the Chief Minister Artists Engagement Scheme to support local talent, and launched the Tura Municipal Board Mobile Application to improve civic service delivery and promote digital governance. The event further saw the announcement of waste management grading for localities, with certificates and mementos awarded to



winning localities for their cleanliness efforts, along with the declaration of locality-wise street lighting projects and distribution of sanction letters for CCTV installations to strengthen public safety and urban infrastructure across Tura. In his address, the Chief Minister stated that governance must remain public-oriented and rooted in continuous engagement with citizens. "CM Connect is an idea built around that vision — that every citizen should be able to connect directly with the Government," he said. He emphasised that responsive governance depends on structured systems that allow grievances to be registered, monitored and resolved in a time-bound manner.

Announcing a major expansion of citizen service delivery, he said that CM Connect Offices will be established across all 56 blocks in the State to bring services closer to the people and reduce dependency on district headquarters. Referring to Tura's urban transformation, the Chief Minister said that sustained efforts over the past eight years have already contributed to improving the

town, while more work continues ahead.

He further highlighted that the ongoing urban interventions are aligned with Tura's strategic preparedness for the 39th National Games 2027, positioning the town as a destination for sports, tourism, and economic activity. He said improved infrastructure, clean corridors, walkable districts, and cultural identity-driven design will define the visitor experience during the event and beyond.

Referring to cultural identity, he noted that heritage and Garo ethos remain central to urban development, including the revival of the historic cenotaph in Tura, which will serve as a space of remembrance and civic pride while blending traditional design language with modern infrastructure. A key highlight of the programme was the CM Connect Session, during which citizens and pre-registered participants raised grievances and developmental concerns directly before the Chief Minister and officials, reinforcing the Government's commitment to participatory governance and time-bound service delivery.

AAPSU urges Arunachal government to carry out major reforms in education sector

Itanagar, May 22: The All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) has sought wide-ranging reforms in the education sector across Arunachal Pradesh, raising concerns over vacant teaching posts, lack of school infrastructure and shortage of academic facilities in colleges and universities.

A delegation of the student body, led by AAPSU president Meje Taku, met Education Minister PD Sona in Itanagar on Wednesday and submitted a detailed 27-point memorandum highlighting issues affecting students across the state.

According to the union, the memorandum reflects the educational realities faced by students in all 26 districts of Arunachal Pradesh and includes concerns related to government schools, degree colleges and higher educational institutions.

During the meeting, the AAPSU raised serious concerns regarding the functioning of government schools without regular principals and vice principals.

The union stated that nearly 52 schools, including higher secondary and secondary schools, are currently operating without proper institutional leadership.

The student body said in-charge arrangements cannot replace full-time heads who are authorised to take academic and adminis-



trative decisions for the institutions. The union demanded immediate recruitment of principals, vice principals and headmasters through a time-bound process. It also called for a large-scale recruitment drive to fill vacant posts of Primary Teachers (PRT), Trained Graduate Teachers (TGT) and Post Graduate Teachers (PGT) across the state.

The AAPSU said every child, including those living in remote villages, has the constitutional right to access qualified teachers and proper educational

support. The union also highlighted the shortage of physical education and music teachers in government schools. Referring to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, the AAPSU said schools should have trained teachers for sports and arts education as mandated under national policy guidelines.

According to the union, the absence of such teachers affects not only the physical wellbeing of students but also the preservation and promotion of

Arunachal Pradesh's cultural traditions and indigenous heritage.

Apart from staffing issues, the student body sought strict implementation of the Right to Education Act in tribal and remote areas and demanded regular delivery of midday meals, free uniforms and textbooks in schools. The memorandum also called for a uniform fee structure in government schools to prevent arbitrary fee collection and demanded a funded statewide programme for upgrading school infrastructure, especially in border and remote

regions.

At the college level, the AAPSU expressed concern over the shortage of faculty members in government degree colleges and urged the government to fill all vacant assistant professor and associate professor posts at the earliest.

The union further demanded the introduction of new academic departments such as psychology, sociology, mass communication, botany, physics, chemistry and zoology in colleges where these subjects are currently unavailable.

Tribal language oaths mark new phase of cultural inclusion in Assam Assembly, says Taranga Gogoi

Guwahati, May 22: BJP MLA Taranga Gogoi on May 21 said the use of tribal languages during the oath-taking ceremony of the 16th Assam Legislative Assembly reflects a growing effort towards cultural inclusion and better representation of indigenous communities in the state. Speaking during the inaugural session of the newly constituted Assembly, the Naharkatia legislator described the day as an important and memorable occasion, especially after being elected for a second consecutive term. Gogoi said returning to the Assem-

bly with a renewed mandate from the people also brings greater responsibility towards public service and development work. "It feels wonderful to be a re-elected MLA because it renews our opportunity to serve the state and work tirelessly for the people who voted for us," he said. The BJP legislator particularly highlighted the use of tribal mother tongues during the oath-taking ceremony, calling it a meaningful development in the functioning of the Assembly. According to Gogoi, the Assembly had earlier witnessed the use of six officially recognised language-



es during proceedings and oath ceremonies. However, this time, MLAs belonging to tribal communities took their oath in their own native languages, including Rabha and Karbi. "In the past, we saw the use of six officially recognised languages in the Assembly. Today, Rabha MLAs took oath in the Rabha language and Karbi MLAs took oath in the Karbi language," Gogoi said. He said the move reflects an important structural and cultural shift within the legislative institution and would help strengthen Assam's social and cultural diversity. Gogoi added that

giving space to traditional and tribal languages in the Assembly sends a positive message to indigenous communities across the state. The MLA further said such steps would help preserve linguistic heritage and improve the sense of participation among different ethnic groups in Assam's democratic process. During his interaction, Gogoi also mentioned that the Assembly had elected its new Speaker during the opening session. He further stated that the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill is expected to be introduced during the ongoing Assembly session.

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the Government,” he said.

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Deputy CM Addresses Concerns Over Proposed Mining Plan

Shillong, May 22: Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong on Thursday clarified that the State government has no intent to impose the proposed Shree Cement limestone mining project at Lum Syрман in East Jaintia Hills district.

Refuting allegations that the government was attempting to push through the proposed project by force, Tynsong told persons that a public hearing, scheduled for Friday, itself reflected a transparent and consultative approach.

He said the purpose of the public hearing was to allow residents and stakeholders to openly express their opinions on the project.

“So, opposing the hearing itself defeats the very objec-

tive of public consultation mandated under environmental regulations. If the government had intended to impose the project forcibly, there would have been no public hearing process at all,” the Deputy Chief Minister said.

Stating that the administration has nothing to hide on the matter, he said the government remained open to dialogue whenever misunderstandings arise.

“Objections should be raised through the official mechanism specifically created for hearing public concerns,” he said, while pointing out that the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board is legally required to conduct such hearings before projects of this nature can proceed further.

■ *Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong emphasized the government’s transparency regarding the Shree Cement limestone mining project in Lum Syрман, East Jaintia Hills.*

■ *The Deputy Chief Minister invited opposing groups to participate in the hearing, which allows for formal expression of environmental and economic concerns.*

He further requested groups opposing the project to participate in the hearing, stating that it will provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to place their objections and suggestions.

“Besides, concerns relating to environmental and economic issues can be formally raised during the hearing,” he added.

Senior ACS Officer Arrested in Bribery Case, Cash and Gold Seized During Raid

Guwahati, May 22: Lachit Kumar Das, a senior Assam Civil Service (ACS) officer, was arrested from his office in Guwahati after allegedly being caught red-handed while accepting a bribe of Rs 45,000. The Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption reportedly recovered a large amount of cash and valuables during a raid at Das’s residence in the Beltola area of the city following his arrest on corruption charges.

According to officials, investigators seized nearly Rs 50 lakh in cash, more than half a kilogram of gold ornaments, and fixed deposit



receipts worth around Rs 70 lakh from the officer’s flat. Several life insurance certificates were also recovered during the operation, which continued till late at night.

Das, who was serving as the Additional Director in the Land Records Department, was allegedly caught accepting the bribe from a person seeking a land purchase per-

mission document.

Investigators also suspect that the officer may have violated government norms related to land transactions and allegedly extorted money in exchange for facilitating certain approvals. Authorities further claimed that Das possessed substantial assets in Guwahati, including land at multiple locations, luxury apartments and several high-end vehicles.

The investigation is currently underway, and officials are trying to determine the full extent of the properties and assets linked to the accused officer.

Kuki CSO Alleges Attack on Mongkot Chepu Village, Flags AI-Generated Misinformation

Imphal, May 22: The Kuki CSO Working Committee has alleged that Mongkot Chepu village, located in the Litan-Sareikhong belt of Manipur’s Ukhrul district, came under a “strategic and unprovoked attack” on May 21. The committee also accused certain groups of spreading “weaponised misinformation” through AI-generated content following the incident.

In a statement, the committee claimed that armed assailants allegedly linked to the NSCN Eastern Flank launched a coordinated attack on the village at around 2:05 PM, disrupting nearly a week of relative calm in the area.

According to the committee, the attack triggered hours of intense gun-

fire, during which village volunteers allegedly retaliated in self-defence. The exchange of fire reportedly continued until around 5:30 PM.

The Working Committee further alleged that the attackers used high-grade weapons, including heavy ammunition and lethal explosives, which it described as evidence of a “deeply organised escalation” in the conflict-prone region.

The statement also expressed concern over alleged unauthorised drone activity over Mongkot Chepu on May 19 and 20. The committee claimed the drone movements were traced to Sikibung, also known as Sharkaphung village, and alleged that the surveillance operations indicated possible coordination ahead of

the attack.

In addition, the committee accused certain groups of circulating AI-generated images on social media that falsely depicted Sikibung village as being attacked by armed Kuki militants.

Describing the alleged misinformation campaign as “deeply irresponsible and dangerously misleading,” the committee said fabricated visuals and narratives were being used to distort facts and inflame tensions in parts of Ukhrul and Kamjong districts. The Kuki body warned that any further circulation of “false propaganda” portraying Kuki villagers as militants without evidence could invite legal action, including defamation proceedings.

Assam Logs Massive Motor Vehicle Offence Cases in 4 Months

Guwahati, May 22: More than 1.92 lakh motor vehicle offence cases were registered across Assam, while fine amounting to Rs 18.48 crore was realised during the period. The data was presented during a State-level review meeting on road safety, enforcement and accident prevention measures chaired by Chief Secretary Dr Ravi Kota in the presence of DGP Harmeet Singh and virtual participation of all District Commissioners, Superintendents of Police and officials of concerned departments.

The meeting was informed that Assam recorded a 15 per cent reduction in road accidents and nearly 30 per cent reduction in fatalities during the period from April 28 to May 21 as compared to the corresponding period last year.

The Chief Secretary directed all districts to treat reduction in road fatalities as a key governance priority by undertaking swift administrative action, intensifying enforcement in accident-prone corridors and preparing district-specific intervention plans based on accident data and local risk assessment. It was observed that National Highways account for the largest share of accidents in the State, and districts were directed to analyse accident-prone NH stretches, identify black spots and strengthen enforcement, engineering correction and emergency response systems. The meeting decided to take strict penal action against unauthorised roadside parking, illegal truck halting and encroachment along highways and major roads.

Textbook Shortage Must End Permanently: ABSU

Kokrajhar, May 22: The All-Bodo Students Union (ABSU) has sought immediate intervention of the Assam Chief Minister in addressing the issue of shortage of Bodo medium textbooks in schools across the State.

An ABSU delegation, led by president Kwrwmdao Wary, submitted a memorandum to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma through the Kokrajhar District Commissioner at the latter’s office in Kokrajhar on Thursday.

According to ABSU, students were continuing to face difficulties owing to the non-availability of Bodo medium textbooks even over a month after the start of the current academic session.

Notably, education through Bodo medium had received official recognition on May 18, 1963.

The student body alleged that schools in 12 districts of Assam offering Bodo medium education are facing an acute shortage of textbooks, affecting students’ academic activities.

ABSU stated that it had earlier raised the issue on May 11 through



a separate memorandum submitted to the Mission Director of the Assam State Textbook Production and Publication Corporation, seek-

ing urgent action and requesting authorities to ensure textbook distribution by May 18.

The organisation appealed to the

Chief Minister for immediate measures to ensure the timely supply of textbooks to Bodo medium schools across the state.

Nagaland Introduces ELIONA for Climate and Disaster Response

Kohima, May 22: In a major technological advancement for disaster management and climate intelligence, the Nagaland government launched “ELIONA”, a cutting-edge supercomputer developed by the Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority (NSDMA).

The supercomputer was inaugurated by Advisor for NSDMA & NRE, Z. Nyusietho Nyuthe, at the Nagaland Centre for Disaster Management & Atmospheric Research (NaCDAR) located in the Transport Commissioner’s building in Kohima.

Speaking at the launch, Nyuthe described the occasion as a significant milestone for NSDMA, the Home Department and the State government. He said ELIONA would strengthen disaster preparedness, climate resilience, scientific research and tech-

nology-driven governance in Nagaland. Highlighting the State’s vulnerability to natural disasters such as landslides, flash floods, earthquakes, thunderstorms and extreme rainfall, he stressed the need for advanced systems for monitoring, early warning and rapid response.

Nyuthe said ELIONA’s high-performance computing capabilities would help process large volumes of meteorological, satellite, terrain, climate and disaster-related data. The system will support advanced weather forecasting, rainfall prediction, landslide and flood analysis, geospatial hazard mapping and artificial intelligence-based applications. He added that the supercomputer would support important NSDMA initiatives, including the Nagaland State Disaster Management Information System, disaster risk

financing, parametric insurance, urban resilience planning and community-based disaster preparedness.

However, he emphasized that the true value of ELIONA would be measured by its ability to assist district administrations, local communities and grassroots-level decision-making.

Providing an overview of the project, NSDMA Joint CEO Dr. Johnny Ruangmei said the name “ELIONA”, derived from Hebrew, symbolically represents intelligence, foresight, resilience and technological advancement. He explained that ELIONA is an AI-powered High-Performance Computing (HPC) infrastructure designed for climate intelligence, atmospheric modelling, disaster analytics, geospatial risk assessment and predictive disaster governance.

Manipur Chief Minister Calls for Talks to Resolve Differences, Appeals to Avoid Disruptions

Imphal, May 22: Y Khemchand Singh on May 22 appealed to the people of Manipur to refrain from enforcing bandhs and blockades, stating that such protests affect daily wage earners the most and further strain the state’s economy amid ongoing unrest.

Speaking at the inauguration of an RCC bridge over the Nambul River at Akham Mayai Leikai in Imphal West district, the chief minister urged citizens to resolve differences through dialogue rather than shutdowns. “Enforcing bandhs and blockades out

of anger toward the government only leads to hardship, particularly for daily wage earners,” Singh said while addressing the gathering.

Referring to his visits to violence-affected Jiribam district, Singh said he had travelled there twice — first by helicopter and later by road — and met members of different communities, including Kuki, Paite, Hmar and Meitei groups. “All are having cordial relations,” he said, adding that people at the grassroots level had come together during his visit. The chief minister also recalled

the bomb attack at Tronglaobi in Bishnupur district in April, where two children lost their lives. He said the incident caused widespread grief and triggered economic disruptions due to shutdowns and bandhs across the state. “The incident caused disruptions to the economy of the state due to shutdowns and bandhs,” he said. Appealing for restraint, Singh said anger or frustration against the government should be addressed through discussions and mutual understanding instead of disruptive protests.

RS Polls in 4 Northeast States on June 18

Aizawl, May 22: The Election Commission of India (ECI) today announced polls for 24 Rajya Sabha seats on June 18, including one seat each in Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. In a statement, the ECI said the elections for the Rajya Sabha seats will be held in 10 States where the incumbents are retiring on different dates beginning June 21 to July 19. The last date for filing nominations is June 8, and the last date for withdrawal of candidature is June 11. The counting of votes will take place on June 18. The retiring Rajya Sabha members from the Northeast are Maharaja Sanajao-ba Leishemba (Manipur), Wanweiroy Kharlukhi (Meghalaya), Nabam Rebia (Arunachal Pradesh), and K Vanlalvena (Mizoram).

Restrictions imposed in Nagaland in wake of ASF outbreak

Kohima, May 22: Authorities in Dimapur, Mon and Medziphema have imposed restrictions on movement, sale and slaughter of pigs and pork following outbreaks of African Swine Fever (ASF) in parts of Nagaland. In Dimapur, after laboratory confirmation of ASF cases at Signal Angami village, the district administration declared a 1-km radius as an “infected zone” and a 10-km radius as a “surveillance zone” to contain the spread of the disease.

Myanmar-Mizoram Areca Nut Smuggling Busted

Aizawl, May 22: The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI)’s Guwahati zonal unit seized around 60,000 kilograms of smuggled foreign-origin areca nuts during two major operations in Assam and Mizoram. Acting on specific intelligence, DRI conducted operations in Mizoram and Assam after preliminary investigations revealed that the foreign-origin dried areca nuts were

smuggled into India from Myanmar through the Myanmar-Mizoram border.

In one of the operations, DRI was assisted by 38 Battalion of Assam Rifles. So far, five persons have been arrested during the operations, official sources said on Friday. Smuggling of areca nuts from the neighbouring country is causing severe economic damage to the domestic areca nut



growers and undermining economic security in the border regions.

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Editorial

Spraying Political Colour on Everything

In an age of sharp partisanship, the habit of viewing every institution, every cultural space, and every public act through a political lens has become disturbingly routine. Governments rename streets, rewrite school curricula, appropriate festivals, and colonise civic bodies — all to stamp the ruling ideology on the landscape of daily life. This is not governance. It is possession. When politics seeps into everything — museums, universities, sports boards, neighbourhood committees — it does not enrich those spaces. It hollows them out. Institutions that once served broad publics become instruments of the party in power, their credibility mortgaged to electoral fortune. When the next party arrives, the

cycle repeats — renaming, reversing, reclaiming — leaving citizens exhausted and institutions weakened. Democracies thrive not because one party colours everything in its preferred hue, but because certain spaces remain genuinely common. A library should belong to readers. A hospital to patients. A public square to citizens. The compulsion to spray political colour on everything betrays a deeper insecurity — an inability to trust that ideas, once expressed in free and open institutions, will earn their place. Leaders who must brand everything fear, perhaps rightly, that without the brand, little would remain.

That is not strength. That is the loudest possible admission of fragility.

The appearance of farm production and yields

India appears to be food self-sufficient as harvests reach unprecedented levels. While rice production reached a record 137.8 million tons in 2023–2024, wheat production surpassed 113 million tonnes. Another record was reached when the total amount of foodgrain produced surpassed 332 million tonnes. But let’s take a closer look. Yield and productivity are frequently confused by the public and policymakers. It is simple to measure yield, which is only kilograms harvested per acre. Productivity, on the other hand, is the output in relation to the total cost of the land, labor, water, fertilizer, and capital that went into the crop.

Although more difficult to quantify, this is more important for comprehending the state of agriculture. Simply adding more inputs to the same piece of land can increase yield. Only when you actually get more out of each unit of what you put in—whether through improved crop varieties and growing techniques, increased mechanization, or more effective water use—will productivity increase. Wheat, rice, and sugarcane are India’s three most resource-intensive commodities; yields have been rising, but productivity has not. India applied 63 times more fertilizer per hectare between 1961 and 2021—from 2.17 kg to 137.9 kg. Food grain production per acre increased 3.4 times during that time. The ratio of input growth to output growth is 18:1. Grain is becoming increasingly less expensive with every kilogram of fertilizer added. More than half of the nitrogen applied to Indian crops comes from rice and wheat combined. However, only about one-third of that nitrogen is actually absorbed by crops; the



remainder either escapes into the atmosphere, leaches into groundwater, or contributes to emissions of nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas that is 270 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

The three inputs that drove the Green Revolution—improved seeds, fertilizer, and water—have effectively saturated the system in the rice-wheat belt of northern India, which provides around 95% of the country’s wheat and 60% of its rice. As a result, total factor productivity (TFP) has decreased, input costs per unit of output have increased, and rice and wheat yields in the northwest have either stalled or started to decline. The ratio of output to all measured inputs, or TFP, is the economist’s name for efficiency, and it presents a totally different picture than the harvest statistics that make

headlines. According to a study conducted between 1980 and 2010, the major producing states saw TFP increase in rice production of only 0.2% annually, with reductions in a number of them. India’s agricultural TFP growth has remained at 0.59% annually since 1990. India’s rate of growth is slower than the global average, which was only 1.1% annually in the 2010s compared to about 2% in the 2000s.

The most striking example is sugarcane. For more than 15 years, the sugar industry—one of the most heavily subsidized and price-controlled in the world—has suffered a steady decline in production. For every 100 kg of yield, sugarcane needs about 17,000 liters of water. Major producing states have farm-level yields of about 80 tonnes per hectare, which is far less than what is possi-

ble from an agronomic standpoint. In comparison, China’s agricultural TFP has increased at a rate that is around six times faster than India’s since the 1990s, in part due to significant research investment and the reduction of input subsidies. Its funding for agricultural research is twice as large as India’s as a percentage of GDP. For comparison, ICAR’s total yearly budget is about \$700 million, whereas India’s fertilizer subsidy bill is currently about \$23 billion. To put it another way, the nation spends about 33 times as much on subsidizing the excessive use of an input as it does on research that could lessen reliance on it. Heavy subsidies for power and fertilizers support the current system. In most states, canal irrigation fees have not been updated in many years, and groundwater is free. Farmers are not motivated to econ-

omize when inputs are free or subsidized. This long-standing subsidy scheme is largely responsible for the agricultural yield gains in India. The question is not whether enough food is produced, but rather whether it can be produced sustainably in light of the effects of the climate crisis, declining water tables, and deteriorating soils.

Thus far, the policy response has been to drill more tube wells, raise the fertilizer subsidy, and keep raising the minimum support price. But this tactic will inevitably fail. Jared Diamond described in his book *Collapse* how agricultural civilizations collapse abruptly, usually at the same moment of seeming peak productivity, rather than gradually. The same may occur in India, where a shock to water supply or fertilizer pricing could drive the system over the edge. India desperately needs to rethink how agricultural achievement is evaluated and rewarded. When land was the binding restriction, measuring yield per hectare made sense, but when other binding limitations like water, soil health, and climate have also emerged, this metric is incorrect. We are preparing Indian agriculture for a decline that needs to be prevented without reducing subsidies and increasing research spending. We should be made aware of the fact that food security, which is dependent on security in West Asia, is unreliable by the current problem with fertilizer prices brought on by the closing of the Strait of Hormuz. Additionally, the headline harvest figures will continue to tell one tale while productivity, aquifers, soils, and the climate tell another until farmers receive price signals for water and fertilizer.

Why the Cockroach Rebellion in India Should Frighten The Opposition

It is simple to misunderstand the Cockroach Janta Party’s (CJP) abrupt rise to prominence in India’s democratic consciousness. The temptation is to view the CJP as another outburst of opposition to the ruling party in a nation where politics are frequently reduced to pro-BJP or anti-BJP reflexes. But that would be too easy. Perhaps the more unsettling reality is that the cockroach has spread throughout the entire political floor. It goes beyond just making fun of powerful people. It exposes those who want to take their position. Chief Justice Surya Kant allegedly called some young people without jobs “cockroaches” and “parasites” in statements that sparked the CJP. However, Kant later clarified that the remarks were about persons with fake degrees, not India’s youth. Because it seemed to condense a generation’s humiliation into a single insect metaphor, the phrase became viral on the internet. The CJP’s satirical movement gained millions of Instagram followers in a matter of days, surpassing the BJP’s official Instagram count at one point, and its X account was blocked in India following a court order. However, the emotional coding is more significant than the numbers. The CJP describes itself as “a political party for the people the system forgot to count” and the “Voice of the Lazy & Unemployed” on their website. “They tried to step on us,” reads the banner. We returned.” That is more than a meme. It is the vocabulary of a generation that feels patronized by leaders who continue to use the language of obedience, insulted by institutions, and neglected by political parties. In an inspiring example of active listening and generational empathy in a democracy, Umang Singhar, a senior Congress politician and Leader of the Opposition in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly, publicly mentioned

the CJP on May 21 and expressed his support on his official social media profiles. However, the opposition should exercise caution in hailing the CJP as a ready-made youth movement that opposes the BJP. It’s true that Gen Z is irritated with the ruling class. However, faith in the opposition does not always follow from it. “The viral success of the Cockroach Janata Party should not be seen only as a dissent against the ruling party [BJP-NDA] but also a mirror to the opposition,” wrote renowned poll strategist Naresh Arora on X, echoing similar sentiments. He also thoughtfully added, “India’s Gen Z youth feel neither side is listening to them.”

“I am uncertain about the future of this movement, but I hope the young people behind it find a way to bring this energy into mainstream politics or perhaps express it through their vote to be a voice of change and in doing so, become impossible to ignore,” stated Congress MP Shashi Tharoor. The Opposition needs to take advantage of this chance. This moment’s main lesson is that. “The Congress or the regional opposition will save us because the BJP has failed us” is not a sentiment shared by many young Indians. “None of you are listening” is the harsher statement they are making.

The crisis of the opposition starts here. The Congress frequently and occasionally forcefully discusses issues including unemployment, inequality, and constitutional principles. However, dynastic politics continue to weigh heavily on it. According to Tharoor, a member of the Congress ecosystem, government suffers when elected position is handled like a family heirloom. Scholarly research has also identified generational factionalism, dynasticism, and personalism as contributing elements to the Congress’s down-

fall. Legacy is not attractive to young voters who have grown up with algorithmic disrespect. They are not impressed with surnames. They question everything. Even though they respect Rahul Gandhi’s use of constitutional terminology, they may nevertheless wonder why the oldest party in India frequently seems to be older than the Republic itself. Regional parties have issues of their own. Many developed sincere linguistic-cultural pride and social coalitions. However, far too many now bear the stigma of familial dominance, entitlement, or corruption. The West Bengal teacher recruitment crisis, in which the Supreme Court supported the firing of more than 25,000 teachers and non-teaching personnel after serious irregularities were discovered, is exactly the kind of incident that hurts young candidates the most: futures, employment, exams, and fairness. The Enforcement Directorate’s continued request for approval to prosecute DMK leader V. Senthilbalaji in a purported cash-for-jobs case in Tamil Nadu illustrates the same erosion of public employment confidence. Candidates with stated criminal offenses had a significantly higher success percentage than those with clean records, according to data from the 2024 Lok Sabha. Criminality also affected national and regional formations. Therefore, the CJP is not merely asking the North Block “where the money went?” in its purposefully provocative manner.

Every state secretariat, party office, local strongman, dynasty, fixer, and “youth leader” who is already in their fifties are all being asked. Actor-politician Vijay’s Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), which won 108 of 234 seats in the 2026 Assembly election and broke the long-standing DMK-AIADMK binary, provided the most striking electoral evidence of this

desire for disruption earlier this month in Tamil Nadu. Despite the lengthy history of interaction between cinema and politics in Tamil Nadu, Vijay’s triumph should not be casually dismissed as celebrity politics. Star power was not the only factor in the 2026 verdict. It has to do with the public’s willingness to penalize familiarity. The official TVK terminology refers to “people-centric politics” and “concrete welfare-driven actions”—conventional terms on paper that, when paired with a fresh look and digital mobilization, become a weapon against fatigue. There is a clear lesson for the opposition space. Being anti-BJP is no longer a sufficient political identity in a country governed by the BJP. Young voters in particular are seeking novelty, sincerity, danger, and identifiable rage. They prefer lived, rather than focus-grouped, political rhetoric. Instead of inheriting a room within the durbar, they prefer leaders who appear to have come from outside. This is why the CJP counts even if it never becomes an actual party. It has already completed one task that many opposition parties find difficult: quickly catching the atmosphere. It was readable because of its ridiculousness.

It was shareable because of its humor. It was sticky because of its rage. In India, comedians, explainers, creators, and rowdy interviewers are progressively bringing political attention to the country. By bringing politics out of the formality of a studio and into awkward, humorous, meandering conversations with politicians, journalists, and public figures, Samdish Bhatia’s Unfiltered by Samdish has grown an audience. Under pressure, comedians like Varun Grover and Kunal Kamra have come to represent political satire. Parties cannot be replaced by these numbers. However, they demonstrate the migration of po-

litical trust. Young people aren’t holding out for a press conference. They are viewing a meme manifesto, a field interview, a roast, a parody song, and a reel. Their frivolity is not the reason for this. The reason for this is that satire frequently reaches a point where serious politics have become untrustworthy. The opposition should be more alarmed by that than the BJP. Welfare delivery networks, a leader-centric brand, doctrinal clarity, and a massive organizational machine are all still present in the BJP. On the other hand, the opposition frequently relies on anti-incumbency without developing a counter-imagination. It provides criticism, although not usually about culture. It provides partnerships, but not always vitality. It provides math, but not necessarily effects. The genius of the CJP is its ability to transform disdain into a sense of community. Cockroach is the insult, and it reverses the authority. The animal that was supposed to represent dirt now represents survival.

The ostensibly indolent turn into hyperactive internet planners. The jobless turn into political messengers. The joke turns into a meeting spot. The message is obvious to the opposition in India. Don’t assume that young voters are just waiting to be mobilized against Modi. They desire respectable employment, equitable testing, reasonably priced futures, free expression, hygienic institutions, and access to politics without family passwords. They don’t oppose politics. They oppose stagnant politics. One of India’s founding fathers, B.R. Ambedkar, has long cautioned that democracy is “a conjoint communicative experience... an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen.” What happens when that respect crumbles is demonstrated by the viral cockroach moment.

There is financial burden associated with the new pay scale

On the surface, the new pay scale’s math seems simple. The Ninth Pay Commission has suggested increasing the limit from Tk 78,000 to Tk 160,000 and hiking the basic government salary from Tk 8,250 to Tk 20,000. Implementation will start on July 1, according to Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury. It is hard to argue against the reasoning: 14 lakh civil personnel’ real earnings have been subtly reduced by years of high inflation. However, how the government plans to fund such a significant increase in recurring spending is less clear. In addition to the present wage bill of Tk 131,000 crore, it is reported that the complete execution of the commission’s recommendations would cost an extra Tk 106,000 crore per year. It makes sense that the new government chose a staggered implementation versus a one-year



shock. Nevertheless, Tk 35,000 crore is anticipated to be spent in the first year

alone. There isn’t much place for comfort in Bangladesh’s financial situation. Rev-

enue mobilization is nevertheless consistently inadequate. The nation has one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios in Asia, at about 7%. While long-promised structural reforms—expanding the tax base, lowering exemptions, formalizing more portions of the economy, and enhancing compliance—remain unfulfilled, the National Board of Revenue has consistently failed to meet its collection goals. External developments are exacerbating the pressure. The import bill has increased due to rising global gasoline prices, significantly constricting fiscal headroom.

The adoption of the new pay scale was initially delayed from the current fiscal year due to these dual pressures: poor revenue collection and increased energy expenditures. These fundamental weaknesses are still present. At a time when infrastructure and productivity-boosting

investments are crucial to Bangladesh’s growth prospects, allocating such substantial amounts to the pay structure will unavoidably put pressure on capital expenditure.

Allocations for the Annual Development Program, which are already hindered by persistent underspending and delays, will now have to contend with this ongoing expense more fiercely. There may be an increasing temptation for the government to borrow money domestically to close the gap. However, external borrowing has its own limitations because Bangladesh’s development partners need it to show that it has implemented meaningful tax reforms, reduced subsidies, and increased efficiency in state-owned businesses. It’s also important to identify the people who will profit from the impending wage adjustment.

The receivers are primarily members of the formal-sector middle class, whose financial situation is nevertheless far more stable than that of the general population, rather than the poorest residents. Rural smallholders, day laborers, and garment workers are more likely to bear the indirect consequences of the adjustment’s budgetary and inflationary pressures. All of this does not refute the need to change public sector compensation.

There are significant long-term costs associated with persistent wage compression. However, the budgetary math cannot be disregarded. Although the phased implementation is a wise choice, a similarly credible and phased tax reform plan is still lacking, at least in public. Without it, Bangladesh’s already precarious financial situation will be put to the test once more by the new pay scale.

Sandhar Technologies soars 11%, nears record high strong Q4 results



New Delhi: Shares of Sandhar Technologies hit a 52-week high of ₹650, soaring 11 per cent on the BSE in Friday’s intra-day trade amid heavy volumes after the company reported strong earnings for the quarter ended March 2026 (Q4FY26). The stock was trading close to its record high of ₹ 697.60 touched on August 6, 2024.The stock of the auto components & equipments company quoted higher for the third straight day, surging 27 per cent during the period. In the past one month, it has rallied 34 per cent, as compared to 3.7 per cent decline in the BSE Senscx. At 11:25 AM; Sandhar Technologies share price was up 7 per cent at ₹627.30, as against 0.56 per cent rise in the benchmark index. The average trading volumes at the counter rose three-fold, with a combined 4.29 million shares changing hands on the NSE and BSE. On a consolidated

basis operating income for Q4FY26 came in at ₹1,307 crore, up 29 per cent year-on-year (YoY) amidst 21 per cent growth in 2W production volumes. EBITDA for the quarter came in at ₹129 crore with margins at 9.9 per cent, up 80 bps QoQ. Consequent PAT in Q4FY26 came in at ₹64 crore up 50 per cent YoY, supported by higher other income and lower tax. Meanwhile, in line with the company’s future Business strategy and growth plans the board discussed the growing opportunities in the field of vehicle telematics, wheel speed sensors, instrument clusters, electronics domain & like items and similar latest technologically advanced products and decided to explore various options like technological collaboration, joint ventures or other feasible mode. The process of identifying a suitable partner is under discussion, the company said.

MTAR soars 24% in 3 days, 144% since driving stock

Mumbai: Share price of MTAR Technologies (MTAR) hit a new high of ₹8,447.95, soaring 6 per cent on the BSE in Friday’s intra-day deal after the company said it secured purchase orders worth of ₹467 crore from an international entity.The stock was trading higher for the third straight day, surging 24 per cent during the period. Since April, the market price of MTAR has more-than-doubled or zoomed 144 per cent from a level of ₹3,469.30. Further, it zoomed 507 per cent from its 52-week low of ₹1,391 touched on August 29, 2025.At 09:53 AM; MTAR Technologies share price was up 4.4 per cent at ₹8,299, as compared to 0.68 per cent rise in the BSE Senscx. A combined 1.98 million equity shares changed hands at the counter on the NSE and BSE. MTAR informed the stock exchanges that the company received a purchase orders valued at \$48.68 million at an exchange rate of ₹96 (₹467.30 crore) from an international entity.MTAR said the company cannot disclose the name of the customer on account of confidentiality. It is in continuation of regular business from existing customer, the company said. MTAR further said that the time period by which the order(s)/ contract(s) is to be executed will be decided later. Earlier, on May 14, 2026, MTAR informed that the company received a purchase orders

valued at \$238.76 million at an exchange rate of ₹95.50/- (₹2,278.96 crore) from the international entity. MTAR is a leading manufacturer engaged in manufacturing and development of mission critical precision engineered systems catering to clean energy – civil nuclear power, fuel cells, hydel & others, aerospace & defence (A&D) sectors. Apart from clean energy, the oil and gas plant will also be commissioned by September end and will be fully operational. The nuclear and aerospace sectors will contribute much larger numbers with nuclear projects being executed this year, having strong order book and volume production commenced in aerospace division with certain customers. The company has a long-standing relationship of over four decades with leading Indian organisations and global OEMs. MTAR in Q4 earnings conference call said that the outlook for next financial looks very positive. And having confidence in the execution of orders on hand, the management raised revenue growth guidance for the financial year 2027 (FY27) from 50 per cent to 80 per cent plus, with clear EBITDA margins of around 24 per cent for the year, mainly due to the company’s initial expansion of capacities in various sectors in clean energy, which has already commissioned.

Power stocks are experiencing high Hitachi, Siemens Energy, and GE

New Delhi: Shares of power generation and related companies were in demand with the BSE Power index surging 2 per cent on the BSE in Wednesday’s intra-day trade on strong earnings and a healthy outlook.At 02:57 PM; the BSE Power index, the top gainer among sectoral indices, was up 1.7 per cent at 8,065.64, as compared to 0.23 per cent rise in the BSE Senscx. The Power index had hit a record high of 8,354.11 on May 8, 2026

Among individual stocks, Hitachi Energy India hit a new high of ₹35,495, soaring 6 per cent on the BSE in intra-day deals. The stock price of the company surpassed its previous high of ₹35,094 touched on May 8, 2026. Shares of Siemens Energy India surged 9 per cent to ₹3,455 in intra-day trade on heavy volumes. The stock was quoting close to its 52-week high of ₹3,624 touched on September 23, 2025. The average trading volumes at the counter jumped over six-fold with a combined 2.37 million shares changing hands on the NSE and BSE.Share price of GE Vernova T&D India rallied 9 per cent to ₹4,800 in intra-day deals. The stock traded close to its 52-week high of ₹4,849.85 touched on May 8, 2026. Siemens, ABB India and CG Power and Industrial Solutions were up 4 per cent each. On Monday, May 18, 2026, GE Vernova T&D India said the company delivered a stellar year, marked by record order bookings and strong

execution. During the year, the company also initiated significant capital investments of more than ₹1,000 crore across multiple product lines and facilities, laying critical foundations for the next phase of growth.facility and recommended a dividend of ₹10/share for FY26. Meanwhile, the demand momentum in India remains strong, driven by electrification, decarbonization and energy security priorities, as well as export opportunities, Siemens Energy said. The company’s backlog was up 22.2 per cent YoY to ₹18,433 crore.With India completely electrified by FY19, the focus has gradually shifted to operational and financial improvements. Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) losses have reduced from over 25 per cent in FY15 to 15 per cent in FY25. Much of this improvement is attributable to gains in collection efficiency. Further, the Average Cost of Supply (ACS)-Average Revenue Realized (ARR) gap has shrunk to just 6p/unit in FY25 from a recent high of 89p/unit in FY21. Financially, DISCOMs collectively made a profit of ₹2,700 crore in FY25 after losses for many years. Finally, dues of DISCOMs, which stuck out like a sore thumb, running into trillions of Rupees, have shrunk sharply. These developments are presaged on a multi-pronged approach involving cooperation by the Union and States and present a launching pad for future growth, according to SBI Capital

Markets.

Capacity additions are happening at an unprecedented pace, with renewed vigour in thermal and nuclear sub-sectors adding to the momentum in renewable. Transmission is on the cusp of the success after some lean years as some operational issues get solved. Distribution remains the last frontier,” SBI Capital Markets said in the power sector report. Analysts at Mostal Oswal Financial Services (MOFSL) expect Siemens Energy to remain one of the beneficiaries of increasing spending on renewables, addition of data center capacities, improved capex trends on private sector industries, and export orders from renewables and data centers. The brokerage firm maintains a ‘BUY’ rating on the stock with an unchanged target price of ₹3,700, based on 55x two-year forward earnings.

The transmission and distribution (T&D) value chain, particularly segments focused on high voltage transformers, continues to benefit from a robust capex outlay of ₹9 trillion until 2032, alongside a much stronger opportunity unfolding from global markets for quality players.

“We have already witnessed the initial phase of this capex upcycle in transformers, and based on our discussions with industry stakeholders, there remains room for the cycle to continue over the next couple of years,” the brokerage firm said.

Honasa Consumer surges 10% on strong Q4 results; JM Financial ups stock TP

Shares of Honasa Consumer

New Delhi: Mamaearth delivered teen growth in Q4FY26, further strengthened its Off-line Distribution ecosystem, with 1.2 lakh outlets billed directly through distributors during FY26. Younger Brands grew 40 per cent plus YoY in FY26, maintaining strong momentum across online and offline channels, the company said.

Honasa’s Q4FY26 revenue performance was tad better but once again profitability was significantly ahead of expectations – like to like (LTL) sales growth was 28 per cent YoY. Ex-Reginald LTL sales growth will be 21-22 per cent YoY (UVG of 30 per cent), said analysts at JM Financial Institutional Securities.The management commentary remains positive – expects to sustain double digit growth momentum for Mamaearth led by traction in focused categories led by hero SKUs and distribution expansion. Guidance on revenue (mid-high teen revenue growth) and EBITDA margin (100bps expansion YoY) remains unchanged. Clearly the initiatives around reviving growth in Mamaearth/ scaling up younger brands and management’s execution capabilities are showing promising results on revenue growth; working capital remains negative too. Faster growth in higher margin Mamaearth brand, scale-up in Young brands provide adequate levers for margin expansion going ahead too, according to analysts. Key positives were a) Mamaearth sales growing in mid-teens while young brands sustained momentum growing at 30 per cent plus on a YoY basis and b) scale leverage/marketing efficiencies led to LTL EBITDA margins expanding to 11 per cent plus, the brokerage firm said in the Q4 result update. Meanwhile, the board



approved its maiden final dividend, recommending a payout of ₹3 per equity share.“We delivered three consecutive quarters of 20 per cent plus growth, with Q4 FY26 becoming our highest-ever quarter in both revenue and EBITDA. This year we also announced our first-ever dividend, reflecting the confidence we have in the long-term strength and direction of the business,” the management said. Reported earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (Ebitda) jumped 186 per cent YoY at ₹77 crore; margins improved to 11.7 per cent from 5.1 per cent in Q4FY25.Honasa reported

strong Q4 results with profit and operating performance more-than-doubling over the previous year, driven by continued momentum in its core brands and improving offline distribution.Q4FY26 witnessed highest-ever quarterly revenue of ₹682 crore, growing 28 per cent year-on-year a 52-week high of ₹397.65, as they surged 10 per cent on the BSE in Friday’s intra-day trade amid heavy volumes after the company reported strong earnings for the March 2026 quarter (Q4FY26)The stock price of the India’s leading beauty and personal care House of Brands company surpassed its previous

high of ₹364.80 touched on May 15, 2026. It hit a record high of ₹546.50 on September 10, 2024. Factoring strong Q4, upbeat outlook and Reginald acquisition, the brokerage firm raised its FY26-28E by 9-12 per cent. Analysts maintained a ‘BUY’ rating on the stock with a revised target price of ₹420 (earlier ₹375).At 09:28 AM; Honasa was quoting 8 per cent higher at ₹389.95, as compared to 0.41 per cent rise in the BSE Senscx. The average trading volumes at the counter jumped over six-fold, with a combined 11.29 million equity shares changing hands on the NSE and BSE.

LG Electronics shares slip 4% as Q4 profit falls; margins hurt by rupee

New Delhi: LG Electronics India shares slipped 4.4 per cent on BSE, logging an intra-day low of ₹1,462.65 per share. However, at 11:01 AM, LG Electronics’ share price recovered slightly, but was down 3.3 per cent at ₹1,480.3 per share. In comparison, the BSE Senscx was up 0.6 per cent at 75,631.09. On the B2B front, the Information Display business recorded strong growth in Q4FY26. In the HVAC segment, LG Electronics India is strategically expanding its portfolio in Variable Refrigerant Flow (VRF) and Cassette AC segments. Notably, LGE India’s advanced HVAC solutions are now functional at the prestigious Seva Teerth, the Prime Minister’s office building, inaugurated recently.

The selling on the counter came after the company released its Q4FY26 results on Thursday, after market hours. In the March quarter, LG Electronics reported net profit at ₹692.7 crore, as compared to ₹754.5 crore a year ago,down 8 per cent year-on-year (Y-o-Y).

The company’s revenue from operations stood at ₹8,053.6 crore, as compared to ₹7,448.4 crore, up 8 per cent Y-o-Y. Its Earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (Ebitda) stood at ₹ ₹945 crore with Ebitda margin at 11.7 per cent in Q4 FY26. The



company, in its filing, noted that YoY Ebitda margins were affected by rupee depreciation and elevated commodity prices. However, the company remained optimistic about margin improvement while maintaining focus on cost discipline, localisation, and operational efficiency. The Home Appliance (H&A) segment delivered revenue of ₹6,516 crore in Q4 FY26, growing 5.7 per cent Y-o-Y. The Home Entertainment (HE) segment delivered strong revenue growth of 19.6 per cent Y-o-Y, with revenue reaching

₹1,537 crore in Q4 FY26.LG Electronics India was established in January 1997 in India. It is focused on various consumer electronics and B2B businesses, from home appliances and media entertainment to HVAC and commercial displays.

The company’s manufacturing units at Greater Noida and Ranjangaon, Pune, have the capacity to manufacture LED TVs, air conditioners, commercial air conditioning systems, washing machines, refrigerators, and monitors.

Increases in power and fuel costs could reduce profitability

New Delhi: The operating profitability of Indian cement companies is expected to decline by 10 -15% in FY27 due to elevated power, fuel, and selling costs triggered by ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia, rating agency ICRA said in a report. ICRA said that, based on its profitability-per-ton sample set estimates, the operating profit of cement companies is projected to decline to Rs 820-870 per MT in 2026-27, compared with estimates of Rs 950-980 per MT in 2025-26.

According to the report, power, fuel, and selling costs account for 50-55 percent of total operating costs for cement companies. India’s cement sector is highly dependent on coal/petcoke for clinkerisation and operating captive thermal power plants. From a distribution perspective, cement companies primarily rely on road networks to transport cement to end customers and move raw materials to manufactur-

ing facilities. “Power and fuel costs are likely to increase by 10-12%, while selling costs could rise by 6-8% in 2026-27, owing to higher freight and packaging expenses”, Anupama Reddy, Vice President and Co-Group Head, Corporate Ratings, ICRA, said in a statement.Cement sector: Price hike to aid ICRA stated that in 2026-27, power and fuel costs are set to rise, driven by higher petcoke prices, tighter fuel markets, and a likely increase in coal prices. **New Delhi:** The operating profitability of Indian cement companies is expected to decline by 10 -15% in FY27 due to elevated power, fuel, and selling costs triggered by ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia, rating agency ICRA said in a report. ICRA said that, based on its profitability-per-ton sample set estimates, the operating profit of cement companies is projected to decline to Rs 820-870 per MT in 2026-27, compared with estimates of Rs 950-980

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All of Gibraltar’s untreated sewage is dumped into the Mediterranean



Europe: The British overseas territory of Gibraltar lacks a wastewater treatment plant and has never had one, thus raw sewage from almost 40,000 individuals and companies is being poured directly into the sea. The southern extremity of the peninsula at Europa Point, where the Gibraltar government claims there are “high levels of natural dispersion,” has been leaking untreated sewage into the Mediterranean for decades. Lewis Stagnetto of the Nautilus Project, a local environmental charity, stated that although the region is meant to be protected for animals, there are frequently “wet wipes and plastic pollution entangled in algae and all over the rocks.” Toxic algal blooms that deplete the water of oxygen and suffocate aquatic life can be caused by raw sewage pollution. also exposes fish and mammals to a variety of chemicals and plastics that can harm health and interfere with reproduction, and also puts humans at danger by dispersing diseases and genes resistant to antibiotics. In contrast to Britain, Gibraltar’s drinking water is desalinated and its sewage system uses seawater. The salinity “historically created challenges that are not present in other wastewater treatment plants around the world,” according to the Gibraltar government. Wet wipes “that appear occasionally on our beaches have... come from outlets in nearby Spain,” according to the state-

ment. In 2017, the European court of justice ruled that the UK ws in breach of wastewater law by failing to treat Gibraltar’s sewage, but the European Commission lost any power to take action after Brexit. Attempts to fix the problem have repeatedly collapsed. In 2018, Gibraltar’s government awarded a contract to a joint venture between NWG Commercial Services (Northumbrian Water) and Modern Water to design, build and operate a treatment plant, only for the deal to fall apart after a Modern Water subsidiary went into liquidation. “This had a significant impact on the delivery of this vital project,” a Gibraltar government spokesperson said. Preliminary talks with the European Investment Bank also “fell through as a direct result of the UK leaving the European Union”, they added. In June 2025, the Gibraltar government awarded a 25-year contract to Eco Waters to build a wastewater treatment plant at Europa Point. Advanced works have begun on the design and geotechnical aspects of the plant and a planning application was submitted in March 2026. Northumbrian Water, which partnered with the government from 2003 until 2024 through a joint venture called AquaGib, was keen to distance itself from the sewage failures. It said operations “centred on the provision of drinking water” and that it was

not responsible for day-to-day operations. “Northumbrian Water was never responsible in any way for wastewater operations in Gibraltar,” a spokesperson said. Its “involvement was as a shareholder and strategic partner, not as the operator or regulator. All decisions in relation to wastewater management were taken by the government of Gibraltar.” AquaGib said it operated a number of pumping stations that pump sewage from low-lying areas into Gibraltar’s main sewer but it “is not responsible for the main sewer or any wastewater treatment”. The sewer itself appears to be in poor shape. Last year, the opposition Gibraltar Social Democrats (GSD) party described “popular tourist hotspot areas ... embarrassingly subjected to the stench of raw sewage”, with waste “directly seeping through the city walls ... causing damage to the marine ecosystem”.

The government blamed decades of underinvestment for the problem, including years when the GSD held power. The government said there was an “ongoing major project to lay new sewerage mains in phases: a £15m investment in Gibraltar’s sewer infrastructure” as well as “various relining projects which ... have resulted in the main sewer being reinforced and improved within the city walls”. As for the beaches, the government said: “Bacteriological water quality is routinely measured in all of Gibraltar’s beaches ... and the latest results indicate that all bathing areas in Gibraltar attain excellent bathing water quality.” Last year, England’s water companies released untreated sewage into rivers, lakes and seas nearly 300,000 times, despite having wastewater treatment plants in place. Hugo Tagholm, the director of the charity Oceana UK, said: “The public are outraged that our rivers and seas are treated as a dumping ground. It’s an environmental and economic injustice, with the fingerprints of big business all over it.” The government must get its act together at home and abroad – our seas need proper protection from sewage and plastic pollution. It’s high time they end the outrage and stop the pumping of untreated sewage into the Mediterranean Sea.”

The Palestinian envoy complains to the Foreign Office over the British Museum’s “erasure”

Iran: Following the British Museum’s removal of references to Palestine from its exhibitions, the Palestinian envoy to the UK has demanded that the Foreign Office step in. In September 2025, the UK recognized the state of Palestine; however, that same year, the museum changed the word “Palestine” to Gaza and the West Bank on a panel that listed the modern nations that were part of the ancient Levant. Husam Zomlot, the ambassador, has asked for talks with the museum to remove the terms “Palestine” and “Palestinian” from the explanatory panels of several exhibits in the ancient Levant and Egyptian rooms, and he has requested that it be restored. Zomlot said it was a historical “erasure” at a time when Israel was conducting a campaign of destruction against Palestinians that several human rights organisations and a report by a UN independent commission have deemed is a genocide. Israel has removed archaeological relics from the occupied Palestinian territories, and in September last year bombed the most important storage depot of ancient artefacts in Gaza City, pulverising three decades of archaeological work. Zomlot was invited to meet the museum’s director, Nicholas Cullinan, and some of its curators on 24 March but said he was given no undertaking the changes would be reversed. Instead, he was offered a tour of the museum, which he turned down. “In the absence of corrective action, or a clear commitment to address the issues identified, it would not have been appropriate

to engage further in a manner that could be interpreted as an endorsement of the current presentation,” Zomlot wrote to Cullinan on 9 April, in a letter seen by the Guardian and New Lines Magazine. The ambassador added he was ready to continue discussions and would welcome a tour “once the necessary corrections have been made”. The British Museum said in a statement: “We have not removed the term ‘Palestine’ from displays and continue to refer to it across a series of galleries, both contemporary and historic, and on our website.” This appeared to conflict with the photographic proof of changes, and earlier remarks attributed to the museum. The name Palestine does remain on some exhibits, such as maps of the ancient Middle East in the Egypt room. Since the March meeting, Zomlot has appealed to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development office to intervene. The British Museum is publicly funded but run by an independent board of trustees, chaired by the former conservative chancellor, George Osborne. The ambassador hopes, however, that the UK government will persuade the museum to align with its own recognition of Palestine. “I sent a letter to the minister in charge in the Foreign Office, and we are waiting for [a response]” Zomlot said. “For me, this is not only a political issue. This is not only a legal issue. This is not even just a historical issue. This is an existential issue. Because erasing our past is erasing our present.” A British government

spokesperson said: “Museums and galleries in the UK operate independently of the government, which means that decisions relating to the management of their collections are a matter for their trustees.” The British Museum has yet to explain the changes, which became widely known only after the Telegraph reported on 14 February that they had been made following concerns by a pressure group, UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI). UKLFI said it had sent a letter to Cullinan arguing that “several maps and descriptions retroactively apply the term ‘Palestine’ to periods in which no such entity existed and risk obscuring the history of Israel and the Jewish people”. The changes to the exhibits however, predated the UKLFI letter. Cullinan reportedly saw the letter only after the Telegraph story was published. The museum has not explained its reasoning. UKLFI quoted the museum as telling the group: “Audience testing has shown that the historic use of the term Palestine ... is in some circumstances no longer meaningful.” The word “Palestinian” has been replaced by “Canaanite” in a panel about the Hyksos rulers of Egypt from the 18th to the 16th centuries BC, while mention of Palestine and the Philistines has been removed from a text about the Phoenicians, who the new text says were “locally known as ‘Canaanites’”. Scholars of the ancient world have generally been sceptical about the need for a change. Canaan is mentioned frequently in the Bible but in few other contemporary inscriptions

from the late bronze age, and when it is, it is usually used to refer to a variety of people and places along what is now the Levantine coast. Peleset, which is believed to be the root of the name Palestine, appears in inscriptions in Egypt from the 12th century BC referring to a community in the Southern Levant. Before that, the most common names for the region were Djahi and Retenu. There are also later inscriptions mentioning Israel, and the kingdom of Judah is mentioned on a monument dating to the ninth century BC. Both kingdoms survived for several centuries in the iron age, alongside the five city states of “Philistia”, including Gaza, which are frequently mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. Scholars say that Philistia or Palestine was the name which stuck through the centuries that followed and variants were used by the Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks and Romans and persisted into the modern age. “The decision to remove Palestine has nothing to do with historical accuracy,” Marchella Ward, a lecturer in classical studies at the Open University, said. “It’s no less accurate than any other term. In fact, given that it’s used so frequently in historical sources rather than in biblical sources, one might say it’s more accurate than other terms.” The picture is confused by the fact that people in ancient times did not think in terms of nationalities, and the terms outsiders used to refer to a certain people or place may have nothing to do with what those people called themselves or their homeland.

Trump claims that the pope’s position on Iran is “endangering a lot of Catholics”

Europe: Pope Leo is “endangering a lot of Catholics” because “he thinks it’s fine for Iran to have a nuclear weapon,” according to Donald Trump’s latest rhetorical assault. The comments are made two days before US Secretary of State Marco Rubio to meet with Leo at the Vatican in an attempt to defuse the tension caused by Trump’s earlier criticism of the Chicago-born pope for denouncing the US-Israeli attack on Iran. Trump stated that the pope “would rather talk about the fact that it’s OK for Iran to have a nuclear weapon, and I don’t think that’s very good” in an interview with Hugh Hewitt, a well-known conservative radio talk show host on the US-based Salem News network. The president said, “I think he’s endangering a lot of Catholics and a lot of people.” “However, I suppose the pope believes that Iran’s possession of nuclear weapons is acceptable.” Leo has consistently called for ceasefires and talks in opposition to the attack on Iran and the ensuing intensification of the crisis in Lebanon and the larger Middle East, but he has never stated that Iran should possess nuclear weapons. The US ambassador to the Holy See, Brian Burch, stated on Tuesday that he anticipated a “frank” discussion



between Leo and Catholic Rubio in the Apostolic Palace on Thursday morning. “Nations have disagreements, and I think one of the ways that you work through those is ... through fraternity and authentic dialogue,” Burch told reporters, adding that he thought Rubio was coming to the Vatican “in that spirit, to have a frank conversation about US policy, to engage in dialogue”. Burch said he did not accept the idea that there was “some deep rift” between the US and the Vatican, saying that Rubio was coming so that each side could “better understand each other, and to work through, if there are differences, certainly to talk through that”. The trip, which coincides with the first anniversary of Leo’s papacy, was organised after Trump lashed out at the pope in April, calling

him weak and saying he was not doing a very good job as pontiff. Trump also shared an AI-generated image depicting himself as a Jesus-like figure, before deleting it and saying it had actually been a portrayal of him as a doctor. Rubio later denied his trip to the Vatican was designed to “smooth things over” between Pope Leo and Trump, and tried to downplay the rift. “It’s a trip we had planned from before, and obviously we had some stuff that happened and no, look, there’s a lot to talk about with the Vatican,” he said. The US secretary of state will also endeavour to patch things up with the Italian government after Trump berated its prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, previously one of his closest allies in Europe. She had criticised his remarks

against Leo, rebuking her government for not supporting the strikes on Iran and threatening to withdraw US troops from Italy as a result. Rubio will also meet the Vatican’s secretary of state, Pietro Parolin, before meeting Meloni and the Italian foreign minister, Antonio Tajani, on Friday morning. The US vice-president, JD Vance – a Catholic convert – has also criticised the pope, saying the Vatican should “stick to matters of morality” and that Leo should be careful when it came to talking about theology and war. Rubio and Vance attended the pope’s inauguration in May last year and had a private audience with him the day after, during which they handed him an invitation from Trump to the White House that Leo has not yet taken up.

How conflict returned as a result of Trump’s effort to reopen the Strait of Hormuz



Iran: Greetings for the morning. The Middle East is once again plagued by uncertainty. After Donald Trump started a program known as “Project Freedom” to assist thousands of sailors trapped in the Gulf due to the conflict in crossing the Strait of Hormuz, the tense ceasefire between the US and Iran threatened to fall apart. The announcement was viewed as a cynical provocation by Iran. Fighting broke out again as Iran tried to hold onto the vital route out of the area. Overnight, however, the US president announced on social media that his initiative had been “paused for a short period of time” to see if a deal with Iran could be reached, but he also stated that the port blockade would still be in effect. For today’s First Edition, I spoke with Julian Borger, the Guardian’s senior international correspondent, about Trump’s strategy and the likelihood of a return to war. But first, this morning’s headlines.

Five big storiesUK politics | Zack Polanski falsely claimed to be a spokesperson for the British Red Cross while campaigning for the Green party leadership, the charity has said. Fuel shortages | Two million airline seats have been cut from this month’s schedules as airlines redraw their operations because of soaring jet fuel prices amid the Middle East conflict. UK news | A British crew member who became ill after a suspected outbreak of hantavirus on luxury cruise ship the MV Hondius is to be medically evacuated, officials have said. Tax | An increased windfall tax should be imposed on the UK’s largest banks, say trade union leaders, after the big four lenders reported almost £14bn in first-quarter profits, partly fuelled by market turbulence amid the Iran war. Society | People from black backgrounds in England are twice as likely to experience strokes as their white counterparts, while also being less likely

tionally, the fact that Great Progress has been made toward a Complete and Final Agreement with Representatives of Iran”. But unease remains, with no direct response yet from Iran and a lack of clarity over whether Trump could reinstate his latest mission. And observers fear another round of violence is not far away. Trump’s Project Freedom was aimed at undermining Iran’s capacity to maintain its blockade of the strait, says Julian Borger. “Iran’s strength is its ability to keep the strait closed – and if that gets challenged then that’s an important card that Iran would have lost. That’s why it’s so important for them to keep it closed,” he says. “Even though Iran is being careful not to engage with the US navy directly, it is keen to keep up a sense of threat around going through the strait.” Just two vessels passed through the strait during Trump’s short-lived project. The US route passes through Emirati and Omani waters, which are more difficult to navigate through than the Iranian side of the passage due to coral reefs and other hazards. But the sheer length of time that ships have been stranded in the Gulf means that some will probably risk the route, says Julian. “For shipowners and crews, you’ve got to remember how desperate they are. They have been stuck there for weeks and weeks with no end in sight, so it is tempting for some to at least try to get out,” he says. “The owners will be watching to see what happens with the first trickle of ships.” After the initiative was announced, a South Korean flagged vessel was struck by what President Trump said was an Iranian attack, and missiles were fired at the UAE by Iran. The Iranians later apologised – but the volley highlights the challenge of convincing shipowners that it is safe to pass through the strait, especially with Iran’s decentralised military doctrine, which permits its military commanders significant freedom to operate independently of its country’s rulers. “Before the war, part of Iran’s defence doctrine was based on the expectation that their leadership would get decapitated. So, local commanders were given a lot of leeway in how they chose to carry out their operations and could inflict as much damage on the enemy as possible,” says Julian. “In a delicate situation like this, it’s difficult for the decentralised Iranian system to collaborate as much as they might want. This might be the reason you had those strikes on the UAE and then an expression of regret.” Markets were unconvinced by the move from Trump, with oil hovering about \$115 a barrel.

The astonishing hair artist who left both Rihanna and Cate Blanchett in awe

Taiba Akhuetie’s artwork evokes discomfort in the viewer. This unease primarily stems from the uncertainty of whether one is encountering something that is alive or deceased. She employs hair as her artistic medium, crafting ordinary objects from both synthetic and human hair. Handbags, mirrors, rocking chairs, and umbrellas are embellished with lengthy, thick braids and straight, flowing strands. Consequently, these lifeless items acquire an unsettling resemblance to taxidermy.

Akhuetie, whose work is about to go on show at the Sarabande Foundation in London, has memories of being fascinated by hair in her childhood. “We used to go to my mum’s friend’s house ...” She stops and quickly corrects herself. “My auntie’s – she would be called auntie, obviously.” Akhuetie would watch her “auntie” braiding her sister’s hair, taken aback by how quickly her fingers moved. She also remembers doing plaits for her friends at school in Kingston, Surrey, and feeling that she was naturally good at it.

Yet for much of her childhood, Akhuetie didn’t like having her hair in braids. “I grew up in a white, middle-class area and wasn’t from money,” she says. “I started to realise that my insecurities were due to compar-

ing myself to people that weren’t like me – and wanting to be like them.” When made to feel different due to her Blackness, she felt “gaslit” and dismissed. She decided to surround herself with people who made her feel secure in her identity.

A shift in her perception of braids ensued. “I really started looking at them as something incredibly beautiful and therapeutic,” says the 34-year-old. In 2014, she launched Keash Braids with her schoolfriend Jessy Linton: part pop-up braiding service, part creative brand. Akhuetie “hustled my ass off” to build up clients, eventually establishing a permanent salon in Peckham, London. This was when braids were having a renaissance among Black women, in part sparked by the natural hair movement of the 2010s, when we put down our straighteners in favour of different, less damaging styles.

Then, when lockdown hit, Akhuetie had to find a new way to earn a living from braiding, with human contact not allowed. Was this even possible? “I was like, ‘You know what? I’m just going to do an installation out of these scraps of hair in my house and this random stool.’” The metal stool was wrapped in braids and teased hair, embellished with flowers and a

bee. “That’s when I realised I could really use this as a medium ‘off the head’. I knew that was my path. I was like, ‘This is it. This is what I’m meant to do.’”

Akhuetie, who is based in Hackney, made her name with one piece in particular: a large umbrella affixed with abundant wefts of dirty-blond hair. She’d got inspiration when heading out one rainy day and looking for a brolly. The creation notched up 100,000 views on TikTok. And the world of couture has naturally taken interest in her wearable art, with Vogue praising her “super textural and avant-garde garments”, saying they give new meaning to the term “body hair”.

Akhuetie has been a stylist and now works with brands, happy to construct custom-made, wearable pieces to order. But she is adamant that she is not a fashion designer. Her work connects with a wide range of people and, while Black hair is clearly a direct inspiration, she describes her work as being “for everyone”.

Akhuetie received an Instagram message from Rihanna asking for a bespoke piece and had to reassure herself that it wasn’t some kind of prank. The result – a braided Louis Vuitton handbag – is so intricate that,



at first, it just looks like a handbag. Akhuetie has also dressed the Nigerian singer Tems for a Met Gala afterparty, as well as the film star Cate Blanchett.

Yet Akhuetie, who comes across as familiar and relaxed as we chat by phone, is careful to avoid getting too swept up by high-profile collaborations. “I don’t think you should fixate on celebrities,” she says. “It can be easy to be like, ‘Oh my God, a famous person really likes my work! I want to do something with them.’ But you have to ask yourself, ‘Would it really make sense if I made something for this person? Or am I just doing it to get two steps ahead faster?’” She pauses and adds: “‘If someone is wearing my pieces, it has to be someone that embodies my work as art.’”

When I ask where Akhuetie sources her hair, I expect her to mention one of the emerging upmarket braiding hair brands that few women can afford. But I’m surprised to find it’s my local, Pak’s in Dalston, which gives her a discount because of how much she buys. The brands she lists – Im-

pression, X-Pression – are all products that have recently been in my own hair, too.

This brings a groundedness, an authenticity, to Akhuetie’s creations, as well as a mirroring between the work and any potential viewer – a sort of cannibalistic gaze. “It’s the same hair I use on my own head,” says Akhuetie, who has also adorned a number of actual mirrors with braiding hair – perhaps playing on, and deconstructing, the idea of looking at one’s own hair in the mirror.

Potentially, there are many elaborate and theoretical interpretations of Akhuetie’s work. As we talk, I proffer a few, but notice she leaves things very open. How does she want people to feel when they look at her work? “A bit confused,” she says. “I want them to be like, ‘What? I don’t really understand how that’s hair.’ I also want people to be intrigued as to why I’m doing it. But actually, I just really love the beauty in what I’m doing.”

The exhibition will contain what she describes as her most ambitious work to date: a large, cylindrical patchwork

of different types of hair stitched together. The show’s centrepiece, it’s composed of numerous colours and textures, speaking to the exhibition title: The Tone. But this has numerous alternative meanings, not least various racialised “undertones”, which Akhuetie describes. “As a Black person, people say the tone of my voice is aggressive. I have to tone myself down for people to relate to me. Then there’s my skin tone.”

Another work in the show is a table studded with resin beads on its underside. “I was reminded of a really beautiful glamorous Black girl with braids and beads,” says Akhuetie. “People who aren’t Black are normally so intrigued they want to touch it and almost treat you like you’re an alien. You wouldn’t ask to touch anybody else’s hair. I named it Don’t Touch My Table.” This is a nod to a phrase “Don’t touch my hair”, which became a slogan of the natural hair movement. “I want people to look at it and go, ‘Why do I want to touch somebody’s hair? What’s making me do that?’”

Louis Vuitton reintroduces its collaboration with Keith Haring



The appeal of traveling with elegance contributed significantly to Louis Vuitton’s status as the largest luxury brand globally, and every effort was made for a journey to New York to present Nicolas Ghesquière’s newest collection.

The first model stepped on to the catwalk carrying a 100-year-old Louis Vuitton suitcase on which the artist Keith Haring had doodled several of his signature grooving stick figures in 1984. Prised from the Vuitton archives, the case heralded a collaboration with Haring’s estate that will include the classic LV Speedy

handbag reissued with the artist’s dancing babies and barking dogs.

The show was held in the lavish marble galleries of Manhattan’s Frick Collection, home to masterpieces by Ingres, Rembrandt and Vermeer – an honour recompensed with a three-year sponsorship, with Louis Vuitton pledging to fund exhibitions, public access and a curatorial position at the gallery. From next year, the museum’s monthly free entry evenings will be re-branded as Louis Vuitton First Fridays.

Louis Vuitton wanted to make noise with this show. Over the past year, fashion

conversation has been dominated by the upheaval and rivalry at Chanel, Dior and Gucci – all of which have new designers. Ghesquière, by contrast, has been at Louis Vuitton for 13 years.

Zendaya, Emily Blunt, Anne Hathaway, Cate Blanchett and Oprah Winfrey in the front row were reminders that Louis Vuitton still outsells its competitors, while the Haring motifs – and the musician Alana Haim taking a turn as a catwalk model – underscored Ghesquière’s continued ability to surprise. Ghesquière said he was not only inspired by Haring’s art, but by his “wonderful values, as a pioneer of unity and of liberation for so many people”.

The designer had fun with the contrast between the Frick’s Upper East Side swank and Haring, who made his name with illegal chalk sketches in New York’s subway stations. Louis Vuitton, founded as a maker of luxury trunks for first-class passengers, now commands more than £2,000 for a handbag.

However, its power lies in the universal recognition that sets it apart from other elite brands and secures its

place in pop culture. “The starting point for this collection was the New York friction between uptown and downtown,” Ghesquière said. “I wanted to celebrate that duality.”

The show was a celebration of New York as a pop-cultural experience, with handbags shaped like takeaway boxes, records and soft-drink cans. Downtown was represented through fabulous jeans – denim being the ultimate American casual wear – while the richly pleated silks and statement chokers recalled the New York elite who once lived and partied in the Frick when it was a private house.

“What is special about this place is that you can feel the ghosts,” Ghesquière said. “Not just the art, but the furniture, the objects, the lifestyle.”

Rose Coffey, a senior foresight analyst at Future Laboratory, notes that the city’s culture and the Louis Vuitton business model share a broad demographic appeal. “New York is a city where street culture and super-high luxury coexist, which reflects Vuitton’s brand positioning,” she said.

Mouni Roy makes a striking impression at the Pre-amfAR event in Cannes 2026

The French Riviera remains a premier destination for high fashion among Indian celebrities, and Mouni Roy is making her mark. At the recent Pre-amfAR event held during the 79th Cannes Film Festival, the actress captivated onlookers with an ensemble that fused timeless Hollywood elegance with contemporary, avant-garde elements.

Mouni Roy’s radiant noir look

For the star-studded evening, Mouni opted for a striking strapless ensemble that featured a dramatic contrast between its bodice and skirt. The top half of the ensemble was a sleek, midnight black velvet bodice that sculpted her silhouette. However, the showstopper element was the lower half – starting from the waist, the outfit exploded into a cascading texture of gold-leaf-inspired scales. The metallic, petal-like embellishments gave the appearance of a shimmering mermaid tail.

Mouni carried a classic quilted clutch in black to keep the focus on the intricate gold work of her dress. Her jewellery remained understated but impactful, featuring statement drop earrings and a matching ring. Her beauty look for the night leaned into Riviera Chic featuring her signature soft smoky eyes, a contoured glow, and her hair styled in effortless waves. Mouni Roy’s Cannes 2026 journey

This isn’t Mouni’s only win this year. The actor has been on a fashion marathon at Cannes 2026, showcasing a versatile range of looks that celebrate both international couture and her Indian roots. She kicked off



her appearance with a sharp, cinematic look on day one, sporting a black halter-neck mini dress paired with patterned sheer stockings and an oversized trench coat – an ensemble that echoed the mood of her upcoming international film Bombay Stories. This sleek, monochrome aesthetic quickly gave way to a heartfelt tribute to Indian heritage during her film’s Cannes event. For this milestone, Mouni donned a breathtaking backless gown from The House of Patola, which. The vibrant fusion of traditional craftsmanship with a modern, form-fitting silhouette was a desi royalty moment on the global stage. As the festival progressed, Mouni

leaned into classic Hollywood luxury for the main red carpet event. She mesmerised in a custom Caroline’s Couture gown – a strapless, sheer dress adorned with a delicate lattice of shimmering crystals that appeared woven onto her skin. To elevate the sparkle, she paired the dress with a massive Chopard diamond floral necklace, balancing the heavy jewels with a clean, slicked-back bun. Her journey culminated in the striking gold-leaf black look seen at the Pre-amfAR event, rounding off a Cannes 2026 wardrobe that celebrated both the artisanal depth of India and the sophisticated allure of the French Riviera.

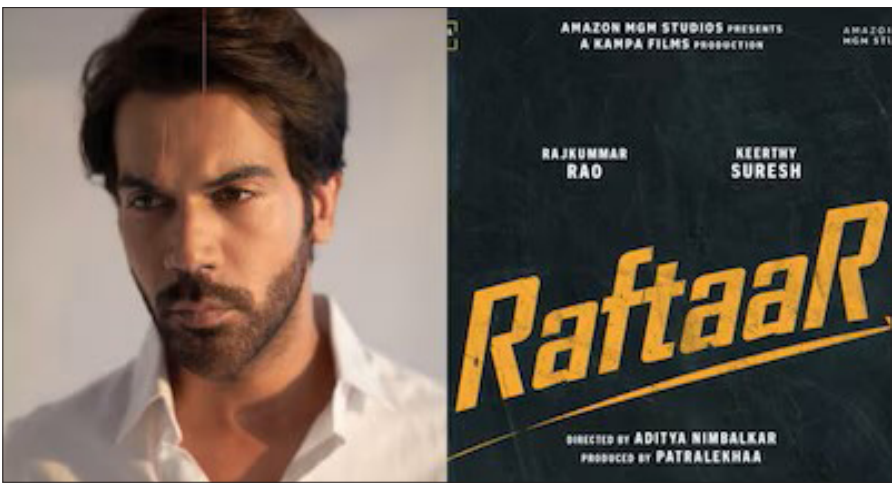
ENTERTAINMENT

Rajkummar Rao’s Raftaar rescheduled, new release date set for October 16

Mumbai: Rajkummar Rao’s much-awaited theatrical film Raftaar has locked a new release date. The Amazon MGM Studios Original will now arrive in cinemas on October 16, coinciding with the extended Dussehra weekend. The film promises a big-screen drama built around ambition, hustle, power and the emotional cost of chasing success.

Directed by Aditya Nimbalkar, Raftaar stars Rajkummar Rao and Keerthy Suresh in the lead roles. The film is produced by Patralekhaa under the banner of Kampa Film, marking the beginning of Rajkummar and Patralekhaa’s entrepreneurial journey as producers. Raftaar is set to release in theatres on October 16. The film has been executive produced by Tarun Bali, while Rohan Narula has written the story and screenplay. PVR INOX Pictures will distribute the film.

Apart from Rajkummar Rao and Keerthy Suresh, the film also features Anurag Thakur, Rohan Verma,



Tanya Maniktala and Rajat Kapoor in pivotal roles. Announcing the new release date, Rajkummar Rao shared a post and wrote, “They say building a dream takes time, but living it takes even more hustle! RAFTAAR is not just a film, it’s our first step into the theatrical world, a labour of belief, grit and countless dreams. When something is this personal and special, it deserves the time to grow into something truly memorable.” He further added, “That’s why we are now arriving, in

cinemas, on 16 October for the extended Dussehra weekend. When you see RAFTAAR, you won’t just watch a film, you’ll recognise the hustle, the ambition, the fear and the hope that drive every dream. Thank you for being our strength. We’re almost there.” Set in the ruthless world of India’s fast-growing ed-tech industry, Raftaar follows the dramatic rise of a start-up and the fiery relationship at its centre. The story revolves around a determined man and an ambitious woman

who are chasing success with everything they have.

The film explores how the pursuit of big dreams can gradually blur the lines between right and wrong. As ambition grows sharper and the stakes rise higher, Raftaar looks at how greed, power and money can begin to affect love, honesty and personal relationships. Raftaar holds special importance for Rajkummar Rao and Patralekhaa as it marks their first major step into theatrical production through Kampa Film.

Arnold Schwarzenegger confirms king Conan finally moving forward after delays

Agency: Arnold Schwarzenegger has confirmed that the long-awaited sequel to Conan the Barbarian Schwarzenegger revealed that the upcoming film, titled King Conan, is finally moving forward after years of discussions. “Next year we are going to do King Conan,” Schwarzenegger said. “That is a reality now, and I am excited about it.” The actor, who first played the sword-wielding warrior in the 1982 cult classic and later reprised the role in Conan the Destroyer, said he had spent nearly a decade pushing for the sequel to happen.

“For the last ten years I have been saying, ‘We should do King Conan, and we should get a great script written, get someone who really understands Robert E. Howard, that understands the artwork of Frank Frazetta and to continue,’” he said, as per the outlet. Schwarzenegger also shared that he hopes original director John Milius will return as a producer on the film. Filmmaker Christopher McQuarrie has been confirmed to write and direct the sequel. McQuarrie previously directed the recent Mission: Impossible films. Teasing the storyline, Schwarzenegger said the new film will focus on an older Conan who is no longer in his prime. “He is no longer in the shape he was



from his heyday, and now people are trying to take him out,” Schwarzenegger said.

“He’s the king, and he gets a little bit complacent,” according to People. The actor compared the tone of the sequel to Unforgiven, directed by and starring Clint Eastwood.

“It will be a lot like that, but it will be with extraordinary battles,” he added. Schwarzenegger also hinted that he may return to other iconic franchises, including Predator and Commando, after revealing that studios have approached him with new scripts, as per the outlet.

Mouni Roy celebrates BFF’s birthday mid-air after Cannes appearance amid divorce



Mumbai: Actress Mouni Roy turned her flight into a mini celebration as she surprised her best friend Trishala Goculdas with a special mid-air birthday celebration.

She shared glimpses from

the flight on her social media account, and gave fans a sneak peek into the heart-felt moment complete with cake, cupcakes. One of the pictures showed a cosy in-flight setup featuring cupcakes decorated like roses,

a handwritten birthday card. A few drinks were also seen arranged neatly on the tray table. Another picture shared by Mouni featured printed photographs of the two friends together placed on the seat,

and Mouni captioned it as,, “Inflight celebrations for my trishkulli!!!!!! @trishilagoculdas.” She also shared another story that read, “Happy happy to you!” along with the birthday setup.

In a proper post on her social media account, Mouni shared a warm picture hugging Trishala at a party and wrote, “Happy birthday lifeline, can’t do life without you...” Mouni Roy, who was recently in Cannes for the prestigious film festival, turned heads at the red carpet. The actress on Thursday had shared a glamorous photo series from the French Riviera amid ongoing news of trouble in her marital life. Taking to her social media account, Mouni dropped a carousel

of pictures and videos, and captioned it as,, “en route to the Croisette” along with hashtags “#Cannes 2026”. The actress used the viral track “I Don’t Chase, I Attract” by Affirmation Club as the background song,, particularly the trending line, “I love money, money loves me.”

The post came amid ongoing news regarding trouble in her marriage with businessman Suraj Nambiar. A few days ago, Mouni and Suraj officially announced their separation through a joint post on social media. A week ago, rumours of trouble in their paradise began surfacing online after fans noticed that Mouni and Suraj had unfollowed each other on Instagram.

Rashmika Mandanna pulls down tujhko preview, Cocktail 2 fans left puzzled

Mumbai: The buzz around Cocktail 2 has intensified after Rashmika Mandanna briefly shared a preview of the song Tujhko on social media before unexpectedly deleting it. The post appeared shortly after the film’s music event and quickly caught the attention of fans, leaving many wondering what led to its sudden removal.

Interest in the film’s soundtrack was already high following the recent Cocktail 2 music launch event. During the gathering, the energetic track Mashooqa, featuring Shahid Kapoor and Kriti Sanon, received a strong response from the audience through a live voting segment. Soon after, Rashmika posted a short glimpse of Tujhko, describing it as “the sound of forever kind of love.” The teaser showcased romantic visuals and



emotional moments from the film. However, excitement soon turned into curiosity when fans noticed that the preview had disappeared from Rashmika’s profile within a few hours. Social media users began questioning why the clip was taken down before any official announcement from the makers. Many expressed their confusion online and urged the production team to release the song without

further delay. Several fans pointed out that the preview had already been widely downloaded and shared across platforms before its deletion. As speculation continues, viewers are eagerly awaiting an explanation from the makers and an official release date for Tujhko. Directed by Homi Adajania, Cocktail 2 stars Shahid Kapoor, Rashmika Mandanna and Kriti Sanon in the lead roles.

Pooja Bhatt shares throwback with Aamir Khan, hints at untold story

Mumbai: Actress and filmmaker Pooja Bhatt recently sent her fans into a nostalgic frenzy after she shared a major throwback picture with superstar Aamir Khan from one of their old photoshoots. The vintage pictures were clicked by celebrated photographer Gautam Rajadhyaksha.

Sharing the photographs on her social media, Pooja wrote, “Someday I will share the story behind these impromptu photos shot on Gautam Rajadhyaksha’s balcony, in his sprawling home on Hughes road. But not yet.. Not just yet.” In the pictures, a young Aamir Khan and Pooja Bhatt are seen twinning in white outfits while posing candidly for the camera. Talking about Pooja Bhatt and Aamir Khan, the two shared screen space in the 1991 romantic drama ‘Dil Hai Ke Manta Nahin’, directed by Mahesh Bhatt. The film, which also starred Anupam Kher, became a huge hit and is still remembered as one of Bollywood’s most loved romantic films. In the movie, Aamir played

the role of ‘Raghu Jetley’, a kind-hearted journalist, while Pooja essayed ‘Pooja Dharamchand’, a rich runaway heiress.

Talking about Pooja Bhatt, the actress made her acting debut with ‘Daddy’ in 1989, directed by her father Mahesh Bhatt. The film also starred veteran actor Anupam Kher. For the uninitiated, Aamir Khan made his debut as a lead actor with ‘Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak’ in 1988 opposite Juhi Chawla. On the work front, Pooja Bhatt was recently seen in projects like Bombay Begums and Bigg Boss OTT 2. Meanwhile, Aamir Khan has lately been supporting his son Junaid Khan, who stepped into Bollywood recently. The actor was seen promoting Junaid’s film ‘Ek Din’, which also stars Sai Pallavi. The late Gautam Rajadhyaksha who was touted as one of India’s most iconic celebrity photographers, was known for capturing timeless portraits of Bollywood stars. He passed away in September 2011 following a cardiac arrest.



Mahesh Babu applauds Jr NTR’s dragon glimpse; Tejasswi Prakash stands firm by Karan Kundrra

Mumbai: Jr NTR has turned a year older and has been getting wishes from all corners. Mahesh Babu extended warm wishes to the RRR star while also showering praise on the recently unveiled Dragon first glimpse. The heartfelt gesture from Mahesh Babu quickly grabbed attention online, delighting fans of both Tollywood superstars.

Tejasswi Prakash has defended Karan Kundrra. In the recent episode of Desi Bling, the actress was asked about her beau’s past relationship, presumably with Anusha Dandekar. Karan and Anusha dated for over three years

before parting ways in 2020, following which the former was accused of cheating on the VJ-actress. Sanjay Dutt has travelled to the United States once again for his routine medical check-up years after recovering from stage 4 lung cancer. The actor was recently spotted leaving Mumbai after promoting his latest release, Aakhri Sawaal. Dutt has continued making regular visits to the US since being declared cancer-free in 2020 following treatment for lung cancer. The Furious, billed as one of the most intense action films of the decade, is set to release in India on



June 12. The film promises a high-octane cinematic experience built around brutal action, emotional stakes and a father’s desperate fight to

save his abducted daughter. Actor Ronit Bose Roy is the latest celebrity to become a victim of cybercrime. On Thursday, the ‘Udaan’

actor informed that someone has been reaching out to people, especially girls, using his name and has been asking them for money.

Ananya Panday, Shanaya Kapoor celebrate Suhana Khan’s birthday together

Mumbai: Ananya Panday and Shanaya Kapoor showered birthday love on their close friend Suhana Khan as they shared heartfelt wishes for her on social media. Both actresses posted special pictures with Suhana, giving fans a glimpse of their long-standing friendship.

Shanaya shared a stunning photo with Suhana against a picturesque waterfront backdrop featuring colourful buildings and yachts. Alongside the picture, she wrote, “Happy birthday my su. Love u for life,” followed by a pink heart emoji. Suhana later reshared the story



on her own account. Ananya, Shanaya and Suhana have been close friends since childhood and are often seen celebrating special occasions, travelling and spending time together. Their

bond has remained strong over the years, reflecting the close friendship shared by their families as well. On the work front, Suhana Khan made her acting debut with The Archies in 2023.

Sonu nigam debuts Abu Dhabi with Bollywood concert August

Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi is set to host the region’s first mega Bollywood live entertainment event of the year, featuring global music icon Sonu Nigam. The legendary singer will officially launch his highly anticipated world tour, ‘The Revolution,’ at the Etihad Arena on Yas Island on Friday, 21 August 2026.

The landmark event is brought to the UAE capital by premier entertainment agency Blu Blood, in partnership with the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) and Miral, the leading creator of immersive destinations and experiences in Abu Dhabi. Dubbed the

‘Lord of Chords’ and ‘Ruler of Hearts,’ the Padma Shri laureate will deliver his first-ever massive, standalone solo arena production in Abu Dhabi. Known for his career-spanning romantic ballads, timeless classics, and high-energy dance numbers, Sonu Nigam’s debut performance at the Etihad Arena marks a historic milestone for South Asian entertainment in the capital. The mega-concert underscores Middle East’s rapidly growing footprint as a premier global entertainment hub, offering world-class culture and live music experiences for international and regional audiences alike.

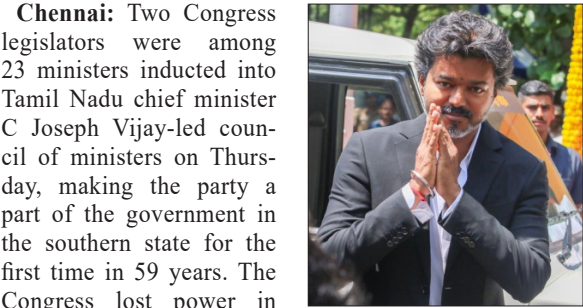
Tejasswi Prakash talks Karan Kundrra wedding

Abu Dhabi: Karan Kundrra and Tejasswi Prakash have been dominating headlines ever since the actor surprised his longtime girlfriend with a heartfelt proposal on the reality show Desi Bling. The romantic moment quickly went viral on social media, leaving fans of the popular couple, fondly called TejRan, excitedly speculating about wedding bells. While many expected the duo to soon make an official announcement about taking the next big step in their relationship, Tejasswi recently revealed that marriage is not on the cards just yet.

During their recent appearance on Neha Dhupia’s YouTube channel, Karan Kundrra and Tejasswi Prakash candidly spoke about their relationship, sharing insights into their love story, personal growth, and life together as one of television’s most adored couples. During the interaction, they were asked, “Who is not ready to get married yet?” She wrote Karan’s name, while he wrote her name. Reacting to it, Karan said, “Main both likhne wala tha.” He further added, “Wo question bada confusing hai hamare context mein.”



Congress enters the government after 59 years, and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Vijay adds 23 new ministers to the cabinet



Chennai: Two Congress legislators were among 23 ministers inducted into Tamil Nadu chief minister C Joseph Vijay-led council of ministers on Thursday, making the party a part of the government in the southern state for the first time in 59 years. The Congress lost power in Tamil Nadu in 1967. Four new ministries were also announced —one for artificial intelligence, information technology and digital services, second for human resources management, third for prohibition and excise, and a fourth one for the welfare of non-resident Tamilians.

Congress MLAs S Rajesh Kumar and P Viswanathan took the oath as ministers in the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK)-led government a day after party chief Mallikarjun Kharge approved their induction.

The addition of S Kamali, K Jegadeshwari, and C Vijayalakshmi on Thursday brought the number of women ministers in the state to four.

Chief Minister Vijay kept the home, police, municipal administration, urban, and water supply portfolios. Additionally, the departments for special ini-

tiatives, poverty alleviation and rural indebtedness will be under him.

The women welfare portfolio, previously held by the CM, was reassigned to K Jegadeshwari, who has been designated as the social welfare and women empowerment minister. Eleven legislators inducted on Thursday were under the age of 40. Six of them belong to the Scheduled Caste community.

The fresh inductions increased the number of ministers in Vijay’s government to 33. It was the first expansion of Vijay’s council of ministers since he was sworn in along with nine others on May 10. Most of the ministers in the government are first-time lawmakers, graduates, and Vijay’s loyalists.

The Congress, which has five lawmakers in the Tamil Nadu assembly, was among the first parties to back

TVK (108 seats) when it fell short of a majority in the 234-member assembly. It quit the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance to back the TVK-led grouping. Left parties, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and the Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) also backed the TVK as Vijay formed the first coalition government in what is now Tamil Nadu since 1952.

The IUML has decided to join the cabinet, party chief K M Khader Mohideen said on Thursday. “Among the two legislators, we have decided to nominate Papanasam MLA, AM Shahjahan, to join the cabinet,” he said. The IUML’s decision followed the TVK’s formal invitation to join the cabinet.

Top IUML leaders called on CM Vijay to discuss the move at a meeting. TVK general secretary Aadhav Arjuna said on Wednesday that the party had invited the Congress which won 5 seats, the IUML and the VCK, which won two seats each to join the cabinet.

The VCK is yet to clarify whether either of its two MLAs will be nominated to join the council of ministers.

Novak Djokovic handed tricky French Open draw, possible final showdown vs Jannik Sinner awaits

Brazil: Chasing a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam title, Novak Djokovic will begin his French Open campaign against Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard in the first round on Sunday. The Serbian is one of the two top contenders for the Roland Garros title this year, along with Jannik Sinner. Both have been drawn in different halves of the French Open draw. The draw took place on Thursday, and both Djokovic and Sinner will face local players in the first round. Sinner takes on wildcard Clement Tabur. Both players will only face each other if they reach the final. To reach the final, Djokovic could face two-time Roland Garros runner-up Casper Ruud, Brazil’s Joao Fonseca and Alexander Zverev, that is, if he advances through the bracket.

Meanwhile, Sinner’s potential opponents are Ben Shelton, Daniil Medvedev and Alexander Bublik. Defending men’s singles champion Carlos Alcaraz has been ruled out due to a wrist injury.

Zverev’s quarter is full of home players. He will face Benjamin Bonzi in his first match and could also face a French player in the third round. The first round will also see Stan Wawrinka take on Arthur Fils. This is going to be Wawrinka’s final French Open campaign. This will also be Gael Monfils’ final French Open, and he will face wild card Hugo Gaston in his opener. Seventh seed Taylor Fritz takes on Nishesh Basavareddy in his first-round match. The winner could face Rafael Nadal in the third round. Also, Frances Tiague will face Eliot Spizzirri in an all-American match. In the women’s section, Aryna Sabalenka and defending champion Coco Gauff are in the same half of the draw, and could face each other in the semifinals. Sabalenka will face Jessica Bouzas in the first round and could take on Jessica Pegula later in the tournament.



Gauff will face Taylor Townsend in the first round.

Iga Swiatek and Elena Rybakina headline the bottom half of the women’s draw. Ex-junior world No. 1 Emerson Jones will take on Swiatek in her opening round game. Swiatek could also face Jelena Ostapenko in the last-32 stage.

She could also face Marta Kostyuk in the fourth round and a potential rematch against Elina Svitolina. The fourth quarter of the draw also has some attractive games. Barbora Krejčíková, Karolína Muchová and Jasmine Paolini are close to Rybakina, ahead of a potential quarter-final against Mirra Andrejeva.

‘We’re the good ones. I really believe that’: meet the German billionaire behind the Enhanced Games

Before we get to doping and psychedelics, arguably the most controversial man in sport is discussing how he came to own the largest triceratops skull ever discovered. And how he plans to install it in his London apartment. So how much did you pay for it, I ask Christian Angermayer, the German billionaire who has made fortunes from biotech, bitcoin and psychedelics and now intends to do the same again using – and many believe abusing – sport. “Not a lot, because I find them.” What personally? “I have bounty hunters who do that,” he replies. “I really don’t want to say what my costs are. But I also have a T-rex. And I don’t know where to put it, so I am going to sell it for around \$40m.”

And the triceratops head? “It’s in London. I’m actually getting it put in my apartment. You need to come by. It’s a complete nightmare to insure it, and it needs a crane to get in, but it’s so spectacular.” Incredibly, this is not even Angermayer’s most audacious plan. Because the dinosaur hunter believes he has unearthed fresh treasure in the dirt with his next project: the Enhanced Games. Critics have dubbed it the Steroid Olympics.

According to an Enhanced Games study, based on 36 of the 42 athletes who will compete this weekend, all but two will have taken performance-enhancing drugs banned by anti-doping authorities. Enhanced says that 91% are using testosterone, 79% human growth hormone, 41% EPO and 29% anabolic steroids. It’s a concept that continues to shock and appal the sporting world. Angermayer, though, is convinced it represents the future.

His bet is that Sunday’s inaugural event, which features the 100m sprint, various swimming races and weightlifting events will be watched by millions of people, young and old, male and female, Republican and Democrat. And he believes that many will, for the first time, start to think about spending \$209 on testosterone cream to make them feel younger. Or \$119 on GHK-Cu Copper, the peptide behind collagen, elasticity and real skin quality. Or one of the many other performance-enhancing drugs that are currently banned in elite sport but are available on the Enhanced website.

“I don’t understand why people limit medicine only for treating an illness,” Angermayer says. “Should we, as a society, think about how not to get sick in the first place? Why not use medically approved drugs, with a doctor, to help you to achieve your goal?” Some of this is perfectly reasonable. As Angermayer points out, GLP-1s, which are synthetic peptides, have been a gamechanger when it comes to treating obesity. He



also knows when it comes to health and anti-ageing treatments, what was once lurking in the shadows is about to become mainstream. But time and again he downplays or disputes what anti-doping authorities say are the dangers and potential consequences.

Most interviews start with a few niceties, a couple of looseners to warm things up. Not this one. Angermayer knows I’ve written a column expressing my scepticism with the Enhanced Games. Originally the Guardian’s application for accreditation to the event was rejected, although organisers later changed their minds. And so we get straight into it. “I know I’m right,” Angermayer tells me. “I was looking forward to this. Only people who have not understood what we’re doing, or are profiting from the gravy train of the IOC don’t. We’re the good ones. I really believe that. I have a very strong conviction.”

But the World Anti-Doping Agency calls the Enhanced Games “a dangerous and irresponsible concept”, I reply, while Travis Tygart, the CEO of US Anti-Doping, says it is a “clown show”. Angermayer’s eyes light up. “I want that quote everywhere,” he says. “I’m sending a heartfelt thank you because they saved us billions in marketing. LIV Golf invested \$5bn and couldn’t get this popularity. We had a survey in November where we asked more than a thousand Americans have you heard about Enhanced Games? And 61% had already, while only 42% had heard about LIV after they spent \$5bn.”

Angermayer is clearly bright. And the evidence of the past 25 years

suggests he usually gets it right. But given he has various biotech businesses, and speaks to scientists and leading doctors, he must be aware of the risks involved in taking performance-enhancing drugs? “These are medically good things, if done properly,” he insists. “You can abuse everything. You abuse people, you can abuse substances. But if it’s done properly with a doctor, it is good for people.” “If these substances had anywhere near the risk all these goons are saying, we would see athletes drop dead.”

But a lot of young cyclists died in the 1990s and early noughties and many suspect EPO abuse was to blame, I point out. Angermayer pushes back, saying he isn’t sure that was the primary cause. OK, so what about the East German athletes in the cold war, some of whom ended up suing a pharmaceutical company in 2005? “East Germany gave it to children, without their consent, without the knowledge, and it was not FDA-approved drugs,” he replies. “You can’t compare that.”

Angermayer’s argument essentially boils down to this: that any substance approved for human use by the US Food and Drug Administration should be allowed to be used in elite sport, with close medical supervision. However Wada warns that FDA approved drugs, which include steroids and EPO, are often meant to be used in a medical setting. And when taken outside it there is the potential to cause serious harm, whether it is immediately or months or years later.

Yet in fairness to Angermayer, he does make several other points that

hit home. When I suggest, for instance, that he is cynically using athletes as a Trojan horse to sell performance-enhancing drugs – he shrugs and says isn’t that what sport has always done? “What about the IOC, who is selling burgers, sugar drinks and alcohol?” he adds. “That is the business model of sports. I didn’t invent it, I’d be proud if I did. But the business model of sports is using athletes to sell products. Some sell shitty scarves, some sell very dangerous drugs.” By that, Angermayer is not referring to testosterone, HGH or EPO, or any of the drugs athletes will be taking in the Enhanced Games.

“Alcohol is, by the way, by far the number one riskiest drug. It’s worse than crack cocaine, it’s surely worse than any enhancement. And we allow it as a society.” He doesn’t flinch. “It’s the devil,” he says. “I think a lot of people believe alcohol is good because it’s socially accepted and freely sold.” Angermayer also points out, not unreasonably, that far more athletes cheat than the 1% who are caught. Where we disagree is on the numbers. He cites the 2011 Wada study that suggested that close to half of elite track and field athletes had used banned drugs in the preceding 12 months. I point out that Wada says there were a “number of flaws and limitations in the methodology” and it has “little or no value when assessing today’s prevalence numbers”. But then he stops me. “Only from the UK, there were seven athletes in the Summer Games in Paris, who cheated to the gills,” Angermayer claims, without offering any

supporting evidence. “Maybe it’s 30%. Maybe it’s 20%. But it’s not 1%.” When it comes to enhancement, Angermayer certainly practises what he preaches. He says he has been taking testosterone replacement therapy since he was 30, and now takes 250mg per week. Enhanced Games athletes, he says, are taking more like 80-200mg because they are younger and don’t need as much.

More recently Angermayer has also started taking tesamorelin, a peptide which stimulates the pituitary gland to produce and release natural growth hormone – but is only approved by the FDA for treating HIV-associated lipodystrophy. “We have decade-long studies,” he says of testosterone. “I am the biggest hypochondriac of all. It would be crazy if I injected myself with stuff which had a risk.” “There is an urban legend that an increased amount of human growth hormones could cause cancer. But the great thing is I have maybe one of the best scientific departments at my disposal and I couldn’t find anything. There’s not a single study in the world. It’s in fact the opposite. A moderate increase in human growth hormones in people older than 30, is actually very healthy because your immune system goes up.” This, to put it mildly, is not Wada’s view. It says that human growth hormone can trigger diabetes, heart problems, and abnormal growth in organs and bones. Part of Angermayer’s conviction that he is right comes from his longtime advocacy for using psychedelics to help mental health and depression. That used to be a fringe position. Now it is mainstream. Our time is nearly up. Before I go I tell him that some people reading this will think he is a super villain, while others will think that he’s a pioneer. So how does he see himself?

“You need to make a judgment,” Angermayer replies. “But I can tell you one thing, I’m definitely not a super villain, for one reason: I brought back psychedelics after they were banned and marginalised. Their whole message is it’s all about love and being not a dick. So I don’t think I’m a super villain.” Angermayer also wants to make another thing clear: the Enhanced Games is here to stay. The next edition, he suggests, might even involve beloved sports stars in their 40s and 50s competing to see if they could come close to their old personal bests while enhanced. It sounds preposterous to me. And, sensing my scepticism, we end with a sporting bet. I say the Enhanced Games won’t last five years. He insists it will be thriving. History suggests the man who pays bounty hunters to find dinosaurs will collect. Either way, try picking the bones out of that.

Kharge is inciting conflict between the CM, Dy CM, and BJP

Bengaluru: Even as the BJP weighs possible organisational changes in Karnataka and discussions continue over the party’s state leadership, BJP national general secretary and Karnataka in-charge Radha Mohan Das Agrawal on Thursday turned his attention to the Congress, accusing party president Mallikarjun Kharge of waiting for a confrontation between chief minister Siddaramaiah and deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar in the hope of emerging as a compromise candidate for the top post. Speaking at the BJP state headquarters, Jagannath Bhavan, Agrawal referred to the continuing discussions within the Karnataka Congress over leadership-sharing arrangements as the government completes three years in office.

“Kharge is instigating a fight between Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar like two cats, while acting like a monkey in Delhi,” Agrawal said. “Kharge is waiting for them to fight so he gets a chance to become chief minister. There aren’t two faces for CM here. There are three people.”

The remarks came amid persistent speculation within the Congress over whether Shivakumar would replace Siddaramaiah later in the government’s term under an alleged power-sharing understanding reached after the party’s 2023 Assembly victory. Supporters of Shivakumar have publicly argued that he should be made chief minister for the remainder of the term. Agrawal said the Congress government was weakened by internal divisions and alleged that legislators from the ruling party were in contact with the BJP. “Several Congress MLAs are in touch with us,” he said. “Even if Assembly elections are held tomorrow, people will defeat Congress and give BJP a chance to form the government.”

He also accused the state government of pushing Karnataka into financial difficulty through borrowing and claimed governance had suffered because of factional disputes. “For the last six to seven months, there has been no government here. They are fighting among themselves,” he said. Agrawal further alleged that the Congress administration had failed to implement its welfare guarantees effectively. “There is a failed, corrupt government in the state. It is an appeasement-based government. It has cheated the people of Karnataka. Even the guarantees have not been implemented properly,” he said.

His comments came a day after the BJP held an organisational meeting in Bengaluru under the leadership of party national vice-president Baijayant Panda. The meeting focused on strengthening the party structure and expanding the reach of welfare schemes introduced by the Union government.

The developments have also intensified discussion within Karnataka BJP circles over possible organisational changes expected after May 25, although party sources indicated that state BJP president BY Vijayendra was likely to continue in the post. Agrawal dismissed suggestions that Vijayendra’s performance was under review. “Whether he continues as president or not will not be decided in a meeting here,” he said. “It is wrong to assume that the president’s assessment is being done here.”

“Assessment in our party is continuous. We don’t need to come here to know what any BJP leader is doing,” he added. “I am not the president’s worker; I am a BJP worker. I can speak on everything.” On the process of choosing party office-bearers, Agrawal said leadership appointments in the BJP did not follow a rigid schedule. “Presidentialship is not a job where forms are filled on the 3rd, interviews held on the 5th, and names declared on the 7th with a fixed salary,” he said.

“We have a strong president now. We fought the Lok Sabha elections under his leadership. We will face the Assembly elections under whoever is the president,” he added.

Agrawal also said changes in party leadership would naturally bring some restructuring in the organisation. “When a new president is finally announced, a new team will naturally be formed in place of the old one,” he said. “The core committee does not change with a new president. That is decided by the national unit. One or two old members may be replaced with new ones.”

Recent political developments within the BJP have strengthened Vijayendra’s position in the state unit. Party leaders and observers viewed the large turnout at the “Abhimanotsava” event in Chitradurga, organised to mark 50 years of public life of veteran BJP leader B.S. Yediyurappa, as a demonstration of influence by Yediyurappa and his supporters.

Jannik Sinner And Novak Djokovic Land In Opposite Halves Of French Open Draw

Paris: The world number one Jannik Sinner and 24-time Grand Slam champion world number four Novak Djokovic, the top contenders for the men’s singles title in the French Open, have been drawn in different halves of the draw and could be set for a meeting in early The draw was announced on Thursday and Sinner, Djokovic are playing against local stars in the opening round. While Djokovic is playing against France’s Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard, Sinner will take on wildcard Clement Tabur, as per Olympics.com.

Djokovic’s road to a possible final at the French Open looks difficult with matches against Brazil’s Joao Fonseca, two-time French Open runner-up Casper Ruud and Tokyo 2020 champion Alexander Zverev should he advance through his bracket. Potential opponents on Sinner’s path include Ben Shelton, Alexander Bublik and Daniil Medvedev. In



the women’s competition, world No.1 Aryna Sabalenka and defending champion Coco Gauff feature in the same half of the draw, meaning that they could face in the semifinal. Sabalenka’s first round opponent will be world No. 51 Jessica Bouzas and a potential quarterfinal with Jessica Pegula could take place down the road. Coming into the tournament after a loss in the Italian Open final, Gauff would play compatriot Taylor Townsend in round one, while her other

compatriot, Amanda Anisimova, also features on her side of draw. Kazakhstan’s Elena Rybakina, Poland’s Iga Swiatek, and Ukraine’s Elina Svitolina headline the bottom half of the women’s draw. This year’s Australian Open winner Rybakina will be aiming for some Grand Slam success on the clay. She will Slovenia’s Veronika Erjavec in the first round. Swiatek and Svitolina are on course to meet in the quarter-finals if they advance their opposition.

Pep Guardiola Confirms His Impending Manchester City Departure, Requesting Privacy Regarding His Reasons

Paris: Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola confirmed on Friday that he will leave the club at the end of the season, bringing to a close a historic 10-year spell that transformed Manchester City into one of football’s dominant powers. City announced that Guardiola will step down after Sunday’s Premier League clash against Aston Villa. The Spaniard, who joined the club in 2016, leaves as the most successful manager in Manchester City’s history after winning 20 major trophies. Guardiola has activated a break clause in the contract he signed last year, which was due to run until June 2027.

He will now move into a global ambassador role within the City Football Group and continue offering technical advice across the organisation’s clubs. Speaking after the announcement, Guardiola said the decision had come from within rather



er than any external factor. “Don’t ask me the reasons I’m leaving,” Guardiola said. “There is no reason, but deep inside, I know it’s my time. Nothing is eternal, if it was, I would be here. Eternal will be the feeling, the people, the memories, the love I have for my Manchester City.” The 55-year-old leaves behind one of the greatest managerial legacies in Premier League history. During his decade at the Etihad Stadium, Manchester City won six Premier League titles,

three FA Cups, five League Cups, the UEFA Champions League and the FIFA Club World Cup. Guardiola’s arrival marked the beginning of a new era for the club. His teams combined relentless intensity with technical precision and tactical control, setting records for points, goals and winning runs while dominating English football for much of the last decade. The club’s long wait for European success also ended under Guardiola when City lifted the Champions

League trophy in Istanbul in 2023, completing a historic treble-winning campaign. Sunday’s match against Aston Villa will be Guardiola’s 593rd and final game in charge of Manchester City.

In an emotional farewell message, Guardiola reflected on the relationship he built with the club, the supporters and the city itself. “When I arrived, my first interview was with Noel Gallagher. I walked out thinking, ‘Okay Noel is here? This will be fun.’ “And what a time we have had together.” Guardiola also spoke about how Manchester’s working-class identity influenced him during his decade in England.

“This is a city built from work. From graft. You see it in the colour of the bricks. From people who clocked in early, stayed late. The factories. The Pankhursts. The unions. The music. Simply the Industrial Revolution

and how this changed the world. And I think I grew to understand that, and my teams did too. We worked. We suffered. We fought. And we did things our own way. Our way.”

The City boss also thanked supporters for standing by the team through both setbacks and triumphs. “Trips to Bournemouth, when we lost the Premier League, and you were there. Trips to Istanbul, when you were there, too.” Guardiola’s departure signals the end of one of the defining managerial reigns English football has witnessed. Beyond the trophies, he changed the expectations around Manchester City and established the club among the elite sides in world football. City’s hierarchy have long viewed Guardiola as a central figure in the club’s football identity, making his exit one of the biggest moments in the club’s modern era.

Pat Cummins Clarifies Test Cricket For Australia Is His Priority Over The IPL

New Delhi: SunRisers Hyderabad captain Pat Cummins has led the franchise to a second playoffs finish in three seasons. Under Cummins, SRH have rebranded themselves in T20 cricket and have also forced the entirety of the Indian Premier League to adapt a more aggressive style of play. However, ahead of their final league stage game against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, Cummins has hinted once again that the Indian Premier League, and in turn SRH, is not the highest priority in his career and will not be in the near future either.

Speaking to ESPNcricinfo at a promotional event ahead of their final home game of the season, Cummins unequivocally stated that Australian cricket, particularly Test cricket, is going to remain his priority over the next 18 months. He also explained that this was the reason behind taking an extended break to recover from his injury during this IPL season. Cummins missed seven matches, nearly half of the IPL season for SRH, while recovering from a lower back injury sus-



tained midway through last year. He played one Ashes Test match in December and January, after which he put himself through another extended period of rest. With a busy Test and ODI schedule ahead of him, Cummins said that he does not want to miss a single Test match in the near future. “Nothing has changed for me, my priority is Australian cricket, No. 1, particularly Test cricket. As Test captain, I never want to miss any Test cricket and make myself available for as many Aussie games as I can,” Cummins said. So where do the IPL and SRH figure in the plans of one of the best leaders of his generation? In the holiday window, according to Cum-

mins. “The IPL is good in that it normally fits in our holiday break, so that’s the obvious one, but they are probably my main focuses and I don’t see that’s going to change at all for the next few years for me at least,” he said. Cummins’ fitness and workload concerns have also meant that he refused to take over the T20I captaincy for Australia despite multiple requests following the retirement of Aaron Finch. Mitchell Marsh was eventually appointed captain, despite his own injury concerns keeping him away from bowling for more than two years.

Speaking about his own fitness issues, Cummins said that the extended break was

designed to make his body feel fully refreshed. The SRH captain added that the injury has now completely healed and that he feels the best he has in the last six or seven years. “I actually feel really fresh for the last four months. I haven’t played as much. So physically, I feel as good as I have probably in six or seven years. I think a lot of the reason why I did probably miss longer than perhaps I could have was with the next 18 months in mind,” Cummins said. “Stress fractures in your back do recur quite often and we just wanted to eliminate all that risk to make sure that if I had a problem in six months, that could rule me out of a lot of those 20 Tests. So physically, I feel great. My back’s fully healed, really strong.

We took a very low risk approach to the rehab to give myself the best chance to play all those Test matches,” he concluded. Since returning to the SRH side, Cummins has been a key component of the attack. The fast bowler has not only provided SRH with key breakthroughs but has matches.

Sixty-Six Team FIFA World Cup Twenty-Thirty Proposal Gains Momentum Ahead Of Twenty-Twenty-Six Edition

Zurich: As the world prepares for the biggest FIFA World Cup ever, with 48 teams, the event could get even bigger in the future, with fresh proposals of the tournament’s 2030 edition being expanded to 66 teams returning to the football governing body’s boardroom. After making history with a 48-team FIFA WC starting from June 11, the world’s football governing body is already thinking about the future, thinking something bigger. The proposal for a 66-team FIFA World Cup has gained a lot of momentum in recent weeks, as per an AS report quoted by Goal.com. It was initially a suggestion of CONMEBOL, the football governing body in South America, to bring elite-level football to more teams but as weeks move ahead, it is being taken more seriously by several member federations. FIFA hierarchy, including the president Gianni Infantino, is looking at the expansion as an idea to promote inclusivity and plurality, particularly the president, who views the event as a global celebration of football.

The 2026 edition is already featuring debutants Cape Verde, Curacao, Uzbekistan and Jordan, and it seems like the list of debutants could grow more as the proposal is gaining momentum. The 2030 edition is set to be hosted by Spain, Portugal, and Morocco, with additional celebratory matches in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. An expansion of the tournament could place pressure on the hosts, infrastructure-wise. The current plan for the 2030 tournament officially is still 48 teams, the FIFA will not finalise the organisational structure until after a cham-



pion is crowned on July 19 this year. In Spain, the hosting landscape has changed, with Malaga having dropped out from hosting matches, while venues like San Mames and Reale Arena stay uncertain. FIFA will make a final decision on a venue. The upcoming 48-team FIFA World Cup will serve as a litmus test for how successful a 66-team edition could be on commercial and sporting terms. If the current edition becomes one, it would undoubtedly become an irresistible idea to expand the tournament. FIFA is keeping the doors open, and the proposal has vent from being treated as “madness” to a viable idea to evolve the game. As the world prepares for the biggest FIFA World Cup ever, with 48 teams, the event could get even bigger in the future, with fresh proposals of the tournament’s 2030 edition being expanded to 66 teams returning to the football governing body’s boardroom.

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East Bengal Clinch First ISL Title After Dramatic Comeback Win

New Delhi: East Bengal wrote its name into the history books after sealing its first Indian Super League triumph after a 2-1 win against Inter Kashi at the Kishore Bharati Krirangan on Thursday. Alfred Planas had given the home team the lead early in the opening half with a first-time finish with his instep. But the Red and Gold Brigade roared back in the second half to overturn the deficit thanks to goals from Youssef Ezzejari and Mohammed Rashid. City rival Mohun Bagan Super Giant stumbled to a 2-1 win over Sporting Club Delhi at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan with Jamie Maclaren scoring a 99th-minute winner but it was too late for the Mariners who needed to score six more than EBFC to win the title.

Mumbai City FC beat nine-man Punjab FC 2-0 at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi. Jamshedpur FC and Odisha FC played out a 0-0 draw at the JRD Tata Sports Complex in Jamshedpur. When the final whistle blew, the stadium erupted into scenes of pure emotion. Players collapsed to the ground, fans embraced in dis-



belief and chants of “East Bengal, East Bengal” thundered around the packed arena. Mohammed Rashid emerged as the unlikely hero with the decisive winner in the 72nd minute after league top scorer Youssef Ezzejari had brought East Bengal level early in the second half, cancelling out Alfred Planas’ 14th-minute strike for Inter Kashi with a 50th-minute goal of his own, as per a press release from the ISL. The victory ensured East Bengal finished at the top of the ISL table with 26 points from 13 matches.

Mohun Bagan Super Giant also won their final match against Sporting Club Delhi by the same 2-1 scoreline and finished level on points, but East Bengal’s superior goal difference of five finally ended the club’s agonising wait for a national league title. Yet the night began with tension and anxiety gripping the home supporters. The enormity of the occasion seemed to weigh heavily on East Bengal as Inter Kashi stunned the crowd with an early goal. Oscar Bruzon’s men started brightly enough, with Ezzejari and Miguel

Figueira testing Inter Kashi from distance in the opening exchanges. Despite the early pressure, Inter Kashi remained composed and organised before striking against the run of play in the 14th minute. David Munoz floated a long ball towards the East Bengal penalty area, and Alfred Planas timed his run perfectly to latch onto it. Without hesitation, the Spaniard struck a magnificent first-time volley that flew beyond Prabhshukhan Gill and into the net, silencing the stadium.

For a few moments, fear crept into the stands. The dream that had felt so close suddenly looked fragile again. East Bengal, though, almost found an immediate response eight minutes later. Bipin Singh delivered a teasing cross across the face of goal and Ezzejari only needed the slightest touch from close range. Somehow, the forward managed to send the ball soaring over the crossbar, leaving supporters clutching their heads in disbelief. Inter Kashi, sensing vulnerability, continued to threaten. Planas tormented the East Bengal defence and nearly doubled the lead in the 24th minute after gliding past Anwar tipped behind.

Shubman Gill Is IPL 2026’s Best Captain, Claims Ex-India Star After GT Crushes CSK



New Delhi: Former India cricketer Mohammed Kaif believes Shubman Gill has emerged as the best captain of IPL 2026 after Gujarat Titans sealed a crushing win over Chennai Super Kings to strengthen their top-two finish hopes ahead of the playoffs. Kaif praised Gill’s leadership style, tactical clarity and the way he has managed Gujarat’s bowling attack throughout the season.

Gill once again led from the front with the bat on Thursday, smashing 64 off 37 balls as Gujarat Titans piled up a massive 229 against Chennai

Super Kings in Ahmedabad. The GT skipper now has 616 runs from 13 matches this season and continues to combine captaincy with elite batting consistency. Gujarat eventually crushed CSK by 89 runs to bounce back strongly after their defeat to Kolkata Knight Riders. Sai Sudharsan’s 84, Gill’s fluent knock and Jos Buttler’s explosive 57 powered GT to a huge first-innings total before the bowlers dismantled Chennai for just 140 in 13.4 overs. The defeat officially ended CSK’s IPL 2026 campaign as they finished with 12 points from 14

Matches. It also marked the third straight season where Chennai failed to qualify for the playoffs.

After the match, Kaif took to X and strongly backed Gill amid the constant debate around his leadership credentials in T20 cricket. “RCB, PBKS, SRH, RR, CSK have been dismissed by GT bowlers, Gill asks his bowlers to stick to Test match line and length. Gill plays correct cricket - has great batting technique and knows how to use his bowlers.” Gill’s captaincy has remained under heavy scrutiny despite Guja captain.