Prelim Bits 27-05-2018

Jonbeel Mela

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- The Jonbeel Mela, held from 18-20 January 2018, usually takes place a few days after Magh Bihu, the harvest festival, in Dayang Belguri in Morigaon district in Assam.
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- A cluster of tribes celebrate this centuries-old ‘mela’ that still functions on the barter system.
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- The Jonbeel lake that lends its name to the fair (jon is moon and beel is lake) also witnesses community-fishing during the fair.
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- Jonbeel Mela is organized by the Tiwa community, with participants from the Tiwa, Karbi, Khasi and Jaintia communities, from the interiors of the state’s Morigaon and Karbi Anglong districts, as well as some border villages of Meghalaya.
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- No one knows exactly when the fair started but some of the medieval buronjis (historical chronicles maintained by Ahoms) refer to it as a venue for diplomacy.
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- The Jonbeel Mela is organized under the patronage of the Gobha kingdom.
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Fruit bats and Nipah virus

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- Fruit bats, or Pteropodidae, are a bat family that eats fruit.
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- In the world’s first Nipah outbreak, which occurred in 1998 in Malaysia, virologists isolated the virus from the urine of the Island Flying Fox, a fruit bat species.
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- In Bangladeshi outbreaks, researchers found antibodies to Nipah in the Indian flying fox.
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- All bats can carry viruses, some of them deadly.
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- The Marburg virus, a relative of Ebola, was isolated in 2009 from the Egyptian Rousette, a fruit bat, in Uganda's Kitaka Cave.
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- After the 2003 outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in China, researchers found antibodies to the SARS Coronavirus in cave-dwelling insectivorous bats.
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- With around 1,200 species, bats comprise 20% of the earth's mammalian diversity.
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- So, it is not a surprise that they host many viruses and also not all of these viruses are threats to humans.
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- Even if the outbreak in Kerala is eventually linked to these mammals, the transfer of bat viruses to humans is a rare event.
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Gyetongba

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- A trove of more than 600 pages of rare Tibetan manuscripts with Buddha's teachings written in gold letters has been restored at a 100-year-old monastery in Alubari in West Bengal's Darjeeling district.
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- Restoration of the gold-inlaid manuscripts in two volumes at the Mak Dhog Monastery started recently.
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- The manuscripts contain the ancient Tibetan text called Gyetongba , which contains teachings of Buddhism.
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- The manuscripts are in the Tibetan script Sambhota, named after its inventor.
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- The restoration work is being done by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH).
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- One volume of the manuscript contained 322 pages, the other had 296 pages

and each volume contains 8,000 verses.
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- They fumigated using anti-fungal chemicals, stitched and used adhesives on the frayed pages.
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- The manuscript was brought to darjeeling from Helambu in Nepal in the early 18th century.
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- The monastery was built in 1914 to foster peace and eventually the manuscripts were kept here.
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Ireland ends abortion ban

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- Ireland voted decisively to repeal one of the world’s more restrictive abortion bans.
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- In Ireland’s historic referendum on its strict abortion laws 66% backed repealing the constitutional ban on terminations.
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- Voters were asked if they wish to scrap the eighth amendment to the constitution, which gives an unborn child and its mother equal rights to life.
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- No social issue has divided Ireland's 4.8 million people as sharply as abortion.
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- It was pushed up the political agenda by the death in 2012 of a 31-year-old Indian immigrant from a septic miscarriage after she was refused a termination.
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The obesity paradox

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- Obese hospital patients are more likely to survive an infectious disease than people of normal weight.
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- Overweight patients were 40% less likely to die compared to those of normal weight.

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- The Patients those who were obese were 50% less likely to die than those of normal weight.
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- Among patients with obesity, presence or absence of recent weight changes, cancer, or smoking had little effect on the association with decreased mortality.
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- This research points to seemingly paradoxical benefits of a condition loaded with health risks.
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Source: PIB, The Hindu, Economic times

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