

Bihar Completes 95% of Jal Jeevan Hariyali Projects, Increasing Irrigation on More Than 2.5 Lakh Hectares

● **Minor Water Resources Department minister Santosh Kumar Suman claims over 2.5 lakh hectares of irrigation capacity restored under flagship water conservation programme**

Patna, June 18: The Bihar government has completed 2,371 of the 2,537 irrigation and water conservation projects approved under the Jal Jeevan Hariyali campaign since its launch in 2019, according to the state's Minor Water Resources Department. Addressing a press conference in Patna on Wednesday, the department's minister, Santosh Kumar Suman, said the completed works account for nearly 95% of the total sanctioned projects. The projects, implemented up to the financial year 2025–26, have restored irrigation capacity across nearly 2.52 lakh hectares and created water storage capacity of around 1,094 lakh cubic metres, the min-

ister said. The state government has extended the Jal Jeevan Hariyali campaign for another five years, from 2025 to 2030, citing its impact on irrigation and groundwater recharge. For the financial year 2026–27, the department has proposed 154 additional projects with an estimated cost of Rs. 206.39 crore. These proposals have been sent to the finance department for onward approval from NABARD. Officials said the new projects could add irrigation capacity across 16,585 hectares. Under the separate "Har Khet Tak Sinchai Ka Pani" programme, the department said 1,837 of 2,256 approved schemes had been completed by the



end of 2025–26.

These projects have helped restore irrigation capacity over 2.27 lakh

hectares, according to the department. The minister said 35,000 farmers had received subsidies under

the Mukhyamantri Niji Nalkoop Yojana to install private tube wells. The subsidy amount was

transferred directly to beneficiaries through direct benefit transfer (DBT), he said.

The department estimates that these installations are currently supporting irrigation over nearly 1.75 lakh hectares. Suman said the state government had announced the construction of four check dams and two ahar-pyne structures in Bhagalpur, Aurangabad, Gaya and Nalanda during the chief minister's recent district visits. The combined estimated cost of these projects is Rs. 87.06 crore, and officials said the work is under way. Once completed, the schemes are expected to create irrigation capacity over 3,730 hectares. The minister said the department was prioritising irrigation expansion in drought-prone parts of

south Bihar, where water scarcity remains a recurring issue. He added that efforts were also under way to remove encroachments from traditional ahar-pyne irrigation channels and revive non-functional government tube wells. At present, 5,558 government tube wells are operational in the state, according to the department. Separately, under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana, Bihar has submitted 105 project proposals worth Rs 274.83 crore to the Central Water Commission in Patna for approval. If cleared, these projects are expected to create irrigation capacity over 21,490 hectares.

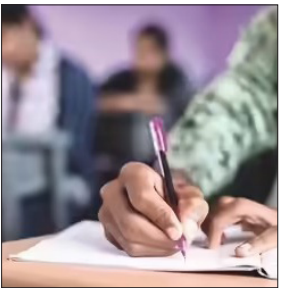
One more held in Gaya's Gurua jewellery loot case

Gaya, June 18: Police arrested one more person in connection with the May 27 loot of jewellery and cash from a bullion trader at Gurua bazaar in Gaya. Two other accused in the case had been arrested earlier after a police encounter on Monday midnight. The arrested man was identified as Rudal Kumar, a resident of Kajichak village under Sandesh police station area in Bhojpur district. Police also recovered some stolen jewellery from his possession.

According to police, Rudal is a close relative of one of the earlier arrested suspects, Shrawan Kumar. On Monday midnight, police had shot Shrawan Kumar and Sujeet Chaudhary in their legs after they allegedly opened fire at the police team while trying to escape.

The robbery occurred when five motorcycle-borne criminals looted around Rs 5 lakh in cash and jewellery worth about Rs 40 lakh from Prabhakar Baranwal, who runs a jewellery shop in Gurua bazaar. Baranwal was shot in the right thigh when he tried to resist. He was returning home after closing his shop at the time of the incident.

Senior superintendent of police Sushil Kumar said police have so far recovered 277.543 grams of gold, valued at around Rs 40 lakh.



Lalu Yadav and Rabri Devi Security Row: Bihar Police Breaks Silence, Saying Cover Is Still in Place

Patna, June 18: Bihar Police has said that RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav and former chief minister Rabri Devi continue to receive security cover, hours after reports and political claims suggested their protection had been withdrawn. In a statement posted on its official X account, the police headquarters said both leaders have been provided with bodyguards, escort personnel and residential security, and that their protection arrangements remain in place.

The clarification follows controversy over the recent reduction in their Z-plus security category. Police officials said the securi-



ty cover of the two senior leaders had not been removed, but revised as part of a routine review process.

According to the statement, the changes were made in line with updated

security assessments and standard protocols.

The department said the existing arrangements were appropriate to the current threat perception. Under the revised setup, Lalu

Prasad and Rabri Devi have been provided with a bulletproof vehicle, pilot car and personnel from the Bihar Special Armed Police (BSAP).

Police also said a ballistic-resistant vehicle had been made available under provisions related to VIP security protocols.

In addition, plainclothes personnel from the Special Branch have been deployed based on situational requirements. The clarification came after RJD leaders and supporters raised concerns over the reduction in security.

Party workers had gathered outside Lalu Prasad's residence at 10 Circular Road in Patna and have

remained present there following the reported changes in official deployment.

Earlier on Wednesday, Lalu Prasad had acknowledged that his security cover had been reduced. The Bihar government had earlier scaled down the Z-plus security cover of both leaders in early June 2026.

The latest clarification from police indicates that while the category of security may have changed, the leadership continues to be provided with official protection.

Police headquarters said security arrangements would continue to be reviewed periodically in accordance with established guidelines.

Bhojpur Encounter Death Triggers Protests

Police and SHO Staff Suspended Due to Growing Concerns

Ara, June 18: Tension remained high in Bihar's Bhojpur district on Thursday after the death of a young man injured in a police encounter triggered protests, allegations of police misconduct and disciplinary action against officers involved in the operation. Following a review of the incident, Bhojpur Superintendent of Police Raj suspended a Sub-Inspector, an Assistant Sub-Inspector and several constables who were on duty during the encounter.

In a separate action, Shahabad Range DIG Dr Satyaprakash suspended Shahpur Station House Officer (SHO) Rajesh Kumar Malakar with immediate effect, citing negligence and serious lapses in duty. Officials said the decision was taken on the recommendation of the Bhojpur SP. The deceased, Bharat Bhushan Tiwari, died while undergoing treatment at Patna Medical College and Hospital (PMCH) after being injured in the encounter.

His father, Kashinath Tiwari, alleged that he had informed police

that his son was suffering from mental health issues and had sought their help before the incident. "I had gone to the police station and informed them that my son was mentally unstable and requested that he be brought under control. Nobody listened to me," he said.

Kashinath Tiwari further alleged that police initially informed the family that Bharat had been shot in the leg and was alive. "He had done nothing wrong. He was mentally unstable. Such a large police force could not capture him alive," he said.

The deceased's mother, Asha Devi, also accused police of using excessive force and claimed her son was shot after surrendering. "My son had a clean record. He only had a quick temper," she said. The death sparked widespread anger in Bilauti village, where residents and family members staged protests by placing the body on the road and blocking the Ara-Buxar four-lane highway.

The blockade disrupted traffic and

drew a large crowd of protesters demanding an impartial investigation into the incident. Police later resorted to a lathi-charge to disperse demonstrators and restore movement on the highway. The action further intensified tensions in the area, according to local residents.

Administrative and police officials remained deployed at the site in an effort to calm the situation. The encounter has attracted public attention after questions were raised about the circumstances leading to



the shooting. According to police, officers had gone to investigate after a video allegedly showing Bharat Bhushan Tiwari brandishing a weapon went viral on social media.

Police said a team led by the Shahpur SHO visited his residence in connection with the video.

During the operation, Bharat allegedly pointed a pistol at police personnel and later opened fire, prompting officers to retaliate. He sustained injuries during the exchange and was subsequently taken for medical treatment. However, family members and villagers have disputed aspects of the police account, alleging that Bharat had surrendered before he was shot.

The incident has intensified calls for an independent inquiry into the encounter, with local residents demanding accountability and transparency regarding the circumstances surrounding the young man's death. Officials have indicated that further departmental and legal proceedings are underway.

The government loosens restrictions on land sales in planned township areas

Patna, June 18: The state cabinet chaired by CM Samrat Choudhary on Wednesday approved the proposal to purchase land for the proposed 11 greenfield satellite townships and to lease or sell the acquired land to investors for investment projects approved by the State Investment Promotion Board.

The sale and purchase of land in the proposed satellite township areas are currently banned.

The state govt has now relaxed the restrictions on the sale, purchase, and transfer of land designated for the proposed townships. Landowners can now sell their land to the govt in cases of family crises, major expenses such as weddings, or other special circumstances.

The cabinet has authorised relevant administrative officials to acquire the land from the owners.

A total of 29 agenda items were approved during the state cabinet meeting. The Bihar Outstanding Sportspersons Direct Recruitment Rules will be amended to provide higher-grade jobs to athletes who excelled at national and international events.

The cabinet approved the proposal to provide either 50% of the travel expenses or Rs20,000 per pilgrim upon completion of the 'Sindhu Darshan' pilgrimage in Ladakh under the 'Sindhu Darshan Pilgrimage Financial Assistance Grant Scheme-2026'.

Among the other major cabinet decisions were setting up a CISF centre at Dobhi in Gaya district, introducing state govt's chartered helicopters for the CM Bihar Helicopter Service and Air Tourism Scheme for fast and convenient travel among various tourist destinations like



Rajgir, Valmikinagar and Maa Mundeshwari temple in the state, developing the 'Budha Samyak Darshan Museum-cum-Memorial Stupa' into an international tourist destination, creation of OSD post at the Patna high court and grant for the Bihar Higher Judicial Service (Amendment) Rules, 2026.

Land will be acquired across Chand and Chainpur blocks of Kaimur district for the Varanasi-Ranchi-Kolkata Expressway proposed by the central govt. A sum of Rs230 crore has been sanctioned for this purpose.

A study will be conducted on the sand availability in five rivers: Sone, Kiul, Falgu, Morhar, and Chanan. A sum of Rs2.32 crore has been sanctioned for this and the services of the Central Mine Planning and Design Institute will be engaged for this purpose. An Intelligent Traffic Management System (ITMS) will be established under the PPP mode to manage traffic and reduce road accidents. A budget of Rs622 crore has been approved to install it at 500 locations across the state.

The cabinet also extended the contractual appointment of Rajiv Kumar, director, Bihar legislative assembly secretariat for a period of one year following the end of his current tenure on June 30.

Bihar Inducts 106 Chief Minister's Fellows To Support Governance And 'Viksit Bihar 2047' Vision

Patna, June 18: The Bihar government on Thursday formally launched the next phase of its Chief Minister's Fellowship Programme, with 106 selected fellows attending an orientation programme in Patna before beginning assignments across various levels of the state administration. The orientation was organised by the Bihar Prashasnik Sudhar Mission Society (BPSMS), under the General Administration Department, at the

Convention Hall of the Old Secretariat. The programme was attended by Development Commissioner Mihir Kumar Singh, Additional Chief Secretary of the General Administration Department and Mission Director of BPSMS, Dr B Rajender, along with officials from the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bodh Gaya and BPSMS. Addressing the fellows, Dr Rajender said the programme had been

designed to contribute to the state's long-term vision of "Viksit Bihar 2047".

He described the fellowship as distinct from conventional recruitment programmes, emphasising that participants would play a direct role in governance and development initiatives while simultaneously learning from the administrative system. "The contribution of young CM Fellows will be crucial in realising the vision of Bihar in 2047," he said.

According to officials, Bihar is among the first states in the country to institutionalise such a large-scale fellowship programme within the government system. Development Commissioner Mihir Kumar Singh urged fellows to engage closely with field realities and use evidence-based approaches to public policy. He highlighted the state's ongoing Sahyog Shivar initiative as an example of governance innovation aimed at

strengthening last-mile service delivery. "Data-driven changes are most visible on the ground," Singh said, encouraging fellows posted in districts to study public service delivery mechanisms and governance outcomes firsthand. He also advised participants to regularly consult the Economic Survey of India and the Bihar Economic Survey as part of their learning and policy engagement. The Chief Minister's Fellowship Scheme

was approved by the Bihar cabinet in September 2025 under the state's Good Governance Programme.

The initiative was developed in collaboration with IIM Bodh Gaya and seeks to strengthen governance systems by bringing talented young professionals into closer contact with policymakers, senior administrators and implementation agencies. The government says the programme is intended to improve policy

implementation, encourage innovation and foster collaboration within the administrative framework. While the scheme initially envisaged the selection of 121 fellows, 106 candidates successfully cleared the recruitment process. The fellows have been assigned to different tiers of government administration for a period of two years. During the orientation programme, fellows were briefed on the objectives of the scheme,

their expected roles and responsibilities, and the ways in which they can contribute to strengthening governance and public service delivery.

Officials said the programme is expected to serve as a bridge between professional expertise and public administration, helping Bihar develop innovative solutions to governance challenges while creating a new generation of policy professionals with hands-on experience in government.

Two Maharashtra men are nabbed at Agartala Airport carrying Rs 1.68 crore in cash



Agartala, Jun 18: On Wednesday, June 17, the Special Branch of Tripura Police apprehended two individuals from Maharashtra at the Maharaja Bir Bikram (MBB) Airport in Agartala after officers discovered undeclared cash worth Rs 1.68 crore in their hands. Police identified the detainees as Dattatry Thakram Virk-

ar (36) and Sajal Sachin Devkar (21), both from Maharashtra. According to a senior police official, the cash, amounting to Rs 1,68,27,000, was recovered during a search operation at the airport. Following the seizure, the two men and the recovered money were handed over to officials of the Income Tax Department and Customs

Department for further investigation. Preliminary investigations revealed that the duo had allegedly been making frequent trips between Maharashtra and Agartala since June 4. Investigators suspect that they were involved in transporting cash-filled baggage between the two locations. According to officials, the men would arrive in Agartala carrying bags containing cash, deliver them at designated locations within the city and return to Maharashtra by flight within a few hours. Investigators also found that the carriers allegedly did not possess the passwords required to open the baggage they transported. The passwords were reportedly shared directly between individuals at the origin and destination points, raising suspicions of an organised network involved in cash movement.

Further, the suspects were allegedly provided with new mobile handsets for each trip, a practice investigators believe may have been intended to avoid detection and maintain secrecy. Authorities are now probing the source of the cash, its intended recipients and the possible involvement of a larger network engaged in illegal cash transportation.

Meritorious tribal girl students are honored under the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme in Arunachal's Tirap



Itanagar, Jun 17: Meritorious tribal female students from Tirap district were honored under the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) initiative at a ceremony held on June 17 at the DC Conference Hall in Khonsa. Techu Aran, Deputy Commissioner of Tirap, addressed the gathering and commended females' achievements in numerous sectors, emphasizing the necessity of providing equal chances to daughters. "Girls today are excelling in every sphere of life. Whether

in academics, competitive examinations or leadership roles, they are proving their capabilities and often outperforming boys. Parents who have daughters are truly fortunate. We must give our girls every opportunity to learn, grow and achieve their dreams," he said. Congratulating the awardees, Aran commended their hard work and dedication and encouraged them to continue striving for greater success. He also urged parents to treat boys and girls equally and continue

investing in the education of their daughters, emphasizing that an educated girl contributes significantly to the progress of her family and society. The felicitation programme was organised by the Department of Women and Child Development (WCD), Tirap, to recognise outstanding performances by local tribal girl students in the Class X and Class XII board examinations. Among those present were Hacham Bangsia, Deputy Director of Women and Child Development; K. Hangphuk, DAEO and in-charge DDSE Khonsa; Pakkar Nomuk, CDPO Namsang; Ponung Tasing, DIPRO Khonsa; along with students, parents and guardians. In her welcome address, Hacham Bangsia highlighted the objectives of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme, stating that it aims to ensure the survival, protection and education of the girl child while creating an environment where

girls can achieve their full potential. She said the felicitation programme was a meaningful initiative to encourage young girls to dream big and pursue their goals with confidence.

Congratulating the students, she urged them to remain focused on their academic and personal aspirations. Awards were presented under two categories—Government Schools and Government-Aided/Private Recognized Schools. Under the scheme, first position holders in both Class X and Class XII examinations received cash awards of ₹15,000 each, while second position holders were awarded ₹10,000 each. The programme concluded with the distribution of awards and words of encouragement from the dignitaries, reinforcing the message that empowering girls through education is essential for building a stronger and more progressive society.

Arunachal Pradesh's Deomali faces rain disaster as infrastructure is devastated

Itanagar, Jun 18: Heavy and continuous rains since Tuesday night (June 16) has caused significant disruption in Deomali, Tirap district, Arunachal Pradesh, with overflowing waters of the Chatjo River destroying roads, bridges, and other infrastructure in various locations. According to sources, the worst-affected neighborhoods include Batey Colony, NCI Colony, and KVK Colony, where inhabitants have been experiencing significant challenges owing to waterlogging and damage to connecting infrastructure. The rising water level of the Chatjo River allegedly precipitated the crisis, causing considerable disruptions to daily life. Several roads and bridges in and around the affected localities have sustained damage, disrupting the movement of people and vehicles. A private



school in the town has also reportedly suffered damage due to the heavy rainfall and flooding. Local residents have appealed to the Tirap district administration to take urgent remedial measures and provide assistance to affected families.

They have sought immediate restoration of damaged infrastructure and relief support for those impacted by the adverse weather conditions. The incident comes amid increasing reports of rain-related disruptions across parts of Arunachal Pradesh as

the monsoon intensifies in the region. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has already issued alerts for several parts of the Northeast, including Arunachal Pradesh, warning of heavy to very heavy rainfall in the coming days. Residents have been advised to remain cautious, particularly in low-lying and vulnerable areas prone to flooding, landslides and river erosion. Authorities are closely monitoring the situation as concerns grow over the possibility of further damage if the rains continue.

Assam takes up preparations for the annual Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya Temple, expecting tremendous footfall this year

Guwahati, Jun 18: The Assam government is making considerable preparations for the annual Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya Temple atop Nilachal Hills in Guwahati, which will begin on June 22. Authorities expect over 800,000 devotees and guests to attend one of the country's greatest yearly religious gatherings. The Ambubachi Mela is an important yearly Hindu religious event held at the famed Kamakhya Temple, commemorating Goddess Maa Kamakhya's symbolic monthly menstrual cycle. Every year, devotees, saints, and visitors go from all over India and overseas to attend the event. Addressing the media, Assam Tourism Minister Ajanta Neog said that three large camps have been established to accommodate devotees and visitors during the mela period. She stated that road carpeting and resurfacing works are being undertaken to improve connectivity and facilitate smooth movement in and around the temple area. The minister further informed that a public announcement system has been arranged to support crowd management and ensure timely dissemination of information. Cleanliness and sanitation have been identified as priority areas, with dedicated measures being implemented across the temple premises and adjoining locations. Special arrangements have also been made for senior citizens and persons with disabilities to ensure accessibility and convenience during the pilgrimage. To maintain public health standards during the event,



Food Inspectors have been deployed to monitor food quality and safety across the mela grounds. Highlighting the state's tourism growth, Neog said Assam has received approximately 8.5 million domestic tourists and around 42,000 foreign tourists so far. Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic), Guwahati, Jayanta Sarathi Borah, announced a comprehensive traffic management plan for the festival. According to the plan,

no vehicles other than emergency services will be allowed beyond Nursery Point. Vehicles carrying food supplies will be permitted movement only during the designated hours between 11:00 PM and 5:00 AM. Authorities expressed confidence that coordinated efforts across departments will ensure the smooth conduct of the annual religious gathering while maintaining safety, accessibility and public convenience.

Nagaland students' body organizes 'Black Friday' protest against delay in girls' dormitory project

Kohima, Jun 18: The All Nagaland College Students' Union (ANCSU) has scheduled a countrywide "Black Friday" demonstration on June 19 to demand the prompt building of a 100-bed girls' hostel at Kohima Science College (Autonomous), Jot-soma.

Under the protest event, ANCSU members would fly black flags at Nagaland institutions to voice their unhappiness with project delays. Addressing a press conference in Kohima on Wednesday, June 17, ANCSU Assistant General Secretary Imnawabang Longkumer said the union's 20-day ultimatum to the government regarding the hostel project had expired.

Longkumer said the union had received assurance from the concerned department that funds allocated for the hostel would not lapse and



would be used exclusively for the construction of the facility. He described this as a significant achievement for the student community. However, he said the department had informed the union that while it was ready to proceed with the project, it required a written directive and approval

from the Office of the Chief Minister, who also holds the Finance portfolio. According to Longkumer, the department has sought an additional week to obtain the necessary approval. He expressed concern that the absence of a formal directive from the Chief Minister's Office was

delaying the project. "The department is ready, but the approval is yet to come. We demand transparency and a written resolution," he said. The student body warned that if the approval is not granted, it would launch a second phase of agitation involving a larger statewide movement. ANCSU General Secretary Sotilo Tep said the issue was not merely about constructing a hostel building but was linked to the future of students and the quality of education in the State. "When education is delayed, dreams are delayed. When girls are neglected, society is weakened," Tep said. The union reiterated its demand for transparency, accountability and protection of students' interests, stating that it would continue its campaign until the government fulfils its commitment to the student community.

Two rebel cadres were detained in separate Manipur operations



Imphal, Jun 17: On June 16, security forces apprehended two active cadres from various insurgent groups in separate operations in Manipur's Imphal East district, according to authorities. In the first operation, security authorities captured an active KCP (MFL) cadre named Heikrujam Hitler Meitei alias Rishi (18), a resident of Ningthoukhong Kha Leikai, Ward No. 6 in Bishnupur district. He was caught at the Kongba Laishram Leikai neighborhood of Imphal East district's Porompat Police Station. In another operation carried out on the same day, security forces arrested an active cadre of SOREPA, identified as Loukrakpam Ibungo Meitei alias John (42), a resident of Irom Meijrao Maning Leikai in Imphal West district. He was apprehended from Kongpal Irapnam Thongkhong under Porompat Police Station in Imphal East district. Officials said both arrests were made as part of ongoing security measures and counter-insurgency operations in the state. Further investigation and necessary legal procedures are underway.

Border barrier is required, but not at the expense of villagers Meghalaya Dy CM Prestone Tynsong

Shillong, Jun 18: Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong has assured residents of Lyngkhong and other affected border villages that the state government will take up their concerns with the Centre regarding the ongoing construction of border fencing along the India-Bangladesh border. The assurance comes amid growing concerns among villagers who have opposed the proposed alignment of the fence, claiming that its construction around 150 yards from the zero line could leave parts of their settlements and agricultural land outside the fenced area. Speaking on the issue, Tynsong clarified that the people of Meghalaya are not opposed to border fencing and fully recognize its importance for national security. "The people of the state are not at all against the fencing. Border fencing is a must and it is very necessary," he said. "The people of the state are not at all against the fencing. Border fencing is a must and it is very necessary," he said. However, the Deputy Chief Minister pointed out that the current alignment of the fence has created practical difficulties for some border communities. According to him, in villages such as Lyngkhong, a portion of the settlement could end up outside the fenced area. Similarly, agricultural land that villagers cultivate every year may also fall beyond the proposed fencing.



Tynsong said the state government has discussed the issue and plans to apprise the Government of India of the concerns raised by local residents. He suggested that, wherever feasible, authorities should consider shifting the fencing closer to the zero line so that inhabited areas and farmland remain within the fenced zone. "We would like to apprise this issue to the Government of India and, if possible, request that the fencing be taken further down towards the zero line so that the land being used for farming activities is not wasted," he said. Responding to a question on whether the matter would be formally taken up with the Centre, Tynsong confirmed that the state government would pursue the issue. Residents

of Lyngkhong and other affected villages have been expressing concerns that the present fencing plan could adversely impact their livelihoods by restricting access to farmland and creating difficulties for families whose homes may fall outside the security barrier.

The development highlights the challenges involved in balancing national security requirements with the interests and welfare of border communities that depend on agricultural land located close to the international boundary. The Meghalaya government is expected to engage with central authorities in the coming days to seek a solution that addresses both security concerns and the needs of local residents.

Three-Day GI Training in Namsai aims to expand markets for artisans in Arunachal and Assam

Itanagar, Jun 18: On Wednesday, a three-day capacity-building course on Geographical Indications (GI) and post-GI efforts kicked off in Namsai area to help local producers and craftspeople improve their lives and enhance market prospects. The programme, organized by the Bankers Institute of Rural Development (BIRD) in Kolkata in partnership with NABARD, will take place from June 17 to 19, with participation from NGOs, farmer producer organizations, and other stakeholders from Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. Nam-

sai MLA Chau Zingnu Namchoom inaugurated the programme in the presence of district planning officer Dr Keshab Sarmah, NABARD deputy general manager Vivek Anand, BIRD Kolkata faculty member and programme director Dr Bhawana Pal, and NABARD AGM Kamal Roy. Speakers highlighted the importance of GI registration, branding, quality standardisation, value addition and market linkages to enhance the income of producers and artisans. The programme will feature technical sessions on GI registration, post-GI



interventions, intellectual property rights and successful case studies from across the country.

Congress criticises PM Modi for Pakistan’s involvement in the US-Iran deal, calling it a “serious blow to foreign policy.”

New Delhi, June 18: As the US and Iran signed an interim peace deal to end months of conflict in West Asia, the document set off a political slugfest in India as senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh questioned the Modi government and its foreign policy.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that was signed by the US and Iran on Wednesday was pushed by India’s neighbour, Pakistan, which carefully positioned itself as the mediator in the peace negotiations between Tehran and Washington. The interim deal is widely being known as ‘Islamabad MoU’.

Reacting to this, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh pointed that Pakistan was once isolated globally by ex-prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh following the Mumbai terror at-

tack of 2008. Ramesh said that the Islamabad MOU reflects ‘Pakistan’s new regional status and global influence.’

“It is a serious blow to both the substance and style of Prime Minister Modi’s foreign policy. Pakistan has now become more deeply embedded in the geopolitical and security architecture of West Asia, which carries serious and significant implications for India,” Ramesh wrote on X.

He also said the MoU is a ‘serious setback’ for the US as major objectives of the war were not achieved at all. “The limitations of military power have once again been exposed. PM Modi’s consistent appeasement of President Trump—whose latest evidence is the MEA’s statement on last night’s Trump-Modi bilateral meeting—is shame-



ful and, in fact, truly anti-national,” he wrote. He said that while the interim deal it represents a major advancement, there are chances that it may become “Memorandum of Misunderstanding for both sides”. “For now, it can only be said that the next 60 days will be extremely crucial,” he wrote.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and his US counterpart Donald Trump

on Wednesday signed the interim peace deal remotely. The two sides are expected to meet for negotiations in Switzerland on June 19, though Iran has said that it is still discussing negotiators’ attendance at the ceremony. Iran also said that there will be no signing ceremony in Geneva.

The crucial agreement that ends months of war calls for Tehran to, at a minimum, dilute its stockpile of highly enriched uranium and would waive but not permanently end sanctions on the country, the Associated Press reported, citing US officials.

The agreement would also open the Strait of Hormuz toll-free for two months and affirm a commitment to Lebanon’s territorial integrity in the face of Israel’s invasion against the Hezbollah militant group.

After uncertainty over the number of rebels, six Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs miss a meeting

New Delhi, June 18: Six of the nine Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) or (UBT) Lok Sabha members skipped a meeting of the party’s parliamentary wing on Thursday, a day after they signed a letter to form a separate grouping ahead of a planned merger with the Shiv Sena. The move offered more clarity after confusion about the actual number of rebels, as they need a minimum of six to form a separate group to avoid disqualification under the anti-defection law. The meeting was to determine how many Lok Sabha members are with Shiv Sena (UBT) chief, Uddhav Thackeray, and whether he would avert a split.Arvind Sawant, the Shiv Sena (UBT) Lok Sabha leader, issued a whip on Wednesday, directing all nine members to attend the meeting in New Delhi at 11am the following day. He warned of action if the party’s members of Parliament (MPs) skipped the meeting. “Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray had instructed that if any MP defected, he should be trampled on in the street,” he said in a direct warning to the rebels.

Shiv Sena (UBT) Lok Sabha member Anil Desai said invitations

were sent to all party parliamentarians through WhatsApp, email, and other channels. “We also have acknowledged confirmings receipt of the invitation, and we are hopeful that all our parliamentarians will attend the meeting,” said Desai before the meeting. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Vinayak Raut said that they will take action against the MPs who have disobeyed the whip and skipped the meeting. The party is likely to issue show-cause notices to the six MPs.

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Shirsat said that things will be clear in an hour on the stand of the six Shiv Sena (UBT) MPSSheetal Mhatre, the Shiv Sena spokesperson, said instead of talking to the MPs, the Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut started abusing them. “They showed a lack of confidence in the six MPs and are threatening them. They are talking of beating the MPs. Is Sanjay Raut trying to damage the Sena (UBT) by doing all this? The Sena (UBT) should have established a dialogue with the MPs.” On Wednesday, the Maharashtra deputy chief minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena said that six rebel Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs, Sanjay Jad-

hav, Bhausaheb Wakchaure, Sanjay Deshmukh, Nagesh Patil Ashtikar, Sanjay Patil, and Omraje Nimbalkar, had signed a letter stating they had formed a separate group.

“We are told that they submitted a letter to the Lok Sabha speaker,” said Sena secretary Kiran Pawaskar. Another Shiv Sena leader said that party MP Shrikant Shinde and Maharashtra minister Pratap Sarnaik met the Speaker on Wednesday with the Sena (UBT) MPs. “The MPs have submitted a four-page letter to Birla, in which they have also said they have no faith in the party led by Uddhav Thackeray, adding that it has moved away from the principles of Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray.” Sanjay Patil indicated on Wednesday that he was not part of the rebel group, raising doubts about the total number of rebels. “I have clarified that I am not joining any other party. I am very much in Mumbai today [Wednesday] and will also attend the party’s meeting scheduled for Thursday in New Delhi,” he said. “I have neither received any offer nor been approached by any party or political leader.”

The statement came even as Patil’s residence in Mumbai was pro-

vided police protection amid the defection buzz. His daughter and Sena (UBT) corporator Rajool Patil said her father was in Mumbai and will attend the Shiv Sena (UBT) meeting. “I don’t know if he has signed the letter given to the speaker.” On Tuesday, six Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs, Eknath Shinde, Sena (UBT) leaders Sanjay Raut, Arvind Sawant, and Anil Desai, rushed to the national capital. Sanjay Patil and Omraje Nimbalkar denied travelling to the Capital.

Shinde camped in Delhi for 18 hours and consulted legal experts on aspects of possible Shiv Sena (UBT) split, before returning to Mumbai on Wednesday evening.

Sanjay Raut, who met Birla in the national capital along with Sawant and Desai, on Wednesday warned against any possible defections, saying those who wish to leave the party should resign and face the public again. “If such reports emerge about our MPs, then they should refute them. This time, the people of Maharashtra will not remain silent,” he said. Sawant said Sanjay Patil had called him to say he would attend the party’s meeting on Thursday.

Raut alleged that the rebels are being bought and each was offered ₹50 crore to leave the party. “₹15 crore was given as an advance. I was even told the MPs were not willing to sit in the chartered planes till they were given the advance,” said Raut. Another Sena minister in Maharashtra said the rebel MPs were negotiating what they would get in return, which slowed the defection process. “...Sanjay Jadhav was assured he would be made a minister of state in the Union government, but another MP is demanding a ministerial berth,” he added, requesting anonymity.

Maharashtra minister and BJP leader Chandrashekhar Bawankule said his party has nothing to do with the attempt to slit the Shiv Sena (UBT). This is the third such crisis in Maharashtra after splits in the Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party in 2022 and 2023. The developments come a week after 20 rebel Trinamool Congress (TMC) lawmakers proposed merging with the little-known Nationalist Citizens Party of India and backed the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, boosting the ruling coalition’s numbers in the Lok Sabha.

Father of Indian sailor killed in US attack appeals to PM Modi

New Delhi, June 18: The father of deceased Indian seafarer Aditya Sharma on Thursday appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Centre to ensure the safety of Indian sailors working in international waters, following the Prime Minister’s remarks on maritime security during his meeting with US President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the G7 Summit. Rajesh Sharma, Aditya’s father, acknowledged the Prime Minister’s diplomatic constraints but expressed hope that the issue of seafarer safety would receive greater attention in the future.

“The Prime Minister might be bound due to his diplomatic responsibilities, and he could not raise his voice in the manner he should have. I still want to thank him, and I wish that our sailors and seafarers will be safe in the future after his statement... I want to appeal to the government to ensure the safety of our seafarers,” His remarks came after Modi raised concerns over the safety of maritime workers amid escalating tensions in the Gulf region during discussions with Trump. Addressing a session on “Forging New Partnerships and Rebuilding International Solidarity”, the Prime Minister highlighted the risks faced by civilian maritime workers operating in conflict zones. “Several Indian civilians have also lost their lives. The safety of seafarers, who connect nations through global maritime trade, is our responsibility,” Modi said.

Emphasising that civilian workers should not become victims of geopolitical conflicts, he called for safeguarding global shipping routes. “We must ensure that sea routes remain secure and that seafarers can carry out their work without fear,” he added, urging greater international cooperation to prevent such incidents.

Trump briefly acknowledged the tragedy during the interaction. “I heard about that. It’s a rough profession, and we work together on it,” Trump said. “This has been happening throughout time, but we work together. We love all those people. They are great people.” The remarks come against the backdrop of the deaths of three Indian seafarers, including Aditya Sharma, in a US military strike on the oil tanker MT Settebello in the Gulf of Oman earlier this month.

Aditya Sharma, a deck cadet on probation, was among the three Indian crew members killed when the vessel was struck on June 10 near the Strait of Hormuz. He was among 24 Indian crew members on board at the time of the attack. While 21 sailors were rescued by responding Omani forces, Aditya and two other Indian seafarers lost their lives.

The incident sparked diplomatic tensions, with the Ministry of External Affairs summoning US Charge d’Affaires Jason Meeks twice within a week to lodge a strong protest over the deaths of the Indian nationals. In a post on X, EAM Jaishankar said, “Spoke to US Secretary of State Marco Rubio this evening. I reiterated India’s strong protest at the attacks by the US Navy in the Gulf that killed three Indian mariners. Such lethal actions against commercial shipping are not justified.”



Govt schools on par with private schools in quality education: Telangana CM

Hyderabad, June 18: Telangana chief minister A Revanth Reddy on Wednesday said his government was making all out efforts to restore confidence in public education and to dispel misconceptions about the quality of education in government educational institutions. Addressing a gathering after inaugurating the Telangana Public School at Arutla in Ranga Reddy district, the chief minister said education remains the most powerful tool for transforming lives and reducing social inequalities.

“There are several misconceptions among parents regarding education in government schools. The Telangana Public School initiative has been launched to eliminate those doubts and demonstrate that government institutions can provide quality education on par with the best schools,” Revanth Reddy said.

He called for a change in public perception towards government schools, saying studying in a public institution should no longer be viewed as a matter of embarrassment.

“The notion that studying in a government school is something to be ashamed of must disappear. Many individuals who studied in government schools have gone on to become IAS and IPS officers, and even chief ministers,” he said.

He said education had the power to bring about fundamental changes in people’s lives and create equal opportunities for all sections of society. “Quality education should be accessible to every child irrespective of social or economic background,” he said.

The chief minister reiterated the government’s commitment to strengthening public education infrastructure and creating world-



class learning environments through Telangana Public Schools, which are being developed with modern facilities, digital classrooms, sports infrastructure and English-medium instruction.

He expressed confidence that the TPS model would help improve educational standards, attract more students to government schools and create future leaders, civil servants and professionals from diverse backgrounds.

Revanth Reddy said the state government would establish Telangana Public schools, one in every assembly constituency. “The Telangana’s future does not lie in glass embellished palaces or colourful walls. We firmly believe it lies within the classrooms,” he said. The chief minister also interacted with students, teachers and school management committee members during his visit. He toured digital classrooms, science laboratories, the library, dining hall and sports facilities and shared breakfast with students.

Reddy said the Telangana Public

School model had been designed with state-of-the-art infrastructure and international standards to offer education from nursery to intermediate level. Along with academics, equal emphasis would be placed on sports, cultural activities and personality development.

Students enrolled in TPS institutions will receive free transportation, breakfast, lunch and evening snacks, while instruction will be conducted entirely in English medium. The schools are equipped with digital classrooms, laboratories, libraries, modern teaching technologies and extensive sports infrastructure.

Highlighting the government’s broader educational vision, Reddy said initiatives such as Young India Integrated Residential Schools and Young India Skills University were aimed at ensuring quality education and skill development for youth. Reddy also stressed the importance of sports in schools and said the government had established the Young India Sports University with the objective of producing Olym-

pic medal winners. Sports training programmes have already been introduced in schools, he said, adding that Telangana was committed to creating world-class sporting talent.

Recalling the football event featuring legendary footballer Lionel Messi in Hyderabad, the chief minister said the government had succeeded in promoting sports despite criticism from political opponents.

The Telangana Public School initiative is being implemented on a pilot basis in four locations — Arutla and Manchala in Ranga Reddy district, and Vangur and Polkampalli in the erstwhile Mahabubnagar district. Based on the success of the pilot project, the government plans to establish 100 Telangana Public Schools across the state in a phased manner.

The Arutla campus features digital classrooms, spacious playgrounds, science laboratories, a library, gymnasium, dining facilities and dedicated infrastructure for sports including cricket, football, volleyball, kho-kho, kabaddi, tennis and carrom. Specialised coaches have also been appointed to train students.

To facilitate access, the government has deployed five school buses to transport students from Arutla and surrounding villages. Officials believe the initiative will encourage parents to shift their children from private schools to government institutions.

At present, the school has enrolled 1,814 students, including 150 in pre-primary classes, 600 in primary education, 800 in high school and 264 students in intermediate courses. The overwhelming response from parents has already made the institution one of the most sought-after government schools in the state.

12 final-yr BDS students booked for ragging in Osmania University



Hyderabad, June 18: Hyderabad police on Wednesday registered cases against 12 final-year Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) students of Government Dental College, the dental wing of Osmania Medical College (OMC) in Afzalgunj, for allegedly ragging first-year students at a hostel on the OMC campus, officials aware of the matter said on Wednesday. The accused students have also been suspended from the college for six months, they said.

The students are accommodated in the Osmania Medical College hostel, where the alleged incident took place. A senior police officer of the Sultan Bazar police station, requesting anonymity, said, “A case has been registered under

the Telangana Prohibition of Ragging Act, 1997 based on a complaint filed by Sanjeev Singh Yadav, principal of Government Dental College, Afzalgunj.”

“The accused students have been counselled and let off. An investigation is underway,” the officer added.

According to police, the incident came to light on Tuesday after first-year students staying at the boys’ hostel on the OMC campus complained to the college management about harassment by seniors.

“The students were allegedly made to bring food orders, alcohol and cigarettes from outside during odd hours and were also asked to fill water coolers. When the juniors did not oblige, they were made to

do sit-ups and wall-chairs and were prevented from attending classes,” the officer said, adding that the statements of the students had been recorded and further investigation is underway to ascertain the circumstances surrounding the incident. Meanwhile, the college management suspended the accused students for six months pending the police inquiry. “We received serious complaints of ragging, both physical and mental, from first-year BDS students. We immediately suspended the accused seniors for a period of six months, pending police enquiry. Ragging is a serious offence and there is no place for such activities in a prestigious institution like GDC,” principal Yadav said.

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Editorial

The Promise of Double Engine Governance

The case for “double engine government” — where the same party governs at the Centre and in a state — rests on the argument that political alignment removes a structural friction in Indian federalism. When Centre and state pull in the same direction, proponents argue, funds flow faster, project clearances clear bureaucratic logjams sooner, and flagship schemes reach beneficiaries without the delays that often accompany Centre-state tussles over implementation and credit. For a region like the Northeast, this argument carries particular weight. Infrastructure projects — highways, railway links, power

transmission — routinely require coordinated land acquisition, environmental clearances, and budgetary allocation across both levels of government. Advocates point to accelerated road connectivity in Assam and faster rollout of central schemes in states with aligned governments as evidence that political synchrony translates into administrative speed, easing investor apprehension and improving the state’s standing in ease-of-business rankings. The argument, in essence, is one of efficiency: less friction, faster delivery, greater accountability since voters cannot pit one government against another.

Cancer Treatments: New Hope for Patients Now and in the Future



It is improbable that we will ever announce complete triumph against cancer. From Nixon’s 1971 “war on cancer” to the 2016 Obama-Biden plan to combat and cure it “once and for all” to Sajid Javid’s 2022 initiative in the UK, governments have repeatedly promised it. However, framing it in this way obscures how true progress is made: not in spectacular victories, but in halting and

reversing the progression of this horrible sickness, often by simply giving individuals more time to live. Several such advances, as well as a larger one that might alter cancer therapy for various types over the next decade, were announced during last week’s American Society of Clinical Oncology meeting in Chicago. According to the Guardian, a new shot is effective against some

head and neck malignancies, while a novel immunotherapy may spare bladder cancer patients from invasive and life-changing surgery. Most importantly, a new medicine called daraxonrasib has doubled pancreatic cancer patients’ survival times in a recent clinical trial. This should be praised on its own merit. Pancreatic cancer has few effective therapies and is

very lethal. In the United Kingdom, only approximately one in every twenty patients survives five years following their diagnosis. It is easy to become discouraged in the face of such a bleak prognosis. In this research, doubling survival meant that participants survived an average of 13 months rather than six. However, we must not lose sight of the reality that those months are valuable to patients and their families. And, in the long run, new medicines can build on this progress. With HIV, the combination of numerous medications with very little effects gradually managed to make the infection a manageable illness in the developed world, rather than a death sentence. Daraxonrasib may also fundamentally transform the treatment of other cancers. We are often told that cancer is technically not one disease, but many diseases that behave the same way. This is true, but there are commonalities across types. Daraxonrasib targets a family of molecules known as Ras, which are often misregulated or mutated in cancer cells. Since the 1980s, Ras have been deemed “undruggable” — now, through some impressive medical chemistry, that is no longer the case. Trials are under way to test daraxonrasib

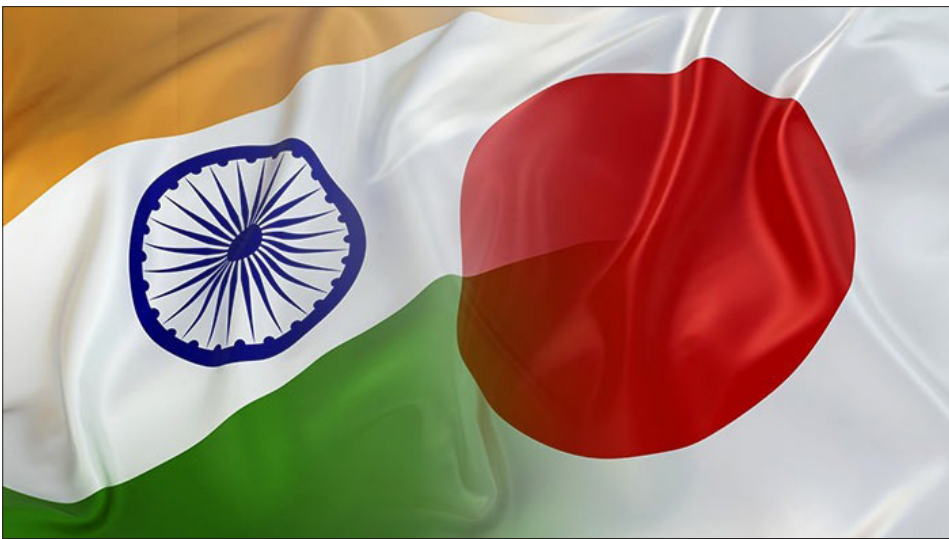
in other cases where Ras play a role, for instance in about 40% of colorectal cancers and 30% of small-cell lung cancers. This offers two lessons. The first is how often the scientifically impossible can be overcome, but only after generations of seemingly minor advances. This makes the success or failure of research programmes hard to evaluate in their own time. The second is how routine genetic screening has transformed cancer medicine over the past decade. Even in cancers where only a small proportion of patients will have problems with Ras, we can now easily identify those people who would benefit from treatment — potentially expanding the use of each new drug. Survival rates have doubled in the UK since the 1970s, similar to many other rich countries, and the head of Cancer Research UK, Michelle Mitchell, says that we are in a “golden age for cancer research”. She is right. Our various wars on cancer have not produced a magic bullet, but each year brings new detection methods, drugs and treatments. This is what real progress looks like: not a grand victory but small advances winning more remissions, more time and more life for patients.

Japan’s Northeast engagement: Can Assam convert promise into progress

For a long time, the Northeast has been touted as an area with limitless potential. The region has long had the elements for growth, thanks to its abundant natural resources, cultural richness, and youthful population. However, the problem has been to translate this potential into apparent economic success. Japan’s growing interest in Assam and the Northeast provides an opportunity to reduce that gap. Japan has identified numerous areas in the region where collaboration and investment might be enhanced. The proposed areas of engagement range from semiconductor manufacturing and logistics to skill development, agriculture, and tourism, indicating a relationship that might shape Assam’s economic trajectory in the future years. One of the most significant breakthroughs has been the growth of the semiconductor sector in Assam. The Tata Semiconductor project at Jagiroad has raised national awareness of the state’s rising significance in the technology industry. In an increasingly digital world, semiconductors have become essential components of nearly every modern system, including communication networks, automobiles, electronic devices, and advanced machinery. Japan’s expertise in electronics, precision engineering and advanced manufacturing can be valuable in building this ecosystem. Japanese participation in areas related to the logistics and handling of sensitive electronic products can introduce new standards of

efficiency and technology in Assam. The impact of such industrial growth can go beyond direct employment. A semiconductor ecosystem can encourage the development of supporting industries, technical services and specialised training facilities. For Assam’s young generation, the semiconductor ecosystem could create opportunities in fields that demand higher skills and offer global exposure. However, investment alone cannot guarantee transformation. The success of any new industry depends on the availability of skilled human resources. Japan is facing a workforce shortage due to demographic changes and an ageing population. As a result, the demand for trained workers from nations such as India has risen. The Northeast, with its large number of young people, can become an important contributor to this requirement. There is growing demand in Japan for skilled workers in sectors such as healthcare, hospitality, agriculture and information technology. But global employment requires proper preparation. Young people need technical training, language skills and an understanding of professional standards. Japanese companies are taking initiatives to establish skill development centres in Assam, which can significantly contribute to this effort. Such programmes can prepare local youth for international opportunities while also improving employability within India. Agriculture is another sector where cooperation can bring meaningful changes. Assam has a strong

agricultural foundation and produces various crops, including tea, fruits and spices. However, farmers often face difficulties because of limited processing facilities, storage problems and market challenges. Japanese technology in agriculture and food processing can help improve productivity and reduce wastage. The focus should be on creating value-added products rather than depending solely on the sale of raw materials. This approach can strengthen rural economies and provide better returns to farmers. Tourism is also an area with enormous possibilities. The Northeast’s natural beauty, wildlife and diverse traditions make it one of India’s most unique regions. However, its tourism potential remains largely untapped at the international level. Japan has a strong culture of appreciating nature, heritage and responsible tourism. With improved connectivity, better infrastructure and effective promotion, Assam can become an attractive destination for Japanese visitors. Tourism can contribute to the local economy while encouraging the preservation of cultural and environmental resources. Japan’s interest in the Northeast extends beyond economics. The region’s location provides it strategic importance in India’s engagement with Southeast Asia. Better connectivity, stronger industries and international partnerships can help Assam emerge as a key link between India and its eastern neighbours. At the same time, development must be planned



carefully. The Northeast’s environment is fragile, and its biodiversity is one of its greatest strengths. Industrial expansion must respect ecological concerns and ensure that local communities become active participants in the process. For Assam, this moment represents more than an investment proposal. It is an opportunity to rethink the state’s role in the national economy. A region once considered distant from India’s major industrial centres can now become a place where technology, skills and traditional strengths come together. The real measure of success will not be the number

of projects announced but the number of lives improved. If Assam can effectively combine Japanese expertise with its human and natural resources, the partnership can become a foundation for long-term growth. For decades, the Northeast has awaited recognition of its true potential. Japan’s growing engagement may provide the momentum needed to turn that potential into achievement — making Assam not just a land of opportunities but a land where opportunities are finally realised.

perspective on Britain and the EU Ed Davey is correct a changing reality changes the argument



Membership in the European single market was at stake when the UK voted on Brexit, but it was not the most important issue in the campaign. The Brexit campaign falsely promised a free separation from Britain’s main trading partner. As immigration became the dominant issue in the campaign, the obligation to enable free movement of people as a prerequisite

of smooth integration with European markets eroded the most persuasive argument for remaining. Reluctance to argue for a liberal migration policy put a stop to attempts to renegotiate the

Brexit deal, even when warnings about the cost of rupture were proven correct. After a decade of neglected growth, the mood is finally shifting. Sir Ed Davey called for Britain to enter the single market in a speech commemorating the referendum anniversary on Wednesday. The Liberal Democrat leader views Brexit as a failed experiment. He notes that the world has changed since 2016. These are self-evident truths, and public opinion has altered correspondingly. Opinion surveys consistently suggest that a majority of people would vote to reverse the referendum results. The idea that Britain needed liberation from Brussels to enjoy competitive advantages was misguided already at a time when the US was a reliable ally, upholding a rules-based global economic order. It looks catastrophically mistaken with Donald Trump in the White House, using tariffs as a weapon of economic coercion, and with Russia waging a brutal war on Europe’s eastern frontier,

while supporting acts of sabotage to destabilise democratic politics in countries that support Ukraine. Although the Lib Dem position is supported by strategic and economic logic, those factors do not easily rival the forces of domestic politics that mobilise anti-immigration sentiment to shut down discussion of Britain’s need to reconnect with the European project. That resistance can be challenged. It can be argued that Brexit failed to deliver the control that the leavers promised; that Eurosceptic diplomatic vandalism made the task of border management harder. It could also be noted that freedom of movement was a reciprocal benefit, not a one-way street — an opportunity denied to the generation that lives with the consequences of a ballot in which they were too young to participate. That perspective deserved greater salience in the debate 10 years ago. Whether it would have swayed public opinion then, or can move the dial now, is unknown. Anxiety around appearing

to support “open-door” immigration is not unfounded. It explains why Sir Keir Starmer ruled out single-market membership in his 2024 manifesto, why that red line still limits the ambition of Labour’s “reset” in EU relations and why it has taken the Lib Dems two years to get from their own caution on these matters at the last general election to their current, more assertive stance. It is easier to set out a theory of better UK-EU relations from opposition than it is to negotiate a better deal in government. Lib Dem plans for Britain to rejoin the single market are not going to be enacted any time soon, but that doesn’t invalidate the call to reconsider. The obstacles are tremendous, particularly when it comes to shifting political narratives around migration. However, the past decade has taught us that arguments for European integration can only acquire traction if politicians have the confidence to present them in the first place.

RBI injects Rs 72,300 crore liquidity via VRR auctions

Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

New Delhi: Infused Rs 72,300 crore of transient liquidity into the banking system through two Variable Rate Repo (VRR) auctions after surplus liquidity in the system declined sharply following advance tax-related outflows.

The central bank injected Rs 50,016 crore through a two-day VRR auction at a cut-off rate of 5.26 per cent. It further infused Rs 22,284 crore through another two-day VRR auction conducted on the same day.

Variable Rate Repo auctions are one of the RBI's key liquidity management tools and are used to address temporary mismatches in liquidity conditions within the banking system.

The move comes as surplus liquidity in the banking system narrowed significantly. According to RBI data, liquidity surplus stood at around Rs 23,881.21 crore as of June 16, down sharply from approximately Rs 1.51 lakh crore recorded on June 15.

Market experts attributed the decline in liquidity largely to advance



tax payments, which typically lead to a temporary withdrawal of funds from the banking system. They believe the RBI may continue to conduct similar operations in the coming days as additional outflows are expected due to

Goods and Services Tax (GST) payments.

The liquidity infusion is expected to help ease short-term funding pressures and ensure smoother transmission of monetary policy.

Sensex gains 347 points, Nifty ends above 24,000 for straight session

Stock market extends rally;

New Delhi: Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended higher on Wednesday, taking their winning run to the fourth straight session, buoyed by softening crude oil prices following a peace deal between the US and Iran.The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 347.14 points, or 0.45 per cent, to settle at 77,155.62. During the day, it jumped 410.51 points, or 0.53 per cent, to 77,218.99. The 50-share NSE Nifty rallied 96.55 points, or 0.40 per cent, to end at 24,085.70. Intraday, the benchmark advanced 119.05 points, or 0.49 per cent, to 24,108.20.Among the 30 Sensex firms, Trent jumped the most, by 7.06 per cent. Bharat Electronics, Eternal, Tata Steel, Infosys, Titan and Bharti Airtel were also among the winners. Bajaj Finserv,



Axis Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, and Mahindra & Mahindra were among the laggards.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, traded at around USD 79.10 per barrel.“Continued weakness in crude oil prices, driven by easing geopolitical tensions around the Strait of Hormuz, has kept investor sentiment buoyant,” Vinod

Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Shanghai's SSE Composite index ended higher, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng index settled lower. Markets in Europe were trading on a mixed note.

US markets ended mostly lower on Tuesday.Foreign

Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 749.18 crore on Tuesday after a day's breather, according to exchange data.

On Tuesday, the Sensex jumped 544.15 points, or 0.71 per cent, to settle at 76,808.48. The Nifty climbed 135.25 points, or 0.57 per cent, to end at 23,989.15.

India's oil reserves cover of imports versus 200-plus

New Delhi: India's current strategic petroleum reserves are equivalent to just about 9-10 days of the country's net crude imports, far below other major import-dependent countries, a new report revealed on Wednesday.The report released by Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) said other countries that rely heavily on crude imports – such as Japan and South Korea – maintain reserves sufficient for over 200 days. The report, ‘How Secure is India's Energy Future? Assessing Accessibility, Reliability, and Affordability’, also noted that over 85 per cent of India's crude oil imports come from just six countries, including Russia and key West Asian suppliers, limiting flexibility supply shocksHemant Mallya, fellow at the CEEW, said, “Disruptions in crude oil, LNG, LPG, coal, or key shipping routes can quickly affect cooking costs, transport fuel prices, fertiliser subsidies, industrial competitiveness, and inflation.” For gas, India imports nearly half its supply as LNG but has no dedicated strategic gas storage facilities, leaving fertiliser plants and city gas networks exposed, the report said.It also highlighted that the country's coal security risks are in-

creasingly influenced by its continued dependence on imported coking coal - particularly from Australia -for steelmaking, and exposure to Indonesian export policies for non-coking coal imports.On the domestic side, declining coal quality and rising production costs signal a narrowing cost advantage for coal power over firm renewable power, said the report.

It argued that clean energy can reduce India's exposure to continuously imported fossil fuels.However, the report said that clean energy can create a different kind of strategic dependence: on critical minerals, technologies, and industrial inputs.This dependence must be managed through domestic manufacturing, supply-chain diversification, recycling, and strategic international partnerships, according to the report.Mallya said, “India's next phase of energy security must move beyond securing fossil fuels to a clear transition plan: optimising gas system utilisation, avoiding further refinery expansion, accelerating viable EV adoption, electrifying industry, reconfiguring refineries for lower gasoline demand, and building resilient green technology supply chains.”

The suspension of Telegram affects more than 150 million users in India

New Delhi: Telegram founder and CEO Pavel Durov has said that the temporary suspension of the messaging platform in India ahead of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test Undergraduate (NEET-UG) 2026 re-examination affected more than 150 million users. In a post on social media platform X, Durov said the Indian government's decision to suspend Telegram services for one week over concerns that some users had shared leaked examination questions impacted a significant portion of the platform's user base in the country. He added that Telegram had already removed hundreds of channels in recent weeks that were allegedly involved in sharing leaked exam materials and running related scams. Durov also said the company is working to make message edit labels more prominent to



prevent misuse of the editing feature for backdating scams and manipulating content timestamps.

The remarks came after the government ordered a temporary suspension of Telegram services

until June 22 as part of measures to prevent malpractice during the NEET-UG 2026 re-examination scheduled for June 21. The examination is being conducted again following allegations of question paper leaks during the original test held on May 3. The restriction was imposed on the recommendation of the National Testing Agency (NTA), which conducts the examination for undergraduate medical admissions. Authorities have also directed Telegram to disable its message-editing feature in India until June 30, citing concerns that it had been used to create misleading evidence of question paper leaks by editing messages after exam papers had already been circulated. In compliance with the directive, Google and Apple have removed Telegram from their respective app stores in India.

Sensex gains 272 points in early trade, Nifty crosses 24,000 oil price

New Delhi: Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty climbed in early trade on Wednesday following a decline in crude oil prices and a rally in IT firms.Extending its rally to the fourth day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex further climbed 271.61 points to 77,080.09 in opening trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty advanced 55.35 points to 24,044.50. From the 30-Sensex firms, Trent, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, HCL Tech and Eternal were among the biggest winners. Axis Bank, Bajaj Finance, NTPC and Adani Ports were among the laggards Brent crude, the global oil

benchmark, traded 0.49 per cent lower at USD 78.44 per barrel“Crude oil prices have fallen sharply to a nearly three-month low. Falling energy prices are expected to act as a tailwind for the Indian economy, helping contain inflation, wealth-tech firm, said.In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index quoted higher, while South Korea's Kospi, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index traded lower. In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index quoted higher, while South Korea's Kospi, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index traded lower.

Axis Bank digital shift cuts fraud by 70 per cent through in-app OTP security

New Delhi: Axis Bank on Wednesday said it has been able to cut internet banking fraud significantly using its mobile banking app after replacing SMS-based one-time passwords (OTPs) with a more secure in-app OTP authentication.

It has introduced a suite of security measures, including in-app OTPs, facial authentication and customer-controlled transaction safeguards, while embedding AI-driven risk monitoring systems to detect suspicious activity in real time. Axis Bank on Wednesday said it has been able to cut internet banking fraud significantly using its mobile banking app after replacing SMS-based one-time passwords (OTPs) with a more secure in-app OTP authentication.

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AI-driven risk monitoring systems to detect suspicious activity in real time.

“SMS OTP is probably the easiest to compromise because fraudsters can ob-

tain it through social engineering or malware-enabled message forwarding,” said Sameer Shetty, group head – digital business, transformation and strategic

programs, Axis Bank. To address this vulnerability, the bank has introduced in-app OTPs, where transaction authentication codes are delivered directly through its mobile banking application.The bank has also introduced facial authentication as a biometric verification layer and plans to offer multiple authentication options to offer greater security “The entire migration that we did from OTP over SMS to mobile OTP for customers who are active on our mobile banking app has led to a 70 per cent reduction in the incidence of internet banking fraud for us,” said Gaurav Gupta, group head – financial crime intelligence, Axis Bank

The lender has also rolled out customer-controlled security features, including the ability to block unauthorised digital closure of fixed deposits and restrict transactions during specified hours to mitigate fraud risks.

Rupee at six-week high as RBI steps and debt inflows lift market sentiment

New Delhi: The rupee rallied to the strongest level in six weeks, fueling bets the currency can extend gains, helped by the authorities' steps this month to boost foreign-currency inflows. The rupee rose as much as 0.3 per cent to 94.29 per dollar, its highest since May 7 and an advance of 1.5 per cent over the last four sessions, before trimming gains to be little changed on the day at 94.50. Improving sentiment helped the currency breach its 50-day moving average this week, a sign of bullish momentum. “The rupee has traded well over the past few days, drawing support from RBI's series of measures to attract capital inflows,” Wee Khoon Chong, Asia Pacific market strategist at BNY, told Bloomberg News. If oil prices continue to de-



cline and the dollar weakens further, the rupee could strengthen toward 93.39 per dollar having breached the 50-day moving average, he said. India on June 5 announced a slew of measures

to boost foreign-currency inflows and support the rupee, which fell to a record low last month. The steps included tax exemptions for foreign investment in government bonds, as well as incentives for state-owned firms borrowing from overseas and banks raising foreign-currency deposits. The measures are estimated to attract \$75 billion to \$80 billion in inflows over the coming months, according to economists at ICI-CI Bank.The rupee has already benefited from a pickup in overseas demand for local debt. Foreign investors have bought index-eligible bonds for nine straight days, with total purchases of \$2.2 billion. Foreign inflows into Indian debt are on track for their strongest month since March 2025

Sensex declines 111.23 points to 77,044.39 trade

Mumbai: Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty drifted lower in early deals on Thursday, but later bounced back to trade higher supported by encouraging developments on the geopolitical front and easing crude oil prices.The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 111.23 points to 77,044.39 in early trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty dipped 26.85 points to 24,058.85. However, later both the benchmark indices recovered their early lost ground and were quoting in the green.The BSE benchmark traded 108.95 points up at 77,264.57, and the Nifty quoted 44.25 points higher at 24,132.60. From the 30-Sensex firms, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, Reliance Industries and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the biggest laggards.Trent, Bharat Electronics, HDFC Bank and Larsen & Toubro were among the winners.In the previous four trading days, the BSE benchmark jumped 3,323.07 points, or 4.50 per cent, and the Nifty surged 924.1 points, or 3.98 per cent.Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, traded 1.66 per cent lower at USD 78.23 per barrel. “Investor sentiment has strengthened after the White House confirmed that US President Donald Trump has formally signed the Peace Deal Memorandum, a significant step forward in the broader US–Iran peace process. The agreement is expected to facilitate the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, easing geopolitical risks, reducing energy-market uncertainty and improving global risk appetite,” Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth-tech firm, said.

Labour campaigners in Makerfield fear sheer



London: Up to 3,000 Labour campaigners are expected to descend on Makerfield for Andy Burnham, prompting fears among organisers that the hordes of activists may end up overwhelming voters during Thursday’s byelection

Local hotels are fully booked and party members are expected to be dispatched to polling stations, and to leaflet people waiting at bus stops and school gates to avoid swamping residents on their doorsteps

Cabinet ministers are among the MPs who are expected to spend the day in the Greater Manchester constituency, where Burnham is seeking to defeat Reform UK’s Robert Kenyon.

There is only so many times we can

knock on doors on polling day without people getting too annoyed,” one MP said. Backers of Burnham are expected to use the sheer numbers of activists and MPs doorstepping in Makerfield as proof that the mayor of Greater Manchester can re-energise the party to beat Reform UK – where the momentum will be crucial for him to then seek to immediately replace Keir Starmer as prime minister

Some MPs and ministers arriving to campaign in the constituency over the past week are said to have sometimes been taken aback that there is little public-facing for them to do apart from dispatching leaflets through letterboxes. “There were just too many of them,” one said.The campaign estimates that the number of volunteers

– including hundreds of MPs – has meant each door in the constituency has been knocked at least six or seven times.The number of volunteers who have signed up has been so vast that the Burnham campaign has organised three campaign centres beyond its headquarters in order to be able to handle the volume of MPs and activists who are arriving in the Wigan suburbs.“It will be the operation that every Labour campaign has wanted to run but hasn’t had the bodies,” one organiser said. “A person on every polling station from open to close, school gates, station leafleting.” All polls in the constituency have given Burnham a clear lead over Kenyon, though MPs who have visited the area in recent days say the race remains tight. One unknown factor will be the size of the vote for Rupert Lowe’s Restore party, which he set up as a rival to Reform and which may get as much as 10% of the vote.Backers of Burnham are keen to prove the mayor can win without the need for Restore to split the vote on the right – or risk casting doubt over the symbolism of his victory.“No 10 will be talking down the achievement of winning Makerfield,” one MP said. “Yet the result at the locals would equate to an 8,000 majority for Reform.

Starmer has not campaigned in Makerfield, despite having promised to do so at the beginning of the campaign.

However, cabinet ministers including David Lammy, Bridget Phillipson and Jonathan Reynolds have been in the constituency in recent days, as well as the former health secretary Wes Streeting, who has said he also intends to challenge Starmer for the leadership.

Harvard and Bard face fresh from over ties to Epstein



London: Harvard University and Bard College are facing new questions about the institutions’ relationship with Jeffrey Epstein amid allegations that the convicted child sex trafficker leveraged his ties to the universities and their faculty to traffic women, while also burnishing his reputation to avoid detection.Jamie Raskin, the top Democrat on the House judiciary committee, said in a statement that Harvard and Bard had both previously attempted to investigate the role their universities and leadership played in facilitating Epstein’s abuse, but that those attempts either failed or fell short of a full accounting of what occurred.Among other demands for information, Raskin has asked Bard to make Leon Botstein, its outgoing president whom Bard has said will retain a role at the college, available for a transcribed interview. Raskin also requested records related to Epstein’s donations, communications, admissions, interactions and institutional decision-making, as well as the full results of an internal review by the college. Raskin is also seeking extensive records from Harvard, including all records, financial documents and communications relating to Epstein’s funding of research and his personal relationships with faculty members. Raskin said Harvard’s previous investigations into the university’s ties to Epstein – conducted in 2008 and 2019 – were at best incomplete and at worst misleading. Raskin said the internal investigations failed to uncover a series of donations Epstein made after Harvard had instituted a ban against such donations in 2008, as well as the full extent of his relationship with Harvard faculty members, including Harvard’s former president, Larry Summers, and the depth of his personal involvement with student admissions and faculty research.“It is time for Harvard, like the rest of America, to come clean and engage in the comprehensive accounting that will allow us to learn from this nightmare, take appropriate legislative action, and make sure nothing like it ever happens again,” Raskin said in a letter to Harvard president Alan Garber.Harvard announced in February that Summers was resigning from teaching at the end of the academic year. The announcement followed the justice department’s release of the Epstein files, which revealed more details about Summers and Epstein’s relationship. The emails showed Summers and Epstein communicated frequently, on topics ranging from politics to women, including Summers pursuing a relationship with a person

who saw him as an “economic mentor”.An Epstein victim who had previous interactions with Botstein said she believed the Bard College president was part of a group of influential and accomplished men whose proximity to Epstein helped to rehabilitate his reputation.A summary of an internal investigation conducted by the WilmerHale law firm, which was initiated by Bard’s board of trustees and was released publicly on 1 May, found that nothing Botstein did in connection to his relationship with Epstein was “illegal”. It also found that the Bard president was “not fully accurate” in describing his relationship with Epstein publicly or to the Bard community, and stated that Botstein did not fully “see” a risk to Bard’s reputation when he pursued Epstein as a donor for the college, or the potential risk his contacts with Epstein posed to Bard students.The law firm noted that Botstein had not disclosed fees he accepted under a consulting agreement with an Epstein entity.Botstein previously denied being friends with Epstein, and has said he never witnessed anything inappropriate, nor had any visibility into Epstein’s “monstrous crimes”. He has never been charged with any wrongdoing related to Epstein.“We have received the letter and are reviewing it,” a Bard College spokesperson told the Guardian.Harvard did not immediately respond to a request for comment.Summers served as Harvard’s president from 2001 to 2006. Epstein donated more than \$9m to Harvard and its affiliated programs from 1998 to 2008, which overlapped with Summers’s tenure. Summers has previously said: “I am deeply ashamed of my actions and recognize the pain they have caused. I take full responsibility for my misguided decision to continue communicating with Mr Epstein.”In a separate letter addressed to Bard chair James Cox Chambers – whom the Guardian previously reported has recently stepped down from that role – Raskin said he was seeking to understand how Epstein exploited and leveraged “multifarious ties in higher education”, from Bard to Columbia University, Harvard and New York University.Raskin pointed out in the letter that Botstein was resigning from his position as president, a role he held for more than 50 years, following a Bard-initiated investigation that concluded his tenure was marked by “substantial lapses in leadership and candor” women in New York and the Russian Federation”.The Guardian reported last month that Bard’s board of trustees voted to end

Defence Minister Koizumi stated that Japan’s enhancement of its defense capabilities is ‘essential’ to avert the possibility of war

South-Korea: Japan must “strengthen its defence capabilities”, Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi has told the BBC, emphasising the need to revisit the pacifist posture that has defined the country since World War Two.He said boosting defence, “reinforcing its alliance with the United States, and expanding collaboration with like-minded countries” was part of “building multi-layered deterrence critical for ensuring that no new war breaks out in this region”.Koizumi said he supported a revision to Article 9 because of how the region has changed over the past eight decades. ”Speaking not as defence minister but as a member of parliament, Japan has not amended its Constitution even once since World War Two. Given how dramatically the security environment has changed, we need to adapt to those changes if Japan is to remain peaceful,” Koizumi said. Beijing is arguably the biggest challenge, and its claims over self-governed Taiwan are the new flashpoint in an old, fraught relationship. The southwestern Senkaku islands, which the Chinese call Diaoyu, stretch towards Taiwan and form what’s called the First Island Chain. It has been described as a strategic barrier of containment between China’s coastal waters and the wider Pacific. But in the past year Chinese aircraft carriers have occasionally operated beyond these islands. Japan’s Defence Ministry identified China’s military moves as the “greatest strategic challenge” in its latest white paper report submitted to Cabinet. The ministry is expected to repeat the same in its upcoming annual government report. Last month, Koizumi rebutted Beijing’s claim that his country was engaging in a “new militarism” and argued it was China and its “huge arsenal” of weapons that was of “serious concern” to the international community. Defence is among the top priorities for the current administration, which has committed to historic spending increases and argues these reforms are needed in what is now an increasingly tense region.China has emerged as a formidable global player, and North Korea’s nuclear ambitions, which have seen it test-fire ballistic missiles over Japan, show no signs of slowing down.Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, who came to power in October 2025, has also pushed for revising Article 9 of Japan’s constitution, which renounces war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. It also states that land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained.But Japan is keen to keep talking to Beijing, he insisted He spoke of the recent changes in Japan’s defence policy, such as relaxing decades-old arms export rules.For the first time in about 50 years, Tokyo can now sell or transfer defence equipment and lethal weapons to the 17 countries with which it has signed formal agreements, including the US and the UK. Australia has selected Japanese war ships. Discussions are under way with the Philippines for used destroyers from Japan’s Maritime Self-Defence Force. We are in deep talks with Indonesia, and New Zealand has also showed interest in acquiring Japanese destroyers,” Koizumi explained in a sit-down interview at his office in Tokyo.“This vision of trading equipment and assets throughout the Indo-Pacific is something we have never seen before.” ”Unfortunately, there have not been many opportunities for direct communication recently. However, as I stated at the Shangri-La

Dialogue, Japan is always open to dialogue. We will continue sending that message and hope that opportunities for dialogue can be created whenever necessary.”Takaichi is not the first Japanese leader to seek these changes. Nobusuke Kishi in the 1950s argued for Japan to have a more normal military posture. Koizumi’s father, Junichiro Koizumi, who was PM in the early 2000s, also supported constitutional revision, including reconsidering Article 9.More recently the late Shinzo Abe, Kishi’s grandson, became an advocate of amending the so-called pacifist clause during his time in office.But the shift has accelerated under Takaichi, prompting some of the country’s largest anti-war protests in decades.Koizumi, 45, also told the BBC that Japan needed to clarify the status of the SDF or Self-Defence Forces. Legally and politically, Japan doesn’t call it a military - although operationally it functions as one.The SDF should be able to carry out its mission with pride and honour, and Japan must possess defence capabilities that remain steadfast even in today’s challenging security environment,” he added. “I met with my China counterpart in November of last year. Because there are areas where our views differ, I conveyed my desire that we continue engaging in dialogue,” Koizumi said. Takaichi is not the first Japanese leader to seek these changes. Nobusuke Kishi in the 1950s argued for Japan to have a more normal military posture. Koizumi’s father, Junichiro Koizumi, who was PM in the early 2000s, also supported constitutional revision, including reconsidering Article 9

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We don’t need to amend Article 9 for defensive operations against China. So it’s more a political agenda than something based on military rationality,” says Hirohito Ogi, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Geoeconomics, studying military strategy and defence policy.If, for example, there was a threat to the southern islands that Japan controls but Beijing also claims, Ogi believes the current constitution is sufficient. “The attack on US bases located in Okinawa or Kyushu region should be interpreted as a direct military attack on Japan.”While his Liberal Democratic Party is pushing for it, “ultimately, the decision belongs to the Japanese people”, Koizumi said.“Here, constitutional revision is decided through a national referendum.

The timing and circumstances under which the public is asked to make that decision involve major political judgements. ry’s largest anti-war protests in decades.Koizumi, 45, also told the BBC that Japan needed to clarify the status of the SDF or Self-Defence Forces. Legally and politically, Japan doesn’t call it a military - although operationally it functions as one.

Defendants pursue millions in claims through obscure federal process

London: January 6 defendants who assaulted police officers are pursuing legal claims for millions in compensation from the Trump administration using an obscure federal process with minimal oversight, but which offers the Trump administration a way to compensate those responsible for violence even after scrapping its “anti-weaponization fund”. The defendants are pursuing their claims using the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA), which allows individuals wronged by the government to file claims for monetary damages. The justice department has complete and unchecked discretion over whether to settle the claims, giving the Trump administration a powerful vehicle to reward those responsible for violence on January 6. The claims would be paid out from the judgment fund, a perpetual appropriation allowed for by Congress and the same pot of money Trump’s \$1.8bn slush fund was going to draw from. All of the defendants seeking compensation received a pardon from Trump. There was fierce bipartisan pushback to the “anti-weaponization fund” proposed by the administration last month after Trump reached a settlement with the Internal Revenue Service. In particular, members of Congress were concerned that people who harmed law enforcement officers on January 6 might receive compensation. “If you’ve been convicted of assault on a cop ... doesn’t seem to me like people who are victims,” Josh Hawley, a Republican senator from Missouri, told NBC News.While the “anti-weaponization fund” appears to be on ice for now, FTCA claims and lawsuits could provide another avenue for payouts. “It risks turning the judgment fund into exactly the sort of slush fund that the ‘anti-weaponization’ was going to be,” said Rupa Bhattacharyya, a former director in the civil division’s

tort branch at the justice department, who worked on FTCA claims and now is the legal director at the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection at Georgetown Law. “If the treasury department is not going to enforce the restrictions on the use of the judgment fund, which is to settle impending or imminent lawsuits where there’s some risk of liability, then there’s no limit on what you can use that judgment fund money for, so long as someone files a bogus claim,” she said. The justice department agreed to settle FTCA claims filed by Michael Flynn, a former national security adviser, and Carter Page, Trump’s foreign policy adviser, for \$1.25m each earlier this year. Many of the January 6 defendants are represented by Peter Tickint, a Florida attorney who is a longtime friend of Trump. He said he’s filed around 400 FTCA claims on behalf of January 6 defendants and expects to start frequently filing lawsuits now that the six month waiting period has expired.“The weaponization fund, for the brief fleeting moment which it allegedly existed, had no policies, procedures, or anything that would indicate what kind of evidence they would have required, what kind of format of a filing they would have required, or anything like that,” he said. “I never thought the weaponization fund, as a practical matter, was very meaningful. Whereas the FTCA gives you a statute with teeth that you can, as long as you can prove your claim, you have a right to recovery.” Among those seeking money Kenneth Joseph Thomas, an Ohio man who was sentenced to nearly five years in prison after being found guilty for assaulting several police officers. Video showed him shoving multiple police officers and throwing himself into a line of officers as he shouted for other rioters to “hold the fucking line”. Also

seeking compensation is John George Todd III, a Missouri man sentenced to five years in prison after being found guilty on several charges, including injuring a Capitol police officer. Both men are among nine plaintiffs seeking at least \$1m each in damages in an FTCA suit filed 29 May in Washington DC. They say they are entitled to damages because they were unfairly and vindictively prosecuted by the government.Andrew Taake, a Houston man sentenced to six years in prison and who pleaded guilty to assaulting police officers with bear spray and a whip-like weapon, is also seeking at least \$2.5m in damages. Taake is entitled to damages because he received inadequate medical treatment and an unfair trial, his lawyers said in their FTCA lawsuit, filed last September in Washington. Bhattacharyya said she believed the justice department could defend itself against the “malicious prosecution type claims” the January 6 defendants were bringing, and she hoped it would do so. When of such offenses were either coerced into confessions based on threats of life imprisonment and threats against their family or went to trial in courts where the evidence was faked, rigged, perjury was testified to and fair trials were not had,” he saidThere is no evidence of wrongdoing in the January 6 prosecutions. I Taake’s case, the others were convicted, they were sentenced by judges, and so those sorts of malicious prosecution claims are eminently defensible,” she said. There may also be advantages to pursuing compensation through FTCA claims instead of the weaponization fund, said Mark McCloskey, a Missouri attorney who is representing many January 6 defendants.There were no restrictions on who could apply to the weaponization fund, making the pool of applicants so big that it could lower the per capita recovery, he said.

Mumbai Rains: Rash After First Shower? Know the Real Cause Before Using Dettol

Mumbai’s monsoon rain absorbs industrial pollutants on its way down. Dermatologists say that chemical cocktail is a little-known trigger for contact dermatitis. Mumbai is still waiting. The IMD has pushed the city’s monsoon arrival forecast to around June 25 — at least 15 days past its normal onset date of June 11 — while private forecaster Skymet has warned the delay could stretch even further, potentially making this one of the slowest monsoon advances in recent memory. When the rains finally do arrive, here’s what they will actually do to your skin — and how to prepare. Mumbai’s first showers are not the clean, romantic downpour many imagine. A report by Mid-day quoted dermatologists explaining that urban raindrops fall through air loaded with sulphuric and nitric particulates, soot, and heavy metals — absorbing industrial emissions on their way down. By the time they hit your skin, they are carrying zinc, cadmium, carbon particles, and combustion by-products, not just water. THE ACID RAIN PROBLEM: That chemical cocktail becomes acidic. Sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide — common Mumbai pollutants — dissolve in rainwater to form sulphuric acid and nitric acid. Healthy skin sits at a pH of 4.5 to 5.5; acid rain pushes it further out of balance, disrupting the natural barrier made of ceramides and fatty acids that keeps moisture in and irritants out, according to dermatologists quoted by Mid-day. THE ACID RAIN PROBLEM: That chemical cocktail becomes acidic. Sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide — common Mumbai pollutants — dissolve in rainwater to form sulphuric acid and nitric acid. Healthy skin sits at a pH of 4.5 to 5.5; acid rain pushes it further out of balance, disrupting the natural barrier made of ceramides



and fatty acids that keeps moisture in and irritants out, sometimes within minutes. Allergic reactions, by con- Dermatologists tell Mid-day that neck folds, underarms,



according to dermatologists quoted by Mid-day. **SIGNS TO WATCH FOR:** Not all rain rashes are the same, and the difference matters. Mid-day reported that chemical irritation from polluted rainwater typically produces a burning sensation rather than itching, with skin feeling tight or sore — trast, usually appear 12 to 72 hours later with intense itching and swelling. If it burns fast and hits exposed areas, rain pollution is the likely culprit. **SKIN FOLDS AND DAMP CLOTHES:** Mumbai commuters caught in a downpour and stuck in crowded trains face a specific risk: damp clothes. and knee folds trap moisture — and if wet clothes stay in contact with skin for long periods, the combination of pollutant residue and sustained dampness significantly raises the risk of contact dermatitis and fungal infections that can initially look like a simple rash. The moment you get

home after the first Mumbai rain is when skin care actually counts. Dermatologists advise: remove wet clothes immediately, rinse with lukewarm water — not hot, not cold — and use a gentle, sulphate-free, pH-balanced cleanser with glycerine or ceramides. Pat dry softly, then moisturise within one minute. Pollutants left to dry on skin continue to cause damage long after the rain stops, Mid-day reports. With Mumbai’s seven lakes sitting at just 10.72 per cent capacity as of June 15 and the city bracing for heavy downpours once the monsoon finally breaks, preparation matters. Dermatologists recommend barrier-supporting moisturisers and water-resistant, silicone-based sunscreens before stepping out — rain does not block UV rays. For acne-prone skin, ceramide-based formulas work best; for dry skin, occlusive moisturisers with oils or petroleum jelly create a water-repellent layer, Mid-day reports. If a rash appears after Mumbai’s first rains, resist the instinct to reach for Dettol, Savlon, or over-the-counter anti-itch creams. Dermatologists warn Mid-day that antiseptics can worsen irritated skin, and steroid-containing creams can mask early fungal infections, causing them to flare up worse later. Stick to calamine with glycerine, coconut oil, or oatmeal-based moisturisers — and if the rash persists, see a dermatologist rather than self-medicating. As the first rains arrive in Mumbai, bringing relief from heat and humidity, they also bring a fresh set of health concerns for many residents. One common complaint during the monsoon season is the sudden appearance of skin rashes, itching, redness, irritation, or small bumps after getting drenched in rainwater. Many people immediately reach for antiseptic solutions such as Dettol, believing the rash



must be caused by germs in dirty rainwater. How- Treating every rash with strong antiseptic products weaken the skin barrier, and encourage the growth of



ever, dermatologists warn that the actual reasons may be very different. Experts say that not every post-rain skin reaction is an infection. The humid environment, increased sweating, pollution, fungal growth, allergic reactions, and prolonged exposure to wet clothes can all contribute to skin problems during the monsoon. without understanding the cause may sometimes worsen irritation rather than solve the problem. The arrival of monsoon changes the skin environment significantly. Mumbai’s high humidity levels create conditions where sweat does not evaporate easily, allowing moisture to remain trapped on the skin. This can block pores, fungi and bacteria. For some people, even a short walk in the rain can trigger itching or inflammation. Dermatologists explain that one of the most common reasons behind monsoon rashes is fungal infection. Fungi thrive in warm and moist conditions, making areas such as the feet, underarms, groin, and skin folds more vulnerable.

Monsoon-Ready Skin: Experts Recommend Essential Facial Treatments To Prepare Before The Rains Arrive This Season



The arrival of monsoon may bring welcome relief from soaring temperatures, but it also introduces a new set of challenges for the skin. Increased humidity, fluctuating temperatures and environmental pollutants can leave the complexion feeling congested, oily and prone to unexpected breakouts. While many people overhaul their skincare routines with the changing season, experts say professional

facial treatments can play an equally important role in helping the skin transition smoothly. The key, however, isn’t chasing an instant glow. It’s about preparing the skin to remain balanced, hydrated and resilient in the weeks ahead. Kausar Siddiquee, Beauty Manager, BBLUNT Salon, believes the shift in weather often leads to concerns surrounding excess oil production and clogged pores. “As we move into the monsoon season, the increase

in humidity can make skin feel oily, congested and prone to breakouts. This is one of the most common concerns clients share in the salon during this time,” she says. One of the biggest misconceptions about monsoon skincare is that humidity eliminates the need for hydration. In reality, skin can often become dehydrated beneath a layer of excess oil, creating an imbalance that leads to irritation and dullness. Siddiquee recommends

facials that focus on deep cleansing while simultaneously replenishing moisture levels. Treatments designed to purify and hydrate the skin can help remove impurities, unclog pores and improve overall texture. “I always recommend treatments that focus on deep cleansing, hydration and skin barrier support,” she explains. “Facials such as hydrating, corrective and purifying-based treatments help remove impu-

rities, unclog pores, replenish moisture and improve overall skin texture.” An added benefit? Professional treatments can enhance product absorption, allowing your at-home skincare routine to work more effectively. For those considering more intensive procedures before monsoon, experts advise taking a gentler approach. Rather than opting for aggressive treatments that may increase sensitivity, the focus should be on maintaining a healthy skin barrier. Dr Tanvi Mahale, Cosmetology Expert, Nuvana, notes that the season can trigger a host of concerns, from excess sebum production to dullness and breakouts. “The monsoon brings a set of skincare challenges from increased humidity and excess oil production to clogged pores, breakouts and dullness,” she says. “Instead of opting for aggressive treatments, I recommend focusing on skin-strengthening and hydration-focused facials that nourish and uplift the skin barrier.” Among the treatments she recommends are Hydra-Facials, LED light facials and skin-rejuvenation protocols that support skin

health without causing unnecessary irritation. While facials can help improve the appearance and texture of the skin, Dr Mahale believes a more holistic approach can amplify results. “At Nuvana, I recommend pairing facials with IV drips, which not only help enhance the results of the facial but also deliver

creating a more comprehensive approach to seasonal skincare. If there is one takeaway both experts agree on, it is that skincare should never be one-size-fits-all. What works for oily, acne-prone skin may not be suitable for someone struggling with sensitivity or dehydration. “The most important factor is choos-

ished and glowing throughout the monsoon season.” Ultimately, preparing your skin for monsoon is less about dramatic transformations and more about creating a strong foundation. By focusing on hydration, barrier support and targeted treatments, you can help your complexion stay healthy, balanced and radi-



essential nutrients and vitamins that work towards energy levels, collagen production, immunity and more,” she says. The idea is to support the skin from within while addressing visible concerns externally, ing a facial that is customised for your skin’s specific needs,” says Siddiquee. “A professional skin consultation helps identify concerns early and ensures the right treatment plan, keeping the skin clear, nour- ant long after the first rains arrive. According to Angelo Castello, CEO, FACE-GYM, growing interest in facial workouts reflects a broader shift in consumer behaviour. rather than pur- elutions,” she says.

Pritam’s Retirement Rumours Spark Buzz in Bollywood, Composer Responds

Mumbai: After Arijit Singh, is ace composer Pritam also retiring from Bollywood? This question sparked a frenzy after Pritam’s recent Instagram note left fans confused about his new career move. The note especially went viral due to Arijit Singh’s previous retirement announcement. However, good news for Pritam’s fans: he is not retiring anytime soon. Pritam recently celebrated his birthday and wrote on Instagram, “Thank you for all the wishes. Can’t answer everyone individually, but please accept my sincere gratitude. Today, I have decided to gift myself a few years to live life differently. To catch up on what I’ve missed.” Pritam added, “Time to set off on new journeys, which have been kept on the back burner for long. Mainstream is a great ride. But I’ve always been more curious about the roads unexplored. Thank you for all the love & support. Always.” This note left fans confused, who wondered if Pritam was retiring from Bollywood. However, a source told Hindustan Times, “Pritam is not leaving the music industry. He of course will continue to work. Through his post, he only highlighted that he has some more fields of interest that he wants to prioritise right now. It doesn’t mean that he will exit the music industry forever.” Arijit Singh’s Playback Retirement



Imtiaz Ali Reveals Desire to Tell Radha-Krishna’s Story on Screen

Mumbai: Imtiaz Ali may be widely associated with some of Hindi cinema’s most memorable love stories, but the filmmaker says he has never consciously set out to make “romantic films.” In a new interview, the director opened up about why love keeps finding its way into his stories, why he did not originally see Jab We Met as a love story, and why he hopes to someday bring the story of Radha and Krishna to the screen. Known for films such as Jab We Met, Love Aaj Kal, Rockstar, Tamasha and Amar Singh Chamkila, Imtiaz has often explored love as longing, confusion, rebellion, memory and self-discovery. However, the filmmaker says romance is not something he forcibly adds to his scripts. Imtiaz Ali Says He Did Not Make Jab We Met As A Love Story Speaking to ABP Live, Imtiaz said, “I don’t want to add romance to everything but it just happens naturally, so I don’t stop that.” The filmmaker explained that even Love Aaj Kal, despite its title and popular perception, was not written by him as a conventional romantic drama. He said, “I never made any of my films like a love story. When Love Aaj Kal was being named, I thought Aaj Kal would be a better name. I thought if this is even a love story? My team explained it to me how they saw it as a love story but I saw it as an interpretation of love across different eras. I definitely did not make Jab We Met as a love story. But this comes up in my films again and again.” Jab We Met, starring Shahid Kapoor and Kareena Kapoor Khan, remains one of Imtiaz’s most loved films. Over the years,



Earlier this year, Arijit Singh took to Instagram and wrote, “Hello, Happy New Year to all. I want to thank you all for giving me so much of love all these years as listeners. I am happy to announce that I am not gonna be taking any new assignments as a playback vocalist from now on. I am calling it off. It was a wonderful journey.” Many fans were left worried as they thought that Arijit Singh had quit music altogether. However, he clarified that he was only retiring from playback singing and would continue to produce indie music and release his new music soon. This came as a relief to the singer’s fans who often swoon to his melodious voice.

Kajal Aggarwal Turns Lawyer in Food Adulteration Drama The India Story

Mumbai: The official poster of The India Story, starring Kajal Aggarwal and Shreyas Talpade, has been unveiled. Presented by Zee Studios in association with MIG Production & Studios, the film is set to release in theatres on July 24, 2026. After building curiosity with earlier posters, the makers have now revealed the first official poster of the film, offering a sharper look at its central conflict and lead characters. The poster introduces Kajal Aggarwal as a determined lawyer and Shreyas Talpade as a concerned father, hinting at an emotionally charged courtroom drama rooted in a serious social issue. The India Story Poster Out The newly released poster of The India Story features Kajal Aggarwal and Shreyas Talpade in intense avatars. While Kajal is seen as a lawyer ready to fight a difficult legal battle, Shreyas appears as a father caught in a deeply personal crisis. The poster also features a young girl playing Shreyas Talpade’s daughter, adding emotional weight to the film’s narrative. Set against the backdrop of the Bombay High Court, the poster includes a pesticide cylinder placed inside a witness box, a striking visual that points towards the film’s central theme of food adulteration. The imagery suggests that The India Story will explore not just a courtroom case, but the human cost of a crisis that affects millions of people. By placing a pesticide cylinder in the



witness box, the poster hints at a story where everyday consumption, public health and accountability collide. Kajal Aggarwal And Shreyas Talpade Lead The India Story Directed by Chettan DK, The India Story stars Kajal Aggarwal and Shreyas Talpade in the lead roles. The film is written and produced by Sagar B Shinde. The film is being positioned as a hard-hitting drama that shines a light on one of India’s most serious yet often overlooked public health concerns. Through its courtroom setting and emotional family conflict, the film aims to expose the dangers hidden behind everyday food consumption. The India Story will release in Hindi, Telugu and Tamil, with Zee Studios handling its worldwide theatrical release. Director Chettan DK On The India Story Speaking about the

film, director Chettan DK said, “The India Story is the story of every Indian whose family or loved ones have been affected by food adulteration. It highlights one of the most neglected yet serious problems in our society—something that impacts each one of us in our daily lives. Through this film, we wanted to bring this hidden reality to the forefront and spark an important conversation. I am confident that the film’s powerful message will be an eye-opener for everyone and encourage people to become more aware of what they consume every day.” His statement underlines the film’s larger purpose beyond its dramatic premise. The India Story seeks to start a conversation around food adulteration, a subject that affects households across the country but often remains outside mainstream

cinematic narratives. A Courtroom Drama On Food Adulteration At the heart of The India Story lies the issue of food adulteration and its devastating impact on families. The film appears to use the courtroom format to question negligence, responsibility and the systems that allow such practices to continue. With Kajal Aggarwal playing a lawyer and Shreyas Talpade playing a father, the film is expected to balance legal tension with emotional stakes. The official poster suggests that the story will focus on the personal consequences of a larger public health crisis. The presence of the Bombay High Court in the poster further indicates that the film will unfold as an intense legal battle, while the image of the young girl points towards the emotional trigger of the narrative. The India Story is backed by co-producers Swati Vinayak Saindane, Anita Jadhav, Vinayak Saidani, Kalpesh Shah, Devyani Khorate and Prem Joshi. The film’s technical team includes DOP Nishant Bhagwat, music composer Mangesh Dhakde, editor Ashish Mhatre, lyricist Shakeel Azami and sound designer Anmol Bhave. With its focus on food adulteration, courtroom drama and family tragedy, The India Story aims to bring attention to a crisis that continues to affect countless people across India. The film will hit theatres worldwide on July 24, 2026, in Hindi, Telugu and Tamil.

Kerala High Court Issues Notice to The Kerala Story 2 Makers Over Religious Sentiment Complaint

Kerala: The Kerala High Court on Thursday issued an urgent notice to filmmaker Vipul Amrutlal Shah, producer of “Kerala Story 2: Goes Beyond”, on a petition challenging the film’s certification and seeking removal of the word “Kerala” from its title. A bench of Justice P.V. Kunhikrishnan, while hearing the plea, questioned whether the petition had become ineffective since the film had already been released and had been watched by a large number of people. The court, however, agreed to consider the matter after the petitioner pointed out that the film’s OTT release was still relevant. The counsel for the petitioner argued that the issue continued to survive as the movie was now available on digital platforms. Khan

Productions. The film features him in a pivotal role. Apart from that, Ali will also be seen in Shakkun Batra’s directorial for the next instalment of Netflix’s anthology Lust Stories. With Raakh, Mirzapur promotions and major upcoming projects in his lineup, Ali continues to balance long-format storytelling, mainstream cinema and character-driven roles. For now, while it remains unclear whether he will attend Aamir Khan’s reported wedding, Ali’s message for the superstar was warm and respectful. He wished Aamir well and called him someone he has always looked up to. The court also noted that the question of whether such a petition challenging a film certification was legally maintainable could be examined at the final

hearing stage. The petition has been filed against the certification granted to the film, alleging that its content harms the reputation of Kerala and creates social disharmony. The petitioner has accused the producer of offences under provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita relating to promoting enmity between groups, acts prejudicial to national integration, and deliberate acts intended to hurt religious sentiments. The plea has also sought to implead Zee Entertainment Enterprises Limited, as the film was released on an OTT platform on May 1. The petitioner has submitted additional documents, including an email sent to the OTT platform’s grievance officer and screenshots from social media alleging that the film was being projected as



a factual account and used to promote a narrative against Keralites and minority communities. The latest petition comes after an earlier round of litigation over the film’s release. Justice Bechu Kurian Thomas had earlier recused himself from hearing the mat-

ter. The movie was released after a Division Bench lifted an interim order that had temporarily stayed its release. Subsequently, earlier petitions were dismissed, and the High Court had also dismissed as infructuous appeals filed by the Centre and the producer.

Aamir Khan-Gauri Spratt Wedding: Ali Fazal Shares His Plans

Mumbai: Ali Fazal has reacted to the buzz around Aamir Khan’s reported wedding with Gauri Spratt on July 5. The actor, who will next be seen in Aamir Khan Productions’ Batwara 1947, was asked if he would be attending the superstar’s intimate ceremony. While Ali did not confirm his presence, he wished Aamir the best for the new chapter in his life. In a conversation with NDTV, Ali said that he may be busy with promotional commitments around the same time. “I don’t know yet. Let’s see. I guess, we will be busy with some promotional stuff at the time for Mirzapur. We are shooting some promotional things around that whole week and it’s not in Mumbai. I wish him all the best. He is my producer. He’s the person whom I always respected, looked up to. I am very happy for this wonderful journey that he’s going into,” Ali said. Ali Fazal On Aamir Khan’s Wedding Buzz Aamir Khan is reportedly set to marry his girlfriend Gauri Spratt in an intimate ceremony on July 5. The actor was previously married to Reena Dutta and later to Kiran Rao. Aamir and Gauri reportedly



kept their relationship private for nearly 18 months before making it public around the actor’s 60th birthday last year. Ali, who shares a professional association with Aamir through Batwara 1947, spoke warmly about the superstar. Calling Aamir his producer and someone he has always respected, Ali said he is happy for the journey the actor is stepping into. However, he added that his own work commitments could come in the way of attending the ceremony. Ali said that promotional work for Mirzapur may keep him occupied during the same week, and the shoot is not expected to take place in Mumbai. Ali Fazal On Being Reluctant To Do Raakh After

Mirzapur Ali Fazal is currently receiving attention for his latest show Raakh, which released last week. During the same conversation, the actor admitted that he was initially reluctant to take up the long-format project after Mirzapur. “This was a big gamble to begin with. I was reluctant to do the show after Mirzapur,” Ali said. Explaining why he hesitated, Ali shared that long-form storytelling demands a major investment of time and energy from an actor. He said, “Long form is a lot of invest in time. I am worried that I will get bored with myself. It’s very indulgent. It takes a lot out of you. But this was the story I had to be part of since I heard

it. It’s very responsibly-told story. And there’s something I thought I would bring to the table. I always like when I can work on a character, there’s something left to the imagination. Everything is not said on paper. And in this case, my character is a sheer contrast to the big chaos happening on the show (the criminals).” Ali said what eventually drew him to Raakh was the responsibility with which the story had been told. He also liked that his character did not spell everything out on paper and left room for interpretation. According to him, the role offered a contrast to the chaos unfolding around the criminals in the show. Ali Fazal On His Character In Raakh Tal-

king about the details of his role, Ali said that his character in Raakh was not written with too much verbosity. Instead, the performance relied heavily on subtext. “The idea was to do a lot with subtext,” Ali said. The actor suggested that this made the role interesting for him, as it allowed him to explore the unsaid aspects of the character rather than depend entirely on dialogue. Ali Fazal’s Upcoming Projects Ali Fazal has a busy slate ahead. He will be seen in Rajkumar Santoshi’s Batwara 1947, produced by Aamir Khan Productions. The film features him in a pivotal role. Apart from that, Ali will also be seen in Shakkun Batra’s directorial for the next instalment of Netflix’s anthology Lust Stories. With Raakh, Mirzapur promotions and major upcoming projects in his lineup, Ali continues to balance long-format storytelling, mainstream cinema and character-driven roles. For now, while it remains unclear whether he will attend Aamir Khan’s reported wedding, Ali’s message for the superstar was warm and respectful. He wished Aamir well and called him someone he has always looked up to.

Shafali Verma Reveals Smriti Mandhana's Advice: 'Stay Calm on the Field'

Leeds: Indian women's cricket team opener Shafali Verma has credited improved mental control and the guidance of vice-captain Smriti Mandhana for helping her overcome a recent lean patch and regain confidence during the ongoing ICC Women's T20 World Cup. India have made a strong start to their title campaign, securing convincing victories over Pakistan and the Netherlands to sit at the top of Group A with four points and an impressive net run rate. Shafali played a key role in India's dominant win over the Netherlands, scoring a powerful 55 off 38 balls and marking a return to form.

The explosive batter said Mandhana's experience and advice have helped her manage her natural attacking instincts at the crease. Shafali revealed that Mandhana often reminds her to remain patient and focus on playing the ball on its merit instead of trying to hit every delivery for a boundary. "Every time I feel like hitting a six, she tells me to stay calm, wait for the right ball, and play along the ground," Shafali said. The pair recently shared a crucial 115-run opening partnership against the Netherlands, helping India post a huge total of 209/5. Shafali said the partnership was built through better communication and discussions about handling pressure situations. "We have played together for several years and understand each other's game. We know when one of us needs



to take responsibility against certain bowlers," she added. Looking ahead to India's next Group A match against South Africa in Manchester, Shafali said the team is prepared for tougher challenges. She praised the bowling unit, especially Shree Charani and Deepti Sharma, for their match-winning performances.

Shafali also provided an update on Shreyanka Patil, who suffered an ankle injury during the previous match.

She said the player underwent scans and the BCCI medical team was monitoring her condition. The opener, who was named Player of the Match in last year's ODI World Cup final against South Africa, expressed her desire to recreate that performance but acknowledged that every game presents a new challenge. She added that India are confident ahead of their upcoming fixtures and are focused on continuing their strong run in the tournament.

Tennis Legends Serena and Venus Williams to Team Up Again at Wimbledon

London: Even at a combined age of 90, Serena and Venus Williams remain a formidable force in tennis. The legendary sisters are set to reunite on the Wimbledon doubles court after receiving a wild card entry for the prestigious tournament, which begins on June 29.

The Williams sisters have enjoyed a remarkable history at the All England Club, winning a combined 21 major titles and medals at Wimbledon across singles, doubles, and mixed doubles events. Their return marks another chapter in one of tennis' most successful partnerships. The sisters last played doubles together at the 2022 US Open, where they exited in the opening round. The match was their first doubles appearance as a team in more than four years.

Serena, 44, recently returned to competitive tennis after nearly four years away from the sport. She made a successful comeback in doubles at the Queen's Club tournament in London, partnering Victoria Mboko before the pair withdrew after Mboko suffered a knee injury.



Serena later competed at the Berlin Open with Karolina Muchova but lost in the opening round. Venus, who continues to play selectively, recently turned 46 and remains one of the most respected figures in women's tennis. Serena revealed that the idea of teaming up with her sister was encouraged by her daughter, Olympia. The Williams sisters have won 14 Grand Slam doubles titles together, including six Wimbledon championships, with

their first triumph coming in 2000 and their most recent in 2016. Their dominance on grass has been a defining feature of their careers, with Serena winning seven Wimbledon singles titles and Venus claiming five.

Their six Wimbledon women's doubles titles as a pair place them alongside Suzanne Lenglen and Elizabeth Ryan among the most successful partnerships in the tournament's history. Wimbledon organisers also

announced several other wild card entries, including Stan Wawrinka and Grigor Dimitrov in the men's singles category. Nick Kyrgios and Alexander Bublik received a men's doubles wild card. While Serena has not ruled out a possible singles return, one women's singles wild card spot remains open. The Williams sisters' comeback, however, will be one of the biggest attractions of this year's Wimbledon championship.

Congress Slams Government's Move, Calls 'Islamabad MoU' a Blow to Foreign Policy

New Delhi: The Congress on Thursday launched a sharp attack on the Centre following the signing of the US-Iran peace agreement, criticising the pact's designation as the "Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding" and claiming it reflected Pakistan's growing diplomatic influence. The party argued that the development marked a setback for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy approach.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the 14-point memorandum between the United States and Iran had been formally released and questioned the significance of its naming. According to him, the use of "Islamabad" highlighted Pakistan's increased role in regional and global affairs, despite the country having faced international isolation after the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. Ramesh described the agreement as a major diplomatic develop-



ment but cautioned that its success would depend on whether both sides adhered to its terms. He said the next 60 days would be crucial in determining whether the memorandum delivered lasting peace or turned into a failed understanding.

The Congress leader also claimed that the agreement represented significant gains for Iran, which he said had demonstrated re-

silience during prolonged tensions. He added that Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, while cautiously welcoming the agreement, could reconsider their diplomatic strategies in light of the new regional dynamics.

Ramesh also criticised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, claiming the agreement was a setback for Israel's position

and that Netanyahu faced increasing international isolation. He accused the Modi government of maintaining strong support for Israel's actions in West Asia, arguing that such an approach was harmful to India's interests.

The Congress leader further stated that the agreement highlighted the limitations of military intervention, claiming that

the United States and Israel had failed to achieve their objectives through conflict. He also criticised what he described as the Modi government's approach of maintaining close ties with US President Donald Trump. The controversy followed the announcement of the US-Iran agreement, under which Tehran agreed to reduce its stockpile of highly enriched uranium while the United States would ease sanctions and allow Iran to resume oil exports. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced that the agreement, named the "Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding," had been electronically signed by representatives of the United States and Iran and endorsed by Pakistan as a mediator. He said the pact would take immediate effect and represented a commitment by both sides towards resolving the conflict through diplomacy.

Uddhav Thackeray's Sena Moves to Prevent Split, Issues Whip to MLAs



New Delhi: A fresh political crisis has emerged within the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT), with leaders from both the party and a rebel faction meeting Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla separately on Wednesday to stake their claim over the party's legitimacy.

The Uddhav camp urged the Speaker to prevent what it described as unlawful defections, while the rebel group reportedly claimed the backing of six Lok Sabha MPs. The development comes amid speculation that several MPs may join the Shiv Sena faction led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. Amid the growing uncertainty, Shiv Sena (UBT) issued a three-line whip to all nine of its Lok Sabha MPs, directing them to attend a parliamentary party meet-

ing scheduled for Thursday. The party is expected to consider disqualification proceedings against MPs who fail to comply with the directive. Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut intensified the political battle by alleging that some MPs were being offered ₹50 crore to switch sides. However, sources from the rebel camp claimed that a letter signed by six MPs supporting the Shinde-led Sena has already been submitted to the Lok Sabha Speaker, with a formal announcement regarding their merger expected soon.

The MPs reportedly backing the rebel faction include Sanjay Jadhav, Bhausaheb Wakchaure, Sanjay Deshmukh, Nagesh Patil Ashtikar, Omprakash Rajenimbalkar, and Sanjay Patil. The Uddhav Thackeray faction, represented by MPs Arvind Sawant,

Sanjay Raut, and Anil Desai, met Om Birla and argued that rebel MPs cannot merge with another party independently, even if they have the support of two-thirds of the lawmakers. Desai maintained that only the original party has the authority to merge.

The developments mirror earlier political splits witnessed in parties such as the Trinamool Congress and have raised fresh questions over party control, defections, and parliamentary recognition.

Meanwhile, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav rejected speculation of an internal split in his party. In another development, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has invited Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee for a meeting on June 19 regarding the ongoing dispute over a party split.

Neeraj Set for Pathirage Clash

Doha: Indian javelin star Neeraj Chopra returns to competitive action at the Doha Diamond League on Friday after a lengthy injury layoff, aiming to regain rhythm against a strong field led by Sri Lanka's in-form Rumesh Tharanga Pathirage.

Chopra, sidelined since the 2025 World Championships due to a back injury, has been training in Switzerland following rehabilitation. The Olympic medalist enjoys a successful record in Doha, where he breached the 90m mark for the first time last year.

Pathirage enters the event as the season leader after a stunning 92.62m throw in Rome earlier this month. The Sri Lankan and Chopra are tied 1-1 in head-to-head meetings. The field also features world champions Anderson Peters, Keshorn Walcott and other leading international throwers. Chopra was recently named in India's Commonwealth Games squad and is expected to comfortably achieve the qualifying standard.

India Secures Five-Year Social Security Relief for Professionals Under UK Trade Pact

New Delhi: India has secured a major concession for its professionals working temporarily in the United Kingdom by extending the social security contribution exemption period from three years to five years under the India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The move is expected to provide significant financial relief to Indian companies and employees posted in the UK.

According to Commerce Ministry sources, the extension was one of India's key demands during the FTA negotiations and has now been accepted by the UK. Under the agreement, Indian professionals deputised by companies to Britain, as well as employees transferred to UK-based affiliates or sister concerns, will not be required to make social security contributions in the UK for up to five years. The exemption will apply to workers who continue contributing to social security schemes in India and obtain a Certificate of Coverage (CoC). Earlier, the benefit



was limited to a three-year period, making the extension a significant advantage for Indian businesses and professionals operating in the UK. India also managed to resolve concerns related to the UK's proposed steel safeguard measures, which had emerged as the final obstacle before the trade agreement could come into effect. The government confirmed that around 85% of India's steel exports to the UK will remain outside the scope of the new import restriction measures.

Officials said the agreement ensures continued market access for Indian steel exporters through a combination of country-specific quotas, residual quotas, and an authorised-use mechanism. The balancing measures were finalised without affecting the broader commitments under the trade pact. The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) is scheduled to come into force on July 15, with the detailed terms of the agreement expect-

ed to be released by July 1. The pact was confirmed by the Prime Ministers of both countries on Wednesday. Officials described the agreement as a balanced arrangement that protects the interests of both nations while expanding trade opportunities. The social security exemption, along with the steel-related resolution, is expected to strengthen economic cooperation and provide greater certainty for Indian businesses and professionals working in the UK.

Pradhan Chairs Meeting to Ensure Smooth Conduct of NEET-UG Re-Exam

New Delhi: Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan chaired a high-level review meeting on Thursday, directing authorities to remain vigilant for the upcoming NEET-UG re-examination on June 21. Attendees included officials from the Education Ministry, state governments, the National Testing Agency (NTA), and various higher educational institutions. To ensure seamless coordination, Ministry-designated officers will deploy to all states by Friday, reporting directly to a central Command Centre led by NTA Director General Abhishek Singh. Additionally, local Control Centres will closely monitor exam operations in every state and union territory.

Pradhan emphasized maintaining the highest standards of integrity, transparency, and efficiency. He instructed officials to guarantee a free, fair, and stress-free environment for candidates. Echoing this, School Education Secretary Sanjay Kumar highlighted the need to put students at absolute ease by providing essential facilities, including proper seating

and drinking water. Higher Education Secretary Vineet Joshi stressed that the remaining time is crucial, calling for proactive coordination and strict protocol compliance. The NTA is currently collaborating with state police, intelligence agencies, and district committees to ensure smooth execution. The hybrid meeting concluded with representatives from 222 institutions assuring full cooperation for a hassle-free examination.



Lionel Messi Takes A Dominant Three-Nil Lead Over Cristiano Ronaldo After World Cup Day One: Did We Not See It Coming?

New Delhi: There are few rivalries in sport that can survive the passage of time quite like Lionel Messi versus Cristiano Ronaldo. For nearly two decades, football fans have measured one against the other. Goals, trophies, Ballon d’Ors, records and influence have all been turned into chapters of a debate that refuses to fade away, even as both men approach the twilight of their careers. And after the opening round of matches at the FIFA World Cup 2026, the scoreboard reads rather emphatically: Messi 3, Ronaldo 0. On the surface, it looks brutal. Messi produced a stunning hat-trick against Algeria, becoming the oldest player to score a World Cup hat-trick and drawing level with Miroslav Klose’s record of 16 World Cup goals. Ronaldo, meanwhile, walked away from Portugal’s 1-1 draw against DR Congo without a goal, without a shot on target and without the slice of history he had hoped to claim.

Yet for all the attention the contrasting performances have generated, was any of this really surprising? If there was one genuine surprise from the opening round, it was Messi. Not because he is incapable of brilliance — at this stage, doubting Messi feels like tempting fate — but because of the sheer scale of what he produced. At 38 years old and just days away from turning 39, Messi was expected to guide Argentina through the tournament with intelligence, experience and moments of



quality. Instead, he delivered one of the performances of the competition, scoring all three goals in Argentina’s victory and once again becoming the centre of football’s biggest conversation. The remarkable thing about Messi’s World Cup journey is that it was supposed to have reached its perfect ending four years ago in Qatar. He had lifted the trophy, won the Golden

Ball and completed the one achievement that had eluded him throughout his career. Yet here he is again, not merely participating but dominating. Even by Messi’s standards, a World Cup hat-trick at this age felt extraordinary. Four years after leading Argentina to glory, he continues to add new pages to a legacy many believed was already complete. Ronaldo’s struggles, on the other hand, did not arrive out of nowhere. The Portuguese captain entered the tournament without a goal at Euro 2024 and had also drawn blanks in Portugal’s pre-World Cup friendlies against Chile and Nigeria. Long before the opening whistle against DR Congo, questions had already emerged about whether the 41-year-old could still consistently influence matches at the highest level.

Against DR Congo, those concerns only intensified. Ronaldo managed just 25 touches and spent much of the evening isolated inside the penalty area as Portugal struggled to convert possession into meaningful chances. To be fair, Portugal’s midfield did him few favours. Despite boasting Joao Neves, Vitinha, Bruno Fernandes and Bernardo Silva, Roberto Martinez’s side lacked imagination and urgency in the final third. Crosses were scarce, passing patterns became predictable and Ronaldo was often left waiting for opportunities that never arrived.

Hamilton Reborn And Mercedes Exposed: Five Crucial Takeaways From The Monaco And Spain Grands Prix

New Delhi: At the start of 2026, Formula 1 looked destined for a predictable story: a dominant Mercedes, a runaway championship and a season that risked getting decided far too early. After a frenetic last couple of races, that certainty has evaporated. Monaco and Barcelona have reshuffled the narrative, revived old contenders and exposed new vulnerabilities. Most importantly, they have given us something many feared 2026 lacked: a genuine title fight. Here are my five big takeaways from a fascinating double-header.

From his painfully evident struggles in the car during the ground-effect era, it was easy and often tempting to believe that the best days of Sir Lewis Hamilton were behind him, and the agony of Abu Dhabi 2021 was the last time he would come close to clinching that record-breaking eighth world title. A shocking first season at Ferrari last year gave the distinct feeling that 2026 was a make-or-break season



for Hamilton. Another tepid year, and we would probably see the last of the legend in December.

Well, among the biggest headlines from the season so far is that retirement is no longer an option for the sport’s greatest driver ever,

at least statistically. The rule reset turned out to be a blessing for Hamilton, along with a car that has had his input in its development, and a support team that is aligned to his preferences. The outcome was his first-ever Ferrari podium in

only the second race of the season in Shanghai, followed by back-to-back second places in Canada and Monaco, before Barcelona saw his 106th career race win, and his first in red. This sensational run of form has put him second in the championship standings, with a real shot at clinching the title. But for now, it is incredible to step back and realise that only six drivers in the history of F1 have won a race at an age older than Hamilton, and five of them did so in the 1950s. At 41, the seven-time world champion has been outpacing his much younger rivals on track, a feat that eluded his celebrated contemporaries such as Sebastian Vettel, Fernando Alonso, Kimi Raikkonen and even the great Michael Schumacher himself. Speaking of Schumacher, the German’s first win for Ferrari came in Barcelona in 1996. Thirty years later, can another scarlet win in Spain herald the onset of greatness for the most iconic driver-team pairing the sport could have imagined?

Stylish Glenn Phillips Wearing Sunglasses To Survive Intense Jofra Archer Barrage At Oval

New Delhi: New Zealand all-rounder Glenn Phillips produced one of the most eye-catching moments of the opening day of the second Test at The Oval, donning a pair of sunglasses to face a fierce spell from Jofra Archer. Phillips finished unbeaten on 49 as New Zealand reached 291 for 7 at stumps after England stand-in captain Joe Root opted to bowl first on a green-tinged surface. Glenn Phillips wearing goggles while batting against England in 2nd Test. Phillips facing Jofra Archer’s bouncers using GOGGLES. pic.twitter.com/ysrOWT-PSIX— Maina Singh (@Maina_Singhx77) June 17, 2026 The New Zealand batter called for sunglasses in the 67th over after struggling with sunlight reflecting off the sightscreen during the final session. The change immediately caught the attention of those at the ground, but Phillips soon had a bigger challenge to deal with. Archer, brought back for a fourth spell after Phillips had taken advantage of some loose bowling from debutant Sonny Baker, went after him with a barrage of short-pitched deliveries. The first ball Phillips faced wearing the sunglasses climbed sharply and struck him on the shoulder. The contest intensified as Archer continued to pepper him with bouncers. One delivery flew past Phillips’ head and left him sprawled on the pitch. Moments



later, he looked towards the New Zealand dressing room and responded with a thumbs-up, a gesture that drew laughter from his teammates. Daryl Mitchell said the innings reflected Phillips’ personality as much as his batting ability. “He thrives in moments like tonight: he’s the entertainer, he’s got the shades on, he’s looking cool. He loves that stuff,” Mitchell said after play.

“That was a seriously tough spell to get through, the way Jof obviously was charging in there and banging that wicket. It was cool to see GP do what GP does.

India Women’s T20 World Cup Test Begins Now



New Delhi: India have made a dream start to their Women’s T20 World Cup campaign, showing little wrong so far. They opened with a commanding win over Pakistan before easing past the Netherlands, and in the process, climbed to the top of Group A, edging past Australia on net run rate. But despite two wins from two, India are still a fair distance from sealing a semi-final berth. Three group-stage matches remain, and the road ahead gets significantly tougher. India next face South Africa before rounding off their league phase against Australia in what could prove to be a decisive fixture. With India, Australia and South Africa widely viewed as the strongest contenders for the top four, every remaining result in Group A carries added weight. From India’s perspective, maintaining their edge over Australia on net run rate could prove crucial as the qualification picture begins to take shape. India will be brimming with con-

fidence after sitting atop the points table, but they cannot afford even a moment of complacency. Their next challenge comes against South Africa on June 20. It was only two months ago that Laura Wolvaardt and her side handed India a 4-1 defeat in a bilateral series at home, exposing key gaps in their game. What will worry India further is that South Africa were not at full strength then, with the likes of Marizanne Kapp, Dane van Niekerk, and Shabnim Ismail missing. Their return only makes the upcoming contest even more formidable. Interestingly, India and South Africa are yet to face each other in the Women’s T20 World Cup, adding an extra layer of intrigue to this encounter. The two sides did share a gripping rivalry in last year’s ODI World Cup, where Nadine de Klerk starred in the league stage before India hit back with a win in the final. With both teams eager to assert dominance, there will be no shortage of intensity.

IPL 2027 Could Begin in Early March as BCCI Explores New Window Amid Heat Concerns

New Delhi: The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is actively considering advancing the Indian Premier League (IPL) schedule to an earlier window, with plans under discussion to begin future editions around March 10 and conclude by May 15. The move is aimed at avoiding extreme summer heat in the latter stages of the tournament while maintaining the current structure and competitive balance. BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia confirmed the development to PTI. The proposal comes amid growing concerns over weather conditions in late May, alongside the challenge of fitting a packed international cricket calendar around the IPL’s two-month window. This year, IPL started around the March 29th (28th), and it was over by May 31. Only thing which we are discussing is that during the fog end of the tournament after May 15...there is apprehension of having rainfall or pre-monsoon season starting,” BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said. “On the other hand, there is hot weather which is not very conducive either for the players or for the crowds,” he said.

Saikia explained that the board’s primary concern is ensuring better playing and view-

ing conditions, especially in regions where temperatures become extreme during the latter half of the IPL season. He said discussions are ongoing within the IPL Governing Council to explore whether the tournament can be advanced by nearly two weeks without disrupting other cricketing commitments. He also clarified that despite occasional suggestions to expand the league, there will be no increase in the number of matches from 74 to 94 in the foreseeable future due to international scheduling limitations. “So therefore, there is a discussion going on in BCCI as well as in our IPL Governing Council regarding whether we can start the tournament a little bit earlier than the fog end of March,” Saikia said. “It will be very difficult to go beyond two months because other countries also have to pay bilateral matches...So, at this moment there is no discussion regarding increasing matches from 74 to 94. Not happening immediately,” he added. Saikia further emphasised that any expansion would require coordination with other cricket boards and the ICC calendar, making it impractical at this stage. He noted that the IPL already operates within a tightly squeezed



international window, and extending it further could disrupt bilateral series involving major cricketing nations. He also highlighted the importance of aligning India’s domestic calendar to support the proposed IPL window, stating that finishing domestic competitions earlier would be crucial for smoother scheduling. Saikia said the BCCI is also working to ensure that domestic tournaments

conclude by early March to enable a cleaner transition into the IPL season. He pointed out that India’s domestic structure already spans several months, starting in late August and ending with the Ranji Trophy final in March, leaving limited flexibility. According to him, streamlining this schedule is essential if the IPL is to begin earlier and avoid overlapping weather and logistical challenges.

World Cup 2026: Ghana Seal Dramatic Stoppage-Time Victory Over Panama to Strengthen Knockout Stage Qualification Prospects

New Delhi: Caleb Yirenkyi scored deep into stoppage time as Ghana secured a dramatic 1-0 victory over Panama in their opening Group L match of the FIFA World Cup 2026 in rainy Toronto on Wednesday. The decisive moment came in the fifth minute of second-half stoppage time when Ghana launched a swift counterattack from their own half. Brandon Thomas-Asante surged down the left flank and drove into the penalty area before squaring the ball for Yirenkyi, who arrived unmarked to tap home the winner. The late strike settled a contest that had produced few clear-cut chances for much of the evening. Panama were the more



threatening side in the first half, while Ghana improved considerably after the break

and enjoyed greater control of possession. The match was considered crucial for both sides in a group also featuring England and Croatia. Earlier in the day, England defeated Croatia 4-2, making Ghana’s victory an important boost in the race for qualification from Group L. Panama nearly made the perfect start when Cecilio Waterman tested goalkeeper Lawrence Ati Zigi with a 15-yard volley in the second minute, but the Ghanaian shot-stopper reacted sharply to push the effort away. Panama continued to probe and came close again in the 38th minute when Jiovany Ramos fired wide after Ati Zigi punched clear a dangerous cross.