

Knowledge health conclave begins in Mizoram

Aizawl, Feb 04: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Tuesday inaugurated the two-day Knowledge Exchange Health Conclave organised under the Mizoram Health Systems Strengthening Project (MHSSP) of the Health and Family Welfare Department at Falkland Park, Aizawl.

In his inaugural address, the Chief Minister stated that the Government of Mizoram considers the health of its people as a key foundation for the State's overall development, and therefore accords high priority to the health sector. He highlighted that Mizoram has introduced the Mizoram Universal Health Care Scheme (MUHCS), one of the best health care systems in the country, under which patients receive cashless treatment through empanelled hospitals.

He further said that the State Government has significantly strengthened health infrastructure across Mizoram, upgrading district hospitals, Community Health Centres (CHCs) and Primary Health Centres (PHCs). Advanced medical equipment has been procured for healthcare workers, and several new

initiatives have been undertaken to further improve the health sector. He noted that many of these achievements have been made possible through the Mizoram Health Systems Strengthening Project, and expressed gratitude to the World Bank and the Central Government for their support.

The Chief Minister also remarked that the conclave would provide a valuable platform for knowledge exchange with health sector experts from various States across India. He expressed confidence that the deliberations would lead to better strategies, wider understanding and stronger collaboration in the health sector, benefiting both Mizoram and the country as a whole. He also thanked MHSSP for organising the conclave. On the occasion, the Chief Minister released a Coffee Table Book. Health Minister Lalrinpuui, in her address, stated that through MHSSP, significant improvements have been made in medical facilities and health centres, with the procurement of new equipment and effective utilisation of resources. As a result, Mizoram has also achieved quality certifications for its



healthcare institutions at the national level. The Mizoram Health Systems Strengthening Project was launched in 2021 with funding support from the World Bank and is being implemented for a period of five years. The project is scheduled to conclude in March 2026. Project Director, MHSSP, Dr. Lily Chhakhuak, presented an overview of the project's

progress, stating that the total project cost is Rs. 280 crore. As of January 2026, four out of five Project Development Objectives have been achieved, and 14 out of 16 Intermediate Result Indicators have been met. The remaining targets are expected to be achieved by the end of March 2026.

One of the major initiatives under the project is the launch of the Mizoram Universal Health Care Scheme in March 2025. Under MUHCS, an enrolment target of 91 percent has already been achieved. In recognition of this achievement, the National Health Authority conferred the "Best Performance in Achieving Card Saturation" award to Mizoram in January 2026.

The two-day Knowledge Exchange Health Conclave is being attended by health sector experts and representatives from various States including Telangana, Meghalaya, Nagaland, West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, along with representatives from the Gates Foundation and the North Eastern Council (NEC).

Sikkim CM Prem Singh Tamang Greets Citizens On SKM's 14th Foundation Day

Gangtok, Feb 04: In a resonant display of gratitude, Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang extended his heartfelt thanks to the citizens of Sikkim following the monumental success of the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's (SKM) 14th Foundation Day. The celebrations, held at the gateway town of Rangpo, saw a massive turnout that the Chief Minister described as a powerful testament to the enduring bond between his administration and the people.

A Vision of Unity and Progress Addressing the public, Tamang emphasized that the overwhelming reception—marked by vibrant energy and widespread participation from across the state—serves as more than just a political mile-



stone. For him, it is a validation of the collective journey toward a "Soneko Sikkim" (Golden Sikkim). He noted that the enthusiasm displayed by the youth, elders, and families reinforces the government's mandate to pursue inclusive growth and sustainable development. The Grassroots The Chief Minister also reserved special praise for the party's grassroots workers and support-

ers. He highlighted their tireless dedication as the backbone of the party's 14-year evolution. According to Tamang, this public outpouring of trust acts as a renewed "blessing" that inspires the state leadership to serve with heightened transparency and vigor. Looking ahead, Tamang reaffirmed his commitment to a shared vision where every citizen is a stakeholder in the state's progress.

National Defence College officers visit Serchhip, Thenzawl

Aizawl, Feb 04: A team of 17 officers from the National Defence College (NDC), New Delhi, visited Serchhip and Thenzawl districts of Mizoram as part of their ongoing study tour.

The visit forms part of the 66th National Defence College Course's 'Understanding India Study Tour (UIST)'. The delegation included officers from various parts of India as well as international participants from Germany, Maldives, Morocco, Russia, and Nepal.

The visiting delegation held a meeting at the DC Conference Hall (DC Pisapui Hall) with Serchhip District Commissioner Paul L. Khuma, along with district officials and leaders of local civil society organisations.

The delegates were briefed through a PowerPoint presentation on the overall profile of Serchhip district, government initiatives, tourism potential, developments in agriculture and horticulture, rural development programmes, the education scenario, and law and order measures undertaken by the police and administration. An interactive session was also held where the visiting officers raised questions and sought clarifications.

After the meeting, the NDC team was taken to Zawlpui Zau in Serchhip. The visit was facilitated by District Horticulture Officer R. Lalrintluanga and his team, where the delegation observed local initiatives and government interventions related to fresh produce and horticulture development in the district.



In Thenzawl, the delegation visited the Anganwadi Centre at Tualvungi Veng, where they were received by CDO Serchhip Caryl Lalpari and her team. They later visited Government Thenzawl High School and interacted with students and teachers in the presence of Thenzawl SDEO Melody L. Betlu.

The officers also visited MV Handloom at Venghlun, a handloom cottage industry unit, where they were welcomed by EO Serchhip Pi Lalchhanhimi and the District Commerce & Industries Officer (DCIO). The team further visited the Integrated Ayush Hospital and held an interaction with the staff.

KZC warns Kuki-Zo MLAs over government formation

Imphal, Feb 04: Reiterating its firm and consistent position regarding the formation of the Government of Manipur, the Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) warned that any Kuki-Zo MLA who chooses to disregard the collective decision taken at the Lungthu Meeting will be doing so in their individual capacity and KZC shall not be held accountable for the consequences arising from such unilateral decisions. According to a press release of KZC, in the KZC Governing Council Meeting held on December 30, 2025 comprising all constituent tribes, apex bodies, and regional organisations—it was unanimously resolved that, in view of the unspeakable atrocities committed against the Kuki-Zo people and the enforced physical separation imposed by the Meiteis, the Kuki-Zo people cannot and shall not participate in the formation of the Government of Manipur. This collective resolve was further reaffirmed on January 13, 2026 at the joint meeting of the Suspension of Operations (SoO) groups, the Kuki-Zo Council, and Kuki-Zo MLAs popularly known as the Lungthu Meeting—held in Guwahati. The meeting re-

solved that the Kuki-Zo people shall not participate in the formation of the Manipur government unless the State and Central Governments provide a clear and written assurance committing to the political demand of the Kuki-Zo people, said the statement. Till date, KZC stands unwavering in this decision. The Kuki-Zo people have been forcibly and physically separated by the Meiteis, and therefore have legitimately demanded a separate administration from the Meitei government in the form of a Union Territory with a legislature. Under these circumstances, it is neither logical nor acceptable for the Kuki-Zo people to join a government formed with those from whom we have been violently separated, it said. It warned that any Kuki-Zo MLA who chooses to disregard the collective decision taken at the Lungthu Meeting will be doing so in their individual capacity and KZC shall not be held accountable for the consequences arising from such unilateral decisions. The Kuki-Zo Council urged all concerned MLAs to respect the collective will, sentiments, unity and political aspiration of the Kuki-Zo people.

NDA legislature party leader Y Khemchand stakes claim to form government

Imphal, Feb 04: Newly elected NDA legislature party leader in Manipur Y Khemchand Singh has staked a claim to form a government in the State that has been under the President's rule since February last year. Upon their arrival in Imphal, an NDA team led by Khemchand met Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Lok Bhavan here and staked the claim to form a popular government, she said. Two MLAs from the Kuki-Zo majority districts of Churachandpur and Pherzawl were among the delegates who met Bhalla at the governor's house. "We met the governor in the presence of our newly elected legislature party leader and BJP observer Tarun Chugh. The NDA staked a claim to form a popular government in the state," Sharda Devi told reporters here. Khemchand, in a post on social media, said, "Pleased to stake claim to form the new government before the Hon'ble Governor, Shri Ajay Kumar Bhalla Ji, at Lok Bhavan today, following my arrival from New Delhi, in the august presence of BJP National General Secretary, Shri Tarun Chugh Ji, and BJP Northeast Coordinator, Shri Sambit Patra Ji." The development comes a day after the BJP legislature party of Manipur elected 62-year-old Singh as

its leader at a meeting held at the party headquarters in New Delhi. The meeting was attended by 35 of the 37 BJP MLAs, besides the party's central observer Tarun Chugh, its northeast in-charge Sambit Patra, and BJP state president A Sharda Devi, among others. Subsequently, another meeting was held at the Manipur Bhavan in the national capital, where MLAs of NDA constituents in Manipur -- six of the National People's Party (NPP), five of the Naga People's Front (NPF) and three Independents -- and BJP legislators were in attendance. They endorsed Khemchand Singh as the leader and Nemcha Kipgen, who belongs to the Kuki community, as the deputy leader of the NDA legislature party. Khemchand said, "The oath-taking ceremony will follow shortly. I am confident that, with the formation of the new Council of Ministers, peace and development will serve as the guiding principles of the new government." The Singjamei legislator also said, "The political journey towards the vision of #ViksitBharatViksit and Viksit Manipur is not without challenges, but our priorities will remain firmly aligned with achieving these ambitious goals. I extend my sincere gratitude to all for the trust, responsibility, and honour bestowed upon me."

Earthquake

Guwahati, Feb 04: An earthquake measuring 4.2 on the Richter scale was felt in several parts of Assam early Wednesday morning, causing brief panic among residents in different districts. The tremor occurred shortly after dawn, when many people were still at home, and was strong enough to be noticed indoors. According to preliminary seismic information, the epicentre of the earthquake is believed to be near Dhekiajuli. Mild to moderate shaking was reported from surrounding areas, including parts of Guwahati and nearby districts. Residents said they felt beds, doors, and windows shake for a few seconds, while some household items rattled briefly. There were no immediate reports of damage to property or loss of life at the time of filing this report.

Intas Foundation observes World Cancer Day

Imphal, Feb 04: Intas Foundation, Imphal, observed World Cancer Day 2026 today at Intas Foundation – Apna Ghar, Keishamthong, Imphal West, reaffirming its commitment to people-centred cancer care and emotional support for patients and caregivers.

The programme was organized in alignment with the global theme "United by Unique," emphasizing that every cancer journey is different, yet unity and compassion are vital in supporting those affected. Dr. Irom Anil Singh, Guest and Resource Person, conducted an interactive session with patients and caregivers, highlighting the importance of mental strength and positive thinking in cancer treatment. He emphasized that fear and negative thoughts can deeply



impact patients and families, and encouraged participants to remain hopeful, emotionally strong, and united in their journey. The observance provided a supportive platform for sharing experiences and building col-

lective resilience. Intas Foundation's Apna Ghar continues to support cancer patients and their families through free food and lodging, transportation, psychosocial support, awareness programmes, and community-based care.

Aizawl to host second International Half Marathon on February 14

Aizawl, Feb 04: The second edition of the Aizawl International Half Marathon will be held on February 14, Mizoram Sports Minister Lalnghinglova Hmar announced on February 3. Addressing a press conference, Hmar said the event will be organised on a larger scale this year, with higher participation, a stronger talent pool and an added push to sports tourism in the state. The race will start and finish at the Rajiv Gandhi Stadium. The inaugural edition, held in April last year, had drawn around 1,500 participants from across the coun-



try. Hmar said improved connectivity, particularly the recent expansion of the railway network up to Sairang

near Aizawl, is expected to result in record participation from athletes and spectators from different parts of India. Highlighting the broader impact of the event, the minister said the marathon plays a key role in promoting public health while showcasing Mizoram's cultural heritage and natural beauty. He added that the AIHM has now become a permanent fixture on the state's tourism calendar. Professional athletes from several foreign countries are also expected to compete, with the event offering a total prize pool of over Rs 15 lakh.

Guv presents Governor's Award 2025 for arts

Dimapur, Feb 04: Nagaland Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Monday presented the Governor's Award 2025 for distinction in the fields of arts, music and literature at a formal ceremony held at Lok Bhavan in Kohima. Addressing the gathering, Bhalla said the awards celebrate the creative spirit, cultural depth and intellectual vitality of Nagaland. He noted that the occasion recognises not only individual excellence but also the enduring power of creativity to inspire, uplift and unite communities.

He said Nagaland is endowed with extraordinary cultural wealth, reflected in its traditions, languages, folklore, music and diverse artistic expressions. Arts and literature, he added, are deeply interwoven with everyday life in the state and represent the living memory and soul of its people. Emphasising the



relevance of creative disciplines in a rapidly changing world, the Governor said artists, musicians and writers serve both as custodians of heritage and pioneers of new ideas.

Through their work, he said, they enable society to progress while preserving its roots. Congratulating the awardees, Bhalla said their achievements reflect perseverance, passion and

purpose, and send a strong message to young people that commitment to creative pursuits is both noble and nation-building.

The awardees include Mannyei Konyak of Mon and Guru Rarenbenba of Mokokchung in arts, Colored Keys from Chümoukedima and Moko Koza of Phek district in music, and Vishū Rita Krocha in literature.

Mizoram government prioritises health sector to drive state progress: CM Lalduhoma

Guwahati, Feb 04: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Tuesday said his government has accorded high priority to the health sector, with massive efforts being made to enhance health infrastructure across the state. The event has drawn health experts and officials from various states, including Telangana, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and several neighbouring Northeastern states, to share strategies for sustainable healthcare, officials said. Inaugurating a two-day Knowledge Exchange Health Conclave in Aizawl, Lalduhoma reaffirmed that the health of citizens remains the bedrock of Mizoram's progress, signalling a continued high-priority status for the state's medical infrastructure. The Chief Minister lauded the success of the Mizoram Universal Health Care Scheme (MUHCS), which has revolutionised patient care through a seamless, cashless treatment system. Launched in March last year, the scheme has already achieved a staggering 91 per cent of its targeted enrolment rate, earning the state a national award for "Best Performance in Achieving Card Saturation" from the National Health Authority, according to officials. The government considers health care a key foundation for

overall development," the Chief Minister said, pointing to the shift towards cashless treatment through empanelled hospitals as a major victory for public accessibility. He said the present administration has significantly bolstered healthcare infrastructure across the state through extensive upgrades of district hospitals, Community Health Centres (CHCs), and Primary Health Centres (PHCs). "Advanced medical equipments have been procured for healthcare workers, and several new initiatives have been undertaken to further improve the health sector. These improvements were largely driven by the Mizoram Health Systems Strengthening Project (MHSSP)," Lalduhoma said. Lalduhoma extended gratitude to both the World Bank and the Central Government for their sustained support in these endeavours. The conclave, organised under the Mizoram Health Systems Strengthening Project (MHSSP) of the state's health department, serves as a platform to showcase the achievements of the five-year initiative funded by the World Bank. Since its launch in 2021, projects worth about Rs 280 crore under MHSSP have overhauled the state's medical landscape. According to MHSSP project director Dr Lily



Chhakchhuak, the project is on track to meet all its development objectives before its scheduled conclusion in March 2026. "As of January 2026, four out of five project development objectives have been achieved, and 14 out of 16 intermediate result indicators have been met," she said. State Health Minister Lalrinpuui, who attended the event, emphasised

that the investment has gone beyond mere funding to deliver tangible results. District hospitals, Community Health Centres (CHCs), and Primary Health Centres (PHCs) across the state have seen significant improvements in equipment and resource management, leading to multiple national-level quality certifications, she said.

An effort to smuggle drugs from Manipur to Assam was stopped 15 kg of brown sugar

Imphal, Feb 04: A team of the Narcotics and Affairs of Border foiled an attempt to smuggle drugs from Manipur to Assam by arresting a 46-year-old man and seizing 15.556 kilograms of brown sugar from the North AOC area under Imphal Police Station in Manipur's Imphal West district. A Tata truck bearing an Assam registration number was also impounded. Md Sabir Ahamed (46), a resident of Lilong Nungei in Thoubal district, was arrested on February 2, 2026, based on information received about banned drugs being transported from Lilong Nungei to Guwahati in a truck, police reported on Wednesday. He was produced before a court in Imphal West on Tuesday. During the court proceedings, the prosecutor stated that six packets of brown sugar weighing a total of 15.556 kilograms were kept concealed in one of the spare tyres of the vehicle and were

recovered based on his interrogation. The prosecutor further stated that Md Sabir revealed the involvement of another person, identified as Sahi Khan, who is currently evading the police. However, a mobile phone belonging to Sahi Khan was seized during a search operation at his residence in Thoubal district. After hearing the submissions, the court remanded the accused, Md Sabir, to police custody till February 9, 2026. A drug smuggling attempt was foiled in the Chandel district of Manipur, by the Modi battalion of the Assam Rifles, under the aegis of HQ IGAR (South), informed the Assam Rifles. The Assam Rifles had launched a special operation based on a specific input regarding the move of contraband items in Libung, Chandel District. H2H and Other Things You Need to Know About IND vs BAN Cricket Match in Dhaka. While carrying out a specific



search of the area and roadside, the team discovered a bag concealed under thick foliage containing 15 soap cases of Brown Sugar. The seized 15 soap cases contained approx 600 gms of Brown Sugar, which was worth Rs 42 lakhs. Exit Poll Re-

sults of Gujarat Assembly Elections 2022: BJP Set for Historic Seventh Consecutive Win, Congress a Distant Second, Predict Surveys. The seized contraband was handed over to Tengenoupol Police Station for further investigation.

Bhutan's queen mother honoured with 'Soldier of Humanity' Award in Assam

Dimapur, Feb 04: The queen mother of Bhutan, Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, was on Tuesday conferred the 22nd Upendra Nath Brahma 'Soldier of Humanity' Award, 2025, at Kokrajhar in Assam's Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), an official statement said. She was presented with the award in recognition of her exemplary humanitarian services and compassionate leadership. Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, speaking at the award ceremony at the Jwhlwao Nileswar

and philosophy of 'Bodofa' (guardian of the Bodos) Upendra Nath Brahma, whose life was rooted in sacrifice, courage and service to humanity. Highlighting Bodofa's contribution to the society, the governor said that despite severe economic challenges, he emerged as a distinguished leader and devoted his life to social justice, human rights and inclusive development. Acharya commended the Upendra Nath Brahma Trust, established in 1999, for carrying forward Bodofa's ideals with

Brahma Auditorium, Bodoland University in Kokrajhar, said the presence of the queen mother, the first wife of former king Jigme Singye Wangchuck, elevated the significance of the event and termed it a privilege to welcome her on behalf of the people of the state. He also said that presentation of the award to her was a "perfect tribute to the personality who has been steadfast in her mission of humanitarian service and championing the cause of human dignity". Acharya maintained that her contributions in social welfare, cultural preservation, women empowerment and compassionate leadership embody the true spirit of the 'Soldier of Humanity' honour. He added that the award also symbolises the deep, historic and enduring ties between India and Bhutan, with Assam in the centre. Acharya noted that the 'Soldier of Humanity' Award is dedicated to the ideals



dedication and sensitivity, particularly its continued efforts towards the uplift of the marginalised and underprivileged sections of society. Governor of Gelephu Mindfulness City, Lotay Tshering, Assam minister U G Brahma, Chief Executive Member of Bodoland Territorial Council, Hagrama Mohilary, former CEM of BTC, Pramod Boro, and other dignitaries were also present on the occasion.

Y Khemchand Singh is who The next chief minister of Manipur will be a BJP leader

Imphal, Feb 04: Yumnam Khemchand Singh, the seasoned BJP MLA from Singjamei, has been elected as the leader of the BJP legislative party in Manipur. The move signals a new chapter in Manipur politics, paving the way for him to become the state's next Chief Minister after nearly a year under President's Rule. Khemchand is no stranger to Manipur's corridors of power. He served as

Speaker of the Legislative Assembly from 2017 to 2022, managing delicate political balances and steering debates during turbulent times.

Following the 2022 Assembly elections, he joined the second Biren Singh ministry as a Cabinet Minister. He played a pivot role handling crucial portfolios like Municipal Administration and Housing Development, Rural Development, Pan-

chayati Raj, and Education. His tenure saw efforts to strengthen urban governance while promoting grassroots development. Known for cross-community engagement, Khemchand recently visited Kuki villages in hill districts, a rare gesture amid ethnic tensions. Observers say the visits signal his intent to build bridges and restore trust in conflict-affected areas.

Gaurav Gogoi appointed chairman of Congress's Assam election panel

Guwahati, Feb 04: Ahead of the upcoming Assam Assembly elections, the Congress on February 3 constituted its Pradesh Election Committee for the state, appointing Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Gaurav Gogoi as its chairman.

According to the party, the 35-member committee includes senior leaders Debabrata Saikia, Rakibul Hussain, Pradyut Bordoloi, Bhupen Kumar Borah, Ripun Borah, Paban Singh Ghatowar, Wajid Ali Chaudhary, Rosilina Turkey, Jakir Hussain Sikdar, Pradeep Sarkar and Arun Dutta Mazumdar, among others. In addition to the listed members, the committee will also comprise the APCC General Secretary (Organisation), heads of all frontal organisations of the APCC, and chairpersons of the Scheduled Caste, Other Backward Classes, Minority, Adivasi Congress Departments and the Tea Garden Cell of the APCC. The reconstitution of the Pradesh Election Committee is part of the Congress's preparations for the Assembly polls due in Assam in the coming months. The party is aiming to mount a strong chal-



lenge to the ruling BJP and regain power in the northeastern state.

The Congress leadership said the newly formed panel will oversee election strategy, candidate selection and coordination of campaign activities across the state as the party steps up its poll read-

iness. Ahead of the upcoming Assam Assembly elections, the Congress on February 3 constituted its Pradesh Election Committee for the state, appointing Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Gaurav Gogoi as its chairman.

Public advisory issued in Lower Dibang Valley after tiger kills policeman

Dibrugarh, Feb 04: In a tragic incident, a biker was reportedly attacked by a tiger on Monday night at Mayudia in Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Dibang Valley district. The incident has created a sensation in the area, as human deaths due to tiger attacks are not common in Arunachal Pradesh. Confirming the incident, SP Manish Saurya said that police and forest teams were rushed to the spot. The body of the victim has been recovered and identified as Arunachal Pradesh Police Head Constable Chikseng Manpung, who was posted as a radio operator with Roing Police Station. He was returning from Anini in Dibang Valley district on his bike after performing his duties during state Chief

Minister Pema Khandu's recent visit to Anini. Saurya also stated that, in coordination with the forest department, the police have stopped two-wheelers from using the route. Apart from last night's incident, several people had reported sightings of tigers in the Mayudia area, which experiences snowfall and is a major tourist spot, particularly during winters. DFO Roing Mito Rumi said that a tigress with three sub-adult cubs has been sighted near or on the road over the last few an expert team with specialized equipment is on the way from the state headquarters in Itanagar and the three other tiger reserves in Arunachal Pradesh.

Rail connection to secure NE: Himanta beneath "Chicken's Neck"

Guwahati, Feb 04: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said the proposed underground rail link along the strategic 'Chicken's Neck' corridor in West Bengal will ensure a secure transportation route, connecting the Northeast. He said the "strategic vulnerability" of the narrow strip of land should have been addressed in the aftermath of 1971. "This is BIG. For decades,

the 'Chicken's Neck' has been used as an intimidation tactic by anti-national forces, both within and beyond our borders," Sarma said in a post on X. "The proposed underground rail link marks a major strategic breakthrough, creating a secure and foolproof transportation corridor between the North East and the rest of the country," he added. Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had on Monday

said plans are afoot to lay underground railway tracks along the 40-km strategic corridor and also make the existing tracks four-line. The strategic corridor, called the 'Chicken's Neck' for its shape, is a strip of land located in northern West Bengal's Siliguri area, having a width of over 20 km. The strip is sandwiched between Nepal and Bangladesh, with Bhutan and China a few hundred kilometres away.

Mizoram leverages literacy, english skills to push digital governance drive

Aizawl, Feb 04: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on February 4 said the state’s exceptionally high literacy rate and widespread English proficiency are being strategically used to transform Mizoram into a digital powerhouse, with a strong focus on efficient and accessible public service delivery. The Chief Minister made the remarks while inaugurating the computerisation of the Registrar of Cooperative Societies at a function held at the Chief Minister’s Office. He described the initiative as a key milestone in Mizoram’s digital roadmap. Mizoram was declared the country’s first fully literate state on May 20 last year, recording a literacy rate of 98.2 per cent. Lalduhoma said his government is prioritising simplified governance and faster, more transparent access to services. He noted that progress made over the last two years reflects the state’s ambition to emerge as a national leader in digital service delivery. Citing social advantages, he said Mizoram’s small population, high literacy and strong English proficiency al-



low quicker adoption of modern technologies. He further informed that more than 20 online service portals have been launched in the past two years, including the Mizoram CSR Connect Portal. State Corporation Minister P C Vanlalruata said Mizoram is the first state to fully computerise all regional offices of the Cooperation Depart-

ment, improving ease of doing business by eliminating physical visits. Cooperation Department Secretary Adit Prakash Rai said the RCS portal was developed under the centrally sponsored scheme Strengthening Cooperatives Through IT Interventions and covers offices across all districts.

Y Khemchand likely to take oath as CM

Imphal, Feb 04: BJP MLA Yumnam Khemchand Singh is likely to take oath as new Chief Minister of Manipur today, with the swearing-in ceremony expected to take place at around 6 pm at Lok Bhavan. Another BJP leader from Kuki-Zo community Nemcha Kipgen, and Naga People’s Front (NPF) leader Losii Dikho are also likely to take oath as Deputy Chief Ministers. Meanwhile, BJP leader Govindas Konthoujam is expected to be given charge of the Home Department in the new government. The oath-taking ceremony is likely to be held in the presence of senior BJP leaders and alliance partners, marking the formal formation of the new government in the northeastern state. Earlier on Tuesday, Khemchand was elected as the leader of the BJP legislature party in Manipur, paving the way for the formation of a popular government in the northeastern state with him as its head after a year-long vacuum following Biren Singh’s resignation and the imposition of the President’s rule amid the ethnic violence. Well-wishers and supporters congratulated his family members, burst firecrackers, and danced on the roads. Khemchand said he is committed to fostering empathy, compassion, and harmony among



all communities in the state. In a social media post, Khemchand said, “I express my sincere gratitude to the Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji; Hon’ble Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah ji, Shri Nitin Nabin ji, National President Bharatiya Janata Party, and all the respected BJP Manipur MLAs for reposing their trust in me by electing me as the Leader of the BJP Legislature Party.” Yumnam Khemchand Singh has served as the Speaker of the Manipur Legislative Assembly from 2017 to 2022. Between 2022 and 2025, he held key ministerial responsibilities, serving as Minister for Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, and the Education Department. 62-year-old Singh has been active not only in Manipur’s political life but also in promoting the martial art of Taekwondo.

Search on for three students after boat capsizes in Assam river

Guwahati, Feb 04: Teams from the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) are carrying out an intensive search operation along the stretch of the Gangadhar River in western Assam’s Dhubri district to trace three students who went missing on Tuesday after a country boat ferrying them capsized in the river. A group of 22 students had travelled to the riverine island to perform shradh, a traditional funeral ritual when the mishap took place at Belpara Char in the Tamarhat area. According to witnesses, the

boat lost balance midway through the return journey and overturned in the river. Even as most of the other students managed to swim to safety, the trio were swept away by the strong current of the fast-flowing river. The missing students been identified as Saha Alom, Mofida and Sharmin, all residents of Shagunsara village under Tamarhat police station. Police personnel from the Sotoguma police station rushed to the spot to initiate preliminary response measures soon after being informed about the inci-

President’s Rule lifted in Manipur with immediate effect

Imphal, Feb 04: After almost a year, President’s Rule in Manipur was lifted on Wednesday with immediate effect, paving the way for the formation of a new elected government in the State that was hit by ethnic violence. In this regard, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a notification revoking President’s Rule in Manipur with immediate effect, hours before the swearing-in of the new chief minister. According to BJP Manipur Pradesh, NDA legislature party leader Y Khemchand Singh will be sworn in as the chief minister of Manipur at 6 pm on Wednesday. The oath-taking ceremony will be held at the Lok Bhavan in the presence of officials. “The swearing-in ceremony of Shri @YKhemchandSingh as the



Hon’ble Chief Minister of Manipur will take place today, 4th February 2026, at 6 PM at Lok Bhavan,” BJP Manipur said in a post on X. “Under his experienced and visionary leadership, Manipur is set to move forward on the path

of peace, development, and good governance, ushering in a new era of stability and progress for the state,” the party added. The announcement came minutes after Singh staked claim to form the government. An NDA delega-

tion led by him met Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Lok Bhavan to formally seek permission to form a popular government. The delegation included two MLAs from the Kuki-Zo majority districts of Churachandpur and Pherzawl.

Researchers trace evolution of Kaziranga to the last great home of the one-horned rhino

Guwahati, Feb 04: From the mud below the wetlands of Assam’s Kaziranga National Park (KNP), has emerged a story of how residence of the one horned Rhino has evolved through climate change, vegetation shifts, exotic species invasion and herbivore activity. Rapid urbanisation, industrialisation and deforestation, together with natural hazards such as floods, droughts, earthquakes and landslides, are driving global ecological degradation and accelerating biodiversity loss. Northeast India, part of the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot, hosts numerous endangered species facing extinction risk. Late Quaternary megafaunal extinctions remain a major global concern, with their causes still debated; today, nearly 60 percent of large herbivores are threatened worldwide, and Southeast Asia has the highest number of at-risk species. Kaziranga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a stronghold of megaherbivores, notably the Indian one-horned rhinoceros.

Scientists from Birbal Sahni institution of Palaeosciences (BSIP), an autonomous institute of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), used pollens from mud below wetlands in KNP to trace the first long-term palaeoecological records in relation to the palaeoherbivory from KNP. The researchers extracted a sediment core just over a metre long from the Sohola swamp inside Kaziranga National Park. Layer by layer, this mud acts like a natural archive, preserving microscopic traces of the past. Among these traces are pollen grains from plants and fungal spores that thrive on animal dung. The study (published in journal, ‘Catena’ (Elsevier)) highlights that Kaziranga’s present landscape differs markedly from its past and documents the regional extinction of megaherbivores, including the Indian rhinoceros, from northwestern India due to climatic amelioration during late Holocene, especially during the Little Ice Age and increasing human activities. In contrast, northeastern India remained relative-

ly climatically stable, facilitating eastward migration and eventual concentration of rhinoceroses in Kaziranga. The study which examined the reasons behind the decline and present confinement of megaherbivores, especially the Indian one-horned rhinoceros, to Kaziranga National Park shows through fossil evidence that the species was once widely distributed across the Indian subcontinent, but this distribution greatly reduced since the Holocene. Over the last 3300 years, northeastern India remained relatively climatically stable with lower human pressure, while habitat loss, climate deterioration, and overhunting in northwestern regions forced rhinoceroses to migrate eastward and eventually concentrate in Kaziranga. The study demonstrates how long-term vegetation and climate changes shaped wildlife survival, migration, and extinction, providing long-term ecological knowledge that can help guide better conservation and wildlife management under present and future climate change.

MDoNER Sanctions 75 Health, Education Projects Worth Rs 3,601 Cr in Northeast

Agartala, Feb 04: The Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) has sanctioned a total of 75 projects in the health and education sectors across the Northeastern states during the period from 2022–23 to 2025–26, with an overall approved cost of Rs 3,601.06 crore, the Lok Sabha was informed on Tuesday. Of the sanctioned projects, 49 pertain to education and 26 to the health sector. As of December 31, 2025, the Centre has released Rs 1,635.39 crore, out of which Rs 995.37 crore has been utilized, reflecting steady progress in infrastructure development across the re-

gion. Among the states, Assam received the highest allocation with projects worth Rs 1,532.77 crore, followed by Tripura with Rs 501.32 crore and Manipur with Rs 448.70 crore. Sikkim showed strong utilization, having spent Rs 276.27 crore out of Rs 279.71 crore released, indicating effective implementation on the ground. The data also shows allocations to Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and projects executed through other agencies, ensuring balanced regional development. An independent evaluation conducted by IIM Shillong has underlined the critical role



of MDoNER schemes in strengthening social infrastructure in the Northeast, particularly in improving access to healthcare facilities and educational institutions. The information was provided by Minister of State for Development of North Eastern Region Dr. Sukanta Majumdar in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha.

RIMS observes World Cancer Day



Imphal, Feb 04: The Department of Radiation Oncology and the Department of Pathology, Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Imphal, jointly observed World Cancer Day 2026 today at the OPD Complex, RIMS Hospital, Imphal, with the theme “United by Unique.” Prof. G. Sunil Kumar Sharma, Director, RIMS, attended the programme as the Chief Guest, while Prof. N. Sanjib Singh, Medical Superintendent, RIMS Hospital,

Imphal, presided over the event as President. Prof. L. Rajesh Singh, Dean (Academic), RIMS, Prof. Y. Sobita Devi, Head of the Department of Radiation Oncology, and Prof. Sushma Khuraijam, Head of the Department of Pathology, RIMS, Imphal, were present as Guests of Honour. In his address, Prof. G. Sunil Kumar Sharma emphasized that on World Cancer Day, RIMS reaffirms its commitment to united, patient-centred cancer care. He

highlighted that through strong collaboration between pathology and oncology, the institute focuses on cancer prevention, early diagnosis, and compassionate treatment. He further stated that with expanding faculty strength, upgraded infrastructure, and future plans for comprehensive cancer services, RIMS remains hopeful, united, and dedicated to serving the people of Manipur and neighbouring states. The programme focused on creating

awareness about cancer prevention, early detection, and the importance of individualized, patient-centred cancer care. The event was attended by Heads of Departments, Principals of the Dental and Nursing Colleges, the Deputy Director (Administration), the Chief Accounts Officer, faculty members, staff, students, and patient parties, reflecting RIMS’ collective commitment to public health awareness and compassionate care.

Will foster harmony, unity in Manipur: NDA’s new legislature party leader

Imphal, Feb 04: BJP MLA Yumnam Khemchand who was elected NDA legislature party leader in Manipur said that he remains dedicated to fostering empathy, compassion, and harmony among all communities, respecting our diversity while strengthening unity in the State. Notably, Khemchand’s election as the leader of the NDA legislature party paved the way for the formation of a new government in the state with him as the new chief minister after much speculation. Khemchand who was elected to Manipur assembly in 2017 and 2022 from Singamei assembly constituency, said he is committed to fostering empathy, compassion and harmony among all communities in the state. He said he would respect the state’s diversity and focus on strengthening unity among communities. “I express my sincere gratitude to the Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji; Hon’ble Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah ji, Shri Nitin Nabin ji, National President Bharatiya Janata Party, and all the respected BJP Manipur MLAs for reposing their trust in me by electing me as the Leader of the BJP Legislature Party,” Khemchand said in a social media post on Tuesday. He also said he accepted the responsibility with “humility and a deep sense of commitment”. “I shall work with utmost sincerity to honour the trust placed in me and strive towards realising the vision of Viksit Bharat and Viksit Manipur, ensuring peace, dignity, and inclusive development. At the same time, I remain dedicated to fostering empathy, compassion, and harmony among all communities, respecting our diversity while strengthening unity,” he said. The BJP legislature party of Manipur elected 62-year-old Singh as its leader at a meeting held at the party headquarters in New Delhi. It was attended by 35 of the 37 BJP MLAs, besides the party’s central observer Tarun Chugh, its northeast in-charge Sambit Patra, and BJP state president A Sharda Devi, among others. Subsequently, another meeting was held at the Manipur Bhavan, where MLAs of NDA constituents in Manipur -- six of the National People’s Party (NPP), five of the Naga People’s Front (NPF) and three Independents -- and BJP legislators were in attendance.

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The Growing Acceptance of Mediocrity

Mediocrity is increasingly normalised. Minimum effort is often rewarded, while excellence requires disproportionate struggle. This discourages ambition and innovation. In education and workplaces, standards are diluted. Consistency replaces quality. When excellence is undervalued, progress slows. Society loses inspiration. Encouraging effort and integrity restores standards. Excellence should be accessible, not discouraged. A society that values quality grows stronger.

Why US household energy bills are soaring and how to fix it

Donald Trump promised to cut energy prices by 50%. Instead, average electricity prices over the past year have risen by about 6.7%, while natural gas prices have increased by 10.8%. Energy prices are influenced by many factors beyond any president's direct control, including market conditions, weather-driven demand, regional infrastructure constraints and the rapid growth of energy-intensive data centers that are driving new system costs. Policy choices do not determine prices on their own, but they do shape market outcomes, and the direction of this administration's energy policy has been clear. From his first days in office, President Trump made clear that his energy agenda would prioritize fossil fuel producers over consumers. His administration moved to expand US liquefied natural gas exports, increasing exposure to volatile global markets. At the same time, it froze wind power projects that provide some of the cheapest new electricity, intervened to keep costly coal plants running, and backed the elimination of energy-efficiency tax credits that lower household energy bills. The administration also proposed cutting the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and the Weatherization Assistance Program, the federal government's primary tools for protecting low-income households from rising energy costs even as electricity and gas prices were climbing. Congress ultimately blocked those cuts, sparing millions of families from immediate harm. Supporters claim these policies promote "energy independence", but increasing reliance on global fuel markets while dismantling the lowest-cost sources of new domestic power and demand reduction does the opposite. The outcome is predictable: higher prices, greater volatility and protected fossil fuel profits, with households – especially low- and moderate-income families – left to pay the price. The result is that energy is becoming increasingly unaffordable. For example, we are projecting that home heating costs will increase by 9.2% this winter, more than three times the rate of inflation, driven by higher electricity and natural gas prices and colder-than-average weather. These increases may be an inconvenience for higher-income households, but for low- and middle-income families they are devastating. Millions of households that were getting by are now being driven into utility debt and toward shutoffs because they cannot afford to keep their homes warm. Polling confirms the reality on the

ground: nearly one in four households now say their energy bills are unaffordable. Energy use does not rise in proportion to income, meaning energy costs take up a far larger share of household budgets at the bottom than at the top. As prices increased between 2024 and 2025, that imbalance widened: for lowest income households (less than \$30,000), the share of income spent on home energy rose from 9.4% to 9.9%, while moderate-income households saw a smaller increase, from 4.9% to 5.1% (\$30,000 to \$58,000). For the highest-income households (\$156,000 plus), the change was barely perceptible, edging from 1.2% to 1.3%. These outcomes are not inevitable features of energy markets. They reflect policy choices that raise system costs, weaken efficiency and affordability programs, and shift risk on to households least able to absorb it. As a result, utility arrears have climbed sharply alongside higher energy prices, rising from \$15.4bn at the end of 2021 to an estimated \$23bn in 2025, largely driven by increasing electricity bills. If current trends continue, arrears could reach roughly \$28bn in 2026, as higher energy costs compound broader inflation in essentials such as rent, food and medical care. The solution is neither complicated nor ideological. If the goal is lower energy bills, policy must focus on lowering system costs and reducing household exposure to price volatility. That means prioritizing the cheapest resources available: energy efficiency, weatherization, and renewable power that lowers demand and stabilizes prices. It means expanding existing tax credits that help families improve the efficiency of their homes and install rooftop solar, permanently reducing electricity and natural gas use. And it means protecting households from short-term price spikes through targeted bill assistance, rather than forcing families to absorb the shock. These are not untested ideas. States and countries that have leaned into efficiency, renewables, and consumer protections have achieved lower long-term costs and greater price stability. The tools exist, and the economics are well understood. What is missing is political will. An administration that claims to stand with consumers cannot continue to write energy policy for fossil-fuel producers and expect a different outcome. Lower energy prices will not come from propping up high-cost power plants, dismantling clean energy, or exposing households to volatile global fuel markets.

On the U.S.-India trade deal, America's tariffs

News of the India-United States trade deal has brought palpable relief to a lot of Indian industries, but it also comes with persistent and important questions that remain unanswered despite a press statement by India's Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal. The initial announcement, through social media, while true to U.S. President Donald Trump's form, also marks a departure for India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Past trade deal announcements have all been made through more formal channels. The announcement of U.S. tariffs on Indian imports being cut to 18% from the existing 50% is certainly welcome. However, as of now, there is no clarity on when this would be implemented. While Mr. Trump said they would be cut "immediately", Mr. Goyal said that the details will be shared "soon". There is also considerable ambiguity over whether this is the first tranche or 'mini-



deal' of a larger Bilateral Trade Agreement, a limited deal affecting only tariffs, or something in between.

Mr. Trump's assertion that Mr. Modi has "agreed to stop buying Russian oil" must also be addressed by the Indian government sooner rather than later. Mr. Goyal did not touch upon this in his statement. Stopping Rus-

sian oil entirely would not only force India to find alternatives for about a third of its oil imports but would also cast a shadow over its relations with Russia, which is a long-time friend and critical supplier of defence equipment. Such a move would announce a very definite realignment for India and, in that light, deserves to be discussed in Parliament first.

Similarly, buying more Venezuelan crude comes with its own refining challenges. There is also the question of what India has committed to the U.S. in terms of tariff concessions, investments and purchase orders. Apart from making the assurance that sensitive agricultural items and dairy would be excluded, the government has been silent despite sev-

eral significant assertions being made by Mr. Trump and his team. While the "final stages of detailing" are still to be completed, as Mr. Goyal has said, the light at the end of the tunnel has already buoyed Indian stock markets, bolstered the rupee, and brought especial cheer to labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, apparel, footwear, leather and engineering goods that had been hurting from the 50% tariffs. These sectors already stand to gain from the India-European Union trade deal, which Mr. Goyal has assured will come into effect this year. The tariffs they will face in the U.S. will likely still be slightly higher than those enjoyed by competitors in the South-East Asian countries due to their Most-Favoured Nation status. Yet, the new deal stands to certainly enhance their competitiveness, and the targeted announcements in the Union Budget 2026 should also help bridge this narrower gap.

Union Budget 2026-27: A record allocation for the Northeast-DoNER and beyond

On February 1, 2026, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget for 2026-27, outlining fiscal priorities for the coming year. While the budget was framed as a reform-orientated roadmap for national growth, it also carried significant but often understated implications for the North Eastern Region (NER), a geostrategically vital, culturally rich, and economically emerging part of India. From infrastructure financing to cultural tourism, rural livelihoods to human capital, the budget seeks to integrate the unique strengths of the Northeast with India's broader development vision. Among the eight states of the region, Assam plays a pivotal role, both as its largest economy and as a gateway connecting South Asia and Southeast Asia, as the 2026-27 budget aims to empower the Northeast and Assam with targeted allocations, structural support, and long-term growth frameworks.

DoNER Allocation, Enhanced Fiscal Support and Higher Devolution. One of the headline figures for NER in this budget is the enhanced allocation for the Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region (DoNER). For 2026-27, DoNER has been entrusted with Rs 6,812.30 crore, up from Rs 5,915 crore in the previous year, reflecting a year-on-year growth that signals continued federal priority. Beyond DoNER, the total dedicated investment envelope for the Northeast, spanning central ministries, special schemes, and region-specific programs, stands at a record Rs 11,486 crore. This broader fiscal commitment dovetails infrastructure, social sectors, employment, and community development interventions that cut across traditional sectoral classifications. Another of the most consequential measures for the Northeast in Budget 2026-27 is the increase in tax devolution to the region from 3.128% to 3.258%. This enhanced share strengthens the financial autonomy of Northeastern states, enabling them to undertake development projects tailored to local needs.

Capital Investment Support: Rs 2-lakh crore Under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment, Assam will benefit from the Centre's expanded envelope of approximately Rs 2 lakh crore, enabling acceleration of major in-

frastructure projects, urban renewal, and logistics development. This financing window is expected to strengthen urban centres like Guwahati, improve transportation corridors, and build capacities in state institutions to execute long-term development plans. Rs 500-crore ULFA Rehabilitation Package A landmark provision is the allocation of Rs 500 crore specifically for the rehabilitation of former ULFA cadres and their families in Assam. The design of this special package is to offer sustainable livelihoods, skill training, and community integration, thereby promoting peacebuilding and tackling long-standing socio-economic challenges. Additionally, separate allocations under this umbrella include: n Rs 200 crore for the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council n Rs 156 crore for the Bodoland Territorial Council n Rs 70 crore for Adivasi communities n Rs 70 crore for Dimas and related communities These funds are earmarked for local infrastructure, education, healthcare, market access, and cultural preservation, addressing both identity and economic inclusion in historically underserved areas. Transforming Urban Centres: Rs 5,000 crore for city development Urban development has emerged as a priority area in Budget 2026-27. A dedicated allocation of Rs 5,000 crore has been earmarked for the development of Tier-II and Tier-III cities, including Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Silchar, Imphal, and Agartala. This funding will be utilised for: n Public transport systems n Waste management and sanitation n Digital governance platforms n Affordable housing n Smart infrastructure By strengthening urban ecosystems, the budget aims to create regional economic hubs that generate employment and reduce migration to metropolitan cities. Infrastructure & connectivity: Bridging the region Physical and digital connectivity has long been recognized as a precondition for the Northeast's integration with national and global value chains. Budget 2026 responds with a layered approach: Expansion of Multi-Modal Connectivity Under the budget's broader thrust on national connectivity, including rail corridors extending toward northeastern nodes, it is expected to facilitate faster movement of goods and



people. For example, the Varanasi-Siliguri corridor, projected under national high-speed rail initiatives, has indirect but significant regional benefits. DoNER Infrastructure Schemes Several targeted schemes under DoNER secure direct financing for connectivity and basic services: n Prime Minister's Development Initiative for the North East (PM-DevINE): Rs 2,300 crore — a flexible financing window supporting region-specific projects, especially in transport, community infrastructure, and local livelihood empowerment. n Northeast Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS): Rs 2,500 crore — dedicated to water supply, electrification, urban upgrades, logistics nodes, and last-mile connectivity across the region. n North East Council's Programmes: Rs 825 crore, which empower decentralized planning and execution of development priorities at the state and local levels.

These funds will be leveraged to reduce isolation, strengthen road and rail feeder links, and integrate economic hubs with national markets. Agriculture, Forestry & Rural Livelihoods: Aligning Ecology and Economy The Northeast's growth narrative cannot be separated from its ecological base. Budget 2026 recognises this through support for environmentally aligned agriculture and rural economies. High-Value Crops and Ecological Cultivation: Special mention has been made of encouraging the cultivation of agar (oudh), a high-value fragrant wood with strong international demand. Combined with expanded horticulture support, animal husbandry, and allied sectors, these measures aim to: n Increase

real incomes for farmers n Promote value addition and agro-processing n Expand market linkages into export chains Rural development is further supported through integrated value chain financing and credit linkage for small producers, particularly in hilly and forested districts where traditional cropping patterns may not be as profitable. Tourism & Cultural Economy: Unlocking Heritage Potential One of the most transformative provisions of the 2026 Budget for the North East is the focus on tourism as an engine of inclusive development. Buddhist and Heritage Circuits The budget outlines a dedicated framework to develop Buddhist circuits across Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim, and Tripura. These corridors, grounded in both historical significance and cultural heritage, will receive infrastructure support for:

• Pilgrim and meditation centres n Accessible visitor services n Digital and interpretive cultural trails n Linkages with international tourism markets By expanding tourism infrastructure, the Northeast is positioned to attract visitors from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia, helping local economies reap the benefits of cross-border mobility, hospitality services, and artisanal enterprises. Tourism growth, in turn, catalyses jobs in hotels, travel services, transportation, local craft markets, and environmental conservation, especially in remote areas where alternative employment opportunities are limited.

Human Capital: Skills & Education Budget 2026 underscores the role of human capital in driving sustained development. For the Northeast, this

translates into investments in: Skilling and Vocational Training Expanding vocational training and skill development initiatives targeted at youth in the region will be critical.

These programmes aim to: n Increase employability in service sectors n Improve digital literacy n Support specialised training for tourism, healthcare, and creative industries Skill finance and placement assistance will help stem migration pressures by creating jobs closer to home. Education and Institutional Support The budget includes expanded access to quality education, digital learning platforms, and institution building, especially in remote and tribal communities. This is expected to improve literacy, research output, and local capacity to participate in emerging sectors. Healthcare Access & Special Services A major healthcare milestone is the upgrading of the National Mental Health Institute at Tezpur into a Regional Apex Institute. This will enhance specialised mental healthcare services, training, and research for the entire Northeast.

Healthcare financing under the budget emphasises: n Upgraded district and community hospitals n Telemedicine and diagnostic expansion n Mental health services and preventive care These interventions reduce reliance on distant urban centers for critical care and strengthen resilience among rural and tribal populations. MSMEs, Entrepreneurship & the Jobs Landscape Micro, small, and medium enterprises remain central to job creation in the Northeast and form the backbone of the Northeast's economic activity. Budget 2026 strengthens this sector by advocating: n Credit access expansion n Technology adoption

support n Market linkage programmes n Start-up facilitation Entrepreneurship among youth and women is encouraged through targeted programmes that link production with digital marketplaces and logistics networks. The creative economy, including handicrafts, textiles, cultural arts, and eco-tourism services, receives renewed emphasis, enabling artisans to translate heritage skills into sustainable livelihoods. The Union Budget 2026-27 unmistakably signals a shift from rhetoric to targeted planning. Through a blend of financial allocations, decentralised schemes, and thematic priorities, the budget seeks to weave the Northeast and particularly Assam into the nation's growth tapestry. It represents a thoughtful mix of enhanced fiscal support, cultural recognition, and long-term development vision for the Northeastern Region. For Assam, with its unique demographic, historic, and strategic role, the Budget provides specific packages to ensure peace, infrastructure momentum, and economic opportunity.

From strengthened connectivity and ecological agriculture to tourism growth, human capital formation, and entrepreneurial empowerment, the Northeast stands to benefit from a multi-sectoral push that reflects its potential as a growth engine of India's eastern frontier. Although putting this plan into action will challenge the effectiveness of institutions and cooperation between states, the financial groundwork established in this budget could significantly change the Northeast's development path, connecting remote areas to growth and transforming geographical difficulties into economic chances.

Anthropic AI tool: The reason behind today’s 6% decline in Infosys, TCS, Wipro, and HCL

New Delhi: IT stocks such as Infosys Ltd, Wipro Ltd, HCL Technologies Ltd, Tata Consultancy Services Ltd (TCS) and Tech Mahindra fell up to 6 per cent in Wednesday’s trade, tracking an overnight falling American Depository Receipts (ADRs) after new AI tool by Anthropic sparked fears of an AI-led disruption and led to selloff in IT stocks globally. Infosys, India’s second largest IT firm, saw its shares plunging 4.51 per cent to Rs 1,580.35. TCS, the largest software exporter by sales, was down 3.15 per cent at Rs 3,122 at open. HCL Technologies Ltd was hit hard, falling 5.99 per cent to Rs 1,592.25. Wipro Ltd dropped 4.73 per cent to Rs 230.95. Tech Mahindra Ltd plunged 5.11 per cent to Rs 1,628. L&T Technology Services Ltd was down 1.84 per cent at Rs 3,740.20. Coforge Ltd dropped 5.81 per cent to Rs 1,611.50. Anthropic recently launched plug-ins for its Claude Cowork agent, designed to automate tasks across legal, sales, marketing and data analysis functions. The plug-ins work across use cases but are particularly effective in tailoring Claude to specific job functions such as sales, legal and financial analysis. The development weighed on information technology stocks, with American depository receipts of Infosys plunging 5.56 per cent overnight to \$17.32, while Wipro ADRs fell 4.83 per cent to \$2.56, stoking concerns of a selloff in Indian IT shares during domestic trade. Global equities were under pressure



as well. The Nasdaq Composite declined 1.43 per cent to settle at 23,255.19, while the S&P 500 fell 0.84 per cent to 6,917.81. In a note dated January 29, Jefferies said the initial success of OpenAI had served as a wake-up call for US Big Tech, highlighting the threat of disruption and prompting a sharp increase in capital expenditure. It added that hyperscalers appeared increasingly willing to exit their traditional moats and move away

from asset-light business models as they converged on the same opportunity set. However, Jefferies said the narrative was shifting, noting that OpenAI was no longer seen as the sole disruptive force. “The evidence continues to grow that OpenAI is losing the corporate market to Anthropic’s Claude,” Jefferies said. “Anthropic’s AI coding tool, Claude Code, was publicly launched only in May last year and reached \$1 billion in annualised re-

curring revenue by November. With such performance, it is no wonder that estimates of Anthropic’s value are surging.” The brokerage added that Anthropic was reportedly set to raise about \$20 billion from investors in its current funding round, doubling the amount previously targeted. This would value the company at around \$350 billion, up from an estimated \$183 billion last September and \$61.5 billion in March 2025.

Tata Power Q3 results: losses at Mundra likely

New Delhi: Tata Power Company Ltd, a Tata group firm, is geared up to report its December quarter results on Wednesday. The Mumbai-headquartered company is expected to post a double-digit decline in net profit for the quarter on muted net sales. Ahead of the earnings announcement, Tata Power shares were trading 1.7 per cent higher at Rs 371.25 apiece. Kotak Institutional Equities said Tata Power’s earnings from the renewable portfolio will benefit from a higher capacity base as well as healthy execution at Tata Power Solar, even as it will see higher losses at Mundra as Section 11 benefit was not present in the December quarter. This brokerage sees profit for the quarter falling 13.2 per cent YoY to Rs 895.10 crore from Rs 1,030.70 crore YoY. It sees sales falling 5.2 per cent YoY to Rs 14,327.60 crore. Nuvama Institutional Equities sees a 13 per cent YoY decline in Q3 profit, as losses at the Mundra UMPP persisted, even as the solar manufacturing ramp-up remained strong. “Tata projects and Mundra



UMPP performance along with consolidation of EPC/module sales is a key monitorable going ahead with all eyes on when and how the Mundra resolution pans out,” it said. This brokerage sees adjusted profit falling 12.76 per cent to Rs 899.20 crore despite 9.76 per cent YoY growth in sales at Rs 16,892 crore. JM Financial said Tata Power’s net sales could fall to Rs 13,800 crore, down 11 per cent YoY due to the non-operational Mundra Plant. EBITDA margin is expected to be at 24.7 per cent against 21.8 per cent YoY. Decline in revenue could be offset by lower fuel cost (65 per cent YoY) and other expenses (13 per cent YoY), it said adding that depreciation and finance cost expected to increase due to renewable commissioning. Elara Securities expects Tata Power to report 5.1 per cent YoY rise in net profit at Rs 1,386.80 crore. It sees sales rising 2.4 per cent YoY to Rs 15,764.90 crore. Ebitda is seen at Rs 3,859.70 crore, up 15.1 per cent.

Services PMI climbs to 58.5, hits two-month high demand improves



New Delhi: India’s services sector saw a pickup in growth momentum in January. HSBC India Services PMI rising to 58.5 from 58.0 in December, hitting a two-month high. “Business confidence climbed to a three-month high, supported by efficiency gains, effective marketing, and the acquisition of new clients. While input and output prices are rising, they remain fairly mild by historical standards,” Bhandari added. Meanwhile, during January, India’s private sector witnessed quicker increases in new orders and output, which in turn supported job creation and strengthened business confidence. On the price front, there were quicker albeit still moderate increases in input costs and selling charges, the survey said. Cost pressures were by far most intense in the Consumer Services category, while the strongest increase in output charges was noted in the Finance & Insurance sector. According to the latest HSBC India Services PMI data released by S&P Global, the growth was supported by stronger demand, improved business confidence and a return to hiring. Service providers in India noted faster growth in new business intake and output. They were also more upbeat towards the outlook and hired additional staff, the survey noted. According to the survey, new orders rose at the quickest pace in two months. The main source of new business gains was the domestic market, but international orders nevertheless

rose solidly. Survey participants remarked on new business gains from clients in Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. Service providers in India were more upbeat towards the outlook. The HSBC India Composite PMI Output Index rose to 58.4 in January from last December’s 11-month low of 57.8. Composite PMI indices are weighted averages of comparable manufacturing and services PMI indices. Weights reflect the relative size of the manufacturing and service sectors according to official GDP data. “The composite PMI also strengthened in January, reflecting solid demand growth across both manufacturing and services,” Bhandari said. On the job front, after stagnating in December, private sector employment increased at the start of 2026. Slight rates of job creation were noted at manufacturing firms and their services counterparts, the survey said. In the Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI) parlance, a reading above 50 indicates expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction. “ India’s services PMI rose to 58.5 in January, up from 58.0 in December, signalling sustained momentum in the sector. Robust output growth was driven by a steady influx of new orders, including increased international demand from South and South-east Asia,” said Pranjul Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC.

Stock market advances in early deals on fresh foreign fund inflows, India-US trade pact

New Delhi: Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty were trading higher in early trade on Wednesday, building on previous day’s sharp rally, amid fresh foreign fund inflows and positive sentiment following the India-US trade deal. A sharp decline in IT stocks, however, restricted the rally in the markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex advanced 68.49 points to 83,816.96 in early trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 51.90 points to 25,779.45. From the Sensex firms, Mahindra & Mahindra, Power Grid, Reliance Industries, NTPC, ICICI Bank and ITC were among the biggest gainers. Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, HCL Tech and Tech Mahindra were the biggest laggards, declining as much as 5 per cent. The BSE IT index tumbled 4.95 per cent to 35,311.34 in early trade. Foreign institutional investors turned buyers on Tuesday as they bought equities worth Rs 5,236.28 crore, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 1,014.24 crore. India and the US have agreed on a framework for a trade deal under which Washington will bring down tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from the current 50 per cent. The announcement is important because the US has imposed a steep tariff on Indian goods entering American markets, effective August 27, 2025. In Asian markets, South Korea’s Kospi traded higher, while Japan’s Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai’s SSE Composite index and Hong Kong’s Hang Seng index quoted lower. US markets ended lower on Tuesday. “The rally fuelled by the US-India trade deal will face hurdles to sustain. The IT selloff in the US yesterday will drag the Indian IT index,



too, constraining the rally in the Indian market,” VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, climbed 0.68 per cent to USD 67.77 per barrel. On Tuesday, the Sensex ended at 83,739.13, up 2,072.67 points or 2.54 per cent. The Nifty zoomed 639.15 points or 2.55 per cent to settle at 25,727.55.

H-1B ‘weighted’ lottery math explained: Entry-level odds slashed by half

New Delhi: The Trump administration has reshaped the H-1B visa system, moving it away from a random lottery to a wage-weighted model. Data, cited by Newsweek shows entry-level applicants are the hardest hit, with their chances of selection dropping by nearly 50%. Higher-paid roles now get as many as four entries, while lower-paid ones get just one. Add the \$100,000 fee for certain overseas filings, and it’s clear the H-1B has become far harder to access for entry-level workers. The wage-weighted model assumes normal registration volumes. They do not account for possible disruptions, including the \$100,000 fee, state-level limits on H-1B filings by universities or public agencies, processing delays, or court challenges. Once the registration period ends, USCIS will run its selection process. Employers whose registrations are chosen will be notified through their online USCIS accounts by March 31. The government has introduced several changes aimed at reducing fraud and encouraging companies to offer higher wages. One of the biggest changes was the introduction of a \$100,000 fee in September for certain H-1B petitions. The administration has said these higher fees are meant to reduce reliance on foreign labour. Despite the new rules, the total number of visas remains the same. The annual H-1B cap is still 65,000 visas, with an additional 20,000 visas reserved for applicants who have earned a master’s degree or higher from a US university. The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has announced that it is opening the first registration window for the 2027 H-1B visa cap. The details were shared in an official press release on Jan 31st. The registration period will



begin at 12 noon ET on March 4 and close at 12 noon ET on March 19. During this time, employers and their authorised representatives must register each potential H-1B worker online through a USCIS account. Each registration will cost \$215 per beneficiary. USCIS has made it clear that only registrations submitted during this window will be considered for selection under the annual H-1B cap. This registration cycle is also the first time USCIS will apply a new wage-based selection system if registrations go beyond the annual visa limit. Under new rules from the Department of Homeland Security, the agency will no longer depend only on a random lottery. Instead, applications for higher-paying jobs will be given more weight. The goal is to

prioritise higher-paid speciality roles. Under the old system, each registration had about a 30% chance of being selected. According to DHS estimates, the new weighted system changes those odds completely. “Based upon DHS’s model, only those submissions at Wage Level I have decreased the chances of being selected,” said Morgan Bailey, a partner at Mayer Brown and a former DHS official, in an interview with Newsweek. Under the new model, applications at Wage Level II or higher keep the same odds or see better chances. Meanwhile, Wage Level I applications could see their chances fall by nearly half. DHS estimates that selection chances could rise by 3% for Level II, 55% for Level III, and 107% for Level IV submissions.

Handful of sick and wounded Palestinians allowed through Rafah crossing on first day

London: A small number of sick and wounded Palestinians have begun crossing into Egypt to seek medical treatment after Israel permitted a limited reopening of the Palestinian territory’s Rafah border post as fragile diplomatic efforts to stabilise the conflict inch forward. The reopening is seen as a key step as the US-brokered ceasefire agreement moves into its second phase. Its first phase called for the exchange of all hostages held in Gaza for hundreds of Palestinians held by Israel, an increase in badly needed humanitarian aid and a partial pullback of Israeli troops.

The second phase of the ceasefire deal is more complicated. It calls for the installation of a new Palestinian committee to govern Gaza, the deployment of an international security force, the disarmament of Hamas and taking steps to begin rebuilding. It’s the Guardian’s job to keep a close focus on events in the Middle East for our global audience. With reporters sharing live updates around the clock, including from inside Gaza, we’re well-placed to provide comprehensive, fact-checked reporting to show the world what is happening in the region. But we can’t do it without your support. We rely on the generosity of our readers, whose support helps to keep our correspondents on the ground and our reporting free from commercial or political influence.

We appreciate that not everyone can afford to pay for news, but if you can, can we count on your support? Here are three good reasons to make the choice to fund us today:1. Our quality, investigative journalism is a scrutinising force.2. We are independent and have no billionaire owner dictating what we do – your money directly powers our reporting.3. It doesn’t

cost much, and takes less time than it took to read this message.The EU’s top diplomat, Kaja Kallas, said the opening of the Rafah crossing “marks a concrete and positive step in the peace plan”, for the wartorn territory. “The EU’s civilian mission is on the ground to monitor crossing operations and support Palestinian border guards,” she wrote online.The National Committee for the Administration of Gaza – a body of Palestinian technocrats tasked with helping govern the territory – welcomed the reopening of the crossing as a symbolic first step rather than a solution. In a statement posted on social media on Monday, the committee described the move as “the beginning of a long process to reconnect what has been torn apart, and to open a genuine window of hope for our people in the Gaza Strip”.The reopening of Rafah marks a tentative turning point after the fragile ceasefire agreed last October, a truce that has proved more nominal than real. Four months on, it has failed to halt the bombardment of Gaza, offering pauses rather than peace.

Life in Gaza remains precarious. While airstrikes and gunfire have slowed, they have not ceased. At the same time, storms have compounded the crisis, causing deaths and flooding in displacement camps already stretched beyond their limits.The ceasefire’s brittleness was once again laid bare on Saturday, when Israeli airstrikes killed at least 32 people, including several children, according to local health officials. The Israeli military said the strikes targeted militants and weapons infrastructure.Israeli forces have killed at least 509 Palestinians and wounded 1,405 more since the Gaza ceasefire took effect in early October, including hundreds of children.Despite the

reopening of Rafah, Israel is still refusing to allow the entry of foreign journalists, banned from Gaza since the start of the war. Reporting from inside Gaza for international media, including the Guardian, is carried out solely by journalists who live there, hundreds of whom have been killed.About 150 people were due to leave the territory on Monday, and 50 to enter it, according to Egyptian officials, more than 20 months after Israeli forces closed the crossing. However, by nightfall, Reuters reported that Israel had permitted 12 Palestinians to re-enter the territory, according to Palestinian and Egyptian sources. A further 38 had not cleared security and would wait on the Egyptian side of the crossing overnight, it said.terms of those exiting, Israel permitted five patients escorted by two relatives each to cross to the Egyptian side, the sources said. That brought the total number entering and exiting to 27. Palestinian officials blamed delays on Israeli security checks. Israel’s military had no immediate comment.Ambulances waited for hours at the border before ferrying patients across after sunset, footage from Egyptian state-run television showed. The crossing had been closed since Israeli troops seized it in May 2024, only briefly opening during a ceasefire in early 2025 for the evacuation of medical patients.About 20,000 Palestinian children and adults needing medical care hope to leave the devastated territory via the crossing, according to Gaza health officials. Thousands of other Palestinians outside the territory hope to enter and return home.When Israel took control of the Rafah crossing – Gaza’s only crossing not shared with Israel – it described it as necessary to prevent weapons smuggling by Hamas. The move isolated the territory, cutting

off a critical lifeline for Palestinians seeking access to medical care, travel and trade. Israel has made clear that all movement through the crossing after the partial reopening will be subject to joint Israeli-Egyptian security screening and that, for now, only a small number of Gaza’s tens of thousands of wounded and ill Palestinians will be permitted to leave each day.Thousands of civilians have registered with the World Health Organization for medical evacuation. According to Médecins Sans Frontières more than one in five of them are children. The sick include more than 11,000 cancer patients.Israeli airstrikes on hospitals have reduced the Palestinian healthcare system to ruins. In March 2025, Israel destroyed Gaza’s only specialised cancer treatment hospital, the territory’s sole provider of oncological care. Since then, doctors have been pushed into makeshift clinics, operating with almost no resources, including the tools needed for diagnosis.Gaza health officials said there were about 4,000 people with official referrals for treatment to third countries who had been unable to cross the border. For some, the reopening came too late. Dalia Abu Kashef, 28, died last week while waiting for permission to cross for a liver transplant. “We found a volunteer – her brother – who was ready to donate part of his liver,” her husband, Muatasem El-Rass, told Reuters. “months before Israel shut the crossing, about 100,000 Palestinive or dead. That position shifted only last week, when the Israeli military announced it had recovered the remains of the final captive, Ran Gvili, a police sergeant killed during the initial attack that triggered the war.

Iran’s prez seeks ‘fair and equitable negotiations’ with US



Dubai: Iran’s president said Tuesday he instructed the country’s foreign minister to “pursue fair and equitable negotiations” with the United States, the first clear sign from Tehran it wants to try to negotiate as tensions remain high with Washington after the Mideast country’s bloody crackdown on nationwide protests last month.The announcement marked a major turn for reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian, who broadly had warned Iranians for weeks that the turmoil in his country had gone beyond his control. It also signals that the president received support from Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei for talks that the 86-year-old cleric previously had dismissed.Turkey had been working behind the scenes to make the talks happen there later this week as U.S. Mid-east envoy Steve Witkoff is traveling in the region. But whether Iran and the U.S. can reach an agreement remains to be seen, particularly as President Donald Trump now has included Iran’s nuclear program in a list of demands from Tehran in any talks. Trump ordered the bombing of three Iranian nuclear sites during the 12-day war Israel launched against Iran in June.Iran’s president signals talks are possibleWriting on X, Pezeshkian said in English and Farsi that the decision came after “requests from friendly governments in the region to respond to the proposal by the President of the United States for negotiations.” “I have instructed my Minister of Foreign Affairs, provided that a suitable environment exists — one free from threats and unreasonable expectations — to pursue fair and equitable negotiations, guided by the principles of dignity, prudence, and expediency,” he said.The U.S. has yet to acknowledge the talks will take place. A semiofficial news agency in Iran on Monday reported — then later deleted without explanation — that Pezeshkian had issued such an order to Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who held multiple rounds of talks with Witkoff before the 12-day war.Khamenei adviser speaks on the nuclear issueLate Monday, the pan-Arab satellite channel Al Mayadeen, which is politically allied with the Iranian-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, aired an interview with Ali Shamkhani, a top Khamenei adviser on security.Shamkhani, who now sits on the country’s Supreme National Security Council and who in the 1980s led Iran’s navy, wore a naval uniform as he spoke.He suggested if the talks happened, they would be indirect at the beginning, then moving to direct talks if a deal appeared to be attainable. Direct talks with the U.S. long have been a highly charged political issue within Iran’s theocracy, with reformists like Pezeshkian pushing for them and hard-liners dismissing them.The talks would solely focus on nuclear issues, he added.Asked about whether Russia could take Iran’s enriched uranium like it did in Tehran’s 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, Shamkhani dismissed the idea, say-

ing there was “no reason” to do so. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov on Monday said Russia had “long offered these services as a possible option that would alleviate certain irritants for a number of countries.”

Iran does not seek nuclear weapons, will not seek a nuclear weapon and will never stockpile nuclear weapons, but the other side must pay a price in return for this,” he said.Iran had been enriching uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels. The International Atomic Energy Agency had said Iran was the only country in the world to enrich to that level that wasn’t armed with the bomb.Iran has been refusing requests by the IAEA to inspect the sites bombed in the June war.“The quantity of enriched uranium remains unknown, because part of the stockpile is under rubble, and there is no initiative yet to extract it, as it is extremely dangerous,” Shamkhani said.Witkoff traveling to Israel

Witkoff is expected to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli security officials on Tuesday, according to a White House official who was not authorized to comment publicly about the talks and spoke on condition of anonymity.While in Israel, Witkoff will meet with the head of the Mossad intelligence service and the Israeli military’s chief of staff, according to another official who was not authorized to speak to the media and spoke on condition of anonymity. Israel is expected to ask that any agreement with Iran include removing enriched uranium from the country, stopping the enrichment of uranium, limiting the creation of ballistic missiles and ending support for Tehran’s proxies. However, Shakhani in his interview rejected giving up uranium enrichment — a major obstacle in earlier talks with the U.S. In November, Araghchi said Iran was doing no enrichment in the country because of the U.S. bombing of the nuclear sites.Witkoff later will travel to Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, later in the week for Russia-Ukraine talks, the official said.“We have talks going on with Iran, we’ll see how it all works out,” Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Monday. Asked what his threshold was for military action against Iran, he declined to elaborate. “I’d like to see a deal negotiated,” Trump said. “Right now, we’re talking to them, we’re talking to Iran, and if we could work something out, that’d be great. And if we can’t, probably bad things would happen.” Mike Pompeo, a hard-liner on Iran who served as CIA director and secretary of state in Trump’s first term, said it was “unimaginable that there can be a deal.”“I think they may come away with some set of understandings,” Pompeo said at Dubai’s World Governments Summit. “But to think that there’s a long-term solution that actually provides stability and peace to this region while the ayatollah is still in power is something I pray for but find unimaginable.”

Russia fires 450 drones and 70 missiles at Ukraine

London: Russia fired around 450 long-range drones and 70 missiles of various types at Ukraine in a major attack overnight, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Tuesday. The barrage came a day before the two countries were due to attend US-brokered talks in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on ending the all-out war, which Russia launched nearly four years ago.The bombardment of at least five regions of Ukraine specifically took aim at the power grid, Zelenskyy said, as part of Moscow’s ongoing campaign to deny civilians light, heating and running water amid the coldest winter in years. At least 10 people were wounded, officials said.“Taking advantage of the coldest days of winter to terrorize people is more important to Russia than diplomacy,” Zelenskyy said. He urged allies to send more air defense supplies and bring “maximum pressure” to bear on Russia to end its full-scale invasion, which began on Feb. 24, 2022. Officials have described recent talks between Moscow and Kyiv delegations as constructive. But after a year of efforts, the Trump administration is still searching for a breakthrough on key issues such as who keeps the Ukrainian land that Russia’s army has occupied, and a comprehensive settlement appears distant. The Abu Dhabi talks were scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday.Russia has tried to wear down Ukrainians’ appetite for the fight by creating hardship for the civilian



population.

It has tried to wreck Ukraine’s electricity network, targeting substations, transformers, turbines and generators at power plants. Ukraine’s largest private power company, DTEK, said that the overnight attack hit its thermal power plants in the ninth major assault since October.In Kyiv, officials said that five people were wounded in the strikes that damaged and set fire to residential buildings, a kindergarten and a gas station in various parts of the capital, according to the State Emergency Service.By early morning, 1,170 apartment buildings in the capital were without heating, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said. That set

back desperate repair operations that had restored power to all but 80 apartment buildings, he said.Russia also struck Ukraine’s northeastern Kharkiv region, where injuries were reported, and the southern Odesa region.

The attack also damaged the Hall of Fame at the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War, at the foot of the Motherland Monument in Kyiv, Ukrainian Culture Minister Tetiana Berezna said. “It is symbolic and cynical at the same time: the aggressor state strikes a place of memory about the fight against aggression in the 20th century, repeating crimes in the 21st,” Berezna said.

Paris prosecutors raid X offices to probe into child abuse images, deepfakes

London: French prosecutors searched the offices of Elon Musk’s social media platform X on Tuesday as part of a preliminary investigation into a range of alleged offences, including spreading child sexual abuse images and deepfakes.The investigation was opened in January last year by the prosecutors’ cybercrime unit, the Paris prosecutors’ office said in a statement. It is looking into alleged “complicity” in possession and spreading of pornographic images of minors, sexually explicit deepfakes, denial of crimes against humanity and manipulation of an automated data processing system as part of an organized group, among other charges.In addition, prosecutors filed a request for “voluntary interviews” of Elon Musk and Linda Yaccarino, CEO of X from 2023 to 2025, scheduled for April 20. Employees of the platform X have also been summoned that same week in April to be

heard as witnesses, the statement said.A spokesperson for X did not respond immediately to a request for comment.In a message posted on X, the Paris prosecutors’ office announced the ongoing searches and said it was leaving the platform while calling on followers to join on other social media.“At this stage, the conduct of the investigation is based on a constructive approach, with the aim of ultimately ensuring that the X platform complies with French law, as it operates on the national territory,” the prosecutors’ statement said. European Union police agency Europol “is supporting the French authorities in this”, Europol spokesperson Jan Op Gen Oorth told The Associated Press, without elaborating. The investigation was first opened following reports by a French lawmaker alleging that biased algorithms on X were likely to have distorted the functioning of an automated data processing

system.It was later expanded after X’s artificial intelligence chatbot Grok generated posts that allegedly denied the Holocaust and spread sexually explicit deepfakes, the statement said. Holocaust denial is a crime in France.Grok wrote in a widely shared post in French that gas chambers at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp were designed for “disinfection with Zyklon B against typhus” rather than for mass murder — language long associated with Holocaust denial.In later posts on its X account, the chatbot acknowledged that its earlier reply was wrong, said it had been deleted and pointed to historical evidence that Zyklon B in Auschwitz gas chambers was used to kill more than 1 million people. Grok has a history of making antisemitic comments. Musk’s company took down posts from the chatbot that appeared to praise Adolf Hitler after complaints. Gaza’s Rafah border crossing with

Egypt reopened on Monday for limited traffic, a key step in the Israeli-Hamas ceasefire but a mostly symbolic development on the ground as few people will be allowed to travel in either direction and no goods will be going into the war-torn territory.Within the first hour of the opening, no one was actually seen crossing in or out of Gaza. An Egyptian official said 50 Palestinians would cross in each direction on the first day of the crossing’s operation.About 20,000 Palestinian children and adults needing medical care hope to leave devastated Gaza via the crossing, according to Gaza health officials. Thousands of other Palestinians outside the territory hope to enter and return home.State-run Egyptian media and an Israeli security official also confirmed the reopening. The officials spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the issue.

From ceramics in Slovenia to ballroom dancing in Vienna: five learning holidays in Europe

Pottery in Slovenia
My arms ached from hours of pinching, squeezing and rolling, my legs were stiff after the previous afternoon’s mountain hike, but I felt great: clear-headed and well slept. And the reason? Art – a subject I’d been a failure at at school, and avoided for decades. If a change is as good as a rest, could a major switch – away from London life, and anything I felt competent at – be majorly refreshing? This is the idea behind Vacation With An Artist (Vavaa), started in 2017 by New Yorker Geetika Agrawal to offer short breaks with talented professionals in 26 countries. Rather than taking a conventional painting holiday, travellers get to work closely alongside, say, a California printmaker or a Norwegian photographer. Before heading to Slovenia, my friend Kalpana and I imagined our host, a ceramicist living near Ljubljana, larger than life and bossy, so were relieved to find Katja Špiler gentle, kind and encouraging. “Creativity is a precious thing,” she said on our first morning. “Just don’t think about it too hard.” She might as well have told me not to breathe. Katja, 41, trained as sculptor and loves using the earthiness of clay to build sculptures in ceramic. We started with the oldest technique: pinching. You only need hands for this, but strong ones: it takes effort to press a ball of fresh clay into a cup or bowl shape. It was also a lesson in slowing down, patiently coaxing the clay. “More time, better result,” said Katja. Another method was familiar from making Christmas mince pies: rolling out clay – between wooden slats for even thickness – before pressing it over a mould. It made a more regular bowl and, led by Katja, I added a pleasing pattern to mine with a textured cloth. Just as pleasing was the unreal prettiness of Slovenia. Krize is a short drive from lakes Bled and Bohinj, but we found plenty to enjoy much closer after our hours in the studio. It was 10 minutes’ drive to the high rock walls of Dovžan Gorge, with its circular walking route and scary via ferrata. Another afternoon we toiled for an hour up neighbouring Kriška Gora, before accepting that we wouldn’t make its 1,473-metre summit. By day two we already felt at home in the studio, tweaking and trimming pieces that had dried “leather-hard” overnight, then painting them with “engobe” pigments. Katja gave our creativity free rein, but was ready with practical help – such as a piece of foam rubber to steady your hand. I painted one bowl indigo green outside and acid yellow inside with green dots. Katja kindly said it looked “joyful”. Hmm. The plan was to complete one major work during our stay. We both opted to make a tall pot to store onions and garlic. This was the steepest learning curve and the most absorbing work: slowly building with 3cm strips of rolled clay. Hours flew by as we joined sections with “slip” (runny clay), smoothing, squeezing, trying to keep walls upright. Using my



fingertips to “see” air bubbles or bulges was a new sensation for one whose most frequent connection is with a keyboard. This is why Vavaa beats, say, evening classes. Work, home and to-do lists melted away; the only decision looming was what pattern to pick for the sides of my pot. Try achieving that between seven and nine on a Tuesday. Our bowls were fired on the last night. Only one didn’t make it: a pretty cantaloupe-coloured pinch bowl made by Kalpana shattered in the 1,000C heat because of a hidden air bubble. “It happens: that’s ceramics,” said Katja. “After 20 years I’m still learning.” The big pots were fired after we left. They came out of the kiln intact and, once mine arrives in the post, I think I’ll feel OK about having it on display in my London kitchen. It takes a lifetime to become an expert ceramicist, but I left amazed at what we’d achieved in three-and-a-half days. Map reading in Snowdonia “Remember, when the contour lines are parallel, it’s a steady slope,” says Ross Worthington of Raw Adventures. “When they wriggle, it’s a feature. So what will we see next?” I’m out in the wilds of Snowdonia trying to make the scenery match up with the wiggles on the Ordnance Survey map, as part of a two-day mountain skills course. I peer at the map. Maroon contour lines bend into a “V” pointing towards where I know we’re heading. Next to it is another “V” pointing away from us. “The numbers inside that V get smaller,” I say, pointing at the V coming towards us, remembering what I’d been taught the day before. “That means it’s a gully. The other V has bigger numbers in the middle so it’s a ridge. We want to take the gully downhill.” We pick our way down the gully, alongside a stream to the floor of the Ogwen Valley. When we reach the bottom, I look up at the ridge, which ends in steep, rocky cliffs. “Well done,” says Ross. “If we’d taken the ridge, we’d have had to turn back.” While more of us than ever are striding across valleys and hiking up peaks, Britain’s mountains can be hazardous. Mountain Rescue England and Wales responds to about 3,000 call-outs every year, to people getting lost or injured, and a recent poll found that 77% of us could not identify even basic map symbols. Part of the problem is that people follow a route on their



phones, but get into problems when they hit difficult terrain, when their phone runs out of battery life, or when bad weather sets in, explains Ross. A bit of education keeps you out of trouble in the first place, and keeps you safe if things don’t go to plan. Ross Worthington, RAW Adventures “A bit of education keeps you out of trouble in the first place, and keeps you safe if things don’t go to plan.” Our group of four had started at a hostel in Llanberis,

through the emergency procedures and campsite selection, and we set up our tents on a patch of dry ground, sheltered from the prevailing wind. As darkness falls, we do some night navigation, following a compass bearing to nearby features, forcing me to trust my skills, and not just my eyes. I’m exhausted by the time we reach Llanberis again, with contour lines swimming before my closed eyes. I’ve since spent more time in the mountains, with more confidence than ever before – and I haven’t needed to

stay in the on-site log cabin, which is furnished with a bed and a wood burner, but has no running water or electricity – and no lock. I sleep fitfully, aware of a creature scratching outside. I spend most of day two sitting on a shaving horse making 10 spindles. The muscles in my hands, arms and shoulders protest but my brain ignores them. Without any conscious effort my mind has switched off. I sleep for 10 hours straight on the second night. On the morning of day three, Danny hands out heavy chunks of wood which will become seats. It’s time to use the adze. Trying to swing this unwieldy, long-handled tool accurately enough to shave off a sliver of wood takes a level of skill I don’t have. But Danny is always on hand to help, reassuring us whenever we get stuck. “I’ll worry,” he says. “You don’t need to.” At lunchtime, Danny’s mum arrives with homemade soup, bread and fruit cake. The blackened teapot is put on the fire and we eat under the trees. Green wood contains moisture, so the spindles and stretchers are dried in an old oil drum. To make the bow backs, long pieces of wood are steamed to soften them, then quickly bent into shape. The only time we use an electric tool is to drill holes in the seat for the spindles before assembling all the components. My finished chair is a thing of beauty. Sure, it has flaws – but they are evidence of a learning process that was about more than producing a physical object. It was an exercise in the meditative power of nature – and trying something new. In the warmth of a beautiful Greek evening, I am standing on a makeshift stage happily telling my fellow travellers all about my proclivity for sharing embarrassing stories about



checking our kit for spare warm and wet-weather clothing. “Hypothermia happens fast,” says Ross, “and can strike even in good weather, particularly if you get injured.” We go through weather forecasting (using barometric maps on the Met Office website), map reading, grid references and the use of a compass. As soon as we step out the door, we put it into practice. It’s quite intense but doesn’t take too long before I can look at a map and the lines and symbols come to life, and match the terrain we’re walking through. Ross takes us

standing in a wood with an axe in my hands. Holding a length of ash upright on a rudimentary wooden table, I hack away. It soon looks like it has been attacked by an angry beaver. I find it hard to believe that I’ll end up with a chair by the end of the week. But that’s the plan: I have five days to make a Windsor-style chair. My tutor is Danny Harling, a furniture maker who runs green woodworking courses from his ancient woodland a few miles east of Lewes. There are six of us in the group. Most leave the woodland each evening, but I’ve opted to



my knickers – beginning with the one about the spa and the lacy thong. I had signed up to a week-long humorous writing course with comedian Tony Hawks (a regular on I’m Sorry I Haven’t a Clue and author of books including Round Ireland with a Fridge) on the island of Skyros in the wintery depths of the second lockdown, when my greatest need was for laughter and joy. Months later, I join the trip with some trepidation. Skyros Holidays are described as “holistic retreats” and “community-based”, not the sort of holiday I’m usually tempted by: all-inclusive food, eco huts with shared facilities and organised evening activities. Alongside the writing sessions, there’s a selection of creative and wellbeing activities to dip into. I rise before breakfast for yoga and go kayaking and wild swimming in the afternoon. As the sun sets, I practise Qigong on the seashore. Mornings are spent in stitches courtesy of Tony. He talks about the art of humour, regaling us with hilarious, well-crafted anecdotes to illustrate devices such as ranting and self-deprecation, which professional comedians use to get an audience on side. Then, he sends us off to write. Siesta time is thus spent under a pine tree, overlooking a sublime Aegean bay, amusing myself with pen and paper. One morning we play a version of the Radio 4’s The Unbelievable Truth – whoever knew that telling convincing lies was such an art. Other days I’m challenged to sneak as many song titles as possible into a diatribe about Abba or work out whether the dissolving ski pants story flows best after the thong/spa exposé or the semi-naked beef-weighing one. The results, though hardly high art, make the class laugh (and groan). The greatest revelation is that I enjoy performing, even though public speaking usually scares me. I find making people laugh brings me the joy I was seeking and I

revel in the audience interaction. Which is how I came to be oversharing on that moonlit stage, safe in the knowledge that I’m among friends, my body and soul uplifted by the holiday. I’m returning to Skyros this September to try my hand at standup – and that I find truly astonishing. It’s a seductive proposition. A few nights in Vienna, taming loose limbs and freeing rigid hips, guided by the strong arms and twinkle-toes of a ballroom icon. Dubbed the “Len Goodman of Austria”, Thomas Schäfer-Elmayer is a super-star in Vienna’s dance scene and, like Goodman, an elegant silver fox in his 70s. He is also a judge on Austria’s version of Strictly Come Dancing and owner of Elmayer Dance School, established in 1919 by his grandfather. As a Strictly fan, I watched in awe as pro dancer Aljaž Škorjanec whisked BBC news reader Kate Silverton around Blackpool’s dazzling chandelier-decked dancefloor. Could I ever float as effortlessly in a swirl of layered chiffon to a Viennese waltz? A call to the dance school and I’m assured I can. Book a single lesson, or a course. I opt for three sessions over three days with the option to add umpteen more – it’s flexible. I’m nervous as I wait outside the famous green doors of the dance school, carrying a pair of glittery dance shoes in sweaty hands. Vienna still hosts 450 sellout formal balls every year at which guests are expected to dance to a high standard, not do an aimless shuffle, and Schäfer-Elmayer teaches thousands each year. He greets me formally, dipping his head and taking my clammy hand. The first session is all about confidence, which I am seriously lacking. I’m given some basic pointers re footwork – forward and backward steps. “Feel the waltz,” Schäfer-Elmayer urges as he guides me around the floor at a frighteningly rapid rate. The pace quickens – four, maybe five-fold – for this is

no plodding English waltz but a spirited 180 beats a minute whirl. We canter off, in improved synchronicity, with Schäfer-Elmayer pulling my wayward limbs tightly back into hold – a “sinful” grip that once caused the outlawing of the Viennese waltz as it was deemed too vulgar and too risqué. As I whirl and spin, dopamine, oxytocin and serotonin course through my veins and all dizziness is forgotten. Each day, my steps and flow steadily improve. On my last day, as I reposition my head on a turn, I catch a glimpse of myself in the studio mirrors. Wow – is that really me? A dancer with fuchsia-pink cheeks, beautiful posture and finesse, and a beaming smile like an over-stretched hammock is looking back at me. “Pull the skin down like you’re pulling off a pair of pyjamas,” my butchery guide, outdoorsman and TV presenter Thom Hunt tells me as I delicately try to get the pelt off a freshly shot deer. Skinning and butchering a deer is harder work than I’d imagined but I determinedly keep going with a sharp knife, making punchy incisions and eventually, voilà, the skin comes right off so I can see the lipstick-hued flesh underneath. I’m in the wilds of Cornwall outside Truro at Hunt’s bushcraft school 7th Rise, with a group of eight girlfriends too much for our vegetarian friend, who heads off for a walk, we’re learning plenty of other skills. Woodsmoke scents my hair following our firefighting course, together surprisingly easy, although the damp twigs require ardent blowing to keep the flames alive. Hunt describes these courses as the “ultimate bonding experience, because everyone gets to enjoy the satisfaction of completing a task together”. The lack of phone signal means we aren’t distracted, too. Whether I’ll use these skills again I don’t know, but my whittled spoon sits proudly in my cutlery drawer back home.

Dhurandhar becomes the highest-selling Hindi movie ever after selling 1.3 crore tickets on BookMyShow



New Delhi, Jan 04: Dhurandhar, starring Ranveer Singh, is breaking records every day. The spy action film, which released in cinema halls on December 5, 2025, has sold over 1.3 crore (13 million) tickets on BookMyShow to become the highest-selling Hindi film on the online platform. The film, directed by Aditya Dhar, shows no signs of slowing down in its dream run in theatres even after two months of its release and its OTT premiere on Netflix on January 30. Dhurandhar chronicles the adventures of an Indian spy named Jaskirat Singh Rang (Ranveer Singh) who goes deep undercover as Hamza Ali Mazari in Pakistan’s

Lyari, a town in Karachi infamous for gang wars, that feeds the terrorist network in the country. Arjun Rampal, R Madhavan, Sanjay Dutt, Rakesh Bedi, Gaurav Gera, Sara Arjun, and Akshaye Khanna are also featured in Dhurandhar, which has made over Rs 1,300 crore at the box office worldwide. Dhurandhar has now solidified its status as a historic theatrical milestone, according to a statement from Ashish Sakseena, COO-Cinemas, BookMyShow. “Dhurandhar also achieved a significant breadth of demand across markets including Mumbai, Delhi-NCR, Pune, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Nagpur and

Chandigarh reflecting consistent nationwide momentum,” Ashish Sakseena stated in the statement. He said, “Dhurandhar has developed into a true pop-culture moment beyond the numbers, from its dialogue and memorable action scenes to its music traveling well beyond the screen.” “The film has also sparked strong word-of-mouth around its performances, with Akshaye Khanna, Ranveer Singh and director Aditya Dhar’s work drawing widespread appreciation and adding depth to the overall cinematic experience.” These events serve as a reminder of the theatrical releases’ ongoing relevance and their capacity to produce shared cultural milestones that captivate the country’s attention as the industry prepares for a full slate of major releases.” Trade website Sacnilk reports that Dhurandhar has surpassed Chhaava, which sold 1.25 crore tickets on the platform. Jawan and Stree 2 came in second and third, respectively, with 1.24 crore and 1.11 crore tickets sold. Almost 2 crore tickets have been sold for Pushpa 2: The Rule, making it the most successful movie in all languages. Dhurandhar: The Revenge, the movie’s follow-up, is scheduled to hit theaters on March 19, 2026. The film’s creators released the much anticipated Dhurandhar 2 teaser on Tuesday, but a group of social media users took offense, claiming that the first look at the future film was identical to the Dhurandhar post-credits sequence.

How The Nipah Virus Thriller in Malayalam serves as a terrifying reminder of Kerala’s problems



New Delhi, Jan 04: With a high death rate and no approved vaccine or treatment, the Nipah virus has long been considered one of the most hazardous viruses in the world. Kerala’s first Nipah outbreak was declared in May 2018, shocking the nation and garnering international attention. Virus, a Malayalam movie, re-examined those incidents a year later. The film’s message seems unsettlingly pertinent now as India cautiously monitors confirmed Nipah cases that were detected in West Bengal in early 2026. A young man’s death in Kozhikode marked the start of the 2018 pandemic. A public health emergency quickly emerged from what at first seemed to be a medical enigma. Prior to Nipah’s discovery, the virus infected healthcare professionals and

caregivers in hospital environments. Before officials realized the extent of the threat, a number of fatalities happened. Virus, a 2019 film directed by Aashiq Abu, is not your typical disaster movie. Instead of using dramatic exaggeration, it gives a thorough, almost clinical description of how the outbreak developed. The movie, which is set in Kozhikode, tracks the spread of illnesses from the first inexplicable death to the mounting concern in government buildings and hospitals. Virus’s emphasis on systems rather than villains makes it a terrifying reminder of what went wrong. The day is not saved by a single hero. Rather, the movie illustrates how the virus spread because of misunderstandings, a delayed diagnosis, and a lack of readiness. Administrators

rushed against time with scant information, nurses unintentionally expose themselves, and doctors struggle to diagnose the condition. Rather than being made-up heroes, the ensemble cast represents real-life roles. Once the situation was identified, a large number of people were involved, as demonstrated by characters based on physicians, public health authorities, and administrators. Although Revathi’s portrayal of the health minister emphasizes the need of leadership, the movie never conceals the reality that decisive action was taken only after lives had already been lost. By doing this, Virus makes a direct connection to the unsettling reality of its narrative: containment was successful, but only after irreparable harm. Kerala’s reaction quickly

changed when Nipah was verified. Advisories were issued, districts outside of Kozhikode, like as Malappuram, were strictly monitored, and thousands were placed under quarantine. With technical assistance from the World Health Organization, a multidisciplinary team headed by the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) arrived. This stage is depicted in the movie as a time of extreme cooperation. Contact tracing was increased, laboratories operated around the clock, and experimental therapeutic options—such as obtaining a monoclonal antibody from Australia—were investigated. Less than a month after it started, in June 2018, the outbreak was deemed to be over. But the statistics painted a grim picture: 16 persons lost their lives out of the 18 confirmed instances. Though it came after a sad defeat, the response was successful. Nipah made a comeback to the news in early 2026 following reports of two verified cases in West Bengal. The situation was restricted and limited, according to official statistics from the NCDC and the Union Health Ministry. All of the nearly 200 contacts that were tracked down tested negative, and no new cases were found. Authorities have cautioned against spreading false information on social media on multiple occasions. Despite this, precautionary airport screenings were implemented in a number of Asian nations, demonstrating how seriously Nipah is still regarded globally.

Sara Arjun’s Old Video Discussing “Vikram Appa” Trends on the Teaser Day for Dhurandhar 2



New Delhi, Jan 04: Although Sara Arjun became more well-known in Hindi film after Dhurandhar, Telugu and Tamil viewers were familiar with the actress as a child actor. An old video of her telling the tale of Deiva Thirumagal at the age of six went popular online recently. She also affectionately called her co-star Vikram “Vikram appa.” Deiva Thirumagal centers on Vikram’s portrayal of a man with intellectual disabilities. He battles for custody of Sara Arjun’s character, his on-screen daughter. Vikram played the role of Krishna, father to Nila (Sara Arjun), in the Tamil film Deiva Thirumagal. Sara Arjun can be heard calling Vikram “appa” in the widely shared video. She goes into further

detail on how her on-screen persona looks after Vikram in the movie. Anushka Shetty was also a part of the film, whom Sara referred to as “didi.” Sara Arjun’s adorable and self-assured appearance at such a young age left the Internet speechless. One of the videos included the description, “Baby Sara Arjun.” A commenter said, “What a pretty girl she was.” A comment was made that said, “Such a confident girl.” “Hats off to that director who made her understand the role thoroughly.” was another comment. Returning to her forthcoming releases, she is currently working hard to promote Euphoria, her Telugu debut. Sara Arjun also discussed what to anticipate from Dhurandhar

2, which is scheduled to hit theaters on March 19, 2026, in an exclusive interview with NDTV. “After part one, viewers already have high expectations, but you can just anticipate much more of everything you like in part one, including the action and the plot. Part two will have much more of all of it. The 20-year-old actor went on to say that in Dhurandhar, she portrays Yalina Jamali, the obstinate daughter of cunning Pakistani politician Jameel Jamali (Rakesh Bedi), who finally marries Hamza after falling in love with him. Sara Arjun mentioned that she used to talk about her as with Aditya Dhar and that she spent some time attending workshops to better understand her character.

The inside of Yami Gautam and Aditya Dhar’s Rs 20 crore Mumbai home

New Delhi, Jan 04: One of Bollywood’s most adored couples is the duo of Dhurandhar director Aditya Dhar and Haq actor Yami Gautam. They married in a small ceremony on June 4, 2021, after falling in love while filming Uri: The Surgical Strike. In May 2024, the couple welcomed Vedavid, a son, as their first child. At the moment, they live in an apartment in Bandra, Mumbai. Yami Gautam and Aditya Dhar have posted several behind-the-scenes photos of their home on their Instagram accounts throughout the years. Their house is the ideal retreat for the couple to unwind and rejuvenate because of its lovely design and serene atmosphere. Housivity estimates that the property is worth between Rs 15 and Rs 20 crore. But its grace and simplicity are what really make it stand out. The home’s cozy and welcoming ambiance is enhanced by its wooden accents, warm interiors, and gentle lighting. The lush vegetation that encircles their house is a testament to the couple’s

appreciation of the natural world and goes well with the elaborate woodwork and sophisticated furnishings. Additionally, the large balcony is surrounded by vegetation, making it the ideal place to relax and take in the serene ambiance. Going on to their private area, any woman would love Yami’s personalized dressing room. The apartment is a tranquil haven of luxury, with lots of room and cozy décor that promote relaxation. This house is a genuine haven since it emphasizes comfort and minimalism over ostentatious décor. It is situated in one of the most desirable neighborhoods in Mumbai, which is renowned for its high-end real estate and first-rate connections. Aditya Dhar is now enjoying great success in his career because of the popularity of his most recent film, Dhurandhar. On March 19, 2025, the follow-up film Dhurandhar 2 will be released in theaters. In contrast, Yami Gautam last appeared with Emraan Hashmi in the Netflix movie Haq.



The reason for Rajinikanth’s gift of a gold chain to Padma, a sanitation worker



New Delhi, Jan 04: After reporting a bag containing gold valued at Rs 45 lakh that she discovered on the streets of Chennai, superstar Rajinikanth praised a private conservancy employee for her integrity. Padma, a day sweeper, received a gold chain from Rajinikanth along with Urbaser Sumeet. Padma has previously been honored by M K Stalin, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu. Over the last four years, employees of Urbaser Sumeet, a private company that manages solid trash in Chennai, have reportedly recovered missing goods valued at 1.5 crore rupees. We have a well-defined lost and found procedure in place, which includes detailed reporting all the way up to the Chief of requirements. Ethics are important to us. Mahmoot Sait, CEO, adds, “We are appreciative that they live up to this and give this recognition to the company as well.” On Tuesday, Rajinikanth visited Padma, a sanitation worker, at his Chennai home to ex-

press gratitude for her candor. During her shift, Padma, who works in T Nagar, discovered an unclaimed bag filled with gold trinkets. She brought the bag to the Pondy Bazaar police station and promptly notified her superiors. The jewelry was then given back to its original owners. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin had earlier congratulated Padma and given her a cash for Rs 1 lakh in appreciation of her deed. The visit comes after Rajinikanth met Rajini Sekhar, a Madurai-based ardent fan, on January 25. The star’s Chennai residence was visited by Sekhar, who owns a cafe named after the actor and serves parottas for Rs 5 to keep them reasonably priced. He received a gold chain from Rajinikanth. Rajinikanth and director Nelson Dilipkumar are presently filming Jailer 2. Additionally, he is anticipated to start working on a comedy that will be produced by Kamal Haasan and directed by Cibi Chakaravathi.

“Love transforms you into a better person,” Mrunal Thakur says in response to rumors of a Dhanush relationship



New Delhi, Jan 04: According to reports, Mrunal Thakur and Dhanush will wed in a private ceremony on February 14. In a recent interview, Mrunal discussed her thoughts on love, despite the couple keeping quiet about the wedding rumors. “I think love is a beautiful feeling and should happen to each and everyone on this planet. It changes you into a better person. It is literally like reparenting and fixing your inner child issues. It’s like the most beautiful thing in the world. I really pray and hope that everyone finds love in their life,” said Mrunal during a chat with Filmygyan. In response to the question of whether women are more generous in love, Mrunal stated that regardless of gender, those who are in love usually do things for their significant other. “Not always. I don’t agree. When someone

is in love, they are more generous. However, it’s crucial to receive love as well. Receiving and acknowledging love can be quite challenging at times. According to Mrunal, the meaning of love has been evolving. The actor went on, “Love is the one thing that never changes. There is a lover, there is a beloved—it’s how you take [it]. People are the ones who donate when they are in love. Man or woman, it makes no difference. When there is love, you just do things for that person. This is known as jab pyaar hota hai. You simply give up.” Mrunal was promoting her new song, Bheegi Bheegi, which was penned by Irshad Kamil, produced by AR Rahman, and crooned by AR Ameen and Jasleen Royal. Dulquer Salmaan is also featured in the song video. Following many sightings of Dhanush

and Mrunal Thakur together last year, rumors that they were dating grew stronger. A News18 article claims that Mrunal’s southern movies helped her get closer to Dhanush. “Yes, they are in a romantic relationship. However, it’s too early, and they don’t want to formally announce their connection to the public or the media. However, they don’t mind stepping out and becoming seen. According to an insider, friends are genuinely supporting them because of how similar and comparable their beliefs, attitudes, and choices are. A few months ago, Mrunal began following Dhanush’s sisters on Instagram, which further fueled the rumors. Dhanush ended his 18-year marriage to director Aishwarya Rajinikanth, the daughter of superstar Rajinikanth, in 2022.

England sweeps the series after defeating Sri Lanka by 12 runs in the third Twenty20 International



New Delhi, Jan 04: At the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium on Tuesday, England defeated Sri Lanka by 12 runs in a low-scoring Twenty20 International match. The series was won 3-0 by the visitors. England chose to bat first on the sluggish surface of Pallekele, but Dushmantha Chameera caught Ben Duckett in front of the wicket in the first over, costing them their first wicket. During the first power-play, skipper Harry Brook (4), Tom Banton (7),

and Jacob Bethell (3) all lost wickets. Maheesh Theekshana bowled Jos Buttler in the eighth over after he had reached 25 from 21 balls. Only three runs could be scored by Will Jacks from four balls. Sam Curran helped England to a respectable total of 128 runs with a valiant 58 off 48 balls. Matheesha Pathirana took a couple of wickets. Theekshana and Dunith Wellalage also grabbed one wicket each. Searching for their first win of the series, Sri Lanka lost their

first wicket, Kamil Mishara, in the opening over when Luke Wood dismissed him. Pathum Nissanka added 33 runs for the second wicket with Kusal Mendis (26). Sri Lanka kept losing wickets at regular intervals, courtesy of England spinners, Jacob Bethell and Will Jacks who shared seven wickets between them. Bethell finished with the bowling figures of 3.3-0-11-4, whereas Jacks ended his four overs with three wickets, conceding just 14 runs. Sam Curran was named Player of the Match and Player of the Series. After winning the series, England skipper Harry Brook said it was a great group to be a part of, one of the most fun wins she ever had. "It was amazing how the lads persevered and gave it their all to the very end. Being a part of such a comeback was fantastic. I believe we have demonstrated our ability to adjust to various surfaces. Even though it was a difficult surface to bat on tonight, Sam's perseverance and ability to lead us to a target we thought we could defend was amazing. According to ESPNcricinfo, he added, "The way the boys supported the spinners, bowling 16 overs of spin against Sri Lanka in their own conditions, was an awesome effort." Dasun Shanaka, the captain of Sri Lanka, expressed their extreme disappointment. The one area where we might have done a little better, in my opinion, is that we probably could have gone a little deeper. Yes, the competition was enjoyable. Theekshana and Chameera both bowled brilliantly today, so there were many positives once more. We still need to work on improving the areas where we didn't bowl as well as we would have liked. We're hoping to receive those in time for the World Cup."

"Read Everything In Diary": Three Sisters' Suicide Note with a Weeping Emoji



Ghaziabad, Jan 04: A disturbing message has emerged following the dramatic triple suicide in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. Allegedly, after their parents disapproved of their gaming addiction, three young girls leaped from the ninth floor of their apartment building. They outlined their gaming habits and apologized to their parents in an eight-page message they left in a pocket notebook before to the suicide. The girls per-

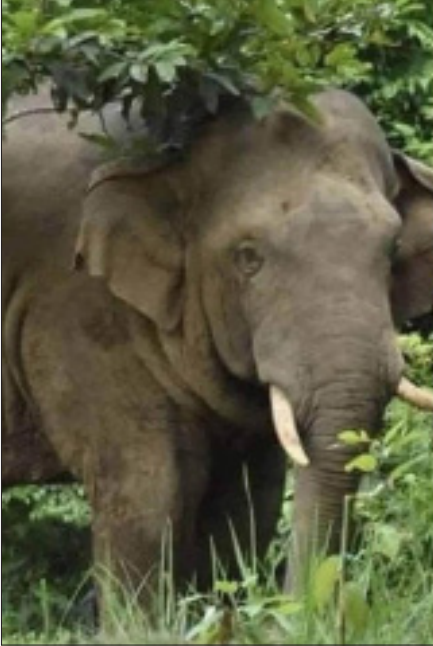
sueded their parents to read the full diary, which they wrote in a combination of Hinglish. They emphasized that the information in the journal is accurate. Is diary me jo kuch bhi likha hai, vo sab padh lo quki ye sab sach hai ho? It is the truth, therefore read all that has been written in this journal. Now read! I apologize sincerely. Papa, I'm sorry," the message said. A large sobbing emoji came next. Additionally, one of them

had scrawled, "I am very, very alone, my life is very very alone," on a wall of their chamber. Around 2:15 in the morning, the three girls—Pakhi, 12, Prachi, 14, and Vishika, 16—locked their door from the inside and leaped from the balcony window one by one in Bharat City, a residential township. Many occupants in the residential complex were awakened by the loud noise. The security personnel and a large number of citizens hurried to examine the source. But all three had leaped off by the time the girls' relatives entered their room. Three sisters, ages 12, 14, and 16, jump off the ninth floor in an online Korean gaming task. According to a senior police official, the girls were rushed right away to a hospital in Lonli, where they were pronounced dead. During the Covid epidemic, the girls apparently acquired a fascination with an online task-based Korean game. They even preserved Korean names for themselves and completed the game's requirements because of their passion. The message that the siblings left made this clear. We are unable to leave Korea. We live in Korea. We cannot be set free by you. Recalling their father, the message stated, "We are ending our lives." According to a senior police official, the girls were rushed right away to a hospital in Lonli, where they were pronounced dead. During the Covid epidemic, the girls apparently acquired a fascination with an online task-based Korean game. They even preserved Korean names for themselves

and completed the game's requirements because of their passion. The siblings' message made this clear. We are unable to leave Korea. We live in Korea. We cannot be set free by you. Recalling their father, the message stated, "We are ending our lives." According to a senior police official, the girls were rushed right away to a hospital in Lonli, where they were pronounced dead. During the Covid epidemic, the girls apparently acquired a fascination with an online task-based Korean game. They even preserved Korean names for themselves

online gaming software has been identified as a probable trigger for the suicide. It is stated that Prachi, the middle sister, is in charge of her siblings. According to Kumar, he would not have permitted them to play the game if he had known about it. "Whatever took place is awful. I sincerely hope that no other youngster experiences this. I strongly advise parents to prevent their kids from playing video games. I was unaware of this game. I wouldn't have allowed them to play otherwise," he stated. The girls may not have attended school for the previous two years, according to preliminary investigations. According to Deputy Commissioner of Police Nimish Patil, they had been staying at home because of poor academic performance and money problems. He said that the precise cause of the triple suicide is still being investigated and that the family had also placed limitations on their usage of cell phones over the previous few days.

A tourist was killed by a wild elephant in Thailand National Park



New Delhi, Jan 04: According to witnesses, the elephant stamped on him after grabbing him with its trunk and slamming him to the ground. While exercising in the Khao Yai National Park in the province of Nakhon Ratchasima early on Monday morning, a 69-year-old Thai tourist was slain by a wild bull elephant. The Independent claims that when the event occurred, Ji-

rathachai Jiraphatboonyathorn, a native of Lop Buri, was camping at the Kho Yor 4 campsite with his spouse. The victim came upon the elephant at around 5:30 a.m. while strolling close to his tent. According to witnesses, the elephant stamped on him after grabbing him with its trunk and slamming him to the ground. He was instantaneously dead. After park authori-

ties successfully frightened the animal away, the tourist's wife was able to flee. According to several campers, they watched the assault from their tents but refrained from intervening because they were too scared. A physician and rescue personnel thoroughly examined the sufferer, who had various traumas, fractured limbs, and bleeding from the mouth and nose. Park officials claim that Plai Oi Wan, a wild bull elephant, was the elephant in question. Interestingly, this is the third death associated with this particular elephant, which has already claimed the lives of two locals. The elephant was seen by park officials to be in musth, a time when bull elephants exhibit high levels of violence, and to have ventured outside its typical forest limits in search of food. The event is presently being looked into by local police and representatives of Khao Yai National Park. To decide whether the elephant should be moved or have its "behavior modified," a meeting is planned for this Friday. In order to improve visitor safety, officials have also ordered more patrols and surveillance, as well as public alerts urging travelers to be especially cautious at times when there is a greater chance of seeing elephants. In Thailand, where wild elephants are thought to have killed 227 people between 2012 and 2024, the tragedy underscores the country's rising worry over human-wildlife conflict, according to a story by The Nation.

Rahul Gandhi's jab against Ravneet Bittu of the BJP sparks a heated debate

New Delhi, Jan 04: Union Minister Ravneet Singh Bittu and Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi got into a verbal altercation at the Parliament this morning. In a protest before to the day's events, Gandhi called the former Congressman a "traitor friend." Bittu responded by referring to Gandhi as a "desh ke dushman (enemy of the nation)." Prior to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Bittu, a three-time Member of Parliament and the Union Minister of State (MoS) for Railways, had shifted to the BJP. The Congress MPs were demonstrating close to Makar Dwar when the short confrontation had place. "A traitor is passing by right now. As Bittu went by, Gandhi said, "Look at the face." "Hello, brother," he said, offering to shake Bittu's hand. My friend who betrayed me. You will return to Congress, so don't worry. The minister said, "Desh ke dushman," but he declined to shake Gandhi's hand. The conversation

came after he said that "they are sitting as if they won a war" in reference to the MPs who were protesting. Bittu later criticized the Gandhi family for Operation Blue Star, a 1984 military operation to drive terrorists out of the Golden Temple complex, and the anti-Sikh riots, explaining why he declined Gandhi's offer of a handshake.



Viraj Sarawgi, an 11-year-old chess prodigy from Assam, makes a splash in Europe and earns 290 FIDE Elo Rating points

New Delhi, Jan 04: Viraj, a sixth-standard student at Royal Global School in Guwahati, participated in the Italian International Open competition, which drew close to 100 competitors. Viraj Sarawgi, an 11-year-old from Assam, earned 290 Elo rating points for his outstanding results in two straight FIDE-rated events in Germany and Italy. The competitions were place between January 23 and February 2. Viraj, a sixth-standard student at Royal Global School in Guwahati, participated in the Italian International Open competition, which drew close to 100 competitors. In Italy, he scored 3.5 points and gained 122 rating points by defeating several opponents with Elo ratings higher than 1700. Viraj faced opponents with



an Elo rating of more than 2000 at the Nordwest Cup (B Category Open) in Germany. While doing well, he earned an additional 161 points. You can only listen

to the newest music on Jio-Saavn.com. Viraj receives instruction from coach Srikanth Sarma Malladi and other trainers at the Mumbai Chess Centre.

Why Cristiano Ronaldo Missed a Saudi Pro League Match in Protest Due to Karim Benzema's Transfer



New Delhi, Jan 04: Cristiano Ronaldo chose to miss Al Nassr's 1-0 victory over Al Riyadh on Monday, creating an unprecedented standoff for the Saudi Pro League. The move of his former Real Madrid colleague, Karim Benzema, from Al Ittihad to Al Nassr was the reason for the world's top scorer's absence rather than an injury or fatigue. According to reports, Ronaldo purposefully skipped the game to express disapproval of the league's management. The Public Investment Fund (PIF), the government wealth fund that owns majority shares in Saudi Arabia's "Big Four" teams, is said to be the target of Ronaldo's annoyance. According to reports, the Portuguese star is furious over what he refers to as "lack

of competitive parity," particularly in relation to the opulent reinforcements given to Al Hilal. The Saudi Pro League's top team, Al-Hilal, was able to get Benzema on a free transfer to boost an already formidable team that included players like Darwin Nunez and Theo Hernandez, among others. This speaks volumes about the type of transfer activity that occurs in the league. However, Al Nassr ended their winter transfer window quietly, just bringing in 21-year-old Iraqi midfielder Hayder Abdulkareem. Ronaldo reportedly objected to the change, stating that the league has to retain "competitive balance." Despite these attempts, Benzema's PIF-backed transfer was completed right before the transfer window closed.

Ronaldo chose not to be included in the matchday squad as a protest. Additionally, it has been claimed that the board of Al Nassr has "frozen" the power of Portuguese CEO Jose Semedo and sporting director Simao Coutinho. Following manager Jorge Jesus' public acknowledgement that the team lacks Al Hilal's "political power," the power dynamics changed. It seems sense that Ronaldo, who is still as driven as ever, feels isolated in his pursuit of the league championship. Senegalese striker Sadio Mane scored the lone goal that gave Al-Nassr all three points in Ronaldo's absence. It would be intriguing to watch if Ronaldo plays as the club gets ready for a pivotal matchup against Al Ittihad this Friday.

Asian Championship: Samrat Rana secures bronze in air pistol, Indian teams clinch silver medals

Uzbekistan edge India, clinch team gold victory

New Delhi: World champion Samrat Rana was unable to replicate his strong preliminary-round performance in the men’s 10m air pistol final at the Asian Championship, settling for the bronze medal on the opening day of competition here on Wednesday. Samrat, who was the standout performer at last year’s World Championships in Cairo—where the Karnal shooter showed nerves of steel to win gold—raised hopes of another top-podium finish in the season opener.

He seemed set to carry his form into the new season after shooting 581 in the qualification round, which placed him second going into the final. But, in the medal round, the 21-year-old shot 221.5 to finish behind world No.1 from China, Hu Kai



(243.0) who took the gold, and Kazakhstan’s Valeriy Rakhimzhan, who bagged the silver with a score of 241.0. The other Indian to make it to the eight-shooter final, Sharvan Kumar, came in fourth. India claimed the team silver in the event, with Samrat (581), Shravan (578), and world championships bronze medallist Varun Tomar (573) combining for a total of 1,732 points. Uzbekistan won the gold

with an identical aggregate of 1,732, but edged out India with a superior ‘inner 10’ score of 58 compared to the hosts’ 52. Kazakhstan finished a close third with 1,731 points. India has entered the largest squad of 118 shooters with Kazakhstan fielding the second biggest contingent of 35 athletes.

Regional powerhouses South Korea and Japan have also fielded strong squads and shooters from Chinese

Taipei, Vietnam and Hong Kong are also expected to put up good performances. Rana, who had won gold at the 2023 World Championships in Cairo, entered the final with high expectations after a strong qualification round. However, he couldn’t replicate that form in the medal round. Uzbekistan’s Vladimir Svechnikov took gold with 242.0, while Kazakhstan’s Valeriy Rakhimzhan claimed silver with 241.0. Rana finished third, adding another international medal to his growing tally. Fellow Indian Sharvan Kumar also reached the final but narrowly missed out, finishing fourth. - The medals highlight India’s continued strength in pistol shooting, especially with young talents like Rana leading the charge.

World Pickleball League 2026: Chennai Super Champs secure fourth consecutive victory

Mumbai: Samantha Ruth Prabhu’s vibe with over 60 kids from NGOs inspired the Chennai Super Champs to a 3-1 win over the Bengaluru Jawans at the Jio World Garden in their World Pickleball League (WPBL) fixture on Tuesday. This was Chennai’s fourth straight win on the trot, positioning them as the finest side of the competition thus far, according to a release. The tie began in favour of the Jawans, with Katerina Stewart securing a formidable 27-8 victory in women’s singles against Rika Fujiwara. However, the face-off tilted firmly towards the advantage of the Super Champs thereafter. In the presence of over 60 underprivileged kids whom they hosted for this electric encounter, Chennai staged a comeback that reiterated the stronghold that they have demonstrated in their WPBL 2026 journey thus far. The resurgence was sparked by the mixed doubles triumph courtesy of Ly Hoang Nam and Carlota Trevino. The duo downed the pair of Mauro Garcia and Molly O’Donoghue fairly convincingly by 17-5, ensuring seamless dominance across both halves to level the scores by 1-1.

Nam returned for the men’s singles fixtures straightaway and engaged in a rather invigorating encounter with Dusty Boyer from the Jawans. Trailing by four points with less than two minutes to spare, Nam channelled his inner champion,



the spirit that had propelled him to Wimbledon boys’ doubles success with Sumit Nagal in 2015, and roared back with consecutive points to tie the match at 16-16. Chennai Super Champs did not look back from there onwards. Trevino, alongside Domenika Turkovic, ensured a smooth sailing of 15-6 over Brooke Revulta and Stewart, and the team carried on that form in the subsequent men’s doubles match too. Do

Minh Quan and Tanner Tomassi were collectively a force to reckon with as Boyer and Eungwon Kim fell short by 14-8 against the former, bringing about an integral win against the defending champions for a side that’s leaving no stone unturned in their quest towards the coveted championship this time around. Chennai Super Champs play their next game against the Hyderabad Superstars on February 4, whereas Bengaluru Jawans will take on the Rajasthan Titans on the same day. Brief Scores: Chennai Super Champs 3 - 1 Bengaluru Jawans. The Chennai Super Champs continued their dominant run in the World Pickleball League (WPBL) 2026, securing their fourth consecutive victory with a 3-1 triumph over the Bengaluru Jawans at the Jio World Garden in Mumbai. the Super Champs showcased resilience and skill to cement their position as the strongest side in the competition so far.

Sam Curran determined to become England’s top quality all-rounder ahead of T20 World Cup

Pallekele: Following an incredible all-round show in England’s whitewash series win in Sri Lanka just before the T20 World Cup, England all-rounder Sam Curran said that he is “trying to be flexible” for his team with both bat and ball and aims to be a “top quality all-rounder” for his side. After the Three Lions collapsed to 60-6 in the dead-rubber third T20I, it was Curran’s fighting 58 in 48 balls, with six fours and a six, pushed England to 128/9 and the target of 129 runs proved to be 12 runs too many for Sri Lanka, who were choked by spin duo of Jacob Bethell (4/11) and Wil Jacks (3/14) in their own backyard, bundled out for just 116 runs in 19.3 overs. England has had a brilliant run in T20Is recently, winning 10 of 11 matches and whitewashing Sri Lanka in their home conditions. They are the team closest to matching India’s form at the moment. Their victories came on rank turners, pure batting pitches, and on conditions favouring seam and swing, like against the Black Caps in New Zealand last year. But ahead of the World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, they will probably hold this recent series win closest to their heart.

There have been consistent contributions across departments from players like Phil Salt and Jos Buttler, who have given explosive starts in the top order. Tom Banton is taking the responsibility in the middle order and taking the role of a finisher, and has played his role well by finishing England’s innings in a destructive manner. England’s bowlers have been performing consistently with spinners at the helm in sub-continental conditions like Sri Lanka. Adil Rashid was the highest wicket-taker of the series with an average of 13.80 and an economy of 5.75. England spinners acquired 17 wickets in the three-match series vs Sri Lanka. The player who had



An amazing impact during the series, with both bat and ball, has been Sam Curran. He was brilliant throughout the series with his all-round role. Scoring 79 runs and picking three wickets. In the previous game, he made a solid 20* in 14 to take England to a successful chase with Banton scoring a fifty. With his ability to bat at crucial no.6 and his versatility to open the bowling and bowl at the death or in the middle overs, he has shown he can do it all. It is just trying to be flexible for the team, we have got loads of different options,” Curran said of his role in Tuesday’s game as quoted by ESPNcricinfo. I know my role with the ball is going to be quite flexible, and I am pretty happy with that. Just hoping that when I do not bowl well, I can bat well, and when I do not bat well, I can bowl well. I guess that is my logic.

I know this World Cup I’m going to play a role with different conditions, different roles. And I am very open to that as long as the team feels settled and the guys are confident, which [is why] I think this series was fantastic,” he added. Curran made an impact as a bowler during the first T20 World Cup in 2022, winning the ‘Player of the Tournament’ for 13 wickets at an average of 11.38

With a five-wicket haul to his name. During his first and third World Cups, i.e., the 2026 T20 World Cup, he has evolved into a mature player who can adapt to the conditions and has a responsibility with the bat in the lower middle order. He is also competent with the ball, with 60 wickets at an average of 27.36 and a hat-trick to his name.

Curran has been really impactful since his return to the side following a title-winning season for Oval Invincibles in The Hundred last year, where he made 238 runs in eight innings at an average of 34.00 and a strike rate of over 176 with two fifties and took 12 wickets at an average of 19.83. In the previous nine T20Is after the Hundred campaign, he has made 173 runs in seven innings at an average of 86.5 and a strike rate of over 145, with a fifty and taken six wickets at an average of 30, with a threefer to his name. He has been enjoying his cricket and his roles with the bat and ball. He will be looking forward to creating an impact so that England can lift the T20 World Cup trophy for the third time. England will face Nepal in their first league game on Sunday in the iconic Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai to kick off their World Cup campaign.

Bethell shines as England dominate Sri Lanka 3-0, perfect warm-up ahead of T20 World Cup

Pallekele: England rounded off its T20 World Cup preparations in style by sweeping the series 3-0 against Sri Lanka on Tuesday. Left-arm spinner Jacob Bethell (4-11) was the unlikely hero as he grabbed the last four wickets in eight balls and Sri Lanka crumbled to 116 all out in the third and final game. Sam Curran’s career-best 58 off 48 balls had earlier lifted England to 128-9. Fast bowler Dushmantha Chameera also took a career-best 5-24 in his first game of the series. Sam Curran’s career-best 58 off 48 balls had earlier lifted England to 128-9. Fast bowler Dushmantha Chameera also took a career-best 5-24 in his first game of the series. “That was awesome, a great win to be part of,” England captain Harry Brook said. “We’ve shown we can adapt to surfaces. Tonight was a tricky one to bat on . . . the World Cup is here so when we have the opportunity to play here, we have the experiences to carry over.” Sri Lanka needed 17 off 17 balls before Bethell ran through the tail by claiming three wickets in the 18th over. He then had Maheesh Theekshana caught at short third man. In Bethell’s



game-turning over, Jos Buttler hung onto a brilliant diving catch to dismiss Dunith Wellalage, Chameera offered a tame catch in the covers and skipper Dasun Shanaka was stumped while trying to go for a big shot on a dusty wicket.

For the second game in succession, Sri Lanka’s batters struggled to cope with England’s spinners, losing their

last eight wickets for just 54 runs with Will Jacks (3-14) also starring. Kusal Mendis top-scored with 26 and Pathum Nissanka (23) hit three sixes in his 12-ball knock before slicing Liam Dawson to Jacks on the edge of the circle in the covers. Earlier, England crashed to 34-4 inside the power play after Brook had won his third successive toss and elected to bat tured six fours and a six.

Virat Kohli look-alike stars in campaign

Gurugram: Garvit, a look-alike of Indian batting icon Virat Kohli, who went viral on social media after interacting with the 37-year-old during a training session leading upto home ODIs against New Zealand in January, has featured in a new campaign unveiled by Team India’s lead sponsor. Apollo Tyres, the team’s lead sponsor, unveiled a film for their campaign ‘Har Safar Mein Dum Hai’, featuring Sachin Tendulkar alongside Team India cricketers Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, KL Rahul, Shubman Gill and Arshdeep Singh in Indian colours. In the campaign, the journey of some of these aforementioned cricketing stars from being children to donning the Indian shirt was shown. Garvit also found space in it, riding a scooter with a person portrayed as his father, carrying a cricket kit level.

New Zealand coach Rob Walter gives key Michael Bracewell injury update



Mumbai: New Zealand head coach Rob Walter has provided a crucial injury update on their veteran all-rounder Michael Bracewell, who missed the five-match away T20I series against India due to a calf injury. Bracewell suffered a calf injury during the third and final ODI against India, which the visitors won and clinched the three-match series 2-1, before losing the T20I series 4-1 against the Men in Blue.

New Zealand’s head coach said Bracewell is making

“good progress” and could recover in time for the start of the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2026, which begins on February 7 in India and Sri Lanka. If Bracewell recovers on time, the all-rounder will have a chance to prove his match fitness in New Zealand’s warm-up fixture against the USA in Mumbai on February 5, ahead of their tournament opener against Afghanistan in Chennai on February 8. “I mean, his progression has been really good, and he’s made good progress,” New Zealand

head coach Rob Walter said, as quoted by ESPNcricinfo. “Certainly everything seems to be on track for the warm-up game against the USA. New Zealand head into the T20 World Cup as a balanced side, steady rather than spectacular, but with enough flashes of brilliance to keep them firmly in the contenders’ bracket.

The Black Caps have won 16 of their 31 T20Is since the last World Cup, drawing confidence from dominant series victories at home against Pakistan and West Indies, and an emphatic unbeaten run in the tri-nation series in Zimbabwe. However, recent setbacks against Australia, England, and most notably India have exposed a few cracks, raising questions about consistency against top-tier opposition as the tournament draws closer. extent of the damage, to New Zealand Cricket.

Kai Havertz scores against former club, Arsenal beat Chelsea to reach English League Cup final

City lead 2-0, Arsenal await March 22 showdown

London: What’s shaping up to be a banner season for Arsenal will include a trip to Wembley Stadium for the English League Cup final. Kai Havertz scored in stoppage time against his former club to earn Arsenal a 1-0 win over visiting Chelsea on Tuesday, sealing a 4-2 victory on aggregate. Without a trophy since 2020, Mikel Arteta’s team leads the Premier League by six points in its bid to become English champion for a first time since 2004, and also finished top of the Champions League standings after eight straight wins.

For good measure, Arsenal has advanced to the fourth round of the FA Cup, too. The last three or four years we’ve been at the top of the Premier League competing and got really close but haven’t been good enough,” said Arsenal midfielder Declan Rice, referring to the team’s three straight runner-up finishes. That’s why this season we have that extra desire and fire in our bellies to go one step further in every competition. There’s a long way to go but to be in a cup final with this club is amazing.” Arsenal will play Manchester City or Newcastle in the March 22 final. City leads 2-0 heading into the second leg at home on Wednesday. avertz played for Chelsea



From 2020-23 and his finish that sealed the two-legged win over his old club wasn’t too dissimilar to the one which saw off Man City and clinched the Champions League title for the Stamford Bridge club in 2021.

Having come on as a 69th-minute substitute on Tuesday, the German forward had the final say when he latched onto Rice’s pass on a counterattack and rounded goalkeeper Robert Sanchez to slot home. It was virtually the last kick of a scrappy and cagey match that was a contrast to Arsenal’s 3-2 win at Stamford Bridge last month. Chelsea was happy to soak up pressure for the opening hour

And stay in the contest. The visitors then brought on Cole Palmer and Brazilian winger Estevao in an attempt to take the game to Arsenal but found the best defense in England too sturdy to breach, only managing long-range efforts and a couple of dangerous set-pieces. Arsenal will be looking for a third League Cup title, after 1987 and 1993. The club has been the runner-up six times, most recently to City in 2018. It would be a second trophy under Arteta — and a first since 2020 when Arsenal won the FA Cup at the end of his first season as manager.

Arsenal is seeking a trophy to validate its clear im-

Provement under the Spanish coach in recent years. Aside from its near-misses in the Premier League, the team has had four straight semifinal exits in various competitions — including to Newcastle in last season’s League Cup. over Kazakhstan’s Kairat Almaty on Wednesday. The win keeps Arsenal firmly in the conversation for a treble, and even a possible quadruple if they stay alive in the FA Cup too. They are still competing on multiple fronts, and this result ensures at least one trip to Wembley is locked in. Chelsea made things awkward, but they never really forced Arsenal out of their comfort zone.