

IN BRIEF


Elton John to publish candid autobiography

LONDON
Music legend Elton John has announced that he is working on his autobiography. The 71-year-old musician shared the news on Twitter, saying, "My life has been one helluva roller coaster ride and I'm now ready to tell you my story, in my own words." The "no-holds-barred" memoir will be co-written by music journalist Alexis Petridis. PTI


Jackie Chan to star in Everest adventure film

LOS ANGELES
Two of China's biggest action stars, Jackie Chan and Wu Jing, are teaming up for an adventure film that revolves around scaling Mount Everest. Tentatively titled *Climbers*, the film is about the first Chinese mountaineers to summit the world's highest peak. Hong Kong filmmaker Daniel Lee will direct the project. PTI


Apple revamps iPad Air and iPad Mini models

NEW YORK
Apple on Monday launched a new 10.5-inch iPad Air and updated its iPad Mini. The models, geared with Apple's A12 Bionic chip and support for Apple Pencil and Smart Keyboard, are available for order. The 10.5-inch iPad Air starts at \$499 and the iPad mini at \$399. REUTERS

India on the brink of a dry eye disease epidemic, says study

Age, urban residence, occupation and socio-economic affluence among risk factors

R. PRASAD
CHENNAI

For the first time, a large-scale, hospital-based study in India involving over 14.5 lakh patients had found the incidence (number of new cases occurring each year) of dry eye disease to be 21,000 (1.46%). At over 12,500 cases, the incidence in urban areas was higher than in rural areas (over 8,700 cases). With a large ageing population, growing middle-class and chronic nature of the disease, India is on the verge of a dry eye disease epidemic, says the study. The prevalence of dry eye disease will be about 40% of the urban population by 2030.

Since the disease tends to be progressive with age, once corneal damage becomes irreversible it can lead to visual impairment and even blindness. Early diagnosis and treatment is therefore important. The



Early diagnosis and treatment is crucial. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

disease is hugely underdiagnosed in India.

The study was undertaken across 200 locations in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Karnataka between 2010 and 2018. The results were published in *The Ocular Surface*.

The study found the onset of dry eye disease is early in men than in women. In men, the age of disease onset is early 20s and 30s compared with 50s and 60s in women. Hormonal imbalance could

be a likely reason for higher cases in women in their 50s and 60s. "This is first study that has shown an age-based gender risk for the disease," said Dr. Sayan Basu from LV Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad.

Low tear production

Age, urban residence, occupation and socio-economic affluence were found to be high risk factors for developing the disease.

Dry eye disease could oc-

cur due to inadequate tear production (aqueous deficient), tear film instability due to evaporation or mixed type. Over 20.5% had dry eye disease caused by inadequate tear production, 35.5% due to tear film instability (evaporative) and 40% being mixed. "As tears are not produced sufficiently in people who are aqueous deficient, it is a more dangerous form of dry eye disease. They have severe clinical disease," said Dr. Pragnya Rao Donthineni from LV Prasad Eye Institute. "There is a possible underlying autoimmune disease, which is causing inadequate tear production and this has to be investigated."

"Testing the tear volume is mandatory for patients with the disease. Only this test will tell if the disease is evaporative [tear film instability], aqueous deficient or mixed," said Dr. Basu.

Japan to make crater on asteroid

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TOKYO

Japan's space agency said on Monday that its Hayabusa2 spacecraft will drop an explosive on an asteroid to make a crater and then collect underground samples for possible clues to the origin of the solar system.

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency said that Hayabusa2 will drop an impactor of the size of a baseball weighing 2 kg on the asteroid, named Ryugu, on April 5 to collect samples from deeper underground that have not been exposed to the sun or space rays.

The mission will require the spacecraft to move quickly to the other side of the asteroid so it won't get hit by flying shards from the blast, JAXA project engineer Takanao Saeki said.

While moving away, Hayabusa2 will leave a camera to capture the outcome. Scientists will then analyse details of the crater to determine the history of the asteroid.

King of surf guitar, Dick Dale, dead at 81

His hits include *Misirlou*, *Let's Go Trippin*



Unique style: A file photo of Dick Dale, in New York. ■AP

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Dick Dale, who became known as "king of the surf guitar" with a twangy rapid-fire, reverb-heavy sound that he said recreated what he heard in his head while riding the waves, has died at 81.

Mr. Dale, whose work included the 1962 hit *Misirlou* that was featured in the film *Pulp Fiction*, died on Saturday night.

Mr. Dale's music was one of the dominant sounds of Southern California's car-and-beach culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He was widely considered the creator of instrumental surf music and an influence on scores of noted bands and guitarists, including Jimi Hendrix, the Beach Boys and Eddie Van Halen.

Keeping the music alive

The popularity of surf music faded in the U.S. with the advent of rock's "British Invasion" but Mr. Dale would have a career revival that started in the 1990s.

Despite health problems that plagued him during ev-

ery show, he was still performing in 2019, often with his son, guitarist-drummer Jimmy Dale.

He often said he kept performing because he wanted to "die onstage with an explosion of body parts." But Mr. Dale also told interviewers he was on the road because he needed to earn \$3,000 a month to pay medical expenses not covered by insurance after bouts with cancer, diabetes and back problems. He said he also liked to inspire people who might be having a tough time.

Mr. Dale said his fans gave him the title "king of the surf guitar". His breakneck-picking style was considered to be a forerunner of heavy metal music.

Hits by Mr. Dale and his band, the Del-Tones, included *Let's Go Trippin* and *Mr. Eliminator*. He was best known for *Misirlou*, a fast-paced reworking of a folk song traced back to Greece and West Asia.

Director Quentin Tarantino used *Misirlou* to set the pace and build tension early in *Pulp Fiction*.

Study seeks to solve mystery behind 'maths anxiety'

Teachers and parents may inadvertently play a role in a child developing the fear of numbers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON

Girls tend to be more affected by 'maths anxiety' than boys, according to a study which shows that teachers and parents may inadvertently play a role in a child developing the fear of numbers.

While mathematics is often considered a hard subject, not all difficulties with the subject result from cognitive difficulties. Many children and adults experience feelings of anxiety, apprehension, tension or discom-



fort when confronted by a maths problem.

Scientists at the University of Cambridge explored the nature and resolution of 'mathematics anxiety'

In a sample of 1,000 Italian students, the research-

ers found that girls in both primary and secondary school had higher levels of both maths anxiety and general anxiety.

More detailed investigation in 1,700 U.K. schoolchildren found that a general feeling that maths was more difficult often contributed to maths anxiety, leading to a lack or loss of confidence.

Students pointed to poor results or negative comparisons to peers or siblings as reasons for feeling anxious.

"While every child's maths anxiety may be diffe-

rent, with unique origins and triggers, we found several common issues among both the primary and secondary school students that we interviewed," said Denes Szucs from the university.

Students often discussed the role that their teachers and parents played in their development of maths anxiety.

Primary-aged children referred to instances where they had been confused by different teaching methods, while secondary students commented on poor interpersonal relations.

Secondary students indicated that the transition from primary to secondary school had been a cause of maths anxiety, as the work seemed harder and they could not cope. There was also greater pressure from tests and an homework load.

Teachers and parents also need to be aware that their own maths anxiety might influence the child's anxiety and that gendered stereotypes about mathematics suitability and ability might contribute to the gender gap in maths performance.

Facebook to offer grants to bring more to 'news deserts'

Firm often blamed for decline in legacy news organisations

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Facebook said on Monday it would begin directing some of its funds to support U.S. journalism efforts to so-called "news deserts" with little or no media coverage.

The leading social network said its Journalism Project Community Network would begin taking proposals in May from areas lacking in local news coverage.

Facebook, which has been blamed for accelerating the decline in legacy news organisations, said it is taking the action after its own research confirmed the growing problem of declining local news coverage in many parts of the country.

This results in little or no content for Facebook's local news feature called "Today



Local news coverage is declining in many parts of the U.S., says research. ■AFP

In" for many communities.

"About one in three users in the U.S. live in places where we cannot find enough local news on Facebook to launch Today In," said a statement from Facebook product marketing manager Jimmy O'Keefe and local news partnerships lead Josh Mabry.

"What does that mean ex-

actly? In the last 28 days, there has not been a single day when we've been able to find five or more recent news articles directly related to these towns."

Both Facebook and Google have been stepping up efforts to support journalism amid concerns that their sophisticated ad networks siphon off most online revenues, making it hard for news organisations to compete.

In the U.S., social media has overtaken print newspapers as a news source for Americans, according to a survey last year by the Pew Research Center.

The survey report found 20% of U.S. adults say they often get news via social media, compared with 16% from newspapers.

40-kg plastic found in dead whale's belly

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MANILA

A starving whale with 40 kg of plastic trash in its stomach has died after being washed ashore in the Philippines, activists said on Monday, calling it one of the worst cases of poisoning they have seen.

Environmental groups have tagged the Philippines as one of the world's biggest ocean polluters due to its reliance on single-use plastic.

That sort of pollution, which is also widespread in other southeast Asian nations, regularly kills wildlife like whales and turtles that ingest the waste.

In the latest case, a Cuvier's beaked whale died on Saturday in the southern province of Compostela Valley where it was stranded a day earlier, the fisheries bureau said.

Belgian pigeon flies high in auction

Chinese buyer snapped up the long-distance racer for €1.25 million

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BRUSSELS

A star racing pigeon named Armando has fetched a record €1.25 million in an online auction, Belgian media reported on Sunday.

The prized bird - Belgium's best long-distance racer of all time according to those in the know - was snapped up by a Chinese buyer for a princely sum that caused a flutter of excitement among fanciers.

Armando had been expected to break the previous record of €3,76,000 (\$4,25,000) paid for a pigeon called Nadine - but not by such a wide margin.

"Earlier this week it became clear that Armando would be the most expensive pigeon ever sold in an online auction," wrote the specialist



Prized possession: Armando, the pigeon. ■PIPA.BE

website Pigeon Paradise (Pipa.be).

"However, no one expected that the magical cap of a million euros would be pulverised," it added. The final amount was €1,252,000.

Pigeon Paradise did not say who had bought the pige-

on, but according to the Belgian news agency Belga it was a Chinese buyer who will no doubt use his new acquisition to breed other champions.

Armando was just one of more than a hundred birds sold by respected Belgian

breeder Joel Verschoot.

Mr. Verschoot's stable of pigeons is based in Ingelmunster, in the west of Belgium, and his online auction of his pigeons has been open for several weeks.

By Sunday, the family had sold 178 pigeons for around €2 million.

Racing tradition

Homing pigeons are raced by releasing them sometimes hundreds of km from home, with the first back home winning.

Racing them is a tradition in Belgium, Britain, northern France and the Netherlands, although it has been going into decline.

But interest from Asian buyers in recent years has given the practice a new lease of life.