

Assam Votes for Accountability, Not Optics: Pawan Khera

Guwahati, Jan 27: Congress leader Pawan Khera said that the people of Assam are looking for accountability and real governance, not political showmanship, as he launched a sharp attack on Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. Speaking through a post on social media on January 26, Khera praised Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, for what he described as consistent and sincere support for the people of the Northeast during a period marked by multiple crises. He said Gandhi had shown character and moral courage by standing with the region when it needed support the most. Khera shared photographs

of Rahul Gandhi interacting with people from Northeastern states and alleged that the Union government had remained largely indifferent to their concerns. He claimed that the Congress party had continued to engage with the region, while the BJP and its ideological allies had failed to address serious issues affecting peace and social harmony. Highlighting specific concerns, Khera referred to the prolonged violence in Manipur, calling it a major failure of governance. He also mentioned the unresolved case related to the death of popular Assamese singer Zubeen Garg and the continuing demand for justice by the family of Angel Chakma, terming these as examples of neglect and lack of accountability.

Lalduhoma Launches ‘Mizoram CSR Connect’ Portal

Aizawl, Jan 27: Chief Minister of Mizoram, Mr. Lalduhoma, today inaugurated the CSR Match-making Portal – “Mizoram CSR Connect” at McCabe Hall, Aijal Club. The portal has been developed jointly by the Mizoram CSR Cell under the Planning & Programme Implementation Department in collaboration with UNDP India, with the objective of facilitating effective linkage and coordination between CSR contributors and implementing agencies. While addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister expressed his appreciation to UNDP India, the Planning & Programme Implementation Department, and the Mizoram CSR Cell for their dedicated efforts in making the Mizoram CSR Connect portal a reality. Referring to CSR data for 2023–24, he noted that Mizoram received only 0.06 percent of the total CSR expenditure in India. Emphasising the significant role CSR can play in development, he

stated that the CSR Cell was established in the Chief Minister’s Office in June 2024 to strengthen CSR-related initiatives in the State. He said that the launch of the Mizoram CSR Connect portal marks an important step in bridging CSR donors and seekers through a transparent and structured digital platform. The portal, he added, is expected to enhance ease of doing CSR in Mizoram while also ensuring transparency, accountability, and measurable outcomes for contributing corporates. Highlighting Mizoram’s strengths, the Chief Minister said that the State’s peaceful environment, low corruption rate, high literacy level, strong progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the people’s deep-rooted spirit of *tlawmn-gaihna* make Mizoram an ideal destination for CSR investments. He invited corporate entities and civil society organisations to ac-

tively engage in CSR initiatives in Mizoram, assuring that every rupee of CSR funds would be utilised in a transparent, meaningful, and impactful manner. Ms. Angela Lusigi, Resident Representative, UNDP India, also addressed the programme and expressed her appreciation for the launch of the Mizoram CSR Connect portal, describing it as a commendable initiative with national and global relevance. She said UNDP was proud to partner in the initiative and reaffirmed UNDP India’s focus on sustainable development, women empowerment, and environmental conservation. Commending Mizoram’s development initiatives, she reiterated UNDP’s commitment to continued collaboration with the State. She underlined the importance of data-driven planning for achieving impactful development outcomes and noted that the portal would greatly support CSR stake-



holders through reliable data and informed decision-making. Secretary, Planning & Programme Implementation Department, Pu Lalmalsawma Pachuau, delivered the welcome address. Adviser to the Chief Minister and Chairman, Mizoram CSR

Cell, Pu TBC Lalvenchhunga, highlighted key CSR opportunities in Mizoram. The event also witnessed the exchange of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between the Mizoram Start-Up Mission and participating corporate and institutional partners.

Assam’s traditional flavours shine at Rashtrapati Bhavan Republic Day high tea

Guwahati, Jan 27: Assam’s rich and time-honoured food traditions received national attention on January 26 as the state’s traditional cuisine took centre stage at the Republic Day high tea hosted by the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The special high tea, organised as part of the Republic Day celebrations, featured a carefully curated menu showcasing traditional dishes from across the Northeastern states. The menu drew culinary selections from Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, with Assamese delicacies forming a major highlight of the Northeast food presentation. Several items closely linked to Assam’s harvest festival Magh Bihu were served, reflecting the state’s deep connection between food, agriculture and seasonal traditions. Among the Assamese items featured were Til Pitha, Til Laru and Narikol Laru, all of which are commonly prepared in households during the winter harvest season. These traditional sweets, made from sesame seeds, coconut and jaggery, are an integral part of Assamese cultural celebrations and family gatherings. Black Rice Kheer, prepared from indigenous black rice grown in the region, was another prominent item on the menu. The dish, which is popular in Assam as well as parts of Nagaland and Manipur, was highlighted for both its cultural roots and nutritional value. Pati Sapta Pitha, a winter delicacy shared by Assam and Tripura, was also served, reflecting the shared food traditions of neighbouring states. From Tripura, the GI-tagged Matabari Peda featured on the menu. Known for its soft texture and distinctive flavour, the sweet is closely associated with local traditions and community-based preparation. Fresh seasonal fruits sourced from the region were also included.

Assam BJP targets Gaurav Gogoi over alleged absence on Republic Day

Guwahati, Jan 27: The Assam unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday stepped up its political attack on state Congress president Gaurav Gogoi, alleging that he was not seen participating in Republic Day celebrations in the state. In a post on social media platform X, the BJP’s Assam unit claimed that Gogoi could not be “located” on one of the country’s most important national occasions. The party said that while there is no legal requirement for any political leader to take part in Republic Day events, the absence of the state Congress president on such a day raised questions. The BJP added that it would be “happy to be proven wrong” and said that even a single photograph of Gogoi unfurling the national flag would settle the matter. The allegation was echoed by



Assam minister Pijush Hazarika, who also took to X to support the BJP’s claim. Hazarika said his sources within the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee had confirmed that Gogoi did not attend Republic Day celebrations in Guwahati. His statement further intensified the political exchange between the two parties. These fresh remarks come

at a time when the BJP has been running a sustained campaign against Gogoi. In recent months, senior BJP leaders, including Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, have repeatedly accused Gogoi of having alleged links with Pakistan. The BJP has claimed that such associations raise serious concerns about his political intentions and public conduct.

The Indian National Congress, however, has strongly rejected all allegations. Congress leaders have described the claims as false, baseless, and politically motivated. According to the party, the BJP is using nationalism as a political tool to attack the opposition and divert attention from issues related to governance and public welfare in Assam.

Rio inaugurates first Drone School of Nagaland

Kohima, Jan 27: Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio inaugurated the state’s first Drone School and Drone Centre of Excellence at the Nagaland GIS and Remote Sensing Centre, Kohima on Monday. The school will equip youth with drone technology, opening avenues for innovation, employment, and entrepreneurship. Rio said the school is a step towards building a smarter, future-ready Nagaland. The state-of-the-art facility is a pioneering initiative of the Nagaland GIS and Remote Sensing Centre (NGISRSC) under the planning and transformation department.

RSS Manipur Prant pays homage to Hidangmayum Budhamani Sharma

Imphal, Jan 27: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Manipur Prant, paid heartfelt tribute to Hidangmayum Budhamani Sharma of Tera Bazar, Imphal West, during a condolence function held at Bhaskara Prabha, Konjeng Leikai, Imphal West. Budhamani Sharma, born on February 28, 1969, tragically passed away on the night of January 21 in a road accident. He is survived by his wife, a daughter, and a son. Professionally, he served as a Security

Officer at Central Agricultural University (CAU), Imphal. A devoted RSS karyakarta, Budhamani dedicated his life to the organisation, serving in various capacities from his childhood until his last breath. He was a Karyakarini Sadasya of Imphal Jilla and had earlier served as Jilla Vyavastha Pramukh of Imphal Jilla. The condolence session was attended by several senior RSS functionaries, including Dr. Th. Naranbabu Singh, Sanghchalak, RSS Manipur Prant;

Khwaitrakpam Rajen Singh, Karyawah, RSS Assam Kshetra; MM Asokan, Pracharak Pramukh, RSS Assam Kshetra; Shijagurumayum Tarunkumar Sharma, Karyawah, RSS Manipur Prant; and Laishram Jatra Singh, Karyakarini Sadasya, RSS Manipur Prant. Numerous karyakartas and swayamsevakas from Imphal Vibhag and Imphal Jilla were also present. A one-minute silence was observed and floral tributes were paid before the portrait of Budhamani as a mark of respect.



Speaking at the occasion, Laishram Jatra Singh described Budhamani as an all-rounder karyakarta who contributed to the organisation in multiple spheres. Shijagurumayum Tarunkumar Sharma recalled his close association with Budhamani

and said he was a dedicated worker who never separated RSS from his life, adding that such karyakartas are rare. MM Asokan reminisced about his first meeting with Budhamani in 1980, remembering him as a young and dynamic karyakarta who worked selflessly to strengthen the organisation from the grassroots. All the speakers prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and resolved to carry forward his spirit of dedication and service.

Foundation for EdTech Skills University laid in Assam’s Tinsukia



Tinsukia, Jan 27: Marking a significant step towards strengthening skill-based and technology-driven education for the youth of Upper Assam, Chief Minister Sarma today performed bhoomi puja of the EdTech Skills University in Tinsukia. Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Sarma said that performing bhoomi puja for the university marks a moment of great joy for higher and technical education in Tinsukia district and across Upper Assam. He recalled that during Advantage Assam 2.0, State government signed a memorandum of understanding with World Education Mission of New Delhi to establish an EdTech Skill University. He said the government had assured full support to set up the university on 100 bighas of land near the Tinsukia Plastic Park. Following this assurance, the promoters came forward, and the State government enacted the Assam

Skill University Bill in the Legislative Assembly. On this auspicious day of Republic Day, he performed the bhoomi puja and laid the foundation stone, formally launching construction of the Tinsukia EdTech Skill University. He said that the university will include academic buildings, skill laboratories, administrative blocks, an auditorium, a swimming pool, playgrounds, and other facilities. With an investment of more than Rs 250 crore, the institution would aim to provide skill based education to the youth of Assam. Referring to the Tata Semiconductor project under construction at Jagiroad, he said that producing around 6.8 million chips will require nearly 30,000 skilled young men and women. He stressed that alongside theoretical knowledge, practical skills have become essential to remain competent in the ever-changing skill eco-system of the country.

Plantation drive carried out in Pherzawl

Imphal, Jan 27: The Pherzawl district administration today organised a tree plantation drive at the district headquarters under the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) initiative, reaffirming its commitment to environmental protection and sustainable development. The programme was jointly organised by the District Administration, Pherzawl, the District Social Welfare Office (DSWO), and District Forest Officer, Pherzawl Division.

The initiative aimed at addressing climate change concerns while promoting environmental awareness among the public. The plantation drive was led by Deputy Commissioner Manuamching, along with Additional Deputy Commissioner Pherzawl and In-charge District Social Welfare Officer Joel G Haokip. Saplings were planted within the district headquarters campus as part of efforts to increase green cover and encourage eco-friendly practices. Officials present during the programme highlighted the importance of tree plantation in mitigating the effects of climate change and ensuring a healthier environment for future generations. They also emphasised the



role of community participation in sustaining such initiatives. The drive forms part of the broader objectives of the BBBP initiative, which, apart from focusing

on the welfare and empowerment of girls, also promotes social responsibility and sustainable development activities across the district.

Nagaland Researchers Unveil Rare Plant Discovery

Kohima, Jan 27: Researchers from Nagaland University have discovered a new plant species, *Hoya nagaensis*, in the Kavunhou Community Reserved Forest of Phek district. Published in the prestigious Kew Bulletin, the study was led by Dr. Gyati Yam alongside researchers Vieneite-o Koza and Joynath Pegu.

The species, distinguished by unique leaf and floral structures, is currently known only from a single location. Due to its limited distribution and threats like shifting cultivation, it has been provisionally assessed as Critically Endangered. Vice-Chancellor Prof. Jagadish Kumar Patnaik lauded the find, noting that it proves community-protected forests are vital refuges for rare biodiversity. The discovery not only strengthens India’s botanical records but also highlights the effectiveness of traditional Naga forest stewardship. Future research will focus on the plant’s ecology, pollination, and ornamental potential while continuing to explore Nagaland’s scientifically undocumented forest regions.

Republic Day grenade blast rocks remote Arunachal village near Indo-Myanmar border

Itanagar, Jan 27: A grenade blast was reported on Republic Day in a remote border village of Arunachal Pradesh, raising security concerns even as the country marked the 77th Republic Day with celebrations across India. According to official sources, the explosion took place at Ranglum village near Border Pillar 168, close to the In-

do-Myanmar international boundary, in Changlang district. The blast was reportedly caused by a grenade that was hurled in the area. No casualties or injuries were reported in the incident. An official confirmed that security agencies suspect the involvement of extremist elements operating in the sensitive border region. “We are suspecting extremists be-

hind the incident,” the official said, adding that investigations are underway to determine the exact circumstances of the blast. Following the explosion, additional security forces were deployed in and around Ranglum village. Search operations were launched to trace any extremist presence in the surrounding forested areas, officials said.

Assam: GAFF 2026 Indian Showcase Awards spotlight Indian and regional cinema

Guwahati, Jan 27: The Indian Showcase Awards 2026, presented as part of the second Guwahati Asian Film Festival (GAFF), celebrated outstanding achievements in Indian and regional cinema, recognising filmmakers and artists whose work reflects cinematic excellence, diversity and storytelling depth. In a glittering awards ceremony, the Best Film Award was conferred on the Malayalam feature ‘Victoria’, directed by Sivaranjini, for its compelling narrative and strong visual language. The film also earned additional recognition at GAFF with cinematographer Anand Ravi receiving the Jury Special Mention for his exceptional cinematography in the film. The Second Best Film Award was awarded to the Nepali film Shape of Momo, directed by Tribeny Rai, applauded for its sensitive storytelling and fresh cinematic voice. Highlighting regional cinema from the Northeast, the NE Spotlight Award went to the Assamese film Noi Kotha (River Tales), directed by Pankaj Borah, acknowledging its cultural relevance and strong narrative rooted in the region. “The Indian Showcase Awards reflect the spirit of GAFF – celebrating bold storytelling, regional diversity and meaningful cinema. This year’s winners demonstrate how powerful narratives can emerge from different cultural landscapes while remaining universally resonant. We are proud to provide a platform where such voices are discovered, appreciated and encouraged,” said Monita Borgohain, Honorary Festival Director of GAFF. The Indian Showcase Competition jury at GAFF 2026 was chaired by acclaimed filmmaker Girish Kasaravalli, with noted film personalities Upal Borpujari and Anupama Bose serving as jury members. The researchers plan to further strengthen the framework by incorporating moraine development histories, automating data preparation processes and adding field-based validation. These enhancements are expected to improve predictive accuracy and



expand the model’s applicability for large-scale monitoring of glacial hazards in high-altitude regions. The awards underline GAFF’s commitment to promoting diverse voices from across India and Asia, offering a platform for emerging and independent filmmakers alongside established talent. The Guwahati Asian Film Festival (GAFF) 2026 also conferred its Lifetime Achievement Honour on veteran actor Bishnu Kharghoria (also known as Bishnu Kharghariya), in recognition of his ex-

traordinary and enduring contribution to Indian cinema. Instituted as an annual honour, the award celebrates artists whose body of work has significantly shaped cinematic culture and inspired generations. Organised by Trending Now Media, the second edition of the Guwahati Government of India. The festival showcased 26 curated films from across 10 Asian countries, attracting strong participation from filmmakers, cinephiles and industry professionals.

KSU warns border residents against aiding illegal entry of Bangladeshi nationals

Shillong, Jan 27: The Khasi Students’ Union (KSU) has warned residents of border areas in Meghalaya against aiding the illegal entry of Bangladeshi nationals into the state, expressing concern over the involvement of some locals in cross-border infiltration. KSU president Lam-bokstarwell Marngar said the nature of illegal activities along the border has changed, with reports suggesting that certain individuals from border communities are helping Bangladeshi nationals enter India illegally. He noted that the issue is no longer limited to cross-border trade, but now involves organised assistance to infiltrators. Marngar said the KSU has instructed all its units, particularly those in border regions, to remain alert and monitor such activities closely. He asserted that the organisation would take strict action against anyone found facilitating illegal entry, regardless of whether they belong to the Khasi community. He criticised those enabling illegal migrants while the organisation continues its efforts to prevent infiltration into the state, especially in the Khasi homeland of Hynniewtrep. Marngar urged those involved to stop immediately, warning that continued involvement could lead to serious consequences. The warning follows recent police action in West Jaintia Hills district. On January 20, police intercepted multiple vehicles along the Dawki route and apprehended 18 Bangladeshi nationals. The operation also led to the detention of



two Indian touts, identified as Meban Dkhar and Melari Rasmus of Lad Demthring, along with the seizure of a vehicle bearing registration number ML04 D 4739.

The arrests have raised concerns about how long the foreign nationals may have been staying undetected in Jowai and nearby areas, officials said.

Early, inclusive solution to Naga issue vital for Nagaland’s progress: CM Rio

Kohima, Jan 27: Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Monday said the prolonged delay in resolving the Naga political issue continues to impede the state’s development, asserting that an early, honourable and inclusive settlement remains the top priority of his government. Addressing the state-level celebration of the 77th Republic Day, Rio called upon all negotiating parties and stakeholders to rise above differences, respect the aspirations of the people and work in unity to bring the long-pending peace talks to a conclusion without further delay. Describing the Naga political issue as one of “paramount importance”, the chief minister said its non-settlement has had a sustained impact on governance, investment and overall socio-economic progress in the state. He said the Political Affairs Committee (PAC)—comprising ministers, advisers, representatives of all political parties and Members of Parliament from Nagaland—has been meeting regularly to review developments and will intensify its role as an active facilitator in the peace process. “The yearning of our people must not be ignored,” Rio said, adding that the opportunity before the stakeholders should not be allowed to slip away. Turning to the long-standing concerns of Eastern Nagaland, the chief minister acknowledged that development initiatives in the six districts have been inadequate and that the region continues to lag behind on several socio-economic indicators. He said the state government is



engaging with the Eastern Nagaland People’s Organisation (ENPO) with “full understanding” of its demand for the creation of the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA). Rio informed the gathering that the government has already conveyed its views and comments to the Centre, reiterating its commitment to addressing regional disparities and grievances through

dialogue and cooperation. On the law and order front, the chief minister said Nagaland remains one of the most peaceful states in the country, with no major security concerns. Citing the latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report, he noted that Nagaland recorded a cognisable crime rate of 84.9 per lakh population—the second lowest in India.

Mizoram seizes 338 arrested since April 2025: Governor 816 crore drugs

Aizawl, Jan 27: Mizoram Governor General Vijay Kumar Singh (Rtd) on Monday highlighted the state government’s robust measures to curb drug trafficking, illegal liquor trade, and organised crime, while also underscoring initiatives for public welfare and health.

Addressing the Republic Day gathering after unfurling the national flag, the Governor said that since April last year, the state police have seized drugs and other narcotics worth Rs 816 crore. During the same period, 338 people were arrested in 217 criminal cases, and a large consignment of smuggled Burmese areca nuts valued at Rs 17.8 crore was also confiscated. He added that 42 firearms, along with a significant cache of ammunition and magazines, were seized, resulting in multiple arrests and criminal cases. Strong enforcement actions were also taken against the illegal liquor trade, with substantial quantities of locally made liquor, Indian Made Foreign Liquor, foreign-origin liquor, and beer seized. In this drive, 82 cases were registered, resulting in 99 arrests. “These concerted actions underscore the unwavering commitment of Mizoram police to safeguarding public order, curbing organised crime, and ensuring the safety and security of the people,” Singh said. The Governor also reported that the state Excise and Narcotics department seized 475 kg of various drugs and arrested 611 offenders in drug-related cases during the 2025–26 financial year. The Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2025, and the Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition) Rules, 2025, notified in October last year, led to over 4,000 arrests for violations of prohibition laws. Enforcement measures also generated revenue exceeding Rs 1.69 crore during the current financial year, surpassing the prescribed annual



target. Singh noted that the Home Department has successfully completed the process of establishing the Directorate of Prosecution, strengthening the state’s law enforcement framework. Singh also spoke about the Mizoram Universal Health Care Scheme (MUHCS), under which beneficiaries can avail cashless treatment worth up to Rs 5 lakh at empanelled hospitals inside and outside Mizoram. The scheme is operational across all state-run hospitals, 13 private hospitals, 3 Day Care centres in Mizoram, and 25 private hospitals outside the state. “These initiatives reflect the government’s firm resolve to enforce laws, curb drug abuse, promote public health, and empower citizens,” the Governor said. Highlighting development initiatives, the Governor spoke about the state’s flagship programme, Bana Kaih (Hand Holding), aimed at empowering citizens through financial, technical, infrastructural, and institutional support. Phase-II of the scheme is underway, with loans disbursed to progress partners and financial assistance provided under the Chief Minister’s special package grant. A total budget of Rs 350 crore has been allocated for the 2025–26 financial year.

Critical infrastructure for Tengenoupal under Vibrant Villages Programme

Imphal, Jan 27: Under the Vibrant Villages Programme Phase-II, funded by the central government, 16 border villages in Manipur’s Tengenoupal district have been identified for critical infrastructure interventions (CII). Livelihood initiatives have seen notable success. Beneficiaries include 30 piggy units, 60 women trained in tailoring, 50 entrepreneurs supported with RAMP branding and skill training, and 60 individuals assisted with Udyam registration. Under DDU-GKY, 27 out of 60 trained youths have already secured employment. “These initiatives reflect our commitment to inclusive development, stronger rural livelihoods, and a more secure and prosperous Tengenoupal,” the DC said, highlighting the district’s focus on social mobilisation, financial inclusion, and sustainable growth.

Social welfare schemes continue to support vulnerable populations. The National Social Assistance Programme has provided aid to 1,104 elderly citizens, 106 widows, and 18 individuals with disabilities, while the Annapurna Scheme supplies free food grains to 183



needy beneficiaries. Baseline surveys for these villages have been completed, and 239 additional villages have been verified for key interventions, including roads, telecom connectivity, and livelihood-generation assets. District Deputy Commissioner Saurabh Yadav, IAS, said during the 77th Republic Day celebrations at Tengenoupal High School Ground. Highlighting infrastructural progress during the 2025–26 financial year, the DC said that MGNREGA had generated 609,467 person-days of employment, averaging 46.77 man-days per household for more than 17,098 job card holders across Tengenoupal, Machi, and Moreh blocks. “We are now mov-

ing confidently toward the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and the Ajeevika Mission – Gramin, which will enhance employment opportunities to 125 work-days, strengthen asset creation, align activities with agricultural cycles, and unlock new funding avenues for our journey toward Viksit Bharat 2047,” he added. Social mobilisation under MSRLM has also strengthened community institutions. With the formation of new Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Tengenoupal now has 357 SHGs across 54 Village Level Federations (VLF) and 4 Cluster Level Federations (CLF), supported through systematic training in bookkeeping, auditing, and leadership.

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma Targets Congress, Akhil Gogoi Over

Guwahati, Jan 27: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday launched a sharp attack on the Congress and Rajiv Dal leader Akhil Gogoi, claiming that if either Akhil Gogoi or the Congress comes to power, Assam would turn into a “Miya state” and the interests of indigenous Assamese people would be sidelined. Addressing the media, Sarma alleged that Akhil Gogoi had recently made politically dangerous and inappropriate remarks while interacting with the “Miya” community. According to the Chief Minister, Gogoi had stated that if the Congress returned to power, he would become the Home Minister and ensure that no eviction drives were carried out against people from the Miya community, while extending them protection. “The way Akhil Gogoi is speaking, it appears that if he or the Congress comes to power, Assam will become a ‘Miya state’, and there will be no work or protection for the Assamese people,” Sarma said. The Chief Minister also targeted

the Congress over its candidate nomination process ahead of the Assembly elections. Referring to the last day of Congress nominations, Sarma alleged that the party headquarters at Rajiv Bhawan was crowded with people from minority-dominated areas of the state. He claimed that out of nearly 700 aspirants who sought Congress tickets, around 600 belonged to the Miya community. Sarma further alleged that members of the Miya community had contributed ₹50,000 each to the Congress, either to seek party tickets or to fund efforts aimed at defeating the BJP in the upcoming Assembly elections. Taking a jibe at the Congress, BJP has been turned into a kind of jihad,” Sarma said, reiterating his allegation that the Congress is indulging in appeasement politics ahead of the elections. The remarks come amid heightened political rhetoric in Assam as political parties intensify their campaigns in the run-up to the Assembly polls.

Threads of Assam on a Global Stage

Guwahati, Jan 27: As India Energy Week 2026 opens in Goa today, bringing together global policy-makers, industry leaders, innovators and investors to shape the future of energy, Cairn Oil & Gas is spotlighting a powerful story of inclusion and grassroots transformation alongside discussions on energy security and sustainability.

Showcasing the rich traditions of North-east, the indigenous women artisans from Cairn’s operational areas in Assam will present their traditional handwoven textiles. Through its initiative ‘Threads of Assam – Woven by Baidews’, Cairn has supported nearly 5,000 women artisans, enabling financial independence while showcasing their craft at the India’s flagship energy exhibition and conference.

IIT Guwahati cultural festival from Jan 29

Guwahati, Jan 27: Bollywood singer Shaan and rapper Raftaar will be performing at IIT Guwahati’s annual cultural festival ‘Alcheringa’. Alcheringa 2026 will take place from January 29 to 1st February 1 on the IIT Guwahati campus. According to the organizers, Raftaar will be the hiphop artist on January 31 and Shaan will be the artist for Bollywood Night on February 1. Alcheringa is the annual cultural festival of IIT Guwahati and one of the largest college festivals in India, featuring competitions, concerts, and workshops.

It hosts a wide range of events including dance, music, drama, fine arts, photography, fashion, literary, and gaming competitions. Students from colleges and universities across India can participate in various competitions, events, and workshops. Alcheringa 2026 – The Pearl Edition this year will be celebrating 30 years of the iconic cultural festival.

Delecacies Northeast integral part of R-DAY high tea at Rashtrapati Bhavan

New Delhi, Jan 27: Traditional culinary delicacies from region formed an integral part of the Northeast food showcase at the Republic Day high tea hosted by the President of India at Rashtrapati Bhavan on Monday evening. The official menu comprised delicacies from Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.

Sharing a video on social media, Union Minister Kiren Rijiju stated, “Delicious North-East food and colourful culture welcomed the guests in Rashtrapati Bhavan “At Home” on the occasion of Republic Day.

“European Council President António Costa, European Commission President

Ursula von der Leyen, Vice-President CP Radhakrishnan ji, Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji and top officials attended,” Rijiju stated, as he shared one of the tables with other Ministers and dignitaries at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The curated spread prominently featured Assamese specialities such as Til Pitha, Til Laru and Narikol Laru, all closely associated with Magh Bihu and harvest traditions in Assam. Black Rice Kheer made from indigenous black rice, widely consumed in Assam and also popular in Nagaland and Manipur, was highlighted for its cultural and nutritional significance.

Pati Sapta, a winter delicacy common to

Now in its fourth edition, India Energy Week is being held from January 27 to 30 under the patronage of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

As the event positions India at the centre of the global energy transition, Cairn’s initiative brings a deeply human and local dimension to the global stage. Representing the Borchapori and Agchamua handloom centres in Assam, both supported through Cairn’s community development programmes, the women entrepreneurs are showcasing and selling a diverse range of traditional handwoven products. These include gamosas, mekhela chadors, jackets, saris, scarves, handcrafted bags, pillow covers and other indigenous textile creations crafted from traditional silks such as muga and eri, reflecting generations of craftsmanship and cultural heritage.

UPF, KNO warn ZUF faction over torching of Kuki-Zo village

Imphal, Jan 27: Two Kuki-Zo umbrella underground organisations - the United People’s Front (UPF) and the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) have warned the Zeliangrong United Front’s Kamson faction that it will be held responsible for any escalation of violence following the burning of a Kuki-Zo village in Manipur. In a joint statement issued on January 27, the United People’s Front and the Kuki National Organisation condemned the arson at K Songlung village and said any deterioration in the security situation would be attributable to the Zeliangrong United Front. “The burning of a Kuki-Zo village is not an isolated crime—it is an act with consequences,” the statement said, adding that “those who sow violence will inevitably reap its consequences.”

The groups described the incident as a criminal act against civilians and warned that further unrest triggered by such actions would be the responsibility of the ZUF (Kamson faction). The UPF and KNO said attacks on villages deepen mistrust and undermine fragile peace efforts. They rejected attempts to justify violence, including claims linked to alleged poppy cultivation, stating that arson, intimidation and collective punishment cannot be defended on any grounds. The statement said accountability for any fallout from the incident would rest with those responsible for the alleged attack, and reiterated that targeting civilians risks widening the conflict at a time of heightened tension in Manipur. The Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) had issued a press communiqué on

Barpeta, Jan 27: Panic and grief gripped Rahampur village in Assam’s Senga constituency after a passenger boat capsized in the Brahmaputra River on Tuesday afternoon, leaving at least seven people missing. According to local sources, the boat overturned suddenly mid-river, triggering chaos among passengers and residents along the riverbank. Several people were thrown into the fast-flowing waters, and rescue efforts were immediately launched by locals,

while authorities were informed soon after the incident. Preliminary accounts suggest that reckless operation of the vessel was the primary cause of the accident. Witnesses alleged that the boat was being driven at high speed despite strong river currents. Alarminglly, none of the passengers were reportedly wearing life jackets at the time of the mishap. Residents have also pointed to frequent violations of safety norms on the Brahmaputra, including overloading of boats

and disregard for weather and water conditions. The absence of basic safety equipment has once again come under scrutiny following the tragedy. The riverbanks of Rahampur were filled with scenes of anguish as families of the missing waited anxiously for news of their loved ones. Search operations were ongoing at the time of filing this report, with rescue teams combing the area amid challenging river conditions. Notably, locals claimed that repeated warnings about un-

safe boating practices and the careless behaviour of boat operators on the Brahmaputra had been raised in the past. However, they alleged that neither the authorities nor the operators took adequate preventive measures, leading to yet another avoidable tragedy. The incident has renewed calls for stricter enforcement of river safety regulations, mandatory use of life jackets, and closer monitoring of passenger vessels operating on the Brahmaputra.

Over 50 Migratory Birds Found Dead in Majuli on Republic Day



Majuli, Jan 27: Panic spread in parts of Majuli district after more than 50 migratory birds were found dead across several locations on Republic Day. Authorities suspect poisoning as the likely cause behind the incident. The carcasses were recovered from agricultural fields in the Kamargaon area and nearby localities. Eight birds that survived the suspected poisoning are currently undergoing treatment at Ratanpur Veterinary Hospital, officials said. According to government sources, the birds had landed in the fields in search of food when unidentified individuals allegedly

used pesticides and other chemical substances on the farmland, which may have led to the deaths. The incident was reported from Dakshinpat Kumar Gaon, Sumoimari, Komargaon and Rawanagaon areas. Several birds found in a critical condition were immediately shifted to the veterinary hospital for medical care. Police and forest department officials have taken serious note of the matter and launched an investigation. Seventeen persons have been detained for questioning in connection with the alleged poisoning of migratory birds, officials added.

New plant species found in Nagaland’s community forests by university researchers

Kohima, Jan 27: Scientists from Nagaland University have discovered a new plant species in the high-altitude forests of Nagaland, adding an important entry to India’s botanical records and drawing fresh attention to the ecological value of community-protected forests in the state. The newly identified plant, named Hoya nagaensis, was found during detailed botanical surveys carried out in remote forest areas that are protected and managed by local communities. Researchers said the discovery once again shows that large parts of Nagaland’s forests remain scientifically unexplored, despite being rich in plant life. According to the research team, the discovery was made during systematic fieldwork in high-altitude forest zones, where access is difficult and scientific documentation has

been limited. These forests are traditionally conserved by village communities under customary laws, a system that has helped preserve rare and endemic species for generations. The research was led by Dr Gyati Yam, Assistant Professor in the Department of Forestry at Nagaland University, along with researchers Ms Viencie-o Koza and Mr Joynath Pegu. The study was funded by the university under its Start-Up Project for Young Faculty scheme. The findings have been published in Kew Bulletin, a peer-reviewed international journal brought out by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, which is widely known for research on plant taxonomy and biodiversity. Nagaland is known for its dense forest cover and varied landscapes, but scientists say that many areas, especially

high-altitude and interior forests, have not been studied in detail. This lack of data makes it difficult to fully understand the region’s biodiversity and plan conservation measures. The research team said their work focused on documenting plant species in areas that have received very little scientific attention so far. During these surveys, they came across a climbing plant belonging to the Hoya genus, which showed features not seen in known species. “While conducting field surveys, we noticed this plant had unique leaf and flower characteristics,” Dr Yam said. “After careful study and comparison with existing species, we confirmed that it is new to science.” Researchers stressed that the survival of Hoya nagaensis is closely linked to the protection provided by local communi-

ties. The plant was found in the Kavínhou Community Reserved Forest in Phek district, an area managed by villagers under traditional systems of forest governance. Congratulating the research team, Nagaland University Vice-Chancellor Prof Jagadish Kumar Patnaik said the discovery goes beyond academic interest. He said it highlights how community-managed forests act as safe spaces for rare plants and wildlife. “These forests are living examples of how traditional conservation practices can protect biodiversity,” he said. “The study strengthens India’s botanical knowledge and also supports global conservation efforts.” According to the researchers, Hoya nagaensis is currently known from only one location.

Governor leads 77th Republic Day celebrations in Mizoram

Aizawl, Jan 27: Mizoram today joined the rest of the nation in celebrating the 77th Republic Day of India with enthusiasm and solemnity across the State. The main State-level function was held at Lammual Ground, Aizawl, where Mizoram Governor, General (Dr) Vijay Kumar Singh unfurled the National Flag, following which the parade contingents paid their respects by saluting the Tricolour. This was followed by the Governor’s Republic Day address. In his Republic Day address, Governor General (Dr) Vijay Kumar Singh extended warm greetings to the people of Mizoram on the 77th Republic Day. He stated, “Seventy-six years ago, we, the people of India, adopted the Constitution to secure justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity for ourselves. Under this great Constitution, we remain committed to preserving unity and integrity in our magnificent



nation.” He paid tribute to the freedom fighters who sacrificed everything for India’s independence and emphasised the importance of diligently pursuing and realizing the Constitution’s objectives. The Governor highlighted several notable achievements and initiatives of the Mizoram Government in recent times. He mentioned the progress under the flagship Hand Holding Scheme (Bana Kaih), where loans have been provided to progress partners, along with funds disbursed under the CM Special Package Grant. Phase-II of these efforts is ongoing, with Rs 350 crore allocated for the current financial

year. He described the inauguration of the Bairabi-Sairang railway line by the Prime Minister on September 13, 2025, as a historic milestone for Mizoram that will significantly boost development. The Governor commended on the success of Mizoram on being declared the country’s first fully literate state on May 20, 2025, and noted the successful conduct of various elections over the past year. On law and order, he stated that Mizoram remains one of the most peaceful states in the country, thanks to effective enforcement by law enforcement agencies. During the celebrations,

the Governor presented awards to outstanding personnel from Police, Fire & Emergency Services, and Mizoram Home Guard & Civil Defence, as well as cleanliness awards. The parade featured 24 contingents (6 Armed, 6 Unarmed, 12 School) along with 3 band parties. The Parade Commander was Pi Jessica Lallawmzuali, Dy. SP (Legal), and Second Commander Pu Alfred Lalrinchhana, Dy. SP (Crime). In the Armed Category, contingents from 34 Assam Rifles, 1st Bn MAP, and 5th IR Bn secured first, second, and third positions respectively. In the Unarmed Category, Ex-Servicemen, 20 Mizo Bn NCC, and Govt. Chanmari Model Middle School Scouts & Guides took the top three spots. Among school contingents, St. Paul’s HSS, Govt. Mizo High School, and PES Republic Veng claimed the top three positions.

Major Anti-Narcotics Operations Net Drugs Worth Over Rs 42 Crore Across Northeast

Aizawl, Jan 27: Security forces have intensified their crackdown on the illegal narcotics trade in the Northeast, with multiple coordinated operations leading to the seizure of drugs worth more than Rs 42 crore across Assam, Tripura and Mizoram, and the arrest of several suspects. In Assam, a joint operation by the Border Security Force (BSF) and the state police resulted in the seizure of banned cough syrup valued at approximately Rs 4 crore. Acting on specific intelligence inputs received by the BSF’s 179th Intelligence Wing, personnel intercepted a cargo truck travelling from Guwahati to Tripura in coordination with Patharkandi Police. A detailed search of the vehicle revealed 150 cartons containing nearly 30,000 bottles of prohibited cough syrup, concealed beneath sacks of potatoes in an apparent attempt to evade detection. Officials said the consign-

ment was meant for illegal distribution, noting that such cough syrups are frequently misused for their narcotic properties. Two individuals were arrested in connection with the seizure. They were identified as the truck driver, Mahant Singh, a resident of Assam’s Hojai district, and the co-driver, Balukumar, a native of Bihar. Both are being interrogated as investigators probe the larger smuggling network. Meanwhile, the Assam Rifles, working in coordination with the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), carried out a series of anti-narcotics operations in Tripura and Mizoram, leading to major recoveries and multiple arrests. In Tripura’s Khowai district, security personnel intercepted a Tata truck on National Highway 8 based on specific intelligence inputs. A search of the vehicle led to the recovery of 1.6 lakh Yaba tablets, estimated to



be worth Rs 16 crore. One person, a resident of Assam’s Sribhumdi district, was arrested and the truck used for transportation was seized. Further investigation is underway. In Mizoram, another operation was conducted in Champhai district following credible intelligence regarding cross-border drug trafficking. At Ngur village, troops stopped a person riding a Kenbo motorcycle. A thorough search resulted in the seizure of 2.2 kg of methamphetamine tablets, a psychotropic

substance with an estimated international market value of Rs 6.6 crore. The accused, identified as Lalhmanghaihzuala, was taken into custody and later handed over to the Excise and Narcotics Department, Champhai, for legal proceedings. In a separate incident in the same district, Assam Rifles personnel intercepted a suspicious two-wheeler. The rider and pillion fled upon being challenged, abandoning the vehicle. A subsequent search led to the recovery of 2.057 kg of Heroin No. 4, valued at approximately Rs 15.42 crore, along with a mobile phone. The seized items were handed over to the local police for further investigation. Officials said the operations underscore the security forces’ sustained efforts to dismantle drug trafficking networks in the Northeast and prevent the region from being used as a transit corridor for narcotics.

Vehicle falls into deep George as 2 die in Mizoram

Aizawl, Jan 27: Two persons died and one sustained injuries after a vehicle they were travelling in plunged into a deep gorge near Phullen, a village in Mizoram’s Saitual district, police said on Monday.

According to reports, the mishap occurred on Sunday afternoon when the three occupants of the vehicle were travelling from their native village, Luangpawm to attend a conference of the Presbyterian Church’s youth wing at Phullen village, located around 20 kilometres away.

According to police, residents of their village launched a search after the family members enquired about the three persons at Phullen and were informed that they had not reached the village.

The vehicle was later traced at the accident site near Phullen village.

Preliminary information suggests that the car lost control as it skidded off the road and fell into the gorge.

The deceased have been identified as Lalthansanga, 33, who was driving the vehicle, and Lalawmsanga, 37.

The injured person, identified as their friend Lalunzira, was rescued from the spot and rushed to Saitual Hospital, where he is currently undergoing treatment.

Police said the cause of the accident is yet to be ascertained and further investigation is underway.

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The Rising Fear of Failure

Failure has become one of the most feared words in modern society. Instead of being seen as a natural part of growth, it is treated as a sign of weakness and defeat. This fear has silently shaped behaviour in education, careers, and personal life. People avoid risks, suppress creativity, and choose safety over exploration because they are afraid of making mistakes. A society that fears failure limits its own potential. In education, students are taught to chase perfection rather than progress. Marks and ranks define worth, and mistakes are punished instead of understood. This creates anxiety and discourages experimentation. Learning should involve trial and error, but fear of failure turns classrooms into pressure zones. Students become cautious thinkers instead of curious learners. In professional life, fear of failure blocks innovation. Employees hesitate to suggest new ideas because mistakes can damage reputation. Organisations that punish failure lose creativity. Progress depends on courage, and courage grows only when failure is accepted as part of learning. Families also play a role. When parents demand success without acknowledging struggle, children develop insecurity. Support during failure builds resilience. Without it, confidence collapses. Media too glorifies success stories without showing struggle. This creates unrealistic expectations. People forget that behind every achievement lies repeated failure. Failure is not the opposite of success; it is its foundation. A society that accepts failure encourages courage, creativity, and growth.

The Decline of Civic Courage

Civic courage, the willingness to stand up for what is right in public life, is slowly disappearing from society. It is the strength that drives citizens to question injustice, oppose wrongdoing, and protect collective values even when it is uncomfortable or risky. Today, however, silence is often chosen over responsibility. Fear of criticism, social pressure, and personal inconvenience discourage people from speaking out. This growing absence of civic courage weakens democracy and allows injustice to survive quietly. In everyday situations, civic courage appears in simple acts. It is shown when someone questions unfair treatment, reports wrongdoing, or supports a victim of discrimination. Yet, many choose to look away, believing that involvement will bring trouble. This mindset creates a culture where wrong actions go unchallenged. Silence becomes acceptance, and acceptance slowly turns into normalisation. When people stop resisting injustice, society loses its moral balance. Educational institutions have a major role to play. Students are often taught to obey rules but not encouraged to question unfairness. True education should nurture independent thinking and ethical responsibility. Schools must teach that courage is not aggression but moral strength. Debates, discussions on social justice, and community service projects can help young minds develop the confidence to speak up. In professional spaces, civic courage is equally important. Employees who raise concerns about unethical practices protect not only institutions but also public interest. However, fear of job loss or isolation often silences them. Organisations must create environments where honesty and responsibility are protected rather than punished. Transparency and ethical leadership encourage courage. The media also shapes civic courage. Responsible journalism empowers citizens to think critically and act responsibly. When media highlights stories of bravery, honesty, and resistance, it inspires society. But when sensationalism replaces truth, courage weakens and confusion grows. Democracy depends on active, courageous citizens. Voting alone is not enough. Participation, questioning, and accountability are equally important. A society without civic courage becomes passive, allowing corruption and injustice to grow unnoticed. Reviving civic courage requires collective effort. Families must teach children to stand for truth. Schools must promote ethical thinking. Leaders must protect honest voices. Citizens must remember that courage is not about power but about conscience. Civic courage is the heartbeat of democracy. Without it, freedom becomes fragile and justice becomes uncertain.

White House backtracks initial claims about Alex Pretti after intense backlash

White House officials sought to rapidly distance Donald Trump and top officials from their initial portrayals of the man fatally shot by federal officials in Minnesota as a gunman, as they faced a deepening backlash after video footage was widely seen to undercut their assertions. The move came as Trump advisers appeared to realize that the caustic portrayals of the man, Alex Pretti, who was reportedly licensed to carry a gun, had turned the killing into an even larger political liability for the president. Over the weekend, senior administration officials including Stephen Miller, the deputy chief of staff, called the victim “a domestic terrorist who tried to assassinate law enforcement”, while Kristi Noem, the homeland security secretary, accused him of perpetrating “the definition of domestic terrorism”. The characterizations were undercut by video footage that showed Pretti was shot in the back roughly 10 times after being tackled to the ground by a group of US border patrol agents whom he had been filming, and disarmed of his gun. At a briefing on Monday, Karoline Leavitt, the White House press secretary, sidestepped questions about the remarks against Pretti and insisted the administration would not comment pending the

In the run-up to February 12 polls, Shakeel Anwar visits outlying constituencies to hear directly from voters about their hopes, demands and expectations. In the run-up to February 12 polls, Shakeel Anwar visits outlying constituencies to hear directly from voters about their hopes, demands and expectations. I went to Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur on Saturday with a simple question in mind: what do the students who shook Bangladesh’s politics in 2024 think of the election now approaching on February 12, 2026? If anyone claims that the coming election is a direct outcome of the student movement of July 2024, it would be hard to disagree. Had that movement failed, there would have been no question of an election at all. Yet, 18 months later, the students who turned a protest against job quotas into a nationwide uprising are no longer on the streets. They are watching campaigns, listening to promises and judging quietly. I sat down with three students who were active during the movement: Bayezid Bostami from the Department of English; Mustansir Muaz, a third-year Mathematics student; and Lamiya Irshad, a first-year English student. They were articulate and measured in their responses. This campus carries a valiant and tragic connection to the July uprising. Abu Sayed, a student here, was shot dead by police during a demonstration and later became a symbol of the uprising. Bayezid still struggles to talk about that day. “Abu Sayed was a student of our department,” he said. “Sometimes I still feel emotional. And I feel worse when I see that even now his trial has not been completed.” For him, that failure is not procedural; it is political. “The interim government largely failed to uphold the spirit of July,” he said. “They forgot their mandate.” Asked what drove them to the streets in the first place, Mustansir answered without hesitation. “We wanted democracy restored. We wanted opportunities based on our merits and qualifications. We wanted justice and freedom of speech,” he said. Those words were

written on walls across the country during and after the July uprising. Faded slogans still remain, particularly around campuses. Do they feel those demands are being fulfilled? Lamiya shook her head. “Hardly,” she said. “I don’t see any headway.” Bayezid believes the problem lies in continuity rather than rupture. “The people making policies are largely the same,” he said. “Look at the trials of killings during the July movement. What percentage has been completed? Even Abu Sayed’s case is unfinished. You can imagine the fate of the others.” Mustansir blunter. “Is there negotiation going on with political parties?” he asked. “Is the police administration stopping the trials because they were involved? We don’t know and that insecurity remains.” He pointed to the killing of Osman Hadi, which shocked the country. “We never thought this kind of murder would happen after 2024,” he said. “And then we hear advisers making outlandish claims like ‘the killers fled the country’. These excuses are not convincing.” Mustansir believes such incidents are happening because critical state institutions were not reformed. When asked what matters most to her after finishing her education, Lamiya answered immediately. “A job.” Does she feel confident she will get one? She paused before answering. “Not really. We still see corruption and irregularities in recruitment.” The quota movement that erupted into a mass uprising in 2024 was rooted in students’ deep anxiety over dwindling employment prospects after graduation. That anxiety, I found, continues to shape how they listen to election campaigns. All three said they are paying attention, but without much faith. “Young people and students are being ignored,” Mustansir said. “Political parties focus on rural and low-income groups because they are vote banks. But look at me, a student of Begum Rokeya University. Are we being given the facilities so that we can contribute to the country?” He gestured towards the campus. “This university spreads over 75

acres. We have only two dormitories. No proper lab facilities. I don’t even consider this a complete university.” Yet parties continue to promise more colleges and universities. “We’ve seen this before,” Bayezid said. “Universities mushroomed during the Hasina period. But did they produce skilled people?” The emphasis on numbers, they argue, misses the point. “If we could turn young people into skilled human resources, that would be better than handouts like interest-free loans,” Bayezid said. “Do they even think about budgetary capacity when making these lofty pledges?” On the BNP’s promise of millions of new jobs, Mustansir laughed. “Where will those jobs come from?” he asked. “Are we being made skilled first? They want to give me a job without making me capable. Isn’t that laughable?” Jamaat-e-Islami’s proposal of monthly interest-free loans for graduates sounded more practical to them, but trust remains thin. “We are in a situation where we cannot trust anyone,”

Bayezid said. “Commitments are made and forgotten. We’ve seen that too many times.” Before leaving, I posed a hypothetical question. If party supremos from BNP or Jamaat, Tarique Rahman or Shafiqur Rahman, were sitting across the table, what would be their number one demand? “For me, it’s good education,” Lamiya said. “Education that makes me a skilled and worthy citizen.” Bayezid leaned back before answering. “An education system that produces skilled and honest citizens,” he said. “And let me tell you, I will vote only for those who think about protecting the country’s sovereignty.” Mustansir did not hesitate. “Freedom of speech,” he said. “That solves many problems. And I want the guarantee of a normal death. Insecurity still haunts us.” As I left the campus, it was clear that the students who once filled the streets are no longer chanting slogans. They are weighing choices. The election that exists because of their movement now faces their quiet but ruthless scrutiny.

Starmer’s fraught visit to China will tell us what he really thinks of the UK’s place in the world

This week, Keir Starmer will reportedly visit China. This will be the first trip of this kind by a British prime minister since Theresa May’s three-day visit to Beijing in 2018. Since then, relations between London and Beijing have become increasingly fraught, caught between growing security concerns and deep economic interdependence. Allegations of espionage and influence operations have sharpened political and public suspicion in the UK, even as deep trade links and supply chains on which the country depends make disengagement unrealistic. As fierce debate about the recent approval for the new Chinese embassy has shown, there are strong opinions about how to best manage relations with Beijing – as well as what, precisely, constitutes a threat and what is an opportunity. The result is an uneasy balancing act in which caution and cooperation coexist, often uncomfortably.

These security concerns are grounded in recent experience. In December, the Foreign Office disclosed it had been the target of a sustained cyber-attack two months earlier that was suspected to be the work of a Chinese group known as Storm 1849. This followed investigations into alleged espionage involving parliamentary researchers and repeated warnings from security agencies about technology transfer and data exposure in sensitive industries. Starmer will surely need a stiff drink on the plane to Beijing as he works through what cards he has to play. For all the current mood of malaise and low confidence, the UK is still a key part of the global geopolitical architecture. As a permanent member of the UN security council, a state with nuclear capability and a G7



country (even if at the bottom with regards to total investment), it retains significant clout. China, however, also arrives at the table with formidable leverage: it is the world’s second-largest economy and a central hub in global manufacturing and supply chains, giving it weight on issues ranging from the climate crisis to financial stability, and making cooperation with it unavoidable. Moreover, Beijing’s aims are clear: securing a more predictable and less adversarial posture from the UK and Europe, limiting criticism of its internal and regional policies, maintaining access to British financial markets and deepening cooperation in education, research, green technology and investment. For the past 30 years or so, China has worked systematically to build its own networks around the world by investing

heavily in infrastructure, energy and transport, often in places where western capital has been reluctant to go. In Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America, China has paired finance with diplomacy, trade and development assistance, presenting itself as a partner focused on growth rather than governance or political reform. Over time, this has translated into influence: access to markets and resources, diplomatic support in international forums and a stronger voice across much of the global south. History does not always count for much, but it counts for something if you can create a narrative that explains the benefits of cooperation and how to build for the future.

That is at heart of what Starmer needs to be thinking about when he touches down in Beijing. What do China and the UK have in

common, and what are the areas where we can, or cannot, collaborate? Perhaps most importantly, how does the UK see its place in a changing world: as a gateway to Europe, a sop to the US or a country that is in decline and “decaying” (as Donald Trump has called Europe as a whole)? The belief that the west is volatile, unreliable and imperialistic is one reason that China has worked hard to embed itself in global supply chains, while reducing its own dependencies on others at the same time. It has done so by targeting strategic sectors: ports and railways, energy, mining, telecommunications and manufacturing, using state-backed finance to place Chinese companies at key points in trade and logistics. This has expanded its access to markets and resources abroad while strengthening

its ability to insulate itself from external pressure at home. While the UK has long agonised over its own energy strategy – and paid the price for being dependent on global markets – China set about solving the problem of relying on oil and gas from the Middle East and elsewhere by fostering a cradle-to-grave ecosystem that has created a near monopoly on photovoltaic cells, wind turbines and batteries. Clean energy is good for the environment, of course. But the incentives to dominate these technologies were also underpinned by the desire to ensure self-sufficiency in an age that Beijing considered to be one of rising geopolitical turbulence long before Trump’s first election. With similar steps taken across a host of other sectors, including rare earths, biotechnology, data analytics and artificial intelligence, China’s emphasis on open-source models has helped accelerate adoption and diffusion at scale, strengthening its position globally. For countries such as Britain, this matters because Chinese companies now sit deep inside supply chains that underpin everything from energy transition and manufacturing to consumer goods and digital infrastructure. All this, then, means that others need China more than China needs others. That much is clear from the most recent trade data. It shows that this year, China is on course to record a trade surplus of \$1.19tn. This is in spite of Trump’s attempts to throttle Beijing by imposing tariffs as well as restrictions on the export of a slew of products. These have been sidestepped by shipping through countries such as Mexico and Vietnam, or by dumping cheap goods in other markets, including those in Europe.

Bovino reports, who has been at odds with Homan for months. Still, Leavitt was careful not to directly contradict the likes of Miller and Noem at her briefing, and maintained that the blame for Pretti’s shooting rested with Walz and Democrats. “This tragedy occurred as a result of a deliberate and hostile resistance by Democrat leaders for weeks,” Leavitt said. The tightrope being walked by Leavitt comes as administration officials privately said they see the shooting as an unintentional error by agents who got spooked by a possible unintentional discharge of Pretti’s gun after it was taken from him. But it underscored the peril of rushing to blame the victim and defend the agents before an investigation had played out. The administration’s initial response to Pretti’s shooting mirrored that of the killing of another Minneapolis resident by federal agents, Renee Nicole Good, a 37-year-old protester who was shot in the front seat of her car as she swerved past an agent. After initially doubling down on the accusation that Good was trying to run over the agent, Trump said last week it was a tragedy after learning Good’s father was a Trump supporter. “You know, when the woman was shot, I felt terribly about it,” he said.

He said in a statement that Trump had agreed to look at pulling federal agents out of Minnesota and committed to ensuring state investigators could launch their own investigations – instead of relying solely on internal inquiries by the Department of Homeland Security. “The president agreed that he would talk to his Department of Homeland Security about ensuring the Minnesota bureau of criminal apprehension (BCA) is able to conduct an independent investigation, as would ordinarily be the case,” it said. “The president also agreed to look into reducing the number of federal agents in Minnesota and working with the state in a more coordinated fashion on immigration enforcement regarding violent criminals.”

Walz’s push for a state investigation comes after the BCA complained over the weekend that they were blocked by federal agents to access the scene of the shooting and unable to gather evidence, even after they went back and obtained a court order to do so. Trump also announced that he would send Tom Homan, his “border czar” to oversee the operation in Minneapolis and replace the US border patrol official in charge, Gregory Bovino. The move suggested a repudiation of Noem, to whom

outcome of multiple investigations into the shooting. “I have not heard the president characterize Mr Pretti in that way,” Leavitt said. “However, I have heard the president say he wants to let the facts and the investigation lead itself.” Todd Blanche, the deputy attorney general, separately tried to backpedal on behalf of the administration, telling Fox News: “I don’t think anybody thinks that they were comparing what happened on Saturday to the legal definition of domestic terrorism.”

The evolving positions at the White House were notable for how quickly they were changing and how reactive the administration was to a sudden free fall in support of ICE and US border patrol tactics across Washington, most notably among Republicans on Capitol Hill. Trump also appeared to seek an off-ramp of his own following earlier posts on Truth Social blaming Tim Walz, the Minnesota governor, and Democrats for Pretti’s death, including one Truth Social post that suggested Pretti had intended to use his gun against federal agents. In a new announcement on Monday, Trump said he had a “very good call” with Walz and that they were on the “same wavelength” about how to proceed with immigration enforcement in the state. Walz’s of-

India, EU concludes negotiations for FTA: Commerce Secy

New Delhi: India and the European Union (EU) have successfully concluded negotiations for the proposed free trade agreement, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Monday.He said the trade deal from the Indian perspective is balanced and forward-looking, which will help in better economic integration of India with the EU-.It will propel trade and investments in both economies, he said.“Negotiations have been successfully concluded. The deal has been finalised,” Agrawal said. Legal scrubbing of the FTA text is underway and the endeavor will be to complete the processes and sign the paer at an early date, he said.The deal is expected to be signed this year, and it may come into effect early Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted the 16th European Union-India Summit in New Delhi with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and visiting President of the European Council, Antonio Costa, to announce the ‘month of all trade deals’. According to Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal, India and the EU have concluded negotiations on the much-awaited Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and the announcement of the conclusion of talks will be made at the 16th India-EU Summit.According to officials, the signing of the deal will take place in about six months after the legal scrubbing. The deal is expected to come into effect sometime next year.

Phase 2 of Adani Ports’ Vizhinjam seaport will begin at a cost of Rs 16,000 crore

New Delhi: Adani Ports will undertake the second phase of development at the Vizhinjam seaport at an estimated cost of around Rs 16,000 crore, with an official announcement expected during the inaugural ceremony on Saturday, sources said.The second phase of development will be inaugurated on Saturday evening by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. “The second phase of development is expected to make Vizhinjam the largest transshipment hub in the Indian sub-continent,” the sources said.The expansion will add 4.1 million Twenty-foot Equivalent Units (TEUs) to the port’s existing capacity, they added. The sources further said, “While Vizhinjam is currently the most advanced and fully automated transshipment hub in India, the phase 2 development will be undertaken with updated automation in technologies and equipment.”Phase 2 will feature 21 automated ship-to-shore (STS) cranes, 45 automated Cantilever Rail-Mounted Gantry (CMRG) cranes, a rail handling yard, and a state-of-the-art electrical and automation system, the sources said.Other highlights of the development include berth expansion, dredging and reclamation to create additional operational capacity, and construction of the deepest breakwater in India, stretching 920 meters at a depth of 21 meters.

“Besides these, deployment of green equipment, like electric vehicle charging stations, development of critical



facilities such as electrical substation, sewage treatment (ISPS) fencing will also be part of phase 2,” the sources added.

Bhushan Power’s share, JSW Steel’s profit increased by 235% in Q3 while sales increased by 11%

New Delhi: JSW Steel, India’s largest steel maker, posted a 235 per cent jump in net profit at ₹2,410 crore in the third quarter from ₹719 crore in the same period of the last fiscal on the back of a one-time gain from deferred tax credit linked to the stake sale in subsidiary Bhushan Power & Steel Ltd.The company’s revenue from operations went up by 11.1 per cent to ₹45,991 crore in Q3FY26 from ₹41,378 crore in the third quarter of FY25. The one-time tax gain that propelled the net profit of the Sajjan Jindal-led company flowed from the 50 per cent stake sale in subsidiary BPSL to JFE Steel of Japan for ₹15,000 crore.

In a note to the results, the company recognised deferred tax assets (net) amounting to ₹1,439 crore based on the reassessment of unrecognised deferred tax assets, as it is probable that carried forward unabsorbed depreciation will be recovered against the likely capital gains on the BPSL transaction. On a pre-tax basis, the JSW’s profit went up by 23.6 per cent to ₹1,457 crore in Q3 from ₹1,178 crore in the same period of last year. JSW Energy on Friday posted a 150 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit at



₹420 crore in the December quarter from ₹168 crore in Q3 FY25, mainly on the back of higher revenues. Total revenue rose to ₹4,255 crore in the quarter from ₹2,640 crore a year ago.

India’s tax-to-GDP ratio reaches 19.6 pc, structural reforms

New Delhi: India’s combined tax-to-GDP ratio has reached 19.6 per cent, placing the country at par with several major global economies and highlighting steady progress in tax collection efficiency, according to a report by Bank of Baroda.The ratio includes both central and state tax collections and is higher than that of several emerging markets such as Hong Kong, Malaysia and Indonesia.The report noted that while India’s central gross tax revenue stands lower at 11.7 per cent of GDP, the overall integrated figure reflects stronger participation by states and better compliance across the system.However, India still trails advanced economies such as Germany, which has a tax-to-GDP ratio of around 38 per cent, and the United States, where the ratio is about 25.6 per cent.Bank of Baroda said this gap presents a major policy opportunity for India, especially given its favourable demographic profile.The report highlighted that the government is increasingly focusing on comprehensive tax reforms aimed at simplification, rationalisation and digitisation. These efforts are expected to push the tax-to-GDP ratio higher in the coming years.Key regulatory steps, in-

cluding the introduction of the Income Tax Act, 2025, and the rationalisation of corporate tax structures, are expected to improve transparency and make compliance easier.The new Income Tax Act, scheduled to come into effect from April 1, 2026, is also expected to widen the tax base by bringing more of the informal economy into the formal system. The report’s historical analysis shows that tax collections and nominal GDP have started moving more closely together over time.Between FY93 and FY02, this relationship was volatile due to a narrow tax base. However, from FY14 onwards, a clear convergence has emerged, becoming more pronounced from FY23. Current data suggest that tax elasticity is around 1.1, which is higher than the long-term average. This indicates that tax collections are growing faster than the economy. The report also found a strong positive link between various tax components and macroeconomic indicators.

Corporate tax collections have also benefited from improved profitability among companies, with buoyancy levels remaining strong compared to historical trends.

Rupee rises 10 paise to 91.80 from its all-time low



New Delhi: The rupee rebounded from its all-time low levels and gained 10 paise to trade at 91.80 against the US dollar in early deals on Tuesday, as the dollar index retreated from its elevated levels.Forex traders said the rupee recovered marginally as traders rushed to cover broad dollar weakness. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 91.80 against the greenback, up 10 paise from its previous close.

On Friday, the rupee hit a historic low of 92 per dollar and gained marginally to settle at 91.90 against the American currency. Forex and equity markets were closed on Monday for Republic Day.“The dollar index was down sharply to a four-month low of 96.80 amid pre-FOMC positioning as it has weakened 0.98 per cent over the past month,” Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director at Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said in a research note.According to forex traders, the rupee remains under severe pressure from heightened global geopolitical uncertainties, weak domestic equities, persistent dollar demand, and unabated capital outflows.

The pending trade agreement with the US remains a key stabilising factor. Until the geopolitical risk eases and the trade deal materialises, the rupee is likely to remain vulnerable to external shocks, they said.

Meanwhile, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has said there is a “path” to remove the 25 per cent tariffs imposed on India for buying Russian oil, noting that such purchases by Delhi from Moscow have “collapsed”.United States President Donald Trump has imposed 50 per cent tariffs on India, including 25 per cent for its purchases of Russian oil, leading to a strain in the bilateral ties between the two countries.“Year ahead forecasts point to continued rupee weakness tied to FPIs’ selling of equities and debt, weakness in Indian stock markets and RBI’s oversold position. The only factor positive for the rupee is its undervaluation by about 5 per cent,” Bhansali added.Meanwhile, the dollar index, which measures the greenback’s strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.02 per cent lower at 97.01. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 1.26 per cent lower at USD 64.42 per barrel in futures trade.On the domestic equity market front, Sensex dropped 417.68 points to 81,120.02 in early trade, while the Nifty declined 111.1 points to 24,937.55.Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth Rs 4,113.38 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

India’s foreign exchange reserves jumped by USD 14.167 billion to USD 701.36 billion during the week ended January 16, the Reserve Bank said on Friday.

AI seen as growth engine, not job killer, say business leaders at World Economic Forum

New Delhi: Biting cold, political tensions and doubts about artificial intelligence did nothing to curb the enthusiasm of business leaders in Davos over technology’s ability to create jobs. Top executives at the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting said that while jobs would disappear, new ones would spring up, with two telling Reuters that AI would be used as an excuse by companies which were planning layoffs anyway.Flag bearers of AI’s trillion-dollar expansion, including chip titan Jensen Huang, said the technology heralded higher pay and more jobs for plumbers, electricians and steelworkers.”Energy is creating jobs. Chips industry is creating jobs. The infrastructure layer is creating jobs,” the Nvidia CEO told the meeting in the Swiss mountain resort.Jobs, jobs, jobs,” added Huang.That optimism contrasted with a potential trade row that had reverberated through Davos until U.S. President Donald Trump struck a deal to call off tariffs and avert a security decoupling with Europe over Greenland.But scepticism over AI simmered below the surface.

Delegates discussed how chatbots could lead consumers to psychosis and suicide, while labour union leaders questioned the cost of recent technology gains.”AI is being sold as a productivity tool, which often means doing more with fewer workers,” said Christy Hoffman, general secretary of the 20-million-strong UNI Global Union.Matthew Prince, CEO of internet security company Cloudflare , said during an interview with Reuters in a mountain restaurant above Davos that AI would keep advancing and that scrappy developers could overcome market or funding blips.Prince, who said he sticks to six-minute chair-lift meetings rather than windowless conference rooms during Davos, warned that AI could become so dominant in the future that small businesses are eviscerated while autonomous agents handle consumers’ shopping requests.Matthew Prince, CEO of internet security company Cloudflare , said during an interview with Reuters in a mountain restaurant above Davos that AI would keep advancing and that scrappy developers could overcome market or funding blips.Prince, who said he sticks to six-minute chair-lift meetings rather than windowless conference rooms during Davos, warned that AI could become so dominant in the future that small businesses are eviscerated while autonomous agents handle consumers’



shopping requests.

In recent years, businesses have griped about how to go beyond ill-fated AI pilots and capitalize on an AI craze started by ChatGPT in 2022. Rob Thomas, IBM’s chief commercial officer, said AI has reached a stage where there can be a return on investment. “You can truly start to automate tasks and business processes,” he told ReutersHowever, PwC said only one in eight CEOs recently surveyed by the advisory firm believed AI was lowering costs and delivering more elusive revenue. And questions remain about what business model can make up for AI’s enormous expenses.Cathinka Wahlstrom, chief commercial officer at BNY, said AI has paid off by shortening the amount of research time for onboarding a new client from two days to 10 minutes.And in the past month and a half, projects that networking company Cisco had viewed as too tedious to take on - requiring 19 man-years of work - were now getting done in a couple of weeks, its President Jeetu Patel said in an interview.Rob Goldstein, BlackRock’s chief operating officer, told a media roundtable that the world’s biggest asset manager had secured nearly \$700 billion in net new client assets last year, viewing AI as a means to business expansion rather than to workforce reductions.”We’re very focused on keeping our headcount flat as we continue to grow,” Goldstein said.Mean-

while, Amazon.com is planning a second round of cuts next week as part of a broader goal of slashing some 30,000 corporate jobs, two people familiar with the matter told Reuters.

Part of the reason anxiety about jobs persists despite corporate assurances is if workers have little say in the rollout of AI, said Luc Triangle, general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation.In these conditions, workers see AI “as a threat”, he said.For billionaire philanthropist and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, the world needs to “get ready for the opportunities and disruption that AI will bring”.“Your economy gets more productive,” Gates told Reuters. “That’s typically a good thing.”Gates cited taxing AI activities as one potential idea for assisting workers, while calling on politicians to get more familiar with the technology.”There certainly are problems, but they’re all solvable problems,” Gates added about AI more generally.Davos largely wrapped up on Thursday with optimism from Elon Musk, founder of SpaceX and Tesla CEO, who talked about his goal to protect civilisation and make it interplanetary.”For quality of life, it is actually better to err on the side of being an optimist and wrong, rather than a pessimist and right,” Musk told a packed congress hall, before he was escorted out via a kitchen, dodging waiting reporters.

Climber Alex Honnold scales 101-floor skyscraper without safety gear

Dubai: American climber Alex Honnold has successfully scaled a Taiwan skyscraper without a rope, harness or safety equipment.The building, named Taipei 101 for the number of its floors, is 508m (1,667ft) tall, made of steel, glass and concrete and is designed to resemble a stick of bamboo.Honnold is renowned for being the first person to climb El Capitan without ropes or safety gear. The 915m (3,000 foot) granite cliff is in California’s Yosemite national park.The climb was originally set to take place on Saturday but was delayed by wet weather. His ascent in Taiwan’s capital was streamed live on Netflix, which said there was a delay on the live feed should the worst happen.We’ll cut away,” Netflix executive Jeff Gaspin told Variety magazine in the run-up to the event. “Nobody expects or wants to see anything

like that to happen.”Honnold completed the climb in one hour and 31 minutes on Sunday - and celebrated the achievement with one word: “Sick.”His time more than halves the record of the only other person to scale the tower. Alain Robert, a Frenchman who called himself “Spiderman”,made it to the top of Taipei 101 - at the time the world’s tallestbuilding - in four hours. He did so with ropes and a harness.As Honnold reached the 89th floor, fans cheered and waved, face to face but for the window with the man clinging to the building. Video of the moment was shared by Honnold and Netflix on Instagram, showing the climber continuing undeterred.Honnold has made many extreme climbs during his career. A documentary about his ascent of El Capitan, titled Free Solo, won an Academy Award.

Tearful goodbyes as Japan returns pandas to China amid worsening ties

London: Thousands of people flocked to a zoo in Japan on Sunday to say farewell to the country’s last two giant pandas, who are set to return to China on Tuesday.The People’s Republic of China has used giant pandas as a gesture of goodwill towards its international allies and competitors since it was founded in 1949.But China retains ownership of all pandas it loans to foreign countries, including cubs born abroad. In return, host countries pay an annual fee of about \$1m (£790,000) per pair of pandas.According to Tokyo’s metropolitan government, some 108,000 people vied to get one of the 4,400 slots available for one last look at the zoo’s beloved pandas.”I have been bringing my son here since he was a baby, so I hope it becomes a good memory for him. I’m glad we could come today to remember them,” Ai Shirakawa told the BBC.motions ran high at the Ueno zoo in Tokyo as people stood in line – some for as long as three-and-a-half hours – to see twin cubs Xiao Xiao and Lei Lei one last time.This comes at a very tense moment in relations between Tokyo and Beijing. Ties have sharply deteriorated after Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said Tokyo would get involved militarily if China attacked Taiwan.The twins’ departure will leave Japan without any pandas for the first time since 1972, the year the two countries normalised diplomatic ties.Tearful goodbyes as Japan returns pandas to China amid worsening ties EPA Giant panda Lei Lei eats bamboo at Ueno Zoological Gardens in TokyoEPATwin cubs Xiao Xiao and Lei Lei will return to China on Tuesda.Thousands of people flocked to a zoo in Japan on Sunday to say farewell to the country’s



last two giant pandas, who are set to return to China on Tuesday.Emotions ran high at the Ueno zoo in Tokyo as people stood in line – some for as long as three-and-a-half hours – to see twin cubs Xiao Xiao and Lei Lei one last time.This comes at a very tense moment in relations between Tokyo and Beijing. Ties have sharply deteriorated after Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said Tokyo would get involved militarily if China attacked Taiwan. The twins’ departure will leave Japan without any pandas for the first time since 1972, the year the two countries normalised diplomatic ties.The People’s Republic of China has used giant pandas as a gesture of goodwill towards its international allies and competitors since it was founded in 1949.But China retains ownership of all pandas it loans to foreign countries, including cubs born abroad. In return, host countries pay an annual fee of about \$1m (£790,000) per pair of pandas.According to Tokyo’s metropolitan government, some 108,000 people vied to get one of the 4,400 slots available for one last look at

the zoo’s beloved pandas.”I have been bringing my son here since he was a baby, so I hope it becomes a good memory for him. I’m glad we could come today to remember them,” Ai Shirakawa told the BBC.Ai Shirakawa (left), with her husband and son at the Ueno zoo on SundayAi Shirakawa (left) says she has been bringing her son to see the pandas since he was bornAnother woman recalled witnessing the pandas’ growth journey. “Witnessing their growth, especially since they were so small, has been such a joy,” she said.Some visitors were pictured sobbing as they bade the bears goodbye.Xiao Xiao and Lei Lei were born in 2021 at the Ueno zoo to their mother Shin Shin and their father Ri Ri, both of whom were on loan to Japan for breeding research. More recently, China’s panda loans have coincided with major trade agreements. In 2011, the loan of two pandas to Edinburgh Zoo in Scotland was agreed during negotiations over contracts to supply salmon meat, Land Rover vehicles and energy technology to China.Many pandas have been returned to China in recent years – a loan agreement typically lasts 10 years although extensions are common.However, the prospects of a new panda loan to Japan have remained uncertain amid the escalating row. Japanese prime minister Sanae Takaichi’s comments on Taiwan angered Beijing which views the self-governed island as part of its territory and has not ruled out the use of force to “reunite” with it.Both sides have since engaged in increasingly hostile actions and rhetoric towards each other. Early this month, China tightened restrictions on exports of rare earth-related products to Japan.

What India’s Republic Day red carpet foreign policy



London: India will mark its 77th Republic Day on 26 January - the day when the country adopted its constitution and formally became a republic, breaking from its colonial past. The annual grand parade will take place along Delhi’s iconic central boulevard, with military tanks rolling past and fighter jets roaring overhead as thousands watch.The parade is a spectacle in itself, but attention is also focused on who is occupying the most prominent seats at the ceremony. This year, it will be European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa.India has invited them as chief guests for the celebrations, placing the European Union at the centre of one of the country’s most prestigious state events.On this day, India turns the heart of its capital into a stage. Thousands of troops march before cheering crowds, armoured vehicles move down the Kartavya Path (formerly Rajpath or King’s Avenue) and colourful tableaux or floats pass by spectators in Delhi, while millions more watch on their screens across the country.The parade is presided over by the Indian president, with the chief guest seated alongside - closer to the presidential chair than even the senior-most government officials.Who sits next to India’s president has long been read as more than a matter of protocol. Over the decades, the choice of chief guest has come to be closely watched as an indicator of India’s foreign policy priorities and the relationships Delhi wants to highlight at a particular moment, experts say. The practice began in 1950 with the then Indonesian president, Sukarno, attending India’s first Republic Day parade. In its early years as a republic, India prioritised ties with other

newly-independent countries - a focus reflected in its early choice of chief guests.Since then, the parade has hosted leaders from across the world, reflecting shifts in India’s global relations and strategic priorities. The chief guests have been from leaders of neighbouring countries - such as Bhutan and Sri Lanka - to heads of state and government from major powers, including the US and the UK. The UK has featured as the chief guest five times - including Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip - reflecting the long and complex history between the two countries. Leaders from France and Russia (formerly Soviet Union) have also been invited nearly five times since 1950, reflecting India’s long-standing strategic ties with the two countries.With such a wide range of past guests, the question is how India decides who receives an invitation in a particular year. The selection process is largely out of public view. Former diplomats and media reports say it typically begins within the foreign ministry, which prepares a shortlist of potential invitees. The final decision is taken by the prime minister’s office, followed by official communication with the select countries - a process that can take several months.A former foreign ministry official speaking on condition of anonymity said: “Strategic objectives, regional balance and whether a country has been invited before are all taken into account.”Former Indian ambassador to the US Navtej Sarna said a lot of thought goes into the desion making.”It’s a balance between important partners, neighbours and major powers,” he said, adding that availability of the state leader during that time also plays a crucial role.

Russia using Interpol’s wanted list to target critics abroad, leak revealsPestrikov had been a major shareholder in large metals

Dubai: In the months leading up to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, he says government ministers pressured him to stop selling his products abroad and only supply the Russian market. He believed this would mean his products could be used to make components for military hardware, such as fighter jets and tanks.He says it wasn’t just that he was against “having to sell much cheaper and to whoever the ministries told me to” but that “it was a moral issue as well... no-one wanted to get involved even indirectly in the production of something used to kill people”.Pestrikov believes his refusal to comply and the fact his wife at the time was Ukrainian led to his companies being nationalised and to Russia investigating him for financial crimes.After he fled to France, he was worried that the Kremlin might try to target him there, so he contacted Interpol and was told about the red diffusion request, which had passed the agency’s checks. Pestrikov decided to challenge it through Interpol’s internal, independent watchdog, the Commission for the Control of Interpol’s Files (CCF), arguing that Russia’s request was politically motivated.Interpol’s constitution expressly states that the organisation cannot be used “to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character”.After Pestrikov had spent almost two years on the wanted list, the CCF ruled that his case was predominantly political. He showed us CCF documents that said the information Russia had provided was “generic and formulaic” and there had been an “inadequate explanation” of the alleged crime. Interpol cancelled the request for Pestrikov’s detention.Interpol only releases very basic data about illegitimate requests for arrests and since 2018 has not revealed which countries are the subject of complaints and inquiries. This lack of transparency makes it difficult to assess the scale of the problem, but for the first time, the leaked documents reveal a much fuller picture.One batch of files shared with the BBC contains a list of complaints sent to the CCF. The data is not complete, but it covers a broad range of countries, and where the nation requesting an arrest is listed, thereare more complaints about Russia than anywhere else - this has been the case for the past 11 years.The files also show that in the past decade, at least 700 people who were wanted by Russia complained to the CCF, and at least 400 of them had their red notices or diffusions overturned - that is more than for any other country, accinto the data we received.Thousands of files provided by a whistleblower at Interpol expose for the first time the extent of Russia’s apparent abuse of international policing agency to target its critics abroad.The data provided to the BBC World Service and French investigative outlet, Disclose, reveals that Russia is using Interpol’s wanted lists to request the arrest of people such as political opponents, businessmen and journalists, claiming that they have committed crimes.Analysis of data also suggests that over the past decade, Interpol’s own independent complaints unit has received more complaints about Russia than anyone else - three times more than the next highest country, Turkey.In addition, it indicates complaints against Moscow’s requests have led to more cases being overturned than for any other country.After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Interpol introduced extra checks on Moscow’s activity “to prevent any potential misuse of Interpol’s channels in relation to the tar-



geting of individuals within or beyond the conflict in Ukraine”. But the leaked documents suggest these did not prevent Russia abusing the system and the whistleblower told us some stricter measures were quietly dropped in 2025.In response, Interpol says that every year, thousands of the world’s most serious criminals are arrested thanks to its operations and that it has a number of systems to avoid misuse which have been strengthened over the last few years.It also says it is aware of the potential impact requests for arrest can have on individuals.When you’re hit with a red notice, your life changes completely,” says Igor Pestrikov, a Russian businessman, whose nameappears in the leaked files. Interpol is not a global police force itself, but helps police across the world to co-operate.A red notice is an alert to all of its 196 member countries, asking them to locate and arrest a person. A red diffusion is a similar request but is only sent to individual countries.Pestrikov found he was named in a red diffusion after he fled Russia in June 2022 - four months after the invasion of Ukraine - and applied for asylum in France.He felt he had two options: “Go to the police and say, ‘I’m in the Interpol system,’” and risk arrest or lie low. This may mean “you can’t rent an apartment, your bank accounts get blocked”, which is what happened to him, he says.”It’s constant nerves, all the time,” he adds, explaining he was always looking over his shoulder. For safety, his daughter and her mother moved to another country. The police can “break into your house at any time... that’s why you’re like a cornered rat”, he says.”It’s the stress, the nerves, the pressure, the lawlessness inflicted on you,” that breaks families apart, he adds.Historically it has been Russia who is one of the main perpetrators of abusive red notices,” says British barrister Ben Keith, who has represented many clients wishing to have their names removed from Interpol’s wanted lists.He

thinks Interpol has a particular problem with Russia and that the agency’s attempts to prevent abuse have not been successful.He says that he has “a steady flow of clients who are subject to Russian red notices who are either politically connected, or often pro-Ukraine, or alternatively as a result of corporate raiding”.International lawyer Yuriy Nemets, who specialises in Interpol matters and extradition, agrees that Interpol’s extra scrutiny of Russia’s requests for arrests, introduced after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, has not proved effective.He says he is aware of a number of cases in which Russians opposed to the war “have been targeted for speaking out against what’s going on and were charged with financial... or other ordinary crimes and put into the database based on that”.“It’s not hard to game the system,” he adds.As well as information on notices and complaints, the Interpol insider also provided the BBC with thousands of messages sent between individual countries via Interpol’s messaging system, revealing another, less formal route to trace people abroad. One message from Moscow to law enforcement agents in Abu Dhabi explained how Interpol had denied a request for a red notice, but that it still wanted help in tracing the subject’s whereabouts. This goes against Interpol advice that members should not use its channels in this way.The leak also contains a message about Armen Aramyan, a journalist who had fled Russia after he was convicted of “engaging minors in dangerous activities” for reporting on student protests that supported the opposition leader Alexei Navalny in January 2021.Aramyan went to Armenia and then on to Germany. The message from Russia to law enforcement entities in both countries sidestepped the more formal red notice and red diffusion process, and asked for “any useful information” about Aramyan as well as his whereabouts.The message was sent in February

2023, during the time Russia was under restrictive measures and its messages were being checked before being sent. We can’t say for sure whether the message was delivered, but based on the source of the data, the whistleblower believes that it was.When the BBC showed Aramyan a copy of the message, he said he was shocked but not surprised.“I don’t think they expected that Germany [would] send them my address, my phone number, and extradite me, but if they could at least get some sort of tiny bits of information it would still be valuable for them.”The leak contains other messages in which a foreign law enforcement agency responds to Moscow’s request for information. It sent details about the movements of an ally of Navalny, Lyubov Sobol, and high-profile defector Gleb Karakulov. The exchange relating to Karakulov happened after Interpol announced its additional vetting of Moscow.The BBC also gained access to internal Interpol reports from 2024 and 2025 which show ongoing concern around Russia’s activities from senior directors within the organisation.In one, a senior figure expresses directly to Russian delegates “serious concerns” about the country’s “wilful misuse” of Interpol systems, stating that there were instances of “flagrant violations” of Interpol rules. Despite the extra restrictions on Russia, the reports show that approximately 90% of Russia’s requests were still passing initial checks in 2024. And yet, in the same period, the CCF was overturning roughly half of all Russian requests that it received complaints about. This raises questions about whether the measures had been stringent enough.One report describes how in 2024 Russia attempted to place red diffusions on judges and a prosecutor at the International Criminal Court, after the body issued arrest warrants for President Vladimir Putin and another government official for their actions in Ukraine. These requests from Moscow were rejected. Even while concerns about Russia’s misuse of Interpol’s systems were being expressed inside the organisation, the reports also show that discussions were taking place in 2024 and 2025 about whether to remove additional restrictions on Russian activity. This seems to have been settled in Moscow’s favour. The whistleblower told the BBC that in 2025 Interpol quietly dropped some extra measures against Russia — it is not clear how far this softening may have gone. Despite repeated requests, Interpol said it was not able to comment due to its “strictrules on the processing of data”.The BBC was unable to disclose all the details of the leak to Interpol as doing so could reveal the source. However, when asked about the issues raised in the investigation, Interpol said it was “concerned that a number of the accusations seems to come from a misunderstanding of how Interpol and CCF systems work, or factual errors about data and changes within Interpol’s systems”.“It is untrue to say that we prioritise police co-operation over preventing abuse – Interpol follows its constitution that expressly forbids the use of our systems on information that is of a predominantly political, military, religious or racial character.”And in the past, it has said it can do more good to prevent crimes by ensuring that lines of communication remain open. We asked Russia’s ministry of internal affairs for comment, but it did not respond.

Mouth-Breathing, A Silent Lifestyle Epidemic

Mouth-breathing is often dismissed as a harmless habit or something that happens only during a cold. However, doctors are increasingly observing that chronic mouth-breathing is becoming surprisingly common. And this is especially among children, adolescents, and working adults. What was once linked mainly to nasal blockages or sleep disorders is now emerging as a quiet lifestyle-related issue with long-term health implications.

Why Are More People Breathing Through Their Mouths?

Modern lifestyles play a significant role. Prolonged screen time, poor posture, increased indoor pollution, allergies, chronic sinus congestion, and constant air-conditioned environments all contribute to nasal dryness and blockage. Dr Archana S, Consultant ENT Surgeon, KIMS Hospitals, Thane, says, “Over time, people subconsciously adapt by breathing through the mouth, even when the nose is structurally capable of normal breathing.” Stress and anxiety also influence breathing patterns. Shallow, rapid breathing during periods of mental stress often shifts airflow



from the nose to the mouth, reinforcing the habit.

Why Mouth-Breathing Matters More Than We Think

Dr Archana S says, “The nose is designed to filter, warm, and humidify the air before it reaches the lungs. Mouth-breathing bypasses this natural defence system, allowing cold, dry, and unfiltered air to enter the respiratory tract. This can

increase susceptibility to throat infections, dry mouth, bad breath, and dental issues such as cavities and gum disease.” In children, chronic mouth-breathing has been linked to altered facial development, misaligned teeth, and speech issues. In adults, it is increasingly associated with poor sleep quality, snoring, and sleep-disordered breathing.

The Sleep Connection

One of the most concerning consequences of habitual mouth-breathing is its link to sleep problems. Mouth-breathers are more likely to snore and experience fragmented sleep. Over time, this can contribute to fatigue, poor concentration, morning headaches, and even metabolic and cardiovascular issues. Some individuals develop positional or mild obstructive sleep apnoea, where

airflow becomes compromised during sleep.

A Lifestyle Problem, Not Just a Medical One

Dr Archana S says, “What makes mouth-breathing particularly concerning is how quietly it develops. Many people are unaware that they breathe through their mouths when they are sleeping or experiencing periods of concentration. The habit becomes normalised, especially in children growing up with allergies or constant nasal congestion.”

The good news is that mouth-breathing is often reversible. Identifying underlying causes such as allergies, nasal obstruction, or deviated septum is crucial. Simple measures like improving posture, staying hydrated, managing allergies, practising nasal breathing exercises, and limiting screen time before bed can help retrain breathing patterns. Mouth-breathing may seem harmless, but when it becomes habitual, it can affect dental health, sleep quality, facial development, and overall well-being. As modern lifestyles continue to alter natural body functions, awareness and early correction of mouth-breathing may prevent it from becoming a true lifestyle epidemic.

The Collagen Question: What To Take, When To Start, And Why It Matters

Collagen has become one of the most talked-about wellness buzzwords – showing up in powders, pills, drinks, and skincare products promising firmer skin, stronger joints, and healthier hair. Yet despite its popularity, confusion around collagen remains high. Is it necessary in your 20s? Is supplementation inevitable after 40? And can taking collagen too early, or without guidance, do more harm than good? Dermatologists stress that collagen needs are not universal; they evolve with age, lifestyle, and individual health, making expert guidance essential.

What Exactly Is Collagen And Why Does It Matter?

“Collagen is the most abundant fibrous protein in the body. It forms connective tissues that provide structure and strength to the skin, hair, nails, joints, and bones,” explains Dr Surbhi Deshpande, Dermatologist at Zynova Shalby Hospital, Mumbai. While the body naturally produces collagen, both experts agree that this process begins to slow down with age. “Production is impacted by factors such as age, diet, stress, lifestyle, and genetics,” Dr Deshpande adds, making collagen depletion a gradual but inevitable process rather than a sudden decline. Dr Shareefa Chause, Dermatologist, Mumbai, reinforces this. She notes, “Collagen production starts to slow down from our mid-20s,” which is why fine lines, weaker nails, and joint stiffness can begin to appear earlier than many expect.

Your 20s: Focus On Protection, Not Supplements

In your 20s, collagen levels are typically strong. According to Dr Chause, supplements are not required at this stage, and the focus should instead be on preserving what the body already produces. Both experts recommend a nutrient-rich diet with vitamin C, antioxidants, and protein to support natural collagen synthesis. Sunscreen, hydration, regular exercise, and avoiding smoking play a crucial role in preventing premature breakdown. However, Dr Deshpande notes that early intervention may be needed in cases of poor skin quality or joint concerns – but only under medical guidance.

Your 30s: Early Decline, Smarter Support

By the 30s, collagen depletion becomes more noticeable. “The skin may start appearing dry, dehydrated, and less firm,” says Dr Deshpande. Fine lines and early wrinkles can surface, especially with stress and sun exposure. At this stage, Dr Chause suggests that topical products and supplements may be considered. “Topical collagen creams, serums with retinol, and oral collagen supplements can help maintain skin elasticity,” she explains, while emphasising that supplementation should be based on individual need, not trends.

Your 40s: Visible Changes, Structured Care

In the 40s, collagen loss accelerates. “Wrinkles, pigmentation, sagging, and thinning skin become more apparent,” Dr Deshpande says, adding that joint discomfort and reduced muscle strength may also emerge. Both dermatologists agree that a combination approach works best – nutritious diets, dermatologist-designed skincare routines, and supplements when advised. Dr Chause notes that professional treatments such as microneedling or peels may also support collagen production if suited to the individual.

50s And Beyond: Targeted Intervention

After 50, natural collagen production drops significantly. “Lifestyle changes alone may not be enough,” says Dr Chause, making targeted supplementation and medical guidance increasingly important. Dr Deshpande highlights the need for high-quality supplements and consistency, paired with hydration, sun protection, sleep, and a protein-rich diet to support skin, joints, and muscles. Collagen is not a one-size-fits-all solution, nor is it something to self-prescribe. Its role in wellness shifts with age, making expert consultation essential before starting supplements. When approached thoughtfully – alongside good nutrition, skincare, and lifestyle habits – collagen can support healthy ageing from the inside out, at any stage of life.

The best women’s boots for winter: 24 favourites, from knee-high to ankle

The season of the boot is officially upon us, with cold breezes and dreary downpours all around. Versatile, durable and effortlessly stylish, boots are a wardrobe staple, able to elevate an outfit instantly. Whether you prefer a wearable ankle cut, a pair fit for muddy walks or something that takes you from day to night, investing in quality is essential. Thoughtful choices can shield you from flimsy soles, cracked faux leather and the disappointment that comes around eventually with impulse buys. A decent boot comes down to three things: comfort, proper fit and durable material. Getting the right width matters more than you’d think – too big and they wear out quickly, too small and you’re in blister territory. And if you’re investing in leather, proper care is needed to keep them looking their best. From the classic ankle boot to the chic knee-high and the recent cowboy revival, the best boots can carry you throughout the seasons with ease.

Chocolate brown boots

Dark brown is the perfect winter hue. I have this pair from Anthropologie, and I love them: the sturdy soles are built for daily wear and with proper care – polishing and shaping – they still look brand-new after months of consistent outings. The deep chocolate shade looks great paired with mid-wash denim, and I find them the perfect companion to summer dresses or skirts that could look a little too sunny on a chilly day.

Slouchy boots

The slouchy boot is a fashion favourite right now, seen on runways from Balmain to Isabel Marant. Integrate this trend into your everyday wardrobe with this timeless pair from Anonymous Copenhagen. The leather is chrome-free, which reduces the toxic byproducts

of the tanning process and makes it ideal for people with sensitive skin.

Biker boots

You don’t have to own a motorcycle to wear biker boots these days. Having exploded in popularity after Miu Miu’s autumn/winter 2021 show, this style is expected to stay in fashion for a long time to come.

Green suede boots

Suede can take some extra TLC, but it’s irresistibly stylish, especially in this olive green pair from White Stuff. A softer twist on the classic black knee-high. Cowboy boots have woven in and out of style so often that they’ve almost become neutrals. The great thing about this year’s take is that they don’t have to be a statement if you don’t want them to be. Take the signature features from a cowboy boot and translate them

without plunging straight in.

Black boots

Ariat was one of the first brands to incorporate athletic shoe technology with the classic cowboy boot. All black, comfortable and stylish.

Leopard print ankle boots

The perfect pair if you want to make a statement, complete with western-style stitching, Cuban heels and pointed toes.

Red suede boots

don’t forget how a chunky boot can balance out an otherwise plain outfit. From Parisian-designed patent leather to edgier styles from east London, ankle boots can be as fashion-forward or as subtle as you like.

Bridgit block point in burgundy

The perfect smart ankle boot: these can take you from the office to the pub and even to the club if you so wish, and they’re affordable too.

Eline Manzanilla boots

Designed in Paris and meticulously crafted in Portugal and Spain, these ol-

ive-green boots from Bobbies have a glossy patent leather



ded-buckle biker-style straps, these boots are made for stomping.

Chunky ankle boots

Swedish favourite Vagabond is a reliable go-to for boots. These are the ideal everyday ankle boots, with a chunky sole and square toe. They’re set to hold up in all weather.

Leather booties

Rain and suede don’t usually go hand in hand, so try a leather Ug boot for a harder-wearing cosy boot. This pair has a sugarcane foam sole rather than a petroleum-based foam, cutting down on fossil-fuel use in production.

Insulated boots

Founded in Canada, footwear brand Sorel (a favourite of Jess Cartner-Morley) is known for creating shoes that are durable even in the harshest of winters. Waterproof, fleece-lined and insulated, these boots are a middle ground between functionality and fashion.

Chelsea boot-style wellies

If a Chelsea boot and a welly had a baby, the result would be this wearable pair. Hunter has almost 170 years of experience in the welly game, and is a dependable favourite for a reason.

Borg-lined boots

Borg-lined boots feel like you’re wearing your slippers all day. It’s worth investing in a suede protector just in case you get caught in the rain, but opt for another shoe if heavy rain is forecast to avoid ruining this suede finish. Heeled boots are a great way to dress up an outfit

when it’s too cold outside for daintier shoes. But they don’t have to be sky-high to make you look well put together. If comfort is your priority, try a kitten heel, and if you never wear heels, maybe a wedge could be a comfortable approach.

Stacked-heel boots

In a warm chestnut brown, this pair has a curved, block-contrast heel, with a wider surface area that will make for easier wear for longer. Easily styled up or down, this boot is great for going from day to night. Unsurprisingly, they’re popular, and only a few sizes are left in stock.

Wedge ankle boots

If you’re shy about wearing heels, try out a wedge. This barely there heel will boost your look without sacrificing your comfort.

Kitten heel boots

A kitten heel and pointed toe is one of the most flattering combinations.

The tiny lift from the heel makes these boots perfect for every day.

Cowprint boots

These cowprint boots will add textural interest to any outfit. With a sculptural, slim square heel, these ankle-cut boots are easy to wear, poking out of jeans or with a dress.

Western-inspired boots

A twist on the popular cowboy boot, this mink brown suede pair from Next comes in standard, wide and extra-wide fit.

Suede kitten heel boots

In a rich brown suede, these knee-high boots are perfect for evenings out.

Biker boots

This biker-style pair features a contour cushion footbed and flexible soles for extra comfort, and comes in wide and regular fits.

Riding boot

This pair of M&S classic riding boots is suitable for pretty much every occasion.



into something more low-key, or go bold with a pop of colour.

Pointed ankle boots

If a classic cowboy boot is a little too Clint Eastwood for you, then this shorter pair from Mango is perfect. With just a hint of cowboy inspiration, the pointed toe and decorative stitching, these boots dip your toes into the style

Made in Portugal, this deep red pair is made from split leather, the soft inner layer of leather hide, giving them a rich velvety finish. Ankle boots are arguably the most versatile style of all, seamlessly moving from casual to beyond. For comfortable elevation, a block heel will be much easier to walk on than a classic stiletto, and

finish, meaning they’re just as suitable as a rain boot as a party boot.

Studded ankle boots

If you love a chunky boot, this pair from east London-founded brand Miista is for you. With a square toe and stud-

The only actress that Farah Khan finds “naturally beautiful”

Mumbai: The film business has recently seen a surge in discussions about skincare routines, natural beauty, and cosmetic procedures. During one of her cooking vlogs, Farah Khan made a light-hearted jest about how only Aishwarya Rai Bachchan is “naturally beautiful” in the industry. During the vlog, Farah Khan was promoting a skincare product when her cook Dilip praised her for having “glowing skin.” This sparked the conversation. Farah Khan responded wryly, dismissing it as her “natural glow” and “inner beauty.”

She later addressed the camera, praised the skincare line, and stated that it was deserving of recognition. Then she joked, “Let Dilip think that I am naturally beautiful.” As she stated, “Aishwarya Rai ko chodhkar shayad hi koi naturally beautiful hoga,” the conversation shifted to the beauty standards that are common in the film industry. (With the exception of Aishwarya Rai, very few people are naturally attractive.) In one of her most recent vlogs, Farah Khan, the director of well-known Bollywood movies like Main Hoon Na, Om Shanti Om, and Tees Maar



Khan, provided the update. She disclosed that she intends to start her next directing project by the end of this year when visiting the Mumbai residence of actor Nakuul Mehta. “Abhi banaungi main!” she exclaimed. Abhi bachche chaley jayenge na college fir banaungi! ‘Wapas Aao Farah Khan’ (I will make a film soon!) is an online petition.

I will make it after my children graduate from college. I have an entire petition to

get back on track! I believe it’s time, and I want to begin at the end of this year.” Additionally, Farah stated that she will work with Shah Rukh Khan if she decides to go back into directing. “I’ll work with Shah Rukh if I decide to make a movie!

If not, I’ll wait and watch YouTube,” Farah remarked. In addition to her enormously successful YouTube vlogs, Farah Khan was most recently saw anchoring Celebrity MasterChef.

Why Tere Ishk Mein by Kriti Sanon and Dhanush is being disparaged by PhD students

New Delhi: Tere Ishk Mein, Kriti Sanon and Dhanush’s troubled romance, debuted on Netflix on January 23. PhD students made fun of the movie, which elicited conflicting responses from people of all ages. A moment in which Kriti’s character discusses turning in a 2,200-page thesis caused a group of PhD students to criticize the movie on X. The group of PhD students acknowledged that creating a 300-page thesis was a difficult endeavor, but they argued that cinematic liberty had gone too far, making the film’s premise absurd. Kriti portrays Delhi University psychology research scientist Mukti Benival in the movie. She decides to focus on Dhanush’s character, Shankar Gurukkal, as he struggles with rage and behavioral problems. Shankar eventually develops feelings for Mukti, but she never feels the same way. PhD students spearheaded a meme-fest on X after Kriti Sanon discussed her research. “Almost everything that is stated and done in this movie under the guise of a PhD is absurd. In the movie theater, I burst out laughing. Writing the thesis was



one of the hardest things I have ever done, even though I was incredibly passionate about my research topic and thoroughly enjoyed the entire research process. For four years, I wrote every single day to complete my 385-page doctoral thesis. An irate researcher wrote, “2,200 pages is just so unbelievably ridiculous.” One student succinctly expressed his annoyance by writing, “As a PhD student, I will never get over this.” “I would

genuinely like to meet this PhD student who writes a 2,200-page thesis! I know movies take cinematic liberty, but LMAO, dude—at least try to sound a bit realistic!!” wrote another. The movie, which was directed by Aanand L. Rai and written by Himanshu Sharma and Neeraj Yadav, debuted in theaters on November 28 of last year. It made Rs 148.5 crore at the box office despite having a budget of Rs 85 crore.

Badshah purchased a Rs. 12 crore Rolls-Royce Cullinan “impulsively”



Mumbai: Rapper Badshah has a reputation for appreciating the finer things in life. He has a number of expensive cars, expensive timepieces, and even limited-edition coats and footwear. The well-known rapper and composer talked about wanting to have the “newest and best” in everything in a recent interview. He also recalled the moment he impulsively purchased

a ₹12 crore Rolls-Royce. During an interview, Badshah was questioned about his vehicles, specifically the Rolls-Royce Cullinan Series II, which is priced at more than ₹12 crore in India. “I think buying the car was very impulsive,” the rapper stated. Jaldi se decide kar liya ki aaj jena hai (I made the snap decision to get it today). I’m feeling badshah wali, hai. It’s

a nice vehicle.

After experiencing the high of purchasing the car for ten to fifteen minutes, you ask yourself, “What comes next?” When Badshah became one of the few Indians to possess a Rolls-Royce Cullinan, one of the priciest vehicles in the world, he made headlines last year. Superstar Shah Rukh Khan and millionaire Mukesh Ambani are two such Indians who possess this luxurious car.

Badshah explained why he purchases so many expensive items in the same interview. “Mera mann karta hai ki jo bhi best hai technological-ly wo mere paas ho” means “I wish to have all the best things in terms of technology.” When people claim that a car is the best, log kehte hai naa ki best gadi hai. The rapper declared, “I want to have all those things.”

Mohanlal and Vishnu Mohan have announced a new project called L367



Mumbai: Veteran actor Mohanlal revealed his upcoming film, “L367,” starring Vishnu Mohan, making Republic Day even more memorable for his admirers. “With great pleasure, I announce my next project, L367,” Mohanlal posted on X. Working with

filmmaker Vishnu Mohan on this thrilling project, which is being produced by Shri Gokulam Gopalan under the name Sree Gokulam Movies, gives me great pleasure. As we embark on this wonderful adventure together, I’m looking forward to this new chapter

and asking for all of your love, blessings, and well wishes.

The movie is being produced by Gokulam Gopalan through his company, Sree Gokulam Movies. Krishnamoorthy is an executive producer, and Baiju Gopalan and VC Praveen

are co-producers. Further information about the movie has not yet been made public. Mohanlal will also appear in “Drishyam 3” in the upcoming months. In the “Drishyam” franchise, the Dadasaheb Phalke Award-winning actor portrays Georgekutty. 2013 saw the release of the franchise’s debut installment. The ‘Drishyam’ franchise centers on George Kutty and his family’s struggle after the disappearance of the Inspector General’s (IG) son.

“Drishyam 3” is the much anticipated follow-up to the highly successful film franchise, which has resulted in multiple remakes in the Bollywood and South film industries. Additionally, he has a cat named “Patriot” with Mammooty.

Kristen Stewart: actresses in Hollywood are “treated like puppets”

Mumbai: Actor-turned-director Kristen Stewart has taken issue with Hollywood’s treatment of female actresses, claiming that they are not given any agency. Kristen described how Hollywood treats actresses like “puppets” in a recent interview. Kristen, who is directing The Chronology of Water, discussed the treatment of female actresses in the business in an interview with Variety. “I have to warn you, actresses are mistreated. People believe that everyone can be an actress, but when I first got down to discuss my film as a director, I thought, ‘Wow, this is a different experience.’ The actor remarked, ‘They are speaking to me like I’m a smart person.’” Based on her personal experience, Kristen claimed that the industry elevates directors while marginalizing actors. The notion that directors possess supernatural skills is untrue. Men are the ones who propagate this notion. I don’t want to come across as constantly whining, but female performers suffer more than male actors; they are not treated like puppets. “Imogen Poots gave this film her all,” she continued. With her most recent project, The Chronology of Water, Kristen Stewart—famous for starring in the Twilight series—shifted to directing. When the movie debuted at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival, it was given a standing ovation for more than six minutes. A woman’s struggle to transform suffering into creativity is depicted in the film, which is based on Lidia Yuknavitch’s memoir.

Recalling Being “Too Good-Looking,” Nakuul Mehta lost a movie

Mumbai: Recently, Nakuul Mehta appeared in the television series Space Gen: Chandrayaan. The program follows the path from the 2019 Chandrayaan 2 failure to the successful Chandrayaan 3 arrival close to the Moon’s south pole, drawing inspiration from India’s Chandrayaan lunar missions. It is currently available for streaming on JioHotstar and has garnered conflicting reviews from critics.

The actor has recounted being turned down by a director because he was “too good-looking” in an interview with a news portal. “The strangest thing had happened,” the actor revealed. There once was



a very well-known filmmaker and producer. I was supposed to work with him on a really lovely movie’s sequel. Everything was fin-

ished. We obtained the dates and took photos. He called me while I was in an acting workshop and said, “I was thinking about it.” You seem

too attractive for the role, in my opinion.” I said okay,” he went on. I was meant to portray the part of a Rajasthani Rajkumar. However, I couldn’t stop wondering how my appearance related to the role I was meant to play. It dawned on me then that he had no better explanation. I was unsure of how to interpret that. Nakuul Mehta and Shriya Saran play the main characters in this series, which was created by Arunabh Kumar and produced by Premeesha Kumar and N. Kumar for The Viral Fever.

Prakash Belawadi, Amruta Khanvilkar, Gopal Dutt, and Meiyang Chang play important supporting roles.

Disha Patani and Talwiinder stroll hand in hand amid dating rumors

Mumbai: There are rumors that Talwiinder and Disha Patani are dating. When Disha and Talwiinder performed with Kehlani at Lollapalooza 2026, rumors about them grew more intense. Videos of him and Disha leaving the arena hand in hand through the throng appeared online after his performance. Later, the two were seen driving away with companions in the same vehicle. Many social media users assumed that the couple had officially started dating after their public appearance. Fans posted their thoughts on social media as the footage went viral. One social media user commented, “Damn - it’s as real as it gets now!!” while another asked, “Why does it look like a scene from a Mohit Suri movie?” Talwiinder and Disha Patani have not made their relationship publicly known. After Disha and Talwiinder were seen holding hands during the wedding of musician Stebin Ben and Nupur Sanon, the dating rumors started.

During the festivities, Talwiinder—who has so far mostly covered his face with paint during public appearances—was spotted without it.



His frank encounter with Disha Patani was captured on camera during the wedding, sparking rumors about their romance. Later, the two went back to Mumbai together with Mouni Roy, Disha’s close friend. They were also seen at Nupur’s reception.

The first glimpse of the Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda movie

Mumbai: In a significant announcement on Republic Day, the producers of actor Vijay Deverakonda’s next movie VD 14 revealed the film’s title as Ranabaali and its release date on Monday. Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika Mandanna play the key parts in Rahul Sankrityan’s film Ranabaali, which is scheduled for a global cinema release on September 11, 2026. Inspired by actual historical events that occurred between 1854 and 1878, the film is set in 19th-century India. The producers unveiled an intense glimpse that presents the Ranabaali realm alongside the title announcement.

The film shows the hardship brought forth by imperial officials and policies during that time, as well as the harshness of British colonial control. The glimpse sets the backdrop for the appearance of a famous hero from what is referred to as a “cursed land,” according to the press release, while depicting areas forced into drought and destruction through striking imag-

ery and narration. Vijay Deverakonda makes an appearance as Ranabaali, a ferocious and powerful avatar with an eye-catching new appearance. International actor Arnold Vosloo plays the adversary Sir Theodore Hector, giving the story more depth. Rashmika Mandanna plays Jayamma. After Dear Comrade and Khushi, this is Vijay Deverakonda’s third project with production company Mythri Movie Makers, led by Naveen Yeneni and Y. Ravi Shankar.

Additionally, it brings the actor and director Rahul Sankrityan back together following their last successful film Taxiwaala. Additionally, according to the press release, Ranabaali revives the popular on-screen coupling of Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika Mandanna following the success of the films Geetha Govindam and Dear Comrade.

The music for the movie, which is presented by T-Series, was written by the well-known combo Ajay-Atul.

In the midst of “Saas-Bahu Drama,” Kangana Ranaut stands with Victoria Beckham, the “Real Queen”

Mumbai: The continuous conflict between Brooklyn Beckham and his parents, David and Victoria Beckham, has garnered media attention. Brooklyn has openly accused his mother of dancing “inappropriately” at his wedding to Nicola Peltz in 2022. Actor-politician Kangana Ranaut remarked on the conflict between Victoria and her daughter-in-law, Nicola Peltz, and offered her support. The couture designer was referred to by Kangana as a “real queen.” On her Instagram Stories, Kangana Ranaut posted a video from the 2007 reality TV show Victoria Beckham: Coming to America. Victoria Beckham is seen in the video handling her driver’s license photo as though it were a profes-

sional photo session. She is reminded in the video by DMV employees that they are unable to “retouch” her picture. Brooklyn Beckham claimed that his mother “hijacked” the first dance he had scheduled with Nicola in an Instagram post detailing his problems with his parents. Brooklyn claims that his mother was waiting to dance when singer Marc Anthony invited him onto the stage in front of about 500 people. He stated, “She danced very inappropriately on me in front of everyone,” and claimed he had “never felt more uncomfortable or humiliated” in his life. Due to Brooklyn’s remarks, the family has been under more public scrutiny, which has led to a surge of memes and jokes on the internet. Many

comments on social media have highlighted the apparent conflicts within the Beckham home, and fans have shared modified recordings and amusing reactions speculating what Victoria’s dance would have looked like. So yet, the family has not responded in unison. However, David Beckham made a broad statement regarding the abuse of social media at a different speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos: “Children make mistakes.” “They make errors. Kids should be free to make errors because that’s how they learn. I strive to teach my children that. However, there are instances when you must also allow them to make those errors,” David continued.



India and the EU End Trade Talks, Seeking Trump Substitutes

New Delhi, Jan 27: In order to strengthen their economic relations and protect themselves from US President Donald Trump’s tariffs, the European Union and India are scheduled to announce an agreement on a long-awaited trade accord on Tuesday. The event, which culminates nearly two decades of discussions, is being celebrated in New Delhi by European Council President Antonio Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. The rapid shifting global alignment under Trump is reflected in the end of discussions following years of suspension. Despite long-standing trade disputes with Indian officials, the EU is now concentrated on reducing its economic dependency on the US and China. In a similar vein, India is attempting to balance its relations with Russia, dispel its reputation as a protectionist nation, and counteract a 50% tariff imposed by Trump. According to Amitendu Palit, the Institute of South Asian Studies’ research head on trade and economics, countries are becoming more inclined to “bury the hatchet” in light of the “atmosphere of uncertainty” surrounding Trump’s plans. “Diversification is absolutely essential,” he stated. “That is the name of the game.” Although some agricultural products are anticipated to be excluded, the deal will reduce tariffs on the majority of consumer and industrial goods exchanged between India and EU countries.



Subject to a cap, the EU would also benefit from increased market access for its auto exports. After legal review, which should take around six months, the agreement is anticipated to be legally inked. It will also need to be ratified by the European Parliament. The statement on Tuesday was made just a few days after the EU completed a separate, protracted trade agreement with the Mercosur bloc of South American nations. This agreement was intended to assist the EU in shifting its focus away from the US and China. However, that agreement has not yet been approved by EU legislators. In a same vein, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is searching for new markets for a nation that Trump once referred to as the “tariff king.” After agreements with the UK, Oman, and New Zealand, PM Modi’s fourth trade accord since last May was reached on Tuesday. In order to secure critical resources and expand India’s global presence, PM Modi is next looking to form

alliances with Chile, Peru, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the Mercosur bloc. The third-largest economy in Asia, India, may gain a competitive advantage in the export of labor-intensive products, such as clothing and shoes, that are severely impacted by Trump’s exorbitant tariffs thanks to the EU-India agreement. More generally, according to a report by Madhavi Arora, head economist at Emkay Global Financial Services Ltd., it may increase the nation’s exports to the EU by about \$50 billion by 2031. Arora identified the textile, chemical, and pharmaceutical industries as possible beneficiaries. With a market of more than 1.4 billion people, the agreement would provide the EU access to one of the economies with the fastest rate of growth in the world. However, compared to the agreement the EU recently signed with the Mercosur nations—Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay—the agreement will not provide as much market access for European exports.

Alexander Zverev Advances to the Semi-Finals of the Australian Open



New Delhi: Alexander Zverev, the runner-up from the previous year, defeated young American Learner Tien with a torrent of aces on Tuesday to advance to the Australian Open semifinals. Zverev defeated home favorite Alex de Minaur or world number one Carlos Alcaraz

6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-1, and 7-6 (7/3) to get to the Melbourne final. After being soundly defeated by Jannik Sinner in last year’s title match, German world number three Zverev is eager to finally win a Grand Slam at the age of 28. “Without my aces I probably would not have won today,” Zverev remarked on a match point after hitting 24 aces and making just one double fault. “Obviously, I’m quite pleased with my serve.” Learner off the baseline was playing un-

believable,” he stated. “The way he is playing is incredible.” In order to avoid temperatures that were predicted to reach 45 degrees Celsius outside, the quarterfinal was held inside Rod Laver Arena. The Californian Tien was the lowest-ranked player remaining in the men’s draw, ranked 29th in the world. Having never advanced to the final eight of a major tournament, he was also the youngest at age 20 and participating in the most important game of his life.

More than 1,200 roads in Himachal Pradesh were closed

New Delhi, Jan 27: More than 1,250 roads in Himachal Pradesh have been closed due to heavy rain and snowfall, seriously impacting daily life in the hill state even as visitors continue to travel to snow-bound locations to take in the picturesque winter scenery. The government apparatus is operating on a war footing to restore road connectivity, according to Public Works Department (PWD) Minister Vikramaditya Singh. “More than 1,250 roads were closed across the state two days ago,” Singh said in an interview. Reopening them is being worked on. Snow blowers and JCB machines can be seen in numerous locations throughout Himachal Pradesh. He pointed out that although the snowfall has been inconvenient, it has also provided much-needed respite during a protracted wait. “The state’s residents had been anticipating rain and snowfall for a while, and it has arrived in significant amounts. “This will help future crops, especially in the hilly areas, so I congratulate the farmers and thank all the gods of the state,” the minister declared. The department is always working to clear roads and help trapped travelers, Singh continued. “There were multiple locations where tourists were stuck. To guarantee optimal convenience, we work closely with district administrations,



including SPs and DCs. We are working to clear roads as quickly as possible, but some challenges are normal in this kind of weather,” he stated. The PWD minister emphasized the long-term advantages, pointing out that additional snowfall would help replenish water supplies and preserve soil moisture, which is essential for orchards. “The state now has about 3,500 devices installed, and more will be set up if needed. “Roads will be reopened as soon as possible,” he promised. Additionally, Singh welcomed visitors, describing them as essential to the state’s economy. “The influx of tourists boosts our economy and adds vitality. Devbhoomi Himachal adheres to ‘Atithi Devo Bhava’. But visitors should travel sensibly and make sure that nothing damages the state’s culture, legacy, or religious sensibilities,” he advised.

What Would Occur If Pakistan Didn’t Attend the 2026 T20 World Cup

New Delhi: As the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) considers a possible complete boycott of the 2026 T20 World Cup, cricket is on edge. Inspired by solidarity with Bangladesh, the ICC substituted Scotland for the Tigers after they declined to visit India. Shehbaz Sharif, the prime minister of Pakistan, met with Mohsin Naqvi, the head of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), on Monday; however, a decision on the matter has been delayed until at least the end of the week. But there is a grim reality hidden under the political hyperbole. A boycott is a possible suicide mission for Pakistan, not just a form of protest. Mohsin Naqvi, the head of the PCB, has often stated that the government has the final say over whether or not the side would compete in the T20 World Cup. The management stated that the government has not yet given the team the necessary approval, even as the selectors revealed Pakistan’s 15-man roster for the competition. The following criteria make Pakistan’s choice to withdraw from the World Cup all but improbable, even though the final decision will be made public within the next seven days. Long before a major event starts, each Full Member of the International Cricket Council (ICC) signs a Tournament Participation Agreement (TPA). Pakistan would be in blatant violation of this legally binding agree-

Amid controversy, ICC Explains Bangladeshi Journalists’ Refusal of T20 World Cup Accreditation

New Delhi: After more than a hundred Bangladeshi journalists were refused accreditation for the 2026 T20 World Cup, the already strained relationship between the International Cricket Council (ICC) and Bangladesh has taken a new turn. The sport’s governing body made this decision after Scotland was officially substituted for Bangladesh in the biannual competition due to Bangladesh’s refusal to go to India for its group matches.

Bangladesh insisted on playing all of its games in a neutral nation like Sri Lanka due to security concerns, but the ICC’s independent unit rejected the claims.

The ICC’s decision to deny credentials to Bangladeshi journalists, preventing them from covering the tournament, has caused a stir among the nation’s media community. However, an ICC spokesman affirmed that the decision was made in response to remarks made by the Bangladeshi government, which de-



scribed travel to India as “unsafe” given the present political unrest.

On the condition of anonymity, an ICC official stated, “They have not been given visas or accreditation because the government kept saying it is unsafe to come to India.” Rana Abbas, the sports editor of the

Bangladeshi media organization Ajaker Patrika, on the accreditation denial. “Extremely sad” is how he put it. “There has never been an incidence like this in Bangladesh. Since before the nation’s maiden World Cup debut in 1999, Bangladeshi journalists have covered

ICC events, including high-profile games like India vs. Pakistan, even when they take place in India. This is the first time that every correspondent has been turned down in this way.

This is unique and extremely regrettable in the history of ICC tournaments. “This is really depressing, in my opinion. Even journalists from non-participating nations are typically accommodated in international sport; FIFA is a prime example. This problem could have an impact on how matches are covered in Sri Lanka and run the risk of creating a negative precedent,” he stated. Before choosing their next course of action, Bangladeshi journalists are said to have contacted the Bangladesh Sports Journalists Community (BSJC) and the Bangladesh Sports Press Association (BSPA).

“For Bangladeshi journalists, facing such a blanket rejection for the first time is deeply disappointing,” Rana said.

Napoli is worried about losing to Chelsea in the Champions League



New Delhi: Due to a severe injury issue and a faltering Serie A championship defense, Napoli is in danger of being ousted from the Champions League when they play Chelsea on Wednesday. After last week’s awful 1-1 draw at FC Copenhagen, Napoli sits just within the elimination zone with just eight points from seven games. They need to defeat Chelsea to salvage a spot in the play-offs for next month. With the Blues, Antonio Conte’s old team, requiring a victory to remain in the top eight and secure direct qualification for the round of 16, that will not be an easy assignment. Napoli enters the match still reeling after a 3-0 loss at

Juventus, which put the Italian champions nine points behind Inter Milan, the current Serie A leaders. For Napoli and Juventus legend Conte, Sunday’s defeat in Turin was a major setback. Conte was full of appreciation for his men who had to persevere in the face of a serious injury. “Our most recent defeat came on December 14 against Udinese. Conte said on Sunday, “We even won the Italian Super Cup in an emergency, an emergency that has gotten even worse.” “The boys need a lot of fan support... I anticipate that the supporters will support the team at this trying time.” From the beginning of the season, physical issues in his team have

hindered Conte’s attempt to become the first Napoli coach to win consecutive Serie A titles. Romelu Lukaku was out until the 79th minute of Sunday’s defeat due to a hamstring injury he sustained during the preseason. While Giovane, a recent addition, made his debut as a substitute—Conte subsequently claimed he hadn’t even seen him train—Lukaku took the place of Antonio Vergara, an academy graduate who had filled in for Italy international Matteo Politano. Large goalkeeper Vanja Milinkovic-Savic was also sidelined by Conte due to a hamstring injury, and winger David Neres traveled to London on Monday for ankle surgery, which is expected to keep the Brazilian out until April. After surgery on his right hamstring, Kevin De Bruyne has been sidelined since October and won’t return until the spring.

Andre-Frank Anguissa, another important midfielder, was scheduled to return on Sunday from another hamstring injury but was left out due to back issues.

Mamata Banerjee might travel to Delhi to demonstrate against SIR



New Delhi, Jan 27: Mamata Banerjee, the chief minister of West Bengal, is expected to travel to Delhi in February to stage a significant demonstration against the Election Commission of India (ECI) on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral roll. The action is taken in the midst of the state’s continuing political dispute over the SIR exercise. Sources claim that Mamata Banerjee is angry over the purported deaths connected to the SIR procedure in the state that would hold elections. She has written to the Chief Electoral Officer multiple times, but she is not happy with the poll body’s response. According to party insiders, this is what motivated her to carry the demonstration nationwide. Mamata’s

scheduled trip to the nation’s capital is also intended to foster a wider opposition consensus against the SIR, according to top Trinamool Congress (TMC) leaders. Her visitation date hasn’t been decided upon yet, though. She might travel to Delhi during the current Parliamentary session, according to certain party members. On November 4, Mamata Banerjee and Abhishek Banerjee led a march through Kolkata’s streets as the SIR process got underway in West Bengal.

The TMC National General Secretary recently intimated that the party leader would travel to Delhi to draw attention to the state’s predicament and step up political criticism on Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar.

Following the Karnataka Governor-Congress confrontation, the BJP is now protesting

New Delhi, Jan 27: The Bharatiya Janata Party accused the ruling Congress of being involved in an excise scam of Rs 6,000 crore, which sparked protests within the Karnataka Assembly on Tuesday. In the midst of the commotion last week over Governor Thawarchand Gehlot’s speech to a joint session of the legislature, the BJP also called for the suspension of some Congress MPs for “insulting and disrespecting” Gehlot.

Near a statue of Mahatma Gandhi on the Assembly campus, the saffron party and its ally, the Janata Dal Secular, demonstrated with signs and slogans. “.. Rs 6,000-crore scam where-in the excise minister and his family members are involved, and proof has emerged. But Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is not willing to discuss this in the House,” BY Vijayendra, the head of the BJP’s state unit, told reporters. “An investigation by the CBI or a sitting High Court judge is the only answer...”

“We are going to demand the resignation of the Excise Minister,” Vijayendra added, accusing the state government of attempting to conceal the corruption by fabricating “drama.” After the Speaker stated that the House will have time to de-



bate this, the BJP withdrew their protest.

The BJP is being attacked over the G RAM G jobs guarantee initiative, which coincides with the confrontation over the purported excise scam. During last month’s winter session, Parliament approved the G RAM G, which took the role of the 20-year-old Congress-era Mahatma Gandhi-labeled program. But now, in an attempt to take aim at the central government, the BJP, before the budget session next month, the Congress-led national opposition is attempting to resurrect the issue.

In this regard, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have become the major battlegrounds. Governor Gehlot’s refusal to read a speech

prepared by the state for the special session caused emotions in the former to escalate last week. Gehlot began the session by reading the opening lines, making a few remarks of his own, and then leaving. This sparked a heated debate in which Siddaramaiah made scathing remarks about the “violation” of the Constitution and becoming a “puppet” in the hands of the center. Eleven paragraphs that the governor wanted removed because they were perceived as criticizing the G RAM G scheme were at the center of that dispute. However, the state administration declined to comply.

Meanwhile, R Ashoka of the BJP asserted that the Congress had exerted pressure on the Governor and

failed to recognize the “good work” of the center. “Congress (in Karnataka) has its own agenda... to convey to Rahul Gandhi ‘we are fighting against centre’...” Rahul Gandhi, a Congress MP, created a different controversy when he said he didn’t know the name of the new law. He remarked, “I don’t know what ‘G-RAM-G is!’” at a function honoring the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the program’s forerunner. Gandhi was criticized for being “against Lord Ram,” which many perceived as unintentionally highlighting one of the opposition’s grievances with the G-RAM-G bill—that is, that it prioritizes the religious icon Lord Ram over Mahatma Gandhi.

Shakib’s return sparks eyewash debate after World Cup axe, ex-captain amused

New Delhi: Former Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal has questioned the Bangladesh Cricket Board’s sudden move to reopen the door for Shakib Al Hasan, warning it should not be an “eyewash” after the T20 World Cup setback. Tamim said Shakib should only return if the decision is based purely on merit and taken for the right reasons. Tamim stressed that Shakib should be allowed to play for Bangladesh again only if the move is genuinely cleared by the government and the Bangladesh Cricket Board, and not as a quick response to public pressure. Speaking on the Off Screen with Syed Zaman podcast, Tamim said respect for a player of Shakib’s stature must come first. “If the government gives the green signal, then it’s fine. If they think he is still capable to play, then you let him play. But if you are telling this just for eye wash, then don’t do this. Because I believe he deserves respect,” Tamim said. Shakib, one of Bangladesh’s most successful cricketers, has been out of selection discussions for more than a year and has reportedly not been allowed to enter the country for nearly 18 months. Against that background, the sudden announcement from BCB media committee chairman Amzad Hossain and director Asif Akbar — confirming Shakib could play again — surprised many within the cricketing community.

The timing raised even more questions as it came on the same day Bangladesh were replaced by Scotland for the upcoming ICC Men’s T20 World Cup. The coincidence was hard to ignore and led to speculation over whether the decision was meant to shift focus away from Bangladesh’s World



Cup embarrassment. Many have pointed out that the BCB had plenty of time to take a call on Shakib’s future earlier. Choosing this exact moment has only added to the doubts surrounding the board’s intentions. The situation has been further complicated by a clear change in stance from Asif Akbar. Previously, the BCB director had said Shakib would need to apologise and show remorse before being considered again, and had even claimed the “current” Shakib had no chance of playing for Bangladesh. Now, he has said Shakib is free to play if he is fit and available. This sharp turnaround has fuelled scepticism. For Tamim and several observers, the episode risks looking less like a genuine cricketing decision and more like an attempt to manage the fallout from one of the most awkward moments in recent Bangladesh cricket history. The Bangladesh Cricket Board’s (BCB) decision regarding Shakib Al Hasan does appear to be linked, at least in part, to fallout from the T20 World Cup context and an ongoing administrative crisis. While Bangladesh is facing deep uncertainty over its T20 World Cup participation, the situation is further complicated by this being the country’s first campaign without Shakib Al Hasan. The government’s refusal to allow the team to play in India due to security concerns has forced the BCB into a rigid position, overriding player agency and intensifying internal turmoil. Insights indicate that the absence of Shakib Al Hasan is both a symptom of broader transition pains and a catalyst for crisis within Bangladesh cricket. Financial threats, potential sponsor withdrawal, and strained relations with India have nationally.

Michael Schumacher shows rare progress, no longer bedridden after 12 years post-accident



New Delhi: Twelve years after his devastating skiing accident, Formula One legend Michael Schumacher has shown rare signs of progress, with reports suggesting that the seven-time world champion is no longer bedridden. According to a Fox Sports report, Schumacher can now sit upright in a wheelchair, allowing him to be wheeled around his homes in Majorca and near Lake Geneva. The former Ferrari driver has remained out of the public eye since suffering a serious head injury while skiing in the French Alps in December 2013, with the family releasing very little information about his condition. Schumacher continues to be cared for by his wife, Corinna, and a team of medical professionals who provide round-the-clock supervision. In the absence of official updates, speculation had grown over the years that he was only able to communicate by blinking. However, sources cited by British media have suggested that this is not entirely accurate. “He understands some of the things going on around him, but probably not all of them,” one source said.

Daily Mail reported that Schumacher’s care involves a team of nurses and therapists maintaining constant watch, with the family prioritising

privacy above all else. Access to the 57-year-old has been restricted to close relatives and a small circle of trusted friends since the accident. Several rumours have surfaced in recent years regarding possible public appearances by Schumacher, including claims that he would attend his daughter Gina-Maria’s wedding, but those reports proved unfounded. Last year, three former employees of the Schumacher family were convicted after attempting to sell images of him in his current condition. “I haven’t heard anything recently. I understand he has a Finnish doctor, a personal doctor,” Hopkins told SPORTbible. “I don’t think we’ll see Michael again. I’m slightly uncomfortable talking about his condition because of how secretive - for the right reasons - the family wants to keep it. I can have an opinion, but I’m not in that inner circle. I’m not Jean Todt, Ross Brawn or Gerhard Berger, who visit Michael. I’m a long way from that.” Earlier this month, Gina-Maria shared a rare family photograph taken before the accident on Schumacher’s birthday, accompanied by the caption: “The best forever. Happy birthday papa.” Schumacher’s recovery remains one of the most closely guarded stories in global sport. While the latest update offers only a modest indication of progress, it provides a rare glimpse into the condition of one of Formula One’s greatest figures. Michael Schumacher is no longer bedridden and has shown some progress in mobility, according to recent reports. The seven-time Formula One world champion, who suffered a

severe head injury in a skiing accident in December 2013, can now sit upright in a wheelchair and be wheeled around his homes.

While detailed information about Schumacher’s condition remains closely guarded by his family, it is said that he is cared for by his wife Corinna Schumacher and a dedicated medical team. Reports also suggest that although Schumacher likely understands some of the things happening around him, the extent of his cognitive awareness is limited and has not been officially clarified. The family continues to prioritize privacy, restricting access to Schumacher to only close relatives and a small circle of trusted friends. Twelve years after his skiing accident, the significance of Michael Schumacher’s recovery is considerable, as recent information says he is no longer bedridden and can now sit upright in a wheelchair. This marks a rare and notable improvement for the seven-time Formula One champion, whose condition had seen little reported progress since his severe head injury in 2013. Recent updates say Schumacher is now able to be wheeled around his residences in Majorca and near Lake Geneva, signaling increased physical capability compared to previous years when there was speculation that he could only communicate by blinking. Although detailed updates remain scarce due to his family’s strict privacy, sources indicate Schumacher has some level of awareness and understanding of his surroundings, although potentially limited. His care continues under the supervision cated recovery.

Australian Open: World No.1 Aryna Sabalenka defeats Iva Jovic, storms into semifinals with dominance Sabalenka dominates tiebreak after Mboko challenge

Melbourne: World No.1 Aryna Sabalenka crushed 18-year-old American Iva Jovic’s Australian Open dream run, securing a 6-3, 6-0 victory on Rod Laver Arena in under 90 minutes. This win in Melbourne on Tuesday marked Sabalenka’s fourth consecutive Australian Open semifinal and 14th Grand Slam semifinal, as per the WTA Tour website. She’ll face either No. 3 seed Coco Gauff or No. 12 seed Elina Svitolina in the final four. “She’s a young, great player. Super happy to get this win in straight sets, happy with the level I played today and yeah, (she’s an) amazing player,” Sabalenka said after her match. “The second set, I felt like I had to step in and put even more pressure on her. Because I can see that she’s young, she’s hungry, and I could tell during the match that no matter the score, she’s still going to be there trying,” Sabalenka added. Jovic, who at 18 is the youngest player



to reach the last eight at the Australian Open without dropping a set since Venus Williams in 1998. Earlier, Sabalenka stormed into the women’s singles quarterfinals of the ongoing Australian Open 2026 tournament on Sunday. The top-seeded player thrashed World No.17 Victoria Mboko in straight sets 6-1, 7-6(1) in a one-sided match on Rod Laver Arena.

The two-time Australian Open champion won her 20th consecutive tiebreak at Grand Slam level, eclipsing an almost two-decade old record owned by Novak Djokovic, who won 19

straight tiebreaks at majors between Wimbledon 2005 and 2007. (ANI) (This content is sourced from a syndicated feed and is published as received. The Tribune assumes no responsibility or liability for its accuracy, completeness, or content.) America’s Amanda Anisimova stormed into consecutive Grand Slam finals, continuing her redemption arc by taking down four-time major winner Naomi Osaka in the semi-finals of the women’s singles at the US Open. Top-seeded Aryna Sabalenka overcame several bouts of inconsistent play Friday to beat Anastasia

Potapova 7-6 (4), 7-6 (7) and advance to the fourth round at the Australian Open. Sabalenka, chasing her third Australian Open title in four years, led 6-5 and 40-0 in the opening set but Potapova saved all three set points to send it to a tiebreaker. Sabalenka led 3-0 in the tiebreaker before Potapova leveled at 3-3. Sabalenka held two more set points and clinched the set when she laced a backhand down the line off Potapova’s second serve.

After trailing 4-0 in the second set, Potapova rallied to tie it 4-4 and again force a tiebreaker. Potapova had three set points to win the set in the tiebreaker, but Sabalenka rallied when the pressure was on. She played incredible tennis,” Sabalenka said of Potapova in her on-court TV interview. “I was always on the back foot. There are days where you just have to fight and . . . it was such a fight.” Sabalenka won the Australian.

Vedanta Kalinga Lancers’ captain Arthur Van Doren credits Hero HIL triumph to teamwork

Bhubaneswar: Vedanta Kalinga Lancers were crowned Hero Hockey India League (HIL) 2025-26 champions following a thrilling 3-2 victory over the Ranchi Royals at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium, according to a release. Following the team’s title win on Monday, Captain Arthur Van Doren reflected on the season’s challenges and credited the victory to the squad’s chemistry and the support of the home crowd. The championship win marks the culmination of a rapid four-week build-up for the squad. Highlighting the difficulty of creating a cohesive bond in such a short timeframe, Arthur said, “Four weeks to build a bond and shape a team is a very short time, and it is extremely challenging. That’s why we are incredibly proud of what we have achieved. I believe we have done it very well—we have created a good, solid unit, and in the end, that was reflected on the pitch.” Addressing the tactical approach against a familiar opponent in the Ranchi Royals--whom they faced for the third time in the tournament--Arthur emphasised the importance of maintaining an offensive mindset. “They are a fantastic team to play against, with a very attacking style that also makes for great entertainment for the spectators. We are extremely proud of how we performed against one of the best teams in the competition, and that is what matters most to us.” Even while protecting a narrow one-goal lead in the dying minutes of the match, the Lancers’ strategy was to keep attacking rather than fall into a purely defensive shell. “It is always important to keep playing our natural game. The danger in sitting back and only defending is that it allows the opposition to attack continuously. We made sure we stayed positive, kept attacking, and even though they created a few chances, we stood strong together as a unit,” he added.

The Lancers’ dominant run included only one loss throughout the tournament, and that too in a game which was a dead rubber for them as they had already secured their spot in Qualifier 1 by topping the league stage. Highlighting the



support of the home crowd in enabling such a successful run, Arthur commented, “The home crowd is always a huge bonus. The energy they bring lifts us—even if it’s just by a few percent, it makes a real difference. That atmosphere is incredible, and we have loved every second of it. The stage is all set for a thrilling encounter in the Men’s Hockey India League (HIL) 2025-26 as Vedanta Kalinga Lancers will take on the Ranchi Royals in Qualifier 1 at the iconic Kalinga Hockey Stadium on January 23. In this all-important playoff fixture, scheduled at 1700hrs IST, the top two teams from the league stage will go head-to-head for a direct spot in the tournament final. The home side, Vedanta Kalinga Lancers, finished atop the points table with 16 points after the league stage, while Ranchi Royals secured the second spot with 12 points, earning them the right to compete in this marquee matchup, as per a press release from Hockey India.

Vedanta Kalinga Lancers have enjoyed a consistent and formidable run through the league phase, losing only once -- a surprising 2-1 defeat to Soorma Hockey Club in their final league encounter, a game that had no bearing on their Qualifier status. Across seven league matches, the Lancers notched four wins in regulation time and two shootout wins, accumulating vital bonus points along the way. Their defence has been impressive, conceding just 8 goals, the fewest in the tournament. Following the win over Vedanta Kalinga Lancers in the Men’s Hockey India League (HIL), the Soorma Hockey Club skipper Harmanpreet Singh said that the team approached the match with a “nothing to lose” mindset and termed the win as a “very important” one as they continue to fight for a spot in semifinals. With this win, Soorma Hockey Club is at sixth spot, with two wins, one win via penalty shootout and three losses, giving them eight points. Another victory could give them a shot at final four stage of the competition. Arthur Van Doren, captain of Vedanta Kalinga Lancers, said after the loss, his team struggled to play.

Spain to host 2030 final

Madrid: Spain will host the final of the 2030 World Cup the president of the Spanish soccer federation said Monday. FIFA has not yet said where it plans to stage the decisive match of a tournament that will be co-hosted by Spain, Portugal and Morocco. But Rafael Louzán told reporters at a media event that the title match will be in Spain, although he did not specify in which city or venue it would be played. Spain will lead the World Cup and the final will be held here,” Louzán said Monday, without elaborating. Real Madrid’s recently renovated Santiago Bernabeu Stadium has been long touted by Spanish media as the venue for the final, but recently there had been reports that Morocco could end up hosting the match. Morocco was hoping to host the final at the in 2028. Spain has officially been confirmed by the Spanish.

Sabalenka defeats young Jovic, Zverev overcomes Tien to secure Australian Open semifinal berths Sabalenka chases third Australian Open crown triumph



Melbourne: Aryna Sabalenka beat 18-year-old Iva Jovic 6-3, 6-0 to reach the semifinals of the Australian Open on Tuesday before searing heat on Day 10 forced matches to be played under cover. Alexander Zverev got the benefit of playing under a roof at Rod Laver Arena and advanced to the final four with a 6-3, 6-7 (5), 6-1, 7-6 (3) win over 20-year-old Learner Tien. The No. 3-ranked Zverev, last year’s runner-up in Australia, reached his 10th Grand Slam semifinal on the back of 24 aces and just a single double-fault — which he served when he had six match points in the deciding tiebreaker. Top-ranked Sabalenka, also a runner-up in Melbourne last year, is aiming for her third Australian Open title in four years. She

won back-to-back titles here in 2023 and 2024 and lost the final ago to Madison Keys.

The first of the four quarterfinals scheduled on Day 10 was played outdoors, despite predictions of the temperature peaking at 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit) in Melbourne. I guess, yeah, as a woman, we are stronger than the guys,” Sabalenka said her later news conference, laughing. “So they had to close the roof for the guys so they don’t suffer!” Sabalenka went up 3-0 in the first set and established her dominance early against the 29th-seeded Jovic, who was playing in the quarterfinals for the first time. Jovic had three breakpoint chances in the ninth game, which lasted 10 minutes, but wasn’t able to convert against the world’s No. 1-ranked woman. In the last game, Sabalenka served an ace on break point and clinched it with another ace on match point. She saved all five break points she faced. It gave her back-to-back wins over up-and-coming teenagers following her fourth-round victory over 19-year-old Canadian Vicky Mboko. These teenagers have tested me in the last couple of

rounds -- incredible player,” Sabalenka said of Jovic in an on-court interview. It was a tough match,” Sabalenka added. “Don’t look at the score. She played incredible tennis and she pushed me to a one-step better level. It was a battle.” Jovic was born in California and is the daughter of parents who immigrated to the United States. Her father is Serbian and Jovic, naturally, has sought some tips from no other than Novak Djokovic. The temperature topped 42 Celsius (108 F) at 5 p.m. local time, but was expected to cool in the evening. Play was suspended on outside courts all afternoon. In the first of the night matches at Rod Laver Arena, No. 3 Coco Gauff was scheduled to meet Elina Svitolina. Sabalenka will play the winner of that match in the semifinals. Top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz faced Alex de Minaur in the night cap. Musetti will face Djokovic without his coach and physio who have had to leave Melbourne for family reasons. He is also pining for his young children, with the second one arriving in late November. “I send a kiss to my partner Veronica and my two little kids that, of course said.

Mother’s advice helps Sohan Tarkar overcome depression, return skating

Leh: Often getting up after biting the dust is the most difficult thing in life, and Sohan Tarkar should be proud of himself for having pulled it off. The Maharashtra short-track ice skater had significant successes to speak of before depression pulled him down almost six years ago. Tarkar started ice skating in 2010 and reached the 1500m semifinals of the Asian Winter Games in Sapporo, Japan, in 2017. He has also qualified multiple times for the Junior World Championships. Twice, he has qualified for the Senior World Cups (Germany and Italy being the venues), but, unfortunately, on both occasions, he couldn’t obtain the Schengen visa, according to a KIWG release.

Despondency and grief consumed him as a result. This was in the months before the COVID-19 outbreak. Then the pandemic made his situation worse. A



lack of physical activity led to his gaining 20kg, which, mind you, could be very counter-productive in the sport. From having a ripped physique, Tarkar turned into a totally out-of-shape, unrecognisable person. A lack of motivation to boot made him sort of depressed. Things were so bad that in his mind, he had made up the decision not ice skate ever again. Tarkar’s mother, Sonali, came to his rescue and, after much effort, persuaded him to give it another shot.

The motherly words worked and he decided to change his life at last towards the end of 2023. “I was really going down. I used to practise six hours every day to keep in shape. Pre-COVID, I weighed 58 kg, and just like that, I got up to 78kg. I had totally shut myself off in addition,” he status. “But hopefully the rhythm that I have right now with the great matchup today will bring me luck for the next one. I feel ready to try to push him to his maximum.