

Importance of pre-marital counselling emphasised

Imphal, Feb 03: A one-day awareness programme on “Pre-Marital Counselling in Manipur” was jointly organised by the Manipur State Commission for Women (MSCW) and the Women Cell, Regional College, Lilong Chajing today at the Seminar Hall of the college. The programme aimed at creating awareness on the importance of pre-marital counselling in promoting healthy family relationships, mutual understanding, and social harmony. In this awareness program, Th. Tiningpham Monsang, Chairperson, MSCW; Sk. Sophia, Member, MSCW; W. Phajatombi Devi, MCS, Member Secretary, MSCW; L. Chandrakumar Singh, Principal, Regional College; and M. Basanti Singha, Head of the Department of Manipuri and Convenor, Women Cell, graced the programme as Presidium Members. Tiningpham Monsang stated that the Manipur State Commission for Women (MSCW), established in 2006, is a statutory body mandated to empower women in the State. She said that the Commission works to promote and protect women’s rights and advocates for their welfare, thereby taking responsibility for addressing women’s issues in Manipur. She informed that the MSCW deals with numerous cases, including domestic violence, harassment, and issues requiring medical intervention. While handling such cases, it has been observed that many prob-

lems originate from issues that existed even before marriage. She emphasised that before entering into marriage, both men and women should properly understand and assess each other. Many misunderstandings arise after marriage, which eventually lead to family disputes. Therefore, she stressed that pre-marital counselling for both men and women is extremely important, as it can help prevent broken families. Appealing to the teaching and non-teaching staff as well as students of the college, she urged them to take full advantage of the awareness programme and to act as messengers by spreading the message among youth, friends, and within their communities. She further stated that building a progressive society is essential. For a society to be progressive, women must respect the rights of men, and men must equally respect the rights of women. A progressive society, she said, begins with oneself and not with others. Concluding her address, she expressed hope that students would grow into responsible individuals and contribute positively to building strong and harmonious families. Appealing to the teaching and non-teaching staff as well as students of the college, she urged them to take full advantage of the awareness programme and to act as messengers by spreading the message among youth, friends, and within their communities. She further stat-



ed that building a progressive society is essential. For a society to be progressive, women must respect the rights of men, and men must equally respect the rights of women. A progressive society, she said, begins with oneself and not with others. Concluding her address, she expressed hope that students would grow into responsible individuals and contribute positively to building strong and harmonious families. W. Phajatombi Devi emphasized the importance of pre-marital counselling for youth, stating that women should be at least 18 years old and men 21 before entering married life. She urged par-

ents and teachers to guide young people regarding this matter. Highlighting the rising incidence of child marriages in society, W. Phajatombi noted that such practices have negative impacts on families and communities. Under the Prevention of Child Marriage Act, the Women’s Commission has been actively conducting various programs to address this issue. She further stressed that pre-marital counselling plays a crucial role in ensuring successful and harmonious marriages. Young women should carefully choose a suitable life partner, and men should likewise select the right partner.

DMU launches book on AI-enabled real-time environmental monitoring

Imphal, Feb 03: Dhanamanjuri University (DMU) hosted the launch of the book Artificial Intelligence Enabled Real Time Environmental Monitoring, released by Vice Chancellor Prof. W. Chandbabu Singh, Registrar Dr. R. K. Joteen Singh, and Finance Officer Rojendrakar Nongthomba. The event, held at the DMU campus starting at 2:30 PM, attracted faculty, students, and environmental experts. Head of Department Koijam Manibusan Singh provided a briefing on the book’s key highlights. Published by Springer with the hardcover edition available from January 3, 2026, the 281-page volume is edited by Dr. Binota Thokchom (DMU, Manipur), Dr. Rishemjit Kaur (CSIR-CSIO, Chandigarh), Dr. Pardeep Singh (University of Delhi), and Dr. Pengpeng Qiu (Donghua University, Shanghai). Vice Chancellor Prof. W. Chandbabu Singh emphasized the book’s significance for Manipur’s environmental issues, including biodiversity conservation and climate resilience, and highlighted DMU’s dedication to innovative research.

In Brief

KDIDWC rejects March 31 deadline for IDP resettlement

Imphal: The Kangpokpi District Internally Displaced Welfare Committee (KDIDWC) has rejected the March 31, 2026, deadline for the resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), calling it unrealistic and unworkable in the absence of basic infrastructure. In a press statement, the Committee said the Chief Secretary’s announcement came as no surprise, given that the proposed resettlement areas lack essential facilities such as schools, hospitals and motorable roads.

Heroin seized

Imphal: In a major drug seizure, Manipur Police arrested one Md. Sabir Ahmed (46) of Lilong Nungei, Thoubal district from North AOC area under Imphal-PS, Imphal West district. From his possession, 15.556 kg of brown sugar and a TATA truck were seized. On the other hand, security forces arrested two individuals from New Checkon, Tribal Market under Porompat-PS, Imphal East district, along with heroin. The arrested persons have been identified as Md. Mustaque Ahmed (28) of Golapati Mayai Leikai, Imphal East district and Raj Khan (28) of Khelakhong Mayai Leikai, Thoubal district.

World Wetlands Day

Imphal: The Department of Geography, Manipur University observed World Wetlands Day 2026 at the lakeshore of Loktak Lake, in line with the global theme “Wetlands and Traditional Knowledge: Celebrating Cultural Heritage.” The objective of the programme was to raise awareness about wetland conservation through community engagement and to understand local perspectives on the preservation and restoration of Loktak Lake. The programme was attended by teachers and students of the Department of Geography, Manipur University. During the observance, faculty members and students interacted with local elders and community leaders.

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members and students interacted with local elders and community leaders. One local leader, Shri Oinam Rajen, Secretary, All Loktak Lake Area Fishers Union Manipur (ALLAFUM), highlighted the deteriorating ecology of the lake and its direct impact on local livelihoods. He noted that sources of pollution now include not only solid waste and plastics, but also biomedical waste and microplastics found in lake organisms, and suggested that issues such as phumdi proliferation and declining water quality could be addressed if the Ithai Barrage is opened for at least 90 days a year.

A lakeshore cleaning drive was also conducted as part of the programme, during which recyclable plastic bottles and other waste materials were collected and deposited at designated collection centres. Observing World Wetlands Day outside the university campus reflects this year’s theme and aligns with Manipur University’s ongoing efforts to strengthen community-based academic engagement, an approach encouraged by the University leadership under the guidance of Prof. N. Lokendra Singh, Vice-Chancellor, Manipur University.

KDIDWC rejects March 31 deadline for IDP resettlement

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release of damage assessment forms, prompt payment of compensation for losses suffered during the crisis, and greater transparency in the resettlement process, with the involvement of community leaders. Highlighting the impact on education, the KDIDWC said the lack of student facilities in Kangpokpi district has severely disrupted the schooling of displaced children. It urged the government to allocate dedicated funds for schools and educational support in the district. Emphasising the need for adequate funding and a clear, time-bound resettlement roadmap, the Committee said IDPs should not be treated as statistics. It reaffirmed its commitment to continue advocating for their rights until concrete measures are put in place.

Ukhrul set to celebrate Naga seed sowing festival Lui-Ngai-Ni

Imphal, Feb 03: The Naga seed sowing festival Lui-Ngai-Ni will be celebrated this year at the Ukhrul district headquarters in Manipur on February 14 and 15, under the aegis of the United Naga Council (UNC). The two-day gala event will be hosted by the Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL). Observed annually to mark the beginning of the agricultural season, Lui-Ngai-Ni brings together Naga communities to seek blessings for a bountiful harvest and the well-being of the people. The celebrations will feature traditional rituals, ceremonial blowing of trumpets, cultural dances, folk songs, speeches and various forms of cultural entertainment. The theme for this year’s festival is “Cultural Renaissance”, which reflects the revival and reinterpretation of Naga cultural heritage in a modern context. Losii Dikho, MLA from Mao Assembly Constitu-

cy, will attend the inaugural function as the chief guest, while Dinganlung Gangmei, Chairman of the Hill Areas Committee (HAC) and MLA from Nungba Assembly Constituency, will be the main celebrant. Awangbow Newmai, MLA from Tamei, will serve as the principal celebrant. Manipur Chief Secretary Dr Puneet Kumar Goel and Tamenglong MLA Janghemlung Panmei will convey their greetings during the inaugural programme. In the valedictory function, greetings will be delivered by Chandel MLA Dr S. S. Olish and Phungyar MLA Leishiyko Keishang. Khashim Vashum, MLA from Chingai Assembly Constituency, will be the host of the festival. A programme note issued in connection with Lui-Ngai-Ni stated that culture forms the foundation of a people’s identity, worldview and way of life. It highlighted that the Naga com-



munity, comprising around 66-67 ethnic tribes spread across India and Myanmar, reflects unity in diversity. Of these, 20 tribes and one associate unit are found in Manipur, including Anal, Aimol, Chothe, Chiru, Inpui, Kharam, Khoibu, Lamkang, Liangmai, Mao, Maram, Maring, Moyon, Monsang, Poumai, Rongmei, Tarao, Tangkhul, Thangal, Zeme and KNUM. Explaining the theme, the note described “Cultural Renaissance” as the rediscovery and renewal

of traditional values, art and knowledge, adapted to contemporary times. It said the theme reflects the Naga people’s efforts to reclaim and celebrate their history, moral values and rich cultural heritage while preserving core traditions amid changing times. The programme note added that this year’s celebration aims to revive, inculcate and sustain both the abstract and practical value systems of Naga culture, shaping the collective destiny of the people.

Underground Rail Link Along ‘Chicken’s Neck’ To Boost Northeast Connectivity, Says Assam CM

New rail link boosts regional security

Guwahati, Feb 03: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has welcomed the proposed underground rail link along West Bengal’s strategic ‘Chicken’s Neck’ corridor, calling it a significant step to ensure secure transportation to the Northeast. The 40-km narrow strip in northern West Bengal’s Siliguri area, bordered by Nepal and Bangladesh and near Bhutan and China, has long been considered a strategic vulnerability. Sarma described the corridor as having been exploited as an intimidation tactic by anti-national forces and termed the underground rail project a “major strategic breakthrough” and a “foolproof transportation corridor.”

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw recently announced plans to construct underground tracks along the corridor while upgrading existing lines to four tracks. The new lines will connect Tin Mile Haat and Rangapani stations, with one extending to Bagdogra, a location critical to India’s



air defence. Sarma expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Minister Vaishnaw for addressing the issue, noting that similar measures could have been considered after the 1971 war. He also criticized past leaders, saying former Prime Minister

Indira Gandhi could have expanded the corridor, and Jawaharlal Nehru’s partition decisions left the Northeast dependent on it. Officials from Northeast Frontier Railway have confirmed the project’s strategic importance for regional connectivity.

The Mizoram government is working to accelerate gas and oil exploration: CM

Imphal, Feb 03: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Monday said efforts are being made to expedite the exploration of natural gas and oil in the state.Lalduhoma said that attempts are also on to harness the state’s green energy potential-naugurating “Saksham,” a two-week oil and gas conservation awareness campaign in Aizawl, he said, “We are continuing to follow up on the exploration of oil and gas beneath the ground in Mizoram to ensure the work is carried out more rapidly. Ad-

ditionally, we are actively working on opportunities for progress in the field of green energy.”The chief minister highlighted India’s energy vulnerability, noting that the nation remains the world’s third-largest consumer of oil and gas while importing nearly 80 per cent of its requirements. He warned that overconsumption depletes non-renewable resources and drives air pollution through carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide emissions.“Conserving oil today is an investment in our children’s fu-

ture,” he said, urging the people to use fuel judiciously to protect both the economy and the environment. Lalduhoma also announced that domestic gas pipeline connections for Aizawl are progressing, with construction extending from Tripura. Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs Minister B Lalchhazova, who also attended the event, said the government is committed to an uninterrupted gas supply.He said that a gas bottling plant at Mualkhang near Aizawl is being upgraded, and the

government is also working towards establishing an oil depot. According to data from the Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC), during 2024-25, Mizoram consumed 119.20 thousand metric tonnes of diesel (HSD), 58.83 thousand metric tonnes of petrol, and 34.6 thousand metric tonnes of LPG. At present, Mizoram has 60 LPG distributors and 115 petrol pumps (retail outlets), officials said. More than 4. 22 lakh vehicles are registered in the state.

Nagaland University team wins global award for Nagamese AI project

Dimapur, Feb 03: A multidisciplinary research team has bagged the second prize at the AI-Powered Education Global Award 2025–2026 Contest, organised by the ASEM Life-long Learning Hub, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, for its innovative project titled “Preserving Heritage through Technology: A Scalable NLP Solution for Nagamese Language (NagaLange.ai).”Nagaland University (NU), through its PRO, stated that the award-winning project addresses a critical gap in artificial intelligence by enhancing machine translation for low-resource and underrepresented languages, with a special focus on Nagamese, a widely spoken creole of Northeast India.The project uses a token-augmented adaptation of the

mBART-50 multilingual model, introducing language-specific tokens to significantly improve translation accuracy without requiring costly architectural changes or large-scale retraining. Experimental results showed substantial performance gains, with Nagamese–English translation achieving a BLEU score improvement from 81.25 to 85.42, alongside up to 40% reduction in accent-induced translation errors compared to leading multilingual models such as Transformer, M2M-100 and NLLB-200. NU said the solution demonstrated strong potential for scalable deployment in education, digital governance, immigration workflows and multilingual platforms, while contributing to linguistic equity and cul-

tural preservation.The study was led by Associate Professor Dr. R. Vasanathan and co-authored by researchers from Nagaland University, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, National College (Autonomous) Tiruchirappalli, Central University of Haryana and Central University of Tamil Nadu.By combining advanced NLP techniques with cultural sensitivity, NU said NagaLange.ai sets a global benchmark for how AI can be leveraged to preserve linguistic heritage while advancing inclusive and equitable education technologies. The study was led by R Vasanthan, associate professor at Nagaland University, and co-authored by researchers from Nagaland University, SRM Institute of Science and Technology,

National College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, the Central University of Haryana, and the Central University of Tamil Nadu. By integrating advanced natural language processing techniques with cultural sensitivity, NagaLange.ai sets a global benchmark for leveraging AI to preserve linguistic heritage while promoting inclusive and equitable education technologies. Experimental results showed marked gains, with Nagamese-English translation BLEU scores improving from 81.25 to 85.42, along with up to a 40% reduction in accent-induced translation errors compared to leading multilingual models such as Transformer, M2M-100 and NLLB-200.

Nagaland: Today is the 79th CSU general conference



Dimapur, Feb 03: The 79th General Conference of the Chakhesang Students Union (CSU) will be held from February 3 to 5, 2025 at Zuketsa in Phek district under the theme “Nurturing identity through knowledge and culture.”Former minister Neiba Kronu will attendas the introductory guest at the opening session on February 3 at 4 p.m. Greetings will be shared by Gihuka Zhimo, president of the All Sumi Students Union (SKK). The programme will be led by CSU tribunal Rite Khutsoh, while the welcome note will be delivered by Kupelhi Losou, convenor of the LOC. CSU general secretary Kuzoto Swuro will present the general secretary’s report, and CSU vice president PovoZo Soho will introduce the CSU units. Chakhesang Women Welfare Society will make a presentation on traditional attire. The session will be followed by the CSU union assembly at 6 p.m. Deputy Chief Minister T.R. Zeliang will be the inaugural guest on February 4, with Kudecho Khamo, advisor for CAWD & Taxes, as guest of honour. L. Dikho, MLA of the 48 Mao Assembly Constituency, Manipur, will be the cultural guest on the same day, while Zhothisa Dawhuo, secretary of Women Resources Development, Government of Nagaland, will attend as valedictory guest on February 5.Dr. Neis-

atuo Mero, MLA of the 16th Pfitsero Assembly Constituency, will be the special guest for the 67th general session of the Zuketsa Students Union (ZSU) on February 5. A discussion on “Indo-Naga Political Talks: The vision and its prospects” will be held on February 4 with panellists Lt. Col. (Retd.) Neipfue (Ape) Venuh, member of the Collective Leadership, NSCN/GPRN; Alezo Venuh, Ato Kilonser, GPRN/NSCN (U); and Acüyi Vadeo, joint secretary, NNC. Dr. Neingulo Krome, secretary general of NPMHR, will moderate the session.Neichute Doulo, CEO of Entrepreneurs Associates, and Vekhohu Puro, EAC, Peren Headquarters, will serve as resource persons for seminars on entrepreneurship and competitive examinations respectively.Greetings will also be shared by Mteisuding Heraang, president of the Naga Students’ Federation (NSF); Pfokrehrii Matekho Pekosii, president of the Mao Students Union (MSU); and Rongley Leyri, president of the Pochury Students Union (PSU). Donald V. Thabah, general secretary of the Khasi Students Union (KSU), will deliver the solidarity message, while Vezuho Keyho, president of the Chakhesang Public Organisation (CPO), will exhort the gathering during the inaugural session.

Conference on Natural Farming in the Region

Dimapur, Feb 03: A one-day Regional Conference on Natural Farming for CRPs, Krishi Sakhis and extension functionaries was held on February 2 at Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Dimapur. The programme was organised by Regional Centre for Organic & Natural Farming (RCONF), Imphal, in collaboration with KVK Dimapur. The conference commenced with an inaugural address by Dr. Homeswar Kalita, head of Regional Centre, Nagaland. Dr. V. Y. Deoghare, regional director in-charge, RCONF Imphal, delivered the keynote address highlighting the importance of natural farming in sustainable agriculture and farmer welfare.



practical approaches, techniques to enhance farmers’ income through reduction of input costs, nutrient and pest management practices, certification systems, and marketing and branding of natural produce. Dr. Phool Kumari, senior scientist & head, motivated farmers to adopt practices for conserving and improving soil health.An open session enabled interaction between farmers and experts, allowing participants to clarify doubts and share experiences.The programme

concluded with a valedictory session featuring feedback from participants, honouring of farmers, and a vote of thanks delivered by Dr. Narendra Chaudhari, junior scientific officer, RCONF Imphal.Resource persons from RCONF Imphal and KVK Dimapur shared valuable insights and field-based experiences. Altogether, 100 participants attended the conference. The programme was chaired by Lireni Kikon, SMS (Plant Protection), KVK Dimapur.

The BJP heralds the return of the government by designating Manipur as an observer

Guwahati, Feb 03: Ahead of a deferred joint meeting between BJP central leaders and NDA legislators from Manipur, BJP headquarter at New Delhi on Monday appointed a central observer for the election of the legislative party leader in the state (Manipur).The appointment of the central observer came amid fresh speculation of the reinstatement of an elected government in the state after state legislators of the BJP and its partners were invited to New Delhi for a meeting with BJP central leaders, possibly to deliberate on finding ways to re-install the elected government..The scheduled meeting, which was earlier scheduled for Monday afternoon at 2 pm, reportedly deferred till 3 pm of Tuesday. Ahead of the deferred meeting, the appointment of the central observer for election of BJP legislators came up.The BJP Parliamentary Board appointed its national general secretary Tarun Chugh as the central observer for the election of the legislative party leader.“BJP Parliamentary Board has appointed Shri Tarun Chugh, National General Secretary as Central Observer for the election of the Legislative Party Leader in Manipur,” a BJP headquarter press

release signed by its national general secretary & headquarter in-charge Arun Singh read.The move came amid talks speculating re-installation of the popular government in the state after MLAs of the BJP and its partners –NPP and NPF – were invited to a meeting with party central leaders with undisclosed agenda. None of the MLAs who left Imphal for New Delhi on Sunday talked about knowing the exact agenda of the meeting.Most of the MLAs have reached New Delhi and remaining will be reaching by Monday, sources said.In the 60-member Manipur Legislative Assembly, with its 59 effective strength after the demise of one NPP member, the BJP currently holds 32 seats.Their ally NPP and NPF has seven and five MLAs respectively. Among the three independent MLAs, one is supporting the BJP while the other two belonging to the Kuki tribe had withdrawn their support to the then BJP government after the unfolding of the violent crisis in May 2023.The Kuki People’s Alliance (KPA) , having two members in the state Assembly, had also withdrawn the support. The opposition Congress has five legislators. The exact number of MLAs who had

reached the national capital could not be ascertained at the time of filing this report.However, sources said that over 30 MLAs who were invited for the meeting were camped at Delhi.Meanwhile, a highly reliable source said that Monday’s scheduled meeting had to be postponed till tomorrow afternoon due to the non-arrival of the MLAs belonging to the Kuki tribes.Of the total 10 Kuki MLAs in the State Assembly, seven of them were BJP legislators.All the 10 MLAs were reportedly invited to the proposed meeting and they could not reach Delhi due to short notice of the meeting with a source related to non-availability of air tickets in addition.Most of the MLAs left Imphal on Sunday by air. But, according to them (MLAs), they have no idea of the agenda of the meeting. State BJP president A Sarda Devi who accompanied the MLAs also did not disclose the agenda saying that she was not informed of the agenda to be deliberated in the meeting. He had told the reporters at Imphal airport, “All NDA legislators have been called. We are hoping and believing that a popular government will be formed.”Former chief minister N Biren Singh who also left

Imphal on Sunday had said “Since all the MLAs of the NDA partners are being invited for a meeting, I expect a positive outcome.”He added that “Earlier there have been meetings of all BJP MLAs. Then again, the PR term is due to end on February 12. Let’s hope for a positive response.”National Peoples’ Party (NPP) Manipur unit president Lorho S Pfoze who also left Imphal for New Delhi yesterday had said that he was also invited to the meeting but “Nothing is certain on government formation.”However, all of them expected the agenda could be related to the re-installation of a popular government in the state before February 12, the day which the President’s Rule in Manipur is to complete one year.Manipur has been under President’s Rule since February 13 last year, following the resignation of former Chief Minister N Biren Singh on February 9 amid threats of a no-confidence motion by legislators.The six-month extended term of the PR is due to end by February 12 before which it would be mandatory to take a decision on the part of the Central government on whether popular government be re-installed or PR be extended.

In three years, the Bhutan train link via Assam will be operational: NFR

Guwahati, Feb 03: Work on railway lines connecting Kokrajhar in Assam with Bhutan’s Gelephu is expected to be completed within three years, officials said on Monday.NFR general manager Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, addressing a press conference here, said, “For Bhutan connectivity, we have two projects. One is 69-km-long from Kokrajhar to Gelephu, and the other is 20-km-long between Banarhat (West Bengal) and Samtse (Bhutan).” Chief Administrative Officer, NFR (Construction), Hitendra Goyal, said the project in Assam is likely to be completed within three years once work commences.“The state government has been positive and helpful in taking forward the work,” he said.The project in West Bengal connecting the Himalayan nation through railway tracks was facing issues, including those related to land acquisition, the officials claimed.The West Bengal project is likely to take time as progress has been “slow”, they said.“The land required passes through four tea gardens. The state government (in Bengal) has been slow to respond and



land acquisition has become a problem. A timeframe for its completion cannot be provided at the moment,” one of the officials said.

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had earlier announced the two projects, which is expected to provide a significant boost to trade, tourism and people-to-people exchanges.

Gelephu and Samtse are the major

export-import hubs in Bhutan along the 700-km India-Bhutan border, the officials said.Gelephu is being developed as a “mindfulness city” and Samtse as an industrial town by the Government of Bhutan, they said.

The Kokrajhar-Gelephu line has been declared a Special Railway Project, enabling fast-tracked clearances and land acquisition.

Assam govt rolls out initiative for advance salary to employees

Guwahati, Feb 03: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday announced a significant welfare measure for state government employees, allowing them to avail salary in advance on a need-based basis to meet urgent financial requirements.The announcement was made at Lok ewa Bhawan in Dispur during the launch of the Swagat Satirtha Portal 2.0, an online platform aimed at streamlining employee transfer processes across departments.Under the new provision, state government employees will be permitted to draw advance salary, which can be repaid either in a lump sum or through instalments within a maximum period of one year. Employees opting for the facility will be required to pay a nominal rate of interest to the concerned bank.Explaining the mechanism, the Chief Minister said employees who repay the advance immediately after receiving their regular monthly salary would incur a lower interest burden, while those choosing instalment-based repayment would be charged a slightly higher interest rate.The initiative, he added, is intended to provide timely financial assistance during emergencies and reduce employees’ reliance on private moneylenders or high-interest loans.Referring to the Swagat Satirtha transfer portal, Sarma reiterated his earlier assurance that the portal would be opened twice in a financial year to facilitate transparent and employee-friendly transfers. He said another round of transfers would be completed before March 31. Clarifying eligibility criteria, the Chief Minister stated that around 9,000 employees who had already benefited from the earlier phase of the portal would not be allowed to apply again. However, employ-



ees who could not avail the facility earlier would now be able to seek transfers to their preferred locations.Sarma noted that the previous edition of the portal was operational from January 1, 2025, to June 7, 2025, and added that the government is targeting completion of the current transfer process by March 7 this year.He further said the Election Commission would be duly informed, as the transfer exercise is administrative in nature and not politically motivated. Government employees have been urged to submit their applications within 15 days to ensure timely execution.The Chief Minister said that both initiatives reflect the state government’s continued commitment to employee welfare, transparency and improved administrative efficiency.

Medical camp for senior citizens held in Kakching



Imphal, Feb 03: Under the supervision of the District Administration Kakching, the District Social Welfare Office in collaboration with the District Health Society organised a free medical camp for senior citizens under the Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana (AVYAY) scheme at Bengali Durga Mandir Community Hall, Serou Part II. A total of 160 senior citizens un-

derwent health check-ups at the medical camp, including screening for blood pressure, blood sugar levels and other ailments were conducted. Also, free medicines were distributed to the beneficiaries. It may be mentioned that the Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana (AVYAY) is a scheme aimed at improving quality of life of the Senior Citizens by

providing basic amenities like shelter, food, medical care and entertainment opportunities and by encouraging productive and active ageing through providing support for capacity building of State/UT Governments/ Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)/Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)/local bodies and the community at large.

Over 15 kg of brown sugar, heroin seized

Imphal, Feb 03: In a major drug seizure, Manipur Police arrested one Md. Sabir Ahmed (46) of Lilong Nungei, Thoubal district from North AOC area under Imphal-PS, Imphal West district. From his possession,

15.556 kg of brown sugar and a TATA truck were seized. On the other hand, security forces arrested two individuals from New Check-on, Tribal Market under Porompat-PS, Imphal East district, along with heroin.

The arrested persons have been identified as Md. Mustaque Ahmed (28) of Golapati Mayai Leikai, Imphal East

district and Raj Khan (28) of Khelakhong Mayai Leikai, Thoubal district. From their possession, 15 soap cases of Heroin No. 4 weighing about 417 grams, and one two-wheeler, Honda Dio DLX

were recovered. Manipur Police also arrested two residents of Andro along with DIC liquor from Sugnu bazar area under Sugnu-PS, Kakching district. They have been identified as Yumkhabam Jenish Singh (22) and Puthem Nanao Singh (19).

From their possession, 500 litres of DIC liquor, and a four-wheeler, A-Star bearing registration number MN-01W-9278 were recovered.



Assam-Bhutan rail link likely to be completed in 3 years: NFR

Kokrajhar, Feb 03: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) general manager Chetan Kumar Shrivastava has said that the railway line connecting Kokrajhar in Assam with Bhutan's Gelephu is expected to be completed within three years.

For Bhutan connectivity, NFR has two projects – one is 69-km-long Kokrajhar-Gelephu line and the other is 20-km-long between Banarhat (West Bengal) and Samtse (Bhutan).

Chief Administrative Officer, NFR (Construction), Hitendra Goyal, said the project in Assam is likely to be completed within three years once work commences.

“The state government has been positive and helpful in taking forward the work,” he said.

The project in West Bengal connecting the Himalayan nation through railway

tracks was facing issues, including those related to land acquisition, the officials claimed. The West Bengal project is likely to take time as progress has been “slow”, they said.

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had earlier announced the two projects, which are expected to provide a significant boost to trade, tourism and people-to-people exchanges.

Gelephu and Samtse are the major export-import hubs in Bhutan along the 700-km India-Bhutan border, the officials said. Gelephu is being developed as a “mindfulness city” and Samtse as an industrial town by the Government of Bhutan.

The Kokrajhar-Gelephu line has been declared a Special Railway Project, enabling fast-tracked clearances and land acquisition.

Mizoram Launches Digital Platform For Registrar Of Cooperative Societies

Aizawal, Feb 03: Chief Minister Lalduhoma today officially launched the Computerization of the Registrar of Cooperative Societies (RCS) at his office in Aizawl, marking a significant milestone in Mizoram's digital transformation journey. A Vision for Digital Excellence Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister emphasized that simplifying public services is a top priority for his administration. “Over the last two years, we have launched more than 20 online service portals,” he noted, citing the recent Mizoram CSR Connect Portal as a prime example. He highlighted that Mizoram's small population, high literacy, and English proficiency provide the perfect foundation for the state to become a national leader in digital service delivery. Transforming the Cooperative Sector The newly launched portal (cooperation.mizoram.gov.in) is part of a Centrally Spon-



sored Scheme under the Ministry of Cooperation. It aims to:

Enhance Ease of Doing Business: Societies can now interact with the RCS and district offices digitally, eliminating the need for physical visits. Improve Efficiency: The system streamlines workflows for departmental staff across all districts. Ensure Transparency: Real-time tracking and cloud-based data management foster a more accountable ecosystem. Leading the Way in India Minister for Cooperation, PC Vanlaluata, proudly an-

nounced that Mizoram is among the first states in India to successfully implement this initiative and the first to fully computerize all Cooperation Department offices statewide. The project, initiated on March 29, 2025, was developed by Noida-based Velocis Systems (a NICSI-empanelled firm) with cloud infrastructure support from Aizawl's INEXT Systems. Commissioner & Secretary Adit Prakash Rai, IAS, provided a technical overview, noting that the rollout covers the Aizawl headquarters and all district-level offices.

Supreme Court Stays High Court Order Cancelling Bail of IAS Officer Talo Potom

Itanagar, Feb 03: The Supreme Court has granted interim relief to IAS officer Talo Potom by staying a Gauhati High Court order that had cancelled the bail earlier granted to him.

Potom's bail was revoked by the Itanagar Permanent Bench of the Gauhati High Court on January 23. He had originally been granted bail on November 4 last year after being remanded to 14 days of judicial custody on October 27.

A Supreme Court division bench comprising Justice J.K. Maheshwari and Justice Atul S. Chandurkar passed the interim order, putting the high court's decision on hold pending further consideration. The bench allowed four weeks for the filing of counter affidavits and directed that the matter be listed again



after six weeks.

The court also permitted Potom to file an additional affidavit to raise further grounds in his defence, as requested. Reacting to the development, Potom, in a statement to the media, said he welcomed the Supreme Court's order and

reaffirmed his faith in the judicial process. He added that he would continue to cooperate fully with the investigating authorities and looked forward to presenting all relevant facts before the court.

Potom was arrested in connection with the al-

leged suicide of 19-year-old Gomchu Yekar, who died on October 23, 2025, in Lekhi village. Investigators have stated that Yekar named Potom and engineer Likwang Lowang in his suicide notes. The investigation into the case is ongoing.

Mizoram to abandon 80 incomplete projects under Sansad Adharsh Gram Yojana

Aizawl, Feb 03: The Mizoram government had decided to abandon 80 projects under Sansad Adharsh Gram Yojana (SAGY), which were lying incomplete for long.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the State Level Empowered Committee (SLEC) held under the chairmanship of Khilli Ram Meena, Chief Secretary, in Aizawl today.

SAGY is a village development project launched by Govt. of India in October, 2014, under which each Member of Parliament (MP) has to take the responsibility of developing physical

and institutional infrastructure in villages. Each MP was supposed to adopt one Gram Panchayat (Village) to develop it into a model village by 2016. After that, MPs adopted two more villages by 2019, and then one village per year till 2024. The implementation of SAGY began in Mizoram in 2014, aligning with the nationwide launch of the scheme. Under this initiative, 14 Gram Panchayats (GPs) in the state have been adopted by respective MPs to be developed as Adarsh Grams (Model Villages).

Each of these GPs formulated a Village De-

velopment Plan (VDP) through a participatory approach involving local stakeholders. In total, the VDPs included 816 projects/activities, covering a wide range of development areas such as infrastructure, education, health, livelihood, sanitation and social inclusion. The original target was to complete all planned interventions by the year 2024. However, 80 projects could not be completed within the timeline due to various challenges, such as initial overambition in planning, funding constraints, and departmental scheme limitations.

AR marks World Wetlands Day with plantation drive

Imphal, Feb 03: In a dual-location initiative reflecting the global theme of wetland conservation for human wellbeing and ecological health, Assam Rifles observed World Wetlands Day through community-driven environmental actions at Komlakhong and Moreh. World Wetlands Day, observed every year on February 2, marks the adoption of the Ramsar Convention in 1971 and raises global awareness about the vital role wetlands play in sustaining biodiversity, preventing floods, storing carbon, and supporting livelihoods. At Komlakhong in Imphal West, Assam Rifles collaborated with forest department officials and thirty local residents to execute a spirited plantation drive. The collective effort resulted in the planting of 200 saplings of native species, including sal, teak, and bamboo, along the wetland fringes. This initiative was specifically



designed to enhance biodiversity, mitigate soil erosion, and restore natural habitats vital for water purification and flood control within Manipur's delicate ecosystem. The event was further enriched by awareness sessions highlighting the critical necessity of community involvement in preserv-

ing regional ecological hotspots. Simultaneously, at S Moljol Primary School in the border town of Moreh, Tengenoupal District, the force engaged the younger generation through a competitive awareness quiz.

Thirty-eight students demonstrated remarkable knowledge re-

garding ecosystem services and the threats posed to wetlands by human activities. By rewarding top performers and conducting educational briefings for students and faculty, the initiative successfully fostered a sense of environmental responsibility in a remote border region.

IIT Guwahati, UK Universities develop machine learning-based framework to design sustainable metal alloys sans CRMs

Guwahati, Feb 03: Researchers from Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, in collaboration with researchers from London South Bank University, University of Manchester, and the University of Leeds, have developed a Machine Learning (ML)-based method to design advanced metal alloys that do not contain Critical Raw Materials (CRMs).

This innovation offers a practical route to identifying high-performance, sustainable materials that are not dependent on fragile global supply chains.

Since the Bronze Age, humans have improved metals by alloying, i.e., mixing a main metal with small amounts of other elements. In recent years, a new class of materials, High-Entropy Alloys (HEAs), has attracted the attention of researchers and industry worldwide.

While traditional alloys contain small amounts of secondary metals in a primary metal (for example, bronze is 88% copper and 12% tin), HEAs contain several metals in nearly equal amounts. These fall under the category of Multi-Principal Element Alloys (MPEAs).

HEAs are attractive because they offer many more combinations than traditional alloys and often exhibit excellent strength and stability at high temperatures.

Many high-performance HEAs used in areas such as aerospace engines, gas turbines, and nuclear power plants employ CRMs such as tantalum, niobium, tungsten, and hafnium. These elements are expensive, difficult to mine, and available in limited quantities.

Heavy reliance on such materials increases import dependence, strains supply chains, and adds environmental pressure due to mining. Reducing their use is therefore essential for sustainability and long-term industrial security.

To address this challenge, the research team led by IIT Guwahati developed a machine learning-assisted alloy design framework that focuses on identifying MPEAs that avoid the most critical raw materials.

The researchers first grouped CRMs into three levels based on supply risk, economic importance, and global availability. They created a database of 3,608 alloy compositions, focusing mainly on simple alloy systems built from elements that are not critically scarce. Among the models tested, the Extra Trees Regressor gave the most accurate predictions of Vickers hardness. This model was then combined with different optimisation techniques inspired by natural processes to search for alloy compositions that deliver high

hardness without using CRMs. A CRM-free alloy, “Ti_{0.011}NiFe_{0.4}Cu_{0.4},” was identified and predicted to have a Vickers hardness value that was even better than that of a well-known alloy containing critical raw materials, which has a hardness of about 480 HV.

The research team developed the newly proposed Ti-Ni-Fe-Cu alloy at a laboratory scale at IIT Kanpur and found its measured hardness to closely match the predicted value, confirming that the AI-based method works in practice. This approach can be used to design alloys with multiple properties simultaneously, such as strength, ductility, heat resistance, and corrosion resistance.

Speaking about the research, Prof. Shrikrishna N. Joshi, Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, IIT Guwahati, said, “The developed CRM-free alloy is particularly suited for applications where high hardness is a primary requirement, offering the added benefit of avoiding the use of Critical Raw Materials (CRMs). This makes the alloy attractive for both performance-driven and sustainability-focused applications.”

Potential application areas include: Wear-resistant mechanical components; Tooling and surface-contact components and automotive and industrial machinery

parts

Speaking about key distinguishing features of the developed framework, Prof. Joshi said, “This is the first validated computational framework for designing critical raw material-free (CRM-free) multi-principal element alloys (MPEAs) using a unary- and binary-based compositional database, without relying on microstructural or processing parameters. The framework is built entirely on compositional data and machine learning (ML) models, making it highly transferable and generalizable to other material systems with limited experimental data. Moreover, it can be extended to predict other key mechanical and functional properties such as yield strength, ultimate tensile strength, ductility (elongation), fracture toughness, corrosion resistance, thermal conductivity, and wear resistance.”

The findings of this research have been published in Scientific Reports, a journal of the prestigious Nature Publishing Group, in a paper co-authored by Prof. Shrikrishna N. Joshi, along with his research team members Dr. Swati Singh from IIT Guwahati, Prof. Saurav Goel from London South Bank University, Dr. Mingwen Bai from the University of Leeds, and Prof. Allan Matthews from the University of Manchester.

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The Pressure to Always Stay Relevant

Modern society places immense pressure on individuals to remain relevant. Constant updating, adapting, and showcasing achievement has become necessary for social and professional survival. This pressure creates anxiety and emotional exhaustion. Social media intensifies this fear. Trends change rapidly, and visibility feels temporary. People fear being forgotten or left behind. Self-worth becomes tied to relevance. In careers, constant competition and skill updates create insecurity. While growth is important, constant pressure without stability leads to burnout. Youth feel this pressure deeply. Identity becomes performance-based. Exploration is replaced by urgency. Relevance should not define worth. Growth must be meaningful, not forced. A society that allows people to evolve at their own pace is healthier and more humane.

A tough fiscal test awaits the next government

In the run-up to the national election, political parties in Bangladesh are making an array of commitments to voters, such as job creation for the youth, increased allocation for health and education, support for households, social protection, and price relief. These are attractive pledges at a time when citizens are facing prolonged economic hardship.

However, in most cases, these pledges are not accompanied by detailed, fully costed fiscal plans explaining how they will be financed. What will be the timeline for implementation? How much additional cost will be required? How much revenue will be forgone if various cuts are offered? What are the implications for the budget deficit and government debt? In the absence of detailed proposals within a concrete fiscal framework, these promises remain only broad economic aspirations. The lack of fiscal details is problematic on several fronts. The elected government will face a mounting challenge to create fiscal space in an economy already stretched to its limits. Due to weak revenue mobilisation, rising public liabilities, and growing contingent obligations, the manoeuvring

space has narrowed sharply. But the demands on public funds, from development spending and social protection to debt servicing and institutional reform, are high. How the next government manages this fiscal balancing act will largely determine the country's economic trajectory in the post-election period. At the heart of this challenge lies an alarmingly low tax-GDP ratio. Bangladesh's tax effort has fallen to a historic low, placing it among the lowest performers globally. In FY2025, the tax-GDP ratio was 6.8 percent, down from 7.38 percent in FY2024. During the first half (July-December) of FY2026, the National Board of Revenue recorded a shortfall of Tk 46,000 crore in revenue collection. This reflects deep structural weaknesses in the revenue system. For over a decade, revenue targets have been repeatedly missed, undermining budget credibility. This has forced the government to rely on external and domestic borrowing. Therefore, fiscal policy has increasingly become reactive rather than strategic.

Expenditure pressures are set to intensify sharply in the coming years. The government faces a growing list of financial obligations that cannot be

postponed further. The Bangladesh Power Development Board needs to clear unpaid bills amounting to more than Tk 20,000 crore, largely owed to power providers.

The government has also committed to injecting Tk 20,000 crore into Sammilito Islami Bank as part of its efforts to stabilise the banking sector. These fiscal burdens are likely to constrain the government's policy choices. Another challenge would be implementing the recommendations of the pay commission set up by the interim government. The proposal includes salary increases for government employees by 100 to 142 percent. While there is a legitimate case for adjusting wages after years of high inflation, the fiscal implications are substantial. Implementing these recommendations without adequate preparation could crowd out development expenditures and exacerbate fiscal deficits.

External vulnerabilities compound these domestic pressures. Although the foreign exchange reserves have recovered to \$28.68 billion as of January 29, 2026 from \$20.49 billion on July 31, 2024, they remain insufficient to comfortably meet rising import bills and external debt

obligations. Though remittance increase in July-November of FY2026 is high at 17.07 percent, the growth is lower than that in July-November of FY2025. The recent trend in export income shows a worrying sign as export growth was only 0.62 percent in July- November of FY2026 compared to 9.76 percent during the corresponding period in FY2025. The country's external debt reached \$112 billion by September 2025, reflecting years of heavy reliance on foreign borrowing to finance infrastructure and budget deficits. Servicing this debt will place increasing strain on public finances, particularly as concessional financing becomes scarcer after graduation from the Least Developed Country category in November this year. Domestic borrowing has emerged as a double-edged sword. To address persistent revenue shortfalls, the government has increasingly relied on the banking system. While this has provided short-term relief, it has also inflated domestic debt. Reduced liquidity in the banking system raises borrowing costs for businesses. Net credit to the government sector has increased by 32.19 percent between December 2024 and December 2025.

Another aspect of fiscal management is public expenditure. Political parties will also need to focus on public spending when making economic pledges. Although the allocation for the Annual Development Programme (ADP) is not necessarily at the optimal level due to resource constraints, the ADP implementation rate has declined since FY2022. In July-November of FY2026, the ADP implementation rate against the original budget allocation was 11.5 percent, the lowest in the last 10 years. Improving the efficiency and quality of public spending is also crucial for creating fiscal space. Wasteful and low-priority spending has coexisted with the chronic underfunding of critical sectors, including health, education and social protection. A culture of fiscal discipline should replace the politics of entitlement. Misuse of public resources, such as tax-free luxury vehicles and excessive perks for MPs and ministers, has undermined public trust. Recent reports about plans to build large luxury apartments for ministers only deepen concerns. particularly at a time when the government lacks sufficient resources for urgent development activities. When hospitals lack basic equipment,

schools struggle with overcrowded classrooms, social safety nets are under strain, and the line for low-priced essentials under the government's open market sales (OMS) programme keeps getting longer, such expenditures are economically indefensible and morally shameful. The incoming government will have to make austerity a top priority at the leadership level for fiscal consolidation. Enhancing accountability mechanisms is essential to improving expenditure efficiency. Parliamentary oversight of public funds must be strengthened, and regular sharing of budget execution data can help ensure value for money and prevent misappropriation. Medium-term fiscal planning should underpin annual budget preparation. Usually, budgets focus on the short term, overlooking future liabilities and risks. The incoming government's success will depend on how effectively it manages this complex fiscal transition. Restoring fiscal space involves more than just balancing budgets. The new government should redefine the social contract between the state and the people. A fair and efficient tax system and public spending that clearly benefit people could help rebuild trust and legitimacy.

competitive financial markets. Defence spending emerged as another major area of focus, with a substantial increase in allocation reflecting heightened geopolitical uncertainties. Beyond immediate security considerations, higher defence expenditure also has implications for domestic manufacturing, research and development, and technology partnerships. The emphasis on indigenous defence production aligns with the broader push for self-reliance and could generate spillover benefits for the wider industrial ecosystem. Budget 2026 also attempts to address social and developmental priorities, albeit without large welfare expansions. Initiatives aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs, small and medium enterprises and farmers point to targeted interventions rather than universal schemes. The use of digital platforms and artificial intelligence in agriculture, for instance, reflects an effort to improve productivity and decision-making through technology rather than through expanded subsidies alone. Such measures, while modest in scale, signal a gradual shift towards efficiency-driven governance. Taken as a whole, Budget 2026 can best be described as a budget of consolidation and continuity. It does not seek to radically alter the economic trajectory but instead builds incrementally on existing strategies. Its strengths lie in its clear long-term vision: infrastructure-led growth, manufacturing expansion, fiscal discipline and gradual regulatory reform. Its weaknesses, from a political perspective, lie in the limited immediate relief for households and the lack of bold tax reforms that many had hoped for. Ultimately, the success of Budget 2026 will depend not on its announcements but on its execution. Infrastructure projects must be delivered on time, manufacturing incentives must translate into real investment, and regulatory reforms must genuinely reduce friction for businesses and taxpayers. In a volatile global economy, the budget's cautious tone may prove prudent. Yet the challenge for the government will be to ensure that caution does not slide into complacency. As India aspires to become a \$5-trillion economy and beyond, sustained reform, effective implementation and inclusive growth will be the true tests of this budget's legacy.

Now that Israel has admitted the Gaza death toll is accurate, don't let apologists move the goalposts

Israel's official and unofficial spokespeople are in damage control mode after a senior military official admitted last week that Israel accepts the death toll published by Gaza's health ministry, which currently stands at more than 70,000. This comes after two years in which Israel and its supporters took every opportunity to disparage and dismiss the health ministry's figures, arguing that they were overblown or fabricated by Hamas.

That prestigious list of repudiators, to name just a few, includes spokespeople for Israel's government and military, then-US president Joe Biden, US Congress, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) chief Jonathan Greenblatt, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac) and any number of talking heads at influential think-tanks and policy centres. Adding credibility to their denials were prominent media outlets around the world that often described Gaza's health ministry as "Hamas-run", thereby encouraging readers and viewers to treat the death toll with suspicion.

In truth, the reliability of the official death toll should never have been in doubt. For one thing, the UN has independently verified the accuracy of the health ministry's figures after each of Israel's previous bombardments of Gaza going back to 2008. For another, the data published by the health ministry since 7 October is extremely detailed: it includes a full name, date of birth, gender and ID number for all victims whose deaths were confirmed either by hospital morgues or by their relatives.

Naturally, mistakes were made amid the intensity of an Israeli onslaught that virtually destroyed Gaza's entire health system, but these were remarkably few and promptly rectified: Sky News found last year that entries in the death toll list with missing or invalid ID numbers dropped from 2,769 in early April to just 313 by the end of July. As such, several external investigations of the published data found that it stood up to scrutiny.

Back in January 2024, my colleague Yuval Abraham reported that Israel's military intelligence agencies



had even surveilled health ministry personnel in Gaza to check whether their data was accurate; upon finding that it was, they subsequently began using it in internal intelligence briefings. "In every status briefing, when everyone updates each other on what's happening, there's a slide that shows the current number of civilians killed in Gaza. And that's based almost exclusively on the Hamas health ministry," an intelligence source told him. Yet

still the denials continued, for two whole years. And even now, the Israeli army came out quickly after last week's reports to claim that "the details published do not reflect official IDF data" – despite Israeli media outlets clearly stating that this is what they were told by a senior official in a private briefing. So are we about to see a wave of mea culpas, or at least a modicum of self-reflection, from all those who peddled the line that the death toll was not to be trusted? Don't

bank on it. In fact, some of them already appear to be shifting the goalposts, arguing that while the overall death toll of 70,000 may be accurate, what actually matters is the ratio of civilians to militants among them, which they claim is comparatively low for urban warfare.

Throughout the war, Israeli leaders have cited a civilian casualty ratio as low as 1:1, or, more recently, 1.5:1, and now they allege that militants account for as many as 25,000 of

Gaza's dead. But these claims, too, fall apart under basic scrutiny.

To understand why, you need only consider whom the Israeli army defines as a militant. After invading the strip in late 2023, the army began establishing militarised areas that it referred to as "kill zones" with arbitrary and often invisible boundaries, inside which they would automatically kill any Palestinian who entered, including children – and retroactively label them as

terrorists. (This currently includes the roughly 60% of Gaza's territory that the Israeli army still occupies despite the ceasefire.) And the army's own data proves it. Last August, +972 magazine (where I am deputy editor) and the Guardian published a joint investigation revealing the existence of a classified Israeli intelligence database that maintains updated information on the status of every Palestinian in Gaza whom, through a combination of mass surveillance and AI algorithms, Israel suspects to be a militant belonging to Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad. According to data we obtained from this database in May last year, Israel had killed fewer than 9,000 militants at a time when the health ministry's overall death toll stood at 53,000. The database, therefore, indicated that 83% of Gaza's dead were civilians, pointing to a civilian casualty ratio with few parallels in modern warfare that adds further weight to accusations of genocide levelled at Israel by the UN, human rights groups and leading genocide scholars. (The

army stated in response that "figures presented in the article are incorrect", without denying the existence of the database and without specifying which data it disputed.) And that's if we're going by the health ministry's figures, which do not include the roughly 10,000 bodies still thought to be under the rubble; nor do they include "indirect" deaths from starvation, disease, hypothermia and treatable health conditions, which often exceed "direct" deaths in war zones. Indeed, various scientific studies conducted throughout the war have estimated that the true death toll from Israel's onslaught may in fact have gone well beyond 100,000.

While we won't know for certain how high the death toll since 7 October really is until Israel stops bombing Gaza and preventing the local and international media from being able to report freely across the strip, there is one thing we can be sure of: the climate of denial regarding the health ministry's figures helped Israel keep slaughtering Palestinians en masse with impunity.

Adani Group, Italian major Leonardo to set up helicopter manufacturing ecosystem in India

New Delhi: Adani Group and Italian major Leonardo on Tuesday announced a strategic partnership to establish an integrated helicopter manufacturing ecosystem in India

The move will be a significant boost for the ‘Make In India’ efforts and to make the country more self-reliant. The manufacturing ecosystem will look to address military demands and boost India’s self-reliance in helicopter production. Adani Defence & Aerospace and Leonardo on Tuesday inked a Memorandum of Understanding for the partnership at an event in the national capital. Adani Group and Italian major Leonardo on Tuesday announced a strategic partnership to establish an integrated helicopter manufacturing ecosystem in India

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The partnership will target the Indian Armed Forces’ requirements, particularly for Leonardo’s advanced AW169M



and AW109 TrekkerM helicopters. “The collaboration will deliver phased indigenization, robust maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) capabilities, and comprehensive pilot training,” a release said. India has a low helicopter penetration density of less than 250 helicopters for the country’s

population, and the country will need around 100 helicopters annually for the next 10 years. Adani Defence & Aerospace Director Jeet Adani said it was laying the foundation for an aviation ecosystem that serves the nation across civil and defence needs. The partnership with Leonardo is rooted not only in shared expertise but in shared purpose, he said. “Together, we will build an ecosystem on Indian soil that brings manufacturing, assembly, training, and world-class support into one cohesive whole,” he added

Adani Defence & Aerospace CEO Ashish Rajvanshi said that with the Indian Armed Forces projecting demand for over 1,000 helicopters in the coming decade, this partnership realises the vision for sovereign manufacturing. Leonardo is a key global player in the areas of aerospace, defence, and security. Leonardo Helicopters Managing Director Gian Piero Cutillo said India is a big market and that the country’s armed forces have a growing requirement for helicopters.

The announcement on Tuesday also comes a week after Adani Defence & Aerospace and Brazilian major Embraer announced a strategic collaboration that aims to set up a regional aircraft manufacturing facility in India.

Centre considers FDI limit in public

New Delhi: The finance ministry is considering raising the foreign direct investment (FDI) limit in public sector banks (PSBs) to 49 per cent from the current 20 per cent as part of efforts to strengthen their capital base. Financial services secretary M. Nagaraju said inter-ministerial consultations are underway on the proposal, and a final decision has not yet been taken. Currently, FDI in PSBs is capped at 20 per cent, while private-sector banks are permitted to receive up to 74 per cent foreign investment. In private banks, FDI of up to 49 per cent is allowed through the automatic route, while investments beyond 49 per cent and up to 74 per cent require government approval. The private sector banks, meanwhile, have attracted strong foreign investor interest in 2025, with RBL Bank, Yes Bank, IDFC First Bank and Federal Bank together securing investments of over ₹54,000 crore. Industry sources said this underscores the depth of overseas capital available for India’s banking sector and strengthens the case for widening access to foreign funds for state-owned lenders as well. In the Union Budget presented on Sunday, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that a high-level committee will be set up to undertake a comprehensive review of the banking sector to align it with India’s next phase of growth, while safeguarding financial stability, inclusion and consumer protection.

GST receipts increased by 6.2% to Rs 1,93,384 crore

New Delhi: According to official figures released on Sunday, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) receipts in January were Rs 1,93,384 crore, an increase of 6.2% over the same month the previous year. In January, gross GST receipts came to Rs 1,82,094 crore. According to the statistics, gross collections increased to Rs 18,43,423 crore on a year-to-date basis (April–January), indicating a robust 8.3% rise (on-year). Additionally, January’s net GST income was Rs 1,70,719 crore, a 7.6% increase over the same month the previous year. Net income so far this year has increased by 6.8% to Rs 15,95,752 crore. Domestic GST receipts reached Rs 1,41,132 crore, an increase of 4.8% year over year. With gross import income of Rs 52,253 crore, up 10.1% from the previous year, import GST collections remained robust. down from Rs 13,009 crore last year. Total refunds recorded at Rs 22,665 crore for January, a slight decline of 3.1 per

cent year-on-year. State-wise post-settlement GST revenues showed a mixed picture. In December, GST collection recorded a 6.1 per cent increase to Rs 1,74,550 crore compared to Rs 1,64,556 crore in the same month of the previous year, reflecting the increase in economic activity during the month. Central GST collections rose to Rs 34,289 crore, state GST collections to Rs 41,368 crore, and integrated GST collections to Rs 98,894 crore. Meanwhile, the Finance Ministry issued a series of notifications that brought into effect the new tax regime for tobacco products from February 1. The ministry also released an FAQ list to explain that, under the Goods and Services Tax regime, the excise duty on cigarettes had so far been rendered a nominal amount of a “fraction of a paisa” per cigarette stick, and that the GST compensation cess rate on tobacco products had not been increased since it was implemented in July 2017.

Careful and careful while focusing on the long term

New Delhi: This year’s Economic Survey and the Union Budget was more closely followed for more reasons than one. Firstly, in the context of current global political uncertainties and economic headwinds, it was important to watch the government’s own strategy and direction to tackle the emerging global order. Secondly, the current situation also provides opportunities for India and this year’s budget announcement was a platform to plan for the future more structurally. In tandem with the Union Budget, the Economic Survey also provides an authoritative diagnosis of the Indian economy’s health that provides the strategic insight into the government’s thinking on the challenges it is grappling with and the issues of national importance. This year’s Survey highlights the resilience in the face of global disruptions – such as ongoing geopolitical tensions and supply chain challenges. India’s GDP growth is projected at 6.5–7% for the year ahead, underpinned by a rebound in private consumption, strong capital formation, and a stable financial sector with moderate inflation. The Survey emphasises the need for continued investment in physical and digital infrastructure, deepening manufacturing capabilities, and strengthening human capital and citizen health to accelerate the growth momentum in the future. The global environment remains fraught with uncertainty and armed conflict in multiple geographies creates significant supply chain risks to our manufacturing, trading value chains and the financing systems and costs.

The budget has balanced the risks and opportunities carefully, focusing on the



fiscal prudence journey, identifying and allocating capital on the future focus sectors like data centres, semiconductors, electronics and bio-pharma and rare earth value chain.

These sectors and the proposed spend would help India to be future ready and absorb future external and strategic shocks. As expected the spend on public infrastructure has been double downed with a record allocation and it continues to be one of the recurring pillars of national development. It will be important to spend the money with speed and efficiency including development of the city economic zones with the state governments. This will enhance productivity, increase employment and help reduce migration to the metros. The other important area of capital allocation has been on the freight corridor investment proposals and the focus on the inland waterways as these

will significantly help in improving the logistics efficiency and costs. By addressing supply chain bottlenecks and reducing logistical costs through integrated infrastructure, the government’s intention to drive a manufacturing-led growth is clear. Continuing on the policy reforms on making the medium and small enterprises more resilient, investable and sustainable deserves appreciation and will be very crucial for future sustainable growth. In a challenging global environment, the Union Budget delivers a fiscally prudent and forward-looking roadmap. This should be looked at as putting the policy bets and capital on the future growth and development of India across the hue of urban, rural and industrial India. Effective execution and adaptive policymaking with continued reform and system efficiency will be key to realising the ambitions.

After a 15% YTD decline, ITC stock is currently at a 52-week low

Mumbai: ITC shares, which are down 15% this year on fresh excise duty hikes on cigarettes announced by the government, slipped to a fresh 52 week low in the previous session. ITC stock ended 3.91% lower at Rs 309.60 on February 1, the day when excise duty hike came into effect. The duty hike was announced in beginning of this year. The stock fell to a low of Rs 306.35 during the session. Market cap of the FMCG firm slipped to Rs 3.87 lakh crore.

The FMCG stock is heavily oversold on charts, with a RSI of 18.4. According to brokerage Systematix, ITC would need to take product price hikes of at least 25-35% (lower on small/ regular filters, higher on premium filters) to try and maintain revenues. It believes pricing

is still likely to lag the higher tax burden by a material margin – implying pressure on realisations. This quantum of pricing could also be a negative for volume growth. Systematix has a hold call on the FMCG stock with a price target of Rs 355. Taking into account the excise duty hike, the brokerage has lowered its FY26/ FY27E/ FY28E revenue estimates by 3%/ 7%/ 7% and EPS estimates by 4%/ 10%/ 10%, respectively to account for the impact of tax changes on realisations and margins.

ITC shares hit a 52-week low, correcting over 15% YTD by early February 2026, driven by a (“Link”: “new excise duty hike on cigarettes”, “url”: “https://www.businesstoday.in/markets/stocks/story/itc-shares-at-52-week-

low-post-ytd-correction-excise-duty-hike-514124-2026-02-02”} announced in the Union Budget. The stock dropped to approximately ₹306-315 range, underperforming due to fears of margin pressure., despite relatively stable, albeit muted, Q3 earnings. Analysts remain cautious, noting significant technical weakness and high, potentially unsustainable., tax burdens. While some analysts believe the, 15-20% correction has priced in the negatives, the immediate trend remains bearish with potential for further, volatility, especially if cigarette volume growth declines further due to, needed, price hikes. ITC share price: ITC stock ended 3.91% lower at Rs 309.60 on February 1, the day when excise duty hike came into effect.

Markets recovered in early trade, with the Sensex up 302

Mumbai: Union Budget for 2026-27, seen as a long-term blueprint for sustaining growth amid rising global risks. Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded in early trade on Monday driven by value-buying in blue-chip firms, after facing massive drubbing on the Budget day. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 302 points to 81,024.94 during initial trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 59.25 points to 24,884.70. From the Sensex firms, Adani Ports, Larsen & Toubro, Asian Paints, Bharat Electronics, Eternal, Reliance Industries, Power Grid and HDFC Bank were among the major gainers. Trent, Titan, ITC and Hindustan Unilever were among the laggards. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday announced measures to boost manufacturing, offered long-term tax incentives for global data centres, and support for agriculture and tourism as she unveiled a Rs 53.5 lakh crore Union Budget for 2026-27, seen as a long-term blueprint for sustaining growth amid rising global risks. Shunning populist measures despite five key states, including West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, heading to polls, the Budget signalled continued fiscal consolidation and infrastructure spending. But a hike in securities transaction tax on equity derivatives rattled equity markets, with key indices plunging as much as 2 per cent in the special Budget-day trading session, before recovering some ground. On Sunday, the BSE benchmark ended at 80,722.94, down 1,546.84 points or 1.88 per cent. This recovery followed a sharp, “massive drubbing” on the previous budget day, while the rupee also gained 37 paise against the US dollar. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 302 points to 81,024.94 during initial trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 59.25 points to 24,884.70. From the Sensex firms, Adani Ports, Larsen & Toubro, Asian Paints, Bharat Electronics, Eternal, Reliance Industries, Power Grid and HDFC Bank were among the major gainers.

HDFC Securities’ top budget beneficiaries were Waaree, BHEL, Tata Steel, BEL, and HAL

New Delhi: The Union Budget 2026-27 arrives during a period of global uncertainty, placing a strong emphasis on structural reforms and maintaining a stable policy regime. The government’s approach blends ambition with prudence, featuring conservative revenue projections and focused expenditure in critical sectors, said HDFC Securities. Union Budget was divided into three ‘kartavyas’ (duties) including to accelerate & sustain economic growth; fulfil aspiration of our people and vision of ‘sabka sath, sabka vikas’, said HDFC Securities. In a nutshell, it believes that the Budget was majorly positive for sectors like IT, textiles, manufacturing, pharma and biotech, while it was negative for capital markets and PSU banks. Despite the budget’s sound mathematics, markets reacted negatively—not due to fiscal weakness, but because expectations were not met. The unexpected increase in the Securities Transaction Tax (STT) on derivatives trading surprised market participants, aiming to discourage speculative trading but triggering a sharp sell-off, it noted. A notable shift in the government’s revenue composition is seen, with GST and other indirect taxes now comprising only 15% of total resources, down from 18% the previous year. This contraction reflects the impact of prior comprehensive tax rationalisation measures, said the domestic brokerage. Capital expenditure receives significant attention, with an allocation of Rs 12.22 lakh crore—4.4% of GDP—the highest in over a decade. For micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), the budget introduces a credit guarantee mechanism for invoice discounting on the TReDS platform and enables TReDS receivables as asset backed securities, aiming to foster secondary market development and improve liquidity. The revised divestment target rises sharply from Rs 33,837 crore to Rs 80,000

crore, reflecting optimism for stake sales in PSUs and asset monetisation. Liberalised investment norms for NRIs and tax holidays for foreign companies providing cloud services via Indian data centres are expected to attract capital and strengthen digital infrastructure. The budget recognises the tourism sector’s potential for employment and forex earnings, and the long-term strategy of providing tax holidays for foreign cloud service providers positions India favourably in the global digital economy. For the auto and auto component companies, PLI was raised to Rs 5,939 crore, which is a major positive for all the companies. It has picked Ashok Leylan, JBM Auto, Tata Motors, Exide and Amara Raja as its top picks. Reduced custom duty on components and engine parts for manufacturing of aircrafts will also be a positive for the aviation sector. The budget also proposed the Biopharma SHAKTI with an outlay of Rs 10,000 crore over the next 5 years. HDFC sees Sai Life, Aarti Pharamalabs, Anthem Bioscience, Divi’s Labs, Piramal Pharma, Zydus Life, Biocon as the key beneficiaries. Budget is also positive for formulation players. The FM also increased STT on derivatives transactions from 0.02 per cent to 0.05 per cent for futures and 0.1 per cent/0.125 per cent to 0.15 per cent for options. The move is negative for broking companies and exchanges, while the permission to PROI to invest in equity instruments through Portfolio Investment Scheme is positive for wealth management players. The government also announced a capital expenditure outlay for the infra sector worth Rs 12.2 lakh crore. It is positive for cement and metal companies. From the infra pack, HDFC Securities has picked L&T, PNC Infra, KNR Construction, NCC, BHEL, Timken India, Unimech, Escorts Kubota, AIA Engineering, KEC International, Adani Ports, Con-



cor among others. Besides that, the outlay on defence is less than expectations but it will be positive for companies like Midhani, Bharat Electronics, Bharat Dynamics, Hindustan Aeronautics and Zen Technologies among others, said HDFC Securities. The government has allocated Rs 74,560 crore for IT and Telecom sectors, which bodes well for TCS, Infosys, Wipro, HCL Tech and data centre companies like Netweb. In the Union Budget, the Government proposed to increase the outlay to Rs 40,000 crore for electronics components manufacturing scheme, which is seen positive for EMS players like Kaynes, Syrma, Avalon, GMDC, NMDC, Vedanta, Tata Steel, JSW Steel, Ultratech Cement, while renewable energy announcements bodes well for NPTC, Tata Power and Waaree Energies. KPR Mills, Arvind and Gokaldas Exports are its top textile picks, while Lemon Tree, Indian Hotels, InterGlobe Aviation are top names from travel and tourism themes.

Trump news summary: Attorney General: Epstein case “over,” Kennedy Center shut

Beijing: Trump announces two-year closure of Kennedy Center, citing construction needs – key US politics stories from 1 February 2026

Donald Trump, who remains embroiled in tensions surrounding ICE’s presence in Minnesota, as well as scrutiny over the justice department’s latest release of the Jeffrey Epstein files, has made another announcement on Sunday evening: the temporary closure of the John F Kennedy Center in Washington DC.Trump, who overhauled the center’s leadership at the start of his second term and renamed it to include his own name, described the center as “tired, broken, and dilapidated,” adding that it has been in “bad condition, both financially and structurally for many years”.The center’s closure comes as a growing number of performers cancel their shows in response to Trump’s shakeup. Last week, Philip Glass, the celebrated US composer, announced his withdrawal of the world premiere of his latest symphony, Lincoln, at the center, explaining that the “values of the Kennedy Center today are in direct conflict with the message of the symphony.”Trump announced a two-year closure of the Kennedy Center, citing construction needs to make the “finest performing arts facility of its kind, anywhere in the world”.Writing on Truth Social on Sunday evening, Trump added that the center’s closure will pave way for a “new and spectacular entertainment complex”. The announcement comes as a slew of cancellations from performers in recent months, as well as record low ticket sales amid backlash towards Trump’s overhaul of the center’s leadership. The deputy US attorney general, Todd Blanche, the point person on the Trump administration’s Epstein files release, told ABC News on Sunday that prosecutors’ review of the Jeffrey Epstein-Ghislaine Maxwell sex-trafficking case “is over”. While Blanche acknowledged “there’s a lot of horrible photographs that appear to be taken by Mr Epstein or by people around him ... that doesn’t allow us necessarily to prosecute somebody”.Blanche’s comments took aim at survivors who met Friday’s release with calls demanding further accountability for the alleged clients of Epstein and Maxwell. Government documents have identified the two federal officers who fatally shot Alex Pretti in Minneapolis as Jesus Ochoa, a border patrol agent, and Raymundo Gutierrez, an officer with Customs and Border Protection (CBP), according to ProPublica.According to those records, Ochoa, 43, and Gutier-

rez, 35, were the agents who fired their weapons during the confrontation last weekend that resulted in Pretti’s death. The shooting sparked widespread demonstrations and renewed demands for criminal inquiries into federal immigration enforcement actions. Immediately following Pretti’s killing, the Trump administration repeatedly pushed false claims about the shooting. A five-year-old boy and his father were back in Minneapolis on Sunday after being released from a Texas immigration detention center where they were held for more than a week, according to US House representative Joaquin Castro.

“Liam is now home. With his hat and his backpack. Thank you to everyone who demanded freedom for Liam,” Castro, a San Antonio Democrat, said in a post on X. “We won’t stop until all children and families are home.” The Texas politician said he picked them up from the detention center and brought them back to Minneapolis early Sunday.

Liam Conejo Ramos and his father Adrian Conejo Arias were detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents on 20 January.A viral photo of the five-year-old preschooler wearing a bunny hat and a plaid coat sparked outrage across the country after claims that the child, who was arrested on the driveway of his home, was used as bait to try to arrest his mother. On Saturday, a US judge ordered the five-year-old boy and his father be released from the detention center, saying: “The case has its genesis in the ill-conceived and incompetently-implemented government pursuit of daily deportation quotas, apparently even if it requires traumatizing children.”During the day of the arrest, the five-year-old was returning from school with his father when immigration agents pulled him from their car near their home in Columbia Heights, a suburb of Minneapolis, according to the school district. “This family is following US legal parameters and has an active asylum case with no order of deportation,” said Zena Stenvik, superintendent of the Columbia Heights public school district, in a statement on 21 January. “I have viewed the legal paperwork with my own eyes. Why detain a five-year-old? You cannot tell me that this child is going to be classified as a violent criminal.”

Stenvik said that another adult who lived in the home was outside during the encounter and pleaded to take custody of the child so he would not be detained, but officers refused.

The Department of Homeland Security refuted this claim, posting on X that the five-year-old “was ABANDONED [sic] by his father, and the alleged mother REFUSED to take custody of her own child”.Amid the release of the preschooler and his father, the school district said on Sunday that they were “grateful for the overwhelming number of well-wishes and offers of support from people around the globe

Liam’s release is an important development, and we hope it will lead to positive developments for other families as well, including our other four students who are being held at the Dilley facility in Texas,” reads a statement by the Columbia Heights public school district spokesperson.

“We want all children to be released from detention centers and hope for the reunification of families who have been unjustly separated.”According to an analysis of records obtained by the Deportation Data Project, ICE booked about 3,800 minors into immigrant family detention from January to October 2025. The number of children currently in migrant detention centers remains unclear. “Liam’s release is an important development, and we hope it will lead to positive developments for other families as well, including our other four students who are being held at the Dilley facility in Texas,” reads a statement by the Columbia Heights public school district spokesperson. “We want all children to be released from detention centers and hope for the reunification of families who have been unjustly separated.” Amid the release of the preschooler and his father, the school district said on Sunday that they were “grateful for the overwhelming number of well-wishes and offers of support from people around the globe” Trump said his administration was in talks with Cuban leadership over a potential deal, following his earlier threats to stop the country from importing oil.“Cuba is a failing nation. It has been for a long time but now it doesn’t have Venezuela to prop it up. So we’re talking to the people from Cuba, the highest people in Cuba, to see what happens,” Trump told reporters on Sunday.“I think we’re going to make a deal with Cuba,” he added without disclosing details of a potential deal would include.. The ongoing partial US government shutdown is expected to continue into early next week, with no reopening likely before Tuesday, if what federal officials on both sides of the country’s political aisle are saying is any indication.

Cyclone Fytia in Madagascar kills several people



Beijing: At least three people have died and nearly 30,000 people have been affected by flooding after Madagascar’s first tropical storm of the season hit over the weekend.Tropical Cyclone Fytia formed to the north-west of Madagascar over the northern Mozambique Channel on Thursday.Fytia was forecast to bring daily rainfall totals of about 150mm where rain is heaviest, leading to a risk of flooding and landslides.Travel disruption and school closures are likely and it is estimated that more than 40,000 homes could be flooded over the next few days. Red alerts were issued in regions in the track of the cyclone, indicating imminent danger, and mariners have been advised to seek shelter.According to a provisional report from Madagascar’s national bureau for disaster risk management, at least three people have died and 28,368 people have been affected by flooding.Fytia moved south-east through northern and central Madagascar on Saturday, bringing heavy rainfall, strong winds and rough sea conditions. Average wind speeds of more than 90mph have been recorded, along with gusts of up to 130mph as of Saturday, according to Météo Madagascar. As Fytia continued to move across Madagascar, it weakened into a tropical

storm, though disruption will continue this week. Meanwhile, eastern Europe has been extremely cold for much of the winter so far. However, it will turn even colder this week, with temperatures across Poland, Ukraine and Belarus set to plunge further. The latest forecast models are predicting daytime highs firmly within the negative double digits, as far west as Berlin. Yet it is the night-time lows that will be the most extreme, potentially dropping below -30C this week across Poland, Belarus and Ukraine.

The cold air will be driven by high pressure centred to the north over eastern Scandinavia and low pressure to the south, centred over western Russia. This will lead to an easterly to north-easterly flow, introducing a very cold air mass to the region. The brutal cold is being driven partly by the cold airmass, but also the existing snow cover on the ground across eastern Europe. The snow has been reflecting incoming solar radiation for several weeks. In tandem with the solar radiation, snow emits longwave radiation into the atmosphere, cooling the air directly above. Both these processes are working together, enabling temperatures to plummet across the entirety of eastern Europe.

‘You take what you can and run’: families describe harrowing journey to escape fighting in DRC

London: It must have been an eerie sight when 35-year-old Diudonné Muka looked over his shoulder and saw a trail of people stretching as far as the eye could see. The line ebbed and flowed deep into the surrounding forest, a river of multi-coloured clothing cutting through the green.He saw countless women balancing trays of goods on their heads, babies on their backs, tightly wrapped in kikwembe cloth. Men and children carried whatever they could: chairs, rugs, blankets and sacks of food; anything that might still be useful.“When war begins, you take what you can in your hands and run,” Muka says over the phone. Over the two-day, 21-mile (34km) trek, he heard a mix of languages, from Kiswahili to Kirundi Lingala and French. Livestock such as cows, goats and chickens were plentiful at first. Then, slowly, they disappeared.band in the Amazon rainforest. There was only one sound that halted the family’s progress: bombing. The shelling was relentless, each side trying to outdo the other. “They bomb, and the others bomb back. Over and over again,” Muka recalls. “You would pass a house that had been hit and see dead bodies, and you thought: ‘I don’t want that to happen to me.’”A woman with a child strapped to her front walks on the side of a road as two motorcycles pass byWho are the M23 rebels and why is there fighting in eastern DRC?Some of the thousands walking alongside him in December were neighbours; others were complete strangers. All were fleeing the town of Luvungi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s South Kivu province, searching for whatever safety they could find. Both North and South Kivu have been engulfed by renewed conflict over the past three years, since the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group re-emerged. The group had captured Goma, the capital of North Kivu, on 27 January 2025, before advancing south to seize Bukavu, South Kivu’s capital on 17 February.In a new offensive that began in December 2025 – just days after a US-brokered peace deal between Rwanda and the DRC was signed – M23 pushed farther south, capturing the city of Uvira on the border with Burundi.A Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) report from January estimates that nearly 65,000 refugees are living in Busuma refugee camp in Ruyigi, Burundi. A UNHCR report puts the total number of Congolese refugees seeking asylum in Burundi at about 200,000. We were told on the phone that everything we left behind had been stolen or looted,” Muka says. Their journey from Luvungi began on 5 December. His wife, Noella Zawadi, was eight months pregnant and caring for two toddlers.“It was better that I made sure my wife and children were safe, even if that meant losing everything else.”



The gruelling walk was only the beginning. “It was very difficult for me,” says Zawadi, “because I was late into pregnancy, I was looking after the two little ones and I was carrying some things. But I pushed through it. “For the kids it was worse. They were hungry, and sometimes they saw dead bodies. That was very shocking for them.”

Before fleeing Luvungi, the family had lived a relatively stable life. Like many in the region, Muka farmed his own land and had planned to sell two tonnes of maize he had harvested. He also owned livestock that included nine cows and four goats.By 7 December, they had reached the town of Sange, 30km south of Luvungi. Then it too was bombed, forcing the family to flee again. Eventually, they crossed into Burundi. Only then did the full weight of what they had lost begin to sink in. “As soon as the fighting began, I left without my cows. We raised them, and we used to milk them but, you know, that’s war,” Muka says. “I had a motorcycle too, to get around. That was lost, too. Faced with hunger, especially that of the children,

Muka made a painful decision about the livestock he had managed to bring. “We sold some [of our goats] to get cash. Some died on the way. Those that died we ate because it was the only thing we had.”Zawadi mourns the smaller things that once brought her children joy. “Back in Luvungi my son had a little bicycle we managed to buy for him. He loved it and rode around on it quite a lot. He was happy doing it.” Items that once held the family together, preserving memories, were stolen or lost. “We had a pretty large collection of family photos that we used to keep, they were very important to us,” Zawadi says. “We had a lot of clothes that we used to wear when we went to church together every Sunday, we left some behind, and some others were lost on the way.”It’s the clothes for the children that saddens me the most, those I know for sure I’ll never be able to get back. I even had some blankets I used to cover them with; those were lost, too.”When Zawadi gave birth to her third child, she received new blankets from Healthnet TPO, but those were stolen soon after their arrival in Bu-

suma. “It gets cold at night,” she says in a voice memo. “I don’t have anything to cover my baby with now.” Hakizimana later explains that Zawadi had been difficult to reach because the newborn had fallen ill. On 19 January, M23 announced it had withdrawn from Uvira. Still, Muka has no intention of returning home. “There is absolutely no desire to go back,” he says. “I have grieved for the people and things I lost. I’m not going back.”

But Busuma is not a long-term solution either. Health risks remain high, and infrastructure is stretched thin. “Resources are far below what is needed to meet basic needs,” Hakizimana says. “There is also a significant risk of disease outbreaks due to overcrowding.”

For Muka, there is one small consolation. “I have my family,” he says, as his children play in the background. “We only have two sets of clothes for them we managed to keep, and some cash left from selling the goats.”Still, pangs of homesickness linger. “Everything I have reminds me of home,” Muka says. “It reminds us of everything we lost.”

Most of Great Britain’s major rail operator

Beijing: The majority of Great Britain’s major rail operators are now in public ownership, as the Labour government continues its efforts to make the railways “more reliable, affordable and accessible”.The nationalisation of West Midlands Trains on 1 February represents the tenth major passenger service to be brought back into public ownership, leaving six to go before the government’s deadline of completing every operator by 2027.The rollout, which is resulting in an operator being nationalised roughly every three months, is gradually bringing an end to a privatised system that critics argue has been overly fragmented and focused on profit, to the detriment of passenger experience.Several operators were already under public ownership by the time Labour were elected in 2024, having been nationalised by the Conservatives over financial woes and poor performance.Meanwhile, Transport for Wales and ScotRail were each nationalised by the Welsh and Scottish devolved governments, in 2021 and 2022 respectively.However, under the current transport secretary, Heidi Alexander, the Department for Transport (DfT) has accelerated the pace of nationalisation, bringing four operators on to the public books since May 2025: South Western Railway, C2C, Greater Anglia and West Midlands Trains. The nationalisations which will manage rail infrastructure and services. Network Rail owns and manages most of the railway infrastructure (tracks, stations, signals) in Great Britain, functioning as a public sector body under the Department for Transport. While train operating companies (TOCs) run passenger services, many are now under government control, with a transition toward a unified structure.

Beyond Botox: Anti-Tox Treatments Redefine Modern Skin Rejuvenation

For decades, wrinkle-free skin came with a telltale sign – stillness. Expressions softened, foreheads barely moved, and the ‘done’ look quietly became shorthand for anti-ageing success. But today, aesthetic ideals are evolving. The goal is no longer to immobilise the face, but to fortify the skin itself. Across clinics and high-end dermatology practices, a new philosophy is taking hold – one that prioritises collagen health, skin architecture and long-term resilience over quick fixes. It’s less about erasing lines instantly and more about improving how skin behaves over time. “For years, wrinkle-smoothing injections defined the idea of anti-ageing. But today, the conversation is shifting, from freezing expressions to strengthening skin,” says Kalpesh Gawade, Founder & MD, Skinnovation Pvt Ltd. “Aesthetic dermatology is moving away from a purely toxin-led approach towards treatments that work in harmony with the skin’s natural biology,” adds Dr Rikta Mohan, MBBS, MD DVL, Myrah Dermamed, Mumbai.

From Muscle Relaxers To Skin Builders

Traditional botulinum toxin works by relaxing facial muscles to smooth dynamic wrinkles. While effective, it doesn’t address the deeper causes



of ageing – thinning collagen, loss of elasticity and weakened dermal structure. “Modern aesthetic science

is increasingly focused on improving skin quality rather than altering movement. Technologies such as Ultrace

Q+, Density and MCT are leading this change. Instead of relaxing muscles, these treatments stimulate collagen,

improve skin architecture and support natural regeneration from within,” explains Gawade.

In other words, the strategy is structural, not superficial. Dr Mohan notes that while toxin still has its place for targeted concerns, patients now want broader improvements. She says, “Clinicians and patients are prioritising skin quality, resilience and long-term health rather than just temporarily smoothing wrinkles.”

The Rise Of Regenerative Injectables

This skin-first mindset has ushered in a wave of biostimulatory treatments that encourage the body to repair itself. “Biostimulatory injectables such as poly-L-lactic acid and calcium hydroxylapatite activate fibroblasts and stimulate the body’s own collagen production,” says Dr Mohan. The result is gradual, natural-looking firmness that develops over months, not hours. Hydration-focused options are also gaining traction. “Hyaluronic acid-based skin boosters like Profillio and NCTF® 135 HA focus on dermal revitalisation and cellular support rather than volume or immobilisation,” she explains. Meanwhile, autologous therapies such as PRP and PRF use growth factors derived from the patient’s own blood to improve texture and healing, further pushing aesthetics into regen-

erative territory.

Why Patients Are Choosing ‘Anti-Tox’

Beyond science, the shift is cultural. “What’s driving this change is a growing desire for subtle, authentic results. Patients want their skin to look healthier, firmer and more resilient without looking ‘done,’” says Gawade. Today’s client is informed, cautious and invested in longevity. The emphasis is on maintaining facial dynamics, not masking them. Treatments are layered, cumulative and discreet — think refreshed, not radically altered. “The anti-tox approach reflects a more mindful era in aesthetics. One that values individuality and science-backed skin health over instant transformation,” Gawade adds. Dr Mohan agrees: “There’s a clear preference for subtle, cumulative results and healthier ageing, moving beyond the ‘frozen’ aesthetic traditionally associated with toxin-centric care.” If Botox defined the last decade, regeneration may define the next. With collagen-stimulating devices, skin boosters and biologic therapies taking centre stage, beauty is becoming less about stopping time and more about supporting the skin’s natural rhythm. The new luxury isn’t a motionless forehead. It’s skin that looks strong, hydrated and unmistakably yours.

The pie and mash crisis: can the original fast food be saved

Outside it’s raining so hard that the sandwich board sign for BJ’s pie and mash (“All pies are made on the premises”) is folded up inside. The pavement along Barking Road in Plaistow is a blur through the front windows and deserted, and there are only two customers in the shop. Another sign – this one on the counter – says “CASH ONLY”. Card machine companies often tell proprietor Nathan Jacobi that he’s missing out by not catering to customers who favour cashless transactions. “They’re the ones missing out,” he says. “Cos they ain’t getting pie and mash.” London’s pie and mash shops, once threatened with extinction, seem to be experiencing a kind of resurgence. “London’s original fast food, ‘pie and mash’ is making a surprise comeback in the British capital ...” announced the Washington Post in a recent article. “This renewed demand for hearty ‘cockney cuisine’, so-called for its working-class East End roots, has been observed across the city.” The revival is said in part to be down to the TikTok generation’s fascination with these bygone establishments and their obscure customs. M Manze’s in Bermondsey – London’s oldest surviving pie and mash shop, founded in 1902 – has never been busier. At Goddards at Greenwich, the Post reported, there are queues down the street every weekend. But behind this flurry of enthusiasm is a backstory of unrelenting decline. There are now just more than 30 pie and mash shops in London, where once there were hundreds. On its website the Pie and Mash Club lists five closures in Greater London in 2025 alone, including another Manze’s in Deptford High Street, which shut this time last year after more than a century in business. There was a queue down the street that day, not because it was suddenly cool; it

was the end of an era. But that still isn’t the whole story. Alongside the closures, a few new pie shops have appeared. Barney’s in Walthamstow only opened in 2018. Bush Pie & Mash in Shepherd’s Bush acquired its premises in 2021, filling a gap left by the 2015 closure of A Cooke’s, which had been in nearby Goldhawk Road since the 1930s. Which picture reflects reality? “It’s a bit of a difficult one to speak about,” says food blogger James Dimitri, who has visited all of London’s pie and mash establishments, bar a few where shops have more than one branch. “A lot of the ones I go to, they’re packed at lunchtimes, from 12 or maybe even earlier.” Others, he says, are doing less well. “There’s one I went to the other day, and it was just a shit atmosphere, kind of dying, and I just know it’s not going to last.” When it comes to the difficulties facing pie and mash shops, I might consider myself part of the problem: although I’ve lived in London for 35 years, I’ve never set foot in one. It wasn’t the food – beef pies, mash, the classic parsley sauce known as liquor, the eels – that put me off as much as the arcane ritual, the fact that there is definitely a wrong way to order and consume pie and mash. For example: I know that you’re not supposed to use a knife, even if you’re offered one – pie and mash is only ever eaten with a fork and a spoon. “Those things are slightly intimidating to outsiders, if you don’t know the rules,” says Jonathan Nunn, co-editor of the food and culture magazine Vittles. “There’s an insularity about pie and mash which is one of the reasons why people love it. On the other hand, that insularity is one of the things that makes it difficult – more difficult than British cafes and fish and chip shops – to induct new customers.” As a precaution I have come to BJ’s with my friend Don,

who knows about these things. Don lives just up Barking Road, towards Canning Town. He eats at BJ’s often, and knows enough to have cash on him. He even dropped by the shop earlier in the week to let it be known that he was coming today, and that he would be bringing an idiot with him. Under Don’s guidance I opt for a single portion each of pie and mash – “one and one” in pie shop parlance. BJ’s is famous, or maybe notorious, for an innovation that amounts in some eyes to heresy: they offer chips as well as mash. “You put this on the internet, that you’ve had pie and chips, the stick you’ll get,” says Jacobi, who runs BJ’s with his wife, Nadine. Worse still, the chips are very good – fried in beef dripping, rather than palm oil. “At least I’m saving orangutans around the world,” he says. Jacobi sits down with us at one of the long communal tables, to oversee my first pie and mash experience. “I’m supposed to flip the pies over, aren’t I?” I say. “You can, I don’t bother,” says Jacobi, handing me a napkin wrapped around a fork, a spoon and a knife. I think: this is a test. “It is my understanding,” I say. “That I shouldn’t touch this knife.” “That’s right,” says Jacobi. “Never use a knife.” But Don, I point out, is using his knife. “That’s cos he’s posh,” says Jacobi. He claims the tradition dates to the second world war, when the pie and mash shops of London donated all their knives to a metal drive. This sounds fanciful, but he says he heard it from a Chelsea pensioner in full regalia. Pie and mash is a famously under-seasoned dish, which makes the next step crucial: after making Xs in the bottom crust of your flipped pies – with the spoon’s edge, unless you’re Don – you douse the plate liberally with salt, white pepper and chilli vinegar. “You must put the vinegar on, because it changes the meal



altogether,” says Jacobi. As the rain slows, the shop begins to fill up. Jacobi, simultaneously working, holding court and submitting to a fractured interview, clears a table after the departure of a satisfied customer. “There’s another one’s taken the pattern off the plate!” he says. I too am satisfied. The pie and mash was tasty, the chilli vinegar hot. It is simple food, made fresh every day and while some enthusiasts will keep score about which pie and mash shops offer the best fare, that is slightly beside the point. “What makes one stand out isn’t always going to be the pie itself,” says Dimitri. “Because even when it’s really good, it’s never going to be mind-blowing. It is what it is: a comforting working-class dish.” I’m thinking: I’ve been here for almost an hour and nobody’s mentioned eels yet. But even as I think it, I see Jacobi coming back to the table with a tub of jellied eels. The pie in pie and mash was originally filled with eels, a cheap source of protein closely associated with London. But as the 19th century came to a close, eel got more expensive, beef got cheaper and the pies were

filled with mince to keep costs down. Eels were relegated to a side dish, stewed or jellied – a decidedly acquired taste. “As a food writer, and as someone who loves London and really wants there to be a great London dish, it’s to my annoyance that I hate jellied eels so much,” says Nunn. “I really cannot stomach them.” “It’s not a thing that a lot of people have,” says Jacobi, “and it’s mainly older people. My boy will eat it, because he’s been brought up with it.” Suffice to say that if you don’t like eels, you won’t like the jellied, Jacobi tells me, is also made of eel. (Traditionally liquor, too, is made with eel stock, but Jacobi doesn’t keep enough on hand to make it that way every time – alternating batches are made with potato water.) But an acquired taste should never be too easy to acquire. After working my way through a small plate of eel segments I find myself becoming pleasantly injured. “You did well there,” says Don. There is an idea that pie and mash isn’t really being eclipsed, it’s just migrating to the suburbs, following on the heels of its former clientele – the white working class of the old

East End. But the origin story of BJ’s runs counter to this narrative. “My dad used to be a lagger,” says Jacobi, “but when he pulled out of the company he owned with two partners, he wanted to find something else to do.” In 1979 he started a pie and mash shop in suburban Elm Park – one of the first in Essex – but it was deemed such a threat to the tone of the neighbourhood that the council wouldn’t let him call it a pie and mash shop. “If we’d put that sign out,” Jacobi says, pointing to the sandwich board leaning against the wall, “they’d have closed us down.” Fed up, Jacobi’s father, Benjamin, returned to the East End, bought an old pet shop in Barking Road and opened BJs in 1982. Competition was stiff – there were nine pie and mash shops in Newham then – but crucially Benjamin owned the freehold. “That’s why we’re still here,” says Jacobi. BJ’s is the only surviving pie and mash shop in the borough. It’s not an easy way to make a living, especially if you’re committed, like Jacobi, to making pie and mash the traditional way. “Tuesdays and Thursdays I mince me own meat,” he says. “Then you’re here at five o’clock

every morning, and you’re literally preparing pies for four or five hours. So you’re not earning a penny, you’re just preparing pies. Then you start cooking at 10 o’clock. That’s the worst thing about it, the prep.” As a highly regarded survivor in the pie and mash world, Jacobi is not unaccustomed to attention. He had an ITV crew in last November, highlighting aspects of the chancellor’s budget. Before that, a TikTok called Ben in the Mix paid a visit. Influencers with cameras drop by regularly. “Best thing,” Jacobi says. “TikTok and YouTube and things like that, helps you out so much. Helps me out anyway.” But pie and mash bloggers can also be a little bit doctrinaire, and Jacobi resents having points deducted for anything non-canonical, like chips. Another example: he serves his mash in domed scoops, where traditionally it should be scraped on to the edge of the plate to form a little cliff. He even offers gravy as an alternative to liquor, albeit grudgingly. “I always say, I make gravy with water,” he tells me. “I make liquor with love.” Online critics who are new to pie and mash

present their own challenges. “One woman gave me three stars because a geezer moaned at her for leaving the door open,” says Jacobi. “It ain’t my fault.” Then there are the Americans who view pie and mash as an exotic curiosity, or a holdover from a previous century, or another example of British cuisine’s manifest shortcomings. When US food critic and social media star Keith Lee came to London last year he ruffled feathers with his blunt assessment of pie and mash, even though he got it about right: “Is it something to rave about? I don’t believe so,” he said. “I just think it’s a comfort food that people are used to going to, and they’ve been going to for years, so they just keep coming back.” In October 2024 the MP Richard Holden called for pie and mash to be granted traditional speciality guaranteed (TSG) status. In pursuit of that designation, last February, 15 representative producers agreed on a standardised recipe. But would such a designation amount to a lifeline, or a straitjacket? The pie and mash shop is itself a product of relentless innovation. It sprung up as an alternative to the street pie man, providing four walls and a roof where working people could eat. It switched from eel pie to mince when the economics demanded it. But once pie shops came to be seen as endangered, tradition became the point, and innovation a drawback. I think the presence of liquor is probably the one non-negotiable thing,” says Nunn. “But having the choice of gravy, or vegetarian pies, if those are things that will help pie and mash shops thrive in 2026 London, then I would rather that happen.” For Jacobi, a simple menu reflects the pie and mash shop’s status as the original fast food. “Some pie and mash shops never used to do tea,” he says, “so they’d have you in and out faster.”

Salman Khan and Subhash Ghai Attend Jackie Shroff’s Private Birthday Celebrations

Mumbai: Bollywood star Salman Khan attended actor Jackie Shroff’s birthday party at director Subhash Ghai’s house. Subhash Ghai posted a photo of himself with Jackie Shroff and Salman Khan at the event on his Instagram account. Salman Khan is undoubtedly one of the most courteous celebrities, showing respect for his elders both mentally and physically. After receiving my SMS inviting him to attend a close friend’s birthday celebration on Jackie Shroff’s birthday, he surprised us with a kind visit to my house and made the evening happier. I’m grateful. “Salman, may you always be blessed,” Ghai captioned the photo. Before that, the director of “Ram Laxhan” gave another look at the small birthday celebration that their close friends, including Ronit Roy and Poonam Dhillon, attended. I’m proud of my wife, Mrs. Ghai, for being kind enough to bring Jackie’s close friends here for a cake cutting last night to



honor our beloved Jackie Shroff’s birthday. Our Ronit Roy Meenakshi, Sheshadri, Poonam Dhillon, Rummy Jafry, and Salman Khan and company made a special appearance at our wonderful little get-together. “I want to thank everyone for making Jackie and me happy at home,” he continued. With Jackie Shroff’s birthday cake in the background, the

group is captured in an unscripted moment. Additional pictures from the event were posted by director Rummy Jafry, who attended the celebration. The director of Jackie Shroff’s 1983 hit film “Hero,” Subhash Ghai, also wrote a poignant birthday message. In his post, Ghai discussed Jackie’s life story and his principles. In a sonnet, Ghai expressed

his pride in Jackie. Salman Khan’s upcoming film, “Battle of Galwan,” directed by Apoorva Lakhia, is based on the 2020 conflict in the Galwan Valley between China and India, which claimed the lives of 20 Indian soldiers. Salman is teamed with actor Chitrangada Singh in the movie. On April 17, the film will be released.

With love from “Naya Hindustan,” Ranveer Singh rains hell on Lyari Dhurandhar 2 Teaser

Mumbai: It’s time to stop waiting. The much awaited teaser for Dhurandhar: The Revenge, the sequel, has been released by the film’s makers in response to the film’s impressive box office performance. The dark and dramatic universe of Dhurandhar 2 is briefly revealed in the teaser. Ranveer Singh makes a brutal and powerful comeback in the teaser for Dhurandhar 2, wreaking havoc on the streets of Lyari. Every frame is dominated by Ranveer’s on-screen persona. The teaser sets the mood for an aggressive and unyielding sequel by highlighting his development into a darker, more deadly person with little dialogue and strong graphics. The creators unveiled a new poster with Ranveer Singh before to the teaser’s release. Deep crimson hues dominate the poster, which the actor posted on Instagram, giving it a somber and dramatic feel. Standing in the downpour, Ranveer is seen gazing straight ahead with a resolute and unwavering attitude. The words “THE REVENGE” are engraved onto a blood-red wall in the background. Dhurandhar 2 would be available in five languages, in contrast to Dhurandhar, which was solely available in Hindi. On March 19, the Aditya Dhar-directed film will be released in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam theaters. Aditya Dhar is the film’s writer and director. Jyoti Deshpande, Lokesh Dhar, and Aditya Dhar are its producers. R Madhavan, Akshaye Khanna, Sanjay Dutt, and Arjun Rampal are among the ensemble cast members of Dhurandhar. The film, which focused on a high-stakes clandestine counter-terrorism mission, was the first installment of a two-picture series. The narrative centers on an undercover Indian intelligence agent who penetrates Karachi’s political and criminal networks



in order to destroy a terrorist group endangering India’s security. Hamza Ali Mazhari, an Indian undercover operative who has made a name for himself in Pakistan’s underworld, is the next character in Dhurandhar 2. Dhurandhar became one of the highest-grossing Indian films after a remarkable run at the box office both domestically and internationally. The movie reached a significant milestone during its theatrical run when its gross receipts in India surpassed Rs 1,000 crore, according to the trade tracking website Sacnilk.

With this accomplishment, Dhurandhar joined a select group of movies that have made more than Rs 1,000 crore. Only Baahubali 2: The Conclusion (Rs 1,417 crore), KGF: Chapter 2 (Rs 1,001 crore), and Pushpa 2: The Rule (Rs 1,471.1 crore) had before reached the milestone. Dhurandhar stands out since it was the first Indian movie to earn over Rs 1,000 crore while only being available in one language. The previous movies, on the other hand, profited from several dubbed versions, which increased their total box office receipts.

Masaba Gupta was discouraged from acting by Neena Gupta



Mumbai: The daughter of cricket star Viv Richards and actor Neena Gupta, Masaba Gupta has established herself as one of India’s top fashion designers. However, Masaba experimented with acting after making a name for herself in the fashion industry, starring in Masaba Masaba. However, Neena discloses that her daughter was given a reality check when she was young and was eager to play the stereotypical heroine in a Hindi movie. Neena recently recounted how Ma-

saba aspired to be a top performer in Bollywood movies from a young age. “She didn’t make that choice. It simply occurred. “The situation was like that,” she stated, adding that Masaba was swayed by the desire of “everyone around her” to follow suit. However, the seasoned actor claimed that she demoralized her. “Look, your body and face look like this,” I told her. You don’t look like the heroine of a Hindi movie, thus you won’t get her. It’s

true. She remarked, “You don’t look like the lead in a Hindi movie from that era. In the end, Neena urged Masaba to consider character roles and pursue acting training.

In the Netflix series Masaba Masaba, the fashion designer makes her acting debut as a fictionalized version of herself.

Neena played her mother in the show as well. “When I saw her work, I started crying. She’s a really talented actor. She is quite organic. I was taken aback. Regarding Masaba’s acting ability, Neena remarked, “She was like a pro.” Masaba later made an appearance in one scene of Modern Love: Mumbai, an anthology movie available on Amazon Prime Video. She participated in a dance performance in Kesari Chapter 2 last year. In contrast, Neena will co-star with Sanjay Mishra in Vadh 2. On February 6, the criminal thriller opens in theaters.

Dilip, Farah Khan’s cook, frequently interrupts Shabana Azmi

Mumbai: Dilip, the cook for filmmaker-choreographer Farah Khan, has gained notoriety on his own after she included him in her cooking videos and vlogs. Javed Akhtar and Shabana Azmi showcased their stunning Khandala home in the most recent video on her YouTube channel. Dilip’s “overacting” and “continuous interruptions” in the video, however, did not impress many online users, who responded in the comments section. Dilip interrupts Farah and Shabana during a conversation at one point in the video, saying, “Irshad, irshad!” Farah jokingly urges him to go cook in the kitchen. Shortly after, Dilip interrupts once more as Shabana starts to explain that the enormous trees on the property are about 150 years old. “Ma’am, apse bhi puraane hai (Farah ma’am, they are older than you too)” he exclaims as he enters. The frequent jokes and interruptions during the guest’s speech did not impress the audience. This was noted by many commenters. One commented, “Dilip was really annoying in today’s video. You will lose your audience if you do this.” Another commented, “You forced Dilip to stop Shabana Mam while she was attempting to explain the 100-year-old tree.

This is really not to my liking. “The only thing I dislike about this channel is that they constantly interrupt guests when they are explaining something important about themselves,” one commenter wrote. I’ve seen this in a lot of the videos, and the visitors’ ex-



pressions say it all. Please, Farah Khan, let them talk. “Farahji, please don’t use Dilip in every scene...this time literally I had to forward the video...your channel is great, but please let your guest speak as these constant interruptions are making me lose interest,” commented another user. I was hoping to see more of Shabana ji. “We adore Dilip, but it’s too much right now. We came to hear the guest’s story, so please allow them to speak. However, Dilip’s constant interruptions are starting to irritate us. Another comment said, “Sweets are good, but not in excess.” Farah disclosed that she began doing food vlogs as she awaited the commencement of her next movie. She started her YouTube career in 2024, and her cooking videos grew in prominence over time. Dilip became an internet phenomenon as a result of her jokes with him.

Since becoming well-known, Dilip has appeared with celebrities like Shah Rukh Khan and in a number of Farah commercials.

Ranbir Kapoor can read Alia Bhatt’s thoughts, according to her

Mumbai: In 2022, Bollywood star Alia Bhatt wed her longtime partner Ranbir Kapoor and welcomed parenthood with the birth of their daughter Raha. Alia wrote a letter to her younger self in which she described her daughter as a miniature replica of herself and mentioned that her husband, Ranbir, was the place where she felt safest. Alia shared a letter she penned to her younger self during a conversation. “Dear little me, please don’t cry over that stupid boy in high school, it’s not worth it,” she remarked, referring to her constant obsession on Ranbir. You will eventually meet the world’s greatest boy, I assure you. He will love you with respect, comfort, tranquility, and laughter—the person you’ve always secretly had feelings for. He knows everything about you and will be your best buddy and safest haven. He will give you the ability to read your mind, which is something you’ve always desired. “Little me, you’re going to have good

and bad days, but you are mostly going to have grateful days, and that dream of taking care of a mini you comes true,” she continued when discussing parenting her daughter Raha. Your heart will expand beyond your wildest dreams, and you will have the world’s most beautiful daughter.

Prepare yourself because she will also be a lawyer in the future. She also encouraged her younger self to love her mother and sister even more and to never stop dreaming.

After collaborating on Ayan Mukerji’s Brahmastra, which went into production in 2018, Ranbir and Alia started dating. The pair married in April 2022 after dating for a few years, and later that year they welcomed their daughter Raha into the world. Love & War, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, will feature the on-screen reunion of Ranbir and Alia. The movie, which is presently in production, also has Vicky Kaushal in a major part.

Unbelievably, Imran Khan hasn’t seen Ranbir Kapoor’s Animal



Mumbai: The debate concerning Imran Khan’s early comparison to Ranbir Kapoor has been going on for a while. Imran Khan has also talked about it a number of times. The actor from Jaane Tu... Ya Jaane Na recently spoke up about the rumors of a “rift” between him and Ranbir Kapoor. Imran Khan stated, “We’re literally just a few months apart in age,” during a conversation. We were never truly acquainted on a personal level. We didn’t get to know each other until we were young performers who had recently entered the industry. The problem is that there are a lot of interpersonal exchanges that take place along with a lot more exterior story construction that you aren’t actually participating in or have a hand in.” Imran Khan also admits that he hasn’t seen Animal, therefore he is unable to discuss Ranbir Kapoor’s development. “It’s less common for actors to do films together,” he stated. Because of this, you typically have less opportunities to meet performers in the same age range. I haven’t

been involved with Indian movies for the past few years. I haven’t seen Animal. It’s difficult to discuss his development during the past few years. However, I watched every one of his movies while I was working. Praising Ranbir Kapoor, he added, “I’ve always considered him to be a tremendously strong actor. My understanding of him, based on the conversations that we had, is that he’s a thinking cinema person. He has a strong instinct and thinks deeply about the craft of acting and the language of cinema. And that reflects in his work.” Imran Khan stated, “You hear something, you read something,” while discussing how such conjecture affects a friendly connection between two actors. It may have made it more difficult to have any type of genuine relationship because of how that played out even in the media tales. In actuality, Ranbir and I would have the opportunity to socialize in a professional setting. Therefore, each relationship’s potential was always constrained. That being said, there was undoubtedly overlap in our social circles. We know many regular people because we were Bandra kids. I suppose the fact that male performers are less likely to interact with one another is an odd and underappreciated aspect of the industry. Actresses are your coworkers. You spend six to eight months working on films with six to seven different actresses. Thus, you learn a little bit about them,” Imran Khan continued. In 2007, Ranbir Kapoor debuted with Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s Saawariya, and a year later, Imran Khan entered the film business with Jaane Tu... Ya Jaane Na. The two arrivals were placed against one another in a number of reports at the time.

A thrilling Malayalam story on the Nipah virus



Mumbai: With a high mortality rate and no approved vaccine, the Nipah virus is particularly dangerous. Kerala’s first outbreak in May 2018 raised alarms nationally and internationally, culminating in a public health emergency after a young man’s death in Kozhikode. The 2019 film Virus provides a clinical portrayal of this outbreak, focusing on the systemic failures and confusion rather than sensationalism. It illustrates the real-life roles of health professionals facing the crisis. After

confirmation of the virus, Kerala implemented strict measures, including quarantines and contact tracing, ultimately containing the outbreak by June 2018, but not before 16 deaths occurred. The Nipah virus resurfaced in early 2026 with cases in West Bengal, leading to precautionary actions while emphasizing the importance of rapid response and preparedness. Virus serves as a cautionary tale on the consequences of delays and inaccuracies in outbreak management.

Amaal Malik needed to borrow Rs. 5 lakh to have surgery

Mumbai: When Amaal Malik, a composer and performer, was in the Bigg Boss 19 house last year, he made headlines. Despite not taking home the medal, he dominated the spotlight the entire time. Amaal discussed a number of medical issues during his time on Bigg Boss 19. Due to a financial situation, he was unable to get the required procedures.

The musician said in a recent discussion that he had facial surgery when his entire face broke during his 12th Board exam. “The cost of surgeries has increased. I had to take out a loan of Rs 5 lakhs for a maxillofacial operation in order to perform my facial surgery. I’ve overcome all of this, even though my right side skull shattered. I broke my entire face during my 12th grade exam. Using a device like that, I composed the papers while keeping my eyes up for three to four hours. All of these mental and physical challenges have been endured by me. All I’m doing is mending things. The singer said, “I have spent my age of 35 [in this condition], because this war began when I was



five years old.” “I have a few surgeries pending,” the music composer revealed. My entire cheekbone fractured when I was 19, and they had to rebuild it. I also have an ACL [problem] in my knee. My nose is broken, my left hand is shattered, my right shoulder is dislocated, and I have forty-five stitches around my jaw. Like the Terminator, I get up every day and go to work.

My mental fortitude is what sustains me. “I now have to work on and gradually fix these issues. Fortunately, I can perform on performances thanks to quality knee braces. My

entire knee used to spin and come off. When I did a turn in a dance routine during the Bigg Boss 19 finale performance, I experienced knee pain. Physical issues need to be resolved. I didn’t have the funds back then, and I don’t have the time today,” Amaal continued.

Amaal Malik has been dealing with mental health problems as well. A while back, he announced on social media that he had severed his relationship with his family. Songs like O Khuda, Chale Aana, and Buddhu Sa Mann are among Amaal Malik’s well-known compositions.

Ishan Kishan, who was about to cry, was comforted by Virat Kohli



New Delhi : The tale of Ishan Kishan’s comeback will live on for generations. Ishan, who holds the record for the fastest double century in ODI history, was removed from the BCCI Central contract list in 2024.

However, the young player returned to domestic cricket, embraced perseverance, scored a ton of runs, and most recently returned to the Indian team for the T20 World Cup and New Zealand series. Ishan made his intentions known as soon as he returned, scoring 76, 28, and 103 in his first three games.

If he is selected to open

alongside Abhishek Sharma at the World Cup, it shouldn’t be shocking. Ishan is finally in a decent situation after years of being in and out of the team. But a few years ago, that wasn’t the case. When we fast-forward to 2021, Ishan was in the midst of the Mumbai Indians’ awful form slump. Ishan had ignited the IPL the previous year with 516 runs, including an incredible 99-run performance against Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

However, he was unable to duplicate that success the next season. Ishan looked like “a broken young man” with 241 runs from 10

games, as Ian Bishop noted on broadcast following a match between MI and RCB, when none other than the legendary Virat Kohli approached, struck up a conversation, and attempted to comfort the upset Indian batsman. Ishan’s body language while standing next to Kohli was far more powerful than the images of him sitting motionless after his knock almost saved MI against RCB in 2020. As Kohli spoke to him, Ishan fought back tears, recalling how his words arrived at the perfect moment.”During another game, I was really depressed. Recall that there was a video that showed me about to cry before Virat bhai comforted me. Bas kisi tarah se aansu roke huye thhe (I only managed to contain my tears). I must have been resting there when he [Virat] saw me.

Ishan remarked, “Poor kid; he must be thinking too much.” As luck would have it, Ishan made history by smashing a double hundred off just 121 balls the very next year, breaking Chris Gayle’s record when Kohli was at the non-striker’s end. For India’s second wicket, Ishan and Kohli combined for 290 runs.

Amit Shah: The US-India Trade Deal Will Open the Door to Deeper Bonds

New Delhi, Feb 03: The US-India trade agreement, according to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, would strengthen the two nations’ strategic cooperation and open the door for more robust commerce and mutual development. Shah stated in a post on X that the agreement will significantly benefit both countries and their citizens, and that trade between the US and India is expected to grow even more. It’s a big day for India-US relations because the trade agreement was signed with a drastically lowered tariff of 18%, opening the door to deeper trade and mutual development,” he remarked. Shah praised the “historic deal” between US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, stating that it will “elevate our strategic partnership and greatly benefit both nations and their people.” India-US business is expected to grow even further. Following a phone call with Prime Minister Modi, President Trump said on Monday that the US and India had reached a trade agreement in which Washington would reduce the reciprocal duty on Indian goods from the current 25% to 18%. “Made in India products will now have a reduced tariff of 18%,” the prime minister declared, expressing his happiness. It was a pleasure to talk to my good buddy, President Trump, today. I’m happy that the 18% tariff on Made in India products will now be lowered. On behalf of India’s 1.4 billion citizens, PM Modi expressed gratitude to President Trump for this fantastic declaration. The prime minister claimed that collaboration between two major economies and the biggest democracies in the world “unlocks immense opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation” and benefits the populace. “Global peace, stability, and prosperity depend on President Trump’s leadership. He stated on ‘X’ that “India fully supports his efforts for peace.” Without addressing



many of the other issues that were mentioned in Trump’s social media post, PM Modi stated that he was looking forward to working closely with Trump to take the bilateral cooperation to unprecedented heights.

Trump declared that India will begin lowering “tariffs and non tariff barriers” against the US to zero and that New Delhi would purchase over USD 500 billion worth of American commodities, including energy. “Out of friendship and respect for Prime Minister Modi and, as per his request, effective immediately, we agreed to a trade deal between the United States and India, whereby the United States will charge a reduced reciprocal tariff, lowering it from 25 per cent to 18 per cent,” the president of the United States tweeted.

India is going to “likewise move forward to reduce their tariffs and non tariff barriers against the United States, to zero”, according to him. Trump said that in addition to more than USD 500 billion in US energy, technology, agriculture, coal, and many other products, PM Modi

also pledged to purchase American goods at a significantly higher level. “In the future, our wonderful connection with India will only get stronger. He remarked, “Prime Minister Modi and I are two individuals who accomplish things, something that most people cannot say.” During his speech, Modi stated, “When two large economies and the world’s largest democracies work together, it benefits our people and unlocks immense opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation.”

“I look forward to working closely with him to take our partnership to unprecedented heights,” he stated. Trump said that he and Modi also talked about putting an end to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The US president stated, “He agreed to stop buying Russian oil and to buy much more from the United States and, possibly, Venezuela.” “This will help end the war in Ukraine, which is taking place right now, with thousands of people dying each and every week,” Trump stated. The last phone conversation between Trump and Modi took place in October 2025. At a meeting in February of last year, the two presidents decided to complete the first part of a bilateral trade deal by the fall. Despite multiple rounds of negotiations, the trade accord came to a standstill when Trump put 50% tariffs on Indian imports, including 25% punitive penalties for India’s purchase of Russian crude oil. The day that Modi and Trump spoke over the phone coincided with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar’s trip to Washington, DC. According to officials, India now has lower tariffs than other export economies. They mentioned US duties of 19% on Indonesia, 20% on Vietnam, 20% on Bangladesh, and 34% on China. India and the US have made “very significant” headway in the trade deal negotiations, according to official sources last week.

The Supreme Court cautions WhatsApp and Meta not to tamper with India’s right to privacy



New Delhi, Feb 03: The Supreme Court issued a strong warning to WhatsApp and its parent firm Meta on Tuesday on the privacy and data-sharing practices of the instant messaging app, declaring that user data cannot be used for profit. “You can’t play with the privacy of our country; we will not allow you to share a single digit of our data,” said Chief Justice of India Surya Kant to the US company. The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) verdict that maintained a penalty of Rs 213.14 crore levied by the Competition Commission of India for WhatsApp’s 2021 privacy policy was being appealed by Meta Platforms and WhatsApp. Despite not finding any abuse of dominance, the Competition Commission of India filed a cross-appeal contesting the NCLAT ruling that allowed Meta and WhatsApp to share user data for advertising. A bench made up of Justice Vipul Pancholi, Justice Joymalya Bagchi, and Chief Justice of India Surya Kant heard the cases. Speaking on behalf of Meta and WhatsApp, respectively, Senior Advocates Akhil Sibal and Mukul Rohatgi told the court that the fine had already been paid. Chief Justice of India Surya Kant had grave reservations over WhatsApp’s privacy policies while agreeing to admit the appeals, stating that the court would not allow the company to divulge even a single piece of user data. The Chief Justice declared, “We will not permit you to share even a single piece of information, you cannot play with the

rights of this country, let a clear message go.” He said that WhatsApp has established a monopoly and was “making a mockery of constitutionalism” by weakening the right to privacy, noting that users have few options because of the company’s strong position. Chief Justice Surya Kant questioned the effectiveness of such consent when senior attorney Akhil Sibal claimed that consumers have the choice to opt out of the policy. Will a poor street vendor selling fruits comprehend your policy? Will your housekeeper comprehend it? You might have gathered information from millions of individuals. This is a respectable method of stealing personal data, and we will not tolerate it,” the Chief Justice declared. Additionally, the Chief Justice stated that the Court would not move forward until WhatsApp and Meta promised not to use users’ personal information. In response, senior counsel Mukul Rohatgi stated that a Constitution Bench was already reviewing WhatsApp’s privacy policy and that an agreement had been made there guaranteeing that no user would be prohibited for refusing to adopt the 2021 policy. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, which permits compliance until May 2027, was also mentioned by him; however, Justice Joymalya Bagchi pointed out that the Act has not yet taken effect. According to Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, personal information was being used for commercial purposes in addition to being sold. Given that every data silo has com-

mercial worth, Justice Bagchi stated that the court would look at how WhatsApp “rents out” data and monetizes users’ behavioral patterns for targeted advertising. Chief Justice Surya Kant expressed similar concerns, based on his own experience of seeing targeted advertisements just after WhatsApp messages about health. “If a message is sent to a doctor on WhatsApp that you are feeling under the weather, and the doctor sends some medicine prescriptions, immediately you start seeing ads,” Kant, CJI, stated. Senior counsel Akhil Sibal and Rohatgi retorted that WhatsApp conversations are encrypted from beginning to end and are not accessible by the platform itself. According to Rohatgi, “WhatsApp cannot see the messages sent between two users.” However, Justice Bagchi noted that the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act does not address the financial value of shared data, in contrast to EU laws. Speaking on behalf of the CCI, senior attorney Samar Bansal claimed that the penalty was applied after looking into the matter in question and that, in an advertising-driven business model, consumers are essentially the product. In response to intense interrogation, Rohatgi stated that Meta would submit an affidavit outlining its data procedures. The proposal was approved by the court, which also allowed Meta and WhatsApp to submit affidavits, postponed the lawsuit until Monday of next week, and added the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology as a party. The dispute arises from the CCI’s November 2024 ruling on WhatsApp’s 2021 privacy policy, which found that the platform abused its dominant position in the Indian messaging market by requiring users to accept increased data sharing with Meta entities under a “take-it-or-leave-it” model without providing a meaningful opt-out. In violation of the Competition Act of 2002, the regulator determined that access to WhatsApp’s messaging service was illegally linked to consent for data sharing. As a result, a penalty of Rs 213.14 crore was levied, along with instructions to restore user choice through transparent opt-in and opt-out procedures and more disclosure. In November 2025, the NCLAT rejected findings of improper leveraging into Meta’s ad ecosystem and set aside the five-year restriction on exchanging data relating to advertising after Meta and WhatsApp challenged the ruling. However, the Rs 213.14 crore penalty was affirmed.

Maharashtra Man Murders Daughter, 6, Will Run in Panchayat Elections

New Delhi, Feb 03: In order to break the two-child rule and run for office in the state’s impending Panchayat elections, a man from Maharashtra killed one of his three children.

In Telangana’s Nizamabad district, Pandurang Kondmangale, a native of Kerur village in Mukhed taluka of Maharashtra’s Nanded district, shoved her six-year-old daughter into a canal. Pandurang (28) and village sarpanch Ganesh Ramachandra Shinde were taken into custody, according to a Monday announcement from Nizamabad Police. Media representatives were informed by Nizamabad Police Commissioner P. Sai Chaitanya that a girl’s body was discovered in the Nizam Sagar canal in Yedapally a few days ago. She was identified as Prachi (6), a resident of Kerur village in the nearby Nanded district of Maharashtra, as a result of the investigation. Her father was taken by police to be

questioned. By claiming that she was receiving treatment at a health center, he attempted to deceive the police. He admitted to killing the infant when the investigating officer questioned him. Everyone was shocked by what he disclosed throughout the interrogation. Running a barbershop in his village, Pandurang was eager to run in the next Panchayat elections. Due to Maharashtra’s two-child requirement for candidates running for local body elections, he was unable to run because he had a three-year-old boy and twin girls who were six years old. He sought advice from Ganesh Shinde, his buddy and the village’s current sarpanch, on how to defy convention. Prachi, the older of the twins, was one of his children, and they plotted to get rid of him. Police claim that at first, they thought of placing Prachi for adoption. However, as she would still be listed on the birth certificate as his

child, that would have been ineffective. Pandurang considered leaving the child as well, but she was concerned about what would happen if she returned. After that, they plotted to murder the child and pretend it was an accident. Pandurang drove Prachi to the Nizam Sagar canal on a motorcycle because his village is only a few kilometers from the Nizamabad area. He ran away after pushing her into the canal. The girl’s lifeless body was floating in the canal when some peasants who were working in the adjoining field heard something dive into the water and hurried there. Social media users shared the girl’s photos extensively. When someone from the Maharashtra village saw Prachi’s picture as the display picture on one of the police officers’ WhatsApp numbers, they recognized her. Pandurang and the sarpanch were arrested after a police team arrived in the area and started an inquiry.

Fast-forwarding Carlos Alcaraz, the “little titan”

New Delhi: Carlos Alcaraz laughed heartily as he sat between a glass of sparkling champagne that he was still waiting to finish and the gleaming Australian Open trophy that he had finally been able to hold. When asked if he could truly appreciate the scope of what he had accomplished at his age, he responded, “I’m trying, I’m trying.” According to him, tennis is “beautiful,” but the “bad part” is that his busy schedule sometimes prevents players from completely appreciating what they may do. Alcaraz understands the essence for the time being: “I know I’m doing history.” Yes, but those were incredibly quick steps in history. Even the Big Three’s game-changing records are overshadowed by history in the cold world of statistics. Both individually and collectively, those three titans have set the standard for men’s tennis. Alcaraz, the Big Three torchbearer Novak Djokovic referred to as a “little titan,” is now soaring at an incredible pace. Rafael Nadal wrote the career Grand Slam at the age of 24 years and 102 days.

Novak Djokovic withdraws from the Australian Open

New Delhi: In the 2026 Australian Open finals, Novak Djokovic’s incredible run came to a halting halt. Carlos Alcaraz defeated the Serbian 6-2, 2-6, 3-6, and 5-7. Many fans questioned whether this was Djokovic’s final Australian Open following the championship match. The 38-year-old reiterated his intention to play “until the 2028 Olympics” during the post-match press conference, implying that we might see him play in Melbourne once more. Djokovic fought valiantly for his 25th Grand Slam victory in the final, losing the opening set in 33 minutes to Alcaraz. However, the Spaniard persevered and won the second set. As Alcaraz raced to victory, Djokovic quickly ran out of energy despite his best efforts to prove a

point. It has been an amazing journey; I adore you all. You never know what will happen tomorrow, much less in six or twelve months. I left it open because of this. I’m not entirely sure. You’ve been following me for a while, and I don’t act phony or pretend. For the past year or so, I’ve been telling you that I don’t know how much or what comes next. I said, “I would like to play until the 2028 Olympics, but that might mean playing one tournament a year, maybe ten, fifteen, two, or seven—I honestly don’t know.” Decisions regarding my future and timetable should not be made so far in advance. My primary desire at the moment is to spend time with my family before deciding what to do next.

Pak puts all of its hopes in “force majeure” in the India boycott of the T20 World Cup

New Delhi: Pakistan’s announcement that it will not play India in the World Cup has caused the competition to enter uncommon and unsettling area. The two teams’ matches have political significance, but once a team declines to play, there is very little space for doubt under the ICC’s playing rules. The procedure is simple in accordance with the competition rules. As anticipated, India will travel to Colombo, train, and attend the press conference prior to the game. The game will be formally forfeited if Pakistan declines to play. Pakistan will receive no points, while India will receive two, and most importantly, their net run rate will suffer. The final step is crucial. Net run rate has frequently determined semifinal spots in crowded World Cup groups. A forfeit is a competitive disadvantage that can follow a team far into the tournament; it is not a neutral result. But there is one other possibility. The match would be deemed canceled rather than forfeited if India did not come to Colombo. Both teams would then split the points. But as things stand, Pakistan bears a heavy burden. The terms of play are clear: the team that refuses to play will suffer the sporting repercussions. Forfeitures at World Cups are rare, but they do occur, according to cricket history.

Following a bombing in Colombo, Australia and the West Indies declined to play group matches in Sri Lanka during the 1996 ODI World Cup, giving Sri Lanka all the points. In 2003, New Zealand rejected to play Kenya in Nairobi due to security concerns, while England forfeited their match against Zimbabwe in Harare due to political and safety issues. More recently, withdrawals from ICC events—such as Zimbabwe’s 2009 T20 World Cup withdrawal and New Zealand’s Under-19 team’s 2022 U-19 World Cup withdrawal owing to COVID-19 restrictions—have demonstrated that the ICC usually puts competition integrity ahead of accommodations. Whether Pakistan’s rejection might be justified by a force majeure provision is currently the main legal concern. Force majeure has historically been used to describe unpredictable and inevitable occurrences, such as natural disasters, divine actions, or harsh political circumstances that make participation impossible rather than undesired. According to ICC sources, this would be a challenging case to make.

Ranji Trophy: Jaiswal joins Mumbai QF squad, Shardul returns to captain against Karnataka

Mumbai: Indian opener Yashasvi Jaiswal and all-rounder Shardul Thakur have been included in Mumbai's squad for the Ranji Trophy quarterfinal clash against Karnataka starting from February 6 onwards. Mumbai will aim to secure their record-extending 43rd Ranji Trophy title as they begin their knockout campaign against Karnataka in Mumbai. Shardul has been named as the captain of the side, having last played for Mumbai in the Vijay Hazare Trophy a month back on January 3 against Maharashtra before an injury ruled him out of the competition. Siddhesh Lad captained Mumbai in their previous clash against Mumbai, which recently ended in a draw.

Meanwhile, Jaiswal, after his maiden ODI ton against South Africa in December, made himself available to play for Mumbai in the 20-over Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy competition and Vijay Hazare Trophy competition. In SMAT 2025/26, he made scores of 29 (against Hyderabad), 101 (against Rajasthan), and 15 (against Haryana). During the VHT 2025/26, he scored 46 (against Goa), 3 (against Maharashtra), and 15 (against Himachal Pradesh). In 11 first-class matches for Mumbai, Jaiswal has made 1,086 runs at an average of 60.33 and a strike rate of 62.59, with five centuries and three fifties in 21 innings, with best score of 181. Mumbai squad: Shardul Thak-



ur (capt), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Musheer Khan, Akhil Herwadkar, Siddesh Lad, Sarfaraz Khan, Aakash Anand (WK), Hardik Tamore (WK), Sairaj Patil, Shams Mulani, Tanush Kotian, Tushar Deshpande, Mohit Awasth, Omkar Tarmale, Divyesh Saxena and Suryansh Shedge. Harpreet Brar takes a four-wicket haul, KL Rahul and Shreyas Gopal hit fifties, Ruturaj Gaikwad scored a 19-ball duck on his birthday, and Shahbaz Ahmed's 11-wicket haul in Bengal's win over Haryana in the ongoing Ranji Trophy on Day 3. During the Bengal vs Haryana match at Ch Bansilal Cricket Stadium, Shahbaz Ahmed ripped through Haryana's batting order, picking up a six-wicket haul in the second innings as Bengal claimed a massive 188-run win on the third day.

Shahbaz accounted for all of the first six wickets to fall, starting with Yuvraj Yogender Singh, to reduce Haryana to 69/6 before the rest of the bowlers cleaned up the tail. Karnataka beat Punjab by five wickets in Mohali after Devdutt Padikkal slammed a match-winning century. The left-handed batter was also named the Player of the Match. Punjab posted 309 in their first innings after Emanjot Singh Chahal (83) and Abhijeet Garg (81) played fighting knocks. Vidyadhar Patil scalped four Wickets For Karnataka.

Karim Benzema joins Al Hilal, sparking Ronaldo riot and reshaping Saudi football landscape

Benzema move ignites Saudi football power struggle

New Delhi: Cristiano Ronaldo and Karim Benzema once ruled Europe side by side, trading goals, trophies and headlines in Real Madrid white. In Saudi Arabia, they are still shaping the story, only now the drama is coming as much off the pitch as on it. What should have been a routine phase of the season has turned into a reminder that superstar footballers arrive with strong opinions, bigger expectations and zero patience for imbalance. On Monday, Benzema officially joined Al-Hilal after terminating his contract with Al-Ittihad. The move followed weeks of uncertainty, with local reports suggesting the French striker had no interest in extending his deal after feeling underwhelmed by renewal talks. He had already missed Al-Ittihad's previous two



league matches, and once that happened, the ending felt inevitable. From a footballing lens, Benzema leaves Al-Ittihad having done his job and more. He led the Jeddah club to a historic domestic double last season, lifting the Saudi Pro League and the King's Cup for the first time in their history.

Even this season, at 38, he remained decisive, scoring 16 goals in 21 matches across competitions. Al-Hilal, already top of the table,

have simply added another serial winner to a squad that already looks frighteningly complete. Al-Hilal sit on 47 points, just one ahead of Al-Nassr, but the gap feels far wider than that. Al-Ittihad, meanwhile, have slipped to sixth, a sharp contrast to where they stood a year ago. Benzema's arrival does not just strengthen Al-Hilal, it reinforces a growing feeling that the league's balance is tilting heavily in one direction. Reports from Portugal

and Saudi Arabia suggest Ronaldo has refused to play for Al-Nassr despite being fully fit. This is not a rebellion against his club. Al-Nassr's CEO Jose Semedo is one of Ronaldo's closest allies, and there is no sense of internal chaos. The issue, instead, sits above club level. Ronaldo's frustration is reportedly aimed at the Public Investment Fund, which controls Saudi Arabia's biggest clubs. Since 2023, Al-Hilal's spending has dwarfed that of Al-Nassr.

Benzema's move to Al-Hilal has only sharpened the contrast, pointing fingers at the issue of some teams being pushed ahead while others are left to make do. For Ronaldo, this is about competitiveness. He wants a squad capable of winning silverware that has eluded his Saudi chapter.

England and Brook chase redemption at T20 World Cup after global white-ball failures

London: England are in search of a fresh start at the T20 World Cup after their Ashes debacle and a series of failures at global white-ball events, with captain Harry Brook under scrutiny on and off the field. The 2010 and 2022 champions, who boast an impressive roster of destructive batsmen and match-winning bowlers, are aiming to win the trophy for a record third time. Brook takes charge at a global tournament for the first time since he replaced Jos Buttler as white-ball skipper last year. Buttler stood down following England's early exit from the 50-over Champions Trophy in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates. That came after an embarrassing title defence at the 50-over World Cup in India in 2023 and a semi-final exit at the 2024 T20 World Cup in West Indies and the United States. The 26-year-old Brook, one of England's most gifted all-format players, has recently been in the headlines for the wrong reasons. Last month the Yorkshireman apologised after he was involved in an altercation with a nightclub bouncer during England's tour of New Zealand before the recent Ashes series in Australia, admitting to a "terrible mistake."

Brook was fined and warned over his conduct by the England and Wales Cricket Board, admitting he was fortunate to keep his job. Now the richly gifted run-scorer has an early chance to shift the focus back on to his batting as he prepares for England's opener against Nepal in Mumbai on Sunday.



England boast a wealth of explosive talent at the top of the batting order, with Buttler, Phil Salt and Ben Duckett all options as openers at the tournament in India and Sri Lanka. Buttler is now 35, but remains one of the most feared players in limited-overs cricket and is a seasoned campaigner in the Indian Premier League, which is also 20 overs per side. In the middle order, Brook and Tom Banton have the ability to change the game in the blink of an eye while rising talent Jacob Bethell is one of several versatile all-rounders. If there is a potential weakness, it may among the pace bowlers. Mark Wood is unavailable because of injury while Jofra Archer, another express quick, has only just returned after suffering a side strain during the Ashes. But Josh Tongue has been rewarded for his impressive performances in Australia with inclusion in the 15-man squad. Luke Wood and

Sam Curran provide England with left-arm pace options, while fellow seamer Jamie Overton, is also dangerous with the bat. Vastly experienced leg-break bowler Adil Rashid leads the spin attack, with all-rounders Liam Dawson, Will Jacks and Rehan Ahmed giving Brook a range of slow-bowling options.

England head coach Brendon McCullum and managing director of men's cricket Rob Key will be desperate for success after the recent 4-1 Ashes thumping raised serious questions about their respective futures. England will start the tournament with their tails up after beating co-hosts Sri Lanka in both one-day international and T20 series -- they have lost just one T20 series since the 2024 World Cup. There has been a significant turnover of personnel since England's white-ball purple patch, during which they claimed the 2019 50-over World Cup and title.

India to host Asian Olympic qualifiers

New Delhi: India will host next year's Asian Shooting Championship (Rifle/Pistol) where eight quota places for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics will be allotted. The development was confirmed by the Asian Shooting Confederation in a letter to the National Rifles Association of India President Kalikesh Singh Deo. The NRAI stated that the event will be held in Delhi and the dates will be finalised in due course. "We congratulate National Rifle Association of India for winning the hosting rights of Asian Rifle/Pistol Championship 2027 where eight Quota Places will be distributed for the LA 2028 Olympics. "We are confident that, under your leadership, the championship will be organised to the highest standards and will be a great success," the letter, which is in PTI's possession, stated. The 68th National Shooting Championships (NSCC) concluded on Tuesday after 36 days of competition, featuring over 16,500 athletes, 45 events, and two venues across New Delhi and Bhopal, making it one of the largest editions in the championship's history.

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es across rifle, pistol and shotgun disciplines, as per a press release from the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI). In the National Championship medal tally, Haryana finished on top with 31 gold, 13 silver and 16 bronze medals to claim a total of 60 national medals. Haryana's dominance was underlined by strong performances across disciplines, with 13 gold medals in rifle, 14 in pistol, and four in shotgun events. Maharashtra finished second in the National Championship standings with 24 gold medals, along with nine silver and nine bronze, while Rajasthan placed third with 15 gold, 15 silver and 21 bronze medals, accumulating 51 medals overall.

In discipline-wise performances, Haryana led the rifle and pistol events, while Punjab topped the shotgun competitions, winning nine gold, eight silver and nine bronze medals. Punjab finished fourth overall in the National Championship medal table with 13 gold medals. The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI), the governing body for the Olympic sport of Shooting in the country, today announced that New Delhi had won the bid to host the Asian Rifle/Pistol Championship 2027, where eight quota places for the Los Angeles 2028 (LA 28) Summer Olympic Games, will be awarded. The same was confirmed through a letter sent to Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo, President, NRAI, by Duaij Alotaibi, Secretary General, Asian Shooting Confederation (ASC) on Monday, according to a release. It will be the second time in a row that India will be hosting the premier continental championship for Rifle and Pistol shooters. Shotgun to be held in New Delhi in April 2027, where a total of 12 LA 28 quota places will be available faith in India ing competitions.

ATP rankings: Sabalenka stays top despite loss Djokovic climbs to third place on men's tour

Djokovic returns to top three for first time since 2024



Melbourne: Carlos Alcaraz completed a career Grand Slam of singles victories with his Australian Open title, but there was some solace for the man he defeated, 24-time Grand Slam singles champion Novak Djokovic. While Alcaraz maintained his No. 1 ranking on the ATP tour ahead of Jannik Sinner, Djokovic, who beat Sinner in

the semifinals at Melbourne Park, moved up one place to No. 3. It is the first time the 38-year-old Djokovic has been inside the top three since August 2024. On the WTA Tour, Aryna Sabalenka maintained her top ranking despite her loss in the final to Elena Rybakina, Rybakina moved up two places to third in the rankings, with

Iga Swiatek in between at No. 2. Three Americans followed in the WTA rankings - No. 4 Amanda Anisimova, Coco Gauff and Australian Open semifinalist Jessica Pegula. Elina Svitolina moved up two places to No. 10 after her semifinal loss to Sabalenka at Melbourne Park. American Learner Tien was one of the biggest improvers

on either tour by moving up five places on the ATP Tour to No. 24, a career high. The 20-year-old Tien, who lost to now No. 4-ranked Alexander Zverev in the quarterfinals, became the youngest American man to reach the final eight of a major since 2002. Elena Rybakina won the Australian Open title with a 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 victory over top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka on Saturday that avenged her loss in the championship decider here in 2023.

Four years ago she won the first set but lost the final in three. This time, after breaking in the first game and taking the first set, she rallied after losing the second set and going down 3-0 in the third. She won five straight games to regain control and served it out, closing with an ace on her first championship point. It was a second major title for fifth-seeded Rybakina, who won Wimbledon in 2022 and entered that Australian final four years ago as the only major winner in the contest.

Benzema joins Al-Hilal, presenting strong threat to Ronaldo's Saudi Pro League championship hopes

Madrid: France icon Karim Benzema swapped one Saudi club for another on Monday when joining Al-Hilal from rival Al-Ittihad — a move that could be bad news for Cristiano Ronaldo. The former Ballon d'Or winner has joined Saudi Pro League leader Al-Hilal, which is one point ahead of Ronaldo's Al-Nassr. Ronaldo is still waiting for his first league title since moving to Saudi Arabia in 2022 and has seen his main rival strengthen with the addition of five-time Champions League winner Benzema.

The former Real Madrid striker, a teammate of Ronaldo's at the Spanish giant, led Al-Ittihad to the title last year, as well as the King's Cup. Al-Hilal is Saudi Arabia's most successful team with 21 league titles and four Asian Championships. Last Year it stunned Manchester City at the Club World Cup 4-3 and knocked out Pep Guardiola's team. Coached by two-time Champions League finalist Simone Inzaghi, it represents a major threat to Ronaldo's hopes of being crowned league cham-



Pion after sparking a wave of top soccer players — including Benzema — to move to the Saudi league. Benzema's deal comes at a time when there are reports Ronaldo is unhappy about a lack of transfer activity from Al-Nassr. Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund is The Majority owner of Al-Hilal, Al-Ittihad and Al-Nassr. Al-Hilal is accustomed to making spectacular signings, having lured Neymar from Paris Saint-Germain in 2023 Bruno Fernandes. Ronaldo joined Al-Nassr after leaving Man United as a free

agent in 2022. Arab Champions Cup.

Raphinha scored twice as Barcelona beat Real Madrid 3-2 on Sunday in the final of the Spanish Super Cup played in Saudi Arabia. Raphinha's 73rd-minute winner came in a fortuitous manner after he slipped while shooting and the shot deflected off Madrid defender Raúl Asencio to fool goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois. The classic final featured a hectic end to the first half when three stoppage-time goals were scored before the break, two by Real Madrid and one by

Barcelona. Barcelona beat Madrid 5-2 in last year's final, when Raphinha also scored twice. We gave all we had," Raphinha said. "I was emotional at the end of the match, we needed a win like this." t was the 16th Super Cup title for Barcelona, more than any other club. Madrid is second with 13 titles. Robert Lewandowski also scored for Barcelona. Madrid's goals were scored by Vinicius Júnior and Gonzalo García. The trophy was lifted by Barcelona defender Ronald Araujo, who had been out November break.