

Sarma's "Strategic Shield": The Plan to Tunnel Under the Chicken's Neck



Guwahati, Feb 3: 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 social media post. "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.

Thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vaishnaw for the decision, Sarma added, "... We are taking a giant step towards mitigating this long-standing strategic vulnerability - one that, in hindsight, should have been addressed much earlier, perhaps even in the aftermath of 1971." Sarma had earlier said that then PM Indira Gandhi "could have asked to expand the Chicken's Neck corridor" after the 1971 war. "She could have redrawn the map for NE's straight access to the rest of the country and not remain dependent on the 'Chicken's Neck' corridor," he had said.

The CM had also held that if India's first PM Jawaharlal Nehru had not "bartered Chittagong port" with a portion of Punjab with Pakistan during Partition, the Northeast would not have been dependent on the 'Chicken's Neck'. The proposed underground lines will be between Tin Mile Haat and Rangapani railway stations in West Bengal, Northeast Frontier Railway officials said. One of the lines will go towards Bagdogra in West Bengal, vital for the air defence mechanism of the country, they said.

Manipur notifies three wetlands for first time under 2017 conservation rules

Imphal, Feb 3: For the first time, Manipur has notified three wetlands covering an area of 466.77 hectares, namely, Yaral Pat in Imphal East, Utra Pat in Bishnupur and Waithou Phumnom Pat in Imphal East-Thoubal districts. "Out of 23 wetlands, we have notified three wetlands under the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules 2017," says Director Dr T Brajakumar Singh of Directorate of Environment and Climate Change (DoECC) while addressing the press on the sidelines of the World Wetlands Day 2026 observation at Yaral Pat on Monday.

Manipur has 132 wetlands as per Wetland Atlas (Space Application Centre) 2021. However, boundaries of 71 wetlands covering an area of 40,401 hectares, were delineated. "Wetlands are green infrastructure. Human survival is closely linked to their health," Dr Brajakumar added. Highlighting the im-

portance of wetlands besides terming it as the kidneys of the planet, he said three ecosystems Ching (hill), Pat (wetlands), Turel (river) have played vital roles in sustaining lives since ancestral times. "So we must protect all these three- not only for our survival but the future generations," he felt. "Wetlands

Sinha, Chairperson Dr Kh Shamungou Singh of (Technical Committee, Manipur State Wetlands Authority), Chief Electoral Officer Manipur Dr Shailish Kumar Chourasia, Secretary (Water supply/Tourism) Hungyo Worshang and Joint Director Ph Vivekananda Sharma of DoECC also present during



and Traditional Knowledge: Celebrating Cultural Heritage," underscores the deep connection between ecosystems and indigenous practices—particularly relevant to Manipur. Principal Secretary (Forest, Environment & Climate Change) Arun Kumar

the day's observation. In his speech, Principal Secretary Sinha, mentioned that the Integrated Management Plans under the National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems are being implemented for five wetlands, including Loktak Lake.

In Brief

PMJJBY: High Claims Success, Record Lapses



New Delhi, Feb 3: Recent official data released in the Lok Sabha on February 2, 2026, reveals a dual reality for India's largest government-backed life insurance scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY). While the scheme boasts an exceptional claim settlement record, it is struggling with a high rate of policy lapses. Total Enrolments: 26.3 crore (as of January 2026). Active Policies: ~12.1 crore (only 46% of total enrollees remain covered). Claim Settlement Ratio: 99.94% (10.2 lakh claims settled out of 10.5 lakh filed). Settlement Speed: Average time ranges from less than 24 hours to 17 days. The primary challenge facing the scheme is policy discontinuation. Nearly 9% of enrollees have lost coverage specifically because they lacked sufficient bank balance for the ₹436 annual auto-renewal.

Bihar's Record Budget

Patna, Feb 3: The newly formed NDA government in Bihar on Tuesday presented a record-breaking state budget for the financial year 2026-27 with a total outlay of Rs 3,47,589.76 crore in the state assembly. This marks an increase of approximately Rs 30,000 crore over the previous year's budget of Rs 3.17 lakh crore for 2025-26. Presenting the budget, Bihar Finance Minister Bijendra Prasad Yadav said that the government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, aims to make Bihar a developed state. In his budget speech, Finance Minister Yadav linked Bihar's development model to five elements. He said that the state's plans were being prepared on the basis of knowledge, integrity, science, aspirations, and respect. The government's priority is to move forward by combining education, technology, innovation, and social justice, he added.

This year, government has given significant importance to the affordable housing scheme for urban and rural areas as it would not only improve people's living standards but would also strengthen the construction sector and create new employment opportunities. The

budget also places special emphasis on connecting the state with a better road network. The government has announced the construction of five new expressways. This will facilitate traffic, reduce travel time, and promote industrial investment. Calling expressways the backbone of development, the finance minister said that they will accelerate Bihar's economic activities. The budget also focuses on increasing farmers' income and promoting modern farming through the fourth agricultural roadmap. Plans for developing infrastructure for industries, encouraging start-ups, and empowering local markets are also included. The government claims that these efforts will provide employment opportunities to young people at the local level. The finance minister said that this budget was not just an account of expenditures, but a roadmap for a developed Bihar. The government is moving forward with a balance of infrastructure development, social welfare, and economic progress.

After the budget was presented, the ruling party called it historic, while the opposition raised questions about effective expenditure of the allocated budget.

Nagaland: Guv presents Governor's Award 2025 for arts, music and literature



Dimapur, Feb 3: 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.

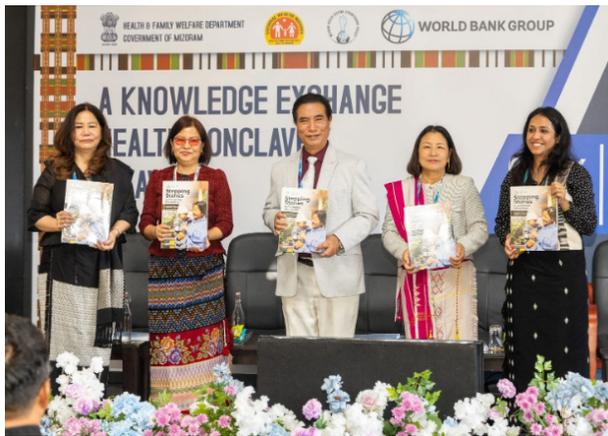
The awardees include Manyei Konyak of Mon and Guru Rarenbenba of Mokochung in arts, Colored Keys from Chümoukedima and Moko Koza of Phek district in music, and Vishu Rita Krocha in literature.



Mizoram CM Inaugurates Knowledge Exchange Health Conclave In Aizawl

Aizawl, Feb 03: The Chief Minister today inaugurated the two-day Knowledge Exchange Health Conclave organised under the Mizoram Health Systems Strengthening Project (MHSSP) of the Health & 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 Lalrinpui, 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 Chhakchhuak, 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).



Assam Women Set World Record with Mass Dihanam

Sivasagar, Feb 3: In a landmark cultural event, 15,555 women from across Assam created a world record by performing the traditional Assamese Dihanam continuously for 42 minutes at Jerenga Pathar in Sivasagar on Monday. The programme was organised by the Ratnagarbha Tejaswini Foundation and witnessed large-scale participation by women dressed in traditional Assamese attire. The historic Jerenga Pathar resonated with cymbals, devotional chants and rhythmic singing throughout the performance. The World Book of Records officially recognised the achievement. Sindhuja VB, Indian coordinator of the World Wide Book of Records, announced the recognition at the venue, stating that the uninterrupted 42-minute Dihanam performance had been

formally recorded as a world record. The event highlighted Assam's cultural heritage and collective participation of women in preserving traditional practices.

In a related development, Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya attended the valedictory function of the Janajati Sammelan and the 30th foundation day of the Vivekananda Kendra Institute of Culture at Assam Royal Global University in Guwahati on January 31. Addressing the gathering, the Governor said the Sammelan served as an important platform for discussions on education, health, livelihoods, cultural preservation and the responsible use of modern technology. He said development should strengthen tribal identity, language and self-respect to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth.

Tripura Collects Rs 889 Crore under Small Savings by December 2025

Agartala, Feb 03: February 03, 2026: An awareness programme on financial inclusion, Prime Minister's flagship schemes, cybercrime, and small savings was organized today at the Muktaadhara Auditorium here. The event was initiated by the Directorate of State Finance Department with support from the West Tripura District Magistrate's office. The programme was inaugurated by Biswajit Shil, Sabhadhipati of the Paschim Tripura Zilla Parishad. In his address, Shil credited the success of the state's small savings schemes to the dedicated agents engaged in mobilizing funds. He extended congratulations to all agents and urged them to continue their efforts while also spreading awareness about flagship government projects to encourage public participation.



As part of the event, eight SAS agents and eight MPKBY agents from different districts were felicitated for their outstanding performance in the small savings programme. They were presented with mementos and awards by Shil and other dignitaries.

The welcome address was delivered by Rakhi Biswas, Director of the Small Savings Department under the State Financial Institution. Superintendent of Agartala Head Post Office, Maniklal Das, spoke on various postal schemes, while Inspector Titon Pal of Agartala

Cyber Crime Branch discussed issues related to cybercrime. The vote of thanks was offered by Amila Rieng, Joint Director of the Small Savings Department. During the programme, it was announced that the state had set a target of mobilizing Rs 1,100 crore under small savings schemes for the 2025-26 financial year. By December 2025, collections had reached Rs 889.19 crore, with contributions from 2,189 MPKBY agents and 1,972 SAS agents across Tripura.

Among the agents, Montosh Kumar Deb of West Tripura topped the list, collecting Rs 70.50 crore by December 2025. Sribas Roy of Gomati district ranked second with Rs 30.50 crore, while Pratima Chakraborty of South Tripura secured third place with Rs 14.89 crore.

Sitharaman Announces East Coast Industrial Corridor and Northeast Tourism Hubs

Arunachal Pradesh, Feb 02: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday announced a new scheme to develop Buddhist circuits across several Purvodaya states in the Northeast, with the aim of promoting tourism and preserving the region's spiritual heritage.

Presenting the Union Budget 2026-27 in the Lok Sabha, Sitharaman said the initiative will cover key Buddhist sites in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura. The scheme will focus on the preservation of temples and monasteries and on strengthening cultural tourism in the region. In a separate proposal to support industrial growth, the Finance Minister announced plans to extend the Integrated East Coast Industrial Corridor to the Northeast, with Durgapur identified as a nodal point. The proposed expansion is expected to improve infrastructure, attract investment, and create employment opportunities in the region.

Sitharaman also announced the development of five new tourism destinations in Purvodaya states and the deployment of 4,000 e-buses to improve regional connectivity. In the health sector, the Budget proposed the establishment of NIMHANS 2.0, a national-level mental health institute in North India, along with upgrades to existing facilities in Ranchi and

Tezpur. The Finance Minister said the move aims to strengthen mental health and trauma care infrastructure. To reduce treatment costs, Sitharaman announced the exemption of basic customs duty on 17 cancer drugs and the inclusion of seven additional rare diseases under the list eligible for import duty exemption on medicines, drugs, and special foods for personal use.

The Budget also proposed a 50 per cent increase in emergency and trauma care capacity in district hospitals across the country, with the objective of improving access to critical care and reducing the financial burden on patients and their families.



Pension tax reform seen as key lever to lift retirement income, drive long-term savings

Guwahati: In its latest policy pitch, the Life Insurance Council–Insurance Awareness Committee (IAC-Life) has highlighted pension taxation as a critical pressure point impacting post-retirement income and long-term savings mobilisation.

Market participants note that taxation has a comparatively harsher impact on pension earners, who rely largely on fixed and predictable income streams. Venky Iyer, Co-Chairperson of IAC-Life, said there is a clear opportunity to align pension taxation with other fixed-interest instruments by taxing only the interest or gains component, rather than the full pension payout. According to him, such a move would immediately improve post-retirement cash flows for pensioners.

“This approach would increase post-retirement income for pension earners and mobilise long-term savings through life

insurance solutions,” Iyer said, underlining the potential for life insurance products to play a larger role in structured retirement planning if tax efficiency improves.

The committee has also recommended a standard deduction for pension earners who do not commute their pension corpus. Industry observers view this as a step toward ensuring tax parity across all pensioners, irrespective of how retirement benefits are drawn.

The proposals come amid broader discussions on retirement security, as policymakers and insurers assess ways to strengthen long-term savings pools while addressing income sustainability concerns for an expanding pensioner base.



Medanta expands cancer care footprint in Assam, highlights advanced therapies and regional outreach

North Lakhimpur: Reinforcing its growing focus on the Northeast healthcare market, Medanta – The Medicity on Friday showcased advances in cancer treatment while stepping up its outreach in Assam through awareness programmes, outpatient consultations and infrastructure expansion.

Medanta organised a cancer awareness and medical interaction programme in North Lakhimpur, where Dr Kunjehari Medhi, Senior Director, Medical Oncology and Hae-

mato Oncology at Medanta’s Cancer Institute, spoke on emerging treatment options such as immunotherapy and targeted therapy. These newer approaches, he said, allow personalised treatment based on tumour biology, offering greater precision, improved outcomes and fewer side effects compared to conventional chemotherapy.

Assam continues to report cancer incidence higher than the national average, with tobacco-related cancers prevalent among men and breast and cervical cancers com-

mon among women. Global estimates suggest nearly one in five people may develop cancer in their lifetime, underscoring the business and public health importance of expanding access to advanced oncology services.

The programme was attended by senior members of the Indian Medical Association, including the Lakhimpur branch leadership and local physicians, reflecting growing collaboration between tertiary care providers and regional medical networks.

Earlier in the day, Dr Medhi conducted OPD consultations in North Lakhimpur, followed by similar services in Dibrugarh on February 1, extending Medanta’s presence across Upper Assam. These initiatives follow Medanta’s recent Bhoomi Poojan in Guwahati for its upcoming 400-plus bed super-specialty hospital, a key investment expected to strengthen healthcare infrastructure in the Northeast. Medanta has also launched a dedicated regional helpline at 8904395588.

Medanta bets on advanced cardiac care as heart disease cases rise in Assam

Guwahati: With cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) emerging as one of the leading causes of death among adults above 40 in Assam—and increasingly affecting urban populations at a younger age—Medanta – The Medicity on Wednesday highlighted the future of advanced heart treatment in Guwahati. Studies have shown that residents of urban and hilly regions are becoming vulnerable to heart ailments well before the age of 40, driven by lifestyle-related risk factors.

The Gurgaon-based hospital, which has been named the Best Private Hospital in India by Newsweek for six consecutive years, showcased its clinical expertise in treating complex cardiac conditions such as Coronary Artery Disease (CAD) and Valvular Heart Disease (VHD). Addressing the gathering, Dr. Praveen Chandra, Chairman, Interventional Cardiology, Cardiac Care at Medanta, underlined the importance of early detection and timely management of heart diseases. He spoke on advances in valve repair and replacement, minimally invasive small-access surgery, robotic-assisted procedures, and interventions to control uncontrolled blood pressure and cholesterol. He also stressed the need to move from reactive treatment to proactive prevention through technology-led and community-focused healthcare.

Earlier in the day, Dr. Chandra held an OPD in Guwahati, bringing specialist consultations and diagnostic services closer to patients in Assam.

In Guwahati, the growing burden of lifestyle diseases is creating strong demand for advanced cardiac care and specialized healthcare services. Guwahati is steadily positioning itself as a medical hub for the Northeast, reducing patient outflow to metro cities. In this context, Medanta’s upcoming 400-plus bed super-specialty hospital construction of which began after a recent Bhoomi Poojan is expected to significantly strengthen the city’s healthcare infrastructure. Medanta has also launched a dedicated helpline for the Northeastern states at 8904395588, aiming to improve access to expert cardiac care across the region.

Sunfeast Wowzers bets on youth-led indulgence with ‘Cheesy Nahi Cheesier’ campaign

Guwahati: FMCG major ITC Ltd. has refreshed the positioning of its premium cracker brand Sunfeast Wowzers with the launch of a new integrated campaign titled ‘Wowzers Cheesy Nahi Cheesier’, as it sharpens focus on indulgence-led snacking and younger consumers.

The move comes amid changing consumption patterns, where youth increasingly seek snacks that offer intensity, personality and share-worthy, sensorial experiences rather than just taste. Staying true to its core proposition, Sunfeast Wowzers continues to highlight its signature 28-layer cracker coated with an indulgent cheesy crème, positioning the product as “cheesier” in experience with every bite.

Conceptualised by Ogilvy, the new TV commercial is set in a vibrant, high-energy environment and captures spontaneous snack moments among friends. Leveraging the growing ASMR trend, the film uses immersive sound and rhythm



to amplify the product’s crunch and cheesy payoff, aligning with how young consumers increasingly engage with food content.

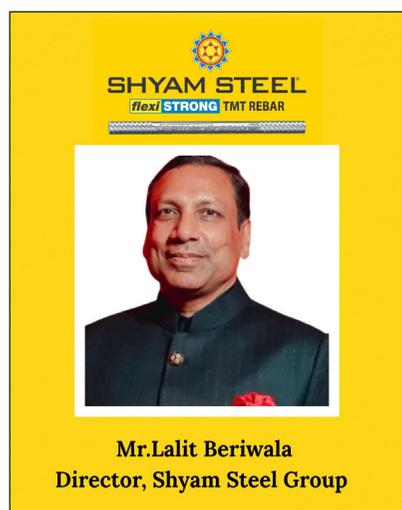
“With Wowzers, we leaned into what makes the product distinctive—its bold, multi-sensorial indulgence,” said Suraj Kathuria, Head of Marketing, Sunfeast at ITC Limited, adding that the campaign aims to feel culturally in sync and visually immersive. Puneet Kapoor, Chief Creative Officer, Ogilvy South, noted that the creative idea was rooted in first-hand experience of the product’s layered crunch and indulgent cheese hit. Through this campaign, Sunfeast Wowzers aims to strengthen its premium, contemporary appeal and deepen cultural relevance in a competitive snacking market.

Shyam Steel Group welcomes Union Budget 2026–27, cites strong infra, tech and inclusive growth push

Guwahati: Shyam Steel Group has welcomed the Union Budget 2026–27, with Managing Director Lalit Beriwal stating that the Budget lays a strong foundation for a more connected, technologically empowered and inclusive India, aligned with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision of Vikshit Bharat by 2047.

Commenting on the Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Beriwal highlighted the continued thrust on capital expenditure, raised to 9 per cent, with public capex increased to ₹12.2 trillion for 2026–27. He said focused investments in railway network expansion, express highway connectivity and construction-led growth would significantly strengthen India’s infrastructure backbone, creating sustained demand for quality steel and supporting higher industrial activity.

The company noted that infrastructure development proposals for tier II and



tier III cities are expected to accelerate growth across the steel, cement and other building material sectors, while generating large-scale employment opportunities in urban and semi-urban areas.

Beriwal also welcomed the emphasis on waterways development and the announcement of seven additional Dedicated Freight Corridors, eco-friendly and sustainable passenger corridors, semiconductor corridors, chemical parks, rare earth corridors and textile parks. He said these initiatives, along with long-term structural reforms, would contribute meaningfully to sustained economic growth.

Highlighting rapid digital transformation, Beriwal said the government’s focus on Artificial Intelligence–driven tools and skill-to-employment frameworks aligns with modern manufacturing needs, enabling smarter processes, enhanced productivity and improved operational efficiency for the steel industry. He also welcomed continued support for women-led enterprises, describing the Budget as growth-oriented, progressive, business-friendly and pragmatic.



Coffee emerges as a key enabler of intentional, productive mornings

Guwahati: In an increasingly fast-paced world, productivity is being shaped less by speed and more by how intentionally people begin their day, with coffee emerging as a central part of modern morning routines. Once seen merely as a quick caffeine fix, coffee has evolved into a purposeful ritual that helps individuals reset their minds, build focus, and ease into the day with clarity and balance.

Instant coffee, in particular, is gaining prominence as an enabler of this shift, allowing consumers to maintain their morning ritual even amid demanding schedules. Rooted in Tata's long-standing legacy in coffee built on decades of expertise and trust, Tata Coffee Grand aligns with the growing "start your day right" philosophy by combining convenience with the richness and aroma of freshly brewed coffee.

Designed to suit diverse morning moments—whether before an early workout, during a quiet planning break, or while transitioning into work mode—the brand supports a smoother and more focused start to the day. Its flavour-locked decoction crystals are aimed at retaining the coffee's natural richness and freshness, ensuring consistency in taste and experience.

As mindful habits and "morning reset" routines gain traction, coffee is increasingly viewed not just as a beverage but as a contributor to mental readiness. By blending quality with ease of preparation, Tata Coffee Grand reflects a broader shift toward productivity that feels intentional rather than rushed.

Good Game launches India operations with Rs 1-crore prize, targets youth gaming economy

New Delhi: Good Game, the world's first as-live global gaming reality show, has entered the Indian market with an ambitious plan to identify the country's first Global Gaming Superstar. The platform has appointed Samantha Ruth Prabhu as a global brand ambassador, alongside Rishabh Pant and gaming creator Ujjwal Chaurasia. The winner will receive a prize money of ₹1 crore (USD 100,000), among the highest payouts for any reality show in India, along with an opportunity to represent the country at a global level.

From an investment perspective, Good Game plans to deploy up to ₹100 crore annually into the format and is currently engaging brand partners and sponsors. The

company projects a minimum reach of 500 million viewers within India's core youth demographic. The show's competitive format blends esports, entertainment and real-world performance, evaluating contestants on gaming ability, creativity, on-screen presence and performance under pressure.

Founder Rai Cockfield said India's large gaming and entertainment base offers strong long-term growth potential, while Samantha Ruth Prabhu noted the platform reflects changing career aspirations among young Indians.

Registrations for auditions are open to Indian citizens above 18, with in-person auditions scheduled in Mumbai and Delhi in February and March 2026.

PM E-DRIVE certification alters economics of heavy E-trucks as Montra Electric delivers first Rhino 5538 EV

Mumbai: Montra Electric, the e-M&HCV arm of TI Clean Mobility under the Murugappa Group, has crossed a pivotal inflection point for India's heavy-truck electrification by becoming the first manufacturer to secure PM E-DRIVE certification for an N3 electric truck. The milestone was marked with the delivery of the first PM E-DRIVE-certified Rhino 5538 EV 6x4 tractor trailer to UltraTech Cement Limited.

From an economic standpoint, the certification materially improves total cost of ownership. Under the ₹10,900-crore PM E-DRIVE programme, ₹500 crore is earmarked for e-trucks, translating into incentives of up to ₹9.6 lakh per vehicle for the Rhino 5538 EV. This reduces upfront acquisition costs while lowering long-term operating expenses through fuel savings, reduced maintenance, and insulation from diesel price volatility—key barriers to adoption in heavy freight. Union Minister for Heavy Industries H. D. Kumaraswamy said the move strengthens India's EV manufacturing ecosystem and advances Net Zero and Atmanirbhar Bharat objectives, particularly in emissions-intensive freight. Designed for Indian conditions, the Rhino 5538 EV rangeavailable in 6x4 and 4x2 variants with battery swapping and fixed battery options targets high-utilisation corridors across ports, mining, cement and long-haul logistics, positioning electric heavy trucks as a viable lever in India's low-carbon growth strategy.

Royal Enfield brings HunterHood to Shillong, expand street culture footprint in the Northeast

Mumbai: Royal Enfield is set to expand its lifestyle and community engagement strategy in the Northeast with the launch of its street culture platform HunterHood in Shillong on February 7, 2026. After drawing large crowds in Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai, the company is taking the festival to one of India's most culturally vibrant cities, aligning with the growing influence of youth-led urban culture in the region.

Built around the ethos of the Hunter 350 motorcycle, HunterHood Shillong will combine motorsports-inspired showcases with music, art and street-led performances. The programme includes BMX

and skateboarding showcases, street football, slam dunk zones and interactive challenges, alongside custom motorcycles by JD Customs. Visual art will feature live graffiti by the Mixed Media Art Crew and Art of Motorcycling 2024 winner Amit Kumar, while performances will blend indigenous dance forms by the Shlem Institute of Music with hip-hop cyphers led by local dancer Iamon Kharjana. Works by Gauhati Art Project founder Abhishek Choudhury and installations by Sameer Hazari and St+art India will also be showcased.

The music lineup includes Reble, Raja Kumari, Trance



Effect, DJ Knack, Smokey, SawaJam Sound System and Gauley Bhai. A flea market and curated food and beverage offerings will highlight talent from across the Northeast.

Tetley Green Tea slim care leverages L-carnitine to tap India's growing wellness market

Guwahati: Tetley Green Tea has sharpened its wellness portfolio by highlighting the role of L-Carnitine, a nutrient essential for energy production and fat metabolism, as urban Indian consumers increasingly seek simple weight management solutions. L-Carnitine supports the transport of long-chain fatty acids into mitochondria for β-oxidation, a critical process for breaking down fat and generating energy. It is naturally found in foods such as red meat, dairy products and avocados, and is also synthesised in the body from lysine and methionine. However, supplementation is often used to ensure sufficient intake.

Scientific evidence refer-

enced in wellness research shows that L-Carnitine can aid fat utilisation, support weight management and improve endurance when combined with a balanced diet and regular physical activity. Green tea further complements this mechanism by helping block malonyl-CoA, thereby supporting fatty acid breakdown and fat utilisation.

Capitalising on these benefits, Tetley Green Tea, a trusted brand of Tata Consumer Products, has pioneered the use of L-Carnitine in Tetley Green Tea Slim Care in India. The variant blends premium green tea with added L-Carnitine, positioning it as a purposeful wellness beverage designed to assist in reducing stored body



fat when paired with a healthy lifestyle, while offering a refreshing taste.

In Guwahati, growing health awareness, rising urbanisation and increasing acceptance of functional beverages have boosted demand for specialised green tea variants. Retailers note that consumers are actively seeking products with clearly defined wellness benefits, making L-Carnitine-infused green tea a promising segment in the city's evolving health and wellness market.

Axis Max Life bets on Arunachal SIP push, sees Northeast insurance sector expansion



Guwahati: Axis Max Life Insurance Limited, formerly Max Life Insurance Company Limited, has strengthened its Northeast growth strategy by hosting Arunachal Pradesh's first-ever state-level workshop on the State Insurance Plan (SIP). Appointed by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India as the Lead Insurer (Life) for Arunachal Pradesh, the company is driving a coordinated push to deepen insurance penetration in the state.

The workshop was attended by Shri Satyajit Tripathi, Member (Distribution), IRDAI, along with senior officials from the Government of

Arunachal Pradesh, including Karluk Ronya, Director, Accounts and Treasuries, and Nabam Rajesh, Deputy Director, Panchayati Raj. Axis Max Life was represented by its top leadership, including Managing Director and CEO Sumit Madan, Director and Chief Business Officer (Partnership Channels) Anurag Gupta, and other senior executives.

During the event, Axis Max Life unveiled the State Insurance Plan Report 2025, which charts the roadmap towards IRDAI's goal of "Insurance for All by 2047." The workshop also focused on rolling out the "Bima Trinity" — Bima Sugam, Bima Vistar

and Bima Vahak — with an emphasis on affordable products, digital access and women-led distribution to reach remote and underserved areas. The company plans a statewide awareness drive under the SIP framework.

Most Northeast insurance operations are anchored in Guwahati, making the city a critical control centre for regional expansion. Increased insurance activity in Arunachal Pradesh is expected to boost policy volumes, agency networks and backend operations managed from Guwahati, reinforcing its position as the key insurance market hub for the entire Northeast.



Maithan Steel celebrates 25 years, unveils expansion plans at Jashn-E-Maithan 2026

Itanagar: Maithan Steel marked 25 years of operations with its nationwide dealers' meet Jashn-E-Maithan 2026, underlining its growth from a 60,000-tonne sponge iron unit launched in 2001 to a 5,00,000-tonne integrated steel plant today. The company entered TMT bar manufacturing in 2012 and now operates across 25 States and Union Territories, supported by over 250 institutional buyers, 2,500 channel partners and a consumer base exceeding 25 lakh, while generating employment for more than 25,000 people.

At the event, Maithan Steel outlined its forward strategy, announcing ongoing expansion across sponge iron, ferro alloys and allied segments.

The company has also secured environmental clearance for a proposed 9,00,000-tonne steel plant, with construction expected to begin during 2027-28, signalling a long-term focus on capacity enhancement and sustainable growth aligned with India's infrastructure needs.

The celebrations in Dhanbad saw participation from over 1,000 stakeholders and featured brand ambassador The Great Khali, reinforcing the message "Strong Matlab Maithan Steel." A wrestling showcase under Maithan Mania culminated in an international open challenge by Parker Boudreaux, adding a global dimension to the milestone year. The company also announced two new humour-led televi-

sion commercials to be aired in January 2026.

In Itanagar, Maithan Steel continues to see rising traction amid increased residential construction and government-led infrastructure activity. Dealers report growing preference for branded TMT bars, with customers prioritising strength, consistency and long-term reliability, positioning the company strongly in Arunachal Pradesh's evolving steel demand landscape.

Directors Madhur Agarwalla and Kaushal Agarwalla said the 25-year milestone reflects enduring trust from dealers, partners and customers, and reaffirmed the company's commitment to expansion, innovation and long-term value creation.

Bajaj General Insurance announces launch of 'Fetal Flourish', India's first dedicated fetal health insurance rider

Shillong: Bajaj General Insurance Limited (formerly known as Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company Limited) on January 14 announced the launch of Fetal Flourish, a pioneering fetal health insurance rider designed to support advanced in-utero medical interventions and high-risk pregnancies, at an affordable premium of ₹1,025.

Unveiled in Pune, the rider is offered along with the company's flagship health insurance products, My Health Care Plan and Health Guard. Fetal Flourish is applicable for women aged 18 to 45 years and carries a waiting period of nine months from policy inception. The rider

provides coverage of up to ₹2 lakh per maternity event for the first two maternity events under the base health indemnity policy.

The offering covers 16 specialised in-utero procedures, including amniocentesis, chorionic villus sampling, fetoscopic laser surgery for twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome, fetal reduction, intra-uterine transfusion, surgeries for neural tube defects, fetal cystoscopic surgery, and procedures for congenital diaphragmatic hernia, among others.

The announcement comes amid rising demand for advanced fetal care, with reports indicating that around 17% of

women in India give birth after the age of 35, increasing pregnancy-related complications and the need for early medical intervention.

Commenting on the launch, Dr. Tapan Singhel, MD and CEO of Bajaj General Insurance, said the rider aims to ease the financial burden on families facing medical complexities during pregnancy, allowing them to focus on treatment rather than costs.

With Fetal Flourish, Bajaj General Insurance said it is strengthening its commitment to innovation in healthcare protection by extending insurance support to one of the earliest and most sensitive stages of life.

India bets big on AI in education as CCSU Meerut becomes first AI-enabled state university pilot

Guwahati: The Government of India has unveiled a landmark public-private collaboration to integrate artificial intelligence across education and skilling, announcing Chaudhary Charan Singh University (CCSU), Meerut, as the country's first AI-enabled state university pilot. The announcement was made by Jayant Chaudhary, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and Minister of State for Education, at Google's AI for Learning Forum in New Delhi. The initiative brings together the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), Google Cloud and Chaudhary Charan Singh University, aligning with the Prime Minister's Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.

Under the pilot, CCSU will operate as a national living laboratory for AI-first education, deploying personalised AI tutors, AI-based skill-gap analysis and intelligent document

processing to improve academic delivery and administrative efficiency. Learnings will be extended to affiliated colleges and scaled across India's 45,000+ colleges and over 1,200 universities. The initiative also dovetails with the government's ₹60,000-crore Model ITI Scheme to modernise vocational training. Addressing the forum, Chaudhary said AI can bridge long-standing gaps between degrees and employability by connecting classroom learning with industry needs and democratising access to skills beyond metros. He also called for stronger teacher enablement, urging expansion of AI support to Kendriya and Navodaya Vidyalayas.

Google leaders, including Preeti Lobana and Chris Phillips, reaffirmed the company's commitment to responsible, population-scale AI adoption, positioning India as a testbed for inclusive education solutions for the Global South.

TVS Motor delivers record Q3FY26 with 37% revenue growth, strong EV and export momentum

Guwahati: TVS Motor Company on January 28 announced its strongest-ever quarterly performance for Q3FY26, reporting record sales, revenue and profitability. The company's operating revenue rose 37 per cent year-on-year to Rs. 12,476 crore for the quarter ended December 2025, compared with Rs. 9,097 crore in the year-ago period.

Operating EBITDA grew 51 per cent to Rs. 1,634 crore, with the EBITDA margin improving to a record 13.1 per cent against a normalised 12.4 per cent last year. Profit before tax (PBT), before exceptional items,

increased 57 per cent to Rs. 1,315 crore. Overall two- and three-wheeler sales, including international business, climbed 27 per cent to an all-time high of 15.44 lakh units. Motorcycle sales rose 31 per cent to 7.26 lakh units, while scooter sales grew 25 per cent to 6.14 lakh units. International two-wheeler sales jumped 35 per cent to 3.66 lakh units, and three-wheeler volumes more than doubled to 0.60 lakh units. EV sales grew 40 per cent to a record 1.06 lakh units.

For the nine months ended December 2025, revenue increased 29 per cent to Rs. 34,463 crore, EBITDA rose

41 per cent to Rs. 4,406 crore, PBT grew 43 per cent to Rs. 3,594 crore, and PAT stood at Rs. 2,625 crore. Total vehicle sales during the period reached 43.28 lakh units, with EV volumes at 2.56 lakh units.

In Guwahati, dealers reported steady growth in motorcycle and scooter demand, supported by improving consumer sentiment and festive-season buying. Rising interest in electric two-wheelers, aided by expanding charging infrastructure and financing options, is strengthening TVS Motor's presence across the city and neighbouring markets.

NSDC International sends 39 trained youth to Japan, strengthen India-Japan skilled mobility pipeline

Guwahati: In a boost to India-Japan cooperation on skilled workforce mobility, NSDC International, under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), organised a send-off ceremony for Indian candidates who have completed Japanese language training and are departing for employment in Japan.

Held at Kaushal Bhawan, New Delhi, the ceremony marked the departure of 39 candidates trained through NSDC International's structured Japanese language and cultural readiness programme. The candidates will take up opportunities in caregiving, hospitality and agriculture across multiple Japanese prefectures, including

Tokyo, Ibaraki and Hokkaido. The programme focuses on language proficiency, cultural orientation and employer alignment to ensure smooth workplace integration and long-term retention.

Economic Advisor, MSDE, Archana Mayaram recalled the Prime Minister's visit to Japan last year, during which India and Japan adopted a joint vision and action plan for human resource exchange of five lakh personnel over five years, including 50,000 skilled professionals from India. She said the outgoing youth represent India's expanding role in the global services economy. National Skill Development Corporation CEO Arun Kumar Pillai said skilled workforce mobility

is now central to global cooperation, adding that Indian youth are carrying India's values and talent to international workplaces. NSDC International has trained over 400 candidates so far, with 185 already working in Japan, while preparations are underway for over 100 more candidates.

For Guwahati and the wider Northeast, the initiative highlights growing business opportunities in overseas skilling, foreign language training and placement-linked education. Rising demand for Japan-focused language programmes is expected to encourage training centres, consultants and aspirants in the region to tap global employment pathways, strengthening the local skill economy.

Axis Max Life advances 'Bharosa Tum Ho' campaign, deepens trust narrative across protection, savings

Guwahati: Axis Max Life Insurance Limited, formerly known as Max Life Insurance Company Limited, has unveiled the next chapter of its flagship brand campaign, 'Bharosa Tum Ho', sharpening its focus on trust while positioning individuals as the primary protectors of their families.

The refreshed campaign uses human, relatable storytelling to depict brand ambassadors Rohit Sharma and Ritika Sajdeh as an everyday couple navigating shared responsibilities. This approach reinforces Axis Max Life's positioning as a trusted partner across savings, protection and retirement categories.

Rahul Talwar, Director and Chief Marketing Officer, said trust is earned through action, citing the company's consistent claims settlement performance as validation of its promise. He noted that in a post-GST environment, pro-

tection has emerged as a core financial priority. The campaign also introduces South Indian actor Allu Sirish, bringing together cinema and cricket to make protection conversations more life-stage relevant and culturally resonant.

Anchored by two films, the campaign explores protection from different perspectives—one capturing the emotional journey of welcoming a child and redefining modern fatherhood, and another blending cricket and cinema in an engaging narrative.

A seven-week integrated media rollout across television, YouTube and Meta during the January-March quarter aims to boost brand recall and deepen trust. Axis Max Life, a joint venture between Max Financial Services Limited and Axis Bank Limited, reported a gross written premium of ₹33,223 crore in FY2024-25.

Dalia versus Upma: Which Breakfast Option Aids in Weight Loss More Effectively

In numerous homes, the breakfast meal typically consists of well-known comfort foods that are simple to prepare and gentle on the digestive system. Two such essentials, dalia and upma, frequently appear on breakfast tables nationwide. Both are regarded as light, nutritious, and satisfying, yet among individuals aiming to shed pounds, a recurring inquiry remains: which one is the more healthful option? At the fundamental level, the distinction starts with the grain. Dalia is prepared from broken wheat, while upma is made using semolina, also known as sooji. Though they may look similar once cooked, their nutritional impact on the body is quite different. Nutritionists point out that dalia scores higher on fibre and complex carbohydrates. Because it di-



gests slowly, it helps stabilise blood sugar levels and keeps hunger at bay for longer periods. This slow-release energy makes dalia particularly suitable for those aiming to manage weight or avoid frequent snacking. Upma, in contrast, is digested faster. It provides a quick burst of energy but may not offer the same level of satiety, especially when prepared without vegetables or protein-rich additions.

Calorie count further tilts the balance. A standard bowl of cooked dalia contains roughly 150-180 calories and is naturally low in fat, making it a preferred choice for calorie-conscious eaters. Upma, meanwhile, typically contains around 200-220 calories per serving. The number can climb higher depending on the amount of oil, ghee, cashews or peanuts used during preparation. While upma is by

no means unhealthy, it does tend to be more calorie-dense. Protein and micronutrients also play a role in this comparison. Dalia offers a decent amount of plant-based protein along with iron, both essential for maintaining metabolism and supporting muscle health during weight loss. Upma contains Vitamin B and can be nutritionally improved by adding vegetables like carrots, beans and peas. However, when eaten plain, it generally falls short of dalia in terms of fibre and protein content. So, does one clearly win the weight-loss debate? Experts say dalia has a slight edge due to its higher fibre content, lower calorie count and longer-lasting fullness. That said, upma can still be part of a healthy diet if prepared mindfully, with minimal oil and plenty of vegetables.



The Importance of Daily Food Habits Over Ideal Diets

"Accomplished is preferable to flawless," states Priyasha Saluja, Founder of The Cinnamon Kitchen, Hormone Health Coach, and Plant-Based Chef. "This is a phrase we frequently employ in both our professional and personal lives, and it is equally relevant to the culinary realm." For many years, the concept of healthy eating has been portrayed as something that must be executed flawlessly. The ideal diet. The correct guidelines. The appropriate moment to begin. However, individuals do not cease to eat healthily due to a lack of concern. They discontinue because perfect meal plans are not practical in everyday life. On a regular weekday, meetings run late. Lunch gets delayed. By evening, energy is low and cooking feels like too much effort. In moments like this, strict food rules tend to break down not because of poor discipline, but because the plan simply doesn't fit the day. The same thing happens around workouts. "People plan to eat before exercising." Then work runs over, traffic builds up, or energy drops. The choice becomes simple, go to the gym without eating or skip the gym altogether. This is why everyday food habits matter more than perfect diets. On a regular weekday, meetings run late. Lunch gets delayed. By evening, energy is low and cooking feels like too much effort. In moments like this, strict food rules tend to break down not because of poor discipline, but because the plan simply doesn't fit the day. The same thing happens around workouts. "People plan to eat before exercising," Saluja says. "Then work runs over, traffic builds up, or energy drops. The choice becomes simple, go to the gym without eating or skip the gym altogether." According to her, this isn't a willpower issue. It's a practicality issue. Track briefly, not obsessively. Short-term tracking can be useful. "It helps you understand what you're actually eating and highlights gaps in protein or fibre," Saluja explains. Once awareness is built, occasional tracking is enough. Keep two meals consistent. Fixing two meals around protein and fibre every day reduces daily decision-making. "It keeps eating balanced without feeling restrictive," she adds. The third meal can remain flexible. Don't eliminate snacks or desserts. "Total restriction doesn't last," Saluja says. Planning small portions of snacks or desserts helps with portion control and makes eating feel realistic rather than punitive. This philosophy also shapes how food is designed at The Cinnamon Kitchen. "Instead of creating products for ideal routines, I focus on how food fits into real moments," Saluja explains. The Almond Flour Cacao Cookie, for instance, works as a practical pre-workout option on rushed mornings. Methi Millet Crackers quietly replace habitual tea-time snacks without demanding a lifestyle overhaul.

Why Reducing Carbohydrates Is Not the Solution and How to Consume Them Properly Instead

Carbohydrates have long been a focal point in discussions surrounding diet culture – they have been lauded, vilified, and frequently misinterpreted. In the quest to reduce caloric intake or pursue weight loss, carbohydrates are often the first to be eliminated. However, they continue to be the body's most effective energy source, crucial for cognitive function, physical activity, and hormonal equilibrium. The problem lies not with carbohydrates themselves, but rather with how meals are organized in relation to them. A properly constructed carbohydrate-rich meal does not result in drowsiness or hunger shortly after consumption. Rather, it provides energy for physical activity, enhances concentration, and promotes metabolic well-being. The essential factor is achieving balance by considering carbohydrates as a base rather than the entirety of the meal. Quality Over Quantity: Choosing The Right Carbs "Carbohydrates have long been misunderstood," says Gurpreet Grover, Health & Wellness Coach, noting that weight gain and fatigue are often blamed on carbs when the real problem is poor meal composition. She emphasises starting with quality sources such as whole grains, fruits, legumes, and starchy vegetables. These complex carbs provide fibre, vitamins, and slower energy release, unlike refined options that spike blood sugar quickly. Dr Archana Ba-



tra, Dietitian and Certified Diabetes Educator, agrees that carbs deserve a central place on the plate, especially when chosen according to one's lifestyle and cultural habits. Rice, roti, millets, potatoes, and legumes can all work – when used wisely. Every Carb Needs A Protein Partner One of the most effective ways to make carbohydrates work better in the body is to pair them with protein. "Protein slows digestion, stabilises blood sugar, and improves satiety," says Grover. Simple additions such as lentils with rice, paneer with roti, eggs on toast, or yoghurt with fruit can transform a carb-heavy meal into a balanced one. Dr Batra reinforces this approach, calling protein the anchor of a carb-based meal. Whether it's dal, curd, tofu, eggs, fish, or chicken, protein helps prevent post-meal crashes and reduces cravings later in the day. Without it, carbs tend to digest too quickly, leading to hunger and energy dips. The Supporting Role Of Healthy Fats Fats often get overlooked, but they play a crucial supporting role in carbohydrate digestion. "Healthy fats improve nutrient absorption and slow glucose release." A drizzle of ghee, olive oil, nuts, seeds, or avocado can enhance both flavour and metabolic stability. Fibre, Volume, And The Power Of Vegetables No carb-based meal is complete without vegetables. Fibre-rich vegetables add bulk, micronutrients, and gut support without excessive calories. They also improve insulin response and diges-

How To Remove Peas From Their Pods In A Few Minutes

As winter approaches, peas become an essential ingredient in daily cooking. Whether in curry, pulao, stuffed kachoris, or warm soups, winter dishes seem lacking without them. However, the process of shelling peas can be quite laborious and time-intensive. It may take almost thirty minutes to shell a single kilogram, resulting in sore fingers and fatigued hands. Consequently, many individuals postpone this task, particularly when faced with two or three kilograms at a time. If shelling peas feels like a chore you dread, this method is perfect for you. All

it needs is hot water and cold water to loosen the pea pods quickly and easily. Start by thoroughly washing the pea pods. Heat about one litre of water in a large pot, do not let it boil. Once the water begins to steam, add the pea pods, switch off the heat, and cover the pot. Let the peas sit in the hot water for around two minutes. This step does not cook the peas; it simply softens the shells slightly, which is key to the trick. Next, prepare a bowl of very cold water. Adding ice will improve the results. Transfer the pea pods directly from the hot water into the cold wa-

ter. The sudden change in temperature helps loosen the shells further. After one to two minutes, you'll notice how easily the pods open. Two Easy Ways To Remove The Peas Once softened, shelling becomes effortless. You can lightly press one end of the pod and the peas will pop out on their own. Alternatively, place several pods between your palms and gently rub or squeeze them. The pods split open, releasing the peas in bulk. Using this method, shelling five kilos of peas takes just five to ten minutes, compared to the usual 20 to 30 minutes for one kilo. It's fast,



painless, and highly efficient, especially useful if you're preparing peas for freezing.



Bengal not mentioned in Budget, govt sees us as 'Bangladeshis': Abhishek Banerjee

Abhishek Banerjee Slams Budget For Ignoring Bengal

New Delhi, Feb 01: Trinamool Congress National General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Sunday accused the Centre of branding people of West Bengal as "Bangladeshis" and lambasted the finance minister for not mentioning the state in her Budget speech. Asked about the Budget, Banerjee said it has no solutions for any community, and called it a "faceless, baseless and visionless Budget". "The Budget speech was 85 minutes long -- 5,100 seconds -- Bengal was not even mentioned. Forget Bengal; farmer, youth... there was nothing concrete for anyone. "They talk about AI, Skill India, technological advancement; how would youth get employment, how would employment be generated, there is no mention. There is nothing on how to increase farmers' income, there is nothing for any community," Banerjee said. "It is the Union



government and its ministers, the ones who presented the Budget, they call us Bangladeshis. Bengal was not even mentioned. Jal Jeevan Mission money has been stopped, they have not even fulfilled old promises..." he said. Accusing the prime minister and the Union home minister of branding ten crore people of Bengal as Bangladeshis, he said, "For the people of the state -- workers, farmers, fishermen and the youth -- there is nothing in this Budget. There is no roadmap for young people," he added.

Banerjee further said they have no expectations from the BJP-led government at the Centre. "We have no expectations from this government. After 2021, the way the BJP has tortured the people of Bengal leaves us with no expectations from them. From the BJP's perspective, they know they will lose Bengal lock, stock and barrel, which is why they deliberately chose not to allocate funds to the state," he added. The TMC leader called Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget speech a

"self-appraisal report". "Government would defend its Budget; to me, it is more like a self-appraisal report written by its own PR department. It does not have any concrete solution to offer to anybody," he said.

He also said that while the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) already exists in Bengaluru and new ones are announced for Jharkhand and Assam, West Bengal "did not get anything". Senior TMC leader Saugata Roy also said there are no new announcements in the Budget, and slammed the Union government for West Bengal not being mentioned in Sitharaman's speech. "The finance minister was given no freedom to make any new announcement. Old schemes have been repeated... None of the states got anything, and West Bengal did not get anything at all," he said.

BJP MLAs Reach Delhi For Manipur Government



Imphal, Feb 01: More than 20 Manipur BJP MLAs, along with state unit president, left for New Delhi on Sunday to attend a meeting with the party's central leadership. Manipur BJP president Adhikarimayum Sharda Devi told reporters at Imphal airport, "All NDA legislators have been called. We are hoping and believing that a popular government will be formed." Former chief minister N Biren Singh said, "Since all MLAs of the NDA partners are being invited for a meeting, I expect a positive outcome. Earlier, there was a meeting of all BJP MLAs. The President's rule term is due to end on February 12. Let's hope for a positive response."

When asked if things would be different had he been in power, Singh said, "Government is a continuing process. I tried my best to change the landscape change in Manipur. There has been a lot of changes in both hills and valley." Lamsang constituency MLA S Rajen Singh said, "There is a possibility that government may be formed. The leader would, however, be chosen by the central leadership after observing the situation in the state. The meeting is likely to be on Monday evening." MLA H Dingo said the meeting is on Monday

evening, but the agenda for the meeting has not been announced. "We were just told to reach Delhi by today itself," he said. Khurai constituency MLA L Susindro said he has not received any information on Delhi meeting.

Remaining BJP and NDA MLAs are also expected to leave for the national capital later in the evening. National Peoples' Party state unit president Lorho S Pfoze said, "I am also leaving for Delhi. Nothing is certain about government formation. We are just called for a meeting." NPP Naga MLA J Pamei said, "Let's expect the best. Yes, we are called, all NDA partners. We are going to see what things are happening." More than 260 people have been killed in Manipur and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023. The Centre had on February 13 last year, imposed President's rule in the state after N Biren Singh resigned as chief minister.

The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation. The BJP has 37 MLAs in the 60-member Manipur Assembly. NPP and Naga Peoples' Front (NPF), which are part of the NDA in Manipur, have six and five MLAs respectively.

India trashes Pakistan's allegations of Indian hand in disturbing peace in Balochistan

New Delhi, Feb 01: India on Sunday categorically rejected as baseless Pakistan's allegations of an Indian hand in attempts to disturb peace in Balochistan, and said it is Islamabad's usual tactics to deflect attention from its "internal failings". External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, trashing the charges, also highlighted Pakistan's record of suppression, brutality and violation of human rights. "We categorically reject the baseless allegations made by Pakistan, which are nothing but its usual tactics to deflect attention from its own internal failings," he said.

Jaiswal was responding to Pakistan military's unsubstantiated claim that India was supporting terrorist elements in their

attempts to disturb peace in Balochistan. "Instead of parroting frivolous claims each time there is a violent incident, it would do better to focus on addressing long-standing demands of its people in the region. Its record of suppression, brutality and violation of human rights is well known," he added. At least 15 Pakistani soldiers and 92 militants were killed in multiple counter-terrorism operations carried out by Pakistani security forces in Balochistan province, the Pakistan army said. The operations were launched after militants belonging to ethnic Baloch groups carried out attacks at several locations on Saturday, it said in a statement.

The Pakistan army said the militants at-



tempted to disturb peace by carrying out terrorist activities in and around Quetta, Mastung, Nushki, Dalbandin, Kharan and Panjgur, it said.

'Budget 2026-27 a highway of opportunities': PM Modi



New Delhi, Feb 01: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Sunday, described the Union

Budget 2026-27 as "historic", saying it reflected the aspirations of 140 crore Indians

and strengthened the reform journey and charts a clear roadmap for Viksit Bharat. In his televised post-budget comments, the Prime Minister also said the budget was a "highway of opportunities". "Today's budget is historic. It reflects the aspirations of 140 crore Indians. It strengthens the reform journey and charts a clear roadmap for Viksit Bharat," he said. Modi said India is not content with simply being the fastest-growing economy and the Budget

strengthens the foundation of India's bright future. "This budget further strengthens India's global role. The 1.4 billion citizens of India are not satisfied with being just the fastest-growing economy. We want to become the world's third-largest economy as soon as possible. This is the resolve of millions of countrymen," he said. The Prime Minister said the budget reflects the empowered presence of the nation's feminine strength. He said

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has set a new record by presenting the country's budget for the ninth consecutive time. Modi said this year's budget presents an ambitious roadmap to give new momentum to the "Make in India" and "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" initiatives. "This budget is the foundation for our journey towards a Viksit Bharat by 2047. This year's budget will give India's reform express new energy and new momentum," he said.

Modi also added that this budget embodies the vision of trust-based governance and a human-centric economic framework and it is a distinctive budget that prioritises reducing the fiscal deficit and containing inflation while balancing high capital expenditure with robust economic growth. The Prime Minister also said the support that MSMEs have received in this year's budget will give them new strength to grow from local to global.



Aston Villa edges Salzburg 3-2 after second-half comeback in Europa League

Lyon Edge Villa on Goal Difference

England, Feb 01: Jamaldeen Jimoh-Aloba's first-ever goal for Aston Villa was an 87th-minute winner in a 3-2 comeback victory over Salzburg to conclude the opening

from Victor Lindelof and then Moussa Yeo's goal. Villa wasn't able to overtake Lyon atop the 36-team standings, however, after the French team beat 10-man PAOK 4-2

the last 16. The teams placed from nine to 24 enter a two-leg playoff. The rest of the top eight are: third-place Midtjylland, Real Betis, Porto, Braga, Freiburg, and Roma.

Midtjylland, a Danish club, beat Dinamo Zagreb 2-0 to move up to third, two points back of Lyon and Villa. In Seville, former Manchester United winger Antony scored and set up Abde Ezzalzouli's goal in Real Betis' 2-1 win over Feyenoord. Porto rallied from a goal down to beat Rangers 3-1 and jump from ninth to fifth, Braga advanced in the sixth spot after a 0-0 draw at Go Ahead Eagles, and 10-man Freiburg slipped to ninth with a 1-0 loss at Lille.

Jan Ziolkowski headed in an 80th-minute equalizer for Roma in a 1-1 draw with Panathinaikos.



phase of the Europa League on Thursday. The 19-year-old Jimoh-Aloba's strike followed Tyrone Mings' equalizer at Villa Park. Morgan Rogers sparked the comeback in the 64th after the visitors built a 2-0 lead on own goal

to remain in front of Unai Emery's team on goal difference. Both Lyon and Villa had already secured a spot in the round of 16.

Like in the Champions League, the top eight finishers advance automatically to

Kishan's maiden T20I ton powers India to 271/5 against New Zealand in series finale

Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 01: Ishan Kishan smashed his maiden T20I hundred to power India to a massive 271 for 5 in the fifth and final T20I against New Zealand at the Greenfield International Stadium in Thiruvananthapuram on Saturday. Kishan scored a 103 off just 43 balls studded with six fours and 10 sixes as India unleashed a heavy-hitting display.

After winning the toss and electing to bat, India got off to a brisk start with Abhishek Sharma cracking 30 off 16 before falling early. Sanju Samson again struggled, departing for six off six, but Kishan and skipper Suryakumar Yadav steadied the innings with a powerful 137-run partnership for the third wicket. Yadav struck a fiery 63 off 30 balls, keeping the momentum rolling. Hardik Pandya made a quick 42 off 17 to further boost the total. Kishan's knock tilted the match firmly in India's favour and underlined his growing importance in the shortest format ahead of the T20 World Cup.



India's total of 271 for five is among their highest in T20Is and left New Zealand facing a daunting chase in the series finale.

Mbappé's Stoppage-Time Penalty Rescues Real Madrid



Madrid, Feb 02: Kylian Mbappé came through for Real Madrid again, converting a penalty kick 10 minutes into second-half stoppage time to salvage a 2-1 win over Rayo Vallecano and move Madrid back within a point of Spanish league leader Barcelona on Sunday. Vinicius Júnior also scored for Madrid after again being jeered by fans early on at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. Jude Bellingham, also booed when the lineup was announced, had to be replaced 10 minutes into the match because of a left hamstring injury. Madrid was coming off a 4-2 loss at Benfica that dropped the team out of the eight automatic spots for the round of 16 of the Champions League. It will face Benfica again in the play-offs. "We came from a tough defeat, one that nobody ever wants, in the Champions, a competition many of us aspire to win," Madrid midfielder Federico Valverde said. "We wanted to change that image, today we had the first opportunity, and I think we played a great game."

It was a thriller at the Bernabeu on Sunday, with Mbappé giving Madrid the victory by coolly converting

the last-gasp penalty for his eighth goal in five matches. The result allowed Álvaro Arbeloa's side to keep pace with Barcelona, which won 3-1 at Elche on Saturday. "It was a victory in which the players put a lot of energy, their soul," said Arbeloa, who took over after replacing Xabi Alonso last month. "We needed the help of the fans and without their push we would not have achieved it." The boos toward Vinicius were subdued after he scored a superb goal in the 15th minute. The Brazil international cleared a couple of defenders before curling a right-footed shot into the top corner.

Rayo, which played a man down from the 80th after Pathé Ciss was sent off with a straight red card for a hard foul, equalized through Jorge De Frutos in the 49th. Vallecano, which threatened at times at the Bernabeu, also saw Pep Chavarria shown a second yellow in the final minutes of added time.

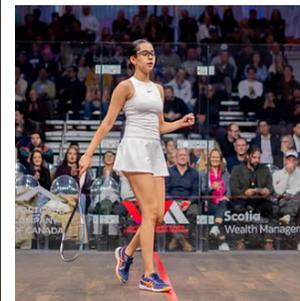
Rayo, which has lost four straight in all competitions, had lost only one of its last five games against Madrid in the league. It dropped to 17th place, just outside the relegation zone.

Mertens and Zhang Secure Australian Open Crown



Melbourne, Feb 02: Elise Mertens and Zhang Shuai, who last played a Grand Slam together at Wimbledon in 2022, reunited at the Australian Open to win the women's doubles title. The Belgian-Chinese duo defeated Anna Danilina and Aleksandra Krunic 7-6(4), 6-4 to win what is a ninth Grand Slam doubles title between them in just their seventh career event as a pair. Mertens now has six Grand Slams, three in Australia, while Zhang has three. Zhang lifted her other women's doubles trophies with the now-retired Samantha Stosur at the 2019 Australian Open and the 2021 US Open. Mertens has now won a doubles Grand Slam in each of the last three years. Currently ranked World No. 6, Mertens was assured of getting back to World No. 1 regardless of the final result. She will log her 40th week on top next week.

Anahat Singh enters final of Squash on Fire in Washington



New Delhi, Feb 01: Indian teenage star Anahat Singh reached her maiden PSA bronze-level final at the Squash on Fire Open in Washington with a 3-1 victory over Sabrina Sobhy of the USA. The Indian world No.31 and seventh seed defeated the American 11-9 11-3 9-11 11-5 in the semifinals. Sabrina is ranked world No.23. Anahat will meet top seed and world No.10 Georgina Kennedy of England in the title clash. Anahat had defeated second seed Sana Ibrahim of Egypt in the quarterfinals.

Pakistan will travel for T20 World Cup but to boycott India match

Chennai, Feb 01: The Pakistan government on Sunday announced that they will be boycotting the T20 World Cup match against India to be played in Colombo on February 15. Sharing a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, the government of Pakistan said that the cricket team has been given permission to take part in the World Cup; however, they shall not take the field against India. "The Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan grants approval to the Pakistan Cricket Team to participate in the ICC World T20 2026; however, the Pakistan Cricket Team shall not take the field in the match scheduled on 15th February 2026 against India," the government posted on social media. This comes on the back of ICC replacing Bangladesh with Scotland



after they refused to travel to India, citing security reasons. This decision puts an end to the speculation

after their chair, Mohsin Naqvi, said that the government will decide on the team's participation in the tournament in the wake of Bangladesh's ouster from the tournament. Interestingly, the announcement came even as the India and Pakistan U19 teams were on the field, playing against each other in the Junior World Cup on Sunday.

Both PCB and BCCI have come to an agreement to play on neutral venues after India refused to travel to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy in 2025. It remains to be seen how the ICC reacts as the clash between two subcontinental rivals carries significant weightage in global revenue. The Pakistan Cricket Board have to provide a reason for not taking the field as well.