

In Brief

Shillong hosts 4th IFOAM World Summit

Shillong: Meghalaya hosted the 4th International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) World Organic Youth Summit, marking Day 01 of the 1st North-east India Organic Week. Organized by IFOAM-Organics Asia and supported by the Government of Meghalaya and APEDA, the summit focused on the state's advancements in organic agriculture. Jennifer Chang, Executive Director of IFOAM Asia, praised Meghalaya's governance and emphasized the importance of knowledge transfer to address the aging farming population in Asia. Maqbool Lyngdoh from MEGNOLIA highlighted Meghalaya's agricultural heritage and the government's support for farmers, stressing the need for effective branding of niche products like black sticky rice and Lakadong Turmeric to enhance market value.

Umrangso Stadium inauguration set for December 5

Guwahati: Assam is set to inaugurate a new cricket stadium in Umrangso, built by the Assam Cricket Association (ACA) and facilitated by the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council. The stadium, covering 30 bighas, will feature a 15,000-capacity gallery and five practice pitches, providing a modern facility for cricket in the Northeast. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma will officiate the opening on December 5. This development aims to elevate Umrangso as a cricket destination, addressing the lack of proper facilities for local players who previously practiced in makeshift conditions. BCCI General Secretary Devajit Saikia believes the stadium will nurture young talent from the region.

Mizo Territorial Army exam set for Jan 18 with 2,700 applicants

Aizawl: The recruitment drive for the Mizo Territorial Army has attracted nearly 2,700 applicants by the end of November, indicating a strong interest among Mizo youths. The selection process, managed by Lt. Col. Goldi Bora, will allow only those who pass the physical and medical tests to take the written examination on January 18. The verification of candidates is ongoing, and the authorities are optimistic about the next stages proceeding smoothly. Lt. Col. Bora praised the enthusiasm, particularly among female applicants, and noted the support from the Mizoram Youth Commission, which has initiated preparatory courses for candidates. Additionally, 27 outreach programs have been held to raise awareness of the recruitment process, with community support ensuring smooth operations thus far.

Nagaon second day eviction drive

Nagaon: The eviction drive in Nagaon district's Lutumari Forest Reserve entered its second day, targeting 5,962 bighas occupied by around 1,700 families. Notices were previously issued for residents to vacate, leading over 1,100 families to leave before the operation commenced. The first day resulted in the dismantling of various structures, including 2,070 kuccha and 192 pucca houses, and a mosque was demolished on the second day.

Shillong hosts 4th IFOAM World Summit

Global youth leaders and organic pioneers converge in Shillong for 4th IFOAM World Organic Youth Summit

Shillong, Dec 01: Meghalaya today welcomed a global assembly of agricultural pioneers, policy experts, and young changemakers for Day 01 of the 4th International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) World Organic Youth Summit.

Organised by IFOAM-Organics Asia, the Summit is a centrepiece of the ongoing 1st Northeast India Organic Week, a landmark convergence hosted by the Government of Meghalaya in collaboration with the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India. The day's deliberations convened with a high-profile inauguration, featuring strategic developmental strides made by Meghalaya in the sector. Ms Jennifer Chang, Executive Director, IFOAM Asia, in her address,



praised Meghalaya for its exceptional governance and efficiency. Highlighting the execution of the summit, she stated, "I have never known a local government that is so organised". She further commended the adminis-

tration's work culture, noting, "Here, the effectiveness is such that everything gets done." Transitioning to the summit's mandate, she emphasised the need for intergenerational transfer of knowledge to counter the ageing

farming population in Asia. She concluded by urging the delegates to take up the responsibility to build upon the legacy and take organic agriculture to greater heights. Mr Maqbool Lyngdoh, Chief Administrative Of-

ficer, Meghalaya Natural & Organic Farming Society for Livelihood & Innovation in Agriculture (MEGNOLIA), in his initial remarks, reflected on the state's deep-rooted agricultural heritage, asserting "Meghalaya is organic by Tradition". He underscored the government's commitment to handhold the farmers, whom he identified as the "main stakeholders". He asserted that the government is firm on providing the necessary support costs to ensure the produce commands a high market value. Highlighting the potential of niche products like the black sticky rice and the GI-tagged Lakadong Turmeric, he emphasised the need for strong branding and thanked APEDA and IFOAM for the collaboration, declaring that to succeed, "We need to position ourselves in a global market".

Railway Alignment and OBC Demand: CESJ Warns of Social Impact and Long-term Ecological Damage

Aizawl, Dec 01: The Centre for Environment and Social Justice (CESJ) has voiced strong reservations over two critical issues currently gaining traction in Mizoram — the renewed demand to grant Other Backward Classes (OBC) status to the Gorkhali community and the possible ecological and social fallout of the proposed railway alignment under the Sairang-Hmawngbuchhuah project.

According to CESJ, the question of including Gorkhalis in Mizoram's OBC list has resurfaced despite the state government's explicit stand on the matter last year. The organisation recalled the decision taken by the Council of Ministers on December 20, 2024, which clearly stated that the Gorkha community in Mizoram "does not suffer caste-based backwardness compared to other groups," a criterion essential for OBC recognition under the Mandal Commission guidelines.

Although the state had supported the community's inclusion in the Central OBC list, it emphasised that extending OBC benefits within Mizoram — particularly under the state's reservation framework — required more detailed socio-economic assessment.

CESJ cautioned that granting state-level OBC status would make the Gorkhali community eligible for reservations not only in central services but also within Mizoram's own quota system. This could, the organisation said, open up access to almost 27 per cent reservation in government employment and other sectors.

Such a move, CESJ argued, may significantly affect job prospects for Mizo youths and disturb the existing social equilibrium, a concern earlier raised by the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA). CESJ urged policymakers to engage in responsible, data-driven delib-

eration before considering any shift in reservation policy.

CESJ also expressed grave concerns about the environmental implications of the proposed railway alignment under the Sairang-Hmawngbuchhuah project. The organisation warned that the current route may jeopardise several rivers, streams, springs, watersheds, and ecologically fragile zones along its path.

With global water scarcity projected to intensify by 2030 — a crisis already manifesting in countries like Iran — CESJ stressed that Mizoram cannot afford irreversible damage to its delicate mountain ecosystems. Mizoram's rivers and watersheds, it noted, form the backbone of water supply for Aizawl and neighbouring areas, and any disruption could lead to cascading consequences for future generations.

Highlighting regional parallels, CESJ pointed out that Meghalaya had earlier resisted the entry of railways due to demographic and migration-related concerns, while Nagaland continues to approach railway expansion near Dimapur with caution. Mizoram, it argued, must adopt a similarly vigilant approach to protect its borders, environment, and water security before pushing ahead with large-scale infrastructure plans. CESJ underscored that tribal populations worldwide have historically remained protective of their land, resources, and natural heritage. In that spirit, the organisation urged the Mizoram government to prioritise ecological sustainability and community well-being over "premature or poorly assessed" construction projects. Protecting rivers, springs, and reservoirs, CESJ said, must remain a top priority as Mizoram navigates development while preserving its unique environmental integrity.

63 candidates elected unopposed ahead of Arunachal's Panchayat and municipal polls

Itanagar, Dec 01: In a significant development ahead of the December 15 panchayat and municipal elections, the Arunachal Pradesh State Election Commission (SEC) has announced that 63 candidates have already been elected unopposed. The early results underline the strong hold of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) across the state's grass-roots political landscape. According to the SEC, the BJP secured 58 zila parishad constituencies without facing any opposition, while one seat went uncontested to a nominee from the National Peo-

ple's Party (NPP). In the urban local body elections, four BJP candidates were elected unopposed to the Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC). The withdrawal of nominations concluded on November 30, clearing the way for these early victories. Despite a large volume of filings across rural and urban bodies, many seats saw little or no competition. The SEC revealed that 440 candidates are now in the fray for 186 zila parishad constituencies. Additionally, 39 candidates will contest for 16 IMC wards, while 21 candidates will compete for the eight wards



of the Pasighat Municipal Council (PMC). The nomination process witnessed high participation, with 600 nominations filed for 245 zila parishad seats, 10,550 for 8,182 gram panchayat posts, 101 for 20 IMC wards, and 28 for eight PMC wards. Scrutiny of nominations was completed on November 26.

However, the SEC noted that 13 gram panchayat constituencies received no nominations, and papers for 14 gram panchayat seats were rejected. Polling in the Dumba Singpho gram panchayat constituency has been countermanded following the death of a candidate whose nomination had been accepted.

Mizo Territorial Army exam set for Jan 18 with 2,700 applicants

Aizawl, Dec 01: The ongoing recruitment drive for the Mizo Territorial Army has recorded a strong response, with nearly 2,700 applicants registering by the end of November. The high turnout highlights the growing interest among Mizo youths in joining the force, as the selection process moves steadily toward the written examination scheduled for January 18. Lt. Col. Goldi Bora, Officer-in-Charge of the Territorial Army Aizawl Company, said the recruitment process is progressing smoothly. He explained that

only those applicants who successfully clear the physical and medical tests will be allowed to sit for the written exam. While verification of documents and screening results is still underway, the exact number of eligible candidates is expected to be finalised soon. He noted that the authorities remain hopeful that the short-listed candidates will proceed to the next stage without difficulty. The officer appreciated the enthusiasm shown by Mizo youths, remarking that many are eager to join the Territorial Army. He acknowledged the public's warm

support, particularly encouraging female applicants, indicating a rising sense of responsibility among youth to serve the nation. The Mizoram Youth Commission has launched a crash course to aid candidates in preparing for the written test, with Lt. Col. Bora expressing gratitude for this initiative. Since registration began, 27 outreach programs have been conducted in Aizawl and surrounding areas to raise awareness about the recruitment process, which has proceeded smoothly with community cooperation and no major issues reported.

LoP Saikia slams govt over tribal status row, education lapses

Guwahati, Dec 01: Leader of Opposition Debabrata Saikia today criticised the Assam Government over the growing tension surrounding the tribal status demand of six communities and the alleged irregularities in the state's education sector. Speaking to reporters in Guwahati, Saikia said the BJP government had "betrayed" the people with false promises and irresponsible statements. Saikia said the ruling party had failed to keep its commitment of granting tribal status to the six communities. According to him, the Chief Minister's recent remarks had created a climate of division and misunderstanding among different groups. He added that such comments had led to a situation where some individuals carried out acts of vandalism at the BTC Secretariat in Kokrajhar earlier in the day. He said it was unfair for the Chief Minister to blame the Congress every time the government faced criticism. "Blaming the Congress to hide their own failures after being in power for ten years is meaningless," Saikia said. He also pointed out that the Chief Minister was giving different explanations at different places to justify the government's inaction. "When he goes to Upper Assam, he says that the Congress stopped them from harming the existing tribal communities. His own words show that he wants to give recognition to the new communities only by affecting the rights of the existing tribes. This is his strategy of division," Saikia added. He further said that the promise of granting



tribal status on the 25th of the month had turned out to be false. He accused the BJP government of running a system of "promises and betrayal," which, according to him, would always be opposed by the Congress. Meanwhile, on the last day of the Winter

Session of the Assam Legislative Assembly, Saikia said that the Opposition raised strong objections regarding the irregularities in the Education Department and the alleged corruption at Tezpur University. Saikia said he presented several matters

that showed how the education system in the state was suffering due to government neglect. He said many venture schools, especially in tea garden and tribal areas, were facing severe difficulties. According to him, these schools were struggling because they were not receiving mid-day meals, uniforms, or textbooks. Using examples from Amguri and Nazira constituencies, he said that students in remote parts of the state were being deprived due to wrong government policies. The Leader of Opposition also highlighted the situation in Tezpur University, where, he said, the administration had been almost paralysed for 70 days. Saikia claimed that the Vice-Chancellor had misused funds and made questionable purchases. He said a plastic chair was bought for Rs 5,500 and a basic bed for Rs 18,000, which he described as clear examples of irregularities. He also said there were serious allegations related to recruitment and book procurement. Saikia questioned why the government had not taken any action even when the future of students was being affected. Saikia also demanded that the government look into the issues related to the Old Pension Scheme for teachers and urged the authorities to relax the policy for the provincialisation of schools that were set up before 2011. He said the Opposition would continue its struggle to protect Assam's education system and ensure accountability from the government.

Medical & Dental Health Camp at Mechuka



Mechuka, Dec 01: As part of Op Sadhbhavana, the Indian Army organised a comprehensive Medical and Dental Health Camp at the General Ground, Mechuka on 30 November 2025, aimed at promoting Health & Hygiene for all in the remote frontier region.

The camp saw an encouraging turnout from the local community with 95 civilians and 37 children availing the medical facilities. Army medical teams conducted detailed health check-ups, dental examinations, disease screening and essential consultations to ensure accessible, quality healthcare for the residents of Mechuka valley.

The initiative also focused on creating awareness about dental hygiene, preventive healthcare and healthy lifestyle practices, empowering the local populace with vital information for long-term wellbeing.

The Indian Army remains committed to supporting border communities through sustained outreach efforts and citizen-centric welfare initiatives under Op Sadhbhavana.

The SIR timeline is extended by ECI, with final rolls starting on February 14

Agency: The Election Commission (EC) has announced a one-week extension for the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls across 12 states and Union Territories, shifting key deadlines to promote transparency amid criticisms from the Opposition regarding the initial “tight timelines.” The deadline for distributing enumeration forms has been pushed to December 11, 2023, while the publication of draft electoral rolls will occur on December 16 instead of December 9. The window for filing claims and objections is extended to January 15, 2026, with the final voters’ list now set for release on February 14, 2024, rather than February 7.

According to a poll panel official, this extension will allow Booth-Level Officers (BLOs) to more effectively communicate details regarding absent, shifted, dead, and duplicate electors before finalizing the draft rolls. This revision is particularly significant as it pertains to states preparing for Assembly elections in 2026, including Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala, and West Bengal. In light of the extension, political parties have reacted strongly. The Samajwadi Party (SP) criticized the extension as insufficient, asserting that pressures on BLOs are detrimental to their health and well-being. SP chief Akhilesh Yadav expressed dissatisfaction with the EC’s response, accusing the Commission of insensitivity towards the challenges faced by electoral officials. The Trinamool Congress in West Bengal pointed out that the extension confirms their claims that the SIR process has been haphazard and rushed, suggesting that the EC acted under pressure from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Congress leader Pramod Tiwari noted that the EC had finally acknowledged the impracticality of the earlier deadlines, advocating for a more thorough approach akin to the 2003 revision.

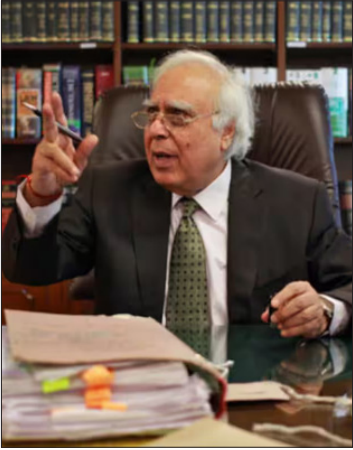
Despite the backlash, the EC defended its decision as a necessary procedural adjustment, aiming to ensure a comprehensive vetting of the voter lists by political party representatives. The BJP countered critiques from other parties by asserting that the extension falls well within the EC’s mandate to refine the SIR exercise, framing the alternative narrative as attempts to delay the process by rival parties.

Concerns remain over the execution of the SIR, particularly regarding uneven digitization progress across the states. With an overall form distribution coverage of 99.65%, states like Uttar Pradesh, which has the largest electorate, report digitization levels as low as 69.56%. Other states demonstrate varying levels of completion, with Kerala at 81.19%, Gujarat at 85.96%, and Tamil Nadu at 87.64%. A group of BLOs in West Bengal termed the extension a “partial victory” but emphasized the need for additional time to ensure thoroughness in the electoral revision process.

The Supreme Court rejects a request for more time to publish waqf details to the portal

New Delhi, Dec 01: The Supreme Court rejected requests for extended time for waqf (Islamic charitable endowments) registration on a centralized digital portal, asserting that the Waqf (Amendment) Act allows for such extensions via a tribunal. Justices Dipankar Datta and AG Masih emphasized that the necessary legal remedy is available, advising petitioners to pursue it. Senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Abhishek Manu Singhvi, representing the applicants, highlighted technical issues hindering the uploading of details to the portal.

Launched on June 6, the Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency, and Development portal aims to improve waqf management



through accurate real-time data and accessibility, with the registration deadline set for December 6. Sibal

argued that the six-month period is inadequate for collecting and inputting the required information, stressing that around one million mutawallis (custodians) would need to approach the tribunal if they followed the court’s order. He underscored the significant documentation required, especially for properties with historical considerations, while also noting that some state governments reported similar uploading difficulties.

The bench pointed out that Section 3B(1), relevant to waqf registration, was not part of the stay issued by the Supreme Court in September. The court stated that modifying the judgment would be inappropriate when the law provides a solution. Solicitor

General Tushar Mehta, representing the Union government, countered the claims of glitches, indicating that approximately 100,000 waqfs have successfully registered and reiterating that compulsory registration has existed since 1929. Amidst these discussions, Sibal detailed the extensive information necessary for waqf registration, including property boundaries, usage, owners’ information, and historical documentation.

Further complicating matters, the All India Personal Law Board and Parliament member Asaduddin Owaisi were among those submitting applications for additional time, reflecting widespread concern over the enforcement of this regulatory requirement.

11 dead, 20 injured as Tamil Nadu govt buses collide

Chennai, Dec 01: Eleven people lost their lives, and 20 others were injured in a head-on collision between two Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC) buses in Sivaganga district on Sunday evening. Chief Minister MK Stalin announced compensation of ₹three lakh for the families of the deceased, ₹one lakh for the severely injured, and ₹50,000 for those with minor injuries. The accident occurred near Vivekananda Polytechnic College when one bus was traveling to Devakoottai and the other to Dindigul. Eight individuals died at the scene, while three more succumbed to their injuries at a nearby hospital. Visual evidence depicted mangled buses, with distressed passengers awaiting assistance. The investigation is ongoing, and police have filed a case at Natchiyapuram police station to clarify the incident’s cause. CM Stalin expressed his condolences and directed district officials to ensure quality medical care for the injured. This tragic event follows another recent bus collision in Tenkasi district on November 24, which resulted in seven fatalities and over 30 injuries. An earthmover assisted in clearing the wreckage from the highway following that incident.

Bio-weapon abuse by non-state actors is “no longer distant,” according to EAM Jaishankar

New Delhi, Dec 01: The misuse of biological weapons by non-state actors is a growing concern, necessitating modernization of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), as emphasized by India’s External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar.

He called for stronger compliance measures, including a modern verification system and ongoing reviews of technological advancements, during a conference commemorating the BWC’s 50th anniversary focused on biosecurity in the Global South. Jaishankar highlighted India’s commitment to



A biological threat, whether natural or deliberate, can spread rapidly across borders and overwhelm systems, necessitating a reinforcement of public health and security measures.

non-proliferation and its robust legal framework supporting UN Security Council resolution 1540. He noted significant deficiencies in the BWC, such as the absence of a com-

pliance system and mechanisms to monitor scientific progress, stressing that these gaps should be addressed to enhance international confidence against bioterrorism.

Coimbatore man's chilling selfie with wife's body after killing her

Chennai, Dec 01: A tragic incident occurred in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, where S Balamurugan, a 32-year-old man, murdered his estranged wife, S Sirpriya, aged 30, following suspicions of infidelity.

Balamurugan forcibly entered the women’s hostel where Sirpriya was staying on a Sunday and attacked her with a sickle, resulting in her death after a violent confrontation instigated by an argument over a phone call. The couple had been living apart, with their two children residing with Sirpriya’s mother, while Sirpriya worked at a local firm and had moved into

the hostel for safety and employment.

The disturbing aftermath revealed that Balamurugan posed next to Sirpriya’s corpse and took a selfie, which he later shared as a status update on WhatsApp. This shocking behavior has unsettled the residents of the hostel, who fled in fear during the attack. Following this egregious act, law enforcement officials have registered a case and initiated an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the murder, which has raised public alarm regarding domestic violence and women’s safety in the region.

The government is criticized by Mallikarjun Kharge for ignoring important problems in Parliament

New Delhi, Dec 01: On Monday, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge responded critically to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s comments, which suggested that the Opposition was misusing Parliament as an outlet for frustration following electoral defeats. Kharge accused the government of sidestepping essential issues that warranted parliamentary discussion, stating, “On the first day of the Winter Session, instead of addressing the key issues before Parliament, Prime Minister @narendramodi ji has once again delivered his ‘dramabazi delivery’.” He alleged that for the past 11 years, the government has consistently infringed on parliamentary decorum, emphasizing that there is a

well-documented history of such breaches.

Modi had previously suggested that the Opposition’s post-election behavior was counterproductive, asserting that defeat should not justify disruptions and that victorious parties should not act with arrogance. He expressed a willingness to advise the Opposition on improving their strategies. In response, Kharge highlighted the rushed passage of several significant bills, noting instances of legislation being made law with little or no prior discussion. He pointed out the government’s rapid processing of controversial laws, citing the bulldozing of anti-farmer regulations and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) as examples of



hasty legislative actions.

Additionally, Kharge criticized Modi for his lack of response to the violence in Manipur until the Opposition initiated a no-confidence motion. He brought attention to pressing concerns such as the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, the alarm-

ing incidents involving Booth Level Officers (BLOs), and reports of vote theft. He declared that these issues should be prioritized in parliamentary discussions and that the Opposition would persist in raising them.

Kharge lamented that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) should cease the “drama of distraction” and instead engage substantively in debates addressing the critical issues impacting citizens. The Winter Session commenced with Opposition members demanding immediate talks on SIR, the circumstances surrounding the deaths of BLOs, and allegations of vote fraud, leading to significant disruptions and adjournments within the Lok Sabha on its first day.

A 30-year-old Haryana student was fatally stabbed in Worcester, UK

Chandigarh, Dec 01: A 30-year-old man named Vijay Sheoran, originally from Charkhi Dadri, Haryana, was fatally stabbed on November 25 in Worcester, UK, following a verbal altercation.

The West Mercia Police arrested five suspects, all aged between 22 to 35, who are also students from regions in India, specifically Haryana and Punjab. These individuals have since been released on bail. Vijay was studying at the University of the West of England in Bristol and had moved to the UK earlier that year after retiring from his position at the Central Board of Excise and Customs in India. Vijay was discovered



with life-threatening injuries early on November 25, and his family has urgently requested the Indian government’s assistance in navigating the complex legalities of repatriating his body.

They have reached out to the Indian High Commission in London. His brother, Ravi, expressed the family’s devastation over the incident and highlighted the challenges they are facing due to the legal requirements in the UK,

complicating their ability to manage the situation independently.

In response to the tragedy, a crowdfunding initiative has been set up by the Non-Resident Indian community to facilitate the swift return of Vijay’s body. Sukhvinder Nara, a lawyer based in London and former deputy advocate general in Punjab and Haryana, has advised Indian students in the UK to maintain vigilance in their interactions, especially with fellow Indian students, to avoid similar incidents. The police investigation remains ongoing as they seek to uncover the full circumstances surrounding Vijay’s death.

In Vikaspuri, Delhi police bust a cricket betting scheme

New Delhi, Dec 01: On Saturday, a cricket betting racket was dismantled in Vikaspuri by the Special Staff West of Delhi Police after credible information was received. Following discreet surveillance at Dussehra Ground, authorities executed a raid at Janta Flats in Budhela Village, where two individuals, identified as Gaurav and Himanshu, were found engaged in betting on an Australian Women’s Cricket League match using the ‘Plus Project 2025’ app on a laptop. The operation resulted in the seizure of two LEDs, six mobile phones, one laptop, and a recorder, and an FIR was filed under the Delhi Public Gambling Act. Earlier in April during the IPL 2025 season, a similar operation led by the Crime Branch in Paharganj resulted in the arrest of six individuals for placing bets during the IPL match between Sunrisers Hyderabad and Gujarat Titans. Authorities confiscated one laptop, one tablet, five mobile phones, additional personal devices, and notebooks used for recording betting transactions. This syndicate used offline methods, primarily taking bets via phone calls and managing data through an app called Betting Assistant and physical notepads, with live betting rates established during matches.

3 dead as cyclone Ditwah brings rain in Tamil Nadu

Chennai, Dec 01: Three fatalities have been reported in Tamil Nadu due to cyclone Ditwah-related incidents, along with significant agricultural damage, including the death of nearly 150 cattle and the destruction of 57,000 hectares of farmland. The state revenue and disaster management minister announced that two individuals died from wall collapses in Tuticorin and Thanjavur, and a young man was electrocuted in Mayiladuthurai. The In-



dia Meteorological Department (IMD) warned of heavy rains affecting crops across various districts and reported that the cyclone has weakened into a deep depression as it moves northward. There is an expectation of colder temperatures in parts of northwest and east India over the coming days.

The requirement for land and the green belt area must be balanced. To the Lok Sabha

New Delhi, Dec 01: The Union environment ministry announced a significant adjustment to the green belt requirements for industrial estates, which has been reduced from 33% to a minimum of 10% of the estate area. This decision was communicated during a Lok Sabha session by Kirti Vardhan Singh, the minister of state for environment, in response to inquiries from MPs regarding the revised environmental standards for industrial projects.

The rationale behind the revision stems from the need to find a balance between land utilization for industrial

activities and the environmental requirements.

The minister explained that the modifications were informed by a committee’s recommendations and were designed to optimize land use while still adhering to pollution control measures as outlined in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification of 2006.

Under the new guidelines, industries categorized as having higher pollution potential—specifically the red and orange category industries—are now required to establish a greater percentage of green cover, specifical-

Members of Parliament requested information regarding the updated greenbelt and plantation regulations issued by the government for new industrial estates, parks, and industrial projects within the Environmental Clearance framework.

ly 15% and 10% of their respective areas. The changes facilitate the expansion of industrial operations while maintaining a commitment to sustainability and environmental protection.

To ensure compliance with the revised standards, a monitoring mecha-

nism has been put in place. Industrial estates are mandated to submit biannual reports on their green belt status to state pollution control boards and related agencies. These reports must contain detailed information including canopy coverage, species of trees, and survival rates, assisted by drone imagery to verify compliance.

These adjustments aim not only to enhance industrial growth but also to address environmental concerns, ensuring that industries are held accountable for their ecological impact while permitting them greater flexibility in land use.

Baramati local body elections and those of five other municipal councils were postponed Voting on Dec 20

Mumbai, Dec 01: The Maharashtra State Election Commission (SEC) has postponed elections in various municipal councils in Pune district due to district court orders being issued after the SEC’s deadline. The new polling date is set for December 20, 2025.

Initially, the SEC mandated that municipal elections should not proceed if appeals concerning membership disqualification or reservation disputes were pending, with a deadline for court decisions established for November 22, 2025. However, rulings regarding the President’s position for the Baramati and Fursungi-Uruli Devachi councils were delivered on November 26, 2025, after this cutoff, prompting the SEC to delay all general elections for these councils. Similar postponements were necessary for councils in Talegaon Dabhade, Lonavala, Daund, and Saswad, where court



decisions also occurred post-deadline. The district administration announced that no new nominations will be accepted, although candidates may withdraw their existing nominations until December 10, 2025, at 3:00 PM.

A revised election program will be published by the SEC and circulated locally to inform voters and candidates, with District Collector Jitendra Dudi emphasizing the importance of adhering to the SEC’s guidelines following the late judicial decisions.

The Supreme Court dismisses a challenge to the Maharashtra local body polls’ delimitation

New Delhi, Dec 01: On Monday, the Supreme Court of India rejected a petition challenging the validity of the delimitation exercise for local bodies in Maharashtra, emphasizing that there should be no further delays in conducting local body elections.

The Court reiterated its commitment to holding the elections by January 31, as previously directed, and refused to entertain any pleas that could impede the electoral process. The petition, filed by Nikhil K Kolekar, contested the delegation of powers by the State Election

Commission (SEC) to divisional commissioners for approving delimitation proposals.

The Supreme Court found the concerns unfounded, referring to a prior Bombay High Court judgment that upheld the SEC’s delegation of authority. While dismissing the petition, the Court indicated it would consider the legal question regarding the delegation of powers in an appropriate future case.

This order followed a previous ruling that allowed elections for over 280 municipal councils and nagar panchayats scheduled for December



2, subject to certain conditions regarding reservations that exceed 50%. Despite ongoing disputes related to reservation issues—especially those highlighted in the Banthia Commission report—the Court maintained that the functioning of local bodies should not be stalled.

• The court affirmed that it will not intervene in the timetable once the SEC announces the schedule and the SC issues clear directions.

The matter of OBC reservation and the validity of the Banthia Commission’s findings is set to be reviewed by a three-judge bench on January 21. The escalation of issues surrounding local body elections in Maharashtra, delayed since 2022, has led to extensive litigation and judicial management to ensure the electoral process moves forward.

Manipur Sangai Festival concludes, showcases unity and cultural pride amid testing times

Imphal, Dec 01: The 12th edition of the Manipur Sangai Festival drew to a close on November 30 with a vibrant ceremony at the Bhagyachandra Open-Air Theatre, marking the end of one of the state's most significant cultural events. Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, who graced the closing function, emphasised the festival's growing role as a national and international platform for cultural exchange, tourism promotion, and global outreach.

Addressing a diverse gathering of tourism stakeholders, performers, and visitors from across India and abroad, Governor Bhalla said this year's festival stood out for its message of "unity and cultural pride despite the challenges faced." His remarks reflected the broader sentiment surrounding Manipur's effort to preserve its cultural identity while navigating a complex social environment.

Bhalla highlighted the



state government's ongoing commitment to strengthening tourism through focused investments and improved infrastructure. He pointed out that Manipur's tourism potential continues to expand as the government prioritises targeted promotion, modern facilities, and enhanced connectivity to attract domestic and international travellers.

"The festival has served as a vital outreach platform, bringing together

tourism professionals, cultural ambassadors, and enthusiasts from within and outside India," he said, noting that the interactions fostered during the event would contribute to long-term partnerships and tourism growth.

This year's festival featured a wide array of activities, from indigenous sports competitions to film screenings, which together showcased the depth and diversity of Manipuri culture. Traditional dances, handicrafts,

cuisine stalls, and musical performances drew large crowds, reinforcing the state's rich artistic heritage.

Governor Bhalla also extended his gratitude to government departments, local organisers, and the people of Manipur for their coordinated efforts in executing the festival smoothly. Their cooperation, he said, reflects the state's resilience and collective spirit.

Umrangso Stadium inauguration set for December 5

Guwahati, Dec 01: Assam is set to inaugurate a new cricket stadium in Umrangso, built by the Assam Cricket Association (ACA) and facilitated by the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council. The stadium, covering 30 bighas, will feature a 15,000-capacity gallery and five practice pitches, providing a modern facility for cricket in the Northeast. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma will officiate the opening on December 5. This development aims to elevate Umrangso as a cricket destination, addressing the lack of proper facilities for local players who previously practiced in makeshift conditions. BCCI General Secretary Devajit Saikia believes the stadium will nurture young talent from the region.

NIT Meghalaya researchers create two chipsets under C2S

Shillong, Dec 01: In a remarkable advancement for India's semiconductor mission and a proud moment for the Northeast, the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Meghalaya has achieved two successful indigenous chip fabrications under the Government of India's Chips to Startup (C2S) / SMDP programmes. These milestones place the institute among the leading academic contributors to India's growing semiconductor ecosystem. Earlier this year, NIT Meghalaya designed and fabricated the state's first-ever indigenous digital integrated circuit, marking a historic step for semiconductor research in the region. This achievement reached national at-

tention when the fabricated chip was presented to Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the SEMICON India 2025 Summit. The moment highlighted the crucial role of academic R&D in advancing India's ambition for self-reliance and technological leadership in semiconductor design and manufacturing. The chip received extensive media coverage for being the first indigenous IC designed in Meghalaya, establishing NIT Meghalaya's capabilities in advanced digital logic and VLSI design. Building on its earlier success, NIT Meghalaya has now received its second fabricated chip, a mixed-signal IC that integrates both digital and analog circuit blocks.

Tripura Raj Bhavan becomes 'Lok Bhavan' from Dec 1

Agartala, Dec 01: Along with the Governors' residences in the rest of the country, the Raj Bhavan in Tripura has been officially renamed as Lok Bhavan from Monday.

Notably, the nomenclature for "Raj Bhavan" has been changed to "Lok Bhavan" following a Union Home Ministry directive to rename all Governors' residences across India. The announcement was issued by the Raj Bhavan authorities following instructions from Tripura Governor Indrasena Reddy Nallu, after consultations with the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. Tripura Governor Indra Sena Reddy Nallu on Sunday said that there will be a change in nomenclature of Raj Bhavan and from Monday onwards it will be called as Lok Bhavan. The change is part of a broader initiative to remove colonial-era terminology from official nomenclature and is seen as symbolic of accessibility and transparency.

"The term "Raj Bhavan" created an impression of a king's domain, whereas in a democratic system, it ultimately belongs to the people. Raj Bhavan will therefore be renamed "Lok Bhavan" from December 1, and designated visiting hours will be introduced for the general public to meet officials," Nallu informed the media.

With this, the concept of Janta Darbar as they have been conducted in Chief Ministers residences will be emulated in Lok Bhavan where people's grievances will be addressed.

All official references to Raj Bhavan will switch to the new name from December 1, 2025.

The detailed guidelines on the implementation process — including updates to official signage, documents, communication materials and ceremonial protocols—will be released in due course, officials said.

Nagaon eviction drive enters second day, hundreds of families left without shelter

Nagaon, Dec 01: The eviction drive at the Lutumari Forest Reserve in Nagaon district entered its second day today as officials continued clearing a large stretch of forest land that had been occupied for several years. The operation, which began on Saturday morning, covers nearly 5,962 bighas of land under the Kamrup Revenue Circle. Authorities say that around 1,700 families had set up villages inside the forest area, building both temporary and permanent houses over time.

The district administration said that notices were issued months earlier, asking residents to leave within a specific deadline. According to officials, many families left the area before the eviction began, while others requested some extra time. The administration agreed, and a one-month extension was given. By the time the drive started, more than 1,100 families had packed their belongings and moved out.

On the first day of the operation, several houses, small schools, Anganwadi centres and even a primary

health centre were dismantled. Officials reported that in total, 2,070 kuccha houses and 192 pucca structures had come up inside the forest land. On the second day, bulldozers were again brought in to clear the remaining houses. In one area, a mosque was demolished, and some residents were seen offering prayers for the last time in front of the debris. The eviction process is taking place at Bedetipar, Sankhula, Juripar and Kendapara villages—localities that fall within the Greater Lutumari Forest Reserve. District Commissioner Debashish Sarma said nearly 70 per cent of the people had left on their own after repeated appeals. More than 5,000 police personnel have been deployed, with four temporary camps set up to avoid any disturbance. Around 50 excavators have also been engaged to speed up the work.

Some families said they had been living in the area for several decades and claimed they did not know it was forest land. Many of them belong to Bengali-speaking Muslim

communities who said their earlier homes in riverine "char" areas were washed away by the Brahmaputra. Several people broke down as their houses were removed, saying they had no place to go.

Officials added that the eviction is being carried out following a Gauhati High Court directive issued on August 18, 2025. A few individuals were also arrested during the operation for allegedly collecting money from people by offering fake legal papers promising protection from eviction.

The administration said arrangements for temporary relief will be provided, but many affected families remain uncertain about where they will live next. The state government has been conducting similar drives across Assam, and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma earlier claimed that more than 160 sq km of land has been cleared of encroachments since 2021. According to the government, over 50,000 people have been evicted in such operations over the past few years.

Gorkha Development Council launches new skill training push to empower young women in Assam

Guwahati, Dec 01: The Gorkha Development Council (GDC) has taken another important step to help the new generation of the Gorkha community move towards self-reliance. The council today launched a fresh round of skill development programmes aimed especially at young Gorkha women in Assam. The programme was held under the Skill Development Training Programme of the GDC, Government of Assam. GDC Chairman Prem Tamang attended the inaugural session of the new Make-Up Artist training course, which has been started to give young women better access to practical skills and job opportunities. Speaking at the event, he said the council would continue to support Gorkha youths in every possible way. "We want our young people to stand on their own feet," Tamang said. "Skill



training is one of the most powerful ways to open new doors for our community. Our aim is simple; every young person should have the chance to learn, grow and earn with dignity." During the programme, Tamang also handed out certificates to trainees who successfully completed the Assistant Electrician and Field Techni-

cian – Air Conditioner courses. He said these technical courses were helping many youths find steady work in different parts of the state. "The Gorkha community has always been hardworking," he added. "All we need to do is give our youths the right training at the right time. The council is fully committed to creating more such opportu-

nities in the coming months." The event was attended by Dr. Kulashree Nath, Honourable Member-Secretary of the Gorkha Development Council, Government of Assam along with several other council members. They appreciated the efforts of the trainees and encouraged more young women to join similar programmes in the future.

If ST status can be granted, then why not 'Bodoland' for us?

Guwahati, Dec 01: A large and tense protest broke out in Bodoland on Saturday as thousands of tribal students came together to oppose the Assam government's proposal to grant Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six more communities in the state. The agitation, which began as a peaceful march soon turned into a violent and emotional confrontation, reflecting deep worry among Bodo groups about what they see as a threat to their political and social rights. The protest started at Bodoland University, where student groups gathered from early morning. They marched towards the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Secretariat in Kokrajhar. What began as a disciplined rally slowly changed as more people joined. The crowd grew louder, and the mood became tense. Students accused the government of trying to dilute the rights of the existing ST communities and of ignoring repeated appeals from tribal bodies. The situation turned serious when protesters reached the BTC Secretariat. Many of them pushed through the main gate, broke parts of it, and entered the premises. Some sections of the BTC Assembly House were vandalised. Security forces had to step in to bring the situation under control, though the crowd continued to swell and raise slogans. Officials said the situation remained sensitive throughout the afternoon. Student leaders spoke against the Centre and the state government. They said granting ST status to the Tai Ahom, Chutia, Moran, Matak, Koch-Rajbongshi and Tea Tribe communities would reduce the share of existing tribal groups in reservation, education and government jobs. Many also said that political representation for Bodos could weaken if more communities were included in the same category. Some students said that these communities had earlier looked down on Bodos and that the sudden demand for equal status felt unfair. One student leader said, "They used to say they come from the Ahom kingdom and treated us as inferior. Now they want the same rights as us. How can we accept that?" Leaders warned that the protest on Saturday was only a beginning. They said that if the government did not respond soon, larger and more aggressive movements would follow. "Today around 2,000 of us marched. This is only a trailer," one of them said. A few student groups also linked the issue to the long-standing Bodoland statehood demand. They argued that if the six communities could push their claim for ST status through a few rallies, the call for a separate Bodoland would also gain new force.

Meghalaya restricts tinted car glasses to Z+ and Z protectees

Shillong, Dec 01: The state government has issued a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that limits the use of tinted glass, sirens, beacons, and name plates on official vehicles.

'Z-Plus' and 'Z' category protectees may use tinted glass for security. Only police, emergency services, and

designated VVIP/VIP vehicles can use sirens. The use of beacons is banned, while guidelines on name plates and the display of the National Flag on vehicles are provided, specifying which dignitaries are allowed to display the flag according to the Flag Code of India 2002.

Meghalaya CM releases Post-Matric Scholarship for 70,000 students

Guwahati, Dec 01: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Saturday released the second and the final instalments of Umbrella Post-Matric Scholarship for the academic year 2024-2025 at a function held at the District Auditorium in Tura.

"The government is releasing the second and the final instalments of the Umbrella Post Matric Scholarship today, amounting to Rs 130 crore, to about 70,000 students," the Chief Minister said in his address.

He had made a commitment about a month ago to release the scholarship without waiting to receive the funds from the central government.

"We are releasing the scholarship to you from our own

resources as we have not yet received it from the central government," Sangma said. He further stated that the state government took this decision keeping in mind the issues faced by students.

The Chief Minister explained that the scholarship could not be released earlier because the existing system did not allow advance payments. "We spoke to the Government of India regarding the challenge and worked out a system where we can now release the scholarship in advance," he said. He also stated that once the Rs 130 crore is released to Meghalaya Rural Bank, it will take a few days for processing and verification before the students finally receive the scholarship

in their accounts. "Therefore, verification is your responsibility as you have to ensure that your bank account is linked to your Aadhaar," he told the students. Stating that education has been a top priority sector for the government, the Chief Minister said the reformative measures taken by the government to streamline the system are not only meant for the benefit of the students but also for the teachers. "I am happy to announce today through this platform that a major reform is under way where we will be resolving the long-pending issue faced by our ad hoc and SSA teachers. We are very close to finalising things for a solution that can be implemented from the

next financial year," he said. The Chief Minister took the opportunity to share with the gathering the government's vision for the state, giving a detailed presentation on some of the flagship programmes for the youth like CM Elevate, YESS Meghalaya, Prime, MGMP, STAR program, Hello Meghalaya besides programmes in sports, music and research. He said entrepreneurship and youth skilling are critical to the state's growth story.

He said the government has planned the economic growth not only for the next two or three years but till 2047 and as such, it has created a lot of reforms, policies, programmes. "You, the youth, will be in the driver's seat

to take us into that phase of 2047 where Meghalaya should become one of the best states in the country," Sangma said.

He further underscored the role of the youth in the vision of \$10 billion economy for the state.

Concluding his address, he said youth are one of the most important stakeholders for the government. "You are a very important asset and integral part in the growth story of our state. While education is important, opportunities for you are equally important. We believe in you and I believe that Meghalaya will be in the safe hands of our youth." Education Minister Lahkmen Rymbui was also present on the occasion.

PM Modi has hijacked Parliament: Assam Congress President Gaurav Gogoi

Guwahati, Dec 01: Assam Congress president and Jorhat Lok Sabha MP Gaurav Gogoi today said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has "hijacked the Parliament of India." He said the Prime Minister does not want to be questioned on major national issues and is avoiding accountability at a time when the Opposition is seeking open and serious discussions in the House. Gogoi said that during the meeting of floor leaders, all Opposition parties had jointly demanded a detailed discussion on the Indian election system. He said the matter was raised clearly and repeatedly, as political parties wanted Parliament to take up an issue that directly relates to the country's democratic structure. However, Gogoi said the ruling BJP is "simply refusing" to list the topic in the Parliament agenda

for the week. He said the refusal shows that the government does not want to engage in debates that might highlight loopholes or concerns raised by different parties. According to him, this avoidance goes against the spirit of parliamentary democracy. He added that Parliament should reflect the agenda of both the ruling and the Opposition sides, and not just the priorities set by the government. Gogoi said that discussions inside the House should allow space for diverse opinions, as that is essential for a functioning democracy. The Congress leader said that by denying the discussion, the government is limiting healthy dialogue on important matters. He pointed out that every political party has the right to raise issues that affect the public, and the government must be ready to respond to these concerns.

Gogoi also said that blocking debates on the election system sends the wrong message to the country. He stressed that such discussions are necessary to strengthen trust in democratic institutions and to ensure transparency in the way elections are conducted. The Assam Congress president further stated that Opposition parties want the Parliament session to run smoothly but with equal respect for all viewpoints.

He said the government's reluctance to include key issues in the agenda is creating tension even before the session has fully begun. Gogoi said that the Opposition will continue to raise its demands both inside and outside Parliament. He said that silencing questions will not help any government and that accountability is the core of a healthy democracy.

BUSINESS

GST collections flat for November, but data point to consumption boost

New Delhi: Government sources stated that the rate rationalization of the indirect tax is giving the intended boost to consumption, despite the fact that receipts from the goods and services tax (GST) were nearly flat in November. They also pointed out that the rate structure of GST has changed today and the compensatory cess is no longer part of the basic tax structure. “These have to be taken into consideration, and it is not possible to compare these numbers with those in the past,” they pointed out. Sources indicated that the compensatory cess on cigarettes and tobacco products, which are currently being used to repay loans, is likely to come to an end later this year. “The repayments are on track,” they noted. Based on the turnover data submitted by taxpayers for November, sources said that the reforms are showing that consumption has seen a boost but numbers going ahead will give a more comprehensive picture. “The impact of these measures is clearly visible in data: taxable value of all supplies under GST grew by 15% during the two-month period of September–October 2025, compared to the same period in 2024. Growth in the same



period last year was 8.6%,” explained an official source, adding that this surge in taxable value demonstrates strong consumption uplift, stimulated by reduced rates and improved compliance behaviour. Underlining that the rate rationalisation under GST was a major reform, sources stressed that major gains will come from it going forward, as it has created an environment of a rational tax system. Gross

GST collections in November grew by 0.7% year-on-year (YoY) to Rs 1.7 lakh crore, while net revenue grew by 1.3% YoY to Rs 1.52 lakh crore. The data for November 2025 reflected the collections for October 2025, which was the first full month since the rate cuts as part of the Next Gen GST reforms came into effect.

As part of the GST reform, the government has

rationalised rates with two main rates of 5% and 18% along with a 40% rate on sin goods such as tobacco and pan masala, while the 12% rate, as well as the compensation cess, have been done away with. A new Health Security se National Security Cess is set to be levied on cigarettes and tobacco products, for which the finance minister tabled Bills in the Lok Sabha on Monday.

Government mandates pre-installation of Sanchar Saathi app I new smartphones

New Delhi: The Indian Ministry of Communications has reportedly issued a directive requiring smartphone manufacturers to pre-install a government-owned cybersecurity application, Sanchar Saathi, on all new devices. Manufacturers must also ensure that users cannot delete the application. The order, which was sent privately to select companies on November 28, has not been made public. It gives major phone makers, including Apple, Samsung,

Vivo, Oppo, and Xiaomi, 90 days to ensure the app is pre-loaded. For devices already in the supply chain, companies have been told to push the app through software updates. The government states the mandate is essential to counter “serious endangerment” to telecom cyber security caused by duplicate or spoofed IMEI numbers, which are often linked to scams and illegal network use. Apple Policy Conflict

The move is expected to raise con-

cerns, particularly for Apple, whose internal policy is reported to prohibit the installation of any government or third-party app before the sale of a smartphone. Apple typically pre-installs only its proprietary applications. The company previously resisted a separate anti-spam app from the regulator. While nearly all smartphones in India run on Android, Apple controls about 4.5 per cent of the country’s 73.5 Crore smartphones.

Centre’s fiscal deficit hits 52.6 pc of full year target at Oct end

New Delhi: The central government’s fiscal deficit touched 52.6 per cent of the full-year target at the end of October, according to official data released on Friday. The fiscal deficit was 46.5 per cent of the Budget Estimates (BE) of 2024-25 in the first seven months of the previous financial year. In absolute terms, the fiscal deficit, or gap between the government’s expenditure and revenue, was Rs 8,25,144 crore in the April–October period of 2025-26. The Centre estimates the fiscal deficit during 2025-26 at 4.4 per cent of the GDP, or Rs 15.69 lakh crore. According to the data released by the Contoller General of Accounts (CGA), the central government received about Rs 18 lakh crore or 51.5 per cent of the corresponding BE 2025-26 of total receipts up



to October 2025. This comprised Rs 12.74 lakh crore of tax revenue (net to Centre), Rs 4.89 lakh crore of non-tax revenue and Rs 37,095 crore of non-debt capital receipts.

Further, Rs 8,34,957 crore was transferred to state governments as devolution of share of taxes by the Government of India during April–October, which is Rs 1,11,981 crore higher than the previous year. CGA data showed that total expenditure incurred by the Centre is Rs 26.25 lakh crore (51.8 per cent of the corresponding BE 2025-26), out of which Rs 20 lakh crore was on revenue account and Rs 6.17 lakh crore on capital account. Of the total revenue expenditure, Rs 6.73 lakh crore was on account of interest payments and Rs 2.46 lakh crore on major subsidies.

Rs 1.8-lakh crore IPO

Mumbai: India’s IPO market has entered a golden phase, and one quiet outcome of this surge is the renewed thrust on capital expenditure across sectors, coupled with aggressive debt payments.

In FY26, GDP growth might exceed 7% and surpass USD 4 trillion: CEA

New Delhi: Buoyed by more-than-expected 8.2 per cent GDP growth rate in the second quarter, Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran on Friday expressed optimism that India’s economy is likely to record growth of 7 per cent or higher than that in the current financial year. The Economic Survey tabled in Parliament in January had projected real economic growth of 6.3–6.8 per cent for FY26. Briefing the media after the release of the second-quarter GDP growth, Nageswaran said the Indian economy is expected to cross USD 4 trillion in the current fiscal year, given the current rate of growth. As India’s economy recorded an 8 per cent growth rate in the first half of the current financial year, he said, the full-year outlook for GDP growth rate is now 7 per cent,

or north of 7 per cent. The Indian economy grew by a higher-than-expected 8.2 per cent — a six-quarter high — as increased factory production in anticipation of a consumption boost from the GST rate cut helped offset deceleration in farm output. The growth in the second quarter, which compared to 7.8 per cent in the preceding three months and 5.6 per cent in the year-ago period, was also aided by a good showing by the services sector, which clocked double-digit growth. The third quarter (October–December) of the current fiscal year has commenced on a sound footing, he pointed out. He further said that the rural demand remains resilient while urban demand is gaining traction post-GST rate cut.

Airbus safety enhancements are finished by Indian airlines

Mumbai: The DGCA on Sunday confirmed that all domestic airlines have finished installing critical software updates on 323 Airbus A320-family aircraft, closing out an urgent safety call by the manufacturer triggered by a potential glitch in the jets’ flight-control systems. According to ET report, the directive came after Airbus flagged that unusually strong solar radiation could, in rare cases, corrupt data processed by components linked to flight controls on a large number of A320-series planes.

The aviation giant had warned that the corrective software patch might cause short-term operational disruptions across global fleets. Initially, 338 aircraft operated by IndiGo, Air India and Air

India Express had been identified for the update. Of these, 323 were in active service, while six were undergoing scheduled base maintenance. Subsequently, Air India determined that nine aircraft in its fleet did not require the modification, a senior DGCA official said. IndiGo, which had 200 affected operational aircraft, has completed the upgrades across its entire active A320 fleet. Meanwhile, Air India had 113 flagged jets. Software updates have now been applied to 100 of its operational aircraft; four more are in maintenance, and nine were later assessed as not needing the fix. The DGCA issued a formal Airworthiness Directive on Saturday, mandating immediate compliance by all Indian operators. The

move followed a global alert from Airbus and an Emergency Airworthiness Directive from the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). EASA noted on Friday that Airbus had advised airlines to ensure the installation of a compliant Elevator Aileron Computer (ELAC), a key component that governs several aspects of an aircraft’s flight-control surfaces. The plane later diverted to Tampa, where several passengers required medical attention. On Friday (November 28, 2025), Airbus said intense solar radiation might corrupt data critical to flight controls in a significant number of A320 family aircraft and that the software changes required to fix the issue would lead to operational disruptions.

Lenskart shares: Jefferies initiates coverage stock rise 5% amid Netflix Shares of Lenskart Solutions jumped

New Delhi: Overseas brokerage firm Jefferies has initiated coverage on recently listed new-age eyewear retailer Lenskart Solutions with a positive outlook and sees up to 23 per cent upside potential in the stock. Lenskart has been in news ever since its IPO for lofty valuations, while the eyewear player has been in news for new launches and products lately. Lenskart, India’s largest tech-driven eyewear retailer, holds just 5 per cent market share, offering strong growth potential. Its vertically integrated omni-channel model ensures cost efficiency, rapid delivery, and superior customer experience. India serves as a bedrock with 85 per cent contribution to Ebitda, while the international segment offers optionality, said Jefferies. Lenskart is India’s largest organized eyewear retailer and among Asia’s top two players, operating an omnichannel model with deep vertical integration

across design, manufacturing, and retail. India’s eyewear market is underpenetrated and growing at 13 per cent CAGR, said the brokerage. Shares of Lenskart Solutions jumped more than 5 per cent to Rs 428.50 on Friday, commanding a total market capitalization close to Rs 75,000 crore. The stock had settled at Rs 407.70 on Thursday. Lenskart will announce its September 2025 quarter results on Saturday, November 29, its first earnings post Dalal Street debut. Prescription eyeglasses dominate, driven by rising refractive issues, high screen time, pollution, ageing, etc. Organized retail penetration is rising, with Lenskart now a firm leader, Jefferies said. “Despite this, its current share is just 5 per cent of the overall market, indicating substantial growth headroom,” it noted. According to Jefferies, Lenskart controls the entire value chain with manufacturing hubs in India, Singapore,

and Dubai, enabling cost efficiency and scalability. Its experience-center store format minimizes capex and accelerates payback, supporting rapid company-owned company-operated model (CO-CO)-led expansion. Lenskart has a global presence in over 10 countries. “While investors often view the international foray with skepticism given the track record of Indian firms, we see a strategic rationale for Lenskart, Jefferies said. “Despite modest industry growth abroad, share gain potential exists along with cross market synergies, and profitability improvement ahead.” partnership with Netflix for the highly anticipated fifth and final season of the global phenomenon, Stranger for the Gen Z and OTT communities. Adjusted Ebitda should grow at 50 per cent CAGR with margin expansion led by operational leverage and international GM improvement. EPS to grow at

44 per cent CAGR. Balance sheet is net cash, with rising return ratios and free-cash flow,” Jefferies added. The foreign brokerage firm initiated coverage with a ‘buy’ with target price Rs 500, valuing it at 50 times FY28E pre-Ind AS Ebitda and said that premium valuation should be viewed in the context of opportunity and leadership. However, it has underscored rise in competition, tech driven disruption (smart devices) or slower-than-expected growth as key risks for business. To recall, Lenskart Solutions made its Dalal Street debut on November 10, as the company raised a total of Rs 7,278.02 crore via its primary offering, selling its shares for Rs 402 apiece. Jefferies India has initiated coverage on eyewear platform Lenskart Solutions Ltd with a buy rating with a target price of Rs 500 a share, implying a 23 percent upside from previous closing price.

IndiGo reports that 60% of the A320 fleet has already been updated DGCA issues advisory

New Delhi: India’s largest airline, IndiGo, on November 29 said it expects only “minimal delays” across a limited number of flights after aviation regulators and Airbus ordered urgent inspections and software updates for A320-family aircraft worldwide. The move comes amid heightened global scrutiny of the jets following a mid-air incident earlier this month involving a JetBlue-operated Airbus A320. Responding to directives issued by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), Airbus, and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), IndiGo confirmed that a majority of affected planes have already undergone required checks. inspections and updates to its A320 family aircraft in full accordance with directives issued by EASA and Airbus,” a company spokesperson said. “Of the 200 aircraft identified for inspections, actions have been completed on 160 by 12:00 IST. No flights have been cancelled, though a few may experience minimal delays.” The airline said it is working closely with regulators and Airbus to complete the remaining updates within the mandated timeline. Airbus flags solar-radiation risk The global alert stems from Airbus’ assess-



ment that intense solar radiation may corrupt critical flight-control data on A320-family aircraft. The company said more than half of its active fleet — over 6,500 jets — would require a software update before their next regular flight. In an order issued today, the DGCA directed all Indian carriers to ground impacted A318, A319, A320, and A321 aircraft until the mandated software modifications and inspections are completed. “IndiGo is undertaking all required inspections and updates to its A320 family aircraft in full accordance

with directives issued by EASA and Airbus,” a company spokesperson said. “Of the 200 aircraft identified for inspections, actions have been completed. India’s largest airline, IndiGo, on November 29 said it expects only “minimal delays” across a limited number of flights after aviation regulators and Airbus ordered urgent inspections and software updates for A320-family aircraft worldwide. The move comes amid heightened global scrutiny of the jets following a mid-air incident earlier this month involving a JetBlue-operated Airbus A320.

Bank Nifty snaps three-day gaining streak, here’s what analysts say

Mumbai: The 12-stock Bank Nifty saw profitbooking on Monday and closed lower after three sessions of gains. The losses on the counter came after the index hit a record high of 60,114. Later, the banking index slipped 71 points to 59,681. BSE bankex too closed 78 pts lower at 66,867. Vatsal Bhuvra, Technical Analyst at LKP Securities said, “Bank Nifty closed with a bearish candlestick in Monday’s session, signaling selling pressure at higher levels. A mild negative divergence in RSI indicates a cautious stance, with a possibility of profitbooking and short-term retracement in the index. However, the medium-term outlook remains bullish as long as the index sustains above 58,500 levels. In the short term, the sentiment turns slightly bearish and traders should remain cautious. Key support levels are placed at 59,200 and 59,000, while resistance is seen around the 60,000 mark.”

The profit-booking was in line with Sensex and Nifty, which closed lower in the current trading session. While

Sensex slipped 64 pts to 85641, Nifty closed 27 points lower at 26,175. Hrishikesh Yedve, AVP Technical and Derivative Research, Asit C. Mehta Investment Intermediates said, “Technically, on the daily chart, the Bank Nifty has formed an Opening Marubozu (red candle) candlestick pattern, reflecting selling pressure at higher levels. As per this formation, as long as the Bank Nifty remains below 60,114, the upside is likely to remain capped in the short term. On the downside, immediate support is placed near 59,400 followed by 59,000. Therefore, short-term traders are advised to adopt a buy-near-support and sell-near-resistance approach.” On Bank Nifty, seven stocks closed lower. HDFC Bank, SBI, Axis Bank, IndusInd, Canara Bank, Federal Bank and AU Small Finance Bank were the losers on the banking index today. On the other hand, Kotak Mahindra bank (1.09%), Bank of Baroda (1.98%), ICICI Bank, IDFC First Bank and PNB were the gainers on the banking index today.

Ahaan Panday and Aneet Padda’s Saiyaara Ready for Grand World Television Premiere

Mumbai: The Saiyaara fever continues strong. After captivating audiences in theatres and on OTT, Ahaan Panday and Aneet Padda’s musical romantic drama Saiyaara is now set for its World Television Premiere. Sony Pictures Networks India, the parent company of Sony TV and Sony MAX, has acquired the broadcast rights to this year’s most successful romantic release. On Sunday, Sony TV made the big announcement through its official social media handles. They shared a trailer of the film, especially created for



the television release. In the caption, they wrote, “Aa Rahe hain Krish aur Vaani, apni ishq ki goonj se fans ko deewana banane. Get ready for the World Television Premiere of Saiyaara, TV par pehli baar on 20th De-

cember, Saturday at 8 pm, only on Sony MAX.” The video starts with a voice-over: “20 December, har dil mein uthegi ishq ki goonj,” followed by the iconic stage performance scene of Krish (played by Ahaan Panday). As soon as the video was shared, fans flooded the comments section with love and unbounded excitement. One of them wrote, “AI-ready shattered records in cinemas and Netflix, and now ready to roar on TV screens.” Another commented, “I was badly waiting for it. Sony MAX, aap ne menu meri sab se vaddi khushi de di, thanks a lot.” Meanwhile, a comment read, “More than 4 months since the movie was released and it still gives me the same feeling,” accompanied by a heart emoji. A few days back, at the Indian

of the Year 2025 ceremony, Aneet discussed the making of Saiyaara and opened up about how Ahaan played a major role in her journey. She said, “I was chasing a feeling since I was 10 and I can safely say that he’s given me my forever and ever. And so has Ahaan. If it wasn’t for him, I don’t think the film would have happened, and I don’t think I would have felt all that I did.” She added, “You guys don’t realise the amount of times it’s been really difficult on set, and he always had my back. So thank you so much.”

Salman, Madhuri reunite for Bigg Boss



Mumbai: Salman Khan and Madhuri Dixit, one of Bollywood’s most cherished on-screen pairs, reunited on the sets of Bigg Boss 19, giving fans a wave of nostalgia. Seeing them together again brought back memories of their iconic chemistry that defined the 1990s. Their warm camaraderie on the reality show instantly took the internet by storm, reigniting fans’ long-standing wish to see them reunite in a mature romantic drama.

During the recent Weekend Ka Vaar episode, Madhuri Dixit visited the Bigg Boss 19 stage to promote her upcoming series Mrs. Deshpande. The moment she walked onto the set, fans were treated to a throwback as Salman and Madhuri recreated a beloved scene from Hum Aapke Hain Koun!, sitting together on folding chairs—just like the memorable moment from the film. Madhuri engaged Salman in a fun conversation and asked whether he still enjoys hosting Bigg Boss each weekend. Salman responded that hosting has now become a routine for him. When she questioned whether he ever gets affected by the contestants troubling him, he laughed it off, saying that nothing really gets to him anymore because people say so many things about him that he no longer takes any of it seriously. Madhuri then teased him, saying that if nothing affects him, why does he advise contestants so often? She quipped, “After all, who are you to them?” Salman humorously replied that he is “nobody” to the contestants, adding that Endemol Shine and JioHotstar are the ones who ensure his bank balance stays healthy. The two wrapped up their playful exchange by recreating the famous “cough scene” from their 1994 blockbuster. Before Madhuri exited the stage, Salman subtly hinted that the possibility of working with her again in a film is not entirely off the table, sending fans into a frenzy. The video of their interaction quickly went viral across social media platforms. Admirers of the duo flooded the comments with excitement, expressing how timeless their chemistry still feels. One user wrote, “Chemistry is insane.... biggest hit of 90s HAHK ... need them again in a lighter comedy or intense age based love story”. Another fan commented, “Sooraj Babu brings them back in a mature family drama for one last time.”

Dhanush’s Tere Ishq Mein Roars Past ₹30 Crore at Box Office on Second Day Tere Ishq Mein

Mumbai: Dhanush and Kriti Sanon’s romantic drama Tere Ishq Mein is showing strong momentum at the box office. After opening to a solid response on its first day, the film continued steady growth on day two, bringing excitement among fans and makers.

The emotional love story Tere Ishq Mein, directed by Aanand L Rai, has struck a chord with the audience and is performing well in theatres across the country. According to early estimates from Sacnilk, the film collected Rs 17 crore on its second day of release. With this, the film’s total earnings have now reached Rs 33 crore within just 48 hours. The film released on November 28 and stars Dhanush and Kriti Sanon in the lead roles, supported by music from AR Rahman, which has also played a major role in drawing crowds to cinemas. Viewers have praised the film for its intense storyline, emotional depth and powerful performances.

On day two, Tere Ishq Mein recorded an overall Hindi occupancy of 22.64 percent. Evening shows saw the biggest crowd turnout, reaching 29.25 percent occupancy, followed by 26.60 percent



for afternoon shows and 12.08 percent for morning shows. The steady rise in audience numbers through the day reflects strong word-of-mouth support. Industry analysts believe that if this pace continues, the film could see a strong weekend boost and may touch impressive numbers in the coming days. The film is facing limited competition at the moment, which may help its performance further.

Trade experts are positive that the emotional storyline and music-driven narrative will help the film maintain stability over the first week. For Dhanush, this is another strong theatrical success, and Kriti Sanon’s performance has also been widely appreciated. With a positive audience response and growing collections, Tere Ishq Mein is expected to continue its upward trend through the weekend.

Ranveer Singh’s IFFI Style Sparks Flirty Comment from Wife Deepika Padukone

Mumbai: Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh, one of Bollywood’s most popular and loved couples, never fail to shell out major couple goals! They leave no opportunity to cheer for each other, and their playful social media banter often leaves fans swooning over them. Recently, Ranveer Singh graced the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa, and he has now shared pictures of his dapper look from the closing ceremony. Deepika couldn’t stop gushing over him, and her flirty comment on his post has garnered their fans’ attention.

On Sunday, Ranveer Singh took to his Instagram to share stunning pictures flaunting his dapper look at



IFFI. He looked stunning in a tailored black bandhgala, paired with matching shoes and dark sunglasses. His polished and effortlessly stylish look had Deepika Padukone’s approval! She dropped a comment on his post that read, “Oh Soo Edible!” along with a drooling face emoji. Check out the post below! Meanwhile, a few days ago, Ranveer Singh performed at Netra



Mantena and Vamsi Gadiraju’s saangeet ceremony in Udaipur, Rajasthan. A video from the ceremony that went viral shows the actor calling Udaipur a ‘lucky charm’ for love stories, and revealing that his romance with Deepika also began here, while they were shooting for Ram Leela.

He called Udaipur a ‘special place’ and went on to reveal how his own love sto-

ry with Deepika Padukone blossomed here. “I want to tell you, Udaipur is like a lucky charm for love stories. I shot a movie here, called Ram-Leela. It was back in the day, and I was starring opposite your Bhabhi. And it was on the long Udaipur schedule of Ram Leela that our love story blossomed. Since then it has been 13 years of togetherness, seven years of marriage, and one beautiful baby girl. So you see? Udaipur is very, very lucky for love stories,” he said. Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone tied the knot on 14 November 2018 at Lake Como in Italy. They welcomed their first child, daughter Dua Padukone Singh, in September last year.

Raj Nidimoru’s Parents Attend Wedding with Samantha, Confirming Intimate Affair

Agency: Raj Nidimoru and Samantha’s intimate wedding continues to draw attention, with new confirmations revealing that the filmmaker’s parents and immediate family were present at the ceremony attended by just 30 guests. While congratulatory messages have poured in and Samantha has shared glimpses of the celebrations, the occasion has also been accompanied by renewed speculation surrounding Raj’s marital status, following cryptic posts by his first wife and unverified reports circulating online. Neither Raj nor Samantha have addressed these rumours publicly. As per a previous report by Hindustan Times, a total of 30 guests were invited at the event, mak-



ing it an intimate one. Now, we can confirm that Raj’s parents and immediate family were present at the wedding. The speculations about the marriage were at an all-time high as his first wife Sshyamali De recently posted, “Desperate people



do desperate things.” Now, several other reports state that Raj hasn’t divorced his first wife and she wasn’t aware of his marriage with Samantha. However, neither Raj nor Samantha have confirmed the specifications publicly.

Dhurandhar Advance Booking Sets Pace: Ranveer Singh Poised for Big Opening

Mumbai: Ranveer Singh’s much-anticipated spy thriller Dhurandhar is rapidly approaching its theatrical release, with excitement steadily building. Advance bookings opened six days early, registering decent initial numbers. According to early estimates from Sacnilk, the film has sold 9,110 tickets across 2,251 shows on opening day in major national chains, including PVR, Inox, and Cinépolis.

While mixed reactions to the trailer may have contributed to the modest start, the makers remain optimistic. With five days remaining until release, Dhurandhar is expected to gain stronger organic momentum as the

Ashoke Pandit Slams Jaya Bachchan’s Paparazzi Comment

Mumbai: Veteran actor Jaya Bachchan, in a recent conversation, spoke about her equation with paparazzi and shared that she has ‘zero’ relationship with them. Now, her remark has gone viral on social media, and filmmaker Ashoke Pandit has criticised the actress’ comment, saying that it “reeks of snobbish elitism.”

Ashoke Pandit, who is the president of the Indian Film & Television Directors’ Association, took to Instagram and shared a note slamming Jaya Bachchan for her remark about the paparazzi, saying, “Jaya Bachchan ji’s statement against the paparazzi reeks of snobbish elitism. To criticise the aggressive coverage of certain paps is one thing, but to demean the profession altogether, laced with downright classist remarks, is unbecoming of such a senior member of our film industry and a parliamentarian.” “They’re



hardworking professionals doing their job, for which most times they’ve been called by the stars and their PR teams themselves. So if she has such a strong opinion against the paparazzi culture, it’s time to look inwards rather than indulge in this misplaced outrage,” Pandit further added in his note. Not only Ashoke Pandit, but several social media users have also reacted to and criticised Jaya Bachchan for her remarks against the paparazzi.

Border 2

Diljit Dosanjh Acing the Uniform Look in Border 2 First Poster

Mumbai: Sunny Deol’s upcoming war drama, Border 2, continues to fire up anticipation as the makers roll out striking first looks of its star-studded cast. After unveiling Sunny Deol and Varun Dhawan’s characters, the makers have now unveiled Diljit Dosanjh in a fierce new avatar. In Anurag Singh’s directorial, the singer-turned-actor is seen as an Indian Air Force fighter pilot soaring into battle.

This still marks a significant expansion of the franchise’s narrative scope, signaling that the makers are now bringing the Indian Air Force into the iconic Border universe. The actor, who is also part of the upcoming war drama, dropped a still of Diljit Dosanjh’s character in the film. Taking to Instagram, he gave fans a chilling glimpse of the singer seated inside a fighter jet’s cockpit mid battle. Diljit’s character flies a jet that appears to be minimally damaged from war, with gun-fire and bullets piercing through the cockpit. Captioning the post, Ahan wrote: “Iss desh ke aasmaan mein Guru ke baaz



pehra dete hain IN (In the skies of this nation, Guru’s hawks stand guard).”

Diljit also shared a video on Instagram, walking out of an airbase hangar in full IAF uniform and turban, sporting his character’s name tag, NJS Sekhon. With the nostalgic classic Sandesa Aaya Hai from the original Border playing in the background, the clip pays tribute to the iconic franchise while introducing a new generation of heroes. Made under the direction of Anurag Singh, Border 2 marks the return of Sunny Deol to the world of Border (1997). This time, he will star alongside Varun Dhawan, Diljit Dosanjh, Ahan Shetty, Sonam Bajwa, Mona Singh, and Medha Rana. Presented by T-Series

and J.P. Films and produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, JP Dutta, and Nidhi Dutta, the film is a sequel to the 1997 war drama Border. Set against the backdrop of the 1971 Indo-Pak war, Border 2 revisits the historic Battle of Longewala, where a small battalion of Indian soldiers fought a large Pakistani strike force. With the addition of aerial combat and a broader scope, the film promises to offer emotion and patriotism of the original. Mark your calendars! The film is scheduled to release in the theatres on January 23, 2026, just in time for the Republic Day weekend. Fans can expect a powerful blend to courage, sacrifice, and the indomitable spirit of India’s armed forces.

Meezaan Jafri Auditioned for Chamkila Role, Concedes Diljit Dosanjh Was The Best Fit

Mumbai: Jaaved Jaaferi’s son Meezaan Jafri was recently seen in Ajay Devgn and Rakul Preet Singh starrer ‘De De Pyaar De 2’. Having made his acting debut in the 2019 film Malaal, he has also starred in Hungama 2, and Yaariyan 2. Meezaan recently revealed that he has auditioned for Imtiaz Ali’s films several times, including for Amar Singh Chamkila! He revealed that he put on a moustache, the pagdi and also learnt one of the songs in Punjabi for the audition. While he didn’t get the part, he admitted that Diljit Dosanjh was the perfect choice for the role, and that he absolutely smashed it!

In an interview with Team Varinder Chawla, Meezaan Jafri said that he has auditioned for Imtiaz Ali several times. “Chamkila, I did the full stache, I put the pagdi, I learnt one of Amar Singh Chamkila’s song in Punjabi. I went and I did the whole song.” He was auditioning

for the lead actor, and the role of Amar Singh Chamkila eventually went to Diljit Dosanjh. Meezaan admits Diljit was the perfect choice for the role. “Suitable actor taken for the right role. I went for it dil se. And I will continue going for other characters also, because that is my job as an actor to do that. and I love that. But great choice by Imtiaz sir. Because Diljit knows the language, he knows the flavour. It’s his world, he comes from there. Diljit sir has absolutely smashed it, which is why he has been nominated for an Emmy as well!” said Meezaan. For the unversed, Imtiaz Ali’s Amar Singh Chamkila had bagged two prestigious nominations at the 53rd International Emmy Awards. Diljit Dosanjh was in the running for the ‘Best Actor’, along with “Amar Singh Chamkila” being nominated in the ‘Best TV Movie/Mini-Series’ category. However, the film did not win an Emmy Award.



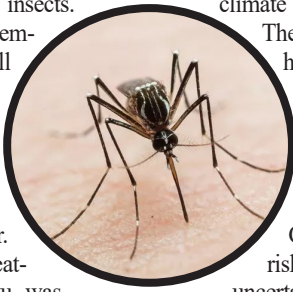
premiere draws nearer. In a surprising highlight, the film features one of the most expensive tickets currently on sale. The BookMyShow platform shows that the most expensive ticket for Ranveer Singh’s action thriller is priced at Rs 2020, including a Rs 70 convenience fee. Yes, you read that right. It is for a show at Maison INOX:

Jio World Plaza, BKC, in Mumbai. But despite the premium price, it does not include food and beverages. Directed by Aditya Dhar and produced under the banners of Jio Studios and B62 Studios, Dhurandhar is a large-scale action entertainer that highlights the bravery of India’s special agents operating in Pakistan. The film

features a stellar ensemble cast, including Ranveer Singh alongside Sanjay Dutt, R. Madhavan, Arjun Rampal, Akshaye Khanna, and Sara Arjun. Inspired by real events connected to National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Ranveer Singh portrays one of his most intense roles yet. Sporting long hair, a rugged beard, and a gritty demeanour, he embodies a fearless undercover spy navigating high-stakes missions. With rising buzz and a star-studded lineup, Dhurandhar is set for a grand theatrical launch on December 5, 2025. Mark your calendars! This spy thriller promises action, suspense, and pulse-pounding patriotism.

Mosquito-borne killer disease threatens blackbirds

A mosquito-borne disease freshly arrived in Britain has spread large distances, with scientists racing to understand the risks to wild birds. Infected insects can spread the deadly Usutu virus to blackbirds, raising fears for the famous songsters. New data shows Usutu has spread across much of southern England in five years, and has been linked to declines in some blackbird populations. Scientists are monitoring its spread amid warnings that climate change is turning Europe into a potential breeding ground for the insects. Longer summers, hotter temperatures and heavy rainfall are creating conditions for the nuisance insects to move into areas that were previously inhospitable to them. Until 2020, all results came back clear. Then, after the summer heat-wave of that year, Usutu was detected in several blackbirds in Greater London. "Blackbirds specifically are quite susceptible to the virus and since 2020 we've found a decline in blackbirds of approximately 40% in Greater London,"

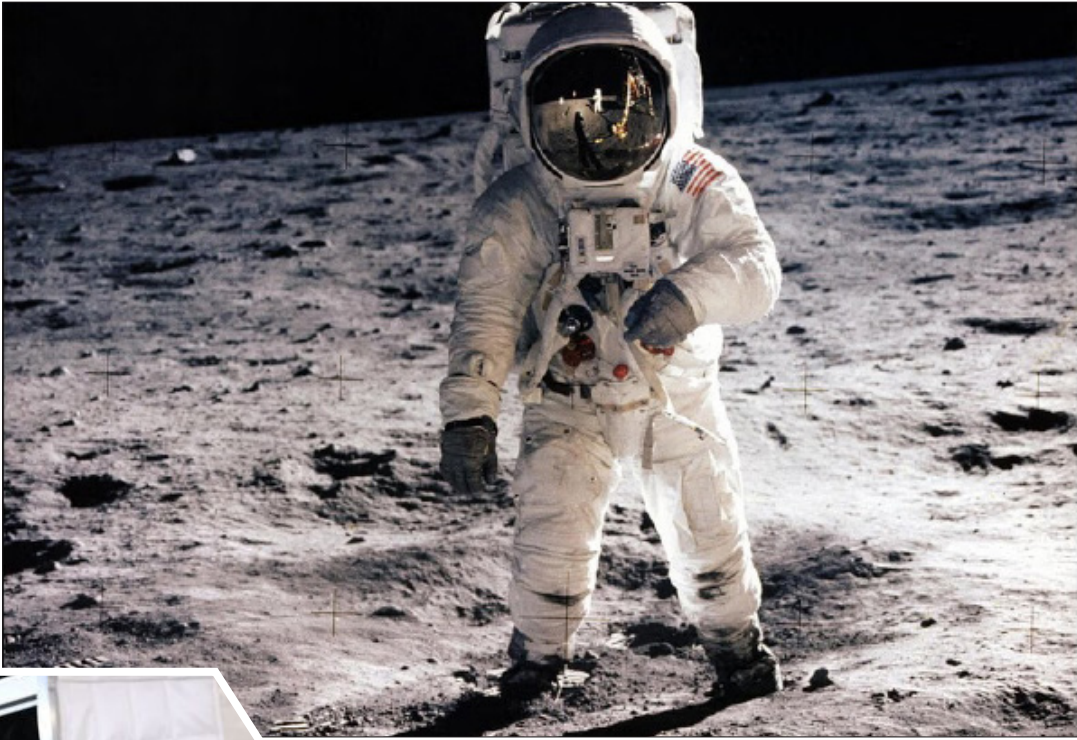
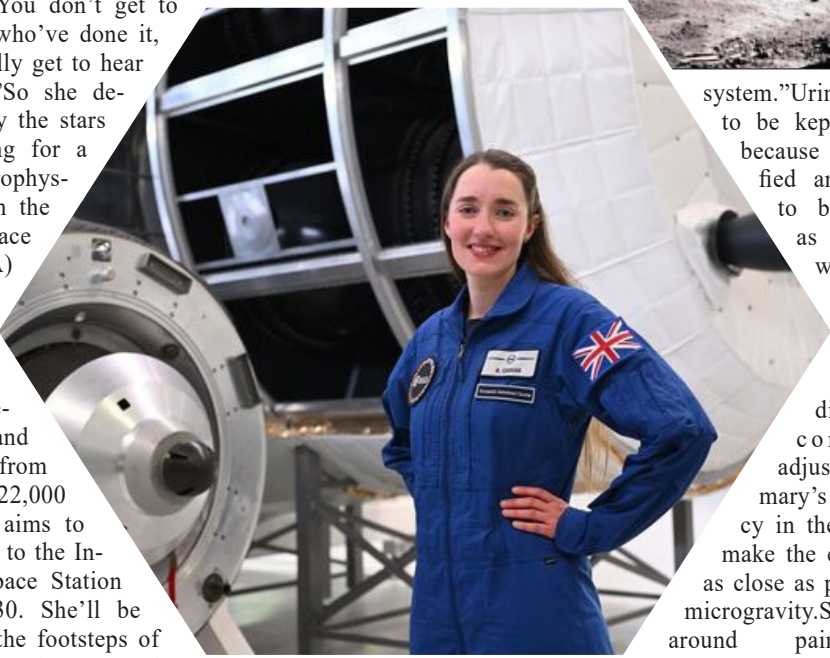


said Dr Folly. "It gives an indication that in the future we might get other viruses that are transmitted by mosquitoes emerging in the UK." Diseases such as Usutu are a growing threat to wild birds, amid a host of other pressures, including habitat loss, climate change and pesticide use. The latest data shows that Usutu has spread further than the scientists expected. It has now been detected in wild birds across much of southern England, at least as far west as Dorset and as far north as Cambridgeshire. How big a risk Usutu poses to wild birds is uncertain. The virus has been linked to mass die-offs of blackbirds elsewhere in Europe, though that doesn't seem to be the case in Britain. And the blackbird remains one of the commonest garden birds with numbers holding steady in many

parts of the country, especially in rural areas, and in the north. To untangle the puzzle – and gather more data on blackbird numbers – the scientists have joined forces with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). They are calling for volunteers to count blackbirds in their gardens over the summer months to find out more about the comings and goings of the birds. Around now blackbirds are breeding and raising their young, frequently seen hopping along the ground and singing from the branches of trees on summer evenings. Lucy Love, a garden birdwatch ambassador for the BTO, knows the blackbirds in her gardens by sight and has grown fond of them. "They're beautiful birds – intelligent, friendly and they have the most beautiful song with a lovely melodic tone to it," she explained. "And we cannot lose them – they're a vital part of our ecosystem."

Will this woman be the first Briton to walk on the Moon?

Rosemary Coogan is surrounded by a team of people pushing, pulling, squishing and squeezing her into a spacesuit. It takes about 45 minutes to get all her gear on before a helmet is carefully lowered over her head. The British astronaut is about to undergo her toughest challenge yet – assessing whether she is ready for a spacewalk. The test will take place in one of the largest pools in the world: Nasa's Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. The pool – which is 12m deep (40ft) – contains a life-sized replica of the International Space Station (ISS), and a "spacewalk" here is as close as it gets to mimicking weightlessness on Earth. "It's a big day," Rosemary says before the dive, which is going to last more than six hours. "It's very physically intense – and it's very psychologically intense." But Rosemary doesn't seem too fazed. She smiles and waves as the platform she's standing on is slowly lowered into the water. Being an astronaut was Dr Rosemary Coogan's dream from a young age, she says. But it was a dream that seemed out of reach. "At the careers day at school, you don't tend to meet astronauts," Rosemary says. "You don't get to meet people who've done it, you don't really get to hear their stories." So she decided to study the stars instead, opting for a career in astrophysics. But when the European Space Agency (ESA) announced it was looking for new recruits to go to space, Rosemary applied and was chosen from more than 22,000 people. ESA aims to get Rosemary to the International Space Station (ISS) by 2030. She'll be following in the footsteps of Britons Helen Sharman, who visited the Soviet's Mir Space Station in 1991, and Tim Peake who launched to the ISS in 2015. Rosemary has spent the last six months training at the Johnson Space Center. As well as exploring the outside of the submerged ISS, she can head inside the orbiting lab in another life-sized mock-up located in a huge hangar. She takes us on a tour of the lab's interconnected modules. It feels very cramped, especially considering astronauts usually spend many months on board. But Rosemary reminds us about the spectacular views. "It is an isolated environment, but I think this helps to give that kind of connection to being outside – to alleviate that sense of claustrophobia." Rosemary's training here covers every aspect of going to space – including learning how to use the onboard toilet. "The lower part is where you put your solid waste," she says, pointing to a loo in a small cubicle that looks like something you might find at a very old campsite. "And this funnel here is actually attached to an air suction system, and that is where you put your liquid waste." Female astronauts have the option of suppressing their periods using drugs, Rosemary says, but can also opt not to. "There's essentially a filter that you put on top of the cone in which you urinate and it's to stop any particles, any blood, from going into the urine



system." Urine needs to be kept separate because it's purified and treated to be re-used as drinking water, she explains. Back in the pool, divers are constantly adjusting Rosemary's buoyancy in the water to make the experience as close as possible to microgravity. She moves around painstakingly, making sure she's always attached to the submerged structure using two hooks. Every hand-hold is carefully chosen along the bars on the outside of each module. They're in exactly the same positions as the ones on the real thing, vital muscle memory if she gets to carry out a spacewalk 200 miles (322km) above the Earth. It's slow and difficult work, requiring plenty of upper body strength and physical effort in the hot, bulky spacesuit. "You do a lot of mental preparation – you really think through every single movement," Rosemary explains. "You have to be really efficient with your energy. You don't want to do something and realise it wasn't quite right and have to do it again." Rosemary is working alongside another astronaut to complete a list of space station repairs and maintenance for the test. Her every move is monitored by a team in a control room overlooking the pool. They're in constant communication with her as she works through her tasks. Former space station commander Aki Hoshida, from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, is on hand for advice. He has completed four spacewalks and says it's a steep learning curve for new astronauts. "When we first start out, there's so much information thrown

Coogan has spent the last six months training at the Johnson Space Center, exploring the ISS and the orbiting lab in a life-sized mock-up in a large hangar.

at you, so many skills that you have to learn and show and demonstrate," he says. "It is baby steps, but they are moving forward – and I can see their excitement every time they come here and jump in the pool." Rosemary takes us to see a Saturn V – the rocket that took the Apollo astronauts to the Moon in 1969. More than 50 years on, Nasa is planning an imminent return to the lunar surface with its Artemis programme. European astronauts will join later missions. With an expected 35-year space career ahead, Rosemary may one day get the chance to become the first Briton to walk on the Moon. "It's incredibly exciting that we, as humanity, are going back to the Moon, and of course, any way that I could be a part of that, I would be absolutely delighted. I think it's absolutely thrilling," she says. After six gruelling hours underwater, Rosemary is nearing the end of her spacewalk test – but then she's thrown a curve ball. In the control room, we hear her call out for a comms check with her astronaut partner who's working on another part of the space station. But she's met with silence. On a video screen, we can see he's motionless. Rosemary doesn't know it, but he's been asked to pretend to lose consciousness. Rosemary's job is to reach him, check his condition – and tow him back to the airlock. After so long underwater, we can see how exhausted she is – but working slowly and steadily, she gets him safely to the airlock. "Rosemary has the endurance of a champion. She crushed it today," says Jenna Hanson, one of Nasa's spacewalk instructors who's been assessing Rosemary. "We're really happy with where she's at – she's doing awesome." The spacewalk is finally over. Rosemary's platform is hoisted out of the pool and the support team help her out of her suit. As her helmet is removed, we can see she's clearly very tired, but still smiling. "It was a challenging one, it really was, and a challenging rescue," she tells us, "But yeah, it was a really enjoyable day." Rosemary's hard work is bringing her ever closer to her dream of getting to space. "It's amazing," Rosemary says, "If I could do that for the real space station – where you can look out and see the stars and see the Earth at the same time – that would just be the cherry on top."

Exceptionally low river levels raise fears over water supplies

Many of the UK's rivers have hit exceptionally low levels and that could worsen in the next three months, according to the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH), raising questions over supplies to households, farmers and businesses. The warning comes after the driest spring in England since 1961, with northern regions experiencing the driest start to the year in nearly a century. Almost all of the UK is expected to have below normal or low river levels in May, apart from the south-west of England and southern Wales. The Environment Agency has said that the UK is at medium risk of drought and warned households of the risk of water restrictions. The next 2-3 weeks will be "crucial" in determining whether the country goes into drought, says Mark Owen, head of fisheries for the Angling Trust and a member of the National Drought Group. That is the committee, led by the government, that declares if and when a drought is officially under way. The country is not now in drought, but the impacts of the exceptionally dry weather are already being felt. Some farmers are being forced to water their crops instead of relying on rainfall, which is something that normally happens later in the year. "We are having a drought now from an agricultural point of view," arable farmer Nick Deane told BBC News from his farm in Norfolk. He had to start irrigating his fields in March. "We have to ration our water and decide which areas we are going to put that water on in order to keep the crops growing," he said. He warned that an extremely long drought would mean farmers struggle to produce food and more produce would need to be imported. The dry and sunny weather this year has led to a larger area of the UK burned by wildfires this year compared with any other entire year. The last drought was in June-August 2022, which was the joint hottest summer (with 2018) and

fifth driest since the 1890s. Five companies introduced hosepipe bans, affecting 19 million people, and waterways had restricted navigation. That drought was preceded by six months of very dry weather. However, the wet summer in 2024 and moderately-wet winter means water supplies are in a better place now and water companies have larger reserves to rely on. But dry weather earlier in the year has risks. It does "potentially pose a greater risk to water resources later on in the year, particularly if the dry weather continues," says Stephen Turner, hydrologist at the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. Last week, Richard Thompson, chair of the National Drought Group, warned that water companies may need to bring in water restrictions to protect supplies if the dry weather continues. At the moment the key questions are when will it next rain and when it does, how much will there be. There are some signs that some rain is on the horizon, with unsettled weather from the west at the end of next week. Drinking water comes from different places depending on the geography and geology of regions. Roughly speaking, the south of England takes a long time to get into drought but a long time to leave. That's because a lot of rainfall is stored in rocks underground and takes a long time to reach rivers and water supplies. By contrast, the north of England quickly enters drought and quickly gets out because reservoirs are more heavily used for water supplies. Water Companies introduce hosepipe bans when water supplies reach a certain low in their areas. If drought conditions become severe, the government can restrict irrigation of farms, reduce boats' movement on waterways, and limit water available to non-essential businesses like car washes. In an extreme scenario, it could ration the amount of water available to homes and businesses but that has not happened since 1976.



Climate experts criticise handling of Tata changes

The UK's climate change advisors have criticised the handling of a switch to greener steelmaking at the country's largest plant in Port Talbot, which resulted in huge job losses. Government ministers should have been better at planning ahead and making sure other green jobs were available locally, the experts said. The independent Climate Change Committee (CCC) has set out its latest advice on how Wales reaches net zero – with a push for more electric vehicles, heat pumps and tree planting. The Welsh and UK governments said they had been working together to develop "a strong vision" for the region's future and deliver "our clean energy superpower mission". More than 2,000 jobs were lost at Tata's Port Talbot steelworks following the closure of its blast furnaces in 2024. The move brought an end to traditional steelmaking at the site, as the company grappled with losses of over £1m a day. It was given a £500m grant by the UK government and is now investing £1.25bn to build a new electric arc furnace by 2027. This will recycle scrap metal into new steel products, but requires far fewer workers on site. The changes will have a dramatic impact on direct emissions of planet-warming gases from Wales. The blast furnaces were constantly fed with coal, and their closure will have more than halved Wales' industrial emissions since 2022, according to the CCC. But environmentalists have warned the situation at Port Talbot could damage public support for climate action if it is seen to mean job losses and the demise of heavy industry. In its report, the CCC said there were "important lessons to learn", and that governments in both Westminster and Cardiff Bay should have been better prepared. "The challenges facing the UK steel sector have been clear for many years and, given the significance of this site to the local economy, a more proactive and decisive transition plan should have been developed," they argued. The UK government should have taken steps to make industrial electricity prices more competitive, and convened "early and collaborative" negotiations between plant owners, workers and the community, the report said. The Welsh government could have ensured "the right training and re-skilling programmes were in place well before closure", it added, and developed a local industrial strategy to support alternative employment in areas like heating services and floating offshore wind. The committee said Port Talbot's experience should now be used "to guide future efforts to decarbonise other strategically and locally-significant emissions-intensive industries," citing Pembroke's oil refineries as an example. Former steelworker Shaun Spencer, who now works for a firm training electrical engineers, said he agreed with the committee's comments "100%". He warned the feeling of "resentment and bitterness" was "very strong" among his former colleagues. He added the approach had been detrimental to "everybody's views of net zero" and to support for the way the UK and Welsh governments deal with things, "especially in this area". Emma Pinchbeck, the CCC's chief executive, told BBC news what had happened at Port Talbot was "foreseeable and preventable", and had "not been the best case study" for what a green transition should look like. Like the UK, Wales has set a legally binding net zero target, which means that by 2050 it should no longer be adding to the total amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The CCC provides independent advice on how much can be emitted over five-year periods, known as "carbon budgets", and how each UK nation might achieve this. Each carbon budget is a stepping stone to net zero, with the latest advice covering the period between 2031-35. The report recommends a 73% reduction in average annual emissions over this period compared to how much Wales pumped into the atmosphere in 1990. Emissions have decreased by 37% so far and the country met its first carbon budget between 2016-2020 mainly through changes to electricity generation – such as the closure of the last remaining coal-fired power station at Aberthaw in Vale of Glamorgan. Future cuts will rely more on all of us making choices about how we live. The CCC has made 16 "priority" recommendations for immediate action. These include supporting people to better insulate their homes and install low-carbon heating systems, drive electric vehicles or opt for public transport. By 2033 – in just eight years' time – a third of cars and vans on Welsh roads should be electric, the committee said, and nearly a quarter of existing homes need a heat pump or similar technology. The committee also said the Welsh government will need to support farmers and rural communities to "diversify their income" away from livestock farming and towards woodland creation and peatland restoration. In 2022, agriculture was the third-highest emitting sector in Wales, accounting for 16% of Wales' emissions. Cattle and sheep numbers should fall by 19% by 2033 due to changes in agricultural policy but also a shift in diets with less meat and dairy consumed UK-wide, the report has predicted. The proportion of woodland cover across Wales will rise from 15% to 17% in 2033 and 26% by 2050, according to the committee's projections. Farming union NFU Cymru said the Welsh government needed to "reflect and consider" whether that advice fit "with the circumstances we have in Wales". "Many thousands of people rely on agriculture and livestock production," said the union's president Aled Jones. The Welsh government thanked the CCC for the report which it said it would now "review and use to set Carbon Budget 4 in regulation before the end of the year". A spokesman said it had been working with the UK government, the local authority and key stakeholders as part of the TaT. The UK government said it had committed £2.5bn "to rebuild the steel industry for decades to come as it decarbonises". "Decarbonisation should not mean deindustrialisation and we will ensure a bright and sustainable future for UK steelmaking," a spokesman added.

Khapli Atta vs. Regular Wheat: The Healthier Choice, According to Experts

Atta (wheat flour) is a staple in Indian kitchens. From chapatis and parathas to snacks and sweets, it's a daily essential that many of us can't go a day without. In recent times, however, several other varieties of flour have entered the market. Among them, khapli atta has gained significant popularity. Also known as emmer wheat flour, it's especially favoured by those looking to eat healthier. But is it truly better than regular wheat flour or just another passing fad? Let's find out from dietitian Shweta J Panchal. Wheat atta is the regular flour we use every day in Indian kitchens. It's usually made from a type of wheat called Triticum aestivum, also known as common bread wheat. It's easily available, budget-friendly and simple to use. Khapli atta is made from an ancient

type of wheat called Triticum dicoccum. It has been grown in parts of India, especially Maharashtra and Karnataka, for hundreds of years. This flour has a light reddish-brown colour and a slightly nutty taste.

What Are The Health Benefits Of Wheat Atta?

1. Good Source Of EnergyIt provides complex carbs that keep you energised through the day. This makes it a reliable option for daily meals, especially for active individuals.2. Rich In FibreHelps with digestion and keeps you gut healthy. Regular intake can support smoother bowel movements and prevent

constipation.3. Supports Heart HealthContains nutrients like magnesium and antioxidants. These may help regulate blood pressure and reduce the risk of heart disease.4. Keeps You FullHelps manage hunger and



supports weight control. It can prevent overeating by keeping you satisfied for

longer.

What Are The Health Benefits Of Khapli Atta?

1. Lower Glycaemic IndexBreaks down slowly, helps manage blood sugar levels. Ideal for people with diabetes or those watching their sugar intake.2. Rich In FibreAids digestion and keeps you full longer. It may also support gut health by feeding good bacteria.3. Less GlutenEasier on the gut for those with mild gluten sensitivity. It can reduce bloating and digestive discomfort in some individuals.4. Nutrient-RichPacked with B vitamins, magnesium, and iron. These nutrients support energy production, immunity, and overall wellness. It really depends on your

body's needs and lifestyle. Dietitian Shweta J Panchal explains that over the years, regular wheat has changed. "A century ago, wheat had a simple protein structure. But with genetic modifications, the wheat we eat today has become harder to digest, more inflammatory, and less nutritious," she says. That's where khapli wheat makes a difference - it's less processed, easier on the gut, and holds more nutrients. So, if you're looking for something that's high in fibre, better for digestion, and more blood sugar-friendly, khapli atta is a great choice - especially for those managing diabetes, inflammation or mild gluten sensitivity. But if you have no gluten concerns, lead an active lifestyle and want a versatile flour that's lighter on the pocket, regular wheat atta still does the job well.

Perfect Chole Bhature: Avoid These Mistakes

The first time you decide to make chole bhature at home, it feels like a bold move. Not because the ingredients are hard to find, but because the stakes are oddly high. With your attempt, you are chasing a memory, maybe of a roadside stall where the bhature came out puffed and proud, or a family Sunday where the chole simmered for hours and tasted better than ever. It is a dish that demands drama: the hiss of hot oil, the slow build of spices, the dough that needs just the right amount of rest. And while recipe books make it sound easy, anyone who has tried knows the truth. Getting both components right, together, is a bit of a balancing act. Too often, first-timers end up with chickpeas that are stubbornly undercooked, bhature that behave like pooris, or oil that refuses to cooperate. But don't you worry, these mistakes are common, fixable, and part of the learning curve.



And as always, we have got your back. Here is a guide - not the recipe - that will help you go the right direction while making this North Indian delight. We will walk you through the mistakes to avoid so your chole bhature turns out bold, fluffy, and absolutely worth the effort. Chickpeas need time. And by time, we mean a good 8-10 hours of soaking. Skipping this step or rushing it with hot water will leave you with hard, unevenly cooked chole. So, plan ahead. Soak them overnight and let them swell up naturally. Your

pressure cooker will thank you. Add a pinch of baking soda while soaking or boiling to soften the chickpeas further. Just do not overdo it. Chole is all about depth of flavour. Simply boiling chickpeas and tossing them in store-bought masala will not cut it. You need a slow-cooked onion-tomato base, with ginger, garlic, and a generous mix of spices like cumin, coriander, amchur, and garam masala. Want that deep brown colour like the ones in dhabas? Try adding a tea bag while pressure cooking the chole.

Beat the Rain: 10 Indian Comfort Foods for Monsoon Lunch



The monsoon influences our moods and meal choices in subtle but powerful ways. As the rain pours down, many of us find ourselves replacing the cooling treats of summer with something warmer, richer and far more comforting. We might avoid street food due to hygiene concerns, but still crave its punchy flavours. And on days when the rain makes us want to skip cooking altogether, ordering in becomes the best plan. If you are wondering what to eat for lunch today, here are ten Indian comfort foods perfect for rainy afternoons. All of them are available on most food delivery apps.

South Indian dishes are known across the country for their familiar and soothing taste. On a busy, grey monsoon day, a plate of masala dosa can uplift your spirits. The crisp texture of the dosa contrasts beautifully with the soft, spiced aloo filling, creating a meal that is both comforting and satisfying. When

the rain is relentless and time is tight, handheld meals are your best friend. Chicken kathi rolls are easy to eat at your desk, in your car or between meetings. Tucked inside a flaky paratha, the juicy chicken filling packs plenty of flavour. Ideal for lunch on hectic days when you still want something indulgent. Craving something hearty and unapologetically rich? Chole Bhature fits the bill. The fluffy bhature with the spicy, tangy chickpea curry is a monsoon hit for a reason. This is not for those on a strict meal plan, but for those who want to enjoy their lunch with zero regrets. Butter chicken and naan are the classic combination that needs no introduction. The creamy, spiced gravy paired with soft, buttery bread is comfort food at its finest. If you are sharing with colleagues or family, this dish is a crowd-pleaser. While ordering it online, remember to get extra naans and rotis - one is rarely enough.

Mango Day Delight: Elevate Dishes with This Sweet & Spicy Chili Sauce

The sheer joy a juicy bite of this fruit can bring on both-ersome and humid days is unmatched. After all, it's not the king of fruits for no reason. That being said, it's high time we look beyond the purview of the mango as is. Teeming with potential to be a savoury delight, this sweet and spicy mango sauce recipe is the perfect first step in that direction. **Ingredients:** Ripe mangoes - 2, red chilli flakes - 1tbsp, garlic cloves - 2, sugar - 1/2 cup, vinegar - 2tbsp, cornstarch - 1tsp, olive oil - 1tbsp, water - 1/4 cup, black salt - 1/2tsp, ginger piece - 1/2 inch.

Method: Peel and roughly chop the mangoes. Add them to the blender along with half the ginger. Blend until smooth. Finely chop the garlic and remaining ginger. Now in a pot or a pan, add oil. Once hot, add in the chopped garlic and ginger. Sauté it on slow to medium heat for a minute until translucent or the raw smell of ginger dissipates. Now add the pureed mangoes, chilli flakes and mix. Cook for a minute. Now add in the sugar, vinegar, salt and half the water. Cook it for 2 to 3 minutes. Now mix in the cornstarch with the remaining water and add it in the above mix. Cook it for a further 2 to 3 minutes until you get the desired consistency. More cornstarch can be added to make it thicker, though a teaspoon should be the perfect amount. Let it cool completely and transfer to an air tight container. Store this sweet and spicy sticky sauce in a container and use as is or even as a glaze for roasting. Sweet Mango Chilli Sauce is a fuss-free 10 min lip-smacking and tongue-tickling recipe that goes well with chips, starters, as a spread on bread and rolls or simply as a dressing. It's the season of Mangoes and though here we get mangoes all year round, the one's which we get this time of the year are the best. They are sweet and juicy. Yes, the local shops have nice and juicy. I need not go for the Indian Variety and wait for a year. This time I was so happy to find the sweetest and the juiciest mango from a local grocery store.

The Fruitful Fix: Mastering Sugar-Free Dessert Sweetening

We tested: best fruits to halve sugar with

Serena is a registered dietitian, food writer, and culinary instructor. She has been a contributing writer and a recipe developer for FoodNetwork.com for a decade where she shares science-based nutrition information on food trends, gut health and brain health. You may want to get rid of sugar from your pantry. Or at least switch up your baking ingredients to include more sweet fruit and less sugar. Why? Simply put, fruits offer more good nutrition than sugar. Unlike sugar, whole fruit is rich in fiber and can help slow down blood sugar spikes after eating those sweet treats. On top of that, fruits provide antioxidants and contain important vitamins and minerals, including potassium, magnesium and vitamin C. Compared to low-calories sweeteners, which can sometimes add unwanted (menthol) flavors or an unusual aftertaste, fruits can actually enhance your baked goods. For example, prunes can help produce golden brown color, and can keep them fresh and moist. Additionally, the richness of chocolate can be intensified with the addition of prunes, and dates can add a caramel note to desserts. Dried fruits are a concentrated form of sugar. The fruits that work best to replace sugar include prunes, raisins and dates, along with fresh bananas. In order to do so, simply make a puree of these fruits so they distribute evenly throughout the treat. When swapping out sugar with fruit, the very general rule is: Substitute up to half of the sugar with fruit puree in one-bowl cake, quick bread or muffin recipes. If you only swap half the sugar, you shouldn't have to decrease the liquid ingredient amounts.

Tips for Sweetening with Fruit

Usually you can't substitute 1:1 sugar to fruit purees. That's because in light and fluffy baked goods like cakes, sugar provides more than just sweetness; it also lends tenderness, and when whipped up with butter, it provides leavening. However, in denser baked goods, you may not detect much of a difference with a full substitution of fruit instead of sugar. Fruit purees work best in dense baked goods like quick breads, muffins, pancakes, snacking cakes and brownies. When mixing up batters, mix fruit purees into the wet ingredients, before adding to the dry ingredients. Check baked goods earlier than specified baking times. Fruits are a darker color than sugar and can make batter darker in color. This attracts more oven heat (just like darker pans) and bakes some batters faster. Allow baked goods using fruit purees to cool completely before cutting, otherwise they may crumble apart. Some baked goods stay fresh longer when fruit purees are used because of the antioxidants in fruits, which act as natural stabilizers. You may be able to substitute 1:1 sugar to fruit puree in desserts that aren't baked, like this chocolate frosting. Experiment and have fun. Your results will still be delicious - even if they're not exactly like the original sugar-sweetened treat.

How to Sweeten Desserts with Fruit Purees

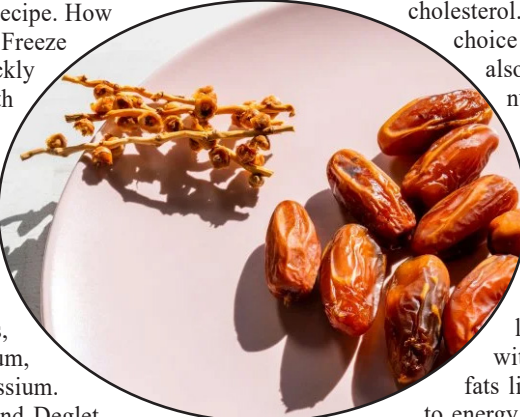
This is our go-to fruit for replacing sugar with fruit. Prunes have a lower glycemic index (GI=29) than most



able characteristics like browning and a high level of antioxidants to baked goods; these antioxidant phenols can naturally stabilize baked goods, keeping them fresher. How to Make Prune Puree: Combine one cup (about eight ounces by weight) of tightly packed prunes with 1/4-cup of hot water in a blender or food processor; blend until smooth. Use prune puree to replace up to half of the sugar, maple syrup, honey or other sweetener in a recipe. It works in most baking recipes, and especially well in chocolate, caramel and spiced desserts, like this carrot cake. Prune puree can also be used in spicy or savory-sweet sauces like barbeque sauce. While raisins are often already thought of as an ingredient in baked goods, they can also be processed into a sugar substitute. Nutritionally, the resulting puree has slightly more potassium than prunes or dates. It's also rich in antioxidants and fiber. How to Make Raisin Puree: Cover one cup of raisins with boiling water. Rai-

sins can also be steeped with cinnamon, ginger or other spices; if using spices, steep for 10 to 15 minutes. Then, puree with at least 1/4- to 1/2-cup soaking water, depending on how much spice flavor is desired. Use raisin puree to replace up to half of the sugar, maple syrup or honey in a recipe. How to Make Raisin Sugar: Freeze raisins overnight. Quickly pulse frozen raisins with a little flour in the food processor. Use quickly before melting. Use to replace up to half of the sugar in some desserts. This one will take some experimenting!

Like raisins and prunes, dates contain magnesium, iron, calcium and potassium. We like both Medjool and Deglet Noor dates. Date puree contains more fiber than raisin puree, but less fiber than prune puree. Date puree contains more calories and carbohydrates than both prune and raisin puree, but it also tastes sweeter. How to Make Date Puree: Place one cup of tightly-packed whole dates in a jar, cover with warm water and soak for 10 minutes. Drain and reserve warm water. Pit the dates if not pitted. Puree dates and 1/4-cup of warm soaking water in a food processor. Date puree works especially well



as a substitute for honey or maple syrup since the color and flavors are similar. It can be substituted 2:1 puree to the amount of honey in a recipe, since honey is sweeter than sugar. Bananas are not as rich in antioxidants, fiber or vitamins as most dried fruit. However, they are a source of potassium and fiber, with more fiber when they are a little under-ripe (use bananas before they get brown for more fiber). You will taste the banana flavor, unlike the dried fruit purees, which are usually not detectable. How to Make Banana Puree: Simply peel a banana and mash it. Swap out up to half of the sugar in a recipe; substitute 2:1 banana puree for sugar. Banana puree works best in chocolate, coffee or tropical treats - where the flavor of banana will be welcome. For more fruit-sweetened recipes, check out these six fully fruit-sweetened desserts and Sugar-Free First Birthday Cake. Dates are fruits of the date palm tree. Harvested by hand from treetops in hot climates, they tend to be soft, plump, pleasantly chewy and oh so sweet. Dates are mostly grown throughout the Middle East and Northern portions of Africa but can also be found in southern states of the U.S including Arizona and California. The most popular varieties of dates sold in the U.S. are Medjool, which are extra tender with a distinct caramel flavor, and Deglet Noor, which are less juicy and milder in flavor. Inside the fruit, dates contain hard pits that can be removed with a little squeezing. If you aren't in the mood for pit removal, many brands of packaged dates offer pitted varieties. Dates are often used to make packaged snack foods like bars and energy bites. Dates are also used to make date syrup, which is made by blending dates and water and cooked down into a thick syrup, and date sugar, a ground powder made from dehydrated dates.

A serving of pitted dates is typically two to three dates (about 45 grams). One serving contains 140 calories, zero grams of fat, 33 grams of carbohydrates, four grams of dietary fiber and one gram of protein. Dates also contain an impressive profile of micronutrients including iron, potassium, calcium, biotin and magnesium. Like many fruits, dates also contain various forms of cell-protecting and inflammation-fighting antioxidants. Dates are most well-known for their concentrated sweetness, which yields a high carb count, but they tend to have a lower glycemic index (a measure of blood sugar response after you eat) since they contain carbs and fiber, which slows how quickly glucose enters the bloodstream. Many of the health prowess of dates are thanks to the fiber they contain. Four grams of fiber per serving adds up to 16-percent of the daily recommendation which is impressive for two small pieces of fruit. That fiber helps contribute to a healthy gut microbiome, and has been linked to lower cholesterol. Data also points to dates being a favorable choice for people living with diabetes. Dates may also benefit bone health as they contain several nutrients crucial for healthy bones including calcium and magnesium - they even contain small amounts phosphorus, another contributor to skeletal health. The biggest concern with dates is the concentration of calories. While you may be tempted to enjoy them by the handful or bag, calories can stack up quickly. Instead of mindlessly chomping on dates alone, combine them with foods filled with protein and healthy fats like cheese, nuts and nut butters. Add them to energy bites, oatmeal, smoothies, baked goods or rice dishes to add nutrients and sweetness without going overboard on calories. As for date syrup and date sugar, these add-ins provide microdoses of the same nutrients but should be used sparingly as they won't provide the same potency as whole fruits. Plus, they're more concentrated in sugar. Dates are full of nutrients and deliciousness. Take advantage of the fiber, antioxidants and one-of-a-kind sweetness, but find strategies to enjoy regularly while keeping portions in check.



dried fruits and bananas (GI=51). And besides the potassium and magnesium contained in most fruits, prunes also contain zinc for immune health and bone-building nutrients calcium, boron and vitamin K. Prune puree also adds desir-

SPORTS

Due to a knee injury, Mark Wood is expected to miss the second Ashes Test in Brisbane

New Delhi: According to a BBC story, fast bowler Mark Wood is expected to miss the second Test of Ashes 2025–2026, dealing a serious setback to England. Wood missed England’s home series against Zimbabwe and India due to pain in his ailing left knee, which had previously undergone surgery in March. Wood made his first competitive appearance since the Champions Trophy in February during the inaugural Ashes Test in Perth. The 35-year-old bowled 11 overs throughout the match as Australia thrashed England in two days, making it the quickest Ashes Test to



end so swiftly in 104 years. Wood missed the team’s first training session in Brisbane, and although he has another four days of practice

to prove his fitness, England are expected to adopt a cautious approach with their star bowler. He is understood to have remained at the team hotel to rest, while the rest of the England squad took part in an optional session at Allan Border Field. Before the Perth Test, he had not played a Test match for 15 months, initially due to an elbow issue, followed by surgery on his left knee. In his on-field comeback ahead of the first Test, during an Ashes warm-up match against the England Lions, damage, and he was cleared to play in Perth, where he finished with match figures of 0–44.

Ro-Ko’s comeback to India, a new opening pair anticipate from the IND vs. SA ODIs

New Delhi: The Test series’ 2-0 victory over South Africa at home hasn’t faded. It has persisted, in discussions, on social media, and when everything is abruptly questioned, even intent and team combinations. It was a sobering reality check for a team that used to make visiting teams feel stuck on Indian soil. Morne Morkel, the bowling coach for India, acknowledged this during his press conference in Ranchi. He called the past two weeks “disappointing,” but he also emphasized that there is no need to linger. With a few days to think things through, the team’s focus has shifted to white-ball cricket with a pressing need to start again. “We’ve had a couple of days now to reflect, and I think the important thing now is to give all our energy to the white-ball team,” Morkel said. With Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma returning, he spoke of “fresh energy” in the squad, adding that

the focus must be on “playing good, solid white-ball cricket” and restoring momentum inside the dressing room. Now, a three-match ODI series offers a different stage. Starting November 30 in Ranchi, this isn’t just a format shift. It is a chance to steady the wheel. India have not played an ODI at home since February 2025, when they swept England 3–0. That series felt like control. This one feels like a response. For the first time since February, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are set to walk out in an ODI on Indian soil. For a side that suddenly looks like it needs its senior core again, their return couldn’t be more timely. Rohit arrives in Ranchi in form. He finished the Australia ODI series as India’s highest run-scorer with 202 runs, highlighted by a match-defining century in Sydney. That run also carried personal significance, making him the oldest player to



reach No.1 in the ICC ODI batting rankings. At a stage when careers often begin to fade away, Rohit seems to be rediscovering another gear. Kohli’s road back has been more complicated. He endured an unfamiliar dip against Australia, dismissed for back-to-back ducks in the first two ODIs, something that had never happened in his career before. But there was a response. His unbeat-

en 74 in Sydney steadied the narrative and suggested that rhythm is returning at the right time. With speculation still circling around their potential participation in the 2027 ODI World Cup, this series becomes about more than just numbers. Every innings is now viewed through a longer lens, one that weighs fitness, hunger and relevance in India’s future plans.

BCCI calls meeting to address gaps

New Delhi: The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has scheduled a meeting with the men’s team management to outline a roadmap across formats and streamline communication between key stakeholders. The meeting will take place on Wednesday in Raipur, ahead of the second ODI between India and South Africa. understands the discussion is likely to involve BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia, joint secretary Prabhetj Singh Bhatia, head coach Gautam Gambhir, and national selection committee chairman. With the meeting planned on match day, the possibility of senior players being called in appears low.

Indomitable India stun Iran in, seal AFC U17 Asian Cup 2026 berth

New Delhi: The full-time whistle had barely left the referee’s lips when the Indian dug-out emptied in a surge of euphoria. Players sprinted across the pitch, substitutes and staff joining those who had fought for every inch in the Ahmedabad evening. There were tears, embraces, fists raised to the sky. The Blue Colts had achieved what looked, for long stretches of the match, almost impossible. India came from behind to defeat Iran 2-1 in their last Group D match at the EKA Arena in Ahmedabad, and sealed qualification for the AFC U17 Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2026, thus marking their 10th appearance in the tournament’s history, as per the official website of the All India Football Federation (AIFF). When Amirreza Valipoor struck in the 19th minute, calmly finishing after a defensive misjudgement, the task appeared to loom even larger. But this young Indian side refused to accept their fate. First, they equalised through Dallalmuon Gangte when the forward converted a penalty in the 45+1 minute, before Gunleiba Wangkheirakpam netted the winner

in the 52nd minute.

The victory meant that India climbed to seven points, level with Iran but ahead on head-to-head and enough to secure qualification against a powerhouse of Asian youth football. The early narrative belonged to Iran. They pressed sharply, moved the ball fluidly, and forced India goalkeeper Rajrup Sarkar into two crucial saves, first tipping away a long-range effort from captain Mahan Beheshti in the 10th minute, then punching out a fierce volley from the same player moments later after Jafar Asadi carved through on the left. Iran looked ruthless, composed, and in command. Yet India hung in, never allowing panic to creep in despite Iran’s territorial superiority. They tested the waters with speculative shots from distance and tried to break Iran’s structure by shifting the ball quickly into the wide channels. Nothing seemed to pierce Iran’s disciplined defensive line.

Then came the moment that changed everything. At the stroke of half-time, a corner from



the left caused chaos inside the Iranian box. As bodies collided and the ball pinged around dangerously, Heeranganba Seram was brought down. The referee pointed straight to the spot. Up stepped Dallalmuon Gangte, ice-cold in pressure, sending the goalkeeper the wrong way in the 46th minute. India had their lifeline, and with it, belief.

Revitalised, India began the second half with renewed purpose. And the winner came in the 52nd minute, born from an Iranian mistake. Defender Amirmahan Afrooziani failed to clear a looping ball, and Gunleiba Wangkheirakpam, unmarked and unhurried, capitalised with a strong finish past goalkeeper Bardiya Dorri. India, against all odds, led 2-1.

IND vs SA: KL Ranchi ODI Rishabh Pant good enough to play as a specialist batter KL Rahul

New Delhi: Rishabh Pant is capable of playing as a specialist hitter if necessary, according to captain KL Rahul. Pant’s participation in the first of India’s three One-Day Internationals (ODIs) against Temba Bavuma’s South Africa on Sunday, November 30 at the JSCA International Stadium Complex has not yet been confirmed. Since India’s August 2024 tour of Sri Lanka, the 28-year-old Pant has not played in the 50-over format. While keeping all options open, Rahul, who is guiding India in Shubman Gill’s absence due to injury, made it plain that if Pant is included in the starting lineup for the series opener, he would not take the wicketkeeping gloves. “Rishabh obviously missed out due to injury, and again, he is someone who has been with the team for a long time. Everyone has seen what he brings and what he can do for the team. Like I answered them earlier, the players who are already in the team and have been performing - sometimes you just have to wait for your opportunity,” Rahul said in the pre-match press conference. “You’ll get to know tomorrow who will play - whether it’s me or him behind the stumps - and I will be in the field,” Rahul added. Rahul also heaped praise on Rituraj Gaikwad, who is set to make a comeback after nearly two years. Gaikwad is among the contenders to open the batting with Rohit Sharma alongside Yashasvi Jaiswal. The 28-year-old Gaikwad last played ODIs during India’s 2023 tour of South Africa. Gaikwad earned his return to the ODI squad following his impressive performances in the One-Dayers against South Africa A, where he scored 117, an unbeaten 68, and 25. Rahul



said that Gaikwad is a world-class prospect, but because the Indian team has a settled top order, players like Gaikwad often have to wait on the sidelines. “Rutu is obviously a top-class player. We’ve all seen that whatever limited opportunities he has received, he has utilised them well and shown what he can do. Unfortunately, in ODIs, the top five or six is quite settled and performing well, so you feel bad for players who don’t get enough chances. But at the same time, you’re happy that the playing group is doing well,” Rahul said.

Nowacki On His Golden Summer & ‘Iconic’ Adam Peaty Ahead GB Debut In Poland

New Delhi: Filip Nowacki On His Golden Summer & ‘Iconic’ Adam Peaty Ahead Of Senior GB Debut In Poland In the space of around seven whirlwind weeks in the summer of 2025, Filip Nowacki won four individual world and European junior titles, rattled a senior British standard and broke Adam Peaty’s age group record. In the time between the European and world juniors, Nowacki won eight golds among an overall haul of 11 medals representing Jersey at the Island Games. It has been an annus mirabilis for the 18-year-old who will make his senior debut for Great Britain at the European Short Course Championships which run from 2-7 December in Lublin, Poland. Nowacki has been shocked by the rate of his improvement, notably



since he moved from Jersey – where he got a fine schooling in the fundamentals by Nathan Jegou – to Millfield and Keiron Piper in the summer of 2024. In

an interview with Swimming World, Nowacki said: “Definitely. I moved to Millfield and I was kind of hoping to improve. I got here and we did less train-

ing it was a lot more work smarter than hard I suppose. “The beginning of last season I was really worried that I wasn’t training enough and that I wasn’t going to see the results that I wanted. The more the season progressed, the better I got.” He made his presence felt at the British Championships in April where he finished second in the 200m breaststroke in 2:11.09 as well as third in the 50 (27.87) and 100 (1:00.28). European junior record and championship mark of 2:09.11. Twenty-four hours later, the teenager lowered it again to 2:08.32 en-route to the title. On to the 100 and Nowacki was in record-breaking form again as he claimed gold in 59.59 while going inside Peaty’s age group mark of 59.92 that had stood since 2013.

Teams intentionally avoid PCs during group Raghunath FIH Hockey Men’s Junior World Cup

New Delhi: World No 2 India earned as many as 20 penalty corners against Oman, who are ranked 40 in FIH junior men’s rankings, in their second Pool B match of the Hockey Men’s Junior World Cup at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium in Chennai on Saturday. Only five of them were converted into goals by the hosts even as they thrashed their opponents 17-0. In their first match versus Chile, they got six penalty corners and a couple of them were converted by the team.

Conversion rate of penalty corners plays an important role in modern day field hockey and more often than not it turns out to be a decisive factor. Coming into the tournament, it was an area to be addressed for the junior Indian team. Ahead of the event, they finished runners-up at the Sultan of Johor Cup in Malaysia losing to Australia in the final. Out of 53 PCs they earned in the competition, they converted only eight and the same was discussed in the build up to the Junior World Cup. India coach PR Sreejesh admitted the area is a cause of concern and said, “We trained hard after that tournament (Sultan of Johor Cup). I am not going to give you any excuses for the lack of scoring but when you look at the other teams there their scoring rate was not that great because of some issues with the ground.” Sreejesh’s words appear to be true at least looking at what has transpired in Chennai and Madurai so far after the two rounds. The issue is not only ailing India but other top teams including world No 1 and defending champions Germany. In fact, the hosts boast of a superior conversion rate than other top 5 teams except Spain. Their conversion rate after two matches is 26.92 which is more than Germany (18.18), Argentina (3rd ranked, 17.45) and Netherlands (5th, 12.5). Spain (4th) leads the chart in that aspect converting five of the 10 short corners they have earned in two matches. As their head coach asserted, India would definitely eye an improvement when they take on Swit-



During the group stage, teams purposefully prevent differences in PCs: Raghunath.

zerland in their last Pool match in Madurai on Tuesday but former India drag-flicker VR Raghunath has a different take on the issue. “It’s a good ratio in my opinion (India’s conversion rate),” Raghunath told this daily.

Raghunath, who developed drag-flicking skills in the later half of his career, firmly believed that the conversion rate will only improve as the tournament progresses. “Most of the top teams do not want to reveal their PC variations during the group stage. As you are being analysed by your opponents, the teams prefer to keep their variations for later stages when it matters the most,” he opined. The former India defender also said that the low conversion of PCs has nothing to do with the fact that the tournament is meant for junior boys. “Most of the players are under-21 and they have enough strength. It has nothing to do with age. During group games, points are important and as long as these top teams are earning points, they prefer to keep their strategies secret for knockout matches. We did that when I was the drag-flicking expert of the team. These all are mind games as drag-flickers usually take safe or direct PCs early in the tournament. Come the knockout stage, I am quite sure the spectators will be able to see wonderful PCs with brilliant variations,” he signed off.

Ishan Kishan says very clear about my ‘just go for it’

New Delhi: After his unbeaten 113 (50b, 10x4, 8x6) helped Jharkhand team chase down 183 against Tripura in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy in Ahmedabad on Sunday, captain Ishan Kishan said he chose to bat with intent despite losing two early wickets. “I think it’s very simple. In cricket, when you open the innings, you just look to score as many runs as you can - pick the odd balls where the bowler comes up with a plan but is not able to execute, and you just go for it. So, I was doing the same. Though we lost two wickets early, my intent was very clear: if the ball is there I’ll just go for it,” he said. Ishan, now carrying a markedly mature air about him, said he is “a very spiritual person”