

Mizoram Assembly approves Bill shifting State University headquarters from Aizawl to Lunglei

Aizawl, Feb 26: The Mizoram Assembly on Wednesday passed the Mizoram State University (Amendment) Bill, relocating the proposed university's headquarters from Aizawl to Lunglei in the southern part of the state. The Amendment reverses last year's decision to designate Aizawl as the headquarters of the proposed university. Introducing the Bill, Higher and Technical Education Minister Vanlalhlana said the decision was intended to address regional development imbalances and promote equitable growth across the state. The proposed university will function in a "cluster mode", bringing various existing colleges under a unified administrative framework. Although the government had initiated the creation of staff posts and begun the process of identifying a Vice-Chancellor and Registrar, the Minister clarified that the amendment represents a change of site rather than a physical relocation. The headquarters had not been fully

established in Aizawl; only the site had been surveyed. The centre is not being shifted but changed," he said, adding that the decision followed sustained representations from residents of Lunglei, Champhai and Mamit districts. While extending support to the Bill, Opposition members raised questions over the timing of the reversal. Some alleged that the government had yielded to pressure from non-governmental organisations and legislators from the ruling party representing southern districts. BJP member K. Hrahmo alleged that the government reconsidered its 2025 decision after legislators from Lunglei threatened to resign. Chief Minister Lalduhoma sought to allay concerns, stating that the shift of headquarters to Lunglei would not diminish Aizawl's academic importance. Under the cluster model, several departments and schools of the proposed university will continue to function from colleges in Aizawl, as originally envisaged



Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma announced on November 20 that the main campus of the proposed state university will now be located in Lunglei, reversing the earlier plan to establish it in Aizawl. The announcement was made during a meeting of the Lunglei

High Powered Committee (HPC) in the southern town. Lalduhoma said the decision responds to long-standing demands from residents of Lunglei and other southern districts, who had urged the government to situate the univer-

sity's main centre in the region. The Mizoram State University Bill, 2025, passed by the state assembly in March, initially proposed Aizawl as the university's main centre. Lalduhoma stated that the government revised the plan in consideration of public opinion and is ready to amend the law if necessary to set up the campus in Lunglei. The new university aims to be teaching-focused and align with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which requires all colleges to affiliate with a university within 15 years. Higher and Technical Education Minister Vanlalhlana explained that the state university will follow a cluster model, integrating multiple colleges and institutions under a single academic framework.. He added that Mizoram University (MZU), the state's only central university, will be transformed into a research-intensive institution by 2035, leaving the 21 existing colleges in need of affiliation elsewhere higher education access.

In Brief

Review meeting in Guwahati

Guwahati: Under Mission AIDS Suraksha, India aims to attain control over HIV by December 1, 2027, coinciding with World AIDS Day, said Dr. Rakesh Gupta, Additional Secretary and Director General, National AIDS Control Organisation, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW), during his address at the inaugural session of the three-day Review Meeting of the Northeastern States on the implementation of the National AIDS and STI Control Programme (NACP) in Guwahati. As part of intensified efforts to achieve the targets under NACP by this deadline, eleven regional workshops titled Suraksha Sankalp Karyashala are being organised across the country during February-March 2026. These workshops will cover all 219 high-priority districts and aim to sensitise key stakeholders at the State and district levels to accelerate progress towards ending AIDS as a public health threat.

Mizo Short Film Competition

Aizawl: The award ceremony for the Mizo Short Film Competition 2026, organised by the Information & Public Relations (I&PR) Directorate in collaboration with the Mizoram Film Development Committee, was held in Aizawl on Tuesday. Raymond Colney's 'Maimizial' won the first prize, while 'Zualtei Pa' and 'Nunna' bagged the second and third prizes, respectively. 'Chanchinbumi', 'Noodles Soup', 'Vindicta', 'The Unforgiven Silence' and 'Thanghawvenga' won the consolation prize. A total of 41 short films of 10-15 minutes in length were received, and after careful evaluation by the judges, the winners were selected. B. Lalchhanzova, Minister, IPR & PS Department, presented the awards. The ceremony was conducted by Director K. Vanlalsangi, and Secretary Betsy Zothanpari Sailo presented a brief report on the short film competition.

Regional workshop to boost NACP implementation in NE

Guwahati: A three-day regional workshop under the National AIDS and STD Control Programme (NACP) got underway here from Wednesday. Deliberations during the workshop will focus on reviewing the implementation of NACP in the seven North Eastern States — Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura — and will cover 60 identified high-priority districts in the region. The workshop will be the first of a series of 11 regional workshops as part of intensified efforts to achieve the targets under NACP by December 2027. The workshop will bring together senior leadership and programme functionaries, including principal secretaries, secretaries and commissioner-cum-secretaries (health), mission directors of the National Health Mission (NHM), and project directors of the State AIDS Control Societies (SACS) from the participating states.

'No Electricity, No Vote'

Guwahati, Feb 25: Nearly eight decades after India's Independence, a remote village along the Assam-West Bengal border continues to remain in complete darkness. Residents of Garumarachor village in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) have erupted in protest over the total absence of electricity, raising the slogan "No Electricity, No Vote" ahead of the upcoming elections. Garumarachor is located under the No. 3 Council Constituency of Kokrajhar district in the Bodoland Territorial Region.

Royal Bengal Tiger Found Dead Inside Kaziranga

Kaziranga, Feb 25: An adult male Royal Bengal Tiger was found dead inside Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve on Tuesday morning, marking the fifth tiger death reported in the park this year. According to officials, the carcass was discovered yesterday by staff of the Lahorijan Anti-Poaching Camp under the Central Range of the Biswanath Wildlife Division. The tiger was found during routine patrolling in the 6th Addition area, locally known as Monabari Soil.

Licensed arms holders of Guwahati asked to deposit weapons within 7 days

Guwahati, Feb 25: The Kamrup (Metro) District Commissioner today issued an order directing all licensed arms holders in the district to deposit their weapons and ammunition at their respective jurisdictional police stations within seven days. The order, issued on Wednesday under the provisions of the Arms Rules 2016, is aimed at ensuring a free, fair, and peaceful electoral process in the district. It covers all categories of arms license holders and takes immediate effect from the date of issue. The directive also covers arms held by individuals, organisations, institutions, and government departments. Those seeking exemption have been asked to apply in writing to the District Magistrate, providing details including their license number, Unique Identification Number (UIN), weapon number, and the specific grounds for seeking exemption. "Any organisation, institution, department or individual requiring exemption may apply in writing to the undersigned with details of the licence number, UIN, weapon number and reason for which exemption is sought," the order read. The officer-in-charge of the police station will issue a receipt to the arms licence holder against the deposited weapon. The deposited arms and ammunition will be returned to the respective licence holders by their concerned police station after the completion of the election process, upon submission of their deposit receipts.

'Maimizial' wins first prize in Mizo Short Film Competition

Aizawl, Feb 25: The award ceremony for the Mizo Short Film Competition 2026, organised by the Information & Public Relations (I&PR) Directorate in collaboration with the Mizoram Film Development Committee, was held in Aizawl on Tuesday. Raymond Colney's 'Maimizial' won the first prize, while 'Zualtei Pa' and 'Nunna' bagged the second and third prizes, respectively. 'Chanchinbumi', 'Noodles Soup', 'Vindicta', 'The Unforgiven Silence' and 'Thanghawvenga' won the consolation prize. A total of 41 short films of 10-15 minutes in length were received, and after careful evaluation by the judges, the winners were selected. B. Lalchhanzova, Minister, IPR & PS Department, presented the awards. The ceremony was conducted by Director K. Vanlalsangi, and Secretary Betsy Zothanpari Sailo presented a brief report on the short film competition. Addressing the gathering, B. Lalchhanzova said that a good film is powerful and can influence the audience's thoughts, guiding them toward positive direction. He emphasized that it is important not merely to produce many films, but to produce quality films. The Minister also announced that, with support from the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, the 'Lemchan - Mizo Film Festival' is planned to be held in Mizoram from March 16-18 to promote the state's film industry.

Review meeting in Guwahati focuses on accelerating progress in high-priority districts of NE

Guwahati, Feb 25: Under Mission AIDS Suraksha, India aims to attain control over HIV by December 1, 2027, coinciding with World AIDS Day, said Dr. Rakesh Gupta, Additional Secretary and Director General, National AIDS Control Organisation, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW), during his address at the inaugural session of the three-day Review Meeting of the Northeastern States on the implementation of the National AIDS and STI Control Programme (NACP) in Guwahati.

As part of intensified efforts to achieve the targets under NACP by this deadline, eleven regional workshops titled Suraksha Sankalp Karyashala are being organised across the country during February-March 2026. These workshops will cover all 219 high-priority districts and aim to sensitise key stakeholders at the State and district levels to accelerate progress towards ending AIDS as a public health threat. The first of these regional workshops began in Guwahati today. The three-day deliberations will focus on reviewing the implementation of NACP in the seven Northeastern States -- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura -- and will cover 60 identified high-priority districts in the region.

In his address, Dr. Rakesh Gupta stated that the Northeastern States remain a priority in the national HIV response. Of the 219 high-priority districts identified nationwide, 60 are from the seven Northeastern States (excluding



Sikkim), underscoring the need for intensified and context-specific interventions, he said. He further added that the Guwahati workshop marks the beginning of an intensive, region-focused review and action-planning exercise aimed at accelerating progress in high-priority districts across the Northeast, including Cachar, Dibrugarh, Kamrup Metro, Nagaon, Nalbari and Sivasagar in Assam; East Siang, Lower Dibang Valley, Namsai, Papun Pare and Tirap in Arunachal Pradesh and East Jaintia Hills, East Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi and West Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya. He stated that during the three-day meeting in Guwahati, representatives from various districts will deliberate and prepare action plans and strategies to enable their districts to achieve Surakshit Plus status by meeting the 95-95-99 targets. Dr. Gupta emphasised that through strengthened inter-departmental coordination, enhanced district-level ownership and mission-driven implementation, the regional workshops titled Suraksha Sankalp Karyashala seek to

reinforce collective commitment towards achieving the 95-95-99 targets and advancing India's goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat.

The primary objective of the meeting is to strategise and accelerate progress towards achieving the global 95-95-99 targets, ensuring that 95% of all people living with HIV know their HIV status, 95% of those diagnosed receive sustained antiretroviral therapy (ART), and 99% of those on treatment achieve viral suppression. These efforts are aligned with India's commitment to ending HIV/AIDS as a public health threat. The meeting is undertaking a comprehensive review of NACP implementation across the Northeastern region, with a particular focus on strengthening district-level planning, assessing micro-level performance indicators, identifying implementation gaps, and developing corrective action plans tailored to local epidemiological trends. Senior officials, including the Project Directors of the State AIDS Control Societies and programme leaders from Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, are participating in the review, which is being conducted in three batches to enable focused, state-specific deliberations. The deliberations are expected to culminate in clear, actionable roadmaps tailored to the epidemiological profile of each State, reinforcing the Government of India's continued commitment to a robust and comprehensive response to HIV/AIDS in the Northeastern region.

Regional workshop to boost NACP implementation in NE

Aizawl, Feb 25: A three-day regional workshop under the National AIDS and STD Control Programme (NACP) got underway here from Wednesday.

Deliberations during the workshop will focus on reviewing the implementation of NACP in the seven North Eastern States — Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura — and will cover 60 identified high-priority districts in the region.

The workshop will be the first of a series of 11 regional workshops as part of intensified efforts to achieve the targets under NACP by December 2027. The

workshop will bring together senior leadership and programme functionaries, including principal secretaries, secretaries and commissioner-cum-secretaries (health), mission directors of the National Health Mission (NHM), and project directors of the State AIDS Control Societies (SACS) from the participating states. Launched in 1992 as a central sector scheme, the National AIDS and STD Control Programme is currently in its fifth phase (2021-26). The programme aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 3.3 of the United Nations, which calls for ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

State-level workshop on eco-tourism underway in Kohima

Kohima, Feb 25: A two-day state level workshop on "empowering communities through eco-tourism: conservation, livelihood and sustainable development" commenced at the capital convention centre, Kohima on Wednesday. In his inaugural address, Kovi Meyase, commissioner and secretary to the Government of Nagaland, emphasised that eco-tourism should not merely focus on attracting visitors but on empowering local communities. When responsibly managed, he said, eco-tourism can balance conservation with economic growth while creating sustainable livelihood opportunities. When responsibly managed, he said, eco-tourism can balance conservation with economic growth while creating sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Eight Decades After Independence, Garumarachor Village in BTR Threatens 'No Electricity, No Vote'

Guwahati, Feb 25: Nearly eight decades after India's Independence, a remote village along the Assam-West Bengal border continues to remain in complete darkness. Residents of Garumarachor village in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) have erupted in protest over the total absence of electricity, raising the slogan "No Electricity, No Vote" ahead of the upcoming elections.

Garumarachor is located under the No. 3 Council Constituency of Kokrajhar district in the Bodoland Territorial Region. Despite repeated claims by the Centre about universal village electrification across the country, the village remains off-grid, with no access to regular power supply since Independence. The situation starkly contrasts official records that suggest every village in India has been electrified.

Men and women from the village recently took to the streets, holding plac-



ards and raising slogans demanding immediate electrification. At a public gathering, residents declared in unison that political leaders should first ensure electricity reaches their homes before seeking votes. The villagers collectively resolved to boycott the upcoming polls if their long-standing demand for power connectivity is not met.

For most families in Garumarachor, hurricane lanterns and kerosene lamps are still the only reliable

sources of light. Children continue to study under dim oil lamps, struggling against darkness as they pursue their education and aspirations for a better future. A small number of relatively better-off households have installed private solar panels to manage basic lighting needs, but the majority of homes remain entirely without electricity.

Garumarachor village No. 2 falls under the Gossaigaon Electrical Subdivision, yet grid connectivity has

never been extended to the settlement. With elections drawing closer, attention is now focused on the government and the concerned departments to see whether urgent steps will be taken to electrify the village or whether the residents will carry out their threat of an electoral boycott.

The unfolding situation has once again highlighted the gap between policy declarations and ground realities in some of the most remote corners of the country.

29 government employees terminated for hiring proxies

Aizawl, Feb 25: In a major administrative reform measure, the Mizoram government has terminated 29 employees across various departments for illegally hiring proxy workers to perform their official duties in violation of service norms, Personnel and Administrative Reforms Minister K. Sapdanga informed the state Assembly on Tuesday. The Minister added that the penalties have been recorded in the employees' Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs), which could adversely affect their future service prospects. The action follows a directive issued by the Zoram People's Movement government led by Chief Minister Lalduhoma, mandating all government staff to return to their designated places of posting in 2024 to curb the long-standing practice of en-

gaging proxies. Responding to questions from members, Sapdanga said disciplinary action had been initiated against 37 employees found to have engaged substitutes in their place of posting. "Altogether, 37 employees have been penalised for hiring proxy or substitute workers on their behalf. Of these, 29 have been terminated from service, while the remaining eight employees received minor penalties," he said. The Minister added that the penalties have been recorded in the employees' Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs), which could adversely affect their future service prospects. Soon after assuming office in December 2023, the government sought self-declarations from employees. More than 3,600 employees admitted

to hiring substitute staff, with the Health Department accounting for the highest number at 1,115. Of those who made disclosures, over 2,000 cited health-related issues as the reason for hiring proxies, while 703 attributed it to domestic problems. Other factors included the lack of residential quarters in rural areas, the inaccessibility of remote villages and language barriers. In June 2024, the government directed all such employees to report to their designated posting places within 45 days of the notification. In March last year, follows a directive issued by the Lalduhoma, mandating all government staff to return to their designated places of posting in 2024 to curb the long-standing practice of engaging proxies.

Manipur CM, Deputy CMs meet Modi

Imphal, Feb 25: Manipur chief minister Yumnam Khemchand, along with his two deputy chief ministers, Losii Dikho and Nemcha Kipgen on Tuesday, called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi at in Seva Teerth in New Delhi and invited him to visit the state. The chief minister and his two deputy chief ministers are currently in New Delhi holding a series of high-level meetings with Union ministers and BJP national leaders since February 21 to seek support for the state's financial recovery and rehabilitation efforts. During his first meeting with the Prime Minister after taking over as the chief minister of the restive state, Singh briefed Modi on the steps being taken up by the new state government to bring peace and harmony in the state. He also urged the Prime Minister to take special care on women empowerment in both hills and valley, the chief minister's secretariat said, in a release. Describing Tuesday's meeting as the first time Khemchand met the Prime Minister after he took over as the state's chief minister on February 4 last, the release added the chief minister and his two deputy chief ministers also invited the PM to visit the state. The chief minister and deputy chief ministers – Nemcha Kipgen and Losii Dikho – had also met Union agriculture and rural development minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan late Monday evening. During the meeting, the Union agriculture minis-

ter approved the construction of 5,000 new houses for the rehabilitation of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Manipur under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna – Gramin (PMAY-G), the chief minister's secretariat said, in another release. Official sources said that the state government, earlier this month, had submitted a proposal for a special project under the PMAY-G for the construction of 5,000 houses for internally displaced persons affected by the ethnic violence. The Union minister approved the new houses for IDPs affected by the law and order crisis (ethnic violence) for the financial year 2025-26 after meeting with the three state leaders. Chouhan warmly received the three leaders and assured all help in their bid to bring peace and normalcy in the state. The Union rural development ministry also approved a special window of Awas+ 2024 household survey for capturing the details of the eligible affected households, the release said. The ministry also allowed the state government to continue the process of registration of the eligible affected beneficiaries under the special project of PMAY-G. The ministry, however, directed the state government that the beneficiaries were identified for the special project as per the guidelines of the PMAY-G, and the identification and uploading of the details of eligible beneficiaries is completed through Awas+ 2024 mobile App. These houses shall be



constructed as per the provisions of the FFI of the PMAY-G. The state government is also allowed to sanction houses for eligible beneficiaries under the special project to whom assistance (one or more instalments) was released earlier under the PMAY-G, but their houses have been destroyed during the ethnic violence. Since arriving in the capital on February 21, the delegation led by Manipur chief minister Yumnam Khemchand has met with Union home minister Amit Shah, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Union defence minister Rajnath Singh, BJP National president Nitin Nabin, and BJP national general Secretary (organisation) BL Santosh. In one of the meetings, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has assured the state delegation of the Centre's full support in strengthening Manipur's financial health. She also promised assistance for the rehabilitation of internally displaced persons (IDPs), a pressing issue in the state.

Arunachal: East Siang hosted a drug and social problems awareness campaign

Pasighat, Feb 25: The East Siang district units of the Adi Ba:né Ané Kébang (ABAK) and Adi Ba:né Kébang (ABK) organised an awareness programme on drug abuse and other social issues at the Kiyit village community hall under Mebo sub-division on February 23. The programme covered three villages — Kiyit, Ngopok and Borguli, and focused on issues including drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, offences under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, crime against women, alcohol and tobacco consumption, education, prevention strategies, protection measures and law enforcement. Resource persons included Oson Borang, Kentai Pangkam, advocate Nyame Dabi, Kayang Megu Borang and Akai Chama, Officer-in-Charge of Mebo police station. The speakers addressed the gathering at length on the topics assigned to them, emphasising the social and legal consequences of substance abuse and related crimes. Papa Tayeng of Kiyit village and Mohan Tamut of Oyan, described as a recovery warrior, shared their personal experiences with Kani (opium) and drug addiction, urging the youth to stay away from narcotics and other harmful substances. Residents of Kiyit, Ngopok and Borguli expressed appreciation for the initiative and called for sustained awareness efforts in the region. Miti Megu Perme, president of the Adi Ba:né Ané Kébang, East Siang district unit, urged the public, partic-



ularly the youth, to take collective responsibility in eliminating social evils and safeguarding their communities. She appealed for concerted efforts to build a drug-free society in the villages, the district and Arunachal Pradesh as a whole. Dijhi Tamuk, president of the Adi Ba:né Kébang, East Siang district unit, advised villagers, especially young people, to pledge to stay away from

drugs, HIV/AIDS-related risks, alcohol and tobacco. Pak Ratan, Head Gaon Bura of Kiyit village and chairman of the programme, expressed satisfaction over the conduct of the awareness drive and pledged to work towards eradicating social evils, particularly Kani and drug abuse, in the area with the goal of achieving a drug-free village.

NCYM young leaders are asked hold faithful to their beliefs

Dimapur, Feb 17: Rev. Dr. James Thoppil, Bishop of Kohima, presiding over the Eucharist during the Kohima Diocese Youth Leaders Retreat cum Central Executive Council (CEC) Meet 2026 of the Nagaland Catholic Youth Movement (NCYM), called upon youth leaders to remain steadfast in faith, united in mission, and committed to authentic Christian witness. He emphasized that effective leadership must flow from prayer, integrity, and communion with the Church, while urging youth to resolve issues with objective justice rather than group or tribal divisions.

Held from February 13 to 15 at Mount Tabor Retreat House, Kohima, under the theme "Courageous Witness: Living Hope in Christ," the three-day gathering brought together diocesan youth leaders and CEC members to foster

spiritual renewal, strengthen leadership commitment, and discern the future direction of youth ministry.

The inaugural Holy Eucharist was celebrated by Rev. Fr. Kokto Kurian, Diocesan Youth Director, who reminded that leadership is a mission of service, urging youth leaders to pause, listen, and discern before acting. The retreat was animated by Rev. Fr. Thomas SDB, Novice Master, who reflected on Jesus' servant leadership and the need for leaders to repent and convert like St. Peter. The case, which triggered widespread concern, is now being

Resource persons including Dr. Johnny Ruangmei, CAN President, Dr. John Murry, Public Leader, and Mhonbeni Florence addressed the youth leaders on leadership rooted in faith, responsible stewardship, collaborative ministry, and the role of

youth as courageous witnesses in today's Church and society. Daily Eucharistic celebrations and common prayers enriched the retreat with moments of communion. The CEC Meet provided a platform to review past activities, deliberate on future plans, and strengthen coordination at parish and diocesan levels. Constructive discussions and decisions were made to enhance youth engagement and evangelization efforts.

Altogether, 54 youth leaders representing 24 parishes/centres and four tribal associations participated in the retreat, demonstrating active engagement and responsibility towards youth ministry. The NCYM office expressed appreciation to the resource persons and participants, praying that the fruits of the retreat may continue to strengthen the Diocese's youth ministry.

Security forces capture ten rebels and destroy

Guwahati, Feb 25: While recovering a cylindrical pressure mechanism IED (Improvised Explosive Device) with 10 kg explosive, security forces in Manipur also nabbed 10 cadres of different armed outfits, including two female cadres, in separate operations in the last two days.

The security forces in the restive state have been conducting search operations and area domination in the fringe and vulnerable areas across districts aimed at curbing the circulation of illegal arms and explosives in sensitive areas of the state besieged by a protracted violent crisis. The police, in its daily law and order update said that the cylindrical pressure mechanism IED with 10 kg explosive was recovered from Sijang (Kuki village) to Sanamahi Temple (Meitei worship place) in the vicinity of Naga village, Lamma Kabui under Churachandpur police station of Churachandpur district on February 13. The IED was safely destroyed by a bomb disposal team in presence of representatives of 2 Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry (JAKLI) and Churachandpur police, the police added. As many as 10 cadres linked to different armed outfits including two female cadres of PLA (People Liberation Army), the armed wing of Revolutionary People's Front (RPF) were also nabbed in other operations during the last two days, the police said. Four of the cadres, including the two female cadres, were linked to the PLA, while three belonged to PREPAK (Pro) faction and one each to a KCP faction, KYKL and UKNA (United Kuki National Front). The two female PLA cadres were apprehended from the general area of Indo-Myanmar border in between Sunrise road and Gate No. 2 of border town Moreh under Moreh police station of Tengenoupal district on February 14.

The police identified them as Akoijam Sakhebi (23) of Khoijuman Mayai Leikai in Bishnupur district and Chongtham Hembaby (17) of Yumnam Huidrom Wangoi of Imphal West district. On the same day, security forces arrested two more active cadres of RPF/PLA including a self-styled lieutenant of the banned outfit in another operation at Pechi Khunou

in Thoubal district. The alleged self-style lieutenant was identified as Mayanglambam Kiran Singh @ Shanti @ Boipu (47) of Ukhongshang Mayai Leikai while the other as Wairopam Sanahal Meitei @ Nongdamba (46) of Yairipok Khoirom Mathak Leikai of Thoubal district. The three active cadres of PREPAK (Pro) were arrested in separate operations in Imphal East district on February 14, the police said. A small arm was also recovered from one of the cadres identified as Ingudam Ingocha Singh (50) @ Borobi of Seijang Makha Leikai. He was arrested from Napetpalli area under Lamlai police station of Imphal East district. A .32 pistol loaded with five live rounds, 10 PREPAK (Pro) visiting cards, one Honda Activa scooter and a sum of Rs 600 also recovered from his possession, the police source said. The security forces arrested an active cadre of KCP (Apunba) identified as Khetics Thongbam (19) of Thangmeiband Meisnam Leikai from his residence in Imphal West district in another operation on February 14. The active cadre of KYKL – Khumanthem Santosh Meitei (36) @ Kanta of Heirok Part-I was arrested during an operation at Kairembikhok Mamang Leikai under Thoubal police station of Thoubal district on February 13.

The UKNA cadre who the police described as "extortionist" was nabbed from Matijang village under Churachandpur police station of Churachandpur district on February 13. A country made 9 mm pistol with three live rounds was seized from the cadre identified as Lunjakai Vaiphei (20) of T Lhangkichoi village of Churachandpur district. Meanwhile, Manipur police arrested two individuals involved in a series of mobile phone thefts, cyber frauds, and related crimes across the Senapati and Imphal West districts.

They were identified as Linai Mercy (19) of Thingba Khunou village and Siipfine (18) of Phuba Khuman village of Senapati district, the police said. Apart from the intelligence base operation to curb the illegal arm network, the security forces, comprising Central and state agencies, were also cracking down on extortion activities with extensive operations.

Delhi police arrests couple in connection racial abuse of Arunachali women case

Guwahati, Feb 25: The Delhi Police on Wednesday, February 25, confirmed that Ruby Jain and her husband Harsh have been arrested in connection with the alleged incident involving three women tenants from the North-East residing in the Malviya Nagar area of South Delhi. The case, which triggered widespread concern, is now being investigated by an officer of the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) and is under the close supervision of senior officials. According to police, the First Information Report (FIR) was registered at the Malviya Nagar Police Station under multiple provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including Section 79 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman), Section 351(2) (criminal intimidat-



tion), Section 196 (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, etc.), and Section 3(5) (acts done by several persons in further-

ance of common intention). During the course of the investigation, the police also invoked relevant provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of

Atrocities) Act based on material available on record, further underlining the seriousness of the allegations. Visuals of the accused, Ruby Jain, surfaced shortly after her arrest, even as police confirmed that her husband Harsh was also taken into custody in connection with the same case.

Authorities stated that further investigation is in progress.

Reacting to the development, Union Minister Kiren Rijiju said his office has been in constant touch with both the victims and the Delhi Police since the matter first came to light. He asserted that strict legal action would be taken against those found guilty and emphasised that any misconduct against people from the North-East in the national capital is treated with utmost seriousness by the authorities.

Akasa Air becomes first airline to operate from new Guwahati airport terminal

Guwahati, Feb 25: Akasa Air became the first airline to operate from the newly inaugurated terminal at Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport (LGBIA) in The carrier has also introduced several industry firsts, including SkyScore by Akasa, SkyLights, QuietFlights, and safety instructions and onboard menus in Braille for visually impaired passengers. Since its launch in August 2022, Akasa Air has served over 24 million passengers, connecting 26 domestic cities and six international destinations—Doha, Jeddah, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait City, and Phuket. The airline currently operates 34 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, with an order for 226 more, all equipped with fuel-efficient CFM LEAP-1B engines that reduce carbon emissions and noise. These features reflect Akasa Air's commitment to environmental sustainability and its goal of maintaining one of the youngest and greenest fleets in Indian aviation. Guwahati on February 22, 2026. The airline's inaugural flight departed Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, Mumbai, at 13:40 hrs and landed in Guwahati at 16:45 hrs. The return flight from Guwahati departed at 17:20 hrs and reached Mumbai at 21:10 hrs. The occasion was marked by a lighting ceremony attended by Bhavin Joshi, Co-Founder and Senior Vice President – Strategy at Akasa Air,

senior airport officials, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, and Jeet Adani, Director of Adani Airport Holdings Limited. The event also included a cake-cutting ceremony and the presentation of a special boarding pass to the first passenger on the flight. Developed by Guwahati International Airport Limited and operated by Adani Airport Holdings, the new terminal is a significant milestone in Akasa Air's expansion in the Northeast, offering passengers a more seamless and comfortable travel experience. The facility enhances operational efficiency and supports the airline's broader strategy of leveraging modern infrastructure to strengthen connectivity to emerging markets. Akasa Air, recognised for its youthful brand identity, customer-centric approach, and technology-driven operations, operates a fleet designed for passenger comfort and sustainability. Most aircraft feature generous legroom and USB ports, while the onboard meal service, Café Akasa, offers healthy and appetising options. The airline's "Pets on Akasa" initiative allows passengers to travel with pets in both cabins and cargo, complemented by over 25 ancillary products such as Akasa GetEarly, Seat & Meal Deal, Extra Seat, and Akasa Holidays.

7th Kaziranga Waterbird Count: Smew’s Spectacular Debut in Record 105,540-Bird Census

Kaziranga, Feb 25: The 7th Kaziranga Waterbird Count has marked a historic milestone with the first-ever sighting of the Smew in the Kaziranga landscape, coinciding with a record census of 105,540 waterbirds. Conducted across the wetlands of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve and its adjoining protected areas, the survey reaffirmed the global ecological importance of Assam’s floodplain ecosystems and their critical role along the Central Asian Flyway.

Kaziranga, a UNESCO World Heritage Site with a conservation legacy of over 119 years, is globally celebrated for its rich biodiversity. Beyond being home to the iconic Big Five mammals, the Tiger Reserve harbours more than 500 bird species, making it a premier destination for birdwatchers. The landscape comprises extensive terrestrial and aquatic habitats and includes two Important Bird Areas — Kaziranga National Park (IBA Code: IN-AS-03) and Laokhowa and Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuaries (IBA Code: IN-AS-02) —

both internationally recognized for their importance to migratory and resident waterbirds.

The waterbird census, first initiated in 2018-19 by the Kaziranga Tiger Reserve authority, has grown into one of India’s most significant citizen science movements in recent years. For the past three years, Numaligarh Refinery Limited has supported the initiative through its CSR programme, enabling large-scale participation of ornithologists, college students, forest staff, photographers, and volunteers. This year’s synchronised survey, conducted from January 4 to January 11, 2026, followed standardized scientific protocols and covered 166 wetlands across 10 ranges in the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division, Biswanath Wildlife Division, and Nagaon Wildlife Division. Over 120 enumerators and 50 volunteers and staff members participated in the exercise. The survey documented 105,540 individual waterbirds belonging to 107 species, including ducks, geese, waders, herons, egrets, and marsh birds. Among the

most abundant species recorded were the Bar-headed Goose, Northern Pintail, and Lesser Whistling Duck. The report also highlighted conservation concerns, identifying one critically endangered species, one endangered species, two vulnerable species, and fourteen near-threatened species listed under the IUCN Red List categories.

Rowmari Beel in Laokhowa recorded the highest bird congregation with 15,661 individuals, followed by Donduwa Beel with 14,469 birds. In terms of species diversity, Rowmari also led with 77 species, followed by Donduwa with 71 and Sohola with 69 species, underscoring the ecological richness of these wetlands.

The highlight of this year’s census was the sighting of the Smew (*Mergellus albellus*), a striking winter migrant diving duck rarely recorded in India. Males are known for their distinctive white plumage marked with bold black patterns, while females display mottled brown coloration. Native to the taiga forests of Eurasia, the Smew

is globally estimated to have around 130,000 mature individuals but is experiencing gradual decline due to habitat loss and removal of nesting trees. In India, sightings are sporadic and localized, primarily in northern wetlands. Its appearance in the Rowmari–Donduwa beels and core Kaziranga areas during the January 2026 survey has generated considerable excitement among bird conservationists.

Ornithologist Dr. Nilutpal Mahanta noted that the Smew’s presence serves as an ecological indicator of wetland health and may also reflect climate-driven shifts in migratory routes. He emphasized the importance of protecting critical refuelling habitats amid threats such as hunting and oil pollution. Bird conservationist Dr. Smarajit Ojha added that the sighting reinforces the resilience of Kaziranga’s floodplain network and underscores the need for strong anti-encroachment and wetland protection measures.

The much-anticipated report was released on February 22, 2026, at JDSG College in Bokakhat by Shri Kamakhya

Tasa, Member of Parliament from Kaziranga Lok Sabha constituency, in the presence of Shri Vivek Menon, Chair of IUCN SSC, Ms. Shivani Jerngal, IAS, and other dignitaries. Assam’s Forest, Environment and Climate Change Minister Shri Chandra Mohan Patowary expressed his delight on social media, describing the Smew’s debut as a spectacular moment that reaffirms Assam’s wetlands as vital biodiversity hotspots.

The findings provide an essential baseline for assessing wetland health, habitat use patterns, and long-term conservation strategies. As floods, siltation, invasive species, and climate change increasingly threaten riverine ecosystems, the survey emphasizes the need for holistic conservation of the entire floodplain-beel network. Strengthened partnerships between the Assam Forest Department, NGOs, scientific networks, and local stakeholders aim to ensure sustained monitoring and adaptive management to safeguard these globally significant habitats for generations to come.

Book on Dr Bhupen Hazarika released by Assam Royal Global University

Guwahati, Feb 25: Celebrating the life, legacy, and timeless creativity of the Bard of the Brahmaputra, Dr Bhupen Hazarika Centre for Creativity at The Assam Royal Global University (RGU) today released the book “BHUPEN HAZARIKA: Twenty Songs and Seven Portraits” as part of the centenary celebrations of the legendary artiste. The event also featured a panel discussion and the screening of a 65-minute biographical documentary, “Bhupen Da Uncut”, showcasing rare, digitised footage of Dr Hazarika filmed in the UK in 1999. The book was formally launched in the presence of eminent dignitaries, scholars, artistes, and admirers of Dr Hazarika’s extraordinary legacy. Edited by Sattyakee D’com Bhuyan, the anthology presents English translations of 20 iconic songs by Arkupal Ra Acharya, alongside seven in-depth essays by distinguished writers from the region. Welcoming the gathering, Prof Amarjyoti Choudhury, Chair, Dr Bhupen Hazarika Centre for Creativity, RGU, described the publication as a celebration of Dr Hazarika’s boundless creative genius. “‘BHUPEN HAZARIKA: Twenty Songs and Seven Portraits’ reflects the extraordinary breadth of his creativity, vast like an ocean. His songs remind us that love for humanity is profound and beautiful yet finds its fullest expression in serving and strengthening one’s own community. He truly carried an ocean of creativity within him,” he said. Addressing the august gathering, Dr AK Pansari, Chancellor, RGU, stated, “The Centre for Creativity at Royal Global University, which proudly bears his name and is led by noted scholar and artiste Prof Amarjyoti Choudhury, remains committed to preserving and advancing the legacy entrusted to us.” Rahul Karmakar, Deputy Editor, The Hindu, reflected on Dr. Hazarika’s continuing relevance in contemporary socio-cultural discourse. Singer composer JP Das shared personal and artistic insights into the legendary composer’s journey. Some of the distinguished guests present at the event include Bobeeta Sharma (Producer and Director of “Bhupen Da Uncut”); Dr. Nripen Borkataki, MD, USA; and Champak Borbora, Illustrator. Describing the anthology, Sattyakee D’com Bhuyan said, “The 20 songs included in this volume have shaped the ethical and aesthetic imagination of our society.” The seven chapters in the book include: “Celebrating Life” by Pradip Acharya; “My Thirty Days with Bhupen Da in the UK” by Dr Nripen Barkataki; “77 B, Golf Club Road, Tollygunge: My Mother’s Memories with Bhupeenmama” by Joor Baruah; “The Lyrical Chronicler: Bhupen Hazarika Often Did a Journalist’s Job, Musically” by Rahul Karmakar; “Shillongore Monalisa Lyngdoh” by Mitra Phukan; “The Legend Through My Eyes” by Mayukh Hazarika; and “Bhupen Da, Tezpur and the Culture We Lived With” by Dr Lakshmi Kumari Goswami.

Assam Governor hands over wheelchairs, Nikshay Mitra kits under sewa sankalp saptah

Guwahati, Feb 25: Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya attended a health camp in a school in Guwahati as part of a public outreach initiative under Sewa Sankalp Saptah on Tuesday.

The camp was organised by Lok Bhavan, Assam in association with the National Health Mission (NHM), Assam, to enable people receive accessible, affordable and inclusive healthcare services.

Governor Acharya upon his visit to the health camp, took note of the range of health services being provided to the people.

Reflecting the spirit of compassionate governance, he distributed wheelchairs to Divyangjan and handed

over Nikshay Mitra kits to caregivers of tuberculosis patients. The Governor also announced a one-time grant to Jahajghat LP School to strengthen its infrastructure and developmental activities.

Speaking on the occasion, Governor Acharya observed that service to humanity is one of the highest expressions of national duty and social responsibility.

He stated that initiatives such as this embody India’s enduring ethos of collective welfare and compassionate care.

Highlighting the focus on inclusive development, he noted that under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi,



He also called upon the youth to actively engage in community service and health awareness initiatives, describing them as vital partners in building a healthier and more resilient society.

Appreciating the dedicated efforts of the NHM, healthcare professionals, ASHA workers and volunteers, the Governor expressed confidence that such people-centric initiatives would further strengthen grassroots healthcare systems, deepen public trust and contribute meaningfully to the vision of a healthier and empowered Assam.

A total of 216 beneficiaries availed health services at the camp.

Royal Bengal Tiger Found Dead Inside Kaziranga

Kaziranga, Feb 25: An adult male Royal Bengal Tiger was found dead inside Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve on Tuesday morning, marking the fifth tiger death reported in the park this year.

According to officials, the carcass was discovered yesterday by staff of the Lahorijan Anti-Poaching Camp under the Central Range of the Biswanath Wildlife Division. The tiger was found during routine patrolling in the 6th Addition area, locally known as Monabari Soil.

Forest personnel stated that the carcass was in an advanced stage of decomposition when located. However, bones, skin, nails, and teeth were found intact at the site, indicating no immediate signs of poaching. A post-mortem examination was conducted by a veterinary officer in the presence of a committee constituted as per the National Tiger Conservation Authority’s standard operating procedure.

Sonali Ghosh, Director of the park, said preliminary findings suggest that the death appears to be natural, possibly due to old age. “Samples have been collected and preserved for forensic analysis. The carcass was disposed of by burning as per established protocol,” she stated. The 6th Addition area, where the tiger was found, has a healthy tiger population. As per the last census, 27 Royal Bengal Tigers were recorded in this zone, contributing significantly to the park’s overall growth in tiger numbers in recent years.

However, the series of deaths within less than two months



has drawn attention. On February 7, an adult male tiger was found dead in the Mandir Baneshwar area under the Burapahar Range. Earlier, on January 18, a female tiger was reported dead at Kathpora under the Western Range (Bagori). On January 14, a young male tiger was found at Thute Chapori in the Eastern Range (Gamiri/Biswanath). The first death of the year was recorded on January 4, when an adult female tiger was found dead at Paschim Bimoli under the Western Range. Kaziranga, known globally for its conservation success, remains one of India’s most important tiger habitats. While officials maintain that preliminary assessments point to natural causes in the latest case, wildlife observers and local communities are closely monitoring developments, hoping the park’s iconic big cats continue to thrive in the fragile riverine ecosystem they call home.

Alliance Talks Under Strain: Gaurav Gogoi Admits Challenges as Congress Workers Protest Dalgaon Seat Move

Guwahati, Feb 25: Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president and Lok Sabha MP Gaurav Gogoi has acknowledged that alliance negotiations ahead of the upcoming Assam Assembly elections remain a work in progress, with seat-sharing discussions with Rajior Dal yet to be finalised. Addressing reporters, Gogoi said that dialogue with Rajior Dal and other opposition parties is ongoing and that a detailed status report is being submitted to the Congress central leadership. He confirmed that the state unit has also sought guidance from the party high command to resolve specific hurdles that have surfaced during the negotiations.

Without naming specific constituencies, Gogoi referred to public objections raised by Rajior Dal chief Akhil Gogoi regarding certain seats under discussion. He remarked that while Akhil Gogoi often shares details with the media, it is not the Congress party’s culture to disclose every aspect of negotiations publicly. “We speak only after due consultation and discussion with party leaders,” he said, underlining what he described as the party’s disciplined approach to alliance-building.

Gogoi revealed that while the Congress has finalised a seat-sharing arrangement with one party, talks with an-

other key regional player remain inconclusive. Though he expressed hope that an alliance would eventually materialise, he admitted that internal complications have made the process increasingly difficult.

One major point of friction, he indicated, is the reported induction of former Congress leaders — previously expelled for disciplinary reasons — into Rajior Dal. Many Congress members, he said, are questioning how a smooth seat-sharing arrangement can proceed if tickets are allotted to individuals once removed from the party. “I leave it to the public. They are watching. They will decide what is right or wrong,” Gogoi stated, hinting at the political implications of such decisions. In a candid moment, Gogoi admitted that although he had earlier been “very optimistic” about forging a broader opposition alliance, the complexities of negotiations have left him feeling constrained. “Still, I will try my level best to make my party colleagues, senior leaders and the central leadership understand the importance of taking everyone together for the upcoming Assembly polls. But truly speaking, I feel a bit helpless now,” he said. Meanwhile, tensions escalated at Rajiv Bhawan on February 25 as Congress workers from the Dalgaon constituency staged

a large protest over reports that the party may concede the Dalgaon seat to Rajior Dal. Demonstrators raised slogans against the proposed move, describing it as a “demoralising compromise.” Protesters argued that Dalgaon has long been considered a Congress stronghold and warned that conceding the seat would demotivate loyal grassroots workers. They cautioned that if the ticket is not given to a Congress candidate, local party members may consider resigning en masse.

In a further show of dissent, more than a hundred Congress workers gathered outside Gaurav Gogoi’s residence at Ajanta Path in Guwahati, reiterating their opposition to any move to transfer the Dalgaon Assembly constituency to Rajior Dal. The agitating workers claimed that discussions over seat-sharing were conducted without consulting local leaders and grassroots members, calling the process undemocratic.

While the party leadership has yet to issue an official clarification, the intensity of the protests reflects growing unease within sections of the Congress rank and file, underscoring the delicate balancing act the leadership faces in managing alliances without alienating core supporters.

Nehru Statue Uprooted in Assam’s Cachar District, FIR Lodged

Silchar, Feb 25: Unidentified miscreants allegedly used an excavator to uproot and remove a statue of India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, at Poilapool in the Lakhimpur sub-division of Assam’s Cachar district late Monday night. The incident took place at a four-way junction in the busy Poilapool market area and sparked outrage among local residents and political parties, particularly the Indian National Congress. Sources said the statue was pulled down using heavy machinery and later taken away. CCTV footage from a nearby shop reportedly shows a group of unidentified individuals operating an excavator to dislodge the statue before loading it onto a vehicle. The identities of those involved have not yet been established. Police reached the spot after being alerted and initiated an investigation. “We are examining CCTV footage and gathering other evidence to identify those responsible. Necessary legal action will be taken,” a police official

said on Tuesday.

Former Silchar district Congress president Pradip Kumar Dey, accompanied by party workers, lodged an FIR at Lakhimpur Police Station demanding immediate arrests. Dey stated that the statue had been installed in the 1990s by former Assam minister and local MLA Dinesh Prasad Goala at the Poilapool junction, a key commercial centre in the area. Describing the act as “deeply condemnable,” Congress leaders questioned how heavy equipment could be used in a public place without drawing immediate attention. They alleged that the incident appeared to be premeditated and demanded strict action against those responsible. Several local organisations also denounced the vandalism and called for swift arrests. Tension prevailed in the area on Tuesday, although no untoward incident was reported. Police said security has been intensified in the locality to prevent escalation as the investigation continues.

Mizoram launches PMFBY for five crops with 90% subsidy support

Aizawl, Feb 26: The Mizoram government will roll out a comprehensive crop insurance scheme covering five key crops to shield farmers from financial losses caused by natural disasters and pests and diseases, Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister PC Vanlalruata informed the Assembly on Wednesday.

The scheme will be implemented under the state’s flagship ‘Bana Kaih’ (Handholding) initiative and aligned with the Centre’s Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY). Vanlalruata said the Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Department has initiated steps to operationalise the central government’s scheme in the state. A State Level Coordination Committee on Crop Insurance (SLCCCCI), constituted for implementing PMFBY, has notified five crops for coverage — paddy, ginger, Mizo chilli, cabbage and brinjal (eggplant). The minister said the

scheme will initially be introduced in select districts with high production potential and later expanded in phases to other parts of the state. While the initial phase focuses on selected high-potential areas, the government plans to extend coverage to additional districts in a phased manner,” Vanlalruata told the House. Under the notified plan, ginger farmers across all 11 districts will be covered. Paddy growers in Champhai, Kolasib and Mamit districts will be eligible, while Mizo chilli farmers in Serchhip, Saitual and Hnahthial districts will be brought under the scheme. Brinjal and cabbage growers in Serchhip district will also be covered. To ease the financial burden on farmers, the state government will provide substantial premium subsidies through the Bana Kaih scheme. Small and marginal farmers holding less than one hectare of land will pay only 10 per cent of the insurance



premium, with the remaining 90 per cent borne by the state. Farmers with landholdings between one and five hectares will receive an 80 per cent premium subsidy, while those owning more than five hectares will be entitled to a 50 per cent state contribution to-

wards the premium, the minister said. Vanlalruata credited Chief Minister Lalduhoma for prioritising the introduction of crop insurance in the state. Earlier this month, the minister had said that a tender process had been completed and TATA AIG General In-

surance Company had been selected as the insurer for the scheme. Valte, a three-time legislator and former Minister, passed away on Saturday at Medanta Hospital in Gurugram. He had been battling severe health complications since May 4, 2023, when he was allegedly intercepted and assaulted by armed militias in Imphal while returning from a meeting at the Chief Minister’s bungalow.

Lalduhoma described Valte’s demise as a “tragic loss” not only for Manipur but for the entire Zo community across Northeast India. “His life was one of unwavering commitment to public service, guided by conviction, courage, and compassion for the voiceless,” the Chief Minister said in a Facebook post. Lalduhoma highlighted the “brutal and painful” nature of the attack on Valte, noting that the legislator had fought bravely for his life while awaiting justice.

The Mizoram CM characterized Valte as a “bridge-builder” who remained a firm believer in mutual respect and peace among diverse communities despite the personal trauma he endured. Throughout his distinguished political career, Valte worked tirelessly for the upliftment of the Zo ethnic tribes in Manipur and championed the cause of the poor and underprivileged. His persistent efforts led to the recognition of Zomi Nam Ni (Zomi National Day) as a Restricted Holiday in Manipur, an important affirmation of identity and cultural dignity for the Zo people. He also played a pivotal role in advocating for the creation of the Mualnuam ADC in Churachandpur district, ensuring better governance and administrative access for the remote Zodawn villages, according to Lalduhoma. Pu Gin was a bridge-builder, a firm believer in peace and mutual respect among diverse communities.

North East Chronicle

FEBRUARY 26 2026 VOL 02 NO. 05

Editorial

Public Health Preparedness in a Post-Pandemic Era

The global pandemic underscored the importance of resilient public health systems. Preparedness extends beyond emergency response; it encompasses infrastructure, workforce training, and community awareness. Healthcare capacity expansion during crisis periods revealed structural limitations. Strengthening primary healthcare networks enhances early detection and prevention. Decentralised facilities reduce burden on tertiary hospitals. Investment in medical research and surveillance systems improves response capability. Data-driven monitoring enables timely intervention. Public communication strategies counter misinformation. Supply chain resilience ensures availability of essential medicines and equipment. Domestic manufacturing capacity reduces dependency on imports during crises. Mental health support must form part of preparedness frameworks. Psychological impact of emergencies often persists beyond immediate threat. Public-private collaboration accelerates innovation. Transparent coordination between agencies enhances effectiveness. Budget allocation to health should reflect its strategic importance. Preventive care reduces long-term expenditure. Public health preparedness is integral to national security and economic continuity. Institutional reform ensures readiness for future contingencies. Resilient health systems protect not only lives but societal stability.

I was at the Baftas – and while hearing the N-word was unsettling, all anger should be aimed at the BBC

I attended the Bafta awards on Sunday. And I arrived early enough to hear the Tourette syndrome (TS) campaigner John Davidson, on whom the biographical film I Swear is based, be introduced. He stood up to wave and take in the applause, and we were told that due to his TS, we might expect to hear involuntary vocal outbursts, known as tics, and that we should understand that the Baftas are an inclusive space in which all people are welcome. Perhaps half the people were listening, others would have been on their phones or engaged in mild chatter. But the tics were instantly audible. When the host, Alan Cumming, was on stage we heard “boring” and there was laughter. When the outgoing chair of Bafta, Sara Putt, was speaking, we heard “shut the fuck up” and there was a mix of knowing silence and confusion. But, as you all now know, it was when Sinners actors Michael B Jordan and Delroy Lindo presented an award that the tics transmuted from things that would be read as benignly antisocial to more outright offensive, as we heard the N-word. There were gasps and whispers of “did he just say ... ?”

Many will wonder how it felt to be a black person in the room in that moment, hearing that incendiary word, which carries with it generational histories of pain and brutality. And I suppose you would expect that I was immediately upset or angered by it. In truth, the most I felt was a degree of awkwardness. It

was right that Davidson was invited into this space (any suggestion that he should’ve been confined to a separate room or contained in a sound-proof box is, plainly, discrimination) and also that the possibility of tics was mitigated with a disclaimer. But, God, isn’t this the worst possible outcome you could imagine? I even started laughing, thinking of everything that came together here at once. I also felt immensely sad for Jordan and Lindo, seeing their faces drop as they stood on stage only to hear that word. There is no amount of warning that could truly prepare you for how the word can send shockwaves through your body.

And so I empathised with their mental strength and magnanimity to simply go on and continue with their duties. Any condemnation of Davidson is not only futile but actively unhelpful. I have seen much online commentary suggesting that his tics were akin to a Freudian slip, an impulsive communication of internally held thoughts. But this is a misunderstanding of TS. Coprolalia, the specific tic disorder leading to utterances of obscene and socially taboo language, is not a communication of subconscious thoughts or desires. This is not a situation akin to a white person becoming angry at a black person and yelling a slur. This is more akin to saying “fuck the queen” while collecting an MBE from her, as Davidson in fact did. It is something that you do not want to do, but that has come out of you without you



even thinking about it – and it is inherently related to the social context presented in front of you.

In 2011, the BBC released the documentary Tourettes: I Swear I Can Sing featuring Ruth Ojadi, a black woman with the condition. The disruption to her life that she described was unimaginable. As for her expletives? “No race, no denomination, no gender, no sexuality, no religion is safe,” she said. Such a condition should only be met with deep empathy and understanding. Davidson has said that he is “deeply mortified if anyone considers my involuntary tics to be intentional or to carry any meaning”. Some have criticised this for not amounting to a proper apology. But I am not sure what exactly an apology from him would do in this

instance. The reality of the condition is that if Davidson were to meet Lindo or Jordan, or any of the other black attendees of the event, we would probably hear the N-word again – and that would be no fault of his own. Some have also framed this as a test of competing rights: of disabled people to be in a public space, and of black people not to be met with racially offensive language. That feels divorced from reality. In that space on Sunday, Davidson’s presence alone did not impinge on my rights or those of any other black person. It is an uncomfortable truth that inclusion will be jarring and emotionally complicated for a host of reasons. That this has concerned such a slur has been deeply unfortunate. But a TS tic is not the same as racial abuse

with intent. What I cannot countenance is the BBC’s decision not to edit out the N-word tic, despite there being a delay in broadcast. Producers have claimed that they “didn’t hear” the slur as they were working from trucks. Even if this was the case, Warner Bros, the studio behind Sinners, reportedly raised the issue with Bafta and was assured that the word would be removed before broadcast. It also doesn’t wash considering that the decision was made to edit “Free Palestine” out of Akinola Davies Jr’s winning speech.

And why did nobody speak to Jordan and Lindo after the incident? In the past few years in the UK, we have had race riots and far-right demonstrations, while public discourse around race has degraded – and race and religious hate crimes have increased in England and Wales. In that context, an N-word outburst at two black actors can look and feel like a culmination of broader societal breakdown. In that way, everyone has been failed – Davidson made to look like an avatar for British racism, black people left to feel confused and angry while instructed to remain graceful and tolerant. I left the room with a sense of understanding, even if I was a little unsettled by the incident. But I have been left much sadder by the broadcaster’s negligence. This episode could have been the right opportunity for awareness and education. Yet our institutions seemingly remain completely unfit to meet the moment.

Make ICT policy a priority, not a side show

In the first days of a new government, it is always the immediate anxieties that set the tone. People want to know whether the streets will be calmer, whether corruption will loosen its grip, or whether the price of essentials will hold steady. Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has already addressed these concerns. However, the government’s real challenge in the long term will be to prove that its ministerial portfolios are fit to withstand the test of time, and few matter more than the ICT portfolio, which feels sidelined in high-level conversations about growth, reforms, and good governance.

Tech policies are no longer a side project on the global stage. Today, they increasingly determine how economies compete, how states protect critical systems, how businesses handle data, and how safely citizens can speak and organise online. Countries that treat this brief as an afterthought do not get to opt out; they simply end up living under rules written elsewhere. Yet our tech governance has too often followed a familiar script: heavy compliance burdens, weak incentives for risk-taking, and a preference for control over capability. Public benefit has remained limited because the state has consistently failed to build the institutional competence that a fast-moving, high-stakes sector demands. The digital economy has grown nonetheless, driven by entrepreneurs and firms operating despite policy rather than because of it.

In a fast-moving policy landscape, delay is often punished. By the time a state realises a law is unworkable, or that a regulatory approach has fallen behind, the world may have already moved on. Standards shift, supply chains relocate, platforms change their enforcement, and what once looked manageable becomes expensive to repair. Bangladesh has already paid some of that price in the past. Enforcement of regulatory frameworks such as the Digital Security Act, 2018 and the Cyber Security Act, 2023 has repeatedly attracted controversy, while reports of data leaks and breaches have periodically jolted the public. These episodes make headlines, then fade, which points



to a deeper problem—a troubling approach to tech policy that seems more comfortable asserting authority than building competence, more inclined towards restrictive law than enforceable standards, and more willing to treat the ICT portfolio as a political instrument rather than a governance discipline.

What is striking here is how often the scale of harm is underestimated. Digital systems sit inside everyday routines, so the consequences of database leaks are not abstract; they are felt in real life. When digital laws are loosely drafted or unpredictably enforced, the impact is felt through fear, self-censorship, and a loss of trust in institutions. The effects also travel beyond borders, shaping how Bangladesh is judged by investors, platforms, partners, and the wider world. The interim government’s attempt to undo years of damage often risked reproducing the same weaknesses. Rights groups repeatedly urged the administration to stop fast-tracking sweeping digital ordinances and to adopt transparent, inclusive, realistic and evidence-based lawmaking. Some of those concerns were addressed, however, most were not. Can the new government’s ICT portfolio, led by Fakir Mahbub Anam, avoid repeating that cycle? It can, but only if it trades reform maximalism for implementable competence.

The first cultural shift this portfolio demands is intellectual humility, particularly from ministers and senior officials who may be tempted to treat digital governance as an extension of conventional bureaucracy. In tech policy, much of the most consequen-

tial knowledge sits outside the state—in start-ups, telecom operators, universities, civil society, diaspora networks, and the engineers who actually build systems. If consultation is reduced to a box-ticking exercise, policy will again be captured by incumbents, blindsided by technical realities, or rejected by the public.

What’s needed instead is the boring, discipline-building work: publishing draft laws well ahead of passage, responding to critiques in time, clearly explaining which suggestions were accepted and why others were not, and creating structured channels for public input. In a country where mistrust of state intent around digital rules is high, transparency across the legislative process is paramount. The second change needed is to stop pretending that rights and security sit at opposite ends of a seesaw. Bangladesh has long lived with the consequences of weak cyber hygiene and poor data governance. It doesn’t need broader oversight powers, vaguer offences, or more discretionary enforcement. What’s needed is enforceable standards, clearer accountability, and independent oversight that gives citizens and investors the confidence that security policy is not a euphemism for control.

A credible, modern ICT portfolio would prioritise three things at once: operational security, legal clarity, and public legitimacy. That requires an enforceable data protection regime suited to a services economy, alongside serious investment in government-wide security standards, incident response capacity, and basic digital hygiene training for officials.

It also requires recognising that cybersecurity is not a single ministry’s project. It is a whole-of-government discipline, with clear audit requirements, procurement rules, and consequences for negligence. Previous governments had a habit of announcing the future in slogans while leaving the present untouched. This government should resist that temptation, particularly on emerging technologies such as AI. A national launch of “AI revolution” may generate headlines; it will not, on its own, generate trust or capability.

Any good policy should take inspiration from global best practice. But that should not mean copying just about any foreign model. Bangladesh’s context is its own. It is densely populated, overwhelmingly young, anchored by a major garments export sector, increasingly shaped by a growing start-up ecosystem, and still recovering politically from a tumultuous period. The point here is to understand the trade-offs embedded in global models of tech governance and to build a Bangladeshi approach that is realistic, grounded, enforceable and credible. The most important cultural change, however, must be internal. Digital capacity across the country remains uneven, so there is no alternative to sustained training, proper incentives, and real accountability. Officials responsible for sensitive systems must grasp the basics of cyber hygiene—phishing awareness, access controls, credential management, data minimisation—because ignorance or lack of awareness can easily lead to leaks, outages, and national embarrassment.

None of this transformation will be easy. That is precisely why the ICT portfolio is one of the most difficult jobs in government. It sits at the intersection of commerce and sovereignty, growth and rights, security and openness. Bangladesh cannot afford to treat it as just a platform for announcements, optics, and slogans. The priority must be the hard governance of the infrastructure and rules that increasingly determine national power. The warnings from our past missteps are written in plain sight. The question for Tarique Rahman’s government is whether it reads them as history, or as a manual.

What the minister of transportation actually said

The recent remarks of the road transport minister—that collections by transport owners’ and workers’ associations often fund welfare rather than being chandabazi—triggered immediate outrage. Many interpreted the statement as an official endorsement of extortion and, therefore, a signal that the practice would continue unchecked. The reaction is understandable. Citizens are exhausted with arbitrary payments, informal tolls, and the daily cost of navigating an already difficult urban transport system.

Yet before we settle, it is worth asking a hard question: what if the minister did not seek to legalise or sanitise extortion, but unintentionally described an informal system of governance that already operates alongside the formal state? In some large residential neighbourhoods of Dhaka, entry of all rickshaws is not allowed. Pullers must wear a numbered jacket or badge issued by a local welfare association or committee; without which they cannot operate in the area. Obtaining that jacket requires a payment. Most residents rarely ask how much the puller pays, where the money goes, or why the system exists. Nevertheless, the arrangement produces visible outcomes: controlled entry, fewer conflicts, predictable fares, and a known group of operators accountable to local committees. It is neither a government licensing system nor a free market. It is something in between—a privately organised regulatory order that even informal battery-powered rickshaws struggle to displace. Economists and sociologists describe such arrangements as informal institutions: systems of rules created by society when formal regulation is weak or unable to manage daily complexities. Bangladesh, like many developing urban economies, operates on two parallel structures. One is the formal state—laws, permits, taxation, police, and regulatory agencies. The other is negotiated order—associations, committees, unions, market groups, and transport organisations that coordinate economic activity where the state cannot intervene in real time. Transport associations belong to the second category. Many transport workers lack contracts, pensions, insurance, or workplace protection. In practice, associations often perform welfare: assisting injured drivers, resolving disputes, allocating routes, and supporting families after accidents or deaths. However, exploitation and abuse certainly occur. Even so, describing the entire phenomenon purely as crime fails to explain its persistence. A system that is only



predatory rarely survives for decades. A system that provides some services—even imperfectly—often survives. History offers parallels: dockworkers in 19th-century ports, taxi operators in European cities, and medieval merchant guilds all collected compulsory contributions. They were criticised as coercive, yet many later evolved into regulated unions, licensing bodies, or social insurance systems. The uncomfortable truth is that when the state cannot simultaneously manage entry, discipline, dispute resolution, and worker protection, society creates substitutes.

Public anger is therefore not misplaced, but it may be misdirected. The question is not whether such collections exist—they clearly do—but whether they remain opaque and vulnerable to abuse. In transport systems with thousands of competing operators, a lack of coordination can create route conflict, passenger harassment, fare instability, and violence among drivers competing for limited demand. Informal regulation currently fills that coordination gap. The real choice is not between extortion and justness, but between unmanaged informality and regulated transition. The state can register associations, require transparent digital recording of collections, audit welfare funds, mandate accident compensation coverage, cap member contributions, and publicly disclose the use of funds, thereby transforming informal payments into transparent micro-levies linked to worker protection.

The minister also candidly ac-

knowledgeed another uncomfortable reality: these informal structures are often influenced by actors associated with the political party in power. That admission, rather than weakening the argument for reform, strengthens it. Informal institutions become abusive precisely when they operate without accountability. Bringing them under transparent rules would not merely regulate financial collection; it would reduce political capture.

The state’s role, therefore, is not to control these organisations nor to deny their existence, but to ensure fair participation, democratic internal processes, and protection from partisan dominance. In doing so, the government would shift from patronage to oversight, a transition essential for institutional maturity. The controversy arose because the minister broke a familiar political script. Politicians usually promise elimination; he acknowledged existence and function. That acknowledgement sounded like acceptance, but it can also be read as an opportunity to confront a reality everyone experiences but rarely analyses. Bangladesh’s transport sector does not need denial—it needs transparency. If these collections function as a shadow welfare mechanism, policy should bring them into accountable regulation where protection remains, but exploitation diminishes. The real challenge is not simply ending chandabazi; it is building institutions strong enough that society no longer has to improvise. That is ultimately a governance problem, not merely a criminal one.

Ashish Dhawan hikes stake to 5% in this beaten-down infra

New Delhi: Ashish Dhawan, the co-founder of ChrysCapital and one of India’s most astute private equity veterans, is possibly doubling down on what we can only assume to be a high-conviction contrarian play. The sales of the company have grown at a rate of 30% from Rs 2,682 cr in FY24 to 3,484 cr in FY25. Coming to the current financial year, in the nine months ended December 2025, the company has recorded sales of Rs 2,517 cr.EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization) jumped from Rs 78 cr to Rs 83 cr in the same period, logging a growth of just 6.4%. In FY26 so far the EBITDA recorded is Rs 53 cr.Net profits seem to be an area for big concern as the company has been reporting consistent losses. Losses jumped from Rs 149 cr in FY24 to Rs 173 in FY25. In FY26 so far, the company has logged losses of Rs 26 cr.The share price of Bluspring Enterprises Ltd after demerger was around Rs 85 in June 2025 and as of closing on 24th February 2026 it was Rs 55, noting a big drop. Now, while retail sentiment remains unsteady around the infrastructure sector’s volatility, Dhawan has quietly increased his stake in an infrastructure service provider to a significant 5%, up from 4.1% in the preceding quarter. Incorporated in 2025 after a demerger from Quess Corp, Bluspring

Enterprises Ltd is in the business as an infrastructure services company.With a market cap of Rs 826 cr, Bluspring is an infrastructure services company. It is an integrated facility management service provider offering end-to-end solutions like Soft Services, Hard Services / Engineering Services, Production Support Services, Hygiene Services, Technology Enabled Services.Ace investor Ashish Dhawan, who held a 4.1% stake at the end of the quarter ending September 2025, has hiked his holding to 5%, which is worth Rs 41 cr as per trendlyne.comLet us look at the financials to see if we can find out why he decided to raise the stakes.This aggressive accumulation comes at a time when the stock is trading near its all-time lows, signalling a sharp divergence between institutional conviction and market noise.Not only Dhawan, Ellipsis Partners LLC, which is a Foreign Institutional Investor, has also hiked its holding from 3.56% to 3.7%.The infrastructure player has faced a gruelling period of price erosion, hit by sectoral headwinds and broader macro-economic pressures that have kept the stock in the red. No wonder seasoned market observers take such moves by investors like Dhawan as either an undervalued asset base ripe for a rebound or a fundamental turnaround that the broader market has yet to price in.

Reliance Industries buys Venezuelan oil from Chevron for the first time in 3 years

New Delhi: US oil major Chevron sold its first cargo of Venezuelan crude to Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries since December 2023, according to a report by Reuters. The cargo includes Boscan heavy crude which is expected to be shipped on the Ottoman Sincerity vessel. This also marks the first sale of the Boscan heavy crude in about six years.Reliance Industries’ has also purchased a 2-million-barrel cargo from Vitol for March loading and is exploring direct purchases from PDVSA, as per Reuters.India steps up Venezuelan oil purchases

Several PSU refiners, including Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum Corporation and HPCL have also recently bought Venezuelan crude.India-US negotiating Venezuelan oil sale, final trade deal to be signed soon: Report

India was the third-largest buyer of Venezuelan oil before US sanctions were imposed in 2019. The



renewed purchases come as India looks to reduce its dependence on Russian oil supplies amid US Trump’s tariff threat. Venezuela’s crude exports rose sharply to around 800,000 barrels per day in January, compared with about 500,000 barrels per day in De-

cember, after the US eased restrictions on the country’s oil exports. In January 2026, following the US capture of Venezuela, President Donald Trump announced that the country’s interim authorities would transfer between 30 million and 50 million barrels of crude oil

to the United States. He said the oil would be sold at prevailing market prices once it comes under US control. Chevron and other US refiners, including Valero Energy, Phillips 66 and Citgo Petroleum, are preparing to increase processing of Venezuelan crude at their refineries, a move expected to lift exports. Chevron and some refiners have hired dozens of Aframax and Panamax tankers under time-charter contracts, meaning the vessels will be used exclusively to transport Venezuelan oil during the contract period.The shift by trading houses to larger tankers is expected to ease pressure on the supply of medium-sized vessels in the Caribbean. Meanwhile, Trafigura, Vitol and Chevron have been exporting Venezuelan oil under US licences. In late January, the US Treasury issued a general licence allowing broader oil exports, which is expected to expand the number of buyers and destinations.

L&T share price up 2% after Rs 5,000-10,000 crore power transmission

New Delhi: The share price of Larsen & Toubro jumped nearly 2% in early trade, as the company’s power transmission and distribution vertical announced a major order win worth Rs 5,000-10,000 crore for the establishment of power transmission infrastructure in India and the Middle East. Following the order win, the company’s share price rose nearly 2% in the early trade session. Over the past one month, the company’s stock has delivered a return of over 14%, while over the past one year, the company’s stock has climbed by over 34%L&T: India order details

The company’s power transmission and distribution (PT&D) vertical has bagged a batch of engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) orders worth Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000 crore for the establishment of electricity grid systems in India and abroad. These orders are classified under the major order win category.For India, the PT&D vertical has received an order for the design, supply and construction of two 220 kV Gas Insulated Substations in the Durgapur–Raniganj–Asansol industrial belt of West Bengal. The scope of the project also covers transmission line segments with advanced conductors and multi-circuit towers. “These grid modernisation jobs will provide a stable voltage profile and enhance reliability of power networks for infrastructure and industrial projects in the region,” the company said in its regulatory filing. The company’s PT&D vertical in the Middle East has secured orders from util-



ities for the turnkey construction of five substations and over 250 km of transmission lines. These are located in three different countries across the region. The projects are up to 500 kV levels, and one of the projects also involves the supply and installation of a 400 kV underground cable system.Commenting on the order wins, the company in its filing added, “In view of surging demand, shifting nature of the energy mix and security-driven initiatives, grid in-

vestments have become high-stake, high-tech priority areas for economic forerunners.”L&T: Order win spreeThis marks the second order win in just two days by the company, as yesterday L&T’s two business verticals had jointly secured a significant order from the Government of India’s Department of Atomic Energy for setting up the LIGO India Observatory. The observatory will come up at Sundhan in Maharashtra’s Hingoli district.

Waaree Energies, Premier Energies and key solar energy stocks slide on imports

New Delhi: Indian solar and renewable energy stocks remained under pressure in early trading on Wednesday, with Waaree Energies and Premier Energies tumbling as much as 15% after the United States announced steep countervailing duties on solar imports from India. Waaree Energies, a major module manufacturer, is also expected to see activity following the U.S. decision, given its exposure to export markets. US is a key market for Waaree Energies. The Commerce Department’s action is part of a trade case brought last year by a group representing a section of the U.S. solar manufacturing industry. With this step, U.S. trade officials sided with domestic factory owners, finding that companies operating in India, Indonesia, and Laos benefited from subsidies that made American products less competitive, Reuters reported. It marks the latest in a series of duties over more than a decade targeting low-cost solar imports from Asia, many of which are produced by Chinese-linked manufacturers, according to Reuters. The department is expected to issue a separate ruling next month on whether companies from the three countries sold solar products in the United States at prices below their cost of production, Reuters added-Previous tariff actions have altered trade flows. Imports from Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia fell sharply after steep duties were finalised last year on shipments from those countries, which had dominated the U.S. market, Reuters reported.However, Waaree Energies does have a plant in US and oper-



ates through its subsidiary in the United States. Vikram Solar is one of India’s largest solar module manufacturers by operational capacity as of March 31, 2025. The company produces solar photovoltaic modules and also offers engineering, procurement and construction services, along with operations and maintenance support.Premier Energies also operates as an integrated solar cell and module manufacturer. Its business includes solar power

generation as well as the production of photovoltaic cells and other solar products. The company, though, has relatively small exposure to US.Waaree Energies dropped up to 14.6%, adding to losses after earlier hitting its lower circuit. Premier Energies fell more than 12%, Vikram Solar down 4.74% extending declines seen at the start of the session.IRFC shares slide 4%: Govt launches OFS to sell up to 2% stake The US Commerce Department

on Tuesday announced anti-subsidy duties on solar cells and panels from India, Indonesia and Laos, according to Reuters. General subsidy rates were set at 125.87% for India, 104.38% for Indonesia and 80.67% for Laos, as per US Commerce Department fact sheet cited by Reuters. US Government trade data indicated that the three countries accounted for \$4.5 billion in solar imports last year, about two-thirds of the 2025 total, Reuters reported.

Silver outpaces gold in global rally s gain

New Delhi: Gold and silver posted firm gains across domestic and global markets, with MCX and COMEX contracts both trading higher alongside ETFs. On MCX, Gold Futures for 2 April 2026 were trading at Rs 1,60,750.00/10 gm, up 0.49%, while Silver Futures for 5 March 2026 stood at Rs 2,67,394/kg, jumping 2.55%. Zerodha Silver ETF was at Rs 26.85, higher by 0.94%, and Groww Silver ETF traded at Rs 25.92 with a rise of 1.01%. ICICI Prudential Silver ETF quoted Rs 264.00, up 0.88%, whereas HDFC Silver ETF was at Rs 253.30, climbing 1.07%. Mirae Asset Silver ETF quoted Rs 257.42, up 0.59%, Edelweiss Silver ETF traded at Rs 264.95 with a 1.02% rise, and Bandhan Silver ETF stood at Rs 264.53, gaining 0.49%. 360 ONE Silver ETF was at Rs 260.39, up 1.07%, while Motilal Oswal Silver ETF traded at Rs 261.00, higher by 0.80%. HDFC Gold Exchange Traded Fund was at Rs 136.69, up 0.18%, while Kotak Gold Exchange Traded Fund traded at Rs 132.29, advancing 0.11%. Mirae Asset Gold ETF quoted Rs 154.24, higher by 0.12%, and Axis Gold ETF stood at Rs 132.58, up 0.08%. Angel One Gold ETF was at Rs 14.80, gaining 0.20%, and UTI Gold ETF traded at Rs 133.60, up 0.04%. Birla Sun Life Gold ETF stood at Rs 139.43, rising 0.15%, while DSP Gold ETF was at Rs 154.25, higher by 0.25%. Gold ETFs

Tata Gold Exchange Traded Fund traded at Rs 15.40, up 0.26%, while Nippon India ETF Gold BeES stood at Rs 131.40, gaining 0.14%. Zerodha Gold ETF was priced at Rs 25.01, higher by 0.20%, and ICICI Prudential Gold ETF quoted Rs 136.04, up 0.24%. SBI Gold Exchange Traded Scheme traded at Rs 135.45 with a 0.07% rise, and Groww Gold ETF stood at Rs 15.53, gaining 0.19%. On Comex, Gold Futures were at \$5201.6 per troy ounce, higher by \$25.3 or 0.49%,



with volume of 17,162 contracts. Silver Futures were trading at \$89.355 per troy ounce, up \$1.849 or 2.11%, with volume of 5,248 contracts. The strength in silver was more pronounced both in percentage terms and in absolute movement, and that tone carried into ETFs as well Tata Silver Exchange Traded Fund was trading at Rs 25.68, up 0.98%, while Nippon India Silver ETF stood at Rs 253.37, gaining 1.08%.

Aditya Birla Sun Life Silver ETF traded at Rs 263.94 with a 0.98% increase, and SBI Silver ETF moved to Rs 258.82, up 0.98%. UTI Silver ETF was priced at Rs 255.38, advancing 1.01%, while Kotak Silver ETF stood at Rs 256.30, up 1.04%. DSP Silver ETF traded at Rs 255.10, higher by 1.07%, and Axis Silver ETF was at Rs 262.62, posting a 1.10% gain.

Nifty cruises past 25,600 led by tech; Sensex jumps nearly

New Delhi: Markets at 11 am: It’s a smart rally after the recent bout of correction. The Nifty is comfortably cruising past the 25,600 mark, while the Sensex is up close to 600 points in intra-day trade. The tech sector stocks are the star in trade today. The Nifty IT Index is up over 2% after the recent 17% drubbing. Several large-cap counters like HCLTech and Tech Mahindra see brisk buying, up over 3% apiece. Some steel stocks like Tata Steel and aviation plays like IndiGo are also up sharply in trade.Markets at open: Indian equity benchmarks kicked off the session on a firm note. The Sensex opened higher and surged 462.41 points, or 0.56%, to trade at 82,688.33 in early deals. The Nifty also advanced 122.35 points, or 0.48%, to hover around 25,547 at the opening bell. On February 25, US markets ended higher. The S&P 500 gained 0.77% to close at 6,890.07, while the Nasdaq Composite climbed 1.04% to settle at 22,863.68. The Dow Jones Industrial Av-

erage rose 370.44 points, or 0.76%, finishing the session at 49,174.50.US dollar

The US Dollar Index (DXY), which measures the dollar’s value against a basket of six foreign currencies, was trading 0.05% up at 97.83 on Wednesday morning. The index evaluates the strength or weakness of the US dollar in comparison to major currencies. The basket contains currencies such as the British Pound, Euro, Swedish Krona, Japanese Yen, Swiss Franc, etc. The rupee appreciated 0.07% to close at 90.95 to the dollar on February 24. Crude oil prices moved higher in early trade on Wednesday. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude climbed around 0.87% to trade near \$66.20 per barrel. Meanwhile, Brent crude, the global benchmark, advanced about 0.83%, hovering close to \$71.26 per barrel. On February 24, foreign investors net sold Indian equities worth Rs 103 crore, according to provisional exchange data. Meanwhile, domestic institutional investors

were net buyers, purchasing shares worth Rs 3,161 crore during the session.Gold rate today

In the international market, gold was trading at \$5,162 per ounce.Gold prices in India remain in sharp focus. On the MCX, April 2, 2026, gold futures were trading at Rs 1,59,916 per 10 grams in the latest update.Markets at pre-open: GIFT Nifty indicates a firm start for Indian equity markets, trading near the 25,670 mark and up around 0.26% in early trade.As the session gets underway, investors will track global cues, including trends across Asian markets and overnight movements on Wall Street. Currency swings and commodity price trends are also expected to influence market sentiment. Asia-Pacific markets are trading higher on Wednesday, led by gains in Japan. The Nikkei 225 is up around 1% in early trade. South Korea’s Kospi also advanced 1%, while the Kosdaq gained 0.22%. In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 opened 0.98% higher.

Trump news at a glance: Ukraine must reach a deal with Russia ‘fast’, says president

Washington:Donald Trump has piled pressure on Ukraine to reach a deal with Russia “fast” before US-brokered talks in Geneva on Tuesday. “Ukraine better come to the table, fast,” the US president told reporters onboard Air Force One while en route to Washington.Trump is pushing to end the conflict, which began when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, but two previous rounds of US-mediated talks in Abu Dhabi did not yield any signs of a breakthrough.Moscow has stuck to its demands in the talks for sweeping territorial and political concessions from Ukraine – rejected by Kyiv as tantamount to capitulation.Trump’s top envoy, Steve Witkoff, and son-in-law Jared Kushner will be in the US delegation, while the former Russian culture minister Vladimir Medinsky will lead Moscow’s team. Ukraine and Russia to meet for second round of talks as war’s fourth anniversary approaches

The talks, brokered by the Trump administration, will take place days before the fourth anniversary of Moscow’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Despite renewed US efforts to revive diplomacy, hopes for any sudden breakthrough remain low.

Trump, who throughout his second presidency has veered between criticising Moscow and Kyiv, reverted this weekend to placing blame on Volodymyr Zelenskyy, suggesting Ukraine was holding up efforts to end the war. Senior Ukrainian and Russian officials are to meet this week in Switzerland for a second round of talks brokered by the Trump administration, days before the fourth anniversary of Moscow’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.The two-day meeting, kicking off on Tuesday, is expected to mirror negotiations held earlier this month in Abu Dhabi, with representatives from Washington, Kyiv and Moscow in attendance. Despite renewed US efforts to revive diplomacy, hopes for any sudden breakthrough remain low, with Russia continuing to press maximalist demands on Ukraine.Aftermath of Russian air strike on residential area in Kramatorsk.

Ukrainian civilian casualties surged by 26% in 2025, say researchers

Read moreWhile the Abu Dhabi discussions were largely focused on military ceasefire proposals, the Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said on Monday the Geneva talks would address a “broader range of issues”, including territorial questions and other demands put forward by Moscow. Trump, who throughout his second presidency has veered between criticising Moscow and Kyiv, reverted this weekend to placing blame on Volodymyr Zelenskyy, suggesting Ukraine was holding up efforts to end the war.“Zelenskyy needs to act. Russia wants to make a



deal. He needs to act, otherwise he will miss a great opportunity,” he said in comments to reporters.But his secretary of state, Marco Rubio, speaking at the Munich Security Conference at the weekend, said Washington remained uncertain whether Russia was genuinely serious about ending the war in UkraineAhead of the Geneva meeting, Zelenskyy made clear Ukraine was unwilling to give up territory in the Donbas – a key Kremlin demand. He cited previous Russian land grabs in Chechnya, Georgia and Crimea and said that “allowing the aggressor to take something is a big mistake”. Trump is ‘deeply committed to your success’, Rubio tells Orbán during Hungary visit – as it happenedRead more

“That is why now I do not want to be a president who will repeat the mistakes of his predecessors or other people ... Because Putin cannot be stopped with kisses or flowers. I have never done this, and therefore I do not think that this is right. My advice to everyone: do not do this with Putin.”He said Russia was currently losing 30,000-35,000 people a month, with its attempt to seize more territory over four years of full-scale war staggeringly costly and mostly unsuccessful. “Can you imagine that in the 21st century? I’m not sure he [Putin] knows that,” Zelenskyy said.

There were no expectations in Kyiv that the latest round of trilateral talks would led to a political breakthrough. Speaking at the Munich Security

Conference on Saturday, Zelenskyy said his country would not give up the heavily defended north of Donetsk oblast, including the cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, or abandon the 200,000 civilians who live there.He said Ukraine would play a “constructive” role in the trilateral talks but acknowledged there were differences with the US over security guarantees. The Trump administration is offering 15 years, with Ukraine wanting an American commitment lasting 30-50 years. Kyiv hopes the war will end this year, Zelenskyy has indicated.Vladimir Medinsky, an arch-conservative Putin adviser who has previously questioned Ukrainian sovereignty, will head Russia’s negotiating team. He will be joined by Igor Kostyukov, the chief of Russian military intelligence, and the deputy foreign minister Mikhail Galuzin, among nearly two dozen officials, Moscow has said Ukraine is expected to send the same delegation as in earlier rounds, to be led in Geneva by Rustem Umerov, secretary of Ukraine’s national security and defence council.The choice of Switzerland marks the first time the talks will be held on European soil after earlier rounds in Abu Dhabi and Istanbul.The choice of Geneva appears to have been pushed by Washington. The Trump envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, who are expected to lead US engagement with Russia and Ukraine, are scheduled to hold separate meetings with Iranian officials in the city later this week.

Disappearances in Mexico surge by 200% over 10 year

Washington: It was a bright morning in August 2022 when Ángel Montenegro was taken. A 31-year-old construction worker, Montenegro had been out all night drinking with some work buddies in the city of Cuautla and was waiting for a bus back to nearby Cuernavaca, where he lived.At about 10am, a white van pulled up: several men jumped out and dragged Montenegro and a co-worker inside before speeding off. Montenegro’s co-worker was released a few hundred meters down the street, but Montenegro was driven away. As soon as she heard that her son had been taken, Montenegro’s mother, Patricia García, raced to Cuautla along with Montenegro’s wife, brother and some neighbors. Arriving at the bus stop, all they found were Montenegro’s cap and one of his tennis shoes.The group spent all day looking for any other trace of Montenegro, but came up empty-handed. “The desperation started when night fell,” said García, who has now spent more than three torturous years looking for her son.Montenegro is one of more than 130,000 people who are considered missing or disappeared in Mexico, an ongoing crisis that has devastated tens of thousands of families across the country. While disappearances began to surge in the early 2000s as the Mexican government sought to take on the country’s cartels, a new report by the public policy analysis firm México Evalúa found that, in the last 10 years, disappearances have increased more than 200%.“It’s a problem that has become uncontrollable at the national level,” said Armando Vargas, a security analyst at México Evalúa. Disappearances “capture the lethal violence” that Mexico is experiencing. According to Vargas, the surge in disappearances over the last decade reflects the increasing takeover by criminal groups of vast swathes of the country, as well as the diversification of the activities these gangs are engaged in beyond just drug smuggling.A police officer guards access to the ranch in Teuchitlán, Jalisco state, Mexico, on 11 March. Secret ovens and human remains: grisly Mexico killing site spotlights forced disappearancesRead moreExpanding their ranks often involves forced recruitment,



while taking over new territory requires the “annihilation of rival groups”, said Vargas. But simply murdering other gang members is likely to catch the authorities’ attention: instead, cartels bury corpses in unmarked graves, burn them to ash or even dissolve them in vats of acid.By making bodies disappear, criminal groups “invisibilize the violence, because that puts them under the radar”, Vargas said.

Meanwhile, criminal groups are increasingly engaging in activities that can involve abducting people and making them vanish, including organ trafficking, sex and human trafficking, and migrant smuggling

The Mexican government, however, has been unable to keep up with cartels as they expand territorially and into new markets, leaving large areas of the country under near-total control of these gangs.

“Criminal power advances in parallel with institutional neglect,” said Vargas. In 2018, the government launched a the National Search Commission to track and find the disappeared, encouraging more people to report their missing loved ones and creating an interactive public platform that recorded disappearances across the country.But the commission was poorly funded, and the platform soon became a political thorn in the government’s side: ahead of elections in 2024, the then president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, launched an opaque “review” of the register, and reduced the number of

disappeared to just 12,377, sparking an outcry among activists and human rights experts.Family of Ayotzinapa students blame Army for investigation delay
epa10593573 Relatives of the 43 students from the Ayotzinapa normal school who disappeared on 26 September 2014 protest in Mexico City, Mexico, 26 April 2023. Relatives pointed to the Mexican Army for the lack of progress in the investigation of the case. EPA/JOSE MENDEZ‘Disappearing the disappeared’: outcry after Mexico reduces number of missing

When asked about the report from México Evalúa, the president, Claudia Sheinbaum, was dismissive, saying “that platform has a lot of problems” and promising that the government would be releasing a new report to more accurately account for the disappeared. But analysts say that, if anything, the number of registered disappearances is an undercount, given the extreme rates of violence across the country and the government’s weakness in finding and identifying bodies.When investigations do take place, they are often slow and ineffective, marred by corruption and incompetence: in 2022, more than 96% of crimes in Mexico went unsolved, according to the United Nations.The lack of a substantial government response to the crisis has forced many mothers, including García, to search on their own. García joined a collective of 12 women who went out searching weekly, probing the ground with metal rods for signs of buried corpses.

Germany calls on France to increase defence spending

Washington: France needs to boost its defence spending to make European self-sufficiency a reality, Germany’s foreign minister has said.As European powers increasingly acknowledge they may be left on their own for their defence as the transatlantic relationship comes under strain, Johann Wadephul said Paris needed to put its money where its mouth was.“He repeatedly and correctly refers to our pursuit of European sovereignty,” Wadephul said of the French president, Emmanuel Macron, in an interview with the German public broadcaster Deutschlandfunk. “Anyone who talks about it needs to act accordingly in their own country.” Germany last year exempted most defence expenditures from its constitutional “debt brake” and it has earmarked more than €500bn for defence between 2025 and 2029.France, which is the midst of bitter battles over its public spending, places third in the EU in terms of its debt burden as a proportion of GDP, after Greece and Italy.Wadephul’s criticism comes amid friction in the Franco-German alliance, traditionally seen as the driving force in EU cooperation. Germany has rejected repeatedly Macron’s calls for pooled debt to boost investment, while there is discord between Paris and Berlin over plans to build a next-generation European fighter jet and seal an EU trade deal with a group of South American countries.On the opening day of the Munich Security Conference last week, Germany’s chancellor, Friedrich Merz, warned of the threat Russia posed to Europe and attempted to draw the US back into firm mutual security commitments, even as he acknowledged ties were in need of repair.“In the era of great power rivalry, even the United States will not be powerful enough to do it alone,” he said. “Dear friends, being a part of Nato is not only Europe’s competitive advantage. It is also the United States’ competitive advantage. So let’s repair and revive transatlantic trust together.”

European countries are facing pressure to enhance their defence capabilities as anxiety increases about whether Washington would use its military might to come to the aid of its Nato partners in the event of an attack.Nato member states pledged at a summit last June to increase defence spending to 5% of GDP by 2035, but Wadephul said progress towards that goal had been falling short.“Unfortunately, efforts in the French republic have also been insufficient to achieve this so far,” he said. “France, too, needs to do what we are doing here amid tough discussions.”Labour party to defence hikes at the cost of spending on health and alleviating poverty. That debate is even more polarised in Germany, with opposition to increased defence spending on the left and, to a degree, from the far-right Alternative für Deutschland party.Speaking on the opening day of the Munich conference, Germany’s chancellor, Friedrich Merz, singled out the threat Russia posed to Europe, warning “freedom can no longer be taken for granted”.“We have to understand that in the era of big powers, our freedom is no longer a given. It is at stake. We will need to show firmness and determination to assert this freedom,” he said.Merz also disclosed he had held initial talks with the French president, Emmanuel Macron, over the possibility of joining France’s nuclear umbrella, underlining his call for Europe to develop a stronger self-standing security strategy. At the same time,



Merz disclosed he had held initial talks with Macron over the possibility of joining France’s nuclear umbrella. However, the prospect of Europe pro-actively seeking its own nuclear defence capabilities beyond US protection laid bare differences within Germany’s ruling coalition.Wadephul, a member of Merz’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU), voiced caution about the prospect of Europe mounting its own more robust nuclear defence, saying: “There are enough atomic weapons in the world.”He told German public television late on Sunday that “no one in Washington is questioning” whether the US would use its own nuclear arsenal to defend Europe if necessary, and he warned against creating that impression with a debate questioning the US protective shieldGermany’s vice-chancellor, Lars Klingbeil, said Berlin would continue to rely on Nato’s nuclear deterrence system and had no plans to acquire its own atomic weapons – an option it renounced under existing treaties.He welcomed the talks with France about joining its nuclear umbrella. “We’ll see what the outcome is,” Klingbeil, a Social Democrat, told the German news agency dpa.However, the senior Christian Democrat Armin Laschet said the proposal risked sending a message to Washington that Germany was voluntarily renouncing the US protective shield. And he noted that France would insist on full control over how its nuclear arsenal was used.“He [Macron] will not give the German chancellor a say in this nuclear armament issue,” Laschet said on public television.Thomas Röwekamp, the CDU chair of the Bundestag defence committee, said Germany must take on more responsibility for European security but not in an ill-advised drive to replace US nuclear guarantees. He called in the Augsburg Allgemeine newspaper for a “European complement within Nato” to the US atomic arsenal. France had been making a key contribution to European defence for years, Röwekamp said, and the current exchange showed “how closely we are continuing to develop this contribution together”.In an article published in the Guardian and the German newspaper Die Welt at the weekend, Britain and Germany’s highest-ranking military leaders made an unprecedented joint appeal to the public to accept the “moral” case for rearmament and prepare for the threat of war with Russia.

The experts: osteopaths on 20 easy and effective ways to treat back pain

Back pain can be excruciating – and it will affect most of us over the course of our lifetime. But what can you do about it? Here, osteopaths share the secrets to preventing, managing and overcoming a bad back.

Avoid triggers
“Prevention is better than cure,” says John Corfield, an osteopath who runs a clinic in Wilmslow, Cheshire. “There are things you can do to help avoid the common causes of back pain, such as swimming, engaging the core and not sitting for prolonged periods.”

Get up as much as possible
“The best thing you can do is move regularly,” says Emma Hayward, a Kent-based osteopath. “Even if that is just to get a glass of water and sit back down. It is about regular, small movements, so that your body is not in one static position for several hours.” Nick Mann, a GP and NHS osteopath at the Royal London Hospital for Integrated Medicine, says: “I’ve got two grownup children and I’ve spent my adult life trying to find ways to teach them not to use their laptops in a curled-up fashion, with their neck strained over it.”

Consider a standing desk
“People sit at desks for way too long,” says Corfield. “You should be up and about every 20 minutes for five minutes or so. In Scandinavian countries, they are big on standup desks. We seem to be so far behind, considering there are more work days lost to lower back pain than any other injury in the UK.” Equally, you don’t want to be standing for a whole day, says Hayward: “Being able to change the position your body is in regularly is probably the best way you can prevent pain.”

Address stress
“I rarely see someone with an injured back who hasn’t also got very stressful things going on in their life,” says Hayward. “I think that primes our body to be more vulnerable to injury.” The osteopath James Davies, who is the author of Body, agrees on the significance of stress as a factor. When injured, “managing stress and ensuring you have a calm, balanced state of mind is integral to recovery”, he says.

Build up core strength
There are a range of exercises you can use to do this, says the osteopath Anisha Joshi, who runs clinics in London and Hitchin, Hertfordshire. She recommends focusing on strengthening the glutes by doing glute bridges: “This can be really effective at helping to support the lower back. Also, thread-the-needles (which involve kneeling on all fours then stretching one arm under the other) are good to get your mid-back moving, while



planks gently engage your core to help the deeper pelvic floor muscles support your lower back from the inside.”

Slouch (occasionally)
Posture is not as important as people think, says Joshi. “There is no evidence to show that posture predisposes you to getting back pain. There is this common saying that we practitioners use, which is ‘the best posture is your next posture’, because it is all about moving. Even if you’re sitting up straight, you are still going to get back pain, so I’d encourage slouching a bit.” That said, adds Davies, “incorrect posture can lead to various problems, affecting everything from blood flow to muscle strain. It is essential to be conscious of how we sit, stand and move throughout the day.”

Treat back pain like a cold
Joshi points to the statistic that up to 80% of people will experience back pain at some point. “There is a lot of fear around back pain,” she says. “I try to get my patients to reframe it as almost like having a cold, because it is that fear that makes people panic.” It is also difficult to avoid. Corfield had his last episode six months ago: “I was going to the gym, doing everything right – I was in great shape.” He was getting a chopping board out of a cupboard when he felt his back go.

Don’t assume it’s sciatica
“It’s a common misconception that all back pain is synonymous with sciatica,” says Davies. “This is not the case. Sciatica specifically refers to pain that radiates along the path of the sciatic nerve, which extends from the lower back down through

the legs. This condition is typically the result of pressure on the nerve at various points along its course, not merely a general state of back pain. Distinguishing between these different types of pain is vital, as it informs a more accurate diagnosis and, consequently, a more tailored and effective treatment approach.”

On feeling pain, act quickly
“Some people will say it will correct itself in six weeks,” says Corfield. “The issue is, if it doesn’t correct itself in six weeks, you’ve gone from it being an acute problem to becoming chronic. So it’s the flip of a coin. It could turn into a bigger problem than it would have been if it were dealt with sooner.” Joshi adds: “If you’re experiencing any pain or discomfort for longer than three days, you should get it checked.”

Understand the meaning of pain
Try not to be afraid of pain, says Hayward, as hard as that may be. Understand what the body is doing when it sends out pain signals. “Pain can be really frightening,” she says. “People think that pain equals terrible damage. Often the pain is the body protecting against damage. So if someone strains a joint or a disc in their back, the body will very quickly create a muscle spasm, which restricts movement, but what that does is protect against further injury. But the muscle spasm itself is incredibly painful. So a big message for people is not to be frightened that they’ve damaged something. Actually, pain levels and damage don’t correlate.” Nick Potter, an osteopath who works for the Centre for Physical Medicine

and is the author of The Meaning of Pain, says: “It sabotages you deliberately, because the brain’s perception is something is harmed or dangerous and therefore it stops you. If you can learn to breathe and relax your muscles, the pain instantly improves.”

Painkillers can be useful, but mask the problem

You can take ibuprofen or paracetamol to ease the pain, says Joshi. “Also, there is some evidence to show that diclofenac gel can be quite good for specific injuries. If you take ibuprofen, it will flood your whole system with anti-inflammatories; diclofenac gel can go directly to the point of pain.” Corfield adds: “If you go to a GP, you will be prescribed medication that is going to mask symptoms. There is not a single medication you can take that’s going to make a disc retract again away from the nerve root. That can only be done with manual therapy.”

Use ice and heat
Consider heat and ice instead of painkillers, says Corfield. “Heat will relax the muscle and get the blood flowing, while ice will reduce the inflammation,” he says. “So there is nothing wrong at all with alternating between the two: 20 minutes of heat then 20 minutes of ice for an hour or two will cover both sides of the problem.”

Keep moving ...
“There might be cases where people physically can’t move,” says Hayward. “But, generally, movement helps and being sedentary can make things more painful and stiff.” Often, people will feel stiffer in the morning,

as inflammation builds when you are still, but Hayward advises getting the spine moving as much as possible.

“Hug one knee, or two, to your chest, depending on what you can manage, then let the knees drop to the side.” Once out of bed, “get the spine moving in each direction by standing and bending forwards, if you are able to, then lying on the back and flexing the hips into a bridge, before standing again and bending to each side”. She adds: “If people can introduce different planes of movement to their spine, backs love that. It’s really simple. They could be doing that at their desk, just leaning to the side and twisting regularly during the day.”

unless you are in severe pain
“If you have an acute disc injury, you can’t move,” says Corfield. “Spend a couple of days in bed, getting up only to go to the toilet.” Mann adds: “Moving is not always the right thing – sometimes it is harmful.”

Adapt fitness regimes accordingly
“Regular activity is a cornerstone of recovery and overall health,” says Davies. “It is not about intense workouts, but rather consistent, moderate exercise that suits your condition and lifestyle. The key is to start slowly, especially after an injury, and gradually build up to your previous level of activity, ensuring you don’t overdo it and cause further harm.” If you were very active before back pain, says Hayward, “it might have to be a staggered return”.

Diversify activities
Hayward says: “If someone is trying to get back to exercise and they are doing one sort of activity, I’d advise them to see if they can diversify their training to keep their body moving in lots of different ways. This is a great way to prevent further injury and help rehab. So if you’re a cyclist and you want to do really long endurance events as part of your training, maybe also do a bit of swimming, pilates or yoga. It will make you stronger and more balanced.”

Mann believes all schools should teach the Alexander technique – a series of movements designed to foster the efficient use of muscles – but says it is never too late to learn. “By undoing patterns of adverse neuromuscular spinal reflexes, students learn to reduce joint and muscle strains in everyday activities,” he says. “Research in the British Medical Journal showed that the effects of AT reduced chronic back pain and disability more than physiotherapy and were preventive one year later.”

Get more sleep
“There is evidence to show that lack of sleep affects back pain more than back pain affects sleep,” says Joshi. “Focus on your sleep as one of the

key areas of trying to heal your back through sleep hygiene and relaxing before bed. If you have to take painkillers to get off to sleep, do it.” Hayward says: “If you’re waking up very uncomfortable in the morning and you’ve got a mattress that is quite old, that could be something to look at.” The best kind of mattress “is very individual”, she says, but she would recommend something relatively firm, provided that is not too hard on your body: “A soft topper can be a good compromise, so you’ve got the comfort on your shoulders and hips and it’s not hard on your body, but you’ve got the support underneath.”

“I often advise people to experiment with sleeping with a narrow pillow between their knees, which can line up the knees and hips. That can often be a really comfortable position to sleep in if your back is sore.”

Hold your phone differently
When holding phones, “most people hang their necks and gradually drop down so that they end up looking downwards, which is an obvious risk factor for neck pain”, says Mann. “What I would recommend people do is stand up and hold the phone out in front of you. Use the other hand to support underneath your armpit, so you’re supported at the elbow, and instead of holding it downwards the whole time you’re holding it in front of you.”

Listen to uplifting music
When working with clients, Potter asks what their go-to “happy song” is. He tells them to put it on when they are doing exercises, “because the neurological distraction means you can’t attend to the pain as much”.

Relax on your back
What is the one thing we should all be doing to promote better back health? “Lie down on a flat surface,” says Davies. “Ensure your back is comfortably straight. Elevate your legs by placing them on a chair or sofa, forming a gentle angle. This position naturally aligns your spine and reduces the stress and pressure often exerted on your back muscles and spinal discs. As you lie in this restorative pose, allow your entire body to relax completely. This not only alleviates the tension in your back, but also promotes overall relaxation.” You can enhance this peaceful experience by engaging in calming activities, such as listening to soothing music, enjoying an audiobook or reading, making this not just a physical respite, but a holistic relaxation practice. Regularly incorporating this simple technique into your routine can significantly diminish back discomfort and contribute to your spinal health; you don’t need to wait for a back pain crisis to do this.”

Radhika Merchant And Isha Ambani Keep It Simple In Elegant Cotton Suits For Nathdwara Temple Visit

The Ambani family recently travelled to Nathdwara near Udaipur, Rajasthan, to seek blessings at a temple as they marked Kokilaben Ambani’s 92nd birthday. Mukesh Ambani was accompanied by his daughter Isha Ambani, son Anant Ambani, and daughter-in-law Radhika Merchant. Staying true to the spiritual setting, the family chose understated, traditional outfits rooted in comfort and elegance.

Radhika Merchant keeps it soft and traditional in lemon yellow
For the temple visit, Radhika Merchant opted for a soothing lemon-yellow cotton suit set that reflected effortless grace. The kurta featured a round neckline, full-length sheer sleeves, and a fitted silhouette that ended at the knee. Delicate thread embroidery and subtle sequin accents added just the right amount of detail without overwhelming the simplicity of the ensemble. She paired it with coordinated cotton pants designed with an organza lining, scalloped hem, and fine embroidery, maintaining a clean, straight-leg fit. A matching dupatta with scalloped borders and light threadwork completed the outfit. Her styling remained minimal, with loose side-parted hair, a classic watch, bracelets, a small bindi, Kolhapuri sandals, and fresh,

natural makeup. **Anant Ambani complements her in classic navy**
Anant Ambani matched the traditional mood in a navy-blue kurta set layered with a richly embroidered Nehru jacket. The silk kurta, paired with a matching churidar, added polish to the look, while slip-on sandals kept the styling relaxed yet appropriate for the occasion.

Isha Ambani embraces Bandhani elegance
Isha Ambani also chose a traditional ensemble, wearing a light blue Bandhani-inspired kurta adorned with soft pink printed lines, gota patti detailing along the borders, and subtle sequin work. The relaxed silhouette, complete with full sleeves and side slits, gave the look an easy, graceful appeal. She styled it with striking rani pink flared pants and a dual-toned cotton dupatta in light pink and yellow, draped casually over her shoulders. Loose hair, embroidered juttis, and minimal makeup enhanced the understated elegance of her outfit.

Mukesh Ambani keeps it timeless in

white
Mukesh Ambani stayed with a classic choice, a crisp white cotton kurta-pyjama set. He layered it with a deep brown Nehru jacket, accented with a silk pocket square, and finished the look with Kolhapuri sandals. The ensemble reflected his signature pref-



er-for simple, ence refined traditional



wear. **A family rooted in tradition**
Isha Ambani, daughter of Mukesh and Nita Ambani, married industrialist Anand Piramal in 2018 and continues to

play a key role in the family’s business ventures. Radhika Merchant, daughter of Viren and Shaila Merchant, married Anant Ambani and has since become an integral part of the Ambani family. For



this temple visit, both Isha and Radhika’s choice of breathable cotton suits, paired with Mukesh and Anant’s classic kurta sets, perfectly suited to the spiritual occasion.

Taapsee Pannu claims that getting a movie like Dunki is challenging for her

Mumbai: Taapsee Pannu, a Bollywood actor, is currently getting recognition for her role in Assi. Taapsee recently talked about how hard it is for someone like her to get a movie like Dunki in an interview with Screen. She referred to Dunki’s work on movies like Assi and Gandhari as a gift. Taapsee responded, “A film like Dunki is difficult to get for someone like me because I’m not some commercial, mainstream, viable heroine,” when asked what motivates her to work on movies like Assi following a commercial movie like Dunki.

That position most likely needed someone like me, so I got it. I have been informed that. That’s because I’ve previously worked on movies like Assi and Gandhari. I have my place and identity in the industry because of this. This is my reality, then. I received

Dunki as a gift during the past ten years.”I’m not sure how long it will take me to get another one,” she went on. It’s difficult because they still have to accept that “Oh, we have to show her all glammed up.” I began working on massy films in the South. My career in Hindi started with David Dhawan. Nothing is more blatantly commercial and confrontational than that. After that, Anurag Kashyap and Anubhav Sinha were my collaborators. The directors’ selection is completely insane. This and that, I can do. I know why I have a particular audience. I’m happy that I’ve gained their trust, even though it may not be much. That privilege isn’t available to all actresses. Thus, this is where I call home. Dunki, a comedy-drama directed by Rajkumar Hirani, is based on the “donkey flight” method of illegal immigra-



tion. Alongside Taapsee, Boman Irani, Anil Grover, and Vikram Kochhar, Shah Rukh Khan played the film’s protagonist. Vicky Kaushal made a brief appearance as well. The movie was a box office triumph, earning ₹454 crore worldwide, while receiving mixed reviews. Taapsee Pannu plays the lead in Anubhav Sinha’s courtroom drama Assi. Kani Kusruti, Revathy, Manoj

Pahwa, Kumud Mishra, and Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub play important roles in the film, which is produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, and Anubhav Sinha under the auspices of Benaras Mediaworks and T-Series Films. The movie received mixed to favorable reviews when it first came out and has made ₹5.75 crore at the domestic box office so far.

After welcoming her son Vihaan, Katrina Kaif makes her first public appearance



Mumbai: On Tuesday, Katrina Kaif was photographed in public for the first time since she and her husband, Vicky Kaushal, welcomed their son, Vihaan Kaushal, on November 7, 2025. Katrina has stayed out of the spotlight, but Vicky has made multiple public appearances in recent weeks. Katrina was spotted in Mumbai with Yasmin Karachiwala, her fitness instructor. She

wore a black blazer and pulled her hair back into a ponytail to maintain a casual appearance. She grinned at the photographers and waved to the crowd from inside her automobile. She didn’t take off her mask for the cameras and kept wearing it. On Reddit, a video of her went popular, and many complimented her in the comments area. A user wrote, “Even though she is wearing her mask,

I can feel that she is genuinely happy,” and another added, “It is really lovely to see her finally achieving everything she wanted in her life - a dreamy film career, successful business, a beautiful family, a loving husband, and a cute little one!”

In September, Katrina, 43, and Vicky Kaushal, 37, revealed they were expecting a child. In 2021, the couple tied the knot at Rajasthan’s Six Senses Fort Barwara. On September 23, they announced the news on Instagram with a Polaroid-style picture of Vicky clutching Katrina’s growing baby bump. She wore trousers and a white top in a casual outfit. Regarding her career, Vicky Kaushal most recently starred in the historical drama Chhaava, one of the highest-grossing movies of 2025, while Katrina Kaif was last seen in the criminal thriller Merry Christmas.

Tejaswi Prakash's face is inked on Karan Kundra's chest



Mumbai: Since meeting on Bigg Boss 15, television stars Tejasswi Prakash and Karan Kundra have been dating. Their wedding has been highly anticipated by fans. Karan recently gave Tejasswi a kind gesture that has gone viral on the internet. Karan startled the paparazzi by revealing his new tattoo during a recent Ramadan celebration in Mumbai. On the right side of his chest, the actor had the visage of his girlfriend Tejasswi inked.

He did not, however, specify if the tattoo was temporary or permanent. Karan was spotted grinning while showing off the tattoo while wearing a purple kurta. Karan received a lot of love from fans for his gesture. Tejasswi is the luckiest girl, according to one comment. “This is so cute,” said another. “Unmatched gesture,” wrote someone else. “This is how men in love look like,” one user said. Some online users, however, thought it was merely a sticker to advertise Tejasswi’s new show. During their time on Bigg Boss 15, Karan and Tejasswi got to know one another. Their friendship quickly turned into love. They have been together ever since they came clean about their affections for one another on the show. They have been cohabitating for a while. Karan recently disclosed that they intend to tie the knot this year in an interview with Elvish Yadav on his podcast. Currently, Tejasswi may be seen in Psycho Saiyaan, a romantic thriller. Amazon MX Player is broadcasting the show, which also features Ravi Kishan and Anud Singh Dhaka. Tejasswi makes his OTT debut with the show. “Psycho Saiyaan marks my OTT acting debut, and I am grateful for the layered character I play,” she remarked. Although Charu initially seems to be grounded in familiarity and trust, her reality is constantly changing.

The way she handles that change—the uncertainty, the anxiety, and the mounting sense that something is amiss—is what makes her journey so captivating. She is compelled to face situations she never could have imagined as the stakes increase.

The two are presently competing in the third season of the culinary program Laughter Chefs. You can watch the show on JioHotstar, which is presented by Bharti Singh and Chef Harpal Singh.

During his travels of India, Flipperachi is eager to finally see Dhurandhar

New Delhi: Flipperachi, a Bahraini rapper, started rapping at the age of twelve. After more than 20 years in the music industry, he became well-known in India after Akshaye Khanna danced to his hit song FA9LA in Aditya Dhar’s Dhurandhar. The rapper was unable to see the movie when it debuted in theaters in December of last year since it was prohibited in Gulf nations. Flipperachi discusses his love for Indian movies, his impending visit, his wish to finally see Dhurandhar, and more in an interview. When asked about his recent rise to fame in India following Dhurandhar, Flipperachi responds, “What can I say, it’s a great feeling.”

“Seeing the music connect on this scale in India is special, as I have spent years developing my career in the region (Bahrain).” I’m thankful for the response, even though I wasn’t prepared for its size. All I can say is that I am grateful for India’s love. It’s

not overlooked, and I can’t wait to meet everyone face-to-face,” he continues. Flipperachi set a Guinness World Record for the most Billboard Arabia charts topped concurrently, demonstrating that FA9LA’s fame did not end in India but also gained a second lease of life in the United Arab Emirates. The rapper claims that following Dhurandhar, other songs have also received attention. “Anything that achieves that level exposes new listeners to your music.” I have witnessed individuals from various nations learning about not only FA9LA but also my previous catalog. That’s always satisfying,” he says. Flipperachi is most pleased that he made Bahrain proud. “People felt proud. It means a lot to me that everyone in Bahrain has been a part of this adventure from the beginning, especially given its size. Therefore, it was a significant occasion for the scene as a whole as well as for myself to watch a

Anil Kapoor still asks his wife for pocket money after 41 years of marriage

Mumbai: In preparation for the release of his next movie, Subedaar, Anil Kapoor is working hard. He shared a humorous moment at the trailer launch. He made the joke that nobody in his family is a true fan, even though he is a very well-known celebrity. He acknowledged that he still requests pocket money from his spouse.”I have no fans at home,” the actor added. I informed my wife that I was going to a trailer launch today as I was leaving the house. “Which film?” she inquired. I come from a household like that, so she has no idea what’s going on in my work life. I get the same treatment from them. Before going to a shoot, I occasionally even ask for Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 15,000 in cash.” Sunita Kapoor and Anil Kapoor have been together for 41 years. On May 19, 1984, they tied the knot. The actor also revealed during the occasion that his wife gave up a lot to help him pursue his career.

“I think I dug into my relationship with my wife in Subedaar,” he remarked. Naturally, my relationship with my daughter is not like this. Sonam, Rhea, and I are like buddies. I love my job, I love my wife, and I love the country. I love my country and my job, but how do I (pauses) make that work? I love my wife, of course. Anil Kapoor portrays Subedaar Arjun Maurya, a retired army veteran who returns home to discover that intimidation and unbridled power had taken over his surroundings. Due to the illegal sand mining operations in the area, there is a culture where resistance is costly and silence is necessary for life. Prince, played by Aditya Rawal, crosses Arjun’s path as he tries to accept a society that is different from



the one he once served. The conflict revolves around their clash. “Fauji hai, scene mein goli jhel sakte hai, beizzati nahi,” Anil Kapoor says in a strong scene from the trailer, highlighting his character’s unwavering sense of dignity. Determined to bring order back to a place where terror and hooliganism have taken over, Arjun decides to step in as things get out of hand. Prime Video will start to stream the movie on March 5, 2026.

Pooja Bhatt Marks a Significant Achievement on Her 54th Birthday



New Delhi: Pooja Bhatt has been outspoken in her battle against alcoholism, and she celebrates each year of recovery as a victory. Yesterday was the actress’s 54th birthday, and she sent an expression of thanks on social media.”Yesterday was special for more than one reason,” she wrote. I sincerely appreciate the flood of love

I’ve received from each and every one of you. the honor of turning 54. primarily for the fact that it was my tenth birthday without alcohol.”54 years of age. Ten years of actual life. “Thank you to the universe for everything and more,” the actress said in closing. In a 2017 interview, Pooja Bhatt first talked candidly about her

struggles with drinking. She claimed that she would have “drank [herself] to the grave” if she hadn’t given up drinking at age 45. On Christmas Eve 2016, Pooja Bhatt disclosed that she has given up alcohol. After discussing her struggle with drinking, Pooja Bhatt often posted motivational messages on social media about her sober achievements. She disclosed that a “stranger (her former wine supplier) rooted for her when some of her own wanted her to fail” on Instagram in May 2018. “I was moved beyond belief,” she wrote. This man used to have me as one of his greatest customers, and now he was concerned that I might break my vow to abstain from alcohol. This close stranger was encouraging me to follow my path while some of my own friends wanted me to fail.”

Priyanka Chopra's unexpected theater visit at the release of The Bluff

New Delhi: Promoting her recently released adventure movie, The Bluff, has kept Priyanka Chopra quite busy. A day prior to the movie’s release on Amazon Prime, the actress paid a visit to fans in a theater following a showing. The actress is seen mingling with the applauding crowd in pictures and videos that went viral very fast. She even expressed gratitude for their support in a few polite words. Priyanka Chopra assumes her fiercest persona to date. She portrays a former pirate in the movie who would do whatever it takes to keep her daughter safe, even if it means leaving a trail of dead. The teaser begins with Priyanka’s character having a peaceful evening at a distant house with her daughter. She feels invaders creeping in, so the calm is fleeting. She faces the assailants directly while concealing her daughter in the basement. She seems on the verge of defeat,

overpowered and ensnared in a tightening noose, until the guys threaten her child. That danger turns into the pivotal moment. When maternal instinct takes over, she fights viciously and brutally till she murders the invaders who broke into her house.

Priyanka’s character calmly reassures her daughter as she watches in disbelief, saying, “I’m still your mother.” The youngster later asks, “How are you so good at killing people?” and she smiles slyly and responds, “Your father didn’t marry me for my cooking.” AGBO Studios is producing it, while Amazon MGM Studios is supporting it. This is the studio’s second partnership with Priyanka after their work on Citadel. Prime Video will debut The Bluff today, February 25. In addition to returning for Season 2 of Amazon’s Citadel, Priyanka Chopra will appear in Varanasi, the next film directed by SS Rajamouli.



and there are a lot of talented actors, so it’s really hard to pick.” As part of his India tour, Flipperachi will play in Bengaluru and Mumbai on March 13 and 14, with further locations and dates to be confirmed. By the way, Dhurandhar: The Revenge, the sequel, will hit theaters on March 19. The singer intends to present some of his other well-known songs to India in addition to FA9LA, which is undoubtedly on the set list. “Performing in India felt like the next step once we saw the reception to the song. He says, “I really want to experience the cities, try real Indian food, and learn about the culture while I’m there.”

Sandeep Reddy Vanga travels to Udaipur for the wedding of Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika Mandanna

Mumbai: Filmmaker Sandeep Reddy Vanga has a friendly relationship with both Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika Mandanna. With Vijay in the lead role, the director made his breakthrough with Arjun Reddy. Years later, he cast Rashmika in his Bollywood picture Animal. Both movies were huge successes. As a result, it was assumed that he would attend the much awaited wedding of Vijay and Rashmika. On Wednesday, the director was seen at the Udaipur airport. Outside the airport, Sandeep Reddy Vanga was photographed by photographers. He accessorized



his ensemble with sunglasses and a vibrant kurta and pants. Vijay and

Rashmika are currently occupied with their pre-wedding celebrations in Udaipur, and their wedding is scheduled for February 26. Additionally, they posted a couple images to their Instagram Stories. About 25 kilometers from the city, at the opulent resort ITC Mementos Udaipur, the pair will exchange vows. The property, which is situated on a hill-top estate, has 117 private villas and is unusually encircled by a lake and a river. The pair acknowledged the unique moniker their followers had given them in a joint statement announcing their nuptials. “Our dear-

est loves, you were there before we made any plans or made any decisions for ourselves,” they wrote. You gave us a name with such affection. You referred to us as “VIROSH.” Therefore, we humbly name this gathering in your honor today. ‘The Wedding of VIROSH’ is what we want to call it.

We are grateful for your unwavering affection. You are always a part of us. Hugs and love in abundance!” In a private ceremony held in Hyderabad on October 3 of last year, Vijay and Rashmika announced their engagement.

Due to increased budget demands, Maharashtra’s debt is expected to reach Rs 9.32 lakh crore



Mumbai, Feb 25: Maharashtra’s state debt is predicted to increase to Rs 9.32 lakh crore, putting strain on the state government’s finances as it looks for more money to continue providing basic services.Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who is also in charge of finance, presented the state assembly with additional budget requests totaling Rs 11,995.33 crore on Tuesday.

The government is trying to limit a growing revenue gap that has already approached Rs 2 lakh crore after large spending approvals earlier in the fiscal year, and the most recent plan is much smaller than past demands. A total of Rs 5,748.10 crore has been set aside for revenue expenditures in order to pay for operating expenses. An additional Rs 6,003.79 crore has been set

aside for long-term asset creation and infrastructure capital expenditures. The greatest portion, Rs 5,840 crore, is sought by the Industries and Energy Department. Of this, Rs 803 crore would be allocated to small and rural businesses, and Rs 3,262 crore has been set aside for the power sector. Rs 1,431 crore for sanitation and water supply is another noteworthy allocation. OBC welfare, rural development, and medical education have all been given less attention. Following the death of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, Fadnavis assumed control of the finance position, which led to this cautious attitude to spending.The present additional demands are restricted to fulfilling existing obligations, in contrast to previous assembly sessions where demands for new initiatives totaling tens of thousands of crores were made.The administration has turned its attention to fiscal restraint in an attempt to stop the revenue deficit from getting worse as the state’s debt load has reached all-time highs.

These Figures Show Why Virat Kohli Was Essential for India Against South Africa

New Delhi:One may be forgiven for not realizing that India was the top T20I team in the world when watching their batting performance against South Africa in the T20 World Cup Super 8. They didn’t appear to be the pre-tournament favorites or the reigning champs. The Men in Blue only scored 111, falling short of their goal of 188. The false sense of confidence and domination that Suryakumar Yadav’s team had developed thus far in the competition was dashed by the 76-run defeat. During this run-chase, one man was absent, and his absence was felt. Indeed, after India won the 2024 T20 World Cup, the “King” of Indian cricket announced the format’s demise.

India needed Virat Kohli in this moment, but he wasn’t there. India consequently collapsed. No, the statistics show that this is more than just speculation. In the history of the T20 World Cup, Team India has only won three games by chasing more than 150. One man has led the chase and brought the Men in Blue home on each of the three occasions. Kohli is that dude. The first incident took place in Dhaka during the 2014 semifinal matchup with South Africa.

The Men in Blue were given a target of 173 by the Proteas. With two sixes and five fours, Kohli hammered 72 not out in 44 balls. With five balls remaining, India won by six wickets. They unfortunately fell to Sri Lanka in the final. In 2016, Australia and India competed in the Super 10 for a spot in the semifinals. Mohali saw some outstanding batting from Kohli.

He scored an undefeated 82 off 51 balls, including two sixes and nine fours. With five balls remaining, India triumphed



by six wickets and advanced to the semifinals. There, they were eliminated by eventual champions West Indies, ending their campaign. Then comes the infamous knock of 2022 against Pakistan in Melbourne during the group round. The goal was 160, and Kohli attended the celebration once more.

The innings featured six fours and four sixes, as the right-hander scored 82 not out from 53 balls. On the last ball of the match, India won by four wickets. Both the game and the innings were great. England, who would win the title in the end, defeated the Men in Blue, who advanced to the semifinals. With 1292 runs to his credit, Kohli is currently the top run scorer in T20 World Cup history. He used to hold the record for most runs in T20Is. With 4188, he is now ranked third overall and second among Indians.

On Rahul Gandhi’s plea in the PM Modi defamation case, the Bombay High Court has reserved its decision

Mumbai, Feb 25:On Tuesday, the Bombay High Court postponed making a decision on Congressman Rahul Gandhi’s request to have a defamation lawsuit against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018 dismissed.After hearing arguments for a long time, Justice NR Borkar’s one-judge bench reserved the decision. A member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) named Mahesh Shrishrimal filed a criminal defamation case in the Girgaon Metropolitan Magistrate Court on August 28, 2019. According to his allegation, Gandhi called Prime Minister Modi a “commander-in-thief” in September 2018 while speaking at a public gathering in Rajasthan. The Congress leader allegedly used the same word to criticize the prime minister on social media, according to Shrishrimal.Gandhi’s alleged name-calling, according to the complaint, amounted to labeling all Indian citizens and BJP members thieves.Gandhi was summoned by the

magistrate’s court, but he contested the summons in the High Court, claiming the complaint was baseless and vexatious and should be dismissed. In the petition, the Congress leader claimed that the complaint was a political maneuver by the complainant. His lawyers pointed to Section 199(2) of the CrPC, asserting that a sessions court must acknowledge offences against public servants while discharging their duties, establishing a legal barrier for the complainant, Shrishrimal. Furthermore, they argued that a political party cannot file defamation complaints under Section 499 of the Indian Penal Code, which disqualified Shrishrimal from acting in a representative role. The complainant countered by stating he had provided sufficient evidence to support his claims and argued his status as an aggrieved party, noting his complaint was made as a member of the BJP’s Maharashtra unit.

As a father battling liver cancer, Rinku Singh returns home



New Delhi: According to sources, Indian cricket player Rinku Singh hurried home from the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup camp after his father’s condition worsened. The information that is now accessible indicates that Rinku’s father is presently receiving ventilator support due to stage 4 liver cancer. During this crucial period, the batter departed the team environment to spend time with his family. Although Rinku is a member of the India national cricket team for the competition, it is yet unclear if he would return to play for the team. The team management is keeping a careful eye on the situation. In recent years, the left-handed hitter has grown to be a crucial element of India’s white-ball lineup, especially because of his ability

to finish under duress. Any prolonged absence can affect India’s lineup in the tournament’s later rounds.His family situation is still the main focus for the time being, and the cricket community is anticipated to support the player during this trying time. We’re waiting on an official update from the team management. Rinku was not on the field during Tuesday’s practice, despite the fact that many players, including Hardik Pandya, Ishan Kishan, Arshdeep Singh, Tilak Varma, Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson, etc., were visible. Rinku has had a mixed World Cup thus far as a batsman, frequently reaching the crease with just a few balls remaining to score. With a top score of 11*, he has only scored 24 runs in five innings while being undefeated twice. The left-hander has amassed 115 runs in eight innings at an average of 28.75 in 10 Twenty20 Internationals this year, with a strike rate of 132.18 and a highest score of 44*. On Thursday, Team India will play Zimbabwe in a match that must be won in Chennai.

The Men in Blue will need to win their remaining games to maintain their championship defense hopes after losing to South Africa by 76 runs in their Super Eight phase opener. They also need to hope that South Africa finishes the Super Eight phase undefeated.

Bhopal tourist killed after rented Thar smashes car

New Delhi, Feb 25: On Monday, a tragic accident in Goa claimed the life of a 65-year-old man, Bhagat Ram Sharma, when his Hyundai i20 was struck by a red rented Mahindra Thar SUV near Happy Bar Junction in As-sagao.

The collision resulted in severe damage to Sharma’s vehicle, leading to his instant death, while two other passengers sustained minor injuries. Remarkably, a five-month-old baby in the car was unharmed. Eyewitnesses reported that the SUV was driven by a woman, but after the accident, a man allegedly hopped into the driver’s seat to shield her from accountability. Footage from the scene shows the man making a phone call and attempting to flee in the SUV amidst confrontations with local residents. Witnesses also claimed that the women in the Thar tried to switch drivers to evade police involvement.

The March 1 launch of the Srinagar-Jammu Vande Bharat train has been postponed

New Delhi, Feb 25: “Unavoidable circumstances” have caused the Vande Bharat Express between Srinagar and Jammu to be delayed from its March 1 debut date, according to Indian Railway officials.A top Railway officer stated, “The Railway Board has put the notification program of Vande Bharat extension from March 1 on hold until further advice due to some unavoidable circumstances.”The much-anticipated train service that will link Srinagar and Jammu on March 1 was announced by Northern Railway just hours before to the announcement. There is a strong need to extend the rail service between Srinagar-Katra and Jammu in order to link the two capital cities of J&K and to enable smooth train connection between Kashmir and the rest of the nation. In June of last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inau-



gured the Srinagar-Katra Vande Bharat train service. The establishment of the historic train service was a first step toward rail connectivity between Kashmir and the rest of the nation. Northern Railways stated on Tuesday that it would be directly connecting Srinagar and Jammu, marking the next significant milestone. The Railways also announced that the Vande Bharat train between Katra and Srinagar will have 20

carriages instead of the current eight coaches in order to improve accessibility and provide smooth connection. In Jammu and Kashmir, the Katra-Srinagar train service has emerged as a popular means of transportation. However, the service cannot handle the rush because of the restricted number of coaches and train frequency.Although direct rail service between Kashmir and the rest of the nation is still a pipe dream, the an-

nouncement of train service between Srinagar and Jammu was generally praised as a historic step. Passengers traveling from or to Srinagar must transship at the station because regular rail services only go as far as Katra.The extension of the Srinagar-Katra Vande Bharat train to Jammu is viewed as a step toward a direct rail service between Srinagar and Delhi, even if passenger transshipment will still occur.

How the Indus Treaty Pause Revives the Chenab Power Project

New Delhi, Feb 25: After decades of operational constraints, India has accelerated desilting activities at reservoirs on Himalayan rivers covered by the Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan, which was suspended. Additionally, decades after important sediment-management systems were rendered inoperable, dredging has started in the Chenab River’s Salal Dam reservoir. Due to the lack of sediment-management facilities required by the Indus Waters Treaty, the storage capacity of the Salal power station in Jammu and Kashmir has drastically decreased by up to 96%. According to a bathymetric survey carried out in May 2025, the reservoir’s initial storage capacity of 284 million cubic meters (MCM) has decreased to just 9.91 MCM. In order to maintain operational efficiency, NHPC (National Hydroelectric Power Corporation) has implemented a silt-management strategy for the facility as the water-sharing agreement is no longer in force. In the long



run, the action is anticipated to boost the reservoir’s capacity to 694 MW and reverse the losses and damages caused to the Salal power facility. India was unable to implement all of these steps when the Indus Waters Treaty was in force. India was previously forbidden from utilizing undersluice gates for sediment control by the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty and a 1978 accord, which required them to stay sealed. Situated on the Chenab River in the Reasi district, the NHPC-operated Salal Hydroelectric Project is a 690 MW run-of-the-riv-

er power plant that provides electricity to the Northern Grid, which includes Jammu and Kashmir.The Salal concrete dam was initially intended to regulate sediment with six silt-excluder gates (silt-stopping structures) and six undersluices (gates at the base of a dam), according to official papers. However, the six undersluices were permanently blocked and the silt-excluder gates were not allowed to operate after the 1960 treaty and the 1978 agreement. According to officials, silt began building up in the reservoir since there were

no facilities for managing sediment. However, following the treaty’s suspension last year, a three-pronged plan is being implemented for the first time in its absence. Salal Power Station is implementing a silt management plan to enhance operational efficiency, focusing on dredging, flushing, and under-sluicing to combat sedimentation. Dredging work commenced on November 25, 2025, under a no-objection certificate (NOC) issued to Reach Dredging Limited, which has been authorized to dispose of 100,000 MT of silt. To date, 177,802 MT has been dredged, with 68,490 MT disposed of. Additionally, a second NOC for Dharti Dredging and Infrastructure Limited was issued on February 17, with work pending statutory clearances. Efforts also include a tender for making undersluices operational, with bids due by March 23, all aimed at restoring storage capacity and ensuring the long-term viability of the hydropower station.

IDFC First Bank in the 590-Crore Fraud Case: “We have paid 100%, but we are still investigating”

Chandigarh, Feb 25: In the midst of the inquiry into the Rs 590-crore fraud at the IDFC FIRST Bank branch in Chandigarh, the bank has declared that it had paid back all of the principle that the Haryana government agencies had demanded.The bank claimed it always upholds the highest standards and ideals in a statement that was published in newspapers today. Because of the way we outline our product policies, disclosures, and no fine print banking, we refer to ourselves as a customer-first bank. If a customer has a different opinion, we give them the benefit of the doubt. The time had come to put our CUSTOMER FIRST values into practice and to step up and deliver when it really mattered. We firmly believe in becoming a principle-based bank. Despite the fact that the case was being investigated, we did not delay the payment. According to the bank’s statement, “This is IDFC FIRST Bank’s DNA.”Therefore, we have paid the appropriate Haryana government departments 100% of the principle and interest as requested, totaling INR 583 crore, even though the inquiry into the matter is still ongoing. The Bank’s constructive attitude, professional demeanor, and prompt, principle-based settlement have been much welcomed and thanked by the departments, according to the statement. “The Bank remains committed to working together with the relevant Haryana Government departments and the law enforcement agencies, to pursue actions against the perpetrators of the fraud and look forward to recovering our dues,” it stated.



In the IDFC First Bank fraud case, over Rs 556 crore, including Rs 22 crore in interest, was recovered in less than a day, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh informed the Assembly yesterday. He stated that the full sum owed to various state government departments, boards, and businesses has been credited back. “Nearly Rs 556 crore, including nearly Rs 22 crore in interest, came back within 24 hours,” he told them.In a regulatory filing earlier this week, IDFC FIRST Bank revealed that it had discovered a fraud involving around Rs 590 crore involving certain Haryana government-affiliated accounts that were run through its Chandigarh branch. According to the bank, the fraud was initially caused by

some branch employees engaging in unauthorized and fraudulent actions, which may have involved other people. According to the bank, the scam started when a government agency in Haryana asked to close its account and move its funds to a different bank. Bank officials discovered differences between the stated amount and the account’s real balance during the procedure.

Later, similar disparities were found in other accounts connected to the government.Four people have been taken into custody as the Haryana Anti-Corruption Bureau investigates the situation. A committee has been established, according to the chief minister, to look into the issue in further detail and establish responsibility.

ECB and The Hundred franchises say players must not face exclusion based on nationality

Pakistani players banned after Mumbai attacks

London: The England and Wales Cricket Board and franchises of The Hundred have issued a joint statement to assert that players must not be excluded on grounds of nationality amid fears that Pakistani cricketers could be deliberately ignored by at least four Indian-owned teams at next month's auction.

Four out of the eight franchises -- Manchester Super Giants (RPSG Group), MI London (Reliance), Southern Brave (GMR) and Sunrisers Leeds (Sun Group) -- are linked to team owners in the IPL and according reports in the British media, all of them would avoid Pakistani players. However, even without any Indian presence among the owners, only two Pakistan players were a part of The Hundred last year and Overall just nine have managed to feature in the first five seasons. The new owners will take charge of the operations from this season onwards. The Hundred was established to reach new audiences, grow the game of cricket and ensure that everyone -- regardless of their ethnicity, gender, faith, nationality or otherwise -- feels they belong



In our sport. Players must not be excluded on the grounds of their nationality," asserted the joint statement from The ECB and all eight owners, including the ones with IPL links. "As the governing body responsible for running the tournament, the ECB is committed to ensuring there is no place for discrimination, and has regulations in place to take robust action to tackle any such conduct. All eight teams commit to selection being based solely on cricketing performance, availability, and the needs of each team," the statement added. On Monday,

Pakistan opener Sahibzada Farhan had expressed his desire to play in The Hundred. As many as 67 male and female cricketers from Pakistan, including almost the entire men's T20 World Cup squad, have registered for the tournament's auction. As far as the Indian Premier League is concerned, Pakistani players were barred from the tournament following the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack that was carried out by terrorists from across the border. No Pakistani cricketer has featured in SA20 since its launch in 2023, with all six teams owned by

Franchise groups linked to the IPL. Similarly, in the UAE's ILT20, franchises controlled by the owners of MI London and Southern Brave have not signed a single Pakistan player across four seasons. England captain Harry Brook had earlier said that it would be a shame if Pakistan cricketers did not take part in the competition and spinner Moeen Ali had warned that such an exclusion could lead to legal action against the owners. Talking about the team composition for Thursday's crucial match, Shastri advised India to play.

Odisha and Inter Kashi share points as ISL 2025-26 match concludes in Bhubaneswar



Bhubaneswar: Odisha FC and Inter Kashi FC played out a goalless draw in Gameweek 2 of the ongoing Indian Super League (ISL) 2025-26 at the Kalinga Stadium on Tuesday, according to a release. Odisha FC, playing their first match of the season, and Inter Kashi FC, building on their encouraging league debut, were evenly matched throughout. Despite chances at both ends, neither side could find the breakthrough as the contest ended in the first stalemate of the season.

Despite nine attempts from Odisha and eight from Inter Kashi, only two shots on target were registered by each side. Odisha's Rahul KP was named the Player of the Match. The visitors made a strong start. Inside the first minute, Inter Kashi midfielder Tomba Singh tested Odisha goalkeeper Amrinder with

a powerful low strike from distance, forcing him into a sharp save. Odisha responded around the quarter-hour mark when Rahul KP fired over from long range, following a quick transition initiated by Lalithathanga Khawlhing. Shortly after, Suhair, VP, headed over for Odisha from close range after a set-piece delivery by Isak Vanlalruatfela. Midway through the first half, Thoiba Singh won a free-kick for the hosts on the right and later headed narrowly wide from Khawlhing's delivery. Suhair again failed to hit the target from another set-piece situation. At the other end, Planas saw a close-range effort blocked by the defence. Just before the break, Vanlalruatfela tested Lluís Tarres with a low strike from distance, but the Inter Kashi custodian gathered comfortably as the teams went into the

interval. Early in the second half, Inter Kashi forward Rohit Danu had a header blocked inside the area. A little after the hour mark, Vanlalruatfela came closest for the Juggernauts, but his left-footed effort from a tight angle was blocked by defender David Humanes. In the 73rd minute, Danu dragged a shot wide from the left after being picked out by Prasanth Mohan. Deep into stoppage time, he attempted another effort from distance, which sailed just over the crossbar. Both teams pushed in the closing ten minutes, with Inter Kashi threatening more. However, neither could apply the finishing touch as the contest ended goalless, with both sides sharing the spoils. The All India Football Federation (AIFF) has announced the fixtures for the Indian Super League (ISL) 2025-26 season. The season will commence on February 14, 2026, with two matches scheduled on the opening day, as per an AIFF release. The opening fixture will see Mohun Bagan Super Giant face Kerala Blasters FC at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan, Kolkata, with kick-off at 17:00 IST. The second match of the opening day will be played between FC Goa and Inter Kashi at the Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, Fatorda, with kick-off at 19:30 IST. The fixtures have been finalised following consultations with participating clubs and relevant stakeholders. The 14 participating teams will compete in a single-leg round-robin format, with each team playing 13 matches.

Windies' Batting Firepower Faces Proteas' Pace

Ahmedabad: The West Indies' big-hitting ability will face a stern test from South Africa when the two unbeaten teams square off in a Super 8 clash of the T20 World Cup here on Thursday, looking to tighten their grip on a semifinal spot. South Africa come into the contest after a commanding 76-run win over home-favourites India in Ahmedabad, while the West Indies hammered Zimbabwe by 107 runs in their previous outing in Mumbai to underline their batting firepower. West Indies' line-up, packed with power-hitters, has shown the ability to take the game away in a matter of overs. However, they will now be up against a balanced South African bowling attack that dismantled India here on Sunday. It was a collective effort from the bowling unit comprising Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada and Lungi Ngidi, whose pace variations have the tournament thus far.

Bodo/Glimt, Atletico Madrid, Bayer Leverkusen, Newcastle United advance into UEFA Champions League Round of 16

Milan: Bodo/Glimt produced one of the shock results of the UEFA Champions League this season as the Norwegian side held off a late Inter Milan fightback to secure a historic place in the round of 16, while Atletico Madrid, Bayer Leverkusen, and Newcastle United also booked their spots in the knockout stages, according to UEFA Champions League. Bodo/Glimt made history by advancing to the last 16 for the first time after a 2-1 win over Inter Milan in Italy, completing a 5-2 aggregate triumph. Jens Petter Hauge opened the scoring, continuing his impressive run in the competition, and Hakon Evjen added a composed second to give the visitors a commanding lead. Inter Milan intensified their efforts late on, with Alessandro Bastoni reducing the deficit, but Kjetil Knutsen's men held firm to record a memorable victory against the three-time European champions. Atletico Madrid also progressed convincingly, defeating Club Brugge 4-1 at the Wanda Metropolitano to complete a 7-4 aggregate win. Alexander Sorloth stole the show with a fine hat-trick, opening the scoring in the 23rd minute after racing onto Jan Oblak's long ball and holding off the defence. Club Brugge responded Through Joel Ordonez's Close-range header, but Johnny Cardoso restored Atletico's lead shortly after the



Restart. Sorloth added two more goals in the second half, including a calm finish from Matteo Ruggeri's cross, ensuring Diego Simeone's side advanced to face either Tottenham Hotspur or Liverpool in the last 16. Bayer Leverkusen joined the last-16 line-up after a goalless draw with Olympiacos at the BayArena, completing a 2-0 aggregate win. The hosts kept a fifth clean sheet in seven Champions League matches despite persistent pressure from the Greek side. Jonas Hofmann went closest before Half-time, while Janis Blaswich made key saves after the break and substitute Ernest Poku struck the crossbar. Leverkusen's victory ended a run of six

Unsuccessful knockout ties, setting up a last-16 meeting with either Arsenal or Bayern Munchen.

Newcastle United also secured their progression after a 3-2 victory over Qarabag in one of the highest-scoring ties in Champions League history. Already holding a 6-1 advantage from the first leg, the Magpies quickly extended their lead with early goals from Sandro Tonali and Joelinton. The second half saw Camilo Duran and Sven Botman exchange strikes within 100 seconds, before Elvin Jafarguliyev converted a rebound following Aaron Ramsdale's save from a penalty. Despite Qarabag's, Newca competition.

Ricky Ponting advises India: back to basics before Zimbabwe clash



New Delhi: Former legendary Australia cricketer Ricky Ponting is of the opinion that the Indian team should be focusing on playing their best XI rather than trying to get the matchups right, when they face Zimbabwe in their next Super Eight clash on Thursday in Chennai's MA Chidambaram Stadium. "Listening to the commentary, the reason Axar didn't play (against South Africa) is because of the left-handers in the opposition side. But there's still some right-

Handers there. It just comes down to the art of the captain of being able to use Axar at the right time," Ponting said on the latest episode of The ICC Review.

The Suryakumar Yadav-led side lost their first Super Eight fixture against South Africa by a big margin of 76 runs in Ahmedabad, and now, India will next take on Zimbabwe in Chennai on Thursday, before wrapping up the Super Eight stage on Sunday against the West Indies in Kolkata. "I would be

going back to the basics. I'd be just looking at their line-up. Who's our best XI for the conditions in Chennai?" added Ponting, who has led Australia to two ICC Men's Cricket World Cup triumphs. "If that has Axar Patel in it, great. If it has Kuldeep Yadav in it, that's the other one that I'd be thinking about bringing back because it doesn't matter with him if it's left-hand or right-hand. He can bowl wrong ones and spin the ball away from the left-hand outside edge of both those batters," said Ponting. Quality spinners have made an impact at the T20 World Cup, especially in the matches played in India. Former Indian cricketer and now commentator, Ravi Shastri, also believed that India will make changes in the playing XI and Axar Patel may play th match against Zimbabwe.. "I think they have to bring him (Axar Patel) back. You need that experience," said Shastri.

Cheating in chess portrayed as bigger issue Than reality, says Gukesh in candid remarks



Prague: Cheating in chess is being portrayed as a bigger problem than what it actually is, says world champion D Gukesh, who does not support Russian Grandmaster Vladimir Kramnik's controversial crusade against the menace that affects the online game. Kramnik, a former world champion, has sued the International Chess Federation (FIDE) for defamation after the world body lambasted his allegations of cheating against late American Grandmaster Daniel Naroditsky and Czechia's David Navara. Naroditsky's death became

A major flashpoint in international chess as, in his last video stream, he talked about being under mental stress due to Kramnik's allegations. However, a recent medical report ruled his death to be accidental, caused by a cardiac issue. Obviously, I am against any kind of unfair or unethical play. I have never done that and I really hope nobody does that. It's a kind of problem that we have been seeing lately," Gukesh said in the pre-tournament press conference of the Prague Chess Festival here. I think people are making it (cheating) a bigger problem

That what it actually is. Specifically about Kramnik's allegations, I don't support most of it. I think there should be more harmony and peace in the chess world," he added in his measured response to the issue.

Several chess players, including India's Nihal Sarin and Arjun Erigaisi along with world number one Magnus Carlsen, have spoken out against Kramnik but the Russian has remained defiant. About Kramnik exactly, I mean what he has been doing, obviously I am not supportive of that. Many people, in the

last couple of years, have been paranoid about cheating," Gukesh said. Naroditsky was just 29 and a popular content creator. His death triggered outrage against Kramnik and FIDE CEO Emil Sutovsky went on to describe the Russian's charges against Naroditsky as "appalling and outright shameful". The world body eventually launched an ethics inquiry against Kramnik, who responded by suing FIDE. "I deeply regret that this profound tragedy was exploited by various individuals and groups to advance their own agendas. There can be no justification for such immoral conduct," Kramnik said last month after Norditsky's medical report came out. Gukesh, who has been battling a slump for the past few months, would be defending his title later this year and he picked compatriot R Praggnanandhaa as the one he would like to face. Pragganandhaa would be competing in the Candidates Tournament next month which will decide the challenger for the world crown. At the Prague Chess Festival, Gukesh will face Hans Moke Niemann of the USA, another player.

Sesko keeps Manchester United's top-four push alive, driving momentum in their Premier League campaign

Manchester: Manchester United edged past Everton 1-0 at Hill Dickinson Stadium on Monday, with substitute Benjamin Sesko scoring the decisive goal to secure all three points. The narrow victory extended United's unbeaten run and underlined their ability to manage tight contests, even as Everton remained competitive for long spells without finding a breakthrough. The first half offered little in terms of quality, with neither side able to create clear chances. Everton showed intent in midfield but lacked penetration in the final third, while United remained cautious and compact, focusing on defensive shape rather than attacking fluency. The second half followed a similar pattern until United found the breakthrough through a move involving their attacking signings. Matheus Cunha switched play with a diagonal pass to Bryan Mbeumo, who drove forward before setting up Sesko. The striker, making a well-timed run into the box, finished calmly past Jordan Pickford in the 71st minute. Sesko once again made a telling impact off the bench. Starting among



The substitutes for the sixth game in a row, the Slovenian scored for the third time in four appearances as a substitute, continuing a productive run despite limited minutes.

His bench role appears to be a tactical decision rather than a reflection of form. United have often approached matches cautiously in the opening stages, with Carrick opting to introduce Sesko later, when space opens up and defenders begin to tire. The approach paid off again, as his movement and composure proved decisive.

He is growing as a player," United head coach Michael Carrick said. "Sometimes it's big steps, sometimes it's little steps. He has taken some huge ones recently. The confidence and belief he is playing with is great to see." Everton attempted to respond after falling behind but struggled to break down United's defensive structure, as the visitors saw out the closing stages to secure a clean sheet. The win moved United three points clear of both Liverpool and Chelsea in a tightly contested race

For the top four. With only a small margin separating several sides and 10 games remaining, United's ability to pick up points in low-margin matches could prove crucial as they push for a Champions League return. Despite not starting a game under the new coach, Manchester United striker Benjamin Sesko does not seem to mind, explaining that he is ready to contribute whenever manager Michael Carrick calls upon him. when the in-form Sesko was left on the bench Against Everton.