

In Brief

Massive Eviction Drive Launched in Assam

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Efforts on to provide domestic gas pipeline connections in Aizawl: CM

Aizawl, Feb 02: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma today said that efforts are underway to provide domestic gas pipeline connections in Aizawl. Inaugurating the fortnight-long Oil and Gas Conservation Awareness Campaign, Saksham 2025–26, organised by Indian Oil Corporation Limited in Aizawl, the Chief Minister said the pipeline construction is progressing steadily from Tripura. Highlighting initiatives taken by the government to improve the oil and gas sector in Mizoram, the Chief Minister said that the State Government continues to pursue enhanced exploration activities for oil and gas beneath Mizoram’s soil.

Gaurav Gogoi slams BJP

Guwahati: Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and President of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, Gaurav Gogoi has criticised the BJP-led Central government over the Union Budget 2026–27, calling it a “template budget” that lacks direction and vision. Reacting to the budget through a post on social media platform X, Gogoi said the budget fails to respond to the changing global economic situation and reflects a lack of seriousness on the part of the government. He alleged that the document does not provide any clear roadmap for the country’s future and does not inspire confidence among the people. Gogoi said that if it were an election year, the BJP would have presented a more aggressive budget with promises of reforms.

Budget 2026–27 sets aside Rs 500 crore for ULFA rehabilitation

Guwahati, Feb 02: The Union Budget for 2026–27 has set aside Rs 500 crore as a special package for the rehabilitation of surrendered cadres of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). According to the budget documents tabled in Parliament, the allocation has been made under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER). The funds are mainly meant to support former ULFA cadres who have laid down arms and are in the process of returning to normal civilian life.

Union Budget 2026 to boost Assam, Northeast: Himanta Biswa Sarma

Guwahati, Feb 02: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has welcomed the Union Budget 2026–27, saying it is a reform-oriented budget that will bring direct benefits to Assam and the Northeastern states through higher financial transfers, infrastructure development and support to key sectors. Reacting to the Budget presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Sarma said the proposals balance India’s national growth goals with the development needs of regions like the Northeast. He stated that the Budget focuses not only on long-term economic growth but also on practical outcomes at the grassroots level. The Chief Minister said one of the most important gains for Assam is the Centre’s acceptance of the 16th Finance Commission recommendations. According to him, this will increase Assam’s share in tax devolution from 3.128 per cent to 3.258 per cent, giving the State greater financial strength to carry out development projects. He added that higher transfers to states will allow more flexibility in planning and execution. Sarma also welcomed the Budget’s focus on future-oriented industries such as semiconductors, electronics manufacturing, data centres, chemical parks and rare earths. He said investments in these sectors will cre-

ate new employment opportunities, especially for the youth, and help Assam connect better with national and global production networks. Highlighting support for women, the Chief Minister praised the proposal to set up Self-Help Entrepreneur (SHE) Marts across the country. He said this will strengthen women-led economic activities and support Assam’s Mukhyamantrir Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan by providing better market access to products made by women’s self-help groups and Lakhpati Didis. On skill development, Sarma said the Budget’s emphasis on industry-linked training in areas such as healthcare, artificial intelligence and related fields is in line with Assam’s plans to build a skilled workforce. He welcomed the focus on training programmes that are closely linked to actual job opportunities. The Chief Minister also appreciated targeted measures for fisheries, commercial farming and the rejuvenation of Amrit Sarovars. He said these initiatives will support farmers, cooperatives and rural communities while strengthening the rural economy of the State. Referring to tourism and urban development, Sarma said new tourism circuits in the Northeast and investments in infrastructure and public transport in smaller towns will improve connectiv-



ity and support Assam’s urban growth. He also welcomed the focus on the Orange Economy, saying it will open new opportunities for artists, cultural workers and young entrepreneurs. On healthcare, Sarma welcomed

the proposal to upgrade the National Mental Health Institute at Tezpur, calling it an important step towards improving specialised healthcare services in Assam. He also highlighted the ₹2 lakh crore

allocation under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment scheme, saying it will speed up infrastructure projects. He further welcomed the ₹6,812 crore allocation for Northeast development.

‘Protect Childhood, Stop Child Marriage’ campaign launched in Kangpokpi

Imphal, Feb 02: The District Administration of Kangpokpi, in collaboration with the Integrated Rural Management Association (IRMA), has officially launched a 15-day mobile vehicle campaign titled “Protect Childhood, Stop Child Marriage.” The initiative was flagged off today from the Deputy Commissioner’s Complex by Lamminal Simte, MCS (AC to DC and SDO, Champhai). This intensive 15-day outreach is a key component of a broader 100-day special drive originally rolled out in December last year to strengthen social safeguards within the district. Speaking at the launch,



Project Coordinator Thangboilen highlighted IRMA’s long-standing commitment to the cause, noting that the NGO has spent the last 6–7 years actively combating child marriage. He emphasized the importance of a coordinated approach, working closely with church pas-

tors, temple priests, and various Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to strive toward a child-marriage-free district. The campaign is part of a massive national effort spanning 250 districts across various states and Union Territories. For Kangpokpi, the mission officially commenced

with today’s ceremonial flag-off by the Assistant Commissioner. IRMA officials expressed their gratitude to the District Administration, the Superintendent of Police, and Officers-in-Charge (OCs) from various police stations for their unwavering support. They reaffirmed their readiness to intervene whenever cases arise, urging the public to maintain contact with authorities. The campaign will navigate every corner of the district to sensitize the public on the legal and social protections available, specifically focusing on child helpline resources and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA).

Reh Festival brings Idu Mishmi community together in border town Anini

Itanagar, Feb 02: The Idu Mishmi community of Arunachal Pradesh is celebrating its most important socio-religious festival, Reh, with deep devotion and cultural pride at Anini in Dibang Valley district, close to the Indo-China border. The central celebrations, being held from February 1 to February 3, have drawn large gatherings of villagers, elders, youth and visitors, turning the remote border town into a vibrant centre of prayer, tradition and community bonding. The festival assumes special significance this year with the presence of Pema Khandu, along with several senior ministers, elected representatives and community leaders. Their participation highlighted not only the cultural importance of Reh but also the strategic and social relevance of Dibang Valley, one of India’s easternmost frontier districts. Reh is deeply rooted in the spiritual life of the Idu Mishmi tribe, mainly inhabiting Dibang Valley and Lower Dibang Valley districts. The festival is observed to seek blessings from the divine mother Nanyi Inyitaya for peace, prosperity, good health and harmony within the community. While Reh rituals are performed in villages across Dibang and Lower Dibang Valleys, Anini and Roing serve as the main centres



for larger gatherings and collective celebrations. The Chief Minister attended the festival along with Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein, Arunachal East MP Tapir Gao, Sports Minister Kento Jini, Women and Child Development Minister Dasanglu Pul, IPR Minister Nyato Dukam, and local MLAMope Mihu, among others. Addressing the gathering, Chief Minister Khandu called upon the Idu Mishmi people to protect and preserve their language, customs and traditional way of life. He said the originality and purity of Idu Mishmi culture is its greatest strength. “Preserving this culture is important not only for the coming generations but also for the world, which wants to understand and experience the unique heritage of Arunachal Pradesh,” the Chief Minister said. He also appreciated the community for continuing age-old traditions despite modern changes and challenges.

Massive Eviction Drive Launched in Assam’s Hailakandi to Clear Encroachments from Reserved Forest

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The drive began around 7 am in the Damchhera area and is being conducted jointly by the district administration and the Forest Department. Officials said the operation will continue until February 4 as part of sustained efforts to reclaim protected forest

land and prevent fresh encroachment.

To ensure smooth execution, the Forest Department has deployed 35 JCB machines, while security arrangements have been significantly strengthened. More than 1,500 security personnel, along with nearly 200 Forest Department officials, have been deployed on the ground to maintain law and order during the operation. The eviction zone has been divided into seven sectors to streamline the process. Eviction activities were carried out on Monday in Sectors 5, 6, and 7, while the remaining sectors will

be covered in phases over the next two days, Hailakandi Divisional Forest Officer Akhil Dutta said.

Officials noted that eviction notices had been served to residents nearly two months ago. Following the notices, a majority of families vacated the land voluntarily, allowing authorities to carry out the initial phase of the drive with minimal resistance.

The administration maintained that the eviction aims to safeguard forest land, restore ecological balance, and ensure that reserved forest areas remain free from illegal occupation.

Saha: Union Budget purely ‘routine’

Agartala, Feb 02: Tripura Congress chief Asish Kumar Saha criticized the Union Budget 2026–27 as “routine” and “visionless,” warning it will trigger layoffs and shrink jobs. Leaders alleged the Budget ignores Tripura’s demands and the Northeast’s aspirations, failing to address unemployment while merely repeating old measures without a roadmap for the future.

Tripura CM: Union Budget is ‘historic’

Agartala, Feb 02: Tripura Chief Minister Prof. (Dr.) Manik Saha on Monday described the Union Budget for the financial year 2026–27 as “historic,” asserting that it reflects the aspirations of 1.4 billion Indians and strengthens the roadmap toward a developed India. Speaking at a press conference at the state BJP headquarters in Agartala city, the Chief Minister said this year’s budget places special emphasis on agriculture and healthcare. He noted that the proposal to establish a medical hub will help create professional human resources in the health sector. In addition, the Centre has offered major relief to patients suffering from cancer and rare diseases by exempting customs duty on 17 cancer drugs and seven medicines for rare conditions. The budget also proposes



setting up a second National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) in North India.

Dr. Saha further pointed out that 41 percent of the nation’s total revenue has been earmarked for states, ensuring Tripura’s share in the allocation. He emphasized that the budget gives special attention to tourism potential in the Northeast, with plans to preserve and mod-

ernize temples and monasteries to make them more attractive as pilgrimage and tourist destinations. “This will boost Tripura’s tourism industry and accelerate socio-economic development,” he said. Highlighting support for small-scale industries, the Chief Minister said the budget places strong focus on micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), alongside traditional handicrafts.

Efforts on to provide domestic gas pipeline connections in Aizawl: CM

Aizawl, Feb 02: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma today said that efforts are underway to provide domestic gas pipeline connections in Aizawl.

Inaugurating the fortnight-long Oil and Gas Conservation Awareness Campaign, Saksham 2025–26, organised by Indian Oil Corporation Limited in Aizawl, the Chief Minister said the pipeline construction is progressing steadily from Tripura.

Highlighting initiatives taken by the government to improve the oil and gas sector in Mizoram, the Chief Minister said that the State Government continues to pursue enhanced exploration activities for oil and gas beneath Mizoram’s soil. In addition, significant efforts are being made to harness the State’s green energy potential, in line with the campaign’s focus on sustainable development, he said.

B. Lalchhanzova, Minister of

Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department, was also present. The campaign is being observed under the theme “Conserve Oil, Go Green.”

In his address, Lalchhanzova said that the government is making concerted efforts to ensure uninterrupted gas supply. The Mualkhang Gas Bottling Plant is currently being upgraded, with construction works in progress. To prevent difficulties caused by disruptions in oil supply in the past, the government is also working towards establishing an Oil Depot. He further stated that since oil and gas are daily necessities, distributors play a crucial role in public service, and urged them to continue working with dedication so that citizens do not face inconvenience.

The inaugural function was chaired by Z. Lhungdhim, DGM (LPG-E) and State Level Coordinator, while Lalhruaitluanga,



Managing Director, MIZOFED, delivered the vote of thanks and concluded the programme.

During the Saksham campaign period, awareness programmes on oil and gas conservation will be conducted through various activities. According to data from the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC), Government of India, during 2024–25, Mizoram

consumed 119.20 thousand metric tonnes of diesel (HSD), 58.83 thousand metric tonnes of petrol, and 34.6 thousand metric tonnes of LPG.

At present, Mizoram has 60 LPG distributors and 115 petrol pumps (retail outlets). As per VAHAN data, approximately 4,22,661 vehicles are registered in the State.

Nagaland: Anti-Leprosy Day observed in Phek

Dimapur, Feb 01: National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP), Phek, observed Anti-Leprosy Day at the conference hall of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Phek under the theme “Leprosy is curable, the real challenge is Stigma.”

Delivering the keynote address, DVBO Phek, Dr. Rebecca Sema, said the theme was a call to action to raise awareness on leprosy and inspire collaborative efforts to eliminate the disease. She highlighted the challenges faced by persons affected by leprosy and informed that medicines and treatment are available free of cost at any DLOs/CMO office in the district. Stressing the responsibility of every citizen, she also emphasized self-care practices.

As part of NLEP activities, the Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign (SLAC) is observed annually across the country as a key advocacy and social mobilization initiative. The theme for SLAC-2026, “Ending Discrimination, Ensuring Dignity,” reiterates

the national commitment to eliminate stigma and uphold the dignity, rights and social participation of persons affected by leprosy.

The programme was attended by all vertical programme staff.

MOKOKCHUNG: Anti-Leprosy Day and the Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign was also observed at the CMO Conference Hall, Mokokchung, under the theme “Ending Discrimination, Ensuring Dignity.” Participants took a pledge on the occasion of National Anti-Leprosy Day 2026.

In her keynote address, DPO CD-II, Dr. R. Toshimenla Jamir, said leprosy is one of the oldest known diseases globally and stressed the importance of combating stigma. She reminded that leprosy is treatable and curable, and discrimination must be avoided. EAC Mokokchung, Vitolu, highlighted the causes, signs and symptoms of leprosy and encouraged healthcare workers and NLEP staff to be more active, coordinate with the masses and strive to eradicate leprosy by 2027.

Nagaland: Visually impaired ‘Miracle Beekeeper’ of Leankonger inspires at NBHM training

Dimapur, Feb 01: During the scientific beekeeping training programmes conducted under the National Bee Board–National Beekeeping and Honey Mission (NBB-NBHM) from January 19–27, 2026, an inspiring story stood out—that of Tsangmong, a 37-year-old visually impaired apiarist from Leankonger Village, Shamator district, fondly referred to by the technical team as the “Miracle Beekeeper.”

Blind since childhood due to illness, Tsangmong began his beekeeping journey nearly five years ago without formal training. Drawing inspiration from fellow villagers, he taught himself apiculture through persistence and experimentation. Using locally available materials, he constructs semi-traditional handmade bee boxes and independently manages his colonies.



His first colony was formed when a natural swarm settled near his home, which he identified through sound and carefully transferred into a box. Despite slow initial progress, his determination yielded results. Today, he maintains four active colonies and produces multiple honey harvests annually. Remarkably, he determines harvesting time by

lifting the boxes and judging their weight, relying on touch and experience rather than sight.

His journey reflects the inclusive potential of apiculture, demonstrating that scientific beekeeping can empower individuals across abilities and circumstances while strengthening rural livelihoods.

During the training programme

at Leankonger Village, Shamator district, SDO (Civil) Bodi Kapfo handed over a scientific bee box to Tsangmong in the presence of Dr. Mary N. Odyuo, principal investigator, and Dr. Avinash Chauhan, Co-PI.

It may be noted that intensive training and demonstration programmes on scientific beekeeping were conducted across Eastern Nagaland districts under NBB-NBHM to strengthen farmer capacities, promote scientific apiculture practices, enhance livelihood opportunities and improve productivity in oilseed crops through organised beekeeping. The programme was funded by the National Bee Board (NBB), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India, and implemented by the School of Agricultural Sciences, Nagaland University, Medziphema Campus.

CM has become quiet after I raised his contempt of the Hon’ble Supreme Court: Gaurav Gogoi

Guwahati, Feb 01: In a statement posted on social media, Gogoi alleged that the Chief Minister became “silent” after he raised the issue of contempt, and accused the BJP leadership of relying on rhetoric and selective screenshots. Gogoi asserted that when a court cites a report relied upon by a party, the language of that report does not automatically become the court’s own words. He said attributing such language to the Supreme Court amounted to a “clear case for contempt.” The remarks come in the backdrop of Sarma’s recent defence of his controversial comments on the term “Miyan,” where the Chief Minister cited Supreme Court observations on illegal migration in Assam. Sarma had said his statements reflected judicial concerns rather than political rhetoric, referring to warnings about demographic change and its implications for Assam’s territorial integrity and national unity. The Chief Minister quoted from a Supreme Court judgment in a case involving former Assam CM Sarbananda Sonowal, stating that continued illegal migration could alter Assam’s demographic profile and pose long-term risks. “These are the Court’s words, not my imagination,” Sarma had said, adding that acknowledging the issue does not amount to communalism and that his government’s actions are aimed at protecting Assam’s identity and security.

However, Gogoi disputed this claim, alleging that the language cited by Sarma did not orig-



inate from the Supreme Court itself but from an executive report referred to during the case. Calling it a “blatant lie,” Gogoi said passing off such material as the apex court’s own words was dishonest and undermined constitutional propri-

ety and institutional integrity. Gogoi further stated that the Supreme Court may take cognisance of the matter, as falsely invoking the authority of the apex court by a constitutional functionary could amount to contempt.

Home Minister Amit Shah Launches ₹1,715-Crore Development Projects in Assam’s Dibrugarh

Guwahati, Feb 01: The projects were unveiled in the presence of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, MPs and MLAs from Upper Assam, state cabinet ministers and senior government officials. As part of efforts to develop Dibrugarh as Assam’s second administrative capital, Shah laid the foundation stone for a ₹284-crore second legislative assembly complex and MLA hostel. The project will comprise a three-storey assembly building, a nine-storey hostel for legislators, an 800-seat auditorium and a barrack for security personnel. The Home Minister also inaugurated the first phase of a modern multi-disciplinary sports complex costing ₹238 crore and laid the foundation stone for its second phase, estimated at ₹209 crore. The first phase includes an indoor stadium, swimming pool, football field, main gallery, courts for tennis, volleyball and basketball, along with hostels. Officials said the second phase will add seating for 30,000 spectators, a central playground and a full-fledged athletic track. He laid the foundation stone for a ₹292-crore Wildlife Health and Research Centre, aimed at improving treatment and research facilities for wild animals. The centre will feature educational and administrative blocks, a central laboratory, museum, auditorium, clinical block



and advanced radiation laboratory, enhancing coordination among forest officials, veterinarians and researchers. Additionally, the Home Minister launched a ₹692-crore wetland restoration and rejuvenation project under the National Disaster Mitigation Fund. The initiative will focus on restoring 15 scientifically identified wetlands across nine districts, with the objective of reducing urban flood risks. Officials said the projects collectively reflect a comprehensive approach to governance, sports infrastructure, wildlife conservation and disaster mitigation in Assam.

Two Killed in Bodo–Adivasi Clash in Assam; Mobile Internet Suspended



Guwahati, Feb 01: A chaotic clash between the Bodo and Adivasi communities led to the death of two people and the temporary suspension of mobile data services in Kokrajhar and Chirang in West Assam, The Hindu reported. According to The New Indian Express, the incident was triggered due to a road accident on Monday night when three Bodo men in a scorpio vehicle allegedly hit two Adivasi persons at Mansingh Road under the Karigaon police outpost. The occupants of the vehicle were working related to a road construction project and were returning from an inspection. The occupants were then assaulted by villagers nearby who also set their vehicle on fire. The mob attack killed Sikhna Jwhlwao Bismit son-in-law of the contractor on Monday. Sunil Murmu (Adivasi), Mahesh Murmu (Adivasi), Jubiraj Bharna (Bodo) and Prabhat Brahma (Bodo) were all taken to Kokrajhar Medical College and Hos-

pital. Due to the injuries sustained, Sunil Murmu also died on Tuesday, The New Indian Express reported. According to The New Indian Express, Tension escalated on Tuesday as both communities took to the National Highway near Karigaon outpost, burning tyres and setting fire to a few houses. A government office was also torched, and the Karigaon police outpost was attacked. To prevent further deterioration of law and order, RAF has been deployed in the area. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is currently in Davos attending the World Economic Forum. He added on X that he is in constant touch with senior officials of the state government and district administration ensuring that the situation returns to normal soon. Assam Police also took on X stating that the situation is being surveilled. They appealed to the public not to fall prey to rumours or misinformation being spread by anti-national elements.

Manipur Player, Referee Leave for Japan for Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Games

Imphal, Feb 01: Manipur’s Sepak Takraw representatives – a referee and a player – departed for Japan on January 29 to participate in the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Games to be held from January 30. The Indian contingent includes Waikhom Jiten Singh, president of the All Manipur Sepak Takraw Association (AMSTA), as referee, and S. Malemnganba as the player, joining 8 other members from across India. The Indian contingent departed from New Delhi on Thursday night for Nagoya, Japan, and is scheduled to return on February 3. As per official instructions, the selected referee had reported in New Delhi on January 27 to complete the required formalities. Association to Face Ngairi FC in Final On the occasion, AMSTA general secretary Ch. Gekant extended heartfelt best wishes to both the player and the referee. He stated that their selection for an international assignment is a proud moment for Manipur Sepak Takraw and reflects the dedication and consistent efforts of athletes and officials from the state. Gekant expressed confidence that they will uphold the honour of Manipur and India through their performance and professionalism in



Japan. The Manipur Sepak Takraw association and the entire Sepak Takraw fraternity of the state have

wished them success for the prestigious international assignment.

Tovihoto inaugurates Orange Festival

Imphal, Feb 01: The two-day 5th edition of the Riisoma Orange Festival was inaugurated at the local ground, Riisoma, on January 30 with advisor, Department of Tribal Affairs & Election, Tovihoto Ayemi, as the special guest. This year’s festival is being celebrated under the theme “Abundance of Riisoma.”

In his address, Tovihoto lauded the village for its fertile land and productive farming practices, but emphasized the urgent need for better road connectivity. He said good roads were vital for development and urged efforts to improve infrastructure. Expressing happiness at the villagers’ use of fertile land, Tovihoto described them as fortunate and encouraged farmers



to make full use of government initiatives.

He pointed out that strengthening and expanding farming activities could significantly contribute to the state’s economy.

Tovihoto further noted that the

festival would help attract tourism and appealed to villagers to adopt new ideas while working hard towards improvements. He assured continued government support for farmers and called for greater collaboration with concerned depart-

ments. Stressing that consistency is the key to success, Tovihoto urged farmers to remain steadfast and open to improvements. He said the government would explore possibilities to expand market opportunities and build sustainable livelihoods through cooperation between the community and the government. He envisioned an agricultural model that is productive, profitable and environmentally responsible.

The programme was chaired by Kekhrie Pfkha, with Rev. Medoneiu Ūsou offering the invocation. Convenor of the Organising Committee, Visier Vimera, delivered the welcome address, while Medokhrie Ū Pfkri enthralled the gathering with her performance.

Karko village backs Siang Upper project PFR, signs MoU with Arunachal government

Itanagar, Feb 02: In a key development for one of India’s most ambitious hydropower and flood-management initiatives, residents of Karko village in Upper Siang district on Sunday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Arunachal Pradesh government, extending their support for the preparation of the pre-feasibility report (PFR) of the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP). The MoU was signed at Yinkiong, the district headquarters of Upper Siang, marking an important step in the early preparatory phase of the project. Officials said the agree-

ment reflects a consultative approach to development, with emphasis on informed consent, continuous dialogue and the participation of local communities, while taking into account environmental and social concerns. The agreement was signed between Dumiin Nokar, representing the residents of Karko village, and Upper Siang Deputy Commissioner Talo Jerang on behalf of the state government. The programme was attended by village residents, senior district officials and representatives from the hydropower department. The event was also attended by Pasighat West MLA

Ninnong Ering, who is advisor to the state’s Hydropower Minister, and Tuting MLA Alo Libang, along with senior officials of the district administration. Addressing the gathering, Ering said the MoU demonstrated the government’s commitment to a scientific, transparent and responsible development process. He explained that the preparation of the PFR is a necessary first step to assess the project in detail, including its technical feasibility, possible environmental impact and social implications. He added that such studies are also important from the perspec-

tive of national security and long-term strategic interests. Alo Libang, in his address, highlighted the long-term importance of the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project for Arunachal Pradesh as well as the country. He said the project is expected to play a major role in strengthening energy security, improving flood moderation in the Siang river system and supporting regional development. At the same time, he stressed that the rights, welfare and active participation of local communities would remain central to the planning and decision-making process. Residents of Karko village

welcomed the government’s awareness-based and consultative approach and expressed their willingness to cooperate in activities related to the preparation of the PFR. Community members said that clear communication and involvement at the early stage helped build trust and understanding about the objectives of the study. With Karko village signing the MoU, a total of five villages have now formally supported the preparation of the PFR for the SUMP. Earlier, similar agreements were signed by residents of Riew, Riga, Pangkang (Kumku) and Begging villages.

Budget 2026–27 sets aside Rs 500 crore for ULFA rehabilitation

Guwahati, Feb 02: The Union Budget for 2026–27 has set aside Rs 500 crore as a special package for the rehabilitation of surrendered cadres of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). According to the budget documents tabled in Parliament, the allocation has been made under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER). The funds are mainly meant to support former ULFA cadres who have laid down arms and are in the process of returning to normal civilian life. The focus will be on rehabilitation, livelihood support and helping them rejoin society in a stable and dignified manner. The allocation follows the Memorandum of Settlement signed on December 29, 2023, between the Centre, the Assam government and the pro-talks faction of ULFA led by Arabinda Rajkhowa. The agreement was signed in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and was seen as a key moment in Assam’s long history of insurgency-related unrest. The peace

accord placed strong emphasis on ending violence, supporting former insurgents and ensuring long-term peace and stability in the state. In the larger picture, the DoNER Ministry has received Rs 6,812.3 crore in the 2026–27 Budget. This is a sharp increase from the revised estimate of Rs 4,479.2 crore in the previous financial year, indicating higher central spending on the development needs of the North Eastern region. Major allocations under the ministry include Rs 2,500 crore for the North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme, Rs 2,300 crore for the Prime Minister’s Development Initiative for North East Region (PM-DevINE), and Rs 825 crore for different programmes under the North East Council. The Budget has also announced several Assam-specific packages. These include Rs 200 crore for Karbi Anglong, Rs 156 crore for the Bodoland Territorial Council, and Rs 70 crore each for special development packages for Adivasi groups and the Dimasa community.

‘Template budget without direction’: Gaurav Gogoi slams BJP

Guwahati, Feb 02: Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and President of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, Gaurav Gogoi has criticised the BJP-led Central government over the Union Budget 2026–27, calling it a “template budget” that lacks direction and vision. Reacting to the budget through a post on social media platform X, Gogoi said the budget fails to respond to the changing global economic situation and reflects a lack of seriousness on the part of the government. He alleged that the document does not provide any clear roadmap for the country’s future and does not inspire confidence among the people. Gogoi said that if it were an election year, the BJP would have presented a more aggressive budget with promises of reforms. However, he claimed that the present budget shows a government that is merely passing time and has no urgency to address economic challenges. According to him, the budget lacks ambition and does not focus on long-term structural changes needed for India’s economy. He further alleged that while countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, China and Japan are taking decisive steps to strengthen their economies, India has been offered uncertainty and hesitation. “The Union Budget has failed to address both present and future needs of the country,” Gogoi said. Earlier in the day, thousands of people participated in the ‘Save the Community, Save the Land’ padyatra organised by the Assam Pradesh Youth Congress in Golaghat town. The march was organised by the Golaghat District Youth Congress and was attended by Gogoi, Leader of the Opposition in the Assam Legislative Assembly Debabrata Saikia, MLA Bhaskar Baruah, and Assam Pradesh Youth Congress President Zubair Anam. During the padyatra, Congress leaders and workers carried banners and raised slogans referring to recent global political developments linked to the Epstein files, including the slogan ‘Modi-Epstein bhai bhai’. Addressing a public meeting after the march, Gogoi said the padyatra was organised to protect Assam’s land and safeguard the rights of indigenous communities. He alleged that the state government is handing over land belonging to indigenous people to corporate houses and outside interests, warning that local communities could become landless if the trend continues.

Ex-CM backs Union Budget reforms for startups; Manipur Congress says state overlooked

Imphal, Feb 02: Former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on February 1 said the reforms announced in the Union Budget 2026–27 would help create new opportunities for startups, IT-enabled services and skilled youth in the Northeast. At the same time, the Manipur Congress criticised the Budget, alleging that it failed to address the state’s long-running crisis. In a post on social media, Singh said the Budget had given a strong push to India’s information technology sector under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. He said the measures announced would support innovation and help young people find new avenues of employment, including in the northeastern region. “These reforms will create fresh opportunities for startups, IT-enabled services and skilled youth. This Budget strengthens India’s



move towards a digital and innovation-driven economy,” Singh said. In another post, the former chief minister also welcomed the Budget’s focus on promoting high-value agriculture and diversifying farm output. He said such steps would help improve farmer incomes and strengthen rural livelihoods over time. However, the Union Budget drew

sharp criticism from the Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee. Its president, Keisham Meghachandra, said the Budget did not reflect the ground realities in Manipur, which has been facing a prolonged humanitarian and security crisis. “Budget 2026 is out, but for Manipur the silence from Delhi is deafening,” Meghachandra said in a post. He claimed that thou-

sands of people have been displaced over the past three years and many families are still struggling to return to their homes. He also alleged that the Budget did not provide for a proposed Peace and Reconciliation Fund for Manipur.

Questioning infrastructure announcements, he said road projects alone would not solve the deeper issues facing the state. “Announcing Rs 12,000 crore for roads means little when people are afraid to travel. Concrete cannot replace security,” he said, adding that Manipur needed justice, priority and a clear roadmap to peace. Earlier in the day, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget for the 2026–27 financial year, outlining measures aimed at boosting infrastructure, digital growth and economic activity across the country, including in tier-2 and tier-3 cities.

AIUDF to Contest Elections Alone, Launches Sharp Attack on Congress

Guwahati, Feb 02: Amid rising political activity ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections, the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) has announced that it will contest the elections independently. Addressing a press conference, party leaders launched a strong criticism of the Congress. AIUDF stated that if Congress genuinely aims to form a government in Assam, it must expand its focus beyond the 22 constituencies with significant “Miya” populations and give equal importance to the remaining 104 constituencies, including those in Upper Assam. Otherwise, the formation of an opposition government in the state would not be possible, the party claimed. The party also advised Congress to “handle Akhil Gogoi and Lurinjyoti Gogoi carefully.” At the same time, AIUDF alleged that there are still “traitors” within the Congress and claimed that BJP agents continue to operate inside the party. According to AIUDF, Congress has yet to remove such individuals. In a sharp remark, AIUDF leaders further alleged that “the Congress hand is now in Himanta Biswa Sarma’s pocket.” The party also blamed Akhil Gogoi and Lurinjyoti Gogoi for Congress’s defeat in the previous elections. AIUDF’s statements are expected to trigger fresh political debate within Assam’s opposition space.

Assam Govt Felicitates NCC Cadets on Return from RDC 2026

Guwahati, Feb 02: The Assam government on Sunday organised a grand felicitation ceremony at the Rudra Singha Sports Complex in Dispur to honour NCC cadets who returned from the prestigious Republic Day Camp (RDC) 2026 held in New Delhi. Director of Sports and Youth Welfare, Ankur Bharali, attended the event as chief guest. RDC 2026 proved historic for the NCC North Eastern Region (NER), which sent its largest-ever contingent of 176 cadets to the national camp. Assam accounted for 129 of them, including 45 members of the All Girls Band from St Francis School, Guwahati. Their performances earned widespread recognition and brought pride to the state and the region. The NER contingent won major accolades during the camp. Its original song “Vatan” was adjudged Best Group Song and secured the Cultural Competition Trophy. Twelve cadets marched in the Kartavya Path Parade, six were part of the Special Guard of Honour, and sixteen participated in the Prime Minister’s Rally Parade. A standout moment came when Senior



Under Officer Kuki Rabha was selected as Parade Commander for the Guard of Honour in the Sword Drill. The All Girls Band from St Francis School also received high

praise for their performance.

For individual excellence, Cadet Priya Kumari and Cadet Sragvi Hazarika received the Chief of Army Staff Medallion

● The Assam government held a felicitation ceremony at Rudra Singha Sports Complex to honor NCC cadets returning from the Republic Day Camp (RDC) 2026 in New Delhi.

and the AWWA Young Achievers Award, respectively, while seven other cadets were awarded DGNCC Medallions. GCI Anjali Sathish J, Cadet Sahit Debbarna, Cadet Julbikka Rizwi and UO Kuki Rabha were presented DGNCC Commendation Cards for their distinguished performance. Addressing the cadets, Bharali lauded their discipline, dedication and perseverance, stating that the NCC plays a crucial role in shaping responsible and patriotic citizens. She described their achievements at RDC 2026 as a testament to their hard work and the high standards upheld by the NCC, and encouraged them to continue striving for excellence in service of the nation. The ceremony concluded with congratulatory messages and words of encouragement, urging the cadets to carry forward the values of leadership, service and patriotism in their future endeavours.

Women raise alarm over MGNREGA woes at Mahila Congress meet in Dimapur

Dimapur, Feb 02: Concerns over delayed wages, fewer days of work and the growing exclusion of women workers under the rural employment scheme dominated a meeting of the Nagaland Pradesh Mahila Congress Committee held in Dimapur. The executive and organisational meeting, held at Congress Bhavan, brought together Mahila Congress members from different districts of Nagaland to review the ground situation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Participants said the scheme, which was meant to guarantee paid work to rural households as a legal right, is facing serious problems in implementation, with women workers being the worst affected. Several speakers pointed to long delays in wage payments, saying workers are often forced to wait for weeks and sometimes months to receive their earnings. Members said this has created hardship for poor families who depend on MGNREGA income to meet daily needs such as food, healthcare and children’s



education. They noted that many women hesitate to demand work or follow up on payments due to administrative hurdles and lack of clear information. District-level representatives shared reports from villages, highlighting that the number of workdays available under the scheme has gone down in many areas. According to them, fewer job opportunities have increased financial pressure on rural households, especially those headed by women or dependent on daily wage labour. In tribal and remote areas, women were said to be losing access to work because of procedural issues and lack of timely approvals.

The meeting also expressed concern over what members described as inadequate budget support and complicated procedures. These, they said, have weakened the scheme and reduced its role as a safety net for vulnerable communities. At the end of the meeting, the Mahila Congress resolved to closely monitor the implementation of MGNREGA across Nagaland. The committee said it would document cases of delayed payments and denial of work, conduct awareness programmes on workers’ rights, and approach elected representatives to raise the matter in legislative forums.

Villagers in Ukhrul warn of 72-hour NH-202 blockade over delayed road work and compensation

Ukhrul, Feb 02: Residents of several villages in Ukhrul district have warned of a 72-hour blockade along National Highway-202 if the government does not act on long-pending demands related to road expansion and land compensation. Villagers from Hungpung, Shangshak Phunghon, Shangshak Khullen and Hatha said they plan to block traffic on NH-202 from February 4 to February 6. The protest will cover the stretch between Finch Corner and Choithar Junction, which they say has been left in poor condition for years. According to the residents, the widening of NH-202 began in 2018, but the crucial Finch Corner to Choithar Junction section has seen little to no progress. They also alleged that land compensation has not been paid

to families whose land was acquired for the project, despite the completion of the acquisition process. The villagers said they submitted a written representation to the Ukhrul Deputy Commissioner on January 28, seeking immediate intervention. However, they claimed no concrete response or assurance has been received so far. Calling NH-202 the life-line of the district, the residents said the highway is essential for medical emergencies, daily travel, trade, education and access to basic services. They pointed out that the current condition of the road has made travel difficult and unsafe, especially during the rainy season. They further stated that work under Package-3 and Package-4 has been stalled



for a long time, leading to severe public hardship. Large potholes, damaged stretches and frequent landslides have increased the risk of accidents and disrupted movement. While construction is reportedly ongoing on the Yaingangpokpi to Finch Corner section, villagers said the Finch Corner to Hungpung package was cancelled due to lack of funds. They added that the

tender for the Hungpung to Choithar section has not yet been floated. The villagers warned that the proposed blockade would be withdrawn only if the concerned authorities provide clear assurance and visible progress on the ground within a week. They urged the government to act quickly to avoid disruption and address the long-standing issues affecting the people of Ukhrul.

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Forests Should Be Protected at Any Cost for Our Future

The escalating climate crisis has made one truth undeniable: protecting our forests is non-negotiable. These vital ecosystems are humanity’s frontline defense against environmental catastrophe, and their preservation must become our paramount priority. Forests absorb nearly one-third of global carbon emissions annually, functioning as the planet’s lungs. When we destroy them, we don’t merely lose trees; we unleash stored carbon, accelerate global warming, and trigger feedback loops that threaten civilization itself. The Amazon rainforest now teeters on the brink of becoming a carbon source rather than a sink—a transformation with catastrophic implications. Beyond climate regulation, forests sustain biodiversity that underpins our food systems, provide clean water for billions, prevent soil erosion, and regulate weather patterns. Indigenous communities who have protected these lands for millennia depend on them for survival. Economic arguments against conservation ring hollow when weighed against the astronomical costs of climate disasters, species extinction, and ecosystem collapse. Short-term profits from deforestation pale against the long-term devastation. Our future—and our children’s future—depends on forests. Protection isn’t merely advisable; it’s existential. We must act decisively, investing in conservation, supporting indigenous land rights, and ending deforestation before the cost becomes irreversible.

A test for the government before the polls

It is quite concerning that there is a sharp rise in mob killings and widespread violence across the country ahead of the 13th parliamentary election. The latest report from Manabadhikar Shongskriti Foundation (MSF) shows that deaths from mob violence more than doubled in January, while custodial deaths, recovery of unidentified bodies, election-related clashes, and attacks on minorities also surged. These incidents reveal a serious breakdown in law enforcement and the justice system. According to MSF, at least 21 people were killed in mob beatings in January, up from 10 deaths recorded in December. Meanwhile, 15 people died in prison custody in January, up from nine in December, alongside additional deaths in law enforcement custody. During the same period, 57 unidentified bodies were recovered, compared with 48 in December. MSF describes the overall human rights situation as “alarmingly violent and complex,” noting that the state’s failure to take visible action against mob killings has emboldened perpetrators. Election-related violence has escalated sharply, with four people killed and more than 500 injured in January alone. However, it has been noted that instead of focusing on preventing violence, law enforcement agencies appear increasingly entangled in politically charged case-making. Reportedly, the number of “unnamed accused” in political cases tripled in a month, jumping from 110 to 320. Rights activists warn that this will enable blanket arrests and create fear ahead of the election. January also saw hundreds of incidents of violence against women and children, alongside a sharp rise in attacks on minority communities, including vandalism of temples and idols. Politicians have also voiced serious concerns about the worsening law-and-order situation and the risk of increased election-time violence—concerns that the government must take seriously. It is the state’s responsibility to ensure that no vested interest groups are allowed to disrupt the election or instil fear in the public mind through violence and intimidation. We urge the government to take immediate and decisive action to prevent further occurrence of such incidents. Those involved in mob violence must be identified and prosecuted, custodial deaths should be independently investigated, and perpetrators of recent political killings must be held accountable, regardless of their affiliations. Without proper action, fear and insecurity could discourage voters and affect the turnout rate, undermining the election’s credibility. The government must send a strong message that violence will not be tolerated.

Reading was the key to breaking through the fog of my parents’ dementia

The novelist Ian McEwan has advocated for the extension of assisted dying to people with dementia, commenting on the deeply distressing experience of his own mother: “By the time my mother was well advanced and could not recognise anyone, she was dead. She was alive and dead all at once. It was a terrible thing. And the burden on those closest is also part of the radioactive damage of it all.” My mother, Pamela, a journalist, died of vascular dementia 10 years ago. My father, the football journalist and novelist Brian Glanville, died of Parkinson’s last year after living with the illness for five years. He also had a milder form of dementia. “Radioactive damage” is certainly a vivid descrip-

tion of the impact of caring for someone living with a degenerative illness, but the perception that someone in the last stages of dementia may be “dead” feels wrong when I think of my parents. How are you to know what is happening in someone else’s brain? A great revelation for me in caring for my parents was a discovery I made through reading to them – that in some respects, their brains were unimpaired. Both continued to enjoy being read to until the end of their lives.

They responded positively to hearing stories, poems and novels throughout their illnesses. They retained their ability to comprehend and follow a story, as well as their knowledge of the meaning of obscure words.

On one memorable occasion, when I was reading my father a series of memoirs by Arthur Koestler, one of his favourite writers, he noticed that I wasn’t reading them chronologically. I hadn’t even realised. However, neither of them were able to communicate that they wanted me to read to them. I only discovered this by accident. My father would spend all day sitting silently in a chair, unable to move without assistance or do anything without the help of his devoted, professional care worker, Molly. To a casual visitor, he would appear to be “dead” to the world, apparently vacant. But he wasn’t – it was simply that, as I observed, Parkinson’s and dementia had robbed him of the ability to initiate a conversation

or express a desire. There appears to be some kind of motor in the brain that enables us to connect with the outside world, which his illness had destroyed. It was only when the family and his care worker made the effort to engage with him, asking questions, encouraging him to communicate, that he would begin to be able to connect. And reading to him was one of the key ways that enabled us to do that. It was a bridge to the world that revealed some of his sophisticated cognitive function was entirely unaffected by dementia. I observed exactly the same process with my mother. There was a moment when she appeared to no longer be able to follow a story towards the end of her life. Then I began read-

ing her Doris Lessing’s delightful memoir about cats and once again my mother, a great lover of cats herself, was fully engaged. As a result, I have learned that one must never assume that because someone with a degenerative illness is silent or uncommunicative that means they are unable to understand what is going on around them or are incapable of engaging.

One has to make the effort to see if there is some way of making a connection. There is evidence that my experience is not an isolated incident. Case studies from the charity The Reader’s reading groups show that reading aloud can have a dramatic effect on people living with dementia, triggering fluency and communication in re-

sponse to a story or poem. In an evaluation of The Reader’s work, Philip Davis at the University of Liverpool concluded that reading aloud to people with dementia produced a significant reduction in the severity of their symptoms and contributed to wellbeing. I am, of course, aware that there may be a point, with the devastating degeneration of Alzheimer’s for example, where this kind of connection becomes impossible. For me, “death”, for certain, only comes when someone physically ceases to function. People with dementia need others to advocate for them – and that includes opposing assisted dying. There are, it seems, still pleasures and connections to be made, even as the world dims all around.

Islamic banks merger: Depositors deserve transparency in Shariah decisions



On January 14, a Bangladesh Bank (BB) letter announcing a “haircut” on deposit profits (no profit on deposits) for the five merged Islamic banks for 2024 and 2025 took depositors by surprise. Following widespread reactions, the decision was revised. The profit rate for individual term and scheme deposits has now been set at four percent for those two years, with a provision to adjust any excess profit already distributed against future profit distributions. In support of the previous decision, on January 15, the governor of the central bank had cited the BB’s Shariah Advisory Board (SAB) opinion that no profit can be paid in the event of a loss. He further explained that, as the concerned banks incurred losses during these years, the cancellation of profit is in accordance with Shariah principles and based on the SAB’s recommendations. Later on January 29, he mentioned that, although depositors do not have any entitlement to the profit, it will be provided as *ihسان* (benevolence) by the government. In addition, he announced that, from January 2026, the profit rate will be fixed at 9.5 percent for deposits with a tenure of more than one year, while deposits with a tenure of less than one year will earn nine percent. Since Shariah compliance is the foundation of Islamic banking, an unclear articulation of this claim and a lack of disclosure regarding Shariah decisions may raise concerns. For instance, the cancellation of already distributed profits and the fixing of profits in *mudarabah* contracts are contentious issues. Without clearly outlining the narrative and parameters of these measures, such decisions may lead to unintended consequences, including setting a precedent for Islamic banks to retrospectively revise their profits based on claims of Shariah compliance, thereby increasing

depositors’ risks.

At the outset, it is worth noting that the Islamic banking system in Bangladesh has accumulated various weaknesses over time. Alongside forced takeovers and large-scale irregularities across several banks, persistent deficiencies in product structuring, governance, Shariah compliance mechanisms, and disclosure practices have been evident in many instances. Significant gaps are also apparent in the regulatory and supervisory framework, and laws and regulations generally do not distinguish between interest-based and Islamic banking. The cumulative effect of these shortcomings has created deep structural vulnerabilities in the sector.

Furthermore, gaps in education and public awareness have contributed to widespread misconceptions, leading to the perception that Islamic banking is no different from interest-based banking. Some even view it merely as banking with Shariah labelling. However, Islamic banking is fundamentally distinct in principle. It is grounded in a coherent Shariah-based contractual and governance framework that emphasises the clear identification of ownership, risks, and liabilities of the contracting parties, along with equitable profit-

and-loss sharing, proper accounting, transparency, and disclosure. The primary source of funds for Islamic banks is *mudarabah* deposits. From the Shariah perspective, the fundamental principle is that these deposits are made on the basis that profits from investments made using the deposited amount shall be shared according to an agreed ratio and mechanism. In contrast, any investment loss results in no profit being paid and a reduction in the deposit amount. In other words, there should be a direct link between the investments made from the deposited amount and the profits distributed to the depositors. At the same time, Shariah principles also establish that if a loss arises from the bank’s negligence, misconduct, or breach of contractual terms, it cannot be transferred to depositors. Instead, it must be borne by the bank in its capacity as the investment manager (*mudarib*). The five merged banks are accused of the latter failures. Additionally, there is a common practice among Islamic banks in Bangladesh of allocating additional profit beyond the amount accrued (based on the ratio in the contract) to maintain market competitiveness. It has also been common in Bangladesh for income from certain non-funded services (fees to issue letters of

credit or bank guarantees) to be shared with *mudarabah* depositors. From a general Shariah perspective, once the profit is distributed to the depositors, their rights are established, and reclaiming those profits would mean the bank unilaterally cancelling the depositors’ rights without their consent. Furthermore, in certain *mudarabah* deposits, the profit distributed at the end of one period becomes the capital for the next. In such cases, revising profits from prior periods may directly affect capital in subsequent periods.

Another point merits particular emphasis. *Mudarabah* depositors do not share in a bank’s net profit or loss, nor in its operating profit. Instead, they participate in the profits generated from investments made using their funds, that is, the investment income reflected at the top line of the income statement. The operating expenses, provisioning, and taxes are borne by the bank’s profit portion. Furthermore, Bangladesh Bank’s 2009 Islamic banking guidelines permit Islamic banks to establish an Investment Loss Offsetting Reserve (ILOR) by allocating a portion of depositors’ profits. As participatory accountholders, *mudarabah* depositors have the right to receive detailed information on the utilisation and performance of their funds, as well as the underlying calculations.

Depositors of the five merged banks entered into contracts separately with their respective banks, based on specific product terms. None of them entered into contracts with the newly formed *Sommilito Islami Bank*. The contractual terms for profit distribution across different products at the five banks may vary significantly, although all may be classified as *mudarabah* products. Moreover, two of the five banks reportedly have lower

non-performing assets than the other three. Therefore, a uniform revision of profits raises concerns about whether the rights established under individual *mudarabah* contracts are being properly upheld. Islamic banks primarily invest through deferred sale and lease contracts. Under Shariah, a sale establishes the seller’s right to the sale price, and a lease entitles the owner to rental income. This raises the question of whether the income recognised by the banks in those two years constituted established profit from a Shariah perspective and, if so, on what Shariah basis that entitlement could be withdrawn since the actual payment has not been received yet. The distinction between the right to profit and the availability of cash for withdrawal warrants careful consideration.

There is no dispute that Bangladesh Bank may take decisions in the public interest under its legal mandate. However, when such decisions concern Islamic banks, transparent disclosure on the Shariah approval becomes necessary to protect public confidence. The Shariah decisions must reflect a rigorous methodological process supported by clear evidence and justification. Accordingly, it is hoped that Bangladesh Bank will publish a detailed explanation of its SAB’s opinion, including the information presented to the SAB, the issues they considered, how the “loss” is calculated, the treatment of reserves, the mechanism for adjusting past profits with future profits, the specific Shariah principles applied in different contexts, and the basis for allowing a fixed profit rate for *mudarabah* depositors. Clarification is also needed on whether the decisions taken for the five merged banks are exceptional or may extend to other Islamic banks. Similar levels of disclosure should also be ensured throughout the merger process.

Voters must hold politicians to task over health and education

On January 25, a 20-year-old female patient suffering from kidney and heart complications jumped to her death from the eighth floor of Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The deceased, mother to a four-month-old baby, had been undergoing treatment intermittently for several months, but her family could no longer afford to continue it. Their resources were exhausted. This incident received little media attention. But it should have shaken us because it is not an isolated tragedy, nor is it merely a personal story of despair. It is a clear and devastating signal of the deep insecurity within which the majority of people in Bangladesh are forced to live. Across the country, countless families have been ruined while trying to pay medical bills. Many cannot afford treatment at all. In Bangladesh, illness does not only attack the body; it dismantles entire households. People sell off land, jewellery, livestock, and dignity. And often, even that is not enough. At first glance, the healthcare sector appears to be flourishing. New private hospitals and clinics are emerging everywhere. They are modern, well-equipped, and prohibitively ex-

pensive. However, this surface-level brightness hides a darker reality. Access to healthcare, recognised as a fundamental right and enshrined in our constitution since 1972, has steadily moved further out of reach for ordinary people. Healthcare has become expensive because it has been systematically commercialised. Successive governments, with policy support from institutions such as the World Bank, have promoted privatisation and market-driven reforms. As a result, healthcare is no longer treated as a public service but as a profitable business sector. The state has retreated, and citizens have been left to fend for themselves. The interim government has not initiated any meaningful departure from this trajectory. The latest budget reflects the same pattern as previous governments: minimal allocations for health and education, which is among the lowest not only in South Asia, but globally. Even within these limited allocations, irregularities persist. There is no visible policy shift that recognises healthcare and education as fundamental rights deserving structural reform. This absence of recognition is

glaring, particularly given the promises made in the name of building a discrimination-free Bangladesh. Those commitments find no reflection in budgetary priorities. The incident cited above and others like it are not random acts of desperation.

They are the outcomes of continued systemic failures. As the country moves towards another national election, political parties are making a wide range of promises. Yet, among these, what is conspicuously absent is a clear and firm commitment to making the state fully responsible for ensuring healthcare for all. This silence must be challenged. All political parties should clearly declare that healthcare is a fundamental right, a public good and that the state must bear responsibility for ensuring universal access. This requires a sustained increase in budgetary allocation, as well as the strengthening of public institutions, including government hospitals, clinics, and community health centres. One crucial and often overlooked step towards strengthening public healthcare is accountability at the highest level. There must be a political commitment that the president, prime

minister, ministers, bureaucrats, and all government officials will receive treatment in public hospitals. Such a commitment, or binding requirement, would fundamentally alter the system. If those in power were required to rely on public hospitals, their own urgency would drive institutional reform. Capacity would improve, funding would increase, and long-overdue overhauls would finally receive attention. At present, the opposite happens. Those in power travel abroad for treatment at public expense. Those with money follow suit. And because the powerful do not depend on the domestic system, there is little incentive to fix it. The education sector mirrors this crisis. Here too, privatisation and commercialisation have expanded rapidly. From primary schools to universities, private institutions dominate the landscape. There is visible glamour and growth. But there is no uniform education standard. Instead, inequality has deepened. Those with money can purchase better-quality education. Those without are confined to a deteriorating public system. Public schools, especially those in rural areas, are often in a state

of neglect, struggling with poor infrastructure and limited resources. This has created a sharp divide between public and private education. However, even within the private sector, a wide spectrum of quality can be observed. Multiple layers of inequality have emerged from the various streams of education—religious versus secular education, Bangla medium versus English medium, Bangla version versus English version and so on. Education, instead of reducing inequality, now actively reproduces it. The interim government has not attempted to reverse this trend of increasing inequality in education. On the contrary, a new and dangerous development has taken hold within educational institutions. Teachers, from primary schools to universities, are increasingly living in fear. They are uncertain whether they can teach freely, whether they can speak openly in classrooms, or whether they can properly discuss history, social science, or philosophy. An organised practice of suppressing independent opinion through mob violence has emerged, with no sustained action by the state to counter it.

Airtel and Adobe’s partnership offers 360 million consumers free fast premium

New Delhi: Bharti Airtel announced a partnership with Adobe as it continues to grow its bundled digital products offerings. Under the partnership, Bharti Airtel will offer all its customers free access to Adobe Express Premium for one year, a subscription valued at around Rs 4,000. The offering covers Airtel’s mobile, Wi-Fi and DTH users and can be activated through the Airtel Thanks app without requiring a credit card.

The rollout, described by the companies as a global first, puts Adobe’s AI-powered design tools in the hands of Airtel’s 360 million customers. Adobe Express Premium is positioned as an easy-to-use creation platform aimed at consumers, students, creators and small businesses alike with access to a catalogue of professional templates. For telcos, this approach serves multiple objectives. Bundled digital products help differentiate otherwise similar data plans, deepen customer stickiness and drive sustained usage without directly resorting to price cuts. As connectivity becomes increasingly commoditised, partnerships that embed everyday digital tools into telecom plans are emerging to defend relevance and remain part of consumers’



daily digital lives. The strategy is limited to Airtel and Jio right now, both with mature 5G deployments. Vodafone Idea is currently focusing on its 5G deployment, and building the customer base. In fact, the telco recently raised the price of its post-paid family plans, making them more expensive than Airtel for the same benefits. State-owned BSNL has increased the data allowance on its pre-paid packs, though it is building its 4G userbase for now. AI editing tool added, supports four languagesUsers also get AI-led

features such as instant background removal, custom image generation, one-tap video editing, auto captions and instant resize, alongside premium. The app supports English, Hindi, Tamil and Bengali, widening its presence across geographies and use cases This partnership is about more than technology. It is about empowering millions of Indians with cutting-edge AI tools to create and innovate. With Adobe Express, world-class creative tools are no longer a luxury—they’re a reality for every Indian,” Siddharth

Sharma, chief executive — connected homes and director — marketing, Bharti Airtel, said.

David Wadhvani, president, digital media at Adobe, said, “We are excited to partner with Airtel to bring Adobe Express Premium to millions of people across India for free, accelerating the growth of India’s vibrant creator economy and enabling people to easily produce standout content — whether boosting their careers, growing their businesses or promoting their passions.”The Airtel–Adobe tie-up fits into a growing trend where telcos are bundling digital productivity and AI-led services to stay relevant in a crowded market. While entertainment partnerships once dominated bundling strategies, operators are now experimenting with tools that encourage creation, learning and continuous engagement, rather than passive consumption.Earlier, Airtel announced a similar partnership with Perplexity, offering the generative AI platform’s paid services as part of a bundle. Competitor Reliance Jio announced a partnership with Google which targeted the 18–25-year-old cohort 5G user for bundling of Gemini 3.0.

SBI chief calls for level playing field ahead

New Delhi: A day before the Union Budget, State Bank of India chairman C S Setty batted for parity in tax treatment of returns on equity investments and bank deposits. Setty said there is no disparity in taxation anywhere else in the world, and it is time for India to align with other markets as well.“I think there should be a level playing field for the financial savings instruments,” he told reporters on the sidelines of a bank event in Mumbai.

Maintaining that he does not know the provisions in the budget, Setty acknowledged that there will be fiscal constraints of such a move, but added that there is no “special treatment” for equities anywhere else.He also said that the provisions incentivising equity investments through easier taxation were probably justified at some point in time, but added that, given where we are today, where interest in the riskier equity markets is rising, no such treatment may be required.

At present, returns on deposits attract taxation as per a taxpayer’s tax slab, which can go up to 30 per cent, while returns made on listed equities have lower or concessional rates with a 12.5 per cent taxation on long-term capital gains of over ₹1.25 lakh and 15-20 per cent on short-term capital gains.Bankers have been asking for parity

between the two financial instruments for some time now, and the same has been intensified, especially after facing challenges in deposit mobilisation.Many bankers say savers have become smarter, maintaining minimum balances in bank accounts while choosing to deploy excess money in equities, hoping for better returns. This reduces the resources for lending available with banks, and at times, they are forced to make excess investments in government bonds or also borrow from money markets to cater to credit demand.A senior banking industry official also sought an extension in the tax holiday provision for income booked in the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) beyond the current 10 years to boost activity in Gujarat’s GIFT City.Meanwhile, on the extension of tax holiday in IFSC incomes, the banking sector official said that activity in the GIFT City has not taken off as desired and added that the extension will help as it will prod lenders to book more business in India’s only IFSC.

The banker added that entities enjoy a 50-year tax holiday on incomes from presence in the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), and underlined the need for the Indian government to also look at extending the tax to make the Indian IFSC more active.

Early trading saw a recovery in markets, Sensex up 302

Mumbai: Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded in early trade on Monday driven by value-buying in blue-chip firms, after facing massive drubbing on the Budget day.The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 302 points to 81,024.94 during initial trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 59.25 points to 24,884.70.From the Sensex firms, Adani Ports, Larsen & Toubro, Asian Paints, Bharat Electronics, Eternal, Reliance Industries, Power Grid and HDFC Bank were among the major gainers. Trent, Titan, ITC and Hindustan Unilever were among the laggards.Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday announced measures to boost manufacturing, offered long-term tax incentives for global data centres, and support for agriculture and tourism as she unveiled a Rs 53.5 lakh crore Union Budget for 2026-27, seen as a long-term blueprint for sustaining growth amid rising global risks.Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded in early trade on Monday driven by value-buying in blue-chip firms, after facing massive drubbing on the Budget day.The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 302 points to 81,024.94 during initial trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 59.25 points to 24,884.70. From the Sensex firms, Adani Ports, Larsen & Toubro, Asian Paints, Bharat Electronics, Eternal, Reliance Industries, Power Grid and HDFC Bank were among the major gainers. Trent, Titan, ITC and Hindustan Unilever were among the laggards.Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday announced measures to boost manufacturing, offered long-term tax incentives for global data centres, and support for agriculture and tourism as she unveiled a Rs 53.5 lakh crore

Union Budget for 2026-27, seen as a long-term blueprint for sustaining growth amid rising global risks.Shunning populist measures despite five key states, including West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, heading to polls, the Budget signalled continued fiscal consolidation and infrastructure spending.But a hike in securities transaction tax on equity derivatives rattled equity markets, with key indices plunging as much as 2 per cent in the special Budget-day trading session, before recovering some ground.On Sunday, the BSE benchmark ended at 80,722.94, down 1,546.84 points or 1.88 per cent. The Nifty tanked 495.20 points or 1.96 per cent to settle at 24,825.45.Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth Rs 588.34 crore on Sunday, according to exchange data.In Asian markets, South Korea’s Kospi tumbled over 4 per cent. Japan’s Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai’s SSE Composite index and Hong Kong’s Hang Seng index were also trading lower. US markets ended lower on Friday. On Monday, February 2, 2026, Indian benchmark indices rebounded in early trade, with the Sensex climbing 302 points to 81,024.94 and the Nifty moving closer to 24,900, driven by value-buying in blue-chip firms. This recovery followed a sharp, “massive drubbing” on the previous budget day, while the rupee also gained 37 paise against the US dollar. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 302 points to 81,024.94 during initial trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 59.25 points to 24,884.70. From the Sensex firms, Adani Ports, Larsen & Toubro, Asian Paints, Bharat Electronics, Eternal, Reliance Industries, Power Grid and HDFC Bank were among the major gainers

Nifty above 24,800, Sensex rises 287 points; Ambit Capital says STT impact to be limited

New Delhi: Stock Market Live Updates: Indian stock market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty 50 open on a flat note. The benchmark indices are in the green even as brokerages raise concerns about a possible dent in liquidity after the increase in Securities Transaction Tax (STT) on derivatives.The FY27 budget aligned with expectations, signaling the government’s confidence in the structural resilience of equity markets, read a report by Ambit Capital post budget. A primary policy shift was a sharp increase in STT on derivatives—futures rose by 150% (to 0.05%) & options by 50% (to 0.15%)—aimed at curbing short-term speculation while maintaining existing rates for cash equities. “However, empirical evidence suggests a limited impact on market activity. We maintain a negative outlook for the next 12–18 months, driven by a broad-based growth slowdown that is leading to rising market concentration,” said the brokerage.

Technically, after a sharp intraday dip in the second half of the day, the market trimmed some losses. On daily charts, the Nifty 50 has formed a long bearish candle, and it is currently trading below the 200-day SMA (Simple Moving Average), which is largely negative. “We are of the view that the short-term market texture is volatile, and volatility is likely to continue in the near future. Hence, level-based trading would be the ideal strategy for day traders,” said Shrikant Chouhan, Head Equity Research at Kotak SecuritiesInvestors will also be looking at the global cues post-budget. Ahead of opening, market participants were monitoring trends across Asian markets and Wall Street. Movements in the rupee and changes in commodity prices are being watched during the trading session.

Union Budget 2026–27The Union Budget 2026–27 was presented on Sunday, February



1, by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. A significant change for investors is the proposed increase in Securities Transaction Tax on derivatives, with the rate on futures rising from 0.02% to 0.05% and revised levies on options to cover broader transactions. The Budget also introduces the Income Tax Act, 2025, which will replace the current tax law from April 1, 2026, aiming to simplify compliance and make filing easier for individual taxpayersFor individual investors, several provisions could impact financial planning and tax liability. Tax Collection at Source on overseas travel, education, and medical remittances has been reduced to around 2% under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme. The Budget also provides a one-time window for disclosure of previously undisclosed foreign assets, makes interest from motor accident compensation tax-free, and cuts customs du-

ties on certain personal imports and medicines. Clarifications on capital gains exemptions for Sovereign Gold Bonds and extended deadlines for revised returns are other measures aimed at easing compliance and reducing procedural hurdles for taxpayers.“The Union Budget of FY27 managed a fine balancing act of maintaining capex growth at 12% despite revenue pressures, with a surge in short-term borrowings the only negative. The Nifty corrected 2% on Budget Day, and we now see limited downside (1-2%) from current levels. A reversal of the recent correction, however, is heavily dependent on the arrest of the weakness in the rupee. The recent gold price crash, to that extent, is good news – as would be an early conclusion of the India-US trade deal,” said Seshadri Sen, Head of Research and strategist at Emkay Global Financial Services.

Tax cut for foreign tour packages in Budget 2026-27 clouds PM Modi’s ‘marry in India

New Delhi: The government’s decision to reduce the tax collected at source (TCS) for foreign tour packages is likely to interfere with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s efforts to encourage couples to opt for destination weddings in India.Presenting the Union budget for 2026-27 in the Lok Sabha, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said: “I propose to reduce TCS rate on the sale of overseas tour programme package from the current 5 per cent and 20 per cent (under a slab-based system) to 2 per cent without any stipulation of amount.” “...If we celebrate marriages on Indian soil, amid the people of India, the country’s money will remain in the country. The people of the country will get the opportunity to render some service at your wedding... even poor people will tell their children about that occasion...” The government’s decision to reduce the tax collected at source (TCS) for foreign tour packages is likely to interfere with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s efforts to encourage couples to opt for destination weddings in India.Presenting the Union budget for 2026-27 in the Lok Sabha, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said: “I propose to reduce TCS rate on the sale of overseas tour programme package from the current 5 per cent and 20 per cent (under a slab-based system) to 2 per cent without any stipulation of amount.”Modi had in Mann ki Baat on November 26, 2023, flagged the trend of foreign destination weddings.“...If we celebrate marriages on Indian soil, amid the people of India, the country’s money will remain in the country. The people of the country will get the opportunity to render some service



at your wedding... even poor people will tell their children about that occasion...”In the tourism budget, the allocation for “domestic promotion and publicity, including market development assistance” has been brought down to zero from ₹136.9 crore. The budget for “capacity building for service providers” has been doubled from ₹25 crore to ₹50 crore, ostensibly “for upskilling 10,000 guides in 20 iconic tourist sites through a standardised, high-quality 12-week training course in hybrid mode, in collaboration with an Indian Institute of Management”.Other proposals to boost domestic tourism include a sea-

plane scheme and a National Destination Digital Knowledge Grid to digitally document all places of significance across the country, including cultural and spiritual locales. The government also proposes to develop mountain trails in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir; Araku Valley on the Eastern Ghats and Podhigai Malai on the Western Ghats.

Sitharaman said key turtle nesting sites and turtle trails would be developed in the coastal areas of Odisha, Karnataka and Kerala, besides bird watching trails along the Pulicat Lake in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Cybersecurity threats are highlighted by census

New Delhi: As the government prepares for the next population census, cyber security is emerging as a central operational concern, with experts maintaining that as much as a quarter of the total budget may need to be allocated to securing digital systems.The shift to app-based data collection for the first time, replacing paper schedules with mobile and web platforms, has significantly expanded the risk surface, exposing the exercise to threats ranging from data leaks to system disruption.

The scale of the exercise — covering more than 1.4 billion people — means cybersecurity is no longer a back-end technology issue but a core governance challenge. With millions of enumerators using hand-held devices and temporary logins, the census will involve one of the largest real-time data collection exercises undertaken anywhere in the world. Any breach or prolonged disruption could undermine the integrity of official statistics and erode public trust in one of the country’s most important administrative exercises.Security experts point out that the first layer of defence lies at the device and application level. Enumerators will rely on smartphones, tablets and hand-held devices, making endpoint security critical. Data must be encrypted at the point of collection and remain protected during transmis-

sion and storage.“Common best practices include hardened device configurations, regular updates, and the use of multi-layered mobile security and anti-malware solutions.

In scenarios where enumerators use personal devices, periodic checks for basic cyber hygiene are generally part of the overall risk management approach,” Jaydeep Ruparelia, CEO of cybersecurity firm Infopercept, said.“Key measures include end-to-end encryption, multi-layered security protocols for mobile applications and web portals, and stringent access controls. For such a critical initiative, around 25–30% of the overall budget should be earmarked for cybersecurity,”

Chetan Jain, founder and managing director at Inspira Enterprises, told Fe. Unlike earlier censuses, where physical forms limited exposure, the digital format requires protection across the entire data lifecycle — from the moment information is captured in the field to its storage, processing and eventual use. Applications built for the census must follow security-by-design principles, with extensive testing and safeguards to ensure that data is automatically deleted from devices once successfully transmitted. This reduces the risk of data exposure in the event of device loss or compromise.

Dalai Lama expresses ‘gratitude humility’



Beijing: The Dalai Lama said he was grateful for his first Grammy after winning the top music industry award for audio book, narration and storytelling.The 90-year-old Buddhist spiritual leader, who lives in exile in India, was announced as the winner at the Grammys ceremony in Los Angeles on Monday for his book Meditations: The Reflections of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.“I receive this recognition with gratitude and humility,” he said in a post on social media. “I don’t see it as something personal, but as a recognition of our shared universal responsibility.”Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama attends a long-life prayer offering ceremony at the Main Tibetan Temple in McLeod Ganj, near Dharamsala on 5 July, 2025.Dalai Lama celebrates his 90th birthday, triggering geopolitical questions for the future

Read morThe Dalai Lama – lauded worldwide for his tireless campaign for greater autonomy for his Tibetan homeland, which Beijing says is an integral part of China – also said: “I truly believe that peace, compassion, care for our environment, and an understanding of the oneness of humanity are essential for the collective well-being of all eight billion human beings.”

His audio book features artists such as RufusWainwright, who accepted the award on behalf of the spiritual leader, and Maggie Rogers.The Dalai Lama was 23 when he fled the Tibetan capital, Lhasa, in fear for his life after Chinese troops crushed an uprising in 1959. He has never returned. The Nobel peace prize laureate insists he has many more years to live, but Tibetans are preparing for an inevitable future without him.Tibetan Buddhists believe he is the 14th reincarnation of a spiritual leader first born in 1391.Communist China condemns the Dalai Lama as a separatist rebel and said

last year that it must approve his eventual successor. The Dalai Lama says only his India-based office has that right. The reciprocal market access in EU market will also open up opportunities for India made automobiles to access EU market.India’s agricultural and processed food sectors are poised for a transformative boost under the India–EU FTA, creating a level playing field for Indian farmers and agrarian enterprises. Key commodities such as tea, coffee, spices, fresh fruits and vegetables, and processed foods will gain enhanced competitiveness, strengthening rural livelihoods, promoting inclusive growth, and reinforcing India’s position as a trusted global supplier. India has prudently safeguarded sensitive sectors, including dairy, cereals, poultry, soymeal, certain fruits and vegetables, balancing export growth with domestic priorities.Beyond tariff liberalisation, the FTA provides measures to tackle non-tariff barriers through strengthened regulatory co-operation, greater transparency, and streamlined customs, Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) procedures, and Technical Barriers to Trade disciplines.Through CBAM provisions, commitments have been secured including a forward-looking most-favoured nation assurance extending flexibilities if any granted to third countries under the regulation, enhanced technical cooperation on recognition of carbon prices, recognition of verifiers, as well as financial assistance and targeted support to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and comply with emerging carbon requirements.Services being dominant and faster-growing part of both economies will trade more in future. Certainty of market access, non-discriminatory treatment, focus on digitally delivered services, ease of mobility will provide boost to India’s services exports.

Trump news at a glance: Kennedy Center to close; Epstein case ‘over’, attorney general

Beijing: Donald Trump, who remains embroiled in tensions surrounding ICE’s presence in Minnesota, as well as scrutiny over the justice department’s latest release of the Jeffrey Epstein files, has made another announcement on Sunday evening: the temporary closure of the John F Kennedy Center in Washington DC.Trump, who overhauled the center’s leadership at the start of his second term and renamed it to include his own name, described the center as “tired, broken, and dilapidated,” adding that it has been in “bad condition, both financially and structurally for many years”.The center’s closure comes as a growing number of performers cancel their shows in response to Trump’s shakeup. Last week, Philip Glass, the celebrated US composer, announced his withdrawal of the world premiere of his latest symphony, Lincoln, at the center, explaining that the “values of the Kennedy Center today are in direct conflict with the message of the symphony.”Trump announced a two-year closure of the Kennedy Center, citing construction needs to make the “finest performing arts facility of its kind, anywhere in the world”.Writing on Truth Social on Sunday evening, Trump added that the center’s closure will pave way for a “new and spectacular entertainment complex”. The announcement comes as a slew of cancellations from performers in recent months, as well as record low ticket sales amid backlash towards Trump’s overhaul of the center’s leadership. The deputy US attorney general, Todd Blanche, the point person on the Trump administration’s Epstein files release, told ABC News on Sunday that prosecutors’ review of the Jeffrey Epstein-Ghislaine Maxwell sex-trafficking case “is over”. While Blanche acknowledged “there’s a lot of horrible photographs that appear to be taken by Mr Epstein or by people around him ... that doesn’t allow us necessarily to prosecute somebody”.Blanche’s comments took aim at survivors who met Friday’s release with calls demanding further accountability for the alleged clients of Epstein and Maxwell. Government documents have identified the two federal officers who fatally shot Alex Pretti in Minneapolis as Jesus Ochoa, a border patrol agent, and Raymundo Gutierrez, an officer with Customs and Border Protection (CBP), according to ProPublica.According to those records, Ochoa, 43, and Gutierrez, 35, were the agents who fired their weapons during the confrontation last weekend that resulted in Pretti’s death. The shooting sparked widespread demonstrations and renewed demands for criminal inquiries into federal immigration enforcement actions. Immediately following Pretti’s killing, the Trump administration repeatedly pushed false claims about the shooting. A five-year-old boy and his father were back in Minneapolis on Sunday after being released from a Texas immigration detention center where they



were held for more than a week, according to US House representative Joaquin Castro.

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

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

Stenvik said that another adult who lived in the home was outside during the encounter and

pleaded to take custody of the child so he would not be detained, but officers refused.

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

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

“We want all children to be released from detention centers and hope for the reunification of families who have been unjustly separated.”According to an analysis of records obtained by the Deportation Data Project, ICE booked about 3,800 minors into immigrant family detention from January to October 2025. The number of children currently in migrant detention centers remains unclear. “Liam’s release is an important development, and we hope it will lead to positive developments for other families as well, including our other four students who are being held at the Dilley facility in Texas,” reads a statement by the Columbia Heights public school district spokesperson. “We want all children to be released from detention centers and hope for the reunification of families who have been unjustly separated.” Amid the release of the preschooler and his father, the school district said on Sunday that they were “grateful for the overwhelming number of well-wishes and offers of support from people around the globe”.

UK should consider resuming talks on EU defence pact, Starmer says

Beijing: The UK should consider re-entering talks for a defence pact with the EU, Keir Starmer has said, arguing that Europe needs to “step up and do more” to defend itself in uncertain times.The prime minister signalled that he wanted to work more collaboratively with other European countries to increase defence spending and build up military capability, and doing so through the EU’s scheme is one option available.Talks for the UK to join the EU’s €150bn (£130bn) security action for Europe (Safe) defence fund collapsed in November 2025 amid claims the bloc had set too high a price on entry, with France blamed for the breakdownHowever, there is understood to be greater appetite on all sides for a deal on the UK to join a future round of Safe, especially since Donald Trump’s threats to take over Greenland and criticism of Nato. Asked on his trip to China whether there was a case for the UK going back into a second-round Safe defence pact if the price was right, Starmer said: “Europe, including the UK, needs to do more on security and defence ... that’s an argument I’ve been making for many months now.“We’ve got to step up and do more. It’s not only President Trump who thinks Europe needs to do more but other presidents as well. I think the same. That’s why we’ve made commitments to greater spending. I think we need to go beyond that.”The Guardian revealed on Friday that the UK and EU were exploring the prospect of new talks on closer defence cooperation. Maroš Šefčovič, the EU’s trade commissioner, is due in London for talks on Monday, when trade, energy and fisheries will be on the agenda.While defence is not currently on the agenda for that meeting, there may be further opportunities for the EU and UK to discuss defence at a political summit convened



by Marco Rubio, the US secretary of state, to discuss critical minerals in Washington on Wednesday, with the Foreign Office sending a minister. Starmer wants to build on defence deals struck with European allies in recent months, and more bilateral deals is another option on the table. Norway has agreed a £10bn deal for anti-submarine warships that will be built in the UK, while Britain has agreed to sell 20 Typhoon fighter jets to Turkey for £8bn“I do think on spend, capability and cooperation we need to do more together. I’ve made the argument and that should require us to look at schemes like Safe and others to see whether there is a way in which we can work more closely together,” Starmer told reporters.“Whether it’s Safe or other initiatives, it makes good sense for Europe in the widest sense of the word – which is the EU plus other European countries – to work more closely together. That’s what I’ve been advocating and I hope to make some progress on that.”The

Safe fund is made up of money the European Commission raises on credit markets, which is then lent to member states over 45 years. They can buy everything from ammunition to drones and missiles.The aim of the fund is to enable the EU to build up a defence capability quickly, something given an extra urgency by the lack of support from Trump and his regular threats over Nato.The UK is not eligible to apply for a Safe loan, but if it joined the programme under third-country rules then UK companies could tender for more procurement contracts to provide arms to the EU, boosting the British defence industry. It is understood that the EU had demanded that the UK contribute about €2bn to the fund and that the British felt a contribution in the hundreds of millions was more appropriate. Starmer is facing pressure from within his own party for closer ties with the EU. He has rejected the idea of rejoining the customs union, as the UK would have to rip up trade deals

with other countries, but the prime minister is known to be keen on further alignment with the single market.EU relations are increasingly becoming a dividing line between Labour and Nigel Farage’s Reform UK, though the government has ruled out the UK going back into the single market or customs union or bringing back free movement.In China, Starmer criticised the Reform leader’s promises on Brexit. “I wouldn’t listen too much to what Nigel Farage has to say about this. It is absolutely clear the botched deal we got from the last government has damaged our economy,” he said.

“Which is why we have to reset that relationship and do want to get closer on defence and security, on energy, on emissions and trade ... when we get to the summit this year we will not only follow up on the 10 strands that we set out at last year’s summit, we’ll also want to get closer with an iterative process.”

Russian drone attack on bus carrying

Russian: Drone attack on a bus carrying mine workers in Ukraine’s central-eastern Dnipropetrovsk region has killed at least 12 people, officials said.The bus was driving about 40 miles (65km) from the frontline, according to police. Images published by Ukraine’s state emergency service showed what appeared to be an empty bus, its side windows shattered and windscreens hanging from the front.An old woman with a shopping bag crosses a road lined with market stalls with netting draped over it.It’s not just about surviving’: the Ukrainian frontline city where life goes on under coverRead moreDTEK, Ukraine’s largest private energy company, said those killed were travelling from one of its mining facilities after they had finished their shift.“The enemy drone hit near a company shuttle bus in the Pavlograd district. Preliminarily, 12 people were killed and seven more were wounded,” the head of the regional military administration, Oleksandr Ganzha, said on Telegram.An earlier drone attack in the region overnight killed a man and a woman in the central city of Dnipro, Ganzha said in an earlier post. A drone also struck a maternity hospital in the southern Zaporizhzhia region on Sunday, wounding at least seven people including two women receiving a medical examination.The attacks came the same day a unilateral reduction in Russian strikes on Ukraine announced by the US president, Donald Trump, was due to end. Trump said on Thursday that Vladimir Putin had agreed to stop strikes on Kyiv and “various towns” during cold weather.The terms of his agreement with the Russia president were not clear, however, and the Kremlin did not link the alleged truce to the weather.A second round of talks between Russian, Ukrainian and US officials on a US-drafted plan to end the nearly four-year Ukraine war will begin on Wednesday, Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said on Sunday.Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner Ukraine war briefing: US reports ‘constructive’ peace

talks with Russia as Zelenskyy pushes for ‘results’

Read morOne of Putin’s top envoys, Kirill Dmitriev, on Saturday held surprise talks with US officials in Florida without Ukraine. Among those US officials were Trump’s envoy Steve Witkoff, the treasury secretary, Scott Bessent, Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner, and White House senior adviser Josh Gruenbaum.Neither the Kremlin nor the US have confirmed the new dates for talks, which Zelenskyy said would be 4 and 5 February in Abu Dhabi

The US says it is close to brokering a deal to end the conflict – Europe’s deadliest since the second world war – but neither Moscow nor Kyiv have been able to find a compromise on the key issue of territory.Russia, which occupies about 20% of its neighbour, is pushing for full control of Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk region as part of any deal. It has threatened to take it by force if talks fail.Ukraine has warned ceding ground will embolden Moscow and that it will not sign a deal that fails to deter Russia from invading again. Many Ukrainians find the idea of surrendering territory their soldiers have defended for years unconscionable.The first round of talks on the US plan, held in Abu Dhabi last Friday and Saturday, failed to yield a breakthrough. At least 12 people have been killed in a Russian drone attack on a bus carrying miners in Ukraine’s southeastern Dnipropetrovsk region, the country’s energy minister said.

“Today, the enemy carried out a cynical and targeted attack on energy sector workers in the Dnipro region,” Minister of Energy Denys Shmyhal posted on Telegram on Sunday “As a result of the terrorist attack, 12 mine workers were killed and seven more were injured.”Police said the attack took place in the city of Ternivka. Footage posted by the State Emergencies Service showed a charred bus with shattered windows that had veered off the road. Energy firm DTEK said in a statement that the killed and wounded were its employees returning from a shift.

10 Ancient Temple Towns Of India Every Traveller Should Explore

India, often called the “land of temples,” is home to countless sacred towns where history, spirituality, and architecture converge. These temple towns are not just places of worship but living museums of culture, tradition, and artistry. For travelers seeking to immerse themselves in India’s spiritual heritage, here are 10 ancient temple towns that are truly worth visiting.

Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh: Varanasi, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, is revered as the spiritual capital of India. The ghats along the Ganges, especially Dashashwamedh Ghat, come alive with evening aarti ceremonies. The Kashi Vishwanath Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is the centerpiece of devotion here, drawing millions of pilgrims each year.

Madurai, Tamil Nadu: Known as the “Athens of the East,” Madurai boasts the magnificent Meenakshi Amman Temple, an architectural marvel with towering gopurams adorned with thousands of colorful sculptures. The temple town has been a hub of Tamil culture and literature for centuries, making it a must-visit for both devotees and history enthusiasts.

Puri, Odisha: Puri is famous for the Jagannath Temple, one of the Char Dham pilgrimage sites. The annual Rath Yatra, where colossal chariots carry the deities through the streets, attracts millions of devotees. Beyond its religious significance, Puri’s coastal charm and vibrant traditions make it a fascinating destination.

Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu: Often called the “City of Thousand Temples,” Kanchipuram is renowned for its ancient shrines dedicated to both Shiva and Vishnu. The Ekambareswarar Temple and Kailasanathar Temple showcase Dravidian architecture at its finest. The town is also famous for its silk sarees, blending spirituality with craftsmanship.

Dwarka, Gujarat: Dwarka, associated with Lord Krishna, is one of the Char Dham pilgrimage sites. The Dwarkadhish Temple, perched on the banks of the Gomti River, is a striking example of Hindu temple architecture. The town’s mythological significance and coastal beauty make it a unique blend of devotion and exploration.

Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh: Ujjain is home to the Mahakaleswar Temple, one of the 12 Jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva. The temple town is also a major site for the Kumbh Mela, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world. Its rich history as a center of learning and astronomy adds depth to its spiritual aura.

Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu: Rameswaram, another Char Dham site, is closely linked to the Ramayana. The Ramanathaswamy Temple, with its longest temple corridor in the world, is a marvel of architecture. Surrounded by pristine beaches, the town offers both spiritual solace and natural beauty.

Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh: Tirupati is synonymous with the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple, one of the richest and most visited temples in the world. Devotees throng here to seek blessings from Lord Venkateswara, and the temple’s grandeur reflects centuries of devotion and patronage.

Somnath, Gujarat: Somnath Temple, another Jyotirlinga shrine, has a history of destruction and reconstruction, symbolizing resilience and faith. Located on the Arabian Sea coast, the temple town offers breathtaking views alongside its spiritual significance. Its legends and architecture make it a cornerstone of Hindu pilgrimage.

Hampi, Karnataka: Though best known for its ruins of the Vijayanagara Empire, Hampi is also a temple town of immense significance. The Virupaksha Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, has been in continuous worship for centuries. The town’s blend of historical grandeur and spiritual devotion makes it a UNESCO World Heritage Site worth exploring.



Why do we yawn? It's almost certainly not for the reason you think

All vertebrates yawn, or indulge in a behaviour that’s at least recognisable as yawn-adjacent. Sociable baboons yawn, but so do semi-solitary orangutans. Parakeets, penguins and crocodiles yawn – and so, probably, did the first ever jawed fish. Until relatively recently, the purpose of yawning wasn’t clear, and it’s still contested by researchers and scientists. But this commonality provides a clue to what it’s really all about – and it’s probably not what you’re expecting. “When I poll audiences and ask: ‘Why do you think we yawn?’, most people suggest that it has to do with breathing or respiration and might somehow increase oxygen in the blood,” says Andrew Gallup, a professor in behavioural biology at Johns Hopkins University. “And that’s intuitive because most yawns do have this clear respiratory component, this deep inhalation of air. However, what most people don’t realise is that that hypothesis has been explicitly tested and shown to be false.” To test the idea that we yawn to bring in more oxygen or expel excess carbon dioxide, studies published in the 1980s manipulated the levels of both gases in air inhaled by volunteers – and they found that while changes did significantly affect other respiratory processes, they didn’t influence the regularity of yawns. There also doesn’t seem to be any systematically measurable difference in the yawning behaviour of people suffering from illnesses associated with breathing and lung function – which is what you would expect if yawns were respiration-related. This, more or less, was where Gallup came to the subject. “When I was pursuing my honours thesis, my adviser at the time said, well, why not study yawning, because nobody knows why we do it?” he says. “That was intriguing – we knew it had to serve some underlying physiological function. So I started to examine the motor action pattern it involves – this extended gaping of the jaw that’s accompanied by this deep inhalation of air, followed by a rapid closure of the jaw and a quicker exhalation. And it occurred to me that this likely has important circulatory consequences that are localised to the skull.” This, in fact, seems to be exactly what’s happening: several reviews of the medical literature suggest that yawning increases arterial blood supply to the cranium, and then venous return (the rate at which blood flows back from the head to the heart). “We can think of the gaping of the jaw as a localised stretch, similar to stretching muscles in other areas of the body,” says Gallup. “In the same way that stretching helps circulation in those extremities, yawns seem to do the same for the skull.” From here, Gallup and his fellow researchers started to develop the idea that yawning helps regulate heat in and around the skull. Your brain’s temperature is mainly determined by three variables – the rate of arterial blood travelling to the brain, the temperature of that blood, and metabolic heat production that occurs within the brain, based on neuronal activity – and yawning, theoretically, can alter the first two. When you yawn, you take in a deep breath of air that moves across the moist surfaces of your mouth, tongue and nasal passages, a bit like air flowing across a car radiator – carrying heat away through evaporation and convection. Studies seem to bear this out: ambient temperature has a pretty predictable effect on yawn frequency, which goes up when it’s just slightly too toasty (when it gets really hot, the air temperature is too high for the radiator effect to work, so other cooling mechanisms such as sweating kick in and yawning settles down again) and down when it’s colder. This also seems to explain why certain medical conditions are associated with excess yawning: either the conditions themselves, or the drugs used to treat them, cause elevated brain or body temperature. The “neuronal activity” explanation is also borne out by animal studies – the mammals and birds with more neurons in their brains yawn for longer durations, irrespective of the size of their actual brains. This isn’t to say that other hypotheses have been entirely put to rest. The one best supported by the evidence is the “arousal change” theory: basically, that yawning helps the brain transition between states – from sleeping to wakefulness, boredom to alertness, and so on. “One possibility is that yawning helps the brain switch between using its ‘default mode network’ – the regions associated with daydreaming, recalling memories and self-reflection – and the attentional network responsible for preparing the body for action,” says the historian of medicine Dr Olivier Walusinski, who has authored several papers on the subject. “One proposed mechanism for this would be that it helps with the circulation of cerebrospinal fluid, the liquid that surrounds and cushions your brain and spinal cord.” It could be the case, in fact, that this function evolved first, with the thermoregulation effect emerging as a useful after-effect: something we’ll have better evidence for as studies are done on a wider array of animals. It could also be that the two explanations are directly related: these state changes probably mean changes in brain activity and temperature, meaning a need for enhanced blood flow and neural cooling. This would explain why you yawn when you’re bored: your brain’s activity level may upshift as it starts to think of ways to move you into a more stimulating situation, and so do its circulatory needs. Wait a minute, though: what about contagious yawning? We’re all aware of the phenomenon of one person in a room – or even on a TV screen – taking a gulp of air, only for everyone else to do the same. Some researchers have suggested that this sort of infectious behaviour brings groups together, perhaps because it’s a hard-to-fake signal of sleepiness, boredom or vigilance – though it’s unlikely to be yawning’s main purpose, as plenty of solitary animals are regular yawners. “It could be that contagious yawning doesn’t have a function and is just a byproduct of advanced social cognitive mechanisms within highly social species,” says Gallup. To put that slightly more simply, lots of animals – including humans – have various ways of improving their empathy, including “mirror neurons”, which fire when an individual performs an action and when they see someone else perform a similar action. It might be, then, that seeing someone else yawn simply makes your mirror neurons kick in, prompting you to yawn yourself. But contagious yawning may also play a role in group coordination through mechanisms related to the arousal change theory: helping every animal in the group switch states from relaxed to active. One 2021 study that tested this effect in lions found that other behaviour can be contagious among yawners, so if one lying lion yawns and then gets up for a walk, other yawners follow. Contagious yawning may also promote group vigilance: if one baboon in a troop triggers others to yawn, they may all become more alert. This may also work the other way around – helping to downregulate arousal before sleep. So, in other words: yawning’s probably good for you, and it’s probably helping your brain function better.

ENTERTAINMENT

Celina Jaitley Regarding Peter Haag’s 15-Year-Old Abusive Marriage



Mumbai: In November of last year, Celina Jaitley filed for divorce from her husband, Peter Haag, in a Mumbai Andheri court, citing abuse and domestic violence. She used to frequently post adorable photos of herself and her kids on social media, so her post was unexpected.Celina revealed in her most recent social media post how her love letters evolved into acts of perseverance and survival—to mend shattered things and heal scars. She said that her decision to remain in an abusive marriage for almost ten years was motivated by

love and hope rather than weakness. Her Instagram post was captioned “Broken: Reality Behind All Things Beautiful—A Marriage Lived in Letters of Love, Pain & Survival.”I am grateful to the thousands of people who keep telling me their stories. What is the most important thing I’ve learned in my fifteen-year marriage, you asked?Celina started, “My biggest lesson is that you cannot change someone by loving them more. Love cannot fix what is already broken.”Celina talked on how, in the midst of confusion and disorder, she found comfort in written words. ”For all who follow my writings, you know how I express myself best. Something I used whenever I couldn’t talk, whenever I wasn’t heard. Writing helped me get through the many low points of my incredibly challenging marriage. I have always communicated myself most clearly and honestly through written words. I used letters to try to boost my husband’s self-esteem, express my love,

reiterate my commitment, and show how sincerely I handled my marriage and my family.”These letters were an attempt to preserve the relationship, to heal fractures, and to hold the marriage together for the sake of my husband and our children,” she said. Talking about the transformation in her work—which portrayed the terrible reality—she wrote: “Over time, however, the nature of my writing changed. My letters began to mirror the reality I was living. They talked about the mistreatment I was seeing and experiencing, how my voice was being silenced repeatedly, how I was not being heard, and how I was consistently blamed. I wrote about being held responsible, over and again, for the hurt, the conflict, and the abuse directed towards me. These texts were documents of abuse, not inconsistencies of it. Peter Haag filed for divorce in an Austrian court last year, according to Celina’s attorney. According to reports, he took this action after Celina discovered that homes in Vi-

enna were being sold without her knowledge. Haag is trying to demonstrate that Celina has no title to any of their possessions in the Austrian lawsuit. Additionally, the attorney claimed that Peter is holding Celina responsible for their marriage’s dissolution. While Celina had asked him to seek a mutual-consent divorce for the sake of their children, Peter was not willing to oblige. The actress, represented by the law firm Karanjawala & Co., sought ₹10 lakh in monthly maintenance and wanted the court to stop Haag from entering her Mumbai apartment. Additionally, she has requested custody of their three children, who are presently residing in Austria with Haag. In addition, she has claimed ₹50 crore as compensation for loss of wages allegedly caused by her husband.Jaitley and Haag married in 2010. In March 2012, they welcomed twin boys into the world. Five years later, she gave birth to a second set of twin boys, one of whom died due to a hypoplastic heart.

Shefali Bagga Responds to Trolls Regarding Yuzvendra Chahal



Mumbai: Bigg Boss 13 celebrity Shefali Bagga lashed out at trolls for generating AI-generated posters of her with cricketer Yuzvendra Chahal and branded such actions “disgusting” and “shameful”. On Saturday, Bagga posted one of the posters to her Instagram account. It showed her with the cricket player, his ex-wife Dhanashree Verma, and RJ Mahvash, who had previously been connected to the player. This is disgusting! It’s disgusting how these trolls handle girls. Get a life. “Classic illustration of our

mindset,” Bagga wrote. Chahal had previously commented on one such viral poster, saying, “2-3 reh gai admin, do better research next time.”Many users suspected Bagga and Chahal were dating after they were seen leaving a restaurant last month, but neither of them acknowledged it.Chahal was formerly wed to Dhanashree Verma. The couple declared their divorce in 2025 after getting married in 2020.Bagga, meantime, made her big break in 2019 after participating in the reality series Bigg Boss 13.

After Saif Ali Khan and Amrita Singh’s split, Sharmila Tagore felt “doubly deprived”

Mumbai: Sharmila Tagore and her son, actor Saif Ali Khan, once made an appearance on Karan Johar’s discussion show Koffee With Karan 8.Regarding Saif Ali Khan and his ex-wife Amrita Singh, host Karan Johar stated during the program, “There is one place that he reached and never left.” It was the home of Amrita Singh. You never left when he arrived there for the first time.

Karan Johar continued, “And Soha (Saif’s sister) tell me that eventually when it culminated into marriage, she was 13 and a classmate told her, your brother just got married.”

When discussing the marriage, Saif Ali Khan remarked, “I remember telling my mother.” Sharmila Tagore stated, “Actually I was visiting Mumbai for something and Saif came to me, to meet me. He then told me, “I have something to tell you.” And then of course, I don’t know what I was doing but I was silent and he says Amma you’re quiet and your colour is changing and you are looking different. We will discuss it later, I informed him. After he departed, I called



Tiger and told him. He remained silent for a while, and we ended the conversation there. I then expressed my want to meet her. I contacted Amrita the next day, and we drank tea and talked, but I was still really stunned.” Karan Johar questioned Saif, “How does one suddenly get married at that age?” “It was kind of like running away from home in a sense,” the actor retorted. I don’t recall a lot of things happening, but I did discover a sense of comfort and a wonderful feeling, and I believed I could turn that into a home.” Saif and Amrita Singh have many similarities, according to Sharmila Tagore. They were quite similar to each other. They were both hilarious. Every time they spoke, there was a lot of laughter, imitations

Arun Govil denies that Prabhas’s Adipurush and Ranbir Kapoor’s Ramayana are comparable



Mumbai: In Nitesh Tiwari’s next two-part film, Arun Govil, well known for playing Lord Ram in Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayan, will return to the epic as King Dashrath. The actor will portray Lord Ram’s father, played by Ranbir Kapoor, in the Ramayana. Fans

are already drawing comparisons between Ranbir’s portrayal and Arun’s legendary performance in the 1980s TV series after seeing the first glimpse of the movie. ”Comparisons are always made when a standard is set, and no one should feel bad that I’m being

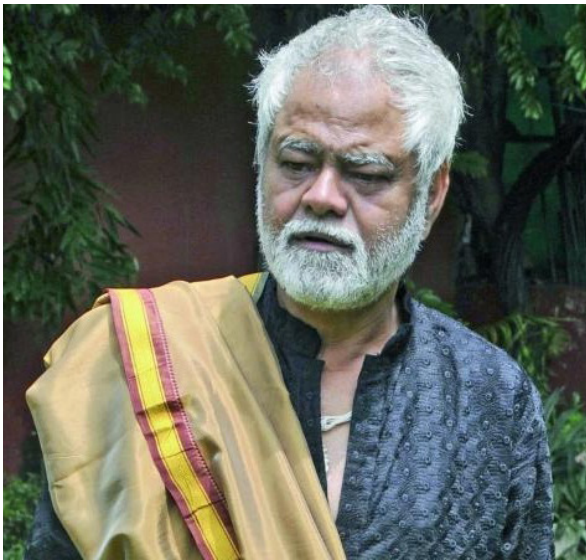
compared,” Arun said at the FWICE and Cine Artiste Welfare Trust event. I feel that in order to portray the role of God, you should appear like that. The appearance is crucial. People should see God in you and say, ‘God can be like that.’” The actor further denied any similarities between the 2022 movie Adipurush and Nitesh Tiwari’s Ramayana. “There is a lot of difference between Ramayana and Adipurush,” he remarked. Arun Govil talked about how enjoyable it was to work on the movie. “I completed the movie a long time ago. The experiences from that film, and with that unit, are beneficial for me,” he concluded. In addition to Ranbir Kapoor, Yash from KGF plays Ravana, Sai Pallavi plays Goddess Sita, Sunny Deol plays Lord Hanuman, and Ravie Dubey plays Lord Lakshman in Ramayana. The film’s technical crew also has some huge names on board, like as Oscar-winning composers Hans Zimmer and A.R. Rahman and Mad Max: Fury Road famous stunt director Guy Norris, along with Terry Notary, known for Avengers. In collaboration with Yash’s Monster Mind Creations, Namit Malhotra’s Prime Focus Studios and DNEG are producing Ramayana. Diwali 2026 will see the release of the first half, while Diwali 2027 will see the release of the second.

Comedy typecasting is something Sanjay Mishra acknowledges

Mumbai: Throughout his lengthy career, actor Sanjay Mishra has gained recognition for his comedic performances in a wide range of motion pictures.

Sanjay acknowledges that he has been typecast as the comic relief, which has “irritated” him despite having portrayed tragic parts in a number of movies over the past thirty years.Sanjay Mishra likened his inventive decisions to cooking, emphasizing the need of using the proper ingredients without extraneous additives.

The seasoned actor acknowledged that because of his prior work in the film industry, producers frequently placed him in comedy roles, saying, “You have to typecast, boss.” I take suppose you store spices in the kitchen? You won’t add sugar or anything similar if you are cooking anything that doesn’t require it. Producers really liked it. Boss, it’s comedy, Sanjay Mishra will do it in one take. Give him a call. He acknowledged that the typecasting affected him, but he was powerless because he was frequently unemployed. “I



get annoyed, but at least I had work when I had nothing.” Thus, this is likewise the case.An alumnus of the National School of Drama (NSD), Sanjay Mishra made his screen debut in 1995 with the Shah Rukh Khan film Oh Darling! Hello, India! After supporting appearances in films like Satya and Dil Se, his character of Apple Singh for the marketing of the 1999 Cricket World Cup won him considerable renown. Comedic parts in movies like Golmaal, Dhamaal, All the Best, and Phas Gaye

Re Obama resulted from this. Sanjay Mishra will be featured alongside Neena Gupta in the film Vadh 2. The two stars return after the first film, which released in 2022. Joining the cast are Kumud Mishra, Akshay Dogra, Amitt K Singh, Shilpa Shukla, and Yogita Bihani, adding more layers to the mystery.Jaspal Singh Sandhu is the writer and director of Vadh 2, a Luv Films production. Luv Ranjan and Ankur Garg are the producers. The movie is referred to as a spiritual follow-up to Vadh.

O’Romeo Producers Release Ishq Ka Fever, Arijit Singh’s New Song

Mumbai: O’Romeo, a new song by producer Sajid Nadiadwala, has a teaser that was released on Saturday. Sung by Arijit Singh, the song “Ishq Ka Fever” serves as a subdued reminder of why his voice has long been associated with love for a generation: it is private, painful, and profoundly human.Ishq Ka Fever is really poignant, especially because Arijit Singh has recently talked about moving away from playback singing. Vishal Bhardwaj, Arijit Singh, and Rekha Bhardwaj were recently spotted crooning the song. Vishal has shared an emotional moment on his social media account where he was seen performing Ishq Ka Fever, recorded by Arijit Singh, further reacting to the Singh’s surprising recent news about parting away from playback singing.



Vishal shared the video on social media and wrote a heartfelt message expressing his shock at Arijit Singh’s choice.He added, “Hey Arijit, I had no idea that this would be one of my final movie songs with you until a few days ago when we were jamming on this song (you were filming the video).” Arijit Singh and Vishal Bhardwaj have already worked together on a number of noteworthy projects.For those who don’t know, on January 27, 2026, Arijit Singh declared his retirement from playback singing.Compos-

ers, filmmakers, and fans have expressed shock at his choice, which has rocked the music and film industries.The singer in a social media statement, disclosed that he will no longer take up any new tasks as a playback vocalist. He wrote, “Hello, Happy new year to all. I want to thank you all for giving me so much of love all these years as listeners. I am happy to announce that I am not gonna be taking any new

assignments as a playback vocalist from now on. I am calling it off. It was a wonderful journey.” The singer called his journey as a playback singer “wonderful” and thanked his fans for their everlasting love and support throughout the years.Speaking of O Romeo, which is directed by Vishal Bhardwaj and produced by Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment, it opens in theaters on February 13, 2026.

Kalpana Iyer of Ramba Ho fame wants to go back to acting after

Mumbai: One of the most famous dance songs from the Bollywood disco era is still Ramba Ho, starring veteran actress Kalpana Iyer. Thanks to its revival in Ranveer Singh’s spy thriller flick Dhurandhar, the energetic song from the 1981 movie Armaan, sung by the renowned Usha Uthup, has been making waves online. Additionally, the Ramba Ho girl’s spontaneous dance video to the song at a wedding went viral on social media as fans were still processing the nostalgic hit. Even years after the initial dance routine became a pop culture hit, Kalpana Iyer recently expressed her gratitude for the affection she received and disclosed that the viral moment was entirely unintentional.“I was at my friend’s son’s wedding, who is like my own child. I just posted the spontaneous dance on social media. And it was all over the internet in a matter of hours. I’m shocked and incredibly appreciative of all the love I’ve received. I’m totally overburdened. And it makes it even more special for a song I performed almost 40 years ago,” she said.

The actress disclosed that the wedding took place in Siliguri, West Bengal, and that she simply followed the music as she made her way to the stage. “I started walking towards the stage, and the dance just sort of happened,” she went on. Nothing was prepared. Instinctively, you can see I am wearing a saree. I went to enjoy the wedding with my family. And when they requested, how could I say no? I did it with love, and see where it all landed.” The seasoned performer, who is yet to view the film herself, also extended her gratitude towards the makers of Dhurandhar for making Ramba Ho yet another viral moment on the internet. “I heard about it from many people. In fact, many of my friends who watched Dhurandhar emailed me those links right away. “Your song is playing, and we are remembering you,” they added, “and I was like... emotional and so grateful,” she recalled. She said, “I am grateful to Aditya



Dhar, how can I not be? It has been a very long time. And for me, it’s like, “Thank you, God,” if a movie has brought it back to life to the point where the younger generation is humming the song. Who would have thought that my music in a movie [would go viral again] at seventy years old? It’s amazing. “May God turn this around and make this work for me because I have missed my industry,” Kalpana said in response to a question about her secret desire to go back into the film business. I’ve missed the studio and its aroma. My industry is one of the many things I have missed. Hopefully, this will be a solid start.

The first runner-up in the 1978 Miss India pageant was Kalpana Iyer. The actress has appeared in a number of films, including Hum Saath Saath Hain, Satte Pe Satta, Anjaam, and Raja Hindustani. Kalpana is a trained vocalist who has worked with musicians like as Usha Uthup and Bappi Lahiri.

Panel suggested strengthening the ties between education, employment, and business



New Delhi, Feb 02: Nirmala Sitharaman, the finance minister, suggested on Sunday that a powerful “Education to Employment and Enterprise” Standing Committee be established in order to improve the relationship between education, employment, and the development of businesses, with a particular emphasis on the services sector. The 21st century is dominated by technology. Everyone benefits from technology adoption, including young people eager to advance their skills, women in STEM fields, farmers working in the field, and Divyangjan gaining access to new opportunities. Before unveiling the proposed committee, Sitharaman stated, “The Government has taken several steps to support new technologies through the AI Mission, the National Quantum Mission, the Anusandhan National Research Fund, and the Research, Development and Innovation Fund.” With the government aiming for a 10% share of global services trade by 2047, the panel is anticipated to suggest policies to increase India’s presence in international services markets. It will determine which service subsectors

have the greatest potential for expansion, employment, and exports, and it will make recommendations for how to close sector-specific gaps preventing the creation of jobs. The committee’s initial terms of reference state that it will look at cross-sector policy and regulatory concerns, such as accreditation and standards-setting, and investigate opportunities for India to boost service exports. Assessing how new technologies, especially artificial intelligence (AI), may impact employment and skill requirements in the upcoming years will be a major component of its mandate. The group is anticipated to suggest ways to improve teacher training institutions, such as State Councils of Educational Research and Training, and incorporate AI-related learning into school curricula in response to these changes. It will also recommend upskilling and reskilling initiatives for technology professionals and engineers to keep pace with developing technologies. The committee may recommend AI-based systems to more effectively connect employees with employment

and training possibilities. In order to improve access to opportunities and upward mobility in the labor market, it has also been tasked with suggesting ways to make informal work arrangements more apparent and verifiable. It would also take into account measures to entice overseas professionals and skilled members of the Indian diaspora to work in India. According to the government, the main goal is to assist employment and business growth in the services economy by better matching education and training systems with industry demands. According to industry participants, the action is an acknowledgment of the growing disconnect between worker preparedness and AI adoption. “The government is recognizing what industry has known for months: the execution gap between AI ambition and workforce readiness is now our primary bottleneck by formally assessing AI’s impact on jobs and skills—targeting a 10% global services market share by 2047,” stated Dhruv Garg, partner at the policy and business advisory Indian Governance & Policy Project (IGAP). The plan comes as the government prepares to expand the India AI Mission, launched in 2024 to build a domestic AI ecosystem by supporting foundational model development, expanding access to compute infrastructure, and funding companies and academic institutes. Ashwini Vaishnav, the minister of information technology, has said that the next stage of the mission will begin within the next five to six months. Startups selected under the project are anticipated to launch large language and small models at the AI conference this month, while the common computing stack will be enlarged from the existing 38,000 GPUs.

Tilak Varma was selected for the India A team’s warm-up match



New Delhi : After fully recovering from his injury, Tilak Varma is expected to rejoin India’s T20 team ahead of the forthcoming T20 World Cup. Due to a groin injury, the left-handed batter missed the New Zealand series, but he is now fully recovered. Tilak has become a crucial component of India’s T20I plans since the 2024 T20 World Cup, bringing steadiness and purpose to the middle order. It is anticipated that his return will bolster India’s batting depth for the international

tournament. The BCCI has included him in the India A squad for warm-up matches, giving him crucial playing experience to make sure he is match-ready. Before joining the Suryakumar Yadav-led Indian team for the T20 World Cup, Tilak is expected to play one warm-up game, providing the team with a much-needed boost. Tilak’s performance at the top of the order might be a deciding element for India during the T20 World Cup. He has now amassed 1,183 runs from 37

innings in just 40 games, averaging an outstanding 49.29 with a strike rate of 144.09. His stats, which highlight his influence and consistency, include two hundreds and six half-centuries. Tilak provides much-needed balance and composure at the crease at a time when India has adopted a high-risk, ultra-attacking strategy in T20 cricket. His performance at No. 3 stands out even more – 542 runs in 15 innings at an average of 60.22 and a strike rate north of 160, with two hundreds and three fifties, including a career-best unbeaten 120. India captain Suryakumar Yadav gave an update on Tilak Varma and Washington Sundar’s fitness following the last Twenty20 International against New Zealand. He expressed hope about their recuperation and hinted at their possible return to action soon. “I believe Washington Sundar is doing well as well. We spoke to both of them yesterday (Tilak Varma and Washington Sundar). Tilak is much superior. Washington has almost started his bowling and batting. Thus, he also has a nice appearance. Hopefully, we get him back soon.”

Kiren Rijiju Cites Musk to Educate Rahul Gandhi on the Indian Economy

New Delhi, Feb 02: Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju referenced Tesla CEO Elon Musk’s remark — on the health of the Indian economy — to rebut Congress MP Rahul Gandhi’s critique of the economic policies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. “I typically do not react to statements which are not made by Indians. While criticizing the government is a democratic right, do not denigrate India. I am mentioning Elon Musk merely to raise Rahul Gandhi’s awareness. “Never minimize India’s accomplishments,” he stated on X. According to a list Musk released on Sunday, China and India together are predicted to contribute 43.6% of the world’s GDP in 2026. With a prediction of 9.9%, the US came in a far third. The Asia-Pacific area is predicted to contribute more than 50% of the world economy by the end of this year, according to the list, which referenced data from the International Monetary Fund. “The balance of power is changing...” Musk commented as he published the data. The world’s richest person,



who has been closely monitoring India’s progress and has met Prime Minister Narendra Modi twice, made a comment that was seen as hinting at a growing consensus among policymakers that the global economy is dynamically shifting to Asia. India is thought to be at the top of that list. In fact, Julie Kozack, head of the IMF’s Communications Department, referred to India as “a key growth engine for the world”

in January 2026 after the organization increased its prediction for the country’s economic growth in FY26 by 0.7 percentage points to 7.3%. Rahul Gandhi’s remarks following Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman’s presentation of the 2026 government budget on Sunday morning prompted Rijiju’s call-out. He criticized the budget for failing to address pressing problems like declining household savings,

farmers’ hardship, and unemployment. “A budget that refuses course correction (and is) blind to India’s real crises,” he added in comments that also remembered his reiterating US President Donald Trump’s “India is a dead economy” remark. “With due respects, I don’t know what course correction he is referring to,” the Finance Minister retorted in a similarly harsh manner. The fundamentals of the economy are solid.

NATIONAL & SPORTS

65-year-old woman dies from tainted water, bringing the total to 32



New Delhi, Feb 02: After weeks of anguish, the poisoned water catastrophe in Indore has silently and painfully claimed another life. On Sunday night, Anita Kushwah, 65, who had been fighting for her life for more than a month, passed away, bringing the total number of confirmed deaths to 32. Anita’s passing is more than simply a statistic; it serves as a somber reminder of how long Bhagirathpura will be plagued by the shadow of contaminated water. She was originally admitted to Bhagyashree Hospital on December 28, complaining of acute vomiting and diarrhoea symptoms that would later become tragically familiar in the locality. After two days of treatment, she was

discharged and sent home. But within hours, her condition fell again. Anita was sent to Aurobindo Hospital on January 1. Three days later, as her condition worsened, she was transferred to Bombay Hospital on January 4. Her illness only got worse after that. Doctors placed her on a ventilator. Her kidneys failed, prompting continuous hemodialysis. Amid protracted critical care, she also experienced a cardiac arrest. On Sunday night, Anita lost the battle between life and death that had lasted more than a month. Confirming the death, Dr Madhav Hasani, Chief Medical and Health Officer, said the government ensured treatment at a higher-level

hospital, but despite all attempts, the patient could not be rescued. Another victim of the tainted water, Eknath Suryavanshi, passed away just last week after spending almost a month in the hospital. His condition did not improve, so his family took him home, where he passed away the following day. More than 450 patients impacted by tainted water have received treatment and been released thus far. Yet the threat is not past. Three patients remain hospitalised, two of them in the ICU, their condition very severe. Three petitions regarding the killings in Bhagirathpura have been filed, and the Madhya Pradesh High Court is now considering the issue. Taking this seriously, the High Court established a committee led by retired Judge Sushil Kumar Gupta and ordered a judicial investigation. The committee’s findings are due on March 5. During court proceedings, the government stated that 16 deaths were directly caused by contaminated water, while additional deaths were attributed to different medical reasons, placing the official tally at 23. This disparity has been openly questioned by the court, which wants to know how many people died and why.

The Anti-Terror Agency NIA Conducts Numerous Raids in the Kashmir Valley

New Delhi, Feb 02: Multiple raids are being undertaken by the National Investigation Agency at six locations across the Kashmir Valley this morning.

According to official sources, the NIA is conducting searches in relation to terror conspiracy cases. The CRPF and Jammu and Kashmir police accompany NIA personnel. Around the target locations, where investigators have conducted searches, forces have been stationed. Sources say various areas, including residential dwellings, were checked in Srinagar,



Bandipore and Baramulla districts this morning. The NIA is exploring terror links and logistical support to terrorist related activ-

ities in the Valley. In the Sopore area, four houses in Bonai, Rafiaband and Model Town Sopore were searched. It was not im-

mmediately known if anyone was detained or arrested by the investigating agency. The majority of significant terrorist-related occurrences in Jammu and Kashmir, like as the recent Delhi blast case, the Pahalgam terrorist assault case, and several terror finance cases, are being investigated by the NIA. The NIA is credited with dismantling the separatist political apparatus in Kashmir since 2018 when the main anti-terrorist outfit took up the cases and detained most of the separatist leaders.

Inter Milan defeats Cremonese to maintain their Serie A lead

New Delhi: With Sunday’s 2-0 victory at Cremonese, Inter Milan increased their advantage at the top of Serie A to eight points. However, the game was disrupted by away supporters who almost hit the home team’s goalie Emil Audero with a firework. Lautaro Martinez and Piotr Zielinski’s first-half scores were enough for Inter to extend their unbeaten league run to 11 matches and add pressure on nearest competitors AC Milan who face Bologna on Tuesday. Inter’s steadiness against the lower-ranked teams allowed them to easily defeat one of the division’s lesser



lights once more. Cristian Chivu’s team have collected 31 points from those 11 fixtures. “It’s not a message to the rest of the league, it’s a message to ourselves,” Martinez added. “There’s still along way to go and it’s a very evenly-balanced division.” Martinez’s header, which came in the 16th minute from Federico Dimarco’s corner, making him Inter’s joint fourth-highest goalscorer in Serie A -- level on 128 with Alessandro Altobelli who won the World Cup with Italy in 1982. Martinez celebrated both his goal and his daughter’s fifth birthday.

Pakistan’s boycott is only a baseless threat to the ICC

New Delhi: Sunday evenings are meant to be calm, sedate, relaxed out. Most people’s top priorities include spending time with family, watching a movie, having a leisurely late meal, and taking a quick glance ahead to the upcoming week. But apparently not on the Pakistani government’s.

The Pakistani government declared on X that while the senior team would travel to Sri Lanka to fulfill its T20 World Cup commitments, it would not play co-hosts India in Colombo on February 15, despite the fact that its Under-19 team took an odd stance in the World Cup match against India in Bulawayo, choosing a pyrrhic victory against the neighbors instead of making even a token push for a steep target that their semifinal aspirations demanded—neither goal was achieved. Although there was no formal correspondence from the Pakistan Cricket Board to the Interna-



tional Cricket Council at the time of writing, this did not stop the latter from issuing a strongly worded response that fell short of being a serious ultimatum, though the reference to “consequences” will not have gone unnoticed. The Pakistan government’s brief and unclear statement doesn’t explain why it decided to boycott the India match. This action is in solidarity with Bangladesh, whose last-minute demand that their matches be moved from India to Sri Lanka for to security concerns was dismissed by the governing body. Recent utterances do offer

a window into the official line of thinking. The strongest evidence that Bangladesh’s request for a venue change was motivated more by ego and a hasty, tit-for-tat policy than by any actual, palpable threat to the national side is the fact that they waited until Kolkata Knight Riders terminated Mustafizur Rehman’s IPL contract at the behest of the Board of Control for Cricket in India. After the ICC’s obviously irritated statement, Bangladesh now has time to consider the consequences of their absence, something Pakistan will also have thought over overnight.

Lautaro Martínez scores again for Inter Milan, edging closer to breaking long-standing historic club records



Milan: Lautaro Martínez is closing in on more records for Inter Milan. The Argentinian World Cup winner scored again on Sunday to set league leader Inter on its way to a 2-0 win at Cremonese in Serie A. It was Lautaro's 170th goal for Inter and left him just one behind Roberto Boninsegna, who is in third place in the club's all-time scorers list. Ahead of them are only Alessandro Altobelli (209 goals) and Giuseppe Meazza (284).

Lautaro has scored 10 goals in his

last 13 league matches to take his tally to 128 in Serie A and the 28-year-old is only 10 away from Benito Lorenzi, who is second among Inter's top scorers in Serie A. Meazza tops that list as well, with 197 league goals. Lautaro headed in a corner in the 16th minute and — after embracing his teammates — he lifted up his shirt to show a happy birthday message for his daughter. Piotr Zielinski doubled Inter's lead in the 31st minute with a fierce 30-yard strike that

Cremonese goalkeeper Emil Audero appeared to have covered until it swerved in mid-air and went through his arms. The match had to be halted for three minutes at the start of the second half after Audero was struck by a flare thrown by the away fans. Audero was able to get up and continue but had a cut on his right leg and appeared to be telling the medical staff that he couldn't hear from his right ear. Inter extended its Serie A lead to eight points over second-placed AC Milan, which visits Bologna on Tuesday. Juventus is playing the same kind of entertaining, attacking soccer under coach Luciano Spalletti as the Napoli team that he steered to the Serie A title in 2023. And after crushing Napoli 3-0 last weekend, Juventus cantered to a 4-1 win at Parma on Sunday.

Bremer scored twice, while United States international Weston McKennie was also on target. Canada standout Jonathan David capped the scoring with his fourth goal in five matches. Parma had briefly made it 2-1 with a comical own-goal from Juventus midfielder Andrea Cambiaso, who shinned the ball into

his own net as he tried to clear. Juventus moved to fourth, two points above Roma ahead of the capital team's match at Udinese on Monday. Atalanta managed to draw 0-0 at Como despite playing almost the entire match with 10 men. It was a dramatic start to the game. With less than eight minutes on the clock, Atalanta defender Honest Ahanor was shown a straight red card for shoving Máximo Perrone in the face during an off-the-ball incident after the Como midfielder appeared to say something to him. Nico Paz should have won the match for Como deep in stoppage time when the home side was awarded a penalty following Giorgio Scalvini's hand ball.

However, Paz had missed his past two spot kicks and he made it three out of three as Atalanta goalkeeper Marco Carnesecchi was able to stop his fairly weak and central attempt in the 98th minute. Como remained sixth, a place and five points above Atalanta. Earlier, Torino beat relegation-threatened Lecce 1-0. Lookman is set to undergo his medical on Monday. He also previously played for Leipzig and Everton.

Former Pakistan skipper says IND-PAK fiasco continues amid T20 World Cup boycott row Pakistan boycott threat sparks chaos

New Delhi: Former Pakistan captain Rashid Latif has warned that the T20 World Cup boycott controversy involving Pakistan is far from over, suggesting the standoff could trigger wider complications for international cricket. Latif believes the decision has been taken with long-term consequences in mind and could resurface across multiple ICC events. Speaking in an interview with Times of India, Latif said Pakistan's stance should not be viewed as a one-off reaction and hinted that the ripple effects could extend well beyond the ongoing men's T20 World Cup.

"Pakistan generally don't take such decisions. The PCB is not even scared of sanctions. It will have a big impact. There is a Women's T20 World Cup in England this year, and Pakistan might play India there as well. Then there is a Champions Trophy in 2028, hosted by



India. So this will not end here. It seems that Pakistan has taken this step after a lot of thought," Latif said. Latif pointed out that relations between the two boards had appeared stable until recently, with both sides agreeing on a hybrid model for ICC events over the next three years.

"Till now, everything was going well. Pakistan and India both agreed that we would play in a hybrid model for the next three years. The Asia Cup happened in Dubai. Pakistan's women's Team played in Sri Lanka

in the Women's ODI World Cup. Everything was going well, but things have changed since the Bangladesh episode happened," he said from Islamabad. The issue began when Pakistan announced it would boycott its league-stage T20 World Cup match against India in Colombo on February 15. The decision followed comments from Pakistan cricket chief Mohsin Naqvi, who spoke about a possible boycott in support of Bangladesh after they were replaced by Scotland in the Tournament.

Tilak Varma and Mayank Yadav selected in India A squad for T20 warm-up matches

Mumbai: Swashbuckling batter Tilak Varma was on Monday named in the India A squad for the T20 World Cup warm-up matches, while tearaway pacer Mayank Yadav returned after a long injury layoff. Tilak, who has been cleared by the BCCI's Centre of Excellence (CoE) following a successful recovery from a groin injury, will feature in one of the two warm-up games before re-joining the senior national side. The left-handed batter will make a comeback to the national side after missing the recent T20 series against New Zealand, in which Shreyas Iyer was used as his replacement.

Tilak Varma will feature in one warm-up match before joining the senior team," the BCCI said in a post on social media while announcing the squad. India A will take on the USA at the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai on Monday before facing Namibia on Friday at the CoE in Bengaluru. Ayush Badoni will captain the 15-member India A squad, which also includes Naman Dhir, Vipraj Nigam and Riyan Parag. Mayank, meanwhile, had been side-lined for over a year due to a stress fracture. Defending champions India will begin their campaign against the USA on the opening day of the T20 World Cup on February 7. Ayush Badoni (c), Naman Dhir, Ashutosh Sharma, Priyansh Arya, N. Jagadeesan (wk), Tilak Varma, Riyan Parag, Manav Suthar, Ashok Sharma, Urvil Patel (wk), Gurjapneet Singh, Vipraj Nigam, Ravi Bishnoi, Khaleel Ahmed, Mayank Yadav. Tilak Varma and Mayank Yadav have been named in the India A squad for the



upcoming T20 World Cup warm-up matches against USA and Namibia, marking significant comebacks for both players. Varma returns after recovering from a groin injury, while Yadav rejoins after a long injury layoff, giving India crucial depth ahead of the marquee tournament. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) confirmed on Monday that Tilak Varma

and Mayank Yadav will feature in the India A squad for two warm-up fixtures scheduled before the T20 World Cup. India A will face the USA at DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai on Monday, followed by a clash against Namibia at the Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Bengaluru on Friday. These matches are designed to provide competitive practice for fringe and recovering players while also testing squad depth.

Tilak Varma, the stylish left-handed batter, has been cleared by the BCCI's medical team after recovering from a groin injury. - He missed the recent T20I series against New Zealand, where Shreyas Iyer was used as his replacement. Varma will play one warm-up match before rejoining the senior national Team for the World Cup. - His rehabilitation included a simulation match at the CoE in Bengaluru, which confirmed his readiness for competitive cricket. India's T20 World Cup campaign begins on February 7, making these fixtures crucial for preparation. The inclusion of Tilak Varma and Mayank Yadav in the India A squad highlights India's proactive approach to managing player fitness and workload ahead of the T20 World Cup.

Carlos Alcaraz plans kangaroo tattoo to commemorate his triumphant Australian Open championship victory

New Delhi: Carlos Alcaraz is considering a permanent reminder of his maiden Australian Open title win, revealing that he may get a small kangaroo tattoo to celebrate the biggest milestone of his career. The 22-year-old said the idea came naturally after his victory over Novak Djokovic in the men's singles final, a win that made him the youngest male player to complete a career Grand Slam. The design is clear in his mind, but the location is still undecided. "I already know it's going to be a kangaroo. I just don't know the place," Alcaraz said. "I'm just thinking about the leg but I don't know which calf, whether it will be the right or left one."

Alcaraz posed with the ornate Australian Open trophy on Monday during a photo shoot at Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building, looking relaxed and stylish in black, wearing loafers without socks. A day earlier, women's singles champion Elena Rybakina was photographed with her trophy along the banks of the Yarra River. According to Australian media reports, Alcaraz spent the night after his victory quietly with his family in his hotel suite, celebrating with pizza, beer and champagne. In a social media message shared with fans during the photo shoot, Alcaraz admitted the scale of the moment was still sinking in. "I still can't believe that I just made it. A dream come true for me,



a career Grand Slam. I'm enjoying this amazing moment. I can't forget the support and the love I've received." After closing out a 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-5 win over the 10-time Australian Open champion, Alcaraz spoke about the nerves he felt before the last point. Before the last point, a lot of things came to my mind, to be honest," he said. "I was really nervous, I was shaking almost. So once I saw the ball go out, I was like, alright, I made it. It was a great feeling, thinking about my family and my team as well." With the career Grand Slam secured, Alcaraz has already turned his attention to what remains unfinished. He is aiming to win the three Masters 1000 titles that have so far eluded him, the Canadian Open, Shanghai and Par-

is, along with the season ending ATP Finals and the Davis Cup with Spain. I hate to lose, so that's my motivation. Trying to lose as less as I can," Alcaraz said. "There are some tournaments that I really want to win at least once.

Obviously the ATP Finals and the Davis Cup is a goal as well. I really want to achieve that for my country, for Spain." A kangaroo tattoo may soon mark the place where his tennis dream became reality, but for Carlos Alcaraz, the pursuit of perfection is only gathering pace. Carlos Alcaraz's next major tennis goals focus on cementing his legacy further after a historic start to 2026, highlighted by completing the Career Grand Slam with his maiden Australian Open title.

Hazlewood to miss early T20 World Cup

Sydney: Australian fast bowler Josh Hazlewood will not travel with the squad for the early part of its T20 World Cup matches in Sri Lanka as he continues his rehabilitation after recovering from an injury here, national selector Tony Dodemaide said on Monday. The trio of Nathan Ellis, Tim David and Glenn Maxwell, however, have reached Colombo and will be joined the Australian squad on Tuesday for the upcoming ICC T20 showpiece, Dodemaide said. Australia will play their four preliminary games in Colombo and Pallekele, starting February 11 against Ireland. Hazlewood will remain in Sydney during the early part of the tournament, which begins on February 7, to continue his return to play program. Sean Abbott has joined the touring party as a travelling reserve. Dodemaide said: "Nathan, Tim and Glenn have arrived in Colombo and we look forward to meeting up with them when we arrive from Pakistan. We felt with Josh it was more practical and beneficial for him to continue his rehabilitation at home in a familiar environment before travelling to Sri Lanka Zimbabwe.

Foord's dramatic extra-time goal secures Arsenal thrilling 3-2 victory over Corinthians in inaugural Women's Champions Cup Six-team Women's Champions Cup debuts globally

London: Caitlin Foord scored on a breakaway in extra time and Arsenal won the inaugural Women's Champions Cup with a 3-2 victory over Brazil's Corinthians on Sunday. Corinthians leveled the match at 2-2 in second-half stoppage time when Victoria converted a penalty in the pouring rain at Emirates Stadium.

Olivia Smith and Lotte Wubben-Moy scored in regulation for Arsenal, which earns \$2.3 million for winning the intercontinental tournament. Corinthians takes home \$1 million as the runner-up. Arsenal, which qualified for the tournament as winners of the UEFA Champions League, earned a spot in the final with a 6-0 defeat of Morocco's ASFAR in Wednesday's semifinals. Smith, who also scored in the semifinal, opened scoring in the 15th minute when Corinthians goalkeeper Leticia punched a shot from Stina Blackstenius into Smith's path. Six minutes later, Corinthians evened the score with Gabriela Zanotti's goal that crossed the line before Arsenal goalkeeper Anneke Borbe could get to it. The 40-year-old Zanotti Also scored in Corinthians' 1-0 semifinal



victory over Gotham FC. Lotte Wubben-Moy scored the go-ahead goal in the 58th with a header off a cross by Emily Fox as FIFA President Gianni Infantino looked on. It appeared that Arsenal had the trophy in hand, but video review awarded a penalty to Corinthians after Katie McCabe's foul in the box in stoppage time, sending the vocal group of Corinthians fans at the match into a frenzy.

Foord put Arsenal back in front with the winning goal in the 104th minute. Arsenal's Borbe was involved in a collision in front of her goal in the waning moments of the match and had to be stretchered off with an injury. Gotham won the Third-place match 4-0 over ASFAR earlier in the day. Khyah Harper, who started after coming in As a substitute in the semi-

final, opened scoring with a goal in the 27th minute. Gotham doubled the lead with a goal from Savannah McCaskill and Jaedyn Shaw converted a penalty to make it 3-0 before halftime. Midge Purce added the final goal in the 48th. Gotham qualified by winning the first CONCACAF Champions Cup with a 1-0 victory over Mexico's Tigres last May. Corinthians won the CONMEBOL Copa Libertadores Femenina to earn a spot and ASFAR won the CAF Champions League. Two continental champions were eliminated in earlier rounds: Auckland United from Oceania and Wuhan Chegu Jiangda representing Asia. The six-team women's Champions Cup was created as an intercontinental championship for women's club Teams. It builds on a growing

number of regional club competitions, led by the success of the UEFA Women's Champions League.

FIFA also is introducing a 16-team Women's Club World Cup, which will launch in 2028 and be played every four years. The new Champions Cup will be held every year, except years when the Club World Cup takes place. Arsenal Women clinched the inaugural Women's Champions Cup with a dramatic 3-2 extra-time victory over Brazilian giants Corinthians, thanks to Caitlin Foord's decisive strike in the 104th minute. The thrilling contest at the Emirates Stadium showcased resilience, drama, and history-making moments as Arsenal became the first club to lift the newly created intercontinental trophy. The final of the Women's Champions Cup, a six-team intercontinental competition, was played under heavy rain at the Emirates Stadium in London. Arsenal, winners of the UEFA Women's Champions League, faced Corinthians, champions of the Copa Libertadores Femenina. The match lived up to its billing, delivering high drama, late goals, And a historic finish.

Glasgow Commonwealth Games athletics team trials scheduled for May selection

New Delhi: The 29th National Senior Athletics Federation Competition, scheduled to be held from May 22 to 25 in Ranchi, Jharkhand, has assumed major importance as it will serve as the final selection trials for the Glasgow Commonwealth Games, set to begin on July 23 in Scotland. While announcing the qualification standards for track and field events for the 2026 Commonwealth Games, the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) stated that only a limited number of athletes will represent the country in Glasgow, according to a release. The federation underlined that the Ranchi competition will play a decisive role in identifying athletes who meet the required benchmarks.

As per protocol of the Commonwealth Games Organising Committee, the number of athletics teams can't exceed 32, including 16 female athletes," AFI senior vice-president Anju Bobby George said. Since a limited number of track and field events will feature at the Glasgow edition of the Commonwealth Games, accordingly AFI will select the team from amongst those who achieve the qualification mark in their respective events in May," Anju added. India had a successful outing at the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games, where the athletics contingent won eight medals. The standout performance came from Eldhose Paul, who clinched the gold medal in men's triple jump, while star steeplechase runner Avinash Sable secured a silver medal, further highlighting India's growing strength in track and field events. In addition to serving as the Commonwealth Games trials, the National Senior Athletics Federation Competition in Ranchi will also serve as a qualification window for the 2026 Asian U23 Athletics Championships, offering young athletes an addition-



al opportunity to earn selection. The Asian Games in September is the major competition of the packed 2026 calendar. The AFI will also send the national team to World Relays in May in Botswana, Anju said. "The selection trials for the World Relays will be held during the third National Open Relay Competition on March 28 in Chandigarh," Anju added. "Foreign teams are also expected to compete in Chandigarh."

According to the AFI senior vice-president, the 65th National Inter-State Senior Athletics Championships, scheduled to be held from June 24 to 28 in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, will be the final selection trials for the Asian Games in September. "The main focus of this year will be the Asian Games in Japan." At the 2022 Asian Games held in China, the Indian athletics team delivered an impressive performance, winning 29 medals, including six gold medals in track and field events. The AFI has already announced guidelines to compete at the 29th National Senior Athletics Federation Competition and the 65th National Inter-State Senior Athletics Championships. During the AFI meeting in Trivandrum, the 2026 domestic calendar was also revised. cities of the 2029 and 2031 editions of world championships.